

The phenomenon of alienation and estrangement in the novel "*Nawbat Al-Ghareeba*" by Mohamed El-Amin Rabie

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Abstract :

Alienation and estrangement are phenomena commonly found in literary creativity, especially in the works of authors from countries that lack a significant degree of freedom. These writers tend to express this alienation through their novels. This article explores the phenomenon of estrangement in Algerian society in general, and the alienation of women in particular, through the novel "*Nawbat Al-Ghareeba*."

The structure of the novel reveals the impact of alienation and estrangement on all segments of society without exception, with the degree of impact varying based on each group's social status or vulnerability. The article aims to uncover the manifestations of this phenomenon as it affects the characters in the novel, especially female characters, and how these leads either to confrontation and resistance or withdrawal and surrender.

Keywords: Phenomenon; alienation; estrangement; characters; society; *Nawbat Al-Ghareeba*.

Summary of the Novel:

The events of the novel *Nawbat Al-Ghareeba* revolve around a girl named "Barkaham," a name chosen by her father, Kamatsho, in hopes that her mother, Soaad, would stop giving birth to daughters. Kamatsho was the only son among seven sisters, and after marrying, he had a first daughter named "Darrajia" and a second daughter named "Barkaham," hoping that his wife would stop having girls and finally have a son. However, she gave birth to a third daughter, leading Kamatsho to marry another woman from the city of Touggourt named Khowlan, in hopes she would bear him the long-desired son. Unfortunately, Kamatsho passed away before realizing his dream, and Khowlan also gave birth to a daughter, whom she named Soaad.

Thus, the household consisted of six women without a man to maintain its dignity. Khowlan took over her husband's business, while Soaad, his first wife, continued to care for her daughters. However, Barkaham was not content with her situation; she rebelled against her mother's orders and wandered the streets of Bousaada. She eventually sought refuge at the city hotel, looking for work to support herself after being abandoned by everyone, including her father's and mother's families.

Her stay at the hotel was short-lived, as the only job she could find was as a dancer. She then moved to Dar Kawakib after being expelled from the hotel. However, her time at Dar Kawakib was also brief. She met a man named Qasim, who worked in military intelligence in the capital. Qasim had started his life as a university student during the revolution, eventually joining the revolution and leaving his pregnant wife, Ziniya, whom he divorced after she gave birth to a son in his absence. He later moved to the capital, living among senior state officials. During his visits to Bousaada, he frequented Dar Kawakib and opened a new chapter in Barkaham's life. He took her to the capital, changed her name from Barkaham to Bahja, and transformed her job from a dancer to an artist.

Bahja began performing at artistic soirées at the Palace of the People in front of the president, government members, and senior state officials. However, the October 1988 events changed her life, as the art trade declined. During the Black Decade, her family became the victims of a massacre committed by terrorists, with only Khowlan surviving and later joining Bahja in the capital.

A rift then developed among the power elites, leading to a coup against the president, who had been Qasim's ally until Qasim changed sides and allied with the defense minister against the president. The president was exiled, and Qasim survived an assassination attempt before going to Germany for treatment. During his absence, his rivals imprisoned Bahja, Qasim's mistress, and her stepmother, Khowlan, under the false accusation of aiding terrorists in the attempt on Qasim's life. In reality, they suspected her of supporting the president. Khowlan died of a heart attack from the shock.

In prison, Bahja met Roufia, who was accused of inciting people against the government. After returning from Germany, Qasim secured Bahja's release from prison and helped clear Roufia of her charges. Roufia

stayed with Bahja, but Qasim later succumbed to liver disease and died in the capital, where he was buried without his family's presence. Roufia eventually returned to her family, and Bahja (Barkaham) decided to return to Bousaada.

Ending the Title of the Novel:

The novel's title, *Nawbat Al-Ghareeba*, does not explicitly reveal the author's intended meaning, making it open to various interpretations. One possible reading suggests that the protagonist, Barkaham, has her own "turn" or moment, just as others do. The phrase hints at the idea that life is cyclical fate changes hands, and it's now the stranger's turn. Throughout the novel, Barkaham is portrayed as a subordinate to Qasim, who manipulates her life and makes decisions without consulting her. She follows his orders unquestioningly, as she reflects, "When I traveled with Qasim to the capital, I followed him like his shadow."

Initially, Barkaham is resigned to her fate, offering no resistance or questions. However, nothing remains constant forever¹. She gradually regains control over her life as she regains her balance: "I felt that Qasim was no longer the same, and perhaps he felt that I was no longer the same either. The truth is that neither of us could stay the way we were." Qasim also notices this change: "He didn't mind, instead seeing my actions as a sign of my independence from him, even though he believed he owned me."

Barkaham's journey represents her reclaiming of freedom and liberation from the debt of gratitude that Qasim had imposed on her². Qasim's death serves as an opportunity for Barkaham to symbolically repay his favor: "It's a piece of white Damascus brocade, ten meters long³."

- "Yes, why are you giving it to me?"
- "Qasim gifted it to me in the final days of his life before he passed away, and I kept it. I want him to be shrouded in it."

The mention of this fabric at both the beginning and end of the novel serves as a symbolic reference to the relationship that bound Barkaham (Bahja) to Qasim⁴. As Qasim's "turn" ends, Barkaham's turn begins. The title subtly reflects this cyclical transfer of power and agency in the characters' lives.

Ending the Opening of the Chapters:

The author begins the novel with a quote from the mystic poet Ibn Arabi: "*He began by mentioning women and concluded with prayer, because woman is part of man in the essence of her appearance, and man's knowledge of himself precedes his knowledge of his Lord.*"⁵" This quote was not included at the beginning of the novel by accident. It serves as a message from the author, expressing his perspective on the topic through the events of the novel, which he titled "*Nawbat Al-Ghareeba*."

This title reflects a far-reaching view that does not treat the subject superficially to satisfy societal beliefs. Instead, it offers a critical perspective, taking us back to the origins of creation according to the religious beliefs of the Muslim Algerian society, which holds that Eve was created from Adam's rib. The novel questions why society marginalizes women, subjecting them to silent oppression if they conform and overt persecution if they strive to assert themselves as they should.

The inclusion of Ibn Arabi's quote suggests that a person cannot truly know their Creator without first knowing themselves. Without this self-awareness, one remains in a state of alienation, constantly struggling until they reach the truth. The author uses this spiritual concept to highlight the deeper existential struggle of women, reflecting on the societal constraints that cause them to experience both inner and outer forms of alienation.

The protagonist's approach to confronting her reality may not have been the correct one, but it serves as an alarm bell signaling that if society does not recognize that women are beings with full rights and deserving of respect, they may rebel in ways that are neither safe for them nor beneficial to society.

The author follows this idea with the statement: "*Some characters in this novel closely resemble real-life figures, but they are not the same.*" This may be an attempt to prevent readers from interpreting the novel as serving a particular agenda or aligning with a specific political or ideological movement. Instead, it aims to mirror a reality that society needs to pay attention to. The alienation of women is a present issue, and the novel's events closely reflect this reality. The author uses this narrative to emphasize the importance of addressing women's rights and roles in society before the consequences become more dire and uncontrollable.

The quote from Youssef Zidan, "*Why should I fear death? It is life I should fear, for it is far more painful,*"⁶" echoes the deep alienation women suffer in a society that views them as a source of shame to be concealed. In this context, a woman can only live a dignified life under the protection of a man; otherwise,

she becomes vulnerable to all forms of harm, which society often accepts because she lacks a male protector to defend her. As a result, her sense of alienation intensifies, and she becomes subject to the misfortunes of life, to the point where death seems more merciful than living.

The novelist poignantly portrays this harsh reality through the narrative of Kamatsho's family, which consists of six women without a male protector. These women endure various forms of contempt, humiliation, and abuse, illustrating the painful consequences of their vulnerability in a society that does not provide them the protection or dignity they deserve.

The second chapter of the novel was titled "*The Womb Rains Daughters,*" and it began with a quote from *Schopenhauer*: "A woman remains like a child all her life." This chapter was an exposition of outdated social customs that made Camacho live in the hell of alienation as a man without a son in his father's family. He had no male offspring but was the brother of seven daughters, and his house was filled with six women who experienced countless forms of alienation. The chapter pointed out that a woman, like a child, is delighted by a flower and hurt by a word. Furthermore, all the silent suffering or rebellion against society that a woman endures is a direct result of what he himself had forced upon her.

The third chapter was then dedicated to Fazzai, whom the novelist chose to begin with a quote from Ibn al-Rumi: "*I did not love my companions with my heart nor my mind, for the heart may grow still or the mind may forget. I loved my companions with my soul, for it neither grows still nor forgets.*"⁷ It is a love that does not succumb to the whims of the heart, which may be swayed by deceptive affection, nor to the rigid rules of the mind. This type of love does not adhere to the laws of nature, nor is it shattered by conflicting interests; rather, it remains eternal and everlasting, no matter how circumstances change. It is genuine to the utmost degree, making its possessor seem strange to those around him. This was evident in the relationship between Bahja and the president, to whom she continued to show respect even after he was stripped of his privileges and left powerless and helpless.

The fourth chapter, "*Ziniya,*" begins with a quote from the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish: "*On this earth, there is what deserves life.*" One of the harshest experiences for the soul, and one of the greatest causes of alienation, is being deprived of the right to stability, happiness, and the peace of a home. This is exactly what happened to Ziniya, the wife of Qasim. She did not choose to marry Qasim; rather, it was his family that sought her hand. She was not consulted when he left her without a second thought, nor did he bother to inform her of his plans. She was left to a fate decided by her father, without her input. Then, Qasim decided to divorce her as if he were ridding himself of a burden. Ziniya represented the alienation of a powerless woman. Darwish's words were a cry against the injustice that society had normalized. Ziniya and women like her in this country deserve to live with dignity. Simply put, they deserve life.

The fifth chapter, titled "*The Chief,*" begins with a verse from the poetry of Al-Mutanabbi, chosen to encapsulate the bitter experience of a man whom politics once elevated to the highest heights, only to later plunge him into a deep abyss. The verse states⁸:

The worst of places is where there is no friend

And the worst of what a person earns is what brings shame

This choice for the chapter's opening reflects a lowly world that ends up imposing a harsh exile on its owner, where politics casts the defeated in its arena into a prison far more severe than that of hardened criminals. And how cruel it is for a man who, just yesterday, was giving orders and making decisions (the leader), only to find himself in an ugly isolation, exiled in a foreign land, increasing the pain of estrangement.

Chapter Six, titled "khowlan" opens with a verse from the poetry of Maysun Al-Suwaidan:

Did you come into this world without a womb,

That you should differentiate between a daughter and a son

It is the despicable social custom that Islam and all the laws of the earth have fought against, yet society continues to weigh by this unjust measure. In this chapter, the author highlights the extraordinary success achieved by Bahja (Barkaham) according to the standards of the ruling authority. Bahja transformed from just a girl working in nightclubs to a renowned artist traveling the world, presenting the rosy image of Algeria under the current regime.

This chapter offers an unspoken comparison between what Qasim, a man who joined the revolution rebelling against colonialism and later became a military security officer and a participant in shaping the future of the state, and Barkaham, the girl who left her mother's house, wandering aimlessly, only to become the state's leading artist. This leads us back to the meaning of the verse with which the author introduced this chapter.

However, the chapter concludes with the story of khowlan, the kind-hearted woman who was always the victim of all events: from her marriage, to her remaining a widow under the guardianship of her co-wife, and ending with her miserable fate in prison for a crime she knows nothing about. It is as if the author wants to scream at society, asking why the poor khowlan who represents the majority of the women in this nation suffers from all this injustice.

Chapter Seven, titled "*A War Without Knights*," begins with a quote from Dostoevsky: "*A man can play the role of Don Quixote in silence: this is the summary of my life.*"

Perhaps the author, through the title "*A War Without Knights*," is alluding to the loss of values such as manliness and chivalry in a war declared against the people, just as the ruling elites have declared it among themselves. The terrorists who faced the defenseless people with merciless machines of death did not possess the ethics of knights, who would never kill an unarmed and helpless person not involved in the battle. Likewise, those who settled their personal scores against each other using the state's resources lacked the morals of knights, who would never betray those who trusted them, nor would they seek revenge in such a disgraceful way that reflects a loss of nobility.

As for the author's reference to the story of Don Quixote, it is an invitation to dream of change and to support the oppressed, even in silence. The beginning of change lies in silent reflection and silent action.

In Chapter Eight, titled "*Rofia*," the author begins with a verse from the Holy Quran: "**O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds.**"⁹

Rofia's character was not prominent throughout the novel. She was mentioned at the beginning, and her story was postponed until the end. This girl, who ventured into the world of politics, found herself accused of inciting against the government. She was initially sentenced to life imprisonment, which was later reduced to ten years, followed by acquittal after Qasim's intervention. This highlights the alienation of women in all fields of life without exception, and how the authorities elevate them when they serve their interests but humiliate and oppress them when they oppose those interests. The reference to the Quranic verse symbolizes the girl's innocence from the charges, yet political standards suggest otherwise.

The final chapter is titled "*Water in a Sieve*" and begins with a quote from Antonio Enriquez: "**The earth was not created for you to always return to it.**"

The saying "like water in a sieve" refers to something futile, as it is impossible to carry water in a sieve. This proverb alludes to the tragic end that Barkaham faced. She left Bousaada as a homeless wanderer, and despite the glory and status she achieved, she lost her family, the man who rescued her from the clutches of nightclubs, and her friend Rofia, who decided to return to her family. She also lost her status as a state-recognized artist and ultimately returned to Bousaada. All of this was like water in a sieve. However, the quote from Antonio Enriquez that the author included suggests that this experience was an attempt, and not all attempts necessarily end in the same way—some may lead to success.

We will examine this novel by exploring the phenomenon of estrangement and alienation. Alienation as a psychological state involves feelings of loneliness, isolation, and withdrawal, while spatial estrangement involves voluntary or forced migration, geographic displacement, travel, or moving away from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one.

First: Psychological Alienation in the Novel "*Nawbat Al-Ghareeba*"

No human being in this world lives life exactly as they desire, and there is no one on this earth who is completely free from the whims and desires of the soul. After all, Adam descended to earth as an alien, and perhaps the differences in human nature and the conflict of their interests are among the main causes of psychological alienation. The human soul laments the loss of what is desired and strives to attain what is sought. Anything that stands in the way of this causes distress and spoils the peace of mind, creating a sense of alienation that often drives one to retreat into oneself or to make compromises with reality, while still feeling that lingering ache within the soul that appears at times and fades at others.

"Alienation is an ancient phenomenon, as old as humanity itself. Since the formation of the first societies, problems and crises have emerged alongside their customs and traditions, leading in one way or another to various forms of alienation experienced by individuals. This alienation has sometimes driven people to rebellion and defiance against society, and at other times to surrender, isolation, and withdrawal into oneself."¹⁰

Perhaps the most significant causes of psychological alienation stem from the shock of a reality that one initially perceives as favorable but soon discovers to be disappointing, leading to alienation. Additionally, the inability to harmonize with one's surroundings and the intellectual or ideological differences with others

contribute to this atmosphere of alienation. In the novel "Nawbat Al-Ghareeba," there are many examples of this.

Alienation has five dimensions. The first is **powerlessness**, caused by the inability to influence society and a lack of control over personal decisions. The second is **meaninglessness**, where a person feels that life has no purpose. The third is **normlessness**, where unethical means become the only way to achieve desires. The fourth is **isolation**, resulting from an inability to adapt to reality, leading to a loss of connection with it. The fifth is **self-alienation**, which affects some creators when reality obstructs their ambitions and dreams.

First: Alienation in the Novel "Nawbat Al-Ghareeba"

1- The Alienation of the Novel's Characters

- Alienation of the Character Kamatsho:

Psychological alienation is evident in the character of Kamatsho, who felt estranged among his seven sisters. His father's love for them made him feel a profound and bitter alienation, leading to intense resentment towards them. "The reason was Darrajia's favoritism towards them and his extreme harshness with him, contrasting with his kindness towards them¹²." This sense of alienation can extend to influence the individual's personality, as they endure the pain of alienation and try to overcome it using their own tools. However, Kamatsho was wounded twice by the same weapon. When he hoped to overcome his alienation as his father's only son among seven daughters, fate dealt him another blow by making him the father of daughters, depriving him of the "prize" society values a male child¹³.

"When he was told that Saada had given birth to a girl, he swallowed his disappointment and named the newborn Darrajia," in an attempt to console his exhausted self, having been deprived of the son he had hoped to name after his father, Darrajia. When his alienation overwhelmed him, he tried to ease it by naming his second daughter Barkahm, hoping that this name would bring him good fortune and that his wife would stop giving birth to girls and finally bear him the son that would restore his psychological balance and social standing. However, disappointment continued to follow him, and when he was blessed with a third daughter, he refused to name her, a clear sign of his surrender to fate. "You name her, or let her mother name her," he said¹⁴.

Kamatsho lived his life enduring psychological alienation, facing it with the weapon of hope that he gained from his second marriage, hoping it would bring him a son. Yet, he died without ever overcoming that alienation.

The character (Camacho) represents a man who was forced by society into alienation, leading him to commit the same offense against his wife and daughters.

- The alienation of the protagonist Barkaham (Bahja):

It is common to find someone within a family who rebels against its rules or even against the laws of society, but it is rare to find someone who does so with determination and follows through until the end. This situation is considered unusual because it has consequences, and the person who takes such an extreme stance is usually someone with a strong and stubborn personality, turning their weakness into a force of confrontation and using their lack of means to devise strategies to navigate the difficulties they face. They may resort to any means to achieve their goals, regardless of how society rejects them or sees them as illegitimate. Rebellion and revolution, therefore, are against all values, not just the miserable situation itself. "This rejection of life in all its aspects by the nonconformist, and the feeling that their existence is meaningless or that their existence is superfluous—stems from their awareness of the marginalization, exclusion, and other factors that have trapped them in the snare of alienation."¹⁵

The protagonist of the novel grew tired of a reality that imposed various restrictions on her freedom, movement, and thinking. Born a female in a society that views women as weak, powerless beings subjected to all kinds of injustices, she was seen as a source of shame, unworthy of respect and vulnerable to dishonor unless protected by a man.

As the sixth of six women in a household without a man, she was bound by her mother's instructions, who feared for her safety against lurking threats. Her mother also sought to instill in her the customs of the society in which she would live. Not all societal rules are fair, just, or logical, but all individuals are expected to abide by them, regardless of their personal views. For this reason, Suaad, the protagonist's mother, was strict with her, out of fear of a harsher and more painful cruelty that the entire family would suffer for a long time. "My mother was insistent on saying no whenever we made a request," she said¹⁶.

Barkaham, however, had a rebellious spirit that could no longer tolerate the injustice. She wanted to assert herself as a unique individual, different from the other women in the family. This sense of alienation grew

within her. "The monotonous days filled with boredom, deprivation, and restrictions were enough to shape within me a woman eager for liberation."¹⁷ Thus, she began breaking the barrier of fear by defying her mother and rebelling against her orders, as if rehearsing her ultimate rebellion against everyone.

Despite the dark horizon and the uncertain future, Barkaham, like any alienated person from their reality, was willing to take a risk that might ultimately turn into a gamble, potentially costing her everything. When she left home and threw herself into the unknown, she thought for a moment about returning, but her stubbornness, reminiscent of her first grandfather Khadeem, prevailed¹⁸. The author hints that achieving one's dreams and asserting oneself is worth the risk, as nothing in this world is guaranteed. At that moment, Barkaham was repeating the experience of her grandfather Khadeem, who, at a certain point, decided to break free and start anew. Servants are obedient, never stepping outside the boundaries of commands, and when one leaves, another takes their place. "No one cares about them."¹⁹

Although the risk was uncertain, it expressed the fear of living as a stranger among people, suffering in silence and dying under the weight of oppression. "He preferred to stay there rather than move to another city, where he might spend his years as a wandering servant, only to end up buried in an unmarked grave in a desolate place."²⁰

It is an end undesired by anyone who has come to understand the reality of life and the purpose of existence. Barkaham's sense of alienation intensified when everyone refused to welcome her, leading her to make peace with her reality while hoping for a better tomorrow, perhaps one she saw in her dreams but had yet to see signs of. She agreed to work as a dancer in a hotel, though she had not left her home for such a fate, and eventually found herself at Dar Kawakib in her quest for self-assertion. At Dar Kawakib, fate introduced her to Qasim, who would rescue her from the miserable situation she was in and from the shameful labels that haunted her. "From today, you are no longer a mere dancer; you are an artist. And if you dance or sing, you will do so with purpose, and I will protect you from the mockers."²¹

On the surface, it might seem that her situation improved, or at least that it was a step in the right direction. However, the reality was entirely different. The change in her situation was nothing more than an enhancement of the conditions of her servitude or an increase in privileges, for following orders, no matter their nature, was a harsher and more painful form of alienation than the one she had endured at home. "That is why I would get upset when I received an invitation two or three days before the event. But it was a formal, high-level invitation, and I couldn't refuse it."²² She is, in essence, "a troubled hero displaced from her reality, finding herself up against overwhelming forces tied to place, power, and utilitarian interests."²³

Barkaham (Bahja) believed that she had attained a prestigious position, that of an artist favored by the president, but she did not realize that her alienation would sometimes disappear only to resurface in an uglier form later. "But since the outbreak of the civil war, I was rarely summoned to the People's Palace anymore." Barkaham (Bahja) tried to overcome her reality by filling the void left by her move from Algeria abroad, hoping to regain her psychological balance and compensate for her alienation. "I lived with many memories and spiritual pains, and my search for ways to forget them led me to join Sufi circles, visit shrines of the Ahl al-Bayt, and consult with psychologists."

The deepest wounds inflicted by alienation on Barkaham were that it caused her to lose all her family without ever having the chance to reunite with them or share the wealth she had accumulated, to bring them happiness and comfort. Fate did not even allow her to apologize to her mother, who had endured the pain of forced loneliness after Camacho's marriage, her isolation, the death of her husband, and her daughter's escape from home²⁵. Her mother lived out the rest of her days haunted by the shame that had engulfed the family, only to meet her end because her daughter was a dancer or an artist, as the political term goes. Barkaham's pain was indescribable: "I was sad because I had become without a family, without a mother or sisters to lean on when time hurt me with its events or when the world closed in on me with its injustice."²⁶

Despite the fact that Barakahim's (Bahja's) presence in the capital continued to make her feel estranged, the absence of (Qasim) was even more painful, for he was her support and refuge. He was the one who had lifted her from the nightclubs of Bou Saada to the splendor of palaces and the luxury of the wealthy, and he had saved her from an unknown fate many times due to political conflicts. His absence was an estrangement like no other. "*I couldn't express to her the horror of the orphanhood that Qasim's departure had left in me, and if I stayed with this feeling for a few more days, I would die.*"²⁷

The character of (Barakahim) represents a woman who remains a victim of estrangement from the day of her birth until the end of her life. Every phase brings a new form of alienation, even if she believes that she has become an artist with a revered position in society.

-The Alienation of Suaad's Character

Suaad was not a central character in the novel, yet she represents a model for many women who experienced familial estrangement due to the selfishness and ignorance of husbands who did not honor God's right in their wives who did not bear sons. This was beyond their control. These husbands also did not observe justice between their wives in cases of polygamy. This deplorable phenomenon of familial estrangement for women often ends in either oppression or deviation.

(Kamacho) temporarily transferred his own estrangement to Suaad when the strange woman (Khowlan) entered her life, making her feel like a stranger in her own home. "*How much Suaad felt oppressed and lonely.*"²⁸ His excuse was his search for a son, but that estrangement did not last long before leading her to another form of alienation that of a woman who has no provider or support.

Suaad's character represents the wife who had no control over what she bore, yet despite this, she finds herself lost in the maze of estrangement, bearing the consequences of what society believed without any mercy.

-The Alienation of Khowlan's Character

Khowlan moved from the city of Touggourt to the city of Bousaada, and all the signs of estrangement were evident in her. She transitioned from her father's house to her husband's house as a co-wife to Suaad, and at first, she could only be a stranger trying to adapt to her new situation. But her alienation intensified when her husband, who had provided her with some sense of peace, died, leaving her at the mercy of her co-wife. "*She accepted living among people who did not recognize her worth, isolating her until no one was left for her except strangers who passed by her shop.*"²⁹ At least, that's how Khowlan perceived it, as Suaad took over her husband's role as the actual authority in the house. Khowlan accepted this, justifying it by her unfamiliarity with the customs of the Bou Saadi community. "*You know better, Suaad. I'm a stranger in this city,*"³⁰ she said. However, she politely demanded her freedom to act, hinting at her acceptance of the new reality as long as she couldn't change it. "*In my village, we are used to a girl doing what she pleases once she becomes a woman.*"³¹

Khowlan, the woman, was resigned to her fate, seeking nothing but a little peace, yet she repeatedly found herself in a reality different from what she had hoped for. She wished to marry a man who would make her happy but found herself as a second wife, far from her familiar hometown, a stranger in another city. She had hoped to bear a son for her husband, but he passed away before she could give him this gift, something beyond her control. She then stepped into the world of men and markets, taking over for her late husband, only to be delivered by fate into a new form of alienation among men and the ridicule of children. However, her patience and endurance enabled her to adapt to all of it. Yet alienation did not spare her even when she thought that fortune had smiled upon her this time when she joined her stepdaughter, Barkaham, in the capital, where security, luxury, and happiness awaited. Political conflicts shattered these dreams, leaving Khowlan and Barkaham like feathers in the wind, constantly moving from one place to another. How could Khowlan, an elderly, uneducated woman who had surrendered to simple family disputes and yielded to her co-wife, Suaad, without resistance, possibly understand the intricacies of politics and the schemes of those in power?

Khowlan's simplicity and cultural level were among the main reasons for her alienation from her surroundings. She could not comprehend what was happening around her, nor did she understand the nature of the conflict in which she found herself entangled. She was accused of aiding terrorist groups, a ready-made accusation tailored for anyone who dares to think about governance or attempts to bring about change that those in power perceive as a threat. She was charged with a crime she could not understand, nor the punishment it entailed. She was imprisoned and died there without ever understanding what had happened to her.

Khowlan's alienation throughout the novel symbolizes the alienation of the simple Algerian woman. Millions of women across this country are like Khowlan, having surrendered to their fates. Each of them lives in isolation, suppressing her sighs and hiding her estrangement. No one notices her until she departs from this world, hoping to receive justice in the hereafter.

-The Alienation of Qasim's Character

Qasim's life began like that of any man distinguished from his peers, alien to his surroundings. He refused to submit to the colonizers, making his thoughts strange to his family, neighbors, and generation. At that time, the revolution seemed like a gamble. While his family was preparing him for a prestigious job after earning his university degree in law, Qasim decided otherwise. His thinking was different from theirs; he joined the

revolution, knowing that he might die in his first battle. His alienation went deeper than that. He would leave his marital home, leaving behind his wife, Ziniya, whose mindset and cultural level could not comprehend how a man could abandon his family, wealth, and future to risk his life in a newly born revolution, facing the most powerful colonial force of the time. Qasim's sense of alienation in a country controlled by the French colonizers made him willing to pay any price, becoming unlike ordinary human beings, where paternal instincts often override all convictions, no matter how deeply held. But Qasim was different. His mother was shocked when he refused to take back his son—who was born in his absence from his maternal grandfather's home. This was an unusual response, as people typically show deep love and desire to reclaim their children, no matter the circumstances. "He refused and gave her an answer that made her pause and wonder if this was indeed her son Qasim, or if someone else had taken over his body during one of those deadly battles."³²

Qasim entered the labyrinth of politics after independence, and the ruling group was far from united. The divisions were clear, and the alignments were evident. How could a man who entered this arena feel secure? He was secretive and mysterious, never revealing his secrets even to his closest confidants. At that time, alienation was imposed, not a choice how could it not be, when he could not be certain who was friend and who was foe? When he was shot, even his closest friend couldn't be sure who was responsible. Was it the enemies of the nation, or was it an attempt by his fellow rulers to eliminate him? "*It could have been a reckless young man among them, or the enemy disguised as a friend.*"³³

Qasim's life began with alienation through his thoughts and convictions, and it ended with alienation after his forced retirement. No longer the military man to whom everyone answered, he became prey to alienation once he lost his position. "*After he was retired and no longer participated in any official work, except for attending ceremonies he found tedious.*"³⁴

The character of Qasim represents the official who believes he is always right, seeing himself as a guardian of the state and society. He considers himself the only one with the right to determine everyone's fate, convinced that he knows what is best for them. As a result, he lives in the alienation created by his own thoughts, and his life ends in a self-imposed alienation born from comfort and privilege.

2-Social Alienation

Social alienation is a reality for individuals in every society on earth, albeit to varying degrees. However, underdeveloped societies are more prone to this type of alienation, with women being the most affected group. As the weakest link, women are often the most submissive to their circumstances, lacking support and protection against the harsh judgments of society. Defying these societal norms often means deepening their alienation and exposing themselves to various forms of harm.

In this novel, the author highlights how society in some of its segments views women with condescension, treating them as mere extensions of men who dictate their fate and way of life, down to the smallest details, under the belief that women are incapable of making proper decisions. "*In a conservative town known for its disregard of the necessary respect for women.*"³⁵

Khowlan's social alienation is evident from the moment she moves from her original community to another that differs in every detail of life. It begins with physical characteristics, as Kamatcho returned from his absence "with a very dark-skinned woman following him," foreign in her way of dressing and even in the colors of her clothing, which the women of Bousaada were not used to. "She was wrapped in a colorful scarf, unlike the women of Bousaada who wrapped themselves in white." She was also different in her manner of speech, "*with the accent of the southeastern villages.*"³⁶ These descriptions alone were enough to place the woman at the heart of alienation, especially since she arrived as a second wife.

It is common for every community to have its customs and traditions that govern the lives of individuals, and often these rules create victims—not because society intends to harm them, but because reality makes them powerless victims. What is remarkable is that some of these victims may even revere the customs that are actually against their own interests. They do not dare to defy or fight them, and they even stand against anyone who violates them out of fear of societal judgment, reputation, or preserving a certain history. As a result, the oppressed individual experiences an alienation that they keep to themselves, unable to even voice it.

Each member of Kamatcho's family lived in their own personal alienation, but with Kamatcho's death, all the women in his family began to experience a deadly form of alienation. They had hoped that their lives would be brightened by the birth of a male child, but that hope faded when the head of their household and the family's man passed away, leaving them with a sense of isolation that made it difficult to enjoy life. Their alienation deepened further when Khowlan, who was their hope for a male child to carry on the family name

and protect them from the gossip and malice of others, gave birth to a daughter. *"We were six women with no one knocking on our door, watched by prying eyes and gossiped about by sharp tongues."³⁸ The shared feeling among them was that they were worth nothing in a society that showed no mercy to their weakness, femininity, or solitude. "We were lined up in the house like any other household items"³⁹*

The alienation of Kamatcho's women and daughters was overwhelming; no one inquired about their well-being, needs, or lacked the concern to check on them. How could they, when these women were seen as weak and powerless by a society that stripped them of their dignity and provided no rights or care? *"No relative ever knocked on our door to ask about us, the purified ones in our self-imposed isolation."⁴⁰*

3- Political Alienation

Political alienation arises from the nature of politics and governance, which represent the opinions of a segment of society that has taken on the role of ruling. It is logical for people to disagree on how the state's affairs should be managed. It is also well-known that those in power often defend their position more fiercely than they defend the correctness of their policies. This often leads to a sense of alienation among certain segments of society, especially those excluded from the benefits of power, as well as those who hold innovative ideas and sincere intentions for genuine change and good governance. When the conflict intensifies, these people feel alienated in their own homeland, a place where they should have been partners rather than mere bystanders on the margins of life.

Even those who hold the reins of power can experience alienation, as they cannot fully trust those around them, no matter how loyal they may seem. It is also common for factions within the ruling elite to clash, with the weaker side feeling a growing sense of alienation. How could they not, when just yesterday they were the ones giving orders, only to find themselves overnight reduced to mere decoration, covering up the internal conflicts within the corridors of power?

This last image is vividly portrayed in the novel through the scene of the president's ousting, where a celebratory concert held in his honor only deepens his bitterness and despair. While the party is held for him in the Palace of the People, within himself, he holds a funeral, mourning a bleak fate and a dark future, uncertain of what lies ahead. *"I was singing and crying, and the president surrounded by the military cried like me, but he did so internally."⁴¹*

The alienation of a political man is harsh, often due to a tragic end. Those who challenge those in power are not only gambling with their political future but also with their lives. *"It is enough that he is surrounded by all these armed men, unaware that his time in the palace is nearing its end, and perhaps his time in life as well."⁴²*

Immersing oneself in the political game can lead to a deep alienation from one's own self, as one may betray their principles and abandon their convictions under the pressure to continue or under the threat of force. In the world of politics, there are areas where neutrality is not an option, and one must choose a side either white or black and bear the consequences. The protagonist of the novel, who fled from familial alienation, found herself alienated among powerful politicians, where any mistake could cost a person their life, no matter how high their rank or esteemed their position. *"I ended my interrupted song with a completely dry throat. I was like a picture of another woman who wasn't me."⁴³*

The political crisis that Algeria experienced during the so-called Black Decade, which claimed the lives of many Algerians, caused a deep alienation that affected the entire nation. Confusion reigned, friends and enemies became indistinguishable, and the average Algerian could no longer feel safe, unsure of where the next blow would come from or where to seek refuge. It was the most profound collective political alienation the society had known since its independence. It was understandable to feel this way under the yoke of colonialism, but it was never anticipated or accepted that such bitterness would be experienced in an independent Algeria.

The novelist subtly touches on this pain without stirring the wounds or aligning himself with any particular faction. This is portrayed in the scene where Kamatcho's daughters and wife are slaughtered, pleading, *"Why are you killing us? We elected you,"* and in the scene where Qasim is shot, as his friend becomes certain that the perpetrator was not the terrorists, but rather a group of fellow rulers who wanted to remove Qasim from their path.

The novelist doesn't limit himself to just one subtle reference to the confusion and ambiguity surrounding events; instead, he presents another scene that highlights the contradiction between the declared fight against terrorism and the settling of scores among those in power. He portrays the accusation against Barkaham (Bahja) of aiding the terrorists in the shooting of Qasim and her subsequent prevention from traveling,

followed by her imprisonment. The irony lies in the fact that a former confidante of the president, the favored one of the military security chief, and a performer at the Palace of the People ends up in the same cell as a girl who once incited protests against the government. Through Barkaham (Bahja), the novelist remarks, "*I didn't tell anyone about the charge leveled against me that landed me in a cell reserved for rebels against the regime.*"⁴⁴

This contradiction breeds both alienation and confusion. The inmates not only suffer from the isolation and loneliness of imprisonment but also from the added alienation of suspicion and fear towards one another. "*Perhaps she's a secret agent or an informant placed among us to report back to them.*"⁴⁵ The uncertainty of their fates only deepens this sense of disorientation. Barkaham (Bahja), Rofia, and the other inmates are overwhelmed by a sense of loss, each living in a world filled with disturbing nightmares. Bahja, imprisoned for a charge she knows nothing about, is unsure of her future unless the absent Qasim intervenes. Meanwhile, Rofia faces accusations that could result in her execution or, at best, a life sentence. "*She could be sentenced to death, and if she's lucky, she'll get life imprisonment and be transferred to Reggane.*"⁴⁶

The situation Bahja finds herself in is dreadful, filled with contradictions, and serves as a testament to the idea that no one is safe, no matter how innocent or how close they are to the inner circle of power. "*I feel insignificant, as though I'm worth nothing, even though I used to mean everything and would sit at the same table as the most important men in the state.*"⁴⁷

Secondly: The Estrangement of Place

A person becomes familiar with a place just as they become familiar with people's faces, and just as they may feel comfortable with some places, they may also feel estranged from others, no matter how comfortable those places may be. The place where a person often feels the safest is their home, and the harshest form of alienation occurs within that very place if they cannot harmonize with their family. The novel we are analyzing is filled with examples of spatial alienation, which affects almost all of the characters. The first victim of this type of alienation was Suaad, Kamatcho's wife. She felt like a stranger in her own home—a place she once found familiar, comforting, and peaceful. However, Kamatcho, who became a victim of the societal pressure to have a male child, turned her home into a desolate place where she felt alienated and lonely. This was compounded by the presence of a new woman, Khowlan, who usurped Suaad's position as the lady of the house and won the heart of her husband, who no longer cared about her. Soon, this feeling of alienation transferred to Khowlan herself. Upon Kamatcho's death, the woman who had wronged Suaad began to lose her sanity and felt an overwhelming sense of uncertainty about her future in that house.

The shadow of spatial alienation continued to haunt the characters, seeping into the life of the second daughter in the family, Barkaham. She felt oppressed, humiliated, and belittled by her mother, which led her to feel alienated within her own family. This sense of alienation drove her from place to place, as she wandered through the streets of the city, then to a hotel where she spent days in unfamiliar surroundings, and later to Dar Kawakeb, where the same feeling persisted. Eventually, she moved to the capital, but it wasn't long before alienation crept back in. She tasted the bitterness of prison, the harshest form of alienation, as a result of political conflict after her protector, Qasim, was injured and sent abroad for treatment. She remained imprisoned until he returned to intercede on her behalf.

Once again, the feeling of alienation resurfaced when she found herself confined in Villa Al-Bahja, as those in power viewed her as a supporter of the president they had overthrown. She was essentially imprisoned in the villa, where "*a prison is the same, whether it's in a cold cell measuring four square meters with three other women, or in a luxurious villa named Al-Bahja.*"⁴⁸ They monitored her every breath, scrutinizing the air that entered the villa, as she was placed under house arrest.

After Qasim intervened and secured her release, the period of political openness dashed the dreams of this artist, leaving her work no longer in demand. She perhaps abandoned her passion for performing at soirées in honor of the state's top officials. Under the weight of these circumstances, she was forced to leave Algeria and embark on a tour of several European countries, eventually settling in Cairo, where she continued to develop her art, "*trying to distract myself from the sorrow that accompanied me due to my distance from my homeland, without even getting a chance to see my family.*"

The conflicts between the ruling factions nearly cost Qasim his life, and one of the repercussions of these disputes was the imposition of house arrest on Barkaham (Bahja), who remained isolated with only Khowlan for company. "*I would search the darkness around me, finding no companion except my fears, in that cold apartment in Staouali.*"⁴⁹

Although Barkaham's move from Bousaada to the capital changed many aspects of her life and provided her with the luxurious existence she had dreamed of, the longing for Bousaada, the tranquility of home, and the warmth of family still haunted her. She was constantly reminded that she was a stranger here, and that her true home was in Bousaada. No matter how many pleasures a person finds to satisfy their desires, the soul remains alienated, searching for peace that cannot be provided by a lavish life, towering palaces, or interactions with the state's elite. Both Qasim and Barkaham were from Bousaada, and both came to the capital in search of a better life, but the longing for Bousaada never left them. The song of Mount Kerdada stirred the wounds of their souls and deepened their sense of alienation. *"I sang it many times afterward at my performances, and every time I sang it, I felt a painful lump in my throat, caused by the images crowding my mind of my mother, my sisters, and Bousaada, the distant city nestled between the mountains, like a pampered woman who refuses to give herself to those who desire her."*⁵⁰

Even the president, for whom Bahja had often sung, was not spared from alienation. His comrades, who spread rumors that he had Alzheimer's, decided to exile and alienate him from the country where he had once wielded absolute power. *"They all agreed that his removal was a mercy for him and for the country. When the plane landed in a distant country, the only person with him was an old servant, chosen to accompany him and forced to stay by his side until he died."*⁵¹

Accompanying him on this final journey was another man estranged from his homeland for a long time, having moved from the south to the capital in hopes of benefiting from the wealth shared among its citizens and political elites. Al-Joudi had arrived there, alienated from the south, living as a servant in the Palace of the People, completely different from those around him an outsider in every sense. But fate was not satisfied with this level of alienation. It decreed that he should leave his homeland altogether, accompanying the president, where the two of them would end up living in a foreign country. Their exile was severe, as they both lived as strangers, essentially imprisoned in an isolated house in a land that was not their own. It was alienation upon alienation.

When Al-Joudi attempted to break free from that deadly isolation, he fell into an even harsher form of alienation, as *"everyone he approached for employment refused him because he was an old stranger."*⁵² The end of this man from the south, who had spent most of his life enjoying the luxury of palaces and the opulent lifestyle of the state's rulers, mirrored the end of his president, who had indulged in all the riches of his country and distributed them among his close associates as if they were his personal property. *"He ended up as a homeless man in the streets of unknown cities, alone and hungry, just as the president was left alone and hungry in a locked room for seven days."*⁵³

The deteriorating security situation cast a shadow over the general peace of the people, especially those belonging to either side of the conflict. This left Barkaham and Khowlan in constant fear of Qasim being targeted at their doorstep. Such an event was a grave warning to them that they would never be safe as long as the one protecting them had been the target of an assassination attempt. Khowlan, the simple desert woman, had already felt alienated when she moved from Touggourt to Bousaada, and then to the capital. *"She had secluded herself in her room since that night when we heard the gunshots."*⁵⁴

How could she not feel estranged from a place to which she had no connection, except through her stepdaughter, whom she had just met, with whom she had yet to form a strong bond due to their long separation? Khowlan's spatial alienation ended tragically when she lost her life in the harshest form of alienation imprisonment.

Conclusion:

The alienation of the intellectual and their ideas is reflected in the events penned by the novelist, who experienced these realities with a conscious mind. Although there may be ideological influences shaping the narrative, the feeling of alienation arises from oppressive circumstances. These conditions make the intellectual seem like a strange being, often suffering their alienation in silence. Even when expressed, it comes through a narrative form that requires analysis by enlightened minds.

The novel addresses a prevailing culture in society that may have served previous generations but no longer meets the needs of the current ones. This has created a rift that is difficult to mend, giving rise to social phenomena that the community struggles to understand or find effective solutions for, allowing these problems to worsen and bring misfortune to all. The severe crisis period in which confusion reigned made people feel estranged from their own country, a place that had become a breeding ground for death in ways its citizens never imagined, even in wars against their fiercest enemies, let alone when the conflict was with their own countrymen over a political disagreement that could have been resolved rationally.

The crisis brought misfortune to everyone, with alienation becoming the dominant theme. The society emerging from the grip of oppressive colonialism still clung to traditions that caused some of its members to suffer from feelings of alienation and disconnection. This is seen in the alienation of a girl within a family that denies her rights in the name of preserving the family's honor, or in the alienation of a wife discarded as mere property under the pretext of a man's right to polygamy and the desire for a male heir, with no regard for her rights. It is also seen in the alienation of a second wife who had no choice in her marriage and did not choose to be in that position, as customs allowed her family to marry her off to whomever they deemed suitable, believing they knew best. There is the alienation of a family without a man, left vulnerable to the gossip and recklessness of society's outcasts, who prey on those without male protection. And finally, the alienation of a woman left behind by her husband, who sacrifices for the nation, only to be uprooted from her home under the guise of preserving her family's influence, which had ties with the colonizers, with no consideration for her fate or opinion.

This is a society that has distributed alienation among all its members, disproportionately giving the weakest among them the largest share.

Alienation was not limited to the common people; even the elite and those in positions of power suffered from the same affliction—though it may have seemed to others that they lived in luxury and stability. The president of the state was deposed, exiled, and placed under house arrest, unable to communicate with friends or relatives. The military security chief lived a life of uncertainty and distrust of those around him because if his rivals captured him, he would face the same fate as his president, or perhaps even be killed.

Barkaham's character does not just represent the alienation of a young, ambitious woman; she is also an artist, as Qasim called her. Art demands creativity and the expression of the artist's own dreams and visions. However, Barkaham became a reflection of an artist who does not represent her true self, nor does she create art out of personal passion. Instead, she sought to please the political elite and benefactors, who showered the artist serving their political agenda with gifts and privileges. Yet, this artist could become more insignificant than a fly if they disobeyed or if the balance of power shifted. With their approval, the artist becomes a patriot serving the nation with their art, presenting a rosy picture of the country. But if they fall out of favor, they are quickly branded as an enemy of the state, a threat to national security. This represents a deep alienation from the creative self, which is not allowed the freedom to produce genuine art but is instead constrained by the demands of the ruling authority.

In short, everyone experiences alienation, and the events of this novel are merely a small sample of the various forms of alienationa microcosm of society as a whole. The novel reveals the extent of alienation experienced by the Algerian individual, regardless of their status, position, or social standing, at least within the internal time frame of the story.

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