

Rawi Hage's Contemporary Dystopia in *Cockroach*

Hanane Bessami

Department of English, Faculty of Letters and Languages

M'Hamed Bougara University, Boumerdes, Algeria

Email: hbessami@univ-boumerdes.dz

Abstract This research examines Rawi Hage's portrayal of Montreal as a contemporary dystopia in his novel *Cockroach* (2010). Contrary to its standard scholarly definition, the novelist sets his nontraditional dystopia in a realistic setting to communicate the struggle of the poor and traumatized immigrant protagonist in the multicultural Canadian city. By using Lyman Tower Sargent's insights on dystopia and satirical utopia, this study contributes to a broader understanding of dystopia in the diaspora. It finds that Hage's novel displays, on the one hand, a contemporary dystopia for the alienated immigrant minority. It regards Montreal as an unconventional dystopian setting, whose capitalist agenda solidifies the exclusion of the marginalized immigrant group. While the text displays a variety of Eastern immigrant characters, the main protagonist's inability to integrate stems from the city's intensification of his already marginalized psychological and social status. On the other hand, this article amalgamates Sargent's approach with a Deleuzo-Guattarian spatial perspective to interpret the protagonist's metamorphosis and refuge to the underground as a satirical utopia. The unnamed narrator's embrace of the underground, as a liberating space, accentuates not only his rejection of Montreal's imposed hegemony, but also his satire of the capitalist system's biased opportunist agenda that amplifies the social hierarchy between the rich and the poor.

Keywords Hage; unnamed narrator; dystopia; diaspora; satirical utopia

Author **Hanane Bessami** obtained her PhD in English literature from the University of Jordan in 2022. She is currently a lecturer at the university of M'hamed Bougara of Boumerdes, Algeria. She is the author of different articles dwelling on comparative studies. Her current research interests underscore investigation of the Deleuzo-Guattarian approach, dystopia and apocalyptic narratives.

Introduction

Diasporic narratives cannot be detached from contemporaneity. These texts often

mirror their surroundings by representing the grappling of real life-like characters, who find themselves seeking validation and integration in the host country. Being said, writers living in the diaspora have attempted to dig deeper into the creation of the hybrid self as a persona that combines Eastern and Western features of cultural identification. Ward et al. contend that hybrid identities often amalgamate features from both cultures to assimilate into a particular setting. The latter bestows the hybrid persona with both “dynamism” and “flexibility,” in navigating new forms of integration (4).

Rawi Hage is among the authors who investigate related matters to the diasporic persona. He is a Lebanese-Canadian novelist, journalist, and photographer who currently lives in Canada. He has published several titles including *De Niro's Game* (2006) which enabled him to win the International Dublin Literary Award. He later published *The Cockroach* (2010), *Beirut Hellfire Society* (2018) and finally *Stray Dogs* (2022) which earned him a fourth nomination in the Giller Prize. His novel *Cockroach* (2010) investigates the extent of assimilation of different Eastern immigrant characters. Set in Montreal, Canada, the novelist represents the struggle of an immigrant protagonist in finding himself in the big city. The novel, while entering the ongoing discourse on hybridity for immigrant minorities, introduces social class and psychological instability as main factors that exasperate the struggle of the unnamed protagonist, which eventually leads him to committing suicide. Later, he is condemned to therapy. In these sessions, he explains the atrocities of his childhood trauma and his use of the cockroach metamorphosis to escape the corrupt human world.

Hage's *Cockroach* (2010) has elicited controversial feedback from the early phases of its publication. For some, the novel represents a form of resistance to Western oppression. Marchi argues that the protagonist's metamorphosis alters the denigrating representation of the cockroach as a filthy animal to “a powerful tool of self-affirmation and liberation” (53). Similarly, Baron affirms that the text is built on the representation of a “collective trauma” of refugees, including that of the narrator, who despises Western “cures” for he sees them as a new form of “imperialism” (133). While the novel clearly demonstrates signs of resistance to Western hegemony, it also critiques the so-called norms of the human world, whose ethics are constructed to maintain the superiority of the rich over the inferiority of the poor. Other critics have elaborated on the inferiority of the main protagonist on the Canadian soil. Poray-Wybranowska regards food as a motif that intensifies the protagonist's impoverished status and highlights the “consumption practices” to denote social position and Bourgeois attitudes (195). Kraus affirms that the novel's

protagonist personifies “the pure man” (113) due to his inability to be seen as equal to Canadian citizens. The critic maintains that the narrator’s suicide attempt deconstructs the façade of Canada as a land of opportunities for immigrants (Kraus 114). While these perspectives are valid, the critics have failed to contextualize the text as a microcosm of the contemporary society’s defects that widen the social gap between the superior rich and the inferior poor.

While several critics have discussed Rawi Hage’s novel from its socio-cultural implications, no research has attempted to interpret it as a reflection of a contemporary dystopia. The present article, therefore, contributes to both diaspora and dystopian studies. It argues that Montreal is portrayed as an unconventional contemporary dystopia that intensifies the social and psychological exclusion of the poor traumatized immigrant minority. In this sense, Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach* (2010) exposes and at the same time critiques the fallacies of the capitalist society that amplify social hierarchies and accentuate psychological dilemmas of the already excluded immigrant minority.

Montreal’s dystopia, in Hage’s novel, is nontraditional. It is a dystopia that communicates the reality of the marginalized, excluded and alienated minority in the diaspora. It highlights their lack of assimilation into a capitalist-driven culture that intensifies social hierarchies and revives unhealed wounds of the past. The main protagonist’s struggles in the Canadian city accentuate the social inequality between the rich and poor. The character’s marginalized social status, as a poor traumatized immigrant, contributes to dissocializing him from both Western and Eastern immigrant characters. As a result, he takes refuge in the underground as his solace from the corrupted human world. While the mainstream in the West regards the underground as representative of hell (Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt 5), to the narrator, it is a space of freedom and liberation from social constraints. He regards the underground as a safe resort to hide from the everyday misery he encounters in Montreal. In this sense, the underground is both a space of resistance and a satirical utopia created by Hage to comment on the status of immigrant minorities living in the diaspora.

To articulate the article’s main thesis, the study is structured as follows. It starts by contextualizing the meaning of dystopia in fiction, then moves to analyzing Hage’s novel through two main lenses. On the one hand, it scrutinizes how the text represents an unconventional contemporary dystopia for the marginalized poor immigrant protagonist in *Cockroach* (2010). On the other hand, it interprets the unnamed narrator’s resort to the underground as a form of resistance to Montreal’s imposed hegemony, which is regarded, in this paper, as a satirical utopia.

The Dystopian City in Fiction

The word “dystopia” summarizes the defects of the postmodern society. Etymologically, the word originates from the Greek language, *dus* and *topos* “meaning a diseased, bad, faulty, or unfavorable place” (Claeys 4). The term comes to represent a diverging image from a utopian city and brings forth an apocalyptic vision of the world, where chaos seems to be the result of years of crime and dehumanization. Andrew Feenberg writes that the aftermath of WWII has led to an ever-growing doubt awaiting the human race as “prophecies of doom have become clichés on everyone’s lips” (41). The effects of constant wars and death have stimulated the convergence to writing about dystopia. In this, Isomaa et al. regard the term “dystopia” as inclusive of different literary genres that project a certain “apocalyptic” aura. They contend:

We understand dystopian fiction as an umbrella term; it gathers together thematically close genres that often intertwine in individual works of fiction, whatever the medium. As we see it, dystopian fiction accommodates the different historical phases of the genre of dystopia, dystopian narratives of apocalypse, and post-apocalypse. (xi)

To put it differently, and in contrast to the previous readings that originally distinguish dystopia and dystopian fiction from apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction (see Booker and Thomas’s *The Science Fiction Handbook*), Isomaa et al. intensify their interconnectedness in the representation of the modern time’s concerns which epitomizes “negative futures for humankind” (xii).

Claeys, for his part, argues that most of what we come to know of the contemporary world is dystopian and pessimistic (4). He argues, moreover, that while dystopia prevails over fictional narrative, it does not separate itself from reality. In fact, it incarnates a “failed utopia of twentieth-century totalitarianism” (Claeys 5). He accentuates that the rise of the dystopian city, be it in fiction or reality, stems from states of “extreme coercion, inequality, imprisonment, and slavery.” He suggests that the world has come to face three types of dystopia: political, environmental, and technological which merge to “dominate” humankind (Claeys 5).

In Literature, drawing a line between dystopian and anti-utopian narratives was quite difficult. It was not until Lyman Tower Sargent’s essay titled “Utopia-The Problem of Definition” that things became clearer. While arguing that dystopia

and anti-utopia are “distinct cultural strategies”, the former denotes a “bad place” as opposed to utopia, while the latter is “against utopia and utopian thought” (Sargent 138). Hicks uses the term dystopian to examine postmodern adaptations of the word in literature and film. He emphasizes that it designates the deficiencies of the urban space and the repercussions of late capitalism (Hicks 2). He further argues that dystopian fiction assesses the socio-political, economic systems, and their influence on the individual’s daily life. He suggests that dystopian fiction aims to foreground these problems and foster positive change and consciousness. Dystopian fiction, thus, comes to highlight social inequality, segregation, and social divisions (Hicks 2-3).

Contemporary novels such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006) are primary examples that embody dystopia that surpasses political, social, and economic affairs and reaches the deep soul of humans. Both works make readers question the limitless possibilities of breaking the line that separates humans from animals as both texts test their characters’, and eventually, their readers’ humanity. This tendency in the representation of the apocalyptic descent of the human soul has reached different parts of the world and has influenced works of literature globally including diasporic narratives. Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach* sets his new dystopia in a Western setting where his social criticism emanates from the struggles of immigrants from lack of integration in the diaspora.

Diaspora or Dystopia? An Immigrant’s Perspective

Montreal, in Hage’s novel, is portrayed as a dystopian multicultural city that intensifies social inequality. While the novel’s setting is realistic, the portrayal of the Canadian city echoes a “bad place” (Sargent 138) for the alienated and marginalized main protagonist. Sargent, in “The Three Faces of Utopianism,” defines dystopia as a “non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived” (9). A dystopia, therefore, despite being imaginary, unveils realities readers are not accustomed to. In this sense, the portrayal of Montreal as a dystopian site is unconventional to ordinary readers. Yet, the immaculate description of realistic details from the perspective of the poor protagonist underscores the hidden agendas of the capitalist city.

The unnamed narrator is unable to integrate into the dystopian Canadian city. After a failed suicide attempt, the narrator feels displaced both at home and in

Montreal. Still having his past interfere in his life decisions in Canada, he reports to the psychiatrist that while he feels “more courageous, more carefree, and even, one might add, more violent”, the new space rejects his presence on its soil as in “this northern land no one gives you an excuse to hit, rob, or shoot, or even shout from across the balcony” (4). The protagonist’s lack of assimilation in the Canadian city stems from the latter’s intensification of his marginalized status as a poor immigrant. The unnamed narrator’s statement illustrates the dystopian city’s “rejection” of the poor and marginalized figures. In fact, it does not offer people like himself many choices for survival. On the one hand, it excludes them because they are socially poor, and on the other hand, it does not provide them with the possibility to seek alternative means to survive.

This feeling of “hopelessness” and “pessimism” is often regarded a key characteristic in the making of dystopia (Zeb et al. 81). The unnamed narrator’s pessimistic attitude in Montreal reveals that the marginalized immigrant poor will never assimilate into a capitalist society, where wealth contributes to acknowledging one’s humanity. His isolation in the “frozen” city does not only emanate from his emotional status, but also from the fact that Montreal, as a dystopian cold space, resembles its weather. It destroys the poor and renders their stay in the city a quest for survival, which indicates the “savagery” of the city’s dystopia (Zeb et al. 83). The unnamed narrator accentuates that despite being in desperate need for food to survive, the multicultural dystopian space does not “excuse” him to seek alternatives to preserve his existence.

Montreal’s dystopia, furthermore, is oppressive and controlling. The unnamed narrator rejects assimilating into a world that is both hypocritical and corrupt in morals and values. He explains to the psychiatrist that his suicide attempt was triggered by a need to “escape the permanence of the sun” (4). In Western and even Oriental mythologies, the sun was perceived as a symbol of fertility, prosperity, and consciousness (Ronnberg and Martin 22). According to Ronnberg and Martin, and in ancient history, sunrays connoted “creativity, prophecy, healing”. For kings, it added to their royalty as they wore sun-like crowns, bestowing a higher level of cleverness. In other narratives, its golden and shiny feature indicates the search for truth and its “nurturing of life” (Ronnberg and Martin 22). In the contemporary era, while the sun still symbolizes hope and prosperity, in Hage’s dystopian Montreal, the sun reminds the protagonist of the corrupt human world. His reference to “the cold, bright city” (6) entails the shivering social inequity in Montreal that excludes the marginalized immigrant poor in the urban space.

Sunrays remind the unnamed protagonist of Montreal’s dystopian diaspora.

To him, any reference to light is connotative of wealth. Zeb et. al. argue that depression and misery are important features in the making of dystopian fiction. They argue that the “hopelessness and misery of the dystopian society” highlight “the difficulties of living in a cruel and merciless world where surviving frequently necessitates suffering constant adversity” (81). In this sense, the protagonist’s suicide attempt is triggered by the “cruel” city that explicitly excludes the poor from its capitalist agenda. The narrator explains that while the sun means hope to some, to him it intensifies his isolation as “nothing made any sense anymore” (32). He states “I saw the ray of light entering my window and realized how insignificant I was in its presence, how oblivious it was to my existence” (32), which indicates that the sun symbolizes good fortune only for the rich, while it does not even consider the isolated poor. The use of words as “insignificant,” and “oblivious” clearly demonstrate the protagonist’s inability to cope to the life with humans, simply because it is not for people like himself. Montreal’s dystopia, in fact, is “oblivious” to the poor and considers them non-existent.

Sargent, in “Do Dystopias Matter,” argues that dystopia “is presented as what has happened as a result of human behavior, of people messing up” (12). Considering this, Montreal is to be read as a dystopian city that does not necessarily emanate from a state of material destruction. It is an unconventional contemporary dystopian setting that is rendered “dystopian” by the consequences of human behavior. Montreal’s dystopia, in this sense, stems from its capitalist-driven agenda that favors the superior rich and excludes the inferior marginalized poor. This is made clear in the novel when sunrays remind the unnamed protagonist of Montreal’s dystopia. His rejection of the sun, I argue, emanates from his opposition to the dystopian inhumane world that denigrates his being simply because he is poor and of a different background. Throughout the development of the narrative, the unnamed narrator associates light with the human world. In one of the instances in the novel, the unnamed protagonist highlights this exclusion, stating the feeling of being “neglected by it” and his solution to escape the sun was to “cease to exist” (Hage 33). Thus, Montreal’s sun provoked the unnamed protagonist’s suicide attempt due to its constant exclusion of the poor immigrant minority.

Montreal’s dystopian aura is similar to Thomas Moylan’s concept of “social hell.” Similar to Sargent’s elaboration on dystopia, the “social hell” provides a sense of estrangement that renders characters feeling lonely due to their inability to fit in. The unnamed narrator is estranged due to his Eastern origins. His inability to integrate into the human world projects itself in his love for darkness. He prefers “dirty and somber corners” over “bright” ones for the latter remind him

of “vampires” (Hage 35). Hage’s use of the word “vampires” manifests itself as another trope that accentuates Montreal’s dystopia. To the unnamed protagonist, the actual “vampires” are not the one depicted in fiction and horror stories, but real human beings who feed on the poor and the marginalized. Indeed, while being hungry and barely having anything to eat, the protagonist needed somebody, who could be “generous enough” to offer him food (Hage 34). However, the constant rejection by the rich reminded him of “the world outside and the cruelty of the cold” (Hage 69). In fact, this immaculate choice of diction in the representation of Montreal accentuates its representation as a contemporary dystopia. The unnamed narrator often associates the city with words such as “frozen,” “shivering,” “cold,” which surpass being mere indications of weather. Similar to Sargent’s reflection of dystopia as a result of human behavior as stated above, this coldness stems from the cruelty of the city and the people living in it. This feeling of hopelessness, and the protagonist’s inability to integrate into the human world reflect rich people’s loss of humanity in a capitalist system that increases wealth at the expense of helping the poor.

In *Thinking Utopia*, Sargent argues that the twentieth century has demonstrated that “utopian aspirations” led to the “creation of dystopias”. He brings forth different historical evidences that illuminate how dreams of post-communist capital, for example, have turned into a dystopia of poverty and corruption (1). Sargent’s statement clearly reflects the unnamed narrator’s sessions with the psychiatrist. Instead of providing help, the psychiatrist solidifies Western stereotypes on the East. He says: “The therapist annoyed me with her laconic behaviour. She brought about a feeling of violence within me that I hadn’t experienced since I left my homeland. She did not understand [...] I am forced to be here by the court! I prefer not to be here” (Hage 5). The protagonist’s rejection of the sessions explain that the Canadian dystopia evokes damage in the psychological state of the protagonist. He feels estranged both physically on the Canadian soil and psychologically as it intensifies the character’s suffering from trauma of both alienation and social exclusion. He often refers to himself as “primitive and uneducated,” which intensifies his inability to assimilate into the “civilized” Western world of humans, where he is regarded a “dirty Arab” (Hage 15). Bright argues that “being the object of the Western gaze”, the protagonist embraces his immigrant status to defy the system that deemed him inferior in the first place (3). He attempts a metamorphosis and converges to the underground to exercise his power as a dirty insect. This metamorphosis enables him to crawl, camp and find “coins under the fridge” as a means to survive (Hage 23). However, this convergence to being a cockroach is controlled by other factors

that most critics have overlooked.

A comprehensive understanding of the cockroach metamorphosis highlights another dimension of dystopia. It actually demonstrates that the unnamed protagonist's inability to integrate stems from his social and psychological exclusion as a poor traumatized immigrant in the Canadian city. Reza, for example, and despite being a poor Iranian immigrant, is able to assimilate into Montreal because of his musical talent and exotic stories of Sufism. Elina Rahman compares Hage's unnamed protagonist to Kafka's Gregor. She insists, however, that the main divergence between these two characters is that while Gregor sees his metamorphosis "limiting" to his capacities, Hage's protagonist "embraces it because it is the only place he designates as his own in Montreal city" (Rahman 46). Yet, while the unnamed protagonist clearly embraces his metamorphosis, he does manifest it only in front of the restaurant owner, Tony or rich people. This shows that the embrace of the cockroach metamorphosis and the underground space is both temporal and limited. This will be explained in details in the coming sections.

Interestingly, the choice of the cockroach as an animal is quite significant in the text on different grounds. Culturally and quite politically speaking, the unnamed narrator's choice of this insect, in particular, stems from the fact that he embraces his Eastern origins, which have often been associated in Western literature with certain derogatory stereotypes. Edward Said in *Orientalism* argues that the East and West have always been analyzed as "complementary opposites since antiquity" (58). He affirms that throughout history, the representation of the Orient has always been connotative of recurring stereotypes. These include primitiveness, dehumanization, backwardness, barbarism (Said 150), and, most significantly to Hage's novel (33), dirtiness or "dirty work". The unnamed narrator, while using the pronoun I, refers to himself as "primitive and uneducated" which intensifies his inability to cope with the "civilized" Western world of humans, where he is referred to as a "dirty Arab" (Hage15). Hence, the cockroach, despite being a dirty insect, manifests its power in the underground as an alternative space of resistance, which shows that the unnamed narrator happily embraces the Orientalist stereotypes to recreate an entire system based on the domination of the underground over the world of humans.

According to Dobson K. (2015), the protagonist regards the human race as the "degrading aspect of his being." He insists that being human ultimately leads to converging to violence as an instinct of survival under the liberal state (265-2666). Daniela Ladiana argues in her article that the recent policies of the neo-liberal capitalist city have created a "space" that intensifies social inequality and creates new manifestations of "power" dynamics. She contends that the latter shapes a

space of "exclusion" as "new structures are created and existing ones consolidated to organize and control forms of social interaction" (260). Applying this to the *Cockroach*, the city of Montreal is a dystopian space that does not only exclude the narrator but also dehumanizes him. The dystopian city deprives the protagonist of human interaction and urges him to steal to survive. In this sense, the dystopian city consolidates forms of exclusion for immigrants and is the first stimulator of crime namely robbery and theft.

Hence, Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* (2010) is a dystopian diasporic novel. Alongside the main canonical Western dystopian novelists including Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell, Golding, Nabokov, and others (see Moylan 142), Rawi Hage comes to navigate a "new map of hell", as coined by Kingsley Amis (1960) in his book *New Maps of Hell*. Similar to Orwell and Huxley's social criticism and anti-capitalist inclination, Hage (2010) constructs a protagonist who despises capitalism. The hatred he has towards humans and the sun stems from the hidden agendas that the capitalist society has penetrated in the life of humans rendering them inhumane. While the ideal situation would be helping those in need, the capitalist society has widened the gap between the rich and the poor consolidating a form of social hierarchy and inequality. Hage's narrative (2010), therefore, questions whether diaspora for immigrants is a blessing or a curse. As a new map of hell, the author depicts the struggle of Arab immigrants in Canada who were consumed by the utopic tendency of the land of opportunities. In reality, however, and under the capitalist system, this vision is merely dystopian.

The diasporic experience, as encountered by the unnamed narrator, is dystopian *par excellence*. It shows the human hypocrisy and life in the multicultural dystopian capitalist city as a land of opportunities for either those who are wealthy enough, or those who can manipulate their talents to adapt in the multicultural city. To poor and psychologically traumatized immigrants, however, Montreal is a land of misery as it keeps reminding them of psychological alienation, isolation, and social exclusion. To Charles Taylor the identity of any human being is molded by its "recognition" from the other. Any misrecognition from both parties may lead to "real damage, real distortion [...] inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (25). Here, it is likely to state that the protagonist's inability to assimilate into the "cold bright state" (Hage 6), adds to his childhood trauma. His inability to have what Charles Taylor terms "the human need of recognition" (26) puts the protagonist in a crisis in which he neither adheres to humans nor Canadian weather.

Montreal's dystopian diaspora alienates the protagonist, causing him a severe

existential crisis. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist finds himself unable to determine the purpose of his life and existence in Canada. He says: “Where am I? And what am I doing here? How did I end up trapped in a constantly shivering carcass, walking in a frozen city with wet cotton falling on me all the time? And on top of it all, I am hungry, impoverished, and have no one no one [...] I am doomed!” (Hage 9). This statement intensifies the claim this article is trying to make. The dystopian aura of Montreal is nontraditional. It is a social dystopia built on the exclusion of the poor immigrant minority. The unnamed protagonist feels displaced, alienated, and excluded in the “frozen city” not only because of his Eastern origins, but also because of his impoverished status as a poor immigrant. The significance of the word “doom” here demonstrates not only Montreal’s dystopian diaspora, but an apocalyptic image awaiting poor immigrants living in the diaspora of exclusion. Taylor (1992) asserts that a key component to achieving a successful multicultural experience is maintaining a dialogic approach “unshaped by a predefined social script” (36). Hage’s protagonist finds himself alone, unable to belong to a group of identification, which accentuates his status as an outcast in the city. Unlike the restaurant owner’s strife for recognition, the unnamed narrator does not seek integration. He hates Eastern immigrants’ ability to act like Westerners, and abhors the latter’s hypocrisy.

To survive in the “frozen” dystopian diasporic city of Montreal, the protagonist resorts to stealing food to remain alive. He becomes a *flâneur* or a dweller in the Canadian city and seeks shelter and food before he “starves to death” (Hage 17). The protagonist, in fact, heavily criticizes those in Montreal who consider themselves “vegan” in their eating habits by adopting a certain lifestyle while having “bigger spoons and dig up the earth for their fathers’ and mothers’ inheritances” (Hage 21). This statement again intensifies the inequality in Montreal’s dystopia. To the protagonist, people who have the chance to choose a lifestyle cannot possibly fathom the struggle of a poor immigrant who “will wait for the wind to shake the branches and drop us fruits” (Hage 21). By highlighting this affinity, the protagonist severely criticizes the capitalist system that has made a lifestyle that widens the gap between the rich and the poor. This social hierarchy is not only between the Western rich and the Eastern poor, but also between Easterners themselves as social inequity and the psychological factor play both a role in rendering Montreal a dystopian diasporic space for the protagonist, as exemplified earlier in Reza.

Jesse Hutchison writes that any immigrant might doom his experience to failure if he tries to become “too authentic” and assimilate into the new culture as a regular inhabitant (Hutchinson 7). Reza, an Eastern immigrant himself, uses

his musical talent to seduce females by intermingling his non-conformity to Sufis' teachings. The latter raises Western female's compassion to his struggles of performing his "love for music" in a rigid society (25-26). Reza's adaptability in Montreal, therefore, is based on the manipulation of his "exotic" features to conform to the expectations of the Western society. The protagonist says "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 fantast elsewhere" (Hage 20). In other words, the immigrants in the novel should always maintain a safe margin in order not to overdo the Canadian experience and fail in their conditioned integration. I refer to conditioned integration as a state of imposed hegemonic domination subjected to immigrants of Eastern descent to be recognized as a group in the West. The identification is conditioned by maintaining a state of so-called hybridity in which the Oriental part must always be shown to keep the power dynamic of superior-inferior intact. To put it differently, the integration in the West is conditioned by assuming the role of an inferior Other. The protagonist, throughout the narrative, insists on his inability to tolerate this Westernized Canadian perspective, which again makes us, as readers, question this diverging approach to creating a hybrid self. Adding to the fact that the narrator cannot fathom the Canadian city's lifestyle, its weather adds to the place's dystopian aura.

Resisting Hegemony in the Underground

To cope with his surroundings, the protagonist deconstructs the human world and creates an alternative place of belonging. The latter allows him to live a life where he takes it upon himself to be deemed a master instead of a mere outcast. Being unable to live in the world of humans, who consider him both primitive and uneducated, the narrator converges to a new alternative space where he refers to himself as the "master of the underground" (23). He bestows his ability to control the area and boosts the skills, which the human race cannot do. He says, "I crawled under beds, camped under tables; I was even the kind of kid who would crawl under the car to retrieve the ball, rescue the stranded cat, find the coins under the fridge" (23). This illustration shows the unnamed protagonist's flexibility as a cockroach in the underground. This place provides him with the possibility to belong without considering the stereotypical image or inferior social status humans associate him with. He refers to the underground as a "world of its own" and says that it emanates from the ruthlessness and injustice of the physical reality. The underground, thus, is an alternative space of existence where the poor find solace from the harsh capitalist society.

By escaping into the underground, the protagonist takes refuge from the dystopian city, and heal his childhood trauma. He says: “I reminded myself that I can escape anything. I am the master of escape [...] I disappeared [...] like thunder [...], I fanned my cockroach wings [...] I escaped most when I stole sweets, pens, chewing gum, and, later on, cameras and cars” (Hage 23). The alternative space of belonging the protagonist resorts to enables him to “disappear” and “escape” from the corrupt human world. This “escape” frees the protagonist from Montreal’s dystopia. In fact, by turning into a cockroach in the underground, the character is not only able to break loose from the human gaze, but also to practice the behaviors considered illegal as stealing. The underground, therefore, is an entity on its own that provides an alternative reality to the narrator and brings insights into the ground’s naturalistic endeavor. The protagonist “pass[es]-through” the corrupt human world to recreate a utopian alternative, where poor dwellers of different backgrounds would eventually belong (Hage 24). The truthful perspective here, and according to the protagonist, is a lens seen by the poor rather than by hegemonic groups. This alternative emanates from revisiting human constructions and correcting them by providing criticism from inside the system not outside it. Again, this article does not seek to represent the protagonist as a character beyond human follies. While stealing cannot be possibly justified by all means, in the context of the dystopian diaspora, this can be interpreted as a satirical utopia.

In “The Three Faces of Utopianism,” Sargent contends that dystopias warn about the status quo. He argues that while the main tendency in the making of dystopia stimulates “pessimism,” hinting at “the idea of the original sin,” many dystopias are indeed “self-consciously warnings” (Sargent 26). He contends that instead of showing a final descent into the abyss, warnings in dystopia usually stand for “choice, and therefore hope, are still possible”. This comment fits the novel’s context. While Rawi Hage’s intention in writing his narrative is prone to different interpretations, his text can be seen as a warning of the current situation in an attempt to reform contemporary society. The author shows his critique of the status quo in hopes of raising consciousness of the social calamity faced by poor immigrants. Instead of building his narrative with an anti-utopian tendency, Hage uses the underground as an alternative where the marginalized poor could belong. The unnamed narrator’s metamorphosis shows his severe criticism of the rich who look down to those below them. This instance symbolizes his criticism of the human foundations, which are strictly biased toward serving those with power.

Sargent defines utopia as a “non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and place” (9). He argues that while this is

considered a more standard definition, he still elaborates on different kinds of utopia including positive, negative utopia, utopian satire, and critical utopia. Although Sargent clearly distinguishes the aforementioned types, he contends that labeling a text as exemplary of one type is quite difficult. The latter, he affirms, solely depends on understanding the writer's real intentions. From the development of Hage's narrative, it can be assumed that the novel shows an affinity with satirical utopia. In "The Three Faces of Utopianism", Sargent argues that satirical utopia is a "non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and place that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of the contemporary society" (09). Thus, the aim of a satirical utopia is to critique society to promote awareness and change in the status quo. Indeed, while the writer's intentions remain questionable, some features of satirical utopia can be applied to Hage's novel. Sargent states in "Utopia- The Problem of Definition" that satirical utopia reflects on a "non-existent place, the major focus of which is satire" (144). Hage's narrative demonstrates Montreal's dystopian diaspora to satirize and at the same time criticize this social hierarchy created by the city's capitalist system. While this article defends the creation of satirical utopia in *Cockroach*, a thorough investigation is required simply because, and according to Sargent, utopias often contain a degree of satire (The Three Faces of Utopianism 144)

In the novel, the protagonist makes it clear to the readers that the underground symbolizes the resistance of the oppressed. As an alternative space, the underground provides a chance for social integration and belonging. Sargent, in "The Three Faces of Utopianism," states that one marker of utopian satire is that "there is no simple good/bad distinction" (8). In fact, the representation of Montreal and the underground depends on the character. Thus, poverty and richness are determining factors in associating a place with good or bad qualities. The unnamed narrator's hatred of Montreal is altered by a convergence to the underground. Being confined in the limited ground occupied by humans, the narrator states that "change is coming[...] and only cockroaches and their earthly kingdom shall survive the last deluge of fire" (30-31). This statement reflects the convergence to a new approach that values the life of the poor in society and renders their rights for equality a valid quest. The novel's severe criticism of capitalism is intensified further when the narrator refers to the standard regulations a servant should comply within a restaurant. An "impoverished presence" is considered a threat to the owner's business; therefore, certain regulations must be met to ensure human hospitality in the rich's doctrine (Hage 85).

Moreover, Hage's satirical utopia is highly critical of socialism, which fails to

identify itself with the poor. The unnamed narrator insists that even if he belongs to society's lowest group, it does not diminish his right to exist. The protagonist accentuates that gaining access to perpetual existence is far better than void and nothingness (Hage 122). In this sense, the protagonist creates a temporary space of existence that enables him to be included within a particular group, which becomes a marker of identification. This space blurs hierarchies and all the already-made human constructions. The protagonist attempts to deconstruct the space of humans, which roams in hypocrisy and bourgeois ideals and recreates a different space in which he finds himself the master of the underground. Again, the narrator here insists that the creation of this space is characterized by temporality and non-fixedness. The space created by the unnamed narrator is his territory to mark a change to the unjust world of the ground. The underground offers the protagonist the possibility for integration that he could not achieve in the world of humans. This liminal space becomes a location where the protagonist criticizes both socialist and capitalist approaches from their biased and opportunist agendas. He regards the underground as a place of resistance for the poor, the marginalized, the voiceless, and all the biased constructions made by humans that do not serve humanity.

Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on the major differences between territorialization and deterritorialization (3). While the former reflects a "merely ordered state", the latter is "more rigid and organized" which he labels as a space of integration. Interestingly, this definition serves the purpose of this article for the main reason that the protagonist's deterritorialization is much more elaborate and constructed if compared to the fragile world founded by biased capitalist ideals. In this sense, the reterritorialization of the alternative space of the underground confirms that while the narrator deconstructs a world, he reconstructs a different one to obliterate the possibility of chaos. This marks an affinity with Charles Taylor's approach in which he states that the politics of recognition depend on surpassing orthodoxy and adhering to heterodoxy as an approach to "speak truth to power," if I may borrow Said's words in *The Representations of The Intellectual* (Said 85). The narrator identifies himself with cockroaches rather than human. He favors the space of vermin, insects, and cockroaches rather than the corrupt world of humans. This identification shows how immigration has deeply affected the protagonist, who finds himself unable to be treated according to what Charles Taylor refers to as "the politics of multiculturalism" (25). While Taylor focuses on dialogism as an important indicator to achieve assimilation, the protagonist's monologist approach to the human world has been replaced by a world in which he finds himself able to display all of his skills learned from childhood.

Yet, while the protagonist uses the underground (p.11) as an alternative space, for him, it is always characterized by temporality. This justifies the interpretation of the text as a satirical utopia in the sense that it unveils corruption to raise awareness and promote change. The protagonist resorts to the underground as a space of resistance, but never considers it as an absolute space of existence. In spite of the fact that the unnamed narrator escapes to the underground to resist Montreal's capitalist system, he never sees it as a permanent space of belonging. The character is unable to escape from the codes of the physical territory. He states "change is coming. Repent, you pompous erectile creatures! And, and, I continued [...] Under new management! Special underground menu served by the undertaker" (p.31). This satirical statement reflects the protagonist's resentment towards privileged humans who cannot possibly relate to the struggle of the poor. This commentary indicates a satirical social stance on human corruption, moral decadence, arrogance, and consumerism that have become the motto of the contemporary human race. The underground's creation is based on deconstructing these biased norms that rendered the alienated immigrant protagonist an outcast in the shivering city. It is a temporal space of refuge that offers him safety and comfort. This alternative underground space emanates from a need to belong rather than a static creation of a limited space of existence. In other words, the underground functions as a replacement to the corrupt world of humans that roams in hypocrisy and injustice, but cannot be taken as a permanent stance of belonging. It represents a resisting aura to the already constructed systems of humans that have always tended to cast out the poor from being involved or participating in the country's economy, politics, or the like. Hage's novel unveils the hidden agendas of Western society to highlight and bring forth some changes that might benefit both Westerners and Easterners alike. The narrator's approach stems from deconstructing the world of humans to reconstruct a peaceful space where the possibility of the creation of a multicultural space gathers people coming from different ethnic and social backgrounds.

Conclusion

To conclude, this article contributed to the overall understanding of dystopia within the context of diaspora. Alongside the main canonical dystopian novels, it argued that Hage's *Cockroach* is to be considered as a dystopian diasporic novel, whose concern is to unveil a different type of struggle of the alienated poor immigrant minority. It asserted, on the one hand, that Montreal is portrayed as a contemporary dystopian setting, whose capitalist agenda intensifies the social dehumanization of the poor. Focusing on the immigrant's perspective, the novel highlights the

unnamed narrator's struggle in the "frozen city" that deprives him of his basic needs as a human being. Adding to his stance as an immigrant of Eastern descent, the unnamed narrator's poverty makes him seen as an outcast. The latter leads him to stealing food to remain alive. The article asserted that the contemporary dystopian city regards apocalyptic imagery as not that of physical destruction but rather a descent into the darkness of the human soul. The text highlights how the rich feed over the poor, which adds to the narrator's misery in the Canadian city. The novel, thus, explores the hidden agendas of the capitalist society that creates a system that consolidates forms of hegemony, power, and segregation.

Being unable to cope with humans, the narrator resorts to the creation of a new space in which he finds his solace from famine, hunger, and poverty. This is interpreted in the context of the novel as a satirical utopia. While some of its features are prominent in the novel, terming Hage's narrative as utopian would need further elaboration. Such a claim requires an understanding of the author's real intentions i.e. whether Rawi Hage intended to create a utopia or it was merely part of his criticism and initiation of capital reform. Therefore, future research might consider deepening the understanding of Hage's novel as a satirical utopia, by finding affinities between utopianism as a concept and the novel's context. Indeed, even if the protagonist attempts to integrate into a new space away from the Canadian territory he already occupied, he never sees the underground as a fixed process of deterritorialization to create a valid territory. The underground, to the unnamed narrator, is a temporal space for existence. In this case, it can be deduced that the novel does not solely reflect the features of space theory as it does not maintain the absoluteness of space but rather the liminality of its creation.

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