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Identity and Allegiance: The Tragic Life of Hassan in *The Kite Runner*

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Abstract

The Kite Runner, a marvelous novel, is written by Khaled Hosseini, who is an Afghan-born American. The virtual world and reality are combined into an organic whole by the outstanding writer. The present author, in his research, is impressed by the intense tragic style and the social background which is hidden after the tragedy. *The Kite Runner* is not only a description of Hassan's tragic life which was caused by his sense of personal identification, but also a paper that demonstrates the relationship between this sense and the history, the customs, and the national conflicts of Afghanistan. This paper aims to use psychological identity theory to analyze the identity and allegiance of the "little person" Hassan, examining the social reasons behind Hassan's unwavering loyalty and moral retaliation despite being framed and excluded by his master. It reflects the social context of Afghanistan at the time and, against this backdrop, the yearning for freedom and peace of the little people.

Keywords

Hassan; sense of personal identification; manifestation; cause

1. Introduction

This novel, set against the backdrop of Afghanistan, tells the story of the protagonist Amir's betrayal and redemption during his growth process and also portrays the integrity, kindness, and bravery of the minor character Hassan. Despite being an ugly Hazara servant, Hassan is unwavering in his devotion and loyalty to his noble Pashtun masters. Even when faced with false accusations and exclusion by his masters, he harbors no resentment and responds with kindness (Khaled Hosseini, 2006). What kind of mindset does Hassan have? The author believes that this is a typical case of identity and allegiance. This paper attempts to use psychological theories of identity to analyze the identity and allegiance of the "little person," Hassan.

2. Sense of Identity

Research on the connotation of identity is abundant across various disciplines. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson believed that identity is the psychological and social consent ability of the self that runs throughout one's life, cultivated in the continuous development of an organized sense and conviction of the self in social reality (Zhu Guangqian, 2009). The last great thinker of France, Jacques Lacan, who was prolific in psychological research, mentioned in his cultural psychology that identity is the self's identification with the central culture of humanity (Yin Wenshuo, 2023). Many modern scholars see identity as related to a series of issues, such as subjectivity, language, psychology, ideology, power, class, and even gender and race (Wang Yu, 2020; Xu Guoxiang & Guo Fei, 2023).

The author believes that the basic meaning of identity refers to the self's identification with a specific social culture. Self-identification involves connecting one's own value choices and spiritual pursuits with a value and cultural system

that is more prestigious, influential, and inclusive, thereby achieving self-confirmation of one's identity or role and gaining spiritual solace. Social identity, on the other hand, refers to others' acceptance and recognition of an individual's worldview, values, and lifestyle.

3. Hassan's Identity and Allegiance

The author believes that in Khaled Hosseini's famous novel *The Kite Runner*, the second protagonist Hassan's identity and allegiance are roughly manifested in two aspects: Hassan's self-identification and the identification of his surrounding social environment. On one hand, Hassan is very clear about his humble identity and status within the larger Afghan group; he is at the bottom of Afghan society. This is both Hassan's social positioning and his clear self-identification. On the other hand, in an environment where Afghan national concepts are clear and strong, Hassan's extremely humble identity and social status are accepted and recognized by everyone in the larger Afghan group. In the eyes of Afghans, it is beyond doubt that Hassan belongs to the lowest stratum of society.

3.1 Self-identification

In *The Kite Runner*, Hassan and Amir drink the milk of the same woman (Hassan's biological mother)—a Hazara wet nurse. They grow up together in the same courtyard, and the first word Hassan speaks is "Amir." They have been inseparable companions since childhood (Liu Xinyi, 2023). However, such a friendship is not pure; there is an insurmountable gap in the depths of Hassan and Amir's hearts, which is their respective identities.

In his relationship with Amir, Hassan always places himself in a subordinate and inferior position, always ready to sacrifice himself and consider Amir's needs first. Facing the heinous violence of the upper-class Afghan Assef, Hassan chooses to sacrifice himself to satisfy the wishes of his master, Amir. Confronted with the frame-up by his master Amir, he chooses to bear the burden himself and leave, to protect the selfish young master. During the Taliban's rule, he gives up his relatively safe and stable life, returns to protect the master's house, and still refuses to live in the "master's" room, instead guarding the courtyard, ultimately paying the price of his life under the Taliban's persecution. In Hassan's mind as an adult, he still addresses Amir as a "young master." What devotion and allegiance to the master!

As mentioned in this text, self-identification involves connecting one's value choices and spiritual pursuits with a value and cultural system that is more prestigious, influential, and inclusive, thereby achieving self-confirmation of one's identity or role and gaining spiritual solace. Throughout the novel, Hassan does not show any resistance or discontent with the unequal reality, nor does he attempt to change his humble and oppressed situation. Hassan feels that his value and spiritual pursuit is to be loyal to his master, Amir, and in realizing this value and spiritual pursuit, Hassan also achieves the self-confirmation of his servant identity. This is Hassan's consistent identification with his servant identity and his unwavering allegiance to his master, Amir.

3.2 Social Identification

As mentioned above, social identification refers to others' acceptance and recognition of an individual's worldview, values, and lifestyle. In *The Kite Runner*, Hassan's identity is acknowledged by almost everyone in Afghanistan, including himself, but not in a noble form; he is considered to be of a humble and inferior group, always inferior in everything he does. The instinctive discrimination and exclusion of Hazaras by various classes of Pashtuns are evident throughout Hosseini's novel: children in the streets call Hassan a "rat-eater, flat-nose, stupid donkey..." (Khaled Hosseini, 2006); in the eyes of Hassan's best friend Amir, Hassan is always an outsider, an alien, a subordinate person, and Amir never truly considers Hassan his friend, even attributing many unwarranted accusations to him; Hassan's father, Ali, implicitly acknowledges his and his son's status as the lowest stratum of Hazara society, even silently taking on the responsibility of raising Hassan as his own after his wife's betrayal and Hassan's birth from an affair with the master.

Hassan's closest foster father, Ali, behaves in a way that clearly shows his acceptance and allegiance to his own low social status, as well as the acknowledgment of his foster son Hassan's inferior status. This lays a deeper foundation for Hassan's own sense of identity. Raised by Ali, who is also a Hazara, Hassan accepts and inherits his foster father's identification with his own status, just as most Hazaras deeply believe—they are the lowest people in society.

After the Taliban took power, they slaughtered Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif. As an adult, Hassan, in order to protect Amir's house, was persecuted by Taliban officials, and the Taliban, who regarded human life as worthless, were

acquitted in court. Not a single person spoke up, and the reason was that "no one would take any risks for a pair of Hazaras." At the end of the novel, when the protagonist Amir returns to Afghanistan to atone for his sins and save Hassan's son, Farid, upon learning that Amir has come back from the comfortable United States to the war-torn Afghanistan not to sell ancestral property but to find Hassan's son, he asks, "Why that boy? You've crossed an ocean from America, just for... a Shia?" (Khaled Hosseini, 2006).

In conclusion, in Afghanistan, the vast majority of people accept and acknowledge Hassan's inferior status as a Shia servant, which further promotes and deepens Hassan's innermost identification with his own identity.

4. The Reasons for Hassan's Identity and Allegiance

As for the reasons behind Hassan's identity and allegiance, this article will roughly analyze them from two aspects:

4.1 The Effect of Religion

In Afghanistan, the predominant religion is Islam (Fu Xiaoqiang, 2002), and the cultural imprint of Islam is deeply ingrained in Hassan, a Shia believer. The most basic tenet of Islam requires people to believe in and obey Allah, to deeply believe in the existence and greatness of Allah from the bottom of their hearts, and to act in accordance with Allah's will, practicing certain religious devotion, combining faith and action to enhance and consolidate belief.

In *The Kite Runner*, the author portrays Hassan as a typical devout Muslim. The story describes that in the most prominent place in Hassan's small cabin, there is a tapestry with the words "Allah is Great" beaded on it. Moreover, on his way back to defend his master Amir's house, Hassan does not forget to hold up the Quran, and kiss it, showing us his devout Islamic faith. It is this extreme faith of Hassan in the Quran that lays the foundation for his identification with and allegiance to his own identity.

The Quran states, "If you are truthful, then, you should bring forth your proof. Those who believe and do good deeds will have a reward with their Lord; they will have neither fear nor regret." (Quran 2:111-112) (Lin Song, 1991). In Hassan's heart, the path to paradise is to wholeheartedly submit to Allah and do good. In the mind of this incredibly devout little Islamic believer, Hassan has even come to regard his master Amir as Allah in his heart. This is why Hassan blindly obeys and persistently shows goodness to his young master Amir because he believes that those who do good will be blessed by the Lord. He accepts and acknowledges his identity as a Muslim.

The Quran also mentions that all of Allah's creation has purpose and meaning (Quran 21:16), and the purpose of creating humans is to worship and serve Him (Quran 51:56) (Lin Song, 1991). As an incredibly devout little Islamic follower, Hassan possesses virtues such as kindness, purity, patience, and sincerity, which are even more evident when he is hurt or wronged. Although he often sees through the intentions of his young master Amir, he always chooses to forgive and obey because of his worship for his young master and his determination to serve him. Islamic theologians believe that obedience is a basic requirement that is manifested in the understanding, confession, and practice of faith and is the embodiment of fearing Allah in practical actions, without any hesitation or wavering. Therefore, Hassan's identification with his servant status and his unwavering allegiance to his young master are actually concrete manifestations of his devout faith in Allah in real life.

Hassan's identification with and allegiance to his identity is also a manifestation of his devout faith in Allah. It is precisely because of Allah's guidance that Hassan believes his existence is meaningful. He demonstrates his identification with and allegiance to his identity through the character traits of honesty, patience, and obedience as guided by Allah. Religion is undoubtedly an important reason influencing Hassan's identity and allegiance.

4.2 The Effect of Ethnic Conflicts

Afghanistan is located at the intersection of Central, East, West, and South Asia and is a multi-ethnic country. Historically, many ethnic groups and races have merged here. Among them, the Pashtun are the largest ethnic group, occupying a dominant position in Afghan society, politics, economy, and culture, mainly adhering to the Sunni branch of Islam, which is the largest faction within Islam. The Hazaras are the third most populous ethnic group in Afghanistan, historically a vulnerable group, and have long been discriminated against by Pashtun and other ethnic groups. Their status has not been valued by the central government. The Pashtun often constitute the middle and upper classes of Afghan society, while the Hazaras are mostly lower class. Moreover, in Afghanistan, ethnic hierarchy absolutely supersedes other social hierarchies (Fu Xiaoqiang, 2002). Amir is a noble Pashtun, while Hassan is a lowly Hazara. As a Pashtun, Amir is the master of the house, while Hassan is a loyal servant. Hassan deeply accepts this ethnic and

class order, accepting their seemingly inherent inferior status, believing that Hazaras should unconditionally obey Pashtuns and be unreservedly loyal.

Amir reads in a history book: "The Pashtuns have persecuted and exploited the Hazaras. In the 19th century, the Hazaras tried to resist the Pashtuns but were brutally suppressed by them." This detail accounts for the historical origins of ethnic conflict in Afghanistan, which sharpened during the Soviet invasion and Taliban rule, a period that *The Kite Runner* also reflects in its narrative of this ethnic conflict.

Assef, the primary antagonist in the novel, is a Pashtun noble who believes that Afghanistan has always been and will forever be the territory of the Pashtuns, that only the Pashtuns are the true, pure Afghan people, and that the ugly-faced Hazaras should be cleansed from this pure land of Afghanistan. Besides Assef, the typical spokesperson for the concept of hierarchy, various minor characters in the novel also show the same contempt and sense of superiority towards the Hazaras. The soldier who humiliates Hassan at the beginning of the novel, Amir's teacher, the passerby to whom Amir inquiries about Hassan's whereabouts after the kite tournament, and even the various characters Amir encounters upon his return to Afghanistan all refer to Hassan or his son as "Hazaras."

Khaled Hosseini successfully captures the nuances of the characters' words and actions to vividly depict the ethnic and class consciousness of Afghan society. This historically sedimented ethnic and class consciousness has planted a seed that struggles towards the light in the tragic life of the lowly Hazara, Hassan, and has deeply ingrained itself into the soul of the Afghan people. Before the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan had the illusion of surface peace and stability, but the cracks and conflicts hidden between the major ethnic groups and the minorities were a significant reason for the country's turmoil, a crucial reason for the tragic life of the lower-class nations, and a vital reason for the tragic life of Hassan, the representative of the lower-class nation.

5. Conclusion

Hassan, the tragic character depicted by Khaled Hosseini, and his struggle with self-identity and loyal following, evoke profound sighs from readers. In the novel *The Kite Runner*, Hassan's image is deeply impressed upon the hearts of many. Although the teachings of the Quran taught him virtues such as kindness, bravery, and forgiveness, in the ethnically tense Afghanistan, Hassan's life was filled with inferiority, grievances, and bullying.

Hassan is a victim of Afghanistan's ethnic conflicts, and his life is fraught with difficulties. As a member of a minority ethnic group, he bears the discrimination and oppression from all corners of society. Hassan's life experiences and tragic fate are a microcosm of the lives of countless ethnic minorities in Afghanistan. His short and melancholic life reflects the century-old turbulent history of Afghanistan.

Through the creation of Hassan's character, Hosseini strongly advocates for urgent internal reforms within Afghan society. In the novel, the kite becomes a symbol that runs throughout the text. The kite represents freedom, peace, and hope; regardless of the region one is from, the sect one believes in, or the ethnic group one belongs to, the yearning for freedom and peace is universal. Just like that carefree kite, soaring through the blue sky and white clouds, it showcases people's desire for a better life.

Hassan's story shows us the hardships of the common people under the shadow of ethnic conflict and war in Afghanistan. They yearn to break free from constraints and pursue inner peace and harmony. However, reality is often cruel, forcing them to struggle in pain. Through Hassan's character, Hosseini allows us to deeply understand that the prosperity and tranquility of a nation cannot be achieved without ethnic unity and social justice.

In this work, we witness Hassan's growth, struggle, and sacrifice. Although his life was brief, his spiritual qualities have touched countless readers. Hassan's story tells us that no matter the adversity, we must adhere to kindness, bravery, and forgiveness, as these are the cornerstones of the progress of human civilization. At the same time, we should always be concerned about those suffering from war and ethnic conflicts, fight for their rightful interests, and work together to create a harmonious and beautiful world.

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