

## Of Basement Kitchens and Filthy Lodges: Spaces in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Hage's *Cockroach*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the spaces that immigrants occupy in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and Rawi Hage's novel *Cockroach* (2008). It explores the representation of menial jobs that immigrants take with low wages in ethnic restaurants; it also highlights how bourgeois compradors exploit immigrants' vulnerabilities because they are undocumented workers. The paper also tackles the issue of immigration in the context of globalization and neoliberalism. It also aims at examining how each novelist portrays the anguishes of the two protagonists, Biju in Desai's novel and the unnamed narrator in Hage's novel, in the underground worlds where immigrants work and live. The paper uses Henri Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space* (1974) as a reference point to examine how spaces play prominent roles in both novels. In both novels, immigrants feel alienated in multinational spaces in advanced capitalist societies. As Desai's Biju and Hage's unnamed narrator peregrinate around unfamiliar cities, they attempt to gain a sense of place in relation to various other places on a mental map.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper studies the signification of spaces immigrants occupy in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) and Rawi Hage's novel *Cockroach* (2008). It tackles the issue of immigration in the context of globalization and neoliberalism. The protagonists, Biju in Desai's novel and the unnamed narrator in Hage's novel, work in restaurants that offer ethnic cuisines in the two multicultural cities of New York and Montreal, respectively. This paper examines how each novelist portrays the experiences of these two protagonists in the underground worlds of these cities where immigrants hide and work. As ethnic restaurants rapidly expand in multicultural American and Canadian cities, bourgeois compradors exploit immigrants since some of these immigrants are undocumented workers. It is a quasi-master-slave relationship: immigrants are marginalized and hidden in the underground worlds of these cities where they work unrecognized, with no evidence of their existence. Immigrants take underpaid jobs and sleep together in cramped and unhygienic basements; their working conditions deny them their essential rights. Arriving from ex-colonies, less developed countries and war zones, immigrants' lives in host countries

are shaped by harsh laws and legislations that are specifically designed to curtail their inflows and criminalize them. In both novels, Desai and Hage centralize disfranchised and marginalized figures.

Successive waves of immigrants have been arriving on American and Canadian shores since the liberalization of immigration laws in the 1960s and the adoption of multiculturalism as a state policy in both countries. In Desai's novel, the protagonist Biju is an undocumented Indian immigrant living in New York City. He works 18 hours a day, shares a small room with other immigrants, and experiences harsh conditions as he toils in a basement kitchen. At the end of the novel, Biju returns to India. In Hage's novel, the unnamed narrator is an immigrant from the Middle East who migrates to Montreal and eventually settles in its slums; he fails in his attempt to commit suicide and is sentenced to attending psycho-therapy sessions through which he unfolds his traumatic childhood experiences in his war-torn homeland. In Montreal, he eventually lands a job in a restaurant as a dishwasher and a busboy.

Since the main two characters work in restaurants that serve ethnic food, it is crucial to briefly discuss the

significance of food in these two novels. In both novels, food is an important signifier that helps readers understand the suffering of immigrants who, ironically, prepare stylish food for customers but are forced to eat unhealthy food. E. N. Anderson (2005) argues in his book *Everyone Eats* that food is a text that should be analyzed and interpreted (17). He argues that immigrants and oppressed people endure hunger and starvation; they eat anything available, regardless of the quality of food, whether it is healthy, clean, or not (21). Urbanization has affected world food provision negatively. Restaurants in the multinational capitalist societies are centers of vitality and activity; they offer dishes from all over the world, with fanciful decorations to the place itself; immigrants who came from the wretched zones of the earth, toil in filthy places with cockroaches and rats (86). So, food, or precisely the lack of it, is a recurrent motif in both novels. Foodstuffs and culinary habits highlight the socio-economic disparities between the two worlds the novels depict. On the one hand, Desai and Hage portray urban spaces in which luxurious restaurants offer fancy food to wealthy people. On the other hand, both novels represent the miserable spaces in which immigrants, the lynchpins of kitchens where this fancy food is prepared, live in constant hunger.

#### “IMMIGRANT SPACES” IN MULTICULTURAL CITIES

Both novels are set in capitalist societies where workers are exploited and mistreated by their bosses; the boss believes that he is a patron to these workers, while, in fact, he is merely a comprador who is engaged in economic and political exploitation. Both novels show how the hierarchy of superior-inferior governs the relationship between the bosses and their employees. The city is hospitable only to the privileged people and to the taxpayers. It is a capitalist and a neoliberal society; immigrants, driven by poverty, experience harsh labor conditions, which profoundly contribute to the state of displacement and alienation that these immigrants experience. Relentless humiliations, exploitations, and degradations that eventually shape their identities and self-perception, all further complicates their social and economic vulnerabilities.

This paper uses French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre's ideas on the production of space as outlined in his books *The Production of Space* (1974) and *Writing on Cities* (1996) to examine how spaces play significant roles in the daily experiences of immigrants in both novels. Lefebvre (1974) argues that hegemony makes use of space in the establishment, based on the underlying logic, and with the help of knowledge and technical expertise, of a 'system' (11). For Lefebvre, social space “subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder” (73). Lefebvre also maintains that space is also the “outcome of a sequence and set of operations” (73). In this context, one may also draw on Robert T. Tally's writings to explore the relations among space, narrative, and representation as outlined in his book *Spatiality* (2013). Tally

(2013) argues that literature functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, and situating them in a kind of fanciful space (2). For Tally, that creates a mental image of spaces that authors describe according to their experiences (2). Tally also discusses immigrants' alienation in multinational spaces and in advanced capitalist societies (68).

The two novelists, to borrow the words of Al-Doori and Awad (2018) on how spaces are represented in literary texts, brilliantly portray how “urban space is defined in relation to its cultural power and those who exercise that power” (15). Biju, in Desai's novel, and the unnamed narrator in Hage's novel, walk around in unfamiliar cities and they attempt to gain a sense of place in relation to various other places on a mental map. Since both novels depict the quotidian experiences of characters who dwell in the underworld, the paper investigates the significance of this underground world. This study examines how the two novelists represent such ugly experiences. These immigrants belong to ethnic minorities. The spaces that these immigrants occupy and navigate are also scrutinized and analyzed in this study since they clarify and reflect the gloomy conditions that these vulnerable people endure in their quotidian experiences. In both novels, immigrants are exploited by bourgeois compradors in an advanced capitalist society which is governed by neoliberalism and globalization.

#### IMMIGRANTS, GLOBALIZATION AND NEOLIBERALISM

In *Capitalism in the Age of Globalization*, Marxist economist Samir Amin (1997) defines compradors as the new master class of individuals bound to specific economic entities, which gradually constructs itself as the prevailing class in the political system, and in the whole society (18). They have wealth in the form of money, commodities, investments, or any resource owned by a person or organization such as factories, restaurants, or any financial or commercial institutions (18). Amin describes the oppressive deeds of the dominant class as mafia behavior (22). He also considers globalization as a new scene of imperialism since people do not have the right to choose their economic and political system; it is a kind of imperialism defined not by colonial rule, but by the global capitalist market (19). Amin provides a compelling analysis of the new capitalist era and discusses exploitative terms of globalization, and he argues that a country's position in the global hierarchy is defined by its capacity to compete in the world market (3).

In both novels, restaurants are spaces where this hierarchical categorization is quite clear. For instance, in Desai's novel, we are informed that spaces are strictly divided in restaurants: “On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native. Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian” (21). So, upstairs is the world of the privileged people while downstairs less-privileged, i.e. mainly illegal immigrants, work tirelessly (21). Also, Hage's *Cockroach* portrays how compradors utilize cultural differences in a globalized world. Frustrated and disgruntled, the unnamed narrator criticizes compradors, represented in the novel by the restaurant's owner:

Filth! They are the worst - the Third World elite are the filth of the planet and I do not feel any affinity with their jingling-jewelry wives, their arrogance, their large TV screens. Filth! They consider themselves royalty when all they are the residue of colonial power. They walk like they are aristocrats, owners from the land of spice and honey, yet they are nothing but the decedents of porters, colonial servants, gardeners, and sell-out soldiers for invading empires. (159)

The above quotation highlights the emergence of a new form of imperialism as a consequence of globalization. It indicates that imperialism without colonies creates inequality among people, and it leads to the development of the great powers. It depicts compradors as dirt because they serve colonial powers by exploiting illegal immigrants.

In "Global Capital and Transnationalism," Crystal Bartolovich (2000) discusses the significance of exotic restaurants, shops, bars, and sites which are organized according to ethnicities in a globalized world. Foreign cultures and cuisines may be fetishized and highly valued in cosmopolitan cities like New York where people appreciate the food more than they appreciate its makers (126). So, globalization devalues people from certain countries, particularly those from previously colonized ones. People are accordingly exploited even by people who share a cultural heritage with them. In this context, Harsha Walia (2010) investigates the changes in Canada's immigration policy (71). Walia analyzes the conditions of migrant workers who moved from their own countries by the same pressures of neoliberal capitalism, which constructs their super-exploitation in the Canadian labor market (80). The article shows how immigrants were doomed to low-wage jobs, often below the official minimum, and to long hours with no overtime pay, to severe working conditions, and cramped and unhealthy accommodation (72). Migrant workers were considerably vulnerable to abuse as well; the emphasis on their rights may lead to expulsion and contract termination (72). In the same vein, Somerville and Walsworth (2009) depict the experiences of practiced immigrants in Canada and the United States, and how they are different (147). Investigating vulnerabilities of highly skilled immigrants in Canada and the United States, Somerville and Walsworth highlight the exploitation of workers by their employers and the discriminatory income penalty on minorities (149).

### SPACES IMMIGRANTS OCCUPY IN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

Kiran Desai was born in India in 1971 and grew up there before moving to England, aged fourteen. She was educated in India, England and the US. Her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) won a 1998 Betty Trask Award, and her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) won the 2006 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. The novel has been studied from different angles. For instance, Sanasam (2009) focuses on the main characters' problems of human identity, and the resentments they undergo which is associated with the postcolonial impact (109). Sanasam highlights immigrants' feelings of emptiness and meaningless when

they leave their loving families and struggle in oppressive capitalist countries to survive (114). In a similar vein, Jayaraman (2011) foregrounds immigrants' attempts of survival in liminal spaces and the diasporic conditions they endure (54). It also defines the condition of diaspora that is created from a twin process of displacement from recognized systems of knowledge and the development of other spaces in a transnational field of communication (55). Both studies negotiate the concept of identity for immigrants in multicultural and globalized societies. Sabo (2012) underlines the discrepancy between home and host land (375). Sabo argues that immigrants' illegal residence in the USA reflects the power imbalance between compradors and poor immigrants, and the socioeconomic injustice in the world in the context of global capitalism (375). It investigates the representation of marginalized people, whether they are considered subalterns, natives, minorities, or immigrants (377). Masterson (2010) studies the novel from a postcolonial perspective (410). He focuses on Biju's struggles to have a respectable life in a foreign land.

Building on the above argument, this paper highlights the significance of the spaces that Biju moves within as an immigrant in New York City. The study delves deep into the traumatic experiences that he bears in New York City and examines the discrepancy between the impoverished underground world where he works and dwells and the world upstairs where wealthy classes gather, eat, and make business deals. It explores how Biju and other immigrants are treated and exploited by bourgeois compradors in an advanced capitalist society, which is governed by neoliberalism and globalization. In the novel, compradors commodify cultural differences to make money in a multicultural and neoliberal world; they own restaurants that offer ethnic cuisines in multicultural American cities. It also looks into the historical continuity between colonial and neoliberal epochs through Biju's diasporic journey and the marginalization of migrants in the Global North.

Drawing on Lefebvre's ideas on the production of space, one may argue that spaces in Desai's novel are sites over which discourses on ethnicities, immigration, and globalization converge. Lefebvre (1974) argues that capital and capitalism influence practical issues relating to space such as employment, investment, and the worldwide division of labor (10). He believes that capitalism constitutes a variety of overlapping markets, commodities, proletariat, knowledge, money, and land (10). He also adds another significant aspect, which is the hegemony of one class (10). Lefebvre considers this aspect essential and distinct because it describes the position of the working class in society, ergo it analyzes the influence of the bourgeoisie in relation to space (10). In Desai's novel, Biju takes on a string of jobs in the USA. He is doomed to ill-paid jobs as an illegal resident, working as a cheap laborer. The first restaurant he works in is French. Upstairs, wealthy people dine, converse, and enjoy their evenings oblivious of the anguishes and sorrows of immigrant Mexican and Indian workers in the underground kitchen (22). The disparity is explicit in the hierarchal structure of this restaurant.

Biju suffers humiliation in several restaurants where he works. For instance, the owner of the restaurant advises Biju to “[u]se the time off to take a bath’ [...] He had been kind enough to hire Biju although he found him smelly” (23). Through this quote, Desai shows how the hierarchy of superior-inferior governs the relationship between the bosses and the migrant workers. Moreover, the quotation clearly highlights the slave-like treatment of third world people. There is a whole world in the basement kitchens of New York, and it is governed by comprador bourgeoisie and capitalists. Upstairs, the space is filled with young uniformed business people in their twenties and thirties and privileged people of wealthy classes. The above quotation is also essential because it draws the reader’s attention to how space is socio-economically divided in the restaurant. Characteristically, the kitchen is located downstairs to further signify the position immigrant workers, like Biju, occupy in society. Seen from Lefebvre’s perspective (1974), one may argue that architectural design of a restaurant, an institution owned by the bourgeoisie, reflects how the dominating group makes use of space to assert its hegemony over other groups (11). Lefebvre argues that every society produces its own space; capitalism and neo-capitalism have produced a space that includes the ‘world of commodities’ (53).

In Desai’s novel, Biju has started his second year in America at Pinocchio’s Italian restaurant. The owner’s wife claims that he smells, and that she is allergic to his hair oil (48). She has hoped for men from Europe; Bulgarian workers or Czechoslovakians because they might have something in common with them like religion and skin color (48). Also, they eat the same kind of food and look like them, “but they weren’t coming in numbers great enough, or they weren’t miserable enough to migrate for a job, she wasn’t sure” (48). Biju does not feel comfortable in this restaurant and he eventually leaves the job (51). In other words, Desai represents restaurants as spaces where immigrants are kept hidden in underground kitchens. In the unlikely event that they show up on the restaurant’s floor, they are humiliated, chastened and sent away immediately.

Andy Merrifield (2006) discusses the issue of industrialization that produces commodities, suggesting that it proletarianizes people, and that it creates wealth for the capitalists and compradors (67). For Merrifield, industrialization has commodified the city (70). He argues that the immigrant workers are victims of discrimination, and that they are deprived of a decent and possible urban life as they face problems of humiliation and segregation (71). Merrifield maintains that immigrants are exploited to death in cellars and lofts (73). In the novel, for instance, Biju slips in Harrish Harry’s kitchen and his knee is seriously injured to the point that he could not get up. Nevertheless, Harry refuses to get a doctor because the medical expense is high. Harry accepts to give Biju fifty dollars to get medical attention in India and to return later. Biju accuses his boss of paying workers nothing, making them work day and night because they are illegal staff (148). Biju believes that this country is nothing without immigrant workers; repeating, “Without us what would they do?” (228) Comprador

owners strive to increase their wealth, and they do not pay attention to the harsh conditions that immigrants experience as they toil in the basement kitchen.

Apparently, Desai’s novel draws the reader’s attention to the relations among space, narrative, and representation. Tally (2013) argues that using literary cartography helps the writer in presenting the social spaces of his or her world (18). He maintains that the active exploration of real and imaginary spaces of literature is the goal of geocriticism which “explores, seeks, surveys, digs into, reads, and writes a place; it looks at, listens to, touches, smells, and tastes spaces” (19). In applying Tally’s ideas to Desai’s novel, one notices that the novel represents New York as a neoliberal capitalist city that is dominated by the bourgeoisie and compradors. The city is hospitable and warm only to the wealthy classes. Immigrants, on the other hand, are humiliated and manipulated by exploitative companies in a capitalist system. In Desai’s novel, restaurants are the best space that highlights the discrepancy between the rich and the poor: while glamorous dining rooms give the impression of affluence and prosperity, underground kitchens lack basic safety and hygienic conditions.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, the basement kitchen is portrayed as a cellar full of Mexicans, Desis, and Pakistanis (23). According to Jayaraman (2011), such spaces can become spaces of entrapment (56). Jayaraman argues that these spaces limit immigrants’ freedoms (56). He also describes such spaces as duplicitous liminal spaces that immigrants cannot sustain, and it affects their production (56). Indeed, Biju and other immigrants are confined and restricted in their movements. The kitchen in which they work is like a prison since they have not got the chance to leave it as freely as they wish. In other words, the space that immigrants have is quite limited. Tally (2013) delves deep into the representation of multicultural spaces (75). For Tally, multicultural spaces are “contact zones”: places of colonial experiences in which people that were geographically and historically segregated come in contact with each other and establish among themselves relations based on servitude (75). In Desai’s novel, immigrants working at the kitchen of Manhattan ethnic restaurants are poor natives from the more inferior parts of the world: Mexicans, Indians, Colombians, Tunisians, Ecuadorians, and Gambians whose experiences are affected by a history of colonialism and neo-colonialism resulting from globalization.

In other words, the novel highlights the fact that the contemporary world economy relies heavily on exploiting cheap labor from Third World countries. Amin (2014) argues that a new master class that gradually established itself as the dominant class in the political system owns the capital of investments, factories, and financial and commercial companies (18). He maintains that they are real bourgeoisie and compradors engaged in competitive markets by their ownership of private properties. In Desai’s novel, Harrish Harry and other restaurateurs are merely compradors who are engaged in economic and political exploitation; they are identified as the new ruling class allied with people in power. Harrish Harry’s wife suggests that workers could live

below in the kitchen. She offers free housing, so she can cut the pay to a quarter of minimum wage and reclaim the tips. Harrish Harry's wife is set to exploit the staff further. Harry says, "Find your market. Study your market. Cater your market" (145). He serves Indian food to Americans who belong to the upper class. In this way, Harrish Harry makes money by commodifying cultural differences and exploiting undocumented immigrant laborers.

Workers toil in Ghandi Café, Harrish Harry's restaurant, under all conditions, the winter storms that howled around the place, the rain, the melting heat, all never mattering. The restaurant is described as a dim space (138). Harrish Harry is angry most of the time and is disciplinary. He mistreats his employees, "but when an American patron enters the restaurant, his manner change[s] instantly, and he drastically welcomes him" (147). As a comprador, his primary intent is to accumulate money. Here, one may draw on Arif Dirlik's argument on the continuity of colonialist practices in new forms and manifestations (328). Dirlik (1994) argues that the new era of global capitalism requires the remapping of the global relations, and demands being informed both by contemporary structures of economic, political, and cultural power and by earlier visions of society (328). As Dirlik succinctly puts it, the "new international division of labor" is a consequence of blurring distinctions between the "three worlds" and the emergence of "Third World" conditions in the most advanced economies (328). Dirlik draws our attention to the continuity of colonialist practices under new guises such as neoliberalism, privatization, open market policies, and globalization. Overall, implementing these policies in advanced capitalist societies and "Third World" countries has augmented the vulnerabilities of disfranchised and marginalized groups such as the working class, refugees, and immigrants.

Desai's novel portrays an advanced capitalist society that relentlessly exploits undocumented immigrants. For instance, Harrish Harry tells Biju, "I take you in. I hire you with no papers, treat you like my own son and now this is how you repay me! Living here rent-free. In India would they pay you?" (188) Biju is subjected to constant humiliation and intimidation; his boss exploits his vulnerability as an illegal laborer. Biju lives in a small room in the basement of a building in Harlem. He shares this space with other illegal immigrants; it is a crowded, crammed, and dark tenement:

The building belonged to an invisible management company that listed its address as One and a Quarter Street and owned tenements all over the neighborhood, the superintendent supplementing his income by illegally renting out basement quarters by the week, by the month, and even by the day, to fellow illegals. [...] Biju joined a shifting population of men camping out near the fuse box, behind the boiler, in the cubby holes, and in odd-shaped corners that once were pantries, maids' rooms, laundry rooms, and storage rooms at the bottom of what had been a single-family home. (51)

The above quotation highlights the poor lodgings and facilities that are offered to immigrants and the pathetic conditions under which Biju and fellow immigrants live. It also

shows how, as illegal immigrants, these men are exploited by an opportunist fellow immigrant. There was one fuse box for the whole building, ergo, if anyone turns on too many lights, the entire electricity goes off, and the residents scream to nobody since there is nobody to hear them (52).

The above quotation is also noteworthy because it shows that Desai does not only represent spaces in which immigrants work, but she also portrays the dilapidated and decrepit spaces in which they dwell. Apparently, the place where Biju lives lacks the basic conditions to be considered a suitable human residence. This is actually further emphasized in another passage which describes immigrants' accommodations as crumbling and disintegrating:

From every angle that you looked at this city without a horizon, you saw more buildings going up like jungle creepers, starved for light, holding a perpetual half-darkness congealed at the bottom the day shafting through maze, silvering into apartments at precise and fleeting times. (189)

The quotation indicates that immigrants live in places where luxury is not available; immigrants share a tiny space that lacks the primary requirements for an adequate standard of living. The ruthlessness of these spaces challenges all attempts of survival. Such spaces can become spaces of entrapment. The host country fails to be a comfort zone for immigrants; it is not home because it does not give them essential rights and tangible benefits.

### SPACES IMMIGRANTS OCCUPY IN HAGE'S *COCKROACH*

Rawi Hage (b. 1964) is an Arab Canadian novelist, a short story writer, and a visual artist who, like other Arab writers in diaspora, "straddle two cultures [and ...] skillfully blend their Arab cultural heritage in their writings" (Awad 2012: 18). Born in Beirut, he later moved to New York and then Montreal; he won the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award (2008), the Governor General's Literary Award for fiction, and the Scotiabank Giller Prize (Sakr 2011: 343). *Cockroach* is his second novel, which has been read as a sequel to the first *De Niro's Game* (2006), and it was translated into sixteen languages. His more recent novels include *Carnival* (2012) and *Beirut Hellfire Society* (2018). Like other Lebanese authors in diaspora, Hage's novels often depict Lebanon's "tragic domestic strife" (Awad 2016: 87). In other words, Hage's characters usually suffer from the traumatic repercussions of Lebanon's Civil War.

Hage's novel *Cockroach* (2008) has received relative attention by academics and critics who have studied it from different angles. For instance, Molnar (2014) argues that the narrator escapes spaces that limit his freedom and threatens his state of living through fantasy (62). Molnar maintains that the novel investigates the complicated nature of the immigrant's experience in an inhospitable city (69). Similarly, Wisam Kh. Abdul-Jabbar (2017) argues that the unnamed narrator feels estrangement in an inhospitable city, so he seeks the wildlife of the underground (1). The article portrays the underground world as a safe refuge for the people who are deprived of normal societal conditions because of

low social or economic status from the rough urban surface where wealthy classes live (1). Sakr (2011) argues that the novel explores the material and psychological experiences of immigrant workers who suffer socio-economic insecurity (344). The novel, according to Sakr, represents violence, alienation, trauma, and intercultural conflicts; hence, Sakr concludes that trauma pervades both the subject and style of Hage's writings (344).

Critics like Lapierre have focused on the diasporic conditions and trauma complex that immigrants experience in Montreal (2014: 559). The article argues that immigrants in Hage's novel are marginalized figures, and that the novel is a critique of Canada (559). The novel, according to Lapierre, depicts Montreal as a space marked by racism, classism, oppression, and exploitation (559). Furthermore, it underscores the failure of Canadian multiculturalism since society is governed by the socio-economic hierarchy (p. 563). Consistent with the previous studies, Huchison has examined how immigrants' experiences reveal the flaws in the standards of Canadian multiculturalism (2020: 140). It criticizes the social order from within, and highlights immigrants' resistance to categorization and discrimination (146).

As can be deduced from the above literature review, critics have pointed out that this novel depicts the hardships that immigrants undergo in contemporary Canada. In order to develop this argument, this paper delves deep into the unnamed protagonist's diasporic journey in Hage's novel *Cockroach*. It spells out the traumatic experiences that immigrants endure in diaspora and it examines the representation of restaurants that offer ethnic cuisines in the multicultural Canadian city of Montreal. Seen from this angle, Montreal is a space where underprivileged and disfranchised immigrants live under harsh conditions with constant threats of deportation. In this sense, the novel highlights how compradors look at immigrants with contempt and continually exploit them. The protagonist loathes the owner of the restaurant because he is employed as a general factotum, so it points out the relationship between the boss and his employee. It also investigates dead-end jobs immigrants take in restaurants that relate to upper ad wealthy classes. Hunger and the role that it plays in shaping the protagonist's relationship to his surroundings are recurrent motifs in Hage's novel.

As with the previous section's analysis of Desai's novel, one needs to rely on Lefebvre's elaborate discussion of the multiple meanings of urban spaces as a reference point to explore the significances of spaces immigrants occupy and move within in Hage's novel. Lefebvre's book *Writing on Cities* (1996) investigates the concept of the city, the rights of its dwellers, and the term of time, space, and the everyday (16). He argues that "[s]pace is nothing but the inscription of time in the world, spaces are the realizations, inscriptions in the simultaneity of the external world of a series of time, the rhythms of the city, the rhythms of the urban population" (16). Hage's novel can be viewed as a novel that reconstructs metropolitan spaces from an immigrant's point of view. In other words, just as Desai's novel does not celebrate upscale New York spaces and depicts instead the confined spaces that immigrants inhabit, Hage

sets his novel in underground Montreal, where immigrants dwell and work. *Cockroach* portrays the experiences of the unnamed protagonist and first-person narrator who works at a French restaurant. He works as a dishwasher; for a whole year, he splashes water on dishes and silverware (28).

With its décor and stylish furniture, the restaurant reflects a glitzy image of Montreal's modernity, cosmopolitanism and wealth. However, when one carefully looks into the restaurant's underbelly, a gloomier image of exploitation begins to appear more clearly. The unnamed narrator takes menial jobs with low wages in this restaurant, which underlines how comprador owners exploit immigrants' vulnerabilities as illegal residents. In the restaurant, the boss, Maitre Pierre, believes that he is a master of these workers. In reality, the boss is simply a comprador who is involved in economic and political exploitation. The restaurant offers food to the privileged upper class, and that the boss wants to give an ambiance of magnificence. Hage's novel depicts the everyday experiences of the unnamed narrator who works in the underworld. He escapes to the underground kitchen as an insect in order to gain a superior order of counter-power; he imagines himself ruling the underground, and he claims his right to possess the world (7). The unnamed narrator portrays the underground kitchen as a world of its own; he says: "Other humans gaze at the sky, but I say unto you, the only way through the world is to pass through the underground" (24).

Nevertheless, there is another space in Hage's novel, which is equally significant. As the unnamed narrator informs the reader, immigrants gather in Artista Café where they ventilate their anguishes and griefs in this liminal and cryptic space:

It opens twenty-four hours a day, and for twenty-four hours it collects smoke pumped out by the lungs of fresh immigrants lingering on their plastic chairs, elbows drilling the round tables, hands flagging their complaints, tobacco-stained fingers summoning the waiters, their matches, like Indian signals, ablaze under hairy noses, and their stupefied faces exhaling cigarette fumes with the intensity of Spanish bulls on a last charge towards a dancing red cloth. (6)

The quotation highlights the desperate situation of immigrants in the host country. They had conversations that foreground their horrible conditions. It also shows the ugly experiences that immigrants undergo. These immigrants belong to ethnic minorities, so they gather to share their experiences and vent out their discontent. Artista Café serves as a small world of the city at large.

Drawing on Lefebvre's ideas and thoughts, one can clearly see how the working class in Hage's novel faces a constant threat of losing their jobs and deportation, and this leads to latent and generalized terror (21). According to Lefebvre, the working class is the only one competent in understanding an urban society, and one which thoroughly knows how and yearns to play (20). He argues that capitalism and the modern political systems in which the state has crucial, primary control over social and economic matters have destroyed both the originative capability of the urban

centers and their capitalist activities (20). In *Cockroach*, one day, Maitre Pierre denies the unnamed narrator's request that he would like to be a waiter because he claims that the sun has burned his face a bit too much (29). The unnamed narrator's reaction was to throw his apron in his boss's face and shout at him: "Your days are over and your kind is numbered. No one can escape the sun on their faces, and no one can barricade against the powerful, fleeting semen of the hungry and oppressed" (30).

In a way, these episodes reflect Lefebvre's views of bourgeois ugliness (75). He argues that the greed of capitalists and comprador owners is visible and eligible, and nastiness takes the place of a somewhat cold beauty and aristocratic luxury (75). In Hage's novel, Montreal is not quite embracing foreigners; it is only hospitable to the privileged people and taxpayers (2008: 208). It is an era of globalization and absolute capitalist dominance; impoverished immigrants endure dead-end jobs, which actively contribute to the state of displacement and alienation. In Hage's novel, the protagonist resists full participation in society, and keeps wondering how it might be possible to 'exist and not belong' (210). He says, "Of course, Canada! Montreal, this happy, romantic city has an ugly side" (281). In order to fully understand the unnamed narrator's sense of alienation and loss, one needs to draw on Lefebvre's argument on the issue of immigration and the question of citizenship. According to Lefebvre, immigration is an integral part of the processes of economic and cultural globalization, in spite of the fact that it is considered a "threat to sovereignty and national identity" (252). He argues that immigrants' problem is not just marginalization; it is also access to affordable and decent housing, living-wage jobs, essential services, and official papers: "Immigrants have been, and continue to be, victims of economic, political, and social segregation, captive in the production system, excluded from the benefits, and marginalized from, or even denied, full participation in society" (256).

The unnamed protagonist decides to work at an Iranian restaurant (68). He would like to work in that place because he knows that he would have food to eat, and the tips would be good (76). The narrator's determination to work in a restaurant rather than taking any menial job elsewhere is unsurprising since he constantly tries to satiate his deprivation and hunger. Hence, one may argue that in Hage's novel, "food and culinary codes serve as a socio-economic marker" that cruelly divides the rich and the poor (Awad 2015: 114). Hage's novel shows how the hierarchy of superior-inferior governs the relationship between the wealthy classes and comprador owners. Apparently, Hage's novel draws the reader's attention to the relations among space, narrative, and representation. Tally (2013) argues that "coming to" a place or event is by its nature exploratory, representational, and projective (20). For Tally, these three attributes are also characteristic of the narrative and mapmaking enterprises (20). He points out that the real and imagined spaces of the world are portrayed in and, to a certain extent, produced and formed by the text (20). Tally points out those writers figuratively portray, or try to portray, the social space of the narrative, as well as the relationship of the individual

or collective subject to a larger spatial, social, and cultural ensemble (25).

Based on Tally's comments, one may convincingly argue that space is of paramount importance is Hage's novel since it reveals dimensions of the ugliness of Montreal that are unknown to rich people. The novel depicts a ruthless urban surface that crushes immigrants and substantially augments their vulnerabilities. As Wisam Kh. Abdul-Jabbar puts it, Montreal is not only estranging but also quite provocative; the city's urban exterior is an indifferent, fragmented space that is hospitable only to the chosen ones (6). In Hage's novel, the narrator depicts the external world as a world of turmoil and entrapment (23). Walia argues that Canada depends on temporary migrant workers, who constitute a disposable workforce, impelled to leave their own countries by the same forces of neoliberal capitalism which adopt their super-exploitation in the Canadian labor market (71). Walia notes the maintained position of migrant workers in their position of vulnerability, keeping them available as cheap labor due to their diasporic conditions of having neither homeland nor any sense of belonging (71). According to Walia, immigrants in Canada are subjected to low wages, often below the official minimum, and the long hours with no overtime pay, dangerous working conditions, and crowded and unhealthy accommodation (72).

Hage's protagonist works at a fancy Iranian restaurant with all the decorations and embellishments that transport its customers to the majestic East (65). He describes the soft music in the background, the dim lighting, the glowing red from the lanterns, and the gold atmospheric ornaments which make him think of the story of the virgins who had lost their lives in the king's castle before Scheherazade distracted him with her tales of jinn and fisherman (67). Listening to songs performed on a traditional Iranian instrument is too attractive and fascinating (65). Customers are surrounded by dunes, lanterns, handmade carpets that match the brown plates, and woven tablecloths (65). They enjoy exotic food; comprador owners take advantage of the privileged people's desire to consume ethnic dishes. Food comes on fancy plates, and there are small candles on red tablecloths (185). The Iranian restaurant offers ethnic cuisines; the comprador owner commodifies cultural differences to make money in multicultural and neoliberal cities. The smell of food from the kitchen brings one back to the land of forests and snow (67).

A sharp contrast could be drawn between the food that customers avidly consume in stylish restaurants, and the unhealthy food consumed by immigrants. This discrepancy reflects immigrants' marginalization by a capitalist system. Hunger in the novel plays a prominent role in shaping the protagonist's relationship with the people around him and his environment at large. Justyna Poray Wybranowska (2014) focuses on the metaphorical significance of food consumption in Hage's work (191). She argues that hunger also means that the narrator craves to be wealthy and he desires to take revenge from his oppressors (191). In the novel, exotic scents of ethnic cuisines and an exquisite delight from the east entice Western customers (204). Wybranowska argues that the lack of food in Hage's novel reveals the protagonist's

relation to the urban center (191). The protagonist lives in a small place that is full of insects, and he eats the leftovers and the cheap food because he does not have enough money. He also shares his concerns with food scarcity to crawling insects that share his home.

Immigrants feel constant hunger because of their socio-economic status; they belong to an ethnic minority, and they live in utter destitution. Hence, one may convincingly argue that the discrepancy between the quality of healthy and freshly-cooked food that the unnamed narrator serves to rich people in the restaurant and the stale and unhealthy food that he consumes is one of the chief ironies in the novel which explains his chronic state of alienation and loss. From a Marxist perspective, not being able to eat from the fancy food one serves to customers reflects the devastating mental and psychological effect of capitalist production on human beings. In other words, the unnamed narrator feels estranged from "the self" as a consequence of being a mechanical part of a social class whose sole raison d'être is to serve rich people and satisfy their needs. As a dishwasher, it saddens the unnamed narrator to "erase happiness with water" (29). He says that in the underground kitchen, nothing is rejected or tossed away; all food is accepted (156). In Hage's novel, the bourgeois have the luxury of making food choices, and they see food consumption as an aesthetic experience (204). However, poor immigrants consume food to satiate their hunger, and they view it as a mere human need.

Just like Desai's Biju, the unnamed protagonist in Hage's novel lives in a small tiny place that is full of cockroaches. It is clear that the unnamed narrator is doomed to move within dull and unclean spaces, whether at work or at home. As the following quotation illustrates, the unnamed narrator's accommodation is unsuitable as a human residence:

Shohreh laughed again. I took her home, showed her my tiny place, and we both removed our shoes and hunted cockroaches down the sink, swimming and sliding in mildew, and slapping them with the heels of our shoes, and I told her how, when Jesus comes and kills all us sinners and beams up the faithful towards his immaculate kingdom, only those insects will survive. They shall inherit the earth, I said. (53)

Apparently, the place where the unnamed narrator lives in is quite dirty and reflects his inability to live in a decent dwelling because he cannot afford it with his low salary. Cockroaches in this novel almost occupy the same space that rats occupy in Desai's novel. In both novels, the reader is made aware of the filthy and unhygienic conditions that immigrants navigate in their rooms.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has principally highlighted immigrants' agonies and woes in the context of globalization and neoliberalism. We have explored spaces immigrants inhabit and move within in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Hage's novel *Cockroach*. Both novels portray the traumatic experiences immigrants undergo in the USA and Canada, respectively. We have also explored how bourgeois compradors exploit illegal immigrants as they accumulate more money; they aim to expand their wealth and to serve neocolonial

powers in advanced capitalist societies. The argument in this paper has benefited from a theoretical framework largely built on Lefebvre's writings. More specifically, the argument has been constructed to thoroughly examine how spaces play significant roles in both novels. Furthermore, the paper has employed Tally's analysis of the relations among space, narrative, and representation. Tally's call for a method of literary analysis that includes the study of geographic space as a critical practice has been pursued and implemented in examining the spaces that immigrants work in and inhabit.

The analysis here has also engaged Amin's views of the new capitalist era to highlight the exploitative terms of globalization. Accordingly, this paper has illustrated the experiences of cross-ethnic diasporas in the context of global capitalism and focused on the lives of disfranchised and destitute immigrants. Moreover, it portrays ethnic restaurants as sites that rob immigrants of their humanity, health, and dignity. Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Hage's *Cockroach* portray the enmity between workers and employers as a consequence of globalization, neoliberalism, and unethical employment policies. The two narratives, accordingly, present the exploitation of workers by their employers; they show how a relentless and ruthless hierarchy of superior-inferior governs the relationship between comprador owners and immigrant workers. Furthermore, both novels portray the discrepancy between the fanciful food that immigrants serve to the upper class in the restaurants and the spoiled, unhealthy food that immigrants themselves consume.

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