

Anti-Systemic Departures in Lebanese-Canadian Writing: Mouawad and Hage

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1 .....	8
Silent (M)otherhood in Wajdi Mouwad’s <i>Scorched</i> .....	8
CHAPTER 2 .....	45
Compulsory Nationalism and Refugee Existence in Rawi Hage’s <i>De Niro’s Game</i> .....	45
CHAPTER 3 .....	68
<i>Cockroach</i> in the Anthropocene: A Scale-Based Reading .....	68
CONCLUSION.....	96
Works Cited .....	99

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the antisystemic writing of Wajdi Mouawad and Rawi Hage, two of the most compelling authors to emerge out of the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora. In their Canadian setting, the writers' politics of unbelonging serves a countercultural purpose by rearticulating the race, class, and gender disparities eschewed in multicultural discourse. As writers of a growing Lebanese diaspora, they recall the collective injuries sustained during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and which remain underexamined by Lebanese society and government. In this way, Mouawad and Hage assume a subversive position in both the Lebanese and the Canadian contexts by reinscribing histories and experiences that risk erasure.

In my analysis of Mouawad's play *Scorched* and Mouawad's novels *De Niro's Game* and *Cockroach*, the differential allocation of precarity and grievability proves the common thread that runs through all three texts. Mouawad and Hage's representation of their character's disproportionate exposure to harm and suffering coincides with the broader claims of antisystemic politics. My intervention brackets these texts' thematic concerns with the critical theories that best explain some of Mouawad and Hage's more radical depictions of immigrants under duress.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the works of two of the most compelling authors to emerge from the Lebanese-Canadian diaspora, Wajdi Mouawad and Rawi Hage. As expatriate writers, both figures contribute to the wider Arab/Lebanese exilic literary tradition, which gained traction following the success of Khalil Gibran in the early twentieth century and the writers of his Pen League in North and South America. As Canadian writers, however, Mouawad and Hage—like their characters—occupy a more precarious position. The issue is in part the uneven development of Canadian multiculturalism which has not yet recognized, or “consecrated,” Arab Canadian literature in its government policy of support for ethnic studies (Dahab 270). In its Canadian setting, Mouawad and Hage’s literary output corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of minor literatures, or texts written by and about minorities in the major languages of the majority culture, and which convey “the political and the collective value of utterances” (Dahab 269). In Mouawad’s play *Scorched* (trans. 2005 from *Incendies*, 2003) and Hage’s novels *De Niro’s Game* (2006) and *Cockroach* (2008), the political and the collective are coloured further by the highly particularized experiences of immigrants under conditions of mounting precarity and marginalization. Despite the generic differences between Mouawad’s tragedy and Hage’s diasporic novels, the writers find in their Lebanese past and Canadian present a shared site of imagination, reflection, and subversion. Both of their works bear the unmistakable mark of antisystemic writing—a writing that, by definition, contradicts the hegemonies which seek to interpellate the text (and its writer) into their systems of subordination.

In “Unrecognizable Texts,” Jeff Derksen identifies as “antisystemic” those texts that “consciously counter a system that seeks to interpellate a subject within a particular field of relations.” Derksen situates these writings “not in an exterior position of opposition but as

articulatory agent[s] within a site.” As a “technology” that commands the set (or ‘field’) of relations that it produces, official multiculturalism persists as the foremost regulatory apparatus for “the ideological and economic management of diversity” in Canada. Its founding in 1971 constitutes an “originary moment” in the construction of a Canadian national identity that recognizes ‘ethnicity’ even as “it seeks to control it through cultural absorption.” Official multiculturalism exercises its hegemony by emphasizing “social biology in Canadian immigration policies” and by promoting a “politics of recognition” which acknowledges diversity but does not challenge the systemic problems foreclosing equality of opportunity. In fact, the emphasis on recognition and representation in Canadian politics perpetuates “a cultural relativist frame where a dominant culture maintains its absolute powers of definition and whose gaze grants worth upon the spectated subject.” Antisystemic writing “rearticulates” from an interior position the “contradictions and overdeterminations” of multiculturalism. Even as it turns away from the politics of recognition and “the more subordinating aspects of the Act,” antisystemic writing does not oppose “multiculturalism and the particularized rights it could potentially bring.” Rather, it reinscribes the race, class, and gender matrices effaced from totalizing multicultural discourse of ‘ethnicity,’ thus laying bare the “frayed” sutures of the Act. In this way, antisystemic texts also suggest a “move from award-winning voter apathy to agency within sites” (Derksen 1998). The texts I have chosen for this project reflect the kinds of antisystemic writing that Derksen recommends for multicultural Canada.

In Mouawad and Hage’s works, the enduring “tension between particularism and universalism” (Derksen) which hastens the uneven development of Canadian multiculturalism is rearticulated in its various social and cultural manifestations. From a liminal position at once within the reach of multiculturalism’s regulatory apparatuses but outside the “ideological

hailing” of the politics of recognition, Mouawad and Hage situate multiculturalism “within the gendered race-labour system of the nation and its place within the world system.” Their immigrant narratives counter the illusion of full national participation and equal opportunity by representing not the “positive immigrant experiences” but the more prevalent stories of intransigence and permanent marginalization in a system that treats “racialized and ethnic subjects as labour commodities through which surplus value is created.” The diasporic perspectives offered in Mouawad and Hage’s texts subscribe to a “politics of unbelonging” (Coleman 62) linking the individual predicaments of their characters to the globalized networks of capitalist exploitation and their attendant histories of (post-/neo)colonial violence.

More specifically, Mouawad’s powerful tragedy *Scorched* and Hage’s unsettling novels *De Niro’s Game* and *Cockroach* measure their characters’ experiences of unbelonging in the host society against the memory of a turbulent Lebanese past marked by French and other neocolonial meddling. The narratives recall the political, cultural, and epistemic breaks triggered at the onset of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), a protracted conflict that saw the military intervention of numerous regional powers, the parceling of Lebanon along sectarian lines, and the dispersal of more than two-thirds of its population. Despite the immeasurable devastations and injuries sustained in its wake, the civil war remains inadequately acknowledged by Lebanese society and government. After 1990, the incumbent government in Lebanon—itsself configured according to sectarian allegiances and presided over by the warlords of the civil war—adopted a policy of forgetting, often termed collective historical amnesia, in order to inherit parliamentary authority unchallenged and to expedite a postwar resolution without the need to confront the war’s belligerents. As an unprocessed trauma, the war has often been approached in terms of an unassimilated and repressed memory. By according the conflict a pivotal role in their narratives,

Mouawad and Hage align their projects with the postwar “pro-memory camp” which seeks “to facilitate a process of public remembrance and soul-searching” against the state’s policy of forgetting (Haugbolle 79). In other words, the writers assume a countercultural antisystemic position in both the Lebanese and the Canadian contexts by reinscribing histories and experiences that risk erasure.

The intransigence we meet with in Mouawad and Hage’s characters suggests “a tactical refusal” (Derksen) of state-sanctioned forms of visibility and recognizability. The interpellating technologies of the modern nation-state—its borders, citizenship regimes, assimilationist policies, and capitalist modes of production and exploitation—are interrupted by immigrant perspectives that, as Edward Said has it, “[clutch] difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will” (“On Exile” 145). However, this same intractability betrays a “jealous state” (141) fundamental to the unbearability of life in exile. The pathos of estrangement—its affective links to “orphanhood” (144) and dissatisfaction—conveys its conditioned and precarious nature. Said cautions against this self-indulgent association of exile with melancholia, even as he admits the sadness fundamental to this situation. Is this suffering only destructive? In her post-9/11 polemic *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler acknowledges the subversive potential of grief and its tacit association with dispossession. She maintains that “to make grief itself into a resource for politics” (30) is to arrive at a new kind of political community that transcends group identifications by foregrounding vulnerability. In my analysis, the differential allocation of precarity and grievability proves *the* common thread that runs through all three texts. Mouawad and Hage’s representation of their character’s disproportionate exposure to harm and suffering coincides with the broader claims of antisystemic politics. My intervention brackets these texts’

thematic concerns with the critical theories that best explain some of Mouawad and Hage's more radical depictions of immigrants under duress.

Chapter 1 considers Mouawad's dramatization of subaltern silence in his play *Scorched* (translated from the French original, *Incendies*, by Lina Gaboriau) which creatively transposes Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* into an Arab setting. Mouawad's revision of this touchstone of Western dramatic tradition subverts neoclassicism's assumed reactionary sympathies. His representation of some of the mythic fixities in *Oedipus Rex* as politically-motivated systems of interpellation rejects the overtones of national worship and neocolonialism often associated with the genre. Mouawad's (re)mastering of Sophoclean anagnorisis sets his production apart from the more problematic film version of *Incendies* (2010) directed by Denis Villeneuve. The play alternates between a Montréal present and a warring Lebanese past where the main character, Nawal Marwan, is caught between capitalism's foremost hegemonic institutions, patriarchy and imperialism. In *Scorched*, these two systems of interpellation resurface to entrench Nawal's difference even in her refuge in Montréal by forcing her into a catatonic silence that can only be broken after her death. Interculturalism—the Québec version of multiculturalism which explicitly announces its assimilationist ambitions for the advancement of a Québécois national identity—exacerbates Nawal's reluctance to share her traumatic (immigrant) past. My reading of Nawal's refusal to speak benefits from Gayatri C. Spivak's exegesis of subalternity as a heterogeneous, elusive, and contradictory field that cannot be adequately represented—let alone interpreted—by even the most radical analytic standards.

Chapter 2 examines Hage's representation of national identity as a false stability and the nation-state as an unsustainable system of regulation in his debut novel *De Niro's Game*. The novel returns to the context of the Lebanese civil war but with an exclusive if inflammatory

Maronite perspective. The novel's central trauma recalls the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre carried out by the Maronite Phalange and its Israeli allies against one of the largest Palestinian refugee populations in West Beirut. Hage's depiction of one of Lebanon's most appalling tragedies proves the genocidal ideologies at the heart of nationalist identification. His scathing depiction of Maronitism as a predatory identity that seeks to align its majoritarian interests with the identity of the nation at the expense of more vulnerable minority and refugee communities exposes the fundamental impossibility of achieving a coherent and embodied national ideal.

Hage overwhelms his novel with dualities that destabilize each other by way of contrast. His use of parody and mimicry to undermine the legitimacy of ideological fixities recalls Judith Butler's exposition of the "structures of impersonation" (186) in her seminal work on gender (de)construction, *Gender Trouble*. With Butler's theory as its guiding heuristic, this chapter approaches the nation-state as a body politic that relies on surface significations to assert a fictional national interiority that it lacks. The ways in which communities and individuals desperately and unconvincingly attempt to impersonate the claims of the nation in Hage's novel proves that nationhood is a "performative accomplishment" (192) impossible to interiorize fully.

Chapter 3 pursues the anomalies in Hage's *Cockroach* that suspend the novel's confessional style of narration to disorienting effect. Despite the critical interest the novel has generated, these aberrant moments in the text are often dropped from serious consideration because they are too transgressive to write back into familiar criticism. Hage's unnamed immigrant narrator—a self-proclaimed human/cockroach hybrid—interrupts not just the smooth functioning of Montréal society with his stubborn irregularity but also the fluency of his own narrative by resorting to considerations of an impersonal and disproportionate ecological dynamic. Although the novel does not explicitly endorse an environmentalist agenda, its

narrator's "species-consciousness" (Clark 17) makes plain the challenges of urban survival to those who are excluded from the discourse of the human. His extreme precarity posits him alongside non-human Others in his foraging for sustenance. This chapter takes on a more experimental analysis of these challenging parts in *Cockroach* by suggesting a scale-based reading in keeping with the posthumanism motivating ecocritical encounters with the Anthropocene. I apply Timothy Clark's scale-framing strategy in *Ecocriticism on the Edge* which attends to the expanded spatio-temporal scale in which the Anthropocene operates. The environmental scale flattens out personal, contextual, and historical considerations to throw into sharper relief concerns of a planetary scale and that cover the span of environmental (as opposed to human) history.

This project aims to fulfill three broad purposes: it examines the imaginative leaps taken by Lebanese-Canadians to process critically the traumas of migration and resettlement to a host country whose hegemonic institutions, although subordinating, "(unwittingly) create... liminal space, and even supply resources, where effective rearticulatory practices take place" (Derksen); it demonstrates the literary, theoretical, and political resonance of the diasporic texts in question as well as their antisystemic potential; and it establishes their pedagogical and academic merit for current debates in the expanding field of Arab-Canadian literature. My thesis situates the works of Mouawad and Hage in the historical context of the Lebanese civil war which remains underexamined by Lebanese officialdom and society. It also attends to the Canadian dimension which has offered these writers refuge and, more importantly, cause for serious artistic reflection on the precarity and vulnerability of the modern postcolonial subject in exile. I hope that the historical and theoretical considerations I bring to this project themselves also rehearse the kinds of antisystemic rearticulation found in Mouawad and Hage's works.

## CHAPTER 1

Silent (M)otherhood in Wajdi Mouwad's *Scorched*

In the preface to his most critically acclaimed theatrical production, *Scorched* (trans. 2005 from *Incendies*, 2003), Wajdi Mouawad describes the stage as a site “of ruthless consolation” (iv). To this paradox he insistently returns in addressing his project on the Lebanese civil war. Perhaps Mouawad imagines the stage as a neutral ground where a ruthless consolation can be democratically negotiated, or as a proxy zone where this paradox can play itself out at an aesthetic and imaginative remove. As a liminal space that occupies a position in both the camps of ruthlessness and of consolation, Mouawad’s stage imbricates the competing categories of romance and horror, repressed trauma and remembrance, as well as nativism and multiculturalism in a seamless dramatic production. While anagnorisis guarantees the tragedy’s totality of movement, Mouawad’s careful framing of scenes also highlights the overlap of categories. In *Scorched*, the romantic plot spawns an unforeseeable horror. Its characters are forced to reconcile with traumas long repressed and to see that truths latent in their collective and personal consciousness are remembered in plain view of the audience. Military nativist backlash in Lebanon and armed left-wing resistance in the name of Arab solidarity are depicted as two sides of the same coin. The play superimposes a tautological coherence onto the splintered history of the Lebanese civil war. Mouawad suspends certain historical realities and promotes others so as to arrive at a holistic dramatic form that is recognizable by all Western audiences. He loosely adapts Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*—“considered the *locus classicus* of anagnorisis in its ideal Aristotelian form”—but with an “undoubtedly Arab” revision (Kennedy 64).

Mouawad draws sparingly from the life of Lebanese leftist militant Soha Bechara—a living legend among the ranks of Lebanese nationalists and communists alike—in his portrayal

of the protagonist Nawal Marwan. On November 17th, 1988, the 21-year-old Lebanese Communist Party recruit Bechara tried to assassinate Israeli-backed paramilitary leader Antoine Lahad of the South Lebanon Army after infiltrating his house as an aerobics instructor to his wife. After the failed assassination attempt, she was arrested, taken to Israel for interrogation, and detained in solitary confinement at the notorious Khiam detention camp in the south of Lebanon. Like other client-state detention facilities spread across the world and commissioned for discreet incarceration by neoliberal democracies, “South Lebanon offered a Guantanamo-like neither/nor status perfect for detentions: ‘Israel’ with regard to control, ‘not-Israel’ with regard to accountability” (Holstun 11). For ten years, Bechara “disappeared into Khiam with no charges, no trial, and no public access” (10). In 1998, shortly before Israel’s official withdrawal from south Lebanon, Bechara was released following an intense international campaign and moved to Paris for rehabilitation before finally settling in Geneva, Switzerland. Bechara’s life had so arrested the imagination of Lebanese people and Middle-East experts that multiple documentaries, memoirs, interviews, and critical studies were published on her internment experience. *Incendies*—both the play and its 2011 film adaptation—is a fictional remake of Bechara’s history as a communist militant. Mouawad rearranges the highlights of Bechara’s life during the civil war—her recruitment, assassination mission, detainment, release, and legacy—to shape his tragic storyline.

Mouawad met Bechara in Paris after her release; he was among those in the diaspora who had followed her story closely for years. By then, he had been contemplating the idea of a mother-rape plot. Over the years, Bechara had become known as Khiam’s “woman who sings” to “drown out the screams of the tortured” (Holstun 10). Khiam saw the contortions of the civil war manifest in its torture chambers; prisoners there were “negated, buried, conveniently wiped from

the world of the living” (11). Mouawad models the prison in Kfar Rayat after the Khiam detention camp. In this abject space, Mouawad has torture and rape spiral into an oedipal misrecognition and an incestuous violation. Torturer Abu Tarek, in an attempt to silence and stifle the will of Kfar Rayat’s “woman who sings,” unknowingly rapes his own mother. During the search for her long-lost son, Nawal had been inevitably implicated in the civil strife that had plagued her country and divided its people into pro-refugee leftists and right-wing nationalists. In Kfar Rayat, mother and son reunite under horrific circumstances.

In an uncharitable Marxist review of *Scorched*, James Holstun censures Mouawad for his treatment of historical material from both the civil war and Bechara’s life. He accuses Mouawad of appropriating Bechara’s experiences by “turning an eloquent, Red Antigone into a catatonic, ill-fated Jocasta” (5). Holstun measures Nawal’s destitution, defeat, and eventual silence against Bechara’s fortitude, life-long resistance, and volubility in her memoir *Résistante*. He faults Mouawad’s choice of genre and cathartic denouement:

Whatever the realities of sexual violence in Khiam, Mouawad’s focus on unwitting incest mythically distances us from the lived experience of the Civil War and the Israeli occupation. Rape-torture drives out electrode-torture, incest drives out both, and the fact of political torture at Khiam dissolves into an oedipal fog. (23)

This is fidelity criticism *par excellence*: the adapted text is held answerable to the historical accuracy, authenticity, and standards set by an authoritative original text or set of texts in an imagined hierarchy. To Holstun, not only do Mouawad’s thematic choices rehearse “a position of neocolonial humanism, [offering] missionary sympathy, catharsis, and reconciliation as the means to forge a modernized nuclear family and neoliberal state” (4), but his tone and aesthetic vision also convey a “disengaged empathy” (31) to the sectarianism that blights the Middle East

to this day. These are attacks that go beyond literary criticism and against the very person of Mouawad whom Holstun describes as “narcissistically non-partisan” (31). He finds Mouawad’s decision to elude the political fray by deliberately leaving out explicit references to Israel and Lebanon inexcusable.

Whereas Holstun faults Mouawad for aestheticizing grim historical realities, one could hold Holstun equally responsible for enlisting the same material for theoretical capital. Although I share some of Holstun’s concerns about the implicit “capitalist development ideology” (17) informing Mouawad’s origin quest, my chapter offers a more sympathetic reading of *Scorched* that aims for neither aestheticization nor top-heavy theorization. Mouawad’s etiological penchant provides grounds for suspicion and further scrutiny, but not dismissal. In fact, I argue that *Scorched* is not an origin story at all despite its writer’s fascination with origins<sup>1</sup>. Mouawad does not limit his characters to a single origin narrative but endows them with multiple *beginnings* (I shall return to Edward Said’s distinction between origins and beginnings in due course) that complicate Holstun’s assessment of Mouawad’s obsession with teleologies of return. This chapter attests to both the technical accomplishment of Mouawad’s powerful tragedy and its possible political resonances. Holstun berates the play’s exclusion of “the political analysis of motives, [leaving] us with no more than some banalities about the quest for identity, the self-destructive horror of revenge, and the human ache for consolation and togetherness” (17). To Holstun, “these commonplaces define Mouawad’s atrophied stagecraft” (17). I maintain that *Scorched* eludes even its writer in its subversive capacities despite Mouawad’s insistence on the apolitical character of his play and Holstun’s resentment of Mouawad’s apparent disengagement. Particularly in the character of Nawal Marwan, whom Holstun finds so contemptible, I argue

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<sup>1</sup> In the preface, Mouawad explains that *Scorched* “continues to explore the question of origins” (III).

there is something redeeming and profoundly political in her fastidiousness in the face of mounting injustices during the war, in her silence in old age, and in her resolve to bring her children together, even after her death. From the young age of fourteen, (m)otherhood continues to haunt Nawal until her last days. Her ‘otherness’ becomes more pronounced when we contemplate her status as a mother first to an orphaned child whom she could never parent, and second to the twins born to her out of an incestuous violation and whom she could never nurture whole-heartedly. Nawal’s condition is not—as Holstun would like to argue—a banal and commonplace domestic drama or, as Mouawad imagines, an apolitical topos: it is a plight arising from the thick of the political fray.

The multi-laminate alterity of the so-called ‘third-world woman,’ Gayatri C. Spivak teaches us, invites discreet and atypical modes of resistance. Crucial to Spivak’s argument on the speechlessness of subaltern women is the compounded precarity of gendered (post)colonial subjects forever caught “between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation” (102; ed. 1983).<sup>2</sup> As Spivak has it, colonialism and patriarchy do not operate in isolation but work in tandem to force subaltern women into obscurity. In her polemical intrusion into French philosophical trends (epitomized in Foucault and Deleuze’s conversation on the status of poststructuralism in 1977), Spivak notices alarming “occlusions” in the works of “those intellectuals who are our best prophets of heterogeneity and the Other” (67). She finds in both philosophers’ contributions to the study of the Other of the West “an unquestioned valorization of the oppressed as subject” (69) and a “persistent constitution of Other as the Self’s shadow” (75)—the Self here standing for the West and its postcolonial elites. Foucault and Deleuze

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<sup>2</sup> I consult both the original (1983) and the revised (1999) versions of Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?.” The 1983 version is a more compressed and straightforward confrontation of Western academic practices, a confrontation that Spivak later develops more fully into a method in the 1999 revised edition.

imagine the Other(s) of hegemonic society—be it the postcolonial subject, the laboring masses, society’s pariahs, or subaltern women—as a cohesive monolith capable of tapping into a class consciousness and of organizing themselves “undeceived” (69). They do not anticipate “a divided and dislocated subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other” (71)—in other words, a subject prone to being deceived under mounting ideological strain. Against these conceptions, Spivak describes the colonized subaltern as “irretrievably heterogeneous” (79) and maintains that, in societies where women are doubly oppressed, “the possibility of collectivity itself is persistently foreclosed through the manipulation of female agency” (75). Combined with capitalism’s most formidable superstructures, patriarchy and imperialism, the “essentialist agenda” of post-structural philosophy—shrouded in “postrepresentationalist vocabulary” (80)—effectively paralyzes female agency in (post)colonial societies by rehearsing Eurocentric epistemic violence. For these reasons, Spivak promotes the revival of representational scholarship that skirts the pitfalls of reductionism (104). The female “critic’s intellectual responsibility” (75) to reconstruct from elusive traces the subversive stories of subaltern women becomes an urgent imperative in Spivak’s assessment of the postcolonial field.

It is with Spivak’s insights in mind that I approach Nawal’s heterogeneous and contested status as a “participant/resistant/victim” (21; ed. 1999). In Mouawad’s play, patriarchy, masquerading as puritanical cultural taboos, and neo-colonialism, in the form of third-world puppet states, conspire to entrench Nawal’s difference even after she leaves her war-torn country for Canada. More importantly, she is tormented by essentialist expectations of what it means to be a loving mother both to her rapist son and to the children conceived of that traumatic violation. All three ideological instruments—internalized misogyny in the atavistic village, proxy

warfare in urban centres, and essentialism at home and in the diaspora—collude to deny Nawal lasting relationships with the women surrounding her, including those who were instrumental in her resistance. These conditions force Nawal into an all-consuming silence that cements her alterity and casts doubt on her mental state. An orchestrated search for paternal and cultural roots ensues after Nawal’s death as her two children learn that they must fulfill the terms of their mother’s will by finding the brother and father they never knew they had. Like the “footprints” left behind by Spivak’s “elusive figures” (21; ed. 1999), the traces that Nawal leaves behind for her children evade conventional narrative logic—they “efface [meaning even] as they disclose” (21). Only in death, as Spivak argues, can subaltern women like Nawal “enter a narrative for us [and] become figurable” (22). As the twins behold the final discovery in all its gravity, their mother’s refusal to speak proves her sanity beyond a shadow of a doubt. This chapter will bring Nawal back to the fold of the political by unpacking the complicated setup of the plot she engineers posthumously.

## I

Part of a tetralogy dedicated to the exploration of origins<sup>3</sup>, *Scorched* remains Mouawad’s most successful project—so much so that its 2011 film adaptation, *Incendies*, earned Québécois director Denis Villeneuve his first Academy Award nomination. *Scorched* also garnered the approbation of Lebanese critics, which in itself is a remarkable feat since any representation of the war is usually met with overwhelming hostility in Lebanon. Part of the play’s commercial and critical success among Canadian, European, and Lebanese audiences is its “palimpsestuous” (Hutcheon 6) relationship to both *Oedipus Rex* and the life of Soha Bechara—two very familiar stories in their respective cultures. Linda Hutcheon encourages critics and audiences to approach

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<sup>3</sup> *Scorched* is Mouawad’s second play in a tetralogy which includes the plays *Tideline* (trans. 2002 from *Littoral*, 1997) and *Forests* (trans. 2010 from *Forêts*, 2006).

adaptations as autonomous works appreciated for their ongoing fascination with their predecessors and appraised based on their creative departure from originals. Holstun denies *Scorched* that autonomous identity by holding it accountable to the realism of Bechara's memoir. This chapter goes to no such lengths. Instead, it shows how *Scorched* benefits from these literary archetypes (Oedipus, Antigone, and Thebes) and modern histories (Bechara, Lebanon, and Montréal) to elicit pity and fear. In so doing, it goes beyond Hutcheon's formula for the appeal of adaptations, that is, "the comfort of ritual" combined with "the piquancy of surprise" (3), to consider an adapted work that uses thematic, historical, and structural parallels to shock its audience and deny them comfort. Indeed, it is with Mouawad's successful return to ancient models as well as the unbearably modern legacies of neo-colonialism that *Scorched* arrives at such a "shattering effect" (Kennedy 65).

Critics approach *Scorched*'s synoptic arc from different starting points because, like *Oedipus Rex*, most of the events have taken place before and outside the narrative proper. While some critics pursue a chronological exposition that begins fifty years before the play resumes (Holstun 2015; Kennedy 2017; Georjic 2014), others remain faithful to the ordering of events as they were presented by Mouawad (Telmissany 2012; Mounsef and Hussein 2014). Since this chapter examines Mouawad's technical choices in framing the Lebanese civil war in the minutiae of a single family drama, I begin my overview of the plot in the diegetic order of the events as they first appear in the play. *Scorched* follows second-generation immigrants and twins Janine and Simone Marwan in their journey to fulfill the terms of their mother's will that they should find the brother they never knew they had and the father whom they were led to believe was dead. Janine is tasked with delivering Nawal's posthumous letter to the father while Simon must hand another to the brother and son. The twins are led out of the comfort of their

upbringing in Montréal and into their unfamiliar ancestral homeland of Lebanon. Moreover, they are confronted with their mother's violent past as a leftist militant and a political prisoner during the war as well as the horrific circumstances of their conception and birth. Embedded within the twins' story is their mother's own search for a son who was born to her out of wedlock thirty years before her imprisonment. The twins find the answer to all three mysteries—the identities of the father, the brother, and the son—incarnate in Nawal's torturer, Abu Tarek (*né* Nihad), in a scene significantly titled "The Voice of Ancient Times." We behold the power of anagnorisis in full effect as the twins retrieve their own identities. Not only are they the consequence of a horrific incestual violation, but their backgrounds are also disturbingly entangled with the history of civil strife in Lebanon. Anagnorisis is the most suitable thematic instrument for Mouawad's narrative conceit of reconciliation, "for the very subject of return (and its close sibling, reunion) is one of the attendant, and often enabling, themes of the device in literature" (Kennedy 64).

In *Oedipus Rex*, an oracle predicts the plot of patricide and incest, setting the chain of events in motion and sealing Oedipus's fate thus. Thebes—both the city and the dynasty—endures in the Greek (and later Roman) imagination as a symbol of the multi-generational incapacity to escape a fate that destroys the city from within its ruling family. In fact, inescapable fate persists as *the* common thread in the Oedipus canon—including, most notably, Sophocles' *Antigone* and Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes*. Mouawad operates within a much more secular framework where the palpable and oppressive hegemony of fate is neutralized in favor of human intention, agency, and error. His play borrows the genre hallmarks of tragedy—its totality of movement, recognitions, and reversals—but casts off the mytheme, or the "set of fundamental generic units of narrative structure from which myths are thought to be constructed" (OED), of inextricable fate. In so doing, Mouawad wrests his characters' retrieval of identity from the

tyranny of a predetermined origin myth and, more importantly, from the perilous politics of origins and myths.

The categorical difference between an oracular prophecy and a human directive is tantamount to the distinction between origins and beginnings. Whereas origins are “divine, mythical, and privileged,” in Edward Said’s telling account, beginnings are “secular, humanly produced, and ceaselessly re-examined” (Said xiii). Said explains that “beginnings inaugurate a deliberately *other* production of meaning—a gentile (as opposed to a sacred) one” (13; his emphasis). When critics fail to track the beginnings of a text, an achievement, or even an identity, they consign their confusion “to the direct intervention of the gods” (15) and assume the magical and sacred discourse of origins (14). History can be equally implicated in this distinction: while “sacred history...is in a sort of permanent rapport with God, [gentile history] is mankind’s, an alternative to the first” in its inflection of authority (92). Even though a story of untraceable mythic origins informs Mouawad’s choice of genre, *Scorched* is categorically not a passive origin story, but a humanly produced search for beginnings.

In *Scorched*, a mother’s commitment to finding her long-lost son amidst civil unrest prompts their improbable (although not impossible) reunion. Nawal—the mother, survivor, and immigrant—orchestrates the plot by leaving behind a set of instructions in the form of a will for her twin children to follow through should they choose to do so. In return, they are compensated with the fullness of identity inculcated through “a very courageous act” (133) of self-discovery. In the final scene, she imparts a lyrical clarification of beginnings to her children:

Janine, Simon,

Where does your story begin?

At your birth?

Then it begins in horror.

At your father's birth?

Then it is a beautiful love story... (134)

By the end of the play, the twins lay claim to both their Arab inheritances—typified by their birth names, Jannaane and Sarwane—and their French-Canadian identities. Theirs is both a “beautiful love story” and a tribute to sectarian horrors all at once.

Janine, Simon,

Why didn't I tell you?

There are truths that can only be revealed

When they have been discovered. (135)

Nawal's last words reveal that “anagnorisis is seldom a static or even transcendent state of being, but a kind of knowledge inherent in and produced by narrative” (Kennedy 72). These are words of consolation mitigating the ruthlessness of the cathartic denouement for the audience. They pervade the silence of Nawal's final years. More importantly, they are restitutions made to the twins for the discontinuities and ruptures they had to endure in the course of their journey.

In a review of Mouawad's oeuvre, May Telmissany treats *Scorched* as an origins play and ascribes to its plot mythic properties in a way that is largely unfounded. She maintains throughout her article that “origins [in the play and the movie] are conditioned by fate imposed on the tragic hero” (48), and that, in both versions, “tension between the divine and the profane takes place” (49). The fetishization of origin myths in this manner risks obscuring the historical, material, and political implications of the text in favour of transcendent observations. Telmissany replaces history with an exalted variation, History, “no longer the source of moral wisdom...[but] rather the site of possible redemption” (54). She tries to dissociate origins from

the connotations of “national worship” (49) but, in so doing, inevitably plunges into the consecrated discourse of fate, “destiny” (56), “immanence” (49), and “redemption” (54). In one of Nawal’s flashbacks, Sawda, her Palestinian friend and comrade, recoils from a divine and immaterial consolation after her friend, Ekal, was found dead: “Divine what? Ekal is dead. All that’s left is his camera...What kind of a world is this where objects have more hope than we do?” (75). Even the characters in the play resist such totalizing readings of their heterogeneous plight. Telmissany tries to clinch her arguments by contending that origins for Mouawad “lie in multiple beginnings, one of which is childhood” (56), but fails to consider the exclusivity of divine origins. Her conflation of both categories ultimately leads her to the far-fetched conclusion that Mouawad’s thematic concerns of war, death, and truth “situate his work within the Western Christian canon” (56). Although Telmissany approves of such applications, these are incommensurable readings of *Scorched* both on a dialogic and thematic level. Fate does not operate palpably in *Scorched*, let alone any Western Christian influence.

This chapter offers neither an etiological nor a teleological, but rather a tautological, or more circular, reading of *Scorched* that accounts for its humanly produced beginnings. It delivers the children’s search for identity from neoclassical censure and considers their unbearably historical predicament. Telmissany’s fixation on teleologies of return blinds her to the tautological premise of *Scorched*. By definition, a return to an ancestral origin entails “that diasporans regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return” (Bayeh 5). The thorny political consequences of such approaches to diaspora studies are grave and endless. Conceptions of this kind have the example of the Jewish diaspora (the proverbial exiles) in mind “where the creation of Israel in 1948 made return possible” (5). In Mouawad’s play, neither the children nor their

mother imagine homecoming in such idealizing terms. In fact, their unhappy return figures as one of the tragic outcomes of the story. From the outset, the twins express no sentimental attachment to Lebanon, display no interest in its complex history, and regard it simply as “the country where [their mother] was born” (38). The twins’ discovery of their violent conception comes hand-in-hand with a growing knowledge of their birthplace (scene 28). In lieu of an etiological trajectory, Mouawad offers a tautological construction that begins ‘at the beginning’ and

depends on the ability of both mind and language to reverse themselves, and thus to move from present to past and back again, from a complex situation to an anterior simplicity and back again, or from one point to another as if in a circle. (Said 29)

More discreet than Said’s whirlwind pronouncement is Mouawad’s deliberate framing of the twins’ return to Lebanon. Janine approaches her mother’s former nurse, Antoine, who had retired after Nawal’s death to work at a theatre in Montréal. In a stage within a stage, Antoine urges Janine “to begin at the beginning” (52) by reconstructing Nawal’s past from images, diary entries, and other elusive traces. The stage-within-a-stage—the *mise-en-abyme*—creates a gaping effect and portends the abyssal journey to come. To the audience, this setup is disorienting; to Janine, the strain “of finding out” elicits anxiety and fear (60). The children’s courage lies in their ability to weather the horror of the final discovery, and also in their readiness to return in both mind and body to their beginnings, and then back again to a present consolation and to Montréal. According to Said, this is the defining condition for a beginning—that is, “the desire, the will, and the freedom to reverse oneself, to accept thereby the risks of rupture and discontinuity” (34).

In the twins' scene of recognition, "The Voice of Ancient Times," guerilla leader Chamseddine, whose character is based on Shi'ite cleric Sayyed Mohammad Mehdi Shamseddine—an advocate for Muslim-Christian coexistence in Lebanon—reveals Abu Tarek's identity to Sarwane (Arabic variation of the name Simon). Instead of an all-knowing shepherd, a paramilitary cleric "as violent as the rest of them" (90) communicates the play's maxims. His words summarize the play's obligation to both the modern legacies of neocolonialism and to classical models: "The son is the father of his brother and his sister. Can you hear my voice, Sarwane? It sounds like the voice of centuries past. But no, Sarwane, it is the voice of today" (127). What in ancient times required some seismic intervention of gods and prophets now finds its ultimate expression in the arbitrary violence of contemporary warfare. Theirs is a suffering of remarkably modern proportions. The play is equally indebted to the "gentile" history of sectarian violence as it is to its classical influences.

By dissociating *Scorched* from the limiting discourse of origins, I can attend to Mouawad's technical accomplishments—grounded in classical forms—without the need to defend his choices against the false dilemma of neoclassical nostalgia. Mouawad achieves the 'ruthless consolation' he had predicted for his production by collapsing Sophoclean anagnorisis with the history of sectarian violence in Lebanon. In so doing, he invites the rapid unravelling of stories devastated by trauma and negotiated through the unpredictability of memory. Traditionally, the structural demands of the tragic genre regulate the momentum of thematic development (Kennedy 65). Aristotle puts it enigmatically in his *Poetics*: "The incidents and the plot are the end aimed at in tragedy, and as always, the end is everything" (65). Said, commenting on Aristotle, brings anagnorisis into the fold of his methodological application of beginnings: "when the search for a beginning is pursued within a moral and imaginative

framework, the beginning implies the end—or rather implicates it; this is the observation around which Aristotle builds the *Poetics*” (41). Elaborate narrative framing—both in the careful development of the plot and deliberate stage directions—assists Mouawad in his transposition of the structural and thematic archetypes from *Oedipus Rex* into his adapted work. Mouawad consigns the often uncoordinated operation of remembrance to the structural restraint and economy of Greek tragedy in order to activate the gravitational draw of the cathartic denouement.

*Scorched* falls under the category of the “Theatre of Witness”—a theatrical branch that “turns audiences [of performed trauma] into witnesses” (Mounsef and Hussein 140). It relies on the careful presentation of testimony—either retold or reenacted as “a tribute to survival” (143)—to overcome the crisis of the modern episteme, or the anxious “relationship of the literary to the traumatic” (141). Flashbacks, overlapping dialogues, supplementary stage directions, and adjacent frames define the Theatre of Witness. As Mounsef and Hussein indicate, this memorialist turn describes “many contemporary plays dealing with the representations of the Middle East with its endless conflicts, revolutions, foreign interventions, and social and political unrest” (140). When Janine tours her mother’s prison cell, the guide explains that “the prison was turned into a museum in 2000, to revive the tourist trade. I used to be a guide up north, I did the Roman ruins. My specialty. Now I do the Kfar Rayat prison” (80). In the wake of national catastrophes, war tourism drives out other forms of recreational travel, though continuities plainly exist between that classical past (for which Janine’s guide is a ‘specialist’) and the ruins of a modern imperial warfare. An epistemological break characterizes the transformation of audiences and tourists from passive spectators of ancient monuments to witnesses of contemporary depravity. Traditional ways of knowing have been utterly displaced by the

supplication of traumatic recall. The monuments of an ancestral Roman empire are the founding—if not literally, then symbolically—of the horrific relics of modern-day colonialism.

Mouawad's play combines the fractured chronotope of the Theatre of Witness with tragedy's hallmark 'totality of movement' by rendering past and present events together in the same frame(s). He adopts makeshift formal strategies to "construct memory as a dual process of retrospective spatio-temporal narrative accounts, combined with physically re-enacted mnemonic flashbacks, alternatively memorializing the 'wound' while refusing to simply reify the violence or recreate it in a sensational form" (141). *Scorched* obliges two timelines—the twins' search for their brother and father taking place in the present intercepted by Nawal's life story in the past—that intersect at the moment of recognition. The play also accommodates movement between two locations, Montréal and Lebanon, sometimes within the same frame. While Nawal relocates from Lebanon to Montréal before she arrives at the truth, the children must leave Montréal for Lebanon in a physical departure from ignorance to knowledge, casting off their unfair assumptions and complacent attachments in the process. Nawal's timeline, which begins in her teenage years upon her first pregnancy, recapitulates the history of the Lebanese civil war. The twins' timeline after their mother's death retraces Nawal's steps fifty years later. This is a much more complicated setup than Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. In an international criminal tribunal, Nawal discovers her torturer's true identity as he recalls his life story, while the twins learn their paternal origins gradually through a series of interviews with people from Nawal's militant past. The gravity of the cathartic denouement is delayed until all of the characters, past and present, arrive at the truth at their own pace. The audience behold the catharsis, twice revealed to the mother and then to her children, presented at the same moment in overlapping frames in a way governed by elaborate stage directions.

In a play that depends on forgetfulness as much as it turns on the prospect of remembrance—for “it is a characteristic of memory, especially memory of traumatic events, to be linked to incompleteness and forgetting” (142)—it is all too easy for the issue of Nawal’s maternity to diminish into the background as the plot shifts from past to present and from one traumatic flashback to the other. Before her son’s testimony, Nawal had delivered her own statement to her torturer and jury in open court: “Abu Tarek. I speak your name for the last time so you know that I recognize you...I recognize you, but you might not recognize me” (100). The tragic irony is that neither of them recognized each other. After Abu Tarek’s cynical statement, the audience witnesses the unravelling of Nawal’s spotty memory as her militant past recedes into the background to make room for a new and disturbing set of associations. Abu Tarek is no longer the torturer whom she had loathed all these years and vowed to forget, but Nihad, the son whom she had promised to find and love until her last breath:

*NAWAL (age fifteen) gives birth to NIHAD.*

*NAWAL ( age forty-five) gives birth to JANINE and SIMON.*

*NAWAL (age sixty) recognizes her son.*

*JANINE, SIMON and NIHAD are all together. (128-129)*

As all three Nawals—ages fifteen, forty-five, and sixty—occupy the stage at the moment of recognition, Mouawad recapitulates what, in Nawal’s mind, are the *beginnings* of both the horror and, as promised, her bitter consolation. He chooses these milestones from Nawal’s life to elicit pity and fear because “Nawal is epitomized by her motherhood, as from her introduction she is dedicated to her unborn child” (Mounsef and Hussein 154). He approaches each frame with impressive precision. Unlike Jocasta who persists as a meek additive to the devastations wrought by fate and whose (m)otherhood dissolves into an oedipal fog as her son and husband

understands the reach of his actions, Nawal—and Nawal’s devotion to her children—is kept in full view of the audience. The play dramatizes her struggle to raise the twins under precarious conditions. She is, in a more direct sense, the author of the play and its most outspoken victim despite her silence.

## II

Five years before her death, Nawal had withdrawn into a deafening silence for no apparent reason, leading her children to believe she was mad. Janine and Simon had not forgiven their mother for her detachment during their upbringing and her speechlessness in old age. The play opens not *in medias res*, but at what seems like a natural ending: Nawal is dead, and her children gather in the notary’s office to collect their mother’s modest inheritance. More importantly, they are ready to part with the emotional baggage they had accumulated during their childhood. In her will, Nawal admits that “childhood is a knife stuck in [their] throat” (8). But Nawal’s cryptic final requests of being buried naked, face down, and in an unmarked grave confuse any attempt at closure and forgetting. In fact, this entire play turns on the prospect of remembrance and traumatic recall.

As Marianne Hirsch indicates in her seminal discussion on intergenerational acts of transfer and secondhand remembrance in the wake of national catastrophes, at stake in the salvaging of survivor memories “is precisely the ‘guardianship’ of a traumatic personal and generational past with which some of us have a ‘living connection,’ and that past’s passing into history or myth [that goes beyond]... a personal/familial/generational sense of ownership and protectiveness” (1). Those who inherit their parents’ legacies of trauma—be it in the form of “stories, images, or behaviors among which they grew up” (5)—are members of the generation of postmemory which describes their relationship “to the personal, collective, and cultural

trauma of those who came before” (5). Mouawad, like his young characters Janine and Simon, did not witness the war firsthand and is therefore a member of the “generation after” or the “generation 1.5” (5). While Mouawad’s memory is tinted with testimonies of the war, the twins know very little about their mother’s past, and even less about their ancestral homeland’s nebulous history. They had only been exposed to the incommensurability of trauma and had only assumed the “nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer [that] occur most clearly within a familial space, often taking the form of symptoms” (34). Hirsch’s analysis of intergenerational acts of transfer explains Mouawad’s representation of the work of memory and reach of collective trauma in *Scorched*.

It is only fitting for Mouawad’s reconciliatory project to begin at such a critical juncture in the twins’ ‘living connection’ to the catastrophes of the past. At the notary’s office, they can either decide to sever their relationship to their mother, thereby denying that living connection any claim to their lives, or choose to probe the depths of postmemory in order to arrive at more meaningful personal and collective realizations. Simon reacts aggressively to Nawal’s posthumous demands:

What makes you think we give a shit, eh? I’m not going to start pretending! Start crying!  
 When did she ever cry over me? Or Janine? Never! Never! She didn’t have a heart, her heart was a brick. You don’t cry over a brick, you don’t cry!...I don’t want to think about her or hear about her again, ever!....(10)

Forced to think of his mother, Simon violently rejects her last wishes, the final remnants of that living connection. The play movingly dramatizes the friction between Nawal finding that form of posthumous speech and the son’s incapacity to listen to it.

When she talks about us in her goddamn will. Why doesn't she use the word *my children*? The word *son*, the word *daughter*! I mean, I'm not stupid! I'm not stupid! Why does she always say the twins? The twin sister, the twin brother... (11)

Simon's outburst passionately recalls the hardships he and his sister had to endure. His resistance to his mother's unwarranted requests mimics the "return of trauma, structured by forgetting or denial" (Hirsch 76). According to Simon, even their bodies were marked by that generational injury: "Why does she say... 'the offspring of my flesh,' like we were a pile of vomit, a pile of shit to get rid of!" (Mouawad 11). His instinctive appropriation of a bodily distortion where none exists typifies the intergenerational dynamics between survivors and their descendants (Hirsch 80). For Hirsch, the post-generation desires a "visual figuration of trauma and transmission" (80) exclusive to their parents and that they had never actually sustained. Of course, the children do not yet know that they are the physical manifestation—the living-breathing scar—of the rape-torture their mother had to endure. In this way, Simon's metaphor is particularly apposite.

This breach "between a memory located in the body and the mediated knowledge of those who were born after" (Hirsch 80) haunts both survivors and their children. In her testimony before the tribunal and her torturer, Nawal verbalizes the insurmountable rift between her and the twins:

The gunshots and death that are part of torture, and the urine on my body, yours, in my mouth, on my sex, and your sex in my sex, once, twice, three times, so often that time was shattered. My belly growing big with you, your ghastly torture in my belly...Two children. Twins. You made it impossible for me to love the children. Because of you, I struggled to raise them in grief and in silence. (Mouawad 101)

Bodily trauma returns here “as a sign of [its] incommunicability, a figure for the traumatic real that defines a seemingly unbridgeable gap between survivors and their descendants” (Hirsch 80). If survivor scars are, as Hirsch argues, the untranslatable remains of certain “historical withholdings” (81) between survivor generations, then the twins are the entire embodiments of that intergenerational incommunicability. Even though they had not lived through war’s ravages, the twins seem its most enduring and unwitting victims. By orchestrating this plot, Nawal seeks to bridge that gap in knowledge and to verify her children’s claim to a traumatic past. In one of Mouawad’s flashbacks of Nawal’s life, the peasant entrusted with the twins’ caretaking during their mother’s confinement insists that she take them back: “It took many miracles for them to be alive today, and many miracles for you to be alive. Three survivors. Three miracles looking at each other” (98). By the end of the play, the twins are no longer members of the post-generation, but are themselves survivors.

Hirsch approaches post-memorial work with an unremitting regard “to the pain of others” (2), following Susan Sontag’s enduring pronouncements in the wake of the Iraq war. By and large, this is also Mouawad’s bequest to his young characters. Janine and Simon learn to identify with their mother’s suffering through mediated knowledge and retrospective discovery. Photographs without context, cryptic diary entries, war tourism, and second-hand testimonies in the form of local legends permit this kind of “identification-at-a-distance” (85). For Hirsch, this is an indispensable literacy for anyone seeking to probe the depths of collective trauma at a generational remove. Mediated knowledge enables the post-generation to carry their parents’ “stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to [themselves], and without, in turn, having [the post-generation’s] own stories displaced by them” (2). In Nawal’s words, these are the kinds of “truths that can only be revealed when they have been

discovered” (Mouawad 135). Spivak similarly encourages the reassembly of subaltern stories from the elusive traces left behind by those who cannot or will not speak owing to the burdens of mounting precarity. Hirsch combines intersectional feminist practices with the anachronism of memory studies to arrive at a method that is alternative to archival research in its devotion to the “imaginative investment” (5) of those in the postgeneration seeking ethically and responsibly to retrieve, preserve, and learn from survivors’ wartime experiences. Spivak, in the same spirit of intellectual responsibility, urges the postcolonial feminist critic not to “disown with a flourish” her “circumscribed task” (104; ed. 1983) of exposing the heterogeneous forces, including hegemony and subjugation, that have rendered subaltern women “doubly effaced” (82) from representationalist discourse. For both Hirsch and Spivak, there is an unquestionable pedagogical merit to the kind of recuperative work that encourages those possessing a generational, socio-economic, or institutional privilege *with a personal stake* to rehash from a mediated remove that which risks being forgotten or effaced from consideration. In Hirsch’s assessment, the post-generation, heirs to their parents’ legacies of personal and collective trauma, are the guardians of post-memorial retrieval. Spivak, on the other hand, has the “female intellectual” (104) in mind for the job of the “trace-structure” method she puts forward (65; ed. 1999). In either case, there is a specific and self-conscious identity politics at work. Although this may be problematic on its own, my present purposes allow and, indeed, benefit from Hirsch and Spivak’s identitarian premises. *Scorched* is, after all, a story of (mis)recognized and retrieved identity. In the characters of Janine and Simone, Mouawad creatively engages both Hirsch’s post-memorial paradigms and Spivak’s trace-structure to redeem lost identities.

Janine and Simon assemble their mother’s life from an old photograph, puzzling diary entries, a “jacket with the number seventy-two on the back” (Mouawad 7), and war tourism.

Memorabilia—what Hirsch calls punctums, or “points of memory” (22), and Spivak describes as “footprints of the trace” (21; ed. 1999)—“*reactivate* and *re-embod*y more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation” (Hirsch 33; emphasis hers). From these haunted objects, the twins explore the limits of investigative study in a process that combines post-memorial research and scholarly field-work. In many ways, the twins mime the trademark procedures of scrupulous academic study in their movement from ignorance to knowledge. They plunge into their mother’s violent past at the behest of the curious character Alphonse Lebel, Nawal’s notary and friend. Of all the characters, Lebel comes closest to Spivak’s imagining of the ideal Western male intellectual. If Foucault and Deleuze are the exemplars of Western male institutional privilege complicit in homogenizing, valorizing, and therefore denying subaltern women that form of heterogeneous speech and identity, then Lebel seems the opposite to that intellectual culpability. He exercises his influence as a public servant to ensure that Nawal’s requests are not defiled by her son’s spurning tantrums. More importantly, he is willing to conceive of Nawal as a heterogeneous subject—as someone who was both eccentric in her prolonged refusal to speak and yet with an important story to tell. Marked by silence, Nawal’s antisocial life has come to deprive her of any claim to the truth and seems to reduce her posthumous demands to those of a mind in decomposition. Although he cannot force the children to comply with their mother’s will, Lebel is the first character ready to listen to Nawal’s last wishes as something other than the ridiculous utterances of a madwoman on her deathbed. Against Simon’s selfish and myopic outbursts, Lebel maintains that Nawal is

Someone none of us knew very well, but someone who was someone nonetheless.

Someone who was young, who was an adult, who was old and who died! ... I mean, the

woman lived a whole life, for heaven's sake, and that has to count for something somehow. (10)

Lebel insists that, in the humdrum character of Nawal's withdrawn life, "there has to be an explanation" (10), even if that explanation does not conform to the conventions of narrative logic. Indeed, subalternity is difficult to track, study, and speak about because "in the rhythm of [subalterns'] daily living elusion is familiarly performed... [thus imposing] the highest standards on our techniques of retrieval" (Spivak 22; ed. 1999). For this reason, "it is only in their death that [subalterns] enter a narrative for us [and] become figurable" (22). To Spivak, these are the most telling signs of narrative "fadeout" (21) that must be pursued without hesitation.

In death, Nawal—previously outside the narrative mode—steps into narrative production and re-inscribes herself into her own story as a "participant/resister/victim" (Spivak 21; ed. 1999). She does so, paradoxically, by consigning her story to an official authority via a notarized will. For Spivak,

When a line of communication is established between a member of subaltern groups and the circuits of citizenship or institutionality, the subaltern has been inserted into the long road to hegemony. Unless we want to be romantic purists or primitivists about 'preserving subalternity'—a contradiction in terms—this is absolutely to be desired...Remembering this allows us to take pride in our work without making missionary claims. (65)

Entering into the narrative mode, however precariously, frustrates attempts at fossilizing subalternity. Nawal chooses Lebel to arbitrate her debut into Spivak's "mode of production narrative" because, like Spivak's ideal intellectual, he is prompted by "moral love" to deliver Nawal's story from silence (65; ed. 1999). More importantly, he is legally obligated to oversee

the proper execution of her last will. In many ways, Holstun's censure of the avuncular "missionary condescension" (21) in Lebel (and in *Scorched* and in Mouawad) replicates the deterrent and homogenizing discourse found in Foucault and Deleuze as post-representationalism. Holstun cannot accept Nawal as a political agent capable of resistance because, unlike Bechara, she is replete with unwelcome contradictions.

### III

In "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Spivak revisits the polarized debate on the indigenous practice of widow sacrifice, *sati*,<sup>4</sup> in Hindu India. I here outline her recuperative method briefly to prepare for my later application of trace-structure to the patrilineal citizenship laws in Lebanon. While the custom of widow sacrifice had long served as one of many excuses for British interventionism in the subcontinent, locals decried its prohibition as colonial meddling. Peripheral to both the mode of production narrative and modes of capitalist production in general, the self-immolating widow fades into obscurity in a silent suspension "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation" (102; ed. 1983). By turning to legal codifications of *sati* in both colonial British law and Hindu scripture, Spivak deconstructs the statements "White men are saving brown women from brown men" (92) and, by way of contrast, the nativist "parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: 'The women actually wanted to die'" (93). According to Spivak, these are self-validating statements brought on by histories of repression. Her trace-structure method reconstructs from the legal/liturgical codifications those repressive histories that have foreclosed subaltern women's "voice-consciousness" from producing a "countersentence" (93), thus condemning them to silence.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Spivak compares *sati*— which represents both the practice of widow sacrifice and the honorific "good wife"— to Gandhi's *satyagraha* (a phrase defining passive resistance). Spivak emphasizes their shared derivation from the Sanskrit root word *sat*— and its religious and socio-political connotations.

From the “grotesquely mistranscribed names of these women, the sacrificed widows, in the police reports included in the records of the East India Company” (93), Spivak can only grasp at the sheer heterogeneity of the women in question; her trace-structure method could only “mark the place of disappearance” as the subaltern woman violently shuttles between “subject (law) and object-of-knowledge (repression)” (102). Of the two case studies offered in the essay, Rani Gulari is the “‘purer’ figure of fadeout” (22; ed. 1999)—a woman closely surveilled by imperial authority<sup>5</sup> and who, in her death, “intended to be retrieved” (2). The other is Bhubaneswari Bhaduri whose story Spivak roughly pieces together and then largely surmises from personal accounts. While Gulari’s royal status in nineteenth-century British India permitted her archival reinscription and (partial) resurrection, Bhaduri was “a woman of the middle class, with access, however clandestine, to the bourgeois movement of Independence” (64). In other words, both women were able to establish traces of their stories, however precariously, through the channels of hegemonic institutionality.

In my final turn, I adopt Spivak’s trace-structure to redeem Nawal from Marxist censure by considering her legal status first as a Lebanese citizen and then as a resident of Canada. In his methodical overview of generations of the Marwan clan—moving backwards from the twins, their mother Nawal, Nawal’s mother, to Nawal’s grandmother—Mouawad privileges the family unit as a site of intergenerational transfer of both personal and collective traumas. This backwards trajectory across time also delineates spatial movement, starting, chronologically, in the Lebanese village and ending in the Canadian metropole. As the play’s foremost heterogeneous character, Nawal is the crucible for compounded intergenerational and national

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<sup>5</sup> Spivak dedicates a fuller account of her retrieval of Rani Gulari in her essay “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives” (1985).

traumas. The critical ruptures in her life can be summarized thus: teenage pregnancy, childbirth, and separation; rural to urban migration; bearing witness to civil-war atrocities; recruitment into the ranks of guerilla armies; assassination mission and detention; rape-torture; childbirth under duress; immigration; and, finally, recognition of her long-lost son and torturer. Of these traumas, the first two are inflicted within Nawal's childhood familial space and sustained on an entirely personal level—although I argue that misogyny, institutionally sanctioned in Lebanese law and systemically reproduced within the familial unit, operates on a collective scale in the play and in Lebanon at large. As Nawal violently shuttles between Lebanon's interlocking axes of repression—classism, racism, sectarianism, and patriarchy—her irreducible plight becomes increasingly hard to grasp and, indeed, more difficult to represent on stage. My final discussion handles Nawal's conditioned predicament in the face of mounting injustice and politicizes her refusal to speak.

At the age of fourteen, Nawal surrenders her firstborn at her mother's behest in order to safeguard atavistic village taboos. The father to her illegitimate son, Wahab, is a Palestinian refugee who is mysteriously taken away after Nawal succumbs to her mother's tyrannical demands that she forfeit both her love and their lovechild. The cycles of retaliatory violence between natives and refugees on a national scale soon follow suit, widening the gap between Nawal and her son in the process and ushering the beginning of the civil war. On the surface, this is a story of an illicit love culturally suppressed by the conservatism of a disapproving village. The underlying sectarianism and racism foreclosing Nawal and Wahab's relationship become increasingly self-evident as the play gradually introduces the hostilities between Lebanese Christians and Muslim Palestinians. Escalating violence between natives and refugees, which previously had been contained in the periphery, soon percolates into the urban centres Beirut,

Saidon, and Tyre, with the Christians forming an alliance with Israel and the Muslims with neighbouring Syria. This is all carefully presented in the play, even if Mouawad withholds explicit references to the parties involved in the 15-year-long conflict.

Underpinning the misogyny and sectarianism is a Lebanese law that marries both modes of repression in an effort to entrench the subordination of women and the perpetuation of a hygienic sectarian society. Article 1 of the Lebanese Nationality Code states that Lebanese citizenship can only be transmitted through patrilineal descent. In other words,

Having a Lebanese mother is not good enough. This bifurcated citizenship legislation implies that Lebanese women are not full citizens in themselves, but merely vessels for their husbands' personhood. Lebanese women can only accept, and never accord citizenship. Lebanese citizenship passes from father to child without attaching to the mother... A racist myth—that gender equality in citizenship would open the door to “hordes” of children of Palestinian men and Lebanese women to become citizens—has been used to deprive all Lebanese women of equal citizenship rights. (Singh and Abdulrahim)

In a drama so preoccupied with patrilineal origins and precarious motherhood, the state's sponsorship and legal synthesis of both sectarianism and misogyny is especially relevant. When Nawal's mother, Jihane, insists that her daughter's still unborn child “has nothing to do with [Nawal]” and “does not exist” (26), she is not only speaking on behalf of her household, but as a mouthpiece for an entire national and international constitution. After all, Nawal is bearing a child to whom she can never accord citizenship status and who could only claim his father's Palestinian identity which, in the eyes of the international order, is not an identity at all. He is a motherless, homeless, and, above all, a stateless child. This is why, in the mayhem of civil war,

Nihad was able to disappear and then emerge anew as Abu Tarek, his mother's rapist. His status as a war criminal is more internationally recognized (hence the international tribunal) than his identity as Nawal's child. As the ghost of her contested maternity reappears in the tribunal hearings, Nawal realizes that her political plight has its roots in her childhood family home. Conversely, the village family drama established in the beginning of the play is revealed as deeply political.

Bookending the twins' journey from ignorance to knowledge is a cyclical return to and from Montréal. Why does Mouawad choose Québec's metropolis—of all places—to frame his narrative? If, as Holstun argues, *Scorched* is a neocolonial apologia cloaked in neoclassical allusions (25), then why does Mouawad not set it in a city closer to classicism's continental beginnings? Why not Paris where the play first debuted and, more importantly, where the colonial overtones would have been more easily discerned? Part of the reason is certainly Mouawad's hyphenated identity. However, as a former French colony struggling to preserve its autonomy as a distinct linguistic community in Canada while maintaining strong diplomatic ties with the colonial center, Québec's metropole offers a compelling contrast to the Lebanese example. Lebanon is also anxious about its sovereignty as a small state surrounded by larger and more established Middle-Eastern nations—primarily Syria and Israel. Like Québec, Lebanon remains curiously intimate with France and French colonial symbols, most strikingly in its espousal of French as an official second language to be taught in school. On the other hand, when it comes to citizenship rights, Québec's nationality laws and policies on interculturalism are antithetical to the Nationality Code and sectarian fabric endorsed by the Lebanese state. At least on a juridical level, women across Canada enjoy equal citizenship rights as men, not least in their ability to pass on their nationality onto their children. In terms of policy, Québec favors its

own version of federal multiculturalism, known as interculturalism, or “a culture of convergence whose core is the French language and Québécois traditions enriched by the contributions from minority culture... Recent policy developments indicate that Canadian multiculturalism is moving closer to Québec interculturalism” (Winter 3). The premise of assimilatory politics cuts through Québec’s interculturalism policies whose unequal but consistent terms of integration are enforced to consolidate the province’s nation-building aspirations (Kymlicka 167); the imposition of the French language as a mandate across Québec is the clearest example of the province’s efforts to delineate its own internal boundaries. Against Québécois interculturalism rests Lebanon’s unwritten constitution of sectarian coexistence that simulates the confessionalist model assumed by the government. Birthright citizenship is passed down patrilineally while the prospect of naturalization is legally impossible: these are Lebanon’s internal borders.

In the play, Québec’s ‘melting pot’ replaces Lebanon’s hygienic sectarian enclaves. As per their French names, Janine—the mathematics doctoral candidate—and Simon, an amateur boxer, are perfectly assimilated immigrants. Their mother’s deliberate historical withholding, coupled with the state’s encouragement to ‘converge’ with majority culture, had led the twins to lose sight of their immigrant background. The same cannot be said of war-traumatized Nawal. Despite her government job, she still suffers from a “bus phobia” after witnessing “a bus full of civilians riddled with machine-gun fire” (64-65)—a trauma that later radicalizes her—and cannot enjoy the simple convenience of public transportation. This is but one example of the traumas Nawal chooses to withhold from her children. For all of the state’s intents and purposes, Nawal’s refusal to speak is as effective a homogenizing instrument as any other assimilatory policy in its arsenal. By entering their mother’s narrative, the twins undergo a process of de-assimilation. In this way, *Scorched* is also about interculturalism unravelling in the face of subaltern retrieval and

reinscription. Holstun calls this “a circular civilizing mission that reverses and then repeats [itself]” (26). I invoke Said’s “alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life” (“On Exile” 146)—his contrapuntal awareness—that compensates the twins’ uncompromising itinerant state with a “plurality of vision” (148). As *de jure* citizens of Canada, one of the most established nations in the world, the twins are already inserted in the “circuits of citizenship and institutionality” (Spivak 65; ed. 1999) and can from a point of privilege pursue the kind of investigative work that Spivak encourages. Mouawad, perhaps unconsciously, sets the stage for a collision between a nation that has assimilation and multiculturalism (to some extent) codified as a federal Act and another that sanctifies exclusivity and intransigence in its very constitution. Lebanon is not, in this sense, imagined as Canada’s Other or shadow, but as its uncanny double. It is the place where familiarity is unperformed, where the repressed is brought to light, and where “all that arouses dread and creeping horror” (Freud 218) finds its ultimate expression. We are reminded here of the German translation of the uncanny, *unheimlich*, or un-homelike, which is a necessary dimension of dispossession and relocation when stripped of the purely psycho-sexual, although the psycho-sexual is inextricable to any reading—even a superficial one—of *Scorched*.

Among other critical omissions, the function of Montréal as a mediating outer frame and Lebanon’s double is entirely lost in Québécois director Denis Villeneuve’s film adaptation *Incendies*. Mouawad had granted Villeneuve a free hand in his adaptation of the play for the big screen. Although masterfully shot, the movie persists in its construction of the Middle East as Other to the West. The audience’s familiarity with the Middle East as a battleground for fanatics—a blatant distortion reproduced in post-9/11 Western politics, disseminated in a plethora of Hollywood blockbusters, and standardized by the Academy—replaces Montréal as

the established gateway into subaltern stories. In keeping with cinematic portrayals of the region, *Incendies* combines the hallmarks of orientalism with modern depictions of Arab backwardness to frame the family drama as Villeneuve imagines it. In the movie, it is not cold and familiar Montréal that begins the narrative, but a harrowing depiction of an unnamed Middle-Eastern country. It opens with a bird's-eye shot of an abyssal valley framed by a palm tree—a hackneyed orientalist device that gestures to the region in question but that, incidentally, is not an indigenous plant to Lebanon's Mediterranean climate. The camera zooms out to reveal a window shot in a room where orphaned boys receive buzz-cuts from armed militants. The camera pans across the room at ankle height before settling on a child's heel, where we can discern three dots tattooed vertically (an allusion to Oedipus's swollen feet). The shot later zooms in on the boy's sulking face as he stares into the camera while receiving a buzz-cut. Five minutes into the movie, we can already guess at its broader theme, that of the militarization of child soldiers in a war-torn Middle East. Apart from the occasional references to religious groups, the movie could have easily been set in a place like Afghanistan or Iraq where such a plot could have translated more seamlessly.

To avoid the pitfalls of fidelity criticism, I briefly outline the thematic implications of a few of Villeneuve's revisions. From the outset, Villeneuve declares his most striking departure from the play: the movie will be handling the radicalization of Nihad in a country ravaged by senseless violence; Nawal's story is but a subplot in the film's more pressing considerations. To these ends, he adjusts the narrative to dramatize a life otherwise not much represented in the play. Indeed, the movie's foremost achievement lies in its sympathetic treatment of Nihad's radicalization. Villeneuve depicts extremism as conditioned and circumstantial rather than inherent—although the circumstances described in the movie are far from accurate. Unlike

stereotypical representations of “angry Arab men” who naturally devolve into armed fanaticism, Nihad becomes Abu Tarek “not by an atavist regression to the instincts of beasts of prey, but by a condensation in him of the methods of violence elaborated in institutions” (Lingis 141).

Although Villeneuve harrowingly portrays institutional culpability in the recruitment of child soldiers, the blame rests entirely on Arab backwardness and not, say, Western interventionism in the region. The theme of the twins’ de-assimilation or, at the very least, duality of vision is displaced by the plot of a terrorist’s redemption and enculturation. The movie ends not with the twins contemplating Nawal’s silence, but with Nihad’s visit to his mother’s grave. Instead of a criminal trial, he is met with a Canadian passport and a modest employment in Montréal’s public transportation services. Villeneuve’s cosmopolitan Montréal features as the site for restoration and absolution for Nihad, whereas Mouawad’s version is inextricable from the circuits of institutionality (for Nawal’s benefit) and the globalized networks of repression (where Nihad faces retribution). Villeneuve tweaks the scene of recognition by having Nawal recognize her son at a public pool from the tattoos on his heel bone before she grows irretrievably silent. Aristotle calls recognitions of this kind—the ones brought on “by means of visible signs or tokens”—the “least artistic” and products of a “sheer lack of invention” (77); they are the least effective in eliciting pity and fear. Narrative anagnorisis—Aristotle’s favourite—is crucial to establishing Nawal’s (m)otherhood as it amplifies the cathartic reach of her plight and gives a resolving shape to the otherwise fractured familial and political injustices conditioning her subaltern existence. Villeneuve’s rushed setup only does half the job of what, by definition, is the utmost function of a recognition scene—that of a structuring device (*Recognition* 1). Since Villeneuve’s watered-down recognition solves a diegetic problem (that of Nihad’s identity) without providing a new set of associations that affects the story on a thematic or structural level, it would be more

appropriate to describe it as a “plot twist” instead of a cathartic anagnorisis. The loss is no small matter.

#### IV

Of all the heterogeneous forces marking Nawal’s life, her refusal to speak is the most difficult to defend. It resembles all too perfectly the defeated features of melancholia, and yet it also supports Spivak’s assessment of subaltern silence as circumspect noncompliance. My interpretation of Nawal’s silence depends on the ways Villeneuve and Mouawad choose to resolve her many contradictions. By omitting Nihad’s criminal trial from the movie, Villeneuve crudely oversimplifies the scene of recognition and—more importantly—dismisses Nawal’s only testimony to her rape-torture. Nawal’s public accusation of Abu Tarek registers a rare moment of prosaic and coherent speech in a life otherwise marked by cryptic silence, evasion, and fragmentation. She concludes her lengthy testimony by confronting her abuser with candour:

Speaking to you as I am today bears witness to the promise I kept for a woman who once made me understand the importance of rising above poverty: “Learn to read, to speak, to write, to count, learn to think.”[...] My testimony is the result of this effort. To remain silent about your acts would make me an accomplice to your crimes. (102-103)

Nawal’s determination to speak confidently stems from a promise she had made to her grandmother to rise above village illiteracy. And yet despite her resolve, Nawal’s address hinges on a glaring misrecognition of her torturer: “I recognize you, but you might not recognize me” (100). Her education and eloquence are of no use to her here.

Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic can explain the inadequacy of prose to brace Nawal in her search for justice<sup>6</sup>. Kristeva's semiotic challenges Lacanian linguistic structures ("the Symbolic") by offering "a specifically feminine locus of subversion of the paternal law within language" (Butler 107). The Symbolic defines all linguistic practices structured by the paternal law—a law that creates meaning "through repression of primary libidinal drives, including the radical dependency of the child on the maternal body" (107). As a feature of the Symbolic, plain and coherent speech replaces the "first echolalias of infants" and the "glossolalias in psychotic discourse" (111)—in other words, the plurivocal heterogeneity—of the primary maternal drives for the stability of the "univocal and discrete meanings" demanded by the paternal law (108). Kristeva's semiotic, on the other hand, refutes Lacan's prescription of the repressive paternal law as the only sanctioned form of cultural meaning-making:

The "semiotic" is a dimension of language occasioned by that primary maternal body [...that] serves as a perpetual source of subversion within the Symbolic. For Kristeva, the semiotic expresses that original libidinal multiplicity within the very terms of culture, more precisely, within poetic language in which multiple meanings and semantic nonclosure prevail. In effect, poetic language is the recovery of the maternal body within the terms of language, one that has the potential to disrupt, subvert, and displace the paternal law. (108)

As a repudiation of the "maternal terrain" (113), the Symbolic is legitimized chiefly through its imposition of the incest taboo, whereas the semiotic's "poetic language breaks the incest taboo and, as such, verges always on psychosis" (117).

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<sup>6</sup> Kristeva is here cited indirectly from Judith Butler's seminal deconstruction of gender in *Gender Trouble* where Butler acknowledges the subversive potential of Kristeva's semiotic theory but ultimately contends that it cannot be sustained as an "emancipatory ideal" (109) outside linguistic and aesthetic practices.

Nawal's experiences with paternal repression and maternal erasure expose the limits of the Symbolic as a viable expressive model. The Symbolic speech that Nawal assumes in her testimony proves impervious to her maternal plight. When faced with a violation of the incest taboo, the paternal law loses its descriptive and regulatory force. Her silence, therefore, is a disavowal of the paternal law's hegemony and the Symbolic's homogenizing function. She can no longer repress the primary relationship with her torturer without perpetuating its aggression against her maternity, since "the 'subject' who emerges as a consequence of this repression becomes a bearer or proponent of this repressive law" (109). In the voice that she finds posthumously, Nawal maintains a non-Symbolic form of expression: "Gently/ Console every shred/ Gently/ Cure every moment/ Gently/ Rock every image" (Mouawad 133-134). The letters she addresses to her children are all defiantly lyrical, thus belonging to the semiotic linguistic domain. Her final poetic appeal—a return to a primary and heterogeneous form of expression—"recovers the maternal body" through "rhythm, assonance, intonations, sound play, and repetition" (Butler 111). In her life and even in her death, Nawal does not capitulate to the laws of paternity that seek to homogenize her experiences.

In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler lodges two complaints against Kristeva's theory of the semiotic: the first is a practical complaint, the second is an ontological one. The next chapter applies Butler's alternative to Kristeva's semiotic structure—that of parodic impersonation—in the context of national identity. For present purposes, I consider only Butler's criticism of Kristeva. As a linguistic modality that arises from the repressions of the paternal law, the semiotic is ultimately a subordinate and unsustainable subversion of the Symbolic. It represents the "privileged practices" within "paternally sanctioned culture" that have the potential of "displacing the paternal law [but that also] always remain tenuously tethered to that law" (116).

Therefore, the semiotic can neither “replace” nor “rival” (115) the Symbolic but can only expose its limits. Butler’s other “more important” charge against Kristeva’s recuperation of the maternal body through the semiotic is one that questions whether “the instinctual object of Kristeva’s discourse is not a construction of the discourse itself” (120). Premising Kristeva’s analysis of the semiotic is a supposed essentialist and “biological destiny” of the maternal body as an obvious locus of repressed drives (120). Even as she acknowledges the heterogeneity of these drives, Kristeva still assumes a unitary maternal experience as her point of departure. Both of these complaints—the domination and the prescription of motherhood—are themes that Mouawad dramatizes in the character of Nawal. Her refusal to speak (or to participate in culturally sanctioned speech) is a tragic if defiant consequence of her shuttling between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the Symbolic and the semiotic, motherhood and otherhood. As a subaltern, she cannot articulate a position that transcends these conditions. Therefore, Spivak’s pronouncement stands: “the subaltern cannot speak” (104; ed. 1983).

## CHAPTER 2

Compulsory Nationalism and Refugee Existence in Rawi Hage's *De Niro's Game*<sup>7</sup>

In *Scorched*, Wajdi Mouawad's conciliatory reflections on the Lebanese civil war require some relativization of an otherwise polarized conflict. His dramatization of the decentered networks and "multiple modes of communication" (Bayeh 4) that facilitate subaltern retrieval—a formidable task in and of itself—takes precedence over more contentious political commentary on the war and its belligerents. Rawi Hage's return to the civil-war context in *De Niro's Game* is bound by no such compromise. His is a more inflammatory rendering of one of the war's most disturbing and enduring crimes, the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre. The issue is in part each writer's gendered take on the war. *Scorched* tells of the patriarchal fixtures inhibiting women's agency. The war exacerbates the tyranny of gender disparity and oppression in its promotion of hyper-masculinities. Nawal's elusive narrative occupies a marginal, limited, and liminal position—what Spivak calls "the silent, silenced center" (78; ed. 1983)—as a direct result of the hegemony of patriarchy and imperialism during the war. The omissions in her narrative reflect the contradictory space of interpellation that she inhabits.

Hage's "very grisly representation of men in war" (Georgis 139) does not face the same systemic and articulatory challenges found in *Scorched*. In many ways, *De Niro's Game* is as much about the privileges of wartime masculinity as it is about its "burdens" (138). The emphatic political speech that we get in the novel is an effect of the characters' decidedly privileged status within gender, national, and sectarian hierarchies. This is not to say that the characters' outspokenness suggests an immunity to the hailings of the interpellating systems at

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<sup>7</sup> This title is inspired by the wording of Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980).

work. On the contrary, the chauvinism and reactionary speech overwhelming the narrative is a consequence of the characters' entrenchment in these hegemonic systems. Narrativization allows Hage to assign the war a more global character by comparing it to other international conflicts arising from the creation of the modern nation-state. This chapter pursues Hage's exposition of the nation-state and its attendants, nationalism and nation-building, as nothing more than what Judith Butler, in another context, styles "punitively regulated cultural fictions alternately embodied and deflected under duress" (Butler 190). *De Niro's Game* addresses the personal and collective injuries sustained by the victims of an unsustainable governing model that is unable and unwilling to account for its own internal heterogeneity.

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Two months before the onset of the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict in July 2006, with the escalation already alarming, Rawi Hage published his debut novel *De Niro's Game*. The novel recalls the contexts of the civil war and the Israeli siege of Beirut in the summer of 1982. From the perspective of his characteristically ambivalent narrator, Hage reports the events that led to the assassination of then-president Bachir Gemayel, "Al-Rayyes," leader of the Maronite Phalangist Party and Israel's foremost ally in Lebanon, and to the retaliatory onslaught against one of the largest Palestinian refugee populations in Beirut in the bloodbath now known as the Sabra and Shatila massacre. With the civil war as its backdrop and a conflict imminent at the book's release date, *De Niro's Game's* "initial success may in part be due to interest in Lebanon during the summer of 2006" (Hassan 1626). Since its publication, *De Niro's Game* has enjoyed critical acclaim, not least for its exposition of the failings of the nation-state as colonialism's most formidable, artificial, and divisive legacy. Throughout the novel, Hage stages the historical forces contributing to Lebanon's dissolution and tormenting the lives of its various characters as

competing dichotomies. As the novel's most persisting motif, this binarism highlights the analogies and oppositions determining the forms of alliance and animosity between individuals, communities, and states.

This “twoness” also parodies the ideological cleavages splitting Beirut into a Christian East and a Muslim West, Lebanon into a Syrian-backed North and an Israeli-occupied South, and the region into Orient and Occident. My term “parody” is here meant to recall issues of pastiche that arise in Judith Butler’s description of subversive bodies in *Gender Trouble*, which is my guiding heuristic. This chapter argues that the novel’s binary organization reveals how nationhood in Hage’s pastiche rendering proves “an ideal that no [state] *can* embody” (Butler 176). Like gender, nationhood is a copy without an original—a fabricated ideal sustained by social and institutional discourses that address themselves to a national “essence” and identity that is impossible to sustain. In *De Niro’s Game*, the ways in which desperate communities in Lebanon unsuccessfully impersonate the claims of nationhood by establishing exaggerated ideological and physical borders denaturalize the ideal of the nation. Ultimately, this extrajudicial miming of national discourse, as well as militarism on a communal level, forecloses the possibility of establishing sovereignty and nationhood on a state level, and also calls into question the myth of the nation-state itself as a viable regulatory model.

In the wake of the era of violent decolonization, independent states found themselves unable immediately to consolidate their hard-won sovereignties. The arbitrary parcelling of Asia and Africa into nation-states—a foreign institution that does not reflect the nomadic, agrarian, and/or tribal characters of many of these regions—impeded their postcolonial rehabilitation and democratic ambitions. In the Middle East especially, the rise of authoritarianism is inseparable from the establishment of the nation-state. As a small state fractured by institutionalized and

colonially-sponsored sectarianism, Lebanon stands as an exception among its powerful neighbours, namely the military states of Syria and Israel. Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Maronites of Mount Lebanon, who enjoyed an autonomous status in these highlands under the Ottomans, were entrusted by France with Greater Lebanon, “a conjured state” which was double the size of historical Mount Lebanon and which includes the coastal cities of Beirut, Tyre, Sidon, Tripoli, and the Bekaa valley, along with their Muslim-majority populations (Hirst 21). Despite its confessionalist constitution—which, in principle, was designed to ensure the fair representation of all sects—the Maronites emerged with the lion’s share of the public sector and its various governmental institutions, primarily its presidency and the army, as well as other key posts. Although spared the terrors of authoritarianism, Lebanon’s deliberate fragmentation by its French colonizer<sup>8</sup> exposed it to interference and violence from other nations, and weakened its institutional and cultural defenses against fanatic micronationalisms. As for external influences, two regional events irrevocably shaped Lebanon’s demographics and agitated its already volatile sectarian composition. The first of these two closely related events is the 1948 exodus of the Palestinian people (also known as the *Nakba*) from their indigenous hometowns of Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, Tiberias, as well as the villages bordering Mount Mar Elias (modern-day Mount Carmel) to the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Among the displaced were members of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) who frequently launched attacks against Israel from these bordering states.

The expulsion of the Palestinians coincided with, and indeed bolstered, the second of the major events influencing Lebanon’s political climate during the 1950s and -60s: the rise of

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<sup>8</sup> As David Hirst points out, “not for nothing has the term *libanisation* (“Lebanonization”) become an official part of the French language, defined in the latest editions of Larousse as ‘a process of fragmentation of a state, as a result of confrontation between diverse communities,’ and tending to replace ‘balkanization’” (4).

Nasserism—president Gamal Abdel-Nasser’s version of Arab socialism that gained momentum during the Cold War and that urged the unification of the Arab world against foreign (particularly Western) meddling. The occupation of Palestine, the annexation of its lands, and the expulsion of its people reinforced the legitimacy of Nasserism among Muslims and anti-imperialists who considered Zionism another feat of European imperialism in Jewish guise. In Lebanon, while Muslims and leftists embraced Nasser’s pan-Arabism and sympathized with the Palestinian plight, the Maronites insisted on their distinctness among the neighbouring Arabs:

According to a mythology clerics and ideologues promoted, they were not really Arabs at all. They were heirs to the Phoenicians, the merchant, sea-faring nation of antiquity; they were a Mediterranean people, honorary Europeans, with Rome as their spiritual Mecca, Paris their cultural one. (Hirst 21)

After the Arabs’ defeat in the wars against Israel, and as the prospect of return became almost impossible for the Palestinians, the Maronites solidified their alliance with Israel while increasingly restricting Palestinian influence in Lebanese territories. The fifteen-year civil war that ensued was the culmination of all of these regional conflicts finding their violent expression in a sundered Lebanon.

Hage’s “particular but unconsenting Christian perspective” (Gana 196) in *De Niro’s Game* summons the ghost of Lebanon’s splintered communities which it collapses with the histories of Syrian meddling, Israeli occupation, and dubious French paternalism. As Nouri Gana suggests, the novel’s chief achievement lies “not so much in the fictionalization of its historical context as in the historicization of its fictional frame, content, and enormity” (197). In a carefully curated setup, Hage organizes the entire narrative—from its “intimate collisions” (197) to its most international perspectives—as a competition between dualities. This motif speaks to the

partitioning of civil-war Beirut into Christian East and Muslim West. In the narrator, Bassam, and his childhood best friend George, Hage stages his most obvious and, as many critics contend, telling binary. At the beginning of the novel, the two teenagers are inseparable and almost indistinguishable from one another; their living circumstances and upbringings are the same bar a few details. In war-torn Beirut, their unaffiliated thuggishness, petty crimes, and overall aimlessness reflects “a romantic self-image that collapses lawlessness and freedom” and that sets them apart from other kinds of vigilantism overtaking the city (Hassan 1627). As they race across East Beirut on the back of George’s motorcycle, Bassam glamorizes their brand of violence and defiance:

War is for thugs. Motorcycles are also for thugs, and for longhaired teenagers like us, with guns under our bellies, and stolen gas in our tanks, and no particular place to go...We were aimless, beggars and thieves, horny Arabs with curly hair and open shirts and Marlboro packs rolled in our sleeves, dropouts, ruthless nihilists with guns, bad breath, and long American jeans. (13)

Their carefree rebelliousness is—as far as Bassam is concerned—the war’s only silver lining. Despite the war’s encroachment and the militia’s persistence, Bassam tries his best to hang on to a recalcitrant ideal that does not submit to ideologies of violence that fall under the authority of the state or any of its claimants. The same does not apply to George whose thuggishness is recruited in the worst possible ways for the service of the Phalangist militia. Indeed, the two friends grow apart when George replaces his “rogue” violence—a violence that is, at once, “beyond the authority of the state” even as it “mirrors the violence of the state” (Hassan 1622)—with a “predatory identity” (Appadurai 51).

The anthropologist Arjun Appadurai defines as predatory those identities whose “social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of [a majority], defined as a we” (51). Within a we/they dialectic, predatory identities emerge out of a numerically larger group’s hostile understanding of itself as “a threatened majority” (51) that could at some point trade places with a proximal minority. As Appadurai indicates, majorities and minorities “are recent historical inventions, essentially tied up with ideas about nations, populations, representation, and enumeration which are no more than a few centuries old” (49). As a corollary of twentieth-century national majoritarianism, predatory identities are also inextricable from the institution of the nation-state. Indeed, what distinguishes a benign cultural identity from a predatory one is the majority’s violent efforts “to be exclusively and exhaustively linked with the identity of the nation” (52), thereby “[closing] the gap between the majority and the purity of the national whole” (52). Appadurai lists the “historical ingredients” of genocidal majoritarian mobilization as follows:

the capture of the state by parties or other groups that have placed their political bets on some sort of racialized nationalist ideology; the availability of census tools and techniques that encourage enumerated communities to become norms for the idea of community itself; a felt lack of fit between political borders and community migrations and populations, yielding a new alertness to politically abandoned ethnic kin or to ethnic strangers claiming to be one’s kinsmen; and a successful campaign of fear, directed at numerical majorities, which convinces them that they are at risk of destruction by minorities. (58)

Maronite mobilization against religious and national minorities fits every factor in this analysis of majoritarian predation. Although a numerical majority in Lebanon, the Maronites are still a religious minority in the Middle East. Their desire to pair their majority identity with the state stems from an anxiety of being turned into a minority within a larger Arab and, primarily, Muslim federation. In many ways, this is also the story of modern Zionism in the region. More than being strategic allies, the Phalangists and the Israelis are ideological ‘kinsmen’ committed to conforming the state exclusively to their respective majoritarian identities. Although the Maronites were never able to realize their dreams of national hegemony, in Israel’s case “the nation had conquered the state” (Arendt 275).

The “horrifying centerpiece” (Libin 79) of Lebanese majoritarianism reaching genocidal extremes is the Sabra and Shatila massacre. This retaliatory bloodbath was carried out “for 40 continuous hours between sunset on Thursday 16 September and midday on September 18 1982” by members of the Phalangist militia in collusion with the Israeli army (al-Hout 1). The assassination of the Phalangist leader and then-president Bachir Gemayel two days before the massacre, combined with Israeli allegations about the presence of 2,500 Palestinian fighters in West Beirut, served as a pretext for cleansing the camps. However, these pretenses were “quickly discovered to be false” (3): The militia already had in custody Gemayel’s assassin Habib Shartouni—a Lebanese national and known communist—who confessed to his crime publicly upon his arrest. As for the supposed presence of armed Palestinian agitators in Beirut, the Israeli army did not find in the camps “or anywhere else in West Beirut the 2,500 fighters who had, it was claimed, remained behind” (3). For the Phalangists, Sabra and Shatila was a calculated extermination of a minority civilian population whose existence, in Appadurai’s terms, “within national boundaries [was] seen as an intolerable deficit in the purity of the

national whole” (53). Edward Said—commenting on Israel’s possible motivations for abetting genocide outside its territories—ventures an explanation:

All Palestinians during the summer of 1982 asked themselves what inarticulate urge drove Israel, having displaced Palestinians in 1948, to expel them continuously from their refugee homes and camps in Lebanon. It is as if the reconstructed Jewish collective experience, as represented by Israel and modern Zionism, could not tolerate another story of dispossession and loss to exist alongside it—an intolerance constantly reinforced by the Israeli hostility to the nationalism of the Palestinians, who for forty-six years have been painfully reassembling a national identity in exile. (“On Exile” 141)

In other words, Palestinian nationalism—twice minoritized at home and in the diaspora—cannot “exist alongside” predatory nationalisms, and especially Zionism and its sympathizers, no matter how far it distances itself from Palestine.

In *De Niro’s Game*, Hage’s retelling of the events that led to the massacre of a refugee population testifies to these historical realities—albeit in a “fictional frame” (Gana 197)—and confirms Appadurai’s theses on majoritarian reaction to even small numbers frustrating the majority’s totalizing projects. As Najat Rahman proposes, George’s testimony of the massacre “is the central trauma and catastrophe in the narrative, measuring the collective devastation and the individual psychological ones as well” (809). It “stands alone” (Libin 78) as the violent culmination of the majority’s anxieties, as the climax of the novel, and as the fateful intersection of Bassam and George’s destinies, which will never coincide again. However, it is also a story as old as the creation of the nation-state and one that is told and retold many times throughout the novel but in different guises. The most obvious counterpart to the massacre of the Palestinians is the wholesale extermination of the dogs that were abandoned by their owners who fled the war.

The residents of East Beirut were able to mobilize the army of the militia in “the battle of one hundred dogs” (62) by fabricating a public health concern, specifically canine rabies. On that fateful night, the militia carried out a “dog massacre” (61) that would rid the streets of their infestation. Bassam deliberately frames the extermination as a crusade (“The Christians won the battle”) and exaggerates the allegations against the dogs who were “executed for treason” (61-62). In *Fear of Small Numbers*, Appadurai singles out public-health discourses as among the most effective modes of propaganda in mobilizing “Germanness” against the “racial cancer (also a Nazi trope) of the Jews” (54). The mobilization of “Christianness” against the neighborhood dogs follows the same logic; it also predicts the extermination of the Palestinians since it serves as a successful trial run for the extermination of a vulnerable population that cannot defend itself against predation by a threatened majority.

Hage includes two other parallels to the Sabra and Shatila massacre that bracket it with other twentieth-century horrors prompted by the creation of the nation-state: the Armenian Genocide and the Vietnam War. Through Bassam’s ancestry, Hage summarizes the history of Armenian presence in Lebanon. As a displaced community whose resettlement in Beirut invariably altered the country’s demographics, the Armenians share with the Palestinians a long and violent history inseparable from the creation of the Middle-Eastern nation-state. In “Seeing Like a Nation-State,” Uğur Ümit Üngör indicates how the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) did not simply coincide with Young Turk measures to “secure the existence of a future Turkish nation-state” (16), but that the creation of a Turkish nation-state from the remains of the Ottoman Empire required calculated applications of social engineering that “possessed a tremendous capacity for violence” (16). In its regional context,

the establishment of the Turkish Republic was a watershed in the modern history of the Middle East, marking the turn of a multi-ethnic empire into a nation-state set upon homogenizing its population. (18)

In this sense, the Armenians of East Turkey were the first victims of the emergence of the modern nation-state in the Middle East. Although an ethnic and linguistic minority, Armenian survivors came to gain citizenship rights in Lebanon through their strategic alliance with the Maronites. However, despite their political allegiances and resistance to Pan-Arabism, the Armenians maintained a policy of “positive neutrality” (Geukjian 65) during the civil war. As a descendant of Armenian survivors, Bassam is hostile to in-group solidarities of all kinds. In East Beirut, he is constantly reminded of how far away he is “from the Turks who had enslaved [his] grandmother” (15). The Armenians and the Palestinians are two refugee communities who—despite their shared histories of systemic removal from their ancestral homelands—meet with very different fates in Lebanon. The Armenian presence helped tip the scales in favour of a Christian numerical majority, a critical asset considering Lebanon’s confessionalist system. On the other hand, the Palestinians are a religious minority whose residence on Lebanese soil angers the majority and frustrates its homogenizing projects. As far as social engineering goes, the Armenians enjoy citizenship rights in full while the Palestinians come to suffer wholesale extermination once more.

The intertextual counterpart to *De Niro’s Game*—Michael Cimino’s movie *The Deer Hunter* (1979)—adds a final coat of universality and complexity to the Sabra and Shatila massacre. Cimino’s polarizing representation of the Vietnam War and its belligerents in *The Deer Hunter* “did not simply represent a historical past—it was animating a war that had never really ended for America” (Chong 90). This is very much the case for Hage whose debut work

rehashes the unfronted horrors of a civil war that ‘has never really ended’ for Lebanon. As Mark Libin indicates, Cimino’s critically acclaimed movie, which lends the novel its title, “creates a dialogue” between Lebanon’s national trauma and the trauma of the Vietnam War (78). Hage borrows many of the movie’s controversial tropes and recasts their application for his critique of predatory identities. His imitation of *The Deer Hunter*’s organizing themes—the savage games of chance, wartime voyeurism, and homosocial masculinities—displaces the movie’s differential allocation of grief (or grievability) through “parodic recontextualization” (Butler 188). Like *The Deer Hunter*, Hage’s novel is devoted to a single perspective, that of a Maronite consciousness, whose version of its historical entitlements and wartime participation is deeply at odds with surrounding narratives. The American experience in Vietnam—at least in Cimino’s rendering of it—insists on a single narrative as well. Cimino restages the My Lai Massacre and the Saigon Execution—both of which were carried out by the U.S. and its allies in 1968—by reassigning the blame onto the Vietcong and “recenter[ing] the narrative on Americans as victims” (Chong 90). When American violence is portrayed, *The Deer Hunter* “justifies U.S. acts of violence committed on screen by deferring to the ethics of warfare” (Chong 92): whereas the U.S. committed crimes “impersonally,” the Vietcong did so “cruel[ly] and sadistical[ly]” (Pauline Kael qtd. in Chong 92). Although a detailed exposition of the movie’s racism and historical inaccuracies would take me too far afield, suffice it to say that Cimino reserves grief and grievability to America and its troops while the Vietnamese are reduced to howling and grunting caricatures.

*De Niro’s Game* is a pastiche of Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter*; its appropriation of the movie’s themes moves beyond mere intertextuality. Frederic Jameson distinguishes the postmodern pastiche from other forms of parodic representation as follows:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its humor. (Jameson qtd. in Butler 188-189)

Nowhere in the novel is this 'unfunny' aspect of the postmodern pastiche better expressed than in Bassam's tally of the many young men who died following the release of *The Deer Hunter* in Beirut. He remembers Roger, "the son of Miriam the widow" (231), who had died while recreating the infamous Russian roulette scene from the movie. To avoid a scandal, George intimidates the paramedics into declaring Roger's death as a gunshot wound sustained from fighting at the front lines. At Roger's funeral, his mother "walked the streets shouting to the balconies, He is a hero, my son is a hero, I gave birth to a *batal, batal*<sup>9</sup>" (231) while the men recited *zajal*, a genre of sophisticated and semi-improvised Arabic verse reserved for joyous occasions. This brief example recalls Nick's story in *The Deer Hunter* who meets a similar fate and is also endowed with a bittersweet rendition of "God Bless America" sung by his friends despite his anti-heroic death. Interpretations of Nick's send-off alternate between condemnation of its "assertions of white solidarity disavow[ing] similarity with the oriental other" and acknowledgements of the movie's implicit undermining of that disavowal in the circumstances surrounding Nick's suicide (Chong 103). Hage's imitation of the scene, however, proves that disavowal beyond a shadow of a doubt; his version reveals the emptiness and absurdity of the honor "hero" especially in the context of war. In both Nick and Roger's funerals, the characters

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<sup>9</sup> "*Batal: hero*" (275).

try to impose some nationalist or heroic significance on the lives of young men lost at a time when male lives were particularly valuable for the defense of the nation. Since the nation is sustained through these ‘heroic’ deaths, what is parodied in Roger’s case is not ‘normal’ martyrdom—a death designated as heroic for its immense sacrifice—but the empty rituals that bolster the self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling claims of the nation, here exposed as fraudulent.

The trauma that Cimino exclusively consigns chiefly to American soldiers in *The Deer Hunter* is predicated upon the isolation and amplification of a single narrative of the war. Through “transposition and dislocation” (Rahman 807), Hage undermines the differential allocation of grief, mourning, and victimhood—the attendants of traumatic expression—even as he declines to vocalize non-Christian expressions of loss. Although the “particular but unconsenting” (Gana 196) Maronite perspective that Hage maintains throughout the novel resembles Cimino’s strictly American perspective of the Vietnam War, the trauma that the Maronite soldiers try to claim as exclusively their own in order to inscribe a collective national memory instrumental for state propaganda proves incommunicable and unattainable. In many ways, this is also Cimino’s project in *The Deer Hunter*: his rewriting of the My Lai massacre and the Saigon execution as American—and not Vietnamese—traumas serves the purpose of tampering public opinion with a portrayal of Americans as victims. George is the spokesman for Maronite consciousness and the only character whose version of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, the novel’s central trauma, is allowed to be heard. In a cocaine-induced delirium, George—nicknamed De Niro for his resemblance to the actor—confesses to the crimes he committed in the camps by comparing (and confusing) what he had witnessed and participated in to the filmic representation of the Vietnam War in *The Deer Hunter*: “[The] Israeli aircraft dropped eighty-one-millimetre illumination flares. The whole area was lit up; it was like being in a Hollywood

movie. And I am De Niro in a movie” (175). What follows is a voyeuristic description of civilian murder that does not recall “De Niro in the movie” but resembles Cimino’s portrayal of Vietcong violence: “We killed! [...] Cadavers in their night-clothes, throats slit, axes used, hands separated from bodies, women cut in half” (175). As George’s audience/hostage, Bassam does not extend any sympathy to his friend’s traumatic confession nor is he appalled by George’s story of “purify[ing] the camps” (174). The moment of fraternal bond that George tries to recreate from the movie—“You are my best friend and my brother, you are” (174)—is met with an audience unswayed by these empty gestures. As Najat Rahman argues, “it is a fraternity that can no longer be sustained” (810). Therefore, the game of Russian roulette that George finally forces on Bassam is not meant to reaffirm the homosocial fraternities that Cimino glorifies in his adoption of this game of chance, but one that “reveals the irreparable loss of a friendship and of the promise of a fraternal relation that could not take root because it is betrayed in war” (810).

As the Phalangists’ most promising recruit, George is the mouthpiece for Maronite militarism and majoritarian predation in the novel. He embodies the majority’s “anxiety of incompleteness” (Appadurai 52)—an incompleteness that is less about “effective control or practical sovereignty [than about] purity and its relationship to identity” (53). As Dina Georgis suggests in her discussion of wartime Arab masculinities in the novel, George’s commitment to a militia loyal to a homogenous and ‘pure’ Lebanese ethnos may in part be due to insecurities about his own ‘impurity.’ Having been born out of wedlock to a French father (whom he has never met) and to a Lebanese mother who died when he was very young, George

cannot abandon Lebanon, maybe because he was abandoned by his French father, or maybe because he has melancholically identified with the absent presence of his French

ancestry. Metonymically, his father stands in for the colonial phantom limb of Lebanon that melancholically fuels Christian Lebanese nationalism. (143)

In other words, George is not the personification of the purity or coherence of the nation but one who confirms the impossibility of the claim. As someone who incarnates the majority's frustrations about its own heterogeneity, George is defenseless against its homogenizing propaganda. He is a prime candidate for radicalization.

In his short tenure as a Phalangist militant, George murders three of his business associates, evacuates refugees from the outskirts of Beirut, engages in battle against PLO fighters, and participates in the climactic Sabra and Shatila massacre. He justifies his crimes by invoking the discourse of a surrounded and threatened majority: "They are coming from all over the world to fight us [...] here in our land. Palestinians, Somalis, and Syrians—everyone has a claim on this land" (128). But perhaps no adversary (national or otherwise) has excited George's rage and set off his homicidal tendencies more than Bassam, his childhood friend. Aside from it being a war story, *De Niro's Game* is also a coming-of-age story. In the duality between the two characters, one could argue that an uncanny thread<sup>10</sup> runs through their rivalry because of (and not despite of) their intimate upbringing and similar circumstances. As children, their friendship might have been informed by the "unbounded self-love" and "primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child" and which understands the double as "an assurance of immortality" (Freud 234). As they grow up, George and Bassam's 'doubleness' gains a new and sinister meaning when the self-critical faculty (which in George is recast as an anxiety of incompleteness) replaces the primary narcissism of the child. As George's intractable double,

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<sup>10</sup> On this point, my argument depends on Hany Ali Abdelfattah's more comprehensive psychoanalytic reading of the uncanny's function in *De Niro's Game*.

Bassam no longer represents an infantile “preservation against extinction,” but stands in for “the ghastly harbinger of death” (234). Bassam might also symbolize for George the paths untaken, since in the double we also meet with “all those unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy” (235). In either case, George is set on taking Bassam out of the picture, through either intimidation or murder.

Over the course of the summer of 1982, George attempts several times to exterminate Bassam to no avail, first through his cousin, then through the militia, and finally in a game of Russian roulette where George meets his demise. As the personified disturbance to George’s stability or uniformity, Bassam operates as a minority identity that “represents a tiny obstacle between majority and totality or total purity” (Appadurai 53) and that must be suppressed or expunged for the sake of that totality. However, Bassam does not belong to a minority in Lebanon and is in fact an uncontested member of the Maronite majority. He is entitled to all the privileges of a national majority and yet chooses to unperform his nationality by operating outside the pale of the militia’s law and by displaying none of the chauvinism characteristic of national identities in times of war. Bassam even betrays himself by defending minorities from the claims of the majority. When Chahine, an employee at the port where Bassam works, refuses to coerce Egyptian laborers to move cargo for the militia because of poor working conditions, another employee objects to Chahine’s humanitarian gesture:

Well, I want to see how they will treat you in Egypt if you go to work there. You are a Christian. Look at the Copts and other Christians. How are they treated in these Muslim countries? (131).

Meeting these accusations, Bassam impulsively rushes to the Muslims’ defense:

I am not sure why I opened my mouth—me, who wanted only to finish my sip of coffee, crush my cigarette on the floor, and board a ship to nowhere. To my surprise, I said, There are many Christians on the West Side of Beirut, still living there, and no Muslim ever bothered them. (131)

In this argument, Bassam contradicts the majority's understanding of itself as threatened—thus “[standing] in opposition to the citizen of the nation-state” (Hassan 1622). He also expresses a deterritorialized perspective by admitting his lack of attachment to his country and nationality. As Salah D. Hassan argues, these two aspects of Bassam—his defiance and ambivalence—disclose a “refugee” consciousness that prefigures an “unstated future, or a future without territorialized nation-states” (1622).

What does it mean to act as a refugee in your own country, or—as Edward Said puts it—to see “the entire world as a foreign land” (“On Exile” 148)? Said has in mind a more positive use for this deliberate statelessness: it promotes “originality of vision” and “a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be” (148). In *De Niro's Game*, however, the consequences of deliberate statelessness are a lot more perilous. Nationalism in times of war is not just expected but compulsory. Soldiers are conscripted to defend with their own bodies the claims of the nation. Their bodies are the sites where nationhood is either consolidated or contested, and with their bodies they either prove that the claims of the nation have been internalized, embodied, and rendered coherent or that the national identity they are defending is indefensible, unintelligible, and discontinuous. When Bassam appropriates the experience of statelessness as a Lebanese national, he is unperforming the “regulatory fiction” of national coherence and revealing its fraudulent construction (Butler 185). Bassam's refugeehood violates the terms of a compulsory system “with clearly punitive

consequences” (190). Since nationalism is a construct that stakes out its boundaries on the body (and then the body politic), its disciplinary measures are also directed at the bodies of those who refuse to internalize it.

The most graphic assault on Bassam’s body takes place in the torture chambers of the militia when they charge him for a murder he did not commit. Since he was tried and convicted in absentia, the confession they try to coerce out of him is not an admission of guilt, but an admission that he is “incapable of truth” (Lingis 147). He is someone “not informed by the established discourse [of the nation], not directed to the things and situations it formulates, and not summoned to contribute to its establishment” (140). The torture that he endures as a consequence is not meant to pressure him into accepting the claims of an established discourse. Instead, the torturer demands that Bassam confesses

that his body is incapable of lucidity and discernment, that it is nothing but corruption and putrefaction. Not only that he does not have a mind capable of contributing to or verifying the truth of the institution, but he does not have a body capable of holding together. The utterance the institution demands to hear from the individual is that he confesses to being filth and shit—that he is already the carrion the torture is making of him. (147)

By refusing to internalize the nation, Bassam exposes his body to assault. Not only do his torturers convict him of murder, but Bassam is also accused of giving the dead man “blowjobs” and of being a “*hashash*” (Hage 151), or a drug abuser. In other words, suspicions about his loyalty to the nation also invalidate his subscription to the hegemonic systems of compulsory heterosexuality and rationality. These are not accusations meant to discredit Bassam’s claim to the truth, but ones that place him outside the institution of truth altogether.

As with all “culturally hegemonic identities,” national identification is consolidated along “axes of differentiation” and by way of “borders and boundaries tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control” (Butler 174). These processes of delineation are necessary for establishing the first contours of a national subjectivity through frameworks of differentiation from the abject, the alien, or the “not-me” (181). They also suggest a striving for “stability [and] coherence determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject” (182). These are the kinds of “surface politics” that have reproduced the nation as a “vital and sacred enclosure” (and nationality as an internalized essence) despite its political construction (184). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler pursues these lines of inquiry in the context of gender (de)construction to show how the “strive for coherence” in both social and psychic spaces is regulated by politics of gender conformity in the interests of an exclusively “heterosexual construction [of society] and the regulation of sexuality within the reproductive domain” (185). The false stability that these mechanisms of exclusion and denial claim to provide actually “conceal the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts” (185). By rendering the body as “a mute facticity [...] indifferent to signification” (175-176), the language of internalization inscribing itself on the body gains descriptive force. This too can be applied to the context of the state—the body politic—which, like the gendered body, falsely exhibits “ethnocultural neutrality” (Kymlicka 163) when in reality all states, no matter how liberal or civic, are always involved in nation-building by engaging those same processes of discrimination, enclosure, and internalization.

In the minorities and the refugees—“rightly termed cousins-germane” (Arendt 268)—the nation-state confronts “the spectres of [its] discontinuity and incoherence” (Butler 23). They

exist outside the norms of national, legal, and cultural intelligibility even as they “themselves [are] thinkable only in relation to the existing norms of continuity and coherence” (23).

Minorities and refugees are unintelligible in the working system of the nation-state insofar as extra-governmental “laws of exception” are needed to ensure their protection “until or unless they [are] completely assimilated and divorced from their origin” (Arendt 275). But minorities and refugees are not the only disturbances to the false coherence of the national fiction. In the terrorist and the spy, several of the nation-state’s nightmares about its own insecurity are condensed (Appadurai 77). Both of these figures treacherously maintain the appearances of assimilation, continuity, and stability—the surface significations that “institute the ‘integrity’ of the [stable] subject” (Butler 185)—all the while subscribing to none of the nation’s fabricated ideals; they impersonate norms of national intelligibility but do not internalize them. By “appearing as normal citizens,” they also “take to the extreme the problem of uncertainty” prompting the mobilization of predatory identities (Appadurai 78).

Near the end of *De Niro’s Game*, Bassam and George come to represent the terrorist and the spy respectively—thus proving that even the individual, the number “one,” can expose the fiction of national continuity through “structures of impersonation” (Butler 186). In his illegal settlement in France, Bassam finds himself on the receiving end of racist and xenophobic sentiments of French nationals after having just abandoned the “Lebanon of Christians, that group that has imagined itself in mimicry to its colonizer, France” (Georgis 135). He reacts with overwhelming force to the taunts of a few French teenagers by pulling out the gun he had smuggled from Lebanon. Although this incident does not qualify as an act of terror, it leaves a lasting impression on Bassam who can no longer sleep—let alone walk the streets of Paris—without his gun by his side. In his French exile, Bassam’s statelessness is no longer feigned but a

matter of fact. He tries to conceal his illegitimacy behind his French accent; the clothes he borrowed from George's half-sister Rhea; a firm resolution to "avoid policemen" (242); and several exaggerated attempts to act "like the Parisians do" (245). In this way, Bassam simulates belonging while concealing his "revolutionary tendencies" (210) and the weapon kept by his side at all times. Though no suicide-bomber, he still very nearly "closes the boundary between [his] body and the weapon of terror" (Appadurai 77) and appears as a normal citizen "to get close to the place of attack" (78). Although Bassam only fantasizes about using his gun, his unchecked and undetected mobility in the liberal West flags him as the most fearsome disturbance to the continent's imagined stability and continuity.

As the (apparent) incarnation of Maronitism and its nation-building aspirations, George's true identity comes as a startling revelation to Bassam who had until then mistaken George's genocidal aggression for misguided chauvinism. Roland, a Mossad agent who then pursues Bassam in his exile, reveals the details of George's recruitment by Israeli intelligence to Bassam, who proves an uncooperative witness to the mysterious circumstances surrounding George's death. Roland describes George as "a smart and a good" (266) agent whose role in orchestrating and consolidating the Phalangist-Israeli alliance invariably undermined not just Pan-Arabism but also Maronitism in favour of a Zionist agenda. During his training in Israel, George had decided to join forces with the Israelis after learning that his estranged father was once a Mossad agent stationed in Beirut. As the "absent presence" (Georgis 143) behind George's anxiety of incompleteness, George's relationship with his father (or lack thereof) explains his readiness to ascribe to—or, in this case, defect from—whichever ideologies best reflect his strive for homogeneity. More importantly, his enactment of Maronitism and Zionism simultaneously—both predatory ideologies that seek "to be exclusively and exhaustively linked with the identity

of the nation” (Appadurai 52)—undermines the ruse of national identity and invalidates the interior legitimacy of both ideologies.

Impersonation reveals that what is marketed as an interior fixity—be that fixity the soul, gender, or national identity—is actually a self-perpetuating and self-fulfilling performance with interchangeable surface significations. It is precisely the performative aspect of impersonation that makes a mockery of the “organizing core” and its “expressive models” (Butler 186). In the expressive model of the nation-state, spies are the most exasperating of insults to the nation because they mock the ‘integrity’ of a continuous body politic by impersonating its surface significations without internalizing its contrived fixities. Indeed, their clandestine simulation of the nation’s surface politics is the most destabilizing of insurgencies committed against the nation’s coherence. Since hegemonic and homogenizing identities—national or otherwise—exert their claims through “identity-differentiation” (182), exclusivity in these totalizing terms is tantamount to internalization. By successfully impersonating both Maronitism and Zionism, George unwittingly confirms that national identification is a performance “instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous”: it is a “constructed identity, a performative accomplishment...impossible to embody” (192).

## CHAPTER 3

*Cockroach* in the Anthropocene: A Scale-Based Reading

In 2008, Rawi Hage published his second novel, *Cockroach*, two years after the debut of his award-winning novel *De Niro's Game* (2006). The two works have often been read side-by-side as a continuous narrative of war and dislocation. However, despite the diegetic continuities between both novels, *Cockroach* inaugurates a stylistic and thematic shift in Hage's writing. Its chaotic handling of categories—the cover blurb makes a stab at it with “carnavalesque”—sharply contrasts with the historical realism of its precursor. As their titles suggest, Hage's later publications *Carnival* (2013) and *Beirut Hellfire Society* (2019) continue in that same style of “surreal absurdity” and “whimsy” (Epilogue Reviews) established in *Cockroach*. This approach allows Hage to move beyond his first novel's “particular but unconsenting Christian perspective” (Gana 196) towards more scalable themes. By scalable, I mean to invoke ecocritical encounters with the “quality” of scalability, or, broadly, the ability “to discuss something in terms of scale” (Tsing 38)—such as space, time, or damages—more than the definition adopted by the scientific disciplines, that is, “the ability of a project to change scales smoothly without any change in project frames” (38). In this chapter, I pursue this dimension in Hage's writing by indicating patterns where the default and day-to-day level of narration is outlandishly interrupted for concerns of an “impersonal ecological dynamic... [that] shade out more conventional considerations” (Clark 100). While the novel does not plainly subscribe to an environmentalist agenda, its subversive representation of survival in urban spaces agrees with the posthumanism motivating ecologically-minded literary inquiry.

In *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, Timothy Clark suggests a new kind of critical practice in keeping with the cross-disciplinary challenges that the Anthropocene poses on human foresight

and planning. According to Clark, existing frameworks have floundered in the face of climate change “because there is no simple or unitary object *directly* to confront, or delimit, let alone to ‘fix’ or ‘tackle’” (10; emphasis his). Combined with its planetary and geological scale, “the Anthropocene manifests itself in innumerable possible hairline cracks in the familiar life-world, at the local and personal scale of each individual life” (9). The scale-effects of climate change—although determined by and implicating all of humanity—remain incalculable and irreducible, while persistently limiting the possibility for collective and individual action (11). These are concerns that have made environmental degradation difficult to pursue as a sustained subject of (eco)criticism “because the issue is one that refuses to stay put, dispersing as soon as you look at it into multiple questions, disciplines, and topics” (10).

Clark’s scale-framing approach is an experimental incursion on dominant literary-critical practices that have fallen short of imagining the expanded spatio-temporal scale in which the Anthropocene operates. Clark delineates three broad-purpose levels: The first is the default, familiar, or *terrestrial* scale “inherent to embodied human life on the Earth’s surface” (33) and which “may now be implicated in destructive scenarios we can neither see nor barely calculate” (40). In criticism (literary or otherwise), it is the “critically naive” (99) and suspicious scale because of its investment in the personal, the convenient, and the short-term while “[foreclosing] the thinkability of other modes of life” (100). Commonplace conveniences at the individual scale, such as the pursuit of immediate monetary benefit or the accelerated cultivation of certain crops, might well ramify into uncontainable and disastrous scale-effects at each possible level. The second, contextual, and most commonly assumed scale in literary criticism is that of socio-cultural historicism: “Spatially, it is that of a national culture and its inhabitants, with a time frame of perhaps a few decades, a ‘historical period’ of some kind” (100). At this scale, criticism

is localized and retrospective, and even the most globalized and forward-thinking theoretical attempts at this level are imaginatively restricted by their spatiotemporal and anthropocentric investments. Against these two normative scales, the Anthropocene entails “a third, larger, hypothetical,” and, indeed, difficult standard that bears in mind scale-effects of a planetary reach and an indefinite timeframe. While a reading at the third scale flattens considerations of human agency and actions—thus proving indifferent to psychological and contextual interpretations (104)—its expanded scope brings to light “under-conceptualized material events and contingencies, many of them all the more decisive for not falling within history in terms of a realm of human representations and decisions” (101). For this reason, a reading at the third scale is as much about framing environmental history as it is about “*unframing*” the first and second scales (104; emphasis his).

*Cockroach* rehearses the kind of scalability that Clark promotes. In the epigraph and throughout his novel, Hage invites his readers to think of his characters not as individual subjects, but as a species. His unconsenting and hallucinatory narrator—a self-proclaimed and unnamed human/cockroach hybrid—delivers an underground impression of Montréal that defamiliarizes the city and upsets its highly-regulated social fabric by insistently breaching the human/non-human divide. The narrator demonstrates a kind of “species-consciousness” (Clark 17) that explains some of his aberrant thoughts and questionable actions. His survival under precarious circumstances depends on his ability to think of himself as belonging to two planes simultaneously, the human and the non-human. *Cockroach* is difficult to read (and its protagonist difficult to like) because of the ways it unabashedly transgresses the terrestrial norm to disorienting effect. While the narrative is framed by confessionalist therapy sessions in keeping with the first scale, the narrator insists on undermining this level of narration by contaminating

the personal and day-to-day with concerns of an impersonal humanitarian (second scale) and ecological (third scale) dynamic. Whereas the novel has been lauded for its “global consciousness”—its keen commentary on “the violence incurred by famines, ethnic conflicts, decolonization, nationalism, totalitarianism, and terrorism” (Kamboureli 68)—little has been said about its species-consciousness and expanded imaginative leaps of a planetary scale. This chapter highlights these challenging parts of the novel that are difficult to reconcile with existing frameworks and that remain unexamined by critics of *Cockroach*.

In an early exchange in the novel, the narrator argues with his friend and, at times, nemesis Reza about “each other’s decadent methods of survival” (26). Reza—a poor Iranian musician—seduces upper-class Montrealers (mainly women) by manipulating their orientalist fantasies “with his exotic tunes and stories of suffering and exile” (25). The narrator, on the other hand, depends on his insect form and agility to break into people’s homes and steal their food. After Reza humiliates the narrator for his lackluster ways, the narrator promises Reza to “bring up from [the underground] the echoes of rodent and insect screams to shatter the drums of his ears! And then [Reza] won’t need to cut trees to carve music boxes...” (25-26). Although each of the characters relies on deceitful means for sustenance, the narrator fancies himself morally superior to Reza because his method of survival does not require the cutting down of trees. In fact, the narrator gloats in his affinities to the vermin underground. His desperate wit in this conversation—and which he resorts to time and again—reflects the incommensurability of his plays of scale. Reza is not entirely wrong in branding the narrator a “lunatic...a loonnneyyyy” (27) for his reference to deforestation in a conversation about swindling the rich. When challenging the terrestrial norm, this vertiginous loss of proportion—a move strangely concomitant with ecological concerns—overwhelms the conversation in a telling way.

The narrator's habit of thinking in scales disproportionate to the terrestrial norm pits him against other people but also against other animals in his foraging for sustenance. After ransacking the house of a suburban couple who had scorned his foreignness and poverty, the narrator must overcome the neighborhood dogs before he makes his escape from the elegant and exclusive residential area:

As I walked away from the suburb, the dogs' barks went up like the finale at a high-school concert. Filthy dogs, I will show you! I said and ground my teeth. I pulled down the zipper on my pants and crawled on my hands and feet like a skunk, swaying from side to side and urinating on car wheels and spraying every fire hydrant with abundance to confuse those privileged breeds and cause an epidemic of canine constipation. (91)

He follows this obscene and vengeful performance with an unsettling admiration of his actions' scale-effects:

I laughed, knowing full well that some dentist would soon be waiting for his little bewildered bundle of love to get on with his business. I laughed and thought: Some dentist will be late for trays of paralyzing syringes and far from reach blinding lights that hover above mouths... And I rejoiced and howled (causing more confusion) at the thought of a salesman stuck like a turtle in traffic, late for his work, flipping through catalogues, rehearsing apologies, and mumbling about dogs' damnation. (91)

The narrator reciprocates the "privileged breeds" lack of hospitality—a description befitting of the pets as well as their owners—by disturbing the neighborhood at each possible scale. In his animalistic element, the narrator imagines a scenario where distressed pets interrupt the day-to-day of Montréal's suburban population. Although a telling example of how scale effects—previously "invisible at the normal levels of perception"—become visible "as one changes the

spatial or temporal scale at which the issues are framed” (Clark 22), Hage’s application of scale framing in this scene reverses its primary utility as a gauge for humanity to assess its impact on other forms of life. Here, it is the animal—the domesticated nonhuman—that interrupts the smooth functioning of capitalist society. Nonetheless, this scene recapitulates the imaginative possibilities afforded by a radical shift in perspectives and begins to answer the question “*how far does a change in knowledge and imagination entail a change in environmentally destructive modes of life?*” (18; emphasis his).

The passage I have just reviewed follows after one of the most analyzed sections in the novel, which it concludes. But because this scene is difficult to write back into familiar criticism, the details of the narrator’s escape have been dropped from critical assessments of the novel. In one of his many flashbacks, the narrator remembers “the last time” he looked through a restaurant window (or any private property) from the sidewalk (86). After the police chase him off for “[unlawfully] staring at people inside commercial places” (87), the narrator returns to exact revenge on the couple dining on St-Laurent street, who had been watching him “as if from behind a screen, as if it were live news...as if [he] were some reality show about police chasing people with food-envy syndrome” (87). In his cockroach form, the narrator creeps into their car, follows them home, and inverts their gaze by observing them minutely, before robbing them and making his dramatic escape from the suburbs; he seems at once absorbed in this spectacle even as he views it with contempt. The novel’s treatment of policing and spectacle in this scene highlights the spatial distribution of precarity in downtown Montréal. In “Montreal Underground,” Dominic A. Beneventi argues that “the desire to keep the poor at arm’s-length” is enforced through “violent processes of physical and social containment that seek to control their bodies and their movements, and ultimately efface their very presence from the public sphere,”

thus giving rise to a highly-regulated “geography of containment” (265). The narrator’s experiences on St-Laurent street illustrate the “paradox of bodily presence/absence” (276) restricting the access of the racial and classed Other to public spaces. The narrator is “invisible in terms of status and authority, but also hyper-visible in terms of [his] difference from a White majority that seeks to police and control public space” (276). He constructs the underground as a byproduct of supermodernity, “as *both* a space of abjection and one of agency” (269; emphasis his), and as a “non-place...characterized by the acceleration of time and the compression of space, a place of transition and anonymity that cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity” (265). Thus, the narrator reciprocates the city’s lack of hospitality by desecrating its most inviolable borders—that of other people’s homes—and by exploiting his affinities to the underground to engage in class warfare (271).

This much has also been noted by other critics and amply theorized, and yet the novel does not stop there. Clearly, the narrator’s animalistic reactions and plays on scale upset normative neoliberal frameworks and radical remappings of the city with disturbing effect. As a result, however, they have hitherto been expunged from critical assessments of the novel. Although any reading that moves beyond the terrestrial norm necessarily flattens out considerations of the first and second scales, my interpretation of the text benefits from those precedents, even as I venture more. As Clark contends,

reading at several scales at once cannot be just concerned with the abolition of one scale in the greater claim of another but a way of enriching, singularizing and yet also creatively deranging the text by embedding it in multiple and even contradictory frames at the same time (so that even the most enlightened-seeming progressive-seeming

argument may have one in agreement at one scale and in vehement disagreement on another). (108)

The narrator's extended flashback—a testimony in its own right of the many faces of societal and individual derangement—is a master example of how far a scale 'embedded' in another can be enriched by the friction and uncertainty prompted by such an occasion.

The narrator's most suggestive and insurgent retaliation to society's geography of containment—a second-scale injustice—is perhaps his third-scale comeback: his *contamination* of discriminative spaces with his refuse that can neither be seen nor controlled but “manifests itself in innumerable possible hairline cracks in the familiar life-world, at the local and personal scale of each individual life” (Clark 9). Attractive as Beneventi's invocation of Foucauldian heterotopias and other “non-places” may be, the novel's chronotope complies with neither “the acceleration of time” nor “the compression of space” (257), both defining characteristics of non-places. Rather, what we get in *Cockroach* is an exaggerated sense of time—spanning only one month of the narrator's precarious living conditions in Montréal—and an ever-expanding sense of space. Whereas the narrator's cramped apartment—overtaken by cockroaches and other vermin—is depicted as an ecosystem and a habitat where species scamper for survival, the time he spends supposedly enjoying the most leisurely and taken-for-granted activities, such as dining out, are embittered by his third-scale anxieties about the disproportionate allocation of resources around the world that have made his “consumption of dead animals” (227) affordable and possible. Whether literal or symbolic, the contamination of time and space in the novel reflects how “human history and culture can take on unfamiliar shapes, as work in environmental history repeatedly demonstrates, altering conceptions of what makes something ‘important’ and what does not” (Clark 101).

These incommensurate realities inform even incidental examples of the narrator's wit. When framed as third-scale concerns, the narrator's contemptuous sarcasm that we meet with time and again conveys at least partial truths. While working as a waiter at an elegant Persian restaurant that parades a highly exoticized orientalist aesthetic, the narrator learns that among the restaurant's wealthy clientele is an Iranian liaison and former rape-torturer who is in Montréal to conclude an arms deal on behalf of the Iranian regime. The restaurant's owner is an overbearing member of the Iranian elite with ties to both Iranian diplomats and Canadian officials who frequent his restaurant to expedite under-the-table transactions on behalf of their governments. While this entire context reeks of second-scale corruption, the narrator does not fail to throw in some third-scale banter to trivialize a situation of unequivocal global concern and magnitude. Commenting on the owner's routine of wrapping the day's profits in the same plastic bag, the narrator derisively applauds his eco-friendly habit of reusing the same bag: "Well, at least he recycles" (263). While an obvious joke at the owner's expense, it may well also be an idiom for third-scale indifference to the tyrannies and injustices this owner is abetting. It is also a revealing example of the narrator's desperate attempts to retrieve some third-scale status or perspective remote from the disempowering first- and second-scale constraints he is otherwise under.

Such occasional references—although intermittent and with little diegetic consequence—can inform more persistent motifs in the novel. Interruptions to the familiar levels of perception—what Anna Tsing terms nonscalable "indeterminate encounters" (37)—strike the narrator in ways that prompt him, in turn, to frustrate any societal or state attempts at either assimilating or excluding him entirely. This is no easy feat considering the narrator's many vulnerabilities: on the one hand, he is a high-risk social outcast surveilled by the government after a failed suicide attempt (the fear of being sent back to a psychiatric hospital is always

lurking in the back of his mind). Commenting on the irony of the narrator's failed suicide attempt, one critic notes that "the narrator's drastic attempt to escape scrutiny places him under increased surveillance. His suicidal (and criminal) behaviour marks him as a viable threat to not only himself but also public safety and sanctity; his suicidal body becomes a social problem" (Kraus 111). On the other hand, he is an impoverished immigrant "a little too well done" (29), as one waiter had previously described the narrator's dark complexion, for the city's liking. Again, his visible otherness marks him as an object of suspicion and marginalization in both public and private spaces. The narrator's desire to "exist underneath it all" (11)—to withdraw from society and yet remain connected to all of it (a categorical impossibility, strictly speaking)—"does not echo the conventional binarism of diasporic subjectivity—the 'there' and 'then' and the 'here' and 'now'...[but] encapsulates his profound sense of abjection and the disjunctive tension he experiences throughout the narrative" (Kamboureli 67). His equivocal appropriation of the cockroach as a substitute form and its cosmopolitan habitat, the sewers, as a practical refuge allows him some agency in a place otherwise unwelcoming. In so doing, the narrator replaces anthropocentric presumptions with an unremitting species-consciousness, and relocates from the familiar terrestrial ground to a subterranean "underground."

The far-fetched prospect of a latent underworld unexpectedly overtaking the surface, and its indigenous species deposing humanity, promises the narrator some enfranchisement, compensation, or vengeful reprisal in the unforeseeable future. As the narrator's limits and vulnerabilities become increasingly apparent throughout the novel, his fantasies about humanity's defeat and the triumph of the roaches become more vivid. Although the narrator takes up this image as his mantra, it is not an image of his own creation, but one that he stumbles upon in a chance indeterminate encounter that frames the apocalypse as if a divine punishment

environmentally expressed. Early in the novel, the narrator—on another search for provisions—is stopped in his tracks by two Jehovah’s Witnesses camped outside his apartment building. They interrupt his mission with their “Caribbean smiles” and ask him if he is “interested in the world” (7). The third-scale dystopia that the women describe—although no very unusual jeremiad—fascinates the narrator and forces him out of his first-scale pursuit:

Before I had a chance to reply, one of the ladies...slapped me with an apocalyptic prophecy: Are you aware of the hole in the ozone above us?

Ozone? I asked.

Yes, ozone. It is the atmospheric layer that protects us from the burning rays of the sun. There is a hole in it as we speak, and it is expanding, and soon we shall all fry. Only the cockroaches shall survive to rule the earth...Repent! The woman shouted as she opened the Bible to a marked page: *Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eyes shall not spare, neither will I pity: and though they cry in mine ears with loud voice, yet will I not hear them.* Buy this magazine (the word of the Lord included), my son. Read it and repent! (7)

Although hostile to any kind of religious instruction, the narrator finds in the missionaries’ third-scale prophecy a compelling alternative to the world he currently inhabits. As a dehumanized subject who has developed a cockroach-like agility to weather the ruthlessness of urban poverty and marginalization, the idea of retrieving some status because of his undesirability (and not despite of it) is compelling. What had been meant as an invective against society’s sins and as prophetic corrective is instead taken up by the narrator as auspicious.

More importantly, the invocation of a third-scale transcendental—the ozone layer—to support and confirm the cockroaches’ insurrection instills within the narrator a new kind of spiritual commitment, not to God or to environmental justice, but to environmental punishment.

This narrative perspective is no skewed view of the Anthropocene, since many people interpret climate change as the environment's way of getting back at humanity for our exploitation of natural resources and derelict stewardship of the Earth. Whereas God used to be humanity's way of scaling up to the infinite and our idiom for framing divine intervention, it seems that the environment—from its underground ecosystems to its disintegrating stratosphere—is also a powerful (and empowering) imaginative resource for the cosmopolitan downtrodden. As the narrative unfolds, personal inconveniences and societal injustices intensify the narrator's anticipation for an underground revolution prompted by a large-scale environmental cataclysm. In these moments of heightened resentment, the prophecy returns, if not as a means for status retrieval, then as a measure for regaining some subjectivity when his subjectivity has been effaced or denied. As a foray into otherwise inaccessible cosmic forces, this apocalyptic refrain overwhelms personal and contextual elements—the “stuff” of the realist mode—in ways that either exaggerate or diminish (but ultimately distort) their significance.

The most sustained recapitulation of the prophecy takes place after the narrator is denied a waiter job at an upscale French restaurant because of his dark complexion. The maître d', Monsieur Pierre, brushes off the narrator's application mockingly: “*Tu es un peu trop cuit pour ça* (you are a little too well done for that)! *Le soleil t'a brûlé ta face un peu trop* (the sun has burned your face a bit too much)” (29). After storming out in a frenzied rage, the narrator “almost [trips] over the stroller of a dark-complexioned woman with five kids trailing behind her like ducks escaping a French cook” (30). The incident sets off his dystopian imagination. He returns to the cockroach as a redeeming trope, and to the promised insect invasion as a righteous revolution, but this time with an expanded use of the category:

Impotent, infertile filth! I shouted at Pierre. Your days are over and your kind is numbered. No one can escape the sun on their faces and no one can barricade against the powerful, fleeting semen of the hungry and the oppressed. I promised him that one day he would be serving only giant cockroaches on his velvet chairs. He had better remove the large crystal chandelier from the middle of the ceiling, I said, so the customers' long whiskers wouldn't touch it and accidentally swing it above his snotty head[...] And, and...! I shouted and I stuttered and I repeated, and I added, as my index fingers fluttered like a pair of gigantic antennae[...]Bring it on! Bring back the flatness of the earth and round surfaces! I shouted. Change is coming. Repent, you pompous erectile creatures!

(30-31)

As creatures that contaminate the entire narrative (due, in part, to their characteristic pervasiveness), cockroaches stand as a symbol for “the lowest denominator of life,” as “creatures that arouse disgust, and thus the urge to exterminate them” (Kamboureli 69). The narrator is inspired by their distinct abilities “to reside both under and above ground” as “creatures of the fringe” but also as tenacious “invaders” (69). Already all too aware of the cockroach's symbolic value and cultural resonances, the narrator expands its application to include those who are “hungry,” who are “oppressed,” and who cannot “escape the sun on their faces” (30). These are the categories of undesirability that have isolated racial and classed Others from the discourse of the human, “exiled [them] from the promises of Canadian multiculturalism” (Kraus 112), and rendered them closer ontologically to the figure of the cockroach. As Kraus suggests, “human rights are not a priori,” and those who “are nothing but human beings must continuously change their identities, adopt false accents and fake names, forget the past, and play the role of the happy and well-assimilated citizen, or they risk discovery” (113). Since “being human does not

guarantee human rights” (113), it is their likeness to the underground vermin that promises these racial and classed Others some compensation, and not any government or international organizing body’s superficial acknowledgment of their humanity. The plainest resistance to these biopolitical state mechanisms is the narrator’s “mutant urge” (31) to shed his human body—his “constantly shivering carcass” (9)—in exchange for a fully-actualized cockroach existence. By deliberately withholding his name, he has taken the first step towards abandoning any human identification.

That said, the narrator’s exasperation, volatility, and incoherence in this scene exposes the instability of the metaphor, not least in its conflated use. The slippery attempt to superimpose a historical pejorative (which he has internalized) unravels as he desperately tries to apply it on an expanded scale. The large, gluttonous cockroaches that he imagines invading the restaurant do not resemble the evasive, nimble, and resourceful cockroaches that inhabit his apartment and which he considers “his Virgilian guides [to] the underground” (Kamboureli 69). His effort to invert a white-supremacist argument about the insane propagation of immigrants and other undesirable populations—a corollary of second-scale chauvinism—by presenting it as a good thing, as an indication of resilience and physical dominance, misfires. Not only does it not agree with his sustained exposition throughout the novel of human excess (or the posthumanism informing that critique), but—as someone hypercritical of identitarian group solidarities among the disempowered—the alliance he imposes on the woman he runs into based on biological or numerical evidence (power in numbers) is even more fragile still. More importantly, his promotion of immigrant reproduction to an extreme is an example of how “what is self-evident or rational at one scale may well be destructive or unjust at another” (Clark 73). Overpopulation—which I approach in the strict sense “as the situation in which the population of

a species exceeds the long-term carrying capacity of its ecological context” (80)—is already a sensitive topic and one that is difficult to pursue without sounding politically suspect. Suffice it to say that the narrator’s answer to a second-scale injustice—that of inhospitality and racism—is a third-scale catastrophe. His second-scale preoccupations in this scene are so emotionally charged that he has no access to more genuine third-scale considerations. His reference to the pseudoscientific “flat earth” (30), combined with his faltering speech, betrays him<sup>11</sup>.

The divergent and, sometimes, polarized criticism surrounding *Cockroach* attests to its ability to navigate across local (individual/territorial) perspectives and global (planetary/deterritorialized) considerations. As critics of the book indicate, “most responses to the text tend to fall into one of two camps” (Poray-Wybranowska 190). While diaspora critics (Hout 2012; Sakr 2011; Abdul-Jabbar 2017) choose to attend to the narrator’s wartime injuries and thus paying close attention to the novel’s confessional style, material critics (Beneventi 2012; Kamboureli 2017; Kraus 2020; Poray-Wybranowska 2014) “focus on the novel’s Canadian context and its involvement with the politics of multiculturalism” (190). Although diasporic perspectives provide useful interpretations of the narrator’s “unresolved trauma complex” (Hout 339), these are largely immaterial readings of the immigrants’ shared precarity, itself exacerbated by exclusionary institutional and societal prejudices in Montréal. Those focusing on the novel’s diasporic entanglements and psychoanalytic implications miss out on the novel’s singularity as an example of immigrant literature about the host society (vs. immigrant literature about the homeland). More importantly, diaspora critics place undue emphasis on retrospection, and a world elsewhere, while *Cockroach* is clearly more attuned to the “here and now.” In many ways, their analyses resemble the myopic conclusions that the narrator’s

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<sup>11</sup> “During the Rwandan genocide the Hutus’ moniker for the Tutsis was Cockroaches.” (Kamboureli 69)

therapist, Genevieve, draws from his love affairs and wartime injuries: “For her, everything was about my relationship with women, but for me, everything was about defying the oppressive power in the world that I can neither participate in nor control” (5). A self-consciously unreliable character, the narrator resists patronizing and reductive interpretations of this kind. They are incompatible with the second-scale prejudices that he must confront on a daily basis. Worse yet, these first-scale concerns misinterpret the narrator’s alterity and sense of dejection as self-inflicted, inherent, or contracted from the Middle East. This is to overlook how far they are conditioned or even prescribed.

Writing against these first-scale preoccupations, material critics and Canadianists implicate the nation-state, its neoliberal discourses, and its chauvinistic society in the disenfranchisement of the immigrant populations in Montréal. Instead of reading the narrator’s cockroach-ness as an extension of his hallucinatory mind, they acknowledge the systems of regulation and biopolitical regimes that have driven him away from humanity and towards the underground. They recognize the narrator as a dissenting subject and as a blight to second-scale aspirations of disproportionate economic expansion and national homogeneity. That said, their uniform interpretation of the narrator misrepresents his (many) contradictions and outlandish behaviour. In material readings of the text, the narrator appears as an empowering and level-headed critic of capitalist society and the novel as a consistent and realist exposition of immigrant existence under neoliberalism. Because his aberrations are difficult to write back into conventional criticism, the disorienting and posthuman descriptions of excess—what I suggest are third-scale grapplings with the Anthropocene—are left unattended in second-scale criticism.

Again, the novel’s third-scale considerations do not diminish its first and second-scale commentary, but only derange them so that their anthropocentric and localized biases become

apparent. That said, scale-framing—“as a strategy for representing complex issues in ways that makes them more amenable to thought or overview” (Clark 74) by enabling “a calibrated and useful extrapolation between space and time” (71)—is also not without its inherent biases. The approach’s working premise of zooming in and out on issues that could be discussed in terms of “scale” runs a grave risk of “being a simplification and even an evasion” (74). In *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Anna Tsing generates a fuller account of the shortcomings of scalability both as a measure and as a science (38). She argues that scalability resists (bio)diversity because such interruptions cannot be neatly summed up or, better yet, “scaled up” (38) without necessarily disturbing the “framing assumptions” (38) that the scale depends on for its “infinite expansion” (37). For Tsing, the European colonial plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the resulting utilitarianism of the nineteenth century which “posited that everything on earth—and beyond—might be...exchangeable at market value” (40), as well as both of these historical precedents’ modern-day corporate manifestations, are all concomitants of scalability’s infinite expansion. However, the methodological alternative that she proposes—that of contaminated diversity whose “unit of analysis is the indeterminate encounter” (37)—does not dismiss scalability altogether or prematurely embrace nonscalability. Instead, Tsing’s contaminated diversity pays attention to the intersection of the scalable and the nonscalable—the indeterminate encounter—and the “rush of stories” (37) that such an occasion triggers.

The most obvious and unapologetic representative of nonscalability in the novel is the narrator himself. He is a paragon of intransigence and unpredictability—an impediment to Canadian society’s smooth functioning in every sense. As an immigrant to a majority culture, the narrator faces the two choices that all immigrants, at some point, must make: he can either

“accept integration into the majority culture” by undergoing the processes of assimilation and acculturation, or he could “accept permanent marginalization” as some communities—such as the Hutterites in Canada or the Amish in the United States—choose to do (Kymlicka 166). The narrator acknowledges neither option, and instead chooses to bother Canadian society with his impudence and brazen “lack of gratitude”—gratefulness being, after all, “the migrant’s duty” (Kraus 118). Moreover, he acts “against the conventional diasporic paradigm that assumes an immigrant like him would be immediately drawn toward his ethnic community” (Kamboureli 66), and instead forgoes belonging altogether, seeking no membership or solidarity from any group. Ontologically, he replicates categorical indeterminacy by identifying as “only half human” (245), the other half which he identifies as cockroach.

The critical literature on *Cockroach* attempts to take on the narrator’s palpable and stubborn alterity from different angles. Whereas Beneventi’s article keeps track of the narrator’s spatial infringement on inviolable private and public boundaries, Brittany Kraus reads the entire plot as one long attempt to escape state surveillance. Smaro Kamboureli indicates the various ways in which the narrator undermines the trope of therapy—and thus social rehabilitation mandated by the state—by deliberately unperforming the memory-work expected of him; adopting Kamboureli’s position, Mark Libin ventures a more *meta* perspective by arguing that Hage’s narrator unsettles “the good liberal reader, and indeed the good liberal host country” (76) by exposing “the all-too seductive liberal ideology that the enlightened bourgeoisie are not only capable of empathizing with the marginalized other but are equally capable of curing him of his trauma” (77). Valuable as these Canadianists’ arguments are, I propose that the narrator, as a nonscalable variable, cannot be absorbed into the smooth expansion of the government’s influence, cannot participate in Quebec’s nation-building aspirations, and does not contribute to

Canada's colourful multicultural mosaic (he cannot be "scaled up" in this way). He must therefore either undergo rehabilitation or risk permanent detention in a psychiatric ward. Mandated therapy and incarceration are, in the end, some of the state's foremost resources for bringing its society to a scale where "a "standard" individual can stand in for all as a unit of analysis" (Tsing 28). For these reasons, the entire narrative can be read as the intersection of the scalable with a volatile non-scalable variable, thus resulting in a "rush of stories" (37) indicative of contaminated diversity—which factors in both the human and the non-human—and not, say, multiculturalism, which is based on competing definitions of the human.

Whereas the capitalist mode insists—despite economic and ecological ruination—that its infinite expansion is concomitant with progress, the precariousness of the world we now inhabit—its populations and ecosystems' vulnerability to natural disasters, economic devastation, and global epidemics—proves that it is "a world without teleology" (20). In a postnatural world irrevocably altered by the intersection of human history with natural history, collaborative survival stands against capitalist "techniques of alienation that turn both humans and other beings into resources" (19). Tsing distinguishes collaborative survival from depictions of survival in popular culture that promote a "one-against-all" ethos or the "advancement of individual interests—whether 'individuals' species, populations, organisms, or genes—human or otherwise" (28). Collaborative survival, on the other hand, is "encounter-based" (34) and assumes that precarity, which implicates everyone and everything, "is a state of acknowledgment of our vulnerability to others...[and that] it is unselfconscious privilege that allows us to fantasize—counterfactually—that we each survive alone" (29). Whereas self-containment forecloses this acknowledgement of vulnerability, contaminating and being contaminated by the other means that "no self-contained individuals or groups [can] assure their self-interests

oblivious to the encounter” (34). Contaminated diversity proliferates when we negotiate our survival through these encounters.

Tsing’s book-length example of mushroom foraging by Southeast Asian communities in the wastelands of Oregon’s logged forests is an elaborate representation of collaborative survival made possible by contamination across different cultures and species. Although going over her ethnographic and botanical surveys would take me too far afield, Tsing provides another evocative (if brief) example of human and nonhuman collaboration:

In order to survive, we need help, and help is always the service of another, with or without intent. When I sprain my ankle, a stout stick may help me walk, and I enlist its assistance. I am now an encounter in motion, a woman-and-stick. It is hard for me to think of any challenge I might face without soliciting the assistance of others, human and not human. (29)

Although living on the fringes of Canadian society, the narrator is not a self-contained individual, but someone who constantly enlists the help of others in order to survive, and vice versa. Similar to Tsing’s woman-and-stick example, the narrator also requires nonhuman assistance to weather Canada’s harsh climate. Towards the end of the novel, he is finally able to steal a pair of boots from an elderly British widow in his apartment complex whose husband had served as an officer for the British colonial armies in Asia. After he slips into his new boots, the narrator feels, for the first time, “warm and stable” (253) as he walks towards his therapist’s office:

The grip of my boots’ soles anchored me more firmly than ever in the soil hidden beneath the street’s white surface...I crossed my legs and moved my feet in my boots, bending them forwards, backwards, and twirling them a bit, thinking of the old lady’s husband

marching to confront his enemies beyond the trenches and muddy battlefields. Now that I have laced my feet into boots, blood, and mud, this health clinic has started to feel homier. (257)

The narrator is now an “encounter in motion” (Tsing 29), a man-and-boots. His existence has become more bearable after he enlists the boots’ assistance. He is also contaminated by this encounter as he acknowledges the “blood and mud” that they had to step over to end up with him. This is contaminated diversity’s “ugly and humbling” side: it “implicates survivors in histories of greed, violence, and environmental destruction...The survivors of war remind us of the bodies they climbed over—or shot—to get to us” (Tsing 33). In the narrator’s case, both he and his newly-acquired boots have survived by abetting many such crimes.

*Cockroach* is a novel about its protagonist’s transformation by just one month’s encounters (its first words are a declaration of love—the ultimate expression of contamination). The narrator is disinterested in the self-contained—human or otherwise—and goes to great lengths to expose the vulnerabilities of the characters he encounters, even (or especially) if it means violating their privacy and breaking the law. Because he is mainly acquainted with immigrants and other social outcasts, the stories he uncovers are deeply tied to histories of oppression, torture, dislocation, and marginalization that are at odds with the image of multicultural tolerance that Canada would like to project. The most resounding example of the dissonance between Canada’s projected image as a beacon of liberality and the realities of its exploitative systems is perhaps the story of Farhoud, the narrator’s Iranian friend. After fleeing incarceration and rape-torture by the mullahs for homosexuality charges, Farhoud meets a closeted Canadian diplomat in Afghanistan who takes him as his lover. Through the diplomat’s connections, Farhoud immigrates to Canada where he is secretly frequented by the diplomat

“who slowly turned into a monster” and revealed his “xenophobic” colors: “Here, clean yourself,” the diplomat says to Farhoud, “You are not in your own country anymore” (111). Kamboureli describes these deliberate acts of painful remembrance as “unforgettings” that resist state attempts to establish and circulate a coherent narrative of its national homogeneity and historical continuity—a narrative whose legitimacy and efficacy depends on the “[instrumentalization of] the acts of remembering, forgetting, and misremembering” (57). Ultimately, the state seeks to mold the individual memories of its subjects through “the machination of national pedagogy” (57) to generate a uniform collective and cultural memory. How individual subjects choose to participate in these memory cultures determines their social positionality and the degree to which they belong to that society. Those who choose to commemorate their nation’s achievements and overlook its transgressions “forge a sense of participatory citizenship” (58), while, for others, “performing this responsibility [...] would imply acquiescence to the nation-state’s history of exclusionary and/or assimilationist policies that had subjugated them in the first place” (58). Kamboureli links these deliberate acts of unforgetting to the theory of commodity fetishism. Fundamentally, commodity fetishism is a mnemonic issue: ““To understand what we have made, we have to be able to *remember* it...*The enigma of the commodity is a memory disorder*”” (qtd. in Kamboureli 74; emphasis hers). The state’s attempts to suppress the social conditions of the Other’s production resemble the market-exchange processes that obscure the material relations that produce the commodity as a reified object. By aggressively exposing the “forgotten” processes that have relegated others like himself to the fringes of society, the narrator resists the conditions of his own commodification.

As the ultimate Other to modernity, nature—at once a romanticised “fetish” and a demonised “phobia”—has also been divorced from society for capitalism’s benefit through the same processes of mystification and historical suppression. As Harriet Johnson puts it,

the partitioning of nature and society involves a forgetting akin to reification.

Anthropocentric bourgeois society misremembers its integral connection with biophysical networks and envisages the earth as either a potential resource out there or a sink for pollution. (Johnson 319)

Here, again, nature’s exploitation and exclusion from collective discourse is presented as a memory problem. If, as Tsing suggests and as Kamboureli confirms, remappings of established narrative topographies resists capitalist efforts to obscure the conditions that exacerbate social alienation and self-containment, then the illusory separation of nature from society (and societal influence and encroachment) can also be undermined through “the rush of stories” (Tsing 37) that remind us that “even the most Promethean urban achievements rest on unpaid environmental debt” (Johnson 319). However, unlike market-place reification which ruptures with the workers’ “reckoning” (322) of their own qualitative (instead of formal or quantitative) value within the mode of production, our ways of life are so deeply interpellated into the ideological reification of nature that “we cannot recollect a non-dominating relation with [it] nor simply resume a genuine, non-distorted praxis” (326). For this reason, Johnson suggests an environmental “negative dialectics” (324) to decipher environmental reification without succumbing to the “consolations of premature de-reification”: it is not enough that we “retrace the natural history of social forms and the social history of the environment...[but] the stories we tell must also be implicated in the social conditions of [its] forgetting” (326).

Late in *Cockroach*, Hage introduces a pastiche of the wilderness-retreat motif familiar to Canadian immigrant fiction. But he does so to combine the suppressed histories retrieved through contaminated diversity with the unforgettings of negative dialectics. The narrator experiences a crisis of category when he is extracted from his natural habitat—the city—into nature. The narrator and his lover, Shohreh, leave the city for a secluded cabin. In yet another indeterminate encounter, he meets an indigenous cook at a diner along the way. The narrator asks the cook about cockroaches “and their history” (292). In a modified version of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ prophecy, the cook tells him about how the white man sullied the land by waking up the sun and making it shine—a reference to global warming—which caused all the birds to fly towards it, leaving the cockroaches to “cover the land and eat everything” (293). According to Johnson, unregistered and unacknowledged oral histories like the cook’s parable “resist reducing nature to the backdrop of bourgeois intimacies...[by disclosing] nature as an involved participant in our storylines rather than a mute given or steadfast set of physical laws.” Although these narratives cannot undo the effects of reification, they nevertheless “reopen denied possibilities,” “alter connections between things,” and “disturb settled associations” (325-326). They unsettle and expose the processes behind the production of nature as a reified object by framing it squarely as a social issue—a connection that has been purposefully mystified for humanity’s infinite extraction of finite resources. By tracing the origins of global warming back to settler-colonialism, the cook locates the beginnings of large-scale exploitation of nature in seventeenth-century America and not—as most environmental scientists propose—in the later industrialization of Europe. He communicates a version of “Plantationocene” ethics that link environmental injustice to the first waves of colonial invasion and genocide (Davis and Turpin 8).

As soon as the couple reach their destination, the narrator is anxious to leave: “nature horrifies me and open spaces make me feel vulnerable” (296). His nervous imagination is further provoked by the cook’s story: “what if early in the morning birds came and laid their giant claws on me” (296). Even though, as one critic notes, part of “the narrator’s anguished shift between [human and cockroach] states is prompted by Montreal” (Dobson 264), he is still able to construct a space in the underground that allows him some agency and an effective subterfuge. In this “urban ecology” (Poray-Wybranowska 201), sewers and drains act “as the nexus of exchange between natural and human-made spaces [and as the] border between the urban space, which sucks in natural resources, and the natural one, toward which wastes are pushed out” (200). In the wilderness, neither his humanity nor his cockroach-ness can protect him from nature’s encroachment. And while the city is inhospitable, nature, on the other hand, is indifferent. The only way for him to survive in the wilderness is to alter it for his own benefit. But as someone whose stubborn desire to unbelong outstrips his need to survive, the narrator chooses to leave instead. In a different context, he had stated that “[he did] not want to be part of anything because [he is] afraid [he] will become an invader” (210). After hearing the land’s oral history from the cook, the narrator knows better than to aggravate the disruption of the balance of nature.

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How does *Cockroach* reconcile the empathy fundamental to collaborative survival with the apathy of a warming planet? The straightforward answer is that it does not. While *Cockroach* addresses itself to both the intimacies of contamination and the abstractions of working across multiple scales, reconciling these two contradictory premises entails negotiations that would go against the novel’s themes of recalcitrance and unbelonging. Instead of opting for an unlikely

synthesis near the end, Hage concludes his novel on a note of incommensurability, disproportion, and flatness that indicates his third-scale proclivities. The set-up goes as follows: a few days after the narrator and Shohreh return from the wilderness, she visits the Iranian restaurant where he works, with her purpose being to assassinate the Iranian diplomat, Shaheed, who had been her rape-torturer in Iran. She hesitates and her plan to shoot him flounders, putting her in great danger. At the last minute, the narrator stabs Shaheed's bodyguard, shoots Shaheed, and rescues Shohreh before escaping down the kitchen drain in cockroach form. Whereas the murder of a diplomatic liaison should be a matter of great diegetic consequence, the offhand way it is presented has proven a critical conundrum. My sense is that the hurried order of events at the very end of the novel speaks to an unmistakable narrative deficit that critics have in turn rushed to overestimate.

Divergent readings of this abrupt ending have produced conflicting interpretations of the entire novel. While diaspora critics read the ending as a cathartic resolution and the conclusion of the narrator's post-war "unresolved trauma complex" (Hout 339), others view it in a much more negative light. To Maude Lapierre, the narrator is complicit in the kinds of violence he supposedly renounces by leaving Lebanon. According to Lapierre, he

deploys the concept of rescue as a strategy through which his violence can be re-signified as "justice". Cockroach's ending, then, has negative connotations because the narrator's escape from the novel replicates forms of global oppression which allow him to disavow his actions. (561)

The limitations of these first- and second-scale readings are plain. Critics imposing a psychoanalytic explanation to the ending assign too much credit to the narrator's confessions in therapy—confessions that he admits have more in common with Shahrazad's stories in *One*

*Thousand and One Nights* than his actual life (102). The narrator's unreliability is an aspect of his nonscalability that those fixated on first-scale assessments do not factor into their analyses. Lapierre's is the harshest take on the novel, and her interpretation turns on a dark reading of its ending; she dismisses the transformative potential of encounter-based contamination, and instead views all the narrator's interactions as exploitative. She insists that the finale reveals the narrator's appropriation of the state discourse of rescue in order to justify his aggression. However, the novel clearly indicates that the narrator had not premeditated Shaheed's murder and that he had no intention of carrying out Shohreh's plot until in the moment itself. Instead of implicating the narrator in malicious state discourses, his final gesture is the clearest expression of contamination inspiring collaborative survival. He is so profoundly transformed in his love for Shohreh that he cannot remain oblivious to her safety. It is precisely the apolitical character of the narrator's assassination of Shaheed that upsets critics like Lapierre and, more importantly, that contributes to the sense of unfulfilledness at the end.

The efforts to write back the finale of *Cockroach* to scales one and two are unconvincingly overdetermined readings of a narrative suddenly rushed into plot. While the murder of Shaheed is an act of grave international concern, its consequences seem at most political and unlikely to resurface as emergent scale effects. In fact, given the classified nature of Shaheed's visit to Montréal, it is doubtful that his death would provoke even a diplomatic dispute. His murder will not disturb humanity as a species. The bland way in which the capricious murder of a political figure is handled in the novel suggests that—on a planetary scale—it does not matter. The narrator's final transformation into a cockroach—followed by his whimsical “gondola” ride to the underground (305)—speaks to the triviality of the act. The reason why critics have assigned so much gravity to the murder despite its rushed presentation is

because—without this ending—*Cockroach* has no climax. Whereas this might be a recipe for a dull and unsuccessful plot, I argue it proves the most suitable representation of species-consciousness. As an analytical tool borrowed from the fields of geology and statistics, scale-framing recalibrates our spatial, temporal, and categorical assumptions, “altering conceptions of what makes something ‘important’ and what does not” (Clark 101). As a literary framework, it throws neglected parts of a text into sharper relief and obscures the “important” parts—the parts that have always been approached with certainty. This is also the legacy of the Anthropocene.

## CONCLUSION

The texts motivating this research project have in common, among other deciding factors, a palpable mistrust of “literal places” (Coleman 61)—places where identities and their attendant ideologies take root. These places of nativity—of homeland, indigenous land, and sacred land—are precisely the sites that Mouawad, Hage, and their characters cannot enter. Against the groundedness and literalism of “Indigenous place,” the texts I have in review occupy an abstract “diaspora space” (66) where “either by traumatic displacement or by imperial writ, land is wrenched free of its literal placedness and [...] becomes discourse” (67). The diasporic positions arising from the abstractions of discourse are often expressed either “in a politics of inclusion[,or] when the bid for inclusion encounters racism, class oppression, or other forms of rejection, then a politics of unbelonging” (62). As this thesis has shown, Mouawad and Hage are affiliated with an intransigent diasporic consciousness. In *Scorched*, *De Niro’s Game*, and *Cockroach*, the writers’ politics of unbelonging serves an antisystemic purpose that rearticulates the race, class, and gender disparities eschewed in multicultural discourse. The theories I pair with Mouawad and Hage’s texts address the abstractions that have been concretized in politics, legislation, and/or the economy, with subordinating effects. These constructs include race, class, gender, nationality, and the human/nature divide. Each of Spivak, Butler, and Clark examine the intersections between some or all of these systems in constructing the Other to hegemonic society.

Beyond diaspora and multiculturalism, there exists for these writers and their characters a shared and imagined site of indigeneity that can be remembered and invoked, but never reached. The Lebanon that persists in all three texts is the only claim they have to nativity, but it is also a site of trauma and disappointment—of identities that were never allowed to take root. As a state,

Lebanon has been so destabilized (as is the rest of the Middle East) by foreign meddling, corruption, and interior strife that it can no longer protect—let alone benefit—its people. The patriarchal and sectarian composition of the state (which its society mirrors in turn) exposes those outside its ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual norms to harm and violence beyond the levels of durability. Being held back by such a parasitic and compromised system casts a new and sinister light on the idea of rootedness. It recalls Amin Maalouf’s definition of roots in his memoir *Origins*:

I don’t like the word [roots], and I like even less the image it conveys. Roots burrow into the ground [...] they hold trees in captivity from their inception and nourish them at the price of a blackmail: “Free yourself and you’ll die” [...] Trees are forced into resignations; they need their roots. Men [*sic*] do not. (qtd. in Bayeh 6)

In the case of Lebanese rootedness, the metaphor loses its association with nourishment and belonging and becomes, instead, a symbol of confinement. This scrupulous and exilic subjectivity which, at once, recalls some of the pleasures of rootedness while realizing the metaphor’s limitations is what Said terms “contrapuntal awareness” (“On Exile” 148).

With an exile’s detachment, Mouawad and Hage voice their criticisms of Lebanese society and government. They recall what is “sweet” about nativity, but their “circumstances make it impossible to recapture that sweetness” (148). The combination of diasporic subjectivity and antisystemic rearticulation found in Mouawad and Hage’s writings reflects the kind of contrapuntal awareness that Said promotes in his examination of twentieth-century forms of mass exile. Both writers find in their dislocation and resettlement cause for serious artistic and political reflection, which they treat without either the nationalist or the self-indulgent baggage that often accompanies diasporic literature. My analysis of Mouawad’s play *Scorched* and

Hage's novels *De Niro's Game* and *Cockroach* focused on the subversive and countercultural potential of the texts in both of their Canadian and Lebanese settings. The theoretical considerations I brought to this project stem from my own interests in immigrant histories and experiences that risk erasure.

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