



From alienation to dream: Representations of utopia in Mohammed Dib's Scandinavian trilogy

Madjda NAIYOU

Laboratory of the Simplified Algerian Encyclopedia.
University of Batna-1-Algeria
madjda.naiou@univ-batna.dz

Mohamed ZERMANE

Laboratory of the Simplified Algerian
University of Batna-1-Algeria.
mohamed.zermane@univ-batna.dz

Abstract

In light of the alienation, the human self seeks to search for alternative spaces that seek refuge in it and satisfy its spiritual need after it has escaped reality and stopped unable to satisfy it. Therefore, this study will try to shed light on the infatuation of the expatriate hero of Muhammad Muhammad Deeb in the utopian space in the Western worlds through his Scandinavian trilogy and to what extent this space achieved the aspirations of the hero and the expatriate hero.

Keywords: *hero, alienation, utopia, space roman.*

De l'aliénation au rêve : représentations de l'utopie dans la trilogie scandinave de Mohammed Dib

Résumé

Face à l'aliénation, l'être humain cherche à trouver des espaces alternatifs où se réfugier et satisfaire ses besoins spirituels après avoir fui la réalité et s'être retrouvé incapable de les satisfaire. Par conséquent, cette étude tentera de mettre en lumière l'engouement du héros expatrié de Muhammad Muhammad Deeb

pour l'espace utopique des mondes occidentaux à travers sa trilogie scandinave et de déterminer dans quelle mesure cet espace a répondu aux aspirations du héros et du héros expatrié.

Mots-clés : *héros, aliénation, utopie, roman spatial.*



Introduction

Utopia that beautiful dream envisioned by Plato in his Republic has remained a human ideal that continues to stir the imagination of humankind. People have tried to conceive it and model their thoughts upon it as an escape from the social, political, and cultural injustices that pursue individuals and communities across the world. When a dream like espace parallel to reality is imagined, one where justice and equality prevail and personal freedoms are respected, the alienated self being the most affected by its environment becomes the most eager to seek such a free realm that answers its deep, often unexpressed needs.

It searches for it in new spaces, yearning and breathing freely once it finds solace within their bounds, after various utopias have placed it upon the track of a legitimate dream.

Therefore, before delving into this study, it is necessary to first understand the particularity of alienation and the general utopian project. Then, we may ask:

Has the alienated protagonist in the Scandinavian trilogy found his solace in the other space? Or has his estrangement and misery only deepened? Has the Western space granted the immigrant the dream he longed for? Or has he faced disappointment instead? This is what the study seeks to uncover and answer.

1. Approach to Preliminary Concepts:

1.1. Alienation:

The concept of alienation is associated with distance and separation; Arabic dictionaries reflect this meaning. Ibn Manzur states: "Al-gharb: departure and with drawal from

people; he departed from us, goes far away, alienated... Al-ghurbah: separation and distance¹."

At the terminological and academic level, however, alienation presents numerous conceptual challenges. It is among the terms that are difficult to define precisely not because its meaning is obscure, but because of the multitude of definitions given to it and the breadth and frequency of its usage². The introduction of the term by various critics into multiple scientific and social fields has made defining it a complex ask for researchers attempting to delineate its conceptual boundaries. It is thus regarded as "a relative phenomenon that varies according to place and time depending on society, and that spreads perceptibly among communities³."

As for the studies that have addressed the issue of alienation, they can be summarized in four main stages, as condensed by Qais Al Nouri as follows⁴:

- The focus and core: From what do we become alienated?
- The alternative: When we lose the connection, what replaces it?
- The pattern: How does alienation manifest or appear?
- •The cause and factor: What leads to alienation?

¹Ibn Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din. (1994). *Lisan al-Arab*. Dar Sader, Beirut

²Ibrahim, Mahmoud. (1979). On Kafka's Alienation: The Metamorphosis as a Model. *Alam Al-Fikr Journal**, Kuwait, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 79

³Anouwood, Michael. (2000). *Dictionary of Hegelian Terms**. Translated by Imam Abdel-Fattah. Supreme Council of Culture, Egypt, p. 79.

⁴See: Al-Nouri, Qais. (1979). "Alienation: Terminologically, Conceptually, and Practically." *Journal of World of Thought**, Kuwait, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 32–33



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In its essence, alienation is a stage of "separation that emerges from simple unity, then returns once again to harmony in a higher, differentiated unity"¹.

In general, alienation speaks of the rupture and fragmentation experienced by the alienated individual in relation to others a loss that eventually generates "a feeling of fear; fear of everything of the future, and even of the present itself for it carries him continuously toward a world of despair and deprivation that it creates"².

According to this perspective, alienation is a feeling that envelops its subject, causing withdrawal and isolation from others. This leads to an advanced state of negativity, conflict, and complete rejection of others factors that further aggravate the situation and may culminate in psychological illness affecting the individual's relationship with his external environment, disturbing both personal and collective balance.

Thus, alienation remains synonymous with feelings of hatred, aversion, and loss implying estrangement of each individual from others. Aversion, being linked to alienation, sometimes gives rise to hatred, and at other times to hostility, subjugation, and enslavement. Under the influence of external conditions whether economic or political the human being becomes enslaved to material things, turning himself into an objects tripped of will.

Throughout the ages, critics have shown great interest in the issue of alienation, associating it with prominent thinkers who each contributed their own insights according to their intellectual and ideological affiliations. The topic has

¹Anouwood, Michael. (ibid.), p. 79

²Publications of the Arab Writers Union, Damascus, p. 43.

become a major research concern, as alienation has grown into a social epidemic spreading with in modern societies dominated by industrial machinery and oppressive laws. Wes hall therefore cite the efforts of some scholars, by way of example rather than limitation.

•**Alienation according to Rousseau:**

Rousseau's name is closely linked to the Social Contract Theory that he advocated in many of his writings. In this regard, he distinguishes between natural freedom and civil freedom, stating that "one must clearly distinguish between natural freedom, which has no limits other than the individual's own strength, and civil freedom, which is bounded by the general will"¹.

Rousseau also regards power as a means to enforce social norms, defining in this respect that the social pact "grants the political body absolute authority over all the members that compose it. ²Likewise, social sovereignty, as Rousseau points out, is not without its perils: "the very aim of the social contract is the survival of the contracting parties; and who ever seeks the goal must also seek the means, and these means cannot be stripped of certain risks even of certain losses"³.

From this stand point, Rousseau considers the state of alienation to be a healthy and constructive condition that enables the individual to merge willingly into the spirit of the community for the sake of the common good of the tribe or human group. This is achieved when "each partner in the

¹Arab Organization for Translation, Beirut, p. 100.

²ibid., p. 112.

³ibid., p. 117.



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association gives himself and all his rights entirely to the whole community¹".

The "Social Contract", which Rousseau analyzed and discussed extensively, is thus a prior agreement among members of a human society through which the individual dissolves into the spirit of the social body, forgetting his individual nature in search of complete harmony within the group. Accordingly, alienation in this sense becomes a voluntary act arising freely, with coercion being largely absent except when necessity demands it.

•Alienation according to Hegel:

Hegel is considered the first to use the term alienation (Entfremdung) in modern criticism. His alienation theory owes much to earlier thinkers and to the ideas surrounding the Social Contract, which presupposes a voluntary or forced surrender to the spirit of the community ideas previously upheld by Rousseau, Nietzsche, and Schiller.

Hegel borrowed from Schiller the notion that the advancement of culture has destroyed the original harmony once enjoyed by the ancient Greeks a harmony with their essential nature, with others, with society, and with nature itself².

Hegel defines alienation as a state of impotence and incapacity that the individual experiences when losing control over his possessions, creations, and products, which end up serving others at the expense of their true owner. Consequently, man loses both power and the ability to

¹Ibid., p. 93.

²Anouwood, Michael. (ibid.), p. 80

determine his own destiny including the course of historical events¹.

•Alienation according to Marx:

Marx viewed the conditions and coercive nature of labor and the means of production as the precursors to the feeling of alienation. He believed that the working class is the most alienated of all social classes. From this standpoint, he argued that liberation must begin with the emancipation of this class in order to free humanity from alienation and its chains.

Marx often insisted that reification or ("thingification") is one of the main causes of alienation, as industrial power has absorbed the worker into a condition that perpetuates inequality between laborer and employer. Thus, the creator of civilization the worker becomes alienated within the very civilization his hands and muscles have built, only to offer it on a silver platter to the capitalist, the owner of wealth. For this reason, Karl Marx proposed socialism as an alternative to capitalism.

In Marx's view, socialism represents liberation from the alienated condition a return to the self and its concrete realization in existence. Alienation, then, is a state of rebellion and detachment from the collective; it is "a passive and unconscious engagement with the world and the self, as though the self were detached from the object²".

The very machine crafted by human hands has come to restrict human motion and freedom. The worker, "who does

¹Ibid., p. 82.

²Fromm, Erich. (1998). Marx's Concept of Man. Translated by Rassas Sayed Mohamed. Dar Al-Hasad for Publishing and Distribution, Damascus, p. 63.



not participate in the management of labor, and who is used merely as an appendage to the machines he serves, becomes a thing through his subordination to capital." This is alienation itself the condition that renders the individual subservient to the capitalist¹, who directs him according to his personal desires or economic plans.

1.2. .Utopia :

Literary discourse has ceased to be purely artistic, aiming solely at entertainment, aesthetic pleasure, and craftsmanship. It has become infused with an ideological tendency that seeks to achieve specific goals and intentions within its authors for in deed, no literary discourse is ever devoid of a purpose or objective. Literature began to be grounded in promotional or propagandist ideas, especially with the rise of socialist thought, which adapted art to serve its own ends. Thus, literature emerged from the cloak of mere documentation and artistic function to pursue intellectual purposes concerned with persuasion, reform, and revival.

As literature moved away from the era of realism, it began to explore the worlds of ideology and to champion utopian ideals. This raises a set of questions: What is the concept of Utopia or (Tubāwiyya, idealism)? And what is its historical background?

The Concept of Utopia

¹Ibid., p. 68.

Linguistically, the Arabic term "ṭūbā" (الطوبى) denotes "the good" or "the blessed."¹

Terminologically, it must first be noted that most studies and research dealing with the term "Tubāwiyya" (الطوباوية) have not drawn a clear distinction between it and the term Utopia. Most scholars use the two terms interchangeably without specifying precise differences between them.

The word Tubāwiyya is synonymous with Utopia in foreign languages. Sir Thomas More was the first to introduce the term in his famous book Utopia. He derived the term from two Greek words: (Ou) meaning "no," and (Topos) meaning "place." He then dropped the initial "O" and Latinized the word to become *Utopia*, making it the title of his renowned work that has become the archetype of the modern utopian concept.²

According to this etymology, the term Utopia is a composite of Ou-Topos ("no-place") or Eu-Topos ("good place"). The first sense refers to a void or a non-existent place a realm that cannot be physically located but can be imagined; in other words, "a place that does not exist." The second sense refers to a place of virtue. Hence, Utopia can be understood as "the perfect place that has no counterpart in the real world."³

Therefore, Utopia represents a space over flowing with goodness, happiness, and justice, devoid of hatred,

¹Al-Zubaidi. (1987). *Tāj al-'Arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*. Edited by Abdel-Karim Al-Gharbawi. Ministry of Information, Kuwait, p. 282.

²Aqqaq, Qadah. (2001). *The Significance of the City in Contemporary Poetic Discourse: A Study in the Aesthetic Reception of Space**. Publications of the Arab Writers Union, Damascus, p. 43.

³Ibrahim, Abdullah. (2013). "Utopia." *Al-Riyadh Newspaper*, Issue No. 16341, p. 94.



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prejudice, and resentment. Yet it remains an imaginary and symbolic place, describable only through metaphor and suggestion.

The Moroccan thinker Abdallah Laroui, in his book *The Concept of the State*, defines Utopianism as "the imagination of a better system beyond the existing state."¹ It is also defined as a model of an imaginary, ideal society in which perfection is achieved or approached, and which is free from the evils that afflict humanity. "Such a society does not exist in any specific geographic location but rather on imagined islands or purely within the author's mind and imagination."²

From these definitions, it becomes clear that Utopia or Tubāwiyya represents a quest for salvation from a world torn apart by materialism and human passions – an attempt to establish an ideal world filled with happiness, noble values, and longed-for justice.

Utopian thought, then, is based on the creation of a virtual world a product of humanity's perennial dissatisfaction with its own condition throughout history. "Human reality has never been a source of contentment for great minds and noble souls; it is filled with evils and sins, and humankind has never succeeded in realizing perfect happiness on earth."³ Utopian aspirations thus express faith

¹Laroui, Abdallah. (2006). *The Concept of the State**. Arab Cultural Center, Casablanca, p. 147.

²Beneri, Maria Luisa. (ibid.), p. 7.

³Eid, Hassan. "A Reading of *Mr. from the Spinach Field. General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 223.

in the idea that “man is capable of transforming reality in accordance with his imagination.”¹

The philosopher Cioran compares the effect of utopia to that of alchemy in their shared pursuit of transformation. Both, he argues, “operate in heterogeneous domains yet pursue an analogous dream of metamorphosis: alchemy strives for what cannot be reduced to nature, while utopia strives for what cannot be reduced to history.”²

Hence, Utopia has, throughout time, played a foundational and constructive role in nourishing the human dream and preserving the desire for existence.

3. Manifestations of the Utopian Space in the Scandinavian Trilogy :

The trilogy (The Roofs of Rasool, Marble Snows, Eve’s Slumber) mirrors the anguish of an Eastern man living in exile a man torn by alienation and dislocation within a foreign society. The works depict political realities and illuminate stories of intercultural love between men and women from different worlds, offering two contrasting models of such relationships and exploring the consequences of mixed marriages in Western societies.

3.1. On the Natural and Urban Level

The purity of the earth has always been a dream pursued by souls weary of the filth of the city its noise, corruption,

¹Mounir, Walid. (2004). “The Defeated Prophet Between the Past of Utopia and the Becoming of Reality.” *Fusool Journal*, General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, Issue No. 64, p. 343.

²Cioran. (2010). *History and Utopia*. Translated by Ahmed Fathi. Al-Jamal Publications, Beirut, p. 134.



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and moral decay. The protagonist Aïd describes this natural utopian space as follows:

"The wilder and more secluded the places we dare to tread, the more she revives and regains her vitality. Her homeland belongs more to greenery and water than to humankind. She too is a creature of water and plants. As soon as we leave the car, she rushes ahead, caressing the tall grasses with her hands — her first touches, her first connections. She cannot do without them. I let her seek that intimacy she longs for, that she needs in moments of pain, in the height of her nervous crises.¹"

He adds elsewhere:

"Seeing that island was pure joy mocking my first astonishment, yet my wonder doubled at the abundance of wildflowers more than we could hope for. Whether you turned right or left, or in any direction, cascades of bright colors met your eyes. That refreshing garden, in which beauty floated freely, swept you away with its grace and perfumed transparency. Yet even these words fail to describe the splendor that over whelmed me that day.²"

B. Utopia and architecture are interrelated as both stem from imaginative creation. Each allows its author to design an idealized world born of pure imagination. Architecture gives physical shape to space just as utopia gives conceptual form to perfection both seek the unattainable ideal. Architecture thus becomes part of the utopian project,

¹Dib, Mohammed. (2011). **Eve's Slumber**. Translated by Mohammed Sari. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 196.

²Dib, Mohammed. (2011). **Marble Snows**. Translated by Mohammed Sari. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 85.

serving as the foundation that contains the social, political, and cultural structures orbiting within this imagined design.

Exile heightens one's sensitivity to place to its beauty, order, familiarity, and strangeness. This duality profoundly affects the protagonist, who describes his relationship with various cities and spaces he inhabits.

The trilogy mentions numerous cities, each amplifying the alienation of the exiled hero. Grefier is one such city that captivates Aïd in *The Roofs of Rasool*, immersing him in estrangement:

"I live in my neighborhood belonging to old Grefier, surrounded by houses of this kind my hotel being one of them. Everyday I pass by others, and each day my admiration grows. The modern city, too, possesses its allure to the point of leaving you stunned, even if only by these buildings these complexes scattered across various districts whose sight never ceases to fascinate me. Truly, there is elegance and the courage of marvelous innovation here a miracle, a familiar miracle, if those two words may coexist.¹"

He is struck with awe by the beauty and order of these places:

"This square deserves two words: magnificent yes, how magnificent! With its square shape, its dignified proportions without excess, its exits placed only at the corners beneath arcades hidden from sight, and above all its symmetry and nobility those vaulted arcades and columns surrounding it. The moment your eyes step upon its carpet, a pride seizes you and transforms your senses. You cannot tell what draws your admiration most the refined details or the

¹Dib, Mohammed. (2011). **Rasoul's Rooftops**. Translated by Mohammed Sari. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 36.



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harmonious whole. You are overwhelmed by the repetition of ornate motifs identical everywhere... You fall madly in love with this wondrous beauty before you can even count all its charms.¹"

Like the ideal cities envisioned by classic utopian writers such as Augustine's City of God Grefier, for Aïd, stands apart from other cities he refuses to name. It remains faithful to its architectural nature, resisting the ravages of time and nature:

"Outside this place, no one knows its true essence, nor the happiness of living here. Over the days, I grew convinced, and I will remain so, that everywhere else existence seems filled with deviation and blindness – ordinary people deceived by the life they live, anywhere except in Grefier.²"

Gradually, Aïd develops a sense of belonging and begins to adapt:

"Magnificent that is the fitting word for Grefier."³

3.2 . On the Social Level

The human soul is naturally drawn to those who show it love, care, and attention qualities that captivated the protagonist in this foreign land. One of the customs that impressed Aïd in Grefier was their sacred hospitality. The locals never hesitate to welcome guests with warmth and humility, showing great devotion to serving and comforting others, whether citizens or strangers alike:

"Such is hospitality here universal and bound to a prevailing spirit of disciplined simplicity among the

¹Dib, Mohammed. *Rasoul's Rooftops*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 75.

²Dib, Mohammed. *Rasoul's Rooftops*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 37.

³Dib, Mohammed. *Rasoul's Rooftops*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 35

most modest in habitants. It touches a sensitive chord with in each of us. From my arrival, I noticed how everyone strives to ease the lives of others. Anything that can help you find greater comfort is fulfilled with unmatched generosity. Not only the happiness of the citizen but of humanity as a whole is considered a sacred duty among people united in this collective sense of purpose.¹"

He adds:

"There are even those entrusted with ensuring the happiness of others and providing them with a life free from hardship and boredom a life to be taken as an example. That person could be me, you, or anyone else.²"

What also captured his attention was the serenity and peace that characterized this city a city of dreams and tranquility:

"From the very first hours, reading the newspapers, I noticed that no crime occurs here, no theft, no division among the inhabitants, and no scandal of any kinds hakes the city, as happens elsewhere. This confirmed my first intuition and added to my sense of harmony. I thought: here is the place where you will seek to settle — perhaps for a long time. Here you will live and work. Those cheerful children's faces, those radiant smiles... what joy it is to see people going about their work. Even the shopkeepers seem like gracious hosts rather than anxious traders.³"

He thus finds an alternative homeland when his own had shut its doors against him:

"I lost a country or rather, my country lost me. So I searched for one willing to take me in... But I thought:

¹Dib, Mohammed. *Rasoul's Rooftops*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 37

²Dib, Mohammed. *Rasoul's Rooftops*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 131.

³Dib, Mohammed. Rasoul's Rooftops. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 38



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I shall not usurp anyone's place. And love does it not grant you rights? Does it not give you the belonging you seek? Such is the power of love.¹

Through love, Aïd creates his own law of asylum love becomes his passport to belonging, his green light to citizenship in this foreign land.

3.3 .The Exiled Hero and Social Relationships

Dib (the author) intertwines his exiled hero's life with various kinds of relationships. The Eastern man often perceives Western society with a sense of fascination due to the great individual freedom it allows. But will such freedom bring satisfaction to the hero? Will he find in the Western family structure something that aligns with his soul?

The protagonist of *The Roofs of Rasool* leaves behind a narcissistic wife concerned only with herself and her beauty, caring for her appearance at the expense of her husband and family:

"This beautiful woman who will surely remain so for a long time bore one child, as if that too were a concession on her part."²

Such a wife could never win her husband's heart, unlike the lover he meets a broad a woman brimming with natural femininity:

"A pure, bare face, free from emotion, interest, or tedious preoccupation its features distilled into what is essential... into its intrinsic beauty. In any case, you

¹Dib, Mohammed. *Marble Snows*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 17.

²Dib, Mohammed. *Rasoul's Rooftops*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 33

are kind; I can sense that without even knowing you.¹"

Thus, the beloved captivates him with her spiritual purity, something he had long missed in his wife Aïda.

Conversely, Burhan, the hero of *Marble Snows*, suffers a nightmarish marriage to a Russian woman. Their relationship turns into unbearable torment:

We no longer know where things will lead us. I wanted you, sought you, took you as you were. Perhaps our stars have grown dim after once shining brightly.²

He continues elsewhere:

"It means we want to tear love out of ourselves or at least we try to. The complaints are but feeble excuses."³

If we were to write down the terrifying words we hurl at each other in those moments... surely desire itself would abandon us at the very thought of them or even the thought of thinking them again.⁴

Their relationship becomes void, torn apart by cultural and national differences that ultimately destroy their marriage and build a wall between them. Burhan blames himself for rushing into this relationship with a foreign woman. Her habits, temperament, and way of life torment him and shatter his spirit, as love alone proves insufficient to sustain their union.

Conclusion:

¹Dib, Mohammed. *Rasoul's Rooftops*. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, pp. 137–138.

²Dib, Mohammed. **Snows of Marble**. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 29.

³Dib, Mohammed. **Snows of Marble**. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 149..

⁴Dib, Mohammed. **Snows of Marble**. Dar Al-Shehab, Algeria, p. 72.



At the end of this research paper, we can conclude the following:

- A. The alienated hero in Dib's Scandinavian Trilogy found in the foreign land a legitimate escape, one through which he rode the wave of utopia in search of the promised land seeking it with in the smallest details of that country.
- B. The hero found in the foreign land a richness in its natural and urban dimensions that fascinated him, as it appeared closer to both natural and spiritual purity in their original state.
- C. The hero's expectations were disappointed by the social structure of the foreign country, despite the beautiful dream she had nurtured about family life there.
- D. Although the alienated hero may find beauty in the foreign land, nostalgia continues to haunt his wandering soul a soul searching for the lost inner peace that might be partially recovered in natural spaces untouched by impurity.

No matter what has been said above, utopia remains a dream that humanity has long been unable to achieve, given the perpetual human conflict throughout history a struggle that may well persist until the end of time.

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