Representation of Inner Exile in *The Patience Stone:* Exposing the Inner Self and Fight Between Reality and Imagination

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Abstract

Atiq Rahimi's novel *The Patience Stone* (*Syngé sabour*) is a good example of how one tries to overcome the marginalization inflicted by being a woman in an Afghan war-ridden society. The protagonist takes us into her fragmented mind and her journey towards self-realization in the face of many ordeals; he gives the woman a voice to an otherwise disempowered one. However, there is a psychological effect to this type of exile; one is related to the inward/outward movement of thought and the fight happening within – the woman in this case, but can take on several portrayals of characters in other novels – that takes on the resemblance of the outside: a war. Rahimi portrays this in his work, a fight between many facets of the woman, one that the reader chances on along as she talks and holds herself back several times before acknowledging her true power. In this paper, I claim that exile is a multi-faceted concept and experience that makes the person more liable to external and internal influences. Rahimi gives us glimpses, through very vivid images, about the dire situation in Afghanistan but is relentless with the woman's monologue as she uncovers truth after truth to her 'there' but 'not there' husband. Though she dies in the end by being brutally beaten to death by her husband's hands, she achieves a certain clarity and a peaceful bliss as the truth is finally out and she is set free.

Keywords: Exile, Identity, Imaginary, Inner-Self, Marginalization

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Introduction

Successive waves of conflict and instability in Afghanistan have resulted in a diaspora of refugees and exiles all over the world. David Kettler writes in his book, *The Liquidation of Exile: Studies in the Intellectual Emigration of the 1930s*, that at a time "in which identities are inwardly and outwardly contested, the concept of native land is too restrictive to capture the bounded domains in which individuals operate and which they may be constrained to leave" (2). To save their identity, people in war-torn countries tend to flee to salvage what little they have left of themselves to provide a better future for their offspring, and Afghans were not the first to go through that ordeal. Unfortunately, they will not be the last, as ruling powers tread over the weak to gain more advantage over the other countries.

Atiq Rahimi, an Afghan writer who went through the Soviet war, sought and was given refuge in 1984 to France; he is one of the greatest voices for Afghans through his novels of which *Syngé Sabour: The Patience Stone* (*Pierre de Patience* in French), won the Goncourt prize in 2008. This novel talks about the plight of a woman, the protagonist, who is caring for her bedridden husband and two daughters in Afghanistan. The fight that she goes through is similar to what so many women in Afghanistan and third world countries go through, as their identity is only hinged on the male in the family, and when found alone, are confronted with the misogyny of the ruling class, namely the Mujahideen and the Taliban. The journey into her identity and the inner and outer conflicts she has with herself and the other characters in the novel shows the reader how she, as a woman, goes from being marginalized and internally exiled in her society and comes out unvanquished and stronger for it.

Exile is a theme in most of Rahimi's books, and what I found intriguing is the resonance of it in his book *Syngé Sabour: The Patience Stone* in particular, where the search for identity is prominent as Rahimi takes the reader on a quest to find out the difference between reality and the imagination; a fear that controls and sometimes paralyzes the protagonist into submission, only to later come out, through death, more knowledgeable and bereft of all demons. Through this article, inner exile will be discussed, and the reader will get to know how the effect of exile on the mind and body as a person, in general, and a woman in particular, changes as it is taken from reality and submerged into imagination as she chances to find freedom. Edward Said, Julia Kristeva and many other prominent writers are mentioned for their important production on exile and how identity becomes conflicted and lost in an ordeal as big as an exile. The importance of this research is to get to know, on a personal level, the effect of this ordeal through realistic fiction, hence Rahimi's novel. Through studies on abjection and psychological realism, one would get a deeper meaning of how a person can change under this type of stress. Kettler asks when and "how does one become an exile, how does one sustain the condition, and when does one stop being an exile in any important sense?" (2) Moreover, how does identity change in exile? Whether it's an exile exerted by the self, upon the self, or by an exile exerted by an outside force, namely society. How does one conquer the imaginary, if possible, and find the real in such a traumatic ordeal as great as exile? How does fear play a role in the disillusionment of the exiled and his/her family, and how is that feeling of helplessness conquered when faced with a new reality?

Method

The method used in this paper is based on research articles and books on the themes of exile, psychological realism, the difference between inner and outer exile, and the critical theory that revolves around the effects of exile as an ordeal on the subject undergoing it. All this is later put into comparison or as backup to Rahimi's novel, as is shown in the below article. Rahimi portrays all the above themes in his story, as well as the power of the woman in a patriarchal country. As many women worldwide are protesting to get their voices heard now, Rahimi has been giving his female characters a voice of

their own to fight oppression. The procedure started with a comprehensive reading of books, articles and research about the topics mentioned above, and then a detailed reading of the novel and the notes taken on the articles and how each corresponded to the ideas presented in the book. All the ideas were gathered in a coherent way that followed the flow of the narrative, and the theories were used to emphasize the importance of this book on inner exile and identity crises. The instruments used were actual literary theory books, like Lois Tyson and Julia Kristeva, as well as scholarly articles from JSTOR. At first the articles were read and notes were taken, then the quotes which adhered to the topic and gave some value to the research were inserted into the body of the discussion.

Discussion

This research paper shows that exile and the search for identity are complex issues. The conclusion is that it becomes easier to befit the new society when one accepts the truth of the ordeal. The woman in Rahimi's book refuses to accept her fate sealed by being a female and undergoes a journey of discovery and truth leading to eternal freedom by death. Though not all exiles face this end up as women, their fight never stops, even when they succumb to their new environment.

Exile: A Living Death in a Captive Mind

What is exile? Edward Said, one of the most prominent exiled laureates of the 20th century, talks about exile in his book *Orientalism*. What is more interesting, though, is that although his book is widely discussed and used as a base for exile studies, his 2003 preface shows another purpose for the book. Said writes that there is "a profound difference between the will to understand for purposes of co-existence and humanistic enlargement of horizons, and that will to dominate for the purpose of control and external dominion" (xii). The Taliban's rule in Afghanistan is one point of domination over the people and women in particular, especially in recent years after they took back control. Instead of moving forward with globalization, they have retreated behind their own borders, transforming the history of a once advancing country into one with "various silences and elisions, always with shapes imposed and disfigurements tolerated" (Said, xii). Their control and dominion, though does not stretch far outside the borders that much, is still perceived as imposed rather than proposed over those with no power in the country.

The different facets mentioned can be related to an identity crisis that results from the different feelings of abandonment, fear, and force used on the person; whether this force comes from an outside source or from within – a form of inner exile, a torment from inside the person – makes it harder to deal with the change of place. Exiles, though, do not have this luxury to move onward from their ordeal. It takes over their mind and body, and as Said describes, the person in exile "can neither be reduced to a formulation nor be brushed aside as irrelevant" (xviii). Human life is important, but war, displacement, migration and exile have become so normative that all of the above have become part of our daily lives. The news talks about migrants who perish in the sea searching for a better life or Ukrainians fleeing their own country as the Russians invade it. The perception of all this plight, through the lens of the media, explodes and rapidly fizzes away as the routine of everyday life takes over.

Though the perils of war are still happening, it becomes disregarded by the general public as they move on to the next exciting thing. Volkova specifies a difference between physical exile and inner exile, saying that the physical part of it "implies a veritable loss: of country, birthplace, language, support, and belonging, and in all cases an absence of an engaged and responsive community and thus most importantly a loss of meaning and communication" (14). Whereas, the person undergoing inner exile, "lives in a void, an exile from identity, time and space, orphaned from a world they never knew"

(15). The void the exile deals with is the lack of familiarity one obtains after years of being in one place: the closeness one feels in a net created by safety and numbers with others in the same situation, something that people have done for centuries.

Inner and outer exile are shown in Rahimi's story *Syngé Sbour: The Patience Stone* through the woman's life as she is shown to be still residing in a war-torn Afghanistan. She goes through a series of tragedies, starting with the abandonment by her family that leads to a loss of identity, which transforms into a type of inner exile or marginalization, where she is cast aside and forgotten. Volkova mentions that gender marginalization "is thus another invisible form of exile, greatly affecting women" (40). Throughout the book, Rahimi gives glimpses of this exile in the narrative; the exile of the woman from her family, physically cast aside in a small house with a room he describes as stifling that signifying the imprisonment the woman might be feeling even though she is in a room with clear colored walls:

> The room is small. Rectangular. Stifling, despite the paleness of the turquoise walls and the two curtains patterned with migrating birds frozen mid-flight against a yellow and blue sky. (Rahimi, p. 5).

The frozen birds on the curtains set an image of flight, and being free, whereas the situation in the room is the complete opposite; the image, it is frozen, is similar to the situation the woman is in; stuck in her life with a bed-ridden man, she is as stuck as the birds are. Rahimi's way of describing the different events happening in captivity is in the sense that the reader feels imprisoned as the woman cannot move or change her fate, stuck beside a man lying on a mattress, on the floor, breathing. The woman's family becomes estranged in a community that relies on the power of the husband, a patriarchal power, to overcome difficulties. However, her power becomes as sheathed as the *khanjar* hanging on the wall with no actual use. The man in his state in the novel is exiled into his immobile body at the woman's mercy, and the woman is exiled from society, marginalized, and forgotten because of her gender. Rahimi shows the exasperation of the woman in her situation through the different words and formulations she utters to her husband, saying:

> But that stupid Mullah has no idea what it's like to be alone with a man who...' She can't find the right word, or doesn't dare say it, and just grumbles softly'... to be all alone with two little girls!' (R., 13).

> The aloneness she feels is because her man is not there to support her, a state of vagueness takes over as her exasperation is shown when Rahimi writes:
> She looks around slowly. The room. Her man. This body in the emptiness. This empty body. (R.,15)

She feels emptiness because she is left to face her ordeal alone. Once relying on a support system, she finds herself dealing with everything on her own after an accident. There is no reaction from the patriarchal figure in this story as the man takes a backhand seat, and the woman and her voice take the lead. Though she is tired, she keeps on coming back to him, hoping, praying, constantly pleading for him to wake up and take his rightful place:

> She punches herself in the belly. Once. Twice. As if to beat out the heavy word that has buried itself in her guts [...] After looking at the man awhile, she moves closer, bends over his face and whispers, 'Forgive me', as she strokes his arm. 'I'm tired. At breaking point. Don't abandon me, you're all I have left.' She raises her voice: 'Without you I have nothing. [...] (R., 18-19)

The torment the woman feels is understandable in a situation like hers. Rahimi shows this in the form of a monologue as the woman endures expulsion and no communication when she says:

> 'My aunt...she has left the house... she's gone!' With her back to the wall she slips to the ground. 'She's gone...but where? No one knows... I have no one left... no one!' (R.,17)

The woman continues on her rant, exposing the unfairness she has gone through:

> 'You men, you're all cowards!' She comes back. Stares darkly at the man. Where are your brothers who were so proud to see you fight their enemies?' Two breaths and her silence fills with rage. 'Cowards!' She spits. 'They should be looking after your children, and me – honoring you, and themselves – isn't that right? Where is your mother, who always used to say she would sacrifice herself for a single hair on your head? [...] You might as well know: they've abandoned you. They've deserted us,' she cries. 'Us, me!' (R.,19-20)

The physical desertion that the woman undergoes, first from her husband, who is in a vegetative state, then her husband's family, who, at first sight of the injury of the supposed *hero,* leave with no notice. Her aunt also follows suit as the reader discovers she had left without leaving a word—all of these make the woman feel desperate and alone. Fear takes over her mind, and her identity starts to fragment. On the one hand, she wants to fight for justice but cannot do so because she is a woman; on the other hand, she tries to fight to keep herself and her family alive but is limited because she does not have the means to. The woman is desperate for a connection, like so many exiles who search for company or companionship; someone to ease their plight of being forgotten and unable to do anything about it. She screams:

> Come back, I beg you, before I Lose my mind. Come back, for the sake of your children... She looks up. Gazes through her tears in the same uncertain direction as the man. 'Bring him back to life, God!' [...] you've no right to leave us like this, without a man!" (R.,21)

The abandonment in her words, in the above quote, shows the fight with her mind commencing. The woman is in search of meaning to what she is going through. Nevertheless, to no avail, the answer she awaits is beyond her reach. Julia Kristeva, in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, writes that even from its "place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. Without a sign [...], it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out" (2). This convulsion of feelings manifesting through words of hate and anger from the woman only makes the reader more attached to her plight.

The woman's life transforms into a living death; captive in her ordeal, she can no longer sustain herself or her kids since she cannot work, and the hostile environment of the war makes her fear even greater. There are similarities to what Sabine Grebe describes in her article, *Why did Ovid Associate his Exile with Living Death?,* to the life of the woman in Rahimi's book, where the life she has inside that blue room has a "crucial liminal distinction between the knowable world, considered the inside, representing an enclosed area of a safe community (life), and the outside, which was characterized by a hostile and chaotic physical and social environment and was believed to be an unknowable world, not unlike death itself" (429). The inside, in this case, becomes the mind of the woman, her identity broken by the fear and chaos on the outside. The latter, however, becomes the outside and is the body and its physical existence in a life that has no respect for it anymore; but this "exteriority [becomes] a void as terrifying as the nether world" (Grebe, 2010, p. 501). The woman's identity suffers a loss, and her mind becomes fragmented with inner turmoil; her emotions become erratic, as do her physical actions. The woman's journey is reflected in the narrative as she moves from inner exile into a sort of self-discovery accompanied by fear, always pushing her into the reality outside.

The grim reality beneath the seams of the woman's life burst when her husband is shot. At first, she is told that he was going to come out of it, but then she is blamed for her lack of faith and not praying enough for him to be saved. The woman

> laughs. A sad laugh. 'And when I reach the seventy-second cycle, that cretinous Mullah will come to visit you and, as always, will reproach me because, according to him, I can't have taken good care of you, can't have followed his instructions, must have neglected the prayers... Otherwise you'd be getting better!' (R.,12)

Through the agony of being alone and blamed for not being a good praying Muslim, her mind becomes a deeper captive. She is reclused into her home with her two daughters, but it improves when she finds her aunt again. Identity is an important factor for an exile, a way out of the monotony, a journey into self-discovery that makes the ordeal easier to handle. The woman goes through a sort of abjection, a repulsion of her outside self as her inner self seeps through the facets that repression had forced upon her body and soul since her birth. Kristeva says that the abject "simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when the subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject" (5). In this case, the woman's inner self pulverizes the layers covering the truth that lies beneath. Through her belief that the patience stone will be destroyed after the truth comes out, the woman defies the restrictions in a society so bent on controlling her. However, she loses both her inner and outer self (body) as she becomes the master of her fate. Thus, the destruction of the outside is seen through her fateful death, but she gains an immense breakthrough for her identity, where she becomes freed from the torment that has been eating at her since the beginning.

Journey of the Self in Reality and Imagination through Fear

What is the identity of an exile? How does the self-evolve when it loses touch with reality? The fragmentation happens after a sudden shock comes into play. Coerced outside of the homeland, whether by choice to save one's family or by an outside force, renders the identity and self-weakness. Dostoyevsky, the father of psychological realism, influenced Rahimi's writings as his books generally take the reader through the thought process and dream of Rahimi's characters as they find their way out of the maze they had constructed or had been thrown in as is seen in *The Patience Stone.* The journey undergone by the reader into the inner exile in *Syngé Sabour: The Patience Stone* alongside the woman through her memories, dreams, and thoughts transform the voyage into one of discovery as the woman treads alone through the valley of darkness on a path ridden with hurt and outrage; which eventually ends in liberation. The loss of the familiar would no longer pose a problem for the woman, for she would have escaped the borders of her entrapment. In her article *Corporeal Borders and Inhabited Bodies as Exilic space in the Theatre of Wajdi Mouawad and Marie Ndiaye*, Angela Ritter writes that being "exiled from our bodies " or exiles living in other bodies is the ultimate displacement" (p. 85). She continues to specify that women "especially fall into this fate of spirits exiled from their bodies. Perhaps the body is exiled from the spirit for the character continues to have effect over others while the body ceases to exist" (p. 91). Rahimi gives the woman a voice in his novel. Yet, her body and self-endure a disruption of everything she came to get accustomed to, so her identity separates into a self that needs to break out of this disruption and another that remains meek and docile. At the same time, the man lies immobile on his mattress. Rahimi shows this conflict in his narrative:

> Overcome by her memories, she stands up heavily. 'I never wanted anyone to know that. Never! Not even my sisters! 'She leaves the room, upset. Her fears echo down the passage. 'He's driving me mad. Sapping my strength. Forcing me to speak. (R., 65) [...]

> 'What's the matter with me now? What am I saying? Why? Why? It's not normal, not normal at all...' She comes back in. 'This isn't me. No it isn't me talking... it's someone else, talking through me... with my tongue. Someone has entered my body... I am possessed. I really do have a demon inside me. It's she who is speaking. (R., 117)

The woman's conflicted journey back and forth into self-discovery, though happens at a time of war, since she is imprisoned in her own war, her clarity comes at slower intervals. Delving inside her own memories and speaking about them reveals to both the man and the reader a distinct fight between what the real and the imaginary. By her inward journey into her past, one filled with segregation and horror, a darkness takes over as she recalls her father punishing her by putting her in a cellar:

> It was dark. I had to spend two days in there. He left a cat with me – another stray who must have been roaming around – and told me gleefully that if the animal got hungry it would eat me (R., 65).

The darkness becomes a symbol of oppression, one that the father thought could control in order to subdue his daughter. However, she ends up finding recluse in it, and befriends a cat, her fear no longer becomes one of the insides – the self – but fear of the other; in this case her father, later on, her husband, and after the police that break into her house. Rahimi describes instances of the woman whose fear transcends into physicality saying"

> "[s]he is shaking. With cold. Or fear" (R., 67).

The fear of the other translates into one stitched into reality, her reality, married to an image of a man which presently still hangs in the blue room as he lays there unknowing of the happenings around him; alert, yet distant as she says:

> I very quickly became used to you, your clumsy body, your empty presence which at that point I didn't know how to interpret... and gradually I started to worry when you went away. To keep watch for your return. I used to get in a terrible state when you went away, even for a little while... I felt as if something was missing. Not in the house, but inside of me...I felt empty (R., 69-70).

The woman's shackles of repression come not only from her inability to change her fate, but from a society that thinks of her as a commodity to sell and exchange for payment of debt, she recalls:

> [...] I were some tawdry reward for your triumph! I was looking at you, but you were staring into thin air (R., 61).

The women found in a society that sees them as products for bartering, try to develop a sense of self to protect themselves from abusers. The woman in this novel protects herself from within, as she tries to find the strength to keep up although she wants to give up, she doesn't.

Rahimi uses the notion of psychological realism, more prominently in the second part of the book, in order to drag the reader into the most private thoughts of the woman. Bowers in her book *Dostoyevsky at 200: The Novel in Modernity,* writes that lives in a state of "extreme excitation, which propels [her] thought to operate with increased intensity, and that, in turn stimulates [her] imagination" (109). This makes the reader question, alongside the woman, the value of reality, and whether the situations surrounding the woman's ordeal are actually a figment of her imagination or not. Ritter has similar notions to Dostoyevsky as she writes that the body "is a threshold – a place of entry and departure, sometimes for multiple identities. Also, it can willingly, or unwillingly, become inhabited by others" (93). The woman does show the emergence of multiple identities. In one instance, she is portrayed to be always in conflict with herself. The woman would utter a sentence, then ask herself why did she bring herself to say something like that. In other instances, she would go back to praying, thinking that the resolution will come from

a higher power, and not from within herself. However, her plight ends when she no longer fights against the outside and accepts that what's on the inside will emerge outwards.

Through the above citations from the novel, one can note that the woman's voyage into her past, the darkness and light that emerge from these memories – shown through suffering and fear – take the reader on a route of separate identities fighting to emerge. But a self whose experiences are solely physical gets lost in the whole array, or disarray, of society and its demands on the body as well as the soul. The woman's experiences in the novel, from her young age, witnessing the cruelty and unfairness of how girls are manipulated, alienated and used as material gain, gives her an edge for when she gets married to be able to keep her husband, so that she might have a decent life. The woman says:

> 'But everything I did was for you... in order to keep you' [...] 'Or actually, to tell you the truth, so that you would keep me. So that you wouldn't leave me! Yes, that's why I...' She stops herself. Draws in her knees and curls up on her side, next to the man. 'I did everything I could to make you stay with me. Not just because I loved you, but so that you wouldn't abandon me. Without you, I didn't have anyone. They would all have sent me packing' (R., 68).

The woman becomes engulfed in her own delirium of being the man's savior. The truth that she avoids saying from the beginning of the novel finally surfaces in a sequence of confessions from the woman to the body of the quiescent man on his mattress. Paul Allen Miller, in his article *Placing the Self in the field of Truth: Irony and Self-Fashioning in Ancient and Postmodern Rhetorical Theory* writes that the speaker "only exists as speaker to the extent that her innermost thoughts are disseminated across a broad temporal, spatial, and social field that makes the locus of identity inherently plural" (323). This plurality, given by Rahimi to the woman, in order to overcome her oppression becomes clearer towards the end of the novel where she says:

> 'So, I feel relieved, set free – in spite of the terrible things that keep on happening to us – it is thanks to my secrets, and to you. I am not a demon!' She lets go of his shoulders, and strokes his beard. 'Because now your body is mine, and my secrets are yours. You are here for me. I don't know whether you can see or not, but one thing I am absolutely sure of is that you can hear me, that you can understand what I'm saying. And that is why you're still alive. Yes, you're alive for my sake, for the sake of my secrets.' (R., 73-74)

Her imagination takes over in these moments of turmoil as she starts seeing apparitions of her father who comes to push her onwards in her journey to self-discovery.

> I felt a presence behind me. I didn't dare look. I felt a hand stroking me. I couldn't move. I heard my father's voice. I gathered every ounce of strength, and turned around. He was there. With his white beard. His little eyes blinking in the darkness. The worn-out shape of him. In his hands he was carrying the quail I had given to the cat. He claimed that everything I told you yesterday had brought his quail back to life! Then he embraced me. I stood up. He wasn't there. Gone, taken by the wind. The rain. Was it a dream? No ... it was so real [...] I was thrilled by his visit, lit up. (R., 74-75)

Talking to someone, even the ghost of a person from her past leaves the exile, in this case, the woman, a little less agitated about the changes happening around her. Talking to her probably dead father made the woman feel a little less left out because there was someone, who when she was a child had been so hard on her, becomes this endearing person that causes her dreams to become a little less dark. She continues on this journey of memories and goes to one from her father-in-law who was the only man in the woman's life who did not marginalize her.

> I didn't even know how lonely I was. At night I slept with your mother, in the daytime I talked to your father. Thank God he was there. What a man! He was all I had. And your mother hated that [...] Your father read me poems, and told me stories. He encouraged me to read, and write, and think. He loved me. Because he loved you. He was proud of you, when you were fighting for freedom. He told me so. (R., 59)

The woman finds through her father-in-law, though a male figure, a haven where she can flourish and become someone better. He saw her for her potential and not her bodily gain; she becomes an asset for him as he for her. The woman's memories of him a tool to soothe her suffering.

The woman's dreams in the second half of the book materialize as she starts sensing and seeing her father. This for her becomes a sign that she is going to be saved, taken out from the misery she's living with her immobile husband. Lois Tyson in his book *Critical Theory Today* explains that dreams can manifest into "symbols of any kind, if we keep in mind that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a given symbol and its meaning" (19). As well as the images of her dead father surface as she approaches her salvation, the memories of her father in law's stories give her peace as well. One in particular becomes the most intriguing about a stone given to Abraham by God. *The Syngé Sabour*. What is interesting is that the word *sabour* comes from the Arabic base word *sabr* which means patience. The woman's patience in the story is seen dwindling at times but never faltering so much as to run away or leave her past. She is perseverant and believes that the stone, her father-in-law told her about, is one that will save her from torment if she reveals all her secrets to it. The woman recalls:

> The day before he died, your father called for me, he wanted to see me alone. He was dying. He whispered to me, [...] I know now where this stone is to be found. It is in the Ka'bah, in Mecca! In the house of God! [...] It is a stone for all the world's unfortunates. Go there! Tell it your secrets until it bursts... until you are set free from your torments. (R., 75-76)

Her torments here are emotional, seeing the people she relies on the most leave, die or become immobile petrify her in fear. The fear resounding in the narrative does not stop after the woman makes the discovery that her husband is now kept alive just so that she can vent herself to him, but it pushes her further into self-discovery. The woman assumes her living arrangements when two assailants invade her space: a couple of jihadists that are fighting for the freedom of Afghanistan, supposedly. Though one was meeker than the other, his look upon her endearing rather than threatening, he is still seen as a man who has power, the one who has power, and she with no power.

> Surprised by the woman's presence, he crouches down next to his companion, who asks him, 'So? 'The second man's eyes are fixed on the woman as he replies, 'it's ok-ok-okay, th-there's a c-c-ceasefire!' stammering, his voice a teenager's in the process of breaking. (R., 83)

Her tenacity in facing strange men who come into her home; for a woman alone in Afghanistan, is very dangerous, but she saves herself from being raped by one of them by answering the questions asked:

> Have you any children.
> Yes. Two... two girls
> Where are they?
> With my aunt.
>
> And you – why are you here?
> To work. I need to earn my living, so I can feed my two kids.
> And what do you do for work?

> The woman looks him straight in the eye, and says: 'I earn my living by the sweat of my body.' (R., 84-85)

The soldier's disgust as she speaks these words to him, and his eventual departure is pleasurable to the woman because she felt powerful in being able to protect herself against someone who saw her as a conquest.

> A triumphant smile flickers across her dry lips. After a long gaze at the green curtain, she unfolds her body and moves over to her man. 'Forgive me!' she whispers. 'I had to tell him that- otherwise, he would have raped me.' She is shaken by a sarcastic laugh. (R., 86)

The achievement is from her side now. The woman feels powerful because she is able to push the man away with just words. Though it doesn't last, she still keeps this pleasurable feeling that she is able to fight against the oppressors in her own way. The story later unfolds as the other soldier comes back, and forces himself on her. However, his demeanor was more of a man searching for power, and ends up giving her the power over him. When the soldier comes back asking to be pleasured, the woman at first refused, and is met with violence; she "is halted by the barrel of a gun against her belly" (R., 105). She cedes to his demand:

> Abruptly, he throws himself on top of her. The woman, struggling to breathe, gasps, 'Gently!'
>
> Overexcited, the boy awkwardly grabs hold of her legs. She is frozen, numb beneath the wild flapping of this clumsy young body as it tries vainly, head buried in her hair, to pull down her pants. (R., 105-106)

The woman, after the deed, feels miserable but doesn't move to pull away from the boy that had wounded her pride. Her maternal instincts take over and she caresses the boy as though he was the one wounded by the whole act.

> It's the woman's hand that is moving. Gently stroking the boy.
>
> He does not protest. She continues stroking. Tender and maternal. 'It doesn't matter,' she reassures him. No reaction at all from the boy. She perseveres: 'It can happen to anyone.' She is cautious. 'Is... is this the first time?' After a long silence, lasting three breaths, he nods his head – still sunk deep in the woman's hair – in shy, desperate assent. (R., 106-107)

Though the woman's achievement in keeping control over her own body is threatened when the soldier boy comes back asking for being pleasured, the fact that he was callow takes away the violence her body experiences, and his inexperience becomes something that the woman is able to control later on in the narrative. The woman does feel disgusted after this first encounter, though and her "eyes fill with tears. Her body huddles up. She wraps her arms around her knees, tucks in her head and wails. A single, heartbreaking wail." (R., 108) The feeling does not stay long after, as pity settles in instead of anger and disgust, and her conversation with her husband resumes.

Rahimi shows the reader the control the woman musters over the soldier where his inexperience plays a role in her managing him, forming him into a man, somewhat softer than the other men she had in her life; one that may come to realize how much power women can yield with their body alone. The man's visits increase and the woman starts developing feelings for him:

> An ephemeral happiness flits across her sad face. 'I should have rushed. I hope he comes back.' As she changes the man's sheet: 'He will come back [...] I hope you don't hate me for talking to you about him and entertaining him in the house. I don't know what's going on, but he's very – how can I say? – very present for me. It's almost the same feeling I used to have about you, at the beginning of our marriage. (R., 130-131)

The happiness the woman feels by a parcel left by the door, a few seeds of corn and a fruit, shows how human contact while in exile helps see light when there is none. Even if the boy she entertains is a man, an oppressor, she feels saved by his presence and touch. She hopes to steer him from becoming a monster like her husband was. But the idea flickers away as she says: "I know that he too could become awful, like you. I'm sure of it. The moment you possess a woman, you become monsters." (R., 131). This possession is what the woman has been fighting against from the beginning of the story, though her *patience stone* belongs to her, her immobile man is a possession for her to keep, she can't really keep living in a life where she is alone. The woman feels guided by a higher power, one from inside, an identity that is linked with the truth that keeps coming out, seeping through her thoughts and dreams.

Rahimi mentions that the voice is related to women, for the voice of a woman is rarely heard when it is screaming but is paid close attention to when it is quiet. And through the woman in the story, her voice becomes a beacon through the dark times that women in her situation have been facing for a long time. Her whispers in darkness, the pleading with herself and God, the aggravated, angry feelings that erupt only to calm down again are all emotions that she had gone through but takes control over them as she discovers that it is she who has the power over her fate. Her identity – as she has been reliving the past and making peace with it, starts to heal. Hasti Abbasi, in his article *The Ideology of Exile in an Imaginary Life,* writes that the "correspondence between things and a reconnection with the past can heal the emotional and physical sense of dislocation" (24). The dislocation Abbasi talks about is one that exiles feel more often because of their trauma. their disconnection from reality, one that acts on their psyche, making them feel more alienated from a society that is supposed to be their support.

Women have always been marginalized in societies with laws that swerve away from the importance of women, making their existence void in face of patriarchy. Larry Goodson and Larry Johnson, in their article *The Fragmentation of culture in Afghanistan*, wrote that the Taliban have made "the issue of women's roles and status a cornerstone of their Islamization program. Their policies have largely eliminated women from the public space, by preventing their participation in virtually all occupational categories of the workforce, their schooling, and the freedom of movement (especially by requiring the adoption of the head-to-toe form of the veil known as the *burqa*)" (281). The women thus become exiled in their own society, in their own bodies, locked away behind a veil, cast aside and ignored because of their inferiority compared to the superiority of the male.

Conclusion

Exile at times of war is a greatly discussed topic. Wars have not made the transition from one country to another simple, either. The Afghan war, specifically from 1978 to1998 is one of the many wars that have produced a generation of uprooted people who have come of age in diaspora, whether in refugee camps or scattered in the west, destroying and disrupting the social structure (Goodson & Johnson, 1998, p. 269). Not only had this uprooting caused detrimental effects on family life and daily activities, but it had also caused severe damage to identity and finding the self in such an ordeal.

The disruption is a result of exile and a cause of severe identity troubles, where the uprooted people were never actually accepted in their adoptive society. Ritter writes that the feeling of foreignness and identity both bring attention to the commonality of the "experiences [that exiles face] and focus on exile as a shared, human experience: we are all exiles in that we are exiled from ourselves and from each other" (p.84). Nowadays, people tend to feel more excluded from the group if they are not under a certain label. The need to be in a group or another, accepted by certain cliques, plays a role in the self and the identity of the person undergoing this judgment, whether acceptance or rejection. As seen in the above piece, Rahimi gives the reader a good image of how the woman is both rejected and looked down upon as a woman, living alone, residing to

selling her body for safety and money. This way of survival is one that many women underwent in Afghanistan to get through the war when their husbands passed away, and they did not have anyone to take care of them anymore. Though in the story, the woman does get raped by another soldier – one who wanted to gain an experience, not a bid to conquer the female body – she was the one who triumphed because she could control the soldier. The woman in the story had gained this control through her body and because of her mind and did not secede to the norms where a woman is a docile domestic object that resides only at home.

The path that the woman took us on as we (the reader) jumped from one point of torment to another makes the end all the more satisfying as her voice, and the one buried deep under layers of oppression, breaks through the shell that had been forming for centuries and escapes. Her truth is set free in the open, and her voice is no longer pushed down and held in exile: she has achieved freedom. Though exile is a topic that has been discussed repeatedly, Rahimi's portrayal of it through his novel gives a new insight into the inner feelings and afflictions one might face in this ordeal.

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I hereby declare that research ethics and citing principles have been considered in all the stages of this paper. I take full responsibility for the content of the paper in case of dispute.

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