

**CONFRONTING MEMORY: GUILT AND THE QUEST FOR
REDEMPTION IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*, *A
THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS* AND *THE MOUNTAINS ECHOED***

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Abstract

This paper reads Khaled Hosseini's portrayal of the characters' guilt as a product of the social and economic hardships that affects them in the Afghani society. It provides an analysis of characters who exhibit behaviours that are products of situations they encounter in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. Furthermore, the paper focuses on the impact of authorial power and background on the characters and setting. It argues that Hosseini uses the pen to portray the life in the war-torn Afghanistan hence providing a communal experience of the suffering of the Afghans.

Keywords: Guilt; Redemption; Memory; Trauma; Ideology

Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's writing focuses on his immediate environment, more specifically his original place of residence, Afghanistan. Through the three works under discussion, Hosseini mirrors the life of a normal Afghani on daily basis, on the verge of the persisting war and instability. Hosseini's work has been subjected to quite a lot of criticism. Most critics who have analysed *The Kite Runner* have concentrated on external factors such as cultural variation and ethnic rivalries and discussed how these issues directly influence the actions of the characters in the novel. In the analysis of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, critics have mainly focused on the sexual, physical and mental abuse that Mariam, the protagonist in the novel, is subjected to, as well as highlighting women's lack of rights in Afghan society. It is also noted by the critics that the issue of class drives the plot of the story in *And the Mountains Echoed*. This research builds on this scholarship to explore how the issues of culture, class and environment play crucial roles in the origination of the various characters'

feelings of guilt and how the characters become traumatized in the process. Furthermore, the research explores how the characters confront their repressed memory of guilt and quests for redemption from their respective predicaments.

Through these three works, Hosseini allows us to see the feelings of an ordinary Afghani. As argued by Henry Louis Gates Jr, literature is one of the “sites for contest and negotiation, self-fashioning and refashioning” (11) The writer’s origin, dwelling place, language, conditions of life, and other experiences that construct his or her identity are reflected in his or her work. Through literature, readers are able to mirror the life that others live as well as gain more knowledge of the world around them. These experiences vary from romantic and happy ones to war and tragedy. As such in the same context, “literature allows us, through vicarious experiences, to understand how other people feel when they have committed a crime, with or without repentance, and how they deal with guilt. It also allows us to project our own emotions onto fictional characters and test situations that we may not encounter in real life” (Nikolajeva 2).

Shadows of Remorse: Deconstructing Guilt

Guilt is the state of “finding oneself feeling personally responsible before God and others for the evil that was intended or has been done out of one’s freedom”¹. In *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Sigmund Freud notes that “if we ask how a person comes to have a sense of guilt, we arrive at an answer which cannot be disputed; a person feels guilty when he does something he knows to be bad” (71). Habib, reading Freud, is of the view that the father of psychoanalysis “postulated that we bear a form of ‘otherness’ within ourselves: we cannot claim fully to comprehend even ourselves, why we act as we do, why we make certain moral and political decisions, why we harbour give religious disposition and intellectual orientations” (571). To a greater extent, this statement is correct in as far as the behaviour of characters in some books is concerned. It can be argued that “far from being based on reason, our thinking is intimately dependent upon the body, upon its instincts of survival and aggression, as well as obstinate features that cannot be dismissed (as in the Cartesian tradition where the mind is treated as a disembodied phenomenon)” (Habib 571). The id which harbours our instincts and desires enables us to address our pleasure principles which likely in most cases are in contradiction with the reality principle. It is for this reason that people act in ways that eventually lead them into conditions of disarray. In some cases, people act in

¹ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/guilt-theology>

ways that are questionable because they seek to achieve proper survival and wellbeing.

In *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, Hosseini presents various characters who find themselves in situations that make them feel guilty. All the three books are set in various environments which directly impact on the lives of the characters. The environment in which each character lives requires effort for the character to survive. All the texts are set in environments that are not peaceful and this condition affects the lives of the characters. Some of their daily experiences are so devastating that they induce states of guilt in the characters.

The characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are from different social classes. Whereas Jalil, Mariam's father is from the upper class, Nana who is Mariam's mother and Mariam are from the lower classes. In this novel, the story centres on the main character Mariam whose guilt originates from the scenario where her mother commits suicide solely because she disregards her advice. Mariam is referred to as a "harami" by her mother because she was rejected by her father during pregnancy. Mariam's mother is excluded from the society and marginalised. She becomes alienated in her own society. Mary Klages states that, "alienation means feeling alien, foreign or estranged to something or someone" (5). Nana's loneliness makes her so obsessed with motherhood that she becomes extremely possessive of her daughter. Since Mariam's childhood her mother keeps telling her that her father never really loves her. At one point, Nana tells Mariam "And don't let him charm you. He betrayed us, your beloved father. He cast us out of his big fancy house like we were nothing to him. He did it happily" (6). On the other hand, Mariam's father Jalil abandons Mariam and is not fully around for her and this is his origin of guilt. Another character who continuously shows characteristics of guilt is Rasheed, Mariam's husband who blames himself for the death of his son. His son drowns in a lake during a time when Rasheed is supposed to be watching over him.

The Kite Runner presents mainly two characters, Amir and Baba who embody guilt which continuously torments them. Amir fails to protect his friend and 'brother' Hassan during his sad encounter with Asseff who with his gang sexually abuses him. On the other hand Baba who is Amir's father fails to publicly acknowledge his relationship with Hassan as his son because he fathered him with a wife of his servant but also mainly due to the fact that he is partially of the lower ethnic group known as the Hazara while he is a Pashtun. Through these, without doubt, it can be evident that class structures and

existing ideology that brings a gap between the two ethnic groups in the society play a big role in the origination of guilt.

The gap between the rich and the poor continues to appear in *And the Mountains Echoed* where guilt is evident through Saboor, Nabi and Parwana. Saboor's guilt triggers a lot of depression in him. Saboor sells off his daughter Pari to the Wahdati family as a means of earning some money to support his family. Nabi's guilt stems from being the catalyst for the selling off of Pari since he organises the processes that lead to the selling off of Pari in an effort to please Nila who is his love interest. Nabi later finds it hard to forgive himself for enabling the separation of his niece and his father. Parwana blames herself for her action that eventually lead to an accident rendering her sister Masooma as an invalid. "Freud conceptualized guilt as conflict between the ego and superego functioning to keep one's behaviour in line with moral standards while pushing id inspired transgressions" (Amodio 1). In a case where the pleasure principle wins over the reality principle, there are certain cases when the guilt may develop as shown above.

After Effects: Reading Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

In his writing, Khaled Hosseini confronts his repressed feelings of trauma as hinted by his personal background. "Repression is the involuntary rejection from consciousness of painful or disagreeable ideas, memories, feelings and impulses" (Myers 34). As someone who experienced war as well as someone who still has relations in Afghanistan, Hosseini reveals his repressed feelings in his works. He makes this representation through the behaviour of characters in all the three novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. All the three novels discussed depict events that reflect real life situations in present day Afghanistan. These are death, abuse of women, and poverty, all of which have been worsened in the course of the war. It is evident that the characters, some of whom are in various states of guilt, are also in a state of disarray and have no peace of mind. Some characters show symptoms of withdrawal which is one of the common elements of trauma.

Schooler defines trauma as "an emotional response to an intense event that threatens or causes harm" (2). The harm can be physical or emotional, real or perceived, and it can threaten the child or someone close to him or her. Trauma can be the result of a single event or it can be result from exposure to multiple events over time. In most situations, trauma forces the victim to remain silent about the traumatic episode when the victim is physically vulnerable and fears further violence or death. This forced silence necessarily sharpens subsequent reactions to the trauma. Psychological trauma is caused by various occurrences

that affect people differently. According to Negin Heidarizadeh “typical causes of psychoanalytic trauma are sexual abuse, employment discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic violence and particularly childhood experiences. Other known causes include catastrophic events, war, treachery, betrayal and sexual abuse” (189). According to Jeffrey Alexander, the reaction to such shattering events is experienced as an immediate and unreflexively response]” (7). In some situations, trauma bears serious long term negative consequences. Traumatic memories affect the mind of the affected persons. In most situations, the effects of trauma can be seen through the actions of the victims.

From this discussion, it is evident that different people react differently to various traumatic situations. In some cases, the destructive extent of the trauma is only felt after sometime; while in others the effects are sudden and drastic. However, one common element is the fact that the affected individuals eventually come to terms with their problems despite the variation in the length of time it takes the various victims to deal with their pain. “The effects of trauma are deliberating even at times life threatening. The power the symptoms of trauma have over a person seems overwhelming. But harnessing that power can become liberating. The rewards are full life empowered by overcoming that adversity” (Cullen 38). Dealing with trauma brings an element of joy and fulfilment.

When a person suffers effects of trauma after sometime, the condition is referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a serious, potentially debilitating condition that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a life-threatening event such as natural disaster serious accident, terrorist incident, sudden death of a loved one, war; or rape or other violent personal assault” (ADAA 2). Some people ably recover from traumatic events, but some experience severe distress, anxiety, and depression for months or even years. Post-traumatic stress lingers for prolonged periods of time in people and affects their various actions. Once one is affected by PTSD, it is hard to really focus on anything else without obstructions.

In the three texts discussed, the characters do not experience traumatic stress immediately after their actions. They feel the stress after some time as they start coming to terms with reality. When this happens, the victims are unable to act as normally as they would routinely do. Eventually, the victims can only deal with the trauma after they face the consequences of their actions. Spiegel describes the essence of traumatic stress as helpless “loss of control over one’s body. The mental inscription of such terrifying experiences sometimes take the form of loss of control over parts of one’s mind, identity, memory, and

consciousness just as physical control is regained” (1). This loss of control is exactly what causes suffering.

The characters in the three novels show typical symptoms of psychic trauma that affect their personalities. According to Cathy Caruth, “psychic trauma involves intense personal suffering but it also involves the recognition of realities that most victims had not yet begun to face” (viii). As evident, one of the main symptoms of psychic trauma is the victim’s social withdrawal and isolation. In other words, the victim withdraws the self from other people as he or she tries to confront and deal with the feelings pertaining to the trauma. Sang-Bin Baek argues that,

Post-traumatic stress disorder occurs after an intense stressful situation such as fatal disasters, captivity, and sexual abuse. This patient suffers from psychic numbness, autonomic arousal symptoms, and reappearance of stressful memories. Due to these symptoms, social isolation is deepening and this patient has a social phobia (5).

Social withdraw is evident through Mariam and Rasheed in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Abdul and Saboor in *And the Mountains Echoed* and Amir in *The Kite Runner*. The common feature that exists among most of these characters is that their trauma erupts from loss. Just like Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* who suffers the loss of her mother and persistent miscarriages , Abdul and Saboor in *And the Mountains Echoed* also become traumatised as a result of ‘loss’ of their sister and daughter respectively. The departure of Pari from the household does not only traumatize Saboor but also affects Abdullah who feels extremely lonely.

But there was no forgetting. Pari hovered, unbidden, at the edge of Abdullah’s vision everywhere he went. She was like the dust that clung to his shirt. She was like the silences that had become so frequent at the house, silences that welled up between their words, sometimes cold and hollow, sometimes pregnant with things that went unsaid, like a cloud filled with rain that never fell (101).

Similarly, in *The Kite Runner*, Amir also socially withdraws himself from his friend Hassan.

I didn’t speak to Hassan until the middle of the next week. I had just half-eaten my lunch and Hassan was doing the dishes. I was walking upstairs, going to my room, when he asked if I wanted to hike up the hill. I said I was tired. Hassan looked tired too—he’d lost weight and gray circles had formed under his puffed-up eyes. But when he asked again, I reluctantly agreed (47)

The presence of Hassan in the household makes life a living hell for Amir, therefore he devises a plan to get rid of him once and for all. All these characters keep to themselves as they try to deal with their respective traumas. They cannot bear to come face to face to confront their fears hence see it fit to keep in isolation. The common factor with regard to the characters discussed in this study is that all the three texts are set in environments that are unstable and, consequently, impacts negatively on their lives as individuals. Most people recover from traumatic events, even though the recovery period varies from one person to another. Some frequently re-experience the event through intrusive thoughts, upsetting reminders or nightmares; relating, concentrating or sleeping becomes difficult (ADAA 1). As Caruth argues, “to be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (13). As it has been shown, this is a common element among the characters under discussion. A traumatic taunt returns to a person against the persons will.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a very familiar crisis that affects most people especially those from unstable environments. Even though other countries such as Afghanistan have the ability of sourcing help from counselling psychologists, there is still a big problem that a lot of people encounter. Various characters in the three texts depict PTSD symptoms. The traumatic experiences that the characters depict are mostly emotional. Whereas some characters are traumatised by a single distinct event, other characters such as Mariam in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* are traumatised as a result of exposure to multiple events in her life. This begins from the point of her mother’s death, to the moment she is married off and finally to the persistent miscarriages that she experiences in her abusive marriage to Rasheed. All these events shatter the characters’ well-being eventually leading to isolation and withdrawal.

Written works sometimes mirror the authors’ lives. Even though upon the production of the work of art, the text is read independent of the author as argued by scholarship supporting the ‘death of an author’ where the interpretation of the text is left for the readers, sometimes the author’s background still plays a big role in the reading of the text. The concept of loss which is recurrent in the three works also foregrounds Hosseini’s own experiences. Hosseini’s loss originates from his loss of relatives as well as the loss of his history through the destruction of his home country, a once developed country that has in recent times turned into ruins due to war. As a survivor of the most grievous traumatic experiences, Hosseini uses writing as a tool to voice out his experiences.

Quest for Redemption

In the three works under study, Hosseini seeks not only to retrieve memories of the war as experienced by the Afghans but to further describe the life within the very instruments of the war. In his autobiographical interviews, Hosseini states that he sees his life in some of the characters he presents even though the works are not autobiographies. In an interview with Al Jazeera, Hosseini rightly stated that his hope for readers of his texts is that in reading his books there is a communal experience of emotions and that the pain that the characters in the books felt will likewise be understood by others,² hence the readers sharing with him the Afghani experience.

The three texts can be termed as Hosseini's personal quest for redemption. In Christian mythology, redemption refers "to the mystery of God's deliverance of mankind from the evil of sin and his restoration of man to the state of grace by an act of divine power and merciful love"³. Redemption restores man to a state of grace. That is, it restores him to a state of peace and happiness.

Each of the characters that Hosseini uses personally portrays a story of selfishness and selflessness, the element of acceptance as well as forgiveness. In addition to presenting the characters engaging in actions that cause them feelings of guilt, Hosseini also presents each character's quest for redemption from guilt, as well as seeking reconciliation with the victim of the said action. Some of the characters achieve the redemption which they seek, while others do not clearly achieve the objectives of their quests. Regardless of this difference, it is clear that most of the characters embark on their respective quests for the sake of achieving peace of mind. They seek this peace of mind so that they can live with themselves again without struggling with their inner feelings of guilt. This section analyses the various characters' quests for redemption and examines the extent to which each character succeeds or fails to achieve the objective of his or her quest.

Psychoanalysis which aims at bringing out that which is in the unconscious world into consciousness is the basic theory that is used in the analysis of the characters' quests for redemption in all the three novels. The aim of psychoanalysis is to "uncover the hidden causes of the neurosis in order to relieve the patients of his or her conflict, so dissolving the distressing symptoms" (Eagleton 138). The unconscious includes all those frightening

² Talk to Al Jazeera-Khaled Hosseini: 'Why I write about pain' YouTube. 4 July, 2014.

³ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-andmaps/redemption-theology>

desires and painful thoughts and feeling that the conscious mind finds too distressing to acknowledge and deal with. As it has been noted in the preceding sections, the guilt that the characters' feel is repressed in the initial stages. However, the guilt eventually gets into some of the characters' consciousness and torments them. This tormenting that the characters go through reveals elements of the psychological problem known as neurosis which among other symptoms is showcased through phobias, hysteria, depression and anxiety. It is this suffering that causes the affected characters to embark on their quests for redemption. In addition to psychoanalysis, the discussion draws on Antonio Gramsci's concept of the subaltern in the examination of the gap between the rich and the poor which directly affects the characters' actions.

In their quest for redemption, the characters confront their hidden memories which are repressed in their unconscious. These thoughts are unacceptable to the conscious and hence are repressed into the unconscious where they are imprisoned by psychic energy. Most psychologists hold that the energy used to repress unaccountable thoughts causes forms of mental distress or illness, such as neurosis and psychosis. "Taking into account guilt's negative effects in the individual, Freud poses the need to confront its disturbing dynamism. It is necessary to eliminate the negative effects of a sense of guilt, which is mostly unconscious and other times excessive and equally disturbing even if it is conscious" (Etxebarria 101). Redemption therefore is an attempt at eliminating this guilt.

By definition, what resides in the unconscious is inaccessible to the conscious mind through any direct route, you cannot think about what is unconscious. Through mechanisms such as condensation and displacement, the unconscious encodes its messages in forms that like dreams and stories need to be analysed and interpreted. "Freud and many psychoanalyses' after him, posited that the creation of art and literature as well as myth, appeared as expressions of the unconscious" (Klages 87). This study therefore treats Hosseini's texts as an expression of his mind.

It has been observed in this study that the achievement of redemption for each character discussed, namely, Mariam, Rasheed, Nabi, Saboor, Amir, and Amir's father, is preceded by personal realization of the wrongs each one of them has done against other characters in the novels. For most of them, apology to the victims is also key to the achievement of redemption. Some of the characters use various forms of actions and communication to show how apologetic they are for their wrong doing. Mariam sacrificing her life to ensure Laila has freedom is her way of redemption in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. On

the other hand, in *The Kite Runner*, Amir goes in the war torn Afghanistan in the midst of war and destruction to rescue Hassan's son. By coming to terms with their wrongful actions, regardless of their causes, the characters demonstrate their attempts to transcend the regrettable past and transform themselves into better people as they have been redeemed from their feelings of guilt. Others such as Jalil in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Nabi in *And the Mountains Echoed* express their apologies in writing because they are unable to meet their victims in person. This would seem to make their acknowledgement of wrong doing less effective than it would be if they apologized to their victims through the spoken word. According to Jacques Derrida's conception of the priority of speech over writing:

The spoken word is given a higher value because the speaker and listener are both present to the utterance simultaneously. There is no temporal or spatial distance between speaker, speech, and listener, since the speaker hears himself speak at the same moment the listener does. This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean and know what we have said (Derrida 9).

This quotation indicates that the ideal form of communication is the spoken word because it derives power and immediacy from the presence of both speaker and listener, whereas the written word lacks such presence and immediacy. The belief of superiority of speech over written language is referred to as phonocentrism. "Phonocentrism treats writing as a contaminated form of speech. Speech, we attribute to it a 'presence' which we take to be lacking in writing" (Klages 165). However, the situations in which Jalil and Nabi find themselves do not enable them to get the physical presence of their victims for them to express spoken apologies. In such circumstances, therefore, their written apologies suffice as full apologies, and facilitate their achievement of redemption from their conditions of guilt.

Resolution of guilt requires the subject openly and unequivocally confessing of himself as a damaging, guilty person to a significant other. Brooke describes what is sought through confession to be absolution not punishment (34). The end goal of peace of mind is that which brings about freedom. Once this is achieved, the subject achieves openness in the world again.

Writing as a product: Confronting Memory

The quest for redemption as discussed in the above section directly reflects the confrontation of not only the characters memory, but also that of the author.

According to Louis Althusser, “art makes us see in a distanced way the ideology from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art and to which it alludes” (qtd in Selden et al 97). In his writing, Hosseini moves between fantasy and reality. In his portrayal of Afghanistan’s political instability, he moves between using elements that are true about the land and the people and a bit of fantasy as portrayed through the characters. As argued by Akshay Sharma, “the common thread that links Khaled Hosseini’s novels apart from them being set in and representative of a society and complex history-is the fact that each character in these fictional works sets out on a journey that is determined and to a large extent linked to the country’s turbulent historical and social background” (1).

In one of his interviews, Hosseini was quizzed about whether his characters portray his personal life, he specifically answered that “whereas his books are not autobiographies, he can somehow see himself in the characters that he develops”. Hosseini specifically gives an example of a character from *The Kite Runner* Amir who together with his friend Hassan flies kites in Kabul. *The Kite Runner* being Hosseini’s first book mirrors a lot of experiences of the land and how it presents the gap between the rich and the poor. In an interview titled “Khaled Hosseini - ‘The Kite Runner’ Part 1” Hosseini states that he uses a lot of his personal memories to recreate the city of Kabul as well as to recreate Amir and Hassan. Hosseini recounts the kite running experience as common among the Afghan boys and talks about this as a sport that he himself liked playing while he was young and still lived in Afghanistan. He also explains about women figures as portrayed in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as real examples of women that he had personally encountered, or heard experiences about. The persistent war and continuous suffering as well as loss that characters such as Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* encounter are real issues that some of his relations or people that he knew have undergone.

As evident therefore, the writing process for Hosseini proves to be more than writing as an industry, but rather what Terry Eagleton terms “product of social consciousness, a world vision” (28). The writing process for Hosseini can be equated to the process of having an access to the unconscious with the author taking the role of the producer. According to Eagleton, “dreams provide our main, but not only access to the unconscious. There are also what Freud calls ‘parapraxes’, unaccountable slips of the tongue, failures of memory, bungling, misreading and mislaying which can be traced to the unconscious wishes and intentions” (137). Hosseini’s writing may not be necessarily through the interpretation of dreams, but rather what Freud describes as phantasies. “A strong experience in the present awakens in the creative writer a memory of an

earlier experience (usually belonging to his childhood) from which finds its fulfilment in the creative work” (Habib 581). These experiences that he went through and those that he still comes across as a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador to Afghanistan furnish him with a lot of realistic details.

These books have the ever-presence of the author’s voice felt. Writers of stories of trauma get a chance to stop existing and start living once they put their thoughts on paper. As Foster notes ‘narrators are like cats. They may talk about other people, but the world is mostly about them (67). His novels carry a mission of redemption but also a voice of the past and the present. Hosseini just like his characters confront memory. Finally, the quote below further expresses the core of the argument that this paper states. In an interview, Hosseini rightly affirms that:

We had a lot of family and friends in Kabul. And the communist coup as opposed to the coup that happened in '73 was actually violent. A lot of people rounded up and executed, a lot of people were imprisoned. Virtually anybody that was affiliated or associated with the previous regime or the royal family was persecuted, imprisoned, killed, rounded up, or disappeared. And so we would hear news of friends and acquaintances and occasionally family members to whom that had happened, that were either in prison or worse, had just disappeared and nobody knew where they were, and some of them never turned up. My wife’s uncle was a very famous singer and composer in Kabul who had been quite vocal about his dislike for the communists and so on and he disappeared. And to this day, we have no idea what happened to him. So that sort of thing, we began to hear news over in Europe of mass executions and really just horror stories. So it was surreal, and it also kind of hit home in a very real way.⁴

As quoted above, it is evident that his personal experiences had and still have an impact on how Hosseini lives his life in the present day.

Conclusion

All the three books discussed in this work are authored by Khaled Hosseini which brings a great perspective in the study. They all share the common feature of being set in Afghanistan and abroad (America and Europe). They all show basic elements of a community that is unstable.

⁴ American Academy of Achievement. Khaled Hosseini, M.D. Biography and Interview. <https://www.achievement.org/achiever/khaled-hosseini/>.

The paper has expressed the argument that the author mirrors realism in the fictional works. Some of the elements that show the truth of these elements are the setting and the life of the characters. The texts portray a war-torn nation of Afghanistan and the problems that this brings and this does not differ with the present situations in Afghanistan. In these works, we see Hosseini's agency as a writer.

This study has argued that external forces in the various environments where the various characters live influence the actions that cause their feelings of guilt. Living in an unstable environment of Afghanistan, the characters encounter various socio- economic conditions and challenges that render them helpless hence traumatising them. Despite the trauma and depression that they encounter, it is evident that the characters confront their guilt and seek redemption.

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