

In the Name of Shame and Honor:  
The Loss of the Self Within the Social Context of a *Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*

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### **Abstract**

This thesis analyzes Khaleed Hosseini's novels *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) by focusing solely on the notions of honor, shame, and the subsequent loss of the self in the social environment depicted in these novels. With a close reading of the cultural settings in the novels and the interaction of characters in their settings, this research explores the interrelationship of honor and shame and their interconnectedness with the cultural construction of the self. I will argue that the social factors of honor and shame influence the composition of various characters' identity in the novels.

**Key Words:** Honor, Shame, the Self

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## Introduction

You are never alone in Afghanistan. You are always in the company of others, usually family. You do not understand yourself as an individual, you understand yourself as part of something bigger than yourself.

-Khaled Hosseini, in an interview with “The Tavis Smiley Show”

“Wearing revealing clothes is shameful for females.” “It is shameful for a man to act and behave like a woman.” “This woman completely dishonored her family. Her father should kill her to restore his and his family’s honor.” These statements are only a few of the many that are related to honor and shame that I used to hear frequently as I grew up in a Middle Eastern setting. From an early age, the words “shame” and “honor” have been tediously and repeatedly restated around me. I learned that some actions are completely forbidden for me to perform or say because they are considered shameful or dishonorable. For example, even though my family did not necessarily believe that I should wear modest clothes, I knew that I was obliged to, since wearing revealing clothes would only mean that I would ruin their reputation among their peers. Personal habits such as my choice of clothing, whom I would talk to, my relationship with others, especially males, and even my conversations with my friends had to be done carefully so as not to bring any shame to my family and myself. I grew up with these ideas so engraved in my head that they became part of my identity.

When I attended the American University of Iraq, the American professors there would consider acts such as cheating on an exam or plagiarizing information to be shameful. Honor to most of them meant acts of honesty, integrity, and nobility. To them, shame and honor did not necessarily correlate with sexual behavior and attitudes. In turn, I came to the conclusion that notions of honor and shame rely heavily on cultural settings, which supports the idea that these two conventions are constructed by the culture itself, meaning that the collective body of

individuals will assess a conceptual notion and add elements to certain concepts, such as honor and shame, and then abide by them. This composes a fabricated and self-established social construct within a culture, where individuals must abide by these rules or else they would not belong to that culture.

Jia *et al.*, have carried out a comparison study between Western and Eastern cultures to demonstrate the ways in which cultures shape and influence the individual's actions. They particularly studied the difference of perceiving codes of honor between the two different cultures. They deduced that cultural norms determine the moral values of individuals, causing them to act and behave in a fashionable manner that accords with what is culturally acceptable (2569). In their analysis, they differentiated between honor cultures and dignity cultures. Dignity cultures (Western cultures) give more value to the individuality of the members in the society. Their moral codes rely on their individualistic decisions. Honor cultures (Eastern cultures) on the other hand, put more emphasis on the virtues and honor of one's self and one's group (2570). This suggests that in Eastern cultures, decisions made by individuals do not only affect them personally. Instead, they affect people close to them, especially their families. To go back to Hosseini's remark at the beginning, this clarifies why he believes that it is hard for individuals in Afghanistan (an Eastern culture) to express their true self. Likewise, the impact of the group on individuals is demonstrated in his novels' characters who must also conform to cultural norms including honor and shame.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghani-American author who has written three successful novels about Afghanistan in which most of his characters must act according to Afghani cultural values. Many themes in the novels appear frequently and explicitly, such as war, terrorism, family ties and relationships, poverty and oppression. However, there are also many embedded themes that

are quite common in his novels; these include honor, shame, and identity. Hosseini's characters vary in their backgrounds. They range from educated, wealthy, non-religious characters, to uneducated, poor, and religious ones. Despite their differences, though, they all have to confront the conditions their culture creates for them. Shame and honor, with their diverse connotations, have power over these characters in the sense that they make them think and perform actions in a particular, not always self-determined way. By changing their actions to fit the cultural norms, these characters lose their true selves, as it is not possible for them to express themselves genuinely in their cultures.

In light of all this, my research question addresses how shame and honor are constructed in two of Hosseini's novels: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. How do these culturally constructed notions alter the identities of the characters to fit the common cultural values? This research aims to show that shame and honor are two social constructs that compose a power which the characters in Hosseini's novels are obliged to obey. The novels make us realize that shame and honor are the two of most prominent culturally influential values and it is by adhering or refusing to conform to these customs that the characters lose their self in one way or another.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, first published in 2007, Hosseini diverts his focus from the male-centered relationship which he explored in his acclaimed first novel, *The Kite Runner*, and focuses on the relationship between women and their solidarity through difficult times which are created by male subjugation. The entire novel revolves around the development of the relationship between two female characters. One is Mariam, an illegitimate child born to Nana, a house-worker, and Jalil, a rich man who is married to three other women already. The other one is Laila, who is born into a middle-class family: her father is a teacher, her mother a housewife.

Mariam and Laila's paths intertwine and lead them to marry Rasheed. Rasheed is already forty-five when he marries Mariam who is only fifteen at that time. He is the antagonist in the novel as he beats, tortures, and imprisons his wives repeatedly. Mariam and Laila's relationship starts with hatred towards each other but eventually ends with Mariam sacrificing her life to save Laila's. They, as leading female characters, experience hardships that originate mostly from certain parameters of honor and shame.

In the second novel that I will examine *And the Mountains Echoed* which was published in 2013, Hosseini shifts his focus from establishing male as well as female solidarity relationships to depicting a variety of male and female characters' interactions with one another. *And the Mountains Echoed* does not only focus on Afghani characters and their cultures like his other previous novels do. It instead concentrates on multiple characters from different cultures around the world, many of whom were born and raised in one culture but moved and lived in a completely different one. Because there are a lot of characters in this novel, I will only focus on a few, including Nila and Suleiman Wahdati, and their servant, Nabi. Nila is an open-minded female character who dresses immodestly, parties with her friends occasionally, and writes sexual poetry. Suleiman is a quiet and non-caring character who hides his true sexual orientation until the middle of the novel, where it is revealed that he is homosexual. This novel depicts the struggles of women and homosexual men, which it represents in such a way that no matter where a person is from, he or she is always subject to the self-established rules of culture and traditions in which they live. Therefore, ideas of honor and shame keep haunting Hosseini's characters regardless of the novel, the background, and the place.

In the following chapter of this thesis, I will first draw a theoretical framework in order to explain my use of the concepts of identity, shame, and honor. I will explain the nature of the self

under the effect of outside forces, such as some social constructs that lead to altering it. I will explain how shame is a social emotion that depends on the outsider's invalidation to be felt. I will also discuss the social influence of the concept of honor and its effects on the identity of the characters in the novels. In the second and third chapters, I will zoom in on the two central concepts of honor and shame, and study the representation and functioning of these notions within Hosseini's two novels. By offering various close readings of the text, I hope to demonstrate that the social interactions between the characters and the social environment in the novels put a strong emphasis on the values of honor and shame which ultimately lead to a controlled social setting in which characters must conform and adjust their identities to fit the social norm.



## Chapter I: Theoretical Framework

### 1.1 Defining the Self

In order to analyze literary characters, readers first begin to learn their trivial attributes such as their names, their occupations, and their interests. Other more categorical features can provide extra information about the identity of a character, such as, their sex, their racial and religious backgrounds, or maybe even their political affiliation. However, learning these attributes about characters is not enough to define the self of these characters. Perhaps it is because the deeper nature of the self is not an easy one to discover. Hence, philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber, psychologists like Carl Jung, and literary critics such as Theodor Adorno scrutinized the notion of self as well as the self in its social context. And while the self has always puzzled us in general, we tend to ponder and question our individuality even more in relation to our social environment. The characters in Hosseini's novels already have a sense of identity which is often presented as an enigma to the reader. And, as I will demonstrate, their cultural setting and the social expectations connected to this, force them to veil even more of who they are.

Literary critics such as Jonathan Culler explore the conundrum of the self and identity in the framework of literary theory. In *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Culler explains it and its relation to cultural studies and raises two important questions regarding the nature of the self. First, he wonders whether the self is something given or something made. Second, he asks whether the self should be considered in an individual or social context. To explain the opposition between whether the self originates from the individual or is based upon social terms, Culler offers these ensuing scenarios.

The first, opting for the given and the individual, treats the self, the 'I', as something inner and unique, something that is prior to the acts it performs, an inner core which is variously expressed (or not expressed) in word and deed. The second, combining the given and the social, emphasizes that the self is determined by its origins and social attributes: you are male or female, white or black, British or American, and so on, and these are primary facts, givens of the subject or the self. The third, combining the individual and the made, emphasizes the changing nature of a self, which becomes what it is through its particular acts. Finally, the combination of the social and the made stresses that I become what I am through the various subject positions I occupy, as a boss rather than a worker, rich rather than poor (108).

Taking these four explanations into account, to identify the self is already a complex task since it does not solely depend on the interiority of the self (that is, the true inner self prior to the effect of the social terms) nor does it completely depend on the exteriority of the outside environment. The identification of the self is a combination of both, that is, the inner self and the exterior impact on the self, which creates an internal struggle that could result in confusion and even the loss of the self if the external social impact is irresistible. This especially appears in shame and honor-based societies, which put extreme value on these morals and force the individuals within the society to accept them. With that being the case, it is no wonder that we often see that the self enters in a conflict between what it is and what it is expected to be. As I will show, this often causes Hosseini's characters confusion and loss of the self in the hope to be included in the circle of the society in his novels.

Culler also plays with the ideas of the "self" and the "subject", as he juxtaposes the two notions. He puts forwards another question, this time regarding the "subject" who struggles with questions such as "what am I?" and "Am I made what I am by circumstances?" (109). Subjects often speculate about their individuality and the meaning of their individuality in relation to a group. Culler states that "The English word *subject* already encapsulates this key theoretical problem: the subject is an actor or agent, a free subjectivity that does things, as in the 'subject of

a sentence'. But a subject is also subjected, determined. 'Her Majesty the Queen's loyal subject, or the 'subject of an experiment'" (109). In the end, he concludes that theory is inclined to propose that to be a subject, is to be a subject of multiple regimes: psycho-social, sexual, linguistic (109). In juxtaposing the self with the subject, Culler asserts that the self formulates as a result of the influence of outside factors. The self is subjected under many significant factors such as the authoritative power of the community or the ideological regimes of the society that ultimately put the self under a scope and eventually alters it. Considering Culler's demonstration of the self, to identify the subject or the self is to identify the factors that articulate it. Therefore, to understand the self is to differentiate it from the power of the ideological regimes of the societies. Through this process of differentiation, one is able to see the influence of the society, its beliefs, its norms, and how these have all been a part of molding that self.

Within each culture, there are certain codes upon which the subjects must follow and adhere. Some aspects of a culture are stronger than others. For instance, considering the Afghani culture, which is the setting of the novels I intend to discuss, elements of shame and honor, are what composes the aspects that glue together the collective attitudes of the culture. Patricia Mosquera argues that shame and honor in countries like Afghanistan are two of the most important core values. Both men and women often do everything in their capacity to hold together their honor and protect themselves from actions that are shameful. Some do not even mind going as far as sacrificing their lives to conceal their shame and preserve their honor (274).

Culler's position on explaining the self suggests that the self is already altered to be an acceptable subject of the social regimes. Supported by Mosquera's explanation of the importance of social norms, I will use these theories to analyze how Hosseini's novels show us that the

characters' identities are subjects to cultural codes of shame and honor, and how these codes compose a social regime that shapes the identity of these characters.

## **1.2 The Social Influence of Shame**

As it is stated above, the cultural values of each society can have the influence to change the self of an individual. Since shame and honor are two of the most important cultural values in Afghanistan, in the following sections I will be focusing on them: what they are, how they are constructed in the culture, and how they eventually change the self.

In a more practical sense of the matter, nineteenth-century scientist Charles Darwin in his book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, describes shame effects as consisting of blushing, confusion of mind, downward cast eyes, slack posture, and lowered head as he noticed these effects in human populations worldwide (69). Shame then is a physical emotion that is often felt internally; however, its effects show on the external features of the body, especially the face.

However, shame is not only an internal emotion that appears externally but is also a social emotion, which means that even though like other emotions, it is felt through the body, it is the most social of the basic emotions. Thomas Scheff in "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory" nominates shame as the premier social emotion (84). Shame, he argues, is a crucial emotion in creating and being part of the social bond. This social bond is what glues together any kind of group relationship, namely, friendship, family relations, and social and cultural relationships (85). Scheff refers to Helen Lewis's work on the emotion of shame. He states Lewis believes that shame is constructed based on social terms, that is to say, the emotion of shame arises when there is a threat to the social bond. "Every person, she argues, fears social disconnections, being adrift from understanding and being understood by the others" (95). Based

on her argument, Scheff dwells further on this idea as he suggests that shame arises from social rejection or failure to fit within the social bond of the society. To his belief, “Shame, since it involves even a slight threat to the bond, is pervasive in virtually all social interaction” (97). He also states that even though individuals may only occasionally feel shame, because of the pressure of the social bond it is part of, shame is always anticipated (97). That is to say, shame is an emotion that is always present in an individual’s conscious that leads that individual to keep thinking about it. Similar to Scheff’s analysis of shame, most of the characters in the novels are constantly conscious of feeling shame in their societies. In order to avoid feeling this social-based emotion, the characters are forced to act according to what is culturally accepted as not shameful.

Since shame is a social emotion, it can therefore be used to advocate a certain construct within a society. It is necessary to discuss how using shame establishes a fabric for the basis of the Afghani culture in the novels. British-Australian feminist and queer theorist and scholar, Sara Ahmed discusses the manipulation of emotions as they have been used as an effective tool to carry out politics of social constructs. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Ahmed focuses on the relationship between language, emotions, and bodies. She examines the impact of emotions on bodies, and the ways in which the body interacts with communities, producing the cultural relationship that constructs a sense of a nation.

Unlike other theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Alder Horney, Ahmed’s theory about emotions differs by suggesting that emotions do not originate from a psychological state. Instead, she offers an analysis of effective emotions “where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects but are produced as effects of circulation” (8). To put it differently, the circulation of certain emotions in a culture is what determines the impact of them. It is not the psychological feelings

of one's cognition that decides the effectiveness of that emotion. With that in mind, she argues that it is thus the cultural dimensions and surroundings that condition the emotion of shame. Her objective is to figure out how emotions have the capacity to form the "surface" of individuals and collective bodies. This is done by "aligning subjects with collectives by attributing 'others' as the 'source' of our feelings" (1). In this case, "the other" is what preconditions the self's feeling about the emotion of shame.

To explain the emotion of shame, Ahmed suggests that it "feels like an exposure – another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful – but it also involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject turn away from the other and towards itself" (103). This complexity of shame intensifies as others see the shameful act. Furthermore, Ahmed presents covering shame in individuals in this way, "In shame, I feel myself to be bad, and hence to expel the badness, I have to expel myself from myself" (104). Feeling ashamed of an act has the capacity to turn the self against itself, heavily influencing the identity, resulting from a change of persona that is so apparent in the eyes of the decision-makers that they end up feeling resentment towards themselves for the choices they have made. Hence, it alters or even changes one's self. Because shame is acquired by individuals who feel they have committed a wrongful act (one that is not approved of by the surrounding culture), that individual attempts to get rid of the shame by taking away a part of themselves.

Shame, which is a cultural condition as explained by Ahmed, shapes the events of Hosseini's novels, as it is the emotion most felt by almost all the characters. In the novels, shameful acts range from indulging in a premarital sexual encounter, being homosexual, or just showing the body (or even the face if the character is a woman). Hosseini's characters tend to hide and cover the shameful act, or even hide their reality even if it composes an enormous part

of their identity. I will use Scheff and Ahmed's theory of shame to explain that within the social settings in the novels, the social pressure and the use of shaming language from certain characters is what causes these characters to anticipate and feel shame.

### **1.3 Honor as a Social Factor**

Honor is a complicated concept as it encompasses a wide range of acts and behaviors. For example, it may refer to integrity, honesty, nobility, etc. On other occasions, honor refers to women's modesty and chastity. In "Honor and Shame," Halvor Moxnes defines honor as "Fundamentally the public recognition of one's social standing" (20). According to Moxnes, honor has two primal axes, ascribed honor and acquired honor. Ascribed honor is inherited from the family, meaning that a person is born with the family's heritage of their previous manners. Therefore, it is not in the slightest based on the person's actions. In contrast, acquired honor relies on the individual's deeds. An individual must constantly work to maintain that honor because it can easily be either lost or gained (20).

Additionally, Moxnes claims that honor, as well as shame, affect people in their social settings (19). The social and cultural recognition of an individual's honor is vital. While a person may enjoy having the virtuous attributes of honor, for it to be recognized it must ultimately be acknowledged by the social surroundings. Moxnes adds:

While honor may sometimes be an inner quality, the value of a person in his or her own eyes, it depends ultimately on recognition from significant others in society. It is a public matter. When someone's claim to honor is recognized by the group, honor is confirmed, and the result is a new social status. With this status follows the expectation of honorable behavior (20).

So, like shame, honor is acknowledged by an external source; in this case, the source is the society and its acknowledgment of a person's honor. To be honorable is to have all the

components of the codes that are heavily rooted in a culture. Honor is thus an agreed-upon public opinion.

On a similar note, anthropologist, Julian Pitt-Rivers in “Honor and Social Status” further explains the difference between men’s and women’s social standing when it comes to maintaining the honor of the household. He suggests that historically, it was the duty of a man to take the responsibility of providing and guarding the household, including the females in it. It is then in the man’s power to protect the female and her chastity. If a woman fails to protect her chastity, she brings shame to the entire family and in turn dishonors them. Both the woman and the man then can be subject to blame for the honor that was taken (25).

In the context of Hosseini’s novels, honor, like shame, becomes synonymous with the character’s identity. To be a respected character and to fit within the social settings of the novels, honor must be maintained. I will then use Moxen and Rivers’ theories of honor to show that in the novels, honor can refer to several behaviors, particularly those that affect women. As the novels suggest, a woman is expected to keep her family’s honor unscathed by not performing sexual activities outside of marriage. Men, too, are encouraged to be chaste; however, the consequences for them are not as severe as they are for women. Additionally, not only does a woman’s sexual conduct matter in keeping the honor of the family, her body must be hidden and veiled too. The burden in keeping a women’s honor does not only fall on her shoulders though; it is also a man’s duty to guard it.

In the above theories about shame, honor, and the self, in one way or another all three deal with the social surroundings of the characters. As Culler argues, it is hard to define the self without referring back to the society in which the individual resides, as it composes a huge role in constructing the self. For Scheff and Ahmed, the social surrounding is indeed responsible for



feelings of shame that individuals experience. Finally, Moxnes and Rivers argue that honor is a social criterion that must be acknowledged publicly in order for it to be recognized or even for it to exist, so honor too depends on the attitudes of the society.

In this thesis, I will focus on the themes of honor and shame and their subsequent effect on the characters' self. Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* are set in a time and a place where it is hard for the characters to be themselves. As my analysis will demonstrate, there is always a social construct that hinders them from expressing their true desires.

In chapter two, I will offer an analysis of the use of the veil and the house to hide both females' and males' shame. Subsequently, I will discuss shame as it is linked to sexuality in females, and shame linked to homosexuality in the novels. Chapter three will discuss how shame and honor are connected. In this chapter, I will first analyze how men's honor depends on women's chastity and modesty. After doing so, I will examine how honor as a social construct is a process of internalization among women. In the final chapter, I will use Michel Foucault's theory of docile bodies to conclude that the social constructs of shame and honor in the two novels reduce characters to mere bodies depleted of their identities.

## Chapter II: Covered Shame: Hiding the Self

In this chapter, I will discuss the factors that have the potential to bring shame to both female and male characters. In order to cover that shame, there are certain cultural tools such as using the veil and using the house as shields to separate the sexes. Following that, I will focus on the sexual shame that the characters experience and discuss their attempts to hide it.

### 2.1 The Veil

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, there is a clear distinction between men's and women's social status. This distinction lies in the roles men and women are obliged to play, their positions in the societies, and their freedom of movement. The male characters have more freedom and more control over their bodies and decisions. They also have more power to manipulate the female characters. On the other hand, the female characters are always subject to any male presence in their lives and to the norms of society in general. In the novels, it appears that the notion of shame is superbly entwined in the society and acts as a preserved apparatus of control. It hides women from sight, whether it is hiding them in the confinement of their houses or hiding their identity by covering them with layers of clothes when they are outside.

To begin with, some, especially individuals that are not exposed to Middle Eastern societies might believe that it is Islam that requires women to cover themselves entirely. Since the Afghani society in the novels follows the Islamic religion, one could argue that the morality of Islam is the reason why women have to cover and it is not necessarily because of the consequences of shame. However, this argument can be refuted if one refers back to the Quran. In the Quran, as feminist scholars of Islam such as Leila Ahmed have pointed out in *Women and Gender in Islam*, it is not specifically mentioned that women must wear a burqa<sup>1</sup> and cover

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<sup>1</sup> The burqa is a traditional Islamic wear that is used by women usually in central Asia to cover the entire body including the face.

entirely (55). In fact, the only verse regarding veiling in the Quran specifically asks women to “lower their gazes, and to guard their private parts, and not to display their adornment except what is apparent of it, and to extend their scarfs (Khimars) to cover their bosoms (jaybs)” (The Quran, Al Nur 24:31).

The religion merely obliges women to be modest. It does not order them to cover either their hair or their faces. The ordeal of fully covering the body must then originate from cultural obligations. With this argument, it is safe to assume that using the burqa is a tool utilized by men in the novels to cover what they believe is shameful about the female body.

In the following analysis, I will use Leila Ahmed and Carroll McC. Pastner’s theories about the necessity to hide women from sight in Middle Eastern societies. Generally, in the novels, there are mainly two ways in which the female characters are hidden. One is by restraining them within the confines of the house. The other is that when they are outside, they need to cover themselves up by using the burqa.

In this regard, Carroll McC. Pastner in “A Social Structure and Historical Analysis of Honor, Shame and Purdah” offers a detailed analysis of honor and shame and their correlation with the purdah in the Afghani social setting. Purdah is a term widely used in South Asia. It includes two different definitions, a curtain, and a veil to hide parts of the body. The curtain refers to a physical separation in the house between men and women which is a practice that is predominant in South Asia, including Afghanistan (Pastner 251).

To stress the importance of the values that pave the way for hiding women, the significance put upon a women’s physical modesty becomes prominent among these cultures. Pastner states, “two of the major methods of preventing the breach of modesty lie in limitations on the physical mobility of women beyond the home and the establishment of sexual “invisibility” through such

items of clothing as the burkah and the shawl” (251). Thus, the veil is used both to hide a woman physically from her surroundings by secluding her from the outside world, and even when she is out, to create a barrier between her and the world in the veil and clothes that cover her wholly.

Taking the veil as a mode of covering shame, Leila Ahmed presents another reason for wearing the veil in Middle Eastern societies. She states, “Veiling and the confinement of women spread throughout the region and became the ordinary social practices, as did the attitudes to women and the human body (such as a sense of the shameful of the body and sexuality) that accompanied such practices” (18). Supported by Leila Ahmed’s argument, I consider the reason for veiling women is hiding away their shameful connotation, which in this case, is primarily their sexuality. If women in such societies are reduced to their sexual values only, this allows men to think that they have the right to order them around and make them do whatever they want. Leila Ahmed further scrutinizes the notion of the veil as she states, “The use of the veil classified women according to their sexual activity and signaled to men which women were under male protection and which were fair game” (15). This means that a veiled woman is a protected woman or a woman who is under the supervision of a man.

### ***A Thousand Splendid Suns***

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, wearing the burqa does not come from a decision that female characters make on their own. It is usually the man that decides this for the woman. Mariam and Laila both wear the burqa as a fulfillment of Rasheed’s order. When Rasheed takes Mariam out to see around Kabul for the first time, before the two go out, Rasheed “fished a sky blue burqa from the bag. The yards of pleated cloth spilled over his knees when he lifted it” (Hosseini 41). Because Mariam had never worn a burqa before, she puts it on and practices walking around in it

in the house. Seeing her struggle in her act, Rasheed tells her, “You will get used to it. With time, I bet you will even like it” (Hosseini 42).

In the novel, a woman’s husband is the one that demands she wears the burqa. Because of this, Rasheed, when he sees Laila with her male friend Tariq, long before they get married has this reaction: “As he passed by them, Rasheed had playfully said, “If it isn’t Laili and Majnoon<sup>2</sup>” (Hosseini 91). However, later, after he has married Laila, he asks her, too, to wear the burqa in the following manner, “I also ask that when we are out together, that you wear a burqa. For your own protection, naturally. It is best. So many lewd men in this town now. Such vile intentions, so eager to dishonor even a married woman. So. That is all” (Hosseini 118-119). In this case, before marrying Laila, she is fair game as Leila Ahmed puts it, so Rasheed is free to tease her as he pleases since she is not part of his family. However, when they are married, Laila can now bring shame to him, so he feels that it falls on his shoulder to protect her from the outsider’s gaze as she is now under his supervision.

The burqa also serves as a tool to reduce female characters to mere objects that must be covered and only uncovered when men think they should. In a conversation between Rasheed and Mariam, Rasheed tells her, “A woman’s face is her husband’s business only” (Hosseini 47). The face is the most important part of anyone’s identity as it is the first thing to be recognized by others. It is the ideal personification to tell individuals from one another. When the face is hidden from everyone else and only belongs to the husband of a woman, then she becomes his property, her purpose to please and preserve a man’s sense of ego and honor.

In both cases, Rasheed manages to manipulate his two wives into wearing it. In the first case, with Mariam, he tells her that she will get used to wearing the burqa and eventually even

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<sup>2</sup> Laili and Majnoon is the Farsi version of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*.

like it. Rasheed does not consider Mariam's thoughts on the matter. He decides how she ought to view the burqa and how to feel about it. Mariam does not get to decide for herself whether she will like to wear it or not, simply because she has no option but to abide by her husband's command. With his convincing techniques with Laila, he is gentler and less assertive as he tries to persuade her that it is only for her benefit that he makes her wear it. Laila, like Mariam, also has no choice but to wear it as the consequence will only lead to Rasheed beating her and forcing her to wear it anyway.

Furthermore, in the novel, there is a more powerful group that makes women in Afghanistan wear the burqa. This group is the Taliban. In the flyers they distribute all over Afghanistan, they specifically force women to wear burqa in the following fashion, "You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten" (Hosseini 144). In this case, all the female figures are forced to wear it because if they do not, the consequences are harsh and unmerciful. Hence, turning women into sheer objects further increases when the Taliban are in power. Their commands, although severe for everyone in the community, are especially cruel to women. This cruelty is a result of their view of women as they are less than men are and should therefore be subjected to whatever commands that befalls them. Their rules include the following:

If you are caught alone on the street, you will be beaten and sent home. You will not under any circumstances, show your face. You will cover with burqa when outside. If you do not, you will be severely beaten. Cosmetics are forbidden. Jewelry is forbidden. You will not wear charming clothes. You will not speak unless spoken to. You will not make eyes contact with men. You will not laugh in public. You will not paint your nails. If you do, you will lose a finger. Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately. Women are forbidden from working (Hosseini 144).

These rules, as absurd as they sound, are only there to exert control over women. The novel's presentation of this extremist group shows that if the society already has the potential to

be manipulated by using its own cultural values, then it will be easy to be controlled. Rasheed forces both of his wives to wear the burqa before the Taliban's existence, which suggests that these ideas were already part of the culture. Even though these rules may sound extraordinarily harsh, they are only an incarnation of what already exists in the culture. The Taliban's proclamations are indeed more extreme; however, their control of the women, just like Rasheed's, relies on using shame as an excuse since there is no religious command that implies these instructions. Hence, this facilitates the Taliban's agenda to use shame as a tool to conduct their mission, which is to hide the women completely from sight.

Moreover, the representation of the veil in the novel suggests that as the burqa becomes a social norm in the culture, even female characters themselves start to believe that it hides away any shame they might feel. Because Mariam has always had to carry the name of harami<sup>3</sup> with her, she has constantly thought that she has brought shame upon herself specifically and to others generally. As explained above, the veil is used to hide any hint of shame. To Mariam, this method works perfectly to hide her baggage of shame too. When Mariam wears the burqa for the first time, the narrator describes her experience as follows:

And the burqa, she learned to her surprise, was also comforting. It was like a one-way window. Inside it, she was an observer, buffered from the scrutinizing eyes of strangers. She no longer worried that people knew, with a single glance, all the shameful secrets of her past (Hosseini 42).

Since she is completely hidden behind the piece of cloth, deprived of all sense of selfhood and an identity, she no longer has to be concerned with the outsider's gaze who might recognize her and know about the shame she constantly feels. Since the outsider cannot know about her shame, she

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<sup>3</sup> Harami is a word that is derived from the word haram, which means illegitimate. Harami is a person who is born illegitimately.

too cannot feel it either, since shame, as Sara Ahmed believes, is a social emotion, meaning that it is felt when the outside gaze recognizes it.

The same is true for Laila who is also forced by Rasheed to wear the burqa. When she wears it and goes outside in it for the first time, she feels a sense of comfort because the veil also hides away the shame she feels, which in her case is different from that of Mariam's. Even though Laila walks with carefulness as not to trip on the lengthy burqa, she believes that "She would not be recognized this way if she ran into an old acquaintance of hers. She would not have to watch the surprise in their eyes, or the pity or the glee, at how far she had fallen, at how her lofty aspiration had been dashed" (Hosseini 122). Laila's shame comes from her marriage to Rasheed as she has always been the most beautiful and educated among her peers. The thought that she ends up marrying an older man who is already married initiates a feeling of shame to Laila. She does not want to be identified or recognized by others so that her feelings of shame are not verified or enhanced. Therefore, to Laila's belief, it is better for her to be robbed of her identity as an individual than for her to be exposed and shamed.

### ***And the Mountains Echoed***

Nila Wahdati, the most important female figure in *And the Mountains Echoed* takes a contrary position to that of the traditional characters of Mariam and Laila. Unlike Laila and Mariam, Nila is more free and open-minded character as she was born in France and travelled many times with her family. Hence, she acts and behaves rather differently than Mariam and Laila who are born and raised in Afghanistan. To give an example, Nila's dress code is extremely different from that of the other two. She wears short skirts and sleeveless shirts which make those around her feel rather uncomfortable, as they are not accustomed to seeing a woman who does not abide by the cultural norms in the least. That is why when her servant Nabi retells the story of his encounter



with Nila to a Greek doctor, later on in the novel, he states, “She rested the heel of one foot against the wall behind her and, when she did, the hem of the dress pulled up slightly and thus revealed a bit of the thigh beneath. I felt a burning spread down from my cheeks to my neck” (Hosseini 51). He also states, “Unlike many of the men I grew up with in my village—young men who had never seen the bare thigh of a grown woman and married, in part, for the license to at last cast their gaze upon such a sight—I did have some experience” (Hosseini 51). Nabi’s first astonishment at Nila’s sight shows that it is culturally shocking for women to be married and to be under a man’s supervision and not to be dressed according to the social norm.

On another occasion, when Nila wants to visit Nabi’s village, Nabi narrates that, “She wore high heels and a peach sleeveless dress, but I did not deem it my place to advise her otherwise” (Hosseini 56-57). Knowing that this is not the “right” way to be dressed especially in his village, where cultural norms are even more emphasized, Nabi feels the urge to tell her to dress differently, but he does not, given the fact that he is a mere servant in her house. These incidents with Nila’s dress code only emphasize how important covering the female body is. If it is not covered properly, it would only lead to judgment and prejudice from the collective opinion of the society. Since Nila is a character that strays away from the cultural norm by showing her true self to the society even in the simplest matters such as dressing as she wishes (which is not hiding away the body that is generally considered shameful), she serves as an anomaly in the society.

The novel here shows that veiling and covering because of shame is induced by the society in general, and by male relatives in particular. Since Nila’s background is not purely Afghani, as she is born and raised in France, and since, her husband, Suleiman does not force her

to cover herself, Nila, does not feel shame about showing her body. Since she does not comply with the cultural construct of shame, her identity, in this case, remains intact.

## **2.2 Beyond the Veil: The Confinement of the House**

There is a clear distinction between females' and males' social standings in the novel as females must not work, study, or be outside. Males, on the other hand, can pursue their education and career as they please without any restrictions. That is why we see Rasheed and Jalil have jobs and are productive members of the society, while Mariam and Laila are merely housewives with no educational background since their husband, Rasheed does not allow it. This restriction on the movement on female characters leads them to stay home at most times, while male characters can go out whenever they want.

Leila Ahmed sheds light on this issue, too, as she discusses how the house and the architecture within the house are also something controlled by males to hide women. She states:

This ideal of a man's right to keep his women concealed—invisible to other men— was given architectural expression. The women's quarters were often designed to be the pleasantest part of the house, not just because the women spent most of their lives there but also because the master spent most of his time there when at home (117).

This is what we see in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*: not only do men have the power to seclude women in the house at all times but also, they have the power to decide where in the house the female should be.

### ***A Thousand Splendid Suns***

In the novel, we encounter several instances that illustrate Leila Ahmed's assessment of the physical/spatial restrictions on women. Mariam, for example, is often portrayed to be present in the house and especially in the kitchen where she prepares meals for Rasheed, or she is seen in the bedroom. She is instructed to stay upstairs when friends of Rasheed come over. At one

occasion, the couple expects Eid<sup>4</sup> visitors at the house, all men, and friends of Rasheed's. During Eid, families gather to enjoy the holiday together; however, when visitors who are not part of the family visit, Mariam cannot be present in sight.

When a knock came, Mariam knew to go upstairs to her room and close the door. She stayed there, as the men sipped tea downstairs with Rasheed, smoked, chatted. Rasheed had told Mariam that she was not to come down until the visitors had left (Hosseini 47).

Rasheed does not want his friends to gaze at his wife, which in his perception is an act that is considered shameful.

Similarly, when Rasheed marries Laila, the first thing he tells her specifically to do is the following:

I ask that you avoid leaving this house without my company. That is all. Simple, no? If I am away and you need something urgently, I mean *absolutely* need it and it cannot wait for me, then you can send Mariam and she will go out and get it for you. You've noticed a discrepancy, surely. Well one does not drive a Volga and a Benz in the same manner (Hosseini 118).

There is one major contradiction within the mindset of Rasheed when he says this.

Previously, the same restrictions were put on Mariam even when it came to leaving the house. However, in this case, he tells his second wife that if she needs something, then the first wife can be sent. This implies that Rasheed believes that Laila carries more honor for him than the first wife does. As men marry wives after the first, it seems that this entails a shift of value. Values that were previously all held by the first wife then became shared amongst all the wives, with the new wives holding a greater proportion of values. In the case of shame, Rasheed believes in that moment sending Mariam outside would result in less shame than if he had sent Laila. This is because the weight of the concept of shame gets divided between the two wives, and it is to

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<sup>4</sup> Eid is an important holiday that Muslims celebrate at the end of Ramadan (Muslims' holy month, during which they must fast).

Rasheed's belief that Laila is in a position to inflict more shame, which is why it becomes permissible to let Mariam go outside the house instead. In addition, Laila is a female subjected to the will and demands of her husband Rasheed, so, shame caused by Laila would not have such an immense impact on Mariam as it would on Rasheed. The shame concept is linked between the subjects of the household and the owner of the household. Shame experienced by one of the subjects does not necessarily reflect upon the other subjects within the same household.

The novel thus represents Rasheed as a traditional male figure who thinks that men are always in charge and that women are under men's subjugation. Meanwhile, in such societies, as depicted in the novel, the female characters do not have the simplest of human rights, as even their movement is controlled and maneuvered according to men's will. The novel's position on such matters makes us readers think about the unequal division between the two genders in the sense that shame is more attached to females than to males. By presenting inequality between the genders in even the simplest events that happen in everyday life such as friends' gatherings, the novel makes us open our eyes to such problems. It makes us think about that in such cultures, mixing the two genders even if it a friend's gathering is unacceptable as a result of cultural prohibitions, like shame.

Moreover, the novel prompts the reader to critically question the spatial restriction of women. Rooms in the house like the kitchen and the bedroom have a connotation of deciding the position of a woman and putting a limitation on their movements even inside the house. To fit in the gender role scenario, the kitchen is a place where women are expected to do the cooking and to prepare meals for their family, but in Laila and Mariam's case, it is to prepare meals solely for their husband, Rasheed. The bedroom, too, is where a woman is expected to carry out another role, which is fulfilling her husband's desires sexually. Therefore, when Rasheed orders them to

be in these locations within the house, he only perceives them as tools designed for his use. In general, the novel imagines a world in which the notion of free thought and decision-making are all stripped away from female characters removing the possibilities for the wives to partake in other activities, especially in society.

The novel's representation shows that Rasheed (an embodiment of his culture) in the name of shame controls, manipulates, and alters his wives' identity to fit his ideals and desires which revolve around shame. In light of this, he robs his wives' desires, passions, and identities. They are not allowed to go outside of the house, let alone pursue their education and career, which serve as immense factors in the formation of anyone's identity as they teach and change someone's thinking process and ultimately shape who they are.

To give a final account of this section, in the novel we encounter several instances that illustrate Leila Ahmed's assessment of the physical/spatial restrictions on women. The danger of the act of hiding away women in the name of veiling their shame strips women away from their identity. In one case, the appearance of all the women is similar, as all of them would be hidden behind a blue piece of clothing that covers them entirely. There is no difference in how they look, no identity that differentiates one from another. To the eyes of the viewer and perhaps even to themselves they will literally all look the same. By partially removing their right to self-expression, even if it were to be expressed through clothing, the female character that is forced to wear that mandatory uniform loses her sense of identity.

### **2.3 Sexual Shame and the Formation of False Identity**

In this section, I will give an account on the link between sexuality and shame in the novels. The association of shame and sex is one of the oldest ways to control an individual's sexuality. Nonetheless, these two notions are entirely different if they were to be perceived on their own

without linking one to the other. So how have they come to be connected? Psychoanalysis is one of the fields that examine this connection. Joseph Lichtenberg's *Sensuality and Sexuality across a Divide of Shame*, sheds light on this relationship. He states that sexuality is a bodily function that is usually forbidden by the individual's surrounding environment. Often, the society shows signs of disapproval of certain acts whenever sexually related topics are practiced or discussed. The disapproving surroundings activate the factor of shame in an individual's conscious (31). The disapproving attitude often begins with the parents of a child who play a major role in constructing the association of shame to the child's sexuality. This is done through the disapproval that parents show whenever their child tries to engage in and communicate his or her sexual desires (36).

This theory also relates back to Sara Ahmed and Scheff's analysis of the social theory of shame. Both of which suggest that it is the social environment around individuals including parents and the society that make feelings of shame develop within them. Sara Ahmed argues that when we feel shame, we detach ourselves from ourselves (104). This shame originates from not wishing to break the social bond that is between us and the people we interact with (Scheff 85). Therefore, when parents, for example, disapprove of their children's sexuality, that child will feel shame and hence, try to avert that shame. This aversion leads to detachment from the self, which results in losing a huge part of the identity because of feelings of shame. This is the case with the characters in the novels, as I will discuss it below.

### ***A Thousand Splendid Suns***

In the novel, Laila's mother Fariba is a traditional woman who like others around her, is driven by strong sentiments of social construct. When Laila becomes a teenager, she starts to spend more time with her childhood friend, Tariq, who unfortunately happens to be a male. Their

relationship when they are children is not as much frowned upon as it is when the two grow up and enter their teenage hood. When Fariba recovers from her long last depression and grief over her two sons who died in a war, she notices that her daughter has grown up into a teenage female, meaning that her daughter is now an easy target for the gaze of men and the neighborhood in general. In other words, she remarks that her daughter can easily bring her shame due to her gender.

Instead of reassuring Laila about her sexuality, Fariba makes her feel extremely uncomfortable. As a matter of fact, she only brings up Laila's sexuality when she asks her about Tariq. After asking how old Tariq is now, she tells Laila, "It was one thing when you were little kids running around. No harm in that. It was charming- But now. Now. I notice you are wearing a bra, Laila" (Hosseini 90). To Fariba, Laila's interaction with Tariq when they are children is fine; however, now since Laila is growing older and developing secondary sex characteristics, their relationship to Fariba is risky.

Fariba continues her parental lecture to Laila and tells her:

Anyway, this isn't about me or the bra. It is about you and Tariq. He is a boy, you see, and, as such, what does he care about reputation? But you? The reputation of a girl, especially one as pretty as you, is a delicate thing, Laila. Like a mynah bird in your hands. Slacken your grip and away it flies (Hosseini 90).

What Fariba implies here is that it is hard for a boy to ruin his reputation, which translates to it is hard for a boy to bring shame upon himself and his family. However, for a girl, like Laila, bringing shame is as delicate and as fragile as a bird in one's hand that can easily fly away and be lost forever or be squeezed and perpetually deformed. Fariba's attitude about her daughter's sexuality generally comes off as negative and repulsive as she surely shows signs of disapproval of the relationship between Laila and Tariq that could possibly lead to sexual interactions that will bring shame to her daughter specifically and her family generally.

Fariba's speech with Laila about her and Tariq does indeed activate the factor of shame within Laila. Later, when Laila fantasizes about her sexual desires with Tariq as it appears in the following lines, "Lying in bed at night, she pictured him kissing her belly, wondered at the softness of his lips, at the feel of his hands on her neck, her chest, her back, and lower still. When she thought of him this way, she was overtaken with guilt" (Hosseini 91). Before the conversation with her mom, Laila does not think of Tariq sexually, but when she does now, her emotions are not completely pleasurable as her feelings are clouded with thoughts of confusion since the guilt which comes as a form of shame becomes mixed in her head. Her mother then is indeed successful in altering her attitude towards sex from something completely normal and enjoyable to something that ought to be stayed away from and not performed. One could say that with the new factor of shame interfering with her sexual desires, Laila's self is changed too. Laila cannot possibly think about sexuality independently to perceive it according to her own thoughts since her mother interfered and associated the idea of shame with sex. This is evident when Laila engages in premarital intercourse with Tariq, later in the novel:

Laila saw three drops of blood on the rug, *her* blood, and pictured her parents sitting on this couch later, oblivious to the sin that she had committed. And now the shame set in, and the guilt, and, upstairs, the clock ticked on, impossibly loud to Laila's ears. Like a judge's gavel pounding again and again, condemning her (Hosseini 102).

In contrast, straight men in the novel do not feel shame when performing sexual activities. It is only expected from the woman to feel it. That is because it is expected of them to associate shame with sexuality because shame associated with sexuality should be engraved in their heads to the point where it should be part of their identity. It is even celebrated when women feel shame especially the first time they engage in a sexual intercourse. When Rasheed and Mariam indulge in a sexual intercourse for the first time, Rasheed wholeheartedly believing



that Mariam feels ashamed tells her, “There is no shame in this, Mariam. It is what married people do. It is what the prophet himself and his wives did. There is no shame” (Hosseini 49). Without even considering another possible explanation as to why Mariam does not seem too interested in their sexual relation, Rasheed assumes it is because she has thoughts of shame in her mind.

As I mentioned before, Leila Ahmed argues that when veiling women out of shame becomes the norm in societies, attitudes of shame regarding the body’s sexuality also becomes the norm within females (18). It is then expected of females to feel shame when they engage in sexual activities. Therefore, it is no surprise that Rasheed thinks it is shame that hinders Mariam from seeming too engaged in their sexual intercourse. On the basis of this norm in the society, he seems to neglect all other possibilities as to why a female behave in a certain way.

## **2.4 Homosexuality and Shame**

Since heterosexual male characters in the novels such as Rasheed do not feel shame when it comes to sexuality, the remaining question is then, how about the homosexual men characters? Do they feel shame in expressing their sexuality? In regard to Suleiman Wahdati, the only homosexual character in the two novels, the answer is indeed yes, as he spends most his life hiding his sexuality. Mark Blechner in *Sex Changes: Transformation in Society and Psychoanalysis* presents how psychoanalysis discusses shaming induced cultures. Blechner notes that feelings of shame associated with sexuality emerge from cultures and societies. Furthermore, he asserts that not only does everyone feel emotions of shame when practicing or thinking of sex, those with a sexual orientation that does not fit the norm, such as the homosexual, experience shame even more. Blechner provides the theory of social psychology that gives the impression that there is an in-group and out-group dynamics that control the arena of shame and sexuality.

The dominant in-group mobilizes and controls the dynamics, resulting in shaming and stigmatizing the out-group (those with less popular sexual orientation) including homosexuals (96). This is done when the in-group shows feelings of disgust and fascination with the outer group.

Furthermore, Reis and Grossmark, who focus on heterosexual men, present another case in which male sexuality is associated with shame in accordance with social expectations in the edited volume on *Heterosexual Masculinities*. They view heterosexual masculinity in a different scope than the usual patriarchal, phallocentric, and/or essentialist as these views usually focus on how men differ from women rather than focusing on how heterosexual men differ from one another (p.xvi). This leads as they suggest to a pre-constructed notion that all men perform sexuality alike from within and across cultures, thus creating a universal social standard. They suggest that this standard is as far away from reality as possible. Different men have different ways of approaching sex and its related aspects (164).

The associative shame that lies in this complexity is attached to those men who do not fit the social capacity of the norm. The norm mentioned above usually revolves around phallic narcissism, which means that men must be dominant, competitive, and winners. Inversely, any male who does not share these characteristics and who does not conform to the phallocentric narcissism ideals is said to be feminine and subsequently be shamed for it (88). This puts pressure on men, too, to behave in certain manners. Thus, a “man” has to be dominant and in the novels this dominance must be exerted on women by heterosexual men. Homosexual men are not even considered in the equation.

***And the Mountains Echoed***

In this novel, Suleiman Wahdati is a homosexual character. One could put forward the argument that Suleiman hides his sexuality or does not act upon it because he is religious and the Islamic religion strictly forbids homosexuality. However, this argument can be easily debunked if one was to focus on his actions, none of which is based on Islamic values. Suleiman is seen to be drinking alcohol and engaging in parties, and he is never seen praying or fasting like a normal Muslim would do. Therefore, his decision of hiding away his sexual identity is solely based on the correlation of his sexuality with shame and fear of social repercussion.

Suleiman is an extremely mysterious character, even dull at most occasions. At first glance of the relationship between Nila and Suleiman, Nila appears to be the outgoing wife who throws parties, has interesting relationships, and even makes the most important decisions in their relationship, as it is her decision to adopt Pari, her servant's step-niece. Suleiman on the other hand, appears to be an extremely bland character who lacks interest in everything, even his wife. He has a firm personality and usually ends his sentences with only few words. He is often in his office mostly busy with his sketchbook. It is not until midway through the novel, that the surprising truth about Suleiman's identity is revealed. When Suleiman suffers from a heart attack, Nila decides to take Pari and travel to Paris for good. However, before she leaves, she tells Nabi, the servant of the house: "It was you Nabi. It was always you. Didn't you know?" (Hosseini 67). It is later revealed that what Nila meant is that Nabi is the person Suleiman desires.

Suleiman lives all his life and even marries in order to cover up the homosexual desire of his true self. This internalized feeling of shame originally comes from the surrounding attitude and invades a person's psyche to shape it according to the general norm. The treatment of homosexual individuals in his culture is certainly not the same as the treatment of straight

individuals. Since homosexuality is extremely stigmatized in his culture, the attitude regarding homosexuality certainly is repulsive, and one of the characteristics attached to shame.

When adhering to Blechner's theory, Suleiman evidently belongs to the out-group in his culture. Due to the fear of the reaction of the in-group, which includes everyone around him, Suleiman opts to not share what he himself considers a peculiar orientation. He decides to forge his identity and remain a part of the in-group to maintain his social standing among his peers, including his wife. The feeling of shame and fear of exposure forces Suleiman to willingly fake his identity and hide his true one.

Moreover, also in the novel it seems that the shame assigned to homosexuality is just a technique that is used by individuals to control those that are homosexual. It wriggles its way so down deep into the minds of the individuals in the society as Blechner above argues. Even some homosexual men believe in the association, even when it is to their own personal disadvantage. It is not an idea that they are willingly choosing to have at certain times; it is what they genuinely believe. Such is the case with Suleiman. He, too, is a victim of the same social construct he is upholding, whether he is aware of it or not. Thus, to his mind it is not right for such a man to confess his sexual desires to his wife. If he were to do so, then not only would he be putting his position in jeopardy and become an object for people's judgment, but he would also bring upon himself a great deal of shame. The amount of shame would be so immense that he chooses to remain silent and indifferent towards everything, even his wife, rather than admitting this element of his personality to Nila. His homosexual desires conflict with many other aspects of his culture's social construct.

The situation does not only end with Suleiman feeling indifferent towards everything, though. He contemplates suicide and even goes as far as to ask Nabi to help him. Nabi refuses at the beginning. However, one day, Nabi decides to do something strange and out of character:

I do remember that I finally rose, walked around the side of the bed, and lay down next to him. I rolled him over so he faced me. He felt light as a dream. I placed a kiss on his dry, cracked lips. I put a pillow between his face and my chest and reached for the back of his head. I held him against me in a long, tight embrace (Hosseini 76).

Nabi has always felt shame as well as disgust from the idea that Suleiman is sexually attracted to him. When he finally grants Suleiman's wish, Nabi afterward kills him. His reason for this action is not dwelt upon in the novel. There are multiple speculations that can be derived from Nabi's decision. He could have felt sympathy towards Suleiman and granted him a taste of what he yearned for before ending his life, or Nabi could have, in a moment of temptation, given Suleiman a kiss and a sense of utter regret swirls within his body, and his immediate reaction is to kill him. The justification for the action is already there too since Suleiman had previously requested this of him. Now, there was also the sense of defending his own action and making sure no one ever finds out, for if they did, things would most likely have gone for a worse turn, or so he might have thought. With so much at stake, Nabi performs an action he otherwise would not have. The trigger for it is probably the result of the emotions he feels and his understanding of the social construct he is part of, which could be summed up as: killing him would be better than there existing the slightest possibility of anyone finding out. Upon that thought, Nabi decided to agree with it and go through with ending Suleiman's life.

By always presenting the events in a tragic way, as a technique of representations, the novel stirs sympathy in the readers' minds. The novel depicts the treatment of homosexuality as it is treated in real life in Islamic societies, especially the Afghani society, which often treats the

homosexual with extreme injustice. Nabi, for example, embodies the society's reaction to homosexual persons, which is a harsh reaction. This tragic event in the novel makes us think about the reasons why these societies support prejudice against people with non-normative sexual orientation. Throughout the novel, Suleiman does not commit any evil act. His only sin is that he is homosexual, yet the man he always loved kills him for it in the end.

### **Chapter III: Honor as a Pillar of Female and Male Identity**

In this chapter, I will shift my focus from shame to honor and to its subsequent effect on both female and males identities. To be able to understand both shame and honor, it is important to first discuss the relationship between the two. Shame depends on body image and sexuality in Hosseini's novels. In this case, shame is closely linked to its counterpart, honor. The sense or the feeling of shame results from the loss of honor that existed prior to it. In Hosseini's novels, the characters show an understanding of shame and honor, which assembles the collective view on the two notions. In "Honor and shame in honor and dignity cultures: How can you re-affirm your own honor once it is tarnished?" Berna Swing argues that in cultures that are built upon the concept of honor, shame is the predominant reaction that occurs in response to the loss of honor (11). Shame is not only an emotional reaction to the loss of honor, it is also a conceptual tool that is used to regulate and influence behavior. In other words, individuals who know the consequences of disobeying honor codes will avoid tarnishing their honor with any decision or act that can be deemed shameful by society (12).

This is not to say that Hosseini's characters can only feel one or the other. Rather it is the case that, due to specific circumstances, the forfeiture of one's honor at any moment in any aspect is replaced by the sense of shame, resulting in situations discussed previously. Honor, therefore, encompasses more than one aspect of an individual's character. In the following section, I will discuss the difference between men's and women's honor by focusing on theories of masculinity and its relation to the societal necessity of proving men's honor. In section two, I will analyze how the female characters internalize and incorporate the culturally determined codes of honor into their lives.

### 3.1 *Nang and Namoos*<sup>5</sup>: a Precondition of Men's Masculinity

Within the novels, honor, which can mean various acts of virtue in its general definition, refers to women's modesty and sexual activities. The two terms of *nang* and *namoos* are often repeated in all of Hosseini's works. The male characters utter the terms in reference to the female characters, whose behavior depends on whether their male counterpart either maintains or loses a part of his honor. Since there are different responsibilities of the male and female characters regarding maintaining and protecting that honor, there is a wide range of gender roles in the novels that each character needs to fulfill to fit their status in their social environment. These roles, which aid in sustaining the honor code, direct male characters to be masculine, which in turn is indicated through dominance. For the female characters, the roles are more submissive.

In her research on the anthropological nature of honor, Diane Baxter claims that:

[i]t can be argued that honor ideology, specifically as it relates to sexuality, is a hegemonic discourse as, in ideal terms, it establishes, reinforces, and idealizes males (and, to some degree, older women) as authorities. Men are guides and protectors who, as part of their commitments, punish, if they see fit and this, too, is seen as natural and obvious (784).

This is what we find in Hosseini's novels as well. The way the male characters' masculine identity is constructed, relies heavily on the ways in which they act with their female relatives and how they represent themselves. Hence, I present the argument that males' preservation of honor is indicated through the representation of their masculinity.

Theories about masculinities have been abundant in the fields of sociology and cultural studies. Several of these theories refer to the sex/gender system to discuss issues of reproduction

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<sup>5</sup> Nang, is the Farsi term that refers to honor in Afghani culture. Namoos, is originally an Arabic word that generally means virtue. Gradually, the term evolved to include gender specific connotation, according to which the females in the family are expected to act honorably and modestly. Hence, Afghanis use it to refer to honor.



and sexual behavior. The division of labor and the structure of sexual dominance are two crucial aspects of this system (Carrigan, *et al.* 111). What both aspects underline is, in fact, a form of subordination of women. In order for men to gain such power, women themselves must also obey the orders (111). This produces what Carrigan and others refer to as ‘hegemonic masculinity,’ which is the culturally idealized form of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity consists of attributes ascribed to the male such as being aggressive, authoritative, courageous, and heterosexual (112). This type of hegemonic masculinity is sustained through collective practice. This model suggests that male characters can reach this level of manhood by practicing this behavior and assuming these attributes. Simultaneously, if one were to stray away from these characteristics, his masculinity is stained, even questioned. According to Cohen *et al.* in “Sacred and the Social: Cultures of honor and Violence” cultures of honor force a man to aggressively retaliate against any provocation that intends to harm his honor. He states that “responding with toughness and strength becomes embedded in the definition of being a man” (266).

Other theories, including several feminist literary theories, ascribe the notion of hegemonic masculinity to the practices of patriarchy. Implementing mechanisms of patriarchy involves the thought that males need to dominate the female. These dominations take shape in traditional methods of exposing masculine power, which include the spheres of work/employment, familial relationships, and even education (Haywood and Mac an Ghaill 79). This means that to attain a masculine identity, a male figure must be able to sustain employment, with which he can earn money and become the provider of the house. When this certain economic status is achieved, the male character automatically becomes the head of the house who oversees all familial relations and affairs. With these advantages and opportunities provided for males, the patriarchal nature of the society remains intact.

### *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

More than anyone else, Rasheed is the male character in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* that impeccably embodies the patriarchal as well as the hegemonic masculinity ideal. Rasheed's sense of masculinity is derived from his understanding of the society around him. To him, men are mentally, physically, and socially superior to women. His masculine behavior begins to show as soon as he starts interacting with Mariam. Soon after he and Mariam get married, she shows resentment towards him. When Mariam refuses to leave the bedroom for days after their marriage, he strictly tells her, "As of tomorrow morning I expect you to start behaving like a wife. Fahmidi? Is that understood" (Hosseini 38). So, to establish his masculine persona, Rasheed from the very beginning of his relationship with Mariam, uses techniques of displaying frustration and dissatisfaction "as he crosses his arms" when he utters these words to Mariam. As soon as Mariam starts crying after hearing them, he shuts her off by ordering her to stop crying, as he does not stand this behavior from women.

Rasheed's sentiment of superiority and his intention of proving his hegemonic masculinity show also in his violent acts towards his wives, Mariam and Laila. He uses violence as a mode to establish dominance over both. At one occasion in which he is dissatisfied with Mariam's cooking of his food, he uses aggression and violence towards her as a way to display his masculinity:

His powerful hands clasped her jaw. He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, his upper lip curled in a sneer. "Now chew," he said (Hosseini 59).

He beats both his wives severely and even locks them, including Laila's daughter Aziza, in separate rooms without food and water when they try to escape. Rasheed considers his

misogynistic behavior as justified. He does not feel any sense of remorse because to him that is what men do, and women, no matter the situation, should accept this behavior.

As mentioned above, for hegemonic masculinity to consolidate itself, it must be performed collectively. This is also what happens in the novel. When both Mariam and Laila get pregnant, Rasheed always wishes for a boy. When Laila gives birth to a daughter, Mariam tells her, “You gave him a daughter. So, you see, your sin is even less forgivable than mine” (Hosseini 131), thus insinuating that the birth of a daughter is a punishment for males. In a similar way of reasoning, Mariam’s sin is connected to the fact that she could not carry the babies, as her pregnancies ended up with miscarriages. Rasheed prefers to have a son rather than a daughter only to continue the patriarchal make-up of his household and to pass on the position of hegemonic masculinity. Whereas a daughter can bring shame to his family and possibly dishonor him by her simplest acts, a son can only serve as a second hand who will be in charge of the women in the house and thus carry forward the cycle of hegemonic masculinity.

Since Rasheed enthusiastically believes in the construct of gender roles between men and women, he also genuinely believes that it falls upon his shoulders to protect his honor, his *nang* and *namoos*, since it is the most primal duty of a man. When Rasheed explains the nature of his work to Mariam, he deliberately mentions this:

I have customers, Mariam, men, who bring their wives to my shop. The women come uncovered, they talk to me directly, look me in the eye without shame. They wear make up and skirts that show their knees. Sometimes they even put their feet in front of me, the women do, for measurements, and their husbands stand there and watch. They allow it. They think nothing of a stranger touching their wives' bare feet! They think they're being modern men, intellectuals, on account of their education, I suppose. They don't see that they're spoiling their own nang and namoos, their honor and pride (Hosseini 41).

Rasheed’s speech shows that there are also men who do not necessarily believe that their honor relies on women’s bodies. However, these men are judged by members of the society such as

Rasheed as lacking morals and ethics since they do not attempt to preserve their *nang* and *namoos*. What the novel shows here is that there can exist opposing views even in the context of one society, forming multiple different identities within a culture where certain characteristics and activities are accepted in one way, and rejected and frowned upon in the rest. This also counts for delicate matters such as what is being considered codes of honor and what is not.

The novel's representation suggests that society generally praises those who act and behave in a manly way; meanwhile, those that do not, are often judged and presumed to be dishonorable or even compared to women. So, unlike the "manly" character of Rasheed, those with unusual identities and personas are to be underestimated and mocked. Laila's father, Babi, is a character whose purpose in the novel is to show the intolerance of others towards those who are not "manly". Babi is surprisingly interested in books and women's rights. He advocates for Laila's education and freedom of choice. He also discusses with her taboo subjects like the ideas of the communists and such. His close relationship with Laila leads him to be lenient with her, almost like he is not influenced by the values of his culture at all. It is striking at first that even the narrator of the novel describes Babi in female terms. "Babi was a small man, with narrow shoulders and slim, delicate hands almost like a women's" (Hosseini 60). However, the novel by its representation of the sympathetic, open-minded character of Babi in female terms consciously prompts us to think and reflect on this type of character without immediately judging it. The novel mentions how Babi is judged by his society. When Laila gets involved into a heated conversation with her male classmate, Khadim, he tells her, "At least my father's not a sissy" (Hosseini 65). The descriptive word suggests that her father is like a woman because he does not act like a "man." The novel's representation of Babi's character shows that there is an alternative way of being a man rather than the popular hegemonic masculinity in the society. Also, the

sympathetic representation of Babi's character, suggests that the hegemonic masculinity which shows in Rasheed's character is not in fact the best way a "man" should be.

### ***And the Mountains Echoed***

On a similar note, in *And the Mountains Echoed*, Suleiman's household staff, which consists of multiple butlers, a gardener, and a chef, all seem to be confused by Suleiman's lack of respect for his own honor. It is well known within the society how a man's honor is directly linked to that of his wife; however, it seems to most that Suleiman does not care for this. Not only does he marry Nila, who is thought of as an extremely devious and sinful woman, but he never bothers refuting suchlike claims and does not prohibit her from writing poetry which always included sexual references.

Because Nila does not behave the way an obedient female from Afghani culture should, she becomes a topic of discussion amongst Suleiman's staff. His gardener, Zahid, relentlessly judges Nila's character and tells of certain events regarding her to his peers. He begins by describing the initial response of Mr. Wahdati's family to Suleiman's marriage to Nila. "The family did not approve of the situation because they were of the opinion that Nila had a poor character" (Hosseini 51). Zahid goes as far as to say that by the age of twenty, she had already been "ridden all over town," comparing her to Mr. Wahdati's car. What is even worse in Zahid's eyes is that "Nila did not even bother refuting or defending herself against such accusations, but instead wrote about them in her poetry. At the mention of this, a murmur of disapproval spreads across the room" (Hosseini 51). One of the other workers remarks that if Nila belonged to his village, she would have had her throat slit already. Suchlike descriptions provide the reader with a strong impression of the intolerant attitude of Suleiman's household towards their employer and his wife. The novel's representation here asserts that it is often males who judge other males

based on their female relatives' behavior since the protection of honor in the society is a man's duty.

Zahid and the rest of the workers think negatively of Suleiman and Nila, as they do not fit and partake in the social construct of the community that is ruled by a strict and uniform understanding of male and female behavior. On the basis of Suleiman's acceptance of Nila's behavior, they consider him a man without dignity, honor, or a sense of shame. There are not any signs of sympathy, nor any of forgiveness for both. It seems to me that the members of Suleiman's staff stand in for the rest of the society and have internalized its dominant norms and values that determine that Suleiman and Nila do not fit in. And the message the novel questions is even stronger: Nila's very existence poses a threat to the entire social structure, as she clearly defies and opposes these norms without being punished for this transgression.

As I have demonstrated above, the novel reveals how the construction of hegemonic masculinity in Afghani society is highly dependent on the subordination of women to the rule of men, which must be agreed on by the society as a whole. In order to gain the socially perfect identity of a "man," male characters need to think of women as lesser individuals, to oppress them, to beat them, and to imprison them inside the house. The reason to do so is the fear that women might bring shame on themselves or dishonor their male relatives. If a male does not conform to these constructed notions of masculinity, then he is looked down on as feminine and considered to be someone who does not care about his honor. The identity of a "man" does not fit him.

### **3.2 Womanly Honor as a Process of Internalization**

As explained in previous chapters, scholars such as Leila Ahmed and Pitt-Rivers have directly argued that the honor of a woman in the Middle East belongs to her male guardian. In Hosseini's novels, the guardian is either a father, a husband or the social obligation in general. In this following section, I will argue that the novels show that the acquisition and retention of honor is a process of internalization that is practiced by both female and male characters and results in determining women's social status and altering their sense of identity. What we see is that if the female characters do not follow codes of honor, they do not fit within their social context. Their identities will be distorted since they do not adhere to the most crucial social construct in their society.

In "How Culture Transforms Mind: A Process of Internalization," Aaro Toomela defines internalization as follows:

Internalization is a process whereby two different mechanisms of information processing, non-verbal ('sensory') thinking and conventional language, that have been differentiated from the 'natural' process in the course of development become united within a new mental structure. The result of internalization is the development of semiotically mediated, 'cultural' mental operations (286).

So in order for internalization to take place, it must be repeated either non-verbally which is done by actions, or verbally through conventional language. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*' context, the frequent utterance of conventional words, such as "harami" catalyzes the process of internalization the most. With the repetition of these utterances, suchlike words become part of a collective belief. Everyone involved in the society will begin to think that the word, harami, for example, holds a negative connotation.

Furthermore, in collective societies such as Afghanistan, internalization of notions that relate to honor and shame is abundant, since honor and shame compose a great deal of the

society's cultural values. These internalized ideals determine the behavior of individuals within this society because they are expected to adhere to them, especially women. According to Nancy Dupree, in Afghanistan, women are frequently considered as the "[s]tandards by which morality is judged, and they carry the responsibility of passing on the values of the society to younger generations" (978). Since it is women's responsibility, moral judgment is usually passed down from mothers to daughters across generations. In this regard, Susan Krieger's essay "The Passing Down of Sorrow" argues that mothers pass down especially their negative emotions to their children, specifically their daughters (84). The internalized thoughts that get passed down, then, are usually negative emotions or negative morals. This, in fact, is the case with the novels as it is explained below.

### ***A Thousand Splendid Suns***

The opening line in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is, "Mariam was five years old the first time she heard the word harami" (Hosseini 4). This sentence is crucial for the construction of Mariam's identity throughout the novel. The word that grabs most attention is "harami". It translates into English as a child who is illegitimate. Additionally, this word has a religious connotation. The word harami is derived from the Arabic word "haram" which is a religious term that means unlawful or forbidden. It refers to an action that was performed when either the correct pre-requisites were not met, or to one that is sinful (Al-Mudarrasi 471). In Mariam's case, it refers to the illegitimacy of her birth. Since she was conceived outside of marriage, she is labeled a "harami".

As a result, this term composes a definition for Mariam that is incomprehensible to her mind as a child. She is not told of the implications of the word and she does not understand why it is used the way it is, or even the significance behind it at the time, as shown in the following



lines: “She did not know what this word harami-bastard meant. Nor was she old enough to appreciate the injustice, to see that it is the creators of the harami who are culpable, not the harami whose only sin is being born” (Hosseini 4). Thus, the novel shows us how from a young age, she is subjected to a type of treatment that is socially accepted and directed at those individuals labeled “harami”. She does not have any fault in the matter, yet is subjected to such punishment anyways. The punishment is inflicted by the “creators of the harami”, individuals who uphold their social construct and serve injustice.

The novel represents the general mindset of the society as one that believes that sinful acts result in sin as well, and for one reason or the other, the resultant sin is to be looked down upon more than the original action itself. This method of punishment allows for the continuation of the social construct and aims to violently punish those who do not adhere to it, even children “whose only sin was being born”. The continuation of such cycles aids in the process of internalization and relies heavily on shaping what a female perceives her honor to mean. For it is the sense of honor, and the consequence of shame, that justify the prohibition of premarital intercourse.

Long lasting judgments and the sense of being perceived in a particular way become integrated into a person’s identity by the process of internalization. In the novel, Mariam undergoes unnecessary and unjustified judgments, criticisms especially from her mother who keeps referring to her as a harami whenever Mariam misbehaves for instance when she tells her daughter: “You are a clumsy little *harami*. This is my reward for everything I’ve endured An heirloom-breaking, clumsy little *harami*” (Hosseini 4). In turn, this also shapes Mariam’s view of the world, as one where she ought to feel confined and restrained, in which she was predetermined to be subjugated. Even later in the novel where Mariam is an old woman, she still

thinks of herself as a harami. For example, when she finds out that Rasheed keeps magazines of naked women, the narrator comments on her position: “And what entitled her anyway, a villager. A harami to pass judgment?” (Hosseini 48). Her identity, her sense of honor, self-respect, and self-esteem are fundamentally altered by her surroundings, so she is fit to be part of the social construct and to play the role befitting of a “harami,” and so she abides by it and feels like there is nothing to feel but what is told.

The first time Mariam is referred to as “harami” is by her own mother, who has also supposedly suffered from the injustice and prejudice of her unaccepting environment. Mariam’s mother, Nana, was Jalil’s house cleaner before she got pregnant with their daughter. She did not need the negative reaction of her surroundings to know that by having a premarital sexual relationship with Jalil that she damaged the entirety of her reputation and her life. This becomes clear from her after-thoughts about the pregnancy that she passes on to her daughter: “I wish my father had had the stomach to sharpen one of his knives and do the honorable thing. It might have been better for me” (Hosseini 6). Nana understood the severity of the judgments and the weight she had been carrying on her shoulders for so long. Even though at the end of the day, she had only broken an aspect of her social construct, she considers death a possibly better alternative to what she went through afterward. This conviction and eradication of logic is possible through internalization, which she passes down to Mariam as she tells her what her father should have done.

Both Nana and later Mariam become subjected to the non-verbal thinking as well as the conventional language components of internalization that I mentioned previously. The novel shows that the events that happen after engaging in a sexual relationship with Jalil, and ending up with child, are horrific. The continuance of Nana’s statement in the previous quote is, “...do

the honorable thing. It might have been better for me. Better for you too may be. It would have spared you the grief of knowing that you are what you are” (Hosseini 6). The way Nana understood herself after committing a rather normal physical act, having sex, came from a mental processing that was indoctrinated and internalized with the concepts of honor, shame, judgment, and what the value of women supposedly is. In her case, she had forfeited her honor and brought shame upon herself and her family, and had allowed society to pass negative judgments on her, and her self-esteem lowered so much that she suggest death not only for her but for her daughter as well. These thoughts are what Nana came to conclude from the non-verbal aspect of indoctrination since she understood the mistake she made on her own at that time as she kept thinking that her father should have killed her. There was no need for others to explain it to her; it had already been internalized.

The passing on of internalized doctrines carries with it a heavy impact on the receiver as well. Nana, who sincerely believes in the social rule, is repeatedly reminded of what she is according to these restrictive societal norms. Internalization, as Toomela argues, requires an active repetitive utterance of the concept to be internalized. Jalil was also a contributor in her internalization as can be seen in the following: “To Jalil and his wives, I was a pokeroot. A mugwort” (Hosseini 6). It is very obviously shown to her what the rest of the society thinks of her, even her own family, and they are not afraid to say it. When her father leaves her, this creates even more space for negative thoughts, as she blames and belittles herself for the decision her father makes. Thus, the novel suggests that this continuous cycle of conventional language and non-verbal action comes from her father and Jalil’s relatives:

The collective gasp of Jalil’s family sucked the air out of Herat (the village where they lived). His in-laws swore blood would flow. The wives demanded that he throw her out. Nana’s own father, who was a lowly stone craver in the nearby

village of Gul Daman, disowned her. Disgraced he packed his things and boarded on a bus to Bran, never to be seen or heard from again (Hosseini 5).

The passive as well as active action lead Nana to become what she becomes, an individual void of the sense and honor and of one's self.

Being so heavily impacted by this experience, she passes on the same judgment, and "truth" to her daughter. Nana calls Mariam a mugwort too, even though Mariam has no fault in the matter. In this case, the internalization is being passed down from Nana to Mariam, and ultimately affects Mariam in the same way it does with Nana. Her understanding of several internalized doctrines, which include abiding by the rules of honor codes in the society, shapes all Nana's view, behavior, speech, and actions. Her treatment of Mariam and the way in which she teaches her daughter that she is no different than what Nana is, also internalizes such beliefs into Mariam, removing her sense of identity and self-worth.

When Mariam asks her mother if she can join a school, Nana tells her, "You will learn nothing of value in school." She adds, "It is our lot in life Mariam. Women like us. We endure. It is all we have. Do you understand? Besides, they will laugh at you in school. They will. They will call you Harami" (Hosseini 12). This quote in contrast to Nana's previous quotes suggests that Nana has lost her self between what she wants and what the society expects her to do. This shows in her ambivalent messages that she passes on to her daughter, Mariam. She is repeatedly confirmative of the harami status of her daughter and quasi-protective in wanting to keep her daughter safe from people who might call or consider her harami. Thus, because of the society's pressure on her, we see a dichotomy presented in her decisions and speech, which is another indication of a lost identity.

Considering Mariam's age when her mother started calling her a harami, it would not only confuse her, but feed her with the idea that something is wrong with her. This creates the necessary space for Mariam in her own mind, with the aspect of non-verbal thinking considered, to start believing that there is indeed something wrong with her. This idea, the more it is shown to her, grows and leeches its way into the rest of her character. The result is what Mariam is represented to be, a subject to male dominance and a vessel designed to "endure it." Through a very early time in her life, Mariam is being shaped to fit what society expects of her, and to be indoctrinated with how they view her as well. The impact internalization had on Nana was great. However, it is even more influential on Mariam, as she is subjected to it much earlier on and for a much longer period. Both lose their sense of identity because of a prohibited action, and the label "harami".

The novel's representation of these tragic incidents steers readers' perception of the unfair reality of the Afghani culture that allows and even encourages such events of internalization to take place. Especially since the events are excruciatingly sad, the novel wants us to sympathize with Mariam's situation. The novel generates feelings of sympathy in readers' minds so that they begin to think about the injustice of the society in which she lives and to acknowledge the hardship of women's lives while being subjugated under multiple cultural values. Perhaps, then, the novel suggests that not all cultural morals are ethically positive; some of these morals are the cause of the character's despondent realities.

## Chapter IV: Synthesis and Conclusions

In this final chapter, I will offer a synthesis of the analysis of Hosseini's novels *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* provided in the previous chapters. I will take the interpretation that I provided in these chapters even a step further, in order to explore the novels' impact in regard to societal issues related to traditional understandings of honor and shame. I will argue that traditional notions of shame and honor, and their effect on an individual's identity sustain the dominance of authoritative powers in the society that emanate from men, the Taliban, and the collective culture.

First of all, what we have seen is that as the characters in the novels conform to the social construct of their cultures, they give up a great deal of their self. These characters including Nana, Mariam, Laila, or Suleiman, even Rasheed are obliged to hold to certain standards, which results in the feeling that these characters are never allowed to be able to show their genuine emotions, reactions, and thoughts. In other words: they lose the elements that assemble their personas. They become empty vessels; they become reduced to mere bodies depleted of uniqueness. I interpret these socially "marginal" characters in Hosseini's novels as representative of a societal phenomenon that I would like to describe as follows: bodies like those of Nana, Mariam, Laila, and Suleiman float around in the cultures in which they live either producing more empty bodies or influencing fuller bodies to become empty too. These bodies, in turn, transform to clay easily molded according to the authoritative powers that function based on patriarchy and religious extremism. They fundamentally turn into what Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish* refers to as docile bodies, bodies that simply obey. Foucault argues that the classical age accelerated the thought that the body can become a target of power (139). The

docile body can be subjected, utilized, changed, and enhanced but in order for a suchlike domination to take place, it requires an “art of distribution.”

This art of distribution implies according to Foucault that bodies must be in a controlled setting, like schools, military, or factories (141-142). Likewise, in the novels, there are several of these controlled settings, but they appear in gendered forms: places like houses function as such for women and the outside, the public sphere can serve for men in ways that the school or military would function. These locations are where usually the authoritative powers are. For women in the houses, men are there to control and dominate every action. Outside of the house, the collective body of the culture controls the actions of both men and women, producing docile bodies ready for domination, manipulation, and control.

As presented by Foucault’s argument, the docile bodies that we find in Hosseini’s novels are bodies that are subjected, utilized, changed, and improved. Also, the bodies of his characters are stripped of their true, unique identity, and they, too, can be subjected, utilized, and transformed. We see this in the lives of Mariam and Laila: they are the perfect embodiment of Foucault’s notion of docile bodies, as their bodies are subjected to the utter and complete control of Rasheed. He utilizes their bodies for his sexual pleasure, whenever he feels like it. When their bodies do not follow the correct orders, he subjects them by beating them harshly and severely. He even has the ability to literally transform the ways in which their bodies look by completely scarring and mutilating them, as Mariam loses all of her front teeth because of his beating, and Laila’s body becomes a mosaic of permanent bruises and marks.

This domination of the body further includes the control of the states’ authoritative power. The infrastructure of this power is already embedded in the culture’s mindset. To demonstrate this, I will shortly come back to my analysis of the influence of the Taliban on

matters such as controlling the women as represented in the novels. In both novels, when the Taliban starts to take over the country, they begin to implement rules and regulations that already existed in the society, but they enhanced it tremendously. It is striking that the rules that are mentioned in the novels are exclusively related to the bodies of their subjects. Women are basically not allowed to do anything they desire with their bodies, as the authoritative powers, whether it is the Taliban or the male characters, think in a very similar mode as explained in Foucault's concept of docile bodies. The Taliban rules state that women's bodies must be covered, that they cannot under any circumstances embellish their bodies with jewelry or cosmetics, and that the utterances that come out of their mouths are completely forbidden, even their eyes are controlled as they are not allowed to look at men even if they desire to. If any of these rules are violated, the punishment is inflicted on the bodies. This extends even to bodily sexuality. The analogy with Foucault's model lies in that the Taliban and the males in the novels desire to turn women's bodies into docile bodies.

All in all, my aim in this thesis has been to explore the interrelationship between honor, shame, and the formation of identity in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. The first chapter offered a brief summary of the theories regarding what the identity of the self is, shame as an emotion of politics, and honor as a product of cultural morals. In the second chapter, I offered an analysis of the ways in which the emotion of shame as experienced by male and female characters must be covered and hidden. Shame is represented in women's bodies that must be covered from head to toe to prevent any possible utterance or reaction from the viewer of the body. Shame in accordance with sexuality, whether a heterosexual relationship or a homosexual one is also extremely stigmatized and must be hidden, or else severe consequences take place. In the third chapter, I examined the difference between



men and women's honor. I also explained the ways in which the honor of both genders are intermingled and dependent on mostly the women, as men cannot achieve or preserve honor codes, if his female relative lacks that honor. I further explained how honor is a process of internalization, specifically among women. Females indoctrinate and engrave these ideas inside other female counterparts which leads to generations of individuals believing in that code of honor regardless of its irrationality. Finally, I explained how all these factors correlate and sustain a source of power to whoever is in charge, usually the men, or a form of government, which is still usually composed of men.

My final thoughts about this thesis is that the notion of culture and societies which sprouts constructed ideas like shame and honor serve as a paradox. This paradox lies in the fact that a culture presumably bridges together its individual figures as it ties them together with aspects such as a shared language, land, religion, politics, costumes, and values. However, in reality, these shared aspects force people to conform to whatever values and morals the culture as a collective body imposes. So, in reality, instead of bridging the gap between people, it can just as well work to increase the gap as it is based on measures that only a few can adhere to. If an individual cannot adhere to these values, or when an individual express a true identity that does not answer to the cultural expectation, then that individual becomes a misfit, a cast off in his or her culture.

Instead of taking every measure of the culture's morals and teachings, perhaps some of them should be altered, or even changed as some of these norms present individuals with real danger. It is telling in this respect that Hosseini's characters often have tragic endings. Nana who could no longer bear the injustice of her surroundings because of a mistake she did not even commit but affected her honor, finally commits suicide. Mariam finally kills her husband

Rasheed, who has always been abusive to her, mocking her, beating her, imprisoning her, and is executed because she finally stops being an obedient wife and kills him. Suleiman whose true sexual identity gets exposed is also killed by the man who finally grants him the wish of kissing his lips. Even Nila, the most rebellious character in all Hosseini's novels finally decides to put the judgment of her society behind, flee the country, and never come back.

These tragic endings for these characters could have been avoided if only the self-fabricated laws of cultures which were imposed on the individual level were not as harsh and as abusive to those who do not fit. If the surrounding people of these characters were more understanding and more accepting of even the tiniest details of an individual's persona, life in Afghanistan would not be as harsh as it is nowadays. And possibly the real-life equivalents of people like Nana, Mariam, Suleiman, Laila, and Nila could finally live in peace.

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