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Representations of the Value System in Algerian Ramadan Drama: A Socio-Communicative Approach to the Series Al-Barani

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Abstract:
This study examines the dialectical relationship between values and reality within the Algerian social context through a deconstruction of the value discourse embedded in the television series Al-Barani. Drawing on a critical socio-communicative approach, the study seeks to analyze the underlying value structures and explore the social dimensions of Algerian drama by interrogating the ethical and moral frameworks that shape the series while situating them within their broader social context. The research adopts the theory of value determinism as its principal theoretical framework.
Using content analysis as a methodological tool, the study identifies several major findings, most notably:

- The destabilization of viewers' reference values through the reconfiguration of the concepts of "victim" and "criminal ".
- The humanization of outlaw characters through the aestheticization and reframing of crime in ways that contribute to its normalization among viewers.

Keywords: *representations; value system; socio-communication; drama; Algeria.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Drama constitutes a social space that accommodates and reflects social practices. However, it does not merely reproduce reality; rather, it actively reconstructs it by shaping perceptions and reinforcing socially accepted meanings and behaviors. This perspective aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, whereby forms of domination transmitted through media are gradually internalized as legitimate social practices. In this way, behaviors that might otherwise be rejected or criminalized become normalized within various communicative contexts without the need for direct physical coercion.

At a deeper level, dramatic content and the values conveyed through it cannot be regarded as ethically neutral. Instead, they are shaped by processes of ideological construction operating at intellectual, social, and cultural levels. This ideological dimension raises a broader theoretical issue situated at the intersection of the Frankfurt School's critical tradition and Bourdieu's sociological perspective. The resulting dialectic emerges through an examination of the relationship between drama and the value system, particularly regarding the role of media in reproducing symbolic forms of social power.

Within this analytical framework, cultivation theory offers a more comprehensive perspective by emphasizing the cumulative influence of media exposure on audience perceptions of reality across both traditional and digital media environments. Through repeated exposure to specific narratives and representations, audiences may gradually internalize mediated perceptions as normative social realities.

Accordingly, drama may be approached through a dual analytical perspective. On the one hand, it functions as a narrative system that reproduces hegemonic structures through communicative processes shaping social perceptions and cultural norms. On the other hand, it contributes to the categorization and normalization of binary oppositions such as acceptable versus unacceptable, deviant versus normative, criminal versus victim, and center versus periphery. These representations are reinforced through repetition, narrative appeal, and discursive power, eventually becoming internalized within audience consciousness.

The Algerian dramatic landscape has been influenced by similar transformations in value systems, particularly within the shifting boundaries of what is considered socially acceptable or unacceptable. Contemporary Algerian drama increasingly legitimizes representations that were previously viewed as socially deviant or morally marginal. In this context, the present study examines these ethical and social contradictions through a critical socio-communicative analysis of the Algerian television series Al-Barani. The study seeks to deconstruct the series' value structure by analyzing its symbolic representations and the ethical system embedded within Ramadan drama productions.

This inquiry is grounded in the theory of value determinism, which serves as a normative framework for evaluating the ethical and social dimensions embedded in the series. The central research problem lies in examining the tension between "dramatic realism," which immerses itself in the world of crime and violence, and "value security," which reflects society's need to resist the normalization of deviant behavior and preserve moral stability.

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following central research question: **To what extent has the series Al-Barani contributed to reshaping the value system of the Algerian viewer?**

This main question can be divided into the following sub-questions:

- How is the conflict of family values represented in the series? Have values such as sanctity and kinship declined in favor of materialism and individual self-interest ?
- What semiotic and dramatic strategies are employed in constructing the "anti-hero," and how do these strategies contribute to enhancing the visual appeal of crime ?
- What are the implications of the humanization of deviant characters on the collective consciousness of youth? Can the series be considered a mechanism of social regulation, or does it function instead as an alternative agent of socialization ?

From a sociological perspective, the value system refers to a set of norms and principles that guide individual behavior and determine collective social goals (Abu Zaid, 2010) In contemporary Algeria, this value system no longer appears stable; rather, it is experiencing a state of disruption resulting from rapid economic and social transformations. Algerian society is increasingly caught between the values of honest labor—associated with effort, patience, and legitimacy—and the values of rapid wealth accumulation associated with the informal economy (Barakat, 2008).

These transformations contribute to the erosion of the collective conscience, whereby values rooted in moral legitimacy are gradually replaced by values emphasizing material efficiency and social prestige (Castells, 2010).

In Al-Barani, this shift is embodied in the transition from a family-based economy rooted in solidarity and cooperation to a gang-based economy driven by ruthless materialism, where ethical values are increasingly portrayed as obstacles to wealth accumulation and social advancement.

1. DRAMA AS SOCIAL ACTION AND THE NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

Television drama occupies a significant position within contemporary media environments because it contributes not only to the representation of social reality but also to the construction of meanings and value systems through recurring symbolic narratives. From the perspective of cultivation theory, long-term exposure to media content may shape audiences' perceptions of social reality by providing recurring interpretive frameworks through which social phenomena are understood (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986, p. 17). Consequently, repeated representations of violence, criminality, and social conflict can influence perceptions regarding the prevalence and acceptability of such behaviors.

This process can be explained through the concept of mental schemas, which refers to cognitive structures that organize individuals' understanding of social reality. Continuous exposure to media patterns contributes to the formation and reinforcement of these schemas, thereby influencing expectations about social interactions and moral conduct (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986, p. 40), Within this framework, deviant practices may gradually become perceived as familiar elements of everyday social life rather than exceptional occurrences.

Research on media violence has also emphasized the phenomenon of desensitization. Repeated exposure to mediated violence may reduce emotional responsiveness to aggressive acts and weaken negative reactions toward behaviors that would normally evoke moral condemnation (Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007) This gradual reduction in emotional

sensitivity has been described as a form of moral numbness, whereby individuals become increasingly accustomed to representations of violence and deviance.

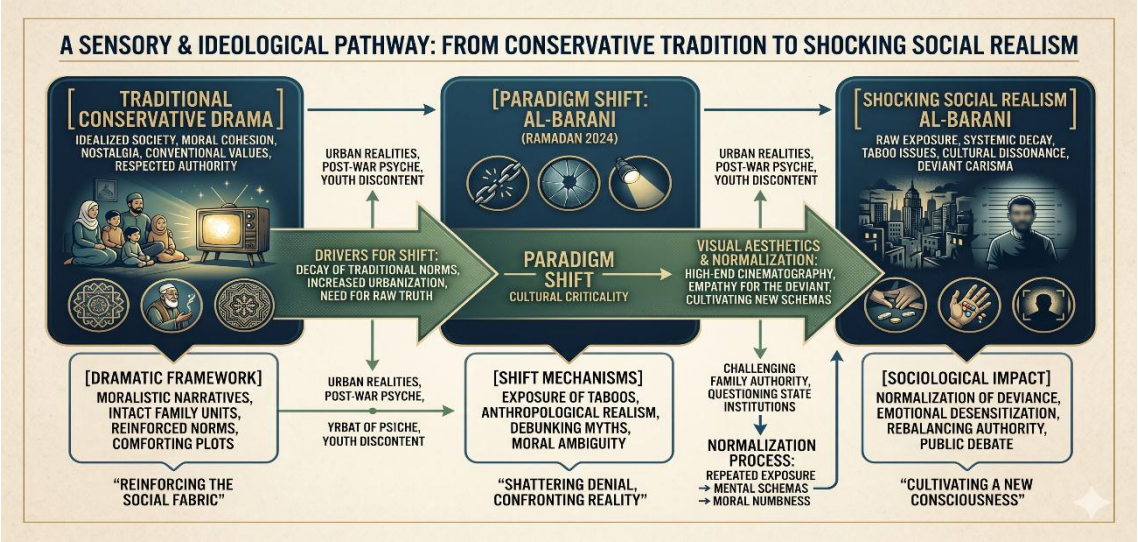
In Al-Barani, visual and narrative techniques contribute to constructing audience engagement with characters involved in criminal activities. Through emotional storytelling, close-up cinematography, and personalized character development, the series encourages viewers to understand the motivations and personal struggles of these characters. Such strategies may foster narrative empathy, a process through which audiences emotionally identify with fictional characters and their experiences (Keen, 2006). While empathy does not necessarily imply moral approval, it may complicate ethical judgment by shifting attention from the social consequences of criminal behavior to the personal circumstances of those involved.

1.1 Drama as a Constructive Social Act:

Contemporary media sociology increasingly rejects the classical view of media as a passive mirror of reality. Instead, media texts are understood as active cultural forms that participate in the social construction of reality by selecting, framing, and interpreting social phenomena according to particular narrative and ideological perspectives (Berger, 1966) Television drama therefore functions as a symbolic arena in which social meanings, identities, and values are continuously negotiated. (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986)

When dramatic productions address issues such as crime, corruption, family conflict, or social marginalization, they do more than document existing realities. Through processes of selection and narrative organization, they define which issues deserve attention and how these issues should be interpreted. Consequently, drama can contribute to the reinforcement, questioning, or transformation of prevailing social norms.

Figure (1):



The Source: Compiled by the researcher using the Gemini AI tool

Theoretical Frameworks: Cultivation, Schemas, and Moral Numbness

The present study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, cultivation theory explains how prolonged exposure to recurrent media messages may influence perceptions of social reality (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). Second, schema theory highlights the role of cognitive structures in organizing social knowledge and guiding interpretation of media content. Third, desensitization theory suggests that repeated exposure to mediated violence can reduce emotional sensitivity and moral reactions toward aggressive behavior (Carnagey, Anderson, & Bushman, 2007).

Together, these perspectives provide a useful framework for examining how dramatic narratives may influence the interpretation of deviance and the representation of moral values within contemporary Algerian television drama.

2.CONTEXT OF PRODUCTION OF THE SERIES AL-BARANI

The series *Al-Barani*, directed by Yahya Mazahim and broadcast on Al-Chorouk TV during Ramadan 2024, emerged within a broader transformation of Algerian television drama characterized by an increasing focus on social realism and controversial social issues (Mouzahem, 2024), Unlike earlier productions that emphasized family cohesion and moral idealization, recent dramatic works have increasingly explored themes such as crime, drug trafficking, corruption, and social exclusion.

2.1 The Rise of Social Realism in Algerian Drama

Contemporary Algerian television drama has witnessed a growing tendency toward the representation of complex social realities and marginalized social environments. This shift reflects broader transformations within media production and audience expectations, where realism and social critique have become important elements of dramatic storytelling. Within this context, *Al-Barani* can be viewed as part of a wider trend that seeks to address sensitive social issues and stimulate public discussion concerning contemporary social challenges.

Table (3): The Sociological Implications of Ramadan Prime-Time Scheduling

Sociological Dimension	Traditional Expectation	The Al-Barani Disruption
Audience Demographics	Multi-generational family gatherings (grandparents, parents, children).	Inter-generational friction caused by explicit thematic exposure.
Spatial Environment	The sacred, collective, and morally protective family living room.	Intrusive exposure to taboo topics (drug addiction, gang violence).
Cultural Resonance	Spiritual reflection, ethical reinforcement, and social cohesion.	Acute cognitive dissonance and confrontation with systemic social decay.

The Source: Prepared by the researcher

2.2 Ramadan Prime-Time Broadcasting and Its Sociological Implications

The broadcasting of *Al-Barani* during Ramadan prime time is sociologically significant because television viewing during this period often occurs within a shared family setting. As family members from different generations consume media content collectively, dramatic representations become part of a broader process of social interpretation and discussion.

The presentation of themes such as crime, violence, and drug trafficking within this context generated public debate regarding the suitability of such content during a period traditionally associated with spirituality, family cohesion, and moral reflection. Consequently, the series became the subject of diverse interpretations concerning the social role of television drama and its potential influence on audiences.

2.3 Social Responsibility and Artistic Freedom

Public reactions to *Al-Barani* revealed a broader debate concerning the relationship between artistic freedom and media responsibility. Supporters of the series argued that exposing hidden social problems contributes to public awareness and encourages discussion of issues that are often ignored within public discourse. Critics, however, expressed concerns regarding the extensive representation of criminal behavior and its possible effects on younger audiences.

These debates ultimately attracted the attention of the Audiovisual Regulatory Authority (ARAV, 2024) reflecting the continuing tension between creative expression, media ethics, and the protection of public values within contemporary Algerian broadcasting.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES:

Previous studies have largely remained confined to a descriptive perspective that focuses on explicit value representations rather than examining the mechanisms through which values are constructed within the dramatic framework. These studies tend to treat value systems as fixed realities without symbolically deconstructing them within the narrative structure, thereby limiting the understanding of the transformations affecting networks of values and the fragmentation of social and cultural references within the Algerian dramatic space.

Accordingly, the present study adopts a critical socio-communicative approach, focusing specifically on the “dynamics of the anti-hero” in the series Al-Barani and on the transition of drama from “moral didacticism” to what may be described as “value chaos.” The scarcity of studies offering an in-depth sociological analysis of this work reinforces the scientific relevance of the present research, as it documents a significant transformation in dramatic structures, particularly through the transgression of the limits of traditional “value-based censorship” (Blaz, 2010). This shift creates an interpretive space for understanding the mechanisms through which social reality is reproduced within the dramatic sphere.

The present study is situated within the broader field of socio-media research examining dramatic content and its relationship to the moral and value structures of society. In this context, the study seeks to address an existing gap in the literature by drawing on the following previous studies:

The study conducted by Atallah and Ahmed Yahya (2026) examined the dimensions and implications of television series set in working-class neighborhoods that reflect the concerns of youth. The study concluded that this dramatic genre introduces controversial values into society, generating divisions between supporters and opponents due to its exposure of distorted value systems.

The present research also aligns with findings from studies on Algerian television drama that examine the representation of social values in popular serials. For instance, Lafza (2020) analyzed the depiction of social values in the television series "Wlad Lahlal", showing that Algerian drama frequently constructs a dual value system in which positive values such as solidarity, family cohesion, and resilience coexist with negative representations such as violence, deviance, and moral ambiguity. The study demonstrates that these representations contribute to a complex reconstruction of social reality, where deviant behaviors are not only depicted but also contextualized within socio-economic conditions that may implicitly normalize them

3. Analysis of the Value System in the Television Series *Al-Barani*

In this section, the series is approached as a “sociological text” reflecting the tension

between inherited traditional values and emerging materialistic values. The analysis focuses on three principal analytical dimensions.

Representations of Family Values: The Breakdown of "Sanctity" and the Centrality of the "Eldest Brother"

Table (2): **Classification of Dominant Values in the Series**

Value Category	Positive Values (Explicit/Implicit)	Negative Values (Dramatic Content)	Sociological Significance
Family Values	Maternal resilience, attempts at	Disintegration, sibling conflict, latent	Collapse of extended family in favor of
Moral Values	Loyalty to promises (rare cases)	Betrayal, treachery, instrumental lying	Crisis of trust in social relationships
Material Values	Self-made work (marginalized)	Rapid wealth, illicit trade	Dominance of "the end justifies the
Aesthetic Values	Elegance, modern architecture	Glorification of violence, vulgar	Aesthetic shock to attract viewers

The Source: Prepared by the researcher

Table 2 reveals a clear imbalance in the value structure embedded within the dramatic text of *Al-Barani*. The analysis demonstrates the overwhelming dominance of negative values—such as betrayal, rapid wealth accumulation, and social disintegration—alongside the decline of traditional positive values. From a sociological perspective, this suggests that drama is no longer confined to the role of a "moral guide"; rather, it increasingly gravitates toward what may be described as a "dystopia of values" aimed at producing shock and emotional disturbance in the viewer.

This tendency reflects a genuine social anxiety associated with the erosion of the middle class and the growing dominance of "material efficiency" at the expense of "moral legitimacy." Within this framework, crime is represented not merely as deviant behavior, but as an economic and social alternative to the collapse of traditional models of social advancement.

Historically, the Algerian family has been structured around the sanctity of kinship ties and the central role of the "eldest brother" as the guardian of family values. In *Al-Barani*, however, this paradigm undergoes a radical transformation. Omar, the eldest brother, no longer embodies protection and moral authority; instead, he becomes a source of danger and violent conflict.

The series illustrates what Émile Durkheim conceptualized as the erosion of "mechanical solidarity" in favor of an increasingly aggressive form of individualism. The conflict between the brothers—Omar, Sayed Ahmed, and Mohammed—reflects the growing supremacy of material interest over family bonds and collective solidarity.

The collapse of symbolic meaning is particularly evident in the scenes of confrontation within the "big house." Traditionally regarded as a protected private space governed by the values of sanctity and familial cohesion, the home becomes infiltrated by the conflicts of the "street," represented by the worlds of drugs, violence, and organized crime. This transformation symbolically signifies the withdrawal of the family from its traditional role as a primary institution of social regulation and moral transmission.

5.2 The Sociology of the "Anti-Hero" and the Humanization of Crime

Table (3): A Semiological Analysis of Key Characters: The Construction of a Value System

Character	Dramatic Role	Represented Values	Outcome (Implicit Message)
Omar (Elder Brother)	Anti-hero	Power, money, violent protection	Power does not guarantee stability
Sid Ahmed	Deviant ambition	Rebellion against poverty, greed	Moral precedes material
Mother	Memory and authenticity	Patience, sanctity, suffering	Traditional values are powerless
Mohamed	Victim / hesitant	Moral confusion	Loss of direction among youth

The Source: Prepared by the researcher

A semiological reading of the characters presented in Table 3 reveals that the director adopts a strategy of "symbolic coding" in constructing the dramatic figures. The "anti-hero" character, Omar, is not portrayed as a morally repulsive outcast; rather, he is represented as embodying power, authority, and dominance, which grants him an aesthetic appeal that transcends the criminal nature of his actions. This fusion of aesthetics and criminality contributes to what media sociology describes as "role-model distortion," whereby audiences—particularly adolescents—tend to internalize the value system of powerful characters regardless of the illegitimacy of the sources of their wealth or authority. This helps explain how Al-Barani evolved from a fictional dramatic character into a broader "social phenomenon" within both digital and real social spaces.

Al-Barani thus represents a particularly dangerous dramatic archetype: the "charismatic anti-hero." The criminal figure is not constructed as socially repellent, but rather as charismatic, elegant, and influential.

The dialectic of beauty and ugliness: Through visually sophisticated cinematic techniques, the "criminal" is at times portrayed as a victim, or as a "strong man" who enforces justice through personal power. Such representation contributes to what is known as the "normalization of deviance" among young viewers, who may identify with the character's physical strength and symbolic authority while overlooking the moral transgressions associated with his actions.

Distortion of values: The series implicitly raises a fundamental question concerning the meaning of "manhood." Is masculinity associated with nobility, chivalry, and protection, or is it redefined through domination and brute force? In Al-Barani, masculinity is reconstructed less as an act of protection than as an assertion of power and control.

5.3 The Clash Between Material Values and the Pursuit of Rapid Social Mobility

Table (4): The Dialectic Between Reality and Drama

Social Phenomenon	Representation in Algerian Reality	Representation in the Series	Expected Impact
Family cohesion	Weakening but still present	Near total collapse	Loss of security
Organized crime	Exists but controlled	Dominant force	Normalization of crime
Masculinity	Linked to honor and protection	Linked to domination	Distorted identity

The Source: Compiled by the researcher

The analytical framework presented in Table 4 reveals the existence of a "representational gap" between lived social reality and the reality reconstructed within the dramatic narrative. Although Algerian society continues to maintain a minimum degree of familial cohesion and symbolic sanctity, the series pushes realism toward its darkest extremes through what may be described as raw realism. This dramatized exaggeration of family disintegration and the dominance of criminal power does not merely reflect reality; rather, it constitutes an "imagined reconstruction" designed to attract attention through the subversion of moral expectations.

The danger of this form of representation lies in the possibility that the continued repetition of such dramatic portrayals may gradually produce a form of cultural conditioning, leading viewers to perceive moral decline and social fragmentation as the norm rather than the exception. Consequently, the symbolic mechanisms of social resistance against deviance may become progressively weakened.

The series reflects contemporary society's growing obsession with rapid wealth accumulation as a supreme value that increasingly overshadows the traditional value of honest labor.

The shadow economy and dramatic representation: The series unfolds within ambiguous spaces situated between legality and criminality. The dominant values governing these spaces revolve around loyalty to the gang, betrayal for personal gain, and the reduction of money to the principal measure of social status and legitimacy.

The symbolism of "Al-Barani" (the outsider): The title itself carries significant symbolic and value-laden implications. Al-Barani does not merely designate a stranger to the neighborhood, but rather an individual positioned outside the collective moral order. The series implicitly advances the idea that society itself has become estranged from its authentic values, as individuals increasingly pursue material prestige and superficial glamour, even at the expense of ethical principles and social responsibility.

5.4 The Representation of Women: Between Stereotyping and Value-Based Rebellion

In *Al-Barani*, women are not portrayed merely as subordinate figures; rather, they constitute an essential component of the broader conflict of values structuring the narrative. The figure of the "mother" embodies attempts to restore family cohesion and preserve traditional values, thereby symbolizing authenticity and moral continuity. In contrast, other

female characters are represented either as participants in material conflicts or as victims of the same system.

The series portrays Algerian women within complex "modern" social contexts; however, they remain confined within a criminal patriarchal structure that limits their agency and autonomy. This representation reinforces the idea that the collapse of male moral values inevitably leads to the alienation of women's freedom and the erosion of their value systems within the social environment surrounding them.

6. The Resonance of the Series in Critical Discourse and Interactive Platforms

The series *Al-Barani* did not pass as a transient dramatic event; rather, it generated intense debate among intellectuals, critics, and audiences in Algeria. Critical reactions may be broadly categorized into two principal currents:

6.1 The School of "Shocking Realism"

Some critics argue that director Yahya Mezahim succeeded in breaking the taboos traditionally associated with classical Algerian drama. In this context, several commentators in the Algerian cultural press—including analyses published in the newspapers *Al-Khabar* and *Al-Nasr*—maintained that the series offered a "reflective mirror" of socially concealed realities, particularly the infiltration of illicit money into family relationships and social structures.

Supporters of this perspective contend that *Al-Barani* did not invent new values but rather exposed value systems already present within marginalized urban spaces. Consequently, criticism directed at the series is interpreted as a form of avoidance or refusal to confront existing social realities.

6.2 Moral and Collective Criticism

In contrast, a strong critical current emerged among academics and researchers specializing in media sociology, arguing that the series fell into what may be described as "criminal folklorization." According to these critics, the exaggerated depiction of violence and drug use within the "Big House" constitutes a form of dramatic distortion that promotes a negative stereotypical image of the Algerian family.

Particular criticism focused on the humanization and glorification of the criminal figure. Critics argued that the series transformed *Al-Barani* into a model to be admired through his elegance, style of speech, and symbolic authority. Such representation contributes to the distortion of value consciousness among adolescents, especially those lacking sufficient critical distance to distinguish between aesthetic attraction and moral legitimacy.

6.3 Audience Interaction Across Social Media Platforms

The reception of *Al-Barani* cannot be fully understood without considering the role of social media platforms, which have produced a new category of "informal critics." Algerian audiences became sharply divided between those who admired the "strength" and realism of the characters and those who rejected the use of "street language" and the normalization of violence within the dialogue.

This polarization accurately reflects the value crisis addressed in the present study. The Algerian viewer appears increasingly suspended between the desire to see reality represented "as it is" and the fear of witnessing the collapse of what remains of traditional notions of modesty, sanctity, and social restraint.

II. Conclusion:

The study concludes that the television series Al-Barani was not merely a transient entertainment product, but rather a "sociological laboratory" that revealed the depth of the

fractures affecting the value system of contemporary Algerian society. Through a socio-semiological analysis, the principal findings may be summarized as follows:

- The dominance of materialistic values: The study demonstrates that Algerian drama, as exemplified by Al-Barani, has shifted from the promotion of "collective values" toward the consolidation of utilitarian and individualistic values, whereby money becomes the primary driving force behind both social and familial relationships .
- The humanization of deviance: The series succeeds dramatically in transforming the "criminal" figure into an attractive and charismatic character, consistent with what may be described as Baudelaire's Aesthetic of Evil. This contributes to a disruption of the viewer's moral equilibrium, as the "charisma of power" comes to overshadow the "superiority of moral values ".
- Shock realism: The series adopts a strategy of "shock realism" aimed at exposing the gray areas of society. However, this approach simultaneously contributes to the normalization of certain behaviors—such as verbal violence and drug use—through their repeated representation within the domestic sphere during prime-time broadcasting .
- The decline of traditional institutions: The series clearly reflects the weakening role of traditional institutions, particularly the family and the school, in regulating individual behavior in the face of the temptations associated with the "street" and the criminal world .
- Based on these findings, the study proposes a number of recommendations directed toward drama producers and regulatory institutions:
- Activating the role of "critical mediation": The study emphasizes the importance of involving experts in sociology and psychology in committees responsible for reviewing dramatic scripts intended for Ramadan broadcasting, in order to maintain a balance between creative freedom and the preservation of value stability .
- Moving beyond "descriptive" drama toward "prospective" drama: Drama should not merely reproduce social ugliness and moral decline; rather, it should also offer positive role models through high-quality artistic production capable of inspiring young audiences without resorting to direct and alienating moral preaching .
- Promoting media literacy: Educational and media institutions should work toward strengthening "critical immunity" among audiences by enabling viewers to distinguish between the aesthetic dimension of dramatic representation and the ethical message conveyed by the work .
- Respecting broadcasting guidelines and cultural specificity: The study stresses the necessity of respecting the particularity of Ramadan prime time in terms of language, imagery, and dramatic content in a manner that preserves the symbolic sanctity of the Algerian household without compromising artistic quality.

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