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"I am the Place and the Place is Me": Tropes of Nostalgia/Longing for Places in Sālim Jubrān's Poetry

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Abstract

The disconnection of Palestinians from their land during the 1948 *Nakba* ("catastrophe," in Arabic) impacts their lives through the present and is reflected clearly in their literary works. The tendency to describe the "old" rural life in a nostalgic style, which highlights the emotional relationship between people and places and expresses sympathy for landscapes, sites, and social relations, became a prominent feature of Palestinian poetry in particular. The ruins of the houses, the crippled abandoned structures, the trees, stones, and plants, are represented as organisms that feel, speak, and participate in the Palestinians' struggle against their enemy. Many recalled objects became familiar icons and indices derived from the Palestinian collective memory. The present article illustrates this phenomenon through some of Jubrān's nostalgic resistance poems.

Keywords

post-trauma – *Nakba* – alienation – repopulation – displacement – distortion – rebuilding – collective memory – free verse – metaphor – icon – index

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"أنا المكان والمكان أنا": تجليات النوستالجيا/الحنين إلى الأماكن في شعر سالم جبران

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خلاصة

انفصال الفلسطينيين عن أرضهم إبّان نكبة عام 1948 ما يزال يؤثّر في حياتهم حتى اليوم، ويظهر ذلك جليًّا في أعمالهم الأدبية. أصبحت النزعة إلى تصوير الحياة الريفية "القديمة" بأسلوب نوستالجي، يُبرز العلاقة العاطفيّة بين الناس والأمكنة ويعبّر عن التعاطف مع المناظر الطبيعيّة والمواقع والحنين إلى العلاقات الاجتماعيّة القديمة، سمةً بارزة في الشعر الفلسطينيّ على وجه الخصوص. كما أنّ أطلال البيوت، وبقايا بعض الأجزاء المهدّمة المهجورة، والأشجار، والحجارة، والنباتات، تُقدَّم عبر هذا الأدب ككائنات حيّة تشعر وتتكلّم وتشارك في نضال الفلسطينيين. الكثير من الأشياء المستدعاة تحوّلت إلى أيقونات ومؤشّرات مألوفة منبثقة من الذاكرة الجماعيّة الفلسطينيّة. يعرض هذا المقال هذه الظاهرة من خلال بعض قصائد جبران المقاومة ذات الطابع النوستالجيّ.

الكلمات المفتاحية

ما بعد الصدمة – النكبة – الاغتراب – إعادة التوطين – التهجير – التشويه – إعادة البناء – الذاكرة الجماعية – الشعر الحر – الاستعارة – الأيقونة – المؤشِّر

1 Introduction

Sālim Jubrān is a Palestinian poet, writer, and journalist born in Buqayʿa, on one of the highest mountains in Palestine, in 1941. In the 1960s, he moved to Nazareth, where he lived until his death in 2012. In 1967, he was arrested and imprisoned due to his political activity and was subsequently subjected to house arrest. Later, in 1972, he enrolled at Haifa University to complete his undergraduate studies, earning a BA in English literature and Middle Eastern history. In the early 1970s, he was a journalist and editor of the literary magazine

Al-Jadīd and the daily newspaper *Al-Ittiḥād*. He later became editor-in-chief of *Al-Ghad*, the young communists' magazine. In 1990, he was appointed editor-in-chief of *al-Ittiḥād*.

Jubrān released three poetry collections: *Kalimāt min al-Qalb* (Words from the heart) in 1971, *Qaṣā'id laysat muḥaddadat al-Iqāma* (Unconfined Poems) in 1972, and *Rifāq al-Shams* (Sun's Comrades) in 1975. Most of his poems deal with poignant issues with a sad tone, an optimistic view, deep longing for the past, and intensive use of the popular idiom in direct language.[1]

Jubrān was raised under conditions of war and emergency, witnessed the depopulation and repopulation of some Palestinian villages near Buqayʿa, and experienced the fear of forced eviction. Sulaymān Jubrān, Sālim's brother, recorded these moments of confusion and panic that gripped his entire family at the time, including Sālim. In an interview, Sulaymān stated, "We witnessed the burning of Suḥmāta, which was located a few kilometres away from Buqayʿa, we all [including seven-year-old Sālim] climbed the wall and saw Suḥmāta burning after an Israeli airstrike… at that moment we recognized that it is our turn now and we will be attacked too."[2]

2 Jubrān the Nostalgic Poet

Any person who has experienced a life-threatening traumatic event at such an early stage of his life is subject to post-traumatic feelings and frequent bouts of nostalgia. It is a kind of nostalgia called, in Jennifer's Delisle's terminology, a "genealogical nostalgia," meaning that children born later to post-traumatic individuals (the "second generation") inherit it. According to Delisle, this is a nostalgia derived not from direct experience, "but out of the very gaps between personal experience and a dominant ancestral past. Genealogical nostalgia involves not just longing for the past, but a self-conscious reflection of the narrator's mediated relationship to that past."[3] Indeed, evidence of this tendency can be found in Jubrān's poetry, which deals predominantly with memories, nostalgia, and passion for the "old place," even though his village was not evacuated. After 1948, the entire reality of the region changed, and, as time passed, Jubrān developed a sense of alienation that only strengthened after he left Buqayʿa at the age of seventeen.

1 See: Sulaymān Jubrān, "An Interview with the Brother of Sālim Jubrān," Haifa, 2020, forthcoming; cf.: Sulaymān Jubrān, *Malaffāt al-dhāt* (Haifa: Kull Shayʾ), 15–16.

2 Jubrān "An interview with the brother of Sālim Jubrān". cf.: Jubrān, *Malaffāt al-dhāt*,15–16.

3 Jennifer Delisle, "Second-Generation Memory in the Age of Global Media," *Biography* 36/2 (2013), 384–385.

As such, the early years of Jubrān's life determined the character of his poetry and impacted the forms, atmosphere, techniques, and language he used. Notably, as the word "longing" (*ḥanīn*) appears 32 times in the 178 poems he published throughout his career, synonyms for "missing" (*ashtāq*) appear 13 times, and the word "child/childhood" (*ṭifl*/ *ṭufūla*) or references to it appear at least 44 times, Jubrān can be considered the "poet of Palestinian nostalgia."

Undoubtedly, Jubrān's poetry is deeply rooted in the past. Throughout his works, he evokes the "old" places, ruined villages, pastoral landscapes, and other patriotic symbols that have become central motifs of Palestinian resistance. By continually retelling the story of the Nakba and preserving it through his verse, he seeks to transcend the fractured present and revive the organic, unblemished life of Palestinians before the catastrophe. Therefore, many of his poems are like documentary reports, using plain language, detailing actual events, and using real names while eschewing metaphoric tropes. Consequently, the traumatic event of the *Nakba* seems to have accompanied him throughout his artistic career.[4]

3 Memory and Place

Places are the most dominant elements in nostalgic memory, due to their actual material presence, regardless of whether they still exist or have changed/disappeared. Places are the most prominent evidence of a person's identity, presence, and affiliation. Most events in a person's life occur in an identified space that continues to be etched in memory; indeed, we usually remember events in relation to the place where they occurred. In the present, places become a strong trigger for recalling the events and details of our lives. According to Routledge, the place is the second-most dominant issue memorialized through nostalgia, following only memories related to social relationships with relatives and friends.[5]

The recalled place always looks like the "original" place but is not a replica. It is more like an ideal place that consists of a mixture of objective and subjective elements. Many of its authentic details are missing or replaced by new ones that the poet dreamt of, while many of the new details added are more closely linked to the poet's present; a place that responds to all his psychological needs and addresses the problems that he observes in his current

4 See: Salmā Khaḍra al-Jayyūsi, *Mawsūʿat al-adab al-falasṭīnī al-muʿāṣir* (Beirut: Al-Hay'a al-ʿArabiyya li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 1997) vol. 1, 171.

5 Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 20–22.

place.[6] Consequently, the "old" place in nostalgic poems appears, at most, as an **icon**—a sketch of the authentic place, with some new elements or highlighted and idealized older components.

A thorough survey of Jubrān's poems reveals that he relates to specific local places in his village of Buqayʿa more than to general iconic Palestinian places. Nevertheless, most of the pre-1948 Palestinian villages are similar in construction; thus, the specific places that Jubrān refers to are archetypes of Palestinian national places. The most frequently evoked places in Jubrān's poetry are the *nabʿ* (well, spring), mentioned in thirteen poems, followed by the neighborhood, *ḥāra*. Although both places seem general and frequently appear in Palestinian poetry, the spatial details provided within the poems make them more private and specific places. This specification addresses the needs of the "exiled" poet, who feels lost and yearns for a warm, private corner where he can attain sympathy, belonging, and a haven. In addition to these two places, Jubrān's poetry includes many other references related to the landscape of his village, including trees, flowers, and birds. The most interesting and unique amongst them is a kind of blackberry tree (*mīs*), which is rare in Palestine and can be found only in Buqayʿa and some nearby villages.

3.1 *The Spring, Well, Fountain:* Nabʿ, Yanbūʿ/ ʿAyn

In *Lisān al-ʿArab* the word *nabʿ* has two synonyms: *ʿayn* and *yanbūʿ*. Interestingly, Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1233 CE), the author of this dictionary, does not distinguish between the three words, but instead combines them in one sentence, saying: "*nabaʿa* means exploded or got out of the *ʿayn*/ spring; this is why we call the spring *yanbūʿ*" (the literal meaning of the verb *yanbuʿ* in Arabic is "gets out").[7] Indeed, the popular, widespread metaphorical usage of *ʿayn* as "spring" in everyday speech is derived from the original use of the same word for "eye." Both the eye and the spring are sources of "water;" thus, the word inspires a similarity that nostalgic poets have picked up on.

Springs, fountains, and wells are notable cultural landmarks of Palestinian villages. Most Palestinian villages and towns are built next to one of these sources of water.[8] As such, the sources attain a spiritual-metaphoric meaning related to life and giving. Still, Buqayʿa's spring has unique features and characteristics, at least from its inhabitants' perspective and especially from that of

6 See: Kendra Smith, "Architectural Sketches and the Power of Caricature," *Journal of Architectural Education* 44/1(1990), 49–58; Routledge, *Nostalgia*, 20–22.

7 Muḥammad Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (vol. 8, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994), 345.

8 See: Shukrī ʿArrāf, *Al-Qarya al-filisṭīniyya* (Jerusalem: Maṭbaʿat Ofist Ḥasan Abū Dalū, 1986), 129, 134.

Jubrān. Unlike most other springs in Palestine, this one is located in the middle of the village, dividing the village into two: a predominately wealthy western part and a predominately poor eastern part.[9] Its location made it the beating heart of the village; being close to the village's homes (in contrast to the water sources in many other villages), it quickly became a place of meetings, social activities, and a symbol of coexistence and unity between the different communities within the village. Over time, many folk stories (including love stories) related to this place emerged and found their way into the people's collective memory. Today, numerous cultural and folkloric materials (folktales, folksongs, beliefs, etc.) still refer to this landmark in Buqayʿa.

As previously mentioned, a water source is found in all of Jubrān's nostalgic poems. In most mentions, it appears alongside other parts of Buqayʿa's landscape, especially the trees, plants, and stones surrounding the spring. The more detailed the landscape being described, the clearer the image of the place; thus, the more restricted and limited the interpretation of the signs must be. Indeed, most of Jubrān's poems exhibit a tendency to draw a detailed picture of the whole landscape of his village, such that the signs of place he uses come together and contribute to the description of the poet's old "ideal" village. This tendency reveals a realistic and direct style, marking the signs as referential and related to the actual place for which the poet longs. Moreover, these detailed descriptions indicate the poet's longing for the life of his childhood in Buqayʿa, where his authentic identity lies, as he declared on several occasions.

In his poem "1948," one of the earliest poems in his collection *Kalimāt min al-Qalb/ Words from the Heart* (1964), Jubrān attempts to immortalize the first days of the *Nakba* through the eyes of a seven-year-old child. This poem is biographical, with some elements of nostalgia; it exposes the effects of the *Nakba* on him and his family by presenting their anxiety, nervous movements, confusion, thoughts, and words. The most prominent feeling portrayed in the poem is fear, especially that of a child, and the child's worry and concern that he may be forced to leave his village. His fear is passed on to the elements of place that surround him, including the spring:

> كان ليل النكبة الأسود لا إشعاع فيهِ/ غير إشعاع القنابلْ/ وهي تنصبّ على رأس قرًى ليست تقاتلْ! [...] إنّ هذا البيتَ يا أمّاه/ ما كان عزيزًا أيّ يومْ/ فلماذا يا تُرى صار عزيزًا وجميلًا؟/ أيّها النبعُ الذي جاد، بلا مَنٍّ/ على طول السنينْ/ من تُرى يشرب من مائك، بعد اليوم، مَنْ/ أيها النبع الحزينْ؟!

9 See: Jubrān, "An Interview with the Brother of Sālim Jubrān."

> The Nakba's night was without a light/ Except for the lights of the bombs/ Falling on the head of the villages/ That do not fight …/ This home, mum/ Never was so dear/ I wonder why is it so dear and beautiful now?/ O spring, which gave his water generously without boasting/ I wonder who will drink your water from now on, who?/ Oh, poor spring![10]

Parmenter argues that the intimate relationship between Palestinian writers and the landscape, as reflected in their works, stems in part from Palestinian rhetoric against Zionism. Unlike the scientific, historical, and political rhetoric often employed by Israeli writers, Palestinian authors, according to Parmenter, adopt a more romanticized discourse, conveying to the world their deep, personal bond with the land of Palestine. Through this romantic expression, she suggests, Palestinian writers have "sought consolation from the belief that the Israelis will never know or love the land as intimately as the Palestinians."[11]

However, this claim is inadequate and cannot be universally accepted. Examining the works of Hebrew writers such as S. Yizhar presents a more nuanced perspective. Yizhar's literature, mainly his novella *Khirbet Khizeh*, reflects a profound and deeply personal relationship with the Israeli landscape. His writings are distinguished by their rich, poetic prose and meticulous depictions of the land's flora and fauna, underscoring an inherent and profound attachment to the natural environment.[12] In *Khirbet Khizeh*, Yizhar portrays the 1948 expulsion of Palestinian villagers, interweaving this harrowing narrative with vivid descriptions of the landscape. This literary approach does more than highlight the physical setting; it also engages with the moral and emotional dimensions of the events, revealing an introspective and ethically charged relationship with the land. Thus, while Parmenter emphasizes a romantic rhetoric among Palestinian writers, the works of Israeli authors like S. Yizhar challenge the notion that such an intimate engagement with the landscape is exclusive to Palestinian literature. Israeli writers, too, have employed profoundly personal and reflective narratives to express their bond with the land, suggesting that literary depictions of landscape transcend a simplistic dichotomy between romantic and scientific rhetoric. After all, these

10 Sālim Jubrān, *Al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyya al-kāmila* (Haifa: Kul Shay', 2012), 13–16. (This translation and all other translations in this manuscript are mine.).

11 Barbara Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones– Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 69.

12 See: Smilansky Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh: A Novel*, Trans. N. de Lange & Y. Dweck (N.Y.: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2014), Original work published in 1949; Tsipi Keller, "S. Yizhar's Khirbet Khizeh," In: *Words without Borders*, 2008. (https://wordswithoutborders.org/book-reviews/s-yizhars-khirbet-khizeh, accessed 20/5/2025).

places have borne witness to countless events and stories interwoven with the daily lives of their inhabitants, including private secrets and personal histories. As a result, they serve as vivid reminders of past social and intimate relationships, imbued with the weight of memory and the significance of historical experience

For the poet himself, places are like friends who share his feelings and keep his secrets. Hence, Jubrān feels that these stones and land and trees and plants are nothing but living, surviving human beings. This is precisely what we observe in the text above; the poet speaks to the spring intimately and expresses his fears directly: *who will drink your water?* Here, the poet blends into the events that he speaks of and becomes part of that past by re-entering the body of the child that he once was and recalling all that the child had said and felt. The child seems to have heard that his family would be forced to leave the village, so his question comes as a kind of elegy and farewell. Why does the child ask about the identity of those expected to "drink of the spring's water" when he knows who they are? All the details, starting with the title, clearly indicate that the answer to who will drink the water is the Israelis, which the poet himself knew. Yet, this scene presents an authentic life filled with the natural, innocent feelings of an ignorant child who knows nothing about the enemy and nothing about whether this enemy is foreign and whether the enemy belong to the environment described in the poem. It may seem that there is a contradiction between the poet's intention to depict the child's authentic life and his idealization of the past. However, rather than explicitly resolving the tension between realism and idealization, the poet allows them to coexist. The child's unawareness of the enemy mirrors the poet's deliberate choice to leave them unnamed, a selective framing that renders the village's loss even more poignant. The poem does not explicitly engage with political struggle but instead captures the rupture of an intimate, personal world.

The tension between nostalgia and realism is not a flaw but a fundamental mechanism through which the poem conveys its emotional and historical depth. Throughout the poem, the poet avoids any direct reference to the enemy's identity. On the one hand, this anonymization enhances the realism of the events; on the other, it serves the poet's intention of keeping the "other" entirely detached from his memory and beloved surroundings.

In addition to humanizing the spring by speaking to it, the poet uses some human attributes to describe the spring, including generosity and sadness. The first attribute is deeply connected to Arab culture, in which *jūd* (generosity) is considered one of the essential features of a real noble Arab. This wording humanizes this spring as an Arab by nature. In true Arab spirit, the spring gives

water freely and without boasting. The other attribute, sadness, describes how the spring feels, not what it does. Sadness is the feeling that overcomes the poet himself, and he transfers it to the place he faces, in a kind of projection. At this point, the intimate story between the poet and nature reaches its climax, when they blend completely. They both are sad, and they both reject any change in the status quo.[13]

The poem's form consists of several scenes, each of which concentrates on one detail of the place and the people there. Each scene has its own rhyme and semantic field, but they all share the same atmosphere of sadness and confusion, and the same rhythm (*al-Ramal*). The name *ramal* is related to "*raml*," which translates to "sand" in Arabic, and is believed to derive from the swift and smooth flow of its rhythm, reminiscent of the ease of walking on sand. In addition, the *ramal* meter is characterized by its gentle and fluid cadence, making it suitable for expressing a wide range of emotions, from joy to sorrow. This versatility has led poets to employ it in various themes, including love, pride, and descriptions of nature. The musicality inherent in the *ramal* meter facilitates a seamless connection between the poem's content and the listener, enhancing the emotional resonance and aesthetic experience of the verses.[14]

In this way, the poet demonstrates the comprehensive effect of the *Nakba* on all the components of the place, while also emphasizing the harmony between those components. Furthermore, the dialogues and monologues that the poet recalls breathe life into the events and make the tragedy more palpable. The spring here is just one of the several sites that the poet evokes; he also recalls the roof, the yard, the house, and many other things. Each one of those places resembles the stability that the child had attained before the disturbance of the "foreign" enemy.

The spring in this poem is one of several detailed descriptions of the site provided with the aim of recalling the strong effect of the *Nakba* on the village's life. Yet, this part is a critical component of the village's structure and a fundamental feature of its landscape, making it a national sign that symbolizes the entire homeland, particularly since the context is political with a biographical tone.

13 For more about places as a tool of resistance, see: Ahmad, Yahya, Ruzi Suliza, and Hashim Mahmoud. "Greetings of Resistance in Arabic Poetry—An Ecocritical Interpretation of Selected Arabic Poems," *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 21/1 (2015), 13, 13–22; Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones*, 46.

14 Ghāzī Yamūt, *Buḥūr al-Shiʿr al-ʿArabī, ʿArūḍ al-Khalīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, 1992), 131.

Notably, this is not the case in other poems where the same metaphor is used. The fear of losing the spring dissipated when Israeli forces reversed their decision to evacuate the village, an act that would make the political significance of the symbol irrelevant. However, the longing for the spring grew stronger over time, becoming transformed into a more personal and emotional longing, related to the poet's mental state and temper.

Jubrān left the village when he was a teenager and completed his studies in another village before settling in Nazareth. This chosen exile away from his home and the troubles he faced throughout his life and career made him feel as if he were living in a distorted, unsafe present, even disconnected from it, which led him to be overcome by a sense of loneliness.[15] Indeed, scholars recognize that loneliness, depression, and alienation are among the most potent triggers of nostalgia.[16] As a reaction, the nostalgic individual tries to rebuild the old place using elements of emotion, imagination, and material elements that belong to the actual place. In this case, all that mattered to the nostalgic Jubrān here was finding an alternative place to live, for a while, away from his current state and place. His poems expressing this nostalgia are more metaphorical, emotional, and personal than collective. A compelling example of this phenomenon can be found in the poem "*Hādha al-Makān*/ This Place", from the collection *Rifāq al-Shams/ Companions of the Sun* (1975).

يُخيّلُ لي أنّني ما وُلدتُ/ ولكنّني منذ الأزلْ/ هنا،/ بين هذي الحواكيرِ/ بين الكروم العتيقةِ/ تحت الجبلْ/ هنا، كلّ رمّانة عشّ حبٍّ/ بها علقت وشوشاتٌ وأغفت قُبلْ/ هنا، كلّ زيتونةٍ/ كلّ تفّاحةٍ/ كلّ تينةْ/ عُصارة دهر المواويلِ/ طورًا نشاوى وطورًا حزينَةْ/ هنا كان جدّي وأصحاب جدّي/ هنا بدء كلّ البداياتِ/ مطلع شمس الشموسِ/ هنا العينُ والتوتةُ المسكينَه/ هنا كنت ألعب حتّى الثماله/ وأسرق لوزًا/ وأحفظ شعرًا/ وأحلم أن العذابَ يموتُ/ وأن العروش تزولُ/ وأنّ العدالةْ ستشرقُ، أحلم أن الحواكيرَ جنّه [...]/ هنا، لستُ أعرف إسمًا لهذا المكانْ/ فهذا المكانُ أنا، وأنا هو هذا المكانْ

15 Sulaymān Jubrān, the poet's brother, confirms that his brother was extremely sensitive and found it hard to connect with reality and daily life. He tended to be alone and always felts like a foreigner who was forced to change his relation to the land (Jubrān, "An interview with the brother of Sālim Jubrān").

16 See: Routledge, *Nostalgia*, 25; Sandra Garrido & Jane Davidson, *Music, Nostalgia and Memory* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019), 31; cf.: Ihab Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination– Telling the Memory*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

> I think I haven't been born/ But since antiquity, I have been/ Here among these gardens/ Among the ancient vines/ Beneath the mountain/ Here, every pomegranate tree of a nest's love/ Has susurrations that hung out on it/ And kisses slept on it/ Here, each olive tree/ Each apple tree/ Each fig tree/ Is the essence of the folksongs era/ The drunk ones and the sad ones/ Here, my grandfather and his friends stayed/ Here is the beginning of all the beginnings/ The place of the sun of the suns' rise/ Here, the spring and the poor mulberry tree/ Here I used to play till fullness/ Steal almonds/ Memorize poetry/ And dream that torment may die/ And thrones may pass away/ And justice/ Will shine/ Dream that the gardens are a heaven [...]/ Here, I don't know the name of this place/ For this place is me and I am this place.[17]

This text is pure nostalgia; the poet recalls many objects that refer to his childhood. He aims to rebuild the environment of the past, where he spent most of his time. He uses three kinds of materials in this process of construction: (a) landscape objects: trees, land, and mountains, among others; (b) acts and movements; and (c) dreams. A complete integration exists between the human beings (the child-poet) and the landscape in all these elements. The landscape witnessed many of the child's stories, and it keeps many of his private secrets, including his love, kisses, movements, amusements, and even his dreams (imagination).

Here, the spring is merely among the things he remembers; it plays a less important role than the one it played in the poem previously discussed. Yet, this object seems to be so close to his heart and rooted so deeply in his consciousness that it appears every time the poet sounds emotional and honest—both when he is scared and confused and when he is passionate and nostalgic. Notably, the style of this poem differs considerably from that of the previous one discussed. The previous poem contains many details related to the events, people, and place; as such, it is divided into several scenes that, as noted, make it a biographical poem. The current is more emotional, romantic, and focused on the poet's inner feelings rather than on objective-collective memory, which narrates the tragic story.

The text emphasizes the poet's use of tropes to create a more tangible integration of meaning, as these figurative devices serve as concrete embodiments of abstract concepts. Tropes, such as metaphors and similes, enable poets to convey complex ideas through vivid imagery, making the abstract more

17 Jubrān, *al-Aʿmāl al-kāmila*, 141–142.

accessible and relatable to the reader. This technique enhances the sensory experience of poetry, allowing readers to visualize and emotionally connect with the content.

For instance, In literature, anthropomorphism is a trope where human traits, emotions, or intentions are attributed to non-human entities, such as animals, objects, or natural phenomena. This technique helps readers relate to these entities by making them more familiar and understandable. For example, describing the pomegranate tree of a nest's love and the kisses kept on it … are instances of anthropomorphism—they can bring scenes to life, making readers feel as though they are witnessing the events firsthand. This aligns with the notion that tropes function as concrete embodiments of meaning, transforming intangible ideas into palpable experiences.

This feature distinguishes nostalgic poetry, in which, in most cases, the metaphor becomes a bridge between the physical absence of the object and the current existence of the spiritual state of the poet. In some cases, the metaphoric "parts" in the poem indicate this absence—an absence that may be related to the weak memory of the poet or the disrupted relationship between the poet and the evoked place. The intensive use of tropes in nostalgic poetry, as many scholars argue, is an exaggerated expression of regret made by the poets who left the place by force or choice or who were not present when the "catastrophe" occurred.[18]

The integration between the poet and the place reaches its climax at the end of the poem, when the poet consciously ignores the "real" name of the place, saying that he is the place and the place is nothing but himself. This sentence is consistent with the opening sentence that emphasizes the age-old relationship between the poet and the place, making the statement that he always was and will remain part of the place.

Turning back to the spring, we see that in this poem it is used as an index for something missing in the present, which is childhood. The question is, why, this time, does the poet use the word *ʿayn* rather than *nabʿ*, although both fit the rhythm here? The answer is that most of the symbols in this poem belong to an emotional semantic field related to feelings of longing, sadness, and love, while expressing sympathy with all the details of the place. The mulberry tree, in his words, is "poor," and the folksongs are sad, so it is likely that the poet intuitively chose a word more closely related to a human being's feelings, especially

18 See: Aaron Santesso, *A Careful Longing- the Poetics and Problems of Nostalgia* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010), 107–108; Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29/1 (2008), 103–128.

sadness, considering the similarity between the tears that fall from the eyes and the water that "explodes" out of the land (in Ibn Manẓūr's words).

Jubrān's longing for Buqayʿa, or more precisely for the places of his childhood, seems to grow stronger over time. Illness, old age, and the feeling that one's journey is almost over are among the common triggers of longing for old places.[19] The spring, in this case, is used as a symbol for the entire place and period of childhood. In the poem "*Ḥanīn ila al-yanbūʿ al-qadīm*"/ a longing for the old spring", published in his final collection, *Sifr al-Khurūj/ The Book of Exodus*, the word "spring" is a key word in the title, where it comes between two words that are a direct indication of nostalgia: longing and old. This is a presentative title, meaning that it is consistent with the whole text and gives a concise vision of all that follows. The text is nostalgic and highly controlled by the concept of the past; the word "old" (*qadīm*) appears five times in twelve lines, and the phrase "*ḥanīn ilā*" (a long for) appears four times, as we can see:

> بي حنينٌ لا يُردّ/ إلى البيت القديم، في الحارة القديمه/ بين حنين لا يُردّ إلى فرح متواضع/ أكاد أصاب بالغثيان من الهامبرغر/ أريد أن آكل صحنًا من المجدّرة/ مع اللبن/ روّبته أمي/ بي حنين إلى الينبوع القديم/ لأنّ الماء القادم إلينا بحنفيّة فضّيه/ مشبع بالدود غير المرئيّ!/ البيت القديم يبتعد/ الينبوع ينشف/ ينطفئ في الأفق.
>
> Inside me, there is a longing that can't be rid of/ For the old home, in the old neighborhood/ Inside me, there is a longing that can't be rid of/ for a simple wedding./ I'm nearly nauseated because of the hamburger/ I want to eat a palate of *mujaddara*[20]/ With yogurt/ Curded by mum/ I long for the old spring/ Because the water that comes out to us through a silver faucet/ Is full of invisible worms! /The old house is going away/ The old spring is drying/ Fading on the horizon ...[21]

Repetition is a typical technique of nostalgic literature. Practically, it helps the nostalgic person concentrate and recall all the details related to the "keyword" that he mentions repeatedly—in this particular case, "old" and "longing." When

19 See: Routledge, *Nostalgia,* 4; Nasser Rozveh, "A Comparative Study of Nostalgia in the Poetry of Abdel Muti Hijazi and Nima Yushii," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 8/3 (2017), 531; Tasha Buttler, *Learning the Languages of Nostalgia in Modern and Contemporary Literature* (Washington: University of Washington, 2012), 21.

20 A traditional Palestinian dish of cracked wheat or rice and lentils.

21 Jubrān, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyya al-kāmila*, 288.

Jubrān repeats these two words, he "digs" deeper and deeper into his memory for more ancient objects that are firmly attached to his emotions.

Notably, the poet insists on "stamping" onto each of the things he recalls the word "old." This wording indicates that those objects are not missed or lost; instead, they are still there in the poet's present, but they seem to have lost their original meaning! Perhaps, the poet's longing has less to do with the place and more with the passing of time. All the places he mentions are just a physical embodiment of the "old times."

To highlight his inner conflict between past and present, Jubrān uses another technique common in nostalgic literature: binary oppositions. Indeed, all the symbols in the text can be categorized according to time, strictly and symmetrically; all the objects of the past (old home, *yanbūʿ*, *mujaddar*) function (emotionally) as alternatives for the current equivalent objects (hamburger, faucet…). The conflict between the two worlds—the nostalgic, spiritual, and imagined world, on the one hand, and the present realistic and materialistic one, on the other—is biased. The poet recruits some techniques in favor of the past world, including focusing on the old objects and starting the sentences with them, repeating the word "old" (as previously mentioned), and distorting all the objects of the present world (the water is full of worms, the hamburger is disgusting, and so on). To highlight this process of distortion, the poet consciously uses the rhetorical device of alliteration (*jinās*) between the two words that describe the spring and its opposite, the silver faucet (*qādim* and *qadīm*, respectively); hence, the verbal difference resembles the real change that took place on-the-ground, which, from the poet's perspective, is nothing but distortion.

The conflict ends with the defeat of the preferred side, as the old house and the old spring start to withdraw from the "battlefield;" in other words, from the poet's memory. The end is crucial here, given that the verbs that Jubrān uses to describe the withdrawal of the past objects are in the present continuous tense (*yabtaʿid*, *yanshaf*, *yanṭafiʾ*). This grammar expresses the feeling that the conflict is live and direct, making the text more effective and the end more tragic and pathetic.

Consequently, the spring here becomes a symbol of the past in all its content: place, time, feelings, and social relations. Notably, in most of the other poems in which Jubrān recalls the spring, it is accompanied by other pastoral objects like stones, plants, and, especially, the mulberry tree. However, in the current poem, the symbol appears alone and independent, making it, as previously stated, a representative of all the old objects for which the poet longs.

3.2 *The Neighborhood*

"Neighborhood/ *ḥāra*" is the second most dominant spatial reference in Jubrān's poetry. Like the spring, the neighborhood appears in thirteen of his poems (three of which are nostalgic). "Neighborhood" is a symbol that carries more of a social meaning than a spatial one; in other words, it refers metaphorically not just to the houses, streets, and landscape of a specific space, but mainly the inhabitants who live in it. Indeed, *Lisān al-ʿArab* offers the following definition of *ḥāra* ("neighborhood"): "Every group of people whose houses are close to each other are living together in the same neighborhood."[22] The people in a neighborhood live together in the same place; share an environment and surroundings; and often take part in similar modes of thinking, folklore, customs, ideology, and activities.

The first appearance of this symbol in Jubrān's poetry was in his poem "*Ughniya lil-qarya*/A Song for the village" from his collection *Kalimāt min al-qalb/ Words from the heart* (1964). In this nostalgic poem dedicated to his village, Jubrān again reveals the psychological conflict between the present and the past and the trigger for his nostalgia, which is his detachment from his village and his sense of alienation:

> بعيدًا عنكِ يا بلدي/ أراكِ، ولا أرى الديدانْ/ أرى التوتةَ والحارةَ والعينا/ أرى الميساتِ والرمانْ/ أرى أهلي وأصحابي وجيراني/ أرى الصبيانْ/ وهم يلهون في الطرقاتِ.../ أفدي فيهم الشيطانْ!/ سريعًا سوف آتيكم، رفاقي/ مثلما يركض للعينِ/ قطيع الماعز العطشانْ/ سريعًا سوف آتي البيت يا أمّي/ أعدّي لي مجدّرةً/ وبعض البصل الأخضر، والألبانْ
>
> Away from you, o my village/ I see you and don't see the worms/ I see the strawberry, the neighborhood, and the spring/ I see the hackberry, the pomegranate tree/ I see my family, my friends, and my neighbors/ I see the kids/ Play on the roads/ I redeem the evilest of them/ Quickly I shall come to you, my friends/ Like a thirsty flock of goats/ Rushing to the spring/ Quickly I shall come home mum,/ Cook for me some *mujaddara*/ With green onion and some yogurt[23]

22 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, vol. 4, 223–225.

23 Jubrān, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyya al-kāmila*, 90–91.

The poem is divided into two parts. The first belongs to the past, in which the poet recalls things and places that belong to his childhood village. The second belongs to the present, in which he declares his psychological detachment from the current life and promises to return to his village. Interestingly, Jubrān uses many words to refer to his village culture and landscape: seventeen of the fifty-one total words describe the culture and landscape, making this poem a true rural poem. The kind of nostalgia that appears here is called "restorative nostalgia," which "conjures up images of an absolute past in a perfect and original form"[24] in an effort at "a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home."[25] Recalling all of the village's details helps the reader to map the place mentally; yet, the image provided is just a sketch of the village, an icon derived from the original understanding of the village's structure. The neighborhood is an essential detail in this sketch. Moreover, the other things evoked indicate that his social relationships in this village are prominent. Thus, it is not only the places that come to the poet's mind but also the people who lived in those places, especially his friends and neighbors, revealing his need to feel safety and satisfaction through the company of "trusted" people, including family, friends, and neighbors.

The anaphora in this poem (the repetition of the word "see" at the beginning of every sentence in the first part of the poem) is consistent with restorative nostalgia, making the poem more focused and coherent. In general, as mentioned above, repetition is a dominant technique in nostalgic poetry; practically, it urges the memory to evoke more things that are related to the same place. The technique of *jināS* mentioned above can be considered an advanced form of repetition. As noted earlier, the *jināS* in the previous poem is used deliberately to highlight a deep and significant conflict between past and present. The "distorted" version of the word *qadīm* (*qādim*) serves as a symbol of the distorted present. In contrast, the anaphora in the current poem functions as an attempt to completely erase the present by emphasizing the act of recalling (*arā*) and presenting the recalled objects as substitutes for those in the present. The poem's structure reflects the same yearning for the past; although it is written in one column, which seems like a modern format, it is old-fashioned. The poem consists of six verses divided into twelve hemistichs written vertically in one column (rather than in two). In addition, it is a monotonous poem with a single rhyme and a single meter *wāfir* (ᴗ---/ᴗ-ᴗᴗ-), which is considered one of the loudest meters.

24 Delisle, "Second-Generation Memory in the Age of Global Media," 385.

25 Buttler, *Learning the Languages of Nostalgia in Modern and Contemporary Literature*, 102–103.

As previously noted, the broad scope of Jubrān's poetry reflects his intention to address both public and personal issues in a direct and transparent manner, often employing ordinary language and at times incorporating speech inspired by popular thought. Nevertheless, in his final collection, *Sifr al-Khurūj* (…), we observe a marked shift toward a more romantic style. This is evident in the significant number of emotional poems centered on romantic love, personal memories, rural landscapes, and private experiences. This stylistic shift is characterized by a greater use of emotional metaphors, a reduced presence of realistic events and material indicators of the past, and an increased focus on natural settings. It involves deeper integration between the poet's inner feelings and the details of nature, resulting in more romanticized descriptions.

In his poem "*risāla*/ a letter", from his last collection, nostalgic feelings take over the poet once again, this time transferring him back in time to his romantic relationship when he was young and still living in his village. Clearly, the mental detachment of the poet from the present is absolute; even things related to his intimate feelings refer to the past and the old place. This disconnect demonstrates that the poet cannot find himself outside his memories, which have become his alternative world. He longs for the old space, he prefers his old friends, the old food, and old social activities and celebrations, and when he thinks about his intimate relationships, only the old love of his youth comes to his mind:

> أسمعُ جسدك من بعيد/ وأرى صوتك، مثل غزالة نازلة من الجبل/ أحنّ إلى عناق حزنك النبيل المشبع بالاغتراب/ مثل عصفورة ضيّعت سربَها وضيّعت المكان [...] يملأني حنين هادئ، يعتمل فيّ، يتغلغل فيّ/ بلا ضجيج/ مثل انتشار حرارة الحياة في الأرض، في مطلع الربيع/ يملأني حنين إلى عالمك الملفوف بضباب الحلم/ أشتهي نبيذك وكرمك وأرضك / [...] كنّا معا قبل أكثر من ألف عام/ في قرية واحدة، في حارة واحدة، في كوخ واحد/ لماذا طرت يا عصفورة الاغتراب الآن
>
> I hear your body from a distance/ I see your voice, like a gazelle that gets down the mountain/ I long for to hug your noble body, loaded with alienation sorrow/ Like a bird that lost its flock and lost its location …/ A quiet longing fills me, dwells inside me, penetrates me/ Without any noise/ A longing for your world that is wrapped in a dream's fog fills me/ I crave for your wine, land and vineyard/ […] In the same village, same neighborhood, same hut/ Why did you fly away, o alienation's bird?![26]

26 Jubrān, *al-Aʿmāl al-shiʿriyya al-kāmila*, 247–249.

Again, the love that the poet longs for is part of the old space of place and time. What makes this love so unique for him is not just the strong relationship between him and his beloved, but rather the fact that this love grew within his preferred place and time. Therefore, the many nostalgic elements evoked in connection to his old love make it a "nostalgic love." Notably, his love and beloved became part of the landscape itself. Hence, he completely integrates his beloved and the landscape (a gazelle gets down the mountain/ a bird that lost its flock) and his feelings and the landscape (craving for land and vineyard). Technically, this integration leads to a substantial use of special tropes that are nothing but a combination of words that carry concrete meanings (hugging, fills…) and intangible emotional words (sorrow, longing…). These kinds of metaphors express the poet's strong desire to see dreams and nostalgic images come true; they help him to embody his desires, rebuild materially the old world, "touch" it, and live in it. The combination of all the things he loves—the village, land, landscape, neighborhood, and his love—makes him "sink" into deep nostalgic emotions, bringing the poem close to being a "pipe dream." This approach leads the poem towards an intensive metaphoric style, which seems more sophisticated at the end of the text, where the metaphors become more ambiguous; they are more likely to be symbols, not merely metaphors (your world is wrapped in a dream's fog/ I crave for your wine, land, and vineyard). Notably, this style is uncharacteristic in Jubrān's poetry, as other examples of the same type hardly exist.

The ambiguous end of the text is quite interesting. There, we observe an apparent confusion between the land and his beloved; indeed, this is an intentional confusion, typical of Palestinian resistance poetry.[27] Furthermore, the meaning of the closed and narrow spaces is clear: the poet speaks not of national, political, or cultural sentiments, but of deeply personal feelings. Some readers and critics might argue that this is a form of romanticism that masks a political stance. While this may hold true for many modern, sophisticated Palestinian poems—such as those by Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Samīḥ al-Qāsim, and others—it does not apply to Sālim Jubrān, whose style remains consistently simple and direct throughout his career. His is a personal love, though it is inevitably tied to the idea of place. The poet expresses a longing for a warm, intimate love that offers him a sense of safety and stability.

Such a love can be achieved when one is in a safe, desired, "narrow" place with firm limits: a private hut in a specific neighborhood in a small village, where both the poet and his beloved feel a sense of belonging. Adding an air

27 See: Parmenter, *Giving Voice to the Stones*, 44.

of ambiguity, the poet uses the word *wāḥid* to describe all the previously mentioned places. This word has two meanings: "one" and "the same." Moreover, throughout the poem he reduces the size of the place, from wide to narrow, and merges or joins things, which helps him overlook the details and differences and concentrate on one thing only—his love within that specific place and time. By narrowing the place and reducing the details, he achieves the desired stability, warmth, and confidence. The neighborhood is an integral part of this process; this hut cannot be located anywhere, but it must be in this specific neighborhood, where he feels safe. The neighborhood now is an emotional sign related to the poet's private feelings, and it is used as an index referencing the period of his youth.

4 Conclusion

Recalling the old places and exposing the strong relationship between them and the people who own them is one of the most dominant features of Palestinian poetry. This tendency characterizes the poetry of Sālim Jubrān, which relates deeply to the past and mainly involves nostalgic recollections of old places, events, and social relations from the poet's world as a child. Jubrān's poetry presents two kinds of detachments that cause a strong feeling of alienation: (a) detachment from his present and reality, which leads him to a kind of nostalgic memory; and (b) detachment from the "old places" in their current states—those places that, over time, had been changed and mostly repopulated by strange settlers. In both cases, the poet exhibits a tendency to distort the present and compare it with an idealized past by applying techniques of binary oppositions, ignorance, objection, and particular kinds of metaphors that help him connect "physically" with the imagined "old" world. The most evoked places in his poetry are the spring, neighborhood, trees (especially the hackberry and mulberry of his former village), and the displaced villages. On the one hand, as an act of national resistance, he tries to rebuild the "old" destroyed or distorted place and to prove the organic relation between the place and its original habitants. On the other, he tries to escape his personal psychological and social problems and his feeling of alienation by rebuilding a utopian world comprised of "old" physical places that he loved and imagined, including activities, relations, and spatial features about which he dreams. On the national level, the spring, the neighborhood, and the landscape become icons that represent all the Palestinian villages under occupation. On the personal level, they become an index to the poets' childhood, which becomes his alternative, therapeutic world.

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