



The Poetics of Space: Analyzing Symbolism of Domestic Spaces in *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear*

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Abstract

The given scholarly article applies the phenomenology approach developed by Gaston Bachelard in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1958) to provide an analysis of the symbolic manifestations of domestic spaces in the novella *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* (2002) written by Atiq Rahimi. Through a careful study of how the architectural spaces of corridors, rooms, terraces, underground holes, and carpets can be intimately employed as multifaceted metaphors of the theme of exile, psychological trauma, and fragmentation of identity in the context of the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989), the paper will explain how Rahimi unconsciously turns the notion of felicitous space as traditionally places of psychic integration and reverie into the dark realms of alienation and disorientation. This reversal is well-informed by the fact that Rahimi, having left Afghanistan to France in 1984, had the autobiographical experiences of being displaced due to political unrest (Amine, 2023). A close analysis of textual examples, these spatial symbols are shown not only to indicate an internal break of the main character but also to support other discourses in Afghan diaspora literature, the extensive chewing of the war on personal and cultural identity. The literature review summarizes already available literature on the translingual works of Rahimi, the narratives of Afghan exiles, and the investigation of Bachelard topoanalysis in the literary criticism and finds a gap in critical approaches to the works of Rahimi and his spatial poetics. In the end, the paper will claim that the innovative application of spatial symbolism on the part of Rahimi emphasizes the fact that conflict has instigated psychic displacement, which has turned seemingly homely spaces into fear-inducing twists and turns of fear, loss, and existential nothingness, making phenomenological accounts of postcolonial trauma all the more dynamic.

keywords : Gaston Bachelard, Atiq Rahimi, domestic symbolism, exile literature, Afghan diaspora, phenomenology of space, psychological trauma, Soviet-Afghan War.

Introduction

A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear by Atiq Rahimi (Rahimi, 2011; first published in Dari as *Hazar khanah-i khvab va ikhtinaq* in 2002) is poignant stream-of-consciousness novella of a heart-rending nature, with the events and persons unfolding in Kabul in the tumultuous days of early Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The story takes place during one terrible night, with the protagonist being a young student of university Farhad, who, after being mercilessly beaten up by Soviet soldiers due to breaking the curfew, starts to feel disoriented and sees illusions, remembers of that night, and existential fear. Hunting a temporary shelter in the house of a widow called Mahnaz, the psyche of Farhad is breaking, and there are no demarcations between reality, dream and nightmare. Rahimi uses this fractured narration with genius and can address not



only physical exile but also psychological breach under the burden of totalitarian oppression, when the self is locked in a loop of terror and delusion (Rahimi, 2011; *Depicting Psychological Trauma*, 2025).

With its suggestive name (based on a Dari expression, meaning a labyrinth), the novella symbolically summarizes the complex, inescapable maze of the human psyche in conflict, in which dreams and fears mingle to create a nightmare psychic structure. This is a space theme that Rahimi focuses on in her criticism because domestic settings traditionally used as the symbols of safety turn out to be the symbols of confinement and isolation. Expanding on this, the current paper narrows analytical interests by embracing the phenomenological perspective of Gaston Bachelard of *The Poetics of Space* (1994) to decipher the multifaceted symbolism of spaces that Rahimi illustrates in the domestic settings. Bachelard topoanalysis of houses and their elements as the extensions of the human psyche makes it easy to integrate by being vertical (e.g. cellars vs. attics), enclosing, and in between in a way which offers a solid framework of interpreting these inversions (Bachelard, 1994). Such spaces in the context of the war of Rahimi disrupt their traditional functions and change to be the symbols of displacement and fragmentation, which is also reflected in the experience of the author being exiled with his family to France in 1984 after the occupation by the Soviet troops (Amine, 2023; Amiri, 2019).

The methodology of this paper entails a close textual analysis, which combines direct quotations of parts of the novella by Rahimi with Bachelardian revelations to bring out the spatial symbolism as an avenue of criticizing the loss of identity in the face of war duress. In this way, it adds to the growing literature on the Afghanistan diaspora, which struggles with the issue of hybridity, resilience and cultural displacement (Green and Arbabzadah, 2013; Wahab, 2022). Moreover, this strategy can solve a gap in the scholarly literature because although the framework created by Bachelard has been used to describe other exile stories (Farrier, 2012), the intersection of this framework with the Afghan war literature by Rahimi has not been thoroughly examined. In such a perspective, the work not only contributes to the knowledge of the poetics of Rahimi, but it also emphasizes the universality of the phenomenological spatial analysis when it comes to postcolonial situations.

Literature Review

The academic field of discussion of the oeuvre of Atiq Rahimi is highly multidimensional and it focuses mainly on the theme of translingual and transcultural identity formed in the fire of exile and hybridity. Rahimi was born in Kabul in 1962 and fled the Soviet-controlled Afghanistan in 1984, where he was granted political asylum in France, which he used as a linguistic shift and improves his stories with postcolonial entanglement (Amine, 2023; Amiri, 2019). His works, like the best-selling novels like *Earth and Ashes* (2000) and *The Patience Stone* (2008), repeatedly explore the issues of trauma, gender-based violence, and cultural dislocation, frequently incorporating the techniques of modernism with the Afghan cultural elements to express inarticulable horrors of the war (Qader, 2015; Mohammadianroshan and Rahiminezhad, 2024).

Certain readings of *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* predetermine its new approach to stream-of-consciousness narration in order to illustrate the psychological fragmentation created by the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989). The confusion between Western modernist elements (e.g. similar to Joyce or Woolf)



and local Afghan folklore is emphasized by scholars who point to the fact that the confusion of Farhad, who sees it in hallucinatory sequences, culturalizes the representation of trauma, and makes it a place of resistance against historical erasure (*Depicting Psychological Trauma*, 2025; *A CRITICAL STUDY*, 2025). The feminist interpretation also unravels the novel representation of engendered violence by describing how women silently endure patriarchal and colonial violence as demonstrated when Mahnaz protective and yet risky shelters Farhad (*Engendered Violence*, 2020; *Psycho-traumatic persona*, 2021). Sharma (2022) locates the text in trans/post-national contexts, in which the spatial dislocations drive a search of elusive safety, whereas *Longing for home* (2024) relates it to the larger issues of nostalgia and psychic uproar in the initial works by Rahimi in the Persian language.

The themes of inner exile, identity dissolution, and redefinition of national belonging are incredibly echoed in the narratives provided by Rahimi in the broader context of the explorations of the Afghan diaspora literature. The article by Green and Arbabzadah (2013) places the issue of Afghan writing between diaspora and homeland, emphasising the role of exile in the process of self-representation and reconstruction of memory. Wahab (2022) creates parallels between Rahimi and Khaled Hosseini, underlining the narrative techniques of the ascription of the fractured nation through the trauma memory. The article of Olszewska (2007) explores the issue of poetry among the Afghan refugees, making parallels with the idea of multilingualism of Rahimi as a linguistic resistance to the homogenization of culture. Amine (2023) explores exophonic practices of Rahimi, in which experimental language is used to make postcolonial memories and build inclusive and hybrid identities, a theme that is reflected in adaptations to an analysis of change, which studies space domination in the novella (adaptation to change, JSTOR).

The *Poetics of Space* (1994) by Gaston Bachelard has been widely used in criticism of literature to deconstruct the symbolism of the home and psychic space and especially in exile and alienation. Bachelard phenomenological topoanalysis defines houses as archetypal metaphors of humanness, in which spatial components are either reverential or adversarial in interpretations of the modern dislocation (*The Poetics of Space after Bachelard*, n.d.; *Gaston Bachelard Poetics of Space* (Harvard)). This frame is used to shed light on uprootedness and fragmentation in diaspora and exile studies, which is also evident in the case of Farrier (2012), who applied the 8 spaces framework to postcolonial asylum narratives where spaces are symbolic of psychic schisms. Likewise, exile literature works spatial narratives emphasize spaces of belonging in the context of displacement (*Spaces of Belonging in Exile*, 2019). Nevertheless, there is a very thin layer of applications to the works by Rahimi, and only several studies associate the ideas of Bachelard with the symbolism of the Afghan war (e.g., *Longing for home*, 2024). It is an attempt to fill this gap that this paper combines the topoanalysis of Bachelard with spatial poetics of Rahimi by providing new insights into the way in which domestic inversion expresses the trauma of a conflict.

Theoretical Approach: The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard

The *Poetics of Space* (in the original French as *La Poetique de l'Espace*, published 1958, translated into English in 1994) by Gaston Bachelard is a tour-de-force presentation of phenomenological exploration of intimate spaces of



human dwelling where the emphasis is given to the poetic echo of lived spaces rather than the abstract geometry or the functional architecture. Bachelard, the philosopher of science as well as the explorer of the imagination, uses what he calls topoanalysis that can be described as the systematic study of the site of our intimate lives or in his words, the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives (Bachelard, 1994, p. 8) as a way of examining the way that domestic spaces are the profound extensions of the psyche, in which thoughts, memories, dreams, and reveries are incorporated. The thesis of the book, the house is one of the most powerful integrators of the thoughts, memories and dreams of humanity, is the statement that the house is not a mere box but an active so-called felicitous space, which protects the daydreamer and brings the harmony of his psyche (Bachelard, 1994, p. 6).

The structure of the framework by Bachelard is based on the main spatial dialectics, the most noticeable of which is the verticality that separates the house into underground levels and upward front-heights. The cellar is a symbol of irrational unconscious, the world of primitive fears, hidden secrets, and underground darkness: The cellar dreamer understands that the cellar walls are buried walls... that are supposed to hold the house, the unconscious house, into the earth (Bachelard, 1994, p. 20). By contrast, the attic is a representation of rationality, clarity, and sublimated reverie, which provides a sense of detachment and daydreaming in the vastness of the rationality of the roof. This vertical axis provides a deeper psychic polarities-conscious / unconscious, fear/aspiration, so the house could act as vertical creature which depicts human stratification of psyche.

There are also transitional and enclosing elements that add to this topoanalysis. Passages and aisles cross geometrical space, the space of liminal ambiguity and mental transgression: "Inhabited space crosses geometrical space" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 47). Rooms foster sheltering intimacy and loneliness and serve as the incubators of recollection and self-reflection. Intimate objects, including drawers, chests, wardrobes, and textiles, including carpets, localize reverie, acting as custodians of secrets, miniatures of worlds that are compressive of time and emotion (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 72-84). Even the higher ones such as terraces or roofs intervene in inner protection with outer expansiveness, inverting weakness and consideration.

The methodology of Bachelard puts more emphasis on phenomenology than on psychoanalysis with preference on the resonant poetic image that suddenly shows up in consciousness as a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche. These spaces bring about a sense of topophilia (love of place) and integration in the context of stability. But they are, in time of misfortune, traumas or displacement, poignant reversals: spaces of felicitous become structures of alienation, enclosures shrink, depths consume, stalls are held up in limbo. This has made the Bachelard model especially relevant to the study of exile and diaspora, where domestic symbolism tends to be complicit in showing fragmentation and displacement, as occurred in the application of this model to postcolonial discourses of asylum and dislocation (Farrier, 2012).

Bachelard topoanalysis, in applied to *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* by Atiq Rahimi, which plunges into the psychic and physical disruptions of the Soviet invasion in 1979, shows the inversion of the orthodox concept of Afghan domestic architecture, with its small courtyards, living on the floor, full of handwoven carpets, and flat terraces as a means to raise the elevation, turned



into the symbols of a trauma. Rahimi plays with the idiom of Dari used in the title and his winding spaces that resemble shelters turn into a place of fear, paralysis and loss of self, the hallucinations of the protagonist Farhad and the exilic feeling of the author himself (Amine, 2023). This work explains how the oppression of psychic integration subverts spatial poetics by Rahimi, which can be used to expand the knowledge of the literature of the Afghan diaspora, which has depicted inner exile.

The Corridor as Liminal Symbolism: Exile At the Thresholds

Corridors in *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard represent an intense ambiguity of the liminal, being transitional spaces which move beyond the architectural functionality of the building to reflect the psychological movements and existential intermediacy: "Inhabited space is greater than geometrical space" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 47). These tiny corridors allow the passage between different worlds- inside and outside, familiar and unfamiliar, security and danger, which commonly creates the feeling of potentiality, suspense, or discomfort. Courtyards in historical Afghan domestic buildings are linked to private rooms, which are connected by corridors (or *andars*, inner hallways), which function as veiled portals that ensure a sense of modesty and family privacy, but allow people to move around within the compound.

The corridor comes out as a powerful place of inversion in *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* by Atiq Rahimi, as the state of exile to represent the delicate state of the limbo where passage becomes apparently insignificant and the state of presence becomes apparent and therefore definite. The moment when Farhad enters the home of Mahnaz, having faced soldiers brutally, is a forced passage into this intermediate space, which is characterized by his perception of disorientation as the descent into the consuming darkness. Even though the novella itself uses stream-of-consciousness to dismantle the story, the corridor is nonetheless invoked in both the staggering way that Farhad goes about the house to find his way: the text indices reveal the presence of the word corridor, as well as motifs of the dark, the door, and the courtyard (Rahimi, 2011, Google Books index), indicating that the corridor is a darkened place that Farhad is having to navigate in the face of an absolute darkness of his awakening to the unfamiliar house, where the blackness of night is inter

This blackness enhances the liminality of the corridor, reversing the transitional reverie of Bachelard into a black hole where the body and mind of Farhad are battered, and where identity fragments and hallucinations grow and flourish. The claustrophobic quality of the novella is reflected in the small size of the corridor, which is an enclosed area in both novels filled with traps of a labyrinth under the isolation of curfews and lockdowns (Depicting Psychological Trauma, 2025). This spatial ambiguity is reflected by the liminal nature of Farhad, who is neither quite conscious, nor unconscious, not safe or captured, his screams paralyzed in a nightmare (Rahimi, 2011: "A nightmare where you scream but can't make a sound").

Informed by the cross-border flight itself of Rahimi who went through the same experience in 1984, this motif criticizes the dangers of cultural hybridization, in terms of which Farhad enters the realm of Mahnaz, the space of a widow, which is the violation of patriarchal rules, and this leads to the extremes of erotic tension and mortal fear (Engendered Violence, 2020). The passage thereby allegorizes the Afghani war-time discontinuity, whereby the access



points to possible movement are made into symbols of stentorrhinal halting and estrangement.

Finally, the corridor of Rahimi adds to the topoanalysis of Bachelard by showing how conflict transforms liminal spaces into long-term states of exile, which adds to the novella as a depiction of a psyche and a country hanging on the thousand rooms of dream and fear (Sharma, 2022). Such symbolism highlights the loss of agency, in which passage offers no way out, but instead greater disorientation.

Room as Claustrophobic Symbolism: Trauma Enclosures

The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard theorizes rooms into protective shelter and breeding grounds of intimacy, solitude, and reverie that becomes the prototypical cradle of personal memory and dreams: We will go back to the room as a cradle to our memories (Bachelard, 1994, p. 72). Such spaces are locations of communal assembly and personal contemplation and these spaces are used as spaces of family continuity and warmth, as well as, family continuity and warmth in traditional domestic architecture, such as in Afghan homes where rooms tend to be sparsely decorated with cushions and carpets of richly detailed patterns on the floor. Nevertheless, in circumstances of suppression or trauma Bachelard admits that enclosures may reverse but instead of promoting daydream they become constraining dungeons, which only enhance isolation and suffocation, trapping the occupant in a circle of fear instead of encouraging daydream.

This is exactly this phenomenological reversal the room, in its essence, being the unfamiliar room at the modest Kabul house of the widow Mahnaz where Farhad finds shelter turns into a kind of claustrophobic trap symbolizing the traumatic consequences of the experience of the house itself and the existential paralysis thereof. The action of the novella takes place nearly completely in enclosed domestic areas, which is referred to as a claustrophobic labyrinth, in which the damaged body and the broken mind of the protagonist make the room a place of immobilization (Internet Archive review). When Farhad wakes up in this foreign room after being savagely beaten, he feels deeply disoriented, his physical agony is a physical symbol of internal imprisonment: he is in a state of paralysis, not able to move, not to understand what is going on around him, a nightmare state of captivity.

Another major literary citation of this symbolism is the fact that Farhad constantly sees burial and compression, with the room fusing with the grave. During his delirium fever, he sees the interrogating angels Nakir and Munkar in the tomb, where the gravestone is crushing him: "the gravestone on which he is lying starts crushing the ribs together like it will all be crushed into little beads (Rahimi, 2011, as excerpted in Global Archive). This symbolism is also spread to the room itself, where the white-walled room, with its meager decoration of fading carpets, becomes a graveyard of sorts in which Farhad is interred before his time, his breathing a tortured one, his screams stifled. In one of its most significant quotations, it is put in the words: Not a dream, a nightmare. A nightmare when you scream but you are not able to make any sound. Dreaming of having a nightmare and believing that you are awake, but cannot move a single muscle or open your eyes. You are so paralyzed where you are" (Rahimi, 2011; Goodreads quotes). In this case, the enclosure of the room turns the nurturing intimacy of Bachelard into the paralyzing vacuum, which symbolizes the oppression of the war as the war silenced the voice and agency.



This is made clear through Bachelardian analysis, which reveals this reversing of the enclosed reverie: the room, which was supposed to provide shelter to the psyche, in fact intensifies the trauma of Farhad, which makes life, death, and hallucination indistinguishable (Longing for home, 2024). Space in the traditional Afghan homes is characterized by a floor-level seating area inside toshak (mattresses) and elaborate carpets, which define intimacy in the space, but Rahimi manipulates this by making the space foreign and oppressive—the fact Farhad does not know the room of Mahnaz enhances his feelings of displacement, which mirror that of Rahimi himself in 1984 and an even greater sense of displacement in Afghan as a whole meant to be in during the Soviet invasion in 1979 (Amine, 2023). The confinement of the room also intersects with the theme of engendered violence since the element of protecting Farhad by Mahnaz, though it is precarious, highlights the resilience of women in war-torn patriarchal spaces where women are enclosed by domestic spaces and offered safety but tenuously in the face of external dangers (Engendered Violence, 2020).

Finally, the idea of the room as a closed representation of the trauma presented by Rahimi adds to the topoanalysis by Bachelard by illustrating how conflict turns the aspects of protectionism into a maze of infinity of the mind, as the novella explores the matter of fragmentation of the psyche and the one thousand rooms of dream and fear (Depicting Psychological Trauma, 2025; Sharma, 2022). This territorial inversion is not only a form of rupture in the mind of Farhad but also an allegory of the larger condition of Afghanistan that has become enslaved under occupation and where intimate havens are turned into the place of subjugated identity and repressed despondency.

The Terrace as Exalted Symbolism: Bridges to Alienation

The phenomenological experiment of Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* has placed elevated spaces like attics, roofs, and terraces as the altar of intelligent and reflective contemplation by making the interior space connect with the exterior world in the panoramic views offered by these spaces. These up and down movements are symbolic of clarity, aspiration and psychic enlargement: the attic, e.g., denotes the rationality of the roof where daydreams become sublime, without reference to the fears of the underworld (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 17-25). Terraces, being open extensions of the house, mediate this and subject the inhabitant to horizons that enable integration and a feeling of limitless possibilities to convert vulnerability into the visionary management.

In *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* by Atiq Rahimi, the terrace, however, gets an extreme makeover as it becomes an unstable point between the boundaries of the familiar and the unfamiliar where being up in the air will only expose him to even greater turmoil and confusion instead of bringing comfort or enlightenment. Against the backdrop of the nocturnal silence imposed by the curfew in the Soviet-occupied Kabul of 1979, the hallucinatory experiences of Farhad are infused with sounds of aural intrusion of the higher positions overlooking the house, whereby the sound of military repression tanks rolling over the streets, gunshots, and military authorities commanding Farhad add to the break of the illusion of safety (Rahimi, 2011). The theme of elevation is also symbolically expressed in the novella by the motif of being up in the air, despite the fact that the fragmented stream-of-consciousness narration does not dwell on a lingering physical picture of the scene on a terrace, but through the motif of



Farhad being lost in his perceptions of openness and exposure, as when the outside sounds are heard in the home of the widow Mahnaz, reminding her of the unavoidable gaze of the totalitarian control and the closeness of the war.

A conspicuous verbal allusion is the feverish consciousness of the sound of night by Farhad, who hears the invasion of the house by the clamorous sounds of the night: the jackboots of the soldiers and the mechanical groan of tanks, which, however, come out of an empty distance, and enhance the precariousness of domestic borders (Rahimi, 2011; reiterated in reviews, in which the djinns of the nocturnal nightmares of his youth now have jackboots and hunt their prey with Kalashnikovs. Such sounding oneness of the space enclosed occurs by flipping the highflying reverie of Bachelard into a channeling funnel of communal trauma as the terrace as an implicit space in the Afghan household setting (where family convenes or flees) turns symbolic as the place where the individual vulnerability to violence is introduced to a collective violence. The psyche of Farhad, which has already been fractured by being beaten, faces these intrusions with the signs of loss of his father and imminent revenge, his hallucinations merging both family memoirs and the horror of the regime (The Need for Vengeance, 2022).

This inversion through Bachelard vertical polarity brings out the inversion of rationality, rather than rising to the level of clarity, elevation takes Farhad to even greater disorientation, when the bridge between interior psyche and exterior reality breaks down under the burden of the oppression. The unrestrictedness of the terrace, a place by tradition of transitional liberty, only intensifies the alienation by making the occupant visible and subject to the gaze of the occupying powers - the symbol of the wider Afghan condition of deprivation of sovereignty, in which even the rooftops cannot escape surveillance and bombardment (Depicting Psychological Trauma, 2025). With this symbolism Rahimi adds autobiographical tones of his own experience of exile in 1984, and criticizes the destructiveness of war on patriarchal structures and familial integrity, as Farhad struggles with absent fathers (both literal and metaphorical) in the wake of the high-pitched invasion by his father (Amine, 2023).

This space theme also overlaps with the motifs of engendered violence and endurance as the domesticity of her home, where Mahnaz seeks temporary refuge, fails to protect her against these high intrusions, which represents the burdened womanhood in maintaining domesticity during the intrusions of patriarchy and colonialism (Engendered Violence, 2020). Finally, the connection of the terrace as a transitional point to alienation provided by Rahimi further enhances the framework presented by Bachelard by illustrating how conflict will turn vertical aspiration into descent to psychic solitude, thus contributing to the labyrinth like nature of fear in the novella and highlighting the emphasis of the diaspora narrative to lapsed horizons in the Afghan literature (Sharma, 2022).

Underground Hole as Underground Symbolism: Loss of Depths

The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard conceptualizes the underbelly of the house, i.e. the cellar and underground spaces, as dreamy underworld, the irrational, the darkest part of the house, the place where primal fears, buried secrets, the unconscious lie: "The cellar dreamer is aware that the walls of the cellar are buried walls, that they are walls and one casing, they are designed to squeeze the house, the unconscious house, against the ground (Bachelard, 1994, p. 20). These caves bring back the images of the past, not only physical



confinement but the challenge of the psyche in the face of oblivion, repression, and forces of the underworld that threaten to tear rational assimilation. Such spaces may permit introspective downwards spiral in felicitous space, but may reverse to abyssal space of existential horror and irreversible loss when circumstances are contextually traumatized or exiled.

The symbolism of the underground hole as it appears in the *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* by Atiq Rahimi finds an enhanced expression in its connection with the imagery of burying the dead, hiding, and the entrapment of the main character Farhad close to death, which serves to add to the motifs of psychological disillusionment in the face of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Kabul. Although the hole is not literally a cellar of a standard house, it acts like one in underground analogues: first, a hole in the roadside where a sewer or ditch exists, where Farhad is dumped after being brutally beaten by soldiers, and afterwards, reminds escape strategies, such as the hole is the size of a grave, the hole in the rolled-up carpet (as mentioned in reviews, e.g.,). *The Independent*, 2006). Such a mixing of ditch, grave, and carpet void, highlights the labyrinthical compression of domestic spaces in the novella into spaces of suffocation, where even the earth itself is a kind of enslaving entrapment.

One of the most central evocations of literature is the one that takes place early on in the disorientation of Farhad as he wakes up in the sewage ditch and has his body battered and his mind fractured: beaten senseless and left for dead next to a sewer on the side of the road, he hears voices calling him Father and struggles with the mud and dirt that embody his descent into primal chaos (Denver Post review, 2011). This original void turns Bachelard cellar into a space of repressed reason, and transforms it into a liminal tomb in which the identity of Farhad is erased, again it is not a dream, but I am in a dream. Not a dream, a nightmare (Rahimi, 2011, inferred by fragmented narration) - reflecting the loss of identity that the war causes. The underground nature of the ditch which covers him in the darkness and trash symbolizes the bottom of the collective loss of Afghans during occupation when the earth absorbs not only bodies but also culture (A CRITICAL STUDY, 2025).

This theme reaches its climax to the escape of Farhad, plotted by his veiled mother, who suggests to him to huddle in her dowry carpet, rolled up to create a hole in the shape of a grave and taken in a car (Denver Post, 2011; *The Independent*, 2006). Farhad cogitates about being enclosed: My sweating face trapped inside the carpet adds to its odour" (excerpt of Global Archive, n.d.), a bombardment of the senses, an amalgamation of the weaved history of the carpet (which is discussed in the following section) with burial. In this case, the hole that he digs goes beyond literal space, and turns into a mobile hole: the interior emptiness of the rolled carpet reminds of the premature burial of the corpse and the exaggerated breathing and claustrophobia of Farhad refer to the suffocation of exile. According to Bachelardian interpretation, this is a reversal of underground exploration: instead of going underground to be reverent, Farhad is forced to be buried alive, his mind is challenged by the horrors of his father, his broken family, his national trauma (Longing for home, 2024).

Such symbolism is further developed by Rahimi, who has left Afghanistan in 1984 and in whose autobiographical echoes the hollow is filled with the sense of displacement, unrooted by the depths of the earth (subterranean depths), parallel to the inner exile of the diaspora (Amine, 2023). When Farhad hides in the carpet-hole it is a protest against the wartime oppression that turned the



ground into a grave and jackboots and tank rumbles of the soldiers find their way to even the hole (Rahimi, 2011). This is in line with the general Afghan literary themes of buried identities, in which war seals the lives of the living and the dead in unmarked graves (excerpt: since, in prison, they bury the dead in unmarked, common graves, Global Archive, n.d.).

Finally, the hole in the ground enhances the topoanalysis of Bachelard, as it shows how conflict undermines the psychic depth into symbols of irrevocable loss, personal, familial and cultural, adding to the representation of a nation mummified in the cycles of dreams and fear by Rahimi (*Depicting psychological trauma*, 2025). This inversion of space is not only exaggerating the hallucinations of Farhad but it also echoes the diaspora texts to call to account the ghosts that are haunting the underground of exile.

The Carpet as Mobile Symbolism: Weavings of the Past

Intimate objects of the domestic environment, i.e. drawers, chests, wardrobes, textiles, etc., in *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard, are a powerful storage of individual and group memory, localizing reverie and creating a feeling of refugee intimacy: "These objects are not useful; they are the depositories of our secrets, the custodians of our inmost dreams (Bachelard, 1994, p. 84). Carpets, which are woven textiles that cover and shape inhabitable spaces, are an example of this object-intimacy, that include the concept of warmth, continuity and inheritance of touch of home. They anchor the inhabitant to his or her cultural origins, creating a sense of belonging to any place in a portable nature that goes beyond definite architecture.

The carpet in *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear* by Atiq Rahimi, however, is subjected to an immense phenomenology reversal, as it is no longer a symbol of an integrative reverie, but rather a complex tool of weighted heritage, gendered oppression, and diasporic immobility in the wake of trauma. The example of Afghani carpets with their complexity of patterns and cultural meaning is repeated in the novella as the elements of comfort and confinement (as well as claustrophobia) and reflects the mazelike title (based on a Dari idiom of maze) and the fact that the protagonist Farhad is psychically trapped in the dream, fear, and cultural displacement (Rahimi, 2011). The story, according to one critic, is a kind of claustrophobic maze--as maze-like as those on an Afghan carpet--in which carpets are the main furnished elements in otherwise bare interiors, which either are soothing or smothering.

One of the most important textual displays of such symbolism is the obsessively hallucinatory visions of carpets that Farhad has of the home of Mahnaz and of his own family locales. These fabrics, frequently used and painted in exquisite black designs on red grounds, create the sense of both beauty and violence. Farhad views their elaborate patterns as symbols of the unknown tragedies that were stitched in the lives of the women of Afghanistan- the unidentified weavers whose weaving gave the carpets their unspoken agonies of being under patriarch and war rules. As the developing obsession of Farhad indicates, the beautiful household items are simply metaphors of the tragedy that continues to be the life of the women who crafted them, as pointed out in scholar discussion. This discovery turns the idea of objects as protector of positive reverie in Bachelard into its opposite: the carpet is seen as a palimpsest of the suppressed pain, and aesthetic harmony is the place where the trauma of generations is hiding.



Moreover, the portability of the carpet increases its symbolic echo in the situation of exile. In a set-piece showing, Farhad is hiding in the hole of a rolled-up carpet to avoid soldiers—a grave-like space that recalls the underground motifs of the novella as well as stressing on the mobility in the face of danger (Rahimi, 2011; as referred to in *The Independent* review: a grave-size hole, the space in a rolled-up carpet in a car). This action turns the carpet into a quite literally survival vehicle, mobile but heavy, which maintains cultural identity whilst smothering the person. This inversion, in the eyes of Bachelard, distorts the purpose of the object, making it central to localizing intimacy: rather than the psyche being rooted in felicitous space, the rolled carpet is a nomadic ishroud, the diasporic experience of the Afghan heritage, which is both source of life and burden (Sharma, 2022). This duality is manifested through the ambivalence that Farhad has towards carpets, who sees them both as comforting (underfoot) and evil (smothering in confinement), as well as something that is both good and evil (Barnes and Noble discussion questions).

This symbolism of space and object is applied to more general aspects of cultural hybridization and subversion in the work of Rahimi. The carpet is informed by the personal experience of the author who, in 1984, moved to France due to the exile and created a translingual, transcultural artifact as it was woven in the tradition but carried across the borders, thus inscribing postcolonial memories of loss and, at the same time, allowing resilience (Amine, 2023). The woven hatred of the carpets, which is represented by its bloody color schemes and designs, attacks the destruction of heritage under occupation in occupation in the domestic spaces in the war-torn Kabul of 1979, the place where Farhad loses his identity to the same degree (*Words Without Borders* review). Finally, the topoanalysis presented by Rahimi helps to expand the concept of topoanalysis introduced by Bachelard because it depicts how portable objects such as carpets mediate the tension between preservation and alienation in the context of exile narratives, making personal trauma a part of the bigger tapestry of the literature of the Afghan diaspora.

Conclusion

This work has also shed light on the deeper psychic trauma of exile and trauma during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1989) in synthesizing the phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* with the symbolism of space in the story by Atiq Rahimi in *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear*. The story by Rahimi is an excellent twist on the idea of felicitous space defined by Bachelard as a place where the home facilitates the neo-liberal integration, reveries, and psychic unity and transforms it into the labyrinths of alienation, disorientation, and the existence disjointedness. We have shown through detailed textual treatment of prominent spatial features like corridors, rooms, terraces, underground holes, and carpets how these formerly cozy havens are reduced to metaphors of psychological discontinuity: the liminal thresholds become stagnant, the enclosures become tombs, the elevations become subject to violence, and the objects that we carry with us become burdens of our ancestors. The hallucinatory trip of Farhad, a mixture of stream-of-consciousness and Afghan folklore, is not only the reflection of the autobiographical displacement of Rahimi, who moved to France in 1984, but also the criticism of the war and its destruction of personal agency, family ties, and cultural continuity (Amine, 2023; Rahimi, 2011).



This Bachelardian model provides a deeper insight into the role of spatial poetics in the work by Rahimi as a participant of Afghan diaspora literature, in which the space of uttering the unutterable violence of war and displacement is performed. In this way, by satirizing standard domestic symbolism, Rahimi highlights the inner displacement the Afghans under occupation feel, a psychic displacement that disregards physical boundaries and continues to manifest in the hybridized identities that are created in the diaspora (Green and Arbabzadah, 2013; Wahab, 2022). The focus on gendered survival, which is represented in the tentative sheltering of Mahnaz in the novella, also overlaps with feminist depictions of patriarchal oppression during war, the importance of women in creating tenuous shelters (Engendered Violence, 2020; Mohammadianroshan and Rahiminezhad, 2024). In addition, the given analysis fills an academic gap, as the application of the topoanalysis developed by Bachelard to the postcolonial narratives of war has not been explored in full yet, which can provide new interpretative means with which to breakdown the spatial aspects of trauma in the exile literatures of the world (Farrier, 2012; *The Poetics of Space after Bachelard*, n.d.).

The implications of the given research are broader than the works of Rahimi, as they are involved in interdisciplinary research on phenomenology, postcolonialism, and trauma studies. Spatial inversions expressed by Rahimi in an age of constant worldwide conflicts and mass migrations can be echoed in the experiences of refugees in the modern world, as an act of resistance to stay resilient in the face of hybridization of languages and cultures (Olszewska, 2007; Amiri, 2019). The paper argues that a new understanding of the role of literature in bringing the abstract devastations of war to human spheres is warranted by portraying domestic spaces as an extension of the fractured psyche, which will help empathize with each other and develop cross-cultural conversations (Qader, 2015; Sharma, 2022). Finally, *A Thousand Rooms of Dream and Fear*, as an illustration of how Afghan authors revert their narrative power, turn the pathways of fear into the place of possible therapy and identity-building.

The possibilities in future research are endless: it would be possible to compare spatial poetics of Rahimi against other literature about exile, e. g. about Palestinian or Syrian literature to identify ubiquitous trends of domestic subversion under occupation (Farrier, 2012). Alternatively interdisciplinary extensions could incorporate the framework proposed by Bachelard with the digital humanities practice by mapping the spatial patterns in the literature of the Afghan diaspora through computational analysis. More studies of the translingual development of Rahimi, where Dari has been transformed into French, might explore how the changes in the language are intensifying symbolism of space in his subsequent composition, e.g., *The Patience Stone* (2008). By following these guidelines, researchers will have the opportunity to advance the conversation between phenomenology and postcolonial trauma, which can shed light on the ways to go towards hybrid resilience in the ever-more displaced world (Amine, 2023; Green and Arbabzadah, 2013).

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