

The Symbolism of the Greening of Resistance in Samih al-Qasim's Poetry: An Ecocritical Reading

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Abstract: Symbolism plays a crucial role in creating depth in poetic imagery. Samih al-Qasim, the symbolic architect of contemporary Arabic literature, masterfully utilizes elements of nature to channel the suffering and hopes of the Palestinian people. This study investigates the symbolism of nature elements in Samih al-Qasim's poem entitled *خطاب في سوق البطالة* (A Speech in the Unemployment Market) through an ecocritical lens. The analysis reveals Samih al-Qasim's novel orientation in composing nature symbols: they function not merely as rhetorical ornamentation, but as a medium of resistance that merges the poet's persona with natural elements such as the earth, sun, and fire. The findings indicate that the nature symbolism in the poem is a manifestation of the Greening of Resistance, fundamentally rejecting the anthropocentric worldview. This rejection is realized through the fusion of the poet's self into nature, creating a biotic community where the fate of humans and the environment are integrated. Consequently, resistance in Samih al-Qasim's poetry is not only a human political effort but a collective endeavor of the entire ecosystem, asserting that the preservation of the non-human environment is equivalent to the struggle for liberation.

Keywords: Samih al-Qasim; Nature Symbolism; Ecocriticism; Greening of Resistance; Palestine

Abstrak: Simbol memegang peranan krusial dalam menciptakan kedalaman citra puitis. Samih al-Qasim, sang arsitek simbolis sastra Arab kontemporer, secara piawai menggunakan unsur-unsur alam untuk menyalurkan penderitaan dan harapan rakyat palestina. Penelitian ini menyelidiki simbolisme unsur-unsur alam dalam puisi Samih al-Qasim dengan judul *خطاب في سوق البطالة* melalui lensa ekokritik. Kajian ini mengungkapkan orientasi baru Samih al-Qasim dalam menyusun simbol alam, yang tidak sekedar menjadi hiasan retorik, melainkan media perlawanan yang memadukan kepribadian penyair dengan elemen-elemen alam seperti tanah, matahari, dan api. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa simbolisme alam dalam puisi tersebut merupakan manifestasi dari greening of resistance (penghijauan perlawanan), yang secara fundamental menolak pandangan antroposentris. Penolakan ini terwujud melalui fusi jati diri penyair ke dalam alam, menciptakan sebuah komunitas biotik di mana nasib manusia dan lingkungan menyatu. Dengan demikian, perlawanan dalam puisi Samih al-Qasim bukan hanya usaha politik manusia, melainkan usaha kolektif seluruh ekosistem, yang menegaskan bahwa pemeliharaan lingkungan non-manusia setara dengan perjuangan pembebasan.

Keywords: Samih al-Qasim; Simbolisme Alam; Ekokritik; Greening of Resistance; Palestina

INTRODUCTION

Symbolism plays a crucial role in creating depth in poetic imagery, thereby allowing the work to possess profound meaning. This symbolic practice reaches its highest intensity within the context of Palestinian resistance poetry (Syi'r al-Muqawamah), which aims to document the suffering, sorrow, and hopes of the people under occupation (Ali, 2025: 56-58). Samih al-Qasim (1938-2014) is recognized as a leading symbolic architect in contemporary Arabic literature. He masterfully utilizes elements of nature to channel issues laden with ritualistic and historical contexts, establishing himself as a mouthpiece for the marginalized voice. His work serves as a medium for expressing the atrocities perpetrated by the Zionists against the Palestinian people (Manna', 2013: 86-90). From the perspective of resistance studies, this use of symbolism can be understood as 'infrapolitics' or veiled resistance, wherein the poet crafts 'hidden transcripts' to voice criticism within a strictly monitored space. Nature symbols do not merely serve an aesthetic function; they become a 'language of resistance' that allows political claims to be articulated when formal channels are closed (David & Steven, 2016: 3-4).

Contemporary literary studies have moved beyond structural and political analysis, entering interdisciplinary domains such as Ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, defined by Lawrence Buell as the study of the relationship between literature and the environment, demands a re-reading of texts with a focus on the role of the non-human world. Although Ecocriticism has developed rapidly in Western literature, its application within the context of Arabic literature remains a relatively new project. This approach is relevant because resistance never occurs in a vacuum; it is a situated social practice where the mastery over physical and symbolic space is central to the struggle. In the context of settler colonialism, ecological narratives become crucial because, as noted in studies of agrarian resistance, 'land and identity are inextricably linked,' meaning that the destruction of the environment is tantamount to the erasure of identity (David & Steven, 2016: 9-23).

Several studies have identified the existence of nature imagery in resistance poetry (such as Mahmoud Darwish), yet the analysis tends to stop at the level of purely political metaphor (Zahro et al. 2025: 668-660). The concept of the "Greening of Resistance" has emerged as a new lens that links political struggle with ecological demands (Ahmed & Hasyim, 2022). Nevertheless, prior research has not deeply investigated how poets like Samih al-Qasim developed a new orientation in crafting nature symbols. This study views al-Qasim's use of nature symbols not merely as ornamentation, but as a form of 'productive resistance' that actively reshapes Palestinian subjectivity amid efforts of erasure. Nature here functions as a 'technology of resistance'—a discursive tool mastered by the poet to invert the narrative of domination and assert ownership over the contested landscape (Qaderi, 2021).

This article offers a scientific novelty through the rigorous application of ecocriticism to Samih al-Qasim's nature symbolism, focusing on the mechanism of self-nature fusion. This novelty lies in the discovery that Samih al-Qasim introduces a new

orientation in his poetry by integrally merging a part of his persona with nature symbols. This fusion creates a unity that fundamentally rejects the anthropocentric worldview, a dimension rarely revealed in conventional political analysis. The findings assert that Palestinian resistance in his poetry is a collective endeavor involving the biotic community (humans, flora, and matter), where human survival is inseparable from the fate of the environment.

First, how does Samih al-Qasim utilize the symbolism of nature elements to construct the narrative of the "Greening of Resistance" in his poem entitled *خطاب في سوق البطالة* (A Speech in the Unemployment Market) against Zionist atrocities?

Second, how does the symbolism of nature in the poem *خطاب في سوق البطالة* function as a rejection of the anthropocentric worldview and form a biotic community as an active subject of resistance?

Through the ecocritical approach, this research aims to deeply investigate the symbolism of nature elements in Samih al-Qasim's poetry to uncover how the poet successfully transforms a specific political struggle into a universal ethical demand rooted in the earth.

The theoretical foundation for this study refers to Lawrence Buell's concept of ecocriticism, who, in *The Environmental Imagination*, asserts that literary texts can build ecological awareness by positioning non-human entities not merely as a backdrop, but as the center of the narrative with intrinsic interests. (Sukmawan, 2016: 12-13). Buell offers a framework for deconstructing how a text constructs the relationship between humans and their environment, which is highly relevant in the context of Palestinian resistance poetry. This theory allows for a reading of Samih al-Qasim's work that does not stop at political allegory, but extends to an analysis of how the land, sun, and fire are presented as equal, collective actors in the struggle against both ecological and political occupation.

As an analytical lens, this study adopts Lawrence Buell's ecocriticism, which emphasizes the 'ethics of place' and the agency of the non-human world. In the context of Samih al-Qasim's poetry, this Buellian framework becomes the appropriate tool to unveil the 'Greening of Resistance'. To be considered ecocritical literature, Lawrence Buell specifies a number of criteria: (1) the non-human environment is present not merely as a backdrop but as a presence that shows that human history is implicated in natural history; (2) human interests are not understood as the only legitimate interests; (3) human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation; and (4) some sense of the environment as a process rather than a constant or a given is at least implied in the text (Buell, 1995: 7-8). Buell's concept of how literature can challenge anthropocentric views by making the reader feel that human and environmental interests are intertwined is consistent with al-Qasim's poetic strategy. Through this lens, the nature symbolism in the poem *خطاب في سوق البطالة* can be read not as decoration, but as a politico-ecological statement that the human liberation of Palestine is inseparable from the liberation of its land and environment.

Lawrence Buell's ecocritical framework provides a solid foundation for this research, offering the perspective that environmentally conscious literature presents the non-human world as an integral part of the moral community. This perspective aligns with Samih al-Qasim's symbolic practice, which merges the poet's persona with natural elements, thereby forming what this study terms the "biotic community" of resistance. Consequently, the application of Buell's theory allows for the revelation of a new dimension in Samih al-Qasim's poetry that transcends conventional political readings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical approach (Descriptive-Analytical Research). As a literary study, the research focuses on the interpretation and in-depth understanding of the meaning, symbols, and themes contained within the poetic text. The descriptive approach is utilized to document and classify the emergent nature symbols, while the analytical approach is employed to elaborate on and interpret the implications of these symbols through the relevant theoretical framework. (Miles & Huberman. 1994: 90-102)

The research object in this study is the poetic texts entitled *خطاب في سوق البطالة* (A Speech in the Unemployment Market) by Samih al-Qasim, which explicitly use nature and material symbols as a medium of resistance, with the primary focus on the poem itself, as well as relevant supporting texts from his collection of poetry. The data collection method used in this research is Documentation Study or Library Research, which focuses on collecting texts and documents relevant to the object and the theoretical framework of the research.

The main data were collected through two sources. First, Documentation of the Original Text, which involves the collection and verification of Samih al-Qasim's poetic text, *خطاب في سوق البطالة* (A Speech in the Unemployment Market), that contains nature symbols, focusing specifically on poems that carry the theme of resistance. Second, Documentation of Secondary Data, which is the collection of important theoretical texts, including Lawrence Buell's work *The Environmental Imagination* and scholarly articles discussing Ecocriticism, the Greening of Resistance, and symbolism in Arabic literature, all of which serve as the analytical framework for primary data interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Poem Text *خطاب في سوق البطالة* and Translation of Samih al-Qasim's Work

Before discussing the symbolism of the "greening of resistance" in the poem *خطاب في سوق البطالة* (A Speech in the Unemployment Market) by Samih al-Qasim (Al-Qasim, 1987: 448), the complete poem text in Arabic along with its translation is presented below. This is essential to provide the full context and facilitate the reader in following the analysis to be conducted by the researcher.

Arabic Text (خطاب في سوق البطالة)	English Translation
ربّما أفقد – ما شئت – معاشي	Perhaps I will lose—whatever you wish—my livelihood.
ربّما أعرض للبيع ثيابي وفراشي	Perhaps I must sell my clothes and my bed.
ربّما أعمل حجّاراً .. وعتّالاً .. وكناس شوارع	Perhaps I will work as a stone-breaker, a porter, or a street-sweeper.
ربّما أبحث ، في روث المواشي ، عن حبوب	Perhaps I will search in the dung of livestock for grains.
ربّما أحمّد .. عرياناً .. وجائع	Perhaps I will collapse—naked—and hungry.
يا عدو الشمس .. لكن .. لن أساوم	O enemy of the sun... but... I will not compromise.
!! وإلى آخر نبض في عروقي .. سأقاوم	And until the last pulse in my veins... I will resist!
ربّما تسلبني آخر شبر من ترابي	Perhaps you will seize the last span of my soil.
ربّما تطعم للسجن شبّابي	Perhaps you will feed my youth to the prison.
ربّما تسطو على ميراث جدي	Perhaps you will raid my grandfather's inheritance—
.. من أثاث .. وأوان .. وخواب	furniture, vessels, and jars.
ربّما تحرق أشعاري وكتبي	Perhaps you will burn my poems and my books.
ربّما تطعم لحمي الكلاب	Perhaps you will feed my flesh to the dogs.
ربّما تبقى على قريتنا كما بوس رعب	Perhaps you will remain perched over our village as a shadow of terror.
..يا عدو الشمس .. لكن .. لن أساوم	O enemy of the sun... but... I will not compromise.
وإلى آخر نبض في عروقي .. سأقاوم	And until the last pulse in my veins... I will resist!

Nature in the Tradition of Arabic Poetry

Nature has been an inseparable part of Arabic poetry since the Jahiliyyah period, where the desert, rain, wind, stars, and animals did not only function as a backdrop but also as a source of metaphor to describe human longing, love, journeys, and suffering (Qabbisiy, 1971: 684). This long tradition continued into the modern period, where nature acquired a broader dimension of meaning—not just aesthetic, but also cultural and political. In the context of Palestinian poetry specifically, nature elements such as land (soil/earth), olive trees, stones, wheat, and rain appear as symbols of collective identity and resistance against occupation. Nature is depicted as an entity that struggles alongside humans, such as the expression of wounded yet persistent land, the unquenchable sun as a symbol of steadfastness, and deeply rooted olive trees mirroring the continuity of the nation's history (Ahmed & Hasyim, 2022: 15-16).

From an ecocritical perspective, the interconnectedness of humans and the environment in Arabic poetry demonstrates that nature is not merely a poetic ornament but an integral part of existence, spirituality, and struggle. Modern Arabic poetry,

especially after the colonial era, presents a significant transformation where nature shifts from being a mere aesthetic image to a living symbol of resistance (Astah, 2008: 23-25). Through the works of poets like Mahmoud Darwish, who wrote of the Palestinian land as a wounded yet living body; Fadwa Tuqan, who presented rain and wind as reflections of hope; Tawfiq Zayyad, with his impossible metaphor of quenching the sun; and Salem Jubran, who features nature as a space for nostalgia—all demonstrate how nature functions as an active agent that also voices resistance. This is what ecocritical studies refer to as the "greening of resistance," where every element of the environment becomes an inseparable part of the narrative of struggle against oppression (Ahmed & Hasyim, 2022: 17-20).

It is within this constellation that Samih al-Qasim's poem entitled *خطاب في سوق البطالة* occupies a special position. His personal experience as part of the '48 Arabs who chose to remain on their land post-Nakba 1948, coupled with his experience of imprisonment and house arrest, lends a specific depth and legitimacy to the use of nature symbols in his work (Qaderi, 2021: 7-8). His political struggle is transmuted into ecological symbolism, where the decision not to leave the homeland turns into a resistance rooted in an eternal attachment to the earth.

In the poem *خطاب في سوق البطالة*, nature symbols are present not merely as an aesthetic background, but as an ideological, rhetorical, and cultural apparatus that articulates the collective Palestinian resistance. The land functions as a metonym for identity and history; the sun becomes a moral symbol that places the occupier as the "enemy of the sun"—an entity opposite to life itself; while the fire that burns poems and books represents the attempt to destroy cultural memory. Through the rhetorical strategy based on the repetition of the phrase "ربّما... لكن... سأقاوم" (Perhaps... but... I will resist), the poem transforms passive possibilities into active determination, where nature symbols function as a catalyst in building the collective will to fight (Al-Qasim, 1987: 448).

Symbolism of Nature as a Construction of Greening of Resistance

The symbolic analysis of the "greening of resistance" in Samih al-Qasim's poem *خطاب في سوق البطالة* reveals three main symbols that collectively form the narrative of the greening of resistance: first, al-turob (soil/earth) as a metonym for collective identity; second, Al-Syams (the Sun) as a cosmic opposition; and third, nār (fire) as a cultural-ecological resistance.

Turob (Soil/Earth) as Collective Identity

Land becomes one of the most central symbols consistently presented by Samih al-Qasim. The phrase "آخر شبر من ترابي" (the last span of my soil) refers not only to the material dimension of the land as living space but, more profoundly, functions as a representation of heritage, homeland, and a sacred entity binding the collective Palestinian community (Al-Qasim, 1987: 448). Land here represents the nation, history, and dignity, so the loss of land is read not merely as the loss of a physical asset, but the loss of collective existence.

Symbolically, the use of the word “شبر” (span/palm-length) holds a profound meaning. The size "span" is not a large geographical scale, but a human body measurement that is very personal and concrete. This conveys the message that every part of the land, no matter how small, is an inseparable part of its owner's self. When the poet says "the last span of my soil," he is indexing the possibility of a very urgent loss, because what is at stake is not just a wide stretch of land, but the smallest unit that is almost indivisible. Thus, the land is personified as a second body—an external dimension of human existence.

The rhetorical effect of the land symbol in this poem is very strong. The expression of land seizure generates emotional resonance that touches the reader. The threat of losing the last span of land evokes a sense of urgency and immediacy, allowing the reader not only to understand the suffering but also to feel it. This land symbol also activates the collective historical memory of Palestine, especially the Nakba of 1948, when millions of Palestinians lost their ancestral lands. Thus, the poem does not only speak on an individual horizon but directly links personal experience with the nation's historical trauma.

The implication of this finding shows that the land in Samih al-Qasim's poetry is not a passive backdrop but a unit of symbolic agency that serves a dual function. First, it binds the collective rights of the Palestinian people to a legitimate physical and spiritual space. Second, the land provides moral legitimacy to the resistance, because defending the land is synonymous with defending the nation's existence and dignity. Third, it solidifies poetry as a symbolic arena where political and cultural claims acquire a legitimate rhetorical form. In this way, al-Qasim positions the land as the core narrative of resistance that unites the body, memory, and collective identity in a single symbolic unity.

Al-Syams (The Sun) as Cosmic Opposition

Samih al-Qasim's use of the sun symbol represents life, light, and universal truth (Al-Qasim, 1987: 448). The sun is presented not merely as a cosmic element but as an irreplaceable existential icon. The sun is the source of life and light that reveals reality. Therefore, when the poet directs his call to the "enemy of the sun" (ياعدو الشمس), he forms a sharp symbolic opposition between light (freedom, life, truth) and darkness (oppression, occupation, falsehood). Through this dichotomy, Samih al-Qasim positions the occupier not only as a political enemy but also as a cosmic enemy that resists the fundamental principles of nature itself.

Rhetorically, the direct invocation through the call form “ياعدو الشمس” (“O enemy of the sun”) transforms the poem from a description of suffering into a confrontational ethical duel. The poet no longer speaks only to a collective audience but directly challenges the oppressor with the language of moral accusation. The function of this call shifts the poem into an arena of symbolic struggle, where the occupying power is positioned as the adversary of life, while the poet and his community stand on the side of light and truth. Thus, every time this line is repeated, it functions as a rhetorical stamp that reasserts the moral claim and legitimacy of the resistance.

Furthermore, the phrase “ياعدو الشمس” does not just descriptively name the enemy; it also strengthens the communicative action of the poem, transforming the discourse into a promise, a pledge, and even a performative resistance. By declaring the occupier as the enemy of the sun, the poet simultaneously states that the adversary has challenged not only humans but life itself. This moral claim makes resistance appear not as a political choice, but as an ethical necessity—to defend oneself means to defend the sun, to defend the continuity of life and truth.

From a theoretical perspective, the sun symbol in this poem opens a unique space for ecocritical reading. Nature here does not appear as a passive backdrop but as a witness and indicator of political truth. The enemy who is hostile to the sun is not only hostile to the Palestinian people but also resists the most fundamental laws of nature. This affirms the idea that nature has an ethical dimension: it becomes a yardstick for judging the legitimacy of human actions. In other words, Samih al-Qasim presents nature (the sun) as a "cosmic judge" that reveals the moral standing of the political conflict.

With this symbolic strategy, the sun in the poem *خطاب في سوق البطالة* functions as a bridge between nature, ethics, and politics. It expands the meaning of resistance from merely a local struggle to a universal arena involving the fundamental principles of life. The occupier is not just an enemy of the people, but an enemy of light, an enemy of truth, and an enemy of life itself.

Fire Burning My Poems and Books as Cultural-Ecological Resistance

Through the phrase “تحرق أشعاري وكتبي” (Perhaps you will burn my poems and my books), for Samih al-Qasim (Al-Qasim, 1987: 448), written works like poems and books symbolize the collective memory and cultural history of the Palestinian community. The act of burning these works is not just physical destruction, but a systematic attempt to erase the narrative and cultural identity. Thus, fire becomes a symbol of oppression that threatens the survival of culture, showing that the resistance being waged is not only physical but also cultural.

Research shows that natural-cultural symbols—such as poems and written works—are closely networked with nature symbols like the land, forming two layers of communal autonomy. The land as living space and poetry as a memory keeper mutually reinforce the struggle to maintain identity and cultural continuity. Therefore, preserving written works and nature becomes an inseparable resistance strategy in the face of oppression.

CONCLUSION

Based on the ecocritical analysis of Samih al-Qasim's poem, *خطاب في سوق البطالة* (A Speech in the Unemployment Market), this research concludes that the Palestinian poet successfully constructed the narrative of the "greening of resistance" through three central nature symbols that mutually reinforce one another.

Firstly, the earth/soil (*al-turob*) acts as a metonym for collective identity, unifying the geographical body with the biological body of the Palestinian nation. Secondly, the

sun (al-syams) serves as a symbol of cosmic opposition, transforming the political conflict into a cosmic struggle. Thirdly, fire (al-nar) represents cultural-ecological resistance against the systemic attempt to erase the collective memory of the Palestinian people.

Through the repetitive rhetorical strategy, "رَبِّمَا... لَكِن... سَأَقَاوِم" (Perhaps... but... I will resist), al-Qasim successfully transforms the poem into a performative medium that actively creates a biotic community of resistance. The nature symbolism in this poem fundamentally rejects the anthropocentric worldview by granting agency to non-human entities, thus asserting that Palestinian resistance is a collective movement involving the entire ecosystem.

The application of Lawrence Buell's ecocritical framework—particularly the concept of the environmental imagination—effectively reveals a new dimension in Samih al-Qasim's poetry that remains overlooked in conventional analysis. The poem is shown to be not merely a political allegory, but an ethical-ecological statement that transforms a specific political struggle into a universal demand for a symbiotic human-environment relationship.

The theoretical implication of this research is the reinforcement of the greening of resistance concept as a relevant lens for literary critique in the post-colonial context, simultaneously opening avenues for further research on the representation of the human-nature relationship in resistance literature across various cultural traditions.

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