



Beyond Betrayal: The Interplay of Attachment and Identity in Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner"

Sama Mahdi Salih

University of Tikrit / College of Education for Humanities / Department of English Language

Asst. Prof. Dr. Mohammed Naseef Jassim

University of Tikrit / College of Education for Humanities / Department of English Language

Abstract in English

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Abstract

Keywords

. This paper examines Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* through attachment theory, with Orientalism used as a secondary framework to contextualize exile and cultural "Othering." The study emphasizes Amir, and how the distance from his father, insecure attachment, guilt, betrayal, and trauma affect his fractured sense of self. It claims that Amir's identity comes about through shifting emotional connections, traumatic memories, and quest for recognition. Amir's internal insecurity and the challenges he faces in finding a coherent identity are also heightened as a result of displacement and Orientalist constructions of the Afghan refugee in the paper. The study reveals the enduring effects of childhood attachments and cultural marginality on the process of identity development, emotional management, and moral healing, by analyzing the novel as a story of damaged attachment in both the personal and socio-political spheres.

Attachment theory, identity, childhood trauma, emotional development, Khaled Hosseini, The Kite Runner

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1.Introduction

The Kite Runner is a novel about memory, betrayal, and moral return. At its core is how the self is formed within relationships of unequal power and relationships that are emotionally unstable. Since the first lines of the narrative, it does not allow the easy division of the past and present, childhood and adulthood, memory and identity. Amir does not start by giving an impersonal account of what has gone before; he begins instead by the recognition that his adult being is still tied up to a scene of fear and silence of his childhood. He says that he "became what [he is] today at the age of

twelve” and that “the past claws its way out,” (Hosseini, 2004, p.1) immediately establishing identity as something made, marked, and wounded in relation to earlier bonds rather than discovered as an autonomous interior essence .

This is important as it puts selfhood in the context of relationships at the very beginning. Amir is not shown as an independent consciousness, who subsequently ends up in the situation of family conflict; he is presented as a person whose very sense of who he is, has been formed within the paradigm of childhood attachment. The structure of his life is centered around characters who never are just external characters. Baba, Hassan, Ali, Rahim Khan and subsequently Sohrab are made emotionally constitutive presences. They give, refuse, deform or demand some form of recognition that produces long lasting effects on the self. The main crisis of the novel is not therefore in the fact of betrayal by the masses, or the subsequent attempt at atonement. It is in the more nuanced way Amir is subjected to under the circumstances of paternal distance, selective devotion, ethnic hierarchy, secrecy and shame. To read the novel through the lens of attachment theory is to acknowledge that the novel is most fundamentally a deeply psychological drama about what the character Amir does rather than simply what the character Amir is doing

The main axis of said hierarchy is the father-son relation. Baba is neither absent nor simply cruel. He is outwardly glorious, ethically imperious, highly esteemed by his peers, and capable of true liberality, but is emotionally inaccessible to Amir. It is also evident throughout the novel as Amir compares himself with the benchmark of his father, Baba, and finds himself inferior. Baba is not as dramatically distant as we understand the term of distance; distance is created through exclusion, comparison, disappointment as opposed to being abandoned. Amir remembers sitting outside the study door while Baba entertained adult company, wondering “why it was always grown-ups’ time with him” (Hosseini, 2004, p.25). He overhears later on Baba saying that there is something missing in him and that a boy who is unable to stand up on his own becomes a man who is unable to stand up to anything (Hosseini, 2004). What comes to light in these scenes is a child, who does not question the fact that his father does matter to him but does not question whether he is lovable. That is just where the power of the attachment theory comes in: the insecurity experienced by Amir cannot be reduced to a mere sadness or lack of confidence. It is organized by a given pattern of relational inconsistency where the attachment figure is massively, highly and periodically rewarding, though not consistently available as a source of emotional regulation

The narrative progression of the novel can thus be interpreted as the history of a hurt self-constructed in an atmosphere of insecure attachment and subsequently forced towards healing. The hunger of Baba to be recognized by him becomes so great that it defines the meaning of kite tournament, blue kite as well as the eventual alley scene where Hassan is beat up in his service of the blue kite. The tournament is important to Amir since it seems to give the prospect of paternity recognition. It is important since the betrayal shows the devastating power of a self-organized on the conditional love. The fact that this structure is not forgotten by exile to America, adult marriage, and literary ambition, but is only carried to new contexts. When Rahim Khan later tells Amir that “There is a way to be good again,” the phrase is effective not because it introduces morality for the first time, but because it reactivates an attachment history that has never ceased to govern him (Hosseini, 2004). The adult story is thereby to be

bound by a narrative of early emotional damage , the injury that is perpetually in guilt, avoidance, longing and the compulsion to go back.

The need to read the issue of selfhood via the attachment theory is particularly necessary because all the most visible themes in the novel, such as betrayal, redemption, exile, war, national collapse can easily overshadow the more insidious processes of relationships through which identity is actually constructed. A large part of the interpretation of the novel naturally drifts towards the political context of the novel, its portrayal of the Afghan past or its moral trajectory of cowardice to responsibility. Those are the dimensions that are central but which do not explain entirely why the story of Amir is so psychologically enticing. What makes the novel so moving is that the ethical drama of the novel cannot be separated and regarded as independent of the developmental experience. Not only is it devastating that Amir betrays Hassan in such a way, but the fact that Amir does so when he is just a child, and his sense of self has been organized around the fear of losing paternal love. His subsequent distress is not merely conscience in its abstract form; it is the result of a broken relational world in which love, admiration, envy, dependence, and shame have never been safely incorporated. The novel can thus be interpreted not only as a moral allegory, but as a story of attachment in which personality is revealed to be brought about by recurring negotiations on matters of proximity, distance, value and rejection. That is why the current reading puts the concept of selfhood at the forefront of the discussion as opposed to it being a byproduct of plot. It is not whether Amir is guilty or he is redeemed, but rather what type of self has been created as a result of the relational conditions of his childhood.

What brings the novel even greater psychological interest is that the injury to selfhood is not limited to the initial scene of the childhood but it continues to affect the subsequent forms of intimacy, remembrance, and responsibility when he is an adult. Not even his physical separation to Afghanistan can break up the prior structure of feeling. Rather, they demonstrate that it is the self that brings with it unresolved attachments in new forms. The past does not just exist as a memory but it exists as a form or a structure that goes on affecting the way Amir perceives love, loyalty and obligation. This is the reason as to why the subsequent swinging of the novel towards Sohrab is so important. The association with the child is not just a new moral obligation; it is a renewal of previous emotional formations, and a challenge to Amir to confront himself in a new position. No longer he is the one who craved being noticed or unprotected, but he is also the one to be called upon to provide protection, security and nurturing. Through this, identity of the novel is connected to the continuity of time where childhood attachment is not taken away or simply repeated but reworked under new pressures. The self which is formed is thus not in any ultimate sense stable. It is formed by way of return, of the reoccurrence of earlier wounds in subsequent relationships, and of the challenging possibility that one may react differently the second time, etc.

1.1 Literature Review

Often, literary scholarship explores the psychological, emotional, and psychological factors behind the development of characters and plots, providing valuable insights into human nature. Since its publication, *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini has received critical acclaim for its powerful and moving portrayal of themes of guilt, betrayal, and redemption. Although there are many studies that try to discuss

the novel from a different perspective (such as post-colonialism, trauma studies, moral philosophy etc), a detailed analysis of the novel based on the theory of Attachment can be of great use in comprehending the deep psychological journey of the protagonist Amir of the novel, and the interpersonal relationships that mold his fractured selfhood. Attachment Theory is a theory developed by John Bowlby and later expanded by Mary Ainsworth that early childhood experiences that occur with primary caregivers have a dramatic impact on a person's ability to create a relationship and to control their emotions throughout life. The idea of “internal working models” (IWMs) came from Bowlby (1969), who theorized that these early interactions produce schemas of thought and feelings that influence an individual's expectations and actions during later interactions. A secure attachment usually takes place when a child is being consistently and responsively cared for which makes him/her feel good about himself/herself and feel trustful with the family. On the other hand, insecure attachment styles, including anxious-ambivalent (resistant) or avoidant types (Ainsworth et al., 1978), can result from inconsistent or rejecting caregiving. These patterns are essential to comprehend people's self- and other-perception, as well as their world view which directly relate to their emotional regulation and relational strategies.

These dynamics are implicit in the psychological interpretations of *The Kite Runner* that are available. For example, Baba is often cited as being cold and distant and how this affected Amir's constant need for his approval. This father-child relationship can be directly traced to the origins of insecure attachment, when a child's need for parental attention is delivered inconsistently and the child experiences more anxiety and a feeling of being unworthy of care. The concept of the fractured selfhood, as articulated in the theoretical framework for this study (Magsi et al., 2024), emphasizes that identity is not formed in isolation but is profoundly “marked, and wounded in relation to earlier bonds.” This view is consistent with the view of attachment theory that considers relational experience as a key determinant of self-concept. While some analyses, such as that by Magsi, Solangi, and Soomro (2024), have utilized psychoanalytic frameworks to explore Hassan's character, highlighting his “unconditional loyalty” and “deep yearning for emotional validation” (p. 552), a more explicit and systematic application of attachment theory allows for a nuanced understanding of how his secure attachment, despite his marginalized status, contrasts sharply with Amir's insecurity. Hassan's steadfast example of a positive IWM in the midst of such injustice illustrates the moral strength that a secure attachment relationship can provide, and Amir's insecure relationships reveal the moral emptiness that can result.

Moreover, the socio-political background of the novel, with the refugee experience and the dynamics of Orientalism as external forces influencing these inner psychological formations, is of great importance. Rasheed and Hamad (2021) discuss how the “binary opposition” (p. 122) between the Western “Occident” and the Oriental “Other” can reinforce existing feelings of inadequacy and marginalization among refugees. Though not a study of attachment theory itself, this post-colonial view provides important perspective into how the social level “Othering” experience can intensify the pre-existing insecure attachment patterns of an individual, thereby creating a personal psychological struggle into a larger cultural and/or identity crisis. In the West, Amir's identity is devalued externally, reflecting and reinforcing his internal devaluation from his childhood, which it makes it more difficult for him to find

a unified identity and more avoidant. It is important, therefore, to grasp the dynamics of these psychological and socio-political factors, in order to appreciate the main themes of the novel, identity, trauma, and the difficult journey towards healing.

1.2 Methodology

The approach used in this study is qualitative, interpretative, with the perspective of Attachment Theory to analyze the formation of self in *The Kite Runner*. Theories such as John Bowlby's and Mary Ainsworth's theories will be used to analyse the concepts of internal working models, insecure attachment, emotional deprivation, guilt and reparative action as a means of understanding Amir's psychological development and his fragmented sense of self

The study primarily relies on close textual analysis. Key scenes, dialogues, memories and emotional reactions are highlighted to illustrate the impact of early attachment on identity, moral conflict, and emotional regulation throughout the novel. All psychological interpretations are supported by direct quotations from the text; the avoidance of unsupported theoretical generalisations

In addition to Attachment Theory, the study uses the postcolonial point of view as a secondary context, specifically that of the Orientalism of Edward Said. This is not a lens through which to analyse per se but a tool to account for how the psychological insecurities are perpetuated through wider socio-political contexts. This is shown by the text references of exile, refugee displacement, and the Pashtun-Hazara hierarchy, which further exacerbates Amir's emotional instability and identity crisis

The research is interpretive and not empirical; thus, it relies on textual evidence and theoretical analysis instead of statistical methods. Through this approach, the study argues that identity in the novel is relationally constructed through attachment, trauma, memory, and socio-political experience.

2. Attachment Theory: Theoretical Framework

No account of selfhood can be convincing if it isolates the individual from the emotional bonds through which psychic life first becomes organized. The formation of human identity occurs in the relationship of care, absence, protection, uncertainty and response. Attachment theory provides an especially potent framework to the process of analyzing the mechanisms of shaping expectations of the self and others due to early attachment to significant figures. In Bowlby's formulation, attachment is not merely affection in a broad or sentimental sense, but a structured emotional system. He defines attachment behavior as "any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified and preferred individual" (Bowlby, 1982, p. 39). The significance of this definition is that it shifts the debate that is often characterized by ambiguous concepts of closeness to one that is much more specific, which is the relational significance. It is not mere proximity that counts, but that one person figure comes to occupy a privileged position to situations of fear, distress, fatigue or uncertainty.

Attachment is hence not selective. Even in situations where more than one adult is involved in the daily care of the children, children do not orient themselves towards all caregivers of the children on equal footing. Bowlby (1982) stresses that attachment figures are not treated as the equivalents of one another, and that one figure is often the primary, particularly where situations are arousing either of the two anxieties or needs. It is this selectivity that is central to any explanation of emotional development since it provides an explanation as to why inconsistency, absence, or loss are never experienced in a general sense. The person to whom the child is seeking comfort is not just anybody;

the attachment figure is the individual whose presence or absence has a special emotional impact on the child. It is with this selectivity that the process of attachment is among the earliest processes through which the psychic organisation of safety, reassurance, and value occurs.

Two functions of the caregiver that are closely related are identified in the theory: caregiver as safe haven and as secure base. The former describes the figure to whom the child turns when in distress and the latter is the figure whose presence allows the child to explore. Bowlby (1982) observes that the infant gradually comes to use the caregiver as a secure base from which to engage the surrounding world. Ainsworth's observational work made this concept central, and Bretherton (1992) later notes that one of Ainsworth's major contributions was the formulation of the attachment figure as "a secure base from which an infant can explore the world" (p. 759). This concept has been key in the sense that it shows that the concepts of dependence and autonomy are not mutually exclusive. The only way that a child will be more independent is when he or she knows that the support will be there when he or she needs him or her. Security is not then the lack of attachment need but the assurance of the ongoingness of care.

The long-lasting psychological meaning of these bonds is elaborated using the idea of inner working models introduced by Bowlby. In *Separation: Anxiety and Anger*, he argues that a child's "expectations of the availability and likely responsiveness of attachment figures" derive from the "history of his interactions with them" (Bowlby, 1973, p. 203). Such internal models are related both to the self, and to other people. They shape whether the self is felt to be worthy of care, whether others are imagined as dependable, whether distress can be expressed safely, and whether closeness is reassuring or risky. What starts as a repetition of interaction slowly evolves to be part of structure. This idea has been reinforced in the later work. As demonstrated by Dykas and Cassidy (2011), attachment related models have an influence on how social information is processed throughout the life span, which influences the information perceived, retained, amplified, or defensively avoided. By doing so, the attachment theory does not only give an account of early bonds, but also a theory of subjectivity. The identity results as expectation generated inwardly as they are formed in relation to care.

In this context, secure attachment is a pattern whereby the child is able to seek comfort in an effective manner, they are able to regain emotional balance after experiencing distress and they also use the caregiver as a base with which they can explore. Ainsworth (1979) describes securely attached infants as children who "use their [caregivers] as a secure base from which to explore" and who, in reunion, "seek contact with, proximity to, or at least interaction with their [caregivers]" (p. 932). Security is not to be confused with emotional self-sufficiency, or an absence of separation protest. Separated children might be upset by being separated, but this does not cause them to lose confidence in knowing that they will at some time have comfort. The trend indicates not a lack of need, but the anticipation that need can be expressed and addressed without humiliating, panicked and collapsing emotionally. This is why secure attachment is very much related to more adaptive emotional regulation and more confident approach to the world.

Avoidant attachment A different structure of the system of attachment. In this pattern, the child is still attached but they inhibit or disguise open bids to be near especially when attachment needs are aroused. Ainsworth (1979) characterizes

avoidant infants as children who “rarely cry in the separation episodes and, in the reunion episodes, avoid the [caregiver], either mingling proximity-seeking and avoidant behaviors or ignoring her altogether” (p. 932). This definition is important as it helps to avoid confusion of avoiding something with not caring about it. The child is not deprived of attachment but the regulation of attachment is achieved by means of the emotional minimization. This is further explained later in the work. Mikulincer et al. (2003) explain avoidance as a deactivating strategy where thoughts, feelings and behaviors related to attachment are avoided in an attempt to contain vulnerability. What one may think is coolness, independence or low need may actually be a defense mechanism to a relational environment where open dependency has not been safely accepted.

Resistant or ambivalent attachment is one where there is a conflicting approach. The child enhances rather than downplay the attachment behavior. Ainsworth (1979) writes that resistant infants “show some signs of anxiety even in the pre-separation episodes,” are “intensely distressed by separation,” and in reunion are “ambivalent with the [caregiver], seeking close contact with her and yet resisting contact or interaction” (p. 932). Later, Cassidy and Berlin (1994) have related this pattern to a relatively low or inconsistent maternal availability and to a lack of confidence in exploration. This is not an absence of attachment but rather with doubt on whether the comfort of the caregiver can be depended on. The outcome is hyperactivating approach characterized by hypervigilance, escalated protest, and the incapability to bring calm. With this type of pattern, the attachment system will be in constant alert due to lack of emotional security in availability.

This hypervigilance is carried over into the child's internal working model where the self is seen as vulnerable and the caregiver as inconsistently responsive. This internal representation, according to Cassidy and Berlin (1994), keeps the person “chronically focused on the caregiver” (p. 973) at the expense of developing the skills of self-regulation. Developmentally this becomes more pronounced in social situations, with the child being more attuned to social cues and worrying about being abandoned. Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) go on to describe the “hyperactivating strategies” that are used to keep the attachment figure close: “clinging and controlling behaviors” that ensure that the attachment figure will stay available (p. 45). In peer environments, this often translates to a lack of social competence; ambivalent children may appear socially inhibited or, conversely, overly dependent on adults for emotional regulation, reflecting a “pervasive sense of loneliness” even when in the presence of others (Berlin et al., 1995, p. 91). These early patterns eventually become a cognitive pattern of thinking that focuses on threat detection, keeping the attachment system perpetually “on” and potentially influencing adult romantic relationships, often characterized as “preoccupation with the partner's availability” and doubt about one's own worthiness of love (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019, p. 112). As a consequence of this long history of instable care, these people have not been able to internalize a comforting mechanism; they are unable to move from outside to inside comfort, and their security will be found in the constant and active monitoring of their surroundings and significant others in those surroundings.

The attachment theory is also very convincing as it holds such a concern to affect regulation. Mikulincer et al. (2003) demonstrate that strategies of attachment are

directly connected with the process of distress management. Balance of help-seeking and more integrated control of feeling are supported by secure organization but not insecure patterns that tend towards hyperactivation or deactivation. This argument is furthered by Dykas and Cassidy (2011) who show that attachment-related models do not only affect overt behavior, but also cognition, attention, and memory. Depending on the organization of attachment insecurity, threatening relational information may be exaggerated, ignored or defensively distorted. The theory thus addresses directly the identity since it relates the selfhood with the habitual ways of interpreting and responding to proximity, rejection, dependence, and loss.

Dagan et al. (2021) argue that insecure attachment can be best characterized as a developmental vulnerability that correlates with later internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression, but is not in a one-to-one predictive manner. This explanation is important as it saves the power as well as the flexibility of the theory. The early insecurity can precondition the experiences of the person under the influence of the feeling of close relationships, the need to be cherished, and the feeling of being left alone. The attachment theory thus enables identity to be viewed in terms of being historically constructed but not deterministically defined.

2.1A Critical Analysis of Character Dynamics in *The Kite Runner*

The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini is a powerful exploration of selfhood, not in isolation, but as a relational identity defined by early developmental attachments, later traumas, and the hard work of repairing. Attachment formation is inevitably tied to the dynamics of care, absence and protection in formative years. In Amir's story, the main character, his sense of self is defined as "marked, and wounded with respect to earlier connections" (Hosseini, 2004, p.3). This analysis explores Amir's psychological growth in the context of attachment theory by detailing how his paternal distance, his internal working models, his fractured self and his search for reparative action shed light on his complicated moral development and search for a unified identity .

The father's role in child development is inadequately understood. One of Amir's inner conflicts is his uneasy relationship with his father Baba. As described by Bowlby, the concept of attachment is about the importance of the primary caregiver to the child who needs to have a "secure base" to confidently explore the world around them. But Baba is physically and socially a massive figure and, emotionally, absent and unapproachable to Amir. The emotional distance puts Amir in a constant state of hypervigilance a hallmark of resistant or ambivalent attachment. Amir perceives Baba as a "force of nature" whose attention commands the room, yet he is simultaneously a source of fear and exclusion for his son (Hosseini, 2004, p. 12). This is clearly reflected in Amir's childhood memories:

I'd sit by the door, knees drawn to my chest. Sometimes I sat there for an hour, sometimes two, listening to their laughter, their chatter. I'd leave me to wonder why it was always grown-ups' time with him. (Hosseini, 2004, p. 7)

This constant absence from Baba's inner circle, especially from the circle of male friends in the "smoking room" indicates a deep lack of emotional connection and tuning in. Amir is desperate to win his father's love, but always feels that he is not up to Baba's standards of the perfect man. Baba's overt disdain for Amir's literary inclinations "Real men didn't read poetry and God forbid they should ever write it!" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 15) further exacerbates Amir's sense of inadequacy. This ongoing emotional

deprivation creates a fractured selfhood with a conditional self worth. Amir feels responsible for his mother's death in childbirth, and that is what drives him to think that he's to blame for Baba's emotional distance. He poignantly reflects, "I always felt like Baba hated me a little. And why not? After all, I had murdered his dear wife hadn't I?" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 15). The emotional isolation from Baba and the guilt the Baba has instilled in Amir creates a strong internal working model (IWM) in Amir. This IWM makes him the least deserving person to receive unconditional love, and drives him to seek it from his father by means of desperate and ultimately destructive ones. The "hypervigilance" of the resistant child is evident in Amir's constant monitoring of Baba's reactions, as seen when "Baba's stony eyes bore into mine and, just like that, I wasn't laughing anymore" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 14), indicating a child acutely attuned to the subtle shifts in his primary caregiver's emotional state.

Amir's split soul is finally molded and hardened at the annual kite fighting tournament. The craving for Baba's approval is such and so high due to years of emotional neglect, it finally ends in a deep down moral bend. The theoretical framework emphasizes that "insecure attachment impacts identity [and] emotion management" and that's exactly what happens down the alley after the tournament.

Amir's loyal servant and half-brother Hassan is assaulted by Assef and Amir has a momentous decision to make. He is so in need of love from his father that he can't see the line between morality and what he considers to be a price to be paid for Baba's love, Hassan.

"Maybe Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 51)

The chilling rationalization is an example of how much Amir's self is "organized around the fear of losing paternal love." His betrayal is less a coward's act and more an inevitable result of a "broken relational world" where a need for a secure base (Baba's affection) must be met at the cost of the "other" (Hassan). The "look of the lamb" in Hassan's eyes a gaze of "resignation" and "acceptance" becomes a haunting symbol of Amir's moral failure and the profound psychological wounding he inflicts upon himself (Hosseini, 2004, p. 50). The image of the lamb, like in the feast of Eid-e-Qorban, is a reminder of the faithfulness of Hassan in the face of innocence and the betrayal that Amir experienced. Amir feels secure in his attachment in the immediate aftermath of his betrayal but this is a false sense of security. When he brings the blue kite back, Baba finally gives Amir the physical love that he so desperately desires:

I put the kite down and walked into his thick hairy arms. I buried my face in the warmth of his chest and wept... In his arms, I forgot what I'd done. (Hosseini, 2004, p. 52)

This moment is a redemptive one, yet it is based on deceit and horrible guilt. It is a substitute for a "reparative action," in which the achievement of the father's love is signalled by his disregard for his conscience and the hurt of another. But by forgetting, instead of facing his wrongdoing, he is only making the wound in his self deeper and the seeds of unresolved internal struggle take root, growing into a tree that will take decades to bear fruit. This physical constriction serves as a powerful metaphor for the emotional stranglehold his guilt maintains over him. The "thorny old barbs of guilt" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 122) continue to torment him, indicating the persistence of the internal conflict and the enduring impact of his childhood trauma on his adult emotion

management. Despite his attempts to build a new life, his IWM, shaped by his early experiences, continues to influence his perceptions and relationships.

Amir's later life in America is a complex way of running away from the fractured selfhood created in the alley. He has made a desperate effort to avoid the geopolitical situation: a tactic that is ultimately futile. As the theory implies, the "past claws its way out" and the wound to selfhood persists in adulthood in areas of intimacy, remembrance and responsibility. Amir clearly says his reason for taking upon America:

"For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his". (Hosseini, 2004, p. 80)

"America was a river, roaring along, unmindful of the past. I could wade into this river, let my sins drown to the bottom, let the waters carry me someplace far.

Someplace with no ghosts, no memories, and no sins." (Hosseini, 2004, p. 84)

The urge to wash away his sins and forget his past is a typical form of avoidant attachment, which includes emotional minimization and suppressing painful memories to reduce vulnerability. But the past cannot be so easily forgotten. His betrayal exists in a way of unresolved trauma, with subtle but pervasive ways of it showing up. It is only when Amir hears the name Hassan that he feels a reaction, a physical reaction:

"A pair of steel hands closed around my windpipe at the sound of Hassan's name. I rolled down the window. Waited for the steel hands to loosen their grip". (Hosseini, 2004, p. 83)

This physical constriction serves as a powerful metaphor for the emotional stranglehold his guilt maintains over him. His "thorny old barbs of guilt" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 122) continue to torment him, suggesting that the internal conflict is ongoing and that his childhood trauma is still affecting his adult emotion management. Though he has tried to establish a new life, his IWM has influenced his perceptions and relationships. His marriage to Soraya, while a source of genuine affection, is initially tinged with the shadow of his past, as he struggles with the secret he carries.

It is through Rahim Khan's phone call and his mysterious statement, "There is a way to be good again" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 5), that Amir will eventually become a "coherent self" rather than a "fractured self." This phrase echoes as a reminder of guilt over the years, after the traumatic experience, and it reactivates an attachment history that has never ceased to govern him. Rahim Khan has always been a more sensitive yet less prominent figure for Amir, who is now offered a means of real reparative action. The truth of Hassan being Baba's son and Amir's half-brother upends Amir's carefully made up story of self and makes him face the crushing reality of his past wrongs. Initially he refuses, but he is ultimately forced to come back to Afghanistan because of this reality. Amir's return to a war-stricken Afghanistan and his quest to save Hassan's son Sohrab is an important transition from "dependency in childhood" to "responsibility and repair." The journey is both difficult and dangerous, and Amir must deal with the challenges of his own inner conflicts. His physical and emotional setbacks (such as a scuffle with Assef, his childhood tormentor) are a metaphor for his efforts to redeem himself for his past. Relying on his intuition, Amir tries to save Sohrab, but he is also trying to heal the fractured selfhood that he has been missing through the guilt and inaction. The journey shows that the self is clearly the result of early wounds, but that it is "not in any ultimate sense stable" and has the potential to be "reworked under new pressures" and become a more ethical and coherent manner of relating. His dedication of Sohrab despite the many challenges is a testament to a real change in his internal

working model, one that goes from self-preservation at the expense of others to selfless care and responsibility.

While Amir's narrative is dominated by the anxieties of insecure attachment, the character of Hassan offers a poignant counterpoint, embodying a form of secure, albeit tragically exploited, attachment. Hassan's steadfast loyalty and selflessness towards Amir could be viewed as a reflection of an ingrained attachment pattern as a result of his distinctive relational past. Hassan feels a strong sense of security with Ali, his adoptive father, as his secure base and may even have an emotional bond with Amir at first, unlike Amir's relationship with his father. The psychological analysis of Hassan by Magsi, Solangi, and Soomro (2024) highlights his "unconditional loyalty" and "deep yearning for emotional validation and acceptance," influenced by a "lack of maternal affection" and socio-economic inferiority (p. 552). Their analysis is based upon a Freudian psychoanalytical point of view, but Hassan's "object-cathexis" on Amir might be understood in an attachment sense as Amir's main, though unreciprocated secure base.

Amir is Hassan's first word, which is a strong indicator of Amir's early and deep relationship with Hassan (Hosseini, 2004). Combined with Ali's steady but non-obtrusive support, this primal bond helped in inspiring Hassan with a sense of unconditional love and a desire to be a "safe haven" for Amir, regardless of what he did to deserve it. This attachment is captured in Hassan's repeated words of "For you a thousand times over" (Hosseini, 2004, p. 67). It's not just a sign of subservient behavior, but a sign of a deep emotional bond and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of his main attachment figure. But this fidelity is a weakness when Amir's attachment to his father is insecure and he is betrayed. As Magsi et al. (2024) argue:

Hassan's character reflects repressed emotions, unspoken longings, and unconditional loyalty, influenced by socio-economic inferiority and a lack of maternal affection... His loyalty to Amir stemmed from a longing for connection and was influenced by repressed desires and masochistic tendencies. (p. 552)

Another part of the attachment theory that is explored in the novel is the relationship between Ali and Hassan's father, Baba. In spite of his physical limitations and his own social status as a Hazara, Ali is a man of quiet strength, and embodies a secure and steadfast bond with him and Hassan. His loyalty towards Baba is similar to Hassan's loyalty to Amir because they have a common history and mutual respect for Baba. Ali is always there for Hassan, and is a secure base that is warm and stable, which is quite different from Baba's inconsistent parenting of Amir. Ali's love and care has been manifested in her life, especially in this difficult society and in the midst of personal difficulties. Although they have tough times, Ali's comfortable relationship with Hassan helps Hassan develop empathy and loyalty, which is why it's a subtle thing: the novel suggests that Hassan's positive outlook on Ali helps him with that, too.

But, Ali's story also reminds us of the intergenerational nature of trauma and social inequality in relation to attachment. He is his own psychologically conflicted identity a result of systemic oppression and loss in his personal life, and yet he is able to create a stable emotional space for Hassan. That is a great strength to have, but it also proves, tragically, to be Hassan's undoing: Amir's strong attachment to Hassan is what causes him to be exploited and suffer. The novel poses the question of whether a secure attachment can flourish in a society imbued with social injustice and unequal power

dynamics, and implies that external influences can have a strong impact on internal working models.

The Kite Runner has been interpreted in various critical ways in modern times; some of these interpretations look at the socio-political context in which attachment and identity are formed. The modern understanding of attachment theory takes into account the effects of society, culture, and historical trauma on the development of attachment and the fragile self. For example, the novel is not just about the Pashtun-Hazara division but it is a dynamic one that makes Amir feel insecure and allows him to be deceptive. Moreover, critics believe Amir's actions go beyond a failure of character; he is also influenced by the deep-seated prejudices of his society, which degrades Hassan's life and, by implication, his emotional state (Hosseini, 2004).

Furthermore, the concept of “collective trauma” can be applied to understand the broader impact of Afghanistan’s tumultuous history on its characters’ psyches. Pervasive insecurity resulting from the Soviet invasion, the emergence of the Taliban and the unrest since then impacts the attachment bonds and one's sense of a coherent self. The narrative of the characters' displacement, loss and violence gives rise to a national psychologically conflicted identity and a need for security emerges as the main concern. This is macro-level trauma and exacerbates the individual psychological trauma that each person is facing, thus increasing the hardship of their healing and redemption journeys. The novel thus becomes a story of personal healing rather than personal healing alone, but a story of the possibility for a collective healing through courage, empathy, and a dedication to justice. According to recent psychological studies on the novel, the “internal conflicts and unconscious desires” of the characters are “inseparably connected with the ‘cultural and emotional voids’” (Magsi et al., 2024, p. 552).

When examined from the lens of post-colonial theory, the socio-political displacement of the refugee is an effective external catalyst for the insecure attachment patterns that are set during Amir's childhood. The portrayal of the refugee crisis in the novel highlights a “binary opposition” where the Oriental “Other” is systematically constructed as inferior to the Western “Occident” (Rasheed & Hamad, 2021, p. 122). Amir's sense of falling short and needing external approval is already strong in his “internal working model,” and being a marginalised refugee in America is a re-enactment of the feeling of being excluded from his father. This construction of the “opposition” between the West and the Middle East and the “simplistic opposition” between the two sides leads to a distorted picture of the Afghan subject that mirrors the paternal distance of Amir's youth (Rasheed & Hamad, 2021 p. 120). This external “Othering” effectively traps Amir in an avoidant attachment strategy; by attempting to “bury his memories” in America, he is not only fleeing personal guilt but also attempting to escape the Western definition of his homeland as a “hopeless place” (Rasheed & Hamad, 2021, p. 127). In conclusion, the “Orientalist stereotyping” in the diaspora perpetuates the assumption that the “Oriental character” is inherently “unworthy”, which causes psychological wounding of the self and makes the process of developing a coherent identity more difficult (Rasheed & Hamad, 2021, p. 128).

Conclusion

To conclude, the examination of *The Kite Runner* by the prism of attachment theory is able to highlight the fact that identity is inherently relational in nature and is continuously developed by the fractured selfhood of childhood. Amir's insecure

attachment to Baba and his betrayal of Hassan shows how desperate Amir is to be recognized by Baba and how this need to be recognized drives a wedge through the self, resulting in a life of guilt and avoidance. But the story will eventually transcend the breaking apart of betrayal and move towards the ethical reconstruction of the self. Amir passionately and actively changes his life and internal working model from minimization of the emotions of exile to the reparative responsibility of saving Sohrab, becoming a full and accountable human being rather than a broken one. For this reason, the novel is a powerful reminder of the impact of early emotional attachments and the socio-political phenomenon of "Othering" that can wound the soul, yet the hope of attaining a "family" is found by the brave efforts of seeking to repair relationships and be held accountable for the wrongs done.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة رواية عداء الطائرة الورقية لخالد حسيني من خلال نظرية التعلق، مع توظيف الاستشراق بوصفه إطاراً ثانوياً لتأطير مفهومي المنفى و«الأخرية» الثقافية. وتركز الدراسة على شخصية أمير، وكيف يؤثر البعد العاطفي عن والده، والتعلق غير الآمن، والشعور بالذنب، والخيانة، والصدمة النفسية في تشكيل ذاته المتصدعة. كما ترى الدراسة أن هوية أمير تتكون من خلال العلاقات العاطفية المتغيرة، والذكريات الصادمة، والسعي المستمر نحو الاعتراف والقبول. كذلك، تُظهر الدراسة أن النزوح وتمثيلات اللاجئين الأفغاني ضمن الخطاب الاستشراقي يزيدان من شعور أمير بعدم الأمان الداخلي ويعمقان أزمته في تكوين هوية متماسكة. ومن خلال قراءة الرواية بوصفها سردية عن التعلق المتضرر على المستويين الشخصي والاجتماعي السياسي، تكشف الدراسة عن الآثار المستمرة للتعلقات الطفولية والهامشية الثقافية في تشكيل الهوية، وتنظيم الانفعالات، ومسار التعافي الأخلاقي.

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