

The environmental plight of the impoverished

**The environmental plight of the impoverished: Exploring  
slow violence and solastalgia in Muhammad Khalil Qasim's  
*Al-Shamandūra (The Buoy)***

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to explore the profound psychological, social, and environmental challenges faced by the Nubian community in Egypt, as depicted in Muhammad Khalil Qasim's *Al-Shamandūra (The Buoy)*. Underpinned by an ecocritical perspective of environmental justice as well as environmental humanities, this study employs the lenses of slow violence and solastalgia to examine the Nubian characters' responses to the gradual and sudden loss of their homeland. By offering a multi-dimensional investigation of the impact of the second raising of the Aswan Low Dam on the Nile as well as the Nubian community, this study delves into the psychological consequences of this man-made project. It examines how it affects the emotional well-being of the characters depicted in the novel. It also sheds light on the environmental consequences, addressing the changes and challenges faced by the natural ecosystem as a result of flooding the Nubian region. Moreover, the study explores the spatial transformations brought about by this project. It analyzes how the physical landscape is altered and how it shapes the experiences and interactions of the impoverished characters within the narrative. By thoroughly examining Qasim's narrative, this study aims to expand the scope of environmentalism beyond conventional narratives. It addresses the urgent need to face environmental justice and empower impoverished communities in the face of multilayered environmental challenges.

**Keywords:** Slow violence, solastalgia, Nubian Community, Muhammad Khalil Qasim, *Al-Shamandūra (The Buoy)*

### **Introduction**

The undesired alterations caused by environmental forces, human actions, and climate change pose a menace to the familiar and cherished places that are called home (Warsini *et al.*, 2014). These changes, whether gradual or abrupt, not only affect the physical landscape but also have profound impacts on individuals' wellbeing and their sense of self, leading to the experience of solastalgia. This experience is characterized by feelings of pain and sorrow resulting from the loss or undesired transformation of a beloved place due to environmental degradation (Albrecht, 2019). However, despite the significance of grief and bereavement in relation to environmental loss, these concepts remain relatively overlooked in literary studies that mostly focus on the tangible material impacts of environmental loss on people's lives. Furthermore, environmental issues, in general, have not been extensively explored in Arabic literature. Cheryll Glotfelty's argument in *The Ecocriticism Reader* highlights the need for "a multi-ethnic movement" within the field of ecocriticism, which has historically been dominated by white voices and perspectives (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxv). To become more inclusive and effective, ecocriticism must forge stronger links between "environmental issues" and "social justice," welcoming a broader range of voices and perspectives (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xxv). To address this gap and gain a deeper understanding of both emotional and material impacts of environmental loss faced by different communities worldwide, this paper aims to delve into the experiences of solastalgia and slow violence as depicted in the Egyptian novel *Al-Shamandūra* (*The Buoy*) by Muhammad Khalil Qasim. By incorporating non-Western cultural expressions, such as Arabic literature, the discourse can be enriched by fostering a more comprehensive and relevant global dialogue on ecological matters.

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**Ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary approach**

Ecocriticism, an interdisciplinary field of study also referred to as ecological literary criticism, emerged in the late 1970s, gaining widespread recognition in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Di Leo, 2023). Basically, ecocriticism explores the intricate “relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). The term "ecocriticism" was initially coined by William Rueckert, who introduced it in his influential essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" in 1978. Rueckert (1996, p. 107) believes in the essentiality of applying “ecological concepts” to the analysis of literary texts. He stresses that ecology holds significant importance for the present and future world. In the mid-1990s, Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* and Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* laid the groundwork for ecocriticism to flourish as an academic discipline. These publications offer scholars a framework and resources to analyze and discuss environmental themes in literature in a more effective way (Di Leo, 2023). This broader approach allows ecocriticism to encompass diverse literary works that engage with ecological themes. Additionally, it plays a significant role in awakening environmental consciousness among literary practitioners who start to explore nature, environmental issues, and the interconnection between humanity and the natural world within their literary texts.

The prominent ecocritic Lawrence Buell suggests that the history of ecocriticism is divided into two waves. The first wave of ecocriticism describes the initial stages of the ecocritical movement, which evolved in the 1970s and 1980s. Buell (2005) defines the first wave as follows:

For first-wave ecocriticism, “environment” effectively meant “natural environment.” In practice if not in principle, the realms of the “natural” and the “human” looked more disjunct than they have come to seem for

more recent environmental critics—one of the reasons for preferring “environmental criticism” to “ecocriticism” as more indicative of present practice. (21)

As suggested in this extract, first-wave ecocriticism focuses on the “natural environment,” such as wilderness, landscapes, flora, etc. During this phase, there is a perceived separation between nature and human beings. Early ecocritics examined nostalgic portrayals of the past, expressing sorrow over the diminishing natural settings. Consequently, ecocriticism witnesses a significant transformation, embracing a more political and interdisciplinary approach. This evolution leads to the emergence of the second wave of ecocriticism.

The second wave of ecocriticism, as described by Buell (2005), emerged in the mid-1990s. It represents a significant advancement in the field. During this phase, ecocritics expand their exploration of environmental themes in literature to encompass cultural, social, and political contexts. In this new wave, ecocritics recognize literature's capacity to foster ecological consciousness and promote environmental thinking (Buell, 2005). Moreover, the second wave includes various literary genres and popular culture. It also witnesses the emergence of various theoretical approaches, such as ecofeminism and postcolonial ecocriticism, which integrated environmental concerns with other critical perspectives. Additionally, this phase addresses the challenges posed by globalization, such as ecological crises, climate change, and resource depletion. Most significantly, scholars within this wave extensively explore how literature reflects issues of environmental justice, which refers to the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and hazards among different social groups (Buell, 2011). This concern is particularly relevant in examining differences between races, as well as between wealthy and economically impoverished communities.

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In the 2000s, ecocriticism moved beyond the second wave and entered a newer phase of significant theoretical development, often referred to as the third wave. This phase represents a broader understanding of nature-culture relationships; it proclaims that nature and culture are deeply interconnected rather than separate entities. Ecocritics of this wave expand their focus to include multicultural literature and arts that embrace diverse ethnic and national particularities (Adamson & Slovic, 2009). They explore how different cultures and communities interact with the environment. Alongside celebrating cultural diversity, the third wave seeks to go beyond ethnic and national boundaries and investigate human experiences from ecoglobal perspectives (Adamson & Slovic, 2009). This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of global environmental challenges and the need for collaborative solutions that transcend geopolitical divisions. This wave further witnesses what Slovic (2010, p. 7) calls "polymorphously activists" who seek new ways to connect their work to environmental and social issues, contributing to the broader movement for environmental justice and sustainability.

The advent of material ecocriticism signifies a transformative shift in the field of ecocriticism, marking the entrance into the fourth wave of ecological thought. This emerging approach initially investigates how the environment impacts the human body; however, it evolves into a post-humanist perspective that explores the interconnections between human bodies, animal bodies, and the broader material world (DeMott, 2018). Ultimately, the emergence of material ecocriticism paves the way for further exploration of human and non-human animal coexistence. It fosters a deeper understanding of humans' position in the environment. Moreover, it encourages a more inclusive and holistic approach to environmental issues in which the well-being of all living organisms and the planet as a whole are considered in harmony.

Overall, ecocriticism, as an evolving and interdisciplinary field, has broadened its scopes by embracing perspectives like transnationalism, ecofeminism, postcolonialism, environmental justice, and trans-corporeality. This inclusiveness leads to the discovery and exploration of unnoticed literary texts from diverse cultural backgrounds and marginalized voices. By authentically demonstrating various environmental voices, ecocriticism fosters significant dialogue on the capacity of literature to address global environmental and climate change-related risks. Moreover, its adaptability and openness enable thorough explorations of complex environmental concepts like slow violence and solastalgia, thereby enriching the understanding of ecological challenges and their literary depictions within literature.

### **Slow violence**

According to Nixon (2011), a truly international environmental movement and ecocriticism must take into account the concept of slow violence, which refers to “violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Nixon's book, *Slow Violence and the Environment of the Poor*, emphasizes the intricate relationship between human beings and the natural world. It illuminates how slow violence, such as oil spills and climate change, greatly impacts marginalized populations with limited political power and resources. Nixon (2011, p. 19) argues that these forms of violence may lead to temporal displacements and "displacement without moving," further underscoring the urgency of considering environmental justice and the well-being of vulnerable communities in the face of ecological challenges.

Nixon introduces the concept of slow violence as a distinct form of violence that is difficult to discern without deliberate attention. Its unnoticeable nature sets it apart from more obvious forms of violence, posing a unique challenge for identification and response. Nixon (2011) stresses the significance of transforming

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prolonged crises of slow violence into persuasive narratives that evoke public empathy and prompt political action. Literature is considered a significant tool in raising awareness of slow violence, particularly when employed by combative writers who passionately amplify the causes of marginalized communities affected by environmental questions. Nixon (2011) asserts that environmental writer-activists play a major role in enabling individuals to perceive environmental threats. Through their works, these writers foster an imaginative understanding of unnoticeable and consequential environmental challenges; they contribute to a broader comprehension of the intricate interplay between human actions and the environment's long-term impacts. Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to explore the portrayal and effects of slow violence in Qasim's novel. It specifically examines the influence of this violence on the characters' well-being, who may experience the psychological grief termed solastalgia. In this context, the concept of solastalgia complements Nixon's perspective, as it further illuminates the psychological consequences and human experiences in the face of environmental degradation.

### **Solastalgia**

Solastalgia, a term coined by eco-philosopher Albrecht Glenn in 2003, has gained prominence for its distinctive capacity to capture the emotional reaction of those who witness the stressful impacts of environmental damage. It includes a profound sense of homesickness while being in one's own home (Albrecht, 2005). Albrecht's realization of the insufficiency of the term "nostalgia," which means a longing for a past time or place, leads him to create this combination merging "solace" (comfort), "*algia*" (pain or suffering), and "nostalgia" (Albrecht, 2005, p. 48). Thus, literally, solastalgia refers to the profound pain and distress resulting from the loss of solace when one faces the lived experience of physical desolation in his/her home environment (Albrecht, 2005). Both natural and human-induced factors, such

as floods, mining, and war, often evoke these feelings of psychological despair (Albrecht, 2005). Albrecht (2015) argues that the lack of solace in the face of unwelcome environmental changes can erode one's sense of place and identity, leaving him/her hopeless and powerless. It is a "psychoterratic" illness in which the psyche suffers due to its relationship with the earth (Albrecht, 2019, p. x).

Academic research on solastalgia has been influential in creating awareness of the profound impact of environmental degradation on human lives. However, it is notable that the psychological consequences of solastalgia are often given less attention than the physical damage inflicted on the human body and the environment. Nonetheless, within the field of environmental humanities, the concept becomes more familiar. Emmett and Nye (2017) acknowledge its importance in recognizing the extensive ecological costs associated with contemporary life. The connection of solastalgia to slow violence further underscores the close link between place-based distress and environmental transformation. By exploring the psychological effects of solastalgia, particularly in the context of slow violence, scholars are able to elucidate the multifaceted interaction between human feelings, wellbeing, and the transformations brought about by man-made activities.

Although solastalgia has been explored in many disciplines, it has not been much applied to literary works. To fill this gap, this study aims to engage critically with this notion and develop it further for a better interpretation of the psychological effects of slow violence on fictional characters. Through an ecocritical approach, the study illuminates the emotional states of the characters in *The Buoy*. It argues that environmental changes intensely impact their psychological well-being, leading them to experience solastalgia.

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**Slow violence and solastalgia in the Nubian context**

Throughout the 20th century, the Nubian community living on the Egyptian side of the dividing line faced significant challenges due to the development of hydropower projects (Gilmore, 2015). The Nubian people's struggle exemplifies the insidious nature of slow violence and solastalgia, as they witnessed a series of floods that unfolded gradually over several decades. It began with the construction of the Aswan Low Dam in 1902 at the first cataract of the Nile River, which caused water levels to rise and subsequently submerge ten Nubian villages (Waterbury, 1979). Subsequently, the dam was raised in height twice, first in 1912 and then again in 1933, leading to the flooding of additional villages (Waterbury, 1979). The culmination came in the 1960s when the Egyptian postcolonial state initiated the construction of the High Dam, a national megaproject with the vision of bringing industrialized prosperity to Egypt (Agha, 2019).

The prolonged and gradual flooding of the Nubian villages exemplifies the insidious nature of slow violence, resulting in a severe environmental catastrophe. The construction and subsequent heightening of the dam led to the loss of villages and arable lands, with larger areas being inundated by rising waters, causing the complete loss and displacement of Nubian settlements (Agha, 2021). The flooding also disrupted the ecological balance; it led to the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity, which deeply impacted the Nubian communities' traditional way of life (Agha, 2019). This gradual environmental degradation led to increased displacement of Nubian families as they were forced to leave their ancestral homes in search of new places to live. The loss of arable land further reduced agricultural productivity and economic resources, driving more Nubian men to migrate to urban centers to work and support their families. Agha (2021) states that despite the ongoing displacement of Nubians, it received significantly less international support and media coverage, further exacerbating the emotional toll on the

whole marginalized community. The gradual and inconspicuous nature of the harm they endured highlights the core essence of slow violence, where the true extent of the violence only becomes evident with the passage of time. The gradual loss of their sacred lands and biodiversity, coupled with the disruption of their harmonious relationship with the Nile River, intensifies their solastalgia and sense of loss.

In the first Nubian narrative found in Arabic literature, *Al-Shamandūra* (Gilmore, 2015), Qasem (1968) presents a socially realistic depiction of a Nubian community before, during, and after the heightening of the Aswan Low Dam. It offers a new perspective on the history of the Aswan Dam, presenting it from the standpoint of marginalized groups. Additionally, it seeks to address a gap in existing literature by critically analyzing modern Nubian writing that has been relatively absent in literary studies.

### **Textual analysis**

Muhammad Khalil Qasim's groundbreaking novel, *Al-Shamandūra (The Buoy)*, published in 1968, offers a powerful exploration of the Nubian people's experiences, particularly in the village of Qattā, during the second raising of the Aswan Low Dam in 1933. As the first literary work by a Nubian author, the novel delves into the environmental struggles faced by the marginalized Nubian community in Egypt, bringing their perspective to the forefront of the national discourse on dams and development. By drawing inspiration from real-life characters and settings, the narrative sheds light on the slow violence and solastalgia caused by this project and reflects the broader global phenomenon of environmentalism emerging from disadvantaged communities in the "global South," as suggested by Nixon (2011, p. 4).

The opening pages of the narrative bring attention to the environmentalism of the impoverished Nubian community, accentuating their helplessness and disproportionate suffering in the face of environmental challenges and inadequate

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infrastructure. This focus is exemplified when the characters stumble upon crucial information about the planned raising of the Aswan Low Dam through an encounter with a Nubian immigrant who accidentally witnessed the rapid raising of the dam while returning from Cairo to Nuba. This revelation leads to their realization that the impending flood would have a severe impact on their lives and the ecosystem. As marginalized villagers, they find themselves excluded from official decision-making processes, leaving them with no choice but to rely on indirect sources of information and rumors circulating through gossip channels. These sources often stem from individuals with connections to the colonial center, such as guards, butlers, and cooks employed by Egyptian officials and decision-makers in Cairo (Qasim, 1968). The Nubians' lack of direct involvement and dependence on secondhand information aligns with Nixon's concept of "unimagined communities" (2011, p. 150), as they are marginalized and pushed to the fringes of society. They find themselves relegated to the periphery of society, almost like ghostly presences in their own territories.

In the narrative, the insidious effects of gradual violence are brought to light through the government's callous treatment of the landscape, viewing it "as if it were uninhabited by the living, the unborn, and the animate deceased" (Nixon, 2011, p. 17). The authorities' persistent quest to raise the dam and flood the Nubian villages indicates a shocking disregard for the safety of living beings, whether human or non-human. They further neglect the rights of future generations yet to be born as well as the deeply cherished ancestral ties that connect the Nubian people to their land. This approach perpetuates a form of slow violence that not only erodes the ecological balance and livelihoods of the Nubian community but also systematically erases the historical memory and cultural significance embedded in the very fabric of the landscape.

The government's decision to flood the Nubian lands presents a great paradox in the novel. Although the project is proposed to lead to national prosperity, it instead results in economic poverty and ecological disaster for the local Nubian community. This discrepancy indicates the government's failure to consider the well-being and development of its own citizens as a whole. Furthermore, the proposed compensation package further exemplifies the government's failure to figure out the true value of the land and its deep meaning to the Nubian people. The narrative powerfully depicts the government's imposition of displacement on the Nubian community, as the clash between what Nixon (2011, p. 17) describes as the deeply rooted "vernacular" landscape of the Nubians and the "imposed" official landscape enforced by the government has distressing consequences. Sheikh Morsi's statement, "If the rulers respected us, all this harm would not have befallen us" (Qasim, 1968, p. 509), deeply resonates with the Nubian community's feelings of disrespect and marginalization due to the authorities' actions.

Qasim's masterful portrayal of the Nubian people's profound place attachment in *The Buoy* highlights a deep emotional connection that goes beyond any financial compensation offered by the government. The land holds an irreplaceable and priceless significance in their eyes; it represents not just physical space but an integral part of their identity. Through affective maps that encompass names, routes, and historical connections, the Nubians' vernacular landscape becomes a source of immense significance, reflecting their intimate relationship with the Nile and their ancestral heritage. They share an unbreakable bond with their homeland as:

They were all born on this land, and before them, their fathers and uncles were born on it. They all adore the palm trees and love the agricultural lands, the houses built with mud bricks and green bricks, and the Nile ... They love them all as much as they love their wives. It is deeply

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rooted in their minds that their country is the most beautiful in the world and that its people are the best people in the world. (Qasim, 1968, p. 51)

Moreover, the narrative exposes that their connection with the Nile is unparalleled, surpassing mere physical sustenance. The Nile holds spiritual and cultural significance; it is intertwined with their daily lives, sustaining their livelihoods, agriculture, and traditions, and playing a central role in their major life rituals from birth to death (Qasim, 1968).

This profound sense of place and belonging makes the government's forced displacement all the more distressing and unsettling for the Nubian cultural heritage and emotional well-being. However, despite these challenging circumstances, the characters in the novel rally together. They are convinced that non-violent resistance is the most viable and effective solution in the face of environmental injustice. Nixon's observation about the environmentalism of the poor forming patchwork "alliances" against "superior" forces strongly resonates with the Nubian situation (2011, p. 4). Suffering from environmental injustice, the Nubian people display strong determination to take action and defend their land and community's well-being. Sheikh Sabir, the local Imam, becomes a staunch supporter of the Nubian opposition, employing examples from Islamic history and the Qur'an to lend legitimacy to their resistance in Friday prayer. Meanwhile, Badr Affendi and his circle of activists traverse between villages in order to passionately urge others to join the resistance and spread awareness about the impending dire fate that awaits them. The cause even attracts educated Nubians who utilize lobbying and petitions to voice collective anger against the unjust compensation arrangements. Through these united efforts, the characters exemplify a profound commitment to resist and protect their community from the adverse consequences of raising the dam.

The campaign, spearheaded by Badr Affendi and Boray to boycott the government's inadequate compensation, proves remarkably successful in challenging the perceived injustice and collective punishment imposed on the Nubian community, especially after Taha's failed assassination attempt on Prime Minister Isma'il Sidqi. With a strong sense of unity and determination, the Nubian villagers firmly reject the government's insufficient compensation for their lands. By choosing to boycott the compensation scheme, they strategically challenge the authorities and draw attention to the undervaluation of their homes and land. This collective movement serves as a powerful response to the oppressive injustice they face; it enables them to assert their rights and demand fair treatment.

Despite the courageous endeavors of the Nubian community to boycott the government's inadequate compensation scheme, their demands and complaints are ultimately disregarded by the authorities. The government's callous treatment of the land and its people becomes apparent as it wages both a figurative and literal war against them, resorting to pressure, bribery, and manipulation to suppress any form of opposition. Nixon's observation that "impoverished communities are often assailed by coercion and bribery that test their cohesive resilience" resonates strongly in this context (2011, p. 4). The government's harsh suppression tactics, coupled with the manipulation of desperate villagers through the offer of extra money, lead to internal divisions. Despite their initial determination to seek equitable compensation, desperation eventually takes its toll; many villagers are pushed to reluctantly accept any form of compensation in the hope of alleviating their immediate suffering. The allure of money, symbolized by the enticing "crisp green guineas" (Qasim, 1968, p. 379), ultimately weakens the villagers' convictions as it leads to a breakdown in their resistance. Abdullah's acceptance of the compensation and the subsequent flood of claimants crossing the picket line mark a

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poignant and depressing end to months of united Nubian resistance.

As the narrative unfolds and the raising of the dam and the disruption of the natural flow of the Nile become imminent, a deep sense of futility and detachment permeate the novel. Qasim skillfully highlights the pervasive yet often difficult-to-identify impacts of slow violence on the Nubian community. He draws attention to what Nixon describes as "the pervasive but elusive" consequences of environmental degradation and social injustices (2011, p. 3). By referring to the Nubian villages facing the threat of submergence for the third time in thirty years, Qasim strategically hints at a longer history of destruction, signifying these events as markers of slow violence. Nixon's concept of "attritional catastrophes" (2011, p. 7) becomes evident in the novel as the Nubian villagers endure the insidious erosion of their livelihoods, culture, and environment due to the long history of dam construction. This aligns with Nixon's idea that "attritional catastrophes" involve various displacements, including "temporal, geographical, rhetorical, and technological displacements" (2011, p. 7). The gradual displacement of the Nubians over time as well as the flooding of their lands are clear examples of how attritional catastrophes affect them temporally and geographically. Additionally, rhetorical displacement occurs as the media fails to adequately capture and convey the complexity of the Nubians' plight; thereby, it underestimates the human and environmental costs. The technological displacement exacerbates the situation as the media's focus on the advantages of raising the dam overshadows the enduring crises that the Nubian people face. Consequently, these displacements lead to a collective "amnesia" (Nixon, 2011, p. 7), where the experiences of altering the ecosystem of the Nubian lands along with their displacement are forgotten or disregarded, further marginalizing and silencing them in the broader narrative of development and progress.

Qasim adeptly captures not only the slow violence of the impending flood but also the deeply distressing experience of solastalgia that the Nubian people face. The consequences of slow violence lead the Nubian community to suffer not only physically but also emotionally; their psychic and physical identity is disoriented in the radically transformed home environment. The novel illustrates how the Nubians lose their sense of place identity and their solace and comfort. This loss emanates from their ecologically conscious relationship with their healthy environment; it leaves them feeling “a form of homesickness,” even while physically “still at home” (Albrecht, 2006, p. 35). The narrator paints a grim picture of the potential consequences of the impending flood, creating a sense of impending transformation that intensifies their solastalgia:

Buildings will be demolished, millions of palm trees will be uprooted, waves will exhume the bodies of our dead, morals will be corrupted, and migration will increase... The entire earth will be filled with worms roaming freely. (Qasim, 1968, p. 331)

This vivid imagery of the upcoming change in their home conveys the environmental devastation the Nubian community will face. The moral corruption and the increase in migration further reflect the erosion of their cultural identity and the disruption of their way of life. The haunting description of the entire land filled with worms adds an apocalyptic tone that intensifies the sense of hopelessness. Through this gloomy atmosphere, the narrative powerfully underscores the profound solastalgic suffering the Nubian people experience; they confront the undesired transformation of their homeland and the impending destruction of their cherished way of life.

The characters’ experiences of solastalgia further echo Albrecht’s understanding of solastalgia as “distress, feelings of bereavement, [and] fear of a new disaster” (2006, p. 36). The narrator’s observation about the villagers eagerly seeking news

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of the near future reflects their distress, restlessness, fear, and uncertainty in the face of drastic changes. They further suffer from flashbacks, nightmares, and overwhelming emotions. As the narrator describes:

They began to awaken and feel that their entire lives —the land they have cherished since childhood, the palm trees, and the houses — are no longer theirs. They feel that the government is plotting against them. So, they walk along the road that goes through the fields alongside the banks of the river to the eastern slopes, contemplating [their] piece of land. They sigh like a person who has lost his only son on his deathbed, counting on their fingers what they [annually] harvest from their land and from every palm tree they own. They compare it to the government's estimates and feel a sense of injustice. They feel both a desire for revolution and powerlessness at the same time; a pervasive feeling of being deceived is running through their veins. As a result, their eyes bulge, fixating again on [their] piece of land and the palm trees. Then they cast angry glances at the north. (Qasim, 1968, p. 365)

The residents' gloom and despair, as evident in the extract, stem from a solastalgic reaction to the gradual destruction of their homeland. Albrecht (2005, p. 47) defines this as "place-based distress," a feeling of helplessness resulting from the perceived environmental injustice being perpetrated upon them. To use Albrecht's words, they suffer from both "imposed place transition (place pathology) and powerlessness (environmental injustice)" (2005, p. 48). The characters feel a sense of betrayal and deception by the government's actions when they learn about the projected changes in their cherished environment. Their sighs and sense of injustice reflect their deep feelings of grief and homesickness for the familiar and ecologically conscious landscape they once had. The comparison between what they harvest from their land and the government's estimates highlights

the dissonance and powerlessness they feel in the face of environmental degradation and displacement. The character's desire for revolution and anger directed towards the north symbolize their non-violent struggle against the slow violence inflicted upon them.

The narrative depicts the poignant and emotional scene of the residents of Qattā as they prepare to leave their homeland. The narrator describes how they "walked with heavy steps," conveying a sense of burden and sorrow as the villagers move through their familiar surroundings, knowing it will be the last time they see their beloved land (Qasim, 1968, p. 434). They pause and contemplate every detail of their environment—"the strips of land" they once cultivated, "the water wheels" that sustained their livelihoods, "the wells" that provided precious water, and "the palm trees" that held deep cultural and spiritual significance (Qasim, 1968, p. 434). This collective act of stopping and contemplating symbolizes the profound attachment the Nubian people have to their homeland and the pain they feel at having to leave it behind. Solastalgia, as described by Albrecht (2005), encapsulates this pain and illness arising from the constant loss of comfort and solace in the face of an unwanted transformation of their physical environment.

The apocalyptic scene of the flood and destruction in the narrative highlights acts of violence that align with the traditional notion of violence, "an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space" (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). The ecological disruption caused by raising the dam culminates in a catastrophic event akin to the traditional concept of immediate and explosive violence. As the water in the reservoir starts to rise, "the flood rose like tall, thick walls, and the waves surged for the first time from the north, overwhelming the stagnant waves creeping from the south. They crashed against the cliffs with force, besieging the houses and causing walls to collapse, stirring up a dark dust" (Qasim, 1968, p. 446). The passage

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vividly paints a scene of violence, chaos, and destruction in the narrative. The motifs, imagery, and language used stress and evoke a sense of power and intensity while the flood is surging with force. The comparison of the flood to "tall, thick walls" conveys its formidable and overwhelming force. The waves coming from both the north and south, crashing against each other, further emphasize the all-encompassing nature of the flood. The mention of the waves crashing against the cliffs with great force gives a visual presentation of the violent impact they have on the landscape and environment. The description of besieged houses and collapsing walls illustrates the devastating impact the flood has had on the village's structures and properties. The imagery of "stirring up a dark dust" adds to the sense of chaos; it symbolizes the turbulence and upheaval caused by the flood's force. The passage collectively creates a powerful image of chaos and destruction; it effectively depicts the catastrophic impact of the flood on the Nubian community and their environment.

The narrative delves into the complexities of environmental destruction. It highlights the physical and emotional impact of ecological devastation on a community that deeply worships its land, Nile, and ancestors. In a bitter irony, the life-sustaining water, on which the Nubian community once relied, transforms into a destructive force. The narrator's powerful observation about water being both a "source of mercy" and "wrath" (Qasim, 1968, p. 211) highlights the paradoxical nature of the ecological devastation. The narrative vividly portrays how the rising water levels not only wreak havoc on Nubian houses and crops but also tragically destroy their beloved palm tree, once a symbol of comfort and tradition. To add to the tragedy, the water reaches the resting places of their deceased loved ones; it tragically exhumes their bodies. This desecration of their ancestors' resting places inflicts immense emotional pain on the community and compounds the already intense solastalgia they are experiencing.

The narrator's physical, psychological, and emotional states are deeply affected by the environmentally devastated landscape, forcing him to navigate within a drastically altered environment. Albrecht (2005, p. 49) observes, "The most poignant moments of solastalgia occur when individuals directly experience the transformation of a loved environment." In the lost land, amidst the legacies of historical place-based distress, solastalgic responses haunt the narrator, as expressed through Hamed's haunting words in the narrative. He conveys a profound sense of isolation and desolation, feeling utterly alone amidst the horror of the ravaged land. Once a vibrant and flourishing landscape, it now lies in ruins, with the Nile receding and water engulfing the once majestic palm trees and shrubs. In this desolate setting, the narrator is surrounded only by the haunting sounds of "trickling water and the roar of the whirlpool" (Qasim, 1968, p. 450), amplifying his sense of solitude and despair. As he stands on the elevated shore, the Nile seems to "stare back at him with an almost menacing demeanor, as if it eagerly awaits to consume [him entirely]" (Qasim, 1968, p. 450). This evocative portrayal captures the emotional turmoil and profound sense of loss experienced by the narrator in the face of ecological devastation; it exemplifies the condition of solastalgia resulting from the "loss of place [that] leads to loss of sense of place" (Albrecht, 2005, p. 49). The impact of solastalgia is keenly felt in his psyche as he grapples with the struggle to find solace and connection in an environment that has been irrevocably transformed into a hostile wasteland. The loss of the once-cherished environment intensifies his feelings of displacement and disconnection; it leaves him haunted by the memories of a time when the land was alive and thriving.

The portrayal of the Nubian community's experiences on the barren west bank of the Nile highlights the profound impact of slow violence and solastalgia. The material and psychological losses they endure are shattering as they struggle to cope with

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their new environment. The transformation of their once-familiar village leads the inhabitants to feel nostalgia, displacement, and alienation. The lack of water and arid conditions make it challenging for them to farm the land and sustain their livelihoods. The new landscape is described as lifeless, resembling a “cemetery” without water (Qasim, 1968, p. 395). The absence of their former customs and traditions, especially during religious festivals, intensifies their sense of alienation and grief for their lost home.

Despite facing initial obstacles, the Nubian individuals displays remarkable resilience and determination to rebuild their lives and alleviate the distress of solastalgia. They strive to reclaim their identity and cultural heritage amid overwhelming challenges. Unfortunately, their optimistic endeavors are shattered to pieces due to the repeated occurrence of environmental devastation. Just as they find solace in their new environment and witness promising signs of growth in their crops, unexpected rises in water levels and the opening of the dam's floodgates destroy their progress before they can harvest their hard-earned crops (Qasim, 1986). This continuous cycle of slow violence plunges them into grief and despair; it leaves them helpless and hopeless, perpetuating the trauma of dispossession and solastalgia. The long-lasting disruption prevents them from finding stability and security, deepening their yearning for their former home and their ongoing struggle to find a place where they truly belong.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the Nubian people's struggle and the far-reaching impacts of environmental degradation on their lives, their cultural heritage, and their emotional well-being as portrayed in Muhammad Khalil Qasim's novel, *Al-Shamandūra (The Buoy)*. Drawing on the concepts of slow violence and solastalgia, the Nubian people's experiences in Egypt are fully illuminated. Slow violence refers to the gradual and long-term environmental degradation that the Nubian lands

endure due to the gradual and sudden flooding caused by the Aswan Low Dam. The study shows that this slow violence extends over generations. It causes profound impacts on the Nubians' ecological system, cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and inherent attachment to the land. Furthermore, the study uncovers the emotional distress and sorrow experienced by the Nubian characters due to the undesired transformation of their cherished environment, termed solastalgia. Moreover, the study highlights the intersection of environmental degradation and poverty in the lives of the impoverished characters in the novel. This adds another layer of complexity to their challenges. The emotional toll of solastalgia compounds the existing hardships faced by Nubian communities. It leaves them vulnerable to the pervasive impacts of environmental injustice. This vulnerability arises from their marginalized position and limited resources to cope with the environmental changes they encounter.

Generally, this paper provides significant and valuable insights into the challenges that the Nubian community encounters. By utilizing the ecocritical framework within Arabic literature, this research enriches the global discourse on ecological issues. It underscores the importance of incorporating diverse voices and perspectives in ecocriticism to deepen the understanding of the intricate relationships between humans and nature and the broader ecological themes. Ultimately, this study highlights the necessity of considering the environmental plight of improvised communities that are mostly forgotten and disregarded.

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