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The Second World War and Africa – New Regards within Colonial Context

Abstract: The Second World War had tremendous impact on Africa. It influenced all stakeholders in the colonial relationship - the coloniser and the colonised alike. Their attitudes and regards evolved significantly, nothing was similar to the pre-war world. Some of the war's most important battles were fought in Africa. The war was ultimately directed by big powers which had a critical approach to colonialism – the Soviet Union and the USA. Their military might was much superior to that of the colonial powers like Britain and France. In addition, England was bombed, and France occupied showing the vulnerability of colonial masters. The participation of African soldiers in almost all the military campaigns of the Second World War resulted in the colonial metropolis being obliged to take into consideration the huge human contribution of African societies into the Allied war effort when planning the post-war future of their empires. The individual war experiences of a number of African soldiers partly explains the emergence of a new kind of political activities in almost all the colonies of the continent. Concerning the French situation, the Conference of Brazzaville in 1944 had an impact in North Africa when the AML (Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom) became a real mass movement in Algeria. The RDA (African Democratic Assembly) in Sub-Saharan Africa developed as the largest political party in the whole continent. The British colonial possessions witnessed the same kind of experience with the Pan-African Conference in Manchester. The decolonisation of these two empires of European origin clearly started at the end of the Second World War and was, at least partly, its consequence.

Key words: African soldiers, military campaign, colonial empire, decolonisation, political movement

Introduction

Both World Wars – the first and the second – had an important impact in Africa and on Africans, as well on African societies. In the First World War, there was a huge number of African combatants in Europe; these figures should also include those who came as forced labour for the European war industry. The number of African soldiers in the First World War was probably bigger than in the second one. Algeria alone sent 197,000 soldiers and 120,000 workers to France as participants in the First World War.¹ French West and Equatorial Africa provided about 200,000 *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*² for the French Army in World War One, more than

¹ This number consists of 175,000 Algerians and 22,000 Europeans of the country. Charles-Robert Ageron, “Le mouvement Jeune-Algérien de 1900 à 1923,” in *Etudes Maghrébines. Mélanges*, **Virhe. Vain pääasiakirja. Mélanges Charles-André Julien, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 234, fn. 1; Omar (Jean-Louis) Carlier, “La première Etoile Nord-Africaine (1926-1929),” *RASJEP, Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques* 9, 4 (1972): 913-4, Belkacem Recham, *Les musulmans algériens dans l'armée française (1919-1945)* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1996), 22-3, fn. 3.**

² *Tirailleurs Sénégalais (Senegalese Tirailleurs)*, these troops were from all French West African and French Equatorial African colonies. They were called ‘Senegalese’ because Senegal was the oldest French Colony in Africa, and the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* were founded there in 1857.

135,000 of them combatted in Europe.³ Thus, hundreds of thousands of Africans participated into the First World War. This resulted from a kind of compulsory conscription which was applied in the British and French African colonies during the First World War.

African participation in the war had an important impact, not only in Africa and in Europe in general, but also on all the European colonial empires, and, of course, particularly on their African colonies. When the almost 300,000 Algerians who had a solid experience of living in Europe for some years, returned home after the war, this had an important impact in the country. It was also true in the remote areas from where the soldiers often came. In all three Maghreb⁴ countries, one impact was the political evolution of the colonised populations. They became more active within colonial structures, and started to defend their own causes. In the 1930s this was visible in the emergence of the political movements which ultimately led these countries to their independence in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵

Between the World Wars, the two main European Colonial Empires – the British and the French – seriously attempted to renew their performance and structures. The British announced the British Commonwealth of the Nations in the Balfour Declaration in 1926. France’s Empire re-enforced the organisation of its ‘territories’ so that they clearly formed French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. Both of these remained as rather artificial administrative structures.

In the Second World War, more battles and military operations took place on African soil. In this sense, the Second World War was much more ‘present’ in African societies.⁶ From the more global perspective, some of the most significant military operations of the Second World War took place in Africa.⁷

The intention of this article is to shed light on how the regards of the different stakeholders involved in the colonial relationship changed during the Second World War. In

³ Marc Michel, *Les Africains et la Grande Guerre. L'appel à l'Afrique (1914-1918)* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2014).

⁴ Maghreb – the land of sunset, from Benghazi to the Atlantic, from the Mediterranean to the southern part of the Sahara (Mauritania, Western Sahara, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya).

⁵ Algeria – Parti du Peuple Algérien (Party of Algerian People; PPA), Morocco – Istiqlal (Independence) and Tunisia – Neo-Destour (Neo-Constitution).

⁶ So far, I have not found any general estimation on the total number of African soldiers taking part in military operations in Africa, Asia and in Europe during the Second World War. The only thing I can say is that this question is important and needs sound and detailed further research. During the Second World War, about 375,000 Africans from British colonies fought alongside with allied forces. “African participants in the Second World War,” <http://www.mgtrust.org/afr2.htm> (retrieved on August 4, 2018).

⁷ This can be seen in the Battles of Bir Hakeim and El Alamein in Eastern Libya and the Egyptian Western Desert as well as in the Allied landing of November 1942 in North Africa.

general, the inhabitants of colonies started to see themselves and their roles differently. Sometimes the superiority of colonial masters was relativized when comparing the military might of Allied forces with that of the colonial masters. The relations between European colonial powers themselves also changed. France found it very problematic that the British Royal Navy directed some of the first military operations in Africa against its naval forces. The Second World War in Africa had an impact even within the colonial powers. Free France was clearly opposing Vichy France in West and Equatorial Africa, as well as in the Maghreb and in the Levant. This was so even if the Frenchmen managed to avoid most of the direct military confrontation between themselves. Of course, even the Second World War between the Allies and Axis powers, was, first of all, really a European civil war,⁸ and thus it weakened the image, and the prestige of colonial powers in the eyes of the Africans.

The Second World War in general, and particularly its military performances in Africa itself, also had many political and societal influences on the continent. In the European and Trans-Atlantic theatres, these had an important impact on the relations between the 'Allies' even beyond the Second World War. As well as the attempts to renew European colonial empires which preceded the outbreak of war, there were also initiatives to completely reorganize the international system during the last years of the war. *The Atlantic Charter*⁹ during the war and the creation of the United Nations (UN) just at the end of the war were among these attempts; these strongly affected colonial structures and their futures.

Preludes

The end of the First World War and its various Peace Treaties in 1919 meant that the status of the former German African colonies changed. Togo, Cameroun, German East-Africa and Namibia acquired new masters: in Togo the master was France which also ruled with England in Cameroun, while in East Africa, England operated together with Belgium; there was also the Republic of South-Africa ruling in Namibia.¹⁰

⁸ The Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs and renowned historian, Kavalam Madhava Panikkar, called the First World War an European Civil War in his study *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco Da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1953).

⁹ *The Atlantic Charter* was the joint declaration of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill on 14 August 1941 which defined the peace goals for the post-Second World War period. In the *Declaration by United Nations* of January 1942, the allied countries asked for adherence to this charter's principles. The Atlantic Charter also inspired many later international agreements, as well as the post-war independence of European colonies.

¹⁰ Rwanda and Burundi went to Belgium and Tanganyika to England. Today's Namibia was at that time called German South-West Africa. German East-Africa today is formed by Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania (Tanganyika plus Zansibar).

In North Africa, the Paris Peace Conference and the Wilsonian program raised hopes for greater possibilities of the political participation of the inhabitants of the colonies – mostly these were in vain. In fact, the North African political representatives had attempted to present a list of political demands to the Wilsonian delegation. In relation to the conditions of the colonies, only India managed to have its presence acknowledged, and was able to sign the 1919 Peace Treaty in Versailles as an entity, together with the Dominions of British Empire.

In the years between the world wars, there were challenging military conflicts in Africa. One of the most severe was the Riff War in the first half of the 1920s; this was fought between the Republic of Riff and Spain (joined later by France) in Northern Morocco.¹¹ The consequences of this war, where the Riffians were defeated, and in which Spain used chemical weapons, led to the strengthening of the extreme right in Spain and elsewhere in Europe, even in Finland.¹²

In Central and Southern Morocco, Frenchmen were obliged to use military force against several Berber tribes until the 1930s. These operations were called ‘pacification.’ In Libya, Mussolini demonstrated an Italian ‘solution’ when he started a kind of Fascist re-conquest in the 1920s and early 1930s by fighting against Senussi resistance leader, Omar Mukhtar.¹³

The Italians also had another military adventure in the eastern part of Africa when Mussolini occupied Ethiopia for almost six years. He invaded the country in 1935,¹⁴ and the Emperor Haile Selassie was obliged to leave the country until its liberation by Allied forces in 1941. Neighbouring Eritrea had been an Italian colony since 1890 and only became independent in 1953.

Of course, Africa was no more pacific or peaceful than other continents have been in the *longue durée* history. The three major military conflicts outlined here show us that the existence and continuation of European colonialism meant continuous violent confrontations in

¹¹ Vincent Courcelle-Labrousse, Nicolas Marmié, *La Guerre du Rif (Maroc 1921-1926)* (Paris: Éditions Points, 2009).

¹² In Spain this meant the strengthening of the movement led by Gen Francisco Franco, and it had clear impact on the Civil War in the second half of the 1930s. At the beginning of the Civil War, Franco started his campaign against the Spanish Republic from Tetouan in Northern Morocco. The Riff War also had the same kind of impact as far away as Finland where some of the most fanatic right-wing extremists joined it.

¹³ Enzo Santarelli, Giorgio Rochat, Romain Rainero, Luigi Goglia, *Omar Al-Mukhtar e la Riconquista Fascista della Libia* (Milano: Marzorati Editore, 1981).

¹⁴ Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 was in the heart of the Abyssinian Crisis which had started the previous year, and which the League of Nations was unable to solve. This weakness of the League of Nations strengthened the extreme right and Fascism in Europe. The warfare in Ethiopia, where Italy used chemical weapons, lasted with varying intensity until the return of Haile Selassie with British Commonwealth troops in May 1941.

Africa. Somehow, these connect the two World Wars together, building a kind of macabre bridge between them.

The warming-up phase

The Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939 when Germany attacked Poland, two days later England and France declared war against Germany. It was only on 10 of June 1940 that the war also expanded to the African continent when Italy declared war on the Allied countries and, in September 1940 attacked Egypt from its colony in Libya.

The Italian 10th army's attempt to invade Egypt was led by Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, but the Allied troops, composed mostly of Commonwealth, and later on the Free French soldiers, managed to stop and defeat the Italians. Generals Archibald P. Wavell and Richard N. O'Connor commanded the Allied forces. More than 130,000 Italian soldiers were taken as prisoners of war. In early 1941, Africa became the main operational theatre of the Second World War when German forces joined the defeated Italians in Libya.

The Second World War in Africa can be divided into several different phases. The first concerns what is called here 'the warming-up phase' where the protagonists built up their main strategic positions.

After the armistice between France and Germany in June 1940, confrontation between England and France consisted of a few sporadic, but tragic incidents such as Mers-el-Kebir on 3 July 1940. On that day, the British Royal Navy attacked the French Navy in the military port of Mers-El-Kebir adjacent to the city of Oran in Algeria. The attack killed almost 1,300 French marines, there were also material losses such as the sinking of one battleship and damage to five others.

This incident had long-lasting impact on British-French relations, and it made the combination of French military into the Forces of the Free French of General Charles de Gaulle more difficult. De Gaulle had not been informed prior to the attack. Still, he understood the British reasoning that there was a real risk of the French Navy joining the Axis operations against the Allies or the French Empire.¹⁵ After Mers-el-Kebir, the French Navy no longer

¹⁵ On 8 July 1940, Gen Charles de Gaulle issued a declaration in which he understood the British action without accepting it, and naming it as an 'odieuse' tragedy. Along with Winston Churchill, there was real panic among the British military and political leaders, and the attack of Mers-el-Kebir was one of Great Britain's most tragic mistakes in the whole war.

fought the Axis, on the contrary, on several occasions it really attacked the Allies. Only the small Free France navy participated in any Allied operations.

The controversial attitudes towards the Allies and the Free France in the French African colonies were strengthened, not only by the attack on Mers-el-Kebir, but also a week later by the bombing of the battleship *Richelieu* in the Dakar harbour in Senegal. Both of these incidents contributed to the Battle of Dakar.

Between 23 and 25 September 1940, the Allies, together with the *Forces françaises libres* (*Free France Forces*; FFL), tried to conquer Dakar, and convince the city's Vichy France authorities to change sides. But they failed because Vichy France fought back very strongly. This battle and the Allies' failure had two main consequences. The first was that French West Africa stayed under Vichy command until *Operation Torch*, the Allied invasion of North Africa on 8 November 1942. The second consequence was that Free France and Gen Charles de Gaulle found a reduction in their political weight among the Allies, and they were obliged to base their African activities in French Equatorial Africa.

For the Africans, the two military conflicts in Mers-el-Kebir and Dakar must have been rather confusing. It was not only the Europeans – Britain and France – that were fighting each other, but the conflict also now included a serious confrontation between the French themselves. Two other battles also belong in this phase – the 1940 operations in Gabon, and a year and a half later in Madagascar.

In the early November 1940 Battle of Gabon, the Free France and Gen Charles de Gaulle stabilised their position in French Equatorial Africa. This now became the first territory under Free France administration. It consisted of important territory from the southern part of the Sahara desert, from Chad to the Congo River. This was extremely important because from *Afrique-Equatoriale française* (French Equatorial Africa; AEF), Free France was able to plan and initiate new military campaigns across the desert towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

Concerning the ambiguous relations between the two France (Free and Vichy) with Great Britain, it is important to also note the battle of Madagascar in May 1942. Britain was anxious about the security of the sea route to India, and wanted to guarantee it. Of course, the safety of the Suez Canal was the key issue in this situation. Thus, Britain invaded Madagascar, then under Vichy France, without informing the Free France, and Gen Charles de Gaulle about

their plans. Britain wanted to avoid the failure at Dakar and to prevent their bad experiences in Syria¹⁶ from being repeated.

Both Free France and Vichy took the battle of Madagascar very seriously, for them both it was aggression against French territory. This had consequences about how the Allies prepared for the landing in North Africa; for Gen Charles de Gaulle the impact lasted until the end of World War Two.

The second phase of World War Two in Africa was different in the sense that its main issue involved confrontation between the Axis powers and the Allied forces. From French Equatorial Africa, and especially from Chad, the FFL started their excursions against the Italian troops near the southern border of Libya. General Philippe Leclerc commanded the 13^e Demi-Brigade de Légion Étrangère (the 13th Half-Brigade of the French Foreign Legion; DBLE), the famous unit, as well as the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais*. These two units formed the core of the FFL in Chad. They were assisted by a few men from the British Long Range Desert Group (LRDG). Together they began hostile raids, it is razzia against the Italians in the border regions of Southern Libya. In February 1941, once General Leclerc had control of the oasis of Kufra, together with his troops, they made the well-known ‘Serment de Koufra’ (‘Oath of Koufra’) where they promised to fight until their flag was on top of the Strasbourg Cathedral.¹⁷

The third, and often almost forgotten, phase of World War Two in Africa consisted of the East African Campaign. The Allies, especially Britain, wanted to strengthen their position in Egypt and, particularly, the security of the Suez Canal. That is why, after defeating the Italians, and destroying their army with the Commonwealth forces in the Western Desert on the Egyptian-Libyan border, the troops from the British Empire conquered Italian Somaliland. The aim of the Allied campaign was to remove the Italians from Africa, as well as to liberate Ethiopia, and restore Emperor Haile Selassie on his throne.

The British Empire forces attacked the Italians from all the countries bordering Ethiopia, from the Sudan and British Somaliland to the North, from Kenya and Italian Somaliland in the South. One of the aims was to join the so-called Wingate Gideon Brigade. About half of its men

¹⁶ In relation to the Campaign of Syria, Great Britain and FFL had together succeeded in pushing out the Vichy France forces. The British leaders were thinking that Great Britain could administer Beirut and Damascus together with Free France when de Gaulle’s delegates simply made it clear this could not happen.

¹⁷ ‘Serment de Koufra’ (‘Oath of Kufra’): «Jurez de ne déposer les armes que lorsque nos couleurs, nos belles couleurs, flotteront sur la cathédrale de Strasbourg» (‘You shall not lay down arms, until the day when our colours, our beautiful colours, flutter over the Strasbourg Cathedral’). In summer 2018, more than 77 years later, the tone of the Oath of Kufra reflects surprisingly Franco-centric and colonial attitudes, especially when it is remembered that in Chad at that time, the FFL was mostly made up of Africans.

were regular Ethiopian troops, that is the Ethiopian units remaining loyal to Emperor Haile Selassie. Addis Ababa was re-conquered in April, and Haile Selassie returned to his capital in early May 1941. Italian troops continued to resist for six months until they totally collapsed in the Battle of Gondar in November 1941, and Africa Orientale Italiana (Italian East Africa; AOI) surrendered. The Allied forces took 300,000 Italian war prisoners.¹⁸ Nevertheless, sporadic Italian guerrilla warfare continued in Ethiopia against the Allies until the Armistice of Cassibile in September 1943, which ended the hostilities between Italy and the Allies.

The Allied Forces in the East-African Campaign were composed mainly of colonial troops, the soldiers originated from British and French West-Africa, from almost all the Southern- and Eastern-African colonies, from Sudan as well as from Yemen and Palestine, and even from India. There were also troops from FFL and from *Force Publique* in the Belgian Congo.

Besides destroying the Italian colonial presence in East-Africa and ensuring navigation in the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean, the East-African Campaign restored the land connection from Cairo to Cape Town. This was extremely important for the maintenance of the Allied Forces when they were fighting against the Axis in North Africa, because it allowed their resupplying from other European colonies in Africa and Asia.

The East-African Campaign has been rather neglected in the history of the Second World War. In order to understand why this is so, one explanation could be its distance from Europe. It also remained in the shadow of European events and European fronts, especially those in Greece and Albania which were invaded by Axis forces. The third explanation might be the absence of American (USA) involvement in the East-African Campaign.

In a sense, the East African Campaign might be one of the last, if not the final episode of the colonial wars, where European powers used the African territories and countries, the African populations and soldiers, just to benefit their own, mostly colonial interests. How the societies in East Africa have reacted to 'European colonial warfare' is not really known, more research is needed on this issue. Concerning the decolonisation after the Second World War, in Eastern and Southern Africa, it could perhaps be said that it followed more general trends in the British and Portuguese Empires in Africa. Excepting Ghana (Gold Coast), which had already reached independence in 1957, the others achieved this only in the 1960s, however long

¹⁸ Hugo Pratt, *Gli Scorpioni del deserto* (Milano: Libri Edizioni, 1976).

before the ‘Wind of Change’ as predicted by Harold Macmillan.¹⁹ Unfortunately, for the Portuguese colonies, independence came only in the 1970s after very bitter conflicts.

The North African War Theatre

After the Commonwealth forces prevented the Italian attempt to invade Egypt, and defeated their army in autumn 1940, the Germans moved into the African continent in order to help the Italians, and to restore their presence in Libya. Both the Axis powers and the Allies used much energy to build up their military structures and organisation in the Libyan Benghazi and Egyptian Western Desert. In fact the Germans created a complete army called the *Afrikakorps* under the command of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. All this resulted in a long series of battles between Italian, but mainly German military forces) and the Allies in Libya and the Egyptian Western Desert. These battles form the third part of the African Second World War.

With these new forces, the Axis hoped to reach the Suez Canal, but failed largely because of Allied defence strategies. In the early summer of 1942, the 1st Free France Brigade, having crossed the desert, resisted and hindered the progression of the *Afrikakorps* in the battle of Bir Hakeim.²⁰ This battle was able to delay the German advance long enough for the Allies to strengthen their positions. The invasion of the *Afrikakorps* was definitely halted by the two Battles of El-Alamein in June, and in October-November 1942 where the Allied forces were commanded by Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.

These battles of El-Alamein developed almost as a duel between the German commander, Erwin Rommel, and the British Field Marshal Montgomery. The Allies won the second battle of El-Alamein after what was then the largest artillery bombardment in the Second World War. It meant that the *Afrikakorps* defeat was so serious that they could hardly reorganize their military structures. After those battles, the confrontation between Rommel and Allied forces moved onto Tunisian soil.

From early 1942, Joseph Stalin and Soviet Union had demanded that the Allies open a second front against Germany in continental Europe. There were many different rumours about

¹⁹ The British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s speech, ‘The wind of change is blowing through this continent. Whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact’ was made in both Accra and Cape Town in January and February 1960. In this speech, Harold Macmillan estimated that African decolonization would take about two centuries, in reality it took only few years.

²⁰ The reputation of FFL commanded by generals Marie-Pierre Kœnig and Philippe Leclerc improved a great deal because of the battle of Bir Hakeim. Churchill called them ‘Fighting France’, while Hitler said they were the best soldiers after the Germans.

the possible options; one of the most persistent concerned *Operation Jupiter*, an Allied plan to attack Norway. This was, in reality, a kind of ruse, or a diversion, because ultimately the Allied strategic decision was the landing in the western part of North Africa, which had been until then following orders from the Vichy France pro-Axis government.

Operation Torch forms the fourth, and certainly the most important, episode of the North African front in the Second World War. The Allied forces embarked to Morocco, Oran and Algiers on 8 November 1942.²¹

There was very little resistance from local Vichy French authorities. Admiral François Darlan, who was the commander-in-chief for the whole of French North Africa, made a deal with General Dwight D. Eisenhower. With this agreement, the whole of French North Africa joined the Allies and remained under the control of Admiral Darlan. One of the results of this volte-face was also that French West Africa joined the Allies; this included the military and naval installation of Dakar. Following the deal with General Eisenhower, Admiral Darlan was assassinated on Christmas Day of 1942.²² The Axis powers were so upset by the Darlan volte-face that Italy and Germany almost immediately occupied all the Vichy French territory in Europe.

One of the reasons why Eisenhower accepted the deal with Darlan, and also retained the previous Vichy administration's civil and military servants in Algeria and elsewhere in North Africa remaining in charge, was that he wanted to continue the military invasion against the Axis forces in Tunisia so quickly as possible.

At the same time, the *Afrikakorps* of Field Marshal Rommel were being pushed towards Tunisia by the Commonwealth troops commanded by Marshal Montgomery, following the successful Western Desert Campaign in Egypt and Libya. After the Allied landing in Morocco and Algeria, the German *Wehrmacht* started to strengthen their land forces in Tunisia. But the Vichy France forces also changed sides quickly, joining the Allies in Tunisia. Therefore, the Axis powers soon found themselves squeezed between Eisenhower in the West and Montgomery in the East; in early May they were already totally surrounded. This resulted in

²¹ *Operation Torch* was preceded by the intelligence activities of *Agency Africa*. It was created in Algiers during July 1941 by Polish intelligence specialists. This agency was one of the most successful intelligence organizations in the Second World War.

²² The deal, which Eisenhower made with Adm. Darlan, was greatly criticized because Darlan was seen as rather pro-Nazi within the Vichy administration. The deal was also criticized by General de Gaulle and the FreeFrance, which were almost ignored during the landing of 8 November 1942.

the surrender of the Axis powers in North Africa on 13 May 1943. The war in North Africa was almost over for a couple of years.

The surrender of the Axis Forces led to the Allied invasion of Sicily in July and August, and then, the Italian leader Benito Mussolini gave up following a coup d'état at the end of July 1943. Less than a month later, the Allied forces crossed the Strait of Messina to Calabria. At the same time, the Allied forces invaded Salerno and Taranto directly from Tunisia. The invasion of continental Italy had started. After the cease-fire, on 3 September, Italy signed the Armistice of Cassibile which became public on 8 September 1943.²³

The success of *Operation Torch*, the Allied invasion of North Africa, had numerous consequences. In January 1943, the Allies held a summit in Anfa, a neighbourhood of Casablanca, where Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill made plans about how to continue the war effort. Free France played only a secondary role at this meeting.

A year after the disembarkation in North Africa, in November 1943, Gen Charles de Gaulle became the chairman of Comité français de Libération nationale (the French Committee of National Liberation; CFLN), which was recognized as the head of the French state by the Allied countries. Algiers became the 'capitale provisoire de la France' ('the provisional capital of France').²⁴

The Allied landing in the Maghreb, *Operation Torch*, had an important impact in North Africa, on the Maghrebins, especially the Algerians. Before World War Two, in the latter half of the 1930s, Algeria had experienced the so-called Blum-Violette-project, an attempt of France's Popular Front to improve the conditions of the Algerians. The main Algerian political movements had tried to support this Blum-Violette-project by their common action known as the Congrès Musulman Algérien (the Algerian Muslim Congress). Because of opposition from Algerian European settlers, both of these attempts failed. At the outbreak of the Second World War, the French Government abolished and banned the Parti du Peuple Algérien (Algerian People's Party; PPA), the most radical of Algerian political movements, and the Parti

²³ Giuseppe D'Angelo, "Old Conflicts and New Borders: Chronicles from the Zones of the Anglo-American Landing of 9 September 1943," in *Borders and Conflicts in the Mediterranean Basin*, ed. by Giuseppe D'Angelo Giuseppe & Jorge Martins Ribeiro Jorge (Fisciano: Mediterranean Knowledge, 2016), <http://www.mediterraneanknowledge.org/publications/index.php/bookseries> (retrieved on June 20, 2018).

²⁴ Alexandre Sumpf, "Alger, «capitale» de la France Libre," in *Histoire par l'image* (published in May 2014), <http://www.histoire-image.org/fr/etudes/alger-capitale-france-libre> (retrieved on July 4, 2018).

Communiste Algérien (Algerian Communist Party; PCA); both were forced to go underground.²⁵

In general, the main features of the Second World War, especially in Europe, also had an impact outside Europe, and especially on colonised people. The war meant that the Europeans, the colonial masters, were fighting each other. One of those masters, France, lost the war in June 1940, and thus a large part of the French III Republic was occupied by Germany. Therefore, confrontation between the pro-Axis Vichy France and Free France followed the armistice with Germany. After the tragedy of Mers-el-Kebir, North Africa, and Algeria, remained under the control of Vichy France; thus they were on the side of those who had lost the Battle of France and of the occupier.

The Allied invasion of North Africa, *Operation Torch*, on 8 November 1942 changed the way the Algerians viewed their own conditions. Like the 14 point program of President Wilson at the end of the First World War, in August 1941, the Allies and their military forces published the Atlantic Charter, and later, in January 1942, the 'Declaration by the United Nations'. Both documents stressed the right to self-determination of peoples, and also the independence of European colonies after the war. More generally, the Allies had a political ideology that was more liberal than that of the Axis and Vichy France, this had importance in the Maghreb. One of the results of the *Operation Torch* was that the then official France, Vichy France, the colonial power, was defeated in North Africa.

The importance of the Allies was highlighted by the installation of General Dwight D. Eisenhower in Algiers where he was in control of all war efforts, including the French administration in North Africa and Free France. In fact, *Operation Torch* and the Allies' performance meant a de facto end to the story of the French III Republic, at least in North Africa.

In November 1942, the Algerians also realized that the Allied military forces were of much greater significance, at least materially in terms of the number of troops and amounts of equipment, than colonial France ever had. The Allied disembarkation emphasized the ideological importance of Anglo-American cooperation in the whole conduct of the war. The Algerians also understood how internally weak Free France actually was, this contributed to its ambiguous image in their eyes.

²⁵ Charles-Robert Ageron, "Le Parti Communiste Algérien de 1939 à 1943," in *Vingtième Siècle, Revue d'Histoire* 12, 4 (1986): 41-42, as well as Claude Collot, "Le Parti du Peuple Algérien," *RASJEP, Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques* 8, 1 (1971):137, 168; Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie politique, histoire et société*, 2^e édition revue et augmentée (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1983), 213.

The disembarkation of November 1942 also resulted in increased activity, especially from Algerian political movements. This was aimed at reassuring the general population that, with the help of the Allied forces, their political and social conditions would improve as compensation for their anticipated war efforts. In fact, in early December 1942, Admiral Darlan had invited the Muslim population in North Africa, as well as in West and Equatorial Africa, to join the Free French and Allied forces in the war effort against the Axis powers. This was done without promising anything in compensation. In spite of this, the large scale mobilisation started in January 1943.²⁶

Algerian political movements reacted to the arrival of the Allies by presenting their political and socio-economic demands in return for their contribution to the approaching war efforts. On 20 December 1942, the main Algerian political movements addressed a 'Message' to the leaders of the Allies.²⁷ The message paid attention to the fact that the Algerian Muslims were asked to contribute to war efforts without clear hope of improving their conditions, in the same way as the European settlers in the country who had the full citizen rights. The 'Message' also referred to the Atlantic Charter's statement of all people's rights to self-determination as a leading principle of the Allied war goals. In concrete terms, the 'Message' proposed the organization of a conference for all Algerian Muslim political representatives and Muslim organizations. This conference was intended to define the Algerian social, economic and political conditions. This could then motivate the Algerians to participate fully with the Allied forces in the war. The 'Message' faced a rather cold and indifferent reception from French authorities.²⁸

The indifference of Free France on one hand, and the Algerian enthusiasm following the Allied disembarkation of 8 November 1942 on the other, provoked Ferhat Abbas²⁹ in early

²⁶ André Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien 1914-1954* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962, 2^e édition 1979), 162-5.

²⁷ *First Message des représentants des musulmans algériens aux autorités* (*Message of the Algerian Muslim's Representatives to the Authorities*) was addressed to the Allies, but the French protested saying that their sovereignty was bypassed. Two days later the Algerians addressed it only to French authorities, *Message des représentants des musulmans algériens aux autorités françaises*. See Claude Collot, Jean-Robert Henry, *Le Mouvement National Algérien. Textes 1912-1954* (Paris – Alger: Éditions L'Harmattan et Office des presses universitaires, 1978), 152-5.

²⁸ Ahmed Mahsas, *Le Mouvement révolutionnaire en Algérie de la 1^{ère} guerre mondiale à 1954. Essai sur la formation du mouvement national* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979), 164.

²⁹ Ferhat Abbas, originally from Sétif, was an Algerian politician and intellectual who participated in the creation of the Fédération des Elus Musulmans d'Algérie (Federation of the Elected Muslim Representatives of Algeria; FEMA) in 1927. Because the PPA and the PCA, Algerian Communist Party, had gone underground, and the religious Ulamaa movement had reduced its activities at the beginning of the World War Two, Ferhat Abbas was

February 1943 to edit a document putting together the Algerian requirements for reforms known by the name *Manifeste du Peuple Algérien. L'Algérie devant le conflit mondial (Manifesto of Algerian People: Algeria in Front of the World Conflict)*.³⁰ At the end of March 1943, Ferhat Abbas and several other Algerian political leaders presented the *Manifesto* publicly. Even if Ferhat Abbas was the main author of the *Manifesto*, almost all the Algerian political leaders had participated in its elaboration. The text of this document regrouped the main points of the Algerian political movement programs since the 1930s. It was addressed to Marcel Peyrouton, General Governor of Algeria, and the following day, to the leaders of the Allied Forces in Algiers.³¹

The essential requirement of the *Manifesto* was the right of self-determination for the Algerians. This could be made possible by the creation of a proper constitution for the country. The *Manifesto* also condemned the colonial regime more generally. In fact, the Wilsonian principles from the First World War were clearly visible in the *Manifesto*, as well as those coming more recently from the Atlantic Charter.³²

Even if the Free France authority, General Governor Peyrouton, received the 'Manifesto' positively, their response was very slow. This provoked those behind the *Manifesto* to elaborate a new document called, *The Additive to the Manifesto*³³ in May 1943.

This *Additive* was more precise and fine-tuned in relation to the original *Manifesto* in terms of the political future of Algeria, and socio-economic reforms for its population. Immediate autonomy would allow the possibility of Algeria's full participation in the Allied War effort.

If the *Additive* was more moderate than the *Manifesto* in its proposition of procedures, its forecasts and wishes for post-World War Two Algeria were surprisingly radical. The aim

the most visible of the Algerian political leaders. This pushed him to be active in the new situation after the arrival of the Allies.

³⁰ "Manifeste du Peuple Algérien. L'Algérie devant le conflit mondial," in Collot & Henry *Le Mouvement National Algérien*, 155-65.

³¹ Charles-Robert Ageron, "Ferhat Abbas et l'évolution politique de l'Algérie musulmane pendant la 2e guerre mondiale," *Revue d'Histoire Maghrébine* 4 (1975): 125-44.

³² Slimane Chikh, *L'Algérie en armes ou le temps des certitudes* (Paris: Economica, 1981), 43 and Mohammed Harbi, *Aux origines du Front de Libération Nationale: La scission du PPA-MTLD. Contribution à l'histoire du populisme révolutionnaire en Algérie* (Paris: Éditions Christian Bourgeois, 1975), 16.

³³ "Document remis au général Catroux le 11 juin 1943 par MM. Ferhat Abbas et le docteur Tamzali. Projet de réformes faisant suite au Manifeste du Peuple algérien musulman du 10 février 1943 présenté par les Délégations financières arabes et kabyles le 26 mai 1943," (This document is generally known by the name *Additive to the Manifesto (Additif au Manifeste)* in Collot & Henry *Le Mouvement National Algérien*, 165-70.

was a more or less an independent Algerian state, which would be federated with France. It also took up the possibility of creating a federation with Morocco and Tunisia.

Before the war, the Algerian political movements wanted to improve the conditions of the Algerians as French citizens. Now, they wanted to finish with the colonial regime and asked for improvements for Algeria as a country.³⁴ In spring 1943, the Allies required more and more war effort from the French authorities. In this situation, the Algerians presented their far-reaching propositions in the belief that France could more easily accept them at that point than after the war.³⁵

The response of France to the *Additive to the Manifesto* was once again very slow, and much more modest than the Algerians had hoped. Algerian political movements got closer to each other in their attempts to advance the principles of the *Manifesto* and its *Additive*.

In autumn 1943, France started to formulate a post-war approach to colonial questions in general, and to North Africa in particular. This could be clearly seen in the discourse of General de Gaulle in Constantine in December 1943 concerning reforms to the conditions of the Algerians. In the Conference of Brazzaville at the end of January 1944, Charles de Gaulle drafted the institutions which were to more generally organize relations between France and its colonies after World War Two. In fact, the founding principles of the Union Française³⁶ were defined in Brazzaville.³⁷

Concerning the French West and Equatorial Africa especially, the Brazzaville Conference was a sign of how the Second World War had changed the geopolitical understanding of the whole African continent. Thus, the Brazzaville Conference was the *de facto* beginning of decolonisation, and it impacted all over the European colonial empires.

In Algeria, when facing the French authorities' slow and modest attitudes, firstly to their political, but also to their socio-economic requirements, the Algerian political movements started to support any activities which aimed to promote the principles of the Algerian

³⁴ Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, tome II, *De l'insurrection de 1871 au déclenchement de la guerre de libération (1954)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 560.

³⁵ Mahsas, *Le Mouvement révolutionnaire en Algérie*, 168 and Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 135.

³⁶ *Union Française* (the *French Union*) organized the relations between the metropolis (France) and the colonies between 1946 and 1958.

³⁷ Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 137 and 138. Edward Mortimer, *France and the Africans 1944-1960* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1969), 49-52. For details of the background of the discourse of Constantine and the Conference of Brazzaville as well as the views of Charles de Gaulle on Algeria, see Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle, Le rebelle*, tome 1 (Paris: Seuil, 1984), 752-4. When asked about the possibilities that the Algerian departments would develop towards more autonomy, de Gaulle exclaimed: 'Autonomie? Voyons, c'est par l'indépendance que tout cela finira!' ('Autonomy? Come on, all this will end up in independence').

Manifesto and its Additive. In this situation of hectic political ambiance in Algeria, on 7 March 1944, Charles de Gaulle introduced an *Ordonnance du 7.3.1944*. This was the largest political reform ever accepted by France in favour of the Algerians since the beginning of the colonial regime in 1830.³⁸ However, for the Algerian political movements it was too little, too late; they argued that the spirit of the *Ordonnance* was against the essence of the *Manifesto* and its *Additive*, it was based on assimilation rather than autonomy.³⁹

In order to strengthen the position of the Algerian political movements, Ferhat Abbas founded, merely a week after de Gaulle's degree, the 14 March 1944 movement which aimed to unify all the Algerian political forces. It was called Les Amis du Manifeste et de la Liberté (Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom; AML).⁴⁰

In the process of establishing the constitution of the AML, Ferhat Abbas and the Fédération des Elus Musulmans d'Algérie (Federation of the Elected Muslim Representatives of Algeria; FEMA) once again had the initiative. Nevertheless, they negotiated very closely with two other political movements, and very quickly, the AML became a real mass movement.⁴¹ In six months, about half a million Algerians had joined the AML, and as its

³⁸ "Ordonnance du 7.3.1944," in Mahfoud Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien. Question nationale et politique algérienne 1919-1951*, tome 2 (Alger: SNED, Société Nationale d'Édition et de Diffusion, 1980), 953-5 and Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 138.

³⁹ Collot & Henry, *Le Mouvement National Algérien. Textes 1912-1954*, 185; Mohammed Harbi, *Le F.L.N., Mirage et Réalité. Des origines à la prise du pouvoir (1945-1962)* (Paris: Éditions Jeune Afrique, 1980), 20-5 and Charles-André Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche: nationalismes musulmans et souveraineté française*, troisième édition revue et mis à jour (Paris: René Julliard, 1972), 257 and 258.

⁴⁰ Especially Youcef Beghou, "Le Manifeste du Peuple Algérien ou la libération nationale par la voie populaire: l'appel au pays réel," *RASJEP, Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques* 9, 4 (1974): 215; Claude Collot, "Le Parti du Peuple Algérien," *RASJEP, Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques*, 8, 1 (1971): 180 and Collot & Henry, *Le Mouvement National Algérien. Textes 1912-1954*, 185.

⁴¹ Collot & Henry, *Le Mouvement National Algérien*, 185; Harbi, *Aux origines du Front de Libération Nationale*, 18 and 19; Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, 259; Mahsas, *Le Mouvement révolutionnaire en Algérie*, 175 and Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 139. The AML appeared for the third time in the 20th century when the Algerians tried to advance their political unity. The first time, after the First World War, was centred around Emir Khaled, grandson of Emir Abdelkader who fought the French invasion in the 1830s and 1840s, when the Algerians wanted to combine their efforts. The second time was during the French Popular Front when Algerian political movements tried to defend the Blum-Violette-project by the Muslim Congress. For the third attempt, the AML united three major movements – the FEMA (Elected Muslim Representatives), the PPA (the radical movement seeking independence and banned since September 1939), and the religious Ulamaa movement which defended the Arabo-islamic identity of Algeria; only the PCA, Algerian Communist Party remained outside the AML. In the two first attempts, the Algerians had defended political reforms initiated by France, in the case of the AML they were opposing the French initiative, the *Ordonnance 7.3.1944* and asked more than France was willing to support. This was the main and most important difference when compared with the period before World War Two. See Jean-Claude Vatin, *L'Algérie politique, histoire et société*, 293 and 294. Vatin highlights that the unity within the AML was the result of its opposition to the French initiative.

members, developed a national civic duty and pride.⁴² The most important impact of the AML was that it made the Algerian public more politicized and radicalized, it was the political educator of the Algerian masses.⁴³

In the beginning during the spring of 1944, the program of the AML was a compromise of the different movements it comprised, and as such, more moderate than the Algerian *Manifesto*. In autumn 1944, especially after it had been unable to advance its goals, the programme of the AML started to become more radical. At the same time, the PPA became more important among basic members of the AML,⁴⁴ this also contributed to the radicalisation of the AML.

The general political, as well as the social and economic atmosphere in Algeria, was rather hectic, somehow over-heated in autumn 1944 and spring 1945. In the summer of 1944, the main Allied attention had moved from North Africa to Europe, and the leading organs of the Free France were transferred to Paris, as such the problems of Algeria were left behind. The Allies had launched a second invasion from the Mediterranean to Southern France, the landing at Provence on 15 August 1944. The forces which landed in Provence were composed of troops from the Anglo-American and French armies. Those in the French Liberation Army came from the FFL, and the French African Army. Because an important part of the French forces were troops of African origin, this landing operation increased political tension in North Africa. This meant that there were also rumours, hopes and expectations of outside intervention against colonialism.⁴⁵

⁴² **Virhe. Vain pääasiakirja.** Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche. Nationalismes musulmans et souveraineté française*, 259; Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 139 and Benjamin Stora & Zakya Daoud, *Ferhat Abbas: Une utopie algérienne*, Destins Croisés, collection dirigée par Bernard Lauzanne, Coll. "L'Aventure Coloniale de la France" (Paris: Denoël, 1995), 139. Concerning the support of the trade unions to the AML, see the non-published article of Abderrahim Taleb Bendiab, *Le mouvement syndical algérien de 1943 à 1954 et ses rapports avec les partis politiques*, Alger, December 1987, 15 and 17.

⁴³ Beghoul, "Le Manifeste du Peuple Algérien," 232-6, 251 and 252 and René Gallisot, "Les conceptions de la Nation Algérienne. Les contradictions idéologiques du mouvement national. Lecture de textes autour du Manifeste du Peuple Algérien," *RASJEP, Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques*, 15, 4 bis (1978): 732.

⁴⁴ As the PPA was banned since 1939, the AML offered it a chance to act openly.

⁴⁵ Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, 141-3 and Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien*, 669 and 670.

The European population, the settlers, who had kept a low profile when the Allied Forces were around, started to raise their heads and oppose the *Ordonnance du 7.3.1944*, as well as all the attempts to enlarge the political rights of the Algerian people.⁴⁶

These kind of different tensions and competition, including a very bad economic situation, the almost famine situation in several parts of Algerian countryside, led to tragic violence. This started in early May, and very quickly caused the abolition of the AML on 14 May 1945,⁴⁷ a week after the end of the Second World War.

Tragic Aftermath

The Second World War in Europe was over on 8 May 1945 when the Allies reached Berlin, and the Axis surrendered. However, the war atrocities were not over for the North Africans. On the very day of German surrender, 8 May 1945, in the Algerian towns of Sétif and Guelma, political demonstrations turned into violent clashes between the protestors, the police and the European settler's private militias.

In fact, the first round of demonstrations in Algeria had already taken place on the First of May when, all over the country, trade unions organized traditional rallies – with official permission. Some nationalist militants took part in these demonstrations, and confronted the forces of order in many cities. They provoked clashes causing few casualties, but leaving many wounded.⁴⁸

A week later, on 8 May 1945, the victory over the Axis was celebrated and French authorities organised demonstrations across the country to symbolise Germany's surrender. As with the First of May gatherings, numbers of different nationalist symbols were also visible in the demonstrations. This led to rioting of varying degrees in many Algerian locations. In the eastern department of Constantine the situation became more dramatic. In Sétif, firing started to be heard, but who fired first – police or demonstrators – or who were the first victims, Algerians or Europeans, remains unclear today. The Algerian demonstrators dispersed all over the city and killed Europeans they came across. The same scene was repeated in the city of

⁴⁶ Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 140 and idem, *L'Algérie amère, 1914-1994* (Paris: La Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1995), 172-3. The European settlers had threatened to provoke riots which would force the government to give up the *Ordonnance du 7.3.1944* and its reforms.

⁴⁷ Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, 263, Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien*, 719 and Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 142.

⁴⁸ Redouane Aïnad-Tabet, *Le 8 mai 1945 en Algérie* (Alger: Office des Publications Universitaires, 1985), 33-8 and Roger Le Tourneau, *Evolution politique de l'Afrique du Nord Musulmane 1920-1961* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1962), 348-9.

Guelma, but the number of European victims was smaller. From these cities, the violence spread into the surrounding rural areas where colonial villages and isolated settler farms were attacked by Algerian armed groups.

The number of European casualties was just over one hundred deaths, and about 150 wounded. In terms of the population of the Constantine district department, about five percent (5%) participated in the insurrection.⁴⁹

France responded very forcefully. Their military forces, including both naval and air forces, participated in the operations. In addition, the colonial administration and private militias of European settlers started cruel reprisals consisting of punitive expeditions which destroyed entire villages, and practising summary executions continuing until almost the end of June 1945. The French historian Charles-André Julien claimed that even some right-wing European settlers considered the repression ‘cruel, merciless and really inhuman in its lack of comprehension.’⁵⁰

Even today the exact number of Algerian victims is unknown, the estimations vary greatly, from 1,500 according to the contemporary *Report of General Paul Tubert*, to the figure of 45,000 presented by the PPA.⁵¹ Probably, the estimate of between 15,000 and 20,000 is not far from the real number of victims.⁵²

As explanations for the insurrection and the massacre of Sétif and Guelma, this chapter has already dealt with the international atmosphere and climate during 1944 to 1945. The items

⁴⁹ Aïnad-Tabet, *Le 8 mai 1945 en Algérie*, 132-4; Julien, *L’Afrique du Nord en marche*, 263.

⁵⁰ «Cruelle, impitoyable et vraiment inhumaine dans son manque de compréhension». See Julien, *L’Afrique du Nord en marche*, 263 and Boucif Mekhaled, *Chroniques d’un massacre, 8 mai 1945. Sétif, Guelma, Kherrata*, préfaces de Mehdi Lallaoui et Jean-Charles Jauffret (Paris: Syros, 1995), 227. Boucif Mekhaled suggests that the violence of repression can be explained by the determination of the European settlers and local administration to show France and the Algerians that the time for reforms was over and that there was no place for national movements in Algeria after the Second World War.

⁵¹ “Rapport à Monsieur le Ministre Plénipotentiaire Gouverneur Général de l’Algérie de la Commission chargée de procéder à une enquête administrative sur les événements qui se sont déroulés dans le département de Constantine, le 8 Mai 1945 et jours suivants,” this report included comments in the text from Tayeb Chentouf and Abderrahim Taleb-Bendiab, “Un Document inédit sur le 8 mai 1945 dans le Constantinois: Le Rapport du Général Tubert,” *RASJEP, Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques* 11, 4 (1974): 289-316. See also Nouschi, *La naissance du nationalisme algérien*, 142, and Pierre René Gazagne, *L’émeute du Constantinois (mai 1945), rapport du 8 octobre 1945* (Alger: Secrétaire général du Gouvernement général de l’Algérie, 1945).

⁵² Alistair Horn, *A Savage War of Peace. Algeria 1954-1962* (London: MacMillan, 1977), 27, fn.; Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien*, 718; Mekhaled, *Chroniques d’un massacre*, 204-9. In 1946, the representatives of the Ulamaa movement in the Algerian parliament presented a figure of 80,000-85,000 victims based on the American sources. Numbers between 15,000 and 20,000 victims is most frequently supported by scientific research. After the tragedy, more or less until today, this debate has been political. See Jean-Louis Planche, *Sétif 1945: histoire d’un massacre annoncé* (Paris: Éditions Perrin, 2006). He suggests a figure of 20,000-25,000 Algerian victims.

of these years included the Conference of San Francisco, the creation of both the Organisation of United Nations and of the Arab League with their favourable attitudes towards all people's right to self-determination, as well as with the rumours about the end of colonialism, and the independence of Algeria. There were many hopes in the collective mind of the Algerians in that spring.⁵³

On the domestic scene, the mass migration to France (where hundreds of thousands of Algerians had worked before the Second World War),⁵⁴ had stopped totally at its outbreak. With the collapse of crops, the famine and, importantly, the epidemic with an increasing death toll, the last year of the war, 1944 to 1945, was the most difficult for the Algerians, especially the rural population.

Of course, the ways in which the demonstrations and the violence developed are important. There are different stories and theories about their spontaneity, and even more, whether they were premeditated and even planned. There is important research literature on this. However, as Charles-André Julien said as early as the 1950s, even if there were plans about armed insurrection, there is no proof that anybody gave orders to execute those plans, or that any probable orders were followed.⁵⁵ Charles-André Julien spoke about 'planned provocation' providing three possibilities – Algerian extremists without connection to political movements, agencies of local colonial administration, or individual representatives of the local police organisation.⁵⁶

⁵³ Chentouf & Taleb-Bendiab, "Un Document inédit sur le 8 mai 1945 dans le Constantinois," 311; Horn, *A Savage War of Peace*, 25, Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, 260 and Mekhaled, *Chroniques d'un massacre*, 89-92. Mekhaled points out that the Algerian political leaders, including Ferhat Abbas, were continuously in contact with responsible individuals among the Allies, and contributed to rumors about the rapid change of Algeria's status at the end of the World War.

⁵⁴ Between the two world wars about 650,000 Algerians left for France. Most stayed there approximately 18 months, so the permanent number of Algerians varied between 80,000 and 200,000. Charles-Robert Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie Contemporaine*, 4e édition, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 73, Carlier, "La première Etoile Nord-Africaine," *RASJEP, Revue Algérienne des Sciences Juridiques, Economiques et Politiques* 9, 4 (1972): 913-4. Carlier notes that, in 1924, the Algerians constituted a smaller minority in France than migrants from other countries. At that time, there were 300,000 Italians and Poles in France. *Ibid.*, 916-7.

⁵⁵ There have been some hypotheses pretending that the PPA were behind the *Forces Arabes de l'Interieur* (FAI), following the model of *Forces Françaises de l'Interieur* (FFI), i.e. resistance inside France during the German occupation. See Ageron, *Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine*, 586 and 587, Harbi, *Le F.L.N., Mirage et Réalité*, 28, *idem*, *L'Algérie et Son Destin. Croyants ou Citoyens* (Paris: Arcantère, 1992), 67-9, Mahsas, *Le Mouvement révolutionnaire en Algérie*, 173-4, as well as Mekhaled, *Chroniques d'un massacre*, 108-10 and William B. Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria 1954-1968* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1968), 51. Mahsas and Mekhaled mention that there were some preparations for the armed struggle by spring 1942, that is, before the Allied invasion.

⁵⁶ Aïnad-Tabet, *Le 8 mai 1945 en Algérie*, 43-55, Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, 263-5. Julien notes the possibility of provocation either from the PPA or European extremists. Aïnad-Tabet looks at different possibilities behind the provocation. For him, both the European settlers and the local French administration wanted to stop the

Equally important are the forms, and especially the motives of colonial repression, which caused the massacre of so many Algerians. It is said that when the attention of the international community and the French government was in Europe, where they celebrated the victory over the Axis, the colonial administration and the European settlers thought that it was the right moment to show everybody that the time for reforms and political concessions was over.⁵⁷

The reforms, those that the *Ordonnance du 7.3.1944* wanted to realize, and the cooperation between the Algerian political movements, were all finished in the tragedy of 1945. From the 1945 Sétif massacre onwards, French policy in Algeria became much more systemically repressive, and expanded into many more domains than before World War Two; this continued until the country's independence in 1962. For instance, different electoral processes were undermined by the disqualification of candidates from Algerian political movements, by their imprisonment, and finally, by the falsification of results. This became so frequent from the second half of the 1940s that practice was called 'elections Naegelen.'⁵⁸

The attitudes and the political behaviour of the European settlers in Algeria also became much more extreme and repressive than before the 1945 events in Sétif. During the violence and massacre of May and June 1945 in the regions of Sétif and Guelma, there was evident cooperation between the colonial public administration, local political representatives and the European settlers' private militias. The methods and the extent of this violence and repression, outside any control and in total illegitimate practice, resulted in their being seen as a subversive movement within the colonial legacy. The impact of this has been very dramatic for Algeria, and also her European population.⁵⁹

political activity of the Algerians, the foreigners and the fascists aimed to weaken France. How the violence really started is not known even today.

⁵⁷ European settlers in Algeria had managed to stop the reforms in February 1919, the co-called 'Jonnart Laws,' they had managed to stop the 'Blum-Violette project' during the time of Popular Front in the second half of the 1930s, and with the 1945 massacre they managed to stop the reforms of *the Ordonnance du 7.3.1944*. Charles-Julien emphasized that Sétif 1945 strengthened their belief that they could continue the domination of the Algerians forever. See Julien, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche*, 265-6.

⁵⁸ 'Elections Naegelen' meant arranged elections and falsified election results named after General Governor of Algeria, Marcel-Edmond Naegelen who started this practice. See Zouhir Mebarki, "Les 'élections Naegelen', c'est quoi?", *L'Expression – Le Quotidien* (published on December 24, 2011), <http://www.lexpressiondz.com/edito/145034-les-elections-naegelen-c-est-quoi.html> (retrieved on July 16, 2018).

⁵⁹ What happened in Guelma in 1945 is also seen as a foreshadowing of the extreme right terrorist movement of *Organisation de l'Armée Secrète* (*Secret Army Organization*; OAS), during the last years of Algerian independence war, 1961-1962. The OAS terrorized both the European and Algerian population, firstly in order to maintain Algérie Française (French Algeria) within the French Republic, and then to apply the scorched-earth policy obliging the European settlers to leave the country. Jean-Pierre Peyroulon, *Guelma, 1945 – Une subversion française dans l'Algérie coloniale* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2009).

For the Algerians, the massacre at Sétif and Guelma in 1945 constituted then, and remains, a real shock and tragedy. Almost everything in the country's evolution during the Second World War, especially after the Allied disembarkation in North Africa, had encouraged the Algerians to believe in a more radiant post-war future. The factors contributing to these expectations included the attitudes of the Allies, the approaches from the Free French and de Gaulle, either in the discourse of Constantine, or in the *Ordonnance du 7.3.1944*. In addition, the participation of the Algerians in the Italian and French campaigns, and in the final victory over the Axis in Berlin, were also significant. If the specific influence of the 1945 massacre was that all stakeholders within the colonial reality became more radicalised, the effect of this on the Algerians was the most intense.

The violence of May-June 1945 was the first serious armed conflict between the French and the Algerians since World War One (1916). Further events of that type now also became possible. The 1945 massacre had at least five different kinds of impacts on Algerians. First, despite the general amnesty of May 1946, the main political movements remained prohibited. This obliged the Algerian political movements to create new parties, which were apparently legal, to replace those which were forbidden, but which continued to exist underground, but in secret forms. Some of these parties even had special clandestine organisations for preparing armed action.

The second impact of the 1945 massacre was the reduction of what had existed in the AML during the final year of the war, that is, the level of cooperation between the Algerian political movements and parties. Instead of seeking cooperation, each party tried to reconstruct its profile after the experience of 1945, and in the situation where the 4th Republic and the *French Union* were created. This was especially the case in terms of the elite and the leadership of the political movements. But the basic members of these movements, remained closer to their fellows in other movements because of what they held in common. Often, this perspective was reflected in the double or possibly multiple memberships across several Algerian political parties.

More generally, it can be said that because of the 1945 massacre, all the Algerian political movements faced an internal crisis, as well as a crisis between them, which involved their relationships. This was perhaps one reason explaining why they were unable to propose a change, or any alternative structure in the colonial relationship.

It is also noticeable that possibly the most important consequence of the 1945 massacre was the traumatising, and moreover, the radicalisation of a whole generation of Algerians,

especially its youth. The young could neither understand nor accept that the massacre was the Free France response and compensation for the Algerian war effort and sacrifice towards the liberation of France. Almost everybody in Algeria felt, and still feels, affected by the 1945 tragedy.⁶⁰ A part of the population, particularly young Algerians went underground; in 1945 or soon after, it was in the maquis that many of them also started to prepare for the actual armed struggle, and since then, were merely waiting for the right moment.

In the summer of 1945, General Duval, the commander of French troops in the country, told European settlers in Algeria that ‘With this repression I give you ten years of peace, do proceed to the reforms, otherwise the violence will start again.’⁶¹ The Algerian War of Independence started nine and half years later, on 1 November 1954.

Accounts

The Second World War changed many things in Africa. Almost all these changes became visible in the colonial context, in the colonial relationship, between Europe and Africa. These changes could be seen in the behaviour of the various stakeholders in the colonial relationship. It was evident in the ways that the political powers in the metropolis were anticipating their future, and the future of their colonial empires. In addition, the colonisers in the colonies also started to see their future in different ways. However, the deepest and the most radical changes took place among the colonised people, within their political movements, and their individual human attitudes.

Thus, it can be concluded that there were five different main battlefields and campaigns for the Africans during the Second World War. In 1940, there were campaigns in Western Africa (mostly in French colonies), then in Eastern Africa around Ethiopia. Later, there were two major campaigns in North Africa, first against the Italians, and then between Rommel and

⁶⁰ An idea of how sensitive the memory of the 1945 massacre remains can be seen in recent articles such as Farouk Zoghbi, “Massacres du 8 Mai 1945: Mémoire et Histoire,” *El Moudjahid. Quotidien National d’Information* (published on May 6, 2018), <http://www.elmoudjahid.com/fr/actualites/123186> (retrieved on May 8, 2018) and Madjid Makedhi, “Mohamed El Korso. Historien et président de la fondation du 8 Mai 1945: « J’ai un grand espoir de voir cette proposition de loi aboutir »,” *El Watan.com. Le Quotidien Indépendant* (published on Novembre 10, 2008), <https://www.dzairnews.com/articles/elwatan-mohamed-el-korso-historien-et-ancien-president-de-la-fondation-du-8-mai-1945-l-ecriture-de-l-histoire-procede-de-la-liberte-de-pensee> (retrieved on June 15, 2018). In February 2005, Hubert Colin de Verdière, France’s ambassador to Algeria, formally apologized for the massacre, calling it an ‘inexcusable tragedy,’ in what was described as ‘the most explicit comments by the French state on the massacre.’ The Algerians have created at least one association and one foundation to maintain the memory of the 1945 massacre. The debate about 1945 remains open.

⁶¹ Kaddache, *Histoire du nationalisme algérien*, 721; Mekhaled, *Chroniques d’un massacre*, 229 and 231, fn. 8; Nouschi, *L’Algérie amère, 1914-1994*, 176.

Montgomery in Libyan Benghazi and the Egyptian Western Desert, and secondly, *Operation Torch*, the disembarkation of the Allies in Morocco and Algeria in November 1942. For the Africans, the fifth battlefield and campaigns were those in Europe, in Italy, France and Germany, and ending in Berlin in spring 1945.

From the point of view of both the coloniser and the colonised, the international settings had changed dramatically during World War Two. The emergence of new organisations like the UN or the Arab League was incredibly important. They were forums where the future of the world could be debated. But even more important was that they presented a world view which was very critical towards colonial realities, which, as a matter of fact, were no longer morally acceptable. In a way, if the UN was an attempt to remake an improved version of the League of Nations, then the colonial empires also needed to change. They were facing something of an ultimatum – change your profile or vanish. That explains why the main European colonial empires tried to change and renew their structures.

Between the two World Wars, the British Empire had tried to renew its structures by formally creating the British Commonwealth of Nations through the Statute of Westminster in 1931. During World War Two it became obvious that it would be impossible to restore the pre-war colonial status quo at the end of the conflict. After some hesitation, the Commonwealth was recreated by removing the first word ‘British’, so that from 1949, ‘only’ the ‘Commonwealth of Nations’ exists where member states are ‘free and equal.’⁶²

In the French case, the evolution was a little different. In spite of de Gaulle’s speech in Brazzaville January-February 1944, there was no mention of the possible independence of colonies in any public documents. The renewal of France itself was carried out in association with the former Empire. In 1946, the constitution was elaborated for the IV Republic and the French Union.

All inhabitants of the metropolis and the colonies became equally French by citizenship. After a couple of failures and a few changes, the constitution draft was finally accepted by the Constitutional Assembly on 29 September 1946. Even if the citizens were equal by nationality, their electoral status varied. Those living in the metropolis, and those few in the colonies who had full French civil status voted for the first college, and the rest, a large majority of the population in the French Union, voted for the second college. This Constitution was accepted by referendum on 13 October 1946, and was applied from 24 December 1946 onwards. The

⁶² This prevailed until Britain joined the European Union in 1973. It reduced commercial connections with the dominions and colonies; these no longer received the free entries to British markets as they had previously.

French Union only integrated some tens of thousands of the colonial elite into national politics. Otherwise, French Union was not really a success story, ending in 1958 with the IV Republic.⁶³

The Second World War had a huge impact on political movements in African countries. In many countries, those whose prototypes had already emerged between the world wars, were able to modernise their structures and performances. As has already been seen in the case of Algeria, the AML, The Friends of the Manifesto and Freedom, represented a new kind of political movement based on previous experiences. Its failure resulted in entirely new kinds of parties facing the post-World War Two challenges. In North Africa, a situation akin to that in Algeria also developed in Morocco and Tunisia, where Istiqlal and Neo-Destour confronted the colonial power, and in 1956 had gained the independence of their countries.

In French West and Equatorial Africa where an impressive number of new political parties emerged, there was also a serious attempt to unify all these new forces in a region-wide political movement. At the Bamako conference of October 1946, these different parties created Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (African Democratic Assembly or African Democratic Rally; RDA), as their common organ. In the second half of the 1940s, 16 national (or 'local') parties had already joined the RDA, which then became the largest political party in Africa at that time. In spite of various crises and difficulties, the RDA managed to maintain cohesion in preparing the French African colonies for peaceful decolonisation. This was then realised in the early 1960s when the RDA had already disappeared. In fact, the RDA had a clear regional role and has been seen as one of the first really Pan-African movements. Its story ended in the turmoil leading France and French Union from the IV to V Republic in 1958.⁶⁴

The consequences of the Second World War elsewhere in Africa were approximately the same as in French West and Equatorial Africa. In relation to British colonies in Africa, and even more generally the whole British colonial empire, the Pan-African Congress in Manchester of 15-21 October 1945 was extremely important, and had far-reaching impacts.⁶⁵

⁶³ In 1956, there was an attempt to refresh the *French Union* by the 'Loi-cadre de Gaston Defferre.' In reality, it was, first of all, an attempt to respond to the war in Algeria as well as to the recent independence of Morocco and Tunisia. The new constitution of the V Republic in October 1958 created the *French Community* (*Communauté Française*) to replace the *French Union*. The *French Community* was declared 'caduc' ('abolished') in March 1961. Today, *La Francophonie*, that is *The Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), is continuing the performances of *French Union* and the *French Community*.

⁶⁴ The RDA partially ended following the 1958 election when Guinea of Segou Touré voted for independence, voting "No" to France.

⁶⁵ The Manchester Congress was the 5th Pan-African Congress after the first in London during 1900. Political leaders as Kwame Nkrumah from Ghana (Gold Coast), Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, as well as Jomo Kenyatta from Kenya, were participants. These leaders were all the main architects in the processes leading their countries to independence in the 1950s (Ghana) and 1960s. In May 1963, their influence helped in

The Manchester Congress participants included, besides those from the African continent, also those of African origin from the Caribbean and the USA. The main theme was, of course, decolonisation, but an important part of the debates also dealt with the problems of racism more generally, and so had an impact on the entire British colonial empire as well as on other Europeans. Political movements accelerated their activities in all British African colonies, the most difficult independence processes emerged in Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya.

The Belgium and Portuguese colonies in Africa followed the British and French path, but with different timing. In the Belgian Congo, today Zaire, it was only 1947 when the Zaireans were allowed to participate for the first time in their country's administration. Nevertheless, the Congo's evolution ended in the violent crisis just after independence at the beginning of the 1960s. In what happened to the Portuguese colonial empire, the Second World War had perhaps less direct impacts than those affecting other European possessions in Africa; the colonies only gained their independence in the 1970s.

The Second World War was really won by 'anti-colonial' super powers – the USA and the Soviet Union. The colonial masters, first in the colonial metropolis of France, but also in the United Kingdom, were bombed and occupied; these nations clearly played the secondary role among the Allies. Besides all this 'macro-development,' the massive participation of the individual people, individual African soldiers, was a 'primus motor', and so the principal propellant for all this evolution. That is why it is so important to pay attention to the number of Africans participating into the Second World War in different ways, mostly as soldiers, of course. Africans participated massively in all five main battlefields, including Europe. Participation in all these battlefields meant that the African emerged as an individual person, becoming a full actor, a full subject of history.

This participation changed the ways in which the Africans looked upon the international order, upon colonial regimes, and upon Europe, which was now quarrelsome and vulnerable. It concerned the colonial masters, which were now seen as weak and equally mortal. In 1945, the African soldiers felt that they had greatly contributed to the victory over Germany and the Axis, and that they had participated in the liberation of their colonial masters. Africans, especially African soldiers, now saw their own individual position differently, as well as their possibilities of changing their own individual conditions and lives. They also viewed the positions of their own countries, and their futures differently.

formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), an association of independent African states and nationalist groups.

In this perspective, the number of Africans, especially soldiers, participating in all these battlefields is, of course, extremely important. Unfortunately, the state of historical research is very modest about this issue. In many cases, for several reasons, often technical, these numbers are unknown. Until *Operation Torch*, the Allied landing in North Africa on 8 November 1942, African battlefields consisted of three major sections. In French Equatorial Africa, the FFL consisted mainly of locally recruited soldiers. Many had no kind of official contracts concerning their FFL engagement.⁶⁶ On the northern front, the Libyan-Egyptian border as well as in the East-African war theatre, the Allied forces mostly consisted of local British Commonwealth troops, but also those from Asian and Middle-Eastern colonies. Once again, the exact number of Africans remains unknown.

At the beginning of the FFL military activities, there were about 30,000 African soldiers from French Equatorial Africa who crossed the Sahara in 1941 towards the battle of Bir Hakeim. After *Operation Torch* in 1942, when the French authorities did their best to mobilize the maximum of the Maghrebins into the Allied war efforts, the number of FFL soldiers rose significantly. At the point of the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and the beginning of the Italian campaign, the French Expeditionary Corps consisted of 100,000-112,000 soldiers, about 60 percent of them were Maghrebins, mostly Moroccans. A year later in August 1944, when the Allies invaded Southern France by landing in Provence, the size of the French Liberation Army was about 260,000 soldiers, 10 percent of them came from Charles de Gaulle's FFL, and 90 percent from North Africa, mainly Algeria,⁶⁷ More than 30 countries, mostly African, contributed to the French Liberation Army between November 1942 and May 1945, its number varied between 260,000 and 270,000 soldiers.

In fact, the North Africans, as well as soldiers from French West and Equatorial Africa, participated in the Allied war efforts until the conquest of Berlin and the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, it was only during the first decade of the third millenary that, France, for example, officially recognized the efforts of African soldiers in the European war theatre, and in her liberation.

Compared with the French situation, the number of soldiers from the British African colonies participating in the Second World War, is more difficult to estimate. One of the main reasons for this difficulty is that troops from British African colonies fought, as well as in Africa

⁶⁶ The story of the FFL finished on 1 August 1943 when it joined the French African Army, and continued its combat as a part of French Liberation Army until the end of the Second World War.

⁶⁷ Concerning the North Africans, 52 percent were Algerians and 48 percent Europeans living in Algeria.

and Europe, in Asia, in India, but firstly in Burma (Myanmar), and in the Pacific Islands against Japanese forces. Altogether, their number is estimated at, with rotations, around one million service men.⁶⁸ The British African soldiers came from West Africa, but also from Sudan, Eastern and Southern Africa, as well as from Yemen and India. In 1945 when the war was over, there were about 300,000 African soldiers serving with British forces in southern Europe, in North Africa, in the Middle East and Asia, as well as in Africa itself. It took about two years to demobilise those men to post-war life in African colonies.

During the Second World War, the Africans also participated in the Axis war efforts. When the Italians tried to invade Egypt and reach the Suez Canal in 1940, there were about two and half times more local than Italian soldiers; those locals were recruited mostly from Libya, with very few from Egypt.

However, it is also said that for the Africans from Italian colonies, the Second World War had really started in 1935 when Italy invaded Ethiopia. In fact, the Ethiopian War continued until May 1941 when Haile Selassie returned to Addis Ababa. Italy had created a colonial army called *Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniali (Royal Corps of Colonial Troops; RCTC)*, it was composed of combatants from Eritrea, Somalia, and Libya. Later, Italy also used local and more 'tribal' auxiliary armed forces in her war efforts within the East-African campaign. It is very difficult to decide on the total number of African soldiers fighting for Italy, the Eritreans alone are estimated to have numbered about 60,000.

The issue of the German Wehrmacht and African soldiers is very complicated, there are few studies and very little statistical information. Many reasons exist for this, probably two are more important than others. First, Germany had practically no African colonies at the beginning of the World War Two. Second, the participation of Africans in Nazi-Germany's military forces contradicted the prevailing racial doctrines.

Nevertheless, there were at least three different ways by which Africans were incorporated in German military forces. First, there were those who were originally from old German African colonies in Western, Southern or Eastern Africa, and who were living in Germany before the outbreak of the war.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ David Killingray with Martin Plaut, *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Wodbridge: James Currey, 2010). Also see "African participants in the Second World War," <http://www.mgtrust.org/afr2.htm> (retrieved on August 4, 2018) about 375,000 Africans from British colonies fought with Allied forces during the Second World War, cf. fn. 6 in this article.

⁶⁹ The so-called 'Afro-Germans' are not taken into the consideration here. They were the children of German women and those African soldiers who served in the Rhineland occupation troops. In France's occupation troops there were about 40,000 African soldiers.

Secondly came those who were voluntarily either in the *Waffen SS*, or later in the *Wehrmacht*. In relation to the Middle East, but also North Africa, maybe the most famous case is the *Freies Arabien Legion (Free Arabian Legion)*. Its soldiers came, first of all, from the Middle East and then Central Asia. However, there were also representatives from all the five North African countries. In addition, ethnic entities such as Senoussi and Tuaregs were represented among these volunteers. The same also applies to some specific cases from the British and French South of Sahara African colonies.

Thirdly, there were an important number of Africans as prisoners of war in German camps in various theatres of war, as well as in Germany itself. Altogether, the Germans took some 100,000 French African troops as prisoners, and some of them were trapped into or pressed to join German military forces. One characteristic of these African soldiers in German military forces is that there are few numerical estimations of their number.⁷⁰ Even if their number remains modest, it is not insignificant. It shows us that every single phenomena in the Second World War had an 'African dimension', which means that Africans had individual experiences in all the different features of the Second World War.⁷¹

In the long run, it was the beginning of the end of the 500 year old European colonial domination, which became the most important consequence of the Second World War. Moreover, here the African experience played a major role. Even the Cold War was a kind of a side issue compared to decolonisation.

The central position of Europe, and its stepchild, the USA, is clearly on the way to dilution. The emergence and strengthening of the so-called BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is a strong sign of these new perspectives where Africa will play an increasing role because of her human and also economic potential.

⁷⁰ It is difficult to put forward any estimation. My personal guess is a few tens of thousands of soldiers.

⁷¹ In this essay to understand the Second World War and the Africans, the soldiers with African origins from USA and the Caribbeans and included in Allied Forces, are not taken into consideration separately.