

## in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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### Abstract

This article explores the idea of homeland, “imaginary homeland” and wounded memory in Khaled Hosseini's debut novel, *The Kite Runner* (2003). The idea of homeland, which includes the illustration of a person's nostalgia towards homeland, is a significant topic of discussion among scholars of diaspora studies. The article demonstrates that Afghanistan as depicted in Hosseini's novel represents the author's nostalgic feeling towards his home country. The novel also illustrates the ideas of a shattered dream and fragmented memories of diaspora subjects which are caused by the loss of homeland as discussed in Salman Rushdie (2006)'s seminal article, “Imaginary

Homelands”. Hence, the article investigates the notion of “imaginary homeland” which is portrayed through the main characters’ experiences, both inner and outer. Apart from the notion of nostalgia, homeland, and “imaginary homeland”, the memory of homeland also plays an important role in shaping the life of diaspora people. This memory can be presented in a positive or negative light, and can be a link between diaspora subjects and their home country. While the word diaspora suggests the idea of dispersion, scattering and exile, it also implies the collective memory and trauma involved in such dispersion. Therefore, the second part of this article investigates the idea concerning the memory of diaspora subjects, especially the wounded memory which shapes a crucial aspect of life in their new home. The study reveals that the protagonist’s recollections of Afghanistan is darkened by and tainted with his own guilts and mistakes. As a result, the ghosts of the past urge him to wholeheartedly adopt America as his new home since it is a place of freedom which he can seek refuge from all guilts and wounded memory.

**Keywords:** *diaspora; homeland; “imaginary homeland”; nostalgia; Muslim diaspora writers*

## 1. Introduction

The idea of homeland is a significant issue of discussion among diaspora scholars, and most diaspora literature contains the notion of homeland in one way or another. Apart from illustrating nostalgic feeling towards homeland, diaspora novels also demonstrate the idea of a shattered dream and fragmented memories of diaspora subjects concerning their “lost” homeland. Salman Rushdie in his 2006 article, “Imaginary Homelands,” propounds that homeland can only be in a diaspora’s imagination and their shattered dreams. Another debate among diaspora scholars in the matter of homeland is the idea of homecoming or returning to homeland which is believed to be an intrinsic feature of diaspora especially among first generation immigrants. However, the notion is rendered irrelevant both in the first and the subsequent generations as it is considered by critics to be the idea which merely happens in diaspora’s dream; hence, it turns out to be only a myth of return (Anwar, 1979). In this sense, the idea of home becomes intangible, something which exists only in one’s imagination and does not take a form of a constructed building, but only where one’s heart is (Cohen, 2008:10). This kind of notion is advocated by Avtar Brah (1996:192) who suggests the following view for the notion of homeland:

Where is home? On the one hand, ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of ‘origin’. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of the day ... all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations (Ibid 1996:192).

The above notions concerning the ideas of homeland are clearly illustrated in Khaled Hossieni’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) where the concepts of homeland and “imaginary homeland” are intricately presented through the portrayal of the main characters and the trajectory of their experiences, both inner and outer. Apart from the notion of nostalgia and homeland, another pivotal aspect of diaspora people concerns their memory of homeland which plays an important role in shaping the life of diaspora subjects in their surrogate country. This memory can be demonstrated in both positive and negative aspects, and can be a connection between diaspora people and their home country. While the word diaspora suggests the idea of dispersion, scattering and exile (Ashcroft et al, 2006:425), it also implies the collective memory and trauma involved in such

dispersion. The first section of this article, thus, seeks to examine the ideas of nostalgia, homeland and “imaginary homeland”, and the second part aims at exploring the notion of memory of a diaspora subject, especially the wounded memory which is a crucial aspect of a diaspora life in one’s new home.

### ***1.1 Homeland, “Imaginary Homeland” and Wounded Memory: A Theoretical Approach***

The original meaning of diaspora is used to refer to “the forced dispersal and displacement” of people (Agnew, 2005:3). For this reason, the most well-known approach to diaspora is probably concerning the concepts of homeland and nostalgia. Psychologically, people in diaspora are those who experience the loss of home and yearn to come back to their original place either in the physical sense or in terms of psychological attachment. James Clifford (1994:305) propounds that the salient characteristics of diaspora comprise “a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, and alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship” (Cited in Agnew, 2005:3). This might be because the feeling of homelessness and exile are “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home” (Said, 2006: 439). Therefore, the remembrance of the past has a tendency to protect an immigrant from the feelings of loss, fear and insecurity in his/her new country of residence. In addition, an immigrant needs to draw on the past as a spring board in order to define the present and establish one’s self and future in the new land.

Furthermore, Vijay Agnew (2005:3) contends that our memories play an important role in connecting us to our past either as an individual or as a collective self, such as one’s origin, heritage or history. This is because “the past is always with us and it defines our present; it resonates in our voices, hovers over our silences and explains how we came to be ourselves and to inhabit what we call ‘our home’” (Ibid, 2005:3). The feeling of nostalgia towards homeland, then, is part of diaspora’s treasured memory and experiences. It cannot easily be eliminated from one’s memory; it may be transformed from a vivid picture of homeland in the memory of first generation immigrants into an imagination and a fostered myth of homeland. But the memory is still there and is nurtured by immigrants from one generation to the other as long as their homeland still exists and those people in diaspora can still trace some links to their ancestors’ memory. From another standpoint, the idea of homeland can be perceived as a trauma especially among those who have experienced personal discrimination, political persecutions, social injustice, ethnic cleansing, as well as warfare in their homeland. Thus, as Agnew (2005:111) proposes, “the words *haunting*, *ghosts* and *shadows* are frequently used in narratives of the past, when people who have confronted the traumas of history attempt to tell us about their genealogy, national history, and themselves” (Ibid, 2005:111, italics in the text). These kinds of experiences also become an important element of how diaspora writers portray their past and their homeland.

In Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003), the novel illustrates a link of the central character, Amir, and his father with their homeland in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul where Amir and Baba, the father, who are now expatriates in the US, are born and brought up. Therefore, one main element in the novel is the feeling of nostalgia that the characters and the author experience towards their or their ancestors’ home countries. However, Baba and Amir’s relationships with homeland are not the same, and the feeling of nostalgia is reflected in both positive and negative light. It seems that both characters glorify their homeland according to their elite background; however, Afghanistan in the Taliban era is depicted by Amir in a totally distressing tone.

Notwithstanding the feeling of nostalgia towards homeland and the wish of homecoming, arguably, in reality the concept of homeland seems to exist only in one's imagination. It also leads to the idea that the depiction of homeland in diaspora writing tends to deviate from or even contradict the reality on the ground experienced by the native people of each nation. As pointed out by Vijay Mishra (2006:449), "Diasporas construct homelands in ways that are very different from people of the homelands themselves". This leads to some arguments on the authenticity of the narratives of diasporas. For example, Janette Edwards (2008:5) reveals that Hosseini is criticised as being an inauthentic voice of Afghan people since he is an expatriate who has been out of Afghanistan for most of his life. His work is also accused of being a representative of elite Afghans who have a totally different experience and worldview from the ordinary vast majority of Afghans. In this case, the idealisation of homeland by people in diaspora also reveals how the notion of a nation-state can be considered as a myth that needs to be maintained and supported by "imaginary" narratives of homelands. Thus, it supports the notion that the idea of nation state is constructed. There are imaginary narratives which are constantly contestant, and the more powerful version of the narratives usually earns a better position. Nonetheless, it can be subverted and replaced by another narrative at some other point in history.

In the next section, we are going to figure out how Afghanistan is illustrated in the novel, how the characters cope with the feeling of nostalgia or the memory about their homeland, and what version of the author's narratives is chosen as a formal representation of his homeland. The notion of "imaginary homeland" and wounded memory will also be thoroughly scrutinised.

### ***1.2 Amir and Baba: Nostalgia and Homeland***

One distinguishing feature of modern diaspora is "the remembrance of a collective misfortune, genocide or expulsion" (Helly, 2006:12). Therefore, we can decipher that the homeland in *The Kite Runner* (2003) is an illustration of Khaled Hosseini's remembrance of the Afghans' misfortune, their dispersion and the nostalgia they have towards their home country. Thus, Amir and Baba are representatives of the author himself, his family and other Afghan expatriates who are first generation immigrants, finding shelter in the US, after fleeing the war in Afghanistan. Amir, a teenager, is more resilient to culture shock and open to adaptation. As for Baba, whose roots are deeply entrenched in the Afghan culture, it is more difficult to sever the connection. Therefore, his sense of nostalgia towards the homeland is stronger than Amir's and the propensity to integration is also lesser.

Baba, the father, is a successful businessman from Kabul who had a privileged upbringing, a son of a reputable and well-respected judge of the city who has a close relationship with the monarchy. His house is believed by the townsfolk to be the most beautiful and luxurious house in the city of Kabul. He marries a highly educated woman, a university lecturer in Farsi Literature, who is a descendent of the royal family. Baba is a charitable person who always helps people without expecting any return. However, religion is only a custom for him, as he leads a secular and modern life; he drinks, never prays and is severely critical of a religious personality like the mullah. After Amir's mother dies giving birth to him, Amir lives in the house surrounded by masculine values, with Baba and the Hazara servants. The father and the son did not form a warm and close relationship. Amir has a hidden feeling that his father hates him as his birth is the cause of his beautiful mother's death whereas in reality his father only sees him as weak and unlike him (Hosseini, 2003:19). Amir tries to win his father's heart to the detriment of his own relationship with the family's most trustworthy servants, Ali and Hassan.

The incident which later leads to Amir's persistent feeling of guilt happens during the kite running tournament, a famous custom in Afghanistan before the long war following the Russian invasion of the country in December 1979. Amir, who decides to win his father's heart by being the champion in the tournament, has to sacrifice his relationship with Hassan when, out of cowardice, he pretends not to see Hassan being assaulted by the psychopathic Assef, and his gang. He also leaves Hassan to their mercy in order to protect himself and to save the kite which Hassan has painfully secured for him and from getting lost or destroyed. Eventually, Ali and Hassan decide to leave the family after Hassan is betrayed once again by Amir who, out of his feeling of guilt and fear, accuses Hassan of stealing his birthday wristwatch and money. Not long after that, in March 1981, both Amir and Baba has to flee from Kabul and later migrate to the US due to the war.

In the US, Baba and Amir live in Fremont, California. They have to leave behind their luxurious life-style in Kabul and start all over again. Although Baba enjoys the freedom and American political ideology, it is very difficult for him to adjust to his new environment. Everything in America seems to irritate him, whether it is the weather, food, traffic or pollution. Baba never tries to learn English nor does he attempt to understand some aspects of the American way of life or its values. For instance, the use of ID card to gain one's trust and guarantee one's honesty is considered so disrespectful for him because back in Kabul only the mention of his name was enough to earn the trust of the whole community; his name was as good as a credit card. In America, things are different; Baba is a worker at a gas station, the family resides in a small flat, and they are considered immigrants who live under the government welfare (Hosseini, 2003:130-131). Because of the unpleasant situation they experience in the US, it is difficult for Baba to adjust himself to the new home and is always nostalgic about the homeland he holds dear. His situation is a testimony of what Agnew (2005:4) has identified, "the individual living in the diaspora experiences a dynamic tension every day between living 'here' and remembering 'there,' between memories of places of origin and entanglements with places of residence, and between the metaphorical and the physical home". This state of being a diaspora is pointedly described by Amir when he reflects on his father's condition in the following paragraph:

Baba was like the widower who remarries but can't let go of his dead wife. He missed the sugar cane fields of Jalalabad and the garden of Paghman. He missed people milling in and out of his house, missed walking down the bustling aisles of Shor Bazaar and greeting people who knew him and his father, knew his grandfather, people who shared ancestors with, whose pasts intertwined with his. (Hosseini, 2003:129)

As a result, for Baba the idea of homeland represents his good old days where everything was in its place and under his control. Afghanistan for him means the love of Afghan culture, family honour, dignity and integrity, as we can see that he is an advocate for honesty and moral upholding. He always emphasises to Amir the importance of being honest, and he himself is an exemplary charity donor. He even risks his life to protect the honour of an Afghan woman from being assaulted by a Russian soldier while they are fleeing from Afghanistan after the outbreak of the war. Even though readers learn towards the end of the novel that Baba commits a great mistake in his life by betraying Ali, his loyal servant, and had an affair with Ali's wife who later gave birth to Hassan, Baba's illegitimate child. Nonetheless, the way he attempts to redeem himself by giving love and care for Hassan, and his dedication for charity works to help the orphans, the poor and the needy, is in part a demonstration of his sincere repentance. Baba's feeling of nostalgia is also intensified by the fact that he has to leave behind his plush and comfortable life in Afghanistan. The tough life he has to go through in the US as a low-paid worker at a gas station and the status of being an

immigrant in an alien land being dependent on others, in this case the American government, also undermines his self-esteem. Thus, Afghanistan is a source of reminiscence of his celebrated life in the past.

As for Amir, the feeling of nostalgia always brings him back to his beautiful hometown and childhood relationship with Hassan, his ethnic Hazara servant and friend whom later Amir discovers to be his half-brother. At the very beginning of the story readers are introduced to Amir's life and his close relationship with Hassan. Throughout the story we can see that what makes Afghanistan a home to Amir is his connection with Hassan and his childhood memories. For example, in the scene in which Baba, Amir and other Afghans are fleeing from Kabul, and all of them have to hide in a fuel tank to smuggle out of Afghanistan, Amir feels suffocated, and Baba reminds him to think of something good to keep himself alive. The only incident Amir can think of is Hassan and himself in a beautiful field of blossoming mulberry trees flying a kite together.

Hassan and I stand ankle-deep in untamed grass, I am tugging on the line, the spool spinning in Hassan's calloused hands, our eyes turned up to the kite in the sky. Not a word passes between us, not because we have nothing to say, but because we don't have to say anything—that's how it is between people who are each other's first memories, people who have fed from the same breast. A breeze stirs the grass and Hassan lets the spool roll. The kite spins, dips steadies. Over twin shadows dance on the rippling grass...I didn't remember what month that was, or what year even. I only knew the memory lived in me, a perfectly encapsulated morsel of a good past, a brushstroke of color on the gray, barren canvas that our lives had become (Hosseini, 2003: 122-123).

It is also evident in the novel that many beautiful memories about the good old days in Kabul are the positive force and the reference Amir employs in building his life and career in America, his adopted homeland. For instance, as a motherless boy, Amir always seeks refuge in his late mother's literature collections. This results in his language ability and the richness of his imagination which he later applies effectively in his studies and career life. His literary talent also allows him to establish himself in a new land and become a successful novelist. In addition, writing is a healing activity which provides a writer who lives in diaspora an opportunity to reconnect with his/her "lost" homeland, to express one's yearning to rebuild his/her nation, to accomplish the dreams of returning to one's home country and to redeem oneself from "a guilty consciousness of having left the 'homeland'" (Toivanen, 2013:440). Hence, the encouragement and a hint Rahim Khan gives to Amir in his long distant call from Pakistan, in which he says "*There is a way to be good again*" (Hosseini, 2003:2, italics in the text), is for Amir not only an advice to redeem himself from the mistake he did towards Hassan; it may probably be interpreted as Amir's redemption from his guilt of staying away from his home country in the time of conflicts and wars.

Consequently, in the case of Amir, it can be advocated that "writing becomes a vehicle for remembrance and inspiration for artistic and scholarly creation" (Dunlop, 2005: 117). The art of writing also brings back the ideal time of the past to heal the wound of the reality of the present. Therefore, writing becomes the apparatus for those who live in diaspora to share a sense of cultural reminiscence and recollect their shattered dreams. It is one strategy for diaspora people to maintain their "cultural identity" which, according to Stuart Hall (1994:395), "is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth". Thus, nostalgia and a homeland in the narrative of Afghanistan in Hosseini's literary work can be perceived as, to borrow Hall's expression, "imaginary reunification" (Hall, 1994:394) for Afghans in diaspora to uphold a link with their home country.

In addition, nostalgia plays another vital role in *The Kite Runner*; it gives an alternative image of Afghanistan before the wars. It might be stated that *The Kite Runner* is probably the first novel in English to give voice to Afghanistan which has for long been portrayed by the media only as a victim of war. Those who were born in the 1970s onwards rarely hear about Afghanistan as anything else but a war-torn country which has been invaded by superpowers and has been a platform for power struggles among the people of different tribes and ideologies in the country. As a result, Hosseini's literary work becomes an essential medium in introducing readers to Afghanistan before the wars. This is successfully done through the recollection of the protagonist's memories about his good old days, which allows readers to share with the characters the Afghanistan of a rich cultural heritage and vibrant people. Therefore, Amir's nostalgia, which is coupled with a positive depiction of the country, reflects the alternative dimensions of the socio-cultural history of Afghanistan.

### ***1.3 Amir and the notion of "Imaginary Homeland"***

Relating to the earlier issue of nostalgia and lost home, scholars also discuss the concept of "imaginary homeland," or the homelands of the mind. Rushdie (2006:428) argues in his article "Imaginary Homelands" that writers who are emigrants, expatriates or exilic usually yearn to look back and reclaim their "lost" homeland. But Rushdie also reminds the writers in such positions that they are not able to fully regain the authenticity of what they claim as their homeland. These writers, according to Rushdie, are only trying to create fictions and not facts. Thus, what they write about is not actual cities or villages, but the ones which are only in their mind and imagination, perhaps the one reconstructed from their memories (Ibid, 2006: 428). Hosseini seems to realise this point well as Amir, the protagonist in *The Kite Runner*, laments when he visits Afghanistan: "I feel like a tourist in my own country" (Hosseini, 2003:231); and later when he is traveling to Kabul, his hometown, Amir sees for himself that Kabul has been devastatingly transformed from the one in his memories. In a sense, the novel has exposed the tragic reality of Afghanistan after the wars and the outcome of the fights to wield power over one another. It also reveals the failure of rebuilding a nation after it has been severely exploited by colonial power, abused by the politicians and destroyed by the long term conflicts among contesting groups to rule the country. Therefore, Amir grieves: "Returning to Kabul was like running into an old, forgotten friend and seeing that life hadn't been good to him, that he'd become homeless and destitute" (Hosseini, 2003:246). In this regard, Afghanistan mainly exists in Amir's imagination and the physical experience of returning home becomes a pivotal moment which brings him to another world totally different from Afghanistan in his memories; thus, for Amir "the *idea* of the home country becomes split from the *experience* of returning home" (McLeod, 2000:209, italics in the text). Therefore, Amir's memories about Kabul and Afghanistan and his imagination about the country only reminisce the time of his childhood when everything is still in place and life is still full of happiness, and not the war-afflicted and impoverished Kabul of the present time.

It is, thus, beneficial to refer to what Edward Said (2006:439) has reflected, "it is true that there are stories portraying exile as a condition that produce heroes, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in a person's life. But these achievements of any exile are permanently undermined by his or her sense of loss". Therefore, the success of life Amir earns in America in terms of his education and career work is unable to replace his sense of longing and his nostalgia towards his homeland. His decision to go back to Afghanistan can be read as Amir's attempt to fulfill his dream of homecoming and his desire to redeem himself from his past grave errors. Nonetheless, readers should also keep in mind that the narratives of Afghanistan are in some part told from Amir's, or in fact, from Hosseini's broken memories; therefore, it is usually depicted

through “broken mirrors”, thus, some elements are inevitably lost and irretrievable (Rushdie, 2006:429). For this reason, Afghanistan in Amir’s memories may be very different from the ones possessed by the Hazara minorities of the country who have been socially and economically marginalised. This point is, thus, crucial when reading diaspora narratives which may be told from different perspectives by people who are from the same homeland but are diverse in societal backgrounds.

Another aspect concerning the notion of “imaginary homelands” is interrelated with the ideas of nation and nation building. As Dean J. Kostantaras (2008) proposes in his article titled, “Idealisations of Self and Nation in the Thought of Diaspora Intellectuals”, it has been a recognised phenomenon that many intellectuals who live in diaspora play a crucial role in shaping and influencing the rebuilding of their former homelands especially in the period of national revivals and independence movements. Numerous intellectuals who live in exile have revealed through their writings their concern about their homelands, and what have been portrayed in their works are the emotional hardships of these talented individuals who “found their status suddenly conditioned by the ideas associated with their places of origin in the host society imagination” (Ibid, 2008:700). Therefore, as an intellectual who lives in diaspora, it could be conjectured that Amir is longing to contribute to the rebuilding of Afghanistan after the time of wars and colonial invasion. It could probably be considered as a kind of “long-distance nationalism”, the phenomenon of “the enduring attachment to original-homeland politics” which occurs among diaspora people (Matsuoka and Sorenso, 2005:152). Said (2006:440) also asserts that fundamentally people who live in a state of exile are “cut off from their roots, their lands, their past”; as a result they have a propensity to search for those institutions which can be reconstructed in a narrative form “by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people”. Therefore, it might be stated that this patriotic aspiration has driven Hosseini to send Amir, the protagonist of his novel, back to Afghanistan to redress his past mistakes. The sacrifice of Amir to free Sohrab, Hassan’s only son, from the Taliban’s grip might be perceived as Hosseini’s own aspiration to save his home country from the the extreme ideology of the Taliban. His artistic contribution also aims to lay a proprietary claim on Afghan history before it was robbed and torn apart by several groups of warmongers. In addition, Hosseini’s negative portrayal of the Taliban, regardless of the lack of each characters’ personal details and historical background, can be read as Hosseini’s wish to express his disapproval of their ideology which contradicts democratic and liberal ideology of the US which Hosseini has affiliated himself with. For this reason, Amir’s audacious fight with Assef, the psychopathic-turned-extremist, represents the struggle of a diaspora subject like Hosseini who wishes to emancipate his home county from what he considers as an extremist regime and help shape the course of the nation to conform to the his political ideology.

## **2. Amir and Wounded Memory: “The Ghosts of the Past” and the Healing of the Present**

In contrast to the positive light of Amir’s reminiscences about his homeland, the past is a festering memory for him. The strong feeling of guilt about his mistakes in the past makes Afghanistan a place of mixed emotional ties for him. His betrayal towards Hassan prevents him from fully appreciating his comfortable life in Afghanistan when he is there. In addition, the memories of the trauma are so persistent that he still feels the pang of his mischievous acts even when he lives a long distance away from home like in America. As Matsuoka and Sorenson (2005:151) point out, “Violence and terror persist beyond the time and space in which they originally occur”. In consequence, the incident of the violent assault on Hassan and the terror imprinted on Amir’s mind are so unrelenting that all of his memories about Afghanistan and many parts of his life in America



revolve around this incident. From the very beginning of the story readers are taken back to the incident in a form of foreshadowing:

I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975. I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek. That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years (Hosseini, 2003:1).

This incident keeps repeating itself in his memory and shapes his present life. It is caused by his cowardice which prevents him from protecting Hassan, his only friend and loyal servant, from a sexual assault by Assef. Furthermore, the situation deteriorates from Amir's childish act to get rid of his own guilt and his boyish jealousy of his father's love for Hassan. The feeling drives him to betray Hassan's sacrifice and honesty for the second time by accusing him of stealing with an intention that Hassan will be expelled from the house and will no longer be around to remind him of his misbehaviour. However, to Amir's dismay, Baba decides to forgive Hassan without realising that the incident is Amir's plot. Amir's feeling of guilt of being cowardly and untrustworthy is so haunting that he has to live with the ramifications of his acts for twenty-six years.

Thus, for Amir the reminiscence of Afghanistan does not contain only nostalgia and memories about his beautiful and fun life in childhood, his past is also darkened by and tainted with his own guilt and mistakes. As a result, the ghosts of the past urge him to wholeheartedly adopt America as his new home since it is a place of freedom where he can seek refuge from all guilts and wounded memories. Amir laments when he thinks about Afghanistan: "Kabul had become a city of ghosts for me, a city of harelipped ghosts" (Hosseini, 2003:136). Here the phrase "harelipped ghosts" reminds readers of Hassan, his harelipped friend and servant. Hence, it is not surprising when Amir declares that he embraces America because "America was a river, roaring along unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far. Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins" (Hosseini, 2003:136). Hence, the idea of homeland and nostalgia in the case of Amir and Baba can be encapsulated in a sentence from Amir, "For me America was a place to bury my memories; for Baba, a place to mourn his" (Hosseini, 2003:129).

Another traumatic memory which lingers in Amir's past and which navigates his destiny is his conflicting relationship with Baba when he is in Afghanistan. The unfavourable relationship between the father and the son is a troublesome past for Amir. Deep in his mind, Amir always carries within him the feeling of guilt that his birth led to his mother's death. Moreover, the fact that Baba never remarries proves his love and loyalty towards his wife whom he not only adores but also has a great admiration for due to her noble lineage as he always proudly refers to her as "my princess" (Hosseini, 2003:15). This feeling, together with Amir's own personality which does not fit Baba's expectations, fill him with scepticism about his father's love for him. While Baba admires masculine and adventurous activities, Amir seems to prefer reading and writing. He can keep himself in his late mother's study rooms for hours and venture into the world of history and literature. He even starts writing and longs to read his stories to Baba, something that Baba does not appreciate or approves of.

However, what troubles Baba the most is Amir's lack of courage to defend himself. Unfortunately, Amir once eavesdropped what Baba told Rahim Khan, his close friend and business partner whom Amir respects and adores, about Amir's failure to defend himself from being harassed

by the boys in the neighbourhood. Baba tends to forget that Amir grows up motherless and does not have a chance to develop a balanced personality, so his criticism causes a lasting scar in Amir's mind, especially when Baba says: "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (Hosseini, 2003:22). Later, the end of Baba's conversation with Rahim Khan that day leaves Amir with a long lasting impact on his insecure little heart: "If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son" (Hosseini, 2003:23). This love-hate relationship can be considered as part of Amir's wounded memories he has with his paternal homeland. However, the love for father is like the love for his home country; it may not be so splendid and full of sweet memories, but it is there, and its tie can never be cut apart. It is like the longing of diaspora who live an exilic life, how terrible the homeland turns to be, the remembrance about ones' homeland seems to be cherished at the depth of their memories.

Nonetheless, the relationship between Baba and Amir gets better when they migrate to America. In a crucial aspect, life in America also acts as a remedy for Baba's own mistakes in the past, and it allows him to rectify what he has done. The fact that the father and the son have to totally depend on each other keeps the relationship closer. Moreover, as Amir expresses his ability in his studies and never causes any trouble to Baba in terms of his behaviours, it is time for Baba to realise that he needs to leave Amir to find his own way. Thus, the "third space" in America is a place of healing; it allows the father and the son to rebuild their relationship. The hardships they have to go through together in the new country testify their love for each other. Moreover, the new environment helps release them from social expectations and offers them an opportunity to reestablish themselves and to flourish in their adopted homeland.

### **3. Conclusion**

As the article has shown, the life's vicissitudes of the two main characters, Baba and Amir, in Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, have been an overt demonstration of how diaspora subjects in the West, especially in the US experience the feelings of nostalgia, confront with the notion of "imaginary homeland" and suffer from the haunting memory that they carry along with them to their new country. We have observed that nostalgic feelings seem to occupy the mind of both characters, but it is expressed from different angles. Baba, who is in his middle age, appears to suffer more than his son from the feeling of nostalgia since his meagre life in the US is in stark contrast with his affluent background in Afghanistan. In addition, his former success and reputation seems to always remind him about the downfall of his life, which is beyond his control. In contrast, Amir tends to be more flexible and is able to adapt to his new country of residence more comfortably due to his young age. Moreover, the feelings of nostalgia and the idea of homeland have been a symbol of redemption for Amir's feeling of guilt concerning his past mistakes and the expression of his longing to rebuild his lost homeland. Furthermore, Amir's life in America seems to be an epitome of an "ideal immigrant" who can successfully thrive in terms of economy and social status in one's adopted homeland. However, the idea of wounded memory also plays an important role in shaping the life of Amir. As the study has epitomised, the protagonist's remembrance of Afghanistan has become haunting due to his past mistake. Therefore, he has little choice but try to embrace his new home, America, as his own as it provides him a better shelter and allows him to seek refuge from his feeling of guilts and the unsound memory he has about his experience in his homeland.

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