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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Storytelling, Memory, and Female Communion in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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| ABSTRACT

This article explores telling stories and sharing memory as a means of achieving female communion and empowerment in Khaled Hosseini's 2007 novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Despite the rich scholarship the novel has received, this particular aspect of storytelling among female characters employed as a means of defying patriarchal norms and coping with life struggles (and a traumatic past) has not been given adequate attention. Storytelling and memory have several patterns in the story; the most important one, for the thematic thrust of this article, is female-female stories, i.e. stories and memories shared by women. Early in the novel, Nana tells Mariam many stories that counter the patriarchal perspectives of Jalil, Mariam's father, and in which she emerges as the victim of cultural oppression yet a resilient woman. Midway through the novel, Mariam and Laila exchange stories, an act which strengthens their bond and trust in each other as victims of oppression and each other's confidante. In prison, Mariam listens to women's stories from female inmates and learns to endure, remembering the inductions of her mother. And Laila draws on some stories she heard from her mother, Fariba, for her emotional and intellectual growth. Such stories form the basis of multiple patterns of strengthening female bonds in the narrative. This argument relies on textual evidence as well as feminist/postcolonial theories on writing and storytelling. It works at the intersection of postcolonial feminism and French feminism to discuss the status of women in the novel within relevant social, political, and historical contexts. Hence, the theoretical framework engages crucial themes on female empowerment and resistance and helps support the main argument about storytelling as a means of resisting patriarchy and subverting dominant power structures.

| KEYWORDS

K. Hosseini; *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; Subversive Storytelling; Memory; Feminist/ Postcolonial Theory; Female Communion.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

One reviewer once described Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) as a tragic narrative, as one about "a painful story that has a beautiful ending" (Newhouse, p. 65). According to Abrar Ahmed (2022), the novel depicts "the strife and hostility that transpired in Afghanistan" as well as the increasing "misery and persecution" of women resulting from this conflict (p. 9). However, does the novel simply depict this oppression of women or question it? How does Hosseini engage the subversive potential of female storytelling and memory as a counter to patriarchal hegemony? The novel covers themes like domestic violence, patriarchal oppression, arranged marriages, social hypocrisy, among many others, against a background of political unrest in a war-torn Afghanistan. Nevertheless, its subversive potential has not been adequately highlighted. Resistance strategies at the level of narratives and stories countering dominant or patriarchal ones form the essence of this article. Despite the abundance of relevant literature on women in the novel and their miserable, marginalized fates under patriarchal structures, Islamic fundamentalism, and discrimination (e.g. Li & Liu 2017; Naaz & Khadija 2022; Bhat 2018; Subramanyam & Tiwari 2022), the specific use of storytelling and the sharing of women's memories, as a counter strategy to patriarchal norms, deserves more attention. This article contends that despite the prevalent pessimism surrounding the lives of women in Hosseini's novel, there is

still hope in the communion women can form through exchanging stories and sharing rich memories, which results in some agency achieved discursively through language and oral narration. Three overlapping female stories (Nana's, Mariam's, and Laila's) shape the feminist perspective of the novel on storytelling and memory. In terms of structure, the novel arguably consists of two main storylines: A. Mariam-Jalil-Rasheed in part one; and B. Laila-Tariq-Rasheed in part two. Hence, storytelling is thematically and structurally ingrained into the narrative. In addition, there are muted stories that characters hide from each other and only discover later in the narrative, the most salient one being the untold story Laila hides from Rasheed, which is her pregnancy with Tariq's child when she married him. Another muted story is that of Rasheed's dead wife and lost son. And there is the tragic story of Jalil losing family members and his fortune after Mariam left to Kabul, a story told to Mariam in a letter he wrote to her by hand and given to Laila after Mariam's death. Also in the background is the story of a country (the story of Afghanistan) torn by war, inner strife, and colonial history. In allegorical terms, female stories in the text (like those told by Nana to Mariam, those exchanged between Mariam and Laila, and those told by Naghma to Mariam in prison) are also the stories of Afghanistan, whereby the private and the public are conflated. The novel's title, we might remember, comes from a 17th century poem by a Persian poet, Saib-e-Tabrizi, on Kabul and the beauty of Afghanistan, i.e. despite turbulent politics. In this article, only main story patterns are explored due to space limitations.

This means that Male-Female stories are less relevant to the discussion, while Female-Female ones are brought to the forefront. Anyway, the pattern of Male-Female stories is distorted, romanticized, and often deceptive. For example, Jalil's stories to his daughter Mariam end up being lies and constructions, and he gives her up when she goes to live with him. On the other hand, Rasheed's account of Tareq's death, delivered through a messenger to Laila, turns out to be a flat lie meant to help him seize Laila as a second wife. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Male-Female stories are made to fall within the imperial and patriarchal logic that impairs women. By contrast, Female-Female stories are presented as more liberating, more subversive, and more realistic.

A look at the available literature on the novel reveals that the potential of feminine writing or storytelling has not been adequately explored although it is a vital theme in the text. For critics like Naaz and Khadija (2022), the novel depicts "the strengths and desires of women who struggle endlessly against patriarchy and become iconoclasts" (p. 57). Lamiaa Rasheed and Elaff Mahmmood (2022) read the novel as one about suffering and endurance, asserting that women suffer physically and mentally and yet learn to cope with this suffering (p. 1). Rebecca Stuhr (20213) has focused on the idea of sanctuary and resistance, seeing for example in Mariam's childhood life in the kolba an idyllic "Eden" compared with the violence and strife of Kabul under the militia fighting (p. 59). By contrast, Stuhr elaborates, Rasheed denied both Mariam and Laila this sanctuary (p. 60), and Laila finds Tariq and takes him and her children to Murree in Pakistan as another sanctuary (p. 63). Storytelling and memory sharing, it could be argued, yet give female characters a mental sanctuary and a safe haven away from violence and patriarchal injustices. Bindu Ann Philip (2016) has read the novel within a feminist framework and asserted the injustices, struggles, and oppressions women in the novel face like restrictions on their education, forced marriages, and domestic violence (p. 791). Hence, this article deals not with the objectification or victimization of women—social, cultural, political, or sexual—as commonly discussed by critics of the novel and as major themes Hosseini tackles. Rather, it looks at strategies of resistance and ideological reprisal, foremost among which are narrative layers of storytelling and memory sharing. Women share their experiences and strengthen each other via stories by way of countering the cultural silence imposed on them. They relate a painful past or a miserable future by way of learning lessons and coping with versatile sources of stress. To explicate such meaningful themes, this article endeavors to work at the intersection of French feminist theories on feminine writing and postcolonial feminist theories on the subaltern to highlight the role of storytelling and memory in giving agency to women. On a first glance, the French feminist theoretical context does not seem apt, while the postcolonial feminist one seems more relevant considering the colonial history of Afghanistan and its complicated politics. However, it turns out that telling stories is not fundamentally different from writing them, and ideological resistance can be a marker of both written as well as oral discourse.

2. Theoretical Frameworks:

The French feminist critic and poststructuralist theorist Helene Cixous (1981) had engaged the cultural silence of women under masculine economy and discussed that silence metaphorically in terms of "decapitation" or losing their heads to "complete silence" and turning into "automatons" ("Castration," p. 43). Cixous frames the cultural structuring of masculinity in terms of castration and its counterpart as decapitation for women, i.e. historical silence and loss of voice. The Freudian/Lacanian logic of excluding women from the symbolic realm of language and culture is a case in point. Cixous contends: "And she is outside the Symbolic because she lacks any relation to the phallus, because she does not enjoy what orders masculinity-the castration complex" ("Castration," p. 46). While women have been historically viewed as different from or inferior to men due to biological differences (as already "castrated" per Freud), it is also the case that they have been deprived of the powerful cultural tools of language and writing (of proper relation to the "Phallus" as per Lacan). The trope of decapitation Cixous uses explains the cultural silence of women as loss of tongue and an inability to speak, i.e. an inability to tell stories in the logic of this article. Like other French feminists, Cixous negotiated the oppression of women rooted in language and discourse, and she thought that a

feminine style of writing that responds to a woman's fertile unconscious and abundant sexuality can counter the restrictions imposed by patriarchal hegemony and rationalized logic.

In another essay, entitled "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous (1976) talks about women's writing and the potential of this writing to overcome dominant power structures. She advises women to write about themselves because they have been excluded from this realm just as they have been denied their bodies: "Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" ("Laugh," p. 875). What applies to writing, I contend in this article, applies to the logic of storytelling. Cixous asserts: "Women's imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible" ("Laugh," p. 876). Since their voices have been repressed from culture, Cixous claims that women were also taught to hate other women and not to be narcissistic. Hence, women should learn to speak and write their bodies ("Laugh," p. 880) if they are to restore that bond with themselves that patriarchy broke. Cixous articulates a poetics of écriture feminine or feminine writing as a counter to cultural marginalization:

> It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is preserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem. ("Laugh," p. 881)

If patriarchal culture had distorted the image of woman as the ugly "Medusa", we should imagine her beautiful and laughing ("Laugh," p. 885). Cixous suggests that feminine writing is subversive because a woman's "libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide. Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours" ("Laugh," p. 889). The stories women tell and exchange can serve the same function of enriching the female unconscious and empowering women against prevalent distortion and silencing. This model that we draw from French poststructuralist feminism and the work of Cixous in particular can be supplemented by another relevant theoretical context, namely Gayatri Spivak's theory on the subaltern, in general, and the subaltern as woman, in particular.

In her influential study of 1988 entitled "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Indian feminist theorist and postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns that Western intellectuals can misrepresent the subalterns who have no voice or platform through which they can express their concerns and get heard by the dominant culture. Spivak contends that "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (p. 28). Spivak contends that women can suffer from double colonization (like imperialism and patriarchy) and even triple forms of oppression when they are poor, black, and female. Also influenced by French poststructuralist thought and the deconstructive logic of Jacques Derrida, Spivak was engaging forms of what she labeled as the "epistemic violence" (p. 28) of imperialism and patriarchy that silence women, misrepresent them, and relegate their voices. She was objecting to the multiple layers and complexities of oppression women encounter due to race, gender, and class considerations. In other words, Spivak's famous account of the sati practice of widow immolation which was abolished by the British colonizers explains her point about the cultural silencing/marginalization of women and how women's voices can be appropriated by the more privileged classes in society. Moreover, her account of how the suicide of a young woman can be misunderstood by her culture and family (as a case of illegitimate affair despite the onset of her menstruation before the act of suicide) proves her point that those in power can misrepresent and distort the muted subject in line with their interests and ideologies. While Spivak's conclusion is that the subaltern cannot speak under such restrictive circumstances (p. 28), it is my contention in this article that women can and should speak, at least to each other. The stories they tell create a counter-culture that rivals the dominant male narratives and the master discourses of the oppressors. Stories exchanged by women can unsettle the foundations of their oppression and create a culture of resistance, a culture which begins by exposing the injustices they suffer. And while Spivak famously declared that the white colonizers claimed to be protecting brown women from brown men (thus replicating layers of oppression), a counter case can be made whereby oppressed women can help other oppressed women from patriarchal men, symbolically and figuratively, via storytelling. This very logic can be applied to Khaled Hosseini's novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* as demonstrated in the following section.

3. Patterns of Storytelling and Memory Sharing in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*:

In Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), Mariam's mother, Nana, emerges as a troubled character with psychological and emotional imbalances due to difficult experiences and traumas associated, in one way or another, with male exploitation and cultural subjugation. Early in the novel, Nana tells Mariam that men are like a compass needle that always points toward the north and that they constantly point fingers of blame and accusation at women. Although she disappears quickly from the novel in a tragic act of suicide, Nana is a major character with a huge impact on her daughter Mariam. In the words of Subramanyam and Tiwari (2022), "Though the story revolves around the central character Mariam, Nana's role is the shadow of Mariam" (p. 4). Initially, Mariam has more interest in her father Jalil Khan and his rich life in Herat. After she grows up and begins to suffer patriarchal oppression, she is nostalgic for the memory of her mother and the stories she used to hear from her.

Both Nana and Mariam are outsiders in a sense. Their life in the kolba testifies to their lot of being the social outcasts, an illegitimate mother and her illegitimate daughter living in the outskirts of Herat in a state of poverty, shame, and disgrace. However, their isolated life suggests the hypocrisy of their society, which tolerates the sexual sin of a married man while punishing the maid he has sinned with. Jalil's authority as a patriarch is not influenced, nor is his social standing. Nana, on the other hand, is viewed as a social pariah, as the sinful woman who broke the decency of a conservative society by sexually yielding to man who is not her husband. Her inferior social rank as a poor maid seems to have given the rich Jalil more authority to exploit her. Hence, social, economic, and gender-related factors have all contributed to Nana's victimization and constructed her "tragic" story as a subaltern.

When the novel opens, Mariam is five years old, living in a kolba with her mother on the outskirts of Herat. Her father visits her on a weekly basis on Thursdays. He would sit her on his lap and tell her stories. One story he tells her is about her birthplace, Herat, being the cradle of Persian culture and the home of writers and poets and the site of famous minarets (p. 1) and special trees. He would enchant her with his romanticized stories and mythically constructed ones. His hyperbolic stories, we will discover, are neither accurate nor actually useful for Mariam's life as an adult. As a counter to Jalil's stories, Nana describes them as "rich lies" of a man who betrayed them both and cast them out of his big house (p. 2). While her mother calls Mariam a "harami" for breaking a special porcelain tea set, she actually hints at the story of her daughter's illegitimate arrival to this life. Jalil's side of the story is a more positive one, calling Mariam his "little flower" (p. 1). This beginning of the novel sets the female worldview against the male one. The privileged masculine principle is juxtaposed against the oppressed feminine one, and Mariam's formative years are full of stories she hears from both sides. Jalil used stories to romanticize Mariam's life and win her to his side. Nana was using stories to achieve the opposite end of drawing the harsh complexities of life and keeping Mariam to her side in that hostile social and cultural space Jalil created for her.

Nana tells Mariam the story of her illegitimate conception, saying that neither her father nor Jalil acted responsibly when she became pregnant out of wedlock. Her own father left Herat in indignation and never saved his honor by killing her as the custom was. Jalil, on the other hand, never took the responsibility for his actions and sent her off from the servant's quarters to live in a clearing outside Herat, on the outskirts of Gul Daman, claiming that Nana forced herself on him. Thus, for Nana being a woman in Afghanistan then meant being a weak victim of patriarchy. She warns Mariam: "Learn this now and learn it well, my daughter: Like a compass needle that points north, a man's accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam" (p. 3). Nana tells Mariam about the small house Jalil and his legitimate sons built for her in the clearing to keep her away for contact with people in Herat and to save Jalil's image as a wealthy merchant and successful businessman with three wives and nine children from his wives. Nana also tells Mariam how once she almost got married when she was fifteen years old. As she tells this story, Mariam sits in her lap and pictures her mother happily wearing the wedding dress and smiling from behind her veil (p. 4). Nana relates the story, and Mariam imagines what happened and reacts to the story:

> Then, a week before the wedding date, *a jinn* had entered Nana's body. This required no description to Mariam. She had witnessed it enough times with her own eyes: Nana collapsing suddenly, her body tightening, becoming rigid, her eyes rolling back, her arms and legs shaking as if something were throttling her from the inside. (p. 4)

The cancellation of Nana's wedding essentially meant the end of her social life and her future prospects. The poverty of her father was another obstacle she faced. Nana ended up working as a maid in rich people's houses. She was exposed and made a victim of dominant, patriarchal power structures. Being a poor woman and lacking sociocultural privilege, Nana comes to embody the subaltern "muted" status in Spivak's essay. Apparently, Nana's stories are not expected to be adequate narratives or mature stories having structure, literary elements, and motifs. They are just an attempt to win her daughter's trust and friendship and distance her from the patriarchal world of Jalil and his likes.

Another story Nana tells to teach her daughter the virtue of endurance is that of the difficult birth of Mariam, with no doctor or midwife summoned by Jalil. Nana tells Mariam that she gave birth to her in 1959 and that she had to lie on the hard floor alone for two days, drenched in her sweat and carrying a knife to cut the cord between them (p. 5). The stories Nana tells are "negative" in a sense, full of blame, bitterness, and accusations. They dwell on her past suffering and traumatic past. Nana's repetition of such stories to Mariam indicates her attempts to psychologically deal with her suffering. She is compelled to repeat them by way of "working through" this pain and finding a cure. Critics like Samuel Durrant (1999) have discussed the notion of "bearing witness" in the context of the historical injustices of apartheid in South Africa (p. 430), and the complex history of Afghanistan (the compounding of colonial and patriarchal oppressions) seems to invite a similar analogy on bearing witness to a history of racial, ethnic, and patriarchal tensions against women.

However, by the time she becomes ten, Mariam begins to believe her father's version of the story of her birth, that she was born in a Herat hospital tended by a doctor and in a clean room (p. 5). Nana insists that Jalil was away with his friends during Mariam's

birth and that he saw her only after a month with signs of disapproval on his face (p. 5). In another story, Nana says that "she was the one who'd picked the name Mariam because it has been the name of her mother. Jalil said he chose the name because Mariam, the tubernose, was a lovely flower" (p. 6). Jalil counters the stories told by Nana. The paternal discourse of Jalil counters the maternal one of Nana. Through stories, Nana wanted to win Mariam to her side, teach her a lesson about the price a woman pays when she sexually succumbs to a man, and invest in her as a future companion in such a dreary, desolate life. For Nana and Jalil, stories become the cultural site of contested power relations.

Mariam's love for stories grows with the time she spends with her Quran tutor Mullah Faizullah, the old pious man who listens to stories and tells them, especially those in the Quran. Faizullah is her tutor and a good storyteller. For Nana, however, Mariam needs not the virtues of schooling and education but rather the skill of "enduring" the humiliations and absurdities of life: "It's our lot in life, Mariam. Women like us. We endure. It's all we have" (p. 9). Nana wants the stories she tells to Mariam to be the guiding principles for her daughter's growth and future life. And this proves useful when Mariam marries Rasheed and gets to endure his abusive treatment before she finally kills him in a surprisingly rebellious act and after many years of tolerating him. For example, Nana's stories about intimate relations in marriage (p. 27) govern her conception of her sexual life with Rasheed, her husband. Being a "harami", Mariam is expected to endure the shame and disgrace of the life of an illegitimate child in a conservative society, and her mother wants the stories she tells Mariam to help her deal with this difficult life. Nana believes that her version of Mariam's story can only save her daughter, not formal education and not the patriarchal perspective of Jalil. Nana invested in her stories to Mariam as a way of life and a way of learning from the past and thus living the future. Her own suicide when Mariam turned to her father testifies to the expectations she placed on her storytelling as a testament against patriarchy.

Laila, who will grow up to be Rasheed's second wife, also hears stories from her mother, Fariba. Those stories are more vibrant and optimistic than Nana's stories. Mammy tells Laila about her father, Babi, being a good teacher, being respected and loved by his students (p. 63). A more significant story relates to how her father proposed to her mother, a story which her mother loved to tell. Laila's mother says she was sixteen then, and their families were neighbors: "I used to climb the wall between our houses, and we'd play in his father's orchard. Hakim was always scared that we'd get caught and that my father would give him a slapping" (p. 63). Laila's mother continues that she was more daring than Laila's cautious father, her cousin, and that one day she asked him whether he will come ask for her hand or have her come to his house and ask for his hand (p. 63). Such stories would not only strengthen Laila's personality and commit her to her past, but they would also give her the power to face life's difficulties. Laila would have to deal with the loss of her bothers Noor and Ahmad in the fight against the Soviets and later the sudden death of her father and mother, just before leaving a turbulent Kabul, in a rocket attack. Laila's father taught her to value female education and freedom, and he thought that the situation of women under the communists was better than under patriarchy and traditional tribal laws (p. 73). While Babi discusses the present with Laila, her mother's stories relate to the past. Both kinds of stories teach her a lesson about the cruelty of forced marriages and underage marriages. Laila's parents are more liberal and progressive than other Afghan families. It is their death that brought her under the patronage of Rasheed. Before his death, Laila's father wanted her to pursue her education and contribute to the development of her country. He believed in the potential of women for change, be it social or political. The positive vision of Laila's father contrasts with those "fake" or "fabricated" stories of Jalil and Rasheed. To win Laila's affection and loyalty as a wife, Rasheed sends a man named Abdul Sharif to tell Laila a "false" story of Tariq's tragic death in explosion away from home, in a rocket attack on a lorry of refugees in Peshawar (pp. 106-110). While Male-Female stories can be precarious and deceiving, female-female ones are made more reliable and more relevant to the lives of women.

In the growing bond between Mariam and Laila as Rasheed's wives, Mariam tells Laila stories about Jalil and Nana and the jinn, stories of her childhood. "Out the words came, like blood gushing from an artery. Mariam told her about Bibi jo, Mullah Faizullah, the humiliating trek to Jalil's house, Nana's suicide. She told about Jalil's wives, and the hurried nikka with Rasheed, the trip to Kabul, her pregnancies, the endless cycles of hope and disappointment, Rasheed's turning on her" (p. 130). Such stories strengthen the bond between the two wives of Rasheed and show the trust they share and potential they have. This growing bond is indicated by Laila's act of braiding Mariam's hair while Mariam is telling such stories (p. 130). As a result of this trust, Laila too tells a significant story about the secret she hides from Rasheed, i.e. Aziza being Tariq's daughter, not Rasheed's (p. 130) and her plan to flee to Pakistan. In Hosseini's novel, exchanging stories is a sign of trust, sympathy, and tolerance among female characters. It is an act of female communion in an otherwise dominantly patriarchal culture.

The last major pattern of female-female storytelling in the novel occurs when Mariam is in prison after killing Rasheed while trying to save Laila's life from his rage. Mariam accepts her statement of imprisonment in a Taliban prison and then resigns to her public execution. In prison, female inmates tell each other stories about Mariam being an unconventional woman who murdered her husband. Hence, Mariam becomes a celebrity among the female inmates, and they try to share with her their food and belongings. Moreover, Mariam gets to know a girl with the name Naghma, who becomes her best friend there and who tells Mariam her own story of being promised by her father to a tailor who is thirty years older than her and who, Naghma says: "He

smells like goh, and has fewer teeth than fingers" (p. 187). This reminds us of Mariam who was given in marriage to Rasheed at the age of fifteen while Rasheed was much older than her. Naghma says that she loved another young man, the son of a local mullah, with whom she tried to elope (p. 187). They tried to get out of Kabul to Gardez. Then they were caught and sent back. The man was flogged and repented for what he did, accusing Naghma of seducing him. "She'd cast a spell on him, he said. He promised he would rededicate himself to the study of the Koran" (p. 187). Her father promised to kill her once she is out of prison. In this patriarchal society, the mullah's son was freed, and Naghma took the blame and the prison sentence of five years. In fact, this story is a clear indication of Nana's warning to Mariam early in the novel that a man always blames a woman. Naghma's father promised to kill her on the day she gets released. By contrast, Nana's father did not attempt to save his honor by killing her when she got pregnant out of wedlock. Instead, he left her to deal with her plight and left the village to escape shame and gossip in his traditional community.

In Hosseini's novel, patterns of female-female storytelling assume both a direct nature and a symbolic one. It is noteworthy to mention that Laila's visit to Mariam's birthplace and childhood site, the kolba in a clearing outside Herat, is also another layer of symbolic stories. In this visit, Laila listens once again to the muted story of Mariam's tragic life. This visit is like Laila's farewell to Mariam's ghost. While Mariam is dead at this point in the story, Laila revisits Mariam's life and listens once again to her story by way of empowering her own life: "Before she leaves the clearing, Laila takes one last look at the kolba where Mariam had slept, eaten, dreamed, held her breath for Jalil" (p. 207). This visit is the last step in the communion Laila seeks to establish with Mariam's ghost and memory. It is a necessary act before Laila can resume her life and thrive, thus giving meaning and value to her bond with Mariam. Laila inherits Mariam's story and appropriates her voice. Her success in her new life with Tariq is expected to bear witness to her memories with Mariam and her transcendence of Mariam's tragic story.

The novel's title, we should remember, comes from a poem by Saib-e-Tabrizi from the 17th century about the splendid beauty of Kabul, as Babi tells Laila: "One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs, Or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls" (p. 102). The hint is that after the war Kabul will be beautiful again. Hence, we should read the stories told by women in light of this positive outlook, in terms of empathy and female communion. Storytelling is both subversive of patriarchy and a means of resistance to it. Moreover, it is an empowering strategy employed by female characters when the dominant power structures imposed on them are hegemonic. While stories carry the weight of culture with their rich range of meanings and associations, they also have the seeds of challenging this culture and revising it. Stories can also function like the Freudian "talk cure" whereby women can vent unwanted content and deal with repressed desires and feelings. Hence, storytelling can touch the deep and rich unconscious of the female principle.

4. Conclusion:

Hosseini may not have exactly produced a piece of feminine writing in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. However, we can recall Cixous's claim (1981) that "the fact that a piece of writing is signed with a man's name does not in itself exclude femininity. It's rare, but you can sometimes find femininity in writings signed by men: it does happen" ("Castration," p. 52). There is, to my mind, abundant femininity in Hosseini's novel. Cixous partly defines that feminine text or writing in the feminine as "passing on what is cut out from the Symbolic, the voice of the mother, passing on what is most archaic" ("Castration," p. 54). In Hosseini's novel, the voice of the mother, of Nana as the novel's mystical matriarch, echoes throughout the text. This suppressed voice is like the unconscious of the text, the unknowable and unpredictable voice of the other of the patriarchal culture.

At the end of the novel, Laila inherits Mariam's story and Nana's story as well. She visits Mariam's childhood quarters to complete her quest for her own identity and complete her own feminine story of maturity against patriarchal odds. She becomes a teacher and has hopes for the future. Zalmai and Aziza also go to school together. While Mariam's final thoughts revolve about her execution being a legitimate end for her illegitimate life, Laila and her family seem to have a legitimate start in life after she gets rid of the yoke of patriarchal oppressions (symbolized by Rasheed) and finds fulfillment in life in being productive and relevant to her community. Following the steps of her mentor/father, she becomes a teacher in a country that needs her. She counters Mariam's tragic story with a more hopeful one. In a sense, Mariam accepts the legal retributions of homicide (of killing Rasheed) so that Laila's story is born. Mariam's story lives within Laila, and it is Laila who voices the suppressed story of Mariam under patriarchy. Female characters like Mariam, Nana, Laila, and Naghma exchange stories by way of supporting each other, exposing patriarchy, and dealing with gendered oppressions. This theme of storytelling cannot be adequately understood without considering it within the context of female bonding, empowerment, and friendship. The exchanged stories create a subversive discourse contra patriarchal power structures. The gendered oppression of women has partly been rooted in linguistic structures and discourse. Female stories and the powerful feminine memory run counter to this restrictive patriarchal logic. Hosseini gave female characters in his novel a story and a voice to speak it. His achievement is both commendable and praiseworthy.

A Thousand Splendid Suns is a book of stories. Female-female stories as stories recounted by women and received by women emerge as the effective storytelling pattern within the patriarchal and colonial context the novel tackles. Those stories are exchanged by way of empowering women, building empathy among them, rejecting cultural silencing, and revising history in favor of the silenced victims. Moreover, female-female stories remain as a tradition of hope for a better future and a sign of the continuity of this female tradition, as those stories told by Nana to her daughter Mariam are then recounted by Mariam to her friend, Laila. Thus, they are also a survival mechanism and an assertion of a new female identity defiant of the restrictions of colonialism/imperialism and patriarchy. Stories are, briefly, an antidote to the epistemic violence that has been historically perpetrated on women.

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