

Nefarious Implications in Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad*

Prof. Dr. Abdulsattar Awad Ibrahim¹, Asst. Prof. Dr. Shireen Saddalla Rashid², Instr. Dr.

Wisam Hamid Lateef³, Asst. Prof. Adnan Jabar Hamid⁴

^{1,3,4} Al-Turath University

² College of Education, Department of English, University of Sallahaddin

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ABSTRACT

The research paper is mainly concerned with the projection of the nefarious implications as exposed in Yasmina Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2007). This novel depicts the evildoings of the American soldiers that have been practiced against the Iraqi people living in Iraq. They have committed nefarious yet shameful acts against the Iraqi individuals whom they consider their foes, whereas the latter are innocent and friendly people. Evil has been an everlasting wrongdoing on earth since the creation of the world. It has been extremely embedded in the nature of man and is sure fought by good-natured people. It is no wonder to find a whole country like the United States practice evildoings against many and various nations, being the posterity of the tribes of the Vikings, Vandals, Gales, Danes and above all the Anglo-Saxons that invaded Britain, slaughtered its nation and settled in it in the fifth and sixth centuries AD and whose posterity are still oppressing other nations and invading countries all over the world. The research meticulously examines those nefarious actions made by the occupying American soldiers depicted in the titular novel, pointing out the bitter behavior of the Americans against the Iraqi nation as represented in *The Sirens of Baghdad*. Edward W. Said's representations in his book *Orientalism* unfolds the Westerners' crooked means in exploiting other nations, whose oriental perspective cannot be exempted from this study.

KEYWORDS: Nefarious, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, Post-Colonial American Novelists.

1. Introduction

The real name of the author of *The Sirens of Baghdad* is Mohammed Moulesehoul, who served as an officer in the Algerian army. He is an Algerian in origin and an expatriate in France who witnessed the wrongdoings done by the French army against his nation at the time of the French occupation of Algeria. Using his imagination and the real events that occurred in his country, he depicts the evil practices done by the American soldiers against the Iraqis in the wake of 2003 American war against Iraq. Therefore, the novel is an adaptation of the circumstances facing the Algerian oppressed nation.

The post-colonial American novelists such as Updike and Delillo have endeavored to deform the image of the Arab Muslims in their books *Terrorist* and *Falling Man*, presenting them as a downright terrorists due to the 9/11 attacks against the Trade Center Towers in New York. In their writings, they depicted them as nations of bad reputations. Moreover, they come to consider them their enemies wherever they encounter them. This kind of the negative image has been embedded in the minds of the Americans so as the latter continue their oppression against them, steal their rich resources and wealth and deform the real identity of

Islam which is a religion of peace and justice. Those two writers describe the Arab Muslim man as being the other, stereotyped and racist personality. *The Sirens of Baghdad* comes as a direct reaction against the American perspective in this respect. Khadra unfolds the real picture of the Arab Muslim and repudiates all the null and void claims of the American novelists throughout realistically and fairly depicting the true nature of the oppressed Arab Muslims, for he truly and realistically witnessed and experienced how the occupying soldiers tormented the occupied people in actual life and killed a great number of them on the grounds of fake allegations as it happened in his own country, Algeria, when it was occupied by the French. Besides, Said has repudiated all the Westerners claims that they occupy countries for the latter's welfare and development. He proves the opposite in his book entitled *Orientalism*:

Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilize, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest mission civilizatrice.

(Said quoted in Bijl, 2022)

It can be suggested that according to the world's political and military legacy, the United States tries always to occupy new resourceful countries and creates adversaries that can be warred and destroyed so as to appear superior and banner as is the case with the Iraqi and Afghan occupation. It makes all its occupied countries tied to its political and economic orbit. Moreover, the Westerners including the United States consider the Oriental people awkward, illiterate, uncivil and underdeveloped, not human beings, whereas, as pointed by Said, they are the true human beings that deserve life and prosperity on the account of the oriental resources:

Arabs, for example, are thought of as camel-riding, terroristic, hook-nosed, venal lechers whose undeserved wealth is an affront to real civilization. Always there lurks the assumption that

although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world resources. Why? Because he, unlike the Oriental, is a true human being.

(Said, Orientalism, Quotes Showing 1–30 of 73)

2. Representations of *The Sirens of Baghdad*

The Sirens of Baghdad exposes the nefarious elements that are associated with the American forces that settled in Iraq when occupied in 2003. Throughout the pseudonym of the author who fought terrorism that afflicted the Algerian people, the issue of terrorism has been presented in detail. The anonymous name of the narrator presents significant insight into the real sense of terrorism practiced by the American soldiers, throughout unfolding the minds of those people who stood in the face of their oppressors. Due to the fact that Khadra is very well acquainted with the representations of the occupier's iniquitous behavior towards the occupied in his own country, it should be noted that he objectively and realistically treats the subject matter in *The Sirens of Baghdad*.

The Sirens of Baghdad implies that in every occupied country such as Iraq, there should be a kind of resistance led by patriotic people whom the invaders in particular and the Occident in general consider extremists and terrorists for they have directed bitter yet severe beats to them during the time of resistance. Hence, *The Sirens of Baghdad* answers the world's enquiries about the reasons of the conflict between the occupier and the occupied and it answers the question why the Arab Muslims do not care to die when facing their enemies represented by the Occident, for they become suicidal projects in the face of iniquity. Hence, the novel shows that the actions of the Arab Muslims against the occupied forces are justifiable from the moralistic point of view. Furthermore, the Arab Muslim is ready to sacrifice himself and leave all worldly pleasures for the sake of honor and dignity. But the Occident considers them terrorists, trying to war them over this false allegation. Thus, Khadra does not exempt the psychic and sociopolitical implications from the prospective of Orientalism, stereotyping racism and othering. Khadra tries to rectify the Occident's falsehood

about the Arab people trying to protect their dignity by means of violence, and unfold its untrue yet insincere negative attitude towards the Arab Muslims whom they consider to be living within the domain of terrorism. Of course, the Occident turns a blind eye towards the fact that the Arab Muslim communities have got the right to enjoy dignified freedom and dignified life.

The setting of *The Sirens of Baghdad* shows that the action occurs in the Arab world, which unfolds what the unnamed protagonist thinks of the Occident that considers him to be a terrorist while he is struggling for the cause of the freedom of his country. He has witnessed how the American forces humiliate, torment and kill his innocent people in the wake of 2003 war against Iraq. The novel was first published in France, whose unnamed protagonist is an Iraqi university ambitious student who appears to be the narrator of the novel, quiet, peaceful and friendly. He hopes to get the university degree for the sake of honoring himself and his poor family. But he converts into a rebel against the iniquity that has afflicted his family in particular and his people in general, so that he can avenge the oppressions of the occupying forces. Hence, the protagonist intends to cause tremendous destruction against the occupied forces due to the fact that his ambition and future career have been wasted. These are some of the reasons why the protagonist has turned into what the enemies call as an abusive terrorist.

At the beginning of the aforementioned war, the invasion of Baghdad requires the protagonist to leave the university and come to live with his family in Kafr Karam with the intention that he could return to study after the end of the occupation, for in the beginning his village has not been inflicted by that invasion. As part of the private university life of the protagonist, it appears that he admires his classmate Nawal, a girl student whom he loves most. This love is not unrequited, for Nawal loves him too. Hence, he has been shocked by the fact of the war and by the fact that his future career may be threatened and destroyed as well. Because of those devastating circumstances, it is the American forces that should be accused of terrorism, not the Arab Muslims who have been accused of possessing weapons of mass destruction, and as it has been explicated by the protagonist himself.

The protagonist comes to live in his village Kafr Karam where he witnesses the signs of war. His deep yet dark hearted feelings impose upon him the sense of revenge against those troops that have already destroyed his village, killed his people and humiliated his family. According to the Bedouin culture in particular and the Arab culture in general, the criminal should be avenged by all means. Besides, the war has destroyed his future career and happiness, not to mention the fact that the occupiers have shot a mentally disabled villager who has been mentally disabled and is innocent accordingly and whom they regard as their enemy. Circumstances become worse than they were before when occupiers have bombed a wedding party in the vicinity of Kafr Karam. The Americans have killed tens of the villagers and they don't care whom they kill already. The disaster occurs in the Hiatems' orchard, and as it is described by the author in the following excerpt:

On the evening news, there was talk of an American drone alleged to have detected some suspicious signals coming from in or around the reception hall. The nature of these suspicious signals was not revealed. Instead, there was a suggestion that terrorists movements had previously been reported in this sector. When the local residents rejected this assertion altogether, the undaunted American hierarchy tried for a while to justify the missile strike by offering other security-related arguments; in the end, however, tired of looking ridiculous, the Americans deplored the mistake and apologized to the victims' families.

(Khadra, 2007, p. 98)

The protagonist's home has been searched by the American soldiers, which he considers the most abused action to afflict his family's dignity. Moreover, his family's dignity and honor have been disgraced by the event that those soldiers have exposed his father naked in front of the villagers which is considered the most nefarious action on the part of the Americans because his father's penis and testicles have been uncovered in front of others, which is an act against the Islamic culture and the Bedouin's culture as well. He has been disgraced, humiliated and dishonored. Therefore, he has got to avenge all the nefarious

actions that have afflicted the villagers and his family in particular. He has thusly gone to Baghdad to join one of the resistance organizations:

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. With a final effort, he pivoted on his heels and tried to go back to the bedroom to fetch his robe—and the blow was struck. Rifle butt or fist, what difference does it make? The blow was struck, and the die was cast. my father fell over backward; his miserable undershirt flapped up over his face, revealing his belly, which was concave, wrinkled and gray as the belly of a dead fish....And I saw while my family's honor lay stricken on the floor, I saw what it was forbidden to see, what a worthy, respectable son, an authentic Bedouin, must never see: that flaccid , hideous, degrading thing, that forbidden, unspoken-of, sacrilegious object, my father's penis, rolling to one side as his testicles flopped over his ass.

(Khadra, 2007, p. 101)

Thus, the protagonist's interior monologue shows that the novel can be considered of one of revenge. His behavior is truthful to life from the psychological perspective.

3. Discussion of the Nefarious Implications in *The Sirens of Baghdad*

Khadra has witnessed how his people in Algeria are severely treated by the French colonizer, and what he has written in *The Sirens of Baghdad* is supposed to be an adaptation of the image of what may really happen to the Iraqis because he knows very well the psychological manifestations of the victim and victimizer. His representation of the Arab Muslim characters under the mercy of the colonizer is therefore supposed to be realistic to a great extent. The victimizers treat his people as if they were animals, not human beings, and are void of any humane features. They have devastated whole cities and neutralized hundred thousand of innocent people in a very vicious manner and profaned the dignity and respect of the farmers, which are actions of humiliation on the part of the Arab character because they have stereotyped

the latter as racists and terrorist, and above all the other that should be eliminated. This ironical situation shows that it is the victimizers who are racists, terrorists and horrible invaders who have iniquitously harmed their victims. The invaders do have an aggressive point of view towards the Arab Muslims whom they have already stereotyped into the *Other* that should be destroyed. Moreover, when considering Said's principles of Orientalism, it must be noted that *The Sirens of Baghdad* shows that the identity of the Arab Muslims has been distorted by the Westerners whose representative is the American army that has already invaded Iraq and regarded its people as foreigners, citizens of a second rate, racists and terrorists at the time that they are the owners of the land and they are thusly cannot be called by any one of those deforming yet nefarious expressions. Therefore, it is no wonder that the Arab Muslims such as the unnamed protagonist who joins the resistance forces to fight the invaders and whose dignity has been injured by the fact that the invaders have left his father with naked genitals in front of the public of Kafr Karam, which is a very nefarious action on the part of the Americans. It has been pointed out that the killing and humiliating a great number of the indigenous people must result in the appearance of the resisting forces to fight the invaders (Bouhassoun, 2016, p. 5), for this is reminiscent of the proverb that for every action there is a reaction, equal in power and opposite in direction. Hence, the resisting forces are the product of those nefarious actions done by the oppressors. Nevertheless, the protagonist decides not to fight the oppressors who have already killed and humiliated a great number of people on the ground that the Arab Muslims think in a manner opposite to the westerners', which points to the great gap between what the Occident thinks of and what the Arab Muslims think of. Here is the Arab Muslims' humane action when revenge is to figure out: "Forgiveness even if one is able to punish" Bouhassoun (2016, p. 4).

From the historical point of view, it is indicated that the post-colonial Arab literature has unfolded the Iraqi resistance forces trying to liberate the country, but that are regarded as terrorists by the Occident. Said's Oriental representations point to the fact the Arab always strive to struggle against the occupiers that cause destitution, illiteracy and disease, not to mention the millions of demises. It can be suggested that

the United States always try to weaken the Orient so as she can exploit its riches and at the same time she will remain the most powerful country in the world. It derives its power and sovereignty from defeating and beating other countries.

Khadra's *The Sirens of Baghdad* presents converse representations to the American fictional arts that depict a fake picture of the Arab Muslims. This novel repudiates the false allegations of the Westerners towards the Arab world. The novel also explores the reasons behind converting those people into extreme fundamentalists after the 2003– war against Iraq. Khadra explains that they have got the right to be so:

[the] novelist, tries to identify the origins of terrorism in an identity crisis in the Arab world with an imbrication of political and economic failure. The encounter with the different Other in an international environment, a fast-moving technological world, from a national to a gender identity issues, the malaise bred by an archaic mentality.

(Bouhassoun, 2016: p. 1)

The protagonist has been deprived of his beloved Nawal, his education, and above all his dignity. Hence, there are satisfying reasons why he thinks of revenge and turns into what the American call as a fundamentalist. It is then the nefarious actions of the occupiers that result in the appearance of the resisting forces:

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, building started to explode in smoke, and from one day to the next, the most passionate love affairs dissolved in tears and blood. The university was abandoned to vandals, and my dreams were destroyed, too. I went back to Kafar Karam, wild-eyed and distraught, and I didn't return to Baghdad.

(Khadra, 2007, p. 19)

The killing of the innocent disabled boy and the bombing of the people participating in the wedding party of the Hiatems, not to mention the killing of a tremendous number of villagers make the protagonist decide to avenge those nefarious actions. Besides, the American soldiers consider all the villagers

fundamentalists: “On the evening news, there was talk of an American drone alleged to have detected some suspicious signals coming from in or around the reception hall. The nature of these suspicious signals was not revealed” (Kahdra, 2007, p. 98). On the other hand the Americans must have got a sound evidence to support their allegations, according to the logical perspective. But, the already mentioned crimes have been done on the ground of suspicion, not on the ground of concrete evidence. This kind of behavior is against the world-wide morality in which all human beings believe, and falls within the domain of evil suspicion. It can be suggested that their crimes are done according to unduly suspicions. Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 13:7) regards evil suspicion crimes with extreme repugnance, which are actions done against Christianity. Charlenemnelson elaborates on Christianity, saying that evil suspicions are against religion and are conducive to evil doings, and as follows:

There are hundreds if not thousands of ways evil suspicion plays out, but it starts with assuming the worst of a person, group, or situation, and that suspicion entertained can move into slander or worse. Perhaps circumstances in life have hurt you and you feel the need to blame someone, and so you have set your eyes on a person, or even an establishment, and imagined all the ways they contributed to your pain. Maybe you feel threatened by someone and so their kindness becomes suspect to you and you question their motives.

(Charlenemnelson, 2016)

The idea of suspicion is looked upon from the Christian point of view: it is something of no avails according to Jesus, and at the same time it produces no good and help for human beings and life in general because it bitterly affects human relationships which are made inflexible. According to the Islamic culture, some suspicions are conducive to sin and evil. Suspicion is thusly prohibited by the Gracious Qur'an: “O you who believe! Avoid most suspicion—some suspicion is sinful. And do not spy on one another, nor backbite one another (Gracious Qur'an, 49: 12). It is advocated that suspicion should be avoided as far as possible; it is in certain instances to result in crime and evil deeds. Therefore, the American troops should not rely on suspicion when verifying the existence of what they call as terrorists

as is the case with Hiaterms' house which has been bombed on the ground of suspicion. One should verify any suspected issue before doing any negative actions towards others. R. W. L Moberly (2009) gives his say in this regard, declaring that the unduly suspicion should be condemned as it has been shown in Genesis 22 which is considered a serious subject matter as considered by the Prophet Abraham: "In general terms, a Christian theologian should not be quick to dismiss a hermeneutic of suspicion, for the prime reason that it represents a kind of secularized counterpart to the dogma of original sin" (Moberly, 2009). From the Western perspective Christopher Hitchens talks about the American way of life. He suggests that Muslims' rage against the US because they are disgusted by the "banality of American life," (Hitchens, p. 1). It seems America is for many the symbol, the embodiment, of the Western, faithless, materialistic way of life" (Anna Bernerson, 2015: p. 5).

Undoubtedly, *The Sirens of Baghdad* can by all means be considered a novel of revenge, for the protagonist intends to avenge the disgraced reputation that has afflicted him and his family due to the Americans' shameful actions that are made against his father, for they have exposed his testicles to the public that is considered an abusive action and sacrilegious according to the Islamic culture, which contributes to "the birth of a terrorist" (Azzeddine Bouhassoun, 2016, p. 2). It appears that the Arab Muslim is ready to sacrifice his life and everything he possesses for the sake of preserving his honor and dignity.

Conclusion

Wherever there are occupying forces harming the occupied nation, there must be résistance forces that hold a negatives attitude towards the nefarious actions made by the occupiers. Occupied countries always suffer from a lack of food, destitution, diseases and many calamities of many and various types due to the nefarious actions done by the occupiers. *The Sirens of Baghdad* has unfolded the fact that the American troops have committed many shameful crimes in Iraq. They are unforgivable crimes which make the protagonist think of revenge; but he decides not to harm anyone due his own culture and kind

personality. The novel can be regarded as a historical documentary book that authenticates an era during which the Iraqi people have been oppressed by tyrannical military forces represented by the American troops. It can be concluded too that the United States, from the historical point of view, always uses its oppressive powers against all those countries that oppose her policy and that possess great riches which she must exploit in one way or another. Moreover, the novel implies that the struggle between good and evil is an everlasting one. The empire of evil maintains its power and sovereignty by weakening other countries as is explicated in the media. Nevertheless, there will come the time when evil powers wane by one way or another and the will of Allah is always looking forward to make the oppressed nations triumphal.

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