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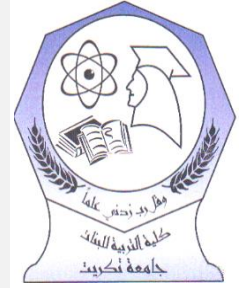


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## Fundamentalism in *The Sirens of Baghdad* by Yasmina Khadra

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### ABSTRACT

The emergence of religious extremism and its effects on people and society are explored in Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*, especially in light of the Arab world. This study examines the fundamentalist motif found in Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*. The story's protagonist's journey illuminates the complicated philosophies, goals, and repercussions of fundamentalist groups. This research investigates the manner in which Khadra depicts the captivating nature of fundamentalism, the elements that contribute to its attractiveness, and the mechanisms via which it may influence and exploit people. Furthermore, this analysis delves into the novel's exploration of the socio-political and cultural circumstances that contribute to the emergence of fundamentalism. Additionally, it scrutinizes the novel's exploration of the tensions and conflicts that arise between traditional values and the forces of modernity. By examining the fundamentalist

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theme in *The Sirens of Baghdad*, this research adds to current understanding of the intricacies of religious fanaticism and how it affects both people and society.

**Keywords:** fundamentalism, Yasmina Khadra, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, religious extremism, Arab world, the complicated philosophies, goals, and repercussions, socio-political and cultural circumstances, traditional values, the forces of modernity.

## الأصولية في صفارات الإنذار في بغداد لياسمينه خضرا

محمد وهاب صالح

مديرية تربية صلاح الدين

و

د. زينب عبدالله حسين

جامعة تكريت

### المستخلص

يتم توضيح ظهور التطرف الديني وآثاره على الناس والمجتمع في رواية ياسمينه خضرة "صافرات انذار بغداد"، وخاصة في العالم العربي. تتناول هذه الدراسة الفكرة الأصولية الموجودة في رواية ياسمينه خضرا "صافرات انذار بغداد". تسلط رحلة بطل القصة الضوء على الفلسفات والأهداف والتداعيات المعقدة للجماعات الأصولية. يدرس هذا البحث في الطريقة التي تصور بها خضرا الطبيعة الأسيرة للأصولية، والعناصر التي تساهم في جاذبيتها، والآليات التي يمكن من خلالها التأثير على الناس واستغلالهم. علاوة على ذلك، يتعمق هذا التحليل في استكشاف الرواية للظروف الاجتماعية والسياسية والثقافية التي تساهم في ظهور الأصولية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يدقق في استكشاف الرواية للتوترات والصراعات بين القيم التقليدية وقوى الحداثة. من خلال دراسة الموضوع الأصولي في "صافرات انذار بغداد"، يضيف هذا البحث إلى الفهم الحالي لتعقيدات التعصب الديني وكيفية تأثيره على الناس والمجتمع.

**الكلمات الدالة:** الأصولية، ياسمينه خضرا، صفارات الإنذار في بغداد، التطرف الديني، العالم العربي، الفلسفات والأهداف والتداعيات المعقدة، الظروف الاجتماعية والسياسية والثقافية، القيم التقليدية، وقوى الحداثة.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*The Sirens of Baghdad* is a novel by Algerian writer Yasmina Khadra, who is the pseudonym for Mohammed Moulessehoul, a former military officer in the Algerian army. It is originally published in 2006. Set in Baghdad during the Iraq War, the novel tells the story of An Iraqi student, who is unable to pursue further education due to the ongoing conflict, witnesses American forces causing a series of humiliation and sorrow in his little community. The life of the protagonist belongs to the desert Iraqi village of Kafr Karam. He is twenty-six years old and belongs to the Bedouin clan. Driven by a desire for vengeance, he escapes to the tumultuous streets of Baghdad, where rebels quickly see the potential of harnessing his fury. Ultimately, he is trained for a covert terrorist operation intended to surpass the magnitude of the September 11th attacks, but he soon finds himself grappling with ethical dilemmas. Through Kadem's journey, the

novel offers a poignant reflection on the futility of revenge and the possibility of redemption in even the darkest of times (Al Janabi, 2018: pp 101-102).

Yasmina Khadra tackles the topic of fundamentalism and the pernicious effects of extreme beliefs in her novel. Set against the backdrop of the Iraq War, the story chronicles the transformation of a young Iraqi student, starting as an ambitious artist and ending up as a disenchanted adherent of fundamentalism. Khadra's work emphasizes the many elements that contribute to the emergence of extremism and the severe outcomes it brings. The book emphasizes the captivating and enticing qualities of fundamentalist ideology, as well as its ability to manipulate and exploit susceptible people. It also delves into the root reasons of radicalization (Mushtaq, 2023: pp 185-186).

An exploration of the psychological and emotional dimensions of extremism offers a sophisticated comprehension of how people might be enticed down a path of destruction. The work delves at the detrimental effects of fundamentalism on individuals, including the devastating consequences and broken aspirations that arise from the protagonist's involvement in extremist groups. Khadra counters oversimplified accounts and generalizations by portraying the people as multifaceted entities motivated by personal encounters, social constraints, and ideological influence (Doe, 2015: p 112).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research explores the convergence of literature, fundamentalism, and cultural criticism in Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* using Hamid Dabashi's theoretical framework as a perspective. The study of fundamentalism in literature has captivated researchers from several academic fields. Research has investigated how writers depict religious, political, or ideological fundamentalism in their literary works and the consequences of these portrayals.

Concerning Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens Of Baghdad*, various researchers delve into examining subjects such as the process of being saved, feelings of remorse, one's sense of self, and how political beliefs influence individual stories. In her dissertation *Representations of Political Violence in Contemporary Middle Eastern Fiction* (2016), Yara Amr El Masry shows that Currently, several Middle Eastern countries are experiencing political violence, including foreign occupation, civil war, revolution, and coup d'état, which is closely linked to international politics. Foreign nations are actively engaging in the issue, providing financial support or manipulating events, leading to violent assaults.

As a result, numerous scholarly and creative works on Middle Eastern terrorism have emerged from Western sources. However, these efforts have often been oversimplified and reduced, exacerbated by a climate of suspicion and Islamophobia following 9/11. She examines five Middle Eastern books that depict significant conflict areas within the region, focusing on the works of Alaa Al-Aswany, Orhan Pamuk, Assaf Gavron, Yasmina Khadra, and Mohsin Hamid. These studies provide detailed insights into the cultural and social environments of Egypt, Turkey, Israel/Palestine, Iraq, and Pakistan, elucidating the intricacy of political violence in the Middle East and revealing how these writers view or react to the discourse on terrorism in their fiction.

In his dissertation entitled *Postcolonial Nationalism and Contemporary Literary Theory: Algerian and Iraqi Novels from 1962 to the Present* (2018), Hazam Kamel Abd

Al Janabi examines the themes of identity and postcolonial nationalism in specific historical novels from Iraq and Algeria that were written after 1960. The study analyzes eight novels: Assia Djebar's *Children of the New World* (1962), Muhsin al-Ramli's *Scattered Crumbs* (2000), Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2008), Ali Bader's *The Tobacco Keeper* (2011), Abdul-Aziz Gramoule's *Za'eem al-Aqaliyah al-Sahiqah* [Leader of the Overwhelming Minority] (2005), Khadair al-Zaidi's *Valyoom Asharah* [Valium 10] (2015), Rashid Boudjedra's *The Barbary Figs* (2012), and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (2013).

The research examines how historical fiction may both establish and validate nationalist discourse, as well as challenge dominant discourses, via a meticulous investigation of the chosen material. The thesis examines the impact of postcolonial nationalism on social and cultural formations in a pan-Arabic setting, specifically focusing on the degree to which critical knowledge and blindness play a role. Additionally, it investigates how nationalist leaders exploit and oppress their population.

The current study is different from what mentioned above concerning the targeted novel in showing the bad effects of using fundamental ideas. By focusing on showing the manifestations of fundamentalism, my study will explore the connection between literature, fundamentalism, and cultural criticism using Hamid Dabashi's theoretical framework.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study follows a qualitative method using descriptive and analytical approaches. The study relies on a post orientalist theoretical framework, and especially Hamid Dabashi's reading of fundamentalism in analyzing Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*. The suggested study will follow the research techniques outlined in the APA documentation style (sixth edition).

#### **4. Fundamentalism in *The Sirens of Baghdad* by Yasmina Khadra: Exploring the Destructive Power of Extremist Ideologies**

Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* is a chilling tale about the deadly influence of religious fanaticism. The narrative follows Khaled, a young Iraqi whose life is profoundly changed by the temptation of radicalization, amid the background of the Iraq War. Khadra explores the attraction and repercussions of radical ideology via the story of Khaled, a young guy who goes from being an innocent and optimistic individual to a devotee of an extremist organization. By examining fundamentalism as it is shown in the novel, the researcher draws conclusions about its effects on people, groups, and civilizations.

Rejecting pluralism, stifling dissent, and justifying murder in the name of a greater cause are common outcomes of fundamentalism, which is defined by a rigid devotion to ideological or religious ideas (Ruthven, 2005). Khadra portrays the manifestation of fundamentalism in different ways, emphasizing its widespread impact on individuals and society. The novel delves into the protagonist's journey, starting as an optimistic and idealistic young man and ending up as a disillusioned adherent of extremist beliefs. Through compelling storytelling and intricate character development, Khadra presents the complex nature of fundamentalism and its harmful outcomes (Mushtaq, 2023: p 188).

An important aspect of fundamentalism in the novel is its capacity to use and manipulate persons who are susceptible or easily influenced. Hamid Dabashi believes that people become extremists due to psychological consequences, which are caused by certain circumstances. These effects include vulnerabilities, phobias, and insecurities, which are used to radicalize individuals. He contends that fundamentalist beliefs provide a feeling of inclusion, selfhood, and direction to those who may experience marginalization or exclusion in the dominant culture (Dabashi, 2008: p 78). The main character, who originally had ambitions of being an artist and seeking a better life, falls vulnerable to the attraction of extreme beliefs as a result of the difficult circumstances and disappointment he faces. Khadra explores the psychological and emotional consequences of indoctrination, demonstrating how fundamentalist organizations exploit people' craving for community, meaning, and importance, eventually guiding them towards a perilous course.

From the beginning of the story, Kafr Karam is shown as an impoverished but content community, inhabited by peaceable individuals whose primary focus is to meet their fundamental requirements and lead a joyful existence. The many depictions of the peaceful town of Kafr Karam serve as a direct contradiction to the Western narrative that portrays Islamic culture as fundamentally violent, suggesting that radicalism is a natural consequence of the ideals they adhere to in their daily lives.

The tale clearly depicts that Arab Muslims do not possess an innate animosity towards the western world and its culture. While conflict wreaks havoc in the rest of Iraq, Kafr Karam remains relatively tranquil and secluded. However, this period of tranquility is short-lived. The story vividly depicted the detrimental impact of foreign occupation on the populace, as it stripped them of fundamental human rights such as access to healthcare, education, freedom of movement, and, most crucially, the right to life. However, it seems that the tranquility of the community was only the serenity before a storm. It is a forewarning of the slow devastation of the hamlet (Das & Rai, 2021: p 1596).

Following years of enduring continuous traumatic experiences associated with death and war, the survivors undergo a profound state of emotional detachment that results in the complete destruction of both their physical and mental well-being. When trying to separate the mind from tragic and horrifying deaths, the mind gets "numbed," leading to a loss of self-awareness "severed from its own history, from its grounding in such psychic forms as compassion for others, communal involvement, and other ultimate values" (Lifton, 1967: p. 89). This cognitive paralysis implies a state of stagnation and breakdown in the process of symbolization.

In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, The protagonist goes from being a "docile, courteous boy" to someone whose "inextinguishable rage" may destroy cities: "I wanted to turn the country into an inferno from one end to the other. Everything I put in my mouth tasted like blood; every breath I took stank of cremation" (Khadra, 2008: pp134 & 159). The individual's repeated exposure to traumatic experiences erodes his mental well-being, and rather of prompting withdrawal, these tragic occurrences compel him to go on a self-destructive path. He relocates to Baghdad, a city ravaged by conflict (Al Janabi, 2018: p 105).

Due to the war, Baghdad has lost its former status as the hub of education and commerce. The city is in ruins, under the control of militias that are causing widespread

destruction and loss of life via daily bomb blasts. The narrative depicts the fact that these unexpected and unplanned assaults have become a normal occurrence in Iraq. These occurrences not only instill fear in the surrounding community, but also diminish their will to live. The wedding celebration is disrupted as an errant rocket accidentally falls in the middle of the festivities. Overwhelmed by the sudden impact of the explosion, the mind is unable to articulate the events it has just seen. When a guy is requested to recount the events, his cognitive abilities falter:

I don't remember what happened after that. I didn't care. Like a piece of wreckage, I let myself drift wherever the waves took me. There was nothing left to salvage. The soldiers' bellowing didn't reach me anymore. Their weapons, their gung-ho zeal hardly made an impression. They could move heaven and earth, erupt like volcanoes, crack like thunder, I could no longer be touched by that sort of thing. (Khadra, 2008: p 103)

The protagonist, an unidentified narrator, has suffered both humiliation and the loss of his degree. Additionally, he has been separated from his lover, Nawal, whom he cherished deeply during their time at the University of Baghdad. The narrator departed for Baghdad with the intention of seeking retribution for his family's humiliation by inflicting a violent retaliation. The young guy aligns himself with the fanatics who manipulate him for their Machiavellian agendas. He ultimately agrees to carry out a mission that is much more horrifying than the events of 9/11, using a biological weapon. The feasibility of this approach is so unsettling that it deeply affects most readers. Thus, the writer serves as a mediator to elucidate the Arab thought and culture to the Western world. The author's method of appealing to western readers is intended to help them comprehend the true motivations behind the narrator's transformation from a nonviolent young man to a fundamentalist:

I was just on the point of declaring myself and unveiling to her the prospect of a bright future, when strange fireworks lit up the sky over Baghdad. The sirens echoed in the silence of the night, the most passionate love affairs dissolved in tears and blood. The university was abandoned to vandals, and my dreams were destroyed, too. I went back to Kafar Karam, wild-eyed and distraught, and I didn't return to Baghdad. (Khadra, 2008, p.19)

He also undergoes a profound feeling of destruction and death after his father is insulted by US forces, which fully overwhelms him. The act of parents being humiliated in front of their children has significant importance in Iraqi society. Due to their lack of preparedness, the protagonist is unable to effectively handle the grief caused by the tragedy that befalls his family. Consequently, his mind fails to behave in the manner it is often taught to do in regular circumstances. His cognitive faculties are unable to comprehend the sensory information, while all his bodily functions undergo a complete cessation:

I couldn't turn away. I was hypnotized by the spectacle the two of them presented to my eyes. I didn't even see the brutes who surrounded them. I saw only a distraught

mother and a painfully thin father in shapeless underwear, his eyes wounded, his arms dangling at his sides, stumbling as the soldiers shoved him along. (Khadra, 2008: p.103)

The multitude of terrifying events and dreams profoundly disrupt the character of the narrator, preventing him from recognizing his former identity:

I finished getting dressed, and then, without a glance at my sister or my cousin, I grabbed my bag and started down the steep path in the direction of the main trail. Don't turn around, an interior voice admonished me. You're already gone. (Khadra, 2008 p.109)

The protagonist is emotionally disturbed and feels as if his whole existence has been shaken by the missile assault at a wedding feast: "My hands bandaged, my shirt torn, and my pants stained with blood, I left the orchards on foot and walked home like a man stumbling through for" (Khadra, 2008: p 95). He feels as if the sky has collapsed on him and that the horrific things he saw there will always be with him. He has a terrifying epiphany since his mind fails to make sense of the outside world; "A voice knocking at my temples kept repeating that the death stinking up the orchards was contaminating my soul, and that I was dead too" (Khadra, 2008: p.97). His guilt forces him to commit the murders of the defenceless. He deals with the fear by hurting himself. His panic is incomprehensible, and he has no idea how to label it: "People don't die in bulk between dance steps; no, what had happened at the Haitems made no sense" (Khadra, 2008: p.98). Therefore, as a passionate and faithful member of his tribe, the narrator pursues retribution in an effort to restore his family's honour and self-worth. The narrator's re-incarnation is motivated by a strong want for vengeance, which is further intensified by the everyday difficulties he faces in Baghdad. The source of his animosity against the western world lies in the injustices he has personally experienced and the tragic events that have befallen his compatriots. In contrast to the western storyline, the narrator's animosity stems from a profoundly personal calamity and the misfortune inflicted upon his compatriots. The choice to terminate the plan, which has the potential to bring the whole world to the edge of complete destruction, displays the presence of compassion and empathy in his character. His innate humanity precludes him from doing such abhorrent acts. Upon the time of self-sacrifice, the narrator comprehends the paramount significance of life in contrast to death, recognizing life as the most eminent endowment granted to humanity (Das & Rai, 2021: p.1599).

In the novel, the precise delineation of terrorism continues to be a subject of contention. Terrorism is a tactic employed by individuals or groups to induce fear and terror in order to achieve political objectives. It can manifest in several forms, ranging from targeted killings of political figures to large-scale acts of homicide. Khadra characterizes the Western invasion against Iraq as an act of 'terrorism'. The narrator accurately portrays the atrocities by providing a realistic portrayal of US airstrikes on innocent populations. The atrocities of the war constitute a primary catalyst for the rise of 'counter terrorism' (Bouhassoun, 2018: p.73).

When American troops raid Iraqi towns and families, they demonstrate complete contempt for Iraqi culture and traditional values. The inhabitants of Kafr Karam saw this infringement as a betrayal of their dignity, since they belong to a culture that displays tremendous sensitivity for a cultural perspective that has impacted their lives for

generations. Consequently, the protagonist feels intimidated and deceived in his own home when it is raided and searched:

I didn't have time to reach for the lamp switch. A squad of American soldiers barged into my privacy....Those shouts! Atrocious, demented, devastating. Capable of unraveling you thread by thread and making you a stranger to yourself. (Khadra, 2008: p.99)

The protagonist experiences distress and psychic numbing after witnessing his family members being humiliated by the invading US soldiers. Family is central to Iraqi culture, and elders, especially fathers, are respected even after they can no longer fend for their family. His mother tries to shield him from the sight of his nakedness, but no amount of begging can undo the situation. The father's private parts are exposed, and the protagonist's world comes to an end. Cultural norms have a symbolic value for a society, and any injury to these principles can undermine human connectedness and give meaning to life. He cannot overcome his sense of shame and anger when the long-standing traditions of his community are destroyed by war. Honor cannot be negotiated, and honor is part of their psychological makeup in a closed society like Iraq (Gaddawi, 2022: p.185).

Dabashi emphasizes the significance of power relations, colonial legacies, and global disparities in driving extreme beliefs. He posits that those who experience marginalization, oppression, or disenfranchisement may be more vulnerable to extreme narratives that provide oversimplified explanations and remedies for complex social issues (Dabashi, 2017). The narrative espouses opposition to a foreign occupation in Iraq and highlights its exacerbation of the situation in a nation already ravaged by conflict. Throughout the tale, the locals openly voice their discontent and apprehension at the presence of the foreign authority in their nation. While acknowledging the brutality and cruelty of Saddam's rule, they have suspicions that the foreign occupation of their nation is primarily motivated by a desire to exploit their valuable natural resources, particularly oil,

Why do you think they're here, the Americans? The Falcon went on obstinately. "Is it Christian charity? They're businessmen, we're commodities, and they're ready to trade. Yesterday, it was oil for food. Today, it's Saddam for oil...If the Americans had an ounce of human kindness; they wouldn't treat their blacks and their Latinos like subhumans. (Khadra, 2008: p.33)

However, the author explicitly conveyed that the absence of cohesion among the Iraqi populace was the primary factor that allowed a dictator like Saddam to thrive and facilitated the intervention of foreign forces in their nation (Das & Rai, 2021: p.1597).

In response to the three transgressions perpetrated by the American military forces, the protagonist resorts to aggression. Nevertheless, after the first two offenses, namely the homicide of the mentally challenged individual Sulayman and the detonation of the wedding celebration, the young man refrained from responding with aggression. Nevertheless, when the American forces conducted a surprise assault on his residence during the late hours of the night, subjecting his family members and his father to humiliation while he was unclothed, he found it impossible to remain mute.



Consequently, he promptly resolved to seek retribution and restore his honor, even if it meant resorting to violence:

And I saw, while family's honor lay stricken on the floor, I saw what it was forbidden to see". He adds: "A Western cannot understand, cannot suspect the dimension of the disaster. For me, to see my father's sex was to reduce my entire existence, my values and my scruples, my pride. (Khadra, 2008: pp.101-102)

Subsequently, he alludes to the same occurrence in which the American forces inflicted harm to his twin sister Bahia using their weaponry, "I heard Bahia grumble before falling silent all at once, struck by a fist or a rifle butt. Pallid and half-dressed, ..." (Khadra, 2008: p 100). American troops in Iraq are displaying derogatory behavior towards his sisters, particularly his twin sister Bahia, demonstrating a lack of respect for the traditions, beliefs, and self-worth of the Iraqi population, particularly women. Women are highly respected in both Muslim and Arab societies and insulting them can provoke strong reactions and potentially lead to a person sacrificing their own life to seek retribution and restore honor. The young man's rage and desire for vengeance were observed by a car driver on his way to Baghdad (Das & Rai, 2021: p.1595).

Richard Marcus examines the Bedouin cultural practice that forbids the exposing of a father's genitalia and highlights the prevalence of such offenses in Iraq (Marcus, 2007). It is understandable that an Arab Bedouin would rebel against people who attempt to degrade him by forcibly removing his father's clothing and exposing him in front of others. This kind of action would naturally provoke a desire for retribution from the victimized individual. Therefore, the main character in *The Sirens of Baghdad* assumes the role of a terrorist in order to seek revenge for the disgraceful treatment of his father, who had his genitals exposed by American forces in front of his fellow citizens. This conduct was seen as dishonorable by the Bedouin community.

In *The Sirens of Baghdad*, while the nameless protagonist and his people have suffered humiliation and death, he does not actively pursue retribution. US military forces conducted house invasions, instilling fear among civilians, and unlawfully stole cash and other possessions. Terrorists often experience frustration due to their living situations or political climates, leading to feelings of humiliation and confusion over their future trajectory. A vengeful and resentful young man becomes a member of the Iraqi Resistance, but unfortunately aligns himself with an extremist faction, descending into a morass of heinous acts and bloodshed. He becomes aware that his acts constitute a heinous offense against humanity and the globe, given that the virus has the potential to cause the deaths of millions of innocent individuals. He chooses to disregard his escape, so concluding the tale (Bouhassoun, 2018, p. 60).

Another aspect of fundamentalism in the novel is the socio-cultural conflict manifestation. According to Dabashi, emphasizing the need of comprehending the socio-cultural aspects of social processes, including how trauma, fear, and insecurity may influence people' ideas and actions. The author examines how encounters with tyranny, violence, and relocation might prompt individuals to seek solace in inflexible ideologies that provide a feeling of safety and assurance in an unpredictable reality (Dabashi, 2017). Khadra portrays the widespread impact of extremist organizations inside societies, their capacity to dominate and manipulate public sentiment, and their enforcement of stringent

guidelines and protocols. The deleterious ambiance created by fundamentalism is shown by the curtailment of personal liberties, the imposition of inflexible gender norms, and the inhibition of intellectual and creative creativity.

Westerners tend to see Arab Muslim characters in *The Sirens of Baghdad* through a racist and terrorist lens, ignoring their innate resilience and capacity to fight back against the occupiers. The story portrays the consequences of the 2003 American military intervention in Iraq, emphasizing the American soldiers as terrorists because of their occupation and mistreatment of innocent people. The Arab Muslim's resistance to the West is mostly a result of poverty, lack of education, and decline caused by imperialist nations. Arab Muslims strive to protect themselves from the adverse elements of life, and those who want to preserve their presence in their own countries are often stigmatized as fundamentalists, extremists, and terrorists by oppressive entities (Naem, 2032: p.10).

Indeed, the contemporary world has already seen the emergence of terrorism, which has been propagated by Westerners who label any opposing force as terrorists. Multiple and diverse conferences were convened to address the precise delineation of terrorism. The novel effectively demonstrates the solutions to inquiries of this kind. The story depicts the social and psychological portrayals that compel Arab Muslims to become fundamentalists and engage in conflict with the Western world. Khadra effectively criticizes the unfounded accusations made by the West regarding the Arab Muslim characters. These characters are portrayed as innocent individuals who are simply striving to survive and live peacefully in their own countries. The reasons for the protagonist's desire to become a fundamentalist battling against the Occident have previously been shown. Hence, the writer tries to precisely identify the origins of terrorism and the potential catalysts that may contribute to its growth in the Arab world. The presence of poverty, racism, stereotyping, and oppression are the contributing elements that drive individuals like the Arab Muslim protagonist into fundamentalism (Bouhassoun, 2018: p.59).

The novel depicts the unjust brutality and degradation suffered by Arab Muslim characters solely based on their Arab Muslim identity. The American forces see every one of them as a potential terrorist, regardless of their innocence or intentions to harm. The American culture demonstrates that terrorism originates from Arab Muslims who are seen as radical and engage in conflict with Westerners whom they view as sacrilegious and blasphemous. The story portrays the profound consequences resulting from the American war on Iraq. It demonstrates the American forces' violation of human rights and their aggression against innocent Iraqi residents in many forms. Hence, the story demonstrates that the Americans themselves should be regarded as terrorists, since they perpetrate acts of violence against innocent civilians inside their own country. The Americans are often seen as the radicals who combat Islam and Arab Muslims. Additionally, it should be noted that the Americans have taken control of Iraq and seized its wealth. Khadra investigates the factors that lead a vulnerable individual to engage in acts of 'terrorism'. All of them commence with the psychological maturation into adulthood and the correlation between the spiritual and physical aspects. Furthermore, the presence of local oppressive regimes and lack of effective communication further contribute to the issues, alongside economic and developmental shortcomings and the perceived abandonment by Western powers (Naem, 2032: p.13).

The work explores the significant issue of the erosion of innocence caused by violence and conflict. This subject is recurrent because to the prevalence of violence, criminal activities, chaos, and dissatisfaction. The protagonist, a young Iraqi guy, initially had qualities of innocence, shyness, peacefulness, and emotional sensitivity. However, as a consequence of the conflict, he undergoes a profound transformation, becoming a violent entity driven by a desire to annihilate the whole world. The author recounts his idyllic upbringing throughout his naïve boyhood:

I was an emotional person; I found other people's sorrows devastating. Whenever I passed a misfortune, I bore it away with me.... At school, my classmates considered me a weakling. ... In fact, I wasn't a weakling; I simply hated violence. (Khadra, 2008: pp.96-97)

Following that, the main character articulates his metamorphosis and descent into aggression:

I was stunned by how easy it was to pass from one world to another... The weakling who had vomited at the sight of blood and lost his head when shots rang out was far, .... I was born again as a someone else, someone hard, cold, implacable... (Khadra, 2008: pp.194-195)

In a pivotal moment in the overarching transformation story, Sulayman, a young guy from the hamlet who has an undisclosed cognitive impairment, is being taken to a local clinic due to a self-inflicted injury. However, the vehicle carrying him is halted at an American checkpoint, and the individuals inside the vehicle are subjected to intense and coercive questioning. Unable to understand his surroundings, Sulayman becomes anxious, prompting his father to inform the soldier, "I beg you, please don't shout [...] My son is mentally ill, and you're scaring him". But the soldier screams: "Shut up! Shut the fuck up or I'll blow your brains out [...]" (Khadra, 2008: p 56). Amidst this intense confrontation, Sulayman experiences extreme fear, manages to flee, but ultimately succumbs to a fatal gunshot inflicted by the American soldier. The narrator recalls that Sulayman sprinted continuously, maintaining a rigid posture with his spine erect, his arms hanging freely, and his torso noticeably inclined towards the left. Based only on his gait, it was apparent that he deviated from the norm. During times of conflict, those who make mistakes are more likely to be given the benefit of the doubt compared to those who remain calm and composed. This concept is sometimes referred to as 'legitimate defense' (Hamdar, 2023: p.608). Subsequently, he proceeds to describe the instant when Sulayman is fatally shot and his own emotional reaction to the act of killing:

The first gunshots shook me from my head to my feet, like a surge of electric current. [...] Every bullet that struck the fugitive pierced me through and through. An intense tingling sensation consumed my legs, rose, and convulsed my stomach. (Khadra 2008: p.57)

The narrator's viewpoint of Sulayman's demise sharply contrasts with the villagers' image of him as benign and adored. The locals adamantly reject any rationale for shooting at a mentally challenged youngster, a morally untainted being who is more closely connected to God than even saints. Sulayman's infirmity serves as a metaphor for the political

disempowerment endured by his father and the other villagers as a result of the invasion and the presence of American forces.

Upon seeing the extensive devastation and loss of life, the young man resolves to seek retribution on behalf of his father and the innocent individuals who were unlawfully killed by American forces. He asserts that the atrocities of the previous day are the driving force behind his motivation. He is utterly consumed by the concept of vengeance. The individual eagerly awaits the opportunity to carry out a suicide bombing as a means of seeking retribution for his father's dishonor. The individual claims to be a Bedouin, asserting that no Bedouin can reconcile with an offence without resorting to violence. His unreasoning rage compels him to believe that it was his obligation to eradicate the insult, his revered duty and his unequivocal entitlement. The death of a young man is not terrifying, but rather courageous, especially when it is connected to the act of restoring the family's honor. He becomes a member of the resistance organization in Baghdad, where he is offered the opportunity to seek retribution. He asserts that fury is the only emotion that has endured in his deceptive, unfair, desolate, and merciless existence. The young guy is filled with a profound sense of detestation and abhorrence towards Arabs due to feelings of shame and loathing (Khalaf & Ahmad, 2019: p.2904).

Similarly, Yaseen and his group of young men from the hamlet of Kafr Karam also succumbed to violence and terrorism by choosing to join a terrorist organization instead of participating in the national struggle, just like some other young men from the area. Consequently, they engage in abhorrent and indescribable acts of wrongdoing. For these individuals, taking lives and engaging in acts of violence become effortless tasks. They have an insatiable desire for blood, particularly Yaseen, who surpasses the other members in the severity of his criminal actions. Yaseen's loss of innocence prompted him to murder Omar, even though they were from the same town, solely based on his suspicion (Smith, 2010: p.276).

The novel also depicts a more generic western other, while it does touch on some of the details linked with the area and its inhabitants being identified as Arab or Bedouin. This generalization is also influenced by Arabism and Pan-Arab nationalist ideas. In his explanation, Adeed Dawisha asserts that the nationalist generation of the 1950s and 1960s strongly believed that the West would intentionally and effectively hinder the objectives of Arab nationalism. They perceived the nationalist aspiration for an independent and assertive Arab nation as a perilous action that threatened Western economic and political interests in the region. Hence, the nationalist endeavor primarily evolved into a confrontation with the Western powers (2003: p 27). The narrator's identification of the adversary as Western is further strengthened during the balcony meeting with Dr. Jalal, who serves as a representative of Iraqi intellectuals. The narrator portrays Jalal as an experienced educator who has had an extensive tenure as a teacher at European colleges. Additionally, Jalal is shown as a frequent guest on television shows and as someone who openly condemns the "criminal deviationism" of his fellow believers. Nevertheless, Jalal's connection with the Western culture undergoes a transformation as a result of what the narrator characterizes as a manifestation of intellectual racism. The narrator provides an explanation:

Profoundly disappointed by his Western colleagues, aware that his status as useful rag head was outrageously supplanting any recognition of his scholarly

accomplishments, [Jalal] wrote a tremendous indictment of the intellectual racism rampant among respectable coterie in the West and performed some incredible pirouettes in order to gain admittance to Islamist circles. At first he was suspected of being a double agent, but then the Imamate rehabilitated him, made him their representative, and gave him a mission. Today, he travels to Arab and Muslim countries to lend his oratorical talent and his formidable intelligence to jihadist directives. (Khadra, 2008: pp.6-7)

Dr. Jalal's association with Islamist organizations and jihadist commands is not due to religious fervor but a desire for recognition and retaliation against perceived Western prejudice. The narrator questions Dr. Jalal's opinion on Iraqi intellectuals' participation in the battle, and he believes many will. The author argues that Arab intellectuals are connected to the West, highlighting an identity crisis and the West's deceitful falsehood. The term "siren song" is used to describe the persuasive language of the West, which has led to death and devastation for the Iraqi people. The novel, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, suggests that the resistance songs in Baghdad, like the West's, are seen as perverse and deceitful, ultimately leading the narrator towards violence and death (El Masry, 2016: p.183).

The interaction between the protagonists and the Western world is further explored via a secondary discussion that occurs in the last portion of Beirut. Khadra's portrayal of Dr. Jalal and his literary buddy Mohamed Seen implies that Iraqis, as well as Muslims in general, have alternatives to violence as a means of responding. The character of Dr. Seen in the story closely resembles the author, Khadra, and may be the sole distinct viewpoint offered by the author. Similar to the author of the book, Seen is an Arab writer residing in Paris who advocates for the influential role of language in creating a fairer portrayal. During an interview, Khadra himself clarifies that people are now living in a period when a significant portion of media coverage of the Orient consists of falsehoods and fabrication. Ultimately, the book serves as a means or device that enables the reader to reach truth. Only works of fiction convey the truth. In order to demonstrate the influence of fiction and myth in the realm of political violence and the pursuit of representation (Feehily, 2006). Seen provides an explanation:

The West is out of the race. It's been overtaken by events. The battle, the real battle, is taking place among the Muslim elite, that is, between us two and the radical clerics... the struggle is internal. Muslims are on the side of the person who can project their voice, the Muslim voice, as far as possible. They don't care whether he's a terrorist or an artist... They need a myth, an idol. Someone capable of representing them, of expressing them in their complexity, of defending them in some way. Whether with the pen or with bombs, it makes little difference to them. And so it's up to us to choose our weapons... (Khadra, 2008: pp.274-275)

Seen's speech draws a parallel between the pen and the bomb, the artist and the terrorist, and the concept of voice and representation. He asserts that intellectuals have the responsibility to use the power of speech instead of resorting to violence in order to get representation. Dr. Seen believes that radical clerics and artists may be interchanged and have the ability to inspire people via their aptitude for presenting a fair portrayal (El Masry, 2016: p 182). In the narrative, Khadra juxtaposes the characters of Dr. Jalal and Dr. Seen, who embody distinct philosophical perspectives on resistance, so creating a conflict between them. Dr. Jalal's primary focus is in examining resistance as a kind of conflict against the Western world. He argues that the West labelled indigenous people as "natives" and those who were free as "savages." Dr. Seen is interested in fostering an internal opposition or revival that would remove power from extreme clerics in Iraq and instead empower Iraqi academics. This is the pinnacle difficulty within the framework of Iraqi conflict.

Due to Dabashi, media and technology play influential role in spreading essential concepts, including cultural, political, and social aspects. He recognizes that media platforms have significant influence in disseminating ideology and molding public sentiment. Dabashi recognizes the capacity of media and technology to magnify basic ideas and reach a broader audience than ever before. He has the belief that digital platforms have the potential to serve as a platform for grassroots movements and marginalized voices, allowing them to be heard and gather momentum (Dabashi, 2008: p 60). Khadra, in the novel, highlights the importance of media and technology in spreading fundamental ideas. By means of depicting war, violence, and human suffering, Khadra radicalizes young men, incites dissent, and strengthens the clamor against the conflict.

The primary purpose of mass media should be to serve as a platform for both entertainment and the dissemination of democratic principles. It serves as a crucial instrument for presenting a wide range of perspectives. Nevertheless, the Safir café has received a toxic present from a religious extremist, targeting the gathering place for young individuals. The lack of literacy in the community has a predominantly detrimental impact on the peacefulness of Kafr Karam. In the absence of authority, fundamentalists attempt to establish their own influence using the idea of infection. Television, being a dual-purpose instrument, also brings about disorder. The TV depiction of death and violence in Iraq aims to evoke strong emotions and appeal to both religious and nationalist sentiments (Bouhassoun, 2018: p.65).

After the American troops attack a wedding in his village, Sayed, a former Taliban member with sympathies towards Islamists, exploits the strong animosity against the Americans that exists in the community. He contributes a television to the nearby Safir Café with the intention of indoctrinating almost all of the adolescent males in the community. Sayed is acutely aware of the potential of television as a potent tool for radicalizing young men and recruiting them into the resistance (Mohammed, 2015: p 166). The channel airs Aljazeera footage depicting civilian losses and highlights the valiant actions of the Iraqi resistance against the American invaders. Sayed's strategy incites the young guys to retaliate. The following paragraph illustrates the protagonist's observation of the effects resulting from his donation of the television:

The TV that Sayed had donated to the idle youth of Kafr Karam proved to be a poisoned chalice. It brought the

village nothing but turmoil and disharmony...Sayed had hit the bull's-eye. Hatred was as contagious as laughter, discussions got out of control, and a gap formed between those who went to the Safir to have fun and those who were there to learn." It was the latter whose point of view prevailed. We started concentrating on the national tragedy, all of us together, every step of the way. The sieges of Fallujah and Basra and the bloody raids on other cities made the crowd seethe. The insurgent attacks might horrify us for an instant, but more often than not they aroused our enthusiasm. We applauded the successful ambushes and deplored skirmishes that went wrong. (Khadra, 2008: pp.83-84)

Through his use of Aljazeera's media coverage, Sayed brings attention to the Iraq war and mobilizes the young men to oppose. Yaseen, Hassan, Hussien, Salah, and Bilal go missing after seeing his TV at a café, which worsens the situation in the hamlet. Sayed is cognizant of the fact that upsetting images and news coverage of conflict may have a significant influence on the local population. In order to heighten awareness of the plight of the Iraqis and rally support for the resistance among the country's young, he carries along a television and several DVDs.

Brainwashing occurs through the use of technology, while extremists disregard their authority and influence. Sayed's perfect use of media and technology appeared again through meeting the young man. After the young guy made the decision to fly to London and join a terrorist organization in order to murder as many people as possible who were gathering in public spaces, he contacted Sayed and received DVDs showing some of the horrific acts that US forces had carried out against Iraqis. These DVDs instill the young guy with intense animosity and preconceived notions against the American military. They instill in him an intense want to swiftly inflict violence against his adversaries. Through this lens, people can see how changing the way they depict pain and suffering could pave the road for a more equitable and peaceful society.

Another aspect of fundamentalism is the destructive consequences of using such ideas by individuals. Dabashi contends that fundamentalism, characterized by its inflexible convictions, fosters intolerance, fragmentation, and aggression among civilizations. These beliefs often stifle opposing opinions and marginalize minority groups, resulting in an atmosphere of fear and animosity. Additionally, they impede human connections by imposing rigid standards of conduct, ethics, and selfhood, so restricting personal freedom and variety. This suppression hinders the formation of authentic friendships rooted in reciprocal esteem and comprehension. Moreover, fundamentalism has the potential to disintegrate societies, instigate disputes, and erode common values and norms, resulting in division and violence among diverse groups. Therefore, the adverse effects of fundamentalism are substantial (Dabashi, 2017).

Concerning Dabashi's idea, the novel delves into the detrimental repercussions of fundamentalism on both personal connections and societal structure. The protagonist's embrace of extreme views causes his relationships with family and friends to deteriorate, emphasizing the dividing and isolating characteristics of fundamentalism. According to Jessica Stern, terrorists often consist of persons who experience feelings of

humiliation. The poverty and despair experienced by individuals may sometimes lead to feelings of outrage and distraction, which can be used by extremist leaders to generate support for a terrorist campaign (2003, p.6). The young man's profound sense of hopelessness and righteous anger compels him to reclaim his family's reputation by seeking vengeance on their adversary. He believes that he must either live like a man or die as a martyr. There are just two options available for those who choose to live without restrictions. He resolves to go to London with the intention of causing harm to a significant number of individuals congregated in public areas. Upon joining a terrorist organization, he encounters Sayed, who provides him with DVDs showcasing the heinous acts perpetrated by US forces on Iraqis. The DVDs instill the young guy with animosity and preconceived notions against the American military. They instill in him an intense want to swiftly inflict violence against his adversaries. Upon witnessing the killing of two Iraqis who were falsely accused of serving the American troops, the young guy maintains a composed demeanor and offers the following remark:

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, 2008: p.96)

A young man raised in a distant place faces the consequences of his past, leading him to Beirut to prepare for an assault. Despite challenges, including being robbed and homeless, he remains determined to return to his hometown. He begins taking injections and drugs without understanding their purpose. When he experiences increased urine flow, he becomes curious about the therapy. He discovers he is being readied for an injection of a non-lethal toxin that will cause everyone who breathes the air he exhales to die. The plan is to use him as a scapegoat and transport him to the United States to contaminate their air and cause their downfall (Naem, 2032: p 17).

The novel depicts a scenario where a young man receives a cautionary advice from Omar, who extends assistance and accommodation. The advice emphasizes the need of distinguishing between right and evil and discourages the act of murdering without a justifiable reason. Omar states:

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, 2008: p.90).

Conversely, Hussein asserts that their purpose is just, but their defense of it is inadequate. A secondary figure condemns the young man's comrades for their mercilessness in the conflict, asserting that they are perpetrators of homicide, destruction, and infanticide: "You consider yourselves Fedayeen...But you're nothing but murderers. Vandals. Child-killers" (Khadra, 2008: p 231). The madness associated with the violence stems from the indiscriminate nature of the deaths caused by senseless violence. Tragically, Omar, who is mistakenly believed to be an informant, is later murdered by his own cousins who are part of the resistance. This incident clearly illustrates the dishonoring of the Iraqi people, as cousins turn against each other based on false accusations (El Masry, 2016: p.198).

As the young guy deliberates on spreading a lethal virus to annihilate the Western population, he ponders the distinction between a virus and a motive. He believes the



Western world is his adversary and agrees to use the virus to dismantle its dominance. As he prepares for his relocation to London, he observes people, including elderly individuals, expectant couples, and European lovers, and decides to end the expedition. He acknowledges that he was stationed at the gate and observed passengers, not accompanying them. Although he is not a terrorist, the brutality he has experienced drives his animosity against his adversary.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Yasmina Khadra's novel explores the detrimental influence of fanaticism. The protagonist's exploration into extreme ideologies underscores the susceptibility of people in search of meaning and a sense of belonging. Khadra's depiction of fundamentalism is intricate, exposing its seductive nature, manipulative tactics, and catastrophic outcomes. This text explores the psychological and emotional effects of indoctrination, revealing the intricate elements that contribute to radicalization. The social expressions of fundamentalism are shown by the dominance and repression enforced by extreme factions, resulting in the degradation of individual liberties, stringent regulations, and the restriction of intellectual and creative creativity.

The work also delves into the detrimental effects of fundamentalism on both personal relationships and society. The main character's deep involvement in extremist ideology weakens his relationships with family and friends, while the broader consequences of violence and terrorism are shown via the tragic loss of innocent lives and the disintegration of the community. Khadra's adept narrative skills confront oversimplified accounts and push readers to analytically explore the intricacies of Fundamentalism. The work provides a compelling examination of the devastating influence of fundamentalism, compelling readers to contemplate its extensive ramifications.

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