

ISRAELI LITERATURE WITH PALESTINIAN LITERATURE, NOW

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Review of:

אמיל חביבי בעברית: עמדות אידיאולוגיות והשפעתן על כתיבת "האופסימיסט", "אח'טיה", ו"סראיא" (Emile Habibi in Hebrew: Ideological Positions and Their Influence on the Writing and Translation of *The Pessoptimist*, *Akhtiya*, and *Saraya*) by Huda Abu Much. 318 pp. Jerusalem: Magnes Press. 2022. Hardcover, \$33.

Conflicts: The Poetics and Politics of Palestine-Israel by Liron Mor. 288 pp. New York: Fordham University Press. 2024. Paperback, \$32.

In his 2017 introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* on Jewish thought in late-Ottoman Palestine, historian Moshe Behar offers a socio-political context to a field that undeniably flourished in the beginning of the 21st century.¹ “Many of the contemporary scholars studying Middle Eastern Jews under Ottoman or colonial domination,” writes Behar, “pursued their formative Ph.D. studies during the years of the Oslo peace process and its fatal disintegration, that is, from 1993 to, roughly, Israel’s 2009 aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip” (271). This generation of young, largely liberal, aspiring academics experienced both optimism that violent conflict in Palestine/Israel could reach its conclusion through political compromise, and its disorienting loss, as the vision hoisted upon Oslo was ultimately shattered. It is against this moment of despair, Behar claims, that scholars plunged into history to explore “paths not taken” and to investigate “modes of coexistence that might have been superior to those they were tangibly experiencing” (272).

It is the same generation of scholars that has produced, over the past twenty years, a body of comparative studies in Israeli and Palestinian literatures, which is, as Ella Elbaz has recently argued, largely redemptive in its thrust.² “To study Hebrew and Arabic literatures side-by-side is to

1. Moshe Behar, “Fusing Arab Nahda, European Haskalah and Euro-Zionism: Eastern Jewish Thought in Late-Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Palestine,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 16, no. 2 (2017): 271–274.

2. Ella Elbaz, “Factoring Asymmetry into the Equation: On Juxtaposing Palestinian and Israeli Literatures,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 55, no. 1 (2024): 127. Elbaz lists Kfir Cohen Lustig, *Makers*

disprove that they are mutually exclusive,” Elbaz writes. “In the face of segregationist political agendas and social realities, these studies embrace an inclusive framework to enable a comparison that emphasizes a shared space of writing and the hybrid, complex identity of its writers” (129). Mizrahi literature, conceived at the nexus of Arab-Jewish identity and encounter, was often crucial to these studies precisely as the site where such “superior modes of coexistence” endured most intimately.

Nowadays, such shared spaces, even visionary ones, seem so distant that it is difficult to still turn to them for comfort or inspiration. While the violence raging in Palestine/Israel since October 2023 is clearly an outcome and extension of the aggressive regimes of control, siege, and settler colonialism that preceded it, there is no doubt that we are now in a different kind of moment. The long stalemate of “conflict management” and of slow, ongoing dispossession has been shattered, overtaken by atrocious bloodshed, hostility, and genocidal acts. As Tamir Sorek and Honaida Ghanim recently wrote, in this current stage of inseparable Israeli and Palestinian existence, “anxiety over being annihilated by the other side eclipses the possibility of imagining a common future”.³ In Palestine/Israel and in global discourse, any form of conversation, let alone empathy, across what has been narrowed down to “two sides,” is rendered suspect, seen as one or another form of treason. And as calls for boycott and divestment gain prominence, literary poetics of coexistence, solidarity, or even analogy and comparison are increasingly viewed as a mode of complicity that conceals structures of violence.

The two recent titles reviewed here, widely diverge in their scale, style, and form of argumentation: Mor’s is the more wide scoped and ambitious

of Worlds, Readers of Signs: Israeli and Palestinian Literature of the Global Contemporary (London: Verso Books, 2019); Hannan Hever and Mahmoud Kayyal, eds., מרחב ספרותי ערבי-עברי (An Arabic-Hebrew Literary Space, Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute Press, 2016); Mahmoud Kayyal, *Selected Issues in the Modern Intercultural Contacts Between Arabic and Hebrew Cultures: Hebrew, Arabic and Death* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing Between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Gil Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004). To these I might add Hannah Boast, *Hydrofictions: Water, Power and Politics in Israeli and Palestinian Literature* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Hella Bloom Cohen, *The Literary Imagination in Israel-Palestine: Orientalism, Poetry, and Biopolitics* (New York: Palgrave, 2016); Anna Bernard, *Rhetorics of Belonging: Nation, Narration, and Israel/Palestine* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014). This list includes only complete monographs and does not list individual articles or special issues.

3. Tamir Sorek and Honaida Ghanim, “Palestine/Israel Review: Carving Out a New Intellectual Space,” *Palestine/Israel Review* 1, no. 1 (2024): 1–20.

of the two, turning to an archive of Hebrew and Arabic texts ranging from the 1930s to the present to extract poetic figures of conflictual relations and analyze their political labor in Palestine/Israel, mediating relations between Palestinians, Ashkenazi Jews, and Mizrahi Jews. Abu Much's title is more narrowly demarcated, reassessing the work of two major Palestinian writers, Emile Habibi and Anton Shammas, in relation to their political positions as Israeli citizens and participants in the Hebrew cultural sphere. Nevertheless, both these titles demonstrate a departure from the redemptive or reparative approach of the "Oslo generation" of literary scholars. While obviously researched and composed before October 7, these two studies nonetheless provide a set of terms and a political framework that reflects our discursive moment of acute "hostile severance," to use one of Mor's key terms. If in earlier studies "coupling Israeli and Palestinian literatures has been framed as an act of scholarly defiance that is seen as going against established hierarchies," as Elbaz claims (133), then in these two recent books coupling is a means to explore the operative techniques of such hierarchies and the mechanisms of their persistence.

TRANSLATION IN COLONIAL SPACE

Abu Much's *Emile Habibi in Hebrew*, a lightly edited dissertation, is the more circumscribed of the two books, focusing narrowly on Emile Habibi's three novels – *Al-Waqā'i' al-gharība fī 'ikhtifā' Sa'īd Abī al-Nahs al-Mutashā'il* (1974, translated to English as *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*), *Akhtīyya* (1985, *Akhtiya*), and *Khurāfiyyat Sarāyā Bint al-Ghūl* (1985, translated as *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter*) and on their translation into Hebrew by Anton Shammas (in 1984, 1988, and 1993 respectively). Abu Much pursues a two-pronged exploration: first, a close reading of Anton Shammas's translation choices and the way they created a new Hebrew Habibi, a domesticated hybridized text that appeals to Hebrew readership and stages a binational community. Second, and more ambitiously, she claims that Hebrew translation has shaped Habibi's Arabic writing. Abu Much argues that the two novels that followed Habibi's celebrated *Pessoptimist* were composed with a Hebrew translation already in mind. The two later novels are therefore "born translated," to evoke Rebecca L. Walkowitz's term, or "literature [that]

approaches translation as medium and origin rather than as afterthought.”⁴ Not merely written for translation, “born translated” novels feature translation “as a thematic, structural, conceptual, and sometimes even typographical device”. This definition seems particularly apt for Habibi’s *Saraya*, which famously includes a translation challenge explicitly addressed to Shamma, thus anticipating its Hebrew translation. But while Walkowitz (who is not discussed in *Emile Habibi in Hebrew*) explores translation-aware Anglophone novels as a means of disturbing English’s presumably homogenous global hegemony, Abu Much examines what happens to both text and writer as they submit to translation into the colonial language in a settler colonial context. She argues that the creative choices involved in both the translations and in Habibi’s writing-for-translation are directly shaped by a distinct political vision, more thinkable in the late 1980s than today: a binational polity, which requires texts to speak simultaneously to two audiences, Palestinian and Jewish, in Arabic and in Hebrew. Abu Much, however, suspends an automatic celebratory assessment of this political vision in order to evaluate the concessions and losses that it entails, and the way it might limit rather than expands the text’s potential audience. For her, what is gained in translation is always, inevitably, a loss, in a zero-sum game of cultural authenticity and colonial concession.

Emile Habibi in Hebrew begins with a comprehensive introduction on “Politics, Literature, and Power,” which establishes a historical and theoretical context for the subsequent analysis of Habibi’s novels. It positions the “contact zone” between Arabic and Hebrew cultures within several political frameworks: a colonial structure of political repression established in 1948, an ideological Orientalist framework that envisioned Israel (and Hebrew) as a Western cultural entity, and a regime of separation that assumes the enmity and incommensurability between the two languages and demands a rigid separation between them. These frameworks are well established as the basis for studies of Israeli and Palestinian literary production, and they are the ones Mor elaborates on as well. Abu Much recaps several well-trodden debates on the political contexts of Hebrew literature and on Zionist national culture, and provides a literature review of studies on translation in colonial context from the 1990s, the heyday of postcolonial theory. These topics are refracted

4. Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 3–4.

through a recap of the inter-Hebrew disputes on the disruptive or destabilizing potential of Shammās's Hebrew writing, especially in Hannan Hever's work.

It is at this point that Abu Much moves beyond a condensed reiteration of the 1990s debates, beginning to historicize them and in this way mark her departure from them. Scholars such as Hever positioned Shammās's (and by extension Habibi's) works in a "postcolonial third space," a realm theorized by Homi Bhabha as the domain of hybridity and destabilization of fixed identities. But this third space of postcoloniality, Abu Much contends, was an artificial construct. An "organic" third space, she suggests, created through migration and daily encounters, would logically have been populated by Mizrahim as hybrid figures bridging between Arabs and Jews, but since Mizrahim sought to assimilate to the Jewish Ashkenazi national hegemony, a process that Mor reviews in detail, this third space did not materialize (61). Instead, what formed was a "synthetic" third space, occupied by liberal Ashkenazi intellectuals, detached from broader Israeli society (26). The artificially postcolonial intellectual sphere, detached from actual hegemony and reality, is the primary space in which Habibi's Hebrew works exist.

The division of roles between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews in this account is schematic – Yehuda Shenhav, for example, a key agent of postcolonial theory in Hebrew who Abu Much cites extensively, self identifies as an Arab Jew and is a prolific translator of Arabic literature. Nevertheless, the significant insight here (which is evident when observing political reality) is that the Israeli sphere could not afford to produce a "proper" postcolonial third space in Bhabha's sense since its intercultural activity still occurs in a *colonial space*. Rather than celebrating Habibi's Hebrew novels as an emblem of postcolonial hybridity, Abu Much concludes that in the Palestine/Israel context, the Arabic-to-Hebrew translation does not destabilize Hebrew, but rather eclipses and oppresses the original: "Treating the [Hebrew] translation as a revival of the original is to create again, and in a new variation, the Palestinian Nakba", she writes (60).

The following chapters of the book are dedicated to the three novels in their two versions. Chapter 1 examines Habibi's three novels in Arabic, and traces how *Akhtiyya* and *Saraya* differ from *The Pessoptimist* in their representation of Jews and Palestinians and hence in their political position. Politics are assumed to be transparent: "positive" representations of Jews are read simply as a means of gaining support of Jewish readers,

“negative” representations are coded for Arab readers. Furthermore, the timeline suggests that it is not Shammas's translations that are responsible for changes in Habibi's style, since *Akhtiyya* was published only shortly after Shammas's translation of *The Pessoptimist* came out, but rather that Habibi's own political outlook and involvement changed in a manner that is also reflected in his literary output, which became more personal, even nostalgic. Chapter 2 traces the reception of these novels in Arabic criticism in Israel and in surrounding countries. Chapter 3 turns to Shammas's translations, focusing on Palestinian space (particularly the use of Hebrew place names alongside or instead of the Arab names) and of Shammas's modes of introducing Arab and Palestinian heritage. The final chapter looks at the reception of these three translated novels in the Hebrew press.

At the conclusion of this survey, Abu Much can say that the more Habibi's work was accepted in Hebrew, the less it was accepted in Arabic. This discrepancy is accounted for by several factors. The first is Shammas's translation policy, which ultimately emerges as quite flexible and diverse, even contradictory. But whether Shammas domesticates the text or foreignizes it, expands on Habibi's Arabic or eliminates parts of it, Abu Much sees him smoothing over the text's difficulties and making its “Arabness” accessible to Jewish Hebrew readers (176). Considering Shammas's elaborate and erudite translations, rife with allusions to largely obscure Hebrew sources and composed in a linguistic register far removed from popular Israeli literature, the claim of accessibility might be overdone. Yet Abu Much claims that by making the Hebrew text more cohesive and stable than the Arabic original, Shammas's choices make the Palestinian-Israeli a more palatable and presentable fellow citizen, devising a Palestinian national identity that would be compatible with Israeli nationalism. The second reason for the increasing divergence between Arabic and Hebrew readership is Habibi's changed political stance, far more conciliatory towards the Israeli state, and the way this supposedly manifested in his later, more disjointed and impressionistic writing. With time, Abu Much argues, Habibi's original becomes increasingly closer to Shammas's anticipated translation (268). Coexistence, according to this reading, is largely formed on the terms of the colonizer. Abu Much provides a sober study of what such coexistence would take: concessions, erasures, and adaptations, alongside the more celebrated insistence on Palestinian presence and visibility.

CONFLICT AS A RELATION

The problem of translation, broadly conceived, also frames Mor's rich and multilayered *Conflicts*, albeit approached from the other direction: what is lost when supposedly universal terms addressing violence and antagonistic relations are applied to the specific context of Palestine/Israel? What local dynamics exceed their translation into a universal language or are concealed by it? Staging a conversation between political, juridical, and literary theory, Mor identifies a series of antagonistic figures that emerge from Israeli and Palestinian literature, cinema, and media, "substituting specific conflictual concepts for the universality of a singular conflict" to invite a new reading of the past and present of Palestine/Israel (1).

The framing of *Conflicts* thus speaks directly to some of the widespread talking points that circulated in the immediate wake of October 2023. On the one hand, *Conflicts* joins many others in its insistence that "conflict" is not an adequate term to the conditions in Palestine/Israel that preceded October 7 ("not a conflict not a war" became one of the recurring slogans in student protests). In its assumption of two antagonistic parties, the term conflict conceals the asymmetry of power, the involvement of numerous international actors, and the internal divisions of the two sides. Under ongoing colonial conditions, Mor quotes Ghassan Kanafani, engagements between Palestinians and Israelis are more akin to a conversation between the "sword and the neck" (41). The term "conflict" is a Zionist misnomer, concealing this reality.

And yet, the pundits who posit that this is not a conflict often also contend that it is not complicated, but rather a clear case of colonial aggression that is purposefully obscured by the insistence on its complexity. Mor demonstrates, on the other hand, that it *is* complicated – an immensely complex overlay of colonial techniques, mechanisms of racialization, and histories of migration, fragmentation, and dispossession – and that no term among those often evoked to describe it, such as colonialism, settler-colonialism, or apartheid, is sufficiently accurate. This recognition of complexity is not a means to end conversation, nor does it preclude holding a clear ethical and political stance. To the contrary, complexity demands that we take the time to learn and discern this specific set of oppressive conditions.

Mor extracts five antagonistic or conflictual concepts from close readings of literary and visual texts – *ishtibāk* (clashing engagement),

levaṭim (disorienting dilemmas), *ikhtifāʾ* (anti/colonial disappearance), *ḥok* (mediating law), and *inqisām* (hostile severance) – and uses them as lenses to diagnose social/political life in Palestine from the beginning of Zionist migration to the present. As such, the book does not only offer nuanced critical readings but also substantive and detailed accounts of the sociopolitical history of Israeli and Palestinian societies, from overviews of mechanisms of Palestinian exploitation to specific episodes such as the Yemenite Children Disappearance Affair. Such granular elaboration substantiates the principled claim to move away from universalizing paradigms, instead allowing theory to emerge from local particularities. While all this “context” makes the book accessible to readers who are unfamiliar with Israeli society, Mor has the rare skill of making much-studied processes – for example, the ideological and materialist underpinnings of Mizrahi racialization – appear fresh, comprehensive, and thought-provoking, thanks to her ability to draw connections across periods and disciplines and declare decisive conclusions.

The introduction presents the normative concept of political conflict, which is in essence juridical: “conflict” sets up a legal arena in which two equal parties dispute in expectation of an ultimate, zero-sum decision or resolution. This sanctioned mode of conflict conceals both the law-making violence of colonial conquest and the law-preserving violence of the state: self-justified by the threatening specter of the random, unorganized violence of “a state of nature,” the juridical notion of conflict becomes the only sanctioned one, authorizing state violence and simultaneously obscuring it. This definition, which focuses on conflict as a product and a technology of the colonial state, marks *Conflicts*’ divergence from earlier literary studies on Jewish and Arab conflictual relations: Mor’s notion of conflict does not begin with identities or groups, but rather with the institutions of state and law that govern them.

Each of the following chapters elaborates a poetic-historical “mode” that demarcates conflictual relations in a manner that exceeds or challenges the self-effacing normative logic of legal judgement. Chapter One, “Conflict (Judgment/*Ishtibāk*),” teases out the limits of the juridical concept of conflict as judgement through a reading of Ghassan Kanafani’s “‘Aʿid ila Ḥayfa” (Returning to Haifa, 1969), demonstrating how the scene of judgement is always already skewed by the material parameters set up by the colonizer. Instead of appealing to judgement, Mor develops Samera Esmeir’s concept of “clashing engagement” (*ishtibāk*) as a mode of ongoing and non-teleological struggle. *Ishtibāk* seems to distill Mor’s

overall contention that conflictual relations are *still* a relation, and that some sort of transformation, evaluation, or conversation does pass through it, albeit through silences, digressions, and catachresis (what she calls “creative metaphors”). Chapter Two, “*Levaṭim* (Disorienting Dilemmas),” unpacks Zionism’s prevalent posture of “shooting and crying” by examining the political work of indecision and inner conflict in two stories by Haim Hazaz. If *ishtibāk* is a mode of struggle or relation (a struggling relation) under asymmetrical conditions, *levaṭim* is a colonial technology that allows the Zionist subject to both distance himself and still participate in the colonial project, allowing it to proceed at pace but with an ethical veneer. The chapter adds to this political analysis by examining how Oriental others – in this case, Yemenite Jews – are viewed as free from such internal conflicts and can be racialized as natural laborers. The following chapter, “*Ikhtifāʾ* (Anti/colonial Disappearance),” illuminates the remarkably common trope of disappearance in Palestinian cultural production, especially in works by Palestinian citizens of Israel. While the chapter dedicates some space to the manner in which disappearance (of characters, of entire communities, of subjectivity) becomes the condition of possibility for narrative, communication, and the production of knowledge, the majority of the chapter positions *ikhtifāʾ* as a colonial technology distinct to Palestine/Israel, combining elements of segregation, extraction, and racialization through erasure. Containing facets of settler colonialism, extractive colonialism, and apartheid, it is not reduceable to any of them. Literature both reflects this technology and appropriates it as an anti-colonial literary trope.

Chapter Four focuses on Dalia Ravikovitch’s poem “Shir eres meturgam me-yidish” (A Lullaby Translated From Yiddish, 1989) to introduce a theoretical discussion on the workings of the law. Through Ravikovitch’s selective citation of a legal case of Israeli soldiers’ brutality against Palestinians, Mor explores both the exceptional logic of the juridical, which in turn normalizes routine violence, and the possibility of offering an unmediated, unabstracted account of violence. Untangling the philological resonances of the Hebrew word *hok* (law) allows Mor to creatively pursue how Ravikovitch’s poetic practice explores the ability to bear witness in a manner removed from the abstracted and exceptionalist logic of judgement. Finally, Chapter Five “*Inqisām* (Hostile Severance),” moves back to take stock of a wide terrain, surveying a host of violent fractures that cut through current cultural, political, and social landscapes in Israel and in Palestine. The guiding question here is

seemingly simple: why are groups that could, and perhaps should, be in solidarity, are not, and are in fact increasingly hostile to one another? Mor examines several kinds of severance in this chapter: assimilating severance is the way Mizrahim have been integrated into Zionist society, made “Arabs by form, function, and class” (204) but then de-Arabized, or severed from Arab culture, to be integrated into Jewish nationalism. This mechanism led to the second form of hostile severance explored in this chapter, the hostility of Mizrahi Jews towards Palestinians. Mor reads the television show *Fauda*, which depicts a unit of Jewish Mizrahi *mista‘aravim*, or undercover agents, as “a text by which Mizrahi men reflect on the role assigned to them in the Israeli economy of violence” (212). Analyzing the way the show depicts Jews and Arabs as different only in their access to domination and sheer force, Mor explores the contours of Anti-Arab Mizrahi hatred, which, she claims, is devoid of the claims to superiority that characterized Ashkenazi Zionist Orientalist hostility. Finally, Mor turns to Palestinian writer Adania Shibli’s short story “Dust,” which indexes a surging sense of hostility within Palestinian society as a function of technologies of border control and social manipulation – the cultivation of collaborators – which Mizrahi Jews are increasingly in charge of executing.

Throughout these chapters, Mor negotiates not only the political space, but also juridical practice and economic structures as meaningful contexts and sources for poetic analysis, an enriching perspective in a field that has extensively focused on politics as a field of representations and identifications. It is also noteworthy that Mizrahi lives and experiences are central to the dynamics of almost every chapter, emerging as crucial to Zionist ideology and praxis. Mor notes that “Mizrahi Jews tend to complicate given categories, troubling the dividing line between colonizer and colonized, colonial and postcolonial” (6). But this is not because Mizrahim are presumed to occupy a culturally hybrid “third space,” as theory stipulates, but because they are multifaceted society subjected to and acting within an ideological regime that deems them internal to Zionism but simultaneously subordinate.

BEFORE / AFTER HYBRIDITY

It is this move away from a broadly conceived “hybridity” and the ambivalence of a “shared space” that marks Mor’s and Abu Much’s departure from an earlier generation of scholarship, a departure that is

grounded in their recognition of the ongoing colonial condition in Palestine/Israel. Undoubtedly, postcolonial theory was the most important toolbox of the reparative mode of Israeli and Palestinian literatures comparative scholarship. Postcolonial theory enabled scholars to translate power hierarchies into cultural relations, to identify the effects of Orientalism in Hebrew cultural dynamics, and to inquire after the politics of cultural representation and access. But as Ella Shohat has argued, postcolonial theory had a unique trajectory in Israeli academia and by extension in Hebrew literary studies. Reflecting on critical trends in Israeli academia in the same period as Behar, Shohat claims that postcolonial theory was translated into Hebrew and adopted to critique Zionism under the paradigm of “Bhabha beyond Said.” Not only was the work of Homi Bhabha translated into Hebrew before foundational anticolonial texts by Franz Fanon and Edward Said, but it was also presented as surpassing or transcending Said’s work (65).⁵ Israeli postcolonial writing thus skipped over what was framed as the “rigid binaries” of colonial asymmetry and stereotype, instead picking up and developing on Bhabha’s notion of a postcolonial “third space” of hybridity, fluidity, and ambivalence. Shohat sees this intellectual history as directly related to the shortsightedness of post-Zionist critique that emerged in the same period. “The relative legitimacy of ‘postzionism,’” she writes, “has derived precisely from a sense of opting out or bypassing the question of Zionism’s relation to colonialism” (64).

Regardless of its divergent political nuances, an intellectual investment in the productive ambivalence of the “in-between space” stipulated in Bhabha’s work characterized much of the comparative literary scholarship in the redemptive mode, as it sought out defiant moments of trespass, ambiguity, and misidentification. Therefore, it is perhaps telling that the two scholars who introduced the “Bhabha beyond Said” paradigm into Hebrew were Hanan Hever, Abu Much’s dissertation advisor, and Adi Ophir, one of Mor’s early mentors. Mor and Abu Much’s first monographs mark a polite yet decisive departure from this previous generation, by insisting on the ongoing colonial situation (rather than postcolonial) as the defining condition for cultural production in Palestine/Israel. Rather than identifying and celebrating a “third space” as a value in and of itself, the two books carefully unpack the logics of

5. Ella Shohat, “The ‘Postcolonial’ in Translation: Reading Said in Hebrew,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, no. 3 (2004): 65.

racialization (in Mor) and the cultural losses (in Abu Much) that scaffold the concept of hybridity.

One of the reasons they can do so is that these two books engage directly with Arabic language criticism (from Palestine and elsewhere) where anticolonialism was and remains the prevalent approach. This is a body of scholarship and commentary that had little presence in either Hebrew or Anglophone studies previously, and its incorporation necessitates new frameworks and conclusions.

What, then, is the relationship between politics and poetics? There are two very different models here, not just in terms of their scale. Abu Much has a straightforward definition: the writer retains a political vision (or a specific political complaint), and he puts his writing to work towards making this vision a reality. As readers, we can trace the contours of the writer's political vision from his creative choices, and a book's reception is largely decided by the extent that its political vision can be accommodated by the political vision of the reviewer or the general public. Mor claims for a relationship between poetics and politics that is far less intentional and direct, noting that *Conflicts* "moves beyond the referential qualities of literature to consider poetics as a kind of diagnostic, capable of reconceptualizing politics" (12). The direction of her analysis is opposite – poetics, a loose definition which here includes rhetorical devices, metaphorical structures, and narrative tropes, are both an analytic reflection of and an intervention in minute and tangible political dynamics. These poetic figures therefore *do* politics in various ways: either as a mechanism of racialization (*levatim*), as a tool of critique or dissensus (Ravikovitch's alternative concept of *hok*), or as a model for resistant praxis (such as *ishtibāk* or *ikhtifā*). *Inqisām* is the most referential of Mor's poetic figures, but it is a term that allows for linking seemingly distinct cultural objects and political phenomena.

The production of new terms is itself, of course, political, as it rejects the primacy of universalized examples and instead argues for local specificity, agency, and resourcefulness. Quite simply, it is a mode of producing new knowledge. Reading Abu Much, I found myself searching for a specific term to define Shammas's particular translational praxis beyond the familiar "domestication" and "foreignization" coined by Laurence Venuti (since Shammas, as Abu Much shows, does both with no particular method or principle). What to name the technique of a translator insisting on being seen, trying to argue his way into a colonial order organized under the principle of *ikhtifā*? What is the conflictual mode

that is staged in his translation, and in Habibi's two meandering and fragmentary, supposedly conciliatory, late novels? These questions demonstrate how Mor's *Conflicts* has produced, beyond an archive of specific conflictual poetic forms, a way of addressing new critical inquiries to literary texts.