

## RELIGIOUS INTERTEXTUALITY THROUGHOUT SAMIH AL-QASIM'S POETRY

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### ABSTRACT

*Being influenced by others is a general human characteristic that does not necessarily mean imitation, but it does mean deep knowledge and education that could lead to creativity. Intertextuality reflects the influence of others on writers and poets. Although intertextuality is an ancient fictional phenomenon, it gained significant importance because recent researchers and intellectuals much follow it throughout the poetry and fiction investigating its functions and approaches. In this context, several researchers have studied intertextuality in the poetry of Samih al-Qasim, but some of these studies are general and others are limited to some poems of al-Qasim, and all of these studies outlined intertextuality generally. Distinctively and differently, this paper investigates specifically religious intertextuality within al-Qasim's poetry, trying to answer the specific questions: How does religious intertextuality operate in al-Qasim's poetry? What are al-Qasim's sources of religious intertextuality? Are they just Islamic or Christian and Jewish too? For what purpose does al-Qasim use religious intertextuality?*

**Keywords:** Samih al-Qasim, religious intertextuality, impact of religions on language.

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### 1. Introduction

Samih al-Qasim is one of the most prominent revolutionary Palestinian poets. Furthermore, alongside Mahmoud Darwish, al-Qasim is one of two major Palestinian poetic voices of the second half of the 20th century. He was born to a Palestinian Druze family in 1939 and died in 2014 in Nazareth. Al-Qasim published six series of poetry, which are well-known in the Arab world. He also wrote several novels. Al-Qasim used his writings for the Palestinian national and revolutionary agenda (Jayyusi, 1995). Recently, some of his poems were translated into other languages, especially English. His poetry leads readers to his valuable historical, political and religious education. This,

alongside other causes, pushed researchers to study and investigate intertextuality throughout his poetry.

This study considers that intertextuality is a literary and linguistic phenomenon that means texts are interconnected to former or asynchronous texts and so texts become intertextual (Abdullah, 2009). Consequently, readers should look into the interconnected text/texts and their links to the current text in order to explore the real meaning of it. Allen calls this a process of 'reading between the lines' (2009, p. 8). Nisreen al-Khawaldeh and others confirm that intertextuality helps readers understand a text, as it familiarizes them with certain objects and concepts, and the matrix of relations (2017). Moreover, "Jonathan Culler notes that intertextuality 'calls our attention to the importance of the prior texts'" (Allen, 2009, p. 1). This leads us to the significance of exploring the semantic and artistic functions of intertextuality.

Writers and poets could use those former or asynchronous texts consciously or unconsciously in different shapes (Al-Ghadhāmī, 1985, Al-Maghīd, 1991). Regarding the question of:

*How "intertextuality" actually operates, intertextuality theories suggest that this generally happens by rewriting the text via three closely linked processes:*

*Deliberation: this is the process of writing the text with [the] consciousness of other text/ texts. Absorption: this is the process of rewriting the unseen text as a natural component of the new text. Dialogism: this is the process of distorting or altering the unseen text and disregarding the sanctity of the original text. (Abdullah, 2009, p. 342)*

Turkī al-Maghīd adds other processes of intertextuality, which are calling up prominent characters from the unseen text or using significant symbols (2016). This article will investigate which processes of intertextuality al-Qasim's poetry includes. It is worth noting intertextuality reveals the education of the writer/poet as well as his or her sources. Regarding al-Qasim's poetry, one can conclude that his poetry is considerably intertextual because it reflects his significant historical, social, political and religious education. Interestingly, Paul Starkey adds another aspect of intertextuality "that is the question of the relationship of the text to earlier works of the author" (2009, p. 159), an aspect of intertextuality that is out of this article's agenda. Intertextuality may serve various functions such as the relation with the past, any discussion with the original texts or other aims (Al-Khawaldeh, 2017).

Several researchers—for example, Nāhidah al-Kaswānī (2012) in her article on reflections of the intertextuality in al-Qasim's poetry—have studied intertextuality in al-Qasim's poetry. However, the aforementioned article is not only a general study on intertextuality in al-Qasim's poetry, but also restricted into two series of poems. Muḥammad al-Aṣfahānī and Maryam Jalānī published an article on religious heritage in al-Qasim's poetry (2011) that did not focus intertextuality specifically. Instead, they dealt with religion as a heritage, exploring religious features of heritage and ignoring the interconnected religious features and their sources, shapes and functions. Moreover, Ḥasan Bandārī and others contributed to intertextuality with their article on intertextuality in modern Palestinian poetry (2009), which is also a general study of intertextuality. In addition, Jamāl al-Nawāf'ah contributed to the field with his specific and thorough study on the influence of Qur'ān on

the modern Palestinian poetry (2008). Although it is not focused on intertextuality, we found it valuable because it cited several examples where the Qur'ān is the intertextuality source in al-Qasim's poetry. For the most part, however, the field has failed to specifically address the dimension of religious intertextuality in al-Qasim's poetry.

This article aims to investigate specifically the religious intertextuality in al-Qasim's poetry, exploring its sources, classifying its shapes or processes and discussing its semantic and artistic functions. Worth noting, al-Aṣfahānī and Jalānī explored the role of religious knowledge in poetic inspiration. Moreover, they pointed out that al-Qasim had deep knowledge of the three Abrahamic religions: Islam, Christianity and Judaism (2011). In this context, al-Nawāf'ah says the Qur'ān influenced not only Muslim Palestinian writers and poets, but also Christian Palestinian writers and poets (2008). It seems, though, that al-Nawāf'ah overlooked the fact that Qur'ān influenced Druze Palestinian writers and poets too, such as al-Qasim.

Our theory is that al-Qasim uses significantly and consciously religious intertextuality throughout his poetry in different processes for his Palestinian national social and political agenda. Thus, this study aims to answer the following specific questions: What are the sources of religious intertextuality in al-Qasim's poetry? How does religious intertextuality operate in his poetry? Moreover, for what purposes does al-Qasim use religious intertextuality?

To answer these questions, we applied a descriptive analytic method referencing al-Qasim's poetry, addressing practical study of intertextuality but not a theoretical or statistical study. This article does not attempt to identify all examples of religious intertextuality throughout al-Qasim's poetry. Regarding translation intertextual texts into other languages, al-Khawaldeh states that translators need to acquaint themselves with textual organizational patterns in both the source and the target languages (2017). Therefore, we opted not to translate al-Qasim's verses to which we refer.

## 2. Religious Intertextuality in al-Qasim's Poetry

It should be noted that al-Qasim is far from the only modern Arab poet to use religious sources within his poetry. In this context, Cobham views "the epistemological system of knowledge, argumentation and expression as a system that is built upon religion, which modern poets draw from and rely on" (Kurraz, 2015, p. 16).

Al-Qasim applies religious intertextualities between his own verses and the religious metatexts, which he quotes or draws from. He evokes symbolic and poetical deliberation, inclusions and allusions. We classify and discuss those religious intertextualities by three principal styles: evokes deliberation and inclusion of religious metatexts, characters, as well as symbols and icons.

Al-Qasim in some places uses partial quotations from the Qur'an, evoking some Quranic passages and employing them for semantic and artistic functions. For example, in his 3<sup>rd</sup> attached verse, he uses (بردا وسلاما) and then (نارا) which intersect with the holy Qur'an: (We said, "O fire, be coolness and safety upon Abraham.") (21:69). No doubt, al-Qasim employs these Qur'anic verses and their context in order to accentuate the tragedy and misery that the Palestinians cope with because of the Israeli occupation. Furthermore, here the poet, by means of Quranic intertextuality, constructs a complicated poetic image. Thus, we could say the poet employs Qur'anic intertextuality

as an artistic technique. It is worth noting that the poet uses Qur'anic intertextuality in the same verse that he talks to his loved girl asking her to kiss him. Thus, the poet combines Qur'anic intertextuality and an emotional romantic context in the same sequential and connected verses. In other words, al-Qasim uses religious intertextuality not from a religious point of view, but rather uses his literary creativity and knowledge of the Qur'an to serve his national agenda and reflect his own strong identification as a Palestinian.

In another poem, al-Qasim evokes a partial Qur'anic verse (إرمي ذات العماد) which intersects with another Qur'anic verse: (Erum of the pillars. The like of which was never created in the land.) (89:7-8). While Erum here is a utopian image, the poet, despite the occupation and Palestinian tragedy, considers his homeland, occupied Palestine, to be like Erum, an imaginary and beautiful homeland. This is an indirect plea by the poet for Palestinians to be patient and not leave their homeland. Moreover, the poet, by means of the slight alteration of using (إرمي) instead of (إرم) as in the Qur'an, succeeds in highlighting national belonging and the idea that Palestine is for Palestinians. Thus, it is obvious that the poet employs Qur'anic intertextuality as well as artistic poetical techniques for his national political and social Palestinian agenda.

A different form of intertextuality al-Qasim employs involves combining evoking the Qur'anic technique of beginning verses with ambiguous letters with partial quotation from Qur'anic verses. He says: (لام نون) and then he uses a partial quotation of the two words (الحمأ المسنون), which intersects with the Qur'anic verse: "We created the human being from clay, from molded mud" (15:26). The poet employs the Qur'anic technique of ambiguous letters to add diversity of poetic harmonies. In addition, he adds a holy and appropriate mood to introduce the topic of his despair regarding his incurable disease. No doubt, those ambiguous letters signify his uncertain near future. Interestingly, the poet appears to opt for the above two words because they remind readers about what they were created from and will come back to, and thus he says indirectly to readers that he is going to die.

Al-Qasim also uses intertextualities by means of a slight alteration of a Qur'anic verse; for example, he says: (أن أكرمنا أمام الله أتقانا). This poetic line of al-Qasim's intersects with the Qur'anic verse: "...Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you..." (49:13). In the beginning of his poem, which begins with the above poetic line, we see semantic openness that stimulates readers, but later, the poet describes Hagar. Thus, al-Qasim here paraphrases from the Qur'an in order to emphasize the status of Hagar as a symbol for the Palestinian nation that suffers and sacrifices continuously.

In other contexts, al-Qasim uses Qur'anic intertextuality through a large alteration of a Qur'anic verse. He says: (سلام عليك), (سلام عليا), (يولد), (ثم يموت); these lines intersect with the Qur'anic verse: "And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive" (19:33). Al-Qasim here employs Qur'anic intertextuality to highlight a human orientation of peace and love. It seems that the poet is focusing on the peace and love that people need in their life. Furthermore, al-Qasim consciously opts for a verse that discusses Essa trying to focus on the connected and shared education of Christian and Muslim Palestinians, contributing to the unifying of

Palestinian groups and sects. No doubt, the poet here employs consciously religious intertextuality for his Palestinian social and national agenda too.

Sometimes, al-Qasim uses partial quotations from the Qur'an in order to intensify his notional concepts and orientations. For example, in the context of his attacking Israeli authorities' policy and attitudes, he says about Israel: (وتقهّر اليتيم), (وتنهّر السائل), (أمانة بالسوء) which intersect with the Qur'anic verses: "...The soul commands evil, except those on whom my Lord has mercy..." (12:53) and "Therefore, do not mistreat the orphan. Nor rebuff the seeker" (93: 9-10). Moreover, keeping in mind the Qur'an's holiness and status in the estimation of his readers, we could say the poet here employ Qur'anic phrases to expand and maximize the credibility of his descriptions as well as narrative.

Al-Qasim, in addition to deliberation, inclusion or partial quotation, evokes religious characters, not only prophets but also prominent religious non-prophetic characters (Al-Nawāf'ah, 2008, Al-Aṣḥāhānī, 2011). Consider the following example: (ماذا يريد المسيح؟) and then (فمروا لي بخيمة) and then (الخطيب، 1968، ص 386) (بعودة يوسف الإنسان) and then (شيخنا يعقوب) in the same poetry section. Interestingly, here the poet employs prophets' names obviously to focus his ideas and orientation. Keeping in mind the story of the prophet Joseph and the symbol of Jesus as a prophet, he likens the Palestinian nation to the prophet Joseph and the Palestinian nation and land to the prophet Jacob as well as depicting the prophet Jesus as the rescuer; Al-Qasim means that Jesus will let Palestinians come back to their homeland, Palestine. That is to say, here we see a complicated intertextuality not only evoking several prophets' names in the same section of poem, but also employing them symbolically. Thus, the poet, with these linguistic icons, deepens his indications and national Palestinian orientation as well as expands the artistic expressiveness of his poem.

A different way in which Al-Qasim uses allusions to the prophets is evocation of one prophet's name, such as Muhammad, calling on him to rescue him and his nation, (اركب بعيرك يا) (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 322) (تعال لي في الشمس معبد) (محمد) Thus, the poet employs intertextuality to expand and magnify the Palestinian tragedy because by calling upon Muhammad it seems as though there are not any other people who can rescue Palestine. While the poet mentions the prophet's name in the previous example, he sometimes evokes prophets' characters without mentioning their names directly, such as in the following example. Al-Qasim says: (لن تسكت هذه الأشعار), then (لن) (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 133) (سأشج حماقات الأوثان) and then (فسأحمل فأسي) (تخمد هذه النار) Here, al-Qasim does not mention Abraham's name directly, instead hinting about his main religious role of breaking idols. The poet employs that religious role for calling his nation's people to revolt against Israeli authorities, whom he is here depicting as false idols. Again, al-Qasim combines intertextuality with symbolism, a combination that not only deepens his ideas and national views but also sharpens the artistic aspect of his poetry.

Although we have addressed the intertextuality of evoking prophets' names directly and indirectly, al-Qasim also uses Qur'anic references to evoke people whom prophets were sent to, such as people of Thamud who were hard and severe with prophets, as mentioned in the Qur'an (7:73, 11:61, 41:17, 51:43, 69:5). The poet employs their character of severity and violence to describe the Jewish people, and thus he focuses the violence and severe characters of the Jewish Israeli authorities during their occupation of the Palestinian homeland. He says: (الطغاة ثمود) (وطغاة) (القاسم، 1990، ص 63) (لم أمت ذاهب) (اليهود). Interestingly, the poet does not just employ Thamud's character in order to describe Jews, but also in order to call his Palestinian people to be patient and not leave Palestine, as well as to come back to their homeland in the future if they have left. Consequently, the poet employs religious history for his Palestinian national and political agenda.

Al-Qasim not only evokes prophets' names directly and indirectly as mentioned before, but also employs Qur'anic stories using their principal components to semantically and artistically serve his political and national agenda. For example, using the story of the prophet Noah, he says: (طوفان) (بعد الشدة) (واصعد يا نوح على طوفان الدم) (هيبى فلكك من أجساد الشهداء) (قولوا للجد الطيب نوح) (الدم) (القاسم، 1976، ص 202) (يرسو فلكك في قمم الزيتون الخضراء). The poet is calling Noah to prepare his ship of martyrs' bodies and asking him, paradoxically and unexpectedly, to join Palestinians in setting sail on the blood flood. Thus, by religious intertextuality, the poet sharpens and deepens, semantically and artistically, his characterization of the Palestinian narrative.

Al-Qasim not only evokes Prophets' names and their Qur'anic stories, but also evokes names of well-known religious characters. For example, he mentions Bilāl together with his religious role of calling Muslim people to pray, aiming to focus sound and poetic abilities as well as calling on Arab countries for unity. He says: (وبلال ومغذنة) (وكتاب) (عندليب وسوسنة) (وهي مني رباة ومغني) (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 280). We could say that the poet here employs the well-known ability of Bilāl with his sound during prayer calls, in order to have pride in his ability at poetic recitation. In another poem, he says: (ودمي يسبح على جدارك يا كنانة) (وفمي بلال في وأذنك العتيقة يا يمن) (يا جزائر) (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 713). Here, the poet employs not the well-known sounding ability of Bilāl, but the reputation and respect he has throughout Muslim countries, in order to bring into focus the fact that all the mentioned Arab countries are of the same heritage and religious orientation. Moreover, aims to call for Arabs to unite. Thus, these diverse intertextualities mean the poet has not only a Palestinian national agenda, but also a collective Arabic national orientation.

While, in the previous example, the poet evokes a prominent religious character by mentioning directly his name, in other places, the poet uses intertextuality with altered names such as the name of (قاييل) [Qābīl], saying: (قايي! يا قابين! أين مضت بماييل خطاه) (قاييل) (القاسم، 1987، ص 312) (جزاء فعلتلك الحرام!). We see that the poet in one case omits the last letter of

the name and in the other; he replaces the last letter of the name with another letter. He opted to replace that last letter with (ن) [n], a letter that sharpens in Arabic the sadness of the context. Thus, we could say that the poet employs this kind of evoking and altering of names semantically and poetically. Furthermore, the poet here employs intertextuality to magnify the violence and severity of the Israeli Jewish occupation, indicating that they committed a violent crime similar to the crime of Qābīl who killed his brother, Hābīl. (Al-Aṣḫānī and Jalānī, 2011).

Al-Qasim evokes prominent religious characters who not only have mainly religious roles or who committed well-known crimes, but also who have historic religious and military charisma, such as Salāḥ al-Dīn. Al-Qasim evokes this character's name several times within his poetry. For example, he says: (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص ( ولا جندينا المجهول في حطين)) (ولا ذكرى صلاح الدين) (ولا خيل الصليبيين) (القاسم، 520). Historically, this name has the characteristics of power, charisma, abilities of military organization and a record of many victories (Al-Aṣḫānī and Jalānī, 2011). It is obvious that the poet, by evoking that name, aims to criticize the Arab leaders of Arab countries, and thus he employs religious intertextuality for his national and political agenda.

It is worth noting that al-Qasim is aware of the historical religious and social roles that Muslim women have, so he evokes in poetry not only well-known male characters but also females. For example, he mentions Muhammad's wife, Khadījah, saying: (زمليني يا ( زمليني) (زمليني يا خديجة) (القاسم، 1993، مجلد 1 ص 534-535)... خديجة Here, we see obviously that the poet focuses on her social and emotional role that is giving her husband the prophet Muhammad tenderness and encouragement when he asked her for it in a very hard situation, which was the beginning of revelation. We could say that al-Qasim employs the previous context to emphasize his own tragedy of incurable disease. Furthermore, al-Qasim evokes another female well-known religious character, Asmā', the daughter of the first Khalīfa, Abū Bakr. He says: (فأنادي أرجعوا لي ... آه... أسمائي الحبيبة)) (القاسم، 1993، مجلد 1 ص 151). So, it should be noted that the poet, by addressing religious intertextuality, supports the feminist agenda that is aiming at improvement of the status and role of women economically, socially, and politically.

Interestingly, and indicative of his intertextual diversity, al-Qasim evokes not only Muslim characters' names but Jewish characters' names too. For example, he mentions Isaiah, and says: (نحن (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 197-198) (نناديه) (أحفاد إشعيا) Jewish religious characters. The diversity of references in his work speaks to al-Qasim's broad and deep knowledge. Furthermore, the poet employs intertextuality from Jewish religious sources for his Palestine political agenda, too.

In addition to deliberation, inclusion, partial quotation and evoking characters' names, al-Qasim uses another form of religious intertextuality, well-known religious symbols. A repeated religious symbol in al-Qasim's poetry is the Cross of Christ symbol (الصليب); he says: (وحملنا كل آلام (الصليب)

(القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 42-) (دون ذنب- كل آلام الصليب) يا أبانا، كيف ترضى لبنيك البسطاء) (الصليب In another poem, he says: (وصارت يداي على سطح بيروت صارت على شكل الصليب يداي) (القاسم، 1987-) (ب، ص 26-25). We see that the poet employs the mentioned Christian religious symbol to express the huge tragedy of himself and of his Palestinian nation. This employment of symbols is in harmony with the two previously mentioned styles and ways of religious intertextuality. As another example, the poet also uses the Christian symbol for Sunday (يوم الأحد) he says: (جمعت قلبين يوم الأحد) (فغدا) (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 121-122) (بدء تاريخي وذكري مولدي) (يوم المسيح المفتدى Here, the poet uses the Christian symbol to talk about optimism and hope. Various, the poet uses religious symbols not only from Muslim and Christian religious sources, but also from Jewish sources. For instance, he says, (إلى أين؟... وحتماً سنبقى) (ورحلنا يوم عاد الآخرون) (ثم عاد الآخرون) (سنوات التيه كانت في سيناء), (القاسم، 1987-أ، ص 51) (تائهين Unlike the previous example, here the poet employs this symbol to express anxiety and fear regarding the Palestinian future, serving his political national approach and views.

## Conclusion

The discussion and analysis of the selected examples of religious intertextuality in al-Qasim's poetry aimed to shed light on the rationale behind it. We found that the poet consciously employed artistic and semantic intertextual relations in his poetry, trying to create a connection between poetry and his diverse religious sources, which were not only Muslim but also Christian and Jewish, for the primary purpose of addressing his Palestinian national orientation and agenda. That is to say, the poet manifests significant commitment to Palestinian national goals throughout his poetry. Al-Qasim employs religious intertextuality to bring into focus and magnify the Palestinian tragedy, highlighting the difficulties of coping with the Jewish occupying authorities as well as anxiety and fear regarding the Palestinian future. The poet uses three principal forms of religious intertextuality. One is deliberation: inclusion and partial quotations, the second is evoking prominent religious characters and the third is religious symbols. We can conclude that such application of diverse types of symbolism is evidence that the poet is well versed and educated. This research suggests the importance of raising awareness of the extensive impact of religions on language and poetry.



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