

Creating Context for *The Kite Runner*

Group One

“Never mind any of those things. 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 that. Nothing” (25).

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Group Two:

“We stayed huddled that way until the early hours of the morning. The shootings and explosions had lasted less than an hour, but they had frightened us badly, because none of us had ever heard gunshots in the streets. They were foreign sounds to us then. The generation of Afghan children whose ears would know nothing but the sounds of bombs and gunfire was not yet born. Huddled together in the dining room and waiting for the sun to rise, none of us had any notion that a way of life had ended. *Our* way of life. If not quite yet, then at least it was the beginning of the end. The end, the *official* end, would come first in April 1978 with the communist coup d’etat, and then in December 1979, when Russian tanks would roll into the very same streets where Hassan and I played, bringing the death of the Afghanistan I knew and marking the start of a still ongoing era of bloodletting” (36).

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Group Three:

“The kite-fighting tournament was an old winter tradition in Afghanistan. It started early in the morning on the day of the contest and didn’t end until only the winning kite flew in the sky – I remember one year the tournament outlasted daylight. People gathered on sidewalks and roofs to cheer for their kids. The streets filled with kite fighters, jerking and tugging on their lines, squinting up to the sky, trying to gain position to cut the opponent’s line. Every kite fighter had an assistant – in my case, Hassan – who held the spool and fed the line” (51).

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Group Four:

“Karim was a people smuggler – it was a pretty lucrative business then, driving people out of *Shorawi*-occupied Kabul to the relative safety of Pakistan. He was taking us to Jalalabad, about 170 kilometers southeast of Kabul, where his brother, Toor, who had a bigger truck with a second convoy of refugees, was waiting to drive us across the Khyber Pass and into Peshawar. We were a few kilometers west of Mahipar Falls when Karim pulled to the side of the road. Mahipar – which means “Flying Fish” – was a high summit with a precipitous drop overlooking the hydro plant the Germans had built for Afghanistan back in 1967. Baba and I had driven over the summit countless times on our way to Jalalabad, the city of cypress trees and sugarcane fields where Afghans vacationed in the winter” (111).

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Group Five:

“He loathed Jimmy Carter, whom he called a ‘big-toothed cretin.’ In 1980, when we were still in Kabul, the U.S. announced it would be boycotting the Olympic Games in Moscow. ‘*Wah wah!*’ Baba exclaimed with disgust. ‘Brezhnev is massacring Afghans and all that peanut eater can say is I won’t come swim in your pool.’ Baba believed Carter had unwittingly done more for communism than Leonid Brezhnev. ‘He’s not fit to run this country. It’s like putting a boy who can’t ride a bike behind the wheel of a brand new Cadillac.’ What America and the world needed was a hard man. A man to be reckoned with, someone who took action instead of wringing his hands. That someone came in the form of Ronald Reagan. And when Reagan went on TV and called the *Showari* ‘the Evil Empire,’ Baba went out and bought a picture of the grinning president giving a thumbs up. He framed the picture and hung it in our hallway, nailing it right next to the old black-and-white of himself in his thin necktie shaking hands with King Zahir Shah. Most of our neighbors in Fremont were bus drivers, policemen, gas station attendants, and unwed mothers collecting welfare, exactly the sort of blue-collar people who would soon suffocate under the pillow Reaganomics pressed to their faces. Baba was the lone Republican in our building” (126).

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Group Six:

“According to tradition, Soraya’s family would have thrown the engagement party, the *Shirini-khori* – or ‘Eating of the Sweets’ ceremony. Then an engagement period would have followed which would have lasted a few months. Then the wedding, which would be paid for by Baba...Soraya and I never went out alone while preparations for the wedding proceeded – since we weren’t married yet, hadn’t even had a *Shirini-khori*, it was considered improper” (169).

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Group Seven:

“That was the first time I saw the Taliban. I’d seen them on TV, on the Internet, on the cover of magazines, and in newspapers. But here I was now, less than fifty feet from them, telling myself that the sudden taste in my mouth wasn’t unadulterated, naked fear. Telling myself my flesh hadn’t suddenly shrunk against my bones and my heat wasn’t battering. Here they came. In all their glory. The red Toyota pickup truck idled past us. A handful of stern-faced young men sat on their haunches in the cab, Kalashnikovs slung on their shoulders. They all wore beards and black turbans. One of them, a dark-skinned man in his early twenties with thick, knitted eyebrows twirled a whip in his hand and rhythmically swatted the side of the truck with it” (247).