

## REFUGEES' SPATIAL IDENTITY AND THE RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF HOME IN CHRISTY LEFTERI'S *THE BEEKEEPER OF ALEPPO*

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**Abstract:** This study investigates how the social identity of refugees is affected by forced displacement while emphasizing the contributions bestowed by refugee studies upon policy-making and integration frameworks. This research delves into the obstacles that derive from physical displacement and social alienation by analyzing Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2019) through spatial criticism and social identity theories. The study relies on Henri Lefebvre's theory of space, Homi Bhabha's concepts of (un)homeliness, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social space, and Henri Tajfel's social identity theory in order to comprehend the displaced individual's rebuilding of their own identities. The shared practices that take place within refugee micro-communities are scrutinized through Liisa H. Malkki's concept of sedentarist bias alongside Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of reterritorialization. This paper sheds light on the pivotal role of spatial justice during the in-between phase of displacement by identifying collective interactive rituals within the novel. Moreover, it inspects the psychological trauma, cultural fragmentation, and resilience mechanisms developed by refugees as a response to their evolving circumstances.

**Keywords:** *Forced displacement, social identity, spatial criticism, (un) homeliness, Reterritorialization*

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## 1. Introduction

Displacement is an inevitable experience that refugees undergo. Such experience affects the social identity of refugees for they are exposed to a fast-paced non-linear change. The paper through *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2019) tackles the relationship between space and social identity of refugees and how forced displacement impacts the lives of refugees. Additionally, it inspects in what way space can have a double dimension, examining the role of micro-communities in the reconstruction of social identity of refugees. Christy Lefteri exposes in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* the harsh reality of forced displacement through the dangerous journey of the couple Nuri and Afra. Nuri is the narrator of the story and the protagonist who ran a thriving beekeeping business in Aleppo while his wife, Afra, is an artist who expresses herself through painting. The couple loses their son in an explosion, costing Afra her sight and engendering an emotional withdrawal that leads to a disconnection from reality. The couple flees the horrors of the civil war in Syria, seeking asylum in the United Kingdom as refugees. The journey of forced displacement takes them through Turkey and Greece, facing various hardships: refugee camps, smugglers and perpetual threat of danger. It is important to state that the dynamic of Nuri and Afra and their quest to find a home is mapped through the relationship between identity and space.

In *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, the journey of Nuri and Afra from Aleppo, Syria to England gives the reader a glimpse of their anchored selves, symbolizing the deconstructed social identity of roving refugees and its impact on their sense of being. Nuri and Afra's constant state of moving from one country to another performs as a catalyst for a series of challenges, nurturing a sense of emotional fragmentation. This fragmentation is expressed through feelings of nostalgia, homesickness, and hopeless pursuit of familiarity in micro-communities. Hence, it calls attention to the private connotation of a collective experience. Lefteri humanizes the refugee experience by reporting it beyond numbers. Nuri and Afra are representatives of many Syrian refugees who have been victims of the same circumstances and have been forced to follow the same traveling path. She vividly illustrates through Nuri's stream of consciousness the chaos of refugees' mental space, as well as the challenging process of self-actualizing in foreign societies. However, it ends on a hopeful note, alluding to the possibility of finding a place within a new space.

Social displacement is an inevitable destiny of refugees due to the value that a specific space holds in the memory of individuals. In *The Production of Space* (1974), Henri Lefebvre portrays space as a product of society, shaped by the economic, political, and cultural aspects of the society inhabiting it. Lefebvre introduces the term "lived space", which is the space that is shaped by the everyday experience of citizens. In other words, identity is dependent on the abstract side of space as presented by Lefebvre; everyday practices are formed by and deeply rooted in the geographical space it is performed (Lefebvre, 1974, p.24). Physical spaces provide a feeling of intimacy that embraces the individual's identity. Therefore, being forced to leave the place that nurtured the identity of refugees opens the door to social isolation. The displaced individual usually tends to rely on memories of his past home as a form of manifesting comfort and safety. Those memories are constructed by the lived spaces of society. Thereby, it presses the ability to prepare the individual to adapt to new social spaces. Additionally, through the theory of Pierre Bourdieu's social space alongside Henri Tajfel's work on social identity, the flexible nature of social identity can be explored, arguing that it goes through a continuous process of deconstruction and reconstruction. In other words, it defies the discourse that promotes the static definition of human social identity.

Nonetheless, the in-between phase is an indispensable factor in the integration of refugees in host societies. The creation of refugee camps or council houses as safe and warm spaces that celebrate their diverse background is vital. Inside the in-between space, social

familiarity finds expression through Homi Bhabha's theory of homeliness and unhomeliness. Bhabha provides a framework that conceptualizes "home" as an ever-evolving process that changes in parallel with identity reorientation. Further, it offers an insight into the social characteristics of micro-communities that are displayed through performative activities such as storytelling and sharing meals. This notion demonstrates how human interactions and familiarity are pivotal in reviving the sense of belonging to socially unidentified individuals. Eventually, this leads to the positioning of individuals in a new space; a micro-community. Exploring Liisa H. Malkki's criticism towards reterritorialization through the Deleuzian lens of deterritorialization; Malkki challenges what she describes as "sedentrist bias", stating that "The sedentrist bias in social thought privileges the rootedness of peoples in places, often ignoring the realities of displacement and mobility"( Malkki, 1992, p.31). This results in limiting the social functionality of micro-communities, which deepens the attachment to this social space, marking a temporal structure of a new social identity. Linking this approach to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of deterritorialization and reterritorialization provides a more practical element, which is reterritorialization, to the hope of finding a new home and reforming the identity of refugees.

Scholarships discuss the English novel *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* from different literary perspectives. Many have examined various aspects focusing on the themes of trauma, displacement, and historical representations. Emanuela Tegla in "War, Loss, and Alienation: The Beekeeper of Aleppo" (2019) discusses the hardships of displacement, arguing that migration is a necessity rather than a choice. Moreover, Tegla provides an angle to perceive the dilemma of living or dying in the novel by using geographical and temporal shifts. This style of narration helps evoke the readers' empathy. On the other hand, Aurelija Daukšaitė Kolpakovienė article "Individual Traumas in Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*" (2022), tackled the concept of individual trauma by exploring the author's portrayal of her characters' traumatic experiences using the Literary Trauma theory. Kolpakovienė stresses the individuality of refugees' experience and treats it as a one-person case that varies from one refugee to another. While there is some truth to it, collective trauma must not be neglected. In other words, refugees do not only share the trauma but also some pre and post-trauma elements as well.

Yiğit and Kurtuluş discuss in their article "Nowhere at Ease: Listening to Syrian Refugee Trauma in Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* (2019)" (2023) the marginalization of refugees in society, which leads to unique and dynamic trauma experiences (Yiğit & Kurtuluş, 2023). This aspect is crucial, as the uniqueness of the refugee experience, in general, is highly overlooked. Therefore, it needs more specific theories that examine the notion of refuge and refugees. Additionally, the significance of the bees as a symbol of home in the novel is analysed in the article of Amina El Halawani "Home is where the Bees Are! Beekeeping as Homing in Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* and Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov's *Honeyland*"(2023). It explores the fragmentation and volatility of refugees' homes, with an emphasis on Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* and the Macedonian documentary *Honeyland*. Further, it brings awareness to the consequences of war on the climate. A more in-depth analysis using Eco-criticism will help crystalize this issue more. On a different note, Khazne Yasser has made a study on Lefteri's fictionalizing of history in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* in his thesis "The Representations of History through Fiction: Christy Lefteri's *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* and Victoria Hislop's *Those Who Are Loved*". He uses the fundamental New Historicist arguments, such as "the textuality of history," "the historicity of texts," and the link between the texts and the writers' cultural and personal backgrounds.

The present paper is directed towards the descriptive analysis of the characters Nuri and Afra from *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*. It introduces them as embodiments of socially displaced refugees and the substandard quality of change they face. Concurrently, it examines the consequences of spatial injustice on their social identity. Additionally, it highlights the role of micro-communities that function as a social environment, harboring interpersonal relationships and interactive rituals in the recalibration journey of Nuri and Afra in the novel. It attempts to explore the specific challenges that displaced refugees face through their search for shelter. The premise is to direct attention to the eminent vocation of spatial familiarity in helping refugees navigate a sense of belonging while in foreign societies. It aids in sustaining a familiar atmosphere for individuals who are longing for familiarity and recognition, emphasizing the vitality of human connections and social environments. By adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, this study attempts to describe the experience of displaced refugees through the lenses of spatial criticism and social identities. It accentuates the efficiency of micro-communities in the reconstruction of refugees' social identity. In addition, it addresses the impact of spatial discrimination towards these communities and the stigmatization of refugees in host societies. Ultimately, fostering phantasm of negative connotation attached to their positioning in society, situating them in the margins. All of this is mirrored by the journey of Nuri and Afra in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*.

## **2. The Spatiality of Refugees' Identity**

Space has been a subject of interest to many scholars from various fields, as it determines the projection of one's self and society. Spatial studies offer a deeper understanding of the relationship between space and identity and by extension between the refugee and home. It provides a framework to examine the fluid nature of refugees' social identity and the manner in which it impacts their community, at both individual and collective levels. Henri Lefebvre and later Edward Soja's work explores the dimensionality of space, challenging its imagery as a flat entity. Lefebvre's concept of life space shaped the abstract and subjective aspects of space. It redefined its rootedness in physical places and pushed it towards more flexible realms "Representational spaces, space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'... This is the dominated—and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). Soja built on this idea by introducing the Third Space in which the personal and collective; the abstract and the concrete exists. "Everything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable" (Soja, 1996, pp. 57–58). Moreover, the fluidity of space empowers the reforming of refugees' identities through the constant line of displacement. Consequently, it counters the idea that the integration of refugees into foreign societies is infeasible.

Social spaces are a prime example of a Lived space, it is where a society lives and identifies. The individual possesses a sense of being through belonging to a society, where his role and orientations are clear. This concept is explained by Pierre Bourdieu, as a large scale of social identifiers that give the society its identity, thus, the identity of its members "A space of relationships which is both structured and structuring, in which positions are determined by the distribution of various forms of capital" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 7). The positioning of individuals within any given social space is an instrumental factor in shaping their identity as well as the identity of the space itself. Therefore, it hints at the mobility of a refugee's identity. Refugees experience social spaces and the shaping of one's identity in a more accelerated manner that echoes in chaos and fear. This difference is the by-product of the circumstances that define their journey. In other words, the cyclical nature of the relationship between identity and space is all linked to the idea that "social space is a social product" (Lefebvre,

1991,p. 26). Further, it affects the position as well as the connotation of the term refugee within a society.

Despite the issuing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which states in Article number 13 that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" ("Universal Declaration" art.13). The journey of reaching a safe space is entrenched with hostility and danger. Christy Lefteri, in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo*, depicts the journey of millions of refugees through the personal story frames of multiple characters. She embodies the experiences of many refugees who are not able to vocalize their struggle. As a result, their image is humanized through the relatable appeal of the characters in the story. The couple's, Nuri and Afra, journey from Aleppo to Britain highlights their detachments and reattachments with themselves, and the space surrounding them. Lefteri's choice of structure accentuates the chaos that navigates disoriented refugees. It maps out the route that most Syrian refugees have to take, an escalating route of displacement, in which Nuri and Afra hesitantly tiptoe around for a while before taking the first step towards internal displacement. In tandem, they marked their first step away from familiarity; their home, their society, and their identity.

Physical distance means a concomitant unfolding of a social issue; social displacement. Nuri is an exemplary character in which the phenomenon of social displacement is apparent. Disturbed, disconnected, and confused, he fails to recognize his state of loss and disorientation. "When I wake up it is dark, and the darkness pulsates. I've had a dream about something vague, not of murder this time; in my mind, there is a glimpse of corridors and staircases and footpaths that make a grid, somewhere far away from here,..." (Lefteri, 2019, p.92). He becomes present in his mental space, a complex space composed of memories and hallucinations. It mirrors his desire to go back to his old space. Yet, the filtration of those memories fails, as the eradicated space is manifested in an alternate method. "On the other side, the shadow of a boy. 'Will we fall into the water?' I heard. 'Will the waves take us? The houses won't break like this do.' Sami's voice. Mohammed's voice " (Lefteri, 2019, p.192). Mohammed only exists in Nuri's mental space. He is a mere hallucination. It could be explained as a coping mechanism for losing his son Sami. "I hear it again, a child's voice, it is Mohammed's voice, I know it, he begins to sing a lullaby, I recognize it, it reminds me of Sami. I put my hands over my ears, but it doesn't block out" (Lefteri, 2019, p.144). In other words, the fear is displaced by Nuri and exists even in his mental space. The failed attempt at escapism is reciprocal to social isolation, resulting in a socially disoriented individual with a substantial spatial gap in his identity. Afra seeks shelter in isolation which is a radical reaction towards being forcibly displaced. "From the day we arrived at the smuggler's apartment, Afra again refused to go outside" (Lefteri, 2019, p.67). Both characters display their social confusion in different ways, yet it has the same outcome on both, which is failing to identify themselves socially.

A new social space is not always deemed as a negative option. Nonetheless, in the context of forced displacement, considering it as an option is debatable. Refugees' self-determination is as limited as their social identity. Moreover, refugees struggle to find a sense of belonging in a limited and often non-existent social space; an unstable space that assigns no social role to them. Nuri and Afra's time in Turkey exposes another layer of spatial injustice, originating from the discriminatory attitude towards them. Afra and Nuri, along with other refugees in Turkey, face several obstacles that deprive them of basic life necessities. The struggle to find a shelter where they would feel safe intensifies their fear of change. It motivates them to seek refuge in their mental space. "Whole families were wandering through the streets, some barefoot, sometimes sitting by the sidewalk when they became tired of walking, and other refugees on the market stalls, trying to make enough money to move on

from here, selling things that people couldn't live without: phone chargers, life jackets, cigarettes" (Lefteri, 2019, p.67). They experience homelessness the moment they reach the safe zone, which is Turkey.

However, homelessness exposes them to a different type of fear. It is a foreign type that triggers their war trauma, displaying their lack of space and lack of identity. Further, it introduces them to an uncomfortable space that imposes on them an undesired status; illegal refugees. They begin their quest for a way out of Turkey, which their existence was never acknowledged. "I have some money.'...' I've spoken to a few people, and there is a bus that can take us to the next town, and from there we can find a smuggler. I've seen people go and not return. I didn't want to try alone" (Lefteri, 2019, p.63). Their quest is filled with risks and uncertainties. They are putting their lives on the line for the potential of a better place. "Their safety and even their lives are often put at risk: they may suffocate in containers, perish in deserts, or drown at sea while being smuggled by profit-seeking criminals who treat them as goods" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.). Due to such circumstances, refugees start gradually disconnecting from the present to endure this complex situation.

### **3. The In-betweens of Homeliness and Unhomeliness: The Refugee Micro-Community Experience**

When removed from the original social pattern, Nuri and Afra face difficulties in adapting to the new social mechanism of host societies. Ultimately, such a situation leads to a state of disorientation and alienation, situating both characters in an uncomfortable space. This discomfort is a symptom that many scholars attempted to study through Homi Bhabha's concept of Unhomeliness and Homeliness: "To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (Bhabha, 1992, p.141). This reflects the feeling of estrangement in a foreign culture. Bhabha's theorization added a layer of fluidity to the socio-spatial identity of the displaced individual as it referred to the possibility of finding homeliness in unhomely spaces. Building on that, unhomeliness is a reaction to displacement and the creation of micro-communities is a reaction to unhomeliness. The latter intensifies the rootedness of the displaced individual to his "home", resulting in the quest for familiarity in an unfamiliar space, marking the emergence of many refugee communities within the dominant host societies. This phenomenon can be explained through Lisa Malkki's take on the concept of Reterritorialization. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) describe reterritorialization as the movement by which a deterritorialized element recomposes restructures, or finds new attachments after displacement. While Malkki does not explicitly use this term, her work studies how displaced individuals reconstruct their identities in foreign spaces. She counters the idea that identity is rooted in a territory. In *Purity and Exile* (1995), Malkki examines how Hutu refugees navigate through displacement by developing "mythico-historical" narratives. This form of coping mechanism is an indicator of the redefinition of their identities. Therefore, deterritorialization fosters a slightly comfortable environment for micro-communities to reclaim a sense of being. Nonetheless, the comfort and sense of being of these communities harbour within their social borders, and their position in the social fabric of the host society is deemed unwelcome. The spatial segregation of the refugee society leads to inequity and it fuels social injustice. On this note, the importance of spatial justice should be emphasized, due to its crucial role in achieving social justice and maintaining a just environment where all individuals can live and express themselves freely, with no space for prejudices. Therefore, displaced individuals can restructure and reconstruct their social identity in a foreign place, in which they recognize their human status and enhance their sense of self. Overall, spatial studies could provide a foundation to build an analytical understanding of the journey of Nuri and Afra in the novel.

When regarding geographical space, the host society is adjacent to the refugees' micro community. The commodification of refugees in host societies is an issue that intersects with the dominant social space. The underground business of people smuggling is detrimental to the socioeconomic structure of Turkey. "It is clear that the Syrian citizens who came to our country left our country with economic, legal, political, and social influences. It is unlikely that the Syrian refugee flood, which harms the development of the country, will be resolved in the near future" (Çoltu & Öztürk, 2020). Henceforth, it influences the Turkish perspective on Syrian refugees and rotates it towards a negative path. Moreover, building on Lefebvre's theory of spatial injustice, this form of racial violence against refugees reflects the aftermath of spatial division within the society. "The design of a place incentivizes different kind of interactions and in doing so it creates different kind of subjectivities" (Delany, 1999, p.51). A class-segregated place limits the inclusion of refugees in social places, creating intangible borders that cannot be crossed. Nuri and Afra's interactions in Turkey are with the smuggler and other refugees only. In accordance to the American writer and literary critic Samuel R. Delany, there are two types of interactions: contact, and networking (Delany, 1999, p.49). In the case of contact, it is a loosely structured and unpredictable type of interaction that supposedly occurs between different social classes.

The urgency for creating communities among refugees is a critical reaction to the destruction of their previous ones. Refugees seek a certain criterion of validation and understanding that can only be given by another refugee. The reason for the exclusivity of such a connection is the need for a mutual ground of a shared experience, as depicted in the following quote "I nodded, and she glanced again at Mohammed and took a step closer to me. 'It's just that ...' She hesitated. 'It's just that I lost my son too. It's just that ... I know. I know what it's like. The void. It's black like the sea' (Lefteri, 2019, p.83). Refugees find themselves in a space where they are far from their past social space and excluded from one of the host societies. They start forming connections based on vulnerable mutuality to confound the gap by inaugurating a certain type of social structure. Structure organizes how individuals live within a society, and in the case of refugees, their society is structured in a manner that resonates with their circumstances. It is a structure of familiarization in which refugees reconnect with their social side through their constructing social networks. Nuri and Afra's conversations with other refugees at the camp underscore the formation of relationships between individuals. They share nothing in common but the struggle of displacement and the need for a safe life. The connection that forms between the African refugee Angeliki and Afra, revives Afra's passion for drawing, "'This is for Angeliki,' she said, and when she'd finished she asked me to put it under the blanket so that it wouldn't blow away" (Lefteri, 2019, p.194). It aids Afra in navigating a sense of self through reconnecting with her habitus as an artist. Also, Nuri manages to form a sort of connection with an Afghan refugee called Nadim, their daily conversations in the same spot function as a ritual, a place with significance for both. Nadim plays the rebab every day in the same place. His music affects Nuri and he forms a connection with it. "I wanted to wake him and tell him to play his music forever so that I would never hear anything else but the moving melody of the rebab until the day that I died" (Lefteri, 2019, p.151). Nadim's music distracts Nuri from his thoughts, avoiding confrontation with his current situation. The importance of Nadim and his music to Nuri gradually unravels as their connection grows deeper.

The absence of Nadim disturbs Nuri and affects his mental state as his relationship with him is significant for his wellbeing. After months of social isolation, fear, and disconnection, Nuri finally manages to connect with his habitus as a friend. His connection with Nadim triggers memories of when he was in Aleppo, fostering a limited environment that eases their loss and gives a glimpse of hope for the future. Thus, a refugee community could be labeled

as a niche community that is inhabited by the outsider segment of the host dominant society. It harbors a strong sense of solidarity and community between them, hence, a sense of belonging that lays the ground for the restructuring and reforming of the refugee's social identity. The emergence of micro-communities in refugee camps is a refusal of unhomeliness. Practically, it is conducive to bringing refugees into society, forming a setting for the value of solidarity and community over competitive individualism.

#### **4. Reclaiming Home: The Importance of the Quality of Space**

Despite the positive impact of reterritorialization in camps, it brings the refugees into the realm of the "unofficial", excluded from the urban planning of the host societies. The geographical and social positioning of these communities influences refugees' sense of value. The design of spaces shapes the subjectivities of its residents, sustaining a keen sense of spatial injustice. Despite the positive impact that micro-communities have on refugees, it is yet in immense need of evolving. The obstacles facing the process of evolving diverge into external and internal problems. The choice of the geographical positioning of refugee camps is the first obstacle that faces the refugees. Although it is known to the refugees that their stay in this place is temporary, the undefined duration fosters a greater sense of fear and uncertainty. "When my vision adjusted, I saw a round black object pointed straight at me. A gun. A gun? My breath caught in my throat, I struggled to inhale, my vision blurred, my neck and face felt hot, and my fingers numb. A camera" (Lefteri, 2019, p. 55). A space that lacks security will trigger the trauma of the refugees. Nuri's mistaking a camera for a gun speaks volumes of the impact that his experience has on him. The refugee camp in Greece failed to provide him with safety. On the contrary, it strengthens the fear. Fear is a prominent part of the displacement process, as it accompanies refugees along the way.

Change and transformation are preconceived concepts that the refugees are aware of their inevitability. The quality of change that refugees are exposed to heightens the level of fragmentation of each individual. The poor quality of the camps gradually dehumanizes refugees in a way that separates the term "refugee" from "human". This separation could be seen in different throughout the journey of the couple. Nuri states that "The night was cold. Afra was shivering and saying nothing. She was frightened here. I wrapped as many blankets around her as I could. We did not have a tent, just a large umbrella that blocked the wind from the North. A campfire close by gave out a little warmth, but not enough to be comfortable" (Lefteri, 2019, p.85). Such space burdens the refugee as an individual and pushes the community to the margin which, as a consequence, enlarges the distance between refugees and citizens. Wright explains that "Practically when these forms of class segmentation intersect forms of social cleavage rooted in salient identities such as race, ethnicity, and religion, the value of community/solidarity becomes narrowed and fractured"(Wright, 2019). Furthermore, a community that emerges in such spaces is fragile. The ties of camaraderie are not enough to maintain a solid social structure. In other words, the absence of an authoritative body that provides both order and safety makes refugee camps a dysfunctional space. It hinders any potential for preparing the refugees to accept a new social space and, by extension, obtain a new social identity.

A chaotic space overlaps with an ambivalent attitude, which indicates the fragility of the social structure and its need for order. Social cues, social roles, and social identity of a refugee camp are not clearly defined and are not under structured guidelines. Therefore, the feasibility of reconstructing a social identity that is solely a reference to the camp is ruled out. The negligence of order and safety impacts refugees' mental and physical health. Consequently, it adds an additional layer of trauma that eventually disturbs the healing process of refugees. After the murder of Nadim, Nuri is no longer capable of staying in the Leros camp. He starts contacting a smuggler who will take them to Athens and help them prepare fake passports to



cross the borders. Once they arrive in Athens, they stay in the smuggler's apartment for a while, and Nuri starts working for him in order to cover the expenses of illegal paperwork. The smuggler apartment differs from the refugee camp in Leros because of the different spatial elements of it. Living in a smuggler's apartment fosters a sense of fear greater than that of the camps. Unlike the volunteers, smugglers have no interest in the safety of refugees, they perceive them as profitable entities. The shift in perception towards the refugees situates Nuri and Afra in a constant state of anxiety and suspicion. Moreover, Nuri gets exploited by the smuggler as he overworks him and constantly sends him on far missions, resulting in Nuri's absences in the apartment. His absence affects Afra significantly as the only familiar individual she knows and trusts is not around often. She enters a phase of paranoia where she always asks him to lock her inside the room.

"('I want you to lock me in,' she said.

'Why don't you lock it from the inside? That way you can get out if you need to.'

However, Afra was shaking her head.

'No,' she said. 'I want you to lock me in.'

'I know the men are dodgy,' I said, 'but I don't think they'll try anything.'

'Please,' she said, 'I don't want the key. I want you to keep hold of it. I want to know that you have it)' (Lefteri, 2019, p.212).

Afra's fear originates from her distrust of the people she is sharing the apartment with. Her intuition is proven right the moment the day Nuri forgets to take the keys with him, and is incapable of going back due to the long distance.

She said, 'He came in here – Mr Fotakis. I thought it was you because you'd locked the door. I didn't know he had the key. He came in here and lay beside me, just where you are lying now. I realized it wasn't you because of the smell of his skin when he came closer to me, and I called out and he put his hand over my mouth and his ring scratched the side of my face, and he told me I should be quiet or you would come back and find me dead (Lefteri, 2019, p.216)

The raping incident has a harmful physical and mental effect on Afra. She feels betrayed by Nuri for forgetting to take the key with him and not saving her. Mr. Fotakis silences her, using the imbalanced power dynamic they have. She is not able to resist, and Nuri cannot react because they need him in order to reach Britain. This suffocates them both and cuts the string that ties them both to each other. Nuri starts avoiding Afra which deteriorates her self-perception and worth. Thus, she is more socially isolated than ever. After this incident, their fake passports are ready, and they get to leave in a couple of days, starting another long journey to their final destination, Britain.

Nuri and Afra's time in the council house in Britain marks the beginning of the healing journey and the reconstruction of the self. The council's structure provides an environment for the refugees to restructure their identities and lives. "'I find it very clean and safe,' I say, 'compared with other places' " (Lefteri, 2019, p.24). There is a noticeable shift in the quality of space. This shift changes the ground in which the reconstruction process is proceeding in. Through Nuri's narration, the image of the interior structure of the council house is clear. "I get a glimpse into some of the other residents' lives. Some have made their beds, while others have left their rooms in a mess. Some have trinkets on their bedside cabinets, precious things from a past life, and photographs on the dresser. Propped up without frames" (Lefteri, 2019, p.77). Each resident has a private room that mirrors their attachment to the past and their present state, which distinguishes each identity. Private rooms provide the residents with a

sense of autonomy and security, all of which create a proper environment for the establishment of a personal space. Those minor details collectively create a sense of safety and homeliness. Hence, it permits them to navigate their way toward personal adhesion.

Moreover, being able to access basic human rights, such as health care is a starting point in the process of transition from a lost refugee to an individual with social landmarks. This could be seen through this quote, "I contact Lucy Fisher and tell her about the problem at the GP surgery and she apologizes and says that she will bring the new documents tomorrow" (Lefteri, 2019, p.101). Lucy Fisher represents an authority that recognizes them and addresses their issues. Lucy is presented as a figure who is in charge of organizing the residents' affairs and guiding them through the transnational phase. She prioritizes their health and safety and listens to their needs. This recognition stems from including the refugees in their social structure by giving them a place in their social space. As a consequence, Nuri feels reassured, and his hope for Afra's recovery grows "She is calm and businesslike, and I like that Lucy Fisher is looking out for us" (Lefteri, 2019, p.101). The inclusion of refugees in the system is part of what Henri Lefebvre described as the "Right to the City". Refugees are granted the right to access the city and gradually become a substantial part of it. In this context, the council house does not function as a setting only. It further extends to propose the importance of spatial quality in the reconstruction of the refugee's social identity, as it provides them with space to acknowledge the reformatory process that they have been going through. It fosters an environment of safety that restores their sense of being part of a space, a space for the humanization of the refugee status.

During Nuri and Afra's time in the council house, signs of recovery start arising "Afra finally spoke. 'I made this for you,' she said" (Lefteri, 2019, p.121). Afra starts reconnecting with Nuri, and the safety of the council house endeavors a space for forgiveness. The arduous road that their relationship had to go through eventually settles in a recovery zone that is hosted by the council house. "The picture she had drawn was so different from her usual artwork – a flower-filled field overlooked by a single tree.' But how did you draw this?' I said.' I can feel the pencil marks on the paper" (Lefteri, 2019, p.121). Unlike her time in Greece, Afra accepts to draw again with comfort and freedom. Nuri's remark about the difference in style reflects the change that Afra as a person is going through, and she is self-regulating her habitus. She managed to adapt to her blindness and rekindle her relationship with art. Thus, she starts developing a sense of safety in the council house due to the coalescence of many spatial factors. The quality of interior design gave Afra a room to reconnect with other residents, she stepped out of her isolated space. This social reconnection is seen when "Afra and the Afghan woman are sitting on deckchairs beneath the cherry tree, by the bee" (Lefteri, 2019, p.222). The garden is a space that witnesses many scenes of connecting and reflection, and most specifically, the ending scene of the novel.

## 5. Conclusion

The present paper accentuates the vitality of space in refugee literature, as it offers an understanding of the journey of millions of refugees portrayed in fiction. The *Beekeeper of Aleppo* is analyzed in order to prove the deconstructive nature of the unjust spatial order that relies on exclusivity and separation. It emphasizes the significance of upgrading the spatial circumstances of refugees. Therefore, it scrutinizes the essentiality of providing them with qualitative change that regards their humanitarian needs. Nuri and Afra's journey to Britain in *The Beekeeper of Aleppo* symbolizes the journey to self-actualization. Britain is the place where they take their first step towards healing.

Refugees undergo marginalization, isolation, and social exclusion in their journey of forced displacement. The marginalization of refugees affects directly their mental and physical state and, by extension, their social identity, all of which is evident in Nuri and Afra's story. It stresses that social exclusion includes geographical and abstract aspects that structure society. However, throughout the novel, signs of the need for social connection are often present, which highlights the need for social space, especially in times of suffering. The process of racialization and reconstructing a social identity is in a precarious state due to spatial chaos and injustice. The spatial chaos inside refugee micro-communities is subdivided into interior chaos and exterior negligence. The lack of interior order and the absence of basic commodities dehumanize refugees and further detach them from their social identity. In addition, the exclusion of the refugee community from the dominant social space is a form of spatial injustice that is manifested in several urban cities. A class-segregated space disturbs the plausibility of potential interactions between refugees and citizens.

Consequently, the refugee struggles to reconcile with the temporal distance as the gap between the refugee and the host society enlarges. Neither Nuri nor Afra were able to reconstruct their sense of being and connect to their social habitus before reaching the council house in Britain. The change of space influences directly their perception of displacement. The design of the council houses creates a space for familiarization and homeliness. This shift in design gives hope to Nuri and Afra by making change more comfortable and safe. Ultimately, it underscores the role of "home" as a concept and how its fluid nature allows the refugees to adapt to new social spaces.

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