

Introduction

Originally, folklore was directly linked to traditions, ancient customs, beliefs, legends, and myths. It was characterized by orality and unknown authors but reflected a pearl of timeless wisdom and spoke for collective identities. In this respect, Thompson (1996) defines it as; "the common idea present in all folklore is that of tradition, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record" (p. 263). Folklore still represents all this and more because folklore in literature speaks for the identity of the people and describes their inner motivations and desires, and by doing so, it became defined as culture; "While anthropologists regarded folklore as literature, scholars of literature defined it as culture" (Ben Amos, 2020, p. 48). The Algerian literary works in Arabic and French are complete with folkloric elements. Algerian writers, willingly or unwillingly, incorporate folk tales and popular beliefs in their literary works. This fact may stem from the rooted Algerian principles and nationalistic attitudes towards different concerns that may inspire their writing pieces.

This research paper seeks to shed light on particular characteristics of folklore in literature by examining the ways it reflects the culture of a group of people and the circumstances that may alter that culture, such as colonization and assimilation. For this reason, Yasmina Khadra, the Algerian writer, has been selected to study this significant literary element. Yasmina Khadra is known for his nationalist writings, mainly during the time of French colonization, and he did not miss the opportunity to highlight the attributes of the Algerian identity amid the war through the different beliefs and traditions expressed in his works. In *What the Day Owes the Night*, a great deal of folkloric elements are considered to reach an understanding of the Algerian culture and national identity during the French occupation. Thus, this paper aims to answer the following questions: How does Yasmina Khadra utilize Algerian folklore elements as a cultural heritage to illustrate the resilience of Algerian national identity during the post-colonial period? What is the significance of female characters in Yasmina Khadra's work in shaping the narrative of Algerian cultural identity? For this sake, textual analysis and literary interpretation are used as approaches to identify the various folkloric elements and explain their significance in culture and identity.

Literature Review

William Thoms introduced the term "folklore" in 1846, referring to the oral transmission of traditional knowledge from one generation to another through tales, music, dance, idioms, poems, rituals, etc. Xu (2021) explains that Thom used this term "to replace the terminology of "popular antiquities" or "popular literature"" (p. 01). It developed by the end of the 18th century and early 19th century. Ben Amos (2020) is a prominent figure in the field of folklore, as he has written abundantly about it, especially about African folk literature. He defines *folklore* as "an artistic communication ... in small groups" (p. 33). This definition highlights the significance of folklore's artistic and social aspects, which embrace various cultural expressions.

Ben Amos (2020) revolutionized folklore studies by calling for a redirection of folklore examination from merely textual and oral analysis, allowing it to be more holistic, underlying the interconnectedness of many cultural and social elements. Accordingly, he advanced that folklore: "is not a closed system. Rather, it interconnects with other social and cultural systems,

including religion, art, law, values, governance, kinship, and, in literate societies, literature, art, popular culture, film, and social media (p. xx). Conversely, Storey (2014) uses popular culture to refer to folklore. However, he distinguishes between folk and popular culture in terms of expression. While folklore expresses the local set of elements and traditions, popular culture stands for more widespread and dispersed aspects of, not necessarily, local folk material. He contends that "popular culture is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, high culture, dominant culture, and working-class culture. A full definition must always take this into account" (Storey, 2014, p. 01). Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamic relationship between folklore and popular culture in shaping social norms and principles. He also distinguishes between high and low cultures, referring to the former as popular culture and the latter as oral culture or folklore. Folklorists are exploring how the traditional, vernacular, and local cultural productions are interconnected and influenced by broader societal relationships.

Because some elements of folklore tend to disappear if society does not practice them, writers willingly or unwillingly incorporate folkloric items into their oeuvres to revive the cultural heritage of their societies. Algerian writers have always been prominent in highlighting folklore elements in their literary works. Many writers incorporate folklore into literature based on the principle that it represents collective culture and national identity. Critical examination of those works allows for identifying elements of both folklore and popular culture in terms of high and low culture, explaining the writers' motifs behind selecting particular folklore elements. Writers such as Tahar Wattar, Abdelhamid Benhaddouga, Mohamed Dib, and Yasmina Khadra exhibit a variety of folklore elements in their novels to reveal the authentic historical context of their characters, settings, and events. Reading those works revives a sense of belonging. It raises the spirit of nationalism, as the writers include vernacular and folk beliefs to reflect the country's national, social, and cultural heritage.

Nevertheless, Yasmina Khadra tends to be more inclusive as he attempts to contrast between high and low culture. He aims to highlight the coexistence of two opposing cultures in one country and artistically explain his characters' attitudes based on their cultural and social upbringing. Unlike other writers, Khadra is more meticulous in portraying genuine characters and describing their development through the narrative, considering the various social and cultural alterations. Many academics and critics have scrutinized Khadra's works, yet they have only offered a limited understanding of the folk beliefs he depicts. We contend that a deeper understanding of the connections between spiritual folk elements and the opposition to cultural assimilation is necessary.

Moreover, Khadra's writings are not mere attempts to preserve folklore and popular culture to transmit them in writing to the coming generations but rather indicate the impact of colonialism on individual identity and cultural heritage. They also highlight the aspects of high culture, the colonial French culture, low culture, and the indigenous local culture and describe how Algerians struggle to maintain their folk beliefs and traditions. The problematics of 'individual identity,' referred to by Preston (2013), have not been examined thoroughly and sufficiently in previous studies of Khadra's writings. Preston suggests it is vital to raise the problem of "individual identity and voice when the sense of belonging to a particular community is ruptured" (Preston, 2013, p. xiv). It has been noticed that various examinations of Khadra's works have focused primarily on his use of folklore as solely a means to preserve the national cultural heritage, for others, as undermining the potential of Algerians to thrive and

prosper. Nevertheless, the dynamic between locals and invaders and how folklore is informed through the struggle between the two has not been outlined, and this is the core of this paper where I aim to focus on examining Khadra's interpretation of Algerian identity utilizing folklore and popular culture. A systematic check of Khadra's novels is undertaken to delve into the protagonist's internal conflict explain traces of the protagonist's identity torn between local and foreign culture and provide insights into Khadra's use of folklore to demonstrate the challenges of Algerian identity against the backdrop of colonization.

Analysis

The Plot in *What the Day Owes the Night*

Mohamed Moulessoul, an Algerian French writer, adopted the name Yasmina Khadra; Yasmina refers to his wife while Khadra refers to his mother, for political reasons. According to Senouci and Serir (2019), Khadra revealed his true identity as a man, however "he faced a moral dilemma mainly because of the French press and Lieut Habib Souaïdia's book, which suspected the army of being involved in what is called the 'Dirty War'" (pp. 501-502). He was born in Bechar in 1955 and had a military career before he devoted himself to literature and writing. He wrote many novels, including his masterpiece and international bestseller *What the Day Owes the Night*, published in 2010 and adapted into cinema in 2012.

The narrative follows the life of the protagonist, Younes, later named Jonas, as he joined the European community, from his miserable childhood to his adulthood. After his father had lost the family land in the countryside, he moved with his parents to the city of Oran and settled in the slums of Jenane Jatou. His father surrendered him to his more affluent uncle when he realized he had no future with him and that his uncle Mahi could save him. His uncle educated him and got him into the European community, where he formed a close friendship with a group of European boys with whom he spent the most decisive parts of his life. As a result, everything changed completely, and he had many decisive choices: his past or present, his country's war, or his European friends.

Beliefs in the Novel

It is vital to illustrate how the different elements of folklore are interrelated and play an integral part in portraying society. The materials of folklore represent the sum of a society's cultural expressions, such as dances, music, tales, proverbs, legends, myths, traditions, and religious beliefs. In *What the Day Owes the Night*, we highlight many folkloric elements that serve as precursors of the Algerian culture and way of life during the French colonization, mainly using dialect, superstition, religious beliefs, and social traditions.

The Use of Dialect

Dialect is a technical and artistic tool for the writer to make his characters well-rounded and natural, bringing authenticity to his work. Ben Amos suggested that dialect "could and should be an object of folklore research" (Ben Amos, 2020, p.175). We support this by stating that dialect in a literary work is considered historical evidence. In *What the Day Owes the Night*, the writer referred to many elements in their original dialect, the Algerian dialect, even though he writes in French.

The narrator used non-standard words to refer to familiar places in Oran, such as "Tahtaha Square" (Khadra, 2011, p. 307). Yasmina Khadra does not use this word aimlessly; he could have substituted it with a French alternative. It is about historical evidence; as stated above, people can identify the place quickly anytime they read the book because that place has always been there, standing as a witness to the different events in Algeria. If the narrator did not use the word "Tahtaha¹," no one would know where the place was, and by doing so, he managed to give the novel a proper dimension even though it is a work of fiction.

'El Malah' is the Algerian name of the town where Younes spent most of his life: "I love Rio Salado—the place the Romans called Fulmen Salsun and one we now call El Malah" (Khadra, 2011, p. 128). Once again, the author calls for the place's historical significance by using non-standard words to make the readers localize it better and even identify themselves with it. 'Jenane Jato,' the slum where the Younes family settled after arriving in Oran, is another location the writer referred to by its authentic name. Yasmina Khadra did not refer to the names of the streets where his uncle used to live, neither in Oran nor in El Malah²; though he described them in detail, he did not give their names, and he only gave the names of the streets where the Algerians used to dwell. This fact may be considered a step towards the construction of national identity. Other words, such as 'the souk' (Khadra, p. 23), have served this purpose.

The novel uses the Algerian dialect not only to refer to places for national and historical evidence but also to depict the culture and traditions of the Algerian people. For this, Khadra has used words in the Algerian dialect instead of their direct equivalent in French, such as "el barakah"³ and 'S'hab el baroud'⁴ (Khadra, pp. 16–372), referring to the folkloric dancers who ride horses and use shotguns while dancing, and "Méchoui"⁵ to celebrate the marriage of Fabrice Scamaroni, the friend of Younes; "Pépé Rucillio donated fifty sheep and paid for the finest méchoui specialists to come from Sebdou"⁶ (Khadra, p. 290).

When Mahi was telling his nephew about his ancestors, he used the word Ulemas⁷ to refer to the Algerian scholars who inspired generations of Algerians: "A man so wise, he might have been a scholar—one of the greatest Ulemas—but as a young man, he gave in to temptation" (Khadra, p. 100). Despite having an equivalent in the target language, Mahi purposefully used this word in the Algerian dialect to underscore the importance of knowledge and to question the underlying themes of the French occupation. As the French claimed to colonize Algeria for the sake of civilizing and educating its people, which is the case of the other colonizing powers, Khadra expressed resistance to such claims and used the word Ulemas to show the Algerian pride in his origins and to highlight the fact that scholarship and knowledge had always existed in Algerian society long before the French came.

Khadra purposefully used the word 'roumi' to refer to the non-Muslim European people. Khadra could have used 'European' or 'French,' but Algerians have long used 'roumi' to denote anything foreign and strange to their culture. When someone dresses in a roumi style, Algerians interpret it as a departure from traditional clothing. Khadra highlighted the differences between the Algerian way of dressing and the European one when he compared the children he met in the slum of Jenane Jato and the other children in the colonial neighborhood: "These children were not dressed in rags like the children in Jenane Jato" (2011, p. 73), and even the mother of Younes was able to identify him as a "roumi" once he was dressed like them: "I think you've put on weight. And you're so handsome in your new clothes! You look like a little roumi" (p. 92).

Khadra meticulously documented every detail in the novel, including the culturally significant words for the Algerians, which he wrote in their original dialect despite their existence in French. Younes described the scene of Germaine as she was undressing him and preparing him for a bath using many non-standard words: "I watched her pale hands working, removing my fez, my gandurah⁸, my threadbare vest, and my rubber boots". The violent stripping of his national identity left me feeling like a bird "plucked of its feathers" (Khadra, p. 75).

For instance, in the novel, the 'fez' has been used many times to refer to that short cylindrical hat, usually red, that nearly all Algerian Muslims wore, along with the 'burnous' long cloak made of wool and designed for men. When he met his uncle for the first time, Younes noticed that he was wearing a fez: "He was wearing a three-piece suit and a red fez over his blonde hair" (Khadra, p. 20). In this description, we may notice two identities: the European one in the three-piece suit and the Algerian one in the Fez. His uncle represents the moderate class, which is fine adapting to other cultures and adding some foreign elements to their lifestyle.

Furthermore, Bliss, the individual who arranged for them to rent a room in the slum, wore a fez: "I remember he had a goatee beard... and wore a filthy fez perched on his huge, bald, misshapen head" (Khadra, p. 24). Nearly all the Algerian children in his vicinity also wore a fez. The fez that Bliss was wearing does not look like the fez that the uncle of Younes was wearing, as if the fez speaks for the personality of its holder. The fez appears filthy and ugly on Bliss, a man who exploits vulnerable people and profits from their misery for financial gain. In contrast, it is elegant and complements his uncle's three-piece suit. This uncle is a man of principles, ready to care for his nephew, and never misses an opportunity to help those in need. He even feels terrible when his brother refuses his support. This novel uses the Algerian dialect to represent Algerian culture and traditions and highlight important aspects of national identity.

Superstition

Superstition is considered a psychological phenomenon that characterizes a specific society. In literature, it is an irrational folk belief that may have religious or supernatural connotations.

What the Day Owes the Night is full of superstitious elements representing the Algerian folk culture, such as the belief in the 'evil eye.' Smith J. asserts that "psychology teaches that it is possible to influence others with your mind, with the expression and influence coming from the eyes. However, we should not refer to this as an evil eye spell, as it is actually a myth" (Smith, 2019, p. 55). While some characters in the novel believe in the evil eye and its power to destroy a person's life, others do not speak about it or seem to believe in such a myth.

According to the novel, the evil eye was the primary reason for the family's collapse. It cast its spell on them at the novel's beginning and resulted in the burning of their land; later, when things started to go well for her husband in Oran, it brought more misery and chaos. When the father of Younes started to be optimistic about the harvest season and asked the grocer to find him some workers to help him in the field, he did not feel at ease with the remark that this last had made: "The grocer's remark, he thought, was some dire omen. This was how my father was; at the slightest problem, he immediately feared the worst" (Khadra, 2011, p.07). A few days later, a fire broke into their field and destroyed all the crops. "I dashed outside and

saw a sea of fire surging and rolling across the fields, the flames so high they seemed to light the heavens, from which not a single star looked down" (Khadra, p. 07). That was the price he paid when someone received an evil eye: "It was a terrible injustice. Three days before harvest. Two inches toward salvation. One breath from redemption" (Khadra, p. 08).

The spell and danger are imminent, as there might be antidotes for the evil eye; the spell and the danger are imminent. The father of Younes thought that if he managed to keep his plans secret from his wife and everyone else, he could spare himself the evil eye: "My father, who until now had always kept his plans for himself so as not to tempt the evil eye" (Khadra, p. 58). He proceeded to illustrate the high cost and downfall his father would face if he shattered this belief, as the moment his father revealed his plans, despite his wife's cautions, everything took a turn for the worse. "Please, Issa, don't say another word. You've never had much luck. "Do not talk about your plans if you want them to come true" (Khadra, p. 66), and she continued to beg her husband to stop bragging about his achievements: "Please, do not say any more,' my mother begged, spitting on the ground to ward off the evil eye. Say nothing, and let things take their course." "The evil eye does not pity blowhards" (Khadra, p. 66). After a couple of days, the father of Younes was attacked and beaten to death as he was waiting for a supposed associate;

'I was sold out,' my father cursed. 'That thug was lying in wait for me. He knew I was carrying that money...This was no stroke of bad luck; that bastard was waiting for me.' ... "He knew now that no matter what he did or said, he was doomed to disaster, and no oaths sworn on mountaintops or holy vows could change the course of his fate. (Khadra, p. 70)

He finally surrendered to his fate and realized the evil eye would follow him and curse his life wherever he went. Although the uncle of Younes was moving to Rio Salado, the little boy did not miss the surroundings on the road and discovered a massive gap in the landscape;

Now and then, we would see a colonial farmer walking his fields or riding horseback, galloping flat out towards some unseen joy." Then, without warning, like a pockmark in this fairytale landscape, we would see some squalid shack, crushed by the weight of poverty and the evil eye. (Khadra, p. 127)

Accordingly, Younes thought that the misery of the Algerian people was due mainly to the evil eye. Not only Algerian characters believe in the evil eye, but also some European characters, such as Germaine, Younes' uncle's wife, who warned her husband, "Stop that; you'll draw the evil eye on him" (Khadra, p.76).

The evil eye was not the only folk belief in the novel; fortune telling was also a factor. When the Younes family moved to the slum of Jenane Jatou and settled there, there were some women in the neighborhood; one of them was a renowned fortune teller. They claimed that whatever she said would come true: "She claimed to have supernatural powers; she would read palms and interpret dreams" (Khadra, p. 32). Years later, Younes found Hadda precisely in the middle of the description Batoul provided years ago, confirming the interpretation. Hadda offered her palm for the clairvoyant to read, and the last "tracing and retracing the lines with her fingernails" stated, "I see you surrounded by many men, Hadda, but I see little happiness. You were not made for happiness. I can see brief moments of joy swallowed up by years of bitterness, shadow, and sorrow" (Khadra, p. 45). Years passed, and when Younes saw Hadda in a bar offering her services as a prostitute, he thought, "Batoul had been right." Many men surrounded Hadda, but there was little joy" (Khadra, p. 174).

The mother of Younes also believed in what Hadda would say and took it for granted; she even tried to impose that thought on her son, who started to lose hope in his father's coming back: "Batoul, the psychic, was never wrong" (Khadra, p. 180). As his mother tells him, she predicted a bright future for Younes and a happy ending for the entire family: "I asked Batoul, and she read it in the ripples of the water. She said, You will be a great man, and as he insisted, she shouted at him, You little fool! How dare you! Batoul, the clairvoyant, saw it in my palm, and she saw signs of it in the water. Your father is safe and well. He is making his fortune; when he is rich, he will come home" (Khadra, p. 151). Some Algerians would find comfort and refuge from their misfortunes by believing in words uttered by someone claiming to possess supernatural powers. People like Batoul provide hope and reassurance to those going through difficult times. The power of superpower belief offers them solace and strengthens them against adversity.

Religion

A society's folklore is not a closed system of irrational beliefs in supernatural powers and superstitions. However, Ben Amos asserts that "it interconnects with other social and cultural systems such as those of religion, art, law, values, governance, kinship, etc." (Ben Amos, 2020, p. 21). Thus, religious beliefs are essential elements in the study of folklore in literature because not only do they represent and speak for the identity of a given society, but they also explain their motivations and deeds.

In the novel, religious motifs, including the motif of God, dominate the narrative from the beginning to the end. The novel idealizes God, leading many characters to believe that he bears no responsibility for the sufferings inflicted on people and that his presence cannot bless chaos and misery; "Sometimes I saw in him a god, fashioning the world" (Khadra, p. 03). In this metaphor, Younes describes his father and compares him to a god because of the strength and determination he displays. Then, he praised Rio Salado as a place where gods should be settling for its serenity and beauty: "It was a blessed place, and I could easily imagine gods and titans finding rest here" (Khadra, p. 131). God may be pleased by what that land would offer; as Rio Salado so enchanted Younes, he found everything appealing and worthy of divine attention and admiration: "proud of having built their houses with their bare hands, of having snatched from this dry, pitted land sweet grapes that would have delighted even the gods of Olympus" (Khadra, p. 130). His admiration for the place was enormous, and he could not express that feeling without reference to God or gods because for him, as is the case for many Algerians, all that is beautiful and charming deserves a divine blessing.

Therefore, describing an ugly, devastated place implies a denial of God's presence, with foolish and devilish things being the only causes. When Younes accompanied Jelloul to where he lived, he could not help but feel disgusted and repelled towards the place. Jelloul consolidated his thoughts and proclaimed the non-existence of God amid that chaos and misery, saying, "Look at this godforsaken slum... Take a good look, Jonas. God himself would not set foot here" (Khadra, p. 208). Khadra did not miss the opportunity to reveal the folk belief about God among the Algerians and the Europeans as a subject of praise and submission or as a non-existent spiritual human creation.

Several religions intersect in the story: Islam, Christianity, Jewish, and even Atheist beliefs, with God or the Lord as the common motif throughout the novel. Belonging to a Muslim family, the protagonist's father always expressed his vulnerability and helplessness in

the face of God's will; "It's the Lord's will, he told his friend after the fire destroyed his land." (p. 12). He continued, asserting that God alone determines our destiny. In response to his brother's attempt to hold him accountable for not seeking assistance, the father of Younes responded, "What is done is done... God had decided" (Khadra, p. 22).

The mother of Younes also expresses her faith and submission to God when she tells her son about their happy old days: "Then God decided that spring should turn to winter, and the gardens died." (Khadra, 2011, p. 93). Additionally, the protagonist learned to submit to his fate and accept that God decides everything that happens to us; "I became fatalistic. My time will come when God decides" (Khadra, p.374).

Expressing gratitude towards God is one of a believer's most important virtues, whether a Muslim or a non-Muslim. In this respect, we find many characters who reveal their belief in God's power, such as Younes' friend Jean-Christophe, who told his friends as he was attempting to engage with Emilie, "I needed a miracle, and the miracle happened. God sent this girl to me, I assure you" (Khadra, p. 264). Other characters, on the other hand, dismissed God's responsibility and condemned only man for misery and evil things. When Younes' father was having a conversation with his friend about the fire that took over his land and killed his hopes for a promising harvest season, this last was not in total agreement with the claim that it was God's will. Instead, he attributed the blame to the colonial power and the local traitors, indirectly assuming: "If men are evil, the Lord cannot bear the blame. It is unjust to burden Him with crimes that we alone make possible." (Khadra, p. 12) He added, "Men invented God to distract them from their demons" (Khadra, p. 13). Taking the opportunity, Younes' uncle accused the man of causing the damage, telling his brother, "The Lord did not command the burning of your crops. God cannot be blamed for the wickedness of man. Nor the devil either" (Khadra, p. 22).

Folklore and the Woman in the Novel

Women are critical in a society's folklore, where they generally embody strength and wisdom. They have always been conservators of beliefs and cultural traditions throughout the ages, whatever the different roles they may hold. The woman is considered the spiritual bearer of wisdom and tenderness, whose blessings span many generations. When the uncle of Younes wanted to speak to him about his origins, he first referred to his great-grandmother: "Her name is Lalla Fatna; she was a woman of money and status, and as domineering as she was rich, one general used to call her Jeanne d'Arc" (Khadra, p. 82). People consider her a 'legendary figure' and compare her to another outstanding female historical figure, 'Jeanne d'Arc.' Jeanne d'Arc, or Joan of Arc, was a French peasant who believed God chose her to lead the French war against the English. The enemy captured her and burned her for witchcraft.

Not only that, he went on to bring up different myths and speculations about her as a national figure: "They say that if the emir Abd al-Qadir had met her, it would have changed the course of history" (Khadra, p. 82). Lalla Fatna was a great woman who represented many other Algerian women before and during the French occupation, women who left permanent prints in the country's history. Through her posture and fancy "Kaftan" and jewels, Younes noticed that she looked as though "she might rule over men and their dreams" (Khadra, p. 82).

Furthermore, we should closely examine other folk beliefs about women and their role in life, drawing on elements from this novel. For this reason, two female characters are considered: the mother and the wife.

The Mother

In this novel, Khadra makes a cultural and psychological contrast between two types of mothers: reserved and sacrificing mothers and preposterous, open, and selfish ones. The predominant Algerian folk belief is that a mother should not be egocentric but rather a source of safety, serenity, and sacrifice.

Younes' mother embodies all these qualities as she abandons her child for his happiness and well-being. She knew her son would only be miserable and might end up wrong, so she had to let him go and hide her agony from him. "Whenever I miss you, I know I am being selfish, and I say to myself, He's better off where he is. He's safe ... It is not good for you to be here" (Khadra, p. 93). That is the ultimate sacrifice a mother can ever make. What is more, she can hold her tears and hide her suffering—things that Younes did not miss: "When I left, my mother did not shed a single tear. She would find time to cry later. She took my hand, talked to me and smiled. Her smile was like a benediction" (Khadra, p. 93). In these words, Khadra characterizes the Algerian indigenous woman with strength, blessing, and beauty. Younes portrays his mother's beauty and glory as a 'Sultana.' Younes, who previously compared his father to a god, is now comparing his mother to a 'sultana,' or a queen. Khadra endeavors to underscore the elevated position of parents in Algerian folklore, emphasizing their profound respect and veneration.

On the other hand, Younes portrays Emilie's mother, his lover, as selfish and arrogant. She is the main reason for the impossible relationship between Younes and Emilie. She seduced him and obliged him later to stay away from her daughter, claiming it was sinful and against the law of nature, though she knew her daughter was in love with him. "You know that to sleep with a mother and her daughter is an offense against God, against the saints, against angels and demons!" (Khadra, 2011, p. 253) said Mrs Cazenave in a desperate attempt to keep Younes, the Arab Muslim Younes, away from her daughter, who loved him. She insisted, "it must not happen, Monsieur Jonas; nothing good can come of your relationship with my daughter. It cannot happen; it must not happen" (Khadra, p. 254). The mother of Emilie did not care about her daughter's feelings because all that preoccupied her was the fear that she would marry an Arab, contrary to the mother of Younes, who set her soul on fire to see her son happy and safe. Emilie became devastated and emotionally sick because of Younes' rejection.

The Wife

In Algerian tradition, the wife must be submissive to her husband and entirely devoted to her family. Her duties are limited to house chores and raising children; she would not dare give her opinion or interfere in her husband's business. In light of this, Khadra describes the wife of Issa and the parents of Younes as such. He portrays her as subordinate to her husband, either following or waiting for him.

As the family moves to the city of Oran, the narrator observes the wife's attitude: "My mother huddled against the slatted sides of the cart, hidden behind her veil, barely distinguishable from the sacks and bundles" (Khadra, p. 10). For a husband, the wife holds sacred status and must remain hidden from other men; therefore, she must be well-covered and protected from prying eyes.

In our world, when men meet, women are expected to withdraw; there is no greater sacrilege than to see one's wife stared at by a stranger. Taking Zara in her

arms, my mother obeyed the request and crouched in the rock's shadow. (Khadra, 2011, p. 12)

The wife of Younes' uncle, on the other hand, exemplifies the European open woman who is free to express her thoughts and opinions to her husband, as demonstrated when she voiced her concern when Younes' father went missing: "Germaine's remark irritated my uncle, and he glared at her, but she did not turn away. She knew I was worried and felt that it was unfair to keep the truth from me" (Khadra, p. 109).

The portrayal of Younes' mother as a wife and the description of her relationship with her husband highlights the Algerian popular belief about women during the novel's time. Not only was she too precious for strangers to see, but she was not ugly enough to hide. Her domestic responsibilities for her husband spared her from additional concerns about his business and problems. There is no way for a wife to argue with her husband and question his choices. While Germaine was walking hand in hand with her husband and sharing his desires and fears, the Algerian wife remained in the shadow, waiting for her husband to come back home and put some food on the table. Though he went missing for many weeks, she kept waiting, for she always trusted in his ability to stand on his feet and return home to relieve their misery.

The Quest for Identity

Generally speaking, identity refers to the state of being who a person is. A simple definition of identity may be provided by Weeks when he stated, "Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. At its most basic, it gives you a sense of personal location, the stable core of your individuality" (Weeks, 1990, p. 88). Thus, identity is a dynamic concept that evolves and identifies the self and societal position.

Identity defines and shapes a person, not only in the present but also in the future. Algeria's national identity was acquired during French colonization and the Revolution. Witnessing such events imbued people with patriotism and nationalism. Thus, they could transfer this identity to the next generation through culture. Identity does not belong to the present alone or to the past; it belongs to the future as well because of undertaking constant changes and embracing new layers during history; as Weedon argues, "History plays a central role in defining both individual and group identity" (2004, p. 28).

In his canonical essay, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall (1990) considers identity an ongoing process. Thus, he divides identity into identity as 'being' and identity as 'becoming' as follows:

Cultural identity... is a matter of 'becoming' and of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists; it transcends place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities originate somewhere and have histories. Nevertheless, like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

Accordingly, cultural identity is not static as it reflects people's interactions with the world and adapts to various experiences and perspectives, shaping and reshaping their understanding of themselves and the world around them. The protagonist in the novel is in a perpetual quest for his cultural identity, which Sysoyev defined as:

An individual's realization of his or her place in the spectrum of cultures and purposeful behavior are directed on his or her enrollment and acceptance into a particular group, as well as specific characteristic features of a particular group that automatically assign an individual's group membership. (Sysoyev 2001, pp. 37–38)

Younes attempted to fit into Jenane Jato's slum for no reason. Then, he tried to blend in with the European colonial population, managing to do so for a while before facing rejection and expulsion. All the efforts he made in his quest shaped his identity; the culture of his people paralleled that of the European community, and he constructed his own identity in addition to the social experiences he had to go through.

Thus, we are not born with ready-made identities; we acquire them through culture and social interaction with the forces surrounding us and the constraints they impose on us. Accordingly, it is crucial to pinpoint that folklore is significant in shaping one's cultural identity. Popular culture draws on character traits and adds cultural dimensions to the self. In this respect, maintaining native culture and traditions is specific to shaping identity and a form of resistance to the colonial dominant cultural power. It can be confirmed in Khadra's use of dialect instead of French for keywords representing Algerian culture and national heritage. “Ulemas, Shab El Baroud, Gandourah, Fez, etc.” express resistance and cultural belonging.

The European attempt to strip away Younes's identity eventually failed. However, it did at the surface level since Younes changed his dressing style and language of communication because the protagonist, who stood for the Algerian youth during the colonial period, kept returning to where he was raised and never got rid of his cultural and ethnic belongings, valorizing and defending them. The author made his audience feel like the French occupation was the first responsible for the social and cultural degradation in the Algerian lifestyle: “You should take a look at the villages around you, Monsieur Sosa. Misfortune holds sway here since you reduced free men to the rank of beasts of burden” (Khadra, 2011, p. 408). For the protagonist, all the misery and chaos that drowned the Algerian population was not inherent but instead inflicted by the French colonization. In a discussion between Younes and Mr. Soza, Younes protested against Soza's claims that the Algerian land belonged to his ancestors and that he had the absolute right to exploit it.

A long time ago, Monsieur Sosa, a man, stood where you are now, long before you and your great-grandfather. When he looked over the plains, he could feel at one with it. There were no roads or railroad tracks, and the mastic trees and brambles did not bother him. Because he was free, this man was self-possessed. This land does not belong to you. It belongs to that ancient shepherd. (Khadra, p. 406)

Younes said that growing up in that community taught him their values and culture, but it didn't bury his true identity; instead, it strengthened it through observation and folk beliefs. Younes added;

This land does not belong to you. It belongs to that ancient shepherd whose ghost is standing next to you ... Take your vineyards and bridges, your paved roads and railway tracks, your cities, and your gardens, and return what remains to their rightful owners. (Khadra, 2011, p. 407)

The power of folklore, cultural beliefs, and history undeniably shapes cultural and national collective identities and defines a person.

Conclusion

The novel delves into issues of identity-making. The journey of identity construction is a continuous process characterized by different stations that help to shape and establish an understanding of it. Those stations may differ according to the social and political setting because constructing identity under colonial rule is not similar to constructing identity in a free nation. Popular culture and folklore are crucial in setting the foundations for that identity since they are uprooted in society and transferred from one generation to another. To answer the main research questions stated earlier and based on a thorough investigation of folkloric elements in the novel of Yasmina Khadra, the researcher concluded that folklore is not only a representative of a country but also an unquestionable factor in shaping national identity. It defines who a person is and where he belongs, and it may predict a person's reactions to certain situations.

The novel of Yasmina Khadra shows, from the beginning to the end, how folklore and popular beliefs are paramount in setting the traits of the Algerian identity and shaping its authenticity. The novel highlights that identity is not innate but acquired through various social and cultural forces, reinforcing its mobility and instability. It is also dynamic and influenced by gender, which might be an essential layer for further research and examination.

About the Authors

Mrs. Hidaya ATTAR is a PhD student dedicated to advancing knowledge in the realms of feminism, and cultural studies. Her academic contributions involve publications in esteemed articles and presentations at prominent seminars and conferences. Her scholarly pursuits are driven by a passion for social justice, ecological sustainability, and cultural critique. ORCID number: 0009-0006-6884-2142

Prof. Ilhem SERIR MORTAD is a professor of English literature and dialectology at the University of Tlemcen. She has over 20 years of experience in language and English literature, Algerian literature, literary criticism, postcolonial theory, and translation studies. She has numerous academic contributions in highly ranked national and international journals. ORCID number: 0000-0002-9707-5548

Notes:

¹ A public yard where people enjoy sitting around. Various popular activities are held there like fortune telling, preaching, buying and selling, playing games ...etc.

² In arabic it means 'salty' referring to the marsh in the region.

³ Refers to the blessing that Allah may grant someone or something causing it to perpetuate and last.

⁴ Men with gun powder long guns used mainly in fantasia and public shows and ceremonies.

⁵ Refers to Grilled or roasted meat that is served on special occasions or to welcome important guests.

⁶ Sebdou is a north-western town in Tlemcen.

⁷ In Arabic : العلماء

⁸ A long loose gown made of wool and worn by men.

References

- Ben Amos, D. (2020). *Folklore Concepts; Histories and Critiques*. USA: Indiana University Press.
- Hall, S. (1990). Cultural Identity and Diaspora. In Rutherford, J. (ed.), *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 222–237). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Khadra, Y. (2011). *What the Day Owes the Night* (F. Wynne, trans.). London: Vintage Books.
- Senoussi, M., & Serir Mortad, I. (2019). Plotting the Unspeakable in Khadra's Wolf Dreams. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 60(4), 501-5013. Routledge: Taylor and Francis group.
- Smith, J. (2019). *The Book of Forbidden Knowledge: Black Magic, Superstition, Charms, and Divination*. USA: Amazon Digital Services.
- Storey, J. (2014). *From popular culture to everyday life*. Routledge.
- Sysoyev, P. V. (2001). *Individual's Cultural Identity in the Context of Dialogue of Cultures*. Russia: The Tambov State University Press.
- Thompson, S. (1996). Definitions of Folklore. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 33(3), 255-264. USA: Indiana University Press.
- Weedon, C. (2004). *Identity and Culture: Narratives of Difference and Belonging*. New York: Open University Press.
- Weeks, J. (1990). *The Value of Difference*. In J. Rutherford (ed.) *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 88-100). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Woodward, K. (1997). *Identity and Difference*. California: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Xue, M. M. (2022). *Folklore*. In *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict*. Academic Press.

Cite as

Attar Zennaki, H., & Serir Mortad, I. (2024). Interrogating the Algerian Folkloric Identity in Khadra's *What the Day Owes the Night*. *ATRAS Journal*, 5(2), 166-179.