

**Polyphony of Unguided Voices: A Bakhtinian Reading of Hosseini's
The Kite Runner / *Polifonia de vozes não guiadas: uma leitura
bakhtiniana de O caçador de pipas de Hosseini***

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ABSTRACT

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin had given a variety of concepts to appreciate and analyze a novel. In this study, there is an attempt to apply the Bakhtinian intellectual tool of polyphony to unearth the deeper layers of Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*. We argue that the novel is polyphonic through and through since it reverberates with multiple voices of various characters, and the novel's narrative structure also supports this multiplicity of viewpoints. The novel defies the traditional path of having the final word from the author or the narrator. In many situations, the narrator's voice struggles and fumbles with confusion, but the voices of some of the characters come up clearly and remain firm on certain aspects. This paper will provide a systematic exposition and an analysis of the novel *The Kite Runner* from the Bakhtinian lens to appreciate the anti-authorial mode where pluralism (polyphony) is celebrated.

KEYWORDS: Bakhtin; Polyphony; Khaled Hosseini; *The Kite Runner*

RESUMO

Mikhail Bakhtin, filósofo Russo, nos forneceu uma variedade de conceitos para apreciar e analisar um romance. Este estudo é uma tentativa de explorar os níveis mais profundos do romance *O caçador de pipas*, de Khaled Hosseini, usando a ferramenta intelectual bakhtiniana da polifonia. Afirmamos que o romance é polifônico, pois está repleto de vozes de inúmeros personagens, e seu enquadramento narrativo acentua ainda mais essa diversidade de perspectivas. O romance desafia a sabedoria convencional que afirma que o autor ou narrador sempre tem a última palavra. Embora a voz do narrador vacile e tropece em muitas cenas confusas, as vozes de alguns personagens emergem e permanecem firmes em alguns casos. Este artigo oferecerá uma exposição e análise metódica do livro *O caçador de pipas* sob a perspectiva do Bakhtinismo, a fim de reconhecer o estilo antiautoral que celebra o pluralismo (polifonia).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Bakhtin; Polifonia; Khaled Hosseini; *O caçador de pipas*

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The essence of polyphony lies precisely in the fact that the voices remain independent and, as such, are combined in a unity of a higher order than in homophony.

Mikhail Bakhtin

Introduction

Since the time Bakhtin's works were translated into English and noticed by Western scholars, he became a key figure in the field of literary theory and several related fields in humanities. In recent times, Khaled Hosseini has risen to great fame due to his impactful depiction of Afghanistan in his novels, most notably in *The Kite Runner*.¹ In this article, we will analyze Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* from Bakhtinian concepts of polyphony. To establish this novel as polyphonic in nature, some examples with excerpts from the novel are cited and analyzed in light of this concept. *The Kite Runner* is commercially successful and critically acclaimed. The review for *The Kite Runner* by *San Francisco Chronicles* (2003) says, "a marvelous first novel... the story of two young boys who are friends in Afghanistan, and an incredible story of the culture. It's an old-fashioned kind of novel that really sweeps you away."²

The novel *The Kite Runner* portrays a story that takes the readers on turbulent emotional exploration. The story is mainly set in Afghanistan and some parts of it are also set in the United States of America and Pakistan. The characters in the novel go through personal, political and social turmoil and fit very well in the story that spans several decades, providing the themes of guilt, redemption and friendship. *The Kite Runner* is a very captivating story that is primarily narrated by Amir, a wealthy *Pashtun* (ruling class) boy. Amir shares a very complex relationship with his friend Hassan, a servant *Hazara* (minority class) boy, who is also Amir's half-brother, but this truth surfaces much later in the story. Amir and Hassan shared a deep bond in their childhood, and both were very fond of the kite fighting game played in the streets of Kabul. Their bond is marred by Amir's betrayal, which casts a shadow of guilt and remorse over him. Due to political

¹ *The Kite Runner* is Khaled Hosseini's first novel, published in 2003. It is based on the story of two friends and half-brothers in Afghanistan.

² "Praise for 'The Kite Runner'." Princeton Book Review. n. d. Web. Available on: https://www.princetonbookreview.com/book_pages/discussion/kite-runner-praise.php. Last access: 28 Jan. 2024.

turmoil in Afghanistan, Amir and his father shifted to the USA, where Amir became a successful writer and got married. However, a call from Rahim Khan, a family friend, prompts Amir to return to Afghanistan and confront his past. To amend for his betrayal to his best friend, Amir rescues Hassan's son from the Taliban and takes the boy with him to the USA. The novel represents a powerful story of personal and national disruption and resilience.

This novel has provided a window to the world to peep into Afghan culture and society. The crisis that has taken over the country is also shown through the intense story of Amir and Hassan. "*The Kite Runner* is Khaled Hosseini's debut novel, which shows not only a person's spiritual growth, but also the history of the soul of a nation, and of a country's suffering" (Du, 2017, p. 92). In this novel, a lot of ideologies are presented and these ideologies do not merge into the authorial consciousness. Hosseini has created a polyphonic world in his novel where various unmerged ideologies conglomerate without being gravitated to the central authorial force. The synthesis of multiple ideologies in this novel is based on the concept of polyphony. The concept of polyphony was propounded after Bakhtin observed that Dostoevsky's works are illuminated with multiple voices and he commented in his seminal work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* about Dostoevsky's works being polyphonic.

Dostoevsky, like Goethe's Prometheus, creates not voiceless slaves (as does Zeus), but free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him. A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6).

Bakhtin mentioned that Dostoevsky's novels are polyphonic because different unmerged voices are at play. This does not mean a multitude of different characters but the voices that unfold different ideologies and refuse to be guided by one authorial idea. The prominent principle of Dostoevsky's writing is "to affirm someone else's 'I' not as an object but as another subject" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10). So, Dostoevsky's characters are developed in such a manner that they are not just parroting the author's mind. Instead, they indulge in voicing out their own unguided perceptions and ideologies. This representation of unguided ideologies by different characters provides the base for the

idea of polyphony. Bakhtin argued that a character can be as powerful as an author in voicing perspectives independently.

A character's word about himself and his world is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice. It possesses extraordinary independence in the structure of the work; it sounds, as it were, alongside the author's words and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7).

With the tool of polyphony, the novels can be shredded to pieces, of which the world of the novel has been built, where each voice, meek or strong, is neither merging nor getting subordinated to a single perspective. Every single voice plays a significant role in the development of a novel because each voice has its own weight, ideology, and validity within a novel. These voices are engaged in dialogue with each other and the narrator, and at the same time, they are not guided by any authority.

Analyzing any work from the Bakhtinian lens of polyphony prepares grounds to understand a multitude of ideologies free from the authorial clutches and also helps to visualize the various standpoints by which a novel is written. These voices often compete and contradict each other and create a melodious commotion that cannot be silenced by the author's voice. The concept of polyphony discards authoritative forces and becomes relevant in many current situations of society, "the issues raised by the question of polyphony have a wide general significance" (Dentith, 1995, p. 41). Thus, the route to approach the novel *The Kite Runner* is based on Bakhtin's explanation for the concept of polyphony.

The critical literature on Hosseini has been echoing with some central ideologies that are represented by the author or narrator and, therefore has been unable to understand objectively the voices that are presenting perspectives independently. In this way, the plurality of unmerged voices and consciousnesses is overlooked, and everything is interpreted within the boundaries of the monologic world, where a single authorial consciousness is at the center. This approach of analyzing *The Kite Runner* is incapable to appreciate the polyphonic artistic architecture design of the novel. Further, it limits the attempt to understand the interacting voices representing various ideologies. The critical

analysis of *The Kite Runner* has been done using many prominent critical theories ranging from post-colonial to psychoanalysis and diasporic studies to trauma studies. But a deeper study of the novel with Bakhtinian analyses opens the door to enter a virgin arena not fully discovered yet. As Bakhtin points out in the essay *Epic and Novel* (1981c) a novel is a genre that keeps on evolving, remains unfinished and is open to multiple interpretations. *The Kite Runner* manifests the multiplicity and provides fertile ground for an array of perspectives. The voices that are occurring independently in the novel *The Kite Runner* are patriarchal, feminist, religious, anti-religious, racist and marginal. These voices will be discussed in detail in this article.

1 Polyphony of Unguided Voices

Instead of a world with a single perspective created by the author in *The Kite Runner*, there is a cacophony of multiple consciousnesses, each with its own world for the reader to dwell in. It is interesting to identify all the threads of ideologies by which a text is woven. These different ideologies are presented by different characters. Sometimes, even a single consciousness becomes a perennial ground of these battling ideologies. As expressed by Bakhtin, polyphonic texts counter the monologic works where everything is led by a single author's perspective. Monologism is a typical characteristic of traditional writings, in which transcendental ideology is represented so strongly that other consciousnesses get integrated into it easily and a world is created "corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 9).

In monological works, the perspective and ideology of authors remain at the centre and the voices of different characters are either merging into that dominant ideology or remain unnoticed, insignificant, and gasping for life. On the contrary, a polyphonic dialogic work gives, if not equal, but fertile ground for all the ideologies to grow and at least get visible. "It is not a monologic discourse, constituted only by the voice of the author-creator, but a fertile field for representations and mixtures of voices and utterances" (Araújo; Araújo, 2022, p. 93). Many times, polyphonic novels are treated as monologic by critics systematically. Various perspectives expressed by various consciousnesses are seen in one strong magnetic field of authorial consciousness. This

makes critics finalize one or two strong themes and ideologies that engulf every independent ideology mercilessly.

In the novel *The Kite Runner*, the characters are illuminated with free consciousness and treated as sovereign subjects rather than controlled objects by the author. Hosseini was able to visualize and portray the narrator and characters as another instead of making them his mouthpiece. This does not mean that characters with their individual ideologies fall out from the cohesive design of the novel and create a proliferation of confusing ideas, leading to chaos. Rather, the independence of characters with certain ideologies is duly incorporated in the artistic design of the author to create a cohesive and “carefully calculated plan of the whole” (Bakhtin, 1984. p. 13). In the novel, Hosseini combines varied and contradictory perspectives in the unity of novelistic construction. In fact, he has created a significant place for all sorts of voices in the textual universe of the novel. Hosseini fashions the characters in such a manner that, in many situations, they express their perspectives strongly and remain unguided by any transcendental power of the author and narrator. One single voice of the author or narrator cannot represent the heterogeneous society and multiple contexts in the novel. The multiplicity of perspectives makes the novel polyphonic space buzz with several voices, and these voices are often contradictory in nature. A detailed representation of these competing voices is provided in the following section.

2 Contesting Voices

The novel triggers a strong sense of others and creates tension among the voices that differ in ideologies. A close reading of these voices enables the reader to understand things beyond the intention and representation by the author. The author has written these characters just to assign significant roles in the development of the story, but a careful examination of their actions and words in the various situations can make the readers discern the ideologies of these characters that may not be the author-creator’s original intention to present. For example, there are strong anti-religious and racist rants that may not be Hosseini’s intention to represent. On many occasions, even the narrator remains in a dilemma, while some characters are very clear in representing their viewpoints. Bakhtin

(1984, p. 5) expressed: “(...) the characters were not an object of authorial discourse, but rather a fully valid, autonomous carrier of his own individual word.”

The father (Baba) of the main character and narrator, Amir, voices strong anti-religious notions in the novel. When Amir told his father what he had learned about sin from a *mullah* (priest) at school, his father sensed his confusion immediately, “I see you have confused (...)” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 15) and explained what he thinks about religion and *mullahs*, “They do nothing but thumb their prayers beads and recite a book written in a tongue they don’t even understand” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 15). Baba represents the voice of reason and elaborates to Amir that actual sin is “a variation of theft” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 16). Baba uses words like “bearded idiots” and “self-righteous monkeys” for *mullahs*, to confirm how he sees those who preach religion. He further says that if God exists, he would hope that He has more important business to take care of than his (Baba’s) drinking scotch or eating pork. From these statements, we can understand that Baba has serious doubts about the role of religion and God.

We if try to focus on signs used by characters, willingly or unwillingly understand the ideology behind these signs. As Simon Denith (1995, p. 22) says,

as soon as we are in the domain of meanings, we are also carried, willy-nilly, into the domain of ideology. That is to say, the meanings carried by signs, whether of language or not—though it is language we are interested in here—take us into the world of values and are therefore ideological.

The other character, Rahim Khan, who has a great influence on Amir, represents the voice of religion. He firmly believes in atonement and heavenly mercy. He writes a letter to Amir and mentions, “I know that in the end, God will forgive. He will forgive your father, me, and you too” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 263). The words used by Rahim Khan, like “heavenly mercy” and “there is a way to be good again,” represent his religious bent of mind. Amir, the narrator, stands on the middle ground and represents the doubt and moral-religious dilemma, “caught between Baba and Mullahs at school, I still hadn’t made up my mind about God” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 55).

Vološinov (1986, p. 10) summarizes this relationship between words and ideology in his book *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*. “Every sign is subject to the criteria of ideological evaluation (i. e., whether it is true, false, correct, fair, good, etc.). The

domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs. They equate with one another. Whenever a sign is present, ideology is present, too.” These religious and anti-religious ideologies are free from any authorial guidance as the narrator, Amir, could not have any firm opinion about religion. Hosseini, the author, does not impose a rigid explanation of religion in the novel. Rather, he sets a more introspective ground for his characters to represent their visions about religion clearly. Hosseini, through his narrative, neither endorses nor condemns the religious notions, but he allows his characters to interpret religion as they explore and experience it in the unsettled socio-political situations of Afghanistan. Thus, the author’s views on religion are open-ended, inviting reflection and allowing characters to opine about it freely. This representation of the multiplicity of perspectives makes *The Kite Runner* a multivoiced polyphonic novel where characters represent their ideologies freely without being guided by the author or narrator.

Amir also represents racist viewpoints and becomes the voice of *Pashtuns*, the ruling class, who always tries to dominate the ethnic minorities of Afghanistan. Amir once reflects that no matter how close he and Hassan are, in the end, he never thinks of him as his friend, “I never thought of Hassan as a friend... In the end, I was a *Pashtun* and he was a *Hazara*(...)” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 22). Amir, being in a position of power, casually predicts the future of Hassan. When Hassan raises a very valid question about the story written by Amir, he shuns his query and thinks, “What does he know that illiterate *Hazara*? He will never be anything but a cook. How dare he criticize you?” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 30).

Amir always enjoyed having the upper hand on Hassan, being his master, and being one of the ruling class. Amir had tried to test and tease Hassan on many occasions as once, while playing, Hassan told him that he would eat dirt instead of lying to him, and Amir was amused to know this. Amir was aware of his cruelty towards Hassan, but he always thought of having a licence to do so. He confesses of being mean to Hassan, “there was something fascinating-albeit in a sick way- about teasing Hassan. Kind of like when we used to play insect torture. Except now, he was the ant and I was holding the magnifying glass” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 47). In fact, Amir chose silence and withdrawal after witnessing the rape of Hassan and tried to justify his action by thinking that sacrifice of Hassan is required to win his father’s heart, “nothing was free in this world may be Hassan is the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay to win Baba... He was just a *Hazara*,

wasn't he?" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 68). Amir uses the metaphors "ant" and "lamb" for Hassan to show his way of looking at his best friend because some racist notion has taken root in his heart.

The main character's outlook, who is also the narrator, differs from Hosseini's standpoint on minorities. This makes the novel dialogic which is the result of a multitude of viewpoints. Thus, Hosseini does not try to become the ultimate source of truth. Instead, he puts his characters in certain social situations and provokes them to voice their opinions. As Bakhtin (1984, p. 58) also confirms that "in a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal," so certain truths can only be revealed by certain characters with a particular ideology.

Hosseini cannot represent the trauma and the turmoil of Afghanistan without liberating the voices from his point of view. In this attempt, he lessens the risk of alienating any of the perspectives, and as a result, the story of the novel buzzes with many unguided ideologies. The requirement to make the novel polyphonic and dialogic comes from Hosseini being an Afghan American writer, so he definitely requires certain characters to voice out what he could not experience on his own. "Hosseini presents *The Kite Runner* to the Western reader in a form which indicates a desire on his part not to claim ownership over that which he did not experience" (O'Brien, 2021, p. 56).

On the other hand, some of the critical literature on *The Kite Runner* also points out that the narrative of this novel is built from a Eurocentric viewpoint and this vision of Hosseini has downplayed and neglected the rich culture and history of Afghanistan. The portrayal of Afghan society and culture in the novel contributes heavily to creating stereotypes and the ideas of others. Hosseini has presented and served Afghanistan as desired by the West because he has a significant influence of West being an Afghan-born American writer.

In speeches, in the media, and in various narratives, a stereotypical image of Afghanistan is propagated by him. Situated within this portrayal of Afghanistan as a country of suicide bombers and female oppression, Hosseini's work does little to counter this kind of discourse. He claims that his narratives are the representations of the stark reality, but they are actually based on newspaper reports and his own imagination as he is physically distant from his homeland. His narratives are Western-centric and present a barbaric and savage stereotypical picture of the East (Shubhi; Sneha; Vikash; Rehana, 2019, pp. 1-2).

This is how some critical readings of *The Kite Runner* indicate Hosseini's biased attitude in presenting Afghan society. The representation in the novel is bereft of the appreciation of the richness of an ancient culture. It highlights the problems and complexities of Afghan society from a Western lens. But the other fact also cannot be ignored that an effort is made by the author to allow multiple voices to present a multitude of opinions in the complex social-political situations of Afghanistan.

An authoritative perspective cannot capture the complexity of an intense story. A free play of all sorts of ideologies that may not align with the author and narrator on various aspects like patriarchy, religion and minorities makes a polyphonic novel. One of the characters in the novel *The Kite Runner* is Assef, who was a child bully and became a cruel Taliban Official later. He becomes the voice of everything that is evil and inhuman. He rapes Hassan and considers that his right since he belongs to the ruling class. When one of his friends gets afraid and calls the rape a sinful act, he defends his actions by saying that "there's nothing sinful about teaching a lesson to a disrespectful donkey... It's just a Hazara" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 66). Assef is a staunch racist voice that puts forward his viewpoints on minorities without mincing the words. He delineates the standpoint of the Taliban taking the utmost pride in all his actions of cruelty. He justifies the massacre of minorities by the Taliban as the will of God and ethnic cleansing, "let the bullets fly, free of guilt and remorse, knowing you are virtuous, good and decent... knowing you're doing God's work... we left them for dogs, dog meat for dogs" (Hosseini, 2007, pp. 242-243). He tells Amir how the Taliban looks at Afghanistan as a beautiful mansion that is littered with garbage and now it is their responsibility to remove this garbage from this beautiful mansion. Assef's choice of words like "disrespectful monkey," "dogs," and "garbage" for depicting Hazaras shows his racist ideology clearly. A plurality of voices presents the other side of the coin, where the views contradicting the author also remain visible. Bakhtin states in the context of Dostoevsky's novels that they are inhibited by the characters that ascertain their truth in dialogue with other truth: "A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 252).

In the novel, there are strong patriarchal views and little space is also created to accommodate feminist voices. Hosseini does not give any explicitly stated perspectives

on patriarchy. However, certain elements and themes can be interpreted as the author's intention to provide certain aspects of Afghan society related to patriarchal norms. Again, he is not becoming didactic about patriarchy but definitely raising questions about it, but at the same time, characters are voicing their notions very clearly that are influenced by patriarchy. The father of the narrator expresses patriarchal views while talking about his son being so timid. He dislikes his son for not being like him, not taking an interest in manly sports like soccer and not being able to defend himself from bullies. Baba also detests Amir's interest in reading the books day and night and not mustering the courage a boy should have. In Baba's words, "he never fights back. Never. He just (...) drops his head (...)" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 19).

Patriarchy unapologetically sets specific attributes regarded as masculine, which a man should always have. Bell Hooks, in her essay *Understanding Patriarchy* (2004) mentions how patriarchy is a social disease, expects males and females to adhere to their gendered roles, and deviation of any sort is seen critically. The narrator's father is also expressing the desire to make his son a real man as per the set standards of society. Baba expressed his disappointment about his son that; "A boy who won't stand up for himself becomes a man who can't stand up to anything" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 20).

He also tells Rahim Khan that if he hadn't witnessed his wife giving birth to his son, he would never believe that such a feeble boy could be his son. Rahim Khan defies the idea of fixed gendered roles that must be cultivated in children from their birth. He says that a child should find his or her own way and they "aren't coloring books. You don't get to fill them with your favorite colors" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 19). The patriarchal notion demands males and females to behave in specific ways in society and defying the set paths is not seen positively. Amir's wife Soraya was lambasted for her outgoing ways of being an Afghan woman. Even Amir thinks in the same manner that how society permits a man to be more privileged than a woman. In his own words, "fathers and sons could talk freely about women. But no Afghan girl –no decent and *mohtram* Afghan girl, at least-queried her father about a young man" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 128).

Judith Butler rightly pointed out in her work *Gender Trouble* (2006) that the woman has to meet certain expectations of society to prove that she is decent and pay the hefty price if she goes away from the set path. Thus, there is a representation of contesting voices in the novel, and that gives the reader a fair opportunity to dive deep into the

ideologies hidden in the words of various characters. In the book *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (1990) extensively comment and analyze the concept of polyphony. They emphasize the fact that polyphony allows a wide range of perspectives and that is the beauty of the complex nature of human beings.

In the novel, Soraya becomes the feminist voice and says her mind openly and courageously. She tells Amir before getting married to him about a scandal of her eloping at the age of eighteen with an Afghan man and causing unlimited pain to her parents. She realizes the mistakes and accepts them candidly in front of Amir. But unforgiving society scratches her old wound again and again as she is a woman. Society works in this fashion where a woman cannot be forgiven for losing her dignity while a man can easily escape such situations. Soraya unburdens her heart to Amir by criticizing the unfair treatment given to her because of her sex. In her words, men can behave in a reckless manner but not women, they can go to nightclubs and make their girlfriends pregnant but if she does something of this sort then she lacks morality, “Oh they are men having fun! I made one mistake and everyone is talking *nang* and *namoos* (Honor and Pride)” (Hosseini, 2007, p. 156). This makes Soraya understand the limitations of being a woman in the society she is living in. Beauvoir also opines that it is entirely understandable for women of the future to feel frustrated by the constraints imposed on them based on their gender (2015). It is astonishing to note that among the various voices, a strong feminist voice is also finding a place. These multiple voices are constantly battling against one another to achieve a significant position. After identifying the diverse voices in the novel, it is essential to see how the narrative structure equally appreciates its polyphonic nature.

3 Polyphonic Architectonics

The analysis of the architectonics of the novel makes the researcher understand how different parts on which the narrative is formed contribute to the whole. In the process of making the novel coherent, the author tries to put all the pieces together to give it the sense of a unified whole. The architecture of a polyphonic novel is developed and designed to provide grounds for various ideologies and perspectives to flower without being influenced by their grower. Since a polyphonic novel has a multiplicity of free

ideologies, there are also invisible contributors to construct social space for them to get visible. These contributors are socio-cultural forces, linguistic elements and spatial-temporal settings. *The Kite Runner* has interwoven lines of stories of friendship between two boys, the social-political turmoil of Afghanistan, life in America as immigrants and generational trauma and redemption. In this novel, Hosseini integrates various lines of stories and allows expressions from multiple standpoints. The focus of the novel is to mingle these different lines of stories with different voices. The need to make the novel polyphonic comes from the true representation of heterogeneous social-cultural aspects of Afghanistan. The complexity of Afghan society can only be represented by various voices instead of one authorial voice. In this section, there is a systematic dissection of the novel to understand how its architecture supports its polyphonic nature.

When the novel has the spirit of a multiplicity of viewpoints, then the polyphonic composition of the text becomes essential. The temporal and spatial linearity has to be distorted to develop a polyphonic textual universe. Different time and space paths are interwoven and united in the plot and narrative to give true independence to the voices. In a multi-vocal novel like *The Kite Runner*, there is a multiplicity of time and space paths to represent all sorts of voices. In this novel, spatial variety set in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the USA helps in displaying multiple voices laced with unique perspectives. The nonlinear representation of time incorporates all the voices from past to present. The novel has numerous shifts from present to past and vice versa to acknowledge all the different voices. The polyphony and chronotope both emphasize on interconnectedness. In a polyphonic work, diverse voices are incorporated, and one voice becomes relevant in connection with another. The chronotope is the interconnectedness of time and space within the narrative setting. The narrative with polyvocal elements relies on diverse spatio-temporal settings. Bakhtin propounded the concept of chronotope and commented that there is an inseparable connection between time and space in literary work that helps events unfold and voices interact. Every literary work has its unique chronotope.

In the literary, artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history (Bakhtin, 1981b, p. 84).

Polyphony represents the free voices and chronotope shapes time and space to suit this multiplicity of perspectives. The spatial and temporal dynamics create the atmosphere where polyphony can be played. The contextual meaning of the text is generated through the interdependency of both these elements. The chronotope brings in the cultural and historical context through its representation of time and space. Polyphony allows multiple perspectives to show up within that context. The diverse voices with different ideologies in *The Kite Runner* are set against the backdrop of some important historical events like the fall of the monarchy in Afghanistan, the Soviet invasion, and the rise of the Taliban.

Various voices, such as religious, anti-religious, patriarchal, feminist, racist, and feeble voices of minorities, are very well incorporated by developing a specific chronotope. The chronotope of events influences characters' lives and helps them to voice out their unguided perspectives. One such event occurred in the novel when Amir and his father were migrating from Afghanistan to Pakistan after the Soviet invasion. On their way to Pakistan, they were stopped by Russian soldiers and one soldier demanded one woman from the group as the price for letting them go; then Baba uttered these words: "war doesn't negate the decency. It demands it even more than in times of peace" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 100). This setting of time and space reveals the perspective of a war victim. One more instance of the unique chronotope of the "Kite Fighting competition" in the streets of Kabul becomes the symbolic arena for a few important characters to face their innermost side. Some of the intense perspectives of characters are expressed in this specific setting. Hassan expressed the notions of servitude and sacrifice. He assures Amir the winning and says, running to get the kite, "For you a thousand times over" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 59). Amir, on the other hand, understood his selfishness and declared, "I actually aspired to cowardice" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 68). Strong racist slurs were also thrown in this situation when Kamal says, "A loyal Hazara. Loyal as dog" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 63). The themes of loyalty, betrayal, personal growth, and intense perspectives of some of the characters are interwoven in this chronotope efficiently. The chronotope settings of the Baba's house in Kabul, the city Peshawar in Pakistan, neighbourhood in California, a Taliban official's house in Kabul, and many such places in the timeline of pre-Soviet era to post-Taliban rule give fertile grounds for polyphony.

Like spatial and temporal architectonics, the linguistic architectonics of the novel also contribute significantly to the polyphonic nature of *The Kite Runner*. Bakhtin's

theory of language guides us to observe and appreciate the use of language in the novel. The thoughts shared by Bakhtin on language not only anticipate many contemporary thoughts but also suggest some unique and exciting ways to appreciate language in the act of interaction and communication. According to him, the significance of language lies in its use in day-to-day utterances. It is fascinating to find out how utterances can represent the characters' ideologies. Thus, Bakhtin confirms language as a social phenomenon. "Form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon social throughout its entire range and in each and every of its factors..." (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 259).

The narrative structure of *The Kite Runner* has a first person narrative. The protagonist, Amir, is a first-person narrator. Amir expresses his viewpoints, emotions, biases, and confusions through first-person narrative. Amir reflects upon his actions of the past; in the course of making his utterances meaningful, he includes other characters' utterances and ultimately shows their perspectives. These perspectives sometimes do not align with Amir, the narrator, like Assef's perception of minorities. The inclusion of multiple free voices in his narration helps to the polyphonic nature of the novel. The diversity of perspectives coexists with several linguistic expressions to remain closely linked with its socio-cultural identity. In the essay *Discourse in the Novel*, Bakhtin provided the concept of Heteroglossia, arguing that extralinguistic features like social identity, ideologies and context give shape to the language.

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized) (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 263).

Characters in the novel *The Kite Runner* use languages like Dari, Pashto, and English to feature a multilingual environment that suits polyphonic expression. A good number of expressions from these languages are included in the novel to create a rich and vivid backdrop that helps the true representation of Afghan culture. Words such as *qurama*, *manto pakora*, *kolchas*, *bolani*, *kabuuli* (food items in Dari and Pashto); *Salam*,

Kodha hafiz, mashallah (common greetings and praising in Persian) etc. and many more such words are infused in the narration effortlessly. The heterogeneity of the Afghan society is presented through linguistic diversity. Apart from this, the characters' utterances confirm their ideologies. In the novel, idiolect and sociolects are responsible for Heteroglossia, and create a suitable linguistic environment for polyphony. In the novel, Amir's father (Baba) has firm anti-religious views that can be seen in his choice of words while expressing these notions. While explaining to Amir about "sin," he discards the explanation given by mullah (priest) and tells his son that the only sin that a human should not commit is theft of different types and then he elaborates, "when you kill a man, you steal a life, you steal his wife's right to a husband, rob his children of a father. When you tell a lie, you steal someone's right to the truth. When you cheat, you steal the right to fairness" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 16). Assef's idiolect shows his staunch racist and Talibani viewpoints. He says, "Afghanistan is the land of *Pashtuns*... not this Flat-Nose here. His people pollute our homeland... they dirty our blood" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 35). The linguistic individuality of the characters suiting their ideology adds colors to the polyphonic structure of the novel. Bakhtin (1981, p. 288) commented that "Language (...) is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms, taken in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it."

Since there is a representation of different social classes in Afghan society, different characters involved in different layers of society use different sociolects. These sociolects are closely tied to the social identity of the characters. Hassan, the humble *Hazara* boy who is also a servant to Amir's family, shows utter humbleness in his communication in almost all situations. Throughout the novel, he calls his friend Amir *Agha*, a term in the local language to indicate higher position and respect. He keeps on repeating in the novel "For you thousand times over" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 59) that shows his servitude and dedication to Amir and his family. On the other hand, Amir, who was friends with Hassan, discards this reality immediately to confirm his upper societal status; when confronted by Assef, he says, "he is not my friend... he is my servant" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 36).

Bakhtin also focuses on the dialogic nature of utterances, where one utterance becomes significant in relation to past utterances and anticipates future utterances in the same context. The present-day theory of intertextuality is quite similar to the theory of

Dialogism. Dialogism establishes the connection of present utterances with past and future utterances. Intertextuality establishes the idea of the interconnectedness of present text with past and future texts. In the novel *The Kite Runner*, intertextuality is used. This practice makes the novel dialogic since it uses cultural, literary, and historical references to make the utterances diverse and related to past elements. Amir's use of various references makes the multiperspective structure of the novel meaningful. Amir infuses the story of Rostam and Sohrab from the Persian epic *Shahnameh*. The story runs parallel to the story of the novel as this story is also the story of betrayal and redemption. There are a lot of references of movies like *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* and *Magnificent Seven* etc. When Hassan was leaving Amir's Home along with his father, at that moment, Amir recalls the common plot of Indian movies and said: "If this were one of the Hindi movies Hassan and I used to watch, this was the part where I'd run outside, my bare feet splashing rainwater. I'd chase the car... pull Hassan out of the backseat and tell him I was sorry" (Hosseini, 2007, p. 94). Thus, the use of intertextuality is making the entire novel dialogic and multi-voice.

A novel's structure is vital to make it a polyphonic text. The interplay of voices and perspectives are adding depth to the novel *The Kite Runner*. The polyphonic nature of the novel is supported by its structure in a very subtle way. The spatial and temporal settings and multiplicity of expression techniques inspired by socio-cultural factors make the craft of novel suitable for polyphony.

Conclusion

The analysis through Bakhtinian concepts generates a different understanding of the novel *The Kite Runner*. In the story of the novel, the multitude of voices is celebrated, as Bakhtin says that a novel should "be defined as a diversity of social speech types (...) diversity of individual voices artistically organized" (Bakhtin, 1981a, p. 262). This understanding helps the researcher to reach extraordinary depths of the novel and observe things beyond the obvious. In *The Kite Runner*, there is an objective portrayal of personalities as someone different, without merging them in the author's voice and intention. Many dissimilar personalities are joined together to make a multi-perspective show in the novel. There is no enormous control by the author or narrator on various

voices such as religious, anti-religious, feminist, racist, and patriarchal. An authoritative perspective cannot capture the complexity of an intense story of trauma, guilt, and redemption based on a culture and land unknown to the outer world. However, Hosseini has been alleged to have projected a Western mode of narration of the story taking place in Afghanistan by some critics. But one thing that makes the novel polyphonic is that he has avoided narrating the story from his standpoint only since he grapples with the dual identity of being an insider and an outsider. This is why Hosseini included many free voices and allowed Amir's (narrator) perspective to get unsettled by the contradicting perspectives of other characters.

Using Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony to Hosseini's famous novel *The Kite Runner* delineates a way to analyze a novel in a subtle way so that the different ideologies that are not promoted by any authorial force can be understood. These different ideologies confront and try to overthrow each other to fill in the position of power, even for a jiffy.

The Kite Runner is such a story that leaves an indelible impression upon the mind of the reader that leads to an urge to interpret the story with different approaches. Bakhtinian approach to polyphony helps to analyze the novel in a unique manner.

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso [*Bakhtiniana*. Journal of Discourse Studies] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The title of the article is appropriate to what it develops and its objectives are clearly expressed. Furthermore, the development of the work is in accordance with the proposed theory and its author demonstrates knowledge of Bakhtin's theory. The text is clear and cohesive. On the other hand, I think that the author, by proposing a polyphonic and carnivalesque reading of Hosseini's novel in question, reproduces the Eurocentric vision in relation to the culture of the Afghan people, the culture in which the story's narrative is set. The author, Hosseini, intensifies ethnic conflicts in Afghanistan, such as the overlap, in particular, of the Pashtuns over the Hazaras. In fact, Western media, films and mass books, especially American ones, have served as intensifiers of the predominant cultural context that emerged during the era of maritime expansions. The Arabs are a recent example of the Others who have been the target of the white man's sovereignty and wrath. In this context, the writer is not very critical when examining Hosseini's speech in "The Kite Runner."

I believe that the author should review the exaltation with which he analyzes "The Kite Runner" and insert a criticism of the vision that the author of the narrative has in relation to the people of Afghanistan. APPROVED WITH SUGGESTIONS

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Reviewed on October 16, 2023.

Review II

The article attempts to analyze Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner* based on the concepts of polyphony and carnivalization. Although the theme of the paper is relevant to Bakhtinian studies and Afghan-American literature, there are some elements that need to be taken into consideration. Here are some:

1. The text discusses two complex concepts and tries to analyze a novel based on them. However, as the concepts need to be well explained so that reader can understand the author's line of thought, the theoretical discussion surpasses the analysis of the novel. This is very clear in the section titled "Overturning of hierarchies" as the literary piece is little examined.

2. The reader should be provided with a summary of the novel in the introduction. Without it it seems that the author assumes that every reader of the paper has read the novel.

3. The author tries to show that the novel is polyphonic and thus brings passages from the novel that portray “independent” voices. However, if they are independent, the author-creator's voice should be highlighted so that we can see how independent they are. In other words, how do the characters' voices differ from the author-creator's voice if the latter's voice is not unveiled in the paper? It is necessary to point out that novels are “variform in speech and voice,” but as it is pointed out in the paper, this is different from being polyphonic.

4. In this vein, for the analysis be better understood the passages from the novel should be architectonically analyzed; that is, the passages have to be analyzed in relation to their content, material, and form. In the article, as the material and form are not analyzed, the passages (excerpts) from the novel are used as illustrations or examples of the content and not really as data to be analyzed.

4. The author should follow the journal's guidelines in terms of formatting and quoting.

5. The text needs language revision.

5. There should be linking sentences between sections.

All in all, I believe that if the author had focused only on one concept (for example, polyphony) and analyzed the novel in terms of the author-creator's aesthetic project and axiological position in relation to the content as well as the novel's architectonics, he would have proven more successfully that the novel is in fact polyphonic. APPROVED WITH RESTRICTIONS [Revised]

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Reviewed on October 17, 2023.

Review III

The article has shown some improvement when compared to the previous version. For example, now it brings a summary of the plot, which helps the reader better understand the analysis and has pinpointed some material elements from the passages of the novel to analyze or highlight. However, I believe that the article could focus on one concept (either polyphony or the carnivalesque) so that the analysis could cover more situations in which polyphony and the carnivalesque are present in the novel. The analysis of the carnivalesque is short and is based on the overturning of hierarchies only. The paper also needs a linguistic revision and needs to follow the journal's formatting guidelines. For example, there is no need to present the reference of a book on a footnote as it is listed on the References section. APPROVED

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