

عن الدماء والنار: للعشرية السوداء بالجزائر في رواية خرفان المولى لياسمينه خضرة

## On Blood and Fire: A Retelling of Algeria's Black Decade in Yasmina Khadra's *Les agneaux du Seigneur*

A Propos de Sang et de Feu : Un Récit de la Décennie Noire de l'Algérie en *Les agneaux du Seigneur* de Yasmina Khadra

\*Fouzia Ziane<sup>1</sup>, Assia Baghdadi<sup>2</sup>, Rachid Mehdi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Language and Literature, University of Msila, Msila, Algeria,  
[ziane.fouzia15@gmail.com](mailto:ziane.fouzia15@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of English Language and Literature, University of Msila, Msila, Algeria,  
[assia.baghdadi@univ-msila.com](mailto:assia.baghdadi@univ-msila.com)

<sup>3</sup> Department of English Language and Literature, University of Bejaia, Bejaia, Algeria,  
[rachidmehdi06@gmail.com](mailto:rachidmehdi06@gmail.com)

Reçu le:03/06/2021

Accepté le:06/07/2021

Publié le:28/12/2021

### Abstract:

Many literary works have revolted to study the apocalyptic reality of 1990s Algeria in its fight against terrorism. Among the pens which rose to write and describe the violence the Algerians were living in: that of Yasmina Khadra. This writer, but also an ex-officer in the Algerian military body, through his novel *Les agneaux du Seigneur* tempts to unveil a state of decomposition and desolation of a society prey to the civil war. The core aim of this article is to examine how *Les agneaux du Seigneur* portrays, explores, and analyzes the Algerian Civil War. Indeed, the article analyzes and interprets the novel through a profound historical and literary contextualization. Algeria's disorder, its sluggish state, the Islamist movement (The

\* Fouzia Ziane:ziane.fouzia15@gmail.com

Islamic Salvation Front- FIS), the insurgency, and the dreadful bloody violence that continued throughout the 1990s are crucial thematic elements used to understanding the civil war.

**Keywords :** Algeria – FIS – Khadra - *Les agneaux du Seigneur* - terrorism – violence

## Résumé

De nombreuses œuvres littéraires se sont révoltées pour étudier la réalité apocalyptique de l'Algérie des années 1990 dans sa lutte contre le terrorisme. Parmi les stylos qui se sont levés pour écrire et décrire la violence dans laquelle vivaient les Algériens : celui de Yasmina Khadra. Cet écrivain, mais aussi ex-officier du corps militaire algérien, à travers son roman *Les agneaux du Seigneur*, tente de dévoiler un état de décomposition et de désolation d'une société en proie à la guerre civile. L'objectif principal de cet article est d'examiner comment *Les agneaux du Seigneur* dépeint, explore et analyse la guerre civile algérienne. En effet, l'article analyse et interprète le roman à travers une profonde contextualisation historique et littéraire. Le désordre de l'Algérie, son état morose, le mouvement islamiste (Front islamique du salut-FIS), l'insurrection et les terribles violences sanglantes qui se sont poursuivies tout au long des années 1990 sont des éléments thématiques cruciaux pour comprendre la guerre civile.

**Mots clés:** Algérie– FIS – Khadra - *Les agneaux du Seigneur* - terrorisme – violence

## المخلص:

نارت العديد من الأعمال الأدبية لدراسة الواقع المروع للجزائر في التسعينيات في حربها ضد الإرهاب. من بين الأقلام التي نهضت لتكتب وتصف العنف الذي يعيشه الجزائريون: ياسمين خضرة. هذا الكاتب، ولكن أي ضابط سابق في الهيئة العسكرية الجزائرية، من خلال روايته خرفان المولى، يغري بالكشف عن حالة من التحلل والخراب لمجتمع فريسة للحرب الأهلية. الهدف الأساسي من هذا المقال هو دراسة كيفية تصوير خرفان المولى واستكشاف وتحليل الحرب الأهلية الجزائرية. في الواقع، تحلل المقالة وتفسر الرواية من خلال سياق تاريخي وأدبي عميق. إن الفوضى في الجزائر ودولتها الراكدة والحركة الإسلامية (الجمعة الإسلامية للإنقاذ) والتمرد والعنف الدموي المروع الذي استمر طوال التسعينيات هي عناصر موضوعية حاسمة استخدمت لفهم الحرب الأهلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإرهاب - الجمعة الإسلامية للإنقاذ - الجزائر - العنف - خرفان المولى - خضرة

## - Introduction

If the mainstream that media chronicle the pages of history is veracious, then the history of Algeria throughout the 1990s was substantially left with skepticism and unanswered queries. The expulsion of international press from the country and the state's control of domestic media impelled the public to rely on state narratives of the violence. Often, the accounts reported the regime's accusation of Islamists on the violence and massacres. In adducing government-controlled media, *The Washington Post*, for example, reported in January 4, 1998 that "in one night this week, more than 400 men, women and children were butchered by unidentified terrorists in four neighboring villages, the Government said" [emphasis added] (Charles Trueheart). With little access to information, the government could grip public perception leaving everybody suspicious of everything and everyone.

At this time and without any alternate narratives, many Algerian writers revolted to starkly portray the sense of prevalent horror and the unfathomability of the violence. The novel pondered in this article endeavors to take up this problem. *Les agneaux du Seigneur*, by Yasmina Khadra, is a good literary work to approach the Algerian Civil War. *Les agneaux du Seigneur* is chosen for its eminence as an illustrative and well-appraised novel as well as its contribution to the public memory of the 1990s.

The dreadful instability that hit Algeria during the 1990s was not a transient phenomenon, especially because it inset many changes in the entity of the state and the society as well. Since its independence in 1962, Algeria has been ruled by the military backed National Liberation Front (FLN a French abbreviation of *Front de Libération Nationale*). Historically, the uni-party system has long dominated the state. It was until 1989 that Algeria introduced the multi-party system to its constitution. Under these reforms, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS a French abbreviation of *Front Islamique de Salut*), a newly born party, gained 188 out of 232 seats in the legislative elections of December 1991. This victory for the FIS characterized a threat to the long dominating FLN, the fact that led the military to intervene to cancel the second round of elections and to force president Chadli Bendjedid from office in a *coup d'état*. As the situation worsened, the military took power and the FIS and all the parties based on religion were outlawed, and tens of thousands of their activists

were jailed. These events soon culminated into violent clashes between the Algerian regime and the Islamist rebel groups, who were considered as political terrorists. The consequent riots and terrorism operations marked the beginning of a bloody decade.

In fact the losses, human and material, in addition to the repercussions resulting from the insecurity and instability, and their overlapping causes inspired many thinkers, writers and novelists. However, the novelistic view in regards to the Algerian crisis represents but a dot in the Algerian literary sphere. This, for one reason or another, is related to the apathy of the Algerian writer towards the Black decade. Yet, many attribute this reluctance to tackle the horrific experience, and to treat it artistically and literarily to two main threats the first of which is murder. Many writers refused to deal with such a topic in their works for they feared they would lose their lives, just like Abou Bakr Belkaid and Abd El Kader Alloula. The second menace was exile; for many, meeting the fate of Rachid Boujedra, Wassini Laradj and Rachid Mimouni constituted a barrier towards treating subjects related to the bloody experience.

However, for the fact that cause-effect relationships in social and political phenomena do not need argumentation, the black decade had to impose itself in literary works be them in prose or in poetry. Though their writings came somehow late, some writers came to grips with different aspects of the dreadful experience. The social, political and even the cultural turn-offs that their works covered reflected their ability to portray the tragic images, and their ability to freely express their attitudes and views in what concerns terrorism.

This paper explores how *Les agneaux du Seigneur* depicts and diagnoses the Algerian Civil War. Following a general introduction to the literary manifestations that characterized the 1990s history, and how the writers of the period differently portrayed the causes of the civil war. Section 2 introduces us to Yasmina Khadra, author of the novel. Section 3 explores the novel and the way in which it employs the metaphor of social problems to elucidate the roots of the civil war. Section 4 holds that the eloquent use of clips of violence by *Les agneaux du Seigneur* is meant to clarify political truths to the reader. It also argues that *Les agneaux du Seigneur* is a replication of the state narrative to a detail. The Savage practices and the massacres which are still unfathomed and obscure are incessantly and plainly depicted as the action of the Islamists. This last section, furthermore, demonstrates that,

while the novel is seeking to roughly condemn the Islamists for the bloody war, the oeuvre faces the reality that the state itself is, to some extent, the one to blame.

### **1- Rewriting History: Literary Manifestations of the Civil War**

The plurality and variety of the literary manifestations formed an important factor for the study of the novelistic view in what concerns Algeria's security crisis. This gave the Algerian novelists an opportunity to identify their position in regards to the prevailing circumstances of the time. This situation of terror that prevailed in the North African country promoted the emergence of the Algerian literature of the French expression of the 1990s. This literature, which appeared under the difficult and terrifying circumstances of the tragic political and social quake that hit the country, came under many nominations. *La littérature d'urgence* (emergency literature) is the term that was adopted in the francophone literary milieu. According to Maissa Bey, this term generated from the fact that the Algerian literary works between 1990 and 2000 were the result of the drastic *sudden* changes that ensued the Algerian society then (1996). In an interview published in *Algérie Littérature Action*, Maissa Bey said,

And then one day I had to feel the urgency to say, "to speak out" as one might carry out a torch. It was a necessity in the face of the increasingly precise threat of speech confiscation. I no longer had, I no longer have the right to continue to indulge in a contemplation that is too often narcissistic and sterile (1996).

However, many Algerian writers and critics disagreed with this terminology. For Wassini Laradj, this literature is no way a reaction to the crisis, instead it "is a documentation of the events of the black decade, just as the European literature during the two World Wars" (Mustafa, 1). Moreover, this literature, for Tahar Wattar, is more than just a documentation of events, "it is an artistic experience that personifies the real misery of the innocent" (Ben Toumi, 2014). Hence, the "Literature of the Ordeal" is the nomination that these writers and critics gave to describe a black bloody period. Maouchi believes that the literature of the 1990s is an armed literature for it deals with the themes of violence, murder and those of the supremacy of the logic of weapons (Hamdoune, 19).

The struggle to give one agreed-upon explanation of the 1990s violence is undoubtedly a conflicted affair. This is partly due to the incompatible realities between the state narrative and the popular perceptions of the civil war. Thus, it is not surprising that the interpretation of the Algerian national history during the 1990s has challenged and confused writers. To take an example, a comparison of the viewpoints of Assia Djebbar, Yasmina Khadra, Wassini Laradj, Leila Maraouane, Taher Wattar, Rachid Mimouni, among many others shows controversial stands when explaining violence of the civil war. One explanation, accounted for by Yasmina Khadra, adopts the state explication: that the civil war was the result of felonious zealotry where a group of the nation, driven by religious radicalism, rebelled against a secular state, and was determined to assume control of the state. The only option for the state was to use violence to reinstate stability within society. Another explanation, presented by Ahmed Hanifi in an interview with France24, suggests that the state being corrupt is the actor to blame for the bloody civil war. Yet in *Les agneaux du Seigneur*, Khadra places some of the blame on the government for it left the majority of the population unemployed, poor, marginalized and desperate though the oeuvre is largely sympathetic to state actions and highly condemns the Islamists for the violence. Thus, Khadra's *Les agneaux du Seigneur* is highly suggestive on this point.

### 2- Yasmina Khadra

One of the few writers who artistically could transfer the reality of the massacres that spread long the country is Yasmina Khadra. The literary production of this author engages in an actuality marked by events of violence and horror due to terrorism.

It is known to those interested in the Algerian literary production that Yasmina Khadra is his *nom de plume* that signed his first novels. It was until 1999 that the writer revealed his masculine identity and real name. He is Mohamed Moulesshoul, a former superior officer of the Algerian general staff. He was among those few who leaned on their testimony and experience to put the political tragedy in a literary template. The circumstances of inferno and the tragic and terrifying reality of the country were a source of inspiration to the novelist. The state of violence gave birth to the emergence of a series of literary works which later fell under the nomination of *la littérature d'urgence*, or the

literature of emergency. The latter, as seen before, was born during the Black decade and won its autonomy through the particular features of its content where it describes the violence, the terror and the quotidian dread lived by the Algerian at the time.

Yasmina Khadra is known for his novels of the Black series which were permeated in the depths of the Algerian life. Above all, he is one of the leading Algerian writers whose works are translated into many languages and glorified in the international literary sphere. Through his outstanding writings, Khadra could win many international prizes such as the Grand Prix of Literary Associations in 2018.

### **3- Repression, Civil War and Terrorism in *Les agneaux du Seigneur***

*Les agneaux du Seigneur* shows how, in a given time, the Islamic Jihadist movement in Algeria dominated the situation through exploiting the marginalized, the abused and the defeated in society. For this, the literary work does not pertain directly to the problem of terrorism, in which the majority of the characters are enclosed to, as it mainly deals with a phenomenon that protruded from the prevalent cultural and religious environment with its rules, teachings, customs, symbols, and references. The writer, hence, sheds light on the other facet of a culture that contributed in to the production of petrification, aggressiveness and despotism of opinion.

The dogma upon which the believers perceive themselves the successors of God, the masters of others, the truth holders, and the righteous ones is the skeleton on which the novel manifests itself. Moreover, the fundamentalist view adopted in the novel clearly demonstrates how the existing legislation provided answers and solutions to different current questions and issues. This can be seen through the "Dactylo", the intellectual public writer. The character of the "Dactylo" is perceived in the work as the one who antagonizes everything related to Islam, and through his ideas and acts he molests the system of Muslims.

However, the October 1988 events and the raging of violence embodied in the return of Cheikh Abbas to the village, a young imam of good reputation, change the quotidian life of the people and the structure of the village.

In the first chapters, the reader is introduced to Ghachimat, a tiny isolated village not far from Algiers, and its inhabitants. Ghachimat overlooks a chain of mountains called *Djebel*

*El Khouf*, the "Mountains of Terror". The choice of the name Ghachimat reflects its harsh nature and the negative influence it exercises on its people. For Bechter, the name Ghachimat is composed of two words; *Ghachi*, which means "ordinary people", and *mat*, which signifies "death" (38). The name Ghachimat connotes "death of the miserable." In the hamlet, people know each other since infancy, envy each other, dispute over a place in the café, contend to marry a girl, and misconceive those living in misery.

Since October 88, where Algiers rebelled against the ogres of the regime, the Muslim Brothers inexorably emerge from the hiding. The tribal hierarchy that managed the fate of the *douar*, that placed the right of the primogeniture above some, and the filial piety above all, seen every day shoved by the young contestants. The old tempt to return to the liability, but their frequent tergiversations permit the flock of the Cheikh to win the dangerously bulimic expansionists (Khadra, 57).

The fundamentalists gradually penetrate the village, the old is excluded, strong friendships break, and the oppressed seeks to revenge. The author depicts an image of the activity of a secret Islamist movement in the village. "The filthy beast wakes up," writes Khadra, "and nothing can stop it" (66). Despite their small number, the inhabitants of the hamlet differ in their attitudes toward the new stream that raided their environment. In this regard, the author makes an artistic symmetry between the lives of the people of Ghachimat. All of the characters in the novel have different relationships with violence. While some are introduced as the perpetrators of the terrorist acts, others are presented as a victim of it.

Because of his antagonism towards the fundamentalist movement, "Dactylo", the public writer of the village is assassinated by a terrorist group. This character is introduced to represent the worldly culture which opposes extremist ideology. "How does Dactylo know all this when he has never left the village? – Dactylo has read a pile of books. You only have to listen to him to be saturated with knowledge. He is not a failure like you," (Khadra, 114). The portrayal of Dactylo as a knowledgeable man clearly shows that he is a man who possesses an intellectual power that cannot be easily influenced by the fundamentalist wave.



Khadra introduces another intellectual man, "Hilal" the teacher, whose only hope is to marry the mayor's daughter, Sarah. Contrarily to Dactylo, Hilal is easily affected by the new wave of Jihadism that invaded the village, and adopts the extremist religious culture as a revenge on the society which cut short his hopes of marrying his beloved. This is why, he decides to join the insurgency.

In his house which fell in darkness, Hilal was listening to the procession as it approaches, and waiting like a prisoner waiting for the moment of his execution. His mother and sisters left the village towards the city to avoid attending the party. As for him, he remained stuck near the window, wishing flood to the whole people of the village. He did not eat anything since the morning. When Tedj came looking for him, he acted as if the house was empty. After Tedj was gone, the teacher [Hilal] vandalized the garden, and then joined his room to smash everything. When he saw the first procession, the procession of Sarah, he muttered with a malevolent curse. Now, here is Allal riding a horse to join his bride. Handsome and bright as he is, surrounded by his cheery friends. His legs collapsed under his body, and wished death before falling down to earth (Khadra, 99).

Hilal is named the "Afghan" because he went to Afghanistan for a mission Cheikh Abbas suggested. When returned to the village, Hilal is appointed "Amir" of a terrorist group.

Allal Sidhoum, Hilal's best ex-friend, to whom Sarah is married is a man of strength, hope and goodwill. As a police officer, Allal is portrayed as a representation of the state which is a symbol of power and authority. However, his assassination projects the image of the state as "a victim" of the terrorist act.

Allal fell in front of his wife's body. His hesitant hand reached out to touch the hair scattered on the lawn. He shot a groan: why Lord, why. Rahal turned, saw the policeman [Allal] bending over his wife and taking her in his arms, and shouted: No. It was too late: a terrible explosion pushed Allal and Sarah across the interstice of the forest, in a whirlwind of fire and flesh (Khadra, 225).

The author draws attention to the state of ambivalence that featured some characters. This category is mainly summed in "Zane", the dwarf, who is always picked on and is constantly debased by the habitants of the village because of his height. Zane epitomizes deprivation, deterioration and indignation. He finds himself helpless before the contempt of the villagers. When violence erupts, Zane unhesitatingly becomes a secret agent of a terrorist group. Desire for revenge on a society that has frequently deprived him respect and opportunism gives way to Zane to engage in barbaric, criminal actions: "Perched on a wall, Zane looks like a bird of prey. His stretched pupils glow with a terrifying light. He knows his revenge is near, and time is already on his side" (Khadra, 58).

Like Hilal, Issa the Disgrace who was a snitch for the French intelligence during colonial times represents ignominy in the novel.

Issa had collaborated with the SAS during the war, when he was the only Arab to frequent the French soldiers' mess. True, he hadn't squalled on anyone or roughed people up, but he committed the sin of attending to his belly at a time when his countrymen were dying of hunger and gall. At the end of the war, guerrillas confiscated his things and were on the verge of crucifying him in the public square. Without the intervention of Sidi Saim the Venerated, his corpse would have been rotted on the riverbank. In Ghachimat, grudge is the main provider of collective memory. Today, Issa still pays. His clothes are smelly. He rarely eats his fill (ibid, 19).

His son, Tedj hates all the villagers because they confiscated him every dignity:

After returning home, Tedj grabbed his father's shoulders and said: -It's all over, do you hear me? – What is over, my son? – Insult... humiliation. From this moment, you will raise your head and walk straight through the people of the village. And nobody will have the courage to despise you like before, I promise you. I'll shut everyone's mouth at once (ibid, 92).

Djafer who represents the socio-economic problems of the Algerian, unemployed and annoyed, wonders all day long to do nothing.

When I try to reevaluate the scenario of my life, I discover that it doesn't deserve the slightest pause. Twenty-seven years of trivia. Days are emptier than nights. You

wake up in the morning to sleep in the evening. And you have been stupefied by the repeated events. Reactions are always the same; trivia are the same (ibid, 16).

Throughout the novel, the author employs this symmetry to bare the cultural and social disparity that prevailed in the Algerian society before the security crisis. *Les agneaux du Seigneur* does not restrict itself to dealing with the aspects of terrorism; it instead attempts to penetrate the depths of the phenomena that led to it, and the consequences that resulted there from.

#### **4-Interpreting Violence in Yasmina Khadra's Work**

In a climate of terror and suspicion, *Les agneaux du Seigneur* chooses to break the silence and tell the savagery of the Islamist fundamentalism that shook a fragile Algeria which, then, had not recovered yet from all its wounds of the 132 years of French colonialism. Khadra, in the novel, presents the multi-faceted violence that agitated his mother land, be it political, social, religious or even linguistic.

The work is profoundly marked by the seal of political violence. *Les agneaux du Seigneur* tells how the civil war wins Ghachimat, a "quiet", "lazy" village (ibid, 47). The narration is accentuated with real events that constitute key moments in the history of the country. The cancellation of the victory of the FIS in the 1990 elections provoked the start of the reign of chaos,

Algiers is a bloodbath! Thousands of youths are in the streets. Shops and administrative buildings set fire. The police don't know where to turn. They fired into the crowd. People are talking the deaths by the dozen. Algiers is a war zone. Hundreds killed. The people are rebelling against the regime. It's the people rising up against the dogs that subjugated them (Khadra, 59-60).

On Friday, after the prayer, the crowd purposely closed the roads where there was a police station to chant 'no democracy, no constitution, only the Quran and the Sunnah (ibid, 116).

These acts among many were considered as a declaration of war in which the state forces replied by the arrest of the leaders of the movement, "Brothers, our leaders have been

arrested. The members of the *Mejlès* are all in prison, and Cheikh Abbas also" (ibid, 116). This ebb and flow between the two sides begins to engulf the country in a swamp of blood.

The novel not only reproduces the weft of the tragic events but also explains the origin of this crisis.

Religion has no involvement in what is happening, says Dactylo. This is misleading, dear. And from the start the problem is in another place. A secretly orchestrated plan. They laughed at the poor people. They separated them and said to some: these are the "tyrants", and they said to some: these are the terrorists. And they withdrew to let them fight. It is about big capitals, big money, and profitable investment (Khadra, 138).

The state, one of these two forces, is presented as corrupt: "the ogres of the regime" (ibid, 57). Mass unemployment, misery, and poverty fueled animosity toward a state that betrayed the hopes of the people. Hilal says:

I also thought this was a giant country for me. After two years of faltering study, I realized I am running into a vicious circle like a broken screw. So, I went back to the village even though nothing of value was happening in this wasteland (ibid, 14).

Thus, any surrogate to the status quo seemed appealing. This fact made a large number of the people ready to be indoctrinated, open to the subversive ideas of the fundamentalists: "in my country, a tainted state confiscated the dreams of our youth to keep but the meanders of a nightmare, the result: fundamentalism" (Khadra, interview).

The gap between the people and their governors gave way to the second force, fundamentalism, to spread. A large number of FIS members were not driven by ideological objectives, but more pragmatic wills; the FIS was "a channel for resentment, hope, and revenge" (Martinez, 46). The party, according to John Entelis, "owed its success and rapid implantation to the spiritual values it conveyed, the condemnation of corruption, and its willingness to address real social problems." (66). These facts oppose the state's constant depiction of Islamists as bigoted thugs. In a passage from the novel, Zane says,

We are a nation that only walks with a baton on the head. There's nothing like a kick to the bottom to rock us. The proof is that since [Islamists] seized power, we are no

longer obliged to pay a bribe to employees or to beg nurses. Everything runs like clockwork. Moreover, they are fighting for Islam and I am a Muslim (Khadra, 113). However, Khadra eventually denies this idea to interpret the civil war. An ex-officer in the Algerian military, it is not surprising then that Khadra depicts the civil war as a confrontation between state heroes and fanatic terrorists, portraying the state's repression as a legitimate response.

The novel also unveils all the hidden facets of terrorism: intolerance towards the religious Hadj Salah, racism against Hadj Maurice, and mainly its hatred of the intellectual Dactylo. Khadra shows, through these characters, the extent to which the terrorists hate these men who seek to awake the people, in the novel Hilal tells Dactylo: "I am scared of books, Dactylo, be them written by poets or by Imams. They invariably put me in a ball" (ibid, 195).

*Les agneaux du Seigneur* is then a black fiction which puts the reader in a horrific atmosphere where obsessions linked to death are the master words.

Social violence, however, constitutes those controversial links based on an abuse of and an unjust use of power, links that emerge from a corrupt puissance, links that make of the strong a tyrant and of the weak a slave.

Based on the idea that men are superior to women, and that a man has all the right to a master's privileges; women are marginalized and stunned to withdraw. "So, where are the women in *Les agneaux du Seigneur*? Erased characters, abused victims or abusive stepmothers, these are the women of Yasmina Khadra" (Dardinga, 99). These characters do not have the status as the masculine characters. They are even not given names; we only know them through names that have a relation to a man. The mother of Allal Sidhoum: "Allal's mother acquiesces, frightened and attentive to the instructions of her sister" (Khadra, 83). "The mother of Allal finished praying" (ibid, 161). The two sister of Allal: "Two sisters long withered" (ibid, 161). "The two girls join their mother in the patio" (ibid). The wife of Hadj Salah: "Someone knocks at the door, says the wife" (ibid, 123).

Those who have names are ignored in the novel, as if they were punished. They occupy some lines with very little information, insufficient to know about their age, physique

or identity. These women are women who transgress the taboos of Ghachimat. They are, thus, impure women (Mansour, 35). Mammy: "And if we went to Mammy the bitch?" (ibid, 15). Sarah, the mayor's daughter, is described by Abbas as "a wanton, a succubus possessed by depraved spirits. She walks bare head, the calf unveiled, and she talks loud in the street" (ibid, 94).

Women in the novel play no role. Powerless as they are, they live under men's dominance and bow to their orders. "And you, mother, despite the affronts possible to happen, simply because I want it, you take your daughters, cakes, and go to demand her hand" (ibid, 38). They are a simple object of desire "the drama of humanity starts when a woman is loved; she then has no right but to satisfy her master" (ibid, 93).

In fact, women in the novel are deprived of the least of their liberty to be left with absolutely nothing. They are being tortured "At four a.m. they are erect, and with kicks they awake their sisters for the prayer" (Khadra, 59), "We will sodomize your wife, drill her eyes, pluck her fingers and back's skin, carve her bosoms, tear her apart with a metal saw" (ibid, 163); and raped "Some little girls were kidnapped, raped and dismembered in the forest" (ibid, 135), "(Zane) squats before the two girls, lifts the dress of one and undertakes to untie his pants" (ibid, 163).

In *Les agneaux du Seigneur*, the writer depicts how the 1990s Algeria has changed to an anarchic society. Chaos and disorder are the words that can best describe the moldiness of social links. The respect, that long shaped the son-father filial relations, now belongs to a gone epoch. "My child, he is barely ten, makes ungracious remarks about me" (ibid, 59). "My eldest repelled my hand. Not a second his arm did not get ashamed of his act" (ibid). "I will get mad. He treats me as a renegade, me, his father, three-time pilgrim" (ibid, 60).

The elimination of this kind of social links is a kind of violence because the system of values becomes trashed. Thus, the nation becomes scatter-brained easy to manipulate by the terrorists.

Religion and violence can coexist only in extreme cases in which *Les agneaux du Seigneur* is about. It conveys the message that Islam is not a source of violence but,

contrarily, a victim of it. "These people have nothing to do with Islam. Dactylo told me that they are deviates. They use religion as a cover. They want to endorse global fundamentalism under the authority of the Iranians." (Khadra, 113).

In the novel, religious violence starts with its title. For "les agneaux du Seigneur", the lambs of the Lord, the first idea that comes to the reader is that of sacrifice which is defined by Oxford as "the act of slaughtering as an offering to a divinity". It is also a religious practice in Islam that dates back to the act of Abraham. This practice which symbolizes Man's total submission to his creator is found distorted in the novel; the terrorists do not sacrifice lambs in the name of God but human beings in the name of FIS. By reiterating the story of Abraham, Haj Salah Vainly tried to sensitize the terrorists who asked him of a *fatwa* authorizing the crime of murder.

God had a message to the entire nations by asking Abraham to kill his child, then offering him a lamb instead of the child. He wanted to make Man understand that faith has limits also, that it stops once a human's life is menaced. Because God knows what life is. It is in it that resides His generosity (Khadra, 127-128).

In fact, the religious violence in which the text talks about appears in the falsification of Islam and its principles to serve the ambitions of the proponents of the FIS who pretend to be God's servants. However, Khadra reveals the criminal identity of these terrorists to exculpate a religion fraudulently manipulated "They killed God in them. The only thing that motivates them is blood" (ibid, 166).

These expressions reflect the extent to which these terrorists are far from the teachings of Islam and Quranic recommendations,

If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder, or to spread mischief in the land – it would be as if he killed all mankind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind. And indeed there came to them Our Messengers with clear proofs, evidences, and signs, even then after that many of them continued to exceed the limits (e.g. by doing oppression unjustly and exceeding beyond the limits set by Allah by committing the major sins in the land (verse 32, The Table Served With Food).

Contrarily to what the verse says, Hilal, Zane, Tedj, and their fellows engaged in endless terrorist acts where killing and murder were their title.

The Linguistic violence which characterizes the Algerian novel of the 1990s is the product of the violence exercised on the people during the crisis. In this concern, *Les agneaux du Seigneur* makes no exception. In fact, the language in Khadra's novel can be considered as a cornerstone in the building of his masterpiece. In this regard, the writer uses a language that can fit the historical context it was put in, a language that can reflect and picture the tragic reality of terrorism through expressions of suffering, pain and soreness. The linguistic violence employed in the novel through the recurring use of atrocious words such as killing, murder, death, assassination, horror portrays the daily heinous practices the Algerian lived through.

The words used to express this violence reflect Khadra's straightforward and sometimes blunt manner in describing the Civil War. Living up to the aesthetics of his work, Khadra did not see fit to use euphemism to spare the reader. For him, the best way to express this reality is to deliver it as it is. In doing this, the language he has chosen to say the terror lived throughout the 1990s is clearly manifested in the form of tirades or through the voices of his characters who express their way of seeing the world that betrays their Hope's, and in a way which "justifies", not in the sense of excuse, their actions. He uses a language that is stripped of all sensitivity and deprived of all decoration and lyricism, and seems as crude as the events describe. This is a subtle didactic process employed by Khadra to enlighten the reader, not necessarily aware of the internal and external mechanisms that led these people to commit the unthinkable and the unspeakable, because certain horrors and the feeling they arouse cannot be materialized in words.

The large number of characters Khadra has used in *Les agneaux du Seigneur* certainly produces a diversity in language. Not limiting himself to a single linguistic register, Khadra keeps changing language level throughout his novel. This change of registers depends essentially on the place which frames the action, and on the characters who participate in it. The characters of the novel, whoever they are, young or old, use a language specific to the villagers. Through them, Khadra has tried to relate their way of speaking to the life they lead



to give the story an illusion of reality. It is about rediscovering a raw, primitive, concrete language which designates life as it is. Varied, this language can express the diversity of the world without going through tropes. Academic language loses its prestige, as does rhetoric. In light of this linguistic manipulation, Khadra could successfully set the tone of the people and the tone of upheaval. This lexical aspect of violence can be read in the words and expressions in the following excerpts: "I want to understand what the fuck is going on" (Khadra, 138), "You bastard. Sit down, go, and tell me how it is, a plow man's job" (ibid 115), "I want to see him debate like a fat old pig ... damn" (ibid, 155), "I sell dope ... and now fuck you" (ibid 142), "your heroism stops there ... son of a bitch" (ibid 162).

This lexicon belongs to the vulgar slang language, the reader is immediately stunned. The vulgarity and the lack of finesse inevitably arouse the interest of the reader who finds himself trapped in a text where the mixture of different registers of language offers him an unusual mosaic. In fact this mixture of literary and oral languages disrupt the rhythm of the novel and aim to exert a violent effect on the reader. The shock produced by the oral language used in the novel is important; on the one hand because it is specific to villagers and not to all social classes and, on the other hand because of the contrast between literary term and popular term existing in the same text. This meeting of two languages so far apart reinforces and accentuates the shock effect.

The elevated tone, shouting and slowing down of pronunciation are also reproduced in writing. The technique used by the author to do this is the cutting of words: "he-does-not-want-to-die... the others imitate him, and start chanting: he-does-not-want-to-die ... he-does-not-want-to-die" (ibid 174). Likewise, this cutting of the words and their repetition accentuates the tragic tone of the situation. In the end, it appears that the *Les agneaux du Seigneur* can be approached from a double perspective: on the one hand, as a fiction reflecting reality and bearing a critical eye on the Algerian society in the 1990s- on this subject Yasmina Khadra declares "it is obvious that the tragedy of my country gave a different meaning to my texts"- (Interview with Yasmina Khadra 1999), and on the other hand, as reflections on writing, based on a language that is played by word, and an oral language as if to reinforce this questioning of writing.

## 5- Conclusion :

This article has considered how *Les agneaux du Seigneur*, a francophone novel by Algerian author Yasmina Khadra, portrays the Algerian Civil War where the text submerges frontiers of fiction and attains its fortress in the real world. It is a text anchored in the tragic reality of the 1990s, a word inundated with violence and brutality which attempts to recall an apocalyptic state where humans have lost humanity. The novel presents a society torn by a civil war tortured by the savagery and barbarity of the Islamists, a society where politics is synonymous to corruption and religion is equivalent to vandalism. The reader hence finds himself drowned in the swirl of the Algerian experience and is unseated by a text which gives but shade in its clarity.

In its interpretation of Algerian 1990s history, this literary production potentially aligns with the state narrative though it suggests some injustices from the part of the state. This sympathetic stand towards the state is derived from his career in the Algerian military. In fact, his work is best read as denunciatory. While it largely condemns the Islamists of the massacres and the crimes of the civil war, it clearly shows state violent responses as legitimate and fair. The method *Les agneaux du Seigneur* proposes is by reassessing the sadistic tendencies of its characters whose acts are driven by revenge. In its conduct toward Islamists, it is worth mentioning that Khadra's work fails to humanize the terrorists when they are depicted as wrathful felons and ferocious thugs. The novel also refuses to represent their suffering because it suggests that their sentiments are never rightful.

Moreover, the article focuses on the novel's success in portraying Islamists as an evil. The idea here is not to propose that Khadra employed the state narrative to frame his interpretation of the civil war. Rather, the idea here is to shed light on Khadra's skillfulness in internalizing the presumption that Islamists are the major generators of and the ones to blame for the civil war.

### Works Cited

- 1) Achour. C. et Bekkat. A. *Clefs pour la lecture des récits convergences critiques II*. Alger : Éditions tell, 2002. p.72
- 2) Addi, Lahouari. "A l'ombre de la Tereur: L'armée algérienneconfisque le pouvoir." *Le Monde Diplomatique*. February 1998.
- 3) Ben Toumi, Liamine. *La problématique du terme "Littérature d'urgence"/ La transformation narrative*.<http://www.aswatelechamal.com/ar/?p=98&a=21620>.
- 4) Bey, Maissa. *Algérie Littérature Action*, No. 5, 1996.
- 5) Burtsher-Bechter, Beate. *Roman Blanc, écrit(ure) noire: Les Agneaux du Seigneur de Yasmina Khadra* (on line) :
- 6) [http://www.limag.refer.org/Textes/Toronto/Colloque1999.htm#\\_Toc524160707](http://www.limag.refer.org/Textes/Toronto/Colloque1999.htm#_Toc524160707)
- 7) Dardigna, Anne-Marie. *Les chateaux d'Eros*. Paris, Maspero, 1980.
- 8) Entelis, John. "Algeria: Democracy Denied, and Revived?" *Journal of North African Studies* 16, No. 4. December 2011. pp. 653-678.
- 9) France24: Interview with Ahmed Hanifi on the release of his novel "La folle d'Alger", collected by Amine Zerouati: [online] <http://www.france24.com/ar/20140904%D8%A7%D9>.
- 10) Hamdoune, Souad. "L'image de l'intellectuel dans les romans de Bashir Mufti. Master Thesis, Kasdi Merbah University, Ouergla, 2009.
- 11) *Interview with Yasmina Khadra* on the release of his novel "A quoi revent les loups", collected by Valerie Pabst, 1999 [on line]: [www.fnac.be/fr/html/auteurs/khadra/interview/htm](http://www.fnac.be/fr/html/auteurs/khadra/interview/htm)
- 12) Khadra, Yasmina. *Les agneaux du Seigneur*. Editions Julliard, France, January 1, 1998.
- 13) Mansour, Thérèse Michel. *La portée esthétique dans le roman maghrébin*. Paris, 1994.
- 14) Martinez, Luis. *The Algerian Civil War, 1990-1998*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000 (1998).
- 15) Mustafa, Faiza. *La littérature d'urgence revient au premier plan*. Al-Akhbar Newspaper, 2001.
- 16) Oxford Dictionary. *English Dictionary Online: definition of 'sacrifice'*.
- 17) *The Holy Quran. Arabic Text and English Translation*. Translated by Maulawi Sher Ali. Islam International Publications Limited. UK, 2004. P.
- 18) Washington Post Archive Online. *Algeria's Massacres, 1998*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/01/04/400-killed-in-algerian-massacres/a42d4124-e27e-4a1e-b816-288d88a3fdef/>