The Idyllic Absence: Locating Afghanistan Through Memory and Landscape

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INTRODUCTION

Fariba Nawa remarks that Afghanistan "does not fit into any regional categories—it's not South Asia, Central Asia, or the Middle East."[1] The unspecified locale both geographically and psychologically becomes two distinctly different places coexisting at the same time through memory. Therefore, to understand Afghanistan, it is imperative to understand the landscape, as the trauma imbibed by the landscape and the inhabitants of the country become co-dependent, through which an immigrant from Afghanistan tries to locate oneself in a foreign land.

THE IDYLLIC PAST

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that resulted in the Soviet-Afghan war between 1979 to 1989 between the pro-Communist Afghan troops aided by the Soviet government and airpower, and the American-funded seven mujahideen rebels, became the gateway for Taliban establishment in Afghanistan. Collison between the seven mujahideen troops in the aftermath of the Soviet retreat resulted in a civil war between them. Qaderi writes, "for two years, we held our breath, unaware that this lull would soon be followed by a storm of discord and civil war."[2] 1990 onwards, the Taliban, which in Arabic means "students", "aided by drug traffickers, the Pakistani government, and rich Gulf Arabs such as Osama bin Laden, ruled the country under a mysterious one-eyed leader, Mullah Omar."[3] The

Taliban gained control over ninety percent of Afghanistan between 1990 and 1994. The Mujahideen in 1994 reunited under Ahmed Shah Massoud but could only establish power in the northeast which comprised ten percent of the country. The Taliban established Sharia Law all over Afghanistan.

> Soon I realized that they were very different from all the other fighters we had seen. They were not only dusty and depressing looking but ruthless and angry, too . . . Taliban implemented sharia law in Kandahar. They closed all the girls' schools. Women and girls were forbidden to leave their houses. The Taliban ordered that no woman's face or form should be seen anywhere in public. Burqas became mandatory, and a woman who had a good reason to be on the street had to be accompanied by a *mahram*. Slightest infractions subjected women to public whipping with cables. Women accused of adultery were to be stoned or shot.[4]

Taliban rule forced several families to flee Afghanistan.

> Herat was in ruins. Tens of thousands of people had died. Young people, the generation born in the 1970s and '80s, had been decimated, either killed in the wars or turned into refugees living in squalid tents beyond Afghanistan's borders. The face of my lovely city had been stripped of its beauty; only a jumbled skeleton remained.[5]

The protagonists of my primary texts, through their writing, depict the loss of the idyllic past. Their memories of childhood, teenage, and war are heavily embedded in the landscape of the country. Hashimi's protagonist Fereiba travels with her three children, Saleem, Samina, and Aziz, from Afghanistan to London where her sister lives. She travels through Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Greece,

Italy, and France, finally arriving in the United Kingdom. It is in London that she confesses for the first time that all her and her children's documents are forged and that they are refugees. Saleem, her teenage son gets separated from her in Athens and has to take a separate lonely route to arrive in London. Saleem oscillates between his love and respect for his father Mahmoud and his anger towards him. Saleem believes that even his mother silently accuses her husband of not leaving Afghanistan at the right time when others like Fereiba's sister were eloping from Afghanistan after the Taliban started gaining control. Saleem believes that had his father left the country early, without succumbing to his love for his homeland, not only would he have been alive, they could still be together with other relatives. Fareiba says, "one day, we will not look over our shoulders in fear or sleep on borrowed land with one eye open or shudder at the sight of a uniform. One day we will have a place to call home."[6] Her "home" however has to be created as far away as she can. Unlike Saleem, Fereiba knows that London cannot be a completely new beginning for her because her sister is married to Fereiba's former lover. Fereiba's present and past will always be intricately related to Afghanistan through memories.

For Qaderi, Afghanistan becomes a land that has denied her of her motherhood. Unlike Fereiba, Qaderi's story is not fictional; she also did not escape Afghanistan to become a refugee. Qaderi protested as she refused to be reduced to a number when her husband decided to take another wife. After Qaderi's husband divorced her, she went to the USA to enroll in a creative writing program. However, the Afghan government denied Qaderi of her son's custody and her husband never allowed her son to even learn that his mother was alive: "I heard that they've asked you about your mother and that you cried when told that your mother is dead."[7] In between the letters she writes to her son with the hope that they will reach him one day, Qaderi narrates her memories of Afghanistan.

> Qaderi writes, "the area across the small river in front of our house had been turned into an arid wasteland by years of Soviet bombing and tank treads and the subsequent destruction of the civil war."[8]

Continuous warfare quite literally turned Afghanistan into a barren land. Not only has warfare destroyed important monuments like the Bamiyan Buddhas, people's homes, offices, and schools, but also the fertility of the land. In addition to warfare, the drought that occurred across Afghanistan forced several people to migrate from the rural to the urban areas. During this time, the Taliban monopolised opium cultivation. Both Qaderi and Nawa explore how Taliban purchased weapons and paid their troops by using the money they acquired through the opium trade.

> One day I asked Baba-jan why God had punished the apple trees. It wasn't the fault of those trees that men had planted opium. My grandfather threw me a stern look. "If the wrath of God comes to a forest in the form of fire, it will burn all the trees, whether dead or alive."[9]

Even though war, bloodshed, trauma, and loss are highlighted in both narratives, it is impossible to not notice the pastoral images that are associated with Afghanistan. Qaderi and Fereiba remember Afghanistan through the lush green gardens, the extensive mountain ranges, the colourful flora and fauna, and the bird's songs. Fariba Nawa in *Opium Nation* (2011) describes her grandfather's house as the "orchard home"[10] which was her "sanctuary".[11] Nawa eloped to Afghanistan with her family after the Taliban government took over the country. On returning after eighteen years, she referred to her grandfather's house as the orchard home even though most of it had been destroyed by the continuous war.

> I throw my burqa on the ground as soon as the rusted red gate closes and I sprint toward the living quarters, imagining my family's laughter ringing inside the hallways. But there is no one there; the place is silent. The doors of each of the eight rooms are locked shut; some of the windows are broken. I run out to the field, looking for the mulberry and pomegranate trees under which we used to have picnics. I find the trees—but no fruit, due to the drought. The small creek is parched . . . But here, in my refuge, I envisioned ripe, colorful fruits, verdant fields, and water flowing through the creek. I climb the roof overlooking Herat and find even more changes caused by the war.[12]

Nawa, despite the vivid transformation that the city has undergone, still clings to the memories of the ripened fruits, creek, and verdant fields. The idea of the pastoral is present in the Quran. Prophet Muhammad has used the metaphor of the shepherd, "All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock",[13] and as Shackford remarks the "Good Shepherd…in the pastoral has never really faded away but has come back again and again with persistent appeal".[14] It is important to consider if the idyllic conception has been influenced by the regular reading and studying of the Quran. Through memory, Afghanistan becomes the "absent present"[15] which Derrida describes as "the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience."[16] Derrida suggests that absence leaves a "trace";[17] in Afghanistan before the Russian and Taliban invasion, the "absent present" idyllic homeland is evoked through the memory of the protagonists. Fereiba's journey from Afghanistan to London becomes a symbolic move away from the pastoral land. However, the movement is more psychological than geographical. The geographic distance becomes overshadowed by the psychological "absent present"

that consistently keeps Afghanistan alive as an idyllic homeland even though the political reality has forced both Fereiba and Homeira to leave Afghanistan. Fereiba even when acutely aware of the present scenario which has forced her away from her homeland, holds on to the landscape to describe the minute details of her childhood. "My father, too, owned land—an orchard, to be exact—and worked as a local official in our town, Kabul, the bustling capital of Afghanistan tucked away in the bosom of central Asia. Geography would become important to me only later in my life."[18] Hashimi's attempt to locate Afghanistan geographically accurately in Central Asia contradicts Nawa's claim that Afghanistan cannot be compartmentalised into a regional category. Hashimi's attempt is imperative to emphasize the distance between Afghanistan and the United Kingdom. The cartographical space along with the war-ravaged reality cannot eradicate the memories of the past. Her description of her father's land as "an orchard-to be exact", is another instance that proves that the idyllic past continues to exist in the memory.

> A month before that, Laila had learned that the Taliban had planted TNT in the crevices of the giant Buddhas in Bamiyan and blown them apart, calling them objects of idolatry and sin . . . Taliban had gone ahead and detonated their explosives inside the two thousand-year-old Buddhas. They chanted Allah-u-Akbar with each blast and cheered each time the statues lost an arm or a leg in a crumbling cloud of dust. Laila remembered standing atop the bigger of the two Buddhas with Babi and Tariq, back in 1987, a breeze blowing in their sunlit faces, watching a hawk gliding in circles over the sprawling valley below . . . "[19]

Memory becomes an important factor to note the changing landscape of Afghanistan. Through Fereiba, Homeira, and Laila's narrative, we see the past glory and the present shackles of a country. However,

irrespective of the present debacle, memory continues to cling to the glorious landscape which becomes a sense of refuge for all three of them. How does the memory of the past then provide a sense of belonging for Homeira and Fereiba?

THE MOTHER AND THE MOTHERLAND

The protagonists imbibe in them the trauma inflicted on their homeland. Trauma, therefore, becomes shared by the inhabitants and the landscape. There is a visible uprooting in Homeira and Fereiba's lives. Homeira writes to her son that she would avoid taking him outside the four walls of their house as, "I didn't want Kabul to become your graveyard, as it had been for so many."[20] This dire wish to not see Afghanistan as a graveyard is perhaps why both of the protagonists emphasize the beauty of the landscape even through the trauma. Homeira and Fereiba's Afghanistan still has the orchard homes, red pomegranate trees, birds and valleys, where they spent their childhood. Both Fereiba and Homeira know that they cannot come back to Afghanistan again. Fereiba's husband was murdered by the Taliban for not accepting their ideologies, and Homeira cannot go back to Afghanistan as she cannot be the "ideal wife".[21] She was the "wife who published books, a wife who spoke in public, a wife who came home late from teaching at the university, a wife who was recognized in her own right. A woman who behaved like this was never going to be an ideal wife to the average Afghan man."[22]

Fereiba leaves Afghanistan because she knows that she cannot raise her three children alone in a Sharia land. Homeira knows that she cannot be a woman recognised on her own in Afghanistan. Motherhood propels one to take on the daunting journey to a different land, while motherhood is snatched away from another owing to the laws of the homeland. The three mothers, Homeira as a mother, Fereiba as a mother, and Afghanistan as the motherland, become intertwined and interdependent. Homeira is constantly

reminded by her mother that "the soil of my homeland is full of disappointments".[23]

The mothers through the generations have known that Afghanistan is a man's land. Both physical and psychological pain that has forced the two mothers to seek refuge in foreign lands get intertwined with Afghanistan as the motherland which has experienced similar trauma. Therefore, in a foreign land, the memory of the idyllic past becomes the umbilical cord that still keeps Fereiba and Homeira attached to the motherland.

The relationship between the mother with the motherland is painful for both protagonists. Fereiba lost her mother as an infant. Her stepmother KokuGul did not mistreat her, but Fereiba knew that she was not KokoGul's own. Unlike her children, KokoGul did not let Fereiba attend school, for if Fereiba went to school with her sisters, who will do the chores at home?

> KokoGul was not an evil woman. She did not starve me, beat me, or throw me out of the house. In fact, she fed me, bathed me, clothed me, and did all the things a mother should. When I stumbled upon language, I called her Mother. My first steps were toward her, the woman who nursed me through childhood fevers and scrapes. Yet all this was done at arm's length. It didn't take long for me to feel her resentment though it would be years before I could give it a name.[24]

Fereiba secretly misses her birth mother. She knew how her Madar-Jan had protected her brother Asad from "evil eyes",[25] and how her father was "pleased that his wife was taking such care to safeguard his progeny."[26] She describes her life to be "haunted"[27] by the death of her mother, for her life becomes a "series of misfortunes".[28] The lack of a mother figure becomes another "absent present"[29] that coincides with the loss of the motherland.

> My birth was haunted by the death of my mother and, while Boba-jan mournfully whispered the azaan in my ear, a very different prayer was being said over my mother's depleted body. The azaan, spoken in my grandfather's voice, wove its way through to the fabric of my being, telling me to keep the faith. My salvation was that I listened. My mother was buried in a newly dedicated cemetery near our home. I didn't visit much, partly because no one would take me and partly because of my lingering guilt.[30]

As Fereiba begins the fateful journey across the world to reach London, Fereiba realises that as a mother she has to choose her children's future. She does not want Samina to grow up in a land that is not for a woman. She does not want Samina to grow up without a mother as she did. Hence, the motherland is remembered as an idyllic landscape that has been violated. The trauma of the motherland, the loss of serenity, beauty, and the essence of Afghanistan become synonymous with the loss that Fereiba experiences throughout her life. The loss of her birthmother, the loss of her mother-in-law, and the loss of her husband, Mahmoud, in the hands of the Taliban, compel her to leave resulting in the loss of her motherland, Afghanistan.

> Qaderi writes, "the area across the small river in front of our house had been turned into an arid wasteland by years of Soviet bombing and tank treads and the subsequent destruction of the civil war."[31]

Continuous warfare quite literally turned Afghanistan into a barren land. Not only has warfare destroyed important monuments like the Bamiyan Buddhas, people's homes, offices, schools, but also the fertility of the land. Qaderi writes that once the Taliban took over, "the streets were barren of women."[32] The association of the

barrenness of the land with the city signifies how the women and the motherland had become one. Even if the women could give birth to children, the children would be known by the father's name.

Homeira knows that Afghanistan is not a land for women, something which is repeatedly reminded of by her mother and grandmother. Unlike Fereiba, Homeira grows up under the protective eyes of her mother and grandmother. However, her relationship with her motherland becomes complicated when her motherhood is challenged by the laws of the land.

> Later, when your father brought in the identity registration card, once again my name, as your mother, was nowhere to be seen. Even in your passport, they didn't ask for my name. Your mother's name does not appear in any paper document. My son, in your motherland the mentioning of a woman's name outside the family circle is a source of shame. And no child is known by its mother's name.[33]

Homeira's inability to accept that she is fated to be a woman known by her husband's name, who must remain strictly within the four walls of her home, step out when it is necessary, and be always accompanied by another man, complicated her relationship with her motherland. Her relationship with the motherland worsened when her infant son was taken away from her.

> I was a bright, playful child, too young and energetic to understand fear, whether of invisible bullets buzzing through the air or of Russian tanks rumbling in the street outside our house. Inside those walls, there was a courtyard filled with apple and mulberry trees, and red and green grapes growing on the vine. We were three generations living there: Baba-Jan and Nanah-Jan, their four daughters, my aunts Kurbra, Hajar,

> Zahra, and Azizah, my uncles Naseer and Basheer, Agha and Madar, plus my baby brother, Mushtaq, and me. Nanah-Jan always said, "A girl should have fear in her eyes." I spent a lot of time in front of the mirror turning my eyelids inside out, hoping to detect the shape or color of fear. Madar often said, "The night this girl was born, we were surrounded by fire. It felt like the city was giving birth. Before Homeira heard her own cries, she heard other people's screams. No wonder she isn't afraid of anything."[34]

The image of the "city giving birth"[35] metaphorically linked with the screams of the people associates Homeira with the landscape. Here, by personifying the city as a mother, Homeira directly acknowledges how she has imbibed the trauma inflicted upon the land. Her birth and the birth of the city become synonymous. The loss of the pastoral in the hands of the Taliban, and the loss of her child because of the laws of the Taliban, combine the two mothers who cling to the memory of the past which provides them with a sense of refuge. The existence of the "courtyard filled with apple and mulberry trees, and red and green grapes growing on the vine"[36] inside Homeira's house is the idyllic Afghanistan that still exists in memory in opposition to the "invisible bullets buzzing through the air"[37] outside the four walls.

> My childhood world was within the bounds of a small window, low in the wall of our house, and a mother who was always trying to keep me away from that window. She knew bullets could pierce the glass. She tried her best to keep me surrounded by four solid cement walls. My mother was like a spider trying to safeguard me within her web.[38]

Homeira's symbolic movement away from inside the house, the idyllic safe space, under the protective eyes of her Madar-Jan and Nanah-Jan (mother and grandmother), and into the reality that

threatens existence with "invisible flying bullets" after her marriage, breaches the separation of the individual from the motherland. Homeira is no longer separated from the scarred motherland. She sees the beloved Herut and Kabul turning into "graveyards". Unlike Fereiba who says that her life becomes a "series of misfortunes"[39] as her birthmother died before she could ward off the evil eyes of strangers by pinning "an amulet to my gown, before she could whisper nam-e-khoda, before she could look at her fingernails, and before she could lovingly waft the espand over my head",[40] Homeira's misfortunes begin after she realises that she is no longer an "ideal wife" to her husband in Kabul. Through their experiences, the protagonists share the trauma between each other and the motherland. Afghanistan ceases to remain external. Even though both of them had to leave Afghanistan, the memory of the land, the lamentation and nostalgia of the lost glory of the land, and the acknowledgment of reality associates the three mothers with a unique bond.

Fereiba says that her brother Asad, "In the two short years my mother nurtured him, he had gained enough strength to secure his place in the world."[41] She associates her homelessness with her mother's death. Asad secured his place in the world because he was protected by his mother, and secondly because he was a man. As Fereiba travels with forged documents in cars that transport refugees from Afghanistan to Iraq, or in vessels that transport refugees to Turkey, she keeps on revisiting her past. Fereiba shares how she spent her childhood, adolescence, her teenage years under the familiar shade of the mulberry trees in the orchard behind her home. Even though everyone, including KokoGul, was scared to go to the orchard after dark, Fereiba would go to pick ripe berries. Her attachment to the lost landscape of Afghanistan can be described as what Robert Tally calls "transcendental homelessness"[42] in his book *Spatiality* (2012). Tally writes "the map is one of the most powerful and

effective means humans have to make sense of their place in the world, whether in a wide-ranging and abstract sense of transcendental homelessness".[43] Hashimi's book begins with the illustrated map that shows the route undertaken by Fereiba to arrive in London. Fereiba says in the prologue that she understood the importance of the map later in her life, "the geography would become important to me only later in my life."[44] Fereiba's memory of the beauty of the landscape provides her with a sense of existence. Even when she is thousands of miles away from Afghanistan, her acute awareness of belonging to Afghanistan provides her with what Tally refers to as "transcendental homelessness". Her sense of existence is further enhanced by the memory of the beautiful landscape that is destroyed because of continuous warfare. Even when Fereiba was taking shelter from the rain in a park, covering Samina and Aziz with plastic, the knowledge that miles away once she had a home and a loving husband, provided her with a refuge.

> Afghanistan is the land of invisible bullets and the land of a death foretold, the land of doomed destinies, and the land of dejected and disgruntled youth, waiting forever for dreams that will never come true. This is how Madar, my mother, Ansari, and Nanah-Jan, my grandmother, Firozah, described my homeland to me when I was barely four years old.[45]

George Lukács describes a novel as a response to "transcendental homelessness."[46] The individual with the help of the novel attempts to create a "cosmos in order to make his own existence intelligible and meaningful".[47] The idyllic space becomes a cosmos for both Fereiba and Homeira which provides them with an anchor. Through memory, Afghanistan remains alive as a land of tranquillity before the Russian invasion. What effect does imbibing the trauma afflicted on the landscape have on the protagonists?

Afghanistan as a dual reality

"Why did you come back to Afghanistan for work?" he asks.

> "Because there's a lot to write about," I tell him. "Is that all? I mean is there something about Afghanistan that made you want to return?" "Yes, look around," I say. "It's beauty, for one." "You haven't seen the ugliness, have you?" "Yes, I have. When I was a child during the Soviet invasion, I saw the ugliness of war. But that's what makes it fascinating, that combination of beautiful and ugly."[48]

On returning to Afghanistan eighteen years after Fariba Nawa left, she still emphasises the "beautiful and ugly". Even though Nawa has seen the cruelty, the ugliness, "Darya, the bartered bride, and Gandomi, the widow whose daughter self-immolated because she feared her brothers-in-law would rape her; in the destitute men who beg on Herat's streets to support their drug addiction; and in the drug lords such as Haji Sardar, who prey on women like Gandomi",[49] she would "rather focus on the exquisiteness of Afghanistan." In both the books *Dancing in The Mosque and When The Moon is Low,* Afghanistan is represented as a beautiful country and at the same time a country that only knows bloodshed and violence. This representation establishes Afghanistan as a dual reality, one which exists in the memory, and the other embedded in the present. Afghanistan's location, therefore, becomes geographical which locates the country in the geopolitics of the world, and psychological which provides the refugees like Fereiba or the diaspora like Homeira with a sense of familiarity, an anchor that helps them to make meaning of their existence as Tally suggests.

The title of the book *Dancing in The Mosque* is inspired by a chapter named the same in the book. As the Taliban closes all schools for women, Homeira starts teaching the girls of her colony inside her house. She is acutely aware of the fact that if the Taliban somehow

gets a hint, they will kill Homeira and her entire family. Despite that, she undertakes the task of educating young girls in her house. Very soon, the refugee children who lived across the river started requesting that Homeira allows them inside the classroom. After consideration, Homeira started teaching the refugee children inside the Mosque. One afternoon, the children decided to dance inside the mosque. As the Taliban had banned all forms of music and dance from the land, Homeira decided to keep an eye on the Taliban check post as the children inside the Mosque danced.

> "Suddenly, I heard a noise beyond the fabric wall. I froze. I saw a stick lifting the heavy curtain that formed the door to the mosque. The muzzle of a rifle appeared . . . Our noise must have drawn Talib's attention on his way to the checkpoint. I flew to the center of the mosque, hoping the shadows would hide me. The children must have seen the fear on my face. They scattered like frightened pigeons before a stalking cat . . . Then the Talib stepped inside. His voice rang out through the tent. My heart stopped.[50]

Homeira was saved by another young Talib that day who decided to not punish the children. Amidst all the chaos, the shouting of the Talib, and the fear of being killed, Homeira could not help but laugh at a student sitting on his books to hide them. The Mosque becomes a liminal space between a river and a Taliban check post, between psychologically idyllic Afghanistan, and the present Taliban-governed Afghanistan. Inside the mosque, Homeira and the children could read, learn and write outside the vigilance of the Talibs. They could challenge the authority by laughing or dancing or even being together. The Mosque becomes a representation of the dual reality through which Afghanistan is represented in the books. Fereiba challenges the Taliban by fleeing Afghanistan. Hashimi writes that "refugees didn't just escape a place. They had to escape a thousand

memories until they'd put enough time and distance between them and their misery to wake to a better day."[51] As Fereiba takes the challenge to walk to Mashhad to reach the Iranian border, she secretly tells her husband that they have "made their way into tomorrow."[52] For Fereiba, a tomorrow brings the possibility of altering the history of the land.

> "Afghanistan is a land of widows and widowers, orphans and the missings. Missing a right leg, a left hand, a child,or a mother. Everyone was missing something, as if a black hole had opened in the center of the country, sucking in bits and pieces of everyone into its hardened belly."[53]

By crossing the border, Fereiba presents a chance of living a complete life for her children. It is perhaps the distance, that allows Fereiba and Homeira to remember Afghanistan through its beauty. Hence, the border becomes that liminal space that compels Fereiba to acknowledge the current political reality and the need to dissociate from the motherland physically, but also allows her to cling to Afghanistan, the nostalgia that propels Saleem to declare that he is from Afghanistan and he does not want to be a refugee in Turkey or Greece. The strong sense of attachment becomes the "cosmos"[54] that provides Fereiba and Saleem with a sense of belonging, and existence. Afghanistan here becomes a home away from home in their minds that contribute again to the dual representation of the country in the novel.

CONCLUSION

Homeira and Fereiba's "tomorrow" is completely different. They are not merely third-world women whose stories should be read as the stories of being repressed, an idea that Chandra Mohanty expresses in her essay *Under Western Eyes* (1991). Their struggles cannot be

homogenised. The two women took separate paths to challenge the Taliban authority. Qaderi writes,

> I always have and always will want to be a mother for you, but I also need to remain Homeira for myself. I could not trade my name for a number; I could not sacrifice my freedom or my dignity. I could not become just another humiliated woman, banished to the supposed sanctuary of our home. I cannot die under a blanket as an angry, pitiful, desolate woman; I am trying to save myself and, by doing that, perhaps save other women as well.[55]

Qaderi's quest to make a place for herself in the world is different from Fereiba's quest to provide her children with a better future. Fereiba says, "I will carry these children—my husband's children—as far as I can and pray that we will reach that place where, in the quiet of their slumber, I, too, will rest."[56] Through their separate journeys, they keep Afghanistan alive through memory. They do not allow pain and bloodshed to completely eradicate the beauty of the land. Memory becomes significant in understanding the history of the landscape. Both the novels, *Dancing in the Mosque* and *When The Moon is Low,* through fact and fiction respectively, establishes the idyllic loss and the simultaneous idyllic presence that provide Afghanistan with two different identities, one rooted in the psyche and the other rooted in the current geopolitical map of the world.

NOTES

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3 Fariba Nawa, *Opium Nation Child Brides, Drug Lords, and One Woman's Journey through Afghanistan* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2015), 18.

4 Homeira Qaderi, *Dancing in the Mosque*. (London: 4th Estate, 2020), 52.
5 Homeira Qaderi, *Dancing in the Mosque*. (London: 4th Estate, 2020), 49.
6 Nadia Hashimi, *When the Moon Is Low*. (New York: Harper Collins USA, 2017), prologue.
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18 Nadia Hashimi, When the Moon Is Low. (New York: Harper Collins USA, 2017), 1.
19 Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 302.
20 Homeira Qaderi, *Dancing in the Mosque.* (London: 4th Estate, 2020), 129.
21 Homeira Qaderi, *Dancing in the Mosque*. (London: 4th Estate, 2020), 131.
22 Homeira Qaderi, *Dancing in the Mosque*. (London: 4th Estate, 2020), 131.
23 Homeira Qaderi, *Dancing in the Mosque.* (London: 4th Estate, 2020), 75.
24 Nadia Hashimi, *When the Moon Is Low*. (New York: Harper Collins USA, 2017), 10.
25 Nadia Hashimi, *When the Moon Is Low*. (New York: Harper Collins USA, 2017), 3.

26 Nadia Hashimi, *When the Moon Is Low*. (New York: Harper Collins USA, 2017), 3.
27 Nadia Hashimi, *When the Moon Is Low*. (New York: Harper Collins USA, 2017), 3.
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