



The Revolutionary Folksongs during and after the Algerian War of Independence in the Region of Djebala, Tlemcen

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Abstract :

The revolutionary folk song chronicled the Algerians' suffering during the French colonization, the battles, the life of the fighters, and their heroism for the liberation of Algeria. It introduced some of the revolution's leaders, fighters, and martyrs, and women were among the groups that preserved this historical heritage by chanting songs before and after independence. It preserves the customs, traditions, and beliefs of a popular group transmitted orally from one generation to another, carrying a considerable amount of the cultural heritage of the Algerian people. This study sheds light on the role of the revolutionary folk song as a complementary source to the archival document for writing the history of the Algerian Revolution.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Revolutionary folksongs witnessed the Algerians' pain and misery during the French colonization. Their topics dealt with the combats, the Algerian fighters "Almoudjahideen" in the fighting rows, and their bravery for the independence of Algeria. Folk songs were mainly sung by women who introduced some of the revolution's leaders, like "Okacha Bensouna," which will be mentioned later in the song performed by Hadja Yamna, fighters and martyrs. Women and other groups preserved this historical heritage by

singing songs before and after independence. This article deals with the importance of folksongs in preserving our national identity and historical memory. It seeks to investigate the role of the national revolutionary folksongs and whether they can be used to write the various Algerian events of our revolution.

2. Definitions of folksongs

The folksong is a type of folk expression that performs a particular function in the life of the people, and it differs from other forms of popular expressions because it is achieved through both the word and the melody (MORSI, 1968, p 222). It preserves customs, traditions, and beliefs of the popular group (in this case, people of Djebala, Tlemcen) transmitted orally from one generation to another, carrying a considerable amount of the cultural heritage of the people mentioned above through time which is a complementary source to the archival document for writing the history of the Algerian Revolution.

3. The role (s) played by the Algerian Revolutionary Folksongs

The Revolutionary folksongs are considered a non-material heritage of the Algerian War of Independence and a historical source to write the history of our national revolution. Moreover, they preserved the Algerian national identity. It is worth mentioning that they served as a source of inspiration, motivation, and support throughout the revolution in different regions of Algeria. It bound people together mainly during hard times and moments of crisis. Additionally, the Algerian Revolutionary folksongs played a prominent role in keeping the 'morale' of soldiers and fighters higher to achieve victory and freedom.

4. Characteristics of the Revolutionary folksongs

The author of those revolutionary folksongs is generally unknown. We all know that most of its singers were women, not men since men were busy fighting the enemy (France) and joined the fighting rows in the mountains.

Folksongs of the Algerian Revolution mirrored the society at that time with all its details. It expressed the love of the ordinary people toward their country and their desire to achieve independence. Besides, it reflected the Algerian national identity. They are chanted with both the word and the melody and are generally composed of two parts with the repetition of the first part. Some songs carried many religious Islamic words, such as "oh Messenger of Allah" and invocations. Furthermore, not all songs had a rhyme. Concerning words used, they are simple and understood by the overall population of a particular region (in this case, Djebala).

Popular folk songs are usually short so as to be remembered and rehearsed easily. They generally have various topics like places, battles, martyrs, events, nationalism, freedom, sacrifice, resistance, weapons, and reactions toward the colonizer. Finally, almost all the folksongs started with a call (ah, oh).

5. The Language Used to Perform the Algerian National Revolutionary songs

Folksongs are generally chanted in dialectal Arabic, which depends on the region. Arabic was part of the Algerian national identity and one of its most significant symbol and pillars. Those songs registered and mirrored every detail of the Algerian revolution.

As a consequence, historical scholars and researchers can use the Algerian revolutionary folksongs as a source to write their research or academic articles, as those songs were passed on from one generation to another almost without modifications or with minor ones.

6. Topics of the Algerian Revolutionary folksongs

Topics ranged from the heroism of fighters to betrayal to French weapons and even negotiations:

6.1. About fighters (Jonoud) and Martyrs

اه نوري يا الغابة نوري..... اه نوري ودرقيلي ذاك الشاب

Oh forest, have more leaves.....(bloom)

Do have more leaves.....(bloom) And hide for me that handsome young man (the fighter).....

The above passage clearly shows that even ordinary people and women who did not join the fighting rows were worried about the safety and security of the fighters, and they were wholehearted with them even over a distance.

اها الجندي في قصور الجنة

و ميمتو راها تستنا

Oh, the fighter (joundi) is in paradise....while his mother is still waiting for his return

اها الجندي ماشي و يوصي

ويا اما اتهلي في ولدي

Oh, the fighter (joundi) is leaving and recommending Oh, mom, take care of my son

اها الجندي ماشي و يوصي

ويا اما اتهلي في مرتي

Oh, the fighter (joundi) is leaving and recommending Oh, mom, take care of my wife

The above lines clearly show that the Algerian fighters and martyrs were real Heroes who sacrificed their souls and lives for their beloved country. Most of them were killed on the battlefields and could never see their families again.

Additionally, the news was scarce (he was in heaven while his mother was waiting), and their families did not hear about them for days and months because of the absence of means

of communication and contact with the fighters. Those fighters who were killed or jailed left orphans and families behind them without supplies or help.

6.2. *Showing Support and Empathy (Sang by Yamna Mouffok)*

يا حليلي كي اندير انا لخويا

الطيارة جات ذا الحربية

يا ربي كي اندير انا لخويا

Oh dear, how to help you, brother....

The military aircraft has just arrived.....

Oh God, how to help you, dear brother?

The preamble or the very first lines of the song show that women and civilians supported the fighters in the mountains and were sometimes very helpless because they did not have weapons or even enough supplements to provide their brothers (Mujahedeen) with. The word brother is not used randomly here; on the contrary, it shows that people were supportive and that they were aware of the situation, the fighters' sacrifices, and the imbalanced powers of both parties (The French owned the sophisticated yellow aircraft " a helicopter," weapons; supplements, tanks, lorries, telescopes, bombs, ...Etc while Algerian fighters had elementary equipment)

6.2.1 Strategy, Help and Warning

يا الخاوة ولا خوندوا الواد القاريطه عندها لاجيما

يا الخاوة ولا خوندوا الواد

Oh, brothers (fighters) use the way of the river path....

The army guardhouse has binoculars.....

Oh brothers, please use the river path.....

The above extract warns the Algerian fighters or "Almoudjahideen" against their French army, who had sophisticated tools and equipment (binoculars). Civilians and women were terrified and worried about their safety if they were seen or caught; they would automatically be jailed, tortured, and killed by the French colonizer. They suggested a strategy to cross the river or walk by the river banks, which are so down and cannot be seen from the high army guardhouse equipped with telescopes and binoculars.

6.2.3. The Royal army versus the Liberation (FLN) Army

يا الجيش المالكي جاني عشية جيش التحرير حتى الليل

اه الجيش المالكي جاني عشية

The royal army visited me in the afternoon....

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*The liberation army would arrive till night.....
Oh, the royal army came in the afternoon*

This part shows the difference between the royal army and the Liberation one. They had distinct roles to play as the former would go in the afternoon or during the day to inform people in the villages and mainly women, that the latter would come at night so that women prepare dinner and supplements (coffee, bread, ...Etc) for the fighters to carry with them to the mountains and caves where they lived. What can be deduced is that civilians and especially women played a prominent role in the Algerian War of Independence.

6.2.4. The Heroism of the Algerian Mujahedeen and Martyrs

*ياو انهارك اه مغنية اه نهار
منين دخولك ذاك الشبان
اه انهارك اه مغنية اه نهار*

*Oh, your day, Maghnia, was a great one....When you were visited by those young men.....
Oh, what a great day, Maghnia!.....*

This part of the same song, as sung by old lady Hadja Yamna Mouffok, shows the great happiness, welcome, and admiration of the civilians and women toward Mujahedeen. They regarded them as their heroes, very brave, who sacrificed their lives, and souls and lived in challenging conditions in the mountains in order to achieve victory and freedom. They welcomed them like kings and were appreciated by everyone in the society, men, women, and even children.

6.2.5. The Religion of the Nation is Islam/Invocations

*يا رسول الله وربي يحفظلي و اندير المينة في فم الكرطي
يا رسول الله وربي يحفظلي*

*Oh, Messenger of Allah 'Mohammed'
(Peace Be Upon Him)....God preserve (them) for me.....
And I put the mine in the entry of the army barracks
Oh, Messenger of Allah 'Mohammed' (Peace Be Upon Him)....God preserve (them) for me.....*

The above passage indicates that the fighters were Muslims and united under one religion. Also, the second part shows that women and ordinary people supported the Algerian revolution and worried about the safety of the Mujahedeen. Those civilians and women were praying to God for them to be victorious over the French, and they showed their support and empathy through songs and prayers.

The spiritual and religious spirits went hand in hand with the values of the revolution. The Algerian fighters had moral values like the love of our nation 'Algeria,' unity, strength, defending Islam, and nationalism. Religion was not only a source of unity and inspiration but also raised the fighters' self-esteem and gave them a push to fight the French enemy till victory or death (martyrdom).

6.2.6. Describing the "Battle of Tarnana" (Djebala)

آه انهار الفيرا ذي تارنانا طاح القبطان مالطيارة
آه انهار الفيرا ذي تارنانا

Oh, the day of the Battle of Tarnana

The captain fell from the plane (the yellow) one

Oh, the day of the Battle of Tarnana

According to the above lines of the song, the captain who was aboard the yellow military aircraft namely referred to and known among the people as البياعة. This name simply means that it had the mission of telling on the fighters so that the French troops would come and kill them. However, according to the song, the French captain was shot by the Algerian fighters and fell from the plane.

6.2.7. Depicting the difficulty of fighting/ imbalance powers

آه نهارك اه و الجان كي يشيب واك الشار و الفور يطيح
آه نهارك اه و الجان كي يشيب

Oh, and that day was tough (turned the hair of the young grey).....

And, that tank and bombs were falling.....

Oh, and that day was tough (turned the hair of the young grey).....

The above passage shows that the mission of the fighters was extremely tough. A metaphor is used here in order to show the degree of difficulty and hardship of that day to the extent that the black hair of a young man would quickly turn grey. The hardships mentioned lie in the fact that the enemy (in this respect France) threw bombs over the civilians and fighters, mainly in villages, and that it possessed sophisticated tanks and bombs, which was not the case for the Algerian fighters.

6.2.8. The Call to Join the Fighting Rows

آه منين لغى عكاشة و قال الى الجهاد و قاع الشبان طاحوا للواد
آه منين لغى عكاشة و قال الى الجهاد

Oh when "Okacha" called for fighting "Djihad"....

All the young men fell down to the river....

Oh, when "Okacha" called for fighting "Djihad"....(Yamna Mouffok, November 01, 2018).

The story, as witnessed and depicted by the old lady 'Yamna Mouffok' is that **Okacha Bensouna**, who is a martyr, cried out loud that day, "Oh, Messenger of Allah, Oh Messenger of Allah (PBUH) Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar (Allah is the Greatest-twice), Oh brothers whosoever wish to fight, weapons are available! Whosoever wishes to fight and participate in the war, even with water! At this moment, the yellow plane arrived and bombed (13 men were all burned).

The above song, as well as the story described by the witness Hadja Yamna Mouffok, clearly indicates that the powers were imbalanced between sides: (Okacha Bensouna called for fighting, rebellion and war while the French military aircraft bombed them on the spot. Additionally, it shows that the Algerian fighters had faith in Allah, seeking His help and blessings, calling Allah and the Messenger of Allah before starting the war and battles.

7. More Revolutionary Folksongs, More Topics

In this song, as sung to us by Lady Halima HAMIDI, aged 95 and wife of martyr Diab Abd-el-Kader, and witness of so many events during the revolution, we notice a variety of topics like the call for the fight, negotiations between France and the Algerian fighters, some important events of the war of independence.

7.1. Title of song: France going out to villages

فرنسا خارجة للدشور

مشينا لمولى بغداد و جنبنا السلاح و الزاد

We had been to the owner of Baghdad.... And brought weapons and supplements.

و اللي بغى يجاهد يجي لهاد البلاد

And whosoever wants to fight.....should come to this country (Algeria)

فرنسا خارجة للدشور خرجوا ليها ناس اللي ليهم شور

France went out to villages....and was met by highly-respected and wise people

خلو القبطان و الفسيان منشور

They left the captain, and the officer hung

قالولا قول يا فرنسا قول

قاتلم ما عندي ما نقول

راني لا نسال قبلاذ الزااير

They told her, "oh France, have your say!"

She replied, "I have nothing to say"....

I have my share/part in the country of Algeria...

قالولا قول يا فرنسا قول

قاتلم ما عندي ما نقول

راني لا نديرالبزوز

They told her, "oh France, have your say!"

She replied, "I have nothing to say"....

I am only making children (settlement)

قالولا قول يا فرنسا قول
قاتلم ما عندي ما نقول

ما تخافوش يا ذ النساء والبيزوز
راني لا نديرالبيزوز

They told her "oh France, have your say!"

She replied "I have nothing to say"....

Do not be afraid, oh women and children

I am only making children! (I came to stay)

قالولا قول يا فرنسا قول

قاتلم ما عندي ما نقول

أنا ما بقالي غير الرحول

They told her, "oh, France, have your say!"

She replied, "I have nothing to say"....

All that is left for me is a departure (Leaving Algeria)..... Sang by Lady Halima HAMIDI.

7.1.1. The Analysis of the Above Folk, Popular Song of the Revolution

The song starts with a significant historical event; getting the supplements, equipment, and weapons from Baghdad (Iraq), and in the second part of the first line, again, there is a call to the fight (whosoever wants to fight...should come to this country) showing that Algerian fighters were welcoming their brothers into the fighting rows of the liberation. Of course, Iraq was the first nation to support the Algerian temporary government. It sent money, soldiers, and students, and many poems were written in favor of the Algerian revolution.

Other stories suggest that "Moula Baghdad" was Imam "Abd-el-Kader Aljailani" is a marabout which was visited by women and some worshippers. They would go there to sit, light candles, pray and invoke God. However, according to the words of the song, this time they went there to get weapons and supplements that were hid there. There were some rumors that Moula Baghdad was buried in Algeria or Morocco but the most credible story is that he was buried in Baghdad, Iraq.

In the third line, the first part, 'France is going out to villages, and according to the singer mentioned earlier and her son, it is the song's title. This part shows that France went to the countryside, mainly to villages, to discuss with local people and see their behaviors and reactions towards colonization. Of course, France expected to speak and deal with ignorant, backward, and savage people, but she was met (according to the song) by highly respected and wise people.

They were both highly educated, wise, firm, and harsh with the enemy. The author used the expression (they left the captain and officer hung) to show that they were brutal with the

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French enemy and colonizer and could never be friends even if they negotiated. When they started the negotiations with the French enemy, "oh France, have your say!" France replied that she came to stay and settle down. France moved to attract the support and compassion of the masses, mainly women, by sending a breeze of ease and protection. At the end, and in the last lines of the above folksong, it can be inferred that France failed to negotiate with the Algerian people and surrendered "all that is left for me is to leave Algeria!" (Lady HAMIDI Halima, June 2nd, 2022).

7. Conclusion:

The national revolutionary folksong reflects an essential side of our traditions and customs as it depicts every detail of life during and after the Algerian War of Independence. It deals with many topics like the life of the Algerian fighters, betrayal, heroism of Jonoud, negotiation with France, the strong desire to become free and independent from France, ...Etc.

It has a critical role(s) to play as it was the population's voice at that time. Women sang those songs to show their support for the fighters (Mujahedeen) and to motivate them to be stronger in the face of the enemy, France. Those songs mirrored the society at that time, showing the harshness of life during the revolution, poverty, and lack of equipment and weapons. Although it depicted the colonizers as a superpower and the one that owned weapons, the people and the Algerian fighters were brave and united and wanted to preserve the national identity.

The revolutionary folksong also played the role of improving the morale of fighters despite the disequilibrium in powers. It carried many religious values like freedom, love of one's country, nationalism, patriotism, unity, solidarity, strength...etc.

Most of those songs were in dialectal Arabic of the region, chanted by women, and passed over from generation to generation. Anyone who spoke French at that time was regarded as a spy or an enemy of the revolution. This was an attempt to preserve the Algerian identity, and Arabic was a significant part of that identity.

Some of the songs dealt with how the Algerian fighters were tortured, bullied, and killed (Martyr Okacha Bensouna).

Last but not least, the national revolutionary folk song can be regarded as a reliable source to write the history of our revolution.

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