

Contributions of Cultural Journalism in Algeria and its Role in Shaping Intellectual and Cultural Identity**Halima Aiche ; university constantine (Algeria)*,**halima.aiche@univ-constantine3.dz <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-9344-2267>

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Abstract:

Journalism is considered a fundamental tool in disseminating culture, shaping intellectual elite and reinforcing them through the presentation of news, information, and ideas in the fields of literature, arts, and sciences. It also plays a role in preserving and developing heritage. This role was prominent in Algerian journalism before independence, as it protected Algerian culture and intellectuals, promoted awareness, strengthened the sense of belonging, and fought various forms of cultural distortion. Many national titles emerged, such as the journalism of the Association of Muslim *Ulema* (Scholars) and reformist journalism. After independence, with the emergence of political and media pluralism and openness, the cultural role of newspapers did not change significantly but was confined to cultural pages and literary supplements of many public and private newspapers. This was aimed at presenting Algerian cultural heritage, preserving it, and supporting Algerian writers and intellectuals to strengthen Algerian cultural movements and thus build an authentic, solid, and strong Algerian cultural identity. Despite the financial, intellectual, and racial challenges, Algerian newspapers still play a decisive and strategic role in

the process of cultural change and highlighting the cultural and intellectual structures existing in Algerian society. Based on the above, we aim to answer the following questions in our paper:

- How did cultural journalism contribute to preserving Algerian intellectual and cultural identity?
- What is the current status of cultural journalism in Algeria after independence?
- What are the challenges faced by national journalism in supporting Algerian culture after independence?

Keywords: Cultural Journalism; Cultural Content; Intellectual and Cultural Identity; Algerian Cultural.

* **Halima Aiche**

Introduction:

This study is based on the classic definition of culture coined by "Edward Burnett Tylor" in 1871 in his book "Primitive Culture," where he defines culture as: "Culture . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"¹

The Algerian thinker "Malek Bennabi" defined it as: "a set of innate qualities and social values that influence the individual from birth to become, unconsciously, connected to his behavior and lifestyle in the environment in which he lives. It is within this environment that the individual shapes his character and personality. When the culture of a society is formed in this manner, it shapes its history, emphasizing the relationship between history and culture, as there is no history without culture, and a people who lose their culture inevitably lose their history"²

Culture and identity are two sides of the same coin, as culture needs identity as a means to protect the cultural heritage of a nation, while culture helps to establish principles and values among peoples. Cultural identity is a modern concept that represents a continuous construction throughout human life.

In this paper, we attempt to discuss Algerian culture, its current situation, general features, and the role of media and journalism in particular in disseminating and protecting Algerian cultural identity after independence.

According to experts, the cultural field has not received the same attention compared to the economic field, due to the ideology adopted by the ruling class at that time, which suggested that economic development is the basis for cultural progress and development. Therefore, a cultural policy was formulated within the framework of what is known as the "cultural revolution," which politicians considered as a continuation of the liberation revolution and other revolutions, as it was associated with change that abolishes the restoration of heritage and works to make elements of cultural identity contemporary and with dynamic energy.

The Cultural Revolution in Algeria after Independence:

The revolutionary dimension in culture is expressed in various official charters as a reinforcement of the economic revolution, as it follows the socialist approach aimed at reshaping various social structures in its broad sense according to perspectives of development, justice, equality, etc., and creating a rupture with various colonial legacies, thus bringing about a change in mentalities and social relations.

Algeria witnessed socio-historical events and circumstances in the 1980s that put intellectuals in a state of debate and gave their discourses - and their thoughts about themselves, their work, and their network of relationships with history, culture, social and political systems - certain justifications with significant implications, especially after two decades of political independence and development in the country.

The most important indicator of these socio-historical conditions in Algeria is represented by the national dialogue about culture, which prompted many intellectuals to engage in intellectual communication, giving qualitative weight to this discourse due to the importance of the issues raised. Despite the narrowness of this discussion, which some called the "cultural national pact," and its lack of democracy with the aim of renewing Algeria's cultural policy, its results appeared in the recommendations of the fifth session of the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front Party (FLN).

In the 1990s, the idea of establishing political parties emerged alongside organizations, movements, and associations in their various forms, which can be divided into two distinct circles in terms of intellectual and ideological nature. The first belongs to modernist cultural organizations with liberal and socialist orientations, while the second circle includes a group of parties and cultural organizations advocating for the Arabic language and Islamic identity.³

Starting from the year 2000, the situation changed, and the reality of the cultural issue in Algeria changed on several levels, including:⁴

- **Material and human level:** The cultural sector in Algeria relied almost entirely on state support through the annual budget allocated to the Ministry of Culture, in addition to budgets allocated by states to provincial cultural directorates, which are part of financial aids to help

these entities organize cultural activities and artistic events. Some of this money goes to the operational budgets of these entities.

- **Legislative and legal level:** After independence, French legal texts regulating the media and culture sector were abolished, and were replaced by constitutive texts for each media or cultural institution. During the early years of independence, there was some ambiguity in defining the nature and tasks of the Algerian cultural institution's management, whether administrative (cultural directorates, cultural centers, etc.), industrial-commercial (cinema, theater, etc.), or economic (printing and publishing institutions).
- **Activities and achievements level:** Despite the undeniable fact that the cultural sector, especially at the structural level, has seen significant development in recent years, with huge funds injected through financing cultural works or establishing national structures to create dynamism in the cultural field, or organizing massive events like the "Algiers, Capital of Arab Culture 2007" event or the "African Cultural Festival 2009" or the "Tlemcen, Capital of Islamic Culture 2011" event, or the "Constantine, Capital of Arab Culture 2015" event, in which huge sums of money were spent on producing films, printing and translating several books, art exhibitions, poetry evenings, and plays, despite all this, the cultural scene in Algeria remains a dismal scene, absent clear cultural policies and long-term strategic foresight, making it merely a folklore scene and a tool for squandering public funds.⁵
- **Cultural Journalism in Algeria:**

Defining the concept of cultural journalism is not easy; it is actually a modern concept that applies to a type of newspapers resembling books in their form, whether their content is literary, intellectual, or scientific. This concept did not become widespread in the Arab world and in Algeria until after World War II. Before that, this type was rarely present on its own, but newspapers in general existed, and these newspapers dedicated some of their pages to cultural news and scientific studies, which could vary in quantity.⁶

Cultural journalism is a branch of journalism characterized by a broader perspective on culture, focusing on reviews, critiques, news, and articles about

arts and culture, including issues of lifestyle, social dialogue, and cultural criticism written by cultural figures expressing these issues in a literary style. The interests of cultural journalism have expanded with our understanding of culture and its role in society.⁷

Cultural content refers to topics related to local, Arab, and international cultural affairs, including cultural activities and materials with literary, intellectual, and artistic production.

Cultural journalism is considered part of cultural media, being a type of newspaper that makes culture the focus of its attention. We can find cultural journalism in three forms: pure cultural magazines, weekly cultural supplements in daily newspapers, and daily cultural pages in general newspapers.

Among the definitions that have also been able to define some aspects of the nature of the cultural page in journalism, we find:

- The cultural page is defined as the space in the daily newspaper dedicated to discussing literary, artistic, and scientific affairs and following them as news, attempting to immerse the reader day by day in what is happening in the cultural scene, both locally and globally, and often trying to impose certain orientations on the reader in this field.
- The cultural page is a space in the daily newspaper for presenting cultural issues in literature and thought by presenting their texts, following their news, and highlighting their personalities through various journalistic arts.⁸

Contribution of Cultural Journalism to Preserving Intellectual and Cultural Identity:

Cultural identity is a complex compound that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, behaviors, laws, customs, and includes the abilities and behaviors acquired by individuals as members of society. The cross-fertilization of cultures through openness to others, dialogue with them, and taking advantage of their positives, and exchanging benefits with them is considered an extremely important endeavor.

Algeria witnessed a deteriorating cultural situation after independence, due to long-lasting despotism, described as "aberrant" because all modes of thinking, action, and laws were in a French mold, and a European mindset, even the vernacular language was affected by interaction with the French. With the aim of reclaiming Arab and Islamic identity to build a new Algerian culture, the government adopted several approaches since independence, giving great importance to education and culture. The first cultural conference was held in 1968, addressing the issue of cultural stagnation in the country. In the field of media, one of the most prominent changes implemented after independence was significant in directing the country's ideology, where media became a tool in the hands of the Revolutionary Council for construction and development.

Newspapers constitute one of the fundamental elements of individuals' intellectual and cultural life, and most of journalism's concerns emphasize the value of culture and its role in society's development and advancement in all fields, serving as a measure of progress.

Algeria relied on written press since colonization, inheriting colonial journalism that played a significant role in its history during the revolution and post-independence era. Algeria adopted an integrated media policy aimed at media, refinement, education, guidance, and awareness in various fields. It formulated laws to achieve these noble objectives, notably in building the Algerian citizen's mentality.⁹

Written press expressed an important aspect of the phenomenon of social and cultural division by reflecting forms of contradiction and conflict existing in society, becoming one of the social institutions divided into two different factions:

The first carries similar and sometimes shared ideas about democracy, openness, secularism, etc., defending and promoting them in society.

The second represents the majority who believe that Arabic and Islam are the preservative vessel of Algerian society's identity and cannot discuss or implement any social and cultural projects without these two fundamental principles.¹⁰

Written press contributed to reclaiming cultural rights for the Algerian people and completing manifestations of sovereignty. It served as the

mouthpiece of the single party post-independence and was tasked with culture. It had two missions:

- Explaining and reinforcing political measures taken by the government and guiding.
- The press took on a directed character similar to other media outlets in Algeria and other socialist countries at the time due to the chosen political-ideological current.¹¹
- Written press, despite its improvisation, contributed to shaping the general mechanisms of Algerian society, playing an important role in reproducing social meanings and understanding. It aimed to consolidate cultural and cognitive frameworks, taking dialectical forms (the dialectic that leads to theories and rules governing people and directing their political lives and is the basis of building communist thought) according to certain mechanisms of communal values. This qualified it to be an important source of values and perceptions in terms of its frameworks adopting a strategy of attention and advocacy for basic values and references that define their social and cultural goals and projects.¹²

The Reality of Cultural Journalism in Algeria After Independence:

National culture experienced a significant revival thanks to the era of freedom and independence, especially with the return of Algerian intellectuals from abroad. Among the transformations witnessed by Algeria after independence, particularly in the field of written journalism, we find numerous cultural newspapers and magazines that undertook the task of disseminating culture and awareness, focusing on the literary and creative aspects.

At the beginning of the seventies, there was a real start to the establishment of a distinctive national culture amidst transformations, heralding a cultural renaissance to replace cultural stagnation. New national newspapers and magazines emerged, including:¹³

- **"Al Mujahid Cultural Magazine"**: First published in June 1967 and continued for five years until it ceased publication in March 1971 after 17 issues. This magazine was a result of the cultural pages in "Al Mujahid" and "Al Shaab." The latter adopted a cultural project represented in the semi-monthly supplement "Al Shaab Al Thaqafi," whose first issue was

published on June 17th, 1972, continuing until March 15th, 1974. It later became a weekly publication.

- **"Al Thaqa Magazine"**: Its first issue was published in March 1971 as a bi-monthly, later becoming a monthly publication. It faced several setbacks that forced it to permanently cease publication with issue number 102, only to resume with the beginning of the nineties under a new numbering system, starting from issue 103 in July/August 1994.
- **"Amal Magazine"**: Its first issue was published in April 1969 by ministerial decree, published in Arabic. It was one of the prominent Arabic periodicals that focused on youth literature, serving as a prominent platform and a solid base for all young writers, thus representing the memory of seventies literature.
- **"Al Asalah Magazine"**: The Algerian media landscape saw the publication of many cultural and literary magazines, among which "Al Asalah" magazine, issued by the Ministry of Original Education and Religious Affairs in Algeria, was one of the most important. It was founded by Dr. Minister Mouloud Kacem Nait Belkacem in Muharam 1391 HA / March 1971 and ceased publication in 1981 under the supervision of the late President Houari Boumediene. It published articles in both Arabic and French and focused on the components of national personality, including culture and literature.

The emergence of this magazine in the cultural scene reflects the political and intellectual debate that Algeria witnessed between 1971-1981 (the Boumediene period, which saw important political scenes such as nationalization movements, the agricultural revolution, the cultural revolution, and the rise of the Islamic movement). Through internal and external positions and dimensions, the magazine's founder wanted to assert the realism of Islam and the Arabic language in preserving the Algerian identity amidst the scientific and technological developments witnessed by the world during that period.¹⁴

As for newspaper supplements, we find:¹⁵

"Al-Nadi Al-Adabi" (The Literary Club), a supplement of the newspaper Al-Jumhuriya, founded by Belkacem Ben Abdullah and El Habib Al-Saaih in 1978, but did not last long.

- "Al-Shorouk Al-Thaqafi" (The Cultural Dawn), issued by the weekly Al-Shorouk Al-Arabi, with its first issue on May 18th, 1993, initially semi-monthly, then became weekly starting from the twelfth issue until it ceased publication with the fifty-sixth issue on August 25th, 1994.
- "Jusur" (Bridges), by the writers Mustafa Natur and Mohamed Zetili, which produced twenty issues before transforming into the newspaper "Al-Sharq Al-Jazairi," which quickly ceased publication.
- "Al-Ahrar Al-Thaqafi" (The Cultural Free), issued by the newspaper "Sout Al-Ahrar" (The Voice of the Free).

Additionally, each Algerian daily newspaper contains a cultural section to cover various cultural activities, publications, and creative works. Among the most prominent literary and cultural sections in Algerian daily newspapers, we find:

- "Al-Yawm Al-Adabi" (The Literary Day) in Al-Yawm newspaper, published every Monday.
- "Al-Kurras Al-Thaqafi" (The Cultural Notebook) in Al-Nasr newspaper, published every Tuesday.
- "Aswat Adabiya" (Literary Voices) in Sout Al-Ahrar newspaper, published every Wednesday.
- "Al-Khabar Al-Thaqafi" (The Cultural News) in Al-Khabar newspaper, published every Thursday.

The challenges facing national journalism in supporting Algerian culture after independence include:

- Combatting misinformation, superstitions, and myths spread by the colonizer among Algerian society.
- **Language duality and identity preservation:** Indicators of social, political, and cultural aspects in Algeria after independence suggest that society underwent a deep-rooted identity crisis. Intellectual elites raised several questions about the fundamental components of Algerian national identity and the nature of the cultural model to be followed.
- **Security and political disturbances experienced by the country:** which affected the media situation, including acts of sabotage, persecution, and

assassination of intellectuals, as well as the closure of cultural and journalistic institutions.

- **Journalism between media duty and commercial reality:** Faced with high costs, nearly complete monopolization of production and advertising by the authorities, political and security difficulties, and attempts at subjugation, journalism found itself compelled to control the commercial aspect, manage expenses, increase revenues to survive in the media market, rely on advertisements as a primary media source, and marginalize cultural topics in all their forms.

Cultural Contents in Algerian Online Journalism:

The cultural product began to be viewed as an industrial commodity, and culture itself became an industrial commodity. The term "cultural industry," according to the definition accepted by UNESCO (2006), refers to "the industry that combines the creation, production, and marketing of intangible creative and cultural content," including "printing, publishing, multimedia, audiovisual media, sound and film production, as well as crafts and design." Cultural journalism faced many challenges in a new digital environment, regarding editorial models and practices, and underwent profound changes.

Recent studies on cultural journalism indicate a crisis between traditional and digital approaches, with a decline in the importance of serious review in the critical and analytical aspects of cultural and artistic issues, primarily reflecting a growing trend towards entertainment and commercial consumption, focusing on marketing, agenda-setting, and fame¹⁶.

With the introduction of online journalism to Algeria, which was deemed necessary due to technological advancements in the fields of media and communication, Algeria witnessed its first forays into online journalism since the mid-1990s. This began with the initial interaction between national newspapers and online publishing in 1996, followed by independent online publishing of pure electronic newspapers starting in 1997. This allowed for the emergence of two types of online newspapers in Algeria:

- **Online newspapers supported by printed editions:**

These are newspapers and journals that have print editions published periodically and are supported by publishing their editions online. Here, the newspaper has two content versions, one in printed and the other electronic, catering to two types of readership.

Newspaper	Website Launch Date	Type of Newspaper
Al-Watan	November 1997	Private
Liberté	January 1998	Private
Al-Yawm	February 1998	Private
Al-Khabar	April 1998	Private
Al-Chaab	June 1998	Public
El-Moudjahid	July 1998	Public
Le Matin	October 1998	Private
Le Soir d'Alger	November 1998	Private
El Acil	March 2000	Private

- **Full-fledged online journalism:** These newspapers do not have a print counterpart and are published solely online, with electronic content and readership. Among the earliest online newspapers are:

ALGERIA-INTERFACE, ALGERIA-WATCH, LE SOUK, AUTO ALGERIE, LA GRANDE KECHFA

Besides others that did not sustainably endure in the media landscape. It is challenging to determine the exact number and type of these online newspapers due to the lack of an authority or agency responsible for counting and categorizing them, in addition to identifying their editorial line.

As for the cultural content in the aforementioned types, it is noted that those responsible for online newspapers in Algeria primarily rely on political and security news. Cultural news comes secondarily, providing the audience, particularly the users of these websites, with ideas, opinions, and topics that increase their knowledge, whether related to material or non-material cultural heritage. Additionally, many online news websites have adopted a policy of

promoting Algerian tourism, showcasing the country's tourist destinations, popular kitchen, and traditional clothing.

These cultural contents in online journalism have been labeled under various names, such as culture, cultural corner, cultural affairs, art and culture, and also include literary works, cultural services, relationships between organizations and institutions, cultural salons, and artistic events.

Conclusion:

Through this paper, it is concluded that the issue of culture in Algeria is linked to various internal and external factors, leading to ideological and cultural conflicts and divisions. Despite these challenges, the activities of Algerian intellectuals, the national policies of the country, and the projects undertaken by the state after independence have contributed to building a somewhat independent Algerian culture, distinct from the colonial legacy, through the contribution of many institutions, particularly the media establishment in Algeria.

Media, in general, and print journalism, in particular, have managed to address many topics, issues, ideas, and trends to disseminate and preserve Algerian culture, becoming the voice of Algerian intellectuals. They have contributed to internationalizing cultural heritage and various cultural activities, attempting to preserve the intellectual and cultural identity of the Algerian state.

At last, we emphasize:

- The necessity for Algerian journalism to adopt the principle of shared culture among Algerians rather than producing media materials that lead to division and regional conflicts.
- Combating trivial culture presented through digital content creators under the principle of promoting culture.
- Opening the door to dialogue and discussion among Algerian intellectuals through newspapers to promote Algerian culture, regulate it, and define it.
- Harnessing cultural diversity to serve thought, knowledge, and culture with the aim of building a strong Algerian cultural identity.
- The necessity of relying on Algerian intellectuals in the production of cultural content through various media and communication channels.

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Footnotes:

¹ Ahmed Abou Zeid, Social Construction, Cairo, Egypt, Egyptian Authority for Books. Volume 4, 1975, p62.

² Malek Bennabi Malek Bennabi , The Problem of Culture, Syria , Dar Al-Fikr, 2000. p12.

³ Oum El-Khir Toumi, Media Discourse and Cultural Duplicity in Algeria - PhD thesis. Algeria, Department of Sociology, 2009/2010, p130, p138.

⁴ Zainab Zemouri The Role of Cultural Institutions in Cultural Development, Mohamed Khider University of Biskra: PhD thesis, 2016, p116.

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¹² Oum El-Khir Toumi. Media Discourse and Cultural Duplicity in Algeria - PhD thesis. Algeria: Department of Sociology, (2009/2010), p138.

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¹⁴ Hanifi Helayli. Cultural Political Discourse in Algeria in Light of Al-Asala Magazine 1971-1981, Tameemi Foundation for Scientific Research and Information, (09, 2006),p152.

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