

COCKROACHES: REFUGEE JUSTICE IN THE NOVELS OF RAWI HAGE

by

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DEDICATION PAGE

This thesis is dedicated to Adel Benhmuda, Jan Szamko, Michael Akhmien, and the refugees Canada has failed.

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, refugees have been represented as passive, silent, and abject. While such representations are often used to elicit sympathy and support, they do so at the risk of dehumanizing their subjects. By rendering refugees as apolitical and decontextualized, such representations encourage ways of imagining refugees that justify exclusionary practices; because they lack the rights and political voice of a citizen, refugees are not owed anything, and so their claims can be accepted or rejected at the will of the host country. This thesis explores the ways in which Rawi Hage, by representing refugees who are active and politically engaged, challenges these representations of the abject and passive refugee. Contextualizing the experiences of migrants and refugees within the history of colonialism and the neo-colonial present, Hage questions the ideas of nationalism and sovereignty that underlie exclusionary practices and suggests that we consider refugees as deserving justice as well as aid.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In Canada, pity for the plight of the refugee has always gone hand in hand with the fear that the refugee's desperate face hides the hostile intentions of an enemy. While the popular image of that enemy has changed over the decades – swarms of unruly Irish Catholics escaping famine, Eastern European “Bolsheviks” driven out by political unrest, and now “terrorist” Arabs fleeing the fallout of colonialism in the Middle East – the hysteria that accompanies this “enemy” has been resurrected every time large numbers of refugees clamour for asylum. Alongside this fear, however, there exists a genuine belief that Canada is and should be a hospitable nation. While actual refugee claimants are often treated with great suspicion, the idea of the refugee still retains a good deal of cultural currency. The media is fond of repeating self-congratulatory stories about refugees who escape horrible conditions in foreign lands to arrive in Canada and begin new lives thanks to the benevolence of the Canadian people, and political leaders are quick to boast that Canada has a long history of accepting asylum-seekers, arguing that “our refugee system is amongst the most generous in the world” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada “Speaking Notes”). The political scientist Peter Nyers captures the disconnection between the idea of Canadian hospitality and the practice of Canadian xenophobia succinctly in his study of Canada's response to two different refugee crises in 1999. The first involved 5,000 Kosovar refugees who were accepted through a project coordinated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the second 599 refugee claimants from China who arrived in boats off the coast of British Columbia. As Nyers points out, “Canadians responded with great enthusiasm” to the state's acceptance of the Kosovar refugees, while the Chinese were “met with extreme hostility”

(*Rethinking Refugees* 81). The Kosovar refugees were seen to be legitimate, but the Chinese refugee claimants were immediately branded and treated as criminals.

The uneasy relationship between these two ways of thinking about the refugee – as potential threat and as victim in need of national benevolence – has led to a sharp (and deeply problematic) division between “authentic” and “bogus” refugees in Canadian political discourse. In order to differentiate between these two groups, and so create a narrative explaining why certain refugees should be accepted while others are denied, Western governments, media, and even activist organizations have tended to assign certain characteristics to each. Nyers suggests that “[t]he politics of being a refugee has as much to do with the cultural expectation of certain qualities and behaviours that are demonstrative of “authentic” refugeehood (e.g. silence, passivity, victimhood) as it does with legal definitions and regulations” (*Rethinking Refugees* xv). In contrast to this silent and passive “authentic” refugee, the “bogus” refugee is usually represented as being clever, pragmatic, and presenting some kind of threat (usually economic or political). While this division reflects a pragmatic attempt on the part of liberal humanitarians to combat Canada’s long history of xenophobia, suggesting as it does that authentic refugees pose no threat to Canadian society and so should be welcomed into the nation, it does so at the cost of dehumanizing the “authentic” and demonizing the “bogus.”

The different responses to the Kosovars and the Chinese were doubtless influenced by a number of factors – Canada’s involvement in Kosovo as a member of NATO may have meant that more Canadians were aware of the desperate nature of the situation in the Balkans, and the racial and ethnic differences between the “European” Kosovars and the “Oriental” Chinese likely played a part as well – but perhaps the most

significant difference between the two groups lies in how they came to Canada. In the case of the Kosovar refugees, the Canadian government had complete control from the beginning. The number of refugees was decided through negotiations with the United Nations, the Kosovars had already claimed refugee status before arriving in Canada, and the Canadian government controlled their transportation and arrival. The Kosovars, one suspects, were treated with relative “enthusiasm” because the circumstances of their arrival were understood to mitigate perceived risk. “Hospitality” would be the wrong word for such an arrangement: the acceptance of the 5,000 Kosovars was about management, not welcome (a fact further underscored by their confinement upon arrival in the country on isolated military bases). Conversely, the Chinese refugee claimants arrived by their own means, had no previous contact with the Canadian government, and were not yet confirmed as refugees at the time of their arrival.¹ Although both groups were driven from their homes by a number of complex factors, the remarkably clear distinction made between them speaks to a need on the part of the government and the popular press to delineate absolutely between “authentic” and “bogus” refugees.² Magnifying the differences and disregarding any similarities they may have shared, the Kosovars (in their passivity and supposed voicelessness) were seen to embody the

¹To legally be considered a refugee, an individual must prove to an authorized evaluating body (such as the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada) that he or she has a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees 14). Until that individual’s claim is evaluated, they are considered to be a refugee claimant or asylum-seeker. While the Kosovar refugees had already had their cases evaluated before arriving in Canada, the Chinese intended to make refugee claims upon arriving in Canada. It should be noted that to do so is entirely legal; asylum-seekers who arrive at Canada’s borders may have their claims rejected, but the law still requires that a claim can only be rejected outright if the claimant has gone through the evaluation process.

²It is important to note that civil servants and Immigration and Refugee Board members who are responsible for processing claims are often much more aware of the nuances and complexities obscured by such terms.

characteristics of “authentic” refugees, while the Chinese (through their agency and willingness to make claims on the Canadian government) were branded “bogus” long before any actual assessment of their claims could take place.³

Suggesting that the only authentic refugee is a silent and passive one who can either be safely pre-identified or who arrives at the carefully controlled space of the airport terminal or border crossing has deeply pernicious effects. Stripping refugees of agency and voice positions them outside of common humanity – either they “stop being specific persons and become pure victims in general: universal man, universal woman, universal child, and, taken together, universal family” (Malkki 378), or they are “conferred animal status, one that is both prepolitical and speechless” (Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees* 88). This in turn means that “authentic” refugees can be allowed to endure a much lower standard of living than would be considered acceptable for citizens. A recent article in the *Waterloo Region Record* provides a disturbing example of this two-tier understanding of human rights. Titled “Paradise found: refugees grateful to finally have country to call home,” the article tells the story of Samjida Begum and her husband Abdul Karim who “live in a cramped Kitchener townhouse with their five children and Begum's 69-year-old mother” (Monteiro). Instead of focusing on their poverty and discomfort, the piece gives an account of their harrowing escape from racial discrimination in Myanmar and brutal treatment in a Bangladesh refugee camp in order to highlight the story's central message: that however depressing their living situation may be by Canadian standards, Begum, Karim and their family are “very, very lucky to be

³ Ashley Bradimore and Harald Bauder discuss how media coverage ubiquitously employed the term “‘illegal’ despite the migrants’ legal rights to claim refugee status at the Canadian border” (10), going on to suggest that this “‘Illegality’ is intertwined with the migrants’ mode of transportation, because ‘the fact that migrants arrived to Canada’s shore by boat and not through ‘legal channels’ criminalized the migrants’ immediately in the media’s eye” (10).

here” (Monteiro).

Because citizenship is the primary ground for national belonging and political action and refugees have lost their status as citizens, their ability to participate in politics through the established democratic channels is constrained. The refugee claimant who attempts to retain political agency despite loss of citizenship causes great uneasiness for the nation to which they appeal for help. It is expected that Begum and Karim will accept – gratefully – whatever the state offers them and not demand the rights that (at least theoretically) come with citizenship. Guatemalan-born artist and activist Francisco-Fernando Granados draws attention to the framework of expectations Canadian society has established regarding refugees when he points out, that, quite simply, “Refugees are meant to be grateful, and talking about the struggles of institutionalized discrimination or the brutalizing refugee certification process would not fit into these frames” (“Reciprocal Gazing”). The discourse of the grateful refugee, however, is not only disempowering; it also masks the harsh realities that many refugees experience upon arriving in Canada and obliquely suggests that refugees can be treated in this way because they are “lucky to be here.” Of course, this phrase carries with it rather sinister undertones: telling someone they are lucky to have something implies that they might just as easily not have it, and that if they are not careful, they might lose it.

Even as the “bogus” refugee has become an increasingly common term in Canadian political discourse, theorists, activists and writers have become vocal in their resistance to the straightforward binary that this term implies, and the assumptions about citizenship and political order that lie behind it. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has suggested that, in a world in which the traditional power of the nation-state

is being eroded, the refugee is “the border concept that radically calls into question the principles of the nation-state and, at the same time, helps clear the field for a no-longer-delayable renewal of categories” (“We Refugees” 117). For Agamben, the refugee's very marginality becomes the central point through which a reimagination of global structures becomes possible. At the same time, Peter Nyers has drawn attention to the fact that, while the very existence of so many refugees serves as a reminder of the potential for states to fail in their mandate to protect and provide for their citizens, “the prevailing attitude in conventional analyses of refugee movements is one that provides no place for refugees to articulate their experiences and struggles or to assert their (often collectively conceived) political agency. Refugees are silenced by the very discourses that attempt to provide solutions to their plight” (*Rethinking Refugees* xiv). While the existence of refugees clearly points to the potential fragility of the nation-state, refugees are given no space in which to articulate their own experience of these failures or offer critiques of what may have caused them. After a century of human displacement on an unprecedented scale (much of it caused by European wars and military or colonial interventions)⁴ the traditional image of the abject refugee cannot and should not be sustained.

Lebanese-born novelist Rawi Hage left his native country during the long civil war that took place between 1975 and 1990, moving first to New York and later to

⁴The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees was established in 1950 to manage the massive displacement of people caused by the Second World War. However, its global mandate quickly led it to become involved with refugees fleeing conflicts caused by the Cold War and various wars of decolonization. Towards the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, it has also had to deal with refugees displaced by the war in Vietnam and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Currently, refugees largely come to Canada from former colonies (Afghanistan, Sudan, Iraq, and Syria are currently the top refugee producing countries), and their flight is often caused either by Western invasions (in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq) or by deeply entrenched political or ethnic conflicts with roots in Western colonialism (United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees News 2).

Montreal. He has worked tirelessly throughout his literary career to subvert and question the notion of the abject refugee. His three novels, *De Niro's Game* (2006), *Cockroach* (2008), and *Carnival* (2012), challenge traditional representations of the refugee and immigrant experience by portraying characters who refuse to play the role of the grateful refugee and instead challenge the inequalities they face in their new homes. Hage's novels also question the logic of sovereignty that assumes states are free to accept or reject foreigners as they choose. While he suggests that ideally the world would be fluid and borderless, he recognizes that the weakening of the nation-state under globalization has not affected everyone evenly; the influence and power of wealthy and politically-connected global elites crosses borders with impunity while the refugees, immigrants, and temporary foreign workers whose lives have been shaped and disrupted by the interests of these elites find borders all too solid.

Hage's vision is uncompromisingly cosmopolitan. He sees every border as an illegitimate exercise of power, and his work mercilessly scrutinizes the inequalities that are built into and sustained by current structures of political belonging. At the same time, he is deeply committed to exploring how these structures are experienced, challenged, subverted, and exploited by the individuals who participate in them. Hage's characters boldly refuse to be defined by their places of origin, but they also refuse to uncritically assimilate into the Western nations to which they flee. Perhaps most importantly, they strive to retain their political voices even when they are denied access to the accepted channels for political action. For these reasons, Hage's work can be helpful both in critiquing the notion of the abject refugee, and in reframing the conversation to provide space to imagine modes of political action that do not rely on citizenship.

My thesis takes up Hage's work as a way of both critiquing the discourse of refugee abjection and imagining different frameworks through which refugees might be represented, frameworks that allow for different – and hopefully more fruitful – kinds of political action. My intention is neither to advocate for a radical politics that rejects the nation-state nor to argue for the necessity of resisting the structures of capitalism. Rather, I start with the assumption that literary analysis can serve emancipatory goals by doing what it does best: examining how literature and storytelling explore the weaknesses and faults of systems, structures, and people, and present ways of pushing the limits of those systems, structures and people. Hage's representations of refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers direct our attention to very basic moral questions about justice and violence. By touching on philosophical as well as political questions, his novels consider how refugees who have been placed outside of the structures of political belonging can assert and defend their humanity in the face of the dehumanizing experiences of poverty and discrimination. While his characters' commitment to a radical cosmopolitan ethics that rejects national politics as a potential ground for action ultimately forces many of them to embrace forms of political resistance that end in tragedy, Hage's capacity to comprehend and represent the complex operations of inequality in the modern world provides generative ways of imagining kinds of political action that might be able to restore political agency to refugees.

In my first chapter, I use the recent arrest of refugee claimant Raed Jaser on charges of plotting terrorism as a way to engage Western responses to the threat of the “dangerous guest.” Due to ubiquitous uses of the term “hospitality” to refer to the relationship between the state and the asylum-seeker – what I term “state-hospitality” –

there is embedded in this very discourse the idea that asylum-seekers are guests and states are hosts. This in turn means that the discourse is always haunted by the spectral fear of the dangerous guest, the guest who takes advantage of the host's vulnerability. This idea of hospitality also assumes the host's sovereign control of her own territory, implying as it does that the host is freely offering a gift to the guest; after all, one cannot offer hospitality if one does not own the thing one shares. Because of this, state-hospitality is predicated on the belief not only that every state is sovereign over its own territory and therefore free to accept or deny migrants in the same way that citizens are free to accept or deny guests into their own homes, but that states also have a duty to exercise discretion in who they accept in order to protect their citizens from dangerous foreigners. *De Niro's Game* follows an asylum-seeker as he escapes from a country torn by civil war and attempts to find refuge in the West, and reading it in the context of the tradition of state-hospitality that has evolved through the work of Kant, Derrida, Gideon Baker, and Mireille Rosello, I posit that the straightforward view of sovereignty which suggests nations should be free to accept or deny whoever arrives at their borders has become antiquated in a post-colonial world of international capital, proxy wars, and massive human displacement. Using Hage's insights into the dynamics of the globalized world, I argue that state-hospitality obscures the existing connections between Western states and the people in other nations with whom they interact, shape, and often effect negatively, and so reinforces a naïve belief among citizens of Western states that they should have the sovereign right to refuse asylum.

While *De Niro's Game* challenges the logic of the nation-state by showing how the history of Western imperialism and the neo-liberal globalization of the present reveal

a world in which national sovereignty and independence are increasingly illusory, *Carnival* continues this line of reasoning through an exploration of the modern cosmopolitan city.⁵ Cosmopolitanism has frequently been invoked as a way of “thinking and feeling beyond the nation” (as the subtitle of Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins anthology of essays puts it) and yet the optimistic humanism that often serves as the basis of cosmopolitan critiques of the nation-state tends to elide the ways in which the nation-state still remains the only concrete ground for political belonging and all that comes with it (at least in certain nations): protected rights, social services, subsidized or public education, access to courts, and so forth. While cosmopolitanism provides a powerful way to theorize ethics and politics in a globalized world, it is important to bear in mind the very real power that nations retain through their ability to regulate and control human movement and political belonging. The nation-state may no longer function according to the logic of sovereignty and independence, but it is still through citizenship that networks of social support and political action are primarily mediated. Those who do not have citizenship – or who lack full access to the benefits of citizenship – often find themselves vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Using Hage’s carefully imagined critique of the cosmopolitan city and adapting John Porter’s notion of the “vertical mosaic,” I want to suggest that *Carnival* gives us an image of “vertical cosmopolitanism” that takes seriously the radically different experiences of cosmopolitanism among people who share the same physical spaces. Globalization and mass migration effect different classes,

⁵While *Carnival* is Hage’s third novel, for thematic reasons I deal with it in my second chapter and take up his second novel, *Cockroach*, in my third chapter. The cosmopolitanism that so preoccupies *Carnival* flows organically from the problems with hospitality dealt with in the first chapter, while the theme of vengeance that is so integral to *Cockroach* stands, I believe, as one of Hage’s most important contributions to Canadian refugee literature. For these reasons, I have departed from what might seem to be the most natural chronology for a study of Hage’s work.

nationalities, and ethnic groups in different ways, and Hage is acutely aware of the fact that many standard divisions – along racial or gender lines, for example – do not fully account for the nuanced structuring of power in the twenty-first century. I bring Ambilavander Sivanandan’s theory of xeno-racism⁶ into conversation with Peter Nyers’ notion of “abject cosmopolitanism” to suggest how vertical cosmopolitanism might offer a more nuanced way of thinking about the dynamics of contemporary Canadian society. Vertical cosmopolitanism affirms the ethical value of cosmopolitanism as an attempt to recognize loyalties that are not based on familial or national membership while remaining critical of the radically different ways in which cosmopolitanism and globalization are experienced, especially by politically disenfranchised groups such as refugees and temporary foreign workers.

My third chapter explores the way in which Hage’s second novel, *Cockroach*, uses the revenge story as a way of drawing attention to one of the most problematic aspects of “refugeeness:” the difficulties refugees face in receiving justice for the wrongs that have been done to them in either their countries of origin or their countries of refuge. While justice is one of the most fundamental and universal principles of human rights, it is always manifested in particular cases and mediated through particular systems. Lacking citizenship, refugees frequently don’t have access to these systems and so are often placed in positions where they have no recourse to justice. Building on Giorgio Agamben’s work on the notion of “bare life,” I explore the ways in which this places refugees in a position of subhumanity. Stripping refugees of any recourse to justice removes them from the ethical sphere of the human subject and places them on an

⁶Xeno-racism is a way of considering the interplay between xenophobia and racism. Xeno-racism is “not just directed at those with darker skins, from the former colonial territories, but at the newer categories of the displaced, the dispossessed and the uprooted” (Sivanandan 2).

animalistic plane; bare life exists in the liminal space in which human beings are recognized as being alive but are not seen as having the rights that are owed to humans. Like animals, they can be pitied and given succor, but they cannot make demands. In these kinds of radical circumstances, where individuals and groups have been denied all access to systems of justice, revenge becomes one of the only avenues through which marginalized individuals can assert their right to justice and, by extension, their right to be treated as human. Drawing on the American philosopher Peter A. French's work on the ethics of vengeance, I consider how *Cockroach* presents a situation in which a refugee who cannot be granted justice through the established legal system takes it into her own hands through an act of vengeance. This act of refugee vengeance – vengeance which becomes a political act because it communicates and rebels against the abject position of refugeeness – parallels the historical cases of Sholem Schwartzbad and Soghomon Tehlirian,⁷ both of whom used vengeance to draw attention to and demand redress for the violence that had been done against their Jewish and Armenian communities in Ukraine and the Ottoman Empire, respectively. Turning to Hannah Arendt's distinction between violence and power, I explore the limits of this kind of violence in order to consider ways in which various types of refugee activism are able to similarly assert the refugee's political voice and potentially change the larger structures that have caused it to be silenced in the first place.

My thesis concludes by reflecting on the practical value of Hage's work as a way of challenging damaging and stereotypical representations of the abject refugee, and on

⁷Sholem Schwartzbad, a Ukrainian Jew, killed the former Ukrainian political leader Symon Petlura in Paris in 1925. He was acquitted by a French court because the killing was ruled to be just redress for Petlura's role in the anti-semitic pogroms of 1919-1920. Armenian Genocide survivor Soghomon Tehlirian killed the Turkish Grand Vizir Talaat Pasha (who had played a prominent role in the planning and execution of the Genocide) in Berlin in 1921 and was acquitted on similar grounds by a German court.

the problems that arise from his ultimately tragic politics. Hage offers a much-needed correlative to uncritical and sentimental portrayals of refugee and immigrant struggles, but his radically cosmopolitan vision leaves little room for the kind of collective political action that might allow refugees to assert a politically effective voice. Ironically enough, both of these facts spring from the uncompromisingly moral nature of Hage's literary project. Because his characters all, in the end, refuse to compromise their principles in order to assimilate into a comfortable life in the West, they assert their individual sense of moral agency and their commitment to radically emancipatory politics. In this way, they challenge the political abjectness of the refugee or migrant by presenting the refugee or migrant as the moral centre of the novel. They become Agamben's "border concept that radically calls into question" not only "the principles of the nation-state" but the very principles of the ascendant neo-liberal world order. However, because they so completely refuse to capitulate to those in places of political or economic power, or play to the expectations of mainstream Western society, they are eventually driven underground. In refusing to compromise their individual sense of morality, they also refuse to make the kinds of compromises that might provide a way for refugees, immigrants, and other members of the dispossessed underclasses created by rampant capitalism and bigoted nationalism to create effective networks of political resistance that could lead to concrete change. Hage's characters reject the kind of politics of compromise that might allow them to actually realize the radically emancipatory politics for which they advocate and so they remain, unfortunately, tragic figures; revolutionaries without a revolution.

Chapter 2: The Strangeness of the Stranger

We come to these countries for refuge and to find better lives, but it is these countries that made us leave our homes in the first place.

- Rawi Hage, *Cockroach*

On April 23rd, 2013, Raed Jaser was taken into custody by the RCMP on allegations that he and Chiheb Esseghaier had plans to derail a VIA Rail train. Jaser, a permanent resident, came to Canada with his family from the United Arab Emirates as a teenager and applied for refugee status in 1993. The long and complicated story of his tangles with the law, his multiple attempts to avoid deportation, and his eventual pardon have raised again the fearsome spectre of the dangerous guest in Canadian refugee discourse (“Canada tried to deport terror suspect”). This spectre is never very far from the surface – since the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001, there has been a growing concern about the potential security threat posed by the immigrant, the refugee, and the asylum-seeker – but Jaser's arrest comes in the midst of a sea change in Canadian Immigration and Refugee policy and the troubled story of his time in Canada has quickly been taken up as a symbol of the supposed “laxness” of the current system. This response, and the thinly-veiled xenophobia that lies behind it, is symptomatic of “the link made by political elites across the western world between 'stronger,' 'tighter,' 'more secure' border controls and a desired drop in asylum applications” (Baker 116), a link which is in turn used to justify exclusionary immigration and refugee policies and an increasingly sharp rhetorical distinction between “legitimate” and “bogus” refugees.

Whether Jaser is found guilty or not – something that has yet to be proven at the time of writing – his case crystallizes a growing fear that Canada is being taken

advantage of by malicious or opportunistic foreigners, the “bogus refugees” who have become a staple justification for changes to immigration and refugee policy. This fear is at least partially based on a sincere belief that Canada is, in fact, a hospitable and open country, and that this hospitality and openness have made it vulnerable to swindlers and terrorists. It is worth noting that recent changes to the refugee determination process, which allow the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Jason Kenney to designate certain “safe” countries, citizens of which “have reduced rights in the refugee process” (Canadian Council for Refugees, “Overview”),⁸ were justified by an appeal not to nationalism or (overt) xenophobia, but to hospitality. Kenney argued that “our generous asylum system has been abused by too many people making bogus refugee claims. Canadians take great pride in the generosity and compassion of our immigration and refugee programs. But they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity or take advantage of our country” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, “Speaking Notes”). By grounding the need for changes to the immigration system in a reference to “those who abuse our generosity or take advantage of our country,” Kenney uses the very rhetoric of hospitality to justify its limitation.

However, while Kenney uses the fear that strangers welcomed into Canada might come with malicious intent to justify furthering a neo-conservative political agenda, it is a fear that can never be entirely absent from any real discussion of hospitality. Hospitality involves opening oneself up to strangers, and this “strangeness” implies an unknown –

⁸The rationale behind designating “safe” countries, that is, “democratic countries that respect human rights” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada “Speaking Notes”), is ostensibly to streamline the refugee process by treating claims from functioning liberal democracies with a greater degree of skepticism. In practice, however, the “safe” designation tends to obscure the fact that some minority groups within these democratic countries do not actually receive the rights that they are guaranteed by law. The Roma people in Hungary and the Czech Republic, who are frequently victims of ethnically motivated violence and discrimination despite living in “democratic countries that respect human rights,” provide an unfortunate example of the dangers with this practice.

and so potentially dangerous – quality. While Jaser serves as a convenient embodiment of this threat, the fear he conjures up is rather more spectral. Whether or not he actually had plans to derail a train is beside the point: latent in any act of hospitality is the possibility that “guests” – be they tourists, refugees, immigrants, or migrant labourers – have the potential to take advantage of their host. Useful as it might be for those pushing a more exclusionary immigration and refugee agenda to have cases like Jaser’s to make examples of, the federal government does not need *actual* dangerous foreigners in order to conjure up the fear of dangerous foreigners.

What is important here is the way in which a very specific rhetoric of state-hospitality is used to defend inhospitable practices. It is precisely because Canadians (like the citizens of other Western nations) are encouraged to imagine their relationship to refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seekers as governed by the rules and risks of hospitality that they feel so justified in refusing that hospitality. By invoking the spectral danger posed by the “bogus refugee,” political leaders are able to present tighter and stricter controls over citizenship and immigration as prudent and necessary “in order that the greater violence of having no hospitality to offer at all is avoided” (Baker 13). What is at stake in the discourse surrounding the dangerous foreigner, however, has wider implications. In addition to pragmatic concerns regarding who decides what counts as “bogus,” or the decreased time periods granted refugee claimants in which they can effectively substantiate their claims,⁹ it is important to also step back and ask why it is that in the twenty-first century some nations are overwhelmingly the destinations of

⁹The Canadian Council for Refugees has criticized recent changes to Canada’s refugee determination system by arguing that “The new system imposes unrealistic deadlines on all refugee claimants. The short timelines will particularly disadvantage the most vulnerable refugees, including survivors of torture and rape, women with claims based on gender persecution, and refugees fleeing persecution on the basis of their sexual orientation” (“Concerns”).

asylum-seekers and other nations seem to constantly generate them. It is also necessary to ask at what point in the securitization of state-hospitality the term “hospitality” becomes so distorted that it ceases to be of any use at all. In stepping back from the immediate concerns surrounding immigration and refugee policy and viewing them through the lens of Rawi Hage's *De Niro's Game*, I intend to open up a space in which some of the more complicated political problems that come from viewing state-hospitality in the context of a globalized and post-colonial world may emerge.

2.1: State-Hospitality and the State of Hospitality

Hospitality has been used to describe the relationship between nations and strangers at least since Kant employed it to mean “the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another’s country” (Kant 118), and the notion of Canada as a hospitable country welcoming those who arrive on its shores is firmly established in the nation's cultural imagination – regardless of what counter-narratives Canadian history itself might suggest. But Kant’s use of hospitality, simple as it might seem, relies on a number of important assumptions, chief among which are the twin notions of sovereign territory and the nation-state. When Jason Kenney speaks of “Canadians” who “have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity or take advantage of our country” he collapses an entire population of 32 million into a single voice with a single viewpoint and no internal disagreements about what constitutes “tolerance” and “abuse.” In addition to willfully misrepresenting the complexities of the Canadian electorate, this way of framing hospitality assumes that refugees and immigrants should be grateful for any “generosity” at all because, presumably, it is a gift – the property of the Canadian

people to be offered or denied at will.

Hospitality *qua* hospitality, however, implies a complex and unstable relationship. If the guest is entirely at the mercy of a host, who may or may not prove hospitable, the host also opens herself up to violation should the guest turn out to be dangerous. And so hospitality is always a matter of mutual vulnerability – if the host is inhospitable the guest may find himself persecuted, and if the guest is dangerous the host may find herself a hostage. Because of this mutual vulnerability, potential hosts are always caught between two morally fraught possibilities: that by receiving a dangerous guest they might endanger their own households, and that by refusing hospitality to a guest they might turn away someone in legitimate need of help. When hospitality is used to imagine a national duty towards immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers, this relationship, as Mireille Rosello points out, becomes a metaphorical one (3). This does not necessarily make it unhelpful, but it does obscure aspects of hospitality which have traditionally been key elements of its conception and practice. In this chapter, I am most concerned with the way in which the metaphorical use of hospitality – what I will henceforth refer to as “state-hospitality” – relies on a problematic conception of sovereign territory.

State-hospitality implies sovereign territory. Without sovereign territory – property over which the host has control such that she might share or refuse to share it with another – there can be no hospitality. But sovereign territory is always limited. Jacques Derrida notes that it is precisely this finitude, which places restrictions on what the host can offer, that makes “unconditional hospitality” (135) impossible; so that she might not be put in the position of having nothing at all to share, the host must restrict her generosity. Regardless of these pragmatic considerations, however, Derrida still upholds

unconditional hospitality as the ideal, and uses it to reproach the increasingly inhospitable West. Much recent work on hospitality follows this same trajectory. But while Derrida is deeply sensitive to the ways in which the rhetoric of security often masks an outright refusal to be hospitable – especially, I might add, in the twenty-first century West – this sensitivity causes him to pay insufficient attention to the ways in which colonized and indigenous peoples who extended hospitality to imperialistic guests were often repaid with violence, and the World Trade Center attacks serve as a reminder that, even in the hyper-securitized West, the threat of foreign terrorists entering a country to launch attacks on its citizens from within is very real. However good and generous the state's intentions might be, the assumption of finite sovereign territory embedded in hospitality requires it to place its responsibility to its own citizens before any wider duties to refugees or the international community. For these reasons, the nation's border delineates an area of responsibility as well as control, and hospitality governs the liminal space in which the foreigner who arrives at the border asks to be made a responsibility of the state. It is the state's very sovereignty over its own territory – its ability to grant or deny the foreigner's request – which makes this a hospitable relationship.

It is precisely this notion of sovereign space that I will seek to question in this chapter. The discourse of state-hospitality as it is currently framed in politics and public discourse generally assumes that, because the responsibility of a state is bordered (both physically and in the more abstract sense of citizenship), it has the freedom to welcome or turn away those who ask to be put under its protection – indeed, it has the obligation to judiciously do so.¹⁰ In this chapter I will consider how the complex interpenetrations of

¹⁰This is not to say that these borders or state responsibility are static, especially in an age where wars of intervention are commonplace and states of exception are more and more frequently invoked to suspend or

Western power in a globalized and post-colonial world make problematic the straightforward assumption that the Western nation state, in choosing to drastically limit the hospitality it extends in the name of security, is merely operating under the conventions of state-hospitality as articulated by Immanuel Kant and ratified by the United Nations through documents such as the United Nations *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*.¹¹ In order to examine how assumptions about the sovereignty of the state and its right to refuse hospitality are made problematic by the legacy of colonialism and the current extent to which neo-colonial Western powers continue to exert a significant degree of influence over the rest of the world, I will explore how the discourse of hospitality has failed to fully account for the drastic changes that colonialism and globalization have wrought.

While questions of hospitality are foundational to western political, ethical, and religious thought from its very roots in antiquity, I will take the work of Immanuel Kant as my starting point. Theorizing a world that was rapidly fracturing along lines of national sovereignty, Kant's brief essay "Perpetual Peace" provides one of the most influential modern accounts of hospitality, grounding it in the agency of the sovereign nation-state. From Kant, I will move to the radical reformulation of hospitality as a foundational element of ethics that arises from the work of Jacques Derrida. Whereas Kant imagines hospitality as a pragmatic way to facilitate peace between states, Derrida

terminate citizenship or the rights of citizenship (consider the case of Omar Khadr, in which the Canadian government colluded with the United States in having a Canadian citizen imprisoned, mistreated, and interrogated for years before he was officially charged with a crime). However, these practices of exception still reinforce the fact that state responsibility has limits, blurred and shifting though such limits might be.

¹¹The *Convention and Protocols* describe the basic responsibilities its signatories owe to refugees. It follows the spirit of Kantian hospitality in assuming that states only have a responsibility to harbour those who have a "well-founded fear of being persecuted" (14).

reconfigures hospitality as the ideal basis for all ethical behavior; As Gideon Baker suggests, “for Jacques Derrida, [hospitality] is the very principle of ethics itself” (3). While Derrida's account draws attention to the way in which the dangerous guest is a necessary possibility in any real account of hospitality, because his account is directed towards an audience in a position of power – towards a potential host, as it were – he does not fully explore the guest's monstrous potential. While he gestures to this possibility when he suggests that the host may become a hostage of the guest (123), he does not discuss the fact that the history of colonialism is, in many cases, the history of the host-as-hostage. I will turn to Julia Emberley and Gideon Baker to explore how the kind of unconditional hospitality for which Derrida pushes has been deeply perilous for colonized and indigenous peoples, where the unknown guest has turned out to be a dangerous one indeed. Following these post-colonial commentaries, I will engage with Mireille Rosello's critique of the very use of hospitality as a metaphor to speak of state interactions with refugees and immigrants. Rosello examines the ways in which the increased bio-political power of the modern state has robbed the metaphor of hospitality of any real meaning. By re-grounding the discourse of hospitality in the actual movements of displaced peoples and the policies of Western states who (don't) receive them, she opens up a space in which to consider how hospitality functions in a post-colonial world. In providing some context for how the critical conversation about hospitality has developed, I will be able to show how this conversation, with its emphasis on the strangeness of the stranger, has obscured the ways in which this strangeness should no longer be taken as given in a post-colonial world, and has in fact led to a profoundly damaging tendency to dehumanize refugees and asylum-seekers.

In his brief but influential 1795 essay “Perpetual Peace,” Immanuel Kant puts forward a philosophical proposal for how world peace could be achieved through a more thoughtfully organized system of international relations. In a few short pages, he lays out an elegant but simple argument that peace is to be achieved through security – on the individual, national, and international levels. Kant's theory is predicated on the belief that it is through a clear sense of political belonging that stable relations among peoples and states are created, and it locates the grounds for this political belonging in the sovereign nation-state. By so doing, Kant assumes two things: that other types of belonging (familial, tribal, religious) are subordinate to the nation, and that the world should be parceled up along national lines. While these assumptions might be taken for granted in the twenty-first century, they have had far-reaching implications. By suggesting that the world be divided into sovereign states, Kant reduces hospitality to a mechanism by which citizens of one state who find themselves abroad can be confident they will not receive hostile treatment from another state. Kant's “universal hospitality” (118) is formulated as the barest possible guarantee of security:

Hospitality (hospitableness) means the right of an alien not to be treated as an enemy upon his arrival in another’s country. If it can be done without destroying him, he can be turned away; but as long as he behaves peaceably he cannot be treated as an enemy. He may request the *right* to be a *permanent visitor*. . . but the *right to visit*, to associate, belongs to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth’s surface. (Italics in original, 118)

Kant recognizes that hospitality is a fundamental ethical principle, but he understands its function to be largely expedient: it protects travelers and ensures stable international

relations. The right to hospitality is manifested in a largely negative way – the “right. . . not to be treated as an enemy.” Kantian hospitality is less about welcoming the stranger than it is about guaranteeing the stranger's safety until she returns to her homeland. Because Kant's system moves always towards stability, the nomad is viewed as an aberration and hospitality as a pragmatic way to facilitate relations between the established (and normative) national community and the stranger who arrives in it.

Moreover, hospitality only becomes a duty when the stranger's life is at risk – the nation may refuse the stranger “If it can be done without destroying him” – and so in the continuum between security and hospitality Kant is more concerned about the nation's sovereign right over its own territory than he is with the rights of the guest. While he does recognize that “originally no one had a greater right to any region of the earth than anyone else” (118), he sees this initial egalitarianism as irretrievable; the more complex political realities of the present call for the necessary limiting and protective violence of the sovereign nation-state.

While the world has changed dramatically since Kant wrote his essay, much of Western political thought still makes the same basic assumptions about nation and territory. It is precisely this belief in the sovereignty of the nation over its own territory that allows Western peoples to believe so strongly in their own right to limit and control who may enter their nations, and thus to the ever-increasing securitization of the border. However, because Kant's theory of international relations assumes that everyone belongs somewhere, he does not address the problem of the stateless person – the foreigner who is foreign everywhere. It is at this point that the West's continued reliance on the Kantian way of thinking about international relations becomes most problematic.

The limits of Kantian hospitality are cogently illustrated by the response of the Canadian media and government following Raed Jaser's arrest. It was quickly discovered that Jaser had been ordered deported in 2004 because his criminal record made him ineligible for citizenship; however, because Jaser was a stateless Palestinian this order was never enforced. He was eventually pardoned and granted permanent residency (Weston, "How a terror suspect slipped through"). While Jaser's case is hardly unusual, and would scarcely merit attention if he had not been subsequently charged with planning an act of terrorism, the outrage expressed by journalists and government officials is telling. Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, brushing over the complexities of the situation, declared that "I don't care if you get a pardon or not. If you commit a serious crime in Canada, you should be kicked out, period" ("Jason Kenney wants to know"). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Greg Weston was even more vituperative, accusing Canada of "running an immigration system verging on the theatre of the absurd" and questioning whether Jaser was stateless at all. Weston went on to suggest that, even if he was stateless, Canada should have found him a "foreign home" (Weston, "How a terror suspect slipped through") regardless. The questions of where Jaser should be "kicked" to, or what "foreign home" might want to accept a convicted felon, are left conveniently silent. Kenney's colloquial use of the metaphor "kicked out" betrays an ironic and somewhat naïve belief that Canada should not have to deal with troublesome residents who do not hold citizenship. Where, exactly, is this "out," this undefined space to which undesirables can be banished? Kenney and Weston's suggestion that Canada should offload its refugee claimants not only betrays an unwillingness to accept the fact that not all humans have citizenship in a nation-state, but

irrationally assumes that there must be a straightforward way to dispose of such people. Jaser is the son of Palestinians who fled Gaza in the early nineteen-eighties to settle in the United Arab Emirates, where he was born. Because the Emirates do not grant citizenship to everyone born within their borders, and because Israel refuses to recognize the right of return for exiled Palestinians, Jaser (like millions of others)¹² has never held citizenship in any nation. The Kantian system locates political agency in citizenship, and so this also means that Jaser has been effectively stripped of any official kind of political voice: he cannot vote, and he cannot run for office. Kantian hospitality, and, one suspects, Jason Kenney and Greg Weston, presume the nation's right to refuse any foreigner whose life will not be thereby endangered because it is assumed that the refused foreigner has a place to which they can return. Jaser's case is an unfortunate reminder that this is not always so.

The limitations of Kant's system for understanding the modern world have, since the Second World War, become increasingly clear. Critics such as Jacques Derrida have tended to respond to Kant's systematic rationalism by seeking to explore the tensions and aporias inherent in them. While Kant is aware of these tensions and ambiguities, he seeks everywhere to resolve them in such a way as to yield universal moral laws (for example, the host may always refuse the stranger unless the stranger's life is in danger). Derrida is less interested in resolving tensions than in understanding what is ethically at stake in them. For Derrida, the ideal response to the stranger or the guest would be an unlimited, unconditional hospitality, an ecstatic openness to whatever comes to us, in which we

say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any

¹²The UNHCR suggests that as many as 12 million people worldwide are currently affected by statelessness ("Who is Stateless").

anticipation, before any *identification*, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. (77)

But this ecstatic openness is limited by an awareness of finitude, our inability to offer unlimited hospitality for the very good reason that we never have unlimited resources to offer, and so “sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence” (55). The impulse towards unconditional hospitality is always tempered by the practical need to turn some away. For Derrida, this turning away is always ethically problematic, and Derridean hospitality is an agonistic negotiation between the “law” of hospitality, which is unconditional, and the “laws, which. . . deny it, or at any rate threaten it, sometimes corrupt or pervert it. And must always be able to do this” (79). Unlike Kant, Derrida offers no pure, universally applicable moral law; instead he leaves the host always in some way guilty of inhospitality.

But while Derrida articulates a desire for greater openness that is beautiful and compelling, no contemporary conversation about hospitality can ignore the fact that, for many non-Western societies, it was precisely the hospitable welcome of the unknown Other that opened the door to colonial oppression. For Julia Emberley, the danger of this hospitality is powerfully figured by the indigenous Nyungar women in Australia who are “raped, 'brutalized and later murdered” (153) after they “extended hospitality toward white men” (152). Gideon Baker uses Montezuma's welcome of Cortez to make a similar point (27); the Emperor of the Aztecs welcomes the Conquistadores into his capital as gods, and the Conquistadores repay this hospitality by taking him a prisoner in his own

palace. In both cases, unconditional hospitality is abused by guests who prove dangerous, and as a result become literal hostages in their own homes. The history of colonization, then, is the history of guest as monster, and the colonial legacy's effect on how we practice hospitality should do more than simply remind us that the colonizer is a dangerous guest; it should destabilize the very notion of the stranger on which this discourse is founded.

Emberley and Baker – like Kant and Derrida – theorize hospitality by referring to concrete examples of its practice. It is telling that the examples of (in)hospitality to which each theorist refers are cases where the stranger literally arrives as an unknown, in a new place, seeking help: Emberley and Baker use indigenous encounters, Derrida uses Greek tragedies and Talmudic texts, and Kant uses China and Japan. But while these theorists use these stories to offer nuanced insights into the workings and dangers of hospitality, all seem to assume that hospitality is the right word to use when speaking of the stranger in international relations. In her 2001 book *Postcolonial Hospitality: The Immigrant as Guest*, Mireille Rosello points out that “the immigrant as guest is a metaphor that has forgotten it is a metaphor” (3). Writing specifically about the relationship between France and its immigrant population at the end of the twentieth century, Rosello draws attention to the fact that, in a hyper-securitized bio-political state that asserts its sovereignty over both public and private space by restricting the rights of individual citizens to offer private hospitality, hospitality has become a caricature of itself. Not only is it true that “since Kant's time, the idea of a right of strangers has come to seem like an oxymoron – hospitality has been decisively reduced to charity” (Baker 2), but even charity has become a generous term for what the Western state offers the

foreigner. Thus, Rosello argues that “It is. . . important to state that depicting immigrants as guests obscures the fact that the reason why they were 'invited' had nothing to do with hospitality” (9). Writing of the large population of Algerians who came to France to find work in the years following the Second World War, she suggests that they “were not regarded as guests in a house; they were hired” (9). While this criticism applies more specifically to immigrants rather than refugees, her argument fundamentally unmasks the self-interest manifested in any act of state-hospitality. As the increased number of Temporary Foreign Workers in Canada reminds us, in the late 20th and early 21st century the stranger is more often than not welcomed so that they might be exploited.

Rosello suggests another reason why state-hospitality is problematic by posing a fairly obvious question: “Isn't a guest always implicitly an equal, who could, presumably, reciprocate at a later date, in a different space, at a different time?” (9). Kantian hospitality assumes that citizens from any state may find themselves seeking hospitality from another, but the geopolitical reality of the twenty-first century is distinctly imbalanced in this regard. The stranger who arrives at the borders of the Western state seeking hospitality may be fleeing injustice, persecution, or poverty in their home country; the Westerner who arrives at the borders of the non-Western state is usually there for leisure or business. But this very fact speaks to deeper problems of global inequality that have roots in the complicated histories of colonization. The flow of people from former colonies to the centres of colonial power that marked the latter half of the twentieth century followed the flow of wealth from those colonies in the centuries before. Ironically, though perhaps not surprisingly, the Western nations that violated the sovereignty of the Empires of central America, the indigenous nations of North America,

the African kingdoms, and the sultanates of India in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries now invoke the spectre of the dangerous guest to justify excluding their own post-colonial peoples.

The intimacy caused by colonialism – the cultural, political, and ethnic creolization that was a by-product of Western imperialism – has led to a situation that defies the straightforward logic of the sovereign nation-state. Bodies such as the British Commonwealth of Nations and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie recognise this complexity; these post-colonial structures recognize on some level that colonialism has irrevocably altered the way the world functions. It is telling that language, the medium in which culture exists and which served as one of the original forces that brought the nation-state into being, is a key element of both organizations.¹³ The fact that Algerian immigrants speak French is not only a testament to the history of their oppression, it is also one of the reasons why they continue to provide France with such a valuable labour supply. Language is one of the most potent symbols of colonial intimacy. Thus Derrida begins *Of Hospitality* by meditating on language, pointing out that “the foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated. . . . He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house” (15). For Derrida, one of the key marks of the stranger is a foreignness to both the legal language of “the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc” and to language “in all senses of this term” (15). (In)ability to use the local language is one of the first ways in which strangeness is communicated, and yet one of the great ironies of post-colonial migration is that migrants

¹³See Benedict Anderson's influential and oft-quoted treatise *Imagined Communities*.

often arrive in the West already fluent in the local language because it has been historically imposed on them through colonization. In *De Niro's Game*, Bassam arrives in France already speaking French because of the long history of French colonialism in Lebanon. One of the key ways in which Hage challenges Western inhospitality is through an examination of the colonial intimacy that already exists between the post-imperial nation and their post-colonial guest.

2.2: Colonial Intimacy and State-(In)Hospitality: *De Niro's Game*

Hage grew up in Beirut during the long years of the Lebanese civil war, and he takes up many of the problems of hospitality in his eloquently brutal novels about refugees, asylum-seekers, immigrants, and peripatetics who, though they seek refuge in the inhospitable West, refuse to become its victims. Reading *De Niro's Game* with attention to the ways in which it dramatizes a refugee's journey, I want to suggest that the contemporary discourse of hospitality ignores the extent to which, in a globalized world still affected by the power-imbalances of colonialism, Western states exercise transnational power that continues to shape the lives of those far beyond their borders. The idea of state-hospitality as it is currently applied to immigrants or asylum-seekers by the Canadian government and the popular press generally assumes both the sovereign right of the state and the “strangeness” of the stranger: because the stranger is not a person with whom the state has a pre-existing relationship such that they can demand entry, the state (because it has no prior obligation) is free to grant asylum to some strangers and turns others away.¹⁴ *De Niro's Game* brings this freedom into question, implicitly suggesting

¹⁴Consider, for example, the case of the Kosovar and Chinese refugees discussed in the introduction.

that Western states should treat hospitality more as a debt that is owed than gift that is given. In Hage's novel global flows of capital, commodities, ideas, and people have created concrete connections between even the most distant and dissimilar corners of the world; his Lebanese Arabs speak French, use Russian weapons, take their nicknames from American films about Vietnam, and dream of walking the streets of Rome. Hage represents refugees whose lives have been so shaped by the West that, when they finally arrive in Western nations, they are mistaken for citizens; by doing so, he implicitly questions whether or not these states have a right to treat such people as strangers. Whatever else Hage's characters might be – vigilantes, lawbreakers, irregular migrants – they are not strangers. Hage's novels, in which elegant Mossad agents assert violent authority on the streets of Paris, Iranian torturers dine in Montreal restaurants, and black nationalists gun down French journalists on the streets of North American metropolises, challenge the assumption that Western state-hospitality is a gift offered to the stranger as an act of generosity. They suggest, rather, that the global nature of Western power and the legacy of colonialism has changed the relationship between the Western state and the post-colonial refugee to one of right instead of choice.

Hage also challenges crude narratives that require the “authentic” refugee to be abject and passive, and blurs the line between “authentic” and “bogus” by portraying the blackmail, bribery, fraud, and even violence refugees must sometimes be willing to commit in order to escape war zones or totalitarian states. For Hage, the passive refugee is about as “authentic” as a unicorn – for a refugee to arrive at the borders of a Western state they must already have exercised a remarkable degree of cleverness, diplomacy, perseverance, and agency. Instead of questioning Western inhospitality by presenting “a

countervision of the immigrant as a good, polite, and industrious guest” (Rosello 9), *De Niro's Game* stages the very spectre of the dangerous guest Western states have used to justify exclusionary immigration policies. Its protagonist, Bassam, is a challenge not only to the xenophobic fear that every refugee might secretly be a terrorist, but also to the liberal accommodationism that seeks to offer hospitality without risk. As Peter Nyers reminds us, “too often the ‘host’s’ noble and high-minded toleration of the other conceals practices that try to efface all the dangers and risks that necessarily come with such engagements” (*Rethinking Refugees* 73). This “high-minded toleration” can ultimately be even more dehumanizing than xenophobia, which at least accepts that the stranger is possessed of agency (albeit a threatening one). Unlike the passive, silent, and grateful refugees so frequently held up as ideal recipients of Western hospitality, Hage presents forceful, active, intelligent subjects who tell their own stories in their own fashion, neither shying away from the moral ambiguity of their actions nor sanitizing the poetic apocalypticism with which they narrate them. In doing so, he forces his readers to consider not only how the West is complicit in the geo-political realities that cause refugee displacement, but also the ways in which Western representations of that displacement further dehumanize and even endanger those who have been displaced.

De Niro's Game begins in war-torn Beirut and ends in Paris, a journey narrated in exuberant and harrowing prose by Bassam Al-Abyad, a clever and nihilistic young man who becomes caught up in the violence of life in a city at war with itself. The novel is divided into three acts, the first two dealing with Bassam's life in Beirut and his attempts to make enough money through drug-dealing, theft, and armed robbery to escape Lebanon and get to Rome, a city that he imagines “must be a good place to walk freely”

(19). Beirut is divided not only by the infamous Green Line separating Christian East Beirut from Muslim West Beirut, but by militias, gangs, ethnic hostilities, and personal vendettas. Bassam and his friend George are “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). Bassam works at the port unloading food and guns, but slyly acknowledges that “the few jobs I got at the port were not enough for cigarettes, a nagging mother, and food. Where to go, who to rob, con, beg, seduce, strip and touch?” (19). Bassam and George both know that in their war-torn city there are only two ways to live a life beyond mere subsistence: leave or join the militia. Bassam tries to leave, and George joins the Christian militia of Abou-Nahra, a man “into Christianity, money, and power” (51).

In the first two acts of the novel Bassam describes with a grim and apocalyptic sense of humour the ever-growing cost of their respective decisions. Bassam eventually runs afoul of Abou-Nahra's militia, and George is drawn into the murky relationship between the Christian militias and Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. After Bassam is framed as a diamond thief by Abou-Nahra and tortured by a powerful militiaman named Rambo, he decides the time has finally come for him to leave Beirut. He kills Rambo to avenge his own confinement and torture, and is on his way to the port when George, on Abou-Nahra's behalf, intercepts him. George drives him to the waterfront, parks the car, and tells Bassam that he has just returned from a massacre in which Abou-Nahra's militia, with the aid of Israeli intelligence, exterminated a Palestinian refugee camp.¹⁵ Drunk, and deeply traumatized by what he has done, George pulls out his

¹⁵This massacre is a thinly-veiled reference to the infamous Sabra and Shatila Massacre of 1982, in which an estimated 800-3,000 Palestinian refugees were killed by Lebanese militias with the knowledge and

revolver and tells Bassam he will give him a chance to escape Abou-Nahra. In a gruesome homage to the final scene in Michael Cimino's Vietnam war film *The Deer Hunter* (which George is obsessed with and which inspired his nickname, De Niro), they play Russian roulette with three bullets in the gun. If Bassam gets lucky he is free to go. Bassam puts the gun to his head, pulls the trigger, and lives. George is not so lucky.

The third act tells of Bassam's flight to France aboard a cargo ship and his attempts to survive as an illegal alien (he sneaks into France without a visa) in a world that is hostile in very different ways from Beirut. Before leaving Beirut, Bassam is given the name and number of George's father – a French diplomat who impregnated George's mother while on assignment in Lebanon and returned to France before George was born. Bassam learns that George's father, Claude Mani, is dead, but that his wife Genevieve and daughter Rhea would like to reach George. Hiding the fact that George is now beyond anyone's reach, Bassam travels to Paris where Genevieve and Rhea give him a place to stay. He learns that George's father, who is Jewish, had been working for Mossad before his death and that George had begun working for them as well. A Mossad agent, Roland, has been monitoring George's family in order to find out what has happened to George, and he offers Bassam a Canadian visa in exchange for information. Bassam, refusing to become caught up again in a war he has gone to such lengths to escape, destroys the visa and decides to go instead to Rome.

There are many ways in which *De Niro's Game* can be read: as a novel of trauma, a commentary on the Lebanese Civil War, a nihilistic manifesto, and a sophisticated exercise in style. It is perhaps most iconoclastic, however, when considered as a refugee

support of Israeli forces.

novel. It is hard to imagine an asylum-seeker who more completely personifies the worst fears of refugee review boards the world over than Bassam: he flees his homeland after killing an enemy in cold blood, he bribes a ship's captain to give him passage, he evades border security to enter France illegally and armed with a handgun, and once in France he feels no compunction about robbing citizens at gunpoint, harassing hotel maids, and stalking his dead friend's sister. In short, Bassam is exactly what keeps Jason Kenney up at night. But if Bassam is a dangerous guest, France is hardly an ideal host. Before even disembarking in Marseille, Bassam must hide from an inspector who boards the vessel in order to check for undocumented arrivals. State "hospitality" manifests itself as a police search rather than a welcome, and after sneaking ashore under cover of darkness, Bassam's first taste of French hospitality is an encounter with a gang of young men who, after informing him that "we do not want filth like you here" (191), chase him down an alley with sticks and pipes. It is only when he pulls his gun on them that they retreat and he is able to continue on his way. The hostels all require him to have proper papers, and so he ends up spending the night and the following day wandering the city. He finally finds refuge in a phone booth because it is the only structure he can enter without money or papers. He rests there for awhile, explaining that "I wanted to justify my existence, and legitimize my foreign feet, and watch the people who passed and never bothered to look or wave" (193). Bassam's arrival in France not only betrays the inappropriate use of "hospitality" to describe the state's reception of refugees, but illustrates the very real violence that he faces from the citizens themselves.

But Bassam's arrival in Marseille does more than dramatize French inhospitality. It also brings into question his own strangeness. He narrates his encounter with the

young men in the following way:

“I heard one of them saying, *Une merde de beur ici chez nous*.

Hey, the driver called in French, we do not want filth like you here.” (191)

By reporting the insult first through transcription and then through translation, Hage brings to mind the question Derrida posed about language and the stranger. Bassam, who is from a former French colony, already understands the language of the skinheads. Moreover, the first insult, which roughly translates as “a shit descended from North Africans is here with us,” reveals that while they consider him to be a foreigner in one sense, they have mistaken him for a *beur*, a French-born descendent of immigrants from former French colonies in North Africa. Because of France's imperial history, even the xenophobic young men are unable to recognize him as a complete stranger.

This fascinating reversal, which inverts the more conventional trope of the Westerner who assumes any non-white must be an immigrant, sets up the theme of cultural interpenetration which dominates the novel's third act. The borders that signify sovereignty are everywhere violated – though in different ways – by imperialist and post-colonial asylum-seekers, and it is in this light that Bassam-as-dangerous-guest should be read. Bassam might pose a potential threat, but so do his “hosts.” Through their inhospitality, the young men force us to consider that Bassam might be justified in coming to their country armed, for his assumption that the law of hospitality will not be upheld turns out to be correct. His gun becomes symbolic of his self-reliance, and though he is told repeatedly during his time in France that he must get rid of it – that in order to become a legitimate guest he must make himself vulnerable to the host – he never does. His refusal to play the part of the helpless refugee makes him a dangerous guest, but it

also saves his life. Bassam's attachment to his weapon also suggest a reversal of the imperial trope in which the colonizer arrives in an idyllic land but must defend himself from savage natives. By having a post-colonial refugee arrive in France with a gun instead of a visa and have to defend himself from the locals rather than be welcomed by them, Hage subtly turns the xenophobic fears of Western nations back on themselves by point out the hypocrisy that underlies them. As I discussed earlier, in settler nations such as Canada, the European was the original and most lethal of all dangerous foreigners; the arrival of the armed post-colonial refugee is an unavoidable reminder of the arrival of the armed imperialist.

While Bassam's arrival in France unmask many of the ways in which hospitality is no longer an appropriate term to use, his arrival in Paris returns us to a seemingly more recognizable display of hospitality. George's sister Rhea and step-mother Genevieve welcome Bassam for a meal and provide him with a hotel room,¹⁶ and over the course of a few days Rhea and Bassam become lovers. This would seem to be an admirable example of opening oneself up to the stranger. And yet, they have done this largely because they are looking for information about George. As Derrida suggests, there is an important distinction to be made between hospitality made to the absolute other, the complete stranger, and hospitality extended to the foreigner, the one who comes “with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner” (25). When Bassam comes as “a friend of. . . George” (194), and moreover as a friend of George who may have a story to tell, he is granted a hospitable welcome. But the hospitality he is granted has clear limits,

¹⁶It is important to note here the typically Western difference between hospitality-as-aid – Rhea's paying for Bassam's hotel room – and hospitality-as-sharing. Though Rhea and Bassam become lovers, Rhea maintains total sovereignty over her own space by providing Bassam with a hotel room. Her hospitality does not require her to extend her vulnerability to her own space.

and its fragility is spelled out clearly when Bassam meets the Mossad agent Roland. Roland confronts Bassam with the fact that his literal host, Rhea, has no power to protect him should the state learn of his irregular mode of arrival. Rhea thus has a double power over him: not only can she refuse him her own hospitality, she can threaten to hand him over to the authorities. This illustrates an irony that Mireille Rosello recognizes as well, namely that “the implied consequence of the state's right to interfere in the definition of what constitutes an authorized guest is that the host's house is a subset of the national territory and that private gestures of hospitality are always a subcategory of national hospitality” (37). While Bassam has been offered hospitality, it is a tenuous offer contingent not only on his literal host, but on the power of the state.

But while the inhospitality of the border patrol and the young men in Marseille, along with Rhea's tenuous position as host, expose the weakness of traditional accounts of hospitality and suggest that Bassam may be right to keep a hand on his gun, the Mossad agent Roland troubles these accounts more profoundly by symbolizing the international roots of the conflict in Lebanon, and the international players who actively take part in it. The cosmopolitan nature of the war is present throughout the novel both in large plot developments such as George's training in Israel, the massacre of the Palestinians, and Bassam's job unloading imported weapons, and in smaller instances like George's conversation about the virtues of the (Russian) Kalashnikov versus the (American) M-16. In addition to the international nature of the war, however, there is also a deeper sense of cosmopolitanism born from millenia of colonization. At the beginning of the novel, Bassam speaks of the

main streets where bombs fell, where Saudi diplomats had once picked up French

prostitutes, where ancient Greeks had danced, Romans had invaded, Persians had sharpened their swords, Mamlucks had stolen the villager's food, crusaders had eaten human flesh, and Turks had enslaved my grandmother. (12)

Lebanon is a land that has been formed by generations of invaders, and though it is at least nominally independent, it remains haunted by the ghosts of colonialism, divided and subdivided by the racial and religious remainders of each successive invader. George, who is literally a bastard son of France, is perhaps a tragic analogue for Lebanon itself – fathered by an irresponsible European, and seduced by a sectarian violence in which he does not truly believe but which rewards him with money and power. George is driven mad and Bassam is made homeless through massive geo-political maneuvers in which they are only pawns. What right, then, do the authors of their language, the engineers of their fantasies, and the makers of their AK-47's have to refuse them asylum when they are rendered abject by violence that has been plotted from the very countries on whose shores they arrive?

In phrasing the question this way, *De Niro's Game* pushes theoretical debates about hospitality to reconsider whether or not they are in any way useful to imagining the relationship between displaced post-colonial peoples and the Western states where they seek asylum. Bassam's experience not only reflects Western inhospitality, it also reveals the pragmatism behind any act that might be considered hospitable (he is taken in by the Manis, but only because they want to find out what happened to George; Roland gives him a visa, but only on the condition that Bassam provide him with information he needs). At the same time, *De Niro's Game* draws attention to the absurdity of the conventional (and increasingly, required) representations of “authentic” refugeeness. Far from

embodying the passivity and innocence of the idealized “authentic” refugee, Bassam's traumatic escape from Lebanon illustrates the harsh decisions that many face in their attempts to arrive in countries of refuge.

There is also an important sense in which the world as Bassam experiences it is more divided by wealth, power, and the connections that come with both than it is by the more arbitrary rights and responsibilities that come with citizenship. The war in Beirut is about ideology, religious and political, rather than nationalism; and the characters who are able to gain the most power are those who appeal across national borders and form alliances with political groups or through trade partnerships. Those who have the right political or financial connections (Claude Mani, for example, or Roland, or the Christian general Al-Rayess) are not particularly impeded by borders or national differences – power and wealth ensure that they can move with relative freedom. Even George, as his status in the militia grows, is able to move with ease between Israel and Lebanon. For those like Bassam, who refuse to become part of the networks of corruption and violence which structure the city, it is an entirely different matter. State borders and national citizenship are, in *De Niro's Game*, a way of controlling those who refuse to play along with those in power. Imagined this way, it is quite logical that state-hospitality has become a way not of helping the dispossessed Other, but of managing the flows of people who no longer fit (or refuse to fit) into the established categories in their countries of origin. This in turn suggests that, rather than being abject and apolitical, refugees are those who have refused or been unable to accept an oppressive status quo and have fled to find better lives.

It would seem that in order to portray refugees and asylum-seekers in a more

humane light, state-hospitality, with its assumption that sovereign states should have the freedom to accept or deny refugees as they please, must be replaced by ideas and practices that do not rely on the strangeness of the stranger. And yet state-hospitality, problematic as it is, has a certain pragmatic value. It can be employed in public discourse, for example, to argue that Canada live up to its benevolent ideals. As powerful a critique as *De Niro's Game* provides, is it really likely to convince Canada's more xenophobic citizens to support a more open refugee and immigration policy? In order to leverage public opinion, as Pierre Trudeau did when he changed the immigration act in 1967, there must be a compelling and broadly-imagined "value" (such as multiculturalism) to which appeals can be made. If "hospitality" is unsalvageable, what can be used to inspire actual change? For Hage, and for many others, "cosmopolitanism" has the kind of imaginative power that might allow us to theorize a more just kind of international relations, and so it is to cosmopolitanism that I turn in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Vertical Cosmopolitanism

There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge.

- Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*.

Of all of his novels, *Carnival* perhaps represents Rawi Hage's clearest statement of his own ethical vision. Told in a loose and exuberant voice by a narrator who only calls himself "Fly," the novel more fully explores the political and ethical themes that first appear in *De Niro's Game*. While Hage's first novel follows the relatively straightforward trajectory of a flight narrative – Bassam's attempt to escape from war-torn Beirut to the safe streets of Rome – *Carnival* tells the story of one who has arrived in a new land and achieved a moderate degree of security there. Fly, raised by a circus travelling throughout the Balkans, the Middle East, and Europe, is now a taxi driver in a large North American city, but his lively narration bounds seamlessly between past and present, ducking back to relate parts of his childhood, share anecdotes about former passengers and fellow-taxi drivers, and provide the histories of his friends and allies. Where *De Niro's Game* unmask the extent to which borders and national differences are less important than power, wealth, and influence, *Carnival* continues this critique by exploring how the cosmopolitan Western city remains structured by hierarchies of power and connection which are far more important than citizenship, race, or national origin. In the previous chapter, I discussed the ways in which Bassam's journey brings to light some of the dangers of the Western discourse of hospitality in relation to refugees; in this chapter I will look at how Fly's travels through an unnamed North American city reveal the inequalities within current ways of imagining

cosmopolitanism in the Western context and explore ways in which these inequalities might best be resisted.

In this chapter I engage with a number of broad, complex terms, including “multiculturalism,” “globalization,” and, “cosmopolitanism,” “Multiculturalism” I use as a descriptive term in reference to cities or nation-states significantly comprised of a plurality of cultures, none of which are considered official. A multicultural society, in my usage of the term, is not necessarily a creolized society; the constituent cultures may well have little interaction. Alternately, I use “globalization” to describe the process by which – largely through free trade, migration, and the development of communication technologies – nations and cultures have become increasingly interdependent and creolized. Because of its central place in the development of my argument, I will spend a little more time sketching out a brief account of some of the ways in which cosmopolitanism has been used in contemporary discourse. As will become clearer as the chapter progresses, I use “cosmopolitanism” both descriptively and proscriptively – to refer to an experience of difference as well as a kind of ethics. I adopt this double usage because it reflects a long-present ambiguity in the word itself, which is by turns used to describe a state of being and a way of being. For while we can speak of an individual who encounters a radically different culture, or a number of radically different cultures cohabiting the same space, as having a cosmopolitan experience; this does not mean that such an individual has responded to this experience positively. This encounter may well have been an unpleasant one that the individual seeks never to repeat, so there is a need to delineate a cosmopolitan ethics as well as a cosmopolitan experience. Cosmopolitan ethics are born from positive responses to cosmopolitan experiences, and require a

committed openness to difference and alterity. It is against the background of this difference between descriptive and proscriptive cosmopolitanism that I will explore Hage's own cosmopolitanism.

In recent years, a remarkable amount of scholarship has been generated on the topic of cosmopolitanism. This scholarship reveals the extent to which “cosmopolitanism” remains a deeply contested category; the word is used variously to refer to colonizing imperialists, international businesspeople, transnational migrants, scholars, dilettantes, and refugees, as well as to discuss international organizations, laws, wars, and political philosophies. Rainer Bauböck suggests that “Cosmopolitanism may refer to an individual life style, to a universalist morality, or to global political institutions” (111), while Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen have delineated “at least six rubrics” under which cosmopolitanism can be imagined (9). This diversity of perspectives arises in part from the vagueness of the term itself. “Cosmopolitan,” meaning “citizen of the cosmos,” was defined by the Cynics of the fourth century BCE (Appiah xiv) as a paradoxical and somewhat defiant term to communicate their “refusal to be defined by. . . local origins and group memberships, so central to the self-image of the conventional Greek male” (Nussbaum 157). From its very beginning the term has had ambiguous implications, being at once an affirmation of solidarity with all peoples and a refusal to be circumscribed by local or national loyalties. For this reason, “cosmopolitan” has come to be used in a truly remarkable variety of ways. As Bruce Robbins suggests, “Like nations, cosmopolitanisms are now plural and particular. Like nations, they are both European and non-European, and they are weak and underdeveloped as well as strong and privileged” (2). Those who see cosmopolitanism as

a powerful way of transcending nationalistic or parochial concerns tend to focus on the cosmopolitan as “first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other” (Hannerz qtd. in Vertovec and Cohen 13), while some of the more skeptical critics see it embodied by the elite and wealthy “cosmocrat,” for whom “cosmopolitanism is conceived largely as a matter of consumption, an acquired taste for cultural artifacts from around the world” (Vertovec and Cohen 7). Still others have argued that, quite simply, “Cosmopolitanism is the Western engagement with the rest of the world and that engagement is a colonial one” (Van Der Veer 166).

There is a basic sense, however, in which all of these ways of thinking about cosmopolitanism assume and attempt to navigate the difference between here and there, local and global, or, put slightly differently, Self and Other. Those who critique cosmopolitanism on colonial grounds are voicing skepticism about the possibility that humans are able to engage Otherness in a way that does not seek to dominate or control it. Given that cosmopolitans from Marcus Aurelius to Sir Richard Burton have been intimately involved in imperial projects, this skepticism is certainly understandable. Philosophers such as Kwame Anthony Appiah and Martha Nussbaum, however, reject the idea that local and global concerns cannot be reconciled. For them, cosmopolitanism is about discerning an ethics that would encourage understanding, respect, and cultural hybridity without collapsing difference. As Nussbaum elegantly suggests,

We need not give up our special affections and identifications, whether ethnic or gender-based or religious. We need not think of them as superficial, and we may think of our identity as constituted partly by them. . . . But we should also work to make all human beings part of our community of dialogue and concern, base

our political deliberations on that interlocking commonality, and give the circle that defines our humanity special attention and respect. (158)

This “concentric circles” model of cosmopolitanism, which Nussbaum inherits from the Stoics, grants that particular loyalties to family, community, and nation are natural and important while arguing that they should be widened to include the more general category of humanity. Richard Rorty makes a similar claim when he argues that, instead of opposing the local and relational category of “loyalty” with a universal and rational category of “justice,” we should see justice as a “larger loyalty” (45) to, at least potentially, “one’s fellow citizens, or the human species, or all living things” (47). In *Ethics of Identity*, Appiah uses the phrase “rooted cosmopolitanism” to describe an engagement between local and global that seeks to negotiate rather than collapse difference (*Ethics of Identity* 213).

While I find rooted cosmopolitanism to be both useful and compelling as way of negotiating different loyalties, there is a sense in which it assumes too much. Rooted cosmopolitanism takes as given that we all have local identities, cultures, and beliefs, and understands the question as revolving around how these particularities might be brought into conversation with different identities, cultures, and beliefs. While none of these thinkers are so careless as to suggest that the local is undifferentiated – indeed, understanding that the local is always constituted by elements gleaned or inherited from a plurality of sources is foundational to Appiah’s cosmopolitanism – they nevertheless assume that we are all involved in and to some degree committed to localities. This kind of cosmopolitanism challenges traditional prejudices that saw (and in many cases continue to see) cosmopolitans as being suspect for their supposed refusal to commit to

the civil life of the nation-state. This refusal has usually been perceived as a choice; in Europe, the Jews and the Roma were persecuted in large part because they refused to conform the social and religious expectations of the nations in which they lived, Stalin attacked the Jewish people of the Soviet Union for their unpatriotic “rootless cosmopolitanism,” and contemporary critics have accused the wealthy, international “cosmocrat” for “revolt against the nation-state” (Vertovec and Cohen 6). Rooted cosmopolitanism's careful articulation of balance between local and global highlights the possibility for the “cosmopolitan patriotism” that both Appiah and Nussbaum explore, and implicitly suggests that just because one chooses to be cosmopolitan in outlook does not mean one denies the importance of locality. Considering cosmopolitanism in the context of migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers, however, it is precisely this assumption of rootedness that must be challenged.

Peter Nyers uses the term “abject cosmopolitanism” to refer to those “Asylum seekers, refugees, non-status residents, undocumented workers, so-called 'over-stayers' and 'illegals'-together [who] have come to constitute a kind of 'abject class' of global migrants” (“Abject Cosmopolitanism” 1070). While they may be “citizens of the cosmos,” these abject cosmopolitans are the inverse of the free-wheeling unattached cosmocrat; rather than using their mobility to avoid particular attachments, they are denied particular attachments because they are forced to be mobile. Instead of occupying the arrivals lounge at Pearson International, they exist in the liminal space of the camp or the refugee detention center. Being displaced from their homes, they have no local to which they can attach themselves. Their ability to engage in the civil life of their homeland is limited at best, and yet their ability to participate in the political life of the

country where they are living is likewise circumscribed.

If we put more emphasis on the “polis” side of cosmopolitan, that is, its implication of political belonging and voice, perhaps a new series of challenges will come to light that might allow us to further nuance the idea of cosmopolitanism in ways that make it more helpful in describing the situation in which many refugees and asylum-seekers find themselves. It seems very reasonable to suggest that a Canadian (or Ghanaian, or Turkish, or Chinese) citizen has the ability to imaginatively and ethically engage with those who do not share their culture, and it seems equally reasonable to suggest that such a citizen might act in a concrete political way to enlarge their circle of loyalty – the relative ease with which people from every corner of the globe can be convinced to participate in humanitarian relief is testament to this fact.¹⁷ It seems rather more difficult to imagine how an incarcerated refugee claimant or temporary foreign worker might practice a cosmopolitan ethics, cut off as they are from any system that would allow them to exercise political action.

In this chapter, I seek to explore cosmopolitanism as it manifests itself in *Carnival*. Hage’s cosmopolitanism manages to be self-consciously rootless while still engaged in political struggle; because it has either been denied a “local” or participates in a “local” that is in constant flux, this cosmopolitanism is neither politically unengaged like that of the cosmocrat nor committed to working from a particular place as in the case of the rooted cosmopolitan. Because it deals with those who have been denied the chance to fully participate in local structures, Hage’s novel does not adopt a concentric circles model of cosmopolitanism that acknowledges the pull of tribal, ethnic, national, or

¹⁷I do not mean to suggest, of course, that such relief efforts are always carried out in a purely altruistic spirit.

religious loyalties (even in diaspora). Instead, it proposes a more fluid model that privileges personal relationships but is nevertheless committed to resisting exclusionary and oppressive forces; it asserts political agency without political belonging. By so doing, Hage pushes cosmopolitan theory to recognize how displacement affects practices of cosmopolitanism.

In the previous chapter I used *De Niro's Game* to argue that the well-established use of “hospitality” to refer to the relationship between Western states and refugees not only fails to acknowledge a variety of deeply inhospitable state practices, but also elides the manifold interconnections that complicate the sovereign right of Western states to refuse migrants in a post-colonial world. In this chapter, I use *Carnival* to argue that any useful account of cosmopolitanism must consider the fact that, given the radically different ways of experiencing alterity, cosmopolitanism might (to borrow an old but still tragically relevant formulation) best be thought of as “vertical cosmopolitanism.” In 1965 sociologist John Porter coined the phrase “vertical mosaic” to describe the economic disparity underlying Canadian multiculturalism (Vallee); in a similar fashion, I want to argue that our experiences of cosmopolitanism in a multicultural context are “vertical,” that is, ordered by a complex hierarchy of power, wealth, citizenship, race, and gender. The rooted cosmopolitan and the abject cosmopolitan may live in the same city, but they will not experience difference in the same way, and so they do not have the same tools at their disposal to actively practice a cosmopolitan ethics of the kind imagined by rooted cosmopolitanism. The ethics that arise from this recognition of verticality acknowledge the value and importance of building political, social, and artistic networks that are not circumscribed by racial, national, or class belonging, but this ethics still takes into account

the deeply unequal power relations that persist within Western societies, and it is committed to resisting these inequalities. The temporary foreign worker, like the refugee, is symbolic of globalization's seedy underbelly. While his experience is, indeed, a cosmopolitan one insofar as it causes him to come into contact with a range of different cultures and peoples, it is experienced in the context of limitation and powerlessness. Just as Raed Jaser provides a way of thinking about the dangerous guest and allows us to question the notion of state-hospitality, the temporary foreign worker provides an avenue for thinking about the unequal power relations that govern experiences of difference in vertical cosmopolitanism.

Carnival represents a city that contains the best and worst of globalization. From the shining towers where business is conducted that changes landscapes thousands of kilometers away to the stinking dockyards where the wealth of the world passes by the watching eyes of the exploited, cosmopolitan encounters are everywhere. Against the background of all this difference and movement, Hage ruthlessly embraces a rootless politics. At the beginning of the novel, Fly describes two kinds of taxi drivers, the spiders and the flies:

spiders are those drivers who wait at taxi stands for the dispatcher's call or for customers to walk off the streets and into their hungry cars. . . . They wait on corners for things to come and ages to pass. Nameless they have become, reduced to machine operators who identify each other and themselves by the number of their car. . . . Flies are wanderers, operators who drive alone and around to pick up the wavers and whistlers on the edges of sidewalks and streets. . . . No wanderer ever rests on the curb to play or feed. No wanderer chooses to travel the

same road twice. (9)

This desire to never “travel the same road twice” is reflected in the novel’s very form. *Carnival* is divided into five acts, each split up into numerous disjointed scenes introduced with sub-headings (“Mother,” “Rodents,” “Zainab,” etc.). These scenes reflect the value Fly places on rootlessness. Some are quite brief, consisting of passing encounters Fly has with his passengers, while others are long expository accounts of Fly’s childhood, the history of his friendship with his closest friends, the activist couple Otto and Aisha, or the death of Fly’s main parent-figure, the circus’s intersexed bearded lady. The novel’s narrative arc roughly takes place over a period of a few weeks during which Fly is reunited with his old friend Otto (who has spent several months incarcerated by the police and the medical establishment after participating in an activist rally) and helps him take revenge on those who have wronged him. At first this vengeance is almost playful – they coerce a wealthy prison psychologist into reading an Amiri Baraka poem, and a man who mistreated a friend of Fly’s is forced to read and write a report on *Finnegan’s Wake* – but when Otto shoots a French journalist because the man suggests that French colonialism is justified by French civilization, it becomes a more serious matter. The novel ends with Otto’s suicide and a series of shocking murders that precipitate Fly’s decision to leave the city for good.

Throughout the novel there is a clear sense that the carnival city is composed of many unstable social strata; Fly’s work as a taxi driver gives him a unique insight into the connections and tensions within these strata, but he chooses to keep himself removed from them. Fly buzzes through the concentric circles of the rooted cosmopolitans he sometimes meets because he refuses to recognize loyalties based on categories he

believes to be meaningless. While the rooted cosmopolitanism discussed earlier focuses on the negotiation between what we owe members of our own familial, ethnic, and national communities and what we owe to the larger community of humanity, Fly rejects the very idea of ethnic or national communities. For Fly, every loyalty is a personal one, given to other individuals based on their own merits.

One of the most important ways in which Hage challenges the political model of rooted cosmopolitanism is by questioning the logic of local community through an interrogation of traditional categories of victimhood. He is extremely sensitive to the complexities of power relations in the twenty-first century, and while immigrants (or women, or racialized subjects) are sometimes cast as victims in his novels, this is not always the case – in fact, *Carnival* repeatedly draws attention to the carnival city's fluidity and moral ambiguity, where oppressor and oppressed are shifting and unstable categories. While ethical judgment is a necessary response to systemic and individual violence, acting upon such judgments is never a straightforward matter. Although the concentric circles model of cosmopolitanism assumes that one owes the greatest loyalty to those closest to oneself, thereby implying that those closest to oneself are those who share familial, ethnic, cultural and national identity, Fly only draws close to him those who share his struggle for a more just world. As a radical individualist, he insists that people be measured by their personal beliefs and actions rather than the abstract categories into which they fit. Fly's insistent deconstruction of supposedly homogenous categories is mirrored in a distinction Rawi Hage made when speaking of immigrant and refugee experiences. In a 2010 interview he noted:

There are different kinds of immigrations. In Canada, there are exiles, there are

people who are very wealthy and they go to live there, and there are people who are not so wealthy, who are struggling and they want to improve their lives and that's why they go there. We can't have a whole definition of what is an immigrant, there are various kinds of immigration. (Hage, "Bookfest")

His novels all reflect this careful parsing of the differences that exist between larger categories like "immigrant" or "ethnic" or "prostitute." Perhaps motivated by a skepticism born of the knowledge that attempts to speak generally of an "immigrant experience" are frequently mobilized to serve political purposes in ways that obscure the radically different treatment immigrants receive based on economic, racial, and religious factors, in *Carnival*, Hage pushes his readers to engage with the plurality of experiences that immigration represents without falling back on easy ways of categorizing victims and oppressors.

Consistent with this challenge, one of the novel's sharpest critiques is leveled against those migrants who fall into the same habits of discrimination that they have been victims of themselves. At one point, Fly notes:

if they spend enough years in this land, [the Spiders] start complaining about foreigners just like themselves and lazy people and the government's waste of money. And though none of these drivers pays any taxes, they start walking like big taxpayers and old men with large umbrellas who feel justified in their sense of entitlement because they fought old wars and gave half their money to the nation state. Buffoons, some of these drivers are. (104)

As Fly suggests, although being a migrant may lead one to have a number of cosmopolitan experiences, it does not make one a cosmopolitan; a cosmopolitan

embraces, cultivates, and practices a certain ethics. The Spiders, who “regulate their lives around the filling of their bellies and the smoking of their cigarettes” (78) may be immigrants and refugees, but they respond to difference so apathetically that they can hardly be considered cosmopolitans. Conversely, Otto and Aisha, having embraced cosmopolitan ethics, are cosmopolitans despite the fact that they are not migrants.

However, while Hage takes great pains to break down the kind of straightforward victim/oppressor binary that suggests a necessary sense of solidarity between those who have experienced any kind of exclusion, he remains attentive to the ways in which racial, ethnic, and gendered forms of discrimination function in ways that oppress large (though heterogeneous) groups of people. As *Carnival* is an unapologetic celebration of the liminal, the peripatetic, and the underclass, many of its characters – most of them, in fact – are excluded from mainstream North American society either because of their gender, their race, or their origins, and this has a clear impact on how these individuals experience the cosmopolitanism of the city. Fly's incisive and often humorous commentary on the people he encounters is always sensitive to these factors, though never in a pious or pedantic way. His awareness of race, for example, is intimately bound up with his concern about inequality; because of this his comments on the subject never fall into the straightforward white/Non-White binary that so frequently collapses all ethnic difference into one of two categories while reinforcing the primacy of some ambiguously-conceived “Whiteness.” At one point, Fly picks up a group of “drunk numbskulls” (32) who ask him where he is from. He explains, “I knew perfectly well where that question would lead. I said Brazil, because that would turn the conversation to beaches and thongs and, if I was lucky, football and carnivals” (32). Unfortunately,

one of the passengers sees his name on the dashboard and shouts “what kind of Brazilian name is that? You are a fucking towelhead or one of those things there, from the desert and shit, Brazilian my ass, fuck. You are a camel jockey, liar, and I bet you are taking us the long way.” One of the other passengers chimes in too, saying, “Are you taking us tourists for a ride? We may be from out of town but we’re still in our own country!” (32). Assuming (perhaps because of his Arabic patrimony) that he is “taking [them] for a ride,” they refuse to pay the fare. This passage is illuminating in several ways – on an immediate level, it serves as a forceful reminder of the danger that racialized subjects continue to face in the course of their daily business, but it also illustrates the fact that not all racialized subjects are racialized in the same ways. While the tourists may not be able to visually distinguish an Arab from a South American, they clearly associate very different things with each group. Fortunately Fly is not a taxi driver to be trifled with in this fashion, and so the episode ends with him exacting his pay after threatening to “turn their white suits into splashes of red” (34). Passing it off as a joke, one of the young men hands him a ten dollar bill saying, “Brazil, good one” (34). One of the great ironies of this episode is the way in which it portrays an act of racism while simultaneously deconstructing the idea of race. The young men only racialize Fly in the way they do because they see his name. They would have no way of knowing otherwise whether he was Middle Eastern or South American. In this way, Hage both recognizes ongoing practices of racism while reminding readers that these practices are based on constructed categories.

This scene is paralleled later in the novel when another taxi driver, whom Fly refers to as the “Samson Spider,” has an even more disturbing encounter with a couple of

young male passengers. The young men threaten to rob him, and, guessing that they are just “two little fuckers dressed in expensive clothing, trying to scare me” (193), and so probably not that dangerous, he decides to scare them instead. He speeds up until his car starts to shake and then begins to sing opera, waving his hands as though conducting an orchestra. It works, and the young men, terrified, apologize and beg him to stop, but he gets pulled over by the police and fined before he can. Unfortunately for the Samson Spider, the young men “turn out to be the sons of a wealthy businessman who finances the mayor’s campaign” (194). This businessman is “Sarnath Patel. . . the CEO of Dovlin Steel. A man who pillages the world and pollutes six villages” (194). He brings a lawsuit against the Samson Spider. Fly intercedes on his behalf, accepting that what his friend did was wrong but responding by asking, “who doesn’t break the law? Does your grand enterprise always obey the laws when it ravages these lands from above and below? When it pollutes villages and rivers with poisonous liquids? And how many deformed faces and crippled kids should sue you back?” (196). The young men who try to hijack the Samson Spider are not white, but this does not make their abuse acceptable any more than their father’s Indian name lessens or excuses the violence his company perpetrates. In both Fly and Samson’s cases, it is the functioning of power that is most repugnant rather than the specifics of how it is manifested – though this does not, of course, mean that these specifics of race and class are unimportant. In the multicultural city racism is still a problem, but it is no longer possible to draw a line between privileged/white and oppressed/racialized. Whites may still be privileged, but not all privilege is white – and inequity rather than whiteness is the problem.

The complex imbrications of race and privilege are perhaps most powerfully

figured in a story Fly tells about Fredao, his friend Linda's rather negligent pimp, towards the end of the novel. Fredao tells Linda's son Tammer, "You are the bastard son of an Arab. Those Arabs were the first to come and enslave my people and sell us to the Portuguese. You, son, you are one part Spanish genocider and one part slave driver" (257). The irony of this statement lies in the fact that Tammer is easily the most abject character in the novel – he may be descended from slave drivers and genociders, but he lives under a bridge because his mother is a prostitute too sick to take care of him. Moreover, this abjection arises in part due to Fredao's own callous treatment of Linda. Fredao teaches Tammer to shoot ("I want to teach you power so you will always be free" (257)), but, in revenge for his treatment of Linda, the first person Tammer chooses to shoot is Fredao. Tammer wants revenge on the person who has actually harmed him, and is not particularly interested in the larger questions of racial blame which preoccupy Fredao. In the carnival city people are judged by their own actions; no one can claim innocence because of their ancestry. No racial group has a monopoly on victimhood, just as none can be completely demonized. For the cosmopolitan Fly, who sees himself as part of no group at all, this is a reminder to hold people accountable for what they do rather than the group to which they belong.

Carnival represents a city that is still divided along racial lines, but these divisions are part of a more complex matrix of differences based in wealth, class, and nationality. Ambalavaner Sivanandan has coined the term xeno-racism to talk about the class/race dynamics of the twenty-first-century globalized world:

Today, under global capitalism which, in its ruthless pursuit of markets and its sanctification of wealth, has served to unleash ethnic wars, balkanise countries

and displace their peoples, the racist tradition of demonisation and exclusion has become a tool in the hands of the state to keep out the refugees and asylum seekers so displaced – even if they are white – on the grounds that they are scroungers and aliens come to prey on the wealth of the West and confound its national identities. The rhetoric of demonisation, in other words, is racist, but the politics of exclusion is economic. (2)

Sivanandan's notion of xeno-racism is helpful for understanding the dynamics of the cosmopolitan city because it acknowledges that class distinction and racialization have always worked together, the second being used to justify the first.

Fly's cosmopolitanism pushes back against the xeno-racist policies of the Western state by seeing networks of solidarity among the oppressed peoples of the city. His friendship with Otto and Aisha is predicated on a mutual hatred for "demonisation and exclusion," and this hatred and the class awareness it stems from is a far more important bond than, say, the racial and ethnic bonds he technically shares with the city's Arabic community. As a response to the power imbalances of the cosmopolitan city, Fly's non-racial solidarity with the oppressed seems very much in line with Paul Gilroy's notion of "conviviality" as a way of salvaging the multicultural project. While accepting that multiculturalism has frequently served as an analgesic to hide the ongoing workings of xeno-racism, Gilroy's conviviality is a way of reimagining multiculturalism that moves away from ethnic or racial ghettoization towards politically useful forms of solidarity. If xeno-racism as a concept recognizes the ways in which capitalism has moved beyond straightforward or predictable binaries of power, then conviviality opens up a space by which reactionary nationalisms might, potentially, be replaced by a cosmopolitan

commitment to justice on a global scale. Rather than “the exaltation of victimage or the world-historic ranking of injustices that always seem to remain the unique property of their victims” (4), Gilroy suggests “that multicultural ethics and politics could be premised upon an agonistic, planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability to the wrongs we visit upon each other” (4). The “agonism” of Gilroy’s multicultural ethics is extremely important, for it reminds us that multicultural societies are not equal ones, and that to embrace the kind of multiculturalism Gilroy pushes for is to embrace a concrete political struggle. This political struggle cannot, however, fall back on older categories of allegiance dictated by racial or ethnic identification; rather, it must take seriously the extent to which the struggle is increasingly being fought along ideological, rather than identity-based, lines. Through Fly’s cosmopolitan resistance to xeno-racism, Hage provides a powerful (if harrowing) way of imagining what this struggle might look like.

Interestingly enough, however, Hage turns to gender rather than race in order to figure his sharpest and also most poetic critiques of hegemonic and exclusive structures of power. In presenting his most potent symbols of resistance Hage turns to bodies that do not fit easily into either male or female categories. The symbolic power of the intersexed person is deployed in the figure of the Bearded Lady to argue for a migratory, unstable ethics, and some of the novel’s most powerful passages relate to this explicitly hermaphroditic liminality and in-between-ness. However, Hage recognizes even as he celebrates these borderline figures that they exist in a painful place. Fly’s transsexual friend Limo is at one point violently beaten while performing at a bachelor party when the unsuspecting groom discovers she has a penis, and as she grows older only one doctor

can be found who will treat the Bearded Lady because she is considered a freak. And yet, it is from these liminal characters that the novel's clearest ethical statements come. In what is probably the novel's most profoundly positive example of cosmopolitanism, the Bearded Lady tells Fly that

Here in these circuses and carnivals we all love each other with our oddities and queernesses. People leave us alone because we mesmerize them with tricks, tickle them with feathers, tie them up in wonder and hope. We never let them know that we read books, that we love everyone and accept everything, that our bodies are free, that we travel, resist, and fight and that we give refuge to convicts and revolutionaries, that we have saved gypsies and Jews. (154)

It is from the Bearded Lady that Fly learns his most cherished values, values that can never be separated from political struggle because they run counter to and will always be challenged by hegemonic political structures. For people like Limo and the Bearded Lady, neutrality is not an option; their very bodies provide a critique of strict gender categories, and whether they like it or not, when it comes to resisting the normative demands of mainstream Canadian society they are, as Ralph Ellison once put it, "committed for the duration" (142). The novel's ethical challenge is to those who, like Fly, must choose whether or not they will embrace liminality or blend into stable and hegemonic structures. The novel's tragic ending, which sees Fly leave the city for good, suggests that he chooses liminality.

So far, I have argued that *Carnival* represents different experiences of cosmopolitanism in the multicultural world of the North American city and also argues, through its narrator Fly, for a cosmopolitan ethic. For Fly, this ethic involves a sort of *sic*

et non; while his cosmopolitan spirit everywhere rejects boundaries and static borders, he also knows that these borders exist and function in very concrete ways and must be recognized so they might be resisted. This is figured in a scene from early in Fly's life, when at his mother's funeral the Bearded Lady says that "Wanderers, tent makers, and animal herders have the privilege of dying anywhere. . . . The earth is their land and all the roads are their burial ground" (155). Shortly after the funeral, however, they are "stopped by border guards who blocked our roads and mocked our ways" (155). To acknowledge no borders means that one must engage in a constant struggle to make this so, a struggle that requires building networks of solidarity with others so that resistance might be possible. Following from Berthold Schoene's suggestion that the cosmopolitan novel is "driven by sound ethical commitment and political conscientiousness, while abstaining from the projection of any particular destiny for humankind as a whole lest it result in the formation of a new grand narrative inclined to reframe the globe rather than releasing its inherent world-creative potential" (17), I want to consider the ways in which *Carnival* embodies this "political conscientiousness" by portraying characters whose experiences of borders as expressions of power are painfully relevant to current political debates in Canada. In order to do so, I turn to the temporary foreign worker.

While the trope of the immigrant in Canadian discourse still assumes a progressive trajectory by which the newcomer arrives full of entrepreneurial spirit, works hard, overcomes obstacles, and finally carves out a space for themselves and their children in the new country, this no longer accurately reflects the reality of Canadian migration patterns.¹⁸ Immigrants whose hard work earns them a place in the fabric of

¹⁸While it is well established in the Canadian imagination, it is also important to note that this trope

Canadian society are being replaced by temporary foreign workers who contribute to the Canadian economy without receiving the benefits of Canadian citizenship. Ironically enough, “The [Temporary Foreign Worker Program], which came into existence in 1973, was initially designed for specific groups such as highly skilled academics, business executives, and engineers, to provide an efficient channel for professionals coming to Canada to work” (Nakache, “Temporary Workers”); however, over the course of the program’s forty-year history it has increasingly become a way for employers to import cheap, unskilled labour to fill jobs Canadians are unwilling to do.¹⁹ A recent report in *The Huffington Post* addressed the changing balance between TFWs *vis à vis* immigration:

In 2012, some 213,516 people entered Canada via the temporary foreign worker program, more than three times the number admitted a decade ago. The private sector brought in 25 per cent more foreign labourers last year than the number of economic immigrants accepted by the government, which has long insisted caps on its own programs are necessary so as not to flood the Canadian labour market. (Mehta, “Temporary Foreign Worker Program”)

While immigrants in Canada have historically been forced to work undesirable jobs, there was (at least ideally) the possibility for hard-working immigrants to climb the economic ladder through thrift, investment, and education. While it may not have been designed to do so, the TFWP ensures that fewer and fewer migrants have access to this kind of up-

obscures the different degrees to which European immigrants and those from other parts of the world have experienced mobility within Canadian society.

¹⁹ It is worth noting that in a capitalist system a scarcity of labour should lead to an increase in wages; if business owners are unable to attract workers, they should have to offer workers greater incentives until the positions are filled or their business becomes financially untenable. The use of temporary foreign workers is a way of circumventing the balancing mechanisms that are, at least theoretically, intrinsic to free-market capitalism.

ward mobility, just as more and more are kept in a state of stasis, unable to improve their lot regardless of how hard they work.

While the Canadian government has stressed that the TFWP is meant as a stop-gap to deal with temporary labour shortages, this does not seem to be the trend. In another article, Vivian Luk argues convincingly that Canadian employers are becoming “addicted” to TFWs. She quotes labour economist Erin Weir as saying that “Temporary foreign workers are tied to the specific job and the specific employer. . . . It’s often very convenient for employers to have people who they know aren’t going to be able to take other jobs, and have little ability to push for better wages” (Luk, “Solution”); the federal government has been quite willing to feed this addiction. Delphine Nakache points out that

work permits, initially valid for 12 months, were extended to 24 months in 2007. . . . Yet decisions on extensions have no regulatory authority and are made on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, if their employer still has a valid Labour Market Opinion, TFWs may be able to renew their work permit from within without having to leave the country. . . . In a context where there is no limit to the number of renewals (IRPR, s. 201), this creates a situation in which TFWs remain indefinitely in Canada.

She goes on to argue that, while TFWs are staying in Canada for longer and longer, “there is currently little hope of permanent settlement, little opportunity for a temporary resident to secure a permanent resident status from within the country.” In this way, a labour relationship that would be considered both an affront to the free market and to the

rights of the worker is maintained on Canadian soil through a perverse exercise of government power. Increasingly the distinction between first and third world no longer relies on geography but on the particularities of one's political belonging within a geographic space.

Carnival reminds its readers of the extent to which globalization has deconstructed the first world/third world binary by introducing elements of the third world to North America even as it introduces elements of the first world to the global south. While Caroline Mardorossian has argued that “migrant art offers a transnational, cosmopolitan, multilingual and hybrid map of the world that redraws boundaries by building bridges between Third and First Worlds” (17), *Carnival* imagines this hybridity less as a matter of bridges and more as a matter of ghettos, spaces within the nation and the city where racialized and/or economically disadvantaged difference is contained and kept from developing. The factory town outside of the city where Fly's friend Sally sometimes works as a prostitute is the perfect example of this – a space in which migrant labourers from all over the world are brought together but paid low wages and denied opportunities for advancement. Sally tells stories of her encounters with exiled Czechs, poverty-stricken Moroccans, pious Mexicans, and others who “come to this land thinking that they have made it, escaped the misery of their homes, but then. . . get stuck in awful jobs” (149) and find some small solace in the arms of Sally and her friend Magdalena. While the meat packing plant is a clearly cosmopolitan workplace, it is also a manifestly inequitable one. The workers who have been brought in are isolated and given no access to the benefits of citizenship.

It is hard not to read the meat packing plant in *Carnival* as a reflection of the

increased reliance of meat packing plants in Alberta on temporary foreign workers. In an excellent article on the XL Lakeside Packers plant in Brooks, Alberta, Michael Broadway describes the vulnerable position of TFW's. He explains that the unpleasant and dangerous nature of the work and the fact that, at least since the nineteen-eighties, it has offered less and less in the way of compensation, fosters a high rate of employee turnover. While many Canadians view such work as a stepping-stone on the way to something better, for TFWs there is no "something better;" they are tied to a single employer for the duration of their stay in Canada. Because they are unable to freely compete in the labour market, such workers live in constant fear that, if they agitate for better work conditions, they will be fired and deported (Broadway).²⁰ While Fly's experience of cosmopolitanism, reflected in his name, is one predicated on freedom of movement and the economic freedom to sell his labour to whomever he pleases (he owns his own car and works for himself), he is aware that for others cosmopolitan experience comes through indentured servitude.

As we have seen in Gilroy's work, most contemporary cosmopolitan theory accepts that cosmopolitanism is not a utopian project, but an agonistic one rooted in the struggle to learn how to get along with difference. In the modern cosmopolitan city, where difference so frequently provides motivation for gang wars and racial violence, this agonism is all too real; as Leonie Sandercock puts it, "A recognition that conflict is inevitable and ineradicable is a good place to begin thinking about a twenty-first-century cosmopolitan urbanism" (45). But there is more than one kind of conflict, and one of the

²⁰Again, one of the balancing mechanisms built into free-market capitalism is the freedom of the labourer to sell her labour wherever she can, thus ensuring that in an even moderately functional economy excessively dangerous or unpleasant labour will be forced to offer higher compensation to attract workers.

things that *Carnival* makes clear is that there are better and worse ways to engage in this conflict. After the death of the Bearded Lady, Fly's closest relationship is with Otto, an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist activist who contends that “people like us, who see through power and greed and protest its savagery, we risk being crushed. It is still a fight. It is still a fight for me, fly. It always will be” (125). For Otto, the city is a battleground between the oppressed and the wealthy, and for most of the novel the weapons he employs are words. However, he is hardened by his experiences in police custody and later in a mental hospital, to which he has been sent to be “pacified” through a forced regimen of drugs. When he emerges, he begins drinking more heavily and it is while he is intoxicated that he murders a French journalist with whom he has had a disagreement about Camus. The Frenchman defends his civilization, arguing that its colonial exploits are justified by the beauty of its culture, and Otto shoots him. In this scene, Otto's tragedy is his inability to see what Fly sees, that power is a constantly moving target. Otto's violence, while it comes in response to the horrendous treatment he receives at the hands of the state, serves no purpose. Unlike the previous victims of his literary vengeance, the French journalist has not wronged him personally; he merely holds a different opinion. In a context where “it is becoming increasingly difficult to discriminate categorically between victims and perpetrators, or explorers and explored, since ultimately no one controls globalisation or could be said to be exempt from the diffusive pull of its systemic subjection” (Schoene 27), discerning the appropriate targets for retribution is a fraught matter. Like the morally ambivalent Fredao, Otto's inconsistency in discerning who his real enemies are leads him to tragedy.

This failure to appropriately identify the enemy is countered by Fly's own strange

relationship with Zainab, his Muslim neighbour, and Father John, a Catholic priest. While he is much more friendly towards Zainab than he is towards John (largely, one suspects, because he is trying to sleep with her), he has deep disagreements with both about religion – something he finds detestable and dangerous. While Fly is quick to point out the evils of religion, he never suggests that either Zainab or John are personally guilty of those evils because of their religious membership. This is an important distinction; Fly's cosmopolitan ethics are the opposite of a cordoned-off, politically-correct view of the world that allows for no criticism of the Other. Rather, Fly engages in rigorous debate with almost everyone he meets. In this way, he models what Sandercock calls “interculturalism,” which “accepts the indispensability of group identity to human life (and therefore to politics), precisely because it is inseparable from belonging. But this acceptance needs to be complicated by an insistence, indeed a vigorous struggle against the idea that one’s own group identity has a claim to intrinsic truth” (49). While Otto and Fredao both succumb to the temptation to classify members of different racial or ideological groups as enemies, Fly resists this easy acceptance of static identity and instead rides the hard line of dialogue, refusing to shut down the conversation even as he insists that his interlocutors provide an account of themselves.

Upon being awarded the IMPAC Dublin award for *De Niro's Game* in 2008, Rawi Hage ended his acceptance speech with an appeal to cosmopolitanism that neatly captures the essence of his ethical vision:

as a traveler, a citizen, a worker, a reader, and a writer, I was fortunately bound to become a global citizen. The history of mankind is full of wars, divisions, the flow of blood, the flight of refugees, and misery. I long for the day when an

African child will be able to roam the world as if it is rightfully his. I long for the day when Palestinian, Guatemalan, Iraqi, and Afghani children will have homes to keep and build upon. I long for the day when we humans realize that all we are are gatherers and wanderers, ever bound to cross each other's paths, and that these paths belong to us all." (Hage, "IMPAC")

In a few eloquent sentences, Hage suggests that the problem with twenty-first-century globalization is not the interruption of traditional ways of life, but the unequal ways in which this has occurred. The cosmopolitan ethic that Fly embodies demands that everyone have the right to be a cosmopolitan, and draws unrelenting attention to the places and people for whom, in our vertically cosmopolitan world, this is not yet the case.

In this chapter, I have tried to chart the ways in which *Carnival* both represents the inequalities of vertical cosmopolitanism and imagines possible responses to these inequalities. These responses are, however compelling, limited, and *Carnival* ends in tragedy. While Fly practices a cosmopolitan ethic that engages and challenges otherness in ways that hold people to account for their actions, there is clearly a limit to this kind of peaceful resistance. Sarnath Patel does not listen to Fly because he does not need to; within the structures of vertical cosmopolitanism, which have been engineered to protect the elites, *Carnival* seems to suggest that the only real avenue to make him listen is the one taken by Otto: violence. In the next chapter, I will engage the questions this violence raises through an examination of how it functions in Hage's second novel, *Cockroach*. While Otto's violence is misdirected, *Cockroach* challenges us to take seriously the idea of refugee vengeance as a way of achieving moral and political empowerment.

Chapter 4: The Vengeful Refugee

Morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies

– G.K. Chesterton

Acts of revenge play a significant role in all three of Rawi Hage's novels. Bassam risks his life and is forced to flee Lebanon because he takes revenge on Rambo, Otto's anger against the oppressive forces of the carnival city causes him to pursue revenge at the end of *Carnival*, and *Cockroach's* central narrative is a revenge story. While the revenge trope is one of the oldest in Western literature, Hage places it in a distinctly modern context and challenges his readers to take seriously the possibility that revenge might sometimes not only be justified, but necessary. In the previous chapter, I suggested the notion of vertical cosmopolitanism as a way of understanding how unequal power relations shape individual experiences of cosmopolitanism, creating both a privileged and an abject class of cosmopolitans, and argued that while Hage is deeply committed to the border-transgressing principles of cosmopolitanism he resists the abusive power embedded in the currently vertical cosmopolitan reality. For Hage, this resistance is often a violent one. In this chapter I will explore some of the implications of this violence through the notion of refugee vengeance. In so doing, I intend not only to discuss what I understand to be the central underpinnings of the political and moral vision realized in Hage's novels, but also explore what can be learned from this vision and how it might be applied to current debates about refugees, migrants, and asylum-seekers.

One of the things that literature enables us to do – and one of the reasons why literary analysis can be helpfully brought to bear on theorizing the migrant and the refugee – is explore the subjective ways in which larger political, historical, or economic problems are experienced by individuals caught up in them. Literary works both bring us

closer to individual experiences of injustice and keep us at enough of a remove that we do not feel the immediate need to censure characters' morally dubious actions in the same way that we would if they took place outside the pages of a novel. While the value or (im)morality of revenge literature is often explained (or excused) as an exercise in catharsis, a sort of pressure-release that allows people to vicariously indulge their violent urges, such readings avoid more interesting questions about what acts of revenge mean and how they might change our perspective on vengeance in the real world. I do not think, for example, that the shocking violence at the end of *Carnival* brings a cathartic release that allows us to exorcise our own violent urges; if anything, it inspires disgust, and sadness that we live in a world where such things can and do happen. Rather than being viewed as a fantastic escape from the institutional justice that governs most of our lives, revenge literature should be taken seriously as a way of exploring the limits of institutional justice. The violence at the end of *Carnival* is a serious warning about the implications of current systemic inequalities; it calls us to reconsider who is excluded from our justice system and to explore ways of ending such exclusions. In this final chapter, I look at how all of Hage's novels – but *Cockroach* especially – take revenge seriously, portraying it as a way for those who have been stripped of their political personhood to assert themselves as moral agents. I will suggest that in *Cockroach*, at least, Hage presents revenge as “a technology of moral empowerment” (French xi) for those who have no recourse to established systems of justice.

This chapter is about the idea and practice of refugee vengeance. By refugee vengeance I mean acts of revenge committed by refugees who have no recourse to established systems of justice, acts that both serve to redress serious wrongs and assert

the moral personhood of the avenger or person being avenged. In doing so, I make two assumptions: first, that acts of “virtuous vengeance” are possible in specific times and places if they meet certain criteria (which will be explored in greater detail further on), and second that these acts make possible a kind of moral empowerment. I believe that refugee vengeance offers a powerful critique of the ways in which refugees are routinely stripped of political agency and moral personhood; refugee vengeance not only asserts agency and personhood in a way not limited by citizenship, but also serves as a reminder of the relationship between violence and power. As Hannah Arendt has argued, these terms are frequently conflated in a way that makes violence “nothing more than the most flagrant manifestation of power” (*On Violence* 3); however, a more careful analysis reveals that “Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent” (*On Violence* 56). The violence of virtuous vengeance always arises from a state of powerlessness in which the avenger has lost all recourse to the structures through which justice is normally mediated, and so these acts of violence should point us beyond themselves to the larger systems of power and exclusion that have caused them.

The previous two chapters dealt with the ways in which refugees and migrants are typically cut off from the accepted forms of political agency because they operate outside of the established structures of political belonging. As we saw in *De Niro's Game*, Bassam's unwillingness to play the apolitical victim saw him fleeing Paris at the end of the novel into an unknown future. In *Carnival*, Otto's refusal to stand idle in the face of political oppression led to his arrest and abuse at the hands of a corrupt police force and his macabre psychological “treatment” at the mental hospital. These fictional accounts are mirrored by the real experiences of refugees and temporary foreign workers who find

themselves the “guests” of Western nations that circumscribe their ability to fully engage in civil and political life. As Giorgio Agamben has noted, this stripping away of individual civil identity places refugees in the tenuous and vulnerable space of “bare life,”²¹ a space “situated at the margins of the political order” (*Sacer* 12) in which they are recognized as human without being guaranteed the “universal” human rights provided to citizens. As he suggests elsewhere, “In the nation-state system, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man prove to be completely unprotected at the very moment it is no longer possible to characterize them as rights of the citizens of a state” (“Refugees” 116). Despite all the talk of cosmopolitanism and the death of the nation-state, sanctioned political agency, it would seem, is still the privilege of the citizen and the citizen alone.

For Hage, this is where vengeance comes in. *Cockroach* is the story of a community of refugees whose only avenue for justice lies in revenge. The challenges the novel presents to its readers are deeply moral ones: what does vengeance do (to the avenger as well as the offender), and at what point does it become not only justified, but necessary? The first part of this chapter will consider how *Cockroach* poses these questions, reading it in the context of the American philosopher Peter A. French’s work on the idea of virtuous vengeance. The second part will look at the implications of these questions for refugee and immigration studies by bringing Hage’s narratives into conversation with the work of Hannah Arendt and Peter Nyers, and reading these narratives against actual cases of refugee vengeance. Ultimately, I want to argue that by representing refugees and asylum-seekers not primarily as refugees or asylum-seekers but

²¹For Agamben, “bare life” is the life of the *homo sacer* (“sacred man”), an “obscure figure of archaic Roman law, in which human life is included in the juridical order...solely in the form of its exclusion (that is, its capacity to be killed)” (*Sacer* 12).

as individuals who have been wronged and abused by systems of government and power – in both their countries of origin and their places of refuge – Hage restores their potential for political agency without falling back on nationally-bounded conceptions of citizenship.

Cockroach is told from the perspective of an intelligent but unnamed and unreliable narrator who weaves together the story of his efforts to survive as an immigrant in Montreal with searing critiques of the hypocrisy and injustice of the world around him. He struggles not only to provide himself with sustenance, but also to stay in one piece psychologically. The narrator, we learn at the beginning of the novel, recently attempted to commit suicide “as a challenge to nature, to the cosmos itself, to the recurring light. I felt oppressed by it all” (4). He was institutionalized after his attempt failed (the branch he tried to hang himself from would not hold his weight), and after his release he is forced to attend court-mandated therapy. Through his conversations with Genevieve, the naive therapist whose inconsistent and unhelpful advice causes him great frustration, the story of his youth in a war-torn middle-eastern city and the murder of his older sister – for which he is partially responsible – slowly emerges. Outside of therapy, his life becomes complicated by his involvement with the beautiful Iranian refugee Shohreh, who was imprisoned and tortured for three years after the revolution of 1979 brought Ayatollah Khoemeini to power. When his job as a busboy at an Iranian restaurant brings him into contact with a man who horrifically abused Shohreh while she was in prison and who is now a powerful diplomat negotiating a trade deal with the Canadian government, the narrator feels that he has been given a chance to make amends for failing to protect his own sister years before. Though he failed to save his sister’s life when she

married an abusive militiaman and lacked the courage to avenge her death, he is now in a position to help Shohreh take revenge on the man who raped her. When, in the novel's denouement Shohreh fails to kill her former captor, the narrator joins her in her stand against the injustice of the world and kills the man on her behalf.

Cockroach is a difficult novel to interpret. In addition to the sophistication of its plotting, the unreliability of the traumatized narrator makes it difficult at times to understand where reality ends and fantasy begins. The narrator has repeated episodes in which he imagines himself to be a cockroach, and it is not always clear when he is simply employing elaborate metaphors to describe concrete experiences and when he is actually suffering from hallucinations or psychotic breaks. The text is also made difficult by its nuanced use of symbols. *Cockroach* adapts many symbolically heavy motifs to serve unconventional purposes. Light, for example, is connected throughout the novel with oppression rather than goodness or illumination, and while the cockroach might first appear to be a reference to the alienated protagonist of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* or to the dehumanization of refugees and immigrants, the novel twists and inverts it to carry a more positive meaning. The cockroach may be dirty, squalid, and inhuman, but for Hage this makes it empowering as well as terrifying. The narrator characterizes the cockroach as symbolic of the violent, revolutionary power that comes with dispossession. At one point he warns the racist maître d' who refuses him a job as a waiter because of the colour of his skin that "one day he would be serving only giant cockroaches on his velvet chairs," for "[d]oomed you will be, doomed as you are infested with newcomers!" (30). In one of the novel's most important scenes, the narrator (after having snorted a line of cocaine) is visited by a giant albino cockroach who chastises him for failing to fully

commit himself to resisting the oppressive power of the wealthy and privileged, for “living on the periphery of the kill. Waiting for the kill, but never having the courage to do it yourself” (201). The future belongs to the revolutionary cockroaches, and the narrator frames his internal struggle throughout the novel as a struggle between his independent, apolitical, and non-violent human side and his “cockroach” side, which embraces and participates in the violent rebellion against oppression and injustice. It is the cockroach side that finally wins out when he avenges Shohreh, and in the novel’s last scene he pictures himself escaping down a drain, slipping with “glittering wings towards the underground” (305).

In addition to these more fantastical elements, however, *Cockroach* also presents an uncompromisingly gritty view of the poverty and squalor its immigrant narrator is forced to endure and harshly critiques the willful ignorance of established Canadians regarding the difficulties faced by immigrants and refugees in adapting to their new environment. The narrator has no illusions about the role that immigrants are expected to play in mainstream Canadian society, noting that “The exotic has to be modified here – not too authentic, not too spicy or too smelly, just enough of it to remind others of a fantasy elsewhere” (20). He is also cynically aware that he can use this desire for a “fantasy elsewhere” to play the “The fuckable, exotic, dangerous foreigner” (199) in order to get food and drugs. Like Fly in *Carnival*, however, he does not limit his attacks on hypocrisy and pretension to settler-Canadians. Indeed, some of the most odious and pathetic characters in the novel are immigrants and refugees. While the Canadians are largely portrayed as being naïve and impotent, he proclaims that “the Third World elite are the filth of the planet and I do not feel any affinity with their jingling-jewellery wives,

their arrogance, their large TV screens. Filth! They consider themselves royalty when all they are is the residue of colonial power” (159). Like Fly, the narrator of *Cockroach* insists on distinguishing between the migrants who have suffered dispossession in leaving their homelands and those who “walk like they are aristocrats, owners from the land of spice and honey, yet. . . are nothing but the descendants of porters, colonial servants, gardeners, and sell-out soldiers for invading empires” (159).

This disconnect, between the dangerously naïve world of mainstream Canada and the refugees and immigrants whose lives continue to be shaped by violence and trauma, is one of the novel’s main themes, and it is colourfully captured in the narrator’s relationship with his therapist, Genevieve. While the narrator knows full well that most of his problems arise from poverty and loneliness – suggesting that “Maybe all I ever needed to be cured was to be held by warm arms, above silky sheets, and fed by food in a full fridge, and gazed at from pillows, and feel my hair caressed” (97) – Genevieve insists on locating the roots of his depression and attempted suicide in his childhood relationships with members of his family. He describes his basic anger with her at the beginning of the novel, saying:

The therapist. . . brought on a feeling of violence within me that I hadn’t experienced since I left my homeland. She did not understand. For her, everything was about my relationships with women, but for me, everything was about defying the oppressive power in the world that I can neither participate in nor control. (5)

In searching for deeper causes for the narrator’s anger, the therapist conveniently depoliticizes his problems. According to Genevieve, neither poverty nor the hostility he

experiences from mainstream Canadian society are to blame for his attempted suicide; instead, she tries to trace it back to the troubled dynamics of his family during his youth. At one point, after she asks if his mother was “nourishing,” he steers the conversation towards his current situation, saying “I like food. . . . Though I worry about food shortages lately.” In a response that captures at once her total inability to understand his situation and the absurdity of her desire to find psychoanalytic causes for his problems, she responds by asking “Did you have enough food in your youth? For now I am interested in your past” (49).

Genevieve is also unable or unwilling to acknowledge the unequal power dynamics of their own relationship. Throughout the novel, she encourages the narrator to use her name when speaking to her, though he prefers to refer to her simply as “doctor.” The narrator, who has no choice but to attend the therapy sessions, is fully aware that he is in a subordinate relation to Genevieve (however she might try to mask it behind a façade of informality) and wants to honestly confront this aspect of their relationship. She prefers to pretend that their relationship is a mutual one – at least until she becomes frustrated by his lack of progress and threatens to re-institutionalize him, justifying these threats by reminding him of her “responsibility towards the taxpayers” (60). As the novel progresses, this unhealthy power dynamic becomes increasingly apparent. When Genevieve suggests that he has problems with intimacy, the narrator, who must bare his soul to Genevieve in their sessions, asks her to open herself up to him, arguing that “I feel as if I do not know you and here you are, asking everything about me. But who are you? I mean, you are silent most of the time” (77). When Genevieve refuses to do so, falling back on the purely “professional” (167) nature of their relationship, the narrator breaks

into her apartment while she is out and spends a day literally inhabiting her world. In this brilliant act of reversal, the therapist becomes the object of analysis as the patient scrutinizes her life through the objects in her home. The narrator “returns” Genevieve’s gaze and, by subtly communicating to her that he has done so, destabilizes her power. In a later therapy session he turns her own reductive line of questioning back on her, explaining that “You can be a pacifist because you have a job and a nice house, a big TV screen, a fridge full of ham and cheese, and a boyfriend who goes with you to nice resorts in sunny places” (99). If revenge is, in essence, about returning a received wrong to the offending party, then this scene constitutes an act of vengeance in an important way. Having been turned into an object of the therapist’s intrusive gaze, the narrator shows her how it feels to have a stranger forcibly penetrate her privacy by returning that gaze.

The narrator’s relationship with Genevieve typifies his relationship with the Canadian mainstream. While he and his fellow-migrants are appreciated for their exotic flavour, they are barred from any meaningful kind of belonging within the structures of wealth and governance. When Genevieve criticizes him for wasting taxpayer money by not fully participating in their sessions, reminding him that “Some of us [actually pay taxes]” (60), he acerbically notes, “Well, yes, yes indeed, I should be grateful for what this nation is giving me. I take more than I give, indeed it is true. But if I had access to some wealth, I would contribute my share” (65). Despite the fact that he is destitute in his new country, the narrator is not allowed to express anything but gratitude to the Canadian government and the Canadian taxpayer. As we saw in the introduction with the case of Samjida Begum and Abdul Karim, this expectation of gratitude makes impossible any meaningful discussion about the failures of the refugee and immigration system by

introducing a false comparison between the refugee or immigrant's standard of living in Canada and the standard of living they experienced in their country of origin. It is also, of course, profoundly dehumanizing. To be stripped of the right to make demands rather than supplications is to be stripped of political personhood, to be "allocated a bare life with minimal requirements, needing only the basics of food, shelter, and medical care to be sustained" (Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees* 98). *Cockroach's* narrator refuses to be stripped in this way – as he says in one particularly virulent outburst, "Bourgeois filth! . . . I want my share!" (88) – but his desire for political and personal agency (and his refusal to play the part of the abject and abjectly grateful refugee) force him outside of established legal channels.

This occurs because, as was discussed in the first chapter, the very state of "legitimate" refugeeness is constituted by a lack of political voice. Peter Nyers writes of the communities of "warrior refugees" who, refusing to become passive victims, take up arms in order to assert their political demands, and points out that the "the conventional literature on refugees condemns these individuals and communities not only on moral grounds but on epistemological grounds. . . the common consensus on the refugee warrior phenomenon is that this classification of refugees constitutes a misnomer, a category mistake" (*Rethinking Refugees* 99). Political action is the property of the citizen or the terrorist: refugee claimants who become politically active aren't citizens, and so, ipso facto, they must be terrorists. But while Nyers argues that "Refugee warriors are, fundamentally, an example of refugees who attempt to escape the state of exception that defines the paradox of the refugee condition" (*Rethinking Refugees* 101), he stipulates that "Refugee warriors, it needs to be stressed, are never simply individuals but always

part of a refugee warrior community” (Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees* 114). He extends his reading of refugee warriors to include the incarcerated refugees who rioted in Australia’s Woomera Detention Centre in 2000, and so includes refugees who employ the traditional tactics of protest used in Western civil society, stressing that this collective political action done in the public sphere is an analogous manifestation of political voice. Nyers does not, however, address the possibility that individual refugees who are not acting within the context of a “warrior community” could similarly assert a political voice. This is precisely the question that I want to investigate through the revenge story at the heart of *Cockroach*. It seems to me that, while they are manifested in very different ways, refugee avengers in *Cockroach* and the rioting refugees of Woomera Detention Centre are engaged in a similar form of resistance. Both cases involve refugees who commit acts of civic disobedience in order to reveal a breakdown in the justice system, and in both cases these acts of civil disobedience assert the full political personhood of the wronged parties. In the case of refugee vengeance, however, the act serves a further purpose: not only does it critique the unjust workings of the law, but it also holds those who enforce and benefit from these injustices accountable. In short, refugee vengeance has a moral as well as a political dimension.

Revenge holds a rather enigmatic place in Western civilization. While the practice of revenge is decried as barbaric and primitive, the revenge tragedy – from *The Iliad* to *Hamlet* to *Unforgiven* – would seem to be both the noblest and most popular literary form, holding a pre-eminent place in our cultural imagination. In his controversial 2001 book *The Virtues of Vengeance*, Peter A. French²² suggests that this

²²French, perhaps unsurprisingly, lives and teaches in Arizona.

ambivalence is due to the fact that while our systems of justice have been “designed to remove the personal from revenge and turn the whole process into state retribution, the impersonal, socially sanctioned meting of punishment to those adjudicated as deserving of it by a disinterested body representative of the community in which the offense occurred” (33), the personal feeling of being wronged and the desire to return that wrong, is “one of the primary foundations of morality” (97). At its core, revenge is a “technology of moral empowerment” (xi), a way of redressing wrongs.²³ The basic thrust of French’s argument is that, while humans have an instinctive sense of justice, we live in a world that does not guarantee just outcomes, and so justice is not a given; it must be enacted, it must be “done.” French sees justice as one of the basic roots of morality – an unjust action does not simply call out for compensation, it calls out for an acknowledgement that there has been an offense, that wrong has been done. “Revenge,” as French points out, “is one way to ensure the linkage between wrongful behaviour and penalties; penal sanctions and other forms of communally adopted or approved punishments are another” (70). For French, vengeance is primarily an act of communication; it is not about compensation and it is not “to make the offender a better person” (85). The offender’s

acceptance of the wrongness of what he or she did is not crucial. . . . What matters is that he or she understands that the penalty is being inflicted because of the wrongness of the act as perceived by the avenger. . . . The act of vengeance is an expression of the effect of morality in and for itself. Morality has been mocked by the offender, but, through the avenger’s agency, morality will yet have a very

²³French does “not claim that it is the only one or indeed that it is the best one, although in some situations it may well be the only available one” (xi).

significant effect on the offender's life. It may well end it. (85)

Our ongoing cultural fascination with revenge arises from the fact that the desire for revenge is an expression of one of our most primal experiences of justice: the desire to make someone who has hurt us feel what they have made us feel, to communicate to them the extent of their transgression.

There are three alternatives to revenge, two of which French acknowledges. The first are the “penal sanctions and other forms of communally adopted or approved punishments” that provide an alternative way of censuring the offensive act; the second is to do nothing, an approach French describes as “cowardice” (110) and which he argues leads to “wrongdoers practicing their transgressions with impunity” (111). The final alternative, of course, is forgiveness. In order to be meaningful in a more than purely personal or introspective sense, forgiveness also involves an act of communication. To forgive is to implicitly suggest that an offense has been committed and thus to inform the offender that they have done wrong. As with vengeance, the offender need not agree that they have committed an offense and may not apologize – forgiveness need not change the offender's actions in order to be meaningful. Moreover, as with vengeance, forgiveness is a way of asserting moral agency. To forgive someone else is to put them in a morally subordinate position to oneself, to insist that the offender has compromised one's human dignity and to suggest that, while this offense has been forgiven, it need not have been – forgiveness always implies the possibility of revenge. As a society, the West is currently far more comfortable with forgiveness than with revenge. Without engaging any of the complicated historical, religious, or sociological reasons for why this is the case, let me suggest that it might in no small part be due to the fact that those in positions of power

and privilege in the West have much to be forgiven for. This is perhaps why Hage gives forgiveness short shrift in his novels. While both revenge and forgiveness assert moral personhood, revenge exacts a cost from the offender in a way that forgiveness does not. In a context where the offenders are powerful and protected members of the elite, there is perhaps little hope that forgiveness will lead to concrete change.

As French acknowledges, in most societies the revenge/forgiveness binary has been replaced by legal systems for retribution and recompense. In such contexts, vengeance becomes a deeply anti-social rejection of the established conventions of legal justice and can hardly be interpreted as upholding the moral order. But what happens when the law is no longer enforced, or when it only serves the interests of an elite? The notion of legitimate vengeance is predicated on the idea that revenge is only acceptable where the ordinary structures for justice have broken down; as French puts it, “revenge is morally permissible if the avenues of civil redress of serious grievance are blocked” (34). In such times, morality can only be preserved through the independent actions of wronged peoples or actions taken on their behalf, and avengers become the ones who uphold morality in the absence of the law through the communicative act of vengeance. Instead of being (or in addition to being), an act of passion, revenge becomes an assertion that in the face of the apparent moral emptiness of the world there are wrongs that should be redressed. As Shohreh argues in *Cockroach*, “People should pay the price for their crimes” (244). Sometimes they don’t, but they *should*.

But revenge as an act of communication is not simply about informing the offender that they have done wrong; to take revenge is, in a very basic way, to assert one’s humanity (or the humanity of the person being avenged) and demand to be treated

accordingly. Those who have been stripped of political personhood and reduced to bare life are, in Agamben's words, those who "*may be killed and yet not sacrificed*" (Sacer 12); that is, those whose lives (and therefore, deaths) have no political meaning. While this may seem somewhat melodramatic – the poetic grandiloquence of academics who have spent too much time in the library, perhaps – one needn't look far to see this dynamic in action. Agamben's example of bare life is life in camps, "internment camps, concentration camps, extermination camps" ("Refugees" 117), and the camps are still with us. Writing of refugee internment camps in Australia, where law requires that refugees without papers be incarcerated immediately, Peter Nyers notes that "refugees detained in these centres are faced with conditions that promote some of the most extremely negative aspects of refugeeness: they are constituted as a bare form-of-life and, therefore, made politically invisible, passive, temporary and speechless" (*Rethinking Refugees* 119). No one can be considered legally to blame for the extreme psychological abuse experienced by the inmates of such camps, because they belong to no political community. Even though we might argue that this abuse is deeply immoral, it is certainly not illegal. Likewise, no one is to blame for the deaths of the Jan Szamko and Michael Akhmien, both of whom died from "medical neglect" (Dawson 8) in Canadian immigration detention centres. While the Canadian government's harsh treatment of refugees in detention centres²⁴ has been criticized by refugee advocacy groups, the simple reality is that the refugee's life *is* bare life; they have no belonging in a political community, and so their lives and deaths are politically meaningless until given meaning by some kind of political body, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for

²⁴For a fuller account of the conditions within Canadian detention centres see Janet Cleveland, Cecile Rousseau, and Rachel Kronick's study of detention and its impact on mental health.

Refugees, and even so influential a body as the UN can do little when a sovereign nation is bent on denying that these lives and deaths are anything but apolitical tragedies or mistakes. While the language of universal human rights is spoken everywhere, it is always mediated by the particular justice systems of sovereign nations; those who have no belonging in a sovereign nation have no rights before those nations.²⁵ In cases such as this, to take revenge for a perceived wrong is a radically political move. By doing so the avenger makes the claim that she deserves to be treated as though she is a member of the political community.

In *Cockroach*, the offense that calls for redress is Shohreh's unjust incarceration and sexual abuse after the Iranian revolution. Because the offense was committed by a protected member of the Iranian government, there is no court in which she can plead her case. But while millions of refugees are in the same situation, Shohreh must bear the further indignity of knowing that the man who abused her is living happily in the same city as her and conducting business under the protection of her government. When she encounters her abuser in a restaurant, she has no way of seeing justice done. In this scene, the full obscenity of the vertical cosmopolitanism discussed in the previous chapter becomes clear. Montreal is indeed a cosmopolitan city, but Shohreh and her abuser do not participate in it equally. He forced her to flee her country, but he can follow her with impunity because of his position as a member of a protected political elite. For Shohreh, taking revenge is not simply a matter of "getting even;" it is a way of asserting, in the

²⁵ Within the categories I have laid out there is a significant grey area, that of the potentially "second class" citizen. The recent case of the murder of Trayvon Martin draws attention to the fact that there may be those whose citizenship makes them technical members of the political community, but whose marginalization for reasons of race, ethnicity, gender, or religion is enshrined within the laws of that nation. The complications of second-class citizenship in cases of legitimate vengeance are problematic, for they remind us of the always-imperfect nature of systematized justice. I do not have space within the structure of this project to take up these issues, but I believe that they are closely related and need to be explored.

face of corrupt hierarchies of power, that her life and her experience have meaning.

Shohreh's revenge on her abuser, though it is ultimately carried out by the narrator on her behalf, bears all the marks of French's virtuous vengeance: there is no established system of justice to which she can appeal, she punishes the person who visited the offense on her and communicates why she is doing so, and her punishment fits the crime. While she doesn't do the actual killing, the person who does it on her behalf is a willing participant who does so in full knowledge of the situation. Unlike Otto in *Carnival*, whose violence arises from oppression but which ultimately fails to manifest itself against the right targets, Shohreh's revenge is both a moral and political act which calls attention to the unjust workings of the system. As in *De Niro's Game* and *Carnival*, Hage's ultimate targets are the acts of discrimination and exclusion that sustain vertical cosmopolitanism. While Canada presents a benevolent face to the world, its political and business elites are as involved in corruption and violence as the elites of every other country. As one of the Iranian refugees in *Cockroach* points out, "Montreal, this happy, romantic city, has an ugly side. . . One of the largest military-industrial complexes in North America is right here in this town. What do you think? That the West prospers on manufacturing cars, computers, and Ski-Doos?" (281). Moreover, the elites protect each other: Shohreh's torturer is provided with a bodyguard by the Canadian government. The narrator's killing of Shohreh's torturer not only punishes him for his iniquity, but also calls the Canadian government to account for its willingness to protect and do business with a corrupt regime.

While *Cockroach* represents a fictional account of refugee vengeance and therefore might be dismissed as a cathartic fantasy of violence, refugee vengeance is not

a purely fictional phenomenon. In Paris, on May 25th, 1926, the Ukrainian Jew Sholem Schwartzbad approached Symon Petlura, who had led the Directorate of Ukraine during the Soviet invasion in 1919 and overseen a series of violent anti-semitic pogroms, and killed him in cold blood. He then turned himself over to the police forces, explaining that he had “killed a great assassin” (“Petlura Trial”). Schwartzbad was acquitted of murder because the act ‘signified that [his] race had finally decided to defend itself, to leave behind its moral abdication, to overcome its resignation in the face of insults’” (Arendt, *Eichmann* 266). More specifically, it was ruled that the act was justified in the face of the violence that the Jewish people had suffered in the Ukrainian pogroms. Forty years later, ruminating on the trial of the prominent Nazi Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt argued that Schwartzbad, and the Armenian assassin Soghomon Tehlirian (who had committed a similar act of refugee vengeance by killing Talaat Pasha, the architect of the Armenian genocide), were justified because

neither [Schwartzbad nor Tehlirian] was satisfied with killing ‘his’ criminal, but. . . both immediately gave themselves up to the police and insisted on being tried. Each used his trial to show the world through court procedure what crimes against his people had been committed and gone unpunished. (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 265)

Both acts of vengeance were primarily about communication. They asserted the personhood of their marginalized groups by exacting the only form of justice available to them. Unlike the raw anger or profound hopelessness that inspires acts of terrorism, refugee vengeance is moral in its affirmation of the ideals that undergird law; what it demands is access to that law. As Arendt shrewdly notes, “he who takes the law into his

own hands will render a service to justice only if he is willing to transform the situation in such a way that the law can again operate and his act can, at least posthumously, be validated” (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* 265). Refugee avengers do not seek to destroy the society in which they live but rather, as the narrator of *Cockroach* puts it, they “want [their] share” (88).

When Arendt argues in her 1970 book *On Violence* that “violence. . . is more the weapon of reform than of revolution” (79), she draws attention to the fact that violence tends to reinforce already existing structures rather than overthrow them. Refugee violence is no different. While Mao famously claimed that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun” (qtd. in Arendt, *On Violence* 11), Arendt suggests that power and violence are in fact very different. For her, “*Power* corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (italics in original, 22), while violence essentially amounts to nothing more than the application of strength to achieve one’s ends. Thus, “[t]he extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All” (*On Violence* 42), and “where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent” (*On Violence* 56). Shohreh’s case in *Cockroach* illustrates precisely this dynamic, for what she lacks completely is power – she has no ability to influence larger political processes, and she is not part of an extended network that might serve to empower her, and so all she is left only with violence. Conversely, the state does not need to use violence against migrants like the narrator because the state’s policies have the overwhelming support of the public. The naïve and innocent Genevieve can be the face of an oppressive system because its power is so thoroughly entrenched that it needs no jack-booted, machine-gun-toting storm troopers in order to maintain the status quo.

However, violence can be a “weapon of reform” insofar as it is used to “dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention” (Arendt, *On Violence* 79). By pointing to the ways in which systems of justice have ceased to properly function, refugee vengeance calls these systems to account for their failure to uphold their own stated values.

But refugee vengeance of the kind that Schwartzbad and Tehlirian represent is also a deeply personal matter. While they strike out against an entire system of oppression, they do so by holding influential individuals within the system accountable. Recognition of the systemic nature of oppression cannot become an excuse for generalized attacks on “the system” that do not hold individuals to account for their actions. As Arendt points out, “Where all are guilty, no one is; confessions of collective guilt are the best possible safeguard against the discovery of culprits, and the very magnitude of the crime the best excuse for doing nothing” (*On Violence* 65). While the abuses of the Iranian revolution were systematic (just as the abuses that led to the deaths of Jan Szamko and Michael Akhmien were embedded in a system), refugee vengeance is a reminder that these systems are operated and sustained by human actors, some of whom have a great deal more responsibility than others. Jason Kenney should be held to greater account for the abuses within Canada’s immigration and refugee programs than other Canadians because he has a power that other Canadians lack. Refugee vengeance upholds the personal and moral dimensions of political action by insisting that those in positions of power take responsibility for what they have done.

Vengeance is based on the recognition of this kind of responsibility, and it makes what is increasingly a revolutionary claim: that individuals are responsible for what they do and should be held to account regardless of who they represent or what political

bodies they belong to. Holding individuals accountable for their actions is one of the foundational principles of morality.²⁶ It is precisely in Hage's individualism – his persistent use of the first person, his refusal to excuse his character's actions even at their most morally problematic – that he is most political. It is because the Iranian diplomat whom Shohreh meets *is* the person who raped her, not just a symbolic iteration of him, that her violence is justified. When Shohreh says that "People should pay the price for their crimes" (244), she is talking about specific people. Again, this does not, for Hage, excuse people like Genevieve or the wealthy Montreal dilettantes who participate uncritically in violent structures, but it does push us to take more seriously the idea that political and business leaders should be made accountable when their policies and decisions cause suffering or death. Like the refugee vengeance of Sholem Schwartzbad, Hage's refugee vengeance is a way of reforming the system, drawing attention to its flaws and failures by asserting concrete claims about individuals whose serious transgressions have gone unpunished. "Rage and violence turn irrational only when they are directed against substitutes" (Arendt, *On Violence* 64); when they are directed towards their proper targets they become entirely appropriate. As French puts it, "[t]o teach morality is not just to teach kindness and a number of prohibitions; it is to teach when and how and at whom to be angry, who and when to retributively hate, and when and how to act because of one's moral anger and retributive hatred" (111).

But what is the actual importance of this for refugee studies? I believe that Hage provides us with a different framework in which to view refugees, one that substitutes the basic but coherent category of moral personhood for that of citizenship. As Nyers and

²⁶French notes that "In the earliest mythological explanations, acts of vengeance are represented as the only ways to rectify structurally unequal situations of tyranny" (4).

Agamben so helpfully elucidate, the problem with refugees is a problem of bare life: humanity so stripped of the things that constitute it that it becomes meaningless. Moral personhood, founded on the basic notion of justice that underwrites revenge – that is, persons empowered to make demands of those who injure them and of whom such demands can be made – is a way of considering the refugee that does not fall back on political belonging.

This insistence on moral personhood was also at play in the protests by the Algerian Comité d'Action des Sans-Statuts (CASS) in Montreal in 2002. During the civil war of the nineteen-nineties, many Algerians sought asylum in Canada. While many were not granted refugee status, the Canadian government decided in 1997 that the country was too dangerous to return failed claimants to and put a moratorium on deportations – an irony not lost on the failed claimants. However, while little had changed by 2002, the moratorium was lifted in April of that year. Instead of complying with the government's decision to deport them to war-torn Algeria, the refugees occupied various Canadian immigration offices, insisting on speaking with the government officials, and refused to be “treated as file numbers, not as human beings” (Nyers, “Abject Cosmopolitanism” 1084). By forcing the officials to engage with them as human beings, and by assuming the capacities of political speech traditionally granted to citizens – namely, the right to make demands – the Algerians asserted their right to be treated as humans. As one of the refugees, Nacera Kellou, described the situation: “The Immigration officials. . . wanted us to provide the good respectful image: that we'd come in, and we'd go upstairs, and we'd sit down, and we'd wait, and we'd talk to them like things are normal. But things aren't normal! This was panic, and we acted in such a way”

(qtd. in Nyers, “Abject Cosmopolitanism” 1084). The bureaucratization of the refugee process allows the officials who carry it out to pretend that they are not, in fact, dealing with emergencies. By acting as humans do in emergencies, the refugees made it impossible for the officials to keep up the pretense of normality.

The CASS protests are obviously not cases of refugee vengeance, but they serve a similar function. In Canada, at least, the current systems of exclusion are maintained through a careful and necessary dehumanization; immigration officials, who probably consider themselves to be decent human beings, have families, enjoy walking in the park, and so forth, can deny refugee claims and incarcerate asylum-seekers for years because they are able to see them as not quite human. Separated from the people whose lives they control by complex policy and labyrinthine bureaucracy, officials are insulated from the consequences of their decisions. What the CASS protests share with refugee vengeance is a commitment to disrupt the regular, “civilized,” workings of the system in order to draw attention to the people who are excluded or oppressed by it. Where they differ is in their methods. While the CASS employs the peaceful techniques of civil protest to draw attention to the condition of Algerian refugees and assert their right to stay in Canada, and by so doing it attempts to draw power through sympathy from the larger Canadian population, refugee vengeance targets individuals within the system who are responsible for injustice and uses violence to demand they be made accountable. Both are limited. The problem with protest is that it requires a wide base of public support; the CASS protests assumed that Canadians would not approve of their government’s unjust policies (or that they wouldn’t if they understood their implications) and would stand in solidarity with the protesters. As Canadian hostility towards immigration and refugees grows, it

becomes less and less possible to rely on the goodwill of the public. The limits to refugee vengeance are rather more obvious: just because an act of revenge may be justified does not mean that the public will see it that way. While Schwartzbad and Tehlirian were both acquitted, there is no guarantee that others would be. Moreover, in the contemporary political climate any act of violence against a Canadian by a refugee, however justified, would likely be considered an act of terrorism.

It is precisely this problematic, I believe, that underlies the deep pessimism that infuses all of Hage's novels. Democratic action requires, on some level, the belief that people are more or less willing to work together for a collectively-conceived good; while there are examples throughout human history of individual acts of courage or resistance that have sparked the sympathy and ignited the outrage of entire nations or communities, Hage is haunted by the always-present possibility that individual acts of courage or resistance will be consigned to the dustbin of history. Hage's novels are shaped by a nihilism that perhaps arises from his own experience of a country torn apart by civil war, where democracy has been unable to overcome deep cultural divisions. One need not read too much of Rawi Hage's own life into his work to say that his novels focus on the individual search for justice because he sees power as always dangerous, problematic and corruptible. His novels instead assert the individual voice of resistance, a voice which says (to quote *Cockroach*'s much put-upon and yet ever defiant narrator), "Yes, I am poor, I am vermin, a bug, I am at the bottom of the scale. But I still exist. I look society in the face and say: I am here, I exist" (122).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

De Niro's Game, *Carnival*, and *Cockroach* all end with their respective narrators alone and on the run. While the refugee stories that the Canadian media and government officials are fond of rehearsing typically end with the refugee being accepted into a benevolent Western state where they find peace and stability, Hage challenges these self-justifying narratives by exploring to the exclusion, discrimination, and violence asylum-seekers and refugees often experience at the hands of Western governments. However, while Hage's narrators may be on the run this does not rob them of moral and political agency; his portrayals of active and politically engaged refugees and migrants critique the traditional expectation that refugees be grateful and apolitical. And yet, even at their most optimistic Hage's narratives contain a deep underlying sense of tragedy. Hage has a nuanced and careful understanding of how power is often abused by those who have it, but his novels either reject or ignore modes of collective action that might challenge such abuses of power. Because his critique of the abject refugee is so rooted in an uncompromising attention to the agency of the individual, he is unable to offer a political alternative to the oppressive structures he critiques. Though he does offer individual and moral alternatives, these alternatives seem unable to escape tragedy. Bassam's refusal to take sides in the Lebanese Civil War is a testament to his deep rejection of the partisanship that tears his country apart, a rejection that shows a high degree of moral and political agency, but it eventually drives him from Lebanon. His rejection of Roland's offer of a Canadian visa reasserts his decision not to get involved, but it forces him to flee again, without papers, to Rome. Though the novel ends with Bassam free and his principles intact, he is also on the run from a powerful intelligence organization with little

money, no papers, and no plan. In Hage's novels, the cost of agency is high indeed.

In the third chapter, I made a distinction between political alternatives to refugee abjection and what I called the individual moral alternative that Hage portrays. The difference between these alternatives is essentially the difference between the Comité d'Action des Sans-Statuts (CASS) and refugee vengeance; in the case of the Comité, refugee abjection is rejected in favour of collective action that relies for its efficacy on leveraging popular sympathy to generate political support. While this collective action may start out on the individual level, with a few isolated voices drawing attention to injustices, to gain any traction these individuals will have to attract enough support from other community, political, or religious groups that the authorities are forced to listen to them. The final goal of such action is a systemic change that would lead to a more just and less dehumanizing refugee process and see Canada practice a greater degree of state-hospitality in a more humane fashion. It demands that refugees be seen as fully human political agents, but it also tacitly accepts the authority of the nation-state and reinforces the normativity of citizenship, and so it is only viable so long as it can appeal to a sympathetic public and deal with a government willing to listen to that public. Refugee vengeance rejects refugee abjection by making political concerns secondary to individual moral concerns. Refugee avengers like the fictional narrator of *Cockroach* or the refugee assassin Sholem Schwartzbad see their actions as having a political dimension (drawing attention to the failures of systematized justice to offer redress to refugees), but the political is secondary to the personal desire to see justice done in a particular case. As I discussed at the end of the third chapter, there are obvious flaws with both alternatives to refugee abjection; however, I believe that the individual and moral dimensions of

refugees' struggles for justice that are foregrounded in Hage's novels might still be made useful for more concrete political approaches to refugee studies. In addition to viewing refugees as collective victims of large (and faceless) geo-political forces, perhaps it is important to emphasize both that every refugee is an individual with a complicated and often morally ambiguous story, and every refugee has been displaced because of the actions of other individuals, who may well hold citizenship in the very nations to which refugees come seeking asylum. Emphasizing the way in which refugees come seeking justice as well as aid – justice that has a personal as well as a collective dimension – encourages us to think of refugees as complex, particular, and possessing political agency.

In the first two chapters I critiqued state-hospitality and vertical cosmopolitanism through *De Niro's Game* and *Carnival*, using both novels to explore the complex functioning of borders in the globalized twenty-first century. Hage portrays a world in which borders are neither absolute nor fading away, but rather are malleable, and manipulated to serve the interests of those in power. For Hage, the nation-state with its conception of collective belonging and equal participation in political structures may be a myth, but the notion that the waning of the nation-state will lead to a waning in oppressive power is equally fanciful. Hage's vision is deeply cosmopolitan, but it is also fully aware of how differently the international businessman and the temporary foreign worker experience cosmopolitanism; in Berthold Schoene's words, Hage's cosmopolitanism seeks to “venture beyond our nationally demarcated horizons into the world at large and understand the domestic and the global as weaving one mutually pervasive pattern of contemporary human circumstance and experience, containing both dark and light” (15). And yet, Hage does not see in this “mutually pervasive pattern” any

avenues for collective action that might feasibly be used to either reform or overthrow the current structures of power, and so he is left only with the individual and his or her coterie of trusted friends, cut off from any political community that might empower their struggles for justice. Under such conditions, refugee vengeance becomes one of the only ways for these characters to assert their right to be treated as humans. This is not a particularly effective long-term solution. As Hannah Arendt observed, violence “can serve to dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention” (79), but it cannot on its own “promote causes” (79); it can bolster power that already exists, but it cannot create it *ex nihilo*.

The alternative to refugee vengeance, refugee activism, is likewise limited. While the CASS effectively made its political voice heard and resulted in many Algerian refugee claimants being given a chance to apply for permanent residency, this decision on the part of the provincial and federal governments reinforced the sovereignty of the state and the normativity of citizenship (Nyers, “Abject Cosmopolitanism” 1086). As Peter Nyers notes, “while the CASS forced the government to recognize them as speaking political agents, they failed at being recognized as political agents speaking as refugees” (Abject Cosmopolitanism” 1087). The CASS managed to assert political agency, but the fact that the government justified its decision to allow many of the Algerians to apply for permanent residency by referring to the Algerians’ “extraordinary situation” (“Abject Cosmopolitanism” 1086) made clear the exceptional nature of the decision. The government’s decision to grant refugees a place in the political order is just another example of the state of exception rather than the sign of an evolving awareness of the dangers of refugee abjection. In the decade since the CASS protests, the Canadian

government has continued to reinforce the state's sovereign power to refuse refugees, culminating in December of 2012 with a series of sweeping changes to Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that further an exclusionary refugee agenda and grant greater discretionary powers to Government ministers. In the face of a government committed to reducing the number of successful refugee claimants while bringing in growing numbers of temporary foreign workers, and a popular press that tends to encourage and support such measures, the hope that strong, sweeping, grassroots democratic action will be able to work lasting systemic changes becomes increasingly tenuous.

There is no question that Hage's grim portrayal of oppressive powers that function on a global level has the ring of truth to it; the question becomes how best to resist these powers. As we have seen, Hage does not offer any clear program for political action. Nor, as a novelist, is he obliged to. That he opens up space to talk about the ways in which this power functions and creates rich and complex characters who challenge the dehumanizing stereotype of the abject refugee is, perhaps, enough. However, I think it is possible to bring Hage's insights into how individuals have experienced the exclusion and lack of agency that often come with being a refugee to bear on how we imagine political resistance. One of the important recurring themes in Hage's work is the notion of individual responsibility. Both the wealthy elites who profit from unethical business practices and the refugees and migrants who fail to challenge these elites are held to account for their actions. For Hage, justice always happens on the individual level, which is why vengeance – the last resort for personal justice in a corrupt world – is such an important element in his work. While it is hardly helpful to advocate for actual acts of

refugee vengeance as an effective way of combating the problems of refugee abjection, it does allow us to reimagine the refugee's need for justice as a personal as well as communal one. This need for personal justice can, perhaps, be most forcefully imagined in the case of failed refugee claimants who are tortured or killed upon deportation.²⁷ These refugees have effectively been failed by the system, but they have also been failed by individuals within the system, and perhaps these individuals need to be held legally accountable. Just as the CASS protests foregrounded the emergency nature of their situation such that immigration officials were unable to ignore the serious dangers that awaited Algerian refugees if they were deported, so opening up legal avenues through which bureaucrats might be prosecuted for failing to grant asylum to refugees in real need might serve to reinforce the rights of asylum-seekers – not as citizens, but as humans.

While the possibility of holding individuals within the government and the civil service legally accountable for what happens to failed refugee claimants is still distant, I believe that demanding this kind of personal responsibility from powerful public officials and politicians is an important part of the struggle for a more equitable and just world. In 1970, Hannah Arendt warned of the dangers presented by the growth of “bureaucracy, or the rule of an intricate system of bureaus in which no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible, and which could be properly called rule by Nobody” (38). Where Nobody rules, nobody can be held accountable. While the complex system of bureaus that has arisen to service the modern welfare state is unavoidable, this does not mean that the individuals who work within it should not be

²⁷The case of Adel Benhmuda, who was deported to Libya in 2008 where he was arrested and tortured, serves as a grim reminder of what can happen to refugees whose claims are rejected (Contenta, “Deported to Torture”).

held accountable for their decisions, just as politicians should be held personally accountable for the legislation they draft. Personal responsibility is not a panacea to cure every ill of a system that increasingly excludes refugees and robs them of political voice, but it may be a way for refugees who have been marginalized or let down by the Canadian refugee and immigration system to assert their political agency by demanding redress rather than asking for mercy.

The tragic and individualistic tone of Hage's novels also speaks to perhaps more pressing concerns about the growing criminalization of refugees. The fact that so many of Hage's characters end up going underground – leaving the sanctioned space of civil society for a liminal existence as undocumented migrants, vigilantes, or political radicals – speaks to the increasingly clandestine nature of migration. Legal scholar Audrey Macklin argues that “refugees are increasingly being erased from our discourse. . . [and] this erasure performs a crucial preparatory step toward legitimating actual laws and practices that attempt to make them vanish in reality” (369). More and more, the only refugees considered to be “authentic” are those pre-selected by the Canadian government from foreign refugee camps. Asylum-seekers who arrive at Canada's borders are immediately considered suspect, and are frequently given little choice but to go underground if they want to avoid imprisonment or deportation. The individualism exhibited by Hage's refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants reflects a deeply cynical attitude regarding the fairness of immigration and refugee systems, and an understanding on the part of these refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants that the state might not only fail to consider their interests, but in fact be actively hostile to them. While Hage's portrayal of refugee vengeance hardly provides a viable program for political action, the

growing criminalization of refugees that Macklin points to draws attention to the fact that for many asylum-seekers, almost all legal avenues are already closed, driving them to pursue what justice they can outside of the law.

Towards the end of *Carnival*, the narrator, Fly, reflects on the Bearded Lady's almost utopian description of the circus in which he spent his youth, as place where "we read books. . . we love everyone and accept everything. . . our bodies are free. . . we travel, resist, and fight and. . . we give refuge to convicts and revolutionaries" (154). As a novelist, Rawi Hage can dream of this kind of freedom and uphold it as the cosmopolitan ideal to be kept in mind as we work towards a freer and more just world. It is, however, hard to imagine how this space might be realized in any but the most fleeting and ephemeral of ways. While Hage's critique of the actually existing power structures that shape our world is valuable for the way in which it draws attention to the inadequacy of current representations of refugees and migrants, his novels do not imagine a political way of overcoming or reforming these structures. His emphasis on individual action foregrounds refugees' moral personhood and political agency in a way that encourages readers to think of refugees not as "huddled masses" but as people with particular stories and specific grievances, but it does not lead to happy endings. Perhaps, however, this attention to the individual and the moral dimensions of refugee experiences can be used to suggest new kinds of political advocacy through its insistence on a politics of accountability.

In the first chapter, I began by discussing Raed Jaser's arrest and the ways in which his long experience with the Canadian refugee and immigration system speaks to the basic failures of the Canadian state and society to understand the complexities of

refugees, migration, and political belonging in the modern world. Perhaps it is apt to end this project by returning briefly to Jaser's case and the problems it makes apparent. While Hage is careful to present characters who are justified in their anger and, for the most part, just in their retribution, Jaser, if he is indeed guilty, can hardly be considered a just avenger; derailing a train full of unknown individuals as a symbolic attack on Canada does not qualify as refugee vengeance. But Jaser's case does serve as a reminder that human beings, if they feel that they have been denied a voice for too long, will act; those actions will not always be rational, fair, or judicious. They may well be misdirected, disproportionate and violent. As the refugee continues to disappear and be replaced with the queue-jumper, the illegal, and the terrorist, the number of asylum-seekers driven to acts of violence may rise. In this case, perhaps Hage's novels offer more than anything else a warning – that the voices of the abject will not be silenced forever.

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