

## Narrative Collusion and Allegiance Justifying: A Cultural Critical Approach to *The Dictator's Last Night* Novel by Yasmina Khadra

<sup>1</sup>Adel BOUDIAR\* 

<sup>1</sup>Echahid Cheikh Larbi Tebessi University- Tebessa- Algeria

Received: 15 / 05 / 2024

Accepted: 07 / 07 / 2024

Published: 15 / 07 / 2024

### Abstract

Yasmina Khadra's novels adeptly navigate complex themes such as terrorism and revolution, employing a gripping narrative style that skillfully constructs a purposeful, creative storyline. This narrative technique is designed to accentuate the emotional dynamics and psychological transformations experienced by all participants throughout the depicted events. Commonly, Khadra interweaves a romantic subplot within his narratives, artfully blending reality with fiction. His novel, *The Dictator's Last Night*, vividly recounts the confrontation faced by Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi shortly before his demise. In this portrayal, Khadra draws a subtle yet profound parallel between revolution, portrayed as a fringe act of defiance, and authority, seen as a central, dominant force. This juxtaposition reveals Khadra's critical stance on revolutions; he views them as inherently unnatural acts that disrupt the transcendent balance of established centrism, regardless of the justification provided by their leaders. By delving into the depths of Gaddafi's ordeal and the dispositions of the rebels, Khadra exposes the complex layers of loyalty and violent opposition, illustrating how the revolution strayed from its noble intentions towards a path marred by gruesome vengeance and malevolent retribution.

**Keywords:** Allegiance, collusion, Cultural Critical Approach, *Dictator's Last Night*, Revolution, Yasmina Khadra

### ملخص

درج الكاتب الجزائري (ياسمينه خضرة) على مقارنة قضايا العنف في العالم، وعلى نقل أحداثه بلغة سردية شيقة وبحبكة فنية يشتغل ضمنها على جوانب العاطفة والتحويلات النفسية التي تؤثر في الإنسان الفاعل والمفعول به ضمن سيرورة الأحداث، وهو غالبا ما يضمّن النص قصة تفيض رومنسية؛ مازجا بين واقعية الحدث وخيالية الحكى. ففي رواية (ليلة الرئيس الأخيرة) التي ينقل فيها آخر الأحداث التي تعرض إليها الرئيس الليبي (القذافي) قبل اغتياله، فإنه يتصدى إلى موازنة ضمنية بين الثورة بوصفها فعلا هامشيا وبين مركزية السلطة، وهنا يتبين موقفه المعارض للثورات مهما كان موطنها أو تسميتها أو تصنيفها، فهو يقدم طرفي المعادلة الدامية بين المركز والهامش، ويميل بشكل ضمنى إلى الطرف السلطوي مرجحا ومسوغا الولاء، معتقدا أن الثورات مهما كانت عادلة فعل خارج عن قانون الطبيعة الذي لا يرضى بتجاوز المركزية الحاكمة؛ وفي هذه الرواية يقدم موازنة بين من ظلوا على وفائهم للرئيس حتى آخر لحظة في حياته، وبين طريقة المعارضة العنيفة التي أدت إلى جنوح الثورة عن شكلها النظيف، وهو ما يعزز تواطؤه السردى مع السلطة ويسوّغ فلسفة الولاء لها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تواطؤ، ولاء، ليلة الرئيس الأخيرة، ثورة، ياسمينه خضرة.

\***Author:** Adel BOUDIAR, **email:** [adel.boudiar@univ-tebessa.dz](mailto:adel.boudiar@univ-tebessa.dz)

## Introduction

Algerian literature, encompassing both Arabophone and Francophone novels, has played a pivotal role in shaping the historical narrative of Algeria from colonial times to the present. Distinctively, Arabophone novels have diverged from their Francophone counterparts in both content and narrative perspectives since the post-colonial era. This divergence is largely influenced by cultural and linguistic nuances, which significantly impact the thematic depth of these narratives.

Consequently, postcolonial Algerian novels vary greatly; some fail to adequately capture this cultural-linguistic shift, while others are crafted by proponents of post-colonial continuity who remained ideologically committed to the colonial legacy in nations reclaiming their independence. This allegiance is subtly indicated through certain narrative discrepancies and the depiction of characters who, under the guise of neutrality, advocate for a continuation of colonial values, often comparing the conditions of independent societies to perpetuate certain aspects of the colonial era and obscure their military legacies.

The focal point of this study is a writer who has extensively explored themes of humanism and is thus regarded as an authority on narratives about terrorism. Yasmina Khadra stands out as a humanist, particularly in his vehement denunciation of violence, especially armed violence, wherever it may occur. A deeper analysis reveals underlying, non-obvious elements that suggest an ideological stance against violence but with a bias toward powerful entities.

This ideological stance is encapsulated in the critique by (Oumssaad, 2018, p. 75), who notes that:

This fact preserves the symbolic meaning that demonstrates the expansion of imperialism's power and the persistence of its slogans endorsing racism, hybridity, and colonialism, which never believe in peace unless in the form of an endless war to wipe out its enemies. It also refutes peoples' rights to freedom, but only as creatures meant for slavery; to achieve such goals, colonialism tries to spread ignorance among such peoples to maintain its power and control. (p. 75)

Such dynamics could equally apply to internal dictatorships or governments that curtail individual freedoms under the pretext of safeguarding state or national interests.

Khadra's perspective opposes what is commonly recognized as "margin's terrorism," yet he acknowledges the legitimacy of "centre's terrorism." He posits that true stability and lasting peace can only be achieved when smaller groups remain subservient without opposing the dominant powers, effectively suggesting an end to terrorism through compliance.

This perspective underpins our analysis of *The Dictator's Last Night*, a novel that poignantly captures the final hours of the former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Khadra portrays Gaddafi in a light that emphasizes his human qualities right up to his death, subtly offering justifications for the policies that incited the revolt leading to his assassination. Our study prompts the author and readers of the novel to engage deeply with the ideological and cultural dimensions presented, maintaining objectivity about the writer's portrayal of reality, irrespective of how closely it mirrors or deviates from actual events.

The central inquiry of our study asks whether this novel, with its human-centric narrative, serves as a model for universal storytelling that addresses human issues transcending geography, affiliation, or status. Alternatively, it explores whether the novel forecasts the downfall of anarchic revolutionary movements, as exemplified by events like the Arab Spring.

Does Khadra defend an ideology of allegiance that prioritizes the interests of the ruling elite over individual and collective freedoms, or does he present an alternative viewpoint that encourages readers to approach contemporary issues with a renewed sense of objectivity?

### **Contemporary Algerian Novel's Topics**

The Algerian novel has boldly tackled complex themes that resonate on both local and international levels. Political motifs have permeated narrative literature in both Arabic and French since the colonial era, tracing back to early incorporations by authors like Stendhal, Tolstoy, and Wakens. It was, however, in the 20th century, amid evolving political landscapes that gave rise to discourses on conflicts, wars, freedom, dictatorship, and resistance to colonialism, that the explicit literary connection to politics became unmistakably clear. This period coincided with multiple occupations across regions like Asia, Africa, and Latin America, fostering a rich narrative production and artistic flourishing, as evidenced by the prolific literary output of the 20th century (Saad, 2006).

#### ***Traditional Topics***

Historically, Algerian novels, whether Arabophone or Francophone, have consistently mirrored global narrative trends by addressing social and historical issues, particularly the crimes and atrocities of colonialism. Notable among early works is Mohammed Ben Mostapha Ben Brahem's *Lovers Stories About Love and Nostalgia*, which may be the first narrative piece reflecting the impact of the French occupation in Algeria. (Mefkouda, 2005).

Pioneers like Mohammed Dib, Mouloud Feraoun, and Kateb Yacine, who were among the first to publish novels in French, managed to navigate the complex cultural terrain without succumbing to the pitfalls of a double identity, a challenge that other authors grappled with in varying degrees, often struggling with their national or linguistic affiliations (Hafnaoui, 2004).

#### ***Modern Topics***

Post-independence, Algerian novelists liberated themselves from the confines of merely addressing moral and social reform, expanding their thematic horizons in ways comparable to universal novelists. "The generation of the seventies, for various reasons, found themselves with greater access to diverse stories and literary works, enabling them to experiment with new literary forms. The era's most profound writers began exploring methods to enhance their narrative output, drawing on their cultural prowess, linguistic competencies, and both Arabic and global literary experiences (Fassi, 2000).

This trajectory of thematic expansion continued into the 1990s and beyond, initially focusing on fostering awareness about freedom and challenging outdated lifestyles, but gradually incorporating issues like identity, exemplified by the Amazigh issue. Contemporary novels now encompass a broad spectrum of themes, including terrorism, utopia, feminist narratives, the plight of marginalized groups, science fiction, mysticism, and otherness (Dik, 2003).

#### ***Text's Polyphony***

In examining *The Dictator's Last Night*, one might conclude the novel was penned in haste, evidenced by the absence of certain fundamental narrative elements typically present in comparable works. This absence, while possibly a deliberate explorative choice, suggests the novel fits within the genre of crisis fiction. Yasmina Khadra's focus on a singular moment—the president's last night, omits many details of the event, presenting it instead from a unique, victim-centric perspective, which allows the protagonist to shield himself or respond

posthumously. In this regard, Eljaachami (2022) highlighted that: “in narrative texts, the author often masks his attitudes behind the story through the novel's structural and creative framework.” He added that “this narrative endeavor might represent the author's quest for innovative possibilities or conditions conducive to renewal and modernization; or, the novel might interact with another narrative, creating a layered text: a novel within a novel” effectively crafting a people’s narrative within a president’s story (pp. 63-64).

The author adeptly arouses the reader's humanist consciousness by focusing on perspectives that diverge from prevailing opinions or current beliefs. In this context, while some may view the defense of the president's assassination as an opportunity to express sadness and remorse, contemporary political climates often discourage such expressions of emotion. This sentiment catalyzes the narrative, offering a fresh interpretation of imagined events crafted specifically to challenge and dismantle the official discourse.

Yasmina Khadra illustrates this through a poignant reflection on the protagonist's predicament: “My son Muatassim will be in charge of defending Syrt; he chooses an abandoned school in the center of District 2 for his general headquarters. The enemy speculates I am hidden elsewhere in a guarded castle since I am capable of adapting to harsh primitive conditions; they will never consider looking for me in such a desolate location. How did they forget that I am a Bedouin? Who is the humble leader and who are the humble leaders? That I am Elgueddafi, that I am the master, whether I am on my throne or sitting on one of those stones that show distances on the streets”(Khadra, 2016, p. 07).

This narrative choice not only reasserts the character's identity but also underscores the inevitability of his tragic realization as he confronts his mortality: “Between pride and mind, there is a certain aversion. When we manage our people, we lose ourselves in our dreamland and become disconnected from reality. But what have we actually governed? For what purpose? Power is ultimately a disdain: we deceive ourselves into believing we know, only to learn that all we know is incorrect. Instead of evaluating, we stubbornly view things as we wish them to be. I'm lonely. 'Lonely in this world’” (Khadra, 2016, pp. 86-87).

### ***Productive Conversation in the Text***

The novel excels in fostering a myriad of concepts through the dialogues crafted by the author, which not only express his viewpoints but also articulate his intended goals. These conversations, while occasionally contradictory, predominantly align with the thematic essence of the work. A particularly effective dialogue critiques Elgueddafi’s policies, highlighting their detrimental consequences which ultimately led to widespread enmity and his eventual demise:

“- President! ...

- Was I wrong with my people? He shouted.

- The unique infallible is Allah. He said at the end. I was very angry.

- Go to hell! Yesterday you had the honour to eat voraciously from my hand and now you spat in my face. The man had a guilty conscience and he is asking forgiveness. you did well your duty idiot! Do not mention guilty conscience when you talk about defending the country...

- I don not care about Arabs, he shouted flustered, you made it easy for them to exploit us. You despised them, insulted them, humiliated them, and you used to qualify them as scabby cattle guided by heinous dogs. It is logically hence that they welcome our collapse. (Khadra, 2016, p. 38).

In this text, Khadra sends a potent message to global authorities, urging them to reconsider their superficial alliances forged by money or power. He advocates for the establishment of genuine allegiances that remain steadfast and unyielding, enduring without dilution or decay.

### ***Sterile Conversations in the Text***

In the narrative, sterile conversations emerge as a viable yet complex form of discourse that attempts to transcend the deep-seated rejection one might feel towards an authority—an authority significant enough to provoke revolt yet simultaneously too imposing to fully reject. This inner conflict leads to a state of submissiveness borne out of fear of confusion and internal dissonance. As Barakat (2006) explained, "Such submitted behavior is also another unconscious operation to justify the impossibility of surviving in such dissonance, and thus succumbing does not suggest any transcending to alienation, it is rather a consolidation of reality" (p. 83).

A poignant example within the text is an argument between Elgueddafi and his son Seif El-Islam, following the Tunisian Spring Revolution. The exchange concludes with a sterile, cutting remark that serves as a double-edged sword: it highlights the leader's delusions of untapped potential while simultaneously mocking the Libyan rebels' belief that their efforts to overthrow their leader were anything but futile and humiliating:

- "It is a shame for all of us. He has the option to surrender. An Arabic president never surrenders. This pulverized person humiliates us and worsens our humiliated predicament.
- This does not apply to me.
- Damned, it is he who rules the authority. If he behaves with determination, order will be re-established. What are his army and police doing?
- Exactly the same thing done by drummers in military parades!
- What a scandal of leader!
- Seif, he has never been a leader! He was an ordinary plunging bourgeois pimp who was ready to run away for a minor disagreement. A pickpocket is more honourable than him. Seif became enraged. I embraced my grandson and turned my back on the television.
- Arab rebels always make me feel bored. As if a Mountain giving birth to a Mouse" (Khadra, 2016, p. 20).

These frivolous and sterile conversations serve two primary purposes within the narrative. Firstly, they allude to the chaotic and terror-filled reality of the night the president was assassinated, a night rife with delirium, sorrow, crude expressions, and irrational decisions. Secondly, they convey the infertility and inherent inability of the authority to evolve or improve its governance, implying that such a power, if capable of growth or adaptation, would not be destined to fail.

### ***Oriented Conversations in the Text***

The principal character of the novel articulates the oppressive nature of the tyranny imposed on the populace. This narrative device is employed to perpetuate the myth that the political failures of the authority are not due to any inherent flaws within its structure, but rather result from the people's inability to comprehend the nuanced administrative wisdom of its policies.

These policies require a deep understanding that goes beyond mere superficial perception. As such, the author crafts dialogues that strategically direct thoughts towards affirming the objectives of the authority's leader. Despite attempts to maintain a neutral tone,

these oriented discussions inevitably demonstrate a bias, as one party in the dialogue, who aligns with the authority, is portrayed fulfilling his role to support the established power unequivocally:

- \_ “ Am I unjust with my people?
- \_ Never! Shouted the servant... our country had never known an enlightened leader like you, nor a so generous father like you...
- \_ Do you want me to assume that the explosions I'm hearing outside are just party fireworks that I have no idea where they are? The servant felt as if all of the traitors' disgrace fell on his shoulders at once.
- \_ They must have their own reasons, isn't they?
- \_ I can not decide what reason Sir!
- \_ My intelligence should be blind and dumb, how could my intelligence services not be aware that something is being prepared... and ...
- \_ Tell me why they revolt against me?...
- \_ The overdose of reassurance may lead to weariness sometimes, thus some individuals try to provoke incidents to busy themselves.
- \_ By attacking me?
- \_ They think that a unique way for a man to become older is by killing his father...
- \_ Killing father? I want you to explain to me what this means.
- \_ I am not sufficiently intellectual.
- \_ It is not necessary to be genius to realize that father must never be killed whatever he does or says..." (Khadra, 2016, pp. 11-12).

This exchange clearly underlines a disregard for genuine authority, pointing instead to ignorance and betrayal as the primary reasons for the populace's disengagement from the authority's ideology. Recognizing "the relation of the authority to knowledge," the reader is led to understand that truths and perspectives are dictated by the authority, which vehemently opposes any ideas that challenge its decisions" (Bauman, 2016, p. 18).

Thus, the authority enforces a dichotomy between virtuous opinions and those it deems problematic, not based on any objective rationality but on its subjective interpretation of what should constitute reality.

In one telling interaction, the essence of loyalty and value, and even the potential to challenge divine sanctities in the course of venerating a man, is encapsulated in a seemingly trivial conversation between the president and a young servant. This dialogue succinctly illustrates the overarching themes of allegiance and the manipulative power of authoritative speech:

- Officer! do you fear death?
- There is a principle I have regarded since I joined the army: we have not to fear death, or we will die of fear...
- Are you a believer? He turned intentionally his eyes toward a book of the Quran.
- You have not to fear anything, I have an open mind. Then he said:
- All right. Although I appreciate your piety, I cannot bear in my mind that there will be an ultimate judgment, after all, that we suffer in this life, death will have no favour unless it puts an end to all that was omitted from existence.
- Don't you wish to enter to the paradise?

- For what purpose? It seems to me that whether you do not enjoy life or benefit from an eternal life is the same thing. All that is endless is meant to debilitate and provoke boredom.
- Officer! If you lack belief, you will never have an ideal.
- I had a belief without having any idea. Sir! I abandoned the first to not share it with hypocrites, I abandoned the second because I have not found with whom I can share it.
- Officer! Do you know why you have joined the army? It was because of a speech, or rather because of scathing critique... it was your speech sir... this child is fascinating me: he is introspecting my anger by heart! He is making his my anger... (Khadra, 2016, pp. 66-67)

### ***The Violence of the Margin***

To comprehend the concept of 'margin' as used in this study, it is crucial to first delineate the dynamics between traditional centrism and the populations under its influence. Yasmina Khadra's novels poignantly address the enduring conventional reality of Arabic countries' post-colonialism, marked by leadership fortified through socialism and the ambitions of Arab leaders.

The narrative explores how the relationship between authority and people has historically been grounded in absolute allegiance, as observed during the era of a one-party system in Algeria, Libya, and Egypt under Jamal Abdel Nasser.

- What image they will keep about me: a leader or a dictator?
- You are not a dictator and did the right thing. There are two types of people: those who behave in accordance with popular opinion and those who require tyranny to govern; ours is the latter.
- I don't agree. I recognise that I was unmerciful to people who disagreed with me. Is there another way to act? Governing is a culture that adheres to one component: blood... I wasn't severe on traitors, officer! I loved and protected my people. You did not have to do that... You overprotected your people, leading to their laziness and hostile behaviour. These folks do not deserve to care about him. It is a society of undertakers and smugglers who understand nothing except lethargy and unlawful trade. Future generations will grieve your loss, just as Russians lamented Stalin. (Khadra, 2016, p. 74)

The emergence of the Arab Spring revolts, which introduced notions of anarchism, represents a pivotal theme within the novel's backdrop. Traditional thinkers struggle to grasp such concepts, often dismissing them as marginal due to their reliance on static perceptions of authority and population dynamics, yet these are increasingly recognized by the West as significant shifts.

If we break into this enclave, the enemy will be able to engulf and eradicate us. We will be unable to withdraw if Misrata militants gain control of Crossroads 167.

The officer argued: we are not confronting a normal army, but rather a human tide destroying everything in its path. In the west, Islamist groups scoured the town. Despite the widespread disarray in Benghazi, the advancing crowds in the east may turn against us. We know nothing about their forces. There are thousands of people roaming

through the dust looking for convoys to pillage them. I see that the south is our particular shelter. (Khadra, 2016, p. 45)

The narrative of Yasmina Khadra intricately explores the evolving dynamics between the center and the margin, particularly in the context of the Arab Spring. The center's depiction of its adversaries as rebels reflects a deep-seated marginalization, undermining their historical roles and contributions, which has led to confusion and challenges to the central authority.

As the relationship between center and margin evolves, the people transcend their roles of absolute allegiance, loudly demanding their human rights and deeper responsibilities towards their nation and the world:

Am I incorrect if the Libyan heroic people are subjected to such abject vilification that it harms the country and provokes countless murders, while it is cynically manipulated by adversaries who eagerly await its annihilation to pillage every last resource? (Khadra, 2016, p. 41)

This powerful interrogation by the author serves as a foundation for the narrative, potentially reflecting his personal views or aligning with the dominant centrist voices, illustrating the complexity and variability of political perspectives.

Despite the fervor of the Arab Spring, one sobering realization emerged—the inability to completely dismantle the old mindset of allegiance. The author presents this notion subtly, suggesting that meaningful social change is exceedingly difficult prior to any revolutionary action, and that submission to the center, while seemingly counterintuitive, might prevent marginal chaotic conflicts that fail to yield substantial results in state governance or peace among citizens.

This sentiment is encapsulated in the idea that people, heavily marked by the ruling classes, remain the weaker party in relationships with state and societal institutions. These institutions dominate people's lives to such an extent that individuals find themselves compelled to fit within their given realities, often at the expense of engaging in significant reform or bold initiatives:

As people are marked by the ruling classes, a people is the weak part in relations with the state, parties, and familial, religious, economic, social, or cultural institutions. (Barakat, 2006, pp. 06-07)

The novel also delves into the theme of violence used by groups to secure political and prestigious positions within authoritative centers. The protagonist asserts his dominance and refusal to submit in a dramatic monologue:

I am not a tyrant; I am the fearsome Roman guard, the female wolf who guards her offspring with its jaws, and the untamed tiger who pees on international accords to establish his country's borders. I'm not sure how to bow my head or turn a blind eye when someone flaunts in front of me. I walk tall and proudly. With pride on my head, I stomp on this world's lords and their followers. (Khadra, 2016, p. 41)

In a poignant scene, the loyalty and subjugation themes are further explored through the interaction between the leader and his servant, illustrating the complexities of allegiance and protection:

The servant summoned me to sit while he remained standing in front of me. His sobriety appears absurd in the midst of the surrounding wreckage if the features on his face were not worthy of the immune soldier's promise. This man loves me more than anyone else in the world. He is willing to die for me... (Khadra, 2016, p. 07)



Khadra's narrative ultimately suggests a collusion with political dictatorship, seemingly detached from broader societal concerns. This detachment, as criticized by Derradj, reflects a broader historical narrative that has transformed significant concepts like freedom, justice, and independence into mere insurgent calls, creating a narrative favorite that attracts both advocates and pretenders:

The novel was written on the last quotes..., aiming to examine a bound past that made time a mystery, curiosity a fairy-tale, and free individuality a mere eventuality, and that transformed the detached history into a novel's favorite topic that has its advocates and pretenders. (Derradj, 2004, p. 79)

### **The Centre's Humanity and the Culture of Allegiance**

Yasmina Khadra explores the theme of allegiance through the lens of humanitarian value, demonstrating devotion to the ruling authority through complex, emotionally charged interactions. One such exchange illustrates the tensions between obedience and personal agency:

- ... he fidgeted in his sit without saying a word.
- Do you think to escape you too?
- Never! I never thought so!
- Do you think you have a mind to think? He said angrily.
- Be quiet! I said that just for bickering seeking only to entertain and to relax, but the temper of my heart was not the best.
- When I try to amuse the people in front of me, everyone, including the General, takes my words seriously. A leader's allusions and jokes should serve as directives and cautions, not fun. AbouBakr's commitment to me is unquestionable, despite his belief in superstitions. (Khadra, 2016, pp. 14-15)

This dialogue peels back the layers of psychological and emotional complexities of the heroic slain leader, presenting an aura of frailty and sadness that draws the reader into a state of 'negative compassion,' leading to a superficial interpretation of the character's depth. Such narrative flattening prompts readers to align with the author's perspective, portraying Yasmina Khadra as a narrator with a predisposition towards sentimentality, echoing the narrative style of George Zidane. Yet, in the contemporary era where history is immediately broadcast and documented, such constructed romanticism often loses its effectiveness, devolving into pretense and fake emotional idealism.

Yasmina Khadra's narrative is described as "a text with innovative features." The dual nature of this innovation includes a narrative crafted in imaginative language that reflects the author's stress from adhering to traditional patterns and his psychological state during the writing process. The second aspect involves the author revealing his own life story through fictitious names and evoking personal and emotional responses using sophisticated narrative techniques, a method referred to as the author's cunning, play, and manipulation of the reader.

Despite the risks, Khadra successfully communicates these dual aspects within his narrative, unimpeded by potential negative artistic impacts from an urgent consciousness or a narrow individual perspective. Political roles, deeply ingrained in life, significantly influence literary values and the societal reception of literature.

As Yaktine asserts, "Political roles are unsuspectedly primordial in life; they can never be negated when literary values become conditioned with such roles as this can minimize the presence of literature within society because attractions between literary trends occur through

political affiliation and consequently influence the level of literary reception and exchange” (Yaktine, 2000, p. 31). The novel begins with a depiction of the president as a figure of strength and moral righteousness:

... I am the leader brother, visionary, the infallible; I am born of a miracle that people say is erroneous I am the one who stands as a minaret in the middle of a stormy sea, erasing with his glowing hand all the darkness and the big waves' froth ... (Khadra, 2016, p. 04)

This image evolves into a portrayal of a leader who sees himself as elevated above mere national symbols, justified by divine favor in his confrontations against external aggressions:

Because my anger was righteous and my determination was legitimate, the Almighty raised me above flags and anthems so that all the world may see and hear me. I reject the idea that crusaders are plotting against me. As an enlightened Muslim, I have always beaten scandals and conspiracies. I will be present when all is clear. Aren't they the experiences that created the gods. (Khadra, 2016, p. 05)

Yasmina Khadra's approach to narrating rebellion against ruling authorities in his work subtly deconstructs the traditional revolutionary traits associated with art and literature. By focusing on the complexities of allegiance and dissent, he explores the nuanced psychological terrain of his characters. For instance, Mansour's character oscillates unpredictably between allegiance and ingratitude, unsettling the narrative stability and provoking thought about the underlying motivations of rebellion:

What does Mansour want? Does he understand the severity of his delirium? He says a word and then contradicts it, he moves from one topic to its antithesis, from allegiance to ungratefulness, and he is troubling me with disconcerting ease. (Khadra, 2016, p. 41)

Khadra employs a concealed textual strategy to portray himself as a nuanced, first-degree rebel, subtly manipulating the narrative to challenge the reader's perception of authority and rebellion. This method is particularly perilous for the uninitiated reader, as it blurs the lines between dissent and loyalty, creating a complex layer of narrative depth.

Mohammed Abbas Nouredine provides insight into the psychological underpinnings of this narrative technique:

In the life of the Arabic man, there is a multiform recurrent phenomenon. It is related to what people demonstrate spontaneously about their devotion to the authority they belong to... Authoritarian societies produce a double-nature personality that exhibits, on the one hand, a strong desire to be subjected and followed, while on the other, an obvious aggressive inclination. In both cases, such a split nature mentality has an unreasonable attitude and suppresses its aggressive tendencies in the subconscious, expressing it as a strong fascination with authority and blind love. (Nouredine, 2000, p. 74)

Khadra strategically selects moments in his narrative that imprint a notion of righteous authority and unjust rebellion on the reader's mind. This manipulation is evident in how he portrays the leader's unwavering determination and sacrificial spirit, intending to sway the reader's sympathy towards the figure of authority:

- I want all of my faithful men to remain standing steadily.
- The power lies in the heart, not the belly of the brother leader. Whether I am hungry, thirsty, or a double amputee, I will find the strength to protect you. I see myself falling

into hell to hold the blaze that will turn to ash every hand that dares to hurt you..." (Khadra, 2016, p. 10)

Further deepening the narrative's exploration of authority, Khadra revisits the central events through the protagonist's memories, revealing a leader who endeavors to instill hope and resilience in his people, while also acknowledging the envy others harbor towards his nation's prosperity:

- I spared no effort to create parties that dominated all of Libya, to install hope in my people's veins, so that neither angels nor the sun would shine in every child's smile. I was aware of the impending danger; I could clearly see the hopefuls' envy of my country's resources. What more cautions do I need to send? I have warned Arab leaders countless times, those state presidents who care only about their pleasures. (Khadra, 2016, p. 19)

Yasmina Khadra provides poignant examples of leaders who deeply trust in their people's allegiance to uphold the foundational values of governance prevalent across the globe. This trust forms a crucial backdrop for every regime, indicating that regardless of the challenges faced, it is not prudent for a regime to expose its vulnerabilities openly:

- "I feel like a miserable insolent who does not deserve to stand in front of you.
- Damn you! What's wrong with you? Do you notice how those wandering jackals outside are making you nervous? Or are you unsure whether to submit or commit suicide?
- My faith prevents me from considering suicide. Leader! I had countless opportunities to escape and save myself. I was even offered a prestigious exile if I agreed to submit. But here I am with you, and no exile can compare to your shadow. You are the best gift life has given me. Dying for you is both a luxury and an obligation.
- I'm glad Mansour I know is back. My praise for him restored his self-esteem, and he returned to me with a frenzied eruption.
- I shall prove that I am still me. This conflict is only a smokescreen. Light will soon spread throughout Libya. I will eliminate those monstrous rebels against you, and I will construct a red carpet out of their skin for you to walk on as you ascend to your throne".

These discussions and perspectives underscore that an individual deeply committed to any allegiance will remain blind to looming threats, as they cannot think beyond the confines of the framework imposed by their sovereign. Such individuals represent risks rather than allies or safeguards.

However, this ideology does not provide a definitive alternative to loyalty or authority in themselves. The initial triumphs perceived in the Arab Spring uprisings illustrate that central leaders do not depend on populist insurgents for their downfall, as these leaders are constructs of international machinations.

The revolts against them are similarly orchestrated by the same global forces and were originally devised by orientalists who continue to plot further disruptions. Thus, what is necessary is not a mere seasonal change but a global tempestuous upheaval that dismantles the edifices of cultural industries and recycles the debris of historical failures, thereby rejuvenating the essence of humanity.

## Conclusion

The dialogue surrounding the novel *The Dictator's Last Night* and the authorial choices therein compels us to highlight several significant observations, delineated below:

- In this work, the author delves into the humanitarian facets of leaders and presidents, while concurrently condemning revolts, assassination, and retribution as manifestations of failure and cowardice. These elements reflect President Elgueddafi's character and the circumstances surrounding his demise at the hands of his citizens. The narrative effectively advocates for loyalty to the philosophy of safeguarding nations, regardless of the extent of oppression.
- The author adeptly blends multiple voices to obscure his narrative stance; we observe his use of quotes and contrasting viewpoints, his defense of certain positions, followed by their critique.
- The author integrates historical data to craft a comprehensive backdrop for the novel's primary scenario, leading the reader to perceive a stance of neutrality. However, the author's neutrality is compromised by his sympathetic portrayal of the leader and his disparaging view of the revolution that ultimately dismantled the regime.
- The author anticipates the revolution's downfall, a prediction derived from his analysis of the rationalizations prevalent among the centrist elite. This forecast appears explicit, not because the revolution lacks validity, but due to its impulsive nature.

### **About the Author**

**Adel BOUDIAR** is a Professor of higher education at the Faculty of Arts and Languages, Department of Arabic Language and Literature, University of Tebessa. He is also the Dean of the Faculty. He is interested in critical and interdisciplinary studies. He has some research papers on image discourse and criticism of the novel published in national and international scientific journals. He is also a member of some scientific journals and research projects. <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5810-5685>

## References

- Barakat, H. (2006). *Alienation in Arabic culture: Man's labyrinths between dream and reality*. Beirut: Arabic Union Studies Center.
- Bauman, Z. (2016). *Liquid Life*. (H. A. Djabr, Trans.) Beirut, Lebanon: Arabic network for research and publishing.
- Derradj, F. (2004). *The novel an interpretation of history: the novel's theory and the Arabic novel*. Casablanca Morocco: Arabic cultural centre.
- Dik, Z. (2003). *Yasmina Khadra as he talked, as he wrote*. Algiers: Dar Elhouda.
- Eljaachami, N. S. (2022). *Cultures' reflection, harmony and contradictions between determinism and experimentation in narrative texts*. Cairo, Egypt: Free printing house for printing and publishing.
- Fassi, M. (2000). *Studies in Algerian novel*. Algiers: Dar Elkasaba for publishing.
- Hafnaoui, B. (2004). *Algerian narrative discourse's mutations: renewal perspectives and abstraction adventures*. Oran: Dar Elgharb for publishing and distributing.
- Khadra, Y. (2016). *The dictator's last night* (A. Serkis, Trans.) Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Essaki.
- Mefkouda, S. (2005). The emergence of Arabophone novel in Algeria: roots and fundamentals. *Algerian Language and Literature Laboratory Journal*, 02(01), 07-32. Retrieved from <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/downArticle/104/2/1/24207>
- Noureddine, M. A. (2000). *Disguise in Arabic authoritarian society: a social and psychological reading of the relation between the Self and the Other*. Beirut Lebanon & Casablanca Morocco: Arabic Cultural Centre.
- Oumssaad, H. (2018). *The third eye: Applications in cultural and post-colonial criticism*. Algiers: Mim publishing.
- Saad, M. R. (2006). *Politics is a theme in the novel*. Retrieved from Elhiwar Elmotamaddin: <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=81278>
- Yaktine, S. (2000). *Literature and institution: toward a new literary practice*. Casablanca Morocco: Ennadjah new printing.

### Cite as

**Boudiar, A.** (2024). Narrative Collusion and Allegiance Justifying: A Cultural Critical Approach to *The Dictator's Last Night Novel* by Yasmina Khadra. *ATRAS Journal*, 5 (2), 220-232.