

وزارة التعليم العالي و البحث العلمي

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research



Mouloud MAMMERI University of Tizi Ouzou
Faculty of Arts and Languages

جامعة مولود معمري - تيزي وزو
كلية الآداب و اللغات

Department of English

Domain: Letters and Foreign Languages
Subject: English
Specialty: Comparative Literature

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Master Degree in English

Title

The Ironical Discourse of War in Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007)

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Academic Year: 2016-2017

Content

Acknowledgements	i
Abstract	ii
Contents.....	iii
I.Introduction	1
II.Methods and Materials	9
II. 1. Theoretical Framework.....	9
II.2. Materials	15
II.2.1. Summary of <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	15
II.2.2. Summary of <i>The Swallows of Kabul</i>	16
III. Results.....	18
VI. Discussion	20
Chapter I: Setting: Space and War	20
I.1 . Setting in Yasmina Khadra’s <i>The Swallows of Kabul</i>	20
I.1.1. Kabul Before the War: Lamentation on the “Pastoral”.....	20
I.1.2. Kabul During the War: “Theatre” of War.....	22
I.2. Setting in Khaled Hosseini’s <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	25
I.2.1. Afghanistan Before the War: Lamentation on the “Pastoral”	26
I.2.2. Afghanistan During the War: “Theatre” of War	29
Chapter II: Characterisation: The Protagonists Response to War	33
II.1. Characterisation in Yasmina Kadra’s <i>The Swallows of Kabul</i>	33
II.1.1. “Binary vision”: Mohsen and Zuneira Vs Atiq and Mussarat.....	33
II.1.2. Mussarat as an Ironical Tragic Hero: “The scapegoat”	37
II.2. Characterisation in Khaled Hosseini’s <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	40
II.2.1.Binary Vision: Mariam Vs Laila	40
II. 2.2. Mariam as an Ironical Tagic Hero: “The scapegeot”	43
Chapter III: Thematic Study	47
III. 1. Loss of Innocence: The Expected and Unexpected Reality of War.....	47
III.1.1.Loss of Innocence in Khadra’s <i>The Swallows of Kabul</i>	48

III.1.2. Loss of Innocence in Hosseini's <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	52
III.2 .Religious extremism: Political and Social Role of the Taliban.....	57
III.2.1. The Extremist Taliban Rule in Khadra's <i>The Swallows of Kabul</i>	58
III2.2. The Extremist Taliban Rule in Hosseini's <i>A Thousand Splendid Suns</i>	63
V. General Conclusion	70
VI Appendix	73
VII. Bibliography	74

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude and thanks to our supervisor Dr.
BOUTOUCHENT Fadhila for her precious help and assistance during the whole year to
achieve this modest dissertation.

We would like also to express our special thanks to Mr Hami and professor AREZKI Dalila
for their guidance.

Abstract

This dissertation is a comparative study of two outstanding works: *Swallows of Kabul* (2002) by Yasmina Khadra and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) by Khaled Hosseini. The main purpose of this study is to show that both authors have used irony to speak about war and its consequences in Afghanistan, despite their geographical distance and language differences. Taking the theoretical concepts from Paul Fussell's work *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), the study has revealed this ironical discourse at the level of the setting, characterization and themes. The setting in the two narratives has revealed that, the two authors share the same view about the devastating effects of war on space and socio-cultural environment, through an ironical paradigm of thought: "pastoral/ anti-pastoral" and "theatricality" and the analysis of characterization has revealed that both writers have inscribed the portrayal of the characters through the contrast of "the binary vision". This is seen in their physical appearances, different backgrounds and different perceptions of life. Thus, this part has revealed how the "Demonic environment" shaped the behaviours of the characters to result in being either a "tyrant pole" or a "scapegoat". The thematic study has highlighted the awful consequences of war, like the religious extremism of the Taliban and the disenchantment of people in Afghanistan.

Keys words: Yasmina Khadra, *The Swallows of Kabul*, Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* , irony, war

Introduction

One of the most popular euphemisms of the WWI was “the war to end all wars”. When the war broke out in summer 1914, the majority of the population hoped and believed that it would be over by Christmas of the same year. Unfortunately, this did not happen, the front-line experience surpassed everything known up to that time. Men and women, mainly writers, were so horrified that they could not find the appropriate language or words to describe the unbearable scenes around them, i.e., they were not able to express their experiences in the traditional literary forms and style. It was the decline of the realistic and pastoral mode of writing and the birth of the modernist era, as Oxford Professor Hew Strachan (2004) rightly puts it: “Critics have credited the war with the birth of Modernism”(Puissant 1-4).

This war was not only a turning point in human history, but it also had a great impact on writing tradition, since it gave rise to what has come to be known as ‘Modern literature’. The Great War marked the beginning of a new, modern era, in which a deep sense of irony developed. This sense has played a great role in shaping the modern psyche and has become a dominant characteristic of modern life. The different studies devoted to WWI literature show the advent of radical changes which inform us about how literature shapes our understanding of the world before and after a conflict, how experience of the war changes our ideas about wartime, honour and heroism. Modris Eksteins states that what emerged from the war was “modern consciousness”. He adds in his *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (1989) that “irony, which is one expression of sensibility at odds with its surroundings, became for many the rhetorical mode and mood”(219). As for Stuart Sillars in his *Art and Survival in the First World War Britain* (1965), Bernard Bergonzi in *Heroes’ Twilight: A study of the literature of the Great War*(1965) and Paul Fussell in *The Great War*

and Modern Memory(1975), they assume that irony became a way of thinking or rather a ‘psychologically dealing with the absurdities of war’(Puissant 5-6).

The fundamental break after the cataclysmic “Great War” did not only concern history but also the course of literary development. Important affinities with WWI literature are identified in post-modern literature, in terms of issues and the way of thinking about war, for instance, post- WWII, Vietnam, Iraq literature, etc. Today, the war has become one of the most important issues facing the world and has been the topic centre of prominent novels, newspapers and academic debates and talk shows giving the evidence that “war is an endless and an evitable condition of modern life” as claimed by Paul Fussell in his *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Among the countries which have been affected by war, where blood and human flesh have become a natural sight, is Afghanistan. This country has fallen prey to the Taliban regime that has made of it a ‘living hell’ and plunged its people in the abyss of misery, trauma and despair. Among the authors, that have been touched by the way war has reshaped the lives of the Afghan people and how music and children’s laughs have been replaced by shells and sounds of knives being sharpened before any execution, the Algerian author Yasmina Khadra in his work *The Swallows of Kabul* (2004) and the American-Afghan author Khaled Hosseini’s in his best-seller *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007).

As a matter of fact, the two authors have devoted themselves to lay bare all kinds of mischief and terror either in their countries or abroad through their committed works. Yasmina Khadra describes war in Afghanistan, Irak and Palestine through his trilogy consisting of *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002), *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2002) and the *Attack* (2005). As for Hosseini, he is best known for his worldwide novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) which has opened a wide vista to the world to know about the life under war in Afghanistan. Our choice of the works mentioned above, is not made at random. Though the two authors

under study come from two different countries, the plight of their people and home lands have brought them together. Yasmina Khadra dwells on his experience in fighting terrorism during his service as an officer in the Algerian army and joins Khaled Hosseini in exposing fanaticism and the ferocity of war. They both set their novels in a Kabul crippled by three decades of restless fighting and grabbed by men fueled by zealotry and hardened by war. They remember the soviet invasion, the civil war, the Taliban occupation and the American invasion of 2001. Hosseini and Khadra take the reader into the dusty streets of Kabul and depict grisly scenes of a country in total decay, where war is seen, heard, felt and remembered on every inch of land.

Besides, Yasmina Khadra is an Algerian ex-army officer who fought against armed Islamist radicals during the “Black Decade” imposed by Islamist party (FIS) in Algeria. Even though he did not witness the war and never visited the land of Afghanistan, he claims in an interview to the Guardian Magazine that he “understands that Taliban mentality very well. The landscape, the struggles, the hardness of life - all these are just like my homeland.” Khadra, points to the jacket of his book "Look at that photo [of a woman in a ‘burka’ crossing a parched, desolate cityscape] "That could be the Saharan village where I was born" (Jefferies 2005). Khadra adds:

I have never been to Afghanistan but I met a lot of journalists who worked there who told me that they read the book and said, 'I see these incidents all the time, but I never noted them,'" says Moulessehoul. "All my literature takes place in that space - it deals with that which has not been attended to. I wanted to bring a new look from a Muslim on the tragedy of Afghanistan and to bring to it a western perspective at the same time - I have written a western tragedy, but also a book that is filled with eastern storytelling. When there are two perspectives, there's a better chance of understanding.

(Jefferies in O'Rourke 44)

Accordingly, *The Swallows of Kabul* takes place not in Algiers but in Taliban-Kabul era, where the Algerian jihadist went to learn to fight and kill. However, it alludes in some way to

the Algerian brutal civil war as O'Rourke states: "Who better than an Algerian officer to explain the brutality of the Jihadists (45), and as Fussell claims "every one fighting modern war tends to think of it in terms of the last one he knows anything about"(314).

For his part Khaled Hosseini, a UN special envoy and humanitarian, writes about Afghanistan after his return visit to Kabul in 2003. His novel is built on his two weeks visit to Afghanistan, which provided him with much of the material he used in his fiction. He told Tamara Jones of the Washington Post that "everything [he] wrote was based on something [he] saw or heard." He added, "However, some of the things were so cartoonishly heinous as to defy all comprehension"(Stuhr 4). Therefore, *The Swallows of Kabul* suits our concern about investigating on a war discourse that can be projected on the Algerian war experience. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* come to parallel it in terms of providing a different view to the Western media that failed to provide the real context and background of the conflict (Mc Lennan in Morgan 126)

Review of the Literature

Yasmina Khadra's and Khaled Hosseini's works have been the main subjects of discussion and analysis for many critics, authors, scholars and journalists all over the world. Their names and works have been on newspaper headlines, TV shows, and magazines, and some of their works have been adapted into movies, such as Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) and Khadra's *Ce que le jour doit la nuit* (2008). Through our review of the literature, we have found out that the two works have already been compared and contrasted. Yet, they have not been compared in a deep manner as literary works; what we have found is an online essay by Fabiha Rahman entitled "The Cycle of Hope and Oppression" published on May 25, 2011, in which she studies the lives of the

female characters caught between horror and hope, meaning that in spite of the sufferings they endure, they have managed to find some hope, which has allowed them to resist.

The two works under study, Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* and Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* have yielded a huge bulk of criticism. The major point that emerges from this criticism is that the two writers are against fanaticism, terrorism, the ill-governance of their countries and the plight of their countrymen. Many critics - like the Nobel laureate JM Coetzee, consider the Kabul described in *The Swallows of Kabul* as a "doomed place", "a hell" where people's lives and hopes are thrown into a state of oblivion. Coetzee writes: "Yasmina Khadra's Kabul is a hell on earth, a place of hunger, tedium and stifling fear" (2005)

Another critic is the Iranian author Azar Nafisi, who is famous for her novel *Reading Lolita in Teheran*. She considers the novel as a great opportunity to discover the real life of Afghanistan under the rule of the Taliban and to know about the story of a people who suffer in silence, but who still fight for a better future. She states :

I am so grateful that the swallows of Kabul has been written, and written with such relentless poetry and passion. The reality of life under a rule such the Taliban's makes us despair not only of the land that could not tolerate such horror, but also of the world that for so long kept silent about it. However, the way that reality is narrated and ultimately redefined by Yasmina Khadra once more proves the power of fiction to turn our despair into hope, to *restore* our stolen sense of dignity and humanity and to desire life when death seems to be the safest refuge. (2006)

Khaled Hosseini, on his part, has received a great literary recognition. Rebecca Stuhr, from the University of Pennsylvania, discusses Hosseini's fiction and its relation to current events and popular culture. In her *Reading Khaled Hosseini* (2009), Stuhr studies *A Thousand Splendid Suns* from three different angles. She first describes it as being a "Bildungsroman" (a novel of transformation) due to the "quest" and the "journey" of transformation undertaken by the characters. She carries on saying that the novel can be called a "historical novel" as well, because "the reader learns so much about the history, culture and customs of Afghanistan [...]"

historical events and historical figures enter into the story” (Stuhr, ,2009:20). She concludes by presenting the novel as a “domestic fiction”, because it deals essentially with “the intimate relationship of the family within the confines of the family home” (Ibid)

In her review of *A Thousand Splendid Suns* in ‘The Guardian’ (May 2007), the British feminist writer and human rights activist Natasha Walter, considers Hosseini’s novel as an enrichment to the western view of Afghanistan ‘which brings to life the Afghan men as loving and feeling individuals’. It is much more a “history lesson to the ignorant westerners”, she carries on saying, “which brings to light the political background of all the oppressed Afghan women”(2007).

Issue and Working Hypothesis

The above studies have revealed some common points between the two novels, which are mainly based on women’s plight as unfortunate citizens caught between oppression and hope. However, to our knowledge, there is not a work devoted to the two authors’ treatment of the irony of war. Accordingly, the main aim of our comparative study is to investigate the two authors’ works from a different perspective. To this aim, We will investigate the ironical discourse of war within the two narratives as a means to relate and recall the war using Fussell’s ironical paradigm of thought, developed in his work entitled *The Great War and Great Memory*(1975). We will demonstrate that though the two novelists are from different areas, backgrounds, and write in different languages, they share and submit to the use of irony to express the unbearable side of war. We will see to what extent these fictional works may be read or studied under Paul Fussell’s oppositional framework, when they deal with space, characters and issues. We will, thus investigate both *Swallows of Kabul* and *A thousand Splendid Suns* on the persistence of this ironical literary tradition that started at the edge of the Great War to contemporary literary productions .

Before introducing Fussell's thesis on irony, it will be useful to take a brief look at some of the key concepts and definitions that revolve around war and irony. War is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a "state of armed conflict between different countries or different groups within a country". On the other hand, Carl Philipp Gottfried Von Clausewitz (1780 – 1831) a Prussian general and military theorist, in his famous work, *Vom Kriege on War* defines it "war is an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will [...] to impose our will on the enemy is its object. To secure that object we must render the enemy powerless; and that, in theory, is the true aim of warfare". (Clausewitz 75)

The term irony refers to a variety of concepts depending on the context in which it is used. In Greek comedy, the character called the "eiron" is a "dissembler", a man who "depreciates" himself, which means a man who dissimulates himself and just pretends to be less intelligent than the "alazon", the one who makes himself invulnerable. (Frye 41). The modern uses of the term irony maintain the root sense of dissembling or hiding in order to acquire "special rhetorical or artistic effects." In a broader sense, the term irony is a literary technique in which the author says a little and means as much as possible. Irony may be divided into categories such as verbal, dramatic, and situational. **Verbal irony** is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker suggests differs strongly from the meaning that is supposedly expressed. **Dramatic irony** concerns a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or a reader is given knowledge of of which one of the characters is unaware. **Situational irony** describes a clear divergence between the expected and actual results in a certain situation. (Abrams 134-135)

In order to fulfil our investigation, we will use Paul Fussell's thesis presented in his national book award *The Great War and Modern Memory* published in 1975. In his work, Fussell examined the language and the mindset of these authors and found out pervasive shifts in habits of expression and thought. In other words, the Great War experience resulted in

shaping and establishing the ways in which these authors remembered and thought about it. Irony, here, is defined as a contrast between what is expected and what actually happens. This irony is used to expose the brutality of war, loss of innocence and end of progress, since it is related to an experience that could not be put into words. He says: “Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected [...] but the Great War was more ironic than any before or since”. (Fussell 8)

This irony is revealed in an oppositional framework through which they could remember the war: “The irony which memory associates with the events [...] has become an inseparable element of the general vision of war in our time” (Ibid:12). The authors of war memoirs relied on a number of patterns of thought that characterise irony, namely the “binary vision”, “the lamentation on the pastoral”, “the anti-pastoral” and “theatricality”. Besides, Fussell relies on Frye’s theory of modes and myths and underlines the use of Archetypal imagery, like “the demonic world” and “the scapegoat” that suggest indeed an unexpected result of the war.

In order to account for the hypothesis we have set above, we have divided our research paper into five main parts. The introduction is devoted to the rise of irony and its centrality in literature, topic generalisation, the review of literature and the issue. As for the Methods and Materials part, it is concerned with the main concepts of Fussell’s theory as well as concepts from Frye’s theory of modes and myths. Besides, a concise summary of the two novels under study is provided in the Materials section. The Results part displays the findings of the research work.

As for the fourth part, which constitutes the major part of the present research paper, it is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the Setting. It explores the space, time and socio-cultural atmosphere in Afghanistan before and after the war in both novels. The second chapter deals with characterisation. It examines the two opposing male and

females characters in both novels. Then, it sheds light on the ironical tragic hero in relation to the “demonic” environment that brings him to a sacrificial ritual. The third chapter bears on two important themes in the two novels under scrutiny: the loss of innocence and the rise of religious extremism. The fifth and last part of the paper is the general conclusion.

II. Methods and Materials

II.1. Theoretical Framework

Paul Fussell, a literature professor and a veteran of WWII, has introduced theoretical concepts in relation to the influence of war on literature, in his substantial book *The Great War and Modern Memory* first published in 1975. His study focuses on the literature of the first World War and the ways in which that conflict is remembered. Fussell examined British memoirs of WWI written by Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and Edmund Blunden, but he also analysed the works of Wilfred Owen, Ernst Junger, and countless diaries, memoirs, and letters taken from the National Museum. He assumes:

by applying to the past, a paradigm of ironic action, a rememberer is enabled to locate, draw forth, and finally shape into significance an event or moment which otherwise would merge without meaning into the general undifferentiated stream[...] I am saying that there seems to be one dominating form of modern understanding; that it is essentially ironic; and that it originates largely in the application of mind and memory to the events of the Great War.
(Fussell 31, 35)

The above quote refers to the central role the war played in the history of English literature by shaping the way people remembered and think of the war. In other words, it had an impact on the author's war memoirs psyche. The enormity of the Great War shattered the existing narratives and gave birth to irony as a dominant mode of writing.

The satirical and ironic war discourse runs throughout the whole book. Fussell states that "Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an

irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its ends” (7). Thus, for him, a situational irony involves a situation in which actions have an effect that is in opposition to what it is intended for, and so the outcome is contrary to what is expected. (8) The oppositional framework that characterizes irony became the means through which people used to understand and recall the Great War. Fussell calls this “the binary vision” (80) or “insistent polarities” or “pointed juxtaposition” (92). This binary continues to influence public discourse and intellectual criticism up to post modern era “the war, which in the outer world had taken place some time ago, was not yet over, but was continuing to be fought within the psyche”(113). This binary vision goes first around a number of antipodal themes, like innocence Vs loss of innocence, death Vs rebirth, pastoral Vs Anti-pastoral. Second, the mental habit of dichotomizing like Us Vs Them “gross dichotomizing [a]s a persisting imaginative habit of modern times, traceable to the actualities of the Great War” (75). Thus, thinking in adversarial term, as Fussell claims, is omnipresent in modern life “there is a line that divides everything and always will” (105).

In the first chapter of Fussell’s book, entitled “Satire of Circumstances” Fussell writes under a subtitle “Never such innocence again” that the “One reason the war was more ironic than any other is that its beginning was more innocent” (18). Indeed, the Great War marked the end of the innocent optimism that dominated western society during the pre-war years. It reversed the idea of progress that had been the essence of the western mindset since the industrial revolution. The former faith in progress was thrown into doubts and cynicism while the reality and the truth about war was shocking. “The war was expected to be domestic and embarrassing rather than savage and incomprehensible”(24). A “simple anti-thesis”, as Fussell rightly puts it, is the atmosphere in which most of the war memoirs take place.

According to Fussell the ‘paradigm’ of war memoir consists of three stages: innocence, death, rebirth. The soldiers associated themselves with the crucified Christ “a fellow-sufferer”.

Bent in a Christian experience, the war memoirs account for stages of a Christian Fall: innocence, fall and redemption. Accordingly, the middle stage is always characterized by a loss of innocence and the movement up the line, battle or recovery become emblem of quest or rebirth. In his chapter entitled “Myth, Ritual and Romance”, Fussell reports a soldier’s words: “it is marvellous to be out of the trenches: it is like being born again” (114). They believed that “after the initiatory rite of baptism, there is a possibility of resurrection”. In the middle of an indescribable terror of war and a modern mechanised and industrialised world of war, “a myth-ridden world” comes to be born. The result is “un-modern superstitions, legends, miracles and rumours”, what propels them back to the popular psychological atmosphere of the Middle Ages. Yet, this new world offered consolation, gave sense to accidental or calamitous events and found a cause to the failure of some British troops.(115).

Pastoral/Anti-Pastoral

“The drama of the binary” using Fussell’s terminology, is revealed through a Pastoral/anti-pastoral dichotomy where he identifies a deep nostalgia toward a pre-war England, in other words “a lamentation on the pastoral”. In the chapter entitled “Arcadian Resources”, Fussell examines English pastoralism and its relationship to the war. He claims that the pastoral allusions and images are in fact, ironized by the war poets through anti-thesis. So, the anti-pastoral comes to show the brutal side of war, when the enemy “is out there” or “down there” what he calls the “persistent enemy” who is always “at watch” (258). The anti-pastoral allows, in fact, ‘to hint by anti-thesis’ at the indescribable calamities of the Great War.

The recourse to the pastoral is invoked as a comfort but sometimes, it is also a means of measurement; a norm by which the war horrors would be gauged. The Golden Age posited by classic and renaissance literary pastoral - The Golden Age when life was simple and happy - is paralleled with ideas of ‘home’ and ‘the summer of 1914’. The literary pastoral language,

and particularly rural data, allows to recall England “as it used to be” as a means to assist memory and imagination’ (235). Thus language, like ‘great hills, the woods, the valley beyond the woods, and twilight’, recalls the pre-industrial England in the face of an ‘unspeakable grossness’ of the war. According to Fussell, the elegy, or pastoral elegy is the paradigm of several war memoirs. The latter associates literal pastoral setting with emotion of nostalgia.

Theatricality

In the chapter labelled “Theatre of War”, Fussell associates “theatre” with modern war. He considers the British soldiers as actors playing roles in a play written by an unknown playwright. He states: “the most obvious reason why “theatre” and modern war seem so compatible is that modern wars are fought by conscripted armies, whose members know they are only temporarily playing their ill learned parts.” (191). The “sense of role” or sense of theatre posited by Fussell is due to the fact that war and “the whole thing is too grossly farcical, perverse, cruel, and absurd to be credited as a form of real life” (192), but at the same time, it provides some psychological comfort, which Fussell calls a ‘psyche escape’ just; as a play must have an ending, so might the war. (ibid).

According to Fussell, it is the British rather than the French, the Americans, the Italians, the Russians or the Germans who referred to the trench raids as ‘shows’ or ‘stunts’, because they are the ones “who understand acting to be a mode of artificial representing, i.e., *mimesis* – rather than a mode of natural expressing” (198). This British tendency to fuse memories of the war with the imagery of theatre in literature is mainly due to the influence of “Shakespeare as a national asset”. Accordingly, the war memoirs are approached in a mode of a theatre with its three components: “Preparation, Climax and Release” in which the front-line war experience is reported “in scenes” divided into “Acts”, since the war can be analogous to a play which has a structure.

The Scapegoat and Demonic Imagery

In the last chapter named “Persistence and Memory”, Fussell posits the Great War memoirs within Northrop Frye’s modes and archetypes. He assumes that war memoirs reside in knife-edge between two modes: the “low mimetic”, a type of literature in which the protagonist has an ordinary level of power-realistic fiction, and the Modern age “the ironic” in which the protagonist has less power of action than we do. In other words, the memoirs are transitional, they move from the low mimetic, realism, and set forward to the ironic of the atrocious and ridiculous.

In fact, Northrop Frye, elaborates a pattern through which the five fictional modes myth, romance, high mimesis, low mimesis and irony, (in both their tragic and comic forms) are said to be cyclically moved. Accordingly, Fussell assumes that the characters, in the war memoirs, pass from pre-war freedom to wartime, what Frye calls “scene of bondage, frustration and absurdity” (Fussell 132). And from this phase, they return to the mythical mode, a body of sacrificial rituals and dying gods begin to reappear, illustrating thus Frye’s circular paradigm. At this level, Frye notes that the ironic mode seizes upon “demonic imagery” regardless of the world it observes: the divine world, the human, the vegetable, or the mineral.

“Demonic Imagery” is one the three types of imagery that Frye proposes in his analysis of the “Dianoia” (meaning) of Archetypal imagery. Frye introduces an Archetypal approach called “Myth Criticism” (theory of myths) or what is called Archetypal literary criticism. The latter, is a critical theory that interprets a text by focusing on myths and archetypes in the narrative. In fact, Frye assumes that literature is a system based on recurrent patterns that help to connect any literary work to universal patterns. Frye’s “Demonic Imagery” corresponds to six categories or levels of reality metaphorically referred to as “worlds”. (Frye 141).

Fussell establishes an archetypal link between Frye's "Demonic world" and the world of war and he equates this world with the nightmarish, confusing, traumatizing experiences of soldiers in the trenches: "Everything [Frye] specifies as belonging to the universal literary and mythic demonic world can be found in memories of the Great War" (313). The demonic world is described by Frye as "the world that desire totally rejects: the world of the nightmare and the scapegoat, of bondage and pain and confusion" (147). He adds "[...] the demonic world is an existential hell, the hell that man creates on earth"(312).

As we have stated above, Fussell establishes a bridge between Frye's theory of Myths and the world of war. He identifies namely among the six levels of reality " worlds":

the human, vegetable and mineral world as follows: First, the Demonic human world for Frye "is a society held together by a kind of molecular tension of ego, a loyalty to the group or the leader which diminishes the individual, or at least contrasts his pleasure with his duty or honour".

These demonic aspects are quite apparent in a unit of the army. Frye adds that in the sinister human world, one individual pole is "the tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless, melancholy, and with an insatiable will", and the other pole is represented by the "pharmakos" or sacrificed victim, who has to be killed to strengthen others (148). Second, the demonic vegetable world which corresponds to the sinister forest, wilderness or waste land; it resembles, according to Fussel, closely to what was seen in the trenches. Third the mineral world, which corresponds to desert and abandoned castles, is paralleled with "the labyrinth or maze, the image of lost direction" like the trench system and the trenches "engines of tortures, weapons of war, armour [...] that would include everything from shovels,[...] and the rolls of barbed wire"(313).

The *Pharmakos*, or the scapegoat, is an ironic tragic character that Frye identifies in his theory of modes as follows:

He is someone who gets isolated from his society. "He is neither innocent nor guilty. He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done, provokes like an avalanche. He is guilty in the sense that he is a member of a guilty society, or living in a world where such injustices are an inescapable part of existence" (Frye)

41)

The *pharmakos* can be identified with two archetypes: Adam or Christ. Adam, the human nature under sentence of death, and Christ, on whom all attempt to transfer guilt give him innocence.

In our work, we will explore to what extent the novelists use the "pastoral elegy", the 'elegiac tone' and "theatricality" to identify the setting; i.e., time, space and the atmosphere in pre-war and post-war Afghanistan. The setting being "a complement of indirect showing of a character or in harmony with the characters' mood" and behaviour. (Hughes and Patin 31) So, we will determine what the characters stand for, by revealing their traits (direct and indirect description) using Fussell's "Binary vision". Then, we will examine how the characters have been affected and shaped by the war through the use of "Demonic vision" and "Pharmakos" concepts. At last, we will examine the ironical consequences of the Afghan exhausting war like the "loss of innocence" and the coming back of 'Middle Ages atmosphere' and the extreme religion imposed by the Taliban that hinders the life of people.

II.2. Materials

Before starting our investigation, it is necessary to provide the reader with the summary of the two novels.

II.2.1. Summary of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Hoseini's Novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is about the "twist of fate" of two Afghan women, Mariam and Leila, who despite the fact of being from different backgrounds and raised in different manners, their fate is brought together by the serial wars in Afghanistan and

find themselves in a society where the educated or the illiterate, the hard worker or the lazy and the rich or the poor are treated in the same wretched way and turned into pathetic subjects facing death, ignorance, starvation, and dislocation .

Mariam, a fifteen-year old girl who lives with her single mother in the small village of Gul Daman. She is the illegitimate daughter of Jalil, a wealthy business man who lives in the nearby city of Herat. Mariam has always been tormented by her illegitimate birth and the echo of the word “harami” has never left her ears until her last breath. The fact of being raised alone by an angry and mentally –exhausted mother has made of Mariam obsessed with her father and wishes to live with him and her ten siblings whom she has never seen. She spends her days arguing and frowning at her mother who keeps warning her from her father’s sweet talk who pays her a visit once every Wednesday.

After her mother’s suicide, Mariam is compelled to live with her father, a father who has always been ashamed of her and has not dared to give her a place among his awns. Being then a burden on her stepmothers and seen as a mark of disgrace by her half sisters and brothers, Mariam is forced to marry a forty-five year old widower named Rasheed, a shoemaker living in Kabul, 760 kilometers away from her hometown. Once in Kabul, Mariam experiences all kinds of ill treatment from her husband: confinement, verbal and physical violence and humiliation especially after her successive miscarriages, a fact which has made of her an incomplete woman in her husband’s eyes.

Meanwhile, the endless wars have ravaged the streets of Kabul, making of its cinemas, universities, theatres and stadiums either debris or camps for the mujahedeen or the Taliban militia men. Like Mariam, Laila is another victim of war-torn Kabul and its oppressive society. She was born on the same night that the Soviet took over Afghanistan. Leila is a beautiful girl raised among books and love, dreaming of becoming an autonomous and

educated woman living by the side of her childhood sweetheart Tariq, who lost a leg when he was a child. After Tariq's family decides to leave for Pakistan, and a rocket blows up her house and kills her parents, Leila finds herself in Mariam's house after being rescued by Rasheed. Being now parentless, and finding out that she is pregnant, Leila accepts Rasheed's proposal and marries him especially after the latter tricks her and fakes Tariq's death. Now both Mariam and Leila are Rasheed's wives and have to endure his bad temper, ill-treatment and violence.

At first, Mariam resents Leila, but after the birth of Aziza, Leila and Tariq's daughter, the two women grow a mother-daughter relationship and strengthen each other to resist Rasheed's tyranny and find a way to escape. After years of suffering, humiliation and unsuccessful escape attempts, Leila, with two children now after giving birth to her second child Zalmai, finds out about Rasheed's ruse and meets Tariq.

Rasheed goes furious when he finds out about Tariq and starts beating Leila and Mariam and swears to kill them. Being unable to bear Rasheed's violence anymore and driven by her love towards Leila and her children, Mariam kills Rasheed and stays in Kabul to take the blame and is executed later on by the Taliban. After this incident, Leila, Tariq and the children move to Tariq's home in Muree, Pakistan where they can live in peace and love. However, after the U.S invasion, Leila misses her home country and decides to return to Kabul.

Before reaching Kabul, Leila decides to go to Herat and visits Mariam's house and village. She meets her friends who are in fact witnesses of her suffering and tears. Once there, Leila is given a box which is meant for Mariam left by her father Jalil. It contains a long letter and a sum of money which Leila uses to renovate the orphanage in Kabul. Leila, who is pregnant with her third child, tries to lead a peaceful life with her husband and two children.

II.2.2.Summary of *The Swallows of Kabul*

The Swallows of Kabul turns around the life of two couples who come from different backgrounds but whose lives intertwine after the series of the Afghan wars. They are reduced to the same pitiful level and lose their possessions, identity, and dignity in a society ruled by fanatics whose mindset is driven by ignorance, violence and destruction.

The first couple is Atiq Shawkat and his wife Musarrat. Atiq is a forty-year old jailer and a former mujahedeen during the Soviet War and who later embraces the Taliban ideals. He is married to the forty-five year old seriously ill Musarrat, a former nurse who saved his life when he was injured. The couple lives a miserable life which is due not only to their poverty or the harshness of the Taliban but also to the lack of love which keeps them away from each other. Atiq is deeply affected by his environment which turns around either guarding female prisoners or assisting their executions, nursing his ill wife or living in a society which he can no more bear. On her side, Musarrat is weakened by her terminal illness which is eating her strength and her status as a wife day after day, her situation worsens and her sadness deepens once she finds out that if Atiq is still with her it is because she once saved his life.

The second couple is Mohsen Ramat and his beautiful wife Zunaira. Unlike the first couple, this couple is known for the deep love and respect they hold for each other. They are educated people and belong to wealthy families who lost their fortunes during the wars. Mohsen, the well-mannered man who was aspiring for a diplomat career has his life turned upside down once he joins the furious crowd in the market and takes part in the stoning of a prostitute. Once he tells his wife Zunaira, who was a magistrate and a women's rights advocate, she loses her temper and refuses to talk to him. In the hope of gaining his wife's forgiveness, Mohsen persuades Zunaira to go for a walk in the city of Kabul. Once in the

street, the couple is surprised by the militiamen who drag Mohsen to the mosque to attend the Mulla's sermon and compel Zunaira who is confined in her burqa to wait under the burning sun for many hours. After this incident, the couple falls apart and Zunaira kills Mohsen accidentally.

Being sentenced to death, Zunaira, spends the rest of her days in a cell guarded by Atiq who is fascinated by her bewitching beauty and eventually falls in love with her. Having noticed the happiness and the love in her husband's face , Musarrat decides to sacrifice her life and is executed instead of Zunaira. After the end of the execution, Atiq loses the track of Zunaira and cannot find her anywhere. His inner regret and his obsessive love for Zunaira have made of Atiq a mad man roaming around the city and bouncing at women whom he takes for Zunaira. He is eventually killed by the Taliban and the other man of Kabul.

III.Results

The research work under the title: Ironical Discourse of War in Yasmina Khadra's *Swallows of Kabul* (2004) and Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) has revealed that Khadra and Hosseini have used an ironical discourse to speak about war in their narratives. We have located this ironical discourse at the level of the setting, characterization and themes. The setting in the two narratives has unfolded the devastating effects of war through an ironical paradigm of thought: pastoral/anti-pastoral and theatricality (using Paul Fussell's terminology). Both authors started by eulogizing the beauty and magic of Afghanistan through the contrast drawn between the pre-war and post-war periods. The nostalgia of the pre-war period is more evident in Hosseini's narrative, which is revealed through the various beautiful pastoral pictures of the country, its culture and history in order to allude to the peaceful and quiet country that has been Afghanistan. The two authors disclose the harsh consequences of a three decades of war and present a devastated country at different levels.

As far as characterization is concerned, it has revealed that both writers inscribed the portrayal of the characters through the contrast of "the binary vision" as introduced by Fussell. This is seen in their physical appearance, their speech and actions. The disclosure of characters is closely related to the setting that has a causal function. Indeed, it established the atmosphere that affected the characters' mood and behaviors. This allowed us to identify the characters' losses at the psychological, social and personal levels. Accordingly, this ranged the characters as victims of this destructing war. Then, the "Demonic imagery" that established another dichotomy, the tyrant pole" and the "scapegoat", what alluded again to the war; that infected the life of the heroes and brings them to a sacrifice.

The third part highlighted some prominent issues that undermined people's life during the war. The irony of war is displayed through its outcomes, which were contrary to what was

expected. Both narratives has shown how all the social's aspirations and whole existence is shattered away and gone upside down. Both narratives reveal genuinely the "loss of innocence" as a result of a traumatic war. So, they have disclosed the unexpected deviation of people's lives from hope to disenchantment and cynicism as their dreams and plans end up in jail, public executions or madness. The religious fervour brought over after the ascendancy of the Taliban led also to disillusionment and despair. The novels under study unfold the rise of a destructive extremism and its consequences, changing thus Afghanistan at the political and social level. People are brought to a bondage situations, their lives are deprived of their fundamental rights of work, education and freedom.

IV. Discussion

I.Chapter One: Setting: Space and War

In this chapter we will examine the setting in the two novels in relation to Fussell's notions: "pastoral/ anti-pastoral" and "theatricality of war". Using these concepts we will explore how Kabul/Afghanistan is portrayed by Khadra and Hosseini before and after the war. To this aim, we will consider how space and time, i.e., the historical period and geographical location, the social environment, the mood, the atmosphere, before and during the war, will contribute to shape the characters and express irony through Fussell's oppositional framework of irony.

I.1. Setting in Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul*

The Swallows of Kabul is set in Kabul, starting from the Soviet invasion to the reign of the Taliban. The novel takes a short glimpse at Afghanistan during time of peace before he sheds light on the torn-Afghanistan under the tyranny of the Taliban rule

I.1.1.Kabul Before the War: a Lamentation of the "Pastoral"

Right from the beginning of the novel, Khadra goes back to the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, before the Soviet invasion, the Civil War and the ascendancy of the Taliban. He describes Kabul as a land of brotherhood, love and harmony with lively boulevards, crowded avenues and peaceful people where 'the windows of the bigger stores didn't have much to offer, but no one can come up to you and struck you in the face with a whip' (Khadra10). Khadra shows how the city was active and provided its people with 'enthusiasm' and 'goodwill' along with motivating work opportunities. He brings back memories of long time ago when 'markets were filled to bursting' (Ibid), surrounded by modern buildings and marvelous gardens where the echo of children's songs and laughs was heard "instead of fanatics shouting "sacrilege!" (Ibid.,72) .

In addition, Khadra goes back to describe the joyful atmosphere where freedom used to get on well with beauty in pre-war Kabul especially before the Talibans' era. Women could walk freely; join schools, universities, or jobs with their "bewitching beauties" without the wearing of the burqa which was optional at that time. The 'family bounds' used to be strong and tight since parents and all the relatives had the opportunity to live together and enjoy family warmth under the same roof before being destroyed by war.

Khadra eulogizes Afghanistan's glorious past. He contrasts the current state of affairs with Kabul's glorious civilization which were strong, feared and whose legends' main concern was to "bring honour and pride home". In this context, Khadra says:

On
ce upon a time, her (Kabul) legends rivaled those of Samarkand and Baghdad, and when her kings ascended to the throne, they immediately began dreaming of empires vaster than the firmament..... those days are gone..... you can't bring them back by circling around their memory. For Kabul has a horror of memory. She has put her history to death in the public square, sacrificed the names of her streets in horrific bonfires, dynamited her monuments into smithereens and cancelled the oaths her founders signed in their enemies' blood. (Ibid:11)

This quotation shows how Afghan people feel nostalgic to their once great empire as they find refuge and solace in remembering it. Yet, Khadra shows how Kabul participated in its own destruction like what happened in Algeria during the "Black decade". The "jihadists" who betrayed the oath of the Algerian soldiers of War of Independence are paralleled with the Afghani who "cancelled the oaths her founders signed in their enemies' blood". Khadra adds:

How far off those days seem. Could they seem nothing but pure fabrications? These days the boulevards of Kabul are no more amusing. The skeletal facades that by some miracle are still standing attest to the fact that the cafés, the eating places, the houses, and the buildings have all gone up in smoke. The formerly black-topped streets are now only beaten tracks scraped by clogs and sandals all day long. The shopkeepers have put their smiles in the storeroom.

(Ibid:11)

Khadra conveys again his melancholy towards today unrecognizable Afghanistan in an elegiac tone. Everything is no more the same, the boulevards, the cafes, the houses. They find it hard to cope with their new reality which provides them with nothing but destruction, tears, longing and lamentation over what they have lost.

The act of recalling Kabul's pre-war days and the feeling of nostalgia and lamentations over its losses correspond to Fussell's concept of 'the use of pastoral mentioned in the sixth chapter of *The Great War and Modern Memory* entitled "Arcadian Recourses". Fussell argues that "pastoral allusion" or the recourse to "pastoral", "rural" England by First World War writers served as "an act of comfort" (Fussell, 1975 :239) but at the same time, it helps to "gauge" the actual state of the ongoing events with what is coming when the enemy is "out there" as Fussell affirms "After the oasis a return to the real world" (Ibid., 237).

I.1.2. Kabul During the War : A " Theater of War"

In order to describe the horrific state of Kabul under the Taliban, Yasmina Khadra presents the warfare experience in the city as being like "a theater" with a stage, actors and an audience. This follows Paul Fussell's concept of " Theatricalty" in which he looks at the association between war and theater and argues that the situation under the war is "too grossly farcical, perverse, cruel, and absurd to be credited as a form of real life" (Ibid., 192).

The story of the novel can be paralleled to a play divided into three stages: preparation, climax and release. The preparation stage corresponds to the presentation of the contrasting lives and backgrounds of the protagonists. The rising action corresponds to the impact of war on Zunaira that leads her to kill her husband Mohsen, consequently she is jailed. The release is from the time Musarat decides to take the blame and sacrifices herself for Atiq and Zunaira. The first scene introduces the stage similarly to a play, when the curtains are raised, the lights come up so that the audience faces the stage and the actors. Khadra's stage here is Kabul

or what remains of Kabul, a city “in the middle of nowhere” and “in an advanced state of decomposition”(Khadra 1,2). Khadra introduces his story as follows:

The cratered roads, the scabrous hills, the white-hot horizon, the pinging cylinder heads all seem to say, *Nothing will ever be the same again*. The ruin of the city walls has spread into people’s souls. The dust has stunted their orchards, blinded their eyes, sealed up their hearts. In places, the buzzing of flies and the stench of animal carcasses declare the irreversibility of the general desolation. It seems that the whole world is beginning to decay [...] And yet it is also here, amid the hush of stony places and the silence of graves, in this land of dry earth and arid hearts, that our story is born.

(Khadra 2)

The above quote illustrates a “dead” and an “unappetizing” atmosphere of a city ruined by war; an atmosphere which conveys nothing but “battlefields”, “artillery exchanges”, “tears” and “sadness”. Khadra’s words bring the reader closer to the experience of war. After decades of ambushes, air raids and bombings, terrible changes have been brought over and devastated Kabul beyond recognition, making it an emblem of pauperism, fanaticism, and fear.

According to Fussell, it is the ‘farcical, absurd, cruel and pervert’ side of a war that reveals the anti-pastoral and “the demonic world” associated to it. This atmosphere is omnipresent all throughout the course of the novel. All the events take place in an atmosphere that conveys an anxiety and uncertainty; in which joy and love are forbidden and belong to the past. The obscurity which haunts different places in the city of Kabul are brought together : the dusty and littered streets, the prison, the cells, the cemetery and the shabby market. The writer describes Kabul as an “antechamber to the great beyond, a dark antechamber, where the points of reference are obscure; a puritanical ordeal; something latent and unbearable, observed in the strictest privacy” (Ibid:10). Khadra gives thus, a whole picture of Kabul in a state of paralysis and total stagnation, ruled by men who fight against change and development. Khadra affirms:

Things in Kabul are going from bad to worse sliding into ruin, sweeping along men and women. It’s a chaos within a chaos a disaster enclosed in a disaster and woes to those who are careless; an isolated person is doomed beyond remedy.

Khadra displays a tangible look on the space. Moving in Kabul has become difficult and anarchical; everything goes wrong and towards inaccurate destinations. Just like the trench system, the market is “the labyrinth or the maze, the image of lost direction”.(Fussell, 1975: 313)The market dominated by noise and crowded by “beggars” and” spectral women” along with “stinking of rotten fruit”. It is a wild space in which the lack of respect and authority is “the authority itself”. He considers Kabul as a “closed space”, isolated conveying which is worrying, depressing and inaccessible. This atmosphere foreshadows the absurd, the farcical that will come later. On the other hand, time in Kabul has lost its meaning and value; it is much more an endless hell, boredom, and extreme disdain without a promising future. The days, nights, hours, and minutes look all the same without hope or ambition or as khadra says: “the night will be as torrid as the day” (Ibid:39).

The cruelty of the war is illustrated through the fatality and the inhumanity of the Taliban. Public executions have become the new face of the city as they are the “Mulla’s” way to set order”, a fact which has brought a continual sense of fear and has made of death a “banal issue”(Ibid.,10). Kabul’s stadiums and gardens are now places where scaffolds are set for hanging, swords are sharpened for beheading, and wheelbarrows are filled with rocks for stoning and lynching, turning them, thus, into places where “ Gods and angels are afraid to thread”(Ibid.,170). Besides, the absurdity that intensifies the theatricality is shown through women who must be covered from head to toe in a“burqa” whilst their husbands and sons are constantly whipped and humiliated by the fundamentalist to join the mosque and pray. It can also be seen through the Taliban who spread over the city to make sure that their absolute rules are being abided like forbidding schooling, laughing, music, TV.

The weather, is an important element that conveys the mood in the novel like what Fussell claims in his book. For him, “summer” in poetry, belongs conventionally to gladness and

“Autumn” to melancholy” (Fussell 5). He shows this contrast by using a line from Thomas Hardy’s poem *After a Journey* (1913) when he says: “Summer gave us sweet, but Autumn wrought division” (ibid). However, Fussell explains that the year following 1914 had changed this tradition meaning that “the golden Summer” of 1914 was gone and replaced by melancholy and wretchedness. (Ibid). Thus, in the same way, Yasmina Khadra focuses mainly on the Summer season and gives an image of the “drought” or “the blazing heat”; that has invaded and taken over Kabul, which stifles people and pushes even “ravens to suicide and shepherds to disappear” (ibid.,1). The writer considers Kabul as being “suffocating as if a window to hell has partially opened in the sky” (Ibid.,73). The suffocating heat and the torrid weather then along with “the humidity and mosquitoes which keep people away from home till dawn” (Ibid) hints by anti-thesis to an ironical image of a once beautiful Kabul blotted out by war and made of it a city of misfortune and sorrow, as Fussell says: “even the weather cooperated to intensify the irony”.

I.2. The Setting in Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Unlike *Swallows of Kabul* which is set in Kabul, *One Thousands Splendid Suns* is set in Afghanistan, primarily in the cities of Herat then Kabul, from Zahir Shah’s rule to the Soviet invasion and later to the reign of the Taliban and post-Taliban rebuilding of Afghanistan. The novel depicts Afghanistan during time of peace when Hosseini sheds light on the rural landscapes and country’s heritage then the torn-Afghanistan as a result of repeated invasions and internal upheavals, when forces are struggling to take control of the country.

I.2.1. Afghanistan Before the War: Lamentation on the Pastoral

The first nostalgic image of Afghanistan is first referred to, through the title of the novel. The title is based on a line from the seventieth century classical poem “Kabul” written by Iranian poet Saib-e-Tabrizi, as translated by Josephine Davis. This poem is an ode to Kabul that mirrors its beauty and powerful allure but also evokes the real Kabul hidden beneath the destruction. The “splendid suns” underline the beauty of daily life in the city, a spectacle that repeats with each rising of the sun. The lines of the poem referred to in the story are: “One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs” / Or the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls” (Hosseini106)

This poem is also recited in the novel twice. Babi, Laila’s father, recites it before leaving Kabul for Pakistan, and Laila remembers it when she returns back to Kabul with her family from Pakistan. It is evident that this poem provides us with a mental image of Afghanistan, as a beautiful place where it is impossible to count for all of its beauty, when it was written many years ago.

From the beginning of the novel, Khaled Hosseini introduces the reader to an Afghanistan that existed before the war- An Afghanistan which is under the rule of King Shah and president Daoud Khan later before the invasion of the Soviets (from 1964 to 1978). Through his characters, Hosseini paints a picture of a peaceful land that unfolds a lot of pastoral images, a land of culture, history, art and poetry . As the novel opens, Hosseini puts the reader in a charming atmosphere through a number of bucolic images. Through Jalil, Mariam’s father, he evokes Herat’s current richness, when he “describes to her the green wheat fields of Herat, the orchards, the vines pregnant with plump grapes” (Ibid.,4). Hosseini sheds light also on the idyllic rural setting of Herat and its environment through an ample description of the flowers and tree-lined streets , he says:

“The track was clanked on either side by knee-high grass and speckles of white and bright yellow flowers, the track snaked uphill(...) to a flat field where poplars and cotton woods soared and wild bushes grew in clusters”
(Hosseini 15)

He also reveals the peaceful life of Mariam and her mother when they wake up. He adds

“ in the morning, they awoke to the distant bleating of sheep and the high-pitched toot of a flute as Gulf Daman’s shepherds led their flock to graze on the grassy hillside. Mariam and Nana milked the goats, fed the hens and collected eggs”(Ibid.,10).

Besides, Hosseini strengthens out the beautiful image and the liberty of women during pre-war Afghanistan, when Mariam decides to go on a visit to her father in Herat. Alone, in her way, she is impressed by the quiet beauty around her. Hosseini draws to the reader a tableau that translates love, friendship and order. He states:

She stood along the edge of the pool (...). She spied on a cluster of boys who were setting sail to paper ships. Mariam saw flowers everywhere, tulips, lilies, petunias, their petals awash in sunlight. People walked along the paths, sat on benches and sipped tea .(Ibid: 19)

All these pictures recall the ‘Golden Age’ as Fussell puts it in his book. The one that is associated with the pre- first world war period, the Summer of 1914. The ‘Golden Age’ or ‘a pastoral Myth’ hints indeed, to a happy and peaceful life. Hosseini recollects these images as he wants to remember his country “as it used to be”. It is ‘a psyche comfort’ but at the same time, it is a measurement to what will come in the second half of the novel.

In the second half of the novel, when the country falls under the power of the communists led by Colonel Abdul Qader and the jihad waged against the soviet invaders under commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, a nostalgia toward the bohemian pre-war days, in term of freedom and non convenience, is illustrated through Laila

‘That winter [...] She thought longingly of the wide-open skies of her childhood, of her days of going shopping at Mandaii with Mammy, of her days of running free in the streets , her days of sitting with Tariq in a bed of clover on the banks of a stream somewhere, trading riddles and candy, watching the sun”(Ibid.,122).

Hosseini evokes Afghanistan's cultural heritage too, from the beginning of the novel. Jalil tells Mariam as she sits on his lap, that Herat, Mariam's birthplace, "had once been the cradle of Persian culture, the home of writers, painters, and Sufis"(Ibid., 4). He even mentions an anecdote that stresses the fact that Herat is a community of artist and poets, saying that "You couldn't stretch a leg here without poking a poet in the ass,"(Ibid., 4) then he laughs. Jalil also recalls the glory of Kabul through its ancient architecture and history. He explains to Mariam, in one of his visits to the 'Kolba'(cottage house), the story of Queen Gauhar Shad, who had raised the famous minarets as her loving ode to Herat back in the fifteenth century.(Ibid.,4). Through the eyes of Mariam who "could make out the minarets in the distance like the dusty fingers of giants" and look also "on the edge of the clearing, [...] the ruins of Alexander the Great's old citadel to the south" (Ibid.,17) Hosseini shows us the Grandeur of Afghanistan history. Besides, Jalil praises Kabul again when Mariam was about leaving Herat with Rasheed, her husband. Jalil says "that Kabul was so beautiful, the Moghul Emperor Babur had asked that he be buried there"(Ibid., 33).

Through the trip of Babi with his daughter Laila and Tariq to Bamiyan, Hosseini expresses his desolation on what happens to Shahr-e-Zohak, 'The Red City' that was destroyed by the grandfather of the invader Genghis Khan and relates some of the history and the purpose of the Bamiyan Buddhas. He states:

'The Red City was built some nine hundred years ago to defend the valley from invaders and Bamiyan was " a thriving Buddhist center until it had fallen under Islamic Arab rule in the ninth century. The sandstone cliffs were home to Buddhist monks who carved caves in them to use as living quarters and as sanctuary for weary traveling pilgrims". (Ibid., 82)

Hosseini glorifies one of Afghanistan greatest monuments, the Giant Bamiyan Buddhas; that leaves Laila and Tariq impressed in front of the magnificence of the panorama they have in front of them. However, he expresses his grief later on in the novel, when he says:" 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”(Ibid.,161) Babi expresses his melancholy towards pre-war Kabul when memory of the old days comes flooding back . He states “It's what I always remember about being up here, the silence. The peace of it. But I also wanted you to see your country's heritage, children, to learn of its rich past.”(Ibid) Finally, the taxi driver who accompany them to Bamiyan join Baby in his mourning on the fate of the country. He states “this is the story of our country, one invader after another [...].Macedonians, Sassanians, Arabs, Mongols, Now the Soviets”. (Ibid., 132).

This elegiac tone expresses sorrow and desolation towards what becomes Afghanistan. It creates a nostalgic world of love and allows for a recollection of the pre-war Afghan in the mind of the author and the reader. Yet, the destruction of historical monuments like the Buddhas or “the Red City” remain like war scenes that elucidate an “anti- pastoral” when the enemy is “out there”, as Fussell assumes it. Yet, this notion will be brought out in the next parts where the ‘demonic enemy’ will render another face to Afghanistan.

I.2.2. Afghanistan During the War : “Theatre of War”

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Khaled Hosseini points to the different wars that torn Afghanistan and draws the reader attention to the horrible reality of war and its effect on people. The war started with the invasion of the soviets in 1978 that come to impose their communists beliefs on a traditional Muslim society, followed by the intervention of the Mujahidin’s then the Civil War and the reign of the Taliban, before the arrival of the US forces in 2001. Yet, The war in Afghanistan takes place in the provinces primarily till the Taliban brings it out to the cities.

The story of this novel displays a play framework that is: preparation, climax and release. Like a play, Hosseini divides his novel into four parts; each one is divided into

chapters that correspond to essential periods in Afghanistan war timeline similar to a play 'Acts'. The two first parts are the preparation of the play where Hosseini presents the background of the two protagonists, before the beginning of the war. The third chapter presents the rising action; the war's horrible impact, physical and mental on the life of Laila and Mariam, leads to the climax when Mariam kills her husband Rasheed, and executed by the Taliban. The fourth chapter is the release. It relates Laila's life with Tariq and her children in the aftermath of Rasheed's and Mariam's deaths when they flee to Pakistan and come back later after the collapse of the Taliban and the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

The sense of theatricality of the war, as Fussell claims it, is due to the fact that war and "the whole thing is too grossly farcical, perverse, cruel, and absurd to be credited as a form of real life" (192). This 'hellish' atmosphere is genuinely displayed in the narrative of *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The war brings about chaotic atmosphere: bombings, land mines, homelessness, starvation... Kabul becomes "a city where every street corner is a trap, where every alley hid a ghost that sprang at her like a jack-in-the-box" (Hosseini 116) Terrible changes ravished the beautiful land beyond recognition. Life gets another turn from the time the Taliban take over the streets of Kabul.

"The streets became littered with bodies, glass, and crumpled chunks of metal. There was looting, murder, and, increasingly, rape, which was used to intimidate civilians and reward militiamen. Mariam heard of women who were killing themselves out of fear of being raped, and of men who, in the name of honor, would kill their wives or daughters if they'd been raped by the militia"

(Ibid., 118)

The above quotations show how the city of Kabul sinks to an absurd, cruel and perverse atmosphere. The cruelty of war is reflected through the continuous suffering that becomes intertwined with all the Afghans. Death, fear, rape were everywhere. The absurd has become a commonplace. The history monuments are destroyed "Men wielding pickaxes swarmed the dilapidated Kabul Museum and smashed pre-Islamic statues" (Hosseini 250) and

the women are forbidden to attend school and universities, or holding an employment outside home. TV screen are kicked in, books are burned, “The poems of Khalili, Pajwak, Ansari, Haji Dehqan, Ashraqi, Beytaab, Hafez, Jami, Nizami, Rumi, Khayyam, Beydel, and more went up in smoke (ibid), paintings are removed from walls, Musicians are beaten and imprisoned, cinemas or any sign of secular western influence is banned. They even go the grave of the singer, Ahmad Zahir, and fire bullets into it.

Moreover, the Farce and absurdity are illustrated through daily life. The Taliban oblige women doctors “to operate in burqa,!” While they cant afford gloves or anesthesia to practise caesareans on women. A painter is flogged because of painting a Flamingo. The Taliban compelled him to either destroy the painting or make it decent! Thus, the painter chooses to put a trouser on the bare legs of the flamingo and get thus an “Islamic flamingo” !(Ibid., 171).

Furthermore, The public executions or stoning in both novels approach caricatures, that illustrate surreal (bizarre) behaviours. According to Ben Ehrenreich, today Kabulis remember the Taliban’s executions with disgust and for him *Swallows of Kabul* is a “more a surreal morality play”(2004). In *The Swallows of Kabul*, the public stoning participant is described with “eyes rolled back, their mouths dripping saliva.” (Khadra 14) While Hosseini also describes the demonic glee of Rasheed to see the hanging, decapitating of people. He says:

then Fridays, he went to Ghazi Stadium, bought a Pepsi, and watched the spectacle. In bed, he made Laila listen as he described with a queer sort of exhilaration the hands he'd seen severed, the lashings, the hangings, the beheadings [...] blowing halos of smoke (Hosseini 146)

It is clear that the novels under study describe and show the change in Afghanistan. This country has undergone internal and external destructive upheavals that transform it from a country of beauty and history, a social and cultural adversity to a country of desolation and deprivation. Our reading of the two novels using Fussell’s ironical discourse of war through

the notion of pastoral/ anti-pastoral and theatricality highlights this oppositional binary or thinking in adversarial term. In other words, the dichotomous framework (thesis and anti-thesis) unfolds the worse of what is expected in any war what brings out the irony, an irony of situation, as Fussell posited it in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory*. The anti-pastoral/theatrical appears with the perversity, the cruelty and absurdity of war that makes the whole events come out like a play in a theatre that has a preparation, a climax and a release. According to Fussell, the absurdity and cruelty of war pushes any author who remember the war and writes about it, to conceive the whole thing as a 'theatre' because what is happening 'can't be credited as a real life'. The war is fought within the psyche of the novelists, this is why they presents it like a play believing that this will have an end , like an actor whose role finishes at the end of the play .

Hosseini and Khadra have managed to give a reader a tangible look at what life was really like during war days. Nevertheless, Khadra description of space and time, his chosen diction, like "decomposition", "suffocating", and "chaos ", "dark antechamber" convey a gloomy feeling, a mournful emotion to make the reader share his profound and traumatic experience of war. For his part Hosseini, who did not witness the war like Khadra, share the wounds of his shattered country as a UN special envoy and as an Afghan-born writer. He takes much time to glorify his country's heritage and history before he reveals the traumatic war. Yet, his approach is rather plain; he manifests a reduced affect of emotions, he uses concrete words rather than abstract, or personifications like khadra.

II. Chapter Two: Characterisation: The protagonists response to war

In this chapter, we will analyse the characters in the two novels using Fussell concepts' of "binary vision" and the "scapegoat" ironic hero. To this purpose, both direct and indirect description will be explored to enlighten the opposition between the protagonists. We will

examine a set of criteria such as the names and titles, the clothes and physical appearance, then the speech, physical action, feelings and thoughts of the protagonists. At last, we will see how the environment- the isolation, the demonic human world- affect and contribute to bring the hero to sacrifice himself embodying the typical image of a Christ.

II.1. Characterisation in Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul*

II.1.1. "Binary Vision": Atiq and Musarrat Vs Mohsen and Leila

Atiq and Musarrat

The first couple that Khadra introduces in his novel is Atiq Shawkat and his sick wife Musarrat, who come from a poor background and have embraced the Taliban ideals. From the very beginning, the author gives the reader a picture of a broken marriage devoid of any love, affection or communication. Atiq, who is now a jailer had previously joined the ranks of the mujahedeen during the soviet war. After being injured, he was rescued and cured by Musarrat who was a nurse at that time. Feeling grateful to her and being aware about her love toward him, Atiq decides to marry Musarrat despite being five years younger. The relationship between the couple is thus based on thankfulness and love from one side, a matter which has made of their marital life only sadness and depression.

Atiq is a forty-two year old jailer at a women's prison in Kabul who has adopted the Taliban ideology. He is introduced as a harsh and bad-tempered man "a man with eternal frown" always in a hurry, bothered by people's presence. He is known for his harsh look especially with his "henna colored beard" and the "whip" he keeps carrying in his hand to show his authority. Unlike Mohsen, Atiq is described as a hard-hearted man feeling compassion towards no one, not even towards the children or the elderly along with the

beggars whom he sees with “disgust” and considers as “cadavers forgotten by gravediggers” (Khadra 41).

Atiq sees his wife as a burden which makes his life sadder and sadder. He can no more bear his loveless marriage which consists of nothing but nursing an ill wife. “He can’t even think about going home to face his unmade bed, the dirty dishes forgotten in the four-smelling basins, and his wife, lying in a corner of the room [...] with a filthy scarf on her head, and purple blotches on her face” (Ibid.,22). Atiq doesn’t feel right wherever he goes: home, the mosque or the street because every inch of the city reminds him of his gloomy situation. Atiq says to himself:

What’s happening to me? I can’t bear the dark, I can’t bear the light, I don’t like standing up or sitting down, I can’t tolerate old people or children, I hate it when anybody looks at me or touches me. In fact, I can hardly stand myself.
Am I going stark raving mad?
(Khadra 42)

The terminal illness of Musarrat, to which no doctor has found a cure, deepened the lack of communication between the couple. This has left her “prostrated, moaning, contorting her body, almost mad with pain” (Ibid.,23).

Mussarat is an illiterate woman, coming from a poor family. She is described as a laid, sick and feeble woman awaiting her death passively. She is destructed by her illness and indifferent husband. Mussarrat is just a shadow in her husband’s eyes, an aching silhouette that conveys only death and gloom. He says

Her face is nothing but a fleshless skull with furrowed cheeks and pinched lips. Her eyes are glazed, icy, glimmering with a faint, deathly light, as though shreds of glass lie deep in her pupils. And, *my God*, her hands. Bony, covered with thin, drab skin, crumpled like paper, they have trouble recognizing things by touch
(Ibid.,120)

She is sad woman, a broken soul that belongs to nowhere. Her self confidence is broken both by the inner and the outer world. She has convinced herself that the fact of not being beautiful and not bearing children have ruined her marriage and made of her husband a sad man.

Mohsen and Zunaira

Mohsen Ramat and his beautiful wife Zunaira are the other main couple. In contrary to Atiq and Musarrat, this couple is known for their love for each other and their liberal ideas; they represent the pre-war modern Afghan couples. Both Mosen and Zunaira come from wealthy families who enjoyed pre-Taliban Afghanistan privileges and have high university degrees. Mohsen was dreaming of a career as a diplomat and Zunaira was a magistrate and an advocate for women's rights. The couple finds solace and peace in each other's love that is why they "married very young and very quick" (Ibid.,73). Despite the war and the damages it brought over; they still call each other "my dear" and stay together.

Unlike Atiq, **Mohsen** Ramat is described as being a mild-mannered, liberal-minded and a sensitive educated man who was dreaming of a career as a diplomat; the son of a prosperous merchant who lost his wealth during the war. As a student in pre-war Kabul, he was seen as a "straightforward", "decent", "moderately religious young man" or "a moderate Muslim" (Ibid). He is a liberal and a pacifist man who does not accept and abide the new way of life established by the Taliban. He is portrayed as a passionate husband who has been deeply in love with his wife since university years and who refuses nothing to her. On this matter khadra claims

[...] and he was an excellent, affectionate, considerate husband. He deprived her of nothing, refused her nothing, and yielded so easily to her requests that she often felt as if she were taking advantage of his kindness. But he was like that: openhanded, easygoing, readier to say yes than to ask himself questions

(Khadra 78)

Unlike Atiq and Muserrat, Mohsen and Zunaira's communication is better. They advise each other in case one of them has lost his way or can no more think wisely. The scene where Mohsen begs his wife to help him and prevent him from losing his way in an upside down society is an accurate example. He says to her

You're the only sun I have left, Zuneira. Without you, my way would be darker than the deepest darkness and colder than the grave. But, for the love of God, if you find that I'm changing toward you, if I'm becoming mean or unjust, please tell me. I feel that things are escaping me, I don't think I'm in control of myself anymore. If I'm going crazy, help me to be aware of it. I'm willing to fail everyone else's expectations, but I can't let myself do you any harm, not even inadvertently.

(Ibid., 42)

Zunaira is a former great lawyer and women's rights advocate deprived of doing her job and practising her knowledge. Unlike Muserrat, Zunaira is described as being "as beautiful as dawn" with "bright eyes", "splendid brows" and "lush and full lips". Her beauty still bewitches her husband though the sorrow and anger that she feels towards her life and country. Khadra says:

She is sublime, her freshness never fades. Despite the rigors of her daily life, despite her mourning for her city, which has been turned over to the obsession and follies of men, not a single wrinkle marks Zunaira's face? It's true that her cheeks lost their former translucence and the sound of her laughter is seldom heard, but her enormous eyes, as brilliant as emeralds, have kept their magic intact. (Khadra 33)

Zunaira used to be rich and lived in harmony with her family and husband till the Taliban occupation; even "her way of patting her mouth reveals her origins in a social rank that has been abolished and no more exists [...] she has class"(Ibid., 153). She was an ambitious and an independent girl who could wear "dresses" and "trousers" and who fought for the emancipation of women. She was a "brilliant girl" whom everyone was in love with and

dreamed of getting married to. Zunaira is a lively and a courageous woman; she is so “hardheaded” and “brusque” known for her resistance against all kinds of social oppression.

Musarrat as an Ironic Tragic Hero: a “Scapegoat”

Musarrat is the hero of *The Swallows of Kabul*. From the beginning of the novel, Musarrat is introduced as an inferior character whose poor health and loveless marriage have left her broken, bewildered without any self confidence. Musarrat can be paralleled with Fussell’s war memoirs characters that are “ironic heroes” according to Northrop Frye’s theory of modes; in which the hero has less power of action than we do. Musarrat has less power than an ordinary person, she is an “ironic hero”.

The tragic irony as Frye claims “Becomes simply the study of tragic isolation as such [...] its hero does not necessarily have any tragic harmatia or pathetic obsession: He is simply somebody who gets isolated from his society, [...] He is innocent in the sense that what happens to him is far greater than anything he has done, provokes like an avalanche”(Frye, 1957 : 41). Likewise, Musarrat is subjugated to a mental and physical isolation due to her illness and her bully husband Atiq and all her misfortunes are the result of her family circle or environment. First, Musarrat is trapped in her mind due to her illness. She locks herself in her room and she even hates to look at her face in the mirror because all what she can see is a “forty- year old woman with a life still ahead but with less fantastic dreams and an aching body with less freshness and desires” (Khadra 120). Her whole world is reduced to a small dark room where she sits on the floor with “her head in her hands waiting for a tear” (Ibid.,121). Musarrat has lost faith in happiness and she thinks that life is nothing but an “inexorable process of erosion” and that “whether you neglect yourself or you take care of yourself, it makes no sort of difference” (Ibid.,119).

Fussell assumes that the characters in the war memoirs witnessed a hard passage from “pre-war freedom to wartime bondage, frustration, and absurdity”. Just like the miserable situations of soldiers in the trenches, Musarrat suffering, frustration is intensified by Atiq who affected Musarrat’s world deeply and alienated her from society. He is presented as an archetype and fond of the Taliban regime. His violence is illustrated in a scene where he asks his wife to stop interfering in his life “Atiq seizes her by her throat and jams her against the wall. Stop your yapping, you old hag. I can’t stand the sound of your voice any longer, or the smell of your body, either.” (Khadra161). Atiq isolates Musarrat, mentally and physically. As said previously, he rejects her because of her illness. In fact, After knowing Zunaira, Atiq recognizes the difference between her and his wife and becomes more violent and harsher. He is amazed by her beauty that has taken his breath and gaze away. Khadra describes her :

[...]That face as beautiful as water from a spring. And that black hair, smooth and soft, which the least impudent of breezes would life as easily as a kite. And those delicate translucent houri’s hands, which look as soft as a caress and that small round mouth.....I’m still trembling from the sight of her. I spent the night watching her sleep. Her magnificence so filled my eyes that I didn’t notice the dawn.
(Khadra 149-150)

The late phase of the ironic mode, as Fussell claims it “seizes upon demonic imagery” before the return to a mythical mode. In the novel under study, it corresponds to the the turning point of Musarrat’s life; when Atiq’s meets with Zunaira at the jail and he falls in love with her. Musarrat embodies the image of a “scapegoat”, about the moment of her execution. The “Demonic” imagery as Fussell claims it, parallels six levels of reality called “worlds”. He shines light mainly on the human, the vegetable and the mineral world. The “human demonic world” displays two poles. The individual pole is “the Tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless”. The tyrant here is exemplified through the character of Atiq while the other pole is represented by the “pharmakos” or sacrificed victim, who has to be killed to strengthen the others”(Ibid.,148).The pharmakos is exemplified through Musarrat. Musarrat’s love for Atiq

makes her believe that she is the reason of his misfortune and depression. She makes the decision to sacrifice herself when she notices for the very first time, “sparkles” in Atiq’s eyes; which convey an unusual love and happiness to the extent of “forgetting to perform his *salat*” or “going out without his turban, his vest, and his whip”(khadra 150). Musarrat who sees her husband at the edge of depression and crying hysterically as he has failed to prove Zunaira’s innocence, she tells him “[...] When I saw the tears in your eyes, I thought I saw heaven opening up and revealing its most beautiful gift. And I told myself that the woman who could move you so deeply must not die” (Ibid.,12). Musarrat decides to take the blame, and to be executed instead of Zunaira. She decides to sacrifice herself to enable her husband to experience and feel real love with a strong and beautiful woman, a woman who could awaken her husband sensitivity. When Atiq admits his love for Zunaira, Musarrat answers:

Atiq, the man with the eternal frown, the man who could walk past a gold coin without deigning to notice it, this man has tender feelings? I’d like to kiss the feet of the woman who’s awakened such sensitivity in you in the course of a single night. She must be a saint. Or perhaps a good fairy.
(Khadra 151)

The sacrifice of Musarrat is paralleled with Fussell’s soldiers war memoirs who associated themselves with the image of the “Crucified Christ” or the “scapegoat”. Musarrat too sacrifices herself for the sake of her husband’s and Zunaira’s happiness. At this stage, Fussell assumes that the sacrifice initiates the beginning of a new fictional mode, the Mythic, where the sacrificial ritual is like a revival or a rebirth of gods. Indeed, before Musarrat’s death, She says:” In this country, there are many mistakes but never any regrets. The question of execution or mercy, of death or life, isn’t resolved by deliberation”, khadra shows “the dawning sun lights up his wife’s face. Musarrat is at peace”. These scene reveals Musarrat’s belief in her revival (spiritual one) if she knows that Atiq and Zunaira are happy.

II.2. Characterisation in Hosseini’s *A thousand Splendid Suns*

II.2.1. “Binary Vision” Mariam Vs Laila

From the beginning of the novel **Mariam** is introduced as a young girl of the wealthiest business men, Jalil Khan and his housekeeper Nana. She grows up in western Afghanistan in the early 1960s, in a small village outside the city of Herat. At age five, she learns that she is a *harami*-bastard - meaning born out of wedlock. She understands that a harami “was an unwanted thing [...] who would never have legitimate claim to the things other people had, things such as love, family, home, acceptance” (Hosseini 4).

Mariam is the name of “a lovely flower.[...] the tuberose”. Jalil, Mariam’s father, used to call her “ his little flower”. He also confines to be the one who chooses this name to his daughter. Yet, Mariam shows a physical and emotional anxiety due to her upbringing. The absence of her father, who comes “For an hour or two every Thursday” and the emotionally damaged mother settle in her a deep insecurity. Nana tells Mariam:

What rich lies!"[..]. "Rich man telling rich lies. He never took you to any tree. And don't let him charm you. He betrayed us, your beloved father. He cast us out. He cast us out of his big fancy house like we were nothing to him."
(Ibid.,5)

The above quote shows the image of a broken mother whose words confuses Mariam. Being an innocent kid, Mariam, cannot understand or believe what Nana says, because of her love to her father. The illegitimate status affects Mariam so much that she holds a disdain sight towards herself., as the author shows it:

Mariam saw her own face first, the archless, unshapely eyebrows, the flat hair, the eyes, mirthless green and set so closely together that one might mistake her for being cross-eyed. Her skin was coarse and had a dull, spotty appearance. She thought her brow too wide, the chin too narrow, the lips too thin. The overall impression was of a long face, a triangular face, a bit houndlike. And yet Mariam saw that, oddly enough, the whole of these unmemorable parts made for a face that was not pretty but, somehow, not unpleasant to look at either. (Idid., 31)

This quotation shows the sight Mariam has on herself. Indeed, this physical description unveils a broke and a sad soul.

Moreover, Mariam faces a fierce rejection from her mother, when she expresses her wish to schooling. Nana considers schooling as “foolish ideas” and useless for her. She says to Mariam:

What’s the sense schooling a girl like you? It’s like shining a spittoon, and you’ll learn nothing of value in those schools “there is only one, only one skill a woman like you and me needs in life, and they don’t teach it in school "Only one skill And it’s this:is tahamul Endure. (Hosseini 12)

Nana constantly brings Mariam down, and recalls her always that “they’ll call you harami[at school] They’ll say the most terrible things about you”. Nana warns her, that she can only expect from life pain and heartache and “like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman” (Ibid.,191). These words and negative ideas affected Mariam for the rest of her life. She grows up as an outsider and cuts herself from people around her as a defence mechanism. After Nana’s suicide, Mariam is plagued by guilt, what contributes to her tolerance at being married to an older man called Rasheed. Even, the burqa she comes to wear later on , has been a comforting act, since it hides her shameful secret. This picture confirms again how Mariam is actually lost and broken from the inside.

Unlike Mariam, **Laila** is the daughter of a well-educated teacher hakim called Babi and his wife Fariba. She grows up in the capital city of Kabul. Laila is physically described as a beautiful girl with “stunning beauty with green eyes, high cheekbones, and curly blond hair and plump lips”(Ibid.,109) She was born on the April coup of 1978, she is given the name of “inqilabi” girl that means “Revolutionary Girl”(Ibid.,62). This name conveys a deeper meaning regarding Laila’s personality. Unlike Mariam, she is an independent girl that responds to her mother neglect with independence and confidence. Laila ‘s confidence, pride and maturity, originates in her father’s encouragements and forward-thinking views on women's rights .Her Education has always been a priority to her father. He tells her:

You’re a very, very bright girl. Truly, you are. You can be anything you want, Laila I know this about you. And I also know that when this war is over, Afghanistan is going to need you as much as its men, maybe even more. Because a society has no chance of success if its women are uneducated, Laila No chance. (Hosseini 63).

The above quotation shows the image of the intellectual afghan man through Laila's father who encourages the emancipation and the success of his daughter through education.

Like Mariam, Laila ends up having to marry Rasheed after the death of her parents when a rocket hit their house. Laila's independence is, in fact, challenged when she decides to marry Rasheed. In fact, after the departure of her boy friend Tariq, Laila figures out that she is pregnant; so in order to give Tariq's unborn child a father, she accepted to marry a 60 man year old.

Nevertheless, Laila's love story with her boy friend Tariq contrasts with Mariam's loveless arranged marriage with Rasheed. Laila used to go off with Tariq and attends a cinema. She even dares to violate the rules by having sex with him before he leaves to Pakistan. While Mariam marriage is arranged by Her father's wives. In other part, Tariq defended and protected Laila before leaving to Pakistan and his coming back later on, is for the sake of taking Laila away of war. The incident in which Laila is thrown with urine out of a water gun is an example that casts Tariq as the fairytale hero. Unlike Mariam who hopes that Rasheed defends and protects her, unfortunately she finds herself under Rasheed damnation.

II.2.2. Mariam as an Ironic Tragic Hero: "the Scapegoat"

Like Musserat, Mariam is the hero of *One Thousand Splendid Suns*. From the first page of the novel she is presented as an inferior character. The word "harami" makes Mariam occupy the lowest rung on the social ladder in Afghanistan. Mariam is comparable to Fussell's "ironic heroes" according to Frye's theory of modes; in which the hero has less power of action than we do. Mariam is inferior to any ordinary person, she is an "ironic hero".

The illegitimate and unfortunate Mariam undergoes a tragic isolation. She is isolated by her mother, father and her husband Rasheed. The boundaries that Nana set up in Mariam's life are actually mental. By calling her a "harami", it inflicted on her a deep psychological damage since the shame of being a *harami* is linked to social standing and reputation.

Her father Jalil isolates Mariam and her mother Nana. However, Mariam adores him, she feels proud of "his vast and worldly knowledge [...]". For an hour or two every Thursday, when Jalil came to see her, Mariam felt deserving of all the beauty and bounty that life had to give. And, for this, Mariam loved Jalil". (Hosseini 6) .Mariam's unconditional love for her father makes her believe that she belongs to Jalil and his family. Yet, she has been forced to come to terms with his abandonment and face the reality at the moment he has turned his back on her. It is only when she decides to go to Herat city that she realises and becomes convinced that she will never find a place where she thinks to belong. Subsequently, Mariam feels herself to be an outcast, a rejected daughter as a result of her father's physical and mother's mental isolation; which break down her identity.

After Nana's suicide, she is forced by Jalil's wives, to marry Rasheed. Rasheed is a Conservative widowed shoemaker, who is three times of Mariam's age. From the beginning of her marriage, he isolates Mariam physically and emotionally and exerts control over her life. He offers her a little of freedom, a little of love and a lot of harm. First, He warns her to avoid the neighbours Fariba and her husband. Second, he insists that she covers with a burqa and avoid contact with males, while he sees porno-magazines. Third, he becomes abusive, both physically and verbally particularly after Mariam's several miscarriages. Mariam's inability to have children turns her into a bitter and fearful woman and accentuates her loneliness. Her dreams are shattered and the bitterness that plagues Mariam, emerges to surface, she bitterly states "the treacherous daughter did not deserve to be mothers and this was just punishment. (Ibid.,93)

From the beginning, Mariam is shown as an inferior woman deprived of opportunities and education. Yet, the war, intensifies her submissiveness as Fussell describes his characters "in a scene

of bondage, frustration and absurdity”(Fussel 312) through the character of Rasheed who is portrayed as an archetype of the Taliban regime, fond of the Taliban commanders. He looks at them with “affectionate kind of bemusement”. He aspires to receive them with “rose petals.” to greet “ new world., new leaders”(Hosseini 146). Rasheed brings Mariam to “bondage and frustration” through his cruel conduct and sadistic behaviour . His varying moods and impulsive disposition end always up in violence or beating.

As Fussell claims, the late phase of ironic mode “seizes upon demonic” imagery” before the return to a mythical mode. In the novel under study, it corresponds to the phase where both Mariam and Laila face Rasheed’s terror and violence. The “demonic human world” with its two poles: “the Tyrant-leader, inscrutable, ruthless” is exemplified in the character of Rasheed, and the other pole, “the pharmakos” exemplified through Mariam. The cruelty of Rasheed grows sometimes to an outright abuse and torture. The following scene is a genuine example when Rasheed compels Mariam to chew rocks and break her molars, because the rice has not been cooked according to his taste.

“He shoved two fingers into her mouth and pried it open, then forced the cold, hard pebbles into it. Mariam struggled against him, mumbling, but he kept pushing the pebbles in, [...] Now chew, he said. Through the mouth full of grit and pebbles[...]. Tears were leaking out of the corners of her eyes.

Mariam chewed. Something in the back of her mouth cracked. "Good," Rasheed said. His cheeks were quivering. "Now you know what your rice tastes like(Ibid: 60).

The oppression of Rasheed continues. He belittles Mariam in every possible way, in front of Laila and treats her as a harami. Mariam was a thirty-three-year-old woman, but the word harami, still had “sting Hearing” it still made her feel like she was “a pest, a cockroach”. Rasheed says to Laila:

But you mustn't blame her. She is quiet. A blessing, really, because,wallah, if a person hasn't got much to say she might as well be stingy with words. We are city people, you and I, but she is dehati. A village girl. Not even a village girl. No. She grew up in a kolba made of mud outside the village. Her father put her there. Have you told her, Mariam, have you told her that you are a harami. (Ibid., 118)

It is the commonality of the suffering in front of a bully husband and unreasonable brutality that brings the two women closer. Their adverse experience helps the development of a bond between the two women to face a common enemy. They become closer after the birth of Aziza. Mariam

becomes a mother figure to Laila. She is able to fulfill her wish to be a mother and to finally give and receive love. Mariam gains an internal strength and finds a sense of belonging through a family that she never thought she would have.

The path of the archetypical “Scapegoat” starts to appear at the moment Mariam sees Laila being strangled to death. Rasheed starts beating Mariam and attempts to choke Laila to death when he learns about Tariq’s visit. This moment has been a turning point in Mariam’s life. She comes to understand the need to fight back to get off this submissive life. She grabs a shovel and hits him on the head till he’s died. Mariam knows that she will be convicted and executed by the Taliban. However, she chooses to sacrifice herself so that Laila, Tariq and her children have a chance of a better life. Mariam is paralleled with the soldiers in Fussell’s war memoirs who identify themselves with the “Crucified Christ” who sacrificed himself for the salvation of humanity. She embodies the image of a “scapegoat”.

After her murdering Rasheed, Mariam decides to stay and face the consequences. She surrenders to the Taliban and accepts her destiny. As a scapegoat archetype, Mariam is innocent in the sense that what happens to her is far greater than anything she has done as Fussell claims it. The violence and cruelty of Rasheed, an outcome of the Afghanistan war, leads her to his murder but at the same time helps her to attain a legitimate ending. The feeling of content overwhelms Mariam before she is put to death. “As she closes her eyes, it was not regret any longer, but a sensation of abundant peace that washed over her” (Hosseini 219). Hosseini adds:

She thought of her entry into this world, the harami child of a lowly villager, an unintended thing, a pitiable, regrettable accident. A weed. And yet she was leaving the world as a woman who had loved and been loved back. She was leaving it as a friend, a companion, a guardian. A mother. a person of consequence at last. No. It was not so bad, Mariam thought, that she should die this way. Not so bad. This was a legitimate end to a life of illegitimate beginnings. (Ibid).

The above quote shows that even if Mariam enters into the world as nothing, having an illegitimate beginning, it succeeds in changing this assumption and leaves the world as a hero. Indeed, she attains a legitimate ending.

As mentioned previously, Fussell claims that the sacrifice of a scapegoat initiates the beginning of a new fictional mode, the Mythic; in which, the sacrificial ritual initiates the rebirth of a hero. Yet, the survival of the soldiers “to be out of the trenches” is considered like another rebirth. Indeed, the rebirth of Laila, tariq and their children corresponds to a new life of peace and freedom they get afterword.

It is clear that the novels cited previously, present their protagonists through an oppositional framework. Our reading to the two novels reveals the use of a common pattern of thought, the one posited by Fussell, the “binary vision. This one characterizes the ironical discourse as it underlines the difference of background, culture and way of living of the protagonist. Nevertheless they come to live a common destiny in a tyrannical world. All the protagonists: Atiq, Mohsen, Zunaira and Musarrat in *Swallows of Kabul* or *A Thousand Splendid Suns* stand for victims of the war. The setting: space, time and atmosphere, seen in the first chapter, helped to shape their existence. Both novelists associate the hero with the “scapegoat” or a “fellow-sufferer” who endures suffering so that the others get salvation. The rebirth of a hero gave the war poets a psyche comfort when they relate their memories; it comes out of a sense of helplessness and helps people achieve relief from their inability to ease the suffering of others. Similarly, the novelists do the same and give a glimmer of hope for the future of Afghanistan.

III. The Thematic Study

In this chapter we will try to explore the important issues exposed in the two novels under study, that reveal the ironical effect of a devilish war in relation to Fussell’s conception of irony. So, we’ll start first, to examine the shift from innocence to cynicism. Then, analyse the rise of extremism and fanaticism-the Holly war.

The irony of the effects of war and mainly of” the loss of innocence” hinge on the fact that things did not turn out as expected or as were planned before. It corresponds in a large

part to the gap between what one expects to happen and what actually happens, a shift from “innocence to cynicism” as Fussell asserts; that is why he says that “every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected” (Fussell 7) in the sense that world war one “was supposed to be domestic and embarrassing rather than savage and incomprehensible” (Ibid., 24)

III.1.Loss of Innocence: The Expected and Unexpected Reality of War

In this section we will investigate on how the whole Afghani nation comes to lose its innocence during the reign of the Taliban. We will discuss then how the two writers use irony to expose and confront Kabul’s losses through a parallel with Fussell’s British soldier premature deaths and the loss of innocence during of the Great War. The irony of the effects of war and mainly of “the loss of innocence” hinge on the fact that things did not turn out as expected or as were planned before. It corresponds in a large part, to the gap between what one expects to happen and what actually happens, a shift from “innocence to cynicism” as Fussell claims; that is why he says that “every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected” (Fussell 7) in the sense that World War one “was supposed to be domestic and embarrassing rather than savage and incomprehensible” (Ibid., 24).

III.1.1Loss of innocence in Khadra’s *The Swallows of Kabul*

It is worth noting to mention first, the reason behind the fact that the Great War that was ironic more than any other. It is because “it’s beginning was more innocent”(Fussell 18). The departure of the Soviet troops was thought to be the end of the Afghan war, like WW1 which was expected to “be over by the Christmas of 1914”. Similarly, the Afghan war is homologous since its first purpose has been to drive out the soviets. Nevertheless, it gives rise

to a severe civil war that has taken the life of a lot of people, as well as an indescribable extremism changing the cultural and social landscape of Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, this innocence is irrevocably lost in the middle stage or the phase of fighting the enemy; characterised by “a disenchantment experience”.

The Swallows of Kabul is a story about disillusionment and broken dreams, a story of people who have their plans called off and their innocence violated in a fraction of a second. Khadra conveys this dramatic transition from “innocence to cynicism” through every character namely women, artists and children. Khadra sheds light on the plight of all women before he exemplifies it through the character of Mussarat and Zuneira. Women who were, like beautiful swallows walking freely in a once liberal Afghanistan, are now seen like “subaltern subjects” and only objects” who can’t think wisely, hypocrite and who are distrustful” (Khadra 27). He adds “only ghosts, voiceless, charmless ghosts that pass practically unnoticed along the streets; flocks of infirm swallows –blue, yellow, often faded” (Ibid., 144).

A prominent example is Zunaira. She is described in the previous chapter as being a beautiful and a strong woman and an advocate for women’s rights. However, after the ascendancy of the Taliban, Zunaira finds herself living a forced life, a life that she has never planned or thought of. She is now a desperate housewife, a silenced woman who can be beaten to death in case she leaves home without her husband or a male family member. Due to the war, Zunaira is frustrated; she was expecting development and improvement but she is doomed and degenerate instead, especially after being dismissed from her job and finding herself in the same situation she used to resist.

Zunaira is an epitome of the majority of intellectual Afghan women that find hard to accept the “burqa” which is imposed on them. She finds it hard to replace her dresses and trousers with a burqa, that is why she refuses to wear it as she considers it as being more “poisonous than the shirt of Nessus”, an insult to women which steals their identity. It symbolizes only “degradation and prison” with its “mask over the eyes like the Kaleidoscopic grillwork over a window and “its gloves, which take away the sense of touch” (Khadra 98). Thus, Zunaira prefers then staying at home rather than going out and seeing the atrocities of the Taliban. She tells her husband:

I don't feel like coming home heartsick, Mohsen. The things that go on in the streets will just ruin my dayI refuse to wear a burqa, of all the burdens they've put on us, that's the most degrading. The shirt of Nessus wouldn't do as much damage to my dignity as that wretched getup. It cancels my face and takes away my identity and turns me into an object. Here, at least, I'm me, Zunaira, Mohsen Ramat's wife, age thirty-two, former magistrate, dismissed by obscurantists.....don't ask me to give up my name, my features, the color of my eyes and the shape of my lips.....don't ask me to become something less than a shadow, an anonymous thing rustling around in a hostile place. (Ibid.,77- 78)

In addition to this, Zunaira and Mohsen's couple illustrates very well the loss of innocence. Under the pressure of war, their love and respect for one another fall apart and end up tragically. Love has no more its place in a city where both hate and violence are the new currency. The turning point of this happy and loving couple is when Mohsen insists on his wife to go for a walk in Kabul, thinking that love and lovers still have a place in “a city grabbed by fanatics whose official language is the whip” (Ibid., 124). Once in the street, the couple is stopped and humiliated by the Taliban militiamen. Mohsen is beaten to join the mosque and Zunaira “wrapped in her burqa”, has been forced to wait for him under the “blazing heat” for more than two hours. After this incident, the couple splits up, leaving their love behind anger and hate.

Mohsen stands for any Afghan man. He is initially described as a passionate and a loving husband. He becomes now, a violent man like Atiq. A man who “sleeps soundly” after witnessing a public execution and “when he wakes up, his head is as empty as a jug” (Khadra 9). His non-acceptance of Zunaira’s rejection makes him harsh. He feels beaten, confused and can no more understand what is happening to him. He has made of the cemetery and the graves his own refuge. He keeps wandering around Kabul and reminisces about his once happy marriage that is now “dead and gone”. He sadly meets his tragic end, when he is accidentally killed by his loving wife, the wife who was “his only reason for living”. He dies with Zunaira’s sentence “I don’t want to see you again, Mohsen Ramat” still resounding in his ears. (Ibid.,130).

Thus, the love of this once happy couple which was supposed to flourish has weathered in Zunaira’s cell and Mohsen’s grave. The tragic end of their marriage shows the ironic gap between what this couple had expected before the war and what actually happened to them. This gap which conveys in fact disillusionment corresponds to Fussell’s explanation of the disillusionment of WW1, in the sense that the war was fought to “to end all wars and utopia would rise” but in reality this was just an illusion and never happened. (Fussell 32).

Another important issue through which Khadra highlights the loss of innocence and the “change from felicity to despair” as Fussell refers to it, is the disillusionment of the intellectuals and the artists during the Taliban era. Many people like, Mohsen, or Nazeeh who is Atiq’s neighbor, were rich and educated but have been degraded by war and were turned into lost people possessing nothing. They have lost their homes, families, friends, careers and their future plans; even their reason seems to be lost, thinking of nothing but leaving the city which has brought their doom. As an example is Nazeeh telling Atiq about his plan to flee Kabul: “I’m never coming back to Kabul, it’s an accursed city. No one can

be saved here. Too many people are dying, and the streets are full of widows and orphans. (Khadra 67)

The ruthlessness and the incomprehension of the Taliban have led to the degeneration of people. Khadra says that "human degeneration is deeper than any abyss" (Ibid., 72) as the war has killed people inside. They have become passive subjects, who follow the "mad crowd" and fall in the trap of stagnation and crime. They find pleasure in stoning each other and carrying out other kinds of executions, losing thus their humanity and innocence. They have become insensitive toward one another. They have lost their compassion and empathy toward one another. As an Afghan intellectual man Mohsen illustrates the striking shift in his behavior. He does not understand how he has succumbed and stoned a woman in the public execution like Atiq who finds pleasure in hurting people's feelings including his wife because war has taught him not "to get too attached to anybody whom a simple caprice, a change of mood, may take away from him" (Khadra 86).

Another ironic element with which Khadra marks the gap between the "ideal and the actual" are the children portrayed in *The Swallows of Kabul*. As it is widely known, children are deemed to be a symbol of prosperity, new beginning, and the hope of every nation. However, in the Kabul described by Khadra, they represent the ugly face and the saddest phase in Afghanistan's history. They are nothing but the inevitable result of "a chaotic world bled white by a series of uncommonly violent wars." (Ibid., 23) The war has left them as "dirty creatures" or as "brats whose faces are covered with flies and snot" (Ibid., 6). They are shown neither pity nor love, as an example, is a vendor who keeps shouting at some children who play next to his stall, he says "you can't stay there!...you're bringing my stall bad luck, not to mention all kinds of bugs." (Ibid.). These children are fascinated by war and show early sparkles of a chaotic and merciless future. They do not have a country that will assure them a

better life and make of them peaceful, autonomous, and responsible citizens .They will be shaped according to the city of Kabul and will grow to be no more than “terrorists” or “fanatics”. Khadra shows this loss of innocence through the “rifles” and “swords” that have become the main fascination and the favourite toys of children, and when he gives a harsh and detailed image of children finding pleasure in “lynching a dog to death” or when “playing execution games” .All these scenes are seen in fact as a “preparation to lynch men in the future” (ibid.,19), paving the way thus to the perpetuation of violence from one generation to another and a continuous process of ignorance and barbarism.

III.2 . Loss of Innocence in Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Like Khadra’s *Swallows of Kabul*, the loss of innocence is a significant issue in this novel. Almost every character, experience it as a result of the war violence, cruelty and oppression, that come along during three decades : the Soviet war, the civil war, and Taliban tyranny. In fact, the war changed the cultural, political, religious and social structures of Afghanistan as a result of the destruction of the prevailing innocence and illusions. The shift from one era to another mirrors primarily the degrading and radical change of people, notably women, elite and artists. In fact, unlike khadra who displays primarily the war under the Taliban regime, Hosseini goes back and starts from 1978 with the coup of Colonel Abdul Qadar against Daoud’s khan government.

The first characters that strikingly mirror the loss of innocence are women. From the perspectives of two Afghani women who come to share the same pain and agony, Hosseini reveals the loss of innocence of Mariam and Laila. Originate of different backgrounds; they come to witness “a bitter taste of endurance and suffocating chains of oppression and violence”. Married at very young age, both are forced to leave out all their dreams and

wonder and become mature women. They are called to grow up at much quicker speed before they even reach puberty.

Mariam has been an innocent girl, longing the days of her father's visits. Her father provides her with all what she needs. However, she does not know what is going on around her. She has not experienced yet the outdoors of their kolba. As a child of 15 years old, she married the ugly Rasheed; while she yearns to start over a new life and cuts from her history as a harami. Unfortunately, she witnesses the start of a new suffering.

This phase corresponds to what Fussell explains in his paradigm of war memoirs; "the first stage is a sinister and absurd or a farcical preparation" before the second stage that is characterised by "disenchantment" or loss of innocence. (Fussell 130). Indeed, what happens in Mariam's life at this level is "farcical" and "absurd". First, her forceful marriage to Rasheed is no more than a legitimate rape. A girl that has been playing in the backyard days before finds herself carrying a child of her own. Second, Mariam thought of Rasheed's sorrow, on the loss of his child, as an opportunity to bring them together, "she [tells] herself that they would make good companions after all." (Hosseini 187). Yet, she comes to be totally deceived. Moreover, Mariam's several miscarriages turn Rasheed to a bully husband who scorns and belittles her at every occasion. At this stage, Hosseini, is in fact, overshadowing what will come later with the beginning of the war.

The civil war has brought Laila to Mariam's house. It leaves her as an orphan after it has taken her parents and her friends. Laila loses innocence the day she has to accept the marriage of Rasheed, a man of 60 years old, while she is only 14. As said previously, Laila has brought up surrounded with her father's love, and has the freedom to attend school, play and walk with her friends, including going to a cinema with Tariq. Unfortunately, her aspirations come to vanish away.

Laila passed that winter of 1992 sweeping the house, scrubbing the pumpkin colored walls of the bedroom she shared with Rasheed, washing clothes outside in a big copper lagoon . . . she felt lost then, casting about, like a shipwreck survivor, no shore in sight, only miles and miles of water (Ibid., 231).

The above quote shows Laila's dream of being an independent woman is limited to one goal which is procreating or being a housewife. Like what Fussell says about the Great War "that fostered a disillusioned modernist sensibility", Hosseini's characters embody this feeling of disappointment and growing sense of hopelessness.

Laila is a significant example of all Afghani women that are brought to a state of bondage under strict Islamic rules imposed by the Taliban. Born in modern household, she attends school between 1987 and 1990. During this time, all women who lived in the cities were encouraged to attend school, work outside home, and vote for candidates in parliament. Besides, women were not forced to wear the veil since the government was trying to modernize the country. In the contrary, they show their beauty and go out with full make up mainly in the cities.

modern Afghan women...walked among strangers with makeup on their faces and nothing on their heads.. Mariam watched them cantering uninhibited down the street, sometimes with a man, sometimes alone[.] These women were all swinging handbags and rustling skirts. Mariam even spotted one smoking behind the wheel of a car. Their nails were long, polished pink or orange, their lips red as tulips. They walked in high heels ...They wore dark sunglasses, and, when they breezed by, Mariam caught a whiff of their perfume. (Hosseini 43-44)

With the advent of the Taliban, women are deprived of their rights, education, and liberation. They are banned to laugh loudly, to play sports, to even talk or shake hands with non-mahram males. They become more than anytime subjects to the male's authority, only the elder member of the family can decide about their personal choices even when it comes to go out. Their potentials are just hindered behind the walls of Afghanistan.

The Afghani Women's bondage has been both an internal oppression (home life) that depicts the males dominance and patriarchal oppression that is accentuated and external one (public life) in society. Women are generally removed from public sphere. A prominent example is the doctor women whose rights to work have been restricted. "Here was a woman (doctor), she thought, who had understood that she was lucky to even be working, that there was always something, something else, that they could take away"(150). The ones who could work has been compelled to work in a burqa "Beneath the burqa, the doctor shook her head curtly"(Ibid). All women are subjugated to be hidden behind a blue scrim, devoid of femininity. Rasheed is a prominent example, who insists that his wives wear a burqa as a protection of his " nang and namoos".

While the former communist regime's policy, has settled the equality between men and women, to get an education. The Taliban's first decrees is that "Girls are forbidden from attending school. All schools for girls will be closed immediately". (Hosseini144) unfortunately, they prevent an entire generation of girls from becoming educated so that they remain in power without having to worry about a women's uprising. The cynicism become epidemic, the age of faith become an age of doubt. Besides, women become pitiable since they continue to be jailed for leaving brutal husbands "None of the women in Mariam's cell were serving time for violent crime-they were all there for the common offense of running away from home."(Ibid.,190) or traded like chickens. In fact, the situation comes upside down for women with no redeeming feature. Hosseini's female protagonists exemplify this damnation, what has pushed them to transcend their own limitations, to revolt, then perform an act of self-sacrifice.

Furthermore, Laila's parents illustrate the move from happiness to cynicism. Hakim describes his wife as a loving, joyful and a vibrant woman before the departure of her sons

Ahmed and Noor to the jihad. He says: “she used to be adventurous then, and...so alive. She was just about the liveliest, happiest person I'd ever met...She had this laugh. I swear it's why I married her, Laila, for that laugh”. (ibid., 83). However, the death of her children shook her to the core and drives her to further desperation. She could not understand and accept the death of her children.

Like Khadra, Hosseini shed lights on the disillusionment of the elite after the Taliban has taken power. The character of Hakim epitomises this radical change. As a professor at Kabul University, a bookish man with liberal thinking, is compelled to drop Laila out of school since "The streets became so unsafe" (Ibid.,177) with the growing war between the Mujahideen. His views about education and women, his open-mindedness are mocked by Rasheed. As a matter of fact, Rasheed attitude's towards the educated people, is no more than a result of the societal dynamics, the Taliban's ideology. Rasheed describes him to Mariam as a mouse: “the husband fancies himself some kind of educated intellectual. But he's a mouse. Look at him. Doesn't he look like a mouse?”(Hosseini 45).

The Afghan culture and the artistic scene are profaned by the Taliban regime. They burned countless films, music tapes, books, and paintings. Consequently, the artists lose purpose and do not know what they must do. It becomes an age of suspicion. The artists turn to bitter cynic irony. A prominent example is a painter who is convicted for painting flamingos with bare legs. Subsequently, he uses ingenious trickery and “make the flamingos decent” by painting trousers on every bird with watercolour and wash them up later on. As concerns, the outrageous behaviour of the Taliban towards Afghanistan's history monuments, we invite you to go back to the first chapter (to avoid repetition).

From what has been said above, it is clear that both novels present the loss of innocence among a central messages released by the two authors. Our reading allows us to

recognise how Khadra and Hosseini explore the way war has ravaged Afghanistan and turned the lives of its people upside down. They have shown the unexpected deviation of people's lives from hope to disenchantment and cynicism as dreams and plans end up in jail, public executions and madness. Indeed, the oppositional schemata followed by the authors who start by revealing the innocent side then the loss of innocence unfolds the irony as a proper response to the war. Thus, like the disillusionment witnessed during the WW1, the Afghani war has brought the characters to a bondage situations. Their lives are deprived of their fundamental rights of work, education and freedom. The cynicism draws the country to sink in a dark sphere.

2. Religious Extremism: Political and Social Role of The Taliban

In this section we are going to analyze khadra and Hosseini's exposition of the religious fervor and fanaticism in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Our analysis will explore how the Afghan revolutionaries after the soviet war have turned to religion in order to rebuild Afghanistan, or how they "looked to the birth of Islam as their paradigm, and saw themselves as engaged in a struggle against paganism, oppression and empire to establish, or rather restore, a true Islamic order." (Lewis 1). Therefore, in the novels under study, khadra and Hosseini lay bare the Taliban extremist regime which consists mainly on fighting to build an Islamic state based on the "Sharia".

In 1996, Kabul falls in the Hands of the Taliban "Afghan and Pakistani madrassa graduates [...] a group focused on Sharia-based law and order. Their leaders were "radical Islamists, many of whom were self- educated holy men." (Ibid., 36). Thus Afghanistan was called "the Islamic state of Afghanistan" and Islamic jihad council was formed. The French scholar Olivier Roy describes this situation:

The men who formed the original core of the Taliban had learned and imparted a version of Islam that differed significantly from other

fundamentalists. . . . [The] Madrassa education instilled in Pakistan focused on returning Afghan society to an imagined pre-modern period in which a purer form of Islam was practiced by a more righteous Muslim society. This made the Taliban approach to governance somewhat utopian in its attempt to battle the enemies of modernity and non-orthodoxy. (Roy quoted in Collins 39)

Being thus under the control of the Taliban, Afghanistan has been dragged back into ignorance, fanaticism and reaches the stage “of the atmosphere of the Middle Ages” into which the WW1 soldiers were plunged under the Great war atrocities, as it is claimed by Fussell.

1.The Extremist Taliban Rule in *The Swallows of Kabul*

As it is mentioned above, the aim of the Taliban is to make of Islam “the state religion” and this is through establishing “Holly laws” which in fact restrict the lives of individuals and kill the liveliness of their city. Among these rules that Khadra focuses on is the prohibition of music and all kinds of art and entertainment are “ranked among the deadly sins” (khadra 31). Paul Fussell argues that when war collides with art it leads to its destruction (40) and khadra too criticizes the fact that music “which was the true breath of life” is now deemed to be against the will of Allah, seen as a “sin” or “haram” with “the base meaning of forbid” (Lewis 71). An example given by khadra is the conversation between Atiq and his friend Nazeeh about the fate of entertainment under the monopolizing power of the Taliban.

“Do you think we we’ll ever be able to hear music in Kabul one day?”

“Who knows?“I’d like to hear a song. You can’t imagine how much I’d like to hear a song. A song with instrumental accompaniment sung in a voice that shakes you from head to foot. Do you think one day-or one night-we’ll be able to turn on the radio and listen to the bands getting together again and playing until they pass out?”

(Khadra 84)

This quote shows how Atiq and Nazih are deceived and how much they miss listening to music. Indeed, everything turns now around religion and people are told about the purpose of life which doesn’t go beyond pleasing and worshipping God.

As the law and order is based on “sharia”, the Taliban have established “The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and the Extermination of Sin” (Collins 40). The religious police or the militiamen then are ordered to beat and punish every person that disobeys the rules, being men or women, young or old. Once in the street everything is forbidden, even laughing or talking about women is considered “degrading” (Khadra 26). Khadra relates how the Taliban police agent shouts at Mohsen once:

Do you think you’re at the circus?“No laughing in the street

if you have any sense of shame left, You’ll go home and lock yourself inside.

Then, another militia man turns and whips Zunaira across the hip after she tries to speak and touch her husband: “Don’t touch him, you! Stay in your place!” And don’t speak in the presence of a stranger.” (Khadra 89-90) .The above dialogue gives a gloomy image of Mohsen and Zunaira’s life being whipped and shouted at, after endeavouring to hold hands and laugh in public.

Serious crimes such as “adultery” and “murder” are punished publicly in a great ceremony especially when it is about executing a woman. To show the mercilessness of the act, Khadra gives the reader a detailed picture of people executing an “adulterous woman” or a “sinner” “an impure woman” as she is referred to by the Taliban. He describes in detail how she is taken by the militia women, and how people gaze at her with “eyes eager to see blood” and “mouths dripping saliva”, how she is “planted in the hole” and “buried in earth up to her thighs” surrounded by people waiting the order of “*Allahu akbar*” to start stoning her. (Ibid., 13, 14). This act is justified by reciting verses from the “Quran” and blaming people for “having shut their ears to the Muezzin’s call in order to hearken to the ribaldries of Satan” (Ibid). On the executed woman the mullah says:

This woman knew exactly what she was doing. The intoxication of lust turned her away from the path of the Lord. Today, the Lord turns His back on her. She has no right to his mercy, no right to the pity of

the faithful. She has lived in dishonor; so shall she die”*Allahu akbar*”
(Khadra 13-14)

We have mentioned in the introduction of this section how Fussell argues that WW1 led to the emergence of “rumors” which were “consolatory in function” or used “to blacken the enemy” or “to make sense of events which otherwise would seem merely accidental or calamitous” (Fussell 117,121) . In *The Swallows of Kabul*, Khadra makes use of rumors, too, whose aim is mainly to sway people to join the ranks of the Taliban and to spread the idea of “Jihad.” The rumors are mainly about the dead “Mujahedeen” who are all seen as being “blessed by the Lord” as despite the boiling heat, their dead bodies “never smelled bad” and “they don’t stink, and their flesh doesn’t decay” and above all, “a kind of musky perfume surrounds them all night long, from sunset to sunrise”(ibid 44-45). Another rumor with which the Taliban attract young men is that they make them believe that after death, the mujahid “will find a throng of houris, beautiful as a thousand suns, waiting to welcome him”.(Ibid., 96)

Khadra also focuses on how the Taliban use Islam as a weapon to manipulate and change people’s mind in the purpose of spreading of “the Holly War” in the sense of “a war ordained by God” and which can also be translated to “jihad” as Bernard Lewis, an eminent historian of Islam and the Middle East, asserts in his *The Political Language of Islam* (1988). In the Taliban ideology and teaching, the word “jihad” has been given a “military connotation”, meaning to fight all the enemies of Islam or the “*kafir*” , “the unbeliever”, i.e “he who does not believe in the apostolate of Muhammad and the authenticity of the revelation which he brought” (Lewis 4). The chief aim of Jihad and the Mujahedeen who consider themselves as “soldiers of God” is then to purify the Islamic lands from all kinds of sins and to make of Islam a universal religion and of Arabic, the language of the Quran the main language of all mankind. Khadra exposes the use of religion for jihad reasons through a

sermon given by Mullah Bashir in the mosque, who is described as being determined with his “threatening language and gestures” along with his “alert eyes” and “stringy beard” to recruit as many people as possible to join the ranks of the Taliban and promote the principles of Islam. He says:

No doubt about it my brothers. It's as true as the sun rising in the east..... That the moment of glory is within our reach that the imam El-Mahdi is among us, that our path is bathed in light. Those who would doubt this for a second are none of ours. The Devil dwells in them, and Hell will find inextinguishable fuel in their flesh.....The Muslim peoples are gathering their forces, and gathering their most deeply held convictions soon there will be but one language on earth, but one law, one sole command (Khadra 93-94)

According to the extremist laws of the Taliban, the “ultimate criterion of group identity and loyalty is Islam” as it is Islam which “distinguishes between “self and the other, between insider and outsider, between brother and stranger” and not “the language”, “the ethnic origins” or “habitation”.(Lewis 4). The non Muslim is then seen as “the other” who is different from the Islamic group. “Islam extremism is starkly divided between “Us and Them” as it has been asserted by Lewis. According to Fussell’s concept of “Gross Dichotomy”, the trench experience “with its collective isolation, its “defensiveness” and its nervous obsession with what “the other side” is up to ; establishes a model of modern political, social, artistic, and psychological polarization”(Fussell 76). Thus it is always the other which is “grotesque” and “inhuman” and thus he is “an enemy”. He says:

We are all here on this side; the enemy over there . we are individuals with names and personal identities he is a mere collective entity. We are visible; he is invisible. We are normal, he is grotesque our appurtenances are natural, his bizarre he is not as good as we are (Ibid., 75)

This binary opposition between “us” and “them” is well presented in *the Swallows of Kabul* whereby the “Holy War” is between the east “us” against the West “them”. Khadra asserts that Since the west is seen as “the other” or “the grotesque he”, it is described in contrast to the Muslim East “us”. So, it is seen as the land of the “kufar” where “scruple, piety and charity” no

more exist. It does all what Islam does not, and all what the Lord forbids. People there are so free that “women willingly give themselves to vice and men marry one another and bodies are sold and bought openly” (Khadra 95) .Though being developed, it is a world based on lies, it is nothing more than “an illusion whose way of life angers the Lord: khadra says:

[...]..The west is finished, it's over and done with, its rising stench smothers the ozone layer. It is a world of lies.... An illusion, an absurd, unsubstantial phantom ... the west is a hoax, an enormous farce, a dissolving dream. Its pseudoprogress is a flight forward, its colossal façade a masquerade [...] it lost its faith, it lost its soul, and we will not help it to regain either one (Ibid., 95)

Thus the West “ He” which threatens the East “us” must be destroyed, or, if not destroyed, contained and disarmed or at least “patronized” as Fussell argues about the “He” and “Us” relationship referring to WW1 (Fussell 75). In the same way khadra’s narrative refers to this binary, he says:

As for those who are martyrs to the cause of evil, they will depart from the calvary of of this earth only to abide in Gahenna forever. Like the carrion that they are, their corpses will rot on the battlefields and in the memories of the survivors. They will have no right either to the Lord’s mercy or to our pity. And nothing will prevent us from purifying the land of the *mumineen*, so that from Jakarta to Jericho, from Dakar to Mexico city, from Khartoum to Sao Paolo, from Tunisia Chicago*Allahu akbar*... (Khadra 96- 97)

Therefore, as WW1 had made people to grow sceptic and cynical of religion, the Taliban war has caused the same effects on people as they have lost faith in God and they feel as being abandoned by God and left to suffer alone. “They have turned their backs on the day in order to face the night” and they see that “patron saints have been dismissed from their posts” and that “prophets are dead, and their ghosts are crucified even in the hearts of children.” (Khadra 2- 3)

b. The Extremist Taliban Rule in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

like Khadra, Hosseini also draws a vivid picture of Afghanistan under Taliban theocracy. He presents the Taliban like an extremist militia who controlled Herat in 1994, then Kabul, on September 27th, 1996. They have imposed on people an ideology that seeks to turn the wheel of history backward to establish theocratic dictatorships on Afghanistan.

In fact, The Taliban's "*sharia*" law has nothing in common with Afghan religious culture. Most Afghan Muslims belong to the "Hanafi" school of thought. The latter is given official status in the laws under the king Nadir Shah who issued a new constitution in 1931(Wahab et Youngerman, 2007: 110). On the other hand, the Taliban fighters has been recruited and educated at "*madrisas*" Islamic religious schools in Pakistan, as Hosseini explains in Rasheed conversation with Mariam:

They were a guerrilla force... made up of young Pashtun men whose families had fled to Pakistan during the war against the Soviets. Most of them had been raised-some even born-in refugee camps along the Pakistani border, and in Pakistani madrasas, where they were schooled in Shari'a by mullahs. Their leader was a mysterious, illiterate, one-eyed recluse named Mullah Omar, who, Rasheed said with some amusement, called himself Ameer-ul-Mumineen Leader of the Faithful
(Hosseini 143)

Fussell assumes that the indescribable terror of the war has pushed the soldiers to come close to religion as a consolation of the calamities of war. Like in Khadra's novel, Hosseini displays the effect of war on the Afghanistan consciousness, as the Taliban call for a return to the pure "Fundamentals" of Islam, a return back to an "imagined utopian" prophetic era. "They believed in the inevitability of Islamic law for ensuring the peace, security of life, property and dignity of people" Sher Muammad Stankzai, the acting foreign minister of Taliban, speaks on Voice of Sharia on 20th November 1996 and declared that God has revealed these laws to Muhamad (AS). He adds that those who consider imposition of this law against rights are insulting all Muslims and their beliefs. (Peter Marsden in Qamar 2004)

The suffering of the soldiers in the trenches of WWI, and their association with the “Christ” sacrifice can be paralleled with the sacrifice of the “guerrillas” or the Moujahideen as they engaged in a holy war against a non-Islamic government. The legacy of the Soviets and their interference in their life brought them back to Islamic extremism that has taken its root in the absence of any movements capable of giving an alternative to change society. In addition to what has been said, the rise of radical Islamic Fundamentalism can only be explained as a result of the social conditions of the region as a result of three decades of war.

[The war] reflects the desperate searching on the part of the oppressed masses for a way out of the seemingly eternal hell of poverty, hunger, unemployment, and disease [...] In the absence of any worldly salvation, many seek solace in religion.”(,1993 quoted in www.socialistalternative.org/right-wing-political-islam-taliban/rise-taliban-islamic-fundamentalism)

When the Taliban seizes Kabul in the fall of 1996, Hosseini portrays Kabul as it has awoken to find the former communist president Najibullah hanged in the Ariana square along with his young brother. The Taliban have dragged Najibullah from his sanctuary at the UN headquarters near Darulaman Palace. They have tortured him for hours because “He was a communist and a kafir .This is what we do with infidels who commit crimes against Islam!” (Hosseini 143) a young man who warns the crowd that this is what happens to the unfaithful. This scene confirms genuinely Lewis’ definition of a “*kafir*” in his *The Political Language of Islam* (1988), as the essence of a “jihad” for him is to purify the Islamic lands from sins and sinners. The Mujahideen or “freedom fighters” echoes the thoughts of religious leaders “the believers” that struggle against the “non believers”. Similarly to what Fussell claims about the soldiers “fellow-sufferer” journey that accounts the Christian experience to a salvation or redemption.

Fussell’s concept of “Gross dichotomy” is strikingly omnipresent in both Hosseini’s and Khadra’s narratives. The distinction between “us and “him”/ “he” comes under his

conception of the presence of an enemy “as persisting imaginative habit” that give “significance to a modern landscape” (Fussell 75-76). Fussell’s concept crosses with Lewis’ one, on the contrast between a “brother” and “stranger” as a mere criteria of belonging to “Islamic group”. Hosseini reveals authentically the line that seems to divide the Taliban as “us” and anyone who doesn’t obey their rules as “him” or a “non -believer”. Hosseini emphasizes the activeness of the religious police, as a landmark that dichotomizes the Taliban and the sinners according to the public policy decrees as the following quote shows

Laila heard of men being dragged from the streets, accused of skipping namaz, and shoved into mosques”. She learns also “Marco Polo Restaurant, near Chicken Street, had been turned into an interrogation center. Sometimes screaming was heard from behind its black-painted windows. Everywhere, the Beard Patrol roamed the streets in Toyota trucks on the lookout for clean-shaven faces to bloody.
(Hosseini 143)

Moreover, right from the beginning of the novel, Hosseini makes a contrast between the Mullah Faizullah’s, Mariam’s Koran teacher, and the “Fundamentalist” Islamic law laid down by the Mujahideen and “arch-conservative” Taliban. Through the character of Mariam, Hosseini highlights the perception of a merciful and forgiving God, on which she believes till the end of her life and the one preached by the Taliban. The Mullah’s liberal interpretation of teachings of Islam, overshadows the religious extremism that comes later on in the novel. Even though, he admits that he does not always understand the meaning of the Koran’s words, the mullah finds comfort in them and teaches Mariam to do the same. Hosseini hints ironically towards the aberrant Taliban conservatism and the tolerant attitudes of Islam in Afghanistan and deepens Fussell’s concept of a “versus habit” that characterises the ‘modern perception’.

Within a matter of days after the Taliban victory, the new leaders issued a chart of the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” where they have introduced a brutally repressive form of the “*sharia*, law, ever issued. This chart upholds strict Islamic laws that aims at purging the

society of all Western, or non-Islamic influences, that have corrupted the Afghan culture and led “society astray”. Officer Mullah Omer underlines the Taliban goal as he says : “his main goal was rid Afghanistan of corrupt, western oriented time servers”(Qamar 61)

Accordingly, “The Voice of Sharia” is blared in Loudspeakers up on mosques, on the radio, written in flyers and pitched into the streets. (The charte taken from Hosseini, 2007: is given in appendix3). The Taliban “onerous” laws has been immediately applied by the Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Suppression of Vice, or what is called “Amar Bin Maroof Nahi Anil Munkir” (ibid: 40) which deployed a religious police force responsible of imposing their “puritanical codes”, as well as a severe corporal punishment given for open public constantly. (Wahab et Youngerman 216-217)

Among the cardinal decrees of “*Sharia*’s Hudood”or the “*Sharia* laws” that provoked a widespread consternation are the ones given at the attention of women. The ones who have been free during three decades in Kabul, are exposed to some extremist rules. They are banned from streets or veiled with burqa, they are no longer allowed in public without a male relative, banned from school... etc. And within few days, the show of public executions starts out; the “spectacles” of death and blood are issued out. Rasheed is shown as a fervent spectator

Then, on Fridays, he went to Ghazi Stadium, bought a Pepsi, and watched the spectacle. In bed, he made Laila listen as he described with a queer sort of exhilaration the hands he'd seen severed, the lashings, the hangings, the beheadings. "I saw a man today slit the throat of his brother's murderer," he said one night, blowing (ibid).

Through the character of Rasheed, Hosseini gives us a Talib archetype who eulogizes the Taliban to be “pure and incorruptible” a “decent Muslim boy”. He swears by Allah “Wallah, when they come, they will clean up this place and bring peace and order”(Hosseini, 143). By contrast, the Taliban are also shown as “Whip-toting,naswar”. Like in *Swallows ok Kabul*, the Taliban patrol on the lookout for the “indiscreet laugh, the unveiled face” to

impose their “puritanical codes”. The Taliban tries to achieve power through intimidation and public shaming in order to make people afraid of them.

It was the raids. [...] Sometimes monthly raids, sometimes weekly. Of late, almost daily. Mostly, the Taliban confiscated stuff, gave a kick to someone's rear, whacked the back of a head or two. But sometimes there were public beatings, lashings of soles and palms.
(Hosseini 146)

Laila is an example of a woman that is kicked and beaten by the Militia men every time she visits her daughter Aziza. When she “went home, she laid on her stomach, feeling like a stupid, pitiable animal, and hissed as Mariam arranged damp cloths across her bloodied back and thighs”. (146)

Moreover, the militia men continue to ‘watch’ people and draw them to the interrogation chamber used to torture every citizen caught for a minor infraction in order to set out their order. Hosseini says:

Laila heard of men being dragged from the streets, accused of skipping namaz, and shoved into mosques. She learned that Marco Polo Restaurant, near Chicken Street, had been turned into an interrogation center. Sometimes screaming was heard from behind its black-painted windows. Everywhere, the Beard Patrol roamed the streets in Toyota trucks on the lookout for clean-shaven faces to bloody
(Hosseini 147).

The public execution of Mariam reflects the mercileness of the Taliban regime. Hosseini describes in details when she is taken by wagon to the Ghazi stadium by a young man with a “deep-set bright eyes” and “slightly pointed face” The reader can follow with much overwhelming feeling how Mariam “quivering voice” expresses her fear in front of a crowded stadium and “thousands of eyes” bore down on her. She has feared that she might scream or vomit or even wet herself in her last moments. However, Mariam’s final words were verses from the Koran

He has created the heavens and the earth with the truth; He makes the night cover the day and makes the day overtake the night, and He has made the sun and the moon subservient; each one runs on to an assigned term; now surely He is the Mighty, the Great Forgiver
(Hosseini 200)

Unlike Khadra who shows people growing sceptical and cynical towards religion and loses faith in God, Hosseini emphasizes the resistance of people to the Taliban damnation. Mariam continues till her last breath to follow the teaching of Mullah Faizullah that has preached a tolerable Islam. She remained faithful toward God “the best of the merciful ones” and asks him to “Forgive and have mercy” on her. (Ibid., 195)

Furthermore, Mariam’s trial in front of three talib judges, reveals the concern Hosseini displays towards the status of women under Taliban Fundamentalist regime. The doubt of the judge in her reasoning and inability to testify is scarcely not surprising. ‘After all she is a woman, she can’t think like a man’. His argument, actually, sends us back centuries ago when doctrines of race determine the superiority of one upon another. This scene can be paralleled with Fussell’s perception of the rise of “un-modern superstitions” and the return back to the “medieval modes of thought” as a consequence of an exhausting WWI. Likely, The Afghani war has affected several ranges of society which are projected through the character of Mariam and the judge :

God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can. Western doctors and their science have proven this. This is why we require only one male witness but two female ones.” (Hosseini 324)

Hosseini’s use of this ‘pseudo’ scientific doctrine is an attempt to empty the ironical discourse of the Taliban judge. The author shows how such an authoritarian organism can rely on erroneous facts to justify their acts.

Finally, Hosseini reveals how the Taliban extremism draws the population to a chaos. The privilege given to men over women draws the Taliban to put them in different hospitals. Thus, the women are sent to woman-only hospital which “had no clean water [...], no oxygen, no medications, no electricity” (Hosseini 148).As a consequence of this absurd rule, Laila is compelled to undergo a caesarean section fully conscious:

Inside the old, dingy operating room Laila's eyes snapped open. Then her mouth opened. She held like this, held, held, shivering, the cords in her neck stretched, sweat dripping from her face, her fingers crushing" (Ibid., 150)

Women has been denied the right to access to healthcare. This scene shows again the hollowness of The Taliban regime who could not solve the economic and social problems since it has no concrete alternative or forthcoming plans to face and solve the people's problems like housing, industrial development or healthcare.

From what has been said, it is clear that the novels under study unfold a changing of Afghanistan, at the political and social level. This country has undergone the rise of a destructive extremism that transforms it to a hollow shadow, where people lost every daily life landmark. Our reading of the two novels parallels Fussell's conception about the relationship between war and religion. The close of the soldiers towards the Christ ideal and the scepticism that resulted at the end of the exhausting war, is quietly epitomized in the two narratives. The ironical paradigm of thoughts namely the "Gross dichotomy" and "versus habit" is omnipresent. It reveals the Taliban attitudes towards the Afghan ordinary people.

The two authors reveal the consequences of the Taliban extremism. The ones who are driven to apply god's will and uproot all what is against the application of "sharia". However, Khadra's use of diction, description and the scenes he exposes are a slightly different from Hosseini. This can only be rooted in his military background. Khadra who has already been a counter-terrorism officer in the Algerian army is familiar with the jihadists and the atrocity of "jihad" during "the Black decade" more than Hosseini who has enjoyed a life of a writer till his visit to Afghanistan in 2003.

V. General Conclusion

This study has explored the notion of war and its ironical discourse in the selected works of two contemporary writers Yasmina Khadra's *Swallows of Kabul*(2004) and Hosseini's *A thousand Splendid Suns*(2007) using Fussell's concepts of irony of war in literary narratives. The two authors share the same view towards the devastating effects of war on people, mainly on memory, behaviours and attitudes, on space and socio-cultural environment. Both of them relate the war through the same ironical discourse that best describe the horror, the obscene and indescribable scenes of war. Yet, the social and cultural background of the two authors inscribes some differences in their use of diction, description and imagery all through their novels.

At the surface level, *Swallows of Kabul* and *A thousand Splendid Suns* can be read like stories of two couples and two women brought to the edge of despair within a Taliban violent society. However, the underlying level reveals an ironical discourse adopted to relate the exhausting war and its consequences in Afghanistan. The two narratives have displayed the significant impact of war on space and socio-cultural environment. The exploration of the setting showed the destruction of culture and history and the rise of an outrageous and absurd environment that paved the way to shape the characters personalities and behaviours. The exploration of characterisation has shown the two oppositional patterns that are the outcome of a calamitous war. We come to understand that their lives are shattered in a way or another, they are all victims of this war. Nevertheless, both novelists opened a glimmer of hope through the spiritual rebirth of the heroes that vehicles their wonder to view other peaceful days in Afghanistan. For the thematic study, it has revealed some important issues: the loss of innocence and religious extremism. The latter displayed the awful consequences of war on the social, political and psychological levels.

In his narrative, Yasmina Khadra, an ex-Algerian army officer, who fought terrorism during the “Black Decade”, exposes his view on war. Khadra relates the war in Afghanistan, but alludes to Algeria. Thus, he presents the war as a universal experience. Khadra demonstrates through this novel that the war and religious extremism can break up anywhere in the world, under such circumstances and destroy any civilisation. Khadra’s gloomy description of the setting, the public executions and his harsh diction reflects his profound affection by the traumatic civil war in Algeria. On the contrary, Hosseini as an Afghan-American writer brings the reader closer to his country’s history and heritage, to show the glory of the pre-war Afghanistan as a cradle of civilisation before he relates what it becomes after the war.

This study has allowed us to change our perception on countries like Afghanistan and the people that are leaving in. The two novelists use the notion of war as a tool to tackle some important issues that fit their aspirations and search of new horizon. Hosseini, a UN special humanitarian envoy, whose goal is to get funds for his country, succeeded to get the attention of the world since his novel was a bestseller. For his part Yasmina Khadra, revealed the real image of “Jihad” used by the westerner to draw a negative perception of Afghanistan and broadly the Eastern region. Therefore, he could show the real extremism and respond to the Western mindset that considers any Muslim a terrorist. This comparative study can be extended to include other writers, from other areas and different languages to explore the ironical discourse in relation to war.

Appendix

Farsi words in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

Didi: sister

Inqilabi: revolution

Kolba: hut, dwelling, small/crude shelter

Mahram: close male relative

Namoos: pride

Nang: honor

Tahamul: to endure

Definitions of Northrop Frye's terminology

Archetype: A symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole.

Dianoia: The meaning of a work of literature, which may be the total pattern of its symbols (literal meaning), its correlation with an external body of propositions or facts (descriptive meaning), its theme, or relation as a form of imagery to a potential commentary (formal meaning), its significance as a literary convention or genre (archetypal meaning), or its relation to total literary experience (anagogic meaning).

High Mimetic: A mode of literature in which, as in most epics and tragedies, the central characters are above our own level of power and authority, though within the order of nature and subject to social criticism.

Low Mimetic: A mode of literature in which the characters exhibit a power of action which is roughly on our own level, as in most comedy and realistic fiction.

Mode: A conventional power of action assumed about the chief characters in fictional literature, or the corresponding attitude assumed by the poet toward his audience in thematic literature. Such modes tend to succeed one another in a historical sequence.

Pharmakos: The character in an ironic fiction who has the role of a scapegoat or arbitrarily chosen victim.

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