

Representing Beirut as a Lady Affected By War in Qabbani's Poetry**Bushra Al-Hawri, Ph.D. Student****Sana'a University****bushraalhuri@yahoo.com**

The main objective of this paper is to examine the representation of Beirut city as a lady badly affected by war in Nizar Qabbani's poetry. Focusing on the female representation of Beirut during the civil war, this paper explores the main female images of this city as portrayed in Qabbani's poems. Using a descriptive analysis, the researcher investigates the important poems in which the poet draws many female pictures of Beirut to show his views about the civil war, its causes, people's attitudes as well as its catastrophic consequences on this beautiful city.

Through analyzing the poems of Qabbani about Beirut, the poet links most female images of this city to the modern bloody history of Beirut during the civil war that lasted from 1975 until 1990. This study reveals how Qabbani portrays the devastating impact of this war on Beirut through personifying her as a beautiful lady falling victim of a undesirable destructive war. The poet uses various images based on the female representation of Beirut to show how this beautiful city was victimized by the savage civil war caused by foreign powers as well as political, religious and sectarian groups. Further, the study indicates the poet's sarcasm and bitter irony to illustrate the brutality and barbarism of all parties and groups responsible for this war as well as the shameful attitudes of Beirut people who fail her in this cruel war. This skillful representation of Beirut reveals the poet's unique philosophy of femininity, creative and vivid style and imagination as well as his sincere attachment to this city.

ABSTRACT**13**

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Introduction

Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, is famous for its fabulous natural beauty, ancient history and coexisting diverse cultures. However, this city has been afflicted by wars, invasions, bloody conflicts and havocs since early periods of history. These frequent invasions and conflicts in Beirut and Lebanon are a result of the important strategic location of this country acting as a connecting link between different cultures, civilizations and powers. Lebanon is a country located on the Mediterranean Sea between Israel and Syria. Before the civil war, it was a flourishing business and financial centre.

During its modern history, Beirut witnessed a long civil war (1975-1990) and it was invaded by the Israeli army in 1978 and 1982. During these events Beirut was badly damaged, thousands of people were killed, thousands displaced and hundreds of thousands fled Beirut and the whole country.

N. Qabbani, the renowned modern Arab poet, was sadly observing these events as well as greatly suffering like other citizens of Beirut during that period. Being a great lover of Beirut, Qabbani portrays these historical events with the eye of the creative poet, emphasizing the destructive impact and consequences of such wars on this female beautiful city. This paper is intended to explore this special representation of Beirut in the poetry of Qabbani, the most prominent and influential poet in modern Arab literature.

Historical Background of the Civil War in Lebanon

Historically speaking, the civil war in Lebanon lasted for around 15 years; it broke out in 1975 and ended in 1990. It was described as a multifaceted civil war fueled by local, regional powers and shaped by political and sectarian factors and interests. Many religious and political groups and militia in Lebanon including Sunni and Shiate Muslims as well as Christians were fighting. These fighting groups were supported by Israel, Syria and Palestinian Liberation Organization. Moreover, this war witnessed direct involvement by some powers as in Syrian invasion of Beirut in 1976 and Israeli invasion in 1978 and 1982. It should be mentioned here that the civil war started in Beirut in which most

fighting and military clashes were taking place. It was also targeted by Israeli air strikes. Thus, this city paid the price for having these opposing groups and powers; it was adversely affected by this long war (Abdullah Al-Shahham 387).

Woman Representation in Qabbani's Poetry

In general, Qabbani is widely known as the poet of woman. Many of his love poems have been sung by famous Arab singers like Abdulhaleem Hafiz, Kazim Al-Sahir and Majida Al-Rumi. Through his prolific poetic works, woman and love are the most dominant themes, so he wrote poems about women more than any other Arab poet. He also addresses various issues and aspects of woman as a beloved, mother, a symbol of freedom as well as writing about woman's rights and oppression in the Arab World. Qabbani was an ardent feminist and an enthusiastic supporter of women's rights and their protagonist (Hafiz Abdulqadeer 10).

On the other hand, Qabbani sometimes uses his poetry for woman as a mask for homeland. So for Qabbani, woman means homeland (Ahmed Haidoosh 91). The poet refers to this in one of his poems as follows:

Does woman mean anything but homeland?
I wish my readers would know
Every poem I write about love,
Just for liberating the homeland. (QCPW 734) (RT)

Qabbani claims that if women could be a proper subject of his poetry of love, the city could as well be a subject of no less significance (Cited in Gohar 125).

It is clear here that the woman images in some poems of Qabbani overlap with homeland representation, which will be discussed in the coming sections in this research paper.

Furthermore, Qabbani uses female historical and religious symbols in national and patriotic issues of independence and resistance against Israel. For instance, he refers to the highly religious and holy female images as represented in Fatima Al-Zahra, the daughter of the prophet Mohammad. This can be seen in the poem " Israeli Wall Fedayee Leaflets":

We have come from the days' womb like water outflow,
From ignominy tent chewed by the air,
From Fatima Al-Zahra's grief,
From Karbala tragedies,
We come to correct history and names. (QCPW 652) (RT)

To show the rightful struggle of the Palestinians against the oppression and injustice of the Israeli occupation, the poet draws on the highly esteemed

religious female figure, Fatima al-Zahra, the daughter of the prophet Mohammad, whose great grief was because of the unfair and brutal murder of her sons, Al-Hassan and Al-Hussein and others of their relatives. There is an intertextuality between this tragedy known in Islamic history and the modern tragedy of Palestine as colonized by the brutal Israeli occupation. The poet's use of the name of Fatima Al-Zahra in these lines indicates his reverential representation of female historical and religious figures.

On the other hand, Qabbani represents woman in various images most of which are derived from the beauty of nature including its flowers and colours (Huyam Ibrahim 5). This feature will be realized through the female images of Beirut in later sections.

Moreover, the poet uses woman in his poetry as an access and key to any topic or theme he wants to discuss (Gemi and Gemi 316).

Qabbani's Female Representation of Beirut

Being the poet of woman, Qabbani represents Beirut as a lady in most of his poems. In the poem "Searching for Writing Space", he declares that Beirut is his favourite lady among millions of women:

O' Beirut, you my female among millions of women,

You, my ambition, when writing my poems, to reach for the sky.

(QCPW 291)(RT)

For Qabbani, the female image is the best in all aspects of life. In a poem titled "I Want You as a Female", the poet asserts his preference of femininity in things, concepts and cities:

I want you a female,

Because civilization is female,

Because poem is female,

Among cities Paris is female,

And Beirut remains female despite her injuries. (QCPW 827) (RT)

Describing civilization, poems, and the two beautiful cities (Paris and Beirut) as females shows the poet's high reverence for women. This is the esteem the poet shows in many poems about Beirut as will be illustrated in later sections.

Similarly, in the poem " Seven Letters Lost in Beirut Post", the poet stresses the femininity aspect in Beirut during Israeli invasion and civil war:

Why did they kill her?

The female that used to splash water

In the faces of deserts? (QCPW 330) (RT)

The image of the splashed water stands for the leading role of this fertile female city in feeding educational, literary and scientific renaissance through printing, publishing and circulating all types of books and magazines to almost all Arab countries during the last three decades of the 20th century.

These selected lines are mere examples of Qabbani's noticeable tendency and insistence on drawing female portraits for Beirut in most of his poems about this city.

The Impact of the Civil War on Beirut

Qabbani draws different pictures for the lady Beirut to show her conditions under the impact of the war as can be illustrated in the following sections.

The Impact of the War on the Beauty of Beirut

Beirut is represented in many poems of Qabbani as a very beautiful lady with attractive physical features. But in the poems that link her to the war, the poet emphasizes the war tremendous effect on the charming beauty of the woman Beirut as can be noticed in the poem "Beirut, the Mistress of the World". It is clear that the title of this poem is very suggestive in terms of picturing Beirut as a very beautiful woman. Literally, the phrase 'Sit al-Dunya' in Arabic means 'the mistress or lady of the world'. One of the implied meanings of this phrase is that Beirut is like the most beautiful lady who attracts the attention and admiration of the whole world.

O' mistress of the world!

Who sold your bracelets dominated by gems?

Who confiscated your magical ring?

And cut off your golden braids?

Who slaughtered the sleeping happiness in your green eyes?

Who scratched your face with a knife?

And poured nitric acid on your beautiful lips? (QCPW 309) (RT)

In these lines, there is an explicit reference to some beautiful aspects that make Beirut a very charming lady like her golden braids and green eyes. Commenting on the female portrayal of Beirut beauty in this poem, Sameer Itani (9) states that she appears as an ideal and perfect woman who symbolizes universal beauty. The poet himself mentioned in an interview that he wrote this poem not to lament Beirut but to defend the beauty of this city which was abandoned by all her lovers (Qabbani: Interview 69).

However, these physically beautiful aspects of the lady Beirut are cruelly affected and deformed: her golden braids are savagely cut off, her green eyes are horrified, her beautiful face is disfigured and her charming lips are ruined by nitric

acid. These lines show the intentionally extreme brutality done to this beautiful lady city. The repetition of the question word 'who' in the lines above shows the poet's agony and anger against those who commit these horrible crimes to the beautiful Beirut. Through using this personifying representation, the poet satirizes all powers and groups involved in this war that leads to the big damage of this beautiful city.

Beirut as an Assassinated Female

One of the gloomy images of the female Beirut drawn by the poet is representing her as a female school student assassinated by her people. In "Searching For Writing Space ", for example, the poet describes the female Beirut's assassination as follows:

Why are we addicted to assassinating the cities
That hold pens and books in their hands and go to school?
Beirut's death was not natural. (QCPW 295) (RT)

The word 'assassination' connotes the meaning of deliberate murder of an important person, which fits the significant status of this city. The assassination of the female Beirut in terms of literacy and school stands for the impact of the war on the leading role of this city in literacy rise and literary renaissance in the Arab World during the 70s, 80s and 90s of the 20th century (Haidoosh 43).

The death mentioned here is a metaphor of the massive destruction of many parts of Beirut city caused by the civil war and Israeli invasion in 1978 and 1982. The poet here accuses Lebanese people of assassinating the female innocent Beirut since they didn't try to stop this destructive war or defend her against Israeli invasion. This accusation also indicates the poet's bitter blame for the Lebanese fighting parties and groups who caused such destruction to their city.

Beirut as a Murdered Bride

Another image related to the murdered female Beirut is representing her as a bride slaughtered in her wedding bed as seen in "The Last Bird Leaving Granada":

Beirut is slaughtered in her wedding bed,
While people are watching,
Beirut is bleeding like a hen on the road,
But where have her lovers fled? (QCPW 91) (RT)

Using a dramatic technique, the poet draws the tragic scene of the beautiful city of Beirut that falls victim of the civil war and its devastation. Here Beirut is personified as a defenseless bride who is hideously slaughtered at her wedding room while her people are watching this crime passively without any attempt to defend her, leaving her bleeding like a slaughtered hen. The use of the simile 'like a slaughtered hen' reveals the weakness of Beirut as a victim of this

war and invasion, Further, Beirut lovers run away leaving her with the killers. The lovers here are a metaphor of her citizens including intellectuals and many politicians. The killers here are a metaphor of the groups and powers involved in this war as well as the Israeli invasion.

This dramatically metaphoric description of the victim bride vividly brings back to readers' memory the enormous destructive effects on this beautiful city caused by the Israeli invasion which was not resisted by the Lebanese or other Arabs. This portrayal also shows the havoc and destruction that Beirut witnessed a result of the long civil war.

Undoubtedly, the representation in the above lines shows the poet's bitter satire of the Lebanese and Arabs' passive and disgraceful roles in not defending their city against Israeli invaders or in not stopping the civil war or even their involvement such a war.

The Female Beirut Engulfed in Flames

Referring to Beirut situation during the war period, the poet portrays her as a woman affected by fire flames which symbolize the destructive civil war. There is much emphasis on this image in the poem "Beirut in Flames and I Love You":

When Beirut was burned,
And the firefighters were trying to put out the fire in her burning
dress,
I wanted to save the second Beirut at any cost,
The very Beirut that belongs to you and me. (QCPW 366) (RT)

Here Beirut appears as a woman whose dress and body are engulfed and hurt severely by fire flames in spite of the efforts of the firefighters to stop such flames.

What's more, the poet links Beirut burning in flames to all important things in his life including his beloved and poetry:

When Beirut was in flames,
I was searching in my special sadness,
For an incomparable woman,
For an incomparable city,
For incomparable poems. (QCPW 372) (RT)

The poet also explicitly states his total hatred and objection to burning this beautiful city as well as other beautiful things:

I am against burning beautiful cats,
Beautiful eyes,
And beautiful cities. (QCPW 387) (RT)

The beautiful cats here can be a metaphor of beautiful women, and beautiful eyes can refer to his beloved. The images above show liken Beirut to a beautiful woman suffering from engulfing fire flames.

Beirut as a Woman Sacrifice for Freedom

The poet portrays Beirut as a lady who sacrifices herself for the sake of freedom as seen in the following lines of "Beirut, the Mistress of the World":

You have paid the cost of your beauty like other belles,

You sacrificed yourself for all words. (QCPW 315). (RT)

This beauty tax paid by the female Beirut can refer to destroying her beauty. However, the cost she pays for words is her life. The "words" here mean freedom of speech, coexistence and religious tolerance. This idea is also emphasized in other lines of the same poem:

We shot you dead in a tribal manner,

So we killed a woman called freedom. (QCPW 310) (RT)

The poet in these two lines personifies both this city and freedom in the female character (Beirut). Commenting on this point, Itani said that Beirut during this period was the last Arab city that believed in coexistence and acceptance of others. It was also the only producing city in the Arab world at intellectual, literary and educational levels (9).

These lines also show this city as savagely killed by her native fighting groups and parties. Through using the pronoun 'we', the poet blames the Lebanese for being the main cause of this civil war.

Beirut as Arabs' Widow

Beirut is also represented as the Arabs' depressed widow, reflecting the real miserable conditions of this city as a result of the civil war fueled by political conflicts, sects and absence of rationality. This can be seen in the following lines in "The Last Bird Leaving Granada":

Beirut is the widow of Arabism,

The widow of sects,

Of crime and craziness. (QCPW 75) (RT)

The image of widow implies weakness, depression and death which can represent the status of Beirut after the war (Hisham Shareef 28). This image also implies the Arabs' involvement in the sectarian conflict during the civil war in Beirut.

Beirut as a Sad Woman

In addition to the female images related to the war impact, Qabbani portrays Beirut as a very sad lady to show his deep sorrow and anger for the destruction and ravages that afflicted this beautiful city during the war period. The

lines below in "Beirut, the Mistress of the World" show the sad female Beirut as follows:

What should we say, Beirut,

When seeing all sadness of mankind in your eyes,

And your burned breasts are under the civil war ashes? (QCPW 311) (RT)

Beirut here is described as a woman having sad eyes with her breasts buried under the ashes of the civil war. This personification summarizes the terrible consequences of the civil war on Beirut.

In some lines in "Beirut Your Concubine, Beirut My Beloved", the poet addresses Beirut while he is away from her, describing her as a woman with a sad face:

Reassure me about you,

You, with the sad face,

How is the sea?

Did they murder it with gunshots like others? (QCPW 346) (RT)

It is clear in these lines that the cause of this sadness is the war effect on this beautiful female city and its sea.

Beirut as Rape Victim

In some poems, Qabbani represents the historical events that happened to Beirut with sharp images. Metaphorically, he describes Beirut as a female rape victim, symbolizing the savage Israeli invasion of this city and the passive role of her people and politicians. The following lines in "Beirut Your Concubine, Beirut My Beloved" show this image:

Forgive us,

For watching your pink blood flowing like garnet rivers,

We watched adultery,

But we did nothing. (QCPW 344) (RT)

There is a bitter satire of the Lebanese people' silent attitudes particularly in not -ostanding against such invasion. On behalf of the people of Beirut, the poet offers an apology to the female Beirut for such a shameful attitude during the invasion.

The Female Beirut Hurt by Her People

Another female image of Beirut is representing her as an innocent woman who is betrayed and hurt by her unfaithful people and lovers as seen in "Beirut, The Mistress of the World":

O' Beirut, we confess now that,

We loved you like wandering nomads,

Made love to you,
 But at dawn, we leave as wandering nomads,
 We confess now,
 We were sadists, bloody-thirsts ,
 We were the devil's agents. (QCPW 324).(RT)

Using the pronoun "we" indicates the poet's blame and rebuke of the most Lebanese who don't love Beirut sincerely but rather they treat her as a materialistic object. The simile "as the wandering nomads" is a satire of the disloyalty and insincere love of most Lebanese towards this city.

In the last three lines, the poet apologizes to the innocent woman Beirut for the Lebanese people's sadism, bloodshed, violence and evil acts done to her. This representation symbolizes the great destruction and havoc caused to this city by the fighting parties including political and sectarian groups during the long civil war.

Beirut in Slavery Trade

In a satirical tone, Qabbani likens the passive role and silence of Beirut people, politicians, writers and thinkers during the war period to a money-minded traitor who sells his innocent beloved in slavery market and trade. The following lines in " Beirut Your Concubine, Beirut My Beloved" are illustrative of this gloomy representation:

Alas Beirut, how bad and cowardly we were!
 When selling you in a slavery market,
 We washed our sadness with wine, sex and gambling halls,
 And remembered the homeland news on Rolette tables. (QCPW 344

)(RT)

Through representing Beirut as an innocent lady in slavery trade, the poet uses the irony of situation when compared to her previous status and image as the mistress of the world. This also reveals the degree of shameful treachery of her lovers who leave her alone in such hard times during the horrible civil war.

Beirut as a Woman with a Changing Character

In some lines in "Beirut, the Mistress of the World", Beirut is portrayed as a lady who has changed negatively in her personality and behavior.

How did you turn to be a heartless woman?
 You were as tender as a nymph,
 I don't understand how the domestic bird,
 became a wild night cat,
 I don't understand how you forgot God,

And returned to paganism age. (QCPW 312) (RT)

Surprisingly, the poet portrays Beirut using harsh images instead of delicate and graceful female images as can be seen in the above lines. Here Beirut's gentleness is replaced by cruelty and wildness, and her faith has changed into paganism. The last two lines mean that in Beirut bloodshed and sectarian fighting and conflicts have become a substitute for religious tolerance and acceptance. This metaphorical representation reveals the dramatic effects of the war on Beirut.

Beirut as Mythical Symbol (Greek Goddess of Beauty and Love)

From a mythical angle, the poet describes Beirut in "Beirut, the Mistress of the World" as 'Ishtar', the goddess of beauty and love in Greek mythology:

Rise from beneath the blue waves, Ishtar,

Rise as a rose poem,

Or rise as a fire poem. (QCPW 314) (RT)

Mythically, 'Ishtar' is regarded as a symbol of beauty and love in some literatures based on the Greek myth. According to this myth, Ishtar comes again to life after her death from beneath ashes with much more beauty. This parallel presents Beirut as a woman with an ideal beauty (Itani 10). The phrases 'rose poem' and 'fire poem' can stand for Beirut revival of literary, intellectual and learning status as well as her increasing beauty and power. This portrayal really indicates the poet's creative employment of this myth in expressing his hopes that Beirut will be rebuilt and regain its great status after the end of the war.

Apology to Beirut

Acknowledging the shameful act of abandoning the woman Beirut during civil war and the Israeli invasion, the poet appeals to her to forgive her citizens and lovers:

Forgive us

For leaving you die alone,

Sneaking out of the room and weeping like escaping soldiers,

We were crying like women. (QCPW 343) (RT)

These lines emphasize two images during the war time: the image of Beirut as a weak innocent woman whose people fail her when she is attacked and murdered by enemies. The second image stressed here is the weakness of Beirut people who resort to weeping and fleeing the room (the country).

Urging Beirut to Revolt against Corruption

The poet in the lines below addresses Beirut as a female revolutionary figure who is urged to stop her sadness and revolt against miseries and destruction left by the war:

Wake up from your sadness,
 For revolutions are born from wombs sadness,
 Rise for the sake of woods,
 Rivers,
 And valleys,
 Rise for the honor of humans.
 Rise for the sake of bread and the poor. (QCPW 325) (RT)

Conclusion

To sum up, Nizar Qabbani presents the historical events of the 1975-1990 civil war and its devastating effect on Beirut through a creative and imaginative female representation of this beautiful city. So he personifies the badly damaged beautiful Beirut as a charming young lady unfortunately victimized by a devastating civil war. The poet uses various female images of Beirut under the impact and horrors of the civil war. Through the various female representation of Beirut, Qabbani uses many figures of speech and literary devices including personification, metaphors and similes. He also uses bitter satire and irony to show the savagery of the fighting groups, parties and powers involved in this war whether directly and indirectly.

Qabbani's poetry about Beirut was deeply affected by the long civil war whether at theme or style levels. In general, this representation of Beirut acts as satire and strong protest by the poet of all causes and parties involved in the civil war. This research has clearly revealed new insights into Qabbani's dramatic, thematic and artistic creativity specially through the female portrayal of Beirut during the civil war.

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