

MY MOTHER'S TABLE

**MY MOTHER'S TABLE:
At Home in the Maronite Diaspora,**

*A Study of Emigration from Hadchit,
North Lebanon to Australia and America*

By

Nelia Hyndman-Rizk

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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I dedicate this study to my mother Mary and our matriline of Lebanese mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers and their rich traditions of matriarchy.

Then a ploughman said "speak to us of work"...

*Often have I heard you say,
as if speaking in sleep,*

*"He who works in marble, and finds the shape of his own soul in the stone, is
nobler than he who ploughs the soil".*

*"And he who seizes the rainbow to lay it on a cloth in the likeness of man, is
more than he who makes the sandals for our feet".*

*But I say, not in sleep, but in the overwakefulness of the noontide, that the wind
speaks not more sweetly to the giant oaks than to the least of all the blades of grass:
And he alone is great who turns the voice of the wind into a song made sweeter
by his own loving.*

Work is love made visible.

*And if you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should
leave your work and sit at the gate of the temple and take alms of those who work
with joy.*

*For if you bake bread with indifference, you bake a bitter bread that feeds but half
man's hunger*

*And if you grudge the crushing of the grapes, your grudge distils a poison in the
wine*

*Excerpt from "The Prophet"
(Gibran 2005 (1923), 33-34)*

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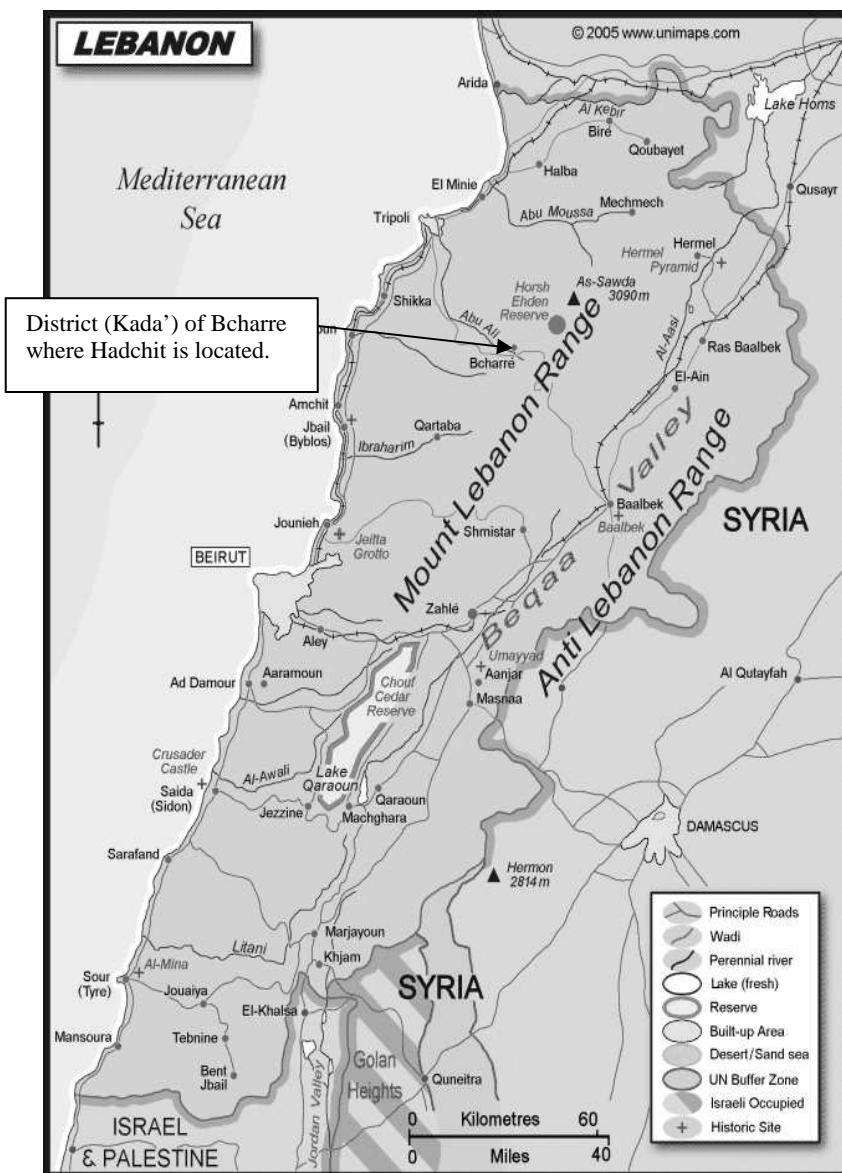
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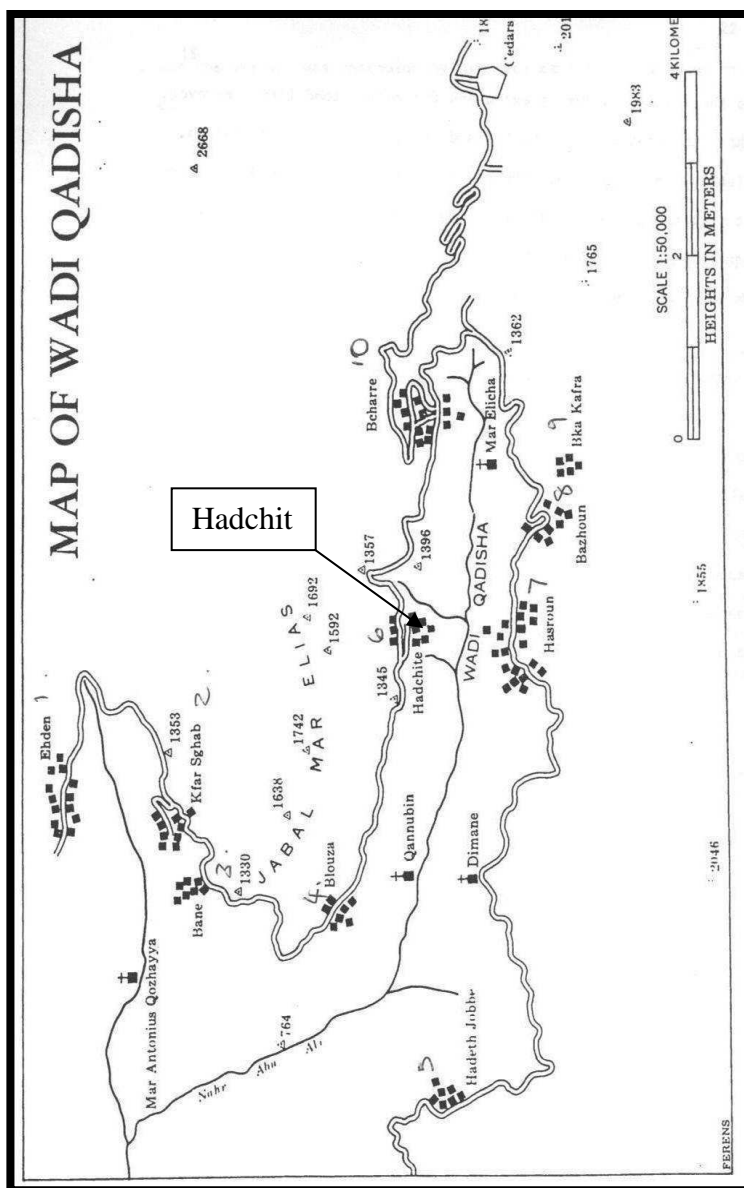
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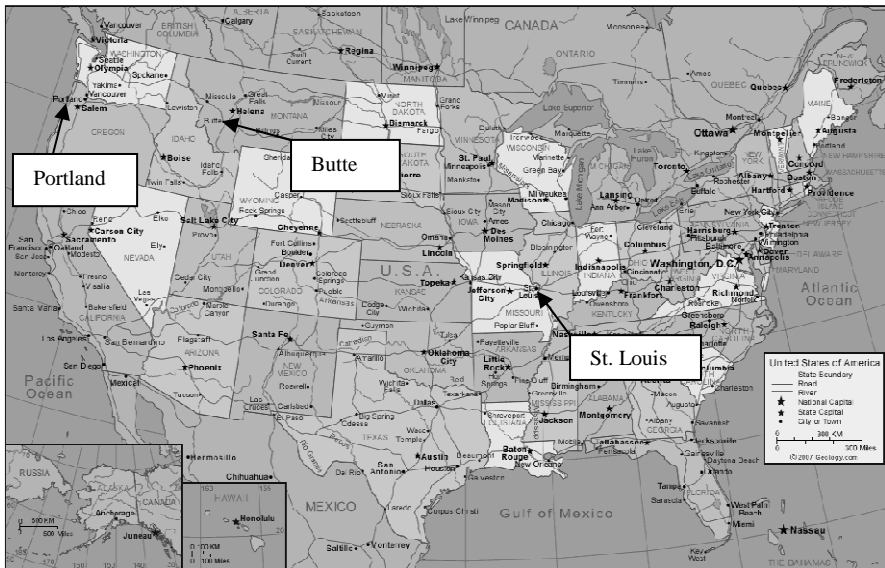
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PREFACE

In the era of globalisation, studies of migration focus on mobility, deterritorialised identities and diasporic forms of belonging across nation state boundaries. Indeed, uprootedness from the soil of home and place has resulted in a general condition of 'homelessness' in late modernity, referred to as the diasporic condition. The search for an 'absolute home' has become the Holy Grail for pilgrims in late modernity and forms the basis for this study, which explores the 'migrant's conundrum': does home move where the migrant moves, or is it forever tied to the primordialism of place, soil and kinship? Through an examination of the construction of homeliness amongst immigrants from Hadchit and their descendants in Australia and America, it will be shown how their strategies of home-building depend upon the capacity to imagine themselves as being united by kinship, a shared village of origins and as part of the broader communal Maronite identity (*Mwarne*), which now transcends nation state boundaries. Patrilineage (*bayt*), village (*day'aa*) and sect (*ta'eefa*) have historically defined Lebanese sectarian identities and now, as this study shows, are deployed as a strategy of home-building and community construction in diaspora. However, capitalist social relations of production in Australia and America have transformed *bayt*, *day'aa* and *ta'eefa* amongst the second, third and fourth generations through the gendered renegotiation of the marriage contract from relations of descent to relations of consent. Thus, the Hadchitis now face a crisis of (re)production and attribute this, in the case of Australia, to the state being *hukum niswen*, ruled by women, an inversion of the gendered order of power in Lebanon. Through pilgrimages to the ancestral village, however, émigrés seek a spiritual resolution to the contradictions of migration through the restoration of their connection to place, but find they cannot seamlessly belong in Hadchit. Meanwhile, multicultural crisis and a milieu of anti-Lebanese racism limit their claims to national belonging in Australia and America. This study finds, therefore, that the contradictions of the migration process are unresolvable through physical mobility, because the feeling of 'home' is a *metaphysical state of being*, which transcends place and is defined by its affective, social and spiritual dimensions. The elusive quality that defines home and provides a sense of unconditional belonging is, in fact, socially constructed by women, through their daily practices of care within the home and the most

important woman for the construction of homeliness is the matriarch, *sit el bayt* – the power of the house. Thus, the place where the immigrant can be at home is metaphorically at their 'mother's table'. The shifting and gendered construction of home amongst immigrants from Hadchit in Australia and America has also led to a transformation of cultural identity amongst them. Through the process of migration, (re)production and return the Hadchitis have become Lebanese-Australians, while the third and fourth generation in America have become 'Honkey-Lebanese' - *looking White on the outside and feeling Lebanese on the inside...*

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INTRODUCTION

Movement plays a key role in the modern imagination with even the idea of home coming to refer to routine sets of practices, rather than fixed places... In 'liquid modernity'...the domination of the unconditional superiority of sedentarism over nomadism and the domination of the settled over the mobile is grinding to a halt...modernity has given rise to the metaphorical figure of the pilgrim...the restless seeker for identity (Coleman and Eade 2004, 5).

In the era of globalisation the migration process has uprooted people from the soil of the place of their birth and led to the primacy of mobility over situatedness. This has transformed the construction of primordial attachments, whereby culture and kinship transcend place and are reconstructed in different parts of the world in new configurations that generate contradictions of identity. Consequently, the search for an absolute home, where the immigrant can seamlessly belong has become the trope and Holy Grail for pilgrims in late modernity. Declining economic conditions under the latest phase of capital accumulation have also contributed to a culture of border disorder and fear in immigrant receiver nations. None more so, than for Lebanese immigrants living in the West in the aftermath of September 11th, such as immigrants from Hadchit, the subject of this study, who now suffer from an acute state of ambivalent belonging and racist exclusion. What force would lead immigrants from Hadchit to uproot themselves from the soil of home and the life of the 'ploughman' (Gibran 1923) to migrate to America at the turn of the Twentieth Century and to Australia in the decades following World War Two?

From peasant to wage-labourer

This study draws upon a political economy perspective to explain how the migration process is intimately connected to the development of capitalism as a mode of production and its requirement for labour. I propose that the migration process can be conceptualised as a negotiation between structures and agents, as a dance between capital and labour. At the macro level capital's changing requirements for labour provides the

pull factor for international migration. At the micro level, immigrants themselves negotiate migration pathways through the development of complex social networks across transnational borders and are driven by a range of complex push factors. The most important, according to Werbner (1990), is the pursuit of success, through the accumulation of capital and status inter-generationally. Indeed, immigrant communities are marked by status differentiation as some become more established than others. Baldassar (2001), likewise, argues that finding success through attaining financial independence, or '*sistemazione*', is central to the dynamics of migrant communities and the principal motivation for migration itself:

Migration is often intimately connected to marriage and sistemazione. To be able to achieve sistemazione an individual needs capital or at least a steady income. The desire for sistemazione is recognized as the most common incentive for migration. Historically, migration was an opportunity to make enough money to 'set oneself up' with house and family when the means to do so were not available at home. Migrating was...a way of attaining independence (Baldassar 2001, 40).

Building on Baldassar and Werbner's argument that migration is a process of building success, through accumulating capital and status intergenerationally, Hage (2005) theorises that migration can be understood as the search for a viable life, or what Bourdieu terms "*illusio*" (Bourdieu 1980, 66), the sense of meaning and importance in one's own life. Hage argues that a sense of meaning and purpose in life is linked to the feeling that one is 'going somewhere' in life and theorises this as a form of 'symbolic movement' (Hage 2005, 8). The decision to move physically, through the process of migration, links symbolic and physical mobility:

We engage in the kind of physical mobility that defines us as migrants because we feel another geographical space is a better launching pad for our symbolic selves...migration cannot be understood without taking into account this relationship between symbolic and physical movement (Hage 2005, 8).

However, he suggests, people only make the decision to migrate when there is no prospect for upward mobility in their home society (Hage 2005, 8). Thus, Hage argues, it is better to migrate and have the possibility for a better life (read 'higher status') than to be condemned to the social position you were born into and become physically and symbolically stuck, *metrahu* in Arabic, where you started with your life potential unrealised (Hage 2005, 9).

A central aspect to attaining a 'higher status' has been the process of peasant transformation into wage labourers under capitalism, as a mode of production. Marxist anthropology theorises that the expansion of capitalism is central to the European expansion and colonisation of the New World (Castles and Miller 2009; Marx and Engels 1848; Wolf 1982; Worsley 1984). As capitalism expanded it converted and incorporated various indigenous and feudal modes of production, referred to respectively as the kin-ordered and tributary modes of production (Wolf 1982, 76). However, Gordelier (in Seymour-Smith 1986, 195) further theorises that religious systems, as a dominant form of social organisation, can also be conceptualised as a mode of production (i.e. the production of ethno/religious nationalisms), through their control over the social relations of production. Thus, in the case of Lebanon, it can be argued that ethno-religious sect is the dominant mode of production, as will be shown in Chapter One. For every mode of production there is also a mode of (re)production, according to Marxist feminist theorists (Delphy 1977; Eisenstein 1979; Firestone 1970; Hartmann 1979; Hartmann and Markusen 1980; MacKinnon 1982; Mitchell 1971), which centres on the role of women in reproducing the social order, referred to as the domestic mode of production (Seymour-Smith 1986, 195). Most Marxist anthropologists argue, however, that more than one mode of production co-exists simultaneously in any given contact zone, thus, ethnography should provide a thick description of the articulation between modes of production (Seymour-Smith 1986, 196).

Central to the process of historical transformation between modes of production and the articulation between them, has been the dislocation of the peasantry from the land in order to convert them into wage labourers on the factory floor (Wolf 1982, 77). Marx (1867) in *Capital* wrote the following:

The expropriation of the great mass of the people from the soil, from the means of subsistence, and from the means of labor, this fearful and painful expropriation of the mass of the people forms the prelude to the history of capital. It comprises a series of forcible methods, of which we have passed in review only those that have been epoch-making as methods of the primitive accumulation of capital.

The "expropriation" of the peasantry has been achieved forcibly, such as through the enclosure movement in England, but also willingly. Humphrey (1998, 30) argues that industrial capitalism actually recruits labour from the South on the basis that they are willing to become wage labourers:

The very recruitment of Labour is premised on the assumption that people are willing to become wage workers, to be proletarianised. Industrial Capitalism generated urban space to make people available as surplus labour. The constant evaluation of the worth of migrants as desirable or undesirable is invariably sheeted home to the question of their willingness to become productive wage workers.

I will refer to the willingness to become wage-labourers as a process of 'voluntary expropriation'. Thus, migration can also be conceptualised as a form of symbolic mobility between modes of production, which produces differential articulations between place, culture, identity, gender and status.

Why would the peasantry willingly be proletarianised? The reason lies in the promise of upward mobility, the driving force behind capital accumulation and its ideological counter-part: the social 'devaluation' of the peasantry. Worsley (1984) suggests that the peasantry have been ideologically devalued over centuries through their construction as being "little more than animals", due to their link with agriculture:

For many people, peasant life still signifies what it did for Marx – 'rural idiocy': a nineteenth-century mental set established over centuries during which peasants were regarded as little more than animals...development is still simply equated with urban, industrial life; underdevelopment with an agricultural existence. Progress is therefore deemed to consist either in moving people out of agriculture altogether or in creating 'factories in the field' (Worsley 1984, 70).

Why does the link with agriculture underpin the ideological construction of the peasantry as being 'backward'? I propose that it is the association between agriculture, soil and the seasons and, thus, the link between agriculture and nature. The logic of 'closeness to/distance from nature' operates as the common duality against which hierarchies of class, gender and race are constructed. Ortner (1974) posits that women's subordination can be understood by the formula that "female is to nature as male is to culture", or that women are symbolically associated with nature, as opposed to men who are identified with culture (Ortner 1974, 361). Building on De Beauvoir's (1953, 58-59) observation that women are embodied in the endless repetition (immanence) of reproducing the species and, thus, produce "perishables", Ortner (1974, 362) surmises that this allows men to accumulate culture, which is socially constructed and, thus, has greater status and meaning, because it demonstrates men's transcendence over nature and women's subjection to it.

Ortner argues that society constructs meaning through culture, which generates meaningful forms that allow the givens of human existence (the ultimate 'given' being death) to be transcended, because the life cycle of the society transcends the mortality of the individual (Ortner 1974, 359). Culture allows humans to perceive themselves to transcend nature and, thus, to construct meaningfulness. However, access to the meaningful task of generating culture is distributed unevenly by gender and social class and, hence, meaning is monopolised by those higher up the social ladder and systematically denied to those below (Jackson 2005, x), through their construction as being closer to nature and, thus, more subjected to it. Developmental racism, or social Darwinism, constructed the hierarchy of the races within this framework. White Europeans were/are represented as being more civilised (transcendent over nature) than indigenous and colonised peoples, who were/are represented as being 'primitive' and, hence, closer to nature (Hage 2003, 53).

The logic of closeness to/transcendence over nature can also be applied to human class formation. Bourdieu (1984, 40), following Ortner, links women's subordination, like the working class, to their 'closeness to nature' and argues that the refusal of nature is, in fact, the starting point for class distinction (Bourdieu 1984, 40). Bourdieu (1984, 53-54) posits that class distinction is measured by accumulated cultural capital and the "distance from necessity". The learning of legitimate culture is premised upon the suspension and removal of economic necessity and the distance from groups subjected to those determinisms (Bourdieu 1984, 54). This produces the pure gaze of the aesthetic disposition, as measured by the objective distance from those trapped within necessity, while freedom exhibits the distance from necessity through the stylisation of life (Bourdieu 1984, 55).

Marx (1844) reflected on the nature/culture/meaning problematic and proposed that the development of capitalism, as a mode of production, is the mechanism, *par excellence*, by which humanity achieved 'transcendence' through the subjection of nature and the victory of the machine. Under the feudal/tributary mode of production, being tied to a 'piece of land' as a peasant represented the bottom of the social order, but under capitalism the proletariat on the factory floor became the new starting point for class distinction. According to Marx (1976, 165), the mastery over nature, or abstraction from nature, is central to capital accumulation and is achieved through the mystification of human social relations as the relation between things, which he referred to as "commodity fetishism":

It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things...so it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities (Marx 1976, 165).

Following Marx, theorists of the European transition from feudalism to capitalism (Dunn 2009; Hobsbawm 1962; 1975; Polanyi 1957; Weber 1930; Wolf 1982) have noted five key transformations in social practices between the two modes of production with respect to Europe. In the first transformation, the capitalist mode of production transcends the seasons and is, of itself, abstracted from nature as a result of the Industrial Revolution, whereas the feudal/tributary mode of production is built upon accumulating surpluses generated by the agricultural cycle (Wolf 1982). In the second, social hierarchy is differentially experienced between the capitalist and feudal modes of production: the former offers the 'possibility' for upward mobility, the capitalist carrot; while in the latter one's station in life is determined through birth and heredity (Seymour-Smith 1986, 194). In the third, the experience of subjection is transformed. In the feudal mode of production the lords/aristocracy owned the land and the peasantry together in a direct form of domination/exploitation. With the shattering of feudal ties, however, a more indirect form of social control develops and the 'possibility' for upward mobility, the cornerstone of capitalism (Marx and Engels 1848; Kuhn 2005, 49). While capitalism offers the 'possibility' of upward mobility, it also suppresses the reality that social class mostly reproduces itself (Kuhn 2005, 49). The myth of upward mobility is, therefore, the key to both the success and inherent contradictions of capitalism. The fourth key transformation is the break-down of collective kinship ties and the rise of individualism and bureaucratic social organisation, along with demands for equal treatment and the elevation of personal choice over pre-determined destiny and fate (Weber in Hylland-Eriksen 1995, 119-120). The final key transformation is the degree to which the progressive character of capitalism, as a mode of production, erodes and destabilises patriarchal social control within the family, through the incorporation of women into the wage labour force (Gimenez and Vogel 2005; Hartmann 1979; 1980; Mutari 2001; Firestone 1970; Mitchell 1971). This is a key question for this study, which now will be considered further.