

Demythologizing the ‘Homeland’ in Khaled Hosseini’s *And the Mountains Echoed*

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Abstract

*The notion of the ‘homeland’ is one of the building blocks of diaspora studies. The pioneers of the field emphasized the idealization/mythologizing of the ancestral homeland by the diaspora members. This paper contends that Khaled Hosseini, the Afghan American writer challenges the argument foregrounded by the diaspora scholars that home is always idealized/mythologized by the diaspora. In his latest novel *And the Mountains Echoed* Hosseini adopts a critical attitude towards his homeland country Afghanistan which results in producing an anti-mythic portrayal of the homeland rather than one that is “mythic.*

Key Words

Diaspora - Khaled Hosseini – *And the Mountains Echoed* –
Homeland – Afghanistan diaspora

The notion of diaspora first used in the classical world has acquired renewed importance in the late twentieth century as diaspora has become a high profile concept in the academic field since its emergence in the 1990s. This is not surprising taking in consideration the nonstop movement of people from one place to another for a variety of reasons. “Once the term applied principally to Jews, Armenians and Africans. Now at least thirty ethnic groups declare that they are diaspora or are so deemed by others” (Cohen 1996: 507). Beside the increase in the number of diasporic groups, the term also witnessed “a dispersion in disciplinary and social space” as Brubaker explains:

Within the academy the term is now used throughout the humanities and social sciences. A sampling of forty recent dissertations showed that they were distributed among forty five different fields and subfields of history, literature, anthropology and sociology through Black studies, women’s studies, religion, communication, folklore and education, to art history, cinema, dance, music and theatre. (2005: 4)

Such proliferation within the humanities has been central to the development of the field. It produces various analyses from very different scientific positions: “some researchers can put the label “diaspora” to a group of people by referring to their history (exile, existence of a collective trauma) or by considering the religion and a memory of the homeland, some others can make this choice in regards of the density of the social relationships in a dispersed group” (Anteby-Yemini & Berthomière 2005: 262).

Literature in particular has a unique relevance to the disciplinary nature of the field. Khachig Tololyan, one of the leading theorists of diaspora and the editor of *Diaspora* the first specialized journal on the field, acknowledges that “the study of literature and mass culture and the new digital media must be brought closer to the work of social scientists” engaged in the theorization of the field since “it helps to constitute the diasporic individual subject who is drawn to others sharing the same mediated subjectivity” (2012: 9). He further insists on the opposition between diaspora studies as practiced by theorists and the study of diaspora conducted by members of the diaspora.

Conceding to Tololyan's opinion the present research paper attempts to examine the diasporic experience as represented by Khaled Hosseini, the Afghani American writer, in his latest novel *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013). The paper contends that Hosseini's novel challenges the argument foregrounded by the diaspora theory that home is always idealized/mythologized by diaspora members. The paper aims to show that there is another stance that some diasporic writers assume towards their homeland, one that is critical rather than mythical, which results in producing an 'anti-mythic' portrayal of the homeland rather than one that is 'mythic'. It should be noted that Afghani diaspora is ignored in diaspora critical theorization in spite of the fact that “the last two decades of the twentieth century witnessed the largest migration of the Afghanistani population in modern history as more than six million people migrated to neighboring countries, and to North America, Europe and Australia” (Bezhan 2014: 239) which is considered a gap in the field.

The theory of diaspora studies forms the conceptual framework of this research paper. The concept of the 'homeland' as proposed by the leading theorists of the field specifically William Safran, Robin Cohen and Khachig Tololyan as well as the opposing views of Avtar Brah and Floya Anthias, among others, provide the theoretical base of the research. So the concept of the homeland which is one of the building blocks of diaspora studies will be thoroughly delineated in the first part of the research. This is followed by the analysis of *And the Mountains Echoed*. The analysis focuses on underlining Hosseini's critical representation of the socioeconomic conditions and sociopolitical issues governing the Afghani society since the mid of the last century up till now. The research argues that it is this perception and critique of societal realities in Afghanistan that make it impossible for Hosseini to idealize his homeland Afghanistan, an attitude that is not yet recognized by diaspora theorists.

Homeland in Diaspora Studies

The word diaspora derives from the Greek dia-‘through’ and speirein, ‘to scatter’. The word embodies a notion of a center- a home

from where the dispersion occurs. The word is often associated with the dispersion of the Jews after the Babylonian exile. As a result it was very difficult for the pioneers of the field to ignore the Jewish experience which led them to define diaspora in a specific way. One of the first scholars to establish the main criteria of the classical theory is William Safran, in his short article: “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return” (1991) marking the beginning of contemporary diaspora studies. Safran was strongly influenced by the case of the Jewish diaspora referring to them as the ‘ideal type’ (1991: 85) but correctly perceiving that many other ethnic groups were experiencing similar circumstances. The Jewish experience, however, continues to influence Safran’s definition of the diasporic communities. For him members of a diaspora idealized their ancestral home and were committed to the restoration of the original homeland. In his essay (1991) Safran defines the diaspora as “expatriate minority communities”:

1. that are dispersed from an original “center” to at least two “peripheral” places;
2. that maintain a “memory,” vision or myth about their original homeland;
3. that “believe they are not – and perhaps cannot be – fully accepted by their host country;”
4. that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return when the time is right;
5. that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland, and;
6. of which the group’s consciousness and solidarity are “importantly defined” by this continuing relationships with the homeland. (83)

Adopting the Jewish experience as the archetypal model leads Safran, thus, to stress the vital importance of the mythologizing of the homeland by diaspora members:

The myth of a common origin acts to ‘root’ a diasporic consciousness and give it legitimacy. The more ancient and venerable the myth, the more useful it is as a form of social distancing from other ethnic groups and a means of affecting an air of difference, perhaps superiority, even in the teeth of dispossession and discrimination. (Cohen 2008: 165)

Mythologizing results in “an idealization of the supposed ancestral home. The myths of a common origin are often territorialized, while highly romantic fantasies of the ‘old country’ are fabulated and avowed” (Cohen 2008: 165).

Robin Cohen in 1996 stresses that “if it is necessary to take full account of this tradition (Jewish/victim diaspora), it is also necessary to

transcend it” (Cohn 1996: 512). He, however, underlines in his book *Global diasporas: an introduction* (1997) the lack of theorization in the publication about diasporas and suggests that the “Jewish archetypal” could be a starting point even if it could not apply to other models of diasporic communities. His list of the ‘common features’ of diaspora that appeared in his writings since 1996 stresses and emphasizes the idealized relation between the diaspora and the homeland: “a key feature of many diasporas is the idealization of the real or putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation” (Cohn 2008: 104).

The emphasis on an original homeland by Safran and Cohen and other scholars of the field is opposed by many theorists. Many scholars like Clifford (1996), among others, warns against making the Jewish experience the “ideal type” of diaspora as it limits the possibilities of the field. Others like Avtar Brah and Floya Anthias question the ability of the classical theory to accommodate the diverse experiences of many diaspora groups into the available framework. Objections against Safran’s categories are summarized by Anna Harutyunyan (2012) as follows:

- By placing these categories at the center of the theory there is a risk of homogenizing and essentializing the diverse experience, memories and representations within the group itself. (5)
- Since the diaspora-homeland relationship is often seen from the perspective of the so called “solar system” where the diaspora is viewed as a ‘periphery’ connected and belonging to one ‘center’ namely homeland, classical diaspora theory ... pay[s] too much attention to the dispersal of people from the center without challenging the notions of the center in and of itself: where was the homeland? What do we remember as the homeland/center? From which historical moment do we proceed when connecting today’s diaspora group with the homeland? How was life before migration? How and where people live? (7)

These ‘social constructionists’ as they are called by Cohen (2007: 2) seek to deconstruct the myth of the idealization of the homeland and the discourses of fixed origin, they do not, however, offer an alternative paradigm. Nonetheless, Avtar Brah, underlines a “homing desire” which is different from a desire for a homeland while home itself becomes a poetic place:

Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a

place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day ...all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations. (1996: 188)

She insists, however, that the question of ‘origins’ be treated as “historically constituted displacements” and not “in naturalized and essentialist terms” (Brah 1996: 188).

Under the sway of such criticisms “a re-questioning and a more sophisticated understanding of shifts in the homeland–diaspora relationship” (Cohen 2007: 3) emerged. As a result three main versions of home/homeland come to be designated by Cohen: “solid (the unquestioned need for a homeland), ductile (an intermediate, more complex, idea of homeland) and liquid (a post-modernist rendition of virtual home)” (Cohen 2007: 4). These three categories, this paper argues, marks a gap in the theorization of diaspora as it overlooks other possible but different views of the homeland that could emerge in the diasporic imagination.

In *And the Mountains Echoed* Hosseini opposes the classical notions of the diaspora-homeland relationship. In his narrative Hosseini scrutinizes the center, Afghanistan, exposing the conditions under which the Afghani people lived since the mid of the twentieth century till now deconstructing the classical notions of the mythologizing of the homeland by the diaspora members. In 2004 Hosseini writes in an email to his friend the Afghani scholar Mir Hekmatullah Sadat in which he says

The romanticized Afghanistan that lives in the mind of our parents (and in my own childhood memory) probably never existed. That society had warts and pimples that no one talked about and that strangely, no one talks about to this day. (Sadat 2004)

In his narrative, Hosseini decides to talk about those “warts and pimples’ that have disfigured the face of his homeland Afghanistan since the mid of the twentieth century till the present time. He sets out to deconstruct the ‘romanticized Afghanistan’ by exposing the impairments of the sociopolitical, socioeconomic and sociocultural foundations of the Afghani society.

Pre-War Era

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, Brah is of opinion that “it is important to examine the circumstances of leaving of

the different diasporic communities if the concept of diaspora is to serve as a useful heuristic device.” Stressing this point she states that “it is axiomatic that each empirical diaspora must be analyzed in its historical specificity”. In this way the “diasporic community’ is differently imagined under different historical circumstances” (Brah 1996: 180). In the light of Brah’s opinion Hosseini’s excavation of the past becomes crucial in understanding his anti-mythic representation of his homeland. Hosseini begins his novel in the 1950s Afghanistan where he unearths the poverty and the cruelty of living in the rural regions as well as the hypocrisy, oppression and violence ruling the westernized Afghani society residing in urban Kabul. He then uncovers the atrocities of the war or rather the wars era of the late twentieth century Afghanistan. Finally he ferrets out the unchanged conditions of the life in Afghanistan in the 21st century where the present echoes the impairments of the past.

The narrative opens in the year 1952 with the two central characters, the brother and sister Abdullah and Pari when they are children living in a remote, poor fictional Afghan village. Abdullah is 10, and his sister, Pari, is 3. He has taken care of her since their mother died giving birth to her. The children live with their father, Saboor, and their stepmother. The family is very poor, and Saboor feels frustrated in a world that seems oblivious of his misery: Looking at his father Abdullah notices that

Father had hardness in him. His eyes looked out on the same world as Mother’s had, and saw only indifference. Endless toil. Father’s world was unsparing. Nothing good came free. Even love. You paid for all things. And if you were poor, suffering was your currency. (24)

Saboor pays for his poverty in the most painful ways possible: the death of his newly born child and the selling of his daughter. Saboor’s baby has died from cold. In fact “He was one of three babies that brutal winter had taken in Shadbagh” (21). Abdullah knows that his father blames himself for the death of his child:

Abdullah knew that Father blamed himself for Omar. If he had found more work, or better work, he could have bought the baby better winter clothes, heavier blankets, maybe even a proper stove to warm the house. This was what Father thought. He hadn’t said a word to Abdullah about Omar since the burial, but Abdullah knew. (28)

Feeling guilty for the death of his son, Saboor tries to save the other two by selling Pari his daughter now that winter is “lurking around the corner” (30). One day he takes Pari and Abdullah on a long trip to the city of Kabul, where their Uncle Nabi works for the wealthy Wahdati family.

Suleiman and Nila Wahdati are rich but have no children. Saboor lets Nabi persuade him to allow the Wahdatis adopt Pari, so she is left with them to grow up. So Saboor had to sell his 3 years old daughter Pari to the Wahdatis to ensure the survival of his other two sons Abdullah and Iqbal. Apologizing to Abdullah, his stepmother tells him: “It had to be her. I am sorry Abdullah. She had to be the one” (48) sacrificed, leaving her father “diminished... stripped of something essential” (46) in the eyes of his son.

Through Saboor’s family Hosseini exposes the sociopolitical and socioeconomic foundations of the Afghani society that hinder its development since the beginning of the 20th century. The poverty of rural Afghanistan is certainly one of these socioeconomic foundations. Sadat explains that the British colonial policies at the beginning of the century aimed to isolate Afghanistan in order to prevent the nation to develop and grow economically. “This isolation also affected other areas of society. For example, literacy, educational levels attained, and health services were lower and not widely accessible in rural areas” (Sadat 2006: 36) especially that most villages were isolated due to the bad infrastructure and a lack of security which increased the deprivation of the countryside. The immense poverty of rural Afghanistan leaves Hosseini unable to idealize his homeland.

Furthermore and due to sociocultural factors modernizations supported by the urban educated elite throughout Afghanistan’s history “met with severe resistance from the conservative and predominantly illiterate population in the countryside, where an opposition to centralized authority still prevails today” (Brakmaan 2005:12). This results not only in the immense poverty of rural Afghanistan but also in “an urban-rural divide and uneven development throughout the country, leading to economic and sociopolitical tensions between the center and periphery” (Sadat 2012: 36), taking in consideration that the rich urban educated elite “consisted of approximately 3 thousand persons in the early 1970s” and “[t]he entire middle class numbered perhaps 1 million people.” This means that “[o]nly a fraction of the total population of Afghanistan belonged to the elite and middle classes” (Braakman 2005: 13) and inhabit Kabul oblivious of the rest of Afghanistan. Nila Wahdati describes the situation rather aptly: “Kabul is an island, really. Some say its progressive and that may be true. It’s true enough... but it’s also out of touch with the rest of this country” (40). Such dichotomy could not result in a ‘romanticized’ society nor a mythologized homeland in Hosseini’s diasporic imagination.

The sharp difference between the rural and urban areas is represented by the immense wealth of Wahdati family who adopts Pari.

Residing in Kabul, the Wahdatis represent the rich urban elite. When Nabi, Abdullah's and Pari's uncle and one of the multiple narrators in the narrative, first entered the kitchen of the Wahdati's house as a full-time cook and a chauffeur his "mouth fell wide open. I thought it had been built large enough to feed all of my home village of Shadbagh. I had a six-burner stove, a refrigerator, a toaster, and an abundance of pots, pans, knives, and appliances at my disposal" (75). The house itself, which is "big enough to contain at least half the homes in Shadbagh" (36)

shone sparkling white in those days, as if sheathed with diamonds. The front gates opened onto a wide asphalt driveway. One entered into a high-ceilinged foyer decorated with tall ceramic vases and a circular mirror framed in carved walnut... The marble floor of the living room glistened and was partly covered by a dark red Turkoman carpet. (75)

When Abdullah and Pari visit the Wahdatis' house with their father on the day Pari is sold, Abdullah spies a bathroom with a porcelain toilets that reminds him of "the hours [he spends] every week lugging buckets of water from Shadbagh's communal well, marveled at a life where water was just a twist of the hand away" (37). Sitting on a couch with gold tassels, Abdullah "had never in his life been so conscious of his own dirtiness" (37). The Wahdatis' house is in sharp contrast to Saboor's "low-ceilinged mud house" that contains one main room separated from the kitchen by a "cloudy plastic sheet" (39). The juxtaposition of the Saboor's poverty and the Wahdatis' wealth demarcates the dichotomy between the rich and the poor and the urban and the rural Afghanistan.

Historically the rich elite class came into being during the reign of King Ammaulah (1919-1928) who wanted to modernize Afghanistan:

Shah Amanullah wanted to modernize Afghan society along the successful example of what Mustafa Kemal Ataturk had achieved in Turkey. The Amani government initiated major transformations in Afghanistan's political institutions and societal traditions. (Sadat 2006: 68)

He also "established the Ministry of Education and not only gave men the right to an education but created an opportunity for women to be educated by opening the first girls' school, Essmat Lycee, in 1921 and sent females to study in Muslim countries such as Turkey" (Sadat 2006: 68). Although the state and the Afghan elite followed the modernization project very strictly yet "the pressure to improve the terrible sociopolitical and sociocultural conditions through western-inspired ideals clashed with the indigenous and traditional practices, which had held together Afghan society for centuries" (Sadat 2006: 68). The result as conceived by

Hosseini is a backward impoverished rural society and a hypocrite urban elite class. Hosseini represents the urban elites as hypocrites, passive and oppressed. Nila's father is a clear example:

And he always wore a suit, again no matter the weather. Perfectly tailored, sharp creases. A fedora too. And wingtips, of course, two-toned. He was handsome, I suppose, though in a solemn way. Also—and I understood this only much later—in a manufactured, slightly ridiculous, faux-European way—complete, of course, with weekly games of lawn bowling and polo and the coveted French wife, all of it to the great approval of the young progressive king. (196)

Although Nila's father follows the king's plan of modernization and adopts the apparent gestures of modernization but deep down inside customs and traditions hold firm grip. When her mother leaves and Nila tries to adopt the progressive ideas by which she was raised, clashes erupt between her and her father:

There were strains between us. We were quarreling. Quite a lot, which was a novelty for him. He wasn't accustomed to being talked back to, certainly not by women. We had rows over what I wore, where I went, what I said, how I said it, who I said it to. I had turned bold and adventurous, and he even more ascetic and emotionally austere. We had become natural opponents. (208)

Her 'modern' father still holds the traditional patriarchal attitude towards women. Nila says

I was angry about the attitude that I had to be protected from sex. That I had to be protected from my own body. Because I was a woman. And women, don't you know, are emotionally, morally, and intellectually immature. They lack self-control, you see, they're vulnerable to physical temptation. They're hypersexual beings who must be restrained lest they jump into bed with every Ahmad and Mahmood. (212)

Gender oppression is a manifestation of the hypocrisy of the rich elite urban class and another testimony to the 'myth' of the 'romanticized society' of Hosseini's youth.

Patriarchally oppressed, Nila rebels by having affairs with the wrong persons, arranging "**clandestine rendezvous and slip[ing] away from home**" (208). As a result her father would punish her with "**his belt, or a closed fist. He'd chase me around the room. I suppose he thought he could terrorize me into submission**" (209). However, she insists on rebelling and asserting her freedom through writing "**long,**

scandalous poems dripping with adolescent passion” (209). As if physical punishment is not enough, her father takes a decision to abscise her womb after an illness that is never defined which leaves her “**Unspeakably depressed**” feeling “**disoriented, suspended in confusion, stripped of [her] compass**” (214). She escapes the patriarchy of her father by marrying Suleiman Wahdati whom she finds in love with his chauffeur. So when her husband falls ill she leaves him paralyzed to settle in Paris.

Floya Anthaias argues in her article ‘Evaluating ‘diaspora’: beyond ethnicity’ that

The concept of diaspora, whilst focusing on transnational processes and commonalities, does so by deploying a notion of ethnicity which privileges the point of ‘origin’ in constructing identity and solidarity. In the process it also fails to examine transethnic commonalities and relations and does not adequately pay attention to differences of gender and class. (1998: 564)

By giving Nila a voice and making her one of the multiple narrators in the narrative, Hosseini continues to demythologize his homeland in which women were and still are oppressed and dehumanized. In fact her life story is given in the form of memories that she recounts while in Paris to a journalist who is writing an article on her as a poetess. Hosseini gives these memories distinction by writing them in bold font to stand out from the other narratives in the book. These memories are the memories of the diasporic Nila of her homeland Afghanistan of the mid of the twentieth century. Women sometimes cannot idealize the place of origin. Anthais emphasizes this point: “{Women} may have a different relation to the nation or ethnic group since they are not represented by it and are generally in a subordinate relation to hegemonic men who are also classed” (Anthais 1998: 565). Gender oppression, then, is another lens through which Hosseini’s demythologization of the homeland can be seen.

“Fiction should discuss topics that people are not comfortable discussing” says Hosseini in one of his interviews (Carter 2011). So he keeps exposing the flaws of the progressive elites of the 1950s. Suleiman Wahdati is one of them. Although he is “a decent man” (100) but he is too disinterested and detached. His wife describes him as “a brooding old man trapped in a younger man’s body” (102). His entrapment may be the result of social repression. He is in love with Nabi his chauffeur: “He could not have chosen a worse time or worse place to be born the way he was” (215), his wife says. Suleiman is equally repressed as his wife Nila is but he is too passive to do anything about it. He wastes his life drawing

pictures of Nabi without telling him condemning himself “to the pain of a life suppressed, of happiness never to be” (119). He finds courage to confess his love to Nabi years later when his mother dies and he is paralyzed. Unlike Nila, Suleiman Wahdati does not narrate his story. It is Nabi who narrates it, as if Hosseini wants to keep him at a distance to assert his passivity and his paralysis. The only time that Suleiman Wahdati comes to life and expresses emotions is when he confesses his love to Nabi. The elite class is severely criticized in Hosseini’s diasporic imagination.

In his forward of *Snapshots: This Afghan-American Life*, Tamim Ansary, a co-editor of the book, writes: “When Afghan Americans sit down at the keyboard to compose, their thoughts are drawn inevitably to the destruction of the world their parents were born into” (Ansary 2010: ix) emphasizing the particularity of the Afghan diaspora resulting from the political background of Afghanistan. Hosseini as a member of the Afghani diaspora is explaining through his narrative why the Afghani diaspora needs to deconstruct the “romanticized Afghanistan that lives in the mind of [their] parents” and in his “childhood memory” (Sadat 2004). Poverty, the dichotomy of the rural and urban and the privileged and the unprivileged, gender oppression and social repression of those who thought that modernization was all about appearances while keeping their regressive beliefs are some of the “warts and pimples” that disfigure that myth of Afghanistan and hinder the diasporic Hosseini from mythologizing and idealizing his homeland.

War-time Era

This era, which is also known as the dark era, is summarized by Nabi by one word: “war. Or, rather, wars” (121). Historically speaking the 1960s constitutional democracy decade, witnessed the eruption of a series of demonstration calling for political reformation. Dupree (2002) explains that political newspapers were either subject to censorship or to complete bans. In 1965 Prime Minister “sought the legislature’s approval of some controversial cabinet ministerial candidates whom most knew as corrupt bureaucrats in a closed session, a gesture that offended the public causing protests on October 25, 1965” (Dupree 1966: 55). Moreover, as Dupree (1985) explains: “The consistent refusal of the ruler to allow the formation of political parties discouraged moderates, alienated leftists, and ensured the rule of the privileged” (80). In addition, tensions between the various political factions were increasing and becoming visible in frequent protest rallies. As a result, a military coup d’état took place in 1973 ending the monarchy and gave birth to the Republic. However, the new regime proved to be as oppressive and authoritarian as the old one which resulted in organized resistance against the regime

ending in 1978 April Revolution. The revolutionary regime was not without opposition. So various opposition groups started to unite along one front declaring jihad (holy struggle), referring to themselves as the Mujahedeen. Finally the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, by that time there were over a dozen different mujahedeen factions throughout the country. The violent war between the communist regime and the resistance fighters had devastated many parts of the country. After the withdrawal of the Russians in 1989 the Mujahedeen took power in 1992. "The different Mujahidin groups, who had never united politically and whose members had become accustomed to an existence as warriors began to fight each other" (Braakman 2005: 13), and Kabul became the stage of intense fighting. Nabi comments on this period by saying:

It was in the 1990s that fighting at last broke out within the city limits. Kabul fell prey to men who looked like they had tumbled out of their mothers with Kalashnikov in hand...vandals all of them, gun-toting thieves with grandiose, self-given titles... The street where we lived, once so quiet and pristine and gleaming, turned into a war zone. Bullets hit every house. Rockets whistled overhead. RPGs landed up and down the street and blasted craters in the asphalt. At night, red-and-white tracers flew every which way until dawn. (121)

What really shocked Nabi during that period was not "the RPG blasts or the rockets, the grenades and the bullets that destroyed the houses and the city, it was the looting that accompanied all that" (122).

In 1994, the Taliban established themselves in Qandahar promising to end the fighting and restore law and order. Rapidly, the Taliban were able to take command in large parts of the country. In September 1996, the Taliban took Kabul. Nabi describes this period:

Eventually, the fighting ended with the arrival of the Taliban, those sharp-faced young men with dark beards, kohl-rimmed eyes, and whips. Their cruelty and excesses have also been well documented... They saved the bulk of their contempt and zealotry for the young, especially the poor women. (124)

At the end of 1997, however, when the Taliban "refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden who was in residence in Afghanistan...the United States officially took position against them and bombed several of Bin Laden's training camps" (Braakman 2005: 14). Summarizing the war era Nabi says:

I can sum it up in one word: war. Or, rather, wars. Not one, not two, but many wars, both big and small, just and unjust, wars with shifting casts of supposed heroes and villains, each new hero making one increasingly nostalgic for the old villain. The names changed, as did the faces, and I spit on them equally for all the petty feuds, the snipers, the land mines, bombing raids, the rockets, the looting and raping and killing. (125)

Hosseini does not relieve any one from responsibility. The atrocities and the scares of war leaves no place for idealization of the homeland. In her *Cartographies of Diaspora*, Brah writes: “[diasporas] are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure” (1998: 190). The result of these collisions and reconfigurations of memories in Hosseini’s diasporic imagination is the anti-mythical portrayal of his homeland.

Post-war Era

The ‘War against Terrorism’ that was initiated by the United States and their allies brought an end to the Taliban era. By 2002, Nabi says “the Taliban had been driven out by the Northern Alliance, and the Americans had come to Afghanistan” (128). In June 2002, an emergency meeting of the Grand Assembly in Kabul elected Chairman Karzai to the post of presidency of the Islamic Transitional State of Afghanistan. Karzai remained a president till 2014 when a national presidential election brought Ashraf Ghani to power. Commenting on the situation in Afghanistan during the first decade of the 21st century Sadat writes:

The Taliban regime was destroyed in late 2001 and their brutal Vice and Virtue Police and militia dismantled. However, there still is a strong presence of religious extremists, gender chauvinists of former ethnolinguistic warlords, and resurgence of the neo-Taliban who want to control Afghan society. These groups are especially powerful in the provinces and rural areas. (2006: 99)

Hosseini agrees with Sadat’s opinion in his portrayal of post-war Afghanistan. He focuses on rural Afghanistan rather than Kabul where Taliban still live, “evidence of slow hesitant rebirth” (141) are seen and “a thousand tragedies per square mile” are felt. Meanwhile in Shadbagh, Iqbal, Abdullah’s and Pari’s half- brother returns after leaving Afghanistan during the civil wars. Iqbal goes to Pakistan where his three children were born. He lives with his family in the Jalozai refugee camp. He has to return to Afghanistan because the “Pakistanis shut down the camp. They said Afghans belong in Afghanistan” (258). Describing post war Afghanistan Larry Goodson writes:

The long Afghan War (1978-1998) has produced profound changes in Afghanistan. An entire people has been uprooted, a generation has come of age in diaspora (both in refugee camps and scattered in the West) or embattled villages, the physical infrastructure has been destroyed, and the social structure has been disrupted. (Goodson 1998: 269)

So when Iqbal decides to go home and to restart, now that the Taliban had supposedly gone to the Pakistani side of the border, he finds out that his land and his house are usurped by Commander Sahib one of the former Mujahedeen and a member of the new rich elite class.

The Commander claims to have a cotton factory in Helmand but in reality he is growing opium and manufacturing drugs. He wears the guise of the patriot who is rebuilding "mother Afghanistan" but at the same time he is expropriating land from the real owners for his own sake. While Commander Sahib takes part in building the village of Shadbagh-e-Nau or new Shadbagh, he takes over the land of "Shadbagh-e-Kohna, Old Shadbagh" to build his house:

The house stood three stories high and was painted bright pink and turquoise green. It had soaring columns and pointed eaves and mirrored skyscraper glass that sparkled in the sun. It had parapets, a veranda with sparkly mosaics, and wide balconies with curved wrought-iron railings. Inside, they had nine bedrooms and seven bathrooms, and sometimes when Adel and Baba Jan played hide-and seek, Adel wandered around for an hour or more before he found his father. All the counters in the bathrooms and kitchen had been made of granite and lime marble. (245)

The rich elegant houses of the rich elite class of the 1950s Afghanistan are echoed in the rich houses of the new elites: the former Mujahedeen.

Part of the land that Commander Sahib seizes belongs to Iqbal and his family. Iqbal goes to court with his ownership document, but few days later the judge tells him that the documents has been burnt in an accident and as he is telling Iqbal and his son that there's nothing he can do now without the papers, they notice on his wrist "A brand-new gold watch he wasn't wearing the last time my father saw him" (270). Gholam, Iqbal's son, confronts Adel, the Commander's son, whom he befriended:

This was my family's land. It's been ours for generations. Your father built his mansion on our land. While we were in Pakistan during the war." He pointed to the orchards. "These? They used to be people's homes. But your father had them bulldozed to the ground. Just like he brought down

the house where my father was born, where he was raised.
(269)

After this confrontation someone tries to kill the Commander for the second time, the first was in Kabul. The assailant is Iqbal who is trying to take revenge from the Commander. Half a decade ago, Saboor, Iqbal's father, pays for his poverty by selling his daughter, now his son, who is taken by the Commander's men never to be heard of again, is paying for his poverty by his own life. In both cases the victims are the poor and the victimizers are the rich. As poverty increases violence increases and the echoes are heard all over Afghanistan.

Following the attempt made on the Commander's life, Adel, his son, who is not allowed to use computers or watch the news or read the newspapers, secretly reads an article about the accident on his father's computer. Noticing the discrepancies between what his father said in the article and what he himself witnessed, he begins to realize other discrepancies in his life:

He saw, for instance, how his mother had secrets inside of her. When he looked at her, they practically rippled over her face. He saw her struggles to keep from him all the things she knew, all the things she kept locked up, closed off, carefully guarded, like the two of them in this big house. He saw for the first time his father's house for the monstrosity, the affront, the monument to injustice that it privately was to everyone else. He saw in people's rush to please his father the intimidation, the fear that was the real underpinning of their respect and deference... This last discovery was, in some ways, the most surprising to Adel. The revelations of what he now knew his father had done—first in the name of jihad, then for what he had called the just rewards of sacrifice—had left Adel reeling. At least for a while. (274)

As with pre-war era Hosseini is unable still to mythologize the post-war era. He is still scrutinizing the "warts and pimples" disfiguring present Afghanistan. Ironically the same pimples still persist: the dichotomy between the privileged and the unprivileged exemplified in Iqbal and his son Gholam and the new elite class, the former Mujahedeen, as well as the gendered oppression exemplified in Adel's mother who had to marry the Commander out of fear. Telling her son how she married the Commander, Adel's mother explains to him that he intended to marry her older sister and on the day he proposed

He showed up... he and five of his men. They more or less invited themselves in. they were all wearing boots. She shook her head and laughed as if it was a funny thing Baba

Jan had done, but she didn't laugh the way she ordinarily did when she found something funny. You should have seen the expression on your grandparents. (252)

The echoes are heard not only through the mountains but also through time. An italic font distinguishes Adel's mother narrative from the other narratives in the book just like the bold font marks Nila's. The fading of the bold font into italics reflects the increasing power of the patriarchal oppression.

In his article 'Diaspora diaspora' Braubaker draws the attention to the danger of essentializing the nation-state and criticizes the discussions of diaspora that "are often informed by a strikingly idealist, teleological understanding of the nation-state" drawing the attention to the "sophisticated discussions" that "are sensitive to the heterogeneity of diasporas, but they are not as sensitive to the heterogeneity of the nation-states" (Brubaker 2005: 10). Hosseini's understanding of Afghanistan as a nation-state is far from being an idealist understanding, on the contrary, Hosseini's narrative is transformed into a vantage point that allows him to self-critically view home. In so doing he adopts a position that is neither solid nor ductile but a distanced critical position that allows him to open "the debate into the most pressing social diseases plaguing Afghans: ethnic-religious relations, the dichotomy of the privileged and unprivileged, the double standard for men and women..." (Sadat 2004). Hosseini's critical position allows the diasporic writer to reveal the ailments of his homeland in an attempt to understand the present and forge a healthy future. Hosseini says: "I don't see how we can move forward from our past; how we can overcome our differences, if we refuse to even acknowledge the past and the differences" (Sadat 2006: 167-8).

It should be noted that the Afghani diaspora is not the only diasporic community to adopt that critical position. In a research conducted on Kurdish novelistic discourse in diaspora (Sweden), Özlem Belçim Galip reaches a similar conclusion:

Kurdish diasporic novelists offer a reflection of an actual Kurdistan intertwined with historical facts and internal critiques; these contribute to producing a negative portrayal rather than one that is "mythic" and "idealised" in the way that has been identified in diasporic literature in general. The effects of diaspora, the traumatic experiences in the Kurdish homeland, and diverse and conflicting political agendas are combined, resulting in these critical homeland portraits. The representation of "home-land" in the diasporic novels is fundamental to the authors' political critiques and

ideological views, which fail to confirm Kurdistan as an ideal “home” conveying safety, solidarity and socio-political freedom. (Galip 2014: 87)

Another diasporic community that displays the same tendency of demythologizing the homeland is the Arab-American diaspora. Carol Fadda-Corney in *Contemporary Arab America Literature: Transnational Reconfiguration of Citizenship and Belonging* asserts this tendency in the writings of the younger generations of the Arab-American writers who destabilize nostalgic memories of Arab homeland by “moving depictions of original homelands beyond a celebrity focus on ethnic and cultural traditions to incorporate harsh realities of war, dispossession, gender politics and exile. Through such portrayals Arab-Americans writers... carry out the important task of “demythologizing the homeland”” (Fadda-Corney 2014: 28). It should also be noted that not all members of the same diasporic community adopt the same critical attitude towards the original homeland. What should be stressed, however, is that “homeland meanings are multiple in a real as well as an imagined sense and can be both idealized and/or associated with traumatic experiences arising from conflicts with, and oppression by, the sovereign state” (Galip 2014: 86). Consequently it becomes very misleading to essentialize the nation-state and to homogenize members of different diasporic communities.

To conclude, this research argues that the assumption held by the classical diaspora theory that the homeland is always idealized/mythologized by the diaspora members is invalid in the case of the Afghani diaspora that is ignored by the theorists of the field. By examining Khaled Hosseini’s last novel *And the Mountains Echoed* the research contends that Hosseini’s represents Afghanistan as beleaguered by war, gender oppression, and the dichotomy between the rich and the poor as well as between the rural and urban; this perception of his homeland results in producing an anti-mythic/critical rather than a mythic/idealized representation of the homeland. It is true that some diaspora theorists like the social constructionists, Clifford, Brubaker, among others, argue against the homogenizing and essentializing the experiences and the representations of diaspora, yet they do not recognize the critical position that some diaspora writers assume towards their homeland, a position that is adopted not only by the Afghani diasporic writers but by other diasporic communities as well.

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