

Representations of the Desert in Abdullah Karroum's *Al-Tarhan*

Samiha Abbes*

University of Badji Mokhtar, bp 12 - Annaba
General and Comparative Literature Laboratory
(Algeria)

Samiha.abbes@univ-annaba.dz

Received: 12/02/2026

Accepted: 22/04/2026

Published: 09/06/ 2026

Abstract: This study examines the representations of the desert in contemporary Algerian fiction through an analytical reading of Abdullah Karroum's novel *Al-Tarhan*. Adopting a textual and paratextual approach, the article investigates how the desert exceeds its geographical function to become a semantic, cultural, and symbolic structure within the narrative. The analysis begins with the paratextual thresholds—particularly the title—before exploring the material and immaterial manifestations of the desert in the narrative body.

The study argues that the desert in *Al-Tarhan* operates as a dynamic narrative agent shaping characters, structuring conflict, and generating semantic binaries such as life/death, loss/salvation, drought/fertility, and colonialism/resistance. By intertwining realism with symbolic density, the novel reconfigures the desert as a site of identity formation, collective memory, and historical contestation. The findings demonstrate that the desert in contemporary Algerian narrative has shifted from peripheral geography to a central epistemic and aesthetic locus.

Key Words: Desert Fiction – Algerian Novel – Narrative Space – Paratext – Cultural Identity

Introduction

The Arabic novel has undergone, throughout its historical development, various structural and formal transformations that have affected many of its aesthetic and compositional dimensions. Among the most significant of these transformations is narrative space. In its early phases, Arabic fiction relied primarily on the countryside and the city as dominant spatial poles—often depicted as oppositional or dialectical spaces. However, a number of novelists later introduced a different spatial paradigm, geographically, culturally, and symbolically distinct: the desert.

Modern and contemporary Arabic fiction is marked by its extensive employment of the desert in its various manifestations—as place, space, and existential horizon. Writers such as Abdulrahman Munif and Ibrahim Al-Koni foregrounded the desert as a central narrative matrix. Likewise, Algerian fiction has produced several novelists who have invested deeply in desert writing. Within this trajectory emerges Abdullah Karroum, whose novel *Al-Tarhan* offers a distinctive representation of the desert rooted in local experience and historical consciousness.

This study seeks to examine the manifestations and semantic dimensions of the desert in *Al-Tarhan*. Before undertaking the textual analysis, however, it is necessary to contextualize the presence of the desert in Arabic fiction more broadly.

1. The Presence of the Desert in the Arabic Novel

Since ancient times, the desert has enjoyed great importance in classical Arabic literature, as it is regarded as the cradle of civilizations, the land of the pre-Islamic Arabs, and the site of divine revelations and prophecies. It possesses a distinctive order different from other worlds. “The Arab desert encompasses an enormous amount of Arab history at all its levels (political, religious, and cultural), and perhaps the Arabic language itself is the most important product of the desert” (Salah Salah, 1996, p. 33). The Arab individual resorted to the desert to take pride in his identity and to cling to his authenticity, for it is his first homeland and source of inspiration. “Throughout the past centuries, the desert has continued to stir the imagination of poets, writers, and artists, and to captivate the hearts of many travelers, adventurers, and researchers. It has also been the stage of heroism and chivalry recorded in popular epics and sagas” (Salah Salah, 1996, p. 33). The desert is thus a space of imagination from which writers derive their creativity, for the harshness of its environment and its serenity at the same time stimulate imagination, provoke reflection, and enhance perception.

This prompted creators to seek “the creation of a possible world, an artistic parallel world capable of blending the forces of human beings with the forces of the surrounding world and generating interaction between them” (Saad Al-Bazai, 1991, p. 34). All this struggle for survival generates within the creator extraordinary energies that enable him to produce a text combining the forces of humanity and nature in a unique experience not found in environments characterized by balance or ordinariness.

The connotations of the desert as a theme in the literary texts of Arab writers have varied according to their artistic and ideological perspectives. “The meanings

of the desert differ according to the position from which the signification is perceived. The desert that the merchants of Quraysh and earlier ages had to traverse is not the oil deserts of the twentieth century; it is different in the eyes of its sons from how it appears to the Western investor, and different again in the eyes of those who come to it for work from various parts of the world... All this renders the proposal of general and unified meanings for the desert impossible unless the standpoint from which the signification proceeds is taken into consideration" (Salah Salah, 1996, p. 23). This means that the desert is a multidimensional space: the writer's view differs from that of the painter, the latter's from that of the tourist, and so on, including the merchant and others.

According to Salah Salah, the general connotations of the desert are divided into two orientations: a negative and a positive one. Among the negative connotations are poverty, drought, awe, and fear; the positive orientation, however, is represented in vastness and boundless expanse, eternity and infinity, serenity, tranquility, and contemplation. The indisputable positive connotation is that the desert constitutes a cultural and doctrinal depth for the peoples of the Arab region (Salah Salah, 1996, pp. 26–28).

Thus, the Arab desert has become a source of numerous and varied significations that have granted it a special place in Arabic literature and culture. This led writers of desert fiction to assert that "the desert novel is characterized by artistic, social, and cultural particularities derived from the dimensions of the desert environment, with its rich cultural references, mythological reservoir, anthropological diversity, and popular heritage" (Meryem Mohamed Marin Mohamed Abdullah, 2014, pp. 220–221). Since critical and literary thought represents the outcome of various developments in economic, political, social, and psychological fields, the novel in the modern era was compelled to depart from the desert's primary meaning as a mere geographical place. It came to bear diverse semantic dimensions, as "contemporary Arabic fiction, in a number of artistically and intellectually accomplished models, turned toward the desert; among the foremost results of this turn was that the desert setting in fiction, in particular, transcended its customary negative stillness in traditional narrative patterns and joined the dynamic elements active in shaping the structure of the novel, granting its internal world greater growth, vitality, and distinctive aesthetic qualities" (Salah Salah, 1996, pp. 7–8).

Among the novelists who have addressed the theme of the desert within an artistically and thematically integrated narrative framework, we may mention—by way of example rather than limitation:

1.1. Abdulrahman Munif

In his novels, Abdulrahman Munif combined the space of the authentic Arab desert prior to the discovery of oil with the newly embellished desert space that emerged after oil was discovered, attempting to demonstrate the difference between the two. The first space, in his view, expresses memory and belonging, whereas the

second, newly formed space expresses a new city characterized by harshness and the loss of everything distinctive and authentic. For this reason, Abdulrahman Munif likened the desert to “a rural bride who wants to imitate the women of the city; therefore she applies cosmetics in large quantities and places upon her body a collection of discordant colored rags, then boasts in displaying all this cacophony of colors... She has neither preserved the past nor managed to enter the future; instead, she continues to borrow from others and to accumulate” (Abdulrahman Munif & Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, 1992, pp. 83–84).

Thus, the absence of the desert’s original essential characteristics led to alienation. The new place came to instill sadness, discomfort, and estrangement in its inhabitants. This is manifested in their irresponsible behaviors and actions, reflecting the relationship of human beings to their original homeland -the desert-upon which they were naturally disposed to love and to which they remained attached, and within which it is impossible for them to feel alienation or estrangement.

Accordingly, Abdulrahman Munif is among the most important novelists who documented the sudden transformation that befell the Arab desert in both its places and its inhabitants. The reader of Munif’s novels notices this interpenetration and interaction: at times the desert appears as a natural place, while at other times the features of its original image appear entirely altered. That is, the desert “appears in Munif’s literature as a space tense between past and present, between entrenched Bedouin life and its social transformations after the emergence of oil and the influx of urban life” (Huda Abu Ghoneima, 2017, p. 9). This means that the desert in his novels is like a coin with two faces: a bright face and a dark one.

This duality is evident in his novel *Al-Nihayat (The Ends)*, where he expresses its dark aspect at the beginning of the novel: “It is drought -drought once again. In the season of drought, life and things change, and even people change and their temperaments change. Sorrows are generated within the soul that at first appear obscure, but repeated moments of anger quickly detonate them, making them rebellious and capable of taking countless forms” (Munif, 1980, p. 13). In these lines, the ugliness and harshness of the desert at a certain period become apparent. Yet as we advance in the reading, its luminous side emerges: “In the new seasons, nature turns green and becomes fragrant on all sides, filled with flowers and plants of wondrous colors and shapes at the beginning of spring, even the southern direction which appears stern and harsh at the end of summer -one does not know, nor can one explain, how it used to draw the people of al-Taybah at the beginning of spring” (Munif, 1980, p. 21).

It may be said that Munif skillfully blended the harsh and the gentle aspects, as embodied in the village located between the city and the desert: city dwellers come

to it for hunting, while desert inhabitants seek refuge there to relieve themselves from its severity. In this context, Faisal Darraj states: “A mysterious justice ensures the renewal of the place and wards famine away from human beings; it carries an innate rationality that balances drought with fertility, rejects killing, and abstains from hunting” (Faisal Darraj, 2004, p. 22). This indicates that the desert space in the Arabic novel changes according to the writer’s vision, which renders it multidimensional in its semantic implications.

Through his novels *Cities of Salt* and *Al-Tih (The Wilderness)*, Abdulrahman Munif departed from one of the desert’s most dangerous characteristics, namely infinity and boundlessness. The desert’s endless expanse generates within the soul awe, fear, and terror, producing disturbance in the depths of the psyche, since “it cannot be dealt with objectively, and this deceptive transformation does not reach its depth and essence; it is sometimes connected to visual and perceptual illusion, while it preserves constant attributes -it does not choose its drought, its heat, or its expanse, for example” (Sahiri Ibrahim, 2003, p. 18). The desert cannot be trusted because it is elusive; each day, indeed each hour, it dons new garments that render it entirely different from what it had been.

1.2. Ibrahim Al-Koni

It is impossible to speak about desert literature without turning to the Libyan writer Ibrahim Al-Koni. He did not merely write about the desert in his novels; rather, he granted it priority in most of his works, including short stories, novels, and other narrative forms. This may be attributed to his belonging to and upbringing within the Libyan desert environment. As Saeed Al-Ghanimi points out, “The home contemplated by Al-Koni’s texts is a Bedouin home because it is a nomadic place and a preservation of the past within the heart of the present, which makes it (that is, the desert novel) different from its opposite (the city novel)” (Saeed Al-Ghanimi, 2006, p. 165). Thus, one who writes about the desert from a distance differs entirely from one who was born in its womb, grew up among its dunes, and lived its conditions.

What distinguishes Al-Koni from others is his “use of the past (whether distant or near) as time, since the past was the cause of the loss of identity, for which Adam descended to the earth -and to the desert in particular” (Amina Mohamed Branine, 2010, p. 199). This is evident in most of his writings, such as *Al-Tibr*, *Al-Majus*, *Nazif Al-Hajar (Bleeding of the Stone)*, as well as *Diwan Al-Nathr Al-Barri*, in addition to *Khareef Al-Darawish* and *Asatir Al-Sahra*. This temporal evocation is achieved through blending the past with the present by employing mythological, spiritual, religious, and historical values within a narrative artistic framework.

The novelistic work of Ibrahim Al-Koni is built upon several elements, among them the relationship between the human being and his desert environment, and his relationship with his fellow human within the boundless desert milieu characterized by infinity and wandering. The relationship thus becomes one of struggle for survival and triumph over challenge. The same applies to the conflict between the mountainous desert and the sandy desert in the myth presented by the author in his novel *Nazif Al-Hajar (Bleeding of the Stone)*, which expresses the opposition inherent in desert life through the binary of elevation and lowland. These two environments (the mountainous and the sandy) were in constant conflict, and the gods would descend from the sky with the rain to resolve that dispute, but without success. Eventually, they grew angry, froze the mountains, and halted the shifting of the sands. Each then resorted to stratagem: the sand embodied itself in the spirit of the gazelle, and the mountains embodied themselves in the mouflon. Thus, Al-Koni's narrative is infused with myth; he expresses his themes and ideas through it, as we discern in *Bleeding of the Stone*, particularly through the discourse of Asouf's father to his son.

The presence of the desert in Ibrahim Al-Koni's novels -beyond what has already been mentioned- is characterized by several connotations. Among these is that "the desert is the opposite of the city: the former is a mythical, spiritual space, while the latter is a realistic, material space, although in the novel *Al-Batr* it expels the hero 'Okhayd' and his camel 'Al-Ablaq,' condemning them to wandering" (Bilal Koussa, 2021, p. 195). Moreover, the desert may suggest estrangement, migration, and the search for the lost paradise. Therefore, Al-Koni made the desert a spiritual space and a place of migration, quest, and limitless discovery equal to the extent of its hidden mysteries.

1.3. Ghassan Kanafani

Ghassan Kanafani inscribed his name on the map of desert writers through two novels: *Ma Tabaqqa Lakum (All That's Left to You)* and *Rijal fi Al-Shams (Men in the Sun)*. The latter narrates the story of a fuel trader who owns a truck he uses to smuggle those wishing to escape the brutality of the desert in search of a better life. One day, the heat intensified to its peak and the scorching sun grew fiercer, and all those inside the tank died. The writer intended to demonstrate that tragic end awaiting anyone who attempts to flee reality in pursuit of an illusory world. Abu Al-Khayzuran likens this journey to the Sirat that must be crossed to reach Paradise, saying: "I liken it, to myself, to the Sirat which God has promised His creation they must cross before they are distributed between Paradise and Hell. Whoever falls from the Sirat goes to Hell, and whoever crosses it reaches Paradise" (Ghassan Kanafani, 2013, p. 66). Thus, Ghassan Kanafani, in this novel, presents the negative aspect of

the desert, considering it a dark, terrifying, and somber place unfit for a dignified life.

1.4. Ibrahim Darghouthi

Ibrahim Darghouthi structured several of his works around the desert, though with varying angles of treatment. For example, in his novel *Wara' Al-Sarab... Qalilan (Behind the Mirage... A Little)*, he reconstructs a period of Tunisian history, narrating the phase of the discovery of phosphate mines in a region of the Tunisian desert. This discovery brought about political, economic, and even social changes. In this novel, the desert transforms from a safe place symbolizing authenticity and rootedness into a sphere of corruption. The corruption of the Other there became a profanation of all that is sacred through the violation of its sanctity and the distortion of its ancient history.

2. The Presence of the Desert in Contemporary Algerian Fiction

Among the most prominent themes that marked the early stages of the Algerian novel was the theme of the desert. It appeared in numerous works, including *Maryam Bayn Al-Nakhil (Maryam Among the Palms)* by Mohammed Ould Al-Sheikh, and *Rahiba fi Al-Sahra' (A Nun in the Desert)* by Zayed Boufelja. Among the novels written in French that adopted the desert as their theme is *Sa'ahabuka Ghazala (I Shall Gift You a Gazelle)* by Malek Haddad (1959), which portrays the desert as a symbol of longing, solitude, and challenge. Also notable are *Ikhtira' Al-Sahra' (The Invention of the Desert)* by Tahar Djaout (1987), the novels *Al-Sahra' Bila Ghita' (The Desert Without Cover)* and *Al-Simurgh* by Mohammed Dib (2003), and *Al-'Ubur (The Crossing)* by Mouloud Mammeri.

As for the Algerian novel written in Arabic, it addressed numerous issues and themes that constituted an essential part of the Algerian people's experience during the colonial period. Among the most important themes were colonialism, identity, belonging, social transformations after independence, and the role of the Algerian individual in liberating his country. "The Algerian novel was preoccupied with the concerns of independence and the bitter armed struggle against the French presence that lasted one hundred and thirty years on Algerian soil, even after independence" (Salah Saleh, 1996, p. 129). Although the armed war in Algeria ended, the writer's war with the pen continued. In this context, Wassini Al-Araj states that "any art or creativity requires stability and freedom; the novel in the early 1990s witnessed a development and diversity it had never known before" (Wassini Al-Araj, 1986, p. 85).

2.1. Rachid Boudjedra

Rachid Boudjedra adopted the novel as a means of unleashing his creative energies and escaping the bitter reality suffered by Algerian society. This is reflected in his novel *Timimoun*, which appeared during the period of terrorism in Algeria known as the “Black Decade.” Through it, the narrator reveals “the existential, ontological, and spiritual anxiety from which he suffers, presenting his vision of the desert, which for him represented death, misery, and suicide. The symbolic connotations that the reader discovers through reading *Timimoun* acquire, first and foremost, an existential character” (Saleh Wala, 2014, p. 155).

This is embodied in the protagonist who “flees from the death and destruction imposed by terrorist groups and hashashin gangs toward suicide and slow death in the desert” (Saleh Wala, 2014, p. 155). This may be attributed to a personal experience lived by the writer since his childhood, which generated within him a kind of harshness and constant fear of something that troubled his soul. All of this drove him to escape into the infinite world of the desert. Thus, *Timimoun* constitutes an imaginative journey into the desert space through realistic events that combine the writer’s past and present.

2.2. Ahmed Al-Siddiq

The novelist Ahmed Al-Siddiq represented the Algerian desert in his novel *Mamlakat Al-Zaywan (The Kingdom of Al-Zaywan)* through multiple symbols and connotations, beginning with the title and extending through its events and settings. The novel focuses on Algerian society and the ideological dimension associated with customs, traditions, and various issues that express its identity, particularly those related to inherited traditions, taking the desert space as its stage.

“The narrator transfers the narrative space from the private sphere to the public sphere, and with subtle maneuvering makes the game of ‘preservation’ a path of double interpretation: on the one hand, it expresses the self’s attachment to its memory in order to protect it from disappearance and oblivion; on the other hand, it points to the latent presence of history in the minds of some during times of hardship. Thus, this novel portrays the Tuat desert environment not merely as a geographical place, but as one bearing spiritual, religious, and cultural dimensions.” The desert is therefore not an ordinary place but rather a symbol of identity and authenticity.

2.3. Al-Habib Al-Sayeh

Another novel that achieved wide circulation and fame within the same historical and heritage-oriented context is *Tilka Al-Mahabba (That Love)* by Al-Habib Al-Sayeh. His engagement with the desert begins with the events of this novel, in which he addresses the particularity of the desert space through his depiction of the region of Adrar as a space that leads the human being into a world of imagination and asceticism, by mentioning certain Sufi connotations such as righteous saints.

The writer opens his novel with the following statement: “Because the novel is a copy of a reality that takes spirituality as its foundation, beginning with visitation, connected to righteousness, and culminating in sama’ (mystical audition)” (Mohamed Bouzizawi, 2017, p. 30). In his view, the desert is unlike other worlds, especially Adrar, which he considers a center of spiritual inspiration. He regards it positively, far removed from being merely a place of drought and barrenness. This is evident in his statement: “Adrar (a city in southern Algeria) does not dwell in my heart; rather, that is love—the reciprocity between imagination and being unleashes the river of love for the desert” (Hamid Abdelkader, 2018). From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the “love” in *That Love* by Al-Sayeh is Adrar itself.

2.4. Al-Saeed Boutajine

The novelist Al-Saeed Boutajine granted place a new dimension different from the conventional one by linking the desert setting to psychological and intellectual states as well as to geographical dimensions. It was not an ordinary setting framed in most Algerian and even Western novels. In his novel *A ‘udhu Billah*, “Tamentit” appears as a shared location in numerous Algerian novels due to its cultural importance. Many civilizations passed through it, endowing it with cultural richness that made it an exceptional cultural beacon. However, Al-Saeed Boutajine did not focus his attention on the historical and cultural aspect of the region; rather, he emphasized the geographical dimension, making place an active character bearing multiple dimensions. He “deals with the real place and grants it a name identical to its existence in reality, in order to make places express the oppression to which human beings are subjected everywhere, and to reveal certain intellectual and psychological aspects of the character through the description of place, relying on the stream-of-consciousness technique in his depiction of place” (Abdullah Karroum, 2023, p. 305).

It is noteworthy that writings about the world of the desert have varied according to the novelist’s perspective, that is, according to his ideology and his intellectual, cultural, social, and religious formation. Hence, a distinction emerged between the desert-themed novel written by its native sons and that written by the visiting creator. The desert possesses particular aspects known only to those who have grown up in its embrace. Therefore, the desert imaginary has had a prominent presence in Algerian creative works through the employment of its aesthetics in narrative production. Among these writers are Zayed Boufelja in his novel *A Nun in the Desert*; the daughter of the desert, Malika Mokeddem, in her novels *Al-Mamnu’a* (*The Forbidden*) and *I Owe Everything to Forgetting*; Ibrahim Saadi in his novel *In Search of Amal Al-Ghabrini*; as well as Jamila Talbaoui in her novels *Al-Khabiya* and *Wad Al-Hinna*, both laden with symbolic values and spatial identity; and *Al-Tarhan* by Abdullah Karroum, the subject of this study. Through it, we seek to

demonstrate its manifestations by examining the paratextual thresholds (the title) and the narrative body (the material and immaterial manifestations of the desert), in addition to the connotations of the desert within the novel itself.

In conclusion, the desert has become a space that accommodates numerous dimensions and connotations, foremost among them the spiritual, religious, and cultural dimensions.

3. Representations of the Desert in the Novel *Al-Tarhan* through Paratextual Thresholds

3.1. The Title of the Novel (*Al-Tarhan*)

The title is considered one of the most important principal keys that help us enter the literary work and decode its signs, for “it is a textual sign that seeks to reveal the features of the anticipated unknown (the text) and creates an atmosphere of familiarity that the reader relies upon before embarking on the journey of exploring the text and penetrating its internal corridors” (Abdullah Karroum, 2023, p. 15). This is what we seek to achieve through our study of the title of the novel *Al-Tarhan* and the disclosure of the relationship between it and the narrative body.

The title of the novel before us suggests numerous and varied connotations because it does not manifest in a single form; rather, it appears distributed between the intentionality of the creator and the perception of the recipient. It occurs as a subject with an omitted predicate, which makes it difficult to determine its meaning precisely. *Al-Tarhan* is an agreement known since ancient times in Tuat culture; it is an illegitimate and repudiated transaction. This is inferred from the narrator’s statement: “I sat with him one day after the afternoon prayer and began to write a reply to a question that had reached him, which was a request for a fatwa concerning the ruling on al-tarhan. He called one of the farmers from the region and asked him to explain the transaction. He then wrote to the inquirer that this transaction does not allow wealth to circulate among the people; therefore, he does not see it as permissible” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 45). That is, *al-tarhan* is an unlawful agreement resulting in grave consequences for one of the two parties.

By projecting this information onto the narrative body, we arrive at several connotations, among them that what is meant by *al-tarhan* is the colonizer who worked to seize and exploit Algerian land during the period of arbitrary confiscation and plunder of its resources for his own benefit. “Colonial France thinks only of its own interests in expanding its economy and exporting coal to Europe; it seeks grandeur and domination at the expense of the weak” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 160). The same applies to “Al-Sibai,” whom “Al-Na‘imi” exploited, taking advantage of his weakness and stripping him of his property in exchange for a small amount of wheat and a few coins to meet his needs during an extremely difficult

period he experienced. This compelled him to agree to sign the *tarhan*: “The student Qallush read to me the document of al-tarhan, then hid it under his sleeve and raised his fingers upward, saying: ‘You know this is the appointed time’... With a stroke of his pen, the student Qallush began to remove ownership and transfer Sabkhat Aoumer, which I had inherited from my grandfather as a trust, from my possessions to the possessions of Al-Na‘imi” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 104). It is a transaction that appears as mercy outwardly but is calamity inwardly.

In the novel, *al-tarhan* is greater than being merely an agreement among the men of Tuat; the author’s intention may extend to those unjust agreements that France concluded with the local population. This is evident in his statement: “As for others, some are forcibly conscripted into the ranks of the French army, or work in their military bases voluntarily like me, or are compelled to endure hardship in the coal mines of Kenadsa, like Baza’s tragic experience in its chapters and conclusion” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, pp. 192–193). The colonizer would agree with the locals to work in his institutions in exchange for a meager wage insufficient to sustain them. In addition, the cover image is connected to the content of the novel, which reflects the resistance and defiance of the desert men against the French colonizer, their refusal to submit to his tyranny, and their attachment to their land and identity.

3.2. The Cover of the Novel

The cover contains two palm trees, and the palm tree, for the people of the desert, is a symbol of goodness, strength, challenge, and authenticity. In addition, the presence of a man dressed in desert attire indicates their adherence to their principles, values, and Arab identity, since traditional clothing is part of our heritage and identity.

At the center of the cover, the man appears intent on confronting the winds that seek to displace him from his place, even to uproot him. The man represents the inhabitants of the Tuat region and their stand against the colonizer and his colonial plans. The winds symbolize the infernal French authority that strives relentlessly to efface the identity of Algerians and dispossess them of their land and honor; yet its dream will never be realized, for the Algerians stand vigilant. This is conveyed through the resistance of the desert man depicted on the cover against the violent winds.

4. Representations of the Desert in the Narrative Body of *Al-Tarhan*

4.1. The Desert as a Symbol of Identity and Belonging

The desert is a profound space that translates the spirit of identity and belonging in an unparalleled manner, by virtue of the principles and foundations it embodies that render it unique and expressive of national identity as a whole through

its customs, traditions, celebratory and funerary rituals, its distinct language, and its historical authenticity. For this reason, the issue of identity has been considered one of the most dangerous matters that cannot be compromised.

Just as Algerians fought the French colonizer who attempted to distort their identity, standing against him with sword, soul, and pen, Abdullah Karroum sought to demonstrate in this novel the resistance of the desert human being to the colonizer who attempted to efface his identity and impose Frenchness through various methods of intimidation and enticement. Yet he continued his struggle and adherence to his identity, for it is the essence of the individual. Identity is “the set of physical, psychological, moral, legal, social, and cultural characteristics through which the individual can know himself, present himself, and be recognized by others, and through which he feels that he exists as a human being with a set of roles and functions that make him feel accepted and acknowledged as he is by others or by the group or culture to which he belongs” (Sharfi Rahima, 2013, p. 193).

Identity is what makes the individual belong to a specific group, with rights and duties, or alien to it if he does not possess its foundations. This applies to the desert human being through his appearance and clothing, his language and dialect, and other details that make him distinctive and recognizable wherever he may be. This is confirmed by Ralph Linton’s definition of identity as “the integrated set of the individual’s mental and psychological traits, that is, the total sum of his mental capacities, feelings, beliefs, habits, and conditioned emotional responses” (Ralph Linton, 1964, p. 605). This is embodied in the people of the desert through their characteristics that distinguish them from others in a culturally distinct manner, expressing identity in Algeria.

The son of the desert embodies this identity through his clothing, attributes, and culture that distinguish him from others and express his authenticity and belonging. The image of identity and belonging to the desert can be observed through several elements, including:

4.2. Representations of the Desert in *Al-Tarhan* through Customs and Traditions

Algerian heritage constitutes a barrier against external cultural invasion because it contains the nation’s reservoir of customs, traditions, arts, experiences, and everything that expresses national identity, especially customs and traditions and their role in linking generations together. Customs are considered “a behavior or behavioral pattern that the social group has deemed correct and good because it conforms to the prevailing cultural heritage; if we apply the normative coercive force of custom, it may be called folkways” (Hashem Mohamed Hashem & Maryam Jalai,

2012, p. 76). That is, customs are behavioral patterns practiced within a particular society.

As for traditions, they are “norms widespread in a country or common among a class of people; that is, noble traits and dispositions, and distinction in relation to others” (Jbour Abdel Nour, 1984, p. 75). They are the relationships that distinguish one region from another, as is the case in the Algerian desert, which is characterized by essential customs and traditions that have made it a symbol of civilization and identity in Algeria. This prompted Abdullah Karroum to highlight this image in his novel *Al-Tarhan*, portraying the details of life in desert society, particularly the Tuat region.

Based on the foregoing, we will attempt to extract representations of the desert through the customs and traditions presented by the author in his novel.

4.3. Material Representations of the Desert in *Al-Tarhan*

4.3.1. Clothing

Clothing is a distinguishing marker that sets one people apart from others; it is therefore a cultural creation specific to one region rather than another. It “provides a profound vision of the spirit of the age and prevailing traditions; clothing is a mirror of society’s conditions and circumstances, and its production was not merely spontaneous and automatic, but subject to an artistic vision stemming from cultural and civilizational specificity” (Omar Messaoudi, 2018, p. 8). The diversity of traditional garments in Algerian society reflects the richness of the country’s cultural heritage, including desert attire addressed by Abdullah Karroum in *Al-Tarhan*.

The novelist sought to clarify the distinctiveness of desert society through his description of its clothing, as seen in his statement: “A white cloak, a wide Arab trousers, and a turban with many folds until it became like an umbrella; and before one end of the turban finished by about a span, he attached to it a wrapped and reddened amulet that appeared in the upper layer of his decorated headcloth to ward off envy and the evil eye” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 102). Through this statement, he refers to the clothing of the wealthy class in desert regions. This is evident in the attachment of the amulet to the turban out of fear of the evil eye, which they believe protects them from envy. Notably, the wealthy adhere to their traditional dress despite their status in Tuat, as an expression of pride and attachment. The white cloak, Arab trousers, and turban are essential elements that distinguish the desert individual both within and outside his region, especially “the turban, which Sheikh Al-Idrisi called the crown of the Arabs, and he often repeated: ‘Turbans are the crowns of the Arabs; if the Arabs lay down their turbans, they lay down their glory and honor’” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 156). This is why the desert man does not abandon his turban, as a sign of pride in his Arabness and origin. The turban is not

merely a piece of cloth protecting the head from heat; it is a symbol of dignity, honor, manhood, and identity. Wearing it expresses belonging and pride in heritage and national culture. Losing or abandoning it represents a loss of dignity, honor, and cultural identity. This is confirmed by Abdullah Al-Ghamdi's statement that the desert person "wears the turban so that it may be a sign and an indication announcing his identity and nationality; since it is his crown, it is also a source of pride that he is keen to display and proclaim" (Abdullah Al-Ghamdi, 2005, pp. 99–100). The turban is thus an important symbol in Arab and Islamic cultures, particularly in desert society.

As for the garment expressing elegance and purity, it is the burnous, which is usually worn only by those of high status, especially when it is white, symbolizing wisdom, shrewdness, dignity, and elevated status: "The student Sallouh came with his dignity wrapped in his white burnous and led the people in the two rak'as of the Eid prayer" (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 84). The imam's adornment in the white burnous during Eid prayer indicates that the burnous carries significant religious and spiritual value, reflecting commitment and respect for religion and its values.

As for the daughters of the Tuat region, they are distinguished by modesty that enhances their beauty and grace, as reflected in their modest dress. "Qadriya was a Tuati princess who won beauty, intelligence, and modesty, adorned in her green jalbaniya cloak, covered by a speckled headscarf from which round silver ornaments hung down toward her earrings" (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 79). The term "cloak" here denotes a wide, loose garment consistent with Islamic teachings, for desert society is conservative and adheres to its religion, unaffected by Western culture that calls for display and abandonment of Arab values and principles.

Another type of women's garment is the *malaya*, usually black, with which a woman covers her body when leaving home. It has a special language understood only by desert inhabitants, making them distinctive and respected: "The women were wrapped in their malayas" (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 124). Each difference and distinction possesses its own beauty. The *malaya* carries several connotations; it is usually worn by married and elderly women, though most women may wear it when attending funerals, as they did at the funeral of Al-Nujoum Abu Al-Sibai, the novel's hero.

4.3.2. Food

Every society is distinguished by its heritage, customs, and traditions consistent with its culture and environment, including desert food characterized by simplicity and the use of available resources in harmony with the desert environment, making it healthy food.

Among the famous dishes in the Tuat region is dried meat (*qadid*): “the plate piled with flatbread and dried meat accompanied by Arab fat” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 69). *Qadid* is camel or sheep meat cut into small pieces, heavily salted, and filled with aged fat—a fatty substance that prevents bacterial infiltration—then placed under the sun until completely dry. It is subsequently stored for long periods and consumed when needed. This dish is healthy and compatible with desert heat; drying removes the fat, leaving only protein. It signals the ingenuity of the desert person who exploits his harsh climate to his advantage.

It is noteworthy that each occasion has its specific dishes appropriate to its nature, making desert cuisine abundant and varied. The narrator states: “The night of the fourteenth of October descended upon us like a dear guest, and we held the ‘Tanja Tober.’ Its aromas spread, and the trunks of the blazing palm tree flared to bake local wheat bread on a smooth stone, while the women’s fingers skillfully fashioned the thin bread slices after baking into small pieces, then mixed them with the broth of dried meat saved from the sacrificial offering. The bread slices met the meat stew in a bowl adorned with eggs, glistening with fat to dye the eaters” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 70). The people of Tuat celebrate the agricultural season in October each year, praying that it will be auspicious, and they prepare the dish “Tober,” named after it, in celebration of this season.

In addition, there is the dish of “Al-Nayir,” called “the seven vegetables,” representing Tuat society and expressing its connection to its environment, since cooking traditional foods is an essential part of these celebrations. They gather to welcome the new agricultural seasons in an atmosphere of distinctive natural colors and flavors. The novelist states: “We ate the Nayir dish with its stew, eggs, and thin bread, and I pledged with Baza, as every landowner does with the fifth share, to make her happy; his mother Zaida blessed the effort and prepared the ‘seven vegetables’ dish, gathering them from the garden, cutting them, and placing them in a pickled dish. Then she honored us with it on the night of Nayir so that our agricultural year might be blessed” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 96). This indicates the special place of agricultural seasons in the lives of the inhabitants, who depend on nature for their crops and food. Their celebrations demonstrate respect and appreciation for nature and simple life, as well as values of collective unity and cooperation. All this appears through dedicating a special dish to this season, cooked in every home on a specific day.

As for dates, they are the cherished daughter of the desert; no home is without them. Some are eaten immediately, some offered to guests, others stored as provisions, and the rest directed to sale or barter, such as for wheat or other household items. “When winter comes and the dates dry, people remove them from their old stalks, then pound some of them in the mortar until they become powder, placing it

in a palm-frond container called a ‘tadara,’ with a cylindrical base and a lid like that used for wheat, preserving the powder to serve the guest when he comes. Some of the remaining dried dates are buried in a silo to be eaten during the rest of the year” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 50). Dates in desert regions symbolize generosity, bounty, goodness, and blessing.

As for mint tea, it is closely linked to the desert environment and is its distinctive sign; no gathering is without the tea tray present. “I perform the rituals of the tea session after dinner... the mint has released refreshing wafts of its fragrance, and beside it the sugar bowl carries the tea box and images of another herb whose scent has spread—wormwood and ghbariya—supporting the tea with the saltiness of flavor” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 101). The ritual of drinking tea is indispensable for the desert individual; it is the sole refuge after the day’s fatigue. “They drink toasts of tea three times a day, subject to increase but not decrease” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 25), that is, after every main meal, due to its benefits in aiding digestion and other advantages that have made them strongly attached to it.

As for the utensils in which the people of Tuat eat, they are wooden bowls made from palm trunks. The family gathers around them, as do guests on occasions. The narrator says: “We laughed as she removed the pot from its heat and poured the ‘taqdir’ dish with its rounded pieces kneaded from local wheat into the wooden dinner bowl” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 86). This gathering around the bowl indicates cohesion and unity among the people of the region, and serves as evidence of shared affection and the familiarity prevailing in Tuat society.

4.3.3. Religious Rituals

Religious rituals constitute a series of actions or sacred behaviors practiced in an organized manner with the aim of consolidating religious belonging. They contribute to defining the religious cultural identity of characters and communities within the narrative work. Religious rituals may also serve as a means of expressing beliefs and moral values that represent an essential component of desert society’s culture, as demonstrated in the narrative body of the novel under study.

The Qur’an is regarded as a primary source of wisdom and is employed in the novel in various contexts, including the expression of faith and closeness to God, which is customary. However, the author here employs it in a distinctive manner by selecting a verse from Surat al-Rahman that contains the name of his beloved, as he states: “I enumerate the beauty of Al-Yaqt, and at times I repeat the verse from Surat al-Rahman: ‘as though they were rubies and coral’” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 63). This verse describes the houris in Paradise, likening their beauty to rubies and coral, and it alludes to the splendor and magnificence awaiting the believers in Paradise. This employment demonstrates the author’s profound attachment to his

Islamic faith and his adherence to the Qur'an, which he integrates even into his daily discourse.

The practice of religious rituals was not confined to the elders of desert society; young children also had a role in performing these rituals, as reflected in the novel: "On the Day of 'Arafah, the children wear their finest clothes and go around the houses in our ksar and its surroundings, carrying a board decorated with saffron containing drawings, miniatures, and the opening verses of Surat al-Fath, borne by their leader. Whenever they enter a house, their leader -whom the talib selects with his own eyes- begins reciting the opening of Surat al-Fath: 'Indeed, We have granted you a clear conquest,' and behind him the children repeat: 'O God, Amen'" (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 116). Thus, children in the Tuat region are raised upon the teachings of Islam and love for it. They imitate the pilgrims on the Day of 'Arafah by circumambulating the houses as though they were circumambulating the Holy Kaaba. This demonstrates the keenness of the people of Tuat to instill Islamic values in children by encouraging them to celebrate the Day of 'Arafah. Surat al-Fath expresses the blessed conquest achieved by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the Muslims in Mecca, as well as the victories witnessed by the Arab nation, indicating pride in identity and ancestral history.

The people of Tuat were also keen to raise their children to respect and honor the sheikhs and notable figures of the tribe, as illustrated by the narrator's statement: "Since my awareness blossomed, I have known that my mother warned me against the mosque's palm tree and that I should not approach its dates, not even its fallen ones" (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 115). The imam of the mosque, according to the people of Tuat, is the sheikh of the kuttab; he is granted a high status among them because he is the teacher of their children and the possessor of knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, they tolerate no offense against him, in reverence for his standing and in magnification of his position within Tuat society.

Moreover, the memorization of the Qur'an is accompanied by a set of diverse religious rituals and practices that motivate children to memorize it and instill within them love for distinction and for the Book of God Almighty. In this context, Abdullah Karroum states: "In my grandfather's circle, I witnessed a student who had memorized the Qur'an and for whom the ceremony of the hafiz and its rituals were completed—his left hand dyed with henna. I approached him and asked about the gifts he had received. He told me that his mother had adorned him with a silver ring, and that his father had written a special bequest for him: gardens in their entirety, with all their trees and water, exclusively his without his brothers" (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 128). The people of Tuat honor the memorizer of the Qur'an and grant him a distinguished status even among his siblings. This reflects pride in an identity whose people honor their children who memorize the Book of God by

offering valuable gifts as encouragement to continue drawing closer to God Almighty.

4.3.4. Intangible Representations of the Desert in *Al-Tarhan*

Melhoun Poetry

Popular *melhoun* poetry represents a source of human themes, as it expresses various social, cultural, political, and even economic issues in a language that blends classical and colloquial Arabic. “Poetry in itself -especially popular poetry- has long served as a transmitter of the people’s emotions and feelings in an artistic form expressed in a smooth Arabic dialect close to simple souls” (Sabrina Bougfa, 2021, p. 874). Thus, the desert poet expresses his emotions and visions in melhoun poetic forms that represent him and the nature of the life he lives.

The inhabitants of the desert are skilled in melhoun poetry and use it frequently; whenever an incident occurs to one of them, he immediately composes a poetic passage about it, expressing himself and conveying what he intends in an artistic and purposeful manner simultaneously. This occurred with “Baza” in the novel when “Dahman al-Naqqar” threatened to pursue his daughter:

“I will reach her,
Even if you see me strike down ‘Umar, O mother, or scatter my bones
in the grave,
Even if the raven turns gray and the owl dies,
Even if the stone speaks,
Even if the mule gives birth to a human on condition and bears twins,
And the palm tree bears no dates” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 29).

From this passage, the courage of the desert individual, his defiance and determination to attain his aim despite the hardships he faces, become evident through the powerful imagery he employs in his poetry.

The desert is the homeland of poetic geniuses, as it is a vast and enchanting space inspiring poets and artists in various themes and fields, as inferred from the novel. “Al-Shallali composed poetry in several genres, including love poetry—which constituted most of his poems—as well as praise, Sufism, and description. In his later days, he inclined toward asceticism and repentance. When death overtook him in the city of Laghouat, he elegized himself as Malik ibn al-Rayb had done, saying:

“Tell my mother, O patience of yours,
In Al-Shallali your reward is great” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 32).

This indicates the deep bond between the desert individual and poetry; even on his deathbed, uttering his final breaths, he invests every drop of his feelings and thoughts in crafting his words and composing his verses, for he senses that his poetry is an inseparable part of his existence and identity, adopting it as a path and direction in conducting his way of life.

Among the images expressing the virility of the desert poet is that his poetry is directed toward supporting the oppressed and the weak who find no defender but a sensitive poet calling for justice and human values. This led Abdullah Karroum to devote space to it in his novel:

“Al-Hablawi rose up, saying:
Since the witnesses drowned in a salty sea,
They erase and rewrite with force,
Even the qaf and the dad graze freely,
A penny of speech they overturn” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 33).

Such poetry aimed at condemning deviants has a profound impact on them, for poetry among them is sacred and holds a respected status. Thus, those engaged in intrigue and corruption fear scandal and disgrace among the people. Accordingly, melhoun poetry in desert society performs the role of reformer and spokesperson of truth when corruption and injustice spread.

Popular Proverbs

The author expresses the image of the desert and longing for its land and scent through a popular proverb that reinforces the spirit of belonging, stating: “The pigeon may fly wherever it flies, but it returns to its nest” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 14). That is, despite colonial efforts to uproot him and distance him from his identity, his adherence to the idea of returning to his family and homeland enabled him to stand firm against the punishments he faced under exploitative colonial policies such as compulsory conscription. This indicates a spirit of belonging and deep-rooted attachment to the homeland.

In another proverb, we perceive the value of remaining faithful to one’s origin versus abandoning it, as in the narrator’s statement: “I do not think silver turns into copper” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 15). This was said by Al-Yaqut to Al-Sibai when he met her after returning from Vietnam. On the surface, it refers to Al-Sibai’s betrayal of his beloved Al-Yaqut, whom he loved but replaced with a Vietnamese wife. Al-Yaqut came to regard him with contempt and belittlement after he had occupied a precious and esteemed place in her imagination—silver versus copper, the former precious and the latter base. On a deeper level, it reveals the author’s

distinction between one loyal to his homeland and the traitor, whom he likens to copper of far lesser value than silver.

Another proverb, in a different context, emphasizes complete rupture within the family due to inheritance disputes: “If you divorce her, do not show her the door of the house” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 62). It reflects the refusal of reconciliation after tensions among relatives and the rejection of compromise, for matters have reached their peak and nothing remains to be repaired. Divorce symbolizes the end of the path and the exhaustion of attempts. Inheritance leads to the fragmentation of families in Tuat society despite their unity in other circumstances.

5. Connotations of the Desert in *Al-Tarhan*

5.1. Wandering and Loss

The connotation of wandering and loss appears explicitly in the novel through the organization of the salt caravan and what befell them on the road. The narrator states: “She preceded me in speaking about our journey tomorrow to fetch salt in distant Al-Bayada, about the length of the road and its loneliness, about its adventures, its ghosts, and its stories seen in the palm and mud dwellings...” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 77). The desert is a place of adventure; even a simple journey may entail much, given its unexpected surprises that alter the purpose of the trip, as occurred with the salt expedition and the unforeseen calamities that befell them: “A violent wind blew, they lost their way, landmarks vanished, and the force of the wind bent the donkeys’ necks westward and carried them far away. The eldest realized that the distance covered was sufficient to connect them to the ksar, demanding that they halt and informing them that they were possibly in al-Hamla. They felt for their provisions, only to discover that a grave matter had befallen them” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 82).

Thus, the novelist charges the wind with the connotation of destruction and transformation from good to bad. Wind becomes a cause of wandering and loss, as it produces sandstorms that alter surrounding topography, leading travelers unknowingly astray. Salvation from such loss is considered a great achievement among desert people, who recognize its difficulty. The author states in this context: “The aged roosters danced from the pain of slaughter in the pits and open spaces” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 88), expressing the villagers’ joy through slaughtering chickens to prepare dinner as a ransom for the safe return of their sons from the danger of being lost in the vast desert wilderness, even though they are sons of the desert aware of its secrets.

5.2. Drought and Aridity

In *Al-Tarhan*, Abdullah Karroum clarifies the value of a drop of water in the desert, linking it to death, indicating that the journey to obtain water is fraught with dangers and challenges: “A drop of water in the thirsty desert—brought with the salinity of sweat and the acidity of blood—claimed the lives of dozens, victims of the struggle with harsh life for survival amid the sand dune and what secrets it concealed in its depths” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 22). Fetching water reflects the human struggle with nature and the harsh environment, illustrating the fragile balance between life and death. The desert is so harsh that obtaining a drop of water equals the lives of its inhabitants, as happened with ‘Al-Nujoum’ in the novel.

“Our water in the foggara of Hano is precious, as in other regions of Tuat, Gourara, and Tidikelt -its three territories that together form Greater Tuat... They say ‘a grain of water,’ which is like love itself; people in that time loved it as an enduring love on this earth between Adam and Eve. For its sake wars were waged, states perished, and peoples were destroyed -perhaps that love surpassed all description” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 23). Water sources in the desert are the beating heart of life; thus, the foggara is a source of existence. Their love for water resembles the eternal love of Adam and Eve. Hence, the desert becomes entrenched in social consciousness as a barren and arid region.

5.3. Security and Tranquility

It is noteworthy that the desert individual is naturally inclined to love nature and all its components -the desert. He cannot endure distance from his homeland because of the unique security and incomparable tranquility it offers, which no other place can replace despite temptations. This was evident in French colonial attempts to distance desert inhabitants from their homeland through compulsory conscription; yet it failed to persuade them and resorted to coercion. Their ultimate wish remained to return to the embrace of their town. The narrator says: “I even contemplated returning to the embrace of my mother and my town in search of safety and fewer afflictions” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 164). He likens his town, the Tuat region, to a mother’s embrace—an embrace incomparable to any other. The security and tranquility of the desert attract visitors who seek to recover their breath exhausted by the chaos and pressures of the city. Its calm resembles psychological therapy that soothes the human soul and renders it more balanced and joyful.

5.4. Knowledge and Wisdom

The people of the desert are distinguished by patience and steadfastness—qualities characteristic of seekers of knowledge. The desert sheikhs of Algeria are among the most prominent scholars and sages, enjoying high esteem in society and characterized by moderation and profound knowledge of literature, arts, and religious values. People are guided by their advice in various matters, consulting

them on daily and religious affairs. The narrator confirms: “With Sheikh Moulay Ahmed, I became acquainted with Maqamat al-Hariri, Nafh al-Tib of al-Maqri, and Al-‘Iqd al-Farid of Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih. In jurisprudence, he opened for me the Risala of Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawani and the Mukhtasar of Khalil with its profound commentaries. In private lessons, he spoke to me about French colonialism and its evils, and about the region’s need for educational revival and combating illiteracy” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 44). It is a beacon of knowledge from whose kuttab, schools, and Qur’anic zawiyas many scholars and sages have graduated.

Another path followed by desert inhabitants toward knowledge and wisdom is immersion in books and manuscripts and practicing writing from an early age, as inferred from the narrator’s statement: “I grew up among books, inkwells, and pens; in its courtyard, if I stumbled, an inkwell impeded me, and if I fell, I fell upon a manuscript whose fragrance I inhaled and with whose Maghrebi-Andalusian script I adorned my eyes” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 109). The desert individual grew up in an environment rich in all forms of knowledge, generating in him the capacity to confront life’s challenges and obstacles more effectively.

5.5. Beauty and Splendor

The desert is distinguished by its unique beauty and enchanting splendor. Among its elements and principal components mentioned by Abdullah Karroum in his novel: “A palm tree rose high bearing goodness; I ascended as a sun illuminating the darkness of the desert, a light that rescued me from the darkness of the camel and its enclosure and opened me to the world and its lights” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 233). The palm tree is a blessed tree symbolizing the beauty and bounty of the desert; thus, desert inhabitants grant it profound importance, expressing the extent of their connection to it as a symbol of authenticity and Arabness. “Hours passed as I stood before the palm tree (Bannakhlof), carving the climber’s supports and perfecting the image of the bride, beautifying her for her beholder” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 170). In the same context, the narrator states: “I stand before the palm tree as a sculptor stands before a rock to fashion from it an enchanting masterpiece; I keep vigil to make of the palm tree the bride of the desert” (Abdullah Karroum, 2022, p. 169). The palm tree reflects the beauty and bounty of the desert and symbolizes antiquity and culture.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of our study, we have reached a set of findings, the most important of which are:

- The image of the desert at the beginning of Arabic novelistic writing in general, and Algerian writing in particular, was associated with the

geographical dimension; that is, as a place framed by specific measurements and boundaries (length, width, area, etc.).

- In the contemporary novel, the image of the desert has transcended the geographical dimension and has come to carry semantic dimensions ranging between life and death, freedom and transformation, introversion and imagination, depending on the author's intentionality.
- The multiplicity of the desert's manifestations in the novel in general, and in *Al-Tarhan* in particular, is due to the diversity of ideological backgrounds and intellectual visions of each novelist.
- The representations of the desert in *Al-Tarhan* were neither detached from realism nor confined to symbolism; rather, they constituted a subtle mixture at times and a profound one at many others.
- Despite the harshness of the desert environment as a desolate and fearsome space, it is also a space of beauty, comfort, and serenity.
- Desert clothing in *Al-Tarhan* transcends its material aspect and becomes a symbol of local culture and national identity, reinforcing the spirit of belonging to the homeland and to the Arab-Islamic nation.
- The popular poet in desert society performs the role of reformer, spokesperson of truth, and educator of the younger generation when corruption and injustice prevail.
- Melhoun poetry in the desert is an artistic and cultural expression and a message encompassing numerous values and principles that reflect the nature of life in desert societies.
- Desert food is not merely sustenance, but an expression of solidarity, belonging, and attachment to land and religion. This is manifested in the most beautiful forms of cooperation, mutual support, and affection during religious, national, and personal occasions.

These are the principal findings reached. The Algerian novel in general, and *Al-Tarhan* in particular, remains a distinctive narrative text characterized by its poetic language and enriched with dense semantic charges and diverse epistemological issues. As much as it opens onto vast semantic spaces, it simultaneously closes upon them. It remains a fertile text requiring deep readings through various methodological approaches in order to extract its semantic dimensions and aesthetic secrets.

References

- 1- ‘Abdullah Al-Ghāmīdī (2005). *Al-thaqāfah al-tilfīzyūnīyah (Suqūt al-nukhbah wa-burūz al-sha‘bī)* (2nd ed.). Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī 2ed, Beyrouth.
- 2- ‘Abdullah Karroum (2022). *Al-Ṭarḥān* (2nd ed.). Dār al-Khayāl lil-Nashr wa-al-Tarjamah, Bordj Bou Arreridj, Algeria.
- 3- ‘Abdullah Karroum (2023). Tamentit wa-ḥuḍūruhā fī al-riwāyah al-jazā’irīyah: Sīmiyā’īyat al-mashhad fī riwāyat “A‘ūdhu bi-llāh” li-Sa‘īd Būṭājīn namūdhajan. *Dirāsāt*, 12(1) University of Bechar.
- 4- ‘Abdurrahman Munīf (1980). *Al-nihāyāt*. Dār al-Hilāl, Egypt.
- 5- ‘Abdurrahman Munīf, & Jabra, Ibrahim Jabra (1992). *Ālam bilā kharā’iṭ* (2nd ed.). Al-Mu’assasah al-‘Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, Beyrouth.
- 6- Amina Muhammad Barānīn, A. M. (2010). *Faḍā’ al-ṣaḥrā’ fī al-riwāyah al-‘arabīyah*. Ghaidaa Publishing and Distribution House, Amman.
- 7- Bilal Koussa (2021), “The Narrativity of the Desert: Toward Reshaping the Narrative Experience from the Perspective of Ibrahim Al-Koni,” *Journal of Setif 2 University*, Algeria, 16 (02).
- 8- Faisal Muhammad Darrāj (2004). ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf wa-masā’alat al-tārīkh. *Nizwa Cultural Section Periodical, Sultanate of Oman, Issue: 38*.
- 9- Ghassan Fayez Kanafani, G. (2013). *Rijāl fī al-shams*. Dār Manshūrāt al-Rimāl, Egypt.
- 10- Hamid Abd al-Qādir (2018, April 29). Ḥuḍūr al-ṣaḥrā’ fī al-riwāyah al-jazā’irīyah: Al-iḥtīfā’ bi-al-insān ‘alā dharrāt al-raml. *Daffah Thālitha*, <http://diffah.aiaraby.co.uk>
- 11- Hāshim Muhammed Hāshim & Maryam Jalāyī, M. (2012). Al-‘ādāt wa-al-taqālīd al-nūbīyah fī riwāyat “Al-la‘b fawqa jibāl al-Nūbah.” *Dirāsāt fī al-‘Ulūm al-Insānīyah*, Tarbiat Modares University, Iran, Issue 02.
- 12- Huda Abu Ghunayma (2017), “Manifestations of the Desert in the Works of Munif and Al-Koni,” *Oud Al-Nad Magazine*, Jordan, Quarterly Issue 03.
- 13- Ibrahim Šāhirī (2003). *Al-faḍā’ wa-lughat al-sard fī riwāyat ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Munīf*. Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, Casablanca.
- 14- Jabbour Abdelnour (1984). *Al-mu‘jam al-adabī* (2nd ed.). Dār al-‘Ilm lil-Malāyīn, Beyrouth.
- 15- Maryam Muhammad Marin and Muhammad Abdullah (2014), Text and Textuality in the Sahrawi Novel, Ibrahim Al-Darghouthi’s novel “Behind the

Mirage... A Little” as a model, Culture for Publishing and Distribution, Tunisia, 1st edition.

16- Muhammad Bouzizaoui, M. (2017). Tajalliyāt al-turāth al-šūfī fī riwāyat “Tilka al-maḥabbah” li-al-Ḥabīb al-Sāyeḥ. (Issue 11).

17- Rahima Sharafī (2013). Al-huwīyah al-thaqāfīyah al-jazā’irīyah wa-taḥaddiyāt al-‘awlamah. *Majallat al-‘Ulūm al-Insānīyah wa-al-Ijtimā’īyah*, (11), Algeria.

18- Ralph Linton (1964). *Dirāsāt al-insān* (A. al-Nāshif, Trans.). Al-Maktabah al-‘Aṣrīyah. (Original work published 1936)

19- Saad ‘Abdulrahman Al-Bāzī’ī (1991). *Thaqāfat al-ṣaḥrā’*: *Dirāsāt fī adab al-Jazīrah al-‘Arabīyah al-mu‘āṣirah* (2nd ed.). Sharikat al-‘Ubaykān lil-Ṭibā‘ah.

20- Sabrina Boukoffa (2021). Tamaththulāt al-ṣaḥrā’ fī al-shi‘r al-sha‘bī al-jazā’irī (Qirā’ah fī qaṣīdat Ḥīziyyah li-Ibn Qayṭūn). *Majallat ‘Ulūm al-Lughah al-‘Arabīyah wa-Ādābihā*, 13(3).

21- Saeed ‘Abdullah Al-Ghānimī (2006). *Malḥamat al-ḥudūd al-quṣwā: Al-mukhayyāl al-ṣaḥrāwī fī adab al-Kūnī*. Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-‘Arabī, Casablanca.

22- Šāliḥ Šāliḥ (1996). *Al-riwāyah al-‘arabīyah wa-al-ṣaḥrā’*. Wizārat al-Thaqāfah, Damascus.

23- Šāliḥ Wala‘a (2014). *Al-mukhayyal al-ṣaḥrāwī fī al-riwāyah al-‘arabīyah*. Manshūrāt Makhbar al-Adab al-‘Āmm wa-al-Muqāran, university of Badji Mokhtar – Annaba (Algeria).

24- Umar Mas‘ūdī, & ‘Abdulkarim Rafīq (2018). Qaḍīyat al-libās fī al-mujtama‘ al-jazā’irī bayna al-ḥadāthah wa-al-qiyam. *Al-Bāḥith fī al-‘Ulūm al-Insānīyah wa-al-Ijtimā’īyah*, (13).

25- Waciny Al-A‘raj (1986). *Ittijāhāt al-riwāyah al-‘arabīyah fī al-Jazā’ir*. Al-Mu‘assasah al-Waṭanīyah lil-Kitāb.