CHAPTER III

CONFLICTED ETHNOSCAPIC NATIONALISM: MEMORY, TRAUMA AND EXILE
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TRAUMA AND EXILE

Modern conflicts are waged on claims of resuscitating ‘imagined communities’ but when they culminate in constructing rigid structures, one person’s “imagined community” eventually becomes a “political prison” for the other (Appadurai, “Modernity” 32). The global dispute (with its parochial view) does overlook the implausibility of sustaining rigid identities in “localized or regional historical conjectures” (Hobsbawm 5). In order to salvage and sustain such power structures the ‘elite’ leaders espouse pugnacious measures. The attempts to modify nations into metonym of power are conscientiously carried out by perpetrators of violence. Such occasions evince discontent among the masses. While a few rebels dissent, the subjugated are coerced to comply with the dominant. Interestingly, then the traumatic zones of conflict turn into a colony and the anarchists are ousted as anti-nationals. As a result of this exodus in the recent times, the globalised space is inundated with exiles, immigrants, and migrants for whom nation remains a figment of imagination. The refugees who relocate themselves in the “in-between” territories configure new forms of national identities (Bhabha, “Location” 2). The liminal spheres consciously or unconsciously confer “new forms of postcolonial identity” on individuals (McLeod, “Beginning” 217). The “interstitial spaces” generate ethnoscapes that provide an opportunity to imagine a home according to the desire of the outcasts. Global flows increasingly facilitate and shift the perception of imagined worlds into imagined scapes. Appadurai in his *Modernity At Large* has construed them on various factors. In his view the landscapes comprising and representing various ethnicities in the present scenario are:
Perspectival construct inflected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as sub-national grouping and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighbourhoods and families. Indeed, the individual actor is the last focus of this perspectival set of landscapes (33)

These ethnoscapes hail the minorities and persuade them to generate multiple identities. By positioning oneself within these ethnoscapes the self (through narratives) attempts to theorize one’s cultural experiences and ideological standpoints. For the expatriates the scape becomes a surrogate nation.

The texts chosen for analysis are a mix of fiction and nonfiction. Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) and *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013) represent the fictional space while Abeer Y. Hoque’s memoir *Olive Witch* (2016), Kamin Mohammadi’s *The Cypress Tree: A Love Letter to Iran* (2011) Ghada Karmi’s *Return: A Palestinian Memoir* (2015) deal with the predicament of the transnational self in ethnoscapes. These texts have been chosen for study as they deal with the trauma of being displaced and having to perform desired identity/ies. While the fictional narratives start in the nation (home) and shift to ethnoscapes, the memoirs are set in ethnoscapes and then move in search of nations (home).

The select literatures discuss choices, family, relationships, freedom, home and honour from different perspectives. The male and female writers emerging from different
countries experiment with the idea of masculinity and femininity that go into the rendering of a nation. The women writers in their narratives employ memoir as a genre of “culture of confession and culture of testimony” to “locate the self” in the theory of nation (Gilmore, “Limits” 2). The texts in construing a male or female identity also deliberately construct /deconstruct a national identity in the process. They illustrate how scapes facilitate the exiles to create their version of nation by forging an idyllic space. This chapter purposefully confines itself to the texts written by Muslim authors so as to read the discourses of nation that challenge the “Islamophobia” of the West. Moreover the texts also reconstruct the ideas of Islam as perpetrating vulnerable women subjects who have to be rescued by the West.

The texts embody varied genres (memoirs and novels) and are located in different regions and cultures. The dissimilar nature of genres informs the ‘presumed accuracy’ of the text and the politics of simulation imprinted in the discourses of truth (that could be altered). This choice of form (novels and memoirs) would enable one to understand the heterogeneous genealogies embedded in the testimonies. In a way it would deconstruct the notion that scape is a homogenous structure embracing differences. Taking from this point the chapter argues how ethnoscape never liberates the self and result in unified entities. The section reads various representations of nations, politics of national consciousness and ambivalent identities in order to comprehend the assimilation and appropriation of identities in ethnoscapes (through fiction and non-fiction).
Engendering Nations

Production of a unified nation has always been contested with counter-narratives. To understand the dual or “disruptive temporality” (Bhabha, “Nation Narration” 299) of the nation this section reads alternate histories of various ethnicities and different gender representations that construct nationalist discourses. In the narratives resonating with ambivalences, the dominant sites of national identity have been taken for consideration.

Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* and *And The Mountains Echoed* bring to fore the present day crisis in imagining Afghanistan. Hosseini has portrayed Afghanistan as the quintessential third world space which struggles for the prerogatives of nation building and yearns for the necessary intervention of the expatriates to reinstate normality. While paying little attention to the Afghan legacy, the novels highlight the Taliban brutality unleashed on the populace. Though many aspects of nation have been brought in by Hosseini, he reinforces the idea of Afghanistan as largely being a gendered construct.

In this connection it is interesting to look at the conception of identities (ethnic and gender) as represented in *The Kite Runner*. Despite the fact that Afghanistan has never come under a colonial regime it has always been troubled with ethnic tensions and clash among ethnic minorities claiming for parts of the country. The very idea of nation couldn’t be realised in the context of Afghanistan, because the Afghans (ethnic and tribal groups) had always resisted any form of homogeneity. The country has always sported repulsion towards any kind of centralized state apparatus moreover, the nation was also a plural society – as Hyman states, “congeries of different ethnic communities, linguistic groups and tribes” (301). Afghanistan was not only affected by the internal colonialism
(i.e.) domination of the Pashtun tribal elite but also by neo-colonial factors, as early as 1940’s (Hyman). In such a context it has been impossible to stir nationalistic feeling or ideology among people, for the majority of people were not willing to be integrated into the collective life of society. Afghanistan as a nation-state has always remained divided by factions. This state of affairs is reflected in Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003) which describes the guilt, punishment and redemption of an individual (male) in the backdrop of war and friendship.

The narrative is blended with the historical past and the nationalist discourses that went into making of the nation. In the Afghan context, as Richard Hyman points out as early 1920’s the monarchy endeavoured to establish this territorial base via modernization. Print-capitalism was introduced by state-elite interaction toward fostering a national idea. The period following from 1930-1978 is similar to Partha Chatterjee’s critique of nationalism where, nationalism became a ‘derivative discourse’ adhering to the ideas of the West. In a measure to ape the western the Afghan elites enforced reforms, such as the abolition of the traditional Muslim veil for women and opened of a number of co-educational schools. But these acts only estranged many tribal and religious leaders and paved way for armed opposition. The problem with this form of nationalism/national idea was, it “was an elitist-Kabuli idea meant for the elites in Kabul” (Shir 6). The elites, who reinforced religious practices, also conceded ‘modernity’ to some extent. This attitude was challenged by the communists. Seizing power from the royals in the late 70’s and 80’s they tried to assimilate the minorities and women into the nationalist discourse of Afghanistan. The religious zealots believed that the Marxist with their Western ideological postulations would ruin the national sovereignty of Afghanistan (i.e) the
Pashtuns and therefore sought to reinstate the dominant tribe and the cultural values. In the early 90s these armed forces of mujahideens took over the country and started governing a religious nationalism with sharia laws. These historic vicissitudes are mapped in Hosseini’s text.

The textual narrative of the nation is impacted within the narrative of the protagonist Amir. The Pashtuns - a dominant tribe in Afghanistan espoused a masculine nationalism in which the ethnic minorities and women are deliberately excluded. The novel projects the nationalist ideology in Afghanistan during the 1960s, which while accepting screening of western movies and Coca-Cola rigorously declined the assimilation of minorities. It is illustrated through Amir, who was clear about sticking to its ethnic ideals,

I never taught Hassan and me as friends . . . never mind that we taught each other to ride a bicycle with no hands, or to build a fully functioning homemade camera out of a cardboard box. Never mind that we spent entire winter flying kites, running kites . . . never mind any of those things. Because history isn’t easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi’a, and nothing was ever going to change. Nothing (22)

In fact, Aseef and his friends rape Hassan- the Hazara boy in order to show the male supremacy of being a Pashtun. Not only the Hazaras but also women are looked down. Though there is a reference to Amir’s mother as the highly educated woman teaching Farsi literature in University, Amir is discouraged from reading and writing poetry –an act of identifying with his mother (the woman). The national narrative reduces the woman to a non-violent apolitical subject. Anything concerned with arts is associated
with femininity, be it music / writing it is constantly banned indifferent of the ruling authority. This idea is strengthened by Baba’s comment that, ‘Real men didn’t read poetry- and God forbid they should ever write it! Real men – real boys – played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young’ (17). When Amir’s constantly preoccupies with books, he is subsequently cast as being effeminate and hence fails to identify with the masculine standards set by the Pashtuns.

The Pashtun nation was challenged by the rise of the Soviet preoccupation. After 1978, the communist principles were viewed as a threat to Islam. Afghans considered that, Saur Revolution brought about a new nationalism- a mélange of the western ideals like Marxism and native values of the oppressed minority, which was a threat to hegemonic Afghan culture. For example Aseef, the Taliban leader tells the protagonist Amir,

I spent some time in jail, at Poleh-Charkhi, just after Babrak Karmal took over in 1980. I ended up there one night when a group of Prachami soldiers; marched into our house and ordered my father and me at gunpoint to follow them. The bastards didn’t give a reason, and they wouldn’t answer my mother’s questions. Not that it was a mystery; everyone knew that communists had no class. They came from poor families with no name. The same dogs who weren’t fit to lick my shoes were now ordering me at gunpoint.... It was happening all over: Round up the rich, throw them in jail, make an example for the comrades’ (247)

The Afghans, despite being in a state of instability, were reluctant to abide by a nationalist ideology offered by the Marxists. It is echoed in the text as Amir and Hassan
contemplate that ‘the Hindi kid would soon learn what the British learned earlier in the century, and what the Russians would eventually learn by the late 1980s: that Afghans are an independent people. Afghans cherish custom but abhor rules’ (45). In such situation, instead of being swayed away by a common nation/nationalist ideology, each tribe came up with its own individualised conceptions of nation. One such means was the resurfacing of jihad leaders. In fact, the mujahideen was keen on uniting the different tribes and as a result aimed to construct a ‘nation with a narrative of its own and to ignite the collectivity / ideology’ (Brennan) of being an Afghan & Muslim. The ensuing Islam nationalism in 1996, which proliferated the pride of jihad, mainly aimed to put an end to the western infiltration into ‘Afghan’ culture. In fact their leader Aseef justifies the action of jihadists,

Aseef’s brow twitched, “Afghanistan is like a beautiful mansion littered with garbage, and someone has to take out the garbage.”

“That’s what you were doing in Mazar, going door-to-door? Taking out the garbage?”

“Precisely.”

“In the west, they have an expression for that,” I said. “They call it ethnic cleansing”

“Do they?” Aseef’s face brightened. “Ethnic cleansing. I like it. I like the sound of it.” (KR 249)

As Bhabha indicates the ‘ethnic cleansing’ sponsored by the Taliban is made possible only through “death, literal and figurative of the complex interweavings of history” (“Location” 5). They constituted a religious nationalism that was bent on
adhering to the practices advocated in the religious texts. But in producing such nationalism, they ended up producing homogenous communities (that claimed to yield stable identities). The Taliban nationalism which started off as an indigenous anticolonial nationalism opposing the elite western model ended up as a mere religious structure. Amir critiques this insular attitude, “What mission is that?” I heard myself say. “Stoning adulterers? Raping children? Flogging women for wearing high heels? Massacring Hazaras? All I the name of Islam?” (KR 248). Religion rather than being a ‘cultural experience’ turns out to be a mouthpiece of fundamentalism (Kinnvall 759). Hosseini portrays Aseef, the Talib who like most of the rich men joined the crusade for the pleasure of avenging the communist:

I wasn’t much of a religious type. But one day I had an epiphany. I had it in jail. . . Every night the commandant, a half-Hazara, half-Uzbek thing who smelled like a rotting donkey, would have one of the prisoners dragged out of the cell and he’d beat him until sweat poured from his fat face. . . He got mad and hit me harder, and harder he kicked me, the harder I laughed. . . You know I ran into that commandant on the battlefield a few years later- funny how God works. . . Then I shot him in the balls. I’ve been on a mission since. (KR 247-8)

The Taliban created their own national identity, to hold together the ‘myth’ called nation. Any national identity is characterised by a political culture with its “unique symbols, flags, anthems, festivals, ceremonies” (Smith, “Nationalism Theory” 34). For instance the novel provides details of kite flying competitions and buzkashi tournaments - as encompassing the ‘Afganess’. But this identity of being an Afgan is subjected to
constant change and is severely scrutinized by the Taliban. They enforced ‘Islam’ to articulate an identity which would pave way for an ‘imagined’ collective belief system. Kalashnikovs, white flags, bearded men and silent burqa clad women came to represent a new national / Afghan identity. This shared tradition of Afghan identity was used by the elite/conservatives as a counter strategy to resist any foreign /western influences, for they positioned themselves as defenders of virtue, in opposition to the external forces. But in this stringent Islam nationalism, national identity was countered by its subjects. Their purpose of any national narrative is to incorporate ‘the other’ and create total cultural homogeneity (Bhabha) but it couldn’t be accomplished during the Taliban reign. Most of the natives felt they had been excluded by the system. Therefore, there was an urge among the natives to flee their homeland, desperately hoping to fit into a nation that would accept them and give them possibilities to reinvent their nation. The story also traces the movement of the Afghan immigrant into America and how the first world country provides refuge for the dispossessed third world individual. Nationalism / national identity, which is absent among those who remain in the country is conspicuous among the migrants as they are bound together by a unifying sense of exile.

In the U.S. he is ‘obliged to forget’ the masculine Afghan nation, and the new space indeed offers him a chance to remember and imagine the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification. The lives of Baba and Amir transform as they (who had relished nobility in Afghanistan) are reduced to vagrants in America. The United States which is initially an alien place for Baba, who, “loved the idea of America. It was living in America that gave him an ulcer” (KR 109) becomes a home for Baba & Amir as they gradually became part of an ‘invented tradition’ which is
fashioned by the modern Afghan elites and intellectuals living in America. Amir thrives as a writer in the U.S – an art which he was allowed not to pursue in his homeland. The ethnocaspe does not only facilitate a chance to escape from the conflicted place but also his mental conflict. Only in the transient ethnoscape does Amir realise the nature of being an Afghan – he can never be a Pashutn hero like his father, but can rise to a hero by ‘his’ own standards. For instance the crux of the novel lies in Amir’s reluctance/helplessness to rescue Hassan. Amir knowing well that the rape of Hassan would haunt him for eternity doesn’t have the courage to fight back, in fact he prefers not to, “I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan- the way he’d stood up for me all those times in the past-and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I ran” (68). But the same Amir who returns from the U.S to Afghanistan at the heights of Taliban rule to rescue his nephew Shorab adapts/adopts a different strategy. He doesn’t hit Aseef but receives the blows with incredible grit. By saving Hassan’s son Shorab (actually it is Shorab who gouges Aseef’s eye with the slingshot and saves Amir) he not only purges his guilt but also exhibits his ‘masculinity’. Amir subtly redefines the perspectives of masculinity. It is only in the U.S, he learns to relinquish his ethnic snobbery and redefine his perceptions.

The Afghan ethnoscape in the U.S. becomes a means of asserting his gallantry which was challenged in his ‘home’. The new ‘home’ - a space to obliterate conflict has been designed by his perspicacity. In the U.S. he can marry Soraya, who has been with a stranger for a few days; he can bring up a Hazara boy as his own. These things would have been a nightmare in Afghanistan. An American Afghan ethnoscape provides a
chance to define or alter one’s ethnic pride or culture according to one’s own craving and the need of the hour. In fact he is able to conceptualize his own form of nation, peopling it anew. But, Amir’s niece (i.e.) Hassan’s young son Shorab, whom Amir rescues from the Taliban has no idea of what a home/nation is. Amir reflects that, “what he yearned for was his old life. What he got was me and America. . . I brought Hassan’s son from Afghanistan to America lifting him from the certainty of turmoil and dropping him in a turmoil of uncertainty” (311). Having been abused in Afghanistan and feeling completely alienated in U.S, it becomes difficult for him to remember/identify/imagine himself with a specific culture or space. Though he neither endures nor denies any identity conferred on him, he is uncertain of what is his national identity.

While *The Kite Runner* projects the difficulties in realising a (Pashtun) identity in constructing a nation, *And The Mountains Echoed* focuses on the nuances of constructing an Afghan nation through different narratives. Unlike *The Kite Runner* which is a rendering of Amir’s account – with no female perspective, this novel comprises of various perspectives of individuals (representing different generations) in imagining the nation. Afghanistan is narrated through the experiences of the natives (Nabi & Nila), first generation emigrants (Abdullah), the diasporic youth (Pari, *Pari*¹, Timur and Irdris) and the outsiders (Markos Varvaris Ademovic).

By employing the narrative of the gay couple Nabi and Suleiman, Hosseini subverts the distinctive image that has been conferred on Afghan men. Remaining a silent spectator to the rise and fall of the nation Nabi carries a platonic relation with Suleiman. Hosseini’s Nabi, a representative of the working class stays in Kabul to escape from the

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¹ Abdullah’s sister and daughter share the same name, therefore in order to avoid confusion I have italicized. Thus, *Pari* will hereafter refer to Abdullah’s daughter.
mundaneness of his village Shadbagh. Hired by Suleiman as a cook and a chauffeur in 1947, he gradually internalises his lifestyle in Kabul though he cannot identify with the elite, “dressed in his customary olive-coloured suit . . . pinching the crease of his pants though he has never quite managed to eradicate its lingering whiff of burnt onions” (ATME 60). Nabi is quite a colonial subject who yearns to be recognised by his masters - the Wahdati’s. Though he becomes their confidante he knows very well he cannot become ‘one of them’. After Nila leaves Suleiman, Nabi replaces her “We (Suleiman and Nabi) argued the way married couples do, stubbornly, heatedly over trivial things” (123). They endure the violent phases of different regimes. The escalating violence was so smothering that Nabi finally loses the sense of war:

I can sum it up in one word: war. Or, rather, wars. Not one, not two, but many wars, both big and small, just and unjust, wars with shifting casts of supposed heroes and villains, each new hero making one increasingly nostalgic for the old villain. the names changed, as did the faces, and I spit on them equally for all the petty feuds, the snipers, the land mines, bombing raids, the rockets, the looting and raping and killing. Ah enough!

(ATME 121)

Despite surviving wars and remaining a trustworthy partner of Suleiman, Nabi feels ‘excluded’. Suleiman’s death which makes him the inheritor to all property too doesn’t give him “true sense of ownership” (127) as he knows that irrespective of his assets he will perpetually be looked at as the domestic help. This notion changes once the Taliban are driven out and American forces establish authority in Afghanistan. The power shift results in a scenario where, “thousands of aid workers were flocking to Kabul
from all over the world to build clinics and school, to repair roads and irrigation canals, to bring food and shelter and jobs” (128). Once the non-nationals are included in the process of fostering a nation slowly does Nabi realise, that he who has been treated as an outcast so far can finally contribute to the nation building. In this effort he rents out his residence free of cost to the aid workers. He admonishes the translators- Afghan men who want to make money out of the medicos and addresses the redeemers, “You have left behind your country your friends, your family, and you have come here to this godforsaken city to help my homeland and my countrymen. How could I profit of you?” (129). Nabi can become an “Afghan national” only by sharing his wealth. The rhetoric of sacrifice and honour which was the main agenda of the dominant Afghans is strongly reflected in Nabi’s discourse. Pathetic but true it is only by the intervention of a foreign force the native is able to claim his rightful position.

Running parallel to the compliant narrative of Nabi, Hosseini also presents another facet of the nation with the image of Nila, the sexually proactive and westernized Afghan woman. Hosseini does not merely juxtapose her with benevolent and self-sacrificing women like Parwana and Masooma of the countryside, instead through her characterization enables the reader to locate the gradations of freedom and power the Afghan women are vested with. Nila, a member of the Pashtun aristocracy embodies the spirit of the liberated modern woman. Being an accomplished poet she writes free verses of “long and scandalous poems dripping with adolescent passion” (209) in an act of “defying the monopoly that men held for ages” (212). She hosts parties, drinks, smokes and dances to jazz. Her husband Suleiman Wahdati who turned out to be “too serious, aloof and uninteresting . . . and in love with the chauffeur” (215) never impugned her.
Unable to cope up with the conformist society suffocating her freedom she realises staying in Afghanistan would muffle her poems. As Suleiman crashes down with stroke Nila feels terrible thinking of the “spousal duties” that lay ahead as she was “uniquely ill suited” for the job. Taking this as a cue she relocates to France in 1952 to save the future of her daughter Pari

I didn’t want her turned, against both her will and nature, into one of those diligent, sad women who are bent on a lifelong course of quiet servitude, forever in fear of showing, saying, or saying or doing the wrong thing. Women who are admired by some in the West – here in France, for instance – turned into heroines for their hared lives, admired from a distance by those who couldn’t bear even one day of walking in their shoes. (ATME 183)

Contrary to her belief she fails miserably to raise her daughter. Nila who was condemned as “a pioneer of anything but bad taste, debauchery, and immoral character” and her writings branded as “ramblings of a whore” (211) is deified in France as the ‘Afghan Songbird’. Nila who abhorred her Afghan identity in her homeland capitalizes on it in France.

While a few (for instance Nila) have the power to move out of Afghanistan to follow their desires or prefer to remain (as Nabi does), majority of the people like Abdullah are coerced to flee the nation seeking livelihood. Once the communist take over the nation Abdullah’s family escapes to Pakistan. From there they immigrate to the U.S in 1982. Abdullah ekes out a living by running an Afghan diner - Abe’s Kabob House on
the east part of San Jose near the Flea Market. The restaurant consisting “eight tables – sheathed by often sticky vinyl covers – laminated menus, posters of Afghanistan on the wall, an old soda machine a ‘merchandiser’ in the corner’ (160) was solely manned by him. While Abdullah cleaned the tables, greeted the guests and maintained the register, his wife Sultana cooked. In the U.S, Abdullah in his “grease-strained white shirt, the bushel of grey chest hair spilling over the open top button, his thick, hairy forearm” is seen as the “goofy Middle Eastern sidekick in a bad sitcom” (364). Abdullah scrupulously dissociates himself from being an American and reinforces his religious and cultural practices. As part of this process he painstakingly drives Pari to Farsi and Koran classes stating that, “if culture was a house, then language was the key to the front door, to all the rooms inside. Without it . . . you ended up wayward, without a proper home or a legitimate identity” (362). His Afghan nation constantly reminds him of his lost sibling and his inability to protect her. The problem with Abdullah is that he is not “aware of the dangers of fixity and fetishism of identities” and continually positions himself within the “calcification of colonial cultures to recommend that “roots” be struck in the celebratory romance of the past or by homogenising the history of the present” (Bhabha, “Location” 9). His conscious efforts to recreate the memories drive him to a state of delirium. The first generation immigrant is not able to assimilate within the foreign space as well as retrieve his lost nation (his sister).

Nation unfurls differently for the second generation immigrants. Though the angst of ‘not belonging’ has considerably reduced, the urge to ‘reclaim’ lost identities is steadily increasing. Three unalike case studies of Pari, Timur & Idris and Pari are presented in the novel. Pari adopted and raised by Nila Wahdati in France becomes a
mathematician. Raised in Paris with little memories of her Afghan family she is baffled. She is caught within the present scape as her efforts to retrieve the past memories flicker. When questioned about her Afghan past she stutters,

Inevitably, someone at these parties will ask Pari her views on the developments in Afghanistan. One evening, a slightly tipsy visiting professor named Chatelard asks Pari what she thinks will happen to Afghanistan when the Soviets leave, “Will your people find peace, Madame Professeuer?”

“I wouldn’t know,” she says. “Practically speaking I’m Afghan only in name.” What she says is true. She does follow the news, reads in the papers about the war, the West arming the Mujahideen, but Afghanistan has receded in her mind. She has plenty to keep her busy at home. (227-8)

Pari undertakes a journey to Afghanistan and America to discover her lineage and family. In Afghanistan she is only reckoned an affluent recluse who can never belong there. Even in America her encounter with Abdullah does not rejuvenate her sense of cultural identity; instead it only brings her childhood memories.

Unlike Pari who goes on a mission to Afghanistan, the cousins Timur and Idris are, “wealthy, wide-eyed exiles” who had “come home to gawk at the carnage now that the boogeymen have left” (135). The two young men visit Afghanistan “a thousand tragedies per square mile” (159) after the 9/11 attacks. The duo who intend to reclaim ancestral property that has been “skyrocketing” with the arrival of relief workers to Afghanistan pretend that they, “have come back to “reconnect,” to “educate” themselves,
“bear witness” to the aftermath of all these years of war and destruction. They want to go back to the States, he says, to raise awareness, and funds, to “give back” (136). They consider them the “lucky one” who escaped the bombing and therefore think “the stories these people have to tell, we’re not entitled to them” (148). During his stay Idris taunted by the “senseless violence” (150) feels he owes to his ‘nation’. In this connection he promises to arrange surgery for the young Afghan girl Roshis in California. But once he returns to his ‘home’ in the U.S. the details “escape him” and his Afghan saga sounds “generic, insipid like those of an ordinary AP story” (159). Idris the ‘immigrant’ exemplifies the ‘native’ caught in the quandary of globalisation. As Chow argument can be used to read Idris native who is no “longer available as the pure, unadulterated object of Orientalist inquiry – contaminated by the West, dangerous unOtherable” (qtd. in Gandhi 127). This state is inferred in the conversation with his wife when he tries to describe, “[t]he shell-blasted schools, the squatters living in roofless buildings, the beggars, the mud, the fickle electricity” he later realises that his description sounds as if he is talking about music. He ultimately realises that he cannot bring it to life (159). Afghanistan becomes to him a mere illusion of antiquity. The account of Idris is tersely juxtaposed with Timur who restores the fate of Roshi and many more Afghans. While Pari keenly searches for her Afghan ties and Timur cannot endure his Afghan identity, Pari (Abdullah’s daughter) wants to shed her Afghan identity.

Pari, the daughter of Abdullah and Sultana compares her life in the U.S. to “an aquarium fish . . . contained, hemmed in, by the hard, unyielding confines of the existence that Baba has constructed for me . . . grown accustomed to the glass” (388). Having given up her dreams of going to Baltimore to pursue arts she confines herself to
nursing her father. Crowded with “relics of her childhood” she is perturbed of her identity or cultural past which is stifling her independence but she is not ready to give it up too. Her reticence nurtured by the imaginary connection with her aunt Pari is broken only after she confronts her. Pari in the U.S is expected to carry the “‘burden’ of representing her culture”, she is warned not to yield to the temptations of the West and behave like a ‘virtuous young Muslim girl’ by avoiding, “boys – first and foremost, naturally – but also rap music, Madonna, Melrose Place, shorts, dancing, swimming in public, cheerleading, alcohol, bacon, pepperoni, non-halal burgers and a slew of other things” (363). Unlike the claims that the West would be a liberating space for the woman, Pari born and raised in the U.S is tethered to familial and cultural values. Once she breaks away from the boundaries of the nation, she becomes free. After admitting Abdulla in the Memory Care Unit Pari decides to move on. Only by shedding all her identities of the Afghan woman and the daughter she is able realise her aspirations.

It is undeniable that the ethnoscapes (in France and the U.S) facilitate a network of constituting the Afghan identity. While nation is carried in the psyche of the immigrants the aid workers rebuild the territorial space. The global swing has made it possible for a greek Markos Varvaris and the Bosnian Amra Ademovic to “navigate the inconveniences and idiosyncrasies of Afghan culture” (134) and carry the project of rebuilding Afghanistan. And The Mountains Echoed present the different trajectories undertaken in realising the nation.

While the earlier texts locate the operation of pluralistic identities this memoir studies their perfidious nature and its effect on the ‘self’. Olive Witch situates the psychological dimensions of the woman involved in realising spatial tensions. The novel
figures the emotional frictions the woman combats while navigating through different cultures and continents. Gilroy situates Hoque - the ‘hybrid’ exile in a state of, “cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents” (2). As Gilmore states in Autobiographies, incoherence becomes characteristic of her memoir, the texts abound with “interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation” (42). Filled with poems, the narratives of discontinuity carrying weather report indicate the topographical as well as her psychosomatic discrepancy. Hoque affirms that her nationality and accent, “changes with the landscape, with the weather” (180). The landscape and the psyche of the woman have been interwoven via parallel narratives. While one account elucidates the trauma of ‘not belonging’, the other recounts the travails of the woman confined to psychiatric care. The fragmented narrative is a strategy of the immigrant who plays on the “diasporic thought” which “betrays its poststructuralist origins by contesting all claims to the stability of meaning and identity” (Gandhi 131). This story which destabilises all claims of normativity epitomises the plight of ‘a conflicted immigrant with ever more tenuous ties to Nigeria, an American in Bangladeshi clothes, a Bangladeshi with American attitude’ (Hoque 102). Hoque’s family continually tormented by violence flees from Bangladesh (during the Pakistan Bangladesh conflict) to Nigeria. After spending thirteen years in Nigeria they relocate to the U.S. shuttling between different spaces the ‘self’ drowns in the complexity of futile identities. She states “I want all or nothing. It might be too hard to almost belong. Not belonging, on the other hand, is cut and dried, an easy place to find.” (23)
Despite being born in Nigeria she is considered ‘an onyocha – a foreigner’ (20) in her neighbourhood due to her pale colour. She grows up as a confused individual when issues regarding her nationality/identity arise, “When the Nigerians ask me where I’m from, I say Bangladesh. The country’s passport is the only one I hold. We visit almost every summer . . . then we come home, to Nigeria” (59). Trying to identify herself with the Nigerian community she gives her an Igbo name – Ngozi. Hoque strives to change her physical appearance in order to be assimilated. She remarks that, “I spend a lot of time outside. I figure that the longer I’m in the sun, the darker and thus less different my skin will be from that of my black friends”. But she comprehends that despite her efforts to integrate she will remain as the “gorilla woman” (22) to her Nigerian friends, and therefore decides it is better to be a foreigner than a half-caste.

Retaining the identity of being the ‘foreigner’ becomes a problem in the U.S. As Bhabha rationalises in his Location of Culture, Hoque has to confront, “the unhomeliness that is the condition of extra-terrestrial and cross cultural imitation” (9). To the thirteen year old Hoque bred in a “colonial school system” (42) taught not to question anything, Pittsburgh resembles “another planet” (65). The paranoia of splintered existence that she has been battling intensifies in America when she is labeled as an African. Induced by this remark she empathises with those in the “Black section”, and begins to read Roots and finds parallels with Kunta Kinte. Everything including the change in landscape - from red earth to snowfall, or language - nasal accents in contrast to the pidgin she was trained becomes a threat. Her rich vocabulary and voracious reading are lost in the casualty of her accent. In Nigeria she was always the superior – in the position of the coloniser who excelled in everything. She states that she was academically proficient and
could, “memorize Blake and Byron, ace arithmetic and algebra, hand in horticulture and history assignments on time and on the mark” (71). But in the U.S. she is genuinely convinced of her inferiority in comparison to the Americans. Lost in the world of computer programs she even calls herself the ‘chameleon girl’ who will conceal her ‘self’ in trying to mimic the American system. In fact even her act of falling in love is a desperate means of fitting in a (American) nation. Glenn her boyfriend mocks that he is her ‘American Dream’. She rightly articulates her position that, “not all of us can gather in / our insides and spill out / the same same / every time / you could call it / being a chameleon / but I’m not / it was the way I learnt to survive in America” (74). To be recognised in the melting pot, Hoques family continuously persuades her to prove her scholastic mettle. An introvert by nature she tries to mimic the perfect American student. Unfortunately in enacting the American identity she loses her sanity, “I climbed into her skin and wore it until it was mine. After a year, I didn’t have to think twice about what was coming out of my mouth. After four years . . . people believed this person was me” (148). She pursues research at Wharton School of Business in Decision Theory to mollify her family. But then she realises that American life has set a non-stop clock in her brain which is moving “faster, faster, faster. I am half –running everywhere all the time. . . I’m no longer tired, I’m moving faster more powerfully than I used to” (91). Coerced into “meta-thinking” all the time, she loses prudence and fails her doctoral course oral examinations (127). Tired of wearing manifold “faces” Hoque is driven crazy, in her words, “I’ve forgotten how to think/I think that’s how I stay alive.” (121) Living in America as a “Bangladeshi Muslim girl” (104) she is perpetually caught in a state of suspicion. Though Hoque is aware that everyone in her family is “learning a new
American game, each in our own way” (69) she is not able to come to terms with it. While the ethnoscapes in Nigeria provide a space for her, the fissures in American ethnoscapes keeps intensifying. Irrespective of the space (whether it is Nigeria or America she is perceived as the ‘native woman’ who is recognised only by her ‘peculiarities’. In fact she becomes an exhibit, a museum piece and as rightly pointed out by Trinh the third world woman “becomes someone’s private zoo” (qtd. in Gandhi 85).

In fact Hoque abhors the very idea of performing ‘the past’. She craves for space of her own, “[a] world that recreates itself, every time my eyes open to the light. Not one that magnifies from [neither] the past nor one that telescopes into the future. I want something untouched by anything except the immediate now” (139). To attain this state she moves to Bangladesh. Her ancestral home becomes a safe haven to recuperate her ‘self’ and forget the “cauterized memories”. Though she tries to recover she is all the time reduced to ‘a caricature, clutching at an American accent and Nigerian memories, my meal spiked with Bangladeshi chillies’ (107). Ironically her quest for ‘home’ draws up short in Bangladesh and she dejectedly remarks, “I don’t know what is betraying me. Somehow, people know I’m not from here. can they smell it? . . . Can they see it? Some unlikely angle, a betraying hunch or arch in my body, my personality” (115). Hoque becomes a “sort of spectacle” (210) owing to her ‘foreignness’.

I’ve always been a foreigner my entire life, but I’ve never felt as out of place as I feel in a country where everyone looks like me. I’ve walked through crowds of African men, unhurried. I’ve danced with abandon among raver Asian kids. I’ve chatted easily with American housewives.
Here, where it seems it should be the most natural, it isn’t. I’m dressed native to a T, speaking my best Bangla, and still a peddler cries out to me ‘Apa, ashen!’ and then in English, ‘Come, sister! What country you from?’

Yours, for god’s sake. (189)

Despite these problems in accustoming to Bangladesh, it becomes a “window” which facilitates a variety of perspectives. In a place of “never getting lost never getting found” Hoques actually starts “entering the living world” (179). Ultimately the ‘unhomely moments’ she resists and contends invariably produce what Bhabha calls, “traumatic ambivalence of personal psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (Bhabha, “Location” 11). Her internal anguish leads her to reject nationhood.

Kamin Mohammadi’s narration of nation is more emotional. Unlike Hoque’s nation which revolves around the self, she traces the Iranian nation on lines of her family’s history. Mohammadi’s The Cypress Tree: A Love Letter to Iran illustrates the political, social and cultural discourses that go into manufacturing the Iranian national narrative. Her text typifies how the “anticolonial nationalism invokes the myths of pure origin and cultural stability” (Gandhi 30). Exiled by revolution she explicates her argument by reviewing different phases of nation. In doing so Mohammadi also deconstructs the reprobate images of “revolution, fanaticism, and black-robed women.” (Mohammadi 9).

Mohammadi designates Iran as a “thoroughly modern country” (19) contrasting it with the retrograde images it has been conferred with. She locates the dawn of the
modern nation to a series of transformation that commenced when Reza Shah took over the Persian government in 1926 and eventually changed its name to Iran (19). Though the King aimed at transforming the oriental image of Iran, “You can call us all Iranians and, multitudinous though we are, we will present one face to the world – we will now look just like you” (35) he overlooked the convolutions involved in identifying with the coloniser. Positioning Western practices as the benchmark, he initiated his modernisation drive by setting elementary schools, providing grants for abroad education and establishing Tehran University which women could also attend. In addition to all these, in 1936 he issued an edict stating women have “to appear in public unveiled” (33). Though this decree on “enforced uncovering of women” (34) resulted in dialogues on modernity and the veil, it also engendered the figure of a modern woman as, “independent and well educated, (she) happily stepped out in her shapely two-piece suits, lips stained with dark lipstick.” (44)

The tides of progress resulted in novel identities. While the model of ‘new Iranian men’ came to denote those who were “educated abroad, dressed in suits and speaking several languages with ease” (35) the ‘new Iranian women’, “had not only uncovered themselves – their hair, their arms, their legs, as they strutted around in the latest fashion from the catwalks of Paris, Milan and London – but their houses and by extension their lives too” (65). Despite such waves of transformation the provincial area of Iran remained unperturbed. In fact this lopsided ‘civilising’ chasm instigated the revolution. To encounter this unrest coming from the educated section of the society the king launched White Revolution (1963) – which propositioned land reforms and assured voting rights to women. This pronouncement enabled the literary corps, “to go into the countryside and
teach the workers on the land how to read and write” (92). Instead of garnering support for the monarchy the white revolution ended up creating disgruntled masses. Mohammadi briefs that in the urge to mimic the West the “progressive king” failed to understand that “the new middle class and in particular the sector of New Iranians who were now living lives that were glossed with a Western patina, were in fact not integrating with an increasingly alienated and marginalised majority” (94). The peasants felt excluded in the new national narrative and imams felt the need to restore their culture and religion. As the King and the elites relished in opulence, resentment seeped throughout the lower rungs of the society, and Mohammadi observes that, “the ordinary people did not care for the adulation the Shah was enjoying abroad” (110).

In Mohammadi’s view the Shahs’ position is almost that of a colonial subject who is, “in awe of the West and at the same time considering himself and his own nation and culture to be far superior” (111). His persona gets entangled between this glorious heritage and the new modern Western ideals. He is akin to the colonised who yearns for the consent of the West, “while claiming superiority to it, and with the power that controlling the world’s oil supply gave him, he increasingly used his influence to lecture the West on its failings, on the corruption of its morals and social systems and to insists on a new world order” (111). Here interestingly we can visualize an ambivalent position of the king who is the coloniser (to the people of Iran) as well as the colonised (ideologically by the West). The Iranian ‘natives’ challenged this anglophilic attitude of King.

Khomeini’s revolution evoked an anticolonial struggle to overthrow the King and his ‘pseudo imperial practices’ that were perpetrating forms of colonialism. As Hall
authenticates, “the anticolonial identities do not owe their origins to a pure and stable essence. Rather they are produced in response to the contingencies of a traumatic and disruptive breach in history and culture” (qtd. in Gandhi 130). According to Mohammadi, Khomeini offered a “new brand of nationalism”, his ‘Islamic system of Government’ promised the mob “certainty. And the certainty was built on a return to Iran’s traditional culture, and which Shiism was a vital part” (Mohammadi 123). Unlike Shah’s nation that served the elites, Khomeini’s united “the Marxists, the socialist, the students, elites and intellectuals” (124). The revolution successfully instituted a new Islamic nation which “managed to embody the two themes that had haunted Iran for nearly a century – tradition (he was a man of God) and modernity (in the Marxist Islam of his followers)” (124). While Shah along with his “modern sort of allure . . . looked very familiar to the West” (93), Khomeini was seen as a “man devoted to this country, his God and his ideals, someone who was leading a revolution for social justice in curious clothes” (128). The revolution - a process of decolonisation resembled a “macabre ritual – a gruesome relay game” where, “Banks, cinemas, off-licences and other symbols of Western cultural imperialism” were demolished. Freedom and equality became the buzzwords and to unify disparate group the nihilist gathered in boulevards where, “the ritual self-flagellation, and religious songs joined by revolutionary slogans and chanting” were performed. Mohammadi and her family who lead a life of sophistication were monitored by the revolution. Therefore Mohammadi totally unaware of the political turbulence of the nation is forced to move to London. The young girl’s nation is largely characterised by her family and extended relations.
Once the family moves to London in 1979 she tries to erase her memories of Iran. They readily adapt in the foreign space: “Our elaborate manners are designed to protect our private selves and this trait, born of so many invasions, has made Iranians adaptable above all else. Wherever we are scattered in the world, we integrate” (13). Unlike most of the immigrants Mohammadi nurtures an abomination for Iran, as she states,

As I grew up I turned my back determinedly on Iran and everything Iranian. . . Angry and ashamed: such a complex cocktail of shame I was carrying – shame for the revolution, shame for the hostage crisis, shame that we had had to leave, shame for the austere looks of Ayatollah Khomeini and the radical images and ideals of the Islamic Republic. . . I was ashamed of standing among the reasonable English people and of not being like them. I sought to erase the shame by fitting in and ignoring Iran as if just by willing it, by denying its existence. (6)

Even in Tehran she enjoys the privileges of an anglicized education, European style café and pop music. Mohammadi brought up as an anglophile readily adapts to remote culture. She compares herself to the “brilliant chameleons” who were proficient at “navigating the vastly different cultures we all inhabited the one at home and the one outside our homes, cultures so opposed to each other that we had all become masters of disguise” (211). Mohammadi readily moves into any geographical terrain and shapes an ethnoscape. The cultural heritage of her family and religion becomes the nodal point to construct her memories. Being “political refugees” (165) they realise that they “were no longer rooted enough in our own culture” (174). Therefore the Mohammadi family clings strongly to their lineages and value systems even in London. As the author in her
testimony observes, her parents “wore their exoticism like a cloak, enhancing them in and also obscuring them from foreign eyes” (214). The family never discussed what was happening back in Iran and the possibilities of returning. The abhorrence for her homeland is intensified by the media projections of Iran as belonging to mullahs and fundamentalists. Mohammadi opines that in England her, “country was now known only as a place of fury and death, the scene on television reducing our millennia of history and culture to a bunch of wild-eyed youth burning the American flag, chanting slogans against Israel, holding hostage American diplomats in the embassy” (168)

She desperately distances from the violent nation and puts on accent, changes her skin tone and feature to escape the pangs of being an Iranian. But when she is around twenty one she “slips through the wall of Anglicisation” (16) and thinks about reconnecting with her past. She starts visiting Iran when she is twenty seven and then on keeps frequenting the place, knowing well that she can never reclaim it. The Iranian land becomes a space of conflict and memories. During her first visit to Tehran, Mohammadi is “mortified by her lack of appropriate manners and language” she comments that she is “not quite a tourist, not quite a local; neither British nor properly Iranian, but lost somewhere in the gap between the two, an empty space which was more dislocating than I had anticipated” (19).

Once in Iran she records the transformations in political structure that ensued in her absence. From her friends she learns that the liberation movement has turned into morality police. Music and dance was banned and veiling was made compulsory. Khomeini died after almost losing the war with Saddam. In her visits to Iran after his death, Mohammadi finds that the major society comprises of youngsters who are “so
lively, modern and forward thinking” (243). The new generation too is divisive— one sect who abide by law and the other ‘hiding beneath’. They dexterously subvert the law imposed on them by wearing masks that the rulers force them to. For instance though a few internet sites are banned in Iran Mohammadi observes the hackers always finding the code, underground parties and fashion gigs being carried on privately, and most importantly women who are forced to wear veil negotiate the practice by not treating the veil / hejab as “outwear” instead it becomes part of their outfit – colourful and chic (246). She mentions that she would be happy to vanish under her headscarf according to her “the Islamic Republic in seeking to make its women invisible has opened up for us also a space to think, a space to be, that is not available in family life” (267). In her narrative Mohammadi “thinks beyond” the “interstitial subjectivities” and as Bhabha advocates focuses on “those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference” (Location 1).

While The Cypress Tree facilitates Mohammadi a nation to which she can return, Karmi’s text problematizes the urge to visit a nation state that does not exists. Return: A Palestinian Memoir is Ghada Karmi’s journey to Palestine on behalf of United Nations Development Programme. As Estelle Jelinek concedes Karmi’s writing resembles the Palestinian nation which is characterized by ‘fragmentation, interruption and discontinuity’ (qtd. Gilmore x). Karmi a “full time Palestinian” (13) undertakes “political project” in Palestine to escape the boredom of personal life. Uprooted from Palestine in 1948, with the nostalgias of the conflict deeply etched in her mind she bears a sense of “inclusion and belonging” (165). Despite being practical and realistic, she grew up in England with a hope that, “there would come a time when we would all be going ‘home’”
Like most of them in exile, Karmi keeps abreast of all news related to Palestine and monitors the internet and media. Being an activist she regularly organizes meetings and conferences. After years of political activism in London she begins to feel “disconnected and irrelevant” (14). Despite living abroad for more than fifty years, she carries the “memory of the homeland however fragmented and shadowy and still knew it as their real country” (18).

Writing about homeland becomes an emotional outlet for her. But she realises that by writing about the lost land from the United Kingdom she will only end up as a “kind of second-hand Palestinian, an armchair windbag” (17) who is removed from reality, therefore she decides to visit Palestine and re-establish her connection. More than belonging, Karmi wants to explore the politics in a state of a “government within a government” scenario (19). Wanting to return to the “Promised Land” she applies for a job at Palestinian Authority and is deputed as the consultant to the PA’s Ministry of Media and Communications.

Once actually in Palestine, the exiled doctor who seeks to resuscitate the non-existing nation woefully reports that she cannot retrieve any memory. The state had become, “scattered and divided” (7) and in that fragmented space the mission to “accommodate two selves, the one Arab and the other English” becomes a futility (280). An air of foreboding fills the place and Karmi begins to doubt her intentions. In her view,

I had sworn never to return to this torn-up, unhappy land. . . I was barely able to comprehend the changed landscape of what had been an Arab place, its new inhabitants speaking an alien language, their looks a motley
assortment of European, Asian, African, and any mixture of these (Karmi 7)

In Palestine Karmi is entrusted with the job of rewriting a strategy for media. But her ideas are constantly overruled by her co-workers, who refuse to take orders from the ‘outsider’. The natives seem to be unmindful of the ‘nation’s cause’ as, “their lives were governed by the overriding imperatives to go on drawing their salaries” (29) irrespective of the quality of their work. The ministries and the people working for it are lacklustre and, “everyone who worked in them was also pretending, playing a part in a charade created by the international donors who encouraged the Palestinians to believe that they needed to have the appurtenances of statehood ahead of attaining their state” (102). Contrasting this group she notices a few foreigners Annete, the French water engineer Rene, the American Tim Rothermell, the UNDP chief and Mary, an American who had left their lives behind to help the Arab cause. Unlike the managements which are dull, brooding over paperwork, the aid workers and volunteers effectively organise demonstrations and protests. Efforts to restore Palestine are mostly taken up by the ‘outsiders’. When the doctor goes to Jerusalem to participate in the protest against Separation Wall among the activists she notices a few, “liberal Jewish Israelis and some local Palestinians, but most were foreigners from various countries” (45). But within their discourses is fixed a layer of imperial ideology. In the text it can be traced from Annete’s view of Palestine, “I don’t know what I would do without the vibrancy of this place, the variety, the struggle, I love it. And I can do so much here, which would mean nothing in Denmark” (49). The third world nation becomes a ground to prove her mettle, and she warily undermines the ‘natives’ as she says to Karmi, “the desk they gave me was in the
office shared with a load of men who ignored me as well... I was glad to get out of there, and quite frankly, I don’t think they even noticed I’d gone” (22).

The rich Palestinians do not take part in nation building instead are “keen to invest in what was shaping up to be the capital city of Palestinian Authority” (21). They do not want their children to stay back instead plan to send them to the U.S. The author is not able to comprehend for America has always been “the enemy camp” backing the Israeli’s with arms that were used against Palestinians. But in the current times, it has turned out to be “the destination of choice to give their children better futures” (51).

Karmi finds that the Palestinian Authority spends resources to exclusively attract the attention of Western journalists and diplomats. Glossy booklets, photographs and maps are repeatedly used to forge the nation. However they fail to understand that without the personalised accounts of the common man a nation cannot come into being. In the “non-committal” and “diplomatic” manner of the bureaucrats where the proletariat is never included in the dialogues to resolve the national conflict, the PA turns into one more inept elite structure and the fight for the nation is lost. From her political encounters she realises that in the “real world no one’s going to put themselves out and do anything about Israel” (54). The activist who was dynamic in England fades into obscurity at Ramallah. She feels life in Palestine is more like an “international conference”

One had to be constantly alert not to miss anything... Each day was full of incident – a meeting, a visiting foreign delegation, a press conference, a new government announcement, a violent army eruption, an angry demonstration – an each day brought a new dimension to my
understanding of life there, all memorable, all seemingly momentous at
time. Being in such a place was at once exhausting and exhilarating, and
unlike anything I had experienced before. (56)

Karmi is treated as a socialite in Palestine. In the land ravaged by conflict almost
every day she witnesses a fund raising dinner or workshop or exhibition or party. In the
process she realises that the ineffectual government agencies are replaced by non-
government organisations. She observes that one “could hardly go from one street to the
next without coming across yet another NGO. They were all funded by foreign, usually
Western agencies, charities, societies or associations” (77). These private sectors which
were initially set up for ‘state-building’ ultimately become sources to obtain money. The
Palestinians knew that once they use words like “capacity building, sustainability,
democratization, and empowerment” (77) in their proposals inevitably funds would be
sanctioned. While a few elite Palestinians shrewdly exploited the ignorance of the NGOs
for their own means and ends the funding agencies too were not bothered to peruse the
applications or look into the ‘real’ conditions. Workshops and Panel discussions are
conducted in Palestine just to “publish” them and record them in to their respective
“annual report[s]”. To her dismay Karmi witnesses the moderators inciting people and
forcing them to engage, so they “can make something exciting happen which will be
worth writing about” (81)

If this was the case with the autonomous bodies, representatives of the
government like Farid too gave misleading notions of “Israeli intransigence and
Palestinians’ readiness” to the foreign media (98). Karmi is shocked by the “image of
equivalence however unintended, between an occupying power and the people it
occupied” put forward by the ‘reliable’ authorities (99). The effort for reclamation of nation in Palestinian context is again the brainchild of the intelligentsia. But imagining a nation is not possible in that context where the traditional men refuse to modernize themselves.

The Ministry of Media and Communication tries to fashion a nation through academic ventures and mediascapes. Karmi is entrusted with rewriting a new media strategy for Palestinian nation. Karmi works reluctantly like “a school child forced to do some hateful piece of homework” (146). She spends most of her time in visiting / revisiting Gaza, Amman, Jordan, Jerusalem, Hebron, Qalqilya, City of David. From the inhabitants she learns the terrible life they have to endure. She registers an individual wailing, “Everyone here will tell you the same, we have no hope, no future, no end to this situation. It is like living hell” (139). In Amman she notes the taxis blaring with reverential Islamic sermons and many women covered in hijabs. The women had appropriated the nature of headscarves by making it more alluring, “to match their clothes and consisting of a close-fitting cap in one colour overlaid by a longer head covering, resembling the chain-mail headdress of medieval European knights, in a different shade” (173). In Amman, Karmi fathoms that Islam is all the Arabs are left with. When she sees Arabs seeking their religion she perceives it as an act of “defence against western aggression” (175). The general public is either “suspicious” or “enveloped in cosy vision of a triumphant Islam” (207).

Regardless of this ‘real’ state, the Palestinian Authority was keen on conducting an orchestra with Arab and Israeli musicians at the Cultural Palace. The seminar turns into a farce where neither the speakers nor the listeners were interested. Karmi says, “I
could see people tiring and leaving the hall to many of them. By the afternoon, there were more outside than inside the hall, talking loudly and distracting those still trying to listen to the speakers” (306). While most of the Palestinians remain indifferent or submissive to the proceedings of the academic exercise, it is only an Israeli journalist who voices out the real situation that the, “Palestinian Authority Leadership should not be behaving as if you were a government of a state. There is no state. You are under occupation” (308).

Various national identities of male nationalism (The Kite Runner, And The Mountains Echoed), split nationalisms (Olive Witch), cultural nationalism (The Cypress Tree) and quasi nationalism (Return:A Palestinian Memoir) are generated in the texts analysed. But these manifestations are volatile and are reworked in the ethnosapes.

Appropriating Identities

As Appadurai argues in Modernity At Large the active movement of people either forced or willing has resulted in various ‘diasporas’ of ‘hope’, ‘terror’ and ‘despair’ (6). The literatures that have been examined project various “diasporas of hope”- The Kite Runner, And the Mountains Echoed, The Cypress Tree, “diasporas of terror”- Olive Witch and “diasporas of despair”- Return: A Palestinian Memoir. These interstitial spaces which generate ethnosapes also preserve memories and kindle the desire to return to their roots. In this context, Ethnosapes refer to,

A landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourist, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and
appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree (Appadurai, “Modernity” 33)

Ethnoscapes reorient national constructs by appropriating identities. They are accomplished by rousing national consciousness and espousing network societies.

The texts project nations as situated in the memories of the culture and recreated through national consciousness (Bhabha). They situate the modalities through which the margins enable the exiles to constitute ethnoscapes. To understand the operation of ethnoscapes and condition of the exiles, (men and women) who, “find themselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (Bhabha, “Location” 1) the production of cultural and gender differences have to be reviewed and re-viewed.

Since the interplay of gender and cultural differences shape one’s national consciousness and ascertain the presence or absence of nation it is pertinent to look into the elements of colonisation/decolonisation to understand the approaches by which culture raises national conscious. Though the select texts do not overtly deal with the colonial struggle, the metanarratives of colonisation, dominance, subjugation and resistance are inbuilt in them.

As Fanon emphasizes, forging an identity itself is akin to a colonial struggle that undergoes three phases. In his view during the first phase the ‘native intellectual assimilates the culture of occupying power’ (Fanon 453). But, after a certain time the native gets ‘disturbed’ and remembers ones roots. This results in the final ‘fighting phase’
the identity of the native is retrieved by rebelling against the dominant (453). In the select literatures the ‘native’ represents the western educated intellectual who readily identifies with the coloniser rather than the ‘indigenous masses’ (McLeod). For instance Nila Wahdati (ATME), Mohammadi’s father Bagher (CT), Dr.Farid (RPM) and Hoques parents (OW) revel in their ‘anglicized’ superiority. They hardly bother about ‘their culture’ being tarnished. In order to retain their identity a few move away from the ‘homeland’ while others like Farid stay back and project themselves as the leaders or representatives. The second and the third phases of reclaiming ‘national identity’ are invoked only in the ethnoscapes. The blimpish attitude of the ‘elite’ disintegrates as they are forced to perform and embrace their indigenous background in liminal spaces.

The texts project a picture of America as “the land of immigrants” that welds together the “needs of pluralism and immigration to construct a society around diasporic diversity”. But despite the images of “mosaic, the rainbow, the quilt and other tropes” owing to complex factors of diversity the “imaginative sources” for social fabrication cannot be provided by the West, be it the U.S or the U.K (Appadurai, “Modernity” 173). Therefore the natives experiment and appropriate their atavistic cultures in the ‘liminal space’. In those spaces the process of ‘appropriation’ becomes a complex yet easy one for the immigrants. The expatriates living in U.S. (*Olive Witch, Kite Runner, And the Mountains Echoed*) / London (*Return, Cypress Tree*) consciously select and rework old traditions, so that what appears as the ‘new’ community is quite different from the original, ostensible model. The ethnoscapes recognise the persuasive factors like ideology and ‘cultural symbolism’ in formation of any nationalism. For instance though the immigrants have to mimic the practices of English they also simultaneously carry their
Farsi and Koran classes (OW, CT, RPM & ATME). While the exiles strictly adhere to the customs of their clan - be it in organising marriages, funerals/ new year celebrations they also makes necessary amendments by forging its symbols, ceremonies, myths and histories to meet the needs of the modern masses. For instance in The Kite Runner Amir’s family does ‘nazr’ in America but do not slaughter the goat, instead they celebrate the occasion with lavish dinners. By appropriating these techniques the immigrants try to “inscribe locality on to bodies” (Appadurai, “Modernity’ 179) and in recreating “nostalgias, celebrations, and commemorations” they produce themselves as national (190).

It is true that the ‘invented traditions’ raise national consciousness. But one has to be critical of its benefactors. In this connection the dispositions of ethnoscapes and its adeptness to accommodate women have to be scrutinised. Feminists critique that regardless of being an independent nation or colony, nationalist discourses exclude the female voices. In most of the cases, the woman irrespective of her social, cultural and political background is not able to realise or even appropriate here identity. Like the nations the ethnoscapes also seem to favour men rather than women. Theorists on nationalism envisage women only as, “biological reproducers of ethnic collectivities, as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups” (Anthias and Yuval Davis 7). The female protagonist be it Nila, Soraya, Pari, Hoque, Mohammadi defy the ideas put forth by the nationalist discourse. Despite experimenting with sexuality they eschew the idea of marriage and motherhood (of being biological reproducers). They abnegate the roles of mother, daughter or caretaker. Nila and Soraya have had affairs with non-Afghans and therefore are not deemed as “the cultural transmitters” (according to the
nationalist discourses propounded by men) and therefore cannot ‘reproduce’. The women subvert this attitude of the patriarchy by adopting Afghan kids (especially those who don’t represent the Pashtun majority) and appropriate a feasible Afghan nation in the ethnoscapes. Hoque, who carries a relationship with Nico in Bangladesh ascertains, “I am uncertain about a future with him, despite his endearing expectations” and also decries the “Asian culture is often limited to two paradigms . . . the test-drive phase is unacceptable to many families” (195). Karmi, the Palestinian doctor marries according to Jordanian Law in a Sharia court and is blessed with the daughter. But when the wedding ends in a failure she starts relationships with non-Muslim men unmindful of cultural constraints. In the texts we arrive at a conclusion that being culturally and biologically active will not herald the woman as the citizen, for the ideas of ‘culture’ are also largely monitored by the male. While ghazals and folk songs played a major role in promulgating the Afghan culture the female is not allowed to participate in it. Amir in The Kite Runner utters, “Soraya told me that her mother had wanted to sing at our wedding, only one song, but the general gave her one of his looks and the matter was buried. . . she spent her days in the garden” (Hosseini, “KR” 154). Even in the scapes the patriarchy has to intervene to protect the woman’s “nang and nomoos” (Hosseini). Pride and honour become the markers of boundaries – for the home as well as the woman.

Women are expected to abide by ‘moral codes’ to sustain and excel in the ethnoscapes. In the words of Yuval Davis, “rather than being seen as the symbols of change, women are constructed in the role of ‘carriers of tradition’ ” (61) While men like Amir, Abdulla and Varvaris who are failures in their nation survive in the ethnoscapes, women are vanquished by the ‘society’. Nila Wahdati despite her transitory fame in
France is recognised only as the drunkard, her daughter Pari afflicted by *swan neck deformity* is not able to excel as a mathematician. Her efforts to reconnect with her brother too end up in vain as he is not even able to recognise. *Pari*, Hoque, Mohammadi and Karmi even in the ethnoscape are featured as the “gendered subaltern” who are trapped between patriarchy and imperialism. This state of conundrum can be read in most of the memoirs taken for analysis. Hoque who frequents the LGB clubs in the U.S. lives in the perpetual fear of having to uphold the identity of a “good Bangladeshi Muslim girl”. Her ‘splintered existence’ is exposed as she states, “When I was younger, a question about studying liberal arts, or being seen in a teen clothing store, might bring on a lecture. Now that I’m drinking and dating, what would my parents and their friend say? (104) .The ethnoscapes seem to be granting autonomy to the women but in comparison to that of the men their freedom dwindles.

As Yuval Davis claims we come across the fact that be it nations or ethnoscapes, “women have tended to be differently regulated to men in nationality, immigration and refugee legislation often being constructed as dependent on their family men and expected to follow them and live where they do” (24). While marriage or raising children enables the man to grow closer to his culture, the woman is distanced from hers once she moves into domestic realm. Hosseini after adopting Shorab starts flying kites and reconnects with the Afghan community, whereas Karmi states, “caught up in my domestic life, I stopped following political events in the Middle East. What had been for years an all-consuming involvement in everything that happened in and around Palestine faded into the background, and I lost touch” (290). Pari in *And The Mountains Echoed* attends Farsi classes to equip herself to visit Afghanistan. But her intentions to travel to
her country become redundant once she gets married to Eric and takes care of her family.

As Bhabha states in *The Location of Culture*, it is the “recesses of the domestic sphere that becomes sites for history’s most intricate invasions”. For the individual caught “in that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily the private and public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as disorienting” (9)

When the private realm itself is caught in a conundrum, the woman unlike the man is not given scope to participate in the military or political struggle either in the nation or the ethnoscape. The nationalist discourses which integrally summon women to participate in the armed struggle also carefully undermine its own claim. In the select texts, the nation is fabricated by men to a large extent. Accordingly, nationality and masculinity begin to complement each other (Nagel 2490). This construct while aggravating the ego of ‘classic patriarchy’ also destabilises the presence of women in nationalism (Kandiyoti). While Palestinian nation is designed by bureaucracy, Imams monitor the Islamic State of Iran and in Afghanistan the state is run by the Taliban & Western forces. The texts project men as the intellectuals taking part in nation building while the woman though educated is still relegated within the private domain. In For instance Karmi’s father, a scholar and “Arab savant” works for the BBC Arabic services, he collaborates with the British Mandate to frame the government and educational policies while there are hardly any references to her mother. Hoque’s father a teacher is depicted as an active member of the Bangladesh uprising, but the mother who is also a teacher working in the University is shown as a third world woman not bothered about issues of nation. A similar idea is reiterated in Mohammadi’s narrative also. Her father
Bagher, the mechanical engineer is a pioneer in instituting factories and managing oil resources, whereas her mother despite being shown as the ‘modern’ woman identifying with the Western standards of living does not contribute anything to the progress of Iran. Hossieni’s *The Kite Runner* too shows Baba occupying an important position in the town. In the select memoirs and novels men belonging to the “intelligentsia” fashion a nation on the grounds of protecting women (by carefully excluding them). As Accad elucidates here masculinity implicates “aggressiveness and violence, which are directly linked with political and personal exploitation of nature and women” (160). The ‘hegemonic theorizations’ on nation (by both men and women) overlook the relation between gender and society and exclude women from accessing the “state apparatus” (Yuval Davis 1) and the ‘Ideological State Apparatus’ and ‘technologies of gender’ make the female subject incoherent (Althusser, Gilmore).

Memoirs become textual practices to dispute this idea of men solely building the nations. The “alternate history of the excluded minority” is included in the “national cultures produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities” (Bhabha, “Location”6). Hoque’s Bangladesh only features imageries of unpatriotic men - men who once started the revolution but currently prefer to stay outside the country or revel in parties and religious festivities. This image is contrasted with women activists who educate the female population. She also brings in the idea of Bangladeshi women who in the 1950s participated at the women’s conference in America and fought for the ‘abolishment of purdah’ (Hoque 215). But sadly when Hoque’s father is revered as a nationalist in Bangladesh her grandmother’s intellectual legacy remains only within the family. A similar idea of the women not included in the nationalist discourses is echoed
in Mohammadi’s Iran that is masterminded by the Imams. For instance in the Iranian context narrating the nation has always been a man’s job starting from Reza Shah to Khomeini and we come across very few instances of women narrating the nation. When Mohammadi interprets the nation from her perspective, (even in an ethnoscape) she has to stick to “uncontroversial topics” (241). She confides,

> They were uncomfortable with me writing about Iran, even when those articles were printed in the travel section, and they hated that my name accompanied these articles. they have never lost their suspicion of the regime and being Iranian through and through, reasoned that to be known was to be , sooner or later, in trouble and that the only way to survive unscathed is to stay anonymous unknown (239)

Karmi finds it difficult even to raise her opinions in the midst of the retroactive Palestinian men (who have been educated in the West). As corrupt men exploit the image of Palestine for their personal needs, she is forcibly driven to acknowledge that “there was no national cause any more and no unified struggle for return” (316).

Leave alone national consciousness, from the texts we understand that the consciousness of the woman is itself at stake. Women writers in the memoirs impose “order where there is chaos, structural coherence where there is memory and chronology, voice where there is silence” (Gilmore, “Autobiographics” 85). But in the select writings incoherence becomes an important aspect. The ethnoscapes instead of unifying multiplies the possibilities of the ‘self’. Hence split personalities are in search of a coherent, unified space which they can never find. The act of writing (which overtly seems a unified piece
of work) acknowledges the incoherence and fragmented identities of women writing. The woman writer miserably fails in trying to write the experiences of an immigrant woman. The already split identities become more ambivalent as the private self gets exposed in the public discourse of nation (Gilmore 2001). Hoque pronounces, “When I try to write out these scenes, it’s America narrating” (190). The subject ‘I’/woman/immigrant gets fragmented and influenced by various political and philosophical discourses. Hoque the narrator of Olive Witch and the represented subject are dual personalities. The represented female figure itself is dual in nature and her very existence is “performative” (Bhabha). The women narrators in their memoir identify this nature of the nation with their split selves. Gilmore in her Autobiographics (1994) contends that female writing (memoirs) perceptively encoded “the possibility of recovery as desire” and further “the possibility of representation as its mode of reproduction” (86). But methods of autogynography are challenged by the nationalist discourses in the select texts and recovery of self is lost in the national narratives.

The heterogeneity of the select texts facilitates a comprehension of the different perspectives involved in narrating the nation. While Hosseini’s novels extol Afghanistan (from a man’s point of view) the memoirs by women neither venerate nor deplore. Hosseini depicts cases of Nila and Amir. While the former is critiqued as being masculine, the latter is condemned for not being masculine. Nila readily transposes out of Afghanistan while Amir doesn’t - he is more feminine and only moves out of Afghanistan as Baba forcefully relocates. While Nila defies tradition Amir is not able to rise up to tradition – Pashtun way of fighting back atrocity. The memoirs deal with female protagonists who flee their homeland at an early age. Only on their return they
accumulate knowledge about the indigenous societal structures. Among the three testimonies Mohammadi is sentient of Iran as the masculine nation. In a nation where “high heeled sandals, cropped trousers, painted toes and bare ankles” are despised she considers her survival as thriving by accident. Being a journalist she wishes her country would be free. She avers, “I don’t know what freedom will look under Iranian sun . . . I hope it will mean female wisdom steps out of the home into public office” (Mohammadi 256). The chaotic environment Hoque is subject to drives her to a point where she is not bothered about the nation being interpreted from the male or female point of view. The idea of nation and ideals of nationalism do not exert control over this female protagonist. She declares, “I don’t like or understand borders, nor do I have any sense of nationalism. I am even more wary of religion. . . Or perhaps region and religion are just the most tangible factors” (Hoque 194). All that the woman longs for is the liberty to associate and at the same time dissociate with nationalities. Unlike the earlier two, Karmi hardly bothers about the gendered identities and differences in institutionalizing nation as she is aware of the non-existing nation. They gradually come to terms that they have to encounter the masculine ideologies either in the ethnoscapes or in the nation.

The stereotypes that produce the nationalist discourses in the ethnoscapes are not “passive and unitary” but are “complex, ambivalent contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive and demands that only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself” (Bhabha, “Location” 70). Hoque, Mohammadi, Karmi, Pari, Nila, Amir all struggle with divisive identities. Caught in transitional spaces they surreptitiously yearn to live a life or design a nation of their
own. While a few can achieve this, the state of the rest becomes undecipherable in an ethnoscape.

National consciousness flows seamlessly into ethnoscapes through network societies. Network societies, religion and culture are also the driving forces behind the constitution of ethnoscapes. In Bhabha’s view, “migrants act of survival by using mixed media works to make a hybrid cultural space that forms contingently disjunctively in the inscription of signs of cultural memory and sites of political agency” (Bhabha, “Location” 7). The ethnoscapes are sustained in most of the cases through mediascapes.

Hoque in a measure to preserve and rework her memories embarks on a project of anthology of short stories along with photographs. The photographs become a glimpse of the developing and exotic Bangladesh. To escape the tyranny of split personalities she finds therapeutic relief in Photographs. She believes as the words and language can manipulate her memory the pictures can deliver ‘reality’. Similar ideas are reiterated in Cypress Tree and Return. Mohammadi affirms that freedom and democracy can be achieved only with the aid of “latest technology” (264). She represents the present day refugee who is forced to become a “cyber warrior” (262). The young generation use “blogosphere” to construct/deconstruct a distinct Iranian identity where the exiles despite living in foreign countries hold to their cultural values. Blogs and virtual communities become a platform to observe the ‘news’ and ardently voice out their opinions (12). The dispersed Iranians disseminate news primarily through online, the cyber portal facilitates them to rekindle the revolution and unite, “We are ready to receive the images, to set up portals and websites and post codes to break locks on banned sites, any way to help the countrymen that suddenly we are linked to in this faceless but totally united way” (263)
Ghada Karmi’s stresses that the Palestinian cause could be improved with better media management policies. She claims that the Israelis and Americans are organized with more capable media personnel in comparison to the Palestinians. In *And the Mountains Echoed* the internet and Facebook become sources through which Pari is able to find Abdullah. The media enables her to get into contact with her long lost brother.

The texts confine themselves to the predicament of the rich or the bourgeoisie. Very rarely do the plights of those from weaker sections of the society have been dealt with. But once the natives become migrants they share the common destiny of poverty. Rarely do the texts project the migrants becoming successful and affluent in their own ‘adopted home’. As Aijaz Ahmed establishes,

> Among the migrants themselves, only the privileged can live a life of constant mobility and surplus pleasure, between Whitman and Warhol as it were. Most migrants tend to be poor and experience displacement not as cultural plentitude but as torment; what they seek is not displacement but precisely a place from where they might begin new with some sense of a stable future (qtd. in Gandhi 164)

It is presumed that the exile narratives try to associate with a ‘stasis’, but contradicting this argument in the select texts the exiles after experimenting with the longing for ‘fixities’—‘home’, reject them. Though all the texts concur with the notion that ‘home’ becomes an abstract concept embedded in the memories of childhood as illustrated in Abdullah and Pari (ATME), Amir (KR), Mohammadi (CT), Karmi (RPM) and Hoque (OW) the itinerant urge (effected by globalisation) keeps them on the move. The texts also serve as stark reminders that “the past is not now a land to return in a
simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenario” (Appadurai, “Modernity” 30). They either try to accept and adapt to the present. While the home a cultural repository of the past can initially pull the native who, cannot resists the feeling “pulled back to our homeland, intoxicated by the rediscovery of our country” (Karmi 240) for her survival she has to return to the “interstitial space” - England. But there are also instances where the ‘liminal state’ becomes a painful phase and the native decides to return ‘home’ (Ramraj). Though a few like Hoque and Mohammadi return to ‘home’ it is only for a transient stay – more like that of the ‘tourist’. The texts also show appalling conditions where for Karmi the idea of ‘home’ rests in her “minds eye”. It is realised from the texts that, “The landscapes of group identity-the ethnoscapes-around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogeneous” (Appadurai, “Modernity” 48).

As Bhabha observes in “Postcolonial and Postmodern”, the postnation scenario facilitates a space where one’s ‘innate culture’ turns out to be a means of, “survival as much as heritage, so that the gap between inherited or official meaning (ideology) and its individual performance provide room for resistance and individuation” (189). Outside their native soil, the natives manufacture an imagined chimerical space that blurs lines between real and illusory. For the individual his/her “identity is claimed either from a position of marginality or in an attempt at gaining the centre: in both senses, ex-centric” (195). By analysing the select texts we understand that a nation can be realised in totality only by evading the ‘ethnocentric myopia’ (Gandhi) engraved deep within oneself and the collective consciousness.
Though they provide sanctuary from conflicts and violence, ethnoscapes take a political dimension and do not entirely vindicate the individual. As theorized by Bhabha in *Nation and Narration* the ‘double’ narrative becomes an essential part of the national discourse. The pedagogic constructions of unified homogenous nation of Amir (KR), Abdullah (ATME), Karmi (RPM) will always be intervened by performative representation of Shorab (KR), *Pari* (ATME), Hoque (OW) and Karmi (CT). These representations include everyone positioned in the margins (immigrants, migrants, refugee, women and minorities) to challenge the ‘continuist’ production of nationalist discourses (Bhabha, “Nation Narration” 305). Akin to Appadurai’s contention the national narrative in forms of ethnoscapes (need not necessarily be unified) realised through ambivalent voices produces local neighbourhood in which the immigrants have to imagine themselves as national.