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***The Role of Revolutionary Theater in the
Resistance Against French Colonialism"
Awlad Kasbah"by Abdel HalimRaïs as a Model***

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Abstract :

Arab resistance literature developed significantly during the period of European colonization of the Arab world in the 19th and 20th centuries. Literary works during this period advocated for national liberation and resistance against foreign occupation. Theater is considered one of the most powerful tools of this literature. It expresses the issues faced by peoples and the injustices they endure, explicitly calling for resistance against colonialism and raising awareness among the masses. It works to document their struggles and highlight their causes in the pursuit of freedom, as happened in Algeria and other African countries through plays that exposed the brutality of the colonizer and amplified the voice of nationalism. Among the most important plays that contributed to spreading the culture of resistance is "Awlad al-Qasbah" (Children of the Casbah) by Abdelhalim Rais.

Keywords: resistance literature; revolutionary theater; French colonialism; Awlad kasbah.

I. Revolutionary theater:

The Algerian Revolution is one of the most important events that dominated a large area of Algerian literature, both classical and popular. It was the raw material for many literary genres, such as poetry, short stories, novels, and theater. The latter, who was forced to go abroad and support the revolution from France and Tunisia, turned directly to drawing inspiration from the events, values and principles of the revolution, and thus plays appeared that wrote themselves, including (*Awlad al-Qasbah*) by Abdel Halim Rais.

The play "*The Casbah Boys*" is a unique creative work that depicts the heroism and sacrifices of the members of a family who resisted French colonialism, each in his own unique way and with different techniques. It is an attempt by the writer to spread awareness among the people to rally around the revolution and support it from various segments and in various ways.

Algerian theatre was founded in the shadow of the national resistance to the French occupation, and was inspired by its manifestations and saturated with the ambitions of searching for the self and expressing identity. It was a popular theatre rich in images of resistance in its suggestive and explicit expressions (Thlilani, 2007, p. 50).

In the early 1920s, following the failure of attempts to write plays in classical Arabic, actors Allalou and Dahmoun began producing comedies in the form of humorous, rough plays written in colloquial Arabic. These plays were first performed at the Corsal Theatre in 1926 and were a great success (Al-Ra'i, 199, pp. 460-461)

Professor Mustafa, the writer of these plays, describes them as not being works in the true sense of the word. Rather, they were theatrical preparations based, for their raw material, on the popular tales of Juha and the stories of One Thousand and One Nights.

In the 1930s, Algerian theatre experienced a golden age under Rachid Ksentini, who was the first to introduce the concept of improvised performance to Algerian theatre. In her book, **Algerian Theatre**, Erlette Roth states that Rachid Ksentini wrote more than 100 plays and sketches and nearly 1,000 songs (Al-Ra'i, 1999, p. 461).

If the descendants of Allal (Allalou) had the merit of laying the cornerstone for the specificities of this theatre, then Rachid Ksentini had the merit of establishing the pillars, and the Algerian theatre gained its true existence and presence in various parts of Algeria after the completion of the theatrical experience at the hands of Muhyiddin Bashtarzi, in addition to many of the founders working with them, including: Mohamed Mansali - Ibrahim Dahmoun - Hassan Kateb - Si Moh - Mohamed Farsi - Moussa Khaddaoui - Mansouri - Abdel Aziz Lakhal - Allal Al-Arfawi (Thlilani, 2007, p. 50).

"The Algerian theatre in general, after the World War and its events, continued to search for a new position, especially after the massacres of May 8, 1945, influenced by those events and benefiting from the rehabilitation of the theatre during the early stages of its emergence, establishing in that a new trend that would become known as political theatre, which would develop during the liberation revolution into a revolutionary

theatre that criticised the prevailing political conditions through which the French administration was moving as an occupying power. The most prominent figures in this new trend are Mohamed El-Toury, Mustafa Kasdrli, Abdel Halim Rais, Mustafa Kateb, and Kateb Yacine (...). With the outbreak of the victorious liberation revolution of 1954, many Algerian playwrights emigrated to France and other Arab countries. Those who remained remained silent or worked within a framework that would not provoke the colonial administration against them, otherwise their work would be considered a product of the revolution (Qarqoua, 2009, pp. 83-85).

Realism was the method of the Revolution Theatre, which truly expressed the glorious November Revolution in the cities and mountains. The playwright Abdel Halim Rais dealt with the daily events that the Algerian revolution was experiencing and reflected them on the stage in simple, popular language (Bayoud, 2011, p. 163.). In commitment to conveying the struggle's thought in an understandable language that urges the fight against the colonizer, Abdel Halim Rais says: "For us, the theater represents a framework for the struggle, because the Algerian theater is a committed theater, working at the heart of the revolution." We represent a popular theatre living in a state of war, and it is natural for us as artists to think and act as fighters. At this stage of the national struggle, our realistic theatre must be the theatre of the National Liberation Front. Through it, we translate the reality of the Algerian people (Lambarkia, 2007, p. 160.).

Therefore, Algerian theatre has taken on a revolutionary, liberationist tone, aiming to raise awareness and disseminate the principles and goals of the revolution. The most prominent of these goals are:

- a) Expressing the concerns of the Algerian people
- b) Promoting the national cause internationally
- c) Involving art and theater in the struggle against French colonialism.
- d) Exposing French economic policies based on domination, oppression, and the distortion of the Algerian Arab-Islamic national identity (Qarqoua, 2009, p. 85).

The Algerian theatre is closely linked to the national resistance, due to the factors and circumstances of its emergence. It is a cultural and civilisational weapon that resisted colonialism at the level of restoring the deep structures that were destroyed. The presence of the resistance in this theatre was multifaceted and manifested (Thlilani, 2007, p. 85). It was carried by many texts written outside the country, especially in Tunisia, because their authors were either students, refugees, or members of the artistic group of the Liberation Front (Lambarkia, 2007, p. 163). Among the most important plays that accompanied the revolution and in which the struggle thought was evident, we find:

1-The play "The Encircled Corpse" by Kateb Yacine, which was first published in the French magazine "Esprit" in December 1954 and January 1955, was performed at the Molière Theatre in Brussels on November 25 and 26, 1958, and then in Paris in April 1959 by the "Jean-Marie Sereau" troupe, who played the role of Lakhdar in the play. Through this play, one of the first to address the Algerian Revolution, Kateb Yacine

reveals the true nature of Algeria's tragedy to world public opinion. He sang the praises of the Revolution and Algeria, described the war of extermination waged by France, and expressed the people's pain and hopes with unparalleled power.

2-The play "The Last Door" by Ashraf Mustafa is considered the first Algerian theatrical text published in Tunisia about the Algerian revolution in *Al-Fikr* magazine during the month of July 1957. It was written in French and was sent by its author to this magazine from "La Santé" prison in Paris, where he was imprisoned with a group of leaders of the Algerian revolution. The magazine's staff translated it, and Saad Allah Abu Al-Qasim commented on this play, saying: "It is a play that carries new features of reality and struggle together. It depicts the Algerian people as having gotten rid of their confusion and beginning to feel their difficult path, which they believe will not be easy to traverse. The play gives an indication of the beginning of the decisive battle." Given the importance of this text, the Algerian students from Zaytouna created a theatre group and performed this play under the supervision of Saleh Al-Kharfi.

3-The play "Longing for the Mountain" by Al-Kharfi Saleh is a resistance play that depicts in four acts the sacrifices and heroism of the Algerian people during the liberation revolution. It was written in 1957 and performed as part of the theatrical activities of Algerian students in Tunisia (Thunder website, cultural section).

4-The play "The Death of Tyrants" by Abdallah Rikibi, a play published in 1959, in which the writer recalls the dawn of the liberation revolution. The play depicts, in four acts, the secret meetings of the leaders and gives a picture of the general political and social situation prevailing in Algeria on the eve of the outbreak of the revolution. It highlights the people's despair of the politicians because of their divisions and, consequently, the general readiness of the people to engage in armed struggle after the failure of the struggle. The play presents scenes of the outbreak of the revolution and highlights the panic of colonialism and its hideous revenge against the defenceless Algerian people. The play concludes with a scene of the death of the tyrants and the liberation of the homeland (Thlilani, 2007 pp. 124-125).

5-The National Liberation Front's Artistic Troupe: This troupe was founded in March 1957 in exile in Tunisia under the leadership of Mustafa Kateb in response to the call of the National Liberation Front. It comprised thirty-five members divided into two sections: one for theatre and the other for vocal arts and folk dance (Thlilani, 2007 pp. 93-95).

The theatrical activity of this group was represented by presenting four plays, in order:

a. The play "Towards the Light" was produced on April 15, 1958, written and directed by "Mustafa Kateb". The show is a collection of scenes from our immortal struggle. The story begins with a scene of an Algerian youth who was captured by the misguided and tortured in the most horrific way. Then he was thrown into prison, in a state that made the viewer expect his death from moment to moment. His eyes closed and images of his homeland invaded his mind in the form of memories of chapters of his life, his older brother's wedding, and his travels... Through these short scenes, we see his upbringing,

his childhood, his circumcision... and through these ordinary incidents, we pass through all parts of Algeria, hear its songs, are captivated by its beauty, feel sorrow over its pain, and are delighted by its dances and melodies in performances characterized by vitality, color, cohesion, and harmony (Bayoud, 2011, pp.150-151).

b. The play **"Sons of the Casbah"** was produced in 1959 and was written by Abdel Halim Raïs and directed by Mustafa Kateb. This play, which consists of three acts and four scenes, embodied the greatness of the liberation revolution and portrayed the image of the sacrifices and heroic values made by the Algerian people through a family in which each member represented the heroism of an entire segment... ((Bayoud, 2011, pp.152-153).

c. The play **"The Immortals"** was produced in April 1960. It was written by Abdel Halim Raïs and directed by Mustafa Kateb. It depicts live scenes from the heart of the battles waged by the National Liberation Army. It was the best expression of this combative aspect of the glorious November Revolution, shedding light on the events that the revolution was experiencing and reflecting an aspect of the reality of a turbulent Algeria.

d. The play **"Blood of the Free"** was produced in 1961 and was written by Abdel Halim Raïs and directed by Mustafa Kateb. This play embodies the values and supreme principles of the Algerian Revolution, the suffering of the Mujahideen in the mountains during the days of armed resistance, and the solidarity of the revolutionaries in life and goals. The events of the play take place in the mountains in the stronghold of a group of revolutionaries... the respect of the Mujahideen for each other and their coexistence among them, and the conviction of the revolutionaries in the continuity of the revolution until independence and national sovereignty are achieved (Thlilani, 2007 pp.97-98).

II. Aspects of resistance against colonialism in the play "Awlad al-Qasbah" by Abdel Halim Raïs:

A play in Algerian colloquial Arabic, the events of which take place in an Arab house in Douira in the Casbah of the capital, on a summer evening in 1957. It consists of three acts and four scenes. It consists of the following characters: Father Hamdan, mother Yamina, eldest son Tawfiq, middle son Omar, youngest son Hamid, daughter-in-law Maryam, and fighter Mimi, in addition to other characters. This family is dominated by the obsession with revolution and the national duty to liberate the homeland and participate in the struggle despite the difference and diversity of roles and the different positions, techniques and images of resistance, which we will present as follows:

1- The pseudonym technique: This technique was embodied by both the eldest son, Tawfiq, and the female mujahid, Mimi. Tawfiq led a battalion of mujahideen under the pseudonym "Si Hisham," in order to maintain the complete secrecy of the revolution's secrets. This was in addition to preventing the colonizers from accessing members of the army through their relatives and acquaintances, using their real names. Although Tawfiq faced many difficulties, misunderstandings, and pressing questions from his family, which led to disagreements and doubts about his patriotism, he did not reveal his revolutionary identity in order to preserve the secrets of the revolution. This is evident in his conflict with his brother Omar regarding his work with the enemy in:

-Omar: Oh... you don't have anyone to talk to, or why don't you like to talk about politics? Why are you afraid that someone might sell you out? Is this your father or your brother? Why don't you like to send your master to the countryside? Were you afraid that we would gain independence and you wouldn't come back as a commissioner? (Raïs, , 2000, p. 23)

Then it is revealed to Omar that Tawfiq is none other than Mr. Hisham, known for his heroic revolutionary deeds. This is after the doctor visits Hamdan's house to treat Hamid's wound. The doctor calls Tawfiq and addresses him as Mr. Hisham. Omar is delighted and gives Tawfiq a military salute and hugs him. In addition to the conflict between the two brothers, there is the mother's fear for her son, which does not prevent Tawfiq from surrounding himself and his work with complete secrecy, and this is evident in:

After one of the traitorous agents is killed by the Liberation Army soldiers, the mother is terrified about the fate of her son Tawfiq, who works with the enemy police:

- Mother: Tawfiq, did anything happen to you with the Khawa? Tell me.

- Tawfiq: (Smiling) What do you want to happen to me with them?

- Mother: I know, I'm telling you, they made you swear to stop working... My son, if that's the case, stop. I don't want anything to happen to you like the inspector they killed today (Raïs, , 2000, p. 21).

The same thing happened with the mujahid Mimi, who was carrying important secret documents related to a large group of mujahideen and was being pursued by the occupation soldiers, so she took refuge with the Hamdan family: Mimi knocked on the door, calling for help:

-Hamdan: What are you?

-Mimi:I'm a mujahida and the soldiers are behind me(Raïs, 2000, p. 26).

2- The technique of disguising oneself as the enemy:

This technique embodies the mujahid Mimi, who dresses up as enemy women and resembles them in all aspects. To overcome the colonizer's doubts about its identity and affiliation, and to enable it to carry out its revolutionary mission to the fullest extent and without obstacles, this is evident in:

-Mimi: (from outside) The rain is sweet, for God's sake, it is sweet. (Hamid opens the door and a girl wearing modern clothes enters... the whole family is in the basement.) I am in your hands, the soldiers are behind me(Raïs, , 2000, p. 26).

3- Technique of disguising yourself as a woman:

This is evident in the character played by the middle son, Omar:

- Omar: Good evening to you (while wearing a woman's blanket)
- Mother: We recognize this voice.
- Omar (pulls off the blanket, revealing the machine gun he's holding) You know, Mom
- Attendees: Omar (Omar places the blanket and the machine gun on the table) (Raïs, , 2000, p. 70)

This is a well-known technique used by male personnel to avoid enemy surveillance and tracking, making it easier for them to move around and transport weapons and documents.

4- The technique of pretending madness and alcohol addiction:

This technique is also embodied by the middle son Omar, who pretends to be drunk, addicted, and indifferent to what is happening around him, while this allows him to move between the enemy officers who mock his drunkenness and his actions or his funny behavior. While Omar was collecting all the news and movements from them and sending them to the Liberation Army, a technique that was as adventurous and dangerous as it was intelligent and shrewd. Like his brother Tawfiq, Omar maintained the appearance of a drunkard, even in front of his family, who were often offended by his behavior and urged him to stay away from alcohol and join the liberation revolution. Despite this, Omar maintained the secrecy of his activities under the cover of debauchery, while his mission was to protect his brother Tawfiq, known as Mr. Hisham.

5- The technique of pretending to be loyal to the enemy:

This image was embodied in the character of the eldest son, Tawfiq, who worked for the enemy authorities as a policeman, which made him gain their trust despite his disagreement with his brothers, Omar and Hamid, about his patriotism because of this work, which was considered a betrayal of the Liberation Army and the revolution. Despite the difficulty of maintaining this position due to the difficulties on both sides, Tawfiq was able to gain the trust of the French authorities and use his position to protect the revolution and its fighters. This is evident in his confrontation with the enemy officers when they followed Mimi to Hamdan's house, opening the door and answering the officer's questions about him being a member of the French authorities, thus saving the fighter.

6- Subscription payment for those unable to participate with weapons:

This image was embodied by both the father Hamdan and the school-aged son Hamid. Everyone who could not support the revolution with weapons did so by paying the membership fees in the National Liberation Front. It is a technique that encourages

everyone who is unable to engage in jihad with their own souls to try to participate in the revolution by paying money to support the revolution financially and provide it with clothing, weapons and food. This is evident in the words of Hamdan the father and Hamid the son:

-Hamdan: I'll finish my subscription anyway...

-Hamid: Me too, and maybe Omar and good luck next time, but that's not enough... (Raïs, , 2000, p. 16)

In addition to the aforementioned techniques, there are other techniques and images that highlight the methods and roles of resistance played by many of the figures mentioned by Abdel Halim Raïs, such as the image of the son Hamid, who plays a reconnaissance role to monitor the road for the mujahida Maryam, the image of the messenger Si Amar, who plays the role of investigation and transferring information to Si Hisham and Hamdan, even the role played by all segments of society in their various positions and tasks, as Father Hamdan said when he addressed his son Hamid, praising the role of his predecessors in defending the homeland:

Hamdan: ... My wish will come true, my son, that the generations before you were not asleep... The speeches on the platform, the actor in the theater, the singer with his song, the editors of political newspapers and those who wrote articles about them... the owners of the printing presses distributing leaflets and so on. All of this and all of this, and they were feeding the spirit of revolution that was living in the people and jealously preserving that fire that would reach the light and that was lit on the first of November and will not be extinguished, God willing, until Independence Day... (Raïs, , 2000, p. 16)

Here, Abdel Halim Raïs mentions the role played by all segments of society in sparking the November Revolution. Through the play "Sons of the Casbah" and the story of the Hamdan family, he calls for people to rally around the revolution and support it in various ways and through various tasks, many of which are highlighted by the characters and members of the family. Every individual can contribute in one way or another to supporting the revolution and the revolutionaries.

III. Conclusion

"Sons of the Casbah" by Abdelhalim Raïs is truly one of the greatest realistic revolutionary plays ever written, a testament to the greatness of the Algerian Revolution and the greatness of its people and fighters. The author faithfully conveys the significant roles and sublime contributions made by members of a family from the Casbah neighborhood. Despite their diverse positions and responsibilities, they all pursued a single goal: the struggle against the colonialists and the liberation of the homeland. They embraced the revolution and defended it with their lives and treasures until the very last moment. The author highlights various military and defensive techniques and numerous methods that help support and assist the revolution. All citizens have to do is choose one of these to rally around the revolution.

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