

Hunger as a Weapon of Revolution in Modern Arabic Poetry

Zulfa Purnamawati^{1*}, Mohamad Nor Amin bin Samsun Baharun²

^{1*}Universitas Gadjah Mada, Bulaksumur, Caturtunggal, Kapanewon Depok, Kabupaten Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Email: zulfapw_arb@ugm.ac.id (Corresponding Author)

(Submitted: 29-09-2025, Revised: 21-04-2026, Accepted: 27-04-2026, Published: 30-06-2026)

Abstract

Hunger afflicting Arab countries such as Sudan, Yemen, Palestine, and Syria represent the peak of human suffering, one that extends beyond its biological dimension and becomes a political instrument used both to sustain power and to provoke resistance. This study aims to examine how modern Arabic poetry articulates hunger as a symbol of suffering as well as a form of resistance against rulers. Drawing on James C. Scott's theory of resistance and employing a library research method, the findings demonstrate that poetry constructs hunger as a symbol of the state's failure to fulfill the people's subsistence rights, thus making it interpretable through the concept of moral economy. Violations of these fundamental rights generate a sense of injustice, which is articulated in literary language as a moral record. Poetry also functions as hidden transcripts, a covert discourse that conveys socio-political criticism through metaphor, irony, and symbolism, enabling subordinate groups to express resistance in a relatively safe manner while still awakening collective consciousness. In modern Arabic poetry, hunger operates as an effective symbolic weapon for revolutionary agitation, mobilizing demands for freedom, equality, justice, and socio-political transformation.

Keywords: Hunger; Resistance; Revolution; Modern Arabic Literature

مستخلص

الجوع الذي يصيب الدول العربية مثل السودان، واليمن، وفلسطين، وسوريا يعتبر قمة المعاناة الإنسانية التي لا تؤثر في الجانب البيولوجي فحسب، بل تصبح أيضا أداة سياسية تُستخدم سواء لإدامة السلطة أو لإثارة المقاومة. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى الكشف عن كيفية تناول الشعر العربي الحديث لموضوع الجوع كرمز للمعاناة وأحد أشكال المقاومة ضد الحكام. وباستخدام نظرية المقاومة التي طرحها جيمس سكوت ومنهجية البحث المكتبي، أظهرت نتائج البحث أن الشعر يجعل من الجوع رمزا لفشل الدولة في تلبية حق الشعب في العيش، وهو ما يمكن فهمه من خلال مفهوم «الاقتصاد الأخلاقي». إن انتهاك هذا الحق الأساسي يولد شعورا بالظلم الذي يُعبّر عنه في اللغة الأدبية باعتباره ملاحظة أخلاقية. كما تعمل القصيدة كـ«نصوص خفية» أي خطاب مستتر ينقل النقد الاجتماعي-السياسي من خلال الاستعارة والسخرية والرموز، مما يتيح للفئات المهمشة التعبير عن مقاومتها بأمان مع الاستمرار في إثارة الوعي الجماعي. أصبح الجوع في الشعر العربي الحديث بمثابة سلاح رمزي فعال للتحريض الثوري وإثارة المطالبات بالحرية والمساواة والعدالة والتحول الاجتماعي-السياسي.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الجوع؛ المقاومة؛ الثورة؛ الأدب العربي الحديث

Citation : Purnamawati, Zulfa, and Mohamad Nor Amin bin Samsun Baharun. "Hunger As a Weapon of Revolution in Modern Arabic Poetry". *Diwan: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Arab* 12, no. 1 (June 29, 2026). Accessed July 4, 2026. <https://journal.uin-alauddin.ac.id/index.php/diwan/article/view/61690>.

INTRODUCTION

The fulfillment of basic needs, particularly food, constitutes the most essential requirement in human life. The failure to meet this need results in severe disruptions to human existence, commonly referred to as famine. Throughout human history, hunger has occurred due to multiple factors, including natural causes as well as social conflicts such as war. As explained by Kaplan, hunger is not merely a biological condition, but a social phenomenon that carries diverse meanings depending on its causes and consequences.¹ Hunger is often politicized, becoming a symbol of structural injustice and a legacy of colonialism that continues to oppress societies.² Moreover, in modern contexts, hunger is frequently understood as an indicator of the state's failure to fulfill its welfare promises, thereby provoking social criticism and the potential for political unrest.³

In the Arab world, widespread famine occurred between 1910 and 1919, resulting in exceptionally high mortality rates that affected children, the elderly, and even individuals in their productive years⁴. One of the primary causes was the scarcity of rainfall, compounded by the global instability brought about by World War I⁵. This calamity came to be known among Arabs as *sanah al-ju'* ("the year of starvation"). Famine has also persisted in modern times, as revealed in a study conducted by Ara⁶. The study categorizes famine in the Arab world into four levels: *musīrun jiddan li qalaq* (extremely alarming), *musīrun li qalaq* (alarming), *mutawassit* (moderate), and *mukhafid* (low). Of the twenty countries surveyed, 35 percent were found to still be experiencing famine. These famines are not primarily the result of natural factors, but rather stem

¹David M. Kaplan, "'Hunger Hermeneutics,'" *Topoi*, 40.3 (2021), 527–33 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-020-09729-8>>.

²Muzna Rahman, *Hunger and Postcolonial Writing*, *Hunger and Postcolonial Writing*, 2022 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315505930>>.

³Eman S. Morsi, "A new hunger: food shortages and satires of the state in Cuban and Egyptian cultural production," *Food, Culture and Society*, 27.4 (2024), 936–52 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2023.2249672>>.

⁴Our World in Data, "Death Rate from Famines by Year," 2023 <<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/death-rate-from-famines-by-year>>.

⁵G. A. Pitts, "A Hungry Population Stops Thinking about Resistance: Class, Famine, and Lebanon's World War I Legacy," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 7.1 (2020), 1–20 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2979/jottturstuassoci.7.1.01>>.

⁶Ara, "Al-Aalam al-'Arabiyy, 6 Asbab Ja'alat al-Juu'a fii A'laa Mustawiyyaatihi," 2025 <<https://www.ararac.com/blog/hunger-in-the-arab-world>>.

more strongly from political causes, both internal dynamics and conflicts that lead to prolonged warfare. For example, famine in Yemen has arisen from a protracted civil war, while in Jordan it has been triggered by economic policies that restricted the distribution of wheat.

These conditions have drawn the attention of Arab intellectuals and writers, who, as integral members of society, have voiced their concern through their literary works, particularly poetry. This engagement has given rise to the term *shi'ru al-ju'* ("poetry of hunger"), which refers to poems that address hunger as a theme. As al-Maḳālīh⁷ notes, hunger has become a source of inspiration for poets to stir the people toward resistance. At the same time, however, hunger also served as a political commodity for rulers to preserve their power.⁸ Hunger, therefore, was no longer viewed merely as a humanitarian crisis but became embedded within political discourse. Political issues within society cannot be separated from economic interests, which in turn create groups that control the economy and its productive processes alongside those who are marginalized. As Scott⁹ argues, understanding the consciousness of subordinate groups is just as crucial as understanding that of the ruling elite. Rulers often deploy hunger as a political issue, offering promises of its eradication to win popular support while simultaneously maintaining control by managing hunger. On the other hand, poets, as representatives of the subordinated classes, used it as a central theme to unify the people's resistance against those in power.¹⁰ Hunger, therefore, emerges as a contested discourse, mobilized in divergent narratives by both the powerful and the oppressed.

One of the mediums through which such narratives were voiced was literary works, one of which is poetry. *The genius of Arabic poetry lies not only in its beauty and artistic quality, but also in its nuanced and remarkable ability to transform harsh and often static political matters into one of the most revered art forms in Arabic literature.*¹¹ Among the major themes explored in modern Arabic poetry are political issues. This particular genre is referred to as *shi'r siyāsī* ("political poetry"). According to Al-Qadīmī,¹² political poetry is "*fannun min al-kalāmi yattaṣilu bi an-nizāmi ad-dākhilī li ad-daulati au nufūzihā al-khārijī makānatihā baina ad-duwali*". By this definition, political poetry

⁷Abdu al-'Azīz Al-Maḳālīh, *Syu'arā'un min al-Yaman* (Beirut: Dār al-'Audah).

⁸A. de Waal, "Mass Starvation and the Political Marketplace," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, 3.1 (2021), 4-14 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7227/JHA.003>>.

⁹James C Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990).

¹⁰N. D. El-din, "Poetry and the Politics of Resistance and Revolution: Tamim Al-Barghouti's Poetic Discourse," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 50.2 (2019), 145-68 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341356>>.

¹¹Waed Athamneh, *Modern Arabic Poetry: Revolution and Conflict* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017).

¹²Al-Qadīmī, *Ittijāhāt asy-Syi'ri al-'Arabī fi al-Yaman* (Sana': Wizārah as-Ṣaqāfah wa as-Siyāḥah, 2004).

encompasses a wide range of concerns, from domestic affairs to international relations. Poetry has been employed to articulate political issues because it is regarded as a more aesthetically powerful art form,¹³ delivered in language that swiftly resonates with both thought, emotion, and reinforced by rhythm that enhances the power of political ideas. Politics thereby becomes closer to the people and more easily received by both reason and emotion. Political poetry may serve as a tool of propaganda for those in power, but it can also function as a weapon of resistance for the oppressed.¹⁴ Because of its rhythm, imagery, and aesthetic qualities, poetry is easily disseminated across different social strata. Poems of resistance often portray the adverse conditions of a nation at a given historical moment, express protest rulers perceived as unrepresentative of the people's lives and call for struggle.

By viewing poetry as both a medium of resistance and a reflection of social crisis, Elbousty reinforces this perspective by arguing that poetry functions as a catalyst for revolution.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Khoury,¹⁶ Barwasi and Nazari,¹⁷ as well as El Alaoui and Pilotti,¹⁸ demonstrate that modern Arabic poetry serves as a testimony of the oppressed classes and a symbol of anti-colonial struggle. Similarly, Rice and Hamdy¹⁹ emphasize folk poetry (*malhūn*) as an archive of resistance, while Aghazadeh²⁰ highlights the performativity of food in diasporic literature as a medium for negotiating identity. In addition, Egreteau²¹ focuses on hunger strikes as a strategy of

¹³D. Nadkarni, "Beyond Autonomy and Activism: 'Poetic Understanding' as a Ground for Political Community," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 46.9 (2020), 1045–63 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453720908467>>.

¹⁴P. de Medeiros, "Poetry Shall Not Serve: Poetry and Political Resistance," *Comparative Critical Studies*, 14.1 (2017), 23–39 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3366/ccs.2017.0235>>.

¹⁵Moulay Youness Elbousty, "Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi's 'The Will to Live': Galvanising the Tunisian revolution," *Journal of North African Studies*, 18.1 (2013), 159–63 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2012.729719>>.

¹⁶Jeries N. Khoury, "Qatr al-Nadā Looking for an Identity: An Inquiry into the Inspiration for Qatr al-Nadā's Figure in Modern Arabic Poetry," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 61.1 (2016), 215–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgv037>>.

¹⁷Ismail Barwasi dan Hadi Nazari Monazan, *Comparative and Sociological Analysis of Class Discrimination in the Poems of Ghaneh Marivani and Mohammad Mahdi Al-Javaheri*, 2021, xviii.

¹⁸Khadija El Alaoui dan Maura Pilotti, "Walking with Lips Raining Fire and Love! Arab Poets' Testimony to the World," *Interventions*, 21.5 (2019), 708–26 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2019.1585923>>.

¹⁹Laura Rice dan Karim Hamdy, "Folk poetry, local knowledge, and resistance in Tunisia," *Journal of North African Studies*, 21.2 (2016), 283–300 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2016.1130940>>.

²⁰Sima Aghazadeh, "Food Performativity and Transnational Identity in Selected Diasporic Women's Writings," *Cultural Intertexts*, 14 (2024), 10–22 <<https://doi.org/10.35219/cultural-intertexts.2024.14.01>>.

²¹Renaud Egreteau, "Fasting as Commemorative Strategy: Hunger Strikes and Collective Memory in Myanmar's Contentious Politics," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2025 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034251363997>>.

resistance as well as a means of constructing collective memory. Thus, such poetry reflects the ideologies in conflict at that period. These poems do not merely describe what has happened, but, more importantly, explain why these events are portrayed, particularly in relation to famine.

Hunger, as a universal phenomenon, presents a compelling theme for scholarly investigation. Alya et al.²² examined the work of Taufiq Ismail through an ecocritical approach, exploring the relationship between hunger and the environment. The study demonstrates that Ismail's poem "*Syair Orang Lapar*" (*The Poem of the Hungry*) portrays the social impact of famine on the local population. The people are depicted as enduring prolonged suffering that leads to poverty and, in extreme cases, death. At the same time, the poem also reveals that this community is unable to give voice to its hardship.

Meanwhile, discussions of revolution in Arabic literature, particularly poetry, cannot be separated from the issue of hunger. As-Sanadiy²³ emphasizes that hunger often serves as a foundational catalyst for resistance movements within the context of revolution. This suggests the necessity of significant governmental attention to the assurance of food security. Al-Fadhil²⁴ further notes that famine in Sudan has led to extensive devastation, both territorially and demographically. Another study highlights that starvation experienced by the homeless, as portrayed in the poem "*As-Sa'ālik*", represents a profound catastrophe for them, leaving them with no option but to lament their fate.²⁵ The hunger issue among the homeless is also addressed in Alsaleh's study,²⁶ which examines how it is represented in poetry and how such representations socially influence public perception. Neimneh,²⁷ through an analysis of Ghassan Kanafani's works, also emphasizes how hunger functions as a symbol of alienation and resistance in postcolonial Arabic fiction.

The foregoing review of literature illustrates the significance of addressing famine management within society. Nevertheless, there remains a need for deeper exploration of how poetry specifically frames hunger as a weapon of struggle.

²²Dina Fitri Alya, Susan Nur Ajija, dan Sri Rahayu, "Ekologi Sastra pada Puisi 'Syair Orang Lapar' Karya Taufiq Ismail," *Literature Research Journal*, 1.1 (2023), 36-46 <<https://doi.org/10.51817/lrj.v1i1.610>>.

²³Yusuf As-Sanadiy, "Al-Juu'u Hal Yaquudu ats-Tsaurata al-Mudhaadah," 2019.

²⁴Al-Jamiil Al-Fadhil, "Al-Juu'u wa al-Harbu - 'Uquubataani' Alaa Tsaurati asy-Sya'bi," 2023.

²⁵Tarbifaka, "Shaihaatu al-Faqri wa al-Juu'i wa al-Hirmaani fii Syi'ri ash-Shu'aaliik," 2021.

²⁶Asaad Alsaleh, "The Hungry Poet of 'Lāmiyyat al-'Arab' and the Quest for New Values," *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 2024, 9-34.

²⁷Shadi Saleh Neimneh, "Postcolonial Arabic fiction revisited: Naturalism and existentialism in Ghassan Kanafani's *men in the sun*," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7.2 (2017), 476-85 <<https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8356>>.

To explain the relationship between hunger and revolution, this study employs James C. Scott's theory of resistance. Hunger constitutes a highly sensitive issue capable of mobilizing all segments of society, particularly when it involves marginalized communities. Such circumstances give rise to widespread forms of resistance, whereby specific groups, though embedded within the larger social structure, are unable to engage in open confrontation due to the imbalance of power. Over time, these subaltern groups consolidate and intensify, eventually transforming into an irrepressible force that may culminate in large-scale revolutionary movements.

Such forms of resistance are employed to secure basic needs, including land, income, prosperity, and food security.²⁸ However, such movements generally require an overarching issue capable of uniting diverse groups, since they often lack formal structures, institutions, or leaders to coordinate collective action. Subordinate communities without full access to power must therefore adopt strategic methods of resistance. As Scott²⁹ observes, "*Like prudent opposition newspaper editors under strict censorship, subordinate groups must find ways of getting their message across, while staying somehow within the law. This requires an experimental spirit and a capacity to test and exploit all the loopholes, ambiguities, silences, and lapses available to them.*" From this explanation, it can be concluded that the emergence of collective solidarity depends on identifying shared causes that bind together the experiences of marginalized groups.

The form of resistance described above can be understood as *hidden transcripts*, which, according to Scott,³⁰ constitute subtle modes of opposition to *public transcripts*. This resistance relies on strategies rooted in assigned roles and linguistic practices to challenge the abuse of power. Such strategies include rumor, gossip, disguise, linguistic tricks, metaphor, euphemism, folklore, ritual gestures, and anonymity. These methods are especially effective in contexts where violence is employed to preserve the status quo, as they enable 'a hidden discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript.' Under such conditions, ideological resistance is veiled, muted, and concealed for the sake of safety. These forms of resistance require little coordination or planning and are employed by both individuals and groups to resist without directly confronting or challenging elite norms. Literature—among other media—thus becomes an effective means of initiating such resistance. Within this framework, the study formulates two main research questions: how modern Arabic poetry represents hunger as a political issue and a symbolic weapon in the people's struggle, and how the theme of hunger is employed in modern Arabic poetry as a form of resistance against rulers.

²⁸James C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985).

²⁹Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance Hidden Transcripts*.

³⁰Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method by analyzing data derived from modern Arabic poetry. In terms of research design, it falls under the category of narrative inquiry, which seeks to obtain data in a chronological sequence³¹. The findings encompass the researcher's reflexivity, interpretations of the issues under investigation, and contributions to the existing literature that may inspire change. This method was chosen to explore modern Arabic poetry in depth, particularly to identify underlying ideas and situate them within the chronological context of famine and the revolutionary movements it inspired. The research is framed within a critical paradigm, emphasizing the constellation of power relations in the processes of producing and reproducing meaning. Data analysis is conducted through library research, drawing on Scott's³² theory of resistance, which plays a significant role in studies of power, domination, and resistance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The thematic shifts in modern Arabic poetry often engage with social problems that closely reflect the lived realities of society. In modern Arabic poetry, the term for 'hunger' most commonly used is *ju'* or *majā'ah*. Etymologically, the term *ju'* denotes three successive levels of hunger: *ju'*, *al-makhmaṣah*, and *al-maṣghabah*. The word *ju'* refers to the state of an empty stomach; *al-makhmaṣah* refers to severe hunger or starvation, while *al-maṣghabah* describes hunger that is accompanied by exhaustion or fatigue. These three levels are not limited to physical experiences such as food scarcity and bodily weakness. Rather, *ju'* is also employed symbolically in Arabic expression to denote other unmet needs, those vital to human life, such as suffering, illness requiring remedy, or broader existential conditions. According to al-Maqālīh, the notion of hunger in the Arabic literary tradition extends beyond its denotative meaning of food deprivation. It also connotes a hunger for justice, for independence and freedom, for equality, and for the establishment of order³³. Thus, the semantic field of hunger in modern Arabic poetry expands beyond its literal sense to encompass a wide range of symbolic and metaphorical meanings.

Hunger as a Symbol of Suffering

The use of hunger as a recurring theme in modern poetry cannot be separated from the sociocultural context of its creation, as well as from the personal circumstances of the poets themselves. The word *ju'* ("hunger") appears in numerous works, including those of Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb, 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayātī, Nizār Qabbānī, Maḥmūd Darwīsh, Aḥmad Maṭar, Amal Dunqul, Aḥmad 'Afīfī Maṭar, 'Abd Allāh al-Baraddūnī, among many others across the Arab world. 'Abd Allāh al-Baraddūnī, a prominent Yemeni poet, frequently engaged with the theme of hunger in works that

³¹Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian dan Pengembangan* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2022).

³²Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance Hidden Transcripts*.

³³Al-Maqālīh.

were deeply shaped by his personal background. In addition to his blindness, al-Baraddūnī lived a life of hardship, including the recurrent hunger that often afflicted his family. As a result, many of his poems depict the experience of “hunger” endured by himself and his family. This is evident in his poem *Ummi* (“My Mother”), which presents a *riṣāʿ* (elegy) for his mother and a reflection on his past suffering. The poems *Itābun wa Waʿid* (“Reproach and Threat”) and *Hīna Yaṣḥū al-Shaʿbu* (“When the People Rise”) express al-Baraddūnī’s anger toward the ruling authorities who caused the Yemeni people to suffer famine. *Layālī al-Jāʿiʿin* (“Nights of the Hungry”) meanwhile highlights the lives of the impoverished communities around him³⁴. In these poems, the word “hunger” functions as a powerful symbol of the suffering endured by both the poet’s family and the broader Yemeni society.

North Yemen faced the problems of poverty and famine that afflicted nearly the entire region. Food security emerged as a crucial issue for preserving the stability of the state. One of al-Baraddūnī’s poems that vividly addresses the famine in North Yemen is *Layālī al-Jāʿiʿin* (“Nights of the Hungry”), presented below.

هَذِي الْبُيُوتُ النَّائِمَاتُ عَلَى الطَّوَى	نَوْمَ الْعَلِيلِ عَلَى انْتِفَاضِ الدَّاءِ
نَامَتْ وَنَامَ اللَّيْلُ فَوْقَ سُكُونِهَا	وَتَغَلَّقَتْ بِالصَّمْتِ وَالظُّلْمَاءِ
وَعَفَتْ بِأَحْضَانِ السُّكُونِ وَفَوْقَهَا	جَثَتْ الدُّجَى مَنْثُورَةً الْأَشْلَاءِ
وَتَمَلَّمَتْ تَحْتَ الظَّلَامِ كَأَنَّهَا	شَيْخٌ يَنْوُءُ بِأَثْقَلِ الْأَعْبَاءِ
أَصْغَى إِلَيْهَا اللَّيْلُ لَمْ يَسْمَعْ بِهَا	إِلَّا أَنْيْنَ الْجُوعِ فِي الْأَحْشَاءِ
وَبَكَا الْبَنِينَ الْجَائِعِينَ مُرَدِّدًا	فِي الْأُمَمَاتِ وَمَسْمَعِ الْأَبَاءِ
وَدَجَتْ لِيَالِي الْجَائِعِينَ وَتَحْتَهَا	مُهْجُ الْجِيَاعِ قَتِيلَةُ الْأَهْوَاءِ ³⁵

Here are the houses that sleep upon hunger, like the restless sleep of the sick upon the tremors of disease.

They slumber, and the night sleeps over their silence, wrapping them in stillness and darkness.

They lie restlessly in the embrace of stillness, while above them lie the corpses of the dark, scattered in fragments.

They writhe beneath the darkness like an old man struggling to rise under a crushing weight.

The night listened to them, yet heard nothing but the moan of hunger from their fading breath

³⁴ Abdullāh al-Baraddūnī, *Dīwān ‘Abdullāh al-Baraddūnī* (San’a, 2004) <Dar al-Andalus>.

³⁵ al-Baraddūnī.

The starving children wept again and again, their cries echoing in the ears of mothers and fathers.

The nights of the hungry grew ever darker, beneath them smoldering a hunger that consumes the soul.

The poem illustrates the phenomenon of famine that afflicted North Yemen on a wide scale. This is indicated by the repeated use of plural forms in the text, such as *layālī*, *ja' i 'ūn*, *buyūt*, *jusaš*, *ummahāt*, *abā*, and *banīn*. Such usage suggests that the famine was not a brief occurrence but rather a protracted condition extending over a long period of time. The famine that struck various regions of North Yemen claimed numerous lives, with more than 1,600 deaths recorded. The victims came from all age groups; elderly people, youth, and even small children were not spared from this calamity. The most tragic cases were those of people who went out in search of food but died before they were able to find any³⁶. The famine also gave rise to outbreaks of disease that further burdened the Yemeni population. One such epidemic struck the village where al-Baraddūnī lived, leaving him blind because of an untreated illness. Thus, the suffering of the people of North Yemen was compounded by famine, disease, and the many hardships they were forced to endure³⁷.

The afflictions faced by the people because of poverty and famine is also depicted in the poem entitled "*Sā'ilun*."

يَدُبُّ عَلَى ظَهْرِ الطَّرِيقِ وَيَجْتَدِي	مَرَزْتُ بِشَيْخٍ أَصْفَرَ الْعَقْلَ وَالْيَدَ
وَأَحْزَانِهِ مَشَى الضَّرِيرُ الْمُقَيَّدِ	ثَقِيلِ الْخَطَا يَمْشِي الْهُوَيْنَا بِجُوعِهِ
وَلَمْ يَدْرِ قَبْلَ السَّيْرِ مِنْ أَيْنَ يَبْتَدِي	وَيَمْضِي وَلَا يَدْرِي إِلَى أَيْنَ يَنْتَهِي
كَيْبًا كَأَحْلَامِ الْغَرِيبِ الْمُشَرَّدِ	وَيُزْجِي إِلَى الْأَسْمَاعِ صَوْتًا مُجَرَّحًا
وَلَمْ يَجْنِ إِلَّا الْيَأْسَ مِنْ مَدَّةِ يَدِهِ	يَمُدُّ يَدَ الصَّفَرَاءِ إِلَى كُلِّ عَابِرٍ
وَيَسْأَلُ هَلْ فِي الْأَرْضِ ظِلٌّ لِمُسْعِدٍ	فَيُلْقِي عَلَى الْكَفِّ النَّجِيلَ جَبِينَهُ
هُوَ الشَّرُّ مِلءُ الْأَرْضِ وَالْيَوْمِ وَالْغَدِ ³⁸	هُوَ الشَّرُّ مِلءُ الْأَرْضِ وَالشَّرُّ طَبْعُهَا

I passed by an old man, his mind and hands worn empty, creeping along the back of the road, asking for alms.

His steps were weighed down, moving slowly in hunger, and his grief dragging him onward like a chained, sickly, thin man.

³⁶Abdullah As-Salāl, *Šauratu al-Yamani ad-Dustūriyyah* (Sana'a: Markaz ad-Dirāsātī wa al-Buḥūšī al-Yamanī, 1985).

³⁷Abdu al-'Azīz Al-Maqālīh, *Syu'arā'un min al-Yaman* (Beirut: Dār al-'Audah).

³⁸al-Baraddūnī.

*He went on, not knowing where it would end, nor from where his path began
And to the ears he sent a wounded, weary voice, like strange dreams that drift in and out.
He stretched his pale hand to every passerby, yet gathered nothing but despair in its reach.
At last, he laid his forehead upon his withered palm while asking if there is, upon this earth, a shelter for the broken.
He is the evil that fills the earth, and evil is its nature.
He is the evil that fills yesterday, today, and tomorrow.*

This poem tells the condition of a beggar whose survival depends entirely on others. The beggar was forced to beg because of the hunger that afflicted him. This poem also illustrates that life in Yemen at the time was far from easy, especially for the poor. There was little that the poor could do to sustain their lives. Clearly, the poem does not merely recount the case of a single beggar; rather, it reflects the wider social condition, indicating that a significant portion of the population lived below the poverty line.

Famine was not only confined to Yemen; other Arab countries, such as Iraq, also experienced such condition, and this too was expressed in poetry³⁹. An Iraqi poet, known for his deep concern with the issue of poverty, portrayed it in the following poem, *al-Armilah al-Murdi 'ah*.

لقيتها.. ليتني ما كنت ألقاها
تمشي وقد أثقل الإملاق ممشاها
أثوابها رثة والرجل حافية
والدمع تذرفه في الخد عيناها
بكت من الفقر فاحمرت مدامعها
واصفر كالورس من جوع محياها

*I met her, wish I had never crossed her path.
She walked, her steps made heavy by the weight of poverty.
Her dress was tattered, her feet bare upon the ground,
and tears fell from her eyes, streaming down her cheeks.
She wept from hunger's grief, till her eyes grew red with tears,*

³⁹Maruf Al-Rusafi, "Laqaituhaa Laitanii Maa kuntu Alqaahaa," 2014
<<https://www.aldiwan.net/poem44448.html>>.

and her face turned pale, like the yellow of hunger.

In the poem above, the depiction of a person suffering from hunger is intertwined with other physical conditions that reveal the severity of the hardship one must endure; particularly when such hunger is experienced not only by the individual but also by other members of the family. This theme is also expressed by Badr Shākīr al-Sayyāb⁴⁰ in his poem *al-‘Awda ilā al-Jaykūr*.

جيكور، جيكور أين الخبز والماء؟
الليل وافي وقد نام الأذلاء؟
والركب سهران من جوعٍ ومن عطشٍ
والريحصرّ، وكل الأفق أصداء
بيداء ما في مداها ما يبين به
دربٌ لنا، وسماء الليل عمياء
جيكور مُدّي لنا بابًا فندخله
أو سامرينا بنجمٍ فيه أضواء!

*Jekur, Jekur, where is the bread and water?
The night has passed, and are the guides asleep?
The caravan lies awake in hunger and thirst,
While the wind stirs, and all horizons echo.
A wilderness, within its reach there is nothing
To show a path for us, for the night sky is blind.
Jekur, open for us a door that we may enter,
Or keep us company with a star that bears light!*

The poem describes the long journey of a figure returning to their homeland. During this journey, the traveler is confronted with hunger, expressed through the question *aina al-khubzu wa al-ma'u?* ("where is the bread and water?"). This question draws attention to the most basic human needs: bread as a staple food and water as a source of life. The following verses present hunger as a condition that is widespread across many parts of Palestine, a situation that continues to this day. This reality is also emphasized by Ad-Daelami⁴¹ in his poem *Madinatun Tatanaffasu bi Khubzin Gha'ibin*

⁴⁰Badr Syakir As-Sayyab, *Ansyudatu al-Mathar* (Hindawi, 2015).

⁴¹Marwan Yasin Ad-Daelami, "Madiinatun Tatanaffasu bi Khubzin Gha'ibin," 2025 <<https://almothaqaf.org/nesos/982907>>.

("A City that Breathes with Imaginary Bread"), which conveys the experience of starvation in the following way.

أرى الجوع كحيوانٍ شفاف،
ينام على وسادةٍ من عظامٍ لم تجد أسماءها بعد.
يستيقظُ ببطءٍ مع أول ضوء،
يُطلّ من نوافذ البيوت المطفأة،
يحرك أصابعه
كما لو كان يعزف على وترٍ خفي
يجعل القلوب ترتجف.

*I see hunger as a transparent beast,
sleep upon a pillow of bones whose names are yet unknown.
It wakes slowly with the first light,
peering through the windows of darkened houses,
moving its fingers
as though plucking an unseen string
that makes the hearts tremble*

Hunger is a reality that occurs in plain sight, yet it is frequently neglected. Over time, such a condition becomes normalized and perceived as an ordinary circumstance. Nevertheless, hunger should not be regarded solely as a matter of food scarcity; it also serves as a significant contributing factor to subsequent forms of deprivation and darkness.

التجوع...
كلمةٌ تمشي على أربعٍ في الظلام،
تلعقُ الأرصفة الباردة،
وتترك وراءها أثرًا يشبه العطش.

*Hunger ...
A word that walks on all fours in the dark,
licking the cold pavements,
leaving behind a trace that resembles thirst.*

The suffering caused by starving is also portrayed by the Jordanian poet Aiman al-'Atum, who wrote about the food crisis in his country following the government's removal of wheat subsidies. This policy made it increasingly difficult for Jordanians to meet their basic needs, a reality conveyed in his poems collected in the anthology *Nubū'ātu al-Jā'i'īna*.⁴² One of the poems, also titled "*Nubū'ātu al-Jā'i'īna*", appears on pages 13 to 23 of the anthology. It was written on 29 September 1996, during al-'Atum's imprisonment as a political detainee in Juwaidah Prison, Jordan. Along with his other works, this poem was later published three times in the anthology format, in 2012, 2013, and 2016.

سَتَمُرُّ أَعْوَامٌ كَأَعْوَامِ الرَّمَادِ عَلَى بِلَادِي
لَا شَيْءَ غَيْرَ الْجُوعِ... وَالْفَحْشَاءِ...
وَالْأَحْزَابِ... وَالْفِرْقِ الْعَدِيدَةِ
سَيَمُرُّ مَنْ أَكَلُوا التُّرَابَ عَلَى الْبِيَادِرِ

*The coming years will be like years of ash upon my country,
nothing but hunger... and depravity...
and parties... and many factions.
Those who have eaten dust
will pass across the threshing floors.*

The harsh condition faced by the Jordanian people is expressed through the phrase "*the year of ashes*", a term referring to a period of famine that was also exacerbated by prolonged drought affecting many Arab countries. From the poems discussed above, it can be concluded that hunger serves as a concrete reflection of societal adversity and represents the most tangible expression of that plight.

These poems show that hunger is not merely a form of physical deprivation, but a violation of the people's subsistence rights. Within the framework of moral economy, Scott emphasizes that peasant communities and impoverished groups hold minimum expectations of the state or rulers to guarantee their basic needs. When these expectations are violated—such as through the removal of wheat subsidies in Jordan or the failure to provide bread and water in Palestine—a sense of injustice emerges, giving rise to resistance. Poetry thus becomes a medium for expressing the breach of moral contract between the people and those in power, in which hunger appears as a symbol of the state's failure to fulfill its moral obligations. At the same time, these poems function as hidden transcripts—a veiled discourse that enables the people to voice criticism without directly confronting authority. Metaphors such as the

⁴²Aiman Al-'Atūm, *Diwānu asy-Syi'ri Nubū'ātu al-Jā'i'īna* (Lebanon: al-Mu`assasatu al-'Arabiyyatu li ad-Dirāsati wa an-Nasyri, 2012).

“transparent beast” embodying hunger, or the “year of ashes” symbolizing destruction, represent forms of linguistic disguise that convey socio-political protest in a relatively safe manner. In this way, poets and subordinate communities can channel resistance through symbols, euphemisms, and aesthetic expressions that are not overtly confrontational, yet still capable of awakening collective consciousness. Poetry becomes a safe space for articulating people’s suffering while fostering solidarity, allowing hunger to be transformed into an ideological weapon that challenges the status quo.

Hunger as Revolutionary Agitation

In the tradition of modern Arabic poetry, the use of the term *ju‘* (hunger) is frequently associated with revolution, expressing demands for change in social structures and in the management of the state by those in power. Hunger is not viewed solely as a natural disaster caused by prolonged drought or crop failure; it is often also the result of governmental actions or policies in the management of food resources. One such example is the famine that afflicted Yemen, as articulated in the following excerpt of a poem.

يُنَاشِدُنِي الْجُوعُ أَنْ أَسْأَلَكَ	لِمَ أَذَا لِي الْجُوعُ وَالْقَصْفُ لَكَ؟
وَتُسَكِّرُ مِنْ عَرْقِي مِنْجَلَكَ!	وَأَغْرِسُ حَقْلِي فَتَجْنِيهِ أَنْتَ
تَمُدُّ إِلَيَّ لُقْمَتِي أَنْمُلَكَ	لِمَ أَذَا؟ وَفِي قَبْضَتَيْكَ الْكَنْوُزُ
وَهَلْ أَصْبَحَ اللَّصُّ يَوْمًا مَلَكًا؟ ^{٤٣}	وَتَقْتَاتُ جُوعِي وَتَدْعَى النَّزِيَّةَ

Why do I suffer hunger while you revel in feasts? Hunger urges me to ask you

I saw my fields, yet you are the one who reaps, you intoxicate your sickle with the sweat of my throat.

Why? When in your two hands lie the granaries, yet you stretch your fingertips toward my morsel.

My hunger has crushed me, and honesty is called, could it be that a thief might one day become a king?

The poem depicts the condition of starvation endured by the people in direct opposition to the situation of the rulers, who live in starkly different circumstances. This contrast creates a paradox that inevitably stirs conflict people. The poem begins with the question “why,” a rhetorical device that does not seek an explanation but instead emphasizes the lyrical self’s lament over the hunger they suffer and the injustice he experiences. To intensify its agitational force, the poem asserts that this is not the result of national poverty but of the actions and policies of those in power.

⁴³al-Baraddūnī.

How is it possible that those who struggle merely to survive are the very ones forced to bear suffering, while the rulers exercise authority without restraint? Such a paradox unsettles the people's sense of justice. Once that sense of injustice is provoked, questions arise, grow into rejection, and ultimately give rise to a spirit of struggle. This same awareness of injustice is also reflected in the following poem.

بَعْضُنَا يَعْنَى وَبَعْضٌ يَتَعَامَى	أَهْ مِنْنَا آه! مَا أَجْهَلْنَا!
وَنُنَادِي: (يَحْفَظُ اللَّهُ الْإِمَامَا)	نَأْكُلُ الْجُوعَ وَنَسْتَسْقِي الظَّمَا
وَطَنٌ هَذِهِ الْجَهْلُ فَنَامَا	سَلْ ضَحَايَا الظُّلْمِ تُخْبِرُ أَنَّنا
تَعْرِفُ الْعَدْلَ وَلَا تَرَعَى الدِّمَامَا ⁴⁴	دَوْلَةُ (الْأَجْوَاخِ) لَا تَحْنُو وَلَا

Alas, how foolish we are, some of us blind, and others are pretending to be blind.

We eat of hunger, we drink of thirst, while saying, "May God protect the Imam."

Ask the victims of tyranny, they will tell you: we are a nation rocked by ignorance, then lulled into sleep.

A ruined nation, cold and unmoved, that knows no justice, nor keeps its honor.

The injustice and adversity that occur are the result of both the rulers' attitude and the people's response. The rulers show no concern for the condition of the populace, while the suffering masses make no effort to resist their circumstances. The convergence of these two factors only deepens and perpetuates injustice and misery. The verses of the poem thus serve as agitation, awakening the people's awareness that they must not allow such affliction to continue unchecked. A pattern of resistance intended to mobilize the people toward collective struggle can also be observed in the following poem.

حَرَسَتْكَ آلِهَةُ الطَّعَامِ	نامي جِياعَ الشَّعْبِ نامي
مِنْ يَقْظَةٍ فَمِنْ الْمَنَامِ	نامي فَإِنْ لَمْ تَشْبَعِي
يُدَافُ فِي عَسَلِ الْكَلَامِ	نامي عَلَى زُبْدِ الْوَعْدِ
نامي تَزُرُّكَ عَرَائِسُ	الْأَحْلَامِ فِي جُنْحِ الظَّلَامِ
كَدَوْرَةِ الْبَدْرِ التَّمَامِ	تَتَنَوَّرِي قُرْصَ الرِّغْفِ

Sleep, O hungry ones, sleep, the gods of food keep watch over you.

Sleep, if waking brings you no fullness, then in sleep you shall be fed.

Rest upon the froth of promises, lulled by sweet words.

⁴⁴al-Baraddūnī.

Sleep, for dream brides visit you in the shroud of night.

Bread glimmers, like a full moon once in its cycle.

In the poem above, the verb “*Amr*” is employed not in its literal sense but to convey irony, illustrating how someone who suffers from starvation is paradoxically asked to take pleasure in that very condition. This functions as a heightened form of protest: when words are no longer possible and the strength to articulate grievances has been exhausted, protest is enacted through contradiction. Moreover, a large portion of the populace continues to support the rulers, albeit reluctantly, as expressed in the following poem.

وَيَحْكُمُهُمْ كُلَّهُمْ دِرْهَمٌ	عَبِيدُ الْهَوَى يَحْكُمُونَ الْبِلَادَ
وَهُمْ فِي جَهَالَتِهِمْ نَوْمٌ	وَتَقْتَادُهُمْ شَهْوَةٌ لَا تَنَامُ
غَيْبٌ يُسَلِّطُهُ أَظْلَمُ	فَفِي كُلِّ نَاحِيَةٍ ظَالِمٌ
وَجُوعٌ بَنَيْنَا.. أَلَمْ تُتَخَمُّوا؟	أَيَا مَنْ شَبِعْتُمْ عَلَى جُوعِنَا
عَلَى الظُّلْمِ؟ لَا بُدَّ أَنْ تَفْهَمُوا ⁴⁵	أَلَمْ تَفْهَمُوا غَضَبَةَ الْكَادِحِينَ

Slaves of desire rule this land, yet each of them is ruled money.

Led by a craving that never sleeps, while they themselves slumber in their ignorance.

In every corner dwell foolish tyrants, ruled by those even more unjust than they.

O you who feast upon our hunger, have you not gorged enough?

Do you not grasp the fury of the laboring ones against oppression?

You must understand.

The adversity experienced by the people is rooted in a system of governance that does not serve their interests. The rulers seek only to enrich themselves, amassing wealth for personal benefit. The poem employs harsh language to denounce them as foolish, ignorant, and unjust, while also asserting that they are ruled by figures even more oppressive. This expression of anger constitutes a protest the persistent deterioration of conditions in North Yemen. The use of such severe language awakens public awareness that passivity is no longer an option; the people must rise and struggle. At the same time, this illustrates that agitation is not always conveyed in the form of direct commands but can also emerge through other forms of expression, particularly through articulations of the lived realities shared by the people.

⁴⁵al-Baraddūnī.

Hunger also becomes a tool of agitation employed by poets to awaken the awareness that their lives are determined by their own agency, and therefore the people must unite in demanding change.

يَا ثَوْرَةَ الْجُوعِ الْمَجِيدَةَ
يَا ثَوْرَةَ الشُّرَفَاءِ لَا... لَا أَصْفِيَاءَ هُنَا...
تَفَرَّقَ بَيْنَنَا لَحْمُ الْقَبَائِلِ
كُلُّنَا فِي الْمَعْمَعَةِ
لَا أُرْدُونِيُونَ انْتَهَوْا

*"O glorious revolution of hunger!
O revolution of the noble ones, no, no true companions here...
The flesh of tribes is torn among us,
and all of us are cast into the tumult.
The Jordanians, they have not ceased"*

The verses above show that the famine endured by the Jordanian people, as part of the Arab world, cannot simply be accepted as fate. Instead, the people come together to resist the suffering brought about by hunger. A similar theme appears in the poem *Madinatun Tatanaffasu bi Khubzin Gha'ibin*, which depicts the famine in Gaza as the result of blockade and relentless assaults during the *Tūfān al-Aqṣā*. In this context, poetry is no longer merely a literary work but emerges as a force capable of mobilizing international involvement in the struggle. A study conducted by Faris et al. ⁴⁶

Reveals a famine of extraordinary magnitude, one that had never occurred before. The military escalation of October 7 further aggravated existing vulnerabilities, particularly in relation to food security, with an estimated 85,750 deaths caused by Israeli attacks, equivalent to about 8% of the 2.34 million inhabitants. The study also reports that 95% of the population suffers from starvation, while at the household level, approximately 88% experience hunger in varying degrees. From the perspective of resistance articulated by James Scott, such famine conditions can be understood as a *hidden transcript* expressed through poetry, as reflected in the work of Ad-Daelami below:

الجوع ليس صمتًا.
إنه صوتٌ أجوف،
يضرّب الجدران بأظافره،

⁴⁶Moezalislam Faris et al., "Catastrophic Hunger in Gaza : Unprecedented Levels of Hunger Post-October 7 th. A Real Population-Based Study from the Gaza Strip," 2024.

يترك ندوبًا على أبواب البيوت
كأنها خرائط من دم ناشف.

*"Hunger is not silence.
It is a hollow voice,
scratching at the walls with its nails,
leaving scars upon the doors of homes,
like maps drawn in dried blood."*

The poem functions as a form of agitation, emphasizing that hunger should not be understood merely as a problem of food scarcity. Rather, it becomes a catalyst for resistance, grounded in the awareness that humanity transcends all political interests.

يقال: التجويع أقوى من السلاح.
لكنني أرى في عيون الأطفال
ابتسامات تلمع كالسكاكين،
تقطع الظلام نصفين،
وتعلن أن الجوع
يمكنه أن يحني الظهر،
لكن لا يستطيع أن يسرق الأغنية.

*"It's said: Hunger is stronger than weapons.
Yet I have seen in the eyes of children
a smile shining like a blade,
splitting the darkness in two,
declaring that hunger
may bend the back,
but cannot steal the song."*

The stanza above expresses that hunger constitutes a weapon of resistance, particularly employed by poets who function as agents of social change. Scattered across different places, these poets continuously articulate the discourse of hunger, stirring emotions, and ultimately giving rise to an awareness of the need to struggle. This aligns with Al-Husainy's⁴⁷ assertion that poetry also serves as a political medium,

⁴⁷Suhailah Al-Husainiy, *Qirā'atun fi Adabil-Muqāwamah fil-Watanil-Arabiyy* (Kairo: Maktabatu al-Adab, 2005).

capable of depicting unfavorable political conditions marked by fraud and deceit, and often infused with cruelty, yet rendered in an aesthetic form that can mobilize resistance. This function of poetry is further reinforced by poets' testimonies that the widespread famine among the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza, has left profound wounds."

الجوع ليس صمتًا.
إنه صوتٌ أجوف،
يضرّب الجدران بأظافره،
يترك ندوبًا على أبواب البيوت
كأنها خرائط من دمٍ ناشف.

*"Hunger is not silence.
It is a hollow voice,
scratching the walls with its nails,
leaving scars upon the doors of houses,
like a map of dried blood."*

This hunger will ultimately find its voice, emerging from behind the ruins and the cries of Gaza's children, thereby drawing the world's attention to Gaza. Even if the struggle has not yet found its path, for poets this voice embodies an unending resistance. At the same time, it nurtures the hope of international help, as famine can no longer be overcome solely by the people themselves. This movement has drawn global attention, as evidenced by the numerous appeals issued by the United Nations to address famine and to call for an end to the ongoing assaults.⁴⁸

وأنا
أكتب،
وأعرف أن الكلمات،
حتى وإن كانت جائعة،
تستطيع أن تشبع الروح،
أن تشعل نارًا صغيرة في عتمة هذا الليل البارد.
أضحك من الجوع نفسه،

⁴⁸UN News, "Rising hunger in Gaza highlights urgent need for 'unfettered' aid supplies," 2025 <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1164271>>.

لأنه، رغم كل قسوته،
لا يعرف كيف يهزم قلبًا يظل يردد الحكاية.

*"And I,
as I write,
I know that words,
even when hungry,
can still nourish the soul,
can kindle a small flame
in the darkness of this cold night.
I laugh at hunger itself,
for though it carries all its cruelty,
it does not know how to defeat
a heart that keeps retelling the story."*

The depiction of hunger as a central poetic theme simultaneously cultivates hope among the people, encouraging them to persist in their struggle. It fosters the conviction that life does not come to an end but will continue, even when confronted with increasingly difficult realities over time.

This discussion underscores that the notion of hunger in modern Arabic poetry transcends its denotative meaning as a lack of food. Through three gradations — *ju'*, *al-makhmasah*, and *al-masghabah* — "hunger" functions both as a symbol of physical suffering and as a metaphor for dissatisfaction with injustice, the deprivation of freedom, and social inequality. Poets, such as al-Baraddūnī and al-'Atūm, connect personal experience with the collective reality of a struggling community, thereby transforming the term *ju'* into a powerful symbol of social critique that evokes empathy and solidarity. The use of "hunger" in these poems demonstrates the role of literature as a medium for reflection and as an impetus for collective change. Within the socio-political context of the Arab world, poetry not only documents adversity but also mobilizes shared consciousness in the pursuit of reform. Future studies may further examine how other terms in modern Arabic literary traditions function both as tools for representing suffering and as agents of resistance, as well as compare them with critical literary movements in other regions.

The term *ju'* (hunger) in modern Arabic poetry extends beyond its denotative meaning. It also becomes a symbol of collective suffering and a critique of injustice. James C. Scott's⁴⁹ moral economy perspective helps explain how the hunger depicted

⁴⁹Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance Hidden Transcripts*.

by poets constitutes a violation of the people's subsistence rights, namely the minimum right to a decent standard of living that should be guaranteed by the state. When rulers fail to fulfill this moral obligation, poetry emerges as a moral record that reveals the suffering of the people not as a natural fate, but as the result of policies that violate the social contract between the state and society. In addition, these poems can be read as hidden transcripts, a veiled discourse that enables people to express resistance through symbols, metaphors, and aesthetic language. Expressions such as "hunger is not silence; it is a hollow voice" or "a smile shining like a blade" function as forms of linguistic disguise that convey socio-political protest without directly confronting those in power. In this way, poets and society channel criticism toward the state in a relatively safe manner, while fostering solidarity and sustaining collective hope. Poetry becomes a safe space for expressing suffering while also awakening revolutionary consciousness, transforming hunger from a mere biological condition into a symbolic weapon that challenges power.

CONCLUSION

The depiction of hunger in modern Arabic poetry demonstrates how physical suffering is transformed into a political symbol that exposes the state's failure to fulfill the people's subsistence rights. These poems show that hunger is not merely a natural disaster, but the result of policies that violate the social contract, and thus can be understood through James C. Scott's concept of moral economy. When basic needs are unmet, a sense of injustice emerges and is articulated in literary language as a moral record, affirming that the people's suffering is a consequence of the neglect of rulers' responsibilities.

Moreover, the use of metaphor, irony, and symbolism in poetry constitutes hidden transcripts, a form of veiled discourse that enables subordinate groups to express resistance without directly confronting the elite. Expressions such as "hunger is not silence; it is a hollow voice" illustrate how socio-political critique is conveyed in a relatively safe manner while still awakening collective consciousness. Poetry thus functions as a safe space for channeling protest, fostering solidarity, and sustaining revolutionary hope. This study opens up new perspectives on poetry as an effective political medium, although it is limited to selected texts. Future research may expand this analysis by comparing representations of hunger in other literary traditions or by examining their connections to actual social movements, thereby deepening our understanding of hunger as a weapon of revolution.

REFERENCES

- Ad-Daelami, Marwan Yasin, "Madiinatun Tatanaffasu bi Khubzin Gha'ibin," 2025 <<https://almothaqaf.org/nesos/982907>>
- Aghazadeh, Sima, "Food Performativity and Transnational Identity in Selected Diasporic Women's Writings," *Cultural Intertexts*, 14 (2024), 10-22

- <<https://doi.org/10.35219/cultural-intertexts.2024.14.01>>
- Al-'Atūm, Aiman, *Diwānu asy-Syi'ri Nubū'ātu al-Jā'i'ina* (Lebanon: al-Mu'assasatu al-'Arabiyyatu li ad-Dirāsati wa an-Nasyri, 2012)
- al-'Azīz Al-Maqālīh, 'Abdu, *Syu'arā'un min al-Yaman* (Beirut: Dār al-'Audah)
- al-Baraddūnī, 'Abdullāh, *Dīwān 'Abdullāh al-Baraddūnī* (San'a, 2004) <Dar al-Andalus>
- Al-Fadhil, Al-Jamiil, "Al-Juu'u wa al-Harbu - 'Uquubataani' Alaa Tsaaurati asy-Sya'bi," 2023
- Al-Husainiy, Suhailah, *Qirā'atun fi Adabil-Muqāwamah fil-Watanil-Arabiyy* (Kairo: Maktabatu al-Adab, 2005)
- Al-Maqālīh, 'Abdu al-'Azīz, *Syu'arā'un min al-Yaman* (Beirut: Dār al-'Audah)
- Al-Qadīmī, *Ittijāhāt asy-Syi'ri al-'Arabī fi al-Yaman* (Sana': Wizārah as-Šaqāfah wa as-Siyāhah, 2004)
- Al-Rusafi, Maruf, "Laqaituhaa Laitanii Maa kuntu Alqaahaa," 2014 <<https://www.aldiwan.net/poem44448.html>>
- El Alaoui, Khadija, dan Maura Pilotti, "Walking with Lips Raining Fire and Love! Arab Poets' Testimony to the World," *Interventions*, 21.5 (2019), 708–26 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2019.1585923>>
- Alsaleh, Asaad, "The Hungry Poet of 'Lāmiyyat al-'Arab' and the Quest for New Values," *Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 2024, 9–34
- Alya, Dina Fitri, Susan Nur Ajija, dan Sri Rahayu, "Ekologi Sastra pada Puisi 'Syair Orang Lapar' Karya Taufiq Ismail," *Literature Research Journal*, 1.1 (2023), 36–46 <<https://doi.org/10.51817/lrj.v1i1.610>>
- Ara, "Al-Aalam al-'Arabiyy, 6 Asbab Ja'alat al-Juu'a fii A'laa Mustawiiyyaatihi," 2025 <<https://www.ararac.com/blog/hunger-in-the-arab-world>>
- As-Salāl, Abdullah, *Šauratu al-Yamani ad-Dustūriyyah* (Sana'a: Markaz ad-Dirāsati wa al-Buḥūsi al-Yamanī, 1985)
- As-Sanadiy, Yusuf, "Al-Juu'u Hal Yaquudu ats-Tsaaurata al-Mudhaadah," 2019
- As-Sayyab, Badr Syakir, *Ansyudatu al-Mathar* (Hindawi, 2015)
- Athamneh, Waed, *Modern Arabic Poetry: Revolution and Conflict* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017)
- Barwasi, Ismail, dan Hadi Nazari Monazan, *Comparative and Sociological Analysis of Class Discrimination in the Poems of Ghaneh Marivani and Mohammad Mahdi Al-Javaheri*, 2021, XVIII
- Egreteau, Renaud, "Fasting as Commemorative Strategy: Hunger Strikes and Collective Memory in Myanmar's Contentious Politics," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 2025 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034251363997>>
- El-din, N. D., "Poetry and the Politics of Resistance and Revolution: Tamim Al-

- Barghouti's Poetic Discourse," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 50.2 (2019), 145–68
<<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341356>>
- Elbousty, Moulay Youness, "Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi's 'The Will to Live': Galvanising the Tunisian revolution," *Journal of North African Studies*, 18.1 (2013), 159–63
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2012.729719>>
- Faris, Moezalislam, Ayman S Abutair, Reham M Elfarra, Nida A Barqawi, dan Amal M Firwana, "Catastrophic Hunger in Gaza : Unprecedented Levels of Hunger Post-October 7 th. A Real Population-Based Study from the Gaza Strip," 2024
- Kaplan, David M., "'Hunger Hermeneutics,'" *Topoi*, 40.3 (2021), 527–33
<<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-020-09729-8>>
- Khoury, Jerjes N., "Qatr al-Nadā Looking for an Identity: An Inquiry into the Inspiration for Qatr al-Nadā's Figure in Modern Arabic Poetry," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 61.1 (2016), 215–30 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgv037>>
- de Medeiros, P., "Poetry Shall Not Serve: Poetry and Political Resistance," *Comparative Critical Studies*, 14.1 (2017), 23–39
<<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3366/ccs.2017.0235>>
- Morsi, Eman S., "A new hunger: food shortages and satires of the state in Cuban and Egyptian cultural production," *Food, Culture and Society*, 27.4 (2024), 936–52
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2023.2249672>>
- Nadkarni, D., "Beyond Autonomy and Activism: 'Poetic Understanding' as a Ground for Political Community," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 46.9 (2020), 1045–63
<<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453720908467>>
- Neimneh, Shadi Saleh, "Postcolonial Arabic fiction revisited: Naturalism and existentialism in Ghassan Kanafani's men in the sun," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 7.2 (2017), 476–85 <<https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v7i2.8356>>
- Our World in Data, "Death Rate from Famines by Year," 2023
<<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/death-rate-from-famines-by-year>>
- Pitts, G. A., "A Hungry Population Stops Thinking about Resistance: Class, Famine, and Lebanon's World War I Legacy," *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 7.1 (2020), 1–20
<<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2979/jottturstuassoci.7.1.01>>
- Rahman, Muzna, *Hunger and Postcolonial Writing*, *Hunger and Postcolonial Writing*, 2022
<<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315505930>>
- Rice, Laura, dan Karim Hamdy, "Folk poetry, local knowledge, and resistance in Tunisia," *Journal of North African Studies*, 21.2 (2016), 283–300
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2016.1130940>>
- Scott, James C, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990)
- — —, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale

University, 1985)

Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian dan Pengembangan* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2022)

Tarbifaka, "Shaihaatu al-Faqri wa al-Juu'i wa al-Hirmaani fii Syi'ri ash-Shu'aaliik," 2021

UN News, "Rising hunger in Gaza highlights urgent need for 'unfettered' aid supplies," 2025 <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1164271>>

de Waal, A., "Mass Starvation and the Political Marketplace," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, 3.1 (2021), 4–14 <<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7227/JHA.003>>