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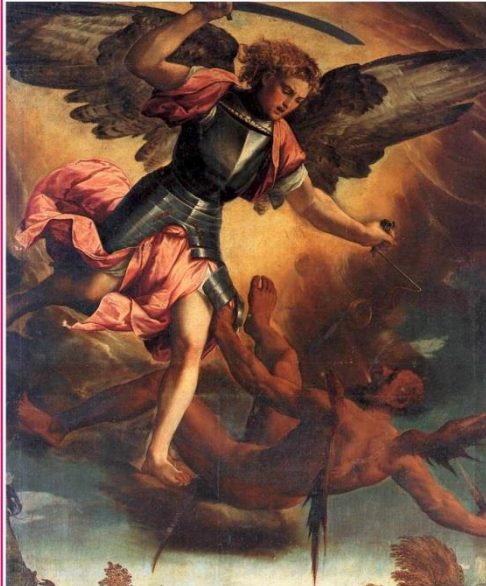
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## **Wartime Deterioration of Young Man's Life in Yasmina Khadra's Sirens of Baghdad**

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### **Abstract**

**This paper investigates the multiple reasons which deteriorate the hero's life during the war that undermines reason and destroys the most vulnerable side of human beings, which is feeling. Violence in all its forms turns the protagonist into a different man whose heart is filled with a volcano of hatred and despair. Yasmina Khadra's Sirens of Baghdad( 2008 ), examines the many disasters that resulted from the Euro-American occupation of Iraq post and their effect in turning a young man's life into destruction. Yasmina Khadra criticizes the western view of the third world as a land steeped in fundamentalism, extremism and violence, especially Islamic region.**

**Keywords: Violence; Baghdad; disasters; terrorism**

## **Deterioro en tiempo de guerra de la vida del joven en las sirenas de Bagdad de Yasmina Khadra**

### Resumen

Este artículo investiga las múltiples razones que deterioran la vida del héroe durante la guerra que socava la razón y destruye el lado más vulnerable de los seres humanos, que es el sentimiento. La violencia en todas sus formas convierte al protagonista en un hombre diferente cuyo corazón está lleno de un volcán de odio y desesperación. Las sirenas de Bagdad de Yasmina Khadra (2008), examinan los numerosos desastres que resultaron de la ocupación euroamericana de Irak y su efecto en convertir la vida de un joven en destrucción. Yasmina Khadra critica la visión occidental del tercer mundo como una tierra inmersa en el fundamentalismo, el extremismo y la violencia, especialmente en la región islámica.

Palabras llave: violencia; Bagdad desastres terrorismo

### Introduction:

Yasmina Khadra, a former Algerian military officer, writes under female's name to avoid political censorship and to defend women's rights, like he says. He writes his novels in French language because his French teacher encouraged him to employ it as his composition language. In his novel *Sirens of Baghdad* Yasmina Khadra discusses the nature of terrorism in Iraq post 2003. He states that terrorism changes the fate of characters who witness their collapse and fall into the abyss of horror and terror.

Terrorism is a problematic issue, and the term (terrorism) itself is problematic because one can read it in different ways at the same time. The injustice, loss of sovereignty, and the lack of a position of identification within the authority of the people always generates anger and suspicion in life itself and its value, and in terrorism all of these combine with other feelings within an ideological awareness that justifies the necessity of violence to reach certain goals even if it is at the expense of innocent people, Dictatorship always paved the way for terrorism generation after generation. Terrorist movements have always started as revolutionary and ideological movements that have found acceptance among people and some see these movements necessary, but with the passage of time these movements lose this position in the popular street, due to the fall of the innocent victims by violence practiced by these groups. Then, violence

increases and the terrorists turn to a completely similar form for those who fought against it. The reasons that lead to terrorism are numerous, including injustice and suspicion; lose of freedom of speech and freedom of choices. Hate and terrorism are not made in Arab societies but they exist in many places. They come after every dictatorial regime which kills, tortures and paves the way to violence and hatred.

Yasmina Khadra is very famous in Western cultural circles, as his literary works were published in French and have been translated into more than twenty languages, and he has won many literary awards. He justifies his choice of his wife's name that he was trying to raise the literary voice of women in a society steeped in obsolete traditions. Khadra was one of the most influential Arab writers who better understands man's mind where he is (Riding,2002 ,p. 1). Yasmina Khadra is currently residing in France and holding the position of director of the Algerian Cultural Center in Paris. Critics have recognized that the novels of Yasmina immersed in the human psyche, and leave in the path of each reader simple particles that would leave him insisting on completing the novel no matter how long it is.

Khadra's *Sirens of Baghdad* begins from Beirut before it takes us to the reefs of Iraq ... and this time, too, it revolves around a "suicide bomber" character on his journey of sliding into hell. The author has so far moved between Algeria and Kabul ("The Years of Kabul" - 2002), Palestine ("The Assault" - 2005), and here he is storming Beirut and Iraq in the *Sirens of Baghdad* to complete his trilogy of extremism and the roots of terrorism. Khadra discusses the tragedy of the Iraqi young man whose life is destroyed as a result to the terrible interference of the US forces in Iraq. This Iraqi young man ends up in the Lebanese capital, Beirut, where he sits in one of its hotels, waiting for his flight that will take him to London for one purpose. The action of the novel takes place in an isolated village in Iraq called *Kafr Karam* which is inhabited by the people of the *Badia*. The narrator describes it as:"a village lost in the sands of the Iraqi desert, a place so discreet that it often dissolves in mirages, only to emerge at sunset" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008,p.8 ). The young man says:"We were poor, common people, but we were living at peace"( Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p. 9). The poverty is not a fertile ground for violence. According to the narrator, before the war, "[they] had [their] little idiosyncrasies, but [their] quarrels never degenerated into anything worse"( Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008,p.14) Khadra chooses this quiet and peaceful village to reveal how young men are transformed into religious fanatics as

a result of political violence.

The young man does not have a name. He represents every Iraqi man experiencing what the hero has gone through. This young man experiences many traumatic actions in his past life, which derived him to move to Art. He enters the University of Baghdad to become an artist. But to his misfortune, the American forces occupied Iraq, and they controlled this university. The young man describes his despair: "From one day to the next, the most passionate love affairs dissolved in tears and blood. The university was abandoned to vandals, and my dreams were destroyed, too." (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p. 307). Not only the University but all the city of Baghdad is turned ashes. It is described as "a city that had broken from its moorings and gone adrift, fascinated by its own suicidal rage and the intoxications of impunity" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p.p. 148). The young man returns to his village but the war comes to Kafr Karam when a missile falls on a wedding party killing children, women and men. It terrorized people and filled them with hatred and prejudice. A witness portrays the terrible scene: "The guests were having a good time, and then the chairs and tables blew away, like in a windstorm." The witness adds: "The force of the explosion had flung chairs and wedding guests thirty meters in all directions" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p. 47). A man screamed angrily: "Look! Nothing but women and children! This was a wedding reception. Where are the terrorists? The real terrorists are the bastards who fired the missiles at us" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p.48).

The young man sees the American soldiers killing the mentally-ill boy, Suleiman. He collapses completely in front of the tattered body of the mad boy. The explosion was made on the pretext that he was trying to explode himself in front of the checkpoint. The mad boy was guiltless but this was their justification for killing him. The young man angrily says: "Every bullet that struck the fugitive, pierced me through and through" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p.57). America's aggressive armed operations in Iraqi cities infuriated people of Kafar Karam; "The sieges of Fallujah and Basra and the bloody raids on other cities made the crowd seethe" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p.43). The Iraqis who feel humiliated and frustrated by the attack give themselves legal rights to return the attack. According to Todorov, "The individuals responsible for anti-Western attacks live with the feeling that their passions are just, and their ideas true; now, as Pascal said 350 years ago, 'violence and truth have no power over each other'" (2010, p.7).

The third time the young man is traumatized and shocked was when the American soldiers stormed his house and this was a turning point in his life. This incident sends him down a path to terrorism and destruction. The American soldiers humiliate his aged father in front of him when they throw him down on the ground naked in front of his family. This offense, according to Bedouin tradition, must be "washed away in blood", Therefore the young man is determined to join an Islamist movement planning an attack on London. He says: "I'd no longer consider things in the same way; I heard the foul beast roar deep inside me, and it was clear that sooner or later, whatever happened, I was condemned to wash away this insult in blood until the rivers and the oceans turned as red as the cut on Bahia's neck, as my mother's eyes, as the fire in my guts, which was already preparing me for the hell I knew was waiting" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.51).

The peaceful life of the young man is deteriorated because there is nothing in Baghdad but destruction and mass killing of a large number of citizens, while American soldiers remain far from danger. He stresses that the US forces, "are nothing but brutes and wild beasts; they drive their big machines past our windows and orphans and have no qualms about stopping their bombs on our health clinics. Look at what they've done to our country: hell on earth" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, pp.18-19). American soldiers' realize that their actions against the Iraqis are inhuman therefore they are terrified of the least action the Iraqis make. . Todorov comments: "The Fear of barbarians is what risks making us barbarians. And we will commit a worse evil than that which initially feared. History teaches us this lesson: the cure can be worse than the disease" (2010,p. 6). Jessica Stern states that those who feel deeply alienated or distressed, they find martyrdom as the only way to escape from life's troubles (2003.p. 6). Silke , on the other hand, adds that these individuals normally think of violent actions when treated violently. They resort to join terrorist groups to have their revenge on the their victimizers. (2004.p. 183). Seeing all this destruction and death the young man decides that he has to revenge for his father and all those guiltless people who were assassinated at the hands of the American soldiers. He justifies: "The horrors of yesterday are what's pushing me on". (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.10) The idea of revenge controls him completely. He impatiently waits to become a suicide bomber to avenge his father's disgrace. He states: "I was a Bedouin, and no Bedouin can come to terms with an offense unless blood is spilled" (Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.97). His blind anger derives him to

think that:”it was my duty to wash away the insult, my sacred duty and my absolute right”( Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.80) Death for the young man is not horrific but it is heroic when it is related to restoring the honor of the family. He joins what is known as the resistance movement in Baghdad where he would be given the chance to have his revenge. He says that anger becomes “all that remained to me in this false, unjust, arid and cruel life.”(Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.80) So, humiliation and hatred of Arabs fill the young man with a deep feeling of detestation and abhorrence;”How could I love anything after what I’d seen in Kafir Karam? If so, who was I? I wasn’t really interested in knowing that”( Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.67).

For Jessica Stern, terrorists are often individuals who feel humiliated. Their poverty, and desperation often give rise to a sense of indignation and distraction, which can be harnessed by extremist leaders to create support for a terrorist movement.(2004,p. 6)

The young man’s despair and indignation motivates him to restore the family’s honor by having his revenge on the enemy. He thinks that that he must live as a man or die as a martyr. There is no third alternative for those who want to live free .He decides to travel to London to kill the largest number of people gathered in public places . When he joins a terrorist group, he meets Sayed who gives him DVDs which contain some of the monstrous operations US soldiers committed against Iraqis. These DVDs fill the young man with hatred and prejudice against the American forces. They make him filled with a strong desire to impose violence upon the enemies as soon as possible. When two Iraqis are killed in front of him under the pretext that they served the American forces ,the young man looks at them with a cold blood, commenting: “I was no longer the delicate boy from Kafar Karam. Another individual has taken his place. I was stunned by how easy to pass from one world to another and practically regretting having spent much time being fearful of what I’d find.”( Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.96). The young man grew up far from the manifestations of hostility, viciousness and explosions of roaring missiles, until those days that began to cast their effects and burdens on him..

The young man made his way to Beirut to be prepared for the attack. Though he faced many difficulties but he never hesitates to go back to his village. Despite the troubles, despite his being robbed and remaining homeless in the streets of Beirut but he insists to continue his mission. He starts receiving injections, without knowing the reason for injecting them, and taking doses of medications without asking a question, but he reached



the flow of urine and urged to find out the reason for all the treatment he was going through. He is shocked to know that he is being prepared to be injected with a poison which will not kill him but he will kill everyone who inhales the air that he breathes. That is their plan to bury him as a scapegoat and then send him to the United States to pollute their air and knock them down.

During a heated discussion at the café in Kafr Karam Omar who offers the young man help and housing, warns the young man: "Keep things in perspective; don't mistake wrong for right. Don't kill just for killing's sake. Don't fire blindly. We're losing more innocent people than bastards who deserve to die"( Khadra'a *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.90). Hussein, on the other hand, explains to the young man:"Our cause is just, but we're defending it badly" (Khadra'a *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p.210) Besides, one of the minor characters criticizes harshly the young man's fanatic fellows for the brutality of their unethical war that cause civilians death more than soldiers, "You consider yourselves Fedayeen...But you're nothing but murderers.Vandals. Child-killers."( Khadra'a *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.231)

While the young man decides to carry the killing virus to destroy the western people, he contemplates: "Virus or bomb, what's the difference, 203 when you're grasping an offense in one hand and, in the other, a Cause?" (Khadra'a *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.269) He is aware that his revenge is personal but the cause is general. For him not just the US, but the whole West is the enemy. So, he is being prepared to carry a revolutionary and destructive virus that will kill a whole nation, resulting in a real human tragedy. He says: "When I agreed to follow Sayed, I divorced myself from life. I am a dead man waiting for a decent burial"( Khadra'a *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.130) The young man accepts to carry the virus as a weapon to destroy all the western hegemony. He believes he is saving the world not only his country from hideous west .When he carries the Virus with him and prepares himself to move to London he looks at the people in front of him, an old man waiting for a call; a man watching his pregnant wife with kindness and care; two lovers of a European race deliver love messages between them and they are kissing each other patiently in the airport. His humanity triumphs over his violence. He believes that he has no right to destroy their romanticism. He comments:"European couple kissing each other [in the airport] deserved to live for a thousand years. I have no right to challenge their kisses, scuttle their dreams, dash their hopes."( Khadra'a *Siren of Baghdad* ,2008, p.152) He adds" What did you do to my fate,

me? I have twenty one years, and I am sure that I have wasted my life one Twenty-seven times”( Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.152) He decides to abort the mission:”I head for the exit. My mind’s a blank, and I let my feet carry me. I have no choice.” (Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.303). When Shakir, a member of the resistance, meets him at the airport he explains, ”I was at the gate. I watched the passengers boarding the plane and I didn’t follow them” (Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.304) Shakir asks him why he did not carry out the attack he answers:” I have no idea” (Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.304) .Probably, it is the sense of the continuity of life and the right of others to it that motivates the hero to wake up and withdraw from the task entrusted to him. The young man is not a terrorist but the violence he experienced motivates his hatred against his enemy. Joseba observes:”At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that a true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a true revolutionary lacking in this quality” (2009, p. 63).

The novel offers no answer to the question why the avenger does not carry out his plan of attack to revenge his enemy .It is obvious that his humanity prevents him from hurting the guiltless fathers and mothers, the old and the unborn children. This task is not typical; it represents the embodiment of blind hostility against innocents and against the young man himself who will share their fate, in a violent act of suicide. When he left the plane that he was supposed to ride, he realizes that he has ended his life and put an end to it, as he learns that once his companions discover that he is not going, it would be time for him to meet his death.

He sacrifices himself deciding to cast off his hatred and prejudice against guiltless people The voice of wisdom murmurs:”If you want to avenge an offense, don’t commit one. If you think your honor must be saved, don’t dishonor your people. Don’t give way to madness” (Khadra’a Siren of Baghdad ,2008, p.183).

For the West, Said argues, Arab Muslims are still regarded as camel-riding, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization (Said 108) For Khadra, Islam has nothing to do with violence .Poverty, political corruption, colonialism and despair instead are the main triggers for terrorism.”And everyone fights with the methods they have... Otherwise, the young people would not blow themselves up in a restaurant. They’d use drones, tanks or airplanes” (Bertelsen 6)

Khadra presented the root causes of Iraqi antagonism and hatred toward the coalition forces in his novel. Iraqis hate Western régimes not Western

people because of the occupation. There is nothing such as the myth of civilizations' clash, but policies' clash. The West is always defaming national resistance by accusing Muslims of terrorism, but authors like Khadra tried to do the opposite and reveal the truth. Khadra has attempted to turn the label of terrorism against those who use it to defame national struggle. As stated in the novel, Iraqis are not violent savage terrorists; they are poets, writers and have lust for life and freedom whereas, American soldiers have been described many times as faithless brutes. As young man says: "Until the day when our privacy was violated, our taboos broken, our dignity dragged through mud and gore...until the day when brutes festooned with grenades and handcuffs burst into the gardens of Babylon, come to teach poets how to be free men(Khadra's *Siren of Baghdad*, 2008, p.12) In *The Sirens of Baghdad* Khadra thus makes it clear that to understand terrorism; one has to dig deep into the roots; the political institutions, their policies and stratifications, societal composition together with the general economic, social, psychological and emotional well-being of every individual in the population. Exploring these branches will help one to see why crime rates are far from declining in the contemporary world. Research findings reveal that most suicide bombers have had at least one of their loved ones killed or severely harmed at the hands of their enemies.

Conclusion:

This paper expose the funeral hymn for a country that America has offered fake freedom, a country that has turned into hellish land and a world of idiots, with no trace of human dignity left. Here the Americans have no mercy on anyone. But all the Iraqis are in front of the humiliation that the occupier afflicts on their family and relatives. The city of Baghdad, which has been in turmoil, embraces all forms of pollution and suspicions. And men of law in the name of God act with the same cruelty and atrocity as their enemies. In this city everything is deviated, men and souls, love and compassion have no place. What we want most from the terrorist novel is to know and experience why someone chooses terror. We want to be inside the mind of the terrorist (Blessington, 1979,p.117). Khadra used this strategy perfectly, as he preferred to adopt the perspective of a naïve protagonist who is suddenly forced to comprehend war and fused into it, turning into reluctant fundamentalist. Terrorism is not only the hell fruit of the absence of both communication and democracy in the Arab world, but the natural consequence of a despising west as well.

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