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Samih al-Qasim: Equal Parts Poetry and Resistance

SHAWQI KASSIS

They turned my wound into an inkwell,
So I write with shrapnel
And sing for peace¹

Samih al-Qasim was one of Palestine's best-loved and most prolific poets. His work exemplifies the poetry of resistance that for decades emanated from inside the territories occupied by Israel in 1948. Samih and I were born in the same village and we grew up together in families that had been close friends over several generations. This tribute is a personal reflection on the life and work of a man who was equal parts poetry and resistance.

THE STORY IS TOLD that during World War II, the family of Samih al-Qasim was traveling back to their ancestral village of al-Rameh² in the Galilee from Zarqa, east of the Jordan River, where Samih's father was stationed with the British Transjordan Frontier Force. On the road, the infant Samih began to cry. There was a blackout in effect, and passengers among the group traveling back to Palestine seemed to fear that somehow the warplanes of the Axis powers circling above would detect the child's cries; gripped by panic, they threatened to kill the baby, causing the infant's father to brandish a weapon in their faces. While it may be the stuff of legend, this oft-repeated story about his early childhood left a deep impression on Samih al-Qasim. As a grown man, he was known to exclaim, "Well, people have been trying to shut me up ever since I was a baby, but I'll show them! I will speak at the top of my voice, whenever and for however long I want—and no one will silence me!"

After the Zionist expulsion of more than 700,000 Palestinians during the Nakba, for the remaining 150,000 people who stayed in Palestine after 1948, it was a time of despair and confusion.³ The newly established state of Israel actively sought to turn them into strangers in their own land: they became "Arab citizens of Israel" who were governed by martial law and subjected to innumerable restrictions. In that dark period, Samih al-Qasim's poetry was, to them, like a lifeboat to a drowning man, and the poet's voice rang out *laden with sadness and ire, and full of pagan fire*.⁴ His poetry was sharp and defiant, but full of intelligence and agility, and his poems transformed all those experiences which for Palestinians evoked shame and humiliation into weapons of steadfastness and resistance.

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Samih al-Qasim's poems are widely known and often recited from memory. Several musicians have set them to music, with singers such as Lebanon's Marcel Khalife transforming the poem "Muntasib al-qamati, amshi" (Upright I walk) into what practically became the anthem of a generation.

Upright I walk . . .
Head high I walk
An olive branch in my hand,
My coffin on my shoulder
. . . . I walk and I walk
My heart is a red moon,
My heart is an orchard
With boxthorn and basil
My lips a sky raining
Fire at times, love always.⁵

Early Years

Except for five years of house arrest in Haifa during the 1960s, Samih lived his whole life in al-Rameh.⁶ According to family lore, their forefather, Khayr Muhammad al-Hussayn, had been a Qarmatian cavalry warrior who had come from the Arabian Peninsula to fight the Crusaders and had settled on the southern flank of Mount Haydar in the Galilee. The site, which overlooked a Crusader settlement, is known among villagers to this day as Khayr's Hollow.

Samih attended primary school in al-Rameh and went on to secondary school in Nazareth. It is there that he met the-then emerging poets and writers of the post-Nakba generation, Rashid Hussein, Shakib Jahshan, Taha Muhammad 'Ali, and others; it is at that time too that his poetic talents came to light, and he penned short poems in exercise books and letters to his friends. Finishing secondary school brought Samih face-to-face with his first major challenge. In accordance with the 1955 conscription law pertaining to the Druze community, to which his family belonged, Samih was required to serve in the Israeli army.⁷ But he adamantly refused to do so and, instead, set up the Free Druze Youth, the first anti-conscription political organization for young Druze men.⁸ The organization attracted a modest following and staged a number of protests against compulsory military service. Initially, Samih was arrested and imprisoned,⁹ but when the military authorities realized that his arrest might motivate other conscripts to defy orders, they released him from prison and exempted him from military service. Samih went back to al-Rameh and worked on and off as a primary school teacher in remote villages,¹⁰ continuing to write and publish revolutionary poetry on both Palestinian and Arab nationalist themes.

In the early years after the formation of the state of Israel, many Palestinians attempted to escape the severe surveillance and other repressive measures enforced against them under martial law by

fleeing to neighboring Arab states. In 1957, the year of his eighteenth birthday, Samih tried to escape to Lebanon on three separate occasions. But every time, he would run into someone he knew in one of the villages lying between al-Rameh and the Lebanese border, some ten miles away, and would be returned to his parents.

Soon after his first collection of poetry, *Mawakib al-shams* (Processions of the sun), appeared in 1958, the Israeli authorities began to harass Samih systematically. He was dismissed from his job with the Ministry of Education, his poetry books were seized, his activities restricted, and he was prevented from pursuing other avenues of work. He was undeterred, however, and remained a sworn enemy of Zionism and its project to dispossess the Palestinians of their land throughout his life. He was for many years a member of the Israeli Communist Party, the only party where Palestinians could express their political opposition, and engaged indefatigably in intellectual and political debates, in addition to producing a steady stream of poetry and essays. He urged Palestinian Arabs in Israel to resist and revolt not only in his writings but also in his everyday actions, participating in and leading mass demonstrations besides refusing to serve in the new state's army. In March of 1960, for example, he and other activists, including Mahmud Darwish, led a mass demonstration at the entrance to the Arab village of Kafr Qasim, thirteen miles east of Tel Aviv, where an Israeli army unit had committed a well-documented massacre, in which forty-nine innocent villagers had been slaughtered, including seventeen women (one of them pregnant) and nine children, aged eight to seventeen.¹¹ Samih and Mahmud were among the political activists leading the demonstration, and both were subsequently detained in a prison not far from the city of Haifa. After that, and for the next decade, the Israeli authorities monitored Samih's every movement, eventually detaining him, and placing him under house arrest along with other prominent Palestinian poets, including Mahmud, Tawfiq Zayyad, and Rashid Hussein.

Fighting for God and Homeland—Vignettes from the Life of a Friend

Samih spent five years under house arrest in Haifa, from 1963 to 1968. He “elected” Haifa, rather than al-Rameh, as the location for his house arrest because at the time he worked as an editor and columnist for several publications of the Israeli Communist Party, all of which were published in Haifa. During this period, he was confined to his quarters between dusk and dawn and was required to report to a police station three times during the day. Each night, a soldier or policeman would come to check on him in his room, arriving without warning at random times to have Samih sign off that he was there.

After finishing secondary school in 1965, I lived in Haifa for a year. There, I rented a room which, for the first five months, I shared with Mahmud who was also under house arrest. We lived on Abbas Street, a thoroughfare that ran east–west along the Mount Carmel promontory and at the western end of which, following a sharp bend, emerged al-Mutanabbi Street. There were many young men who rented rooms from local Palestinian families in Haifa. Like us, they came to the city in order to pursue work and educational opportunities.

At the time, I worked as a shop assistant in a grocery store that belonged to a wealthy Haifa merchant in the commercial area close to the port. As Samih lived in a nearby building, I often

went to his room after work and I would stay there while he took a walk or ran some errands, in violation of the restrictions on his movements. When the soldier or policeman responsible for checking on him would arrive, I would distract him by offering him some of the Arabic food that Umm Qasim (Samih's mother, whom I called Aunt Hana) would have me deliver to him—fresh fruit, different kinds of breads and pastries, and tasty Arab dishes. I would sign the slip of paper, pretending to be Samih, and the official would depart, happy with what he had eaten. Mahmud began to notice that I was often late coming back to our room in the evening and one day he asked me why. "Charity begins at home," he objected when I told him I was doing my "patriotic" duty vis-à-vis Samih. Mahmud wanted me to do the same for him. I agreed and so I would sign for Samih one night and for Mahmud the next night. I was eighteen years old at the time, and it made me feel as if I too were fighting the good fight, for God and for our homeland.

While in Haifa, Samih was perpetually in financial straits. At the time, I was earning 480 Israeli lira a month while Samih and Mahmud made no more than the minimum wage, 100 lira per month, which increased to 120 lira in 1966.¹² The monthly rent for the room Mahmud and I shared was forty lira, a bowl of hummus in a restaurant cost one whole Israeli lira, and a full meal came to about three lira. Samih, who was paid at the beginning of every month, would have spent his salary within a week at the most. For the rest of the month, he survived on money he borrowed from his friends.

As Palestinians, we watched in agony when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, besieging and then occupying Beirut, forcing the fedayeen out of the city, and facilitating the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps after the exodus of the Palestinian guerrillas. Rumors swirled about that Mahmud, who now lived in the Lebanese capital, had been killed or had committed suicide. Following my father's death that year, I went home for two months in the autumn and I saw for myself how pained by the events in Lebanon Samih was, both politically and personally. His eyes were etched with grief and disbelief, and he kept to himself for days at a time without seeing anyone. A few weeks after my arrival, he read me passages from a poem he was working on which he had titled "Taghriba ila Mahmud Darwish" (Ode to Mahmud Darwish).

And then in the spring of 1984, the two poets were able to meet up at a poetry reading organized by activists from the Arab community in London. The audience asked Mahmud what he was currently working on. "I'm looking for a wall on which to hang my clothes," Darwish replied. When Samih was asked the same question, he answered, "I had a project, which I've now completed—it was to find out whether this man (Darwish) was alive or dead. Here he is, alive. So thank you. And now I'm going back to my country." When the poem was published a few months later, it was dated al-Rameh, 27 October 1982.¹³

Poet and Polymath

Samih's poetry was just as defiant and politically committed as he was. Rebellious against the status quo, no matter the consequences, and persuading others to do the same, were fundamental to his vision of himself as a poet. This awareness of his role and his unblinking gaze informed his

every endeavor. He once said, “Creativity is a process of constant rebellion against the status quo; it is an unceasing call to recreate the world. Still, even perpetual revolution must retain some kind of equilibrium, it cannot stray too far out of the orbit of its intellectual and social environment—or else it becomes chaotic and destructive rather than constructive.”¹⁴

To you who build on the ruins of my house, I say,
Under the ruins, retribution stirs
My trunk may fall victim to your axes,
But like a god, my radicle is readying underground.¹⁵

Hand in hand with his view that you had to subvert traditional forms to innovate, Samih also understood that the creative process and the tools of self-expression mature with time. He never felt that he had said his last word as a poet because he was constantly growing and exploring new ground, whether in terms of his language, or of the subject matter and structure of his poems. Like the links in a chain, each stage in his growth complemented the previous one and paved the way for the next.

Samih al-Qasim’s poetic output falls into two main periods: before the 1967 war and after it. In his first three collections, *Mawakib al-shams* (Processions of the sun, 1958), *Aghani al-durub* (Songs of the byways, 1964), and *Iram* (1965), the poems portray Arabs as shapers of their own destiny who are determined to fight their attackers and to achieve the impossible. During this period, Samih also celebrated liberation movements around the globe (including Yemen, Algeria, and other parts of Africa, Vietnam, as well as Latin America) and iconic individuals such as Che Guevara, Patrice Lumumba, Ahmed Ben Bella, Ho Chi Minh, and Djamila Bouhired. He dreamed of building his own “virtuous city,” *Iram*, where love would rule and peace and justice prevail.

After the 1967 war, came four other collections of poems: *Dammi ‘ala kaffi* (My blood is on my palm, 1967), *Dukhan al-barakin* (Smoke of the volcanoes, 1968), *Suqut al-‘aqni’a* (Fall of the masks, 1969), *Wayakunu an ya’ti ta’ir al-ra’d* (And so the thunderbird comes, 1969), and *Sarbiyyat Iskandarun fi rihlat al-kharj wa rihlat al-dakhil* (Alexandretta: the outside and the inside journeys, 1970).¹⁶ The strident titles of these collections reflected the events of the time: they were a response to the unanimous jubilation of Palestinians following the launch of the Palestinian revolution under Fatah’s leadership, on the one hand, but also a strong, confident, and astute riposte to the Arab armies’ defeat in the June 1967 war. Some of the poems in *Dammi ‘ala kaffi* and *Dukhan al-barakin* addressed such issues as revolutionary class struggle and the role of women in mobilizing the resistance.

The death of Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970 ushered in a decade marked by a reactionary backlash against the Egyptian leader’s pan-Arab project. Nasser’s death coincided with the bloody events of Black September (1970) in Jordan, which was soon followed by the outbreak in 1975 of the sixteen-year civil war in Lebanon, both signal events in the still-unfolding Palestinian tragedy. When the decade closed with the 1979 peace agreement between Israel and Egypt that was a repudiation of everything that Nasserism had stood for, the psychological blow was devastating for pan-Arabists and for Palestinians, whether inside or outside the homeland. Now, mirroring

the fate of Palestinians everywhere, spiritual and physical death became a recurrent leitmotif of Samih al-Qasim's poetry: during Black September in Jordan; in Shiyyah and 'Ayn al-Rummana in Beirut (where a Palestinian bus shooting marked the official beginning of Lebanon's civil war) as well as in the refugee camp of Tel al-Za'atar in Lebanon; in the territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which were occupied in 1967; and within Israel/1948 Palestine, where Israeli police killed six unarmed young Palestinians peacefully protesting on Land Day (30 March) in 1976.¹⁷ Samih al-Qasim produced three poetry collections and three long poems in this period, all of them referencing death in one form or another.¹⁸

Until the early 1980s, Samih al-Qasim's poetry was marked by the major themes of pride in Arab identity, attachment to the land of Palestine, religious tolerance, the relationship between the personal and the collective ego, as well as a bias toward scientific socialism in the way he presented and analyzed issues and events. His anthology, *Diwan al-hamasa* (Anthology of fervor), which was issued in three stages between 1978 and 1981, exemplifies this approach. In later works, including *Jihat al-ruh* (Regions of the spirit) and *Qarabin* (Sacrifices), both published in 1983, as well as *Sarbiyyat al-sahra* (Poem of the desert, 1984), *Persona non grata* (1986) and *La asta'dhinu ahadan* (I ask for no one's permission, 1988),¹⁹ he addresses the travails of Lebanon's Palestinians at the time of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. In an evocation of Ulysses's long sea voyage in search of a safe haven, Samih al-Qasim depicts the heroic stand of the fedayeen and their departure from Beirut aboard Greek ships sailing across the Mediterranean. The poems reflect the men's sadness, despair, and desolation as they are driven out by Israel and spurned by the local population to their adversaries' delight.

Three fundamental elements characterize Samih al-Qasim's poetry: revolutionary optimism, "prophetic-ness" or prescience, and a poetic phrasing that in Arabic is described as *sahil* (the word for the neighing of a horse) but could best be likened to a rhythmic, almost martial cadence. In his revolutionary poetry, which extolled rebellion and resistance and called on others to rebel and resist—especially his children's generation—the tone was ever optimistic. Thus, he entreated,

Raised in the face of the oppressor,
Your hand is the pennant of a passing generation
Calling forth its successor.
I have resisted, and so must you!²⁰

And:

On this path,
Always,
Our banners are sight to the blind
Our voices hope to the drowning
We are the torment of our enemies, always
And always
Comfort to our friends.²¹

In addition to the many national and international awards and prizes that the poet won over the decades, titles and attributes were heaped upon him. Various known as the poet of the

Palestinian resistance, of Arab nationalism, of the struggle, and of revolutionary rage, he was also called the colossal poet. The prescient nature of much of his poetry won him the sobriquet “poet of prophecies,” and one Lebanese critic described Samih al-Qasim as having an aura of “prophethood.”²² A quick perusal of his pre-1980s poems indeed presage the children’s or first intifada—also called the stone uprising in Arabic—which saw the youth of the occupied territories rise up against the military occupation, facing Israeli tanks with nothing more than stones in their hands. Calling him a prophet might be hyperbole, but his poetry was certainly prescient: Samih al-Qasim had for many years been writing about an uprising which had yet to come.

Blow them up, blow up the festering passions weighing your spirit down
Here’s one . . . and here’s another
There are still more stones in the ground
There are still a few empty bottles
For us to hurl at the tanks²³

The final distinguishing element of Samih al-Qasim’s poetic gift lay in the right or pertinent combination of expression, rhythm, and emotional impact. In what might be called his poetic phrasing, verses or verse fragments with the same meter are repeated, creating a sustained beat and almost staccato cadence, much like a military march. There are many examples of such phrasing in his poems, particularly, “Ila ghuzatin la yaqra’un” (To conquerors who do not read) and “Guantanamo” which are best recited in one unbroken breath.

Samih had other talents that were known only to a few friends and associates of his. He was a fine artist whose many paintings adorned his house and he also illustrated the cover of the first edition of Taha Muhammad ‘Ali’s collection of short stories, *Jisr ‘ala al-nahr al-hazin* (Bridge over the river of sadness), as well as the cover of his own *sarbiyya*, or long poem, *Ilahi, Ilahi, limadha qatalani* (My God, my God, why have you killed me?), which came out in 1974. Samih was also an accomplished musician: he composed and set some of his own poems to music, including “Arab al-sawa’id,” “Maysalun,” and “Dula.”²⁴

His literary output was enormous: fifty-four collections of poetry, several plays in verse, a number of long poems (*sarbiyyat*), as well as over twenty prose works on a variety of subjects, from novels to biographies, and from literary criticism to political analysis. But Samih was a man of verse first and foremost. And it is for his creative, innovative, and prolific poetry that he won accolades both within the Arab world and outside. Besides winning numerous Arab and international awards, Samih al-Qasim garnered a following among poetry lovers everywhere and was widely translated into languages as varied as French, Russian, German, Spanish, Greek, Italian, Czech, Turkish, Vietnamese, Japanese, Persian, Hebrew, and English.²⁵

Samih al-Qasim composed and wrote until his dying day. When he breathed his last on 19 August 2014 after a three-year battle with cancer, he left behind several unfinished works. His funeral was attended by thousands of mourners who came together to pay their last respects in a gathering unlike any witnessed before in the humble Palestinian town at the foot of Mount Haydar. In accordance with his lifelong wish never to leave his ancestral home, the poet was interred in his beloved al-Rameh.

About the Author

Shawqi Kassis was born in Haifa, Palestine, to a family from al-Rameh in the Galilee. After obtaining a PhD in Microbiology from Tel Aviv University in 1979, he moved to the United States and worked in academia and in the pharmaceutical industry. In 2004, he established Arabic and Hebrew programs at Drexel University in Philadelphia and since 2009 has devoted his energies to writing and lecturing on a variety of topics related to his homeland and to Arabic language and literature.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Samih al-Qasim, *Fi intizar ta'ir al-ra'd* [Waiting for the thunderbird] (Acre: Dar al-Jalil, 1969), pp. 121–28.
- 2 Al-Rameh, a town of Christians, Druze, and Muslims, is located on the main road between Acre and Safad. It lies in the foothills of Jabal Haydar, a mountain in northern Galilee 1,073 meters above sea level. (Although no trace of it can be found on Israeli maps, which refer to it as Har 'Ofa'im, Jabal Haydar can easily be located in Salman Abu-Sitta's seminal work, *Atlas of Palestine 1948* (London: Palestine Land Society, 2004).
- 3 Only 150,000 of a total 900,000 Palestinians remained after Zionist forces in 1948 declared the creation of the State of Israel and banned Palestinians who had fled or been expelled from returning. At over 1.5 million people today, Palestinian citizens of Israel make up roughly 20 percent of the country's population.
- 4 Samih al-Qasim, "Ta'aly linarsum ma'an qaws qazah" [Together we shall sketch a rainbow]," *Diwan Samih al-Qasim* (Haifa: Arabesque, 1979), pp. 405–11.
- 5 Al-Qasim, *Diwan*, p. 174.
- 6 The military authorities would give Samih a pass once or twice a year to go to visit his parents in al-Rameh for a few days.
- 7 The Druze are a monotheistic sect and an offshoot of Shiite Islam, found primarily in the countries of the Levant: Jordan, Syria, Palestine/Israel, and Lebanon. Following early beginnings in eleventh-century Egypt, members of the sect moved to the Levant to avoid persecution by Salah al-Din al-'Ayyubi (Saladin).
- 8 The Free Druze Youth was named after the Egypt's Free Officers movement that was revered for its Arab nationalist ideology.
- 9 In 1957–58, Samih was detained on at least five separate occasions, for two to seven days at a time, for refusing to serve in the Israeli army and for his attempts to flee to Lebanon.
- 10 Because of the shortage of qualified teachers among Palestinian Arabs in Israel in the 1950s, the Ministry of Education was willing to appoint educated Arab young men who were known to be nationalist activists. They were typically assigned positions in isolated and remote villages that could not be accessed by public transportation.
- 11 The demonstration of 1960 was not held just to commemorate the victims but to protest the decision (a month earlier) of a special military tribunal to release the soldiers and commanders of the unit found guilty of perpetrating the massacre. It was also to protest an earlier ruling that the commanding officer, Col. Issachar Shadmi, was not guilty in the massacre despite implicitly sanctioning the cold-blooded killing of Arab laborers returning from their fields at the end of the day. Charged instead with "misunderstanding the orders given to him" and "exceeding his authority," Shadmi was sentenced to pay one penny as a penalty. Hence, the reference to Shadmi's penny in the poem Samih recited during the protest: "Oh Caesar! Long live thy justice: One penny is the price of fifty human lives," (Al-Qasim, *Diwan*, p. 462). [For more on the Kafr Qasim massacre, see "Kafr Qasim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1973), pp. 165–66.]
- 12 At the time, one U.S. dollar came to about three Israeli lira. The Israeli Communist Party, most of whose members and leaders were Arabs, was in financial straits. Although its representatives in the Knesset received government salaries of ISR £2,000 a month or more, they handed most of it to the party, which then gave them back ISR £300 at most.

- 13 Mahmud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim, *Al-rasa'il* [The letters], 2nd ed. (Haifa: Arabic Press, 1990), pp. 17–27.
- 14 Samih al-Qasim, *'An al-mawqif wa al-fann* (Beirut: Dar al-Awda, 1970).
- 15 Samih al-Qasim, *Dammi 'ala kaffi* [My blood is on my palm] (Nazareth: al-Hakim Offset Press, 1967), p. 14.
- 16 The term *sarbiyya* was invented by Samih al-Qasim to indicate a long poem with one main theme and several secondary themes. The word is derived from the tri-consonantal Arabic root (*s-r-b*) from which words relating to paths, trails and mazes are derived.
- 17 In the summer of 1976, after a military assault and a thirty-five-day siege, Lebanese Christian militias overran the Palestinian refugee camp of Tel al-Za'atar. This was the first large-scale massacre of Palestinians in Lebanon in which it is estimated that hundreds, and possibly thousands, of civilians were killed.
- 18 These were: *Qur'an al-mawt wa al-yasmin* [A Qur'an for death and jasmine], 1971; *Al-Mawt al-kabir* [The great death], 1972; *Marathi Samih al-Qasim* [Samih al-Qasim's elegies], 1973; the long poem *Ilahi, ilahi, limadha qatalani* [My God, My God, why have you killed me?], 1974; the long poem, *Thalith uksid al-carbun* [Carbon trioxide], 1975; and *Wa ma qataluhu wa ma salabuhu wa lakin shubbiha lahum* [They killed him not, nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them], 1976.
- 19 For a complete list of al-Qasim's works (until 2013) and year of publication, see Nabih al-Qasim, *Samih al-Qasim: mubda la yastathinu ahadan* (Samih al-Qasim: an innovator who asks for no one's permission), (Kafr Qara: al-Huda Press, 2013).
- 20 Al-Qasim, *Dammi*, p. 117.
- 21 Samih al-Qasim, *Iram* (Haifa: Ittihad Press, 1970), pp. 48–50.
- 22 For a complete list of literary scholarship (book and articles) on the work of Samih al-Qasim, see Nabih al-Qasim, *Samih al-Qasim: mubda* (Samih al-Qasim: an innovator), 2013.
- 23 Samih al-Qasim, *Wa ma qataluhu wa ma salabuhu wa lakin shubbiha lahum* [They killed him not, nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them], (Jerusalem: Salah al-Din Press, 1976), p. 98. The title of this poem is a reference to the Qur'anic verse, 4:157–58, which states that while appearing to have been crucified and killed, Jesus was raised by God "unto Himself."
- 24 These are lyrics that al-Qasim wrote in colloquial Arabic and which he set to music. The first, "Arab al-sawa'id," talks about the bedouin tribe who lived on the top of Mount Kammaleh, near al-Rameh, until they were displaced by the state of Israel in the late 1960s. According to tribal lore passed down over generations, the Sawa'id were the descendants of the Arab/Muslim army commander who defeated the Persians in the decisive battle of al-Qadisiyya, fought in 636–37 C.E., during the first period of Muslim expansion. The second, "Maysalun," references a famous battle Syrian Arab nationalists fought and lost against French forces in 1920. The third, "Dula," (the colloquial pronunciation of the Arabic word for state, or *dawla*) is a satirical short poem about the state of Israel.
- 25 Al-Qasim's only poetry collection in English, *Sadder than Water*, came out in 2006. With a beautiful introduction by Adina Hoffman, the collection was translated by Nazih Kassis and published by Ibis Editions in Jerusalem. Another volume of al-Qasim's poems is forthcoming in 2016: *All Faces but Mine: The Poetry of Samih al-Qasim*, translated by Abdulwahid Lulua and published by Syracuse University Press.