

Alienation in Contemporary Kazakh Prose: Artistic Mastery and Psychological Dimensions in Zhadyra Shamuratova's "Infinity Between Seconds" and "The Chest"

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Abstract—Being a psychological state, alienation manifests in modern literature as profound estrangement from self, others, and society, often reinforced by globalization and technology. This study aims to fill the gap in research into the motif of alienation in modern Kazakh prose. Using a comprehensive approach that combines comparative and hermeneutic methods, it explores the ways how the motif of alienation is expressed in the collections "Infinity Between Seconds" and "The Chest" by one of the prominent authors in modern Kazakhstan, Zhadyra Shamuratova. The qualitative literary analysis enabled the identification of various dimensions of alienation: self-fragmentation, social estrangement, spiritual estrangement, and loss of national identity. Our research demonstrates how individual literary techniques including the use of specialized language, detective elements, and the grotesque allow revealing alienation from different perspectives and relating them to current issues in today's Kazakhstan. This study of contemporary Kazakh prose offers conclusions regarding the writer's mastery in using contemporary imagery in prose and psychologism in revealing societal realities, as well as contributing to the enrichment of postmodern literature by connecting global existential crises with national revival.

Index Terms—alienation, contemporary prose, Kazakh literature, postmodernism

I. INTRODUCTION

The motif of alienation, which permeates the works of leading authors of world literature, such as Franz Kafka (Kittler, 2025), Haruki Murakami (Mishra & Pattnaik, 2024), and Samuel Beckett (Papa, 2025), acts as a fundamental category revealing the identity crisis of modern man. Alienation is interpreted as an individual's separation or estrangement both socially, politically, and morally (Azizova et al., 2025), and as emotional isolation or detachment from others (Lumi & Lumi, 2015). Alienation remains a persistent motif in literary works belonging to different literary

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eras, taking various forms due to social, psychological, or cultural factors (Gautam, 2025). In contemporary literature, alienation extends from a merely individual matter to “broader social malaise” (Azizova et al., 2025, p. 2) and is highlighted as a critique of modernity, portraying the isolating effects of urbanization, industrialization, and the decay of traditional values (Senapati & Bano, 2025).

Emerging in the context of post-Soviet transformation and globalization, contemporary Kazakh prose is becoming an attractive object of scholarly research within the context of understanding human existence (Zhamankozova & Toxanova, 2024). In the era of accelerated migration and digitalization, the society in Kazakhstan is experiencing a breakdown in traditional ties, resulting in an individual’s existential isolation. Although the motif of alienation and loneliness in Kazakh literature first attracted the attention of writers and scholars during the Soviet period (Abdikov, 1997), it acquired a new resonance in the development of prose after Kazakhstan gained independence in 1991. The literature of independent Kazakhstan not only addresses contemporary themes but also deeply analyzes the problem of personality through the image of an individual in modern society (Temirbolat, 2023). The depiction of characters as unique, inimitable individuals, a mysterious world, and cognitive poetics (Aimukhanbet et al., 2025), gained particular potential after liberation from Soviet censorship. In contrast to the Soviet era, contemporary Kazakh prose and poetry clearly demonstrate a bold, experimental approach. Drawing spiritual nourishment from independence, the younger generation of writers and poets clearly demonstrate a tradition of mastering the latest trends in world literature, writing style, thought, and a desire for bold innovation, primarily in form.

Along with innovation, considerable attention in literary studies has recently been paid to the analysis of alienation and loneliness in contemporary Kazakh poetry. For example, a comparative analysis of the means of expressing alienation and loneliness in different eras of Kazakh literature is provided, covering psychological, social, and philosophical aspects (Tashymbayeva, 2020). In the works of the contemporary Kazakh poet Bakhyt Bedelkhanuly, alienation and loneliness are viewed as a spiritual and existential state, symbolizing deep immersion in the spiritual world and philosophical reflections on existence and nature (Khuatbekuly, 2025). However, despite the growing interest in the motif of alienation in Kazakh poetry, little is known about the specific expressions of this motif in contemporary Kazakh prose. At the same time, Kazakh prose is becoming a frequent subject of research in the field of contemporary literature, particularly in terms of analyzing the characteristics of postmodern literature through the use of conceptual metaphors (Rakymzhan et al., 2022) and the role of archetypal image in expressing modern national ideology (Akbulatov et al., 2025). While the motif of alienation and loneliness has received considerable attention in global postmodern literature (Masood et al., 2025), this area remains understudied in the Kazakh context.

In our investigation, we aim to expand the scope of analysis of Kazakh postmodern literature by examining the expression of the motif of alienation in the works by one of the prominent authors in contemporary Kazakhstan, Zhadyra Shamuratova. In her prose, the main focus is on the inner world of an individual in the context of the social transformations in independent Kazakhstan, where the central place is occupied by the motif of alienation. In our paper, a comprehensive analysis combining comparative and hermeneutic methods is done of the writer’s literary works from the collections “Infinity Between Seconds” and “The Chest”, aiming at the identification of various dimensions of alienation and their connection to current issues in contemporary Kazakh society. The systematic comparison of prose texts focuses on how the motif of alienation manifests itself across various narrative contexts, characters, and stylistic devices. We compare variations in the depiction of alienation across stories, identifying recurring patterns as well as contrasts in the author’s approaches to the same motif. The hermeneutic method is used to interpret the symbolic, linguistic and stylistic layers of the selected texts. The analysis begins with a close reading of verbal details and moves on to reconstructing the deeper meanings these devices convey in relation to alienation, reflecting the tensions and contradictions of contemporary Kazakh society.

Our research demonstrates how individual literary techniques including the use of specialized language, detective elements, and the grotesque allow the author to reveal alienation from various perspectives, from manifestations of the individual’s inner nature to the loss of national identity, from social to spiritual estrangement. This study examines the motif of alienation not as a universal designation, but as a fluid and historically constructed phenomenon, taking on various forms in diverse cultural and literary contexts. In Zhadyra Shamuratova’s prose, alienation functions not only as a psychological state but also as a structuring aesthetic principle, organizing narrative, language, and genre hybridity within the context of postmodernism. This approach allows for the examination of alienation as a national-postmodernist category, reflecting both global literary trends and the unique cultural and existential challenges of contemporary Kazakh prose.

II. TRADITION, INNOVATION, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPTH IN ZHADYRA SHAMURATOVA’S PROSE

In postmodern literature, the mini-genre has gained prominence (Ismakova, 2015), encompassing diverse forms such as short stories, essays, novellas, and intellectual prose. In both of her collections, “Infinity Between Seconds” (2021) and “The Chest” (2023), alongside with short stories, Zhadyra Shamuratova often turns to the short genre of the novella. The novella as a short-prose genre is known for concluding the story sharply and unexpectedly, and leaving the reader with a thought. It is often considered to be the most sophisticated mode of short fiction (Kimber, 2016), differing from a story by its imaginative plot, unusual storyline, and compositional structure without detailed narration. Being longer than a short story but shorter than a novel, the novella appears to occupy a clear formal niche (Frank, 2023). The

defining characteristic of a novella is its form: it typically has no subplots and revolves around a single main storyline, focused on one pivotal turning event, such as an unexpected accident, a revelation of one person as another, or other sudden intrusions of the inexplicable into the characters' daily lives (Fuchs, 2019). In this respect, Zhadyra Shamuratova's short works correspond to the requirements of the novella genre: they are brief in length, the plot line is completed abruptly, and the author's idea is deliberately withheld, leaving the reader with something to ponder over. Although the novellas are short, the author highlights the complex and intertwined issues of human relationships in contemporary Kazakh society exhausted by social problems in the information age.

Zhadyra Shamuratova's prose is also distinct in the way the writer selects and identifies her themes, conducting conducts their in-depth exploration, revealing their connection to her own spiritual worldview. By discovering her subject matter in this way, the writer strives to shape her unique creative signature. As evidence of this, one may point to the way she titles each of her works and how she carefully identifies and refines the urgent and pressing issues of her time. The common themes and significant issues in her novellas include the problems of youth, unemployment, the alienation of individuals in a rigid and unfeeling society, the spiritual and internal crisis of the community, the protection of Kazakh national interests in a society permeated by corruption, national education, national identity, language, the impact of global trends on national consciousness and values, the frequent occurrence of criminal incidents, the contrast between village and urban civilization, and the social, domestic, and political issues that exist between authorities and people.

Another outstanding feature in Zhadyra Shamuratova's writing is her ability to rationally use the typical features of a literary character with psychological internal and external descriptions in creating a contemporary image. This demonstrates her deep research ability and sensitivity to the social milieu. The writer skillfully portrays the issues mentioned above through the inner psychological and tragic conflicts of the ordinary people. She masterfully presents eternal themes such as the love between mother and child, the passion for art, wealth and poverty, sorrow, loneliness, the human struggle with one's inner self, and, most importantly, each character's loyalty to oneself and one's inner beliefs, regardless of circumstances. Examining the gallery of characters in Zhadyra Shamuratova's prose, one finds that her characters are either professionals suited to the modern era or members of social groups shaped by the new society. Furthermore, the author is innovative in introducing previously unseen characters in prose, who are representatives of different social groups, anti-images such as swindlers, exploiters, outcasts. These characters are neutral, without a division into "good" or "evil", which reflects postmodernism through multilayeredness and rejection of norms.

Each character in the collections by Zhadyra Shamuratova is portrayed as an unfortunate person carrying the burden of alienation. Some novellas show the incompatibility of religious beliefs and extremist tendencies among social life and modern youth with traditional national values (Akylzhan's entanglement and misguidance in religion in "Infinity Between Seconds"), while the others portray self-alienation and self-destruction of a person, for instance, "Snail Meat with Garlic", where Asylbek, consumed by greed, wagers all his possessions at a casino, ruins his family, and suffers the consequences of his reckless actions, or "The Secret Revealed at Dusk", where the actress lives in isolation from others, facing failures in love and artistic pursuits, suffering from mental illness, and being forced to isolate herself from people. Through her characters, the writer presents a realistic picture of our contemporary era by displaying prototypes of people in today's society.

In Zhadyra Shamuratova's works, special attention is attracted to artistic details and techniques of portraiture in psychological depiction. Her writing reveals the inner emotions and struggle of the characters, employing stream of consciousness, free dialogue, and narrative-driven artistic expression. Another innovative feature of her writing is the addition of a detective element, as she thoroughly explores criminal themes and strives to develop this literary field. The frequent presence of detective elements in her works is no coincidence, as the author herself has experience working in the press of the internal affairs sector. This background allows her to deeply study and reflect on her topics, providing the freedom to address domestic social and universally relevant issues. Although Zhadyra Shamuratova writes artistic prose, she pays special attention to factual details, highly values research, and demonstrates an essential intellectual and critical approach. In her works, she achieves significant artistic depth, making her a master of short literary forms in modern Kazakh prose.

All of these works artistically demonstrate the complexity of alienation in modern life. The author, from a thematic perspective, addresses a wide range of pressing issues in contemporary society, such as unemployment, wealth and career, underestimation of art, the confusion of individuals corrupted by riches and cannot control their will, as well as problems related to casinos and religion, etc. In addition to the main issues, she delves deeply into the psychological state of her characters' inner worlds, seemingly seeking answers to why people endure the anguish of loneliness. But rather than blaming someone, the author prefers to leave it to the readers to make various thoughts and decisions through the actions of the genre, which is driven by various situations in society. Based on the qualitative analysis of Zhadyra Shamuratova's writing, we identified four main dimensions of alienation expressed in her prose and their relation to current issues in contemporary Kazakh society.

III. DIMENSIONS OF ALIENATION IN ZHADYRA SHAMURATOVA'S PROSE

A. Alienation as Self-Fragmentation

In Zhadyra Shamuratova's stories and novellas, alienation appears as a universal burden for heroes cut off from loved ones and themselves. In the short story "The Secret Revealed at Dusk", alienation is caused by two parallel concepts that are woven together: the former represents wealth in modern society, the latter signifies lack and poverty. But the common motif of both threads is alienation. By describing the sadness behind wealth, the author attempted to portray the motif of alienation from a new perspective within the context of today's society. The main characters are a pathologist named Arys and his maternal aunt, who is an actress. The crux of the story is revealed when we delve into the secrets of the secret diary and immediately understand that the actress is, in fact, Arys's biological mother.

Arys experiences the hardships of life and encounters poverty. His only support in life is his mother, who has passed away. Before his mother dies, she informs her son that he has a maternal aunt who is his only relative. When Arys meets this previously unknown relative, he is disappointed. While Arys has grown up witnessing life's difficulties, his maternal aunt is a wretch who suffers from loneliness even though she lives in the midst of great wealth. However, she has a harsh character and does not even greet guests. She is completely accustomed to loneliness and has no companion other than her dog. The following fragment adds to the characteristic of Arys's aunt and his attitude to her:

Arys's maternal aunt seemed strangely cold and indifferent, paying little attention to people. Even upon hearing about the death of her sister, she sat stiffly without shedding a tear. Her question appeared peculiar:

- Did she pass from cancer?
- From the heart.
- Did everyone from the maternity hospital come?
- Yes. Everyone came. They even helped with the funeral.
- Did she suffer much?
- No. It seemed as if she did not suffer at all. Or at least she didn't let me know.
- If she left quickly, your mother was lucky.

The young man was taken aback. What did she mean? Was leaving life early considered happiness? She had raised and educated her only child, expecting to enjoy the fruits of her labor, so how could leaving him alone in a big city, without any relatives, be considered happiness? This person is strange. (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 11)

Although Arys, whose mother has passed away, contemplated marrying Aiya and establishing a household, he is saddened by the thought that he has no relatives to support him in this big city. Despite his suspicious and cautious nature, which makes him unwelcoming even to visitors, Arys chooses to confide in the only person left to him after his mother, and the vivid tableau of his thoughts on the bus, along with the events passing before his eyes, can be seen as a mirror of contemporary society:

What he loves to do in the world is to observe the faces, movements, and clothes of the people in the salon. Thanks to his dark glasses, he can especially gaze at the figures of women. Faces marked by anger or resentment, tired, bored eyes, or vacant, meaningless glances never weary him. Not only does he recognize them, but he even feels as if his way of life is the same as those people he has seen only once in his life, and as if they were his own kin. Not all the passengers were like him, returning late from work, hurriedly eating Chinese noodles, sheltering in dilapidated, filthy dormitories, and draping an old jacket from last year over themselves; among them were those with a reasonably comfortable life. Yet, the atmosphere in the salon was such that, in everyone, one could sense dissatisfaction with their day and a tendency to blame someone for it. Then why are they dissatisfied? Is it because they're not rich, because they're sitting in this salon with people like me? Or maybe it's because when they came looking for a better life, everything didn't turn out as great as they thought?

- Either stand back or move aside! You're really in the way!

The woman with the hoarse voice who spoke to him seemed sleepy at first glance, judging by the length and thickness of her eyelashes. Her sleepy eyes were piercing and cold. As he stepped aside to let the passengers who were about to get off pass by, a sudden burst of acrid body odor brushed harshly against his nose and mouth. "She must have spent all her money on fake eyebrows, eyelashes, and getting her nails done, and didn't have enough left for a bar of soap to wash her armpits," he thought with disgust. (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 19)

From this very detail alone, the author seems to unravel many concealed truths born from the brief crossing of different destinies and the glances of various lives. By conveying social reality, a vivid picture of our modern life through the consciousness of the character, the author, as a member of that social environment, is able to see every phenomenon with a writer's refined sensibility and strives to present that social environment through the viewpoint of his characters. It seems that, rather than depicting the characters as conventionally good or bad, the author's primary aim is to convey that they are, above all, ordinary human beings. The author reveals Arys's inner vulnerability, known only to himself, thus avoiding one-sided characterization and striving to maintain artistic conventionality as the guiding principle in shaping the image.

The climax of the story "The Secret Revealed at Dusk" is revealed when the protagonist reads the crimson leather diary written by his maternal aunt. Although the pathologist Arys constantly encounters secrets in his professional life,

he is nonetheless astonished to realize that, despite the familial ties of sisterhood, the people he regards as his mother and maternal aunt are worlds apart, and that part of the mystery lies in their lifelong neglect to seek one another. The solution to this mystery is revealed as follows:

From the moment of his birth, I fled from him in fear that we might become too close; I hurried away before I could even cherish him as my child and did not even give him a name. It was the child's fate, truly, the nurse was a good person; she had made him into a human being. She named him Arys. He grew up to be a decent guy. What a height! All my life, I had convinced myself that I had never given birth to a child. Yet, when my son, whom I had abandoned at birth, came searching for me, I was nearly driven out of my senses. I experienced so many different states in one moment that it seemed as if my brain had forgotten how to think. I didn't know how to behave in front of him. Let's just say that I couldn't even get into a momentary role... (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 43)

Here, the heroine pours out her soul secrets in her diary that she could not tell anyone. The actress, suffering from a nervous disorder, ultimately abandons her own child. The psychologically captivating effect of the short story on the reader, the simplicity of the language and the style of narration will not leave the reader indifferent. At the same time, the author skillfully weaves scientific terminology into the language of literary narrative. The protagonist, Arys, a forensic pathologist, is a figure unprecedented in Kazakh literature. In depicting his work moments and his assessment of the surrounding world, the author not only employs medical terminology appropriately but also reveals the inner nature of a professional unfamiliar to the reader. This approach serves a dual purpose: it provides the author with a vehicle to convey detailed information about the character and demonstrates the author's thorough research into the professional field to credibly position Arys as the central character of the narrative:

To restore the firmness of the materials, he placed them in formalin. In this way, the tissue remnants underwent several rounds of processing before being embedded in special paraffin. Separate slides contained bile, a part of the tumor, and materials that the surgeon had cut out during the operation. In order to clearly see the cells under a microscope, the tissues were stained with a special liquid, in this process, organs stained with blood appeared gray, while very thin tissues took on lighter shades. He took a few glasses and put them away. He sat there, calmly, without thinking about all this. It usually takes 2-4 days to study a biopsy, and about ten days to make a definite diagnosis. Now all that remained was to fill out the report and draw up a conclusion on today's work. The silence was broken only by the clicking sound of the keyboard. The printer whirled as the first report was completed. He then proceeded to the second. It was as if he knew each of his patients personally. (Shamuratova, 2021, p. 7)

B. Alienation as Social Estrangement

The central theme of the story "The Builder" is unemployment. It reflects the life of Kazakhs wandering through large cities like Astana in search of ways to support their families. Even though the country has passed through the transitional years of independence, the author portrays the unresolved hardships of Kazakh life in parallel with the beautiful buildings of a major city like Astana. Numerous impressive buildings have risen in Astana, yet the author raises the question whether all the people behind these structures are truly happy. The answer to the question is reflected in the life of the builder Kuat. Many young Kazakhs like Kuat, who work in construction, are wandering around without receiving their wages. It is true that in today's reality, powerful companies often create various obstacles when it comes to paying workers their wages. The fact that ordinary workers, who have contributed to the development of Astana, go for months without receiving their salaries; the burden placed on men as heads of their families; the many domestic problems they face; and the rise in divorces and other misfortunes caused by unemployment, all these real-life issues are brought together in this short novella, which seems to pinpoint the ailing side of contemporary society with striking accuracy.

The setting of the novella's plot is an unfinished high-rise building in Astana, where construction is rapidly underway. Within this construction environment, the story reveals the unheard cries of ordinary workers, unseen construction workers and hired hands, who fall into despair because their wages remain unpaid. Although the construction worker, Kuat, enjoys standing on the upper floors of the new building and observing the life of Astana from above, his mood darkens whenever he thinks of his family's difficult situation back in the village. He especially feels helpless when he listens to audio messages from his son:

Kuat likes observing the city from above; when he first came to the capital, the countless lights shimmering in the deep darkness after the chaos of the daytime bustle would somehow lift his spirits. Every time his eyes fell on the words 'This is the place of happiness' written on the blue-roofed construction fences buzzing with activity behind them, he would drift into a dream: "The people living in those homes must truly be happy. If only, if not for himself, then at least his children could find a place in this so-called abode of happiness". (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 7)

Through the character's divided thoughts, the author reveals the turmoil and restlessness of his inner world:

Recently, the city has begun to seem boring, even its restless daytime bustle no longer catches his eye as it used to, and when evening falls, its once dazzling lights appear dimmed. Over the past day or two, he has come to realize that he is utterly out of place in this city. What is he even doing here? He ought to look for another

job, or perhaps return to his village, but where can he go without a single coin to his name? There is no one left he can borrow money from. (Shamuratova, 2023, pp. 7-8)

In this passage, Kuat's inner turmoil is clearly visible. Behind the images of each character such as Kuat, who cannot obtain the payment he deserves and ends up arguing; the burly Eraly; the middle-aged man in his fifties whose name is not mentioned; and the hawknosed Bolat, stand the prototypes, the reflections, of countless ordinary Kazakh men. It goes without saying that there is a social problem of exploitation of honest work, the social and everyday struggles of those who cannot reap the fruits of their own work, a harsh reality, many issues intensifying in society. It is as if today's society has grown numb to such problems. The author delves into the causes and consequences of why, even in the era of independence, a handful of Kazakhs continue to live in poverty.

From the character of Aidar, the brigade leader in the novella, we see how people of his kind, those eager to profit during a turbulent transition period and to live off the struggles of others, began to thrive. The author briefly describes the moment when Brigadier Aidar becomes an intermediary and conveys the words of his superiors. Through this depiction, the narrative hints at those who flourished in such times, the very people responsible for the everyday hardships of an era riddled with corruption, for example:

"Let me say it again", the big boss says, "There's no money, but be patient, we'll figure it out." They'll sort it out, don't worry, everything will be "okay", guys. – His eyes flickering restlessly, he patted Kuat, who was standing to the side, on the back. His face looked gentle. – Think about it, where will you go if you leave? There are layoffs everywhere, no one's doing well. So why don't you just wait it out a bit longer and keep working? You'll get it eventually. Isn't that right, Kuat? – His laugh seemed mocking.

Earlier, when the guys had said about Aidar, "that man has two or three hidden layers inside him," he had not paid attention. But now he seemed to finally recognize that fake, affected expression. One look from that sly fox was enough to see he had been through plenty. Kuat was on the verge of grabbing him by his wispy, scraggly beard and smashing a bright flash of a blow straight into those murky, muddy eyes of his... but Bolat held him back. (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 11)

The novella presents a vivid portrayal of the deceit, cunning, and fraudulence of the modern era through the character of Aidar, who embodies these traits as a prototype. It can be said that during the difficult transition period of Kazakhstan, which passed to market economy, fraudsters were rampant and lived off the people. "The eye" reveals the entire inner nature of a person, the author paid attention to the eyes in detail. The contradictory aspects of society, the changes in human nature in difficult times, are deeply touched through the description "with playful eyes and gentle face".

The idea of the story is that no matter how many political and social reforms there are, when viewed from the perspective of national interests, it is the concerns of the small, disadvantaged people, the ordinary Kazakh, that truly matter. Although the economy has developed, the author conveys the unresolved contradictions between society and the individual in a system deeply affected by corruption. Yet, the author gives priority to hope in the inner struggle of man. What hardships has the resilient Kazakh nation not endured? The story depicts a society that, despite the difficult social and economic conditions that the people of independent Kazakhstan experienced in the early years, has continued its modest daily life without losing hope for the future.

The next morning, as soon as he woke up with a new resolve, he hurried along the streets of Astana, ruled by a cold and indifferent stillness, driven by the frantic struggle simply to survive:

"No, this city is not heartless, it is a huge beehive made up of thousands of blocks, and the people like bees leave their hives early in the morning, each striving toward their own purpose, each certain to find the ray of warmth they seek." No sooner had this thought crossed his mind than one thousand and fifty rays of light, frozen in the clear air, suddenly scattered in all directions, and a joy filled with hope seemed to spread through his entire being. Hope does not die. (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 14)

In "The Builder", the problem of exploiting ordinary people's labor is clearly raised. Individuals like Kuat, who earn their bread through honest work, live with a quiet hardship, yet they do not lose hope for a better future. The author emphasizes that even in today's developed society, many powerful people still benefit from the labor of the weak, exploiting the skills and efforts of socially vulnerable groups for their own interests. The writer depicts a society that belittles robust, strong-built Kazakh men, men with the stature of warriors, and exposes the problems of labor exploitation and poverty.

C. Alienation as Spiritual Estrangement

The work "Parapsychologist Patirgul" is a novella with a grotesque, allegorical content. From the beginning to the end of the story, the self-deprecation of the character is clearly visible in the author's narration. The central idea of the story evokes the period in post-1990s Kazakhstan when, after the stagnation of public life and the crisis that followed, the country saw an explosion of fortune-tellers, shamans, healers, clairvoyants, and self-proclaimed advisers who deceived and manipulated the population like mushrooms sprouting after rain. Although they did not disappear completely in later times, it is no secret that they were replaced by various energy-information coaches, spiritual practitioners, various affirmation makers, astrologers, numerologists, and other loudly advertised -ologists.

The subject of the novella reflects the true face of contemporary society: a spiritually exhausted community that, instead of seeking knowledge in books or science, fills its inner void by listening to various fraudsters, and mistaking

them teachers. How many Patirguls are there who take advantage of the current Kazakh people, impressionable, easily influenced, and spiritually hollow at a time when society's consciousness is increasingly filled with foreign and misleading ideas? They may consider themselves to be the spreaders of spiritual knowledge, yet we witness the collapse of national education in the era of modern global trends. In an era where there are sorcerers, soothsayers, and those who poison the human mind, like Patirgul, this is a work that takes a critical look at our nation itself. Because, as the author states in the novella, most of those who turn to Patirgul are Kazakhs: "the Kazakh character is like this, they love the limitless in everything, if it's words, they are verbose; if it's praise, it is abundant; and when they need to trust someone, they open their mouths like children and believe blindly" (Shamuratova, 2023, p. 21). Here is the sorrow and lament of so many deceived people in modern society. In today's world, it is no longer surprising to see people who are deceived by fraudsters who embezzle their money in the hope of getting an easy prey. This seems to have become an established trend. The author, approaching this issue with grotesqueness and bitter sarcasm, seems to blame the gullible people who, in times of spiritual crisis, did not resort to education and work, but visited saints, soothsayers, fortune-tellers, and numerologists. This constitutes the first core aspect of the story.

The second, symbolic layer subtly portrays the situation between the people and the political system. The author also includes officials among the above-mentioned characters. The author summarizes the novel in a romantic tone, saying that an apparatus to combat fraudsters, embezzlers, and corrupt people has been invented and imported from Japan:

Meanwhile, word suddenly spread that they had started evaluating all those useless advisers and self-proclaimed shamans, identifying the frauds and keeping only the true experts. Lately, since everyone had caught the disease of lying and people could no longer tell who was a numerologist, who was an akim, who was an astrologer or a deputy, the government, which has lost its mind, has ordered a remarkable, one-of-a-kind device from Japan. The astonishing thing about this device was that whenever a liar opened their mouth, it would fill the space with a loud, irritating buzzing sound, preventing their words from reaching anyone else (compared to this, your lie detector with wires tied to your body is nothing). It didn't matter whether you were in an office, at home, in the East or the West, if you opened your mouth and started lying, it seemed you wouldn't even be able to hear your own voice.

Since the arrival of that device, around eight thousand officials who had been deceiving the public by claiming, 'We did this, we did that' while pocketing the money meant for roads and bridges, as well as those who earned money by pretending to cure nonexistent illnesses or by 'removing curses,' have been convicted, with many of them already serving prison sentences. Patirgul does not consider herself a fraud, yet she has become cautious after hearing the government's announcement. Whether from worry or from the 'spirit' her mentor supposedly summoned for her, lately Patirgul has begun talking erratically, saying whatever comes to her mind, they say. (Shamuratova, 2023, pp. 25-26)

From the image of Patirgul in the story, we can understand some indicators of the disconnection between the government and the people in today's society. The author's idea in the novella is that the Patirguls who deceive the ordinary people, or the government, are all condensed into one image. However, through the detail that "Patirgul does not consider herself a fraud", the author suggests that certain phenomena deeply rooted in society are difficult and burdensome to change. This story of the author is not only a socio-economic problem of the people, but also an open criticism of the other side of the political life of our country. Through the theme of eliminating fraud and mutual collusion, we sense the author's wish for our people and nation to improve their living conditions and achieve happiness through hard work and honesty.

The novella discusses anti-moral values against the established social ethical norms of modernity, which become the core of the author's idea and reflect the image of society in a socially symbolic way, either explicitly or implicitly. This is because, while value, as a philosophical and sociological category, represents positive or negative meanings related to a person, anti-values are considered phenomena that are contrary to the centuries-old ethics of human society, openly condemned, and especially contrary to the worldview of the Kazakh people, which is based on the foundations of national knowledge and traditions, and weaken spiritual culture and national identity. In "The Parapsychologist Patirgul", the author uncovers the vices of today's world to an absurd degree. Patirguls are not merely petty swindlers deceiving ordinary people; they can be regarded as the very embodiment of tricksters and fraudsters in modern Kazakh society. On a deeper level, they also serve as a typified, grotesquely portrayed artistic image of those in power. On an almost absurd level, beneath a delicate yet grotesque subtext, the author masterfully portrays some of the confusions of the whole nation in an era of advancing civilization, inability to distinguish good from evil, the genuine from the false, capturing these states with remarkable artistic precision.

D. Alienation as Loss of National Identity

Zhadyra Shamuratova connects alienation with a disconnection from roots. In "The Chest", the chest, serving as a symbol of tradition, national spirit, customs, unity, is moved to a barn, looted and forgotten. This is an allegory for globalization devouring Kazakh identity. In this way, the author raises the issue of the neglect of national values that are on the verge of being swallowed by modern civilization and global trends. As times change, values also change, yet the spiritual values accumulated over centuries that preserve a nation's identity must remain intact. Using the chest as a narrative detail, the author brings forward a very delicate issue overshadowed by global cultural expansion and offers it to the thoughtful reader.

In “The Chest”, the writer addresses the change of time, transformations within society, and the changing attitudes toward national values that accompany the transition from one generation to the next. The chest serves as a narrative detail. The chest emphasized by the writer symbolizes the national concept itself; it represents national identity, traditional customs, national spirit, national heritage, and the repository of what has been passed down from our ancestors. Its gradual removal from the place of honor and its relocation to the shed or storage area, as well as its worn and neglected state, symbolically reflects the contemporary era in which Kazakh identity is becoming increasingly distant. The chest lying open and scattered symbolizes the plundering and loss of national heritage. This forms the core of the author’s main idea in the story.

In the collections of stories, Zhadyra Shamuratova depicts numerous issues, such as a mother who rejects her own child, unstable and ill-fated love, rivalry and competition in the arts, linking them to the present-day face of a society that is gradually drifting away from its national values. In general, she speaks about this in one of her interviews:

Since our childhood fell in the 90s, the people of our village seem different to me, with less humor and more sadness. At that time, the strong men of the village wasted away from drinking and some were found hanged in a drunken state. There were those who, out of helplessness, took their own lives thinking, ‘Even if I die, at least my children will receive an orphan’s allowance.’ And the children who grew up as orphans had no one to whom they could claim their fathers’ worth. Nowadays, there are plenty of trainings and psychologists, but back then, if only there had been two or three elders in the village whose words and presence carried real weight, such tragedies might not have happened.

Yes, although for some people it may look like nothing more than a soot-covered castiron pot, the qazan (cauldron) is a symbol. The Kazakh qazan is a symbol of the unity of all the people in the house, the harmony and unity of family members gathering to share a meal from one vessel, and the prosperity that arises from that unity. A Kazakh whose black cauldron never leaves the fire is said to be truly wealthy. The Kazakhs used to call someone the most foolish one, because it is impossible for a person who overturns and breaks a pot that is on fire to be sane. In the story, there is a moment when the old woman sighs, saying, “What good can come of someone who abandons her own cauldron and runs away?” The Kazakh spirit and traditional character have remained in the old homesteads together with those black cauldrons. When did the trend of changing the identity and traditions of the nation begin? It has been many years. There is a line where the narrator says, “One of those cauldrons came from my father’s house,” and this too is symbolic. In the past, no matter how dearly a Kazakh family loved their daughter, they would never give her their household cauldron when she married. The reason was that once the girl left, she became part of another family; if you gave her your cauldron, the abundance and prosperity of your own home would shift to that new household. Over time, as eras changed, we gradually drifted away from such traditions. The worry now is whether the cauldron that once fed the Kazakh people will, one day, turn into nothing more than an archaism. (Shamuratova, 2020, p. 18)

The ideas mentioned in this interview and “The Chest” are closely connected with the notions of hybridity and transculturation (Roudometof, 2015) as a glocal phenomenon (Figlerowicz & Mertehikian, 2023). This process combines uniformity with diversity (Robertson, 1995) while innovatively fusing global and local cultural traditions (Aleshinskaya, 2020), yielding texts that negotiate post-Soviet transitions into global modernity. During the years of independence, the absorption of national ideology into global processes and the rapid penetration of market economic relations have, in fact, contributed to a gradual detachment from national values. The chest symbolizes the erosion of national identity, emphasizing the uneven fusion of transculturation in modern Kazakhstan, where national Kazakh traditions are devoured by global market forces.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study illuminates the motif of alienation as a multifaceted prism through which Zhadyra Shamuratova analyzes the existential and social problems of independent Kazakhstan. In her collections “Infinity Between Seconds” and “The Chest”, alienation emerges not as a single theme, but as a dynamic interplay of self-fragmentation, social alienation, spiritual disunity, and cultural disorientation. In the story “A Secret Revealed at Sunset”, the personal isolation of Aris and his mother underscores self-alienation, where family ties dissolve into irreconcilable worlds, amplified by innovative medical terminology that reveals the characters’ inner voids. “The Builder” reflects social alienation through the exploitation of Kuat against the glittering facades of Astana, critiquing alienation and corruption among workers through vivid prototypes such as the duplicitous Aidar, while maintaining an undying sense of hope. The grotesque allegory of “Parapsychologist Patirgul” highlights spiritual alienation, satirically depicting the gullible flight of society to charlatans amid the post-Soviet spiritual vacuum. “The Chest” symbolizes the loss of national identity, and the plundered relic evokes the generation gap under the onslaught of globalization. Zhadyra Shamuratova’s artistic techniques, including detective intrigue, stream of consciousness, antiheroes, symbolic details, the grotesque, and specialized language, go beyond simple representation, transforming alienation into a critique of the isolating forces of modernity: urbanization, market predation, and the decline of national values. These aspects resonate globally, yet are unique to Kazakhstan, intertwining personal psyche with the pain of national revival.

The findings of this study have broader implications for understanding the role of alienation in contemporary Kazakh literature and post-Soviet cultural discourse. By demonstrating how alienation is expressed through narrative form, style

and linguistic choice, this analysis contributes to the theoretical understanding of Kazakh postmodernism and ways of reimagining global motifs in the national context. It also paves the way for comparative investigations into alienation in post-Soviet and Central Asian literature, as well as for further exploration of the engagement of prose with socio-political change, identity and modernity.

This study has several limitations. Focusing on a limited number of texts from two collections by Zhadyra Shamuratova, it cannot claim to represent the full spectrum of alienation in contemporary Kazakh prose. Furthermore, the interpretation is based primarily on literary-hermeneutic and comparative methods, without employing quantitative or sociological approaches that could complement the analysis of reader perceptions or authorial intentions. Future research could expand the corpus, incorporate oral or digital data, and thereby more fully explore how various levels of alienation (personal, social, spiritual, national) function in the works of other Kazakh writers.

DECLARATION OF THE USE OF AI

Perplexity.ai was used for translating fragments from Kazakh into English and checking basic language elements such as grammar, spelling, and punctuation. AI-translated fragments were afterwards checked by the authors to allow for clarity and precision.

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