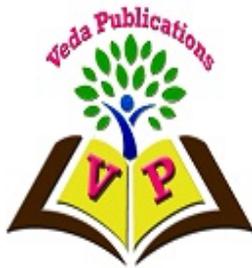




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**WAR AS LIVED EXPERIENCE: TRAUMA, SURVIVAL, AND REFUGEE CONSCIOUSNESS IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER***Navjot Kaur ^{1*}, Dr. Prachi Atreya²^{1*}Research Scholar, Department of English, Tantia University, Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tantia University, Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan

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Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2026.13103>**ABSTRACT****Article history:**

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The contemporary war fiction increasingly emphasizes the lived realities of individuals instead of focusing on strategic or political narratives of battle, and this change is best illustrated by Khaled Hosseini's 2003 novel *The Kite Runner*, which portrays war as a deeply internalized phenomenon that affects memory, identity, and moral consciousness. The function of trauma, survival, and refugee awareness as interrelated aspects of war as lived experience in the novel is examined in this paper. Through trauma theory and exile studies, the paper argues that Hosseini depicts war as a chronic psychological state that permeates exile and diaspora rather than as a discrete historical event, drawing on trauma theory and exile studies. While survival emerges as an ethically compromised process rather than heroic endurance, Amir's narrative voice portrays the long-lasting impacts of guilt, silence, and moral harm. Additionally, the novel's portrayal of the refugee experience shows exile as a stage of emotional liminality where pain is reframed within diasporic identity rather than erased. This study advances war fiction studies by placing *The Kite Runner* within current debates about trauma and refugee literature, highlighting the personal, emotional effects of violence and displacement. Eventually, the paper brings forth the view that Hosseini's book redefines the legacy of war by giving emotional truth and moral reflection precedence before political settlement.

Keywords: war as lived experience, trauma, survival, refugee consciousness, Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*



INTRODUCTION

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, war literature experienced a dramatic change, moving away from narratives focusing on the battlefield and towards the depiction of moral uncertainty, psychological pain, and displacement. Modern authors are increasingly highlighting the effects of war on everyday life, stressing trauma, memory, and survival after the fight, rather than just depicting it as a geopolitical event or military confrontation. *The Kite Runner* (2003) by Khaled Hosseini contributes to this literary movement by portraying war as a lived and lasting experience that shapes people's consciousness long after the physical violence has stopped.

The novel does not provide a chronological description of battle; instead, it is set against the backdrop of Afghanistan's chaotic history, which includes the collapse of the monarchy, the Soviet invasion, Taliban control, and the ensuing diaspora. Rather, Hosseini uses exile, remorse, and personal memory to filter national trauma. In *The Kite Runner*, war permeates friendships, homes, and moral decisions, leaving a lasting impression on both direct victims and silent spectators. This inward shift aligns the book with trauma-centered tales rather than traditional war novels, reflecting a larger trend in war fiction that prioritizes emotional reality above factual evidence.

The majority of previous research on *The Kite Runner* has concentrated on issues of Afghan cultural identity, father-son interactions, remorse, and redemption. Although these studies provide insightful information, they frequently regard war as

a contextual background rather than as an experienced force that actively influences character psychology and story structure. Furthermore, the novel's discussion of refugee displacement usually focuses on assimilation and nostalgia rather than on how exile reconfigures pain rather than resolving it. Because of this, Hosseini's criticism has not sufficiently examined the connection between trauma, survival, and refugee awareness.

To address that gap, this paper argues that *The Kite Runner* depicts war as a lived experience—a persistent psychological condition that is shown through trauma, morally challenging survival techniques, and refugee consciousness. The study explores how Amir's story represents belated trauma, how moral compromise is necessary to survive in wartime Afghanistan, and how living as a refugee in the United States results in a state of emotional liminality rather than closure.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

This study looks at how *The Kite Runner* depicts war as a lived experience, mainly using trauma theory and studies of exiles and refugees. These theoretical stances make it possible to comprehend war as a continuous psychological and ethical state that influences memory, identity, and narrative form rather than as a distinct historical occurrence. The article highlights the relationship between trauma, survival, and refugee awareness in Hosseini's book by including these concepts.

TRAUMA THEORY AND NARRATIVE MEMORY:

A critical lens for examining the psychological effects of violence and how it is portrayed in stories is



provided by trauma theory. According to Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is an experience that overwhelms the mind and is difficult to understand right away. It returns later through memory, repetition, and narrative fragmentation. In this way, trauma is not completely absorbed at the time it occurs but reappears obsessively, influencing one's identity and storytelling techniques. This comprehension is especially pertinent to *The Kite Runner*, since Amir's narration revolves around remorse, delayed recognition, and recurring flashbacks to a suppressed childhood memory.

Amir's ongoing sense of moral injury long after his physical withdrawal from Afghanistan can be explained by Caruth's emphasis on belatedness. He is traumatized not only by seeing violence, but also by his inaction, which he internalizes as shame and remorse. Thus, trauma theory makes it possible to interpret war as an internal state that permeates consciousness as opposed to an exterior event limited to particular historical periods.

By making a distinction between acting out and working through, Dominick LaCapra (2001) improves trauma analysis. While working through implies a contemplative engagement with trauma that permits ethical responsibility without closure or erasure, acting out entails compulsive repetition and emotional paralysis. To comprehend Amir's narrative arc, this distinction is essential. Amir alternates between acting out—through avoidance, quiet, and self-reproach—and partially healing instead of attaining total redemption, especially when he returns to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. As a result, the book challenges oversimplified healing tales by

portraying trauma as a persistent moral burden rather than a wound that can be healed.

Additionally, trauma theory emphasizes the connection between collective violence and personal suffering. According to scholars like Kali Tal (1996), trauma narratives serve as acts of witnessing that contradict prevailing historical narratives. Amir's personal anguish and Afghanistan's national tragedy collide in *The Kite Runner*, implying that human memory serves as a medium for the mediation of social suffering. Therefore, war is felt both on the battlefield and in one's own moral consciousness.

SURVIVAL AS ETHICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL NEGOTIATION

Survival is increasingly viewed in trauma studies as a morally and psychologically complicated situation rather than as a victory. Guilt, quiet, and moral uncertainty are common among survivors, especially when survival requires cooperation or inaction. According to LaCapra (2001), moral compromises that defy heroic portrayals are often necessary for survival under traumatic situations. This viewpoint is fundamental to the current interpretation, which interprets survival in *The Kite Runner* as a morally complex negotiation influenced by social hierarchy, fear, and helplessness.

While Hassan's life is characterized by perseverance and acquiescence within authoritarian organizations, Amir's survival—both physical and emotional—depends on avoidance and silence. These disparate survival tactics can be analysed without moral absolutism according to trauma theory, which shows how war limits moral decision-making rather than fostering unambiguous moral agency. In this



approach, survival becomes a measure of trauma rather than its alleviation.

EXILE, REFUGEE CONSCIOUSNESS, AND DISPLACEMENT

This paper uses exile and refugee studies, especially Edward Said's observations on displacement, to supplement trauma theory. According to Said (2000), exile is a state of irrevocable loss characterized by rupture, yearning, and a lingering sensation of alienation. Exile, in contrast to voluntary migration, is characterized by historical violence and force, creating a shattered identity that is poised between the past and the present. Understanding Amir's experience as a refugee in the US requires this paradigm.

In this article, "refugee consciousness" refers to a way of being that is influenced by memories, unresolved trauma, and displacement. According to academics like Liisa Malkki (1995), refugees are frequently portrayed as either heroic survivors or helpless victims, which obscures the complexity of actual displacement. By depicting exile as a place where trauma is neither completely expressed nor erased, Hosseini's book challenges these dichotomies. The idea that exile prolongs rather than ends the trauma of war is reinforced by Amir's American life, which provides physical safety but does not bring psychological closure.

Said's description of exile as a "permanent state of loss" sheds light on Amir's diasporic identity's emotional liminality. His incapacity to completely embrace the present and his commitment to Afghan memory are indicative of what this study refers to as refugee consciousness, a state in which the past is

still morally and emotionally relevant. Thus, exile becomes an extension of conflict through different channels, with psychological ramifications that transcend national boundaries.

WAR AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

This article conceptualizes war as lived experience—an ongoing state that changes subjectivity, ethics, and memory—by combining trauma theory and exile studies. This approach highlights the endurance of conflict in personal story and diasporic identity rather than seeing it as a historical backdrop. Trauma, survival, and refugee consciousness are interrelated reactions to ongoing violence and displacement rather than discrete themes in *The Kite Runner*.

A reading of Hosseini's book that prioritizes emotional truth over political resolution is made possible by this integrated theoretical approach. According to this interpretation, war continues through memory, stillness, and moral reflection rather than migration or chronological distance.

WAR AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN THE KITE RUNNER

Khaled Hosseini depicts war in *The Kite Runner* mostly through the psychological fallout rather than through vivid descriptions of fighting or political strife. Through Amir's sense of shame and silence in particular, war is revealed as an intrusive force that changes memory, moral consciousness, and narrative voice. This section makes the case—based on trauma theory—that the novel presents war as a delayed and internalized phenomenon that lingers in the mind long after the actual violence has stopped.

**TRAUMA AS BELATED EXPERIENCE:**

The main traumatic event in the book is Amir's observation of Hassan's attack, but its psychological effects develop gradually over time and space. Amir's response as a child is avoidance and quiet since he lacks the moral and emotional maturity to comprehend the incident. His ongoing trauma stems from this incapacity to take action.

This delayed experience is reflected in the novel's narrative structure. Amir narrates his early years from a temporal distance, and the storytelling process itself turns into a place where pain reappears. His many revisits to the betrayal memory highlight how compulsive traumatic recollection can be. In this way, war is enmeshed in the continuous repetition of memory that distorts linear time rather than being restricted to the actual violent act. The past encroaches on the present, demonstrating how trauma breaks down temporal barriers and turns battle into an ongoing lived experience.

SILENCE, GUILT, AND MORAL INJURY:

What is known as moral injury—the psychological suffering brought on by deeds or inaction that go against one's ethical principles—exacerbates Amir's pain. Amir's anguish results from his passive cooperation, in contrast to those who experience direct physical brutality. According to trauma theory, seeing violence can be just as psychologically damaging as actually experiencing it, especially if it is coupled with feelings of shame and guilt. Amir's silence reveals how people are forced into ethically dubious situations by conflict, serving as both a survival strategy and a cause of self-loathing.

Amir's suffering is made worse by what is referred to as moral harm, which is the psychological distress caused by actions or inactions that violate one's ethical beliefs. Unlike individuals who are subjected to direct physical violence, Amir's suffering stems from his passive involvement. Trauma theory states that seeing violence can be just as harmful to one's mental health as actually experiencing it, particularly if it is accompanied by feelings of guilt and shame. Amir's silence illustrates how conflict pushes people into morally questionable circumstances, which can be both a survival tactic and a source of self-loathing.

TRAUMA BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD:

The novel's refusal to limit pain to the battlefield is among its most important contributions to war literature. According to Hosseini, trauma permeates friendships, family ties, and home environments. The lack of overt fighting scenes highlights how ubiquitous conflict is rather than lessening its existence. Everyday events become areas of psychological strain due to the pervasiveness of fear, suspicion, and loss.

This broader view of trauma is consistent with current trauma research, which acknowledges that continuous exposure to oppression and instability can result in long-lasting psychological damage. *The Kite Runner's* depiction of Afghanistan's fluctuating political administrations reinforces the idea that safety is ephemeral and brittle. Even at seemingly routine moments, characters' mental landscapes are shaped by war, which becomes a fact of life rather than an uncommon event.

**WAR AS INTERNALISED EXPERIENCE:**

The Kite Runner reframes war as an interior experience that endures beyond physical relocation through Amir's psychological journey. Amir still has the scars of war in his mind even after leaving Afghanistan. Distance does not make trauma go away; rather, it gets ingrained in identity and memory. This internalization supports the main thesis of the book, which is that the long-term ethical and psychological effects of war are what cause the real destruction.

Hosseini opposes traditional depictions of war as a spectacle of violence or valour by emphasizing shame, stillness, and delayed trauma. Rather, *The Kite Runner* depicts war as a lasting lived event that transforms moral duty and subjectivity. The novel's examination of survival and refugee consciousness, which further complicates the connection between conflict, identity, and moral action, is set up by this psychological framing.

REFUGEE CONSCIOUSNESS AND DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN THE KITE RUNNER:

In *The Kite Runner*, exile serves as a continuation of the psychological and emotional fallout from conflict rather than an end to misery. According to Hosseini, being a refugee is characterized by memory loss, ethical liminality, and identity reshaping without trauma erasure. This section makes the case that the novel redefines membership and moral duty across national boundaries by constructing refugee consciousness as a lived state in which conflict continues to dominate the psyche.

EXILE AS CONTINUATION OF WAR:

Conventional tales frequently frame exile as a means of resolution, portraying migration as a shift from peril to safety. By portraying Amir's move to the US as a change in geography rather than a change in psychological state, Hosseini subverts this reasoning. The emotional impact of war, ingrained in memory and remorse, persists even when the physical brutality fades. Thus, the experience of refugees in *The Kite Runner* serves as an example of how conflict continues to exist outside of time and space.

Traditional narratives often depict migration as a transition from danger to safety, framing exile as a form of resolution. Hosseini challenges this logic by depicting Amir's relocation to the US as a shift in location rather than a shift in mental condition. Even when the physical violence has subsided, the psychological effects of war, which are embedded in regret and memory, endure. As a result, the story of refugees in *The Kite Runner* illustrates how violence persists beyond location and time.

MEMORY, NOSTALGIA, AND ETHICAL LIMINALITY:

The novel's portrayal of refugee consciousness mostly relies on memory. The ambiguity that characterizes diasporic memory is evident in Amir's memories of Kabul, which are laced with both remorse and love. Nostalgia is entwined with moral reflection; it is not just sentimental attachment. The past cannot stay unchanging or romanticized; it must be acknowledged. The emphasis on repetition and belatedness in trauma theory is consistent with this ongoing engagement with memory. Amir's recollections are invasive returns that interfere with



his current life rather than voluntary acts of remembrance. In this setting, the incapacity to completely inhabit the present due to the ongoing moral and emotional claims of the past characterizes refugee awareness. Thus, Hosseini questions narratives that link psychological recovery to effective absorption.

COMMUNITY, SILENCE, AND DISPLACEMENT:

The idea of exile is further complicated by Hosseini's portrayal of Afghan refugee communities in the US. These communities serve as places for shared memory and cultural preservation, but they also encourage trauma-related silence. Public demonstrations of cultural continuity interact with personal anguish, indicating that dislocation results in collective coping mechanisms that may prevent candid discussion of trauma.

This collective silence is a reflection of larger dynamics seen in refugee studies, where memories of loss and suffering are frequently overshadowed by stories of resiliency and achievement. Amir's emotional loneliness in *The Kite Runner* is exacerbated by these silences, which support the notion that refugee consciousness entails negotiating both individual and societal memory. As a result, exile becomes a situation that is shared but experienced differently, influenced by both personal guilt and societal expectations.

IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION IN EXILE:

It is possible to interpret Amir's desire to become a writer as an effort to rebuild his identity while living in exile. By turning personal memories into narrative, writing provides an indirect way to express trauma.

His ethical load is not entirely alleviated by this artistic outlet, either. Rather, it highlights the conflict between accountability and self-expression that defines refugee consciousness. The book implies that reconstructing one's identity while living in exile is only temporary. Afghan memories continue to haunt Amir's American identity, demonstrating how refugee consciousness defies assimilationist closure. The novel's depiction of displacement as a continuation of experienced pain is reinforced by the fact that war continues to influence subjectivity even in situations of relative safety.

CONCLUSION:

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini delivers a potent reconfiguration of war as lived experience, highlighting its long-lasting psychological, moral, and emotional ramifications. The novel locates the impact of war in personal memory, moral compromise, and displacement rather than portraying it as a sequence of historical occurrences or military conflicts. Through the interwoven themes of trauma, survival, and refugee awareness, Hosseini shows how war continues to shape identity across time and space, even when physical violence has stopped.

Survival turns out to be an ethically difficult process influenced by fear, social hierarchy, and historical context rather than heroic perseverance. In turn, refugee awareness exposes exile as a continuation of conflict, where trauma is reframed rather than resolved by displacement. These components work together to create a story in which moral judgment, diasporic identity, and private life are all impacted by war. In the end, *The Kite Runner* pushes readers to acknowledge that the lives that are



irreversibly changed by violence and displacement—
rather than political results—are the real legacy of
war.

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