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**Towards a Poetics of the Black Hole: Trauma, Memory and Language**

**in Samir Naqqash's *Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time***

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**Towards a Poetics of the Black Hole: Trauma, Memory and Language**  
**in Samir Naqqash's *Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time***

by

Rachel Elizabeth Green, B.A.

**Thesis**

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**Towards a Poetics of the Black Hole: Trauma, Memory and Language in Samir**

**Naqqash's *Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time***

by

Rachel Elizabeth Green, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

SUPERVISORS: Tarek El-Ariss and Karen Grumberg

Samir Naqqash (1938-2004) is best known as one of the last holdouts among Jewish Israeli authors from Iraq, continuing to write in his native Arabic in Israel despite immense social and market pressures to switch to Hebrew. This thesis reads Naqqash's last novel, *Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time* in light of theories of trauma, specifically Cathy Caruth's *structure of trauma*, Dori Laub's notion of *belatedness of trauma*, and Dominick LaCapra's *foundational trauma*. It posits that the novel employs a *poetics of the black hole*, manipulating trauma, memory and language in order to narrate the forgotten fate of the protagonist's hometown of Şablākh, in Iranian Kurdistan, during World War I. Like a black hole, the texture of the novel's prose possesses an infinite density of traumatic affect as the characters are haunted by the *ahwāl*, or terrors. Also like a black hole, there is no way to measure the novel's mass, no way to authoritatively and thoroughly grasp the details of its plot since said details remained sequestered deep within. The structure of trauma in the text depends both on trauma's repeated returns in the first part of the

novel, and a type of prophetic projection that speaks of the approaching moment of calamity in the second. Each of these two parts end where the other begins, creating an infinite loop where traumatic memory and prophecy alternate towards infinity, each awaiting the arrival of the other in a dizzying dance that contributes to the black hole's gravitational pull. The presence of three narrators allows the text to employ chronicle, affect, and artifice at one and the same time. Language, namely a rich allusive fabric, allows Shlomo to inscribe himself in the wandering minstrel position of the Islamicate tradition, casting himself as the most articulate Shahrazād of the Thousand and One Nights and the most adventurous and mobile Sindibād the sailor. In this way, Shlomo is able to recover the (non-Hebrew-) speaking subject position, and mobility in the Islamic(ate) world canceled by virtue of the restrictions placed upon holders of an Israeli passport. Similarly, by staging visitations by well-known apparitions -- a *ghūl* in Şablākh and the Prophet Nahum in Qosh, the text inscribes these sites of speechlessness within the larger cultural geography of the Islamicate literary tradition. At the same time, by selecting the unraveling of Şablākh as foundational trauma for all that follows, Shlomo confounds the genealogies of trauma of both Zionism and Arab Nationalism(s). And with Şablākh, Shlomo also mourns the collapse of the city's multi-confessional social fabric. What was once a testament to the possibility of a home that flies the banner of humanity is now nothing more than a haunting memory, lost but not forgotten within the depths of the black hole.

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## **Introduction: Framing the Conversation**

My interest in Samir Naqqash's Shlomo Al-Kurdi wa-Ana wa-Al-Zaman<sup>1</sup> (Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time) began at a book fair at the Syrian national library, while I was a Center for Arabic Study Abroad (CASA) student in Damascus in 2008. Curious if the fair might have any Israeli literature in Arabic, perhaps tucked quietly away in a corner, I inquired if they had any Arabic-language works by Shimon Ballas, Sami Michael, or Samir Naqqash. To my great great surprise, Naqqash's Shlmo Al-Kurdi was indeed on the list of books for sale, yet by the time I had arrived at the vendor's booth there was not a copy to be found. After a few minutes trying to divert my attention to other enticing selections, the representative of the German publishing house quietly mentioned that sometimes inventory is "adjusted" at the last minute. Undeterred, I headed to the bookstore where books arrive from Lebanon weekly. Next time, next time, I was told; for on each of their agent's trips there was someone, a border guard or an inspector, who apparently had better uses for Samir Naqqash's novels than letting them be sold to Syrian consumers. Even our literature professor in CASA, who had us remove our cell-phone batteries during class, ostensibly so that the Syrian secret police could not listen in on our thrilling and dangerous discussions of Modern Arabic literature, politely demurred when we asked to read and discuss Naqqash in class. Although this was an example of a very good novel,

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1. Samīr Naqqāsh, *Shlumu al-Kurdi wa-ana wa-al-zaman* (Cologne, Germany: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2004). [Arabic]

he said with a smile there was no way we were going to read it together on university property.

I begin with this anecdote in order to demonstrate the tendency of Naqqash's writings (as well as those by his cohort of Iraqi-Israeli authors more generally) to be "disappeared." In this case, my first-hand experience of the very literal erasure of Naqqash's name and book from the fair informs a greater, epistemological erasure of the spaces of overlap between Israeli and Arab cultures. The banning of Naqqash from the book fair booths and store shelves is also the banning of Naqqash from the syllabi, the libraries, and the consciousness of Arab, Israeli and Jewish cultural memory. And the barring of Naqqash from these places is the barring of the spaces of overlap, the erasure of the marginal so as to consolidate the center and homogenize the periphery.

Were Naqqash's works and those of his long-time pen pal Naghuib Mahfouz to be read side-by-side in a syllabus for an Arabic literature course (or to be sold alongside one another at a book fair), it would necessarily call into question the notion of an absolute separation or binary opposition between Israeli and Arab<sup>2</sup> culture. It would suggest a type of parity between center (Mahfouz) and margin (Naqqash), thus calling into question the very hierarchies of culture that inform notions of canonicity, notions which in turn under-

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2. Here I do not intend to equate Israeli and Arab literary culture, realizing that the phrase "Arab culture" spans many countries, each with unique reading practices and politics of the literary. The boundaries of the literary canon will certainly differ from one Arab country to another, just as Modern Standard Arabic itself also differs slightly from one country to the next. Rather, I refer to "Arab culture" to refer to the body of readers/consumers and potential readers/consumers of modern Arabic literature.

pin the nationstate project.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Naqqash's mere existence as an author complicates and even endangers traditional nationalist paradigms.

Yet, for this reason the margins are crucial. As Julia Kristeva argues in Word, Dialogue, Novel, new meaning for words, and perhaps for culture, too, are negotiated in the spaces of the margins, of the carnival.<sup>4</sup> If Naqqash exists on the margins of both the Israeli and Arab literary cultures, then recovering his voice necessarily entails a journey to the outer reaches of the literary, itself a transgressive and potentially revolutionary move. By recovering Naqqash's voice, we rethink the politics of canonicity, redefining who and what is granted admission not only to the literary canon(s), but to the national and supra-national groups for which these canons play a defining role of demarcating the spaces of belonging and exclusion. Indeed, if an Arab author who is Arab not only in extraction but also by virtue of his dogged adherence, against all odds, to the use of the Arabic language as the vessel of his art, can be granted entree to the definitive corpus of Israeli literature, then *Israeliness* as an abstract concept can no longer be defined in opposition to *Arabness*. Similarly, if an Israeli Jewish author who did not hide his Jewishness or the possibility of Jewish presence and agency within an Arabic-language cultural sphere can be granted entree to the diverse, far-reaching space of modern Arabic literature, then *Arab-*

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3. The same can be said about the subversive power of including Naqqash in a syllabus of Israeli literature. However, this comparison is slightly more complicated since Naqqash purposefully did not write in Hebrew, the primary national language of Israel, as will be discussed subsequently.

4. Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *The Julia Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 34-61.

ness as an abstract concept can no longer be defined in opposition to *Israeliness*. In other words, to read the Israeli and Arab literary canon(s) against the traditional ideological divisions imposed by Zionism and Arab nationalism, respectively, and to interrogate the supposed binary opposition between them, not only undermines said ideologies, but also radically redefines what might mean to belong to these collectives. No wonder books like this are not freely available at book fairs in countries governed by totalitarian dictatorships.

\* \* \*

Shlomo Al-Kurdi wa Ana wa Al-Zaman (Shlomo al-Kurdi, Myself and Time) (2004) is the last novel of Samir Naqqash (1938-2004), an Arab-Jewish, Iraqi-Israeli author and citizen of the world. Born in Baghdad in 1938, Naqqash moved to Israel with his family in the mass *aliya* of 1951. However, for the rest of his life his heart yearned for Iraq and his pen remained fiercely and exclusively loyal to his native Arabic. Naqqash, described by fellow author Sami Michael as a man with "a mechanism of self-destruction," was the only author among his cohort of Iraqi emigres who continued to write in Arabic. This he did despite the lack of a market for the books of an Israeli Jew writing in Arabic, both in Israel and in the greater Arab world. It is against this backdrop of such compelling politics of language, identity, and cultural consumption that this thesis seeks to interpret the articulation of speech, speechlessness, memory and trauma in this final novel. It proposes a reading that, aware of the symbolic power of Naqqash to upend the politics of canonicity and confound simplistic notions of binary identities, will attempt to

foreground the aesthetics of the text.<sup>5</sup> And in so doing, new insights come to light not only about Naqqash the man, but also about existing and speaking in the spaces of trauma, of margins, of erasure marks.

Specifically, this thesis will argue that Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time employs three narrators and two distinct modes of time in order to hone the sense of disorientation and loss in narrating the foundational trauma of the unraveling of Şablākh in Iranian Kurdistan, ancestral village of protagonist Shlomo Al-Kurdi Al-Kattani. Finding himself challenged by the task of telling, of speaking the unspeakable events of Şablākh,<sup>6</sup> Shlomo likens such imperfect powers of mind to a *black hole*, an apt image that invites itself to be a structuring principle via which to interpret the disoriented, non-linear, poetics of the text. Indeed, Shlomo's primary tool for telling his story is the black hole of his memory, a space of presence and yet also a space of absence, a space of infinite gravity in which there is no way to determine the mass contained within, It is from within these dimensions of such galactically-proportioned disorientation, from within the unforgiving physics of the black hole, that Shlomo attempts to regain his powers of speech, not just by speaking, but by speaking in the very signs and symbols that modern ideologies of the

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5. The question of the relative merits of text-intrinsic versus text-extrinsic criticism is a complex one that will not be addressed here. Suffice to say, this thesis seeks to begin with the text as a type of corrective move to balance the general scholarly emphasis on Naqqash the man at the expense of his texts in contemporary debate.

6. All transliterations are according to the Library of Congress rules. I have chosen not to transliterate names of authors, or the name Shlomo Al-Kurdi. In the case of the authors, this is because they are already widely known in literary circles without diacritical marks. In the case of Shlomo Al-Kurdi, my goal in omitting diacritical marks is to create a sense of familiarity between him and the reader.

canon have attempted to silence. Indeed, by articulating speechlessness and the regaining of speech in terms of Jewish and Islamicate<sup>7</sup> cultural memory, the text crafts a firmer sense of belonging to, and indeed a spoken elegy for, the lost world of indigenous Jewish life in the Islamicate East. The result is a text that serves as an infinitely-looped mosaic of memory, history and language, marshaling the fragrance of a lost world and breathing into it a type of eternal life so as if to never admit to a moment of farewell.

Ironically, Naqqash departed this world with proverbial ink still wet in this last work,<sup>8</sup> a retrospective taking-stock of the life of the protagonist, Shlomo Al-Kurdi, but having not penned an autobiography of his own. Thus, it is tempting to consider this novel as an autobiography in a minor key, a text that despite its genre nevertheless serves the purpose of a last will and testament. However, even if the novel contains autobiographical trace elements, between its pages there is clearly at play a larger project of intervention in collective memory(ies), a project which this thesis attempts to interpret. The novel orbits around a particular moment of trauma, but not the one that the reader would expect from an Iraqi Jewish author living in Israel, for the center of gravity in this novel is the

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7. In The Venture of Islam, Marshal Hodgson coined this term as follows: "There has been [...] a *culture*, centered on a lettered tradition, which has been historically distinctive of Islamdom the *society*, and which has been naturally shared by both Muslims and non-Muslims who participate at all fully in the society of Islamdom. For this, I have used the adjective 'Islamicate.' I thus restrict the term 'Islam' to the *religion* of the Muslims, not using that term for the far more general phenomena, the society of Islamdom and its Islamicate cultural traditions." (58) See Marshall Hodgson, The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization, Vol. 1: The Classical Age of Islam, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 57-59.

8. While the exact date of authorship is unclear, the text was published in Arabic in Cologne, Germany in 2004 by Al-Kamel Verlag, the same year as Naqqash's passing.

occupation, famine, and self-cannibalizing of the Kurdish village of Şablākh in Western Iran during World War I. This privileged moment of unraveling, marginal to both the Zionist and the Arab nationalist hierarchies of trauma, forms the core upon which the novel is precariously perched. It is from this core moment of trauma that the novel connecting the dots, backwards through history and forwards through Shlomo's life, chiseling out an infinite loop of traumatic enunciation that mourns and reifies a lost world while simultaneously challenging the politics of canon formation.

This body of this thesis is divided into five sections. Section A, "Of Literary History/ies: Finding a Place for Samir Naqqash, between Hebrew and Arabic Literary Historiography," will present historiographical background on both author and text, delving into the politics of canonicity in both Hebrew and Arabic that have attempted to perform the erasure of Naqqash.<sup>9</sup> This section will also address the role of Kurdistan in defying any presuppositions the reader might have about that the text limits itself to deconstructing a Jewish-Arab binary.

Section B, "Plot, Poetics and Gravity" will provide a textual summary while also elaborating how the poetics of the text, a "poetics of the black hole" resist the very act of

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9. I am aware that author and text in this case present a type of chicken-and-egg problem: which precedes, which proceeds, how is one to speak of one without the other? My inner positivist has chosen in Section A to focus first on Naqqash the author, briefly delaying in-depth discussion of the novel so as to establish a historical frame of reference, while taking into account that this is certainly the only way to enter this "house of many doors," to borrow Deleuze and Guattari's term from their theorizing of Kafka.

summarizing and thus demand of the reader a more nuanced treatment.

The next three sections will expand the notion of a poetics of the black hole, exploring trauma, memory and language in the novel. Section C, "Trauma: Narrative Structure as Black Hole," will discuss the narrative structure of the novel as a device for recreating the chaotic processes of memory of the traumatized subject. Namely, it will interrogate how the novel is structured in two parts: a first part describing in an a-chronological sequence stages in Shlomo's life post-Şablākh, and as a second part comprising a detailed, ordered chronicle of the unraveling of Şablākh. It will posit the first part as the time *after* trauma, the time of haunting, and the second part as an attempt to marshal a hybridized language of Biblical and Quranic, Jewish and Islamicate prophecy to stage an ultimately unsuccessful return to the moment prior to the formation of traumatic memory. This section will be followed by Section D, "Memory: Şablākh as job for three narrators," which will explore the impact of the novel's split narration on the crafting of the traumatized subject and enabling him to remember, but also to forget. Lastly, Section E, "Language: Speech and Speechlessness in Epic Cultural Terms" will hone in on the varied depictions of speech and speechlessness in the text, interrogating how the (re-)construction of epic symbols of speech, text and cultural memory are employed to articulate the processes of trauma, witnessing, and departure from trauma's site. Among these symbols are the *qaṣīda*, *dahr*, prophets and ghouls, Shahrazād and Sindibād, and syncretic multilingualism.

## Samir Naqqash, Shlomo Al-Kurdi and the Poetics of the Black Hole

### A. Of Literary History/ies: Finding a Place for Samir Naqqash, Between and Beyond Hebrew and Arabic Literary Historiography

Samir Naqqash (1938-2004) is an Israeli author of Iraqi descent. Or, as he would have identified himself, an Iraqi Jewish author whom the vicissitudes of fate left with no passport but an Israeli one. These semantics of identity underlie the singular act of resistance of which Naqqash is best known: composing his entire literary oeuvre in his native Arabic, despite immense social and economic pressure exercised by Zionist institutions and cultural norms to eschew his Arab identity, upon immigration to Israel.<sup>10</sup> This process of acculturation to the new state included within its folds acute linguistic pressures to eschew the Arabic language, a language and culture that Zionism came to appropriate and redefine as the exclusive purview of the Arabic-speaking Palestinian enemy.<sup>11</sup>

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10. In Zionist parlance, Naqqash's immigration would be called *aliya*, or literally, *going up*, a term that equates the modern act of obtaining Israeli citizenship with the traditional religious notion spiritual ascent attained by physical presence in the Holy Land. Although the use of the phrase is somewhat idiomatic in Hebrew, Naqqash would likely not have agreed with its connotations and would have likely preferred the term *hagira*, or simply, *migration* to describe his and his family' move to Israel.

11. It should be noted that Zionism's antagonistic relationship with Arabic was itself a the result of a historical process and was not necessarily inevitable. In fact, many prominent early Zionists, among them the renowned Geniza scholar S. D. Goitein, argued that "learning Arabic is part of Zionism," and that the Jewish youth in Palestine should be as familiar with Arabic as they are with European culture and spirituality, so that they would "be able to feel that *they are children of the orient and act within it*" (Liora Halperin, "Orienting Language: Reflections on the Study of Arabic in the Yishuv," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96:4 (Fall 2006): 481–89)(Originally in S. D. Goitein, *On the Teaching of Arabic* [Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1946] 8. Emphasis in original). Halperin notes that early Zionist settlement did not see itself as necessarily exclusionary of the native Arabic-speaking population, and to that end welcomed the study of Arabic and the adaption of the best elements of Arab culture. In this way, the project of Jewish settlement in Palestine would serve as a bridge between East and West. After World War I in particular, Halperin argues, the study of Arabic was seen to serve three ends: as a romantic apparatus for educating Jews about Medieval Jewish life under Islam; as a tool for the modernization

Naqqash never wrote an autobiography. Unlike his Iraqi contemporaries, such as Sasson Somekh, who left readers with the story of his life in his own words,<sup>12</sup> Naqqash's biography must be (re)constructed from other sources. Interestingly, as a text told from the perspective of an old man tending to the memories of a long and adventurous life, a life that happened to intersect with the crossroads of history, Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time almost reads like a fictionalized account of the the autobiography that wasn't.

In the absence of an authoritative autobiography, or even biography,<sup>13</sup> there is a scattered corpus of essays and interviews that attest to different moments in Naqqash's

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of the native population, and as a strategic mechanism for gathering information. Given the political realities of relations between the early Yishuv (Jewish settlement in Palestine) and their Arab neighbors, this romantic, orientalist notion did not carry the day, but it is important to keep in mind that Naqqash was not the first to indulge an alternate vision whereby Arabic would occupy a place of prestige among Jews in historic Palestine, and that Naqqash's transgression should appear as such as not an historical inevitability. There were, of course, significant differences between Naqqash, who was a native speaker of Arabic, continuing to write literature in his native tongue, and S. D. Goitein and his ilk, early Zionist settlers from Europe who romanticized a language not their own. The Israeli intellectual Nissim Rejwan recounts meeting with Goitein in his home when studying Oriental Studies under his tutelage at the Hebrew University. According to him, Goitein commented that Rejwan was "different" than other oriental students, that he was "intelligent" and that he should change his name. Rejwan writes, "That was the way it was with the Orientals (African and Asian Jews)--you had to be 'intelligent,' exceptional and 'clean,' or whatever, to be taught the elements of the Hebrew language!" [From Nissim Rejwan, "First Impressions" in *Outsider in the Promised Land: An Iraqi Jew in Israel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006) 2.] The point here is simply that there have been many different views, from many different quarters, about how Arabic should fit into life in the Yishuv, and later, the Jewish State.

12. See Sasson Somekh, *Baghdad Et mol* (Bene Berak: Haha-Ḳibuts ha-me'uhad, 2004) [Hebrew]. The memoir has also been translated to English and Arabic. The Arabic translation was published by the same Iraqi-run German publishing house, Mansurat Al-Jamal, that published Shlomo Al-Kurdi. In his introduction to the memoir, Somekh explains that one rationale for writing his memoir is the fact that other Iraqi-Israeli authors of his generation, among them Samir Naqqash, have not written memoirs of their own.
13. As of this writing, Sasson Somekh and Lital Levy are working on such a biography of Naqqash, as well as an edited and translated compilation of his works.

life, and different aspects of his thought and works.<sup>14</sup> The goal of this paper, however, is not to make an empirical contribution to the project of writing Naqqash's biography. Rather, it will suffice here to mention a few salient points to help situate the novel and its reading.

Naqqash is portrayed by those who knew him as a type of a tragic hero who possessed both "amazing talents"<sup>15</sup> and "a mechanism of self-destruction."<sup>16</sup> He was born in Baghdad in 1938, the eldest son of a Jewish family at a time when some sources estimate that the population of the city was between one-fourth and one-third Jewish. His family was one of means, his mother a nurse and his father in business with Muslim partners. He reflects in an interview with Ammiel Alcalay that he was exposed to world literature in Arabic as well as to English as a child, and that his home was filled with English books, and he and his sister attended private schools.<sup>17</sup> He left Iraq for Israel with his family at age thirteen in a mass migration that included thousands of other Iraqi Jews. Shmuel

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14. For a formidable bibliography of Hebrew-language academic works on Naqqash, as well as of primary source material, see Reuven Snir, 'Arviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut: ma'avak zehuyot bi-yetsiratam shel Yehude 'Iraq (Yerushalayim: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi le-ḥeker kehilot Yisra'el ba-Mizrah: yeha-Universitah ha-'Ivrit bi-Yerushalayim, 2005), 202-246 [Hebrew]. In her obituary of Naqqash, Neri Livneh also cites a significant number of interviews; see Neri Livneh, "Samir Mi?," Haaretz, August 6, 2004, accessed March 28, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.988723>. For a partial bibliography of German and French academic writings on Naqqash, see Osman Hajjar, "Exile at Home: Prophecy as Poetics," in *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pfitsch, and Barbara Winckler (London: Saqi 2010), 286.

15. Livneh, "Samir Mi?" Translated from the Hebrew.

16. *ibid.*

17. Ammiel Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996) 100-132.

Moreh notes that the abrupt transition from "talented, gifted eldest son in Baghdad, to the *Ma'abarah* [transit camp, mainly for Jews from Arab lands]" was a tragedy for Naqqash tantamount to the "destruction of childhood."<sup>18</sup> The traumatic nature of such a sudden transition, indeed, a fall of sorts (an experience opposite of *aliya*), cannot be understated. To add salt to Naqqash's wounds, his father passed away after only two years living in Israel. Heartbroken, the fifteen-year-old Naqqash and his older cousin surreptitiously crossed the border to Lebanon in an attempt to "escape" from Israel, attempting to actualize plans laid by Naqqash's father before his death. They were apprehended, returned to the Israelis, and sent home to their families in the transit camp six months later. But this was only the beginning of his attempts to escape Israel and return to the cosmopolitan world of his youth, as Naqqash continued to travel widely during the years 1958-1962, spending time wandering in Iran, Turkey, and India as he tried to find a place to call home, a place that could accommodate his personal narrative as he wished to compose it.<sup>19</sup> Upon his return to Israel, he worked alternatively in the Histadrut, the Tax Bureau, and as a news editor at the Arabic department of Kol Yisrael, the Israeli government Ara-

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18. Livneh, "Samīr Mi?" Translated from the Hebrew.

19. The obituary in Haaretz seems to break with the convention of offering only praise for the deceased in that it recounts some anecdotes that are downright strange and paint Naqqash not only as ungrateful and self-impressed, but also as having an extremely difficult, if not puerile character. Most surprisingly, the article paints Naqqash as having embraced Israel as the one true home for Jews, at the same time as he was invited to return to Iraq with the staff of *Al-Mu'atamar*. Oddly, none of the other biographical sources about Naqqash present him in this light or mention such a "conversion" experience at the end of his life. The obituary in Yediot Aharonot (Y-net, see n. 19) presents a far more standard account of Naqqash's life and death.

bic language station. He began university study in 1971, registering to study Arabic and Persian literatures, and beginning doctoral study in 1978.<sup>20</sup>

Of his life in Israel he felt the following: "I don't exist in this country [Israel], not as a writer, a citizen nor a human being. I don't feel that I belong anywhere, not since my roots were torn from the ground in Iraq."<sup>21</sup> His sister Samira notes that he simply never found himself in Israel.<sup>22</sup> In 1991, perhaps in a misguided if quixotic attempt to return to roots, he moved his family to Cairo, although he is purported to have brought them back to Israel after three months.<sup>23</sup> He subsequently moved his family to Manchester, England where he wrote for *Al-Mu'tamar*, a publication of Iraqi exiles living in Great Britain.

Over the course of his life Naqqash wrote over thirteen novels and short stories, most of which faithfully reproduce not only the Arabic dialect of Iraqi Jews, but also varieties of other Baghdadi sociolects,<sup>24</sup> no small feat considering that Naqqash left Iraq at

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20. Meirav Yodilovitch, "Halakh l'olamo ha-sofer Samir Naqqash," Ynet-Books, July 7, 2004, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2943653,00.html>.

21. Nancy Berg, *Exile from Exile* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 3.

22. Oddly, the Haaretz article ends with Naqqash apparently having repented from his anti-Zionist ways at the end of his life, claiming upon his return from England that there is no place in the world like Israel for Jews. Overall, this obituary paints a rather negative picture of Naqqash.

23. In Livneh's article, Moreh describes this experiment as unsuccessful. Livneh quotes Sami Michael as saying that Naqqash was unlucky in that he was a coward.

24. In addition to *Shlomo Al-Kurdi wa Ana wa Al-Zaman* (Novel, 2004), his literary works include five collections of short stories, three plays, four novels, and an essay: *al-Khata'* (Short stories, 1971); *Hikayat kull zamān wa-makān* (Short stories, 1978); *Anā wa-hā'ulā' wa-al-fisām* (Short stories, 1978); *Yawm habilat wa-ajhadat al-dunyā* (Short stories, 1980); *al-Junūh wa-al-insiyāb wa-masrahīyatān ukhrayān* (Two theatrical plays, 1980); *'Indamā tasquṭu adlā' al-muthallathāt* (Essay/fictional story, 1984); *Nuzūluh wa-khayt al-Shaytān* (Novel, 1986); *Fūwah yā dam!* (Novel, 1987); *Al-Rijs* (Novel, 1987); *Al-Maqrūrūn* (Theatrical script, 1990); *'Awrat al-Malāika* (Novel, 1991); and *Nubū'āt rajul*

such a young age. For these efforts he was twice awarded the Prime Minister's Prize in Arabic Literature in 1981 and 1985 -- a prize that under any other circumstances would surely indicate an author's wide readership, acclaim, even canonicity.<sup>25</sup> However, in terms of sociolinguistic virtuosity, Shlomo Al-Kurdi, *Myself and Time* is the outlier among Naqqash's writings; with the exception of one basic phrase each in Baghdadi Jewish Arabic, Hebrew, and English, the novel is written exclusively in Modern Standard Arabic. Furthermore, the protagonist Shlomo Al-Kurdi is neither a native Arabic speaker, nor ethnically Arab, but rather, an Aramaic-speaking Kurdish Jew from present-day Iran, who speaks Russian and Persian as second languages before ultimately learning Arabic in Iraq and Hebrew in Israel. Reuven Snir posits that Naqqash may have consciously decided to write this text in language more widely understandable in order to ensure his literary legacy would not be effaced by the idiosyncrasies of his earlier linguistic choices.<sup>26</sup> Naqqash died of a heart attack in 2004 at age sixty-six, a world away from the Iraq of his youth, in Petakh Tikva, Israel, his Arabic-language writings more or less unread,<sup>27</sup> caught

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majnūn fī madīnat mal'ūnah (Short Stories, 1995).

25. Yodilovitch, "Halakh l'olamo ha-sofer Samīr Naqqāsh."

26. Snir; 'Arviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut; 244.

27. While there have not been sociological studies settling the question for certain as to the extent of Naqqash's readership in the Arabic-speaking world, Naqqash notes in a letter to Ezra Murad that his works were extremely well-received in Iraqi Kurdistan, in Northern Iraq, something he discovered on a trip there in 1994 while conducting fieldwork for his doctorate. See Ezra Murad, "Sheva' shanim le-ptirato shel Ha-sofer Samīr Naqqāsh," Parshan, October 20, 2011, accessed 4/22/2012, <http://www.parshan.co.il/index2.php?id=8752&lang=heb>. Livneh also notes that Naqqash's writing were always known among Iraqi intellectuals and exiles in Europe.

in the cracks between Pan-Arab and Israeli-Zionist national<sup>28</sup> narratives.

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The story of the migration of Arabic-speaking Jews to Israel, a story of which Naqqash is part and parcel, has been told often and well. Neither Samir Naqqash nor his last novel, Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time can not be fully appreciated without this narrative. As Ella Shohat explains, Zionism created a new master narrative and teleological interpretation of Jewish history in which returning to the Land of Israel would heal the "deformative rupture"<sup>29</sup> of living in exile. However, by dismissing and then repressing the millennia of Jewish history in the Arab world, Zionism generated what Shohat terms "historical, psychic and epistemological violence" as it sought to create the so-called "New Jew," characterized by physical strength, a deep connection with the land, and native Hebrew. She elaborates,

One could argue that by provoking the geographical dispersal of Arab Jews, by placing them in a new situation 'on the ground,' by attempting to reshape their identity as simply 'Israeli,' by disdaining and trying to uproot their Arabness, and by racializing them and discriminating against them as a group, the Zionist project of the ingathering of the exiles itself provoked a dislocation that resulted in a series of traumatic ruptures and exilic identity formations. The Israeli establishment obligated Arab Jews to rede-

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28. I include the term "nationalist" here although I am well-aware that Pan-Arabism and Zionism are not necessarily commensurate as national movement of a single nation-state. By the Pan-Arab nationalist narrative, I refer to a greater sense of Arab cultural revival that includes all Arabic-speaking peoples in all Arabic-speaking countries, but nevertheless finds itself threatened by the inclusion of the Arabic-speaking Naqqash.

29. Ella Shohat, "Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews," *Social Text* 21.2 (2003): 49.

fine themselves in relation to new ideological paradigms and polarities, thus provoking the aporias of an identity constituted out of its own ruins.<sup>30</sup>

According to Shohat, the Zionist ingathering of the Jewish "exiles" made them exiles once more, or to borrow Nancy Berg's terminology, Zionism placed Arab Jews in a condition of "exile from exile." Furthermore, Shohat maintains, Zionism's canonized national narrative suppressed memories, and by extension languages, that interfered with the orderly dichotomy between Jews, who were assumed to be exclusively of the West, and Arabs, whose inherent otherness was marked by their belonging to the East. In this way the Zionist narrative of Jewish history erased the hyphen between Arab and Jew, thus subordinating Jews from Arab countries to a universal Western Jewish experience.<sup>31</sup>

It is against the background of Shohat's epistemological violence that Naqqash's choice to write in Arabic reveals the depths of its subversiveness. Indeed, under other circumstances, the act of writing in one's mother tongue would be mundane. However, for Naqqash, a Jewish immigrant to Israel, or *oleh*,<sup>32</sup> writing in his native Arabic represented nothing less than a subversion of the official Zionist narrative and a complication of its binaries whereby Jew equals European, enlightened, and therefore rightful owner of the land, on the one hand, whereas Non-Jew equals Arab, unenlightened, and therefore

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30. Shohat, *Rupture and Return*, 52.

31. Shohat, *Rupture and Return*, 58.

32. The term *oleh* describes a Jew who makes *aliya* to Israel, referring to immigration for the purpose of contributing to the Zionist project of the rebuilding of the Jewish homeland.

expendable native, on the other.<sup>33</sup> Writing in Arabic, Naqqash was the outlier among his fellow Iraqi immigrants as most of the Jewish Iraqi immigrants to Israel who like Naqqash had literary inclinations elected to produce their works in Hebrew when faced with the same circumstances, so as to address a Jewish Israeli readership and participate in the Israeli cultural scene.<sup>34</sup> When asked why he did not follow suit, he would answer, "I am simply continuing to write in my own language."<sup>35</sup> This unassuming response undoubtedly belies the deeply political nature of Naqqash's linguistic choice, a choice which simultaneously undermines the Zionist narrative of the ingathering of the Jewish exiles, and complicates the politics of anti-normalization in the Arabic-speaking world.<sup>36</sup>

Naqqash's unique linguistic choices, as well as what from a contemporary vantage point looks like the culturally-hybridized nature of his literary oeuvre necessarily mean that his writings straddle a number of divergent conversations and national canons, rejected by all by virtue of the lack of his cultural purity.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, straddling different cultures

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33. This formula is a slight modification of the logic underpinning colonial expansion more generally.

34. Nancy Berg elucidates the rationale behind the switch and compares the Arabic and Hebrew language writings of the immigrants from Iraq in her monograph, *Exile from Exile*, previously cited above. She notes that the Iraqi authors who wrote in Arabic attempted with their writing to "prolong the past," nostalgically reviving their childhood memories. She notes, "The description of home in these narratives defines exile, for home is everything exile is not. Home is childhood, while exile is adolescence; home is the past, exile the present; home is stability, rootedness, continuity, and order, while exile is discontinuity, transience, and chaos. Home is the memory and exile the reality." (153)

35. Ammiel Alcalay, *Keys to the Garden*, 110.

36. On politics of Normalization see Deborah Starr, "Egyptian Representation of Israeli Culture: Normalizing Propaganda or Propagandizing Normalization?" *Review Essays in Israel Studies*, ed. Laura Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, vol. 5. Albany: SUNY Press, 2000. 263-282.

37. I am aware that there are a number of theoretical terms available to articulate the hybridity of a figure

is not a guarantee in itself that a work or its author will be accepted or rejected by the arbiters of literary taste on either side, as Mahmoud Kayyal demonstrates in his study of the writings of three Israeli-Palestinian authors and their reception or lack thereof by Palestinian critics.<sup>38</sup>

While this thesis is not a study of the reception or lack thereof of Naqqash or of his works, it does seek to theorize how Shlomo Al-Kurdi specifically, and Naqqash's oeuvre more broadly, might fit into a literary history. It is an exercise that necessarily proceeds in fits and starts in order to convey the full panorama of identities that Naqqash adopted, rejected, challenged and forged through his writing.

On the one hand, his writing is of interest to readers of Israeli literature, even though only one of his stories, "Yawm Ḥabalat wa-Ajhadat Al-Dunyā" (Hebrew: "Yom she-Tevel Harta ve-Hipilu bo;" English: "The Day the World Conceived and Aborted) has been translated to Hebrew, by his sister Ruth. Similarly, excerpts of Naqqash's works have been presented in English as Israeli literature in Ammiel Alcalay's Keys to the Gar-

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such as Naqqash. I have selected the term "straddling cultures" to emphasize that although Naqqash may not yet have been granted a place among the pantheon of great Hebrew or Arabic writers, he is nevertheless acculturated to both Israeli and Iraqi/Arab cultures. Even if these cultures do not claim him, he has no choice but to claim them. The term "straddling" best expresses Naqqash's predicament from his own perspective and accurately captures the connotations of precariousness his situation invokes. Furthermore, the term "straddling" is also a hopeful one, suggesting that although Naqqash is not yet on firm ground, he and his works have not yet been consigned to oblivion.

38. See Mahmoud Kayyal, "Arabs Dancing in a New Light of Arabesques': Minor Hebrew Works of Palestinian Authors in the Eyes of Critics," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 11:1 (2008): 45-47. This can be inferred from Kayyal's indication that Anton Shammas' Hebrew-language *Arabeskot* work has been accepted by critics into a Palestinian canon, whereas the Hebrew-language work of Na'im Ara'idi and Sayed Kashua have not.

den,<sup>39</sup> an anthology by Israeli authors of Middle Eastern descent. It is noteworthy that Naqqash's stories are the only entries in Alcalay's volume translated from Arabic; not surprisingly, the rest have been written in Hebrew. Indeed, when all the content is published side-by-side in English, it is not possible to discern that the excerpts written by Naqqash originate in a different language than the others. Also held in common among the various authors is the fact that none of them is considered among the central voices of the Israeli cultural scene; rather, they contribute to the project of reclaiming a space for those marginalized within the Zionist literary canon. Even though Naqqash himself harbored ambivalent feelings about being included in that canon, and about exchanging his Iraqi passport for an Israeli one, thus curated he and his writings together become a site of alterity via which Hebrew literature can define and counter-define itself. However, when the center is Hebrew-language Israeli literature, Naqqash will forever occupy the margins.<sup>40</sup> Naqqash, by virtue of living his life in the Hebrew-speaking Jewish state, has one

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39. Cited above as Alcalay, "Keys to the Garden." Alcalay included two short translations excerpted from Naqqash's *Awrat al-Malāika* (Novel, 1991) [The Angel's Genitalia] and *Nubū'āt rajul majnūn fī madīnat mal'ūnah* (Short Stories, 1995) [Prophecies of a Madman in a Mad City] respectively.

40. In their essay, "Towards a Minor Literature," Deleuze and Guattari argue that the three characteristics of a minor literature are "the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (18). [Felix Deleuze and Giles Guattari, "Towards a Minor Literature," in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16-27.] While Naqqash's writing is certainly seen to possess political immediacy due to its linguistic politics, as an author he poses a notable challenge to Deleuze and Guattari's paradigm since the collective nature of his enunciation, at least in Shlomo Al-Kurdi, does not hearken back to a particular minority group living in the major language but speaking and writing it in a minor key. The fact that Naqqash, demographically, is a member of a group that has essentially *abandoned* the political sphere of the Arabic language, his writing in Arabic cannot purport to represent a present-day collective. The collectivity inherent in his writing is nostalgic at best.

foot in Jewish-Israeli literary history, even though he wrote *against* the linguistic norms of said canon. Yet, this view of Naqqash as linguistic and cultural renegade, as a romantic forever trapped in a language and culture rendered obsolete by Israeli cultural norms, clearly does not tell the entire story. Indeed, Naqqash could also have a place, and in recent years has come to have a place, among Arabic-language readers, and such a view must be taken into account as well.

It is thus possible to start again, to read Naqqash from the perspective of the Arabic-language literary scene. Indeed, while Naqqash was always known among the relatively small group Iraqi exiles in Europe and among Arab thinkers more generally, his work has recently enjoyed increasing posthumous acclaim by Arab authors and editors, namely from his native Iraq, in a variety of ways.

Within the Iraqi sphere, Naqqash's writings read quite naturally into the genealogy of modern Iraqi fiction, providing a sort of "pre-history"<sup>41</sup> for titles that draw upon Iraq's Jewish past, such as Ali Badr's 2008 novel, Hāris al-Tibgh (The Tobacco Keeper).<sup>42</sup>

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41. Citing Hans R. Jauss's notion of "pre-history," Lital Levy raises in her dissertation the necessity of writing a "pre-history" for the history of Arab Jews before the advent of political Zionism. See Lital Levy, "Jewish Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863-1914" (PhD diss., University of California - Berkeley, 2007) 30.

42. In Badr's text, a decidedly a-political Jewish Iraqi violinist leaves Iraq for Israel with his Jewish wife and son in the same mass immigration as Naqqash, in 1951. Disaffected with life in Israel, the violinist attempts to find his way back to Iraq. Along the way, he converts from Judaism, to Shi'ite Islam, and then to Sunni Islam, marrying a woman of each persuasion and then disappearing, but not before a son has issued from each union. His three sons are thus the unsuspecting members of an extended family that includes half-siblings on all sides of violence following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. 'Alī Badr, *Hāris al-tibgh* (Bayrūt: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2008). Published in English translation as Ali Badr, *The Tobacco Keeper* (Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2011).

In Badr's text, an inter-confessional extended family is formed via the transgressive, surreptitious actions of a lone individual. Similarly, or perhaps, in anticipation, in the work of Samir Naqqash, inter-confessional friendships that once resembled the bonds of kinship but have since been wiped from communal memory are memorialized and immortalized, as if put in a time capsule for a future explorer to unearth and resuscitate. Reading Naqqash and Badr in conversation with one another, it is not difficult to imagine the two authors as interlocutors on opposite ends of a scratchy telephone line stretching across geography and time, seeking to reunite contemporary Iraq with the lost sons of its multi-confessional past. In other words, when Naqqash is considered beyond the context of Hebrew-language, Israeli literature--a paradigm, as stated previously, where his person is discussed but the content of his works more or less ignored, his work takes on new import, providing a clue to a lost puzzle piece for which contemporary Iraqi authors are consciously searching.

Thus, it is not surprising that in the years since his death in 2004, Naqqash has warranted increasing attention in the Arabic language literary scene. One of his short stories, "Tantal," was included in Mustafa Shakir's groundbreaking 2008 anthology, Contemporary Iraqi Literature.<sup>43</sup> The inclusion of Naqqash in such a collection is remarkable, for it suggests that after struggling his entire life to be accepted in the Arabic-speaking literary scene as an Iraqi Jewish author, Naqqash had finally arrived--despite the Israeli citi-

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43. Samir Naqqash, "Tantal," in *Contemporary Iraqi Fiction: An Anthology*, ed. Mustafa Shakir (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 115-129.

zenship he had grudgingly possessed and had unsuccessfully tried to renounce.

While Shakir included Naqqash in an anthology based on the fact that Naqqash was born in Iraq and wrote in Arabic, it is also possible to read Naqqash more widely against a number of broader thematic trends in Arabic literature. For example, Reuven Snir sees Naqqash's early work as participating in the existentialist trend in Modern Arabic literature, which began in the 1950s. To that end, Snir draws parallels between Naqqash's existentialism and that of Egyptian author, Edwar Al-Kharrat.<sup>44</sup> Or, in another vein, the surrealism of Naqqash's oeuvre lends itself to the discussion about the traumatic experience of loss in the modern world, and the simultaneous attempt to reclaim a turath, or heritage, that seems to be slipping away.<sup>45</sup> For these reasons, the inclusion of Naqqash in an Arabic book fair or an Arabic literature syllabus is not only logical, but even imperative.

There is one additional conversation to which Naqqash is extremely relevant: the historical conversation about Jews in Arab lands *before* the advent of political Zionism. While Arabic-speaking Jews such as Anwar Shaul in Iraq were producing Arabic-language poetry and theater, in the 1920s, in effect announcing their arrival as members of the modern Iraqi state, their literature remains the object of study by cultural historians. It is in this historical conversation about Arab Jews that Orit Bashkin intervenes in her

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44. Snir; 'Arviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut; 209, particularly n321.

45. See, for example, Issa J. Boullata, Terri de Young, and Mounah Abdallah Khoury, eds; *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature* (University of Arkansas Press, 1997).

book, New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq.<sup>46</sup> Here, Bashkin articulates the notion of “Arab-Jewish time” as a means via which Iraqi Jews carved out a place for themselves in Arab nationalist ideology. “Arab-Jewish time” entailed the secularization of the Arab past, on one hand, and a stress on Arab culture, rather than on Islam, on the other. “Arab-Jewish time” was thus a means of historicization that privileged the flourishing of Jews under Islam. Granted, this sentiment was local in nature; it never became the official, canonical stance of any national literature, or, for that matter, any nationalist movement period--not Arab, and not Israeli. Yet, amongst their own, the construct of Arab-Jewish time enabled Iraqi Jewish intellectuals to imagine a future for themselves in a pluralistic Iraqi state. And in order to fully appreciate the notion of Arab-Jewish time, Zionism must necessarily be “provincialized.”<sup>47</sup> Shlomo Al-Kurdi as a text speaks in the native idiom of this “Arab-Jewish Time,” itself a subset of Marshall Hodgson's notion of Islamicate civilization and culture.

However, as Bashkin acknowledges, secularized Islam does not necessarily have to be “Arab,” with the multiethnic 'Abassid empire as a case in point. Indeed, as a concept, the notion of Arab-Jewish time, whether it is employed to historicize Jews in Iraq

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46. Orit Bashkin, New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1-3, also as presented in a lecture entitled “On Sponges and Lost Love: Three Poems and a Few Comments on Arab-Jewish History in Iraq,” at the University of Texas at Austin, March 12, 2012.

47. Bashkin, New Babylonians, 6. Here Bashkin notes that in calling for the provincialization of Zionism in order to understand Iraqi Jews in their own historical context, she is paraphrasing Dipesh Chakrabarty's well-known phrase.

(as communists or Iraqi patriots), or Iraqi Jews in Israel (as Arab Jews), excludes certain groups as well. Thus, while Iraqi Jews in the early 20th century understood themselves to be Arab Jews, meaning that they were both Jewish, and belonged to a greater Arabic-speaking culture and national movement that wasn't Zionism, they additionally understood themselves as part of the "East." For them this "East" included not only Arabs, but also enabled a wider political consensus that included other minority players in the Iraqi political sphere, such as the Kurds. Seen in this light, Naqqash's Shlomo Al-Kurdi serves as a potent reminder that just as the term *Mizrahi*, or "Eastern," in Hebrew masks nuances among the Jewish immigrants to Israel who did not hail from Europe, the category of "Arab-Jew," or "Arab Jewish time" also has the potential to mask nuance, in this case subsuming all the Jews living in the Islamicate cultural sphere as Arab. Seen in this light, Shlomo Al-Kurdi is a notable and timely intervention in the conversation about Arab Jews that defies expectations by placing a Kurdish Iranian Jew center stage.

Clearly, the choice of Kurdish as Shlomo's native language and Iranian Kurdistan as his ancestral homeland breathes new life into a body of literary works written by Arab-Jewish authors. On the one hand, the choice draws attention to the potential slippage between Mizrahi and Arab Jew, and between Arab Jew and Jews of the Islamicate cultural sphere, living in Arab Jewish Time. On the other hand, the choice of Kurdish and Kurdistan further complicates and intensifies the perceived marginality of a text written in Arabic by a Jewish citizen of the State of Israel. Ella Shohat suggests that Naqqash may have chosen to feature a Kurdish protagonist in protest of the low status accorded to Iraqi Kur-

dish Jews in Israel by Iraqi Jews with roots in Baghdad.<sup>48</sup> Seen in this light, the text serves to protest social inequality within Israeli society proper. Yet, what Shohat suggests about the relative status of different groups of Iraqi immigrants in Israel also hints at hierarchies of another sort. Of critical importance is that neither Arab readers (in Arabic) or Jewish readers (in Arabic, or in future translation into Hebrew or other languages) would necessarily be aware of pre-World War I historical events in light of which Shlomo Al-Kurdi transpires. Indeed, just as the history of Arab Jews is often elided from the official Zionist narrative, in a similar fashion is World War I in the Middle East also of little consequence in traditional historiography and European cultural memory. And while the famine that killed over a fourth of the population of present-day Syria and Lebanon is at least part of national memory, supported materially by national institutions, and the Armenian genocide is also widely taught and commemorated, World War I as experienced by the Kurds remains an outlier, often written off as peripheral to the national narratives around which histories of war are written. The vanquished among the vanquished, the Kurdish experience did not fit into any of the national histories of the League-of-Nations recognized sovereign Middle-Eastern entities that formed around them at the end of World War I.

In the text, Naqqash gives no indication or disclaimer that the historical events depicted are true, leaving the ostensibly uninitiated reader, perhaps accustomed to his or

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48. Conversation with Professor Shohat, Middle Eastern Studies Association (MESA) conference, December 2nd, 2011, Washington, DC.

her own hierarchies of historical trauma, to reevaluate. Indeed, World War I devastated the Kurdish population of Iran, not only from artillery fire, but also from exposure, crop failure, and famine. British diplomatic reports document a high death toll from hunger in and around both Sulaymaniyya and "Sawj Bulaq" (Şablākh), a situation that resulted both in cases of a daily gathering of the dead, as well as cannibalism among the living.<sup>49</sup> It is estimated that close to 500,000 Kurdish civilian lives were lost during the war. In the text, Naqqash alludes to a number of foundational traumas for various ethnic and religious groups, such as the the destruction of the first and second Jewish temples, the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, the Farhūd, and the Nakbah. However, by creating a genealogy of trauma that seeks to situate all of these events in the forgotten catastrophe of a forgotten people, a people whose national aspirations were overruled in the Treaty of Lausanne, Naqqash calls into question the privileging of any one foundational trauma over another. In other words, Shlomo Al-Kurdi interrogates not only the Zionist and the Arab nationalist ideological narratives, but also the contemporary discourse surrounding the Arab Jew that itself may elide the existence and national aspirations of other ethnic minorities such as the Kurds. All of this is to say that Shlomo as a character elides categorization, similar to but even more than in the case of Naqqash himself. By crafting a Kurdish protagonist, Naqqash reaches even deeper into the world of subject distant both temporally and epistemologically, a subject resisting his objectification and abjectification by an unforgiving

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49. David McDowell, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (New York: I. B. Tavis & Co., LTD., 2004).

history. In other words, by anchoring the text upon the pinhead of a deeply-felt trauma deep in the territory and the memory of Kurdistan, the text plunges even deeper into the black hole of the margins of history. This is the space of trauma, a space of dissonance where nothing and everything, no one and everyone belong, a space where the familiar significations break down. In this sense, all three of Kurdistan, Shlomo and Naqqash can only be read in terms of Kristeva's *carnival*, to be read in-between, in the cracks, nowhere and everywhere, allowing the alternative temporality governing these spaces to lead the way.

Thus, by staging a plot about Kurdish Jews, in Arabic, language of the enemy, in Israel, promised land of the Jews, the text not only resists the binary opposition of Arab and Jew, but also destabilizes the entire conversation by blowing up the borders of the conversation. The text admits the familiar notions of *Arab* and *Jew* only on a case-by-case basis; the author guards the fabric of the text with great care and vigilance. The reader must beware that this text may or may not be autobiographical, may or may not confirm expectations about the dimensions of Arab, Jewish, Muslim, Iraqi, Şablākhi, and/or Kurdish cultural belonging. What the text does do, however, is admit that under the pressures of the black hole of memory of the traumatized subject, such distinctions as those between character and author, speaking and listening, or Arab and Jew, do not hold up to scrutiny. While it is possible to approach Shlomo Al-Kurdi from various sub-disciplines of literary and cultural history, charting its reception in Israel, its reception in the Arab world, and its significance in its native cultural context of "Arab-Jewish" time, and

Islamicate cultural memory, ultimately the distinctions among these divergent spheres of inquiry collapse on the threshold of the text. It is only in retrospect that the mere existence of these distinct areas of human knowledge manifests itself also as an aftereffect of the traumas articulated within. That is, while the text is an enigma when seen from the vantage point of literary history and the politics of canonicity, when the tables are turned and literary and cultural history is seen from the vantage point of the text, the sub-divisions of the field (Hebrew, Arabic, Muslim, Jewish, Arab-Jewish, Kurdish, Islamicate) seem a type of aftereffect of trauma. It is for this reason, for the violence inherent in the mere periodizations of history, that Shlomo Al-Kurdi must begin anew, narrating trauma as he himself has lived it.

## B. Plot, Poetics and Gravity

While narration can function as a means of intervention in a literary history that does not accommodate the marginal, Shlomo Al-Kurdi is stymied in this regard partly in that it is a text that resists the act of summary. Indeed, given the repetition, haunting and speechlessness inherent in a narration built upon the poetics of the black hole, Shlomo Al-Kurdi is a text that enacts the difficulty of the traumatized subject in accurately historicizing. Indeed, it is Shlomo himself who first likens the presence of Şablākh in his mind to a *black hole*, or a *thaqab aswad*: "Şablākh, kāna bi-al-nisbati lī thaqaban aswad, aw ‘adaman, fī ra’sī yaḥwī juhlī al-‘aqlī \ Şablākh, it was for me an absence, a black hole in my head that contained my reasoned ignorance."<sup>50</sup> For Shlomo, the defining experience of his life is experienced as an *absence* in his mind, an absence that just like the center of a black hole, collapses all mass with its infinite gravity, all light and all time into an infinitely dense single point that simultaneously contains everything and nothing within itself. Under circumstances such as these, memory constantly inaugurates itself anew, returning to the place where it is absent, only to disappear again so that it can yet again return.

This repetition of traumatic memory, its ability to stage repeated returns, was first pathologized by Freud.<sup>51</sup> Observing patients who had served as soldiers in World War I,

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50. Naqqāsh, Shlomo Al-Kurdi, 69 [Arabic]. This and all other translations from the text are my own.

51. In the original Greek, trauma refers to a physical wound. In modern parlance, however, the scope of the term has expanded to include blows that torment the mind. Freud adopted such a notion of trauma as he crafted the tenets of psychoanalytic theory. Since then, theorists and theories of trauma have

Freud posited that memory of traumatic experience haunts the subject, returning again and again, stubbornly and disruptively, possessing him with its presence as it constantly inaugurates itself anew.<sup>52</sup> In the case of Shlomo Al-Kurdi, the haunting of the text necessitates that the reader in essence iron out the wrinkles in time in order to recover elements of the narrative from the infinite gravity of proverbial black hole in order to isolate events as they may have occurred, thus attempting to achieve the contours of a chronological summary.

Such a summary may read as follows. Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time presents itself as a death-bed retrospective on a lifetime punctuated by multiple traumas of dislocation and the subsequent attempts to reconstruct a self whose integrity is increasingly denied by each subsequent upheaval. The narrative follows protagonist Shlomo Kattani, a young, successful Kurdish Jewish merchant from idyllic Sabkakh in Qajar Iran, at the outset of World War I, through his death as a quiet yet defiant old man in Ramat Gan, Israel. Şablākh, like much of the Kurdish areas in Western Iran, finds itself a no-man's land during the war, a battle field for the warring Russian and Ottoman armies, with the Iranian sovereign, the Shahanshah, decidedly uninterested in defending this forsaken corner of his territory. The rivalry between the two foreign armies exacts a high

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proliferated to interpret and explain the unprecedented upheavals of the 20th century and beyond.

52. Ironically, like the events of Şablākh, Freud's treatment of trauma and repetition was also borne of the events of the First World War. In Freud's case, observing the recurrent nightmares and post-traumatic symptoms of soldiers returning from the battle front, a war whose mechanized destruction was heretofore unprecedented, inspired his theory of trauma.

civilian death toll, as each side plays games of divide-and-conquer, privileging one religious group while subjecting the other(s) to gratuitous acts of violence. Events both historic and local conspire to create a horrific, if little-documented crisis of historic and highly traumatic proportions.

Seen from afar, the economic collapse wrought by the riptides of World War I in Şablākh gives way to an epidemic of starvation and human cannibalism, comprised of the stories of countless individuals and families. While the text meditates on the causes, effects and meaning of this epidemic, it also sketches in loving detail a handful of individuals whose lives are at once far removed from and yet deeply embroiled in the cyclone.

Shlomo and his Muslim business partner Mir Ali have known one another since childhood. While the reader's first introduction to the pair is their triumphant return from a trade mission to Moscow, laden with enticing merchandise, by the end of the narrative neither man's family remains intact. Shlomo's second wife Esther and her two young children together are murdered by the stray bullets of trigger-happy foreign soldiers, while Mir's younger brother Rada also succumbs, to both the war and his own lustful madness. And in an inversion of the well-known history of the Farhūd,<sup>53</sup> where Muslims took in and protected their Jewish neighbors, the Jewish Shlomo hides in his own home his Muslim business partner plus his extended family, sustaining and protecting them throughout

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53. The Farhūd was a series of Nazi-inspired, anti-Jewish urban riots that occurred in Baghdad on June 1 and 2, 1941 that occurred between the collapse of the pro-Nazi government of Rashid Ali and the arrival of British forces. Jewish properties were looted and over 170 Jews were killed.

the second Russian occupation of Şablākh. Despite the desires of the occupying powers to the contrary, Shlomo and Mir find their religious differences unremarkable and hardly a reason to betray lifelong bonds of friendship in the name of an abstract politics of divide and conquer.

In addition to featuring business partners of divergent religious backgrounds, the text also includes a communist in its Şablākhi mosaic. Hasan Jaqmaq, the idealistic, Muslim communist, heralds the arrival of Russian forces as the dawn of the liberation of the proletariat. His affinity for the Orthodox Russians is an outlier given that Şablākhis' loyalties tended to fall according to religious lines. For Jaqmaq, Russian war crimes in Şablākh are not only a premeditated, religiously-motivated attempt to taunt and torment the city's Muslims, but also a betrayal of the values of Marx and Lenin. When he marches in to the Russian headquarters to tell the commander such, he is jeered by the Russian officers but later cheered and lionized by the Russian military rank and file. Hasan's behavior, although portrayed somewhat farcically, pays homage to the intellectual fancies of Iraqi, and particularly Jewish-Iraqi intellectuals living across the border in Samir Naqqash's Iraq.

There are also three well-developed sub-plots that question the relationship between the political and the personal. First, the unlikely affair between Hasan Bozourk, a young man whose family's food supplies run low, and Almas, a young woman orphaned by a missile attack on her father's home, suggests the degree of personal transformation possible in times of extreme duress. The relationship develops into one of mutual love

and affection as both Hasan and Almas are transformed. With Almas's pregnancy, paternal feelings awake in Hasan the spirit of compassion and sacrifice, impelling him to struggle as he takes his last breath to obtain food at gunpoint for his starving loved ones.

While Hasan's transformation and heroism is laudable, the actions of characters in other sub-plots paint a far less flattering image of human behavior under extreme circumstances. Specifically, the actions of feuding brothers Wali and Murtada Haji-Zadeh ultimately spell disaster for the remains of Şablākh's paltry wartime agricultural output and food supply. The depths of humiliation to which Wali brings Murtada during *Yawm Al-Iştabul* (Day of the Stable), and the subsequent humiliations he visits upon him during *Yawm Al-Madār* (Day of the Circle Trot), both foment in Murtada a burning desire for revenge that supersedes any powers of foresight or prudence. The feud between the two brothers and their gangs of thugs ensure that what remains of Şablākh's warehouses and fields go up in smoke, even as the residents of the village starve.

Thus, in the long run, against the big screen of the war and the smaller screens of individual hardship, also destroyed is the deeply-rooted, multi-confessional community of Şablākhī Kurds. Destroyed along with this community is the utopian dream for which it stands of human equality and decency in the face of the military machines revved up and unleashed by the merciless forces of modern ethno-nationalisms. Sadly, Shlomo's frantic, crazed attempts to stave off disaster, both in his own home and in Şablākh writ large, come to naught: political intrigue and conspiracy theories in Tehran compel the remaining Jewish families in Şablākh to flee for their lives, leaving behind them everything

and everyone they ever loved.

While the story of Şablākh ends there with the exile and exodus of the city's Jews, it is Shlomo's family, and ultimately Shlomo himself, whom the text continues to track in the years after the trauma of expulsion, painting in exquisite detail their heavy footprints, weighed down by memories and specters.

In Baghdad, Shlomo's family finds itself reduced to the status of impoverished, stateless refugees. Shlomo defiles himself scrubbing British toilets in order to feed his children and eventually decides there is no choice but to set out on the open sea to seek his fortune in British India. Lady Luck soon smiles upon him, and he rebuilds his fortune importing used clothing from India to Iraq. Yet, the tables turn again as the terrors of Şablākh repeat themselves in the Farhūd. Within ten years, Shlomo's children, all married, leave Iraq for Israel and the United States. Shlomo and other remaining Kurdish Jewish refugees are deported back to Iran. Shlomo dreams of returning to Baghdad, but instead he is carried by the unrelenting tide of history to Israel where he joins his children, returning to Baghdad only in memory. The reader is thus invited to follow Shlomo as he attempts to narrate through all of these vicissitudes, as well as through the culmination of his story: his moment of dying and approaching the gates of heaven, at which moment he is perhaps finally and unequivocally able to speak of what he saw, or, at the very least, is able in his dying moments to designate Time as his executor and trustee to all of his memories, authorizing Time to speak eternally on his behalf. Time as narrator, while lacking Shlomo's empathy or artistic touch, nevertheless seems a worthy heir. After

all, Time by definition resides outside the infinite gravity of the black hole, thus enabling him to historicize, to measure and evaluate the passing of the moments of human life with the perspective of eternity.

### C. Trauma: Narrative Structure as Black Hole

Drawing on Freud's early work on the repetitive nature of trauma, Cathy Caruth posits a *structure* of traumatic experience:

The pathology [of trauma] consists [...] in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or an event.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, traumatic experience is structured *differently* than ordinary, everyday experiences. Whereas everyday experience proceeds chronologically, the structure of traumatic experience is such that events in question are not fully assimilated until after their repeated return, if ever at all. In this way, traumatic experience creates its own temporality.

The narrative structure of Shlomo Al-Kurdi, like the structure of traumatic experience itself, similarly creates its own temporality -- a temporality borne of repetition and haunting; however, it also introduces the notion of narrated trauma as circularity, a notion not directly accounted for by Caruth.

Indeed, the text manages to speak of the traumatic implosion of Kurdish Şablākh only by alternatively employing a *traumatic mode* in the first part of the text, and a *prophetic mode* in the second, where one part/mode leads back to the other in an infinite loop. Such is the *black hole* of traumatic memory, where the traditional laws of time and

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54. Cathy Caruth, "Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4-5.

space do not apply. Shlomo thusly lives and re-lives the events of Şablākh, an experience with infinite density and yet no measurable mass, where the traumatic events return again and again by virtue of the very infinitely-looped structure of the text. In this way, Naqqash's text transforms Caruth's *repeated* return and *departure* into a type of *eternal* return and departure.

It should be noted that alongside the eternal return of the trauma of the physical destruction of Şablākh abides another trauma: an epistemological destruction, Shohat's epistemological violence on a much larger scale: the replacement of multiethnic empires and the imposition of nationalist nation-states. Şablākh, a multi-confessional Kurdish village, had no place in this new world, both on account of its multi-confessional makeup, as well as its Kurdishness at the inopportune juncture in time known as World War I. Indeed, For Freud's traumatized patients, for Shlomo, and for Şablākh, World War I was a moment where life could not continue as it had always been, a moment where time began not only to bend, but also to be cut and spliced, making itself both circular and non-congruent. Such non-congruency and circularity becomes is the texture of the novel's prose, for such is the texture of experience for Shlomo and for Şablākh at the critical historical moment of World War I.

The novel is not plot-driven, but rather, it is a patchwork of memories, at times completely devoid of order, at other times chronological, but mostly impressionistic and deeply grounded in Shlomo's consciousness. The reader is aware of a traumatic event around which this entire haze of memories and recollections revolves in circular fashion,

but the core of this system of orbit does not reveal itself but slowly and painstakingly. This event shapes the narrative with extreme force, exerting a sense of seriousness and density on the narrative, and yet not truly present except in its absence. The most tangible moment of the narration, the dense core towards which the entire thing spirals, is the conclusion, the moment of exile, the quiet snap when the roots are finally torn free from the soil in Şablākh. This is the moment where the narration ends, but it is also the moment where it begins.

Giving some semblance of directionality to the text is the interplay between its two sections, which together not only narrate trauma, but also reenact and redefine the structure of trauma itself. The first section of the novel, entitled "Mā Ba‘d Şablākh / "After Şablākh," spanning the years 1919 through 1985, chronicles Shlomo's sundry attempts to re-situate and re-root himself and his family in the wide world beyond, and in fact after, Şablākh. This chronicle, however, is anything but a chronicle in the traditional sense of the word. The chapters are presented in chaotic, a-temporal fashion. At this stage the reader remains unsure of what actually occurred in Şablākh, except for the fact that unsaid memories from that storied place, whatever those memories may contain, are a highly disruptive force in Shlomo's life.

In Writing History, Writing Trauma,<sup>55</sup> historian and theorist Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between trauma that is physically experienced, which he calls *historical*

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55. Dominick LaCapra; Writing History, Writing Trauma; (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

trauma, and trauma that is simply a constitutive part of broader acculturation and passed down via cultural artifacts, which he calls *transhistorical trauma*. According to LaCapra, historical trauma results in a sense of loss, whereas in the case of transhistorical trauma, the subject experiences not loss, but *lack*.<sup>56</sup> In the case of Shlomo and Şablākh, the reader familiar with the narratives of Zionism and of Arab nationalism will recognize that Shlomo has experienced some type of historical trauma that does not comprise any piece of the genealogies transhistorical trauma commemorated or consecrated by either of these narratives. By crafting a narrative structure, which, mimicking the structure of trauma, stages repeated returns to a space of historical trauma outside of the realm of the more prominent nationalist narratives of Zionism and Arab nationalism, the text confounds any attempt to be read according to traditional notions of canonicity.

The staging of repeated returns to Şablākh suggests the city as site of *founding*, or *foundational trauma* for a lost community. LaCapra and others, such as David Eng, coin the such a notion as a shared experience around which a sense of community and kinship is formed.<sup>57</sup> While the terms *founding* and *foundational trauma* can be interchangeably, in this context the term *foundational trauma* is preferable in that it conveys the notion of trauma as a platform upon which both individuals and nationals build their narratives;

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56. Interestingly, LaCapra warns that the conflation of lack and loss can create what amounts to a dangerous precedent whereby a lack, misinterpreted as an impossible loss, is experienced as a type of secular original sin. See LaCapra, *Writing History*, xiv.

57. LaCapra, *Writing History*, 81.

whereas the term "foundational trauma" connotes the nation founding itself upon stories to the potential exclusion of the individual who constructs his own individual edifice. A founding/foundational trauma may begin as historical, but ultimately becomes transhistorical and mythic as it is bequeathed from generation to generation. With Şablākh, Shlomo sanctifies for himself such a foundational trauma, but since the story of Şablākh is one he says will fall upon deaf ears, he implicitly accepts that this trauma is one that shall forever remain in the real of the historical. He implicitly accepts that it shall never be canonized in either a national consciousness, or a national literary canon -- not in Hebrew, nor in Arabic, nor in Kurdish.<sup>58</sup> Shlomo's loss is more immediate than those of any nationalism, for he has experienced it as a loss rather than a lack, yet its tragedy is that it is constitutive only of a stillborn identity that never was to be, and that like a mule, will not perpetuate itself for another generation. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the circular nature of the two sections of the text take on greater import in sustaining Shlomo as he attempts to narrate his story of his personal foundational trauma from within the space of the black hole.

The first section, "Mā Ba‘da Şablākh / After Şablākh," opens as Shlomo is already

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58. The reason for the impossibility of canonization in each of the three languages is different. That the novel features a Jewish character who ultimately migrates to Israel would seem to disqualify it from canonicity in spite of its being written in Arabic. The fact that it is written in Arabic and consecrates the memory of a place where Jews suffered equally alongside Muslims and Christians and were not uniquely persecuted on account of their being Jewish would seem to disqualify it from the Zionist canon. And, the lack of national institutions operating in the Kurdish language would seem to impede the creation of a Kurdish "national" canon on logistical, practical and semantic grounds.

an old man, highly reflective yet mysteriously defiant in Ramat Gan, Israel in 1985. From there, the reader is transported back to Shlomo's youthful years in Baghdad and Mumbai in 1924, more than sixty years prior. From there, even earlier to Baghdad in 1919, and then skipping stones ahead to Baghdad of 1930, 1941, and 1951. The last two chapters of the first section chronicle Shlomo's second exile, from Baghdad, to Tehran in 1961. The section concludes again in Ramat Gan in 1985. Conversely, the second section of the novel, entitled "Şablākh 1914-1918," attempts a chronological narration of events, seemingly unaffected by traumatic memory and its aftereffects. Although, ultimately the text suggests that this second part is also narrated from within the black hole of traumatic memory, albeit under the fallacious pretense that it has somehow been freed of trauma's repeated returns.

In each of these times and places in the first part, Shlomo carries with him his memories of Şablākh, memories he likens in their expansiveness to the deep waters of the sea: "Fī a'lā'ī mustawda' aw marbiḍ dhikrayāt makhzūnah bi-kalimāt tuḍāḥī hādhā al-bahr al-sā'ūn naḥnu ilayhi \ And above me a storehouse or a sheep fold of memories, archived in words that resemble this sea towards which we are heading." (17) Not only does Shlomo carry the memories; the memories also carry him, like a boat slowly drifting on the sea.

Throughout, Shlomo not only remembers, but is haunted by memories of Şablākh, memories that pounce without warning, just like an animal in a *marbiḍ*, a sheep fold. One such instance occurs on Shlomo's initial foray to Mumbai. The seemingly benign depths

of the sea churning below the boat invert themselves in Shlomo's mind, evoking the the towering mountains of Kurdistan, their pure white caps of fresh snow stained by trails of blood. Pleasant daydreams of a future reclaimed, of fortune regained and honor restored, give way to an attack of the past, a reconstitution of the horrors of Şablākh on the screen of Shlomo's mind. No sooner does he celebrate his good luck at having found a benefactor in Mumbai than traumatic memory pounces without warning, short-circuiting his celebration:

Hā qad ḍamantu nafaqātī fī Bumbāy [...] Fa-lan afqud al-hadaḍ alladhi min ajlihi rakibtu al-bahr [...] wa-haq ‘aynayki yā umm al-banīn?! Hābī qad iktasabtu ṣadīqan wa-dalīlan fī ‘urḍ al-bahr wa-hīna sayursū al-markab fī Sāsūn Dūk... Lā, lā. Inna ashbāḥ al-māḍī tanba‘ithu faj’atan. Shayātīnuhu tarqaḍu ‘alā ashlā’ malā’ikatihi al-ṣarī’ah. Rād‘, mufāj’ah kānat tatawallad fī kull laḥzah, turá kayf satakūn al-laḥzah al-qādima? Mufāj’ah. Al-la‘na ‘alā dhālika al-māḍī wa-al-dhikrayāt! Mufāj’ah... rād‘! La tastabiqu al-umūr yā Shlūm! Turá mādhā sayahḍuth ba‘da an akhtū khaṭawātī al-ūlá ‘alā raṣīf Sāsūn Dūk? (22-23)

*Now I have ensured that my room and board will be taken care of in Mumbai [...] I shall not lose sight of the goal for which I have set out upon this ship [...] I swear it, Umm Al-Banīn [Asmar, Shlomo's first wife]. \ Now I have acquired a friend and a guide, while I am still in the middle of the sea, and once the ship anchors at Sasson Dock... No! No! the ghosts of the past are darting out suddenly. Its devils are dancing on the corpses of his angels, felled in battle. Take heed, surprises born at every turn. What does the coming moment hold? A surprise. Curses upon that past, and upon the memories! / A surprise... take heed! Don't prematurely anticipate events, Shlomo! Just wait and see what will happen once I take my first step on Sasson Dock! (22-23)*

Here, Shlomo is yanked from his joyful enthusiasm and anticipation of a successful conclusion to his trip by the sudden, haunting intrusion of a formless, all-encompass-

ing past. When Shlomo feels in control of his memories, he likens them to a storehouse like the sea -- he possesses his memories just as he possesses the free will to undertake his journey to Mumbai. However, when memory assumes the reigns, its formlessness takes on a fearsome agency. Memory here is like a ghost, quick as the ship is slow -- "tan-ba'ithu faj'atan \ darting out suddenly." It is a past that is diabolically nimble, able to turn the celebration in Shlomo's heart, itself a dance of sorts, into a blasphemous ritual of desecration -- "Shayātīnuhu tarqaḍu 'alá ashlā' malā'ikatihi al-ṣarī'ah. \ Its devils are dancing on the corpses of his angels, felled in battle." Because the capriciousness of this past has invaded his present, Shlomo is inclined to equate not only the past, but the future as well with surprise and nothing but surprise -- *mufāj'ah*. It is only by consciously attempting to distance himself from these mysterious memories, by burying them in the flood of his curses -- "al-La'nah 'alá dhālika al-māḍī! / Curses upon that past!" that he can divest them of their power to hijack his hopes for success, hopes that had now already begun to materialize on the ship. Shlomo must fight off the belated return of the memories of Şablākh in order to proceed to seek his fortune.

The linguistic cues in the text suggest that looking back, Shlomo sees a red thread connecting all subsequent hardships in his life as a wandering Kurdish Jew to be related to the initial unraveling of his ancestral village of Şablākh. He initially uses the term *ah-wāl*, or *terrors*, to describe the traumatic, unspeakable events of Şablākh. The *hawl*, pl. *ahwāl*, according to Lisān Al-'Arab, is "Al-Makhāfah min al-amr la yadrī mā yahjum 'alayhi minhu ka-hawl al-bahr wa-hawl al-layl. / The fear of something unknown that at-

tacks without warning, such as the hawl of the night, or the hawl of the sea."<sup>59</sup> The use of such a term highlights the powerlessness and potential lack of agency of he who fears and is terrorized. It is thus noteworthy that during the first part of the novel, before Shlomo has even clarified what occurred to him in Şablākh, or even in Baghdad, he employs the term *ahwāl* as a catch-all phrase. He likens his experiences in these two cities to things fluid, such as the sea or ghosts as seen above, likening himself to an oar and recasting himself as an active subject in the face of the repetition of these *ahwāl*: "Fa-ra'aytuka tuhaddiq bī, anā al-mijdhāf alladhī fajj al-ahwāl waṣāṭ al-zaman, anā, kawmah quwāmiā mi'atu 'āmin mumaddidah 'alā al-sarīr" / "I saw you starting at me, me the oar that has straddled the terrors (*ahwāl*) in the middle of time, me, a one-hundred year old pile spread out on the bed." (9) Indeed, the canvas of the term *ahwāl* slowly expands to include other traumatic experiences that for Shlomo evoke the same sense of loss and powerlessness as the events of Şablākh -- namely, the loss of his wife Asmar in the Farhūd. Other Jewish characters come to employ the term *ahwāl* as well. For example, Sheikh Mordechai Hayy pleads as he receives a fearsome, prophetic vision on the eve of Asmar's death in the Farhūd, "Limādha tu'āqibunī yā mawlāy bi-m'arifāt al-ghayb al-mashū'm al-muf'ima bi-al-ahwāl?" / "Why do you punish me, O Lord, with knowledge of the ill-omened void, infused with terrors?" (51) Even though it is not Shlomo who received the vision in this instance, the vision is nevertheless one of a *hawl* that comes to terrorize

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59. Lisān al-'Arab, definition of *hawl*: <http://baheth.info/all.jsp?term=هول>. Accessed 11/24/2010.

Shlomo and his family in particular and add to their cumulative experience of trauma and loss.

Shlomo experiences the Farhūd, one *hawl* among all *ahwāl*, not as a tragedy onto itself, nor as an independent historical event, but rather, as a *repetition*, a repetition of Ṣablākh:

Wa-tabkī al-sakīnah tandub al-arwāh al-barī'ah allatī uzhiqat, waylī 'alā al-dimā' al-zakiyya al-masfūha! (...) wa-hunāk min al-dhikrā suwar ka-al-atyāf, wa-minhā mā amtazija bi-al-rūḥ, fa-huwwa tiktār al-hayāt.. tabdu wa-ka'nna al-māḍī ṭawāhā lakinnahā tuba'th fī al-mustaqbal wa-sanaḥmiluhhā, min thumma, ma'nā ilā al-ajdhāth. (45)

*The Shekhina [immanence of God] cries, mourning the innocent souls that were extinguished. Woe for the innocent blood, poured out! (...) There are snapshots of memory, like ghosts, some of them mingled with the soul; it is the repetition of life... And it appeared as if the past had turned the page on these snapshots, but rather, they were revived again in the present, and they will continue to be revived in the future, and we shall carry them with us, for that reason, until our graves. (45)*

Here, Shlomo experiences mental snapshots from the moment of the Farhūd that "mingle" with his soul. The pictures are formless, like ghosts -- formless and foreboding like the formless *ahwāl*. And the mingling of past memories with present realities, forming a new type of compound, is what Shlomo articulates here as the "repetition of life," the sense of *déjà vu* from which the notion of foundational trauma derives its interpretive power. The past returns, permeating not only the present, but also, as Shlomo observes from the vantage point of his old age, permeating the future, permeating the remainder of

his life up until he meets his grave. He continues,

Fāj‘at al-awwal wa-al-thānī min Huzayrān, fāj‘at Yahūd Baghdād (...) Fāj‘atFāj‘atī anā, al-muḍā‘ifah, al-muthallathah, al-murabbi‘ah, al-mufarrikhah dūn hawādah kūlli ḥayātī al-muttaṣilah mundhu al-ān, wa-rujū‘an bi-thawānī al-‘umr, hatthā tilka al-sā‘ah al-mash’ūmah... (45)

*The calamity of the first and second of June, the calamity of the Jews of Baghdad (...) and my calamity, my doubled calamity, tripled, quadrupled, spawning without rest in all the parts of my life, connected, from this moment and returning back through the seconds of my life, until that ill-fated hour... (45)*

The language used here to describe Shlomo's sense of a genealogy of trauma permeating his life from the time of Ṣablākh all the way to the hour of his death is extremely telling. An anonymous calamity of a random date in history, in this case the specific date of the first and second of June, is at once the calamity of a particular religio-ethnic group, the Jews of Baghdad, which is at once his own personal tragedy. And yet for Shlomo, this is not merely an historical event, nor is it a single calamity: it is the *sum* of calamities (doubled, tripled, quadrupled), a sum that can be calculated by following the red thread through the connected moments (*muttaṣilah*, connected), from the Farhūd back through all the seconds of his life to that "ill-omened hour \ al-sā‘ah al-mash’ūmah."

The use of the term *al-mash’ūmah* (ill-omened) in particular strengthens the reader's sense that the return of which Shlomo speaks is a return to the *ahwāl*, or terrors of Ṣablākh. Throughout the chronological narration in the second part, events related to the movement of armies and the degradation of life within the city are repeatedly identified

as *al-shu'm*, or an ill-fated omen. Mir names Shlomo *Nabī Al-Shu'm*, or Prophet of the Bad Omen (214), as Shlomo continues to anticipate the starvation and destruction of the city. That Şablākh will starve is *shu'm* (132), and Shlomo uses the term *shu'm* to describe the swiftly deteriorating behavior of most of his neighbors. The emphasis on the events of Şablākh being *mash'ūmah* suggests that "from this moment" refers to the Farhūd, the moment when Shlomo felt his calamity quadrupled, and that "that ill-fated hour," or *al-sā'ah mash'ūmah* to which the calamity returns back through the seconds of Shlomo's life refers to Şablākh. That Shlomo should understand the Farhūd to be *muttaşilah*, or connected back to the ill-fated hour of Şablākh creates for Şablākh a pride of place in Shlomo's personal genealogy of trauma, elevating Şablākh to the status of foundational trauma, an event from which all subsequent events are descended. This would be akin to the martyrdom of 'Ali in Shī'ī tradition, or the destruction of the First Temple in Jewish tradition. In fact, Shlomo knows his Jewish history but draws a lesson quite opposite from what Baron's "lachrymose view" would suggest. Recounting ancient threads of Jewish cultural memory, Shlomo contemplates the implications of "Al-Ṭūfān wa-ghurbat Banī Isrā'īl wa-khurāb al-Haykal al-Awwal, wa-khurāb al-Haykal al-Thānī wa-sabī Ashūr wa-sabī Nabuchadnaşr [...] / The flood, and the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, and the destruction of the first temple, and the destruction of the second temple, the Babylonian exile the captivity of Nebuchadnezzar [...]." (161) He draws hope in the possibility of divine intervention, rather than feeling crushed under the weight of his despair, even if his sense of redemption is one that looks towards the restoration of Şablākh, rather than the

fulfillment of the Zionist project. Şablākh, however, for some odd reason, does not conform to the same redemptive logic that Shlomo applies to these other transhistorical traumas, to use Dominick LaCapra's terminology. Rather, for Shlomo, the great transhistorical traumas, tales from the realm of legend, tell a story of redemption of a sort, whereas his personal traumas, or, as LaCapra would put it, historical traumas, are a testament to the inherent ambivalence of the universe.

Thus, throughout the first part of the text, "Mā ba'da Şablākh / After Şablākh" the reader is made aware of a *fāji'ah*, a calamity, that was the first in a string of calamities for Shlomo, a string that Shlomo collectively refers to as the *ahwāl*, or terrors. These terrors are recurring in nature and infuse not only his past but also his future, to the extent that he must actively fight off the returns of traumatic memory associated with them in order to forge his way ahead in life. Yet, despite the everpresence of these *ahwāl*, the reader does not actually enter Şablākh or come to a clear understanding of what transpired there during the First World War, for Shlomo is haunted and speechless, unable to articulate what it was that he lived, and what he lost in that fated mountain hamlet. He is trapped within the atemporal confines of the black hole where he is again re-living Şablākh as if it is happening in that same moment, an absence so strong as to undermine his ability to escape the gravitational pull of the experience. Rather, in the first part, Shlomo's communication with the reader is punctuated by amorphous flashbacks, a disordered chronicle that lacks a sense of historical progression, and the articulation of a sense of entrapment and repetition. Under these circumstances, the reader is only aware that something momen-

tous has occurred prior to his arrival on the scene, and that Shlomo is simultaneously trying to escape and narrate that which transpired.

It is only in the second part of the text, "Qabla Al-‘Āṣifah: Şablākh 1914-1918 / Before the Storm: Şablākh 1914-1918" that the reader is finally initiated into a somewhat chronological telling of the events of Şablākh: the various waves of occupying armies-- Russian then Ottoman than Russian, the sectarian divide-and-conquer, the burning of the fields, and the political intrigue that ultimately spell expulsion for the city's Jews. This part, in contrast to the first part, is told not as a series of flashbacks like a Faulkner novel, but rather, as a testimony that proceeds in chronological fashion tinged by increasingly anxious premonitions of what lies over the horizon. And while unlike in Naqqash's Prophecies of a Madman in a Mad City, there are not overt references to the Book of Ezekiel in Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Naqqash's preoccupation with the book, and with the Bible more generally in this prior work suggests a subtle but significant parallel: Just as the book of Ezekiel, the book of the Bible that spans the destruction of Jerusalem and the First Temple in 586BC, is organized around seven visions, so is this section comprised of seven main *jawlāt*, or rounds of war, heightening the sense that events unfolding are in some way a latter-day Biblical prophecy.

The allusion to Biblical stories in the second part of the text as a way to provide a semblance of chronological order to memories of Şablākh suggests a narration that seeks to anchor itself in both Muslim and Jewish textual-cultural memory. In this way, the *hawl*, too, becomes a space of overlap, a vector of traumatic experience that begins to

defy fixed notions of foundational trauma where the borders of (traumatized) human communities start and stop with the nation.

This two-part structure, "Mā ba‘da Şablākh / After Şablākh" and "Qabla Al-‘Āşifah / Before the Storm" serves to initiate the reader into the decades of aftereffects of the novel's central trauma before a word is directly spoken of the *ahwāl* that occurred there. In this way, the reader approaches the events of Şablākh in a belated fashion. This is the belatedness to which Cathy Caruth refers when she says that in order for traumatic experience to be fully assimilated, and thus fully lived, traumatic experience requires the listening of another, of a witness, at a time subsequent to trauma's initial occurrence. It is only through the listening of a witness, *after* the fact of trauma, according to Caruth, that the traumatized subject may fully face their trauma, thus staging a departure from trauma's site. Two central questions for Shlomo are thus, to whom shall he speak; and how shall he speak, how shall he muster the force of will to escape the gravity of the black hole of memory?

The reader has already witnessed Shlomo grapple with these two questions, reliving the events of the foundational trauma of Şablākh over and over again in the sediments of his memory, before the text speaks directly, albeit belatedly, of what transpired there. This in turn suggests that even many years later, Shlomo is still not sure of how to begin speaking, despite the fact, or perhaps because of the fact that what occurred there has given shape in his mind to all the vicissitudes that followed.

Indeed, reading the two parts of the novel comparatively with each another sug-

gests a distinct mode of narrative time in each. The first half, in all of its a-temporality, suggests what can be called a *traumatic mode*: events are told out of order, the text is haunted by the repeated returns of traumatic memory, and the reader is never provided with a clear testimony of actually occurred in Şablākh. This is time as lived *after* traumatic experience, as has been the primary focus of contemporary trauma theorists as discussed in Chapter 1. Conversely, the second half of the novel, in its bold attempt to overcome the affects of trauma and traumatic memory as experienced by Shlomo, actually attempts narrate traumatic experience as if in the moment, namely, as a well-ordered, well-organized testimony. The text *seems* to take Shlomo back in time, to the time before the destruction of Şablākh, so that the reader sees Shlomo experiencing events for the first time. Yet, despite having been sent back in time and essentially having his memory erased, Shlomo is nevertheless possessed by a deep foreboding of what is to come. This is not the return of traumatic memory, but rather, *the time prior to the formation of traumatic memory*. Rather than return, there is instead *anticipation* of calamity, or the stillness before the storm.

This anticipation in turn suggests a different mode of time -- what, to borrow Dan Miron's terminology in his discussion of Bialik's "City of Slaughter," might be called the prophetic mode.<sup>60</sup> Miron identifies the attempt of many early Modern Hebrew authors

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60. In his essay, "The Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry," Dan Miron discusses the use of prophetic tonality in early works of Hebrew literature as inspired by the German "Sturm und Drang" and romanticism, including such works as Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a serious parody of the Sermon on the Mount (136). Taking Bialik's 1897 poem, "Surely, the People is Like Grass" (Isiah 40:7) as the poet's first of many "prophetic poems" of 1904-1906, Miron articulates a Hebrew genre of

and poets, such as Bialik and Mapu et al. to create "serious parody" of Biblical prophecy in the contemporary Romantic European tradition -- what Miron terms "pseudo-prophecy."<sup>61</sup> The notion of prophecy as organizing principle for the second part of the novel is already planted by the seven-part organization. However, prophecy in isolation is one thing; prophecy as a tool for the recovery and narration of memory prior to the moment of trauma is something else. I thus seek to borrow Miron's term "pseudo-prophecy" to juxtapose it, as a mode of time, with the atemporal and at times circular, historicization-resisting nature of traumatic memory.

Traumatic memory is inherently backwards-looking towards a moment of catastrophe already indelibly etched in one's consciousness. Pseudo-prophecy, on the other hand, can be construed as a type of *anticipation*, a type of looking forward towards a catastrophe waiting to happen. While the true prophet is inspired by a god, the pseudo-

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"pseudo-prophecy," in which the author may not employ "overt prophetic formulae" but nevertheless assumes "a tone of supreme moral authority" that makes overwhelmingly apparent his attempt to parody. It is important to note, of course, that Miron is considered the most canonical of canonical Hebrew critics, and Bialik is considered the father, or "prophet-founder," of Modern Hebrew verse, unlike Naqqash who has occupied only a marginal role in Israeli cultural life. See Dan Miron, "The Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry," in *The Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry and Other Essays on Modern Hebrew Literature* (New Milford, CT: Toby Press, 2010) 127-190.

61. While Miron suggests pseudo-prophecy as a way to evoke the "trappings of prophetic authority," it is notable that he does *not* argue that Hebrew is best suited for such a task. Indeed, in his treatment of Bialik's Yiddish-language "Dos Leste Vort," he suggests that Yiddish as "non-Hebraic and culturally non-sublime linguistic vehicle" serves to "offset" the self-aggrandizing implicitly in the self-identification as a messenger of God. While Bialik and Naqqash employ prophecy in very different ways and towards very different ends, there is something to be said for writing what Miron terms "pseudo-prophecy" in a vernacular tongue. In an inter-confessional, Arabic-speaking milieu, of course, the stakes of articulating prophecy are quite different than in a Yiddish-speaking, exclusively Jewish one. That comparison is not my purpose here.

prophet is rather a traumatized subject attempting to play the omniscient narrator as an empowering mechanism for the speaking of trauma. The true prophecy prophesizes whereas the pseudo-prophet *performs*. Thus, a key difference between prophecy and pseudo-prophecy is that prophecy is future oriented, whereas pseudo-prophecy, despite all appearances, is actually oriented towards the past. Pseudo-prophecy pretends to narrate trauma from a time prior to its occurrence, but since it is the product of the memory and speech of a traumatized subject speaking, indeed, narrating, in hindsight, it is an intervention in the telling of the past that employs artifice to empower the subject, grafting onto his character supernatural powers of foresight and discernment.

It is this artifice of pseudo-prophecy that provides Shlomo the semblance of narration, indeed, the semblance of agency, in the face of the black hole of memory. Specifically, the time leading up to the catastrophe of the expulsion from a starving, broken Şablākh is recalled in the first part of the text in traumatic flashbacks; in the second part, it is narrated as prophecy, with Shlomo as pseudo-prophet, using the tool of pseudo-prophecy and the omniscience of hindsight to craft a narrative device to enable his traumatized self to open up and speak. That Shlomo is also assisted by his two co-narrators further intensifies appearances of an inner battle to regain master over speech and memory.

Indeed, the actual, (collaborative) telling of the events of World War I in Şablākh is fashioned as a type of pseudo-prophecy, as opposed to being fashioned as the testimony of a traumatized survivor as the first part of the text. In Part Two, Shlomo is cast not as

the introspective old man reflecting on a lifetime of wandering, but rather, as a sort of modern prophet whose visions emanate from an uncertain combination of a fertile imagination, common sense, and preternatural inspiration.

The retrospective nature of the narration, however, casts doubt on the authenticity of Shlomo's prophecies; is casting the narrative in terms of prophecy a later revision, a way to bring order to the chaos of the story? Are his prophecies *performance*, are they pseudo-prophecies? Indeed, the imposition of prophecy as an organizing concept, as well as the introduction of the vocabulary of the divinely-ordained and supernatural, serves to recast the haunting memories of trauma in terms that allow for some type of control, as well as a modicum of possibility for human agency.

From early on, both Shlomo and Hacham Nahum hold up the Biblical story of Joseph as a guiding principle for the residents of Şablākh as the storm clouds of war gather. (131) The people of Şablākh assume they are far from harm's way, but unlike them, Shlomo "sami'a faj'atan al-dawīyy al-qādim min ba'īd \ heard suddenly the thunder advancing from afar" (131), and he instinctively draws on the Biblical story of Joseph as a *qudwah*, or guiding example. In his capacity as newly-appointed secular leader of the Jewish population of Şablākh, he intones to the worshippers gathered in the synagogue:

Yā ahl al-khayr wa-al-ḥikmah, innanā najid fī tawrātinā jawāban 'alá kulli shay'!  
wa-amāmanā sinūn 'ijāf sata'kul al-akḍar wa-al-yābis, wa-la tabqa 'alá shay' wa-  
innī l-ūshīr 'alaykum bimā ashārahu sayyidunā Yūsef al-Şadīq 'alá al-Maşrīyīna  
wa-ḥukām Mişr. (131)

*O people of goodness and wisdom, indeed we find in our Torah an answer to*

*everything! And before us are many years of famine that will destroy everything. There shall remain nothing at all. I only have to point to Joseph the friend of the Egyptians and the rulers of Egypt. (131)*

Hacham Nahum seconds Shlomo's characterization of events: "Na‘m al-tashkhīs wa-na‘m al-ishārah, fa-li-yakun lanā fī al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ qudwa hasanah. / Yes to the characterization and yes to the analogy, let us have from amongst our righteous forefathers a shining example! (131)" And when the people congregated find themselves confused and flustered by Shlomo and Hacham Nahum's cryptic proclamations, Shlomo clarifies that he will offer his own house and provisions to the community if necessary once the time comes. He also warns others to store food for what he predicts will be the impending dry years--particularly his business partner Mir Ali who continues to sell food rather than purchase it. Shlomo's hoarding in his own home comes to border on the absurd as his domicile teems with chickens and other fowl that will no longer fit in the chicken coop. No one believes Shlomo, and everyone calls him *majnūn*, or crazy. The more Shlomo sets his sights on serving as Joseph, the *mashbir*, or the supplier of food for his city, the more his city considers him a lunatic spewing false prophecies of a make-believe Armageddon. Yet Shlomo imagines that if he succeeds as Joseph, Ṣablākh will be saved from the ravages of the war.

While Shlomo determines to hoard food as well as Joseph, providing food and organizing logistics in preparation for an impending famine, the text suggests that Shlomo's behavior is seen not simply as prudent, but also as bordering on the prophetic. Re-

turning from morning prayers, Shlomo fears that his prophecies will be realized: "Arjū khawfan min an tataḥaqqāqa nubū'āti. / I recoil with fear that prophecies will be realized." (141) Indeed, the ubiquity of the term *tanabba'*, to prophesize, historically related to the word *nabīy*, or prophet,<sup>62</sup> to characterize Shlomo's premonitions about the coming of the famine add to the reader's sense of Shlomo as a latter-day Joseph. Shlomo's neighbors eventually come to recognize him as a type of seer, and Mir asks him if he has become *Nabīy Al-Sh'um*, (214) or the Prophet of Ill-Omen, an epithet that belies the sense throughout the village that Shlomo has been gifted with an almost supernatural ability of foresight. And should Shlomo succeed, as a result of his preternatural foresight, to save Şablākh, then perhaps the passing of the Great War through Shlomo's small city will simply be one of the many times in Jewish history when destruction loomed large on the horizon, but the people were ultimately redeemed.

Aware of the village's growing insistence that he possesses preternatural abilities, Shlomo vehemently denies the claim, instead ascribing his foresight to being well-informed about history and human nature:

Anā lastu bi-nabīy wa-la bi-hakīm al-‘aşr, lākinnanī sami‘atu wa-qar’atu ‘an ahwāl ḥurūb al-hamqá. Inna al-jū‘a qādim yā ahl Şablākh! Kuntu ad‘uw al-nās li-shirā’ mā amkana min mu’an istihlākiyyah. (208-209)

*I am not a prophet, nor am I a wise man of the age, but I heard and I read about the terrors of wars of folly. Hunger is coming, O people of Şablākh!*

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62. For more on this relationship, see John Huehnergard, "On the Etymology and Meaning of Hebrew Nabi," *Eretz Israel* 26 (1999): 88-93.

*I would call to the people to buy what they could of consumer goods.*  
(208-209)

The question of Shlomo's exceptional powers of foresight is posed repeatedly throughout the testimony of the second part of the text and casts a shadow of existential proportions.

If Shlomo undertakes the mantle of modern-day prophet even though his "prophecy" is not necessarily divinely blessed and ordained as was Joseph's, what does that mean for the notion of divine plan in an era of such extreme political upheaval? In this regard it is also noteworthy that just as prophecy is no longer what it once was, similarly the very framework of folk tradition more generally has ceased to guide the people and guard them from harm.

The question of Shlomo's reliability, as both narrator and prophet, will be undertaken in greater detail subsequently. For now, suffice it to say that the notion of Shlomo as struggling prophet, devoid of divine assistance or even regard, is underscored by the changing meaning of an epithet typically applied to cities: *Al-Mahrūsah*, or, guarded by God. Throughout, Şablākh is referred to as "Şablākh Al-Mahrūsah," or "Şablākh, Guarded by God." However, this term gradually loses its force as Şablākh comes under siege, eventually taking on an ironic shade of meaning. After the massacre of Muslim civilians by Russian troops, the occupying forces demand that the Jews, the smallest and ostensibly weakest religious group in the village, bury the bodies outside of the Muslim cemetery, without the traditional rites of Muslim burial. Shlomo asks,

A-fa-takfī hādhihi al-sā‘ah al-khalawiyya ma‘a rabbī li-daf‘i al-ghimmah  
‘an baldatinā al-maḥrūsah? Wa-ḍaḥaktu min hādhihi al-kalimah. (182)

*Is this solitary hour alone with my Lord sufficient to drive away the sadness from Baldatna Al-Maḥrūsah, our village protected from on high? And I laughed at this word. (182)*

Shlomo laughs here because the word *maḥrūsah*, although embedded in everyday speech, no longer carries much force of meaning in a new political reality where Ṣablākh is clearly *not* protected by anything, neither sovereign below nor god above. Shlomo expresses this same sentiment more forcefully subsequently, when speaking of the twenty-three Christians and fifteen Jews slaughtered in yet another massacre, this time led by Ottoman forces, he notes that "Kull ha’ulā’ min ahl Ṣablākh Al-Maḥrūsah allatī wa-yā lil-asaf lam ta‘ud maḥrūsatan. / All of them were among the people of Ṣablākh the Protected that is no longer so protected." (229) Here, Shlomo openly declares that the phrase is no longer applicable. Thus, just as *Ṣablākh Al-Maḥrūsah* is no longer truly *maḥrūsah*, or protected, as it was in the days of old, similarly, prophets no longer prophesize in line with divine inspiration and plan. The second part of the text may be narrated as if a prophecy unfolding, but the notion of divine inspiration is undermined by the overall sense, as evidenced by Shlomo's changing attitude towards the term *maḥrūsah*, that the divine has long left the scene.

Additionally, there is a logic internal to the text that articulates the fluidity in vantage point between the two modes, the traumatic and the prophetic -- the notion of the *jawlah*. As stated previously, the presence of seven main groups of *jawlāt* suggests a sub-

the parallel with the seven visions of Ezekiel during the time of the destruction of the First Temple; the term itself also raises questions about the nature of time before, during and after traumatic experience.

The term *jawlah* (pl. *jawlāt*) is present both in chapter headings of the second part of the novel, and it also appears briefly in a dialogue that sets the reader up to question the term's function in organizing time: A memory of a conversation Shlomo once had with an elderly resident of the village resonates with him as he laments the fate of Şablākh and of mankind: "A-fa-tadrī yā waladī anna al-silm jawlah lākin al-ḥarb jawlāt? \ Do you know, my son, that peace is a *jawlah* but war is many *jawlāt*?" (165). The term *jawla*, or round, *partie*, or revolution as with the planets, but also survey, is present in the chapter headings used to order the sequence of events and chapters in the second half of the book, narrates the flow of wartime events in Şablākh. There is a chapter named after each of *jawlāt* 1-6, followed by one entitled "*Al-Jawlāh al-sābi‘ah ilā al-thālithat ‘asharah wa-majā‘at Şablākh / Jawlah seven through thirteen and the starving of Şablākh*" (304). However, given the fact that the narration of the war in Şablākh is the only part of the text that unfolds chronologically, it would seem that for Shlomo post-war, despite the section headings, it is actually the time after war, the time of *silm*, of peace, that is comprised of *jawlāt*, of many journeys. Indeed, for Shlomo life post-war that is comprised of the endless return of the *ahwāl*.

Thus, the first and second parts of the text thus work in unison to narrate Shlomo's trauma in two distinct modes of time. The first mode, as employed in the first section, is a

traumatic mode, mimicking the "structure of trauma" as articulated by contemporary theorists, complete with an a-temporal structure that reflects the inability of the traumatized subject to properly historicize, as well as traumatic memories that return again and again to haunt the speaker. Conversely, the second mode, the prophetic mode, unfolding chronologically and mostly devoid of the traumatic memory of the first part, enacts what LaCapra might call a working-through of traumatic memory: Shlomo is finally speaking of what occurred, in order to free himself from trauma's repeated returns. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the two modes suggests that the second one, the prophetic talking-through, is possible only once the first one, the "aftereffects" has run its course.

The clearest articulation of the trauma of Şablākh, the articulation for which Shlomo seems to have been searching for the entire text, appears at the very end of the novel:

Al-khaṭr qādim min al-sharq, al-khaṭr qādim min al-shimāl. Wa-qāfilah min al-‘arabāt tamḍī janūban wa-tanharif naḥwa al-gharb, ṣukhūr mulawwanah tashuqquhā shi‘āb ta‘lu tāratan wa-tankhafīḍ tāratan. Wa-ashjār kabīrah khaḍrā’ wa-a‘ashāb takthur aw tanzur, man ‘ād yatadhakkar al-rabī‘?! Al-rabī‘ ‘īd al-muṭma’inīn, wa-mā ab‘aduna naḥnu ‘an al-ṭuma’nīnah, lākinannā fī hādhihi al-laḥazāt nabta‘id ‘an akhtār ma‘lūmah qādimah. Natawaghghal fī ghayāhib al-majhūl fī yawm mashūd. Yawm uqtuli‘at fīhi judhūrunā min turābinā, kunnā jamā‘ah qad ṣamadat fī kull al-ahwāl. Fajjat tayārāt al-nār wa-al-mawt. Wa-ẓannā annā (sic.) akhīran nablughā shibh nihāyat al-baḥr al-‘āsif. Nartamī, thamma, kay naltaqīta al-anfās. Lākinna shabaḥan maskhan iqtaraba minnā. Dāhamnā fa-fararn minhu fazi‘īn. Tamḍī qāfilah fī darb sataghrub shamsuhu ba‘ada qalīl. ‘Arabāt satabtali‘uhā al-‘atmah wa-al-la-ma‘arūf. Taḥlum bi-shirā’ ḥayātihā fī baladin ākhar. Majmū‘ah lam yaḥmilhā ḥukāmuhā min anfusihim, wa-mā dara’ū ‘anhā ’ẓulm al-ghurabā’, fa-farrat, mu’ṣṣahibatan ma‘hā saqaṭ mat’ā.. Saqaṭ matā’ yā Şablākh al-mubta‘idah al-maḥbūbah. Innā naḥnū aṣbaḥnā, yā Şablākh, saqaṭ matā’, wa-hā bi-al-layl yulqī ‘alā al-dunyā lawn gurāb, wa-‘arabāt al-f’ārīn tasr‘ fī al-‘atmah qadaman naḥwa

ḥudud gharībah. Majmū‘ah qad faqadat huwīyatā.. taṭwī arḍ al-ābā’  
ḥathīthan, yabtali‘uhā la-layl.. wa-‘ammā qalīl satabtali‘uh’ā arāḍī dawlah  
ukhrā li-tagħdu, majmū‘at muhājirīn, lāji’īn masākīn! (359-360)

*Danger is coming from the east, and danger is coming from the North.  
And a caravan of wagons is advancing towards the south, turning West,  
traversing rocks of many colors, traversing ravines, at times rising, at  
times falling. Towering green trees and grasses, becoming many in number  
or few, who still remembers the spring? Spring is the holiday of those re-  
assured by peace of mind and tranquility, but oh how far we are from  
peace of mind. But in these moments we are also drawing ourselves fur-  
ther and further away from the known dangers that are coming. We press  
on deeply into the darkness of the unknown on that momentous day wit-  
nessed by all. The day our roots were plucked from our soil, we were a  
troop that had braved all of the terrors. We had traversed the currents of  
fire and death. And we thought that we had almost reached the shore at  
the end of the storming sea. We threw ourselves onwards, to catch our  
breath there. But a disfigured ghost drew near to us. It took us unawares,  
and we fled from it in terror. The caravan departs upon a path upon which  
the sun will soon set. The darkness and the unknown will soon swallow up  
the wagons. They dream of purchasing their lives in another country. A  
group whose rulers did not protect them from themselves, and did not  
know the injustice of the foreigners that had been exercised upon them.  
They fled, with them only scraps of junk... Scraps of junk, O beloved  
Ṣablākh, the Ṣablākh that moves further and further away. We have be-  
come, O Ṣablākh, scraps of junk, and the night shines upon the world the  
color of the blade, and the fleeing wagons hasten in the darkness, advanc-  
ing towards the Western border. A band that has lost its identity... Crossing  
the land of the fathers, the night swallows them up... And soon the land of  
another, foreign country will swallow them so that they become a group of  
migrants, pitiful refugees! (359-360)*

As the closing paragraphs of the entire novel, this narration of the departure from Ṣablākh laments what has been lost in the historical trauma of the disintegration of the beloved city during a World War that uprooted ethnic minorities, shattered multi-ethnic empires, and imposed the nation-state paradigm the world over. This band that has lost

not only its identity, but also its ties to place ("our roots were torn from the soil / Yawm uqtuli‘at fīhi judhūrunā min turābinā"), its status as valued contributors to and components of a cohesive whole ("we have become scraps of junk / innanā naḥnū aṣbaḥnā [...] saqaṭ matā’"), and most critically, its visibility ("the night swallows them up / yabtali‘uhā la-layl"). Such a trauma could be a *foundational trauma* of a community, except that these Kurdish Jewish refugees are absorbed twice over by other national narratives and cultures -- first in Baghdad, and later in Israel. Furthermore, there has yet to come into being a national entity of a Kurdistan which would privilege the memories of Ṣablākh as part of any sort of national foundational trauma.<sup>63</sup> In this way, this historical trauma of the disintegration of, and subsequent exile from Ṣablākh is doubly traumatic due to its lack of an audience, its lack of a witness. At the same time, however, in closing the novel on such a note Jew and Palestinian, Kurd and Arab, implicitly become one under the banner of humanity, no longer separated by their ethnicities, but rather, united, oddly enough, by the unraveling of a distant, ice-covered village high in the distant mountains

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63. Aline Schlaepfer cites this passage to suggest that Naqqash defines Israel as a foreign country, rather than the destination at the end of exile. However, it seems unnecessarily restrictive to read this passage in terms of such a binary. This passage does not seem concerned with the act of aliya; indeed, the refugees described here are making their way most immediately to Baghdad. Following Schlaepfer's concern with the destination of the departing caravan, the logical conclusion of her interpretation of this passage would also make Iraq a foreign country, even though she is concerned in her work with articulating Baghdad as home in Naqqash's oeuvre. Indeed, it seems that there is more at play here than simply reversing the binary between Israel as home and Iraq and exile. See Aline Schlaepfer, "Baghdad-Jérusalem: le début ou la fin de l'exil? Conflits identitaires dans la littérature de Samīr Naqqāsh," in *Standing on the Beach with a Gun in my Hand, Eternal Tour Jérusalem 2010*, ed. Donatella Bernardi, Noémie Etienne (Geneva: Labor et Fides et Montreuil, Black Jack éditions, 2011) 42. [French]

of Iranian Kurdistan, under siege at the height of World War I.

Furthermore, such a conclusion of the second section, with the disintegration of beloved Şablākh, interacts in critical ways with the conclusion of the first section, which narrates Shlomo's death. The conclusion of second section, "Qabl Al-‘Āsifah / Before the Storm," with the above-cited moment of exile, naturally leads to the beginning of the first section and its initiation of the decades of traumatic aftereffects. Similarly, the conclusion of the first section, "Mā Ba‘d Şablākh / After Şablākh," with its narration of Shlomo's death, also leads to the beginning of the second section with its pseudo-prophetic, chronological narration of the *ahwāl*, as shall be explained.

The end of the first section, "Mā Ba‘d Şablākh / After Şablākh," with its narration of the moments leading up to Shlomo's death, creates an infinite loop in the temporality of the narrative by making the moment of death the same moment that Shlomo teams up with Time so as to narrate the *ahwāl* and the unraveling of Şablākh. In this concluding passage, he first foresees the silencing of his own earthly voice as he returns his soul to its creator. Once his body goes limp and his voice goes silent, he anticipates that he will speak with interlocutors in some type of heavenly realm: "Yahmud min thumma al-fikr, taşmut al-dhikrá. Yakhrus al-tārīkh [...] wa-sa'arwī al-aḥdāth li-man khalaqa al-aḥdāth / Thought will also fade away, memory will be silent. History will become mute. [...] I will tell my of events to he who has created the events." (74) And as Shlomo anticipates the moment his voice will cease to speak on earth, he formally assigns Time as executor of his store of memories of the *ahwāl*, citing the line "Bāṭil al-abāṭil, al-kull bāṭil / Vanities

of vanities, all is vanity"<sup>64</sup> from the book of Ecclesiastes, suggesting that he is at peace at the end of his days.

In the last moments of his life, Shlomo retraces his the places he has lived as if they are a map of *sufi maqāms*: "Sa'īd wa-ḥazīn, masrūr wa-ka'īb. Fī nūr Allāh tumhá kull al-ashyā'. Şablākh... Ṭehrān... Mūskū... Baghdād... Rāmat Kān! / Happy and sad, I am overjoyed and yet melancholy. In God's light, all things are erased. Şablākh... Tehran... Moscow... Baghdad... Mumbai... Ramat Gan!" (75) And having thus stenciled the topography of his life upon chronological time, Shlomo tells time that the story is now over. Time, however, says it has only now just begun, noting, "Al-dajājah wa-al-bayḍah, wa-al-rajul wa-al-ṭifl, a-wa'iyta al-ān? / The chicken and the egg, the man and the baby, do you get it now?" (76) In other words, which comes first, trauma, or its repetition? Agreement is then reached to narrate collectively, and the chicken-and-egg question returns as each section leads you to the beginning of the other section.

The first part thus ends with Shlomo merging with Time, in silence, imagining his story being told forever in an endless loop as he finally moves freely and chronologi-

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64. Ecclesiastes 1:2. This is the standard Arabic translation of the verse "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" as found in the famous Smith and Van Dyke version, the translation in which Nahḍawī intellectual Buṭrus Al-Bustānī participated. Naqqash includes this same verse, in this same standard translation in his novel *Al-Rijs*. However, he employs an alternate translation in his collection of stories *Al-Khata'*, where he translates the verse as "'Abath fī 'abath, al-kull 'abath." Snir maintains that this alternate translation corresponds more closely with the existentialist notion of "absurdity," which would be in line with the self-proclaimed philosophical vantage point of the collection. It is notable that by employing the standard translation in *Shlomo Al-Kurdi*, Naqqash suggests that this text is not necessarily to be read in light of the teachings of Existentialism. See Snir; 'Arviyut, Yahadut, Tsiyonut; 204.

cally through the cities of his life as if they are Sufi shrines, whereas the second part ends with the exile from Şablākh, a chronological transition back to the beginning of the novel, where Shlomo tells of what happened after Şablākh. The chicken-and-egg question, trauma and its repetition, thus plays continuously in the black hole of memory: which comes first, the trauma or the traumatized subject? It is as if only after Shlomo has time on his side, not just as a co-narrator, but as a sort of heir or executor of his last testament, that he can finally speak, in his last moments, of the *ahwāl* -- that he can finally proceed to narrate the second part of the book, "Qabl Al-‘Āsifah / Before the Storm."

It is in this last moment that Shlomo gives himself over completely to the black hole of memory for a brief yet infinite-loop of an instant, an infinite loop of a *jawlah* where he cycles endlessly between the modes of traumatic memory and pseudo-prophetic projection, an eternal return of trauma which the reader assumes will enable him to leave this world in peace.

The structure of the narrative as infinite loop between traumatic memory and prophetic projection thus redefines the very structure of trauma. It does this firstly by providing the traumatized subject with the tools of pseudo-prophecy as a way to re-imagine himself in the time prior to the formation of traumatic memory. And it does it secondly by allowing for a the fabrication of a relationship with a witness that is willing and able to hear all trauma, even those that would otherwise be silenced by the death of the author or by the a-canoncity of the trauma itself; the temporality of trauma is no longer limited to Caruth's trauma and belated return. On the one hand, the infinite loop of traumatic enun-

ciation as Shlomo as crafted it, where the narration of the moment of his death is but a cue to return to Şablākh and tell of the *ahwāl* all over again, proceeds around and around, like the hands of a clock. But on closer examination, the infinite loop of the moment of trauma as narrated from the black hole of memory enables the traumatic moment to impart its temporality in both directions, inching ever further forwards and backwards, framing the traumatic by both remembering it and anticipating it. The prophetic awaits the traumatic in the tense calm before the storm, the tick-tocking of the machine, the dogs howling before the earthquake. In the quiet narrative space that necessarily foregrounds any story, the prophetic broods as it awaits trauma, welcoming it. The text's poetics of the black hole thus create a circularity of trauma, piecing together an infinite loop of traumatic enunciation, enabling not only trauma's repeated, but also its eternal, return.

#### **D. Memory: Speaking of Şablākh as a Job for Three Narrators**

As discussed above, the chronological division of the text into a second part composed in the idiom of "pseudo-prophetic projection" and a second part in the idiom of "traumatic memory" serves to doubly enact the anxiety and traumatic disorientation Shlomo experiences post-Şablākh. Of the two parts, it is the second, the space of the pseudo-prophetic projection, that is the one closer in form to chronicle. Yet the attempt to narrate, indeed, to historicize, the central trauma of Şablākh via the pseudo-prophecy the foundational trauma would not be necessarily be possible were the traumatized subject left to his own devices, as his memory might fully or satisfactorily recall all events, much less have had access to more perspectives than his own.

What is needed, then, for the traumatized subject to superimpose a positivist chronicle upon his own experience of traumatic affect is the presence of more than one narrator, which the text provides. As Nancy Hawker notes: "Remembrance [in the text] is worked out through two parallel, and complex, sets of conversations: one with Shlomo Kattani (later known as Alkurdi), the persona of the narrator's younger life; and the other, polite if tough-minded, with Time, called upon to assist in recording these memories."<sup>65</sup> Thus Shlomo, Shlomo's younger self--referred to as Aba Salman, as well as Time, all play a role in narrating. The result is a panorama of history, superimposed upon a panorama of traumatic experience, where the three narrators routinely complicate the narrative via

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65. Nancy Hawker, "Mizrahi Wanderings" *New Left Review* 25, January-February 2004, accessed 12/1/2010, <http://newleftreview.org/II/25/nancy-hawker-mizrahi-wanderings>.

their own abilities and shortcomings of memory and empathy. Their collaboration results in a highly dense reenactment of both traumatic affect and working through, with different narrators at different times playing the parts of witness and traumatized subject.

At this juncture it is important to note that the three-part narrative structure articulated by Hawker introduces an important element into this narration marked by trauma: that of the witness. Caruth notes that the listening of another is critical for the traumatized subject to depart from trauma's site, while Dori Laub, elaborating on the moment of trauma itself, identifies the *collapse of witnessing* at trauma's site as an integral characteristic.<sup>66</sup> In other words, a person cannot bear witness for him or herself, and so with this term Laub is referring to what the traumatized subject perceives as the inability of any *other* sentient being to bear witness to a traumatic event at the time of its occurrence. The existence of a witness at trauma's site would be a contradiction of terms, for had there had been a witness, he or she would have been compelled to intervene; the fact that the event occurred implicitly dictates that it was unwitnessed. Thus, the dual presence of Aba Salman and *Zaman* engages Shlomo not with an interlocutor-witness per se, but rather, implicates him in a metastructure of witnessing and narrating where each narrator alternatively plays a different role in order to both reenact and attempt to overcome Laub's *collapse of witnessing*. Thus, unraveling the traits of all three narrators, as well as the nature of the three-part collaboration, helps unpack the role of this metastructure of witnessing

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66. Dori Laub, "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 65.

and narrating in acting out the chronological disorientation resulting from the text's divergent use of prophetic time and traumatic memory.

While it is at times ambiguous which narrator is speaking, it is generally possible to know based either on context, or on the type of pronouns used: The third person is typically employed by Time, whereas the second person is usually used by Shlomo or by Time to address the traumatized subject Aba Salman, and the first person is typically used by Aba Salman himself. When grammatical analysis does not yield a clear answer, the tone of the narration also helps: Aba Salman narrates quotidian matters but tends to stop when approaching a moment of extreme emotion or trauma.<sup>67</sup> Shlomo philosophizes, and Time speaks in a cool and detached manner. That said, in some sections the division of the narration still remains ambiguous, perhaps suggesting and even performing the interconnectedness of the narrators.

Of the three narrators, Aba Salman seems to play the role of core physical remnant of traumatic experience. He speaks the least, most often playing the role of silent canvas upon whom the memories and affects of the elder Shlomo are sketched. The other two narrators repeatedly describe his facial expressions, both traumatized and merry, in great detail and usually using the second person, but he is the least self-aware interlocutor of the three, narrating events as they occurred but not reflecting upon them all that much. The presence of Aba Salman, that is, of the literary device of convening a conversation

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67. Shlomo's encounter with the Woman of Warning, to be discussed in Section E, is one such example.

where Shlomo and his younger self are both present, seems to enable Shlomo to literally return to trauma's site, attempting to finally witness events as they transpired. It is only via the presence of Aba Salman that Shlomo is able to be a witness at all, by creating a rupture between the (elder) Shlomo's memory/body/voice, and that (younger) part of him that was physically present in Şablākh.

However, Shlomo does not always occupy the role of stable witness to the traumatized Aba Salman; at moments he also relapses into a state of trauma, losing the thread of the narrative and relapsing into silence. It is for this reason that the presence of Time is so important: Time sees all. Thus, Shlomo is sometimes able to function, in his witnessing of Aba Salman, as a sort of deputy witness to the ultimate witness: Time, or in Arabic, *Zaman*. Indeed, since Shlomo is caught between the two vantage points, or roles, of traumatized subject on the one hand, and witness to trauma on the other, Shlomo is not able to fully witness his own past and free his younger self from trauma's repeated returns. *Zaman* is a necessary participant in the conversation, for among the three, only he is truly able to bear witness from an objective vantage point.

Of the three narrators, *Zaman* is the one with an infinitude of memory, making him the definitive chronicler, as well as the admittedly harsh antidote to the selective forgetfulness of man:

Qāl: Innanī aṭwīhā wa-taṭwīnī, fa-umtudaḥ bilā istiḥqāq wa-ul‘an min ghayr dhanb. Anā lā akthara min shāhid. Lī ‘uyūn tará, kathīra lā ḥaṣra lahā. Lā a‘rif al-nasyān, la yada lī wa-la qalb, fa-lā adrī limādhā tata-maḥḥakūna bī wa tatawassalūna aḥyānan <<Raḥmāk yā zaman!>> aw

<<Al-la‘nah ‘alá al-zaman...>>

*He said: I turn the page, and it turns me. I am praised without warrant and cursed without guilt. I am no more than a witness. I have eyes that see, a lot, with no end. I do not know forgetfulness, I have no hand and no heart. I do not know why they quibble and plead with me at times, "Have mercy on us, O Time!" Or, "Curses upon Time..." (230-231)*

While admitting that he is not always loved by mankind, Time nevertheless characterizes himself as the most reliable of witnesses. He is unassuming, letting the pages of history move him along, which is not surprising given that he has no hand with which to turn the proverbial pages of his own accord. He has many eyes and can see that which Shlomo and Abu Salman cannot, and his infinite gigabytes of memory mean that he is immune from forgetting or deletion. His lack of heart may suggest that he is the ultimate stoic, succeeding in accurately recalling events but failing to provide the traumatized subject with any sort of human empathy or recognition.<sup>68</sup>

Shlomo's complex and ultimately ambivalent relationship with this *Zaman*, this

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68. Notably, *Zaman* is also able to take on the facial expressions and physical affects of the people about whom he is speaking -- a type of transference of affect from traumatized subject to outside witness. For example, when *Zaman* tells of *Yawm Al-Iṣṭabul*, the Day of the Stable, arguably the beginning of the end for *Ṣablākh*'s chances of surviving the war intact, he takes on the *ibtisāmah mutahakkimah*, or ironical smile, of Abu Salman. (188) Upon carrying out a daring arson of *Wali*'s warehouses, Time pants just as *Murtada*'s thugs pant, although the thugs pant louder (287). Perhaps given that Time seems to mimic certain human behaviors or idiosyncrasies, Shlomo wonders aloud if Time is also ever rendered speechless by events, as are mortal humans, such as Shlomo himself, as well as Abu Salman.

definitive, unassuming chronicler with no heart, serves to frame the novel's larger existential concerns. Shlomo vacillates vis-a-vis *Zaman*, at once imploring *Zaman* to assist him, and then blaming *Zaman* for betraying both him and humanity. Indeed, as Shlomo notes, "Wa-al-waqtu yanfad, wa-huwwa yakmun fī qabḍah min qabḍatayn, qabḍah maḥūdah wa-qabḍah mal'ūnah / Time passes, concealed in two grasps, one praised and one cursed." (258) Indeed, despite the disclaimers made by *Zaman*, Shlomo impugns Time, charging it with responsibility for infusing his existence with *ahwāl*, or terrors, and vowing that he shall take his revenge. (9-10)

Yet, for all of his frustration with *Zaman*, Shlomo is nevertheless in need of *Zaman's* help. Aware of his own limitations and the limitations of the human mind, he implores *Zaman* to tell, indeed to bear witness to, the story of the Farhūd and of Asmar's death at the same time as he hushes Aba Salman:

Al-qalb mā 'ād yaḥtamil ḥajm al-fāji'ah al-mal'ūnah, fa-lā anta ta'ūd tar-wihā, wa-lā uradiduhā anā 'alā asmā'ika wa-li-nad' al-zaman al-rāwī-al-shāhid yarwihā fī samt wa-khushū', idh huwa adrá minka wa-minnī bi-tafāṣīl al-aḥdāth [...] Taḥadduth ayyuhā al-zaman al-rāwī al-shāhid bi-al-qīṣṣah. Arwihā bi-amānatika al-ma'sūmah min kadhb aw nisyān al-insān, wa-min tashwīh al-aḥdāth aw sahwatihi 'anhā. (45-46)

*The heart can no longer bear the dimensions of the calamity. Don't you tell it, nor will I repeat it for you to hear. Let's let Time the Teller and the Witness to recite it silently and modestly, for he knows the details of events better than both of us [...] Speak, O Time the Teller the Witness of the story. Tell it faithfully, free of all lies or forgetfulness, free from the distortion or negligence of morals. (45-46)*

Shlomo implores Time to speak where he has simultaneously commanded Aba Salman to

be silent on account of the depths of his sadness, despite the passage of so many decades. He implores Time to speak because of Time's superior memory and accuracy; man forgets and distorts, whereas Time is faithful and reliable. He has exempted Aba Salman from speaking on account of the weight of his sadness, and he has exempted both Aba Salman and himself from speaking on account of the frailty of their mortal powers of memory. And once Time has obliged, and reaches the painful denouement -- the dramatic murder of the virtuous woman in the black abaya by a knife-wielding mob (59), Shlomo has heard enough. He cries out, "Yakfī yā zaman! Qad na‘iyat al-ghāliyah al-mahbūbah <<Umm Al-Banīn>> fa-da‘ min awlá wa-ajdar minka yanūh ‘alayhā. / Enough, O Time! You have announced the death of [Asmar] Um Al-Banin. Now let one who is more deserving than you mourn for her." (59). As much as he detests the misfortune Time has brought, he knows that he requires Time's corroboration in telling, in order to mourn his losses and to free himself from trauma's repeated return. But although Time can tell, it can only do so from a cold distance. Mortals may not remember as clearly or as accurately, but with the story now told, it is time for Time the chronicler to step aside.

While it is *Zaman* who lends the narrative its ability to historicize in time, Shlomo insists that he, too, has an important contribution to make: distortion (*taḥrīf*). While Time maintains that such distortion (*taḥrīf*) is an affront to events as they occurred, Shlomo argues that such distortion is necessary on both strategic and aesthetic grounds:

Yansá al-mar’ mā yabghī nisyānahu, wa-yatadhakkar mā lā yabghī an yan-  
sāhu, wa-yuḥarrif al-insān mā kān yatamanná law sār ‘alá dhālika al-wujh

min al-tahrīf.

*Man forgets what he needs to forget, remembers what he does not need to forget, and distorts events so as to remember them as he wished they would have occurred.(98)*

He later refers to such distortion as an artistic enterprise:

Bal anā a‘raf minka bi-khabāyā nufūs al-nās, wa-bi-siyāghat al-aḥdāth siyāghat al-fannān al-muḍfī ‘alayhā jamāliyah lā ta‘rifuhā anta. Innanī fannān lastu bi-muwaththaq. Wa-anā aqtaḥim afkār al-shakhṣiyāt wa-mashā‘irihā. Fa-uqaddimuhā lil-qāri’ walīmatan shahīyatan. (135)

*Indeed I know better than you of what is hidden in the souls of men, and how to fashion the events with the hands of an artist, enveloping them in an aesthetic of which you are unaware. I am an artist and not a chronicler, and I plunge into the depths of characters and their feelings, then I present it all to the reader as a sumptuous banquet. (135)*

Here, by defending man's right to forget that what he wishes to forget, and to distort that which he wishes to distort, Shlomo inadvertently concurs with Time's point that human memory is for the most part incapable of accurately recounting events. And yet, Shlomo nevertheless pleads with Time that there is still value in the point of view of the hero, in this case that of Aba Salman, Shlomo's younger self, and therefore both Shlomo and Aba Salman should be allowed to take part in the telling. In so arguing, Shlomo implicitly argues that there is value in a point of view that is not fully "accurate" or free from omissions: that there is a place for artifice in the construction of human memory. Shlomo thus offers not man's powers of recall or accuracy, powers which he has already conceded, but rather, the power of art and artifice. By offering his artistic abilities as a worthy credential, Shlomo implicitly suggests an alternative way of working through trauma: the trau-

matized subject may eventually be able to return to the site of trauma, and even if he is never able to offer an accurate chronicle as would Time, he can still participate in the telling by offering his aesthetic sensibilities to gently shape and craft the memories that remain. In other words, accuracy is not enough. Rather, by offering himself as artist, Shlomo suggests that not only accuracy, but distortion, too, plays an important role in the recollection and narration of trauma. Accuracy is required for the sake of events, but distortion may be required for the sake of the subject.

The collaborative narration thus allows for weaving together the threads of chronicle, affect, and artifice which in turn allows the traumatized subject to both enact the traumatic forgetting of events at the same time as said events are recovered and remembered, thus allowing them to be spoken. In this way, memory in the text is always expendable yet always guarded ("backed-up"). And in both its being forgotten and being remembered, it is always textured with traumatic affect and stubborn pride, elements that might otherwise interfere with the fluid transitions in the text between forgetting and remembering. In this way, the poetics of the black hole allow for a traumatized subject that at once remembers and forgets; it allows for a subject that displays the range of everything from the speechless, to the mellifluous, culturally aware, multilingual madrigal, speaking of trauma as he inscribes himself into the very cultural idiom of speech of the world that is slowly slipping away.

## **E. Language: Speech and Speechlessness in Epic Cultural Terms**

In articulating the traumas of Şablākh and beyond both to and with his two interlocutors, the language Shlomo marshals enables him to mourn and reinhabit his lost world even as he articulates its slipping away. Specifically, Shlomo engages particular Eastern and Islamicate intertexts and allusions in a way that highlights not only the ability to speak in a particular cultural idiom, but also recasts himself and his dramatis personae as the most articulate and well-wrought the idiom has to offer, in their speech and in their speechlessness. In this way, Shlomo narrates in a way that refigures the speechlessness of trauma, transforming the all-consuming black hole of memory into a font of vague recollection for the whispering babble out upon which the edifice of his lost world was wrought.

This section will interpret a number of such instances in the text, where Islamicate intertext narrates gives form to articulations of speech and speechlessness, including traces of the *Qaṣīda* and its existential wranglings (invocation of *Dahr* as epic witness, imperilment of the rule of the just sovereign), speech usurped via visitation (of the Prophet Nahum and the Woman of Warning), and paragons of speech well-spoken (Shahrazād, Sindibād, and the syncretic multilingualism of Shlomo Al-Kurdi). All of these moments of the narrative contribute to both a sense of tribute for what Shlomo ultimately loses upon his migration to Israel, as well as a sense of resistance against said loss by turning the Islamicate into a central device via which the physical affects of the traumas of Şablākh, the Farhūd, and the ultimate relocation to Israel are articulated and

repatriated.

### 1. The *Qaṣīdah* Lives: *Dahr* as Epic Witness

Features of Shlomo's relationship with Time as witness simultaneously evoke and reconfigure traces of the *qaṣīdah*, or classical Arabic ode. Namely, Shlomo's recalcitrance in interacting with Time, as well as his uncertain theology vis-a-vis the role of Time and God in human affairs co-opt and refine the traditional notions of fate in the *qaṣīdah* tradition.

Alone among the narrators, Time, or *Zaman*, is simultaneously implored and cursed. Such a state of affairs is more intelligible when *Zaman* is read not simply as an invented narrative device in Shlomo Al-Kurdi, but rather as a variation on a theme with longstanding roots in the *qaṣīdah* tradition and in the Islamicate cultural sphere. In this tradition, humans have long had an ambivalent relationship with Time, which like God, has many names in Arabic, each intimating a slightly different nuance of meaning. Time is not only *zaman*, but also *al-ayām* (the days), *al-layāli* (the nights), and most critically for Shlomo's purposes, *dahr*. In the odes, these terms imply not only time, but also fate. Yet, *dahr*; a term that Shlomo uses interchangeably with *Zaman* to refer to his all-seeing, all-knowing co-narrator, is unique among these concepts in taking on a particularly ominous shade of meaning.

Shlomo calls upon *dahr*, which Liṣḥān Al-‘Arab defines as "an extended period of

time; a thousand years [...] the life of the entire world."<sup>69</sup> In the pre-Islamic conception of fate, it was this notion of *dahr* as the life of the entire world that set the stage for the Islamic view of predestination, as evidenced, for example, in the Qurān, in Sūrah 45:23-34:<sup>70</sup> "They say ... we die and we live and only *dahr* destroys us".<sup>71</sup> *Dahr* came to be synonymous with the capricious and cruel element of fate and was thus personified in foreboding terms, depicted as an ominous force to be feared.

As Lisān Al-‘Arab explains, in pre-Islamic Arabia it was common to curse *dahr*, just as Shlomo does in Shlomo Al-Kurdi. Early Islam found this state of affairs of problematic, and the Prophet Muhammad is purported to have instructed people not to curse *Dahr*, for God said that "I am Dahr."<sup>72</sup> From then on, people were instructed not to curse *dahr*, because the curse would fall upon God; however, poets continued to use the term *dahr* as they always had.

Thus, that Shlomo is mostly polite in his interactions with *Zaman* suggests that he is heeding the injunction of the Prophet Muhammad not to curse time; however, that he is extremely stubborn in his interactions with *Zaman* (or "tough-minded," as Nancy Hawker

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69. Ibn Manzur. "Dahr." In Lisān Al-Arab. Accessed online: <http://www.baheth.info/all.jsp?term=%D8%AF%D9%87%D8%B1>, 11/20/2011.

70. "Dahr," Encyclopedia of Islam, [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dahr-SIM\\_1665?s.num=1&s.q=dahr](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com.ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/dahr-SIM_1665?s.num=1&s.q=dahr). Accessed 2/3/13

71. Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*, London 1949, 20 ff., 31; as cited in the Encyclopedia of Islam entry on Dahr.

72. See al-Bukhārī, *Tafsīr* on 45. 24/23; Adab, 101; Tawhīd, 35; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* on 45. 24/23; further references in Wensinck, *Concordance*, s.v. *ādhā*, *khayb*; a possible connexion with funeral rites is noted by Goldziher, *Muḥammedanische Studien*, i, 254. As cited in the Encyclopedia of Islam entry on Dahr.

phrases it)<sup>73</sup> evokes the desire to curse *Dahr* in the spirit of the pre-Islamic poets of old. By cursing *dahr*, Shlomo inscribes himself as another generation of Islamicate poet, animated by the same challenges and mustering the same linguistic and spiritual resources in the face of adversity. Additionally, Shlomo's ambivalent relationship with *dahr* allows the recalcitrant Shlomo to accentuate his difference within that same Islamicate sphere. By cursing *Dahr*, Shlomo exercises his self-proclaimed Kurdish stubbornness, while simultaneously accentuating his own personal experience, his own historical trauma, of what would later be subordinated to the Zionist narrative of divinely-decreed Jewish suffering. Yet, by also calling upon *Dahr* to stand bear witness as he speaks, Shlomo also implicates one of the most storied, epic listeners in Islamicate cultural memory, thus intensifying the scope of the speaking-listening exchange between himself and his famed interlocutor.

In addition to making *Dahr* his witness, Shlomo engages and indeed reconfigures another aspect of fate in the *qaṣīda* tradition. As Stefan Sperl explains, in the classical panegyric *qaṣīda*, fate is juxtaposed against both the Caliph and against God. The rule of fate is senseless, arbitrary, and inimical to human life and flourishing, whereas the rule of God and the Caliph is exactly the opposite.<sup>74</sup> According to Sperl, in the strophe of the *qaṣīda*, *Zaman* rules in chaos, and in the anti-strophe, the Caliph rescues the poet, and by

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73. Hawker, *Mizrahi Wanderings*.

74. See Stefan Sperl, "Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early Ninth Century," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 8 (1977): 31-33.

extension, all of society, by defeating fate and implementing God's rule on earth. In Shlomo Al-Kurdi, however, despite Shlomo's expectations to the contrary, this equation does not compute. Indeed, as Shlomo struggles with the role of his cruel interlocutor *Zaman* in directing human affairs, he simultaneously impugns both the Shah of Iran and God for their absence and indifference. As Shlomo notes following the initial shock of the Russian massacre of Şablākhi Muslims,

Akhtanaq hawā' al-baldah bi-şarkhat alam taşadat shimālan, janūban wa-sharqan wa-gharban ilā a'la fa-balaghat 'arshayn. 'Arsh allāh wa-'arsh al-shāh. Bayda anna al-ithnayn taghādā 'an muslimī Şablākh wa-miḥnatihim wa-lam yaktarithā bihim abadan. (184)

*The air of the village was choked with a scream of pain that echoed to the north, to the south, to the east and to the west, disappearing into the heavens and reaching two thrones: the throne of God and the throne of the Shah, even though both of them ignored the Muslims of Şablākh and their hardship, not paying them any mind. (184)*

In the text, Shlomo laments that both God and ruler seem to have removed themselves from their traditional roles as keepers of order and the protectors of human flourishing. In this way, Shlomo echoes the concerns of the pre-Islamic odes regarding the advent of an age of just governance on earth, even if in modern prose rather than *jāhili* meter. Yet in Shlomo's case, rather than fight *Dahr* for control of the affairs of the city, both God and the earthly sovereign seem to have abandoned the people of Şablākh. God and the sovereign have forsaken the people; in the same vein, *Dahr* is but a shadow of its mischievous, capricious self in the days of the *qaşīda*, for if neither the ruler nor God are playing their

expected roles, neither will Time. And it is perhaps for this reason that Time argues that all of the blame for events in Şablākh are the doing of man, that man alone has chosen his fate in this new ruler-less cosmic order. Thus, Shlomo Al-Kurdi inverts the appeal to Time as witness, a very traditional trope in Classical Arabic literature, by emptying it of its revolutionary potential and turning it instead into a nominally sympathetic witness. By the time of Shlomo, Şablākh, and World War I, neither God nor the earthy sovereign cares to rule with justice. But it seems to matter little, for by this point, *Time* has also ceased to actively intervene in human affairs, but rather, is now nothing more than a witness.

Thus, by the cursing of a witness whom Shlomo refers to as *Dahr*, and by the evoking the notion of a sovereign and a God who do not intervene or pay any heed to the justice or injustice with which human society are governed, the text undertakes the mantle of the *qaṣīda*. Indeed, the trauma of Şablākh, and of the Farhūd, and of the move to Israel, are all born of the breakdown of the fabled justice for which the original *qaṣīdas* yearned. By casting all of these traumas as witnessed by *Dahr*, Shlomo crafts himself as one speaking to and thus heard by the most epic witness of all in the Islamicate tradition, thus elevating his losses from the margins of Islamicate cultural memory to its center. And by cursing said witness, he inscribes himself into the mold of the Classical Arabic poet of old while simultaneously making a space for himself in the tradition as *different* from that mold, both via his self-proclaimed Kurdish stubbornness, and his Jewish suffering, putatively ordained from on high.

## 2. Speech Usurped and Place Transformed: Of Prophets and *Ghilān*

By addressing *Dahr* as his witness, Shlomo enunciates his trauma in a way that simultaneously mourns and reifies the Islamicate cultural sphere that becomes lost to him on account of war and relocation. In the same vein, the text also employs visitations of prophets and *ghilān*, or ghouls, in order to recast and remember the *loss* of speech in a way that reifies and preserves the Islamicate cultural sphere. This dynamic is present in both the visitation of the Prophet Nahum to Sheikh Mordechai Hayy Al-Kurdi, as well as in the visitation of the *ghūl*, the Woman of Warning, to the people of Ṣablākh.

The visitation of the Prophet Nahum to Sheikh Mordechai Hayy Al-Kurdi in the prophet's Biblical hometown of Al-Qosh<sup>75</sup> in Northern Iraq on the eve of the Shavuot holiday presents a rereading of numerous Biblical stories as a way to warn of the impending loss of life in distant Baghdad. Although the visitation renders Sheikh Mordechai speechless, the unspoken intertextual allusions that make way for the Prophet Nahum's terrifying proclamations serve to reify key elements of Jewish cultural memory, thus creating out of this city a site where the Biblical and the Islamicate meet once more before parting ways. In other words, the visitation of Nahum superimposes the mythic upon the factual,

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75. Qosh is the home of the Nahum, a minor biblical prophet also holy in Christianity and Islam, who prophesized the destruction of the wicked city of Nineveh (near present-day Mosul). Although Naqqash opens the door to a potential intertextual relationship between Shlomo Al-Kurdi by reviving the spirit of the Prophet Nahum to speak of the destruction of the Jews of Baghdad, any intertextual relationship would be archetextual at most, to use Gerard Genette's term. That is, the return of Nahum in this scene evokes the genre of prophecy and the place of the prophet's tomb in Qosh, but the extent of any potential transtextual relationship seems to end there. In this way, the text makes only a passing nod at the Book of Nahum, thus creating a relationship that is fluid rather than overdeterministic.

extending Orit Bashkin's notion of Arab-Jewish time a few more intensified moments forward, resisting the end of the "timeline" in the same breath as announcing its inevitability.

In the mausoleum, Sheikh Mordechai attends to the requisite ceremonies in the mausoleum of the Prophet Nahum, braiding the candles, filling the candle beds with water and oil, and then lighting the candles and the *qarayāt*.<sup>76</sup> However, despite his fastidious attention, the wicks refuse to remain lit. Only after a terrified and bewildered Mordechai adjusts the window, washes, and pleads for forgiveness from the prophet will the flame take. Never before has Mordechai seen the candles in the tomb refuse to stay lit, much less twice, much less on the eve of a holiday. When it occurs to Mordechai to rise from his state of emotional exhaustion and check the candles again, his intimations of ill omens are confirmed, and the sight of which ties his tongue and plunges him into a deep coma:

Kānat kull al-qanādīl wa-al-qarāyāt tatawahhaj, lākinna lawna al-mā' wa-al-zayt fihā jamī'an taḥawwalat ilā lawn aḥmar qānin.. ka-al-dam al-makhaḍ.. wa-taḥawwalat 'aynā Murdikāy Ḥāy ilā qimmat ra'sihi, wa-it-tasa'at maghārat famihi wa-inḥarafat li-yamīn, wa-lisānuhu nashaba fī waḥl dhuhūl mughriq, wa-shabbat dākhil ra'sihi zawba'ah majnūnah wa-atāḥat bi-mazqī afkārihi fa-tanātharat fī kull al-arjā', wa-idh aflaḥa al-Shaykh Murdikhāy Ḥāy bi-an yaḥulla 'uqdat lisānihi wa-yantuq, ghamghama bayn lujaj muḥīt junūnihi, "Al-dam bi-qanādīl al-Nabīy Nāhum wa-al-qarāyāt! Haliktu yā Murdikhāy! Bi-ḥaq quds al-aqdās haliktu!" Wa-ghāṣ fī ghaybūbah 'amīqah. (48)

*The flames of all of the candles and the qarayāt were glistening, but the*

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76. This is a type of ceremonial candle lit on festive occasions by Iraqi Jews according to Ali Badr (electronic correspondence, 10/2011).

*color of the water and the oil had turned into a deep blood red... Mordechai Hayy's eyes rolled up towards the top of his head; his mouth cavity widened and inclined to the right; his tongue became quagmired in a drowning putty of bewilderment; a hurricane of madness broke out in his head, his thoughts were swept away in rupture and were scattered in all directions. Sheikh Mordechai Haay was lucky enough to undo the knot of his tongue and speak, he muttered from the depths of the sea of his madness, "Blood is in the candles of the Prophet Nahum! I'm so weak, Mordechai! By the Holy of Holies, I'm so weak!" Then he plunged into a deep unconsciousness. (48)*

Here, it is the fantastic sight of a religious ritual objects that invert religious lore which spark a series of traumatic affects ending in speechlessness and coma. Indeed, the turning of the candle water to blood evokes the plagues of Passover in the Book of Exodus where the waters of the Nile were turned to blood, as well as the story of Hanukkah, where the candles in the Temple in Jerusalem remained lit for eight days despite an insufficient supply of oil. Yet, in the story of Passover, the waters of the Nile turns to blood as a punishment upon the recalcitrant Pharaoh of Egypt as a sign of the Lord's wrath. That the water in the the lamps of the tomb should turn to blood suggests that the Jews of Baghdad have committed a great transgression for which they shall be punished. Similarly, that the blood should appear in the candleholders, the same candleholders which served as the very vessels of the Hanukkah miracle, simultaneously inverts the lore of both holidays, turning the myths and legends of celebration into the portents of mourning. Additionally, the statement by which Mordechai swears, "by the right of the holy of holies," refers to the innermost sacred chamber of the Jewish temple on the Haram Al-Sharif in Jerusalem. Together, these three allusions create a heightened sense of storied Jewish presence in

Iraq at the very moment when the viability of said presence is threatened. Mordechai may suffer some shock at the wrath of the prophecy, but he is still firmly emplaced in an inter-confessional mausoleum in a country that has hospitably sustained a two-thousand year Jewish presence, an actor in an ongoing saga where the text comes alive and lived experience is transcribed anew. Even as Mordechai is rendered speechless, his speechlessness -- induced by the shock of the visitation of a holy prophet, is one that speaks of the ancient Jewish presence in Iraq even as that presence faces the first intimations of danger.

In a slightly different vein, the recurring specter of the Woman of Warning, *Al-Mar'ah Al-Nadhīr*, is another element of the text that foregrounds the articulation in culturally-specific terms of the usurpation of speech as a way to mourn loss. This woman, a ghost who appears in different clothing and different forms, is recognizable as a type of *ghūl* (pl. *ghīlḥān*) or *ṭayf* (pl. *atyāf*), an important trope in Arabic literature from the *qaṣīda* through modern works.<sup>77</sup> Her presence in the text thus inscribes the Ṣablākh as another ruined desert campsite in the long tradition of ruined desert campsites in the Arabic *qaṣīdah* tradition. However, in this case, the ruined campsite housed not wandering Bedouin, but a settled, multi-confessional town on the historic frontier of the Arabic language.

The Woman of Warning usurps for herself the powers of speech of the residents of Ṣablākh, rendering them speechless at the same time as she inscribes them as members of a community where both folk tradition and fate know no religious boundaries, as Shlo-

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77. It is the *ṭayf*, benign or playful in nature, that haunts the lover at his beloved's abandoned campsite. The *ghūl*, on the other hand, is often a menacing presence.

mo's encounter with her suggests. Already subject to the intensified inter-sectarian unrest fomented in the city by the presence of the occupying armies, when the *ghūl* first appears to Shlomo he assumes that she is Jewish. She swiftly chastises him, maintaining that she knows no earthly religion and appears to all *Ṣablākhis* equally, regardless of their faith. In fact, the text highlights her equal-opportunity haunting by focusing more on her visitation of a young Muslim boy named Ali, rather than her visitation of the Jewish Shlomo.

The visitation of *Al-Mar'ah Al-Nadhīr* to the young Muslim boy Ali not only renders the terrified child unable to move or speak; it also usurps his powers of speech so that his silence may augment those of the *ghūl*. She appears in the guise of a young girl, inviting him to play the absurd game of *kibr*, or growing. The "little girl," mischievous and mean-spirited, then swiftly transforms before his eyes at breakneck speed, cycling through the stages of human life until she is nothing more than a pile of bones on the cold ground. He wishes to speak but is prevented:

Al-Walad yarta‘id amāmahā ka-al-nakhlah allatī tu’rajjih sa‘fahā ‘āṣifah,  
in‘aqad lisāuhu, hamma an yahrub [...] shari‘a dharā‘uhā yaṭūl ḥattā aṣba-  
ha amāmahu wa-ṣaddahu ‘an al-farār. Wa-fi al-ḥāl aḥass bi-qabḍah aqwā  
min al-hadīd tamsiku bihi thumma tu‘īduhu ilayhā. Arāda an yaṣrukḥ fa-  
kammāt famahu kurrah min fulādh [...] ḥāwal [an yaghmuḍ ‘aynayhi] bay-  
da anna jafānayhi tajamadā wa-ḥadaqatayhi tasmarratā raghaman ‘anhu  
[...] Kāna yarāhā ḥatma anfīhi, wa-hiya tatakhaṭṭā marāhil al-‘umr bi-  
sur‘ah junūnīyah [...] Amma al-bashrah al-jāfah min farṭ al-shaykhukhah  
fa-qad akhadhat tataqashshar wa-tatafannat thumma tatasāqaṭ ‘an al-wujh,  
wa-mā baqā akhīran amām al-walad al-maskīn, lam yakun bi-akthar min  
jumjumah fawqa haykal ‘azmī mukaffan.. tāh ‘aql al-ṣabī, lākinnahu kān  
muṣṭādan lā qudrata lahu ‘alā al-iflāt.

*The boy shuddered before her like an ant whose palm leaf had been tossed*

*and turned by a storm. His tongue became tied, he attempted to flee [...] Her arm began to lengthen until it arrived before the boy and blocked him from escaping. At the same moment he felt a grip stronger than iron grabbing him and returning him to her. He wanted to scream, but a ball of steel covered his mouth. [...] He tried [to close his eyes] but his two eyelids froze and his two irises turned red despite himself. He saw her right in front of his nose as she passed the stages of life with crazed speed. Her skin, dried from the extreme aging, began to flake off and then to fall from her face. In the end, what remained before the poor boy was not more than a skull above a skeleton ready for the grave... the boy lost his mind, but he was like hunted game, unable to escape. (252)*

Here, Ali is not only unable to remove himself from the site of trauma; he is also unable to let sound out of mouth, or to close his eyes to shield himself from the incomprehensible news and its terrifying messenger. The notion of a "ball of steel" covering his mouth belies the depths of the trauma of the macabre encounter. Indeed, the paranormal aging of girl and the gruesome way in which her body decomposes itself ("her skin, dried from the extreme aging, began to flake off and then fall from her face"), making itself "ready for the grave," is particularly traumatic since Ali, still playing games in the street with neighborhood children, is most certainly too young to understand matters of death and burial. While the traumatized Ali has lost his powers of speech, the speech of the *ghūl* and her ominous portents gain relative volume and import as they are proclaimed uninterrupted before her silent, captive audience:

Ammā al-haykal al-‘athamī, fa-qaḍ yushbih faḥīḥ al-af‘á wa-bi-lisānihā ka-lisānihā kān yataḍallā min fajwatin mā bayn asnān al-jumjumah. "Anā al-Mar‘ah al-Nadhīr, jī‘tu uhadhdhir mimmaḥ sayaqī‘u fī hādhihi al-baldah min shurūr mustaḥīrah, ukhabbir ahlaka wa-dhuwayka bi-anna arḍ Ṣablākh

satataqayya' qubūrahā, wa-anna al-laḥm sa-yakhtaliṭ bi-al-laḥm, wa-sa-taḥḍum al-‘awrāt ‘awrātihā. ‘Inda’idhin ikhtafā al-kābūs, wa-akhadha al-walad yaşrukḥ, yabkī wa-ta‘dū naḥwa baytihi. Yuṭriq al-bāb bi-junūn wa-yarta‘id ka-al-sa‘fah fī mahabb ‘āşifah hawjā’. Infataḥ al-bāb. Saqaṭ fī aḥḍān ummihi wa-kāna yalhath wa-yartajif, zā’igh al-‘aynayn, ma‘tūh al-bukā’ [...] ḥawal al-nuṭq wa-‘ajaz.

*The skeleton, [had a voice that] resembled the hiss of a snake, with a tongue like the tongue of a snake dangling from the gap between the teeth of the skull. "I am the Woman of Warning, I have come to warn of the imminent evils that will befall this town. Inform your family and your kinsmen that the land of Şablākh will vomit up its graves, and that flesh will mix with flesh, and that loins will eat their loins. At that moment the nightmare disappeared, and the boy began to scream, crying and running towards his house. He knocked on the door with crazed abandon. He trembled like a palm leaf in the eye of a hurricane. The door opened. He fell into his mother's embrace, panting and shuddering, cross-eyed, crying with abandon. [...] He tried to speak and was unable. (252-253)*

Here, it is seen that just as 'Ali's tongue contracts in his mouth and he is rendered unable to speak, the dry skeleton sprouts a snake-like tongue that not only speaks, but seems to monopolize speech, relaying a terrible prophecy--a seemingly nonsensical proclamation that the graves will vomit and the loins shall eat their loins. The tongue of the skeleton speaks this prophecy, and 'Ali, powerless to speak back at the moment of this traumatic encounter, sees his fear transformed into the affects of crying and trembling. Once Ali is again able to speak, his family asks him what he saw and heard, but when he repeats the words of *Al-Mar'a Al-Nadhiir* verbatim, the reaction is one of disbelief and scorn. His family does not take his warning seriously; his grandmother asks if it was a barking dog that caused him such a fright. They instead suggest that he is crazy: "Al-qubūr wa-al-qay, wa-al-laḥm wa-al-arḍ, wa-kull ḥādhīhi al-mazāhir al-gharībah ‘alā al-şabī, a-ḥādhā faz‘

aw junūn? / Graves and vomiting them up, flesh and the ground, and all of these things about which the boy surely has no knowledge, is this fright, or madness?" (253)

Even though the woman had been appearing to everyone, the family chooses to dismiss the boy's words as those born of madness, perhaps because believing that the Woman of Warning had appeared to the boy would make her prophecies more difficult to dismiss or ignore. And just as the beauty of the Qur'an was thought to be beyond the capabilities of the illiterate Muhammad, thus rendering the text of divine, rather than human origin, the horrific nature of the boy's words are deemed beyond the capabilities of the imagination of a young child. Thus, although his family and his Sheikh may think he has gone mad, the reader is left with the chilling knowledge that the ominous warning that has been channeled through this young boy is perhaps even more reliable than Shlomo's intimations of catastrophe, since unlike Shlomo, this boy would not have the capabilities or previous knowledge to dream up such horrific visions of human suffering. The boy's lack of self-awareness or self-aggrandizement in being a conduit of prophecy or warning, as opposed to Shlomo's very self-conscious self-identification as a latter-day Joseph, also makes his words harder to dismiss. While the reader might question Shlomo's veracity in narration as a traumatized subject speaking of his uncanny, unparalleled ability to anticipate and obviate the catastrophe that ultimately formed for him a foundational trauma, the figure of Ali does not invite the same type of doubt or question. Rather, Ali's macabre encounter invites a focus on the speechlessness born of the visitation of the supernatural; in this case, a speechlessness that in its silence draws attention to the religious diversity

of the Şablākhi social fabric and their shared fate under the bullets and canon balls of the war.

While it is to be expected that Time would narrate the visitation of the Prophet Nahūm to Qosh and, the visitation of the ghūl to little Ali's playtime in Şablākh, it must also be noted that Shlomo is unable to narrate his own encounter with her. It is here that Zaman must intervene in the telling of Shlomo's personal experience, to narrate events from the site of trauma, the site of the *hawl*, as they occurred. For without Zaman the witness, Shlomo's traumatic encounter with the ghūl would remain unseen and unarticulated. Indeed, their meeting is grammatically marked as one where Time assumes the narration from an affect-stricken Aba Salman. Time tells Shlomo, in the second person, that on his way home from Synagogue one morning he encountered the *ghūl* in the form of a woman, wandering aimlessly in the streets. Time tells Shlomo that he was surprised, embarrassed, shocked, and that he tried to suppress the matter in this memory:

Şādafta al-mar'ah al-majhūlah al-murtadiyah thiyāban bayḍā' ka-al-kufn  
[...] Kull jalīd Şablākh kasā fu'ādaka. Lā tankur annaka fazi'ta ayuh'ā al-  
Kurdī al-shadīd al-mirās [...] "Lā tuhāwil yā Shlūmū, fa-lastu bi-jinīyah  
aw 'ifrītah, anā aqwā min al-jān wa-al-shayātīn, a-fa-lam tasmi'unī aqūl  
laka innī anā al-nadhīr, fa-iḥdhir.. wa-hadhahir yā Abā Salmān! Wa-  
ikhtafat 'an anzārika. Farrakta 'aynayka, nafaḍta rāsaka, qaraṣta dharā'aka.  
al-Kābūs kāna ḥaqīqah, ḥaqīqah ḥāwalta nisyānahā aw katmahā. (191-192)

*You chanced upon the unknown woman, wearing clothing as white as a shroud. [...] All the ice of Şablākh incased your heart. Don't deny that that you were terrified, O you stubborn, intractable Kurd [...] "Don't try, Shlomo, for [...] I am stronger than all of the jinn and the devils. Do you not hear me when I say to you that I am a warning, so beware, and be warned!" Then she disappeared from sight. You rubbed your eyes, shook*

*your head and pinched your arm. The nightmare was reality a reality you tried to forget or suppress. (191-192)*

In this context, the grammatical shift between first and second person enables the text to include a traumatic memory which Aba Salman himself would likely have omitted if left to his own devices; thus the presence of other narrators ensures that even what the traumatized subject suppresses will be spoken of and witnessed. Unlike in the case of Ali, here the reader is privy to Aba Salman's innermost thoughts and anxieties at the moment of contact with the *ghūl*, abruptly panning out to see Aba Salman from the outside, unable to speak, rubbing his eyes and pinching himself in an attempt to sort out reality from illusion, of sorting out that which is worthy of recall and that which would be better left forgotten. Given that Ali is not one of the three narrators appointed to tell the tale of Ṣablākh, it can only be imagined what it was that transpired in his mind in moments before he was rendered completely silent and still.

Together, the prophetic encounters between Mordechai Hayy Al-Kurdi and the Prophet Nahum, as well as between Ali and *Al-Mar'ah Al-Nathūr*, both combine registers of traumatic affect and cultural memory in a way that allows the characters to proclaim their authenticity by virtue of the very circumstances in which they lose the ability to speak. In the case of Mordechai, he is struck speechless in a Jewish tomb, swearing on behalf of the Jewish holy of holies, given foresight by a figure in the Jewish tradition of what will befall the Jews of Baghdad. In the case of Ali, he is struck speechless in multi-confessional Ṣablākh, faced with a ghost out of common lore and who is appearing equal-

ly to all Şablākhi Kurds regardless of religion, and given foresight as to what will happen to the city's multi-confessional social fabric. In both instances, the invocation of Islamicate lore in its various forms as a tool to narrate the disintegration of Jewish Baghdad on one hand, and inter-confessional Şablākh on the other, enacts a memorial of speech and speechlessness to a lost world at the first intimations of its traumatic unravelings. Indeed, it was these types of multi-confessional communities, where folk tradition and fate were the shared lot of all religious groups equally, whose very existence and legitimacy was threatened and attacked not only by the First World War, but also by Zionism. Indeed, This diversity, or even coexistence, as selectively and romantically mined from the Islamicate past and fashioned into a useful concept for the Iraqi present, is part and parcel of what the Jewish Iraqi nationalists of Naqqash's day sought to build upon as they articulated their vision for the public sphere in Modern Iraq.<sup>78</sup> Thus, Ali's speechlessness in Şablākh, like that of Mordechai in Qosh, evokes in its silence the nostalgic contours of the idealized Islamicate world at which the impending war on the horizon is slowly chiseling away.

Thus, the presence of the *ghūl* and her usurpation of speech, as well as the presence of the Prophet Nahum and his rewriting of the eponymous Biblical story, both become one more *hawl* of the *ahwāl* in Shlomo's life. In this way, Baghdad is inscribed as a new Nineveh, while Şablākh becomes one more desert ruin where the voices of men are

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78. See Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 15-57.

no longer heard and the only sounds are that of the howling jackals under the night sky.

### 3. Speech well-spoken: *Shahrazād*, *Sindibād*, and the Syncretic Multilingualism of Shlomo Al-Kurdi

In addition to drawing on cultural lore in the crafting of the speechlessness of Mordechai and of Ali, Shlomo Al-Kurdi also makes extensive use of cultural signifiers that emanate from the semantic fields of literature and rhetoric to craft and commemorate the act of speech, especially beautiful speech, and especially religiously syncretic and multilingual speech. In this way, Shlomo as speaker, narrating from within the space of the black hole of his memory, reinscribes himself not just as speaker of trauma, narrating to a witness, but also as a speaker of Arab-Jewish cultural memory, narrating to the annals of history.

In retrospect, Shlomo remembers himself as an array of epic storytellers, in essence attempting to compensate for the prior moments when he was unable to speak. He asks his younger self if he recalls "al-ša'alūk al-šakīr / the drunkard brigand poet," (69) a title of self-identification that inscribes Shlomo in the tradition of *Shanfará* and the pre-Islamic brigand poets of Arabia. He also selects for himself the epithet "Shahrazād of Şablākh" in referring to how, after the fact, he was able to speak of events that had transpired:

Ta'ūd (Shahrazād Şablākh) tarwī hikāyātihā, wa-ḥawla madfa'at Salāḥ al-Dīn taqūm al-aḥdāth al-munṣarimah min ilḥādihā wa-tanba'ithu ja'aja'at al-madāfi'a al-ghābirah wa-tula'la' al-banādiq wa-yata'ālā lagḥt yakhtaliṭ fihi, ma' raṭāntika al-'Arabiyah, al-Kurdiyah wa-al-Arāmiyah wa-al-Fārisiyah wa-al-Rūsiyah wa-al-Ādhiriyah, wa-al-Turkiyah wa-al-Almāniyah wa-ḥattā al-Inklīziyah.. (72)

*To once again be the Shahrazād of Şablākh, telling the city's stories as bygone events rise from their graves around Saladin's hearth, the passing clamor of cannons is emitted, the rifles resound and the tumult rises, mixed with your babbling in Arabic, Kurdish, Aramaic, Farsi, Russian, Azeri, Turkish, German, even English... (72)*

Shlomo as *Shahrazādhād* suggests, first and foremost, that he is a masterful storyteller with magical and mythical stories to tell, but more fundamentally, this epithet contains within it the literary figure, Shahrazād from the *Thousand and One Nights*, who is the very antonym of and antidote to speechlessness. Furthermore, recasting the tides of his fortune's ebb and flow as episodes out of the *Thousand and One Nights*, he intensifies the notion of himself as storyteller, and of the traumatic episodes of his life as legendary episode worthy of telling. Indeed, the facial expressions of Aba Salman as he speaks to Shlomo and to Time, particularly his smiles, suggest the working through trauma in the presence of a witness to listen has the potential to transform speechless Shlomo to verbally-gifted Shahrazād, from tongue-tied refugee to epic storyteller, who, incidentally, in this instance tells stories amidst babbling in all the languages of the Eastern theater of World War I ("Arabic, Kurdish, Aramaic, Farsi, Russian, Azeri, Turkish, German, even English"). Shlomo is the multilingual Shahrazād of the war, and he has survived until morning to speak in many languages of what he has seen.

While Shlomo conceives of his halting voice as Shahrazād's at its best moments, he similarly reconfigures his wanderings from that of a refugee to that of a travel-writer and explorer. En route to India, Shlomo is at first unable to communicate meaningfully

with any of his shipmates due to the lack of a common language and fears that they will judge him harshly on account of his accented-Arabic, twice removed from being a normative (ie. Muslim) native speaker. His tongue "cut off," he reclaims a sense of agency by focusing on his ability to move freely and calling himself the lone Sindibād of the 20th century:

Wa-law fataḥtu famī fa-inna al-umūr qad tata‘qqad. Alkun makhnun wa-hajīn wa-Kurdī Yahūdī wa-Fārisī Adherbayjānī wa-Baghdādī wa-musāfir ilā al-Hind. Anā! Kull hātha anā. Wa-muhājir wa-mughādir. Anā waḥdī al-Sindibād fī maṭla‘ al-qurn al-‘ashrīn. (18)

*If I were to open my mouth, then matters would become more complicated. I stutter, nasal, a mix of Jewish Kurdish and Persian, Azeri, Baghdadi, and traveling to India. Me! All of this is me. A migrant, a vagabond, a merchant departing. I alone am Sindibād at the dawn of the 20th century.*  
(18)

Here, Shlomo imagines himself as travel writer and explorer from the Thousand and One Nights, Sindibād the sailor from Basra who traversed the wonders of the world, both natural and supernatural, who, like Shlomo's Shahrazād, is similarly multilingual. By reclaiming his image from the gaze of the ‘aqāl-wearing, Gulfī Arabs on the ship, recasting himself as the one Sindibād of the 20th century, he creates a positive association, empowering himself not only with the power of speech, but the power of speech that can travel, speaking and being heard far and wide. In this way, Shlomo turns his wandering, politically and nationally-marginal self into an agent of movement between the interstices, both in space (sailing as Sindibād) and time (Sindibād as legend vs. Sindibād in the present).

Thus, Shlomo appropriates Islamicate resonances to cast himself as a type of wandering minstrel, an eloquent Shahrazād and adventurous Sindibad who wishes to delight an audience with tales, wherever his wanderings may take him. And in the invocations of both of these folkloric character, Shlomo makes characteristic reference to the languages that he had mastered: Kurdish, Persian/Farsi, Baghdadi Arabic, Aramaic. Shlomo Al-Kurdi may have been tongue-tied as he witnessed the slow unraveling of his beloved Şablākh, and he may have been cut-of-tongue as he sought to rebuild his life in Iraq and in India. But with the passage of time, he reinvents himself, highlighting his extensive abilities to speak, in any language of his choice, and in the idiom of the storytellers of Islamicate literary culture.

While part of Shlomo's recovery of speech entails recasting himself as the great storytellers, Shlomo also invokes the language of ecumenism as he invites the reader into his inner life. In this way, Shlomo commemorates not just the spaces of cultural memory devoted to classical literature -- to *dahr*, to Shahrazād, and to Sindibād, but also to the spaces of cultural memory devoted to religious coexistence. Indeed, Shlomo makes sense of his home, and even his body in terms of a syncretic Islamicate turāth. His heart beats like lines of psalms, *dhikr* and *du'ā'* (267) -- forms of religious poetry in Jewish, Christian and Muslim liturgy. Similarly, Shlomo insists on bringing food to his starving neighbors, invoking a variation on a common folk saying supposedly based in Islamic ḥadīth, or saying of the Prophet Muhammad: "Ḥāshī Allāh! Fa-al-jār lil-jār wa-qad awṣā nabīkum bi-sābi' jār / God forbid! The neighbor must help his neighbor, your prophet has

commanded until the seventh neighbor." (324) Notably, Shlomo has reconfigured the saying, changing "The Prophet" to "your Prophet," thus simultaneously recognizing the ḥadīth as sacred to his interlocutor, and inscribing himself as one who recognizes the saying's inherent power while delineating for himself a space just outside but adjacent to its cultural force. In these ways, Shlomo is able to assert his place as a non-Muslim still bound by the neighborly code articulated by the Prophet, sensitive to the cadences of devotional poetry in all faiths. In these ways Shlomo casts himself becomes a type of ḥadīth-transmitter and liturgical poet, reenacting the hopes of the Iraqi nationalists of Naqqash's day that yearned for a modern Iraqi public sphere that would accommodate all Iraqis equally, regardless of religious or ethnic background.

\* \* \*

All of these particular Eastern and Islamicate intertexts and allusions -- from the circumstances of the speechlessness of Mordechai and Ali, to the invocations of Shlomo as Shahrazād, Sindibād, and as whisperer of liturgical poetries, to the proud assertions of multiglossia in the languages of Iran, British Iraq and India, while all notable in their own right, gain particular significance when read within the context of what Ella Shohat has termed the "epistemological violence" exercised by Zionism against Jews of Arab descent. In Naqqash's Israel, languages other than Hebrew were considered a type of contraband, a threat to the integrity of the state. Arabic in particular was construed as the language of the enemy, the most subversive language of all, completely devoid of cultural value. And should Arabic have had any cultural value, it was questionable whether or not

it could serve as any sort of inspiration for literature and culture in the Jewish state. To that end, it is not surprising that Shlomo describes the telling of events as being "cut-off" when he moves to Israel (71), where he finds himself cut off not only from the source of his memories, but also from the ability to tell and share them, since Arabic language and literature are forcibly "otherized." When seen in this light, the text serves as an alternate universe where Shlomo, and by extension Samir Naqqash himself, is not merely any old speaker of Arabic, but rather, the most eloquent arabic speaker of all -- Shahrazād, speaking to the most epic Arabic witness of all - *Dahr*. Similarly, casting his wanderings in the iconic image Sindibād the sailor, it is as if Shlomo trades in his Israeli passport, with all of its travel restrictions, and through use of Islamicate intertext, becomes a true citizen of the world and subject of history, free to wander at will in time and in space. By paring his invocation of these intertexts with a plethora of languages -- Kurdish, Aramaic, Azeri, Arabic, Russian, English, German and others, it is as if Shlomo seeks to simultaneously amplify the speaking of trauma, and highlight his own agency in communicating his story for an audience whose scope transcends and transgresses any boundaries imposed by political ideology, or, more to the point, imposed by nationalist political ideologies that gained steam following the breakdown of the great empires in the First World War. Thus, as long as Shlomo can speak, be witnessed, and release himself from the infinite gravity of the black hole of memory. Freeing himself to wander in the folds of cosmopolitan Islamicate cultural memory, perhaps he will be able to mourn the traumas of the loss of Şablākh, the loss of Baghdad, and the loss of the Souq where speakers of

every language knew Shlomo Al-Kurdi by name.

## Conclusion

This thesis has read Samir Naqqash's Shlomo Al-Kurdi, Myself and Time in light of theories of trauma in an attempt to articulate the novel's *poetics of the black hole*. In the text, protagonist Shlomo Al-Kurdi Al-Kattani experiences the *ahwāl*, or terrors, of the disintegration of the multi-confessional social fabric of his native Şablākh in Iranian Kurdistan as a type of personal foundational trauma to which all subsequent traumas in his life, such as the Farhūd riots in Baghdad, return. In this way Shlomo inscribes himself in a personal genealogy of loss that confounds the institutionalized genealogies consecrated by both Zionism and Arab nationalism. And in light of these traumatic experiences, Shlomo refers to his memory as a type of a black hole, or *thaqab aswad*, as he attempts to narrate a lifetime of what Dominick LaCapra would call historical traumas, or traumas of historic proportions that are lived firsthand. In the text, these poetics of the black hole are characterized by a prose deeply saturated with traumatic recall -- so much so that the text manages to narrate a plot only in passing, keeping the reader at a considerable psychic distance from the events being narrated. It is a prose heavy with infinite density of traumatic affect, that despite its density leaves the reader with no way to measure or even feel its mass due to its sequestration of tangible plot details deep within. Naqqash's poetics of the black hole in this text are thus comprised of a suspension of the traditional rules of space and time, allowing for multiple and at times contradictory temporalities to coexist so as to simultaneously exist within, after, and before the moment of trauma.

The text crafts this poetics of the black hole using a variety of tools that marshal

notions of trauma, memory, and language. These tools include the structure of the text, roughly corresponding with trauma; the narration of the text, roughly corresponding with memory; and the allusive fabric of the text, roughly corresponding with language.

Via its narrative structure, the novel stages an intervention in what Cathy Caruth identifies as the structure of traumatic experience, whereby the traumatized subject is possessed by an event that haunts in its repeatedly returns. The traumatized subject is therefore unable to properly historicize or narrate. In Shlomo Al-Kurdi, a two-part narrative structure stages the decades of traumatic affect experienced by Shlomo post-Şablākh as, ordered in chaotic, non-chronological order, *prior* to the attempt at the telling of an orderly, historical chronicle of what transpired in Şablākh and how. In this way, the text enacts what Dori Laub terms the inherent belatedness of traumatic experience. However, the text intensifies Laub's belatedness and Caruth's repeated return by introducing another element to the historicization of trauma: (pseudo-)prophecy.

The second part of the novel, composed as a chronicle that, contrary to the non-chronological nature of the first part, proceeds in sequentially, is narrated once the reader has already witnessed Shlomo experience trauma's aftereffects. However, once he finally arrives at the moment of speaking of Şablākh, his narration is nevertheless colored by said aftereffects in that Shlomo seems to narrate events as he wished they had happened. Namely, Shlomo narrates events as if he *anticipated* them, as if he were a type of seer or prophet who was already charged with responsibility and worry for the impending storm that he narrates himself as having foreseen with clarity. In the text, Shlomo and others

grapple with whether or not Shlomo has been anointed as latter-day Joseph the *mashbir*, whether or not *Şablākh* is still *mahrūsah* (guarded by God from above), and whether or not the horrific events of the war are or are not part of a divine plan. Indeed, the narration of the time prior to trauma as if all were prophesized, as if the traumatized subject had been a type of prophet, true or false, amends Caruth's structure of trauma, creating a situation where traumatic memory reaches back to the time prior to the formation of traumatic memory, and infuses said traumatic memory into all moments of the subject's life, into every space of the subject's lived universe. The structure of trauma no longer consists solely in its repeated returns, back and forth between zero and infinity on the cartesian graph; via the introduction of prophecy, the ink of trauma now bleeds into the negative quadrants as well, occupying the space between zero and negative infinity, as well.

Additionally, by a narrative slight of hand, the text ties together the end of each section with the beginning of the other one, essentially creating of the text an infinite loop. The second section, and thus the novel as a whole, concludes by speaking denouement of the moment of exile from *Şablākh*: the caravan and its wagons commence their lugubrious departure towards the horizon -- an exile where all refugees, Jews and Palestinians included, become one under the banner of humanity. Carrying with them nothing more than "pieces of junk," and having themselves become nothing more than "pieces of junk," these *Şablākhi* refugees are swallowed by the night. Such a conclusion naturally returns the reader to the beginning of the first part of the novel, with its initiation into

decades of traumatic aftereffects. Similarly, the first section concludes with the moment of Shlomo's death, a moment in which he bequeaths his memories of the *ahwāl* to Time, so that Time can speak of them for eternity, even though no one will hear him. Time and Shlomo agree to tell together, as Time tellingly asks Shlomo which comes first, the chicken or the egg, the man or the baby. Implicit in Time's question is a recognition that trauma and its aftereffects, too, confound any attempt at stating which comes first, which comes second. Traumatic affect and prophecy coexist. To read one is to read the other, and to read either is to enter into the infinite loop of traumatic affect and enunciation. Such is the narrative structure, and such is the black hole: a place where time is circular, where beginnings and endings each lead back to one another in the absence of a fixed temporality.

Via its narration, the text enables the traumatized subject to simultaneously remember and forget. Specifically, the presence of three different narrators -- Shlomo, Aba Salman ie. Shlomo's younger self, and Time, all competing and collaborating, allows the novel to become at once historical chronicle, documentary footage of traumatic affect, and finely wrought albeit distorted record of how Shlomo wished things had been.

Via its allusive fabric, the text speaks the language of an Islamicate cultural idiom, allowing Shlomo to inscribe himself and his *dramatis personae* in a literary and cultural tradition at the very moment that their belonging and active participation in said tradition stands to be lost. By casting as his witness not only Time, but *Dahr* of the *Qāṣidah* tradition, Shlomo casts himself as speaking to the most epic witness of all.

Alternatively, by staging visitations that usurp speech, the text enacts speechless-

ness at the same time as it inscribes the *places* of speechlessness within privileged Islamicate literary traditions that co-opt the speechlessness of the moment into the speech of jealously-guarded text. Namely, a visitation by the Prophet Nahum in Qosh that leaves Sheikh Mordechai Hayy speechless, where portents of the destruction of the Jews of Baghdad is allusively composed as a latter-day Biblical story in which Baghdad becomes a latter-day Nineveh. Similarly, a visitation by the Woman of Warning leaves little Ali speechless, his voice usurped by the snake-tongue which emerging from the skeleton of the cheeky ghūl. The portents of the ghūl thus inscribe ruined Şablākh in the tradition of the abandoned desert campsite over which the poet of the Qaşīdah laments.

Speech well-spoken also plays a role in inscribing Shlomo as among the most eloquent speakers of the Islamicate cultural tradition at the very moment when he is threatened with the cutting of his tongue and cultural displacement. By positing himself as the Shahrazād of Şablākh he becomes the most eloquent speaker of the Islamicate cultural tradition -- a tradition which Zionism sought to render inferior. Similarly, by positing himself as a modern-day Sindibād, he empowers himself to speak of the *ahwāl* uninhibited by any geographic boundaries imposed by his Israeli passport. And by taking great pain to recall the multilingualism of the places he has lived at the times in which he lived in them -- Kurdistan, Baghdad, Mumbai, he resists the monolingualism imposed by a Zionist ideology in his ultimate destination. Shlomo's multilingualism is also a syncretism, since Shlomo describes his own heart as beating to lines of prayers holy in all three monotheistic religions present in Şablākh, processes events according to sayings of

the Prophet Muhammad. By recalling and perhaps also reliving his own multilingualism, acquired through his various Sindibād-like voyages to Russia and to British India, it is almost as if he translates his memories into all the languages in which he once lived, thus striving for an even greater audience, should any audience be willing to listen at all.

Writing in Arabic about processes of memory and forgetting in the consciousness of Shlomo the Kurdish, Iranian Jew, Samir Naqqash calls into question standard notions of a canonicity that abide strict political or linguistic binaries. Furthermore, by making of Şablākh in Iranian Kurdistan a foundational trauma, a trauma to which all other traumas in the life of Shlomo Al-Kurdi return, the text also calls into question the very hierarchies of trauma as consecrated by the Zionist and Arab nationalist narratives, respectively. Indeed, Kurdish Şablākh is arguably not suitable for anyone's national canon. It is not considered acceptable in Arabic because it is about a Kurd and a Jew, two figures today seen as inimical to the project of Arabism. It is not considered suitable for an Israeli canon in part since it is written in Arabic, language of the enemy, but also because it privileges a historical trauma where Jews and non-Jews shared the same black fate, a notion inimical to the entire Zionist conception of Jewish history. And, the novel may be suitable for a type of Kurdish canon, except that the Kurdish experience remains one of fragmentation, where the expression of collective memory or of cultural specificity is not a right granted consistently in all five countries where Kurds reside (Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Armenia).

Not granted full access to any of the aforementioned larger bodies of canon,

Şablākh becomes a proxy for the dream of the Iraqi nationalists of Naqqash's day who yearned for a society drawn from a romanticized, applied version of Islamicate culture where all human beings, Jews and non-Jews, Arabs and non-Arabs alike, all shared equally in the rights and responsibilities of membership in the human race. The loss of Şablākh is the beginning of the loss of, indeed the mourning for, that dream. Shlomo mourns that loss all the days of his life, but who shall mourn with him? Together with Time and with Aba Salman, the three of them shall mourn together in an infinite loop from within the space of the black hole an "inconvenient" trauma, a trauma marginalized but not forgotten.

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