

## *Symbolic Resistance in Samira Azzam's "Bread for Sacrifice"*

### *The Major Role of Symbolism in Political, Feminist, and Social Resistance*

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#### **Abstract:**

Resistance genre is a form of literature that sparked as a reaction to the colonial campaigns around the world. It constitutes the outcome of the literary movements that have always attempted to keep pace with the developments throughout history; hence, it defines the route which some authors insisted on undertaking in order to participate with their fellow citizens in their struggle towards independence, even if holding only their pens as a weapon. Therefore, and since the Palestinian crisis of occupation has persisted to be the central political issue of the Arab world, the Arabic literature of resistance has oriented its productions towards advocating the Palestinians' right to regain their land. Indeed, as the selective intellectual elite, those writers needed to send their revolutionary ideas through a manoeuvre that avoids the hindrance of the censorship. That is how they resorted to symbolic language in order to give their motivational texts some sort of artistic forms and to grant them a safe aesthetical channel to pass through it to their desired destination. As an example of this genre, Samira Azzam presented her short story "Bread for Sacrifice", implying her resistant stance throughout the language of the work, choosing symbolism to present her issue in a more lively manner. Azzam's story features the work of art which is basically instituted on the pillars of symbolism, whereby she could display the whole story of the strife towards liberty through a well-chosen set of representations. These symbols were inspired by some essential items of the Palestinian cultural heritage in order to urge the rightful owners of the homeland to preserve their home and save their inheritance from the attempts at eradicating it. Building upon this argument, this paper examines the use of symbolism in Azzam's work in order to uphold resistance on three levels – nolitical. feminist. and social resistance.

**المقاومة الرمزية في قصة سميرة عزّام "خبز الفداء"****الباحثة****ساره زهير شاهر****الدكتور****علي اللحام****جامعة دمشق / كلية الآداب والعلوم الانسانية****المخلص:-**

يُعد أسلوب المقاومة شكلاً من أشكال الأدب الذي نشأ كردة فعل على الحملات الاستعمارية حول العالم. ويُشكّل نتاج الحركات الأدبية التي لطالما حاولت أن ترافق التطورات عبر التاريخ، وبالتالي فإنه يُعرّف الطُرق التي يسلكها الكُتّاب في سبيل المشاركة في صراع البحث عن الاستقلال إلى جانب مواطنهم، حتى لو اتخذوا من أقلامهم سلاحهم الوحيد. وحيث أن قضية احتلال فلسطين استمرت بالسيطرة على المشهد العربي، فلطالما وجّه أدب المقاومة العربي نتاجه نحو مناصرة الحق الفلسطيني باستعادة الأرض. ولكن بسبب الظروف القاهرة التي وجد الكُتّاب مسيرة كتابتهم فيها تحت رقابة المحتلّ العسكرية، فقد اضطروا لإجراء مرواغات يستطيعون من خلالها النفاذ بأفكارهم الثورية. وعلى هذا الأساس، قام الكُتّاب باللجوء إلى اللغة الرمزية من أجل إعطاء كتاباتهم التحفيزية طابعاً فنياً وتزويدها بممرات جمالية وأمنة في الوقت ذاته، لتعبر من خلالها إلى وجهتهم المقصودة. وكمثال على هذا المنحى الأدبي تقدّم سميرة عزّام قصتها القصيرة بعنوان "خبز الفداء"، حيث قامت بتضمين موقفها المقاوم من خلال مفرداتها التعبيرية على مدى العمل. وتتموضع قصة عزّام ضمن أطر الأعمال الفنية التي يتم تأسيسها بشكل أساسي على أعمدة الرمزية، حيث استطاعت استعراض قصة الصراع نحو الحرية بكامل تفاصيلها من خلال مجموعة من الصور التي تم اختيارها بعناية فائقة. وقد استوحيت هذه الصور من بعض العناصر الرئيسية في الموروث الثقافي الفلسطيني لتحث مالكي الأرض الشرعيين على المحافظة على موطنهم وحفظ تراثهم من محاولات طمسه. بناءً على ما سبق، تتناول هذه المقالة البحث في استخدام الرمزية في عمل عزّام من أجل دعم المقاومة على ثلاثة أصعدة مختلفة، ألا وهي: المقاومة السياسية والنسوية والاجتماعية.

## 1. Introduction

Resistance is a term that describes the reaction an individual undertakes against an action which aims at repressing some aspects of his/her life. It defines the process whereby an oppressed person does not accept being a subject to any aggressive attempt and revolts against their oppressors. As a mirror of life, literature has provided a genre that specializes in depicting such revolutionary movements, as an endeavor to enroll the pen in the battlefield of resistance. An outstanding example of such a literary type is “Bread of Sacrifice”, a short story by the Palestinian author Samira Azzam, through which she manifests the manoeuvres a writer has to take in order to express their revolutionary ideas. She utilizes the scope of her work to participate symbolically in the struggle of her fellow people towards gaining the liberty of their land from the Zionist occupier. Deploying the illustrative features of resistance literature, this paper is going to approach symbolism in resistance literature on three levels. The discussion is going to revolve around the headlines of the symbols representing political, social, and feminist resistance.

Resistant movements spread around the world as a response to the colonial and imperialist attacks that are taking place. However, the scope of the Arabic resistance literature focuses on the Palestinian productions in specific, since their case turns to be more than an everlasting occupation; it becomes more of a total denial and eradication of the Palestinian identity. Thus, the need is felt to put the remnant pieces of that national entity together, and consequently this quest is answered in the literary realm, where “the rupture in the lived experiences of Palestinians was in fact reconstructed through resistance literature” (Abdo, 2014: 97). In effect, waging the soul of resistance needed the motive to keep it inspired and enlightened on the road of activism. Accordingly, the active role of literature is noted to be enhancing the will to survive

and to regain the right in a homeland emblazoned with life and peace, where “springtime in this part of Palestine is a sparkling sea, traversed by white sails during the day and lit by the twinkling lamps of fishing boats at night” (Azzam, 1992: 393). Then, here sprang the impact of “resistance literature . . . [as it] formed the fuel which kept their revolutionary spirit thriving” (Abdo, 2014: 100). That is why the pen is enrolled as a commander in the legion of resistance along with the weapon.

Nevertheless, confronting the Zionist armed forces with words has not been that easily condoned. Consequently, the necessity comes for the authors to use the symbolic language in projecting their opinions, so that to avoid losing the freedom of their voices. Indeed, it is argued that "they [the writers] found in symbolism a manoeuver and triumph over the military censorship; as well as a fully aware method to express freely. Consequently, it enabled them to continue their artistic innovation, besides their duty" (Kallab, 2004-2005: 33).\* That is, in one way they use symbolism in order to convey their ideas without putting their heads on the guillotine. As a result, once approaching resistance literature, it is important to dive in depth into the symbols presented by the author in order to comprehend the complete message. Consequently, giving the full rein to their artistic imagination, writers may picture a whole life, or a whole story, within one symbol. This argument of symbolism is invited by the aesthetical way Azzam manipulates in depicting the issue she aims to propose. Notably,

Symbolism is an artistic approach prevailed by the imagination. This dominance attributes to the symbol a prior signification as for the variety of meanings and emotions. Hence, the poet, or the artist, undertakes to translate his thoughts and feelings into signifiers that express the meanings

and emotions only in the symbolic manner (Assi, 1970: 191)\*.

Obviously, Azzam's short story forms a series of symbols through which she raises an argument that might take a whole novel to be presented. Accordingly, "Bread of Sacrifice" is narrated by the use of many symbols which are worth unfolding and clarifying the ideas they could stand for.

As part of the collective feature of this work of resistance, its characters should be of a more symbolic attribute, rather than a mere portrayal of protagonists in a work of fiction. In fact, "the individual lives of the protagonists of works of resistance literature are not only individuals; they stand also for the lives of most of the people who live within the milieu of the protagonists" (Allaham, 2009: 26). This can be exemplified by Azzam's deployment of only two main characters through whom she forms her full desired picture of a typical brave soldier, as reflected in Su'ad's eyes who tells him, "I'm starting to believe that you are something of a hero" (Azzam, 1992: 393). In addition, there is Su'ad, the figure that represents the tender yet hardworking Palestinian woman, who puts her country above all the other choices of love and family, and who was well-known to be "always around, giving this one something to drink, that one something to eat, answering the bells that ring in all the rooms", as if she is preserving the life in her homeland (1992: 391). The first significant character to be introduced to the readers is Ramez. His allegorical representation is intensified through the ambiguous introduction the author initiates, referring to him as a 'he', while merely describing his occupation that "he had been ordered to guard the small hospital the Arab Legion had set up" (1992: 389). She reveals the name of that identity only when he meets the other symbolic character 'Su'ad', who reflects various

depictions. This inclination towards the nameless persona might be taken into consideration as a deliberate attempt on the behalf of Azzam to make her character appear as a symbolic reference to every person believing in an issue. Notably, the absence of any kind of physical description of Ramez also adds to the notion of his being an abstract character meant to be identified with whoever experiences such a struggle as his. In addition, Ramez appears smoking in the beginning of the story; this could be taken as an exemplification of the wrath felt by the character, in the sense that he resembles the "tobacco-filled pipe" being in the process of burning, because of the fire waging inside him (Azzam, 1992: 389). On the whole, it could be argued that Azzam portrays Ramez in her story in such a way to represent a person struggling for his rights that are stripped off from him.

In addition, another character seems to be of vital importance, which is the female protagonist Su'ad. In line with the argument of symbolism, Su'ad stands for the firm Palestinian woman who is deeply rooted in her homeland, besides representing that homeland itself. As observed in Ramez's eyes, Su'ad is unified with Palestine, "in Su'ad's eyes he saw all of Palestine's goodness" (Azzam, 1992: 394). In effect, Azzam grants a (concrete?) definite identity to the (abstract?) warrior Ramez by naming him only when he substantiates his affection towards his home through his love emotions towards Su'ad. Also, Su'ad symbolizes her country in another attribute, which is Palestine the mother. Ramez pictures her giving birth to the generation of the warriors to come, when "he saw the image of a happy home for him, and a wife who would bear him young heroes" (1992: 394). Those heroes will walk on his/the warrior's footsteps towards the liberation of their mother/home. For a soldier like Ramez, this liberation is precisely "the meaning of his [and consequently his descendant's] existence" (1992: 394).

Another important emphasis on Su'ad's being the representative of the mother land is when she brings Ramez and his comrades the basket of food (1992: 396). Apparently, she is the very one who brings them their supplies, when everyone else, including the official institutes, become reluctant to providing the soldiers with their needs. It follows that Su'ad volunteers and risks her life to do so, proposing the symbol that she is nurturing the defensive power, constituted in the few warriors left on the front lines, and supporting them in order to preserve their mission of defending the land represented by her. Hence, Su'ad exemplifies the mother that encourages her sons to defend their roots and their right to be and live, even if that means her ceasing to be. Consequently, it can be said that Su'ad stands for the homeland with all its indications.

Further, Su'ad's character is given another dimension, where the readers see a different and mightier depiction of her at the end of the story. As a matter of fact, Su'ad died when she was coming to bring the soldiers their food that would sustain them; in other words, her death is the price of their lives. Therefore, Ramez " would tell them an ancient story known to this land and its people"; a story that expresses the origin and the roots of this country, and the secret behind its continuing to exist (Azzam, 1992: 399). Indeed, this clearly expressed remark cannot take the observer but in one direction, which is "the story of the redemption of life by flesh and blood" (1992: 399). Seemingly, the self-sacrificing Su'ad, who does not hesitate a moment to risk her life in order to preserve those warriors' lives, appears as a form of manifestation of Jesus Christ. Even more, linking this idea to the above one of Su'ad's image as a generous mother, it can be more argued that she is the tender-hearted figure who prefers to suffer by her own on seeing her fellow humans' suffering, just like the Savior. Put simply, by

drawing this parallelism between Jesus and Su'ad, Azzam wants to ascribe her female figure the most sublime characterization.

In the same way, a comparison can be drawn between Azzam's bread and the Christian "Bread of Sacrifice" itself. Right from the title of the story, Azzam does not choose such an intensive title haphazardly, and she constitutes all the reasons, emotionally and patriotically, behind this mentioned sacrifice throughout the story. Apparently, Su'ad, the Jesus-like figure, gets 'crucified', leaving behind her 'the apostle' Ramez and 'the last dinner' she brought him and his companions. Thus, Su'ad's invitation, "eat, for this is my body; drink, for this is my blood", would propose Ramez as the "Eastern Orthodox priest" serving the loaves of bread soaked with Su'ad's blood, which she offers in a tragic, kind of celestial, scene (Azzam, 1992: 399). Arguably, alluding to the death of Jesus Christ, and how Su'ad's death forms a present reflection of that previous incident, Azzam might be offering the readers a question concerning the identity of the killers of both these significant characters. Taking into consideration Azzam's Christian religion, she might be drawing the reader to the conclusion of the Jewish identity of the everlasting assaulter of the Palestinian people.

Equally important, one of the most prominent symbols embodying Palestinian people and their case is the "kaffiyyeh". This symbol has been always laden with references to Palestine, in the sense that it is considered to be a cultural heritage. It symbolizes the Palestinians' strife, as they used to veil their faces with it during the demonstrations in the face of the Zionist forces. A study has demonstrated the value of the kaffiyyeh, expressing that

After the Arab Revolt of the 1930s, the keffiyeh [or *kaffiyyeh*, according to its spelling in the translation of Azzam's story] became a heavily used symbol that, despite

different political contexts, has consistently signified the same intent: Palestinian solidarity for independence (Damluji, 2010: 7).

Thereupon, this symbol is one of the earliest that Azzam uses when she depicts her character 'Ramez', and the atmosphere surrounding him, as he starts to recollect his memories; "it had been cold that night, and neither his *kaffiyyeh* nor his heavy overcoat were enough to shield him from the biting chill" (Azzam, 1992: 390). Consequently, depending on Damluji's observation of such a cultural object, alongside Azzam's use of it in her narrative, it can be argued that she intends here to manifest that the homeland of Palestine is no more a warm bosom for its sons. Apparently, the *kaffiyyeh* does not ward off Ramez from the cold weather, the same way the war-torn country cannot guarantee its citizens a shelter in an independent and unified homeland anymore. Additionally, the primal spark of warmth between Su'ad and Ramez, the homeland and the patriot, appears when she comes to hand him a cup of tea that sustains his body from the coldness of the estrangement felt after the internal exile imposed on them by the occupier. Accordingly, "he felt it would be nice to have a warm object to hold against his chilled fingers", and so to feel the warmth of his home (1992: 390). Precisely, the use of tea here is meant to act as a reminder of a popular inheritance, which recalls the image of the Palestinian families gathered to drink the most common drink among them. Hence, Azzam is alerting her protagonist to the process committed by the invader to destabilize their cultural roots and national symbols.

Moreover, the loaf of bread never ceases to indicate different illustrations in this story. Actually, the importance of such a symbol stems from the fact of its being deployed usually in the literature of

resistance to represent the right of respectable living, as well as of freedom. This can be supported both by Azzam's employment of this symbol in her piece of writing at hand, besides Ghassan Kanafani's usage of it. As for Azzam, she uses it in a very precise and crucial depiction; it is Su'ad who brings the bread to Ramez and his comrades, when they are in the front lines, and the battles are at climax, "she was wrapped in a coat and was carrying a large basket . . . there was bread, cigarettes, and candy in the basket" (1992: 396). Seemingly, Su'ad comes at this stage bearing the bread to remind them that there is a right that is worth fighting for, which is your right to have a free homeland, and an honorable life on it. Likewise, a parallel argument is traced down in the loaf of bread that appears in Kanafani's famous saying, "they steal your loaf of bread, they give you a crumb of it; and then, they order you to thank them for their generosity, how insolence!"\*. Again, it might be detected that Kanafani focuses on the use of bread here in order to indicate people's life, as if the loaf of bread here is deployed as a kind of synecdoche; that is, being usually the most basic constitution of life, bread here stands for the good living. Truly, "in his literary work, Kanafani recognizes the strong relationship between the social, the economic and the political in the making of peoples' histories" (Abdo, 2014: 105). In other words, the illustrations made about bread by both authors show how exploiting the economic situation of people serves as an effective weapon in order to force them into surrendering. On the whole, in light of Kanafani's loaf of bread, Azzam's bread can be analyzed as a heavy implied symbol used to refer to the Palestinians' dignity and persistence.

In addition, the use of symbolism is not restricted to the political resistance in Azzam's piece of writing. She also deploys it to enhance the position of the feminist struggle to affirm their vital

role in the resistance movement. Indeed, the hints to feminist resistance continues to show up throughout the story. In this respect, Azzam is considered a pioneer, to whom "recognition is deserved, too, for her early, tentative articulations of a feminist societal critique that would more vigorously be taken up by later authors" (Frag, 2014: 103). Hence, she presents Su'ad's character to voice the author's belief about the negligence of women's sacrifices in the attempts to free their lands, while "all that is needed to counter such notions is the inclusion of such experiences and voices back into the history of resistance, representing it in its complete and comprehensive form" (Abdo, 2014: 41). Seemingly, the activist Su'ad is seen to be defending her patriotic stance, when she confirms to Ramez that she insists on staying in the city in order to perform her duties, "no, not because of you. Yes, I love you, it's true. Still, you're not everything!" (Azzam, 1992: 395). Similarly, Su'ad's defensive response to Ramez, when he asks her about the hardships she might confront in her job as a nurse, suggests that she considers his enquiry to be laden with underestimation to her role as a female. That is why, "with a gravity he had not expected, she replied, "do you think I'm not good enough for duties like this?" (1992: 390). Considerably, her aggressive reply may be justified in the notion that "such conditions [of defending against occupation] have intensified patriarchy within the Palestinian traditional culture, limiting, among other things, women's representation in the public realm" (Abdo, 2014: 86). Clearly, her insistence on fully practicing her duty, and far more than it, ended by immortalizing her as the savior figure of her 'fellow comrades'.

In the same way, when the rumours spread about the Zionist invader coming close to their city, Su'ad's "brother had tried to make her come with them, but she had refused. She had argued with him and he had slapped her on the face. All she could do then was

run away” (Azzam, 1992: 395). In this sense, Su’ad is presented to be a revolutionary character even on the gender roles of her society. She seems to be smashing "the conditions of patriarchal society and the inferior position of women within this society" (Millett, 1970: 505). Until the last scene of the story, Azzam appears to be deconstructing the stereotypical masculine conception of heroism. She presents "Su’ad’s death, and particularly the messianic overtones it carries, [as it] inverts the normally masculinist discourse of martyrdom by having the woman die so that the men can live" (Farag, 2014: 89). Picturing her protagonist’s death in such a celestial manner, Azzam ascribes the very sublime end result of being a hero to Su’ad, represented by her martyrdom. Accordingly, this author "is perhaps the first to expose the woman’s active role in the Palestinian struggle, showing her for the first time as an independently patriotic character, unaffected by external persuasion to be otherwise" (Habib, 1999: 16). Besides, she does not restrict her depiction of the female role to standing behind the militant troops on the front lines. Therefore, she provides the scene where women are getting trained in order to stand, along with their male comrades, holding their weapons, when Ramez “was in the middle of demonstrating to a women’s squadron how to stand firm holding a heavy rifle without faltering” (1992: 393). She sheds the light on the abandoned ability of women to participate in the fight and projects the efforts they exert to ensure their importance in the struggle. That is, Azzam translates the fact that “during the training phase of the armed struggle, women attended political courses at which time they read and discussed world struggles and revolutions” (Abdo, 2014: 89). Indeed, Su’ad assures that in her response to Ramez when he first asked about her name replying, “we are all comrades here” (Azzam, 1992: 391). As has been noted,

Azzam illustrates the prominent role of women in both social and political resistance.

In a similar discussion, presenting the relationship of the couple protagonists in an obvious patriarchal conservative society highlights a form of social resistance, where Ramez and Su'ad break the restricted rules of their society. The manifestation of their love is best clarified as he meets Su'ad while "she was not in her nurse's uniform" (Azzam, 1992: 392). This meeting announces their acquaintance as a not professional one anymore; rather, they get stripped of their formal traits. Moreover, they do not bother to conceal their relationship, when they agree to meet in a training camp in front of all the squadrons, as he told her "I train recruits, both men and women. Come to the Port Club" (1992: 393). Also, when she took the mission of delivering the basket of supplies to the comrades, "she always stayed just a few minutes, but they were enough to arouse his emotions in a way that made him both tired and happy" (1992: 396). Even in the death scene, Ramez does not hesitate to bid farewell to his beloved with kisses and declarative cries of their love. Concerning this, Azzam describes: "why did she not revive under his kisses and his anguished cries, and how could those eyelids not tremble with life as he whispered his love to her?" (1992: 397). That is, practicing their relationship publicly, Azzam presents a young generation whose resistance is rooted in their souls. Growing to learn how to defy every notion that tries to deprive them from their rights, they break even the social restrictions which fight back their emotions in order to repress the persons from expressing their feelings.

All in all, literature has always been a contemporary companion to all the events taking place in different eras and areas. It has proven to be the only registration through which people's voices

could be able to survive and reach the consecutive generations. Therefore, resistance advocates have enrolled literature in their troops in order to convey the struggles of their crises and the sacrifices they have made for. That is why Palestinian authors have oriented their pens into taking over the power of writing as their defending weapon, where they chronicled the assaults their land has been subjected to since the 1948 Nakbeh. They materialized their suffering into literary works, so that “aided by a rich literature which keeps the memory and history of Palestine the homeland alive, the Palestinian struggle is not an ideological struggle or a struggle of ideas alone: it is a materialist struggle as well” (Abdo, 2014: 100-1). Indeed, the literature of resistance demonstrated its effectiveness as the Zionist occupation pointed their censorship force towards silencing the critical writers. This literary genre performed the role of the motive in energizing the defending militants. Following this, “one needs to remember here that resistance literature expresses ideas or words only while it is still under production; the moment the word leaves the pen or the desk of the writer, it turns into a dynamic force for change” (100). Hence, as an author who ascribes her productions to resistant school, Azzam undertakes writing under the umbrella of resistance as a method of participating in her people’s struggle to their freedom. However, to slip through the barriers of the invader’s observation, she turns her evocative speech into symbolic illustration, so as to pave the way for her messages to reach their aimed recipient. In addition, she exploits the power of expressions granted to her by literature in order to highlight the forms of internal resistance such as the social and feminist ones. Indeed, she deploys the powerful value of symbolism in presenting her ideas in an intensified manner, where the symbol is able to convey a more impressive message of her issue. Also, she shapes her line of

thoughts in the form of the symbols represented in her story so as to engage the readers directly with the struggle lived through by her people. All of the previously mentioned aspects conclude that Azzam's "Bread of Sacrifice" is a short story that compresses in its symbols motivational invitations to reestablish a collaborative and affective resistance ideology.

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- I translated the extracts marked by this \* from Arabic into English.

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