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المقالات العربية

- 1 - مجلس الإدارة وتعزيز حوكمة شركات المساهمة العامة وفقاً لقانون الشركات التجارية العماني رقم 18/2019
أفلق بن سلطان بن محمد الشعبي، د. بدرالدين بن الحاج إبراهيم
- 31 - مفهوم الملكات وأهميتها في العمران البشري من خلال رؤية ابن خلدون
أحمد البرعمي، وعبد العزيز برغوث
- 57 - أساليب تنمية الكفاءات في الحضارة الإسلامية وتطبيقها المعاصرة: دراسة تحليلية لإسهامات عمر بن عبد العزيز
بخت سعيّد الحمر، فطيمير شيخو
- 97 - الأوقاف ودورها في الحضارة الإسلامية "وقف عثمان بن عفان نموذجاً"
مسلم نصيب سعيد البرعمي، همام الطباع
- 148 - دور التخطيط في شؤون الدولة في الحضارة الإسلامية: دراسة تحليلية لنموذج عمر بن الخطاب
يوسف علي العوائد، تميم أسامة
- 188 - صورة الآخر في رواية "صباحات في جنين" لسوزان أبو الهوى
بشرى بشير أحمد، رحمة أحمد عثمان، وعاصم شحادة علي

English Articles

- Tawhid in Practice: Management Students' Reflections on Surah al-Anfal and Surah at-Taubah 238
Rodrigue Fontaine and Ibrahim Nuhu
- The Concept of Papal Infallibility in Christianity and 'Iṣmah (Sinlessness) in Islam: A Comparative Study 263
Muhammad Zamir Syahmi bin Zainudin and Thameem Ushama
- Rethinking Consociationalism and Coalition Politics in Malaysia 295
Abdul Wahed Jalal Nori
- Role of Worldview in Family Empowerment Plans: Proposed Islamic Integrated Framework 316
Abdelaziz Berghout
- The Villainous East Versus The Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis of The Kite Runner and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan 347
Homam Altabaa and Nik Nayly Binti Nik Nubli

The Villainous East Versus The Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

Kejahatan Timur versus Kewiraan Barat: Analisis Poskolonial Terhadap *The Kite Runner* dan Perlambangan Muslim Afghanistan

Homam Altabaa* and Nik Nayly Binti Nik Nubli**

Abstract

The East is often portrayed as dangerous or mysterious in numerous Western literary works that attempt to depict it. As Edward Said has argued, this is due to the Western tendencies to view the East as fundamentally other and inferior. Rather than resisting such preconceived notions, Khaled Hosseini in his novel *The Kite Runner* (2003) reflected a pro-Western stance through his stereotypical representation of Afghanistan which fits into the expectations of the West, especially after the September 11 attacks. Due to his pro-Western stance, the novel and Hosseini himself gained significant recognition and popularity in the United States. Hence this study aims to examine the Orientalist discourse present in the novel by utilising the theory of Postcolonialism, with a special emphasis on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. The analysis focuses on the contrasting portrayal of Afghanistan as the Orient and America as the Occident. The study found that the novel reinforces the idea that the Orient is violent, sexual and backward, while the Occident is depicted as the civilized saviour. Such depictions give a positive view of colonialism and imperialism.

Keywords: *The Kite Runner*, Orientalism, Edward Said, Orient, Occident, Postcolonialism, Afghanistan, America.

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The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis **348** of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

Abstrak

Timur sering digambarkan sebagai suatu kawasan yang bahaya dan misteri dalam sastera-sastera Barat yang cuba untuk menggambarkan kawasan atau budaya Timur. Seperti yang diujahkan oleh Edward Said, hal ini mungkin kerana kecenderungan Barat untuk menggambarkan Timur sebagai pihak lain dan lebih rendah daripada Barat. Khaled Hosseini tidak menolak prasangka-prasangka tersebut, malah, dia menggunakan prasangka-prasangka tersebut dalam menghasilkan karyanya, *The Kite Runner* (2003), yang dilihat sebagai pro-Barat. Khaled Hosseini menggunakan stereotaip dalam menggambarkan Afghanistan yang mana penggunaan stereotaip tersebut sesuai dengan tanggapan-tanggapan Barat terhadap Timur, terutamanya setelah kejadian serangan 11 September. Oleh sebab pendirian pro-Baratnya, Hosseini serta novelnya telah meraih pengiktirafan serta populariti di Amerika Syarikat. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan meneliti wacana Orientalis yang terdapat dalam novel *The Kite Runner* dengan menggunakan teori Poskolonialisme serta penekanan istimewa terhadap konsep Orientalisme Edward Said. Analisis ini mengetengahkan gambaran kontra antara Afghanistan sebagai Oriental dan Amerika sebagai Occidental. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa novel *The Kite Runner* mengukuhkan lagi idea bahawa mereka yang dilihat Oriental adalah ganas, seksual dan berfikiran ke belakang manakala mereka yang dilihat sebagai Occidental pula digambarkan sebagai penyelamat yang bertamadun. Gambaran-gambaran ini memberikan pandangan yang baik terhadap kolonialisme dan imperialisme.

Kata Kunci: *The Kite Runner* , Orientalisme, Edward Said, Oriental, Occidental, Poskolonialisme, Afghanistan, Amerika.

Introduction

Afghanistan, which is a country in South Asia, has experienced several civil wars, foreign interventions, and insurgencies over the years. Although the country was quite stable under the forty-year rule of King Zahir Shah, a *coup d'état* in 1973 led to the overthrow of the monarchy.¹ The fall of the monarchy and the rise of the republican government, headed by Daoud Khan, resulted in the country facing increasing instability. There were religious and ideological clashes under Daoud Khan's regime. However, Khan was overthrown and killed in a 1978 communist coup known as the Saur Revolution which was initiated by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) led by Nur

¹ Chintamani Mahapatra, "The Afghan Turmoil: Problems and Prospects," *India International Centre Quarterly* 24, no.1 (1997): 131–143, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23004638>.

Mohammad Taraki. By the year 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, where the invasion resulted in a prolonged cycle of destruction and misery. However, when the Soviets withdrew in 1989, a civil war takes place between the Afghan mujahideen and other rebel groups from the year 1992 until the emergence of the Taliban.²

The Taliban is an Islamic extremist group that emerged in Afghanistan in 1966 consisting of the mujahideen and the Pashtun tribesmen who studied in Pakistani *madrassas*.³ The Taliban's version of Islam was extreme and harsh. Women were required to cover themselves in veils, televisions were banned, and men were jailed if their beards appeared short.⁴ Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the United States announced a war on terrorism and invaded Afghanistan which results in the overthrow of the Taliban. It is worth mentioning that after the September 11 attack, Muslims in America were assaulted, discriminated, and subjected to hate crimes where they were being labelled as terrorists. After the attack, Muslims were sent death threats and subjected to harassment, as well as being attacked, beaten and "held at gunpoint." There was also the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment by the Americans, and the media portrayal of Muslims was primarily negative.⁵

Furthermore, for the purpose of this study, it is important to have some information about the ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Accordingly, Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic and a tribal society of which the population is made up by fourteen different ethnolinguistics groups.⁶ The main ethnic groups in the country are known as the Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara. First, the Pashtun is the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, consequently holding the most influential political power in the country and are primarily Sunni Muslims. The Pashtun social structure relies on

² Vikas Sharma, and Sarwar Ahmad Najjar, "Treatment of Historical Sources: A Study of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*," *Research Journal of English* 6, no. 2 (2021): 105-112.

³ Jayshree Bajoria, and Zachary Laub, "The Taliban in Afghanistan," *Council on Foreign Relations* 6, (2011).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Kiara Alfonseca, "20 years after 9/11, Islamophobia Continues to Haunt Muslims," *ABCNews*, September 12, 2021, <https://abcn.ws/38wRgip>.

⁶ Sean Carberry, "Afghans Confront Sensitive Issue of Ethnicity," *NPR News*, May 8, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/2013/05/08/179079930/afghans-confront-sensitive-issue-of-ethnicity>.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 350 of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

the *Pashtunwali* code of honour and behaviour. They uphold family honour, protection of female relatives and guests, defence of property and hospitality. On the other hand, is the Tajik ethnic group, which is the second populous ethnic group in the country after the Pashtun. The Tajiks mostly lives in the northern, north-eastern and western part of Afghanistan. Though they do not follow a specific social structure like the Pashtun, the Tajiks emphasize loyalty towards the village and family.⁷

Last but not least is the Hazaras, who are mostly situated in Hazajarat, a mountainous region in the central provinces of Afghanistan. In contrast to the Pashtun, the Hazara are Shi'a Muslims who mainly follow the Ismailis branch of Islam. They have been historically subjected to discrimination and persecution due to their status as an underclass of Afghan society.⁸ During the Taliban rule, the Shi'a Hazara group claim they were subjected to an unprecedented degree of violence and persecution.

Background of the Author: Khaled Hosseini

Khaled Hosseini was born in 1965 in Kabul, Afghanistan and moved to the United States in 1980. His father was a diplomat in the Afghan Foreign Ministry and in 1976, the Ministry relocated Hosseini's family to Paris. They were unable to return to Kabul due to the communist coup and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. His family were then granted political asylum in the United States when he was fifteen years old, and later in 1980, his family moved to San Jose, California. In terms of his education, Hosseini received a bachelor's degree in Biology from Santa Clara University and also gained a Medical Doctorate from the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine. In 2006, Hosseini was appointed as a Goodwill Ambassador by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Refugee Agency. Currently, he is the founder of a non-profit organisation called The

⁷ Erin Foster, and Wiebke Lamer, *Afghan Ethnic Groups: A Brief Investigation*, (USA: Civil Military Fusion Centre, 2011).

⁸ Mohammad Hussain Hasrat, "Over a Century of Persecution: Massive Human Rights Violation Against Hazaras in Afghanistan," (2019).

Khaled Hosseini Foundation which provides humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

The Kite Runner published in 2003 is Hosseini's first and best-selling novel. Together with his second novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *The Kite Runner* (2003) which is set in Afghanistan and the United States has sold over thirty-eight million copies worldwide.⁹ Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* has also been translated into forty-two languages, published in thirty-eight countries¹⁰, and also remained on the New York Times best-seller list for two years.¹¹ Moreover, the novel has received multiple awards such as the San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year and Entertainment Weekly's Best Book in 2003, the Boeke Prize and appeared in the American Library Association's notable book list. However, *The Kite Runner* was labelled as a banned book because of sexual violence, and Islamophobia, as well as, due to the view that the novel would inspire terrorism and promote Islam.¹² The novel was also banned due to its offensive language, violence and homosexuality. Nevertheless, it could not be doubted that *The Kite Runner* has given Hosseini remarkable popularity especially in America, evidently when he was invited to the White House by the Bush family in 2007 for the screening of a film adaptation of the novel¹³. Among Hosseini's other works include *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), *And The Mountains Echoed* (2013) and the *Sea Prayer* (2018).

⁹ Hermione Hoby, "Khaled Hosseini: 'If I could go back now, I'd take the Kite Runner Apart'," *The Guardian*, June 1, 2013, <https://bit.ly/39wWU42>.

¹⁰ Boyd Tonkin, "Is the Arab World Ready for a Literary Revolution?" *The Independent*, April 15, 2008, <https://bit.ly/3sL0TRk>.

¹¹ Hillel Italie, "Kite Runners' Author to Debut New Novel Next Year," *NBC News*, October 29, 2019, <https://bit.ly/38DQ4tt>.

¹² Betsy Gomez, "Banned Spotlight: The Kite Runner," Banned Books Week, September 12, 2018, <https://bannedbooksweek.org/banned-spotlight-the-kite-runner/>.

¹³ Mohammad-Makram, "Neo-orientalist Narrative: A Study of the Representation of Muslim Societies in Selected Post-9/11 Literary Works," (PhD diss., International Islamic University Malaysia, 2014).

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 352
of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

Statement of the Problem and Previous Studies

The representation of Afghanistan in comparison to the United States in *The Kite Runner* requires critical interpretation and analysis. This is due to the glorification of the West and the degradation of the East as a place of poverty, violence, terrorism, and exoticism. Accordingly, the portrayal of the East, specifically Afghanistan, in *The Kite Runner* is ironic because the country has been violently invaded by the American forces after the September 11, 2001, attack. Besides that, the novel, which is primarily set in Afghanistan was written by an Afghan author who has lived in the United States since the year 1980, which is twenty-three years before the publication of *The Kite Runner*. Consequently, by living in the West, the author may have internalized an Orientalist or a Western view of the East which could be a contributing factor to the novel being a massive best-seller in the United States. Although the author of the novel, Khaled Hosseini is an Afghan, it can be argued that he utilises a Western construction of the East in his novel which grants him recognition and popularity in the United States. Although previous research has analysed *The Kite Runner* using a postcolonial approach, the aspect of Orientalism in the novel remains unclear. Furthermore, past studies have given much focus on characterization in the novel, but the journey of the narrator, Amir, is inadequately studied using a postcolonial lens. The focus on Amir's journey is significant as it offers a critical perception of how Amir views Afghanistan in contrast to America, and how he may have adopted a Western perception of the East.

This study could be a beneficial addition to the research of postcolonial studies, specifically Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* in literature. The novel chosen for this study itself, which is, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini remains a relevant piece of literature today due to its insight into Afghan culture and the Taliban, which would mostly spark interest among Western readers, especially in this post-September 11 period. Thus, it is hoped that through postcolonial criticism, this study could demonstrate that there are some inaccurate representations of the East and concurrently the religion Islam, which could reinforce Islamophobia.

Numerous studies concerning the portrayal of Afghanistan in *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini have been conducted by scholars over the past few years. Even though there is published research that aims to examine the novel using a Postcolonial, Oriental, or Neo-Oriental

approach, the findings appear to be generic and lack of a thorough analysis of the subject matter. Therefore, after searching for studies that use Postcolonial criticism and Orientalism to analyse the novel, it can be said that further analysis of the novel is needed. Nevertheless, there is still a need to review how past studies have analysed the novel.

In *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini portrayed the Afghans as savages and racists, while the Americans as saviours. The portrayal of Afghans as savages and racists is reflected through the character, Assef, a Pashtun who oppresses the other ethnic group known as the Hazaras. Assef views Afghanistan as belonging only to the Pashtuns, and that the Pashtuns are true Afghans, whereas the Hazaras only pollute their homeland. He also does not believe in morality and thus rapes Hassan, a Hazara, for disobeying his command. On the contrary, the Americans in the novel are seen as a saviour who wants to protect the Afghans from terrorism. For instance, the married American couple in the novel, Mr and Mrs Caldwell is depicted as kind people because they provide houses and food for the Afghan children who have lost their parents.¹⁴ The aforementioned example creates the impression that the Americans are like angels in Afghanistan and without the presence of the Americans, the Afghans could not dream of peace and prosperity. However, Hosseini does not portray the brutality and failure of the American power in Afghanistan. There are thousands of innocent Afghan people who were being killed, tortured, disposed, and removed from their homes by the American forces, which are all not mentioned in the novel¹⁵. The novel does not highlight the failure of the United States in its War on Terror against Afghanistan which was initiated after the September-11 attack.¹⁶ It was mentioned in the novel that the Taliban “scurried like rats into the caves”, but the real accounts were different because, after seventeen years in Afghanistan, the United States could not defeat the Taliban and thus commenced a discussion with the Taliban in Doha in 2019.¹⁷

¹⁴ Waheed Ahmad Khan et al., “The Role of Native Informers in Representation of 9/11: A Critical Study of Khaled Hosseini’s Selected Novels,” *Multicultural Education* 7, no.1 (2021): 321-326.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 323.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis **354** of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

Similar to Khan et. al, a study conducted by Aubry¹⁸ also mentions that the brutality of the Americans against Afghans is not portrayed in *The Kite Runner*. Since the setting of the novel shifts to the United States, there is no mention of the Afghans living in America who were harassed, assaulted, and sometimes killed after the September-11 attack because they appeared as Middle Eastern people.¹⁹ The novel also does not depict the outrage felt by Afghans in America regarding the sudden change in US policy towards Afghanistan. Hosseini did not include the details of the Afghans who were discriminated against in America, especially after the September-11 attack because his American readers would be furious if he appears to be “un-American” (p. 35).²⁰ The novel’s depiction of the Taliban appears to lend support to the United States’ invasion of Afghanistan. Likewise, Hosseini presents the American invasion of Afghanistan as well-intentioned and a necessary occurrence.²¹ It could not be denied that in the novel, the narrator, Amir, did not report any encounter with racism in his new country of residence, the United States, instead he depicted the country as a hospitable place for the Afghans.

Ironically, while the narrator of the novel, Amir, did not portray any instances of racism in the United States, he however depicted the racism that takes place in Afghanistan. An article by Hosseini and Zohdi proves that the narrator, Amir, illustrates the racism of Pashtuns against the Hazaras that are respectively the majority and minority ethnic groups in Afghanistan.²² In the novel, Amir, says that the Hazaras were severely oppressed by the Pashtuns. The Hazaras were not only forced to leave their land, but they were also killed, treated as slaves and had their homes were burned down.²³ On top of that, the Hazaras were also mocked and insulted by the Pashtuns due to their physical appearance, specifically their eyes and face. As an example, Amir says that the

¹⁸ Timothy Aubry, “Afghanistan Meets the Amazon: Reading the Kite Runner in America,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 124, no. 1 (2009): 25-43. doi:10.1632/pmla.2009.124.1.25.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 35.

²¹ Katrine Ørnehaug Dale, “What Happens in Afghanistan, Does Not Stay in Afghanistan: Understanding American Literary Representations of Afghanistan Through a New Orientalist Approach,” (Master’s thesis., University of Oslo, 2016), 1-55.

²² Akram Sadat Hosseini, and Esmaeil Zohdi, “The Kite Runner and the Problem of Racism and Ethnicity,” *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 74, (2016): 33-40.

²³ Ibid., 36.

Hazaras were called mice-eating, flat-nosed and load-carrying donkeys which are all negative connotations attached to the particular ethnic group.

Moving on, a study by Miller presents that in Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*, the Afghans or the Muslim world are portrayed as evil, while the Americans and Western values are glorified.²⁴ The portrayal of the characters, Amir and Baba as the "great hero" that migrated to America, and Assef as the "paedophilic Taliban", perpetuates the notion that Western values are good and Islamic values are equivalent to bad and evil.²⁵ The depiction of Western values as good can be seen through Amir's heroic rescue of Sohrab. In the later course of the novel, Amir who is portrayed as a successful Westerner must return to his "Other" world, Afghanistan, in order to save the innocent orphan, Sohrab from the incarnation of evil, Assef. Amir's heroic rescue emphasises the importance of colonial or imperial power to intervene in "dark" countries and save the subhuman "Other" who would otherwise be trapped in brutality and ignorance. In addition, Amir's heroic rescue of Sohrab supports the notion of "Westernization of Goodness" in comparison to the "Islamization of Evil."²⁶

Similarly, a study conducted by Bouguerra and Maadadi supports the findings by Miller²⁷ that Amir is the manifestation of the West in the novel.²⁸ The American presence in *The Kite Runner* does not necessarily have to be an American character, but it can also be a reference to the west in terms of their culture, commodity and lifestyle.²⁹ Consequently, Amir became the portrayal of Americans in the novel, specifically when he returns to Afghanistan after living in the United States. Amir is represented as the stereotypical American who came to a war-torn Arab

²⁴ Matthew Thomas Miller, "The Kite Runner Critiqued: New Orientalism Goes to the Big Screen," *Common Dreams*, January 5, 2008, <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2008/01/05/kite-runner-critiqued-new-orientalism-goes-big-screen>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Miller, "The Kite Runner".

²⁸ Amel Bouguerra, and Aicha Nour El Islam Maadadi, "Cultural and ideological perceptions of the other in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*," (PhD diss., University of Mohamed Boudiaf M'Sila, 2018).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 356
of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

country for a humanitarian mission.³⁰ Even the other Afghan characters in the novel do not view Amir as a fellow Afghan as they treated him as an American man visiting Afghanistan.³¹ This further strengthens the point that Amir becomes the American representation in the latter part of the novel. As the American presence in the novel, Bouguerra and Maadadi explained that Amir becomes the contradiction between his old friends and his old life. For example, in the novel, when Assef talks about killing the Hazaras in Afghanistan, Amir tells him that in the west, they have an expression for that, it is called ethnic cleansing.³² This shows that Amir who returns from America is explaining the situation in Afghanistan to a man who has been living there his whole life. The aforementioned example serves as an illustration of the American being portrayed as more intelligent than the Afghans. Amir's presence serves as a strong contrast to the Afghan characters when he returns to Kabul, subsequently juxtaposing the modern versus the primitive, the good versus the bad and most importantly, the West versus the East.³³

These previous studies collectively agree that Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* represents Afghans versus the Americans in a contrasting manner. The Afghans are portrayed as evil, racist and savages who oppress the other ethnic group, called Hazaras. The Americans, on the other hand, are represented as saviours and good. Pertaining to the representation of Americans, previous research has pointed out that in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini did not portray any of the mistreatment and assaults that Afghans living in America had to face. Additionally, the American invasion of Afghanistan is portrayed as a necessary occurrence in the novel. Overall, this section overviewed the representations of Afghans versus Americans in the novel from past research that uses postcolonial and neo-oriental criticism. However, it is concluded that further analysis of the novel is needed using the approach of postcolonialism and Edward Said's concept of orientalism, as it is found that these approaches are critical to understanding the narrator's journey from the West to the East and how it contributes to Oriental thinking.

³⁰ Dale, "What Happens in Afghanistan."

³¹ Ibid., 19.

³² Bouguerra, and Maadadi, "Cultural and ideological."

³³ Dale, "What Happens in Afghanistan."

Religion and the ways of practising Islam in *The Kite Runner* can be interpreted in different ways.³⁴ For instance, Amir's father, Baba, views that religion is about morality, pride, honour and courage. Thus, religious men are those with a respectful and honourable rank in his society, as well as, among his people, just like Baba who is well-respected in the district of Kabul.³⁵ The authors further explained that Baba is also secular in his religious views. Baba is a man who drinks and has had an affair with his servant's wife, but for him, those actions are not a form of sin. According to Baba, there can only be one sin, which is the sin of theft. Likewise, a study by Mohammed mentions that Baba hates the mullahs.³⁶ He tells Amir that he will never learn anything valuable about religion from the mullah who taught him at school. Additionally, the mullah, who are the religious leaders portrayed in the novel are not respected for their preachments and became a subject of a joke among the Afghans.³⁷ Consequently, Amir's religious views are predominantly influenced by his father, Baba because he is not a religious person himself. Amir performs religious practices only when he needs it, and he is also uncertain regarding the existence of God.³⁸ Amir's uncertainty in God and in his prayers are due to the secular values brought by colonialism.³⁹ Amir treats religion or religious practices as a form of comfort during desperate times. He returns to God only when he found himself hopeless and lost.⁴⁰ As an evidence, when his father got sick, Amir prays, recites the half-forgotten verses of the Qur'an and asks kindness from God he was not sure existed. Besides that, when Amir learned about Sohrab's committed suicide and felt worried, he murmured a prayer and promised God that he will fast, as well as perform *salah* and *zakat*.

Religion or specifically, Islam can be interpreted as a form of extremism through the character Assef and the Taliban. Assef who in the latter part of the novel becomes a Taliban member, stoned women to death publicly while claiming that he is following God's order. Taliban

³⁴ Bouguerra, and Maadadi, "Cultural and ideological."

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁶ Bahman Jabar Mohammed, "Image of Islam in Postcolonial Novels: E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*," *Journal of Raparin University* 4, no. 13 (2017).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁹ Mohammed, "Image of Islam."

⁴⁰ Bouguerra, and Maadadi, "Cultural and ideological," 50.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 358 of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

uses religion to justify their violent actions of beating, killing, raping and stoning women and other civilians.⁴¹ Similarly, Mohammed⁴² says that the Taliban gives the impression that religion or Islam is only about punishment. This is because, Assef, the Taliban leader, believes that every sinner must be punished in proportion to their sins. Accordingly, he stoned a man and a woman to death because for Assef, they have dishonoured the sanctity of marriage.⁴³ The abuse of power by the Taliban as depicted in the novel shows Islam as a religion that is cruel and uncivilized.⁴⁴

The aforementioned studies have shown the ways the characters in *The Kite Runner* view and treat the religion, Islam. This can be evident as previous studies have illustrated that the character, Baba views religion is about pride and honour, meanwhile the narrator, Amir finds religion as a source of comfort during distressing times. Besides that, religion can also be viewed as a source of extremism through the character and the Taliban leader, Assef, who uses religion to justify the violence perpetrated against others in the novel. It is worth mentioning that these previous studies use a postcolonial approach in analysing religion. Although postcolonial theory paves the way to explore factors like religion and how it influences human experiences, there is limited research made on this subject matter.

The Orient as a Place of Violence

In *The Kite Runner*, the act of violence is a main and repetitive occurrence throughout Amir's everyday life in Afghanistan. The narrator Amir witnesses physical, sexual, verbal and sectarian violence that is perpetrated mainly against minority groups and also children in the streets of his neighbourhood. Amir gradually discovers that such violent acts that are commonplace occur due to factors of ethnic and sectarian conflict between the Pashtun and Hazaras. Because the Pashtuns occupy a higher social status than the Hazaras, they are framed as responsible for threatening peace in the country. In a way, the narrator Amir sees

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mohammed, "Image of Islam."

⁴³ Ibid., 54.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

how the ethnic and religious divide in Afghanistan can lead to violence that will soon escalate on a much larger scale.

From the perspective of Postcolonialism and Orientalism, the construction of a violent Orient or Afghan 'Other' can be understood as part of Anglo-American political thought. Essentially, this pattern of thought is embedded in the Orientalist archetype of the violent and treacherous nature of the Afghan people.⁴⁵ This suggests that the portrayal of widespread violence from the narrator's journey in Afghanistan is a typical Orientalist stereotyping of Afghans. Such narratives create a negative perception of the Orient by portraying and characterising the Orient as a region of sexual, violent, and extreme people (114).⁴⁶ In relation to this, the depiction of a violent Orient also functions to legitimize the domination of Western power in foreign lands that claim to bring about civilization.⁴⁷ Thus, the Soviet and American long-lasting wars in Afghanistan are seen as inevitable due to the violence that suggests Afghan backwardness and lack of restraint. Accordingly, in *The Kite Runner* readers are exposed to various forms of violence that suggest Afghans are barbaric and cruel. Through Amir's journey, *The Kite Runner* illustrates how violence is entrenched in Afghanistan where it is utilised, with religious endorsement, to establish dominance.

Pashtuns Assert Dominance and Power over the Hazaras through Sexual Violence

The narrator Amir focuses on two sects of society or two different ethnic groups that are prevalent in his native land, Afghanistan, which are the Pashtuns and Hazaras. In contrast to the Pashtuns, who hold most of the political power, the Hazaras mainly constitute the servant class.⁴⁸ Due to this social hierarchy, Amir illustrates how the dominant and

⁴⁵ Keith Stanski, "So These Folks are Aggressive!: An Orientalist Reading of 'Afghan Warlords,'" *Security Dialogue* 40, no.1 (2019): 73-94.

⁴⁶ Edward W. Said, "Islam Through Western Eyes," *The Nation*, January 2, 1998, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/islam-through-western-eyes/>

⁴⁷ John McLeod, "Beginning Postcolonialism," in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (second edition), (England: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁴⁸ Amin Saikal, "Afghanistan: The Status of the Shi'ite Hazara Minority," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no.1 (2012): 80-87.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 360
of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

powerful section of the society asserts or maintains their high status over those who are considered inferior due to their ethnic and religious affiliations, particularly through sexual violence. Sexual violence or rape has commonly been used as a political tactic to maintain hierarchical relations.⁴⁹ Hence the act of sexual abuse or rape is used as a major strategy by the Pashtuns to assert dominance over the subordinate Hazaras. This can be seen through the rape incident between Assef and Hassan that the narrator Amir witnesses and allows to occur.

Firstly, Assef, a young boy from the dominant Pashtun ethnic group, rapes Hassan, who is from the minority Hazara, as he aims to assert his superiority over him. Because he feels disrespected and insulted by Hassan for threatening him, Assef is committed to carrying out a sexually violent act to remind Hassan that he is “just a Hazara”⁵⁰, a person who is of the lowest status in Afghanistan. In a way, Assef perceives that Hassan does not deserve any slight sense of power over him due to his status as a Hazara and consequently a servant. Even though Assef is just a young boy, he has a strong stance against the Hazaras, evidently when he insults them with racial slurs and degrading remarks. For instance, he would call Hassan’s father, Ali, “flat-nosed Babalu,” and Hassan as a “slant-eyed donkey”⁵¹, which refers to their Mongoloid feature. In one of Amir’s encounters with Assef, Assef feels strongly that Afghanistan is a land exclusive to the Pashtuns, and not the Hazaras who “pollute our homeland”.⁵² Accordingly, when Hassan challenges Assef for the purpose of defending the narrator Amir from getting punched, Assef feels intense dissatisfaction, leading him to rape Hassan. It should be noted that the rape incident among the two young boys occurs not out of lust but is instead an act of domination or an illustration of power. As a result of the rape, Assef takes sadistic pleasure in tormenting Hassan because he is able to demonstrate his strength and dominance, not only as a boy but also as a part of the Pashtun ethnic group. Overall, through the act of sexual violence, Assef was also able to

⁴⁹ Georgiana Banita, “Ask Him Where His Shame Is: War and Sexual Violence in *The Kite Runner*,” (n.d).

⁵⁰ Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, 83.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 52.

keep Hassan under his control, thus affirming Hassan's status as the weak Hazara, undeserving of an equal life and power with the Pashtun.

On the other hand, the rape is made possible by the narrator Amir as he chooses to not save Hassan upon witnessing the incident. One may question why Amir allowed the rape to take place, even though he has a close relationship with Hassan. As a silent observer, the narrator Amir has internalized the Pashtun-Hazara power dynamic, where he realises his superiority as a Pashtun in contrast to Hassan's inferiority as a Hazara. Thus, despite Hassan's unwavering respect and obedience, Amir feels resentful towards him. Accordingly, this contributes to the ambivalent nature of Amir and Hassan's relationship. As Amir is a member of the Pashtun majority, and Hassan comes from the minority Hazara, their relationship is restricted by an unbalanced form of power or status. While Amir accepts his privileged status as a Pashtun, he struggles with his personal relationship with Hassan, whom he views as inferior or the Other. Thus, when he witnesses the rape, he feels torn about whether to save Hassan because he practically grew up with him, or to escape, which is a decision made possible due to Hassan's inferior status. This is evident when Amir reasserts and agrees with Assef's opinion that Hassan "was just a Hazara, wasn't he?".⁵³ In the end, Amir chooses to run away, which later becomes the major source of his feeling of guilt, leading him to return to Afghanistan to save Hassan's son, Sohrab, after migrating to the United States.

Nevertheless, Amir's ambivalent attitude has a significant impact on Hassan. The rape that Amir allows to occur causes a brutal violation of Hassan's sense of identity and contributes largely to his sense of unhomeliness, especially in Afghanistan's Pashtun-centred society. After the sexual assault, Hassan chooses to remain silent about being raped because he realises his inferiority as a Hazara compared to Assef's and Amir's dominant status as a Pashtun. He also distanced himself from Amir in the same way Amir avoided talking to him. Hassan's feeling of unhomeliness then becomes a factor behind his admission to Amir's accusation of stealing because he acknowledges that he does not belong

⁵³ Ibid., 85.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 362
of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

in the neighbourhood. Thus, he should move to Hazajarat, a region inhabited only by Hazara ethnic minorities.⁵⁴

In this novel, acts of sexual violence are a mighty tool for the Pashtuns to assert dominance and power against the minority Hazaras, which reinforces the notion that the Orient is violent, cruel and inhumane. Additionally, in the latter part of Amir's journey when he returns to Afghanistan as an adult, he witnesses a brutal and rather murderous form of violence conducted by the Taliban who use religion to justify such acts. Accordingly, readers may find that religion becomes the means which allows further violence to be perpetrated.

Violence in the Orient is Condoned by Religion (Islam)

The second part of Amir's journey when returning to Afghanistan as an adult is crucial in terms of the portrayal of religion and violence in the country. As the religion Islam is strongly attached to Afghanistan (Bruderlein, 2001), it is rather natural or easy for the author Hosseini to assume—through his narrator Amir—that Islam condones violence in the country. It is common through a Western lens, Islam is looked at with great hostility and fear particularly because it belongs to the Orient. Accordingly, Islam and Muslims are regarded as anti-human, anti-democratic and antirational. Concerning this, a similar view can be seen when Amir highlights a public execution event, he witnessed at the Ghazi Stadium that was conducted by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Correspondingly, the depiction of the ruthless Taliban feeds into the Western media representation of Muslims.⁵⁵

Amir first learned of the atrocities committed by the Taliban through a letter written by Hassan, and also Rahim Khan. The Taliban is portrayed as savages lacking human decency, who killed and tortured people in Afghanistan, especially the Hazaras who are Shi'a Muslims and also women, using the name of God. Thus, when the narrator Amir himself directly witnesses the brutality of the Taliban during the event

⁵⁴ Lawrent E. Duke, "Methods of Domination: Towards a Theory of Domestic Colonialism in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" (College thesis., University of Southern Mississippi, 2019).

⁵⁵ Said, "Islam Through Western."

of the public execution, he ascertains that the Islamic faith authorizes such acts of heinous violence that eventually lead to murder. This is evident when a Talib mentions that such execution is necessary to implement the *Shari'a* or the Islamic religious law and to obey the “will of Allah and the word of Prophet Muhammad that are alive and well here in Afghanistan”.⁵⁶ The Talib further claims that punishing every sinner “in a manner benefitting his sin” comes from the words of God, hence the public execution that is carried out by throwing stones at the sinners until they die is deemed acceptable by the Islam. Such religious articulation from the aforementioned lines is similar to Edward Said’s view on Orientalism, where any representation or discourse about Islam is radically flawed. The horror depiction of the public execution is also problematic in a way that there is no clear distinction made between adherence to Islam versus outright extremism. As a result, those who adhere to or practice Islam, especially in the East, are seen as primitive and backwards.⁵⁷

The negative depiction of Islam, and concurrently the Taliban and Muslims, as a religion that encourages violence has always been a controversial issue in literary works and global media. It cannot be denied that the Western media has constantly portrayed Islam in a biased manner. Evidently, Edward Said mentions that Islam is portrayed in the media as a distinctly mediaeval and stagnant entity, which suggests it as being backwards and regressive.⁵⁸ Accordingly, through the narrator Amir– the author Hosseini, has significantly produced a reductive representation of Afghanistan by equating it with violence made possible by Islam and carried out by the Taliban. As a result, Afghanistan is seen as a place filled with extremists and violent people.

Besides that, another event that influenced Amir’s view of religion can be seen through his interaction or conversation with his father, Baba, regarding the religious division in terms of belief. Even though Baba is a Sunni Muslim, he has a sceptical stance on Islam and its values or

⁵⁶ Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, 233.

⁵⁷ Mohd Farhan Abd Rahman et al., “Orientalist Studies Verge on Islam: Early History,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 7, no.12 (2017): 1246-1256.

⁵⁸ James A. Reilly, “Western Media and Islam: Edward W. Said. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11, no.1 (1981): 161-164.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 364
of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

practices. He despises the mullah, who is generally known as conservative Muslims, and sees them as a bad influence on Amir. Baba believes that Amir will:

never learn anything of value from those bearded idiots... Piss on the beards of all those self-righteous monkeys... They do nothing but thumb their prayer beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don't even understand... God help us all if Afghanistan ever falls into their hands. (Hosseini 2003, 18)

From the above lines, Baba mocks the religious practices carried out by the mullahs and also criticises them as having a 'holier-than-thou' attitude. Significantly, Baba does not trust the mullah to govern the country using the Shari'ah rules, arguably because he sees the application of religion on a state level as radical. In addition, Baba also claims that the mullah is blindly following religion as they do not understand the language in the "book", which is referring to the Quran, filled with verses written in Arabic. Similarly, Amir has also developed a similar view to the kids in his school that are struggling to learn "those tongue-twisting, exotic Arabic words"⁵⁹ from the Quran. In addition, Baba feels that the mullah could lead Amir astray or to a form of religious fanaticism. The 'Mullah' that Baba is referring to are those who are Sunni Muslims with a trained and equipped knowledge of Islam. They commonly preach about the five pillars of faith in Islam and believe that drinking is a terrible sin for Muslims as "those who drank would answer for their sin on the day of *Qiyamat*, Judgement Day".⁶⁰

In contrast to the teachings and beliefs put forth by the mullahs, the narrator Amir notices that Baba frequently drinks whiskey and eats pork. In Baba's defence, his casual act of drinking and eating pork is common and not a form of sin because, for him, there can only be one sin, which is theft. Besides that, Baba also does not believe in the existence of God. This can be evident when he asserts that "if there's a God out there, then I would hope he has other more important things to attend to than my drinking scotch or eating pork".⁶¹ Over time, Baba's disbelief in God influenced Amir, which can be seen during the kite tournament when

⁵⁹ Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, 117.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

Amir repeatedly says “if there was a God...”.⁶² Furthermore, Amir mentions that Baba mocks everything religious, including the celebration of Eid Al-Adha. From the aforementioned examples, it can be seen that Baba is more secular in his stance on religion. It cannot be denied that Baba’s approach to Islam and God is filled with disrespect and bitterness. Additionally, Baba’s attitude towards religion frames those who adhere to Islamic practices and beliefs, like the mullahs, as a primitive and backward community. In contrast to Baba’s secular lifestyle, Islam is also seen as unfit for the modern world. As a result, readers were given the impression that a ‘good Muslim’ is the one who supports modern or Western life, while, the ‘bad Muslim’, in this context, the mullah, demands an Islamic way of life and opposes the modern ones.⁶³ Accordingly, the tension between secular and conservative Muslims has traditionally become the argument in society. Evidently when the Taliban, who are believed to be conservatives and traditional Muslims, imposes strict Islamic rules, which do not favour secular Muslims. In a sense, Amir perceives that the secular and conservative Muslims could not live peacefully together due to their different beliefs in religion.

The Occident as a Place of Salvation

Due to the widespread violence in Afghanistan, the narrator Amir along with his father, Baba, migrates to America, specifically, California, to find salvation, peace and security. It cannot be denied that America has become a common destination for immigrants with the purpose of seeking a better life and escaping from political and religious conflict in their homeland.⁶⁴ This is true in the case of Baba who attempts to escape from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However, for Amir, he seeks to salvage himself from the horrors of Hassan’s rape which became a haunting memory of him in Afghanistan. He perceives that by moving to America, he could bury his feeling of guilt for betraying and not helping Hassan when he was assaulted. As Amir relies on America or the Occident to find salvation, in a way, he reinforces the dichotomy between

⁶² Ibid., 71-72.

⁶³ Mohammad-Makram, “Neo-orientalist Narrative.”

⁶⁴ Ramesh Preasad Adhikary, “Crisis of Cultural Identity in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*,” *Scholar Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Science* 9, no.5 (2021): 179-187.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 366 of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

the West as heroic and superior compared to the East. Therefore, this section analyses Amir's perception of America, and how his integration into Western society reproduces the narrative of the 'White Saviour' to the unfortunate living in the Orient.

America as the Promised Land for Amir

Oftentimes, immigrants would suffer when trying to begin a new life in the host country as a second-class society.⁶⁵ This is because of the differences between culture, religion and also the physical appearance of people of the East compared to those of the West. These differences could then contribute to the sense of displacement among immigrants in their new country. However, the narrator Amir does not appear to have a similar immigrant experience in America, instead, from the first chapter of the novel he claims America, instead of Afghanistan, as his "home".⁶⁶ Therefore, this section of the paper highlights various scenes or events that contribute to Amir's formulation of his attitude in embracing America or the Occident as a 'promised land.'

First, Amir has a strong sense of belonging in America as he embraces the dominant Western culture. The idea of America is not alien to Amir because before migrating, he has become familiar with American culture and lifestyle in Afghanistan. Indications of the American lifestyle can be seen in the form of watching Western movies like 'Rio Bravo' and 'The Magnificent Seven', owning a Ford Mustang which is the "same car SteveMcQueen had driven in *Bullitt*"⁶⁷ and drinking whiskey. Hence, even before being forced to migrate, Amir had long embraced the American way of life. Moreover, for Amir, owning anything American in Afghanistan seems to elevate his self-image and status. This can be evident when he says, "in Afghanistan, owning anything American... was a sign of wealth".⁶⁸ From this line, it can be observed that Amir perceives

⁶⁵ Wigati Dyah Prasasti, and Putu Suarcaya, "Paradoxical Significance of Living in the New Promised Land in Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*: A Place to Bury or Mourn Memories?" *Asiatic: IJUM Journal of English Language and Literature* 14, no.1 (2020): 56-70.

⁶⁶ Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

culture as something material, rather than something unique to his Afghan identity. Concurrently, embracing the dominant Western culture would be more rewarding for him, instead of conforming to his native Afghan cultural norms.

Hence, it is not surprising that Amir does not feel alienated in America despite the supposed cultural differences. Throughout his life in the new country, Amir is able to achieve his dreams and goals which appear to be bleak in Afghanistan. For instance, he successfully received a college education, became a known writer, and married a woman named Soraya. Besides that, the relationship between Amir and his father, Baba, significantly improves as they became closer to one another once they are in America. However, at the same time, Hassan who stays in Afghanistan is suffering from poverty, and brutality by the Taliban and eventually got murdered. From the perspective of Orientalism, the West is considered a place of progress and development, while the Orient is viewed as remote from any enlightening process or changes (McLeod, 2010).⁶⁹ Thus, the contrasting situation between Amir and Hassan suggests that only those living in the West can achieve modernity and advancement significantly through education and a job whereas those living in the East are more inclined towards impoverishment and deprivation from any sort of the perceived Western advancement. In other words, if America is considered a promised land for Amir to achieve success and happiness, Afghanistan is a symbolic wasteland for Hassan since he is stuck in violence and poverty.

Besides that, it is also ironic that the narrator Amir depicts illustrates that he feels belonged in America compared to Afghanistan. This is evident when Amir lives in Afghanistan, though he is wealthy, he lives in a state of misery. For example, he says that "long before the *Roussi* army marched into Afghanistan, long before villages were burned...Kabul had become a city of ghosts for me".⁷⁰ Hence his act of migration to America to seek a better life could not be simply viewed as an attempt to escape from the political conflicts in the country, but because the narrator views Afghanistan as dreadful and unpleasant. It is not surprising that Amir becomes more hopeful and has a brighter outlook on America and the West. For instance, he mentions that

⁶⁹ McLeod, "Beginning Postcolonialism."

⁷⁰ Hosseini, "The Kite Runner," 148.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 368
of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

“America was different... there are no ghosts, no memories, and no sins...for that, I embraced America”.⁷¹ Evidently, Amir loves America and the way the country offers him a means of salvation or to escape from the “ghost” and trauma that is haunting him in Afghanistan.

Similarly, Baba holds a positive attitude toward America by believing it to be one of the most powerful countries in the world. This can be evident when he says, ‘there are only three real men in this world, Amir...America the brash saviour, Britain and Israel. The rest of them... they’re like gossiping old women.’⁷² From the aforementioned line, America is depicted as “real men”, and this notion is similar to what has been pointed out in Edward Said’s Orientalism. Where the West is deemed to become masculine compared to the feminized East.⁷³ Hence due to the distinct characteristics of the West as powerful, compared to the weak East, Baba admires the West and is confident that it can provide him and Amir with a better future. In relation to this, the depiction of America as somewhat a promised land for Amir and also Baba can be viewed as problematic and untrue for some, especially for Afghan and Muslim immigrants who have been known to face extensive discrimination in the country, especially after the September-11 attack in the United States. For example, Alemi and Stempel (2018) found out that the presence of Afghan and Muslim communities is resented by the host society the United States, and became a target of hate crimes, discrimination, and stigmatization due to widespread Islamophobia.⁷⁴ Therefore, the depiction of Afghan immigrants living peacefully in America by the author Hosseini– through his narrator Amir could be a matter of privileged and also glorify America to be more superior to the East. Such portrayal strengthens the Orientalist way of thinking that constantly degrades countries in the Orient.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 136.

⁷³ McLeod, “*Beginning Postcolonialism.*”

⁷⁴ Qais Alemi, and Carl Stempel, “Discrimination and Distress among Afghan Refugees in Northern California: The Moderating Role of Pre- and Post-migration Factors,” *PloS ONE* 13, no. 5 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0196822>.

The West as Saviours to the Orient

The West appears to be an important element, especially in its role in the Orient. In the latter part of Amir's journey, he is given the responsibility or the task to save Hassan's son, Sohrab, who is stuck in an orphanage controlled by the Taliban, none other than in Afghanistan. Though the narrator Amir was initially reluctant to return to Afghanistan due to its unstable political condition, his feeling of guilt from the past, particularly, from not helping Hassan when he was raped becomes the driving factor for him to rescue Sohrab. This section of the paper analyses the role of Amir as the Western embodiment and saviour to the Oriental particularly through his rescue of Sohrab from the evilness in the East.

First and foremost, by simply putting Amir who has a strong sense of belonging with the American society, in a way, he becomes the symbolic embodiment of the West. Hence, making him the only possible saviour of the child Sohrab, reinforces the idea that the West are saviours to the Orient. This is because, it suggests that the Orient is not only incapable of saving itself from such dangers in their own land, but also that they heavily depend on the West which is perceived to hold the utmost superior power in the world. Orientalism has put forth the notion that Oriental people needed saving from themselves, concurrently justifying Western colonialism and invasion of the Orient.⁷⁵ Accordingly, Amir's mission to rescue Sohrab from the dangers in Afghanistan is strangely similar to the 'White saviour' narrative. 'White saviour' presents White characters as heroic based on the perceived sacrifices they make for the characters of Colour.⁷⁶ This concept can be applied to Amir, the embodiment of a Westernized character, who eventually rescues Sohrab, a child who needs a saviour.

It is not coincidental that when Amir arrives at the supposed orphanage where Sohrab lives in Afghanistan, he learns that the orphanage has been selling children including Sohrab to a Taliban official in exchange for money. This encounter serves the purpose of shaping the Orient with institutionalized discrimination against children, where even

⁷⁵ McLeod, "Beginning Postcolonialism."

⁷⁶ Jeanne Dyches, and Deani Thomas, "Unsettling the "White Savior" Narrative: Reading Huck Finn Through a Critical Race Theory/Critical Whiteness Studies Lens," *English Education* 53, no.1 (2020): 35-53.

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 370 of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

orphanages that is supposed to be safe children, turns out to be horrendous. In relation to this, Afghanistan has been commonly constructed as a subject for Orientalist writing, where Afghan women and children are in need of rescue, hence to a certain extent it is seen as worth to re-invade the country.⁷⁷ This can be as true in the case of Amir, who is now the embodiment of the West that revisits Afghanistan to save a child, named Sohrab from such evils in the Orient. In a turn of event, the Taliban official turns out to be Assef, the person who has made Amir's childhood turn into a traumatic mess by the incident of raping Hassan. However, the complicated and traumatic relationship between Amir and Assef is reduced into 'us' versus 'them' oppositions. This is because, in comparison to Assef who is the racist and sexist Eastern or Oriental man, Amir has developed into a selfless, rational, and civilized Western individual. Thus, it is natural for readers to perceive Amir as better than Assef. To make it worse, Assef is also a paedophile who grooms and treats children, including Sohrab, as sex slaves. This can be evident when Amir describes that Sohrab wore "bells strapped around his ankles... his eyes darkened with mascara, and his cheeks glowed with an unnatural red"⁷⁸ and danced with music to entertain the Taliban men. The aforementioned example is a depiction of a child who is a victim of sexual grooming and abuse by older men. Young boys as seen through Sohrab is dressed up as females and are forced to dance for the powerful men, which are the Taliban. In this event, Sohrab also seems to be overwhelmed by humiliation and fear of sexual abuse. The narrator Amir could easily identify such sexual acts towards Sohrab which is carried out by the Taliban, including Assef. Evidently, when Assef refers to Sohrab as "my Hazara boy"⁷⁹, it affirms his treatment of Sohrab as his child sexual possession. In a way, this reflects that the Taliban, who comprises of Eastern man, finds indulgence by sexually abusing innocent children. Hence, by this point, Assef resembles every aspect of a demonic Taliban warlord that is similar to the way American media represent or imagined them to be. Assef appears to be sadistic and cruel, concurrently becoming the major antithesis to Amir's Western values and identity.

⁷⁷ Larbi Sadiki, "Orientalising Afghanistan," *TRT World*, September 11, 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/orientalising-afghanistan-49873>

⁷⁸ Hosseini, "*The Kite Runner*," 302.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

Therefore, upon seeing Assef treating Sohrab in a disturbing manner, Amir believes that he must defeat the evil Oriental man, which leads up to a fight between them. Orientalism has put forth the notion of the Oriental people needed to be civilised and conform to the moral standards upheld in the West.⁸⁰ A similar occurrence can be seen through the fight between Amir and Assef, where it is symbolic of Western powers' attempt to diminish the barbarism in the Orient. As the Orient is perceived as inferior and lacks morality, it gives path to seeing the greatness of the West. Accordingly, given the fact that Amir, who embodies America, is successfully able to defeat Assef and remove Sohrab, it suggests that Western power needs to intervene in the Orient, in order to help bring civilization. Accordingly, Amir's encounter with Assef can be viewed as a form of support for the American intervention in conflicting countries, like Afghanistan, which in the end, causes more harm than good. In a way, the author Hosseini—through his narrator Amir, is suggesting that the only hope for Afghanistan have a bright and stable future relies heavily on the direct involvement of the Western saviour, America.

Conclusion

To conclude, when the Orient is represented in a patronizing manner, such as, violent, extremists, uncivilized and paedophilic, this asserts that the Orient remains inferior and fundamentally other to the West. Hence in the novel, America as the Occident is perceived as a country that is able to civilize people. This can be evident through the journey of Amir from the East to the West. Although Amir was unjust and betrayed Hassan in Afghanistan, he turned out to be bright, positive and selfless as he migrates to America. This relates to the stereotypical historical role of the Occident as the civilized saviour. Such a role can paint the American invasion of Afghanistan in a positive light as the Americans are civilizing the violent and uncultured Pashtun majority.

The portrayal of Afghanistan through the narrator's point of view as embedded with widespread violence due to ethnic conflicts and

⁸⁰ McLeod, "Beginning Postcolonialism."

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 372 of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

religious extremism gives a path to a positive perception of American invasion and domination in the East. This is in line with the argument put forth by Edward Said that an imagined construction of the East by modern Orientalists or native elites who internalizes Western ideology of the East, serves to legitimize European or American colonial and imperial goals. In relation to this, America as the Occident is treated as the only aspiration for Afghanistan to escape from their own barbarity and cruelty. Besides that, by utilising the theory of Postcolonialism, this study is able to identify the narrator's treatment of the subaltern, particularly Hassan, and how his life is a mimicry of the dominant Western culture, which contributed to his sense of belonging in America. Therefore, by analysing the narrator's journey through the lens of Postcolonialism and Orientalism, the researcher was able to come out with two main points for the analysis, which are the way the narrator Amir perceives the Orient as a place of violence and in contrast, the Occident as a place of salvation.

In the novel, the Orient and Oriental, specifically Afghanistan and Afghans, are stereotyped as savages, and consequently becoming the 'Other'. The reason why this point is highlighted is that, throughout the novel, the researchers found out that there are several instances of abuse that eventually become a trait attached to the Oriental or Afghans. Besides that, as Afghanistan itself is predominantly a Muslim country, it is rather easy to construct a reductive view of Islam as permitting violence. Orient is typically characterised as a region of sexual, violent and extreme people.⁸¹ This is proven true from the analysis of the narrator's journey conducted in the previous chapter. Throughout Amir's journey in Afghanistan, it is observed that the perceived act of violence is entrenched in the country, thus allowing for such inhuman acts to occur. Most of the violence arises from the ethnic division in Afghanistan, particularly between the Pashtun and Hazara. In the novel, it is presented or rather stereotyped that the Pashtun who are Sunni Muslims are the ones that carried out most of the cruel acts. Due to ethnic strife in the country, the dominant Pashtun ethnic group sexually violates the minority Hazara for the purpose of establishing dominance. As mentioned in Chapter Three, by raping Hassan, who is a Hazara minority, Assef was able to assert his dominance and power as the

⁸¹ Said, "Islam Through Western."

superior Pashtun. Similarly, the narrator Amir indirectly participates in Hassan's rape as he allowed for it to happen

The novel does not escape from stereotyping and presenting a reductive view of Islam to readers. Acts of violence are perceived to be endorsed by the "extreme" religion, Islam. The researchers found that the novel seems to support the Western prejudiced view against Muslims and Islam by suggesting that the religion condones violence that is carried out in the Orient. An example can be the murderous public execution event in Afghanistan as the Taliban justified such violent act by claiming it to be part of the *Shari'a* or Islamic religious law and the words of God. This scene or event is perceived to be problematic because readers, especially those who are not familiar with Islam, could not differentiate extremism from an acceptable form of adherence to Islam. As a result, Islam is viewed to be associated with violence and becomes an antithesis of the Western religion, Christianity. In a way, the novel purposely ridiculed Islam, which can further be seen when Baba mocks the religion and also the mullahs in Amir's school. Baba suggested that Islamic values and practices are unfit for the modern world, consequently, those who adhere to the religion are seen as a backward society. It cannot be overlooked that the novel's representation of Islam and Muslims supports the expected Western perception of the Orient, not only as violent and sexual beings but also as extremists who are in need of Western civilization.

Next, the second key point demonstrates how the narrator Amir perceives the Occident, particularly America, in contrast to the Orient. The researcher found this point necessary because the narrator tends to focus on the negative aspects of his native land, Afghanistan, while enthusiastically embracing America. In a way, the narrator's positive depiction of America in the novel functions to validate Western superiority and its hegemonic status. Additionally, given that the narrator Amir migrated to America, his perception of the Orient would have been influenced by Western preconceptions of the East and the Orientals.

It is not surprising that the narrator Amir finds salvation as he migrated to America after all the horrors and atrocities he witnessed in the Orient, especially Hassan's assault. It is found out that Amir finds a deep sense of belonging in the Western society, though it is ironic given

The Villainous East versus the Heroic West: A Postcolonial Analysis 374
of *The Kite Runner* and its Portrayal of Muslim Afghanistan

the differences in culture and religion between Afghan-Muslim immigrants and the American society. However, the researcher identified that the underlying factor for Amir's sense of belonging in America is because his life in Afghanistan is a mimicry of the Western dominant culture and lifestyle, as it serves to elevate his status. In contrast to his broken and unstable life in Afghanistan, ironically everything was fixed as he moved to America. For example, in the analysis of the previous section, it is observed that Amir's distant relationship with his father, Baba, was quickly amended as they were living in America. This representation in the novel that every conflict can be solved as long as the West is involved serves as an exaggerated overview to assert Western superiority and legitimise American political goals in the Orient.

From the above analysis, the author juxtaposed Amir's life in America with Hassan's conditions in Afghanistan. This contrasting image suggests that those living in the Orient will continue to struggle with poverty and political imbalance, while the ones in the Occident are able to achieve stability and success. The researchers found out that this contrasting overview tends to strengthen the Orientalists' perception of the East as backwards and unable to achieve stability. The Orientals are perceived to be caught up in their own barbarism and cruelty, which in the end, relies on Western power to 'rescue' them. Accordingly, the idea that the West are saviours of the Orient is presented through Amir's mission to save Hassan's son, Sohrab in Afghanistan. The researcher argued that the reason why Amir's rescue of Sohrab is similar to the popular narratives of 'White Saviour' or 'White Man's Burden' is because, first, his process of Westernization while living in America shapes him to become a symbolic or embodiment of an American figure in the novel. Second, placing Amir who is now the American figure, as the only source of hope for Sohrab to be freed from the paedophilic and evil Eastern man, suggests that eventually, the Orient relies on Western powers to liberate themselves from their self-imposed atrocities.

The contrasting portrayal of the villainous East versus the heroic West in *The Kite Runner* analysed in this study suggests that the novel is written by a pro-Western author, whose work can be categorised as a continuation of Western or Orientalist literary tradition of writing the East as mentioned by Edward Said. The author's narratives regarding

Islam and Muslims in the novel also seem to indicate that the religion is equivalent to extremism and violence. Even though in the concept of Orientalism, Said mainly focuses on works from the late 19th to the early 20th century, *The Kite Runner* can serve as an example of a modern 21st-century work that interestingly participates in Orientalizing itself. It is clear that the novel purposely presents an Orientalized version of Afghanistan and Islam to fit into the expectations of the West, in order to gain significant recognition and popularity in the United States. This is evident when the novel becomes the top New York Times best-seller, as well as receiving other awards such as the San Francisco Chronicle Best Book of the Year in 2003. The researcher mentioned in Chapter One that Hosseini is a prominent Afghan-American writer, especially in the United States as he is more than capable to depict the social and political struggles in Afghanistan. However, given the novel was written during the peak of the American expedition in Afghanistan or known as the 'War on Terror' because of the September-11 attack, Hosseini seems to place a positive view on the intervention. Arguably, this became the reason why the novel is widely accepted by Western readers because it does not challenge any sort of occupation imposed in Afghanistan by the American authorities. Instead, the author provided justifications for why the Orient is in need of civilization by the West. Through his work, the author tends to confirm that the Orientals are dangerous and hypocrites under the veil of religious righteousness. The East is also perceived to be underdeveloped, though this is because of various foreign interventions in the country, such as by the Soviet Union and also the United States itself which deeply involves itself with the political activity in Afghanistan.

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