



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***TRAUMA, FANTASY AND SUBJECTIVITY FORMATION THROUGH A
LACANIAN APPROACH IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S NOVELS***

HANIEH HAGHIGHI

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By

HANIEH HAGHIGHI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2017

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DEDICATION

To Ferdowsi, the greatest Persian poet of all time to whom I owe my love to literature.



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2017

Chairman : Associate Professor Rosli Bin Talif, PhD
Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication

The history of Afghanistan teems with several coup d'états, civil wars, foreign military interventions, and rigorous tribalism along with ethical and sexual discriminations which all have left several traumatized generations in this country. So far, a number of scattered Afghan poets expressed their bitter experience of war, and its traumatic outcomes in their Persian and Pashtun poems; however, the first Afghan writer, who expressed these factors and attracted the world's attention to the sufferings and troubles of his nation, was the Afghan-American physician, Khaled Hosseini. Hosseini is a master of narrating a certain kind of story in which unbearable traumatic events including violence, abuse, and misery are made readable. The main pillars of his novels are the illustration of traumatic events including war, loss, rape, domestic abuse and violence which shape, design, and propel the story having serious influence on the subjectivity of his characters. As result, his works are proper to be worked on regarding the social, psychoanalytical-philosophical concept of trauma and its impacts on subjectivity formation in order to open a new perspective in the horizon of literary-cultural studies relying on the ideas of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan.

Lacan regards trauma as something that creates the subject forever. He also holds the viewpoint that all subjects are essentially traumatized through the separation from the mother and the entrance into the realm of language. However, their encounter with the Real reoccurs over and over throughout their lives creating their subjectivities in trauma. As an outcome of trauma, fantasy functions as a space for the manifestation of unconscious desires and is a way in which subjects structure or organize their desires as a defense against the helplessness of not being. Only the subjects who can traverse their fantasies are able to recover from trauma and create a new subjectivity.

Adopting a Lacanian approach, this research addresses the impact of trauma as the main source of people's actions and a basic factor in their self-perception, on the subjectivity formation of the characters of Hosseini's novels, namely *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*, and reveals the function of fantasies, as the designers of the framework through which a subject perceives reality, in their lives. It also examines whether any of the characters traverse the fantasy to build a new subjectivity. In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, this research identifies the external stimuli causing trauma in the characters' lives to examine how these psychological scars affect the formation of their subjectivities, and employs a close reading of the texts focusing on the narrative, the dialogues and monologues of the characters, the description of their dreams, and also their behaviors which all reflect the characters' desires, fantasies, and consequent traversing from them. Finally, the present study reveals how some characters including Amir, Laila and Pari and Pari Wahdati recover from trauma through traversing their fantasies and build new subjectivities, and some including Mariam, Abdullah and Nila fail in creating new subjectivities by recovering from Trauma due to their inability to traverse their fantasies.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**TRAUMA, KHAYALAN DAN PEMBENTUKAN SUBJEKTIVITI DALAM
NOVEL-NOVEL KARYA KHALED HOSSEINI MENERUSI PENDEKATAN
LACAN**

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Sejarah negara Afghanistan diperwatakan dengan kejatuhan kerajaan, perang saudara, budaya kesukuan dan campur tangan oleh kuasa asing serta penindasan seksual dan perkauman. Semua ini telah meninggalkan parut dalam beberapa generasi warga negara tersebut. Mutakhir ini, terdapat segelintir penyair Afghan dari serata dunia yang telah meluahkan pengalaman pahit semasa zaman perang dalam tanah air mereka serta kesan-kesan perang yang penuh trauma menerusi karya mereka dalam bahasa-bahasa Pashtun dan Parsi. Dalam nada yang berbeza, pengutaraan isu-isu sedemikian melalui penulisan prosa telah dicetuskan buat kali pertama oleh Khaled Hosseini, seorang penulis dan doktor berbangsa Afghan di Amerika Syarikat. Khaled Hosseini sememangnya amat mahir dalam menceritakan peristiwa dan pengalaman yang perit dan traumatik, umpamanya keganasan, penderaan dan kesengsaraan. Unsur-unsur utama yang dapat dikesan dalam novel-novelnya termasuklah paparan-paparan peristiwa traumatik seperti peperangan, rasa kehilangan, pemerkosaan serta penderaan dan keganasan rumah tangga. Selain daripada memainkan peranan penting dalam bentuk, lakar dan jalan cerita novel-novelnya, paparan-paparan sedemikian turut mendatangkan pengaruh yang mendalam terhadap subjektiviti watak-wataknya. Justeru, novel-novel Khaled Hosseini amat sesuai untuk dikaji berasaskan konsep trauma dalam konteks-konteks sosial, psikoanalisis dan falsafah serta kesan-kesannya terhadap pembentukan subjektiviti bagi mencetuskan perspektif yang baru dalam bidang kajian sastera-budaya berlandaskan ideologi ahli psikoanalisis Perancis, Jacques Lacan.

Menurut Lacan, trauma merupakan salah satu unsur yang kekal di sebalik penciptaan sesuatu subjek. Beliau turut percaya bahawa setiap insan secara asasnya mengalami trauma buat kali pertama melalui perpisahan dari ibu mereka serta melalui pembelajaran bahasa. Namun, pertembungan mereka dengan “Yang Benar” sering

diulangi dalam hidup mereka, dan hal ini menciptakan subjektiviti mereka dalam trauma. Sebagai salah satu kesan trauma, khayalan berfungsi umpama ruangan bagi penjelmaan keinginan-keinginan yang tidak disedari. Sehubungan dengan itu, khayalan juga merupakan mekanisme bagi para subjek untuk menstrukturkan serta mengelolakan keinginan mereka sebagai penangkis terhadap sebarang kekurangan dalam diri mereka. Oleh yang demikian, hanya subjek yang dapat menyusur khayalan mereka berpeluang untuk mengatasi trauma mereka serta menciptakan subjektiviti baru.

Menerusi pendekatan Lacan, kajian ini mempersoalkan kesan-kesan trauma, pertamanya sebagai punca utama di sebalik perbuatan manusia dan seterusnya sebagai faktor asas dalam tanggapan diri berasaskan pembentukan subjektiviti watak-watak dalam novel-novel *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* dan *And the Mountains Echoed* karya Khaled Hosseini. Di samping itu, kajian ini turut mengutarakan fungsi khayalan sebagai pereka struktur rangka yang membolehkan subjek-subjek memahami konsep hakikat dalam hidup mereka. Bertitik tolak daripada hal ini, kajian ini juga meneliti sama ada watak-watak dalam novel-novel karya Khaled Hosseini menyusuri khayalan mereka untuk membina subjektiviti baru. Bagi mencapai objektif-objektif ini, kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti perangsang-perangsang luaran yang mendatangkan trauma dalam kehidupan watak-watak tersebut, dan seterusnya meneliti bagaimana kecederaan batin sedemikian membawa kesan terhadap pembentukan subjektiviti mereka. Sehubungan dengan itu, kajian ini turut mengutarakan keinginan watak-watak tersebut sebagai kekurangan diri yang tidak disedari dan juga sebagai pencetus di sebalik khayalan mereka. Akhir sekali, kajian ini mendedahkan bagaimana beberapa watak termasuk Amir, Laila dan Pari dan Pari Wahdati pulih daripada trauma melalui menyeberangi fantasi mereka dan membina subjectivities baru, dan beberapa termasuk Mariam, Abdullah dan Nila gagal dalam mewujudkan subjectivities baru oleh pulih daripada Trauma kerana mereka ketidakupayaan untuk merentasi fantasie mereka.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 15 February 2017 to conduct the final examination of Hanieh Haghighi on her thesis entitled "Trauma, Fantasy and Subjectivity Formation Through a Lacanian Approach in Khaled Hosseini's Novels" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Several coup d'états, civil wars and foreign military interventions along with social problems and radically biased traditions have left many individuals traumatized in Afghanistan. As a neutral country in World War II, Afghanistan was a quite stable country under the rule of Mohammed Zahir Shah. However, a bloodless coup launched by the then prime minister, Mohammed Daud Khan, terminated this stability in 1973. As a result, various ethnic and religious clashes started all over the country, and the consequent Marxist revolution, known as the Saur Revolution, in 1978 resulted in a bloody civil war. International interference of Pakistan and the Soviet aggravated the situation and victimized numerous militias and civilians. In this chaotic condition, the assassination of the president, Nur Muhammad Taraki, in a cup in 1978 followed by the assassination of his deputy by Soviet Special Forces in December 1979 led to the Soviet military intervention.

After one decade of war which resulted in the death of more than one million Afghans, the Soviet withdrew in 1989; however, it continued to support the president of Afghanistan, Mohammad Najibullah, until 1992. The collapse of the Soviet brought about the fall of the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan and consequently caused another civil war. In 1994, a movement initiated from religious schools of Afghanistan besides the jihadi fighters who had fought against the Soviet constituted the political-religious force of Taliban and gradually took control of Afghanistan. According to a report by the United Nations, Taliban committed a vast massacre against civilians while attempting to consolidate control over Afghanistan. From 1996-2001, the terrorist network of al-Qaeda shared power with Taliban and made the country the basis of their plots and operations. The strict and cruel rules practiced by Taliban, especially toward women, caused many troubles for Afghans. Several reports indicate a myriad of Taliban's suppressive actions including some public executions. Taliban's refusal to hand over Osama Bin Laden, the leader of al-Qaeda who later claimed the responsibility for the September 11 attacks, to the USA resulted in American-British war in Afghanistan. The Taliban government collapsed in December 2001, and the new government was formed under Hamid Karzai.

Since 1990, in several wars, over 400,000 Afghan civilians were killed, and more than five million sought refuge in different countries. Although Afghans have been liberated from the nightmares of coups, wars, and the domination of the Taliban, their collective memory will never forget the bitterness, atrocity, and brutality of these traumatic events.

So far, several scattered Afghan poets expressed their bitter experience of war, and its traumatic outcomes in their Persian and Pashtun poems; however, the first Afghan writer, who decided to express these factors and attract the world's attention to the sufferings and troubles of his nation, was the Afghan-American physician, Khaled Hosseini.

Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan-born American novelist and physician who has published three novels which are set at least partially in Afghanistan and depict Afghans as the protagonists. Hosseini is the expert on narrating a certain kind of story in which unbearable traumatic events including violence, abuse, and misery are made readable. His novels tell the tumultuous history of Afghanistan through which numerous citizens suffered from the torment of civil wars, foreign military interventions, and rigorous tribalism along with racial, ethical and sexual discriminations. However, according to Natasha Walter from the Guardian, Hosseini "doesn't gloss over the horrors his characters live through, but something about his direct, explanatory style and the sense that you are moving towards a redemptive ending makes the whole narrative, for all its tragedies, slip down rather easily" (The Guardian 2007).

Khaled Hosseini was born on March 4, 1965, in an educated middle-class family in Kabul, Afghanistan. His father was a diplomat, and his mother was a Persian language high school teacher. When he was 11 years old, his family moved to Paris. Following the April 1978 Saur Revolution in which the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) seized power, it was impossible for the family to return to their homeland. In 1980, after the outbreak of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, Hosseini's family sought political asylum in the United States and stayed in San Jose, California. Hosseini, then aged 15, experienced a cultural shock particularly due to his inability to speak English. Having earned a bachelor's degree in biology in 1988, he entered the University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, where he received his M.D. in 1993. Later on, he started working as a medicine for more than ten years. In his novels, Hosseini "challenges his readers to reflect on discrimination and political abuse within their own experience in light of instances of such abuses in a different and unfamiliar country" (Stuhr 77-78). In fact, he is the first Afghan-American writer who writes in English and uses fiction to convey his messages to the world. His "multifaceted novels appeal to readers for a variety of reasons, whether it is for their epic depiction of Afghanistan, their poignant description of family relationships, their narrative of individuals who develop as they face grave decisions, or for their riveting stories" (109)

His best-seller 2003 debut, *The Kite Runner*, spent 101 weeks on the bestseller list as a paperback. The protagonist of the novel, Amir, is a young Afghan boy from Wazir Akbar Khan district of Kabul who has an intimate friendship with Hassan, his father's young Hazara servant. The novel follows a series of events, from the collapse of Afghanistan's monarchy following the Soviet attack, the flood of refugees and the appearance of the Taliban regime. The prominent themes of this novel have been considered as the relationship between parents and children, guilt, and redemption.

Hosseini asserts, “Because its themes of friendship, betrayal, guilt, redemption and the uneasy love between fathers and sons are universal themes, and not specifically Afghan, the book has been able to reach across cultural, racial, religious and gender gaps to resonate with readers of varying backgrounds” (San Francisco Chronicle 2005).

The story of Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) also takes place in Afghanistan. The story centers on the problems and issues Afghan women deal with. It depicts the story of two women, Mariam and Laila, whose lives become tangled during Afghanistan's riotous thirty-year transition from Soviet occupation to Taliban and later post-Taliban governments. “The story, epic in scope and spanning three decades, follows these two indomitable women whose fortunes mirror those of their beloved and battered country—nothing pretty to look at but still standing—and who find in each other the strength they need to survive” (O, the Oprah Magazine 2007).

Hosseini's third novel *And the Mountains Echoed* was released on May 21, 2013. It narrates the story of Saboor, a poor Afghan father who gifts his 3-year old daughter, Pari, a better life by giving the child to a wealthy man residing in Kabul, never to see her again. Pari is strongly bonded to her brother, Abdullah and this loss and yearning for reunion propel the story. Like his two other novels, the motif of this novel is the relationship of Afghanistan to the broader world. Prior to its release, Hosseini said: “My new novel is a multi-generational family story as well, this time revolving around brothers and sisters, and the ways in which they love, wound, betray, honor, and sacrifice for each other. I am thrilled at the chance to share this book with my readers” (Christian Science Monitor 2012).

The concept of trauma has been defined in myriad ways by scholars and researchers of various disciplines and persuasions. Having been derived from the Greek ‘traumatizo’ meaning to wound, trauma signified “a blow or shock to the bodily tissues which led to injury or disturbance. Later this medical concept was extended to encompass the structures of the mind, developing a broader psychological and social reference” (Rogers et al. 1-2). However, later, this medical concept developed a larger psychological and social reference and embraced the structures of the mind. The concept of trauma in psychology is redefined to signify the state of mind stemming from the shock, which results in the disconnection of the involved person from their relationship to the world.

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, due to different states of physical and mental exhaustion in soldiers of two important wars, the Crimean War (1854-6) and the American Civil War (1861-5), the most significant focal point to the study of trauma was the aftermath of hostilities. The psychological trauma in times of war is considered as shell shock or combat stress reaction and can result in an acute stress reaction which may cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Gill Straker introduced the term Continuous Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CTSD) into

the trauma literature in 1987 describing the effects of exposure to recurrent, high levels of violence usually related to civil conflict and political repression. The term is also pertinent to the effects of exposure to the contexts in which crime, as well as gang violence, are prevalent, and to the effects of enduring exposure to life threats in high-risk careers such as police and fire brigade.

The experience of the survivors of concentration camps in Europe and Japan became another important focus for the study of trauma. Besides the scientific focus and debates, trauma entered the realm of popular discourse in various ways. The augmenting public awareness of this concept through the media resulted in a gradual acceptance of the idea that psychic disturbance can hurt both survivors and witnesses. Life historians found the nature of traumatic memory a significant issue due to the effects of trauma on storytelling about the self. They are interested in and attracted to Freudian psychoanalysis, which considers storytelling as an attempt to master the shocking experience and as a construction of meaning. The importance of life story lies in understanding the importance of trauma in human's life. It provides an opportunity to investigate the relation between personal and collective experience through concentrating on recalling and forgetting as cultural processes. It also suggests a means of interpreting the experience of marginalized people along with their forgotten histories shaping the possibilities of exploring the relation between individual memories and the broader public context through bringing rich sources to the study of trauma.

Considering trauma as a psychic and a bodily phenomenon, psychoanalysis played an important and historical role in the redefinition of this concept. Psychoanalysis reveals that the traumatic effects of a terrible event or a shocking circumstance upon the psyche are displayed unconsciously in various physical symptoms as well as disturbances in neurotic behavior. As symbolic expressions of something difficult or even impossible to make sense of or assimilate with, the ordinary sense of oneself, hallucination, nightmares, and amnesia can manifest and reflect these turbulences.

The main pillars of Hosseini's novels are mostly traumatic events which shape, design, and propel the story along with constituting the identity of characters. Distressing events like war, loss, rape, domestic abuse, and violence are regarded as different types of trauma. Moreover, his characters are holding tightly by dominant ideologies which either deprive them of or provide them with several occasions in their lives. The historical background of social and political issues in Afghanistan as well as the real illustration of the characters create a fertile field which for working on social, psychoanalytical-philosophical concepts of trauma, fantasy and their impact on identity in order to open a new perspective in the horizon of literary-cultural studies relying on the ideas of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, in the aforementioned fields.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

From 9/11 on, the world has witnessed the growth of Afghan diaspora writers, who have been attempting to attract the attention of the readers in all over the world to the cultural, political and social situation of Afghanistan. Besides Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, which is the first work of fiction by an Afghan diaspora, there have been several novels, short story collection, and poems written by other diaspora writers on Afghanistan. The national trauma of the country has made the Afghan literature highly responsive and armed Afghan writers to portray the traumas by their pens. Authors like Atiq Rahimi and Nadim Aslam chose English and French languages to convey their messages to the whole world. However, Khaled Hosseini is the only author among his ilk who traces the impact of trauma in the subjectivity of his characters and his novels end in solutions or suggestion for recovery from trauma and create a new subjectivity to constitute a recovered nation and consequently a hale and hearty generation.

Hosseini is the expert on narrating a certain kind of story in which unbearable traumatic events including violence, abuse, and misery are made readable. His novels tell the tumultuous history of Afghanistan through which numerous citizens suffered from the torment of civil wars, foreign military interventions, and rigorous tribalism along with racial, ethical and sexual discriminations. The main pillars of his novels are the illustration of traumatic events including war, loss, rape, domestic abuse and violence which shape, design, and propel the story having a serious influence on the subjectivity of his characters. So far, the studies on Hosseini's novels have been mainly concerned with the image of Afghans in his novels, female voice, domestic violence, and the problem of Religion and ethnicity; however, there is an academic lack of studying the impacts of trauma on the subjectivity formation of his characters. Hosseini's works are proper to be worked on regarding the social, psychoanalytical-philosophical concept of trauma and its impacts on subjectivity formation in order to open a new perspective in the horizon of literary-cultural studies relying on the ideas of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan who regards trauma as the basic factor in identity formation of an individual and suggests clarifying solution on overcoming and recovery from trauma. The common problem all the selected characters encounter with is the very traumatic lack which is challenged through fantasy. As a result, they perceive reality through the framework of their own fantasies. In fact, the characters have different perspectives and attitudes toward life and attempt to compensate for their traumatic lacks. In certain case, these attempts bring about undesirable destructive results for the society; therefore, the need to be considered and their social impacts must be highlighted.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study tends to examine the effects of trauma, as the main source of people's actions and a basic factor in their self-perception, on the subjectivity formation and consequently the lives of the characters and to reveal the function of fantasies, as the designers of the framework through which a subject perceives reality, in their lives. It also examines whether the characters are successful in creating a new subjectivity

through traversing their fantasies and recovering from trauma. Therefore, numerically the objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the effects of trauma on the identity formation and consequently the lives of the characters.
2. To reveal the function of fantasies in the lives of the characters.
3. To examine if any of the characters succeed in creating a new subjectivity through traversing their fantasies and recovering from trauma.

1.4 Research Questions

In doing the current study, the following questions are raised:

1. How does trauma affect the identity formation and consequently the lives of the characters?
2. How do fantasies deprive a character of possessing an objective account of the world?
3. Can any of the characters traverse their fantasies and create their new subjectivities after recovery from trauma?

1.5 Overview of the Conceptual Framework

The second half of the 20th century was the time of psychoanalysis breakthrough into literary studies academic psychoanalysis immigrated from departments of psychology to departments of philosophy and literature. In spite of the psychology departments which study Freud merely as a historical reference, literature researchers employed his ideas to work on literary interpretations. A number of disciplines have contributed to literary studies in different eras. Jacques Lacan was a French psychoanalyst who has significant impacts on many leading prominent French intellectuals specially those who associated with poststructuralism in the 1960s and the 1970s. His controversial and considerable ideas influenced various disciplines including clinical psychoanalysis, critical and literary theory, sociology, feminist theory and 20th-century French philosophy. Lacan was born on 13 April 1901 in Paris and attended the Jesuit College Stanislas to fulfill his ardent Catholic mother's expectations. He entered medical school and specialized in psychiatry at the Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris. In addition to medicine, he was interested in the philosophies of Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger. In 1931, Lacan became a forensic psychiatrist and in 1932 received the Doctorat d'etat for his dissertation 'On Paranoiac Psychosis in its Relations to the Personality'. The Congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association in 1936 witnessed young Lacan's presentation of his first analytical report. The congress chairman, Ernest Jones, who was unenthusiastic to extend Lacan's presentation time, terminated his lecture before the conclusion. In spite of all dissatisfactions with his psychoanalytical career, Lacan started holding a weekly seminar in Paris in which he began to re-read Freud concentrating on linguistics, contemporary philosophy, biology, ethnology, and topology. This private seminar became public in 1953 and during twenty-seven years

influenced psychoanalytical theory and clinical practice along with the cultural life of Paris.

As a predecessor to the Lacanian reading of trauma, the Freudian reading is important due to identifying the importance of repetition and its focus on the practice of testimony. However, Lacan believes that the traumatic event can never be precisely represented. Terry Eagleton asserts the impossibility of representing a traumatic event since this representation “becomes an object in its own right, sheering off from the phenomenon it hoped to encircle” (*The Ideology of Aesthetic* 341).

While his precursor, Freud, worked as a physician and took psychoanalysis as a science with a close relation to medicine, Lacan applied it to the humanities. Lacan never rejected Freud’s ideas in main areas; however, he represented a different trend commenting on the most radical points in Freud’s works resulting in the separation of his psychoanalysis from Freud’s. Lacan’s turned psychoanalysis into a philological field and consequently, related it to literary studies. As a post-Freudian psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan focused on the idea that trauma is an event essentially impossible to integrate into one’s sense of selfhood. Developing the studies of trauma from individuals’ experience to collective ones, Lacan defined trauma like the loss of unity with the mother, interference of language in the symbolic order, loss of phallus and fear of castration. Lacan declared that what he called ‘The Real’ had a traumatic quality external to symbolization. Lacan claimed that as an object of anxiety, The Real is “the essential object which isn’t an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail the object of anxiety par excellence” (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II* 164). Unlike the Freudian reading of trauma which emphasized on the traumatic event, the Lacanian one focuses on the subject’s entrance into the symbolic which results in a fragmentary identity.

Lacan describes the encounter with “an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us.” Therefore, what is reoccurred in trauma neuroses is called The Real, which is beyond the signifier. It is “the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle.” As a result, the function of the *tuche* “first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our narration, that of trauma” ((*Four Fundamental Concepts* 53-55)). Lacan emphasizes that all subjects are fundamentally traumatized through the separation from the mother and stepping into the territory of language. However, the character’s encounter with the real happens over and over throughout the life, constructing the identity in different ways pertaining to trauma.

In contrast to Freud who believed in the existence of unconscious at the very point of being, Lacan holds the viewpoint that unconscious is a signifier which is the impact of the symbolic order on the subject and is created through his enunciation.

As a gap in the symbolic chain, unconscious “manifests itself at those points when language fails and stumbles” (Homer 68) since it is structured like language, it functions in relation to its differential system and is regarded as the discourse of the Other. While Freud considered unconscious as something inside the subject, Lacan emphasizes on its existence as an intersubjective space among individuals which enters into the symbolic order from the outside. As a result, the psychoanalytical subject appears in relation to the Other; it is a lacking subject who is missing his very being. In line with this idea, the Lacanian subject is created through the process of alienation resulted from acquiring language and the separation of his desire. It is not regulated through structures; however, it is constituted in relation to the Other’s desire.

Lacan introduced three stages in the process of subject’s development including the Real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. The Real, is the most challenging to explain in such a manner that Lacan himself attempted to clarify its definition in his late works. It is the very residue that language is not able to transform and always manifests itself as a trauma. As the strike of the Real, trauma occurs through a gap in the symbolic order. Fink suggests that the Real is the pre-symbolic place, the time that language did not exist to signify our being (24). Evans holds that while in the Real ‘there is no absence,’ the Symbolic is organized in the binary between presence and absence (1).

This stage is impossible due to an individual’s inability to express it through language. Once the child leaves this stage, it manifests its impacts in the rest of life. It vents whenever an individual is supposed to acknowledge the materiality of his existence, an acknowledgment which is understood as traumatic as it threatens his very reality. The main cause of separation from the Real is the acquisition of language since its differential system regulates and even manipulates one’s perception of the world. Once the child acquires language and steps into it, he turns into an empty signifier in the realm of the others. Opposing to the imaginary stage, which is the register of self-recognition as well as the ego-formation, and the symbolic stage which is the realm of language and social reality, the Real is the unknown territory which is in persistent tension with the socio-symbolic world. This brute materiality erupts in the form of needs since they originate from it. The justification of the existence of the Real is that it is experienced by individuals through entering discourse as a sign. For instance, the cry of the infant is a sign; however, where it originates from is the Real which is impossible to access since it is beyond symbolization.

Psychoanalytical trauma is a psychical event which does not necessarily happen in reality. It “arises from the confrontation between an external stimulus and the subject’s inability to understand ad master the excitation” (Homer 83). The appearance of trauma indicates that the process of signification involves a specific blockage or fixation. The majority of traumatic confrontations are the result of individual’s early encounter with the problem of sexuality and his incapability to realize it. The psychological scar which this event leaves in one’s unconscious will

decline in his future life. Traumatic experiences prove that the Real is never totally absorbed into the symbolic order (social reality). Trauma causes the spot of symbolization captured and the subject fixed in an earlier stage of development. For instance, “a memory is fixed in a person’s mind causing them intense mental disturbance and suffering” (Homer 84). Since it is beyond symbolization and is perpetually displaced at the core of the subject, trauma is regarded Real.

Lacan regards trauma as something that creates the subject forever. It exists in the origin of the subject which is not experienced. All of the experiences including the entire process of desire, substitution, objet petit a, and fantasies can be considered as repetition compulsion since these experiences create the subject and the individual’s whole. Lacan states that:

In effect, the trauma is conceived as having necessarily been marked by the subjectifying homeostasis that orientates the whole functioning defined by the pleasure principle. Our experience then presents us with a problem, which derives from the fact that, at the very heart of the primary process, we see preserved in the insistence of the trauma in machining us aware of its existence. The trauma reappears, in fact, frequently unveiled. How can the dream, the bearer of the subject’s desire, produce that which makes the trauma emerge repeatedly-if, not its very face, at least the screen that shows us that it is still there behind? Let us conclude that the reality system, however far it is developed, leaves an essential part of what belongs to the real a prisoner in the toils of the pleasure principle. (Four Fundamental Concepts 55)

Instead of a single traumatic experience, Lacan ascribes trauma to an individual’s encounter with the Real. Further, repetition grows into the signifier for the primary encounter with the Real. Therefore, the individual endeavors to establish an identity based on a lack to the extent that he can never recollect the Real once he has entered the symbolic. According to Lacan, since the Real is unrepresentable, the traumatic presentation is impossible. Lacan also holds the viewpoint that all subjects are essentially traumatized through the separation from the mother and entrance into the realm of language. However, their encounter with the Real reoccurs over and over throughout the life, creating the identity in trauma. For instance, they re-experience the trauma in the loss of beloved ones, humiliation, discrimination, bullying and abuse.

A particular fantasy functions as a space for the manifestation of unconscious desires and is a way in which subjects structure or organize their desires. Lacan suggests this process of formation of the fantasy can be assumed as the subject’s defense against helplessness, as if he protects himself. The subject constructs himself in order to protect himself against this helplessness of “not being” when confronted with the desire of the Other. This helplessness can imply the impossibility of forming a subjectivity that parallels with the ambiguous and unattainable desire of the Other as the signifier always distorts the desire. As a result, the signifiers presented by the

Other do not directly produce the Other's desire. So, it is required for the desire to be situated in fantasy. In other words, "fantasy is the response to this question: what am I in the Other's desire?" (Feldstein et al. 51). They are universal and simultaneously particular notions through which the subject learns how to desire and endeavors to sustain the phallic territory.

As the raw material of Fantasy, desire is an unconscious lack of being, the essence of man which is manifested in the big Other as splits of the tongue and inconsistencies in speech. Desire is disclosed in the domain of the symbolic network which is beyond the grasp of the subject. The imaginary ego functions as a support for the consistency of experience; therefore, the imaginary order constitutes reality and provides a pathway to the Real which manifests itself in the subject's dreams. Desire can also be considered as the never-fully-satisfied insufficiency of the subject and is originally a desire for love. In other words, the absence of love incorporated in desire prompts the individual to act. The fathers' prohibition of the desire of the mother subverts this desire into language. Directly approaching to the object of desire is a threat to reveal the lack which is essential for the existence of desire. Since the child is not merely the recipient of desire from others, fantasy does not correspond to anything in the Real. In fact, the subject's desires depend on lack, and this very lack guarantees the continuation of ensures he continues to desire. The prominent Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, introduces various typical features of fantasy. In his viewpoint, fantasies are constituted as a protection against the desire as the Other which manifests in what the Other, in its consistency, wants from me. They also create a framework through which a subject perceives reality. As a result, they deprive the individual of possessing an objective account of the world. Consequently, the individual takes its own subjective view of reality.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is the first to provide a new perspective to the literature on Afghanistan war and its aftermaths besides other various types of trauma caused by the patriarchal structure of Afghan society. It is also places Khaled Hosseini as the reprehensive and the trauma writer of Afghan people who not only illustrates the impacts of trauma on his nation but also portrays the possibilities of recovery suggesting that the only way to provide a secure condition for the next generation is to overcome the long-term trauma which was cherished by the Afghan's themselves through their fantasies of strict traditions, sexism, discrimination, tribalism, racism, etc. The selected novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed* provide the marginalized individuals with the opportunity of expressing their troubles, sufferings, and desires in a traumatized society bounded by a rigid traditional structure.

In fact, the main significance of this study is that this research is the first Lacanian study of Hosseini's works which traces the impacts of trauma on the subjectivity of the characters and establishes that his novels signify that the traumatized Afghan nation can overcome their state of trauma caused by the several traumatic events they

have experienced only when they traverse the fantasies such as racism, ethnic favoritism, gender discrimination, and restrictive traditions. Only after observing the falsification of these fantasies and traversing them, they can build their independent identities and hope for constructing a secure and comfortable condition for the future generation.

1.7 Methodology

As mentioned before, according to Lacan, trauma is the main source of the subject's actions and a basis factor in their self-perception and consequent identity formation. Since the subject's inability to understand and master the external stimulus causes trauma, this paper intends to identify that stimulus in the characters' lives such as loss, separation, racial, ethnical and sexual discriminations and violence to examine how these psychological scars affect the formation of their identities. The selected novels, *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And Mountains Echoed*, represent various characters from different Afghan ethnics, genders, and social classes who are involved in common or different traumas according to their conditions. Retrospectively, what all of these characters share is being victims and having the crisis of identity. As a result, the influence of these traumatic events on the formation of their identities will be investigated.

The first selected novel, *The Kite Runner* depicts the traumatic events including ethnical discrimination, violence, rape, betrayal, separation and unwanted immigration along with their bitter impacts on the present and future of the characters. Therefore, the study focuses on the protagonist's fantasies as well as his final attempts to gain an integrated identity and traces his probable recovery from trauma.

The second selected novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* centers on the condition of women before, during, and after the reign of the Taliban. The protagonists, both women and obliged to marry the same man, suffer years of domestic abuse at their husband's hands, and consequently their lives tie inseparably. The double trauma of being a woman victim aggravates their situation and multiples their struggles to achieve an integrated identity. The current study illustrates that these women represent two separate classes of Afghan women suffering from the same trauma regardless of their differences. They are both traumatized women struggling to understand and come to terms with their painful experiences through constructing their own identities.

Focusing on the issues of Afghanistan specially poverty, separation, family ties and immigration, the third selected novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, expresses the trauma of loss and desire for reunion through the tongues of eight narrators who tell inter-woven stories from different perspectives. The present study highlights the significant impacts of trauma on the concept of identity and traces the struggles of the selected characters to form their identities through their traumatic experiences.

To achieve the second objective, at first hand, the study concentrates on the desires of the characters, as the raw material of their fantasies, which are manifested in the subject's dreams and actions. As a result, both night dreams and daydreams of the selected characters will be identified and discussed. Moreover, the novels' omniscient point of view provides the researcher with sufficient evidence to identify the characters' desires and fantasies. Consequently, as fantasies are the designers of the framework through which a subject perceives reality, the current study identifies them in each character's life and traces their impacts on the identity formation. Likewise, as traversing fantasies enables the characters to behold the discrepancies and falsifications of their imaginary-symbolic reality and results in recovery from trauma and create their new identities.

Lacan states that since psychoanalysis analyses speech through working with words, it is largely relevant to the linguistic creation and consequently, anyone with anything to say about language is already a psychoanalyst. The task of the analyst is to discover a contradiction between what the subject says and the gap in that very speech to find a different history from the one told by the subject. As a result, this research tends to do a close reading of the texts focusing on the narrative of the texts, the dialogues and monologs of the characters, the description of their dreams, and also their behaviors which all reflect the characters' desires, fantasies, and consequent traversing from them.

1.8 Scope and Limitations

The present research paper studies the novels written by the Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini including *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, and *And the Mountains Echoed*, in light of Lacanian ideas of trauma and fantasy. So far, Hosseini has written the three will-be-discussed novels; therefore, the study will be on the very three books. As the writer of the first work of fiction by an Afghan diaspora after 9/11, Hosseini's work have been selected to be studied due to his clear depiction of the trauma of his nation, the diversity of his novels characters and their traumatic experience, the plots, and his vivid portrayal of the characters' fantasies as the outcome of their trauma. The personal experience of living in Afghanistan and diaspora, his extended researches and interviews with traumatized people and his artistic talent all have provided Hosseini with the opportunity of the compensation for his cultural distance and presenting a clear image of Afghanistan.

This study will start with a Lacanian perspective and examines the concepts of trauma and fantasy in the novels and deals with other issues to the extent they are about these concepts. In fact, Lacan changed psychoanalysis into a practical instrument in the fields of, literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, and feminism. In spite of Freud and other scholars who dealt with trauma in a more clinical way, Lacan's ideas are more practical and applicable to literary works, as he was the first one who conducted a Lacanian study on literary works. As result, his works are proper to be worked on regarding the social, psychoanalytical-philosophical concept of trauma and its impacts on subjectivity formation in order to

open a new perspective in the horizon of literary-cultural studies relying on the ideas of the French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan who regards trauma as the basic factor in identity formation of an individual and suggests clarifying solution on overcoming and recovery from trauma. Since this study does not employ a clinical study of trauma, the examination of the protocol of trauma is not applied to the texts. In fact, the focus of the study is the common problem all characters encounter with, the very traumatic lack which is challenged through fantasy. As a result, they perceive reality through the framework of their own fantasies. In fact, the characters have different perspectives and attitudes toward life and attempt to compensate for their traumatic lacks. In certain case, these attempts bring about undesirable destructive results for the society; therefore, the need to be considered and their social impacts must be highlighted.

In *The Kite Runner*, the study focuses on analyzing the character of the protagonist, Amir, in the second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, it analyzes the characters of Mariam and Laila, and in the third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, it considers the main characters, Abdullah, Pari his daughter, Nila and Pari Wahdati.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

1.9.1 Three Lacanian Stages of Development

Lacan introduced three stages in the process of the subject's development. He names the first stage, which extends from the birth moment until six months of age, 'the Real stage' which is ruled by a chaotic mixture of feelings, perceptions, and needs. In this stage, the infant cannot distinguish itself from the mother and the world around. The second stage called 'the mirror stage' spans from 6 to 18 months of age and is the realm of demands. Child's awareness of his total integrated body is perceived in this register. The image he sees provides him with a sense of integrity and unification. However, the outcome of this sense is a simultaneous alienation since the child identifies himself with the image and at the same time perceives it as an-other. The third stage of development, which is from 18 months to 4 years, is associated with the acquisition of language and stepping into the Symbolic order. This register is all about language and desire.

1.9.2 The Traumatic Lack:

Lacan defined trauma like the loss of unity with the mother, interference of language in the symbolic order, loss of phallus and fear of castration. Unlike the Freudian reading of trauma which emphasized on the traumatic event, the Lacanian one focuses on the subject's entrance into the symbolic which results in a fragmentary identity. As the strike of the Real, trauma occurs through a gap in the symbolic order. Fink suggests that the Real is the pre-symbolic place, the time that language did not exist to signify our being (24). Evans holds that while in the Real 'there is no absence,' the Symbolic is organized in the binary between presence and absence (1). Lacan also holds the viewpoint that all subjects are essentially traumatized through

the separation from the mother and entrance into the realm of language. However, their encounter with the Real reoccurs over and over throughout the life, creating the identity in trauma. For instance, they re-experience the trauma in the loss of beloved ones, humiliation, discrimination, bullying and abuse.

Searching for the mother's body, subjects satisfy themselves with a series of objects called objects petit a. By object petit a, Lacan means the preferred imaginary features of fantasy which appear in the original separation. Lacan mentions the example of envy to demonstrate how the object petit a works. Envy is provoked by the image of someone who has something which, yet it might not be useful to me, makes me sick thinking of someone else possessing it instead of me. The objet petit a is that constant sense of something missing or lacking in the subject's life. Even after attaining the set goals, there exists something that the subjects desires; however, he is unable to pinpoint it. It signifies the void various objects attempt to fill within symbolic reality. The objet petit a stands for the lack. It is not a lost or lacking object since the subject could find it to satisfy his desire.

1.9.3 Subjectivity Formation:

The psychoanalytical subject appears in relation to the Other; it is a lacking subject who is missing his very being. In line with this idea, the Lacanian subject is created through the process of alienation resulted from acquiring language and the separation of his desire. It is not regulated through structures; however, it is constituted in relation to the Other's desire.

Lacan introduces René Descartes as the most important interpreter of the subject who assumed that the subject could doubt everything including the existence of other people, the world and even himself; but as long as he doubts, he thinks, and consequently, he exists (Cogito, ergo sum). However, Freud rejected Descartes's idea proclaiming that Descartes's 'I think' was improbable since there is a huge unconscious in the background of one's thinking which is the main component of 'I exist.' As a result, thinking becomes inappropriate to one's certainty (Seminar XI 40). Lacan regards trauma as something that creates the subject forever. It exists in the origin of the subject which is not experienced. From a Lacanian perspective, all of the experiences including the entire process of desire, substitution, objet petit a, and fantasies can be considered as repetition compulsion since these experiences create the subject. As a reaction to trauma, in order to deal with the original lack, the subject creates fantasy as a scenario in which he functions as the protagonist. If the subject does not discover the falsification of his fantasies and does not go beyond it cannot overcome trauma and fails to create a new subjectivity.

1.9.4 Traversing Fantasy

Traversing the fantasy is to take subjective responsibility and stop suggesting that the Other has got the lost object of desire. In other words, traversing fantasy is becoming aware of and accepting that the lost object is something posited by themselves as a means to compensate for the trauma of castration they experienced earlier. Lacan argues beyond or beneath the images of everyday life and dreams there is always one fundamental fantasy; the analyst must help the analysand traverse the fundamental fantasy to thereby change his mode of defense, and thus to open up to other modes of jouissance.

Traversing Fantasy is the process through which a complete reversal happens in the subject's place in relation to the Other's desire and enables the subject to leave his former self behind and creates a new subjectivity. Lacan asserts that the subject who has traversed the fantasy agrees that the big Other along with any concrete Other, taken by the subject as its representative, does not have what he has lost. Finally, the subject accepts that what seems to be his place in the order of the Other is not something fixed. As a result, he can accept that he is a lacking subject, or in the Lacanian term, a subject of desire. Traversing fantasy does not mean that the subject suddenly wakes up and finds fantasy as an illusion; however, it is experiencing the fact that the fantasy functions to conceal the void, the lack in the Other. In a nutshell, it is giving up the attempts to reclaim the objet petit a from the Other.

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"Possessing the Secret of Joy and Kristevan Revolt" .4th Social, Developmental Studies International Conference 2013. (As the co-author)

"The Semiotic and the Symbolic in *The Bluest Eye*". 4th Social, Developmental Studies International Conference 2013. (As the co-author)

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