NEOLIBERAL HUMANITARIANISM AND POSTCOLONIAL DISPLACEMENT IN *THE BEEKEEPER OF ALEPPO*

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Abstract
In an age of escalating displacement driven by war, persecution, and economic inequality, the figure of the refugee has become central to postcolonial narratives. The Beekeeper of Aleppo (2019) by Christy Lefteri offers a powerful literary exploration of forced migration, trauma, and survival, while simultaneously critiquing the structures of neoliberal humanitarianism that claim to aid refugees. This paper analyzes how Lefteri's novel reveals the contradictions and limitations of global humanitarian efforts, showing how refugees are often controlled, commodified, and reduced to cases within aid systems that operate according to neoliberal logics of efficiency, marketability, and security. Drawing on the work of theorists such as Aihwa Ong, Arjun Appadurai, and Achille Mbembe, this study argues that The Beekeeper of Aleppo exposes the tension between refugees' search for dignity and the constraining frameworks of camps, asylum interviews, and NGO interventions. The novel depicts displacement not only as the loss of home but also as entry into a system that disciplines the displaced subject, demanding particular performances of suffering. By focusing on Nuri and Afra's journey, this paper highlights how literature critiques the ethics of aid and challenges readers to reconsider the human costs of neoliberal humanitarianism.

Keywords: Postcolonial displacement, Neoliberal humanitarianism, Refugee narratives, Migration and trauma

Introduction

In the contemporary global order, displacement is no longer a peripheral issue but a defining reality of the postcolonial condition. With over 100 million people forcibly displaced worldwide (UNHCR, 2023), the figure of the refugee occupies a central place in cultural, political, and literary discourse. Humanitarian organisations and state agencies present themselves as protectors of refugees, but critical perspectives argue that these systems frequently operate within frameworks that commodify, contain, and control displaced populations. (Fassin, 2011)

The Beekeeper of Aleppo (Lefteri, 2019) offers a powerful literary exploration of these dynamics. Through the journey of Nuri and Afra, a Syrian couple fleeing civil war, the novel highlights not only the violence of war but also the structural violence of aid regimes, asylum procedures, and border controls. The novel depicts how trauma is filtered through systems that demand marketable, coherent narratives of suffering. (Ticktin, 2011) Refugee camps and interviews become spaces of surveillance and control rather than unconditional care.

By portraying the refugee experience in this light, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* invites readers to question the ethics of contemporary humanitarianism and to reflect on the deeper human costs of global displacement beyond the surface of aid and compassion. The novel positions

displacement as not only the loss of home but also entry into complex systems of control, bureaucracy, and commodification that shape the lives of the displaced.

Literature Review

The study of forced migration, refugee narratives, and postcolonial displacement has generated a significant body of scholarship that critiques the intertwined roles of global capitalism, state power, and humanitarianism. Foundational theorists such as Edward Said (2000) and Homi Bhabha (1994) have argued that displacement in the postcolonial world is not merely geographical but deeply cultural and psychological, producing subjects caught between memory, identity, and structures of control. Said (2000) describes exile as a "condition of terminal loss", while Bhabha (1994) explores how displaced identities are negotiated within what he terms the "third space" of cultural enunciation.

Refugee studies scholars have extended these ideas by showing how migration is shaped by the global systems that claim to offer protection. Agier (2011) contends that humanitarian aid often functions as a form of management and control, where refugee camps act as spaces of surveillance rather than care. Similarly, Ong (2006) introduces the concept of "graduated sovereignty" to describe how neoliberal states selectively grant or withhold rights from displaced populations depending on their perceived economic value. Ticktin (2011) and Fassin (2011) critique the moral economy of humanitarianism, arguing that refugees must perform their suffering legibly to qualify for assistance, which reduces complex human experiences to bureaucratic categories.

In postcolonial literary studies, refugee narratives have been examined for how they expose these structures of power. Malkki (1995) highlights how refugee identities are stripped of historical and political context and reconstituted as humanitarian subjects, while Appadurai (1996) draws attention to the global flows of people, money, and information that shape migrant experiences. Recent literary criticism (Hartnell, 2019; Tazzioli, 2020) shows that contemporary fiction increasingly portrays the refugee condition as mediated by neoliberal discourses of compassion and control.

The Beekeeper of Aleppo (Lefteri, 2019) has received critical attention primarily for its depiction of trauma and resilience in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis (Souter, 2014; Cheesman, 2018). Scholars have praised Lefteri's work for humanizing the displaced and drawing attention to the emotional and moral costs of forced migration. However, there is a gap in existing scholarship regarding how the novel critiques neoliberal humanitarianism and its entanglement with postcolonial displacement. While studies have explored the novel's engagement with trauma (Hartnell, 2019) and the ethics of witnessing (Souter, 2014), few have analyzed how it interrogates the structures of aid, borders, and global capitalism that shape refugee lives.

This paper seeks to contribute to the growing literature on postcolonial migration fiction by focusing on how *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* critiques the systems that claim to protect but often discipline and commodify the displaced. Building on the theoretical frameworks of Agier (2011), Ong (2006), Mbembe (2003), and Spivak (1988), this study aims to show how Lefteri's novel reveals the limits of neoliberal humanitarianism and challenges readers to rethink the ethics of care, aid, and belonging in the postcolonial world.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in postcolonial theory, migration studies, and critical humanitarianism to explore how *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* critiques the management and commodification of refugee lives within neoliberal systems. The analysis draws on key theorists who illuminate how displacement is shaped not only by violence and war but also by global power structures, border regimes, and aid economies.

Edward Said's (2000) notion of exile as a "discontinuous state of being" provides a foundation for understanding Nuri and Afra's psychological fragmentation as they navigate war zones, camps, and asylum processes. Said (1978) also reminds us that representations of the "Other" are always bound up in imperial power relations, a dynamic that persists in the humanitarian gaze cast upon refugees today.

Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity and the "third space" helps explain how displaced subjects negotiate identity at the intersections of home and host cultures, though in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* this space is often constrained by systems of control rather than genuine cultural exchange. Bhabha's idea of the unhomely (1994) also resonates with Nuri's and Afra's fractured sense of belonging.

Gayatri Spivak's (1988) seminal question—*Can the subaltern speak?*—is central to understanding how the voices of refugees are shaped, silenced, or forced into acceptable forms by humanitarian systems. The asylum interviews in the novel, for example, demand coherent, linear narratives that fit bureaucratic expectations, echoing what Spivak calls the "epistemic violence" of colonial discourse (p. 281).

From migration and humanitarian studies, Aihwa Ong's (2006) theory of neoliberal governance as "graduated sovereignty" is particularly useful. Ong argues that states and global institutions grant or withhold rights and protections selectively, depending on migrants' perceived economic or political value. In the novel, Nuri and Afra's movements through camps and interviews reflect this conditional inclusion.

Michel Agier's (2011) work on "encampment" highlights how refugees are managed and contained rather than fully welcomed. Camps, as Agier argues, are spaces of suspension where displaced people are controlled, surveilled, and rendered marginal. This aligns with the novel's depiction of refugee spaces not as sanctuaries but as zones of moral ambiguity and hidden violence.

Achille Mbembe's (2003) theory of necropolitics further deepens this analysis by showing how state and institutional powers decide who is allowed to live, move, and thrive—and who is left to die or languish in limbo. The novel's depiction of border deaths, lost children, and unseen suffering illustrates the necropolitical dimensions of the contemporary refugee condition.

Finally, Arjun Appadurai's (1996) concept of global flows helps situate Nuri and Afra's journey within the broader circuits of people, capital, and information that define late modernity. Their movements are not merely personal or national but entangled in the globalized systems that both enable and constrain mobility.

Together, these theories provide an interdisciplinary lens for analyzing how *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* critiques the structures that govern displacement. The novel is not only a story of personal trauma and resilience but also a literary intervention that challenges readers to see the hidden violence and contradictions of neoliberal humanitarianism.

For the objective of this current study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How does *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* critique the role of neoliberal humanitarianism in managing and controlling refugees?
2. How are refugee identities shaped, silenced, or contested in the novel's depiction of humanitarian and asylum processes?
3. What moral and emotional tensions does the novel reveal about the refugee's struggle for dignity within systems of neoliberal aid?
4. How does *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* challenge readers to rethink global responsibility, care, and the ethics of migration?

Discussion and Analysis
1. Neoliberal Humanitarianism and Refugee Identity

In *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, Christy Lefteri offers a poignant exploration of how neoliberal humanitarian frameworks both sustain and fracture refugee identities. Neoliberal humanitarianism refers to the mode of aid where the language of compassion coexists with bureaucratic control, market logic, and the outsourcing of care to private or semi-private actors (Ticktin, 2011). Refugees are simultaneously constructed as subjects of care and as administrative burdens — a tension that Lefteri captures through Nuri and Afra's navigation of asylum processes, institutional aid, and societal expectations.

Lefteri depicts this duality vividly in the interactions between Nuri, Afra, and humanitarian agents such as Lucy Fisher. Lucy, representing the British asylum bureaucracy, embodies the paradox of neoliberal humanitarianism: her warmth is paired with impersonal efficiency, and her gestures of care are entwined with the requirement that refugees present coherent, marketable narratives of suffering. When Lucy advises, *"Get your story straight. Think about what you're going to say to the immigration officer. Make sure it's all clear and coherent and as straightforward as possible"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 24), she exposes how humanitarian compassion is mediated through documentation, rationalization, and performance.

The asylum system, as shown through Nuri's experience, converts refugees into "*verifiable, printable entities*" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 106) — people are reduced to data points to be processed within state systems, echoing Fassin's (2011) critique of the "humanitarian government" that manages lives through moral economy and biopolitical control. Nuri's unease during this process is palpable: the need to "get his story straight" or risk exclusion reveals how neoliberal aid demands refugees become legible to the state in ways that can obscure their complex identities and traumas.

Neoliberal humanitarianism also shapes spatial experiences in the novel. Nuri and Afra's residence in council-funded temporary accommodations or barbed-wire camps evokes what Agier (2011) describes as the "encampment" logic of neoliberal governance, where refugees are contained and managed rather than integrated. The novel's description of camps as *"an empire of identification"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 108) highlights how the very spaces of supposed refuge become sites of surveillance, control, and dehumanization.

Moreover, Lefteri uses subtle narrative strategies to critique the moral contradictions of neoliberal aid. Nuri's reflection on the social worker's scripted kindness — *"She looks up at me now and her face is a burst of warmth"* — illustrates the dissonance between genuine individual goodwill and the structural violence embedded in the asylum apparatus (Lefteri, 2019, p. 23). The refugee is caught between gratitude for safety and bitterness at being reduced to a case file or a set of fingerprints.

This system's psychological toll is profound. As Judith Butler (2004) notes, neoliberal humanitarianism frames displaced lives in terms of grievability — deciding which lives merit mourning, support, or visibility. Nuri's fear of being deemed unworthy of refuge underlines this reality. His internalization of the asylum state's logics — his anxiety about seeming "ungrateful" if he complains of cockroaches or squalor (Lefteri, 2019, p. 23) — shows how the refugee identity is shaped by constant negotiation between expressing need and performing compliance.

Finally, Lefteri's novel suggests that neoliberal humanitarianism fractures identity by forcing refugees into pre-scripted roles. Refugees must conform to the figure of the ideal victim: suffering but dignified, needy but non-threatening, grateful but silent. Nuri's distress at fabricating stories to satisfy bureaucratic expectations — such as the invented child Sami — exemplifies this pressure (Lefteri, 2019, p. 31). The requirement to shape identity around

official templates erodes the integrity of selfhood, as refugees must edit their truth to be legible to power.

In summary, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* critiques the neoliberal humanitarian regime for commodifying refugee identity and transforming care into a mechanism of control. Lefteri's work resonates with broader postcolonial and critical humanitarian scholarship in revealing how refugees must navigate aid systems that offer survival at the cost of erasure, fragmentation, and perpetual performance.

2. Commodification of Refugee Trauma and Asylum Procedures

In *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, Christy Lefteri presents a powerful critique of how trauma is commodified in neoliberal asylum systems, transforming human suffering into something that must be narrated, documented, and performed to secure survival (Fassin, 2011; Ticktin, 2011). Through Nuri and Afra's journey, Lefteri exposes the bureaucratic machinery that demands refugees package their grief in ways that are legible to the state, often at the cost of truth, dignity, and mental stability.

From the start, Nuri is instructed that survival hinges on delivering a "clear and coherent" narrative. At the British asylum office, Lucy Fisher advises: *"Get your story straight. Think about what you're going to say to the immigration officer. Make sure it's all clear and coherent and as straightforward as possible"* (Lefteri, 2019, p 24). This reflects the moral economy described by Fassin (2011), where suffering is valued only when it conforms to expected scripts. Nuri's internal battle reveals the psychological harm of this system; haunted by trauma, he doubts his ability to present a coherent self and fears being disbelieved.

The demand for narrative coherence leads Nuri to invent Sami, an imaginary child whose fictional death makes their pain more consumable: *"Sami made sense to them; Sami gave shape to our pain"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 8). In doing so, Nuri conforms to the asylum system's expectation of loss while distancing himself from his authentic grief. This illustrates Spivak's (1988) argument that the subaltern must speak in ways that uphold hegemonic structures of recognition.

Lefteri's portrayal of refugee spaces underscores how trauma is commodified in tangible terms. The Greek camp is described as *"a place of wires and waiting, a city of the lost"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 8), where survival depends on telling the right story at the right time. Officials reduce refugees to files and forms, seen in Nuri's observation that *"the man with the clipboard looked at me like I was a puzzle, like he was putting together pieces of a story he'd heard before"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 8). Such encounters exemplify how trauma becomes a commodity traded for safety and legitimacy (Malkki, 1995).

This flattening of identity leads Nuri to question his own emotions: *"Was I crying for Afra's blindness, for Sami, or for myself?"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 8). Real grief, complex and contradictory, is at odds with the linear narratives demanded by bureaucracies. Repeatedly rehearsing a marketable version of their trauma fractures Nuri's sense of self.

Beyond the asylum office, Lefteri critiques the shadow economies that grow around refugee pain. Smugglers and exploiters in Istanbul profit from suffering in literal terms, charging extortionate fees for passage. Nuri is appalled by this moral corruption, recognizing that their trauma sustains these illicit economies. As Mbembe (2003) notes, refugees often find themselves entangled in necropolitical systems where survival itself becomes transactional.

Refugee accommodations reinforce this critique. The B&B in the UK is another zone of containment, where Nuri feels forced to accept substandard conditions silently: *"I felt guilty for feeling dissatisfied; after all, we were safe"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 8). This enforced gratitude is part of the commodification process—pain must be endured quietly in exchange for care, however minimal.

Yet Lefteri also presents small acts of resistance. Afra's return to art, drawing scenes from memory, defies the reduction of their experience to a case file. Nuri's gentle gesture toward an injured bee — *"When I put my hand out she crawls onto my finger … so I take her inside with me"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 9) — asserts his humanity in a system that seeks to erase it. These moments affirm Butler's (2004) claim that precarious lives can assert their worth against systems that seek to erase them.

Importantly, Lefteri critiques the way asylum processes privatize trauma. Nuri's reflections on Aleppo's destruction, global complicity, and imperial violence are not part of his official narrative. The asylum system focuses on individual tragedy, demanding that refugees silence the political causes of their suffering (Ong, 2006). Nuri's silence on these issues signals what the system refuses to see.

Finally, the novel shows how commodification fragments refugee communities. Scarce resources, competition for aid, and unequal recognition foster resentment among the displaced. Lefteri depicts rivalries and tensions in the camps, highlighting how the logic of commodification divides people already torn apart by war.

Ultimately, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* argues that recovery begins when refugees reclaim their own stories outside the market of trauma. When Nuri confesses the truth about Nadim and Sami to Afra, healing begins—not through asylum approval, but through restored honesty and human connection. Lefteri's work calls on readers to see beyond commodified suffering and recognize refugees as complex, ethical subjects who persist despite the systems that seek to reduce them to their pain.

3. Moral Tensions and Ethics of Survival

In *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, Christy Lefteri presents displacement not only as a humanitarian crisis but as a profound moral trial. The novel explores how forced migration compels individuals to confront ethical dilemmas that destabilize their sense of self, challenge their values, and entangle them in survival strategies that blur the line between right and wrong. Through Nuri and Afra's journey, Lefteri foregrounds the moral tensions that arise when human beings are forced into circumstances where agency is constrained and survival often entails complicity in injustice or harm.

Lefteri's portrayal of Nuri's involvement in Nadim's death exemplifies this moral ambiguity. Nuri recounts that in the chaos of Istanbul, as he and Afra struggled to protect themselves from predatory figures who profited off refugee misery, Nadim's death was the result of a violent act in which Nuri played a part. Nuri reflects: *"There was no sense to it, no justice, just violence echoing violence"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 10). This admission encapsulates the core of the ethical conflict: displacement situates refugees within necropolitical systems, where survival often depends on participating in or being complicit with the very structures of violence that oppress them (Mbembe, 2003).

Nuri's guilt over Nadim's death haunts him, manifesting in recurring nightmares, hallucinations, and self-doubt. Lefteri uses these episodes to highlight how displacement does not absolve moral responsibility but renders moral decision-making more complex, fraught with impossible choices. As Fassin (2011) argues, humanitarianism often imagines refugees as passive victims, but Lefteri refuses this simplification. Her narrative insists that refugees are moral agents, even when constrained by dire circumstances, and that their ethical struggles are integral to their humanity.

Beyond physical violence, Lefteri explores quieter forms of moral compromise. Nuri fabricates parts of his asylum narrative to increase the likelihood of approval. The creation of the fictional Sami is not only an act of commodifying trauma but also a source of deep ethical conflict for Nuri. He reflects with anguish on the ease with which an invented child elicited sympathy, while his and Afra's real, complex pain remained invisible: *"Sami made sense to*

them; Sami gave shape to our pain" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 10). This reveals how the asylum system pressures refugees into moral compromises, rewarding those who conform to its expectations and punishing those who do not (Ticktin, 2011).

The ethics of survival are further complicated in the relationships Nuri and Afra form along the way. In the camps and during their passage, they encounter fellow refugees whose desperation leads to betrayal, exploitation, or indifference. Lefteri depicts these tensions without judgment, portraying them as the inevitable outcomes of a system that forces individuals into competition for limited resources and recognition. The camps become spaces where moral community fractures under the weight of scarcity and fear—a reality that aligns with Agier's (2011) critique of how encampment erodes solidarity by turning refugees into managed subjects rather than empowered individuals.

Afra's silence throughout much of the journey operates as both a psychological response to trauma and a moral stance. Her muteness resists the imperative to narrate pain on demand, defying the bureaucratic demand for the refugee to "perform" suffering in exchange for care (Spivak, 1988). Lefteri uses Afra's refusal to speak as a form of quiet resistance, a way of asserting dignity in a system that commodifies grief.

Even small acts take on moral significance in Lefteri's narrative. Nuri's compassion for a dying bee— *"When I put my hand out, she crawls onto my finger … so I take her inside with me"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 12)—stands in stark contrast to the violence and indifference he witnesses elsewhere. This moment symbolizes his desire to preserve life and goodness despite the moral compromises he has made. The gesture reminds readers that even in the most dehumanizing conditions, ethical choices remain possible, though always shadowed by ambiguity.

Importantly, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* critiques the structures that create these moral tensions. Lefteri does not suggest that Nuri's or Afra's ethical struggles are inherent to their characters; rather, they are shaped by external forces—war, displacement, border regimes, and neoliberal humanitarianism—that constrain agency and force impossible choices. As Butler (2004) argues, precarious lives are made so by systems of power that limit the conditions of ethical action. Lefteri's characters grapple with moral questions not because they are exceptional, but because the conditions of displacement demand it.

The novel's conclusion reinforces this ethical complexity. When Nuri finally confesses the truth about Nadim and Sami to Afra, it marks not only an act of personal healing but an ethical reckoning. He reclaims his narrative from the asylum system's scripts and from his own strategies of survival, seeking to restore honesty and trust. Lefteri suggests that ethical survival requires this kind of truth-telling—not to the state or to institutions, but within intimate human relationships.

In this way, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* challenges simplistic notions of refugee morality, offering instead a portrait of displacement as a state of constant ethical negotiation. Lefteri's refugees are not only victims or survivors but moral actors struggling to uphold their humanity in the face of dehumanizing systems. The novel calls on readers to recognize the ethical costs of displacement and to see refugees not as cases or statistics, but as individuals engaged in profound moral Labor.

4. Refuge Dignity and Resistance

In *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, Christy Lefteri illustrates that amid displacement, trauma, and bureaucratic dehumanization, refugees struggle not only for survival but to preserve their dignity and resist the systems that seek to reduce them to mere victims. The novel offers a nuanced portrayal of how Nuri and Afra assert their humanity in small but powerful ways, challenging the structures that commodify their pain and erase their identities. This focus

resonates with Butler's (2004) notion that precarious lives assert their grievability through acts of narrative reclamation, memory, and care.

Lefteri foregrounds the tension between refuge and dignity from the outset. As Nuri and Afra move through the perilous landscapes of Istanbul, the Greek islands, and Britain, they are repeatedly confronted with systems that treat them as cases rather than people. The camps, B&B accommodations, and asylum interviews are designed not to provide refuge in the fullest sense but to manage and contain. Yet within these constraints, Nuri and Afra resist erasure by holding onto the fragments of their past and asserting their right to a future.

Afra's art is a key mode of resistance. Though traumatized and initially blind, Afra slowly reconnects with her identity as an artist, creating drawings that memorialize the people and places they have lost. These private acts of creation reject the demand that refugees' pain be legible only through official narratives. Instead, Afra asserts her own terms for remembering and grieving, embodying what Mohanty (1988) calls the politics of refusal — a refusal to be defined solely by loss or victimhood.

Nuri's acts of care, especially his tenderness toward the injured bee — *"When I put my hand out she crawls onto my finger ... so I take her inside with me"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 9) — symbolize his effort to preserve compassion in a world that encourages indifference and brutality. This small gesture mirrors his longing to reestablish ethical relations with others, resisting the moral corrosion that displacement can foster.

Lefteri also depicts narrative itself as a form of resistance. Throughout the novel, Nuri's eventual decision to tell the truth about Nadim's death and the imaginary Sami signals his reclaiming of his own story from the asylum system's scripts. As he confesses to Afra, he reasserts their shared humanity and dignity: their pain is no longer a performance for officials but a truth shared between equals.

Furthermore, the novel critiques the limited refuge offered by neoliberal humanitarianism. The temporary safety of camps and bureaucratic accommodations often comes at the cost of dignity. Nuri's reflections — *"I felt guilty for feeling dissatisfied; after all, we were safe"* (Lefteri, 2019, p. 13) how refugees are forced to express gratitude for minimal care, erasing their right to demand more. Yet even in these conditions, Nuri and Afra resist through memory, art, and the rebuilding of their bond.
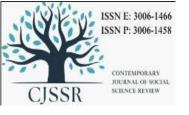
In sum, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* shows that true refuge is not simply shelter or legal protection but the preservation of dignity and agency in the face of dehumanization. Lefteri's characters resist not through grand gestures but through small acts of care, honesty, and remembrance. These moments challenge readers to recognize refugees as ethical subjects, not just victims or dependents, and to imagine forms of refuge that honor both safety and dignity.

Conclusion

The Beekeeper of Aleppo by Christy Lefteri stands as a significant contribution to contemporary postcolonial and migration literature, offering a layered critique of forced displacement and its impact on identity, morality, and human dignity. Through the intertwined narratives of Nuri and Afra, Lefteri brings to light how the refugee experience is shaped not only by personal grief and trauma but by broader global structures — neoliberal humanitarianism, bureaucratic asylum systems, border regimes, and necropolitical governance — that commodify refugee suffering and constrain agency. Her novel insists that displacement is not merely a physical or legal condition but a profound psychological and moral trial that reshapes the very fabric of selfhood and community.

Throughout the novel, Lefteri critiques the demand placed upon refugees to narrate their pain in ways that are coherent, commodifiable, and legible to bureaucratic systems of care. Nuri's fabricated inclusion of the imaginary Sami in his asylum narrative reveals the moral tensions of survival: the imperative to conform to expected scripts of victimhood in order to secure

refuge, even at the cost of personal integrity and psychological well-being. This echoes Fassin's (2011) argument that the moral economy of humanitarianism often values suffering only when it is packaged for consumption in forms that fit state and institutional expectations. Similarly, Afra's initial silence functions as a subtle form of resistance — a refusal to perform trauma on demand for a system that seeks to manage and contain, rather than truly understand, refugee lives (Spivak, 1988).

Moreover, Lefteri foregrounds the gendered dimensions of displacement, showing how migration reshapes and exposes the unequal burdens placed on men and women. Afra's journey, marked by her blindness and later her return to artistic expression, symbolizes the struggle to reclaim agency in the face of trauma and erasure. Nuri, in contrast, grapples with the loss of his role as protector and provider, experiencing a crisis of masculinity that deepens his psychological fragmentation. These dynamics reflect Mohanty's (1988) and Yuval-Davis's (1997) critiques of how patriarchal and colonial structures intersect in the refugee experience, creating specific vulnerabilities and possibilities for resistance along gendered lines.

The novel also offers a powerful meditation on moral tensions in conditions of extreme precarity. Nuri's involvement in Nadim's death and his ongoing guilt reflect the impossible choices refugees must make when survival is at stake. Lefteri refuses to present her characters as purely heroic or victimized; instead, she reveals the complex moral landscapes navigated by displaced individuals, who must often balance survival against ethical integrity in systems designed to dehumanize. This aligns with Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics, where the lives of refugees are managed, valued, or discarded according to the logics of security and profit.

Yet amid these structural critiques, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* insists on the resilience and dignity of its characters. Nuri's compassion for the smallest, most vulnerable forms of life — symbolized by his rescue of a dying bee — and Afra's quiet acts of remembrance through art illustrate how refugees assert their humanity even in the face of overwhelming dehumanization. These acts of care, memory, and truth-telling challenge Butler's (2004) "frames of ungrievability," asserting that refugee lives matter not because they fit institutional narratives of deservingness but because of their intrinsic human worth.

Ultimately, Lefteri's novel calls upon readers, scholars, and policymakers to rethink what true refuge means. It argues that safety and shelter are not sufficient; real refuge must also safeguard dignity, agency, and the right to narrate one's own story on one's own terms. By centering the lived realities of Nuri and Afra within a broader critique of global inequality and humanitarian governance, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* enriches postcolonial literary discourse and urges a more just, ethical engagement with the politics of displacement. The novel stands as both a literary achievement and a moral call to action, reminding us that at the heart of the refugee experience is not only loss, but also the unyielding struggle for dignity and belonging.

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