

Lamentations and Hopes of Conflict Victims in *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* Song (Michael Riffaterre Semiotic Analysis)

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Abstract: This article aims to analyse the lyrics of an Arabic song entitled *Sayyidi ar-Rais* by Heba Meshary Hamada using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory. The song tells about the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The Israeli- Palestinian conflict that has caught the world's attention, through this song Heba M.H wants to convey a message which is her self-expression of the phenomenon that is happening. She tries to describe the situation and condition of the Palestinian people during the conflict. By using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, the researcher wants to dig deeper into the meanings contained in the lyrics of the song *Sayyidi ar-Rais*. This research is a qualitative-descriptive research with the type of library research where the data obtained comes from literary sources related to the material objects and formal objects used. Based on the results of an analysis of the lyrics of the song *Sayyidi ar-Rais* using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, namely through heuristic and hermeneutic reading, it was found that the song *Sayyidi ar-Rais* describes the lamentation of a Palestinian child who tells of the suffering he and the Palestinian people are experiencing as a result of the conflict with Israel, and hopes for freedom and peace for the land of Palestine and also for its people.

Keywords: Arabic Song; *Sayyidi ar-Rais*, Conflict, Semiotics

A. Introduction

Many Arabic literary works, whether in the form of poetry or prose such as novels, make a picture of the reality of life that occurs in society as a theme or topic of discussion. This happens because many poets and writers want to convey feelings and messages of life through their works. In its development, in modern times it is not only limited to poetry, short stories, novels, or dramas that are included in Arabic literature, but has also spread to the art of music. In modern times, many Arabic songs have attracted the attention of people from various parts of the world because of the beauty of the words, content and meaning contained in them. One of the Arabic songs that attracts the attention of people

from various countries in the world is a song entitled *Sayyidi ar-Rais* by Heba Meshary Hamada.

The song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* is a song created by Heba Meshary Hamada, he is one of the famous writers from Kuwait. This song is performed by a child singer named Alex George S. He is a singer from Ain Saadeh. Basically, this *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* song is a song that is delivered in the form of an advertisement. The advertisement was produced by one of the major telecommunications companies in Kuwait, Zain, in order to welcome the month of Ramadan in 2018 as well as support for the Palestinian population in Jerusalem, which at that time was officially declared the capital of Israel by the United States under the leadership of Donald Trump. The song, which is packaged in the form of an advertisement, was also uploaded on Youtube social media on Zain's official account on 16 May 2018, which until now has been watched 57 million times and also received a positive response.

The song titled *Sayyidi ar-Rais* is a song that describes the conflict between Palestine and Israel. As we know that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a conflict that is quite public attention. The attacks carried out by Israel against Palestine have claimed many lives. The conflict certainly triggers the public or people from various countries to sympathise with what is experienced by the Palestinian state and its inhabitants, not only from the Islamic community but also from other communities.

Some people think that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a religious conflict, but the conflict is actually caused by the struggle for land in the Palestinian territories. This conflict is caused by the Jewish people who want to establish their *national home* in Palestine. Jews consider Palestine as the promised land. In this case, Jews believe that Jerusalem must return to be the capital of the Jewish people and must restore the rights of the Jews who have been oppressed.¹ The desire of the Jewish people finally began to manifest when Palestine fell into British hands after the defeat of the Ottoman Turks during the 1917 war. This was favourable for the Jews who wanted the land of Palestine. Evidenced by the

¹ Alwi Shihab, *Islam Inklusif: Menuju Sikap Terbuka Dalam Beragama* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999).

Balfour Declaration on 2 November 1917 which was a promise to the Jews to establish a homeland for the Jews in Palestine.²

In the lyrics of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais*, Heba Meshary Hamada wants to convey a message that is an expression of himself towards the phenomena that occur around him. She tries to describe the situation and condition of the Palestinian people during the conflict. How the suffering they had to face because of the many losses they experienced, both the loss of homes as a place to live, their loved ones, as well as freedom and peace to live. Peace became a rare thing for the people of Palestine, it happened because of the cruelty of the Israeli Zionists who continue to bombard Palestine with various kinds of weapons they have.

From the description above we can also understand that a song lyric is not just a beautiful series of words, but song lyrics are a representation of the reality seen and felt by the poet. With his writing expertise, Heba wrote the lyrics of this *Sayyidi ar-Rais* song using the right and good choice of words, touching and full of meaning. The meanings contained in the lyrics of this song are of course some are easy and can be understood immediately, but there are some that require other interpretations before they can be understood. Of course, to understand these difficult words requires the right tool, and the right tool is semiotics.

Semiotic studies or semiology is a study of the function of signs in a text, namely how to understand the system of signs that exist in the text that plays a role in guiding readers to be able to capture the messages contained in the text. In other words, semiotics interrogates the codes set by the author so that the reader can enter the space of stored meaning.

In semiotics, there are many theories about signs, and one of the *most popular* and suitable theories for studying poetry texts and the like is Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory. In his theory, Michael Riffaterre argues that if you want to reveal the meanings contained in the text, then there are four aspects that must be considered by readers or researchers. The four aspects are

² Emilia Palupi Nurjannah. M Fakhruddin, 'Deklarasi Balfour : Awal Mula Konflik Israel Palestina', *Jurnal Sejarah Dan Pendidikan Sejarah*, 1.1 (2019), 15–26.

(1) discontinuity of expression, (2) heuristic and hermeneutic reading, (3) matrix, model, and variant, (4) hypogram.³

Riffaterre considers poetry to be a language activity, although this activity is slightly different from other language activities because poetry speaks about something with another meaning, or conveys meaning in an indirect way. This *indirection* can be caused by three things: *displacing of meaning*, *distorting of meaning*, and *creating of meaning*.

Heuristic reading is a form of reading in which the reader unites linguistic signs. At this stage what is obtained is the meaning based on the reader's linguistic ability.⁴ More clearly, heuristic reading is a reading based on the first level semiotic system. This reading produces the meaning of the poem as a whole according to normative grammar. The hermeneutic or retroactive reading is a re-reading of the results of the heuristic reading by giving an interpretation. This reading is based on the second level semiotic sign system which is a reading based on literary conventions.

Matrix is an abstract concept that is not actualised. The matrix itself is not present in the text, but the actualisation of the matrix can be present in a text called a model. Then the model is transformed into variants in the form of descriptions or problems. Matrix is a keyword and the core to determine the theme and the big meaning contained in a poem.⁵ Meanwhile, a hypogram is a cause or background for the creation of a literary work that can be in the form of events in history, the state of society, or nature and life that the writer experiences.⁶

³ Rachmat Djoko Pradopo, *Pengkajian Puisi: Analisis Strata Norma Dan Analisis Struktural Dan Semiotik* (Yogyakarta: UGM Press, 2018), 4.

⁴ Yulia Nasrul Latifi, 'PUISI ANA KARYA NAZIK AL-MALA'IKAH (Analisis Semiotik Riffaterre)', *Adabiyāt: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra*, 12.1 (2013), 25 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/ajbs.2013.12102>>.

⁵ Sammad Hasibuan, 'Nasionalisme Dalam Puisi Hanin Karya Ahmad Rami Dan Faruq Juwaidah (Sebuah Tinjauan Intertekstualitas)', *Tsaqofiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab*, 4 (2022), 223–242.

⁶ Rachmat Djoko Pradopo, *Pengkajian Puisi: Analisis Strata Norma dan Analisis Struktural dan Semiotik*, (Yogyakarta: UGM Press, 2018), 5.

B. Literature Review

Based on the researcher's search and review of previous studies, there are several studies that are quite relevant to this research. First, a journal article entitled "Charles Morris' Semiotic Analysis of the Song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* by Hema Meshary Hamada". The journal was written by Sherly Ulfa Umairoh, a student of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, and published by *Tabuah Scientific Magazine: Ta'limat, Culture, Religion, and Humanities* Volume 26 No. 1 edition January- June 2022.⁷ The second, a journal article entitled "The Influence of Modern Arabic Music Literature on the Song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* by Hema Meshary Hamada (Semantic Analysis)". The article was written by Zahratol Mukaromah, Rika Astari, Salma Nuraeni, and Febriani Indah Wulandari and published by *Lisanan Arabiya: Journal of Arabic Language Education* Volume 5 No. 1 in 2021.⁸ The two journal articles above have similar material objects with this research. Third, a journal article entitled "Poetry *Ana* by Nazik Al-Malaikah (Riffaterre's Semiotic Analysis)". The article was written by Yulia Nasrul Latifi, a lecturer at the Faculty of Adab and Cultural Sciences of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. The article was published by *Adabiyat: Journal of Language and Literature* Vol XII No. 1 June 2013.⁹ Fourth, a journal article entitled "Michael Riffaterre's Semiotic Analysis on The Poetry *Ikbari 'Isyrina 'Aman* by Nizar Qabbani". The article was written by Yusuf Haikal, a student of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and published by *Diwan: Journal of Arabic Language and Literature* Volume 7 No. 2 in 2021.¹⁰ Both journal articles have similar formal objects or approaches with this research.

⁷ Sherly Ulfa Umairoh, 'Analisis Semiotika Charles Morris Dalam Lagu Sayyidi Ar-Rais Karya Hama Meshary Hamada', *Tabuah*, 26.1 (2022), 40-47 <<https://doi.org/10.37108/tabuah.v26i1.683>>.

⁸ Zahrotul Mukaromah and others, 'Pengaruh Satra Musik Arab Modern Pada Lagu Sayyidi Ar-Rais Karya Hama Meshary Hamdana', *Lisanan Arabiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab*, 5.1 (2021), 13-34 <<https://doi.org/10.32699/liar.v5i1.1695>>.

⁹ Latifi.

¹⁰ Yusuf Haikal, 'Analisis Semiotika Michael Riffaterre Pada Puisi Ikbari 'Isyrina 'Aman Karya Nizar Qabbani / Michael Riffaterre's Semiotic Analysis on the Poetry Ikbari 'Isyrina 'Aman by Nizar Qabbani', *Diwan: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab*, 7.2 (2021), 160 <<https://doi.org/10.24252/diwan.v7i2.20618>>.

C. Methods

The research method is one of the most important points in a study. A study will not go well if it does not use the right research method and in accordance with the material object and formal object used. The method used in this study is a qualitative-descriptive method. In this case, the presentation of data will be delivered in the form of description or translation, and not in the form of numbers, tables, or graphs. While the approach that will be used in this study is the literary approach, especially in the realm of semiotics study Michael Riffaterre. This research is a research library research, so the data obtained is the result of literature study collected from sources related to research objects.

The material object in this study is the lyrics of the song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* by Heba Meshary Hamada which is also a primary data source in this study. The data obtained are the results of researchers' review of the lyrics of the song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* using the technique of refer and noted, namely by listening directly by the song created by Heba Meshary Hamada entitled *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* then recorded the lyrics of the song. After the data is collected and considered valid, the data is analyzed using the Semiotics theory Michael Riffaterre which then in its presentation will be delivered in the form of a description or description. Data decomposition in descriptive form will make this research more objective because the data obtained is delivered in accordance with the actual conditions.

D. Finding and Discussion

1. Heuristic Reading to *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* Song

Heuristic reading is the first stage of reading known as the *first order semiotics system* in Riffaterre's semiotic construction which is mimesis. Mimesis is one of the studies of literary works that seeks to understand the relationship of literary works with reality or reality.¹¹ In this heuristic reading, the text is read by looking at the existing linguistic meaning. The heuristic reading of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* song lyrics is as follows:¹²

¹¹ Wiyatmi, *Pengantar Kajian Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006).

¹² Samir dan Heba Meshary Hamada Abud, *Sayyidi Ar-Rais (Zain Ramadhan 2018 Commercial)* (Kuwait, 2018) <<https://youtu.be/1lJB7cv97Dg>>.

سيدي الرئيس

سيدي الرئيس . رمضان كريم . وأنت مدعو على الإفطار . إذا وجدت بيتي في الدمار .
وعادت أُمي من الطابور . بجذ وقلب مكسور

وأذنت مساجد . ورنّت الكنائس . جيران في الله . أبواب بلا حارس . ووصلت مراكب الموت
إلى أرض الأحلام . دون أن يصبح الأطفال قضية رأي عام

سيدي الرئيس . أنا لا أنام . كلّما أغمضت عيني، أسمع انفجا . ويشتعل سريري دخانا و
نار . ويخرج الخوف من باب الدولار . وتبكي الأغاني . وتنزف الألعاب
سيدي الرئيس، تنزف الألعاب

سيدي الرئيس . نحن الهاربون . نحن المبعدون . نحن المذنبون
نحن المتهمون بالعبادة، بالعبادة . المحكومون شيقا بالإبادة . بالإبادة
الذين قطعت ألسنتنا . لأنها نطقت بالشهادة، بالشهادة

سيدي الرئيس . سنفطر في القدس، عاصمة فلسطين . يكتبها رب الأمنيات العالقة بين يا
ليت آمين

Mr President. This is Ramadan. I invite you to break the fast together. You will find my house has been destroyed And my mum just got back from the queue With bread and a broken heart.

And the call to prayer for the mosque was heard And the church bells have rung Coexist because of God Doors without guards. Then came the ship of death To the land of dreams. Without making children an issue of public opinion.

Mr President. I can't sleep. Every time I close my eyes, I hear the sound of explosions My mattress was engulfed in smoke and flames. My fears came out of their nest. Songs become cries, my toys bleed too Mr President, my toy is bleeding too.

Mr President. We became fugitives. We were expelled. We became sinners. We became suspects because of our faith and worship We were

sentenced to death. By those who shut our mouths Because of the shahada that we said.

Mr President. We want to break our fast in Al-Quds. Capital of Palestine. Determined by Allah. between prayer and hope. Amin.

The song title *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* mean Mr President. The word *sayyid* itself means master or respectful call to an olderman, while the word *rais* means head, leader, chairman, president, boss, or superior. The first stanza reads: *Mr President (now) Ramadan/ I invite you to break the fast together/ You will find my house has been destroyed And my mum just got back from the queue With bread and a broken heart.*

This first stanza describes the conversation between *my* character who is a child and someone he calls Mr. President, here there is no explanation of the identity or other explanations about the Mr. President character. Because it has entered the month of Ramadan, the little boy invites the President to break the fast together at his house. Then the child explains that later the father will see that the house he lives in has been destroyed and his mother returns from queuing for bread with a broken heart.

The second stanza reads: *And the call to prayer for the mosque was heard And the church bells have rung/ Coexist because of God Doors without guards/ Then came the ship of death To the land of dreams/ Without making children an issue of public opinion.* In this second verse illustrates the sound of the mosque's call to prayer with each other with the sound of the church bells, where the two places of worship live side by side with peace. But then the ship came to death to the land of dreams without regard to the lives of children who live there. Here it is not yet known what is meant by the ship of death and the land of dreams.

The third stanza reads: *Mr President I can't sleep/ Every time I close my eyes, I hear the sound of explosions My mattress was engulfed in smoke and flames/ My fears came out of their nest/ Songs become cries, my toys bleed too Mr President, my toy is bleeding too.* In this third stanza, my character, who is a small child, complains and laments to the person he calls Mr President that he cannot sleep because every time he wants to close his eyes he hears the sound of explosions. He also saw that his mattress was on fire and he was terrified, his beautiful songs turned into cries, and his toys were soiled with blood.

The fourth stanza reads: Mr President/ We became fugitives We were expelled We became sinners/ We became suspects because of our faith and worship We were sentenced to death/ By those who shut our mouths./ Because of the shahada that we said. In this fourth stanza, the little boy character (as mentioned in the previous explanation) tells and expresses his sadness to the figure of Mr President that he and other people who are then represented by the word kami they become fugitives, sinners, suspects, and even expelled because they believe, and worship. They were also sentenced to death by people who silenced their mouths for saying the shahada.

The fifth stanza reads: Mr President/ We want to break our fast in Al-Quds Capital of Palestine/ That which Allah sets between prayer and hope Aamiin. In this fifth stanza, our characters express their wish and hope to break their fast in Palestine, the capital of Palestine. In the last line of this fifth stanza, there is the word aamiin which is a form of isim fi'il amr which means istajib lana (grant) which is usually said when someone hopes for something to happen or materialise.

From this heuristic reading, the meaning of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* song lyrics is not yet clear and is still ambiguous. There are still words that have no known meaning and intention that actually want to be conveyed. Therefore, it equires reading in the second stage, namely hermeneutic reading.

2. Hermeneutic Reading of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* Song Lyrics

Hermeneutic reading is the second reading stage after heuristic reading, which is based on literary conventions. This means that a text is interpreted through understanding words from connotative meanings and the lack of continuity of expression deliberately carried out by a writer.¹³ The results of hermeneutic reading of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* song lyrics are as follows:

As mentioned in the introduction, *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* is a song that describes the conflict between Israel and Palestine. One of the conflicts that has received much public attention is the inauguration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by the United States government under the leadership of Donald Trump, which was

¹³ Noor Nailarrochim, 'Puisi Al-Kulira Karya Nazik Al-Malaikah (Studi Analisis Semiotika Michael Riffaterre)', *A Jamy: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab*, 9 (2020).

originally the capital of Palestine. The decision had a negative impact on the Palestinian population in Jerusalem and its surroundings. The lyrics of the song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* describe the suffering of the Palestinians due to the conflict with Israel.

If we refer to the title of this song, namely *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* which means Mr President, then it is as if this song is addressed to them, namely world leaders, presidents of developed countries who have a high position in the eyes of the world. The goal is that they can know and feel how the suffering experienced by the Palestinian people due to the actions of Israel and its allies.

In the first stanza of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais'* song, the word *Mr Presidentis* no longer just interpreted as a man who is old and serves as president, but can be interpreted as someone - whoever it is - who has great power and influence in the eyes of the world who with just one decision can affect peace and human life. This can be understood from how the little boy tells his suffering to this Mr President in the hope that he can know and understand the suffering that the boy is experiencing so that he can help him. In this case, Mr President here can also be addressed to the leaders of developed countries whose opinions must be heard, as well as related institutions such as the UN which also participates in resolving the conflict between Palestine and Israel.

In this first stanza there is also the word *broken heart*, what is meant by broken heart here is not the heart as an organ of the human body, but the feeling of sadness felt due to the many sufferings experienced. The suffering is caused by many factors as written in the previous array that their homes were destroyed because of the continuous bomb attacks carried out by Israeli Zionist forces against Palestine so that they no longer have a place to live, even to eat they have to queue at the posts which of course are also not easy to obtain.

Then in the second stanza there is a sentence and the call to prayer of the mosque was reverberating and the church bells had rung coexisting because of Allah, the mosque referred to here is the Al-Aqsa mosque while what is meant by the church here is the Wailing Wall where the Jews pray, both are located in the city of Jerusalem and are in the same area even the Wailing Wall is attached to the back of the Al-Aqsa mosque. Before Israel acquired Jerusalem as part of their territory, the majority Muslim Palestinian population and the Jewish Israeli population lived side by side peacefully without any guard.

In this second stanza, there is also the expression *ship of death*, what is meant by the ship of death here is the Israeli Zionist army troops who come with various kinds of weapons to attack the Palestinian population. While the expression *land of dreams* in the next array is addressed to Palestine, which is the land where the little boy was born and built his dreams with his family and friends.

Then in the third stanza there is the phrase *my toys bleed*, what is meant here is of course not that the toys bleed, but the expression describes how severe the situation was when the bomb exploded to injure and claim the lives of many Palestinians at that time, also destroying their homes to the point that the toys were also exposed to the blood of the victims who were injured or *martyred* at the time of the incident.

In the fourth stanza there are the words *fugitive, expelled, sinner, and suspect*, these words describe the position of the Palestinians at that time where they could not feel freedom and peace to live and worship. They were colonised, expelled from their own country, even shot dead just because they believed, practised Islam, and worshipped in the mosque that they revered, Al-Aqsa mosque. They cannot freely worship there because of the many policies and restrictions issued by the Israeli Jews to worship in Al-Aqsa mosque.

In the fifth stanza there is a sentence *We want to break our fast in Al-Quds*, the word *we* here refers to the little boy in the song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* and also other Palestinians. The sentence is spoken by a child to Mr President, and what is meant by Al-Quds here is Jerusalem which used to be the capital of Palestine. The phrase above, although it is a statement sentence, the sentence served as a sarcasm to the American President at that time, Donald Trump, who inaugurated Al-Quds as the capital of Israel in 2018 and was no longer the capital of Palestine. The expression can also function as a hope, namely the hope that Al-Quds will return to being the capital of Palestine.

Based on the hermeneutic reading above, it can be seen that the matrix of the lyrics of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* is about the lament of a child who hopes for freedom and peace for his country Palestine. The matrix is concluded from the model obtained, which is about the suffering of the Palestinian people. This model can be known from the variants that exist in each stanza. In the first stanza, the variants are in the sentences *my house has been destroyed* and *a broken heart*. In the second stanza, the variant is found in the phrase *then came the ship of death*. In the third

stanza, the variant is in the phrase *explosion sound*. In the fourth stanza, the variants are found in the words *fugitive*, *expelled*, *suspect*, and *death penalty*. The four stanzas, namely the first, second, third, and fourth stanzas are all expressions of lament over the suffering that the Palestinians experience. The fifth stanza is a closing that expresses their hope that Al-Quds or Jerusalem can return to be the capital of Palestine, which in other words they want to return to their former life, where they can still feel freedom and peace in living life.

From the description above, it can also be seen that the hypogram or background of the writing of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* song lyrics is based on existing facts and realities, namely the conflict that occurred between Israel and Palestine, where the conflict has had a very bad impact on the freedom and peace of life of the Palestinian people.

From the description of the analysis of the lyrics of the song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* above using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory, we can find out that Heba Meshary Hamada as the author of the song lyrics really wants to convey to the public about how the description of the suffering experienced by the Palestinian population, how they feel when they know that their lives are not okay because the explosion of bombs and Israeli army incursions can come at any time which ultimately causes them to lose their homes, families and relatives, food difficulties and various other sufferings. They also hope to be able to live in peace and tranquillity again as before the conflict occurred. From the other side, we can also understand that conflicts between nations or countries can have fatal consequences. Therefore, as much as possible we must avoid conflicts between nations or countries for any reason, so that later there are no more people who become victims and feel a very bad impact on their lives.

D. Conclusion

The lyrics of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* are written based on the reality of life, which is related to the conflict that occurred between Israel and Palestine, especially regarding the suffering experienced by the Palestinian people at that time. Heba Meshary Hamada as the lyricist of *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* has succeeded in attracting the attention of the global community to sympathise with what the Palestinians are experiencing through the selection of good diction and precise delivery.

Based on the analysis of the lyrics of the song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* using Michael Riffaterre's semiotic theory through heuristic and hermeneutic reading, it can be concluded that the song *Sayyidi Ar-Rais* describes the lament of a Palestinian child who tells of the suffering they experience due to the conflict with Israel, as well as the hope for freedom and peace for his country Palestine and its people.

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