

The Algerian Revolution in the Historical Discourse of Abi Al-Qasem Saadallah

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ABSTRACT: *The research examines the Algerian Revolution in the historical discourse of the historian Abi Al-Qasem Saadallah, based on his reputation as a well-known patriotic historian alongside some other historians in such writings, who have a long history in this subject. The research has focused on the main reasons that contributed to the delay in writing the revolution history from Saadallah's perspective like the timing of writing about these events, the unavailability of necessary documents that would substantiate the events, as well as the nature of the ruling system prevailing in Algeria after regaining national sovereignty. It also addresses Saadallah's personal perspective, to the revolution history types of writing plus the most important rules and conditions for writing it that would determine its broad outlines, and also includes Saadallah's poetic examples about the revolution. The article aims to understand the reality of writing the history of the revolution in the Algerian historical school, specifically in the case of Abi Al-Qasem Saadallah, according to the methodology of critical analysis of his various opinions, and the research leads to a number of conclusions about the issues raised.*

KEYWORDS: Algerian revolution, Algeria, historical school, historical discourse

RÉSUMÉ: *La recherche examine la Révolution algérienne dans le discours historique de l'historien Abi Al-Qasem Saadallah, sur la base de sa réputation en tant qu'historien patriotique bien connu aux côtés d'autres historiens ayant une longue expérience dans ce domaine. La recherche s'est concentrée sur les principales raisons qui ont contribué au retard dans l'écriture de l'histoire de la révolution du point de vue de Saadallah, telles que le moment de l'écriture sur ces événements, l'indisponibilité des documents nécessaires pour étayer les événements, ainsi que la nature du*

his works in various other scientific fields. This has prompted many writers to address the topic in Saadallah's writings, emphasizing the necessity for historical writing about the revolution to be undertaken by Algerian historians striving for scientific objectivity and uncovering its hidden truths. On the light of the foregoing, we can raise the following questions: What is the extent of Saadallah's interest in the revolution? What are the main reasons for the delay in his writings on this topic? What conditions did he set for writing the history of the revolution? And what types of historical writing does he have regarding the history of the revolution?

The study aims to uncover the real reasons that lead the historian Abi al-Qasim Saadallah to delay writing about the history of the Algerian revolution compared to his early writings on other topics, especially the history of the national movement or the cultural history of Algeria. The analytical-critical method was suitable for studying the ideas and beliefs mentioned by Saadallah. It is noteworthy that many authors and academic studies have addressed the writing of the history of the revolution, similar to the writings of historians Nasr al-Din Saidouni, Jamal Qanan, Dr. Lahcen Zeghidi, Mohammed Amin Belgaïth, and others.

1. Reasons for delaying the writing of the revolution history from Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah's perspective

After our comprehensive examination of this issue from all its aspects, it became apparent to us that among the reasons are those related to the objective aspect, such as the scarcity of documents, the appropriate time frame for writing, and the nature of the prevailing political system after the restoration of national sovereignty. Additionally, there are other subjective factors and reasons that have influenced this specific literary output.

We can further elaborate on this as follows:

1.1. Objective Reasons

The timing of writing is considered one of the problematic issues that Abi al-Qasim Saadallah highlighted as a hindrance to completing his work on the history of the revolution (Saadallah 1992, 11). A point that he emphasized in his interview with the Lebanese newspaper Al-Hayat, where he indicated that the temporal distance is necessary for certain events to

impact the lives of people in the nation (Saadallah 2011, 39). From his perspective, history should be written from a reasonable temporal distance, after the passing of the generation that experienced the events. The farther the distance, the more objective interpretation becomes available, and events can be addressed with scientific objectivity. Conversely, closer proximity allows emotional intensity to dominate, providing events with a more subjective interpretation.

He believes that a true historian should let time work on historical events before delving into them with lessons and analysis, as temporal distance is a fundamental element in achieving objectivity, especially if the historian has lived through and participated in the events. Otherwise, they risk being entangled in the maze of personal interpretation and self-judgment (Saadallah 1992,10).

According to Saadallah, writing on this subject does not necessarily imply publication. If any historian writes a work, fully aware that its publication may stir political problems or social unrest, then time will transform those issues into a different context, granting the current authority the full right to prevent its publication. There are works that harm relations with other countries, and we know that every state and every citizen has the right to secrecy or privacy. Some authors' diaries are placed in banks, with instructions not to open them until several years after their death. For example, the truth about the assassination of American President Kennedy is still unknown because it is not in the interest of the American people to know it fully at the moment. And what national benefit would the Algerian people gain today from knowing the details of the killings of Ibn Boulaïd, Abane Ramdane, Shaabani, and El Amouri?

The Algerian revolution, with its characteristics, is a human endeavor that cannot be sanctified, despite the nobility of its goals and its legitimacy. Throughout its course, and even during the period preceding it, there were several disagreements among its leaders and figures. Some of them are still alive, and analyzing their positions and resolving their disputes may favor one party over the other. Some may intervene by exploiting political influence to obscure or silence the truth (Saadallah 1992, 10).

As it is the case with all worldwide revolutions, there were multiple events and mistakes that occurred during the revolution. Each party denies responsibility for them and refrains from delving into them or revealing their

hidden aspects. Certain parties may be embarrassed, or those present in the ruling authority post-independence may be condemned. All these factors limit the researcher's freedom. Issues of the revolution, such as the disagreement between the Messalists and the Centralists before the outbreak of the revolution, and then the conflict between the members of the national movement led by Messali Hadj and the elements of the National Liberation Front, especially the bloody clashes that occurred between the followers of both sides in exile, despite both aiming for independence. Similarly, the disputes among the military leaders, all of these factors increase the complexity of researching the history of the revolution during the current time period (Saadallah 1992, 10).

As for the problem of the availability or lack of necessary documents, Abi al-Qasim Saadallah's project in his writings on the history of the revolution does not aim to study a specific event but rather aims to conduct a comprehensive survey of a period of seven and a half years, following the approach he used in studying previous stages in the national movement and cultural history. Regarding oral sources, or rather personal testimonies of the event's makers, due to their importance in writing the history of the revolution, despite the emergence of a huge number of personal memoirs from mujahideen, soldiers, military leaders, and political officials, he does not solely rely on them either, despite their abundance as important historical material and despite their revelation of many truths, sometimes accompanied by exaggerations. This can lead to bias towards one person and belittling another, taking sides at the expense of the other, and so on (Saadallah 2011, 158).

One of the most significant obstacles that Abi al-Qasim Saadallah faced in writing about the liberation revolution is the problem of gathering necessary material. Due to its importance, reaching the truth to its proportion cannot be achieved without having sufficient information, whether in the form of written documents or oral testimonies. In this context, one of the most important challenges of writing the history of the liberation revolution arises, which Saadallah alone did not face but remains a hurdle for every researcher in this field, namely the issue of the archive of the liberation revolution, which is primarily located in both Algeria and France.¹

¹ Youssef Ménasseria: "Modern and Contemporary History of Algeria," *Annals of the Historian*, Algerian Historians Union, Issue 3, 2005, p. 260.

The problem of accessing the archives, whether in Algeria or abroad, makes any historical writing, no matter how serious, temporary and incomplete in all aspects. Documents play a vital role in uncovering the facts, as there is no history without documents. This does not mean that writing about the history of the revolution is impossible, but it will not cover all the events of the revolution or answer all the questions raised.

Despite the French authorities providing a vast amount of archives related to the history of Algeria, whether during the colonial period or the liberation revolution, in various archive centers they possess, including archives overseas, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the Ministry of Defense,² there are files that cannot be accessed at all, as they are considered state secrets. Access to these files is prohibited, especially those documenting the illegal actions carried out by the occupying authorities in Algeria, classified as crimes against humanity.³

On the other hand, we find an important part of the revolution's archive present in Algeria. Some of it is held by Algerian individuals and families, while other parts are housed in national archive centers, with some having a classified nature that prohibits access due to their sensitivity in the current period. Additionally, half of it is located in archive centers in France, as most of the documents condemning the illegal practices of the French occupation, especially during the liberation revolution, were taken by the occupying authorities upon their departure from Algeria.⁴

The nature of the political system after independence somehow contributed to Abi al-Qasim Saadallah's postponement of delving into the history of the Algerian revolution. He sees that "European and American historians are protected by laws, strengthened by traditions, and enhanced by political stability, characteristics rarely available to historians in third world countries."

The political disputes among the leaders of the revolution, which emerged after independence and began with the crisis of the summer of 1962, led to the prohibition of some writings by revolutionary figures, especially personal memoirs of some leaders, due to power struggles with their authors. Among these writings is "Tashreeh Harb" / "Anatomy of War" by

its author Ferhat Abbas, despite being the first president of the Algerian interim government during the revolution. Others were abroad, like Mohammed Boudiaf and Houari Boumediene, although they were among the six leaders who contributed to igniting the revolution.

1.2. The Aspect Related to The Personality of Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah from a Personal Perspective

While the aforementioned factors primarily offer an objective explanation for Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah's delay in writing, there are also personal aspects of his character that contribute to this inclination. He contends that the problem isn't solely the lack of dedicated national writers documenting the liberation revolution's history but also the overall reluctance among Algerians to document their history, which he attributes to a lesser inclination towards writing compared to other societies (Saadallah 2007, 239).

Due to their colonization of our land, their familiarity with our details, and their desire to maintain and preserve their influence over us, the French have had the monopoly of Algerian history writing throughout all eras. Saadallah's sentiments towards the French historical school, which began with the writings of military personnel, orientalist, and clerics, and extended to writings by university academics at the University of Algiers. After independence, this influence shifted to France itself, where it continues to impact our youth who pursue education there. Saadallah's wish a group of proficient researchers, equipped with the tools of science and research and convinced of the necessity of carrying out the mission of writing Algerian history from ancient times from a nationalist perspective, will graduate from the university. This is to reveal Algerian identity, define its dimensions, and highlight its contribution to human civilization in general and Arab-Islamic civilization in particular (Saadallah 2007, 239).

Another prioritizable reason that barred Aba Al-Qasim Saadallah from devoting himself to research and writing about the revolution history which was his intellectual renaissance project represented in the cultural aspect with its encyclopedic nature. He emphasizes that the battle to liberate Algeria's history from the dominance of foreign writings in general, and French in particular, is a comprehensive one that includes all the chronological stages the country has gone through.

The project Saadallah aspired to was encyclopedic in nature, aiming to write the history of the revolution as a continuation of the parts he had already written concerning the history of the national movement. Consequently, his project aimed to conduct a comprehensive and integrated study of the various stages the revolution went through, rather than studying isolated issues that may be temporally distant (Saadallah 1983, 180).

On one occasion when historian Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah was asked why he hadn't started writing the history of the revolution, his answer was as follows: "Since when have we written our other history, leaving only the history of the revolution? All of Algeria's history remains unwritten, which has made us stumble in recognizing our identity and belonging. This is what has allowed others to find our land without a written history, so they began to write to fill the void as they desire." (Saadallah 1992, 12).

As another reason, Dr. Saadallah acknowledged the absence of a conducive deep historical research atmosphere, in which freedom of thought and expression still lags behind the required level and desired hope (Aouimer 2017, 13-14). Despite Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah, has not published works on the Algerian revolution history or completed the remaining parts within his collection on the Algerian national movement history, he did not neglect the subject or fail to recognize its importance. He believed that the current phase, although not yet suitable for writing a detailed and accurate history of the events of the liberation revolution due to the above-mentioned reasons, it is nonetheless a very sensitive and important phase for documenting the events of the revolution (Saadallah 2007, 239).

The combination of both of the reasons objective and subjective has led Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah to continue documenting the revolution events, gathering the available material, and waiting for the appropriate stage to embark on historical writing based on pure scientific research. This is despite living through a period of independence for more than fifty years. However, his commitment to his principles and his refusal to write for the sake of writing or to undertake incomplete work led him to stand firm in his position.

Having been a participant in the revolution, Saadallah feared personal bias in his writings. He avoided writing and like some Algerian historians, he expressed concern that, his perspective might be influenced by his role in the events, potentially undermining his academic credibility later on. "I know

some Algerian historians who, when they wrote about the national movement, did so from the perspective of their parties or the organizations to which they belonged before the revolution. I believe that historians of the revolution would also be influenced by their roles in it and the limits of their participation and responsibility.”⁵

Saadallah did not hide some other personal reasons, one of which was his involvement in the revolution. Since 1956, he became a member of the Cairo Branch of the General Union of Algerian Muslim Students, supervised by the National Liberation Front (FLN). Saadallah represented it in several conferences, including: the founding conference of the General Union of Arab Students, and the Union of Palestinian Students in Cairo in 1958. In 1961, he represented it at the International Student Conference in America. He describes himself as having lived the revolution deeply in his actions and writings (Saadallah 1983, 141).

Accordingly, he had his own positions, inclinations, and personal opinions regarding various related issues and the crises it had faced. He also had his own perspective on the disputes that occurred among its leaders, which made him fear that subjectivity might dominate his writings, as he was always keen on objectivity. In this regard, he mentions, “Historical writing is not without pitfalls even when dealing with the period prior to the revolution, and a country like Algeria has been subjected to trials and radical changes. Its contemporary history cannot be written without errors or faults, especially by individuals who lived through and participated in the events, as they will be thrown into the mazes of personal interpretation and self-judgment” (Saadallah 1992, 13).

2. Types of Writing Algerian Revolution History by Abi al-Qasim Saadallah

Historical writing about the Algerian revolution will remain mere claims if not supported by documents and facts. Hence, the importance of documenting the history of the revolution becomes apparent. Abi al-Qasim Saadallah raised numerous questions about the role of Algerians in documenting their revolution’s history and expressed some observations. The cautious and sensitive spirit that characterizes Algerians plays a

prominent role in these writings; they typically want to ensure the accuracy of what they say or write. Additionally, the novelty of the revolution itself contributes, as despite the passage of a considerable amount of time, this period is relatively short compared to what historical documentation demands. Saadallah also emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing between various types of historical writing, which he categorizes as official writings, popular writings, and scientific writing (Saadallah 2007, 239).

By “official writing”, we mean the state itself taking care of the heritage of the revolution, publishing it, and interpreting it in a way that reflects its philosophy and demonstrates its ideological stances and future directions in light of the philosophy of the revolution itself.

The historian Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah believes that the state and its institutions have a critical task in collecting the material of the revolution’s history, preserving it, and making it available to researchers. They should also oversee a team of researchers to establish a general framework for this history as this method is practiced today in most advanced countries, “Today, we do not call for this type of history, for the Algerian revolution is not the work of a single hero or a single entity or a single institution. The team tasked with writing its history officially must take all these factors into account so that the history of the revolution does not turn into a history of a certain autocracy or oligarchy, or a biography of one leader among leaders” (Saadallah 2007, 239).

Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah refers to “scientific writing” as the documentation of the history of the Algerian revolution by specialists in history departments at Algerian universities, based on available sources and documents. According to him, this has not yet come to pass, as the documents are still not fully available. Furthermore, a researcher’s findings on sensitive topics can potentially be withheld from publication at the university if their dissemination would harm others or public interest. Saadallah believes that there is only one method for writing history, which is the scientific approach. In this approach, the historian relies on all available tools, examines positions, theories, and schools of thought. Undoubtedly, the Algerian revolution, as a popular movement, requires a historian who is well-versed in contemporary theories and events, and who is in control of their material and tools.

The term “popular writing” refers to the efforts of popular writers, meaning non-specialists, such as political scientists, journalists, and literary figures, as well as chroniclers who are interested in writing the history of the Algerian revolution. They aim to praise its positions, showcase its authenticity, and highlight the nobility of its goals. Through this approach, the material is enhanced, and people read the history of the revolution through the pens of its own sons, thus filling the gap against envious foreigners who seek to undermine its success. (Saadallah 2007, 239).

According to Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah, intellectuals, and indeed it is their duty, can contribute to writing the history of Algeria, each in their own field and expertise. As for Activists, they should record their memoirs and impressions of the parties they were involved in, as well as their roles, contributions, and the challenges they faced during the revolution. Politicians and journalists should author works that clarify their positions, expectations, and their roles in the events they experienced. Religious figures, reformers, and traditionalists should describe their relationship with the people and the ruling authority, analyze the public response to the revolution, and interpret their reactions. Writers, in their part, should create novels and poems inspired by the historical reality filled with vivid examples of heroism, prominent events, humanistic stances, and sacrifices for the sake of the nation or religion. Some writers delve into the history of literature, examining the connection between literature and the people, and the relationship of the writer with the events of their country. This applies to all educated categories. Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah believes that the collective works of these individuals are an integral part of the writing process in history in general, and specifically in writing the history of the revolution, which he refers to as “popular writing.” (Saadallah 2007, 239)

3. Rules and Conditions of the Revolution History Writing According to Saadallah

Abi al-Qasim Saadallah specifies a set of general conditions and rules for those who wish to write the history of the revolution, indicating that adherence to these rules can enhance the aesthetics of writing and produce new and distinguished scientific materials. He emphasizes that failure to adhere to these rules may lead in various ways to the detriment of the documentation process of the historical liberation revolution events. He sees this rejection as one of the most important aspects that contradicts and

considers it inconsistent with the historical documentation process, and does not align with his distinctive serious nature.

One of these rules is the research methods, which are the most important thing that must be provided to the researcher, especially the researcher in the history of the Algerian revolution, and which can assist the historian in reaching the truth. Among these methods are recording, manuscripts, memoirs, historical documents, and the appropriate environment. The historian does not write under bright lights or amidst the noise of gatherings and crowds. Additionally, they should utilize photographers, maps, reading devices, as well as employees and assistants for writing, correction, and indexing (Khaledi 2017, 217).

It's noted that many completed works have remained awaiting publication for three or four years or even longer due to the lack of scientific publishing means. This could be seen as a waste from the reader's perspective, as their interest in reading and accessing the material diminishes over time, affecting the authors' morale and motivation due to the long waiting period for publication.

Alongside the issue of delayed publication, freedom of expression stands out as one of the fundamental requirements in writing the history of the revolution. In other words, directing writing in this subject is impossible; thus, freedom of expression and writing are essential conditions for the emergence of writing in this field. Freedom in writing does not mean glorification, praise, defamation, or slander; rather, it signifies balanced judgments along with a spirit of accepting criticism. Historians cannot please all parties, yet just because someone disagrees with their opinions doesn't mean their views should be suppressed or prevented from circulation. (Khaledi 2017, 220)

Therefore, freedom of expression and publication is the greatest means. How can we aspire to reach the truth if historians have to suppress their ideas and opinions and distort events in order to be accepted? Thus, getting rid of biases and sensitivities is crucial to popularizing history and writing about it. (Saadallah 2007, 240)

4. Examples of Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah's Contributions to Documenting the Algerian Revolution History

Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah's life encompasses more than just his literary endeavors; his early beginnings remain often overlooked. While his writings

on the revolution were not as plentiful as those on preceding periods, he still delved into poetic compositions about it (Trabulsi 1926, 211). He managed to compose three poetry collections: "The Victory Collection for Algeria," "Rebel Love Collection," and "The Green Time Collection," totaling 121 poems, blending revolutionary and emotional themes. Describing it as a reflection of both his youth and the era of the revolution. (Saadallah 1985, 88). Saadallah noted its composition between 1950-1960, coinciding with his twenties and the peak of the Algerian revolution (Saadallah 1985, 119). Saadallah's poetry after 1960 notably celebrates the magnitude of the liberation revolution and his elation at its triumph. Notable works include "Night of Bullets" and "Struggle to the End," which depict the Algerian people's fervor for freedom and defense of their homeland. Additionally, "The Song of Farms and Fields" portrays the plight of Algerian farmers under French occupation. (Saadallah 1993, 88)

In the poem "Aures" (Al-Rikibi 1982, 104), which he recited when France declared general mobilization to exterminate the people after the revolution, he praised the acts of bravery and courage of the Algerian people. (Saadallah 1976, 128) As for his poem titled "The Revolution," it instills the spirit of revolution and struggle in rebellious souls. (Al-Alyousi 1970, 194) Saadallah also commemorated the historic strike called for by the National Liberation Front in 1957 in a poem titled "Determination." Additionally, he has another poem titled "The Sacred Revenge" alongside the poem "The Awakening," in which Saadallah wonderfully portrayed Algeria's transition from a state of despair to a revolutionary phase. (Saadallah 1985, 88)

Among the most important poems recited by Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah about the revolution are: "Crown of the Arabs," "People's Shaker," "Whisper of Genius," "Cry of Liberation," "Eagle Processions," "Burning," "Priestess' Fury," "My Path," "Song of the Farmers," "Example of the Free," "My Language," "Tale of a Giant," "The Revolution," "Night of Bullets," "Algeria's Redemption," "O My Country," "The Fedayeen," "O People," "Yesterday and Tomorrow," "Rebel and Love," "Victory for the People," (Khrafi 1984, 98). Additionally, "Return of the Eagles," "The Propeller," "Giants," "The Clay," "To the Atlas Mountains," "My Homeland," "The Captive Rebel," "Barbarossa," "Free Poet," "To the Gallows," "Algeria Speaks," "Awakening," "Message to the Mountain," "The Sacred Revenge," "Eternal Algeria," "Aures," "Rebel Anthem," "Ring of Victory,"

“O Year,” “Legend of Algeria,” “When,” “Covenant,” “Determination,” “Algerian Spring,” “Struggle to the End,” “Blood and Torch,” “Olive Field,” “The Rock,” “The Traitor,” “Fertilization of Blood,” “The Mujahideen,” “People of God,” “God for All,” “Victory,” “The Rebel,” “Storms,” “The Wound and Destiny,” “Songs of Salvation,” “O Wounds,” “The Village That Burned,” “Clouds,” “Where to” (Khrafi 1984, 75).

These poems offer valuable scholarly content for documenting the Algerian revolution, as their author, with firsthand experience of the events, serves as a primary source. This scholarly resource counters criticisms suggesting Saadallah prioritized chronicling the history of the Algerian national movement over that of the revolution.

Conclusion

In his commitment to objective historical research, Abi Al-Qasim Saadallah postponed writing about the revolution until conditions suited him. Various factors led him to collect relevant documents and wait for the right time to begin a historically grounded, purely scientific approach. This decision was made despite his direct involvement in many of the revolution’s events and his preference for historical writing free from personal bias.

Saadallah felt that the conditions were not suitable for him to write the revolution’s history in the way he wanted, following his own methodology. He consistently emphasized his identity as neither a hired writer nor a mere chronicler of events, firmly resisting any attempts to influence his historical narrative. Instead, he always prioritized truth over external influences and considered himself solely a historian committed to scientific research. In his writings, he left a wealth of information on the Algerian revolution that could have enriched other works on the subject.

In general, circumstances influenced Saadallah’s delay in writing the history of the Algerian revolution, some of which were personal and others objective. Saadallah sets forth a set of rules and conditions for those wishing to write on this subject, which he described as having a personal nature that should be overcome, and as a topic that can be divided into multiple types during writing.

Saadallah, a distinguished poet, authentically expressed his profound connection to the liberation revolution through poetry imbued with its essence, advocating for jihad and freedom while urging people to join the struggle.

Despite its complexity and sensitivity, given its historical, political, and social peculiarities, the research may open up future perspectives on the topic of writing the history of the liberation revolution and how the Algerian historical school dealt with it. However, it is possible to find academic research centers focusing more on the topic in a purely scientific manner, far from personal biases. This could involve assigning research projects to dedicated teams and offering doctoral projects on genuine scientific subjects. Accordingly, avoiding superficial or biased writings. It is essential that individuals, groups, or even official bodies do not interfere in directing research on the topic of writing the history of the revolution.

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