



Bread of the Ravens

Aksil Azergui

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An armed resistance breaks out in the mountains, and a journalist makes plans to document the stories of those fighting, in Aksil Azergui's rousing novel *Bread of the Ravens*, a literary exploration of life amid the indigenous Amazigh people of North Africa.

An unnamed journalist writes a newspaper article criticizing the government. Before the papers can be distributed, the military destroys all copies. The journalist, still committed to his mission, makes his way to the mountains. When he is stopped at a checkpoint, he is recognized, beaten, and imprisoned.

Between bouts of torture, the journalist takes solace in his dreams. In them, he searches the villages for a subject. But writing, for the mountain people, among whom oral traditions reign, has been declared sacrilegious; no one is willing to participate: "they monitored the sky and earth. They monitored their own words and their hand gestures. They live in another prison, without walls, but nothing like the one I knew."

Before the journalist is imprisoned, his words exhort resistance. As the novel continues, though, he endures physical and mental torment and becomes more melancholy and alienated from himself. His bouts of consciousness are brief, and he becomes "tired of fighting an enemy I cannot defeat alone. I am homesick and yearning for the beauty of a smile. I am trapped in this darkness."

The novel brings to the forefront the Amazigh poetic tradition—descriptive, infused with emotion, and evocative of place. Its scenes are rendered with clarity, even amid dream sequences. The realities of political imprisonment are made clear, though the journalist's escapist fantasies linger the longest.

Bread of the Ravens is a short, impactful novel about censorship and political repression.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (May / June 2026)

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