

The Algerian, Tunisian And Moroccan Press: Historical And Linguistic Issues

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Summary:

This article offers a comprehensive overview of the development of print media in the Maghreb countries, focusing mainly on Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia and their use of the French language. It delves into the origins, historical, political, and socio-cultural influences shaping the press in each country while addressing challenges such as censorship, financial constraints, and competition from electronic media at various times. Additionally, this contribution highlights the impact of different political periods, especially post-independence and revolutions, and the evolution of partisan press in these contexts. The role of the French language in the press is also discussed, emphasizing its significance as a lingua franca in the Maghreb region and its role in disseminating ideas despite efforts to promote national languages.

Keywords: Print Media, Maghreb, French Language, Maghreb Press, Linguistics.

Introduction

The written press is often seen as a constantly evolving organism, both a witness to and a player in the life of a society. It collects diverse languages and contributes to the creation of new words. As P. Albert, it is influenced by human actions and fully reflects current events: « It is sensitive to all political and

economic developments as well as to all variations in fashion and the spirit of the times » (Albert, 1990:7).

P. Charaudeau highlights the multiplicity of perspectives journalists explore in the print media. According to his analysis :

«The press is essentially a scriptural area, made up of words, graphics, drawings, and sometimes still images, on a paper support. This ensemble places the medium within a written tradition (in the narrow sense) that is essentially characterized by a distanced relationship between the writer and the reader due to the physical absence of the transmitting and receiving instances, one concerning the other, a conceptualization activity on the part of both instances to represent the world, which produces specific logics of production and comprehension, a multi-oriented ocular journey through the writing space that ensures that what has been written remains as a trace to which one can constantly return: those who write to rectify or erase, those who read to recall or recompose their reading . » (Charaudeau, 1997, 125).

Over the past decade, the Maghreb print media have undergone significant quantitative and qualitative development. It is increasingly becoming an essential means of socio-cultural communication, playing an increasingly crucial role in understanding various aspects of society. Public authorities and private companies compete to dominate or gain a press market share. The growth of this sector is one of the most striking features of the Maghreb media landscape. In this contribution, we will attempt to highlight its linguistic and historical stakes.

1. Algeria

The popular belief that the press in Algeria began in 1962, at the time of the country's independence, is erroneous. Its origins go back well before this period, to June 14, 1830, when French forces landed in the region. According to S. Benmansour (2019:14), Jean-Toussaint Merle, secretary and historiographer to Maréchal de Bourmont, published a newsletter entitled *L'Estafette d'Alger* on June 29, 1830, which unfortunately soon ceased publication.

1.1. Newspapers from the pro-colonial period

Newspapers that supported colonial ideology included the following titles:

Le Moniteur Algérien: This official newspaper, under the authority of the colonial authorities in Algeria, was created on January 27, 1832. It covered many subjects and sometimes reproduced speeches by the King of France. In its 26th issue, it began publishing articles in Arabic, marking a turning point.

Al-Akhbar founded by Auguste Bourget in July 1839, began to include a few pages in Arabic in 1902. The paper's new managers, notably Élisabeth Eberhardt and Victor Barrucand, initiated this change, although their political orientation was favorable to the government. They gave space to articles about Algerians and the Muslim religion.

Al-Mobacher was launched in 1847 following the end of Emir Abdelkader's resistance. This fortnightly newspaper introduced a few pages in Arabic in its editions to generate interest. The promulgation of the law of July 1881 opened up a degree of freedom for the press in Algeria and led to an increase in local publications in the big cities, such as *L'Africain* in Constantine, *Le Gouraya* in Bejaïa, *L'Afrique française* and *La Sentinelle républicaine* in Algiers. Similarly, smaller towns had newspapers like *La Lanterne* in Bordj-Menaël, *L'Echo du Zakar* in Miliana, and *Le Tell* in Blida.

As for the assimilationist movement, it strongly supported the idea of French Algeria and initially manifested itself through the newspaper *El Akhbar*, which quickly attracted the attention of the indigenous population.

Subsequently, several pro-native Frenchmen set up their newspapers to serve as a mouthpiece for the colonized. These newspapers included :

L'Islam: This weekly, published in Algiers and Annaba from 1910 to 1914, started exclusively in French. Later, it included two Arabic-language pages in its publications.

La voix des humbles: This French-language monthly, created between 1922 and 1928 and directed by M. Faci, aimed to defend the idea of « French Algeria ».

L'Iqdam (1919-1923): Founded by Emir Khaled to promote reflection on Islam, this weekly was initially published in French only. Later, *L'Iqdam* began publishing two pages in Arabic, with very different content from the French-language pages. Its

central theme was the Muslim Renaissance, known as « la Nahda ».

1.2. The reform movement (1925 - 1940)

The publication of the newspaper El-Mountaqid marked this movement, the death of Ulema leader Abdelhamid Ben Badis, and the discontinuation of the newspaper Ac-Chihab. During this period, two opposing trends were visible: the traditionalists, who represented the zaouïas, and the Oulémas, who embodied the reformists.

1.3. Newspapers after independence

It is essential to describe better the organs and sectors of the Algerian print media to understand its situation. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to grasp this reality without addressing the context of its evolution. With this in mind, We will briefly outline the main phases that shaped the Algerian press after independence. B. Brahimi (1996) identifies six distinct episodes:

1.3.1. The 1962 - 1965 period

After independence, colonial newspapers gradually disappeared to be replaced by Algerian publications. At that time, newspaper circulation distribution was characterized by 15,000 copies for Arabic-language dailies, while European newspapers had 65,000, as they were not yet subject to bans.

This period was also marked by a problematic situation in Algeria:

« An immense, massive country; twelve million inhabitants barely recovered from the ravages of war a strong popular tradition of Islam, a solid popular tradition of Islam, egalitarianism and community life a general primary level of education in an atmosphere of poverty the departure of a million French nationals a total upheaval of state structures and an attempt to apply the norms of socialism to a country. Hitherto managed according to colonial methods, the heritage of a foreign culture that had prevailed for one hundred and two years and a break with the living sources of Arab culture the harsh reminder of economic realities after the enthusiasm of the revolution - such was the framework into which the Algerian press of 1965 had to fit. » (Souriau - Hoebrechts, 1969:247).

1.3.2. The 1965 - 1979 period

During this period, the print media in Algeria underwent disruptions linked to political changes. After the death of President Houari Boumedienne, the printed press became an instrument used by the state to disseminate its policies.

Rising paper prices, on the one hand, coupled with high illiteracy rates and declining reader purchasing power on the other, prompted the government to reorganize the media landscape. This reorganization resulted in higher tariffs and reduced the number of newspapers.

It is worth pointing out that all single-party newspapers were placed under the authority of the Ministry of Information and Culture. These newspapers were now supervised by a general manager appointed by ministerial decree.

1.3.3. The 1979 - 1988 period

During this critical phase, the press was gradually integrated into the daily lives of Algerians, becoming a crucial means of communication on both social and political levels. B. Brahimi highlights the importance of this period, marked by the advent « of the Information Code, adopted in December 1982 by the National People's Assembly, representing a turning point in the history of the Algerian press. This law of February 6, 1982, published in the Official Gazette No. 6 of February 9, 1982, was the first law on information since the country's independence » (1996 :31) .

This period was also marked by the creation of numerous national and regional newspapers published in Arabic and French. This competition led to significant progress in the content and presentation of these newspapers.

1.3.4. The 1988 - 1991 period

This phase, marked above all by the events of October 1988, differs markedly from the three previous periods.

« The popular uprising of October 5, 1988, led to profound upheavals in the country's political and cultural life. These upheavals had quantitative repercussions on the media field (creation of numerous newspapers and regional state radio stations) and freedom of information (creation of privately-owned newspapers, major radio and television programming changes, and spoken and televised news). » (Brahimi, 1996 :9)

According to the author, around 140 partisan and private newspapers were created.

1.3.5. The 1992 - 1997 period

B. Brahimi sees it as an exceptional phase in many respects, particularly in the political and cultural spheres, influenced by the state of emergency declared on February 9, 1992. This period marked a radical change for the press. Many partisan or private newspapers disappeared, while new French-language papers such as *L'Écho de Tlemcen*, *El Acil*, *Les Nouvelles Confidences*, *L'Opinion* were created.

As for their circulation, it fell considerably due to the imbalances the country was experiencing at the time.

1.3.6. The period from 1997 to 2002

A significant transformation has affected journalism, making it more modern and professional. The publication of new titles and the considerable increase in circulation, reaching around one million five hundred thousand copies a day, have significantly impacted the dissemination of information.

Privately owned newspapers continued to outnumber publicly owned ones, and *El Khabar* remained the foremost choice of Algerians, with a daily circulation of four hundred thousand copies.

B. Brahimi notes that following the 60s, when newspapers were perceived as rare items aimed at an educated readership, the 2000s have profoundly altered the media panorama, transforming it significantly.

2. Morocco

Several research works on the history of the Moroccan press have been undertaken, notably those of J-L. Miège (1954), J. Baida (1995), A. Aouchar (1990), and M. El Ayadi et al. (2006). However, apart from the occasional testimonial or debate, which may be stimulating but is not based on in-depth investigation, there has been little contemporary discussion of this subject. Moreover, the predominant theoretical approaches do not seem sufficiently exhaustive to fully grasp the complexity of the Moroccan press and how it operates.

Before Morocco came under French rule in 1912, various newspapers appeared in different languages, despite the organizational difficulties of the print media, mainly attributed to Material and technical limitations. Nevertheless,

considerable efforts were made to inform Moroccans using rudimentary means rooted in local culture. J. Baida, in his work, highlights some of these means, such as the Barrahs, informers working with the Makhzen, responsible for spreading news orally in neighborhoods and markets. In addition, religious preaching in mosques and zawiyas was also exploited to convey messages or comment on political, social, or cultural events.

The geographical proximity of Morocco to Europe has had a considerable influence on the history of the Moroccan press. Tangier, a Moroccan city close to Europe and located at the entrance to Gibraltar, played a crucial role in introducing certain European ideas, notably freedom of expression. This proximity also facilitated the installation of the first printing works in Morocco in 1880.

Foreign newspapers were encouraged by the Makhzen, which welcomed them and allowed particular articles to be translated into Arabic for distribution to Moroccans, provided they did not attack religious and political aspects.

2.1. From independence to the present day

After independence, Morocco promulgated a newspaper code in November 1958, which was officially published in an official bulletin on November 27, 1958. Before this, no laws governing the press in Morocco were in place.

In a modern legal framework and liberal environment, the state sought to nationalize the press. This led to the creation of many newspapers, although some disappeared due to difficulties encountered.

Today, the Moroccan press benefits from a solid infrastructure and boasts many newspapers, from dailies to weeklies. This diversity has propelled the country forward in this field. These newspapers are published in Arabic, French, and Amazigh.

However, English-language newspapers are absent, mainly due to a limited English-speaking readership and the irregularity of British and American publications in the country. As for Amazigh, the number of Amazigh-language newspapers remains limited despite the institutional recognition of this language as official. Efforts are being made to balance the use of Amazigh and Arabic in the Moroccan media.

3. Tunisia

The birth of the written press in Tunisia dates back to July 22, 1860, with the publication of the first newspaper, *Erraid Ettounsi*, written in Arabic. This newspaper made Tunisia the second oldest in the Arab world, just behind Egypt.

The development of the Tunisian press has been hampered by the country's many political, social, cultural, and economic upheavals. This period was marked by strict media control, limiting journalists' freedom to reveal certain truths or cover significant events.

Attempts at French naturalization proved disastrous for the colonists. The naturalization law of 1923 provoked strong reactions. A press campaign was launched to warn of threats to religion, leading to arrests and exile for members of the « *Destour* ».

Despite the obstacles encountered in the Arabic-language press, the nationalists turned to the French-language press, reinforcing their efforts with newspapers such as *L'Étendard Tunisien* (1929) and *La Voix du Tunisien* (1930), to which academics, including Habib Bourguiba, contributed. This period also saw the emergence of literary production by Tunisian writers, with the publication 1929 of *La Kahena*, a literary journal.

In 1933, the strength of the national struggle, supported by French-language newspapers, forced the colonial authorities to impose a tyrannical regime similar to that of Arabic-language newspapers. Despite this, newspapers in French and Arabic remained bastions of national demands.

In 1934, the « *Destour* » split into two factions, giving rise to the « *Néo-Destour* », each with its newspaper: *La Voix du Peuple* for the « *Destour* » and *L'Action Tunisienne* for the « *Néo-Destour* ». Other newspapers appeared during the German occupation, such as *Al Yawm*, *As-Sabab*, and *Ifriqya Al Fatat*, but were suspended after Germany's departure.

This period was marked by a nationalist struggle demanding a renewal of Tunisia's supreme authority. Despite strict control of the press, it continued to publish clandestinely. In 1951, the *Neo-Destour* daily *As Sabab* was launched in Arabic, facilitating access to information for the Tunisian people.

This era was also marked by the political blocking and repression of certain media, as well as a lack of professional

freedom, although many independent journalists tried to resist an oppressive and unpredictable regime under Ben Ali.

The Tunisian press during and after Ben Ali's reign can be divided into public, private, and partisan.

The public press comprises two entities under the aegis of the Tunisian state: SNIPE and Dar Essabah.

Société Nouvelle d'Impression, de Presse et d'Édition (SNIPE) publishes two major newspapers in Tunisia: La Presse de Tunisie in French and Essahafa in Arabic. Launched in 1936 by Henri Smadja, La Presse de Tunisie is one of the country's oldest newspapers and was nationalized in 1968.

According to K. Labidi (2012:52), SNIPE has long been entrusted with unprofitable tasks, particularly in the case of the Arabic-language newspaper El Arab, whose circulation costs exceeded its selling price of 61 millimes per issue. In addition, on the instructions of the Presidency of the Republic, SNIPE was forced to print the magazine Solidarité, owned by a Tunisian journalist living in Paris.

La Presse journalists protested against the problematic working conditions within the company, staging demonstrations to denounce the situation in 2009. In June 2010, the SNIPE union supported the journalists by calling on the authorities to resolve the problems, threatening to wear a red armband in protest.

After the January 14, 2011 revolution, relations remained strained between journalists and the management of La Presse. SNIPE encountered significant financial difficulties, particularly with Essahafa, representing a financial burden for the company. In February 2011, SNIPE's former CEO announced that Essahafa would cease publication to be replaced by an electronic version. Faced with the adverse reaction, management proposed turning Essahafa into a weekly.

In May 2012, SNIPE's CEO reported that the company was making an annual loss of 2 million dinars, with an additional daily deficit of 5,500 dinars attributable to the publication of Essahafa. This newspaper was seen as a refuge for journalists dismissed from other media for political reasons.

In June 2011, an agreement was reached between SNIPE and the Tunis Regional Labor Union to resolve a dispute that arose after

January 2011. The agreement provided for a halt to the project, the cessation of printing, and a reorganization of the newspaper.

On January 7, 2012, Mohamed Nejib Ouerghi was appointed head of SNIPE, replacing Hmida Ben Romdhane, according to information provided by the author.

Dar Assabah, established by Habib Cheikhrouhou in 1951, is a private press company that publishes Assabah in Arabic, Le Temps in French, and the weekly Asabah Al Ousboui. After the founder's death, dissensions arose between Raouf and Moncef, heirs to the company, disrupted by Ben Ali's policies. Dar Assabah also faced financial difficulties resulting from injustices in the selective advertising distribution by the Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure. As a result, Raouf Cheikhrouhou's siblings sold their shares to Sakhr El Materi, a member of Ben Ali's family, thus becoming a Dar Assabah shareholder.

Following the seizure of all Sakhr El Materi's assets after January 14, 2011, Dar Assabah was placed under the administration of a receiver.

3.1. Private press

The private press in Tunisia has been hampered by multiple challenges, often in the grip of power and used for corrupt purposes. Significant changes affected this sector after January 14, 2011, mainly quantitatively.

From 1977 to 1986, dubbed the Printemps de la presse tunisienne (Springtime of the Tunisian press), several quality newspapers appeared, notably the weeklies Errai and Le Maghreb. However, from 1990 onwards, the Tunisian press experienced a marked decline, characterized by the rise of low-quality newspapers used by the government to saturate the market. These included Al Anwar and Les annonces. Crucially, most of these low-quality newspapers were owned by individuals linked to the regime, with no connection to the world of the press.

Between 1988 and 1990, a period of prior censorship marked the history of the press in Tunisia. Publishing houses were obliged to submit a copy of their newspapers to the Ministry of the Interior and the Secretariat of State for Information to obtain prior distribution authorization, a condition from which ruling party press organs were exempt. This measure was soon

replaced by other forms of control, such as direct instructions and threats.

In 1991, the Agence Tunisienne de Communication Extérieure was created initially to promote Tunisia's image abroad but quickly evolved into a tool of absolute media control, controlling the monopoly on the distribution of public advertising.

From 1991 onwards, censorship eased. Articles on sensitive subjects began to multiply, but the authorities often summoned journalists to justify their publications, even on minor subjects. Newspapers were increasingly controlled, prompting Tunisian citizens to seek information mainly through foreign media.

During the Ben Ali era, the Directorate of Political Affairs exerted a harmful influence on the press sector, controlling newspaper content and monitoring the activities of political parties.

Following the January 14, 2011 revolution and the departure of Ben Ali, many newspapers belonging to political parties close to the government disappeared, leaving many journalists unemployed. The Syndicat National des Journalistes Tunisiens intervened to solve this problem.

Just after the fall of the Ben Ali regime, some 227 titles appeared in Tunisia, including weeklies, monthlies, dailies, and more. However, only around 30 newspapers started publishing. Some publishers who had committed ethical violations were granted permission to create new newspapers.

There was much speculation about funding these new titles, with many believing they were financed by businesses close to the former regime. Most of these new publications were sensational and scandal-driven tabloids, engaging in political one-upmanship and personal score-settling.

Newspapers that were once opposed to human rights defenders during Ben Ali's regime turned into self-proclaimed revolutionaries after the fall of the regime. However, despite an apparent focus on the regions from which the revolution originated, the problems of these regions are not addressed in the media.

Today, the print media in Tunisia faces several significant obstacles, including rising printing costs, competition from electronic media, and a declining readership.

3.2. Partisan press

The partisan press in Tunisia began to emerge mainly from 1977 onwards, except for a few newspapers from the « Destour » party, which later became the RCD (El Amal and l'Action), and newspapers from the Communist party, which later became « Ettajdid » (Attaliaa and La Tribune). In 1981, new newspapers were launched, such as Attariq El Jadid (newspaper of the Communist Party), El Wehda (newspaper of the Popular Union Party), and El Mawqif (newspaper of the Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste Party, which became the Parti Démocratique Progressiste in 2001).

However, these newspapers encountered financial difficulties, a lack of readership, and restrictions imposed by the authorities. From 1997 onwards, the authorities introduced a policy to support the partisan press to improve the country's image abroad. However, this subsidy has not significantly improved the content or form of party newspapers, which remain largely inaccessible to the general public.

Following the revolution and the opening up of the media market, the partisan press gradually lost its readership. As a result, many newspapers disappeared. The political, social, and economic changes that took place after the fall of the Ben Ali regime and the increase in the number of political parties in the country made the future of partisan newspapers in search of democracy increasingly uncertain in Tunisia.

Conclusion

Examining the press in Maghreb countries underscores two crucial aspects of undeniable linguistic importance.

The enduring influence of the colonial past and the challenges associated with Arabization are apparent. The persistent prevalence of French-language newspapers in Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) underscores the obstacles faced by Arabization policies. This reality underscores the profound and lasting impact left by colonizers on the region's print media, illustrating the complexity of linguistic and cultural issues in the Maghreb media landscape.

The terms « imported press » or « finished product » aptly describe the daily situation in Maghreb countries, where French-language newspapers continue to solidify their societal position. Despite efforts to encourage the use of Arabic in

these media, the continued dominance of French-language newspapers highlights the persistent challenges faced by initiatives promoting the Arabic language in print media.

In summary, an analysis of the Maghreb press reveals the critical importance of considering linguistic and cultural dimensions in understanding its evolution and impact on society. These findings underscore the necessity to develop media policies that are inclusive and sensitive to the linguistic and cultural realities of the Maghreb countries while recognizing the diversity and complexity of historical influences shaping the media landscape in this geographical area.

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