

The Events of (May 8th, 1945 CE): Between the Memories of the Past, the Suffering of the Present, and the Harbingers of the Future

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Abstract:

The Events of (May 08, 1945 CE) in Algeria represent A Crucial Turning Point in the History of the Algerian National Movement. These Events reflected the Extent of the Algerian People's Attachment to their Homeland, their Principles, their Aspirations for Freedom, and their Hopes for the Revival of a Free and Independent Algeria. The Course of the Political Struggle shifted towards Armed Struggle, that is, through Revolutionary Violence, based on the Conviction that What Was Taken by Force Can Only Be Regained by Force.

From this Perspective; What Occurred on (May 08, 1945 CE), was An Uprising of the Algerian People, demanding that France Fulfill the Promises it had Made to them, particularly after the Victory over the Axis Powers and the End of World War II.

In this Context; This Study will Examine the Events of (May 08, 1945 CE), as An Enduring Historical Epic in the Minds of Algerians, one that Embodies the Memories of the Past with its Experiences, the Suffering of the Present, and the Harbingers of the Future, through the Lessons and Insights We Can Glean from it.

Keywords: The Massacres, May 8, 1945, Algeria, France.

❖ The International Situation on the Eve of the End of World War II:

On the Eve of the End of World War II; The International Situation was Experiencing a New Phase in the International Relations. New Features of International Politics had Emerged, shaped by the Battlefields of World War II, and there was A Shift towards Peaceful Solutions to the International Issues, rather than the wars that had Inflicted So Much Damage on the World. Among these Political Developments were the Following:

- The Defeat of the French in the Face of the German Invasion (June 1940 CE), and the Shaking of France's Prestige, contributed to the Weakening of its Power and the Return of Hope to the Hearts of the Algerians.
- The Declaration on the Atlantic Charter in (August 1941 CE), which Stipulated in its Third Article the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination.
- The Allied Landing in North Africa (November 08, 1942 CE), and its Impact on the National Movement in Seizing this Opportunity and Taking Advantage of the

International Circumstances, and Presenting the Demands of the Algerian People to the Representatives of the Allies and the Local French Authorities in Algeria.¹

- The Announcement of the Birth of the Arab League in Cairo on (March 22, 1945 CE), which gave A New Breath to the Liberation Movement.
- The Collapse of Hitler's Armies in (April 1945 CE), and the Meeting of the Allies in San Francisco to Establish the United Nations, as A Successor to the League of Nations.

❖ **Local Developments:**

- The Leading Political Forces on the National Scene Attempted to Seize the Opportunity and Capitalize on the Prevailing International Circumstances. On (December 22, 1942 CE), Ferhat Abbas Submitted a Statement in the Form of a Memorandum to the French General Government in Algeria and to the Representatives of the United States and Britain. The Statement Asserted Algeria's Right to Self-Determination, as Advocated by the Allies. However; These Parties Ignored the Statement and Expressed Reservations. In Response to this Disregard; The Algerian Political Movements Authorized Ferhat Abbas to Draft a New Statement Outlining the Demands of the Algerian People in (February 1943 CE). This Statement; Known as "The Manifesto of the Algerian People", was Delivered to Representatives of Both the Provisional Government of the French Republic and the Allied Representatives in Algeria.²
- France adopted the Policy of Stalling, especially after Charles de Gaulle's Visit to Constantine (September 12, 1943 CE), and the Launch of His Reform Program, during which He appointed "General Catroux" as Governor-General of Algeria, succeeding "Breton". These Reforms were Essentially Superficial and Illusory, and Catroux Considered the Algerian Manifesto A Storm that had to be Stopped at all Costs.
- The Ideological Evolution Demonstrated by Ferhat Abbas regarding the National Cause, a Positive Development Following the Birth of the Friends of the Manifesto and Liberty Movement on (March 14, 1944 CE), stemmed from a Meeting held in Sétif between Ferhat Abbas, Messali Hadj, Sheikh Bachir Al-Ibrahimi, and Maurice Labor of the Communist Party. They Discussed How to Formulate a Common Strategy and Adopt a Unified Stance on Issues Concerning the Country's Future. At this Meeting; They Agreed to Issue a Joint Document Expressing their Strong Will to Establish an Algerian State.³ This Indicates the Extent to which Ferhat Abbas Moved Closer to the Nationalist Camp,

1 - Nāṣir Al-Dīn Sa'īdūnī, Algeria: Starting Points and Horizons "Approaches to the Algerian Reality through Historical Issues and Concepts", Islamic West House for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 2000 CE, p. 123.

2 - Bachir Khaldoun, Elements about the Events of (May 08, 1945 CE), Maalem Magazine, Issue: 04, Association of History and Archaeological Monuments, Guelma, Algeria, 1990 CE, p. 16.

3 - Ammar Bouhouch, The Political History of Algeria from the Beginning until (1962 CE), Islamic West House for Printing and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, 1997 CE, p. 237.

after Having Previously Struggled Alongside the Proponents of Annexation and Integration within the Federation of Deputies.⁴

It appears that the Movement of Friends of the Manifesto and Liberty Spread Rapidly in Algeria, reaching (164) Branches, and the Number of Members Reached (500,000) Members.

The Activists in the Movement Sought to Spread National Consciousness among the Algerian People. This Prevailing Psychological State among the Masses was Described by Ferhat Abbas as follows: “The Algerian Masses were Ablaze with Patriotism, burning with Enthusiasm, and Determined to Aspire to A Better Life”.⁵

This Rising Wave of National Liberation Consciousness among Algerians was Sparked by the National Movement, which Called Upon them to Embrace the National Cause. Secret Newspapers and Posters Proliferated, all Urging Mobilization against Colonialism. Among the Most Prominent of these was the Leaflet Posted in (February 1945 CE) on the Walls of the Capital Algiers City and Some Other Algerian Cities. Its Most Important Message Read: “O Muslim Brothers...The Life of Your Country is in Danger, for Colonialism has Destroyed It Materially and Morally. The Algerian People have not Enjoyed Civilization due to the Presence of the French Colonizer. The Arabic Language has been Oppressed Since the Occupation. Islam is Ridiculed. Our Dignity Can Only be Guaranteed and Respected within the Framework of an Algerian Government based on the Sovereignty of the Algerian people, Rejecting Any Foreign Domination. For this Cause; Your Brothers Died in Dungeons, Suffering in Prisons and Camps”.⁶ It Calls for the Rejection of Colonialism and the Demand for Independence, which Indicates that Algerians Continue Political Activity despite the Conditions of the Ban.

- The Activity of Lamine Debaghine, One of the Active Poles in the People’s Party in the El Eulma Region, was Centered on His Opening of His Medical Clinic, and the Activation of the Direct Mind Adopted by the Political Parties, including the Manifesto and the Association on (April 04, 1945 CE), through the Commemoration of the Fifth Anniversary of the Death of Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis, and His Meeting with the Leader Messali Hadj in (April 1945 CE) in His Detention in Qasr Chellala -According to Debaghine’s Account. The Details of the Meeting Concerned Igniting the Revolution, and Messali Hadj's Agreement to Appoint the Officials who would Lead the Regions, as Follows: [The Capital Region and its Surroundings would be Headed by Muhammad

4 - The Federation of Elected Algerian Muslim Representatives was Founded in Algiers in (1927 CE). Its Aim was to Defend the Interests of Elected Representatives who remained Affiliated with the French Administration. For More Information; See: Claude Collot-Jean Robert Henry, The Algerian National Movement Text (1912-1954 CE), 2nd Edition, Office des Publications Universitaires, 1977 CE, p. 39.

5 - Ferhat Abbas, The Night of Colonialism, translated by: Abu Bakr Rahal, Dar Al-Qasbah, 2005 CE, p. 104.

6 - Abdelkrim Bousafsaf, Fundamental Transformations in the National Movement (1945-1954 CE), *Cirta Magazine*, Issue: 05, Constantine, Algeria, 1981 CE, p. 28.

Belouizdad, the Larbaa Region and its Suburbs by Ahmed Bouda, the Kabylie Region by Ali Halit, the Eastern Algerian Region by Chadli Mekki and Massoud Boukadoum, the Western Algerian Region by Mahfoudhi and Boutlilis, and the Central Command Under the Supervision of Lamine Debaghine].⁷ However; The French Authorities Uncovered their Secret, and Messali Hadj was transferred to the City of El Menia in the Sahara.

The Revolutionary Wing remains Distrustful of French Politics and does not See the Allied Victory in the World War as A Victory for the National Cause.

The Atmosphere was Marked by Heightened Tension between Algerians and French in Most Algerian Cities, Coupled with A Growing Sense of Nationalism and Political Awareness, even among Children in French Schools. In one Municipality in the Sétif Region; A Teacher wrote on the Blackboard: "I am French, and France is My Country". The Algerian Students responded by Writing: "I am Algerian, and Algeria is My Country".⁸

On the Eve of the End of World War II; Algeria was Experiencing Extremely Dire Economic and Social Conditions. This was A Result of the Colonial Economic Policies Imposed on Algerians as A Consequence of the War, Coupled with Widespread Poverty and Famine that had Rapidly Spread throughout the Country. The Situation was Further Exacerbated by the Disruption of Supplies due to the War Effort, as the Country had relied on Reserves of Consumer Goods, particularly Grain, from Previous Years, which were Diverted to Fuel the War Effort. This Intensified the Suffering of the Algerian People and Pushed them towards Famine, especially Given the Ongoing Drought.⁹

❖ Celebrating International Workers' Day (World Workers' Day):

Political Parties and National Associations Decided to Organize a Peaceful March to Celebrate Labor Day. Among those who Called for this March were the People's Party, the Friends of the Manifesto and Liberty, and the General Confederation of Workers. The Algerian People Demonstrated on (May 01, 1945 CE), Starting from Martyrs' Square and Proceeding towards the Central Post Office. According to Some Historical Studies; More than (20.000) People Participated in the March.¹⁰ The Demonstrators Carried Banners Bearing Slogans Such as: "Down with Colonialism...Down with Imperialism...Long Live A Free and Independent Algeria...Establishment of A Sovereign Algeria".¹¹ However; The French Police Opened Fire on the Demonstrators in the Peaceful March, resulting in the First Victim among the Demonstrators,

7 - Larabi Al-Zubairi, The Great Leader and the Little Leaders, Echourouk Newspaper, dated (April 05, 2007 CE).

8 - Djamal Qanan, Issues and Studies in the Modern and Contemporary History of Algeria, Publications of the National Museum of the Mujahid, 1994 CE, p. 200.

9 - Nāṣir Al-Dīn Saʿīdūnī, Op. Cit., p. 125.

10 - Ali Tablit, From the Crimes of the French Occupation in Algeria: The Massacres (May 08, 1945 CE), Al-Dhakira (Memory) Magazine, Issue: 02, 1995 CE, p. 55.

11 - Ibrahim Al-Askari, Glimpses of the Liberation Revolution and the Role of the Eastern Base, Dar Al-Baath, Constantine, 1989 CE, p. 65.

and Prevented the Demonstrators from Participating in this Annual Celebration of Labor Day, which Expressed the Will of the Algerian People and their Desire to Sacrifice for the Homeland. Conversely; It was A Terrifying Day for the Colonial Settlers, who Demanded that the French Authorities take the Necessary Measures to Suppress the Algerian National Movement.

After News of the Incident Spread; The Demonstrations Expanded and Spread to Many Algerian Cities, such as the Blida Atlas (Atlas de Blida), the Mitidja Region, Constantine, Sétif, Oran, Tlemcen, Béjaïa, Guelma, Souk Ahras, Khenchela, Batna, and Other Cities.

❖ **Beginning and Expansion of Events in the City of Sétif (May 08, 1945 CE):**

What Happened on (May 1st) in the Demonstrations in Algiers, especially the Battle to Raise the National Flag, and the Rising Chants Calling for the Free and Independent Algeria and the Fall of Colonialism, is Clear Evidence of the Spread of National Consciousness among the Majority of the Algerian Masses. This National Awakening was Characterized by A Kind of Political Agitation and A Readiness to Adopt Any Position that goes beyond or Expresses the Aspirations of the Algerian People.¹² On (May 8th, 1945 CE), Demonstrations Swept across the Country, with the City of Sétif being the Epicenter of the Unrest due to the Factors Mentioned Earlier, as well as its Strategic Location at the Crossroads between Constantine and Algiers. Ferhat Abbas and Sheikh Muhammad Al-Bachir Al-Ibrahimi were Active in the Surrounding Area, and the Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom Movement was Founded there in (1944 CE). This Made the City A Stage for Tragic Events, as the Demonstrations in Sétif were Characterized by Resistance and Confrontation.

(May 08, 1945 CE), Happened to be A Tuesday, which was A Weekly Market Day. The Organizers Made It a Day for Peaceful Demonstrations and taking to the Streets to Celebrate the Allied Victory over the Axis Powers and their Triumph over Nazism and Fascism, and to remind France of its Promises. This was Done with the Permission of the French Authorities through the “Governor/Lastraße Carbonal”. According to What Ferhat Abbas Mentioned; Carbonal had told “Dr. Saadan” in (April 1945 CE) that Disturbances would Occur, and that A Powerful Party Would Soon Emerge as A Result.¹³

More than (15,000) People, including Young and Old, Farmers and Merchants, gathered in the City of Sétif. The March began in Front of the Old Mosque near the Railway Station, led by A Group of Islamic Scouts Carrying the National Flag and Banners Bearing Slogans Such as: “Long Live Algeria”, “Down with Colonialism”, “Democracy for All...Release Our Imprisoned Leaders”, and “For the Establishment of An Algerian Council”. All these Slogans Carried Nationalistic Connotations. The Demonstrators also Chanted Songs of Freedom and Independence, including: “O Youth, Hail North Africa...From Our Mountains Rises the Voice of the Free...Calling Us to Independence”, and Other Poems that were taught to Algerian Youth in the Schools of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and the People's Party.

12 - Nāṣir Al-Dīn Saʿīdūnī, Op. Cit., p. 131.

13 - Ferhat Abbas, Ibid., p. 114.

At the Forefront of the Peaceful March was (the Scout/Bouزيد Saâl). After the March had Covered One kilometer; This Young Man raised the Green and White Flag with the Red Crescent. The Police, who were Surrounding the Demonstrators, did not Intervene Until They reached the Heart of Sétif City, specifically in Front of the France Café, where the Police Chief appeared, rushing towards the Flag Bearer to Take it away from the Hand of the Scout Saâl, who was at the Forefront of the Demonstrations, and who Strongly Objected to this. One of the Policemen then Shot at Him, and the Events Spiraled Out of Control. The French response was Expected to be Harsh and Unjust towards the Peaceful Demonstrations, which turned into Bloody Clashes. The Algerians Found themselves with Only Simple Tools and Sticks to Defend themselves. What Angered the Algerians Most was the Usage of Live Ammunition against Unarmed Civilians and the Indiscriminate Attacks by the Foreign Legion Under the Command of General Duval and Colonel Bourdilla. Everyone was Determined to Destroy the Villages and Hamlets, and their Slogan was “Death to the Arabs”,¹⁴ which Increased the Enthusiasm and Unity of the Algerians. They targeted Official Buildings, Gendarmerie Headquarters, and Tax Collection Offices, and the Peasants Attacked the towers and Barracks, Seized Weapons, and Burned the Farms of the Colonial Settlers.

It appears that France Employed all its Land, Air, and Sea Forces to Extinguish the Flames of Resistance, which had Spread to Numerous Cities, Towns, and Villages across the Country. To Name but A Few; There were Kherrata, Guelma, Jijel, Constantine, and Others. The Geographical Reach of the Demonstrations Extended even to the Sahara, all imbued with the Spirit of Patriotism and Revolutionary Ideals. Therefore; The Tragedy was Immense.

In this Context; One of the Leaders of the People's Party, Hussein Al-Ahwal, revealed this Tragedy through A Memorandum Sent by the Party to the United Nations on (August 12, 1950 CE), which Stated: “On (May 08, 1945 CE); While the Whole World was Celebrating the Day of Armistice and Victory over Nazism, the Algerian People Wanted to Express their Hope that their Sacrifices would be Recognized and that They would be Able to Achieve their National Demands. However; The French Armies Tasked with Maintaining Security and Stability Unfortunately joined the French Armed Forces and Committed a Massacre in which (45,000) People were Killed. The Heroes of the Seventh Algerian Riflemen, who had Returned Victorious from the Battlefields of Africa and Europe, found their Homes Destroyed, their Fields Devastated, their Women Violated, and their Families Shot Dead”.¹⁵

Sheikh Muhammad Al-Bachir Al-Ibrahimi, Head of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, also Revealed the Malicious Intentions of Colonialism and the Extent of its Brutality in Exploiting and Dominating the Algerian People. He Described the Crimes of French Colonialism in Algeria on (May 08, 1945 CE), as Horrific and Atrocious Scandals that Spared Nothing, Representing A Flagrant Violation of Human Rights. These Crimes alone are Enough to Stain

14 - Ferhat Abbas, *Ibid.*, p. 114.

15 - Al-Fodail El-Ouratilani, *Algeria the Rebel*, Dar Al-Huda, Ain M'lila, Algeria, 1992 CE, p. 423.

France's History with Darkness, and this History will remain Etched in Memory Forever, according to Al-Ibrahimi.¹⁶

Al-Ibrahimi Held the French Colonial Authorities Responsible for this, and Considered the French Position Shameful regarding these Brutal Crimes, Executions, and Arbitrary Laws that He Received, and from which He Himself was not Spared.¹⁷

Sheikh Al-Ibrahimi was Distinguished by His Mature Intellect, Vast Knowledge, Keen Insight, and Open Mind. He Viewed this Colonial Policy with the Expertise of a Seasoned Observer, and His Patriotic Fervor Led Him to Expose France's Colonial Intentions to the Algerian People, revealing the Injustices inflicted upon them. France had Exploited Algeria as A Human Reservoir in the First and Second World Wars, where Algerians Fought alongside, Supported, and Defended France, only to be Betrayed and their Promises Broken. As Al-Ibrahimi Put it: "A Nation Like any Other...And Offered Hundreds of Thousands of Its Sons as the Price of Victory, fighting without Purpose and Dying without Honor...".¹⁸

Then He addresses the Colonial Powers, Condemning their Massacres on (May 08, 1945 CE), Saying: "...Is it More Honorable for An Algerian to Return Home from the Battlefield, after Sharing in the Victory but not the Spoils...To Find His Father Dead, His Mother Driven Mad by Grief, His House Demolished or Burned, His Crops Ruined, His Honor Violated, His Wealth Looted and Divided, and His Children Wandering in the Open". Al-Ibrahimi Considers this A Reward, stating: "This Day is not Unusual in the Calendar of French Colonialism in this Country, for it has Many Days like it, but what is Strange is that it was Deliberately Chosen to be the Final Act in the Book of War, perpetrated by those Exhausted by the War against those who Shared in its Shelter and helped them Achieve Victory".¹⁹ This is Evidence of the Profound Impact these Massacres had on the Psyche of Al-Ibrahimi, who Considered them Crimes against Humanity, and it is Another Clear Example of Blackmailing the Patriotism of Algerians.

Many have written about the Consequences of those Inhumane Massacres. Ferhat Abbas Estimated the Number of Martyrs at (60,000), while the Arab League Counted (45,000). The Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, in its Newspaper Al-Basair, cited A Figure of (80,000).²⁰ French Sources, however; Reported that the Death Toll ranged between (1,500) and (2,000), A Figure Confirmed by French Interior Minister Adrien Texier after his Visit to Some of the Cities Affected by the Events of (May 8th).²¹

As for Political Repression; France resorted to the Policy of Arrests and Raids, targeting Active Members of the Algerian Manifesto, including: [Ferhat Abbas, Ahmed Francis, Ahmed

16 - Muhammad Al-Bachir Al-Ibrahimi, Eyes of Insight, Ibid., p. 382.

17 - Ibid., pp. 419-420.

18 - Muhammad Al-Bachir Al-Ibrahimi, Remnants, Vol. 03, Ibid., p. 334.

19 - Ibid., p. 333.

20 - Ahmed Sari, Events (May 08, 1945 CE) through Some Official French Documents, Al-Dhakira (Memory) Magazine, Issue: 06, 2000 CE, p. 34.

21 - Op. Cit., p. 35.

Boumendjel, Mustapha Hadj, Kessous Aziz, and Others]. It also arrested Some Members of the Association, most notably: [Sheikh Mohamed Al-Bachir Al-Ibrahimi and Sheikh Mohamed Khairuddine]. Furthermore; It arrested Many Activists from the People's Party, including: [Mohamed Khider, Abdullah Filali, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Ahmed Bougara, and Benyoucef Benkhedda]. The French Administration also monitored the Algerian Population, forcing them to Surrender their Weapons, particularly in Areas where Demonstrations had taken place; however, many Smuggled them out, sometimes even Burying them Underground. These are just A Few Examples; The French Authorities rounded up (400) Algerians and took them to the Tachouda Area near El Eulma, where they were Shot in Front of their Families and Spouses, and then thrown into A Mass Grave.²² This is A Stark Example of Barbarity and Savagery, practices Completely Devoid of Humanity.

Conclusion:

In Conclusion; The Massacres of (May 08, 1945 CE), remain A Stain on the Reputation of France and the French People. We Must Convey the French Crime Committed against the Algerian Demonstrators to Algerians today, because this Uprising Strengthened the Convergence of Viewpoints within the Algerian Political Movement, rejected many Disagreements, and Highlighted the Spirit of Coalition among the Political Class in all its Diversity. This was done to Thwart French Attempts to Force National Demands into Accepting Certain Reforms at the Expense of the National Cause. However, Algerians Struggled for Liberation from the Yoke of French Colonialism, but the Road is Still Arduous, and the Dilemma remains between the Two Sides as long as the Other Side Continues to Deny its Crimes, remains Obstinate, and Considers them A Civilizing Message that Brought Civilization to the Algerian People.

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