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Mun Afghaniyum: The Nexus of Psychocultural Feelings of Manhood, Guilt and Culture in *Shooting Kabul*

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ABSTRACT
This research paper explores anxiety through a psychoanalytical lens, along with repression, honor, and feelings of guilt experienced by Fadi, a young Afghan immigrant, in the novel Shooting Kabul. Fadi's family flees from the Taliban in Kabul, and during their escape, he loses his younger sister, Mariam. Drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis, the study analyzes Fadi's mental state throughout the novel and examines the cultural concepts of Pashtunwali and Afghaniyat, which are closely linked to feelings of guilt that shape him as a man. Through a textual analysis of the novel, the article shows how Fadi's traumatic experiences and associated guilt hinder his ability to cope and recover from anxiety, leading to further psychological distress. The research emphasizes the importance of understanding the psychological effects of displacement and guilt on children in conflict zones and highlights the need for effective mental health interventions to support children and families affected by conflict, war, and displacement.

Keywords: *Afghaniyat, Manhood, Guilt, Pashtunwali, Shooting Kabul, Culture, Migration.*

Introduction

Migration continues to be one of the most pressing global crises, often placing children at the center of displacement and trauma. According to UNICEF's Uprooted: The Growing Crisis for Refugee and Migrant Children (2016), nearly 31 million children live as international migrants, many of them from conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. These children face not only physical dislocation but also profound psychological pressures that shape their identities and futures.

Literature often uncovers unseen and unexplored dimensions of human existence. Henry Fielding's Joseph Andrews reveals the moral confusion of 18th century society (Riaz, 2017), while Naheed Hasnat Senzai's novel portrays the enigmatic psychological burden of a young child in the 21st century. This paper examines Senzai's Shooting Kabul through a psychoanalytic lens, focusing on how repression, guilt, and cultural expectations shape the experiences of the young protagonist, Fadi. During his family's escape from Kabul, Fadi loses his younger sister Mariam—

a traumatic moment that becomes central to his sense of dishonor and failure. Drawing on Freud's theory of repression, this study argues that Fadi's recurring guilt reflects not only a personal psychological wound but also a culturally inflected experience shaped by Afghaniyat (Afghan identity) and Pashtunwali (the Pashtun code of honor). Caught between personal trauma and cultural expectations, Fadi embodies the complex nexus of manhood, guilt, and cultural identity.

By exploring this intersection of psychology and culture, the paper highlights how guilt in migrant children is often amplified by collective values of honor and masculinity. These factors are socio and political which, according to Hakeem. Et al, lay linguistic (Hakeem. 2017), social and political narratives of a particular group.

The analysis positions Fadi's silence and self-blame as symptoms of repressed trauma, showing how cultural codes push him prematurely into manhood. Ultimately, the study contends that Shooting Kabul reveals the complex ways displacement reshapes children's emotional worlds, offering insight into the psychological burdens that accompany migration.

Theoretical Framework

The nexus: Freud and Fadi

Andri and Dewi (2007) posit that anxiety constitutes a significant issue within psychoanalysis; Freud, in 1890, observed that anxiety is a result of the unexpressed or unidentified libido, which is an inborn part of human beings. Freud categorizes anxiety into three dimensions: anxiety of reality, anxiety of neurosis, and moral anxiety. Repression is a defense mechanism against anxiety. This phenomenon is explained in the book *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1921), which suggests that anxiety governs an individual's thoughts and actions regardless of the coping mechanisms they may establish. Consequently, the individual's beliefs and values become subservient to their anxious mindset. Bateman and Holmes (1995) propose that this phenomenon leads individuals to categorize themselves, resulting in a loss of identity and a decline in emotional stability. Psychoanalysis, in the context of modern literature, provides a proper lens to understand the complexity of guilt and honor, which is primarily a process of self-reflection. Freud argues: repression occurs when the ego blocks an instinctual impulse from reaching consciousness, as it would produce unpleasure rather than pleasure due to particular circumstances. This blocked psychic process then manifests as a symptom—a substitute for the desired action that was never fulfilled. Freud names this unconscious resistance repression (p. 258), a defense mechanism that keeps a threatening thought or feeling at a distance from the conscious mind. He further notes that when a psychological impulse is rejected—or "repudiated" and "condemned"—it becomes "powerless" and yields to repression (p. 259). Psychoanalytically, this repression stores his emotions and fears in the unconscious (Bressler, 1999), leaving him caught between cultural codes of honor and the traumatic images of loss.

Fadi represses feelings that might hinder his efforts. Yet, as Tyson (2006) notes, repression does not remove guilt or pain but buries them, making them harder to overcome. In "Navigating Norms and Insecurities: Men, Masculinities, Conflicts, and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan" (2018), Henri Myrttinen exacerbates that gender power dynamics are purely tied to cultural factors, resulting in expectant roles. Fewer cultural factors contribute to men and boys reaching their level of expectations in Afghanistan because the issue of masculinity has always been overshadowed by women and girls' agendas. After Mariam is left behind, Fadi's honor shatters. He delves into a constant feeling of guilt for having lost his honor by not protecting his sister.

This phenomenon is widely functional in Afghanistan, says Andrea Chiovenda (2015): for an Afghan man, *ghairat* (honor) is most considerable, which applies overtly to protecting their woman and maintaining his family's *izzat* (dignity). If he fails to protect his ghairat, the consequence is self-harming violation. This violation is observed as part of the Afghan code of life: a man is obliged to enact self-injury after having his *izzat* (dignity) scratched. In our protagonist's case, guilt is an active source of practicing the cultural code of punishment. Guilt has been associated with both positive and negative outcomes, depending on the context and intensity of the emotion (Tangney & Dearing, 2002, p. 417). Excessive or maladaptive guilt can be associated with negative outcomes, such as shame, anxiety, and depression (O'Neil et al., 2018, p. 237). Guilt-ridden children are more likely to experience shame and anxiety, particularly when they perceive themselves as socially rejected (p. 32). Muris and colleagues (2014) found that excessive guilt was associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression in children (p. 121). Guilt can be used as a tool to not only decode the behavior of human individual existence, but it also provides a way to analyze other culturally more complex feelings, i.e., anxiety. Anxiety denotes a range of channels that contribute to its birth and its plunge into individuals' daily and unconscious state of mind.

Psychoanalysis, says Mahroof Hossain (2017), "was born out of the self-analysis undertaken by Sigmund Freud in 1897". Psychoanalysis models one's external behaviors by an overpowering *unconscious* state (Monte.1877). Man's everyday life is uplifted through psychoanalysis. Every human being experiences it in their daily lives. This could be either a conscious happening or an unconscious, all of us practice it usually. (Tyson. 2006) Parts of his life, attitude and ways of communication reflect an uncanny state to the core. (Sibi. 2020) Human state of mind repeatedly reflects his actions of which he seems entirely unaware. Repression haunts him and he begins behaving erratically.

Seldon (2005) approaches psychoanalysis as an archetype by calling Freudian psychoanalysis a candid and straight representation of a collective group of images, incidents and certain details which have a natural connection to the present situation. In effect, he highlights that any action has two aspects: its original occurrence and later interpretation. And the significance implies the construction of the later as it is more powerful on the individual as well as his past. The person happens to abandon the actual action however remembering only the vibrations it caused. Seldon (2005) notes that this remembering effect becomes the cause of further anxiety. The individual rolls between the catastrophe of repression that he attaches from this incident; meanwhile, his repression drives him from familiar to unfamiliar fears. Later, the individual becomes trapped in the entity of repression where his personality becomes an unsettled projection of different ideas and thinking. In the novel, Fadi, too, contributes to the parallel projection of suppression by submission of guilt of his uncommitted sin produced in spectrum of Afghan manhood. Throughout the novel, after the displacement of Mariam, he continuously considers himself the culprit which opens up vistas for the psychoanalytical study of his condition.

Sigmund Freud's concept of repression explains how children respond to feelings of guilt by pushing them into their unconscious minds to avoid the emotional pain associated with them (Freud, 1915, p. 141). The portrayal of guilt in Fadi is a result of pre-manhood which is a common concept in Afghanistan. As early as he loses his sister, the man in him begins emerging. He

becomes a man of Afghan values, mindset, and responsibility. Thus, this study explores the limbo of Afghaniyat present in the young protagonist, Fadi.

Afghaniyat, Manhood, Children Psychology

Fadi is a teenager who grows into cognitive maturity during their escape from Afghanistan in the war-embedded time. As SK presents, Fadi is only a playful child unaware of the war's trauma. Soon, when the Taliban take over Afghanistan and the family flees to America, the displacement of Mariam seemingly infuses responsibility, feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety, all caused by one cultural factor called honor in Fadi. Although young by years, the culture of honor that makes him regard himself as responsible for the family's misfortune is great. War has always affected children and women the most (Raudalen & Melton, 1994). The effect of war can be broadly manifested as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral disturbances (Chimienti, Nasr & Khalifer, 1989). By undertaking a comparative analysis, children of different backgrounds of conflict contract different effects. Noticeably, each experience has its own development on the affected child. According to Vanessa Williamson and Erin Mulhall, policy directors of organizations in Iraq and Afghanistan, depression is a condition that occurs in a conflict victim, including "alertness," "nightmares," "insomnia," and "irritability." But above all, it involves "feelings of guilt" and "hopelessness." For Fadi, the pressure of guilt takes place because his Afghaniyat permits it, which induces the belief that a man should at any cost protect his women. Substantially, the culture of honor is an injection that Fadi receives from his elders. Fadi's father, after Mariam's loss, considers losing his namus: the Afghan concept of honor that refers to protecting women. The concept of namus is so prevalent that even Mariam's doll Gulmina "wears a burka" (p. 25). Another reason why Fadi plunges into honor is the Pashtunwali concept of Panah, according to which when you bring someone into shelter with you, they become your responsibility. Their protection and safeguard are significant priorities for the person, but in Fadi's case, he cannot safeguard Mariam and thus shifts into a damaged honor. Apart from Panah, Toorah (bravery) is an important part of Afghan culture. Afghans are historically praised for standing against oppression with undefeatable courage and bravery. While boarding the truck at midnight, Fadi's bravery is hit hard as he cannot hold Mariam's hand strongly and she is left behind. The scene continues as long as Fadi is afraid of owning the truth. While examining war-affected children, it is essential to consider both the stressors and the environments in which they exist. Trauma, war, and affected children are interconnected, each shaping the other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within this development, the child—surrounded by social and cultural structures—becomes the most vulnerable. In Shooting Kabul, Fadi's psychological pressure intensifies as he ceases acting like a child and assumes the responsibility of recovering his lost sister Garbarino and colleagues emphasize the exosystem (community) as a major influence, since teachers, caregivers, and peers can make trauma more bearable. Fadi, however, shares his guilt with no one, bearing alone the pressure of honor and responsibility. Studies suggest boys are more vulnerable to war's effects, often displaying greater social and emotional disturbances (Elbedour, 1993; Kuterovac, 1994; Macksoud, 1992). Common experiences such as "attack," "seeing people killed," and "loss of a loved one" create lasting distress (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Wessells & Kostelny, 2012). Such ecological impacts transform not only individuals but also cultural ways of perceiving and feeling (Welles, 2016). Fadi's relations with his family shift as he grows isolated and ashamed, despite their silence about Mariam's loss.Displacement further disrupts children's networks of family and community, eroding stability and security (Boyden, 2002). Afghan boys, in particular,

may be distanced from the family as they assume new roles under pressure. War threatens the family as a unit of care and socialization, creating economic, emotional, and social strain. Psycho-social consequences often include long-term depression, anxiety, poor concentration, and social withdrawal (Boyden, 2002). For Fadi, losing Mariam's hand marks the beginning of prolonged disconnection. His honor feels tainted, and though remorseful, he cannot share this guilt with his family. Instead, he internalizes responsibility, moving prematurely into manhood under the weight of Afghaniyat, where protecting namus is central. Fadi's failure to safeguard Mariam leaves his cultural identity deeply fractured.

Culture: *Afghaniyat* and *Pashtunwali*

According to Riaz (2021) The Afghans proudly declare themselves as Afghans first, then Muslim. The second theory for understanding Fadi's guilt feelings is by connecting his shame, guilt, and self-blame to the concept of Afghaniyat in Afghan culture, as presented by Mir Hekmatullah Sadat, which, in Fadi's case, is centralized to early manhood in him. In Sadat's 2008 paper, *Hyphenating Afghaniyat (Afghan-ness) in the Afghan Diaspora*, Afghaniyat refers to the cultural commitment and way of life of Afghans, including their beliefs, customs, and mentality. The feeling of Afghaniyat maintains and influences connections with the homeland and is a means to assess involvement and loyalty to Afghan culture. In his 2001 paper titled *The Quest for Afghanistan by Defining Afghaniyat*, Sadat introduced the term "Afghaniyat," which he defined as the essence of being Afghan (p. 341). In the paper *Hyphenating Afghaniyat (Afghan-ness)*, published in 2008, Sadat assessed the concept that Afghan immigrants are descendants who are culturally dedicated to their homeland, or Watan, and that this dedication extended to their lives as immigrants in a host culture. Therefore, the Afghan Diaspora is best understood through the lens of Afghaniyat, which encompasses the Akhlaq-e wejdani (physical behavior), aqa-id (beliefs), and Ananat (customs) that shape the mentality and way of life of Afghans. The feeling of Afghaniyat among the Afghan Diaspora maintains and influences their connections with their homeland and serves as a means to assess their involvement and loyalty to Afghan culture. Additionally, the Afghan Diaspora serves as cultural representatives for Afghanistan.

In the globalized world today, and within the Diaspora, Afghans have the option to preserve, hyphenate, or reject their Afghaniyat. In clear terms, Afghaniyat and Pashtunwali, which is the traditional lifestyle of the Pashtun people, constitute the core of Afghan culture and are essential for Pukhtun identity. As Banting Errin (2003) notes, Pashtunwali is widely interpreted as "the way of the Afghans" or "the code of life" (p. 14). Although scholars have claimed that Pashtunwali emphasizes Islamic principles, Singh (2014) argues that the code dates to pre-Islamic times. Hawkins (2009) describes Pashtunwali as a set of rules that govern how a Pashtun should live and how the tribe behaves, offering guidelines for acceptable Pashtun behavior. Wafamal (2014) assesses the nuances of Afghan cultural segments known as Pashtunwali or Afghaniyat, which include fundamental components such as Nanawatia (asylum), Isteqamat (trust in God), Melmastia (hospitality), Toorah (bravery), Badal (justice), Subt (loyalty), Imandari (righteousness), and Ghayrat (self-honor). Within the context of Pashtunwali, deras, jirgas, and Loya jirgas are unique institutions that aid in conflict resolution within Afghan community and family. Wafamal maintains that Jihad and the culture of suicide bombing are foreign to Pashtunwali and were taught in refugee camps. Instead, he believes that Afghans' true culture is non-violent (Riaz, 2021). Thus, Pashtunwali can play a crucial role in helping the country achieve peace and stability after 2014.

Honor, Afghaniyat, and Guilt in Afghan Culture

Cultural factors shape how gender and age influence a child's experience of guilt, often rooted in concepts of honor. In collectivist societies, children may feel heightened responsibility toward family and community, which increases guilt (Chang & Sanna, 2012), while those from disadvantaged backgrounds experience guilt differently due to stressors like violence and poverty, often linked to emotional and behavioral problems (Leijten et al., 2018). In Afghanistan, cultural psychology frequently forces children to confront issues beyond their years, leading to repression of guilt (Shinwari, 2018). Pashtunwali enforces strict rules where deviation produces shame, with *ghaiyrat* (honor) central to women's dignity and embodied in Fadi's responsibility for Mariam (Akbarzada & Kruger, 2017; Safi, 2014). Family environments further shape shame- and guilt-prone tendencies through modeling and reinforcement (Ferguson & Stegge, 1995; Tangney, 2002). While both genders are affected, Afghan boys are often held more accountable for protecting women, with *namus* as a cultural expectation (Shinwari, 2018). For immigrant families, cultural codes can clash with host values, producing dissonance and guilt in children adapting to new contexts (Duruvala et al., 2019; Friedman et al., 2016). Freud's concept of repression helps explain how such honor-bound guilt transforms into psychological repression, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive approaches to immigrant mental health.

Discussion

Repression and Culture of Honor

A Pashtun must "safeguard the namus with his life" (Senzai, p. 13). When Habib fails to protect his daughter, Fadi internalizes this loss as his own failure, believing Mariam "belonged to him too" and that "he has no respect" (Senzai, 2010, p. 51). The repeated phrase "because of him" (p. 21) places the weight of honor on Fadi, transforming him prematurely into manhood and producing a pervasive sense of guilt. He struggles with anxiety, low self-esteem, and fear, yet repression prevents him from expressing these emotions, even in the supportive environment of America. As repression intensifies, it manifests in depression and stress (Cherry, 2022), deepening his silence. Although no one blames him, the cultural weight of namus makes Fadi self-inflict guilt, and his obsessive desire to recover Mariam only heightens his anxiety.

Namus

According to Parker (2019), repression protects individuals from negative emotions and experiences. In Fadi's case, guilt merges with defense mechanisms as he struggles with Mariam's displacement. Determined to find her, he also fears the consequences of his failure, which, contrary to cultural expectations of honor, intensifies repression. As Senzai (2010) writes, "hopelessness threatened to turn to despair as Fadi remembers Mariam's tiny fingers slipping through his" (p. 23).

Fadi's fear fuels his reluctance to confess the wrongdoing he believes is his fault. When Noor admits to their father that she felt responsible, Fadi sweats, fearing she might expose him: "She is going to tell him… tell him I lost Mariam…" (Senzai, 2010, p. 47). His reaction reflects repressed guilt and lost honor, an unconscious process Freud (1974) describes. Fadi insists, "Everyone thinks it's their fault that she's gone. But it's my fault, not anyone else's. It was mine. I have no honour. I didn't protect Mariam" (Senzai, 2010, p. 23). Although repression hides these feelings, they persist (Freud, 1923). Bound by honor, Fadi consistently represses guilt rather than confess. At school, he despises himself while watching other children play: "I bet none of them ran away and lost their kid sister in the process" (Senzai, 2010, p. 53). His guilt and shame endure,

becoming a core issue that shapes destructive behavior unless confronted (Tyson, 2006). Silence preserves his image as a man who safeguards *namus*. Even when speaking to Miss Bethune, he withholds his role and only discusses the misfortune, reflecting how Afghaniyat silences confession.

The burden of guilt drives him to extreme measures: stealing documents, hiding in his father's taxi, and believing, "This is it. This is my chance to go and find Mariam, and I'm going to screw it up" (Senzai, 2010, p. 71). These actions reflect his attempt to atone by assuming responsibility, aligning with Afghan ideals of honor and bravery. He also enters a photography competition hoping to win a trip that could help find Mariam, but failure deepens his despair. Eventually, confiding in Miss Bethune leads him to a photograph that results in Mariam's rescue. Yet even then, he remains silent about his guilt.

Culture and its effect on Children

Fadi would likely have experienced less complex outcomes had he been born into a different socio-cultural background. Afghan cultural expectations define men as protectors, strong and brave, with their identity encapsulated in *honor*. This view also distorts gender roles: men are portrayed as aggressive and committed to cultural values, while women are depicted as submissive and in need of protection. Such a framework denies men's emotional needs, forcing them to suppress feelings to meet societal expectations. Despite his youth, Fadi constructs his cultural identity through self-criticism and an early assumption of manhood shaped by Afghaniyat. Instead of enjoying clumsiness and play, he is burdened by the expectation that a man must never lose his sister, a standard Mariam's displacement makes impossible to uphold.

Pashtun culture's emphasis on collective values heightens his guilt, as he feels he has failed his family and community: "Everyone thinks it's their fault she is gone. But it is my fault, not anyone else's. I'm the one who doesn't deserve to belong to this family. I'm the one who tore it apart" (Senzai, 2010, p. 48). Religious and moral traditions reinforce this accountability, linking failure to guilt and shame, whereas other systems may prioritize forgiveness. Gender norms also shape his experience: girls may be socialized to feel guilt for assertiveness, while boys like Fadi are made to feel guilt for vulnerability or emotional expression, both reinforcing repression.

Religion

Culture and religion strongly shape a child's sense of guilt and morality. In some traditions, guilt is seen as positive, helping children internalize moral standards and maintain social harmony (Chen et al., 2014, p. 641). Religious beliefs also influence children's values and perceptions of right and wrong (Smetana, 2011, p. 641), shaping which behaviors evoke guilt and how it is expressed (Chen et al., 2014, p. 641). In collectivistic cultures, guilt often arises from actions harming others (Chen et al., 2014, p. 643). Religious teachings stress honesty, respect, and compassion, encouraging responsibility and atonement (Smetana, 2011, p. 140).

Fadi's guilt is reinforced by Islamic rules that designate men as guardians of family honor. In migrant communities, preserving religious identity is a constant struggle (Kilinc & Al-Khattab, 2017). Though victims of fanaticism in Afghanistan, Fadi's family donates to mosque construction in the U.S., where the Afghan community proudly raises a building with towering minarets (Senzai, 2010, p. 193). Such attachments reflect both alienation in the host culture and the search for recognition.

While Fadi's inner world is bleak, he belongs to a community disrupted globally and locally. After 9/11, Habib stresses that "these are not true Muslims" and cites Islam's principle of no

compulsion in religion (SK 113), even as Muslim shops are vandalized and anti-Muslim sentiment spreads (SK 205, 235). Immigrants, stunned, watch the "stark, horrific images" on television (SK 170). The environment fosters conflict between cultures, as Afghan immigrants cling to their identity through food, music, and décor in homes and restaurants (SK 223). Though assimilation seems ideal, Afghan culture remains irresistible, continuing to shape the diaspora.

Peer Pressure in Exile

To live in the community, Fadi must prove his worth as an Afghan. The text highlights the resilience of Afghan migrants' nationalistic attitude, which shields them from alienation after 9/11. At school, Fadi and his Afghan friends represent Afghanistan as a nation rather than divided ethnicities, but when he is beaten, they vow revenge, reflecting their collective identity. His father also stresses unity: "We need to come together as Afghans now, for the sake of our country." Yet despite this solidarity, Fadi cannot shed his guilt, as Afghan culture equates protecting women with safeguarding *namus*.

Mariam represents the lost integrity Fadi longs to restore, while Noor embodies a shift toward new identity. Fadi reacts defensively to Noor, linking Mariam to Afghan *ghaiyrat*, the brother's duty to protect his sister. His determination to recover Mariam reflects the Pashtun belief that women embody family honor. As a Pakhtun, Habib is bound by *Pashtunwali* to defend his family's women with his life, and this extends symbolically to Afghanistan itself. Bernt Glatzer describes *namus* as encompassing both women and the homeland, though in American culture the concept carries different connotations, exposing its fluidity.

Fadi's two sisters highlight this cultural tension. Mariam, lost, represents violated *namus* and the weight of guilt, while Noor adapts to the host culture. On the flight to the U.S., Noor fixates on a fashion magazine (SK 52), signaling her embrace of a new identity and emancipation from Afghan codes. Her transformation contrasts with Fadi's struggle, underscoring the clash between inherited notions of honor and the realities of immigrant life.

The hosts' Pressure

While Fadi's own culture haunts him through his memories, the present time is equally marred by the host culture in the USA. Fadi faces an additional layer of trauma as an immigrant in his community. At school, he is constantly bullied and threatened by his peers, being called names such as "Osama" and "camel" (SK 179, 236). Zizek argues that Muslim children may struggle to fit in at school due to their dietary restrictions and cultural differences, resulting in a sense of isolation and lack of respect from their peers (21-42). As a defense mechanism, Fadi finds solace and purpose in photography, which allows him to view the world from an artistic perspective. In pursuing his passion for photography, Fadi hopes to win a contest, find solace, and reunite with his sister (SK 190). Despite Fadi not expressing hatred towards the host society, he is subjected to racial bullying by Felix, who represents the American hosts affected by 9/11. Donald Kerwin notes that in the political arena, the idea to expel or detain immigrants began within the first week of the attack, with the general population becoming increasingly agitated towards immigrants and their perceived involvement in the attacks. Interestingly, the imam in the novel takes a different stance, emphasizing humanity over Islamic fanaticism, thus creating a softer image of religious clerics. The imam's presence strikes a balance between the two extremes of Islamic ideology and provides a unique perspective on the aftermath of 9/11.

Fadi's cultural change plays a significant role in his approach to guilt, which is positively converted into a greater acceptance of his siblings as his equals. When Noor starts her life in the USA, she

can move and work (SK 161). The author insinuates that more progressive social conventions, women's rights, autonomy, and access to resources could yield positive outcomes for guilt-associated concerns. Noor's financial assistance to Fadi represents a shifting image of the cultural environment and host cultural impact: "She put the money into his hand with a smile" (SK 163). Fadi's cultural apprehensions and views about the idea of "sister" as namus wane; they are replaced by a new cultural disposition in which Noor must work to finance her needs. Dinesh Bhugra, in his article Migration, Distress and Cultural Identity, argues that women in the minority culture tend to enjoy the positive influence of the host culture (129). In Fadi's perceptions, the female gender is depicted as the talisman of Afghan culture, which is fragile and weak, needing to be safeguarded by the male counterparts.

This is mainly because immigrant children like Fadi are humiliated and labeled as terrorists (SK 231) by their classmates, provoking the basis for an antagonistic view of the host culture. The memories and present times continuously haunt Fadi's acclimatization process. Under constant pressure, Fadi is molded into a gullible character who cannot face Felix, an aggressive and confident white teenager (SK 179). Fadi converts his culture-related anxiety into a repulsive force. The scene includes the strategic reference to an "ambush" (SK 267); it is a method of tribal warfare reclaimed by the Afghan children. Moreover, the Afghan teenagers are vigorously engaged in a fight with the schoolboys, believing that an Afghan must take revenge or "Badal," which is ingrained in the minds of Afghan progenies when they assume their rivals must be punished for what they have done to Fadi, a member of the Afghan community (SK 265). The males are under strict orders not to evade the vitality of their cultural identity that demonstrates power, strength, and ghaiyrat or family dignity. Girls are the symbol of Afghan "dignity" that needs to be safeguarded at any cost, even if one loses life in the process. About Habib, the family guardian, the narrator states: "He had lost his sense of honor because he had not been able to protect his namus—his daughter. But it wasn't his fault, thought Fadi. It was mine. I have no honour. I didn't protect Mariam" (SK 51). The older Afghans, such as Uncle Amin, retain their cultural nuances such as hospitality and warmth for guests, but they seem less aggressive regarding other aspects of culture such as dignity and namus. For instance, concerning Mariam, they never connect her loss to Afghan dignity, but when Fadi's father decides to leave his house, Uncle Amin is furious and declares: "As a Pukhtun, I am insulted you are leaving my house" (SK 91). This suggests that Americanized Afghan families redefine their family structure. Meanwhile, SK presents a fear that if immigrants cannot maintain some codes of genuine Afghan culture, they will lose their legacy while living in host societies that rejoice in cultural heritage and encourage diversity.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Fadi's traumatic experiences in Shooting Kabul illustrate how childhood guilt, when compounded by cultural codes of honor, can escalate into long-term psychological distress. Freud's concept of repression helps to explain how Fadi's guilt and shame, initially sparked by the loss of Mariam, become buried in the unconscious yet remain active in shaping his identity. The analysis demonstrates that such guilt is not merely personal but deeply cultural: Afghaniyat and Pashtunwali transform a child's private failure into a collective dishonor, accelerating Fadi's premature passage into manhood.

The findings highlight the complexity of guilt in childhood, showing its close associations with shame, anxiety, and depression. When guilt is maladaptive, as in Fadi's case, it produces a cycle of repression and self-blame that obstructs recovery and undermines psychological well-being. By situating this struggle at the intersection of psychoanalysis and Afghan cultural frameworks, the paper underscores how external cultural forces intensify internal psychic conflicts in migrant children.

Beyond its contribution to psychoanalytic literary criticism, this study emphasizes the broader implications of literature in understanding the lived experiences of displacement. Shooting Kabul not only narrates an individual's trauma but also reflects the cultural conditions under which migrant children interpret loss and responsibility. Recognizing these dynamics is vital for both literary scholarship and for developing culturally sensitive approaches to supporting children and families affected by migration and conflict.

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