

The unitary activity of the independent current in the ranks of the Algerian National Movement

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Abstract:

The Algerian national movement witnessed interactions and signs in the period between the two wars and played an effective role in revitalizing the life of the struggle and spreading awareness among Algerians. Despite the tensions that characterized it, the independence trend, being more representative of the popular circles and more realistic in its proposals, was able to maintain a distance between itself and all the spectrums of the national movement, which qualified it to lead it and interact within it in the future.

In this scientific paper, we will seek to investigate these tensions and how the independence movement was able to work to unify ranks and form a platform for unified action, which was achieved with the outbreak of the Great Liberation Revolution.

Keywords: Algerian nationalism, independence, Algerian Revolution, Mesali Hadj, French Colonialism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of the national independence movement on the Algerian scene at the beginning of the twentieth century, it has endeavored, with all available efforts and in every phase of its history, to consolidate the idea of independence among popular and even elite circles. Therefore, it entered into alliances with other nationalist movements.

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Despite the difficulty of the task as a result of intellectual and ideological differences, this trend found itself on every unification occasion in a political dilemma, not only at the level of the trends of the national movement only, but also within this trend itself, in which contradictory currents appeared that contradicted their projects to solve the national issue.

However, despite this, this trend was able to direct those unity efforts to be consistent with national aspirations, despite the ideological and political calculations that marred those efforts, imposed by the logic of competition, embodying the principle of survival of the fittest and most worthy. So, how did the independence trend manage that unity battle that it fought during its struggle?

1. The position of the independence movement on the demands of the Islamic Conference:

Within the framework of the unification efforts of the reformist and political elite in Algeria, Muhammad Mubarak al-Mili pointed out that: “The idea of establishing an Algerian Islamic political party dates back to the aftermath of the end of World War I, within the framework of the movement led by Prince Khaled.”⁽¹⁾

It is likely that the idea of an Algerian conference that includes all reformist and political movements crossed Ibn Badis' mind since the early 1930s. Ibn Badis had openly called for the convening of the Islamic Conference since the beginning of 1936, that is, before the announcement of the victory achieved by the Popular Front.

The idea of the Islamic Conference arose from the principle of preserving the self and national rights with the aim of standing up to all colonial maneuvers that aimed to undermine the foundations of the national character.⁽²⁾ In an effort to achieve this goal, many consultative

(1) Ahmed Sari. *Figures and Issues from Contemporary Algerian History*, Al-Matba'a Al-Arabiya, Ghardaïa, Alegria, 2004. p. 108

(2) Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, *Studies in Modern Algerian Literature*, 5th edition, Dar Al-Ra'id for Books, Algeria, 2007, p. 116

and preparatory meetings were held in preparation for the Algerian Islamic Conference, which was held on June 7, 1936⁽³⁾, in the Majestic Cinema Hall, in Algiers, with the attendance of four thousand delegates.

They represent various national organizations such as the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, the Algerian elected representatives, and the Algerian Communist Party.⁽⁴⁾

The North African Star, which represented the political front of the movement, was absent from the conference. The independence movement, which he was keen to participate in and made efforts to participate in, but he encountered opposition from the Algerian communists who used their political influence in the French arena, their argument being that the Etoile Party was a separatist organization and its demands were extremist and that it would oppose the demands of the conference to the Popular Front government.⁽⁵⁾

However, Messali Hadj, leader of the Istiqlal Movement and head of the Etoile party, recorded his presence at the conference with a telegram he sent from his residence in Switzerland, in which he presented his party's political perspective to the conference attendees. Other sources reported that Etoile representatives from Tlemcen and Mostaganem also attended the conference. In order to achieve the objectives of the Islamic Conference, which are represented in confronting the colonial policy, headed by the Blum-Violet project, which aims at Westernization and integration, and depriving the Algerians of exercising their rights to prevent the national movement from developing because it will take away from it a part of its elite that was influenced by the idea of integration.⁽⁶⁾

(3) Lamia Boukrioua, The Maurice Viollet Project: The Political and Social Conspiracy Against Algeria, Journal of Human Sciences, University of Biskra, Vol. 4, 2012, p. 315.

(4) Ahmed sari . op cit . p110

(5) Abu al-Qasim Saad Allah, The Algerian National Movement, Vol. 2, the aforementioned reference, p. 139.

(6) Abu al-Qasim Saad Allah, studies ,op cit. 2, pp, 146 – 147.

Messali replied that he would come to Algeria and address the masses in the same tone. However, what must be clearly pointed out is that Messali's speech, which he delivered in Algeria at the Islamic Conference, in which he highlighted the revolutionary line of the star, also included support for the conference's reform demands. What is the explanation for that?⁽⁷⁾

After returning from France, the Congress delegation issued a general invitation to Algerians to attend the meeting scheduled to be held at the Municipal Stadium on August 2, 1936, to present the most important findings. Messali Hadj, president of the North African Star, were accompanying the delegation on the ship transporting them.

The meeting was held in the name of the entire Algerian Islamic nation, allowing everyone to attend and speak. In front of more than twenty thousand of the large crowd, Amar Ouzgane opened the session, where he gave a speech in which he presented the supreme goal of the conference.

He declared his absolute rejection of the integrationist demands it had brought, and said that he would not mortgage Algeria's future or link it to demands that conflicted with the popular will. He stressed that the hope is to live in freedom and dignity.⁽⁸⁾

He also opposed the Viollet Project, which came with the idea of integration and called for complete independence, saying: "This land is not for sale, the people are its owner and heir." With his political acumen, he was able, within twenty minutes, to attract supporters, as the masses chanted for his life and the life of Algeria, demanding freedom. Thus, the Etoile Party achieved a great popular gain, which led to the opening of 60 branches in Algeria alone, not in France. What Messali Hadj achieved by defending national rights at the Islamic Conference was not the first gain for his party. Eight hundred delegates at the Brussels Conference, Belgium, against colonialism, held in

(7) Abu al-Qasim Saad Allah, *The Algerian National Movement*, op cit, p. 144.

(8) Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, op cit, p. 105

February 1927, had previously approved his speech, which became known as the “Founding Document of Algerian Nationalism.”⁽⁹⁾

Messali became the sole national leader by gaining international recognition at the largest gathering in the world, in which the weak denounced the strong. Messali's speech in Brussels laid the groundwork for the North African Star's program, which would work to raise awareness among the masses about their social and economic rights and political freedom.

Precious nationality." and eight million workers and one billion people on earth stood up against imperialism.

This speech contradicted what was published in *Al-Iqdam* and North Africa newspapers, as stated in one of them: “Brothers in North Africa, let us all resist the imperialist attack... let us from our united front... for the independence of our countries. Long live free North Africa.” Thus, the star's revolutionary approach became prominent, but later he adopted reformist demands that included achieving agrarian reform, abolishing the Native Law, universalizing education, establishing the Arabic language, and equality between Algerians and settlers, the same demands that the Islamic Conference had called for.⁽¹⁰⁾

The party was exposed to violent shocks throughout its years of activity, which contributed to its political maturity. This is what Mahfoud Kaddache explained, saying: “A comparison between the Etoile's programs of 1927, 1933, and 1935 reveals a firm loyalty to the principle of independence, a careful attention to detail, and a confirmed maturity. However, at the same time, at the tactical level, it reveals either hesitation or a dual choice in legitimate or revolutionary activity. .

On January 26, 1937, the Popular Front government dissolved

(9) Lounes Lahouas, *The Club of Progress and Its Role in the National Movement 1927 - 1954*, previous reference, 130 - 132

(10) Al-Akrouth Khamili, *University of Algiers between colonial objectives and the formation of Algerian Muslim students, 1909-1956*, thesis Master's degree, Institute of History, University of Algiers 2008 - 2009, p. 110.

his party, exploiting the tense relationship between the members of the Islamic Congress and Messali, especially when the Communist Party demanded an end to its activities because it opposed its project and instead presented a national program rejecting the integration policy introduced by the Front government and adopted by the Congress.⁽¹¹⁾

The Etoile was once again considered a revolutionary movement that threatened France's presence in Algeria. For his part, Messali Hadj defended his party's positions, recalling that Algerian workers had always stood with their French brothers, whether in their strikes or demonstrations, including those denouncing the fascist regime in June 1936. He added that in his speech to the Islamic Congress, he had called for independence and cooperation with France and recalled his alliance with the Popular Front government and its constitution, to which the star had contributed greatly, but that the fate of his party was the solution. It is true that some writings with different ideological and political leanings were quick to define the nature of the star and considered it a radical revolutionary party before its time.⁽¹²⁾

The Etoile's ideology evolved from the announcement of some principles in 1927, which were compiled in 1933, to its detailed conception in 1936. In all these stages, political awareness emerged, characterized by the circumstances related to colonialism in Algeria. The Etoile remains the first political organization in Algeria that rejected colonialism and carried revolutionary demands aimed at achieving complete independence.

2. The independence movement's participation in the February 1943 statement:

The Allied landing in North Africa in November 1942, accompanied by the American declaration: "The rights of all peoples,

(11) Ahmed Meriouch, Sheikh Al-Tayyib Al-Aqbi and His Role in the National Movement, dar Houma edition , Algeirs p. 113.

(12) Mohamed Kan, Cultural Associations and Clubs in the City of Algiers During the French Occupation 1930 - 1954, (Doctoral Thesis), University of Algiers 2, 2016 - 2017, p. 250.

large and small, will be respected in the new era," gave hope to the peoples of the region in general, and Algerians in particular. It also revived political life. During World War II, Ferhat Abbas issued a statement demanding that Algeria be granted autonomy. A meeting was then held at the home of lawyer Ali Boumendjel in Algiers on February 7, 1943, to draft a joint national statement between the various national parties and movements. Other sources indicate that the meeting took place before that, in December 1942, with representatives from across the political spectrum in attendance. They agreed to publish a new charter containing demands on behalf of the people, including the following: ⁽¹³⁾

- Condemning colonialism, as it is the exploitation of one people by another and a source of conflict and war between states.
- Implementing the right to self-determination for all peoples, large and small.
- Granting Algeria its own constitution that guarantees the rights of the people.

These demands formed the political basis for the February 10, 1943, statement, which was divided into two parts. One part sharply criticized colonial policy and its harmful effects on Algerians, while the second part contained a set of demands for which no timeframe was set. These demands combined independence and reformist provisions: ⁽¹⁴⁾

- Condemning colonialism and the need to eradicate it
- The right to self-determination for peoples, large and small
- Granting Algeria its own constitution
- Freedom and equality for all citizens

(13) Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Algerian National Movement*, Vol. 3, 3rd ed., Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1986, p. 83

(14) Mahmoud Qassem, Imam Abdelhamid Ben Badis, the spiritual leader of the Algerian Liberation War, Dar Al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 1968, p. 19.

- Establishing Arabic as an official language after French
- Separating Islam from the state and religious freedom for all citizens.

On June 26, 1943, an appendix to the manifesto was approved, which included urgent demands related to improving the social and economic situation of Algerians, as well as longer-term demands, the most important of which was the establishment of an Algerian state with a constitution drafted by a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage by all Algerians.⁽¹⁵⁾

This was the same demand called for by the independence movement through its new organization, the Algerian People's Party. Ferhat Abbas emphasized that he did not write the manifesto until after consulting with Debaghine and Hussein Asla, and obtaining the approval of Messali Hadj

The newspaper "Al-Umma" detailed this program, presenting it in the form of independence demands represented by the establishment of an independent government. Some sources attributed this to the difficulty of working inside Algeria. The People's Party's program, which did not mention independence, carried a new ideological philosophy.⁽¹⁶⁾

According to Abul-Qasim Saadallah. Messali thus chose political flexibility and avoided a radical confrontation with France. He made this clear in an interview with the Tunisian newspaper Al-Zahra on June 5, 1937, when he stated that he was not against the French, but against the imperialists, and that he was working to force France to recognize the Algerian identity, without exposing his party to dissolution. In other words, if he had continued with the same approach, he would not have been allowed to operate. However, this activity would later be paralyzed by France.⁽¹⁷⁾

(15) Ahmed Meriouch,,op cit. p. 280

(16) Abdul Rahman bin Ibrahim bin Al-Aqoun, National and Political Struggle, Vol. 1, el assala edition,Algeirs p. 281

(17) Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, The Cultural History of Algeria, op cit, p. 170

Therefore, we must reconsider our political program.” As for international circumstances, Mohamed guenanech attributed them to the change in concepts during the outbreak of World War II. Nazism became symbolized by nationalism, and independence was adopted by fascism. A new slogan was chosen to distance itself from any external connection or subordination. In his opinion, it is not a retreat from his revolutionary line that he began since the founding of the star, stressing that the party is purely Algerian, and as Al-Umma newspaper confirmed in December 1937, “The Algerian People’s Party is a purely Algerian organization.”⁽¹⁸⁾

The People's Party's oscillation between radicalism and moderation was attributed by Ahmed Mehsas to a flaw in the party's program, which he described as "a blueprint for revolutionary action, but lacked the techniques for this work." Other sources attribute this to the circumstances of political work at the time and the immaturity of the idea among broad segments of society, which caused the leadership to encounter a dilemma. On the one hand, it saw that the demand for independence should be explained gradually until it was accepted by the masses and then adopted by the people. On the other hand, planning and methods for achieving this were absent, so they relied on bold propaganda, excitement, and the arousal of emotions, given that the idea of freedom was dominant in the party's ideology, to the point that its opponents described it as extremist and the French administration accused it of banditry.⁽¹⁹⁾

Debaghine believes that the flaw lies within its leadership, saying: "The major problem in this party is the lack of ideology." Despite this, the Algerian People's Party is credited with nurturing the idea of independence, which became the cornerstone of the political development that subsequently occurred in Algeria. As for the second part of the question, these demands highlighted an intersection of

(18) Ahmed. Tawfik. Madani, *A life of struggle*. Algiers, Algeria: Knowledge world for publishing and distribution. 2008., p. 252.

(19) Ahmed Tawfik, Madani, *op cit*, p. 252.

partisan interests.

Debaghine expressed this by saying, "The initiative for the statement goes back to some officials of the Algerian People's Party, but the party leadership ultimately preferred this consensual solution." The statement was then presented to the Allies and to the government of Charles de Gaulle, who considered it suitable as a basis for reforms. This encouraged the crystallization of other demands in the form of a "complementary statement" that was submitted to de Gaulle on June 10, 1943.⁽²⁰⁾

Although de Gaulle showed responsiveness to the statement, starting in September 1943, rejection began to characterize his position through a series of arrests of leaders and activists, headed by Ferhat Abbas, in addition to the decree of March 7, 1944, which constituted a blatant retreat from the promises he had previously made to the Algerians in his speech in Constantine on December 12, 1943, in the form of a reform committee to alleviate the state of popular tension and present France as a democratic state before the Allies. He then followed these measures by establishing the "Committee for the Preparation of a Program for Political, Economic and Social Reforms for the Benefit of French Muslims in Algeria" on December 19, 1943. This committee received representatives of the national parties, and Messali sent it a statement from his detention in Ribal (Kasr el Chellala) on January 7, 1944, in his personal capacity, not his party capacity, because his party was banned. In it, he called for a solution to the Algerian issue within the framework of independence principles.⁽²¹⁾

In general, the formulation of the February 1943 statement by the national group, with its various orientations, is considered an important step in the development of the political struggle in Algeria, as it stated: "The time has passed for the Algerian to accept being anything other than Algerian." It also expressed the national demands through the

(20) Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, *The Cultural History of Algeria*, Vol. 3, op cit, p. 215

(21) Rabah Turki, *National Education and the Algerian Identity*, el karama edition , Algeirs .p. 213.

pursuit of the right to self-determination, and for that, the people “accept all sacrifices, and the responsible authority must grant this people its freedom.”

3. The, independalist Movement joined the Movement of Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom in 1944:

After France reneged on its promises included in de Gaulle's Constantine speech, took arbitrary measures against the nationalist parties, and rejected the February Manifesto, Ferhat Abbas announced in the city of Setif in March 1944 the birth of a new political organization called the "Movement of Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom." This move was considered a response by the nationalist parties to de Gaulle's reforms, which favored Algerians in granting French citizenship.⁽²²⁾

On April 14, the movement's basic law and its program, inspired by the February 10, 1943 statement, were deposited with the French authorities. This program aimed primarily to work for the recognition of the Algerian nation and opposed to imperialism, as expressed by the Algerian People's Party, the elected officials, and the scholars included in this unified political grouping.

As for the People's Party, its leader, Messali Hadj, stipulated the addition of the word "freedom" in order for his party to join the movement. It was transformed from "Friends of the Algerian Manifesto" to "Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom." Its program, as stated in Article 4 of its political law.

This demand was inspired by the program of the People's Party, which stipulated: "Promoting the idea of establishing an Algerian state and establishing an independent republic linked by federal ties with a new French republic opposed to colonialism, creating a spirit of solidarity and a desire for coexistence in good times and bad, a spirit which, according to many, is the foundation of every nation." The

(22) Yahya Bouaziz, *The Algerian Woman and the Arab Feminist Reform Movement*, Dar Al-Huda, Algeria, 2001, p. 43

People's Party's political orientation was clearly evident in the program of the "Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom," through its "rejection of independence under French tutelage and its demand for a constituent assembly elected by universal suffrage without discrimination."⁽²³⁾

In addition to Messali's personal achievements, the People's Party benefited politically from its presence within the Movement of the Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom, as the idea of independence and revolutionary ideology became ripe for dissemination. Because the movement provided him with the freedom of activity, assembly and demonstration among the masses, which he was deprived of by the dissolution decision. In return, although the demand for independence called for by the People's Party expanded the base of the supporters of the statement, with its members reaching 500,000, as attested by Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, who said: "A large number of them joined the Algerian People's Party, whether out of conviction in its goals or because they used it as a cover to achieve their goals"⁽²⁴⁾

4. Alignment of the Independalist Movement within the Algerian Front for the Defense of Freedom and Respect it:

The "Front for the Defense of Freedom and Respect it" included the Victory Movement, the Democratic Union Party for the Algerian Manifesto, the Communist Party, and the Association of Ulema. Representatives from these groups represented its office at the meeting, the date of which varied between June and July 1951. It was likely founded on August 1. At the rally held at the municipal stadium in the capital five days later, on August 5, the primary purpose of its formation was announced: to undertake joint national action.

The program of the "Algerian Front for the Defense of Freedom and Respect for It" stipulated the following:⁽²⁵⁾

(23) Ahmed Sari, *Figures and Issues from Contemporary Algerian History*, op cit, p. 107.

(24) Mohamed Kan, *Cultural Associations and Clubs* op cit. pp 103, 106

(25) Ahmed Sari, op cit, p. 109

- Cancellation of the alleged legislative elections held on June 17, 1951
- Respect for fundamental freedoms: freedom of conscience, thought, the press, and assembly
- Combating all forms of repression to free political prisoners
- Reversing the exceptional measures imposed on Messali Hadj.

The disagreements within the independence movement cast a shadow over the Algerian front and its subsequent fate. These disagreements became prominent since the founding conference of the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD) in Algiers in February 1947. After the broad outlines of its program were represented, emphasizing that the Algerian nation is an indisputable reality and that the primary goal is to eliminate hegemony and restore national sovereignty, the movement continued its work as a recognized party operating within legal frameworks. Its literature left no room for interpretation, "political struggle in all its forms," while remaining fully faithful to the principle outlined earlier, namely independence.⁽²⁶⁾

A single electoral body without discrimination based on race or religion, and the establishment of an independent, democratic, and social Algerian state. However, the phrase "independence through revolution" was absent from the program because the Victory Movement accepted to deal with colonialism in accordance with its laws.

This negatively affected the leadership's decisions, which were characterized by improvisation and ambiguity regarding the chosen means of action. Messali Hadj was unable to lead the masses toward consistent and continuous action.⁽²⁷⁾

The intensity of the disagreements increased with the participation in the elections, as the leadership was accused of changing

(26) Yahya Bouaziz, *The Algerian Woman*, 2001, p83

(27) Ahmed Tawfiq Al-Madani, *op. cit.*, p. 233

the party's strategy and adopting a different approach. A new trend toward moderation, reform, and working in accordance with French laws. After boycotts had been the prevailing principle at such events, participation became a requirement imposed by force of the decision issued by the founding conference, which posed a threat to the national cause because fragmentation had become a tangible reality. This reality can be classified as follows: the presence of two currents. The first was divided between those who supported reformist politics and preferred to work within a legal, public framework represented by the Victory Movement, and those who rejected it and hid behind secret activities through the People's Party. A second current favored revolutionary action and established the Special Organization, presenting itself as an alternative to the first trend with its two wings.⁽²⁸⁾

. A union based on partisanship cannot last if it is pervaded by contradictions and disagreements, although he considered its establishment a major political event. Apparently, one of the reasons for the disagreement within the Algerian Front, which led to its failure to continue, was the refusal of the Ulema and the Democratic Union to go on strike to secure Messali's release, as the Victory Movement had wanted. Messali Hadj's reserved stance toward the Algerian Front may have been related to the refusal of the rest of its members to go on strike on his behalf. Whatever the case, confusion remains regarding the requirements of the current situation through which Messali justified his position toward the Algerian Front—whether he meant to transition to armed action or to continue participating in the elections despite the fraud that had occurred.

The background behind Messali Hadj's reservations about the Algerian Front project dates back to 1951, when a dispute arose within the leadership over the party's strategy. While Messali sought to gain external support from Arab countries to internationalize the national cause, the Central Committee turned internally, calling on various

Mahmoud Qassem, Imam Abdelhamid .op cit, p. 24(28)

parties to form a national unity within the framework of a unified front (the Algerian National Rally), believing that this project would mobilize all energies to achieve independence.⁽²⁹⁾

However, Messali rejected the national unity project advocated by the centralists, describing it as a defeatist effort to retreat from revolutionary principles. He justified this by the inclusion of reformist parties such as Ferhat Abbas's party. This plunged the party into a crisis of political discord, which some interpreted as a pursuit by both parties of personal interests, characterized by mutual accusations aimed at covering up the original goal of "preserving party power." In addition to these reasons that led to the failure of the Algerian Front for the Defense of Freedom and Respect for It, another reason was the difference in tactics between Ferhat Abbas, who believed in solutions, and Messali Hadj believed in the revolutionary solution as his supporters marketed, but the revolutionary current (Boudiaf's group) attributed the stagnation that had afflicted the Algerian Front to the attachment of its members, including Messali Hadj, to the ropes of legitimacy. In their view, the sterility of the Algerian Front stemmed from the fact that its interests were less than the major national principles that the independence movement carried, which led to its failure because the parties within this movement lost their effectiveness in it, especially after the people lost hope in it to achieve independence.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the above, and despite the fact that the unity experiments undertaken by the national group, beginning with the Islamic Conference and ending with the Algerian Front for the Defense and Respect of Freedom, including the February Manifesto and the Movement of Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom, failed to achieve their desired goals. They revealed fundamental differences in thought, ideology, and political discourse, not only among the various nationalist movements, but also even within a single movement—by which we

(29) Ahmed Meriouch, *op cit*, p. 297.

mean the independence movement—which led to the failure of their continuity, they nevertheless had positive effects by sifting through ideas and correcting concepts. Everything that was inconsistent with the foundations of the national character and did not live up to the aspirations of the Algerian people was eliminated. Furthermore, these efforts were all channeled into the development of the national struggle, consolidating the idea of armed action as the sole means of achieving independence, from which the November 1, 1954 Revolution was born.

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