



Resistance and National Struggle in Algerian Colloquial Poetry: A Cultural and Discursive Analysis of Revolutionary Expression

Reghissa Attia

Dr., Lecturer (category A)
Popular Literature University of Lounici Ali -Blida 2
Algeria
Email: attiareghissa@gmail.com

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Abstract

Algerian colloquial poetry has long functioned as a powerful medium of cultural resistance, collective memory, and national mobilization, particularly during periods of colonial domination. This study examines the role of colloquial poetic discourse in articulating resistance and struggle within the context of the Algerian liberation movement, focusing on selected poetic models produced during the colonial and revolutionary periods. Adopting a descriptive-analytical and cultural-historical methodology, the article situates colloquial poetry within the broader framework of popular literature as an organic expression of social consciousness and political engagement. The analysis demonstrates that colloquial poetry did not merely reflect historical events but actively participated in shaping revolutionary awareness, mobilizing youth, and reinforcing values of sacrifice, patriotism, and collective responsibility—especially among Algerian communities in migration. Through emotionally charged language, symbolic imagery, and accessible vernacular forms, this poetic discourse functioned as an alternative media system that complemented armed resistance and political organization. The study further argues that colloquial poetry played a crucial role in preserving national identity and cultural continuity in the face of systematic colonial erasure, acting as both a repository of collective experience and a catalyst for revolutionary action. By examining poetic texts as sites of ideological struggle and cultural negotiation, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between popular literature, resistance culture, and nationalist movements in Algeria. The findings highlight the importance of oral and vernacular literary forms in liberation contexts and underscore their relevance to contemporary studies of resistance, memory, and postcolonial cultural production.

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Introduction to the Colloquial Poet Abdelhamid Ababsa (Ababsa, 2002)

1. His Birth and Lineage

Abdelhamid Ababsa, also known as "**Abdelmajid**", is a contemporary Algerian colloquial poet born on December 15th, 1918, in the town of Brika, Batna Province. He is the son of Mohammed Ben Messaoud, nicknamed "**the poet of Tribes**".

The poet grew up in his hometown and was raised in his city. When he reached the age of four, he moved with his father to Biskra, then later to Batna to receive his primary education. He subsequently moved to Constantine to work as a compositor in the workshop of the magazine "**Al-Chaheb**", which belonged to the Society of Muslim Scholars under the presidency of Cheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis at that time.

His family then moved to Algiers, where he resumed his studies at the Youth School and, at the same time, continued working in the printing press of Abul-Yaqadhan in "**De Rovigo**" area. In 1931, his father founded the magazine "**Al-Mirsad**", and later founded the magazine "**Al-Thabat**". Abdelhamid assisted him in this endeavor due to his expertise in the art of printing.

In 1932, the poet learned to play the piano and this marked the beginning of his journey with national songs. After that, he recited a poem in colloquial verse at the Islamic Conference Festival, which gained widespread fame as he exposed the machinations of colonialism in it. He was subsequently exiled to Morocco by the "*French*" governor of Tlemcen at that time.

Abdelmadjid later returned to Algiers and founded a band called "Ababsa's Varied Performance Tours". In 1939, he joined the troupe of (**Mahieddine Bachtarzi**), where he met the famous Egyptian artists of that time—*Mohammad Abdelouahab* and *Mohammad Abdelmottalib*—which reflected on his artistic personality and his influence by them in melody and performance.

2. His Early Patriotism

The poet witnessed the events of May 8th, 1945. However, like other respectable and free-minded intellectuals, he did not remain silent about this tragedy. Rather, he expressed his patriotic position, rejecting these heinous and barbaric acts. This was a popular cause condemning the crimes of May 8. The French authorities consequently sentenced him to two years in prison.

3. His Struggle in the Ranks of the National Liberation Front

The poet joined the liberation revolution. He was at that time in France and carried out mobilization for the revolution, gathering the Algerians present there through his patriotic poetry. He also sang to the migrants about their right to struggle and to join the ranks of the revolution, in his capacity as a revolutionary artist, while simultaneously performing patriotic and zealous hymns.

During this period, according to what we have documented in his published collection, the poet composed five poems, all filled with genuine patriotic spirit. These poems are:

1. "O Youth of the Emigration, Prepare Yourselves", composed in 1955
2. "Message of the Fighter", composed in 1957
3. "O Fighter, O Patient One", composed in 1985
4. "Events of December 11th, 1960"
5. "Events of Paris, October 17, 1961"

These poems represent his revolutionary struggle and resistance through the true and responsible word. This was what Algerians in diaspora needed—someone to instill in them hope, pride, and courage to confront the schemes of colonialism, just as his fellow colloquial poet *Abderrahman kacem Al-Bantiussi Al-Biskari* did. He (Reghissa, 2001) also played an active role among migrants during the national liberation revolution, and after independence, he dedicated himself to national songs and hymns until 1984.

4. His Death and Legacy (Ababsa, 2002, p.176)

Abdelhamid Ababsa resided in the capital, Algiers, where he died on May 15th, 1998, leaving behind a poetry collection published in two editions:

1. *Al-Shier al-Mollum* (The Colloquial Poetry Collection of the Late Artist Abdelhamid Ababsa), publications of the National Institution for Communication, Publishing and Advertising, 2002 (ANEPE, p.755).

Both editions lack scientific verification, as they contain numerous errors at the level of vocabulary and the arrangement of poems. However, the collection is very important in the anthology of Algerian colloquial poetry.

Part Two: Algerian Colloquial Poetry and Revolutionary Mobilization

Algerian colloquial poetry accompanied all popular resistances carried out by the people since French colonialism set foot on Algerian soil. It witnessed these revolutions with enthusiasm filled with heroism and a desire for liberation, whereby national, patriotic, and religious sentiments merged in one crucible.

These numerous resistances were a source of inspiration for poets, especially colloquial poets, as they were the voice of their society, expressing themselves through the different dialects spoken by everyone.

The best example of this is the wandering poet *Abdelkader Fitas*, who states: "After France's entry into Algeria and occupation of the northern regions, instructions and orders were given to monitor the *meddah* (colloquial storyteller) and tighten the noose on him in markets, gatherings, or councils, and to provide reports about his activities. Most French Orientalists later acknowledged this" (Fitas, 2016, p.30).

The *qawal* (storyteller) traversed villages, settlements, and even cities to broadcast and recite poems and stories, through which he conveyed news of revolutions that would scarcely die down in one region before igniting in another. Thus it continued until the liberation revolution of November 1954, which resulted in the independence of the country.

Throughout this long history spanning 1830–1954, colloquial poetry, alongside oral narrative poetry and storytelling, was the most important cultural component expressing, preserving, and carrying out revolutionary mobilization.

Leila Kouraich states: “The Algerian audience was concerned with this form of narrative (colloquial and even colloquial verse) and celebrated it as compensation for what the foreign occupier had robbed them of—their national rights and Arab-Islamic identity. Thus, when through narrative they would restore the glories of their ancient ancestors, they were simultaneously working to reveal the personality of the heroic Algerian people and highlight their capacity to rise in defense of their stolen rights” (Reghissa, 2014, p.150).

The most important cultural component expressing, preserving, and carrying out revolutionary mobilization—and here poets emerged who fulfilled this national duty and joined the revolution, one of whom was *Abdelhamid Ababsa*.

Once the Algerian revolution erupted, it needed media propaganda to recruit youth into its ranks, particularly outside the homeland and specifically in France (Al-Zoubairi, 1984, p.18).

This nascent army that emanated from the National Liberation Front had to strengthen and increase its members, particularly in the first years of the revolution. In this initial launch, “the number of fighters in the (NLF) did not exceed one thousand” (Mortadl, 2011, p.38). As this army began to lose members as martyrs, the role of the colloquial poet *Abdulhamid Abbassi* became prominent through his colloquial poem filled with inflamed patriotic sentiments, in which he calls upon Algerian youth to join the revolution by enlisting in its noble army and committing to its principles. He says:

*O youth of the emigration,
prepare yourselves
The homeland calls upon you
Free your country from enemies
Glory returns to you
Your homeland requires change
And obey in the army of liberation* (Ababsa, p.493)

And the poet asks these youth to follow the example of their brothers in the interior (within Algeria) who responded to the call of revolution with complete willingness, loyalty, and steadfastness. Because, in the end, it is either victory or martyrdom. He says:

*Your brothers in struggle are fighting
The fighter is pleased to meet death
The sincere one in his deeds succeeds
And God will reward you with victory*

The poet reminds the youth in emigration or diaspora of what French colonialism did to their motherland in terms of oppression and destruction. Even then, there in the land of exile (*France*), were living as displaced and persecuted persons. He also reminds them that ages are in God's hand—how many fighters engaged in several battles and did not die, while how many bedridden people never fought a single battle and did die. He says:

*O youth of the emigration, remember
What the treacherous enemies did
In liberating your country, think
The precious homeland is dearer to you
Through struggle raise your voice high
Life for the living and death for the living
With the strength of colonialism pass
Life is in your hands
The Creator alone is He who kills
As for love, causes descend
And whoever fulfills his lifespan will depart
And glory returns to you* (Ababsa, p.493)

In order to make struggle attractive to the youth against the enemies of the homeland, the poet reminds them that fighters are God's beloved and chosen ones. If they are martyred in defense of their religion and land, protecting their homeland, then paradise is their abode and beautiful maidens will meet them in the garden of contentment. Here the poet reminds us of the famous *Abdelkader al-Ouahrani*, whose poem on the entry of the French expresses the same idea (Without Author, 2002, p.45).

The convergence of ideas between the two poets is attributable to the shared cultural milieu—the first lived on the eve of French occupation in 1830, while the second lived approximately after the outbreak of the 1954 revolution. Throughout this extended period of 124 years, the people lived through the devastation of colonialism, which made no distinction in destruction between the tree and the human being. Ababsa says:

*The fighter is beloved of God
Victory and sacrifice are ransom
The fighter loves his dwelling
Beautiful maidens will meet you
And whoever is martyred for his homeland
And lives in the hearts of the nation
His soul ascends to the Merciful
And the angels rejoice in you* (Ababsa, p.494)

Thus the poet continued to spread these ideas in the hearts of youth so they would answer the call of the homeland. All this intellectual activity carried out by the poet would later become evident in the demonstrations of December 11th in the heart of the occupier's territory.

The Qualities of Fighters and Their Heroism

In 1958, *Abdelhamid Ababsa* composed poetry at a time when battles were raging throughout the country. The revolution in that year had reached its peak in the conflict between the two sides, which had reached its climax.

In the midst of this intense struggle, only strong, resolute men could persist in continuing the path—the path of struggle. In precisely these circumstances, the poet presented his poem “O Fighter, O Patient One”, in which he depicts the courage and bravery of these dauntless fighters, portraying their feats that surpassed legends, presenting them as models to be emulated by others. He says:

*O fighter, O patient one
You are the lion of the mountains
You are the champion of the free
You are a crescent for Algeria
You are the poison of colonialism
You are the champion of independence
Algeria takes pride in you
And the machine gun is in your hand*

The poet shows that the strength of these brave men comes from the strength of their faith in God and their faith in their just national cause. For no right is ever lost without someone seeking it, and they were never, by the testimony of history, aggressors—they were the victims, with the entire people behind them. Therefore, heroes throughout history emerge from the womb of suffering. The poet says:

*God strengthen you with victory
Over tyrants and the vile
A lion in the arena
Enemies fear you
You struggle with heart and faith
With your heroic brothers
And your courageous male brethren
A fighter from ancient roots
Your patience and faith you displayed
And your enemy in the arena you overpowered
What you desired in your heart
Is effective victory
Through your struggle you revived the homeland
With your young warrior brothers
Enemies tremble from you
A lion in the arena of honor
Your leaders take pride in you
You are the tiger in combat* (Ababsa, p. 490)

Such heroic imagery is achieved only by legendary heroes. Therefore, the impact of the Algerian revolution extended to all corners of the earth. When we cast a careful, contemplative eye on the ages of the martyrs whose names we find recorded on plaques displayed on streets, public squares, or neighborhoods to commemorate their memory, we find that

they were quite young—perhaps the oldest among them did not exceed thirty-five years of age. This phenomenon in itself is noteworthy. All of them were youth, but they shouldered their responsibilities toward this cherished homeland with courage and pride.

The poet continues to present these descriptions. In 1958, as we mentioned, he continues in the same vein:

*In the face of enemies, you stand firm
You don't abandon them in fear and horrors
Victory in your struggle is pure
The liberation of your land, Algeria
Through the sacrifice of the revolutionary people
The enemy becomes humiliated
You take pride in your national flag
Your slogan is independence
By faith your strength is fortified
The homeland is your honor and your love
And whoever yearns to be near you
Your homeland shines like a crescent*

The poet calls upon these fighters for God's victory, and indeed victory was achieved at their hands through their sincerity, confirming His saying: "And it was incumbent upon Us to help the believers (Qur'an 30:47).

He also calls for steadfastness, for without steadfastness there would be no victory: "God establishes those who have believed with the firm word, in worldly life and in the Hereafter" (Qur'an 14:27). The poet says:

*God grants you victory over your enemies
Showing the nations examples
God steadies your steps
In love of your country strengthen your power
With victory your Creator elevates you
You build your history for generations
God's victory is always with you
You left for the fighters' examples
Victory for the fighters
Children of the living people
Sacrifice and the persevering
In protecting those of majesty
The martyrs—their deeds are mighty
Their souls in paradise are weighed*

What the colloquial poets said would become a source for writing history. Indeed, it is valid to be a historical document from which information and positions can be taken. If history presents us with events as they occurred in complete objectivity, then poetry, particularly colloquial poetry, presents us with the spirit of these events.

This does not contradict our objective scientific history, and this is what prompted one researcher at the Algerian university to present us with some of the finest scientific research that addressed this subject. The matter indeed deserves such attention.

Colloquial Poetry and Tragic Events

Documenting the Events of December 11, 1960 in Algeria

The demonstrations of December 11th, 1960 are considered the countdown to the French colonial presence in Algeria. This is because the people took to the streets demanding independence after colonists and settlers claimed that Algeria was French or that it was an inseparable part of French territory.

At this time, the French President at that time, *Charles de Gaulle*, visited Algeria, particularly directing himself to Ain Temouchent, supposedly a quiet region, from which he would broadcast his warning colonial speech and declare that Algeria was Algerian, loyal to certain Algerians aligned with him and his new resulting policy. However, Algerians, particularly in the capital and its suburbs, took to the streets and clashed with French military and police forces in a memorable day during which more than 100 martyrs fell.

Such clashes regularly occurred between Algerian nationalists and colonial occupiers. Such events would repeatedly occur throughout the country, and they usually resulted in victims, particularly among Algerians, as most of them were disarmed without weapons or significant military equipment, while the others (the French) were always heavily armed, especially the soldiers and conscripts who were stationed around the capital.

It was once said: "...In this charged atmosphere, Abdelhamid Ababsa was among this angry youth victorious for his national cause and standing with his country, hoping to snatch it from the hands of the occupiers. He (the poet) presents us with a vivid, dark picture of that ill-fated day when he says:

*My eyes weep with tears
My heart is full of sorrows
Joy has drowned in blood
How many young men have died
On the day of the eleventh, grandeur collapsed
December sixty bears witness
Soldiers and police are enemies to us
With the French police, the invaders (Ababsa, p.480)*

Then the poet critiques French propaganda claiming that "*Algeria is French*", attacking de Gaulle's sudden move, which he thought could allow coexistence between Algerians and French, leading him to propose new projects involving housing and employment as if Algerians who took to the streets were demanding housing and employment alone while leaving everything else as it was. Ababsa says:

*France conducts propaganda
Said Algerians are with us
Thinks our people have certain intentions
Deceiving us with security (Ababsa, p.491)
She sent her president, de Gaulle
In the land of Algeria, he travels
The people demand and speak
We need to be brothers*

Then he uncovers their "clever" colonial policy. However, the people have resolved to snatch their freedom from the claws of these savages who kill women, infants, and the elderly for nothing except that they said "Algeria is our homeland and we will accept no alternative", Ababsa says:

*They speak to us in politics
They fire at us with rifles
With their weapons they kill us
Giving us honeyed words
Young men of the capital are tools
They carried out demonstrations
They shot them with machine guns
They killed men and women (Ababsa, p.480)*

Then the poet depicts how these anti-colonial popular demonstrations, which went from Bab El Djoud to Bab El Oued, encompass all segments of the people—youth, elders, women, and children—carrying national flags and all repeating the word "struggle" against French settlers. It is a sweeping popular flood. True, it cost many martyrs, but that was the reason for uprooting the French occupiers from Algeria. Ababsa says:

*From Bab El Djoud to Bab El Oued
The people call to struggle
Algeria is the land of ancestors
We will liberate it from enemies
At that moment jealousy was kindled
In the hearts of youth, a flower bloomed
A great revolution returned from them
The enemy retreated ashamed
So many died in Mazuena
They married the brave women of paradise
They raised and elevated our reputation
It spread in all lands (Ababsa, p.480)*

These demonstrations also spread throughout the capital and its outskirts, and people came out with bare chests to face French bombs despite violence and arrests. The demonstrations continued for several days in several provinces including Annaba, Oran, Constantine, Chlef (formerly Les Aïssoua), Blida, and others.

The Algerian people in these tense circumstances rallied around the Liberation Front against de Gaulle's policy and project aimed at "*Algeria is Algerian*", against which the settler colonists rebelled, saying "*Algeria is French*". For this

reason, Algerians, holders of the cause, took to the streets expressing their rejection of both. De Gaulle's statement and the colonists' statement, insisting that any proposal except independence is rejected. He says:

Happy are those who died in struggle

Victory or martyrdom

Beloved by the Lord of servants

Their dwelling is the garden of contentment (Ababsa, p.482)

The poet concludes his poem praising the courage of the people who spared no effort in refuting the colonial thesis, showing that the popular revolution was the culmination of all previous resistances. Thus, success was its ally, and independence was sufficient success:

My homeland, our people have sacrificed for it

Through struggle and blood elevated it

And God's victory is with it

The fighter is beloved of the Merciful

Our war is against cruel colonialism

And we liberate Algeria in our land

And victory for the revolutionary people

Offering their chests to fire (Ababsa, p.482)

These demonstrations represent a major political victory, whose repercussions reached nations that, nine days later, approved a resolution recognizing the Algerian people's right to independence and self-determination.

Thanks to these demonstrations as well, many nations like Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Congo, and the Soviet Union acknowledged the Algerian people's right to self-determination after suffering lasting 132 years.

Documenting the Events of Paris, October 17, 1961

In October 1961, **Maurice Papon**, the police prefect of Paris, issued an order prohibiting Algerian residents in France from going out after curfew. At that time, there were 300,000 Algerian residents, and this tightening represented further pressure on the revolution.

On October 17th, 1961, tens of thousands of these migrants responded to a call from the Federation of the National Liberation Front. They took to the streets of Paris in peaceful protests that soon turned into massacres when French police met the demonstrators with bullets, throwing protesters shackled into the Seine River. It was a bloody night that resulted in 400 victims, thousands of wounded, and tens of thousands arrested.

In this inhumane, charged atmosphere filled with anxiety, fear, and injustice, the poet Abdelhamid documents all of this in this popular poetic text, bearing the most important characteristics of popular literature—realism. He says:

O Algerian, O Muslim

Never forget what happened

Write in your heart with blood

What colonialism did to us (Ababsa, p.483)

And what did colonialism do to the innocent except kill, arrest, and displace:

Paris on the seventeenth of October

Nineteen sixty-one marks its date

The Algerian people gathered in it

Men, women, and small children

The poet emphasizes that the Algerians living in the French capital, Paris, at that time, are migrants and at the same time “children of the revolution”. They were even mobilized. These people conducted peaceful protests in response to the decision of the National Liberation Front. He says:

They stood with their free brothers

Dying in honor as free men

The people gathered in one mass

To protest humiliation

These protested—according to the text—against the humiliation and degradation that migrants experienced there. However, what happened is documented in this text:

Police with deranged minds

They took them with dogs and patrols

Obsession entered their minds

They treat them with brutality

Thousands entered the prisons

They burned men in fire

They filled the prisons and the Seine

They killed and threw bodies (Ababsa, p.484)

All these brutal acts occurred before the eyes of the world. They thereby exceeded what the Germans did to the Jews during World War II in the incident historically known as the "*Holocaust*". The poet says:

What the Germans did to the Jews

They did the same and more at the border

Bullets in the heads of the strong

Powerful poison in their hands

The text also suggests that French police were dressed in nurse uniforms, assuming that their work was humanitarian, healing the sick. However, what happened was the exact opposite. This false disguise was nothing but deception, which no rational mind can accept:

Police dressed in medical uniforms

Tortured in the hospital wards

Powerful poison in their hands

Killing and torture with deception

These are vile images perpetrated by those who claim brotherhood and freedom.

The Echo of These Events and Their Repercussions Worldwide

Such humanitarian crimes could not pass unchallenged. The free world witnessed them and became even more sympathetic to the revolution and its justice. "*No right is ever lost as long as someone seeks it*". This exposed the French policy and military leaders to the world. The poet says:

The world condemned the standing

Their shame in every newspaper

Their rulers tremble in fear

Exposed in every country

They exposed the secret police's tricks

Said this is an act of betrayal

The policy of gases is dangerous

Colonialism's betrayal is known

The Position of the People and Migrants After These Events

What occurred in these bloody events had occurred before throughout the French colonial presence on this blessed land. Official history documents what happened as an event, but the Algerian people's determination to achieve independence has been sealed since the first spark of November 1st, 1954, through which brave fighters threw—either victory or martyrdom. This is what the end of the text confirms:

All of this they did

Our youth will never be humiliated

Even if it takes our sacrifice for our land

We will die with honor and pride (Ababsa, p.483)

We note that not long after these events did Algeria achieve the awaited independence, as if these events had hastened it. Thus the Algerian people suffered the ravages of French colonialism until they achieved their independence on July 5th, 1962.

Long live Algeria, Long live Algeria, Long live Algeria

Conclusion

Through our reading of some of the revolutionary popular poetic models of Abdelhamid Ababsa, we conclude the following:

- Algerian colloquial poetry, particularly the revolutionary variety, can be considered a valid historical document for writing the revolutionary history of Algeria.
- This poetry, through models of Abdelhamid Ababsa, contributed to preparing the revolution and pushed Algerian youth to join the ranks of the revolution and to enlist under the banner of fighters.
- The documentation of colloquial poetry for the events of December 11th, 1960 and the events of October 17th, 1961.
- The concern of this colloquial poetry with depicting the personalities of fighters and making them symbols to be emulated.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on the analysis of literary texts, historical documents, and publicly available cultural sources within the field of Algerian colloquial poetry. It does not involve human participants, personal data, interviews,

surveys, or experimental procedures. As such, no ethical approval was required. All primary and secondary sources have been used in accordance with academic integrity principles, with proper citation and respect for intellectual property. The research was conducted with cultural sensitivity, particularly given the historical and symbolic significance of resistance literature within the Algerian national context, and avoids any form of misrepresentation or distortion of historical or cultural facts.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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