



The Purpose and the Ideology of Colonization: A Study of the Otherness in The Kite Runner

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Abstract

The Kite Runner is considered being the first novel by Afghan-American writer Khalid Hosseini which is published in 2003. The novel discusses the story of Amir, a young Afghan boy who is experiencing colonization. As to the history of Afghanistan through The Kite Runner, it has witnessed a very long history of invasions by the Russians, Turks, British, and Indians. Postcolonial literature concerns with colonialism at the time of colonization as well as colonist ideology along with its legacies as the running effects after the colonized take over. This present paper is aimed to inspect the otherness aspects of some characters in The Kite Runner. Through very critical research and the application of Orientalism, and Post-colonial theory; the researchers attempted to study social, religious, and ethnic otherness in Khalid Hosseini's The Kite Runner. The current study is aimed to achieve and reach the otherness aspect through a systematic review of textual analysis and Edward W. Said's theory of Orientalism, Othering in particular, of the very distinguished and yet very globally celebrated novel of Afghan-American novelist, Khalid Hosseini. The novel-The Kite Runner-with its eloquent and well-expressed structure granted much reputation and glory to the very prominent novelist. As a matter of fact, the researchers tried to flash the light on how the Pashtun and the Hazara stood as the other in one another's perspective, and the otherness of Islam as regarded by the colonizers through the novel so far. As far as the novel is studied, it is concluded or found that the colonized people are treated as other, inferior, subaltern, and inhuman by colonizer and colonial hegemony.

Keywords: Colonization, Ideology, Otherness, Stereotype, The Kite Runner.

Introduction

Colonialism exterminate the basics of any native culture, religion, language, beliefs, values, and industry of a country. Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner revolves on colonialism, imperialism, and its impact on the social and political structures of Afghanistan. As to the background of research, this study tries to apply Edward Said's theory of Orientalism on the novel. Said is a Palestinian critic, and literary theorist who believes that one thing the Orient cannot do, was representation of self. Since self is a very indispensable

issue in post-colonial literature. In *Orientalism*, Said explains “how colonialism works not just through armies, but through narratives; not just through conquest, but through literature” (Said, 1978). As for his wide-ranged knowledge, he explored how the West depicted a picture of the East, how the East is stereotyped, and what stories you are being told through literature. Said illustrates how literature or narratives proved the Orientals as irrational, barbarians, starving, dictator, uncivilized, terrorists, misogynist, and the Other. Khaled Hosseini’s works have been critically analyzed worldwide by many critics. Moreover, hundreds of scholarly papers examined *The Kite Runner* from different critical approaches. Ann Hornaday the critic says that for all the pain and loss that *The Kite Runner* depicts, it is still a film of exhilarating, redemptive, humanity, conveying an enduring sense of hope. But, a critic named Rick Groen asserts that the movie doesn’t have the heart of the book. The novel gained a worldwide praise, as *School Library Journal* presented the novel as “a beautifully written first novel.” And as well *New York Times* writes regarding the novel, “Rich in warmth and humor Full of haunting images ...vivid and engaging.” On the other hand, *Daily Telegraph* and *Library Journal* call it a devastating and painful story. “The feminist approach is based on finding suggestions of misogyny within pieces of literature and exposing them” (Kundz, n.d.). Kelli Kundz concludes female characters as subjected to their male characters, being inferior, and she also stated that Hosseini shows the lack of women characters as well as he uses few female character to displays that sexism is still fulfilled in Afghan society. Patricia Said demonstrates that this novel not only excludes women but also strengthens patriarchy and male dominance. Reading the novel, Kerry Gray, an instructor, considers the women in Afghan society that women have no voice in who they marry in the story. Christopher Sequeira also examined Hosseini’s novel through his dissertation, he highlights that the impact gender has no society and the characters through the male chauvinist perspective. He also reveals the gender role, sexism and patriarchy presence in the text. But Jaitra Bharati states, “*The Kite Runner* is a novel dealing with the cultural experience, reaffirming identity, and the female agency in migration” (Bharati, 2019). She also asserts that it utilizes multilingualism, mythology and cultural tropes, and that the characters wish to get their lost homeland in the novel and they try to overcome normative straightjacket by accepting the double perspectives of the hybrid individual. Niraja Saraswat (2014) considers *The Kite Runner* as a presenter of a devastating and painfully honest depiction of identity, betrayal, deception, and atonement. She also insists that the novel’s “vital theme is identity and redemption” (Saraswat, 2014).

The Kite Runner is critiqued according to Marxist perspective by Kelli Kuntz. She declares that the social economic condition of ‘Baba’ is to control his relation with ‘Ali’ and ‘Hassan’ as well as the relationship of Amir and Hassan is based on social economic status. Kuntz explains that the novel indicates the effects of social structure on the lives of people. Vega Ma’arijil Ula explores the Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis approach to find about Amir’s ambivalence; in his work, Amir is depicted as a person who doesn’t have a principle to struggle for what he believes and as a person “who always depends on Hassan” (Ula, 2015). Peng Yuan (2018) relates Hassan’s tragedy to national and religious ethics that is also

influenced by “deformed family ethic” (Yuan, 2018). Peng also explores the impact of national discrimination and religious hierarchy on morality of Afghans. In another paper the novel is targeted racism on Afghan minorities as it mentions that “racism is more a social construct than a biological difference which roots in acts of some groups of people that use their facial preference to obtain their goals” (Sadaat & Zohdi, 2016).

Ronny Noor insists on novel’s colonial theme, and says that “this lucidly written and often touching novel gives a vivid picture of the Russian atrocities” (Prasad, 2020). The reason beyond *The Kite Runner*’s postcolonial analysis is its political and imperial text. The novel also talks about liberal imperialism by facilitating the operation of a far more insidious global domination. It further talks about USA’s attack. Such imperialism and colonialism could have managed to suppress and kill the colonized voices; however these voices could have been heard then, but rather have been held back and silenced. Dr. Jalil Ghiyasi and Shahram Kiyai’s paper (2012) concentrates on social conflicts and disorders. Sarah Hunt discusses *The Kite Runner* as a powerful depiction of the formation of a complex Afghan-American “cultural identity against the backdrop of the turbulence of modern Afghanistan” (Hunt, 2009). Juan Da considers it as it shows the “history of the soul of a nation, and of a country’s suffering” (Da, 2017). Therefore, the researchers would apply Edward Said’s theory on *The Kite Runner*.

Material and Method

Through the current research paper, it has been attempted to explain the analysis of Otherness in Khalid Hosseini’s play, *The Kite Runner*, using Edward W. Said the Palestinian critic’s theory of Orientalism, the Otherness in particular. As to the providence of the novel’s analysis, we relied on their interpretation of the novel’s text, supplemented through the related literary theory. Moreover, primary and secondary sources are also used to reach accomplishing the present paper. First and foremost, the novel, *The Kite Runner*, itself serves as the primary source of information. Second, the books and the journal articles serve as the secondary sources and materials enriching this paper. This paper is supplemented using research techniques such as textual and narrative analysis, and creative writing as well.

Otherness: The Colonial invention of difference

Postcolonial literature concerns with colonialism at the time of colonization as well as “colonist ideology along with its legacies as the running effects after the colonized take over” (Gareth & Hellen, 2000). Said’s notion of Othering which is a colonial creation of difference or distinction of ‘Us’ Versus ‘Them’ serves to separate a supposedly dominant culture from a category of people allegedly an inferior ‘other’. The novel discusses the problematic issues of postcolonial identity as including the relationship between cultural and personal identity such as double consciousness, otherness, and hybridity. As for *The Kite Runner*, Khalid Hosseini unveils the trauma upon the people by repetitive wars that happened in Afghanistan by the Russian, the American’s invasion, and the Mujahiddin's take over. One of the widely known and segregating policy of colonialism is 'divide and

rule or reinforcing supremacy of a group of people over other groups of people. Colonizers used racial, tribal, cultural, and political differences among the people to apply their ideology. Joseph Conrad describes the colonial forces in the words of the recurrent character Marlow, "Nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others" (Said, 1978). Therefore, the colonizers used many tricks to make a distinction or a gap among the people to make their colonial agenda ongoing. Accordingly, Amar Aichraiou (2008) who argues that it was often set in a hierarchical relation that obeyed a horizontal distinction based on skin color as well as a vertical differentiation that encompassed the indigenous cultural and social layers. Such distinction or gap building leads to what Fanon categorized as 'national bourgeoisie'. Therefore, the social caste system or stratification, ethnic conflicts, social disorder, racism, disunion, injustice, otherness, and marginality occur by the national bourgeoisie, and pave the way for colonizers to rule desirously. Otherness is a key concept in postcolonial literature; in such literature, the Other is the one who is not Me, who is inferior and subaltern in sense of power, race, gender, religion, wealth, culture, language, identity. Hence, Emmanuel Levinas a French philosopher specified the notion about the Other beginning by referring to the 'self' because 'the self' as he clarified can't exist, can't have a concept of itself as a self without the other. One of the main purposes of the colonizers is to give supremacy to one group of the people over other groups ethnic and treat the others as subalterns. The Russians were quickly applying their hegemony and considering the Pashtuns as superior rather than any other social group of people within the novel. The novelist pointed to such racial differences throughout the novel many times. Russian Soldier shouts in squealing sound on Hassan, and he says, "You! The Hazara! Look at me when I'm talking to you. I know your mother. I took her from behind by that creek over there" (Hossini, 2003). In general, the Russians were treating the colonized people as the Other and subaltern. It is mentionable that the soldier never says a word to Amir who is a Pashtun. On the other hand, buggery is a core stereotypical notion regarding the Orient. It seems that the novel reflected too many stereotypical notions of the Mujahiddin. Zaman, the director of an orphanage in Kabul, says that there is a Mujahid official who visits once every month and takes a boy with himself. Such negative stereotypical notions of the Mujahiddin show their attitude toward boys by the novelist. Hosseini's descriptions of the Mujahiddin stir or encourage his Western audience to take any action for civilization. Furthermore, the novelist's words about the Mujahiddin reflect as he treats them as Others who need to be reformed or civilized.

The colonizer's invention of religious distinction

The core subject of Orientalism is studying Islam and Muslims. The Western authors attempted to divide the history of religion into two kinds: sacred and profane, so labeling "the Jews and Christians at the first, the Muslims in the second" (Said, 1978). Muslims are the Other for the West; so the West represents the "deepest and most recurring image of the Other" (Said, 1978). In *The Kite Runner*, both the Pashtun and the Hazara represent each

other as the Other. Consequently, the Pashtun stereotyped the Hazara as subaltern, inferior, slave, illiterate, and so on through the explanation of Hosseini. In other terms, Colonizers stereotyped both the Hazara and the Pashtun in terms of Otherness. This is evident in a Russian Soldier behavioral who barked at Hassan on the way to the Cinema, "You! The Hazara! Look at me when I am talking to you!" As well as, that soldier shouts at Hassan in another part of *The Kite Runner*, "I know your mother... What a tight little sugary cunt she had" (Hosseini, 2003). Therefore, such behaviors are depicted as a way the colonizers treat and represent the Other. The self-referred superior or dominant colonizers categorize the inferior in social groups with the descriptions that identify them. The unheard voices of the Other are silenced largely. So they fail to discover their voices and to identify themselves. Throughout *The Kite Runner*, the otherness is supported by who respects and who is respected. For example for Baba,¹ Ali is other. Ali respects and Baba is respected. All Hazara tribe is other for Assef, and he stereotyped them as "dog meat for dogs" (Hosseini, 2003). In addition, the Pashtun are treated as the other in the novel. As so, on the way to Jalalabad, a Russian soldier shouted that he "wanted a half-hour with the lady in the back of the truck" (Hosseini, 2003). This depicts the way the colonizers treat the colonized people as not self or as the other. In another part of the novel a character, Karim says, "these *Roussi*² are not like us" (Hosseini, 2003). The novelist tries to point out the depiction of separation between colonizers and the colonized people or between self and other by such words. Baba and Ali were very close from a very young age. Since Ali's parents were sentenced to serve in the army in Kandahar by Baba's father who once was a judge, Ali was brought up along with Baba in his family. Baba ever told his boyhood story with Ali to Amir, but Baba "in none of his stories did Baba ever refer to Ali as his friend" (Hosseini, 2003). Ali and Hassan's personality is shown as being a loyal, protector, and serving the family. Thus such relation makes the authority and the submission or the self and the other relationship. Asking about Hassan, most of the people were addressing him as 'you! the Hazara'. They were dehumanizing Hassan just because of his racial traits. Although Amir loved Hassan too much yet he believed in the differences, accordingly Amir imagines, "Because history isn't easy to overcome, neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a and nothing was ever going to change it" (Hosseini, 2003). In another sense, Assef who raped Hassan rather than Amir for being Pashtun marks the otherness throughout the story. From the other aspect, Assef is described as sadistic, sociopathic, and monster than human. By his birthday gift to Amir which "it was a biography of Hitler," (Hosseini, 2003), the novelist attempts to engage it with Assef's brutal behavior, arrogance, vision, superiority over others. By Assef's personality and raping Hassan, Hosseini may foreshadow the sadistic or sociopathic era of that time. For Western readers, Assef might be marked as demonic other or he might be characterized as savage, subaltern, criminal, uncivilized, and pagan who need to be reformed. Said (1978) well recognizes the role of the West and the East in terms of connection or relationship with each

¹ Baba in Pashto language means 'father', this character is Amir's father in the novel.

² *Roussi* means 'Russians'

other as "for a number of evident reasons the Oriental was always in the position both of outsider and of incorporated weak partner for the West" (Said, 1978). To the extent that Western scholars were aware of contemporary Orientals or Oriental movements of thought and culture, these were perceived either as silent shadows to be animated by the Orientalist, brought into reality by him, or as a kind of cultural and intellectual proletariat useful for the Orientalist's grander interpretative activity, necessary for his performance as a superior judge, learned man, powerful cultural will" (Hosseini, 2003). If the relation between Amir and Hassan is studied in the text, it is apparently clear that the novel is conveying an othered or an Orientalized Afghan culture for his Western audience that uses an interior Orientalist to depict American political necessity. For Western readers a foreigner character comes into one of the two concepts; being an internal Orientalist or being the Oriental subject who works for the benefit of the West. Amir represents internal Orientalists and Hassan represents the Oriental subject for Westerners. Therefore, the relationship between the Orient and the West is described as the 'incorporated weak partner' by Edward Said. Furthermore, Amir and Hassan's relationship reflects the ethnic division in the novel. Later in the novel, when Amir reached his dream of Americanization, the relationship of both Hassan and Amir is transited to a relation between the East and the West in terms of the East's necessity. The writer reflected this point in Hassan's letter to Amir. Hassan needs Amir in the letter, so it is reflected as the East's need of the West. Therefore, Amir and Hassan's relation is based on a sense of need, reformation, and civilization.

Conclusion

As to the negative effects of colonialism upon the culture, religion, language and every other value, this study examine the otherness caused by colonialism throughout the novel of Khaled Hosseini. In Orientalism, Said explains "how colonialism works not just through armies, but through narratives; not just through conquest, but through literature" (Said, 1978). This research paper is about to clarify their superior and inferior as of the West and the East. It has been studied to find some parts of the texts regarding the West and the East. As to the close examination of the text, the novel outlines the West as Assef and Russia as they delegate the side with more power to oppress or other the weak side or the East. Afghanistan and Hassan symbolize the East as they are considered as the weak side that is to be oppressed and labelled as the other through the novel. Regarding the social and political position, Ali and Hassan's social position are inferior and other compared to Baba and Amir's. Said believes that one thing the Orient cannot do, was representation of self. looking from the perspective of colonizers, most of the colonized characters occupy a subordinate position within the society that is presented as other and inferior in terms of ability, knowledge and social positions. The portrayal of inferiority and otherness through the novel implies that they need another leadership of those who are more capable and yet more civilized and educated. Everything that doesn't fit in the value scope of colonizers is to be treated as other. So most of Afghan colonized people, the culture, and the religion and so the like are not to fit within the scope of colonizers, so they are considered as other or

inferior. Specifically, Anita Dimitrijovska-Jankulovska and Milica say, "Any area that is not part of European soil is considered inferior, dangerous and less valuable" (Jankulovska & Denkovska, 2023). However, otherness is concept in postcolonial criticism, it is more dedicated to the Orientals. So that Otherness is a very significant term associated with colonialism, it truly refers to colonized people or to the soil which is not part of colonizers' territory. Therefore, Afghans are considered less valuable as to the perspective of colonizers. As to the occident and orient, the colonizers are occident and the colonized are orient or they are considered in the category of others rather than self. Hence, the Russians are categorized as the superior, civilized and more educated to lead, but Afghans are categorized as inferior, other, less civilized and educated who needs leadership by the core scope of colonialism. The *Kite Runner* has been published in 2003, exactly after the 9/11. Hosseini, as an Afghan-American writer, attempts to soften the obstacles and barriers in front of Afghan immigrants in America. By narrating the story of childhood, Hosseini tried to show his Western audience that Afghanistan was once a civilized country as to Western standards. Hosseini intentionally or unintentionally draws his country as of civil discord and inhumane governance where everyone, especially children were victimized and categorized as Other. Otherness can be considered to be a very vital theme or issue that affected Afghan people. To take in mind, every empire tries to give supremacy to one distinct tribe in a colonized society, and other groups are treated as other or subalterns. Therefore, the ones who are regarded are labeled as superior and the ones who regard are labeled as the Other. Throughout *The Kite Runner*, the otherness is supported by who respects and who is respected. Therefore, it is concluded that in every non-Muslim colonization, the colonizers treated the colonized people as the Other. The novel attempts to show that when Amir reached his dream of Americanization, the relationship of both Hassan and Amir is transited to a relation between the East and the West in terms of the East's necessity.

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Data Availability Statement:

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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