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## Plan / Outline:

Hook: context is often a motivational factor in the writing of novels, history, culture and social setting are influential in literature.

Intro: History, context, social setting shapes  
 'The Kite Runner' by Khaled Hosseini  
 'Bulibasha' by Witi Ihimaera.

History of Afghanistan, monarchy, Republic, Russian invasion, Taliban.

Culture, e.g. place of women, religion, Afghan traditions.

Social, racial tensions e.g. Hazara and Pashtuns.

History of Maoris in NZ, colonization and oppression by Europeans.

Cultural views, customs and traditions of family, the Mormon religion.

Social, Maori poverty, second class status in NZ

Body 1: • context of 'The Kite runner', historical  
 • effect on story / characters.



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05 Context - historical, cultural or social - can have an effect influence on the way literary works are written or received. Discuss with reference to at least two of the works you have studied.

Writers often reflect the context of their country, people and culture in literature. Context is frequently a driving factor in the writing of novels as history, culture and society are influential and inspiring on literary works, especially if they are socially critical in nature. 'The Kite Runner' by Khaled Hosseini, set in Afghanistan and the United States in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and 'Balibasha' by Witi Ihimaera, set in mid 20<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand, are both prime examples of the influence that context often has on literary works. The social and cultural settings of the two novels are shaped by their individual historical contexts and repeatedly feature powerful themes and events based on the history, culture and society of their time periods and settings. How all three contextual elements have influenced 'The Kite Runner' and 'Balibasha' will now be analyzed.

The most powerful historical influences on 'The Kite Runner' are the historical and political events which have and continue to shape the authors



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home country, Afghanistan. As the story of the protagonist, Amir, progresses so does his country. The reader bears witness to the calm times of monarchy in Afghanistan, the downfall of ~~the~~ its leader, the subsequent creation of a Republic, the Russian invasion, which dismantles it and finally the raging conflicts among Afghans which ultimately lead to the nation's take over by the ultra-religious Taliban. Although these historical events take place in the background of the story they are essential to <sup>the</sup> overall context in which the story takes place. 'The Kite Runner' is a novel that is ~~is~~ primarily based on the actions and events of the past having consequences and influencing the present. This is outlined in Amir's cowardly betrayal of his friend and half brother, Hassan, which haunts him his entire life. The novel repeatedly jumps back and forth between past and present using flashbacks, and this not only provides greater understanding of the actions of the characters, but also underlines the overall feeling that 'The Kite Runner' is about facing the past. Therefore the historical events outlined in numerous flashbacks serves as a kind of symbol that it is not just the protagonist who is shaped by the past, but also Afghanistan as a whole.

Cultural and social context is also highly



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influential on characters and events in the novel. Based on the main cultural and societal problems that face Afghanistan, Khaled Hosseini wrote his novel in a way that it represents these issues through the actions and events shown in the story. One of the social problems in Afghanistan is the racial discrimination of Hazaras, an ethnic minority with mongoloid features, by the main ethnic group, the Pashtuns. This is most evident in the rape of Hassan, an ethnic Hazara, by the novel's antagonist, Assef. Assef's character is used to symbolize the oppression of Hazaras in Afghanistan and the powerful theme of rape makes the reader understand how Hazaras are often seen as worthless, or not even human in Afghanistan. This use of Afghanistan's societal context once again builds up the ensuing events of the story, which are primarily based on the rape of Hassan.

cultural  
Social context is most evident in the treatment of women in the novel and the influence of Afghan traditions. Soraya, Amir's love, and the woman he wants to marry, is shown to have lost her honor as a woman by running off and sleeping with a man before marriage, which causes her to receive great criticism from her father, General Taheri, who is a strict believer in traditional values, which often favor men



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over women and allow men to have pre marital sex, while women cannot.

Cultural values also play a role in the form of the Taliban in the novel, as their strong religious views mirror the extreme and often ~~off~~ violent cultural and religious views, which some members of Afghan Society hold. Their actions are underlined with dialogue, such as Farid (Amir's friend) saying "and they call themselves muslims" while witnessing the stoning of a young man and a young woman. To the readers this not only depicts the authors opinion on cultural and religious conditions in Afghanistan, but also provides a greater understanding of why Afghanistan is repeatedly in conflict.

In 'Bulibasha' the historical context of the story's setting also play a vital role in the overall portrayal of the story and actions of the main characters as the story is set amongs the Maori indigenous population of New Zealand the novel provides numerous historical events, which shaped the country, that the author is showing. Background information on the colonial origins of ~~society~~ in ~~New Zealand~~ and oppression of the Maoris by ~~the~~ European settlers links into the many societal problems of the community, such as racial discrimination and inequality of the indigenous



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population. The most memorable examples of racial discrimination as part of societal context is the court scene, where the novel's protagonist, Simeon, visits a local courthouse as part of a school trip and realizes how unfair and inequally the judicial system of the white people (often referred to as Pakeha) deals with seemingly insignificant crimes committed by Maoris against white people. The scene also emphasizes the societal problem that Maoris are often uneducated in New Zealand. As Simeon contemplates what he sees unfolding in the courthouse he asks himself "why didn't we fight back?" "We didn't know how." This use of ~~dialogue~~ in the first person narrative allows the reader to form a more intimate relationship with Simeon and helps the author to convey the societal problems in his country through the thoughts and opinions of the protagonist.

The cultural context of New Zealand mostly influenced the author's portrayal of the novel's antagonist and oppressor, Bulibasha. Bulibasha, also known as grandfather Tamihana, is the embodiment of traditional values and rules, customs of family life and old-fashioned regulations that define each person's place in the Tamihana family. As the cultural and traditional values



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of Maori society looks down upon education, values ~~the~~ physical strength and sport over intelligence and often discriminates between the roles of ~~men~~ males and females. Witi Ihimaera included these elements of Maori society, which often limit the success of the Maori people in school and career. Witi Ihimaera once said that as a Maori it is his duty to make known the life of his people to the world, and in order to be received positively by greater audiences the author has to provide this context to the readers.

Balibasha's ~~other~~ cultural views are primarily shown through his constant clashes with Simeon, whom he puts down and picks out for being different. Balibasha tells him over and over again to "get your hair cut Simeon" which emphasizes the overall feeling that traditional Maori culture does not value boys who do not behave "warrior-like" or are generally different in their behavior.

Another powerful and somewhat shocking cultural theme is the kidnapping and subsequent rape of Grandmother Ramona by Balibasha. The reader, who is shocked by the contrast of this violent and unethical event between the normally idyllic lifestyle of the Maori community is even more alienated.



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\*with his child

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by Ramona's approach to her captivity and rape. Contrary to most western customs Ramona chooses to not escape her oppressor as she is pregnant\* and could not bear the loss of honor to her family, should she return to her true love Rūpeni Pōta. However puzzling this fateful choice of hers may be it reflects the cultural values and mindset of Maori women and society, to whom honor, loyalty to men and upholding family harmony are exceedingly important. The author, whose story was therefore once again influenced by the cultural context of his country, emphasized ~~the~~ these culturally based decisions through the strong characterization of Grandmother Ramona and her dialogues in which she not only tries to make her family understand her life choices but also, indirectly, the reader.

All in all the cultural, historical and social contexts of both novels have shaped their authors' approach to showing characters, events and themes. It is through this creative use of characters, themes, dialogue\* and first person narrative that Khaled Hosseini and Witi Ihimareva have been able to portray the context of the country and people whom they write about so effectively. It is this

\* flashbacks, characterisation



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use of context that makes their stories  
receivable to wider audiences world-wide  
and makes it easier to comprehend the actions  
of characters and events, which they  
are involved in.



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