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Absence of Law to Protect Civilians during War in *The Kite Runner*

Violence is a main theme represented in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. The structural and narratological developments of the novel may show a clear and easy representation of the issue, but there are deeper concerns related to the representation. The represented violence manifests the other hidden issues in the novel which are either "unnarrated" or "disnarrated". There is a lot of information which are hidden, and the narrator actually does show what happens but also what does not happen in the narration. A key element causing the violence is the traumatic experiences of the narrator, Amir. His past continues hunting him until the end of the story. The story itself presents a healing method from trauma by talking and sharing the stories with the close and beloved ones. Soraya, Amir's wife, is an example who narrates her story to her husband and vice versa, and this results in a healing process from their long continuing traumatic experiences.

Personal traumas influence not only the development of the narrative, but the characters and events as well. Hosseini deploys "Afghanistan's national trauma" by using the character of Hassan farming his "rape and its resultant trauma as an allegory for the turmoil engulfing Afghanistan following a coup in 1973 which toppled the monarchy and precipitated decades of political uncertainty, starting with a communist takeover and the invasion of Russian forces in 1979"². The traumatic experiences of both Hassan and Amir, as well as other characters, which are the results of war, sectarian and religious conflicts, show the collective trauma that none of the Afghans could avoid. The traumas do not remain harmless, they progress into invisible violent actions transferring into the visible ones

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² S. O'Brien, *Translating Trauma in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner*, "Transnational Literature" 2018, No. 2, p. 4.

of which abolishing becomes unimaginable. According to Jefferess: “there has been diverse approaches to interpreting the novel – as ethnography, coming-of-age narrative, and/or morality tale” and “the text’s apparent humanizing function reflects current theories of a cosmopolitan ethics”³. The novel can be read as a semi-reliable text for the readers to understand not only the history of Afghanistan, but also the structural establishment of social, cultural, and religious aspects of the country. Nevertheless, the novel is certainly a fictionalized story and it should be treated as such but it can be rather a notable and significant resource to the reader understanding the situation and structure in Afghanistan.

Amir and Hassan become the main characters of the narrative whom life and actions put influence on the developments of their lives. It is true that Amir continues struggling (even when he is mature) with the guilt of not preventing the rape of Hassan by Assef, but he “uses storytelling as a healing tool” to recover from the pain of the guilt from his childhood⁴. Hassan, however, becomes a mediator symbolizing the root issues of the narrator with his own father as he builds jealousy toward the sympathy of his father to Hassan⁵. Thus, the story telling by Amir helps him and all the other characters to “make sense of themselves, one another, and the world”⁶. That process is a key element of healing from traumatic experience as the characters start to know the reasons behind things happening and this may reduce the possible violent actions. According to an argument, the act of storytelling by Amir is seen “as an important means of characterization, and helps characters to overcome traumatic experiences”⁷. Then, if a traumatic experience may cause a violent action and suffering, storytelling can be an effective tool to prevent possible harm not only to the self but toward other individuals as well.

The narrative style of this novel is helping the characters in shaping their past, in other words, to “create the past”⁸. The narrator looks back in the past and suffers from all the issues which were the main traumatic events in his

³ D. Jefferess, *To Be Good (Again): The Kite Runner as Allegory of Global Ethics*, “Journal of Postcolonial Writing” 2009, No. 4, p. 390.

⁴ K. Nayeypour, *The Use of Storeytelling in Khaled Hosseini’s The Kite Runner*, “Hacettepe University Journal of Faculty of Letters” 2018, No. 1, p. 53.

⁵ E. Lee, *Domesticating The Subaltern in The Global Novel in English*, “The Journal of Commonwealth Literature” 2012, No. 3, p. 327.

⁶ D. Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Oxford 2009, p. 54.

⁷ A. Nünning, R. Sommer, *The Performative Power of Narrative in Drama: On the Forms and Functions of Dramatic Storytelling in Shakespeare’s Plays*, [in:] *Current Trends in Narratology*, ed. G. Olson, Berlin 2011, p. 220.

⁸ N.R. Norrick, *Conversational Storytelling*, [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. D. Herman, New York 2007, p. 139.

life; narrating the life of the narrator is “at once a product and agent of history; the site of experience, memory, storytelling and aesthetic judgment; an agent of knowing as much as of action”⁹. As the narration becomes an inclusive product, the narrator and the characters can use it as a healing tool to heal their traumatic experiences which caused violence and made everyone suffer. Those are the happened and represented scenes while there are others which did-not-happened-but-could-happen-scenes that would change the direction of the story. It is important to see what happened and what did not happen to explore the results that took place and the ones which would take place in case of happening something that did not happen.

Literature is not a text to be read in a free time as a material to pleasure our desires. It is rather to understand the messages behind the text. Not only that – it is also to explore the hidden codes within the used language in order to analyze the bigger picture of which can be related to the life of the reader or at least the world s/he lives in. Edward Said argues¹⁰:

Whatever I’ve done politically has been entirely dependant on the ability to read critically, to be able to understand the uses to which language can be put. And here I mean to refer to the truly vast range of possibilities that language has. I think the only place you can get a sense of this range, and a feeling for these possibilities, is through the study of literature. Because that’s what literature in a sense is about. Writing is not only about describing the world, and writing about it realistically, and reporting it [...].

Likewise, literature should be read to understand and comprehend things not only in a simple and surface way, but rather critically. Beside considering the use of language and the variety of vocabularies, narratological methods importantly assist in the critical reading. Therefore, it is not enough to see what the narrator represents and what is happening in a narration, but the reader has to look for what is not happening and not told, as well as for the reasons behind hiding those details. If we mean to look at a text critically and look for a theme like violence to see how it is represented, this is a proper way of doing, that as seeing only the represented violence in a text may not be of our intention as much, as the reasons behind causing those violent acts. These all can help to see the text as a healing tool for the narrator and characters, but the reader may find it as a medium in solution seeking for himself. In this pa-

⁹ J. Biehl, B. Good, A. Kleinman, *Introduction: Rethinking Subjectivity*, [in:] *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, eds. J. Biehl, B. Good, A. Kleinman, Berkeley 2007, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

per, Johan Galtung's direct violence, in his theory named as violence triangle, will be used as a part of theoretical framework to identify direct violence. Galtung introduces violence triangle in his two articles "Violence, Peace and Peace Research"¹¹ and "Cultural Violence"¹². He simply divides violence into three types: structural, cultural, and direct. Galtung defines direct violence as a visible part in which individuals are involved in directly while structural violence exists between groups and entities, and cultural violence is the involvement of the others to give a validation and acceptance toward the committed structural violence, leading to the existence of the last type, direct violence.

"Disnarration" is a narratological method used in this paper to show how it affects the representation of violence. This term is defined in the article "The Disnarrated"¹³ and according to the definition "disnarration", is what is not represented in fictional works and what is not happening in a narrative. In a following work¹⁴, the term is widened and the explanation toward the definition of the term is: "the elements in a narrative that explicitly consider and refer to what does not take place ("X did not happen"; "Y could have happened but did not"). "Disnarration" focuses on what did not happen while it could happen and if it happened, the story might have progressed in a different direction. This is a type of criticism to criticize the past in a context to consider the possible outcomes, mostly positive ones. Here, the didacticism is more obvious to advice the reader what leads certain conclusion and the same paths should not be followed again as it led to negative endings. Then, "disnarration" is important in stories because "Counterfactual scenarios are evocative not only because they illustrate attitudes, but because they often depict near, misses, lost opportunities, and foreclosed possibilities"¹⁵. Counter factuality is a "hypothetical alteration in a past sequence of events that changes the events in a factual sequence in order to create a different, counterfactual outcome"¹⁶. "Disnarration" is a suitable narrative mode to explore a story in order to assess and evaluate the progress of a story for the audience to follow or avoid similar steps in their own stories.

¹¹ J. Galtung, *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research*, "Journal of Peace Research" 1969, No. 6.

¹² J. Galtung, *Cultural Violence*, "Journal of Peace Research" 1990, No. 27.

¹³ G. Prince, *The Disnarrated*, "Style" 1988, No. 22.

¹⁴ G. Prince, *A Dictionary of Narratology*, Nebraska 2003, p. 22.

¹⁵ J.R. Harding, *Evaluative Stance and Counterfactuals in Language and Literature*, "Language and Literature" 2007, No. 16, p. 264.

¹⁶ H. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction*, Lincoln-London 2008, p. 119.

“Disnarration” is not hidden or difficult to look at in a narrative; it is possible to express it through narration, narrator or character but a construction process is needed by using:

alethic expressions of impossibility or unrealized possibility, deontic expressions of observed prohibition, epistemic expressions of ignorance, ontologic expressions of nonexistence, purely imagined worlds, desired worlds, or intended worlds, unfulfilled expectations, unwarranted beliefs, failed attempts, crushed hopes, suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies, and so forth¹⁷.

Thus, “disnarration” is neither a hidden thing, nor very obvious and clear. It needs to be considered and studied through a detailed analysis of a text considering various factors taking place in its construction. Through this mode of narration, Prince theorizes the importance of imagination as he:

directs our attention to the issue of how vital the hypothetical in fact is in its dynamic and contrastive interaction with events which are deemed to “really happen” in a narrative world, and he shows that such questions are not only ontologically complex but rhetorically significant in a variety of ways¹⁸.

The most significant part of this narrative mode is to assess and evaluate, as mentioned earlier, which may lead to a possible judging act on not only a text, but the characters and narrator as well. What did not happen and what had to happen are the major processes of a narration and they all make a narrative more dynamic. The narrations should not be looked at in a way what they tell the audience and what happened there, but it is also important to look at what could happen in the condition of the existence of possible basis. This narration mode can also “create suspense by presenting possible and false solutions in contrast with the correct and inevitable one” and it can also “distract the audience”¹⁹. The distraction is good, though maybe not always, to engage the audience more in the possible actions and the details behind the scenes, in other words, to decode the narrative codes set by the narrator. The narrators can codify a narration and this can be more enjoyable for the audience, as they may see it as a puzzle finding and they become a part of the problem solution due to taking part in leading the process by pointing out what did not hap-

¹⁷ G. Prince, *The Disnarrated*, “Style” 1988, No. 2.

¹⁸ H. Dannenberg, *Gerald Prince and the Fascination of What Doesn’t Happen*, “Narrative” 2014, No. 22, p. 307.

¹⁹ M. Lambrou, *Disnarration and the Unmentioned in Fact and Fiction*, London 2019, p. 22.

pen and while it could happen for the benefit of a better result in the story. In short, “unnarration” is something that happened but it cannot be narrated in words or represented in any medium to the audience due to various reasons which are building barriers in front of the transition of the knowledge from the narrator to the audience; while “disnarration” is something that did not happen instead of what happened, but it could happen. Both narrative strategies are important to investigate a narration in order to look at different invisible possibilities, especially when it comes to decoding the codes set by the narrator in order to better comprehend the messages aimed to be conveyed to the audience through different used narrative features.

The war crimes are starting to be represented from the middle of the narration and they become a part of the climax; they continue toward the denouement through the falling action. Those are all the outcomes of the war including the sign signaling emergence of Taliban. Women are seen as the honor of men in Afghan and similar conservative societies, and this pushes men to make extra effort in protecting their women. Following the Soviet invasion, the narrator and his father flee from the country and on the way they are stopped at a check point. The request of the soldier to a married woman with her babe and husband who tries to flee from the country too, “the soldier wanted a half hour with the lady in the back of the truck”²⁰ is a structural violence. The soldier represents the party in power and the woman is the struggling Afghan society during the war time. There is no reference to being Pashtun or Hazara as all the Afghans here are treated equally by the invader. This is an evidence representing the equality of all citizens during the hard times, but it is also showing that the unfair power distribution has a main role in discriminating individual rights. The act itself is disnarration showing the reader that there is not a reliable legal system which may protect everyone, especially civilians. The truck driver is an Afghan and along with almost everyone in there saying nothing due to their fear of the soldier who is holding a gun and representing the absolute power at the scene. Almost all of them involve in a cultural violence act as they do not react, even if they disagree with the act of the soldier but remain silent; their excuse for their silence is the soldier’s gun. The narrator himself is silent but here he creates a hero and shows the reader that it is not everyone involving in cultural violence all the time. This also manifests that direct violence can be prevented by stopping structural violence and not letting it transform into direct violence through the medium of cultural violence. At a hopeless moment of the tears of the woman and her husband, Baba stands

²⁰ K. Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, New York 2003, p. 106.

up and denies the act; when the soldier threatens him by shooting, “Tell him I’ll take a thousand of his bullets before I let this indecency take place”²¹. Baba’s attitude is rejecting all the possible excuses made to not prevent violence. He also proves the possibility of violence prevention if there is a will and courage; Baba’s brave attitude toward the soldier protects the woman from being raped and a “thousand of his bullets” shows the seriousness of Baba in stopping the violence no matter what it will cost him, even his life.

Making an excuse for an act of violence is a violent act itself. Following all the happening between the soldier and other characters, the Russian officer arrives and prevents any undesired conclusion, but he still makes an excuse for the violent act of the armed man, “they are just boys, and when they come here, they find the pleasure of drug”²². It is not the soldier blamed or to be sent for a discipline committee, but the commander’s excuse is the effect of drug influencing the soldiers to commit violent acts. Making an excuse for the soldier is another disnarration sign of the existence of any possible law protecting the civilians during the war time. The narrator represents violence like a chain of which one step is responsible to another move, that they all build a continual violence circle. Moreover, it is not only the direct violence represented by the narrator, but all the other hidden steps of violence are manifested through the linguistic and narratological elements. Not only that, violence is sometimes represented as a necessary action to bring justice or to protect the others. When the smuggler makes the people wait in bad conditions and they may stuck, Baba raps his hands around the neck of the smuggler and when he is told, “put him down, Agha, you’re killing him”²³, he responds “it’s what I intend to do”²⁴. Baba has no choice and there is not any legal system present to protect the civilians. The smuggler takes his money and aims to leave them all to not known, then Baba steps up again to take the role of law and legal system to protect the civilians. The violence is not always negative, it is indeed sometimes needed when there is no other option to protect the justice.

To sum up, *The Kite Runner* represents the war time as a period without any valid legal system to protect the civilians. There are various types of violence committed against the unarmed people who try to flee from the war and Galtung’s violence triangle is clearly found as a form of violence represented in the narrative. Not only that, but disnarration is a narratological technique

21 Ibidem, p. 107.

22 Ibidem, p. 108.

23 Ibidem, p. 109.

24 Ibidem, p. 109.

used by the narrator to show what is not happening in order to manifest the absence of law.

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Summary

This paper explores the topic of violence as it is represented in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003). The aim is to look at the possibilities of representing violence in the fictional context. The novel is analyzed accordingly, through its characters and acts in order to see violence structures in the small narratives of each characters and the main narrative itself. For this purpose, disnarration is applied as a narratological approach.

Keywords: Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*, violence, narrative, representation

Отсутствие закона для защиты гражданских лиц во время войны в *Бегущий за ветром*

Резюме

Эта статья исследует тему насилия в том виде, в каком она представлена в книге Халед Хоссейни «Бегущий за ветром» (2003). Цель состоит в том, чтобы взглянуть на возможности представления насилия в этом вымышленном контексте. Соответственно, я проанализирую роман по его персонажам и действиям, чтобы увидеть структуры насилия в небольших повествованиях каждого персонажа и в самом основном повествовании. Для этого я в первую очередь буду применять разобшение как нарратологический подход.

Ключевые слова: Халед Хоссейни, «Бегущий за ветром», насилие, повествование, репрезентация