



## Pseudo-conservative and Pseudo-democratic: Human oppression in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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**Abstract.** This paper is the study of the role of pseudo-ideologies in the repression of the Afghan individuals, whether they espouse different ideologies or ordinary people with moderate thought. During its modern history, Afghanistan has witnessed a constant struggle between the Communist and reactionary ideologies. Throughout the takeover of these ideologies to the power, the Afghan individual was oppressed and discriminated against because these political currents declared certain ideologies and applied different ones. Political struggle for power in Afghanistan and the suppression of the Afghan individuals by the dominant group is one of the most important topics that Hosseini noted in his novel, *A Thousand Splendid Sun*. Adorno's theory, the "authoritarian personality" was adopted primarily for an analysis of the socio-political aspects of the addressed novel. To achieve realistic results, the study focused on tracking the activities and violations of both Conservatives and Communists that were committed against individuals who did not belong to them to reveal the contradiction in their ideologies. The study adopts the socio-political framework to clarify the role of pseudo-ideologies in suppressing the individual rather than liberating him and guaranteeing his rights. Thus, this study examines the relationship between pseudo-ideologies and human repression.

**Keywords:** Afghan individual, Conservatives, Communists, dominant group, oppression, pseudo-ideology, the authoritarian personality.

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Political background

Afghanistan is one of the countries that the political conflict is increasing between the parties seeking power. This ongoing struggle is between two main poles: religious militants who claim conservatism and communists who claim liberation. Each of these poles tries to seize authority and snatch it from another by adopting different means and methods. The most important and most common of these methods, followed by both poles, are spreading ideologies and distorted ideas about the opponent by calling him negative attributes. On the other side, publish positive beliefs about their future projects in the case of assuming power. This manipulation of people's ideas and their illusions with unreliable reforms have led to a decline in the people's standard of living and the spread of persecution and marginalization to the general public. The difference in what these parties are promoting and applying has a tremendous destructive effect not only on opponents, but on those who do not follow any party. Since these parties give up the principles of justice and equality, they advocate and are busy with limiting the power and benefits to the members of the ingroup only.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

"The Authoritarian personality" is a theory that was set by a group of theorists in the 1950s to study the personality that has authoritarian traits. To study this personality in all its aspects, four scales of the theory have been developed which are Anti-Semitism Scale, Ethnocentrism Scale, Political & Economical Conservatism Scale, and Fascist scale. The present theory is based on an explanation of the tendency of authoritarian personalities to divide society or any environment in which they are present into ingroups and outgroups. These authoritarian groups classify any group that does not conform to their ideas and attitudes as an outgroup and are treated as a threat that must be eliminated. To get rid of those outgroups and to snatch authority from them, the ingroup tends to spread negative thoughts and attributes about them. These negative qualities, which are usually illogical and fabricated, become a justification for ingroup's members to oppress and marginalize members of outgroups. It attempts to investigate and examine the relationship between "Conservation" and prejudice.

In their theory of authoritarian personality, Adorno et al. distinguished between two types of conservatives, the "genuine conservative" and the "pseudo-conservative". Adorno refers to him as genuine because "he wants the best man to win no matter what his social background... he is relatively free of the rigidity and deep-lying hostility characteristic of ethnocentrism" (182). Concerning that opinion, the "genuine conservative" puts the interest of the nation above the interest of all and does not matter that the ruler is a member of the ingroup. While the "pseudo-conservative", as Adorno et al. refer to him and write, "The ethnocentric conservative is the pseudo conservative, for he betrays in his ethnocentrism a tendency antithetical to democratic values and tradition" (182). About that opinion, the pseudo-conservative puts the interest of the ingroup above the interest of all and turns to anti-democratic policies. Even for the pseudo-conservative, Adorno et al. distinguish two of them. The first type tends to pretend to be democratic, but he is undemocratic and pursues undemocratic policies. The second type is the one who pretends to be democratic and tends to act in a tamper and subversion way privately (680). Most authority-seeking groups tend to manipulate the ideas and attitudes of individuals by calling for conservative principles which are abandoned as soon as those groups reach their goal and interests.

### **The problem of the study**

The use of Pseudo-ideologies to attract supporters on the one side, and snatch authority from outgroups on the other, besides the role of these Pseudo-ideologies in suppressing and persecuting people.

### **Significance of the study**

The present study's significance lies in trying to expose the contradictions between the declared "Conservatism" and the hidden "Pseudo-Conservatism" of authority-seeking groups' ideologies. Besides the role of these Pseudo-ideologies in oppressing people.

### **Purpose of the study**

The present study attempts to discuss the aim that encourages authority-seeking groups to follow Pseudo-ideologies. Also, the contradictions in their ideologies which attract people from one side, and oppressing them from the other side.

### **The study approaches the following set of questions**

According to the events presented in Hosseini's addressed novel, did the Communist Party apply its declared ideology in Afghanistan during the assumption of power?

Were conservative reactionary groups really "Conservative"?

Did both parties meet the individual goals and interests that made them the title of their ideology?

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study is a qualitative analytical study aimed at discussing Afghan human oppression due to the Pseudo- ideologies of the authority-seeking groups. The activities of groups and personalities seeking power will be analyzed before and after assuming power. To reach logical conclusions about the contradiction in these activities and ideologies using the targeted novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini, a qualitative analytical method was adopted instead of using other methods. Adorno's "authoritarian personality" theory will be used primarily for the analysis of the targeted aspects.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Communism Between Declared and Hidden Ideology**

The time of the monarchy in Afghanistan is characterized by relative openness in terms of allowing females to attend schools and universities and allowing women to work. Hosseini referring to females schools and their education during the monarchy time writes, "Bibi Jo had brought news that Jalil's daughters Saideh and Naheed were going to Mehri school for girls in Herat" (17). In her Article, Niloufar Pourzand referring to King Zahir's policies towards females' education writes, "It was during his reign that in addition to an expansion of provision of school education for girls, young women began to be accepted at universities and a number were sent abroad for higher education" (77). These and other reforms policies indicate that the king was a "genuine conservative" who puts the interest of the country above everyone's interest and without forcing anyone to follow them. Despite the availability of these schools, families were not forced to register their daughters.

During the reign of King Zahir, Communist groups tried to confiscate the rule in Afghanistan and impose their ideology on Afghan society, which is characterized by "Conservatism". Communist ideology

pretended to support democracy, equality, and the freedom of women. Although most conservatives rejected Communist ideology and formed groups opposed to it, the king was influenced by their ideas. Pervez Hoodbhoy pointing out the reason behind refusing the Communist intentions and appearance of reactionary group writes, "suspicions of Soviet desire to instill a socialist regime in Afghanistan were sometimes aired in the West. But, as a highly fragmented Islamic tribal society, Afghanistan appeared a highly unlikely candidate for socialism" (16). The tribes considered the new regime a threat to Islamic laws and Afghan customs and traditions.

The spread of Communist ideology in Afghanistan was rapid and influential so that ideology was behind the king's issuing of a package of reforms that carried a communist character. Nila, one of Hosseini's *And The Mountain Echoed's* character, refers to the King's reforms, she says " By God! He said. No more wearing of the veil, for one... And no more polygamy... You will all attend school" (181). Although these reforms are incompatible with religious laws and cultural norms, the Communist trend has sought to impose them on other currents by making them mandatory. The attempt to impose a certain ideology on all the different components of society contradicts Adorno's statement about the "genuine conservative" and goes in line with the "pseudo-conservative". This is in line with Adorno's description of the pseudo-conservative, writes "The first type tends to pretend to be democratic, but he is undemocratic and pursues undemocratic policies" (680). The manifestations of these reforms are positive and progressive, but the hidden is an attempt to impose on other groups and seek to subdue them.

These reforms, which represented only one group at the expense of the others, provoked the ire of the reactionary conservatives and deposed the king. Daoud Khan seized power with the help of the communists, as Hosseini pointed out in his novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Jalil says, "There are rumors that the socialists in Kabul helped him take power" (23). The impact of the communist ideology on Afghan society was particularly evident, especially for women in Kabul. Hosseini describes the modern dressing of women, not wearing the hijab and allowing them to put makeup and smoke in public places. Equality between men and women was evident in terms of the right to work and to learn for both sexes and this is the most important declaration of communist ideology. Pervez Hoodbhoy refers to the growing influence of the Soviet Communist ideology during Daud's ruling, writes "The Kremlin leadership was entirely satisfied with the state of affairs in the early years of Daud's rule. Soviet influence grew, and the Soviet Union became Afghanistan's leading trading partner" (17). But the Soviet support was short-lived.

Attitudes between Daoud Khan and the Soviets tense in 1978. The killing of a senior Communist Party leader has caused a revolution. Hosseini refers to that incident in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, "Rasheed said that Mir Akbar Khyber had been a prominent communist, and that his supporters were laming the murder on President Daoud Khan's government" (97). As noted earlier, Daoud Khan was not a Communist but came to rule with their help, but as soon as he felt they were a threat to his authority, he tried to get rid of them. Although the communists were part of the ingroup, Daoud Khan treated them as outgroups when he felt their danger to his authority. The purpose of seeking communist support for Daoud was not because of acceptance of their ideology, but for personal interests and the acquisition of authority. Adorno refers to that kind of ideology as opportunistic ideology. He writes, "The aim of such opportunism is to maintain identification with those on top—whoever they are, whatever they represent—and to avoid at all cost the anxiety of being identified with those below" (834).

After the fall of Daoud's government, the Communist Party took power in Afghanistan and became the dominant ingroup. Once they took power, the Communist Party began to treat other groups as a threat and were liquidated. Their ideology, which advocates equality between the people and freedom of thought, turned out to be illusions. About the crimes that accompanied the Communists taking power, Mohammad Ismail Siddiqi writes, "In the beginning groups with different ideologies were allowed to function, later on with the increase of supporters to Marx' ideology in the government, the Muslim youth movements were brutally suppressed by mass killing of members of the Muslim organizations" (126). Hosseini also referring to the massacres that accompanied the communist takeover of authority writes, "Days later, when the communists began the summary execution of those connected with Daoud Khan's regime, When rumors began floating about Kabul eyes gouged and genitals electrocuted in the Pol-Charkhi Prison" (100).

### **Opportunistic Interests Instead of the Genuine Conservative**

"The Conservatives" have always played a crucial role in determining the fate of political and social life in Afghanistan, whether they were opposed to the ruling authority or are the leaders of the authority. During the period when they play the role of an opponent, they promote negative publicity about their

opponents to weaken them and seize their authority. Their ideology is based on pretending in their endeavor to promote Afghani social and cultural values inherent and resist any change in the social hierarchical system. Because of the high percentage of illiterate people and their adherence to religious teachings, conservatives have found wide support in Afghanistan. (You should make sure you are objective and impartial in your discussion). In a reference to an Afghan Prime Minister in the monarchy era about the difficulty of persuading society of the reforms, Jafri writes, "In a society in which unfortunately more than 90% of the people are illiterate, the creation of public understanding of the proposed democracy is not an easy task" (170). "The Conservatives" took advantage of this support to counter any real efforts by the official authority to establish a democratic state and institutions.

Just as the Communists used the principle of justice and equality to attract the largest number of supporters to their ideology and increase their authority, "the Conservatives" used the same principle for the same reason. Tahir Amin on the objectives of "the Conservative" group writes, "Its objective was the reconstruction of Afghan society according to Islamic tenets-the creation of a modern state with political participation and socioeconomic justice in line with Islamic values" (377). As noted by Tahir, conservative ideology is based on social justice and economic equality for all individuals within Islamic law. To snatch authority from "the Conservatives" as an outgroup, the communists were described as infidels who were trying to destroy Afghan social norms and religious laws. The ideas of many young men have been tampered with under the pretext of jihad from various countries, in addition to Leila's brothers who both killed in the fight against the Soviets, Hosseini writes "Egyptians, Pakistanis, even wealthy Saudis, who left their millions behind and came to Afghanistan to fight the jihad" (112). The liberation of the country, the preservation of Afghan social customs and traditions, and the protection of citizens were among the most important principles stated by the conservatives and influenced many.

After the Soviet occupation ended, the Communist ideology collapsed, and "the Conservatives" assumed authority in Afghanistan, all these principles went with the wind. All hidden intentions came to the fore and it became clear that all these sacrifices went for opportunistic interests aimed at seizing authority rather than preserving values and traditions. Once the communist thought collapsed, the conflict between "the Conservative" parties in Afghanistan increased. Targeting and persecuting of citizens by "the Conservatives" have replaced protecting and liberating them which has announced about earlier. Pointing to the brutality of those parties and the falsehood of their conservation, Hosseini writes "Militiamen stationed in the mountains sharpened their marksmanship-and settled wagers over said marksmanship-by shooting civilians down below, men, women, children, chosen at random" (172). Killing innocent citizens, women and children, and other atrocities which would mention which indicate that these groups are not "Conservatives", instead they are Pseudo-Conservatives.

Regarding the contradictory of ideologies in terms of both declare and hidden, Adorno writes "This contradiction throws into relief a further aspect of fascist ideology that can be described as ideological opportunism. By this term is meant a disregard for ethical principles and truth-values, which are replaced by opportunistic manipulation of ideas and "facts" in the service of Realpolitik ends" (834). In fact, according to the events of the addressed novel, these groups were adopting an opportunistic ideology to obtain personal benefits instead of the Conservative ideology. Commenting on the loot obtained by those Pseudo-Conservatives groups which indicates those opportunistic ideology, Hosseini writes:

Laila learned from him, for instance, that this road, up to the second acacia tree on the left, belonged to one warlord; that the next four blocks, ending with the bakery shop next to the demolished pharmacy, was another warlord's sector; and if she crossed that street and walked half a mile west, she would find herself in the territory of yet another warlord and, therefore, fair game for sniper fire. (172)

The confiscation of citizens' lands and the usurpation of their rights was one of the measures followed by these groups to achieve opportunistic gains at the expense of the innocent citizens who do not belong to them and do not believe in their ideology.

The fighting parties for authority, that claim Conservation, have not only seized the lands of innocent people by force, but rather have repeatedly bombed their villages every day, causing their displacement and killing many of them. Referring to the conditions that civilians were going through during the struggle of these parties, Hosseini writes:

Laila knew that somewhere in the city someone had just died, and that pall of black smoke was hovering over some building that had collapsed in a puffing mass of dust. There would bodies to step around in the morning. Some would be collected. Other not. Then Kabul's dogs, who had developed a taste for human meat, would feast. (183)

Although all of those fighting parties are declared conservative ideology, the basis for their dealings with all rests on ingroup-outgroup relations. Even innocent people were considered outgroups and used the most extreme means to remove them from the scene so that the ingroup be able to get the authority. Commenting on the need to liquidate the outgroups that citizens are part of, Adorno writes "The ingroup must be kept pure and strong. The only methods of doing this are to liquidate the outgroups altogether, to keep them entirely subordinate, or to segregate them in such a way as to minimize contact with the ingroups" (150).

The rights and freedom granted to women by the Communist trend during the conducting of authority were considered one of the most important points of disagreement between the Communist ideology and the Conservative ideology. "The Conservatives" used this point in their favor to denounce and condemn this freedom, which they claim is a great violation of Afghan customs and traditions. To attract a large number of supporters for their conservative ideology, they promised to preserve those customs and traditions and protect women. The contradiction was very clear between what was announced and what is applied on the ground during the conservatives' assumption of power in the country. "The Conservatives'" propaganda is related to changing the name of Afghanistan to the Islamic State of Afghanistan and issuing several laws and punishments that include violators of social and religious customs and laws. About those laws and procedures, Hosseini writes "strict Islamic laws that ordered women to cover, forbade their travel without a male relative, punished adultery with stoning" (253).

"The Conservatives", before assuming power, called for equality and preservation of customs and traditions; this means that punishments must include everyone who violates these laws, especially those crimes which is related to adultery and raping. The events of the novel present the crimes committed by those groups claiming conservatism against women illustrate the opposite. Instead of punishing the members of those groups, they received the support of their leaders by violating religious and social customs and provisions. Rasheed explanation to Mariam what violations might happen to a woman who goes out of her home alone during the period of conservative rule, assert to us the conservatives' fake ideology; Rasheed asks, "How many days do you suppose she'll last before she's abducted, raped, or tossed into some roadside ditch with her throat slit? Or all three?" (209).

During conservatives' reign, women were used as a means of pressure on individuals who did not belong to their ideology or have a moderated ideology to subdue them. Rape was practiced against women as a reward for ingroup members and punishment for outgroups; Hosseini writes:

There was looting, murder, and, increasingly, rape, which was used to intimidate civilians and reward militiamen. Mariam heard of women who were killing themselves out of fear of being raped, and of men who, in the name of honor, would kill their wives or daughters if they'd been raped by militia. (247)

Adorno's suggestion may be the most likely to explain the reason behind the persistence of members of these groups to commit such crimes that come with the approval of most of the group members, writes "If his external authorities, or the crowd, lend their approval to this form of aggression, then it may take the most violent forms, and it may persist after the conventional values, in the name of which it was undertaken, have been lost from sight" (233). The rape of women and the violation of symptoms by the "conservatives" parties go in the opposite direction of the conservation and the principles advocated by the conservatives. After receiving encouragement and praise from members of the group, those individuals go on with those crimes. Rasheed refers to the plight of the young boys who are forced to join the Mujahideen. In the case of, those boys are captured by the opposite group; Rasheed says, "They make the boys lead them to their homes. Then they break in, kill their fathers, rape their sisters and mothers" (248).

When the Taliban, who are considered extremely conservative, took over the authority, Afghans thought they would end these crimes and bring peace. Concerning the encouraging hopes of the simple people about the Taliban, Rashid writes, "For some Afghans, the Taliban created hopes that a movement led by simple Islamic students with an agenda of bringing peace to the country might succeed in finally disposing of the warlord factions which had been overthrown in April 1992" (5). Commenting on "the Conservative" propaganda declared about the Taliban and its members; Rasheed says "At least the Taliban are pure and incorruptible. At least they are decent Muslim boys,... They will bring peace and order" (267). Once the Taliban leaders were in power, they issued laws and provisions that were overly conservative, at least publicly, and everyone forced to follow. On the ground, the persecution of the Afghan individual did not stop and peace was not achieved, as Rasheed expected, but the Taliban committed the most severe types of crimes and violations against outgroups members and civilians.

Adorno's opinion of the duality in adopting the ideologies to authoritarian individuals may apply to members of the Taliban; he writes, "Extreme personal opportunism is often, though not always, connected with ideological opportunism and indifference toward ideological content" (485). Referring to the crimes committed by the Taliban, opportunistic ideology prevailed over conservative one, in other words, that was pseudo-conservative ideology intended to achieve personal interests.

Among those tyrannical measures, is to prevent women from working, studying and not going out without a relative man. These measures, implemented under the pretext of conservation, have increased the suffering of all members of Afghan society. About the Taliban and the impact of their agenda on women's rights, Aisha Ahmed writes "The ultra-conservative Taliban regime enforced a reactionary agenda, which aggressively suppressed the rights of both rural and urban Afghan women" (26). The exclusion of women from the field of education led to the breakdown of this aspect because most faculty members are women. They also contributed to the deteriorating health aspect of the country, through conditionally allowing women to work in the health sector and under severe conditions due to lack of medicines and the wearing of the niqab. The deprivation of women from work, which is sometimes considered the sole breadwinner for the family after the murder of their breadwinner, has led to widespread hunger, and mothers were forced to abandoned their children because of poverty as happened with Laila and her teacher. About the main reason which forced women to give up their children, Zaman addressing Laila:

It isn't your fault. Do you hear me? Not you. It's those savages, those wahshies, who are to blame. They bring shame on me as a Pashtun. They've disgraced the name of my people. And you're not alone, hamshira. We get mothers like you all the time- all the time -mothers who come here who can't feed their children because the Taliban won't let them go out and make a living. (311)

As for the men, who are not belong to Taliban, were not protected from these tyrannical and brutal measures. Every Friday, people were gathering at the soccer field to watch Taliban members punishing individuals they had accused of violating the laws the Taliban had previously announced. About those punishments, Hosseini writes "In bed, he had Laila listen as he described with queer sort of exhilaration the hands he'd seen severed, the lashings, the hangings, the beheadings" (275). These punishments may be due to simple things, such as not attending prayer, not having bearded or stealing due to poverty. While the Taliban members are exempt from these punishments, even when they commit crimes that more brutal than the crimes committed by individuals not affiliated with the Taliban.

## CONCLUSION

Political hypocrisy and duplicity between what is presented and what is applied are the most prominent features of the modern era. People's ideas and opinions are manipulated by proposing ideologies that embrace reform visions and projects. A good example of this is what happened in Afghanistan during the last decades of the previous century. The study finds that both the Communist and Conservative ideologies manipulated people's ideas in order to gain power, not for reform and to guarantee a decent life for the citizen. The study also finds that once an ideology succeeded in seizing power, it seemed to interact with people on the basis of the outgroup and ingroup, and it seemed to be liquidating members of those groups that were ideologically different from them. The price that the simple citizen paid was high in the struggle of these ideologies for power. The study also finds that these ideologies are nothing but opportunistic ideologies that are far from what they educate and advertise. The novel, the subject of our research, showed a lot of evidence and examples that these groups, Communist or Conservatives, committed heinous crimes against citizens after seizing power, which contradicts the principles of their ideology that came to apply it. The obsession of the members of the dominant group about authority, and their insistence on excluding the opponents, increased the burdens of the simple citizen, who found himself in a struggle and useless fighting.

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