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Methods of Domination: Towards a Theory of Domestic Colonialism in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

Lauren E. Duke

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Methods of Domination: Towards a Theory of Domestic Colonialism in Khaled
Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*

by

Lauren Duke

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Approved by:

Linda Pierce Allen, Ph.D., Thesis Adviser
Associate Professor of English

Luis Iglesias, Ph.D., Director
School of Humanities

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

Abstract

While the canon of post-colonial literature has been heavily researched, little scholarship can be found connecting post-colonial theory to instances of colonial tropes within autonomous nations, an event which may be described as “domestic colonialism.” This thesis will examine Khaled Hosseini’s work, *The Kite Runner* (2003), as a modern work of post-colonial literature, as it reveals the methods of domination present in 20th century Afghanistan. I will evaluate the text based on the definitions of traditional settler colonialism and anthropological classifications of intergroup domination in order to highlight the narrative of domestic colonialism that is present within the text. Through evaluating Hassan’s role as a subjugated character within the work, including the methods through which his subjugated status is maintained, I assert that *The Kite Runner* is an allegorical text that warns against social hierarchies and illustrates domestic colonialism within Afghanistan.

Keywords: ancestral bonds, ethnic difference, epistemic violence, domestic colonialism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Kite Runner (2003), Khaled Hosseini's critically acclaimed debut novel about the coming-of-age of two young boys in 1970s Afghanistan, is known around the world by scholars and readers as the first Afghan novel published in English (Jefferess 389). The text highlights the dominant ethnic conflict present in late twentieth-century Afghanistan through the relationship of Amir and Hassan as they navigate the politics of social and familial hierarchies. Since its publication, scholarly response has focused primarily on the novel's impact on western audiences in a post-September 11 world. Together, *The Kite Runner* and Hosseini's second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2008), sold more than 10 million copies in the United States and more than 38 million copies worldwide. Because *The Kite Runner* gained global notoriety after its publication, there has been a significant amount of literature and scholarship that addresses its role in popular culture, particularly within Western nations. Bringing a story-line that includes the humanization of Middle Eastern characters to the United States following September 11 has resulted in research that measures American perception, pedagogy on teaching the novel in the American classroom, and the analysis of characters and their roles in various areas of academic study.¹ *The Kite Runner* is typically read by Western scholars as a novel which popularized more sympathetic depictions of Middle Eastern people at a time

¹ In "To Be Good (Again): *The Kite Runner* as an allegory of global ethics," David Jefferess examines the search to become a "good Muslim" throughout the work from an American perspective; in Stephen Chan's "The Bitterness of the Islamic Hero in Three Recent Western Works of Fiction," he critiques the accessibility of the "Islamic Hero," as it is possible only because he is in a Western novel; In "Bold Books for Teenagers: Making Time for Literature with Middle Eastern Perspectives" by Kristina V. Mattis, *The Kite Runner's* pedagogical value is examined as a method to teach western ideas on morality in the classroom.

when American perception and media coverage was primarily negative.² One way that the work is not commonly analyzed, however, is through a post-colonial lens. Despite Afghanistan having never been colonized under the technical definition of settler colonialism, this thesis will argue that post-colonial theory may be applied to Hosseini's work in order to identify "situations of the colonized"³ in his depictions of Hazarajat, a geographic region in which ethnic minorities were historically displaced in Afghanistan. Featuring a subaltern ethnic community of Afghans who are subjected to systemic exploitation and ideological violence, Hazarajat is indeed a colonized region. By reading *The Kite Runner* as a work of postcolonial fiction, this thesis offers new ways to understand one of the most successful works of literature in the past two decades.

Hosseini narrates the story of two boys as they come of age in Kabul, Afghanistan, a region marked by a long history of ethnic strife that has served to divide privileged and subaltern populations. Bound by friendship and blood, the boys represent oppositional binaries within the social hierarchy based on their ethnic backgrounds. Yet, in this story of isolation, power struggles, and the search for identity, the historic lines between Pashtuns and Hazaras in Afghanistan are blurred by the choices Hosseini makes in his work. Amir, a Pashtun, is a member of the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan.

Hassan, a Hazara, is a member of the minority ethnic group that is segregated from and

² See Sunaina Maira's "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and U. S. Orientalisms," which reviews the media coverage of Muslim people in the United States following the September 11 attacks. Her research concludes that the vast majority of media coverage of Islamic people was dominated by rhetoric of fear and western stereotype.

³ Albert Memmi's 1958 text, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, outlines colonial relationships through explanations of various colonial perspectives. In the chapter "Situations of the Colonized," he discusses the methods of colonialization as well as the effect of these methods on colonized people (Memmi 90-118).

suppressed by the Pashtuns; however, Hassan is also Amir's childhood friend and biological brother.⁴ The differences between the boys' experiences are both stark and non-existent throughout the text—Amir is a Sunni Muslim, while Hassan is a Shi'a Muslim, but they share similar ideas about what entertains a young boy growing up in Afghanistan. The ambivalent⁵ nature of the boys' relationship serves as a microcosm of the sociopolitical hierarchy in Afghanistan that creates conditions of the colonized even within domestic borders. This relationship between majority and minority is the catalyst for oppression within the work, and the geographical and social boundaries of marginalization operate within a colonialist framework.

Hazarajat is a region within the highlands of Afghanistan where the Hazara ethnic group was displaced after facing persecution from majority groups, primarily the Pashtuns. Hazaras migrated out of Hazarajat into Iran following an unsuccessful revolt at the end of the nineteenth century, but "colonies remain in these two areas...many north of Hindu Kush, where they were granted land" (Bacon 231). The region does not technically fit within the definition of settler colonialism, as the dominating force was not a foreign invader attempting to "settle" among the people of Afghanistan. In his foundational description of colonization, Memmi describes the "voyage" the colonizer takes to "expatriate" into "exile" (3), to a place "where he does not find a large group of his fellow countrymen" (4), a "colony" removed from "his own country," a place in which he imagines his "return to his homeland" (5). The displacement of the Hazara

⁴ Hosseini reveals Amir and Hassan's shared paternity late in the narrative (Hosseini 222).

⁵ Hommi Bhabha's theory of ambivalence among colonized people suggests that, within colonial situations, both the colonizer and colonized develop a duality of identities that are both positive and negative in terms of colonial relationships.

people was within Afghanistan itself, as the Hazara people were forced to settle between the major cities of Kabul and Herat (Bacon 231). Hazarajat functions as a “settlement” in which the population was displaced by its own national compatriots in an act of domestic colonization. While the conditions among the subaltern population renders the novel ripe for postcolonial analysis, the domestic space of the colonial settlement, marked by intergroup domination, creates unique complications that I will also explore in this thesis. In the novel, Hazarajat is present as a space to and from which Hassan and his family move, from their residency in the servant’s quarters at the home of a wealthy Pashtun man. While Hazarajat was not officially colonized by foreign settlers, there is precedent for evaluating the oppression of certain minority populations within a country as examples of domestic colonization. For example, Native American activist groups have cited the economic, health, and geographic situations on Indian reservations as “comparable to Third World” (Partnership with Native Americans).⁶ Similarly, in *The Kite Runner*, Hazarajat is an area with domestic boundaries drawn based on historic racial oppression within the geographical borders of one country, Afghanistan. The physical separation of the “Other”⁷ in Afghanistan is institutionalized through this geographic

⁶ The displacement and mistreatment of Native Americans imposed by the U.S. government have resulted in today’s reservations, where geographical boundaries are set, and first nations peoples are left to govern themselves according to their traditional beliefs and customs. This displacement has had lasting effects on the indigenous populations of the United States; greater percentages of Native Americans in the United States live below the poverty line, fewer have access to health care, and reservations are overcrowded and unsanitary (Partnership with Native Americans). The situations of Native Americans in the United States have led some scholars to apply theories of colonialization to certain geographical regions of the United States where these populations are prevalent.

⁷ The “Other” is a term used to define one who has been marked by his or her society as different. In literature, the Other is used to identify major themes, as an individual or

partition or boundary. This thesis will discuss how this complication of geographic Otherness creates the conditions of the colonized that allows for a critique of colonial relationships.

While Alessandro Monsutti has recognized the “colonial tropes” often used to represent Afghanistan in literature, he does not identify the colonial situations in Hazarajat that allow for colonial and postcolonial readings of Afghan literature. Monsutti attributes many of Afghanistan’s modern circumstances to British policy in the 19th and 20th centuries, citing the former’s diplomatic isolation as a result of the latter’s “literature [that] constructed the romantic representation of an unruly and remote region cut off from the outside world, a trope that remains influential even now” (Monsutti 271). It is my assertion that colonial tropes are present throughout the novel because Hazaras were in fact colonized within their own country. By assessing the methods and discourse of domestic colonialism as a means of intergroup domination within Afghanistan, this thesis will examine the role of the Hazara people in Afghanistan as a colonized people. Given the ways in which Hosseini complicates these colonial relationships, this thesis argues that *The Kite Runner* is a modern example of post-colonial literature, and presents new and complex images of the colonial identity within Afghanistan. The Pashtun methods of dominating or colonizing the Hazara people are present in anthropological theories of intergroup domination and literary theories on colonization; by discussing the methods of domination referenced in both theories, this thesis provides both postcolonial and anthropological lenses through which to analyze ethnic domination. Reading this text as a

group is foiled by those who exemplify the “accepted” roles or identities of a society. See Said 1.

post-colonial work, specifically through the examination of domestic colonization between ethnic groups in Afghanistan, solidifies *The Kite Runner* as a work which unveils the colonial challenges of places which are not traditionally considered colonized.

In Hosseini's depictions of Hazarajat, as well as Hassan's place in the geographies of Afghanistan, situations of the colonized are present. Albert Memmi identifies "situations of the colonized" as "the ideological aggression which tends to dehumanize and then deceive the colonized," manifested into concrete practices, as the subjugated are trapped by "low wages, the agony of [their] culture, [and] the law which rules them from birth until death" (Memmi 91). In *The Kite Runner*, the Hazaras are confined within a space that creates these colonial situations. The region of Hazarajat functions as a "settlement" of the Hazara people within Afghanistan who have been displaced and forced to settle within a periphery constructed by dominant groups. The boundaries of Hazarajat serve as a manifestation of the "ethnicisation and sectarianisation of economic and political relations" between the dominant and subaltern groups of Afghanistan (Adelkhah 139). While the "colonizer" in this sense comes from within the country rather than a foreign nation, the displacement of the subjugated group into settlements which are economically and geographically Othered mirror the colonial situation. Parallel to the creation of third world enclaves within the United States in the form of Native American reserves, Hazarajat was created to segregate an ethnic population that had been violently subordinated by the dominant group. Though the subaltern populations are left to govern themselves, they are physically displaced from their home territory by a dominating force who employs methods of colonialism to maintain their oppression; their sovereignty is impoverished by the limitations of their settlement, and is ultimately limited to the

settlement. Moreover, the creation of Hazarajat and the identifying term “Hazara” has come to represent any signifiers of ethnic difference in the region, and is used by dominating groups to differentiate between majority and Other—the term is applied to ethnic minorities throughout Afghanistan, despite the region to which they “belong” (Adelkhah 142). In addition, the psychological relationship between the Hazaras and the Pashtuns closely parallels relationships that emerge in colonial situations. Hosseini’s representation of the geographic and social boundaries regulating the lives of Hazaras and Pashtuns serves as an indication of dominant and subordinate relationships in Afghanistan ripe for postcolonial analysis.

The anthropological term for the domination of a majority group over a minority group, as the Pashtuns dominate the Hazaras, is “intergroup domination.” In explaining the idea of intergroup domination, Ronald Horvath writes:

Intergroup domination refers to the domination process in a culturally heterogeneous society and intragroup domination to that in a culturally homogeneous society. In Britain, both inter- and intragroup domination can be found, more clearly so in the past than today. The domination of the English over the Welsh, Irish, and Scots was a clear example of intergroup domination. (46)

The desire for a homogenous society fuels intergroup domination, as the group which perceives itself ethnically superior has the power to subordinate Others. While the domination of one cultural group over another within the borders of one country does apply to the conflict between Pashtuns and Hazaras, I argue that the Pashtun’s displacement of the Hazaras reflects their desire to maintain the heterogeneity of Afghan

society. Maintaining heterogeneity in their society enables them to maintain their dominant power over an Othered ethnic group, drawing parallels to colonial social structures. Hosseini's focus on heterogeneous differences, such as ethnic and class-based distinctions between Pashtun and Hazaras, reiterates the theme of intergroup, rather than intragroup, domination within a domestic colonial situation.

What distinguishes the anthropological concept of intergroup domination from the relationship between colonizer and colonized is the significance of the Other: in the colonial context, the Other is necessary to sustain colonization, whereas in the context of intergroup domination, the Other stands in the way of the goal of cultural homogeneity. In the combined context of "domestic colonialism" that this thesis suggests, the presence of the subjugated group is necessary for the *act* of domination to be carried out, domination which is facilitated by a culturally homogenous group seeking to subjugate Others. Colonization of a place is most effective when there is a group of people to colonize and subject to forced labor and domination. The image that the colonizer constructs of himself is dependent on the construction of the colonized as a foil. These dependencies are reflected in the novel, and allow for parallel readings of colonization and intergroup domination in the text. Colonial situations are present in complicated relationships, as characters in the work represent the desire for a "pure" Afghanistan, yet they depend on the existence of the subjugated to maintain their dominating power in the country. The colonizer relishes in his privilege, wrought at the expense of Others, but also seethes in disgust at the presence of Others; Homi Bhabha describes this ambivalence as a type of fetish,⁸ and this colonial fetish is present throughout various

⁸ See Bhabha 38 – 45.

examples of intergroup domination within the narrative. The relationship between intergroup domination and situations of the colonized in the novel is woven into the social, familial, and geographic relationships of the main characters. These connections between the domination of groups within shared national borders, and the domination that occurs in the colonial situation are exposed in *The Kite Runner*, and must first be reviewed in relation to one another before being applied to the text.

Hosseini builds on three distinct characteristics of intergroup domination in order to establish the power of the Pashtuns over the Hazara characters within the work. The first is a disproportionate distribution of rights and privileges wherein the dominant group maintains power over the market and social structures; the second recognizes that the dominant group sets the limits of the aforementioned rights and privileges; and the third clarifies that the subordinate group has absolutely no share of these rights and privileges, as they have been explicitly denied (Apfelbaum 268). This distribution and seizure of rights is achieved through the aggregation of the “Other” via marking, labelling, and stereotyping. Stereotyping constitutes the primary method of domination within the novel, as the Pashtun characters use physical signifiers of difference among Hazaras in order to stereotype them. The colonizer’s tools of usurpation include systematic devaluation of the colonized; without the construct of an Other’s relative inferiority, colonial power does not exist. The colonizer thus creates a “mythical portrait of the colonized” (Memmi 79),⁹ in which stereotyping is used to attribute fictitious characteristics to colonized subjects. Through what Memmi calls “the mark of the

⁹ For an in-depth description of this portrait, see Memmi 79-89.

plural,” the colonizer aggregates individuals into a group in order to depersonalize their identities, and to create a hierarchical discourse separating colonizer versus colonized (Memmi 85). A similar aggregation occurs to facilitate intergroup domination. Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto argue that “people perceive relatively unusual negative traits or behaviors and relatively unusual people, such as ethnic minorities, as going together, resulting in negative group stereotypes” (Sidanius et. Al 11). This perception is one which is depicted, along with the “mark of the plural,” as dominant groups within the novel deploy stereotypes in order to associate negative cultural traits with markers of physical difference. These methods of domination result in a hegemonic, or dominant discourse (Said 7). Throughout the novel, Pashtun characters attempt to discursively represent the Hazaras, specifically Hassan and his father, in such a way that perpetuates a singular, stereotyped identity for them. These stereotypes also serve to reinforce the dominance of the Pashtuns, who are discursively authorized to assert their superiority by comparison. The ideologies that legitimize Pashtun superiority also justify the suppression of Hazara human rights, thus becoming a method of systemic domination within the text.

While the “mark of the plural” is present within *The Kite Runner*, the ironic role it plays in unifying the Other against a common oppressor is not. Hosseini includes biological ties between the dominant and subordinate protagonists in order to demonstrate the complications among the Hazara people that may prolong the path to revolt. Within the text, the aggregation of the dominated is prevented through the hybrid identity of Hassan, one which complicates the likelihood of revolt and suggests a hope for assimilation or reconciliation. Hosseini also complicates the concept of assimilation,

however, through his emphasis of the power of internalized hegemonic discourse and familial ties. Rather than create characters who individually represent binary subject positions within the colonial situation, Hosseini creates an ambivalence within Hassan, whose conflicting identities complicate one another (Bhabha 37). Hassan's ambivalence is the result of colonial methods of domination, and Hosseini creates this ambivalent protagonist to contest the notion of a homogenous Other. Horvarth's explanation of intergroup domination suggests the implications of creating a seemingly culturally homogenous "Other": the unification of the Other could lead to autonomous power, and thus pose a threat to the hegemonic power of dominant social groups. The goal of cultural homogeneity is expressed by Assef as he asserts his dominance and condemns those who house Hazaras. When read in context of the theory, however, the characters within the text who advocate for cultural and ethnic homogeneity and displacement of the Hazara people are ultimately undermining their own dominant role. The actions of the Pashtuns throughout the novel contradict their nationalist rhetoric: they do *not* desire to create a totally homogenous society—they desire the power wrought from the colonization of the Hazara people. Assef describes exercising his dominant power over the Hazaras in the work as "breathtaking" (Hosseini 277). In this example of power wrought at the expense of an Other, intergroup domination as defined by Horvarth, and the role of the colonizer according to Memmi meet: the colonizer depends upon the existence of the subordinate group, and thus the state's heterogeneity, in order to maintain his hegemonic power.

The erasure and manipulation of the history of the Hazara people within the text allows the Pashtuns to isolate and Other this targeted group based on values assigned through their constructed histories. The "historical and cultural genocide" through which

the identity of a people is destroyed and replaced with labels assigned by the dominant group is present throughout the plot of the narrative (Apfelbaum 270). Without a history, the legitimacy of a culture is challenged. By controlling and distributing knowledge among the Hazara people, the Pashtuns thus maintain their dominance; this epistemological power fabricates truths as characters such as Hassan are not exposed to their own histories or cultures (Spivak 24).¹⁰ Subjected to the dominant rhetoric of the Pashtuns, the Hazara people begin to internalize the hegemonic discourse that establishes their inferiority. Hassan neither enquires about the history of his people, nor does he challenge the social place that has been assigned to him. Hassan's "memory which is assigned to him is certainly not that of his people. The history which is taught to him is not his own" (Memmi 105). Hosseini demonstrates the epistemological power of the Pashtuns in order to expose its role in colonial oppression.

The politics of "place" in the text, both physical and social, also allow for connections between intergroup domination and colonial theory. In his description of the agents of colonization, Memmi identifies the "colonial," a dominant group member who "is living in a colony but having no privileges, whose living conditions are not higher than those of a colonized person or of equivalent economic or social status ... a colonial is a benevolent European who does not have the colonizer's attitude towards the colonized ... a colonial so defined does not exist" (Memmi 10). Therefore, colonial power is inescapable, despite the attitude of the colonizer. Pashtun superiority is manifested in physical spaces within Afghanistan, such as Hazarajat, Kabul, and Baba's estate, as the

¹⁰ Spivak explores theory of epistemic violence in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak."

social hierarchies constructed for intergroup domination result in a physical and geographical separation of the Other. The presence of these stratified ethnic groups within a single country invokes the definition of intergroup domination; however, the societal and physical places occupied by Baba, Amir, and Hassan are those which exemplify situations of colonialism. Theories on intergroup domination and colonialism are able to be applied interchangeably in this sense, as Baba and Amir act as ambivalent dominators who accept privilege yet struggle with their personal relationships with and physical proximity to the Other. Their dominant power is inescapable, however, as demonstrated through the physical space in which they live.

The domestic “places” occupied by dominator and dominated within the text function as discursive representations of “Occident” and “Orient”;¹¹ for example, the place of Hazarajat in relation to Kabul or Herat¹² is Orientalized through the discourse of majority ethnic groups in those cities, which categorizes it as a place where a Hazara would go to “rot” (Hosseini 41). While the domestic relationship between the dominator and dominated in *The Kite Runner* does not typify the discursive conflict between Occident and Orient characteristically depicted in postcolonial literature, it does represent the discursive methods of domination used to separate otherwise geographically restricted spaces. The physical space in which Hosseini places his characters is one which demonstrates the existential significance of the Other in actual proximity to the dominator, so that one’s superiority or relative inferiority is legitimized in comparison. Just as Hassan and Ali’s shack is physically constructed as Other than and lesser in

¹¹ See Edward Said’s “Orientalism,” pg, 1-27

¹² See Elizabeth E. Bacon’s “The Inquiry into the History of the Hazara Mongols of Afghanistan.”

comparison to Baba's estate, the "geographical sectors as 'Orient' and 'Occident' are man-made" (Said 5). While the Occident and Orient serve as abstract spheres in which the West discursively groups itself in relation to the Other, the physical spaces of *The Kite Runner* serve as domestic representations of hegemonic discourse. Hosseini depicts Baba's home as a "man-made" colonized space, signified by the politics of place that reiterate discourses of ethnic inferiority. Hassan's subservient role within this colonized space is constructed by Baba, Amir, and Assef out of necessity, so they may maintain their dominating power. Colonial discourse thus facilitates intergroup domination within domestic settings, as the existence of the disempowered validates the powerful. Despite their vocal support for ethnic purity, the Pashtuns have a need for the heterogeneity of their society: assigning Hazaras "lesser" roles in the space they both inhabit constructs the Pashtuns' relative superiority and helps maintain their privilege. These constructed roles place the dominated in an ironic position of power, however, as their existence is imperative for the Pashtuns to maintain dominance within their geographical space. Moreover, Hosseini recognizes the existence of some measure of choice amidst subordinate populations, as Hassan and his father reject ultimately their domestic roles in order to live in Hazarajat. Their rejection of their roles and relocation into a subaltern community emphasizes the unsustainability of these methods of domination, as the politics of place symbolically assign power to the identity of the dominated.

The ambivalence of Hassan's identity does not allow him to assimilate successfully: the socially constructed hierarchies of race and ethnicity are too powerful, even among the relationships and places that complicate the immobility of social roles. Though Hassan shares the heritage of the dominant group, he is unable to attain the

recognition or position of the dominating class. Even his friendship with Amir is never labeled as such. As the boys go to movies, climb trees, and fight Assef, Amir is adamant that Hassan is “not [his] friend. He’s [his] servant” (Hosseini 41). The roles of dominator and colonizer are blended in this sense, as Hassan’s dominated role within the domestic sphere reiterates the impossibility of assimilation. Memmi explains, “The colonizer knows also that the most favored colonized will never be anything but colonized people” (9). As such, Hassan does not achieve the acknowledgement of his half-brother or biological father during his lifetime, despite the favor that is shown to him due to his genetic ties. Baba himself recognizes that the dominant place of the Pashtuns does not allow for the social mobility of Others, even for those Hazaras connected to them via shared ancestry. Hosseini emphasizes Hassan’s inability to assimilate in order to reveal the complications of his filial ties. Because the Pashtuns do not allow him to be legitimized as a dominator himself, Hassan’s hybridity effectively forecloses the possibility of ethnic identity-based privilege.

The connections between intergroup domination and settler colonization come to a head in Khaled Hosseini’s *The Kite Runner*, as the Pashtuns employ discursive and physical acts of domination in order to Other the Hazara ethnic minority. Hosseini uses the perpetuation of stereotype as well as the politics of place to demonstrate domestic colonialism in Afghanistan. Moreover, Hosseini complicates the trope of traditional settler colonialism through the inclusion of Hassan’s dual heritage, tying him to the Pashtuns in the novel while creating a conflict that both inhibits and aids the inevitability of revolt. This thesis will closely examine the methods of domination present within the

text while evaluating the extent to which Hassan's complex ethnic identity and his roles within physical space act as agents of symbolic revolt.

Chapter 2: Ancestral Bonds and Ethnic Difference

The biological bonds within *The Kite Runner* complicate hierarchies of physical difference, as dominating groups within the work use the Othering of those who are ethnically different as the foundation for their methods of domination. Hosseini presents stereotypes of the Hazara people based on physical difference, rather than actual behaviors. As ethnic minorities, Hassan and other secondary Hazara characters are grouped based on phenotype, which allows the dominant group of Pashtuns to create stereotypes that contradict their identities. Significantly, however, these discursive representations of the Hazara people are undermined by Hosseini's characterization of Hassan, who is marked as ethnically different, yet has Pashtun ancestry as well. In this section, I will argue that the discursive methods utilized by Pashtun characters to dominate Hassan and other Hazara characters create fixed narratives of the subjugated that contradict their ethnic identities. This contradiction deconstructs hierarchies of domination within the work, yet complicates potential pathways to revolt. Due to the linked heritages of the Pashtun and Hazara protagonists within the novel, Hassan's character is able to engage in a symbolic revolt, one which undermines the socially constructed methods of domination within the text. This revolt is also complicated by the implications of familial loyalty, however, as Hassan does not intentionally challenge the hegemonic structures which have bound him from birth. Hosseini's portrait of the colonized¹³ thus suggests the ways in which domestic colonization is especially complicated by localized ethnic hybridities.

¹³ See Albert Memmi's "Portrait of the Colonized" 79-141.

The Rhetoric of Difference

Hosseini narrates the objectification of Hassan by Pashtun characters seeking to assign him worth based on markers of physical difference. Amir recalls, “they called [Hassan] ‘flat-nosed’ because of Ali and Hassan’s characteristic Hazara Mongoloid features. For years, that was all I knew about Hazaras, that they were Mongol descendants, and that they looked like little Chinese people” (Hosseini 9). This initial description of Hassan’s face both Others him and reinscribes social and cultural divisions within the setting of the novel. The physical aversion to the Other by majority ethnic groups reflects their desire to maintain a heterogeneous society in which one culture is dominant over the other, as is the goal of intergroup domination. The aversion itself signifies heterogeneity, and enables dominance based on the reiteration of hierarchical notions of superiority and inferiority attached to these manifestations of physical difference. This distinguishing characteristic follow Hassan throughout his life; however, his filial ties to Baba complicate a totalizing idea of the “Other.” Despite his ethnic classification, which dictates his lower social standing relative to Pashtuns, the ambiguity of Hassan’s biological inheritance resonates. Through the inherent contradiction of Hassan’s discursive identity, Hosseini creates an ironic literary revolt; Hassan’s filial ties to the Pashtuns, along with the change in his physical appearance throughout the narrative, such as the surgery which corrects his cleft lip, thus serve as a genetic and physical revolt against dominant structures of oppression.

Assef’s use of physical difference as a marker for ethnic difference, and justification for creating a homogenous society within Afghanistan, is undermined by the

necessity of the Other in order to maintain his hegemonic power. Hassan's nose is the target of Assef's insults, as he associates the Hazara nose with ethnic and religious inferiority. Assef insists, "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" (Hosseini 40). Although Assef derides Hassan's physical difference in order to highlight his desire for a "pure" Pashtun community, his rhetoric is wrought with inherent contradiction. While words such as "true" and "pure" indicate a desire for a homogenous society, Assef would not be dominant without the existence of a subordinate group. The Hazara people serve as foils¹⁴ necessary for legitimizing the power of the Pashtuns. Assef's megalomania thus undermines his claims of desirable homogeneity: when Assef rapes Hassan, for example, he exercises dominance through physical invasion. This dominance would not be possible if Hassan was not his foil, one who is able to be conquered. This also suggests a fetishization¹⁵ of Hassan's physical difference; Bhabha describes the colonial fetish as a focus on "'otherness' which is at once an object of desire and derision," and explains how "epithets, racial or sexual come to be seen as modes of differentiation" (38). Assef uses Hassan's difference as a means for dehumanization, but also to exercise his desire for domination over and differentiation from the Other.

¹⁴ In Edward Said's *Orientalism* he discusses the notion of foil as a "contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (Said 2).

¹⁵ Bhabha discusses the forms of difference between the colonizer and colonized as "racial and sexual." The subjugated body "is always simultaneously inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power" (Bhabha 38). He states "the stereotype, then, as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both colonizer and colonized, is the scene of a similar fantasy and defense—the desire for an originality which is again threatened by the differences of race, colour, and culture" (Bhabha 45). The ambivalence within the colonizer gives way in form of fetish.

Hassan's characterization of Assef suggests that notions of Pashtun superiority are rooted in a base lust for power. While Assef asserts that he desires a "pure" Afghanistan, in fact he desires to maintain his power over the fetishized subject.

Hosseini strategically waits to reveal Hassan's Pashtun paternity until late in the novel, in order to underscore the irony of Assef's lifelong focus on ethnic difference. Assef's identity is dependent on the inferiority of those around him, yet simultaneously undermined by the inaccuracies of his rhetoric. With this irony, Hosseini provides a literary example of Said's theory of Orientalism. Just as the West creates a narrative about the East based on manipulated images and dominant rhetoric that reiterates a singular cultural narrative, Assef creates a dominant rhetoric based on stereotypes of difference that contradict Hassan's complex identity. Without Hassan's existence as a dominated subject, Assef would no longer exist as a dominant agent, which mirrors the existence of the Orient as a foil for the Occident in Said's conceptualization of Orientalism. Essentially, Hosseini depicts how the Pashtuns have Orientalized the Hazaras in order to construct their own relative superiority. Rather than revolt through ideological or physical methods, Hassan's ethnic hybridity is itself a revolution against the binary notions of "pure" identity that Assef assigns him.

Though he capitalizes on Hassan's physical difference in order to establish his dominant role, Assef himself is also physically different from the Afghans around him. Born to a "German mother and Afghan father, the blond, blue-eyed Assef towered over the other kids" (Hosseini 38). Assef's blue eyes inspire fear among the children of Kabul, and he uses force in order to subdue those around him with his "famous" brass knuckles (Hosseini 38). Attributing it to his Western heritage, Assef believes his physical

difference makes him superior— and he even goes so far as to publicly share his admiration for Hitler. His connection to the German dictator, infamous for ethnic cleansing, suggests the problematic nature of Assef’s discrimination, rooted in Western methods of domination. Assef is physically different from the Pashtuns, but his difference connects him to a cultural legacy of imperial violence and power, rendered through force and maintained by fear. This skewed power dynamic mimics that which is defined as characteristic of intergroup domination (Apfelbaum 268). Assef awards himself rights and privileges at the expense of those around him. As a member of multiple dominant groups—Pashtun and Western European— Assef embodies dominance through his hybridity; Assef’s subjectivity brings Hassan’s hybridity into sharp relief, exposing the claims to a “pure” ethnicity as arbitrary and inaccurate. Rather than “Orientalizing violence,” by providing the Western reader with a work in which the antagonist is characterized solely through Eastern traits, Hosseini provides the reader with a violent character that reflects the Occident in physical appearance (Shabangu et al. 47). Through Assef’s Western lineage, Hosseini’s critique of stereotype is more broad than that of intergroup domination. Assef’s characterization is one which reveals the irony of stereotype both within the novel and to the Western audience for whom the work was published. Once again, physical characterization is undermined in the work, exposing the unstable foundation of discourse that is “not truth, but representations” working to regulate Afghan social hierarchies (Said 21). Hosseini’s depiction of Assef’s hybridity thus erodes the foundation of the stereotype that allows for groups to dominate one another through “an arrested, fixated form of representation” (Bhabha 45). Because

Assef also represents the physical difference that he condemns, its use to stereotype and create the Other is undermined.

Assef's physical appearance is one which ironically separates him from the "pure" Afghanistan he wishes to create, once again subverting the methods of domination within the text. Despite his ethnic diversity, Hassan has a more legitimate claim to Assef's notion of a "pure" Afghanistan via his Afghan parentage, than Assef's Afghani-German identity allows. The presence of dual cultures in the physical appearance and the cultural lineage of both Hassan and Assef suggests a hybridity of their identities. While Assef views the duality of his identity as positive, the threat of Western interference into Afghan culture is always present through his German lineage. The hybridity of Assef's identity, one which combines two dominant cultural legacies both physically and discursively, is one which establishes his power relative to the Hazaras. Hassan represents a different hybridity, one that encompasses the dominator and the dominated; this reflects the classical condition of colonial hybridity first theorized by Homi Bhabha. As Bhabha states, "[T]he interstitial passage [liminality] between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4). In Bhabha's definition, the dominator and dominated are combined into one hybrid identity. Although Hassan is unaware of his hybridity, he represents both Pashtun and Hazara people simultaneously, as the colonizer and the colonized. While his physical appearance has marked him as Other within Afghan society, his paternal lineage contests Assef's claim to be a "pure" Afghan. Hassan's

power lies in his hybridity, as he occupies a “third space”¹⁶ in which his identity does not align with any fixed narratives of societal roles. Bhabha describes the third space as a site that “enables a transgression of these limits [what he calls “the boundaries of colonial discourse”] from the space of that otherness” (38). Though not common knowledge for the majority of the novel, Hassan’s hybrid identity serves as an embodied revolt against the dominant group. Rather than an ideological or physical revolt against his fellow Afghans, Hassan’s very existence is a corporeal revolt against the social constructs of discrimination that accompany the colonial situation.

Hosseini presents the irony of stereotype once again in Hassan’s position as a foil to Assef. Although Said describes the Orient as a foil to the Occident, Hosseini complicates the foil with the hybridity of both Hassan and Assef. Rather than depicting unified, homogenous, discursive, and wholly oppositional identities, which is how Said describes the Occident and the Orient (5), Hosseini’s characterizations align with Bhabha’s notion of hybridity to suggest that identity is complicated by ambivalence (Bhabha 37).¹⁷ Though the dominant group is itself ethnically and racially diverse, the focus on the Hazara as an impure aberration allows for them to create a homogenous identity for the subordinate group, one that is Other. This aggregation, signifying Memmi’s “mark of the plural,” aids in reiterating hegemonic discourse amongst the

¹⁶ Bhabha’s “third space” theory connotes the area between colonial discourse and stereotypical difference. He states “for a willingness to descend into that alien territory may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (Bhabha 37).

¹⁷ Bhabha specifically takes issue with Said’s unifying characterizations of Orientalist discourse. See Bhabha 41 – 45.

colonized, which eventually leads the subjugated to accept their devalued position in society (Memmi 85). The ambivalence of Assef's identity, marked by both his physical appearance and cultural heritage, gives way in the form of fetish. Assef's focus on Hassan's physical appearance is a projection of his own ambivalence: simultaneously embracing himself and rejecting ethnic "impurity," Assef fetishizes Hassan as the subject of his desire and disgust. Hosseini's depiction of the complex identities of both the dominator and dominated does not overshadow the disproportionate divisions of power among ethnic groups in the novel; it does, however, present an irony that undermines the rhetoric of the dominant group.

Epistemic Violence and Physical Difference

The possession and distribution of knowledge, and the power associated with it, is a common theme throughout *The Kite Runner*, one which utilizes the physical differences of the Hazaras as a justification for social hierarchies. Ethnic privilege is maintained through the control of history and knowledge, as the stereotypes that are grounded in the Hazaras' "Mongol" traits overshadow the accurate histories of the ethnic groups in the novel. The reiteration of stereotype between dominant and subjugated groups in order to create social hierarchy is evident in the exchange of dialogue between characters; however, the use of stereotype as a discursive strategy of dominance is also presented through discussions of history among characters. This connection is first made when Amir recalls what he has learned about Hazaras through childhood, building on his prior understanding of Hazaras as "Mongul descendants." Upon reading a book found in his

mother's study, Amir recounts a new version of history, one he had not learned about in Pashtun accounts of history:

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 9)

In this textbook description of the colonial situation, Hosseini depicts a people invaded, conquered, confined to a settlement, and then colonized. The words "quelled them with unspeakable violence" are ironic, as a quelling is a responsive action, generally used to put an end to acts of violence themselves. The suggestion that the Hazaras were met with violence for no reason other than ethnic difference inverts the responsiveness of the quell by rendering Pashtuns as violent aggressors. Moreover, the "unspeakable" nature of the violence, which Hosseini then chooses to speak about—killing, selling people, burning homes, and stealing land—bespeaks a barbarity typically relegated to those less civilized. The atrocities recounted in Amir's history textbook exemplify epistemic violence, as the knowledge shared through institutions of learning within the Pashtun community is

meant to marginalize the Hazaras through the repression of historical accuracy and the introduction of stereotype (Spivak 24). As stereotyping is the tool most closely associated with colonial oppression, this excerpt reveals the methods related to Afghan domestic colonialism that were implemented in order to construct this unbalanced power dynamic.

Representative of the Hazaras, Hassan becomes a subject defined by stereotypes of his physical appearance rather than by factual histories. Said explains that colonial stereotypes are constructed according to a material investment, in order to maintain discursive authority over an Other; as such, stereotypes are established to construct superiority, “*not* the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (21). Despite the ways Hassan is repeatedly stereotyped by Assef and other Pashtun characters in the novel, he is able to gain power as the “aesthetic subject,” power which offers “alternative frames of thought, (by simple questioning as in the case of children subjects), [helping to] negotiate and challenge the accepted epistemological frames” (Raza 3). Amir and Hassan are both aesthetic subjects, and Amir questions the validity of knowledge constructed about his half-brother; by depicting them as such, Hosseini shifts the perspective of the novel from Amir’s psychological journey to a larger dilemma, one of intergroup domination between ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Hassan’s role as a representative of the irony of domestic colonialism asserts an epistemic value, one which contrasts sharply with the role society has assigned to him. Hassan’s role as a child character, who both accepts and exemplifies internal hegemony of the Hazara in Afghanistan, provides an existential revolt from the binary rhetoric that surrounds him. Because Hassan’s characterization allows for questioning of stereotypes rooted in the aesthetic, he is a powerful and subversive subject within the work.

Amir works as an aesthetic subject as well: Hosseini depicts Amir's childish immaturity and comfortable, inherited privilege in order to achieve a resonating pathos with readers. Amir is oblivious to the role of the "flat-nosed" castigation as a discursive tool of oppression and contradicts the social roles which are meant to clearly divide him from Hassan. When Amir first discusses their ethnic difference, he states "nothing was ever going to change that. Nothing" (Hosseini 25). Yet, when describing their bond, he then says "but we were kids who had learned to crawl together, and no history, ethnicity, society, or religion was going to change that either" (Hosseini 25). Amir's childlike naivety is compounded by his own ambivalence. He contradicts his initial point, that nothing could ever change the religious or ethnic difference between them, by immediately invalidating religion and ethnicity as a tool for division. Amir remains ambivalently focused on the physical difference that separates the two boys. Because Hassan did not look like him, he was Other; even as children, both Amir and Hassan have internalized the power of physical difference as a rationalization for domination. Though Amir develops a bond with Hassan, their bond is circumscribed by the limitations of discourse. Amir does not understand that stereotyped difference does not constitute one's identity; because he internalizes these stereotypes and projects them onto Hassan, he presents an ambivalence that resonates throughout the narrative and pushes the plot forward. Hassan's biology once again subverts the dominant discourse, as his role as an aesthetic subject is blended with his ethnic identity. While complicating Hassan's identity, his hybridity allows for a revolt against stereotype and presents the inadequacies of discursive domination.

The text points out on multiple occasions that the two half-brothers nursed from the same breast, and while this does reiterate the fraternal link between the two of them, Amir is still unwilling to refuse the privilege of his dominant status. Amir's role as aesthetic subject aids in the revelation of baseless social hierarchies, but he does not actively aspire to enact social change; Memmi writes: "but no one seriously aspires toward changing customs, language, religious affiliation, etc., even to ease his conscience" (Memmi 37). Amir's words are essentially literary tools that aid in the reader's revelation about skewed social binaries in Afghanistan. Amir's role as child, and as aesthetic subject, is meant to make-up for his lack of aspiration to change, as Hosseini hopes to maintain the reader's sympathies. His role as dominator, however, is forever present, even in his friendship with Hassan. Though Amir never used the phrase "flat-nosed," his recognition of the lack of difference between them and commitment to the idea that things will never change is just as damaging. Just because Amir does not articulate stereotype based on physical difference, that does not prevent him from contributing to the hegemony-perpetuating hierarchies of privilege in Afghan culture. The roles of Hassan and Amir as victims and perpetrators of epistemological violence are brought to light through the emphasis on their marked difference. The irony in this epistemology is only evident to the readers, since the stereotypes are undermined covertly: Hassan and Amir are unaware of their fraternity throughout Hassan's lifetime.

Though Hassan is not conscious of the complexity of his identity, he accepts his place in society due to the "knowledge" he has accrued about himself and others. At one point, Hassan pleads with Assef to stop bullying him and Amir, saying "Please leave us alone, Agha" (42). The narrator immediately notices Hassan's deferential behavior,

signaled by the polite use of “Please” and the honorific “Agha.” Hosseini writes, “He referred to Assef as ‘Agha,’ and [Amir] wondered briefly what it must be like to live with such an ingrained sense of one’s place in a hierarchy” (Hosseini 42). The irony in Amir’s dialogue is apparent from his place as an aesthetic subject; Amir does know what it is like to live with an ingrained sense of one’s place in a hierarchy, but his sense of place is not visible to him because he is privileged. Because of Amir’s privilege, he has easily assimilated into the roles this hierarchy has assigned him: those of dominator and usurper.¹⁸ Hassan has also internalized these discursive hierarchies and himself believes that he is subordinate based on the stereotypes that are constantly reiterated; as a child, he is unable to challenge those roles due to the knowledge that has been kept from him. Hassan can only respond with the rhetoric which has been taught to him from birth. Only when Hassan surpasses the epistemological constraints which have bound him is he finally able to revolt from the rhetoric of the dominator.

The hierarchy to which Amir refers is one which emerges initially from religious differences, but becomes codified as an ethnic and class-based hierarchy and mediated through stereotyped assessments of physical appearance. In an example of the ways in which discourse can create “a will to power and knowledge” (Bhabha 40), Hassan accepts the subordinate role that these stereotypes discursively assign him, and remains illiterate for the majority of his childhood. When Hassan writes to Amir as an adult, he states “the savages that rule our *watan* don’t care about human decency” (Hosseini 216). In this letter, Hassan is revolting from his epistemological constraints, writing and expressing his ability to reclaim his power against the constructed histories of

¹⁸ See Memmi 52.

his oppressors. Through the assertion of his critical voice, Hassan proves success over the epistemic constraints which bound him through childhood, keeping him illiterate. He also uses the language of the dominator against him, using words such as “savages” to characterize their actions. In his letters, Hassan is speaking out against the dehumanizing practices of the Pashtuns in Afghanistan. Hassan is granted an epistemic power that was initially denied him due to his ethnicity, thus revolting from the role of the Hazara in Afghanistan. The language of Hassan’s letter alludes to Aimé Césaire’s “boomerang effect”: “The colonizer, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms himself to threatening him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal” (Césaire 20). Hassan’s use of the word “savage” serves as a reversal of the hegemonic discourse which has stereotyped the Hazara people throughout the novel. Hassan is not only revolting through the exercise of literary power; he is redirecting rhetoric which devalues the colonizer. Hassan’s epistemological agency undermines existing social hierarchies, and serves as a rhetorical revolt against his oppressors.

While some implications of Hassan’s lineage are complicated by the prolonged secrecy surrounding his true parentage, these familial ties are transparent to the reader. This transparency serves to reiterate the absurdity of social hierarchies as the reader becomes complicit in the secret that undermines stereotypes about Hassan and all Hazaras. Joseph Slaughter suggests that the thematic message of the work is not one which encourages the rejection of socially constructed hierarchal systems between groups in Afghanistan; rather it is one which warns against rejection of family, or fellow Pashtuns. He writes:

Hassan turns out to be Amir's half-brother, and, given their shared patrimony, Amir's redemption [of Hassan's son] represents not so much an overcoming of ethnic prejudices [. . .] as a reunification of the natural family. This plot logic [. . .] does not suggest that Pashtuns should, in principle, treat Hazaras with dignity [. . .]; rather, it warns that some Hazaras may be Pashtuns, by nature (birth) if not by social convention. (Slaughter 321)

Though the reunification of the "family" is certainly one implication of Hosseini's narrative, Slaughter's postulation does not leave room for an evaluation of the work as a symbolic revolt. The ethnic lineage that connects Hassan to the Pashtuns does not negate his revolt against the stereotype; on the contrary, Hosseini's revelation undermines the basis for the stereotype itself. As Bhabha explains, "To recognize the stereotype as an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power demands a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic or functionalist modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse and politics" (37). When Hassan's biological father is revealed, his connection to the dominant group deconstructs the strict binary categories separating Pashtuns from Hazaras; in this way, the foundation of the dominant rhetoric justifying the subordination of Hazaras is discredited by Hassan's hybridity, and the fragilities of the hegemonic discourse and manipulated history are revealed in turn.

Chapter 3: Revolt within a Dominating Space

While domestic colonialism in Afghanistan geographically separated Hazara peoples into the region of Hazarajat, Hosseini highlights the geography of the colonized space to demonstrate asymmetric distributions of power within Afghanistan. Hazarajat's geopolitical classification as a subordinate, colonized settlement is complicated by familial ties that undermine distributions of power within the domestic space. Hassan's socioeconomic status is marked by place, as he moves from the servant's quarters of his father's home, to the subordinate settlement of Hazarajat, then back to the servant's hut in which he was raised. Amir and Hassan do not "innocently represent the merely idiosyncratic characteristics of children. Rather, they embody the supposed values and representations of the geographies to which they belong" (Shabangu et. al 49). The relationship between the two boys is one which was established based on economic difference that resulted from the geographies of privilege. Hosseini illustrates dominating spaces within Afghanistan primarily within two settings. First, Hosseini references the existence of Hazarajat, via the rhetoric of Afghan nationalists within the work. Identified in opposition to the dominating space of Kabul, Hazarajat is created through rhetoric based on stereotype, rooted in socially constructed signifiers of ethnic difference. The space which most symbolically presents the implications of domestic colonialism, however, is Baba's estate. Reducing the larger issue of class conflict to the geography of Amir's home and Kabul, Hosseini characterizes Hassan as representative of the dominated, relegated to the role of servant by dominant economic and ethnic groups. Yet, Hassan is simultaneously Baba's son, and his filial and fraternal ties to the house of a Pashtun patriarch invoke complex familial relationships that undermine the geopolitical hierarchies that would render him subservient. Hosseini complicates these relationships

in order to suggest that revolt is possible in a state bound by nationhood yet divided by constructed geographies of difference.

The “Place” and Immobility of the Dominated

Hazarajat, in the mountainous region of central Afghanistan, is a settlement characterized by intergroup domination and domestic colonialism. The existence of the region is necessary as a foil for morally superior Pashtuns claiming a “pure” Afghan lineage. The construction of Pashtun superiority, pride, and purity was facilitated by religious extremists, Afghan nationalists, and the Taliban. By grouping the Hazaras in Afghanistan into a region that lacks resources and economic opportunity, “the colonizer asserts [the colonized’s] fundamental and complete immobility” (Memmi 113).

Hazarajat represents this social separation through a geographically separate place that literally divides and isolates an ethnic group from opportunities for social and physical mobility. The colonizer facilitates this immobility in order to solidify and maintain the powers which he has awarded himself. The history of the boundaries between Shi’a and Sunni Muslims is extensive, as “religious difference, geographical separation, economic subordination and phenotype act together, constituting strong boundaries between them and the other ethnicities of the country” (Harpviken 278). The Hazara characters throughout the novel are subjugated based on economic inequity, racial stereotype, and geographic separation. Hazarajat is a region that was socially constructed in order to separate people, create hierarchies, and identify an Other in Afghan society. Thus, Hazarajat itself represents the socially constructed racial and ethnic biases that are perpetuated in the dominant discourse of the country. By creating domestic boundaries

within a country's borders, dominant groups produce a seemingly homogenous society that maintains its power through the dominance of an Other. Though Hazarajat is geographically separate from Afghanistan's major cities, they are not autonomous: many radical Sunni Muslim groups and Taliban members enter the space in order to persecute the Hazaras. Though the region is never the central setting of the work, it is always present, as stereotype and insult are often accompanied by reminders of geographic Otherness.

While Hazarajat is a segregated region within Afghanistan, the implications of its construction by dominant groups are present in the novel, through interactions between characters in Kabul. Hosseini's language highlights the subordinate status of those hailing from Hazarajat in order to Other Hassan; for example, when complaining to Amir about Hassan, Assef asserts, "if you and your father didn't take these people in, we'd be rid of them by now. They'd all just go rot in Hazarajat where they belong. You're a disgrace to Afghanistan" (Hosseini 41). Assef's statement suggests that Hazarajat and Afghanistan are separate entities, as if the displacement of Hazaras to the region was one which would eliminate them from Afghanistan. Hazarajat is *within* Afghanistan, however, so "belonging" in the region is literally belonging in Afghanistan, as an Afghan. The irony of this language is apparent, but does not change the powerful fabrications which construct social hierarchies and segregation. By referring to Hassan as "these people," Assef essentializes those who connect to Hazarajat, either in appearance, origin, or religion, as subordinate and Other. Again, Assef utilizes the "mark of the plural" in order to group the Other as subordinate in relation to his dominant place. Hazarajat thus serves as a colonized space, in which the subjugated exists in relation to their dominators.

Assef Orientalizes Hazarajat, framing it in order to contrast it with the ethnic majority in Afghanistan; the creation of Hazarajat is “an act of delimitation by which something is cut out of a great mass of material, separated from the mass, and made to stand for, as well as be” (Said 16). Thus, the region stands for socially constructed difference between members of the same nationality based on ethnic difference. Its existence suggests a geographic and social immobility that serves to maintain the privilege of the dominant group.

By mimicking the geographic isolation of Hazarajat within the domestic sphere, Hosseini creates an image of subjugation between ethnic groups that is both restrictive and unsanctioned. Amir describes Baba’s estate at length, stating that he had “built the most beautiful house in the Wazir Akbar Khan district, a new and affluent neighborhood in the northern part of Kabul” (Hosseini 4). This detailed location of the house suggests the significance of its place. Baba deliberately chose the location in an “affluent” area, which contrasts with the Hazara’s lack of choice in the placement of Hazarajat in an area of the country that was not rich with resources. The specificity of the home’s location also contrasts with descriptions of Hazarajat in the novel: while Hazarajat’s existence is mentioned, its geographic location is not. Hosseini is subtly instructing the reader to look for domination within the estate itself, as it becomes a clear representation of social inequity that illustrates domestic colonialism in Afghanistan on a smaller scale.

Baba’s home symbolizes Afghanistan, not only in its characterization as a gated, autonomous entity, but through the people and structures within it. The detailed descriptions of each room in the house, the “sprawling” estate contained “intricate mosaic tiles, handpicked by Baba in Isfahan,” are juxtaposed with the descriptions of the home of

Hassan and his father, Ali (Hosseini 4). Far behind the house, “on the south end of the garden, in the shadows of a loquat tree, was the servants’ home, a modest little hut where Hassan lived with his father” (Hosseini 6). The “shadows” to which the Hazaras on the estate are displaced mirror the geographic displacement of the Hazaras in Afghanistan. The shadows also suggest a lack of fruitfulness in comparison to the rest of the estate. Amir describes a terrace that opens to “rows of cherry trees” and a “small vegetable garden among the eastern wall,” all of which would not be possible in a land that only lives in shadows (Hosseini 5). Placing the hut in the shadows of a loquat tree symbolizes the implications of life in Hazarajat, wherein Hazaras have been geographically uprooted and confined to impotent land in an otherwise fruitful nation. Hosseini emphasizes the smallness of the servants’ quarters compared to that of Baba’s home, using words such as “modest” and “little”; these descriptors also mirror the subservient position of Hazaras in Baba’s household, as well as the ways in which Hassan and his father have internalized an acceptance of their positions. Through his depictions of the geographies of privilege and subordination, Hosseini is able to emphasize the place-bound and cultural significance of the each character in the work.

Hassan engages in a symbolic revolt against his own immobility, when he migrates to and from Hazarajat of his own free will. Once Hassan and Ali leave, Amir is left alone within the confines of home and loses his power within his dominating space. Hassan and Ali’s displacement to Hazarajat parallels the displacement of Hazaras in Afghanistan due to domestic colonialism; however, it also serves as a deconstruction of the dominant power within the home. As the servant rejects his post and chooses to return to the geographic boundaries that separate him from the master, he is taking away

the immediate power of the subjugator. Even as Baba begs Hassan and Ali to stay, his dominant power is present. He says “I forbid you to do this...Do you hear me I forbid you!” (Hosseini 107). Hassan and Ali’s choice to leave is an assertion of their autonomy, arising from their refusal of Baba’s commands. Hassan finally denies his duty as a servant in his dominator’s estate and leaves for Hazarajat. Hassan maintains his social roles, but revolts from the constraints the domestic space. Hassan’s duty to maintain his role within socially constructed boundaries is simultaneously a revolt against his colonizers, as he refuses Baba’s pleas to stay. When Hassan returns from Hazarajat as an adult, to live with Rahim Khan in Baba’s estate, he occupies the hut in which he lived as a child, out of respect to his Pashtun companion. While Hassan still accepts his subordinate place and returns to the servants’ dwelling, he freely engages in yet another geographic migration, which again discredits Assef’s idea of “rotting” in Hazarajat. Hassan’s mobility undermines the geographies of privilege constructed by ethnic borders: he challenges the discursive perimeters circumscribing Hazara existence, and inverts the authority of place by asserting autonomy over his own migration. Regardless of Hassan’s mobility, however, he maintains a subordinate position in each place he inhabits and is ultimately unable to escape from the violence of oppression. Although he challenges the limitations of place, “how could [he] escape the low wages, the agony of his culture, the law which rules him from birth until death?” (Memmi 91). Since the impossibility of escaping one’s social place is so apparent within the novel, the fluidity of geography among the homes that Hassan inhabits presents a symbolic revolt against the ideological “place” of Hazaras. Hassan’s mobility within Afghanistan, while significant, does not suggest that he has transcended the class divisions between Hazaras and

Pashtuns. Hosseini thus complicates notions of socially constructed boundaries, even those manifested through geography, by revealing the possibilities invoked via shifts in ideological perspective.

The Revolt of the Laborer

Just as the domestic sphere acts as a colonizing space in the novel, the relationships within it demonstrate the internal conflict between the colonizer and the colonized. Within the physical space of the home, Hassan assumes the role of “servant,” a role which is assigned to him based on his ethnic identity and his assumed paternity. Hassan and Amir “fed from the same breast” and developed a bond tainted by socially constructed roles powerful enough to infiltrate the home (Hosseini 25). Despite the social hierarchies present at Baba’s estate, domestic servitude transitioned into interpersonal relationships that defied hierarchical constraints. These boundary-breaking relationships were apparent between the two boys, as well as between their fathers, illustrating a brotherhood that undermines segregationist ideologies. Nevertheless, the dynamics of the relationship forged within the home allowed Amir to subjugate Hassan, paralleling the interactions between their fathers. Amir used his ethnic and economic power over Hassan to manipulate him into acts of humiliation that served to reiterate social hierarchies identifying master and submissive; Amir unapologetically exploited Hassan’s obedience as a domestic laborer in order to establish his own social dominance. Amir’s ambivalence, combined with Hassan’s internalized acceptance of his subservient

role, results in their complicated filial bond. The politics of the domestic sphere both create a dominating space and allow for a revolt from the hierarchies that bind them.

Amir and Hassan thus represent two distinct geographies within one dominating space, though their identities are complicated by conflict within the novel. The relationship between dominator and dominated, “founded on the essential outlook of the two protagonists, becomes definitive category” (Memmi 72). Memmi argues these categories are definitive “because they are what they are, and neither one nor the other will change” (Memmi 72); however, Hosseini’s characterization of ambivalent characters marked by hybridity challenges such definitive distinctions. Amir’s privileged membership within a dominating group is one which is only guaranteed by the presence of those subordinate to him, such as Hassan. His mornings start with breakfast laid out by Hassan, who then irons Amir’s clothes while he sits and eats (Hosseini 80). The politics of place can thus be broken down in the dining room at breakfast: Amir sits in a position of dominance at the head of the table, while Hassan carries out his duties as a servant. As the servant, or laborer, Hassan’s roles suggest he is bound by duty to his oppressors. Living among the Hazaras, Amir has never made breakfast for himself, and never will as long as he is granted colonial privilege. Ironically, without Hassan’s role as servant, Amir himself would be powerless. If Hassan did not iron Amir’s clothes while he sat at a table that “could easily seat thirty guests,” Amir would be left alone and dominant over no one (Hosseini 5).

Hassan’s duty as a servant is overshadowed by his fraternal role, and he revolts from the traditional restrictions of servitude through friendship. The subtlety of this revolt

is one which indicates its complications, due to familial and amicable bonds within a traditional setting where intergroup domination has occurred. Hassan accepts his role out of filial love for his colonizers and the internalization of his own inferiority, which he experiences living among Pashtuns. His subjugation at the hand of his friend is, to him, representative of the roles they have both internalized. Hassan views his position of servitude as a duty he must fulfill as a dominated subject; simultaneously, however, Hassan consistently revolts against these traditional roles by asserting his friendship with Amir. Hassan's ambivalence is not surprising, if we read it in light of Bhabha's assertion that "fixity," or a more fixed, static, or binary representation of the colonized, is "a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity" in a way that is neither realistic nor practical (Bhabha 37). In spite of the powerful, discursive ideologies Hassan has internalized about his own relative inferiority, the way he conceives of himself and his role in Afghan society is not, in fact, fixed. Hassan's ambivalence is the source of his power, allowing him the space to revolt against the normative rules of his culture that limit his autonomy.

Hassan and Amir's roles within the strict cultural hierarchy of the domestic sphere are often challenged through the personal relationships between the two boys. The politics of friendship and kinship complicate the role of the "place" for the boys, as Hassan insists on a bond between the two that transcends that of laborer and master. In many ways, it appears the roles confining the two boys to their respective places are reiterated both within and outside of their home; for example, when the boys leave the dominating confines of the house in order to climb poplar trees or wander just outside of the estate, Amir would read to Hassan, and taunt him when he did not understand certain

vocabulary, saying “words were secret doorways and I held all the keys” (Hosseini 30). In this example, Hosseini demonstrates that the motif of the dominant home and master are present well outside of the estate’s gates. Epistemological themes present themselves in relation to the symbolic presence of the domestic sphere as Amir connects the attainment of literacy with the physical symbol of the doorway. Similarly, mobility between rooms is prohibited by locked doors. The idea that the colonizer holds the keys to these doors suggests he is prohibiting the mobility of the dominated subject. Yet, this apparent representation is then juxtaposed with the equality of the two boys among the branches of the same pomegranate tree where Amir read Hassan stories. Engrained into the bark of the tree is the phrase “Amir and Hassan. The sultans of Kabul” (Hosseini 265). In this inscription, the two boys are deemed equals and dominating forces in Kabul, able to withstand the hegemony of majority ethnic groups. The juxtaposition of Amir’s control over language with the literal inscription of Hassan’s existential agency and equality via the words carved onto a living tree demonstrates the ambivalence within him: Amir struggles to balance his role of usurper with sentiment for his companion. Hosseini thus complicates Memmi’s theory of the usurper through the hybridity of the dominator. An example of what Bhabha calls “productive ambivalence” (Bhabha 38), while Amir holds a dominant role, he is unable to identify solely as a usurper, and attempts to act as a benevolent colonial through an expression of equality between the two boys. Amir cannot deny his dominant role, however, and this extension of dominant power does not successfully transfer to Hassan.

Hassan’s devotion to his position of servitude is so steadfast that he protects Amir even after Amir betrays him. After Amir falsely accuses Hassan of taking his watch,

“Hassan sacrificed himself to preserve narrow and selfish Amir because he was bound by the class and social ethics, which made him willing to bear everything in their own ethics and class environment” (Yuan-Yuan 59). Hassan is willing to bear the responsibility of his class, exercising the choice he makes due to his fraternal and filial ties. Once again, Hassan does not revolt through physical action. His acceptance of social hierarchies serves as a psychological revolt against Amir, to whom he remains loyal. His choice to accept Amir’s accusations torments Amir, who sought denial from Hassan. When Hassan does not deny the rhetoric of the “mythical portrait of the colonized,” which portrays him as thief, Amir’s method of domination becomes undermined (Memmi 79). In his refusal to participate in the fabricated portrait of his own subjectivity, Hassan’s silence is an act of revolt.

Hosseini’s characterization of Hassan’s actions demonstrates the complications of revolt given filial and fraternal ties among the characters. Rather than express physical revolt through a plot that included direct conflict between the dominator and the dominated, Hosseini asserts that revolt is inevitable due to the fragilities of socially constructed boundaries. Hassan can never, and will never, revolt against those he loves, so he engages in variations of symbolic revolt. The fraternal bond between Hassan and Amir represents the bonds between countrymen, and ultimately suggests the complexities of physical revolt against domestic colonialism. Through Hosseini’s sympathetic portrayal of Hassan’s subjugation, Hassan becomes the epicenter from which domestic colonization is depicted. Hosseini utilizes the methods and theories on traditional settler colonialism to emphasize the nature of the domination of the Hazara people within Afghanistan; by depicting Baba’s estate as a microcosm of colonization, Hosseini

successfully undermines the discursive justification for ethnic segregation. The motif of home resonates throughout the young boys' journeys, allowing for it to be linked to the realizations of familial ties between the two. Though Hassan does not learn of his true paternal heritage, the implications of this bond suggest the complications even within the inevitability of revolt in situations of domestic colonization.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The methods of domination between Pashtun and Hazara characters that Khaled Hosseini illustrates in *The Kite Runner* have introduced the Western world to a new colonial narrative, one of domestic colonialism. The hegemonic power of Pashtuns within the work is complicated by Hassan's genetic ties to Baba and Amir, which undermine the rhetorical and physical tools of domination present in the text. Through the relation of these genetic ties to the geographies of privilege and ethnic difference, the text reiterates that revolt is inevitable for the colonized subject. The complications of filial and fraternal relationships, the opposition to epistemological constraints, the juxtaposition of the domestic space, and the challenge to the subservient role of the dominated each contribute to the theme of the unsustainability of domestic colonialism within the work.

The implications of this text as a novel attempting to reimagine Middle Eastern culture for a Western readership in the post-September 11 culture of the United States are far reaching. Hosseini redirects the rhetoric of the "war on terror"¹⁹ to a revolt against colonial forces in Afghanistan. The introduction of sympathetic Muslim characters complicates the narrative of Islam in the U.S., but the impact of the text extends far beyond countering the Islamophobic discourse flooding American media outlets at the time. The story of Amir and Hassan serves as an allegory for the place of Muslim people in American society, as they attempt to assimilate and find their identity as U.S. citizens.

¹⁹ The phrase "war on terror" was coined by the Bush administration following the September 11 attacks (Masters 77). It is used to describe a political and military ideology that led to combat in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen. Some argue this phrase established a rhetoric of fear and repression in the American public.

Read allegorically, *The Kite Runner* warns against the introduction of methods of domination in the United States, and speaks out against the injustices of discrimination. The end of the novel lends itself to this reading, as Hassan's son is introduced to America and must find a way to assimilate. Because Hosseini asserts that assimilation is impossible in a colonized space, he is warning against domestic colonialism in the West.

Hosseini's debut work re-introduced the American public to the Middle-Eastern protagonists, as sympathetic characters who show agency in the face of violence and oppression. Hosseini's portrayal of intergroup domination as a site of domestic colonialism offers a humanized understanding of Afghan characters. Reading *The Kite Runner* as an example of domestic colonialism helps us to understand colonial tropes in works that are not traditionally recognized as post-colonial.

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