

Power Relations in *The Kite Runner*: A New Historiscist Reading

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Abstract

This research paper deals with the issue of power relations in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. It discusses the novel's purpose and meaning as inseparable from its historical and political background. References to Ferdowsi's *The Shahnameh*, for instance, are discussed as an important source of influence that fosters the wrong set of power relations in Afghani society. Hosseini's background also becomes another point of interest as his objective yet realistic depiction of events enables him to transform the limited political and social struggle within Afghani borders into an issue of global concern. This paper will show that what was once a society purely dependent on the belief that physical strength and valor were the major determinants in forming power structures has now changed to give prime importance to discourse as an essential source of that power.

I've reached the end of this great history
And all the land will talk of me:
I shall not die, these seeds I've sown will save
My name and reputation from the grave,
And men of sense and wisdom will proclaim
When I have gone, my praises and my fame.

(Ferdowsi 552)

These concluding lines of *The Shahnameh* are a reminder of its unique position as a well established classical statement in historiography, in a similar manner that Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* is being acclaimed in modern times as another such literary work that succeeds in intertwining the personal and historical, presenting an insightful portrayal of Afghanistan in the 1980's. *The Shahnameh* is referred to in this novel as an intertextual source. It lays

the basis for the modern reader to understand the significance of the background of Afghani history and culture. *The Shahnameh* defines the ethnic affinities and helps to establish a link between the past and the present.

The political and historical events in *The Kite Runner* set the ground for the personal plot to unfold and the private experiences of the characters bring into greater focus the many discordant power shifts that plague the country. This in turn imparts a plurality to the narrative. As an account that takes its strength and significance from the historical and political issues at hand, *The Kite Runner* cannot be read or interpreted without fully acknowledging its cultural, social or biographical details. Hosseini's background takes on special importance as his distance from the events and his exposure to the west endow him with the necessary astuteness to interpret incidents in a dialectic, non-emotional manner, while his Afghani background gives verification to historical, political and cultural details. As an American-Afghani writer, Hosseini proves to be an effective narrator whose close association with the diasporic community gives him the forte to articulate the tangible historical aspects of Afghani culture. Hosseini's authoritative voice and insight imparts to the Afghani experience a pluralistic perspective pertaining to the diversities prevailing therein.

In *The Kite Runner*, the kaleidoscopic array of conflicts portray a society ridden with grievances and disputes. Whether they are in the form of class struggles, patriarchal hierarchies, political showdowns or competitive games like kite running, they all attest to a disharmony in the social strata within Afghani society. Hosseini's disapproval of the struggle for power relations amongst Afghanis is clearly shown in his frank, self expository narration of the injustices that occur within that society. What this paper seeks to prove is that as Hosseini critiques the many inequalities produced by asymmetrical practices, his work paradoxically reveals yet another set of power relations: ones that surpass all historical and cultural bounds and emanate from a sense of commitment, loyalty, love and sacrifice.

In order to understand and analyze this attempt of Hosseini's in *The Kite Runner*, the most aptly suitable literary approach for this interpretation is New Historicism because it refuses to isolate a text from its social, historical, economic or political background. With this view of history as literature and literature as history, it is interesting to note that the word 'history' regains what it has lost from its original Greek meaning. No longer satisfied with history as "a study of the past," it has grown to include the subjective "intellectual process" that modern critics describe as the ongoing continuous struggle to relate historical facts to social and human consciousness (Sacks; Sarup 74). It is important to note that though the New Historicist approach calls for an

association between a text and a specific historical and cultural background, the intellectual process involved in reading that text imposes the writers own subjective consciousness, thereby making it open to infinite interpretations and possibilities.

Roger Kimball, a mentor of Stephen Greenblatt (one of New Historicism's most notable recent proponents) asserts, "What the new historicism does is to substitute a species of sociology for literary criticism. Is there something about the literary experience that transcends contingencies like time, place, race and sexual orientation? Until recently people[never] thought that there was" (19). In this statement, there is a comprehensible attempt to explain unambiguous the connection of history with literature as portrayed in *The Kite Runner*. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt in *Practising New Historicism* state that New Historicism "is not a coherent, close knit school in which one might be enrolled or from which one might be expelled," but is an evolving set of practices that allow for a pluralistic and multi-dimensional reading of a text (2). As a discipline which allows for a diversified and dialectic interpretation of texts, New Historicism acknowledges the impact literature has on society. It believes that literature does not "merely reflect the ideas, beliefs and desires of a society in a disinterested manner," but it is also accountable for forming and shaping those beliefs and ideas (Malpas and Wake 61). The American literary critic H. Aram Veesser also says that "every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices" and that "literary and non-literary 'texts' circulate inseparably" (xi). What this means is that literature is not just the product of the beliefs of a culture, but is also the producer of new ideas and principles. As such, New Historicism acknowledges literature as a site of "power and resistance" that has the potential to form and sustain "complex strategic relations" of power (Malpas and Wake 61; Sarup 83). Another critic who has a lot to say about the relations of power and knowledge is Michael Foucault. In his book *Discipline and Punish* which has become a key source for New Historicist studies, he claims:

That power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations,.... In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, [but] the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge....

(Foucault 265-266)

Foucault's theory of knowledge as a source of power reveals his fascina-

tion with complex strategic relations in a society. He attempts to define knowledge in terms of having power over others, especially the power to define them, while at the same time he pronounces power as inherent for the production of that knowledge.

As a historiographical novel, *The Kite Runner* necessitates that its reader be familiar with the important folklore and cultural concepts that work towards fostering the wrong set of power relations in Afghani society. One important source of these cultural concepts is to be found in Abul-Gasem Ferdowsi's *The Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), which is mentioned as a vivid intertextual reference in the narrative. *The Shahnameh* is a collection of semi-legendary accounts about the pre-Islamic shahnamehs before the tenth century. It is considered to be the national epic of Persia and symbolizes for many the "the Iranian national spirit" (Daniel 264). Its accounts revolve around the kings of Persia and the heroes who served them. Like many Epics, it is framed as a history of many wars, and many individuals going through a mixture of failures and triumphs, love and grief, courage and cruelty. Its accounts were so "rich, detailed, coherent and meaningful, that they came to be accepted as a record of actual events - so much so that they almost totally supplanted in collective memory the genuine history of ancient Iran" (Daniel 33). Ferdowsi's accounts became so important that they prevailed as one of the primitive sources of understanding Iranian culture. As Shahbazi confirms in his book *Ferdowsi, A Critical Biography*, "Shahnameh is not a dry reproduction of historical narratives. No history has been so eagerly read, so profoundly believed and so ardently treasured... as *The Shahnameh* of Ferdowsi" (ix). Though many critics considered this epic to be celebrating the central role of monarchy, many others actually believed that it criticized this institution which exploits the loyalty and courage of its heroes for the purpose of furthering the selfish ends of the monarch. In *The Kite Runner* the oscillation of the power systems, the narration of concurrent historic and cultural details raising the statue of ordinary characters to that of epic heroes are some of the redeeming factors that reverberate the essence of *The Shahnameh*.

One of the known in *The Shahnameh* is that of Rostam and Sohrab and though this story is the one most referred to in *The Kite Runner*, *The Shahnameh* as a whole sets the general background against which the characters in the narrative are developed. Consequently, the qualities which the characters of *The Kite Runner* are juxtaposed against are magnanimity, capacity for vengeance, loyalty, generosity and truthfulness; all those attributes that the heroes of *The Shahnameh* are well known for. Success and failure, happiness and misery in *The Kite Runner* seem to be totally dependent on whether one professes to have or lack these qualities. Amir, the

narrator, is traumatized as he keeps comparing himself to the accomplishments of a Persian hero, only to realize how unworthy he is to be called Baba's son. The more conscious he becomes of his deficiencies, the greater is his adulation for his father and Hassan, and the bigger is his sense of being rendered isolated and powerless. Amir's self-disapproval thus turns out to be a direct reflection of his inability to conform to the traditional concepts of power. Madan Sarup says that traditionally "power" has been conceptualized as the force "which lays down the law, which limits, obstructs, refuses, prohibits and censors" (73). Thus, in traditional terms, Amir's inability to conform to the established concepts of heroism denies him that sense of power which can help him to take charge of his life.

In keeping with the canon of *The Shahnameh*, in *The Kite Runner* both Baba and Hassan, the Hazara servant, are complemented for possessing Rostam-like qualities. They are said to be "vigorous, competitive, valiant, generous and charismatic" (Bird, "*The Kite Runner* and Persian Folklore"). For Amir, Baba is the perfect image of the Persian hero. He is an active person who hunts, plays soccer and never shies away from entering new ventures. For instance, though he has no experience in architecture, when he sets his mind on building an orphanage, he single-handedly designs it. He is also generous, helping those in need. When his acquaintance Del Mohammed asks him for money to open a restaurant, he gives it to him unconditionally. Rahim, Baba's friend, comments that he not only gave him the money but he also "refused repayment" until he was forced to take it (KR 82). Baba's sense of social responsibility is so strong that he personally funds the building of the whole orphanage project "paying for the engineers, electricians, plumbers and laborers" (KR 12). Amir's conception of his father is so idealistic that he places him on a pedestal he can never measure up to. He says: "Real men didn't read poetry - and God forbid they should ever write it![like he does] Real men - real boys - played soccer just as Baba had when he had been young" (KR 17). In his seeming perfection, Baba becomes symbolic of the strong, united Afghanistan that all Afghans wish for.

Courage is also another feature of Baba's personality that earns him a lot of respect amongst his countrymen. It is claimed that he is so courageous that he once fought a bear and defeated him. He also seems not to be intimidated by violent people. When he is on his journey out of "Shorawi - occupied Kabul" to the safety of Pakistan, he confronts a Russian officer who believes that it is within his rightful claim to rape the Afghani woman riding with them in the truck as payment for their passage along the border (KR 100). Baba's willingness to risk his life to protect a complete stranger shows his high ethics and humanitarian principles. Baba's heroic act earns him the respect of

all those around him, especially the woman's husband who kisses his hand for having shown the courage which he was not able to muster himself to stand up to the Russian officer.

Further elaboration of the heroic deeds of an ideal father are enumerated as Baba is forced to leave his home town and migrate to America. Despite the fact that he becomes a refugee in a foreign country, working at a menial job, his dignity and pride remain intact and he never lets go of those traditions that form an important part of his past. He still holds on to those values and traditions that empower his sense of self and reinforce his sense of identity. For instance, when Amir wants to marry Soraya, he goes 'kastegari' (asking for hand in marriage) in the old Afghani way determined to show his respect to a culture whose traditions, after all, sanction his own perception of self. Baba cares so much about his image and his self-respect that even when his doctor tells him that he is ill with cancer, he decides to forego chemotherapy, preferring not to spend his last days under someone else's care. His words to Amir are: "I don't want anybody's sympathy" (KR 137).

Amir's blind admiration for his father, however, does not go unnoticed by him and it becomes an added factor that empowers Baba's sense of greatness. As such, he perceived that he had the right to "mold the world around him to his liking" (KR 14). What essentially this means is that Baba felt that he had the right to decide what was good or bad, right or wrong and since "Baba saw the world in black and white," his high ethics and standards became a tough act for Amir to follow (KR 14). As the hero, Baba believed he had the prerogative to lay down the "law which limits, obstructs, refuses, prohibits and censors" (Sarup 73). His judicial capabilities essentially became the barometer against which Amir continuously measures up against and always fails.

Hassan, the Hazara boy, is another character in the story who displays qualities of a Persian hero. Some critics go as far as calling Hassan the "real hero" for his unswerving "loyalty, truthfulness, valor" (Bird, "Heroism and Tale Telling" 12). From the moment Hassan appears in the story, he is hard at work trying to please Amir: "While I ate and complained about homework, Hassan made my bed, packed my books and pencils" (KR 23). Not only does Hassan work hard physically in order to please Amir, but he is also willing to humiliate himself at the prospect of making Amir happy. When he and Amir play cards, he loses on purpose to give him the confidence he needs to win the kite tournament the next day. Amir's comment that "He was so goddamn pure, you always felt like a phony around him" shows Hassan's power of influence over Amir (KR 51). Despite the fact that he is always trying to fade into the background, his goodness and purity force others to be affected by

his powerful presence. It is then no coincidence that Amir's first short story is crafted in the presence of his strongest and most assured ally - Hassan.

Hassan's most powerful act of selflessness happens as he tries to protect Amir's prized trophy - the kite - from Assef (Amir's nemesis) and his friends. Because Amir felt neglected and a failure his whole life, he puts great emphasis on winning the kite tournament. Understanding this, Hassan does everything he can; he even sacrifices his manhood, to protect Amir's prized trophy from damage or embezzlement. Assef's denigrating allusion to Hassan as "A loyal Hazara, loyal as a dog" sums up Hassan's relationship with Amir (KR 63). Hassan willingly gives up his dignity, his sense of integrity for Amir, while Amir uses him as a means to meet his ends. When Amir cannot find any one to play with, he turns to Hassan as his playmate, but when it is time to stand up for him and protect him, he can only think of himself and his own victories.

As Amir watches Hassan being raped, he identifies Hassan's look of "resignation" to that of a lamb which is about to be slaughtered on 'Eid Al-adha,' a Muslim day of festivities. Amir's association of Hassan's offering of himself, to that of Prophet Ibrahim's sacrifice of his son Ishmael to God, unequivocally elevates Hassan's status to that of a religious hero. Amir's description of Hassan's "look of acceptance" again reaffirms Hassan's acknowledgement of his magnanimous role and proves his willingness to sacrifice himself to "a higher purpose" (KR 67). This association between Hassan and an important religious figure clearly gives importance to Hassan as a pivotal figure in the scheme of the narrative and elevates him to the position of a religious hero whose actions are of truly symbolic significance, in keeping with the tradition of the Persian heroes of *The Shahnameh*.

Hassan's appreciation of the Persian epic *The Shahnameh* in the narrative also ascertains his respect for and identification with Persian heroes. From the beginning of the narrative, we see Hassan's fascination with the heroes of *The Shahnameh*. As Amir would read to Hassan from the book, Hassan would ask him to "Read it again, please, Amir agha" (KR 25). Hassan's emotional reaction to the sacrifices that take place in the accounts, especially Rostam's sacrifice of his son Sohrab, clearly indicates his identification with these characters and their larger than life actions. It is then no coincidence that Hassan names his son after the warrior hero Sohrab. Hassan's gift of a new copy of *The Shahnameh* to Amir on his thirteenth birthday reaffirms Hassan's devotion to Amir despite his lack of appreciation of Hassan's sacrifices. This grand gesture by Hassan not only reconfirms Amir's sense of unworthiness, but also testifies to Hassan's greatness.

Despite Amir's ungratefulness for all that Hassan has done for him,

Hassan continues to look forward to serving his friend even after he has left the country. When Rahim asks him to leave his comfortable home in order to look after Baba's house as he has to travel somewhere else, he consents out of a feeling of loyalty for his old master. As the Taliban accuse him of being a liar and a thief, staying in a house that is not his, he stands his ground refusing to be intimidated by them. His public humiliation as he is taken out on the street and shot in the back of the head reasserts his position as an inconsequential Hazara. However, despite his consistent denigration, Hassan proves to have the staunch loyalty and allegiance that is missing in more highborn characters, such as Amir.

Having established Hassan's heroic stature, however, it is important to be aware of the fact that Hassan's heroism is of a different and less traditional nature than that of the Persian heroes. Lacking in qualities, such as royal ancestry and concern for a good name, Hassan's heroism is of a more contemporary disposition. Amanda Bird in "Heroism and Tale - Telling" states that "Hassan displays the virtues of a true hero: loyalty, truthfulness, valor. But he does not appear to be concerned about obtaining a good name. In fact, he even confesses to thievery to protect Amir" (KR 12). In "Manliness in Persian Literature", Arley Loewen asserts that fame or a good name is the deciding factor of a Persian hero in *The Shahnameh*. A person might have all the other attributes of a hero, but unless he is celebrated as such, his heroism is meaningless (57). The lust for glory is both a necessity, and a liability. This is where Hassan differs from the champions.

Nevertheless, Hassan's heroism lies in his ability to sacrifice himself despite the knowledge that his heroic acts will be met with ungratefulness and lack of appreciation. His positive exercise of valor and loyalty, in spite of people's lack of acknowledgement of his sacrifices, endow him with qualities of a much more humane nature than that found in Persian heroes. In fact, these qualities enrich him with the charisma and power of influence in the narrative to affect the scheme of the story without being affected by negative acts of treachery.

Michael Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* reassesses the concept of 'power' and power relations in a society. He says that the old conception of 'power' as a judicial, negative force has been replaced by a more positive and fruitful one. Madan Sarup explains Foucault's new conception of 'power' as one which "operates through the construction of new capacities and modes of activity rather than through the limitation of pre-existing ones" (73). She further explains this point saying that "For Foucault, then, conceiving of power as repression, constraint or prohibition is inade-

quote: power produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth" (74). Foucault says:

We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another.... These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analyzed, therefore, not on the bases of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations.

(Foucault 265)

Referring to Foucault's theory, it becomes clear that Hassan's power emanates not from the traditional social hierarchies of power but from the knowledge that despite his sacrifices, he will be disowned and disavowed in the presence of traditional power relations. Hassan's knowledge actually becomes "a power over others, the power to define others" which is of far greater significance than traditional dichotomies of power (Sarup 67). As an anti-type to Hassan, Amir's deficiencies are brought into greater focus and Hassan's high ethics become the norm against which Amir keeps defining himself. As the real hero, the true 'kite runner' of the story, Hassan becomes the creator of his own rituals of truth and relations of power that Amir has been unable to accomplish so far.

In contrast to Baba and Hassan, his "other half.... The half who had inherited what had been pure and noble in Baba," Amir considers himself to be unworthy of his father's love and attention (KR 313). The more that he witnesses moments of grandeur by either one of them, the more disgusted he becomes with his own deficiencies and baser motives. Once as Amir was listening in to a conversation between Rahim and Baba, he overhears his father telling Rahim: "If I hadn't seen the doctor pull him out of my wife with my own eyes, I'd never believe he's my son" (KR 20). Amir's feeling of dejection keeps him imprisoned in a world where he believes he can never amount to anything. The more that he lives around the heroic figures of his father and Hassan, the less pride he has in himself and the more powerless he feels about his life. Feeling unworthy of his father's love or admiration, Amir's childhood and early adulthood are spent fulfilling this prophecy.

If Baba and Hassan are portrayed, each in his own right, to be of heroic stature, Amir, in keeping with the modern historical trends, describes himself

as the anti-hero who "instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, and heroism in the face of fate, is petty, ignominious, ineffectual or passive" (Michaud and Michaud 214). Amir's major flaw as an anti-hero is his cowardice. His father's description of that flaw is that "there is something missing in that boy" (KR 20). Amir's inability to stand up for himself or others is the major obstacle that keeps him imprisoned within a world of lost heroes. Amir's problems start very early in life as he is pushed around and whacked by the neighborhood boys. His attitude is always passive as "he never fights back. Never, he just... drops his head" (KR 19). His father believes that the problem with this is that "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up for anything" (KR 20). It is important to note here that the passivity that Amir suffers from is very different from Hassan's acquiescence. Whereas Hassan complies out of a sense of duty and respect for his masters, Amir's inertia is of a basically cowardly nature. Hassan's strength makes him endure, while Amir's weakness makes him shy away from all responsibilities.

Amir's major display of cowardice, which will haunt him for the rest of his life, is his passive acceptance of Hassan's rape. Though Hassan is raped because he wouldn't hand in Amir's kite to Asseff, Amir's cowardly nature makes him watch on as his friend gets violated. Amir's physical weakness in addition to his cowardice makes him shy away from confronting Asseff and avenging Hassan's honor. He confesses: "I ran because I was a coward... I was afraid of getting hurt" (KR 68). As he tries to rationalize his actions, Amir admits to even more measly thoughts. He says: "Nothing was free in this world. Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay to win Baba. Was it a fair price?... He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?" (KR 68). Though Amir's line of reasoning might have seemed to make sense so early on, he later realizes that the prize he was really after, his father's affection, could not be bought with objects like kites. Though his father displays affection towards him for the next couple of days, it does not in any way "close the chasm" between father and son (KR 76). Furthermore, Amir's acceptance of his inability to display virtues of valor and honor renew his feelings of inadequacy and keep him powerless and unworthy of anyone's affection. As Hassan hands over the kite to Amir, his fear is not that Hassan would show signs of anger but that he would actually show "guileless devotion" to him who is unworthy of it (KR 69).

Amir's later rejection of *The Shahnme* as a present for his thirteenth birthday from Hassan is also symbolic of Amir's failure to display the true virtues of the Persian hero. As he takes the book and places it under the heap of gifts he has received, he attempts to bury the shame he feels for not having shown loyalty to his friend. Unlike Persian heroes who "never flag in their

pursuit of personal honor and glory," Amir has miserably failed to avenge his friend and to repay the sacrifices he has undertaken for him (Hanaway 97).

As Amir and Baba flee the country, Amir continues to display traits of physical and moral weakness. His consistent lurching and moaning on their journey out of Kabul reawakens Amir's sense of unworthiness and powerlessness. He says: "I knew he saw my car sickness as yet another of my array of weaknesses - I saw it on his embarrassed face" (KR 96). Comparing himself to his father, Amir continues to fail by comparison. Baba's heroic act of standing up for a complete stranger brings into focus Amir's dishonorable act of sacrificing his friend for a mere kite. Amir's words "sometimes, I too wondered if I was really Baba's son" reaffirms Amir's sense of unworthiness not only as a son but also as a human being.

Though Baba and Amir's relationship changes for the better in America, we find that Amir's anti-heroic qualities still haunt him and play a major role in his lack of self confidence. When, for instance, he discovers that his father is about to die from cancer, his first thoughts are about himself, of his inability to fend for himself: "What about me, Baba? What am I supposed to do?" (KR 137). Amir's feeling of loneliness and helplessness despite his mature age (22) becomes one of the reasons why he asks for Soraya Taheri's hand in marriage. The thought of living without his father's support and courageous nature drives him to find that strength somewhere else. No sooner does he go 'khastegari' (asking for hand in marriage) than Soraya displays the courage he was looking forward to depending on as she reveals to him details of her past liaison with an Afghani man. Despite Soraya's presence in his life, Amir still feels that he has little control over his world. As he and Soraya are not able to have children, Amir's only explanation is that "something, someone, somewhere had decided to deny me fatherhood for the things I had done. Maybe this was my punishment" (KR 164). Amir's inability to make up for his past mistakes and his sense of unworthiness consume his energy and deny him any sense of fulfillment. The assessment given by Farid, the driver, of Amir's position as a "tourist" in his own country when he revisits Afghanistan supports Amir's feeling of alienation not only from his country and its traditions, but also from his rootless life as an unworthy son to a heroic father.

As the personal and political intertwine in the narrative, Amir's tragic relationship with his father and Hassan becomes symptomatic of the political struggles in Afghanistan. In The Times Literary Supplement James O'Brien says that Amir and Hassan's relationship actually "echoes the betrayals and power shifts that begin to shape the country shortly after the story begins" (25). Amir and Hassan's and Amir and Baba's distorted relationships become representative of the social and religious struggles that infest the country.

Madan Sarup says that the way that this can be explained is through Foucault's theory of power that claims that political and national struggles actually "function on the basis of other already existing power networks such as family, kinship, knowledge, etc." (79). In other words, personal relationships fuel political struggles at the same time as political struggles inflame personal relationships.

The political struggles that are discussed in the narrative seem to find their roots in both the social and religious differences of Afghani tribes. Some of these differences come to form the background against which the narrative unfolds, while others play a more active role in the movement of the plot. The social system upon which Afghani society is based is one of ethnic inequality; Hazaras, descendents of Moguls, are considered to be inferior to the Pashtuns, "the largest and most politically powerful ethnic group in Afghanistan" (Blood). In *The Kite Runner*, Ali and Hassan belong to this marginalized group who are considered to be of lesser value because of their religious beliefs, ethnic origin and even appearance. Throughout the narrative, we see Hassan and his father Ali accepting their inferior position as a given. While they may feel pain as they are being marginalized, they never act against their victimizers or try to rectify their situation. Asseff's comment that "Afghanistan is the land of the Pashtuns. It always has been, always will be. We are the true Afghans, the pure Afghans, not this Flat-Nose here" sums up the Pashtun attitude towards Hazar. Even though liberal Afghan, like Baba, might treat them with kindness and make them feel part of the family, when it comes down to social status, it is a given that they should sacrifice themselves and be silent. This is most clearly seen in Ali's acceptance of Baba's past sexual molestation of his wife Sanaubar. Congruently, Hassan's devotion to Amir remains intact despite Amir's ingratitude and deception. Hassan knows that Amir didn't stand up for him in the alley when he was being raped, yet he still manages to show "guileless devotion" to him (KR 69). Even after Amir accuses him of stealing and he is forced to leave the house he was raised in, he remains loyal and accepting of his lower status in life. When Hassan and his wife are asked by Rahim to come back and take care of Babas's house, they come and stay in the back house. Though they could have stayed in one of the large, comfortable rooms in the main house, their understanding of their ethnic inferiority makes them choose not to violate the social hierarchies imposed by society. Hassan's unforgettable expression "For you, a thousand times over" epitomizes his unswerving loyalty to his sovereign master (KR 59).

As an oppressed national minority, the Hazara political identity was being slowly dissolved to be assimilated into the dominant culture. One way that the state did this was to play down their national identity and emphasize

their religious difference as 'Shia'. By replacing their national identity with a religious one, the Pashtuns aimed at breaking their social unity as Hazara descendants into a multitude of Islamic sects (Jafaris, Ismailis, and Shia). Divided in their doctrinal differences, Hazara's were less likely to pose a threat to the dominant culture (Hafizullah). This aspect has been played upon by Hosseini to build up the eventual crescendo leading to the display of the dichotomy of power between the master and servant, the ruler and the ruled.

Though the Shia and Hazara accepted their 'ghesmat,' destiny, for their lower status in life, nevertheless, the inequities of the caste system caused tensions to develop between them and the Pashtuns. In *The Kite Runner*, Amir's deception of Hassan, when he accuses him of stealing, forces Hassan to move to another town and causes Amir to live with the experience of guilt for the rest of his life. Though Hassan and Ali accept their inferior position in life, it is other people's violation, like Baba and Amir, of all human decency that creates tensions and power struggles that one way or another lead to a fragmented state of being.

Hence, the new historical approach endorses the fact that while the envisaging of the social and religious differences in Afghanistan caused strife and inequity amongst the different classes, it also fed into the political struggle that was fermenting in Afghanistan. Madan Sarup's previous evaluation of Foucault's theory of state power as functioning only on the bases of other already "existing power networks such as family, kinship, knowledge..." proves true of the Afghani situation (79). As the Islamic fundamentalist Mojahideen and the Marxist people's Democratic Party of Afghanistan fought over control of the Afghani government, the Soviet forces interceded and a war was well on its way. After eleven years of futile war, the Soviets withdrew only to leave a country even more divided and broken than it used to be. As the Taliban took control of the country in the 1990s, they managed to bring it to a new low, committing atrocious human rights violations, especially against women. In *The Kite Runner* this is depicted in graphic style in the last chapter when Amir goes back to revisit Kabul and finds it ravaged under Taliban rule. As a high-ranking official in the Taliban government, Asseff reappears as a "cartoonish embodiment of sadism and the desire for absolute power" (Caballero-Rob). Having been already described earlier in the book as a 'sociopath,' he represents everything that has gone wrong in Afghanistan. His fascist, racist and sadistic tendencies represent the Afghanistan which is plural, divided and sick, while "Amir's struggle to defeat him and save the young Sohrab appears to be an allegory for a broader struggle for Afghanistan" (Caballero-Rob).

What is true of the political struggle in *The Kite Runner* is also true of the

personal conflicts in the narrative. Though Amir has always felt powerless and insignificant in comparison to the heroic figures of Baba and Hassan, his new life in America in addition to the experiences he goes through later in Kabul as an adult give him the knowledge and confidence to take charge of his life. As Amir becomes active, courageous and outspoken, he unconsciously integrates the traditions of his Afghani culture with the values of his new foster country. Once considering himself an anti-hero, Amir now becomes a hero in his own right empowered with knowledge, wisdom and force to stand up for what he believes in. As Khalid Abdallah, the British born actor who plays the role of Amir in the movie *The Kite Runner*, remarks, "the change is so affecting because there is a journey in it that so many people recognize: the desire to have your father be proud of you [finally!]" (14). Finally, allowing for his heritage and cultural values to take center stage, Amir finds in himself the strength and power that had been there all along, but which he had always felt unworthy of. Once he saves Sohrab, Hassan's son, from the clutches of Taliban oppressive rule, he becomes aware of his ability to be heroically active. No longer a passive recipient, but an active agent of change, Amir takes responsibility for creating the power relations in his life. Amir's newly-acquired knowledge and power is what finally empowers him with the insight and strength to relay his experience to us through power of discourse. Writing in retrospect with the knowledge of the consequences of his earlier actions, Amir is able to take his readers on a journey back in time and space so that events and actions are no longer read in isolation from one another, but reveal a process of shifting power relations. As a continuum, events take on historical importance bringing into life the many changing facets of the human struggle for survival or domination.

Just as New Historicists emphasize the importance of being open to new perspectives, new readings, Hosseini shows that it is only in the afterthought, only after the narrator had been through his experiences as a child, been to America and tried a different life and then gone back to his homeland and acknowledged his culture and traditions that he was able to put facts into the proper perspective. Hence, the novel contains a remarkable acquisition of the historical aspects, as Krizner and Mandell observe, "New historicism focuses on a text in relation to the historical and cultural contexts of the period in which it was created and the period in which it was critically evaluated" (1950). These contexts are not considered simply as background but as integral parts of the text. History in *The Kite Runner* is not just an objective fact; history is interpreted and reinterpreted depending on the power structure of that society. This is in keeping with the further observation of Krizner and Mandell, "Literature, in new historicism does not exist outside time and place and

cannot be studied without reference to the era in which it was written" (1951). Also of importance is the period in which the work is "critically evaluated" because new developments in history and altered power structures offer a modified perspectives against which the text needs to be read (Krizner and Mandell 1950). In keeping with pioneering buoyancy, Hosseini has infused the concepts of New historicism to an extent that it has electrified the perception and illuminated the conduit of the concept to an unexpectedly newer comprehension. As a result, although the novel accommodates all the necessary traditional requisites to assist it to qualify as an outstanding example of New historicism, yet it is a trail blazer by being able to surpass all historical and cultural bounds and portraying a universal struggle of mankind, despite maintaining the new historicist recognition of all literature/discourse as being culturally and historically specific.

Alan Silverman remarks on this commendable achievement of Hosseini, "Instead of just making it a building account of history, it is an intimate account that requires no atlas and no translation to engage and enlighten" (F9). Hosseini's power as a writer manifests itself in the ability to become an active agent presenting this very account mentioned by Silverman. He officiously wields his own experiences as an Afghani along with the incidents of living in America and creates a discourse which in its own right establishes its claim to "new objects of knowledge" (Sarup 74). Hosseini's realistic depiction of life in Afghanistan transfers the whole struggle for power from a rudimentary, private experience of a nation to an all encompassing and universal struggle of mankind. Hosseini's ability to recount real occurrences from the past while at the same time avoiding being side tracked by emotional attachments to any one particular race, religion or sect allows him to present the Afghani experience in all its richness and turmoil.

Writing from the gut, not the heart, Hossieni has enraptured readers not only in the West but all over the world, who no longer flinch at the name of terrorist Afghanistan, but are striving to be familiar and sympathetic to its multitudinous problems and conflicts. Hosseni's narrative actually refocuses attention on Afghanistan not as a terrorist state but as a country whose problems play "a pivotal role in the global politics of the new millennium" (Publishers Weekly). Unlike other Afghanis who believe that the only way they can make a difference is by meddling in the politics of the country, Hosseini's participation is of the most worthy and affective kind; it rectifies the narrow views of the West and opens up new vistas for the East, hence soliciting a corrective solution for the power imbalance. His work enlightens and through enlightenment gives power to the reader whose fascination and respect for the narrative, in its turn, acknowledges the text as a powerful effort in terms of

focusing on the problems of the diasporic community of the Afghani. With both knowledge and verification in hand and without any acerbity, Hosseini's text is eloquent in drawing the attention of the West to their indifferent attitude towards the perennial trauma of the ethnic groups and the disparity of power equations between them.

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السلطة في العلاقات الشخصية:

The Kite Runner

مشاعل السديري

موضوع هذه الورقة هو السعي لاكتشاف مصادر القوة في العلاقات الشخصية في رواية The Kite Runner للمؤلف خالد حسيني، سنة 2003. وفيها يتم تسليط الضوء على السياق السياسي والتاريخي لتلك الفترة التي كتبت فيها الرواية، ويلاحظ التغير في مصادر القوة في هذه الرواية عن الأزمنة الماضية، ففي كتاب The Shahnameh لفردوسي الذي يستعرض بعض التقاليد والأعراف السارية في المجتمع الأفغاني، وقتها، تتبلور السلطة والقوة لدى الأفراد بما يتمتعون به من قوة جسدية وشجاعة، وفي ظلها تتشكل علاقات شخصية غير سوية.

أما في كتاب حسيني فتظهر القوة والسلطة الشخصية بصورة ذات صبغة أدبية، ويكون مصدرها الموقف وجرأة الكلمة.