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THE UNRESOLVED ETHNIC CONFLICT IN KHALED HOSSEINI'S *THE KITE RUNNER*

Khaled Hossein'in *Uçurtma Avcısı*'ndaki Çözümlenmemiş Etnik Çatışma

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Abstract

The tragic state of an ethnic minority group in Afghanistan is the primary subject in Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*. The Hazaras' violent and humiliating suppression takes place in the two narrative levels in Hosseini's novel—in the story level or within the fictional society and in the level of narration or discourse. In other words, repression of the Hazara people is shown in the two narrative aspects of *what* and *how*. Thus, *The Kite Runner* is first of all the linguistic description of the humiliating and uncompromising dominant sociocultural perspective towards the Hazaras. Representing the Hazara people as one of the victims of ethnic cleansing in the modern history of Afghanistan, Hosseini's narrative all in all fails to recognize a desired ethnic identity and dignity for the minority group. As we argue in this paper, the novel deliberately attempts to represent a reconciling atonement for the Hazaras' humiliating repression within the Afghan society. This

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purpose, however, changes into an unfulfilled desire by the end of narrative as the recognition of the Hazara people's ethnic identity increasingly becomes a secondary narrative concern.

Keywords: Ethnic Conflict, The Hazaras, Afghanistan, Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner

Öz

Afganistan'daki etnik bir azınlık grubunun trajik durumu Khaled Hüseyni'nin *Uçurtma Avcısı* (*The Kite Runner*) adlı romanındaki ana konudur. Hazara halkının şiddetli ve aşağalayıcı bastırılması, Hosseini'nin romanındaki iki anlatı düzeyinde gerçekleşir - öykü düzeyinde veya kurgusal toplumda ve anlatım ya da söylem düzeyinde. Diğer bir deyişle, Hazaraların baskılanması, *neyin* ve *nasıl* adlandırılan iki anlatı boyutunda gösterilmiştir. Bu nedenle, *Uçurtma Avcısı* her şeyden önce Hazaralara yönelik aşağılayıcı ve uzlaşmaz baskın sosyokültürel perspektifin dilsel tanımıdır. Hazara halkını Afganistan'ın modern tarihinde etnik arınmanın kurbanlarından biri olarak temsil eden Hosseini'nin anlatısı, azınlık grubu için arzu edilen bir etnik kimlik ve haysiyeti tanımamıştır. Bu makalede tartışıldığı gibi, roman Hazaraların Afgan toplumu içinde maruz kaldıkları aşağılayıcı baskıya bir kefaret yolu bulmaya çalışır. Ancak, böyle bir anlatı arzusu anlatının sonunda gerçekleşemez zira Hazara halkının etnik kimliğinin tanınması ikincil bir anlatı kaygısına dönüşür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Etnik Çatışma, Hazaralar, Afganistan, Halit Hüseyni, *Uçurtma Avcısı*

> - *"Which way did he* [Hassan] *go?"*
> - *He eyed me up and down. "What is a boy like you doing here at this time of the day looking for a Hazara?"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 69)

Introduction

The Kirkus Reviews describes Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner (2003): *"a striking debut … [a] passionate story of betrayal and redemption … framed by Afghanistan's tragic recent past" (2010).* As embodied in the relationship between Amir and Hassan and, later in the novel, in the relationship between Amir and Hassan's son Sohrab, the central theme in Khaled Hosseini's novel is the relationship

between the Hazara people and the Pashtuns. In other words, it is a novel about the socio-cultural state of an ethnic minority group within an Afghan society controlled by the Pashtun Afghans. In Rebecca Stuhr's words, *"This is an important aspect of the novel, because of the inflexibility of the social division between Baba and Ali and Amir and Hassan. Because of the nature of the culture within Kabul and Afghanistan, they are divided by economic status, religion, and ethnicity" (2009: p. 26).* The novel primarily portrays the tragic state of the Hazara people as an ethnic minority in the conventional society of war-ridden Afghanistan during the last three decades in twentieth century. The novel also shows the complicated process of the Hazara people's acceptance into Pashtun Afghan society. The nature of the represented interaction between the two ethnicities reflects the role and place of the Hazaras in the contemporary Afghan society.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic society which has suffered continued conflict among its different ethnic groups. The coexistence of different ethnicities within a society has its own advantages and disadvantages. According to Peter Kivisto and Paul R. Croll, *"Ethnicity [. . .] was in the past, is at present, and can be expected to be in the future both a powerful source of identity and collective solidarity and the underlying source of ethnic conflict" (2012: p. 157).* The various ethnic minorities in Afghanistan have usually been the victims of the long ethnic conflicts in the country. The Hazara ethnic group is one of them. Representing *"about 7 percent of the population of Afghanistan," the Hazara people "are the poorest and most marginalized of ethnic communities of Afghanistan" (Rais, 2009: p. 32).* Their cultural and political exclusion has on the one hand enhanced their identity and on the other hand exacerbated the ethnic conflicts in the country. Highlighting the two faces of the ethnic minorities' exclusion, Kivisto and Croll argue that *"Exclusion is the most common form of ethnic conflict, one that can occur with or without violence—though if it does so without violence, the powerful groups have the potential for relying on force if they meet resistance from excluded groups"* (2012: p. 120).

Representation of the Hazara people in The Kite Runner reflects the historical place and role of the Hazaras in modern Afghan society. Studying "*the relations between Hazaras [as an ethnic group] and the modern state in Afghanistan over three historical periods"* (2017: p. 20), Niamatullah Ibrahimi highlights three significant phases. The first phase refers to "*The Hazara integration into the Afghan state during the 1890s.*" In this period, "*the state- and nation-building processes in Afghanistan required the broadening of relations of exchange between Pashtun centralisers and Pashtun tribal elites to include other ethnic groups in the country."* However, as Ibrahimi emphasises, *"despite some haphazard efforts, the Afghan state failed to create such a broad-based system of exchange."* Ibrahimi terms the second phase of the relationship between the Hazaras and the Afghan state a period of *"exclusion and marginalization, 1901–1978. […] a period of prolonged systematic ex-*

clusion of the Hazaras from the material and symbolic benefits of modern Afghanistan" (2017: p. 20). The third phase of this relationship is "*struggle for recognition. From the 1970s, the Hazaras gained greater collective awareness as a group, transformed their identity from being a source of humiliation and marginalisation to a resource for political mobilisation, and attempted to revive and reclaim their culture and identity"* (2017: p. 21). By focusing on the two last periods in The Kite Runner, Hosseini represents the systematic marginalization and painful recognition of the Hazara people by the Pashtuns.

The first and the most important part of the narrative plot in The Kite Runner takes place around the middle of 1970s just before the Taliban's uprising. The focal character in this part is Hassan. He is a biracial Hazara whose partly Pashtun identity is concealed during his life. He experiences the worst of the socio-political suppression of the Hazara people in Kabul. According to Sayed Askar Mousavi, "*The political suppression undergone by the Hazaras during this period [1929-78] was unprecedented and unsurpassed throughout the history of Afghanistan. [. . .] Throughout this period the Hazaras lived as a nation imprisoned at the hands of their Pashtun captors"* (1998: p. 160). Hassan consistently occupies the narrator's mind throughout the entire narrative and his ubiquitous presence or absence propels the narrator's main actions. In the second part of the narrative, the *"exclusion and marginalisation"* (Ibrahimi, 2017: p. 20) of the Hazaras is symbolized first by a socially respected Pashtun Afghan called Baba, the narrator's father. As a result of his clandestine affair with his Hazara servant's wife, he has a half-Hazara son – this is Hassan – whose identity he hides both when he is in Kabul and when he has to move to the US with his legitimate son and live in San Francisco until the end of his life.

As a representation of the socio-cultural resistance to the racial and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan, the continued denial of the Hazara people's identity happens systematically under the different political powers leading the country and culminates in the reign of the Taliban rebels who came to power in the 1990s. By focusing on this issue, the narrative events in the second part of *The Kite Runner* turn around Hassan's son, Sohrab. In a similar manner to the humiliating exclusion and marginalisation of his father, Sohrab is represented as a victim of racial discrimination. He is excluded, insulted, and raped by a Taliban officer who turns out to be Assef, his father's childhood offender. Despite the official and unofficial marginalisation of the Hazaras, the overall narrative plot, particularly in its second part, is an attempt to reconstruct the social status of the Hazara through restoring their identity and dignity to them even if this is likely to happen only outside the borders of Afghanistan. However, socio-culturally and politically, the recognition of an ethnic minority is not allowed to happen without a blood kinship between members of an ethnic minority, the Hazaras, and the dominant ethnic group, the Pashtuns.

The main conflict in *The Kite Runner* lies between the shared perspective of the experiencing I and his Pashtun society and the perspective of the narrating I towards the Hazara people's pathetic situation in the Afghan society. The narrator's perspective towards them is in accordance with the implied author's ethics in the narrative. The narrator's decision to go back into the war-ridden Afghan society in order to fetch his unidentified Hazara nephew is a backlash against the dominant anti-Hazara ideology in the story level of the narrative. His success in taking Sohrab out of the borders of Afghanistan can be read as the prime example of the impact of the implied author's ideology on the narrating I' discourse. This phase is in fact the narrator's effort of denial, or at least rearrangement, of his own past, and the reality of the Afghan society regarding the Hazara identity.

First Phase: Concealment, Suppression, and Marginalisation of the Hazara Identity

The Kite Runner is a novel populated by the Hazara characters. In other words, it is primarily a novel about the Hazara people. By focusing on three members of a single Hazara family, the novel portrays the grave situation of the Hazara people in Afghanistan during the last three turbulent decades of the twentieth century. The Hazara in the novel are presented as types moulded, defined, and manipulated by the dominant Pashtun Afghan perspective. The novel shows how the three generations of a family are humiliated and marginalised based on a non-changing racist mindset towards their ethnicity.

Part One of *The Kite Runner*, which includes Chapters 1 to 13, mainly presents us the information that is important in grasping the rest of the narrative. It brings the key characters such as the narrator, Hassan and Baba to life and arouses our interest and sympathy (or, in the case of Assef, aversion) towards them. In other words, part one is the main cause of what happens in Part Two, stretching from Chapter 14 to 25. Both parts open with the narration of the same call from Rahim Khan, the narrator's childhood companion who lives in Peshawar, Pakistan, in the time of narration. In part one, the narrator tells us how Rahim Khan's *"fateful phone call"* (Stuhr, 2009: p. 34) brought back his old memories and encouraged him to do what he did in part two. In other words, the novel is a mixture of the narrator's memories and his actions. Choosing a retrospective mode of narration, the autodiegetic first person narrator tells us the reasons of his actions in part two.

The depressing mode of the narration about the Hazara is established in part one. All the Hazara characters, except Sohrab to whom the second part is mostly dedicated, are introduced and described in part one. The recounting process of the narrator's memories begins with his nostalgic childhood history with Hassan who, in the narrator's words, *"never denied [him] anything"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 4). This motivates his exploration of the past life. In order to characterise Hassan vividly, he

introduces and describes Hassan's parents—Ali and Sanaubar whose voices are entirely absent in the narrative. The manner of their description foreshadows the subsequent situation of the Hazara characters in the storyworld. In other words, their representation reveals the sum of the social minds' humiliating perspective towards the Hazara people as an ethnic group.

The main controlling force in the course of narrative is exerted by the narrator's childhood companion and supporter Rahim Khan, Baba's close friend. His call from Pakistan to the narrator and his letter to him provide the trigger for the events in the second part. Rahim Khan himself is a victim of the inflexible, ethnic conflict in his society. The reason he has lived as a bachelor all his life is his family's rejection of the Hazara girl Homaira as a possible wife. He tells the adolescent Amir how he intended to marry her when he was eighteen years old but, when he told his family about his intention to marry "*a Hazara, the daughter of [their] neighbor's servants"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 98), all its members rebelled against him and, in doing so, destroyed his and Homaira's shared dream about their future:

> *"You should have seen the look on my father's face when I told him. My mother actually fainted. My sisters splashed her face with water. They fanned her and looked at me as if I had slit her throat. My brother Jalal actually went to fetch his hunting rifle before my father stopped him. [. . .] It was Homaira and me against the world. And I'll tell you this, Amir jan: In the end, the world always wins. That's just the way of things. [. . .] That same day, my father put Homaira and her family on a lorry and sent them off to Hazarajat. I never saw her again."* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 98-9)

Because of his own first-hand experience, Rahim Khan has the emotional capacity to sympathise with Sohrab. Likewise, since he is aware of the hidden details of Amir's childhood (family) life as well as the nature of his relationship with his father, he sympathises with him and understands the mental tortures in his adult life. These qualities make him into an ideal motivator of the adult narrator's determination to save Sohrab and, by doing so, to soothe his own guilty conscience.

The represented Hazara identity within the storyworld is close to a type, or cliché as all the Hazara characters are exposed to violence, inequality, hate, marginalization, and exclusion. The burgeoning point of this image is coincident with the appearance of Hassan's mother Sanaubar. She is described as a *"notoriously unscrupulous woman who lived up to her dishonorable reputation"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 8). The narrator's characterisation of her is based on malicious and mostly unfounded rumour about her in the storyworld. As an adolescent, he believed in the rumour that Sanaubar's *"brilliant green eyes and impish face had, rumour has it, tempted countless men into sin"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 8). Whatever he tells us about her is the impact of this rumour, or the partial information he remembers from his

young adolescent years, *"I have heard that Sanaubar's suggestive stride and oscillating hips sent men to reveries of infidelity"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 8). The narrative shows the way Sanaubar is socially stigmatized. Nobody, including her own son, dares to mention her name: *"Hassan never talked about his mother, as if she'd never existed. I always wondered if he dreamed about her, about what she looked like, where she was. I wondered if he longed to meet her. Did he ache for her, the way I ached for the mother I had never met?"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 6) The reason for the tacit social agreement to say nothing about Hassan's mother is her debauchery, *"Hassan lost his [mother] less than a week after he was born [in 1964]. Lost her to a fate most Afghans considered far worse than death: She ran off with a clan of traveling singers and dancers"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 6). Sanaubar is in fact presented as a symbol of deviation from the Pashtun Afghan conventions who therefore deserves to be denigrated and banished from the Pashtun Afghan society. She is represented as a statue of shame. The narrator tells us a story which shows how under the impact of the people's evaluation of, and perspective on his mother configures Hassan's sense of shame leading to his marginalisation. One day, the narrator and Hassan walked to the movies through a military barracks, a soldier calls Hassan**:**

"Hey, you!" he said. "I know you."

[…]

"You! The Hazara! Look at me when I'm talking to you!"

[…]

"I knew your mother, did you know that? I knew her real good. I took her from behind by that creek over there."

The soldiers laughed. One of them made a squealing sound. I told Hassan to keep walking, keep walking.

"What a tight little sugary cunt she had!" the soldier was saying, shaking hands with the others, grinning." (Hosseini, 2003: p. 7)

Being a Shi'a Hazara woman in a Sunni Pashtun patriarchal society makes Sanaubar an exceptional case for derision, sneering, grinning, oppression, exclusion, and vehement denial. In a quite different manner, the Hazara identity again acts as the main cause of inflicting mental torture on her husband Ali.

In different periods of his difficult life, Ali is presented as a victim of Pashtun suppression. When two young brothers *"from a wealthy and reputable family in Kabul […] struck and killed"* Ali's parents in a car accident, as an orphan he was adopted by the narrator's grandfather *"who was a highly regarded judge and a man of impeccable reputation"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 24). The close tie between the Hazaras and the Pashtuns in the narrative is established by such a generous action. However,

neither the descendants of this judge nor the Pashtun society welcome this bond afterwards. For example, as the narrator acknowledges, the narrator's father supported and favoured Ali, but *"in none of his stories did Baba ever refer to Ali as his friend"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 25). He is also *"tortured"* in the *"neighborhood"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 38) particularly on the part of one boy called Assef whose extremist perspective towards the Hazaras represents the dominant negative attitude towards them in the Pashtun society.

Ali is represented as physically deformed : *"Ali had a congenital paralysis of the facial muscles, a condition that rendered him unable to smile and left him perpetually grim-faced" and "polio had left [him] with a twisted, atrophied right leg that was sallow skin over bone with little in between except a paper-thin layer of muscle"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 8). His facial paralysis alarms some younger children and invites mockery from some older ones. The Pashtun society makes an association between Ali's deformities and his identity as, in Harold Bloom's words, *"He is made fun of for his gait and also for being a Hazara"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 18). Thus, his physical deformity changes into the primary cause of his humiliation, *"Ali's face and his walk frightened some of the younger children in the neighborhood. But the real trouble was with the older kids. They chased him on the street, and mocked him when he hobbled by. Some had taken to calling him Babalu, or Boogeyman"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 9). As a member of an ethnic minority, Ali is presented in the narrative based on some corporeal features interpreted negatively by the dominant voice in the society. The narrator's intimate discourse in this case portrays the real situation, *"For years, that was all I knew about the Hazaras, that they were Mogul descendants, and that they looked a little like Chinese people. School textbooks barely mentioned them and referred to their ancestry only in passing"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 9).

The narrator's conventionalised information about the Hazara people and his distorted perspective towards them are challenged when he accidentally reads one of his late mother's history books on them. This book presents the Hazaras from an opposing perspective into which the narrator was born and grew:

> *An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan's people! In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras. It said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had "quelled them with unspeakable violence." The book said that my people had killed the Hazaras, driven them from their lands, burned their homes, and sold their women. The book said part of the reason Pashtuns had oppressed the Hazaras was that Pashtuns were Sunni Muslims, while Hazaras were Shi'a. The book said a lot of things I didn't know, things my teachers hadn't mentioned. Things Baba hadn't mentioned either. It also said some things I did know, like that people called Hazaras mice-eating,*

flat-nosed, load-carrying donkeys. I had heard some of the kids in the neighborhood yell those names to Hassan. (Hosseini, 2003: p. 9)

Despite its momentary effect, reading this book does not change his behaviour towards Hassan since his maltreatment towards him is basically out of his own sense of jealousy as well as a reflection of the society in which they lived. At that time of his life, he does not understand ethnicity issues as he does later in his life.

Hassan is an illegitimate child. This has both real and symbolic connotations in the narrative. He is the son of the Hazara Sanaubar and the Pashtun Sahib, the narrator's father. He terribly suffers from the impact of such an embarrassing situation during his entire short life. As a *"towering Pashtun specimen"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 13), Sahib never in his life confesses the truth that Hassan is in fact his own unlawful child. Instead, he advances a double game throughout his life although he indirectly and reiteratedly expresses his inner suffering to his son, *""When you kill a man, you steal a life," Baba said. "You steal his wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness. Do you see?""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 18)

Hassan plays a fundamental role in the adolescent and adult years of the narrator's life. In Lee Erwin's words, he *"acts as a surrogate brother who is able to mediate between the narrator and his aloof father as well as ultimately, in the person of his own son, restoring wholeness to the narrator's marriage"* (2012: p. 327). The narrator's adolescent perspective towards Hassan is a mixture of his own thoughts and the collective belief about the Hazara people. Although he is not aware of the ethnic issues in his adolescent years, the narrator's distorted perspective on Hassan is an effect of the existing negative socio-cultural attitude toward the Hazara people. In other words, as the adult narrator acknowledges, he thought and felt as if he had all the advantages of supremacy, *"history isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion. In the end, I was a Pashtun and he was a Hazara, I was Sunni and he was Shi'a, and nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 25). *"The real impact of their status," according to David Jefferess, "becomes clear when Amir enacts the guilt for his failure to protect Hassan through further brutality against his friend, which ultimately leads to Hassan's exile from the household"* (2009: p. 392).

Amir's awareness of their apparently irreconcilable social statuses acts as the justification for his behaviour towards Hassan. For example, startled by the illiterate Hassan's interest in *"the mystery of words"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 28) and feeling humiliated by his prodigious talent, Amir reminds himself of his own supremacy since Hassan was doomed to failure because of his own ethnic identity, *"That Hassan would grow up illiterate like Ali and most Hazaras had been decided the minute he had been born, perhaps even the moment he had been conceived in Sanaubar's unwelcoming womb—after all, what use did a servant have for the written word?"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 28). Under the sway of such cultural prejudice against the Hazara,

the adolescent Amir justifies his teasing in order to *"expose his [Hassan's] ignorance"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 28). However, compared to the inflexible and hateful perspective on Hazaras of the racist Pashtuns like Assef, his young self's degradation of Hassan is not necessarily based on the ethnic issues. Rather, it is a transient juvenile emotion. For example, when he finds himself *"guilty"* at the end of his second recollections about his maltreatment of Hassan, he immediately seeks atonement, *"I'd try to make up for it [teasing Hassan in order to expose his ignorance] by giving him one of my old shirts or a broken toy. I would tell myself that was amends enough for a harmless prank"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 29). Despite the young narrator's personal considerations on his behaviour towards Hassan, he falls back on the ethnic issues when he feels challenged by Hassan's clever mind. For example, when he reads Hassan one of his early stories and Hassan rightly identifies *"the Plot Hole"* in his story, he does not tolerate his insightful criticism. He soothes himself by humiliating Hassan in terms of his ethnic identity, *"Hassan who couldn't read and had never written a single word in his entire life. A voice, cold and dark, suddenly whispered in my ear, What does he know, that illiterate Hazara? He'll never be anything but a cook. How dare he criticize you?"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 34)

The hateful discourse against the Hazara people in the storyworld is overtly represented by Assef. He acts as the main agent of ethnic aggression against them both as a young adolescent and as an adult. His anti-minority character shows itself from the moment he appears in the narrative. For example, as a young adolescent, he gives Hitler's My Life as a birthday gift to the young narrator. He hates all the non-Pashtun citizens of the Afghan society. His connection to the Taliban in the second part of the novel is not primarily because he is a true follower of their ideology but because some parts of his own ideology echoed in their theocracy. He is in fact a fascist, racist nationalist. In a conversation with the young narrator, Assef tells him about his intention to share his *"vision"* with the *"new president"*[1]:

> *"Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our watan. They dirty our blood. [. . .] Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That's my vision. [. . .] I'll ask the president to do what the king didn't have the quwat to do. To rid Afghanistan of all the dirty, kasseef Hazaras."* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 40)

With his hateful, radical ideology, Assef acts as an outstanding agent of harassment of the entire Hazara family in the novel. Calling them *"the garbage"* he

[1] Mohammed Daoud Khan. As the first President of Afghanistan, he served in office from 1973 to 1978. He replaced the moderate King Zahir Shah who was the last king of Afghanistan and ruled the country from 1933 to 1973.

finds himself *"on a [constant, anti-Hazara] mission"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 284) since his childhood. Besides teasing Ali, he humiliates and rapes his son and grandson—Hassan and Sohrab—and justifies himself on the grounds of their ethnicity. By doing so, he influences the whole course of narrative events.

Assef's hateful plot against the Hazara has two climaxes in the narrative. He humiliatingly rapes Hassan and Sohrab respectively in parts one and two. The two actions change the course of narrative events, influencing deeply both the lives of the victims and the life of the narrator. Assef's intense aggression against Hassan as a Hazara boy shows itself in a significant kite running tournament held in winter 1975, in the narrator's neighbourhood. When Hassan shows determined resistance to giving the last kite to Assef, since the kite belongs to the young narrator and is the proof of his winning the tournament, Assef first blames him by saying he is *""A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 72). Then, he decides to teach him *""a lesson""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 75) which turns out to be particularly violent one and invasive—raping. By reminding them of Hassan's ethnicity – *""It's just a Hazara""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 75) – he tries to persuade his friends, Wali and Kamal, to join him in his heinous act.

Assef's thoughts act as a mirror to the unexpressed thoughts and feelings about Hassan of Amir, the narrator. Assef tells him the truth, the fact that he is only a Hazara to Amir as he is only a Hazara to any other Pashtun. He does so in order to dissuade him from sacrificing himself for Amir. However, since Hassan's loyalty is unlimited and unconditional, he does not submit to Assef's demand. He is raped mainly because of his identity, and in such a traumatic event, Amir's non-action is as effective as Assef's insulting action. The only difference between their roles lies in the mode of their involvement. While Assef speaks openly to Hassan and punishes him for his resistance, Amir in most cases does not tell Hassan what he thinks and feels about him. In the raping scene, he does not want to be involved in the conflict between Assef and Hassan despite the fact that he observes the *"look of the lamb"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 76) in Hassan's eyes. However, in his second chain of recollections, triggered by learning the truth from Rahim Khan about his late father and Hassan, Amir questions his own cowardice and passivity in the raping scene:

> *I ran because I was a coward. I was afraid of Assef and what he would do to me. I was afraid of getting hurt. That's what I told myself as I turned my back to the alley, to Hassan. That's what I made myself believe. I actually aspired to cowardice, because the alternative, the real reason I was running, was that Assef was right: Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he? (Hosseini, 2003: p. 77)*

The moment Amir learns about Hassan's true identity, he begins to re-examine the past events through the lens of his newly obtained perspective. Coincidently, the reflective mode of narration in the first part gives its place to the adventurous one in the second part.

Second Phase: Confession, Compensation, and Configuration of the Pashtun-Hazara Identity

The time of narration in the second part of narrative is close to the time of the kind of experiences Amir describes than in the first section, which goes back to his boyhood and early adolescence. Amir has been married to a Pashtun Afghan called Soraya for about fifteen years without having a child. He is, however, a successful novelist. Speaking to Rahim Khan in Pakistan and reading the letter he wrote about Amir's father's highly protected past life, Amir begins to reconstruct his past thoughts and feelings about Hassan as a Hazara boy. As a result of scrutinising his own past life in Kabul during 1970s, Amir, now in his early forties, questions his own thoughts and behaviour in the past. Being aware of his own grave mistakes enables him to take on the other characters' perspectives as well. He finds out that what he did to Hassan was similar to what his own father did to Hassan's father Ali, *"in none of his stories did Baba ever refer to Ali as his friend. The curious thing was, I never thought of Hassan and me as friends either. Not in the usual sense, anyhow"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 25). He finds a close similarity between the way he and his father treated the Hazara family in their past lives, *"Baba and I were more alike than I'd ever known. We had both betrayed the people who would have given their lives for us"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 226). Amir understands that they both kept silent about the truth. Thus, more than judging his now-dead father, Amir tries to understand why his Baba had to have a double life and felt unable to tell the truth publicly.

Whatever Amir does in the second part is as much a retaliation against his own sinful behaviour in the past as it is an atonement for his own and his father's great mistakes. In other words, Amir wants to make up for his and his father's mistakes in the past. In Rahim Khan's words, Amir and his father are both *"tortured soul[s]"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 301). Possibly, it is because of his own malicious past thoughts, feelings and destructive non-action approach towards Hassan that he tries to come to terms with what his father did to him and Hassan,

> *"your father was a man torn between two halves, Amir jan: you and Hassan. He loved you both, but he could not love Hassan the way he longed to, openly, and as a father. So he took it out on you instead—Amir, the socially legitimate half, the half that represented the riches he had inherited and the sin-with-impunity privileges that came with them. When he saw you, he saw himself. And his guilt."* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 301)

Amir reacts sympathetically to his father's closely guarded secret. Being a realistic person, he is aware of the irreversibility of the past. Unlike his father, Amir finds a chance to visit his childhood neighbourhood in which his behaviour affected Hassan's life negatively. Motivated by Rahim Khan's resonating words in his mind, *"There is a way to be good again"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 2, 192, and 226), and deeply influenced by his indirect suggestion concerning the necessity of saving Hassan's son Sohrab from the hands of the Taliban in Kabul, the adult Amir decides to visit his childhood environment after two decades. His action surprises those he meets in Afghanistan, especially because of Sohrab's ethnicity. In Kabul, when he goes to the orphanage where Sohrab is living, his driver Farid's conversation with him shows how it seems strange for the Pashtun people to do what Amir does:

> *"Amir agha?" Farid said, startling me from near sleep.*
> *"Yes?"*
> *"Why are you here? I mean, why are you really here?"*
> *"I told you."*
> *"For the boy?"*
> *"For the boy."*
> *Farid shifted on the ground. "It's hard to believe."*
> *"Sometimes I myself can hardly believe I'm here."*
> *"No . . . What I mean to ask is why that boy? You come all the way from America for . . . a Shi'a?"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 267)

Similarly, when he finally finds out that Assef is the Taleb officer who sometimes takes Sohrab with himself, he goes to his place. The first thing Assef asks is his real reasons for making the long and dangerous journey back to Kabul. With his highly racist mind, he cannot even imagine why Amir has put his life into danger to save a Hazara boy's life. In other words, his racism has made him devoid of not only any sympathetic feelings but also any mind reading ability:

> *"I wonder," Assef said. "I wonder why you've come all this way, Amir, come all this way for a Hazara? Why are you here? Why are you really here?"*
>
> *"I have my reasons," I said. (Hosseini, 2003: p. 285)*

The anti Hazara Pashtun mentality shows itself again on the part of Amir's father-in-law when Amir finally succeeds in taking Sohrab with him to his home in California. General Iqbal's humiliating inquiry about Sohrab is essentially a question related to the boy's ethnic identity. Despite the fact that he has been living in society in the US for about two decades, he has not got rid of his Afghan Pashtun mentality which, as represented in the novel, is traditionally a centralist, racist one. The one-sidedness of the Pashtun perspective towards the ethnic-cultural diversity shows itself in General Iqbal's words:

> *"So, Amir jan, you're going to tell us why you have brought back this boy with you?" [. . .] People will ask. They will want to know why there is a Hazara boy living with our daughter. What do I tell them?" [...]*
>
> *"It's all right." I turned to the general. "You see, General Sahib, my father slept with his servant's wife. She bore him a son named Hassan. Hassan is dead now. That boy sleeping on the couch is Hassan's son. He's my nephew. That's what you tell people when they ask." [...]*
>
> *"And one more thing, General Sahib," I said. "You will never again refer to him as 'Hazara boy' in my presence. He has a name and it's Sohrab."* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 360-61)

In his answer to his father-in-law's challenging question, Amir tries to draw his attention to the Pashtun side of Sohrab's identity. In other words, as Lee Erwin rightly highlights, *"when the narrator's father-in-law challenges the presence of 'a Hazara boy' in the household Amir does not simply reply, 'He's an Afghan' or 'He's my son', but instead goes into the entire story to prove that in fact Sohrab is not actually a Hazara boy"* (Hosseini, 2012: p. 329).

Despite the socio-cultural resistance to the Hazara identity, Amir's moral decision to compensate for his past mistakes does not change. His atonement is not realized without its costs as he has to go through some life-threatening events in the second part. The more he goes into the heart of darkness in his journey to Kabul, the more he wants to compensate for his past shortcomings in regard to Hassan and indirectly to his legacy Sohrab. In the New Orphanage, Amir learns the fact that a Talib officer sometimes takes Sohrab with himself (Hosseini, 2003: p. 255-56). Being outraged and more determined, Amir goes after the officer who turns out to be Assef, Sohrab's father Hassan's abuser.

When Amir sees Sohrab in Assef's place for the first time, he finds the *"resemblance"* between him and his father Hassan *"breathtaking"* and *"disorienting"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 279). Refreshing his old memories, this scene emboldens him to continue his efforts to save Sohrab. Towards the end of the novel, this mission increasingly assumes the aspect of a symbolic act—the redemption of both Amir and Afghanistan. Or as Jefferess points out, *"Amir's quest for personal redemption may be read as an allegory of Afghanistan's national project of healing"* (2009: p. 390). The manner of Sohrab's description, when he appears in the narrative for the first time, symbolically shows the ethnic minority Hazaras' captivity and helplessness during the Taliban regime, *"His head was shaved, his eyes darkened with mascara, and his cheeks glowed with an unnatural red. When he stopped in the middle of the room, the bells strapped around his anklets stopped jingling"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 279). In other words, the racist Assef tried to change Sohrab into a slave who should

dance to the music of the conservative Pashtun. This is another face of his *"ethnic cleansing"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 284) mission in the storyworld.

Having succeeded in rescuing Sohrab from both Assef's harassment and that of the Pashtun Afghan society, Amir then witnesses a new phase of Sohrab's torture, which is mostly psychological. His answers to Sohrab's simple questions about their past life are not persuasive to the boy, *""Why did people want to hurt my father?" Sohrab said in a wheezy little voice. "He was never mean to anyone""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 319). When Amir finally tells Sohrab the truth – that he and his father Hassan were in fact brothers – he does not know how to answer the boy's questions:

> "*Your father and I were brothers," I said. [. . .] "Half brothers, really. We had the same father."*
>
> *[. . .] "Father never said he had a brother."*
> *"That's because he didn't know."*
> *"Why didn't he know?"*
> *"No one told him," I said. "No one told me either. I just found out recently."*
> *[. . .] "But why did people hide it from Father and you?"*
> *"You know, I asked myself that same question the other day. And there's an answer, but not a good one. Let's just say they didn't tell us because your father and I . . . we weren't supposed to be brothers."*
> *"Because he was a Hazara?"*
> *I willed my eyes to stay on him. "Yes."*
> *"Did your father," he began, eyeing his food, "did your father love you and my father equally?"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 322)

Thus, the damage Assef inflicts on Sohrab's soul is irreparable. Sohrab experiences a major trauma and, understanding this, Amir tries to help him to overcome his post traumatic depression. When a skilful migration lawyer, Omar Faisal, suggests to Amir that he should *"relinquish [Sohrab] to an orphanage"* for a short time in order to apply for *"orphan petition"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 339), the thought of orphanage rekindles Sohrab's traumatic experience in the orphanage in Kabul, *""I'm scared of that place. They'll hurt me! I don't want to go""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 341). Haunted by his highly insulting and humiliating situation in Kabul, Sohrab thinks that he is *""so dirty and full of sin""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 319). As a result of his depression-induced-trauma, he cuts his wrists in the bathroom in a suicide attempt. Desiring his *""old life back""* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 354) relentlessly, his injured soul is not repaired even when he lives with Amir and his wife in California. He mostly sleeps and most of the time he feels *""khasta." So very tired"* (Hosseini, 2003: p. 355). The mentally tortured and distorted Sohrab is the narrative proof of the unresolved conflict of ethnicity in the storyworld.

Conclusion

The pathetic situation of a minor ethnicity in The Kite Runner is an example of the way different minorities live in the less or non-developed countries around the world. The members of a dominant ethnicity in the novel are represented as being culturally legitimatized to violate the ethnic minorities' basic human rights either directly, as does Assef, or indirectly, as do the narrator and his father. The novel presents the identity of the Hazara people as a mixed and hybrid concept of which Ali, Hassan, and Sohrab are the truest representatives. Their life is a constant experience of intimidation and humiliation. The narrator persuades himself both to accept the reality and to tell it too. More than being about the Hazara people, the narrator's adventures are about the moderate Pashtuns. Likewise, more than being a rebellion against the anti-Hazara discourse, the adult narrator's struggle to save Sohrab is mostly because of their kinship. Rahim Khan's disclosing letter about Hassan's true identity and the role of Hassan's own father in hiding the truth give Amir the desired opportunity to alleviate his own mental torture regarding his past mistakes. Thus, by the end of the narrative, the central theme turns out to be the originality of the Pashtun afghan rather than the necessity of racial, cultural, and ethnic equality and diversity in modern Afghanistan. The racial conflicts and ethnic inequalities are in this way marginalized as the narrative end reinforces the hypothesis that the Hazara and other ethnic minorities, without blood ties to the dominant ethnic Pashtuns will remain marginalized and unrecognized in future. Amir is not a civil activist concerned to achieve equality for all groups of people living within the borders of an underdeveloped country. Rather, he is an educated, western-oriented, and enlightened Pashtun Afghan who is ready to put his life in danger in order to defend, protect, and save the moderate Pashtun Afghan identity. This symbolically brings peace and order back into his own life in the same manner that his victorious return with Sohrab to his home in California upgrades his life with Soraya into that of an ideal family.

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