

Women under War and Patriarchy: Female Subjugation, Agency, and Resistance in Khaled Hosseini's and The Mountains Echoed

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Abstract

This paper examines how Khaled Hosseini represents female subjugation and resistance through the intersecting pressures of patriarchy, war, class, family, and memory in *And the Mountains Echoed*. Although the former predicts the domestic enslavement of Mariam and Laila under the patriarchal control of family and marital violence, the latter constructs a more diffused narrative of gendered vulnerability via Pari, Nila, Parwana, and Masooma and other women shaped by factors of poverty, migration, and emotionally violent family dynamics. The paper employs feminist literary analysis, close reading of the text and readings of Afghan social history to suggest that Hosseini does not simply dramatise the experiences of the Afghan women as powerless victims. Rather, he recounts limited expressions of agency: sisterhood, caregiving, silence, moral choice, bodily endurance, and memory. The paper concludes that the women of Hosseini are oppressed by frameworks bigger than the form of a single man, but their opposition is met with the moral ethics of relationships and survival instead of having the traditional heroic freedom.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini; *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; *And the Mountains Echoed*; Afghan women; patriarchy; female agency.

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan and its moral and historical context of re-creating and transforming individual lives through war, displacement, poverty, patriarchy, and memory recur in the fiction by Khaled Hosseini. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, women are placed in particularly vulnerable positions as the family, the state and the community control their actions and their bodies. The genres of the chosen novels are not the same. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a more linear and more gender-related work, constructed around the life of two women, Mariam and Laila, who find their lives intertwined through forced marriage, domestic violence, motherhood, and resistance. *And the Mountains Echoed* is slightly broader and more fragmented; the tales travel through generations and continents, and women are represented in the form of divided sisters, mothers, stepmothers, servants, emigrants, and artists. But the two novels are an effort to show female oppression as an institution and not as one event. The structures of patriarchy discussed by Hosseini include a patriarchal network of naming, marriage, household authority, sexual control, social shame, economic compulsion, and social law. That network is exacerbated by war, which razes normal kinds of protection and transforms women into family sacrifices.

The title of this paper—"Women under War and Patriarchy"—therefore points to a double pressure. War in Hosseini does not simply generate bombs, deaths and flows of refugees; it creates circumstances that further entrap women in dependency and render the bodies a point of social negotiation. Patriarchy is not just an act of male cruelty; it is reproduced via honour, reputation, family responsibility, property, law and inherited custom. The life of Mariam starts with illegitimacy, and the words spoken about her show that identity is a sentence in itself that is patriarchal. The novel starts by proclaiming that the first word Mariam recalls when she was five is *harami*, which, itself, is not just a kind of introduction to the characters but also an introduction to the social division based on gender (Hosseini, *Splendid* 12). In comparison, *And the Mountains Echoed* begins with the fable of sacrifice and parting, introducing the reader to the process of doing without that Pari would later do away with her own family, as well as to the gendered economies through which poor families have to make a living (Hosseini, *Mountains* 7).

The current literature about Hosseini has tended to analyse *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a feminist work addressing issues of the oppression of Afghan women, female servitude, Taliban prohibition, and sisterhood. Verme Vera interprets the novel as a manifestation of social and cultural challenges that affect Afghan women, with a particular emphasis on the challenges of discrimination and intolerance (219-21). The same can be found in Fadhilah and Handayani, who find the criticism of the novel in its portrayal of violence in the home against a polygamous family (44-47). This point is continued by Asif and his co-authors, who explain that sisterhood is an important way in which women oppose patriarchal systems both in *And the Mountains Echoed* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (79-82). The readings are helpful, but the paper asserts that we should read the two novels simultaneously not necessarily due to the similarities in the setting; the setting of Alexander the Great in Afghanistan, but because they offer two forms of gendered subjecting subjugation: the obvious cruelty of the family home and the diffuse or dispersion form of violence caused by kinship, poverty, and memory.

There are three arguments in the paper. To begin with, Hosseini portrays female oppression and subordination symbolically and in a corporeal form: women are beaten, locked up, auctioned, humiliated, and renamed. Second, he demonstrates that war and political instability can make patriarchal power more powerful by limiting women's access to education, mobility, equal protection of the law, and economic independence by women. Thirdly, the novels envision resistance to be not a mere movement towards emancipation but as a relational agency. As Mariam makes her last ethical decision as Laila forces an act of reconstruction, as Pari regains her memory and Lila renders her artistic self-fashioning distressing, it is all forms of resistance created in the constraints. This paper therefore avoids a reductive victimhood reading. Hosseini's women are wounded, but they are not narratively empty. They contemplate, recall, make decisions, guard, and occasionally stand up to destroy their souls.

2. Literature Review

The recent scholarship on *A Thousand Splendid Suns* has gradually shifted its focus from general accounts of the sufferings of women and on to structural accounts of patriarchy, political violence, economic dependence, and resistance. Niyamat, Akhter, and Waheed adopt a Marxist-feminist perspective, claiming that the novel portrays women as being doubly marginalised by both patriarchal authority as well as by social, economic, and political conflict; it is important to note that Niyamat et al. are particularly focused on economic dependency and thus it is easier to understand why the household can serve as an institution of discipline and not only a private space (Niyamat et al. 349-50). Humagain also interprets the arc of Mariam and Laila as a drift from gender oppression to consciousness and revolt, and identifies their subjection in both early marriage, polygamy, sexual and domestic abuse, political anarchy, and Taliban dictates (141-43). Along with these works, these facts do not allow one to ever reduce the portrayal of women provided by Hosseini to a description of priestly husbands: the dominance of women at home is supported by an even more significant order of the society that makes the dependence of women seem not unnatural.

A significant body of scholarship addresses the issue of domestic violence and how society enables men to have control over it. According to Fadhilah and Handayani, violence, whether physical or psychological in nature, marital domination, and normalized male authority are all intertwined forms of violence in the home of Rasheed (45-49). Alqaryouti also makes the claim that the novel associates discrimination and structural oppression with intersecting gendered, class, and ethnic hierarchies, as well as introduces education and solidarity as forms of gaining independence (490-91). This is further highlighted by Humagain, who demonstrates how the naturalisation of male authority is enforced by metaphors of property and submission, especially with Rasheed insisting that the wife is owned by the husband, and that expansion of the female body (along with subsequent public visibility) is at the mercy of his control (142-43). What is crucial about these readings, then, is their transit between incident and structure in the sense that Rasheed is not simply an individual pathology but an individual act of expression of a culture of entitlement that is given power by law, economy, and social codes of gender.

A second large strand is about sisterhood, persistence and the shift between compliance and resistance. According to Joyia, Farooq, Ghafoor, and Gull, the female characters in Hosseini are sidelined by male, social, cultural, and political hierarchies but at the same time can fight back against the brutality despite the fact that they may find themselves always in the passive position (98-100). Based on the subaltern approach of Spivak, Yasin et al. also assert that Nana, Mariam, and Laila navigate their existence through endurance to collective action and that solidarity empowers them to attack social and domestic repression (745-47). Imran and Ismail carry this argument

throughout the fiction of Hosseini but categorise his women into the obedient, resistant, and the empowered types and make it very clear after the publication of *And the Mountains Echoed* that one of the women, Nila and Pari, were defiant of expectations as prescribed by patriarchal norms (3-5). These studies are especially useful for the present comparison because they prevent the category of 'subjugated woman' from becoming static. Hosseini habitually demonstrates that obedience can be a strategy to survive, that perseverance can be the forerunner of insurgency and that resistance can exist in relational and not individualistic ways.

The third required qualification provided by postcolonial feminist scholarship is that Afghan women are not objects that should be considered a homogeneous victim group apart from history. According to Çevik and Töngür, the book *A Thousand Splendid Suns* should be read through the lens of local culture, gender discrimination, and identity as well as the forms of active and passive resistance created in a war-torn society (56-59). The study by Ling Ma also perceives Mariam and Laila as Third World women whose marginalisation is created by patriarchy and hegemonic power, yet their friendship evolves the hostility into solidarity and resistance (x, 17-22). More recently, Zhang, Xu, and Umanowai suggested that gender, class, ethnicity, marriage and political power intersect; meanwhile, they characterise gendered marginality as historically constructed as opposed to culturally ingrained and predict constrained, yet productive, agency (2-3). This measure is essential since it will not succumb to the urge of converting Afghanistan into an explanatory shorthand on misogyny. The novels rather welcome the focus on particular historical orders of war, social inequality, family relations, and political power.

The historical aspect of the first novel has been highlighted by Zubair who perceives *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a literary history of the Afghan history, culture, tradition, invasion, civil war, Taliban rule, and resultant changes in the day-to-day social life (198-200). It is possible that such a piece of context makes a difference in understanding the fact in Hosseini that war is no longer a loose adjunct in his fiction. Political unrest restructures marriage, work, education, mobility, migration and home control. Meanwhile, *And the Mountains Echoed* is not as commonly the focus of the debates on female oppression as *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Imran and Ismail are among the scholars who explicitly connect Pari and Nila to Hosseini's wider pattern of women negotiating objectification, patriarchal expectations, and the desire for intellectual independence (4-5). The difference between the two is thus quite sharp: this is due to the fact that the two novels allow the transfer of the spectacular violence of forced marriage, beating, and state prohibition into the less obvious violence of kinship exchange, caregiving obligation, change of classes, migration, and memory loss.

Combined, this growing literature implies three directions of a comparative study that are vital. On the one hand, Hosseini is a society of patriarchal economic and political and domestic power, as Niyamat et al. demonstrate that financial dependence contributes to the escalation of subordination, and Alqaryouti predicts the overlap of social hierarchy and agency (350-52; 490-93). Second, resistance cannot be sudden or even continuous. Yasin et al. and Imran and Ismail demonstrate that the concepts of endurance, solidarity, education and self-articulation is a continuum instead of a mere opposition between victim and liberation (747-50; 5-8). Third, postcolonial feminist readings warn against the tendency to single out the women in Afghanistan as a collective group of the oppressed (Çevik and Tönguer 58-60; Zhang et al. 2-4). The current paper elaborates on these observations yet compares them comparatively: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* are interpreted as two different narrative grammars of gendered subordination, one of them being confined within the incurable household and oppressive state and the other being scattered in the family exchange, memory, class, and transnational exile.

3. Theoretical Framework

The research is based on feminist literary criticism and especially the terms of patriarchy, gendered violence, intersectionality and female agency. Patriarchy here can be conceived not as the rule of individual men but as a social order whereby the power of men is institutionalised by the relationships of the family, legal law, religion, custom, economy and representation. This explanation of patriarchy as a gender-based system of social structures and practices by Sylvia Walby comes in handy since the novels of Hosseini demonstrate that women are dominated in the family, in the culture, workplace, sex and in the state (Walby 20-24). In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Rasheed is a tyrant who relies on his influence over the home, yet this power is all the more sinister by the fact that the Taliban controls women in public sight. In *And the Mountains Echoed*, Saboor chooses to give Pari away because of poverty, familial responsibility, and gendered notions of care and sacrifice.

Intersectional feminism is also prominent. According to Kimberle Crenshaw, intersectionality explicates the increase in the degree of gender oppression when it is combined with other aspects such as class, ethnicity, legal status, disability, and social location (140-41). Not only is Mariam a woman, but an illegitimate daughter, a poor rural child, an unwanted dependent, and a social protectionless wife. Laila is different gendered simply the fact that in the beginning, Laila possesses education, parental love and freedom of movement, but war deprives her of these values. Pari of *And the Mountains Echoed* is a poor girl-child who is vulnerable and lacks mobility of the class, but subsequently is adopted and able to acquire mobility. This parallelogram reveals that Hosseini is sensitive to all sorts of unequal female vulnerability.

The concept of relational agency is also used in the paper. The liberal conceptions of agency tend to view freedom in terms of individual choice, whereas the latter ethics of femininity as care emphasise that agency among women may develop through the process of giving care, mutual support, accountability, and survival amidst constraint (hooks 43-46). Relational agency is more fragile in *And the Mountains Echoed*, since love may turn into a set of logic according to which sacrifice may be justified. The very love which has guarded may hurt.

Lastly, reading war as a gendered structure occurs in the study. Feminist war studies have revealed that war reshapes the private life and generates gender-specific vulnerability even in cases where women are not the direct participants (Sjoberg 11-14). This is a fact that is confirmed by Hosseini in his fiction. War demolishes educational facilities, hospitals, employment, and communities; it also predisposes people to forced marriage, displacement, starvation, as well as domestic dependency. In this way, patriarchy, intersectionality, relational agency, and gendered war are regarded by the theoretical framework to discuss the oppression of the women characters in Hosseini and the ways in which they struggle.

In such a way, a postcolonial feminist alert is introduced into the structure. The research does not make "Afghan women" a universal, culturally determined identity, or suppose that Western individual autonomy is the sole gauge of emancipation. Zhang et al. believe that the Hosseini women are influenced by the intersection of militarisation, class, ethnicity, marriage, and political authority, whereas Çevik and Tönguer argue the necessity to interpret resistance in the context of the local cultural and historical forces (2-4; 58-60). The analysis of Ma, inspired by Spivak, of the marginalisation of women in the Third World further raises the issue of voice for women whose voices were not allowed to speak (17-22). Against this, it is assumed in this paper that agency encompasses relational, embodied, and memory-based acts of action-protecting another woman, refusing an imposed identity, continuing education, telling a buried story, or resisting and transforming care into an ethical resistance-instead of only spectacular escape from patriarchy.

4. Methodology

This study uses qualitative textual analysis and feminist close reading. The main books being discussed are *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini. The discussion addresses the narrative voice, characterization, plot, use of symbols and signs of control in the home and in public, and instances of female resistance. The passages have been chosen and read in the format of MLA 9th edition. The secondary sources will be institutional articles about Hosseini, feminist articles, open-access journal articles, and publicly available scholarship on Hosseini, Afghan women, feminist criticism, domestic violence, gendered war, and sisterhood. The approach is not statistical but interpretive. It is not going to make blanket statements about all Afghan women, but it seeks to trace how both the texts chosen create gendered suffering and agency.

The comparison takes place in three phases. First, the paper discusses *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as a narrow-focused account of familial and political patriarchy. Secondly, it studies *And the Mountains Echoed* as a disjointed story where the oppression of women can be found in the realms of family disintegration, upward and downward social mobility, disability, exile, and memory. Thirdly, the paper makes comparisons between the two novels to reveal how the depiction of women by Hosseini is evolving towards the dramatic revelation of violence to less evident laments of gendered loss.

5. Female Subjugation in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

The most direct fictional account of how women are subjected to the collective oppression of patriarchal practice, domestic abuse, financial reliance and political fundamentalism is *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The process of subordination in Mariam starts prior to marriage, as the social status of illegitimacy makes her a woman who has

no legitimate right to either family, inheritance or home or even respect in the community. According to Ling Ma, this is a kind of Third World female marginalisation whereby women are denied the ability to express themselves and occupy a central place in society due to patriarchal and hegemonic structures (x, 31-35). Niyamat et al. also emphasise that women in the novel are not oppressed by personal will alone; it is the context of culture, society, economy, and politics which creates the conditions under which violence becomes habitual and routine (349-50). Hosseini writes this process to dramatise by giving Mariam the first lesson, a lesson in blame: the female child is taught that shame would go to her before she could claim authority that she can make any claim.

The patriarchy Jalil shows towards Mariam is decent, instead of blatant cruelty. In privacy, he is loving, but in the world, he is a coward. He gives stories, sweets, and gestures, yet refuses legitimacy, household inclusion, and moral responsibility. The weakness of his being is pivotal since Hosseini reveals that patriarchy is perpetuated not solely by violent men such as Rasheed but by socially-acclaimed men who take away the reputations of women in the name of preserving it. This fame economy is the immediate cause behind Mariam being forcibly married to Rasheed. Her departure out of the kolba to Kabul fails to emancipate her she is merely handed over by the disregard of her father to the possession of her husband.

The marriage of Rasheed becomes controlled into slavery. The insistence on the burqa, the policing of the face of Mariam, along with the repetitive linking of female appearance to male reputation and honour, make domestic territory the territory of policing. When he declares that 'a woman's face is her husband's business only,' he converts modesty into ownership and makes public appearance evidence of male control (Hosseini, *Splendid Suns* 60). This logic is one of the main processes of gender oppression, as defined by Humagain, and signs of the broader subaltern state of a patriarchal society, as interpreted by Yasin et al., veiling, confined movement, and reliance (142-43; 745-47). The influence of Rasheed is particularly cruel since material means of escape allow Mariam few equations with the financial sphere, which is also in line with the Marxist-feminist stress that Niyamat et al. put on the connection between economic inferiority and domestic subordination (350-52).

Laila comes into the novel with alternative possibilities. Her father appreciates education, and envisions her own future outside of the home. Nevertheless, war annihilates those circumstances under which this future could be created. The same rocket that kills her parents brings down the social world which was offering her security also. When Laila finally marries Rasheed, it is not out of love but as a means of survival in war. In this paragraph, Hosseini presents one of the most crucial points of the novel: the war will be able to turn male marriage into a refuge which will act as a prison at the same time. Laila agrees to marry in part to save her unborn child, and Rasheed agrees because he dreams of sexual reproduction and procreation. She turns into a battleground, where war, hunger, motherhood, and male desire all intersect.

The Taliban government extends the power of Rasheed's household to gender discipline, supported by the state. The kind of public limitations imposed on women, whether in order to move, to educate themselves, to work, to dress or to receive medical care, replicate at the legislative level what Rasheed had already imposed at home. Zubair anchors these limitations in the changes that happen in the act of civil war, invasion, and Taliban fundamentalism, where political turbulence changes the cultural and social aspects of Afghan life (198-201). Alqaryouti also interprets gender inequality in the novel as absolutely unrelated with the social and political issues, though Imran and Ismail see the suffering of the women as the direct result of the war, the intervention of the extremists, and the subjugation of women to authority by the male (491-94; 1-3). The political argument that Hosseini makes is thus structural: there are no two distinct systems of patriarchy in the private and authoritarian in the public, but two complementary types of power.

Yet *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is not only a catalogue of suffering. It is emotionally framed in the establishment of solidarity between Mariam and Laila. Initially, they are set up as competitors since the Rasheed family relies on female competition. It is only when they realise that their real enemy is the structure that pits them against each other that sisterhood begins. Their joint work, covert means of communication, and nurturing of children create a counter-household inside the house of Rasheed. According to Asif et al., sisterhood in the fiction written by Hosseini is liberating since women are united and patriarchal domination is undermined by the power of their unity (81-84). This unity in the novel is not an abstract ideology but a handy tool of survival.

The last stand of Mariam is ethically multifaceted. She kills Rasheed to rescue Laila, goes under execution, and she does not allow her life to be debased into shame. Those anti-critics who focus on endurance and subaltern resistance describe this change as the triumph of a long tradition of forcibly passive obedience to ethical action

(Yasin et al. 748-51; Joyia et al. 103-5). However, the novel is not a manifestation of resistance in the form of a successful liberation. Mariam agentically cannot help herself, and the state, which could not save her from years of violence, finally gains absolute power over her body. Her ultimate self-realisation is thus essential as it shifts the value of the patriarchal legitimacy to the relational consequence:

Though there had been moments of beauty in it, Mariam knew that life for the most part had been unkind to her. But as she walked the final twenty paces, she could not help but wish for more of it. . . . And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. A person of consequence at last. (Hosseini, *Splendid Suns* 270)

The movement from ‘harami’ to ‘a person of consequence’ reverses the language of illegitimacy with which Mariam’s life began. The fact that the reversal does not justify her execution is that solidarity enables her to build a moral identity that the patriarchal family and state had displaced in her. The idea of constrained yet meaningful agency expressed by Zhang et al in the article best fits the predominantly structural case in this scenario since Mariam is not performing as a free agent, but as an agent within a structurally impossible scenario (2-4). This is a relational resistance: by saving Laila and the children, she becomes consequential, not because they are legally recognised by the society that ostracises her.

The finale of *Laila* gives another type of resistance. Her return to Kabul is not a fantasy of complete restoration. Afghanistan still is bleeding, and the memory of Mariam is inseparable from the rebuilding. The weapon that Laila has to fight is in education, motherhood, remembering and being useful to society. Hosseini thus shifts her gender politics towards survival and rebuilding. The novel indicates that the power to recall and reinterpret the dead, train the living and reconstruct social worlds that have been broken by war and patriarchy is a part of female resistance.

6. Female Subjugation in *And the Mountains Echoed*

And the Mountains Echoed portrays female oppression in a more disjointed and indirect manner. As compared to *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it is not focused on the oppression within the confines of a single marriage or two women. Rather, it demeans gendered vulnerability by diffusing it through interconnected narratives. The first fable sets the moral framework of the novel: a father sacrifices a loved child in order to save the other members of the family. The story begins, “You want a story and I will tell you one,” but the apparently simple folktale becomes a coded explanation for Pari’s later separation from Abdullah (Hosseini, *Mountains* 7). The moral of the fable is that love may not be foreign to violence. This plays an important role in interpreting gender in the novel since women and girls tend to be the tools of manipulation through which families negotiate poverty and lack of desire, feelings of guilt and survival.

Pari is adopted by Nila and Suleiman Wahdati based on class and not gender. She is neither beaten nor locked up like Mariam, but the decision to place her in an affluent Kabul family deprives her of any say of her own. Imran and Ismail specifically point to the objectification of Pari in her childhood and subsequent schooling, with Nila being among the themes of Hosseini as women shift their positions as objects of subjection to intellectual freedom (4-5). Joyia and others also encapsulate the answering crisis of the novel as the selling off of a daughter by a poverty-stricken family at war and in a state of starvation (99). This linguistic adoption cannot disarm the material economy of the act: poverty renders the child fungible, class renders the fungible to seem charitable, and gender aids in figuring whose life can be restructured in a family bargain.

There is little point in recounting it in detail, Mr. Markos, the scene that did unfold precisely as I had feared. . . . I took those two helpless children, in whom love of the simplest and purest kind had found expression, and I tore one from the other. . . . It weighs on me. All this time has passed, Mr. Markos, and it still weighs on me. (Hosseini, *Mountains* 74)

It reveals the brutality behind a seemingly generous agreement, and Nabi confesses. The repeated first-person admission—‘I took’ and ‘I tore’—removes the possibility of treating Pari’s relocation as an impersonal outcome of poverty. However, the novel rejects a villain-victim dichotomy, too, with Saboor living poor, Nila unable to have children, Nabi wanting to have them (desire), and the wealth of the Wahdatis uniting in a single choice. This is exactly the type of combination of intersectional pressure that postcolonial feminist criticism sets the reader to track. Class and kinship make gendered vulnerability as much as does overt misogyny, and the injury continues

to the extent that Pari has been transported not just to new sites; she is slowly losing the memory of where she has come from.

One of the most complex women by Hosseini is Nila Wahdati. She is mind and soul privileged materially, artistic, sexually promiscuous, and socially transgressive but she is alone, self-destructed and involved in the breaking up of Pari. Imran and Ismail regard Nila as one of the Hosseini resistant women experiencing the challenge of patriarchal confinement and having influenced the intellectual independence of Pari in future (4-5). Freedom, however, is not simple empowerment to her. Nila has the right to break the gender norm since class privilege and migration will offer resources Nila cannot find in Mariam or Parwana, and at that she has not yet been able to escape the social judgment and emotional loneliness. Her poetry, sexuality and non-conformity to traditional domestic femininity are self-authored, yet they do not undo the harms that are created by the family and history. Hosseini thereby obscures a correlation between modernity and liberation.

Parwana and Masooma give a more dark version of sisterhood as compared to Mariam and Laila. Contained in their relationship is care, envy, resentment, disability and guilt. The beauty and desirability of Masooma is opposed to the invisibility of Parwana, which is complemented by the fact that Saboor prefers Masooma notwithstanding her inferiority. The sisters are not by nature the would-be enemies; they are only hurled into a competition by an order in which women are judged by beauty, marriageability and male focus. In questioning Masooma about whether she could love the children of Saboor as she loves her children, the question reveals the feminised work that women are supposed to do to love; love has to be provided, even in situations where love and choice are limited (Hosseini, *Mountains* 52). The subsequent position of wife and stepmother of Parwana is founded on loss that should not be discussed openly.

The novel's treatment of caregiving is particularly important. Women are supposed to take up the emotional and physical expenses of survival of the family. The disability of Masooma leaves Parwana with the responsibility of taking care of her; the displacement of Pari causes another woman to become a mother; the adoption of Nila transforms maternal desire into ownership; and, later on, in the novel, the reader receives fragments of broken histories. This pattern can be explained using feminist ethics of care. Care may constitute agency, yet in patriarchy it may also be forced work. The success of Hosseini is in revealing the two sides. Women tend to care, as they love, but they are also entrapped in the issue of having to care.

In contrast to Mariam, Pari is not aware of the conditions of her submission on the first page. She lost her memory secretly. And the *Mountains Echoed* is a late gendered realization of a novel. The damage to Pari is not merely deprivation of village; it is deprivation of narrative of herself. When they finally regain memory by way of letters, testimonies and traces, it is not all. Abdullah's late note—"I pray you find it, sister"—reveals the enduring emotional bond but also the cruelty of time (Hosseini, *Mountains* 275). Childhood cannot be made back by the reunion. Therefore, in the novel, the act of resistance is through memory-work instead of the literal escape of the body.

The literature about the women of Hosseini lends credence to this more controversial definition of solidarity. Asif et al. have maintained that cooperation among females is a possibility as a survival strategy against patriarchal oppression but also note that envy and non-cooperation may enhance suffering (82-86). Imran and Ismail extend the trend in the novels by Hosseini to promote mother-daughter and sisterhood relationships as the venue where women gain emotional resources on which to entrench themselves in a battle against them (6-8). In *And the Mountains Echoed*, however, solidarity is never redemptive per se. Parwana and Masooma have a loving, but broken, relationship; Nila and Pari have a nurturing, but based on the loss of another family, relationship; and Pari later redeems Abdullah, an intimacy but a lost love. Feminine relation is hence not only refuge but also encumbrance, a tendency that is difficult to simplify into the storylines of simplistic notions of empowerment and is in line with the idea of relational agency as constraint espoused in the paper.

In *And the Mountains Echoed*, war is not as constantly present as in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, but it is still structurally present. The instability in Afghanistan influences migration, changes in class, adoption, exile and returning. The disjointed structure of the novel is a reflection of the fragmentation of Afghan families. The life of women is shattered into letters, recollections, gossip, photos and fragmented stories. This type of narrative is gendered by itself, as there are numerous women in the novel whose narrations are not completely under their control. Others remember them, desire them, judge them, rescue them, abandon them or translate them. Even voice is needed in the recovery in order to resist.

7. Comparative Discussion

The two novels read side by side indicate that Hosseini travels through a process of focused patriarchal violence to diffused gendered loss. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* reveals the presence of violence in the form of arranged marriage, beating, pressure to bear children, burqa, Taliban decree, and death sentence. And *the Mountains Echoed* unleash less violence: a child is sacrificed, a sister is forced to take care of life, self-expression of a woman is a scandal, and class and migration splinter family memory. It is not that this novel is feminist and that that novel is not. Instead, both novels explore other grammars of subjugation.

Examples of these recognisable agents of patriarchy in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* include Jalil, Rasheed, the Taliban, the judges, the guards, and the social customs. Mariam and Laila will be able to recognise the forces that both restrain them when they cannot easily get out of them. In *And the Mountains Echoed*, there is a more diffuse power. Saboor presents Pari, yet he is not a villain like Rasheed. It is Nabi who makes the arrangement; Nila is the beneficiary of the arrangement, and it is the abjectness, the poverty, that makes it a reality. The moral dilemma of the novel is that it does not distinguish between barbarity and need. That is why the initial fable is so prominent. The decision of the father is monstrous and loving, which has to be, and which cannot be forgiven. The gendered subjugation in this novel manifest itself very frequently in this very mixed shape.

The family is the main place of female vulnerability in both novels. Mariam is hurt by the denial of her father, the oppression of Rasheed and the patriarchal constitution of the state. Her father sacrifices his life, her adoptive mother demands her needs, and Pari is hurt by the silence that envelops her origin. Rivalry between siblings and the marriage economy of village life are wounded by Parwana. The impossibility of living Afghan femininity without being punished hurts Nila. The family is also the place of resistance, however. Mariam is a better mother than the others is an adopted one; Laila recreates with a memory; Pari pursues a truth of relationship; and even the wrecked sisterhoods show that there is a truth of female recognition to be manifested.

Another difference between the novels is how they treat agency. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* accords Mariam a last, dramatic act of defiance. And *the Mountains Echoed* provides Pari with a subtler agency: the restoration of memory, witnessing, perception of the concealed order of her life. Laila's agency is public and restorative; Nila's is aesthetic and self-fashioned; Parwana's is compromised and burdened; Masooma's is tragic and bodily constrained. All these women collectively demonstrate that agency in Hosseini is not exclusive. It may be sacrifice, refusal, care, storytelling, survival, or return.

In particular, the intersectionality theoretical lens is particularly helpful in comparison. Gender is not enough to understand why Mariam was suffering; illegitimacy, poverty, alienation in the rural area, marital status, and legal issues. The fact that Pari was transferred to a different class and adopted, as well as migrated and was made to remember, was not only possible because of gender. The theory created by Crenshaw assists us in comprehending that females are not oppressed uniformly (140-42). This understanding is reinforced in the fiction of Hosseini, who demonstrates that various women are affected in different ways based on their position in family and economy, and history.

The comparison also makes the Western humanitarian interpretations of Afghan women as voiceless victims more complex, with Çevik and Tönguer signaling against the universalisation of women in war-ravaged non-Western societies, and Zhang et al. more directly, homogenising models of Third World women, preempting a historical specificity, the idea of class, ethnicity, and political power (58-60; 2-4). Imran and Ismail also remark that media stereotypes of women in Afghanistan as either uniformly weak or inactive mask the paths of resistance and reinvention (1-2). Hosseini is sure to portray extreme oppression, yet he also provides women with interiority, contradiction, desire, rage, artistic ambition, memory, and morality. The women are not just the representations of the suffering of Afghanistan. They are compelling and poetically demanding subjects whose decisions are important, however brutal the conditions of such decisions may be. It is due to this that agency is critical to the argument of the paper: otherwise the criticism runs the risk of reproducing the silencing and homogenization that postcolonial feminist analysis aims to unveil.

8. Conclusion

This paper has asserted that *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* are the results of women's oppression that is a result of war, patriarchy, and poverty, family responsibility and social embarrassment. In *A*

Thousand Splendid Suns, Hosseini prefigures overt violence due to the illegitimacy of Mariams, Laila, forced marriage, domestic violence, Taliban law and sacrificial resistance. He creates a less noticeable, but no less painful narrative of gendered loss with Pari, Nila, Parwana, and Masooma in *And the Mountains Echoed*, illustrating how women are determined by family trades, changes in social status, motherhood, and fragmented recollection.

The comparative reading shows that Hosseini's women are neither passive victims nor uncomplicated heroines. They resist when they are in constraint. Mariam's choice of Abd-Rahman, the reconstruction of Laila, the memory work of Pari, the art revolt of Nila and the burdened caring of Parwana all show that agency can come in the form of forms which are morally hard, silent, relational, and expensive. The novels thus serve feminist literary discourse by exposing the self-sustaining nature of personal and institutional patriarchy during wartime in Afghanistan as well as demonstrating that women form meaning, a sense of solidarity and ethical authority within ruined worlds...

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