



“ Fighting Balkan Wars along the Grands Boulevards : antagonistic media narratives in French public space ”

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Title: « Fighting Balkan Wars along the *Grands Boulevards* : antagonistic media narratives in French public space »

Abstract

The Balkan Wars represent one of the most significant moments of the Eastern Question. Besides their controversial place within national historiographies and memorial debates, these events have also been characterized by contested stances regarding their immediate coverage, mainly within societies who were in apparent way exterior observers. The French national newspapers, whose headquarters were largely situated in the district of *Grands Boulevards* in Paris, were fascinated by these conflicts. Among these newspapers, some of them sent their own reporters in the Balkan Peninsula in order to have first hand news. This information was often biased by military censorship. But above all, it was heavily influenced by propaganda mechanisms activated by the States in war, political and ideological cleavages within French society, each journalist's predispositions towards Balkan actors and his or her perception of French economical, political and cultural interests in the region.

The patterns of belligerents' stigmatization or idealization, the controversial use of images in order to praise or denounce one's actor attitude, the language choices announcing different events, arranged information into mental structures, allowing journalists to deliver the ongoing conflict and its consequences to their fellow citizens in a comprehensible form.

This paper aims at studying the various factors which influenced the treatment of events and the spreading of news in the French public space or imagined community, giving place to what Suzan Carruthers has defined in her work on the media at war, as more than one single media narratives.

In Southeastern Europe, different versions of historical events are very often related to the history manipulation for the achievement or legitimization of nationalist goals. Balkan countries have been reluctant till now to recognize the full extent of the damage caused by the ruthless attitude of their armies and apologize for the crimes perpetrated by them during the Balkan Wars. The practices of 'ethnic cleansing' implied large-scale deportation or extermination of local populations as highlighted by international inquiries, especially the one conducted under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation¹, but also by recent scholars' studies such as the works of Benjamin Lieberman, Tasos Kostopoulos or Justin McCarthy².

Besides their controversial place within national historiographies and memorial debates, these events have also been characterized by contested stances regarding their immediate coverage, mainly within societies who were in apparent way exterior observers.

The French national newspapers, whose headquarters were largely situated in the district of *Grands Boulevards* in Paris, were fascinated by these conflicts. Among these newspapers, some of them sent their own reporters in the Balkan Peninsula in order to have first hand news, while others consecrated enough space in their columns in order to comment and analyze the ongoing battles, military occupations or diplomatic negotiations and geopolitical stakes.

¹ See Dotation Carnegie pour la paix internationale, *Enquête dans les Balkans. Rapport présenté aux directeurs de la Dotation Carnegie par les membres de la Commission d'enquête*, (Paris, 1914).

² See T. Kostopoulos, *Polemos ke ethnokatharsi, 1912-1922*, [War and Ethnic Cleansing, 1912-1922] (Athens, 2007), B. Lieberman, *Terrible Fate: Ethnic Cleansing in the Making of Modern Europe*, (Chicago, 2006), J. McCarthy, *Death and Exile. The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922*, (Princeton, 1995).

This paper aims at studying the various media narratives as Suzan Carruthers defined them in her work on the media at war³, and the factors which influenced the treatment of events and the spreading of news in the French public space or imagined community⁴.

How journalists and newspapers ‘manufactured’ these news and in so doing they invented antagonistic narratives of what happened in the battlefields, the negotiation tables or within the occupied cities during the Balkan wars? Which events became news and how they have been reported to French citizens?

The theoretical milestone of this paper is that media do not simply mirror the reality of a conflict. As Daniel Berkowitz asserts, ‘news is neither a reflection nor a distortion of reality because either of these characterizations implies that news can record what is out there’⁵. According to the author of *Social meanings of news*, ‘prior to any selection of events or stories, journalists must determine what constitutes an event, where events can be found and how events can be told as stories’⁶.

Nevertheless, this paper does neither share a postmodernist approach according to which all we know is socially constructed and thus truth does not exist in any meaningful way. In public discourse as Kathleen Hall Jamieson highlighted it, ‘when different stories compete for primacy, each may embody some version of the truth’⁷. But this does not mean ‘that some stories are not more true than others, and that there are not some facts on which most can agree’⁸.

³ See S. Carruthers, *The media at war: communication and conflict in the twentieth century*, (London, New York, 2000).

⁴ For the concept of ‘imagined community’ formed by newspapers’ readers, see B. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, (London, 1991).

⁵ D. Berkowitz, *Social meanings of news: a text-reader*, (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi, 1997), p.211.

⁶ *Idem.*

⁷ K. H. Jamieson, *The Press effect: politicians, journalists and the stories that shape the political world*, (Oxford, New York, Auckland, 2003), p. xiv.

⁸ *Idem.*

First of all, which are the news published or which are the categories of historical facts which became media events in the French Press during the Balkan Wars? In a newspaper as *Le Figaro*, we were talking on October 1912, about the Orient-Express whose departure was hindered after the triggering of military operations. And the journalist exclaimed: “Here is the first, the real disaster of Balkan Wars”⁹ for the passengers willing to travel to Istanbul and the Orient. On the contrary, *L’Humanité* and other socialist newspapers were publishing at the same time, stories about pacifist movements’ opposition to the War and labor rights’ restrictions within Balkan societies as a result of war preparations¹⁰.

Besides the news selection, another mechanism behind news construction is their arrangement in order to form news stories. This arrangement has a quantitative and a qualitative aspect. By quantitative aspect, I mean the quantity of news concerning a given historical fact, the space they occupy, and their place within the newspapers’ architecture. Do they appear in the front page or rather inside their volume?

During the diplomatic confrontation concerning the creation of an independent Albanian state, there had been a battle of interviews within French newspapers. Some newspapers as *Le Journal* or *Le Matin*, were hosting the opinions and interviews of Essad Pacha¹¹ or Ismail Kemali¹², whereas *Le Figaro* offered at the same time its readers the views of the Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos¹³, advocate of a minimalist scenario for the definition of Albanian frontiers. In the front page of the newspaper *Le Temps*, the views of a Serbian historian regarding the Serbian ambitions over the ottoman vilayet of Kosovo occupied two thirds of the space attributed to this question, whereas the Albanian arguments were reduced to the remaining one third¹⁴.

As far as the atrocities’ news are concerned, another category of news which led to antagonist media narratives, there were two major tendencies : During the first months of the conflict and till December’s armistice, the majority of French newspapers published news about atrocities attributed to the Ottoman soldiers and paramilitaries. The only exception to this media narrative, were the news published in socialist newspapers¹⁵ or the stories published by individual voices such as Pierre Loti

⁹ « Notes d’un Parisien », *Le Figaro*, 4 October 1912.

¹⁰ «Le manifeste des Socialistes de Turquie et des Balkans contre la guerre», *L’Humanité*, 14 October 1912. During the anti-war meetings which took place in France and elsewhere in Europe on November 1912, there had been a large coverage of these events within the socialist newspapers such as *L’Humanité*. On February 1913, the newspaper *La Bataille Syndicaliste* published a testimony of a Bulgarian worker, about the disastrous effects of mobilisation on labour rights and working conditions in Bulgaria. See, «La guerre et les syndicats», *La Bataille Syndicaliste*, 24 February 1913.

¹¹ Edouard Helsey, “Une visite chez Essad pacha”, *Le Journal*, 27 mai 1913.

¹² “Ismail Kemal bey, chef du gouvernement provisoire albanais”, *Le Matin*, 29 April 1913.

¹³ G. Bourdon, « Conversation avec Venizelos », *Le Figaro*, 3 February 1913.

¹⁴ Yakchitch, « Albanie et Serbie », *Le Temps*, 21 February 1913. On 2 June 1913, *Le Temps* allocates two columns to the serbian position regarding the delimitation of frontiers in the Ottoman Macedonia, whereas only ½ column is assigned to the bulgarian position.

¹⁵ “Exactions et massacres des troupes grecques et bulgares à Salonique », *L’Humanité*, 1st December 1912.

and Claude Farrere in *Gil Blas*¹⁶. This news informed their fellow citizens about the war crimes committed as well by allied Balkan armies against ottoman Muslim populations.

During the 1913 summer operations, French newspapers had been overcome with news reporting atrocities perpetrated by Ferdinand's soldiers. In reaction to this unilateral media coverage, Francis de Pressensé, one of France's prominent pacifists, asserted that:

the Press, this particularly dangerous power, which has no antidote and which is occupying the boulevards of the public spirit, decided to belittle and discredit Bulgaria by any means (...) It represents in the darkest colors Bulgarian misdeeds while remaining silent about the misdeeds of her adversaries¹⁷.

Such statements could be integrated in a long genealogy of Eastern Question's related atrocities' selective media coverage on behalf of Western European media. During the revolt of Ottoman Rums in the southern Balkan peninsula at the beginning of the 19th century, in what has been called in the historiography as the Greek War of Independence, the news about the brutal retaliations against civil population in the island of Chios (Sakiz) were related in French gazettes of that period or immortalized by artistic works such as the painting of Delacroix or the poems of Victor Hugo. On the contrary, massacres committed by the Christian rebellious against Muslim or Jewish Ottoman civilians in the city of Tripolitsa in the central Morea¹⁸ had not been reported in French public/media space. Some forty years later on, the notorious Bulgarian atrocities, denounced by Gladstone were largely diffused within English and other European newspapers, whereas the atrocities committed by the Russian army and Bulgarian rebellious after the defeat of the Ottoman army against the Muslim Ottoman populations in the region of nowadays Bulgaria, did not have the same echo in the European societies' public or media space¹⁹.

Apart from the place and space devoted to different news, another important element of differentiated Balkan Wars' media coverage, consists in the way these news was presented. The critical variable was not usually the facts themselves but the manner in which they had been arranged and interpreted in order to construct narratives describing what was going on during the conflicts. As critic Kenneth Burke noted, language does our thinking for us, because the terms we use to describe the world determine the ways we see it²⁰.

¹⁶ P. Loti, "Encore les Turcs", *Gil Blas*, 10 November 1912, R. Aubry, « M. Claude Farrère raconte des histoires turques », *Gil Blas*, 18 December 1912.

¹⁷ Francis de Pressensé, "Le mot de l'énigme », *L'Humanité*, 12 July 1913.

¹⁸ B. Lieberman, *Terrible fate...*, (Chicago, 2006), p.9.

¹⁹ A. Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History*, (Oxford, 2008), p.84. This author also comments that during the 1877-8 russo-turkish war, the atrocities committed as usual by both sides, were blamed in Europe entirely on the Turks, fixing the notion of the Barbaric Turc in the European mind and prepared the way for the acceptance of the need to create some form of independent Bulgaria.

²⁰ Cited in Jamieson, *The Press effect...*, p. xiv.

Thus talking about an imperialist campaign or qualifying the war as a crusade, or a war between civilization and Barbary²¹, are two diametrically opposed ways to conceive the ongoing conflict's nature, as well as Balkan leaders' motivations and Balkan Peninsula's history as a whole.

Other demonstration of antagonist media narratives, is the way Muslim refugees' crowds were portrayed. Their tragic fate was announced in the majority of French newspapers. However, a newspaper as *La Croix* of the 17th November 1912, published a photo in its front page entitled : 'The return toward Asia' whereas *Le Journal* of the same day, commented the photo showing Muslim Ottoman refugees gathered in the port of Silivri, in the following way : 'The massive exodus of Balkans' Turkish populations'.

The way this story had been presented in *Le Journal*, insisted on the human tragedy aspect, whereas in the case of *La Croix*, news presentation demonstrated a complete lack of sympathy towards the victims and at the same time reproduced one of the dominant elements of turcophobia/islamophobia of those days and of nowadays, that is hostility among turcophobes/islamophobes towards Turkish and/or Muslim populations' presence in the European continent.

Another example of antagonist media narrative, is the way news about massacres' authors were presented. French citizens who read *Le Matin* and *L'Humanité* at the beginning of August 1913, saw a photo illustrating cadavers laid down the road in the suburbs of the city of Doxato. Both captions accompanying these images accused Bulgarians, but *Le Matin* gave precise details about the origin of this photo informing its readers that it was sent to the newspapers by Greek authorities²², whereas this information was not mentioned in *L'Humanité*²³. Competing narratives were also published in French Press regarding the destruction of Seres, an ottoman city in Macedonia. According to Greek sources published in *Le Figaro*, the responsibility for the arson lied with Bulgarians²⁴. On the contrary, news coming from Bulgarian sources and integrated in *Le Radical*, put the blame on the Greek side²⁵.

As Laurent Gervereau reasons, the photo is a powerful emotive, but it offers no explanation. We can feel shock or sorrow for those pictured as they lie dead, but the image cannot reveal what happened before or after their deaths, nor can it tell us who did the killing. For that to happen, we need to read the caption²⁶.

How could we explain these antagonist media narratives ? Which were the factors, the criteria, the parameters which were bound to influence and shape the French Balkan Wars' media coverage?

²¹ In the majority of socialist newspapers, the first Balkan war is presented as motivated by both economical and political expansionist projects and interests. On the other hand, this same conflict is conceived as a war of races and religions within the right nationalist and anti-secularist newspapers.

²² "Sur la route des Bulgares", *Le Matin*, 1st August 1913.

²³ "Habitants grecs de Doxato emmenés par les Bulgares et massacrés", *L'Humanité*, 2 August 1913.

²⁴ « Les atrocités », *Le Figaro*, 23 July 1913.

²⁵ « L'incendie de Serès », *Le Radical*, 13 July 1913.

²⁶ L. Gervereau, *Un siècle de manipulation par l'image*, (Paris, 2000), p.36.

There are different theoretical models which are trying to account for such phenomena in communication studies²⁷. One type of theory is journalist-centered, arguing that news is shaped by the professional judgment of journalists. A second theory favoured by social-science studies, shows how story selection and presentation is influenced by organizational requirements. A third approach is event-centered; the so-called mirror theory, proposes that events determine story selection, with journalists simply holding a mirror to them and reflecting their image to the audience. Another type of theory suggests that news is shaped above all, by the sources on which journalists rely, or by those groups in society powerful enough both to create what they call public events and to gain access to journalists. A final set of theories explain story selection with forces outside the news organization. Economic determinists view economical interests and concerns as molding story selection. Ideological determinists believe that journalists align the news to their political orientations or to the ideology of those who are holding power in the country. Cultural theorists consider that journalists select stories in accordance with their personal values or/and the way they are representing 'otherness'. I took in consideration the theoretical principles of all these approaches and the results of my study allowed me to construct a multi-factorial model of understanding Balkan Wars' antagonist media narrative in French newspapers.

War reporters and the news' sources

In order for an historical fact associated to a war, to reach the public, it must first be viewed by reporters or sent as information to a newspaper, then related in news stories. Apart from the reporters, other sources of information, are the a) News agencies, b) French citizens who are receiving letters from the Balkans and finally c) diplomatic or cultural institutions of the belligerents countries communicating directly to the newspaper editorial office.

All French newspapers did not have the same degree of access to these news' sources. Some of them could afford to send reporters in the battlefield and they had very often easier access to the Quai d'Orsay, the French Foreign Office. Another important element which could account for antagonist media narratives was the distribution of war reporters' to the belligerents' armies.

²⁷ H. Gans, *Deciding what's news*, (New York, 1979), p.78.

Table : War reporters sent by French newspapers in the Balkans. (reporter) (newspaper) (Military headquarter)

First Balkan War	Second Balkan War
Max Aghion (<i>Le Figaro</i>) (ottoman) Gustave Babin (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (monténégrin) Alphonse Cuinet (<i>Le Matin</i>) (ottoman) Paul Erio (<i>Le Journal</i>) (ottoman) Jean Leune (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (greek) Stéphane Lauzanne (<i>Le Matin</i>) (ottoman) René Lebault (<i>Le Petit Journal</i>) (serbian) Ludovic Naudeau (<i>Le Matin</i>) (<i>Le Journal</i>) (bulgarian) Alain de Penennrun (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (bulgarian) René Puaux (<i>Le Temps</i>) (ottoman) Georges Rémond (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (ottoman) Jean Rodes (<i>Le Temps</i>) (ottoman) H.-C. Vallier (<i>Le Matin</i>) (bulgarian)	Gustave Babin (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (bulgarian) Paul Erio (<i>Le Journal</i>) (ottoman) Reginald Kahn (<i>Le Temps</i>) (serbian) René Lebaut (<i>Le Petit Journal</i>) (serbian) Jean Leune (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (greek) Alain de Penennrun (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (serbian) Georges Scott (<i>L'Illustration</i>) (greek)

In his correspondence with the Minister of foreign affairs, the French consul in Salonika wrote on July 1913, that according to various reports he had collected, Bulgarians had not the monopoly of massacres: 'Unfortunately for them, (he goes on), there is nobody left in Macedonia to discover and dig up the cadavers of people belonging to their nation, so as to show them to European newspapers' war reporters'²⁸. As for Leon Martin, he commented in *Gil Blas* at the end of October 1912, that there were four sources of information coming from the Balkan Allies and only one on behalf of the Ottomans²⁹.

Besides news accessibility, there are also two major processes which could explain the antagonist media narratives. Noam Chomsky in his work on *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of Mass Media* talks about processes of filtration³⁰, while Hall Jamieson uses the metaphor of lenses³¹. I am going to use the term of external and internal censorship in order to understand what became news and how was reported. I applied this concept of a double censorship process in a two scales or two level analysis, an individual one, concerning the war reporters and an institutional one, the editorial office.

²⁸ Archives of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkey/479/Balkan Wars/ notice of French Consul in Salonika to his Minister of Foreign Affairs, n°160, 26th July 1913.

²⁹ L. Martin, "La guerre dans les Balkans", *Gil Blas*, 27 October 1912. These news battles remind us of how the Great War had been related to the American Public opinion. As a matter of fact, from the very beginning of war, Americans were subjected to a one-sided view of the belligerency, because transatlantic cable lines from Germany had been cut, allowing British and French censors to filter the vast majority of news published in the American media space. For further details on this propaganda mechanism during the First World War, see R. Andersen, *A century of media, a century of war*, (New York, 2006).

³⁰ N. Chomsky, E.S. Herman, *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of Mass Media*, (New York, 1988).

³¹ Jamieson, *The Press effect...*, p. xii.

In any way, I rejected the naïve premise that media simply mirror a world out there and dispensed with the idea that it was possible for French reporters to cover stories, as Richard Salant of the American CBS network famously proclaimed, ‘from nobody’s point of view’³². On the contrary, I considered both war reporters and newspapers institutions as belonging to various socio-economic categories, having certain predispositions towards conflicts’ actors, and breathing a particular ‘cultural air’ which as Richard Hoggart put it, infuses ‘the whole ideological atmosphere’ of any given society.³³ War reporters are always a part of what they report and thus can never be totally neutral or detached from events.

As far as the external censorship is concerned, one of its immediate and more commented aspects, was the military censorship. Leon Martin wrote in *Gil Blas* that war reporters were always kept far from the battlefields³⁴. Consequently they were completely dependent on the news transmitted to them by each military headquarter.

The information was also subject to propaganda mechanisms and practices targeting either war reporters or directly the editorial office. Sam Levy, newspaper editor in ottoman Salonika, highlighted on December 1912 in the bulletin of French Human Rights association, that ‘every two or three days, news about Turkish atrocities are sent abroad by the telegraphic agencies of Athens, Sofia or Belgrade, and these news are automatically published in European newspapers without questioning their veracity’³⁵. The propaganda mechanisms were once again fully illustrated during the July 1913 military operations, when, as a journalist of *Le Radical* noticed it, ‘the polemical between the Balkan governments about the atrocities goes on, the atrocities too. Each government tries to publish in details the excesses committed by its adversaries’³⁶.

The Greek diplomatic archives that I consulted in order to explore the propaganda campaign of one of the belligerents, are very eloquent regarding how Balkan states were trying to manipulate public opinion within Great Powers societies. To that issue, the Greek ambassador in Paris informed his Foreign Office that he did his best in order to raise an outcry about the Bulgarian atrocities on July 1913. Despite the opposition he met with on behalf of the Russian embassy, he asserted that being aware of the importance of such a news campaign, achieved to ‘publish in *Le Matin*, *L’Echo de Paris* etc, all the telegrams issued by the King as well as the general report of the 6th division commander.’³⁷.

³² P.J. Shoemaker, S. D. Reese, *Mediating the message: theories of influence on mass media content*, (New York, 1996), p.35.

³³ cited by M. Schudson, “The sociology of news production” in D. Berkowitz, *Social meanings of news: a text-reader*, (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi 1997), p.19

³⁴ L. Martin, “La guerre dans les Balkans”, *Gil Blas*, 27 October 1912.

³⁵ S. Levy, “Sauvageries chrétiennes”, *Les Droits de l’Homme*, 29 December 1912.

³⁶ “Le chapitre des atrocités”, *Le Radical*, 29 July 1913.

³⁷ Archives of Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Balkan Wars/1913/47/1, notice on behalf of the Greek ambassador to Paris to his Minister of Foreign Affairs, n°19861, Paris, 6 July 1913.

Such narratives of demonization of the enemy aimed to provide the necessary psycho-political context for justifying operations of ethnic cleansing and defend the legitimacy of one's territorial claims next to the French public opinion³⁸. In this sense, *Gil Blas*, invites its readers to 'accept with mistrust the stories of massacres committed by the Turks'³⁹, because the Allies have interest to discredit their enemies in the public opinion and represent them as a stain to the European civilization.

Personal affinities

Coming to the concept of internal censorship, one of its key elements, are the personal affinities between the French Press and the Balkan Wars' actors. These personal affinities can be the result of empathy developed between reporters following and covering one army's operations as Georges Rémond of *L'Illustration* admitted it for his experience in covering ottoman army's campaign in Tripoli and in Thrace⁴⁰. However, in the majority of cases, these affinities preexisted the conflicts covered. When we read news published by Jean Leune for instance, we are at first sight astonished by his unconditional support to Greek claims and the systematic effort to omit any responsibility for atrocities committed by the Greek army. This astonishment is somehow moderated if we bear in mind, as Georges Bourdon reveals us in *Le Figaro*, that Jean Leune was married to a Greek⁴¹. For his part, Georges Bourdon, war reporter of *Le Figaro*, confessed that being full of classical studies, he was passionately devoted to the 'Greek cause'⁴². As Uluğlı Serhat highlights in his work *The image of Turkish Orient in French literature*, there have been two factors which played a considerable role in French pro-Greek affinities and positions during the Eastern Question : the idealization of Greco-Roman antiquity and the association between Greek political and religious nationalism based on christianism⁴³. On the other hand, turcophiles as Pierre Loti, embraced the Ottoman cause, as a result of their personal ties with this country, their admiration for its culture, and their Romantic view of the Ottoman Orient as an ideal refuge for their aberration of everything was associated to the Occidental modernity in terms of technological evolution, society's democratization or acceleration of life trends.

Ideological criteria

The Balkan Wars perception was also dependent on the ideological orientations characterizing the French political landscape. Thus, two major media narratives about the causes of these conflicts, had emerged. On the one hand, a socialist-pacifist one, considered the First Balkan War as an imperialist

³⁸ Andersen, *A century of media*, ..., p.6.

³⁹ L. Martin, "La guerre ...", *Gil Blas*, 27 October 1912.

⁴⁰ G. Remond, « Sur les routes de la défaite », *L'Illustration*, 16 November 1912.

⁴¹ G. Bourdon, « L'armée bulgare débordée », *Le Figaro*, 24 July, 1913.

⁴² *Idem*.

⁴³ S. Uluğlı, *L'image de l'Orient turc dans la littérature française: les idées, les stéréotypes et les stratégies*, (Istanbul, 2007), p.225.

campaign, an aggressive and unjust war. On the other hand, a nationalist-militarist one, presented this same conflict as a crusade, a liberation and just war. At the same time, sociopolitical debates that had agitated French Third Republic's society had been reactivated, updated and projected to the narration of what happened in the Balkans.

Images over the same historical fact, the blessing of soldiers by priests before they left for the front, were viewed and presented as the exultation of alliance between the Army and the Church by opponents of the 1905 Law separating the State and the Church⁴⁴. On the contrary, the secularist segments of French society denounced in the radical and socialist Press⁴⁵ the alliance between militarism and clericalism, considering such events as a will to instrumentalize religion in order to meet expansionist ambitions.

Another example which illustrates the ideological aspect of news' construction, was the unilateral coverage of civilian populations' mistreatments by Ottoman soldiers or paramilitaries in far right-wing islamophobe newspapers in which at the same time Balkan Allies operations were presented as a crusade aiming at expelling Muslim populations from the European continent⁴⁶. Finally, resisting war activities in Balkans and elsewhere in Europe, including manifestations for peace organized in France, became front page news in newspapers such as *L'Humanité*⁴⁷, or *La Bataille syndicaliste*. On the other hand, they were almost absent, except for when it was about to minimize and mock their efficiency, in militarist or nationalist newspapers which insisted on the unanimous fervor supposed to have enthusiastically pushed Balkan kingdoms' subjects into war against the Ottoman empire.

Geopolitical factors

Antagonist Media narratives were also due to reporters' or newspapers editors' perception of the French interests in the Balkan peninsula in particular and in the international relations in general. According to some newspapers as the bonapartist *L'Autorité*⁴⁸ the victories of the Balkan kingdoms characterized by linguistic and religious nationalist policies, would jeopardize French cultural and material interests in the region. On the other hand, the maintain of the territorial status quo was viewed for them as a guarantee for the rights and privileges attributed to catholic congregations and French-speaking educational institutions by an empire faithful to the dogma of Capitulations. On August 1913, news about the intention of Bulgarian-friendly Macedonians to convert themselves in the Catholicism so as to avoid a forced assimilation to the language and official religion of Serbian conquerors, were mainly published in *Le Temps*⁴⁹. Some months ago, *L'Humanité* published a letter

⁴⁴ « La croix orthodoxe rassemble ses enfants contre le croissant musulman », *La Croix*, 2 octobre 1912.

⁴⁵ « La bénédiction des drapeaux serbes », *L'Humanité*, 19 October 1912.

⁴⁶ « La France et la Question d'Orient », *La Croix*, 5 October 1912.

⁴⁷ « A Paris, 100 000 manifestants contre la guerre », *L'Humanité*, 18 November 1912.

⁴⁸ P. Cassagnac, « Point de vue français », *L'Autorité*, 18 November 1912.

⁴⁹ D. Vasileff, « Réveil de l'agitation macédo-bulgare », *Le Temps*, 15 August 1913.

addressed by an Ottoman war prisoner to the socialist deputy Henri Nivet where the inertia of French authorities in front of the numerous acts insulting French interests in this city had been attributed to Russia's will to stop any protestation⁵⁰. The socialist newspaper hostile to the authoritarian character of the tsarist regime and opposed to any franco-Russian alliance, diffused this information, whereas the Press favourable to such a diplomatic configuration did not publish any news which could damage this relationship.

Economical concerns

Another important variable we should not overlook in understanding news construction, is the economical concerns of reporters and newspapers. At the beginning of the 20th century news were viewed as consumer products and newspapers readers were considered as consumers. Such a conception raises the question of news profitability. News can be profitable because the public likes them or because they are subsidized by different propagandas. The first condition reminds us of the reciprocal relation existing between the Press and its public, the second one reveals the role of venality in journalism. Victor Marguerite, writes in *Le Journal* on November 1912 that French readers are yearning for sensational news coming from the Balkan hecatombs⁵¹. In fact, French newspapers readers' tastes were in great part shaped according to their endeavor for news items ("faits divers") and serial novels ("roman feuilleton") which built their narrative structure on the search for sensationalism. As various studies had suggested it, media, in wartime aspire to reflect their publics by "celebrating consensual values and emphasizing their own responsiveness to the popular mood"⁵² that they have very often created in interaction with their public.

As far as the Press venality is concerned, the efficacy of such a phenomenon is both doubtful and difficult to study. As Patrick Eveno highlighted it⁵³, most of French newspapers of those times had turned themselves into a battlefield where rival propagandas were trying to publish news they had fabricated or that they were favourable to their claims. Besides the competitive character of such a financial struggle, the amounts offered to the newspapers they represented a tiny amount of their annual turnover. No matter how marginal this parameter had been in news construction, the subsidized missions of French reporters should have a substantial impact on their way to perceive the conflicts or litigious questions they were about to cover. For instance, the mission of two French reporters, René Puaux for *Le Temps* and Charles Vellay for *L'Homme Libre* (Georges Clemenceau's tribune) in the Ottoman vilayet of Janina, a region claimed both by Greek and Albanian nationalists, had been

⁵⁰ "Exactions et massacres des troupes grecques et bulgares à Salonique », *L'Humanité*, 1st December 1912.

⁵¹ V. Marguerite, "L'heure présente", *Le Journal*, 19 November 1912.

⁵² D. Hallin, T. Gitlin, "The Gulf War as popular culture and Television drama", in W. Bennett, D. Paletz, (eds.) *Taken by storm; the Media, Public Opinion and the US foreign policy in the Gulf War*, (Chicago, 1994), pp.149-163.

⁵³ P. Eveno, *L'argent de la presse française des années 1820 à nos jours*, (Paris, 2003), p.73.

financed by the Greek government⁵⁴. The news they published in their respective newspapers were openly favourable to the Greek arguments about the ethno-demographical profile of that region⁵⁵.

Representing Balkan ‘otherness’

Finally, news construction, was also the result of dominant representations regarding Balkan space and history. As far as news related to the war violence and atrocities committed were concerned, there have been two main approaches in the French newspapers. The first one, considered these events as proofs of Balkan people inherent tendency to violence opposed to the civilized way of making war of French and Westerners in general⁵⁶. On the other hand, socialist newspapers reminded their readers of the brutality which characterized French and other European troops’ attitude during colonial wars at the turning of the 20th century⁵⁷. For their part, royalist or right-wing newspapers such as *L’Echo de Paris*, compared Balkan Wars to the violent repression by Republican army of French Anti-Revolution movement at the late 18th century⁵⁸.

Conclusion

Thus, Balkan Wars were not only a series of military and diplomatic events. They have been also a time of news battles. The patterns of belligerents’ stigmatization or idealization, the controversial use of images in order to praise or denounce one’s actor attitude, the language choices announcing different events, arranged information into mental structures, allowing reporters and newspapers to deliver the ongoing conflict its causes and its consequences to their fellow citizens in a comprehensible form. The process of selecting which events should become news and how they should be presented was often the result of military censorship and of Balkan States or other Great Powers’ propaganda mechanisms. It was also dependent on political and ideological cleavages within French society, each journalist’s predispositions towards Balkan actors and his or her perception of French economical, political and cultural interests in the region. The interaction between all these factors gave place to competing narratives or antagonist media narratives of the 1912-3 Balkan Wars within French media space.

⁵⁴ *Archives of Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 1913, 49, n°10 : budget for subsidies allocated to French newspapers and journalists in 1913.

⁵⁵ C. Vellay, « Les frontières albanaises », *L’Homme Libre*, 15 May 1913, R. Puaux, « La vallée d’Argyrocastro », *Le Temps*, 25 May, 1913.

⁵⁶ For this essentialist approach of war violence in the Balkans, see M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford, 1997), p.137.

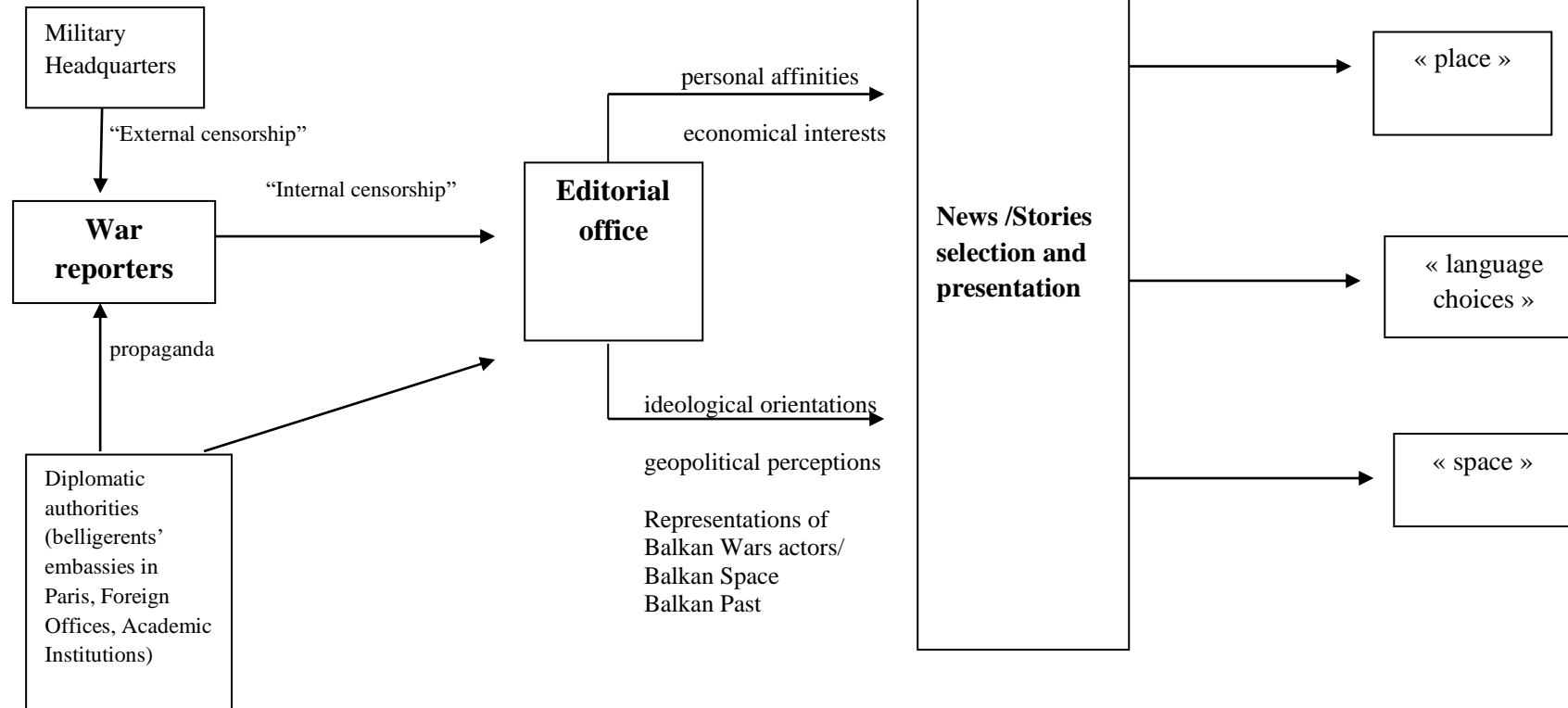
⁵⁷ A. Cipriani, “Guerre à la guerre”, *L’Humanité*, 24 October 1912.

⁵⁸ L. Corpechot, « Les Révolutionnaires », *Le Gaulois*, 8 December 1912.

Table: Schematized pattern of Balkan Wars' antagonist media narratives

Who and how decides what's news ?

How news about Balkan wars related events are framed?



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Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, France)

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