



IRAQI  
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية  
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية



ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

## Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <http://jls.tu.edu.iq>

### The Representation of Refugees' Crisis through the Lenses of Edward Said's *Orientalism*: A Post-Colonial Study of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

Prof. Dr. Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed \*

English Department-College of Education for Women-Tikrit University

E-mail: [lamia.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq](mailto:lamia.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq)

Reem Adnan Hamad

English Department-College of Education for Women-Tikrit University

E-mail: [Reemadnan@st.tu.edu.iq](mailto:Reemadnan@st.tu.edu.iq)

<b>Keywords:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Refugees</li><li>-Khaled Hosseini</li><li>- The Kite Runner</li><li>-Edward Said</li><li>-Orientalism</li></ul>	<b>Abstract</b> <p>Said's <i>orientalism</i> theory identifies what he calls the false picture of the Orient or the East produced by western scholars, historians, cultural and legal theorists, and colonial rulers, given the West's primary goal of controlling everything in the East. Therefore, Khaled Hosseini's <i>The Kite Runner</i> has a historic relevance to the post-September events, which some critics see as if Hosseini, as an Afghan writer, is trying to ease the tight seclusion of Afghan immigrants in America. Hosseini is demanding to show a new vision of his country and change Western feelings towards Afghanistan from hatred to sympathy. <i>The Kite Runner</i> introduces itself as a novel that challenges the simplistic opposition between the West and the Middle East by building a bridge of understanding to the other culture, explaining to the West and the rest of the world that Afghanistan is more than rockets and gunshots in relation to Said's <i>Orientalism</i>. Since Afghanistan is stereotyped as a war zone neglecting its citizens, history, and traditions, Khaled</p>
<b>Article Info</b>	
<b>Article history:</b> <p>Received: 12-8-2021 Accepted: 1-9-2021 Available online 23-1-2022</p>	

\* Corresponding Author: Prof. Dr. Lamiaa Ahmed, E-Mail: [lamia.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq](mailto:lamia.ahmed62@tu.edu.iq)

Tel: +9647712715570 , Affiliation: Tikrit University - Iraq

	Hosseini comes to change these wrong perceptions, in which this research discusses this matter in detail shedding light on the historical background of Afghanistan's refugee crisis. He paints a vivid image of refugees and the obstacles they face as they escape to a new country, in relation to the actions of the novel, and a postcolonial reading to analyze the-other.
--	--

تمثيل أزمة اللاجئين من خلال عدسة الاستشراق لإدوارد سعيد:  
دراسة ما بعد الاستعمار في "عداء الطائرات الورقية" لخالد حسيني

ا.د. لمياء احمد رشيد\_ جامعة تكريت \_ كلية التربية للبنات

ريم عدنان حمد \_ جامعة تكريت \_ كلية التربية للبنات

<p><b>الخلاصة:</b> تحدد نظرية الاستشراق التي قدمها سعيد ما يسمى بالصورة الزائفة للشرق التي رسمها العلماء الغربيون و المؤرخون و المنظرون الثقافيون و القانونيون و الحكام الاستعماريون، نظرا لهدف الغرب الأساسي المتمثل في السيطرة على كل شيء في الشرق. تمتلك رواية "عداء الطائرات الورقية" لخالد حسيني صلة تاريخية بأحداث ما بعد ١١ أيلول/سبتمبر، التي يراها بعض النقاد كما لو أن حسيني، ككاتب أفغاني، يحاول تخفيف العزلة الشديدة للمهاجرين الأفغان في أميركا. ويطالب حسيني بإظهار رؤية جديدة لبلاده وتغيير المشاعر الغربية تجاه أفغانستان من الكراهية إلى التعاطف. تُقدم "عداء الطائرات الورقية" نفسها على أنها رواية تتحدى المعارضة التبسيطية بين الغرب والشرق الأوسط من خلال بناء جسر للتفاهم مع الثقافة الأخرى، موضحة للغرب وبقية العالم أن أفغانستان أكثر من مجرد طلاقات نارية وصورايخ لما له علاقة بنظرية الاستشراق. وبما أن أفغانستان مُقولة كمنطقة حرب مهملة مواطنيها وتاريخها وتقاليدها، فإن خالد حسيني يأتي لتغيير هذه التصورات الخاطئة، حيث يناقش هذا البحث هذه المسألة بالتفصيل، ويلقي الضوء على الخلفية التاريخية لأزمة اللاجئين في أفغانستان، التي يرسم من خلالها صورة حية للاجئين والعقبات التي يواجهونها أثناء هروبهم إلى بلد جديد، فيما له من صلة بأحداث الرواية، وقراءة ما بعد الاستعمار لتحليل الآخر.</p>	<p><b>الكلمات الدالة:-</b></p> <p>- اللاجئين - خالد حسيني - عداء الطائرات الورقية - إدوارد سعيد - الأخيرة</p> <p><b>معلومات البحث</b> <b>تاريخ البحث:</b></p> <p>الاستلام: ١٢_٨_٢٠٢١ القبول: ١_٩_٢٠٢١ التوفر على النت 23-1-2022</p>
---	---

## 1. Introduction

Edward Said, the Palestinian American academician and lecturer, had been the notable professor of the comparative literature at Columbia University for a long time until his death in 2003 due to leukemia. Said's name came into lights and gained a big fame when his book *Orientalism* was released in 1978 and built up the ground for the theory of post-colonialism, leading to a kind of stir of arguments, which did not vanish with Said's dissolution (Bhabha 105-133).

After the release of Edward Said's book, *Orientalism* (1978), various analyses of postcolonialism have gained big prominence. In the present world, the word "postcolonial" is defined as the study of relations between Europeans and the countries they invaded and conquered. Said's *Orientalism* theory identifies what he argues the false picture of the Orient or the East produced by western scholars, historians, cultural and legal theorists, and colonial rulers, given the west's primary goal of controlling everything in the East. In Said's view, these individuals have often portrayed the Orient as the uneducated and uncultured "other" in order to portray it as the opposite polar of the sophisticated and cultured West. According to Said, the dominant colonizers tend to impose their language and culture on the colonized society while ignoring the Oriental people's traditions, backgrounds, values, and beliefs for the sake of governing and enforcing their fortune under the guise of irradiating, teaching, and even humanizing them (Said 79).

Consequently, the colonial texts have depicted Indians, Egyptians, Palestinians, Latin Americans, and many others as almost the same Orient and Other in contrast to the United States and Europe, the Occidentals. Said believes that the long-term European *colonialism* in the East has a damaging effect on even the most enlightened and well-informed Western Orientalists' objective writings. He also observes that showing sympathy for a resisting nationalism is more strongly expressed in forms of writing such as fiction, which leads him to explore the themes of resistance cultures, demonstrating how the people can build their own culture and history. (Griffiths 40). He argues and discusses how the colonial west has always seen the Orient as inferior, and how this perspective can be reflected not only in early adventurers' and explorers' writings, but also in significant literary works by well-known authors. Said stresses in his thesis on the Anglo-French and American experience of Arabs and Islam, which for almost a thousand years together existed for the Orient, that there would be no end to the narrative tradition of *Orientalism* (Ali 22).

Said's definition of post-colonialism demonstrates how the war on terrorism has a significant impact on the lives of colonized citizens in various ways. In the "Preface" to the 25th anniversary edition of his pioneering and popular *Orientalism* (1978), Edward W. Said addressed the connection between prejudices, bigotry, and the 2003 Iraq War. "Without a well-organized sense that these people over there were not like "us" and didn't appreciate "our" values ...there would have been no war "(Said 20).

However, there is no wonder that the theory of *Orientalism*, whatsoever its vices may have been, transformed and shook up the way in which Western scientists and critics viewed the representations of nonwestern or Eastern literal and historical matters and cultures. Said also intends to stir up interest in the way in which the discourse of *Orientalism* helps to originate the West and the East, since both of them form a "binary opposition" and define each other. The fact that *Orientalism* assigns inferiority to the

East concurrently serves to create the West's superiority, and with the same way the immortality, naivety, oppression and lack of reason of the East set up the West as reasonable, mortal, democratic, and advanced. The West seems to always work as the "centre of almost everything" and the East is an inefficient "other" that simply over its existence gives a confirmation of the West's centrality and domination. Consequently, the contraposition of the East and West's discourse makes use of one more basic opposition, that is between the masculine and the feminine, by which clearly the West serves as the masculine with its enlightened, rational, and disciplinary attitude while the East is its feminine contest, submissive, indisciplined, and erotic (Bertens 112-214). Said views and claims that the instability of power and authority is what warranted and warrants the West's ability to make a misrepresentation of the Middle East, *Orientalism* then works in the service of the West's hegemony over the East primarily by creating the East discursively as the West's inferior "Other" (Said 7).

It is equally important to demonstrate that post-colonial scholars, such as Bhabha, are among the first to write ideas about a more complex relationship between the East and the West. Unlike Said, who focuses on framing Occidental and metropolitan culture as dominant and deliberate, Bhabha's work tries to go beyond a binary study of colonial relations (Moore-Gilbert 115). In his research, Bhabha includes the formation of the Western identity as well as the psychological effects and the operation of the unconscious, where colonial relations become more nuanced. The relationship between the two is then structured by multiple and contradictory beliefs. He also explores how the development of an occidental's identity is influenced by how he or she perceives the Oriental. Concepts such as "Britishness" or "Englishness" could not have been created without contact with alien culture, and therefore, to conceive of oneself as modern, rational or even "developed" according to Bhabha, could not have occurred without seeing the other as distinctly different in relation to oneself (Gilbert 117).

Additionally, in an article entitled *Islam through Western Eye* published in *The Nation* two years after *Orientalism*, Said emphasizes his ideas of the distorted image of Islam in the Western texts and media, shedding more light on how Islam is seen as a threat of a return to the Middle Ages and a danger to the democratic order in the West. In this article, Said reasserts his point in *Orientalism* that the same mistake made by the past Orientalists is repeated now by blindly generalizing all the Muslims and by simply classifying them into good or bad Muslims. He wonders how the scientific progress and objective research in the West, mainly in the United States, has not included *Orientalism*, where Orientalists are still biased, but the reason according to him is, after all, a political one (Said 488).

In this sense, Said defines *Orientalism* as a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, and about what it is to be done and what they cannot do, Said argues that what has been written about the East is no more than false assumptions upon which the Western attitudes toward the East were built, justifying and encouraging the European and American colonial and imperial behaviour towards the Arab-Islamic peoples and their cultures (Ball 135).

What is more, the natives regard the colonists as "the others". They came from Europe and took over the native land and made them slaves in their own land and society. These people's personal freedoms have been taken away, and they have been forced to live a life of marginalization. The colonizers took over the upper class, pushed all the others

down because they felt their way was better. The upper class, therefore, wrote the history of the persecuted nation. The only way to bring the oppressed nation into history is to bring the individual up and decide to write what he has seen or heard. The natives are therefore fighting for the justice of their “cultural identity”. They’re trying to build a nation on that culture in which postcolonial criticism can be articulated as an argumentative discourse that in general labels the historical truths of decolonization, rather than on the principles that everyone else insists they must adhere to. It allows people to break free from sociopolitical and economic domination in order to reclaim their power, as well as providing a parley space for justice (Hunt 132).

The certainty that Said’s works are estimated and that there is a necessity to pay attention to a critic like Said sadly indicates the truth that human rights are not being respected or taken into consideration by the political powers in many countries of the world. People are in need to know the concepts challenging colonialism as well as multiple nationalist teachings. The need to engage with Said is especially felt today when people all around the world have to face globalization often connected with the cultural, political, economic, and military reaches of the United States of America. Said’s works based on the notion of recognition help us to understand not only the case of Palestine but also other similar conflicts around the world. According to Said, “*Orientalism*” can be interpreted in a number of ways, and an orientalist can be anyone who makes systematic study of or teaches the Orient. Said illustrates the intertwined relationship between literature and the life of its time. In fact, this relationship between literature and the Imperial endeavor has been emphasized by many other writers (Loomba 76).

Finally, Said’s philosophy of *Orientalism*, as well as his provocative viewpoints, therefore, will be considered in order to investigate the refugee crisis following the September 11 terrorist attacks and the US war on terrorism. Several post-modernist authors have portrayed this issue in their works, including Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* (2003), by which it explores the historical background of Afghanistan’s refugee crisis, and depicts the three different presidents as well as the causes for the leadership changes. The practices of discrimination and brutality towards Afghanistan bring us back to Said’s *Orientalism*, which tackles the issue of representation of the Other.

## **2. Reading to Know the “Other” in *The Kite Runner***

Negative generalizations have been developed as a result of people’s lack of knowledge of how they read the Other. This chapter sheds light on the social, ethnic, and racial otherness in *The Kite Runner*, which has inspired the Afghans portrayed by the novel’s protagonists, as well as how Hosseini depicted Islam and how he could approach both the West and the East (Hunt 17).

According to the Chinese Professor Nie Zhenzhao (8-11), literature was originally produced primarily for ethical and moral reasons. It offers moral models for people to consider society and life from an ethical standpoint, moral advice for people’s material and spiritual lives, and moral experience for people to better themselves. The main events take place in Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital city. Amir, a 12-year-old boy, was determined to win the competition and successfully run for the last kite in order to gain the approval of his father, one of Kabul’s wealthiest and most respected merchants. Hassan, Amir’s half-brother, the son of his father’s servant, and the best kite runner he has ever seen, offered to assist him. Hassan was still there to help Amir get out of

trouble. A thousand times over for him. However, on the way to catch the kite for Amir, Hassan was raped by Assef, and Amir hid and stayed silent. Amir felt terrible and guilty for his cowardice, and he couldn't confront Hassan, so he let Hassan and his father leave his house by doing something he despised. When war broke out in Afghanistan, Amir and his father were forced to flee to the United States. He couldn't forgive himself for what he has done to Hassan previously. When he heard from his teacher that Hassan was his father's son from Ali's wife, he returned to his hometown, which had been badly ravaged by the war. While Hassan's brother and his wife died, their son Sohrab was left alone. He was asked by Rahim to save Sohrab. He struggled for Sohrab this time and was able to reclaim him and bring him to America.

The novel is about a father-son relationship that lasts a lifetime, as well as a friendship between two boys. Simultaneously, it depicts Afghanistan's dark social and political tensions. The novel was both personal and political for Hosseini. It delves into issues such as social inequalities, inequality, crime, and Taliban violence. Amir's development can be seen in the United States. He has matured as an individual and has the confidence to make amends for his past errors. This implies that a country other than Afghanistan offers enough opportunities for a prosperous life. In this case, Hosseini portrayed America as a prosperous and peaceful nation. Kite flying is a symbolic activity. The kite is a sign of liberation. Hassan and Amir were expected to fly kites. Amir's kites are caught by Hassan. They take pride in their childhood rights (Anjita 234). Amir runs to catch the kite for Hassan's son at the end of the novel and says, "for you, a thousand times over." Amir is finally free of his remorse. Hosseini comments on the theme of *The Kite Runner* :

"Because its themes of friendship, betrayal, guilt, redemption and the uneasy love between fathers and sons are universal, and not specifically Afghan, the book has been able to reach across cultural, racial, religious and gender gaps to resonate with readers of varying backgrounds" (Hosseini, 2003).

Conversely, different principles and traditions were often referred to as Afghan ways or American ways although they seemed to be unrelated. As long as the Afghans were in the United States, they believed in upholding Afghan customs and never branding themselves as anything like Americans. In some cases, the distinction between the West and the East was defined as absolute and systematic. Adoption was never an option for Amir and his wife Soraya when they learned they couldn't have children. For instance, Amir was told:

Bachem, this adoption . . . thing, I'm not so sure it's for us Afghans." Soraya looked at me tiredly and sighed. Now, if you were American, it wouldn't matter. People here marry for love, family name and ancestry never even come into the equation. They adopt that way too, as long as the baby is healthy, everyone is happy. But we are Afghans, Bachem (*The Kite Runner* 172 ).

This quote, according to Mashaal Al-Sudeary (247), highlights a lot of what happens in the book. "We are Afghans," concluded the debate, meaning that core elements of the Afghan way of life could not be altered or modified. Although the difference was defined as absolute, the systemic difference between the West and the East has traditionally been used to explain the Orient as abnormal, underdeveloped, or inferior. Many Afghans were forced to flee their homeland and property due to the brutal fighting and seek shelter in other countries as refugees. Similarly, Amir and his father

are doomed to abandon their homeland in *The Kite Runner*, and he explains their departure in the following lines:

Standing on the shoulder of the road, I thought the way we'd left the house where I'd lived my entire life, as if we were going out for a bite: dishes smeared with kofta piled in the kitchen sink; laundry in the wicker basket in the foyer; beds unmade; Baba's business suits hanging in the closet. Tapestries still hung on the walls of the living room and my mother's books still crowded the shelves in Baba's study. The signs of our elopement were subtle: My parents' wedding picture was gone, as was the grainy photograph of my grandfather and King Nader Shah standing over the dead deer. A few items were missed from the closets. The leather-bound notebook Rahim Khan had given me five years earlier was gone (97-98).

Hosseini's novel explores the historical background of Afghanistan's refugee crisis. It depicts the three separate regimes as well as the reasons for their shift. Hosseini paints a vivid image of refugees and the obstacles they face as they escape to a new country. When refugees arrive in a foreign country, they face a variety of issues. The lives of refugees are marked by a number of ups and downs. The lives of refugees are lost because the host countries' nation states do not show interest when the rights of refugees are debated. They seem hesitant and naive when it comes to providing refugee rights. The position of Europe and other host countries in this regard is insufficient to resolve the Afghan refugee crisis. To resolve them and resettle them in their homeland, they must accept true cities of refuge (Alam 17). By depicting some symbolic characters such as Amir, Hasan, and Ali Agha, Hosseini criticizes such notions of nation states. He also depicts the hatred of so-called upper-class individuals. Assef resembles this type of individual. His disdain for Hazara reveals a racist mindset, which is a contributing factor to the refugee crisis. Amir describes his struggle to leave their city, Kabul, as follows:

Baba grumbled something under his breath. I wanted to tell him I was sorry, but suddenly I was salivating, the back of my throat tasting bile. I turned around, lifted the tarpaulin, and threw up over the side of the moving truck. Behind me, Baba was apologizing to the other passengers. As if car sickness was a crime. As if you weren't supposed to get sick when you were eighteen. I threw up two more times before Karim agreed to stop, mostly so I wouldn't stink up his vehicle, the instrument of his livelihood. Karim was a people smuggler it was a pretty lucrative business then, driving people out of Shorawi-occupied Kabul to the relative safety of Pakistan. He was taking us to Jalalabad, about 170 kilometers southeast of Kabul, where his brother, Toor, who had a bigger truck with a second convoy of refugees, was waiting to drive us across the Khyber Pass and into Peshawar (*The Kite Runner* 111).

Hosseini criticizes the actions of nation states, according to Levinas (16), who says that they are there to shed crocodile tears for refugees. They act as though they are in favor of giving refugees rights, but in fact, they are unconcerned about refugees at all. He portrays the fictional idea of nation states by explaining the actions of Pakistani officers in Peshawar. Their care of Sohrab and Amir exemplifies their ostensible commitment to refugee rights. He uses *The Kite Runner* as a request for refugee rights, claiming that there are not enough nestling wings to save refugees' rights. The novelist asks the concerned authorities to be liberal in order to solve the refugees' problems through his book. He also suggests that nation-state behaviour be modified in order to solve the refugee crisis. If nation-states refuse to do so, the planet will devolve into

shambles of unjust citizens. Humanism's true meaning would be lost. In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini declares:

It should have been a time of glory for Afghans. Instead, the war raged on, this time between Afghans, the Mujahedin, against the Soviet puppet government of Najibullah, and Afghan refugees kept flocking to Pakistan. That was the year that the cold war ended, the year the Berlin Wall came down. It was the year of Tiananmen Square. In the midst of it all, Afghanistan was forgotten. And General Taheri, whose hopes had stirred awake after the Soviets pulled out, went back to winding his pocket watch (184).

Since refugees are human beings before they are refugees, they should be treated similar to people. People are human until they become citizens. In his novel *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini advocates as much equality as possible between people and refugees. If the refugees do not receive equal rights, the fond memories of their lives will never be forgotten, and the country will be divided into first-class, second-class, and no-class people. That may detract from humanity's true beauty in the eyes of the world (Levinas 37).

However, many in the Afghan diaspora, including Amir's father, did not hold America in the same regard as they did prior to their arrival. Most of what Amir had known had changed when he and his father came to America. "Baba loved the idea of America," he explained. It was his time in America that caused him to develop an ulcer (*The Kite Runner* 116). As Amir adapted to the cultural norms of the place where they were staying, studied creative writing, and aspired to spend the rest of his life in America, his father found it more difficult to bear their stay.

Amir, the story's protagonist, shocks western readers by not being all that different from them, as Amir's upbringing is common to Western culture. A young boy grows up in an affluent family, in a nice home, and is raised by a single father who appears to be fairly secular. As Baba refers to the Mullahs as "self-righteous monkeys, saying that all they do is thumb their prayer beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don't even understand" (*The Kite Runner* 17). He has the voice of any non-religious Westerner. Amir grew up watching American Westerns, drinking Coca-Cola, and riding in his father's Ford Mustang, and his everyday activities included playing and pulling pranks like any other child. The argument Hosseini is trying to make here is not to make the readers forget that the story is set in Afghanistan and that the characters have been "modernized," but to help them understand the story better (Ornehaug Dale 14).

When Amir returns to Afghanistan, he reflects on how different the country is from what he recalls. He sees that children are no longer playing in the streets, that fun seems to have left the property, and that the buildings have deteriorated. He commented on his various experiences from their first day in Kabul while his travel companion slept:

Farad's snoring soon echoed through the empty room. I stayed awake, hands crossed on my chest, staring into the starlit night through the broken window, and thinking that maybe what people said about Afghanistan was true. Maybe it was a hopeless place (*The Kite Runner* 246).

Amir is pondering these ideas when he suggests that he might agree with the Western definition of Afghanistan as a hopeless location, but he is not implying that Oriental communities are incapable of defining themselves. Since Amir doesn't say which



response he believes is correct (accepting or rejecting the Western concept of Afghanistan as a hopeless place), it is impossible to assume that he means the Orient is incapable of or shouldn't be permitted to define itself.

Consequently, the Orientalist stereotyping that is employed in the development of Amir's identity is also evident in the depiction of Assef, the novel's antagonist. When Assef first appears in the book, he is portrayed as a thug and a bully. Assef must be somewhat mad, Amir admits early in the novel, as other children in the region fear being beaten up by his brass knuckles. Western readers perceive Assef to be a pagan, a savage, a thief, and in need of change. As a consequence, Oriental characters are often inferior to their counterparts in the West. Amir's Western identity, on the other hand, evolves and grows throughout the book, becoming a more modern, liberal, Western character, while Assef only evolves by becoming a more inferior and devious "Oriental" character. As a response, the roles of the modern American West and a traditional Muslim world are contrasted in the book, generating binary opposition that inflames the contradictions between the two opposites and eventually sustains Western power structures supremacy over the East (Hunt 1-17). Amir explained Assef as:

... he was the embodiment of every parent's dream, a strong, tall, well-dressed and well-mannered boy with talent and striking looks, not to mention the wit to joke with an adult. But to me, his eyes betrayed him. When I looked into them, the facade faltered, revealed a glimpse of the madness hiding behind them (*The Kite Runner* 90).

Although Western readers want to identify with Amir's "otherness" through self-recognition, they have the opposite experience with Assef. Instead of finding a representation of themselves in Assef, they discover a character who is "primitive, barbaric, and oppressive," in the words of Alsultany (59), and therefore an antithesis to modern Western ideologies. As a result, Western readers are likely to rely on reassuring Orientalist assumptions to cast Assef in a position of Oriental inferiority by identifying Assef as a foreign character who also happens to embody the polar opposite of all they know themselves to be. The Orientalist stereotypes are at work here, which portray Oriental characters as inherently inferior to their Western counterparts, enable the Orient to be used as a "subject" for the benefit of the West as a whole. In this case, Assef's characterization acts as a backdrop for Amir's westernization, as well as a benchmark for how much Amir's Western identity progresses and evolves over the course of the book.

Furthermore, Farlina Nina (25) describes that, while Amir develops into a more modern, liberal, Western character within the bildungsroman framework, Assef only develops into a more cartoonish and vicious "Oriental" character. The cracking of Amir and Assef against one another creates a binary opposition mechanism, which inflames the contradictions between the two opposites and eventually maintains the supremacy of Western power structures over the East. Hosseini's work avoids being labeled Orientalist because, as an Afghan-American, he occupies a hybrid stance that encompasses both East and West. Hosseini is a supporter of the imperial machine, not the machine itself. In other words, even though *The Kite Runner* may not have been written with the intention of meeting the Western structure of the bildungsroman, the Western reader interprets it as such.

With this framework in mind, One instance of ethnic division and conflict in *The Kite Runner* is Amir's relationship with his best friend (and half-brother) Hassan:

[I] was stunned to find an entire chapter on Hazara history. An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan's people! In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said that the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence." The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said that part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a. The book said a lot of things I didn't know, things my teachers hadn't mentioned. Things Baba hadn't mentioned either (*The Kite Runner* 9).

This ethnic and social divide is crucial to the novel's plot, but it can also be easily translated into a binary opposition between the traditional "East" and "West." Hassan embodies the ethnic minority, physically damaged, and less fortunate companion of Amir, but he is also the more moral, traditional, and wholesome of the two boys. Amir, on the other hand, is a member of the privileged class and of the dominant and favored race, but he is poor in spirit and exploits Hassan's less privileged status for his own gain. Hassan will live an impoverished, yet spiritually satisfying, life in Afghanistan in his later years, while Amir will immigrate to America, get an education, and settle down in San Francisco, California.

It seems that the relationship between Amir and Hassan is clearly not exclusive to the Western reader. The boys' characteristics are formulated to resonate with a common and easily recognizable Western system of characterization from the viewpoint of a Western reader. Since Amir's dominant ethnicity and Hassan's inferior ethnicity are often prominent in their relationship, Amir unquestionably becomes the internal Orientalist and Hassan the Oriental subject for the sake of a Western audience. This assertion also takes us back to Said's statement that the Orient only exists in relation to the West as an "incorporated poor partner," reinforcing the idea that Amir and Hassan's ethnic and social differences serve to establish a binary opposition between the "East" and the "West" and represent an Orientalized Afghan community (Nina 122).

Before returning to America with Sohrab, Amir must be "absolutely surrounded and physically battered by the literal ruins of the past," as exemplified by his brutal encounter with his childhood's mortal enemy Assef (Muntz 31). Assef has joined the Taliban by this point, and he looks every bit the demonic Taliban warlord that American audiences expect them to be. Assef has been the perfect antithesis to Amir's Western identity, cruel and sadistic in nature but justified by religious fanaticism and extremism. He happily remembers the 1998 Hazara massacre in Mazar:

You don't know the meaning of the word "liberating" until you've done that, stood in a roomful of targets, let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse, knowing you are virtuous, good, and decent. Knowing you're doing God's work. It's breathtaking.' He kissed the prayer beads, tilted his head (*The Kite Runner* 277).

Since Assef fits neatly into the reassuring Orientalized paradigm of characterization that celebrates Western ideologies over Eastern ideologies, he is a widely obtainable and compatible figure with American audiences.

Because of the huge rivalry between Islam and Christianity, supported by the 9/11 attacks and massive propaganda against Islam, the West perceives Muslims as the Other and vice versa, Hosseini attempts to portray Islam in its true essence in *The Kite Runner*. Hosseini distinguishes between Islam as a faith founded on mercy and salvation and

Islam as an alibi used by extremists to justify their terrorist acts. Orientalism, as an intellectual orientation to legitimize colonialism, has influenced much of what we know about Muslims and the West's relationship with primarily Muslim countries like Afghanistan. Negative generalizations have been made because people aren't mindful of how they're interpreting the other (J. Paust 325).

After the events of 9/11, the world's understanding of Islam altered. All Muslims are terrorists, pagan, and barbaric in the eyes of westerners, their women wear hijab, and their men bear old Russian-made weapons. Despite the fact that Islam has many similarities with Christianity and Judaism, it is widely misunderstood in the West. The following is how Khaled Hosseini describes the events and their effects on Afghanistan:

Tuesday morning last September, the Twin Towers crumbling down and, overnight, the world changed. The American flag suddenly appeared everywhere, on the antennae of yellow cabs weaving around traffic, on the lapels of pedestrians walking the sidewalks in steady stream[...] soon after the attacks, America bombed Afghanistan, the Northern Alliance moved in, and the Taliban scurried like rats into the caves (*The Kite Runner* 316).

While the central government has made progress in limiting the power of some warlords, and regional commanders still control significant territory. Despite major efforts, Afghanistan continues to suffer from a lack of functional justice. It is clear that the superior dominant social group fixes the inferior social group with definitions that describe them, robbing them of their speech and their ability to identify themselves, and eventually robbing them of their identity as well. This racial or ethnic discrimination reflects how individuals or social classes perceive one another, with the Other seen as a desirable and corrupt minority (J. Paust 331). Khaled Hosseini mentions the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, and how they changed Americans' attitudes toward Afghanistan:

It was the year many Americans first learned where Kabul, the country's capital, was and who the Taliban were. To a great extent, Americans had pictured Afghanistan as a land of cave-dwelling terrorists (*The Kite Runner* 68).

The American influence is illustrated in the novel in this passage, which does not have to be an American character but may be a reference to the west in terms of history, life, or commodities. Whatever kind of presence it is, it typically focuses on one of these three aspects, savior, teacher, or modern/moral. Morality and modernity are not necessarily synonymous, but in this book, they are, and it only proves the whole principle of "Orientalism," in which the Orient is inferior to the Occident. As a result, the West's modernity acts as a counterpoint to the East's primitivism, and it is this lack of modernity that strengthens a negative impression of the East.

In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini addresses a sensitive cultural problem in Afghanistan that the Afghans would probably prefer to keep private. According to Michener, there is a clear misrepresentation of Islam in the western mind:

Many Westerners, accustomed by their history books to believe that Muslims are barbarous infidels, find it difficult to comprehend how profoundly our intellectual life has been influenced by Muslim scholars in the field of science, medicine, mathematics, geography and philosophy. Crusader who invaded the Holy land to fight Muslims returned to Europe with new ideas of love, poetry,

chivalry, warfare and government. Our concept of what a university should be was deeply modified by Muslim scholars (74).

Wardana Tomi (2) believes that Hosseini is attempting to improve Islam's reputation by emphasizing its tolerance, especially in Amir's character. When Amir finds himself lost and helpless, he prays and fasts to return to God. Amir, like any human being, makes mistakes and is given the opportunity to be forgiven, after all, that is what the story is about, finding a way to be good again.

However, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* had a historic relevance to the post-September events, which some critics saw as if Hosseini, as an Afghan writer, was trying to ease the tight seclusion of Afghan immigrants in America. Hosseini attempted to protect his home country by displaying the other side of Afghanistan, the oppressed, the cruel governance and the stolen childhood, when Amir visited the orphanage in search of Sohrab (Hassan's son), the director of the orphanage told Amir that there are a lot of children in Afghanistan but little childhood. Perhaps Hosseini is trying to show a new vision to change Western feelings towards Afghanistan from hatred to sympathy. *The Kite Runner* introduces itself as a novel that challenges the simplistic opposition between the West and the Middle East by building a bridge of understanding to the other culture, explaining to the West and the rest of the world that Afghanistan is more than rifles, rockets, and gunshots (Muntz 153).

Hosseini begins his novel with a powerful phrase often quoted in his book, "Come. There's a way to be good again, Rahim Khan said on the phone just before hanging up. Said it in passing, almost as an afterthought. A way to be good again" (*The Kite Runner* 192), to represent hope in Afghanistan's most desperate situation, hope for Amir to atone for his wrongdoings, hope for Afghanistan to create a new government that will bring peace and prosperity to the region, and hope for Afghanistan that one day a new generation of Afghan children will grow up without hearing the sounds of bombs and weapons.

On the other hand, Hosseini discusses the challenges that refugees face while attempting to migrate from one country to another. Nation-states demand legal papers, which is completely absurd. At first, a person in search of life safety is unconcerned about legal documents. He has certain humanitarian rights because he is a human being. He is a human being before he is a citizen or a refugee, and he should receive humanitarian aid. The nation-state clearly believes that feeding people is sufficient. Simple humanitarian rights are not as critical as a person's survival. The situation will be even worse if the individual is from a suspicious country (Al-Sudeary 43).

If *The Kite Runner* does not succeed in changing perceptions of Afghanistan, it does so by reducing misconceptions and providing a better picture of cultures and history. The West's perceptions of the East must be changed, with generalizations and ideological norms regarding the East being eliminated. Readers' senses are enlivened with real Afghan surroundings thanks to Amir's memories:

We chased the Kochi, the nomads who passed through Kabul on their way to the mountains of the north. We would hear their caravans approaching our neighborhood, the mewling of their sheep, the baaing of their goats, the jingle of bells around their camel's necks. We'd run outside to watch the caravan plod through our street, men with dusty, weather-beaten faces and women dressed in long, colorful shawls, beads and silver bracelets around their wrists and ankles (*The Kite Runner* 26).

Eventually, the way the major characters feel and assume that the West is stronger than their nations reveals how the building of “The Other” affects their personalities. Being “The Other” in *The Kite Runner*, for example, has caused Amir to become Americanized, making him uneasy about his Afghan identity while also allowing him to become a strong individual. In other words, decolonial knowledge in political science should be regarded as part of a larger mission to decenter the profession by undercutting what is now considered predominant or “mainstream”.

### **Conclusion**

While Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* is a strong and convincing work of fiction, the creation of both Amir and Assef’s Afghan cultural identities is misguided and problematic due to the heavy dependency on Orientalist stereotypes. Though readers of Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner* are led to believe that they are building a “bridge of understanding” between themselves and Afghan culture, they are simply identifying with a traditional view of the East-West relationship. This is aided in part by the fact that the “foreign” characters with which the Western reader identifies are, in fact, not “foreign” at all despite their heritage, they have been designed to meet Western political and psychological needs. The novel also explores the motives for seeking asylum. It also addresses the issue of refugees. Afghans are forced to flee their homeland in search of a safe haven. They are fleeing to Pakistan because of Russia’s totalitarian ideology, which occupied Afghanistan in the name of spreading communism. They hypnotized the Afghan rulers into thinking that the republic would change their lives in some way. It was unable to bring any relief to Afghans’ lives. Rather, it posed a danger to a small group of people, forcing them to leave their homes and seek refuge in Pakistan. Accordingly, Oriental characters are often inferior to their counterparts in the West. Amir’s Western identity, for example, evolves and grows throughout the book, becoming a more modern, liberal, Western character, while Assef only evolves by becoming a more inferior and devious “Oriental” character. As a response to that, the roles of the modern American West and a traditional Muslim world are contrasted in the book, generating binary opposition that inflames the contradictions between the two opposites and eventually sustains Western power structures supremacy over the East.

### **Works Cited**

- Alam, M. Shahid. *Challenging the New Orientalism: Dissenting Essays on the War Against Islam*. North Haledon: Islamic Publications International, 2007.
- Ali, Tariq. *Remembering Edward Said*. Conversations With Edward Said. Oxford: Seagull, 2006.
- Al-Sudeary, Mashaal. “Power of Relations in the Kite Runner: A New Historicist Reading”. *Arab Journal for The Humanities*. MSU Encore, Vol. 27. No. 107, , 2007, pp. 233-249.
- Anjita, Gopi. “Resurrecting Afghanistan: Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*”. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2017, pp. 234-238.
- Ball, Anna. “Critical Exchanges in Postcolonial Studies, Post 9/11”. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 2008.
- Bertens, Hans. *The Basic: Literary theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.

- Bhabha H.K. "Unsatisfied Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism". *Cross Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, Camden House, Vol. 6, No. 9, 1996, pp. 191-207.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Postcolonial Theory and the Literature of Decolonization*. Bryden (ed.), Vol. I, No. 3, 2014, pp. 105-133.
- Dale, Katrine O. *What Happens in Afghanistan, Does Not Stay in Afghanistan*. University of Oslo, 2016.
- Hosseini, Khaled. *The Kite Runner*. United States, Riverhead Books, 2003.
- Hunt, Sarah. *Can the West Read?*, Oxy Scholar-Occidental College, March, 2009.
- Jordan J. Paust. "War and Enemy Status After 9/11: Attacks on the Laws of War". *Yale Journal of International Law*. Article 5, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2003, pp. 325-335.
- Loomba, A. *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart J. *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London: Verso, 1997.
- Nie, Zhenzhao. "Criticism of Literary Ethics". *Foreign literature research*, London Press, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2005, pp. 12-22.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1979.
- Said, E. *Culture and Imperialism: Islam Through Western Eyes*. The Nation, New York: Vintage, 1994.