



## ETHNOCENTRISM AND ITS EFFECTS AS DEPICTED IN THE KITE RUNNER NOVEL

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### Abstract

This study analyzed the portrayal of ethnocentrism and its negative effects in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* using Bizumic's ethnocentrism theory. This study used descriptive qualitative methods; the data were collected from the novel in monologues, dialogues, and narratives. Based on the data, ethnocentrism depicted in the novel taking setting in Afghanistan was represented in terms of superiority and in-group preference. The novel depicted that one ethnic, the Pashtun, felt more superior to the Hazara. This superiority made the Pashtun always evaluate other groups based on their standard. They built the in-group preference in which they regard their standard as the best compared to the Hazara. In addition, the negative effects of ethnocentrism were manifested into three points: violence against other groups, ethnic wars, and desire to control the territory. In short, ethnocentrism causes differences in thoughts and opinions between one group and another and further affects their relationship negatively.

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## INTRODUCTION

Humans' sociability is a nature that leads humans to live together to meet their needs and help others meet their needs. In other words, they will live in a group to survive. In this world, various groups or ethnicities have different cultures, including values, norms, traditions, and others. The word ethnicity is different from race as their distinction is based on different aspects. Race is differentiated based on physical characteristics, whereas ethnicity is distinguished based on cultural characteristics related to language, history, religion, and customs (Montague, 1942).

Similarly, Bos (2015) stated that ethnicity is socially constructed and historically contingent that further fosters solidarity among its members. Due to the different cultures of many ethnicities around the globe, the conflicts that happen among these groups are usually called ethnic conflicts. Ethnic conflicts still exist in this modern era, for example, ethnic conflicts in Iran or other countries. The ethnic conflict is closely related to a tendency that one group feels like the most superior group known as ethnocentrism.

According to Sumner and Keller (1911), ethnocentrism is defined as "the sentiment of cohesion, internal comradeship, and devotion to in-group, which carried with it a sense of superiority to any out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group." Based on this statement, ethnocentrism deals with two main points: in-group devotion and the sense of superiority. These points lead to the effects of ethnocentrism itself.

Ethnocentrism brings negative effects in terms of intergroup relations (Bizumic, 2014). It triggers conflicts among the ethnicities, including hostilities and ethnic wars. These affect how the different ethnicities live side-by-side in social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. Pesic (1993:101) stated that "manipulating this kind of ethnocentric nationalism has been seen and the quickest and most effective method of gaining political power and maintaining control of the population." From this statement, it can be concluded that ethnocentrism can positively build nationalism, but on the other hand, it could raise political power and control for the more superior group.

The issue of ethnocentrism and its negative effects can be seen in *The Kite Runner* novel by Khaled Hosseini, which tells a story of the Pashtun and the Hazara ethnic in Afghanistan. This novel was chosen as the object of the study as Afghanistan has been known for having ethnic conflicts in this country. As stated by Nisa' (2014), who conducted the study about ethnic conflicts in *The Kite Runner*, there were three ethnic conflicts in the novel: rivalry, hostility, and Hazara's

struggle against the Pashtun. These ethnic conflicts indicated that ethnocentrism issues exist in the novel that needs to analyze. The Pashtun shows superiority and in-group preference to the Hazara and further brings conflicts among people from these ethnicities. In brief, this study was intended to shed light on the portrayal of ethnocentrism and its negative effects in the novel.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Ethnocentrism**

Ethnocentrism is not a novel issue as it has taken place in many countries consisting of various ethnicities for many years. The concept of ethnocentrism is closely related to human nature; in this case, it is egocentrism. It is aligned with what McGee says that “ethnocentrism as a group level analog to egocentrism, that is, as ethnic group self-centeredness” (1900: 37). Further, egocentrism is realized by people who are egocentrically put more attention to themselves than other people (Kruger, 1999). The notion of self-centeredness is supported with the understanding that ethnocentrism is also defined as the view of things in which one’s group is the center of everything (Sumner, 1906, quoted in Branner, 2013). Because of this view, they will see themselves as having better qualities than other ethnicities as they always judge different cultures based on their standards and values.

Thus, it is not surprising if ethnocentrism deals with the feeling of superiority as Sumner and Keller said that, “the sentiment of cohesion, internal comradeship, and devotion to the in-group, which carries with it a sense of superiority to any out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group” (1991: 11). Ethnocentric people will devote their attention to their group, or Sumner called it as in-group; it builds a sense of superiority to other groups and a need to defend their group’s interest from other groups or called out-group. The notion of in-group superiority is also pointed out by Bizumic (2014), who stated that there is a belief in in-group superiority. Thus, discussing ethnocentrism involves in-group and out-groups, where the ethnocentric group believes in superiority.

Another point related to ethnocentrism is highlighted by Njoroge and Kirori (2014), who said that ethnocentrism would raise a tendency of the people to favor their group over other groups. The ethnocentric group will strongly put in-group preference into account. It is because they want ethnic purity (Bizumic, 2014). In an ethnocentric group, people will choose to interact with their group members or even marry the same group. Moreover, the in-group preference will influence

how the people judge other ethnics; they will evaluate the different groups based on their standards. If the other groups have differences with them, they will see them as an inferior group. Bizumic added, “intergroup expressions are concerned with the view that the in-group is more important than out-groups and involved preference for one’s own ethnic in-group over out-groups, belief in in-group superiority, wish for ethnic purity, and approval of exploiting out-groups for in-group needs” (2012: 37). Not only about the in-group preference, but it is also integrated with the approval of exploiting out-groups for in-group needs. It can be about raising political power and control.

Bizumic (2012: 38) further explained six dimensions of ethnocentrism are divided into two second-order factors. The first factor is intergroup ethnocentrism, which is related to the relation among the groups. Intergroup ethnocentrism includes preference, superiority, purity, and exploitativeness. These four aspects affect the relation of one group with other groups. Meanwhile, the second factor is intragroup ethnocentrism, which is related to the relation among the group members. The intragroup ethnocentrism consists of group cohesion and devotion. It means that the members have a strong devotion and cohesion for their group, manifested in solid faith and pride. From this notion, it is clear that ethnocentrism brings negative and positive effects.

Because of intergroup ethnocentrism, there is a big possibility of conflicts. According to Bizumic (2014), ethnocentrism may not directly result in wars, but it can trigger intergroup conflicts and lead to actual hostilities and wars. Furthermore, Bizumic (2014) conveyed that:

The concept of ethnocentrism should be important to peace psychologists given that it could contribute to direct (i.e., overt, brief, episodic, sporadic) kinds of violence among ethnic groups, such as ethnic wars, but also to structural (i.e., slow, covert, societally arranged) kinds of violence because it gives more social value to certain groups over others.

From that statement, the violence experienced by the out-group can be in direct forms or structurally arranged. Direct forms of violence can be manifested in ethnic wars. In contrast, the more dangerous violence is the structural kinds of violence as it affects how society sees how one group has more values than others. In brief, ethnocentrism brings negative effects on how one group will live side by side in a certain area.

## **METHOD**

This study belongs to qualitative research as the data were in the form of monologues, dialogues, and narratives. There were several steps taken to collect the data. The first step was reading the novel several times to get a clear picture of the story. The second was identifying the data related to the research question. The third was looking at the data and removing the data that were not closely related to the research question, or it can be said as reducing the data. The fourth step was classifying the data into a table consisting of the data, the data type, and the reference supported the data. After the data were collected, the data were analyzed using ethnocentrism theory by Bizumic to answer the research question.

## **DISCUSSIONS OF MAIN THEMES**

In the discussion, there are two points conveyed to answer the research problems. The first is the portrayal of ethnocentrism in the novel *The Kite Runner*. The second is the negative effects of ethnocentrism depicted in the novel *The Kite Runner*.

### **Ethnocentrism depicted in the novel *The Kite Runner***

Ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan have been taken place for many years. The conflicts become the root of ethnocentrism embedded in society as it deals with the nation's long history. The previous study conducted by Nisa' (2014) revealed that in *The Kite Runner* novel, there were three ethnic conflicts, including rivalry, hostility, and the Hazara's struggle against the Pashtun. However, the study has not discussed ethnocentrism in the novel that is very close to the ethnic conflicts. Thus, this study aimed to fill the gap by analyzing ethnocentrism to get a more comprehensive picture of how the ethnic issues were depicted in the novel.

Based on the data, the portrayal of ethnocentrism is divided into two points, including superiority and in-group preference. Based on Bizumic's theory, there are two second-order factors in ethnocentrism, including intergroup ethnocentrism and intragroup ethnocentrism. The data from the novel indicated that intergroup ethnocentrism manifested in superiority and in-group preference. In terms of feeling superiority, the novel depicts that the Pashtun feels superior to the Hazara. The following is the quotation representing the superiority in the novel.

The following week, after class, I showed the book to my teacher and pointed to the chapter on the Hazaras. He skimmed through a couple of pages, snickered, handed the book back. "That's the one thing Shi'a people do well," he said, picking up his

papers, “passing themselves as martyrs.” He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shi’a like it was some kind of disease (Hoseini, 2003: 9).

In the quotation above, Amir’s teacher, who belongs to the Pashtun, gives negative judgment and feels more superior to the Hazara, which is shown by the word, “He wrinkled his nose when he said the word Shi’a, like, it was some kind of disease,” (Hoseini, 2003: 9). In addition, the teacher also considers the only thing that the Hazara does well is being martyrs. Having thought of the Hazara as a disease and martyrs indicates that the teacher perceived the Hazara as being the inferior group.

Another quote that supported the portrayal of the Pashtun’s superiority is “A loyal Hazara. Loyal as a dog,” (Hoseini, 2003: 68). In this quote, Assef speaks to Hasan, who was one of the Hazara group members. Assef considers the loyal Hazara is like a dog. In this context, most Hazara people work as slaves who will always follow their master’s order. Assef considers what a dog does to its master is like what the loyal Hazara does. The feeling of superiority is one of the manifestations of ethnocentrism; as Sumner & Keller (1911) stated, ethnocentrism raises the attitude of feeling superior to other groups.

Moreover, the following quote depicts the Pashtun’s feeling superior and looking down to other groups:

“You know, I asked myself that same question the other day. And there’s an answer, but not a good one. Let’s just say they didn’t tell us because your father and I... we weren’t supposed to be brothers.”

“Because he was a Hazara?”

I willed my eyes to stay on him. “Yes.” (Hoseini, 2003: 295)

The quote shows Amir and Shorab’s conversation about Amir and Hassan’s past friendship. Amir said Hassan could not be friends with Amir because Hassan came from the Hazara family. According to Gudykunst, ethnocentric groups see themselves as superior to other groups treated as inferior. Gudykunst further said that in ethnocentrism, there is a group that feels itself the greatest so that they cannot make a relationship such as the friendship between different groups.

The severed relationship between the Hazara and the Pashtun is also depicted in the following quote,

Of all the neighborhood boys who tortured Ali, Assef was by far the most relentless. He was, in fact, the originator of the Babalu jeer, \_Hey, Babalu, who did you eat today? Huh? Come on, Babalu, give us a smile! \_ And on days when he felt particularly inspired, he spiced up his badgering a little, \_Hey, you flat---nosed Babalu, who did you eat today? Tell us, you slant---eyed donkey! (Hoseini, 2003: 36)

The quote above shows how the Hazara kids and the Pashtun kids cannot build a friendship. The Pashtun kids tend to mock the Hazara kids by addressing bad words such as calling them Babalu that carries meaning as a ghost. In addition, Assef also calls Ali flat-nosed Babalu and slant-eyed donkey. Those words imply what Sumner and Keller said about ethnocentrism as how a group feels superior to other groups, which causes disharmony in the life between groups (1911).

Ethnocentrism also emerges in the form of in-group preference. A quote in the novel *The Kite Runner* concerning in-group is, “He wedded my mother, Sofia Akrami, a highly educated woman universally regarded as one of Kabul’s most respected, beautiful, and virtuous ladies. And not only did she teach classic Farsi literature at the university, she was a descendant of the royal family” (Hoseini, 2003: 15). The quote tells that Amir’s father married Sofia Akrami, a Pashtun woman who became a lecturer in Kabul. It indicates that the Pashtuns want to keep the purity of their group, so they marry their group member. The situation is in accordance with Bizumic (2014), who said that ethnocentrism covers in-group preference to keep the purity of the group as a sense of wanting to preserve the culture, for example, maintaining offspring by marrying another Pashtun.

Another quote that discusses the depiction of in-group preference in the novel *The Kite Runner* is, “Afghanistan for Pashtuns, I say. That’s my vision” (Hoseini, 2003: 38). In this quote, Assef said Afghanistan is only for the Pashtuns. These words depict Assef’s interest in making Afghanistan only for Pashtun by facing against the Hazara. This statement implies Sumner and Keller’s (1911) definition of ethnocentrism as “the sentiment of cohesion, internal comradeship, and devotion to the in-group, which carries with it a sense of superiority to any out-group and readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group.”

The explanation above shows that the novel expresses the sense of superiority and in-group preference. These two points are also connected with the wish of keeping the purity. This depiction is related to what Bizumic (2014) called intergroup ethnocentrism. Intergroup ethnocentrism affects how the different ethnicities live together. Sumner and Keller said that ethnocentrism causes disharmony in the life between groups (1911). In *The Kite Runner*, the Pashtun and the Hazara disharmony is portrayed by how the Pashtun felt more superior and refused to live together with the Hazara. They also tried to make Afghanistan only for them, not for other ethnicities.

### **The negative effects of ethnocentrism in *The Kite Runner* novel**

The intergroup ethnocentrism further results in some negative effects. This study found three effects of ethnocentrism in the novel, including violence against other groups, ethnic wars, and desire to control the territory.

The first effect of ethnocentrism portrayed in the novel is violence against other groups. One case is Hasan's mother was raped by a soldier from the Pashtun. She was raped for the sake of the soldier's pleasure. This case implies what Gudykunst (2003) stated that ethnocentrism enables the superior group to treat the other group for their pleasure. Another evidence was found when Assef threw Hasan a rock when he wanted to take Hasan's kite.

We crossed the residential street and were trekking through a barren patch of rough land that led to the hill when, suddenly, a rock struck Hassan in the back. We whirled around, and my heart dropped. Assef and two of his friends, Wali and Kamal, were approaching us" (Hoseini, 2003: 35).

Throwing Hasan's back with a rock is a part of violence against other groups. As a Pashtun, Assef felt unbothered to hurt Hasan since Hasan was merely a Hazara. Even for a trifling matter like a kite, a member of the superior group could easily hurt others seen as inferior.

The second effect found in the story is the ethnic wars. The ethnic wars started a long time ago, as stated in history. "It said that Hazara had tried to rise against the Pashtun in the nineteenth century but the Pashtun had "quelled them with unspeakable violence," (Hoseini, 2003: 9). From this quotation, it is stated that the ethnic war has taken place since the 19<sup>th</sup> century between the Pashtun and the Hazara. The words "quelled them with unspeakable violence" indicate that violence was a common thing to do in gaining the political power.

The following statement supports the notion that the ethnic war has taken place in Afghanistan's history.

I blew the dust off it, sneaked it into bed with me that night, and was stunned to find an entire chapter on Hazara history. An entire chapter dedicated to Hassan's people! In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed the Hazaras". (Hoseini, 2003: 9).

In this quote, Amir is reading his mother's old book. In the book, it is written that the Pashtun group fought with the Hazara group and Pashtun won.

The ethnic war is closely related to the third effect of ethnocentrism: the desire to control the territory. The ethnocentric group feels it is the most powerful party in the nation. They have a sense of wanting to rule a region because they want other groups to follow the rules that have been



made. Gudykunst (2003) said that in ethnocentrism, a group would forcing other groups to think and do as they do. There is a quote showing the case,

His blue eyes flicked to Hassan. “Afghanistan is the land of Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat -- Nose here. His people pollute our homeland, our watan. They dirty our blood.” (Hoseini, 2003: 38).

The quote shows a conversation between Assef and Hassan. According to Assef, the Hazara group does not deserve to live in Afghanistan. Assef wants Afghanistan to be governed by the Pashtun group so that the Pashtun group will control the whole country. Assef’s statement is aligned with what Sumner said that ethnocentrism is a readiness to defend the interests of the in-group against the out-group.

From the data above, ethnocentrism brings negative effects as depicted in the novel, including the violence against the other group, ethnic war, and desire to control the territory. These three effects connect with the efforts of the Pashtun to gain political power and control. Thus, intergroup ethnocentrism is very dangerous because it affects how the groups live together and interact in a certain area. The conflicts will always occur as the superiority and in-group preference will always be perceived by the Pashtuns.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study sheds light on how ethnocentrism can influence how a group perceives and treats another group. The intergroup ethnocentrism was depicted in the novel in terms of superiority and in-group preference. Further, it brings negative effects in the relation of the Pashtun and the Hazara. The Pashtun has committed violence towards the Hazara people. Moreover, there is a desire to control the territory and gain political power. As a result, the relations of these two groups are not in harmony resulting in an ethnic war in the country. Thus, to avoid ethnic conflicts, people should be aware that ethnocentrism can negatively influence intercultural relations if they do not understand that every culture may have different values, beliefs, etc. These differences among ethnicities do not put a particular group as a superior one, but they form the group’s identity and uniqueness from one to another.

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