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Navigating Diasporic Existence: Identity, Belonging and Displacement in Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Allepo*

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Abstract
This study examines how Lefteri constructs diasporic consciousness and trauma as central narrative dynamics that interrogate the complexities of identity, belonging, and forced displacement in a globalized world. The selected novel *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* brings to light the conflicts between the desire to cling to the country of origin and the need to survive in exile through the character of Nuri Ibrahim who is a Syrian refugee negotiating the physical destruction of war and the psychological burden of loss and memories. Drawing on diaspora studies and postcolonial theory, the study highlights how Lefteri, the novelist, represents displacement as a liminal state where one experiences fractured identity. The novel's movement between memories of Aleppo and the harsh realities of refugee transit mirrors the sense of disorientation of the diasporic subject, whose identity is disturbed by violence, border controls, and institutional inattentiveness. Finally, this study suggests that *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* transforms the refugee experience into a broader meditation on global precarity, demonstrating how diasporic identities emerge not only as sites of loss and alienation but also as fragile forms of resilience and ethical resistance in an increasingly dehumanized world.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Diaspora, Displacement, Refugee Consciousness, Identity, Belonging.

Introduction

Groups in diaspora are confronted with new realities and new opportunities – and new challenges. But whether a displaced or dislocated group can seize the possibility of remaking itself is, in the first instance, a question that begs for an appreciation of the materiality of power. (Goodman, 2006, p. 1)

The twenty-first century has seen an unparalleled increase of forced migration with the displacement of millions of people due to war, political instability, environmental degradation, and economic exploitation. In this regard, diasporic narrative has become more prominent in the literary and cultural studies, as it presents a critical perspective of the realities of displacement as encountered by these communities that are usually lost behind political rhetoric and media abstraction. It is the literature that offers the crucial medium to express the emotional, psychological, and ethical aspects of exile, and in this way, displaced voices are heard beyond the statisticians and policy discussions. Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* emerges as a compelling contribution to this body of diasporic writing, foregrounding the human cost of war and forced migration through an intimate portrayal of refugee experience. The novel reveals the way in which people are displaced, how identity, sense of belonging and memory are redefined, and alienation places the diasporic existence as an experience of loss and trauma and precarious existence.

Set against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war and the European refugee crisis, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* follows the journey of Nuri Ibrahim and his wife Afra as they flee their devastated homeland in search of safety. Lefteri (2019), who worked with refugees prior to writing the novel, uses the actual testimonies to create a story that is more focused on the emotional truth rather than the political spectacle. The novel does not dwell on the geopolitical reasons of the conflict but on the consequences of war unusual to ordinary people-how the lives of ordinary people cannot be returned to the normal way of life after violence and displacement. Lefteri (2019) shifts the focus of abstract conceptualization of crisis to the close space of grief, memory, and displaced identity, therefore, humanizing the refugee position. The main issue of *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* is the question of the identity in the state of forced displacement. Nuri is a beekeeper and his sense of purpose, community, and his relationship with the land is greatly attached to his identity as a beekeeper. The beekeeping is used as a symbol of harmony, continuity and sustainable relationship with nature, which is sharply contrasted with the annihilation of war and violence. The loss of this vocation is not just a matter of economic deprivation; but it is also the deprivation of self-identity and cultural sense of place. Thus, displacement serves as an ontological disruption, which upsets the pillars that identity builds on. Afra's blindness further intensifies this crisis, functioning as both a literal impairment and a metaphor for trauma, grief, and the inability to envision a future unmarked by loss. Belonging, another central concern of the novel, is portrayed as fragile and conditional. Throughout their journey, Nuri and Afra encounter borders, detention centers, and humanitarian systems that reduce them to case numbers rather than recognizing their humanity. Host spaces offer temporary shelter but rarely provide genuine inclusion, reinforcing the refugees' sense of alienation. Lefteri (2019) reveals that the membership in a globalized world is frequently controlled by legal status, economic usefulness, and racialized views on value. Consequently, the diasporic subjects are between state of suspended belonging neither fully belonging to a homeland they have lost nor fitting in the societies that they migrate to. This condition emphasises the structural inequalities that govern contemporary migration and highlights the ethical failures of global humanitarian responses. Memory is an important element that supports the diasporic consciousness in the novel. The memories of Nuri about Aleppo, its scenery, routine and community life serve as a home and a place of suffering at the same time. The sense of identity that memory helps him maintain in the face of disintegration is also what makes him grief-stricken as it keeps reminding him of what he has lost forever. Lefteri's (2019) use of fragmented narration and shifting temporalities reflects the traumatic memory, highlighting how the past intrudes upon the present in the lives of displaced individuals. In this way, the novel portrays trauma as not a one-time occurrence, but rather a continuing state which influences the perception, interactions and self-understanding.

This study examines how *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* constructs diasporic existence through the interconnected themes of identity, belonging, and displacement. It bases its argument on the postcolonial and diaspora studies theory, stating that Lefteri (2019) introduces the concept of refugees' experience as a prism through which one can critically analyze more global problems of precarity, border violence, and institutional indifference. The novel promotes personal suffering and emotional richness to refute mainstream discourses which marginalize refugees and diminish their lives to human crises without ethical responsibilities. It depicts diasporic identity as both a site of profound loss and a fragile form of resilience, insisting on the enduring humanity of those who continue to navigate displacement in an increasingly dehumanized world.

Literature Review

Diaspora is not only about geographic displacement but a compound condition of displacement, cultural bargaining and continued adjustment. According to Clifford (1994), diaspora refers to "dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement [and] adaptation" (p. 309), and he points out that diaspora discourses entail "experiences of displacement, of constructing homes away from home, while remaining rooted in specific, discrete histories" (Clifford, 1994, p. 302). Brah (1992) describes diasporic spaces as "sites of hope and new beginnings" (p. 130), highlighting the aspirational

dimension of migration despite its traumatic origins. Displacement deepens the diasporic condition, producing what Bonnici (2004) refers to as a "sense of not being at home and even feeling strange and uncanny" (p.131). These experiences disrupt identity because the diasporic subjects have to negotiate between the homelands they have lost and the new host societies leading to the development of hybrid identities that do not replicate the mother country and do not fully adapt to the new environment. To Bonnici (2004), this hybridity is the result of the meeting of cultures since diaspora turns out to be "the start of a culture which is neither a repetition of the mother countries nor a strict adaptation to the local native one" (p. 131). As a result, belonging is made precarious and contested as the diasporic people live in the liminal spaces where identity is re-created constantly through memory, loss and survival.

Walsh (2020) commends *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* on its abundant, descriptive voice and vivid imagery that contrast beauty with the atrocities of the system of war. It highlights Lefteri's masterful use of bee symbolism to reflect social interdependence and tenacity, aligning the protagonists' fragility and resilience with the broader devastation of displacement. (Walsh, 2020). Lefteri's novel vividly humanizes the refugee experience as it focuses on the story of Nuri and Afra, and this gives the refugees back their agency and voice that is usually pushed to the periphery in media discourse. The emotional nuance and the depiction of perseverance of the story brings out the effort needed to endure displacement. Nevertheless, its sad conclusion highlights the uncertainty that refugees continue to experience, and some of the most important questions regarding asylum and belonging in the future remain unanswered (alcuthbert, 2020).

Lefteri's novel powerfully humanizes the Syrian refugee crisis by portraying the lived experiences of Nuri and Afra amid ongoing violence and displacement. It turns abstract geopolitical struggle into personal tragedy, and it provides a voice to people who are usually marginalized in the mainstream discourse. Nevertheless, the mixture of the documentary description and fictional narration can break the narrative unity of some readers, making it difficult to distinguish between reality and fiction (SYRIAWISE Team, 2022). The stage adaptation of *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* at Nottingham Playhouse brings Christy Lefteri's powerful refugee narrative to life but struggles to fully support its emotional impact, resulting in a production that feels uneven and detached. Although the narration and sound effects are very expressive in terms of trauma, the staging and choreography are not as subtle as they should be to enhance the involvement of the audience. However, the play still has a reverberation as a heart-wrenching depiction of displacement (Ryan, 2023).

Despite the growing scholarship on refugee stories, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* has not been studied as much in postcolonial and diaspora studies. The literature tends to focus on the humanitarian and geopolitical setting and does not pay enough attention to the way Lefteri builds the diasporic consciousness based on the trauma, memory, and identity disruption. This study addresses this gap by discussing the theme of displacement, belonging, and cultural fragmentation in the novel.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The research methodology is a qualitative, interpretive one based on the hermeneutic inquiry and close textual analysis. *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* by Christy Lefteri is the main source of data that is analyzed in terms of postcolonial and diaspora theories. Thematic analysis is used on the major motifs, narrative structure, and character development to cover the issues of identity, belonging, and displacement. The secondary academic sources facilitate contextualization and interpretation, which guarantee rigorous and ethical academic analysis.

Postcolonialism is a term that is used to describe cultures and societies that have been historically shaped by colonial activities, which includes the time since colonization to the current times. According to Walder (1998), postcolonialism covers "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (p. 35). Postcolonial criticism, then, is concerned with the experiences and literary works of people whose history is characterized by political, social, and psychological oppression. It explores the impact of colonialism on knowledge production and the spread of scientific theories and indicates

how Western epistemologies tend to prevail and marginalize non-Western views (Shakun et al., 2024). Postcolonial theory emerged partly as a reaction to the limitations of Western critical paradigms, which frequently overlook cultural heterogeneity and the socio-political complexities embedded in postcolonial texts (Ashcroft, 2001). Although it seeks to question the existing methodologies and arguments in the various fields of social sciences, critics claim that it is not always rigorous in research and scientific objectivity (Felsch, 2023). In general, postcolonialism provides a critical approach to the study of social situations, cultural separations, and political injustices caused by colonial and imperial oppression (Jabeen et al., 2024).

The question of identity has been a big issue in postcolonial studies since it exposes the intricate nature of historical domination, cultural negotiation, displacement and the legacies of colonial encounters. The concept of identity in postcolonial discourse is viewed as a dynamic and hybrid process, which is influenced by colonial past, cultural displacement, and opposition to the dominant power structures. According to Hassan and Qasim (2025), identity is "shaped by colonial histories, cultural displacement, and resistance to dominant power" (p. 1038), and identity cannot be viewed through the prism of strict cultural categories. Rather, it is to be considered as a moving and changing object that is constantly restructured by the means of memory, migration, and socio-political conflicts.

Among the most important contributions to this discussion is Homi K. Bhabha whose theorization of cultural and identity hybridity highlights the fact that identities are created through ongoing translation, negotiation, and interaction between rival cultural forces. Hybridity is used to contest the essence of binarity, to disrupt colonial hierarchical formations, to dislocate the concept of fixed or pure cultural identities, and thus to expose the power relations inherent in colonial encounters. According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity should not be understood as a simple combination of separate cultural elements, but rather as a dynamic and evolving process produced through the unequal power relations between the colonizer and the colonized (Bhabha, 1994). Within this paradigm, identity and culture are dynamic and constantly negotiated, interacted with and contested, thus undermining the colonial polarities and the romantic image of cultural purity. In the case of Bhabha, hybridity is the cultural blending that occurs in both colonial and postcolonial settings, resulting in the emergence of "new, hybrid identities that cannot be deftly classified" (Al-Qassab, 2025, p. 313). Bhabha (1994) does not see hybridity as a passive blend but as a critical approach that disrupts the mainstream discourse of colonialism and reveals the artificiality of identity. This idea repositions cultural and social liminality as a place of potential and opposition instead of lack, and the creative potential of people who occupy in-between spaces. The conceptualization of the Third Space of enunciation by Bhabha (1994) is the political and cultural discourse that is hybrid and in-between in the colonial and postcolonial settings. It is against this background that hybrid cultural identities are formed as a result of the "cultural encounter in colonial domination and inequality" (Bhandari, 2022, p. 172).

Hybridity is closely linked to Bhabha's concept of mimicry, which explains how the colonized adopt the language, customs, and behaviors of the colonizer as a survival strategy. Mimicry suggests an indecisive imitation and "performance of the dominant culture by the colonized or marginalized individuals" (Hassan & Qasim, 2025, p. 1041). Nevertheless, this imitation is incomplete and imperfect in nature, creating gaps that expose and disrupt colonial power. The corresponding notion of ambivalence reflects the attraction and repulsion of the colonial culture at the same time- the contradiction of wanting to assimilate and at the same time trying to retain the identity. The focal point of these tensions is what Bhabha (1994) refers to as the Third Space, which is an imaginary space in which hybrid identities are constantly being produced and cultural meanings are being renegotiated. This Third Space is a state of discursivity that resists clear definition in terms of cultural norms and meanings (Hassan & Qasim, 2025). It contains collective identities, including nations, ethnicities, and diasporas, which are perceived as hybrid constructions created in the process of cultural interaction, adaptation, and resistance. According to Bhabha, processes of colonization and globality have led to cultural contact, "rendering a hybrid third space" (Bhandari, 2022, p. 172).

In sum, drawing on Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the Third Space, this study defines the concept of

diasporic identity as fluid, contested, and constantly redefined by displacement and cultural encounter. Hybridity disrupts the fixed binaries and shows the constructedness of the colonial power, and the Third Space offers the place of resistance, negotiation and new meanings. From this perspective, *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* can be understood as an exploration of diasporic subjectivity shaped by fragmentation, resilience, and ethical transformation in exile.

Textual Analysis

"Identity crisis/hybrid identity is a dominant theme of literature in the rapidly growing globalized society. It has become a highly debatable issue" (Mortaza et al., 2024, p. 4177). Lefteri (2019) provides a clear description of the life of the diaspora, combining the themes of identity, belonging, and displacement. The novel, through the forced migration of Nuri and Afra, examines the emotional and psychological schisms of war, exile and resettlement. Lefteri (2019) describes diaspora not as a movement across the borders but as a condition of life characterized by loss, fragmented memories, and a permanent quest of home. The story reveals that displacement disrupts both personal and cultural identities as well as creating new modes of belonging based on resilience and survival. Putting personal suffering in the context of wider socio-political realities, the novelist offers a subtle insight into the life of refugees and the ambiguities of the diasporic existence. She demonstrates the risks of the refugee experience and its long-term effect. The migration of Nuri and Afra to England subjects them to life-threatening risks and harsh conditions on several occasions. They meet human traffickers and have to experience degrading travel conditions, including being driven in a truck with "a cow in the back of the pickup, the floor scattered with its feces" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 60), and face the risk of being killed during the dangerous crossings of the Aegean Sea. Nuri is threatened with conscription in Syria, and in Athens, economic desperation compels him to take a job with a smuggler, which leads to the rape of Afra by Mr. Fotakis. These incidences underscore the fact that migration is often typified by exploitation and violence.

Diaspora offers a complex dilemma, leading to the formation of a hyphenated identity. Immigrants face challenges on multiple levels—physically, mentally, and psychologically" (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 596). In host societies, refugees are often blamed for social and economic problems, becoming convenient scapegoats. This hostility is observed in the refugee camp in Athens and subsequently in England, where a billboard states that there are too many migrants and "this island [England] will break under our weight" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 5). Lefteri (2019) dispels the simplistic views of migrants by showing their varied backgrounds and possible contributions. The fact that Afra was a former award-winning painter in Syria is a contradiction to the Western stereotypes, but it is a surprise to the host community: "The art she made was amazing. She won awards for her paintings of urban and rural Syria" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 20). This response underscores the implicit distrust that migrants tend to face. Nuri is no exception. Although he is fluent in English and a good beekeeper, his skills are met with surprise by people. In his asylum interview, he mentions that the officer appears to be impressed by his language proficiency: "Her name is Lucy Fisher, and she seems impressed that I can speak English so well" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 24). These responses are a twisted perception of Syria, which is usually depicted only in the image of war, which erases the cultural diversity of the country and disregards the fact that there was a functioning society prior to the war.

Migration does not end with the journey; it continues in the host country, where institutional barriers further complicate resettlement. Although Afra and Nuri have a history of social standing in Syria, they are subjected to the same dehumanizing asylum process as other refugees. The asylum requirements demonstrate that the acceptance is conditional: "To stay in the UK as a refugee, you must be unable to live safely in any part of your own country because you fear persecution there" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 25). Even though they fulfill this condition, Nuri has to also prove that " [he is] not a killer" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 7) of the officer, demonstrating how migrants are assumed guilty and have to prove their innocence all the time. This weight increases the psychological pressure, particularly because they do not have a country to go back to, and the process becomes

a question of survival. Following the interview, Nuri falls physically ill, as he understands that the interrogation assaults his identity. The questions are absurd and intrusive: "Have you ever killed anyone? What's the national anthem of your country? Can you sing it without the words? Do you read political books? What is the current situation in your country? Who is your president? Are there any landmarks in Aleppo? Have you seen Daesh?" (Lefteri, 2019, pp. 235-238). These questions, though requested on bureaucratic grounds, are dangerous to exacerbate trauma. Nuri concludes the interview by saying: "When I stand my legs are numb and I feel that I have been robbed somehow, of life" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 238). His numbness is a metaphor of emotional paralysis, as it demonstrates how migrants are deprived of dignity and turned into suspects instead of human beings due to displacement and dehumanizing processes.

Bureaucracies tend to treat migrants as cases, and their identities are turned into numbers and paperwork. This dehumanization adds to the sense of alienation and doubt in people who already have fractured selves. The use of the word 'robbed' by Nuri is important, implying that he was violently taken away his life and not passively. This is supported by the traumatic experiences that have shattered his world: the loss of his beehives, the death of his son Sami, the rape of Afra, and his separation with Mustafa. Aleppo, which was a source of meaning, turns into a place of irreversible destruction. The initial symptoms of bureaucratic misery are manifested when Nuri and Afra arrive in Greece. The whole migration system is based on official documentation; otherwise, migrants will be invisible in the institutional structures. Nuri notes this fact: "They wanted their papers so that they could exist in the eyes of the European Union. And the ones who were the wrong nationality would get no papers—except for a ticket back to wherever" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 130). The right to basic rights, including protection, education, and healthcare, is conditional on the possession of the appropriate paperwork, but the distribution of this right is uneven. The novel emphasizes a nationality hierarchy, in which some groups are given precedence. Syrian refugees are considered relatively lucky, as the Syrian civil war is so large-scale, and Nuri and Afra are not an exception. This selective mechanism reveals the brutality of a system that discriminates suffering according to geopolitical categories as opposed to the need. The fear of deportation is the Sword of Damocles that hangs over the migrants all the time. Bureaucratic procedures are very demoralizing to many since forced return equates to death.

Beyond institutional barriers, the migration process unfolds through increasingly perilous stages. The journey of Nuri and Afra consists of three important stages: the first time they stay in Turkey, the intermediate one in the Greek island of Leros and the last one in Athens. Every stage brings about new dangers and Athens was the worst stage before they finally fled to England. In this regard, their migration turns out to be a downward movement to deteriorating conditions, where hope is lost and pain is aggravated. It is only when they arrive in England that they come out of this darkness and feel a feeling of rescue. The couple resides in a congested house in Istanbul, which was organized by a human trafficker, and it is a temporary place of residence. Men and women are segregated into separate rooms and migrants of different nationalities are made to share space. Istanbul, in spite of these inhuman conditions, is a sliver of hope to Nuri, a ray of hope that is the stark contrast to the hopelessness that he will experience in Athens. Istanbul is a waiting place, but Athens is a place of stagnant resignation, a place that reminds of the warning of Angeliki: "This is the place where people die slowly, inside. One by one, people die." (Lefteri, 2019, p. 175). The waiting time in Istanbul serves as a buffer period to the asylum seekers, as they wait a temporary period before they embark on the risky journey to Europe through Greece. The following step is to reach the Greek islands, which is completely dependent on the weather conditions, and the trip is unpredictable and dangerous. When the moment finally comes, Nuri and Afra embark with a large group of people in overcrowded boats to take a dangerous sea journey. These boats are overloaded with people as it is widely reported, and the passengers have little or no hope of survival in case anything goes wrong. As their boat enters the Greek waters, it begins to fill with water, and appears to be sinking, but the Greek authorities save it in time. They are brought to Farmakonesi and thence to Leros, where they are expected to remain a long time. Leros is very symbolic place in the novel, both the historical and the present day suffering. The dark past of the island, which was formed by the conflict and the fact that

it was a leper colony, casts a dark shadow on the migrants that come to the island. This is a painful history that Nuri reveals by the account of an official: "'This island was a leper colony once,' she said. 'This asylum was like a Nazi concentration camp. People were caged and chained without names or identities. The children here were abandoned, tied to their beds all day'" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 138). By including this context, Lefteri (2019) makes a powerful comparison between the old and the new manifestations of institutional cruelty. The source is not only useful as historical context but also as a reminder that dehumanizing treatment still exists.

Athens is the last and the most destructive part of the journey of Nuri and Afra. They are then taken to a refugee camp which becomes unbearable. The camp is ironically placed in an abandoned airport, a place of movement and freedom, but represents instead of freedom, stagnation and confinement. Once migrants enter Greece, they are then detained in different areas and the camp eventually turns into an area of crime, such as human trafficking, drug trafficking, organ trade, and forced prostitution. Athens is a place where hope is lost to the residents: "Peoples are get stuck here… This is the place where people die slowly, inside" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 175). In Athens, Nuri encounters Mr. Fotakis via an agent as he tries to find a means to get to England. Mr. Fotakis charges seven thousand euros to transport the couple to the UK, although they agree on the cost of five thousand with Nuri promising to work with him until their counterfeit passports are prepared. Nuri is a courier, who carries packages throughout Athens. Mr. Fotakis welcomes the couple to his house. Nuri takes the risk to leave the dangerous camp even though he is aware of the dangers. He mentions that "Mr. Fotakis [makes him] uneasy" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 271) and he also says that "[they are] treated like special guests" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 271). Their decision to stay is influenced by the room he offers, even though it is damp, cramped, and unsanitary. Nuri explains that "It's better than [sleeping in] the park" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 270). Afra feels unsafe and he wants Nuri to lock the door and take the key with him every time he goes.

One night Nuri loses the key and decides never to go back, lest he misses his delivery schedule. Upon returning he discovers the key gone and the room locked. Afra opens the door and Nuri is sure that something has gone wrong, Afra has been raped by Mr. Fotakis. Mr. Fotakis carries on with the plan as though nothing has changed after the assault, as though their lives have not been changed. The counterfeit passports are finally prepared and tickets to fly to England are obtained. He goes to the extent of making them Greek coffee, keeping the atmosphere disturbingly normal. Nuri is in a moral and emotional dilemma. He thinks of taking revenge but realizes that whatever he does would risk their escape. There is no other way but to pretend that nothing has occurred. Nuri knows that he is powerless and vulnerable, but he is reluctant to take this direction, which Mr. Fotakis appears to understand, and he is sure that Nuri will not strike back. Nuri describes his dilemma: "But, if I took this revenge, Afra and I would never be able to leave. If I let him live, we would still have this chance to escape, even though something of me would always be left behind, trapped within the dank walls of this apartment" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 292).

Because bees are central to the novel's symbolism, they naturally appear in the title and recur throughout the story. Lefteri (2019) compares bees and migrants, especially by the illustration of a wingless bee that Nuri found in the guesthouse when he arrived in England. The bee remains alive despite being impaired, thus representing the strength that bees and refugees have in common. Bee imagery is used throughout the story to emphasize the difference between life in the pre-civil war era and life in the post-civil war era, thus portraying the radical change that the migrants undergo. This implies that war and displacement transform the symbolism of the bees. Afra is astonished by the fact that bees do not stop their work even during the destruction: "Look at them still working, when everything else is dying" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 12). While human society collapses, the bees keep working, suggesting a lingering hope. Mustafa reinforces this idea in a letter to Nuri: "Where there are bees there are flowers, and where there are flowers there is new life and hope" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 198). However, in England, the symbolism of bees changes radically. The focus is shifted to an individual wingless bee in the garden of Nuri, who symbolises his loneliness and the inability to adjust to a new land. This transformation is an indication of the shift of migrant identity, which was collective to individual survival. The social support of the homeland is substituted with the unfriendly environment, and

Nuri and Afra have to abandon the fixed identities and create a more flexible sense of self. This change is in line with the idea of the third space as proposed by Bhabha that allows migrants to bargain identities outside binary categories. Nuri and Afra are trying to lose their previous selves without becoming completely assimilated by the host society. Similar to the wingless bee, they are taught to survive without the identities that once characterized them, and thus, re-construct themselves by surviving and adapting.

In one of the letters, Mustafa writes that he is now keeping bees in England, and that he has found that "Beekeepers from Britain usually have Italian honeybees exported from New Zealand, but these native bees are much more able to withstand the crazy climate here" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 197). His observation suggests that native bees are more adapted to the weather of Britain, and it is possible to state that, similarly to bees, humans also struggle to adjust to the new environment. He is a passionate writer of prosperous hives: "The beehives are thriving, Nuri! These British black bees are very different from Syrian bees. I thought that they would never work under 15 degrees Celsius, but these bees work at temperatures much lower…" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 243). The fact that Mustafa talks of the hardiness of native bees to emphasizes their better adaptation to the UK climate. And the fact that he speaks of Syrian bees shows that the Syrians find it hard to adapt to a new environment. But the letter of Mustafa is optimistic. He rediscovers a vital aspect of himself by going back to beekeeping. Despite having different bees in Syria, he is able to produce honey. Afra interprets this as an image of productivity and hope. Even when the bees collect nectar from small sources like railway plants instead of expansive fields, they persist in their labor. This strength has never left Mustafa indifferent and his achievement is a sign to Nuri and Afra that they can also find a home and a role in England. To Mustafa, beekeeping fulfills his identity. Therefore, as he adjusts to a new life, he is not completely deprived of his previous identity, which proves that migrant identity can remain flexible. Having been initially incomplete as "a beekeeper without bees" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 197) , he later comes to feel complete as he adapts to a new climate and a new kind of bee. In this adaptation, he starts to mend the broken pieces of his identity.

Lefteri (2019) also shows how migration and trauma transform identity, especially in the case of Afra. Before the war, "Afra was different" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 19), and she was portrayed as a cheerful, strong, and vibrant girl. Her energy is is seen through her paintings which were at one time alive and garnered her international recognition. However, the war and the death of her son cause a serious psychological breakdown. She does not have the desire to live and does not want to abandon her ruined house even "waiting for a bomb to hit [her]" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 40). Her trauma is in the form of blindness, which is a catastrophic loss to an artist. Later, a doctor informs her that she is not physically blind and that her blindness is psychosomatic, a reaction to trauma and her wish not to participate in life any more. The act of not seeing brings Afra closer to death and she starts losing her identity. She starts recovering when she starts painting, albeit in a distorted and miscoloured form. Little by little, her art becomes more apparent and she sees again, a symbol of the recovery of her selfhood. This experience demonstrates that the impact of migration can continue to be felt many years after the experience. Afra's remark in therapy— "I can't explain what it is, Dr. Faruk, but I know something is wrong. He is not my husband" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 211)—reveals how Nuri has changed due to PTSD. He is a happy and outgoing person, but turns withdrawn, irritable and reliant on his imaginary friend Mohammed. This change is a reflection of psychological harm as well as survival tactics, reshaping his identity in the diaspora.

The Moroccan Man on the other hand demonstrates voluntary identity change. He reads "How to Be a Brit, and sometimes smirks to himself" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 6), which means that he wants to study the British culture and at the same time ridicules it. He picks up some of their customs, such as drinking tea with milk and using slang like "Geezer" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 50), yet he remains puzzled by norms like queuing. His repeated use of "their" highlights the distance he maintains from the host culture. His discomfort with British practices—such as "the way the non-Muslim men stand up to piss" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 6) or "wearing tracksuits in public" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 70)—reflects a lasting attachment to his cultural roots and illustrates a struggle that may persist across generations. This concept can be seen in the selective assimilation of the Moroccan man: he

takes some of the British practices but denies others. Using the first person plural, he places himself in an intermediate position, resonant with the host culture and yet different. His attacks on the British ways are a kind of mimicry which both modifies and questions the norms of domination. Conversely, Nuri and Afra are forced to undergo forced identity change within "an empire of identification" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 133). Their counterfeited documents change their names to "Gloria and Bruno Baresi" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 276), which symbolizes a radical change in the self-presentation they need. The physical alteration of Afra, taking away her turban and dyeing her hair to a blonde to make her, proves the erasure of identity as a survival tactic.

Conclusion

The Beekeeper of Aleppo presents diasporic existence as a profound negotiation of identity, belonging, and displacement, revealing how forced migration reshapes the self through loss, trauma, and memory. The main characters of the novel, Nuri and Afra, face displacement as a constant state that keeps on redefining their identities even after leaving Syria. Their cross-border travel reveals the emotional and psychological discontinuities of the violent alienation of the familiar. Displacement is therefore an ongoing process of struggling to make a coherent self in the face of constant instability. Lefteri (2019) portrays how the sense of belonging is denied, again and again, through descriptions of hostile host societies, institutional apathy, and the precariousness of the refugee existence, forcing migrants into the state of constant otherness. This exclusion is intensified by bureaucratic obstacles and social stigma, which reinforce marginalization and undermine attempts to settle. By focusing on intimate personal narratives rather than political spectacle, the novelist humanizes the refugee experience and challenges dominant portrayals that reduce migrants to statistics or passive victims. In a postcolonial and diasporic perspective, identity of the diaspora is fluid and hybrid, which is negotiated by adapting to the culture and resisting. Nevertheless, the characters are resilient and invent new ways of connection, hope, and belonging despite trauma and fragmentation.

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