

# Religious Extremism and the Representation of Diasporic Identity in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

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## Abstracts

Khaled Hosseini published *The Kite Runner* in 2003, two years after 9/11. The novel explores several themes; including diasporic identity and ethnic conflict. This article attempts to analyze how religion, as an institution, guides and shapes these themes. Religion in *The Kite Runner* manifests itself in two forms. First, the novel depicts the relationship between religion and ethnicity through Pashtun versus Hazare or Sunni versus Shia conflict. Second, the novel depicts the relationship between religion and identity as the protagonist struggles to negotiate between different aspects of his identity in a post-9/11 metropolis. This article contends that the novel leaves almost all of these conflicts unresolved. Except for identity/personal conflict, every religious issue remains unsolved because they operate on a cultural/social scale. These conflicts remain open-ended because the novel's fictional framework reflects the real world.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Diasporic Identity, Ethnicity, Metropolis, National Identity.

## Introduction

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) delves into the issues of identity, morality, and redemption in the context of Afghanistan's complicated political and social landscape. One of the themes explored in *The Kite Runner* is the representation of Islam, which plays a prominent role in Afghan culture and society. Throughout the novel, Hosseini portrays Islam as an integral part of Afghan identity. The author depicts Islam as a faith that is deeply intertwined with Afghan customs and traditions but also acknowledges the destructive potential of religious extremism. Furthermore, the novel highlights how Islam is used in order to justify repression and violence against certain groups within Afghan society.

Hosseini presents a multifaceted view of Islam, demonstrating its capacity to unify and divide. For example, Baba, Amir's father (Amir is the protagonist of the novel), represents a more secular and humanistic approach to Islam, emphasizing personal integrity and kindness over strict adherence to religious rituals. In contrast, Assef, the antagonist, embodies the extreme and perverse interpretation of Islam that the Taliban espouses. Assef's character uses religion as a tool for oppression and cruelty, showcasing how religious dogma can be manipulated to serve violent and authoritarian ends.

Scholars have analyzed the representation of Islam in *The Kite Runner* from various perspectives. Several theorists emphasize the healing power of culture and view Afghan culture as a means to transcend ethnic and religious conflicts. They argue that Hosseini's depiction of traditional Afghan customs, such as kite flying and the celebration of Eid, highlights the potential for cultural practices to foster unity and reconciliation among different ethnic and religious groups (Shamel, 2007, p. 5).

Others examine the ethical issues embodied in the novel concerning cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism. They suggest that Hosseini's narrative advocates for a global moral responsibility and the need for cross-cultural understanding and empathy. By portraying the protagonist Amir's journey from guilt and atonement to redemption, the novel underscores the importance of humanitarian values and the potential for personal and social transformation through acts of kindness and moral courage (Du, 2017, p. 91).

Additionally, researchers have focused on the complex issues of cultural identity and race relations that are highlighted in *The Kite Runner*. The novel intricately explores the tensions between the dominant Pashtun ethnicity and the marginalized Hazara community. Through the characters of Hassan and Amir, Hosseini delves into the intricacies of ethnic discrimination, loyalty, and betrayal. The narrative reveals how ethnic prejudices are deeply ingrained in Afghan society and how they impact personal relationships and societal structures (Ahsan, 2018, p. 200).

The diasporic experience is another crucial aspect analyzed by scholars. Amir's life in the United States as an Afghan immigrant sheds light on the challenges of maintaining one's cultural identity while adapting to a new environment. The novel portrays the sense of loss, nostalgia, and the struggle for identity that many immigrants face, highlighting the universal quest for belonging and acceptance.

The primary theoretical source of this research is Edward Wadie Said's theories of Humanism and Democratic Criticism and Orientalism. These theories explore a wide variety of subjects, including the cultural and religious dynamics of the 21st-century neocolonial world. Furthermore, Said portrays Islam as a faith that is a source of contention between the metropolis and the neocolonial world:

"A changed political atmosphere has overtaken the United States and, to varying degrees, the rest of the world. The war against terrorism, the campaign in Afghanistan, and the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. All these have given rise to a world of heightened animosities, a much more aggressive American attitude towards the world, and considering my own bicultural background much-exacerbated conflict between what has been called "the West" and "Islam," labels I have long found both misleading and more suitable for the mobilization of collective

passions than for lucid understanding unless they are deconstructed analytically and critically" (Said, 2007, p. XVI).

Said also sheds light on how religion can be manipulated to serve personal and political agendas, leading to intolerance and violence. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said depicts a complex and nuanced representation of Islam. He acknowledges the role of religion in shaping cultural identity and traditions, while simultaneously acknowledging that religious extremism can lead to oppression and violence.

Humanism and democratic criticism are two concepts that are often discussed in academic circles. Said was the first theorist who saw their redemptive qualities for postcolonial societies. While each concept has its own unique history and philosophical roots, they are ultimately intertwined in their values and goals. In his final years, Said attempted to explore the relationship between humanism and democratic criticism and how they can be utilized in order to form just and equitable societies across the globe. According to Said, Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively, over the acceptance of dogma or superstition. It is based on the belief that human beings possess inherent worth and dignity and that they are capable of rational thought and action. Humanism emerged during the Renaissance as a response to the strict religious dogma of the time, and it has since evolved into a secular worldview focused on human potential. However, Said argued that the world, especially the postcolonial world, was in dire need of a second Renaissance. Throughout his life, Said heavily relied on post-structuralist theories. He consciously attacked and criticized the role post-Renaissance humanistic sciences played in the evolution of Orientalism. But ultimately, he argued that what the world needed was not the removal of these sciences from the world, but their reformation within the context of a new humanism (Said, 2007, p. 2).

Democratic criticism is a political philosophy that emphasizes the importance of free and open debate in a democratic society. It holds that society benefits from the free and open exchange of ideas, as this allows for the identification and correction of errors and injustices. Democratic criticism is essential to democracy. It holds those in power accountable. It also guarantees the interests of marginalized groups. At the end of his life, Said was deeply disillusioned with the tyrannical nature of postcolonial. He believed that the liberation movements which led to the ousting of traditional metropolitan powers, had ironically turned into metropolitan-supported totalitarian political systems. Said wished that this new kind of criticism which was democratic and was based on modern humanism would be accepted by postcolonial nations and would lead them towards a better future. (Said, 2007, p. 23).

According to Said, despite their different origins, humanism and democratic criticism share a common goal: the pursuit of justice and truth. Humanism emphasizes the importance of reason and evidence in determining truth, while democratic criticism emphasizes the importance of open and free debate in identifying and correcting injustices. Together, these two concepts can form a powerful force for positive change in postcolonial nations. Said hoped that humanism and democratic criticism could work together through the promotion of human rights and social justice. Humanism recognizes that all human beings are entitled to the inherent dignity and worth, something utterly rejected by poststructuralist criticism, and that they have certain rights

that cannot be violated. Democratic criticism can help ensure that these rights are upheld, by allowing for free debate about issues of injustice and oppression. Through democratic criticism, marginalized groups can have their voices heard and their concerns addressed, helping to create a more equitable society:

"Said's intellectual legacy will be primarily political- not just in the popular imagination, but also perhaps in the eyes of academic research. This is inevitable and it is perhaps how it should be. But the present work, the last completed book he wrote, allows us to situate this legacy in the larger philosophical setting of his humanism-perhaps the only "ism" that, with stubborn ideals, he continued to avow, despite its being made to seem pious and sentimental by the avant-garde developments in the last few decades of literary theory" (Morefield, 2022, p. V).

Said's final observations about the state of the postcolonial nations and the metropolis fit perfectly with *The Kite Runner's* narrative. First, Afghanistan is a failed postcolonial nation that suffers from a wide array of cultural, social, political, and religious maladies. Second, the metropolis has not changed since the fall of the traditional European empires. It has created a problematic relationship with diasporic societies. *The Kite Runner* is a story of redemption on a human level and a story of failure on a cultural/societal level. Said is one of the few academics whose theories can explain both of these issues.

## Literature Review

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is a foundational text in postcolonial studies. In this book, Said explores how the Western world perceives and represents the East, particularly the Middle East and Asia. He argues that Western writers, scholars, and even politicians have historically constructed the Orient as an exotic, backward, and uncivilized "Other" in contrast to the rational and progressive West. This has led to a distorted understanding of Eastern societies, fueling stereotypes and justifying colonial domination. Said's work challenges readers to question these stereotypes and recognize the power dynamics involved in cultural representations. *Orientalism* has had a profound impact on how scholars study and understand colonial and postcolonial societies, highlighting the importance of examining who controls the narrative and for what purpose.

In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2007), Edward Said continues his exploration of cultural and literary criticism with a focus on the role of humanism. Said advocates for a form of humanism that is inclusive, democratic, and engaged with the world's political and social realities. He critiques narrow, Eurocentric interpretations of humanism that exclude non-Western cultures and voices. Instead, Said calls for a humanism that acknowledges the diversity of human experiences and promotes understanding and dialogue across cultural boundaries. This book is a reflection on the power of literature and criticism to foster empathy, challenge injustice, and contribute to a more democratic and equitable world. Said's arguments are a reminder of the ethical responsibilities of scholars and critics in shaping public discourse.

In *Taliban Narratives: The Use and Power of Stories in the Afghanistan Conflict* (2018), Thomas H. Johnson delves into the role of storytelling in the conflict in Afghanistan. Johnson explores

how the Taliban use narratives as a powerful tool to influence and mobilize people. By analyzing speeches, pamphlets, and other forms of communication, he reveals how the Taliban frame their actions and objectives to gain support and legitimacy among local populations. Johnson argues that these narratives are not just propaganda but are deeply rooted in Afghan culture, history, and religion. This book highlights the importance of understanding these narratives to effectively counter the Taliban's influence. Johnson's work is significant for policymakers, military strategists, and anyone interested in the dynamics of the Afghanistan conflict, emphasizing that winning the narrative battle is as crucial as military victories.

Valentina Badalič's *The War Against Civilians: Victims of the "War on Terror" in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (2019) provides a sobering analysis of the impact of the "War on Terror" on ordinary people in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Badalič focuses on the civilian victims of the conflict, examining how military operations, drone strikes, and counterterrorism measures have caused immense suffering among local populations. She argues that the war has often been conducted with little regard for human life, leading to widespread casualties, displacement, and trauma. Badalič also critiques the legal and ethical justifications for these actions, questioning the morality of a war that targets civilians under the guise of fighting terrorism. Her work sheds light on the human cost of the war, offering a crucial perspective that is often overlooked in discussions about counterterrorism and military strategy.

## Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze the representation of religious extremism and diasporic identity in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. The analysis is grounded in Edward Said's theories of Orientalism, Humanism, and Democratic Criticism. First, the novel is closely read to identify key themes related to religion and identity. Specific passages that highlight these themes are selected for detailed examination. The study then applies Said's concepts to interpret how the novel portrays the effects of religious extremism on ethnic conflict and the shaping of diasporic identities. Additionally, the research draws on secondary sources, including scholarly articles and books, to support the analysis and provide context. The methodology is focused on exploring how Hosseini's narrative reflects broader cultural and political issues, particularly in relation to the experiences of Afghan characters both in their homeland and in the diaspora. Through this approach, the study aims to contribute to the understanding of how literature can illuminate the complex dynamics of religion and identity in postcolonial societies.

## Results and Discussion

### Religious Extremism and Hazara-Pashtun Conflict

The Pashtun-Hazara conflict has plagued Afghanistan for centuries. The two communities belong to different ethnic groups and have been at odds with each other for a long time. In order to better understand Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, it is essential to examine the historical roots of this conflict. It is also important to investigate the role of Islam and British and Russian colonialism (Roy, 2015, p. 97).

The Pashtun-Hazara conflict has a long and sordid history. In ancient times, both groups inhabited different regions of what is now known as modern Afghanistan. The Pashtuns lived in southern Afghanistan, while the Hazaras lived in central Afghanistan. From a geopolitical perspective, several factors contributed to this conflict (Clements, 2003, p. 5).

Historically, the Pashtuns have been the dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan, often holding positions of power and influence. The Hazaras, on the other hand, have been marginalized and subjected to discrimination and persecution. This ethnic division was exacerbated by religious differences: the majority of Pashtuns are Sunni Muslims, while most Hazaras are Shia Muslims. These religious distinctions have often been used to justify the oppression of the Hazaras by the Pashtun-dominated government and other Sunni groups (O'Brian, 2018, p. 5).

The role of colonialism further complicated the Pashtun-Hazara conflict. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Afghanistan became a battleground for the British and Russian empires, both seeking to expand their influence in the region. The British, in particular, favored the Pashtuns, viewing them as a more reliable ally against Russian encroachment. This favoritism contributed to the entrenchment of Pashtun power and the further marginalization of the Hazaras. Additionally, the imposition of arbitrary borders by colonial powers disrupted traditional land use and migration patterns, exacerbating ethnic tensions. The Pashtun dominance was solidified during the reign of Abdur Rahman Khan in the late 19th century. Known as the "Iron Amir," he implemented policies that targeted the Hazaras, including land confiscation, forced labor, and massacres. These brutal measures decimated the Hazara population and entrenched a legacy of animosity between the two groups.

In the 20th century, the conflict between the Pashtuns and Hazaras was further fueled by political upheaval and the rise of Islamist movements. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the subsequent civil war saw various ethnic groups vying for power. The Pashtun-dominated Taliban regime, which emerged in the 1990s, continued the persecution of Hazaras, committing atrocities against them in the name of establishing a Sunni Islamic state. Understanding the historical context of the Pashtun-Hazara conflict is crucial for comprehending the dynamics in *The Kite Runner*. Hosseini's portrayal of the relationship between Amir, a Pashtun, and Hassan, a Hazara, is deeply rooted in this historical animosity. The personal betrayals and ethnic prejudices depicted in the novel reflect the broader societal tensions and historical injustices faced by the Hazara community (Badalič, 2019, p. 237).

The role of Islam in the conflict is multifaceted. While it serves as a source of identity and cultural cohesion for both Pashtuns and Hazaras, it has also been manipulated to justify violence and discrimination. Extremist interpretations of Islam, particularly by the Taliban, have intensified the persecution of Hazaras, reinforcing their status as an oppressed minority (Lee, 2019, p.25).

One factor was political competition. In ancient times, there was fierce political competition between different tribes for power and resources which often led to conflicts among them. The second factor was religious differences; most Pashtuns in Southern Afghanistan are Sunni Muslims while many Hazaras in central regions are Shia Muslims. Religion has played an essential role in perpetuating violence between these communities over time. Both sects have

different beliefs about religion and its practices which often resulted in violent clashes such as bombings or targeted killings based on sectarian affiliations.

Islam is significant in shaping Afghan societal values surrounding power relations, including warlord-led governance structures which are still practiced today by some. Additionally, militant Islamic movements like Al Qaeda and Taliban emerged from within Pakistan's borders following Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan. Their ideology focused on uniting Muslim communities worldwide under a fundamentalist Islamic front. The Taliban, specifically, played a significant role in the Pashtun-Hazara conflict (Clements, 2003, p. 7).

Colonialism and subsequent political interference in Afghanistan have also contributed to the ongoing conflict between Pashtuns and Hazaras. During the early 20th century, when Afghanistan was still under colonial rule by Britain, many Pashtun elites received preferential treatment from the British administration (Clements, 2003, p. 196). Meanwhile "other" ethnic groups like Hazaras were discriminated against; this unequal treatment led to resentment among non-Pashtuns that persists even today.

In recent decades Pakistan's intelligence Services have given militia groups free rein across Afghan borders. Consequently, local conflicts have become part of a broader regional struggle for power (Clements, 2003, p. 170). Patronage networks run into foreign countries with arms spreading across borders making it difficult to differentiate between local and international influences behind violence.

The Taliban is one of the primary reasons why the situation continues to deteriorate in terms of human rights violations suffered by both parties involved in this ongoing conflict. At times, they use religion as a weapon against their opponents without considering its impact on civilians. Both sides suffered horrendous human rights abuses at each other's hands over time. Many tribal leaders manipulate social norms surrounding honor killing or forced marriages to ensure their power remains unchallenged within their respective areas (Clements, 2003, p. XIX).

According to Hosseini, his depiction of the Pashtun-Hazara conflict is the most controversial aspect of his novel. The Pashtun diaspora in Europe and North America have tried to ban the novel's sale, censor it, or remove it from libraries. Hosseini has repeatedly argued that what he has depicted in the novel is the truth of race relations in Afghanistan: "They never say I am speaking about untrue things. Their beef is, 'Why do you have to talk about these things and embarrass us? Don't you love your country?'" (Young, 2007). His critics contend that Hosseini oversimplifies the complexity of race relations in Afghanistan. Others believe that he one-sidedly demonizes the Pashtuns and victimizes the Hazaras. However, if one follows Said's theories regarding post-colonial race relations, one would not focus on whether Hosseini has painted a correct picture in his novel or not. One would concentrate on the fact that after centuries of disabuse at the hands of the metropolis, the postcolonial ethnic groups, prefer to attack each other rather than utilize their shared history to reach a common goal. This phenomenon deeply disillusioned Said about the future of postcolonial nations. It seems that forgiveness, redemption, and ethnic reconciliation are only possible at a personal level. As is the case of Amir and his search for redemption. Said states the failure of postcolonial nations to get passed their internal animosities has further hardened the attitude of the metropolis towards postcolonial nations:

"There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment, and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts ... The breathtaking insouciance of jejune publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no live notion (or any knowledge at all) of the language of what real people speak has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct an ersatz model of free market democracy" (Said, 2003, p. XIV).

### Religious Extremism and Ethnic Conflict

In analyzing the depiction of Islam within *The Kite Runner*, one cannot overlook the pervasive Pashtun-Hazara conflict deeply ingrained in Afghan society. This historical animosity, rooted in ethnic and religious divisions, serves as a stark backdrop to the narrative's exploration of faith and identity. The Soviet invasion of 1979 and the subsequent rise of the Taliban exacerbated existing tensions, leading to the brutal marginalization of the Hazara minority—a plight often overlooked in mainstream discourse (Clements, 2003, p. 15).

The Pashtun-Hazara conflict, driven by long-standing ethnic and sectarian differences, profoundly influences the characters and events in *The Kite Runner*. The novel illustrates how these divisions are perpetuated and exploited by those in power, particularly during periods of political instability. The Soviet invasion brought widespread chaos and destruction, further deepening the rift between different ethnic groups. The ensuing civil war saw the rise of the Taliban, a predominantly Pashtun militant group that sought to impose its extremist interpretation of Sunni Islam on the entire country (Chivenda, 2020, p. 37).

Under Taliban rule, the Hazaras faced systematic persecution and violence. The Taliban's interpretation of Islam justified their brutal actions, reinforcing the notion that the Hazaras, as Shia Muslims, were heretics and thus legitimate targets. This historical context is crucial for understanding the novel's depiction of the Hazara characters, particularly Hassan and his son Sohrab, whose experiences reflect the broader suffering of their community (Aubry, 2020, p. 2Du).

Hosseini uses the personal story of Amir and Hassan to highlight the broader socio-political dynamics at play. The friendship between Amir, a Pashtun, and Hassan, a Hazara, symbolizes the possibility of unity and reconciliation amidst deep-seated prejudice. However, their relationship is fraught with tension and betrayal, mirroring the larger ethnic conflicts within Afghan society. Amir's eventual journey of redemption and his efforts to save Sohrab can be seen as an allegory for the need to confront and rectify historical injustices. Furthermore, the novel delves into the complexities of religious identity and its impact on individual lives. Baba's secular approach to Islam contrasts sharply with the Taliban's extremist views, showcasing the diversity within the Muslim community. This diversity is often overshadowed by the dominant narrative of religious extremism, but Hosseini's nuanced portrayal offers a more comprehensive understanding of Islam's role in Afghan culture.

The depiction of religious extremism in *The Kite Runner* serves as a critique of how religion can be distorted to serve political agendas. The Taliban's use of Islam to justify their oppressive



regime highlights the dangers of conflating faith with power. This theme resonates with contemporary discussions on the misuse of religion to perpetuate violence and division, making the novel relevant beyond its specific historical context (Aubery, 2020, p. 11).

The novel provides a lens through which to examine the insidious role of religion in perpetuating the subjugation of the Hazara community. The rigid Sunni orthodoxy enforced by the dominant Pashtun elite serves not only as a marker of religious identity but also as a tool for the systematic oppression of Hazaras, relegated to the margins of society. The characterization of Hassan, a Hazara Shia, as the epitome of humility and resilience, stands in stark contrast to the depiction of Pashtun privilege embodied by characters like Assef, who weaponizes Islam to justify his atrocities (Gross, 2005).

The novel presents a provocative interrogation of the Pashtun-Hazara dichotomy, revealing the inherent contradictions within Afghan Islam. While Baba's outward piety may suggest a commitment to religious principles, his complacency in the face of Hazara persecution exposes the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy underlying societal norms. Amir's internal struggle with faith reflects the broader existential crisis faced by Pashtuns complicit in the systemic oppression of their Hazara brethren—a moral quandary often swept under the rug in discussions of Afghan identity:

"I read that my people, the Pashtun, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said 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 part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 9).

At its core, the novel's portrayal of the Amir-Hassan dynamic serves as a poignant commentary on the complexities of power and privilege in a society rife with ethnic and religious strife. Amir, as a Pashtun Sunni, grapples with the guilt of his complicity in Hassan's suffering, emblematic of the collective culpability of the Pashtun elite in perpetuating systemic injustice. While transcending societal barriers, their friendship underscores the pervasive influence of religious and ethnic hierarchies in shaping individual destinies (Gross, 2005).

### Religious Extremism and Afghan Culture

The portrayal of Amir and Hassan's friendship in *The Kite Runner* is deeply intertwined with Afghan society's cultural and religious dynamics, shedding light on the complexities of honor, shame, betrayal, and loyalty. Within the Afghan cultural milieu, traditional notions of honor and shame exert a powerful influence, shaping interpersonal relationships and moral judgments. Amir's betrayal of Hassan, driven by his desire for paternal approval and societal validation, serves as a poignant commentary on the corrosive effects of cultural expectations on individual integrity (Shamel, 2007, p. 7).

In Afghan society, honor and shame are central to one's identity and social standing. These cultural values are often tied to family reputation and societal expectations, dictating behavior and influencing personal choices. Amir's internal struggle with these concepts is evident

throughout the novel. His need to earn his father Baba's approval and to conform to societal norms leads him to make morally questionable decisions, ultimately betraying his loyal friend Hassan (Hosseini, 2003, p. 52).

Hassan's unwavering loyalty to Amir, despite being a Hazara servant, highlights the deep bond they share, transcending ethnic and social barriers. However, the power dynamics between them are stark, with Amir's privileged Pashtun status allowing him to act with impunity while Hassan, the marginalized Hazara, endures the consequences of their interactions. This imbalance underscores the broader ethnic tensions and social hierarchies present in Afghan society.

The kite-flying tournament, a symbol of honor and victory in Afghan culture, becomes the pivotal moment where Amir's internal conflict culminates. Winning the tournament is Amir's chance to gain Baba's approval, but it comes at the cost of Hassan's dignity. When Hassan is assaulted while retrieving the winning kite, Amir's failure to intervene marks a profound betrayal rooted in his fear of losing his father's esteem and his own societal standing. This act of cowardice and the subsequent guilt haunt Amir, shaping his character and driving the narrative forward (Hosseini & Zohdi, 2016, p. 5).

The themes of honor and shame are further explored through the characters' relationships with their fathers. Baba, a man of high moral standards and a revered figure in their community, embodies the traditional Pashtun ideals of strength and honor. His disappointment in Amir's perceived weaknesses exacerbates Amir's insecurities, fueling his need for validation. Conversely, Hassan, though the illegitimate son of Baba, represents innate goodness and integrity, embodying the moral compass that Amir ultimately strives to align with.

Hosseini's exploration of these themes reflects broader societal issues, such as the impact of cultural expectations on individual actions and the pervasive influence of social hierarchies. The novel critiques the rigid adherence to honor and shame, suggesting that these concepts can lead to moral compromises and perpetuate cycles of guilt and redemption.

Amir's subsequent struggle with guilt and shame underscores the pervasive influence of cultural norms on personal conscience and moral development. In a society where honor is paramount, the transgression of ethical boundaries carries profound implications for one's sense of self-worth and societal standing. Amir's quest for redemption, driven by his internalized sense of shame and obligation, serves as a microcosm of the broader existential crisis facing Afghan identity amidst socio-political turmoil:

"I sat on a park bench near a willow tree. I thought about something Rahim Khan said just before he hung up, almost as an afterthought. There is a way to be good again. I looked up at those twin kites. I thought about Hassan. Thought about Baba. Ali. Kabul. I thought of the life I had lived until the winter of 1975 came along and changed everything. And made me what I am today" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 2).

Moreover, Hassan's unwavering loyalty to Amir, rooted in a complex interplay of gratitude and cultural conditioning, raises provocative questions about the nature of friendship and allegiance within Afghan society. While Hassan's sense of honor stems from his association with Amir, a member of the privileged Pashtun elite, it also underscores the entrenched hierarchies of power

and privilege perpetuated by Afghan cultural norms. Hassan's subjugation to Amir's whims, despite his inherent dignity and worth, exposes the insidious nature of social stratification and the role of religion in legitimizing oppressive structures (Shamel, 2007, p. 9).

At its core, *The Kite Runner* offers a searing critique of the intersection of Islam and Afghan culture, challenging prevailing narratives of honor and loyalty to confront uncomfortable truths about complicity and compulsion. Amir and Hassan's friendship serves as a microcosm of the moral ambiguities and ethical dilemmas inherent in navigating the complex terrain of cultural identity and religious obligation in a society plagued by systemic injustice.

### Religious Extremism and Political Power in Afghanistan

In *The Kite Runner*, the Pashtun-Hazara divide serves as a glaring indictment of the systemic oppression and inherent brutality of Pashtun hegemony. Baba's exploitation of Ali, a Hazara servant, epitomizes the deep-seated entitlement and callous disregard for human dignity that characterizes Pashtun elites. Ali's disability serves as a convenient tool for his subjugation, highlighting the grotesque power dynamics at play (Kanosh, 2022, p. 138).

The novel portrays the Pashtun-Hazara relationship as one of master and servant, deeply rooted in historical and societal hierarchies. This dynamic is evident in the interactions between Baba and Ali, where Baba's position as a wealthy Pashtun landowner grants him significant power over Ali, a marginalized Hazara. Despite their long-standing relationship, the inherent inequality between them underscores the pervasive nature of ethnic discrimination in Afghan society (O'Brian, 2018, p. 7).

Ali's physical disability, caused by polio, symbolizes the broader societal view of Hazaras as inherently inferior and subordinate. His limp is not just a personal affliction but a representation of the systemic oppression faced by his community. Baba's treatment of Ali, while seemingly benevolent on the surface, masks a deeper exploitation rooted in the power imbalance between Pashtuns and Hazaras. This exploitation is further exemplified by Baba's secret fathering of Hassan, Ali's son, which remains hidden due to the potential scandal and the societal taboo of a Pashtun having a child with a Hazara.

The novel critiques the Pashtun hegemony by showcasing how it perpetuates violence and dehumanization. The power dynamics between Baba and Ali reflect the broader societal norms where Pashtuns exercise control and dominance over Hazaras, often with little regard for their humanity. This entitlement and disregard for dignity are evident in the casual way Pashtun characters, including Amir, dismiss and mistreat Hazaras (Hosseini & Zohdi, 2016, p. 6).

The brutality of Pashtun hegemony is further illustrated through the character of Assef, a sociopathic Pashtun who embodies the extremist and violent tendencies within the community. Assef's admiration for Hitler and his participation in the Taliban's ethnic cleansing campaigns against Hazaras amplify the novel's condemnation of ethnic bigotry and the violent enforcement of ethnic hierarchies. His actions towards Hassan and later towards Sohrab reflect the systemic nature of this brutality, sanctioned and perpetuated by those in power.

Amir's journey of self-discovery and redemption involves confronting these deeply ingrained prejudices. His initial betrayal of Hassan, driven by his internalized sense of superiority and fear

of losing his father's approval, highlights the corrosive effects of Pashtun hegemony on personal relationships. Amir's eventual recognition of his complicity in this system and his efforts to rescue Sohrab represent a rejection of these oppressive structures (Hosseini & Zohdi, 2016, p .7).

The portrayal of the Pashtun-Hazara divide in *The Kite Runner* serves as a powerful critique of the entrenched social hierarchies and the dehumanization they perpetuate. By focusing on the personal stories of its characters, the novel illuminates the broader societal injustices faced by the Hazara community and challenges readers to confront the moral implications of ethnic discrimination.

Assef, the embodiment of Pashtun supremacy and Taliban ideology, represents the vile manifestation of religious fanaticism and racial superiority. His atrocities against Hazaras and other marginalized groups lay bare the genocidal intent behind Pashtun hegemony, fueled by a toxic cocktail of bigotry and religious zealotry:

"Assef was the son of one of my father's friends, Mahmood, an airline pilot. His family lived a few streets south of our home, in a posh, high-walled compound with palm trees. If you were a kid living in the Wazir Akbar Khan section of Kabul, you knew about Assef and his famous stainless-steel brass knuckles, hopefully not through personal experience. Born to a German mother and Afghan father, the blond, blue-eyed Assef towered over the other kids. His well-earned reputation for savagery preceded him on the streets. Flanked by his obeying friends, he walked the neighborhood like a Khan strolling through his land with his eager-to-please entourage. His word was law, and if you needed a little legal education, then those brass knuckles were just the right teaching tool" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 38).

Moreover, Baba's obsession with Pashtun honor and masculinity perpetuates a culture of toxic patriarchy and entitlement, which thrives on the subjugation and exploitation of women and ethnic minorities alike. Amir's complicity in this culture of privilege and impunity serves as a damning indictment of Pashtun's complicity in perpetuating systemic injustice and violence (Jefferess, 2009, p. 400). Amir's belated awakening to the horrors inflicted by the Taliban upon Hazaras exposes the grotesque realities of Islamic extremism and Pashtun hegemony, revealing the complicity of the privileged elite in perpetuating violence and oppression. His attempts at redemption serve as a feeble attempt to absolve himself of the blood on his hands, yet ultimately fall short in challenging the entrenched power structures that underpin Afghan society (Ramin & Ward, 20024, p. 36).

*The Kite Runner* offers a controversial and unapologetic exploration of the intersecting forces of Islam, ethnic conflict, and political power in Afghanistan. Through the lens of Amir's journey, the novel forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths about the insidious nature of Pashtun supremacy and the devastating consequences of unchecked religious extremism.

### The Taliban as the Ultimate Evil

The portrayal of the Taliban in *The Kite Runner* as the ultimate evil is a contentious yet poignant narrative choice. Hosseini's depiction presents the Taliban not merely as a political entity but as a symbol of deep-seated oppression and violence, particularly against minority groups like the

Hazaras. By framing the Taliban's rise as a tragedy for Afghanistan, Hosseini challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths about ethnic discrimination and religious intolerance within the country (Johnson, 2017, p. 37).

One of the most provocative aspects of the novel is its portrayal of the Taliban's use of ethnic and religious identity to justify their atrocities. The deliberate targeting of the Hazaras, who are not only ethnically distinct but also Shia Muslims, underscores the Taliban's extremist ideology and its willingness to use violence to enforce its worldview (Newberg, 2018, p. 28). This raises profound questions about the nature of identity-based conflict and the role of religion in justifying acts of violence (Lee, 2018, p. 561).

Furthermore, *The Kite Runner* suggests that the Taliban's rise represents a betrayal of Afghan values and traditions. By imposing a strict interpretation of Sharia law and banning forms of artistic and cultural expression, the Taliban is depicted as erasing Afghanistan's rich cultural heritage. This portrayal challenges readers to consider the impact of extremist ideologies on cultural and societal norms.

The novel also highlights the personal consequences of the Taliban's rise, particularly through the experiences of characters like Amir and Baba, who are forced to flee their homeland. This narrative choice humanizes the broader political and social upheaval caused by the Taliban's rule, emphasizing the individual stories of loss and displacement amid larger societal changes:

"I told you how we all celebrated in 1996 when the Taliban rolled in and put an end to the daily fighting. I remember coming home that night and finding Hassan in the kitchen, listening to the radio. He had a sober look in his eyes. I asked him what was wrong, and he just shook his head. "God help the Hazaras now, Rahim Khan sahib," he said. "The war is over, Hassan," I said. "There's going to be peace, Inshallah, and happiness and calm. No more rockets, no more killing, no more funerals!" But he just turned off the radio and asked if he could get me anything before, he went to bed" (Hosseini, 2003, p. 213).

*The Kite Runner* presents a provocative and controversial portrayal of the Taliban, challenging readers to confront uncomfortable truths about identity, extremism, and cultural heritage. Hosseini's narrative forces us to reckon with the complexities of power, violence, and betrayal in the context of Afghanistan's recent history.

### Religious Extremism and Diasporic Identity

The exploration of religious extremism and diasporic identity in *The Kite Runner* delves into the intricate interplay between religion, cultural heritage, and the challenges faced by individuals in the diaspora, particularly Amir and Baba. The novel presents Islam as a foundational element of Afghan identity, shaping Amir's understanding of his heritage and connection to his homeland. However, upon immigrating to the metropolis, Islam ceases to be a mere cultural marker and becomes a contested aspect of identity, viewed through a lens of suspicion and misunderstanding by the host society.

Amir and Baba's experiences as expatriates highlight the complexities of navigating diasporic identity in a context where their Islamic heritage is both a source of pride and a barrier to integration. The novel provocatively suggests that the metropolis perceives Islam as a backward

and violent religion, forcing individuals like Amir and Baba to grapple with the challenge of preserving their cultural and religious heritage while adapting to a new societal context (Khanosh, 2022, p. 5).

Central to this exploration is the portrayal of Islam's influence on familial and community dynamics. Islam's emphasis on community, family, and traditional gender roles significantly impacts Amir's relationship with Baba, who adheres steadfastly to Afghan and Islamic traditions. Baba's reluctance to embrace cultural and religious adaptability in the metropolis contrasts sharply with Amir's recognition of the need for change and evolution in a new cultural environment.

Amir's journey as an Afghan-American expatriate underscores the complex process of negotiating one's cultural and religious identity in a diasporic setting. His struggle to balance his Afghan heritage with the demands of metropolitan life reflects a broader theme of cultural and social adaptation faced by many diasporic individuals. The novel provocatively challenges readers to reconsider notions of cultural authenticity and the complexities of diasporic identity formation in an increasingly globalized world.

## Conclusion

*The Kite Runner* offers an intricate view of Islam as an integral part of the Afghan Heritage, both in and out of Afghanistan. The novel shows the cultural ties that connect Islam to Afghan heritage. Through Amir's experiences, the novel offers a fascinating view of the diasporic identity and how cultural and religious traditions can shape the diasporic identity. Throughout the novel, Amir faces reconciling his Afghan and American identities. These challenges are the result of the cultural differences between the two countries.

One of the primary challenges that Amir faces is coming to terms with his Pashtun heritage. For a long time, Amir does not realize that it is his ethnicity that provides him with respect and wealth. As time passes, and tragedies befall not only Amir but also his friends and family, he begins to understand how far deep the roots of ethnic animosity are. Amir feels guilt and shame because of his Pashtun heritage, which is closely intertwined with his Sunni Islamic heritage. Amir sees, again and again, Pashtuns oppress his country's minorities. This sense of guilt and shame increases when he flees Afghanistan and the Taliban takes the rights of power and cracks down on ethnic and religious minorities. When Amir arrives in the United States of America, he faces a new type of identity crisis, individualism versus collectivism. While the metropolitan society emphasizes individualism and personal freedom, Afghan society emphasizes, family and community. Amir struggles to reconcile to come to terms with his Afghan past and his metropolitan present. He feels trapped between his desire for individual freedom and his obligations towards his family. Another challenge Amir faces is the opposition between tradition and modernity. Metropolitan culture is associated with modernity, progress, and innovation. Afghan culture is traditional, conservative, and religious. Amir's desire to become a writer is at odds with his father's expectations as he wants Amir to become a successful and wealthy businessman. Amir struggles with the cultural institutions that separate him from his Afghan heritage. Growing up in the United States of America has attuned him to metropolitan cultural

values. This creates a sense of disconnection from his Afghan identity. Overall, Amir faces numerous challenges. These challenges arise from his Pashtun heritage and his metropolitan life. He more or less successfully navigates these cultural waters and manages to find peace for what he did to his friend.

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