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Theme of Identity and Redemption in Khaleed Hossieni's The Kite Runner

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Abstract

The Kite Runner, written by Khaled Hosseini, is a famous novel for its devastating and painfully honest depiction of identity, betrayal, deception and atonement. The narrative portrays the journey of a boy escaping from his haunted childhood while torturing himself with his own contrition. These two concepts of identity and redemption play a vital role in creating the string that binds the characters together. As a reader of The Kite Runner, one embarks on a journey that leads through the life of the glamorous prosperous Afghanis, as well as the treacherous horrific life of those less fortunate. Most importantly, however, one encounters face-to-face the good and evil that comes out when these two very distinct lives are intertwined. Amir's "unatoned sins", as they are described in the novel's opening chapter, have plagued his conscience and cast an oppressive shadow over his joys and triumphs. The phone call interrupts Amir's seemingly comfortable life as a married man and newly-published novelist in America, and launches an epic journey back to Afghanistan in search of redemption. The present paper explores guilt and perseverance in The Kite Runner as the motivation for an individual to seek redemption and attain the satisfaction of self-fulfillment. Unfolded through the first person narrative mode , the novel is structured like the memory lane of the protagonist Amir whose sense of remorse and guilt over the sin of leaving behind his ever loyal friend Hassan, for reasons far too vague , force him to commit acts of expiation through return . Amir's return to homeland, tarnished and tattered by war, fundamentalism and the turbulence of a Taliban led regime unfolds his journey towards self identity and redemption. Unlike Changez in The Reluctant Fundamentalist, in The Kite Runner, Amir faces no sense of identity crisis in the adopted homeland. Rather he feels himself a stranger when he returns to the changed realities of his home town, Kabul. Amir's journey home in search of Hassan's surviving son, Sohrab is replete with conflict, violence and violations. In the novel, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a volatile plane of clash and confrontation of identities and loyalties. As Seyham describes," border carries intrinsically within itself an idea of perpetual motion and confrontation (201). The border thus turns almost into a real space in which the confrontations between cultures , nationalities and languages take place , and in which , ideally the culture of hybridization replaces the traditional idea of a national identity. Amir is a cultural hybrid which makes him distinct and unique. Thus the novel revolves around the central axiom of personal selves permeated by political prejudices and permutations.

Key words: The Kite Runner, Identity, Redemption

Article

A sweeping story of family ,love, and friendship told against the devastating backdrop of the history of Afghanistan over the last thirty years , The Kite Runner is an unusual and powerful novel that has become a beloved , one of a kind classic .The unforgettable , heartbreaking story of the unlikely friendship between a healthy boy and the son of his father's servant , the Kite Runner is a beautifully crafted novel set in a country that is in the process of being destroyed .It is about the power of reading , the price of betrayal ,and the possibility of redemption and an exploration of the power of fathers over sons – their love, their sacrifices, their lies.

Two further concepts which require exploration for their use in this argument are "identity" and "representation". These concepts will be used within broad terms mostly based on their application in post-9/11 critical writing, and theoretical methods of linking these two concepts, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis, will be employed. My focus will be on how personal and national identities are constructed through representation and memory.

Leach points to the act of identification which causes the construction of this self understanding, referring to the Lacanian "mirror-stage" (77) where the child recognizes its own reflection in a mirror and "begins to formulate a coherent sense of self and to develop some coordination by identifying with its own reflected image" (77). This model of external visual identification with a sense of self is relevant to the post-9/11 world, where negotiation of the meaning of the attacks takes place in the visual realm. Leach explains: "The model presupposes a specialized sense of a visual awareness grounded in the notion of image" (77). It is always a question of recognizing – or misrecognizing – oneself in the other" (77). Identity is created in the interaction with the external event or the other, especially in the visual realm. Leach also continues to note that the objects of identification themselves, for this discussion the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre and the memorial built in their place, "do not have any inherent meaning" (78) and are "essentially inert" (78), but only through identification do they become "sites of memory" (78).

The Kite Runner is narrated by Amir, the son of a wealthy Afghan businessman, who immigrates to America with his father after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. In America, Amir becomes part of the Afghan subculture in California, meets his wife Soraya, and becomes a successful author. His past haunts him, as in childhood he had witnessed and failed to prevent the assault and rape of his servant and friend Hassan, who was left behind in Afghanistan when Amir and his father emigrated. Amir eventually returns to Afghanistan after he receives a letter from one of his father's friends named Rahim Khan, and he discovers that Hassan had fathered a son, Sohrab, who was kidnapped by a member of the Taliban. Amir undertakes to rescue Sohrab as an act of redemption for not preventing or speaking about the rape of Hassan when they were children.

Although Amir views America as a place of redemption, there are hints of a barrier to full inclusion into American society. These barriers are mostly shown in how Amir's father, simply referred to as Baba in the novel, is actively resistant to accepting his position as a disempowered immigrant. Additionally, the novel presents very few instances where Amir or Baba interact with American citizens who are not of Afghan origin. This lack of interaction is conspicuous in a novel where America seems to be idealised to such a great extent. Amir refers to one of these rare encounters in a visit to an official who assesses their eligibility for government support and offers Baba food stamps: "Baba dropped the stack of food stamps on her desk. 'Thank you but I don't want,' Baba said. 'I work always. In Afghanistan I work, in America I work. [...] I don't like it free money [sic]' " (114). Baba's refusal to accept financial assistance is one of the ways in which he resists an identity of dependence and powerlessness. Indeed, Baba becomes the embodiment of power through his association with what the novel constructs as masculine symbols of power while living in Afghanistan, symbols which are idealised in Amir's experience of America. However, despite his ability to enact these masculine ideals, Baba is not able to maintain his power in America. I argue that even though Baba maintains the national myth of the American dream and embodies the images of masculine power, his loss of power in the US is due to the ethnocultural boundary which encircles American identity as it is constructed in the novel. Baba does not identify as an American but maintains his identity as Afghan. Amir reflects on this identification in relation to the refusal of food stamps:

"And that was how Baba ended those humiliating food stamp moments at the cash register and alleviated one of his greatest fears: that an Afghan would see him buying food with charity money. Baba walked out of the
welfare office like a man cured of a tumor" (114). Ironically, his loss of power in America is symbolised through physical deterioration and ultimately through being diagnosed with cancer.

At Amir's high school graduation in California – one of the symbols of Amir approaching his own American dream – he recounts: "Baba's beard was graying, his hair thinning at the temples, and hadn't he been taller in Kabul?" (114). This physical decline reflects his loss of power within America. Even while living in California, his main frame of reference in thinking about his identity is still Afghanistan, and he is unable to integrate into American society with the same status he once held.

In contrast to Baba's difficulty with integration and his loss of power, Amir flourishes in his new life. Anis Shivani holds that "Hosseini is avoiding some of the harshest truths. Amir's transformation into an enviable writer in America seems too easily earned, since it comes with his marriage to an angelic wife, the daughter of an exiled Afghan general" (33). The troubled relationship which Amir and Baba shared in Afghanistan during Amir's childhood also becomes one of mutual respect and closeness in America. I argue that the father and son can finally connect because there is a shift in the relationship of power between the two characters, where Amir's skills as a writer become valuable and where Baba no longer has the ability to use his family name to gain success. Since Baba is no longer the incarnation of the ideals of masculinity through money and influence, Amir no longer feels disempowered in Baba's once-overwhelming masculine presence. Amir is able to adopt this position in America since he subscribes to the requisites of integration into American society: he pursues studies in English at University when his father refuses to take lessons in the language, and he accepts the mores of American society where his father protests and tries to hold on to aspects of Afghan life. This can be seen in Baba's violent conflict with shop owners who demand an ID from him before allowing him to use a check as payment. Amir reflects:

I wanted to tell them that, in Kabul, we snapped a tree branch and used it as a credit card. Hassan and I would take the wooden stick to the bread maker. He'd carve notches on our stick with his knife, one notch for each loaf of naan he'd pull for us from the tandoor's roaring flames. At the end of the month, my father paid him for the number of notches on the stick. That was it. No questions. No ID.

(112)

Janette Edwards notes how the parallels between author and character seem to position Hosseini himself as an outsider to Afghan identity. Through interviews with Afghan-Americans, Edwards exposes the view of Hosseini as a "guy in America […] whose voice […] is inauthentic and whose motives are suspect" (5). Edwards explains that "Hosseini was a diplomat's child who had, in all likelihood, spent most of his life outside of Afghanistan before emigrating to the United States. His early separation from his homeland and the fact of his reckless devising of characters and situations that would certainly pit neighbor against neighbor back in Afghanistan [demonstrate that he did not] really know the fabric of the society […] about which he wrote" (5). The contestation of authorial power based on the accusation of an inauthentic Afghan identity speaks to the broader tensions exposed in this argument.

Edwards quotes Hosseini's response to criticisms of The Kite Runner: "I guess it's my Western sensibility, now that I've lived here for so long, that I feel like these are the things we should talk about" (qtd. in Edwards 8).

However, instead of telling the shop owners this, Amir simply apologises and offers to pay for the damages which his father has caused to their shop during his rage at the request for identification. Baba's difficulty with adjusting to American life is echoed by Amir's father-in-law, General Taheri, who is another symbol of masculine power through his link to wealth and the military.Amir explains: "I learned that [General Taheri] had kept his family on welfare and had never held a job in the

U.S., preferring to cash government-issued checks than degrading himself with work unsuitable for a man of his stature" (154). Both Baba and General Taheri base their lives in America on memories of their past power in Afghanistan, and are thus unable to adjust to their new positions. Amir explains: "The general believed that, sooner or later, Afghanistan would be freed, the monarchy restored, and his services would once again be called upon. So every day, he donned his gray suit, wound his pocket watch, and waited" (154).

One of the most striking differences between The Reluctant Fundamentalist and The Kite Runner is how the latter shows almost no consciousness of the way in which Afghanistan and the expatriate characters are viewed within the American society which they are surrounded by. For the characters in The Kite Runner and even for Amir, who associates strongly with America, the Afghan subculture becomes the main point of identification. Interactions with non-Afghan Americans are scarce throughout the novel, highlighting a sense of exclusion for this Afghan community from broader American society and constructing them as outsiders. Amir's identification as American is possible because he achieves his American dream and he appropriates the main symbol of power, economic success. He does not seem to experience or acknowledge ethnocultural boundaries to this identification primarily since he only represents

the Afghan subculture. Indeed, by representing the poverty of this group and their identification solely based on their past in Afghanistan, Amir is able to strengthen his own identity as American by contrast, since he achieves wealth and feels no attachment to Afghanistan when he returns there.

Amir sees it as a way for his Afghan identity to be more acknowledged within American society, referring to the aftermath of increased American nationalism and interest in Afghanistan in a seemingly positive light, highlighting the War on Terror as a campaign against the Taliban which becomes his personal enemy, and not referring to any hostility towards Arab Americans or Muslims after the attacks (316). The position of the attacks within each narrative also plays an important role in understanding how identity is constructed around the event. In the Kite Runner the attacks are mentioned near the end of the novel, as a postscript to the main narrative, once Amir's identity as American and anti-terrorist is already solidified.

Amir's quest to redeem himself makes up the heart of the novel. Early on, Amir strives to redeem himself in Baba's eyes, primarily because his mother died giving birth to him, and he feels responsible. To redeem himself to Baba, Amir thinks he must win the kite-tournament and bring Baba the losing kite, both of which are inciting incidents that set the rest of the novel in motion. The more substantial part of Amir's search for redemption, however, stems from his guilt regarding Hassan. That guilt drives the climactic events of the story, including Amir's journey to Kabul to find Sohrab and his confrontation with Assef. The moral standard Amir must meet to earn his redemption is set early in the book, when Baba says that a boy who doesn't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything. As a boy, Amir fails to stand up for himself. As an adult, he can only redeem himself by proving he has the courage to stand up for what is right.

What complicates the plot of the novel is the way that ethnicity and religion serve to create a divide between Hassan and Amir, who otherwise are more than friends, and indeed enjoy a kind of brotherhood (rather ironically, as it transpires). To be a Pashtun is a vital part of your identity, it is suggested, because it means that you are in power and are the dominant force in a country where the Hazaras have been suppressed and the Pashtuns still hold sway. Note what Amir discovers in Chapter 2 of the novel in a book about what it means to be a Pashtun:

I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence." The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a.

It is rather disturbing that Amir continues to say the history of genocide and "quelling" is not anything that he has learnt about himself at school, so it suggests that the Pashtuns, from their position of dominance and power, have deliberately moved to "erase" certain aspects of history, re-writing it from a Pashtun perspective. To be a Pashtun therefore shapes your identity because you are in power and you are in a position of supremacy in society, and this is something that Amir uses and abuses in his relationship with Hassan.

In The Kite Runner, redemption is so important because sin is so enduring. Amir opens the story by telling us not about how exactly he sinned, but about sin's endurance: "... It's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out." Hosseini uses structure to emphasize the themes of sin and redemption. Because Amir tells the story in retrospect, every memory, even the blissful ones of his childhood before the rape, are tainted with it. If the timeline of the novel was strictly chronological, we would not have the power of hindsight. Hosseini uses the first chapter almost like a thesis for the novel. As Amir retells the story of his life, he weighs each event against his sin, his betrayal of Hassan. As we learn towards the novel's end, Amir is not the only character who needs redemption, Assef notwithstanding. Until Rahim Khan reveals Baba's secret, Amir thinks he is the only sinner among his family and friends. Even before Amir betrays him, Hassan makes him feel guilty simply by being such a righteous person. Amir is constantly trying to measure up to Baba, because he does not realize that Baba is so hard on him because of his guilt over his own sin.

One Amir finds out about Baba's sin, he feels as though his entire life has been a cycle of betrayal, even before he betrayed Hassan. But having a taste of betrayal himself does little towards redeeming Amir. In Ghazi Stadium, the Taliban skews the words of Muhammad in order to justify murdering the alleged adulterers. The mullah announces that every person should have a punishment befitting his sin. Although he would not want to compare himself to the Taliban, Amir believes this in regards to his own sin. When he tries to get Hassan to pelt him with pomegranates, he is expressing his feeling that in order to be forgiven for hurting Hassan, Hassan must hurt him. When Assef almost kills Amir, he feels "healed," as though now that Assef has hurt him, he is redeemed. He even tells Farid that in the room with Assef, he "got what he deserved." In the end, Amir finds out that punishment is not what will redeem him from his sin. It is not even saving Sohrab. In order to atone for his sin and Baba's before him, Amir must erase the lines of discrimination he has lived with all his life by giving Sohrab an equal chance at success and happiness.

Soraya needs Amir to forgive her before she can marry him. In the same way, Rahim Khan needs Amir to forgive him for keeping Baba's secret before he dies. Rahim Khan, the story's unofficial wise man, is the one who truly understands how redemption occurs. He tells Amir in his letter, "I know that in the end, God will forgive. He will forgive your father, me, and you too ... Forgive your father if you can. Forgive me if you wish. But most important, forgive yourself." Rahim Khan carries the novel's ultimate message about forgiveness. God is merciful; it is people who are not. Therefore, truly atoning for one's sins means coming to terms with them by oneself, without relying on a higher power. When Amir prays, he is still bound by fear and guilt; instead of wishing unselfishly for Sohrab to recover, he begs God not to leave "Sohrab's blood on his hands." When Amir manages to forgive himself in the very last moments of the novel, he redeems himself at last.

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says that a boy who doesn't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything. As a boy, Amir fails to stand up for himself. As an adult, he can only redeem himself by proving he has the courage to stand up for what is right.
. Khaled Hosseini's novel The Kite Runner revolves around betrayal and redemption. Redemption is the act of saying or being saved from sin, error or evil, which the main character Amir seems to need the most. Amir lives with the guilt he has built up over the years because of one incident from his childhood. Amir's fathers words still echo through his head "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything." –pg. 24 Although Amir destroyed the lives of many people, and he has had more than one opportunity to redeem himself of his guilt, he is not the selfish little boy he once was.

How often does one stop and think, "How will this affect everyone else in my life?" Amir had a chance in the alley, to put Hassan first and change the path of both their lives, but he made the decision to turn around and run because it was what he Thought was best for him:

"I had one last chance to make a decision. One final opportunity to decide who I was going to be. I could step into that alley, stand up for Hassan – the way he'd stood up for me all those times in the past – and accept whatever would happen to me. Or I could run. In the end, I ran. I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba." –pg.77

Amir's selfish ways were a result of the lack of his father's affection in his life. As a young boy, he was forced to deal with his father's disinterest in him, which made him incredibly jealous of Hassan. Amir could not understand at the time, why his father adored his servant's son more than his own son. As the tension increases between Amir and Hassan, Amir can no longer stand to see Hassan everyday because of what Amir had not stopped and he could not bear seeing his father showing Hassan love and not him. Hassan and his father are forced to leave their home after Amir places his watch under Hassan's pillow and accuses him of stealing it. Hassan did not even deny the accusations because he had figured out what Amir was doing. "Hassan knew. He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again, maybe for the last time." –pg.111 Even after the alleged theft of the watch, Amir's father is willing to forgive Hassan, which stunned Amir, and made him see that the love his father has for Hassan is greater than he imagined.

Amir did not just ruin Hassan's life; he also ruined the lives of many people with his decisions after the incident in the alley. Baba lost a chance to watch his son, Hassan, grow up and also lost the chance to bring him to America so he could start a new life. Sohrab lost both his parents to war because they were still living in Afghanistan, lost his childhood to war, and tried to commit suicide as a result of Amir going back on his promise to keep him safe from orphanages. Soraya lost her right to the truth when Amir kept his past a secret even though she opened up to him about hers. It is one thing to destroy your own life with guilt, but it is a completely different issue when you destroy the lives of others.

Before Amir can go on the road to redemption, Amir must realize that he can't go back and change what he has done as a child, and he must find inner peace. Although if it was not for Amir's actions as a child, Sohrab never would have needed to be saved in the first place but by saving Sohrab, the last piece of Hassan's life, does make a difference. From the moment he

chose to turn his back on Hassan, there were many chances where "There's a way to be good again" –pg.238 for all his wrongdoings, but he chose not to take any of these. Sohrab was his last and only chance for redemption.

"I have a wife in America, a home, a career and a family". But how could I pack up and go back home when my actions may have cost Hassan a chance at those very same things? And what Rahim Khan revealed to me changed things. Made me see how my entire life, long before the winter of 1975, dating back to when that singing Hazara woman was still nursing me, had been a cycle of lies betray*als and secrets." (238)*

Amir admits that he cost Hassan a chance at a good life and that he had many opportunities to change the outcome of Hassan's life. But at this moment he realized he could lose everything he has built in America, but for the first time in his life, Amir did not care about only himself, he came to terms with what he had done, and he was ready to redeem himself at any cost.

Amir finally became the man who stood up for himself and his sins. Throughout his childhood, Amir looked for his father's affection and he never could get it. His father had said "I'm telling you, Rahim, there is something missing in that boy." –pg.24 Amir's father would have been proud of him at this very moment because that was all he had wanted from him. The guilt that was built over the years was finally put to rest at the safety of Sohrab. In Afghanistan when Amir stood up for Sohrab and Assef aggressively beat him up, Amir had said "My body was broken—just how badly I wouldn't find out until later—but I felt healed. Healed at last. I laughed." –pg.289 which showed Amir had come to terms with what he had done as a child and was finally felt relieved. Although he was getting beat up, it did not matter anymore, he just wished he had stood up to Assef years ago, and maybe he would have earned his redemption in that alley.
Khaled Hosseini's novel The Kite Runner revolves around betrayal and redemption. Redemption is the act of saying or being saved from sin, error or evil, which the main character Amir seems to need the most. Amir lives with the guilt he has built up over the years because of one incident from his childhood. Amir's fathers words still echo through his head "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything." (24) Although Amir destroyed the lives of many people, and he has had more than one opportunity to redeem himself of his guilt, he is not the selfish little boy he once was.

How often does one stop and think, "How will this affect everyone else in my life?" Amir had a chance in the alley, to put Hassan first and change the path of both their lives, but he made the decision to turn around and run because it was what he Thought was best for him:

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father adored his servant's son more than his own son. As the tension increases between Amir and Hassan, Amir can no longer stand to see Hassan everyday because of what Amir had not stopped and he could not bear seeing his father showing Hassan love and not him. Hassan and his father are forced to leave their home after Amir places his watch under Hassan's pillow and accuses him of stealing it. Hassan did not even deny the accusations because he had figured out what Amir was doing. "Hassan knew. He knew I had betrayed him and yet he was rescuing me once again, maybe for the last time." – pg.111 Even after the alleged theft of the watch, Amir's father is willing to forgive Hassan, which stunned Amir, and made him see that the love his father has for Hassan is greater than he imagined.

Throughout the novel, the protagonist struggles to find his true purpose and to forge an identity through noble actions. Amir's failure to stand by his friend at a crucial moment shapes this defining conflict. His endeavor to overcome his own weaknesses appears in his fear of Assef, his hesitation to enter a war-torn country ruled by the repressive Taliban, and even his carsickness while driving with Farid into Afghanistan. Late in the novel, Amir discovers his father's lifelong deception about his half brother Hassan, a revelation that leads to a deeper understanding of who his father was and how he and his father had both betrayed the people who were loyal to them.

Amir, the narrator and protagonist, grows up as a child who is uncertain about his own identity and struggles to discover his "real" self. At first, Amir's goal is to gain the acceptance of Baba, and through that, he may be able to find his true self. But in reality, Amir's dedication to gaining Baba's acceptance leads him astray from finding his true self and creates even more confusion for the young boy. Amir's friend and servant, Hassan, helps Amir actually discover Amir's real identity, both in adulthood and childhood. Amir even claims that Hassan is his guide to his identity when he says "I thought of the life I had lived until the winter of 1975 came along and changed everything. And made me what I am today" (Hosseini 2). Hassan and Amir had participated in a kite running competition that day, with Hassan being the champion of that competition. Baba shows great pride in seeing Hassan win the kite running tournament, but Amir shows great envy towards his servant. This leads to one of Amir's greatest regrets: Amir watches Asseff rape and abuse Hassan, and Amir does not even scream for help, but instead pretends that nothing ever happened. In adulthood, the regret that Amir feels pushes him to return to Afghanistan and attempt to discover his true identity. In Afghanistan, Amir realizes that he has always been selfish person, and that his yearning to attain the acceptance of Baba covers his benevolent side. With Amir's self-discovery, he decides that he will begin to pay for his mistakes one step at a time, beginning with the adoption of Hassan's son, Sohrab.

In The Kite Runner, redemption is so important because sin is so enduring. Amir opens the story by telling us not about how exactly he sinned, but about sin's endurance: "… It's wrong what they say about the past, I've learned, about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out." Hosseini uses structure to emphasize the themes of sin and redemption. Because Amir tells the story in retrospect, every memory, even the blissful ones of his childhood before the rape, are tainted with it. If the timeline of the novel was strictly chronological, we would not have the power of hindsight. Hosseini uses the first chapter almost like a thesis for the novel. As Amir retells the story of his life, he weighs each event against his sin, his betrayal of Hassan. As we learn towards the novel's end, Amir is not the only character who needs redemption, Assef notwithstanding. Until Rahim Khan reveals Baba's secret, Amir thinks he is the only sinner among his family and friends. Even before Amir betrays him, Hassan makes him feel guilty simply by being such a righteous person. Amir is constantly trying to measure up to Baba, because he does not realize that Baba is so hard on him because of his guilt over his own sin.

The Kite Runner chronicles the joyful lives of two boys, Amir and Hassan within the beautiful and peaceful valleys which Afghanistan once was. Unfolded through the first-personnarrative mode, the novel is structured like the

memory lanes of the protagonist Amir whosegyring sense of remorse and guilt over the sin of leaving behind his ever-loyal friend Hassan for reasons far too vague, force him to commit acts of expiation through return. Amir's return is to a homeland tarnished and tattered by war, fundamentalism and the turbulence of a Taliban led regime. Having escaped to America with his baba, Amir's present is always coloured by the richness and happiness of his childhood days. For Amir, "America was a place to bury his memories" (20). But he realizes that "it's wrong what they say about the past . . . about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out" (1). Unable to escape from the ever-strangling threads of the past, Amir the writer seeks to return in search of "a way to be good again."Unlike Changez in The Reluctant Fundamentalist , in The Kite Runner, Amir faces no sense of identity crisis in the adopted homeland. Rather he feels himself a stranger when he returns to the changed realities of his hometown, Kabul. The politically, socially and culturally charged landscape of Afghanistan frightens him: I stood outside the gates of my father's house, feeling like a stranger. I set my hands on the rusty bars remembering how I'd run through these same gates thousands of times as a child . . . more tangles of weed sprouted through the fissures . . . . Most of the poplar trees had been cut down. . . the paint had begun to peel . . . the lawnhad turned the same brown as haze of dust hovering over the city, dotted by bald patches of dirt where nothing grew at all. (228)His homeland has been reduced to a land of dust where dead bodies hang from trees as victims of a repressive regime. "Nothing you remember has survived. Best to forget," says Rahim Khan, his godfather. And he replies "I don't want to forget anymore" (230).Amir's journey-home in search of Hassan's surviving son, Sohrab, is replete with conflict, violence and violations. He has to disguise himself as a typical Muslim man with a long beard, Kurta and Pyjama so that he can get into his homeland without any confrontations with theTaliban. Crossing the borders of his country in disguise to redeem his sin, Amir is shocked to note the decline of his homeland which was a tranquil landscape where he and Hassan flew kites in his memory. In the novel, the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is a volatile plane of clash and confrontation of identities and loyalties. As Seyhan describes, border carries intrinsically within itself an idea of "perpetual motion and confrontation" (201). The border thus turns almost into a real space in which the conflicts and confrontations between cultures, nationalities and languages take place, and in which, ideally, the culture of Hybridization replaces the traditional idea of a national identity. Amir is a cultural hybrid which makes him distinct and unique; in fact, different from Changez, the reluctant fundamentalist.

Hosseini's The Kite Runner and Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist revolve around the central axiom of personal selves permeated by political prejudices and permutations. They converge at the point of return of the protagonists but diverge at the causes and motives of return; they eloquently portray the trauma of return and not the sweet nostalgia of homecoming. While in Mohsin Hamid's narrative, despite the promise of becoming a cultural hybrid, the protagonist is impelled to cling on to his primordial identity, in Khaled Hosseini's novel, the protagonist is drifting away from his ethnic identity and embraces an existence in the "third space." While Changez' journey-home is forced by the changed veracity of his adopted homeland – America, Amir's choice to drift away from Afghanistan is due to its vilely venomous milieu. The analysis of both these "narratives of return" shows that narrated journeys and returns can contribute to discussions of home that emphasize the fixed spatiality of subjectivity. It also creates discourses on transformed spaces and the transformation of temperaments. The return- home of both these protagonists is permeated by ambivalence, atrophy and algos , at the same time the return path becomes productive spaces in which clash and dialogue between "the old and the new" take place. Presenting in common riveting tales that clearly document the trials and tribulations of return-home, these books also carve tapestries of fathers and sons, servants, best friends, love, family, loyalty, betrayal, war, fundamentalism, discrimination, reconciliation, and redemption. Through the agonizing journeys and sojourns – physical and psychological – these narratives eloquently enunciate the intersections of homecoming, return and expatriation; they form testaments of the turbulence of Nostos and algos.

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