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This Ain't Kansas Anymore

Violence is a strong physical force that is intent on damaging, violating, or abusing. Violence is a constant in our daily lives so much that it generally goes unnoticed in its norm. Daily news programs pour out the horrible events that unfolded nights before. News anchors tell us about abuse, war, domestic violence, and other random acts of violence that has become the constant backdrop of our lives. We move along on our path and leave the violence in the background, but sometimes the violence moves from the background into the foreground. Outsiders and forces of nature shove violence into our face. The violence that strings us along in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner is one that not only sets a relentless backdrop for the setting and Amir, himself.

Kabul, Afghanistan lingers in the background of this novel as a moderately peaceful world penetrated and eventually overtaken by violence. The violence in Kabul is first presented to us in racial terms as we walk through the military barracks with Amir and Hassan. Soldiers shout racial slurs at them from the barracks, "You! The Hazara!" (7). Hassan, the Hazara, comes from a group of people oppressed by the Pushtans, Amir's people. The Hazaras are born slaves to the Pushtans and are ridiculed throughout the novel for their physical features, religion, and their lack of education.

Throughout the novel, violence entertains Afghans, even in their sports. Buzkashi is a beloved sport of Afghanistan. It requires one horseback rider to scoop up an animal carcass and drop it into a scoring circle while other horsemen try to tear him from his steed (20). The crowd screams as a rider is torn from his horse and trampled, creating quite a contact sport. Kite running is another sport in Afghanistan that has violent

undertones. Kids run around trying to cut other kids' kites free with glass covered string. Amir refers to the kite as the gun and the tar, the glass-coated string, as the bullets. Amir even remarks that fighting kites was a little like going to war Kids leave the tournament with the bloodied fingers of battle (50). Violence flies here as victory.

Violent religious rituals color the grass with blood and portray a rather disturbing image after Eid-e-Qorban. Eid-e-Qorban is an Afghan-Muslim day to celebrate how Ibrahim almost sacrificed his own son. This religious holiday tradition requires the meat of a sacrificial lamb to be divided into three parts, one for family, one for friends, and the last for the poor. A mullah prays over the sacrificial lamb which is then given a sugar cube to distract it from the hidden kitchen knife about to slit its throat (76). The sacrifice and sugar coated death is clearly a violent act.

Violence is more straightforward when it comes to war. The first we hear of war in this novel is when Russian troops invade Afghanistan (35). Amir recalls this as the end for Afghanistan and a beginning of an era of ongoing bloodletting (36). The images of war are almost always violent. Tanks rolling through the streets (36), foreign invaders trying to rape native women and threatening loved ones (115) and neighbors turning on neighbors, brothers on brothers, and everyday people turning on everyone else (112) are just some of the violent aftershocks of war. This background of violence, war, sacrificial lambs, bloody fingers, carcass tosses, and racial discrimination set a sense of uneasiness for the reader. The reader seeks to turn the page in hope for a resolution, for a break from the violence. However, no break is given in this novel. The reader is continually pushed forward by the violence pulsing in the background.

Amidst all the violence in the background, the reader must not forget Amir and how violence played a major role in his past. Amir is brought into this world in violence with the death of his mother during childbirth (19). He is introduced to us as a child who