Spacial Poetic Text throughout Samih al-Qasim's Poetry

Saleem Abu Jaber, Khaled Igbaria

Abstract—For readers, space/place is one of the most significant references to reveal deep significances and indications in modern Arabic poetic texts. Generally, when poets evoke places and/or spaces, they do not mean to refer readers to detailed geographic or physical spaces, but to the symbolic significances and dimensions that those spaces have and through which poets encourage spacial awareness in their readers. Recently, as a result, there has been a great deal of interest in research addressing spacial poetic texts and dimensions in modern Arabic poetry in general and in Palestinian poetry in particular. Samih al-Qasim is one of the most recent prominent Palestinian revolutionary poets. Al-Qasim has published six series of poems that are well known in the Arab world. Although several researchers have studied al-Qasim's poetry, to our knowledge, yet no one has studied the aspect of spacial poetic text in his poetry. Therefore, this paper seeks to fill a gap in the scholarship that has not been addressed up to now. This article aims, not only to demonstrate the presence of spacial poetic text and dimensions throughout al-Qasim's poetry, but also to investigate the purpose for which the poet uses spacial poetic text. Our theory is that the poet, consciously and significantly, uses spacial poetic texts to magnify the Palestinian identity of the Palestinian readers. Methodologically, we applied a descriptive analytic method, referencing al-Qasim's poetry, addressing spacial poetic texts practically but not theoretically or statistically.

Keywords—Samih al-Qasim, place and space, Palestinian poetry, spacial poetic text.

I. INTRODUCTION

THROUGHOUT about fifty years of Samih al-Qasim's poetic career, Palestinian places and spaces were a fundamental component throughout poetry. Al-Qasim was born for a Palestinian Druze family in 1939 and grew up in Nazareth. Al-Qasim's poetry is well known throughout the Arab world. The poet published several volumes and collections of poetry. (Samih al-Qasim is one of the most prominent revolutionary Palestinian poets. Furthermore, alongside Mahmud Darwish, al-Qasim is one of two major Palestinian poetic voices of the second half of the 20th century) [1]. Al-Qasim used writings for the Palestinian national and evolutionary agenda [2]. Recently, several of al-Qasim's poems were translated into other languages such as English. (His poetry leads readers to valuable historical, political and religious education) [3].

'Place' does not mean only what the word location suggests, but it has significant meanings of reality, history and social experiences [4]. Khosravi et al. explore detailed and further meanings:

A place is not a place until people have been born in it, have grown up in it, lived in it, known it, died in it- have both experienced and shaped it as individual, families, communities until things that have happened in it are remembered in history, ballads, yarns, legends, or monuments [5].

In this context, Hunziker et al. connect place to identity of people: Place identity is not to be understood as a sub-aspect of sense of place, but rather as a specific perspective on people-place relations, namely, a self-reflective perspective [6]. All of these dimensions of 'place', alongside other causes, pushed us to study and investigate place and space component throughout al-Qasim's poetry. Our theory is that al-Qasim is one of several Palestinian poets who are integrally bound to place in their poetry. Most of al-Qasim's poems represent multiple elements of place and space. Furthermore, our theory is that al-Qasim employs places and spaces to focus Palestinian Identity. Thus, this study examines several concepts of place and space within selected poems of al-Qasim in order to reveal aspirations, experiences and emotions connected to specific places. Further, this paper will not only explore the presence of spacial poetic text and place dimensions throughout al-Qasim's poetry practically not theoretically or statistically, but also investigate purposes for which al-Qasim employs place and spacial poetic texts throughout poetry and thus this study seeks to contribute to the field that has not yet sufficient addressing the above issues.

II. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Readers could see how al-Qasim explores one of the significant national concepts by focusing the Palestinian historical roots in Palestine lands. Here are some examples, al-Qasim says:

[If my إن كان جذعي للفؤوس ضحية جذري إله في الثرى يتأهب trunk fell victim to the ax, my trunk is a god preparing itself in the soil.] [7]. وجذورنا في رحم هذه الأرض ممتدة

[Our roots extend into the womb of this land] [8].
إن جذورنا في الأرض راسخة ...ولن تقلع وإن مشيئة الإنسان لا تهزم

[Our roots are deeply rooted in the soil and will not never be uprooted. Moreover, man's desire will not be vanquished.])[9]

No doubt the poet not only focuses and substantiates Palestinians have historical and continuous relation and belonging to Palestine home lands, but also rhetorically denies any possibility of retreat or withdrawing from that belonging

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or relation. However, it seems like declarations, which have no any connection to reality. Differentially, al-Qasim uses significant devices much connected to reality such as names of Palestinian villages and cities by evoking them within titles of several poems. In this context, Botolv Helleland argues:

Anthropologists in particular have investigated the role of place names as references to and symbols of acts and experiences … Place names are social signals of belonging to a group, and the more names that are shared, the stronger the bonds are within the group. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest among onomasticians to deal with the identity aspect of place names [10].

Thus, Helleland proves in detail how places' names are connected to reality and history. For example, al-Qasim entitles a poem: Kafr Qasim. This title is a name of Palestinian village, which her people suffered from a massacre that the Israeli authorities did in 1956. In the context of fictional titles, Mahmud Ghanayim explores titles' classification according their functions such as descriptive, connotative, referential and seductive titles [11]. No dould that because the historical event in 1956 –the massacre- the above title 'Kafr Qasim' could applies several functions such as referential, connotative and seductive. Readers mostly will expect evoking the massacre event and its results, and thus they will be pushed to read the poem. No doubt that al-Qasim by entitles poems with Palestinian cities and villages' names, addresses focusing Palestinian identity and strengthens Palestinian belonging to their homeland even they have been occupied by Israeli authorities. Furthermore, al-Qasim, by evoking historical events connected to Palestinian nation, narrates those historical events as well as documents them fictionally.

Al-Qasim entitles some of poems not only with Palestinian cities and villages' names, but also with other Arab cities such as Beirut. Al-Qasim, in the poem 'Beirut' explores the Palestinian historical forced displacement or/and migration to Beirut and thus the poet documents the Palestinian historical tragedy happened in 1948 because of the Israeli occupation. Interestingly, in another poem, al-Qasim mentions several capitals and cities all over the world that Palestinian were displaced to such as Paris, Baghdad, Moscow, Amman, and Roma: Al-Qasim says:

هنا باريس... هنا بيروت... هنا موسكو...هنا عمان... هنا روما...هنا بغداد
فكيف نفر؟ كيف نفر؟ من منشئنا الأرض؟ كيف نبيح للنسيان... أجيالا من البعض؟ وكيف...؟ وكيف...؟ لن نهدأ

[Here is Paris, here is Beirut, here is Moscow, here is Amman, here is Rome, here is Baghdad. How will we flee? How will we flee? From out native earth? How will we expose generations to forgetfulness? And how…? And how…? We shall never calm down] [12].

Al-Qasim calls Arabs countries to be united for establishing the Arab Nationalism that Jaml Abd Al-Nasir called to. For example:

أبكيك يا جمال

في لهجة العراق /في لهجة السودان
أبكيك في الأردن في ليبيا وفي لبنان

[I mourn for you Jamāl
In the dialect of Iraq, in the dialect of Sudan
I mourn you in Jordan, in Libya and in Lebanon] [13].

Al-Qasim criticizes, employs ironical description to ridicule for Arab countries' defeat in 1967 war with Israel; Al-Qasim says:

ارتجت دمشق والتفتت للهرب. أمسكتها الرعدة وأخذها الضيق والأوجاع كماخض...لذلك يسقط شبانها في شوارعها وتهلك كل رجال الحرب في ذلك اليوم.
مصر عجلة حسنة جدار الهلاك من الشمال جاء جاء... شبابها يرتدون، يهربون معا...
وها أنذا في جميع الجهات
أضمد جرحي بنقلة ثوبي وأوراق أشجارك القاتمة

[Damascus is waxed feeble, and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail. … Therefore, her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be cut off in that day.
Egypt is like a very fair heifer, but destruction cometh; it cometh out of the north… her youth also are turned back, and are fled away together… And then in all directions I shall bind my wound with the tatters of my garment and the leaves of your standing trees.] [14].

These functional entitling poems by names of cities or villages could push readers ask the question: Does the poet employ such entitlement only for focusing and exploring the Palestinian issue? This leads us to look deeply in other poems of al-Qasim, for example:

من أين يبلغك الطريق؟! من أين يا أحياء شيكاجو الفقيرة؟
يا مسرح الجازباند.. في نيويورك؟ فالزنجي جوعان..وخائف

[Whence does the road reach you? Whence, o poor neighborhoods of Chicago?
O jazz band theater in New York? And the negro is famished, and scared.] [15].

Here, al-Qasim focuses social and economic gaps in the USA such as Chicago. Further, al-Qasim explores the American occupation to Vietnam criticizing the American authorities socially and politically, here is an instance:

في أمريكا. يا واشنطن الصماء ..
تحت ضجيج آله
من أين؟ في فيتنام مذبحة؟
وأنت تصدرين كعكا.. وأدوية إلى القمر الحزين!!

[In America, O deaf Washington…
Under the noise of god
From where? In Vietnam, is a massacre?
And you export cookies and medications to the moon!] [16].

That is to say, the poet employs cities' names to explore human issues connected to other societies rather than

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Palestinian. Differentially, al-Qasim employs not only names of cities and villages within poetry, but also Palestinian space for focusing and documenting the Palestinian tragedy. For example:

يا ويلي .. رجال أربعة حملوه.. حملو فيه رصاص الجيش، يا ويلي
أمام الله والناس، على الدوّار أردوه قتيلا!
لم يعد لي غيرك اليوم / فلا تقسُ عليّا
لا تكن يا ابني جوادا عربيا/ كن نسيما خيالا
ريثما تتنسل من قصص حواكير البلد/ هاهم يطعنون حارة الجامع

[O dear, four men lifted him, carried in the bullets of the army, o dear

Before God and people, on the square they killed him!

Today I no longer have anyone but you / so do not be cruel to me

Do not my son be an Arab knight / be a breeze, a ghost

While you procreate from the stories of the city's vegetable gardens

Now they penetrate into the neighborhood of the mosque] [17].

No doubt, here the poet points out the Palestinian tragedy employing space where Israeli army killed Palestinians in squares inside the Palestinian villages and cities. Here, al-Qasim does not give specific name of city or village because the mentioned events happened mostly in all the Palestinian cities and villages. The poet not only explores tragedy, but also employs place and space to call Palestinians for revolution and rebellion against Israeli authorities. For example, the poet says:

باسم مليون شريد مرة أخرى/ ومليون ذراع في السلاسل
باسم طفل مرة أخرى تيتّم/ وعجوز حرموها ضنعة الذكرى وتاريخ السنابل
مرة أخرى ومنديل صبية/ حبها نصب على قبر مقاتل
باسم مدن صارت مخيم/ وقرى تفرق في ماض محطم
مرة أخرى/ كروم أورقت في الأبديّة/ عبرها دبابة تعوي وجيش يتقطم
باسم شعبي أتكلم

[In the name of a million fugitives once again / and a million arms in chains

In the name of a child orphaned once again / and an old woman deprived memory and the history of the grains

Once again a young woman's handkerchief / whose love is placed on the grave of a fighter

In the name of cities that have become camps / and villages in fear in a smashed past

Once again / vineyards burst into leaf in eternity / crossed by a howling tank and a destructive army

I speak in the name of my people] [18].

In another poem, al-Qasim says:

يا جبال الثلج التي حطمتها   في ضلوعي عواصف الأقدار
لا أبالي مهما تكدس ثلج   فضلوعي مقدودة من نار
وفؤادي لا يستكين لرزى   فهو نار عنيدة الأنوار
أنا أمشي إلى أعالي المعالي   وأنير الدروب للأحرار

[O snowy mountains which the storms of fate have smashed in my ribs

I don't mind however much snow accumulates, for my ribs are cut by fire

My heart does not submit to calamity, it is a fire that resists light

I walk to the highest summits and illuminate the paths for the free] [19].

Here, the poet integrates exploring the Palestinian tragedy with calling to revolution and rebellion employing Palestinian space of al-galil mountains to confirm the Palestinian issue is much significant and needs much continuous straggle. Thus, here al-Qasim is proud to reveal poetry, which is committed to Arab nationalism and to the Palestinian agenda. In another poem, al-Qasim says:

بكفاحي/ بدمائي النازفات من جراحي
سوف أستل صباحي
من نيوب الظلمات
همتي الساحة والصدر سلاحي

[With my struggle, with my blood that flows from my wound I shall snatch my morning

From the fangs of darkness

My zeal is the arena and the breast is my weapon] [20].

Al-Qasim uses a specific Palestinian space 'al-saha' that is a real public yard in Nazareth where people demonstrate or have public opened meeting etc. First, this term 'al-saha' could be understood as a space in which a war or conflict could happen, but then Palestinian readers will conclude that the mentioned term is a specific space in Nazareth city where the poet lived.

Interestingly, al-Qasim uses a technical style by exploring an imaginary letter received from Palestinian prisoners:

رسالة من المعتقل
لا تستخفوا .. زارني وطواط/ وراح في نشاط
يقبل الجدران في زنزانتي السوداء

[A letter from prison

Do not scorn... a bat visited me, and moved briskly

Kissing the walls in my black cell] [21].

Here, al-Qasim employs the mentioned style for focusing the oppression, isolation and suffering Palestinian prisoners meet in the Israeli prisons. That is to say, al-Qasim employs imagine for revealing the Palestinian reality.

While al-Qasim employs place and space for focusing the historical Palestinians national rights, contrarily, the poet employs several historical major events for indicating and stressing the tragedian Palestinian 'place and/or space'. For example, al-Qasim says:

هنا .. في قراراتنا الجائعة/ هنا .. حفرت كهفها الفاجعة
هنا.. في معالمنا الدارسات/ هنا.. في محاجرنا اللامعة
نبوخذ نصّر الفاتحون وأشلاء رايتنا الضائعة

[Here, in our famished depths / here, the calamity dug

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its hole

Here, in our features the studies, here, in our shining stone quarries

Nebukhathnessar and the tatters of our lost flag] [22].

Interestingly, the poet employs another significant technical style by giving a speech addressing the stolen and occupied Palestinian villages in particular and homeland in general. For instance, the poet says:

يا قرانا.. نحن لم نسلب.. ولم نغدر الأرض التي صارت يبابا
...
يا بلادي نحن ما زلنا على شوق قَسَم الغربة وارتقابا
يا بلادي! قبل ميعاد الضحى موعد ينضو عن النور حجابا

[O, our villages ... we did not rob nor betray the land that was devastated …

O my country, we are still in yearning for the oath of absence and expectation

O my country, before the morning appointment there is an appointment in which the light will remove its veil] [23].

Here, it seen obviously personification by a speech addressed collectively to the Palestinian nation calling to patience and hope for the coming generations. Such speech is an evidence to the mentioned commitment of the poet for the Palestinian agenda.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to analyze al-Qasim's poetry through a spacial lens to explore and investigate how poetry is highly attached to the concept of place and space, which is one of the key elements of the commitment to the Palestinian issue. Throughout several poems, al-Qasim makes a great effort to relate the readers to the Palestinian villages and cities places and spaces in particular and to the Palestinian homeland in general. Several poems show how al-Qasim technically and semantically employs names of Palestinian villages and cities and spaces in order to depict not only the Palestinians historical tragedy but also their oppressed and difficult reality because of the mentioned tragedy. Furthermore, it has been shown al-Qasim employs 'place and space' for not only Palestinian agenda, but also for human rights all over the world.

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