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Deconstructing Orientalist Representation of The East in Yasmina

Khadra's Sirens of Baghdad

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ABSTRACT

Because of the blatant, direct persecution, and misrepresentation of all Iraqis, which comes from an Orientalist's ignorant perception of the Orient (Iraqi), this study will be conducted to show the different misrepresentations of Arabs and Iraqis by the American tropes in a novel entitled *The Sirens of Baghdad* written by an Algerian novelist, Khadra Yasmina. The current study explores orientalists' misrepresentation and the Western gaze towards the Middle East, especially the Iraqi character. Khadra portrays the complex life of Iraqis during the invasion of 2003, in the context of us versus them. Drawing on the critical framework of Orientalism theory by the theorist Edward Said, this paper examines how *Sirens of Baghdad* deconstructs Orientalist representations by giving voice to marginalized perspectives and resisting the erasure of local knowledge and agency. Khadra's narrative subverts simplistic depictions of "Islamic extremism", highlighting the

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multifaceted social, political, and psychological factors that shape an individual's path towards violence and, ultimately, the possibility of redemption and nonviolent resistance. The study emphasizes the importance of embracing nonviolent resistance which represents a powerful alternative to the spiral of violence, gesturing towards the possibility of reconciliation and moral progress.

Keywords: Orientalism, Iraq, Stereotyping, Resistance, Terrorist, Deconstruction, The Sirens of Baghdad

تفكيك التمثيل الاستشراقي لصورة الشرق في رواية "صفارات إنذار بغداد" لياسمينه خضرا

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المستخلص

نظرًا للاضطراد الواضح والمباشر والتشويه الذي يعاني منه جميع العراقيين، والذي ينبع من التصور الجاهل للمستشرق (العراقي)، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى أظهر التمثيلات الخاطئة للعرب والعراقيين من خلال الاستعارات الأمريكية في رواية صفارات الإنذار في بغداد للروائي الجزائري ياسمينه خضرا. تستكشف الدراسة الحالية التمثيلات الخاطئة للمستشرقين والنظرة الغربية تجاه منطقة الشرق الأوسط، وخاصة الشخصية العراقية. يُصوّر الروائي خضرا الحياة المعقدة للعراقيين اثناء غزو عام 2003، في سياق "نحن ضدهم". من خلال استخدام الإطار التحليلي النقدي لنظرية الاستشراق لإدوارد سعيد، تستعرض هذه الدراسة كيف تقوم رواية صفارات الإنذار في بغداد في تحليل التمثيلات الاستشراقية من خلال إفساح المجال للأصوات المهمشة ومقاومة محو المعرفة والقوة المحلية. تقوض الطريقة السردية لأسلوب خضرا الصور النمطية البسيطة للتطرف الإسلامي، موضحة العوامل الاجتماعية والسياسية والنفسية المتعددة الأوجه التي تشكل طريق مسار الفرد نحو العنف، وفي نهاية المطاف، إمكانية الخلاص والمقاومة الغيرعنفية. وتؤكد الدراسة على أهمية تبني المقاومة الغيرعنفية التي تمثل بديلاً قوياً لدوامه العنف، مشيراً إلى إمكانية تحقيق المصالحة والتقدم الأخلاقي.

الكلمات الدالة: الاستشراق، الصورة النمطية، العراق، الشرف، المقاومة، الإرهابي، التفكيكية،

صفارات الإنذار في بغداد

1. INTRODUCTION

Sirens of Baghdad (2007) is a novel written by Yasmina Khadra, an Algerian writer, who currently resides abroad in Western countries; this novel narrates the Iraqis'

struggles against US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The story speaks about a young Iraqi, deliberately unnamed to represent all Iraqis at that time, who joins Jihadist groups after he witnesses the horrendous acts done by the American troops to his village and his family, bursting him into a wave of constant anger and despise to all westerners. Even though they were isolated in this small village, they nevertheless witnessed the brutality of American troops and heard about what they had done to Iraq through television, which became an indispensable part of their lives because of the daily fear, rage, and anticipation they had since the invasion's commencement. The experiences of this young Iraqi are somewhat reminiscent of the real experiences of Iraqis at that time, and they may even accurately represent it.

What people have seen in Iraq since the invasion of 2003 is the worst human tragedy of the early twenty-first century. The invasion took place intending to free and democratize Iraq; instead, what has unfolded in Iraq is enormous human loss and suffering. As stated by James Zandstra (2013), the Iraq invasion dates back to President George Bush's famous line about Iraq, Iran, and North Korea being part of the (axis of evil), all due to the incident of September 11, 2001, even though Iraq was not responsible for this act which was done by three Afghan individuals, Iraq was focused at and concerned the US. Resolution 1441 condemned Iraqi action, it did not explicitly call for military enforcement and left the US demands somewhat unsatisfied, nevertheless the US invaded Iraq with full military power On March 19, 2003. Iraq was defeated on the first of May in 2003 and the Iraqi experience after its defeat was an enormous tragedy for all Iraqis; it turned to a place of anarchy and destruction. Killing, bombing suicides, gun sounds, anonymous dead bodies, and everything that is an imaginable and unbelievable, occurs during these times. people suffered from the atrocities of the sectarian war in all parts of Iraq. Furthermore, as highlighted by Randy T. Odle (1997), who illustrates how Iraq's infrastructure was collapsing horribly, the war and the broader sanctions not only hurt individuals but also devastated the country's infrastructure (p.18). As stated by Hanna Duggal & *AJLabs* (2023), intense conflict, a lack of commodities, dollarization, and erratic monetary policy all contributed to severe inflation, despite US goals of preserving economic stability and reconstructing Iraq's oil infrastructure following the 2003 invasion (Reynolds, 1995, n.p.). It is obvious that Iraq has lost its industrial and commercial infrastructure, but "the destruction of its cultural, artistic, medical, and educational systems goes even beyond" (İhsanoğlu, 2007, p. 922).

The present study seeks to highlight the atrocities of war on Iraq, reflecting upon reality of the American Tropes and their dehumanizing Iraqis stereotyping them as barbaric and inferior. In this aspect, the study will adapt Said's concept of *Orientalism* to deconstruct the Western stereotypical representations of East. In Yasmina Khadra's *Sirens of Baghdad*, which speaks of the Iraqi experience during US invasion, conveniently by a character that has no name which is aimed to represent all Iraqis at that time. The protagonist is a young Iraqi man who becomes infatuated with the idea of revenge after several attacks on his village and loved ones; he joins the resistance movement. The novel grapples with the devastating impact of war on individuals and communities, depicting the trauma, grief, and loss experienced by Iraqis.

Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* has formed how the East is represented and imagined culturally by Western academics. The representation usually portrays the Orient as exotic and stereotypical)Other(. Thus enforcing unequal distribution of power between the East and the West (Mora, 2009, p. 419). Edward Said criticizes how Western representation of the Orient is built through a variety of textual sources that conveniently depend on Westerners' narrative and own perceptions.

Orientalism, according to Edward Said, is a concept that involves the portrayal and study of the East by the West. It is fundamentally the way Westerners interpret, define, and study the cultures, languages, and peoples of the Eastern world often in ways that reinforce a sense of superiority of the West over the East. Said describes this as a pervasive Western tradition that has been built up over centuries, which frames the East as exotic, backward, uncivilized, and at times dangerous.

Edward Said's definition of Orientalism brings attention to the false narrative built by Western scholars when talking about the Orient. Europeans divided the world into two parts, the East and the West or the civilized and uncivilized. Being the ones who create the eastern identity, they also used orientalism to proclaim themselves as the superior race compared to the Orientals, to justify their colonization by this concept as well as stating that it was their duty towards the world to civilize the uncivilized world, to bring light and enlighten the uneducated world. The problems emerged when Europeans began to generalize the qualities they believed to be Orientals and began to depict these manufactured attributes associated with Orientals in their western culture through media and literature. This has created a certain image about the Orientals in the European mind and this infused a biased opinion in the European attitude towards the Orientals. Orientalists such as Said have found this bias and influence in their research. the US- led war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq is one of the ways that Orientalism has existed through the portrayal of Iraqis as passive victims or extreme Islamists. According to Said, "the dominant colonizers tend to impose their language and culture on the colonized society while ignoring the Oriental people's traditions, backgrounds, values, and beliefs for the sake of governing and enforcing their fortune under the guise of irradiating, teaching, and even humanizing them" (Rasheed, 2021,122). Moreover, Lamiaa Ahmed Rasheed (2021), in her article titled "The Representation of Refugees' Crisis through the Lenses of Edward Said's Orientalism: A Post-Colonial Study of Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" claims that "there is no wonder that the theory of Orientalism, whatsoever its vices may have been, transformed and shook up the way in which Western scientists and critics viewed the representations of nonwestern or Eastern literal and historical matters and cultures." (p.122); so Said's conceptualization of the orient help in motivating and stirring Eastern writers to write for the sake of defying these deformed stereotypes imposed on them by Western thinkers. Khadre's *Sirens Of Baghdad* aims to represent Iraqi people and give them a space to speak for themselves and challenge the western depiction of Iraqis as terrorists.

2. DECONSTRUCTING THE OTHER in KHADRE'S SIRENS OF BAGHDAD

The narrative of *The Sirens of Bagdad* follows a young, gentle Iraqi who, after witnessing the cruel treatment of American forces, decides to change his peaceful stance. In an attempt to exact revenge on behalf of his family and village, he joins the resistance

organization. War can bring out the worst in people, in this aspect, the protagonist is set on a journey of self-discovery that is all about his revengeful pursuit for the death of his loved ones. The book opens in Beirut, where the protagonist is recruited and given a mission to eliminate the West in an attack that is supposedly bigger than the September 11 attacks. The comparison of the future attack with the past September 11 bombing, said by an Iraqi who eventually gives up his mission to do so, might be a sign that the ones responsible for the bombing of the actual trade center are not Iraqis and the whole story of invading Iraq is just a sham that is used to justify the heinous act of the actual invasion.

The novel unfolds between a young unnamed Iraqi and an academic smart imamate, named Dr. Jalal who hates the West but used to be an achiever among Western intellectuals, the protagonist asks Dr. Jalal about his past life among Westerners, and he replies that “The West will never acknowledge our merits. As far as Westerners are concerned, Arabs are only good for kicking soccer balls or wailing into microphones. The more we prove the contrary, the less they’re willing to admit it” (Khadra, 2007, p.10). Dr. Jalal’s words are what Edward Said wrote in his book, *Orientalism*(1977), as he states that the Orient is a “European invention” it has been since ancient times, a place of “romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said,1977, p.1). Stereotypes are often used, whether Asians, Arabs, or Africans, it has been since the dawn of time, but to use these stereotypes and merits to justify wrongdoing perpetrated on orientals is unjustifiable. Iraqis were only models, of preconceived expectations, manuals that the American army read and memorized like some kind of amendment, the GIs wore these manuals like sunglasses that identified Iraqis according to their merits and description, often considering anyone as a possible threat that needed to be eliminated.

Deconstruction is essentially concerned with something akin to a critique of the Western intellectual tradition, even though it is not strictly negative. Deconstruction is typically explained through textual analysis. It aims to reveal and then challenge the different binary oppositions presence/absence, speech/writing, and so on that form the basis of our prevailing modes of thought (Reynolds, 1995, n.p.). According to deconstruction theory, having an unnamed character during times of war has a lot of meanings and could be interpreted in various ways. The anonymous civilian could represent the anonymous victims of war, undermining the dichotomy between combatants and non-combatants. Their anonymity could undermine the concept of personal identity and highlight their place in a larger, impacted by war community, thus it could represent all Iraqis not just the protagonist. A protagonist without a name might mean a man with no power or lack of agency. It also means a refusal to submit to pre-established identities that is based on stereotyping clichés.

In Kafr Karam, the village where the protagonist lives, a disturbed boy named Sulayman had an accident with an iron gate that resulted in his finger being cut. Despite the hospital being far away from the village, his father rushed him there for treatment. However, on their way they were stopped at a checkpoint by American soldiers and subjected to mistreatment as they were suspected of having ties to terrorists. When Sulayman reacted by shouting and running out of the car uncontrollably, the soldiers shot

and killed him without hesitation, “Bull’s-eye, first shot”(Khadra, 2007, 41), even though he was mentally ill. This incident reflects how American troops often stereotyped Iraqis as terrorists without considering individual circumstances. This act could also reveal the hidden fact of what stereotyping abroad looks like. It also challenges the idea that the American soldier is virtuous and a hero who needs to be thanked for his service when returning home. Khudra challenges the righteousness of the American soldier thereby subverting the morals behind the occident behaviour to worldwide readers. In the same time, Khudra tries to humanize the Iraqi perspective of the American troops, by making the American army come to pay homage to Sulayman’s family for killing their son, in an act of humiliation and grief. Which shows a more delicate side of the American troops.

The fact that the GIs were almost robotic in stereotyping Iraqis, almost of being sure of their actions, means that they set themselves apart from Iraqis, as a dominating force, which means that Iraqis are reduced to a mere “Other” a binary opposition that consists of us and them, that all dominating colonial power use to justify their colonial domination, as proposed by Said’s Orientalism that The “relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said, 1977, p. 5). Setting themselves apart in a battle of us versus them mindset, stereotyping arises and the dominating spirit of the occident appears. In a conversation between the protagonist and his cousin, Kadem who wishes that America would only take the time to listen to Arabic or Iraqi songs, they would understand that we are not the monsters that they claim we are,

If the West could only understand our music, if it could even just listen to us sing, if it could hear our soul in the voices of Sabah Fakhri and Wadi es-Safi and Abdelwaheb and Asmahan and Umm Kulthum—if it could commune with our world—I think it would renounce its cutting-edge technology, its satellites, and its armies and follow us to the end of our art (Khadra, 2007, p. 51)

This means that the West has formed the wrong idea of the East. Essentially, by not listening to Iraqis, viewing them as a source of terror and stereotyping them, they become an “other”. Otherness, according to Jean François Staszak (2007), is the outcome of a discursive process whereby a dominating in-group (“Us”, “the Self”) stigmatizes a difference, real or imagined, and presents it as a denial of identity, potentially serving as justification for discrimination. Derrida suggests that responsibility towards the other is about respecting and even emphasizing this resistance (Reynolds, 1995, n.p.). The west should embrace the cultural differences of the other and not seek to distort them, as they represent the cultural essence of the other that needs to be recognized and acknowledged.

This process creates one or more dominant out-groups (Them, Other). In a naive way, difference belongs in the domain of fact, and otherness in the discourse. When people are treated as an “other” they basically are treated violently, because that separation between two groups justifies the violent action perpetrated against them as necessary and often for the best, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) explains that having a sense of value and superiority is having the right over the devalued orient, which give pathway to violence, “the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as other. This project is also the asymmetrical

obliteration of the trace of that other in its precarious Subjectivity” (p.76). If intolerance and otherness are abolished then these Iraqis will not be downsized to mere terrorists.

In one of the incidents in the novel, where the village is celebrating an extravagant wedding at the Haitem’s residence, all of a sudden during the wedding, missiles from out of nowhere fall on Haitem’s house, killing most of the people there. The place was filled with cops and foreign TV channels that started to cover the incident, where a grieving father shouted at the channels and the officers,

Look! Nothing but women and children! This was a wedding reception! Where are the terrorists?” He grabbed a cameraman by the arm, showed him the corpses stretched out on the grass, and Said, “The real terrorists are the bastards who fired the missile at us (Khadra, 2007, p. 67).

The protagonist refuses to be called a terrorist, as he often says that he is a shy person who cries in his room alone and that he rejects violence and often turns the other cheek. The protagonist is sensitive, even though he is a Boduian, known for their strength and manly behavior, the author subverts this constructed identity and make him sensitive, who often turns the other cheek. The protagonist rejected the idea that he would be constructed as a terrorist and chose to remain confined in his room after several young boys decided to join the resistance movement, taking vengeance on their loved ones. The turning point for the protagonist was the insults he and his family endured one night, as the American army bulged into their house like maniacs and started kicking things,

A squad of American soldiers barged into my privacy... I was swept up into a tornado and tossed from one tumult to another... I heard Bahia... struck by a fist or a rifle butt. Pallid and half-dressed, my sisters were penned up at the other end of the hall with the children... My mother, ejected from her room, immediately collected herself and went to help her invalid husband Soldiers brought out the old man... With his threadbare undershirt hanging loosely from his thin shoulders and his stretched-out drawers fallen nearly to his knees (Khadra, 2007, pp. 70-71).

As his father tries to bring something to cover himself with, he steps to his bedroom to bring his robe, when a sudden rifle strike on his head sends him to his final death, uncovering his male parts, which was the final abyss for the protagonist. From this point the protagonist has seen what every Boduian dare not to see, his family’s honour is hanging loose, and from this point, there is nothing but a revengeful spirit that arises from him. This attack on the protagonist’s family can be seen as a type of alienation, where the American army reduced his family to mere terrorists, violating their rights, and committing horrendous actions against them, this treatment can be seen as a form of Dehumanization, which can potentially contribute to violence or terrorism by reducing empathy and increasing hostility towards the targeted group. the West constructed the Orient by assigning its characteristics, identity, and value, then proceeded to treat these constructs as truth- similar to propagating and believing in falsehoods. This perpetuates an unequal power dynamic between the West and the Orient where Western superiority dictates how “the Other” is defined and classified.

The process of writing always reveals that which has been suppressed, covers over that which has been disclosed, and more generally breaches the very oppositions that are thought to sustain it. This is why Derrida's 'philosophy' is so textually based and it is also why his key terms are always changing, because depending upon who or what he is seeking to deconstruct, that point of equivocation will always be located in a different place (Reynolds, 1995, n.p.).

Condemning an unnamed character that might represent all Iraqis, of being a terrorist, means that the way the narrative condemns all Iraqis of being a terrorist. On the other hand all the crimes that is done by the American troops are not addressed by crimes rather they are self-defenses and not one act is made by a particular person, no one is named while the victims of the attacks are named, this indicates that to American troops, Iraqis are just targets waiting to be shoot.

A monster (terrorist) is created, the protagonist, plans to take vengeance for his suffering, as explained by Leyla Bellour (2017) people's fury is fueled by the American army's brutal crimes against civilians, and this anger is then released through aggression. In other words, their need for vengeance grows. Allegedly, America came to Iraq to war against terrorism, when in fact the whole world got to see the horrors of the so-called righteous acts of the American army's action in Abu Ghraib, the most inhumane acts were done to a lot of Iraqis; most of them were innocent. Numerous institutions like the U.S. military (Abu Ghraib prison), Andersen Accounting, and the Catholic hierarchy, appear to have misfortunes that transcend space and time. While corporations frequently refer to these issues as "a few bad apples" (Sowers and Dulmus, 2007, p.11). There is a type of bias present in the translation of criminal actions. When an Arab or Iraqi commits terrorism, it is often generalized to all Iraqis and seen as a collective act. For example, all young people from Kafr Karam village were mistreated without any evidence. However, when white American soldiers commit heinous acts of torture that surpass terrorism, it is portrayed as isolated incidents "a few bad apples" and not representative of all American soldiers who have actually committed worse acts off the record (Sowers and Dulmus, 2007, p.11).

Essentially, the turning points in the protagonist's life were the death of a mentally ill teenager, the bombing of a wedding reception, and the humiliation endured during a security search by the American troops, the last event influenced the protagonist massively, due to the nature of that event, as his whole family is basically were standing half naked, and his father nakedness in the middle of the room, it is something related to honor, a concept which is absent in the American culture; something that goes over the American troops head, this gap in not knowing how to deal with an Iraqi or an Arab, invading without knowing basically who is going to be invaded, depending mostly on orientalist's perspective is what formed most terrorist at that time.

The novel itself subverts the conventional stereotyped novel of the American soldier portrayed as a hero, instead, Khudra focuses on the real side of war, the horrific effect and destruction caused by the American troops, ergo subverting conventional imagery of the American soldier. All the operations done by the American army to Baghdad, more importantly, the village of Kafr Karam have been wrong and incorrect which is another area that Khudra tries to subvert as most of the war novels speaks about

the precision of the American operations and how they are always right, but here its subverted as they killed a mentally retarded person, bombed an entire wedding reception, and drag half of the village people into the street with zipwires.

The protagonist becomes a violent man whose only purpose is to get retribution because of the Western culture's lack of respect for family honor. The Western misconception that Arabs have the potential to be terrorists is discredited in the novel. In actuality, they resort "to violence as a defense against American brutality and real terrorism" (Bellour, 2017, p.55). Defecting Honor is the reason behind the protagonist's transformation from a person who does not believe in violence to someone who is filled with anger and contempt against the collision forces,

I'd no I knew 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 (Khudra, 2007, p.72)

In this novel, the protagonist, Dr. Jalal, decides to leave the village and heads to Baghdad. Jalal is from a small village in Iraq, and he comes from a relatively humble background. He is an educated young man, having received a university education, which sets him apart from some of his more rural and less-educated compatriots. His initial experiences with the violence and chaos of the Iraq War, as well as the suffering of his people, lead him to become disillusioned with the state of his country. This disillusionment, coupled with a sense of injustice and desire for revenge, makes Jalal vulnerable to the influence of extremist rhetoric and the lure of joining a radical group. He meets an interpreter who tells him that he used to be a "sand nigga" a term based on the Orientalist perspective, used to identify those who worked as interpreters, which is essentially calling an Iraqi, even though works with them, as back warded and really belongs to the desert. Name-calling is another way that the Occident treats the Orient, and another pathway for otherness, by devaluing and downsizing the other into unified ridiculous names, "sand nigger" is a derogatory term for Arab people, used as a racial slur, reflecting deep-seated biases and discriminatory attitudes. But he make the interpreter refuse this ongoing name-calling by the American troops and resigns accordingly. The West has scientifically fictionalized the "image of the Orient"(Mora, 2009, p. 421). An extensive propaganda campaign has been launched to actualize this fiction, including literature, painting, film, and other artistic mediums. The stereotypical "Orientalist" discourse of the West causes "Orientalist" clichés to become ingrained in society's memory and cause society to adopt a "Orientalist" perspective; as a result, certain symbolic elites who stand for authority and power in the nation replicate the second ring of the hegemony (Mora, 2009, p. 421)

Bellour (2017) states that the brutality of the US army caused an increase in the number of people willing to give their life to protect their freedom, dignity, country, and people. This is what ignited the protagonist himself from the first place because of the humiliation that the US army has done to him and his family; according to SENOUSI Mohammed (2019), humiliation, poverty, and fury are frequently the result of

hopelessness, and extremist leaders can use these emotions to mobilize people behind a terrorist cause. For those “who are extremely alienated or desperate, martyrdom offers the best way out of life's problems” (Khadra, 2007, p. 500). All what happen to the protagonist can be drawn from orientalist’s treatment to the west, if it were not for the American troops and what they caused of suffering and humiliation, the protagonist, would not have thought of revenge, and so the gap created by the separation of two teams, us versus them, has created gaps in understanding each other’s culture and traditions; it has made the West knit the east and formed it to whatever shape they knitted, and then made the East accept these stereotypical representations.

Kadem, the narrator’s cousin and friend says that “If the West could only understand our music, if it could even just listen to us sing [...] if it could commune with our world- I think it would renounce its cutting-edge technology, its satellites, and its armies, and follow us to the end of our art” (Khadra, 2007, p.37). The West have stereotyped Arabs backward and primitive, they underestimates the Arabs’ culture intentionally and ignore the glorious history of Iraq’s cultural heritage. The conventional role assigned to the East is that of a primitive terrorist that must be shot and destroyed in contrast to the flawless American soldiers, who are portrayed as heroes. However, the author subverts these roles by having the conventional Eastern character act in accordance with his heart rather than exacting the retribution he had long desired. This causes the preconceived ideas about the West to be inaccurate and hateful because they are founded on harsh stereotyping. “The West loves only itself and thinks only of itself. It throws us a line so it can use us as bait. It manipulates us and sets us against our own people.” (Khadra, 2007, p.8).

The protagonist then sets himself on a journey of revenge, but his friend and cousin advise him not to do so because the resistance movement affected even innocent civilians in its way to revenge, “You see what the resistance does every day. It’s killed thousands of Iraqis” (Khadra, 2007, p.109). In the third part of the novel, which sets in Beirut, where the protagonist, in collaboration with other jihadists, planned for destructive attack in London. This plot, which “will be the greatest operation ever carried out on enemy territory, a thousand times more awesome than the attacks of September 11” (9), will cause the death of a millions of innocent people. The protagonist will carry a very tiny virus that will murder the lives of innocent people. His mission is:

Rriding the subway and going to the train stations, stadiums, and supermarkets, with the goal of contaminating the maximum number of people. Particularly in train station, so the epidemic will spread to the other regions of the kingdom. The phenomenon propagates with lightning speed. The people you contaminate will transmit the virus to others less than six hours before they themselves are struck down. (Khadra, 2007, p. 142).

The protagonist is heroically portrayed through the narrative of Khadra, he tries to resist the temptations of that revenge, acquiring a mark that would not go with what the west has written on its expectations of the orient’s behaviour. His mission was to release the deadliest virus that would cause more calamity than the 9/11 attacks. As planned, he was supposed to travel to London, but he missed his flight. At the airport, he sees people having their day, European couple were in an intimate situation, loving and kissing each

other, these small daily events change his mind of revenge, and he instantly goes back to his older self and humanity, the self that saw violence as the last resort not an initial response to life problems that:

Woman in the airport, hopefully examining the screen of her cell phone; that father-to-be who was so happy, he didn't know which way to turn; that young European couple kissing each other.... They deserved to live for a thousand years. I have no right to challenge their kisses, scuttle their dreams, dash their hopes (Khadra, 2007, p. 207).

As the narrative exposes the real evils of the American troops, the protagonist reflects the goodness of the supposed violent who represents evil, thereby challenging the fact that Arabs or Muslims are terrorists. Even in the case of the protagonist, the narrative shows that he is sensitive and cries in his room a lot, which means that he might be a victim not a perpetrator of evil. Khadra makes his story not much as a good versus evil type of narrative, but rather as a struggle of moral conundrums that those involved in the dispute must overcome. Khadra seeks to give voice to the silenced people by focusing on the feelings and interior conflicts of the protagonist. The novel's focus on the experiences of ordinary Iraqi citizens, rather than just political or military figures, can be seen as an attempt to amplify these marginalized voices and challenge the dominant stereotypes. This is one of the key aspects of deconstruction theory which tries to give voice to the marginalized groups and challenges the Western stereotypes and Eurocentric representation of the other as primitive and violent.

The author completely shatters all the stereotypical merits that are attributed to Iraqis and Arabs in general, by not reacting violently, he decides to resist his desire for vengeance with love. He eventually is killed by the terrorist group that prepared him for this attack. In the climactic end, Jalal, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, finds himself in a final confrontation with an extremist group that he had previously been associated with. Despite his newfound pacifist beliefs, Jalal is forced to make a difficult choice to protect his loved ones from the threat of violence. In a heroic and selfless act, Jalal decides to sacrifice himself to save others, stepping in front of a suicide bomber to prevent the attack from taking place. His death is thus imbued with a sense of redemption, as he chooses to give his life in the service of his newfound commitment to nonviolence and peace. The protagonist dies sacrificing himself in order not to hurt a single soul. Over the course of the novel, Jalal's journey of revenge and radicalization eventually gives way to a transformative experience, as he is confronted with alternative perspectives and a message of nonviolence. This transformation leads Jalal to ultimately reject the path of violence and embrace a message of peace, even at the cost of his own life. Although he believes that the West destroys his country and undermines their culture, his personality undergoes a change and redemption; he always asserts that:

Peaceful co-existence is no longer possible. They don't like us, and we don't put up with their arrogance anymore. Each side has to turn its back on the other for good and live in its own way. But before we put up that great wall, we're going to make them suffer for all the evil they've done to us. Our patience has never been cowardice. It's imperative that they understand that. (Khadra, 2007, p. 9)

The dichotomy of Us/them, according to Jalal, gives the West the right to occupy other countries and impose their culture and orientations due to their over-humanity and supremacy. This binary opposition between the West and East is the main cause of spreading violence and destruction over world. For Dr.Jalal, “the West has long defined the world in its own terms; thus, they created binaries in which the West is always the first privileged binary while the Arab world is always represented by the second polarity” (Bellour, 2017, p.60). As Gayatri Spivak (1988) a prominent postcolonial figure, argues in her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that “silencing the other”- the ways in which marginalized, subaltern voices are suppressed or rendered invisible within dominant power structures and discourses of the West (44). It contributes to misrepresent the other and this constitutes a form of epistemic violence—the erasure or suppression of alternative knowledge systems and narratives. Dr.Jalal says to his friend Mohammed seen who is a novelist:

The West could amuse itself by defining the world as it saw fit. It called indigenous men ‘natives’ and free men ‘savages’. It made and unmade mythologies according to its own good pleasure and raised its charlatans to divine rank. Today, the offended peoples have recovered their power of speech. They have some words to say. And our weapons say exactly the same thing (Khadra, 2007, p.137).

In this regard, Khadra seeks to reform the Western distorted image of the East that they are all terrorists and barbaric, “we can intervene and put things in perspective, calm people down, readjust their focus, and get rid of the stereotypes this whole frightful mistake is founded on. We’re the golden mean, the proper balance of things” (Khadra, 2007, p.187). It may be an enlightenment to the Americans who view its soldiers as heroes, often thanking them for their service. Overall the message that *Sirens of Baghdad* conveys is that the Western portrayal of Iraqis, especially Muslims, as brutal, religious extremists or fanatics who are prone to violence in the name of their faith.

Iraqis have been stereotyped as terrorists or insurgents who pose a threat to Western interests. Iraqi culture, history, and societal norms have sometimes been depicted as backward, underdeveloped, or primitive in comparison to Western standards. Thus, Khadra strives to present the truthfulness of Iraqis and to capture the nuance and diversity of Iraqi culture, society, and individual experiences. She rejects through her novel the perpetuating of such stereotypes and presents more nuanced, well-rounded, and accurate portrayals of Iraqis. She wants of them to enlighten others of their culture, stopping violence and insuring a stable world for both sides. At the end, the protagonist chooses to forego his mission and refuses to play the expected role of a terrorist; he ultimately rejects violence and instead embraces a message of peace and nonviolence. In deconstructionist reading, this situation challenges the notion that Iraqis are inherently prone to religious radicalization or terrorism. The novel encourages readers to see Iraqis as complex human beings, worthy of empathy and understanding, rather than as one-dimensional stereotypes. This is ultimately fitting to what deconstruction theory seeks to prove; it seeks to uncover and disrupt the dominant narratives that often marginalize or misrepresent certain groups, such as the stereotypical portrayal of Iraqis in Western fiction. *Sirens of Baghdad* subverts these dominant narratives by centering the

perspectives and experiences of Iraqi characters, allowing them to speak for themselves and challenge the preconceptions of the reader.

3.CONCLUSION

Sirens of Baghdad speaks about a tormented young man, who becomes fascinated with the idea of revenge after he witnesses his family's honour torn apart by the American invasion. The narrative challenges notions of subverting the attributes given to Arabs or Iraqis as barbarians and terrorists. Khadra shatters the orientalist's predictions of what the Orient is supposed to behave, by ensuring them that her main protagonist is a young Iraqi terrorist exactly like what the West has predicted and then shatters their notions completely by changing the course of his expected behaviors to a course that embrace forgiveness, tolerance, and love; as the protagonist sacrifices himself and chose not to obey the militant force he has joined, which leads to his death. This study also shows that what formed this revenge is not completely understanding the Iraqi culture, traditions, or religion, viewing Iraqis as backwards, and ignoring their rich history and culture. The novel frequently adopts the first-person perspective of the Iraqi protagonist, allowing readers to intimately experience the character's inner thoughts, struggles, and personal transformations. This intimate narrative voice humanizes the character and invites the reader to empathize with an Iraqi individual, rather than viewing them through the lens of stereotypes. The novel shows futility of violence and offers a humanizing counter narrative that expands our understanding of the Iraqi experience. Jalal's redemptive journey, in particular, gestures towards the possibility of nonviolent resistance and the universal human capacity for empathy and moral growth. Ultimately, *Sirens of Baghdad* represents a powerful testament to the transformative potential of literature to disrupt and decolonize Orientalist representations. By embracing the complexities of the human experience amidst conflict, Khadra's novel contributes to a more inclusive understanding of the Middle East that moves beyond the limiting confines of Orientalist thought.

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