

## Questions for Reading Groups

- Apart from telling us that Kurt and Hans's boat was hijacked in the Gulf of Aden, Khadra gives little indication as to where they are held until they reach the Red Cross camp in Darfur. Why do you think this is so?
- Is Kurt a sympathetic character? What is the effect of his story being told in the first person? Is his anger towards Jessica justified? Were you surprised that he was drawn back to Africa after all he had been through?
- One of the most dramatic moments of the book comes when Kurt calls his kidnappers 'savages'. To what extent does this passage embody the tensions between the kidnappers and their hostages? Did you feel any sympathy for the kidnappers?
- Speaking about his novel *The Swallows of Kabul* on German radio, Khadra said, 'The West interprets the world as it likes. It develops certain theories that fit into its world outlook, but do not always represent the reality. Being a Muslim, I suggest a new perspective on Afghanistan, on religious fanaticism and what I would call religiopathy.' To what extent do you think Khadra's personal circumstances as an Algerian Muslim living in Paris inform his writing?
- Khadra has written about violence in many parts of the world in his novels, particularly the Middle East. Why do you think he is repeatedly drawn to write about human conflict?
- Khadra's novel *The Attack* was made into a successful film. How well do you think *The African Equation* would transfer to the big screen? How does the book compare to films such as *Captain Phillips*?
- In an interview with the *Independent*, Khadra said his experience in the Algerian army 'was enriching for me as a writer. Living with hundreds of people all the time, you learn to grasp character in an instant - who is sly, who is brave, who is wicked.' To what extent do you think Khadra's experience of serving during the Algerian civil war impacts his choice of themes and characters?
- 'Khadra is a passionately moral writer but he rarely sits in judgment,' wrote the *Literary Review*. To what extent does *The African Equation* present two sides to the story and lead to a better understanding of the problem of piracy in East Africa?
- 'The novel is a tool, an instrument, which makes truth accessible. Only fiction tells the truth.' Do you agree with Khadra's assessment of the power of fiction to explore current affairs?