

Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack*: A "Redemptive Narrative"

¹-Mohamed Amine Khoudi, * ² - Amar Guendouzi

¹ - University of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi Ouzou, Algeria
medlaminekhoudi@yahoo.fr

² - University of Mouloud Mammeri Tizi Ouzou, Algeria
guendouzi@yahoo.fr

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Abstract: This article studies how Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack* brings innovative narrative twists to the terrorist novel genre to challenge contemporary, western-based approaches to the issue of fundamentalism. It claims that the narrative's humanist stance is the result of his long repressed feelings when he served in the Algerian army, during the period of the interior war of the 1990s. Amidst the tormented environment of that decade, silence was imposed on Khadra's literary and humanist expression. But when he quitted the army, his repressed experience with political violence and terror found an outlet in fiction in the form of a redemptive narrative, which demarcates from some conventions of the 'terrorist novel', and provides new perspectives on the complex issue of fundamentalism.

Key words: Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack*; fundamentalism; redemptive narrative; the terrorist novel.

خلاص الذات لياسمينه خضرا في رواية "الهجوم"

* Autore corrispondante.

المخلص: يدرس هذا المقال كيف تراجع رواية "الهجوم" للكاتب الجزائري ياسمينة خضرا صنف الرواية الإرهابية لغرض مناقشة الفكر الغربي المعاصر و تعامله مع قضية الأصولية. تتبثق مراجعات خضرا للسرديات الغربية من موقف انساني نتيجة مشاعر مكبوتة منذ فترة طويلة عندما خدم في الجيش الجزائري ، خلال فترة الحرب الداخلية في التسعينيات. وسط البيئة المعقدة لذلك العقد ، فُرض الصمت على تعبير خضرا الأدبي والإنساني. لكن عندما ترك الجيش ، وجدت تجربته المكبوتة مع العنف السياسي والإرهاب متنفساً في الخيال في شكل سرد تعويضي ، يراجع من خلاله بعض أعراف "الرواية الإرهابية" ، مقدما وجهات نظر جديدة حول قضية الأصولية المعقدة.

الكلمات المفاتيح: ياسمينة خضرا " الهجوم " ؛ الأصولية ؛ خلاص الذات ، الرواية الإرهابية.

1-Introduction:

With the publication of *L'attentat* (2005, trans. *The Attack*, 2006), the second fiction of a trilogy including *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) and *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2006), Algerian author Yasmina Khadra shifted the perspective of his investigations of fundamentalism to the exploration of the terrorist mindset. In so doing, he tackled a topical subject, which has become, since then, a heated political and ethical issue in contemporary literature, and attracted the interest of many Western authors, such as, Richard Flanagan (*The Unknown Terrorist*, 2006), John Updike (*Terrorist*, 2007), and Don DeLillo (*Falling Man*, 2007), who have helped produce and re-conceptualize the modern genre of the 'terrorist novel'. However, contrary to the treatment of the fundamentalism issue in Western novels, such as in the fiction already mentioned, and to the sociological and political studies devoted to the subject, Khadra brings various innovations to the genre, at the levels of discourse, plot and characters. His innovations might be the results of his long career in the Algerian army, during the long period of the interior war of the 1990s, when the country witnessed a bloody conflict between the

army and the fundamentalists of the FIS, the Islamic Salvation Front. During those years, and in front of the horrors of the conflict, Khadra's military duties imposed silence on his literary voice and humanist ideals, until he retired from army service in 2000, when he gained the freedom of speech and gave free rein to his literary expression. The publication of *The Attack* in 2005 is, thus, a landmark novel in his literary career, since it is the first narrative to express his repressed humanist voice and to represent his political, social and ethical views on the issue of fundamentalism.

The originality of *The Attack* lies in its complex exploration of the heated issue of fundamentalism, by drawing on a female, Arab Israeli perspective. For this, Khadra deterritorializes his firsthand experience with terror acquired in the Algerian conflict of which he was a direct witness and actor, and displaces the issue of terror to Israel, bringing his main theme to bear on one of the oldest and deadliest conflicts in the contemporary world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, Khadra pushes his experimentation farther and adopts a female character that sacrifices life, love and family for the country's freedom, in the name of religion. These two innovations enhanced the critics' interest in Khadra's fiction, and have owned him a controversial reception of his novel by reviewers. For example, Anne-Marie McManus (2013) studies the sympathetic portrayal that is presented by Western critics of Middle Eastern women "who commit or support forms of violence identified as terrorist" (McManus, 2013, p.80). In her research, she refers to Khadra's *The Attack* to claim that the Algerian author

Uses the husband/wife storyline to introduce the titillating notion that terrorists seduced—literally and figuratively—a beautiful, Westernized woman. These gendered dynamics draw the line of sentiment between a compassionate Sihem who suffered and a sexually abjected murderess. It is

only Amin, the rational male narrator, who saves the day and affirms the power of the liberal subject to resist the creeping threat of hatred. (Ibid p.93)

On the other hand, Dominique Garand (2008) investigates Khadra's treatment of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He shows "how the author suspends all a priori or preconception and how, despite a readiness to accept antagonistic voices, proposes values which transcend the conflict by avoiding sacrificial solutions." (Garand, 2008, p.37). Similarly, Jędrzej Pawlicki (2014) suggests that Khadra displaces his Algerian background to deal with the Taliban in *The Swallows of Kabul*, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in *The Attack*, and the Second Gulf War in *The Sirens of Baghdad*. For him, Khadra's trilogy offers three contemporary settings that examine the issue of terror

Les romans qui composent la trilogie du grand malentendu se réfèrent aux régions qui constituent l'un des enjeux les plus importants pour la communauté internationale. L'Irak, l'Afghanistan et la Palestine sont des lieux où se croisent les intérêts de la civilisation orientale et occidentale, où s'affrontent la force militaire des institutions et la résistance des populations. Les fictions khadraiennes sont ancrées dans la réalité contemporaine, elles mettent en scène le décor que le lecteur connaît grâce à la diffusion d'informations massive et rapide. (Pawlicki, 2014, p.37)

Contrary to the critics above, we think that Khadra's novel can best be approached through the author's intellectual engagement with the issue of fundamentalism, as well as his personal experience in the Algerian army. In our view, in writing the novel, he could not ignore the various Western-based studies on the subject, which argue that fundamentalism is, either a defensive ideology emerging "in times of crisis" (Marty and Appleby, 1991) in order to defend traditional identity against the assaults of "modernity and

secularization” (Ruthven, 2004), or a “social movement” seeking to impose “alternative, often cultural domains” (Marranci, 2009, p.34). Khadra’s discourse departs from all those views, and questions what Ludwig Wittgenstein called ‘**family resemblances**’” (Ruthven, 2004, p.9) (emphasis ours) among fundamentalists, a concept which seeks to put all fundamentalist ideologies on par with one another. Thus, in drawing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for inspiration, Khadra revises both the ideological and the social analyses of fundamentalism to put the stress on political and humanist concerns linked to unresolved conflicts, as is the case between Israel and Palestine.

2-Fundamentalism:

In revising Western-based studies of fundamentalism, Khadra anticipates Gabriele Marranci thoughts on the subject, published in 2009 in *Understanding Muslim Identity Rethinking Fundamentalism*. Marranci observes that academic research about fundamentalism has “enjoyed a great degree of homogeneity” (Marranci, 2009, p.2), which may underline the poor conceptualization of the subject. She also highlights the limitations of those discussions of the phenomenon, since most often they focus on “**what** produces ‘fundamentalism’ rather than **why** people develop certain patterns of ideas and practices” (Marranci, 2009, p.26) (emphasis ours) inside their fundamentalist groups. For Marranci (2009), “this attempt to answer mainly the ‘what’ question, while leaving the ‘why’ aside, has produced a rather taxonomic understanding of fundamentalism.” (Ibid). Therefore, Marranci aligns her research interest on the same issue tackled in Khadra’s novel, which is the exploration of the hidden motives that may drive individuals to join extremist groups. In other words, the Algerian authors can be credited to

be a precursor in shifting the interest on fundamentalism, from the ‘what’ question to the ‘why’.

In the various studies of fundamentalism, the latter is perceived more as a group phenomenon than an individual choice. These studies overlook the subjectivity of the perpetrator as if to signify the suppression of his sense of self under the control of a radical ideology. Khadra’s *The Attack* questions this assertion, by dramatizing the quest of a doctor, therefore an intellectual, who goes in a quest journey to unveil the motivations, meanings and significance of his wife’s self sacrifice for country and religion. Khadra explores fundamentalism with a focus on the individual self and offers a different understanding of the phenomenon. Approached from this angle, fundamentalism becomes in his fiction a subject for humanist investigation and a quest for justice, which brings fresh perspectives to the ever-changing forms and norms of the Western terrorist novel, particularly the kind of fiction published in the United States on the of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

If Khadra breaks away from some established norms of the terrorist novel, it is further argued in this article, it is because the freedom he enjoyed after the end of his army service and its long self-imposed silence might have pushed him to produce a redemptive narrative which goes over his past experiences to alleviate his sense of guilt, through airing the feelings and thoughts that he might have repressed when he was forced to take part in a deadly conflict, called by many political commentators ‘civil war’. The displaced conflict in Khadra’s novel is a clear indication of the latter’s allegorical dimension, wherein the attitude of Amin, the Arab Israeli surgeon, stands for the author’s newly acquired identity, away from home and military contingencies. Amin’s capacity for cultural understanding and

human empathy represents in *The Attack* all what Khadra was denied in his army service in the name of military discipline and duty.

3-Yasmina Khadra's Biography:

The review of Khadra's biography and the developments of his various writing projects demonstrate his recurrent identity crises and the tremendous place of literature in the formation of the ultimate humanist identity of the author. Yasmina Khadra, a woman's name, is the nom de plume of Mohammed Moulessoul, who was born in 1955 in Kenadsa, in the Algerian Sahara. In 1964, his father, an officer in the Algerian army, enrolled him against his will in a cadet training school to take education. In 1975, still under the father's urge and always against his will, he enlisted in the Algerian army for a 25 years career. During his service, he reached a high-rank position in the military hierarchy at the counter-terrorism unit. In the 1990s, he was directly involved in the bloody violence of the "Black Decade," the name for the Algerian civil strife, which opposed the army to Islamist insurgents.

Khadra's military career did not prevent him from starting a literary career as early as the beginning of the 1980s. His first texts were published under his real name but, in 1989, he decided to publish under pseudonym Commissioner Brahim Llob, because his early novels were subject to military review prior to publication. This is the reason why he declares that his decision to write under a pseudonym was meant to avoid censorship: « A l'époque ou j'ai écrit *Houria*. J'étais encore soldat. Je l'ai écrite avec beaucoup de censure, et lorsque je suis passé dans la clandestinité en 1989, j'ai acquis une sorte d'impunité qui allait avec mon inspiration. » (Pawlicki, 2013, p.46).

However, in 1997, Khadra chooses a second pseudonym, this time bearing his wife's name, to move to a new phase in his identity of a writer.

With the new identity in formation, he published three novels between 1997 and 1998, namely *Morituri* (1997) *Double Blanc* (1997) and *L'Automne des chimères* (1998). The three novels constitute a trilogy which portrays the Algerian civil strife and its context in a poignant and crude naturalist way. Like his first fiction, they are steeped in the detective novel genre, but with a marked interest in the political and social origins of fundamentalism. The new theme would emerge as the main subject of his next novels, namely *In the Name of God* (1998) and *Wolf Dreams* (1999), that signal the first significant transformation in his style. Unlike his first detective novels that tell Commissioner Llob's investigations into Algiers' terrorist underground, these works deal with the ways common civilians turn into merciless murderers under the influence of a radical ideology.

The stylistic change in Khadra's fiction coincides with his decision to resign from his military position in 2000 and to go on self-exile in Aix-en-Provence with his family. In an interview in Algerian newspaper *Liberté*, he acknowledges that his self-imposed exile was the result of an identity crisis experienced when he retired from the army: "maintenant que je ne suis plus soldat, qui suis-je ?... quelle attitude adopter pour être moi rien que moi c'est-à-dire quelqu'un dont j'ignore tout ?" (Khadra, 2002, p.55). The answers to those questions are addressed in his autobiography, "*L'écrivain*", subsequently published in 2001. In this work, he expresses his passion for writing, which goes back to his childhood, in order to explain to his readers the genesis of his literary trajectory. Throughout the novel, he recounts how he integrated the military institution at an early age and how he was imposed a strict military life that was at odds with his literary aspirations. The severe army discipline and the harsh life in military camps during the war might

explain the author's need to reinvent a new self and imagine a new life through fiction. In this regard, he explains

J'ai écrit ce livre par nécessité, pour faire une dernière mise au point. Je refuse que l'on me dénie mon droit d'être un écrivain par que j'ai été un militaire algérien. Lorsque « l'écrivain » est sorti en librairie, certains ont voulu faire le procès de l'armée à travers moi. Soudain, je représentais l'axe du mal. J'étais dévalorisé. On m'a présenté comme un homme de pouvoir alors que je n'ai qu'un souhait : me réserver à l'écriture. (Slimani, 2006, p.17).

It was after the publication of the autobiographical novel that Khadra unveiled his true name in an interview with *Le Monde des livres* in 2001. The controversies and questioning that followed his revelation can be explained by the resistance of the literary establishment to integrate a writer who comes from the military. The revelation of Khadra's background caused him many problems, as he was accused of torture and the killing of innocents when he served as an army officer. Jeffries quotes Khadra as saying that he "had to really fight against those who did not appreciate [his] work because they pigeonholed [him] as some sort of brute who was responsible for military massacres." (Jeffries, 2005) His subsequent novel *L'imposture des mots* (2002) (*The Imposture of Words*) narrativizes his military career and confronts all those rumors that circulated about his past. In other words, the publication of these two autobiographical texts, i.e. *The Writer* and *The Imposture of Words*, marked another turning point in the Khadra's literary commitment, and showed that his inspiration was no longer to be found in the Algerian society of the late 1980s, but in his own life experience as, first, a boy, then, a soldier.

4- The "Terrorist Novel" and its Revisions in Khadra's *The Attack*:

After autobiographical writing, Khadra would try his hand at another literary genre, namely the reemerging form of the terrorist novel. This form, which narrativizes terror, has a long history in Western literature, going back as far as 19th century fiction of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Henry James. It might have provided Khadra, in *The Attack*, with an outlet to articulate with aesthetic distance his former military experience of fighting terrorist organizations. However, as it will be argued, Khadra revises some literary norms of the genre in order to embrace both his former commitment against fundamentalism acquired in the army and the kind of humanist empathy inherent in literature. In so doing, he produces a narrative which is still autobiographical in inspiration, looking to redeem his military past through the quest of Amin, the Arab-Israeli surgeon who goes in a journey to, supposedly, unveil the fundamentalist process through which his wife turned into a suicide bomber. However, Amin is no less than Khadra's fictional self, who revisits his past experiences in the shoes of a lifesaving doctor, instead of the life-taking soldier.

Basically, the "terrorist novel" is a fiction that attempts to "explore the motives and ideas behind the sociopolitical and psychic act of terrorism." (Kubiak, 2004, p.296). According to Blessington (2008), what makes its "great urgency" (Blessington, 2008, p.117) is that it dramatizes "the attack on innocent people" (Ibid p.18), and the deep "fear" of being a "random casualty in a political or religious conflict" (Ibid). However, in spite of its urgency due to the terror-stricken post 9/11 world, the genre has a long history, going back to "the last three decades of the nineteenth century" (Frank and Gruber, 2012, p.7) when terrorism emerged in Europe and authors, such as Dostoevsky, Stevenson and James, "set the pattern for late twentieth-century fiction." (Frank and Gruber, 2012, p.44). Blessington argues that the

terrorist novel achieves prominence in our time because the world faces the menace of “more terrorism” (Blessington, 2008, p.123) after the 9/11 attacks. But for Peter Boxall (2013), the widespread of the terrorist novel is due to its propensity to offer contemporary novelists “a new way of weaving time and history and embodiment together.” (Boxall, 2013, p.123).

Antony Kubiak (2004) calls the terrorist novel all “those forms of writing that we might, in the spirit of critical excess, describe as narrative terrorism: attempts to destabilize narrativity itself-disrupting linearity, temporality, plot, character or whatever conventions may be regarded as essential to the production of stories, memories, dramas, or histories.” (Kubiak, 2004, p. 295). At the heart of this kind of narratives is the obligation for the protagonist to make a choice in the midst of a flawed world. This is why the plot of the terrorist novel most often centers on “the dilemma of a character who is trapped among other negative alternatives. The character needs to make a choice” (Blessington, 2008, p.118). In other words, the terrorist novel involves a main character trapped in a complex conflict, urging him/her “to join one “or the other of the political forces, or to escape.” (Ibid) This character becomes one of the main foci of the story and enables the classification of the genre.

Besides the focus on character, other conventions define the typology of the terrorist fiction, such as: “the focalizer (s) of the story, the setting, the major incidents, the climatic action, as well as the terrorists, their tactics and their targets.” (Applebaum and Paknadel, 2008, p.412). All these conventions underline the complexity of the form of the terrorist novel, and its propensity to go beyond the simplistic, dualistic portrayal of ideology, to offer a deeper understanding of terror. Kristian Versluys (2009) claims that “the novelistic practice of viewing a situation in its full complexity entails the

denial of the reductive logic of terrorism, the black-and-white ideological view that legitimates indiscriminate violence.” (Versluys, 2009, p.16). But in spite of its complexity, the genre lays more often the stress on the victims of violence and their sentiments, rather than on politics and the perpetrators. Appelbaum and Paknadel elucidate this aspect and write

[The] cultural work of the terrorism novel from 1970 to 2001 has been by and large to legitimate the position of innocence occupied by terrorism’s victims and the political society to which they belong....These novels tell us that terrorism is the violence of an Other; it is illegitimate violence perpetrated from an illegitimate position. (Appelbaum and Paknadel, 2008, p.427).

4-1- The Re-examination of the “Terrorist Novel” in Yasmina Khadra’s *The Attack*:

The focus on the victims of terror is quite new if the long history of the genre of the terrorist novel is considered. It is the result of the orientation of post 9/11 American fiction, which saw the country’s authors address the trauma of their fellow citizens who survived the attacks. Contrary to these authors, however, Khadra does not focus his narrative on the direct survivors of terror and their trauma; he rather shifts it to the study of fundamentalism as an ideology and the consequences of the most extreme form of self sacrifice on loved ones and relatives. In so doing, he exploits the genre’s capacity for change and transformation, what Frank and Gruber call its “transgeneric mode”, to tell a story which reverses traditional terror plots, and adopts a female perpetrator, an unusual character in terror history and fiction. The mysterious radicalization of Sihem and the long period of silence that followed it prompt her husband, Amin, to go on a long journey of

investigation, acting like detective Llob in Khadra's early fiction, but this time equipped with humanist ideals and a sheer capacity for empathy.

Dr. Amin Jaafri is a naturalized Israeli citizen and a successful surgeon from Bedouin stock, who shockingly discovers that his wife committed a terrorist act in a Tel Aviv restaurant. As a result of his shock, he undertakes a journey, both real and symbolic, into the sacred cities of Judaism, Christianity and Islam to retrace his wife's footsteps and discover the motives that led her to commit a suicide bombing. Contrary to most terrorist novels that deploy a linear plot to explain both the impact of the terrorist attack on the survivors or follow the radicalization process of the terrorist figure culminating with the radical act, Khadra reverses the journey of the terrorist plot, starting with the blast and ending with uncovering the reasons behind it. In more immediate words, the focus in the novel is put on Sihem, the perpetrator, not on the Israeli civilian victims of the attack. The reader is then invited to follow Amin's investigations into the reasons that pushed Sihem to blow herself up, but not to discover, as most terrorist novels propose, the protagonist's execution of the terrorist plan at the end of the text. In reversing the journey, Khadra returns to the detective plots of his early fiction, such as *La dingue au bistouri* (1990), *La Foire des enfoirés* (1993), *Morituri* (1997), *Double Blanc* (1997) and *L'Automne des chimères* (1998), and creates a hybrid narrative that blends the detective story with the terrorist plot.

4-2- The Reenactment of Khadra's Detective Genre in *The Attack*:

The Attack reenacts the detective plot found in Khadra's earlier detective novels of the 1990s, since Amin's mission to Gaza reminds us of Brahim Llob's investigations in Khadra's early detective fiction. However, even if

they share ethical and idealist positions, inspector Llob and surgeon Amin differ in their vision concerning violence. The former is prone to violent acts, whereas the latter remains loyal to a non-violence ethics. This difference between them elicits the transformation in Khadra's discourse, from the violent tone of his early detective fiction to the humanist commitment of his international novels.

Amin begins his investigation into Sihem's fundamentalist trajectory in Bethlehem. Endorsing the role of a detective who never shrugs off humanist ideals, he goes to Kafr Kanna, in Bethlehem, in order to meet the people who have seen Sihem before the attack. This is a symbolic beginning, since Bethlehem is no other than Christ's birthplace. It juxtaposes Christ's religion of love with contemporary Bethlehem, the place of disaster and violence. In this highly symbolical city, Sihem is considered as a Palestinian heroine when she performs the radical act of suicide bombing. Blessington (2008) explains that terrorist figures in terror narratives are elevated to the rank of heroes by "co-inspirators and their supporters. After death, [...] such heroes are rewarded with a martyr's reputation in order to inspire others, and some of the faithful believe that jihadists go to Paradise." (Blessington, 2008, p.118). But Amin's secular mind does not subscribe to this belief; for him, nothing justifies his wife's radical behavior, not even her religious devotion and sincere love for country and God.

Amin's next destination in the quest of his wife's terrorist motivations is Jenin, where he meets a commander of a fundamentalist organization, whose rhetoric of hatred provides him with some answers on Sihem's radicalization. Amin understands that humiliation and misery are sources of resentment, the feeling which might have pushed Sihem, and other fundamentalists, to adopt violence as a form of resistance to Israeli occupation. Nonetheless, an

important question remains, as why Sihem did not share her political commitment with him. Adel, Amin's nephew and Sihem's inmate in the local terrorist unit, explains that "she didn't have the right. And furthermore, she had no intention of letting anyone get in her way. A commitment like this, you keep quiet about it" (Khadra, 2006, p.226). What emerges of Sihem's commitment to secrecy is a fundamentalist code, which privileges the cause over family and all earthly life. Amin is the victim of this behavior, just as Sihem herself. However, contrary to his wife, he refuses to be silenced!

Thanks to his commitment to humanist ideals and his great capacity for understanding and empathy, Amin becomes the outspoken consciousness of the novel. He is portrayed as a 'secular man' and a non-violent figure (McManus, 2013, p.92) who expresses "equal delight" when he contemplates Jerusalem's monuments to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Khadra, 2006, p.142). Furthermore, he stands out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and rejects all discourses of violence and hatred. As a surgeon, his unique commitment is to save human life regardless of religious or ethnic origin: "there's nothing, *absolutely nothing*," he argues, "more important than your life. And your life isn't more important than other people's lives" (Ibid p.100). As a consequence, he refuses the 'binary choice' proposed by the commander of the terrorist unit in Jenin, and makes a strong plea for human life whatever its origin: "You have chosen to kill; I have chosen to save. Where you see an enemy, I see a patient. I'm neither selfish nor indifferent...I just want to be able to live my share of existence without being obliged to detract from the existence of others." (Khadra, 2006, p.160). Marty and Appelby (1991) explain that fundamentalists create a Manichean vision of the world "in which evil and good struggle" (Marranci, 2009, p.33). Amin opposes so strongly this dual choice, that one is led to understand that

his opposition is meant to reflect Khadra's dilemma when he was serving in the army, and to suggest that *The Attack* can be read as a redemptive narrative which repudiates his former commitment to military action.

Amin's detective mission is also meant to search for his wife's voice, silenced by the power and discourse of fundamentalism. Indeed, except the letter sent to her husband, Sihem is a silent character in the novel. Amin's journey, therefore, may be read as an attempt to give voice to this silent figure, by unwinding her terrorist trajectory. His investigations speak for Sihem's actions, attitudes, and feelings, filtered through his consciousness. And even if ultimately he does not bring her back, nor succeeds to prevent her awful act, he is still able to rehabilitate her love for him and their country. In a moving passage, Amin nostalgically recalls their sincere love for each other

There was a perfect love, a harmonious serenade that seemed unmarred by a single false note We didn't talk; we *told* ourselves, the way a storyteller tells a romantic idylle (Khadra, 2006, p.76)...I can't close my eyes without finding myself face-to-face with Sihem's smile. She was so living and so considerate, and when we'd stand together in our garden, my arm around her waist, and I'd tell her about the wonderful days they lay ahead of us and the grand projects I was working on for her, she seemed to hang on my words...She was a firm believer in our bright future, and every time I lost heart, she redoubled her efforts. We were so happy; we had such confidence in each other. (Ibid p.125)

4-3- The Representation of the Female Terrorist in Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack*:

Furthermore, unlike many terrorist novels that dehumanize terrorist perpetrators, Khadra represents Sihem as an ambivalent figure, a

perpetrator, but also a loving wife and double victim of her gender and of her country. Her commitment to the freedom of her people confronts two obstacles: the Palestinian patriarchal order wherein the leading roles are restricted to men, and the cruelty of Israeli colonial policy. In other words, in choosing a female terrorist, Khadra challenges the various studies on fundamentalism, which underline “the misogynist instances of fundamentalist groups.” (Marranci, 2009, p.39-40). His terrorist figure is a well-educated woman, whose commitment to fundamentalist ideology and suicide violence might indicate that terror is complex issue involving, most often, victimized groups, be them women, or colonized peoples, bearing deep resentments against their oppressors.

When the Israeli media identify Sihem’s identity, Amin is sacked from the hospital and an infuriated mob awaits him outside his house to unleash racist violence against him. The mob savagely beats him, and treats him, among other derogatory names, as “the filthy beast”, “the dirty terrorist”, and “Arab traitor”. The intolerant and racist behavior of the mob makes him aware that he has never been integrated into Israeli society, and that he is a victim of another fundamentalism, this time speaking in the name of another religion and ideology. In fact, Israeli fundamentalism was there, hidden and latent, and when Sihem committed her act, it has come to full light. This teaches Amin that fundamentalism does not have a single religion, nor is solely associated with oppressed people only.

5-Conclusion:

In the end of the novel, Amin becomes aware that his investigations into his wife’s self-sacrifice are inconclusive: “I believe I’ve arrived at my destination. The route I took has been terrible, and I don’t have the impression that I’ve reached anything or **learned anything redemptive...**”

(Khadra, 2006, p.247) (emphasis ours). This statement of failure raises a lot of questions on Amin's journey of discovery and Khadra's objectives in writing the novel. However, in view of the developments in Khadra's art, one can say that if Amin's journey seems literally fruitless, it is because the narrative is traversed by a redemptive subplot that speaks for the author himself rather than his main character. The subplot is conveyed thanks to Amin Jaafri's identity, which functions as the author's alter-ego, through which he dissects the discourses of violence and counter-violence and privileges the discourse of life and tolerance whatever the nature or protagonists of the conflict. Indeed, since *The Attack*, Khadra continued to write successful international fiction, such as *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2006), *Une Equation africaine* (2011), and *Khalil* (2018). He would also return to his country's colonial past and explore with friendly eyes the period of French domination in *Ce que le jour doit à la nuit* (2008). All these works were made possible thanks to *The Attack*, which has allowed him to work through his sense of trauma inherited from the Algerian Black Decade, and to convey a message of peace and tolerance that transcends intolerant discourses made of binary oppositions, such as: death vs. life, hate vs. love, perpetrator vs. victim, and oppressor vs. oppressed, and men vs. women.¹

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¹ **Yasmina Khadra's Biography :**

Yasmina Khadra is the nom de plume of Mohammed Moulesshoul, who adopted a woman's name to hide his identity. He was born in 1955 in Kenadsa, in the Algerian Sahara. In 1964, his father, an officer in the Algerian army, decided to enroll him in a cadet training school where he took his education until joining the Algerian army in 1975. At the end of his military career, he became a confirmed high-ranking counter-terrorism officer who survived the violent Black Decade's violence of the 1990s. He started to publish his literary

works at the beginning of the 1980s. He chooses a feminine nom de plume in 1988. Obviously, this choice is notable for many reasons. Indeed, Yasmina is the name of his wife; he wanted to pay tribute for the Algerian women. In 2000, he decided to resign from his military post in 2000 and departed into exile in Aix en Provence with his family. It was with the publication of his semi autobiographical novel *L'Écrivain 'The Writer'* (2001), that Khadra unveiled his true identity in an interview with *Le Monde des livres* in 2001. Khadra also writes successful international fiction, such as *The Attack* (2005), *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2006), *The Swallows of Kabul* (2007), and *Khalil* (2018).