

The Discourse of Resistance in the Critical Oeuvre of Abd Allah Rukaybi: A Study of References and Mechanisms

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Received: 29.04.2026

Accepted: 22.05.2026

Published: 03.06.2026

Abstract

This article interrogates the discourse of resistance within the critical oeuvre of Abd Allh Rukaybi, casting light upon his conception of the dialectical nexus between literature and liberation. It elucidates how Rukaybi consecrated literature as an efficacious instrument for articulating human concerns and safeguarding national identity, while foregrounding the centrality of freedom as an indispensable condition for authentic creativity. It further surveys his critical stances regarding the evolution of poetry and the short story in Algeria, demonstrating their passage from subjective inclinations toward a realist commitment intimately aligned with the Revolution. It concludes that Rukaybi contributed to the consolidation of a resistant cultural consciousness, one that installs both writer and critic as pivotal agents in confronting hegemony and in the construction of a society cognizant of its issues.

Keywords: Literature, Resistance, Criticism, Freedom, Identity, Rukaybi.

Introduction:

Abd Allah Rukaybi, the Algerian writer and critic who devoted his life to serving Algerian literature in particular and Arabic literature in general, through his creative and critical works, which in their entirety revolved around the most salient existential human issues. In this article, we shall attempt to examine one aspect of his critical production in the fields of the short story and poetry, with a focus on one of the issues to which he devoted considerable attention, namely the relationship between literature and resistance and revolution in its various forms. How did he conceive this relationship? And what role did he assign to the writer in shaping it?

If literature, as a cultural expression and a form of creativity, intersects with the critical process in terms of influence and counter-influence, whether negatively or positively, then authentic creativity is that which generates a genuine and effective criticism, one

that renders literature a noble human message that calls for the highest values and raises the banner of freedom, liberation, and resistance in their various manifestations.

Since « *literature is the expression of human dignity and human values, it has thus been able to portray human characteristics in every place and at every time in an artistic manner of profound effect* » (Belmachri, 1981, p. 20), an effect revealed and nourished by the critical process, and as the proponents of postcolonial literary theory in cultural and literary studies maintain, critical discourse does not confine itself to an aesthetic and historical task, but rather exceeds it to assume a resistant political function. These studies have thus directed cultural activity toward a trajectory that charts for society its path toward reclaiming its position and achieving its moral and material emancipation, through strategies and mechanisms that develop and enhance both individual and collective consciousness.

From this perspective, as Edward Said holds, it is worth noting that the critic, in the process of unveiling the methods of domination, must possess a particular sensibility and training that enable him to refrain from submission to any authority that might prevent him from fulfilling his desire to change the world, and to resist all that distorts the face of history in terms of ideas, injustices, and inhumane policies.

Here is one of the earliest critics in Algeria who contributed to laying the foundational stones of many cultural and intellectual achievements in the country, one of the prominent figures of Algerian thought and culture, who lived and suffered as this nation suffered through its multiple ordeals. He lived through the ordeal of the homeland during the period of brutal settler colonialism, which sought to efface the nation's thought and language and to sever its Arab-Islamic extension; he witnessed all the transformations of the homeland as it reconstructed itself and rose anew after a long oppressive colonial night; and he lived through the national crisis of the 1990s.

He is the Algerian writer and critic Abd Allah Rukaybi, « *one of the cultural figures whose contributions have recorded a strong presence through their role in founding and activating the Algerian critical movement by combining short story writing, drama, and criticism, thereby forming an important part of our critical and creative memory* » (Ahmed El-Hadj, 2012, p. 6). Through his analyses of the contents of many literary works, Rukaybi called upon the creative writer to contribute to the crystallisation of positive national values,

focusing on the great and effective function of the creator, which continually impels him to contribute to the process of change sought by humankind.

His critical studies span both poetry and the short story, foregrounding the relationship between literature and art and the aspirations of humankind to attain freedom, a freedom that engenders a resistant human literature. « *For literature and art are nourished, first and foremost, by freedom, the freedom to which the writer and the artist are committed with respect to their age, the issues of their homeland, and humanity at large, not the freedom by which the artist is bound toward the ruling state* » (Rukaybi, 2009, p. 167). The freedom of which Rukaybi speaks is that which inspired the writers of the Algerian short story and sustained their works; it is likewise among the most exalted ends of literature.

Returning to Rukaybi's critical studies, such as his book *The Algerian Short Story and The Development of Modern Algerian Prose*, along with numerous critical articles and interviews, we find that he maintains that « *freedom is what unleashes the emotions of the artist or writer into a plaintive melody that sings of human hopes and expresses their pains and dreams... their anxieties... their present and their destiny. When these emotions become petrified and desiccated under the blows of the lash, the lash of terror, this human being will neither sing nor chant; and if he does sing, his song will not be sincere, genuine, or moving... The freedom of man signifies the freedom of the artist, and vice versa. If this freedom is constrained, how can we demand of this human being, this artist, that he work toward the liberation of others while his own hands are bound and his dignity wounded?* » (Rukaybi., 1965, p. 4). In this perspective, Abd Allah Rukaybi « *regards freedom as an indispensable condition for the success of the artistic work, since the confiscation of the intellectual's or artist's freedom amounts to the annihilation and falsification of his ideas and emotions* » (Ahmed El-Hadj, 2012, p. 17).

Thus, he delineates one of the essential functions of literature, wherein content must not be severed from reality. This constitutes an explicit summons addressed to writers not to deviate from their vocation toward their nation, while insisting upon the revolutionary vocation of literature and affirming that every literature bears the attribute of resistance, whether of a national or patriotic inflection.

As for his studies of Algerian poetry, he addresses the principal stages through which the poetic movement in Algeria has traversed, beginning with what he termed the « *poetry of*

withdrawal,” which emerged as a reaction to a reality dominated by French culture and to the siege imposed upon Arab-Islamic culture. Poets of this phase thus turned toward isolation and retreat: “they withdrew into cloisters, chanting solace and tranquillity, awaiting divine mercy, and imagining... thereby... that they had fulfilled their duties, for they preferred the life of the hereafter to this transient life » (.Rukaybi, n.d, p. 12). This withdrawal was not confined to the mosque or the hermitage; rather, it extended to an inward retreat into the deprived self and the repressed psyche.

Our critic traces this poetic movement in parallel with the intellectual evolution that Algeria underwent in the aftermath of the First World War. The totality of the political and intellectual transformations characterising that period impelled the Algerian intellectual to contemplate change and to advocate a renewed awakening: *« the Algerian people came to realize that another earnest course of action was imperative, beyond reliance upon France’s justice; thus they began to look about, seeking recourse and reflecting, searching for themselves amidst this vortex in which they lived ,of ignorance, poverty, and backwardness... across various domains » (.Rukaybi, n.d, p. 17). Here, he underscores that these movements constituted the incipient stages of an intellectual maturation that engendered a class of intellectuals calling, at times, for reform, and at others, for equality and renaissance: « and poetry came to articulate all this; it came as an expressive echo of it all, without binding itself to a specific orientation, without serving as the mouthpiece of this or that, but rather as a faithful register of the people’s aspirations and sufferings, voicing its word, and the people’s word, neither courting this nor accommodating that » (.Rukaybi, n.d, p. 18).*

After conditions had revolved within a vicious circle, ideas had grown confused, voices had risen and subsided, and calls had become contradictory, our critic holds that the events of the eighth of May came to unveil and lay bare the truths. The poets thus found themselves compelled into the very midst of this momentous occurrence: *« they found themselves living this immense event, and saw... with their own eyes... how the dignity of their people was affronted and their rights trampled (...) so they took up their tools and set about demolishing the crumbling edifice of ignorance » (.Rukaybi, n.d, p. 23).*

This phase thus marked the inception of a consciousness of resistance: resistance to ignorance and abasement, resistance to a faltering self.

Ultimately, our critic concludes that all these precursory stirrings converged toward a single, anticipated outcome, namely, revolution and effective resistance, long prefigured by the poets. Some among them even anticipated its locus, envisioning it as a revolution erupting from the summits of the mountains. This is what Rukaybī intimates when he addresses a poem by the poet Aḥmad Ma'ash al-Batini, who composed verses juxtaposing the Alps, whence colonialism had issued, with the Atlas Mountains, which would expel it; he likewise alludes to the poem *From Our Mountains*: « *perhaps poetry discerned in the mountains a symbol of strength and inviolability, perceiving in them a steadfast refuge to which revolutionaries might one day resort. It may have been a bold leap of imagination; yet... in any case... it proved true, and reality confirmed it: the revolution indeed issued from the mountains and fulfilled the poets' aspirations after a long span of anticipation and prefiguration* » (.Rukaybi, n.d, p. 24).

Rukaybi continues to affirm that poetry accompanied the liberation revolution, sustained it, and conveyed its events and heroism, just as it had accompanied the resistance of Emir Abd al-Kader and all subsequent resistances.

Before turning to his critique of the Algerian short story, we shall briefly pause at his view of certain poetic productions, notably that of the poet Mubarak Jalwaḥ, as presented in his book *The Poet Jalwaḥ: From Rebellion to Suicide*. This poet, though relatively little known, is described as « *despite his authenticity, singularity, and distinction, and despite having devoted almost the entirety of his production to his own preoccupations and those of his homeland, he sang of love for woman and of his love for his country, and thus merited recognition as a pioneer of national romanticism in modern Algerian poetry; he likewise rebelled against the classical reformist school and its conception of poetry and its function* » (Rukaybi A. A., 2009, p. 5). Jalwaḥ, whom our critic regarded as among the most perceptive of his contemporaries in apprehending poetry and its role in our lives, exemplifies Rukaybī's emphasis, within his critique of Algerian poetry, upon the romantic current, following his treatment of the stages of poetic development in Algeria, beginning with religious poetry, which constituted the subject of his doctoral dissertation entitled *Modern Algerian Religious Poetry*.

This is what emerges in his discussion of the poet Jalwaḥ, wherein, through this exemplar, he foregrounds the significant relationship between the poet and his homeland, the affiliation of Algerian poetry prior to the Revolution with the classical current associated

with the reformist movement, and the reasons underlying its transition to Romanticism. In his view, this transition did not constitute a revolt against the classical doctrine; rather, it was the outcome of the adverse conditions prevailing at the time, conditions that themselves called for revolt.

When our critic turns to the Algerian short story, from its beginnings to the stages of its development, he addresses the narrative forms that Algerian prose came to assume, such as the narrative essay, the narrative sketch, and the short story, while concentrating on the principal currents that characterised it. He begins with the Romantic current, which emerged in these works alongside the Realist current, dividing it into two tendencies: one embodying serenity and idealism, aspiring to chaste and spiritual love; and another, more acute and material, aspiring to purely physical love.

He reproaches the Romantic current for its remoteness from reality and depth, for human life is more complex and broader in horizon than a life confined to the pursuit of idealised love or purely material passion. This stands in contradiction to the orientation of the authentic artist, who « *constantly seeks the human being and gives expression to both the particular and general concerns of humanity, its anxieties, its aspirations, its longings, and its material and spiritual life alike* » (Rukaybi A. , 2009, p. 153). Hence, he distances this Romantic outlook, whether idealistic or violently material, from both reality and reason, insofar as it remains a purely subjective vision in its dreams, representations, and sorrows.

On the other hand, our critic maintains that the Realist current, which influenced Arab writers and emerged in the Algerian short story during the Liberation Revolution, was intimately bound to the tragic reality of that period. This current, inclined toward resistance and liberation, holds that « *realism is thus an orientation toward reality, and the artistic short story is that which conveys this reality with fidelity, reflecting it in a persuasive and justified style; it does not transmit it directly nor record it mechanically, but rather represents it in a manner that suggests its plausibility* » (Rukaybi A. , 2009, p. 168). In other words, Rukaybi considers realism to be that which sustained the nation's struggle against colonialism and exploitation, such that this current became one of the most salient features of the Algerian short story during the Liberation Revolution. Indeed, « *the influence of the Revolution manifested itself in the content of the short story, which began to divest itself of preoccupation with social traditions and likewise to shed the reformist*

colouring that had long dominated it, and instead to address the reality of both the individual and society » (Rukaybi A. , 2009, pp. 51-52).

He further sought to underscore that the Algerian short story is intrinsically bound to revolutionary content, whereby this genre was transformed into a new and effective force in the reconfiguration of life and the cultivation of national and social values. In this respect, he affirms that the short story writer bears a great and efficacious function, one that continually impels him to contribute to the process of change to which humanity aspires.

We thus find Abd Allah Rukaybi, both storyteller and critic, « *calling upon the intellectual to defend his identity and his linguistic, national, and religious values through his artistic productions* » (Ahmed El-Hadj, 2012, p. 13), productions that are not confined to narrative or poetic creation, but extend beyond them to encompass critical activity. Accordingly, it is never permissible for the critic to place his expertise at the service of the central authority in society as a commodity to be dispensed in order to confer a semblance of legitimacy upon its conduct. In contrast, there stands the committed intellectual (critic), one endowed with principled positions, who does not pursue the glitter of office, but directs his concern toward realities pertaining to the various forms of resistance to the domination of repressive apparatuses in all their manifestations, while also exposing the ways in which texts and culture are instrumentalised to consolidate a particular hegemony that persuades the subordinate of his inferiority and incapacity for resistance.

Such a conception, and such a critical orientation, contributed to the formation of a broader cultural consciousness, whereby « *modern Algerian culture throughout the first half of the twentieth century assumed the character of resistance, bore the weapon of cultural confrontation, and witnessed the full engagement of all intellectual elites in this current; it affirmed the role of the militant word in defending national identity and collective existence, and regarded struggle and resistance against the foreign occupier as a sacred mission requiring universal mobilisation and commitment* » (Zarman, 2005, p. 35).

Thus, Rukaybi the critic sought to disclose the orientation of literary works at a decisive juncture in Algeria's history: « *from this perspective, we find that his primary concern was directed toward highlighting the dialectical relationship between our intellectual and*

cultural productions and our identity, along with our national and religious foundations » (Ahmed El-Hadj, 2012, p. 13) .

From this, it may be said that Abd Allah Rukaybi encapsulated the function of criticism in its engagement with the creative work: to reveal its prettiness, to interpret it, to present its creator's vision of the world, and to elucidate its symbols and modes of expression in such a way that the literary work becomes an effective means of resisting all forms of domination. This process, grounded in the principle of analysing and deconstructing the literary work into its most meticulous intellectual and artistic elements, ultimately discloses the aesthetic value and function of this literary production.

Conclusion:

Finally, it must be noted that it would constitute a form of literary ingratitude to speak of Algerian literature, both creative and critical, or to produce works, studies, and academic research on numerous writers and critics from various regions without addressing the works of the writer and critic Abd Allah Rukaybi. He who advanced Algerian literature through significant strides, and who engaged with certain literary works as a critic, interrogating all that they bear of messages and codes, thereby furnishing our library with numerous works spanning the short story, drama, and critical studies, works that merit sustained attention, reading, and rereading.

Footnotes:

1. Rukaybi, A. (n.d). Studies in Modern Algerian Arabic Poetry. Cairo, Egypt: National Printing and Publishing House.
2. Ahmed El-Hadj, A. (2012). The Critical Trajectory of 'Abd Allah Rukaybi. Ben Aknoun, Algeria: University Publications Office.
3. Belmachri, M. (1981, October). The Literary position, the Palestinian Cause in Contemporary Arabic Poetry. The Literary position, 126, p. 20.
4. Rukaybi, A. (2009). The Algerian Short Story. Algiers, Algeria: Arab Book House for Printing, Publishing and Distribution.

5. Rukaybi, A. (2009). *The Poet Jalwah: From Rebellion to Suicide*. Algiers, Algeria: Arab Book House for Printing, Publishing and Distribution.
6. Rukaybi, A. (1965, 12 24). *The Algerian Arabic Short Story (The Realist Trend)*. *Ech-Chaab Newspaper*(938), 4.
7. Zarman, M. (2005). *Al-Ibrahimi and the Struggle of the Word: The Culture of Resistance (Vol. 1)*. Jerash, Jordan: Philadelphia University.