

وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي

MINISTERE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE

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قسم اللغة الانجليزية



Domaine : Lettres et Langues Etrangères.
Filière : Langue Anglaise.
Spécialité : Littérature et Approches Interdisciplinaires.

Dissertation submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master in English

Title

A New Historicist Reading of Yasmina Khadra's
The Swallows of Kabul (2002)

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Promotion: 2018

N° de série:
N° d'ordre :

Dedicated

To

My beloved parents: Abderahmane and Yasmina

Who supported me all along my studies.

My brother and sisters: Hanafi, Aziza, Zakia, Leila, Samira.

My nephew Abderrahmane

My beloved fiancé

Djaffar who encouraged me to realize and to finish this work.

All my friends

Hamida

To

My beloved parents: Amar and Hasni

Who supported me all along my studies.

My brothers and sisters: Mohand, Ismail, Yacine, Ferhat, Naima and Ferroudja

To

My nephew

Abd erraouf

All my friends

Fatiha

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our deep gratitude to our supervisor Ms. Fatima BENSIDHOUM for her support, guidance and encouragement throughout the fulfilment of this modest dissertation and during the process of our studies.

We are also thankful to the members of the board of examiners for their acceptance to assess our work.

We owe special thanks to all the teachers of the English Department, and to all those who offered psychological support and backed us up during the hard times mainly Dr Arzeki

KHELIFA

Abstract

This research paper deals with Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002). For its theoretical implication, we have applied Stephen Greenblatt's theory of New Historicism (1980-1990). The chief aim of this dissertation is to analyze Khadra's depiction of the Afghan people under the reign of the Taliban, by relying it to the most pertinent and relevant concepts of New Historicism, such as Power, Subversion and Containment. To achieve our purpose, we borrowed from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of Prison* (1975), and John Brannigan's *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (1998). Our work is divided into three chapters. The first one explores the Textuality of History and Historicity of Text and how they attached to the tale of Khadra. In this chapter we tempted to show how he textualized history and how he historicized the text. The second chapter uncovers the concept of Power and its types, shedding light to how it is exercised by the Taliban upon the characters of *The Swallows of Kabul*. The third and last chapter exposes two main concepts which are Subversion and Containment. In this chapter we explained how characters subverted the laws, and how the Taliban fight to contain them and their behaviors.

Contents

Dedication i

Acknowledgmentsii

Abstractiii

Contentsiv/v

I. General Introduction1

 Review of the literature2

 The Issue and Working Hypotheses4

 Methodological Outline.....5

 Endnotes6

II. Methods and Materials7

 1. Method7

 a. Stephene Greenblatt’s New Historicism (1980-1990)

 2. Materials9

 a. Synopsis of *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002)9

 Endnotes10

III. Results12

IV. Discussion14

Chapter One:14

 a- Textuality of History and Historicity of the Text.....14

 Endnotes24

Chapter Two: Types of Power.....28

a-Physical Power.....	28
b- Psychological Power.....	32
c- Panopticon Power and its Application.....	35
Endnotes.....	38
Chapter three:Subversion and Containment.....	40
Endnotes.....	47
VI. General Conclusion.....	49
Bibliography	51

General Introduction

The crisis in Afghanistan began as a struggle for power amongst the different urban elite groups attempting to control the government in Kabul. This soon led to a civil war as the traditional elite tried to secure its authority against the encroachment of the central government. This acquired an international dimension which is the intrusion of not only the neighboring states but of the super powers either in pursuit of their own interest or to manifest their stance to their rival nations. After a revolution that was supposed to bring freedom, military or civilian dictators and monarchs have established their power and turned the country into a kingdom.

History records so many situations where human beings undergo so severe experiences such as oppression, war and terrorism, peoples endure sufferings and torture by being considered inferior. Besides, these sufferings are the examples, in certain situations, are stimulus as well as the reason why human mind gives birth to some literary works. Some of these fictional works shed light and expresse pain and suffering of certain minorities into famous masterpieces such as Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul*(2002).

The novel takes part of the trilogy which is composed of : *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002), *The Attack* (2005) and *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2006). It deals with the terrorist phenomena which shaked many territories in the world such as Afganistan, Palestine and Irak. It is written by a former Algerian army officer Mohamed Moulsehoul who choosen a femal pseudonym (Yasmina Khadra) in honor of his wife and the arabo-muslim women. This work is considred as the most endorsed and approved novel. It treats social, political and humanistic issues.

Therefore, the study of *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) from a New Historicist perspective is an original theme which had never been dealt with, and this makes us inquisitive to go deeper and discover what Khadra keeps inside.

The Literature Review

Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) had been the center of interest for many critics. Indeed, it has been studied from different perspectives. To start with, Bob Corbett who discussed the novel from a historical perspective, asserts :

This is a very dark, sad and very powerful novel. It is about 1989 in Kabul, Afghanistan. The Russian had invaded about 10 years earlier. The war brought the Taliban to power and the rule of the terror of the Taliban and their stringent religious rule¹.

Corbett claims that Khadra's novel is obscure. It depicts the period of the reign of the Taliban. The invasion of the Russians before ten years, leads them to take power, and generate the terror to the Afghans as well.

In addition, Elizabeth Erickson has criticised *The Swallows of Kabul* in her work named *Burqa or Nah* from the religious perspective. Her purpose is to show her resentment of the mandatory apparel that made Burqa requirement for women. She argues : " the first in depth discussion about Burqa that takes place in *The Swallows of Kabul*, mainly consists of Zunaira's insight as why wearing one is degrading"². Erickson treats the religious rule of the Taliban which consists on covering the face with a Burqa thus denying religious freedom of women.

Furthermore, Ayon Onatade, in his comment on Khadra's novel, says that it is the first novel to examine the brutality of Afghanistan under the reign of the Taliban. The following quotation confirms Onatade's idea :

[...] *the Swallows of Kabul* is a novel that tugs at the readers thoughts constantly. It depicts in detail the results of individual choices along with the irrationality of daily life under the Taliban for some. *The Swallows of Kabul* may be too harsh in its portrayal but this has not stopped its chilling impact. The characters are powerfully drawn along with their environment. This is not an easy book to read but it certainly is a compelling one³.

Onatade esteems that *The Swallows of Kabul* makes the reader plunge in deep thoughts. It mirrors the individuals' sufferings under the tyranny of the Taliban. Besides, he believes that the novel evokes fear and fright, since it holds back rough and chocking scenes. However, according to Onatade, the novel is a compiled and a rich work.

The Swallows of Kabul has received the price and recognition of many well-known international institutions. It was also chosen as the best book of the year in 2005 by the Sun Francisco Chronicle and the Christian Science Monitor. It was also one of the American Library Awards notable books in 2005⁴

Neil Wright examines the novel from the stylistic study in his work named *Stone 's Throw : The Swallows of Kabul*. He observes the attractive and fetching style of Khadra. He proclaims :

This short but eloquent novel written by the Algerian army officer Mohamed Moulessehou. It will may be the messenger of a future literature whose object will be to present in shark and uncompromising terms, life as it is in the war and oppression ravaged cultures of the West Asian World. A world where dictatorship, invasions and barbarism have combined to reduce humanity to the point of constant suffering and dispair.⁵

Wright advocates that Moulessehou's *The Swallows of Kabul* may be the messenger which will offer the comming generations the chance of knowing how the West Asian was submitted to barbarian, savage and inhuman hierarchy.

In an interview with Khadra in the German radio Station SWR1 in 2006, Khadra says :

The West interprets the world as it likes. It develops certain theories that fit into its world outlook, not always represents the reality. Being a Muslim, I suggest a new perspective on Afghanistan, on religious fanaticism and what I would call religiopathy. My novel *The Swallows of Kabul*, gives the reader in the West a chance to understand the core of a problem that they usually only touch on the surface. Because fanaticism is a threat for all, I contribute to the understanding of its causes and backgrounds. Perhaps then it will be possible to find a way to bring it under control⁶.

Khadra affirms that Western view the world as they like. They often do not portray the reality. According to Khadra, being a Muslim in Afghanistan is a sort of religiopathy. He asserts that

his novel gives the Westerners the opportunity to grasp the real conflicts that they treat superficially.

Moreover, what makes of Khadra a different, is the fact of being a humanist writer. In fact, this quality is dominant in his writings. Ruth Amar confirms that :

Khadra est tout d'abord un humaniste qui met toujours l'accent sur le thème humain ; ses contradictions, son impuissance face aux tragédies des guerres. Si l'engagement a d'abord une valeur politique, s'engager est pour Khadra une dynamique portée vers l'autre sans laquelle l'irresponsabilité, l'indifférence prendront le dessus⁷

Khadra is a humanist who always treats or puts the stress on humanistic issues and his contrariness and powerlessness face to wars. If commitment is a political magnitude, to engage for Khadra, is a way to reach the summit without difference. (translation is ours).

Ruth affords that Khadra is a humanistic writer who engages to treats political, social and historical conflicts.

b-Issue and Working Hypothesis

From the above review of the literature, we can notice that Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* has been a center of various critics. It is noticeable that many critics have dealt with the novel from different perspectives, most of them are limited incriticizing the work's value, others focused on its style. To our knowledge, no previous study has been undertaken so far to study *The Swallows of Kabul* from the New Historicist perspective, which is our task in this dissertation.

To achieve our purpose, we intended to rely on Stephen Greenblatt's theory New Historicism (1980-1990) and Foucault's interpretation of power in his well known work *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (1975) in order to discuss and analyze our issue. Khadra's novel contains key issues which are in tune with important key concepts for New Historicism.

C-Methodological Outline

At the methodological level, our research paper is undertaken following the IMRAD system. It is composed of four sections. It starts with an Introduction that states our main purpose. It includes a review of some of the literature written on Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul*. Then, it raises our issue and working hypothesis. The Methods and Materials section provides a brief summary of Stephen Greenblatt's theory New Historicism (1980-1990) and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975)*, as well as an overall synopsis of Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul (2002)* mentioned above. The Result section contains the findings of our research. The discussion section is composed of three chapters. The first chapter deals with the Textuality of History and Historicity of the Text. Its aim is to prove that Khadra textualizes the history of Afghanistan and historicize his literary text as well. The Second Chapter is concerned with the theme of power. It is presented through the oppressor upon the oppressed. The third chapter deals with subversion and containment. Subversion appears through the two characters who subvert the Taliban domination. Containment is presented through the Taliban who control the whole of Kabul, they observe every coin, sphere and monitor every move and gesture. Our dissertation ends with a general conclusion that restates the main issues tackled within this piece of research.

Endnotes

¹Corbett Bob. *Comments on Yasmina Khadra : The Swallows of Kabul.*(2004).

²Erickson Elizabeth. *Burqa or Nah.* (2013).

³Onatade Ayo. *Books in Translation : Yasmina Khadra.* (2013).

⁴Journal Article. *The christian Science Monitor.*

⁵Neil Wright. *Stone's Throw : The Swallows of Kabul.* 132.

⁶Research Journal of Language. Literature and Humanistes. (2015)

⁷Lanasri Ahmed. *La Trilogie du Malentendu de Yasmina Khadra.* (2016).22.

II / Method and Materials

1- Method

This part of our work deals with Stephen Greenblatt's theory of New Historicism (1980-1990) which is developed in his essay *The Power of Forms and the Forms of Power in Renaissance* (1982). For the sake of relevance, we will try to apply this theory on *The Swallow of Kabul* (2002), using some selected concepts which are pertinent to our study. We are going also to borrow some key concepts from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish : the Birth of the Prison* (1975) which is considered as an influential text for New Historicists.

Stephen Greenblatt was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1943, and did his undergraduated and graduated studies at Yale University. For more than twenty years, he taught at the University of California at Berkeley where he was one of the founders of *Representation*, the journal in which much pathbreaking New Historicist work first appeared.¹

New Historicism is a school of a literary theory which was developed during the 1980s and flourished during 1990s. It was fathered by Stephen Greenblatt who became a key figure in cultural poetics in U.S English Departments in 1980s and 1990s. Inspired by Michael Foucault's historical and theoretical understanding of power.²

New Historicists see the literary work as a vessel tossed in a social sea of competing interest, antagonist values and contradictions³; this means that a literary text is a product of different values, traditions and circumstances. Moreover, they frequently use important concepts including Textuality of History and Historicity of the Text, Power, Containment and Subversion.

Stephen Greenblatt asserts that term New Historicism has been used unintentionally and the preferable term for it is "Cultural Poetics"⁴; this term seeks to reveal the relationship

between texts and their sociohistorical context. It assumes that texts not only document the social forces that constitute history and society, but also figure the social processes themselves which form both individual identity and sociohistorical situation⁵. Its main objective is to understand a literary work according to its historical background. It places a text within the totality of socio-cultural institution and practices that make the history and culture milieu of particular moment of time and place, in this way, literature interacts as a product as well as a producer of social and cultural conventions and codes. Furthermore, New Historicists analyze the text by incorporating in their evaluation both literary and non-literary documents which author might have consulted at the time of writing ; that is to say, a reader is supposed to understand the link between the text and the attended social, political and economic conditions in which it is wrought.⁶ Greenblatt in his essay *Resonance and Wonder* asserts :

The New Historicism obviously has distinct affinities with resonance, that its concern with literary text has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own⁷

Greenblatt believes that any literary text in New Historicism should make reference to the historical conditions and circumstances of its production, and find out the relationship between that historical conditions and those of the present. New Historicists thus, reject the idea that text is autonomous ; they are inclined to historicize the texts in order to make them relevant to the present.⁸ They also reject the autonomy of the author and the autonomy of the literary work and see literary texts as absolutely inseparable from their historical contexts, they argue that texts are always connected to their historical and social context.⁹

As far as the idea of power is concerned and scoped in New Historicism, Greenblatt developed it and put forward two terms ; 'Subversion' and 'Containment' and these two terms are often used to refer to the capacity of the dominant order to generate subversion as

to use it to its own ends¹⁰. This means that the dominator often engenders subversion in order to use it. He pushes the dominated to subvert his laws, then punish him to show to the subversive and to the others that he is invincible and uneasy to defeat. Overall, in order to obtain power, the oppressor should use subversion, this policy allows him to exercise his power and impose his authority upon the oppressed. According to New Historicists, subversion is always produced in the interest of power.¹¹ This means that subversion is a means or a tool to achieve power. Power without subversion is nothing and useless. As claimed by John Branningan : “ Power needs to have subversion, otherwise it would be without the opportunity to justify itself, and to make itself visible as power ”¹².

In New Historicism, the term Power explains itself. The French Philosopher Michael Foucault who influenced this theory, argues that power is not merely physical force but a pervasive human dynamic determining our relationships to others. Power also refers to the ways in which a dominant group exerts its influence over others.¹³ This idea vividly illustrates and demonstrates Foucault’s understanding of power, he wants to say that power is not always a physical force, but rather, it may refer to a domination which imposed on the oppressed.

2-Materials

Synopsis of *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) :

The Swallows of Kabul (2002) is the first in Khadra’s trilogy which is composed of three novels : *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002), *The Attack* (2005) and *The Sirens of Baghdad* (2006). It examines the brutality of Afghanistan under the reign of the Taliban. Set outside Algeria, the reader is brought into the lives of two very different couples who live near one

another .On the one hand, we have Mohsen and Zunaira Ramat. Mohsen, is from a wealthy family of shop keepers destroyed by the Taliban and Zunaira a lawyer who is no longer allowed to leave her home without an escort . Mohsen, once had dreams of being a Diplomat while his wife a Magistrate .On the other hand, there is Atiq Shaukat a loutish Taliban prison keeper who has religiously adopted the ideology of the Taliban but struggles to remain within his faith along with his wife Mussarrat who saved his life but is now dying. Both couples find themselves smothered by Muslims Fundamentalism. Mohsen who has become so dulled by the daily incidents of brutality. One day finds himself wandering dissoluted amongst the devastated streets of Kabul and participating in the stoning of a prostitute. His confession to his wife strains and subsequently leads to the breakdown of their already tense and fragile marriage. Atiq, who is also losing his grasp on reality, speculates as to whether his continuous contact with the condemned is also making him consider the worthiness of his own life. As he begins to lose his sanity, he meets and falls in love with Zunaira after she is arrested and charged with the murder of her husband after a tragic but physical argument. At the end of the novel, Atiq's wife musarrat decides to die in the place of Zunaira and the latter succeeds to escape from the prison as well. Atiq goes mad searching for Zunaira who mingles in the crowd.

Endnotes

¹E.Cain William Et all. Norton Antology of Theory and Criticism. Stephan Greenblatt : Introduction to the Power of Forms. b-1943, University of OKLAHOMA, London. (2001). 2250.

²Ibid,. 2250

³Ibid., 2250

⁴Bhat, Altaf Ahmad. *A critical Note on New Historicism*. Ph.D scholar school of studies in English , Vikram University Ujjain (M.P) India .14.

⁵Veenstra.R.Jan. *The New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt :On poetics of culture and the Interpretation of Shakespeare*, 174.

⁶Bhat, Altaf Ahmad. *A Critical Note on New Historicism*. Ph.D scholar school of studies in English , Vikram University Ujjain (M.P) India.14-15.

⁷Narinda Tiwary and N.D.R Chandra. *New Historicism and Arundhati* . 83

⁸ Altaf Ahmad. *A Critical Note on New Historicism*. Ph.D scholar school of studies in English , Vikram University Ujjain (M.P) India.16.

⁹Narinda Tiwary and N.D.R Chandra. *New Historicism and Arundhati Roy's Works*. 82

¹⁰Jie-Xiu LIU, Yong-hui MA, Xiao-Juan YAO. *Power, Subversion and Containment : A New Historicist Interpretation of The Virginian*. Northeast Petroleum University, Daqing, China. 604. 2014. Vol. 12. N° 7, 614.

¹¹Brannigan John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*.1998.08

¹²Ibid., 08

¹³Narinda Tiwary and N.D.R Chandra. *New Historicism and Arundhati Roy's Works*. 85.

Results

In this part of our dissertation, we will shed light on the findings reached throughout our study. Our aim is to explain that Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) can be read and approached through the perspective of New Historicism. We have applied the theory of New Historicism (1980-1990) of Stephen Greenblatt, and we have borrowed some prominent concepts from Foucault's study of Power advanced in his book *Discipline and Punish : the Birth of the Prison* (1975).

Throughout the study of *The Swallows of Kabul*(2020), and in the light of New Historicism, we have demonstrated that Khadra depicts the real historical events that surrounded in the period from 1994 to 2001. Besides, we have reached two main conclusions ; the first is that Khadra historicizes the text by reporting real-like events. He narrates and depicts the Afghan suffering under the reign of the Taliban through Mohsen, Zunaira, Atiq and Musarrat. Khadra does not bring only the words, rather, he reports the facts. The second conclusion is that Khadra textualizes history. He makes of the history of Afghanistan a written text which chronicles to an important phase of the Afghan history. Thanks to his novel, the coming generations will have the chance to deep in history of the condemned Afgans who submitted to the hierarachy of the Taliban. The incidents that occurred in Kabul under the rule of the Taliban are vividly brought by Khadra to attest for the intimate relationship between the text and its context.

In our research we have noticed that Khadra is implicated in his country's political conflicts, by portraying them through targeted novels. Furthermore, our analysis has reached the idea that *The Swallows of Kabul* is an embodied text which deals with historical, social and political issues, and depicts the conflicts that occurred in Afghanistan. Besides, it

underpines and deals with important issues such as power, subversion and containment and others. Such themes are proved to be the backbone of New Historicist theory.

Discussion

In this section of our work, we will read *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) from a new historicist perspective, applying the most important concepts. In the first chapter we will discuss the concept of 'Textuality of History and Historicity of the Text'. In the second chapter we will discuss the concept of 'Power' and its types and in the third chapter we will focus on 'Subversion and Containment'.

Chapter One : Textuality of History and Historicity of the Text.

History serves humanity, it makes us know from where and what we come. We cannot understand anything without history. However, history cannot exist alone, literature serves it. Indeed, It makes it shown, appeared and read. Foucault asserted : “ History cannot divorce from textuality”¹. We can refer to this idea as the Textuality of History which is defined as when the literary text presents the history and makes it a fiction. The literary text thus, depicts the historical contexts that occurred in different eras. *The Swallows of Kabul* portrays and captures Afghanistan's history and its brutal tragedies. Khadra describes Kabul under the Taliban rule, and makes it a hell on earth, although he never visited Afghanistan. The terror, terrory and ravages that reigned over Kabul, are depicted in his novel.

New Historicism advocates the close relationship between text and context, especially history when the text was produced². New historicists argue that texts are always intimately connected to their historical and social contexts. History serves as repressed conscious of literature³. This view explains that each of 'Text' and 'Context' serves or completes the other. They are linked to each other. We can refer to this idea as the Historicity of the Text which is defined as when history is the reason to the production of the text. This means that the text is created under the influence of the historical backgrounds and the writer's own life experiences⁴. Moreover, New Historicism also is based on the assumption that a literary work

is a product of time, place and circumstances of its composition. That's why the literary texts must be read and interpreted in their biographical, social and historical contexts⁵. Since history was mostly recorded in the form of narration, historians could access history in the form of textuality as well⁶. *The Swallows of Kabul*, is the result of the conflicts that happened in Afghanistan. It reveals important events in the history of Kabul from 1994 to 2001. The story takes place in Afghanistan exactly in Kabul which is described as an underdeveloped and decayed city. Khadra portrays it as being a dark and a rude land which is situated in the middle of a desert, bare and exposed to the hot sun, with posts of observation. Silence and obscurity dominate every place and corner, Khadra writes : "Then, without warning, at the foot of mountains, singed bare by the breath of raging battles, rises Kabul, or rather, what's left of it : a city in an advanced stage of decomposition"⁷.

The story obviously and clearly reflects Afghan history. However, it seems comparable to Khadra's homeland Algeria. The latter had suffered from nearly similar circumstances with Afghanistan. Algeria submerged in an absolute chaos and confusion as mentioned by Charles Bonn : " les années 90 sont pour l'Algérie, chacun le sait, celle d'une guerre civile particulièrement cruelle"⁸ " everyone knows that the 90s for Algeria are a peculiar cruel civil war" (translation is ours). The Black Decade from 1990 to 2002 that Algerian people suffered from, is similar to the period from 1994 to 2001, that Afghans witnessed. The 90s represent for both Algeria and Afghanistan the most marked chaotic epoch. Moreover, the movement of students named Taliban is comparable to F.I.S (The Islamic Salvation Front). This movement which is founded in Algeria by a group of important Imams and youths in March, 10th.1989⁹, is not highly different from the Taliban. They share the same purpose which is imposing islam, and considering those who do not respect it as 'outlaws'. This is maintained in what follows :

Sa tactique a consisté à confondre systématiquement son existence avec celle de l'islam : à considérer tous ceux qui le combattent comme les ennemis de cette religion ; à culpabiliser tous ceux qui ne le suivent pas¹⁰ [...].

Its policy consists of confusing between its existence and that of islam : all those who fight against it, esteemed to be the enemies of this religion ; blame all those who do not follow it. (translation is ours).

Since Khadra is an army officer, who served the Algerian Army for 36 years, he is undoubtedly not allowed to describe and report the tyrannical circumstances that Algeria underwent. Rather, he preferred to write about Afghanistan mainly Kabul. Afghanistan shares nearly the same faked politics, corrupted islam and tragic conflicts with many arabic countries in general and Algeria in particular where no one is authorized to speak about the dishonesty of the authorities

. Moreover, *The Swallows of Kabul* enables the reader to grasp Khadra's position not only as a writer but also as a human being who refuses religious fanaticism by making reference to the harsh social circumstances that characterized the Afghan's capital, Kabul. This idea conforms with that of Greenblatt who conceives a text as a place where the author's ideas, social institutions and practices are negotiated¹¹. Furthermore, his military career permits Khadra to bring the events and represent them in a literary genre which is close to reality. That is to say, in the novel, Khadra describes many details and events that ordinary persons ignore when reading them, the reader can notice that he is well-informed about the army and war. In the novel, before the stoning of the supposed guilty the woman, Khadra describes every move and reports every word, and also describes the place of the execution in a way which is too realistic. He writes :

Abdul Jabbar's truck grazes him, just misses a muleteer, and hurtles into the square, closely followed by the powerful 4*4. At the sight of this cortege, an incongruous roaring shakes the crowd, [...], militiamen distribute a few savage blows [...] the sinner is helped down while shouts of abuse ring out here and there¹².

This quotation demonstrates that Khadra is well-informed of how executions happen, how the executioners behave and how the crowd reacts, this kind of explanations do not come from someone who ignores how things go, even if we can argue that things are fruits of his imagination !

Since New Historicism discards the concept of a text as self-sufficient and autonomous freestanding of its attended factors like biography, history and society¹³, it is useful to know that Khadra's real name is *Mohamed Moulesehoul*. The writer took a feminine pseudonym which is *Yasmina Khadra* to avoid submitting his manuscripts for approval by the army. This would guarantee his self-security, and devote his career for writing. His choice for this female name is also as a homage to the Arabo - Muslim women. He affirms : “ Garder mon pseudonyme féminin est une façon pour moi de combattre auprès de la femme arabo – musulmane.”¹⁴. [Guarding my feminine pseudonym is my manner to fight with the arabo – muslim woman]. (Translation is ours). He adds : “ J’admire leur courage et l’espoir qu’elles entretiennent. Mais aussi écrire avec ma situation de militaire à l’époque était condamné à mort”¹⁵. [I admire the fortitude and hope they keep, yet, writing as a soldier in that epoch, is a condemnation.] (Translation is ours). Khadra's writings when he was a soldier was a risk for him and his career. Besides, through *The Swallows of Kabul*, Khadra refers to women in general and the Afghan ones in particular. Women are of a great importance and value to Khadra. He compares them to the swallows once being veiled with the blue burqa from head to toe. Knowing Khadra's life, attitudes and intuitions by reading or searching for his biography, may help the reader to reveal what hides between the lines of his novel. It is for this reason that New Historicism rejects the idea that text is autonomous, the historical context and author's biography are paramount to understand it.

Literature is not simply a product of history, but it participates in the making of history. Thus, new historicism prefers a parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts,

usually of the same historical period¹⁶. *The Swallows of Kabul* reflects the hard period that marked Afghanistan from 1994 to 2001, when an Islamic group and their students formed the Taliban movement. This movement took the power in 1996 and controlled the major part of Afghanistan. The Taliban imposed a set of what they called 'Islamic rules', regimes and restrictions on the population ; no music, no shaving of beards, no laughing outside especially with one's mate. Women are firmly restricted to home, most of them were barred from schools and Universities. These 'Islamic' rules were applied on the whole of the country by the military religious chief Mullah Omar. In the novel of Khadra, Kabul is set under the Taliban rule. The characters illuminate the politics and the conflicts that resulted in the defeat with the Taliban. The characters of the novel are manipulated, dominated, and alienated with the same manner in which people of Kabul are treated in the past. Kabul's dwellers are submitted to the Taliban's insane laws and crimes, and were obliged to obey their stupid orders. In the novel, an agent of Taliban says to Mohsen Ramat in the street when he saw him joking and smiling with his wife : " No laughing in the street ! if you have any sense of shame left, you'll go home and lock yourself inside " ¹⁷. Television is also prohibited, music too ; no one dares to listen music or to sing. A friend of Atiq Chaukat tells him : " I'd like to hear a song. You can't imagine how much I'd like to hear a song with instrumental accompaniment " ¹⁸. He also adds:

When I was a child, it often happened that I didn't get enough to eat. It didn't matter, though. All I had to do was climb a tree, sit on a branch. And when I sang _ you don't have to believe me, but when I sang, I stopped feeling hungry¹⁹.

Here we can realize how life used to be simple and happy before the coming of the Taliban, who make life in Kabul dark and obscure. People in Kabul are condemned to sadness, they neither express their feelings nor mourn their verdict. The arrival of Taliban approves the arrival of woe, even children suffer, because they are subjected to the same restrictions as

adultes. Their innocent faces cannot understand why they are treated so harshly. The majority of them are not allowed to attend their schools. The narrator says :

The innumerable *madrassas*, the religious schools that spring up like mushrooms on every corner, no longer suffice to hold all the children. Everyday, their numbers increase and their threat grows, and no one in Kabul cares²⁰.

The Taliban make an end to the charm of childhood. They use islam verses to instruct and conduct the people, but they pretend to ignore that islam insists on educating children and make of them a good example for others. The objective of the Taliban is to shake Kabul not to build of it an evolved country. Comparing to other children, those of Kabul are the most oppressed ones. Khadra adds :

[...] They're invading the city inexorably, like the packs of dogs that turn up out of nowhere, feed in rubbish dumps and garbage cans, eventually colonize whole neighborhoods, and keep the citizenry at bay²¹.

The quotation above demonstrates that children's life in Kabul is close to that of dogs. The high proportion of poverty and famine in their country, leads them to eat from the bin and the rubbish. The Taliban regime makes of childhood a very harsh periode ; children go through numerous sufferings and undergo the same conditions with adultes.

The Swallows of Kabul portrays and refers, as it is mentioned before, to true facts. It evokes the real movements and conflicts. During their rule, the Taliban used to enforce their strict islamic practices on the Afghans. Nany Hatch Dupree maintained in 1996 that : “ The Taliban closed all schools in Kabul depriving **102.000** girls of education and **7.800** teachers of employment ”²². All schools were closed by the Taliban who exerted such policies in order to prevent the citizens of Kabul from essential rights such as education and work. In the novel, Mohsen, Zunaira, Atiq and Musarrat are infoced to submit to the Taliban orders, especially Mohsen and his wife Zunaira. Before the Taliban make an end to their ambitious

plans, the couple used to be an educated and emancipated one. In *The Swallows of Kabul*, Zunaira, is depicted as a beautiful graduated and intelligent woman who ultimately finds herself between the wet and dumped walls ; neither her knowledge nor her degree could serve her anymore. She says : “ That’s too hard to deal with. Espicially for someone who was a lawyer, who worked for women’s right ”²³. Zunaira used to defend women’s rights, but with the coming of the Taliban, she becomes with no value, restricted to the household. She finds no reason to wear *burqa*, she even does not accept it.

Before the arrival of the Taliban, Afghan women used to dress western clothes, and had the right for education, and work in government. They were honored and respected, they used to behave and conduct freely and live their lives with confidence. Khadra writes :

They were inscrutable vestals, their laughter a song, their grace a dream of delight. And this is the reason why the wearing of the burqa has become a necessity, more to preserve women from malicious eyes than to spare men the temptation of infinite allurements²⁴.

The position and beauty that women had, must not be shown, they must be covered and veiled with *burqa* in order not to be seen or provoked. Everything changed with the coming of the Taliban ; their policies against women are very oppressive. Women are forced to an eternal oppression. They become of no value, they are jailed at home, veiled with *burqa* once being outside of home. They become weak and nameless, as if they do not exist. Khadra writes : “ [...] The women, mummified in shrouds the color of fever or fear are utterly anonymous ”²⁵. Through this quotation, Khadra describes women as not having the beauty that they had in the past, the pallor took place in their faces, they are of no importance. Taliban’s offense toward women, caused their alienation from the society by living dishonored and humiliated in their own country.

On December 6th, 1996, it was announced that the department of promotion of virtue punished **225** women for being unveiled, which according to them, was an act against women dignity²⁶. Being veiled reflects women's dignity, any act of disobedience conduct them to hard punishments. In *The Swallows of Kabul*, women are prisoned within the walls of their houses, devoting their daytimes in householding, and once they have a chance to go outside, they must be veiled and never speak with strangers, otherwise they will be punished. Contrary to other women, Zunaira, refuses to wear *burqa* ; the idea of being veiled is just a stupid rule for her. She claims : “ It cancels my face and takes away my identity and turns me into an object [...] If I put that damned veil on I' m neither a human nor an animal ”²⁷. Zunaira's identity and face are so precious for her that she can't hide them and she would be less valuable than an animal, who doesn't understand anything, and accepts to be conducted and manipulated.

For Greenblatt a textual representation or a literary text, is a product of its negotiation with history and cultural exchange which becomes an interesting site for New Historicists. Obviously, literature cannot be understood without having knowledge of its historical context. The ‘textuality of history’ with the ‘historicity of text’ as defined by Louis Montrose and quoted by Stephen Greenblatt²⁸. Jean Howard argued :

A common way of speaking about literature and history is just that way : *literature and history, text and context*. In these binary oppositions, if one term is stable and transparent and the other in some way mirrors it, then that other term can be stabilized and clarified too²⁹.

By this quotation Howard sees that the term " text and context " mirrors the term " literature and history ", that is to say literature represents the text and history represents the context. It is necessary to understand history with the help of literary texts in order to see culture and

history in the historical texts³⁰. This means that the literary text is a window to history, from which the reader could plunge in the past and feel it as the present.

Khadra bring us the real historical events which happened in Afghanistan through his novel *The Swallows of Kabul*. Its characters and scenes make the reader not only to read the conflict, but also to live and to feel it. In the period between 1994 and 2001, when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan, they killed many women convicted for their crimes or adultery by shooting or stoning them in the head to death at the National Stadium in the presence of large crowds. In 2013, a woman named Nadjiba was executed in one of Kabul's villages named Charikan, an hour far from the capital. She was accused for adultery. Her husband shot her at the command of Mullah Khaliq who read a false verse from the Qur'an³¹. Khadra also evokes a similar scene which is a stoning of a woman. She was also accused for committing adultery. The words that are used by Khadra make us feel, as readers, the rigidity and the malice of the Taliban, through killing that woman in the name of God. He writes :

This woman knew exactly what she was doing. The intoxication of lust turned her away from the path of the Lord. Today the Lord turns His back on her. She has no right for His mercy, no right to the pity of the faithful. She has lived in dishonor ; so shall she die³².

This quotation explains that the Taliban justify their executions and tyrannical rules by relying them to Coran verses, they spot islam by killing and punishing innocent persons in the name of God. The quotation below confirms what has been said above :

[...] After reciting a verse from the Qur'an, he reads something that sounds like a judgment, returns the sheet of paper to an interior pocket of his vest, and at the end of a brief meditation proposes that his listeners arm themselves with stones³³.

Instead of using coran as a tool of teaching tolerance, respect and equality, the Taliban have misunderstood and destroyed some verses so as to become a justification of their executions. Thus, they spot the sacred book's reputation as well.

New Historicists interpret the significance of the past for the present, paying attention to the forms of power which operated in the past and how they are replicated in the present³⁴. New Historicists see that a literary work should be based on applying the power in the present as it has been applied in the past. Khadra describes the sorrowful and miserable scenes that happend in the past, and the crimes which were employed on the Afghans then makes them replicated in the present through his novel. Khadra uses in his novel the forms of power that happened in the past, and this enables the reader to make a link between the past and the present. In addition to that, the reader has the chance to feel and live the event as if it happned today.

Khadra reports the historical events and rewrites them with ardor, this may be interpreted that he has a great experience and deep memories. The reader of *The Swallows of Kabul* may pick up a precious historical information. To support this idea, we should refer again to New Historicism, this latter opens up new dimensions for the readers not to restrict themselves to the verbal construct of work only, but to unravel the historical and cultural consciousness of the writer also³⁵. The chief aim of this idea is that the reader should instruct himself about the literary text's historical and cultural circumstances. Khadra seems realizing this idea of New Historicism for his readers, because his representation of the events make them questioning about what they are reading, since these events are real and credible ones. The majority of the places and the persons he uses are taken from the reality, this what makes his readers trust his writings. The active reader is the one who checks about history in order to include what the literary text tempts to show. According to New Historicism, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of literature, by considering it in historical context

while treating history itself as historically contingent on the present in which it is constructed³⁶. *The Swallows of Kabul* may be well- understood by the reader if he returns back to history ; that is to say, if he reads and searches about the history of Afghanistan mainly Kabul, he will be able to feel and live the events and reads between the lines. Thus, his second reading after knowing the history will be better than the first before knowing it. Khadra makes an overview of the Afghan history, Kabul exactly, through his novel. Therefore, the analysis of *The Swallows of Kabul* in its historical context can disclose the relationship between its text and history. In this sense, the text shapes the history.

The influence of historical context on *The Swallows of Kabul* can be easily found in its context. The surrounding events, the historical conflicts that touched Kabul, the influence of the Taliban over Afghan people, and the approaching of *The Swallows of Kabul* from the perspective of New Historicism, would provide new viewpoints for its text and history.

Endnotes

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Chapter two : Types of Power

In this chapter, we will focus on the concept of "Power" and shed light on its types (physical, psychological and panopticon power) and the forms it takes. To realize this, we will borrow from Michael Foucault and some other new historicists.

We do not have to define power, because it defines itself. However, it is useful to know that power is nearly everything in life. If it does not exist, there will be neither the oppressor nor the oppressed. Unless power existed, all the humans would be equal, and live their life without being threatened. But unfortunately, this is quite impossible, life is constructed so, and the human being is born with the feeling to own, to govern and to dominate. It is very difficult to understand what does power mean actually. New Historicism addresses the idea that the lower common denominator of all human actions is power which is a means through which the marginalized are controlled, and the thing that they seek to gain.¹ This idea aims to explain that everyone seeks to be powerful despite of being dominated or alienated, this can be summarized in one sentence which is " Survival of the fittest". This is what dominates Khadra's novel which tells us about the sovereignty of the Taliban and their sense of governing and dominating the whole of Kabul. In other terms, the oppressor finds his pleasure in punishing and torturing people, and make them terrorized. By trying to recover their power and rights, the Afghan people find themselves the victims of the primitiveness of the Taliban.

a-Physical power :

Physical power is applied by the oppressor on the oppressed when this last does not obey his orders and rules. Even if he obeys, the oppressor uses violence. This type of power provides the oppressor to use physical punishments, humiliation and killing in the purpose of installing total monopoly and subjugation.

The French philosopher Michael Foucault who is a major influence on New Historicism writes : “ Power is exercised rather than possessed ; [...] power is not repressive but productive. ”². By this quotation, Foucault urges on the idea that power is practiced, it means that, the one who is in power exerts it on those who are not, this makes of power unmanageable and uncontrollable ; and cannot be stopped because of its capacity to reproduce itself. The fact that *The Swallows of Kabul* opens upon a marked and an unforgettable event which is the stoning of a woman who is believed to be a prostitute one, the scene is actually a vivid proof of how the Taliban exercise their power upon women. ‘Stoning a woman to death’ ; this statement makes the one shivers once pronouncing it, but for the Taliban it is a legitimate punishment of every woman who commits a sin. The Mullah Omar exhorted the crowd in the name of God, converting murder into a vision of retribution³.

Khadra writes :

After reciting a verse from the Qur’an, he reads something that sounds like a judgment [...] and at the end of a brief meditation proposes to his listeners arm themselves with stones [...]. At once, a hail of projectiles falls upon the condemned woman, [...] shivers under their impact without a cry [...] bloody and broken, the woman collapses and lies still⁴.

The question that comes to the reader’s mind once reading the quotation above, is : Are the Taliban sure of the sinfulness of the woman or not ? If no, why they stone her to death ? The answer is that, Taliban are certainly sure of the innocence of the woman, but it is obviously the only policy to terrorize and frighten the people of Kabul about the danger of disobeying their ‘ islamic ’ laws. For them, it is by making the Afghans see punishment with their own eyes that would make them cautious. It is never a hazard that the woman is stoned in the square. Rather, it is the Taliban planification, they make the execution as a spectacle, in order to be seen by all the inhabitants of Kabul. Khadra writes :

Abdul Jabbar’s truck grazes him, just misses a muleteer, and hurtles into the square, closely followed by the powerful 4×4. At the sight of this cortege, an incongruous roaring shakes of crowd, where chaggy adults and slender youths vie for the choicest places⁵.

People are gathered in the square in order to witness the execution ; forming a crowd which consists of both adults and youths. Everybody is invited to see the orchestra that Taliban performed. The Taliban use many different places to execute people, among them the square, this last is enough to hold a large number of spectators. They use many ways to kill and many operations and means to execute, as the stoning. This act makes the victim dies gradually and slowly, making him suffer and wishes to die as soon as possible, to end his pain.

During their reign, the Taliban exercise their power through using religion. The religious coercion controls the atmosphere of Kabul to the extent of paralysis. Every sphere and every corner is dominated by religion which become a weapon and a justification to exercise power. In the name of Coran, of Islam everyone is submitted and considered as an outlaw or a devil, if he/she does not obey or act according to the Taliban orders. The Taliban and their agents become the representatives of God, they act and punish in place of Allah. They impose many illogical rules, they threaten women to be killed or shot if they do not cover themselves from head to toe. They must wear *burqa* once being outside in order not to expose their beauty to men, and avoid the bright colors so as not to be remarked. Although the *burqa* existed before the Taliban's coming, they make it a mandatory dress for women. The Taliban use severe beatings, whipping and verbal abuse wherever there is any deviation from the set of laws imposed by them. Accordingly, they use power to achieve their aims. Power is the ability a person has to influence others⁶, The Taliban possess this ability and they succeeded to dominate all Kabul in a very short period. The title *The Swallows of Kabul* is in fact the women of Afghanistan in general and Kabul in particular , whose beauty must be hidden. The *burqa* is a symbol of docility ; women are weak creatures who submit to domination and manipulation. In the novel, all the women in Kabul are dressed in blue *burqas* like shadows, no one dares to speak and object this rule, because the Taliban would humiliate and punish them rudely. Khadra asserts : “ [...] the women, despite wearing long veils and

peering through netting, pirouetted in their perfums like gusts of warm air. The caravan travelers of bygone days used to swear that they had nowhere and never, in all their wanderings, encountered such bewitching beauties.”⁷. Despite it hid nearly all the women’s rotundity and shape, the veil never hide their beauty, they have been and are still of irresistible fairness.

The Taliban think that the veil represents women’s education and honor, this is why they make it an obligation, not a choice. They impose on them religion by using their force and power in case of disobedience. Contrary to Islam the Taliban abuse women rights ; Islam preserves and protects women, whereas Taliban dishonor and expose them to an absolute danger . In Kabul, women are less important than objects, they do not have a right for a smile, because the Taliban see a smile as a crime. The love that Zunaira feels towards Mohsen makes her sacrifice to go outside with him despite the danger they may affront. Just to draw a smile in his face, She puts her veil on, and accepts to face the risk. However, the humiliation that is waiting for Zunaira out is worse than death ; after seeing them laughing with each other in the street, the Taliban oblige Mohsen to assist ‘the faithful’ letting his wife Zunaira waiting for him under the hot sun .Khadra writes :

She Knew, before she set out, that her rashness was going to expose her to the most detestable fact of her existence, to the constraint that even in her dreams she refuses to accept : the forfeiture of her rights.[...] An irrepressible rage constricts her chest, bruises her heart, and swells the veins in her throat.⁸

Zunaira’s humiliation caused her rage, she regrets her acceptance to go outside, the Taliban treated her as a cheap merchandise. She accepted to go with her husband even if she knows that the Taliban will ruin her mood.

The Taliban come to use their force when people try to disobey their orders. In the novel, the Taliban oblige Mohsen to go with them to assist the speech presented by Mullah,

and let his wife waiting outside. An agent of the Taliban orders Mohsen : “ For now, you’re going to join the congregation in the mosque over there. In about fifteen minutes, Mullah Bachir is going to preach a sermon.”⁹. When Mohsen refuses to join them, they come to use force. Khadra writes : “ Two whips interrupt him. They land simultaneously, one on each shoulder.”¹⁰. The Taliban oblige firmly Mohsen to join the sermon, he does not have to refuse or to oppose their orders. An agent of the Taliban orders him again :

I tell you that Mullah Bashir is going to preach in ten minutes, and you talk to me about walking your wife to her parents’ house. What exactly do you have inside your skull ? Am I supposed to believe that you attach more importance to a family visit than to a sermon from one of our most eminent learned men ?¹¹

Mohsen is put in a very hard situation, his disobedience of the Taliban order may generate him great problems, and if he lets his wife alone under the warm sun, this may expose her to danger. However, the force that the Taliban use obliges him to choose the sermon and abandon his wife out. Khadra writes : “ With the tip of his whip, he raises Mohsen’s chin, forcing him to look him in the eye, then scornfully thrusts him back.”¹², the agent of Taliban continues : “ Your wife will wait for you here, by this wall, out of the way. You’ll take her home later.”¹³. The citizens of Kabul subjugate to the laws of the Taliban, neither their lives nor their families are important. No one has the priority in Kabul except the Taliban.

b-Psychological Power :

New Historicism welcomes Foucault’s insistence that power operates through innumerable channels ; this includes not just direct coercion and governmental action but also, crucially, daily routine¹⁴. For Foucault, power cannot be seen as a direct and a clear action as the majority think. Rather, it may appear beneath many ways and channels which can be strange and obscure. This idea will be more clarified if we refer to *The Swallows of Kabul*, mainly to ‘the stoning of the woman’. In that great day, two principle characters are present :

Atiq Shaukat, the discrete jailor who is ordered to bring the supposed prostitute to be stoned, and Mohsen Ramat, a former university student, now out of work, who hates and disregards the Taliban. He usually evades this kind of executive spectacles. However, the oppressions and terrors that Kabul went through make Mohsen weak and lead him to mingle in the crowd. So without thinking, he picks up three stones and throws them at the powerless woman, one of them beated her in the head. Khadra writes : “ Mohsen picks up three stones and throws them at the target [...] but on the third try he hits the victim flush on the head.”¹⁵. He adds : “ he sees a red stain blossom at the spot where his stone has struck her”¹⁶. It may be obscure for readers, the fact that the principle characters Atiq and Mohsen participate in the stoning of the woman. Atiq, is a discrete person, who does not dare to oppose the Taliban rules. Additionally, his duty is to protect the people of Kabul, and be in the same position with them. However, his work, as a jailor, obliges him to bring prostitutes to be executed. Mohsen refuses to submit to Taliban rules, fights to bring back his rights. Nevertheless, he finds himself contributing with Taliban by participating not only in stoning the woman but also in knocking her down. In the moment of the stoning, neither Atiq nor Mohsen are aware of what they are doing, and this is what the Taliban is searching for in fact ; the convention between the oppressor and the oppressed. Atiq and Mohsen join the Taliban, hand in hand to stone the woman. This attitude can be referred to as ‘hegemony’ which is defined as:

In hegemony, the oppressed class literally ‘gives’ the oppressors the permission to oppress them : Hegemony occurs through social practices and beliefs which neither the oppressor nor the oppressed are aware of.¹⁷

This quotation attempts to explain that the oppressed (Atiq and Mohsen) become a docile conforming desceplined bodies when they accept the rules given by the oppressor (bring a prostitute to be stoned, stone the woman to death). The oppressor and the oppressed are not aware of. It is achieved with the acceptance through ‘unconscious’ of the oppressed. The

Taliban achieved their aim on stoning the woman by the hands of Mohsen and other Afghans. The Taliban did not order Mohsen to stone the woman, but their savage practices, carnages and massacres weakened him. The crowd who is gathered by the Taliban drives him to lose control and stone the woman to death. The oppression exerted on Mohsen pushes him to kill the victim. He is psychologically influenced by the Taliban to the point of killing in him not only the 'educated' or the 'emancipated' Mohsen but basically and intentionally the 'human Mohsen'! He asserts after the stoning episode :

A prostitute was stoned in the square. I don't know how, but I joined the crowd of degenerates who were clamoring for her blood. It was as though I'd been taken up by a whirlwind. I, too, wanted to be in a good position to watch the impure beast perish ! And when the rain of stones began to overwhelm the demon, I found myself picking up rocks_me too_and pelting her with them_ I must have gone mad, Zunaira [...]¹⁸

This quotation reveals how Mohsen becomes mad because of his crime, he regrets it and wonders how he could do such thing. He used to be a wise and a good person. The Taliban indirectly conduct him to do so. Khadra asserts : “ If he lost his way in a moment of a collective hysteria, that is because the horrors of everyday life are sufficiently powerful to overwhelm all defenses [...]”¹⁹. The horror in Kabul makes of Mohsen a criminal. The Taliban used power tactics in order to achieve their projects. The stoning is in fact a psychological outlet which permits the oppressed to discharge their anguish and their disillusionment. Moreover, is a kind of diversion ; a means used to allow the crowd to cry their ailment on someone who seems as an oppressor, or an outlaw. Thus, the negative energy is ejected towards the 'sinful' woman who is stoned to death. The oppressor generally uses this means to direct energy of the oppressed and his anger in order to mingle in their crimes, rather than using his force upon him. In order to gain the oppressed and avoid his anger, the oppressor creates some conflicts and problems which may lead the oppressed to forget his acts and mingling in that conflict. In the novel, the shoutings and the anger of the people in the square permit them to discharge their wrath upon the poor woman, rather than to

discharge it on the Taliban who do not stop ruining their lives. This policy seems indirect but has deep roots ; after screaming, and participating in the stoning, the crowd disperses, thereafter, each one turns back to his home relived and satisfied. Instead of subverting the Taliban rules and affronting them, they indirectly contribute with them. This is what makes of the movement of the Taliban prosper and thrive without making a physical effort, people do not fight, do not subvert to regain their power, instead, they mingle in the problems and conflicts that the Taliban create. This idea is not far from that of Greenbaltt who thinks that no physical or military force need to be deployed or exercised for power to have operated effectively in the interest of dominant ideological systems. When the self is ideologically and linguistically constructed, it will reproduce hegemonic operation.²⁰. One's intelligence and education lead him to be powerful in his society. Even in games, the players' intelligence and tactics make of them the winners. The well-educated person uses this kind of policies in order to realize his plans. The Taliban use their dialectic of power and Coran knowledges. In other words they instrumentalize religion for the sake of power. Consequently, they are of a considerable intelligence which helps them on achieving and accomplishing their plans.

c- Panopticon Power and its Application :

The original idea of the panoptic prison, or panopticon, was designed by the English social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century as a prison institution in which one guard would be able to observe all prisoners, but the prisoners themselves would not be able to see the guard. This panoptic prison has a single watchtower in the middle where the watchman would be able to observe without being observed²¹. The idea of being watched will make the prisoners embarrassed and turbulent, especially if they ignore who observes them. Foucault argues :

The panopticon must not be understood as a dream building : It is the diagram of a mechanism of power in its ideal form ; its functioning, abstracted from

any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system : It is in fact a figure of political technology that must be detached from any specific use.²²

The panopticon for Foucault is not just a well-constructed building, rather, it is a political construction which inspire the creation of power relations and exercise them on the dominated. Its use must be just for the sake of power and political reasons.

Kabul is comparable to the panoptic prison, the agents of the Taliban play the same role with the watchtower and the people of Kabul seem to be the prisoners. In each corner of Kabul's boulevards there is an agent of the Taliban who observes every slight act. People feel observed at any moment of time. They walk with fear of being caught and brought to prison. No one in Kabul dares to get a walk freely without turning right and left to assure himself of the safety of streets. Khadra asserts : “ And the Taliban thugs often shoot at suspicious shadows without warning ”²³. In Kabul, anyone may be shot by the Taliban without being warned. Any act of disobedience may draw the Afghan to death or to the cell. This tactic used by the Taliban aims to dominate the whole of Kabul, and observe its peoples' moves in order to control and dominate them. It also prevents and terrifies them from the disobedience of the laws. The feeling of being observed would make the people of Kabul control their moves and footsteps, and correct their behaviors.

The perfect application of the panoptic power reduces the number of those who exercise it and increases the number of those on whom it is exercised. This may allow the oppressor to intervene at any moment of time if any mistake is committed and gives the power of mind over mind²⁴. Moreover, what makes the power of the Taliban strong is their good planification to exercise it. Making the Afghans' minds think about who observes them and where, makes them stay in the same circle ; any wrong footstep may shake their existence. The number of the dominated Afghans exceeds that of the Taliban, nevertheless, they succeed to exert their own monopoly on their souls and achieve an overwhelming domination.

Furthermore, the panopticon aim is not only power, rather, it may inspire many issues.

Foucault urges :

The panopticon, on the other hand, has a role of amplification ; although it arranges power, although it is intended to make it more economic and more effective, it does so not for power itself, nor for the immediate salvation of a threatened society : its aim is to strengthen the social forces – to increase production, spread education, raise the level of public morality [...] ²⁵

By this quotation Foucault insists on the idea that the panopticon power has many other amplifications and aspire to a solid social forces. That is to say, it aims to make the educative level spread and increase. Although the Taliban's aim and objective is far from being educative, their panoptic power aims to insert their islamic ideologies. They oblige people to be conservatives when walking in the streets, preventing men from shaving their birds and women from from exposing themsemves to men. Since they occupy all the corners in the streets of Kabul, nothing can escape their eyes. And when they remark people's moves like Mohsen' s and Zunaira's laugh they suddenly jumped to humiliate them. An agent of the Taliban asks them : “ Do you think you're at the circus ? ”²⁶. It is clear that the Taliban observe everybody in Kabul, otherwise, they would never be able to capture the smile or the laugh of the couple. Each angle, there is a police man who observe and watch every error or mistake, all people in Kabul are overseen, every wrong footstep, or move may throw them to jail. Power is everywhere, the Taliban leader may be absent, but his agents are in every nook in Kabul. Foucault's idea is true in fact for thinking that power is ubiqitos which means omnipresent.²⁷ In a country like Kabul, no one is safe, and no one can escape his verdict. He could be killed or jailed whenever and wherever without a convincing reason. Thereby, where one feels observed or watched by the other, this is also power actually.

The Taliban succeeded to put Kabul under their control and impose their laws on it. Besides, they experiment on them all the means they had in order to dominate and oppress

them. Thus, the Afgans are subordinated and subjugated to the Taliban's physical, psychological and panopticon powers.

Endnotes

¹Tiwary Narendra, Chandra N.D.R *New Historicism and Arundhati Roy's works*. Journal of Literature and Media Studies. 2009,80.

²E.Cain William, A.Finke Laurie, E.Johnson Barbara. *Northon Antology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Michel Foucault. 2001. 1618.

³Wright Neil. *Stone's Throw The Swallows of Kabul*. 132.

⁴Khadra Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*. 2002, 14.

⁵Ibid., 12.

⁶Pitso Victor, Letseka Moeketsi. Foucault's Discourse and Power : Implications for Instructionist Classroom Managment. 2013, 24.

⁷Khadra Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*.2002, 10.

⁸Ibid.,98.

⁹Ibid., 90.

¹⁰Ibid., 90.

¹¹Ibid.,90, 91.

¹²Ibid.,91.

¹³Ibid91

¹⁴Greenblatt Stephen. Introduction to the Power of Forms. 1982, 2250

¹⁵Khadra Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*. 2002,14.

¹⁶*Ibid.*,14

¹⁷Pitso Victor, Letseka Moeketsi. *Foucault's Discourse and Power : Implications for Instructionist Classroom Managment*. 2013,024

¹⁸Khadra Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*. 2002, 36.

¹⁹*Ibid.* 72.

²⁰Brannigan John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. 1998, 07.

²¹Sheridan Connor. *Foucault, Power and the Modern Panopticon*. 2016, 11, 12.

²²Foucault Michel. *Discipline and Punish : the Birth of the Prison*. 1975,205.

²³Khadra Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*. 2002,49.

²⁴Foucault Michel. *Discipline and Punish : the Birth of the Prison*. 1975,206.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 207.208.

²⁶Khadra Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*. 2002,89.

²⁷Pitso Victor, Letseka Moeketsi. *Foucault' s Discourse and Power : Implications for Instructionist Classroom Managment*. 2013,26.

Chapter Three : Subversion and Containment

In each part in the world, there are persons who do not tolerate oppression and do not accept power operations. In order to dominate, to control and to observe, the oppressor uses nearly all the means he has to manipulate the oppressed who is contained by numerous manners and subjugated to all kinds of oppressions. However, in several cases, the oppressed generally fights to resist and to subvert the dominator's rules and restrictions. He also tries not to fall in his trap and refuses to obey the legitimate authority. People who are oppressed and alienated generally subvert the laws, which means the total rejection of all kinds of hierarchy and subordination. Subversion is a supplement to power, because where we find power we find subversion. Stephen Greenblatt developed his idea of power and put forward two terms : « subversion » and « containment ». The two terms are often used to refer to the “ capacity of the dominant order to generate subversion as to use it to its own ends ”¹. From this idea, we understand that any kind of power draws subversion ; the more the oppressed tries to subvert the oppressor, the more the oppressor contains him. Therefore. To show the dangerousness of disobedience, the oppressor creates conflicts and laws, and when the oppressed subverts and refuses them he punishes him as well. Thus, the dominator generates subversion.

In *The Swallows of Kabul*, when the Taliban punish someone who subverts their laws, they do it in the presence of all the Afghans so as to prove and warn them about the danger of opposing them. In addition, The Taliban try to contain the Afghans by pushing them to attend the prayers and the sermons, they gather them in the mosque to instruct them about religion and implementing their instructions in the people's mind. Khadra writes : “ Taliban militiamen are patrolling the perimeter of the sanctuary in packs, seizing men who are passing by and forcing them *manu militari* to join the assembled faithful ”². The quotation shows how

the Taliban observe the people and carry them with force to attend the sermons. They use sermons in order to wash the people brains and pack them with faked convictions and wrong promises. The Mullah Bachir says :

No doubt about it, my brothers. It's as true as the sun rising in the east. I have consulted the mountains and examined the signs in the heavens,[...] and they all affirm that the long-awaited Hour has arrived. You need to listen [...] Every murmuring sound, telling you that the moment of glory is within our reach, that the Imam El-Mehdi is among us, that our path is bathed in light. Those who would doubt this for a second are none of ours. [...] You will hear them for all eternity, bewailing their failure to seize the chance that we offer them on a silver platter : the chance to join our ranks, to place themselves once and for all in the shelter of the lord³

In order to contain the people of Kabul, the Taliban uses convictions to achieve their objectifs and to convince people about the advantage of following their instructions. In the sermon, the Mullah Bachir insures the people about the presence of the awaited Imam El-Mehdi among them. Imam El-Mehdi is, in fact, the man who is cited by the Prophet's *Hadiths*, where he says that the Imam will come back to accomplish his duty of spreading Islam. The humanity is waiting for him to come, to inforce the Islamic religion, and to accomplish justice, equality and peace. “ L’Imam al- Mahdi (As) est la direction, il est le chemin, la voie qui mène à la lumière ”⁴. [The Imam al-Mahdi (peace be on him) is the guidance, he is the path that leads to the light] (Translation is ours). All muslims believe in the returning of the Imam El-Mahdi one day, because the Prophet Mohamed (peace and prayer be on him) cited this in his *Hadiths*. However, the Taliban's convictions make the people of Kabul, think that this man is really present among them. The Taliban contain a great number of people, because once people hear this kind of information, they will be convinced of how things will be better in the hands of the Taliban, because most of them believe in God and so, they will trust in the Taliban, too. The Mullah reminds the people of Kabul of the chance that is given to them, and the danger of not being in the Taliban sides. By obliging them to attend the sermons, many

Afghans are contained and dominated. It is by force that Mohsen is taken to attend the “faithful” and let his wife Zunaira waiting under the sun. Khadra writes :

Mohsen raises his hands in a gesture of capitulation. After a furtive glance at his wife, he directs to a green-and-white building, around which other police agents and militiamen are intercepting pedestrians and compelling them to join the faithful who are waiting to hear Mullah Bachir’s words.⁵

The green-and-white building seems to be a prison in Kabul ; the Taliban compel every pedestrian in Kabul to walk in, even if he is not a faithful. It is the same for Mohsen who is carried violently to attend the sermon.

Stephen Greenblatt writes in his famous essay *Invisible Bullets*, that the production of subversion is the very condition of power⁶. This means that there is no power without subversion ; subversion is the response of some to the power exercised over them ; when there is resistance, there will be subversion. Greenblatt thinks that power needs to have subversion, otherwise it would be without the opportunity to justify itself, and make it visible as power⁷. Greenblatt emphasizes that power without subversion has no opportunity and no efficacy. Not far from Greenblatt’s idea, Foucault pointed out : “ [w]here there is power there is resistance ; and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power ”⁸. In the novel, no one tries or dares to subvert or to resist the coercive power. Even inside home, the relationship between the couples ; Zunaira and Mohsen, Musarrat and Atiq, is permeated by the oppressive rule of the Taliban. Love turns to hate and paralysis. Moreover, The *burqa* in *The Swallows of Kabul* represents oppression and inequality, taking away women’s identities and turning them into an immanate object. All women are forced to wear the *burqa*, once they step on to the streets. However, Zunaira, is the only woman who subverts these laws. In the novel, all women are forced to accept their destiny, but Zunaira who used to be a lawyer, disregards the Taliban. She hates even

confronting them in the street, and prefers staying at home than to go out putting the *burqa* which hides her beauty and identity. She insists :

Here at least, I'm *me*, Zunaira, Mohsen Ramat's wife, age thirty-two, former magistrate, dismissed by obscurantists without a hearing and without compensation, but with enough self-respect left to brush my hair every day and pay attention to my clothes. If I put that damned veil on, I'm neither a human being nor an animal, I'm just an affront, a disgrace a blemish that has to be hidden. That's too hard to deal with. Especially for someone who was a lawyer, who worked for women's rights⁹

Zunaira refuses to wear the *burqa*, she subverts the laws that Taliban imposed on her and other women. She used to be a free lawyer woman who takes care of herself. However, after the Taliban banned her from work, she prefers staying at home, looking after herself, being the real Zunaira, not the one who the Taliban wants to be. Angela King thinks that the female resistance is possible, she affirms :

I'm not suggesting that all women clamber to conform to the ideals of femininity. There have always been, and always will be, those who gleefully subvert or ignore the 'rules' or who enjoy the pleasures of fashion and beauty without feeling them to be an obligation or a necessity.¹⁰

King thinks that there are always women who enjoy to be pretty and beautiful, and surely find pleasures in wearing fashionable clothes. Thus, the majority of them ignore and subvert the rules that oblige them to hide their beauty. Furthermore, this kind of subversion appears through Zunaira, who refuses to change herself to be in tune with Taliban conception of how a woman must be. It is for this reason that she resists and subverts the laws and disobeys the Taliban rules, who condemn the women and entomb them inside the *burqa*. Nevertheless, her subversion is not visible to the Taliban, they are not aware of the refusal of Zunaira to wear the *burqa*. Subversion must be invisible to the subverted according to Greenblatt. When Zunaira finally accepts to walk with her husband Mohsen, they met the Taliban agents in the street and order Mohsen to attend the sermon. Zunaira stays under the hot sun waiting for her husband to come back home. Khadra writes :

Mummified under her veil, Zunaira is suffocating. Anger knots her stomach and obstructs her throat. A mad desire to lift the cloth in search of a hypothetical breath of fresh air intensifies her nervousness. But she does not even dare to wipe her dripping face on her burqa. Like a lunatic in a straitjacket, she stays where she is [...].¹¹

Even she firmly refuses to wear *burqa*, hates the Taliban, Zunaira does not dare to talk in their presence. She stays immobile and silent under the warm sun. She seems obeying the Taliban orders, but inside of her she wants to scream and insult them. The subversion of Zunaira is not visible to the Taliban. She is intelligent and wise enough to make them know how she disagrees and refuses their restrictions. In fact, the show of resistance or subversion is confined in Zunaira's home when she cries her misery and anger towards Mohsen, her husband. She shouts at him :

Ask the Taliban for permission first. Go on, let's see what kind of guts you have. Go to them and demand that they change their law, and I promise I'll take off my veil immediately [...] Since you're my very own husband, go find the miserable bastard who dared to lay a finger on your wife and chop off his hand [...].¹²

Zunaira discharges her anger on Mohsen. She rejects him and refuses to take her burqa off and quarrels with him and blaming for not being able to disobey the Taliban agents. In fact, the scene of violence turns out to be that of murder because Zunaira at last kills her husband. The unintentional killing of her husband, is in a way or another the killing of the demon through him, because his participation in the stoning captures the death of the beloved Mohsen ; the one that Zunaira loved. 'Mohsen the devil' kills 'Mohsen the angel'. The act of murdering her husband is subversion and jailing her is a way of containment. Zunaira will be stoned to death in the square, and assume the consequences of her resistance.

Foucault claimed that resistance exists wherever there is domination. Power is never total, uniform or smooth but shifting and unstable ; if it is exerted on 'micro levels', it can be contested on micro levels, there is 'no single locus of great Refusal' but a 'plurality of

resistances'¹³. Foucault aims to explain that resistance is accomplished according to power, and this latter, is changeable. The power that is exercised over the weak persons may change to become as a challenge with them, and this leads to numerous resistances. *The Swallows of Kabul*, depicts the condemnation of the Afghan to the horror, and their adaptation to live in fear and threat. No one seems enough resist in the work of Khadra. Atiq for example suffers from two pains ; that of doing a very hard task ; being a jailer, and that of his wife whose disease causes his preclusion to achieve his duties. All these troubles do not push Atiq to subvert, he is just complaining and thinking of how to overcome his problems. Khadra claims :

A city that mistreats him, damages him, day after day, night after night, wether he's in the company of some wretch condemned to die and awaiting her fate in his stinking jail or watching over his tormented wife, doomed to an even crueller death.¹⁴

The quotation above demonstrates that Atiq is obliged to live two similar hard situations ; that of being with those who are condemned to death in jail, and that of being awaited by his wife whose death is approaching. The two circumstances make him static and paralyzed. Atiq never tries to change his life or to find solutions, his trust in God helps him to overleap his pain and accept it as it is. He sighs : “ *La hawla*. Lord, if this is a test you're giving me, give also the strength to overcome it.”¹⁵. Contrary to Atiq, Nazeech, his friend, despite his weakness, and the threats he lives everyday, he finally decides to run away. He thinks to escape the Taliban tyranny, without making them aware of his departure. He declares :

Damned if I know. I' m just going away, that' s all there is to it. I've got everything ready_ my bag, my stick, and my money. As soon as my right foot is healed, I' m going away. No thank-yous, no good-byes. I' ll pick a road at random and follow it all the way to the ocean. And when I reach the shore, I' ll throw myself into the water. I' m never coming to Kabul. It' s an accursed city¹⁶.

By this quotation, Nazeech wants to subvert in his manner. He can neither affront nor resist the Taliban insane laws. So he decides to go far from Kabul without turning and regretting. It is true that he does not dare to affront the Taliban, and fight against them, but he finds that his departure will change at least, his life. Atiq does not encourage him, rather, he accuses him of lie, and assures him that he cannot run away, because the Taliban are above everyone in Kabul, and no one can change this reality. Although he is disappointed by his friend's view, Nazeech does not give up, he decides to go far from Kabul, and he realises his will. Khadra writes :

Now that he's conquered the mountain, there's nothing to stop him from taking on the horizon. He feels capable of walking to the end of the earth. Proud of his exploit, unthinkable for a man of his age, he shakes his fists in the air and his vengful eyes over Kabul [...] ¹⁷

Nazeech succeeds to overcome the emotional and mental paralysis that other characters suffer from. Nazeech and Zunaira are the only characters in the novel who experience development because they are the only ones who faced the fate imposed by the Taliban. Besides, unlike Atiq or Mohsen, Nazeech manages to run away far from the city of Kabul, and this is quiet symbolic in terms of power and subversion. Zunaira also manages to run away from jail. So both of them find an issue or an outlet outside the hell of Kabul.

The combat that turns around Nazeech's brain, pushes him to leave, he indirectly challenges the Taliban, and despite his age, he does the best thing that youths do not dare to do. Dying in the top of the mountain is better than dying with the sound of bums. Therby, Nazeech act can be considered as subversion ; the fact of escaping that kind of life in Kabul under the Taliban restrictions is a great refusal. He is not capable enough to change Kabul, but he succeed to change his own life. The open ending of *The Swallows of Kabul* is significant, it is a hope in change. In the novel Khadra makes Zunaira the only one who escapes her fate. No one Knows her destiny as she runs away, but at least the reader is left with hope because

even in hellish, demonic atmosphere of Kabul, love is the only one which triumphs, and this seems the ultimate message of Khadra.

Endnotes

¹Liu, Jie-xiu, Ma, Young-hui. *Power, Subversion, Containment : A New Historicist Interpretation of the Virginian*. 2014, 614.

²Khadra, Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul* 2002.40.

³Ibid., 93.94.

⁴Al- Hachem, Mohamed. *L'Imam Mahdi : Résurrection Des Cœurs*.no page.

⁵Khadra, Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*. 2002,91.

⁶Brannigan, John. *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*. 1998, 08.

⁷Ibid., 08

⁸Chung, Lai Hsiung. *Limits and Beyond : Greenblatt, New Historicism and Feminist Genealogy*. 2006, 24.

⁹Khadra, Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*.2002, 77.

¹⁰King, Angela. *The Prisoner of Gender : Foucault and the Disciplinary of the Female Body*.2004, 36.

¹¹Khadra, Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*.2002, 97. 98.

¹²Khadra, Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*. 2002. 132.133.

¹³King, Angela. *The Prisoner of Gender : Foucault and the Disciplinary of the Female Body*.2004, 37.

¹⁴Khadra, Yasmina. *The Swallows of Kabul*.2002, 50.

¹⁵Ibid,. 50.

¹⁶Ibid, 66.

¹⁷Ibid, 105.

General Conclusion

Throughout this piece of research, we had the opportunity to read Yasmina Khadra's novel *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) from the New Historicist perspective. To achieve our aim, we have explored the theory of New Historicism according to its guru Stephen Greenblatt, and we have borrowed some concepts from the French philosopher Michel Foucault who influenced on the theory.

Neitzsche affirmed : "We want to serve history only to the extent that history serves life". History is our past, and the past must be recorded and written in order to serve us in the present and serve the coming generations in the future. History may be a blind spot in every human's life, rather New Historicism urges on the necessity to textualize this history, and never burying it, but making it alive to illuminate the human being's path.

Our dissertation is divided into three chapters ; the first chapter is devoted to study the concept of the 'Textuality of History' and 'Historicity of the Text', relying it to the historical circumstances that occurred in Afghanistan between 1994 and 2001 and how Khadra makes it a literary work. The second chapter attempts to emphasize on power and its types and how the Taliban exercises it on the Afghans. The third and last chapter deals with Subversion and Containment and explains how and why some characters subvert the Taliban who tries to contain them and imposes their tyrannical restrictions on them.

Furthermore, along our study of Yasmina Khadra's *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002) from the New Historicist perspective, we have reached two main conclusions. The first one is that New Historicism opens a new dimension, and gives the opportunity to the reader not to grasp the verbal and written work only, but to enrich his historical background. Moreover, the second conclusion is that Yasmina Khadra has 'textualized the history' and 'historicized the text'. He gathered the historical events that occurred in Afghanistan mainly in Kabul in a

literary genre entitled *The Swallows of Kabul* (2002). Besides, *The Swallows of Kabul* give the opportunity to the reader to grasp in history and pushes him to go deeper and know the history of Afghanistan in general and Kabul in particular.

The frame of our research prevents us from exploring all the issues related to Yasmina Khadra's novel. Accordingly, we invite other students to study the novel from other perspectives, such as modern tragedy and commitment. In addition to that, we suggest also to study the novel from the feminist perspective because it shows how the arabo-mulism women are dominated and objected to the rules and how they react to such oppression.

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