

Representations of Afghan Women in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*
Time Ramphiphatthamrong¹ and Chalathip Wasuwat¹

¹Faculty of Humanities, Chiang Mai University

Abstract

This research studies the novels *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* written by Khaled Hosseini for the purposes of investigating the representations of Afghan women through the female characters. Hall's Representation, Mohanty's notions of the Third World women and double colonization, and the status of Afghan women were employed in the analysis to investigate how Afghan women are represented in Hosseini's novels and help investigate how the two forms of domination between patriarchy and colonialism are involved in the oppression of women in Afghanistan. The results show that Hosseini's representations of Afghan women reflected through his novels still reproduce stereotypical images of Afghan women. Despite his attempt to portray Afghan women as realistically as possible, Hosseini's female characters are depicted as victims and as oppressed women. This is because these women live in under the ideologically male dominated society. This research also reveals that colonialism and patriarchy in Afghanistan bear a strong similarity to each other, and both persistently oppress women. Both the invasion of the Soviet Union and the patriarchal power demand submission from women. Under the patriarchal ideology, the colonial power and the Taliban law, Afghan women are twice oppressed. However, Hosseini's novels not only provide texts that deal with how a religious practice is oppressive to Afghan women, but also present how the female characters resist and liberate themselves in their oppressive circumstances.

Keywords: Representations of Women, Afghan Women, Patriarchy, Khaled Hosseini, Postcolonial Literature

ภาพแทนของผู้หญิงอัฟกันในวรรณกรรมเรื่อง เดอะ ไคท์ รันเนอร์ อะ ทาวซัน สะ เพลนดิด ชันส์ และ แอนด์ เดอะ เมาน์เทน เอกโค้ โดย คาร์ลเลต ฮอสเซน

ธามม์ งามพิพัฒน์ธำรงค์¹ และ ชลธิป วสุวัต¹

¹คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาวรรณกรรมเรื่อง เดอะ ไคท์ รันเนอร์ อะ ทาวซัน สะเพลนดิด ชันส์ และ แอนด์ เดอะ เมาน์เทน เอกโค้ ประพันธ์โดยคาร์ลเลต ฮอสเซน โดยมีจุดประสงค์เพื่อวิเคราะห์ภาพแทนของผู้หญิงอัฟกันผ่านตัวละครผู้หญิง โดยมีแนวคิดเรื่องภาพตัวแทนของสจ๊วต ฮอลล์ แนวคิดเรื่องผู้หญิงโลกที่สามและอาณานิคมข้ามชั้นของโมนานที และสถานะของผู้หญิงอัฟกัน เป็นกรอบในการวิเคราะห์เพื่อศึกษาว่าผู้หญิงอัฟกันได้ถูกแทนภาพอย่างไรในวรรณกรรมของฮอสเซน และช่วยค้นหารูปแบบของการครอบงำสองแบบของระบอบประชาธิปไตยและการล่าอาณานิคมเกี่ยวข้องอย่างไรในการกดขี่ผู้หญิงในประเทศอัฟกานิสถาน ผลวิเคราะห์พบว่าภาพแทนของผู้หญิงอัฟกันผ่านตัวละครผู้หญิงในวรรณกรรมของฮอสเซนยังคงผลิตซ้ำภาพเหมารวม ถึงแม้ว่าฮอสเซนพยายามที่จะแทนภาพผู้หญิงอัฟกันให้มีความใกล้เคียงกับความเป็นจริงเท่าที่จะเป็นไปได้ แต่ตัวละครผู้หญิงก็ยังคงถูกแทนภาพการถูกทำให้เป็นเหยื่อ และเป็นผู้หญิงที่ถูกกดขี่ เนื่องจากผู้หญิงเหล่านี้อยู่ภายใต้สังคมที่ผู้ชายเป็นใหญ่ งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ยังเผยให้เห็นว่าลัทธิอาณานิคมและระบอบประชาธิปไตยในประเทศอัฟกานิสถานมีความคล้ายคลึงกันอย่างมากและทั้งคู่กดขี่ผู้หญิงอย่างฝังแน่น ภายใต้สถานการณ์ประชาธิปไตย ลัทธิอาณานิคมและกฎหมาย ผู้หญิงอัฟกันมีการถูกกดขี่แบบซ้ำสอง อย่างไรก็ตาม วรรณกรรมของฮอสเซนไม่ได้ประกอบด้วยเนื้อหาที่เกี่ยวข้องแค่ข้อปฏิบัติทางศาสนาส่งผลต่อการกดขี่ผู้หญิงอย่างไร แต่ยังแสดงให้เห็นว่าตัวละครผู้หญิงต่อต้านและปลดแอกตัวเองในสภาพแวดล้อมที่ถูกกดขี่อย่างไร

คำสำคัญ: ภาพแทนของผู้หญิง ผู้หญิงอัฟกัน ปิตาธิปไตย คาร์ลเลต ฮอสเซน วรรณคดีแนวหลังอาณานิคม

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, Afghanistan has often been portrayed and shown in the Western media as the area of wars, terrorists, religious zealots, violence, primitiveness, exoticness and danger. Particularly after a disastrous and tragic event like the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Afghans have faced their stereotypes about their culture, ethnicity and religion, and they have often been depicted as villains and terrorists through a large number of Hollywood films and American television shows (Bakali, 2013, p. 39). The first week after the attacks of 9/11, burqa-clad Muslim women were on face covers of the magazines in the U.S. and on the front page of the New York Times (Fahmy, 2003, p. 92). Since then, the representations of Afghan people in the media have been presented in negative ways which finally result in

several misconceptions and reproduce stereotypical images of the Afghans, especially women who are extremely passive and sexually silenced victims of masculine dominance. (Bardici, 2012, p. 41). The Western media have begun embedding the message in people's mind by presenting and broadcasting negative images of Taliban and al-Qaeda, which were under the control of Osama Bin Laden. Printed and online contents extensively present information such as the pictures of Muslims pumping their rifles in the air in Afghanistan. Because the gender issues such as the representations of male and female characters, gender inequality and subordination have been studied increasingly by feminists, activists and academics worldwide in the last few decades, these kinds of issues have been portrayed in many literary works especially the stories set in Third World countries such as Afghanistan to show how women have to cope with their lives within a patriarchal society.

Most literary works especially novels set in Afghanistan have often dealt with violence, military troops, wars, women oppression and patriarchy. Interestingly, the stories of Afghanistan have been increasingly interested by people around the world after the shocking events of 9/11 in 2001. It was Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-born American novelist and the author of *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*, who distributed new perspectives and aspects about Afghanistan to the rest of the world.

First published in 2003, *The Kite Runner*, is a historical novel composed of the conflicts between the two ethnic groups of Afghanistan including the Pashtuns and the Hazaras. The novel presents a dramatique story of Afghan people confronting political controversies and disputes eventually resulting in both physical and mental agonies within the country. Even though the themes and plots in *The Kite Runner* are mainly portrayed through two male protagonists, Amir and Hassan, women's roles in Afghan culture are represented through minor female characters such as Soraya, Jamaila and Sanaubar to show how these female characters deal with double standards and inequalities in patriarchal and traditional Afghan society. The following Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, which came in 2007, is the story of Afghan women about affection, hatred and resistance under the patriarchal Afghan society. In this novel, the theme of women's struggle for liberation is presented through the two female protagonists, Mariam and Laila, who have different life backgrounds. Throughout the novel, Afghan women not only experience the suffering resulting from men's exploitation but also have no choice either to stay or fight against this

kind of misery. Published in 2013, the third novel of Hosseini *And the Mountains Echoed* is built on the relationship between Abdullah, and his three-year-old sister, Pari. The novel presents how Pari copes with her new family who adopted her when she was very young. The storyline and the female characters in the novel such as, Pari and Mrs. Nila Wahdati are presented through the backdrop of tragic and chaotic events when Afghanistan was ruled by the Soviet Union and the Taliban. This research aims to study how Afghan women are represented in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*.

2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of this research will be based on three theoretical frameworks which are the work of representation, Third World women and status of women in Afghanistan.

2.1 The Work of Representation

In order to study how Hosseini represents Afghan women in his novels, it is necessary to review the representation theory which will be employed as the main theoretical framework. Stuart McPhail Hall, a cultural theorist, political activist and sociologist working in the field of cultural studies, proposes his ideas of how media messages are produced, disseminated, and interpreted respectively in his book titled *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* published in 1997. In Hall's book, the relationship between the representation of thing, meaning and language are suggested and explained clearly. According to Hall, the representation means the process or system in which meaning is produced and exchanged in people's mind in the culture through the use of language, signs and images which represent things in the "real" world (p. 1). Hall then conceptually purposes his idea about two systems of representation which explains how the meaning is produced in our minds through the use of language. That is, there are two processes of representation. The first process is called "system" meaning all kinds of things, people and events are associated with a set of concepts in people's mind or "mental representation." The second process of the representation is the relationship between conceptual maps in our thoughts and a set of signs organized into various languages which represent the concepts. The correspondences between "things," "concepts" and "signs" is the heart of the production of the meaning in language (p. 17).

Therefore, Hall's theory of representation is provided in the analysis in order to explore the representations of the female characters in Hosseini's novels. The theory purposes the practices of representation in the media, helping to understand the way certain things are represented. In this case, the representational practices commonly called stereotyping explains the fixed and oversimplified portrayals of gender and demonstrates the vivid images of the oppositions between men and women. In other words, the idea of "representation" that is applied in this study refers to the portrayals produced to illustrate the image of Afghan women through the female characters in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. These representations of Afghan women are presumably intended to reflect the Afghan women living in Afghanistan when the country was under the Soviets and Taliban rules respectively.

2.2 Third World Women

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's six arguments against Western feminist scholars about the representations of "Third World women" are conceptually explained and reviewed in her article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" published in 1984. According to her article, Mohanty, a postcolonial and transitional feminist, a prominent professor of women and gender studies, and the author of distinguished book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* in 2003, criticizes some Western feminist scholars who attempt to homogenize and universalize perspectives and presuppositions over women in the "Third World country." According to Mohanty, selected texts studied by western feminist scholars including Fran Hosken, Maria Cutrufelli, Juliette Minces, Beverly Lindsay, and Patricia Jeffery are discussed and claimed in order to show how some Western feminist scholars discursively emphasize the codification of their writings which try to colonize and ghettoize "Third World" women as the collective "other" from Western women. According to Mohanty, women in the "Third World" have suffered from what is called "double colonization," first as a colonized subject and second as a woman in a patriarchal society. In addition, Mohanty argues that western feminist scholars construct monolithic terms, and label a large group of "Third World women" as poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, and victimized without considering related factors, complexities, diversities, and multiplicities of women in the "Third World country." In this case, Mohanty also suggests that race, class, gender, geography, and history should be considered when

attempting to understand the positions and experiences of women in reality. As Mohanty states, “I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality . . . and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the “third world” in the context of a world system dominated by the West on the other, characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world the third world” (Mohanty, 1984, p. 335). Here, Mohanty’s argument above problematizes Western feminism as misrepresenting women in the Third World countries.

2.3 Status of Women in Afghanistan

Wali M. Rahimi in the book *Status of Women: Afghanistan* which gathers a great numbers of projects conducted by UNESCO and dealt with Afghanistan and other seven countries will be used to analyze throughout the study. Not only does the book present about the topic of women in Afghanistan, it also discusses the issues of the cultures, traditions, gender’s role, statistical data on women and situations of today women in their respective countries. The selected topics will be applicable to this study as it highlights on the female characters who experiences different lives in Afghanistan.

Concerning about marriage in Afghan society, it means the relationship and bond between a man and a woman. The primary purpose of marriage in Afghanistan is regulating or managing the sexuality as well as creating a circumstance for the continuity of the family. An Afghan child who was born under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of marriage eventually become “birth-status rights” of the Afghan society (p. 11). For example, the marriage of the same Afghan groups are more preferably than between the Afghan and other Muslim group. In case they want to marry with another Muslim nationality, they must be officially permitted by the government. Marriage is a sacred ritual arranged by both man’s and woman’s parents. It is the visit of the both sides of the family to initially report the satisfaction. Then, in case all agreement about the marriage is reached, an engagement day is finally fixed and a “formal deputation, Rooybar” from the groom’s side is sent to ask bride’s hand for marriage. It is seen that, according to Rahimi, the parents from both side are the “decision makers in all aspects of the marriage” (p. 12). In addition, according to Islamic law and Afghan norm, “premarital sexual relationship” is prohibited as the virginity of women is highly valued in Afghan society. The child marriage, according to Rahimi, is also proposed he states, “the attempts of parents to marry their daughters and sons at an early

age is to prohibit premarital sexual relationships” (p. 12). Legally, the marriage for girls and boys in Afghanistan, according to the Afghan Civil Law, is at the age of sixteen and eighteen respectively. However, the socio-cultural reasons condone this practice at the earlier age.

In addition, the topic of polygamous marriage is indispensable to review as this issue is shown in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* when Rasheed marries his new wife, Laila without his ex-wife's consent. According to Rahimi, “all Afghan ethnic group are polygynous” (p. 12). That is, Afghan social norm traditionally permits men to have more than one wife (p. 12). As this practice is stated in the Qur'an: “... [M]arry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one” (cited in Kassam 35). Islam allows a Muslim man to have a limit of four wives. However, a Muslim man can marry more than one wife solely in case that he can deal fairly and afford his wives. As a result, “polygamy is not a rule, but an exception, flexible enough to relate to various circumstances, times, cultures and needs” (Kassam 35). That is, a man can have a new marriage in case his wife is unable to fulfil his satisfaction; for example, she cannot have a child, she is widowed due to the death of her husband during the wartime. However, a man has to treat his wives equally.

3. Research Methodology

This research aims to study how Afghan women are represented in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Sun* and *And the Mountains Echoed*. In order to achieve the goal of study, firstly, the main female characters in Hosseini's three novels will be scrutinized to sort out how these female characters are characterized and portrayed. Then, Afghan women's portrayals reflected through female characters will be studied and analyzed in order to find out whether Afghan women represented in Hosseini's novels provide the readers with new perspectives or reproduce the stereotypical images that are dominant in the Western media. Throughout the study, Hall's theory of representation, the notions of the Third World women proposed by Mohanty and status of women in Afghanistan are employed as theoretical frameworks of the analysis.

4. Results

4.1 The Representations of Afghan Women in *The Kite Runner*

Jamila is a female character who clearly shows how Afghan women are posited in the patriarchal Afghan society where women are inferior to their male counterparts like their husband and father. Living in Afghanistan, Jamila used to sing in public and was one of the singers who could sing both popular and traditional Afghan music in Kabul. Though she had never sung professionally, she had had the talent. Unfortunately, after marrying General Taheri, Jamila is forced to stop singing. As Amir recalls Soraya talking about her mother, Jamila,

That she never sing in public had been one of the general's conditions when they had married. Soraya told me that her mother had wanted to sing at our wedding, only one song, but the general gave her one of his looks and the matter was buried. (p. 163)

This extract shows that Jamila's space is limited and restricted as she is positioned in domestic roles and is not able to be in public area to express her abilities or skills such as singing. It is because her husband, General Taheri who adheres to Afghans traditional customs and values that allow men to complete authority to supervise women. He, therefore, takes responsibility to control his wife's and his children's behaviors. Not being able to refuse, as a condition of her marriage to the general, Jamila has to agree to never again sing in public and must give up her career as a singer after being married because of the General Taheri's order. This affirms the cultural belief which determines the wife's condition to stay at home, to be obedient and to be guarded by her husband after marriage. Afghan married women's positions are reserved to be housewives and mothers. They have no other choices for them. They must devote themselves to be ideal housewives and ideal mothers for their families. Because of their restrictions, Afghan women often lack opportunity to develop their skills and fail to obtain important position in the public. Since the Afghan family is a patriarchal entity, a male family member, be it a husband a father or a brother can naturally decide and control over a female family member's life.

Mohanty's argument about women's double colonization of patriarchy and colonialism are supported by the next analysis as this concept is disregarded by the Western feminisms. When Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviet Union, Afghan people's life, especially

women's were threatened and held under duress by these groups of people. In order to strengthen this notion, there is a scene in the novel that shows women are one of the susceptible targets of colonial power. The time when Amir and Baba, together with several Afghan people, are in the back of a truck fleeing to Pakistan. Then, the truck driver has an arrangement with the Russian soldiers after arriving at a checkpoint passing through Jalalabad on their way to Peshawar, Pakistan. One Soviet soldier stares at a young Afghan woman in the truck and wants to increase the price of passing through. In addition, he wants half an hour with the woman, as Hosseini writes "Karim [Amir's friend] cleared his throat, dropped his head. Said the soldier wanted a half hour with the lady in the back of the truck" (p. 115). This statement implies that the soviet soldiers attempt to exercise their power anytime when they have opportunity. This soldier is trying to spend time alone with the woman so that he can sexually harass her. This incident, as a result, clearly reflects what Mohanty calls "double colonization." That is, women's experience of colonization is different from men's. Before the arrival of the Soviet soldiers, the young Afghan woman already experienced oppression under patriarchal power. Once the Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, Afghan women then are doubly oppressed by both colonial and patriarchal powers.

4.2 The Representations of Afghan Women in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Unlike *The Kite Runner*, which is presented through male protagonists, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* narrates the theme of women's struggle for liberation through the two female protagonists, Mariam and Laila. In the novel, Mariam's and Laila's portrayals are that of Afghan women who are treated as second-class citizens. Both Mariam and Laila are forced to get married Rasheed, who is about many years older than them. Mariam and Laila then becomes a slave to Rasheed and his family members because a perfect wife, in accordance with Afghan culture, is considered as the belongings of her belongings, "whose mastery over her is also taken for granted" (Rahimi, 1991, p. 9). Rasheed, as a consequence, can control Mariam and Laila every moment and impose his ideas on them. This shows that the positions of Afghan women are affected by the patriarchal ideology underlying the Afghan society and considering women as inferior to men. As purposed by Rahimi, "In fact, Afghan women, even until the beginning of 20th century were the slaves of their father, husband . . . Her most valued characteristic was silence and obedience" (1991, p. 6).

Even though Mariam and Laila are Afghan women living in the same Afghan culture, they are different in terms of their ethnicity, upbringing, family, and class. Laila, a beautiful and intelligent girl, is a daughter of a well-educated father who motivates her to engage in knowledge and learning. As he tells Laila,

“I know you’re still young, but I want you to understand and learn this now... Marriage can wait, education cannot. You’re a very, very bright girl. Truly, you are. You can be anything you want, Laila... I know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, maybe even more. Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila. No chance.”

(Hosseini, 2007, p. 114)

In contrast, Mariam stays with her mother, Nana who does not allow Mariam to go to school because she thinks that it is unnecessary for women to go to school. As Nana tells her daughter,

“What’s the sense schooling a girl like you? It’s like shining a spittoon. And you’ll learn nothing of value in those schools. There is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don’t teach it in school. Look at me.”

(Hosseini, 2007, p.18)

The above extract supports Mohanty’s critique of Western feminists who tend to universally categorize the “Third World” women as “illiterate” and overlook the cultural specificities which mark the conditions of the Third World women (p. 352). More specifically, Western feminists often fail to understand the specific condition of Afghan women as shown in the novel and tend to universalize Afghan women’s experiences. In this case, Laila’s and Mariam’s class, family background and ethnicity are considered in order to show that Afghan women are not a homogenous category.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, each female character has different consciousness of her life. Laila is portrayed as a girl who is aware of gender equality. She is the only one of female characters who has ever gone to school and her father always highlights her an importance of education. When Laila is young, she talks with her friend who thinks that women are incapable of getting education. Thinking differently, Laila regards women should have equal rights to men in terms of getting education. It implies that Laila’s consciousness of education straightly reflects her awareness of women’s right and equality. Therefore, her

consciousness of women's rights are manifested when she faces the problem. There is a scene in the novel that Laila is aware of her equality. Marrying Rasheed and living together with Mariam, Laila asks Mariam to go outside with her. Mariam, who is never concerned about gender equality and always submissive to her husband due to her strong belief, refuses Laila to go outside. However, Laila thinks that women have the right to live free from subordination and limitation as she asks Mariam, "We're leaving this spring, Aziza and I. Come with us, Mariam" (p. 250).

4.3 The Representations of Afghan Women in *And the Mountains Echoed*

Nila is represented as a modern Afghan woman who is successful and professional in her career, which is a renowned poet in France. In the same way, Nila, as a representative of Afghan women in the novel, reflects the fact that Afghan women in today society are more accepted and influential without men's control. After Nila and her husband, Mr. Suleiman have never been happy and comfortable with their marriage life, Nila decides to desert her husband suffering from an acute stroke of brain, and she migrates to spend her life with her adopted daughter. In the novel, Nila's portrayal is that of a modern Afghan woman living a life of her own choice and relishing her personal autonomy. Nila is also depicted as an Afghan woman who has more opportunities and freedom to wear clothes and pursue her works compared with other Afghan women who live in Afghanistan.

Although Nila is portrayed as a strong, independent woman who no longer lets herself be a target of victimization. She has always been in troubles with her father. That is, when she stayed in Kabul, she was often beaten and controlled by her father. Nila's father naturally has a cultural dominance and power over Nila, and he must be treated with the highest respect. The cultural belief, in the same way, determines Nila's condition to stay at home, to be obedient and to be guarded by her father. This situation highlights and promotes the notion that the pictures of traditional Afghan women chiefly obtain from a traditional beliefs and thoughts dictated from generation to generation. It is seen that Nila's father controls her with regards to her behaviors, activities and even ideas. As a consequence, he represents the picture of the authoritative master over his daughter. In the same way, in a patriarchal context of Afghanistan, men are considered to take responsibilities in their families and societies. It can be said that the reason why Nila can become a successful poet probably comes from her education. In the novel, when Nila was young, she studied

French language with her mom who is French. As Nila states in her interview with Etienne Boustouler who is an editor of a renowned magazine, “My mother taught me in Kabul when I was little. She spoke only French to me. We had lessons every day. It was very hard on me when she left Kabul” (p. 235-236). In addition, after her parents got divorced, Nila was still get education by her father as the excerpt below,

Yes. My parents divorced in 1939 when I was ten. I was my father's only child. Letting me go with her was out of the question. So I stayed, and she left for Paris to live with her sister, Agnes. My father tried to mitigate the loss for me by occupying me with a private tutor and riding lessons and art lessons. But nothing replaces a mother. (p. 236)

Therefore, Nila uses her education as a tool to flee from oppression and institution of marriage. That is, throughout her life, she has always been expected by her family and husband to be obedient, silent and compliant. Considering her home country is not the place where she delights in her modern and passionate life, Nila moves to the liberal country where she can enjoy her life without the restrictions imposed by the social norms like Afghanistan. After she moves to France with her adopted child, she can live her lives autonomously. In other words, she can live her life with her own choice and without her husband's control. She is happy and comfortable with her personal autonomy as she uses her knowledge to pursue her career.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

After the day of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the representations of Afghan people in the Western media have been presented in negative ways which finally result in several misconceptions and reproduce stereotypical images of the Afghans, especially the Afghan women who are extremely portrayed as passive and sexually silenced victims of masculine dominance and wars. Along the same lines, several literary studies have been conducted with positioning women in the center of the story. Among them, Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *And the Mountains Echoed* are selected to study because of its widespread acceptance.

Hosseini's novels reveal two types of representation of Afghan women as reflected through the female characters namely Jamila, Laila, Mariam and Nila. The first representation

is that female characters are portrayed as the victims and the oppressed. Hosseini's representations of Afghan women as would make these three novels, Mohanty would call, "victim-oriented" discourse (p. 354). During the invasion of the Soviet Union, the political condition of Afghanistan was unsteady, and Afghan women were the targets of the oppression. More specifically, Afghan patriarchal society has already posited Afghan women in a patriarchal society, and the coming of colonialism, an invasion of the Soviet Union, to Afghanistan exposed women to be doubly oppressed. This event supports Mohanty's concept of double colonization. However, after Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan, the country was then ruled by the Taliban who set back the practices of women's freedom. The coming of the Taliban bear a strong similarity of the invasion of the Soviet Union. That is, women were the prime targets of sexual and physical abuse and they were restricted from basic freedoms imposed on her by the Taliban. Moreover, the above discussion is also in support of Mohanty's critique of Western feminists who neglect the socio-historical contexts and specificities that mark the condition of the Third World women and categorize the Third World women as a monolithic entity regardless of class, race, ethnicity, patriarchy or even the consequences of colonialism. As has been noted, the dominant portrayal of female characters in Hosseini's novels is to be highly submissive, obedient and reliant on their protectors such as husband and father. Women's inferiority, according to Afghan culture, is determined as a natural concept supported by the religious belief in the male-dominated cultural construct. This belief is finally accepted as a social norm for being perfect womanhood which is different from the reality of women's identity.

In addition, the second representation of Afghan women through the female characters in Hosseini's novels is that of women who resist against the oppression and express their freedom and thoughts. That is, female characters use their education as a tool to fight against the oppression. Laila's awareness of education clearly reflects her consciousness about women's equality and rights when she gets older. Also, Nila, as portrayed in the early chapter of the novel, is represented as the oppressed who experiences several struggles to stand for herself. Instead of staying with her husband who is a homosexual, she decides to isolate her husband and moves to France where she can enjoy her life without the restrictions imposed by her father and husband. From this example, it can be seen that Nila

thinks differently, which is uncommon in Afghan society. She has a strong willingness and determination to be freedom and independent without relying herself to others.

The study unveils that the representations of Afghan women in Hosseini's novels still reproduce the stereotypical images of Afghan people. That is, Afghan women are portrayed as passive, male-oriented and obedient and they are mostly related with the time when Afghanistan was chaotic due to the political instability. The representations of Afghan women, as portrayed in Hosseini's novels, are fixed and oversimplified. In accordance with Stuart Hall, the Orientalist discourse contributed by Hosseini through the female characters in the novels reinforces and reproduces the readers to construct the theme of "stereotyping." However, the representations of Afghan women in the novels provide the readers with some new perspectives. That is, the female characters stand up for their rights, bravely fight against the unfair situations and go against the belief that women are supposed to be tolerated or endured men's exploitation in a patriarchal society.

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