



## Guilt, Power, and the Politics of Representation: A Postcolonial Feminist Re-Reading of *The Kite Runner*

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### Abstract

This paper offers a postcolonial feminist re-reading of *The Kite Runner* (2003), examining how guilt, power, and representation intersect within the narrative. Drawing on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of subalternity, and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity, the study argues that the novel negotiates ethnic hierarchy, gendered marginalization, and diasporic identity while remaining embedded in global literary markets shaped by Western geopolitical discourse. Through selective close reading, the paper demonstrates that the text operates within a framework of ethical ambivalence, simultaneously resisting and reproducing dominant structures of representation.

**Keywords:** *Postcolonialism, Feminist Criticism, Subalternity, Hybridity, Diaspora, Orientalism, Trauma*

### Introduction

Since its publication in 2003, *The Kite Runner* has occupied a central position in contemporary world literature. While often read as a narrative of guilt, betrayal, and redemption, the novel also invites sustained theoretical engagement. Emerging in the aftermath of 9/11, it entered Western literary markets at a moment when Afghanistan was heavily mediated through discourses of terrorism, extremism, and war. Its reception, therefore, cannot be separated from global geopolitics.

This paper situates the novel within postcolonial and feminist frameworks, arguing that it occupies a liminal space where resistance and complicity intersect. While



existing scholarship has explored the novel through postcolonial or trauma-based approaches, comparatively little attention has been paid to the intersection of feminist critique and global representational politics. This study addresses that gap.

### **Orientalism and Geopolitical Representation**

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism provides a crucial framework for analyzing the novel's politics of representation. Western discourse has historically constructed the East as irrational and backward, thereby legitimizing imperial dominance (Said 1–5). *The Kite Runner* both challenges and risks reproducing this pattern.

The novel humanizes Afghan life through intimate cultural detail, yet its emphasis on violence and instability may align with Western expectations. It thus operates within a representational double bind—resisting stereotypes while remaining embedded in them.

### **Subalternity, Silence, and Internal Hierarchy**

Spivak's question—"Can the subaltern speak?"—illuminates Hassan's position (Spivak 271). As a Hazara, his voice is mediated through Amir's narration, limiting his autonomy.

This dynamic reflects internal hierarchies within Afghan society. While Hassan is morally central, he remains narratively marginal, demonstrating the limits of representation.

### **Hybridity and Diasporic Identity**

Bhabha's concept of hybridity explains Amir's diasporic identity within a "third space" (Bhabha 56). His position between Afghan memory and American life destabilizes fixed identity.

His authorship further situates him within global literary markets, shaping how his story is told and received.



## **Feminist Critique and Gendered Power**

Mohanty critiques the homogenization of “Third World women” (Mohanty 333), a concern reflected in the novel’s limited female representation.

Although Soraya shows agency, her narrative remains secondary. Gendered double standards reveal entrenched patriarchy, while female voices remain structurally marginalized.

## **Masculinity and Patriarchal Expectation**

The novel critiques hegemonic masculinity through Baba’s rigid ideals (Connell 77). Amir’s moral crisis reflects the pressures of conforming to these expectations.

Patriarchy thus constrains both men and women, producing emotional and ethical consequences.

## **Trauma, Memory, and Ethical Witnessing**

Trauma’s belated nature is reflected in Amir’s retrospective narration (Caruth 4). His return to Kabul becomes an act of confrontation and ethical witnessing.

The rescue of Sohrab symbolically transforms guilt into responsibility.

## **Globalization and Cultural Circulation**

The novel’s global success reflects its circulation within transnational literary markets (Appadurai 32). While it critiques power structures, it also participates in systems that commodify cultural difference.

## **Conclusion**

The Kite Runner operates at the intersection of postcolonial and feminist critique, engaging issues of representation, identity, and power. Its strength lies in its ambivalence—it humanizes Afghanistan while remaining entangled in global structures of representation. This tension makes the novel a crucial site for examining the ethics of storytelling in a globalized world.



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