

**Social Aspects of Alienation in Albert Camus' Novel *The Stranger*  
Between Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses**

المظاهر الاجتماعية للاغتراب في رواية الغريب لألبير كامى بين التحليل الكمي والكيفي

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**Abstract**

The study aims at investigating the social aspects of alienation in Albert Camus' novel, *The Stranger*, depending upon the studies of Melvin Seeman (1959), Dwight Dean (1961) and Russell Middleton (1963). This study depends on the quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods and uses recurrence analysis method within the quantitative analysis. Idea was also used as the unit of analysis. The results of the study show that 'meaninglessness' was the most repetitive social aspect in *The Stranger* then 'self-estrangement', 'social estrangement', and 'powerlessness'. The least repetitive social aspect was 'estrangement from work'. Also, this study concludes that the quantitative and qualitative analyses differed in showing the main aspect of the novel; 'social estrangement' was the main aspect according to the qualitative analysis, not 'meaninglessness'.

**Keywords:** Social Aspects, *The Strange*, Albert Camus, Quantitative Analysis, Qualitative Analysis.

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**المخلص:** تهدف الدراسة إلى تقصي مظاهر الاغتراب في رواية *الغريب* لألبير كامي من خلال الاعتماد على دراسات كل من ميلفان سيمان وديوايت دين وراسل ميدلتون. وقد اعتمدت هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، واستخدمت طريقتي تحليل المضمون الكمي والكيفي في آن معاً، وكانت الفكرة هي وحدة التحليل المستخدمة ضمن التحليل الكمي. وتم الوصول إلى جملة من النتائج أبرزها أن "اللامعنى" هو أكثر مظاهر الاغتراب تكراراً في رواية *الغريب*، ويليه "الانفصال عن الذات"، ثم "الانفصال الاجتماعي"، "قالعجر"، وأخيراً "الانفصال عن العمل". كما بينت النتائج أن هنالك اختلافاً بين التحليل الكمي والكيفي في تبيان المظهر الرئيس للاغتراب الذي تدور حوله الرواية؛ فالانفصال الاجتماعي كان المظهر الرئيس الذي تدور حوله الرواية وفقاً للتحليل الكيفي وليس اللامعنى.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاغتراب، *الغريب*، ألبير كامي، تحليل كمي، تحليل كيفي.

### Introduction:

The concept of alienation has received a lot of attention in various fields of human sciences and it is studied in many religious, political, social, economic, and literary contexts. Its meanings vary according to the contexts. Moreover, the research papers which dealt with alienation show that it has social aspects that express or, at least, reflect its content. Melvin Seeman's, Dewight Dean's, and Russell Middleton's studies in 1959, 1961, and 1963, respectively, are examples of these research papers. However, these aspects are not absolute, they are rather relative and no consensus has been reached about them, yet. This study will try to analyse these aspects in Albert Camus' novel *The Stranger* due to the great relationship between literature and society as the latter is the place from which literature texts take their raw materials. This novel was chosen owing to the diversity of social aspects of alienation, and the social temper which alienation has in it.

### Statement of the Problem:

Alienation is an existential phenomenon that accompanies humans in their life. It manifests in humans' questions about life, death, the afterlife, and the essence of existence. These parameters include dimensions of alienation and make humans alienated due to their infinitive questions about the origin of everything. Besides, the study of alienation is not an easy mission as it is a bifurcated concept and laden with meanings. It can be

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referred to as the separation from oneself, social estrangement, renunciation of rights, and meaninglessness towards the world's phenomena, and so on.

The ongoing studies in the field of alienations confirm that alienation has many aspects that express and reflect its content. Melvin Seeman (1959), Dwight Dean (1961) and Russell Middleton (1963) discussed these aspects profoundly in their studies and classified them differently. In addition, these aspects are relative rather than absolute and there is no consensus about its comprehensiveness.

On the other hand, literature is the real reflection of society; it tackles the depth of social issues, illustrating them in critical and controversial manners in order to reveal the truth. Alienation - as a social matter- has been a topic of interest for literature for a long time, so it was studied in various contexts to understand its manifestations; however, its impact on literature is severely under-researched. The current study aims at analysing the aspects of alienation in Albert Camus's novel, *The Stranger* - as a model of the novels which dealt with alienation- quantitatively and qualitatively. This topic was chosen particularly for the purpose of serving the great interest of sociology of literature. Also, *The Stranger* novel was picked due to the diversity of alienation's aspects in the given novel and the lack of research papers that deals with literature in Sociology. The long experience of Albert Camus in existential writings plays a fundamental role in choosing the topic as well.

Ultimately, according to the previous justifications, this research will try to answer these questions:

- ❖ What is the most common aspect of alienation in Albert Camus's novel?
- ❖ Does the most frequent aspect reflect the essence of alienation in *The Stranger* novel?

### **Objectives:**

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- ❖ To know the main social aspect of alienation in Albert Camus's novel, *The Stranger*.
- ❖ To identify Meursault character's aspects of alienation.
- ❖ To estimate the extent to which the quantitative and qualitative analyses is different in concluding the main social aspect of alienation in *The Stranger* novel.

### **Originality:**

The importance of this current study lies in the fact that it is one of the subjects which belongs to a significant field of sociology; the sociology of literature as the studies related to this realm of sociology are rare. Also, there are no previous studies that have dealt directly with analysing the social aspects of alienation in the novel, especially in *The Stranger* novel. That will make this study new and original. This study may conclude important results which can benefit the intellectual heritage of sociology as well as it may illuminate the way for other studies to discover the aspects of alienation in other novels. In short, these reasons make the study new and original.

### **Methodology:**

The study used the quantitative and qualitative content analyses methods to analyse the social aspects of alienation in Albert Camus' novel, *The Stranger*. Also, the method of recurrence analysis was used within the quantitative content analysis as it helps to estimate the importance of the categories, depending on their repetition and provides hierarchical order to the variables of the study. The idea was chosen to be the unit of analysis - within the framework of quantitative analysis- due to its frequent use and the accuracy it provides. The quantitative and qualitative methods were relied upon in order to avoid deficiencies in both of them. Although the qualitative analysis content method discovers the ambiguous ideas of the study, it is characterized by subjectivity. The method of quantitative content analysis provides highly important information and numbers about the problem of the study, but it cannot penetrate the depth of the problem. Therefore, the integration of the two previous procedures leads to

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expanding the study perspective in an attempt to reach more accurate results.

### **The Definitions of the Study:**

#### **❖ Alienation:**

"The social and psychological separation between oneself and one's life experiences." (Ritzer, 2007, 119)

#### **❖ Social Aspects of Alienation:**

A set of dimensions reflects the content of alienation concept.

#### **❖ The Operational Definition of Social Aspects of Alienation:**

The degree which demonstrates each aspect of alienation as per its repetition in *The Stranger* novel.

### **Literature Review:**

With increasing exposure to alienation and a growing interest in *The Stranger* novel, numerous interpretations appeared in the past ten years. This review, however, will be limited to the closest interpretations. The purpose here is to investigate the most related studies, compare and contrast the perspectives which each entails, and benefit from these studies to find out where the research will lead us. Considering the novelty of the study, the most relative research papers of the current study were discussed. They were also classified according to their languages into Arab and English papers:

#### **❖ Arabic Papers:**

*Touzene Abdelkader*, in his research, *The Symbol and Ambiguity in Albert Camus's Novel The Stranger* in 2017, aims at analysing the symbols and vague signs in *The Stranger* novel. The research depends on the analytical method and shows that:

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❖ Meursault is not only Camus, but a man who represents all the French who immigrated to Algeria for the sake of the sun, and who did not hesitate, for a moment, to kill the Arab.

❖ The trial of Meursault, which the writer presents as a tragedy, was held by a fair court when its judge conducted the death sentence against the colonizer. Despite the fact that the colonizer has been exposed, the writer still sympathizes with him, trying to justify his crime.

Although the research, in my opinion, was important, it started from theoretical ideas without providing any statistical facts to prove its hypotheses, so it was limited. Also, these analytical attempts dealt with the issue from a one-sided perspective and did not make a connection between the results of the research and the social situations.

The research *Alienation in Albert Camus's thought* by **Paddi Om Hani & Ghailani Sarah** in **2018** aims to investigate the manifestations of alienation in the literary production of Albert Camus. The analytical method was the essential method on which the research-based and the results show that:

❖ Alienation in *The Stranger* novel is associated with absurdity. Besides, human in this life is free and seeks happiness because life has no specific meaning or purpose and all the aspects of life are repetitive and dull. These reasons make humans alien in this world and do not regret their actions.

❖ Camus's expression of the multiple forms of contemporary human alienation is justified as he is an existential philosopher and the existential philosophy is based mainly on the rejection of restrictions and pursuit of freedom.

Despite the fact that, according to the view of my research, this research studied paramount parts of the novel, it was characterized by the theoretical type and lacked quantitative sides.

❖ **English Papers:**

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The research of *Hitendrakumar Patel* titled *Absurdity in Albert Camus': The Outsider* in 2013 aimed at investigating the concept of absurdity in Albert Camus's novel, *The Stranger*, and it is analytical research that reached a set of results, most notably:

❖ Meursault admits that life has no meaning, rather it is what one makes while being conscious of two certainties: life and death.

❖ Meursault is driven out by a tenacious and therefore profound passion, the passion for an absolute and for truth. This truth is as yet a negative one, a truth born of living and feeling, but without which no triumph over the self or over the world will ever be possible.

Although the research, in my point of view, discussed an essential topic, It didn't make any connection between the theoretical ideas and reality, so this reduced the methodological importance of the research. Besides, it was theoretical rather than quantitative.

*Md Islam & Muhammad Islam*, in their research, *Albert Camus' Meursault in The Outsider: An Existential Hero and Beyond* in 2018 looked into analyzing the character of Meursault in Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger* from an existential point of view, taking into consideration all the main features of existentialism. It is analytical and philosophical research whose results show:

❖ Meursault is equally an existential hero and a mirror reflecting the ugly truth of society. Thus, the study helps the readers to grow a critical and analytical understanding of their own society through the eyes of Meursault.

❖ Meursault is mostly deemed as an absurd character which can be argued as an unjust representation of him, as close analysis of his character does not show any absurdity in his activities or speech towards his fellow people. In this sense, labeling him as absurd is a failure or a limitation of the perception about him not of the character himself.

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Like other research papers, this one relied on analytical methods and its results were significant, but they lacked the quantitative side.

According to the previous reviews, it was found that philosophical and literary analyses have been overwhelmingly mentioned above. The papers' goals revolve around investigating many topics in *The Stranger* novel, such as absurdity, symbolism, ambiguity, alienation, and analysing the character of Meursault in the novel. This current study differs from others as it attempts to analyse the aspects of alienation in the novel by using quantitative and qualitative content analyses methods to identify the main social aspect of alienation around which the novel revolves. What makes this research distinguished is its attempt to mix the quantitative and qualitative types of methods. These methods are the most suitable methods in sociology to deal with texts and they distinguish the current study from others.

### **The Definition of Alienation:**

The English word “alienation” is derived from the Latin word "Alienatio", a noun that comes from the Latin verb "Alienare", which holds the meanings of transfer, surrender, diversion, or exclusion. Furthermore, this verb is derived from the word “Alienus” which means belonging to another person and it comes from the word “Alius,” which refers to the other. (Rajab, 1988, 31-32)

Raymond Boudon (1934-2013) and Francois Bourricaud (1922-1991) claim that alienation has legal, psychological, social, and religious interpretations. The legal interpretation refers to the transfer or sale of money or rights, the psychological one indicates that alienation is a general intellectual weakness, while the social interpretation assumes that it is the dissolution of the bonds between individuals. The religious interpretation declares that alienation is the dissolution of the bonds between individuals and god. (Boudon & Bourircaud, 1986, 29)

The definitions, which were collected within this study, focused on three matters of alienation: the social dimension of alienation, the psychological one, and the combination of the social and psychological

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dimensions. The definition given by Edger Borgatta and Rhonda Montgomery concentrated on the social dimension of alienation. They considered it as **“the isolation of individuals from a community- a detachment from the activities, identifications, and ties that a community can provide.”** (Borgatta & Montgomery 2000, 100) Whereas the definition by Frederik Matouk dealt with alienation from the psychological side. He defined it as the loss of the distinctive human personality. (1998, 32) Maan Alomar combines the social and psychological sides of alienation as he explains that it is the excluding of individuals from themselves and from others as well. (2000, 109)

With all of that said, the concept of alienation is the state in which individuals feel disconnected and isolated from themselves or the society around them. That makes them unable to adapt to their inner and outer world properly.

### Social Aspects of Alienation:

Many studies discussed the aspects of alienation and differed in their classification. The first study was Melvin Seeman's study (1959) entitled “On the Meaning of Alienation”, in which he suggests five social aspects:

- Powerlessness: it is **“the expectancy or possibilities held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the occurrences of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks.”** (Seeman, 1959, 784)

- Meaninglessness: this aspect is **“characterized by a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions about future outcomes of behavior can be made.”** (Seeman, 1959, 786)

- Normlessness: This term originates from Emile Durkheim's concept of anomie, as indicated by Seeman himself. (Seeman, 1959: 787) It can be defined as **“a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve goals.”** (Seeman, 1959, 788)

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- Isolation: it refers to **“those who, like the intellectual, assign low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society.”** (Seeman, 1959, 788-789)

- Self-Estrangement: it is **“the degree of dependence of the given behavior upon anticipated future rewards.”** (Seeman 1959, 790)

Also, in the study of Dwight Dean (1961), “Alienation: Its Meaning and Measurement”, he divided the aspects of alienation into powerlessness, normlessness, and social isolation. (Dean, 1961, 753) He didn’t offer new meanings to powerlessness or normlessness. However, he believed that social isolation can **“be traced to Durkheim’s conception of anomie, which included a feeling of separation from the group or of isolation from group standards.”** (Dean, 1961, 755)

Russell Middleton, in his study, “Alienation, Race, and Education” which was published in (1963), classifies the aspects of alienation into six categories, namely, powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social estrangement, and estrangement from work. His definitions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness were similar to ones given by Seeman (1959). Nevertheless, cultural estrangement refers to the lack of palatability of what is desired by people. Middleton chooses this name to distinguish it from the traditional connotation of social isolation aspect. Also, his use of social estrangement was closer to Dean social isolation (1961) and it referred to the feeling of loneliness. The final aspect, which is, estrangement from work means, according to Middleton, unwillingness to work and do it compulsively to meet the needs and desires. Middleton considered this aspect as an indicator of Seeman’s aspect of Self-Estrangement. (Middleton, 1963, 973-974)

### **Quantitative Analysis:**

#### **- A Brief about the Novel:**

The novel focuses on the main character, Meursault, who received the news of his mother's death from the nursing house where she was living. Meursault had not seen her for a year. After her death, he attended the

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funeral in Marengo city, twenty-four kilometers from his place of residence, Algeria. He refused to see her cadaver did not cry, smoked cigarettes, and drank coffee with milk during the funeral. After that, He went swimming and met Marie Cardona, an old co-worker who had a crush on her since they were working with each other. They swam together, went to the cinema, and had sex.

It is of great importance for clarification to mention that Meursault is a quiet person who lives alone in his apartment, satisfied with his monotonous life, and has no social relations. He hardly knew Marie, Celeste who was the owner of his favourite restaurant, and his neighbor Raymond Santos who was not admired by other neighbors because he worked as a pimp but he refused this accusation and introduced himself to other people as a shopkeeper. Furthermore, Meursault's point of view towards life seems to be nihilistic.

The plot of the novel starts when Santos invited Meursault and Marie to go to his friend's cottage on Saturday and a group of Arab men, who are the brothers of Santos's mistress, follow them in their journey. The Arab men wanted to quarrel with them because Santos devaluated their sister when he discovered that she deceived him and took his money. Santos was wounded during the conflict and Meursault suddenly killed one of them unintentionally by shooting him with the gun. Afterward, he attributed his action to the sun and the judge, who is responsible for the case, was suspicious of his cold behaviour as Meursault did not look guilty at all. Finally, the trial went out of course, turning into a condemnation of Meursault because he did not cry at his mother's funeral and was indifferent at that time. In the end, he was sentenced to death and he received the news of his death as indifferently as he received everything he went through in his life.

### **- Categories of Analysis:**

After presenting the aspects of alienation, five of them will be used to analyse Albert Camus' novel *The Stranger*. This use is not arbitrary; rather,

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it is based on a tribal reading of the novel and deletion of aspects which haven't been repeated. Hence, the categories of analysis in this study are powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement, social estrangement, and estrangement from work. The method of recurrence analysis will also be used within the quantitative analysis as it helps to estimate the importance of the categories, depending on their repetition and provides hierarchical order.

### - Discussing the Results of the Quantitative Analysis:

Number	Aspects of Alienation	Frequency	Percentage
1	Meaninglessness	219	51.50%
2	Self-Estrangement	108	25.35%
3	Social Estrangement	48	11.26%
4	Powerlessness	45	10.56%
5	Estrangement from work	6	1.40%
6	<b>Total</b>	426	100%

**Table 1: Frequency and Percentage of Social Aspects of Alienation**

According to table 1, the most repetitive aspect in *The Stranger* novel is 'meaningless' with 51.40%. That may be attributed to the personality of Meursault who dealt nihilistically with the prevailing ideas and beliefs in society and considered everything around him pointless. Meursault was living alone, so that may have provoked him to think of the essence of life and discover the meaninglessness of this life. Besides, Albert Camus belongs to the existential trend and his writings are filled with absurdity and nihilism. The second repetitive aspect was 'self-estrangement' with 25.35%. It could be explained due to Meursault's character that was very calm and silent. He barely talked, and always tried to avoid speaking

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because of his different mentality which makes him unable to understand the social norms and criteria. The third aspect was 'social estrangement', with 11.26%, which could be interpreted as Meursault's lifestyle. He had no friends except Marie, and his social relations were very weak. Therefore, this aspect was not repetitive tremendously in the novel.

'Powerlessness' was the fourth repetitive aspect with 10.56%, and it is less repetitive than other aspects because Meursault was not helpless, except when he was in prison and faced a severe time. Finally, 'estrangement from work' was the least frequent aspect in *The Stranger* novel with only 1.40%. That can be explained by the fact that his work was not as much discussed as the other matters related to the nihilism of life, the death of Meursault's mother, and the period of his imprisonment as a result of shooting the Arab man.

### Qualitative Analysis:

Quantitative analysis shows that meaninglessness is the main aspect of *The Stranger* novel but Meursault's indifference towards everything surrounds him, according to the qualitative analysis, is traced to an entire rejection of the pseudo society and its norms. In addition, Meursault refused to say what he did not feel and this can be noticed in more than one place, such as the way he responded to Marie's questions: **"She looked at me. "Don't you want to know what I have to do?" I did, but I hadn't thought to ask."** (Camus, 1988, 42) The same thing appears in his answers during his trial: **"He thought for a minute. He asked me if he could say that that day I had held back my natural feelings. I said, "No, because it's not true"."** (Camus, 1988, 65) And also: **"Lastly, I was asked if I had anything to add. "Nothing," I said, "except that the witness is right."** (Camus, 1988, 90) Accordingly, Meursault is a different character who did not adapt to society and its criteria did not share the same common concepts in society and did not think the same way others do. He was such a person who came from the pre-formation of society period. Therefore, he could not understand this society which left the essence and indulged in nonsense

when they judged him for not crying at his mother's funeral, not for the crime he committed.

It is worth noting that Meursault was not good at playing social roles; he simply did not want to act out what he believed and he was strange in a world filled with norms, customs, and criteria. Thus, he could not easily understand all these restrictions, laws, regulations, and handcuffs with which members of society bind each other, so he withdrew from this society and expressed himself without any mask and without demonstrating the reasons for his behaviours. Meursault's last wish, before his execution, embodied his separation from society which imposes its norms as if they were like the knives which slaughtering everyone try to think or live in a different way when he said: **“I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate.”** (Camus: 1988, 123) Consequently, alienation in Meursault's character appears socially and not because of meaninglessness that leads to absurdity.

### Findings:

- ❖ ‘Meaninglessness’ is the most frequent social aspect of alienation in *The Stranger* novel with 51.40%.
- ❖ ‘Self-Estrangement’ is the second repetitive aspect in the novel with 25.35%.
- ❖ ‘Social Estrangement’ is the third frequent aspect in *The Stranger* novel, with 11.26 %.
- ❖ The fourth aspect of alienation in the novel is ‘powerlessness’, with 10.56%.
- ❖ The least repetitive social aspect is ‘estrangement from work’ with 1.40%.
- ❖ The quantitative and qualitative analyses differ in showing the main aspect of the novel; ‘social estrangement’ is the main aspect of the novel according to the qualitative analysis, not ‘meaninglessness’.

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