

The Arabic Afterlives of S. Yizhar's *Khirbet Khiz'ah*: Translating Global Modernist Affect between Empathy and Distress

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ABSTRACT: Like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), S. Yizhar's *Khirbet Khiz'ah* (1949) has been read locally as embodying liberal ideals of empathy. Some Hebrew writers further believed that Yizhar's text positively inclined Arabic-language readers toward Israel by broadcasting the image of an empathetic Zionist. However, analyzing the novella's Arabic translations and receptive afterlives suggests a more complex dynamic that partly mirrors Conrad's pained postcolonial Anglophone reception. Namely, while Palestinian critics *within* historic Palestine have read empathy tried by circumstance, critics in the wider Arab world have read a historical testament broadcasting not empathy but personal distress. What emerges is a model of translation as transaction between currencies in an affective economy whereby empathy and personal distress refract as they circulate through the myriad epistemological spaces of Edward Said's crisis of modernism.

A CURIOUS TRANSLATIONAL INTERTEXT LINKS TWO WIDELY READ WORKS, S. Yizhar's *Khirbet Khiz'ah* (1949) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in what Sara Ahmed terms an *affective economy*.¹ It is a global affective economy of liberal values and their limits, of empathy and personal distress, comprised of the modernist text as it travels and transacts from one affective currency to another across asymmetries of power. The two

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¹ Reading emotions as "creat[ing] the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies or worlds" (117), Sara Ahmed defines an *affective economy* as a discursive space in which "emotions work by sticking figures together... creat[ing] the very effect of a collective" (119). See Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 117–40.

celebrated texts, one a canonical Israeli novella of protest,² the other a classic of British modernism indicting European exploitation of the Congo,³ further share in a number of related global literary phenomena: a modernist aesthetic that privileges the subjective experience of the narrator, acute ethical concerns vis-à-vis conquest and colonization, and an intimation of a more universal knowledge just beyond the horizon of the mimetic world of the text.⁴ It is within this global context, positioned at the intersection of affect studies, translation studies, and postcolonial theory, that this article both contextualizes and interprets the Arabic-language translation and reception of Yizhar's *Khirbet Khiz'ah*. On the one hand, the novella's Arabic-language afterlives intervene in and complicate Hebrew-language and global discourses of empathy as a liberal value with ambassadorial promise. On the other, in mirroring the postcolonial Anglophone afterlives of Conrad's novella, *Khirbet Khiz'ah* in Arabic reveals a hitherto obscure and uncanny relationality: a multilayered transtextuality⁵ between Conrad's and Yizhar's texts both in life and afterlife.⁶

The translational intertext sets the relational stage. Reverberating far beyond the pages of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is the haunting phrase "The horror, the horror!" (178). This final utterance of Kurtz, imperial ivory trader gone mad in the depths of distant Africa, constitutes what Cedric Watts identifies as a "thematic nexus" (215). "The horror!" proclaims judgment on Kurtz's own corrupt actions on the continent, entrancement with the compelling temptations of blood

² Published in Hebrew in 1949 immediately after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and included in the Israeli high school curriculum since 1964, *Khirbet Khiz'ah* comprises a first-person narration by a Jewish soldier in a unit tasked with depopulating and destroying an Arab village during the 1948 war. Interspersed with meandering descriptions of flora and fauna are the juvenile antics of the teenage soldiers and the sensitive narrator's internal questioning. Yizhar himself served in intelligence during the war, later as a representative in Parliament, and ultimately as minister of education. He is considered a founding member of the 1948 generation of Hebrew literature and continued to produce literary works until his death in 2006. See S. Yizhar, "Khirbet Khiz'ah," in *Arba'ah sipurim* [Four stories] (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz ha-me'uhad, 1959). Subsequent references will be provided in parentheses within the text.

³ Published in 1899 during King Leopold II's brutal rule over the Congo under the "Congo Free State" (1885–1908), *Heart of Darkness* comprises ship captain Marlow's narration of his journey up the Congo River to retrieve legendary ivory trader Kurtz. The journey exposes for Marlow the excesses of the colonial endeavor in general and the horror of Kurtz's unchecked will to power in particular. Polish by birth, Conrad served as a sailor on French and British merchant ships and in 1886 became a British citizen. His 1890 trip to the Congo in the service of a Belgian company inspired the novella, and by 1893 he had devoted himself exclusively to writing. See Joseph Conrad and Cedric Watts, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, rev. 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Subsequent references will be provided in parentheses within the text.

⁴ Edward Said suggests that *Heart of Darkness* "encourage[s] us to sense the potential of a reality that seemed inaccessible to imperialism." Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 29. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically within the text.

⁵ According to Gérard Genette's typology, *transtextuality* is an overarching category including "everything that brings [the text] into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts" (81). It includes both *intertextuality*, or the presence of one text in another, and *architextuality*, which he defines as "the relationship of inclusion that links each text to the various types of discourse it belongs to" (82). See Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 81–83.

⁶ References to Conrad's novella have long suffused analyses of Israeli literature and its engagement with Palestine and Palestinians: as argumentative foil distinguishing classical Zionism from European imperialism (Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005], 98–99), as cue for the confrontation with evil within (Joseph Cohen, *Voices of Israel: Essays on and Interviews with Yehuda Amichai, A. B. Yehoshua, T. Carmi, Aharon Appelfeld, and Amos Oz* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990], 173), and as self-evident analogy for the moral journey of the Israeli soldier in the Occupied Territories (Adia Mendelsohn-Maoz, *Borders, Territories, and Ethics: Hebrew Literature in the Shadow of the Intifada* [West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2018], 1–4). This project builds upon these readings in positing a broader relationality.

and treasure which he has not fully disavowed, and condemnation of both human nature below and agnostic cosmos above (215). It is this “horror” that *Khirbet Khiz'ah*'s English translators Nicholas deLange and Yaacob Dweck successfully channel when the Jewish soldiers encounter two wrinkled, foul-smelling, elderly Palestinian women in a “senseless stupor,” who “in a sudden panic or alarm . . . had fallen, or been abandoned” amid the commotion and piles of discarded household wares: “[E]xposed to the sun like moles in the midday, like a terrible deformity that had always been hidden indoors and had suddenly been exposed in all its horror [*be-khol zva'ato*], and here it was before us. What could you do with them but spit in disgust, and gag, and not look, and run from here — *The horror [palatzut]! The horror!*”⁷

If Kurtz's *horror* is his articulation of an epiphany at once personal, political, and existential that provides moral clarity to Conrad's narrator Marlow, then the *palatzut* of Yizhar's soldiers here expresses the delayed internalization of a multilayered shock.⁸ It is a shock that plants the seeds of an epiphany to come for Yizhar's narrator. The epiphany is born of the Zionist soldiers' own youthfulness, celebrated and severed from the immediate historical diasporic Jewish past, held up against the aged visage of the two Palestinian women who in their mole-like rootedness in the earth represent the offal from a different act of historical severing. This other severing, that of the Palestinian villagers from their ancestral lands, is also the work of the soldiers' own hands.⁹

Empirically speaking, Yizhar was most likely unfamiliar with *Heart of Darkness* when he wrote *Khirbet Khiz'ah*.¹⁰ Indeed, Bart Moore-Gilbert suggests that this *appearance* of an intertext with *Heart of Darkness* is an interpretive error born of his (Moore-Gilbert's) own reliance on the 2008 English translation of Yizhar's text.¹¹ However, a closer analysis suggests that it was actually *through Conrad* that Hebrew-to-English translators Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck were able to more forcefully evoke *Khirbet Khiz'ah*'s underlying biblical register. As Watts (215–16) notes, Kurtz's final utterance constitutes an allusion to psalm 55:¹² “My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me” (Ps. 55:4–5 KJV). The original Hebrew of the psalm reveals Conrad's “horror!” as none other than Yizhar's *palatzut*: “Libi yahil be-kirbi ve-eimot mavet naflu 'alay / Yirah va-ra'ad yavo vi va-tehaseni palatzut” (Ps. 55:5–6). Verse 6 thus constitutes the novellas' biblical place of meeting, nested within a psalm entreating deliverance from the violence of corrupt communities and unfaithful friends.¹³

⁷ S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, trans. Nicolas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck (German Colony, Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2008), 53. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically within the text.

⁸ The Hebrew *palatzut* connotes horror, fear, shock, and trembling. Avraham Even-Shoshan, “Peletz,” in *Ha-milon he-hadash* [The new dictionary] (Jerusalem: Sivan, 1979).

⁹ As expressed by the title of Moshe Shamir's foundational work: Moshe Shamir, *Be-mo yadav: Pirkei Eliq* [With his own hands: Elik's story] (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1975).

¹⁰ Bart Moore-Gilbert writes that at first this phrase convinced him that Yizhar had read Conrad. However, he explains, *Heart of Darkness* appeared in Hebrew only in 1961, and even if Yizhar had “stumbled upon” the English text earlier, Yizhar's next of kin “doubted that his command of English was sufficient to have enabled him to make real sense of it.” See Bart Moore-Gilbert, “Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessimism,” *Interventions* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Watts offers Ps. 55:4–5 as Conrad's inspiration. Because of variation in numbering across religious traditions, this corresponds to Ps. 55:5–6 in the Hebrew.

¹³ Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and PHEME PERKINS, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, fully revised 5th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 826–27.

In both *Khirbet Khiz'ah* and *Heart of Darkness*, an intertextual allusion to the biblical *palatzut* of psalm 55 expresses an overarching sense of a generalized, agentless, all-pervading condition, pointing toward a sense of moral entrapment from which there is no escape. Indeed, when Yizhar's narrator looks inward, crying in his depths, "Bleeding heart, bleeding heart, bleeding heart!" (81), he embodies what Edward Said, channeling Conrad, has termed the "crisis of modernism." Per Said, the modernist text responded to the challenge of the other "with the formal irony of a culture unable either to say yes, we should give up control, or no, we shall hold on regardless: a self-conscious contemplative passivity forms itself . . . into paralyzed gestures of aestheticized powerlessness."¹⁴ It is this aestheticized powerlessness that Conrad and Yizhar weave through their allusions to psalm 55. In other words, drawing on Ahmed's terminology, the two texts appear to be in "affective alignment" vis-à-vis this powerlessness and its aestheticization: they ascribe to it the same affective value.¹⁵ Thus, the circular intertextuality of horror/*palatzut*, in tandem with underlying thematic and aesthetic continuities, suggests the two texts' circulation within a shared, translingual affective economy querying ethics, duty, and responsibility in the face of privilege, but stopping short of action toward outright rebellion.¹⁶

However, Arabic renderings of Yizhar's *palatzut* further serve as a reminder that affective economies are necessarily populated by divergent currencies. Although Arabic translations of both psalm 55:5/55:6 (Van Dyke) and *Heart of Darkness* do indeed render horror/*palatzut* as the abstract *ahwāl* (terrors),¹⁷ the two extant Arabic translations of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* eschew this option. Instead they employ a verb conjugated in the first-person plural, past tense: "faza'nā [we were afraid]!"¹⁸ Here, horror-turned-fear adheres to an agent, resulting from a specific act, experienced by specific actors in a specific context, and thus no longer all-pervading throughout the cosmos. It further ascribes a tense, critically suggesting that, for the speaker, fear's moral sting may have already dissipated with time.

Yizhar's Hebrew-to-Arabic translators have here produced what André Lefevere terms "refraction," defined as any adaptation of a literary work for a different audience, including acts

¹⁴ Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 313. He further cites Georg Lukács, *Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 126–34. On Hebrew modernism more broadly, see Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics*, *Contraversions 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Ahmed suggests that members of "affective communities" experience shared affective orientations toward social goods. To belong is thus to be "aligned." Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 37.

¹⁶ The affective alignment in question is further illuminated by a number of concepts. On "moral luck" in the Zionist context, see Mendelsohn-Maoz, *Borders, Territories, and Ethics*, 27–44. On the mental health impacts of colonization upon colonizer and colonized, see Frantz Fanon et al., *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004). On the complex relationship between Zionism and colonialism, see Gershon Shafir, "Zionism and Colonialism: A Comparative Approach," in *The Israel/Palestine Question: A Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Ilan Pappé (London: Routledge, 2007), 81–96; Derek J. Penslar, "Zionism, Colonialism and Postcolonialism," *Journal of Israeli History* 20, nos. 2–3 (June 1, 2001): 84–98.

¹⁷ *Lisān al-'Arab* defines the *hawl* (pl. *ahwāl*) as a "fear from something that attacks without warning, such as fear [hawl] of night or of the sea." Muḥammad Ibn Mukarram Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* [Language of the Arabs] (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 4722. This and all subsequent translations from Arabic sources are my own.

¹⁸ Yizhār Smilānškī and Tawfiq Fayyād, *Khirbat Khiz'a: Riwaya* [Khirbet Khiz'ah: A novel] (Beirut: Dār al-Kalima, 1981), 61; Rashād 'abd Allāh al-Shāmī and Yizhār Smilānškī, *Al-Filasṭīniyūn wa-al-iḥsās al-zā'if bi-al-dhanb fī al-adab al-isrā'īlī* [The Palestinians and counterfeit feelings of guilt in Israeli literature], 1st ed. (Cairo: Al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabī, 1988), 208. Subsequent references to these works will be provided parenthetically within the text.

of translation, criticism, and teaching.¹⁹ Per Lefevere, refractions are inevitably “misunderstandings and misconceptions” (234) that aim for a degree of containment so that literary works “not be allowed to get too far out of step with the other systems in a given society” (236). Reading Lefevere and Ahmed together, refraction perhaps creates a type of affective *realignment* whereby one affective currency is transacted to another, rendering a literary text *affectively* intelligible for a new audience. In this vein, the refraction of *palatzut-to-faza'nā* implicitly connotes not an intensification of a single, “all-enveloping” (Said, 22) narrative but, rather, an acknowledgment of “a network of interdependent histories that it would be inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand” (Said, 19). Rendering *palatzut* as *faza'nā* thus is not only a translation from Hebrew to Arabic but a translational transaction whereby one affective currency is transacted into another.

It is thus possible to discern two affective currencies circulating and transacting among the English and Arabic translations of the Hebrew-language *Khirbet Khiz'ah*. These currencies roughly correspond with Charles Maier's notion of an epistemological fault line between what he terms “Holocaust Memory,” an optimistic narrative of Enlightenment progress from which the Holocaust was but an aberration, and “Postcolonial Memory,” a narrative of modernity as inherently and irreparably destructive.²⁰ The textual spaces of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* and *Heart of Darkness* alternatively constitute and prefigure Maier's epistemological space of Holocaust Memory. Here, in the circumscribed space of the literary texts, empathy as liberal value possesses great thematic and political purchase. Conversely, in Maier's epistemological space of Postcolonial Memory, expressed by the Arabic *faza'nā*, “empathy” expressed coterminously with power casts a dark, dangerous shadow.²¹

Thus, within the affective currency of Conrad's *horror* and Yizhar's *palatzut* lies the hope of a redemptive empathy. By recognizing the humanity of the other, the script goes, Yizhar's protagonist and Conrad's Marlow each becomes what Hannah Wojciehowski calls “the hero who exculpates the group.”²² The affective currency of the Arabic *faza'nā*, on the other hand, casts this hope as a self-referential illusion; the empathy of the powerful is unmasked as mere personal distress, a self-oriented emotion seeking to alleviate one's own discomfort.²³ Empathy thus refracts

¹⁹ André Lefevere, “Mother Courage's Cucumbers: Text, System and Refraction in a Theory of Literature (Originally Published in 1982),” in *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2004), 235. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically within the text.

²⁰ Charles Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 807–31. As quoted in Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, “Introduction: The Holocaust and the Nakba; A New Syntax of History, Memory and Political Thought,” in *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History*, ed. Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, Religion, Culture and Public Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 3–4.

²¹ On critiques of empathy, see Lauren Gail Berlant, ed., *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, Essays from the English Institute (New York: Routledge, 2004); Lynn M. Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Carolyn Pedwell, *Affective Relations: The Transnational Politics of Empathy*, Thinking Gender in Transnational Times (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). Subsequent references to Pedwell's work will be provided parenthetically within the text.

²² Hannah Wojciehowski, personal conversation with the author. See also Hannah [Dolora] C. Wojciehowski, “Francis Petrarch: First Modern Friend,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 282–83.

²³ On the distinction between empathic concern, comprising both cognitive and emotional components and distinguishing between self and other (here “empathy”), on the one hand, and personal distress, on the other,

as personal distress as it transacts between currencies across asymmetries of power in an affective economy. Indeed, in this light the two currencies appear mutually constitutive of one another as they circulate globally across divergent positionalities. To paraphrase Said, it is here, in a global affective economy, that the affective currencies of empathy and distress are recognizably “circumscribed by a larger history” (24) of power, erasure, and resistance.

THE AFFECTIVE CURRENCY OF EMPATHY: LOCAL READINGS OF CONRAD AND YIZHAR

Operating within the space of “horror [*palatzut*]!” as an all-pervading cosmic condition, contemporaneous local criticism of *Heart of Darkness* and *Khirbet Khiz'ah*, respectively, together trace the contours of an affective currency in which the literary text incubates an empathy with the potential to *do things* in the wide world outside the bounds of the written page.

Heart of Darkness tackles a political problem that critics believed to have been “resolved” within Conrad’s lifetime. Citing contemporary English-language praise of the novella as a “heavy indictment” and “the most powerful thing ever written on the subject,” Watts notes that *Heart of Darkness* “contributed to the international campaign of protest which eventually curbed the Belgian excesses in the Congo” (xxiv–xxv). King Leopold II’s personal rule over the Congo ended in 1908, although the Congo remained a Belgian colony until 1960.

While *Khirbet Khiz'ah* speaks to a very different history, early Hebrew-language praise of the novella nevertheless mirrors early European readings of *Heart of Darkness*. Indeed, as Anita Shapira demonstrates in her landmark article “Hirbet Hizah: Between Remembrance and Forgetting,” early Israeli readers (1949–51) by and large praised the text’s ability to depict its Arab characters with empathy, celebrating it as an expression of conscience and courage.²⁴ However, the Hebrew-language reception of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* differs from the European reception of *Heart of Darkness* in an important way: from the outset, Israeli intellectuals speculated as to the ambassadorial promise of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* among Arab readers.²⁵ In other words, they envisioned a translingual affective economy in which the Hebrew-language novella could broadcast the image of an empathetic Zionist, thus inviting Arab readers, in turn, to view the Zionist endeavor more favorably and, implicitly, to view Palestinian dispossession in 1948 as a sin for which Israelis might atone without abdicating the spoils or their newfound majority.

For example, in 1951 Israeli journalist Gavriel Stern contended that the depiction of a Jewish conscience in *Khirbet Khiz'ah* had played a powerful ambassadorial role among the Arab Left. Writing in *Al-ha-mishmar*, the daily paper of the socialist-Zionist Ha-shomer ha-tza’ir youth movement, Stern quoted an “anonymous” article from 1949 in *Al-Šarīḥ*, a Palestinian newspaper from Nablus, to argue that “*Khirbet Khiz'ah* has encouraged progressive elements in the Arab camp.” He further explained that these progressive Arabs saw in *Khirbet Khiz'ah* evidence that,

see C. Daniel Batson, “These Things Called Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena,” in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 7–8.

²⁴ Anita Shapira, “Hirbet Hizah: Between Remembrance and Forgetting,” *Jewish Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2000): 1–62. On readers in 1949–51, see 10–31. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically within the text. Shapira further notes that during 1949–51, the expulsion of Palestinians during the war was considered a “moral problem” within Israeli discourse. But with the shifting exigencies of international politics, the expulsion, which had been “acknowledged as an obvious fact of the war, was now transformed into a virtual ‘state secret’” (25).

²⁵ On strategic forms of empathy, including “ambassadorial empathy,” see Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, 142.

in Stern's words, "a deep love of permanent peace' beats in the heart of the Jewish nation."²⁶ Among other places, Stern's reading reappears, via Shapira's article, on the book jacket of the novella's 2008 English-language translation.²⁷ Celebrated legal scholar Amnon Rubinstein echoes Stern's mind-set nearly thirty years later, noting that writers of Yizhar's 1948 generation saw their experiences of guilt toward the dispossessed Palestinians as "pointing, even if only theoretically, towards a possible future in which peace and justice would prevail."²⁸ And while the founding fathers of Hebrew academic literary criticism tended to look for abstract meanings and universal themes in the novella (such as nihilism,²⁹ truth,³⁰ and love³¹), more recent criticism has returned to questions of ethics raised by Stern, Rubinstein, and others. Such criticism has employed a variety of lenses, including Rachel Feldhay-Brenner's analysis of trauma,³² Gil Hochberg's articulation of intergenerational haunting,³³ and Uri Cohen's analysis of "empathic sadism" and "shooting and crying" as constitutive of the "security narrative."³⁴ Like Cohen's analyses, Hannan Hever's readings have focused on self-exoneration³⁵ and in this way echo some of the novella's Arabic-language criticism from more than thirty years prior. Thus, in returning to the question of ethics, these critics build an important foundation for reading *Khirbet Khiz'ah* as a site of a transtextual negotiation of divergent histories and affective currencies.

²⁶ Gavri'el Shtern, "Sifrut u-folitikah (be-shulei 'pulmus Yizhar)" [Literature and politics (concerning the "Yizhar controversy")], *'Al-ha-mishmar*, May 25, 1951. This and all subsequent translations from Hebrew are my own except where noted.

²⁷ Adina Hoffman, Ibis Editions, email correspondence with the author, April 16, 2019.

²⁸ Amnon Rubinshtayn, *Lihyot 'am hofshi* [To be a free people] (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1977), 129. As quoted in Arabic in al-Shāmi and Smilānski, *Al-Filasṭīniyūn*, 83.

²⁹ Barukh Kurtzavayl, *Bein hazon le-vein ha-absurdi: Praqim le-derekh sifriteinu ba-me'ah ha-'esrim* [Between a vision and the absurd: Chapters on the path to our literature in the twentieth century] (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1966), 157.

³⁰ Dan Miron, "S Yizhar: Some General Observations," in *Midnight Convoy and Other Stories*, by S Yizhar (Tel Aviv: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1969), 269.

³¹ Gershon Shaked, *Ha-siporet ha-'ivrit, 1880–1970: Be-hevlei ha-zman; Ha-realizm ha-yisre'eli 1938–1980* [Hebrew fiction, 1880–1970: Through the trials of time; Israeli realism, 1938–1980], vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1977), 225.

³² Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli, Arab, and Jewish Writers Re-visioning Culture*, Studies on Israel (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 152–72.

³³ Gil Hochberg, "A Poetics of Haunting: From Yizhar's Hirbeh to Yehoshua's Ruins to Koren's Crypts," *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3 (2012): 55–69.

³⁴ Uri S. Cohen, *Ha-nosah ha-bithoni ve-tarbut ha-milhama ha-'ivrit* [Security style and the Hebrew culture of war] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2017), 176–77.

³⁵ On narcissism in the novella, see Hannan Hever, "Shum gerush lo poter klum: 'Al *Hirbet-Hiz'ah* me-et S. Yizhar" [Deportation doesn't solve anything: On *Khirbet Khiz'ah* by S Yizhar], in "Mirqamim: Tarbut, sifrut, folqlor, le-Galit Hazan-Rokem" [Textures: Culture, literature, and folklore, for Galit Hazan-Rokem], special issue, *Mehkarei Yerushalayim be-sifrut 'ivrit* 2 (2013): 601–14. While the false binary whereby Hebrew- and English-language criticism of Hebrew literature constitutes the "field" whereas that published in Arabic sits apart is problematic, it nevertheless illuminates a political reality, however historically contingent. Another comparative reading of a text's Hebrew and Arabic receptions is Lital Levy's analysis of Emile Habibi's *Pessoptimist*. See Lital Levy, *Poetic Trespass: Writing between Hebrew and Arabic in Israel/Palestine* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 17, 108–30.

EMPATHY IN REFRACTION: THE POSTCOLONIAL ANGLOPHONE HEART OF DARKNESS AND THE ARABIC KHIRBET KHIZ'AH

In the late 1970s, renowned Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe forever changed how *Heart of Darkness* would be read in academic settings worldwide. In a Chancellor's Lecture given at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (1975), later published in the *Massachusetts Review* (1977), Achebe lamented the status of the canonized *Heart of Darkness* as "permanent literature,"³⁶ deigning it "an offensive and deplorable book" (790) that "celebrates [the] dehumanization" of Africans" (788). Narrator Marlow, he argued, "toss[es] out" the "bleeding heart sentiments" of the "English liberal tradition" (787) yet always "manag[es] to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white and black people" (787). Thus, for Achebe, Conrad was at once a "purveyor of comforting myths" (784) and a "bloody racist" (788). On the other hand, as Watts notes, other postcolonial critics, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Frances B. Singh, and C. P. Sarvan, made more allowances for Conrad and his work, noting that despite the text's problems, it was nevertheless progressive for its time.³⁷ Others found the novella reflective of a reality both historical and deeply personal.³⁸

Together, these readings constitute refractions of Conrad's text into affective currencies both within and in excess of what Carolyn Pedwell critically terms the "liberal narrative of empathy," or the belief that social and political conflict can be "addressed affectively through practices of empathetic imagination" (94). The inclusion of the essays of these postcolonial critics in the Norton Critical Edition of *Heart of Darkness* in 1988³⁹ thus constitutes an acknowledgment and further rendering visible of the novella's preexisting circulation among divergent affective currencies in a broader affective economy, itself a recognition of Said's intertwined histories.

Arabic refractions of the Hebrew-language *Khirbet Khiz'ah*, similar to postcolonial Anglophone refractions of the English-language *Heart of Darkness*, reveal affective currencies alternatively privileging empathy and unmasking empathy as mere personal distress as they unpack the myriad dimensions of "the horror!" However, the particularities of the Arab cultural boycott of Israel,⁴⁰ combined with refraction as translational transaction among divergent affective currencies, render the case of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* somewhat more complex.

Indeed, Arab critics have interpreted *Khirbet Khiz'ah* through the lenses of both empathy and distress, with empathy employed as an interpretive lens more directly by Palestinians in the State of Israel or West Bank. Interestingly, it is Arabs living in the wider Arab world who have tended to eschew empathy as constitutive of their theoretical framework, tending to read the novella primarily as historical testament to the Palestinian Nakba. Revisiting their writings is not to diminish the meanings of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* in the Israeli cultural sphere but, rather, to recognize the secular journeys the novella has already taken and may yet still take, far from the

³⁶ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," *Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 783. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically within the text.

³⁷ This sentence paraphrases Conrad and Watts, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, xxii–xxiii. See Joseph Conrad and Robert Kimbrough, *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, 3rd ed., Norton Critical Edition (New York: Norton, 1988). Only Achebe's essay remains in the 4th ed. (2006).

³⁸ V. S. Naipaul, "Conrad's Darkness," in *The Return of Eva Perón, with The Killings in Trinidad*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1980), 214–16.

³⁹ Conrad and Kimbrough, *Heart of Darkness*.

⁴⁰ On Hebrew studies in the Arab world, see Deborah Starr, "Egyptian Representation of Israeli Culture: Normalizing Propaganda or Propagandizing Normalization?," in *Review Essays on Israel Studies*, ed. Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, vol. 5 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 263–82.

canonical centers of Hebrew literature, circulating far and wide, transacting among currencies in a global affective economy.

Despite Gavriel Stern's reading, the 1949 article in *Al-Ṣarīḥ* did not read *Khirbet Khiz'ah* as extolling Jewish love of peace per se, nor was the article anonymously written. Indeed, the editor, publisher, and primary writer of *Al-Ṣarīḥ* was Hāshim al-Ṣab'a (1912–58), a Palestinian journalist, Azhar student, pedagogue, and revolutionary. Born in Qalqilya to a landowning family dispossessed of their coastal orchards in 1948, al-Ṣab'a's peripatetic life straddled the currents of twentieth-century Palestinian history.⁴¹ Among the three newspapers al-Ṣab'a founded, the satirical *Al-Ṣarīḥ* was the longest running, published from 1947 until his death in 1958; it wandered with him from Jaffa, to Jenin, to Nablus, and to Jerusalem.⁴²

Al-Ṣab'a discusses *Khirbet Khiz'ah* in the thirty-fifth issue of *Al-Ṣarīḥ* (December 31, 1949) in a front-page, above-the-fold article entitled "What Is the Solution? Signs of Anxiety and Contradiction in Israel."⁴³ Describing economic, military, and intellectual anxieties in the newly formed Jewish state, he argues that Israeli citizens are caught between the "deep love of a permanent peace" and fear of another round of hostilities with the Arab states (as well as of a "Third World War"). According to him, a novel by "the Jewish novelist Yizhar" (he does not identify the novella by name) "gave expression to these fears in the aggregate."

The focus of the article is not *Khirbet Khiz'ah* as revelation but *Khirbet Khiz'ah* as evidence of a contradiction in Israeli society. For while the Jewish masses, including soldiers, desire "deeper stability, greater safety, and a more lasting peace," they have not yet realized the "error" of housing the "Jewish refugee who lived in a 'camp [*mu'askar*]" in Europe in the home of "an Arab man who has now become a refugee living in a camp [*mu'askar*]." Al-Ṣab'a further queries the Israeli state's intention to keep newly acquired "plunder" (*al-maghānim*), suggesting that the peace-loving Jewish soldiers are "deceived, compelled to employ the methods of Nazis and Fascists." Notably, in using the same word, *mu'askar*, to describe both the displaced persons camps in Europe and Palestinian refugee camps in the Middle East,⁴⁴ it is as if al-Ṣab'a is writing at a time when the displacement of Palestinian refugees still seemed temporary and reversible, a brief moment before the affective currencies of empathy and personal distress became global.

Unlike al-Ṣab'a, subsequent Arab readers of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* approached the text after the dust had settled on 1948 and its medium-term geopolitical implications. Among these later readers, Palestinians living in the State of Israel or West Bank tended to view the text through the lenses of empathy, humanism, and other positively valenced attributes, however flawed.

One such critic is Palestinian academic Ghānim Maz'al (1953–), educated in part at the Hebrew University, who analyzed *Khirbet Khiz'ah* with an eye toward articulating and qualifying both the "horror!" and the humanistic values as expressed within the text. In *Al-shakhṣiyya al-'arabiyya fī al-adab al-'ibri al-ḥadīth* (The Arab character in modern Hebrew literature),

⁴¹ Yahyia 'abd al-Ra'ūf Jabr, "A'lām wa-shakhṣiyyāt adabiyya min Qalqilya" [Eminent persons and literary personalities from Qalqilya], *Qalqilya tāymz* (blog), accessed April 11, 2019, <https://qalqilya-taimes.blogspot.com/2016/12/list.html>.

⁴² "Al-Ṣarīḥ," accessed April 11, 2019, <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/nlis/ar/jrayed/pages/al-sarih.aspx>.

⁴³ Hāshim al-Ṣab'a, "Mā huwwa al-ḥall? A'lām al-qalaq wa-al-tanāqud 'ala Isrā'īl [What is the solution? Signs of anxiety and contradiction in Israel]," *Al-Ṣarīḥ*, December 31, 1949.

⁴⁴ A refugee camp, Palestinian and otherwise, is called a *mukhāyyam*, from the root kh-y-m, for things related to tents. *Mu'askar* comes from the root 's-k-r, connoting the semantic field of the military.

published in both Acre (1985) and Amman (1986),⁴⁵ Maz'al analyzes Yizhar's works in a chapter entitled "Stories Possessing Realistic and Humanistic Traits." His analysis of *Khirbet Khiz'ah*, as well as of Yizhar's short story "The Prisoner,"⁴⁶ also published in 1949 and exploring similar themes, gives equal weight to praising the humanism expressed within these texts and to finding that humanism incomplete. He praises "The Prisoner" for "plac[ing] a mark of shame upon the foreheads of the interrogators" (53) and for accurately portraying the conflict between military and humanistic values. He further praises *Khirbet Khiz'ah* for auguring Palestinian resistance. Interpreting the irony of Jews "doing exile" to others, Maz'al argues that the soldier-narrator of *Khirbet Khiz'ah* "affirms the slogans of Zionism, based on the right of the Jew in this country . . . but he wants to apply these slogans in a humanistic spirit [*rūḥ insāniyya*]" (64). Maz'al tempers his praise by arguing that in Yizhar's stories, military values prevail and that his depiction of Arab characters is problematic. Yet, he ultimately gives Yizhar the benefit of the doubt, much as some of the aforementioned postcolonial critics made allowances for Conrad's horizons circa 1899: "The war left a mark," Maz'al writes, "on Yizhar and on others who believe in the brotherhood of peoples" (66).

Similarly, Walid Abu Bakr, renowned Palestinian author, critic, and translator, wrote about *Khirbet Khiz'ah* in the wake of the First Intifada in his 1996 monograph *Ṣūrat al-'Arabī fī al-adab al-isrā'īlī* (Image of the Arab in Israeli literature).⁴⁷ Counting Yizhar among one of the "attentive literary voices [lit. *pens*] able to survey the damage to come," Abu Bakr identifies empathy in Yizhar's "The Prisoner," noting that the text was "the first to critique Zionist treatment of the Arabs" and to "empathize morally [*yata'ātaf akhlāqiyyan*] with the Arab" (58). Yet, this empathy, at times contradictory, requires qualification. The protagonist of "The Prisoner" takes no moral stance "except the position of the pain he [himself] suffers" (59). Abu Bakr further finds the characterization of Arabs in "The Prisoner" stereotypical, insofar as the shepherd is portrayed as "stupid, naïve, unaware of what occurs around him" (59). On the other hand, Abu Bakr reads the portrayal of Arabs in *Khirbet Khiz'ah* as bifurcated, both "affirming the presence of the Arabs on the land, their connection to it, and their care of it over the course of a long history" (60) while simultaneously casting the Arab as "a coward who does not defend his pristine land, despicable, abject, with no blood in his veins either individually or collectively" (60). Like Maz'al, Abu Bakr sees *Khirbet Khiz'ah* as having "prophesized" Palestinian resistance, further considering it an "awakening of the conscience [*ṣaḥwat ḍamīr*]," as important today as when it was published (59).

In sum, Abu Bakr reads Yizhar as having taken a "daring step" by describing the Israeli "War of Independence" as a "dirty war" (62). Like Maz'al, he looks favorably upon *Khirbet Khiz'ah*'s invocation of the Jewish history of exile as moral statement, thus implicitly acknowledging

⁴⁵ Ghānim Maz'al, *Al-shakḥsiyya al-'arabiyya fī al-adab al-'ibrī al-ḥadīth* [The Arab character in modern Hebrew literature] (Amman: Dār al-Jalīl, 1986). Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically within the text.

⁴⁶ In Yizhar's short story "The Prisoner" an Israeli patrol captures, interrogates, and beats an innocent, arguably simpleminded Arab shepherd. As in *Khirbet Khiz'ah*, the protagonist's tortured internal dialogue does not lead to action. See Yizhar Smilansky, "The Prisoner," in *Modern Hebrew Literature*, ed. Robert Alter, trans. V. C. Rycus (New York: Behrman House, 1975), 294–310.

⁴⁷ Walid Abū Bakr, *Ṣūrat al-'Arabī fī al-adab al-isrā'īlī* [Image of the Arab in Israeli literature], 1st ed. (Ammān: Dār al-Karmal, 1996). Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically within the text. Mahmoud Kayyal's bibliographic research has been immensely helpful in locating this and other sources. Mahmoud Kayyal, *Thabat bibliyūghrāfī lil-tarjamāt wa-al-dirāsāt al-'arabiyya 'an al-adab al-'ibrī al-ḥadīth fī Isrā'īl wa-al-'ālam al-'arabī* [Bibliography of Arabic translations and studies about modern Hebrew literature in Israel and the Arab world] (Tel Aviv: Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 2003), 107.

“the horror!” on its own affective terms. For Abu Bakr, all of this amounts to “compassion and remorse” for the Palestinians and their usurped rights (62). Thus, both Maz‘al and Abu Bakr discern positively valenced qualities in relation to Yizhar’s wartime writings: a humanistic spirit and moral empathy, respectively. Although both qualify their praise, their final analysis does not seem to contradict the affective currency of internal Israeli discourse. For Maz‘al, 1948 took a toll on Arabs and Jews alike, and for Abu Bakr, compassion and remorse connote recognition. Recalling Conrad’s more conciliatory postcolonial Anglophone readers, these two Palestinian critics would allow *Khirbet Khiz’ah* to remain in the proverbial canon.

Contrary to Maz‘al and Abu Bakr, critics in the wider Arab world seem to have analyzed from within a somewhat different affective currency, identifying personal distress and the moral limits of *Khirbet Khiz’ah* and thus rejecting the original affective valences of “the horror!” from the outset. This group, which includes Palestinian author-in-exile Tawfiq Fayyād, as well as Egyptian scholar Rashād al-Shāmī, read the text’s moral limitations as requiring a fundamental paradigm shift, perhaps adopting what translation scholar Mahmoud Kayyal has described as a “radical, antagonistic stance”⁴⁸ toward Israeli culture. They also tended to emphasize the literary text as historical testament to the Nakba. Yet, within a global context, their critical approach mirrors that of Chinua Achebe vis-à-vis Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, long ago canonized alongside its object of critique.

Tawfiq Fayyād (1938–), Palestinian author of short stories, novels, and children’s literature, was the first to translate *Khirbet Khiz’ah* into Arabic. Born in the village of Muqeible near Jenin, Fayyād lived in exile in Cairo, Beirut, and later Tunis. After a protracted legal battle, he was permitted to return to Israel in 2015. Fayyād first published a partial translation of the novella with introductory remarks in the November 1977 issue of the Beirut-based *Palestinian Affairs* magazine, the quarterly publication of the PLO’s Palestine Research Center, edited at the time by Mahmoud Darwish and Elias Khoury. This was followed by a book-length full translation with introduction, preface, and commissioned illustrations in 1981. Fayyād’s introductory comments in both the magazine and the book indicate that Israeli newspaper *Ma’ariv*’s coverage of the 1977–78 controversy concerning Israeli director Ram Levi’s film adaptation of the novella motivated both his translations.⁴⁹

In contrast to the more exploratory tone of his 1977 remarks, in 1981 Fayyād stakes out an overtly antagonistic positionality, employing the language of the courtroom to argue that Yizhar’s “document of indictment” necessitates a “relationship of conflict” (7). Quoting extensively from *Ma’ariv*’s coverage, Fayyād’s 1981 preface attributes the name *Khirbet Khiz’ah* to the village of Khirbet Ikhzā‘a, southeast of Khan Yunis, and the plot to actual wartime events at Khirbet Khiṣāṣ (4). This shift may mirror the aggressive tone adopted by Iraqi cultural journal *Al-Aqlām*’s 1979 issue on Israeli culture, published as a form of government-sanctioned cultural resistance against Egypt’s 1978 signing of the peace treaty with Israel.⁵⁰

While Fayyād states that it was “moral impulses,” specifically “feelings of guilt” (6), that compelled Yizhar to write, these feelings of guilt mean little to Fayyād himself. “It is difficult for

⁴⁸ Mahmoud Kayyal, *Ha-tarbut ha-yisre’elit be-‘einayim ‘araviyot: Bein stereotipizatzia le-normalizatzia* [Israeli culture in Arab eyes: Between stereotyping and normalization] (Tel Aviv: Shoken, 2006), 26.

⁴⁹ Shapira notes that the film aroused a second round of debate about the novella in Israel. See Shapira, “Hirbet Hizah,” 18–29.

⁵⁰ Muhammad ‘Afīfī Maṭar, “Hawla manhaj li-dirāsāt al-adab al-ṣiḥyūnī [Concerning methodology in the study of Zionist literature],” *Al-Aqlām* 14 (1979): 9–14.

the sufferings of the Israeli soldier in the face of the scenes of destruction, forced migration, and abuse—all of his own doing—however persuasive,” he writes, “to be adequate compensation for the crime he committed, even if he was only an individual among a group, because the entire Zionist operation arose in this fashion” (6).

Fayyāḍ’s translation laid the groundwork for the first academic book on the Palmach generation and Yizhar in the broader Arab world: the 1988 monograph *Al-Filastīniyūn wa-al-iḥsās al-zā’if bi-al-dhanb fī al-adab al-isrā’īlī* (The Palestinians and counterfeit feelings of guilt in Israeli literature) by Egyptian scholar of Hebrew Rashād al-Shāmī (1943–2006). Indeed, like Fayyāḍ, al-Shāmī insists on the historicity of *Khirbet Khiz’ah*, in this case by conflating the author and narrator, whom he refers to as the “author-narrator” (*al-adīb al-qāṣ*). He writes, “S. Yizhar—the author-narrator) sobs over the Arab village emptied of its residents during the war” (102, parentheses in original). While an in-depth review is beyond the scope of this article, al-Shāmī’s monograph is particularly noteworthy for its analysis of the place of empathy both in Yizhar’s novella and in broader Zionist discourse.

By framing his inquiry in terms of the literature of the 1948 generation writ large, al-Shāmī evinces a nuanced understanding of the Israeli discourse of Jewish values, selecting interlocutors such as Amos Oz and Amnon Rubinstein. He further finds Yizhar’s wartime writings “magnificent [*rā’iya*] from a literary perspective” (23). Nevertheless, al-Shāmī’s analysis illustrates the limitations of refracting empathy and “the horror!” across currencies in an affective economy. For what Israeli critics have read as empathy, al-Shāmī understands as a textbook definition of personal distress: “All these cries emanating from within the feelings of the hero-storyteller . . . are interpreted as empathy [*ta’āṭūf*] on behalf of 1948 war literature toward the Palestinians. But in reality, these cries are nothing more than the weeping of a murderer over his victim, a type of unburdening the conscience [*tafrīgh al-ḍamīr*], or fabricated feelings of guilt because what happened was not contrary to Zionism’s goals” (87). Having interpreted the Israeli reading of empathy as personal distress, al-Shāmī in turn casts doubt on the notion that empathy could beget altruism, much less a resolution to the conflict. It is obedience to the demands of the group, preventing protest from ever progressing beyond the realm of thought, that “makes [the protagonist] an impotent being, lacking the ability to repair the world [*iṣlāḥ al-‘ālam*]” (94). For al-Shāmī, group allegiance renders empathy’s potential forever stillborn.



The translational intertexts of the Hebrew *palatzut* (horror) link two modernist classics, S. Yizhar’s *Khirbet Khiz’ah* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in a global affective economy of liberal values and their limits. Both texts possess rich histories of interpretation whereby local readers in both place and time have interpreted empathy within the literary text as expressing a powerful ethical stance. *Khirbet Khiz’ah* is further distinguished by the presence within Israeli discourse of ambassadorial hopes for the novella’s depiction of the empathy of the Zionist soldier toward the Palestinian villager. Yet, given the affective limits of these localized interpretations, a global perspective on the novellas and their refractions for different audiences necessitates an articulation of distinct affective currencies across asymmetries of power. To this end, postcolonial Anglophone readings of *Heart of Darkness*, which highlighted the limitations of vision and ethics in the text, have long been canonized in the Western academy alongside the original novella.

A review of some of the extant Arabic-language criticism reveals that some analyses embrace the premise of empathy in the text as an expression of liberal, humanistic value, however limited, while others unequivocally interpret empathy in the text as mere personal distress. The former tend to have been penned by Palestinians living and writing between the River and the Sea and with academic exposure to Israeli educational institutions. The latter tend to have been penned by Arab authors, both Palestinian and otherwise, living outside the bounds of Mandatory Palestine. Given these circumstances, Arabic criticism of S. Yizhar spans the affective currencies of empathy and personal distress. The rendering of Yizhar's *palatzut* in the extant Arabic translations of the novella as *faza'nā* (we were afraid) serves to fundamentally alter the nature of crisis and responsibility in the novella. Alongside the Arabic criticism of Yizhar's novella, these translational movements, blockages, and transactions render Said's "crisis of modernism" and "intertwined histories" themselves as alternate sites of negotiation. It is the negotiation of translation as transaction in an affective economy that can tend toward globality only by aspiring to acknowledge all currencies and power differentials circulating within. However, this acknowledgment cannot be an end in itself, lest it serve to reify the political, cultural, and economic status quo. To tend toward a more *just* globality, discursive maps of affective economies must move beyond the liberal narrative of empathy to continue drawing into comparison an increasingly diverse array of texts, histories, and refractions. Thus can the categories of affective currency themselves be challenged and reconfigured in novel, illuminating, and productive ways. A