

National, Regional, Global TV in Algeria

University students and television audience after the 2012 Algerian Media law

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Abstract

This article investigates new trends in the consumption of national and transnational television channels in Algeria, following the changes introduced by the 2012 media law. Research on this topic was conducted through a small-scale audience survey among university students in Mostaganem, West Algeria, at the beginning of 2015.

As other neighbouring countries, since the Eighties Algeria has been exposed to a rising amount of transnational television flows. After an initial French dominance, the last ten years saw a gradual growth in the Gulf channels' penetration, while national television became increasingly neglected. This partially changed after the 2011 uprisings, as many Arab countries accelerated a process of media liberalisation. In Algeria, the media law approved in 2012 opened the door to the creation of private television channels. The article explores the choices made by young Algerians in terms of national and transnational television content, both for news and entertainment. Based on the results of our survey and on other historical and contextual data, we argue that a new national perspective on news and current affairs is emerging in the country, together with the success of non-Western productions for entertainment formats. In both these domains, students from different faculties and backgrounds showed similar preferences, going beyond the linguistic, cultural and social segmentation that characterised the Algerian audience since the emergence of satellite television.

Keywords: Algeria, Arab Uprisings, transnational television, news, entertainment, audience studies

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I. Introduction: transnational, local and (new) national perspectives on the MENA region

Since the beginning of the Nineties, Arab media studies have been mostly dedicated to exploring the growth of the pan-Arab broadcasters and the consolidation of their public across the MENA region (e.g. Sakr, 2001; Kraidy, 2002; Zayani, 2005; Lynch, 2007). Opposed to the national dimension, a global and, most importantly, a regional focus acquired increasing prominence, as some media outlets started to emerge as interfaces connecting local and diasporic communities (Sarnelli, 2014).

More recently, in parallel with, and as a consequence of, the political turmoil started in 2011, national media landscapes in the region started to regain attention. As Tourya Guaaybess argued, “The 2011 Arab Spring confirms the importance of an analysis of Arab media especially focusing on the national scale” (2013: 1). At the same time, as Christensen says, the new wave of protests confirmed “the multi-scale interconnectivities linking the local, national, regional and the transnational” (2013: 10). In the field of media and communication, as Guaaybess pointed out, theories such as that of Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham (1996) with their “middle-range” approach, focusing on the regional rather than global broadcasting space, proved to be the most suitable to describe the media dynamics in the MENA region (Guaaybess, 2013: 4). In this model, some key actors emerge as intermediaries between the global and the national level: a role that in the region was covered for a long time by Egypt, in combination with other minor players such as Syria and Lebanon, and now has been taken by the Gulf countries (Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia) as unrivalled importers, distributors and producers of television content. These intermediaries can also reinforce the cultural influence of some global players, as in the case of the Saudi networks and their agreements with the main American companies (Hoyler and Watson, 2013; Yunis, 2014).

However, it is not only American audiovisual products that are mediated by Gulf giants such as MBC. Other television products, such as the Turkish dramas and Bollywood movies, have challenged and even surpassed their popularity among Arab audiences. Turkey is now the second largest exporter of TV series in the world after the United States, and is enjoying great success among Arab audiences (Yanardağoğlu and Karam, 2013; Özercan, 2015). The growth of Indian audiovisual exports on a global scale has also been the object of several studies (e.g. Rao, 2007; Desai 2013; Paul 2014). After the launch of the Indian-owned and Emirates-based Zee Aflam in 2008, today there are about 35 channels showing Bollywood content in Arabic in the MENA region (Thussu, 2013).

This shift in transnational audiovisual flows still has to be investigated in terms of its impact on audiences. In Arab media research, as noticed by Noha Mellor (2013: 202), “despite the technological advances of communication, the audience theories have been rather stable, constructing the audience as passive target of western communication propaganda”. Similarly other scholars, such as Walter Armbrust, had previously concluded that the field of Arab media studies “is dominated by a form of technological determinism”, with most investigations focusing on the impact of news, from television or the Internet (2012: 48). Analogous conclusions were also drawn by Marwan Kraidy (2009) on the tendency of recent scholarship to focus on a deterministic role of media rather than adopting a broader cultural perspective, when looking at how media content was received by audiences. Moreover, as shown by Mellor

(2013: 207), among the Arab media studies investigations developed since the beginning of the satellite era, only a small amount of studies adopted a qualitative approach. Among these few exceptions there is the ethnographic study conducted by Tarik Sabry on young Moroccans (2004; 2005), showing how long-term consumption of global Western media texts, combined with other factors, played a role in altering young Moroccans' structures of feeling (2005: 3). Another exception is the research realised in 2003 in Algeria by Ratiba Hadj-Moussa. Her study explored the advent of satellite television – “one of the most notable developments of the past 20 years in Algeria” (2003: 451) – and its consequences on the identity of Algerian society.

Since 2003, much has changed in the landscape of satellite television, in the region and in Algeria. One general phenomenon, as framed by Mellor, is that “Arab audiences seem to grow more attentive to their distinct local identities, despite the proliferation of pan-Arab transnational media” (2013: 212). Marwan Kraidi also defined the phenomenon as “a renaissance of national broadcasting” (2014: 18). In fact, particularly after 2011, a transformation of many national media systems has started (Guaaybess, 2013), and in Algeria affected mainly television news production and distribution. The new national channels that emerged after liberalisation rapidly gained a large audience, also thanks to the growing distrust towards the pan-Arab broadcasters. Among the young Algerians interviewed, many perceived Al Arabiya and especially Al Jazeera to be “too compromised”, after the 2011 revolts, and distant from the interests of the Algerian population (“they hate us”, in the words of a student of English at Mostaganem University). This article thus aims to investigate how these shifts in national and transnational TV production and distribution are received by the audience in Algeria, starting with a small-scale survey among university students, and suggesting the need for further research on these topics both in the country and in the MENA region.

Among the North African countries, Algeria is the one that received probably less attention after 2011. Still, from a political and strategic perspective, the country is a central player in trading and military relations with Europe and the US (Huber 2013: 1). In 2011, after an initial eruption of protests, the Algerian government rapidly announced the concession of moderate reforms, and the dissent disappeared from the streets. This result was probably contributed to by recent national history, and especially the long and bloody civil war – most Algerians call it instead “the terrorism” or “the black years” – which made the population willing to accept political and economic compromises in order to avoid new risks of violence. In 2014, a frequent comment among Algerians was “We already had the revolts like in Tunisia and Egypt. It was 1988, and then came the terrorism”.

Four years after 2011, the country is still characterised by high youth unemployment, no alternatives to an economy heavily based on the oil and gas sector, and high levels of corruption. Most importantly, the succession of political power does not seem to rest on solid ground. To these social and political aspects have to be added the properties of a postcolonial state still characterised by linguistic, cultural and ethnic divides, which are also reflected in how television channels are regarded by the public. The article will retrace some of the key aspects of the development of the mass media in Algeria in order to explore how the national audience receives today regional and global media content, and how media consumption patterns changed following the 2012 media law.

II. Television in Algeria: from state TV to French and then Gulf waves

Under the colonial occupation, before the liberation war started, television was in the hands of the colonisers and, as for radio before (Fanon, 1965), the new medium was completely alien to most Algerians, both as producers and as an audience (Djefafila 2012: 8). When the Évian Accords were signed in March 1962, after seven years of war, the agreement reached between France and the temporary Algerian government included the continuity of broadcasting. The name of “French radio and television” was kept until October 1962, when it became clearly incompatible with the new independent state, and the national army decided to occupy the radio and television stations to interrupt the transmissions from France (Belkhiri, 2014: 136). The first challenge for the newly created Radiodiffusion-télévision algérienne (RTA), in a country destroyed by the war and lacking many professional figures, was the continuation of the broadcasting service itself. Television started to transmit again in 1968, with the creation of the Radio and Television House in Constantine, covering mostly the Northern regions. In 1976, 95% of Algerian territory could receive, through terrestrial signal, the first Algerian channel (Ihdaden, 2002:108). Soon the new medium became the voice of the single national party, “Front de libération nationale” (FLN), while at the same time silencing the components not corresponding to the political, cultural and religious unity promoted by the government (Brahimi, 1989; Dris, 2012). In 1986 the state broadcasting service was renamed as “Entreprise National de Télévision” (ENTV), a name that has lasted until today.

After the huge wave of protests in 1988 violently exploded as an answer to political oppression and economic impoverishment, with Islamist organisations rapidly channelling the dissent in their favour, a first set of liberalisation steps followed. In the field of television, this resulted in a “haphazard deregulation”: the state maintained a monopoly, but at the same time, since 3 April 1990, “the monopoly *de jure* has been rescinded, yet without explicit permission being granted for a network to operate autonomously” (Mostefaoui, 1995: 42).

Meanwhile, Algeria had entered the world of satellite television since the mid-eighties, following the launch of the first French satellite TDF1 in October 1985 (Bouali, 2005: 81). As described by Hadj-Moussa, satellite television was initially “an urban experience, limited to those intimately connected to the ruling class, and then progressively spread to include the comfortable middle class (...), finally reaching the lower classes and spreading across the whole of Algeria” (2003: 452). Such a widespread availability, which came to influence “the manner in which Algerians see, understand and interpret the world” (ibid.), was initially confined to the French channels.

By the middle of the 1990s, when the reception of the satellite channels had become a mass phenomenon, for most Algerians the choice between the old national television and the new charming foreign programmes was predictable. Here started what Daoud Djefafila (2012: 2) described as a true “discontinuity” between the state television and its national public, particularly reinforced by the unreliable news coverage of ENTV during the following civil war years. As for entertainment, national television relied almost only on imported programmes, instead of investing in local productions (Mostefaoui and Khelil, 2012: 26). Like in neighbour countries, and even more so, the lack of national competitors in Algeria resulted then in the uncontested expansion of the French satellite channels both for news and entertainment.

As shown by Belkacem Mostefaoui (1995), the penetration of the French satellite waves in the Maghreb was not only tolerated but even encouraged by local governments, to revitalise national economies with foreign investments and to contrast with the growing Islamist influence. Still, for the public, their relationship with French channels was from the beginning one of ambivalence, between attraction and rejection, as a new form of the old conflictual relation (1995: 193).

In this context, Saudi-owned MBC - the first Arab satellite private channel, broadcasting initially from London and then from Dubai - started to rise as an alternative to French channels. The network was seen positively also by Islamist groups, accusing Western programmes of corrupting Algerian morality (Medjahdi, 2005: 47-35). As observed by Hadj-Moussa (2003: 453), Islamists were not opposed to television itself: some groups rapidly understood that “satellite television introduced them... into the homes of Algerians”. At the same time, Algerian authorities were also addressing the national public via foreign channels. In this sense, satellite television in Algeria became “like an interface between the various contenders on the political stage” (Hadj-Moussa, 2003: 460).

III. Television, language and culture in Algeria

The expansion of French channels added a new level to the already existing linguistic stratification. One of the well known paradoxes of postcolonial Algeria in fact is that the number of French speakers increased notably more after independence than during the colonial occupation, thanks to the new government's efforts to combat illiteracy (Gaifati, 2002: 24). At the same time, soon after independence Algerian political leaders started to promote the use of Standard Arabic in place of French, as part of the new nation-building discourse, together with the emphasis on Islam as the state religion (Gafaiti, 2002: 29; Grandguillaume, 1995; Hadj-Moussa, 1996). Despite the policies favouring Arabic, economic and social prestige related to the use of French persisted in several key cultural and economic sectors. As Michael Willis argued: “The fact that it tended to be poorer, more rural Algerians that became Arabisants, whilst the wealthy, more urban groups stayed largely Francophone... also meant that the social and economic cleavages between the two groups widened.” (1997: 51-52) This division, still relevant in contemporary Algeria as in other Maghrebi states, is also reflected and reproduced by different media consumption choices. As a university teacher of English explained: “My sister is a surgeon, and when she sees Lebanese or Syrian serials on TV she says ‘I cannot understand a word’, you know she always studied in French”. On the other hand, a young high school teacher we met was encouraging her children to watch only cartoons dubbed in “proper Arabic”, and complained that many people in Algeria cannot speak Standard Arabic (Mostaganem, February 2015). The contempt for Algerian Arabic, which despite being only an oral language is the only one really uniting the nation, is often combined with admiration for the 'high' language, Standard Arabic, and the acceptance of French; all kept together by the continuous 'code-switching' for which the Algerians are well-known (e.g. Coubet, 2013; Davies and Bentahila, 2008). Translated in television terms, as Mostefaoui observed, this brought about a gradual 'naturalisation' and integration of the French and Arab channels into Algerian culture

(1995: 247). A more recent study by Miliani and Roubai-Chorfi (2012) on the relation between linguistic variety and media practices in Algeria concluded that the Arabic language is strengthening its position in audiovisual communications while French, traditionally related to literary productions, tends to prevail in the Internet domain. To this picture also has to be added the other important segmentation in the country, that among different ethnic groups or “micro-societies” (Arabs, Chawias, Kabyles, Mozabites, Touaregs); as summarised by Ali Kessaissia, the result is that “all communities have their preferable satellite TV channels, programmes and languages” (2010: 5). This statement, although being of common sense for anybody observing the social and cultural variety of the country, still “remains fertile terrain of empirical inquiries” (Kessaissia 2010: 5). Our study couldn’t cover the variety of cultural differences in the country, being limited to university students and to one city. However, in this contribution we tried to address at least partially the issue of the Arabophone/Francophone divide, to explore how much it is still relevant among the many parameters influencing media preferences today.

IV. Algeria’s television landscape in the satellite era

The most notable change in the television landscape in Algeria in the last fifteen years is the transition from a dominating French presence to the prevalence of Middle Eastern and Maghrebi channels in Arabic, as confirmed by several audience surveys (Ahcene-Djaballah 2015). Compared to the Nineties, it can be argued that a shift occurred also from a direct foreign influence model, made up of French content broadcast by French channels, to a mixed form. In this new configuration, in fact, it is mainly Turkish, Indian and American entertainment content that is on air, mediated by Gulf channels like MBC. In his work on the adaptation of global formats in the Middle East, Amos Thomas observed that while most media products tended to come from outside the region or from more liberal countries in the region such as Turkey, Lebanon, Syria or Egypt, on the other hand “media owners and advertisers come largely from the more culturally conservative countries in the oil-rich Gulf sub-region” (Thomas, 2009: 106). Within this regional balance, as Mostefaoui (2009) noticed, the Algerian government managed until 2011 to maintain a monopoly over national broadcasting and at the same time to 'externalise' its audience to foreign channels. By the end of 2010, satellite dishes were spread over 60 percent of households throughout the country, providing a variety of alternatives to the poor choice offered by state-owned channels (Anas, 2012).

It is important to note that, in comparison with other new and old media, television still holds a central place in Algeria. Looking at the most recent national statistics available on the use of leisure time in Algeria (ONS, 2012), it also emerges that there is still a big difference in family structures and in media consumption between urban and rural areas; that the literacy level of women in the country is finally and decisively rising for younger generations; that in their free time men spend definitely more time outside than women. The tendency noticed by Hadj-Moussa, that “satellite television facilitates the *retreat* of men towards the *interior* of domestic space” (2003: 456) can be relevant compared to the past; still, according to the 2012 state survey, women of all ages are spending most of their time at home, dedicating a large amount of time to domestic work and child care, and consuming more television than men. On the other

hand, men are also more often surfing the Internet. Overall, the percentage of time dedicated to other activities (reading, sport, theatre) is almost non-existent for both men and women, also due to a limited number of opportunities, while television actively promotes a 'house culture' opposed to a 'going-out' culture (Boukrouh, 2011:65-66). In this respect, as argued by Mostefaoui and Khelil (2012: 6), television can still be defined as by far the main means of information and entertainment for Algerians.

V. After 2011: regional and national shifts

In many countries of the Middle Eastern and North African region, a movement of media liberalisation started immediately after the 2011 revolts. As Guaaybess argued: "It appears that some rulers have been aware of the fact that the Arab Spring was a good opportunity to accelerate the liberalisation movement started years ago." (2013: 8). Interestingly, most of these movements tended to reinforce a local perspective in the media, encouraging national unity and cohesion.

Algeria had been until February 2011 under emergency rule, a hangover from the civil war years which obstructed any fundamental changes in the media sector (Anas 2012). Major protests in the country had started already in December 2010, in parallel with Tunisia. After a first wave of riots, easily appeased by the government's economic concessions, there followed another phase of more systematic political demands promoted by parties and social organisations (Volpi, 2013). In order to avoid an escalation of the protests, the government lifted the state of emergency on February 24. This move was soon balanced by the adoption of new 'antiterrorist' measures, but it still had a great symbolic importance in the political climate of the time. In April 2011, the government installed a constitutional commission in charge of reforms, and in September a new media law finally put an end to state monopoly over radio and television.

The new media law approved in September 2011, and promulgated in February 2012, came twenty-two years after the previous one. The 1990 law had resulted from the period of reforms which came after the 1988 uprisings in the country, and preceded the victory of the Islamist party in the first multi-party elections in 1991. It was then followed by the military coup and the long civil war between the state and the armed Islamic groups. The 1990 law had been a significant innovation in terms of media pluralism, allowing for the creation of new newspapers, strongly limiting the control of the ruling party, and promoting a more professional class of journalists (Dris, 2012: 308). Together with the new law came the creation of a new institution, the "Conseil supérieur de l'information" (CSI), acting as a filter between the State and the media sector, and the suppression of the Ministry of Communication. The following year, though, the ministry was re-established among the growing tensions preceding the coup, and the CSI gradually lost power until it ceased to exist in 1994, when the information sector was definitively put under the control of the military (Ferchiche, 2011).

The 2012 law was approved in a context characterised by completely different endogenous and exogenous factors. After his rise to power in 1999, Abdelaziz Bouteflika tried to do what most previous Algerian leaders couldn't achieve, that is, to reduce the influence of the army over political power, even if with ambiguous results (Sarnelli 2016). Under his rule, the country

started to overcome the tragedy of the civil war and found a new social and economic stability, based on oil revenues funding state investments in infrastructures, with the emergence of a new business class. Outside the country, the collapse of other authoritarian states undoubtedly urged the government to react fast and to approve a series of reforms. Together with Libya, Algeria was the only country in the Arab Maghreb not to have started a liberalisation of the audiovisual sector prior to 2011, despite several announcements made during the previous decade (Dris, 2012: 313).

Among the main innovations included in the new media law, article 4/10 states that information services in the country can be provided by the public sector, by political parties or associations, to private citizens subject to Algerian law and with capital owned by physical or legal bodies of Algerian nationality (JORA, 2012). Another important provision included in the 2012 law (article 84) is the abolition of the imprisonment of journalists for libel, an important step despite the persistence of several other obstacles limiting professional freedoms, such as the broad areas of “national security”, “national economic interests”, “national history” or the privacy of public figures (JORA, 2012). An important persistent restriction on the operating of private media, however, is the control the government still holds over advertisements, through the state-owned national agency for publishing and advertising (ANEP), with a de facto monopoly over that market (Miliani and Roubai-Chorfi, 2012: 157). In sum, after 2011 the Algerian regime decided to liberalise the media sector, and to keep open access to the Internet, unlike other regimes in the region, knowing that total control over information is impossible, and that management of information resources relying on censorship often produces reactions opposite to what is desirable. Rather, by allowing the entry of new private players, and by hosting new media content on state and private media, the new management of information seems to work in a more subtle manner, in what could be defined as a “neo-authoritarian media order” (Dris, 2011: 304).

Among the new Algerian private channels created after the 2012 law there are news channels like Echouruk and Ennahar, funded by editorial groups; there are generalist channels like Al Djazairia, and channels targeting specific groups of audiences, like Samira TV, based on cooking programming and domestic activities, sponsored by the businesswoman Samira Bezouaya; Dzair TV, funded by the businessman Ali Haddad, is mostly dedicated to sport; and Al Adala, the first Algerian channel officially promoting a political party, or better a political figure, the Islamist Abdallah Djaballah.

Some of the new investors are therefore pre-existing media groups (El Watan, El Khabar); others industrial groups active in other fields (Mehri, Rabrab, Haddad, Rahim), conglomerates, single public figures or businesspersons (Miliani and Roubai-Chorfi, 2012).

[Table 1: New Algerian channels and their sponsors]

Recent surveys conducted after the approval of the new media law revealed a fast rise in the popularity of the new private channels. According to Media Market Research, at the end of 2013 the most watched channel in Algeria was the news and current affairs channel Ennahar TV, with 27.3% of audience share. The second most popular one was Samira TV with its cooking programmes, with a share of 27.2%, while the other news channel Echouruk was following with 17.4%. In total, the audience of the new private channels, one year after their

launch, was already double that of the Algerian state channels. Still, none of the Algerian channels could reach the share of foreign giants like MBC: its channels, combined, were scoring more than 33% (MMR, 2013).

One year later, at the end of 2014, according to the Tunisian company Sigma Conseil, the most followed channel in Algeria was A3, the third state channel, with a share of 15.5%, closely followed by Ennahar (13.3%), Echuruk (13.1%) and by the Tunisian Nessma TV (10.2%). According to Sigma, these results showed “the reinforcement of the audiovisual identity of each of the Maghrebi countries, and confirm the disappearing of the French channels from the Maghrebi audiovisual field, after a long-lasting colonisation” (in Ahcene-Djaballah, 2014).

It is interesting to note that one of the consequences of the new law is the growing audience for one of the Algerian state channels, A3. The third public channel - after the institutional ENTV and the francophone Canal Algerie - was launched in 2001 and aimed at reaching an international Arabophone public via satellite. As for the other state channels, though, until 2011 A3 was able to reach a large public only when broadcasting big sports events or other extraordinary occurrences (Miliani and Roubai-Chorfi, 2012). However, in parallel with the opening of the audiovisual market, the Algerian government decided to invest in the refurbishing of at least one of the state channels, and precisely the one offering essentially entertainment content (soaps, movies, talk-shows). A3 still relies mostly on low-quality national productions, but since 2011 it has been introducing more variety and modernised the style of some of its shows.

VI. The Mostaganem survey: young Algerians and television culture

As Ali Kessaissia argued, in Algeria there is a need for “an alternative approach” to the study of audiences of global media, considering the “geographical and socio-techno-cultural local context with an emphasis on Algeria as an African, Arab, Muslim and especially a transitional country” (2010:1).

While at present there is a persistent lack of audience reception studies in Algeria, and there are also very few studies investigating the changing media environment after the 2012 media law, in such a moment of transition it would appear to be even more important to explore the preferences, motivations and attitudes of the new national public.

What follows is the outcome of a small audience survey conducted among university students in Mostaganem, West Algeria, between the end of 2014 and the beginning of 2015, based on questionnaires and interviews. Far from being representative of the whole Algerian population, this small survey is based on a “convenience sample” of students from different faculties.

We tried to combine the gathering of quantitative data through the questionnaires and qualitative data through group interviews. It has been argued that these methods would not be suitable for a country like Algeria, for a variety of factors, such as an absence of audience research records, lack of familiarity with data collection procedures (that could be confused with police investigations), plus traditional and electronic illiteracy (Kessaissia, 2010). However, the choice of the university environment allowed us to limit the impact of all these factors that could compromise survey results in other environments in the country. Our survey

was carried out more than two years after the approval of the new media law, in a time of relative political quiet, after the re-election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in April 2014.

The choice of the university population in Mostaganem, where both authors were based at the time, was motivated by practical reasons: lack of funding to expand the survey in other cities, the opportunity to reach a large number of students during the academic semester, the chance to cover a reasonable geographic variety given that a number of students at the university came from other provinces in the North-West of the country. We included students from different faculties, and within each faculty a random course and class were chosen, having gained previous authorisation from the head of the faculty. The disproportion between female and male respondents to the questionnaires reflects the actual composition of courses, and is not too far from the last national statistics, which showed university female student numbers reaching 65% (Laaredj-Campbell, 2015). In the focus groups, though, we tried to control the gender composition, including whenever possible an equal amount of female and male students randomly selected within the same courses.

Given the limited scope of our research, we decided to not include in the questionnaire demographic variables such as socioeconomic condition, but to consider mainly gender differences, the official language used in the course of studies (Arabic or French), and to match these with the course of study and with individual preferences in terms of media consumption.

Despite the small dimension of the sample, the quantitative results of our survey were very close to the findings of the recent national surveys (e.g. Media Market Research 2013, Sigma 2014). This might be because of the university system in Algeria, where students' enrolment fees and other expenses (such as housing and meals) are all covered by the state, thereby encouraging access to university for students of all social and geographical origins.

Considering the historical and social preconditions of television consumption in the Algeria, our study was aimed at answering three main research questions:

1. Is the Arabophone/Francophone divide still significant for the new generations of television viewers in Algeria?
2. How do university students select national and international TV programmes?
3. Where are the new private channels placed among the preferences of young Algerians?

Considering the historical audience fragmentation in the country, has a similar splintering of the audience continued following the creation of the post-2012 channels?

VII. The questionnaires

The questionnaires, based on a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions, were made up of two parts. The first part required the students to indicate some general information such as their gender, course and faculty, area of residence, and languages spoken. The second, most substantial part, asked students to indicate their preferences in terms of: favourite channels and favourite content; programmes they usually watched with their families and individually; languages in which their favourite formats were broadcast; watching television segments, movies and series on the Internet; favourite sources for news.

The questionnaires were distributed to 226 students in five faculties. One half of the students

declared themselves to be from Mostaganem and the surrounding area, the other half from other cities and villages in the North-West of Algeria.

[Table 2: Students age, faculty, gender]

Some of the questionnaires were distributed to the students in French (150) and others in Standard Arabic (76). This choice reflected the university system in Algeria, where in some faculties (the scientific and technological ones, plus foreign literature) the language used for teaching is French, while in others (the remaining humanities) it is Standard Arabic. While this division is not representative of the actual language competencies of the students in the two groups – many Algerian students are proficient both in Standard Arabic and French – we considered the university use of one language as one of the many variables that could influence their media consumption choices.

a. Favourite channels in the Arabophone and in the Francophone group

The first visible difference among the two groups of students, corresponding to the “Francophone” and “Arabophone” faculties, is the position held by the French television channels (TF1, France24, M6, TV5) among the 20 most viewed channels. In the comparative chart, only one of these channels (TF1) appears in the “Arabophone” group. Other channels also have different positions in the list.

At the top of the list, though, in both cases, are the new private Algerian channels. Eshouruk and Ennahar were indicated among the first three channels, and in the Francophone group the first choice was even given to one of the state channels, Algérie3 (A3). Other new channels – KBC, El Djazairia, Samira TV – are also present in both groups, with different positions. Another important similarity between the two groups is the central space taken by the MBC channels and by other Gulf networks – Arabic versions of international channels, such as MTV and National Geographic, or pan-Arab entertainment channels (including sport).

The students' preferences seem to confirm new trends in television consumption in the MENA region, following the events of 2011: rising success of the new national private channels, especially the ones broadcasting news and current affairs, and consolidation of pan-Arab entertainment networks from Gulf countries. Interestingly, the pan-Arab news channels that dominated the previous decade (Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya) do not even appear among the first 20 most popular channels. While this kind of segmentation between national and international content has been documented in other world regions in the past (e.g. Chouliaraki, 1999; Curran, 2002; Clausen, 2004), in Algeria, as in some other MENA countries, it became more significant as the rise of new national and private channels focusing on local news significantly intensified after 2011 (Kraidy, 2014).

A significant exception in Algeria is the case of A3, one of the state channels, which appeared to be particularly successful among the students of the French-speaking faculties. This seems to indicate that the refurbishing of the channel started after 2011 was favourably received by the national audience, and allowed it to keep pace with the new private competitors.

Most importantly, the chart also suggests that, apart from a few differences, students from Arabophone and Francophone faculties are choosing the same channels, and are operating a similar selection in terms of new and entertainment content.

[Table 3: preferred channels for the Arabophone and Francophone group]

A recurrent factor highlighted by several studies in the Arab media field is the gender divide in television consumption, “amongst female consumers who are likely to follow entertainment genres, whilst men prefer the news genre” (Mellor, 2013: 209). The preferences indicated by the university students in Mostaganem partially confirm this difference, with more females choosing film and drama/entertainment series, along with music and dance programmes, and males indicating a preference for news and sport. However, this factor seems to be far less relevant compared to others. On the one hand, in fact, girls are also watching news, documentaries and other information programmes. On the other hand, boys are often not so much interested in news as they are in sport, and many of them said they also frequently watched movies. Most importantly, it was mainly the choices of the girls, who made up three quarters of the respondents, that determined the results of the chart (table 3) showing news channels like Echouruk and Ennahar as the most popular choice.

Overall, considering the preferences indicated by the students, the Algerian television landscape nowadays appears to be divided among different countries and languages, each of them dominating one sector. In the news sector, the persisting prestige of the French channels is noticeable, together with new or established Middle-Eastern and Maghrebi channels in Arabic. In the field of entertainment, Egyptian and Syrian dramas seem to have been definitely surpassed by dramas from Turkey, dubbed or subtitled in Lebanese or Syrian Arabic, combined with a minor presence of Korean, Indian and American series. As for movies, our survey confirmed the new dominance of Bollywood films, mostly dubbed in Gulf Arabic, along with American movies.

[Table 4: Most popular contents/languages]

b. Everyday (and) family television

For several students, the choice of national or international channels seemed to be related also to the viewing setting, and to differences between collective and individual viewing.

When asked with whom they prefer watching television, most of the students indicated that the company they kept was not relevant (38.2% of the girls and 35% of the boys), but some said that they preferred to watch television with their families (22.4% of the girls and 16% of the boys). Among the programmes that were more appropriate to watch with their families, 30% of the girls and 37% of the boys indicated news and political programmes (others mentioned historical movies and series, comic programmes, sport, documentaries, social and religious programmes). The family viewing setting in Algeria in fact still seems to require a very careful content selection, as explained by some students in open-ended answers. “I watch with my family all that is compatible with the Algerian mentality,” wrote a female student; another girl

added: “All that is in the circle of respectful and clean things to watch.” Not everybody, though, seemed to be willing to accept this selection, particularly among the boys: “I never watch television with my family!”, wrote one student. This reminds us of what Mostefaoui wrote in the early 90s about French television in the Maghreb, namely that it was being “acclimatised” by the north African public into family life, to reduce the perturbing character of some images (1995: 248). Ten years later, Hadj-Moussa described this process in a similar tone.

The common expression used to signify the installation of a satellite dish evokes the boundary between inside and outside. *Faire rentrer* (to bring in) is an implicit reference to the introduction of a foreign and alien body. This expression is never used in the context of national television. The ‘entry’ of satellite television requires a certain number of changes in the organisation of interior spaces in order to conform to “custom and tradition”. (2003: 457)

Now that there are usually more than one television set in the family home, this “acclimatisation” of content often means having separate viewing spaces. 68% of the students said they had 2 or 3 television sets at home, 19% indicated they had more than 3 sets, and only 12.4% said there was one television set for all the family. As a result, a significant number of students indicated that they preferred to watch television alone or with friends (38% of the girls, 48% of the boys). As a boy bitterly commented during one group interview: “Now everyone has his own channel, each of us lives in his own fictional reality”. A mature female student in another group also described this process in nostalgic terms. “When we were younger we were always together, family and neighbours, watching the only channel available, ENTV. Now everyone has his own interests and his own channel”.

This division between the individual and the family watching, and most importantly between the content that is appropriate or not for family viewing, also tends to reflect the division between national and foreign channels. Given that the domain of the news and current affairs is the one that is more likely to be shared with the rest of the family, the focus of the new Algerian private channels on this domain contributed to reinforce such a division, while leaving the less traditional entertainment content to be viewed by the young Algerians away from their families.

VIII. The interviews

Together with the questionnaires, we also conducted five focus groups, initially thought of as a way to expand some lines of enquiry emerging from the questionnaires. In the end, the focus groups, based on semi-structured discussions, tended to cover a wider range of topics. The discussions took place in university classrooms or common spaces, and involved five different groups, each made up of a minimum of six and a maximum of ten students, for a total of 41 participants. The discussions were recorded, transcribed, integrated with written field notes and thematically analysed. The students were enrolled in five university courses: Technical Sciences, Arabic, Psychology, French, English. Three groups’ interviews were conducted in French, two in Arabic. During the discussions, though, the differences related to the field of study or to the language used didn’t seem to have a significant influence on the selection of the topics and on the attitudes shown by the students. We will therefore present the issues recurring

in all the discussions, and highlight some differences when relevant.

Our main aim through the interviews was to investigate the preferences, attitudes and perceptions of young Algerians in terms of national and international channels, and the cultural models they associated with them. Similar themes have been previously explored by a long tradition of audience studies, informed by a debate between the approaches focusing on the ‘effects’ of media and those, developed since the 1980s, emphasising the space for individual and collective ‘use’ and ‘interpretation’. Among the approaches contributing to the first strand there is “cultivation theory”, which in the original version of Gerbener, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli was a study of “the independent contributions television viewing makes to viewer conceptions of social reality” (1994: 23). Generally speaking, cultivation research is motivated by a concern that television adversely affects its viewers (Cohen & Weimann 2000), and even considering the distinction between “light” and “heavy” viewers, it considers TV viewing mediating the effects of demographic variables on the perceptions of social reality (Morgan, and Shanahan, 2010). In the context of our study, though, the focus was rather on how viewers evaluated different television content and formats and how they associated them with different cultural models, given the vast offer of content and formats available from different countries. In this sense, we considered television being part of a broader cultural environment, in relation with other alternative or complementary social practices and shared values. This area of inquiry builds particularly on the tradition of British cultural studies (Morley, 1980; 1992; Curran and Morley 2005). However, audience research today requires a higher emphasis on the transnational dimension of television distribution and consumption. As Adrian Athique recently observed, “our knowledge of transnational audiences remains highly fragmented and lacks a common conceptual or comparative framework” (2014: 4). Within a broader global media environment, as André Jansson (1999) noticed, the concept of identity – in its “performative” and “affective” dimension (Hall 1990; Walkerdine and Blackman 2001) – constitutes one important link between the micro and the macro contexts of media consumption. Mass media’s potential to create and nourish cultural communities has often been discussed in relation to already demarcated social groups; but since they have turned into international companies, today mass media do not only nourish geographically-determined “imagine communities” (Anderson 1983), they also contribute to the establishment of new, deterritorialized ones (Jansson 1999:19).

Leaving these bigger issues on the background, we tried to focus in the group interviews on some main questions, such as the most successful formats; the perception of ‘external’ cultural influences on Algerian identity; the perception of different cultural values related to some television products; the difference between local and foreign production; the preferred news sources.

a. Formats

The most popular entertainment format in all the groups was drama from Turkey, with the partial exception of students in the English group (where Turkish drama was less often mentioned). In particular, two series were mentioned in almost all group discussions: “Fariha” and “Hareem Elsoltan”, two very different products – the first being a romantic story focused

on the overcoming of class divisions in contemporary Turkey, and the second a dive into the golden era of the Ottoman empire. These genres reflect two parallel strategies put into place by the Turkish drama industry, as argued by Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013): whereas some dramas conjure up an accessible modernity, others employ a counter-hegemonic narrative that puts Middle Easterners in the role of heroes. In this second case, the stories are often based on the invocation of a glorious past as a justification for the influential role of Turkey in the present (Zayed, 2013). These series, appreciated by the students because of their style – “the acting, the set design, the details” – were also seen as the main reason behind the success of some pan-Arab channels. In the words of one male student: “The best channels are the ones in Arabic broadcasting foreign programmes, with great stories and good scenarios.” While the sensational success for Turkish series in Arabic started in 2008 (with “Noor”, in Turkish “Gümüş”), after 2011, as observed by Zayed (2013), the demand for Turkish drama has even increased in connection with the decreasing output from Cairo and Damascus. The notion of “Neo-Ottoman Cool” on which many Turkish series are relying, as observed by Kraidy and Al-Ghazzi (2013: 18), is actually a deeply ironic one, given that modern Arab countries were born precisely from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Despite this paradox, the Neo-Ottoman style is selling not only on television; in fact, it has a huge influence also on the textile industry, setting trends for female Muslim fashion and for male casual dressing in the region (Christensen 2013: 9). In 2015 Algeria, all city shops and markets were filled with “Made in Turkey” clothes, and even the “Made in China” jewellery was following the “Ottoman” patterns.

Other popular entertainment formats mentioned by all the students were Bollywood movies, Korean series, and American movies and series, the latter being particularly successful among the students of English. As for the Turkish series, the followers of the Korean and Indian productions seemed to be fascinated by the whole culture associated with them, including the language, the music and the fashion. The Korean series, whose popularity is already high in some Arab countries (Kim, 2013), seemed to be regarded by the boys, at least in public discussions, as “for girls only”. The same label was also applied to Bollywood movies, even if in the (anonymous) questionnaires several boys included them among their favourite programmes.

Apart from the romantic stories secretly or openly appreciated by many young Algerians, the key to the success of Bollywood movies seems to lie in the fact that “Indian films speak to audiences in ways that Hollywood cannot”, as a newspaper article already framed it fifteen years ago (Fueller, 2000). In many Arab countries, in fact, Indian family values are perceived as closer and more understandable, despite the huge differences with local culture, compared to American dysfunctional families and individualistic heroes. Moreover, most Bollywood films are already designed for family consumption. In this light, Indian movies are seen as an alternative to American movies in many Muslim countries, including Algeria (Thussu, 2014: 139).

Finally, the students of the language faculties (Arabic, French, English), while mostly agreeing with their peers on the above-mentioned series and movies, also referred to other television content, motivated by their specific cultural interests. Several Arabic students followed Syrian series “because of the refined plots and the good Arabic language used”; English students indicated British movies and series “for the accent”; and French students were often watching Francophone channels (France24, TV5).

b. Perception of cultural influences on Algerian identity

One of the topics covered by all the discussions was the perceived influence of other regional or global players on Algerian national culture and identity. Many students associated the success of some particular formats with visible trends in Algerian society, especially in fashion and dressing styles. “You can see a Turkish influence, in the way girls put their hijab...”; “even in traditional weddings you find now the Sari...”; “everybody is copying the hairstyle of the football players”. While the majority of the students considered these influences as somewhat superficial, a few interpreted them as a serious threat to the national culture. In the words of one boy: “Shops are called after Syrian or Turkish programmes, the newly-born are called after television personalities... Even when selecting the partner now it feels like being in soap operas”.

When asked about the most influential foreign cultures in Algeria, almost all the students mentioned Turkey. According to one female student, “Turkish are Muslims, but they are trying to send some message through their shows... to push people to follow them... And it works, Algerians are following them!”. Among other influential countries, some students indicated Lebanon, “because they have a 'foreign' attitude”; Saudi Arabia, “for religious reasons”, and the Emirates, for their wealthy lifestyle: “they have these shows on expensive cars...”. Finally, “there is always *La France* of course...”. In 2003 Hadj-Moussa wrote that, in a new relation mediated by satellite television channels, “France constitutes the core around which Algerian identity is manifested and around which it is articulated” (457). Despite a love-hate relationship due to the partially unresolved colonial trauma, France, also referred to as “the step-mother” (*la marâtre*) (Berger, 2002), still holds an important place in the imagination of the Algerians. For most young Algerians, compared with the generation of their parents, the special place held by France in their “atlas of emotion” (Bruno, 2002) is now surely challenged by other influential countries. However, the persisting importance of the French language seems to be undisputed, especially for foreign language students. In the words of one female student of English: “It became part of our culture - you cannot go through a whole day without saying one word in French.”

c. Cultural values

Another recurring topic explored through the group interviews was that of the ‘cultural values’ associated with specific formats produced in different countries. When asked about differences among various television formats and related cultural models, some students used as a discriminating value the level of “openness” or “sophistication” showed by specific channels or formats.

(Boy, Technical sciences): In many channels you can find different and more sophisticated cultures compare to the Algerian one, Algerian culture is closed for the world, other countries are more open.

(Girl, Arabic literature): I'm watching Turkish soap operas on Arabic channels, I see the openness Turkish people have, both cultural and financially, with all the business exchange...

The case of Turkey seemed to be particularly controversial, as it was seen as an “exception” within the supposedly homogeneous Islamic culture. In the view of a female student: “Turkey has a great history in Islamic civilisation, but it does not represent all the Islamic people now, it is half European and half Asian... they are currently looking for identity.” The suggestion of an “identity crisis” attributed to the Turkish people by a psychology student would come from the difficulty of reconciling new behaviours with a traditional national culture, which in the students’ words often equates to national religion. “These things are not acceptable in our... country, or religion”, said another female student. In fact, religion was often identified also by other students as a guide to discriminate among content - “You can identify the good and bad things in each culture, by following Islamic principles” - or as a protective shield - “I am interested in other cultures, but I am not influenced by them, because I am Muslim”.

In terms of attitudes towards cultural or religious values, we found no significant difference among students of foreign languages, Arabic literature, hard and social sciences. In general, several students, notably all girls, saw it as a moral duty to “resist” the “external” models introduced by some television programmes, and to “put limits” to the fascination of these programmes. As one girl put it: “We just watch TV. They expect us to follow them, and there are some victims of that... But we just watch to have fun.” Similarly, a girl from the French students group – which together with the English group were the ones watching more European and Western channels – explained: “If I watch a European channel I set some limits - it’s to see something new, not to change my way of life...”.

Interestingly, this defensive attitude was never applied to the entertainment products coming from other Arab countries, such as the Gulf states, despite the huge cultural, linguistic and political differences, because of the unity of language and, most importantly, of religion. The mediated construction of a shared Arab identity, daily reinforced and reproduced by pan-Arab satellite television (Phillips, 2012: 2), emerges in this sense in opposition to a more marked form of “otherness” such as that of the European models. Still, in the pan-Arab satellite world, Algeria and other Maghreb countries are clearly perceived even by their own citizens as less close to “the centre of Arabism” compared to the Middle-Eastern or Mashreq countries. As Algerians often put it: “We can understand them, but they cannot understand us.” Atiqah Hachimi (2013) addressed this as the “Maghreb-Mashreq language ideology”: an old cultural hierarchy that acquired new contingency through its media exposure. One of the reasons for the persistent symbolic hegemony of the Arab East is the popularity of its cultural industries, in the fields of television products or music. On the opposite side the Maghrebi productions, even in the case of the locally popular music industry, never managed to “sell” much in the rest of the Arab world (Hachimi, 2013: 291).

Similar conclusions were reached by some of the university students in Mostaganem. In the words of one boy, a student of Arabic: “Any programme has an agenda, Indian films promote Indian culture in the world, Turkish movies promote Turkish culture...We have become unproductive recipients.”

d. Foreign and local productions

Following the discussion on the cultural productions of different countries, in three out of five groups the students raised “the problem of Algerian productions”: “Algeria has its own culture but there is a lack of strong national media”, commented one boy. Many complained about the lack of entertaining productions, especially for young audiences: “Algerian channels are only about politics, but teenagers just want to have fun!”, said another male student. Both female and male students described the existing Algerian entertainment formats as “banalities”; “lacking in any creative spirit”; “without concepts -hey’re only good for the family evenings during Ramadan”.

Some of the problems characterising the Algerian media production system were also generalised to the rest of the Arab world. In the words of one girl, “all the Arabic channels are broadcasting American and Turkish movies because we don't have Arab movies”. The foreign language students, who were often watching programmes in other languages, tended to compare the domestic and foreign formats more frequently, as in the following exchange among three English students.

(Girl 1): “I watch reality shows. Not the Arab ones, they are boring. I watch the French ones.”

(Girl 2): “It’s not about being boring, they just copy the Western shows and I don’t think this is a good way...”

(Girl 3): “I think we don’t watch Arab channels or Arab programmes ... because they are the same, they are not different from the way we live. We always have dreams and fantasies and we kind of live there... through the movies. So if we watch an Arab movie it’s not that kind of dream, it’s just the same! It’s too close to us. When we watch we like to ... open the gates for our fantasies to come true, yes. That is more interesting.”

This fascination for faraway worlds and symbolic places (Azzi, 2009) disclosed by satellite television is close to what Tarik Sabry (2004; 2005), in his study in Morocco, called “mental emigration”: “Young Moroccans... are able to emigrate mentally to the West inside Morocco through their long-term exposure to “globalised” Western media texts and so expand the West's mental geography and its project of modernity” (2005: 3). Sabry’s study demonstrated that difference in socio-economic and cultural conditions produced different readings of and reactions to Western modernity among young Moroccans. While those who opposed such television contents in Sabry’s study were mainly young Islamists, this attitude seemed to be more common in Algeria, as exemplified by the opinions of many girls. The girls, in fact – for the most part fashionably veiled according to the latest Turkish trend – more than their male peers wanted to show, during our open discussions, to be well-equipped to resist the allure of foreign formats. At the same time, their private spheres seemed to be were often dominated by the domestic consumption of these entertainment products, and not balanced by many outdoor activities as for the boys.

In general, the possibility of “travelling without moving” offered by television seemed to be an essential component of some formats’ success, given that none of the 41 students taking part in the group interviews, like most young Algerians, had ever visited another country. When asked

which countries they would like to visit, some recurring choices were Saudi Arabia, France, Spain, Turkey, Dubai, India and Syria. The students of English also added the USA and the UK.

It would be worthwhile exploring with further research the issues of “mental” and physical migration in Algeria, including young people from different areas and with different socio-economic profiles.

In the case of the university students interviewed, most of them expressed a strong wish to travel, but not to migrate. The point was spontaneously made by several students, as by a girl in the English group: “Wherever I go nobody will treat me like the people of my country... I dream of a scholarship abroad but then I will come back”. It would therefore be worthy of study to expand the investigation of this topic outside the university setting, and far from institutional constraints which were probably not conducive to the voicing of any desire not in line with dominant political discourses.

e. News sources

Through the focus group we tried also to understand what were the most popular news channels among the students, and what were their attitudes towards these channels. Among the issues raised during the discussions, the credibility rapidly gained by the new national news channels seemed to mark an important difference with the pre-2011 scenario, and also with previous audience studies in the region. After decades of foreign channels’ cultural hegemony in Algeria – European, global and then regional networks, via radio, Hertzian waves or then by satellite feed – for the first time national news sources were valued more than the ones from abroad, at least to get national and regional news. The reasons for this success can be found in the perceived higher independence of the new channels towards the state, but also in their more “modern” editorial style. As a female student explained, “For national news, I prefer the private channels like Echorouk, Ennahar ... they put the news in brief with several flashes during the day, in the government channel like ENTV the idea of brief news doesn't exist”. As summarized by another student, “For the news now I prefer watching Algerian channels”.

However, all the students interviewed made a clear division between national and international news sources, depending on the topic. As far as Algerian and regional news was concerned, in fact, they all put in first place Echouruk and Ennahar; then Dzair News, and A3. To get international/global news, they would go instead to France24 (in Arabic or French), Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, BBC Arabic. The students of English also added Euronews in French, BBC in English, France24 in French; the students of French added France24, Euronews and TV5. One male student of French explained: “For me the important thing is to be able to have the news with journalists who are ‘indigenous’, who know local culture”.

Even when relegated only to the national and regional space, the emerging trust in the Algerian news channels created after 2012 seems to mark a relevant change compared to some ten years ago. Reporting the results of a 2002 survey, Mustafa Medjahdi (2005) noticed that according to 95% of those interviewed, the national media produced nothing but propaganda, and were incapable of offering any trustworthy information; on the contrary, foreign media were considered more objective and reliable. In the same period, looking at the international

information flows around the country, starting in Algiers then going to Paris or London and then back to Algiers again, Hadj-Moussa observed that this circuit “embraces the yet-to-be-traced contours of a national geographic space that has changed and is, in some way, dislocated” (2003: 461). In this sense it seems that, with the opening of the media sector, a re-positioning of the information flows in the national space has finally started in Algeria. The new channels rapidly gained a credibility that state television never enjoyed before, and this effect was reflected also in a state channel like A3 as an answer to the new competitors.

IX. Conclusions

Despite the persistent social, cultural and linguistic divides in Algeria, historically reflected in different media consumption choices, the rapid success of the new Algerian television channels is introducing some relevant changes in the preferences of the younger generation. In fact, a new national public seems to have gathered around the channels created after the 2012 media law, as far as television news is concerned. To be sure, the choice of television channels - and languages - in Algeria is still influenced by several factors such as education, family conditions and area of residence. However, based on the results of our small-scale survey among university students, it seems that the younger generation is united at least by two aspects: first, the choice of pan-Arab channels (with content from Turkey, India, and the USA) for entertainment programmes; second, the choice of the new Algerian channels for national and regional news. These choices are related on the one hand to the success of content from regional producers, and on the other hand to the new credibility developed in national television news production after 2012. These results seem to confirm some larger and global regional trends: the rising importance of entertainment productions from non-Western countries, and specifically from India and Turkey for the Arab television market; the decline in the popularity of the pan-Arab news channels that shaped a regional audience until 2011; and the re-emergence of national perspectives in television news.

This last point seems to be particularly relevant in a country like Algeria, indicating that for the first time since the beginning of the satellite television era different parts of the country are watching the same news channels. This does not mean that the new channels themselves produced a sudden change in Algerian society; rather, they probably gave voice to, or developed in parallel with, some trends running along all the region. As stressed by Guaaybess (2013) and Kraïdi (2014), after 2011 a return to a national perspective has been witnessed in several MENA countries. However, it is clear that broadcasting liberalisation alone is not enough to ensure pluralism, freedom of expression or quality content in the media. The fact that a “new national perspective” in Algeria has been entrusted by the state to private “broadcasting contractors”, is potentially problematic, as Mostefaoui argued: “The experience of corruption in these media, less autonomous in terms of freedom of communication, is symptomatic of what the local conditions have in store for ‘the opening up of broadcasting’” (2013: 184). The decision of the Algerian government to allow the emergence of new, even critical voices, doesn’t mean in fact that the system is completely open, nor that it is less controlled, as shown by the example of the

state agency still controlling all national advertisements (Miliani and Roubai-Chorfi, 2012). This is what has been defined by Chérif Dris as a “neoauthoritarian media order where the motto is freedom of expression without freedom of the press”. (2012: 303). In sum, many of the questions presented here deserve further investigation, in order to monitor these evolutions and to test them with a larger-scale audience survey throughout the whole country, including both qualitative and quantitative methods. The hope of this contribution, though, was to highlight some significant emerging trends, such as the dawning of a new national perspective in television news, and the rising success of non-Western entertainment productions, and above all to suggest the importance of investigating them from the viewpoint of the public in a country like Algeria, under-represented in academic literature and yet increasingly crucial in regional balances.

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