



**The socio-political news of Bejaia in the 19th century in the local press
Case of the newspaper « L'oued-Sahel » in Béjaia**

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Résumé :

Ce texte interroge un aspect assez important de la colonisation française en Algérie, il s'agit de la facette médiatique du colonialisme mobilisée pour asseoir l'hégémonie et la suprématie des colons et faciliter le contrôle de l'administration coloniale sur les populations indigènes. Ce « soft power », qui a accompagné la présence française en Algérie, est appréhendé du point de vue de l'information de proximité et de l'actualité sociale et politique de la région de Bejaia en Kabylie, à travers les contenus du journal local « l'oued sahel ». L'analyse de contenus de ce titre a révélé une distinction flagrante dans le traitement réservé aux colons et aux autochtones, considérés comme des citoyens de seconde zone, même si le discours officiel se veut fédérateur et égalitaire.

Mots clés : traitement médiatique ; presse coloniale ; analyse de contenus ; oued sahel ; actualité socio-politique.

Abstract:

This text questions an important aspect of French colonization in Algeria, it is the media facet of colonialism mobilized to establish the hegemony and supremacy of the colonists and facilitate the control of the colonial administration over the indigenous populations. This "soft power", which accompanied the French presence in Algeria, is apprehended from the point of view of local information and social and political news in the region of Bejaia in Kabylie, through the content of the local newspaper "l'oued Sahel". The content analysis of this title revealed a glaring distinction in the treatment reserved for settlers and natives, considered as second-class citizens, even if the official discourse is unifying and egalitarian.

Media treatment; colonial press; content analysis; oued Sahel; socio-political news.

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1. Introduction:

Questioning and talking about the past of a place, of a city is often a delicate undertaking, especially since this past is directly linked to the colonial period characterized by a form of social segregation and a downgrading of the local population in the benefit of the settlers. . This was the case for all Algerian cities during French colonization, and the city of Bejaia was not immune from this colonial policy of social division where natives and colonists coexist inequally.

Moreover, it will be relevant that dealing with the question of the socio-political news of Bejaia in the local colonial press is already in itself an attempt, which supposes the scaffolding of the historico-political context of a whole ideological section linking the two shores during the second half of the nineteenth (19th) century.

Far from analyzing the dominant/dominated, or even colonizer/colonized dialectic, our interest is essentially focused on the question of daily life, in other words, the news of that era. The latter being recorded and reported by the newspapers of the time, it is important for us to shed light on the media coverage devoted to local populations by the French colonial press.

The reason that drives us to take an interest in this news, as a processual and accumulative construction of social, political, cultural practices in interactions of institutional and social actors, is explained by its informative and representative capacity of the priority and worrying subjects of the moment.

2. Subject matter :

In this study, we deal with an important aspect in the themes related to the history of a colonized territory: the local colonial press. The history of the process of the conquest of Kabylia, in particular after 1871, notes that the French State, through its territorial institutions and its structured political identities, has in parallel with the military machine, favored a strategy of normalization and consolidation of colonization. The colonial press presented a new political tool for the construction and promotion of the colonialist discourse of submissive and pacified French Algeria. The press is a tool of social communication, applied by the French colonialism in Algeria, because of its prominent role in its propaganda policy, which accompanies the expansionist policy of France. The colonial administration exerted a strong propaganda action alongside its military, educational, economic policy...this policy was concretized by the creation of a printing press, the distribution of leaflets, and the distribution of newspapers in the service France and its expansionism. (Amiraoui, 2000, P 139)

The local press is supposed to deal with facts and subjects that interest the entire population of the covered territory as a whole and through its different communities and categories. We aim by this work to describe how a newspaper belonging to the local press which must advocate the information of thematic and geographical proximity of the



population living in this territory covered by the newspaper. The main question that emerges is how the colonialist press treats both indigenous and settlers populations?

In this perspective, our exploration of an initial corpus of articles published in the city of Bejaïa between 1887 and 1899 of the newspaper « L'Oued-Sahel » allowed us to collect and categorize data on the sociopolitical news of the time and its actors.

The thematic analysis of the selected articles according to the indicators practiced in journalistic analysis (space, frequency, editorial genre, place, source of information and intervening actor) leads us to suppose two hypotheses:

The socio-political news covered in the newspaper « L'Oued-Sahel ».is exclusively French.

The indigenous population and its actors are excluded from the media coverage of the newspaper « L'Oued-Sahel ».

3. Elements of methodology :

In this study, we proceeded to the selection and analysis of a set of issues of the newspaper « L'Oued Sahel », local newspaper of the city of Bejaia. The choice was made in a way to respond to the initial hypotheses, by focusing our interest on two types of content: the first type includes editorials and articles concerning the socio-political news of Bejaia, obviously seen by the said newspaper and this to be able to highlight the ethnocentric aspect which characterizes it, because giving primacy to the news of the European population, and especially French, who lives in this city. we hope through this methodological process the highlighting of this unacknowledged univocity. The second type consists of the same variants sorted according to their composition-gender, that is to say reflecting the position conferred on both French and indigenous populations in the lines of the newspaper and it is following this sorting that we made appeal to content analysis. this method allows us to break down the material thus considered into sets and subsets suitable for the interpretation of the message relayed by the newspaper and whose purpose being the construction of knowledge, as reliable as possible, the scope and aims of the journal. in doing so, a structural approach was taken to the issue of the exclusion of the indigenous population from the coverage of the newspaper. The identification of a few structured relationships guided us in the categorization of concepts reflecting a dynamism in the perception of non-European inhabitants of the city.

First, let's just trace the contours and conditions of journalistic practice in the city of Bejaia in the period thus considered, two major elements will emerge which are the opposite of the practice of a local press. On one hand, it is endowed with a system of values specific to the French imperial ideology of the time of the colonies; on the other hand, it tries to establish a framework of practice that condones denial, relegation and denigration of the local population. Secondly, these two elements mentioned above will support our analysis of the real place occupied by the indigenous population in the configuration of the



newspaper. This last element will provide us with an interpretation involving the plausible and latent reasons which have made the indigenous population of Bejaia a disinherited mass.

The press in Algeria during colonialism :

By referring to the work of Zoheir Ihaddaden,(Ihaddaden, 1991,21) we can classify the ante-independence press in Algeria into several categories. The government press, controlled by the colonial administration through the governor general. the first title of this type was born in 1847, it is the newspaper "al moubachir". the government press is considered a pillar of French presence and domination in Algeria. as for the second type, the pro-indigenous press, founded by a group of French people hostile to colonial policy and who wish to come to the aid of the nationalist elite, which led to the creation of a French association for the protection of indigenous people. The latter has, among other actions, created newspapers as their spokesperson, such as the newspaper "al mountakhab in 1882". Concerning the third type, the "indigenous press". it is administratively and financially managed by Algerians, its content focuses on public order issues in Algeria and its relationship with the French occupier. This press had flourished since 1893 with the launch of titles such as "Al haqq" in annaba. The fourth type, "the independence press", is a typically Algerian press, it does not recognize the existence of the French state on Algerian soil, it fiercely fights it and spreads political awareness among the population. this press has become the symbol of the dynamism of an emerging civil society, the newspapers partially replacing the political parties which did not yet exist and ensuring the circulation of ideas in local society.(Zessin, 2011, 35)

Socio-political context of Bejaia in the 19th century :

1. Bejaia seen by « L' Oued Sahel »: the social condition and the colonial fact

Bejaia undergoes colonization from 1832 but its populations lead a fierce resistance which is characterized by the great insurrection of 1871 which set all of Algeria ablaze and which was repressed as savagely as in Kherrata or Amouchas in 1945. (Benkhalfa, 2018).

After having stabilized, the French began a site on the scale of the city which is " the route of military engineering" which stretched from (1848 to 1871). It is the narrowness of the site which imposed to make important installations by superimposing on the Turkish traces; by mobilizing military engineering, there was the creation of orthogonal routes, widening of roads and creation of several public squares. The city has therefore seen its urban fabric restructured according to the Haussmann plan.

Until 1871, the extension of the city of Béjaïa had always taken place within the ramparts (intramural densification). The advent of the railway (generating element of urban development outside the old city) was the starting point for the extension of the city towards the plain (extramural extension)

The port which has always been located at the foot of the Kasbah up to Fort Abdelkader was extended on the side of the plain. There was a drilling of the rampart of



1848 for the realization of a road connecting the old city to the new, thus constituting a new line of urban growth towards the southwest

During this period, the growth of Bejaia is essentially characterized by the extension of the city on the sea side by pushing back the natural limit, as well as the establishment of two poles: generating elements of urban development. This period is also marked by a remarkable densification of the districts: « Sidi Soufi » and « cinq fontaines » (Ikni, 2017)

When the French arrived, industrial production units were created.

In a colonial approach, it was a question of exploiting regional wealth in order to satisfy the needs of European populations on the spot, while maintaining dependence on the metropolis. (Dahmani, 1987)

The manufacturing units were rather artisanal; they consisted, first of all, in transforming natural resources (wood, cork) and local agricultural products (olives, figs and cereals). As for the type of goods produced, these were beverages, pasta, tobacco and finally rapeseed and sunflower oil. The spatial distribution of economic activities obeyed to various logics, namely, the characteristics of the physical environment, the demography, the socio-cultural environment and, the colonial policies. The city of Bejaia experience a high concentration of both population (with a high percentage of Europeans) and economic activities. (Lamrani, 2018)

To see more closely, what is specific to the French occupation of Bejaia is the legitimization of a new order inherited from this status of colonist in the first order, because the French were the first to bend the Kabyle region, with a concomitant result which was: “the shaking of the social edifice on which the region was built and the loss of all political existence. » (Abrous, 2004, 427).region As a result, the French quickly adopted a contingent approach towards the indigenous population, by approach, we must understand a whole system of supervision of the political, social and even economic practices which took note in the city of Bejaia. In these first years of occupation, the journalistic landscape was marked by the birth of two local newspapers, namely: « La Kabylie » and « L'Oued Sahel ». The newspaper « La Kabylie » was founded in 1873, followed by the founding of the « l'Oued Sahel » in 1886. The interest shown in this paper for the newspaper « l'oued sahel » is essentially due to the disappearance of the archives of « La Kabylie », and the availability of «l' oued sahel »

The objectives of these newspapers touched on various fields ranging from the dissemination of information to publicity and the dissemination of the concerns of the inhabitants, the echo of what was happening there in the city. The newspaper "l'oued sahel" is a political, commercial, literary and agricultural newspaper, as it is defined itself. It appears every Thursday and Sunday, the first issue was published on Sunday, April 10, 1887. This publication aims to be “a real forum open to all, and not to a privileged few. Everyone will be able to defend the interests of our region” (oued sahel, 1887), in the words of its managing director Pierre Ottavi in the editorial of the first issue.

An analysis of the first issues



of L'Oued Sahel sheds a little better light on the tone given to the relationship between the natives and the French in a global way (population and administration). This coexistence is translated by a systematic concealment of some and a spirit of identity affirmation of others; it is said in the editorial of the very first number that the program of the newspaper is part of a line giving echo to all the legitimate complaints, taking inspiration from the needs of (our) region. The author of these lines, in this case Pierre OTTAVI, general manager of the newspaper, describes the context in which the latter appears to be a critical and crucial moment for the town of Bejaia, a situation which can be overcome on condition of federating, in concord, all the forces of the population of the entire district. If the intonation is federative, the more or less latent intention of the newspaper is to be observed in the objectives to which the collective of the newspaper appeals and which is, according to them, anchored in a surge of activism respecting the soul and the professional ethics. On the contrary, the fading of the aspirations of the indigenous population is more than visible, the aspirations of the newspaper are clear and summarized in the devotion to the Republic, to the respect and the holding, loud and clear, of its emblem.

In this sequence of ideas, it is useful to point out the importance given to the establishment and crystallization of a colonial culture through the instrumentalization of journalistic discourse, this priority runs through all the editorials of the newspaper in that it is at the very foundation of the idea of living together, between Kabyles and Europeans, and subsequently of that of citizenship. Simple justification of the colonial fact or strategy of building a new society in fragments, assimilation is advocated according to the opinion of the Kabyle population, it is even compared to the successful conquests of North Africa and Canada.

Bejaia, social project, fragmented population:

The thematic analysis of certain issues¹ has proved fruitful. At first, we tried to understand the interweaving of the elements constituting the essence of the discourse of « L'Oued Sahel » which we call for the sake of clarity the cross-cutting themes, the latter can be grouped into two large sets structuring the major part of the subject of the newspaper:

- A first set is delimited by a major socio-political project, to which the population and the European administration of the town of Bejaia are very attached, it is taken up from start to finish in the columns of the newspaper up to the point of become a veritable leitmotif punctuating its approach. In this set, it is necessary to emphasize the entities of representations already mentioned in our initial hypotheses, it is that the colonial fact must benefit the Arab, indigenous population of Bejaia. On another complementary register, the analysis of the evaluation, supposed to highlight the judgments formulated by the newspaper towards the indigenous population, informed us about the deep attachment of the latter to the principles of the Republic, a phenomenon hitherto unknown by the local

¹ based mainly on the most significant issues of the first ten years of existence of the newspaper, with as variables that dealing with the socio-political aspect of the city.



population, although in the imagination of the editors and of a fringe of Europeans living in Bejaia. This insane conception must be transposed, even originally or partially, to this new "cultural" space, to this new colony. Let us quote on this subject a note from Pierre BATAIL the day after the general elections of August 1896, where he addressed a pamphlet to the Arab population, the core of which said the following: "... You complain of being governed by the Jews and the Judaizing. Get naturalized, accept French law, become citizens, and in the next elections you will get rid of these people... But now, the natives don't hear it that way, they don't want to be French. So why focus exclusively on them. » (oued sahel, 1896). Over the issues, the language intensifies and doubles in virulence, going so far as to glorify colonialism to the point of treating the latter as the purveyor of civilization by praising the merits of colonial life, as the new director of the journal A. BILLARD who sees in Algeria a « blessed country, for some as for others, whose winters are springs, whose admirably fertile soil assures the settler who lavishes his enlightened care on it with results infinitely superior to those which would get in Europe » (oued sahel, 1898) .

The second set finds its roots in the exclusivity of the treatment of information, in other words on the ostracism which defines the lines of the newspaper. As such many clarifications can be provided, and for good reason, since the creation of the newspaper the French and/or European population seems to be privileged in the columns of the « Oued Sahel » to the point of reducing the space reserved for the Kabyle population to tickets concerning simple miscellaneous facts or to calls for general mobilization as was the case in 1896.

The integration of the local population with a view to assimilationist cooperation :

The French intentions do not elude the question of the absorption of the local populations of the time, although contradictory debates open from time to time and take up the space of a few issues, backward-looking tendencies reappear periodically to partially cover a hegemonic specificity transcending the local culture. We cannot speak here of a phenomenon of acculturation in its anthropological significance, however we bet that the reality as it is described in those times leads us to believe in the appearance of signs of diffusionism in the sense that French cultural historians give it because it refers to the existence of a single dominating, imperial and typically Western ideology. The writings of Mouren (Mouren, 2002) are significant. Assimilation is translated into vigorous concepts whose internalization by the indigenous community would be liable to initiate a lawsuit against the human darkness in which the latter lives.

The gap in the consistency of the newspaper « oued sahel»:

Another opposite mechanism accompanies the approach of the newspaper, it is perceptible in the containment and the partitioning of the spaces reserved for the treatment of information pertaining exclusively to the indigenous class. The attentive reader will moreover easily see the strangeness with which are relegated, in the background, the facts worrying the local population which is reduced to a sort of disinherited populace in its own



place of existence. In this regard, what is most striking is also the syntactic evolution of the denominations attributed to the inhabitants of the arrondissement, from the status of Kabyles, they pass to that of Arabs, then belatedly to indigenous. In addition, note that the language adopted towards the local population has adapted over time to the socio-political situation that the city and the population of Bejaia went through. The use of the possessive pronoun "our" cited above experienced a meteoric rise during the first years following the birth of the newspaper. For years, the actors of the newspaper have repeatedly resorted to the use of the personal pronoun "we" to designate all of the two key populations thus brought together.

2. « L' Oued Sahel » and the natives, between contempt and forgetfulness:

At this point in the analysis, we introduce this title in order to answer our second question, which concerns the exclusion of the indigenous population in the content of the newspaper « l'oued sahel ». Exclusion, which is here a form and not a process, is to be understood in a symbolic unfolding aimed at the construction of an ordered system of ideals as adequately as possible with the representation that the French population has of its experience of occupation and its future in Bejaia, to the point of presenting the latter as an « integral part, a district in the metropolis that is Algeria, legitimizing in passing the existence of a colonial press alongside an Algerian Arab press» (oued sahel, 1887). However, by focusing on the question, we will notice that this representation which isolates the indigenous population and confines it to a status of secondary population is in fact only the component of a triptych: contempt-attachment-forgetting, which happens to be the guiding thread of this symbolic exclusion of which an editorial, under the title « thing of Algeria », dating from 1890 summarizes the essence of the vision that the French forge of their colony : « it is rational that we give to the inhabitants of this country, in order to preserve what is there, to attract new ones, certain advantages which all nations grant to those who populate their colonies» (oued sahel, 1890). Everything suggests that this practice is in no way a well-considered strategy but a claimed status, the newspaper has tried somehow to monopolize a space that has been unrecognized to it, reluctant for forty years. On this specific point, the French attached particular importance to it, to the point that the newspaper calls out to the "State": "... we will even say more, because if the State does nothing to colonize this region itself, it prevents also by its negligence, free colonization to prosper there» (oued sahel, 1890)facts

2.1. Contempt and attachment:

This fact can be seen from the publication of the first editions of the newspaper, the contempt for the indigenous population of Bejaia is twofold: it concerns both a way of perceiving them and a way of treating them. The population of Bejaia is perceived as being devoid of any societal alternative, it is alone, faced with socio-political prerogatives, isolated from a "civilized" reference system, its way of life, and doubly of thought, can only sink into the most total archaism. The newspaper l'Oued Sahel, as it describes the indigenous population, tries to approach it in a way to get it out of this straitjacket by taking



care to remedy it by combining European education and a basis of thought from 'a long line of civilization as was the case in other parts of Africa. which makes the Paris correspondent of the newspaper say that the colonial affairs which are so little known to them (for the French deputies and the inhabitants of the city of Bejaia) will become familiar to them and will certainly be an education for them. Later, the day when a budget for the colonies will be presented to them, they will be able to assess it with full knowledge of the facts ". (oued sahel, 1889).

Pushing the analysis further, what precedes brings us face to face with a very important observation for the rest of this point: it is that the couple contempt-attachment thus presented, emanates from a structural consideration, that is to say, taking this couple of concepts in a hierarchical and interdependent way. By despising the target population, the newspaper intends to draw a threshold of citizenship that the indigenous population must not exceed, it is a limit that is just as moral as it is psychological. and at this moment, the presentation of the attachment to an experience, a project or even a way of seeing the future together seems to slip into the lines of the newspaper. this was the case for the treatment of the foreign legion in the conflict between France and Germany in 1894, , « ... also remember that the Algerian skirmishers fought against six at Wissembourg, carrying the French flag high and proud, and that they showed the same heroism a few days later at Froesviller »(oued sahel, 1895). The attachment, of the European population and of the newspaper, to this land conquered as a friend is the reason why the natives must submit, voluntarily, to this civilizing opportunity which is offered to them.

2.2. Attachment and forgetting:

It follows from the above that the mission of the newspaper, far from being that which is displayed in its front page, is based on a succession of treatment reserved for the local population. the attachment, the first factor of assimilation, changes definition to endorse another more difficult to understand but no less more credible to interpret in a temporal logic. If the newspaper, at one point in its history, was able to link civilization and assimilation, this theme was no longer understood, or almost, as such at the turn of the 19th century. The attachment that is made of it to the condition of the city of Bejaia is the axis of this change, from a civilizing aim it passes to another more radical claiming the total submission of the indigenous population who did not know how to integrate. to the new ideological and cultural system advocated by the French mission in Algeria in general and in Kabylia in particular. Since this attachment must undergo a mutation, it can take two possible paths: a city with a system of Franco-French representation, where the assimilation of the population is indisputable and where the authority conferred on the actors and notables of the "Arab" population by Bejaia is very limited, not to say almost absent. or, the conception of a city where the two most represented populations would subsist with a nuance that stipulates an internal exile of the local population. The forgetfulness of the population of Bejaia appears especially in political discourse, during general elections or municipal councils, two passages are to be highlighted, they both date from 1899. the first



concerns “the native electors” where it is clearly said that: “the French government would no longer be the master of Algeria. He would be the slave of the natives, of whom he would have to respect all the wishes they expressed through their representatives»(oued sahel, 1899). The second appears in the space of a month, he treats the assembly constituted by the natives as being “the sovereign arbiters, masters of the department, who could dispose of credits and subsidies of their own accord to the detriment of our regions » (oued sahel, 1899). It is precisely this second point that seems to have been favored by the representatives of the newspaper and subsequently adopted by the entire European population of the town of Bejaia.

Conclusion :

The newspaper « L'Oued Sahel », through its local work, has directed the most important part of its message towards the service of the interest of the French population and its policy of political-cultural differentiation. Since its appearance, it has never ceased to defend the interests of the settlers, the only population, whose concerns and expectations are capable of being carried and supported. Conversely, the process is resolutely opposed to that which concerns the indigenous population of the city of Bejaia. The stigmatization that is made of the latter is to be read in a social logic, the ascendancy of the colonist and his civilization, but also in a form of rupture with the practices of the colonial empire, where we are witnessing a change of definition of the concepts of colonization and status of colonized, wanted and assumed by the French.



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Annex : screenshot of the first issue of “l'oued sahel”

L'OUED-SAHEL

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Bougie, le 1^{er} Juillet 1887

Lorsque, aux élections législatives de la Haute-Garonne, M. de Calvinhac n'obtint, sur cent mille électeurs, qu'une majorité de 1,800 voix, notre attention se porta sérieusement sur la situation électorale de la France.

Dernièrement, dans la Haute-Marne, cette majorité descendit, pour l'élection de M. Vitry, à douze cents voix, et dans l'élection sénatoriale qui vient d'avoir lieu dans

gouverner en faisant lutter continuellement l'une contre l'autre deux moitiés de la France? N'en serait-il pas né une guerre intestine, aussi bien que la guerre sociale serait certainement née de la radicalisation de la France? Sait-on à quel abîme, avec leurs programmes pleins de problèmes insondables, les radicaux nous entraînait. A cette heure nous pouvons nous reposer un peu sur une majorité conservatrice à droite et à gauche, et il suffit que le ministère Rouvier et ses partisans veillent activement au salut de la République pour que la dan-

sans doute éloquentes, mais ils n'étaient pas sages.

M. Déroulède est connu pour un caractère aussi loyal qu'ardent; on sait que c'est avec une conviction profonde qu'il s'est attaché à son œuvre. Mais il s'est trompé plus d'une fois, cette fois-ci encore il a cru bien faire sans doute mais que ne gardait-il le silence auquel il s'était condamné?

L'attitude de la Ligue des Patriotes servira de prétexte à l'exécution rigoureuse des arrêts prononcés à Leipzig et l'Alsace-Lorraine n'en sera pas moins écrasée par la plus impitoyable des tyrannies. On peut même repro-

Ligue des Patriotes sont unanimes à blâmer les manifestations aussi inutiles qu'intempestives auxquelles elle a donné lieu.

« On peut dire, écrit le *Rappel* que cette bruyante intervention en faveur de M. Koehlin-Claudon ne lui a pas rendu un fameux service.

« Et l'attitude de la Ligue ne servira pas seulement à l'exécution rigoureuse des condamnations de Leipzig, elle en servira, aussi, à un resserrement du carcan au cou de l'Alsace-Lorraine. »

Le *Matin* par la plume de M. Emmanuel Arène tient à peu près le même langage; il considère ce meeting comme une faute.