



HJRS Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities \(HEC-Recognized for 2022-2023\)](#)

Edition Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities, 3\(2\) April-June 2023](#)

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Link of the Paper: <https://jar.bwo.org.pk/index.php/jarh/article/view/196>

ASSIMILATION OF UNFAMILIAR STRUCTURES IN NEW TERRITORY (AFGHANISTAN) IN GREEN ON BLUE BY ELLIOT ACKERMAN

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Paper Information

Citation of the paper:

(APA) Hamza. Muhammad, younas. Muhammad and Abbasi. M. Ismail (2023). Assimilation of Unfamiliar Structures in New Territory (Afghanistan) in Green on Blue by Elliot Ackerman. Journal of Academic Research for Humanities, 3(2), 129–137.

Subject Areas:

1 English Literature
2 Humanities

Timeline of the Paper:

Received on: 26-02-2023
Reviews Completed on: 19-03-2023
Accepted on: 20-05-2023
Online on: 27-05-2023

License:



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Recognized:



Published by:



Abstract

In Green on Blue, Elliot Ackerman re-accentuates the concepts of assimilation between the familiar structure of war and culture of the center (America) and the unfamiliar structure of new territory (Afghanistan), reflecting the traumatic syndrome of Afghans and imaginative failure in war zones. The textual analysis of Green on Blue in alignment with the theoretical lens of Michael Rothberg encapsulates the confusion of the war on terror and the use of Afghan recruits in the name of cultural pride as fuel on the battlefield. Green on Blue emphasizes bearing witness to contemporary events, vacillating between large rhetorical gestures of the familiar center of empire and traumatic domestic details of new territory. So the familiar structure symbolizes American structure with a blue color as the center, and the unfamiliar structure symbolizes Afghan culture and scattered militant groups with a green color. Only one female character with no imaginative attachment relegates mutual relations to the opposite gender. Afghanistan, as new territory for the American schema of seduction on textual and contextual levels, demystifies the western claims of peace and prosperity after the eradication of terrorism. Elliot Ackerman completely ignores the imaginative aspect of human life and portrays Afghans as vicious and mindless barbarians. He reinvigorates Richard Gray's theoretical perception of failure of imagination only with the exposure of the pugnacious nature of Afghans devoid of humanitarianism. His ambiguous assimilation of center and margin proves the non-conformist alterity of new territory.

Keywords: Assimilation, Structure (culture, war), cataclysmic, traumatic syndrome, prosthetic reach, extra-territorializing, Imaginative failure

Introduction

The study explores assimilation of familiar and unfamiliar structures to expose the western policy of war in new territory (Afghanistan) narrated in *Green on Blue* (2015) by Elliot Ackerman. In post-9/11 fiction, American writers reinvigorate the Western concept of assimilation to form a new constellation of battlefield to exercise power and subvert ideological practices of the local Afghans of new territory. The paradigm shift, in literary products, assimilates prosthetic structure of the content with other territories. Elliot Ackerman, an American commander of Marine and White House fellow, narrates the story of different Afghan inhabitants who are used to damaging resistance against imperialist invaders. The story of *Green on Blue* reciprocates American imperialist forces as center and Afghan public as others of extra territory. The main objective of imperialist invader is to disseminate ambiguity among the common people who are sufferers and do not comprehend their scheme of military operations. In Afghanistan, American forces run an unseen parallel structure of war by hiring poor natives to counter the resistant forces. This exercise of American and allied forces complicates the situation of battlefield to secure their position in the region. On the surface, the people observe this fight between allied forces and local resistant. However, the use of natives against the natives exposes unfamiliar structure of war to lessen the loss of invaders. Amalgamation of these structures produces the complex conditions of imaginative failure for the natives and does not reflect their sense of grievability on international level.

Research Questions:

1. Why does Ackerman frame various structures of war, cultural space through familiarity with local traditions, and policies of the center (America) in *Green on Blue*?
2. How does Jack demonstrate traumatic syndrome of protagonist (Aziz) with

confusion and imaginative failure in local characters?

Research Method

Employing textual analysis as a research method by Catherine Belsey, this research investigates the role of center to form policies of war. The study of the text assures the reader to highlight various covert and overt meanings of the text. "Textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help" (Belsey, 2013, p.160). This research method invokes interpretivism to apply theoretical concepts of Michael Rothberg and Peter Morey to expose the ambiguous nexus of foreigners as handlers and locals as fuel. The researchers develop understanding with detailed reading of the text that interconnects interpretivism with theoretical notions. Textual reading of *Green on Blue* unveils planning of imperialist attackers who hire local inhabitants to counter resistant forces. Belsey highlights the role of research to contribute knowledge for further studies in the same field. The interpretation of text in theoretical perspective helps understand multiplicity of meanings in different contexts. The text of *Green on Blue* is an icon to understand western political and strategic maneuvering to carry out their plans of prolonged hegemony.

According to Belsey, the role of reader becomes more prominent to conceptualize interpretive role of the reader. Text invites the readers to incline for its interpretation of composition of ideas which are often found between the lines. The text of *Green on Blue* demystifies consumption of two different structures working parallel. Ronald Barthes endorses the same point and articulates that "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author" (Belsey, 2013,

148). The reader's role lies in dissection of the composition of text with its artifacts

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework of the study comprises on two main essays of post 9/11 cryptography. The rudimentary concept of assimilation of structures of center which is considered familiar to the readers and other territories which are unfamiliar, has been derived by Michael Rothberg and pragmatics of cultural assimilation by Peter Morey. *Green on Blue* by Ackerman encapsulates three fundamental aspects of assimilation of others' culture and policies of the center. Ackerman as a representative of the center, demonstrates American policy to launch different groups to counter local resistance with affiliation to imported culture and its manifestation through different fields. Peter Morey is of the view that

The contrasts the comfortable lifestyle of its central protagonist, with the global upheaval caused by the war on terror and its prosecution, which has brought people onto the streets in unprecedented numbers. It also attempts to make connections between domestic familial relations and an invasive, brutal outside world that threatens them. (Morey, 2018, p.45)

The novel also resembles a modernist structure of reminiscence of *The Wasted Vigil* which interlinks multicultural efforts in new territory.

Green on Blue (2015) by Elliot Ackerman echoes to expose assimilation of familiar and unfamiliar structure in new territory as a war zone. Michael Rothberg theorizes the concept of familiar and unfamiliar structures representing the center (America) and the others (Afghanistan) respectively. Peter Morey postulates a combination of cultural manipulation and invaders forecasting in battlefield. The study meticulously ascertains strategic planning to engage local groups against each other to reduce the intensity of the loss of imperialist invaders. Theoretical essays of Michael Rothberg and Peter Morey

are useful in readings of *Green on Blue* by Elliot Ackerman.

Analysis and Discussion

Peter Morey (2018) employs a phrase "a degenerating mind" (p.46) to reflect intellectual stagnation of Aziz whose survival depends upon money. His mind succumbs to inertia due to irretrievable loss of family members. Aziz commences his narration as "[t]he war that came after the Russians but before the Americans killed our parents" (Ackerman, 2015, p.04). Despite knowing this fact, his financial position forces him to join American led local Lashkir (a group of local fighters assisting invaders) to carry out American planning. American forces often hire local influential personalities to search poverty stricken people who are instigated to fight against resistant forces. Morey's postulation reflects that "a long line of political utopian movements 'licensing every form of excess' (p.48) where things become very complex for the common man.

The post 9/11 literature reflecting the pathetic situation of Afghanistan and Iraq provides sufficient content to understand strategic planning of the west (America and allied forces) and their war tactics in the field. Literature after 9/11 is "characterized by the transition from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity" (Keniston, 2008, p. 03) to construct an opinion for launching local groups in war to support America. In the avalanche of post-9/11 genres, the western writers construct American narrative to prepare ground for the consumption of local fighter in war against terror. A well-organized construction of narrative "has given rise to a number of hybrid forms" Cohen, 2002, p. 03) to nuance strategic planning. Allen Cohen abrogates western narrative of ruthless revenge and challenges facts of "'corporate controlled media, presidency, and congress" (p.04) to convince the people. Most of the writers after 9/11 relied on assertion by the official sources of American state instead of presenting allusions and citations in their

critical writings. The use of state apparatuses about war conceals the facts on the ground. An attempt to engage local fighters for the assistance of American and allied forces has never been explained in media. This strategy confiscates Afghan social integration and creates a sharply divided and dispersed society. The formation of these structures by invaders finds no space in the main stream media expressing grief of Afghans. This continuous trend gained popularity among the readers to form opinion in favour of the west.

The long term impact of 9/11 changed many dimensions of battlefields and introduced lethal strategic planning. Beigbeder postulates the concept of transition in complex period of war against terror in Afghanistan and Iraq. He is of the view that post-9/11 fictions written about Afghan/Iraqi society “to show how 9/11 continues to reverberate in their lives” (2009, p.05) demonstrate multidimensional structures of war and its aftermaths. Invaders adopt many steps to lessen the intensity of the loss of soldiers and capital to quell resistance of the fighters. Invaders’ victory in the battlefield depends upon the skillful use of media and locally hired fighters. Their target is to ensure direct and indirect representation on the ground to disseminate hegemonic realization in Afghans to create fear and stop their resistance. The physical disaster of 9/11 incident provides a stiff ground to interrogate incommensurability of loss in the West and Afghanistan.

Even, the postmodern fiction of 21st century demonstrates a contrast between interaction and visibility. Familiar structure catches visibility of the public and creates a scene of “want-them-to-see” (Arnold, 2005, p.21). Unfamiliar structure operates through interaction and conceals its visibility. In *Green on Blue*, the nexus of American and Taqbir (local Afghan dealing with fighters on Americans’ behalf) represents unfamiliar structure that actually operates to secure victory in the battlefield as well as media. Local

facilitators cause to decrease the intensity of the loss of lives of American soldiers. The role of American authorities in Afghanistan and Iraq stamps them as center in operating powers. Doug Arnold is of the view that media, politicians and public are essential parts of operating familiar structure supported by unfamiliar structure.

Taqbir as the representative of American forces, works to convince Aziz in predicament. Aziz desperately needs money to continue medical treatment of his brother Ali whose condition is serious and unpredictable for survival. Moreover, Taqbir being a member of comprador class, plays tricks to create cultural Space between American Empire’s culture (center) and that of the extra-territory. Comprador is a Portuguese word which means the middle man between foreign investors and the local market (Ashcroft, 2013, p.67). Mr. Jack, an American commander, formulates a project to launch Lashkir consisted of local militia to scatter resistance of Taliban. In military strategies, America works on different aspects to get favourable results to damage the counter narrative that exposes its aggression. The use of two strategies like force and false sympathies with victims of blasts simultaneously helps establish their roots in new territory. Taqbir, in the guise of sympathizer with Aziz, provides money for his brother’s medical treatment and purchased his allegiance for American forces to combat against Taliban. Taqbir is completely familiar with local traditions and visits hospital to help victims with money to demonstrate his generosity and stigmatizes opposite forces. He catches the emotional attachment of injured family members and communicates to disseminate hatred against Taliban. As Svenja Frank describes that “[a]s the cultural space that is capable of unifying thoughts, emotions, and viewpoints of people who have never met, literary history is employed to demonstrate that communication between cultures is possible” (Frank, 2017, p.259).

For the recruitment in Lashkir, Taqbir reiterates his historical cultural norms which are related to human sentimentalism. He manipulates miserable condition of Aziz in present dilemma of ongoing 'war against terror'. Rothberg postulates this phenomena as "the sense of historical sweep with the keen understanding of the specific dilemmas of the present. It presents the questions of difference, otherness and strangeness" (Rothberg, 2009, p.153). Therefore, Taqbir consumes his money to save Ali's life whose brother (Aziz), in return, joins local militia to fight for honour (nang) and revenge (badal). The victim's brother is in the state of dilemma when he gets offer for money to save the life of his brother who is the only blood relation after the death of his parents. The poverty stricken people of third world countries succumb to economic austerity and political turmoil due to prolonged wars (Bell, 2017, p.23). Ackerman structures local insurgents as the most dangerous groups for foreign forces which prolong their stay in Afghanistan in the name of peace and stability. In the name of cultural protection and personal grief, Taqbir visits hospitals and searches recruits for Lashkir to fight against Taliban. He concocts various stories and alleges Gazan who explodes at public places to kill the civilians. He explains his motif in front of Aziz as "[w]e fight against the Taliban to uphold Pashtunwali (Pashtun cultural norms and values), said Taqbir. The Special Lashkar protects the border and keeps men like Gazan in their place. So you fight for the government? We fight for the nang (revenge) of our homes, but for no government, answered Taqbir. He stuck his chest out in his clean American uniform" (Ackerman, 2015, p.18). Here Rothberg's concept of extraterritorialization for Afghanistan becomes more relevant and centrifugal for American commander Mr. Jack who supervises these war tactics. Afghan soil as an extra territory becomes battlefield for the accomplishment of American plans and Taqbir's American uniform symbolizes center

as an icon of power. American uniform for fight strengthens the concept of center which launches policies to control geo-political scenario.

The whole story of Aziz's destruction of home and massacre of innocent people in Sperkai (Orgun) forces him to join Lashkir. The penetration of cultural norms in his nature contributes to decide for fight against Gazan who is presented the head of Taliban militia in Shkin. Through reminiscence, Aziz recalls his past incident when his father took revenge for his injury. Aziz describes this event that

The man refused and my father didn't ask twice. He struck the man in the face, splitting his lip just as his son had split mine. Before the man could get back to his feet my father left, the matter settled. On the walk home, my father spoke to me of badal, revenge. He told me how a man, a Pashtun man, had an obligation to take badal when his nang, his honor, was challenged. (2015, p.09)

The growth of people with this nature makes them more sentimental and radical. Therefore Rothberg uses the word "radical reaccentuation" (2009, p.151) which is the pivotal point to accelerate reaction against the opposite forces. Inculcation of revenge in the mind of Aziz works as a frame of grievability (reflection of pathetic situation in media) and empathic ties by the acolytes of American Empire.

Since the Russian invasion, Afghan population has been a victim of war and lost thousands of people. After 9/11 incident, American forces along with its allies attacked Afghanistan and killed millions of people in the name of terrorism. Ackerman disseminates ambiguous discourse which interlinks local sense of grief and foreign sense of de-realization of loss of human life and infrastructure. The local population is misused by the center to fight against their own people. The most dangerous strategy of war is to dismantle the ideological forces into small groups and engage them in insurgency against each other. Mr. Jack a special commander for

strategic analysis is deputed in Afghanistan and Iraq to formulate his findings for the enactment of theory of 'divide and rule'. In this ongoing ambivalence of cultural clashes, Afghan people succumb to internal differences created by the center. Therefore, it becomes obvious when "militants accused men of being informants and beheaded them in front of their families. Americans accused men of being militants and disappeared them in the night on helicopters. The militants fought to protect us from the Americans and the Americans fought to protect us from the militants, and being so protected, life was very dangerous" (Ackerman, 2015, p.11). In the name of protection, common people are brutalized and used in war as fuel to protect invaders' interests. Aziz loses his parents in an attack launched by the militants in Orgun and his brother becomes handicapped in a blast in the market. The only one member of the family remains healthy and he is rapped by Americans to fight against Taliban in the name of revenge and honor. These news do not find space in international media for the reflection of persecution of the local Afghan. Their sense of grievability is marginalized being 'others'.

Michael Rothberg postulates theoretical point to establish a strong affiliation of personal catastrophe with ideological cultural norms. The protagonist of novel and various other characters are prepared to retaliate against resistant force due to their emotional attachment and loss of blood relations. Therefore, Rothberg is of the view that "[a]ll life...is personal: cataclysmic, public events are measured purely and simply in terms of their impact on the emotional enlightenments of their protagonists" (Rothberg, 2009, p.154). Aziz and Sabir who are commanders of the Lashkir both have lost their family members in gun battle and explosions. Their private and personal irretrievable loss stirs their hatred and wrath against militants. American discourse catches their personal emotional attachment of blood relations and they decide to act upon the plan mapped out by the

center. American forces and their acolytes have decided to visit hospitals where the victims of blasts and bullets are brought for treatment. The supervisor of the hospital spreads the same discourse of American's policy and utters the name of Gazan a local Taliban commander as responsible for tragic incidents.

The supervisor shook his head and slowly regained his breath. Gazan is a dog to do these things, he said. He's become bold. A bombing in the bazaar! And what will the Americans do? They give so little to those who support them. Perhaps after this bombing they will be more generous, but enough of this. Please, you must be hungry. (Ackerman, 2015, p.17)

After receiving the same discourse from every side, it strengthens suspicion of the victims' family members. So the concepts of revenge (badal) and honour (nang) expedite reaction of the people and force them to pursue the enemy.

Another important phase of Aziz's life begins with training of recruits who are prepared for fight in spring season with Gazan in the border area of Shkin. In the training period, the recruits are treated with humiliation and abusive language is used by a local trainer Issaq. Judith Butler's concept of grievability and empathic ties is very much relevant in this scenario. All the recruits of Lashkir belong to poor families which have already lost their members in this war. Butler is of the view that "dehumanising 'derealization of loss' – or in other words, an 'insensitivity to human suffering and death'" (Gorman, 2015, p.32). American empire and comprador class consisting of people like Taqbir, Issaq and Sabir humiliate their own people in training. Issaq uses abusive language like son of swine and food leftovers of the allied forces are presented in launch and dinner during the training sessions. The recruits are forced to eat naans (earthen oven baked bread) and onions left by American or allied soldiers. One of the recruits tried to run away and he was shot dead by Issaq. Aziz

thinks and says that “my misfortune brought me here” (Ackerman, 2015, p.23). Inhumane treatment and scurrilous remarks upon their loss increase the pains and sufferings of young Afghan boys who are mercilessly trained to fight with local Taliban commanders.

The manipulation of American forces lies in trapping the poor and injured Afghans to use them as fuel in the war against terror. American policy of using local Afghans in war is not reported on international media. Their death toll rises but international community remains quiet. Butler is of the view that the quietness of international media upon the loss of local lives support imperialist invaders. It has been favourite strategy of international imperialist finance to bait the third world country to catch the big fish. A little amount spent upon the treatment of injured Afghans secures American lives and assets in Afghanistan. Here American imperialism after 9/11 instigates the offended groups of local population to launch secret operations against the opposite forces. Actually foreign forces plan to decrease their loss of man power with the consumption of Lashkir as advanced guard. Therefore, in Flojah city of Iraq and Afghanistan, American forces adopt trio-strategic planning to counter the resistant forces. The use of air strikes, formation of local Lashkirs through money and opening of new institutions contribute to pave the ground for victory. These military tactics show desirable results and prolong the stay of allied forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. This assimilation of familiar and unfamiliar structure vitiates the resistant forces against American empire. The schema of seduction upon media foregrounds anti-terrorism discourse in complete alignment with the center. Sabir’s brother Jazeem was assigned this duty to form Lashkir first. Therefore, Yar opens this secret to Aziz and tells that “commander Sabir’s brother was Jazeem, but the Americans called him James. They gave him the money to start the Special Lashkar. I smiled, thinking of an Afghan

commander named James” (Ackerman, 2015, p.35).

Rothberg confronts deterritorialization and is in the favour of extraterritorialization, but in both of these cases American culture is placed as center and the rest of the world is other. This concept of binary of center and margin penetrates in the writings of American novelists who demonstrate superiority of structure in the text. The structure of text reflecting war and culture with binary of power and hegemony prioritizes familiarity of the center to unfamiliar margin. The values of unfamiliar culture are purchased or hijacked by financial assistance or direct assault. In Pashtunwali, hospitality has its major position but Americans have launched program to damage the true spirit of this tradition. When Sabir approaches Gomal and calls meeting of shura (a group of local elders for decisions) of the village a wealthy person named Atal excuses for his important business. But his business is to serve Americans as mentioned by Issaq that “important business! Issaq laughed. With us gone, his business is surely back at our firebase selling the secrets of his village to the Americans” (Ackerman, 2015, p.41). Even in the meeting, members of shura clearly state the current situation of war created by American due their presence in Afghanistan. They have brought enormous changes in local structure of war and created new groups to follow their directions. Therefore Mumtaz as member of shura in Gomal elaborates his viewpoint about the role of Gazan and Sabir in catastrophic incidents. The villagers consider both of them responsible for attacks but reason of attacks of Gazan is due to the presence of Sabir’s Lashkir that operates under American command. His indictment on Sabir is that “Sabir, you say this outpost would make us rulers of our village, but you’re ruled by the American who pays you. To accept your help means we’d be ruled in that way too” (p.42). So the policies of the center change the structure of the culture of new territory with formation of acolytes.

In the complexity of war with multiple groups, it is not virtual to maintain the balance of cultural norms of Afghanistan. Mortaza, a soldier of Lashkir names different resistant groups like Haqqani, Taliban and Heza-b-Islami in his discussion and indicts Americans to create groups to damage Afghan culture. All these groups bring catastrophe for innocent Afghans who succumb to this division and find no solution until American forces stay here. Fareeda a young girl in Atal's house depends on medicine due to her paralyzed arm. She herself vacillates between her wretchedness of life being a member of deprived community and impacts of war in Gomal. Atal, Gazan and Sabir are controlled by American Mr. Jack who forms and deforms groups to continue his hegemony on Afghans. Aziz gets surprised and shocked when he comes to know the entangled frame of war. Formation of different groups and their mutual tussles complicates the prevailing scenario of Afghan war. In the name of peace, Americans arrange killings of the rebel commanders and assign the same duty to others. They hire local people to kill the members of different opposite groups and put the blame upon them. Resultantly, these groups start fight against each other and seek support from American and allied forces. American force has been symbolized as blue in the novel because it put Afghan on the front to fight against resistant forces. Green is symbol of Afghan force that is used in the war on terror through money. So Aziz decides to get rid of Atal, Gazan and Mr. Jack to purify his land but remains confused till the end of his story. For his action, he just says that "no one would know this killing had been a green on blue" (Ackerman, 2015, p.122). Apparently, he succeeds in killing the responsible person but the situation still presents grim picture. Here Peter Morey is very relevant to picturize this situation as a:

An unimaginable sweep of time, numberless generations spawning by infinitesimal steps complex beauty out of inert matter, driven on by the blind furies of random

mutation, natural selection and environmental change, with the tragedy of forms continually dying, and lately the wonder of minds emerging and with them morality, love, art, cities— and the unprecedented bonus of this story happening to be demonstrably true. (Morey, 2018, p.37)

The collaboration between American and Afghan group produces further confusion for ordinary person who is trapped in the name of cultural norms. Aziz realizes this complexity of ideas and vague plans of familiar planning and unfamiliar enactment. The structures of war and culture are comingled in Green on Blue that demonstrate assimilation of center and margin besides leaving confusion. Here Aziz does not understand how to find solution of problems of the people because every stakeholder claims for protection of people, peace and prosperity. On the other hand, they continue war with this belief that "war prospers us" (Ackerman, 2015, p.121).

Conclusion

The study sums up that Green on Blue accentuates to bear witness to contemporary events vacillate between large rhetorical gestures of the familiar center of empire and traumatic domestic details of new territory. The assimilation of familiar and unfamiliar structures of war and cultural norms establishes a complex circle of policies of the center (America). This ambiguous situation of war causes to lose the senses of local Afghans who are used in war against terror. Butler's assessment about the difference of realization of loss in extra territory (Afghanistan) and the center (America) justifies narrative of marginalized community. Imperialist invaders also manage international media to amplify their viewpoint. On the contrary, the effectees/marginalized communities do not succeed in conveying their voice in global politics. As Aziz mentions that "something the Americans made. I then recalled how Commander Sabir kept Gazan in business, and how the Americans kept Commander Sabir in business" (p.123). So, the familiar structure

symbolizes American structure of war and culture as center and unfamiliar structure symbolizes Afghan culture and scattered militant groups. This dramaturgy of power and politics damages clarity of perception and theorizes vagueness. Unbalanced assimilation of center and margin creates suspension for the clarity of both the structures. Therefore, Aziz, at the end, does not reiterate the traditions (nang honour and badal revenge) of his culture in the structure of war. Moreover, the whole story shows obvious paralysis of imagination and reflects traumatic syndrome of prolonged war. Only one female character with no imaginative or emotional attachment relegates mutual relations of opposite gender. Afghanistan, as a new territory for American schema of seduction in textual and contextual levels, demystifies the western claims of peace and prosperity after eradication of terrorism. Elliot Ackerman completely ignores imaginative aspect of human life and portrays Afghan as vicious and mindless barbarians. He reinvigorates Richard Gray's theoretical perception of failure of imagination only with exposure of pugnacious nature of Afghans devoid of humanitarianism. His ambiguous assimilation of center and margin proves non-conformist alterity of new territory. Aziz's ambivalence, at the end, ensures American hegemony and hijacking of Pashtun ethos to create an environment of traumatic stress completely devoid of imaginative or emotional attachment.

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