الهشاشة، وقابلية التعرض للأذى، والمسؤولية الأخلاقية في سرديات اللاجئين في الأدب الإنجليزي

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Precarity, Vulnerability, and Ethical Responsibility in Refugee Narratives of English Literature

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ملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة أهمية الأدب الإنجليزي المعاصر في سياق إعادة تشكيل أخلاقيات وسياسات النزوح، وذلك من خلال العلاقات المعقدة التي تربط بين مفاهيم الهشاشة، والقابلية للتأثر (أو الضعف)، والمسؤولية. وفي هذا الإطار، ومن خلال تحليل نقدي لرواية "الخروج إلى الغرب" (Exit West) للكاتب محسن حامد وكتاب "لا صديق سوى الجبال" (No Friend but the Mountains) للكاتب بهروز بوتشاني، ستوضح هذه الورقة كيف يعكس هذا الأدب قدرة اللاجئين على تجاوز قيود الأعمال الأدبية الأخرى عبر ابتكار خطابات جديدة تتمحور حول الفاعلية والأخلاق. كما تبحث الدراسة في كيفية تصوير هذا الأدب للاجئين بوصفهم ذواتاً تكشف مواطن الضعف في مفاهيم المواطنة والانتماء ضمن السياق العالمي، وذلك من خلال استكشاف الديناميات الخفية للحط من القيمة الإنسانية في سرديات الدول القومية. وتجادل الورقة بأن هذا الأدب يبيّن كيف تخلق الخطابات السردية الجمالية مساحات للمقاومة ضد عمليات الحط من القيمة في ظل الدول القومية العالمية. وبالاستناد إلى إطار نظري يربط

بين أطروحات جوديث بتلر حول الهشاشة والمسؤولية في الخطابات السردية الجمالية، تؤكد الدراسة أن هذا الأدب يقدم تأملاً في تلك الخطابات ويبتكر مساحات للمقاومة في مواجهة الحط من القيمة الإنسانية. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن هذا السرد يمثل فضاءً تخييلياً نقدياً لإعادة بناء سياسات الإنسانية في ظل تجربة عالمية للأزمات، وذلك في سياق العلاقة بين الخطابات الجمالية وممارسات النزوح؛ كما تخلص إلى أن هذا السرد يعكس الدور النقدي للأزمات داخل الخطابات الجمالية وضمن المساحات السردية الجذرية المرتبطة بالتجربة الإنسانية.

Abstract

This study explores the significance of contemporary English literature in the context of recreating the ethics and politics of displacement through complex relations between precarity, vulnerability, and responsibility. In this context, through a critical analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*, this paper will illustrate how this literature reflects the capacity of refugees to circumvent the limitations of other literature through inventing novel discourses of agency and ethics. The study will explore how this literature reflects refugees as subjects that disclose the vulnerabilities of citizenship and belonging in a global context through exploring how this literature reflects hidden dynamics of depreciation in narratives of nation-states. The paper will argue that this literature reflects how aesthetic discourses of narrative invent spaces for resistance against depreciation in global nation-states. Through a theoretical discourse in relation to Judith Butler's narrative of precarity and responsibility in aesthetic discourses of narrative, this paper will argue that this literature offers a reflection on aesthetic discourses and invents spaces for resistance in relation to human depreciation. The final argument of this study will conclude that this narrative serves as a critical imaginative space in relation to reconstructing the politics of humanity in a global experience of crisis in relation to aesthetic discourses and acts of displacement. The argument will conclude that this narrative reflects a critical role of crisis in aesthetic discourses within radical spaces of narrative in relation to human experience.

Introduction

The twenty-first century has brought into effect a new age of displacement that has been defined as an "age in which forced migration constitutes the political and moral horizon of a conception of global modernity." The crisis in refugees, in which over one hundred million forcibly displaced refugees are present within this world, not only

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displays that politics in this age is unstable but is indicative of a splitting in morality that is to be worked through. The question of displacement in the present age is the new normal and indicates the underlying structure of global capitalism and conflict. In these circumstances, literature opens as an imperative space within which the question of humanity within the absence of citizenship and displacement needs to be conceived and examined. The question of English literature offers an enabling site within which the question of refugees needs to be unearthed.

This study investigates the role of narratives of refugees in modern English literature in shaping ethics by considering Judith Butler's interconnected notions of precarity, vulnerability, and responsibility. Butler's ethics challenges the principles of humanism by stating that "we are constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies" (Butler 22). Precarity thus is not a condition of a few persons on the margin but an ontological position of being subject to others inequitably. The value of certain lives, especially those of refugees, is rendered ungrievable as it is determined by the politics of power that recognizes what life is worth as "human." Butler states that "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living" ("Frames of War" 15). The figure of the refugee thus represents the structural form of vulnerability within the global order.

The ethical problem that Refugee Stories in English Literature witnesses has been observed by these texts with an aesthetic observation that combines politics. For example, "*Exit West*" by Mohsin Hamid of 2017 and "*No Friend but the Mountains*" by Behrouz Boochani of 2018 illustrate two ends of two complementary scales of displacement. The first fiction novel illustrates the exit of people from war zones via "portals of doors," which usher those escaping refugees into world-class cities. The text by Boochani, writing clandestinely via text messages from an Australian detention center, subverts imprisonment into a meditational poetry of freedom and endurance. Both texts illustrate Butler's description of "the condition of being addressable," where "ethical life emerges from the acknowledgment of dependence on others" (Butler 42). These texts foreground the precarious and the excluded to compel the reader to reconceptualize the notion of responsibility outside the boundaries of nationhood, race, or juridical status.

The moral power of these texts lies in their refusal to reduce refugees to objects of pity or passive victims of circumstance. Rather, they illuminate "the systemic violence that brings precarity into being" (Butler 2). The question is not how to acknowledge the humanity of those different from us but how to rethink "the very terms through which recognition becomes

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possible" (Butler 2). Literature engages in this rethinking in that it challenges unitary definitions of citizenship. By its aesthetic language, literature reveals and makes manifest what is obscured in political rhetoric. Literature reveals this fragile web that connects human beings in a shared condition of need. Stories of refugees have an ethical role in that they convert witnessing into responsibility.

In the realm of literary scholarship, studies on refugees have been engaged by the concept of postcolonialism and transnationalism. For example, Homi Bhabha argues that the migrant experience 'becomes the paradigmatic figure for the modern condition' (Bhabha 13), while Edward Said argues that the experience of exile spawns 'an unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place' (Said 173). In particular, these theories have contributed much to the understanding of the concept of displacement. In contrast to these theories, which concretize the concept of displacement based on the principles of cultural narrative, Butler's philosophic approach emphasizes the ontic principles of vulnerability. For example, Butler argues that 'to be a body is to be exposed to others and at risk of violence' (Butler 26), an approach that emphasizes the principles of ethics being embedded within interdependence rather than an autonomistic framework. This research utilizes that approach and argues that the concept of refugee literature validates Butler's philosophic concept by giving it flesh within human experience.

For instance, in Boochani's memoir, the character responds to the circumstances by writing, "The prison destroys everything, yet within its walls we dream of humanity" (Boochani 112). The speech echoes Butler's statement that vulnerability can be a foundation for an ethics of 'resistance' instead of passivity. In both of these texts, the example of Nadia and Saeed's experience of displacement on an impossible path of migration shows that care and memory provide a strategy for survival. The experience of crossing borders in Nadia and Saeed's text shows that 'identity' is a discursive process and practice of 'evaluation' that is exposed to others. The above-mentioned strategies for display of care and for survival all embody Butler's formulation of "ethics based upon the recognition of relationality, loss of mastery, and persistence of dependence" (Butler 44). The figure of The Refugee in both novels represents a site of confluence of ethics and politics that not only encompasses vulnerabilities but is full of possibilities for survival.

The narrative strategies that are employed in both Hamid and Boochani's works remind us that "the form of literature is itself a place of ethical concern." In this context, for instance, the "disjointed text" of prose poetry in the works of Boochani reflects "the experience of physical

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displacement" that occurs through detention. Moreover, the shifts in narrative perspective in the works of Hamid disintegrate "the distinctions between individual and collective narrative." Similarly, all the above-mentioned narrative strategies can be interpreted as a symbol that represents "the constitutive opacity of the self. The impossibility of giving an account of oneself that includes the account of one's own origins and nature" (Butler 34). In these regards, Refugee Literature inscribes both life and narrative as precarious.

This hermeneutic approach considers literature an ethical pedagogy, an act of knowing by encounter. As Martha Nussbaum writes, "Literature enlarges our sympathies by enabling us to imagine the lives of others who differ from us" (Nussbaum 5). However, the work of refugee narratives extends far from sentimental sympathy and seeks instead an acknowledgment of implication within the structure of exclusion. Sara Ahmed supports such an understanding by stating that emotions "are not private possessions but social practices that shape the boundaries of selves and others" (Ahmed 10). The involvement of the reader in emotion thereby evolves within the domain of an ethics of encounter as finding itself situated within the ethical framework of global vulnerability.

In terms of methodology, this study employs a dialogical reading strategy that enables a dialogue between literature and philosophy. The ideas of Butler are incorporated in a dialogue that is conducted through narrative and theory. The strategy fits the citation of Butler that "responsibility is not chosen; it is imposed upon us by virtue of our relational existence" (Butler 91). As a result, reading refugee literature is a performative act of responsibility that recognizes that ethical subjects are produced in relation to the suffering of others.

The narrative is developed across multiple levels. The next section will elucidate the theoretic foundation underlying Butler's ethics of vulnerability. The subsequent section will encompass a literature review that aggregates pivotal interpretations within the domain of refugee studies to highlight the gap in the literature that this study aims to address. The analysis portion will consequently explore two more profound texts: *Exit West* and *No Friend but the Mountains*, and will present an analysis of selected texts that delve into the complexities associated with the confluence of vulnerability and moral imagination. The final portion will address the narrative mentioned above in relation to global ethics that reshape global citizenship through a communal foundation of vulnerability.

Ultimately, though, the significance of this research is that the experience of refugees in relation to English literature is more than just a witnessing

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to catastrophes. It is a moment in literature that reflects on a philosophical level how to actually be ethically alive in a world of inequality and exclusions. It is a reflection of a moment in this literature that reminds us that it is not only others that are alive in states of precarity, but that it is actually life itself. In doing so, these texts represent the ultimate role of literature as a reflection on being ethically alive. Literature has the primary role of turning witnesses into spectators.

Theoretical Framework

Judith Butler's work on precarity and vulnerability provides an important framework for investigating the role of narratives of refugees as rewriting ethics and politics of belonging in the modern world. In her work "Precarious Life", Butler states that "precarity occupies a politically induced position in which certain populations experience the failure of social and economic supports and become relatively exposed to injury and death as a form of structural violence" (Butler 25). The notion of precarity formulated by Butler opens up a viewpoint on vulnerability that goes further than the fragile nature of humanity. The figure of the refugees represents the extreme form of such a condition since it stands at the border of humanity and abandonment.

Butler states that it means to be human that we "are given over to others even before any possibility of choice" (Butler 82). This ontological dependence opposes her ethics to the liberalism that considers that it is precisely the relevance of liberty that founds the subject. In the narratives of refugees, exposure comes back as exposure to borders, to violence, and to the eyes of others. At the same time, it holds the power of an awakening of ethics. Through narratives that tell exposure, literature rebuilds the moral imagination that Butler sees as crucial to her ethics.

The concept of ethical responsibility in Butler's work owes a great deal to Emmanuel Levinas, who argues that "the face of the Other 'orders and ordains me through its presence'" (Levinas 198). For Levinas, the face stands for vulnerability and marks an infinite responsibility that proceeds from rational deliberation. The concept of ethics for Butler begins at the moment that we realize shared vulnerability with others, including those who politically escape understanding (Butler 43). The figure of the Refugee becomes representative of an ethics that is not a legacy of persecution and oppression but of those moments in political constructions where humanity itself is placed in a fragile position.

This specific phenomenon is related to Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life.' It refers to those people that have no political status but are still under the power of the state. The refugees' role is evident in Agamben's work as follows: "The refugee must be recognized for what he is in truth: 'no less

than a limiting concept that radically calls into question the very terms of the nation-state'" (Agamben 134). The theory of Butler is based on Agamben's ideas but adds new aspects not only regarding excluded subjects but relation as well. Specifically, it differs in that it points out where is the role of "vulnerability."

The connection between statelessness and philosophy can be made with a reflection on statelessness by Hannah Arendt. In "*The Origins of Totalitarianism*," she points to the effect of refugees without rights when she says that "The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but that they no longer belong to any community whatever" (Arendt 295). The intervention of Butler here turns that observation into an imperative of belonging that has to be redescribed outside the juridical and nationalist narratives.

In such a theoretical framework, vulnerability appears neither as weakness nor as a force that acts alone. As Butler argues, "Vulnerability does not denote passivity but a form of openness, a mode of being affected and affecting others" (Butler 15). In such a sense, vulnerability stands neither as a condition of weakness nor as an opportunity. The narratives of refugees offer an insight into the manner in which storytelling turns vulnerability into an opportunity.

This study follows that the proposed research utilizes the Butlerian framework to investigate the role of literature in mediating the moral relationship that exists within the reader-refugee dynamic. The texts that were chosen to represent an extension of Butler's moral philosophy-*Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *No Friend but the Mountains* by Behrouz Boochani represent the fictional reconceptualization of Butler's moral theories. In the two texts that were chosen for analysis, magical realism reconstructs the notion of precarity as a transnational affect that emphasizes the shared vulnerability that exists within the context of being. In contrast to magical realism's emphasis on the shared vulnerability of being that exists within the human condition of being refugees, that is, precarity and vulnerability, as the only alternative form of moral testimony within *No Friends but the Mountains*.

In short, this theoretical framework provides a hermeneutic foundation that condenses ethics, politics, and aesthetics. Butler's philosophy deconstructs the notion of separateness and re-conceptualizes responsibility as an affective and collective process. Refugee literature offers a moment of exposure that renders it central to the rearticulation of the concept of ethical responsibility in the new century.

Literature Review

Refugee narratives within current English literary scholarship have begun to explore the intersections of displacement, ethics, and aesthetics. The engagement with Judith Butler's framework of precarity, vulnerability, and ethics remains relatively unexamined within critical scholarship. The prevailing scholarship on refugees as a figure of loss appears relatively confined to the repositories of victimhood. The narrative scholarship on refugees unravels the primary currents of research on the subject while indicating Butler's framework as enabling of a relational engagement.

The early critical engagements were primarily with the testimonial and documentary role of refugee narratives. For example, Edward Said argues that exile entails “an unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place” and represents “a discontinuous state of being” (Said 173). Although Said's meditations aptly convey the psycho-traumatic aspect of exile, these may tend to define refugees in exclusively terms of loss. The notion of precarity elaborated by Judith Butler provides a politically and ethically more fruitful approach. She explains it as "a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler 25). Refugee narratives may thus be conceived as an ethical challenge that solicits a collective response rather than a compassionate expression.

Current scholarship has been highlighting affect and ethics within the analysis of the literature of refugees. For instance, Julia Kristeva writes that the "foreigner reminds us of our own unconscious, of our unrecognized self” (Kristeva 191), thus underscoring the moment of reflection implied within the encounter of the 'Other'. Similarly, Kelly Oliver writes that "witnessing needs to respond to vulnerability without mastering it” (Oliver 88), thus highlighting the potential contained within these narratives of refugees that offer mediations of interdependence.

Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* has been studied extensively for presenting migration as a global and universal phenomenon. Anna Hartnell states that "the novel poses migration not as an exceptional circumstance but as a universal human potential” (Hartnell 62), while Lyndsey Stonebridge states that "Mohsin Hamid translates the crisis of refugees into a meditation on shared vulnerability” (Stonebridge 145). However, these readings that presuppose the universal tend to ignore the performative aspect of Hamid's aesthetic choices that resonates through the prism of Butlerian theory. The narrative voice of *Exit West* contests the boundaries of security and threat, as well as those of home and exile, echoing Butler's notion that "no life is livable without social conditions that sustain it” (Butler 23).

Similarly, Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* has been analyzed for its testimonial and political value. Writing about Boochani's memoir, Omid Tofighian points out that "the text resists the language of the oppressor by reconfiguring suffering into a form of philosophical resistance" (Tofighian xvi), and it is a "decolonial text that dismantles Western epistemologies of confinement and freedom" (Ravenscroft 57). There has not been much analysis of Boochani's text in relation to vulnerability as a relational ethics concept, in addition to its status as a political and sociological factor. The relation between ontology and ethics that is derived from Butler's ideas on vulnerability opens up a novel perspective in relating to how Boochani operates and translates containment to a solicitation to his audience.

The ethical politics of refugee biographical writing has also been examined in relation to Robert Eaglestone and Gillian Whitlock. Eaglestone suggests that "ethical reading is a commitment to openness, to being unsettled by the text" (Eaglestone 126), while Whitlock suggests that "Refugee memoirs are soft weapons that disrupt political binarism through intimate narrative" (Whitlock 4). Although both ideas illuminate well the ethical power of narrative, they lack a thorough examination of how shared vulnerabilities can produce ethical obligation, an important aspect of Butler's ideas. For instance, Butler suggests that "the recognition that our lives are bound up with others whose circumstances we may never fully apprehend" is where ethics is made (Butler 49), meaning that literature can promote ethics through this relation.

Current literature that brings human rights rhetoric and literary writing into a more informed context follows. Farrier has noticed that "the literature of refugees in our time frequently stages the failure of human rights language to capture the lived reality of displacement" (Farrier 103), while Stonebridge argues that "literature keeps open a space of ethical inquiry when politics has foreclosed it" (Stonebridge 22). Although this literature recognizes literature as a site for ethical inquiry, it is important to note that a more insightful perspective focuses on how vulnerability enables ethical responsibility. The role of refugee literature is therefore twofold.

In this regard, trauma theory and affect theory have contributed to contemporary interpretations of refugee literature. Cathy Caruth affiliates trauma as not "simply the experience of the event itself, but is the response to the event in the other" (Caruth 9), while Lauren Berlant discusses "slow death" as "the reduction of life to its slower-moving moments" in societies ruled under neoliberal politics in relation to marginalized bodies (Berlant 95). In this context, and as a complementary

strategy to those ideas above and below, an ethics akin to those proposed in this argument can encompass both trauma and vulnerabilities in a different and more ethical fashion.

However, this is a field that is still largely undertheorized in relation to more expansive definitions of literature, and as a consequence, this dissertation seeks to fill this gap through its critical praxis that brings precarity and vulnerability as critical instruments to shed critical light on how literature translates political crisis and disaster into a scene of ethical reflection. In this study, accordingly, to critically produce a more complex reading of Hamid and Boochani side by side is to cross the disciplinary boundary that distinguishes literature as a fictional genre from its critical as well as more political functions that actualize a critical vision of "the obligation to preserve the lives of those who are not recognized as lives" (Butler 75).

Methodology

The current study adopts a qualitative and interactive-analytical methodology that relies on a genre of literary analysis facilitated by Judith Butler's ethical and political theory. The central concern is to critically analyze how contemporary refugee literature stages precarity and related interpretations of ethical and political responsibilities. The integration of this academic inquiry relies on a combination of close-reading strategies and theoretical aspects to decode the underlying ethical inferences in relation to the textual matter. As Rita Felski suggests, "literary analysis compels attention to the affective and evaluative aspects of reading that reveal how a text engages a reader's moral and ethical sensibility" (Felski 15). The methodology is in line with Judith Butler's claim that ethical responsivity is contingent upon a relationally exposed path and not a premeditated one (Butler 44).

Selection of Texts

The two works were chosen for their complementary perspective on life as a refugee in contemporary English literature. The works are Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) and Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018). The novel *Exit West* is a magical realist novel that discloses displacement as a common human experience. The memoir *No Friend but the Mountains* is a biographical work that discloses life in Manus Island detention centre in Australia. The two works were selected to provide a diverse perspective in relation to genre. The novel and memoir will enable a critical investigation into depicting ethical responsibility through different genres. As Hamid states: "The novel is concerned not only with the movement of refugees but with the ethical choices forced upon individuals in moments of dislocation" (Hamid 98).

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The memoir states that "In this prison, the story becomes the only way to assert existence and humanity" (Boochani 112).

Analytical Framework

The study relies on a triadic structure of precarity, vulnerability, and ethical responsibility developed by Judith Butler for its frameworks for analysis. Firstly, the concept of precarity, exposure to injury and deprivation as a political construct (Butler 25), serves as a critical discourses framework for this study to comprehend how literature is used to negotiate life as a refugee. Secondly, as a critical responsiveness to this context, Butler's theory of vulnerability is critical in applying its ideas to a study since it is not a passive condition but a relation of openness that makes ethics possible (Butler 26). Finally, ethical responsibility corresponds to a response to this precarious openness without domination (Butler 91).

The methodology involves three complementary analytical stages:

Close Textual Analysis: The texts are analyzed in relation to language and narrative structure and characterization. Here, different literary devices like metaphor in the narrative and narrative voice are isolated in relation to how they embody precarity and vulnerabilities. For example, "The magical doors in Hamid's novel represent a metaphor for imprecise and permeable borders that concern and illustrate Butler's point that 'our lives are bound up with others whose conditions we may never fully apprehend" (Butler 49). The narrative structure in "Boochani's prose-poetic text reflects a psychological dislocation prisoners experience in detention and hence expresses ethical duties through its narrative structure."

Theoretical Synthesis: The findings of this textual analysis are interpreted in relation to a theoretical synthesis that combines aspects of Butlerian theory with the viewpoints of Emmanuel Levinas regarding "the ethics of the Other" and Hannah Arendt in relation to "statelessness" (Arendt 295). Levinas states that "the face of the Other commands me and owes me to respond" (Levinas 198), a tenet that is reflected in both "Hamid" and "Boochani" when they find that their encounters with "vulnerability" demand a response that is informed through ethics.

Comparative Ethical Analysis: The comparison of the two textual works is conducted to identify similarities and differences in their approaches to ethical responsibility. The roles and interplay between imaginative narrative and experience are some of the aspects that will be considered. Furthermore, aspects that distinguish testimonial narrative from fictional narrative will also be looked into since literature is

considered to "keep open the space of ethical questioning when politics has foreclosed it" as suggested in a proposed theory by Stonebridge (22).

Rationale for Methodology

The interpretive-analytical approach is especially pertinent in examining the ethical aspects of refugee literature. The quantitative technique and/or sociological study can provide valuable insights into patterns related to migration movements. However, as a technique and/or discipline, it is not capable of examining affective-relational-imaginary maneuvers involved in ethical experience in literature. As Eaglestone suggests, "ethical reading of literature demands an involvement in the text and an attention to how narrative disputes pre- and/or post-constitutions and evokes thought" (Eaglestone 126). The above-mentioned technique focuses primarily on a close-reading procedure that is embedded in a theoretical framework.

Furthermore, applying Butler's philosophy in the analysis of literature allows this study to shift from more traditional interpretations that underpin purely humanitarian discourses. In this regard, thanks to this methodology, this study is rather focused on how this narrative relates to ethical engagement in the context of its enactment. As suggested by Boochani, "By writing, our fragile existence is turned into a place where demanding justice and proclaiming our humanity is possible" (Boochani 114). Similarly to Hamid's argument, this study shows that in this context of ethical engagement, this concern is not really related to universal precepts but is more focused on this aspect of risk in relation (Hamid 121).

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary sources are the full texts of *Exit West* and *No Friend but the Mountains*. Secondary sources are academic papers on refugee studies and ethics, as well as theoretical papers on how to critically analyze literature. The research relies on iterative cycles of reading where interpretations are constantly developed through theoretical thinking that can permit thematic patterns in ethical representation to emerge. The quotes from both sources are analyzed in relation to this theoretical perspective built from Butler's work.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Although this methodology can provide a deep insight into ethical representation in literature, it acknowledges certain limitations. The reading is thought to have an interpretive rather than an empirical foundation with regard to its scope. The results are pertinent to a text specifically selected to study and not to all literature in relation to

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refugees in a broader context. Furthermore, when literature talks about human suffering to a deep extent, a sensitive and critical concern for representation is required in relation to ethical representation. As Ahmed argues, "ethical engagement requires acknowledgment of the relationality of affect, rather than its objectification" (Ahmed 10).

Analysis

The analytic approach to this inquiry is focused on the works *Exit West* (2017), by Mohsin Hamid, and *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018), by Behrouz Boochani. The reason for this is that both works reflect distinctive but complementary approaches in relation to refugee studies. Both works highly value the political and ethical connotations of refugees and have distinctive approaches towards narrative that expose different facets of reality regarding precarity.

Precarity and Displacement in *Exit West*

In *Exit West*, Hamid situates the experience of refugees in a speculative and global context that points not only to the universalization of precarity but to its uneven distribution. The thematic conceit in *Exit West*, the doors for transportation to other borders, translates to a situation in which refugees are simultaneously present and absent. Hamid tells us, "When the doors open, it is always at night, and people have to step through with blind trust" (Hamid 23). The above metaphor encapsulates exilic ontological insecurities and symbolizes Butler's contention that "precarity is a politically induced condition in which certain populations are differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler 25). The refugees' journey through doors points to not only individual vulnerabilities but to some extent, even relational aspects of vulnerabilities in which "their continued life is rendered possible through a web of shared patterns and textures" and through some "ethical attention directed to that life" (Butler 25).

The affective labor of ethical responsibility is a role that is examined in Hamid's narrative. The two protagonists in Hamid's novel are Nadia and Saeed. The two have to deal with challenges surrounding migration while offering enough attention to one another in a relationship. As Hamid argues, "Love, in a time of crisis, becomes an act of witnessing and sustaining the other" (Hamid 98). There is a connection between this narrative and Butler's argument that "To be a body is to be exposed to others and at risk of violence" (Butler 26). Therefore, in making the bodies within this narrative exposed within a personal as well as political context, Hamid believes that this experience of precarity is not merely a symbol for suffering but can actually initiate a reflective and relational process of thinking through ethics.

The novel primarily critically explores issues of national identity and a sense of belonging. In "*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*" and "*The Property*," Hamid has depicted that politics associated with borders are arbitrary and morally complex. In this context, when refugees migrate to a new city, they experience either welcome and acceptance or rejection and hostility. In this scenario, as argued by Butler in "*Frames of War*," "specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living" (Butler 15). The narrative of displacement in Hamid's novel manifests this tenet in that refugees are in a zone between two states in which their status as human life is always under negotiation.

Vulnerability and Ethical Responsibility in No Friend but the Mountains

In contrast to the speculative possibilities related to Hamid's narrative, a testimonial and poetic response to detention on Manus Island is expressed in Boochani's memoir. The text itself is a manifestation of this fragmentation as a reaction to detention. Therefore, "The prison destroys everything, yet within its walls, we dream of humanity" (Boochani 112). The above claim is a possibility that is informed in critical theory proposed by Butler in a suggestion that in a scenario where bodies are made as fragile as possible, a human reaction to engagement is possible (Butler 44).

The significance of witnessing is evident in this narrative. The act of writing and storytelling is one that elevates witnessing to a discourse of ethics that exists between the individual and a universal. As Butler states, "'Responsibility is not chosen; it is imposed upon us by virtue of our relational existence'" (Butler 91). The significance of writing that represents this tenet makes this audience conscious of its own involvement in this ethics. As Boochani argues, "To tell the story is to assert that we exist, that our lives matter" (Boochani 114).

The memoir can also be analyzed in the context of the structural aspects of precarity. The role of detention is that of a tool of social and political effacement; it makes refugees stateless and "ungrievable." In this context, it is important to note that "the problem is not simply how to recognize the humanity of those who are different, but how to reorganize the very terms through which recognition becomes possible" (Butler 2). The strategies in this refugee memoir attest to this reorientation and work to rebuild these terms through its poetic and testimonial structure in a manner that makes refugees' humanity morally apprehensible.

Comparative Insights: Fiction and Testimony

By comparison between the two texts, one can identify the complementary strategies that literature employs to perform a kind of ethics as if according to Butler. In Hamid's speculative novel, this is achieved through the universalization of vulnerability in a precarity that overcomes borders and social inequalities. In contrast to this universal presentation in *Exit West*, a more concrete and political understanding of this same concept is developed in No Friend but the Mountains, a text that makes this performative action through witnessing and narrative. Thus, as a whole, "ethical life is inseparable from the recognition of others and the conditions of their vulnerability" (Butler 44).

Both of these works resist political discourses that reduce refugees to less than human. The doors in Hamid's narrative disrupt national borders and definitions of citizenship as a privileged right. The memoir in Boochani's writing reveals "the experience of detention as a structure of suffering that occurs through a systematic and pervasive denial of humanity" and challenges the states that perpetuate this denial. Both works illustrate a definition of vulnerability and precarity as more than a condition to be suffered but as an opportunity for ethical address: "To be addressed by the suffering of others is to be called to respond" (Butler 43).

Ethical Imagination and Literary Form

The more formal strategies of both texts underscore their ethical undertones. Hamid's evocative narrative voice slipping effortlessly between magical and social realism corresponds to the very uncertain dynamics of contemporary global migration. Boochani's poetic text manifests its vulnerabilities through its self-disrupting structure to register both the displacement and resilience of detained refugees. As Butler suggests, "the ethical relation is performative; it emerges through acts, gestures, and practices that recognize interdependence" (Butler 42). In this regard, ethics and aesthetics converge in a performative mode that engages both writers to critically shape and train the reader's sensibility to note and respond to precarity.

In a critical reading of *Exit West* and No Friend but the Mountains, this thesis demonstrates that refugee literature serves as a site of ethical and political interruption. Hamid and Boochani construct precarity not only as a site of suffering but as a relation that must be recognized and that warrants a response. Both novels illustrate how a triadic structure can construct a politics of vulnerability as a relation, precarity as a political effect, and ethical obligation as a relation of interdependence. Through its engagement of the reader in this ethical relation, this thesis argues that refugee literature can reshape a politics of morally imagining and that human relations have continued importance in a politics of crisis.

Discussion

The reading of *Exit West* and *No Friend but the Mountains* shows that contemporary refugee literature has a dual role in that it not only testifies to the status of precarity of refugees but is itself a site of relational ethics that urges a response to this precarity. The role of this study in highlighting the ideas of precarity and relational ethics developed in Butler's work is to show that literature is not simply a passive reflection of crisis but an active site of politics. As Butler argues, "to be addressed by the suffering of others is to be called to respond" (Butler 43), and this calling is precisely what is dramatized in Hamid and Boochani's works.

Hamid's employment of magical realism blurs national and spatial frameworks to equate the refugee experience with a universal human condition. Nadia and Saeed's experience through magical doors symbolizes the unstable status of displacement in the contemporary world. Saeed says of magical doors that "the doors opened at night, and one had to step through without knowing where they led" (Hamid 23), indicating both the risks and possibilities involved in a life in displacement. The novel brings together the human experience of displacement in a way that corresponds with Butler's argument that this experience is a universal relational experience and a universal ethical concern (Butler 25).

Conversely, in Boochani's memoir, precarity is framed in relation to lived experience in detention, specifically in relation to systemic exclusion and the effacement of political subjects. The writing is fractured and poetic and conveys a fragility as well as a moment of agency in that it recognizes that a commitment to ethical obligation is not simply made in witnessing suffering but is made in acknowledging those frameworks that produce that suffering. Boochani argues that "To tell the story is to assert that we exist, that our lives matter" (Boochani 114), highlighting how this is in line with Butler's argument that a commitment to ethical obligation acknowledges lives socially and politically marginalized (Butler 91).

Both works shed light on the connection between vulnerability and ethical responsibility. Hamid makes this vulnerability universal and challenges his audience to resonate with it in relation to displacement in general, while Boochani ties it to real-world instances of experience. Both works thus suggest Butler's point that "vulnerability does not denote passivity but a form of openness, a mode of being affected and affecting others" (Butler 15). Thus, literature about refugees acts as a platform to perform this ethical response through which a connection is made between a response and the precarious experience in the story.

Furthermore, this literature interrogates and subverts pre-existing political and legal discourses. Hamid undermines traditional discourses of citizenship and borders, and Boochani problematizes detention as a dehumanizing apparatus that is capable of reducing one's humanity to a mere liability. In this regard, Butler argues that for ethical responsibility to occur, it is paramount for recognition to happen. As she says: "Specific lives cannot be apprehended as injured or lost if they are not first apprehended as living" (Butler 15). Literature peculiarly enables this since it brings to the fore "precarious" lives that are beyond the imaginative parameters of political discourses.

Moreover, this study can contribute to the field of refugee studies and literary criticism as it is demonstrated that ethical obligation is both affective and cognitive. In this context, as Oliver rightly points out, "Witnessing demands that we respond to the vulnerability of others without mastering or appropriating it" (Oliver 88). In this context, this is reflected in all of the sources examined in this study, as all of them point to a perspective where one can identify with the vulnerable perspective of a refugee without appropriating others. In this context, literature has a transformative role to play.

Conclusion

This study has established that contemporary refugee literature engages in a deep and meaningful fashion with Judith Butler's theory of precarity, vulnerability, and ethical responsibility through works like Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and *No Friend but the Mountains* by Behrouz Boochani. The two works represent refugees as politically and ethically intelligible subjects in whom their displacement reveals the deep structural inequalities and vulnerabilities that underlie contemporary displacement. The two works therefore make a socially and politically fringe group's vulnerabilities and precarity apparent in a way that forces a reaction through ethical imperative.

The above analysis reveals that literature is an ethical intervention in itself since it converts instances of suffering into opportunities for reflective thought and ethical and political commentary. The fictional imagination of Hamid universalizes the precariousness of refugees and seeks to inspire a global response, while the testimonial poetry of Boochani seeks to actualize precarity and demands a response. The two works illustrate how a narrative out of refugees can produce an ethics that links aesthetics and politics and supports Butler's argument that "our lives are bound up with others whose conditions we may never fully apprehend" (Butler 49).

Moreover, this study has a role in offering a mode and a model in relation to the analysis of literature within a refugee context. The mode incorporates a theory related to Butler and offers a perspective that argues that ethical obligation in literature is a performative practice that is indexical and in response to structural inequities. In literature, refugees are not passive subjects but rather actors.

In conclusion, this study has established and proved that the literature of refugees holds a transformative effect in not only registering displacement and suffering but in making an earnest effort to promote ethical consciousness as well. In a world that is witnessing statelessness and political disenfranchisement as a common trait, the literature of refugees makes people aware that ethics and human brotherhood are not inherent but emerge as a response to recognition. Therefore, as Butler states: "Vulnerability is the condition of human life; ethical responsibility arises when we recognize it in others" (Butler 44); and this is precisely what makes literature of refugees a place of supreme significance in charting out a strategy to tackle the ethical challenges that arise in our contemporary world.

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