

THE PRESS IN ALGERIA DURING THE FRENCH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS (1830-1962)

Kamal Salimov*

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the power structures established in the media domain during the French colonial rule in Algeria (1830–1962) and the continuities of these structures in the postcolonial period, within the framework of postcolonial theory. The theoretical foundation of the study is grounded in Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Homi Bhabha's notions of hybridity and mimicry, Robert J. C. Young's idea of epistemic colonialism, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot's theory of silenced histories. The media is examined not merely as a tool for information transmission but as an apparatus of colonial power legitimization and a formative element of collective memory. The French colonial administration strategically utilized media to suppress the historical, linguistic, and cultural memory of the indigenous population. The exclusion of Arabic from the public sphere, the normalization of French-language press, and the criminalization of resistance constituted key elements of this strategy.

The transformation of the media field in the post-independence period reveals how the postcolonial state restructured its memory politics. Newspapers such as *El Moudjahid*, which played a revolutionary role in the anti-colonial struggle, later became vehicles for official state ideology, thereby limiting pluralistic representations. The national liberation war was selectively glorified through the media, while the historical contributions of Berber, communist, and women's movements were systematically marginalized. Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) is employed here to reveal how institutionalized forms of forgetting rather than remembering were constructed. The analysis of the French press highlights that media discourse was not monolithic.

This article moves beyond viewing media history as a linear trajectory of technological or institutional development and conceptualizes it as a field of power where political imaginaries are shaped and collective memory is produced. Media assumes a foundational role in constructing collective identity through the political structuring of meanings attributed to the past. In the Algerian context, media functions as part of the continuity from colonial epistemic violence to the ideological apparatuses of the postcolonial state. Building a democratic media order requires a critical deconstruction of these historical memory regimes and the deeply entrenched epistemic inequalities.

Keywords: Postcolonial Media, Memory Regime, Colonial Representation, Epistemic Violence

INTRODUCTION

The French military intervention in Algeria in 1830 marked not only the beginning of political and administrative domination but also the onset of a cultural, linguistic, and epistemological colonization. Within this context, the media assumed a special role as one of the ideological apparatuses of the French colonial project. Far from serving merely as a channel for information dissemination, the press was strategically deployed to suppress indigenous identities, legitimize the French civilizational mission, and circulate colonial ideology (Ruedy, 2005, p. 41; McDougall, 2017, p. 63).

However, the media did not solely function as a vehicle of domination. It also became a vital platform for resistance, collective memory, and national identity construction. Algerian intellectuals—both within the country and in diaspora communities—developed counter-hegemonic media strategies through their publications, challenging colonial narratives and articulating alternative historical accounts. Therefore, the history of media in Algeria should not be analyzed merely as a tale of repression and censorship, but rather as the intellectual projection of a multilayered resistance (Shepard, 2006, p. 94; Ageron, 1991, p. 171).

This study analyzes hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices carried out through the media in colonial Algeria between 1830 and 1962 within a postcolonial theoretical framework. It draws upon

*Dr., Ege University Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Journalism, Izmir, Türkiye,
selimov.kamal@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0002-6125-5088, DOI: 10.54414/ZKST3308.

Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* (1978), Homi K. Bhabha's notions of *mimicry* and *hybridity* (1994), and Robert J. C. Young's theory of *epistemic colonialism* (2001). In this regard, the media is positioned as a powerful actor at the intersection of narrative production, identity construction, collective memory, political power, and resistance.

1. Media and Discourse in French Colonialism

The French colonial administration positioned the media in Algeria not merely as a tool for communication or public information, but as an apparatus of hegemony that constructed the ideological and cultural foundations of colonial domination. From the mid-19th century onwards, newspapers such as *L'Estafette d'Alger*, *Le Moniteur Algérien*, and *Le Messager* became instruments for systematically reproducing the colonial gaze. In these publications, the indigenous population was frequently portrayed as "backward," "prone to violence," and "uncivilized," while French intervention was legitimized through the rhetoric of a civilizing mission (Conklin, 1997, p. 91; McDougall, 2017, p. 67).

Within Edward Said's framework of *Orientalism*, the language used in the French colonial press disseminated representations that underpinned the epistemological structure of the colonial order. According to Said (1978, pp. 2–3), Orientalism is an ideological narrative whereby the West legitimizes its superiority by defining the East as irrational, exotic, and passive—contrasted with the rational, progressive, and civilized West. The French colonial press systematically reproduced these ideological representations in the Algerian context, rendering the indigenous population either invisible or stereotyped (Lockman, 2004, p. 121; Burke, 1998, p. 64).

Homi Bhabha's (1994, p. 88) concepts of *mimicry* and *hybridity* offer a valuable theoretical lens for understanding how Algerian journalists educated in French institutions engaged with colonial discourse from within. Through French-language publications, they developed alternative discourses that challenged colonial narratives. This represented a subversive response to the colonizer's strategy of creating a "domesticated native" and instead signaled a transformation of discourse from within. Bhabha interprets such counter-narratives as creative interventions that expose the internal contradictions of colonial power (Bhabha, 1994, p. 114).

The French administration systematically pushed Arabic out of the public sphere. A decree in 1838 officially defined Arabic as a "foreign language" in administrative documents, and by 1895 the publication of Arabic-language newspapers was entirely banned (McDougall, 2017, p. 135). These policies extended beyond linguistic suppression to encompass the erasure of cultural memory, the fragmentation of identity, and the imposition of a singular narrative in the public domain (Young, 2001, p. 386). In this framework, the media emerged not only as a site for knowledge production but also as a contested space for identity formation and historical representation.

1.1. Theoretical Depth: State, Memory, and Domination in Postcolonial Media Theory

Colonial administrations established their authority not only through physical control over land and populations, but also through the power to produce meaning, write history, and shape collective memory. Postcolonial theory focuses on analyzing these multilayered forms of power. Within this framework, media is not merely a tool for the circulation of information, but a domain where discourse is constructed, memory is shaped, and legitimacy is produced. In colonial and postcolonial societies, media practices constitute one of the primary arenas in which power relations are both sustained and contested (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 10; Mbembe, 2001, p. 105).

Benedict Anderson's (1983) theory of "imagined communities" demonstrates how nation-building was made possible through print materials. According to Anderson, newspapers and journals create a shared perception of time and a sense of collective identity, laying the groundwork for national belonging among diverse populations. Within this framework, colonial media policies not only kept the colonized under control but also generated discourses that legitimized occupation and domination at the colonial

center. In the case of Algeria, French colonialism exemplified this form of “print domination,” establishing a media regime that marginalized the indigenous population while glorifying Western identity (Conklin, 1997, p. 91; Lockman, 2004, p. 121).

Achille Mbembe (2001) draws attention to the persistent epistemological forms of domination in colonial systems. According to Mbembe, the knowledge production mechanisms of colonialism, when merged with the bureaucratic structure of the modern state, form a regime of meaning that encompasses the individual’s modes of self-definition. This regime, which began in the colonial period, continues to exert influence throughout the postcolonial process. Media, as the ideological carrier of this regime of meaning, delineates the boundaries of representation and determines which memories will be visible in the public sphere. In Algeria, this function was manifested through the French press during the colonial era, and later through state-controlled media institutions following independence (Mbembe, 2001, p. 123).

Partha Chatterjee (2004) argues that modern nation-states, particularly after independence, continue the institutional legacy of colonialism in shaping their relationship with citizens. This continuity is not limited to the legal or political system; the media also becomes a crucial component of this structure. According to Chatterjee, postcolonial media assumes a directive function aligned with the normative framework of the state, extending beyond the role of public information. As such, media that once served as the voice of the people during resistance may transform into an instrument that carries the discourse of the state in the post-independence era (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 79).

Within this theoretical framework, media is positioned as a vehicle of ideological continuity, beginning with colonial domination and continuing through postcolonial control mechanisms. As Robert J. C. Young (2001) emphasizes, epistemic colonization is not achieved solely through texts; it is also established through modes of media representation. These representational strategies shape how concepts such as identity, belonging, history, and memory are perceived in the public sphere. In the Algerian context, these strategies can be traced across a broad spectrum—from the content of French-language newspapers and the systematic suppression of Arabic to the transformation of revolutionary media into a component of the state apparatus.

This section’s theoretical framework seeks to conceptualize the historical trajectory of Algerian media not merely as a sequence of events, but at the levels of meaning, power, and representation. As an epistemological apparatus of colonialism, the media becomes one of the principal platforms used by the nation-state in the construction of its own mythology.

2. Forms of Resistance in the Indigenous Press

The absolute control over the sphere of knowledge imposed by colonial authority in Algeria began to erode in the final quarter of the 19th century due to various intellectual challenges. Despite the French administration’s strict censorship practices and restrictive language policies against Arabic, indigenous journalists endeavored to develop alternative modes of communication—both in content and discourse—to achieve visibility in the public sphere (Shepard, 2006, p. 94; Ageron, 1991, p. 171). These efforts were not confined to individual journalistic practices alone; they also contributed to the formation of civil society, the emergence of critical thought, and the awakening of national consciousness.

One of the earliest examples of such counter-media practices was *El-Hak*, a weekly newspaper launched in 1893 by Slimane Bengui in Annaba. Although it included content in both French and partially in Arabic and refrained from directly targeting the French administration, it took a critical stance in defending the cultural rights of the indigenous population (McDougall, 2017, p. 144). The newspaper’s closure within a year reveals the colonial regime’s deep intolerance of press freedom and its determination to restrict the public space for expression.

Beyond content production, the indigenous press succeeded in creating discursive plurality. The cultural differences between secular intellectuals educated in the French system and Arabic-educated scholars from traditional religious schools produced a multi-layered representational landscape within

Algerian media. Although these differences occasionally led to ideological conflicts, they also provided a shared platform for critiquing the colonial order (Lorcin, 1995, p. 201; Grandguillaume, 2004, p. 44). While addressing their respective audiences, both nationalist and Islamist currents found expression in the media through distinct discursive codes.

An important example in the 1920s was *El Ouma*, published by Ahmed Messali Hadj, the leader of Étoile Nord-Africaine (ENA), a political organization founded in France. Printed in Paris, the newspaper aimed to disseminate the idea of independence among Algerian workers and appeal to both the migrant community and the French public. In doing so, it contributed to bringing the Algerian question onto the international agenda (Shepard, 2006, p. 157; McDougall, 2017, p. 189). Despite being written in French, its content directly targeted colonial power structures, thereby intervening from within the dominant discourse.

These interventions can be read within the framework of Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry. This mode of discourse, which adopts the colonizer's language and form only to invert its meaning, constitutes a form of epistemological leakage within the colonial knowledge system (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Although written in the colonizer's language, these publications exposed the contradictions of the colonial system, developing a new language of resistance.

In the same period, Islamist-reformist publications developed a different form of resistance. Under the leadership of Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, *El-Munteqid* (1925) and *Esh-Shihab* (1929–1940) redefined Arabic not merely as a medium of communication but as the main bearer of Islamic identity and collective memory (McDougall, 2017, p. 196). Through these publications, religious discourse was integrated with cultural resistance, helping to re-establish Arabic in the public sphere (Bouchène, 2012, p. 163).

In contrast to the nationalist line, reformist publications adopted a more cautious stance. Newspapers such as *Al-Musawah*, published by Ferhat Abbas, focused not on a structural critique of the colonial system but on demands for equal citizenship within the existing framework (Shepard, 2006, p. 211). However, after the 1945 Sétif and Guelma massacres, the social resonance of this moderate discourse diminished, and revolutionary demands gained momentum. This shift illustrates that, while media actors diverged in both content and strategy, they shared a common goal of undermining colonial hegemony (Stora, 2001, p. 122).

The diversity of the indigenous press also carries significance in light of Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere. These publications, developed in opposition to the official discourse of the colonial system, institutionalized practices of critical thinking and deliberation around shared grievances across diverse social groups. In doing so, they laid the foundation for an alternative public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989, p. 83). The press thus emerged not only as a medium for circulating information, but also as a vehicle for collective memory, national identity, and cultural consciousness.

2.1. Silenced Identity: The Berbers and National Media Representation

The anti-colonial media resistance in Algeria has historically been closely associated with Arab identity, often excluding the cultural and political contributions of Berber communities from dominant narratives. Especially during the first half of the 20th century, nationalist and Islamist media outlets offered highly limited representations of Berber identity. This marginalization is directly related to both restricted access to media and the construction of a singular national identity—an extension of the colonial legacy (Silverstein, 2004, p. 81; Ait Kaki, 2001, p. 143).

The French colonial administration occasionally portrayed the Berbers as a "moderate native" or an "intermediate people" vis-à-vis the Arab majority—a designation that served as an extension of divide-and-rule tactics within the media sphere. The prohibition of publications in the Berber language deprived this community of essential tools for expressing cultural continuity. While the French press often depicted Berbers as objects of ethnographic interest, it deliberately avoided recognizing them as political subjects

(Goodman, 2005, p. 201). These representational practices rendered Berber identity invisible at both symbolic and structural levels during the colonial period.

In the post-independence period, the FLN's central Arab-Islamic nationalist discourse further narrowed the media space for Berber-identified actors. Following the "Berber Crisis" of 1949, ethnic diversity within the independence movement was suppressed, and Arab identity was imposed as the sole legitimate form of national belonging (Aït Kaki, 2001, p. 149). During this period, the national press framed cultural and political demands related to Berber identity as "separatism" or "reactionary," thereby transforming media into a mechanism of representational discipline (Silverstein, 2004, p. 86).

The few platforms where Berber intellectuals found space for expression were mostly cultural magazines not controlled by the state or diaspora publications abroad. Mouloud Mammeri's work on tribal poetry and literary production in the Berber language can be seen as both a literary and media-based intervention. Through his writings, Mammeri opened an alternative space for expression that challenged the monolithic narratives of the nation-state by emphasizing cultural continuity, historical memory, and linguistic resistance (Goodman, 2005, p. 205). However, such efforts were never integrated into official media structures and were kept outside publicly accessible communication channels.

The erasure of Berber identity in the media reflects more than representational neglect—it reveals how the modernist and unitary imagination of the nation-state was reproduced through media policies. In this context, the media became an ideological apparatus that glorified the FLN's military victory, established Arab identity as normative, and categorized Berber cultural diversity as a "threat." The absence of Berber representation in media should not be viewed as a technical or administrative oversight, but rather as part of a deliberate strategy of mnemonic exclusion.

In postcolonial media studies, the examination of such silences offers a critical framework for understanding crises of representation and the regulation of collective memory. The Algerian case compels us to interrogate which actors are centralized and which are marginalized in the writing of media history, urging an analysis that incorporates both the visible and the invisible. The systematic exclusion of Berber identity demonstrates that national media not only constructs identity but also selectively reconfigures it.

3. The Statization of Media in the Post-Independence Period

With Algeria's declaration of independence in 1962, the media landscape—shaped for decades under colonial domination—entered a new political and social phase. During the colonial period, journalism had developed under conditions of repression, serving as a vehicle for resistance, identity formation, and collective consciousness among the indigenous population. However, the rapid transition of media into state control following independence marked a significant shift. Media outlets, once regarded as symbols of resistance, were transformed into organs of official ideology, and pluralistic structures were replaced by monolithic representations (McDougall, 2017, p. 221).

One of the most striking examples of this transformation is the newspaper *El Moudjahid*, which had served as the voice of the National Liberation Front (FLN) during the anti-colonial struggle. During the war, the newspaper played a central role not only in disseminating information but also in constructing the revolutionary narrative. After independence, however, *El Moudjahid* evolved into an ideological apparatus that glorified the liberation struggle while legitimizing the policies of the new regime (Stora, 2001, p. 132). This transformation reflects the concern expressed by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), where he warned of the danger that revolutionary values might be instrumentalized during the process of state formation (Fanon, 1963/2004, p. 122).

In the postcolonial period, the nation-state's media policies constructed collective memory not merely as a historical phenomenon but as a source of political legitimacy. The war of liberation became the founding myth of state ideology, systematically reproduced through various media channels (Roussel, 2017, p. 191). From the perspective of Pierre Nora's (1989) concept of lieux de mémoire (sites of

memory), media practices in independent Algeria served less to commemorate resistance and more to build a regime of memory under political control. Narratives constructed through television broadcasts, newspapers, and official ceremonies selectively reinterpreted the past, systematically excluding alternative historical accounts.

This univocal historical narrative gave little to no space to Berber identity, the role of women in the struggle, or resistance groups outside the FLN. Thus, national memory became a domain monopolized by state actors, and media outlets marginalized all discourses that diverged from this narrative (Evans & Phillips, 2007, p. 218). In a manner reminiscent of colonial practices of cultural homogenization, the postcolonial state utilized media as a tool for enforcing ideological uniformity, significantly limiting freedom of expression.

Following the 1965 military coup, pressure on the media intensified. Under the FLN's one-party regime, media became not a means of communication with the public but an instrument of ideological control. During this period, *El Moudjahid* transformed into a publication that not only conveyed official communiqués but also glorified the cult of leadership, reinforced national unity rhetoric, and propagated state values (Ait-Benali, 2013, p. 79). Journalism became grounded in loyalty, discipline, and uniformity rather than critical inquiry.

In this regard, Robert J. C. Young's (2001, p. 401) analysis of media transformation in postcolonial states is especially pertinent. Young emphasizes that media, once a tool of liberation during anti-colonial struggles, can be repurposed by post-independence ruling elites as a mechanism of ideological control. Algeria exemplifies this contradiction, wherein those who once challenged the colonial monopoly on knowledge production became agents in reproducing a similar monopoly.

The process of postcolonial authoritarianism extended beyond the control of media institutions to the suppression of journalists, intellectuals, and dissenting voices. The state permitted only narratives that reinforced its own legitimacy, while systematically censoring alternative interpretations of history, demands for diverse identities, and attempts at critical memory work. Discourses once developed to resist the epistemological hierarchy of colonialism were now enveloped by a new state-centered regime of knowledge (Young, 2003, p. 89).

The statization of media following the anti-colonial struggle signaled the emergence of a new form of domination. The consolidation of the national liberation ideology through an absolute narrative regime in the media threatened both freedom of expression and the principle of historical plurality. Thus, while formal colonial censorship had come to an end, it could be argued that censorship persisted in functional terms, albeit through different instruments.

3.1. FLN and *El Moudjahid*: The Transformation of Media from Resistance to State Power

During Algeria's struggle for independence from colonial rule, media functioned not merely as a tool of communication but as a vital instrument of resistance. *El Moudjahid*, first published in 1956 by the National Liberation Front (FLN), became one of the principal carriers of revolutionary communication. By publishing in French and, at times, other languages, the newspaper addressed both Algerian resistance fighters and the international public. In doing so, it helped articulate a national discourse while also contributing to the development of transnational anti-colonial solidarity (Evans & Philips, 2007, p. 204; Stora, 2001, p. 159).

Beyond merely reporting military victories, *El Moudjahid* sought to convey the FLN's political vision, garner popular support, and call for societal solidarity—thus helping to construct a revolutionary public sphere. Its journalistic language aimed not only to expose colonial violence but also to construct an alternative narrative of history and identity (Harbi, 1980, p. 87). In this sense, *El Moudjahid* can be considered a revolutionary adaptation of the “public sphere” described by Jürgen Habermas, emerging in the colonial context as a space for critical counter-discourse.

However, following Algeria's independence in 1962, the role of *El Moudjahid* underwent a profound transformation. It became the official publication of the newly established nation-state and evolved into a discursive apparatus legitimizing government policies (Zeraoui, 1994, p. 118). With the FLN consolidating political power and suppressing dissenting voices, the media sphere also lost its diversity. Thus, a newspaper that had once served as a revolutionary communication tool gradually turned into a monolithic ideological arm of the state.

This shift reflects a common pattern in postcolonial media structures. Media outlets that had emerged as the "voice of the people" during anti-colonial resistance are often co-opted into the state's control mechanisms following independence, thereby losing much of their critical character. In Algeria's case, this process aligned with the FLN's one-party system; *El Moudjahid* not only carried the memory of revolutionary struggle but also became instrumental in producing the ideological framework that would ensure the continuity of the ruling regime (Layachi, 1998, p. 212).

The symbiotic relationship between media and power can also be interpreted through Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. According to Gramsci, power is maintained not only through coercion but also through the production of consent. In the post-revolutionary context, *El Moudjahid* did not merely inform the public—it functioned as a hegemonic tool aimed at embedding the values of the new regime in the popular consciousness (Gramsci, 1971, p. 123). As such, media became a discursive platform through which a regime born out of revolution could continuously reproduce its foundational myth.

The evolution of *El Moudjahid* reflects more than a change in editorial policy; it reveals the shifting position of media within the broader networks of power that extended from colonial domination to postcolonial statehood. The newspaper's journey from resistance to statehood illustrates how media shapes historical memory and plays a central role in the state's strategies of legitimization.

3.2. Post-Independence Media: Censorship and Monovocality

The independence process initiated in Algeria in 1962 was not only a historic victory for a people who had fought against colonial domination but also marked the construction of a new structure of power. However, this new political order failed to deliver the expected democratic openness in terms of freedom of expression and media pluralism. The media sector was swiftly placed under state control and transformed into a monovocal structure. The FLN's one-party regime regarded the media as a platform for reproducing political legitimacy, bringing the majority of press institutions under public supervision (Aït-Larbi, 1993, p. 34; Layachi, 1998, p. 207).

Although the post-independence media order appeared to be decolonized in a technical sense, it in practice reproduced a structure similar to the colonial regime's domination over knowledge. The state positioned the press as a tool to be shaped according to "national interests," and editorial independence or pluralistic representation were not constitutionally guaranteed. This approach transformed the media from a vehicle for informing the public into a propaganda apparatus reinforcing political power (Roberts, 2003, p. 117).

Nearly all newspapers operating during this period were either directly controlled by the state or supported through state funding. Outlets such as *El Moudjahid*, *Algérie Actualité*, *Horizons*, and *Ech Chaâb* adopted a narrative that predominantly highlighted the FLN's achievements, while systematically suppressing critical journalism addressing social problems. Political opposition was not allowed to express itself through the media; viewpoints outside the ruling ideology were either ignored or framed as a "threat to national unity" (Zeraoui, 1994, p. 124).

Censorship was not limited to direct prohibitions; indirect pressures on journalists were also applied systematically. Licensing regimes, financial controls, and bureaucratic sanctions rendered independent press initiatives nearly impossible. The Press Law enacted in 1968 criminalized publications deemed "contrary to the interests of the state," thereby institutionalizing self-censorship (Aït-Larbi, 1993,

p. 39). This legal framework constrained not only the content of journalistic production but also every aspect of editorial decision-making, from topic selection to headline wording.

Although the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a degree of media liberalization, these developments were limited and temporary. Economic crises, internal divisions within the FLN, and increasing social opposition brought reform demands to the fore. However, these demands were either co-opted and neutralized within the system or suppressed through repressive measures. For instance, during the 1980 Kabyle Uprising, the state ignored demands related to Berber identity in both print and visual media, framing the protests as acts of "separatism" (Silverstein, 2004, p. 92). This revealed the media's monolithic function in constructing national identity and its tendency to suppress cultural diversity.

This structure gave rise to a symbiotic relationship between media and the state. The press was used as a strategic tool to obscure crises of legitimacy and manipulate public reaction. Journalists working in this environment were often affiliated with the ruling party; ideological loyalty was prioritized over professional ethics. In such an atmosphere, critical journalism was not only suppressed but equated with "treason" or "espionage" (Roberts, 2003, p. 123).

All of these developments reveal that the media in Algeria functioned not as an independent public sphere but as a structure reinforcing the state's hegemonic discourse. The phenomenon of "reproducing colonial legacies," often emphasized in postcolonial literature, is clearly observable in the country's media institutions. Post-independence media did not become autonomous but rather integrated into the representational strategies of the new power structure. The absence of press freedom, therefore, constitutes more than a structural problem—it serves as an indicator of the limits imposed by the political imagination.

3.3. Memory Regimes in the Media and Representations of the War

In the post-independence period, the Algerian state employed the national media both as a vehicle for contemporary political narratives and as an instrument for shaping collective memory. During this time, the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962) was reproduced in the media not simply as a historical event, but as a foundational narrative that reinforced the legitimacy of the state. The representation of the war was structured around specific stories of heroism, martyrdom, and victory myths, while alternative perspectives and conflicting memories were systematically marginalized (Stora, 1992, p. 28; Hachemaoui, 2015, p. 319).

The independence movement led by the FLN was transformed through media into a "national memory bloc," emphasizing an idealized historical narrative that glorified military victory and collective unity and sacrifice. This narrative was institutionalized by the continuous reproduction of selected events and figures, while internal conflicts, divisions among revolutionary groups, and the distinctive contributions of Berber, communist, and women's movements were largely excluded or relegated to secondary importance (Evans & Phillips, 2007, p. 72).

Official television broadcasts regularly featured programming commemorating the armed resistance launched on November 1, 1954, and the ceasefire on March 19, 1962. These anniversaries became central rituals in the state's memory politics. These commemorative events and broadcasts functioned as lieux de mémoire (sites of memory) in Pierre Nora's (1989) sense, forming a symbolic calendar of remembrance filled with selective representations designed to sustain a shared sense of history. This calendar did more than merely evoke the past—it also delineated the boundaries of current political belonging and definitions of citizenship.

This institutionalized memory regime in the media effectively excluded alternative narratives. The symbolic distinction drawn in media representations between civilians killed during the civil conflicts of the 1990s and the martyrs of the independence struggle illustrates how the state selectively remembered the past. This selective memory can be interpreted through Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) concept of

“silenced histories.” The dominant state narrative not only determined what would be remembered but also what would be forgotten or suppressed, thus turning the media into a mechanism for memory control.

4. The Representation of the Algerian Resistance in the French Press

The Algerian War of Independence was not only shaped by military and diplomatic struggles but also by its media and ideological dimensions. Newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, and news agencies in France played a decisive role in shaping public perception through their methods of defining and framing the conflict. These representations contributed either to the reproduction or to the critique of the colonial regime’s legitimacy. The representation of the resistance in the media extended beyond information dissemination—it revealed the complex relationship between French national identity and its colonial past. The Algerian issue moved beyond the confines of “foreign news” and took center stage in domestic political debates within France.

The stance of the French press during this period was far from homogenous. Media outlets differed based on their political orientations, ideological affiliations, and degrees of economic independence. The mainstream press, which maintained organic ties with the state, generally adopted a discourse legitimizing colonial policies. These outlets often criminalized the resistance and steered public opinion accordingly. On the other hand, the left-wing opposition press developed a more critical stance, exposing issues such as torture, censorship, and racist policies. However, the impact of these alternative voices remained limited due to the structural constraints of the media system. Particularly during the early years of the war, deviating from the dominant discourse entailed considerable risk.

The representation of the Algerian resistance in the French media was shaped not only by the content of reporting but also by the identities of the subjects portrayed, the discursive strategies employed, censorship mechanisms, and the techniques used to manipulate public opinion. These modes of representation simultaneously revealed and obscured the colonial regime’s crises. This section analyzes the French press’s approach to the Algerian resistance under four key headings: the visibility of the war, discursive differences among newspapers, the representation of Algerian actors, and the role of the media in shaping post-independence memory politics.

4.1. The Visibility of the War and Mechanisms of Censorship in the French Press

The Algerian War of Independence, which began in 1954, was long presented to the French public not as a “war” in the official sense, but rather as a “series of events.” This definitional manipulation by the French state directly impacted the scope of the press and shaped how the public understood the events. Censorship measures imposed on media organizations affected not only news content but also the language used. Terms such as “war,” “occupation,” and “torture” were systematically banned or replaced with euphemisms (Vidal-Naquet, 1972, p. 83). This censorship policy was implemented not only in right-leaning publications but also in mainstream newspapers.

The framing power of state-controlled news agencies, such as Agence France-Presse (AFP), suppressed the voices of local reporters. As a result, massacres, disappearances, and civilian deaths in Algeria were conveyed only indirectly or in ways unlikely to draw reader attention (Connelly, 2002, p. 173). These implicit narrative strategies did not merely obscure colonial violence but also blurred responsibility, deferring moral debate.

In addition to direct censorship, self-censorship became a widespread practice. Journalists, reluctant to risk their careers or publishing licenses, took care to present events in a “balanced” manner. This gave rise to a form of epistemic hegemony within the media, severely limiting the public circulation of truths concerning the anti-colonial resistance.

4.2. *Le Monde* and *L’Humanité*: Divergent Discourses in the Mainstream and Left-Wing Press

Despite the censorship regime, discursive diversity in the French press did not entirely disappear. Newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *L'Humanité* adopted different political stances on the Algerian issue. While *Le Monde* emphasized independent journalism and neutrality in its editorial line, its reporting on the Algerian War often adopted a tone sympathetic to the state's position (Thomas, 2008, p. 64). In the early years of the conflict, the actions of the FLN were framed as "terrorism," while French military intervention was portrayed as a "restoration of order."

In contrast, *L'Humanité*, the organ of the French Communist Party, developed a more overtly anti-colonial stance. It framed the Algerian resistance as a struggle for liberation against imperialism and attempted to expose France's use of torture, executions, and collective punishment with supporting evidence (Shipway, 2008, p. 201). In this sense, *L'Humanité* played a critical role in rendering colonial violence visible to the French public.

Nevertheless, the influence of the leftist press was limited by both its low circulation and the prevailing political climate. With the rise of Charles de Gaulle in 1958, the media landscape underwent a re-centralization. This process, coupled with the restriction of dissenting voices, led to a growing homogenization in the representation of the war.

4.3. The Representation and Stereotyping of Algerian Actors in the Media

The representation of Algerian fighters and civilians in the French press was often constructed through orientalist and reductionist tropes. As an extension of the colonial legacy, Algerians were typically portrayed either as "savage insurgents" or "passive victims," with little regard for the historical and political complexity of their demands (Sivan, 1991, p. 44). As Frantz Fanon (1961) also noted, these depictions reproduced the logic of colonial thought through the medium of journalism.

Armed actions against the French military were frequently decontextualized and described with terms such as "terrorist," "bloody assault," or "barbaric attack" (Kumar, 2006, p. 59). By contrast, the repression exercised by the French army—including mass arrests and village burnings—was either absent from news coverage or neutralized through technical jargon.

These distorted representations persisted not only during the war but also in post-war memory. A significant portion of the French public continued to recall the Algerian War as a matter of "public order," with the political content of the resistance suppressed. In this way, the media functioned not merely as a vehicle for relaying information but also as a symbolic apparatus that obscured colonial violence.

4.4. Post-Independence Effects: Memory and Media Responsibility in France

Following Algeria's independence in 1962, the French media largely portrayed the process as a "loss" or a "national trauma." Neither politicians nor the media fully assumed responsibility for the war. This culture of denial hindered the public's historical reckoning (Stora, 1998, p. 43). Until the 1990s, it was nearly impossible for news about torture, mass executions, and colonial crimes to appear in the media.

This silence had both individual and institutional dimensions. French television and newspapers preferred to maintain a nostalgic national narrative rather than critically question the war's place in collective memory. The discrimination faced by Algerian-origin citizens in France serves as a concrete example of the social consequences of failing to confront the colonial past (Bancel, Blanchard & Lemaire, 2005, p. 91).

However, from the 2000s onward, a slow process of reckoning began to take shape in the media. Newspapers like *Le Monde* published self-critical editorials concerning their past stances, and some television channels produced documentaries on the Algerian War. These developments indicate a growing awareness of media responsibility. Nevertheless, it is clear that a comprehensive confrontation with the legacy of colonialism is still lacking, and the media must adopt a more proactive role in this regard.

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Under French colonial rule, the media sphere functioned not merely as a repressive apparatus but as a strategic platform for establishing cultural hegemony. In the case of Algeria, the media became an instrument of colonialism's epistemic project, extending beyond censorship to institutionalize inequality in news production and access to information. Newspapers that published in French and aligned with the metropole systematically rendered the cultural and historical experiences of the local population invisible. The designation of the colonial language as the only legitimate medium of news played a decisive role in the colonization of knowledge. This constituted a process of mental occupation beyond physical control.

As demonstrated by the example of *El Moudjahid*, local media initiatives that emerged under colonial repression played a crucial role in organizing resistance and constructing national consciousness. These publications developed an alternative discourse that challenged the representational crisis of the colonial order and built a new language of history, identity, and solidarity. During the war years, they produced not just news but a memory of struggle. However, this critical and revolutionary potential was later absorbed by state ideology after independence. The media, which had functioned as a tool of liberation, became a central ideological apparatus in the reproduction of the new power structure.

Although the post-independence media order initially raised hopes of an end to colonial domination, it soon became clear that a new hegemonic national narrative was being constructed at the domestic level. The FLN's single-party rule shaped the media as a domain for maintaining political continuity. In this process, editorial autonomy was suppressed, and diversity of expression was significantly curtailed. This structural transformation suggests a linear continuity between the colonial regime's knowledge policies and the postcolonial state's mechanisms for producing legitimacy. In other words, colonial domination was not overcome but restructured in different forms and contents.

The state's dominance over the media extended beyond content control to reinforcing a singular narrative in the construction of national memory. Berber identity, female resisters, socialist factions, and local initiatives—actors in the broader resistance movement—were either ignored or marginalized in media discourse. In line with Michel-Rolph Trouillot's concept of "silenced history," this reveals how the past is remembered—or forgotten—under the control of power. The media thus became an instrument for directing both remembrance and forgetting.

Looking at the French press, the representational issues during the war, despite the divisions between mainstream and leftist outlets, reveal the persistence of a common colonial gaze. While publications like *Le Monde* acted out of a reflex to protect France's international reputation, leftist newspapers like *L'Humanité* did sometimes criticize colonial violence, but still maintained a significant distance from representing Algerians as autonomous subjects. This indicates a structural inequality in Western media regarding who gets to speak and when. Algerian actors were largely denied the right to represent their own struggle; their voices were often filtered through the lens of the French intelligentsia.

In post-independence Algerian media, a framework dominated by an absolute national narrative emerged, marginalizing all discourses that challenged this narrative. State-backed publications did not merely celebrate the FLN's victory; they also constructed a defensive front against any attempts to question or reinterpret that victory. The media became a political tool for reconstructing the past, rather than simply representing it. Memory thus ceased to be a fixed structure and became a political text that is continuously rewritten.

The analyses presented in this study demonstrate that the media in Algeria has functioned as a mechanism of domination intrinsic to both colonial and postcolonial power structures. The loss of the media's critical nature—formed within anti-colonial resistance—after independence offers a concrete example of how a tool of freedom can be transformed into a means of control. The history of media must be approached not merely in technological or institutional terms, but as a space of transformation for political imaginaries and collective memory.

The democratization of Algerian media depends not only on changes in state policy. This transformation requires the recognition of plural forms of memory, the creation of space for alternative historical narratives, and the structural safeguarding of freedom of expression. Today, media continues to produce silenced memories of the present alongside those of the past. Confronting the cultural traumas

created by colonialism necessitates dismantling the epistemic hierarchies that still persist in the media landscape.

REFERENCES

- Aït-Benali, H. (2013). *Médias et pouvoir politique en Algérie: Une histoire de tensions*. L'Harmattan.
- Aït-Larbi, S. (1993). *La presse algérienne: De l'indépendance à l'ouverture démocratique*. Éditions Enal.
- Evans, M., & Phillips, J. (2007). *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*. Yale University Press.
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers.
- Hachemaoui, M. (2015). The invisible origins of the Algerian authoritarian regime: On the socio-political genesis of the post-colonial state. *Middle East Critique*, 24(3), 309–327. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2015.1060831>
- Harbi, M. (1980). *Le FLN: Mirage et réalité: Des origines à la prise du pouvoir (1945–1962)*. Editions Jeune Afrique.
- Layachi, A. (1998). *Economic Crisis and Political Change in North Africa*. Praeger.
- McDougall, J. (2017). *A History of Algeria*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nora, P. (1989). Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire. *Representations*, 26, 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>
- Roberts, H. (2003). *The Battlefield: Algeria 1988–2002. Studies in a Broken Polity*. Verso.
- Roussel, C. (2017). Mémoire officielle, mémoire sociale et politiques de la mémoire en Algérie. In M. Brulin & J. Frétigné (Eds.), *Mémoires algériennes: De la guerre à la crise politique* (pp. 183–201). L'Harmattan.
- Silverstein, P. A. (2004). *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. Indiana University Press.
- Stora, B. (2001). *Algeria, 1830–2000: A Short History*. Cornell University Press.
- Stora, B. (1992). *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie*. La Découverte.
- Trouillot, M.-R. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press.
- Young, R. J. C. (2001). *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Blackwell.
- Young, R. J. C. (2003). *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Zeraoui, Z. (1994). *Pouvoir et opposition en Algérie: Les acteurs politiques dans la crise*. Publisud.