

A New Stage for Rawi Hage's Protagonist in *Carnival* (2012)

Nosaybah Walid Awajan

Assistant Professor

English Language and Literature/ Faculty of Arts and Sciences

Middle East University

Amman, Jordan

Abstract: *The paper critically analyzes Rawi Hage's three novels, De Niro's Game (2006), Cockroach (2008), and Carnival (2012). The paper depicts a new stage for Hage's protagonist in Carnival (2012) which follows Hage's first and second novels De Niro's Game, and Cockroach. It also tries to show that Hage presents the same protagonist in his three novels, where at the latest the same protagonist has transformed and changed in a more confident, wise, independent and helpful person rather than how he is shown as a lost, irresponsible and dependent protagonist in the previous novels. He is no-longer shown as marginalized, oppressed and traumatized as he is presented in the earlier two novels. Hage no-longer depicts the protagonist with more than one identity nor trying to reach to liberation, empowerment and individualism. Instead, he is shown as has achieved them. The article tries to discuss this in showing Fly's new perspective of life, his free choice and his wisdom.*

Keywords: Rawi Hage, immigrant, identity, diaspora, the West

Introduction

Rawi Hage is a Lebanese–Canadian novelist, short story writer, and visual artist, who was born in Beirut and moved to New York, then to Montréal in Canada, where he worked as a cab driver then discovered his talent as a photographer (Abdul-Jabbar 2017, 169). Canada, as many Western countries, has always attracted the non-westerners' attentions and was opened for foreigners and immigrants until it started to, according to Andre Forget (2013), “deport any terror suspect” since the World Trade Attacks in 2001 (14). Forget (2013) also adds that the phenomenon of immigrants' threat has grown and is still growing (14). This has accompanied and enhanced the stereotypical images that have already been known about non-white people and non-westerners. Forget (2013) continues that Canada has specifically been taken of advantage by many foreigners and immigrants. This is due to the fact that Canada was and still is suspected as a country with hospitality and openness, which would make it vulnerable to people (foreigners) from outside (14). These fears and suspensions have had an impact on immigrants who live in Western countries.

Nouri Gana (2015) states that Arab immigrant writers questioned different issues in their writings such as “migration, indigeneity, and belonging” in their host countries as a “a source of national anguish, dilemmas, disenchantments and one of the main engines of coercive and discriminatory policies” (13). According to Jumana Bayeh (2017), the Arab novel in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States of America “juxtapose urban spaces, utilizing particular narrative techniques to highlight that a full appreciation of Arab cities and spaces relies on a transnational framework” (22). Thousands of Arabs migrated to the West because of different circumstances such as Wars, according to Gana (2015), these Arab new comers have challenged the oppression in the West, which increased after the events of September 11, 2001 (Gana, 18). This could be based on what Edward Said (1978) states in his work, *Orientalism* (1978), where he considered the basis of Orientalism - how the Westerners see the Orient. Orientalism is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1978, 13). Wail Hassan (2011) states that, according to Said, Orientalism has a big influence on immigrant Arab writers and shapes their discourse (4).

Many Arab writers wrote about the oppression they faced and expressed it through their writings (Gana 2015, 19). They also presented how the West portrayed the Arabs and how they perceived such portrayal, which is how Said (1978) stated it, the West (Occident) has portrayed the Easterners (Orientals) as people who are exotic, different, inferior, irrational, psychologically weak and backward other. The west has portrayed itself as a rational, psychologically strong self through its misrepresentation of the East. This labelling is what made it hard for the Arabs to start a new life in the West after their migration and forced them to live in an alienated and marginalized way (Gana 2015, 19 &20). This will be the fact until they, as Homi Bhabha (1994) states, find “a sense of home” with “a space to which they belong” (23). This could happen in the “third place” (23). They are challenging their new culture and their new language to balance their lives in a point where, according to Mary Louise Pratt (1992), “disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other” (6). Victoria M. Abboud (2009) comments on the “Contact Zone” which Pratt suggests, that it refers to an individual when he “represents two nations, cultures, and homelands” (374).

Hage as any other Arab-Western writer tries to portray the corruption of his home country from the war and the reason why Lebanese leave to Western places, then expresses the difficulties and issues that immigrants suffer from in the West (Salaita 2011, 22). He visualizes the shock which the immigrants face after living the real life in the place they have always looked at as the Utopia (Abdel Nasser 2016, 4). Rasheed El-Enany (2006) explains that Arabs perceived the West as superior since the 19th and early 20th centuries as having the power of science, technology and knowledge (154). Elsayed Ahmed (2010) also points out that most Arabs are fascinated by the modernity of Western societies and people (32). Forget (2013) comments on the same point saying that many refugees move to the West to find better lives and then they find a different image than the one they had (14). Hage faced many issues in his home country because of the

war and its consequences which made him think of migrating. Hage's life in the West had an impact on his writing. Salaita (2011) discusses the effect of the Civil War (1975-1990) in Lebanon (a former French colony) on Arab-Western fiction. It occurred between Christians (Lebanon with the highest number of Christians) and Muslims, specifically between Sunni Muslims and Maronite Christians. Salaita also adds that the Lebanese Civil War was "a complicated affair" which led to a complex production of Arab Western literature (11). He mentions many Lebanese writers who presented the war in their writings to the Western readers, such as Etel Adnan, Rawi Hage, and Patricia Sarrafian (12).

Rawi Hage depicts the Arabs living in their home countries as marginalized and exiled (Zamanpour 2019, 81). He also depicts the context of war in his novels and how Lebanese become ambitious to leave Lebanon. Hage shows how these people become traumatized with the war's context and its effects. The description of the context gives the reader details in a way that enables him/her to really visualize the scene. This is to show how desperate the Arab people are to leave their countries to the West, to the unknown, as long as they are going to leave the harsh situations they live in. Forget (2013) states that immigrants leave their hometowns to the West for refugee and to live better lives, but these Western countries are the reasons why they left their homes in the first place because of the occupation (14). Abboud (2009) declares that Khalil Gibran believes in the fact that immigrants leave their home countries looking for better lives, where they can have better times, but it becomes challenging and difficult for them to survive in such countries (372 & 373). This is because of the way the Westerners view the Arabs, which would lead to their suffering. Abboud (2009) adds that this is a very difficult stage where the immigrants need to "negotiate their identities through their pasts and their current situations" (373).

Safaa Abdel Nasser (2016) states that Hage's three mentioned novels present the society's outsiders as being immigrants, who were already exiled, and marginalized and considered outsiders in their own home countries. They are presented as trying to escape and migrate to the Western countries for a better life and for a change (2). Hage presents the issues that immigrants face in the West living as outsiders instead of having the perfect life. He does this by reflecting on his own experience and life as an immigrant. One of the consequences of such a life is alienation where immigrants live in isolation away from the surrounded society. Abdel Nasser (2016) clarifies this point by explaining how the outsiders live in alienation in the West as a result of the oppression and segregation (2).

The call for change proceeds in the life of the immigrant, Hage's protagonist, against the life of marginalization and alienation, in Hage's first two novels, *De Niro's Game* and *Cockroach*, until the protagonist changes in Hage's third novel, *Carnival*. Hilde Staels (2018) states that Hage uses the mode of grotesque in his novels to show the protagonists resistance, show reality from his own perspective and to portray the context of the protagonist's social alienation, domination, subordination and marginalization which would all end with "a resilient and mobile identity"

(17). Hage tries to show and portray such a change, or rebellion in order to have a real life through, what Abdel Nasser indicates, “morphing into fluid characters, borderline ambiguity, and alternative identities” (2016, 2). She adds that Hage presents “shape-shifting, metamorphosis, and therianthropy” in his novels as a way for the protagonists’ “liberation, empowerment, social justice and change”, he presents his protagonists as trying to “retain their voices and assert their individuality” (3). The life of the three protagonists in the three mentioned novels parallel the life of an immigrant who leaves his home country to the West, which is Hage’s life himself. Hage tries to present the mental and physical struggle of the immigrants and their fight for a normal life through his protagonist in the three novels. It is the struggle for identity through the different stages that Abdel Nasser describes (51). Hage clarifies that “we are all sharing the same struggle for identity, especially self-identity” (“Long day”, 169 cited in Abdel Nasser 51). Hage here refers to himself, other immigrants and his protagonist in his novel as “we”. The protagonist reaches to this identity in Hage’s third novel, *Carnival*, which could be seen in the protagonist’s change and transformation in his life, his free choice and his wisdom. These are depicted in his job and behavior in *Carnival*.

Review of Literature and Analysis

If we follow Hage’s three novels, *De Niro’s Game* (2006), *Cockroach* (2008) and *Carnival* (2012), we can find that Hage’s protagonist resembles the life of an Arab immigrant from Lebanon to Canada and all the stages that the immigrant goes through and how he starts his rebellion on his situation as a marginalized immigrant in *Cockroach* until he reaches to the change and the free choice in *Carnival*. F. Elizabeth Dahab (2015) states that *Cockroach* can be read as a continuity for the first novel, *De Niro’s Game* (278). The reader first meets Hage’s protagonist, Bassam Al-Abyad, in *De Niro’s Game* (2006), which is told from his point of view. From the first page of the novel, Bassam expresses his desperate need of leaving Lebanon trying not to blame the conditions he is living in and the state of war, instead, he is justifying his escape and saying that the reason is Fairuz. Bassam says, “It is time to leave, I was thinking to myself” (Hage, 2006, 11), then after a couple of lines, he says, “I was not escaping the war; I was running away from Fairuz, the notorious singer” (Hage 2006, 11) These lines present an ironic situation where Bassam is not just running away from the state of war in Lebanon, but because of other reasons such as, poverty, routine and desperation. So Fairuz’s song here stands as a symbol of such conditions that surround Bassam, “Nothing ever stopped those melancholic Fairuz songs that came out to it” (Hage 2006, 11) and this goes on when he says, “*that whining singer who makes my life a morbid hell*” (Hage 2006, 12). As could be seen from the previous quotes, Hage tries to show how the people in Lebanon live a routine life with no changes. Poverty, unsettlement and decadent is described for the reader to visualize the context from the beginning of the novel. Even war to these people has become typical and part of their lives, “The sky was a deep blue. From it, bullets and bombs fell randomly” (20). This could be understood as a kind of indirect justification for Hage for wanting to leave his home country. Bassam, here reflects the

life of Hage who cannot stand the situations in Lebanon at that time of the civil war and dreams of leaving his home, he says that he was “desperate and restless” (Hage 2006, 19). Bassam even tries to clarify through his narration that they were used to the bombs and this became part of their normal and daily routines. Salaita (2011) adds that Hage’s main focus in the novel is to portray the Lebanese Civil War and the effect of such a context on the people and that the dream of each citizen is to leave these conditions behind him and escape (20).

Bassam describes himself and his friend George, nicknamed as *De Niro*, who works in a poker-machine and cashes money from gamblers, as “We were aimless, beggars and thieves, horny Arabs” (Hage 2006, 13). Salaita (2011) clarifies that Hage uses here and throughout the novel “colorful descriptions” to show how people in such a time and context are “corrupted” (22). The corruption is also seen within the families, Salaita (2011) highlights the theme of the corrupted family in the novel with the absence of the father (22). George’s father is a way and Bassam’s father is not mentioned. George then starts working with the militia. Bassam has a job at the port that would not provide him with the money he needs. They both, as Salaita (2011) states it, “become emblematic of the breakdown of Lebanese society” (24). Bassam thinks first of Roma, as a Western place where he would find freedom and where its people and animals would feel happy and “well fed” (Hage 2006, 19), and mentions the same place several times throughout the novel. This is the way most Arabs perceive the West as El-Enany (2006) and Ahmed (2010) state (El-Enany 2006, 154 and Ahmed 2010, 32). He tells Rana and George about it, and asks them if they would go with him (Hage 2006, 34 & 69). This resembles the many dreams and visions of beautiful and calm places for him to live in, such as a house, trees, a sun that was so clear without any interruption from dark and gloomy clouds and fresh water moving in a river without any reflections of fire (Hage 2006, 78 & 79). This continues until he really thinks of leaving after his mother dies from a bomb explosion (81). Salaita (2011) declares that Hage gives realistic descriptions to show that people are really suffering from the harsh and difficult ways and situations of living (22). His mother was the reason why he was still in Beirut and he is now free, he states this when he says, “the death of my mother had liberated me” (Hage 2006, 86). Bassam changed a lot after the death of his mother, he even thinks of Fairuz’s songs in a different way as she is now “singing in Paris” (89). This is because he looks at the West in a different ways and is better than his home country. This is seen in the way he perceives the songs of Fairuz. He answers Nabila that he just wants to leave the place, “Rome, Paris, New York, wherever I can go”, when she tells him” to take George and go look for George’s father in Paris (Hage 2006, 112). Bassam gets tortured by the militia and plans for a robbery to go on an Egyptian ship to Marseilles with a gun, Paris (Hage 2006, 183) and calls the number Nabila gives him, Claude Mani’s number when he first reaches Paris (Hage 2006, 193). Salaita (2011) also adds here that people, such as Bassam and George, are responding to such situations, war, poverty, corruption, by breaking down their moral values (22). This could justify how Hage presents Bassam and George as thieves and killers.

Bassam feels inferior to the people surrounding him, he thinks that he and the maid are “irrelevant” whenever Rhea and Genevieve are having discussions (Hage 2006, 200). He stays in Paris till Rhea tells him that he should leave to Canada after he puts her in some problems with Ronald, Rhea’s friend (Hage 2006, 236). Ali Zamanpour (2019) argues that both *Di Nero’s Game* and *Cockroach* question the rights of immigrants to be treated with hospitality without being an owed debt and not treating them as strangers. He shows how Bassam, such as Hage, first suffers from the fear of being in a Western country who looks at him as a terrorist, “xenophobic” (31). Hage depicts the first shock any immigrant would face when first reaches a Western country.

The protagonist in *Cockroach* (2008) starts feeling the effects of being an Arab living in the West, as Edward Said described, as being marginalized, oppressed and having no will. Such life elaborates insecure and doubtful feelings which any person would always want to change and rebel against. The novel starts with the protagonist stating that he no longer trusts his emotions (3). Hage presents the protagonist in *Cockroach* as he is the same one in *De Niro’s Game* and as if *Cockroach* follows *De Niro’s Game* (Dahab 2015, 278). According to Dahab (2015), Hage presents “the oppositional tortured individual who walks around trying to understand, assimilate or to transcend his own otherness” (279). Hage shows the protagonist’s rebellion and need for change from the beginning of the novel. He describes himself as being transferred to a cockroach whenever he sees a woman. Hage here uses the word cockroach as a symbol of strength and power. The protagonist through “metamorphosis” transfers into a cockroach which provides him with the power and strength. Hage mentions “the act of metamorphosis” from a cockroach for the first time in *De Niro’s Game*, when he describes Jallil Al-Tahouneh, the friend of Bassam’s uncle, when he was deprived from his authority, power and strength after seeing Bassam’s gun pointed at his head, “he turned from a cockroach into an apologetic hunchback, apologizing, and bowing his head, and calling me *Ustadh* (teacher)” (Hage 2006, 147). The cockroach is seen as a symbol of strength. Amir Taheri (2009) points out that Hage’s *Cockroach* is the same as Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, although Kafka’s protagonist is metamorphosed into a cockroach without knowing, unlike Hage’s protagonist (36).

Then we are told by the protagonist, whose name is not introduced in the novel that he had tried to commit suicide. He confesses to the reader and not to his therapist saying that the reason behind his suicide attempts was because he was trying to escape the unchanged and remained sun and after a few lines adds that his attempts were only to challenge nature, out of curiosity, and “to the recurring light”. He then explains how he is “oppressed by it all” (Hage 2008, 4). The protagonist from the beginning portrays his position in the current Western place where he is staying and we as readers could understand that he is oppressed, marginalized and alienated and his only way to escape is to commit suicide, because as an Arab, he cannot be part of such an “oppressive power” nor to control it (Hgae 2008, 5). This is also seen in the unchanged sun that he thought will be different. These thoughts were elaborated in the mind of the protagonist in his

meetings with his therapist, whose name is Genevieve, the same name is mentioned in Hage's first novel (Hage 2006, 5). It is the name of the French (Western) woman, Cluade Mani's wife (Hage 2008, 195), while in *Carnival*, it is the name of Otto's therapist (Hage 2012, 120). The unnamed protagonist criticizes the other immigrants whose conditions are the same as his because they try to pretend not to be oppressed and marginalized like him:

At least I am not a hypocrite about it. 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. There is existence and there is the void; you are either one or a zero (Hage 2008, 122).

Forget (2013) states that Hage shows how immigrants come to the Western countries for refugee and to find better lives, but it is these countries that made them leave their homes in the first place. They do not find what they want in these countries (Hage 2008, 14). He also adds that Hage points out that this novel is not just "about immigration" but it is also about "the socioeconomic conditions that immigration incurs". Forget cites what Hage states, "I'm exploring poverty issues, class, religion, fundamentalism, displacement — there are other things to explore through immigration" (Hage's *Cockroach Crawls*", 2010 cited in Forget 2013, 14). The novel narrates the concerns of a young man who has migrated to Canada as a refugee from the Middle East and has been living in Montréal for several years (14).

The protagonist not just questions his existence, he also questions the reason of himself leaving his homeland, he says, "I wondered how I had ended up here. How absurd. How absurd. The question is, Where to end? All those who leave immigrate to better lives, but I wanted to better my death. Maybe it is ending that matters, not the life, I thought" (Hage 2008, 160). The protagonist here is referring to two points. The first point is that the protagonist is comparing himself to other immigrants who he heard about and live better lives, such as Reza's friend, Hisham, a Persian computer programmer who moved from Canada to the United States because he thought "there is more money" (13). This is also related to a conversation in Hage's previous novel, *De Niro's Game*, with George on the same topic about America. George advised Bassam to go to America because it was better than Roma and because the later had "no future" (Hage 2006, 34). The protagonist blames himself and tries to give a justification for his situation that he had chosen the wrong country. The reader can always, while reading *Cockroach*, reflect on Hage's previous novel, *De Niro's Game*, because of the many connections between the two novels. The protagonist also describes the people of the country from a marginalized and oppressed perspective. This description contradicts the image he had for the West before. This could be noticed from his description, "Filth! They consider themselves royalty when all they are nothing but the descendants of porters, colonial servants, gardeners, and sell-out soldiers for invading empires" (Hage 2008, 159). We can see here how he is comparing between his way and other immigrants' way of living with how the people in the Western countries live. He also thinks that they are the reason of their suffering. They have jewellerys and "large TV screens"

(159). This could also be related to what Forget states and was mentioned earlier that these empires are the reason why Arabs want to leave their home countries and look for better lives (14). Unfortunately, people leave these colonies and try to follow their dreams in living in the Western countries and then they still live as oppressed which does not differ from the life they used to live in their home countries. This is stated by Majeed when he said, “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” (Hage 2008, 223). This is related to Gibran’s statements that Abboud (2010) mentioned (372 & 373).

The protagonist thinks of the roaches in his kitchen as people who have power and authority for planning and doing. He was wondering what the roaches were planning for. They did not appear in the kitchen that day but he was busy to give them more attention since he was meeting Reza that day (Hage 2008, 195). Abdel Nasser states that the protagonist perceives the cockroaches as powerful creatures (5). This is clarified by Staels (2018) that although the cockroach is a disgusting bug and an insect, but yet it is hard, fast, and easily able to be a “resilient survivor” (18). When he comes back home, he tries to look for them and starts hitting the roaches which come in front of him. Staels (2018) also adds here that the protagonist was only hitting the cockroaches without killing them to keep their “survival instinct” (19). He starts hearing voices saying, “Manipulative, good-for-nothing murderer” (Hage 2008, 200). Then the protagonist sees a very big cockroach his size which asks him to continue killing the roaches with his slipper if he is able to (Hage 2008, 201). He thinks that the world came to an end and that one of the “ruling race” came to take him. The cockroach accuses him of “always escaping” and always “feeling trapped”. The cockroach tells him that he is part of human and part a cockroach (Hage 2008, 201- 203). The cockroach tells him what he needs to hear, it is the protagonist’s own inner-self talking and addressing him. This is because he no-longer wants to be an escapee who is marginalized, inferior and victimized. The conversation between him and the cockroach is actually a conversation between the protagonist and himself as it is a wakeup call. This could be seen from the conversation between the protagonist and his therapist. He told her about the whole thing and how he thinks he is part human and part insect since being human means to be trapped and being an insect means to be free (Hage 2008, 207). According to Staels (2018), this is part of Hage’s use of the grotesque which occurs in the protagonist’s self-image. This has started from the day he was playing with his sister (Hage 2008, 18). He thinks he is part of the cockroaches, he refers to his childhood saying, “I am a master of escape [...] as a kid, I escaped when my mother cried, when my father unbuckled his belt, when my teacher lifted the ruler high above my little palm [...] I fanned my cockroach wings. I let the air cool off my swollen hands as I stood in the corner” (23).

The protagonist’s change into a cockroach in his imagination is because he thinks it is the way he can become the controller, have authority and reach to his free will. He mentions that one day the cockroaches will be the only survivors “to rule the Earth” (Hage 2008, 7). The protagonist is shown in the novel as a rebellion who is calling for change and trying to have his freedom from

the situation that he lives. Abdel Nasser (2016) declares that the protagonist is trying to alter his identity as a way of rebellion in order to reach to his “liberation, empowerment and individualism” (2). His departure from reality is his way of rebellion. He chose an insect because they are oppressed animals to call for change (2). Rita Sakr (2011) states that *Cockroach* is “deeply concerned with class, economic disempowerment, unemployment, and misery among various groups of immigrants” (349). These are what the protagonist fears from and, are the reasons of having such thoughts. According to Derek C. Maus (2017), the unnamed protagonist is trying in such a way to be integrated in such a new society as many other immigrants rather than being rejected (1).

Wisam Kh. Abdul-Jabbar (2017) states that what happens to the protagonist is related to internalization, which is “a psychological term which refers to inner issues that pertain to human behaviour and mentality and the way we conceive the external world” (770). Sue Walrond-Skinner (1986) also views internalization as a “process whereby the individual transfers a relationship with an external object onto his internal world” (186). Abdul-Jabbar (2017) continues by saying that the internal self here becomes a separated one as a “newly formulated identity” (771). This means that what the unnamed narrator sees in front of him is “a reflection of his own image which does not scare him. This could be noticed from what he says, “Soon I stood barefoot, looking for my six pairs of slippers. I looked in the mirror, and I searched again for my slippers. In the mirror I saw my face, my long jaw, my whiskers slicing through the smoke around me [...] I closed my eyes and thought about my dilemma” (Hage 19). Abdel Jabbar states that the “narrator has completely internalized the object of the cockroach to the point that it no longer seems alien to who he is and how he perceives his entity” (Abdel Jabbar 2017, 770). The protagonist sees the giant cockroach another time when he was drying his gun he brought from one of his friend’s houses where he hid it. This time the protagonist threatened it with the gun but did not have the courage to shoot it. They both shouted, “Shoot, coward!” then he continues saying, “We lowered our hands and cocked the gun at the same time. He laughed and I almost feel his index finger pushing the trigger ahead of mine”. They were interrupted with the doorbell and laughed (288). The giant cockroach could be seen as a representation of himself, the side which is calling for change. It is a kind of rebellion for his life, situation, and weakness. This is proved by the Pakistani woman running away after seeing the protagonist’s wings (288). The same happened at the end of the novel when he shot Shaheed, when he ran away and climbed on a leaf and “steered it with” his “glittering wings” (305)

Dahab (2015) declares that the protagonist portrays Hage himself who suffered from the same position and situations, the “industry of otherness” who is “claiming his right to possess the earth” (279). The life of the protagonist resembles the life of an immigrant in a new country and this could be proved by the protagonist’s reference to his home country, and his suffering during the war time (22). As Dahab (2015) states, the reason why he chose the cockroach as “a viable trope” is to help him in expressing his experience and the experience of all the immigrants in

Montreal. Such a nature would deliver the “despair” and “violence” that the immigrants face (282). The novel questions the existence of an immigrant living in a Western country, “What if I ceased to exist?” (Hage 2008, 33) The protagonist never mentions the place where he comes from and always refers to it as, “back where I come from” (128). According to Dahab (2015), it is Lebanon in 1980s because of the many mentioning of the bombing and the militia (282). This could also be evidenced by the Arabic names he mentions such as, Mona, Suad, and Naim, “back home” (Hage 2008, 143).

Hage’s third novel, *Carnival* (2012), opens with showing an immigrant who has transformed and reached to the identity that he was trying to rebel for in the previous novel, *Cockroach*, which Abdul-Jabbar (2017) mentioned and discussed (770). Dahab (2015) states that *Carnival* continues with the same setting of *Cockroach*, which is Montreal, although not mentioned (291 & 292). As an immigrant, the protagonist reached to the place which Homi Bhabha (1994) calls, “the third place”, where he has changed and formed his identity as an immigrant who lives in the West. Forget (2013) argues that *Carnival* (2012) presents a protagonist who “has arrived a new land and achieved a moderate degree of security there” (51). This means that the protagonist is in a new stage where he feels more secured which could be seen throughout the novel in his new job, his new perspective to life and his free will and choice. Fly tries to reach to the point which is called by Homi Bhabha (1994) the “Third Space” where he seeks a difference and a change in his situation as an immigrant. Zamanpour (2019) calls it the “political change” and describes this position as the “enunciative position”. Fly seeks to escape to such a space where he can rebel and show refusal (18).

The title of the novel, *Carnival*, is an indication of and symbolizes starting a new life. This is the protagonist’s new life which follows the life of Hage’s two previous protagonists, Bassam and *Cockroach*’s unnamed protagonist. He is named as Fly, which is also a name of an insect, but the difference now is that flies can fly, unlike cockroaches which only live on grounds. This could be a way that Hage uses to differentiate the currently secured and independent protagonist from what he used to be, but yet he is still an immigrant which is inferiorly looked at and perceived by the Westerners. Forget states that Fly is still aware of himself as being an immigrant but now he is completely in a stage of “xeno-racism resistance” (59). Hage’s *Carnival* presents “rebirth” and the word carnival is a place where people are freed (Zamanpour 2019, 77). Hage presents the surrounded world as a “jungle” while he is in a time of “rebirth” and “liberation”, even flying on a carpet shows his liberation (Zamanpour 2019, 80). According to Whitlock (2011), “*Carnival* intensifies *Cockroach*’s looseness” which aims of adding “celebration from which it takes its name” (281). The name of the novel itself indicates a new stage for the protagonist.

The first thing that shows how Fly has changed is his job as a taxi driver which he shows complete satisfaction and fulfilment in. Dahab (2015) states here that Fly’s taxi resembles his flying carpet which he mentions throughout the novel (281). Fly describes himself as an observer, while in *Cockroach*, the unnamed protagonist always had the feeling as if someone is

watching and following him, “all the while looking behind me. I had that strange feeling of being chased. So I ran as if I was being hunted by giants who could pick me up and ponder me” (230). Forget (2013) argues that being a taxi driver gives Fly the opportunity to see the unique things in a better way (Forget 2013, 51). His feeling of himself being an observer comes from his feeling of being free. He feels that he is free and could escape and drive his car whenever and to wherever he wants. The protagonist considers himself a “book hero” who has the most fortunate way in escaping, he can fly any time for his freedom (Hage 2012, 23). This is one of the meanings of his name, “Fly”. Another point which the protagonist states here is that he has the freedom of dreaming unlike others who cannot fly by just can open their arms (Hage 2012, 23). From what has been discussed, the transference, and change of the immigrant could be noticed in his awareness of his complete free will. According to Ali Zamanpour (2019), this is seen in Fly mentioning his father's magical 'flying carpet' throughout the novel (74). To him “Arabs are the masters of flying carpets” (Hage 2012, 88). He also states that the nature of such a job is “a larger philosophical question of being and the ethics of survival” (Zamanpour 2019, 76). The protagonist also has “the eyes and ears” to capture “the pulse of feeling running through nearly everyone” (Hage 2012, 8). As can be noticed, Fly shows a different person and is given abilities that show his confidence and satisfaction.

Fly describes himself as a “wonderer” and an “operator” (Hage 2012, 10). He wonders in the roads and operates his car in having the authority of choosing who he will allow to ride and who he will help, this is because he perceives people from a different perspective. Forget adds that Fly has the ability to see the “connections” and “tensions” from a detached place, from his car, he has the choice of choosing the people he wants to be close to and help (Forget 2013, 51). He describes the type of men that each driver needs to know and which people could a driver and his taxi be safe with and which are not (Forget 2013, 23). He also chooses the people who he can be close to which is something that shows his wisdom, “Fly only draws close to him those who share his struggle for a more just world” (Hage, 2012, 52). Fly would sometimes give suggestions and commentaries, “If they spend enough.... Some of these drivers are” (104). Hage presents Fly as a man who is mature in his thinking which could be seen when Fly picks up the “drunk numbskulls”. They ask him where he is from and he thinks “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” (Hage 2012, 32). Fly’s mature thinking and wisdom could be noticed from how he deals the passengers even after being selective. Forget comments on the same quote saying that it shows Fly’s mature thinking (55).

Another change in Hage’s protagonist is that he follows his own laws which shows his confidence in himself. This could be seen in different places throughout the novel. The first time, when he mentions that he makes his own laws to “encourage people to flee their confinements and chains” (Hage 2012, 64). Other evidences are mentioned in the novel which really show that he has his own laws, such as him assigning names for the taxi drivers, saying that he always gets

paid, and being in service when he only wants to be (Hage 2012, 10, 55 and 134). Fly refuses all the boundaries and “borders” although he is aware of their existence. His self-confidence is also seen in the way he perceives himself and he is sure of what he says. He considers himself the best as a driver because he knows all the roads and the paths (Hage 2012, 58). He knows and is aware that people feel safe with him and like his rides. He is described by the passengers as “careful” and “honest” (59).

Another point related to his change of personality is the help he offers the people around him. He also chooses the people that he would help, such as the homeless man (Hage 2012, 21), the boys whose eyes were sprayed with gas by Linda (Hage 2012, 54), Linda against Fredao (Hage 2012, 55 & 56), Otto when he was chased by the police (Hage 2012, 108), Mary against her mean husband (Hage 2012, 137), Mary again when she asked him to call Father Smiley (Hage 2012, 168), Simon Spider (Hage 2012, 193), the clown (Hage 2012, 170) and Tamer and Skippy (Hage 2012, 258). Buchner George (2004) states that the protagonist is presented by several “images of God”. He adds that the images show him as a new creature who looks down to other creatures and is ready to consume them (8).

Conclusion

From the previous discussion and with the researcher’s engagement with literature, many evidences and references appeared and revealed the relationship and the link between Hage’s three novels and how the three novels complement each other, each one showing a different stage of the same protagonist. The protagonist is an Arab from Lebanon, who suffers from the Civil War and its consequences, and dreams of a better life which he believes will achieve by leaving to a Western country, he first thinks of Rome, which he keeps referring to as Roma throughout the first novel, *De Niro’s Game*.

The second novel, *Cockroach*, starts with showing that the protagonist is in Canada with the feeling of being marginalized, oppressed, corrupted and lost, unlike the life that he has always been looking forward to and dreaming about. He starts his rebellion and revolt on these circumstances by some techniques used by the author, such as metamorphosis, which was introduced in the first novel by Hage. He starts visioning a cockroach which is his internal self. This is the scene where confrontation, empowerment and change happen and is reflected in the third novel, *Carnival*, where the protagonist had gained his identity and transformed into a confidence, courageous, wise and helpful man.

As could be noticed, the three novels show the life of one immigrant, the protagonist, which starts from Bassam, which also reflects the life of Hage himself and the stages that he went through. There are many scenes, names and references to Lebanon that are common and repeated

in the three novels or may be linked together. This gives an indication that the three novels are linked and related especially in the setting that links the three novels too.

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