

Violence as Counter- Terrorism in Yasmina Khadra's
The Sirens of Baghdad

Dr. Leyla Bellour
Department of Foreign Languages
Abdelhafid Boussouf University Center of Mila
Leila_bellour@hotmail.com

Abstract

Yasmina Khadra's novel, *The Sirens of Baghdad*, which is set in a post-colonial context, attempts to explain the heinous violence in Iraq after the American invasion. The novel vindicates that Iraqis' resistance, which often resort to violent suicide bombings, is an inevitable act of counter- terrorism, because the US committed horrendous terroristic crimes against civilians. Thus, Khadra's novel debunks the Western myth that terrorism in the Arabo-Islamic world is the result of poverty and Islamic fundamentalism. Of utmost importance, the paper evinces that violence is the result of the clash of civilization, which is one of the main motives of America's occupation of Iraq.

الملخص

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تفسير ظاهرة العنف في العراق بعد الاحتلال الأمريكي من خلال دراسة نقدية للرواية ما بعد الكولونيالية الموسومة بـ "صفارات انذار بغداد" للأديب الجزائري يسمينة خضرة. بالاعتماد على النظريات التي تحاول تحليل ظاهرة الارهاب، يبين هذا المقال أن المقاومة العراقية التي غالباً ما تلجأ إلى التفجيرات الانتحارية العنيفة و التي يعتبرها الغرب إرهابية هي رد فعل حتمي للإرهاب الأمريكي الشنيع، و بالتالي فإن المقال يفنّد الأسطورة الغربية القائلة بأن الارهاب في العالم العربي الاسلامي هو نتاج الفقر و التطرّف الديني. يركّز

هذا المقال على وجه الخصوص على أن العنف هو نتاج صدام الحضارات الذي يعتبر من أهم أسباب الغزو الامريكي للعراق.

The US invaded Iraq on March 2003 under the alibi of ending the atrocities of Saddam Hussein, who was considered as a tyrant, and thus to spread democracy and human rights. The War, as George Bush claims, is also a part of the US's mission to end terrorism. This holy war on terror started after the events of 9/11, and Iraq was viewed as one of the allies of Al-Queda though this claim is not based on any proof. Another main reason for occupying Iraq was the belief that the latter possesses weapons of massive destruction though investigations proved that this is not true. It is also targeted because it is one of the supporters of the Palestinian cause. One important reason for the occupation is the control and possession of Iraqi oil wells to serve the American economy. So, Saddam is not the real cause of the invasion. Also, the US would have never occupied Iraq if it really possessed weapons of massive destruction. According to Noam Chomsky, who denies the existence of any war on terror, "The U.S. invaded Iraq because it has enormous oil resources, mostly untapped" (There is no war on Terror') The US is very obsessed with preserving its place in the most powerful countries in the world; hence, it uses violence to crush all the countries that are threatening and challenging its position by their abundance of raw materials. Tzvetan Todorov states that "competition between countries is inevitable-and this implies that those who have less will become increasingly aggressive towards those who

have more” (2). Another central aim behind occupying Iraq is the fulfillment of its imperial ambitions.

The war is condemned as unfair and many countries were opposed to it including the British and the American citizens. This horrendous war on Iraq, which has been faulted by many people all over the world, resulted in the death of thousands of civilians, and thousands of them immigrated to other countries. Reports by experts showed that the war resulted in real humanitarian damages. People suffered from poverty, famine, lack of clean water and medicine. A major result of the war was the murder of Saddam Hussein in a way which was insulting to human nature.

The novel vindicates that the US war on Iraq is the main cause of terrorism in this country. The novel is narrated by a nameless male student. America’s violent war transforms this young student, who was very gentle, peaceful, and shy, into a person who is ready to act violently in order to take revenge. The violence of the coalition forces changes the young man’s ambitions of making great academic achievements into the ambition of destroying the West, especially America. The protagonist lives in Kafr Karam, a peaceful village known for its conservatism and moral values. According to the protagonist, for “Bedouin, no matter how impoverished they may be, honor is no joking matter. An offense must be washed away in blood, which is the sole authorized detergent when it’s a question of keeping one’s self-respect”(66-67). The protagonist was a very emotional and sensitive person. Since childhood, he has been a very peaceful person, who disliked violence. He says: “At school, my classmates considered

me a weakling. They could provoke me all they wanted; I never returned their blows [...] In fact, I wasn't a weakling; I simply hated violence"(49).

During the raging war between the Iraqi people, especially in Baghdad, and the US forces, Kafr Karam was untouched by the war. Though they were very poor, people of Kafr Karam were living happily in peace. So, poverty is not the main motive for terrorism in the Arabo-Islamic world as Westerners believe. For many people in the West, the Arab men are only dreaming of a job, a house, and a wife. The lack of these things, they think, is what drives them to become terrorists. The narrator says: "We were poor, common people, but we were living at peace"(9). Poverty is not the fertile soil for violence; Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaeda was a very rich man. The invasion of Iraq created a grievous disharmony among people. According to the narrator, before the war, "[they] had [their] little idiosyncrasies, but [their] quarrels never degenerated into anything worse"(14). So, the occupation of Iraq resulted in a great disagreement and misunderstanding between people, who were like brothers before colonialism.

The protagonist went to the University of Baghdad few months before its occupation by the US, but he returned to Kafr Karam, waiting for the war to end in order to return to Baghdad. His village was not touched by the war until a long time later. Though the war had not reached Kafr Karam yet, people got the news of the war, in the other places, from TV. They used to gather in a café and watch the news

together. The TV was given to them as a present by Sayed, who was a member of the resistance in Baghdad. In Al-Jazeera channel, they watched the raging war in Fallujah between the American soldiers, who were supported by the Iraqi security forces and the Iraqi resistance whose members fought with very simple means in comparison with the tools of massive destruction possessed by the American troops. The battle results in “hundreds of dead, mostly women and children”(39). Many people, who were watching the news, were convinced to join the resistance to free their land and restore their independence. Americans will never leave Iraq by the miracle of Ababil birds. America’s violent military operations in the other Iraqi cities made people of Kafar Karam very angry; “The sieges of Fallujah and Basra and the bloody raids on other cities made the crowd seethe”(43). Mass media is used to fuel violence and rage. The T.V Sayed gave to people of Kafr Karam augmented people’s hatred of the West and filled them with wrath and anger. This medium, which shows the massacres committed by the US, pushed people to join the terrorist groups.

The Iraqi people are victims of the most destructive war in history. In this war, the US and the coalition forces smash everything without mercy. Even hospitals were targeted. Falcon avows that to be ruled by a tyrant like Saddam is better than being ruled by enemies from outside. He states that “The GLs are nothing but brutes and wild beasts; they drive their big machines past our windows and orphans and have no qualms about stopping their bombs on our health clinics. Look at what they’ve done to our country: hell on earth”(18-19). One of the most famous terroristic attacks by the US Noam Chomsky makes

reference to is “the assault on Fallujah by US forces in November 2004, one of the worst crimes of the invasion of Iraq, which opened with occupation of Fallujah General Hospital. Military occupation of a hospital is, of course, a serious war crime in itself, even apart from the manner in which it was carried out” (Chomsky on Charlie Hebdo). Innocent children are blown to pieces without pity. Hence, everyday, people’s contempt and rage increase. All Iraqis asked for the removal of the coalition forces, but as the protagonist says: “the coalition’s response to protest marches was often racist violence”(88).

People of Kafr Karam were somehow unconcerned about the war until the latter knocked their houses. In fact, three incidents happened which changed the entire personality of the protagonist. First, the horrendous murder of a teenager who is mentally handicapped in a checkpoint. Sulayman was taken by his father and the protagonist to the hospital after cutting his fingers, but in a checkpoint, Sulayman was exploded without pity. His body destroyed into pieces. Sulayman was suspected of carrying explosive devices. His father and the protagonist were silenced and prevented from explaining to him that Sulayman was mentally ill. Firing an innocent young man, who is mentally retarded, is a terrible and vulgar violent act that the narrator could never forget. American soldiers’ fear of Iraqis’ suicide bombs pushes them to behave in an inhuman way. Todorov states: “The Fear of barbarians is what risks making us barbarians. And we will commit a worse evil than that which initially feared. History teaches us this lesson: the cure can be worse than the disease”(6). In fact, their bombing of civilians is more

terroristic than 9/11. An American colonel tried to give money to Sulayman's family to compensate for his death. Their materialistic life makes them believe that money might heal the wounds of Sulayman's family. The murder of Sulayman left indelible psychic wounds in people of Kafr Garam. It augments their anger and hatred of the Americans. Chmosky said that the American troops "have been treating people in such a way that engenders resistance and hatred and fear"(On the War in Iraq). In other words, Iraqis' rage against the Americans is due to the latter's terroristic crimes.

The second incident that helped transform the personality of the protagonist is the bombardment of a wedding party by the American troops; "The force of the explosion had flung chairs and wedding guests thirty meters in all directions"(47). Most of the dead were women and children. While some foreign television teams come to report the incident, a man told them in rage: "Look! Nothing but women and children! This was a wedding reception. Where are the terrorists? The real terrorists are the bastards who fired the missiles at us"(48). They call others' resistance terrorism, but they never describe their own violent, inhuman, and barbaric acts as terroristic.

After the bombing of the wedding party, some young man vowed to avenge this terrorist crime. Few weeks after this terrible incident, and in response to it, "the district superintendent was shot to death in his official car. That same day, a military vehicle was blown up by a homemade bomb"(50). The American army's violent acts against civilians stoke people's anger, which is vented through

aggression. That is, they become inflamed with a strong desire for vengeance. According to Todorov, the “individuals responsible for anti-Western attacks live with the feeling that their passions are just, and their ideas true; now, as Pascal said 350 years ago, ‘violence and truth have no power over each other’”(7). In fact, many people left Kafr Karam to join the resistance in Baghdad. According to Noam Chomsky, “it is likely that U.S. aggression could inspire a new generation of terrorists bent on revenge, and might induce Iraq to carry out terrorist actions suspected to be already in place”(“The Case Against US”).

Indeed, the US lost its supporters of the war when the world witnessed the crimes it committed against the Iraqis. One example is the American troops’ humiliation and abuse of the Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib. These scandals are well-known in history. However, America’s violent actions are never classified as terroristic. Noam Chomsky states that “terrorism is not terrorism when a much more severe terrorist attack is carried out by those who are Righteous by virtue of their power”[Chomsky on Charlie Hebdo: one man’s terrorism is another’s war on Terror]

The third and most horrifying event that made a radical change in the protagonist’s personality is the humiliation of his father in front of the entire family, which was dishonored. Though the murder of Sulayman and the bombing of the wedding were traumatic events, they did not push the protagonist to join the resistance. He avows: “As a

matter of fact, I was indeed angry. I held a bitter grudge against the coalition forces, but I couldn't see myself indiscriminately attacking everyone and everything in sight. War wasn't my line. I wasn't borne to commit violence-I considered myself a thousand times likelier to suffer it than to practice it one day"(50). Then, there came the incident which made the protagonist undergo a complete change. The Americans entered his house and humiliated his family, especially his father, in front of him. The protagonist hates his arms, which remain paralysed, unable to act violently and defend his family. The protagonist realized that he will no more be the same person. He says:

I'd no longer consider things in the same way; I heard the foul beast roar deep inside me, and it was clear that sooner or later, whatever happened, I was *condemned to wash away this insult in blood* until the rivers and the oceans turned as red as the cut on Bahia's neck, as my mother's eyes, as the fire in my guts, which was already preparing me for the hell I knew was waiting(51).

The emergence of the resistance, which the US defines in terms of violence and terrorism is a reaction to America's terroristic attacks. The narrator says: "The horrors of yesterday are what's pushing me on"(10) The invasion of Iraq results in more terroristic attacks. It increases the Arabs' hatred towards the US who commits the most horrendous crimes in the human history by humiliating Arab leaders, slaughtering innocent civilians, and imprisoning innocent people. The concept of

family honor, which is absent in the Western culture, is the main reason that turned the protagonist into a violent man whose sole goal is to take revenge. The novel debunks the Western myth that Arabs are potential terrorists. In fact, their use of violence is to shield themselves against the violence of the Americans. According to Todorov, “all the terrorists in the world think they are counter-terrorists, merely responding to a prior act of terror”(*The Fear* 7-8). America’s violence led to the growing number of volunteers for death in order to defend their dignity, their nation, their people, and their freedom.

The protagonist returned to Baghdad with the ultimate aim of avenging the Americans’ terroristic actions and restoring his family’s lost honor. Thus, he joined one of the furious groups of resistance. The protagonist says: “I was a Bedouin, and no Bedouin can come to terms with an offense unless blood is spilled”(97). So, humiliation and hatred of Arabs engenders in the protagonist a profound feeling of hatred and the loss of his authentic and very kind self; “How could I love any thing after what I’d seen in Kafr Karam? If so, who was I? I wasn’t really interested in knowing that”(67). The land, which saw one of the greatest civilizations in the world, becomes ravaged and assaulted by the Americans’ violence and the Iraqis’ counter-violence. The protagonist sinks into this hellish world of terrorism.

Baghdad was under daily terroristic attacks by groups who wanted the US to leave the country. In fact, the capital turned into a battlefield full of decomposing corpses. In Baghdad, he met Omar the Corporeal from Kafr Karam, and he offered him help and housing.

Omar tried to convince the protagonist not to join the resistance groups, because Iraqis are also victims of their actions. Omar told the protagonist: “You see what the resistance does every day. It’s killed thousands of Iraqis. In exchange for how many Americans? [...] as for me, I disagree”(79).Iraqis’ counter-terrorism is faulted for its blindness in killing innocent people. Omar gave the protagonist a golden piece of advice. He says: “If you insist on fighting do it properly. Fight *for your* own country [...] Keep things in perspective; don’t mistake wrong for right. Don’t kill just for killing’s sake. Don’t fire blindly. We’re losing more innocent people than bastards who deserve to die”(90). Weapons such as explosive bombs which are targeted to the combatants of the enemy are likely to kill non-combatants of the colonized country. This resistance led Iraqis to kill their own kinsmen accidentally or intentionally if they are traitors. Omar fails to dissuade the protagonist from getting involved in a fundamentalist group.

In addition to Omar, another wise person, who showed the protagonist the futility of violence is Hussein, the son of Yasseen. He mocks the war, saying: “What’s going on makes no sense. Killing, killing, and more killing. Day and Night. On the squares, in the mosques, Nobody knows who is who anymore, and everyone has it in for everyone else”(104). Those who join the resistance, like Yasseen, kill people randomly; they no more differentiate between the criminal and the innocent.

Though avenging America’s violence takes also the life of innocent Iraqis, the protagonist insists on avenging the offense. He

says: “it was my duty to wash away the insult, my sacred duty and my absolute right”(80) He felt deeply moved by the obligation to restore the honor of his family. Honor is above everything in life. It’s more important than life itself. So, death for the protagonist is no longer horrific but rather heroic. He decides to die in the name of honor, dignity, and national freedom.

The protagonist witnessed, through the death of Omar, how human life is relegated to nothingness. Omar was killed by Yassenn, because he suspected him of showing his hiding place to the enemies. Later, they found that it was another person who did it. The protagonist was tormented by a strong feeling of guilt because it was him who showed Yaseen Omar’s house. War is blind. It undermines reason and destroys the most vulnerable side of human beings, which is feeling. In fact, the US succeeded in creating conflicts among Iraqis. Dr Jalal says: “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.”(8). Dr. Jalal, like so many Arab intellectuals, were used by the West against their own people before joining the resistance.

In fact, it was Sayed who helped the protagonist enroll in a terroristic group. Sayed is originally from Kafr Karam. He lives in Baghdad, and he visits Kafr Karam occasionally. While in Baghdad waiting to be assigned an operation by Sayed, the latter gave him some DVDs, which contain some of the heinous crimes the coalition committed against Iraqis like

the siege of Fallujah, the racist assaults carried out by British troops on some Iraqi kids seized during a popular demonstration; a GI's summary execution of a wounded civilian inside a mosque; an American helicopter's night attack on some peasants whose truck had broken down in a field-the visual chronicle, in short, of our humiliation, and of the awful blunders that had become so commonplace(97).

Watching the DVDs filled him with more rage and hatred. It makes him saturated with a strong desire to inflict violence upon the enemies.

The protagonist came to view death as a normal event. An example is his attitude towards the killing of the Captain and his detective by Sayed's employees Amr and Rachid. Though Sayed loves the Captain, he didn't hesitate to kill him when he discovered his secret; that he is with the resistance. In fact, the captain came to spy on him. The murder of the two officers didn't move the protagonist's sentiments. He saw the incident with cold blood. This evinced the utter change of his character. The protagonist says: "I was no longer the delicate boy from Kafar Karam. Another individual has taken his place. I was stunned by how easy to pass from one world to another and practically regretting having spent so much time being fearful of what I'd find."(96).

One of the means of resistance used to augment people's hatred of the West is rhetoric. In his conversation with Dr Jalal, the student says: In Baghdad, "I heard a lot of speeches and sermons. They made

me mad as a rabid camel I had only one desire: I wanted the whole planet, from North Pole to the South Pole, to go up in smoke And when someone like you, a learned man like you, expresses my hatred for the West, my rage becomes my pride”(8). Hate speeches by intellectuals like Dr. Jalal were like bombs that blow everything up. Through Dr. Jalal and the protagonist, in particular, the novel vindicates Westerners’ narrowed and exclusive focus on illiteracy or ignorance as the main motive behind violence. The latter might be carried out by highly educated people.

In his explanation of the real reasons of America’s occupation of Iraq, Dr. Jabir states “The world is run by the forces of international finance, for which peace is equivalent to layoffs [...] The second thing the USA knew was that Iraq was the only military force in the region capable of standing up to Israel. Bringing Iraq to its knees would make it possible for Israel to dominate the Middle East [...] Saddam was nothing but an excuse ”(19) Thus, the real motive for the invasion of Iraq is desire for hegemony and the greed for money.

The third part of the novel took place in Beirut where the protagonist, in collaboration with other jihadists, planned for a horrendous terroristic 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). For the protagonist, not just the US, but the whole West is the enemy. So, before travelling to Beirut, the protagonist was prepared to carry a revolutionary and destructive virus that will kill a whole nation,

resulting in a real human tragedy. The protagonist's mission, according to Sayed, "I'll make September eleventh seem like a noisy recess in an elementary school"(122). Prof. Ghany spent years making this virus, which costs a lot of money and the lives of many people. The protagonist's weapon of revenge is not a suicide bomb, but a small and undetected virus that will take the lives of thousands of the enemies. The protagonist says: "When I agreed to follow Sayed, I divorced myself from life. I am a dead man waiting for a decent burial"(130). The protagonist was ready to carry the virus for the sake of his family and country. In fact, he will be the savior not just of his country but of the whole world, because his virus will end imperialist hegemony. Prof. Ghany explains to the protagonist how the virus works:

Your mission then will consist in riding 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(142).

The protagonist, who was ready to fly to London to transmit the destructive virus, missed his flight, which was very shocking for those who spent a lot of time, money, and energy preparing him for the great mission. It was also very disappointing for the protagonist who

considers the act as very important to avenge his family's dishonor. However, he seems to come back to his authentic identity which favors humanity over violence. He saw a European couple deeply in love, and he thinks that destroying their romanticism is a very cruel and criminal act. The protagonist says that the "European couple kissing each other [in the airport] deserved to live for a thousand years. I have no right to challenge their kisses, scuttle their dreams, dash their hopes..."(152). So, at the end, and despite the US and the coalition forces' violence against the Iraqis, the power of love triumphs over the desire for violence.

Many scholars and researchers tend to focus on poverty, illiteracy, and fundamentalism as the main driving forces behind terrorism and violence, In fact, the war on Iraq is never or hardly attributed to the so-called 'clash of civilizations', a theory which was propounded by Samuel Huntington. According to Huntington, the major source of conflict in the world is cultural. In his words, "the principal conflict of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics"(22). For Huntington, the most violent conflicts in the future will occur basically due to differences between civilizations. Huntington goes further to say that the "next world war, if there is one, will be a war between civilizations"(39). In the novel, Sayed says that Americans, who are machines, "will hit a wall in Baghdad" He adds: "Our streets are going to witness the greatest duel of all time, the clash of the titans: Babylon against Disneyland, the

Tower of Babel against the Empire State Building, the Hanging Gardens against the Golden Gate Bridge, Scheherazade against Bonnie Parker, Sindbad against the terminator”(87). The wall, which the US views as a part of its civilizing mission is both literal and metaphorical. It is symbolic of the separation of cultures. For Dr. Jalal, the dialogue between Arabs and the West is impossible, because they are in the period of the clash of civilizations. Dr. Jalal says:

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”(9).

Westerners, according to Dr. Jalal, are subjected to the Manichean dichotomy of Us/them. Their belief in their super-humanity and the sub-humanity of others incites them to inflict violence on others, considering them as objects rather than subjects. Westerners view themselves as civilized, and they reject the culture of Arabs, whom they view as barbarians. However, one of the main aspects of civilization is to recognize and accept cultural differences. According to Todorov, “we cannot advance on the road to civilization without having previously acknowledged the plurality of cultures. If we refuse to take into consideration visions of the world that are different from ours, we will find ourselves cut off from human universality, and end

up nearer to pole of barbarism”(34). Americans’ stubborn rejection of the Iraqis’ ways of life impels them to invade Iraq under the pretext of fighting terrorism, which is a mild word for the term barbarism which they shy away from using. Their invasion results in barbaric acts that are more terroristic than the ones they claim to fight against. Todorov posits: “Torture, humiliation, and suffering inflicted on others are marks of barbarity. The same is true of murder, and even more of collective murder or genocide”(24).

The West ignores and underestimates the Arabs’ culture. Kadem, the narrator’s cousin and friend says: “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”(37). The West denigrates anything that belongs to Arabs. They never attempt to understand their culture. Americans ignore and destroy the rich heritage of Iraq. Indeed, they commit acts of cultural homicide. Sayed says:

Do you, think they have a clue about this fantastic Iraq they’re trampling down? They know nothing of these things! They never look at this side of history. All they see in our country is an immense pool of petroleum, which they intend to lap dry, even if it costs the last drop of our blood, too. They’re bonanza seekers, looters, despoilers, mercenaries They’ve reduced all values to the single dreadful question of cash, and the only

virtue they recognize is profit Predators, that's what they are, formidable predators. They're ready to march over the body of Christ if they feel it'll help fill their pockets. And if you aren't willing to go along with them, they haul out the heavy artillery(87).

Americans are blind to the great civilization of Iraq. They are materialists who view Iraq as nothing but a repository of oil. Americans show no respect for the culture and traditions of the Iraqis Examples include destroying mosques.

Westerners do not respect Others' religions and their values. Sayed and Yaseen remind the protagonist that Americans do not have a sense of honor and dignity unlike Arabs; they are devoid of morality. Sayed explains that these people "can watch their wives in bed with their best friends and act as nothing's wrong"(86). Americans who are ignorant of the Arabs' culture do not know that honor is the most privileged value for the Arabs, and that it might lead to murder. Westerners believe that their values are the best and the right ones; hence, they must be universal. The only means to spread these Western values is to impose them by power and violence. Dr. Jalal told Mohammed that he no longer adheres to the Western ways of viewing the world which they tried to impose on others. He says: "The exchange rate they charged me is no longer current. I'm my own unit of measurement. My own stock market. My own dictionary. I made the decision to revise and redefine everything I knew. To prescribe *my own truth*"(137).

According to 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. Dr. Jalal says to his friend Mohammed Seen who is a novelist,

Once upon a time, 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(137).

According to Dr. Jalal, the Arab world that has always been erased and silenced in Western discourse has regained its power of speech to define itself and to write its own version of Truth which is falsified by the West.

According to Sayed, life in the West is based on the Darwinian rule of survival for the fittest. He says: “They arrive here from an unjust, cruel universe with no humanity and no morals, where the powerful feed on the flesh of the downtrodden. Violence and hatred sum up their history. Machiavellianism shapes and justifies their initiatives and their ambitions””(86). For Sayed, the West is devoid of humanity and morality. They are able to do anything to achieve their aims. They have no reference of morality that could preclude their

brutal acts. Sayed says: “What can they comprehend of *our* world?, which has produced the most fabulous pages in the history of human civilization? Our fundamental values are still intact; *our* oaths are unbroken; *our* traditional point of reference are the same. What can they understand about us?”(87). This quote reveals the clash of civilizations and the impossibility or difficulty of mutual understanding between the East and the West.

Sayed’s group aspires to fight back the West and to regain the glorious times of the Arab civilization. The protagonist was longing for a suicide bombing, but Sayed didn’t send him. Sayed was planning to send him on a mission which was more important than suicide bombing. This mission, Sayed says, is “the most important mission ever undertaken in history. The *final* mission. The mission that will bring about the unconditional capitulation of the West and return us permanently to our proper role on the world’s stage”(117). By defeating the West, Arabs will claw back their prominent role in the world as in the old times.

The clash of civilization, which amounts to violence, includes the religious question. Dr. Jalal, in his conversation with the protagonist makes a reference to an incident in Amsterdam in which a Muslim killed a Dutch filmmaker “because of a blasphemous documentary that showed a naked woman covered with verses from the Qur’an”(125). According to Samuel Huntington, the main difference between civilizations is religion. Thus, the most important clash of civilizations is the conflict between the Islam and the West. In his

words, “the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a clash of civilizations”(32).The novel debunks the Western myth which associates violence with Islam. In fact, It is not Islamic fundamentalism which pushed people to become jihadists; this is very clear in the character of Dr. Jalal who used to drink wine and court women. Dr. Jalal has been teaching in European universities for years. During his sojourn there, he was always attacking the Arabo-Islamic world. Then, he rebelled against the West, and he became a supporter of jihadists in Iraq. Violence of the Iraqis does not emanate from the madness of some Muslim fundamentalists. It is used as a means of self-defense.

In the last chapter, there is an important encounter between Dr. Jalal and Mohammed Seen the novelist. The latter, who is too dreamy, tried to convince Dr. Jalal that they might fight them and change their minds with the pen instead of violence. He believes that they should get rid of stereotypes and binary thinking, something which the West cannot do. They will always look at Arabs as barbarian anti-modernized people. Dr. Jalal states: “The West isn’t modern; it’s rich. And the ‘barbarians’ aren’t barbarians; they’re poor people. Who don’t have the wherewithal to modernise”(136). The West defines barbarians as those who are poor and the modern as those who are rich.

While Mohammed Seen still believes in the possibility of a mutual understanding and dialogue between cultures, Dr. Jalal thinks that the world is in the heyday of a hot clash of civilizations. Dr. Jalal told Mohammed: “You’re caught between two worlds, Mohammed. It’s a very comfortable position to be in. We’re in the midst of a clash of

civilizations. You're going to decide which camp you're in"(138). Cultural dialogue is possible only if the West respects other human beings and their cultures. It can be a reality if the West avoids all kinds of discrimination and gets rid of its imperialistic creeds.

Dr. Jalal told the protagonist about the West's intellectual racism, which is an aspect of the clash of civilizations. He says:

True racism has always been intellectual. Segregations begins as soon as one of our books is opened [...] The West is nothing but an acid lie, an insidious perversity, a siren song for people shipwrecked in their identity quest. The West calls itself "welcoming" but in fact it's just a falling point, and once you fall there, you can never get back up completely(9).

Dr. Jalal considers Westerners as racists who degrade Arabs even if they are genius. This is clear in Dr. Jalal and Prof. Ghany, "who worked for decades in the most prestigious American research institutions before being kicked out *because he was an Arab and a Muslim*"(126).

The West does not like and respect Arabs, even the highly intellectual ones. Arab elites, who live in the West, try to assimilate to the foreign culture, but their intellectual merits are not recognized. Dr. Jalal tells the protagonist:

They thought they'd find a homeland for their knowledge and fertile soil for their

ambitions in Europe. And when they saw they weren't welcome, for some stupid reason they decided just to hold on as well as they could. Since they subscribed to Western values, they took for granted the ideals people whispered in their ears: freedom of expression, human rights, equality, justice, Bright, shining words"(9).

Iraqis realized the fact that Americans' occupation of Iraq is not to end the tyranny of Saddam and spread security, democracy and freedom; it's to steal the wealth of Iraq, destroy its civilization, and prevent its advancement. The Falcon says:

They're businessmen; we are commodities, we are commodities, and they are ready to trade. Yesturady, it was oil for food. Today, it's Saddam for oil [...] If the Americans had an ounce of human kindness, they wouldn't treat their blacks and their Latinos like subhumans. Instead of crossing oceans to come to the aid of some poor, emasculated raghead, they'd do better to put their own house in order. They could do something about the Indians they've got rotting away on their reservations, kept out of sight like people with some shameful disease (19).

What Falcon implies is that America's attitudes towards others makes its barbarism very evident despite its claims of humanism. In this respect, Todorov states: "Barbarians are those who deny the full humanity of others. This does not mean that they are really ignorant or

forgetful of their human nature, but that they behave as if others were not human, or entirely human”(16).Americans’ mission of restoring democracy to Iraqi people is opposed to their home policy of social discrimination, because blacks and Indians in the US do not enjoy the human rights which America wanted to spread in Iraq.

Conclusion

Yasmina Khadra’s novel *The Sirens of Baghdad* depicts violence and terror in Post-colonial Iraq. America’s heinous crimes are the direct reason for the rise of counter-terrorism, which sometimes takes the grab of terrorism. America’s violence and some extremist forms of Iraqis’ resistance exemplify two kinds of terrorism. The first is motivated by imperialist creeds and cultural genocide, while the second is a kind of counter-terrorism; in other words, a defensive reaction to terrorism. That is, vengeance is one of the main motives behind Iraqis’ violent attacks. The novel evinces the interchangeability of the terms victim and terrorist. Like the American soldiers, Iraqis undertake violence, hence, they reverse the binary opposition victim and oppressor and show the possibility of the reciprocity of violent terror. The novel vindicates that Samuel Huntington’s theory of the clash of civilizations applies to the raging war in Iraq. Hence, the hostility between the East and the West will exacerbate in the future, and the world will fall prey to these conflicts.

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