

**LA MISSION LIBERATRICE: REFRAMING ALGERIAN MEDIA
CENSORSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

La Mission Liberatrice: Reframing Algerian Media Censorship in the 21st Century

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On June 13, 2021, the Algerian Ministry of Communication revoked the media accreditation of the French television news channel France 24 in Algeria. This was during a period of popular protest led by the pro-democracy Hirak party, on which France 24 has been reporting heavily. While the Ministry claims the move was due to France 24's spread of misinformation due to implicit bias, the platform issued a statement the same day confirming they were surprised by the action because of the channel's transparent coverage of all nations, including Algeria. Western-tied academics, media, and policymakers have viewed the revocation of France 24's media accreditation as anti-democratic in nature. I challenge the established view among Western academics and policymakers, including Hafid Gafaïti, that media censorship in postcolonial Algeria is simply an undemocratic action associated with control and a denial of basic human rights. This specific decree was announced one day after legislative elections were

held in Algeria and during a period of civil unrest in which there were several arrests of journalists and political opponents. However, I go beyond Algeria's lack of democratic identity to argue there are historical, political, and psychological impacts of French colonialism which together explain Algeria's decision to censor media and reclaim its own identity.

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NOMENCLATURE

ALN	National Liberation Army
APS	Algerian Press Service
FIS	Islamic Salvation Front
FFS	Socialist Forces Front
FLN	National Liberation Front
PRS	Party of the Socialist Revolution

INTRODUCTION

On June 13, 2021, the Algerian Ministry of Communication revoked the media accreditation of the French television news channel France 24 in Algeria. As one of the most prominent French global news broadcasters, this revocation undoubtedly casts a shadow on both Franco-Algerian relations as well as on Algeria's reputation among democratic Western nations which so value freedom of the press. The Ministry claims this move was due to "the clear and repeated hostility of [France 24 towards Algeria] and its institutions, its lack of respect for the rules of professional ethics, and its practice of media disinformation and manipulation." France 24 issued a statement the same day confirming the agency was surprised by the action because of the channel's "transparent" coverage of all nations, including Algeria. Because this legislation was implemented one day after legislative elections were held in Algeria and during a period of "mounting official pressure against the Hirak [opposition party] and a string of arrests of journalists and opposition figures," Western academics, media, and policymakers view this action as anti-democratic in nature (France 24). However, beyond the argument that Algeria is attempting to prevent and/or destabilize democracy, few have asked why actions to censor the media were taken. Khaled Drareni, a correspondent for the French-based Reporters Without Borders, told *Voice of America*, "In the same way that the [Algerian] government controls or tries to control the Algerian press, it also tries to control the foreign press" (Scott). Yet, Drareni does not offer an explanation as to why that is; he simply states that censorship happens and it is bad. I challenge the vaguely established view among Western academics and policymakers that

media censorship in postcolonial Algeria is simply an undemocratic action associated with control and a denial of basic human rights (Gafaïti 60).

Rather than recognizing and respecting differences in governance, the West has a history of judging and condemning nations which do not follow the same path to development or ‘civilization’ as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, etc. The assumptions the West makes about alternate forms of governance demonstrate an implicit bias in global communications, which ultimately hinders Algeria’s and other postcolonial regimes’ development and status within global society. Furthermore, this bias creates an alternative version of history that damages national identity. To challenge these assumptions, I analyze how and why Algeria chose to censor media in the aftermath of the nation’s War for Independence through an analysis of domestic and foreign media. Going beyond the country’s lack of democratic identity, I argue the historical, political, and psychological impacts of French colonialism have led the Algerian government to censor its media in the 21st century.

To understand fully how this issue is rooted in the legacies of colonialism, one must begin in 1830, three years after a public dispute occurred between a French consul and an Algerian businessman over a trade debt. To restore the French monarchy’s deteriorating public image, King Charles X set his troops on the path to Algeria on June 14, 1830, where they brutally pillaged the city of Algiers. French troops were met with hard resistance for several years, though ultimately oppression won out and Algeria remained under French colonial rule for 132 years until its hard-fought independence in 1962.

Jennifer Sessions argues the purpose of the Algerian conquest was to provide “concrete ‘solutions’ to domestic unrest” and economic downturn in the metropole during the July

Monarchy (76).¹ French administrators transferred the military tactics and manpower utilized in the colony to quell rebellion in Paris; the colony itself also acted as “an outlet for unemployed French workers” (77). However, French political leaders’ justification for colonialism slowly developed into *la mission civilisatrice*, an administrative and moral policy code defining a need for the French to civilize the “barbaric” and “savage” Algerian people culturally and morally (85). In addition to the use of “dehumanizing stereotypes,” the French used “exemplary violence designed to destroy resources and terrorize Algerians into submission” throughout their rule (81).

Furthermore, the French categorized the Algerian people using an oppressive, arbitrary rule of law, the “*Indigénat*,” which was established by French colonial administrators in Algeria in 1881; it spread throughout all of French West Africa by the turn of the 20th century. The *Indigénat* was an administrative decree and set of guidelines by which all French colonial administrators, or *commandants*, were supposed to rule and police within the colonies. However, *commandants* often enacted the *Indigénat* via “spectacular punishments” (Mann 333). The decree was “concerned primarily with asserting administration power” and essentially enabled *commandants* to justify their individual abuses of power over native peoples in French colonies (333). This included arresting natives for having a “bad attitude towards paying taxes” as well as the asinine yet true example of a commandant who required native people to stop frogs in a nearby river from disturbing his sleep by slapping the water with their bare hands all night long (334). Thus, the Algerians were subjected to emotional and physical oppression for over a

¹ The July Monarchy was a brief period of time (1830-1848) between the Bourbon Restoration and the rise of the Second Republic in France. Led by the elected King Louis-Philippe, the period is characterized by protest and civil unrest between the bourgeois, the working class, and the royalists.

century, which, combined with their “stubborn resistance,” inevitably led to organized uprising and the War for Independence (Sessions 81).

The residue of French colonialism continues to affect Algerian governance and society today, long after independence. One such effect is the suppression of media, which has existed in some form or another throughout both colonization and independence. Even though the limits of media freedoms and plurality of media options have changed throughout the postcolonial regime, with a rise in freedom of expression during the early 1990s, media censorship has steadily increased throughout the 2000s, particularly in tandem with the beginnings of the Hirak Movement in 2019. The 2021 “Freedom in the World Report” categorizes Algeria’s human rights status as definitively “Not Free” due in large part to “legal restrictions on media freedom,” which also affect a slew of other civil liberties.

Yet, I argue that exploring the Algerian government’s justifications for media censorship opens a space for better understanding the nation’s decisions, in nuanced context, rather than with judgement. (This judgment is what prevents Algeria, among other under-developed nations, from successfully developing.) Algeria does not have the support of the global community, which controls diplomatic and economic conversations, because the nation is taking alternative paths towards development that do not align with the democratic ideals set by France, the United States, etc. If judgment were eliminated, then the regime’s actions could become legitimized by the international community, thereby enhancing Algeria’s international reputation. Moving non-Western countries like Algeria into a “developed” status would inevitably diversify the global economy and likely enhance diplomatic relations as more cultures and political views become widely accepted.

1. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Media censorship is not a new phenomenon in Algeria; in fact, it is something that was originally implemented by the French during colonization. Historically, media censorship in Algeria has roots in ethnographic propaganda, a means to push a tailored argument or perspective onto the audience. However, as time has gone on, that propaganda has developed from a means of telling the Algerians what they are not (e.g. civilized) to a means of reinforcing who they are (e.g. bold freedom fighters; a conglomeration of arabophone and francophone culture in addition to hundreds of ethnic minorities, yet all distinctly Algerian), which I analyze in the following section through the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism. As I point out in Section 1.1, the state-owned newspaper *El-Moudjahid* is a prime example of censored media that aims to redefine national identity from Algeria's perspective. Western academics view Algeria's media censorship in the 21st century as an act of rejecting modernity and democratization. My following historical analysis concludes that Algeria's censorship of domestic media was and is a way for the nation to unify its values post-independence, while censorship of foreign media is a tool for removing foreign control from the sovereign nation.

1.1 20th Century Censorship: Colonial and Postcolonial

The very first newspaper in Algeria, *L'Estafette d'Alger*, was printed and controlled by the French colonial administration from the point of conquest in 1830 until 1932, to “promote the expansion of the colonial army's control across Algerian territory” (Layadi 287). Never pretending to be unbiased, it was simple propaganda to promote French colonialism and the empire's power. This propaganda was upheld throughout the 20th century with the colonial administration's introduction of *la mission civilisatrice*, the moral justification for colonizing the

uncivilized. The French colonial administration tightly regulated the media during the colonial era, which created arbitrary views of its power. In 1895, the French began prohibiting newspapers from publishing in any foreign non-French language, which included Arabic. The invention and assimilation of radio also allowed the colonial administration to establish its authority across the colony — which proved the most effective considering low literacy rates among the native Algerian population. B. Olatunji Oloruntimehin argues that “for both civil and military personnel the only tool for dealing with the conquered populations was repression” (301). In one instance, that “repression” took form in France’s media censorship.

As the National Liberation Front (FLN) — the leading socialist revolutionary party which actively opposed the French occupation — grew throughout the 20th century, the party utilized radio as a means to spread nationalist ideas against French rule, stirring the pot for the beginnings of a revolution. In his case study of postcolonial Algeria, “Power, Censorship, and the Press,” Hafid Gafaïti initially defines Algerian journalism as “a means of propaganda” under the ruling FLN to fight both internal and external dissent (51). Nacer-Eddine Layadi agrees in his examination of Algeria’s media development that “the historical context in which the Algerian media were formed and developed has pushed the media to play a propaganda role” (300). Therefore, it is only logical the opposition party utilized the press to push its own agenda.

On June 22, 1956, the French- and Arabic-language newspaper *El-Moudjahid* was founded; two months later, it became the “official voice of the FLN” (Layadi 288). The FLN used this newspaper to define and spread ideas of Algerian self-governance. Frantz Fanon himself contributed a great deal to *El-Moudjahid* with revolutionary rhetoric. Andrea Stanton argues the choice to publish in both French and Arabic was a strategic decision to place “pressure on speaker (or writer) and audience alike thanks to the differing positions they

occupied in the colonial hierarchy” (63). In other words, publishing in both languages allowed the party to effectively send its messages to both those it wanted to rally under its cause and to those it was fighting against. Additionally, Stanton makes the pertinent point that publishing in French, an official language of the United Nations, allowed the party to send its message to the wider international community to gain more attention, credibility, and support (64).

El-Moudjahid's title itself is a play on Arabic words (in a French transcription) which loosely translate to “the soldier,” “the revolutionary,” and “the volunteer” (Stanton 64). Stanton argues the reference to “jihad” is a “call to self-improvement [which] embraced the desire to protect oneself continually in all areas” (64). Therefore, this newspaper is a symbol which both protects and reinforces Algerian identity. After independence, the Algerian government centralized all colonial-era printed media (Layadi 289). To this day *El-Moudjahid* remains a state-owned paper, though it disassociated with the FLN in 1991 when the party eventually lost power.

Algeria's media has seen a variety of changes over the 60 years since independence, transforming from a centralized monopoly to a plurality of privately-owned platforms. All the while, censorship has existed in one form or another to prevent the intervention, inundation, or manipulation by foreign entities which would impede Algeria's sovereignty. For example, “all colonial printed media became nationalized” and therefore centralized by the newly formed Algerian government immediately after Algeria and France signed the Evian Accords in 1962, which officially ended the war and granted Algeria sovereignty. This was a means to continuously uphold revolutionary ideals as the state was nation-building (Layadi 289). Algeria — more importantly, the FLN — knew it wanted to establish a socialist regime, which will be further examined in Section 3. The party recognized that historically, differing biases or

misinformation surrounding the state's politics may be spread if various regional and local media platforms are set up around the country because each community could present information differently. Therefore, a part of the state's centralization of media included the abolition of regional and local media in favor of national platforms, which aided Algeria's socialist establishment by eliminating any potential for division (290). This centralization of media created a state-owned monopoly which persisted for three decades.

During the 1980s under Col. Chadli Benjedid's presidency — when there was still a state-owned media monopoly — there was an abundance of corruption at senior levels of government which was pointedly kept out of the news due to “authorities' strict control of access to information” (Glickman 8). Many underdeveloped nations in Africa struggle with corruption at the political level, a phenomenon from which Algeria is not exempt despite its egalitarian ideals of freedom and wealth. Gregory Mann presents one explanation as to why corruption is prevalent in Algeria. He parallels the abusive and corrupt *indigénat*, the French colonial rule of law defining *commandants*' authority, and the “type of authoritarianism and small-scale government violence” which many African states face today (352). However, Mann ultimately argues against this parallel's significance, and I agree with his stance that there is a clear distinction between colonial and post-colonial authoritarianism. In the case of Algeria, that distinction is seen in the fact that during post-colonialism the people have been included in the push to uphold the fundamental pillars of states which define ‘Algeria’ and what it means to be ‘Algerian,’ no matter how authoritarian or democratic that push may be. Therefore, I argue the 1980s regime did not want the domestic press digging into any hidden corruption for fear that the international community would get ahold of the news and intervene like the West so often does

in cases of African state corruption, which would completely violate the thin thread of sovereignty Algeria so delicately holds onto.

However, one important moment to examine is Benjedid's news blackout, in October 1988, in response to worsening riots. According to a 1991 Human Rights Watch report, "As army troops machine-gunned crowds of protestors, horrified Algerian journalists were forbidden from reporting what was happening" (9). While Human Rights Watch and Freedom House criticize this censorship as an extreme human rights abuse, I argue it is no surprise this occurred only 24 years after independence, when French oppression was still fresh on the minds of many Algerians. Once the public outrage from the 1988 riots and media blackout forced the regime to recognize that the people did in fact know something was going on behind closed doors, Benjedid began implementing change within domestic control, reforming media plurality to fulfill the people's needs while still upholding Algeria's sovereignty. This included writing a new constitution for Algeria in which "journalists and the press were assured a greater freedom" (Gafaïti 54). Additionally, the 1990 Information Law was passed, which transformed Algeria's press into a free, diverse plurality. Gafaïti argues that the government still continued "indirectly" controlling the media after this law was implemented, even though it "constituted a step towards the principle of political liberalization" (55). He further concludes that media censorship in Algeria "exists as an enunciation of power in the sociopolitical discourse that organizes the public sphere" (60). I argue state-control of media and media monopolies were an essential factor in Algeria's post-independence state building. Additionally, Algeria's state-owned media being called undemocratic is hypocritical when some democratic nations like the United Kingdom have also utilized state-owned media throughout their histories (e.g., the British Broadcasting Corporation).

Layadi examines Algeria's socialist-clientelist regime, wherein there exists a high priority on the state and a lack of distinction between the public and the private. He offers historical context and an evaluation of the economics of Algerian media in order to discuss the changes and challenges to the post-independence media system. Some of these economics-based decisions include various moves to censor media amid transitions from public and private ownership. For example, the rise of global and domestic terrorism in the 1990s brought a general decline in freedom of the press as the Algerian government worked to censor its media to protect national security (Layadi 292; Gafaïti 58). While this initially seems authoritarian and anti-democratic in nature, it is important to note the efforts of the George W. Bush Administration to censor American media a decade later (c.f. "Buying the War: How Big Media Failed Us") by justifying the need to uphold national security in anticipation of the Iraq War. Therefore, domestic media censorship within Algerian during this time period was not only utilized to unify national values, but also to ensure national security.

1.2 The Hirak Movement

Moving into the 21st century, Algeria saw the rise of the pro-democracy "Hirak" movement in early 2019. Peaceful demonstrators, mostly students, took to the streets to call for President Abdelaziz Bouteflika — who "was widely suspected" to no longer be ruling due to illness — to step down and begin Algeria's democratic transition (Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies). Initially, the movement went largely unreported in Algerian media. Western human rights activists believe this was because the Algerian government was attempting to suppress the movement. The Carnegie Endowment concluded that "the Algerian regime has yet to make true political concessions; it has maintained the political status quo while ignoring increasing pressure for reforms and profound transformations taking place in Algerian society"

(Rachidi). However, according to the Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies, “the Army Chief of Staff pledged on more than one occasion to protect the Hirak movement and help uphold its peacefulness.”

The movement’s non-violent nature presented the Hirak to the local and international public opinion as a “disciplined, organized, and peaceful social movement,” according to the Arab Center for Research & Policy Analysis. However, France 24’s coverage of the protests portrayed a negative image of “violent demonstrations full of arrests, inhibition, and police encirclement” (Kessar, et. al 10). This included phrases like “protest erupted,” “several arrested,” and “Thousands of Algerians defy police,” from a February 22, 2021, report and “Protestors ... were met by security forces who used truncheons and fired tear gas,” from a February 26, 2021, report — both covering the two-year anniversary of the Hirak movement, which began on February 19, 2019 (France 24). Kessar argues that France 24’s bias blatantly labels Algeria as an authoritarian military regime with few democratic freedoms (10). France notably has a vested interest in quelling the Hirak because of the movement’s goals for national development which would further loosen any economic holds France still has lingering over Algeria. I argue there is obvious bias and commercial interest on France 24’s part as they focus only on the police narrative and emphasize the actually peaceful Hirak movement as violent in order to lose its international credibility. In contrast, *Le Quotidien d’Algérie*, a privately-owned, French-language newspaper based in Algeria, reported on February 20, 2021, that the two-year anniversary emphasized that “the Hirak invariably maintains its peaceful course towards a free and appeased society, governed by law.”² This report focuses on the protestors’ peaceful and law-abiding actions, never once mentioning a police presence at the protests or any arrests made. A large

² My translation from French.

reason behind the choice to peacefully protest is due to many Algerians' memories of the violent civil war, which occurred only thirty years ago and still did not result in a significant regime change (Sdiri, *Orient XXI*).

Furthermore, despite cries of authoritarianism and suppression coming from multiple French and Western media outlets, human rights organizations, and NGOs after the Algerian Ministry of Communication banned France 24, France itself was the one who taught the Algerians how to censor and utilize media for propaganda purposes. As we will see in the next section, this form of French oppression during its colonial reign has had a number of trickle-down effects on the Algerian people, journalists, and leaders which have ultimately led to the government's reproduction of media censorship post-independence. Censorship thus does not exist as an active form of non-democracy, but as postcolonial residue of the colonial era. Though, as I have examined, Algerian media censorship has been increasingly focused on censoring the foreign press in the 21st century.

Domestically, the Algerian press has seen a variety of changes to allow state- and privately-owned platforms. That is not to say domestic press does not face any censorship.³ However, initial centralization of the media upon independence was a way for Algeria to kick-start its return to Algerian values by focusing on a socialist distribution of unified thought via the media. Today, as the Hirak movement has risen, the Algerian government has censored foreign media in order to prevent a non-Algerian narrative about democratization from emerging. Therefore, as this section has highlighted, censorship has historically occurred in post-colonial

³ Arrests of journalists and citizens in protest have steadily increased since the start of the Hirak; see "Pétition contre les arrestations et les atteintes aux libertés." Additionally, Algerian nationals who are correspondents for foreign press, such as the world-famous Khaled Drareni and Ghania Mouffok, also face significant censorship due to their association with the "enemy" of the state; see: "Un journaliste en Algérie n'est pas toujours un flic."

Algeria to return power to Algerians so they might define their own news after experiencing 132 years of their narrative being wrongly defined for them.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Now I move into an examination of the psychological effects of French colonialism on the Algerian nation, which I argue play a significant part in Algeria's choice to not only censor media, but to deny democracy writ large, at least until recently. Media censorship is not merely an authoritative act made solely by the Algerian government; rather it is necessary for Algerians to decide who they are and how to present their national narrative. Although censorship is something learned from France's oppressive colonial reign, Algerians are able to take back power and use censorship to gain their own freedom.

2.1 The Psychology of Colonial Oppression

The idea of censorship as postcolonial residue stems from the idea that colonialism itself has never quite gone away for Algeria. The colonial experiment not only damaged Algeria's attempts at development on a political and economic level, but it has left an imprint within the collective memories of all Algerians, causing them to reproduce some of the oppression they experienced during colonization. In their analysis, "On the Psychology and Politics of Oppression," Isaac Prilleltensky and Lev Gonick define oppression as both the present state and long-term process of being dominated by a force which excludes one from certain resources, status, or opportunities in order to secure said dominating force's own advantage (129). Prilleltensky and Gonick discuss the political and psychological realities of oppression which "lead to conditions of misery, inequality, exploitation, marginalization, and social injustices" (130). These conditions create negative feelings of the self which can have lasting and traumatizing effects on one's identity.

Colonialism is a particular example of the oppression to which Prilleltensky and Gonick refer. Many theorists and academics have focused on the political consequences of colonialism, specifically in regards to the lasting impacts of French colonialism on the developing state of Algerian politics. However, colonial oppression had immense psychological impacts on colonized subjects which, in Algeria, led to revolution, framed post-independence nation-building, and still continues to affect governance in the 21st century. Frantz Fanon, famed psychologist and member of the FLN, was the first to start the conversation on the psychology of colonialism. In chapter five of Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*, he discusses the socio-political dynamics of the veil, *haik*, Algerian women wear. During colonization, the French wanted to destroy Algerian originality and tradition in order to replace it with Western values and customs. However, the colonizer knew attacking Algerian society directly would likely see a strong reaction from the men; the French viewed Algerian women as less likely to resist because they were hidden behind closed doors anyways (44). Fanon argues the veil became the most important symbol of Algerian tradition and femininity that the French needed to destroy. The colonizer moved to defend Algerian women by "demonizing" the men who, in France's eyes, forced them to wear veils (44). The call to unveil, therefore, became a means to persuade the women to finally accept French values, one being liberation. Fanon details the psychological battle Algerian women face regarding their decision to wear or not to wear the veil. On the one hand, taking the veil off is seen as conforming to the colonizer and forgetting tradition. On the other hand, a woman's choice to remove the veil is a liberating one, as she alone gets to decide what she does or does not wear and why. As a result of this battle, Fanon describes the liberating process of unveiling. The woman must first "consider the image of the occupier lodged somewhere in her mind and in her body" (52). Then, she comes to the decision to "remodel [her

image], initiate the essential work of eroding it, make it inessential, remove something of the shame that is attached to it, [and] devalidate it” (52). The language Fanon uses to describe this extensive physical and mental process suggests it was traumatic, and the trauma needed to be overcome to solidify her self-identity. This is a metaphor for the physical and emotional journey of revolution Algeria had to undergo to overcome the trauma experienced under French colonialism.

In her observations of Fanon’s works, Irene Gendzier notes how he discovered “colonialism was not merely an expression of the seizure of territory but that it sought to actively transform the lives of its inhabitants under conditions that deprived them of their will” (512). This aligns with Prilleltensky and Gonick’s definition of oppression. Furthermore, Gendzier argues the French colonizer utilized the media as a tool for “promoting a particular form of behavior that served his ends” (512). Therefore, this is something Algerians were familiar with: the media was a tool for oppression of identity and exertion of political will for over a century. As such, I argue it was inevitable Algerians, once independent, would use the same tools to promote their own behaviors and values, which served their socio-political ends while nation-building and beyond.

Furthermore, as Fanon argues in *Les Damnés de la Terre*, “the violence which presides over the arrangement of the colonial world ... will be taken up and assumed by the colonized” (31). The colonized must utilize violence to overtake the colonizers because that is all they know, having been treated with insurmountable violence in order to create and maintain the colonial situation. Fanon, a colonized person himself, believed violence was the only way to achieve power and must therefore be necessary in order to dismantle the colonial system. I argue that in Algeria’s case, violence continues in the 21st century in the parallel form of media

ensorship: because censored media was the only media Algerians received during colonization, newly independent politicians, state-builders, and journalists believed it was necessary to censor their media to enforce their own Algerian values and narrative.⁴ Therefore, media censorship, like revolutionary violence, is a learned habit developed from the psychological trauma endured during colonialism, which still lingers within the minds of Algerians.

2.2 First-hand Experiences of Colonial Trauma

All too often the citizens' perspective is lost in academic conversations about politics and governance. However, in order to rebuild Algeria's narrative, we must first consider the narratives of those who make up Algeria, who are *Algerian*.

Mokhtar Mokhtefi was born and raised in the French colony of Algeria and, in support of an independent, democratic nation, fought for the ALN during the War for Independence. He was an activist deeply in love with the idea of freedom for his homeland. However, colonial reign certainly had its effect on Mokhtefi and the Algerian population at large. According to his memoir *I Was a French Muslim*, so aptly named for the ethnic categorization placed upon Algerian natives by the French, Mokhtefi believed he "was weaned on violence" during colonialism. He shares an anecdote from a conversation with Mohamed Amara Rachid, who tells him, "After almost 125 years of colonial domination ... our people have been reduced to a shadow of themselves, they are resigned" (Mokhtefi 127). Mokhtefi additionally proves throughout his memoir that the violence, both physical and mental, imposed upon the Algerian population by colonial administrators did have trickle-down effects onto the Algerian population. One such example is during his military training, when he calls his captain out for the discrimination imposed upon the trainees: "We've suffered enough from racism to tolerate it

⁴ See Section 2.2; Hafid Gafaïti's arguments

among ourselves” (243). Yet, this is the only way the captain knows how to discipline them based on the experience of colonialism. In the memoir’s introduction, Mokhtar’s wife Elaine shares how once the nation transitioned towards independence, “Algerian leaders responded to the methods used to control and maim them by introducing similar constraints and techniques” (Mokhtefi x). The Mokhtefis’ first-hand experience confirms that the abusive tendencies of the French, to include media censorship, were reproduced by Algerian leaders due to the traumatic experience of colonialism.

Moreover, Assia Djébar spent her life rewriting the narrative of Algerian women. The colonial perception of *les Algériennes* was hypersexualized and dehumanizing, a view she exaggerates and challenges in her most famous work *L’Amour, la Fantasia* (1985), a retelling of the nation’s conquering. Additionally, the view of Algeria and its history as something “fantastic” and militarized was one that fit into the larger, ambiguous category of Orientalism, which Djébar also highlights in *Fantasia* (1985). Algeria and Algerian women’s narratives were forgotten in history, pushed aside by France’s perception. France continues to jeopardize Algeria’s international reputation through its political reporting on the Hirak. The world, led by France, objectifies an entire nation, neatly placing Algeria into obscure categories that bizarrely stretch to fit every other formerly colonized nation. By re-centering the global perspective on Algeria and *les Algériennes*, Djébar’s works first highlight on a micro level how France’s historical, Eurocentric projection has damaged Algerian nationality and then offer an alternative narrative to embrace. According to Jennifer Bernhardt, “Djébar complicates the notion of linear history.” Similarly, by censoring the foreign projection of the Hirak, Algeria is able to put its own reports at the forefront in order to rewrite the nation’s history from its own perspective.

2.3 Postcolonial Storytelling

The way in which postcolonial regimes are portrayed in the media is a warped perception of stereotypes which lumps all of them together under certain titles such as ‘failed states’ or ‘under-developed nations.’ Algeria, much like the rest of Northern Africa and the Middle East, experiences particular harm to its international reputation due to its Arab history; looked at by Westerners with caution and ethnographic curiosity. In reality, each formerly colonized nation has seen its own development, success, and failures since claiming independence. Yet, the stereotypes pushed by global media outlets like France 24 often arise from unconscious bias among Western nations who either feel historically superior and/or remember the significant loss experienced during decolonization. These biases and memories damage formerly colonized nations’ ability to be seen as successfully developed nations by the international community. This lack of support and recognition, I argue, is what is pushing Algeria to reframe its own narrative via foreign media censorship; without such international recognition, Algeria is not able to reap any benefits from international trade or diplomacy. Instead, it is repeatedly ignored due to its prescribed status on the global hierarchy, and the nation’s complex history and civilization is often overlooked in shadow of the West’s biases. As I will examine, the FLN was forced to adopt some of these biases regarding anti-Arab sentiment when political division between socialists and Islamic nationalists arose, which needed to be stymied in order for the nation to continue on a unified path towards development.

2.3.1 *Anti-Arab Sentiment*

Fouzi Slisli examines the effects of Western media on Algeria’s politics and governance in the 1980s-1990s in “The Western Media and the Algerian Crisis.” He argues that rising anti-

Islamic sentiment across the Western world — which has historical roots in Orientalism⁵ — from the mid-1980s onward had a widespread affect which reached Algeria during a particularly tumultuous time. A kind of political “civil war” was brewing in Algeria towards the end of the 20th century as a result of challenges faced during post-independence nation-building. These included the ideological conflict between the leading socialists (the FLN) and the opposing Islamic nationalists (the Islamic Salvation Front, or FIS), who each saw different values needing to be at the forefront of Algeria’s national development. When the international community, particularly the West, started to emphasize anti-Islamic rhetoric in the media, this gave the FLN an excuse to justify the repression of a large group of Algerians. This included political oppression as well as the suppression of the people’s ability to access or produce media. Gafaïti argues, “the press became one of the decisive sites for the confrontation between the regime and its enemies” as a result (57). In one example, I look towards Slisli’s examination of the label “terrorist,” which was historically applied to socialists and communist groups in the global media throughout the 20th century. However, as the world moved its focus away from the Cold War towards the War on Terror, “terrorist” became associated with Islamic extremists (Slisli 45). As such, the FLN (socialists) wanted to change the rhetoric around themselves, taking advantage of the global transition and confronting the FIS in the media by applying the label “terrorist” to them. Thus, the FLN explicitly adopted the West’s narrative, thereby giving up the power to frame its own domestic affairs.

However, Slisli points out that regardless of the FLN’s façade of bias, “the foundation of the Algerian identity ... is Arab, Berber, and Muslim” (46). This undoubtedly presents a problem for Algeria as a whole regarding its stereotyping in Western media. Slisli notes how acts of

⁵ Orientalism refers to the historically implicit stereotyping and dehumanization of people and cultures from non-Western nations which manifests in movies, art, and other forms of media. See *Edward Said On Orientalism*.

politically-motivated violence in Western-allied nations are always presented as “pro-democracy rebels,” etc. in the media, whereas these same acts occurring in a non-Western-allied nation are always labelled as “terrorism.” This suggests an implicit bias has historically existed and continues to exist among Western media outlets to present certain events one way or another based on their host nation’s diplomatic relations (Slisli 45). As such, the West frames postcolonial storytelling, whether in a positive light, such as in Israel’s case, or in a negative light, such as that of Algeria. Examples include Bernard Lewis’s “The roots of Muslim rage!” and Daniel Pipes’s “The Muslims are coming! The Muslims are coming!” and “Dealing with Middle Eastern conspiracy theories,” as mentioned by Slisli (47). Slisli concludes “there is a systematic effort in the West to divert the public’s attention from the facts, as well as reinforce its ignorance” (48).

Considering Slisli’s comprehensive analysis, it is no wonder why Algerians feel marginalized on a global scale. It is traumatizing to have the entire world against you; one “internalize[s] psychological images of inferiority” (Prilleltensky and Gonick 128) from the constant stereotyping and dehumanization. Islamophobia has psychologically damaged the identities of the Algerian nation and its people. Therefore, I argue the nation has become defensive of its own values and sovereignty in reaction to both historical anti-Arab sentiment and 20th century Islamophobia, forcing the nation’s leaders to a point where they are ‘manipulating’ their media — at least, by Western standards — in order to uphold their fundamental identity as truly Algerian. In reality, Algeria’s censorship in the 21st century is not a manipulation of media or a violation of freedom. On the contrary, it is an act of liberation which sets the Algerian narrative free from the West’s shackles.

2.3.2 *Western Expectations*

The world views the United States as a prime example of revolution and democratization. As such, every other nation's revolution and development is compared to the U.S. and expected to follow its model. However, I argue the colonial world's situation is not even comparable to the United States' development. The people in charge of the American Revolution were white, they spoke English, they were Christians, and they followed very similar, if not the same, cultural practices as their 'oppressors,' from whom most were descended. The Americans sought independence in order to implement a new political and government system, but they were never traumatized during British colonization (excluding Native Americans and enslaved peoples) in the sense that Africans, Asians, and South Americans were traumatized during European colonization. In complete contrast, the colonial world was invaded, conquered, and occupied by foreign oppressors. Fully developed societies suffered complete devastation to their cultures; their entire civilizations were destroyed and replaced with foreign institutions, from religion and language to dress and education. The postcolonial world was at a disadvantage before it even began.

Furthermore, America's Founding Fathers spent a majority of the American Revolution inventing the institutions required to build and sustain the first modern nation-state based on democratic principles. Once independent, of course they were able to kickstart America's development because they already had a solid foundation from which to build. In contrast, Algeria suffered 132 years of oppression under a foreign regime which practiced democracy and allowed free discussion among its own people but which absolutely prohibited this among its colonial subjects (Mokhtefi x). This prevented Algerians from having the opportunity to develop democratic thought or institutions should they become independent. Forced assimilation itself

preoccupied their time and minds.⁶ Instead, Algeria — as “one hero, the people” (Mouffok, *Orient XXI*) — could only focus on the immediate goal: free themselves from their oppressor. Because this was their common goal, socialism became the natural political course once France half-heartedly recognized Algerian independence. However, because Algerian revolutionaries did not look past this common goal of unification under revolution, the nation’s development was doomed to fail, or at least stutter, from the start. Therefore, I argue Algeria’s focus throughout the 20th century was on stabilizing the nation under common goals in order to lay a foundation for further development and potential democratization. Algeria only rejected democracy in the interim.⁷ As egalitarian freedom-fighters, it is hard to argue Algerians would not be pro-democracy. However, 1962, 1988, and 1998 were not the right times to adopt democracy just yet. Its political leaders knew this, and censored media in an attempt to prevent alternative thinking so that all Algerians could focus on common goals rather than division.

It seems that today, Algerians are ready for democracy, as proven by the success of the Hirak movement. The Minister of Communication himself, Ammar Belhimer, came out in support of the Hirak movement on June 13, 2021, according to *Reporters Algerie*, saying the movement “has expressed legitimate and major demands” and its “protection must constitute a national mission.”⁸ I argue Belhimer made the decision to censor France 24 and foreign media at large because he, like the rest of Algeria, knew it was time to finally begin the democratic transition. But, Algerians needed to write their own story about this historical transition rather than allow France, which has a vested interest in preventing Algeria’s democratization, the

⁶ Forced assimilation can be defined as the practice of converting a group of people to an alternative culture, including language and religion, involuntarily. Forced assimilation was a popular tactic the French used during colonization in order to achieve their *mission civilisatrice* (Oğurtimehin 291).

⁷ More on this in Section 3.

⁸ My translation from French.

opportunity to tell an alternative story. Thus, media censorship in the 21st century is an empowering move that allows Algeria to take back control of its own story.

3. POLITICAL ANALYSIS

A final consideration of Algeria's politics is required to showcase how censorship is not bad for the nation. Considering other postcolonial regimes who have utilized censorship, I argue this is a common choice required for formerly colonized nations to redefine their identities. Moreover, I argue, in agreement with Monroe Price's theory on free speech, that a balance between state censorship and free expression is necessary even in democratic societies.

3.1 Censorship and Socialism in the Maghreb

European overseas colonies were run under authoritative regimes for such long periods of time that they were "unprepared for democracy" upon independence (Bernhard, et. al 229). Algerian journalist Salima Mellah concurs in her recount of the 1988-89 protests, noting how even 20 years after independence "learning to debate and the exchange of ideas [was] new" to the nation (*Le Quotidien d'Algérie*). In the Maghreb region, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria all turned to socialism as soon as the French left.⁹ Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom's study finds that France's "direct rule" in Africa ultimately encouraged the development of one-party systems upon independence, which did not facilitate democratic development (231). E. A. Alport's study on socialism in the Maghreb concurs that Algeria adopted socialism as a result of the mass exodus of French workers after independence because the nation required significant land reform and a restructuring of the economy (685). Alport notes how "all this [socialist development] was improvised. No plan, no doctrine ..." (688). However, I argue the development of socialism was

⁹ Though, in Morocco's case, socialism did not actually develop despite the large number of socialist parties which formed after independence. See: "*Socialism in Three Countries: The Record in the Maghrib.*"

natural and did not need a plan, whereas any attempt at democratic development would have required such planning.

3.2 Revolutionary and Postcolonial Politics of Algeria

Jean Daniel's examination of "The Algerian Problem" in the immediate aftermath of the nation's independence suggests Algeria was only free from France technically. The West labelled the Evian Accords a "success" because they leveraged a large amount of Charles de Gaulle's policies in favor of France yet supposedly did not "compromise in the least the highest ideals of the Algerian revolution" (606). However, language from the Evian Accords suggests otherwise. Chapter II, Section A states, "The Algerian State will freely establish its own institutions and will choose the political and social regime which it deems to be most in conformity with its interests." Yet, the very next clause requires Algeria to "base its institutions on democratic principles," thus in complete contradiction of the previous clause considering the Algerian revolutionaries leading the fight followed socialist values. Section B highlights include such requirements as "Algeria shall guarantee the interests of France," "Algeria will belong to the franc area," and "French interests will be assured." This very clearly favors France's economic and political interests and contradicts the sovereignty it is supposedly granting Algeria within the same document.

After all, as Daniel points out, General de Gaulle originally planned the Evian Accords in order to keep control of Algeria by granting it a position within a wider "French Commonwealth" (606). This would have perpetuated and deepened an economic, cultural, diplomatic, and military interdependence between the two nations. According to these original plans, Algeria would have been "governed ... by Algerians but receiving preferred treatment from the metropole ... after the French had shaped the local leaderships and administrative

bodies” (Daniel 606). Therefore, France would still have much control over Algeria. In fact, Daniel points out, “In de Gaulle’s mind the Community was to enlarge the prestige of France above all in order to increase her influence in international decisions” (608). This sounds quite similar to France’s original justification for colonial expansion. Thus, the FLN fought back against these first drafts of the Evian Accords, and General de Gaulle soon realized France no longer had anything to gain from fighting. Daniel argues, “the more time France allowed to pass, the more intense Algerian radicalism became,” which in combination with “the support of the immense majority of underdeveloped and exploited nations” (610) forced de Gaulle to concede full independence to Algeria.

I argue Algeria’s “radicalism” came about as a result of the paternalistic oppression France has repeatedly reinforced from the point of conquest up until this day. Algeria rebelled against France upon independence by rejecting democracy, instead opting for a socialist system that would serve the people rather than a republic that served the empirical elite. Thus, the oppression under a Republican monarchy-turned-democracy bred a particularly “radical” form of socialism in Algeria. However, just as children of abusive parents tend to harbor and reproduce abusive tendencies even after they have been liberated and given a chance to develop independently, so too does Algeria harbor some policies of oppression such as media censorship. Though, as I argued in Section 2, Algeria is able to reclaim power by using media censorship, a learned oppressive tactic, in the 21st century to free its narrative and attempt democratization now that the nation is largely ready to do so.

Returning to discussion of Algeria’s post-independence nation-building, Marina and David Ottaway argue that as soon as Algeria had its independence, it immediately focused on “destroying the social and economic order of the colonial era and at making Algeria into a

socialist country” (1). Gafaïti also argues the extreme media censorship and the assassinations of journalists which occurred throughout the late 1980s into the 1990s are explained by the rejection of democracy during post-independence state-building (57). However, I argue it is important to consider the “fragile basis” which Algeria found itself upon when examining this late 20th century timeframe (Ottaway 1). In addition to the fundamental act of rebellion, there was a rejection of democracy at the time of independence in order for the Algerian state to build itself up to a stable enough point via unified values and thought. This created a foundation for the nation to stand on and begin to consider democracy as an option. Algeria was not ready for democracy immediately after independence or at all throughout the 20th century. As such, democracy was pushed aside to focus on unifying the nation. One method of doing so was censoring the media in the name of patriotism in order to “defend [the regime’s] antifundamentalist line” against the FIS (Gafaïti 57). Therefore, it is not the rejection of democracy which caused the media censorship in the 20th century; rather, democracy was rejected *and* media was censored in order for the nation to focus on the stabilization of its socialist regime.

To further this point, Layadi argues Algeria’s socialist system, which promotes a unity of thoughts, has framed media censorship and the government’s decision to centralize and monopolize media. In order to promote the sovereign goals of the nation, the government must ensure the proper domestic narrative is portrayed to the people without interference from foreign actors which hope to dismantle this socialist system. Even with rising media pluralism, media has been basely regulated. The revocation of France 24’s media accreditation is a prime example of regulated media among a pluralistic press system in order to eliminate foreign interference. According to the 2021 Freedom in the World Report, the Algerian government passed a decree

in December of 2020 which requires all media to be “directed by Algerian nationals” and operated within Algeria itself. The report suggests this decree, among a slew of other media censorships, is used “to harass the media and censor or punish controversial reporting” (Freedom House). However, I argue this action was taken in order to prevent the possibility for foreign manipulation. France 24 could theoretically pass the French agenda — to promote French values and the empire’s expansion — through the media to the people who consume it. The continued bias present in France 24’s reporting, according to the Algerian Ministry of Communication, is exactly why the Algerian government needed to censor the platform’s access to an Algerian audience.¹⁰ The goal of socialism is to achieve a unity of national political and economic thought determined among and by the people. If a French agenda is passed into the minds of the Algerian people, whether good or bad, this takes away their ability to develop their truly own ideas. Thus, censorship is required to uphold the socialist system. If, as mentioned earlier, Algeria is ready to embrace democracy, foreign media censorship is still critical to supporting that transition. Without foreign interference, the nation can develop a distinctly Algerian system of democratic socialism.

While the merits of socialism may be widely debated across the world, this form of political and economic governance is not only what was inspired from the nation’s revolutionary struggle, but it is the system which has worked best with varying developments during its post-colonial nation-building. The West’s only acceptable alternative, capitalist democracy, has not worked for Algeria as of yet — though, the Hirak movement is beginning to show otherwise. Layadi argues “the democratic transition in Algeria has not [yet] been achieved because the state has systematically rejected the idea of a rotation of power” (292). This is undoubtedly because a

¹⁰ See page 10.

rotation of power leaves room for opposition to creep in and completely dismantle a system that is still in the process of being built. Algeria, 60 years after independence, is still developing its institutions while simultaneously repairing its culture that was lost during colonialism. The government, the FLN, and other leaders have continued state building by using the socialist ideals laid out in the revolution as a framework on which to expand. Because these socialist ideals helped to free them from French oppression, it is obvious political leaders would hope and believe these same ideals would help the now-independent nation to develop and prosper. Therefore, any opportunity for a rotation of power granted by democratization could potentially sway the nation away from these pre-established and trusted goals; this could be detrimental to the nation. To prevent this, the government needed to censor its media to stop France and other Western nations from blindly pushing their pro-democracy agendas onto the Algerian people before the nation has achieved its original goals of development. Thus, censorship is not a move to stop the people from having freedom of the press, rather it is a move to stop foreign manipulation of the nation's slow-going development by its own, socialist, Arab, Algerian values.

3.3 Defending Sovereignty and Fighting Dissent

In "Power, Censorship, and the Press," Hafid Gafaïti notes that journalists themselves are caught in the battle between patriotism (i.e. conforming to the regime's censorship) and democracy (i.e. fighting for freedom and the truth) (56). After independence, journalists generally complied with media censorship in order to align with the socialist regime's ideology of unit. Gafaïti argues "this kind of collaboration [with the state] was widely accepted since it was based on a nationalist past shared by the entire population of a country ravaged by 132 years of French colonial rule" (52). Similarly, Bernhard, Reenock, and Nordstrom's study notes how

“the structural legacies of colonial rule in combination with the homogenizing impulses of nationalist movements led to a strongly predatory state” (299). An increasingly violent and repressive military regime and rising tensions in the late 1980s, such as the 1988 riots, fragmented journalists’ collaboration with the state when the press flipped from free to completely censored. Censorship has since shifted away from blocking all criticisms of the state towards blocking terrorist sentiments and foreign manipulation in the 21st century. Many journalists often do comply with this censorship since it is for the greater good and safety of the state.

Regardless, Gafaïti argues that freedom and censorship, no matter the case, cannot coexist — there exists a general consensus among Western academics with Gafaïti’s perspective. However, he points out an ability to see them as a cooperative process which can often go hand-in-hand with each other, particularly for those journalists in postcolonial nations who carefully consider their roles within their socialist society. Gafaïti therefore concludes that “censorship exists as an enunciation of power” by the state which journalists agree to adhere by as a means to respect nationalist values. While I agree there is a degree of mutuality between freedom and censorship, in Algeria’s case it is not because journalists are willing to be poster children for an increasingly corrupt regime’s abuse of power. Rather, Algerian journalists agree to censor their work from the biases which exist externally and have the potential to destabilize the nation as a path towards achieving future freedom from foreign manipulation. Therefore, censorship paradoxically frees the media from an imposed narrative. If Algeria is ready to democratize, as is seen by the slow crumbling of Bouteflika’s corrupt regime since 2019, foreign censorship will become more important than ever for the Algerian press because without foreign manipulation, they will be the ones recording history as it occurs from their nation’s own perspective.

CONCLUSION

Algeria rebelled against France by actively choosing socialism over democracy once independent. Moreover, Algerians had never before experienced democracy or were allowed free expression to lay the seeds for democratization. Additionally, the exodus of French workers upon independence required a unified socialist system to prepare the economy under a centralized system. A part of this development was centralizing and censoring media. Because censorship was an effective tool learned under the French, Algerian leaders knew this was the best way to quell dissent in order to progress the nation under a united front. As Algeria has developed since independence, the nation and its people now seem to be at a point today with the Hirak movement where they are ready to embrace democracy. However, censorship of foreign media is still required to prevent an alternative, bias story from being recorded in history on this momentous transformation.

As this thesis has proven, censorship is not necessarily a negative policy choice intended to suppress the people of a nation; rather, it is a strategic policy for formerly colonized nations. As Bernhardt argues, “the re-writing of history is a common step in the project of nationalism.” In “Free Expression and Digital Dreams,” Monroe Price argues the balance between open and closed speech, between free and censored media, is crucial to any nation-state (65). The colonial experience allowed colonized peoples to understand that censorship is a form of power which allows a certain message, a certain recording of history, to be kept out of the public’s mind while an alternative, polished message is presented. Left in the shambles of destroyed civilizations with little knowledge or means to utilize or operate leftover modern infrastructure upon declaring independence, nations like Algeria faced the challenge of uniting a people under common values

which were long forgotten. Centralization and censorship of media was the easiest way for Algeria to present those values. Thus, democracy was implicitly rejected. Repair was required before further development — and potential democratization — could occur. The choice to censor was not made to announce Algeria's refusal to choose democracy; it was made because it was the only way the nation could survive. Today, that choice has developed into a means of sustainable self-care, a way for the nation to declare what 'Algeria' is without a Eurocentric frame. Media censorship has been Algeria's *mission liberatrice*, its journey towards freedom from the West's continued intrusion.

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