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Desert Life Matters: A Comparative Study of the Narratives of Space in Selected Postmodern Novels

A THESIS SUBMITTED

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بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

﴿ أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ ٱللَّهَ أَنزَلَ مِنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ مَآءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِۦ ثَمَرَٰتٍ مُّخْتَلِفًا أَلْوَٰنُهَا ۚ وَمِنَ ٱلْجِبَالِ جُدَدٌۢ بِيضٌ وَحُمْرٌ مُّخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَٰنُهَا وَغَرَابِيبُ سُودٌ ﴾

الزمر(21)

“Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky with which We bring forth fruits of different colours? And in the mountains are streaks of varying shades of white, red, and raven black;”

By Mustafa Khattab, The Clear Quran

Supervisor Certification

I certify that this thesis entitled "**Desert Life Matters: A Comparative Study of the Narratives of Space in Selected Postmodern Novels"** by **Ahmed Khashea Naji Abdullatif Al-Rawi**, was prepared under my supervision at the College of Arts, University of Anbar, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English Literature.

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Decision of the discussion committee

We certify that we have read this thesis, **"Desert Life Matters: A Comparative Study of the Narratives of Space in Selected Postmodern Novels",** and as Examining Committee, examined the student in its content, and that in our opinion it is adequate as a thesis for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature.

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Dedications

To My amazing Mother and Father,

My beloved Brothers and Sisters,

My cherished Friends,

Victims of Hurricane Daniel in Libya

I humbly dedicate this work

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Abstract

The desert is often depicted as a barren, empty, and meaningless space in literary works. Such depictions reinforce the notion of desert as unproductive, uninhabitable, and devoid of value, reflecting a utilitarian mindset that fails to appreciate these environments' intrinsic worth and diversity. However, these “wastelandish” narratives of the desert overlook the rich cultural histories, ecological complexities, and spiritual significance that many Indigenous communities attribute to desert places. Previous studies primarily focused on the desert narratives as a backdrop or shed light on the negative side of the desert. Thus, the current study investigates and compares the desert narratives of outsiders and insiders in Ibrahim Al-Koni’s *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1995) and Hernan Diaz’s *In the Distance* (2017). The current study analyzes the dynamics between ‘Asouf’ and ‘Cain’ in Arabic desert narratives, along with the depiction of ‘Håkan’ and ‘The Brennans’ in English desert narratives, through the lens of Marc Augé’s *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (1995). This study employs the assumptions of Augé’s concepts of “place” and “non-place” as the methodological tools for data analysis. Consequently, the study concludes that the desert narrative in the Arabic novel is a relational “place” that stands as a space of cultural and personal significance for the construction of identity, as in the case of Asouf and his community, contrasted with outsiders like Cain, who holds the Western narrative of the desert as an irrational “non-place” with valueless space. Comparatively, the American desert narrative of the English text initially appears as a “non-place” for Håkan, reflecting Augé's concept of a transitory and anonymous environment, yet, Håkan's immersion in the desert transforms it into a meaningful “place” that matters in constructing individual identity. Conversely, the desert narrative for the Brennans remains unrelational and meaningless as a space for articulating needs and desires, aligning with Augé's notion of “non-place”.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background of the Study

> *The desert is a place of terror and hauntings, a place of miracles and visions, a hell and a utopia. There, the Fathers lived as "true citizens of heaven" in a utopia that was "no place" on earth.* (Jasper 26)

The desert, a vast and enigmatic landscape, has captivated human imagination for millennia. Aidan Tynan argues in his book *The Desert in Modern Literature and Philosophy: Wasteland Aesthetics* that "The desert is where these two narratives – the surface narrative of human history and the geologic or cosmic narratives of deep time – are played out in a cyclonic embrace that turns the Middle East into a plane of immanence" (221). He also asserted that the desert is not a place but a way of being and thinking. It is the space of the unknown. It is the place where the old world is left behind, and the new one emerges. It is where thought can roam free, unencumbered by the constraints of history and tradition (188). On the other hand, Bahaa Taher, in his novel *Sunset Oasis*, stated, "The desert is a space in which people discover themselves" (18). According to Taher, the desert is a vast, desolate space characterized mainly by an unbroken expanse of desert sand stretching to the horizon, where the individual is forced to confront the harsh realities of life and death.

However, the study of the desert is not a new topic. Many Arabic and English writers, scholars, and researchers have dealt with it throughout history. Deserts have fascinated people since ancient times and inspired literature, art, and science. Writers, explorers, and scholars want to unravel its mysteries and document its profound influence on human culture, spirituality, and perception.

The desert plays a significant role in Arabic literature, symbolizing the unknown, the infinite, and the spiritual. The desert is often portrayed as a place of isolation, where characters can retreat from the distractions of everyday life and connect with the divine. The Arabian Desert has long been the center of an ancient history of poetry, beginning with pre-Islamic odes and encompassing a continuing succession of transmitted and disseminated oral poetic forms. (Al-Ghadeer 10)

For example, in the classic Arabic poem, The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, the poet Omar Khayyam describes the desert as a place where the "sands of Time" can be measured and where the "Wine of Life" can be savoured. Moreover, In *The Conference of the Birds*, a poem by Farid al-Din Attar, the desert is the setting for a group of birds who embark on a journey to find the legendary Simurgh bird, a symbol of spiritual enlightenment. Many Arabic writers have used the desert as a setting for their works, exploring its symbolism and themes. For example, in *The Cairo Trilogy* and *Miramar* by Naguib Mahfouz, the desert is portrayed as a place of escape from life. In addition, in *The Thousand and One Nights*, a collection of stories by various authors, the desert is the backdrop for tales of love, adventure, and magic. Other notable works that feature the desert include Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, *Sunset Oasis* by Bahaa Taher, and *The Sand Child* by Tahar Ben Jelloun; all these works demonstrate how the desert has been a rich source of inspiration for Arabic writers, serving as a symbol of the human journey and the search for meaning and spirituality.

In addition, Scholars have presented several studies on desert narratives, exploring the complex themes and cultural significance embedded within these texts. Among these studies is Kendra Lynne Pearson's paper, "Storytelling and Paradox in Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North" (2021). She discusses how Salih's novel undermines binary oppositions like East/West modern/traditional and

deconstructs competing postcolonial discourses through its relationships with Western texts like Othello and Heart of Darkness and modern Arabic novels. The desert plays an important symbolic and literal role. The desert represents a liminal space of transition, testing, and encounter with the unknown.

Moreover, Claudia Rapp's "Desert, City, and Countryside in the Early Christian Imagination" (2006) approaches the desert from a literary and historical perspective; Rapp examines the literary motif of the desert as the ideal location for monastic retreat and how this concept transformed from pagan to Christian literature. He argues that early Christianity absorbed and reshaped the multi-valent meaning of 'desert' established in various traditions, which retained its influence for centuries.

Furthermore, Naglaa Saad Hassan's "The Arab Desert in American Poetic Discourse" (2013) traces how the image and representation of the Arab desert have evolved in American poetry over time. It first examines the historical roots and contexts that shaped early portrayals, including Judeo-Christian teachings and westward expansion encounters. It then analyzes how contemporary poets depict the Arab desert, showing it is now influenced more by direct experience, though still tied to cultural/religious underpinnings. Arab American poets grapple with homeland political realities, while some non-Arab writers view it lyrically or spiritually. The Iraqi war also impacts soldier-poet perspectives. The Arab desert imagery remains contextually bound, reflecting the diverse backgrounds writers bring.

On the other hand, English literature has also offered insights into the desert narratives as a space of existential crisis and disorientation. The desert has been a recurring theme in English literature, often symbolizing the unknown, the exotic, and the harsh. In the works of authors such as H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and T.E. Lawrence, the desert is

portrayed as a vast, unforgiving expanse, a place of danger and adventure. For example, in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, the desert is a treacherous obstacle the protagonist must overcome to reach the fabled mines. Also, we have Lawrence's *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which offers a more nuanced portrayal of the desert as a place of beauty and spirituality, where the protagonist, Lawrence himself, finds a sense of peace and purpose. Moreover, the desert landscape has long been used in literature as a metaphorical space that explores themes of identity, memory, morality, and the human experience.

This is evident in works such as Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands* (1959), Paul Bowles' *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), and McCarthy's works, which are all set in the Sahara desert. The depiction of the desert serves as a setting for reenacting and retelling the American military's past as eschatological. In both works, violence is associated with rituals and ceremonies, and the desert has become central to how we imagine the world as lost and the Earth as dead. While these works reimagine the American frontier as violent and Westlandish, they also note space as the principal agent of power.

A wide array of studies have delved into desert narratives, one of the significant studies is Syrine C. Hout's "Grains of Utopia: The Desert as Literary Oasis in Paul Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* and Wilfred Thesiger's *Arabian Sands*" (2000), compares how the desert is portrayed as a utopian space or area of refuge in Bowles's *The Sheltering Sky* and Thesiger's *Arabian Sands*. Hout's paper delves into the concept of the desert as a potential utopian space within mid-20th-century Orientalist discourse, analyzing how the authors portray the desert as an alternative to the perceived corruption of Western civilization. (23)

Furthermore, Alison Bartlett's "Desire in the Desert: Exploring Contemporary Australian Desert Narratives" (2001) explores

contemporary Australian desert narratives by white women writers, analyzing how they represent desire, relationships, and connections to the land in contrast to traditional masculinized exploration narratives. The author suggests that the trope of desire offers new ways of conceptualizing narrative relations with the desert, accommodating dominant explorer narratives while also allowing for different perspectives, particularly around familial relationships, sexuality, and Indigenous presence.

From an ecological perspective, Meg Furniss Weisberg's "Jungle and Desert in Postcolonial Texts: Intertextual Ecosystems" explores postcolonial depictions of the desert and forest, with an emphasis on two novels by Étienne Goyémidé and Tahar Djaout, respectively, as examples: *Le silence de la forêt* (1984) and *L'invention du désert* (1987). Allusions abound in postcolonial literature's depictions of these "extreme" landscapes, and the works nearly always have an ongoing dialogue with the colonial genres that shaped how readers saw them. In modern postcolonial writing, the stylistic devices used to portray jungle and desert settings counter the homogenizing influences of the past and the present.

Similarly, David W. Teague, in his book *The Southwest in American Literature and Art: The Rise of a Desert Aesthetic* (1997), took an ecological approach to examine how Anglo Americans have viewed the desert landscapes of the Southwest over time. He focused on how different cultures described and related to the land to argue against the exploitative attitudes that have threatened the unique desert environments of the Southwest.

Furthermore, Astrid Ensslin's "Women in Wasteland – Gendered Deserts in T. S. Eliot and Shelley Jackson" (2005) examines how the gendered desert is portrayed in T.S. Eliot's modernist poem *The Waste Land* and Shelley Jackson's postmodern hypertext narrative *Patchwork Girl* - or *A Modern Monster*. The study analyses how these texts depict

the desert landscape as a gendered space and discusses how their representations differ between the modernist and postmodernist periods. Jackson presents the desert positively as a virtual frontier space where the female cyborg protagonist Patchwork Girl can freely develop alternative notions of femininity free from male influence. Thus, the research finds that the texts exemplify the shift from modernist pessimism to postmodernism regarding the female experience of the gendered desert landscape.

In addition, Rachel D. Friedman's research entitled "Deserts and Gardens: Herodotus and 'The English Patient'" (2014) discusses the tension in Michael Ondaatje's novel The English Patient between the desire to "erase nations" and reject national identities, and the longing for roots and attachment to place/territory. It draws parallels between Ondaatje's novel and the ancient Greek historian Herodotus's Histories in grappling with this tension between placelessness and rootedness. Friedman also explores how, in both novels, the desert acts as a setting of patriotism.

Moreover, Sergejs Polanskis's "Desert as Albert Camus' Absurd Landscape." (2013) explores the significance of the desert landscape in the writings of Albert Camus. Polanskis argues that the desert serves as a metaphor for the absurd condition of human existence, reflecting the hostile indifference of the universe towards human aspirations and struggles. The desert represents a space of emptiness, isolation, and confrontation with nothingness, where Camus' characters confront the absurd and find themselves trapped in a meaningless existence. Polanskis also examines how the desert functions as a central motif in Camus' works, symbolizing existential anguish and the search for authentic living in the face of the absurd.

Roslynn D. Haynes's book *Seeking the Centre: The Australian Desert in Literature, Art and Film* (2018) approaches the Australian

desert from a multidisciplinary perspective, delving into its profound impact on Australian culture through literature, art, and film. Haynes explores the desert as a physical landscape and a rich source of spiritual significance, as understood by the Aboriginal people. She traces the complex relationship between the desert and those who sought to conquer it, examining how early colonists grappled with this alien space. Furthermore, Haynes delves into the shifting perceptions of inland explorers in fiction and art, portraying them as heroes, failures, or subjects of psychological study through the lens of travellers, artists, novelists, photographers, and filmmakers.

Moreover, from a philosophical and existential perspective, Marlies Kronegger's "From Profane Space to the Sacred Place or Center in Désert" (1995) explores the desert as more than just a geographical space, but as a place that holds a deep significance for the characters. He distinguishes between space, which can be measured and defined by rational terms, and place, which represents the union of man and the natural world.

As we can see, the desert is recognized as a place that can shape one's character and worldview. The varied perspectives highlight how cultural lenses influence literary interpretations of the same environmental setting. Writers from different cultural backgrounds have approached the desert narratives from varying perspectives. These diverse backgrounds give rise to a broad spectrum of perspectives on the desert.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The desert is significant in Arabic literature as a place of unfamiliarity characterized by scarcity and hardship. It provides authors with symbolic opportunities to explore themes of isolation, struggle, and human resilience. On the other hand, English literature associates desert

with the idea of a lost world and a lifeless place, a Wasteland. In addition, the desert's cultural meaning has long been stigmatized by the dominant narratives that the desert solely stands for isolation and solitude, with negative associations and influences on inhabitants.

Several scholarly works have examined the desert in different literary works from various disciplinary perspectives, ranging from themes of loneliness and struggle (Hout, 2015), a tangible geographical place and an abstract imaginary landscape (Yeh, 2016), and postcolonial ecological representations (Weisberg, 1987) as examples. These diverse disciplinary approaches provide insights into the complex narratives of the desert.

However, past studies have overlooked analyzing the narratives of desert that matter in shaping the destiny of insiders and outsiders in Hernán Díaz's *In the Distance* (2017) and Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990), particularly in light of Marc Augé's theorization of "place" and "non-place". More importantly, comparing the English-Arabic narratives of the desert in the selected texts has not yet been done using Augé's concepts.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The present study has the following objectives:

1- The first objective is to explore the representation of desert narratives in Hernán Díaz's *In the Distance* and Ibrahim al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*, using Augé's theorization of "place" and "non-place". This will be achieved by examining how the desert is represented in the selected texts through the interactions of the insiders and outsiders with the desert setting.

2- The second objective is to examine the impact of the desert narratives on the characters and how the desert becomes a space for articulating their needs and desires. This will be done by analyzing

how the desert allows the characters to attach and detach from social structures and identities defined by the desert setting in light of Augé's theorization of "place" and "non-place".

3- The third objective is to compare the analysis of the two narratives of the desert in the selected novels written in Arabic and English contexts.

1.4 Research Questions

The study answers the following questions:

1- How is the desert narrative represented for the insider and outsider characters in the selected Arabic and English novels?
2- How does the desert impact the characters and become a space for their identity transformations and experimentations? What is the role of the desert narrative in shaping the characters' identities?
3- What is the outcome of comparing the role of the desert narratives in identity formation in the Arabic and English selected novels?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study of desert narratives holds significance across various disciplines. In literature specifically, the desert landscape frequently features prominently and is deployed symbolically. Augé's conceptualization of "place" and "non-place" offers a novel analytical framework for examining the desert narratives beyond physical description.

The current study is significant as it applies Augé's theory to studying the desert narratives in Ibrahim al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990) from Arabic literature and Hernan Diaz's *In the Distance* (2017) from English literature. By closely analyzing depictions of the

desert narratives through the lenses of “place” and “non-place”, new insights will be gained into each novel's representation and metaphorical uses of the desert.

The study also challenges dominant perceptions of the desert as an empty and valueless place by revealing its complexity as a multilayered place and a space. Focusing on the desert's philosophical conceptualization offers a fresh reading of both novels untethered from other critical frames.

Furthermore, comparing the desert narratives in the Arabic and English texts provides an opportunity to examine how portrayals may differ based on social and historical relationships to the desert. The study cultivates a deeper understanding of cultural mindsets and symbolic connections to natural environments. Analyzing each novel's employment of physical and psychological portrayals of the desert as a “place” and “non-place” adds a new dimension to character development and narrative exploration beyond prior criticism. The textual analysis guided by the framework's assumptions highlights creative usages dismantling structured perceptions and enabling radical subject formations.

The current study is also significant in applying Augé’s theorization of “place” and “non-place” to study the desert narratives in the Arabic and English selected texts. More importantly, comparing the Arabic and English narratives of the desert helps us better understand the desert conceptualization in both English and Arabic literature.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

1.6.1 Introduction

The desert has long captured the imagination of writers across cultures and traditions. In Arabic and English literary works, it serves more

than just a backdrop; it actively shapes the characters, narratives, and emerging themes. Its precise influence and narratives can take different forms depending on historical, social, and ideological contexts. In terms of Arabic literary works, the portrayal of the desert narrative holds a prominent place as a recurring theme within Arabic literature. The desert transcends its role as a mere empty place for the narrative; instead, it serves as a canvas that highlights the intricate and often conflicting aspects of human existence in relation to societal norms, cultural heritage, and the natural environment. In this context, the desert becomes a space that captures the complexities and tensions inherent in the human experience. (Al Farhan and Al Raddadi 3)

Conversely, in English literature, the desert narratives have become central to how we imagine the world as lost and the Earth as dead. It has long been a subject of fascination and desire for the Western imagination. Its vast, arid landscapes are alluring and repellent, representing a space of desolation and emptiness (Tynan 7). However, the current study aims to compare and delve deeper into the desert narratives found in Arabic and English texts, exploring them through the lens of Marc Augé's influential concepts of "place" and "non-place." Augé’s concepts provide considerable insight into interpreting the cultural meaning of the desert in these novels and analyzing its role in re-signifying desert narratives beyond its boundaries. Augé’s theories of “place” and “non-place” aim to deconstruct dominant views that have long stigmatized the desert as a space of isolation, enabling new interpretations of its usage in the narratives.

In his famous work *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), Augé introduced the concepts of "place" and "non-place" as a framework for understanding how humans interact with and imbue meaning into different spaces in the modern world. These concepts offer a compelling lens through which to examine various environments, including one of Earth's most extreme and enigmatic landscapes, the desert.

1.6.1 Marc Augé's Concept of "Place"

In Marc Augé's book, he explores the concept of "place" and contrasts it with the idea of "non-place" which he sees as a defining feature of our contemporary, supermodern world. Augé's theorization of place is deeply rooted in an anthropological perspective and draws upon the notion of anthropological place. Augé begins by establishing the fundamental role of place in anthropological inquiry. He states that "Anthropology has always dealt with the here and now. A practicing ethnologist is a person situated somewhere (his 'here' of the moment) who describes what he is observing or what he is hearing at this very moment" (8). This highlights the importance of place, or the "here" in the ethnographer's work, as they are grounded in a specific location from which they observe and describe the present reality. Augé then delves into the distinction between place and non-place, defining "place" as relational, historical and concerned with identity. He elaborates:

> A place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity. The layout of the house, the rules of residence, the zoning of the village, placement of altars, configuration of public open spaces, land distribution, correspond for every individual to a system of possibilities, prescriptions and interdicts whose content is both spatial and social. (p. 77-78)

To fully appreciate how Augé's concept of "place" can be applied to desert environments, we must first delve deeper into what this term means within his anthropological framework. For Augé, a "place" is not merely a physical place but a space that is imbued with meaning, identity, and cultural significance by those who inhabit this space. It is a locale that fosters social interactions, collective memories, and shared experiences. Augé characterizes "places" as having three key features: they are

relational, historical, and concerned with identity. Let's examine each of these characteristics in turn:

Relational: "Places" facilitate and are defined by social relationships. They are spaces where people interact, form connections, and build communities. These interactions create a web of social meanings that become integral to the identity of the place itself.

Historical: "Places" have a sense of continuity with the past. They accumulate layers of meaning over time, embodying the collective memories and experiences of those who have inhabited them. This historical dimension gives "places" depth and significance beyond their immediate physical characteristics.

Concerned with Identity: "Places" are crucial in shaping individual and collective identities. They provide a sense of belonging and are often central to defining themselves and their communities.

Figure 1: Augé's concept of "place"

With this understanding of Augé's concept of "place," we can now explore how certain parts of the desert can indeed be considered "places"

for those who spend time through it and inhabit it, whether insiders or outsiders. While the vast, uninhabited expanses of the desert might seem to contradict this notion, there are numerous examples of desert communities and settlements that embody the characteristics of "place" as defined by Augé.

For Augé, these places are generated under the conditions of “supermodernity” and bring with them a set of thematic traits. They are locations where non-verbal communication takes primacy, which fosters solitary individuality and is defined by their ephemerality. Alongside the term “non-place,” the concept of “placelessness” has also assumed a central role in contemporary discourse on the phenomenology of place, especially from the perspective of human geography, where it is employed to delineate between an authentic and inauthentic relationship to place (Relph 54). According to Edward Relph, the notion of placelessness is intricately tied to current culture and society. Thus, in his assessment, the uniformity of landscapes derives from “an insensitivity to the significance of place,” which in turn might lead to “the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes.” Far from neutrally defined, place and placelessness interact dialectically, with the latter deployed as a site of criticism, not just for environmental aesthetics but also for contemporary society and culture. (68)

Moreover, Augé emphasizes the symbolic and affective dimensions of place, stating, "Places are at least partly woven together out of stories heard and told, memories and dreams shared with those to whom we feel linked in one way or another" (43). This notion of place as a site of shared narratives, memories, and emotional connections further underscores its significance in the construction of individual and collective identities. Augé contrasts place with the concept of non-place, which he defines as "spaces of circulation, consumption, and communication" (79). These non-places,

such as airports, shopping malls, and highways, are characterized by their transitory nature, lack of history, and absence of relational or identity-forming connections. Augé also explores the relationship between place and culture, arguing that place is a crucial site for expressing and reproducing cultural practices, values, and identities. He writes:

> The layout of the house, the rules of residence, the zoning of the village, placement of altars, the configuration of public open spaces, land distribution, correspond for every individual to a system of possibilities, prescriptions and interdicts whose content is both spatial and social. (52)

This quote highlights how a place's physical and spatial dimensions are deeply intertwined with social and cultural norms, rituals, and beliefs. The place serves as a medium through which cultural meanings are embodied and transmitted across generations. In contrast, non-places are characterized by their lack of cultural specificity and their homogenizing tendencies. Augé argues that these spaces are designed to facilitate the movement and consumption of individuals. However, they do so by stripping away cultural particularities and imposing a certain uniformity and standardization. For example, airports and shopping malls worldwide often exhibit remarkably similar designs, signage, and commercial offerings, reflecting a globalized consumer culture that transcends local or regional identities. Augé provides several examples of what he considers "anthropological places" including the Kabyle house layouts of Algeria, Ebrie or Atye villages in West Africa, and initiation ceremonies marking lifecycle rituals. Regarding the Kabyle house, he notes:

> anthropological place - is a principle of meaning for the people who live in it, and also a principle of intelligibility for the person who observes it. Anthropological place functions on a variable scale. The

> Kabyle house with its shade side and its light side, its masculine part and feminine part. (52)

This dualistic layout directly orders social relations through the symbolic division of space. Similarly, he highlights how the three-way division of Ebrie or Atye villages structures the lives of clans and age classes. Ritual ceremonies centered around specific places also constitute "anthropological places" for Augé. He sees these spatial arrangements as expressing the group's identity and reinforcing social order through the regulated use and meanings ascribed to places.

Augé also asserted that "anthropological places" are always founded through an "invention", even if multiple backgrounds and influences may shape this invention over time. Founding narratives serve to bring spiritual forces together with the first inhabitants in establishing a shared identity with the territory. Nevertheless, this invention "is only a semi-fantasy" as migration and exchanges with outsiders are also inherently part of group histories (45). The relation to place as a semi-fantasy is illustrated through Augé's example of an Alladian divination ritual using a corpse to determine if a death occurred inside or outside the group's territory. Through this rigid spatial interrogation of identity, places are repeatedly "reaffirmed on the occasion of almost every individual death" (46). However, Augé acknowledges that awareness of other groups and the need for exchanges like marriage and trade undermine complete identification with place.

Moreover, a key element of "anthropological places" for Augé is their demarcation of boundaries separating the group from nature and outsiders. Villages undertake the "social demarcation of soil" to establish identity through their spatial arrangement (43). Within places, further spatial differentiation organizes gender roles, age classes, clans, and ritual processes. This internal spatial ordering reflects "...the identity conferred on

them by the same criteria, the same values and the same interpretation procedures" (51). Drawing on examples from West Africa, Augé shows how rules of residence, house layouts, village zoning and ritual spaces all serve to spatially situate individuals through "...a system of possibilities, prescriptions and interdicts" (52). Kinship, marriage and other social relations are directly referenced through this embedding of the social order in place.

A key distinction between place and abstract space for Augé is the relationship to history. Despite inhabitants recognizing landmarks without needing special knowledge, Augé argues that places cannot dispense with history as such (55). Founding narratives locate the group in a temporal as well as spatial context, and places endure across generations through recurrent rituals marking historical continuity. Augé quotes Durkheim highlighting how commemorations at sacred sites enable a community to both recognize itself across time and envision a shared past. In this way, places are attributed historical depth and meaning because they escape history as science for inhabitants (56). The preservation and materialization of history through places is a key source of identity and meaning for social groups in Augé's conceptualization. Augé utilizes these examples to demonstrate how geographical arrangements, social structures, and rituals are inextricably linked in creating and maintaining the significance of anthropological sites. Each example illustrates a unique facet of how places develop and reflect cultural identities and social order.

Another intrinsic element of place theorized by Augé is language. He argues that the completion of place happens "...through the word, through the allusive exchange of a few passwords between speakers who are conniving in private complicity" (51). Specialized words, myths, interpretation procedures, and the shared linguistic "cosmology" of a group constitute important components of place. Using the Kabyle house as an

example once more, Augé highlights how the internal spaces and components are "...conceived in terms of a topography recalling the Freudian topography but applied to realities conceived as being substantially material" (61). Places are thus defined through the symbolic ordering of space and social relations embedded in group language and mythologies. Language plays a central role in the relational and meaning-making properties of place for Augé.

1.6.2 Marc Augé's Concept of "Non-Place"

Having explored Augé's concept of "place", we now turn to the contrasting concept, that is "non-place". This idea is central to his analysis of what he terms "supermodernity" and provides an intriguing lens through which to view certain aspects of desert landscapes. As we mentioned above, Augé introduced the concepts of "place" and "non-place" in his book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1992). Augé defines "place" as relational, historical, and concerned with identity and relations, while "non-place" refers to transit spaces like highways and airports defined by solitary contract and anonymity rather than social relations and history. These concepts have proven influential in understanding the changing nature of space and place in the context of globalization and modern mobility. Augé characterizes "non-places" as having three key features: they are non-relational, non-historical, and unconcerned with identity. Let's examine each of these characteristics in turn:

Non-relational: Non-places discourage or minimize social interactions and connections. They are spaces designed for transience and individual use rather than community building.

Non-historical: Non-places lack a sense of historical continuity. They are often designed to be uniform and interchangeable without accumulating layers of meaning over time.

Unconcerned with identity: Non-places do not contribute significantly to individual or collective identity formation. They are spaces people pass through rather than inhabit and do not foster a sense of belonging. In the examination of the meaning of diverse places and settings, Marc Augé presents the difference between 'non-place' and 'place'.

Figure 2: Augé's concept of "non-place"

To understand "non-places", Augé first contrasts them with the concept of "place". He defines place as a space invested with meaning through history, relations, and identity, somewhere like a village or house that is symbolized and has meaning for those inhabiting it or at least spending much time through this place. In contrast, a non-place is a space that "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Augé 77-78). Non-places lack a sense of history or relation - they are transitory spaces of movement rather than destination.

Augé acknowledges that place and non-place rarely exist in pure form but rather intertwine and combine in reality. However, he argues that

"non-places" are proliferating and dominating more aspects of contemporary experience due to the acceleration of history, spatial overabundance, and individualization under supermodernity. Supermodernity differs from modernity, according to Augé, because in modernity, old and new are integrated through symbols like church spires alongside chimneys in Baudelaire's Paris. In supermodernity, history, and local particularities are "simply a spectable" within non-places, presented as curiosities without synthesis. (Augé 111)

The core characteristics of non-places, according to Augé, are a lack of history, relation and construction of identity. Unlike anthropological places which people invest with meaning and symbols, non-places do not facilitate relations or connections between individuals. They are transitory spaces individuals pass through anonymously, alone in a crowd. Augé aims to establish non-places as a new object of anthropological study to understand contemporary spatial experiences emerging under supermodern conditions. Following Augé's line of thinking, 'non-places assist in developing and daily reinforcing individuality by creating a form of nameless space that cannot be owned, that cannot be engaged in emotionally' (68). Augé argues that a person entering the space of non-place is liberated of his customary determinants.

One of the key examples Augé uses to illustrate non-places is the airport. He describes the airport arrival lounge as a space presenting itself as a non-place, that is, a space that cannot be defined as relational, historical, or concerned with identity. Airports do not carry any historical meaning or identity for those passing through; they are nodes in a system and symbols of that system. Augé explains the experience of the individual in the airport. They follow signposted instructions without establishing relations with others. Communication occurs through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce like inserting a credit card rather than

social exchanges. The passenger accesses their anonymity only by providing proof of identity to access the space. Within the airport, individuals are alone despite being surrounded by crowds. Augé argues that this produces "a strange form of solitude" characterized by a lack of history, relation, or constructed identity.

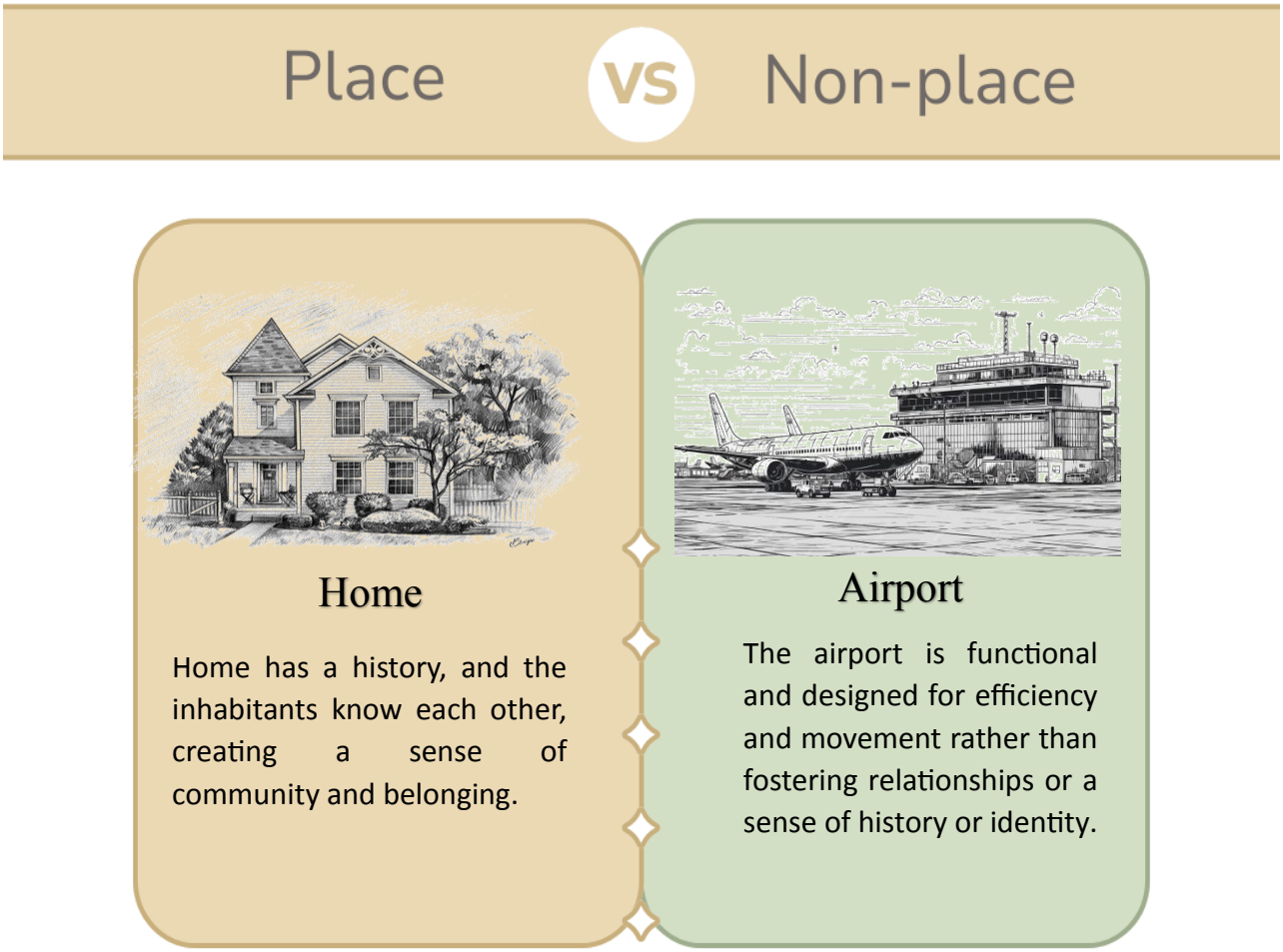

Figure 3: place vs non-place

This visual representation aims to capture the essence of spaces invested with meaning "places" versus purely functional and transitory "non-places". The experience of those inhabiting airports resembles the transience and anonymity of the flaneur in the city, according to Augé. Like Baudelaire observing the crowd from above, individuals in transit are spectators of others' transitory scenes, engaging in a "sort of unconscious flanerie" through glimpses and snapshots. However, Augé argues that the act of transit overrides any act of narration or meaning-making. Individuals pass through "successive instantaneous configurations" of spaces and scenarios, obstructing the construction of place (86). Airports exemplify the disjointed, fragmented experience of transiting non-places for Augé.

Space alone does not produce connection and community; it is 'the inauguration of spaces that represents one of the most essential acts of communal life' (Augé 95). Place and non-place nearly appear to be inflexible opposites, much like opposing polarities. However, Augé adds that the one is never entirely ceased, and the second is never quite completed: they are like palimpsests on which the jumbled game of identity and relations is continuously rewritten (79). Another major example of non-places discussed by Augé is the supermarket. He describes how the supermarket customer drifts through aisles surrounded by "luminous signs" and recorded messages addressed indistinctly as one circulates through (83). Interaction again occurs anonymously through payment with credit or debit cards. Augé argues that the supermarket homogenizes space and standardizes rituals through self-service aisles and product placement, following globalized logic. (84)

In supermarkets, Augé contends history plays no role beyond branding and product histories conveyed through labels. Relationships are fleeting and commercial; the exchange consists of gestures encoded in retail rules. Like airports, supermarkets create "singular

solitudes...characterized by neither identity, nor relations, nor history" by integrating individuals within standardized functioning (84). According to Augé, the supermarket exemplifies how non-places induce a particular experience of estrangement and disconnectedness from others. He also provides numerous examples of what he considers non-places throughout his work:

> The installations needed for the accelerated circulation of passengers and goods (high-speed roads and railways, interchanges, airports) are just as much non-places as the means of transport themselves, or the great commercial centres, or the extended transit camps where the planet's refugees are parked. (33)

This list illustrates the diversity of spaces Augé classifies as non-places, from transportation infrastructure to commercial zones to refugee camps. What unites them is their transient, functional nature and lack of organic social connections. Augé is careful to note that the distinction between places and non-places is not absolute:

> Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. (80)

This nuanced view acknowledges that elements of place and non-place are thus presented as an analytical tool for understanding tendencies and transformations rather than a rigid categorization. Augé situates his theory of non-places within a broader analysis of what he terms "supermodernity." This concept is crucial for understanding why non-places have proliferated in contemporary society.

Augé's theory of "non-places" and "place" offers a compelling lens through which to examine the spatial logic of supermodernity. By contrasting the anonymous, transient spaces of airports, highways, and shopping centers with traditional anthropological places, Augé highlights fundamental shifts in how we experience space, time, and social relations in the contemporary world. The concept of non-places helps us understand the proliferation of standardized, functional spaces designed for mobility and consumption rather than dwelling and community. It raises important questions about identity, social connections, and the meaning of place in an increasingly globalized and mobile world.

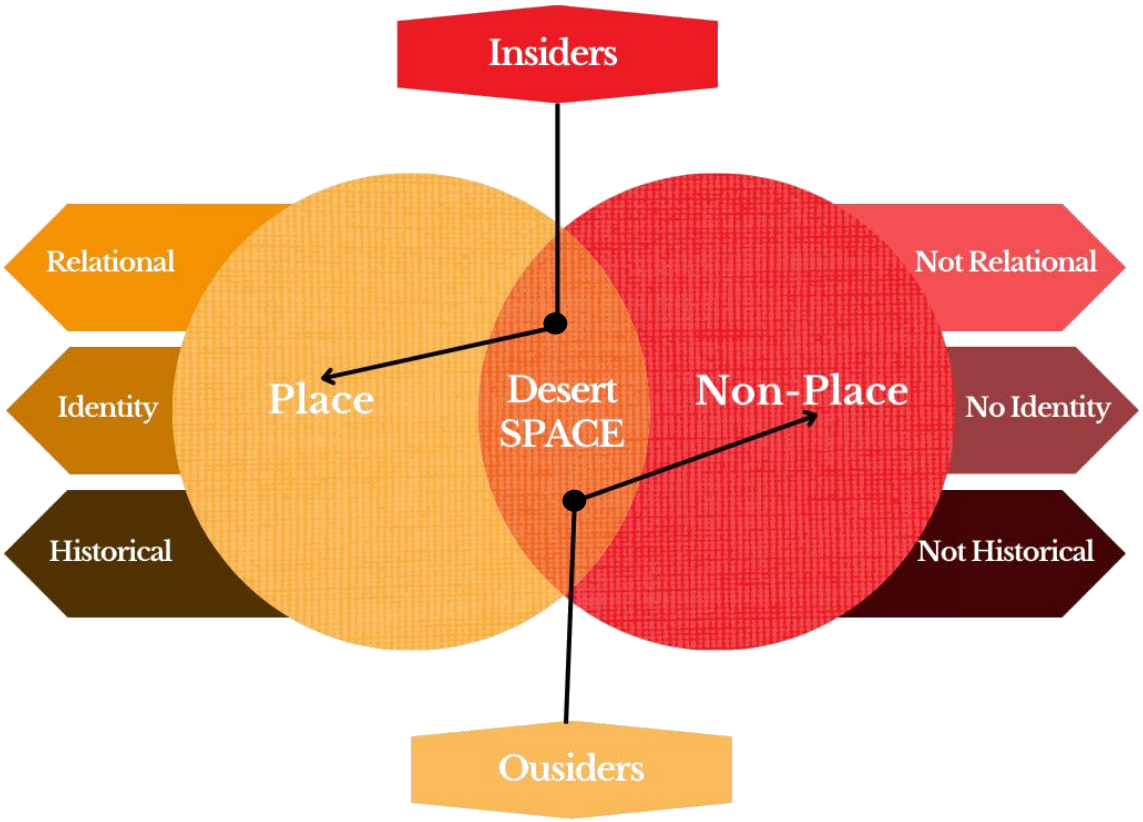

Figure 4: Conceptual Framework

1.7 Methodology

The present study is qualitative, examining the portrayals of desert narratives in Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* and Diaz's *In the Distance* through the lens of Augé's theorization of "place" and "non-place." Due to the importance of understanding different cultural conceptualizations of spaces and places, Augé's framework analyzes how these novels represent the desert as "place" and "non-place" and how characters relate to their surroundings. The researcher draws from Augé's definitions of "place" as relational, historical, and concerned with identity and "non-place" as transit spaces lacking relations and identity.

The study is comparative in the sense that the researcher adopts a comparative approach in analyzing the selected texts in relation to Augé's concepts. It compares how the desert acts as a "place" and "non-place" for the character in the Arabic novel and the English one. In addition, it also compares the depiction of desert narratives in the selected texts to explore how these authors construct notions of place and identity within deserted settings. By analyzing these texts from different cultural backgrounds, the study uncovers shared themes and divergent perspectives on the desert as both a physical and metaphorical space. This comparison seeks to illuminate how the concept of desert interacts with ideas of belonging, displacement, and the human experience across cultural contexts. This adds nuance to Augé's theory when applied across different cultural contexts and literary forms.

For this reason, a textual analysis guided by Augé's concepts of "place" and "non-place" is conducted to study the scenes in which the desert landscape is portrayed and how characters interact with it in the selected novels. Therefore, two novels are selected for data analysis. Each one tackles the issue of desert representation from a different cultural perspective. For example, (the Arabic narrative) Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of*

the Stone is selected to investigate the desert as a “place” and “non-place” imbued with cultural and spiritual significance for its inhabitants. Different scenes in which characters, particularly Asouf, interact with the desert environment are investigated to show that the desert is not merely an empty expanse but a space rich with meaning and history for insiders like Asouf and his family. On the contrary, outsiders like Cain see the desert as a non-place devoid of meaning. The novel depicts the complex relationship between humans, animals, and the desert ecosystem, highlighting the sacred nature of this landscape to its indigenous people.

The second novel (the English narrative), Diaz's *In the Distance*, is chosen to explore the desert also as a “place” and a "non-place" from the perspective of a lost protagonist. In this novel, scenes where Håkan, the Swedish immigrant, encounters the vast American desert are investigated to show how the desert appears at first as a “non-place” with which Håkan has no relation or familiarity. This place becomes a transitional, anonymous space that challenges traditional notions of identity and belonging. The novel, through Håkan's journey, depicts how the desert transforms in the eyes of the outsider from a mere "non-place" devoid of meaning to a meaningful "place".

To carry out the current study, the researcher depends on different primary sources that tackle the issue of the desert landscape and the concepts applied in the analysis. Also, copious secondary sources are used to enhance the study and present a comprehensive analysis of the selected texts. Besides, the researcher uses different interviews, whether on websites or on YouTube, in which the novel theorists and authors speak about the significance of the desert setting and their motivation for presenting their works. Furthermore, some of the theorists' and well-known scholars' critical opinions are merged within the analysis due to their importance in enhancing the analytical process.

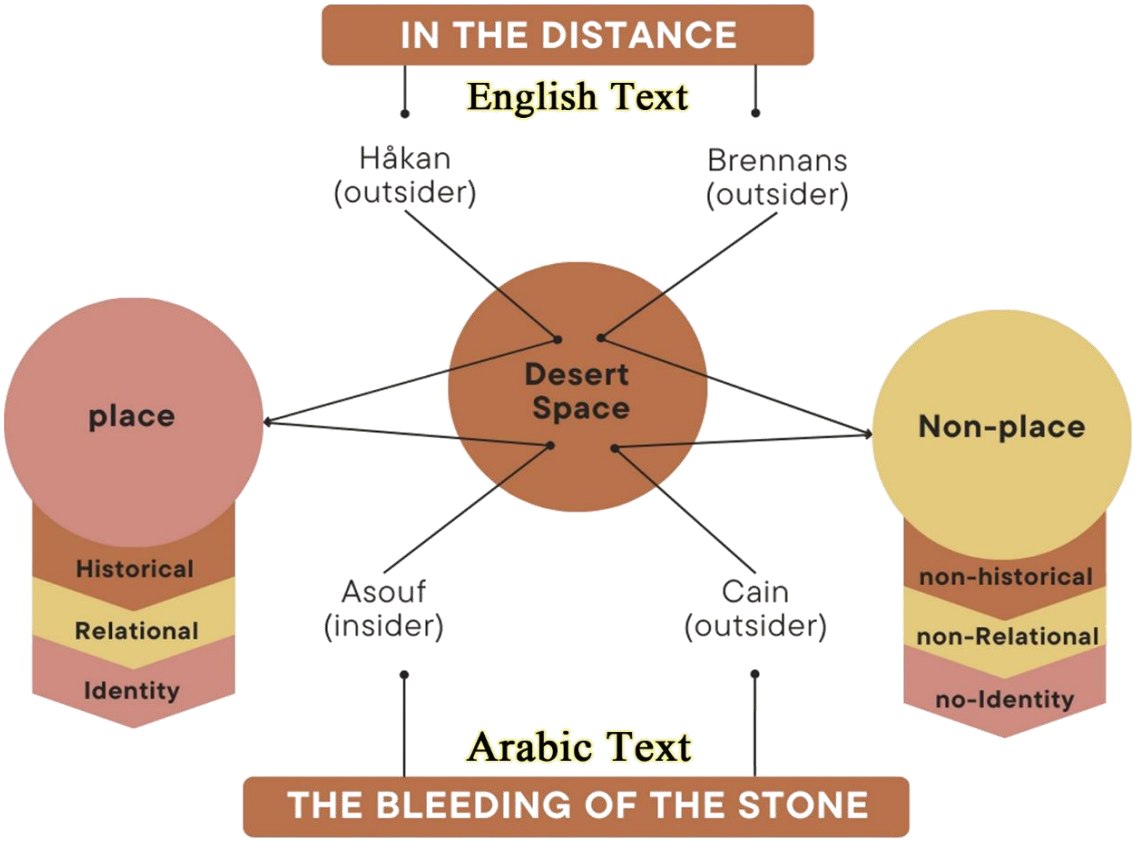

Figure 5: Methodology

1.8 Scope and Limitation

The study is conducted within Augé's concepts of "place" and "non-place" frameworks, utilized to examine the desert narratives. This approach

allows for a nuanced examination of the desert. It considers the desert's traditional role as a defined geographical "place" with cultural and historical significance and its potential characteristics as a "non-place", a space of transience, anonymity, and detachment from local identity. The interplay between these concepts provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex nature of desert narratives in the selected texts.

In addition, the study falls within the scope of desert writing using space literary theory. Scenes that do not directly engage with the desert setting are not considered in the analysis section, as they fall outside the research scope. As a result, the study is limited to passages from two texts that specifically deal with desert landscapes and their impact on characters and narratives. The research is limited to the following texts:

1. *The Bleeding of the Stone* by Ibrahim al-Koni (1990)
2. *In the Distance* by Hernan Diaz (2017)

Furthermore, the study considers the following aspects of Augé's theory and related concepts:

1. The desert as a "place" with identity, history, and relationships.
2. The desert as a "non-place" of transience and anonymity.
3. The role of the desert in shaping character identity.
4. The desert as a site of cultural memory and erasure.

The study is comparative. Therefore, it is limited to one text selected from Arabic literature and the second chosen from English literature to conduct the comparative analysis.

1.9 Justification for Selection

The study selects Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* and Diaz's *In the Distance* to examine the desert narratives as a "place" and "non-place". The study chose these novels as they are concerned with desert narratives, which are stereotyped as barren and wastelandish. In addition, both texts are notable for exploring human interaction with vast, seemingly empty spaces. Besides, little ink is spilled on applying Augé's concepts to desert literature. Thus, the researcher selects these concepts because they are fit for understanding the desert's impact on the insiders and ousiders. The text selection depends on the liability and relevance of the novels to the topic of the study. These texts are selected because each sheds light on different forms of human interaction with the desert landscape, and cultural meaning. Al-Koni's text is directed toward the Tuareg experience to show that the desert is a space of profound meaning and connectedness. Diaz's text studies how the desert functions as a barrier and a conduit for human movement and identity formation.

1.10 Research Layout

The study is divided into five chapters. The first lays out the thesis proposal. It consists of the background of the study, the problem statement highlighting the study gap, the research questions and objectives, the significance of the study, conceptual frameworks, methodology, the scope and limitations of the study, and the justification for data selection. The second chapter includes a review of existing literature on the topic, including studies, to highlight the gap in the current study. It includes studies about the desert, which have been studied from different perspectives. This chapter also contains previous studies on the selected texts. The third chapter examines the desert as a "place" and "non-place" in

Al-Koni's *Bleeding of the Stone*, focusing on how the author constructs a sense of belonging and identity through the desert narratives that represent a meaningful "place" for insiders or its people that really matters for them. It also investigates how the desert is a "non-place" for outsiders who fail to assimilate its meaning.

Chapter four analyzes how the desert narratives oscillate as a "place" and a "non-place" in Diaz's *In the Distance*, exploring how Håkan perceives the desert as a "non-place" when he first encounters it and how he later perceives it as a refuge and solace for him. Finally, the last chapter presents the study's conclusions, compares the concluding remarks, and offers the study's contributions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter surveys a comprehensive review of previous scholarly investigations pertaining to desert narratives, the theoretical frameworks employed, and the selected data. The chapter is structured into distinct sections to facilitate a systematic exploration of the subject matter. The initial section delves into studies that have been conducted on desert narratives, further subdivided into two subsections: the first examines studies that have approached deserts from an ecological perspective, while the second focuses on studies and related works that have explored deserts from a philosophical standpoint. The subsequent section is conducted on studies that have applied Marc Augé's conceptual frameworks of "place" and "non-place" as analytical lenses. The final section surveys studies that have been done on the selected data, which is divided into two subsections: one dedicated to past studies on Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the*

Stone, and the other addressing past studies on Hernán Diaz's *In the Distance*.

2.2 Mapping the Desert: Conceptualizations of the Desert

Deserts have long held significance as symbolic spaces in literature. Their vast emptiness and sparse vegetation create an atmosphere of isolation that lends itself to contemplation. The desert is a place where characters may confront internal struggles or commune with nature in solitude. Many Arabic and English novels use desert settings to represent themes of exile, alienation, communion, and spiritual journeys (Abu-Lughod 45). This section explores how different scholars approach the desert from various perspectives. This arid landscape is perceived as a site where the very codes and symbolic representations through which we comprehend the notions of existence, stagnation, and non-living are disrupted and reconfigured, thereby challenging conventional understandings and prompting a reevaluation of these pivotal concepts (Tynan 4).

The desert in Arabic literature has served as a potent source of inspiration for numerous Arabic literary works, particularly those engaging with the profound socio-cultural transformations precipitated by the advent of the oil industry. Prominent among these authors is ʿAbd al-Rahman Munif, widely regarded as the most influential and notable writer to explore the deserts of this region. Munif's literary legacy has been carried forward by subsequent generations of Arab authors, who have continued to engage with the desert as a symbolic terrain upon which to interrogate the complexities of modernity and the erosion of traditional ways of life. (Abu-Lughod 48)

A significant piece of research within the studies of desert narratives is Kahina Enteghar's "Reading the Desert in Selected Contemporary

Novels by Cormac McCarthy, Michael Ondaatje, and Paulo Coelho" (2013) who approaches the portrayal of the desert in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian, Michael Ondaatje's The English Patient, and Paulo Coelho's The Alchemist*. Enteghar explores how the desert landscape impacts characters physically, psychologically, spiritually, and existentially, leading to violence or spiritual enlightenment. He utilizes theories of naturalism, postmodern nomadology, and archetypal criticism. Additionally, it illustrates how the desert metaphor is shaped by the novels' worldviews and cultural backgrounds, revealing diverse attitudes and symbolizations associated with the desert's geography (4). Likewise, Rune Graulund's "A Desert Reading of Cormac McCarthy's The Road" (2010) presents a reading of McCarthy's novel *The Road,* which represents a significant departure from his previous desert-themed works like *Blood Meridian*. While the desert in *Blood Meridian* embodied an eternal, violent presence, the barren wasteland of The Road symbolizes ultimate absence and entropic cessation. The novel's bleak, static landscape is antithesis to the persistently cyclical desert visions in McCarthy's earlier writing.

Closely, Nermin Haikal's "Fight-or-Flight Response: A Study of Bahaa Taher's Sunset Oasis with Reference to Trauma Theory" (2019). She discusses how the desert exacerbates Mahmoud Abd El Zahir's traumatic memories and his inability to confront danger. The isolation of the desert leaves Mahmoud alone with his troubled thoughts and past injuries, leading to a decline in his mental health. Haikal at the end of the research, concludes that the harsh journey through the desert increases Mahmoud's helplessness rather than healing him from his injuries. She concludes that the desert is not a suitable place for Mahmoud's recovery, which challenges the idea that the desert is a place of solitude and rediscovery.

Similarly, in the research paper entitled “The desert-governess romance: Regency England meets exotic Arabia” (2022), Turner and Wadsö Lecaros approach the desert as a mystical backdrop that heightens the sense of geographic and cultural dislocation for the European governess, fantasies and the frisson of encountering the radically unfamiliar “other”. They argue that the desert provides dual forms of escape for heroines through both the geographical domain of the exotic setting as well as the historical backdrop of Regency England, and the desert's exoticism amplifies romantic escapism.

Moreover, Elizabeth Gargano’s “English Sheiks and Arab Stereotypes: E. M. Hull, T. E. Lawrence, and the Imperial Masquerade” (2006) analyzes how E. M. Hull employs the desert setting in her popular romance novel *The Sheik*. As Gargano notes, the desert provides the exotic backdrop that allows Hull's English heroines to escape civilization and the restraints of sexual inhibition. Hull employs the desert as the setting for transgressive desires through reliance on disabling racial stereotypes that reinforce imperialist ideology.

Furthermore, Mandeep Boro’s “Nomadism and Displacement as Resistance in Bolaño's The Savage Detectives” (2015) effectively analyzes how Roberto Bolaño represents the desert as a vital space of resistance and nomadism, yet they cannot cope with the deserted plains. Boro represents the desert as a space of resistance for marginalized poets like Tinajero and the visceral realists. Through acts of nomadism, wandering the desert, and leaving control of the city and nation, they revolt against dominant figures like Octavio Paz and reject confinement by national literary establishments.

Although the above-mentioned articles explore the desert from diverse perspectives, viewing it as a physical landscape, a cultural construct, and a symbolic representation. While these works offer valuable

insights into the multifaceted nature of deserts, my research diverges from them in terms of its scope, objectives, or methodological framework.

2.2.1 Ecological Perspective of the Desert

Ecological perspectives provide important insights for understanding how deserts are portrayed in Arabic and English novels. According to Buell, place and environment are not merely literary devices but rather inextricably linked to human history and the natural world. The perspective posits that humanity's relationship with nature is reciprocal, with nature an equally vital factor in the universal ecosystem (416). Human actions can disrupt this balance, potentially leading to ecological calamities. As such, the environment should not be portrayed as a static backdrop but as a dynamic process in which human activity shapes and shapes (417).

A major study within the scholarly work on desert narratives from an ecological perspective is Sana Tariq and Bahramand Shah's "Environment and Literary Landscape: An Ecological Criticism of Louise Erdrich's Novel Tracks" (2019) which applies ecocriticism theory to analyze Erdrich's novel *Tracks* from an ecological perspective. It examines how Erdrich's fictional work highlights the interconnectedness between Native American cultures and the natural environment and how nature, including the desert space, is an active part of the Ojibwe tribe's lives and beliefs. The study explores the novel's representation of the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, the spiritual reverence for land, the personification of nature, and the consequences of human actions on the environment.

Furthermore, David N. Cassuto's "Dripping Dry: Literature, Politics, and Water in the Desert Southwest" (2001) focuses mainly on the desert landscapes through the lens of national identity myths, elucidating how the challenges posed by severe aridity influenced the trajectory of American

history starting in the mid-nineteenth century (Tynan 19). Cassuto approaches the desert as something that has "molded the regional literature of the region" (58). Through analyzing novels by Barbara Kingsolver, Edward Abbey, John Steinbeck, and Mary Austin, Cassuto examines how "the myths that have pervaded the regional literature of the West have interacted with the myths that have shaped water policy throughout the twentieth century" (60). The desert is thus represented not just as an arid geographical place but as a space intricately tied to the literature and politics surrounding water usage and conservation in the American Southwest.

Similarly, Sharif S. Elmusa, in his research paper, "The Ecological Bedouin: Toward Environmental Principles for the Arab Region" (2016), examines how three Arab novels—Abd al-Rahman Munif's *Endings* (1977), Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990), and Sabri Moussa's *Seeds of Corruption* (1973), represent the desert as more than just a setting. Elmusa identifies a "figure" in these novels that he calls the "Ecological Bedouin", whose depiction provides insight into environmental principles for the Arab region (13). Despite the comprehensive examination of deserts in the articles, which consider them as physical terrains, cultural constructs, and symbolic entities, my study takes a distinct approach.

2.2.2 Philosophical Perspective of the Desert

Philosophically, the desert landscape occupies a unique place in philosophical thought and Arab literary traditions. Its vast emptiness pushes humans to contemplate their place in the world (Salih 1). According to Gilles Deleuze, a landscape devoid of landmarks and resistant to mapping can be described as "deterritorialized". He posits that deserts epitomize deterritorialization, characterizing them as "smooth spaces" where movement is not directed from one specific point to another but

rather involves occupying space from any given moment (351). In such spaces, one navigates with a continuous vector of deterritorialization. Deleuze contends that deserts disrupt the conventional narratives of civilization (352).

A key work within the body of research on desert narratives from a philosophical perspective is *Desert in Modern Literature and Philosophy* (2020). Aidan Tynan approaches the concept of the desert as a spatial theme that has emerged in modern literature and philosophy. He analyzes how authors have represented the desert and the main ideas about the desert put forth in their works. He traces the emergence of the desert as an aesthetic concern in Western literature and culture from the late 18th century onward. Before this period, European travelers to desert regions paid little attention to describing the landscape, often passing over it without comment (30). Tynan reflects on the Western narratives of the desert by arguing that the importance of the desert motif across modern literature and philosophy stems from modernity's confrontation with groundlessness. The metaphysical certainty of the world gave way, producing experiences of deracination and displacement (41).

The desert came to figure in this crisis spatially as a place defined by a radical disjunction from any existential ground or “homeland” (42). It spatializes modernity's problematic relationship to place and the contingencies of dwelling. This book is different from the current study in the sense that the book is mainly centered around a philosophical point of view.

Furthermore, in his book *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (1968), Edward Abbey vividly portrays his experiences working as a park ranger in the remote desert landscapes of Arches National Park. He finds that the austerity of the desert environment provides a space for profound revelation, allowing one to rediscover their

primal human connection to the natural world. Throughout the book, Abbey reflects his narrative of the value of solitude in the wilderness as a refuge from the crowds and demands of modern industrialized society (26). He expresses disdain for the trend of increasing tourism and development in national parks, lamenting how the paving of roads and the influx of travelers intrude upon the tranquility of remote desert canyons. Abbey perceives the desert as profoundly beautiful in its untamed, natural state, arguing that this wildness is diminished by human presence and technology (30). His vivid descriptions aim to capture the desert in its pristine, pre-intrusion state, focusing on the tranquility and vitality of its inhabitants. Abbey presents *Desert Solitaire* as a tribute to the spiritual and reflective qualities inherent to wild desert landscapes, making a case for preserving wilderness as a place still capable of provoking self-reflection in humans.

Closely, in his interdisciplinary study of the desert, Jasper's *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (2008) approaches this space in a unique way through an examination of "religion, literature, art, and culture" related to the desert (24). Rather than conducting a strictly academic analysis, in a departure from current study, this book reads much like a travel narrative as he metaphorically takes the reader on a journey through the desert. Jasper represents the desert not just as a landscape but as a space existing in both the exterior and interior realms. He conceptualizes the desert as existing "between the pages" of sacred texts, as mystical figures like Antony internalize biblical narratives by literally wandering in the desert (28). In this way, Jasper considers how the desert exists as much in the imagination and spiritual realm as it does on the map.

Moreover, James E. Goehring, in his 1993 paper "The Encroaching Desert: Literary Production and Ascetic Space in Early Christian Egypt", explores the literary portrayal of early Egyptian monasticism and its relationship to the physical locations of ascetic practice. The key idea of

this article is that while ascetics occupied various locations along a continuum from cities to remote deserts, the literary sources predominantly depict monks withdrawing to the desert, using the desert/city dichotomy as a metaphor for the contrast between truth/falsehood or divine/demonic. This literary depiction, rather than reflecting historical reality, may have influenced the development of monasticism itself.

Correspondingly, “Travel and Desert Landscape in The Sheltering Sky” (2016) by Ya-Ju Yeh. It analyzes Paul Bowles' novel *The Sheltering Sky*, exploring how the desert landscape shapes the identities and relationships of the protagonists, a married American couple traveling in North Africa. The desert is depicted as a real and metaphorical space that catalyzes existential self-discovery for Port, the husband, who seeks escape from civilization. For Kit, the wife, the desert becomes a site of solitary wandering after Port's death, transforming her into an authentic traveler. The indeterminate, borderless desert undermines boundaries and destabilizes conventional frameworks, prompting the characters to confront their desires, fears, and connections to each other.

In a similar way, James Michael Harold’s PhD thesis, “Lovers adrift in the desert: An analysis and comparative study of the poetics of the desert” (2013), approaches the desert as both a literal space and a symbolic landscape represented in travel writings from the 12th–13th centuries and early 20th centuries. Harold seeks “to identify the existence and endurance of a dynamic between the desert, embodied experience, and the desert as text” (117). Despite their differences, he determines that these travel writings reflect “a dynamic of diversity and affinity” in Orientalist and Occidental perceptions of the desert.

Similarly, Peter Kerry Morgan's “Impersonality and the Extinction of Self: a Comparative Analysis of the Poetry of Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas” (2014) conducts a comparative analysis of the poetry of Keith

Douglas and Alun Lewis, examining their shared impulses toward poetic impersonality. It argues that both poets employ detachment as a stylistic device that paradoxically reveals inner contestations and ethical engagement with human suffering. For Douglas specifically, the desert becomes a space where his “extrospective” stance and apparent emotional distance mask an underlying complicity and moral responsibility as a witness to war's destruction (9). Morgan explores how Douglas's desert poetry enacts coded testimonies to inner conflicts through subtle perceptual shifts and competing voices, challenging readings of his work as purely callous or disengaged.

2.3 Past Studies on Auge's Concept of “place” and “non-place”

Many theorists have tried to explain the impacts and underlying reasons for the widespread changes brought about by modern societies, particularly the effects of place and space on people. To address these issues, theorists used various conceptual frameworks, one of the prominent theorists of which was Augé's concept of “place” and “non-places”. Consequently, many researchers and scholars consider Augé's theory of “non-places” to be a leading framework for examining anthropological places and non-places rise. It provides insight into the driving forces behind these processes and offers a counter-narrative to mitigate their effects in modern contexts. For this reason, Augé's conceptualization of non-places is widely used as a theoretical foundation across disciplines like architecture, urban planning, sociology, and literature. This theory allows researchers to understand how places are being displaced by non-places in contemporary societies and how to counter this phenomenon through the alternative narrative proposed by Augé and his followers.

Among these studies is Yuliia Terentieva's “Campus as A Non-Place in the Novels of David Lodge” (2022) examines how university campuses

are portrayed in David Lodge's novels Changing Places and Small World, exploring the idea of the campus as a “non-place”, a transient space where individuals lose part of their identity and conform to the rules and norms of the location. The analysis considers the campus a heterotopia, drawing on Foucault's concept of spaces deviating from societal norms while representing, contesting, and inverting them. Terentieva investigates how characters' development intertwines with their physical campus spaces and how campuses embody utopian or pastoral ideals while simultaneously reflecting non-place characteristics.

Similarly, Sonia Caputa's “The International Hotel as a Heterotopic Site and a Non-Place in the San Francisco Novel I Hotel by Karen Tei Yamashita.” (2016) analyzes Karen Tei Yamashita's novel “I Hotel” through the lens of Marc Augé's theory of non-places and Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias. It argues that the International Hotel in San Francisco functions as both a heterotopic site and a non-place for the Asian American immigrant community depicted in the novel. The hotel provides shelter yet isolation, a familiar space in an unfamiliar landscape. Yamashita's innovative narrative techniques capture the diversity of voices and experiences within the Asian American movement fighting against the hotel's demolition, connecting it to broader histories of racial marginalization.

Moreover, Tomasz Gadzina's “Spaces, (Non-)Places, and Fluid Identities in Tim Winton's Fiction” examines how Tim Winton's fiction explores concepts of place and space to depict his protagonists' shattered selves in postcolonial Australian geography. It analyzes Winton's oppressive places juxtaposed against liberating spaces through the lens of humanistic geography, Edward Relph's placelessness, and Marc Augé's notion of non-place. The study reveals that Winton's settings cannot be neatly categorized into oppressive places and liberating spaces, as the

postmodern concept of non-place complicates the characters' experiences of displacement and uncanniness, rendering a stable sense of identity unattainable.

In different terms, Sarah Sharma's “Baring Life and Lifestyle in the Non-Place” (2009) critiques two prevailing theoretical approaches to understanding “non-places” such as airports, hotels, and refugee camps. One approach views them as apolitical spaces of consumption and mobility, while the other sees them as exemplifying biopolitical regulation of life akin to concentration camps. Sharma argues that non-places must be understood as sites where the logic of the camp and the spectacle collide, producing differential biopolitics of “bare life” and “bare lifestyle.” Within non-places, global capital finds an amenable space to both invest in cultivating lifestyles and reduce human life to maximize its power. The films “Dirty Pretty Things” and “The Terminal” articulate the tensions between bare life and lifestyle in non-places.

In addition, Les Roberts “'Welcome to Dreamland': From Place to Non-Place and Back Again in Pawel Pawlikowski's Last Resort” (2002) analyzes Pawel Pawlikowski's film Last Resort through the lens of Marc Augé's concept of “non-places”. It argues that the Dreamland amusement park in Margate, England, depicted in the film, serves as a metaphorical non-place that reflects the marginalized existence of the film's refugee protagonists. However, the paper contends that the film ultimately subverts the notion of non-place by imbuing Dreamland with a sense of community and belonging, transforming it into a meaningful place. This exploration of place and non-place raises broader questions about the experiences of displacement and alienation in the contemporary globalized world.

2.4 Studies Done on the Selected Data

Many writers always try their best to reflect on deserts' harsh and unforgiving landscapes to explore themes of isolation, survival, and humanity's relationship with nature. This is evident in the desert narratives found in works such as *The Bleeding of the Stone* by Ibrahim Al-Koni and *In the Distance* by Hernán Diaz. These authors pay great attention to the desert environment, using it as a backdrop to examine broader social and existential issues that touch the lives of their characters. Whether through lyrical descriptions of the desert's beauty or harrowing depictions of its unrelenting harshness, these writers immerse readers in its unique sense of place and atmosphere. The current section is devoted to past studies conducted on these selected works.

2.4.1 Past Studies on Hernan Diaz's *In the Distance*

Hernan Diaz's *In the Distance* is a novel that delves into the themes of isolation, identity, and the American frontier during the mid-19th century. It consists of a haunting narrative that follows the journey of a young Swedish immigrant named Håkan as he traverses the harsh landscape of the American West. The novel challenges the reader to question the nature of belonging, the malleability of memory, and the American dream myth. Critics have praised the novel's lyrical prose, subversion of Western tropes, and exploration of the immigrant experience. Kirkus, one of the leading literary journals, awarded the book a starred review, calling it a stunning work of historical fiction that reimagines the Western genre and explores the depths of human loneliness and resilience. They also describe it as A tale of survival, self-discovery, and the elusive nature of home told through the eyes of an unforgettable protagonist (Kirkus Reviews). While previous studies have examined Hernan Diaz's *In*

the Distance from different perspectives, none have focused on the desert narratives in the novel.

In this section, we review the past studies that have been conducted on Hernan Diaz's novel *In the Distance*. As a relatively new novel published in 2017, there has been limited academic work analyzing and interpreting the novel. A few brief articles have touched on themes and narrative techniques employed by Diaz, but a full-length scholarly study is still demanded to cover the narratives of the desert within the selected framework of the current study.

A pivotal study among the studies of Diaz's novel is Abedi and Moradi-Joz's "Posthumanism in Hernan Diaz's In the Distance" (2021), which focuses on the potential representation of posthumanism and the exploitative relationship between humans and nature. The researchers analyze how the novel represents "the inextricable bond between humans and their surroundings in the most anthropocentric trend of posthumanism and addressing our exploitative way of living and the outcomes of our ill-treatment toward the natural environment" (49). In their analysis, the researchers determine that Diaz demonstrates how the "furtherance of the human race has made us a threat for planet earth" and aims to warn of environmental consequences (56). They conclude that Diaz employs posthumanism to break down human exceptionalism and represent abused non-human entities, critiquing the modern period's objectification of nature.

Another study that approaches the novel from a different perspective is Neil Campbell's "What West? Worlding the Western in Hernan Diaz's In the Distance" (2019). Campbell argues that Hernan Diaz's novel represents an "interruptive Western" that challenges and reimagines Western genre conventions (103). The novel places the American West globally, exploring migration, colonialism, and ecological interconnectedness themes. Campbell contends that Diaz "worlds" the Western by disrupting linear

narratives of progress and manifest destiny, instead portraying the West as a space of complex local-global interactions. The protagonist's disorienting journey eastward across America subverts typical frontier narratives. Through this analysis, Campbell demonstrates how contemporary Western literature can critique exceptionalist ideologies and situate the American West within broader planetary systems and histories.

In similar terms, Pieter Vermeulen's "Frankenstein's Monster Goes West: Hernan Diaz's In the Distance, Cli-Fi, and the Literature of Limitation." (2023) analyzes Hernan Diaz's *In the Distance* as a work that reimagines the Western genre for the climate change era. It argues that the novel promotes a literature of limitation and adjustment in contrast to dominant modes of climate fiction. By revising tropes from Westerns and "Frankenstein," the novel emphasizes constraint and diminished possibilities rather than fantasies of escape or overcoming.

From Archetypal Approach, Rashad Al Areqi's "Archetypal Approach and Narrative Techniques in Hernan Diaz's In the Distance" (2022) approaches the novel by analyzing archetypes and narrative techniques in the novel to depict the protagonist's journey and struggles in the American West (925). This article is not in accord with the current thesis in the sense that Al Areqi uses an archetypal approach to explore how the protagonist Håkan embodies archetypes of the classic hero's journey, the American Dream of opportunity and success, and the relationship between man and the terrible mother figure of nature and the wilderness.

Moreover, Khum Prasad Sharma's "Between Mythology and Modernity in Hernan Diaz's In the Distance" (2023) examines Diaz's novel and its exploration of mythology and modernity in the context of the American West. It also analyses how the novel challenges conventional Western myths through the journey of protagonist Håkan Söderström (88).

The paper argues that Diaz employs mythical archetypes and narrative techniques to critique romanticized notions of the frontier while addressing contemporary themes.

2.4.2 Past Studies on Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*

The Bleeding of the Stone (1991) novel by Ibraheem Al-Koni explores the mystical, spiritual traditions of the desert and is set entirely within its immense sands. Al-Koni's literary works exemplify a prevalent trend within Arabic desert fiction, wherein the desert landscape is depicted as a refuge or an escape from the perceived detrimental effects of imposed modernization. Literary critics have scrutinized Al-Koni's portrayal of the desert, highlighting his conception of it as a mythical space. As Hastrup asserts, "For Al-Koni, the desert transcends its physical dimensions and becomes a metaphysical inquiry, a symbolic representation of human existence itself... it is not merely a geographic location but rather a transcendental space, a metaphorical reflection of place" (24). Al-Koni also presents the desert as integral to understanding characters and their outlooks within an Arabic cultural context, reflecting the desert's Arabic narrative and its impact on the characters. In this section, we review the past studies that have been conducted on Al-Koni's novel.

Mythologically, Amira El-Zein's "Mythological Tuareg Gods in Ibrahim al-Koni's Work" (2015) approaches the novel analytically to interpret the role of Tuareg mythology within his work. She focuses on how Al-Koni weaves the myths of the Tuareg people through "a system of literary symbols and metaphors" to explore universal themes (200). She examines the presence of Egyptian mythology in Tuareg myths as depicted in al-Koni's novels *The Seven Veils of Seth*, *The Bleeding of the Stone*, and *Anubis*. She analyzes how al-Koni fictionalizes the gods Seth, Asouf, and Anubis to dramatize the values of nomadic versus settled life. Similarly,

Elena Imen Carruba's "Mythical Realism in North African Fiction: Ibrahim Al-Koni's Gold Dust and The Bleeding of the Stone" (2018) approaches the works from the perspective of mythical realism. She argues that "myth is the main feature of magical realism in al-Koni's work". Carruba seeks to move beyond the concept of magical realism and define al-Koni's style as mythical realism.

Furthermore, Göran Larsson's "Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel" (2014) approaches the study of Sufism in contemporary Arabic novels by analyzing works from seven prominent Arabic authors. He examines "how these leading figures in contemporary Arabic literature use Sufism and Islam as references or focal points in their literary works" (83). Larsson focuses on examples from novels by Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih, Ibrahim al-Koni, Tahar Ouettar, and Bahaa Taher to discuss how these authors incorporate Sufism into their works. Larsson points out that these post-war Arabic authors use Sufism to "question the prevailing order or discuss existential questions (life and death, meaning of life)" when other forms of social or political critique are restricted (89).

In different terms, Susan Mchugh's "Hybrid Species and Literatures: Ibrahim al-Koni's 'Composite Apparition" (2012) approaches Ibrahim al-Koni's novels *The Bleeding of the Stone*, *Gold Dust*, and *Anubis* through the lens of animism and human-animal hybridity. She outlines how Al-Koni uses scenes of humans transforming into animals as "composite apparitions" that evoke "ancient animist belief systems in order to develop a unique critical perspective on state-sanctioned slaughter" (286). She argues that al-Koni crafts these hybrids as "integral components of the desert dweller's perspective, and with broader implications". (291)

In similar terms, Fatima Moolla's "Desert Ethics, myths of Nature and Novel Form in the Narratives of Ibrahim Al-Koni" (2015) approaches Al-Koni's novels through the lens of desert symbolism and

environmentalism. In her analysis of *The Seven Veils of Seth, Anubis, and The Bleeding of the Stone*, Moolla examines how "the natural world is viewed through the lens of the mythical, encompassing the religious worlds of both Tuareg animism as well as monotheism represented by Islam and early Christianity" (176). She analyzes how Al-Koni's desert-based fiction incorporates mythical, religious, and sacred elements that challenge the conventional novel form.

Furthermore, Jehan Farouk Fouad, Saeed Alwakeel's "Representations of the Desert in Silko's "Ceremony" and Al-Koni's "The Bleeding of the Stone" (2013) provide a comparative analysis of the representations of the desert in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* and Ibrahim Al-Koni's novel *The Bleeding of the Stone* (36). Both novels are seen to transcend the physical depiction of the desert, transforming it into an existential realm that raises ontological and epistemological questions about human existence. The desert is depicted as a timeless microcosm that allows for a reenactment of the creation story and the struggle between good and evil, becoming the locus for rituals and ceremonies to restore balance (38).

From a postcolonial point of view, Lava Asaad, in his article "A Sacred Covenant: Islamic Environmentalism in Ibrahim Al-Koni's The Bleeding of the Stone" (2020), Asaad asserted an insightful analysis of Islamic environmental themes in Ibrahim Al-Koni's novel *The Bleeding of the Stone*. He situates the novel within postcolonial and ecocritical frameworks, exploring how Al-Koni uses Islamic rituals and teachings to challenge Western narratives of human dominance over nature. (195)

Majed Alenezi's "An Invisible Existence Between Life and Death in Al-Koni's The Bleeding of the Stone" (2018) analyzes Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* through an ecocritical and metaphysical lens. Alenezi argues that the novel portrays a metaphysical, ontological

dimension of existence between life and death, established through the dialectical relationship between the protagonist, Asouf, and the desert setting. The desert is central, shaping rituals and boundaries, while humans are marginalized. (1151)

Likewise, Snow J Sharmilla's "Nature in Peril: An Eco-critical Reading of Ibrahim al-Koni's The Bleeding of the Stone" (2018) conducts an ecocritical analysis of Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*, exploring how it highlights environmental issues and advocates for preserving traditional desert life. It examines Al-Koni's portrayal of the Tuareg people's harmonious relationship with nature and the threat posed by colonial exploitation, overhunting, and ecological destruction in the desert.

Methodologically, Motasim Almwajeh and Shadi Neimneh's "Mythopoetics: Sustaining the Ecosystem in Ibrahim Al-Koni's The Bleeding of the Stone" (2021) explores how Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* incorporates mythology to highlight the importance of preserving the ecosystem and exposing cultural disharmony in the Sahara Desert. The researchers argue that Al-Koni employs mythical elements, such as human-animal metamorphoses, reverence for the desert, and recounted stories/ancient engravings, to depict a cultural gap between the desert's natives and foreign hunters. The novel celebrates traditional practices in protecting the desert and its inhabitants against rationalist systems instigated by modern technology, emphasizing the role of myth in sustaining the ecosystem.

Although there have been some studies about Ibrahim al-Koni's novels, including *The Bleeding of the Stone*, from different perspectives, such as hybridity, Sufism, Tuareg mythology, and composite apparitions, none of them have adequately highlighted the space of the desert or its positive impact on the characters. While some papers slightly discuss the desert setting, there has been no research, according to available sources

focusing specifically on the Arabic narratives of the desert in al-Koni's work or its constructive influence. The studies only touch on the desert in passing without deeply examining its significance in terms of the impact of the desert as a space in shaping the characters' destiny.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Despite the extensive body of literature examining desert narratives from various perspectives, a significant gap remains in approaching these tales from a spatial standpoint, particularly through the lens of Augé's concepts of "place" and "non-place". Most existing studies have primarily focused on the conceptualizations of the desert from ecological, philosophical, or other perspectives. Further, past studies on Hernan Diaz's novel *In the Distance* and Ibraheem Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* are reviewed. While these studies have undoubtedly contributed valuable insights, they have largely overlooked the spatial dynamics inherent in desert landscapes and their potential to embody Augé's theoretical framework. Indeed, most scholarly work has concentrated on the desert's mythological role and stereotypical image, with little attention paid to its spatial characteristics as defined by Augé. For this reason, the present inquiry seeks to investigate desert narratives through the prism of "place" and "non-place", exploring how these concepts manifest in literary depictions of arid environments and challenging traditional interpretations of desert spaces in fiction.

CHAPTER THREE

Desert Narratives as a "Place" and "Non-Place" in Ibrahim Al-Koni's The Bleeding of the Stone

3.1 Introduction

The desert is conceptualized as a hypothetical spatial construct, where a metaphysical tradition that has reached its limits can envision its transcendence. (Tynan 2). It is often seen merely as a wasteland. Still, it is historically significant as the birthplace of many prophets and religions and a space of spiritual cleansing and folkloric mythologies. Klemm notes that "The 'desert' refers to a complex locus of experience and reflection; it is simultaneously an interior space of the mind; an exterior place where pilgrims, adventurers, and travelers can visit and dwell; and an intertextual space produced by cross-references among cultural creations dealing with the desert as archetype or icon of the imagination. ... The desert is an oasis where humans can renew themselves and undergo personal transformation" (14). Tynan also argues that the desert can be understood in different, complex ways, as a natural wilderness, a barren wasteland, an ecology that is both biodiverse yet vulnerable, a place signifying geographical extremes or otherness, a sacred or forbidden domain, a metaphor for emptiness, a terrain shaping subjective experiences, or an area eliciting pure aesthetic appreciation. (20)

As an example of the desert writer, Ibrahim Al-Koni (Libyan fictionist) draws extensively from the Libyan folklore and myths of the desert in his writing. He portrays the desert landscape, animals, and people groups like the 'Tuareg' in a symbolic and mythological way. Al-Koni does

not just describe the surface characteristics of the desert but explores its inhabitants' social and cultural dimensions. Through the narrative of the desert, Al-Koni captures essential aspects of Tuareg culture and beliefs and revives superstitious thought that is still important to desert communities. His work engages with the physical features of the desert environment and the inner world of its people on a deeper symbolic level.

In this chapter, Ibrahim al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990) is analyzed in light of Marc Augé's concepts of “place” and “non-place”. According to Augé's definition, the desert as a place where desert people live is considered a space. It has significance and meaning for them as their home/place of origin and upbringing, while visitors and outsiders introduce aspects of “non-place” into the desert. The outsiders represent transience and anonymity rather than roots/community. Their arrival transforms part of the desert setting into a “non-place”.

Consequently, the reflection of Augé's concepts can be seen in the life of Asouf, the central character in Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*. Asouf is a Bedouin herdsman who lives alone in the remote desert (place) region of Massak Satfat. Having lost both of his parents at a young age, Asouf spends his days herding goats and avoiding interactions with other people. He is forced to encounter outsiders when Christian tourists visit his land to view ancient cave paintings. Asouf shares a profound connection with the desert environment, specifically with the Barbary Sheep, known locally as the 'Wadden', that inhabits the surrounding mountains. He acts as a guide for these visitors, leading them to important sites. Later, he encounters two hunters who request assistance locating a Waddan to pursue. He is wary of people after being taught by his father to fear harm from others. The novel depicts Asouf's solitary lifestyle in the desert. It explores the psychological impact of his isolation, as well as his complex feelings towards the visitors who disrupt his solitary existence in the desert.

3.2 Desert as a "Place" in Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*

Ibrahim Al-Koni's novel *The Bleeding of the Stone* vividly depicts the lifestyle and hardships faced by the Tuareg people living in the Libyan deserts. Through lyrical descriptions of the desert landscape, Al-Koni illustrates the deep interconnectedness between the Tuaregs and their desert as a place. In the novel, he says, ''No one sees into things as desert people do; no one can match them in reading the secrets of the unknown" (71). This quote offers insights into how indigenous desert communities perceive and relate to their desert as a narrative of space. It highlights the profound connection and interdependence between these people and the desert. Thus, desert peoples have developed a narrative of intimacy with the desert as a space for articulating their being. In Augé's view, places are supposed to provide their people with shelters, refugees or camps, which offer their inhabitants provisional protection. (104)

Al-Koni imbues the desert space with rich symbolism and significance, depicting it as a space that "cleanses the soul" and connects people to something more significant. He depicts the desert as a space that purifies people not just physically but also spiritually, which can be discerned from the opening chapter of the novel, titled "The Stone Icon." In this chapter, the narrator conveys to the reader a vivid picture where description is interwoven with narration and action. As we can see in the following extract:

> The evening was coming, the flaming disk of the sun sinking slowly down from the depths of the sky as it bade farewell, with the threat to return next morning and finish burning what it had not burned today, and Asouf plunged his arms into the sands of the wadi to begin his ablutions, in readiness for his afternoon prayers. (7)

Awin Al-Fouri maintains that the desert is not the space or a setting where the novel's events occur. However, it is the novel's protagonist with a special status and distinguished characteristics. He also added that “The place reflects the mysterious inter-related relationship that links the novel's characters into one entity and destiny in which drama mingles with legends, philosophy, magic and superstitions” (42). The barren desert place in Al-Koni’s novel symbolizes their ascetic lifestyle and provides a setting where they can commune together under the moonlight, protected from outside influences. He describes the desert in one of the scenes when Asouf’s father says, “Here, in the desert, was freedom and death”. (18)

This quotation shows how the desert holds the narrative of freedom. By escaping to the desert, one can break free from the constraints of interacting with others and the social hierarchies. However, this freedom sometimes comes at the cost of death, as the title of one of the novel's chapters indicates “The Price of Solitude”, as surviving in the harsh environment of the desert is difficult. Webber asserted, “Freedom from the constraints of proximity captures the essence of the 'place urban realm.' Indeed, this liberation has provided immense opportunities to birth new ideas. (53)

The desert as a space is also prominently featured in Arabic literature as a zone of reclamation, identity-building, and resistance against outside hegemony. Marc Augé maintains that the terms of contemporary discourse should be spatial because spatial arrangements express the group or the individual’s identity. Unlike, for example, homes/places, which are viewed as places of identity, relations, and history, other locations, “places”, are spaces that “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (77-78). The desert spirit portrayed through Asouf, and his father evokes Middle Eastern societal ideals of tribal honor, self-sufficiency, and defiance against oppressors.

Thacker maintains that Foucault viewed space as possessing a spatial and historical character integral to various material and social life forms, like schools and prisons. Regarding power's productivity, Foucault stresses examining how subjects are situated within, fabricated by, or react to specific spaces. Diverse spaces can mirror, bring about, or reject prevalent power structures (33). Similarly, Schmid asserted that while Foucault sees space as power, Lefebvre perceives space as fundamentally intertwined with social reality. In other words, space does not simply exist independently but is socially produced by humans (201).

Al-Koni also presents the nature of the desert and how the sounds in the desert deceive and delude, “Sounds in the desert could deceive and delude. In the early morning, and in the evening, the calm magnified the remotest noise and brought it nearer, turning it to clamorous din” (6). The desert is portrayed as a vast, silent expanse, but Al-Koni challenges this notion by drawing attention to the auditory experiences it offers (Colla 3). Al-Koni's work completely redefines the perception of the world. In this new perspective, the Sahara is seen as a significant and inhabited region rather than a desolate one. Additionally, the Tuareg people are portrayed as central figures in history rather than being marginalized in the periphery. (Colla 5)

The calm and stillness of the desert act as a canvas upon which even the faintest sounds are magnified, distorting their true nature and distance. This phenomenon creates a disorienting effect, where the familiar becomes unfamiliar, and the senses are left grappling with an altered reality. Al-Koni's use of the words “deceive” and “delude” suggests that the desert actively participates in this auditory illusion, almost as if it possesses a sentient quality. The desert is not merely a passive backdrop but rather an active force that manipulates and distorts the sounds that traverse its domain. This anthropomorphic portrayal imbues the desert with a sense of

mystique and power, challenging the notion of human dominance over the natural world.

This is evident in how Augé views anthropology as "places that have been converted into a multicultural community center and a vibrant hub for political, cultural, and various other activities in the modern world" (73). In the novel, the desert is personified as a dynamic force, with the sun pouring itself onto the plain and clothing the desert in a "red mantle of its rays" at sunset. The author's use of sensory details immerses the reader in the desert environment. The auditory details, such as the "noise of the truck" growing louder and the "bleating of the goats," create a sense of ambiance and atmosphere. The visual descriptions, like the "cloud of dust on the horizon" and the sun's rays bathing the desert, paint a vivid picture of the desert's vastness and ever-changing hues.

Moreover, Al-Koni employs a powerful metaphor to convey the Bedouin's deep connection to the desert, their unwavering determination to protect it, and their way of life due to its impact on their lifestyle. Augé states that "place and non-place do not integrate. This non-integration makes the nature and quality of connections between places problematic. The critical question is not whether to search for genuine physical solutions for connections between places and non-places" (79). The desert in the novel can be seen as a real homeland (place).

The narratives of the desert in Al-Koni's novel will be examined in the upcoming section and subsection as a "place" and a "non-place" through the characters of Asouf, his father, and his mother as representatives of the Tuareg people and the desert visitors or outsiders: Cain, Masoud, and John Parker. For the native people, the desert is a home and meaningful place, they are deeply connected to this space because their lives and culture are rooted here, and the desert matters to them. Nevertheless, the desert does not feel like an actual place for outsiders just

passing through or doing any temporary job there. It is more of a vacant non-place they are not part of and do not belong to in the same way.

3.2.1 Asouf: The Narrative of the Desert

Asouf is the central character in Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*. He is established as a solitary inhabitant of the desert region of Massak Satfat in the Libyan desert. Having grown up isolated from other people in the desert with his father and mother, Asouf embodies traditional desert people's ideals and worldview. Throughout the novel, Al-Koni uses Asouf to present the narratives of desert life and perceptions of the desert from the viewpoint of someone who considers it as home / 'place' and has an intimate knowledge of its nature. Asouf's character also explores the impact of living alone in the desert space for so long and the significance that the desert holds for him physically and spiritually.

From the very beginning of the novel, Asouf has been raised in utter solitude, having grown up isolated in the desert with only his parents for company. This upbringing shaped him to value independence and self-reliance above all else. When first introduced, Asouf is depicted herding his goats alone as a young man and how it looks like to live in the desert:

> It was only when he started praying that the male goats decided to butt one another right there in front of him. Even so, he had no neighbors to help him or to take care of his needs when he was ill. There was only this endless wilderness all around. (Al-Koni 7)

The novel establishes Asouf's harmonious relationship with the desert's rhythms through simple acts like him beginning his prayers in the evening when "the flaming disk of the sun sinking slowly down from the depths of the sky". His spirituality is intertwined with the natural world surrounding the ancient Wadi Matkhandoush, where he had faced the merciless sun for years. According to Augé, the "non-places" that

characterize hypermodernity can be defined in contrast to places. Specifically, Augé asserts that if a place has relational, historical, and identity-forming dimensions, a space lacking these defining qualities can be considered a non-place. (77)

This conceptualization of place and non-place provides valuable context for understanding Asouf's relationship with the desert. Asouf lives in harmony with the desert environment and shares long-standing historical and cultural connections stemming from his ancestral heritage. Through these relational and historical dimensions, the desert takes on significance as Asouf's homeplace rather than merely a non-place devoid of meaning. Thus, Augé's theoretical framing helps elucidate how the desert holds profound importance for Asouf and his people by serving as a place rather than a placeless space defined by the interconnected relationships, traditions, and identities that have formed there over time. Augé contends that places ‘are spaces where people cohabitate living together’. (110)

Despite living in solitude, Asouf gains extraordinary familiarity with his desert surroundings through his daily interactions with them. Al-Koni uses descriptive passages about Asouf expertly navigating the desert to convey his profound familiarity with its dynamics. For example, when first introduced to herding his goats, Asouf immediately senses an incoming rainstorm: “he saw a cloud of dust on the horizon. The bleating of the goats rose, while the young kids leaped constantly at the mouth of the cave in protest at their early confinement” (15). Here, his ability to read subtle signs in the landscape hints at an intuitive understanding built up from lifelong exposure.

Likewise, Foucault (1984) describes heterotopia space as “privileged or sacred or forbidden places” that serve as sites of exclusion for those in a state of crisis about broader society (26). Such spaces offer a feeling of belonging within a sheltered location while also rendering one exposed and

vulnerable (27). Asouf's role as a guardian of the desert in the novel represents a form of heterotopic space, although Asouf is not an outcast of society. Yet, throughout the novel, Asouf takes on the task of protecting the desert's secrets and inhabitants from outside intrusion. This is evident when the archaeologist asks Asouf to safeguard the ancient paintings in Wadi Matkhandoush. In assuming this guardian role, Asouf simultaneously belongs to the sheltered space of the desert while also standing apart from other spaces as one charged with its exposed protection. Thus, through Foucault's lens, Asouf personifies a heterotopia by his position guarding the desert. The archaeologist says:

> “From now on,” the department official told him, “you are the guardian of the Wadi Matkhandoush. You'll be our eyes here. A lot of people will come, from all races and religions, to look at these ancient things. You must watch them. Don't let them steal the stones. See they don't spoil the rocks. These rocks are a great treasure, and these paintings are our country's pride. Keep your eyes open. People are greedy, ready to grab anything. If they can, they'll steal our rocks to sell them in their own country, for thousands, or millions even. Keep your eyes peeled! You're the guardian.” (Al-Koni 13)

Asouf refuses monetary payment for his guarding role, which comes under the influence of the narratives he is raised by in the desert that he is spiritually united with it. Thus, protecting the desert is more than a job for Asouf - it is a personal responsibility and commitment to his way of life. Living freely in isolation, as his father taught him, he does not want to be financially dependent on outsiders. As an insider with extensive knowledge of the desert, he feels a duty to shield it from harm through tourism and treasure hunters. When Christian tourists start visiting the site, Asouf ensures they respect the desert by not damaging the rock paintings. He welcomingly shares his culture's history but remains wary of outsiders,

spending much time alone in the desert even after taking the guardian role. This portrayal suggests that Asouf feels a deep spiritual and cultural connection to the desert that he lives to protect for future generations.

Moreover, Asouf demonstrates an ability to care for himself without relying on others, which stems from his upbringing in isolation. When his parents die, leaving him utterly alone, he is forced to assume full responsibility for himself from a young age (Fouad and Alwakeel 50). However, he also demonstrates resilience, surviving independently through hard work and an intimate understanding of desert survival gained from his father. After his father's death, Asouf continues living a solitary existence. His intense discomfort around other people also suggests he has become uncomfortable with any intrusion on his solitude after so long living apart:

> He did not sleep at all that night. How was he, who had never mixed with people, to talk with them, make his case to others? How could he, who was afraid of people, to go near them when the mere thought of going among them terrified him? (Al-Koni 31)

Here, Al-Koni hints at how Asouf's lifelong isolation has made him distrustful and fearful of interacting with other humans. Having grown accustomed to self-reliance, he regards intrusions on his solitude with wariness rather than welcoming company. Through Asouf's character, Al-Koni establishes how isolation can breed independence but also discomfort around others for those raised alone in the desert.

Further, when outsiders like Cain entered Asouf's desert space, it disrupted Asouf's way of life and sense of safety in the wilderness he knew so well. Even as modern technology like helicopters started penetrating the desert, Asouf resisted seeing the desert transformed from an empty, spiritual place into one claimed and used by outsiders. Susan Rasmussen noted that imposing boundaries and national identities has severely limited

Tuareg practices and culture, often directly involving their environment. They pointed out that “the French colonial administrators disrupted many local systems of adaptation and the natural ecological balance of the Sahara and Sahel” (69). For Asouf, the desert is a sacred ground that holds secrets and spirits from ancient times, a space where he finds meaning, peace, and identity that he struggles to protect from encroachment. Asouf's isolation in the desert causes him to develop a deep connection with the desert and animals. He comes to see the Waddan not just as a beast but as “his father.” The harsh desert environment is also what ultimately leads to Asouf's mother's death and pushes him to interact with others he usually avoids, like Cain. (78)

Moreover, the Waddan, a majestic and elusive animal, is a powerful symbol representing the spirit of the desert in this novel. Its presence embodies the untamed essence of desert space, evoking a sense of mystery and reverence. Through the central character's actions, Al-Koni skillfully weaves a narrative that celebrates the inextricable connection between human beings and their natural surroundings. (Fändrich 332) Then what Asouf had been fearing all day happened:

> From behind a rock, just opposite him, a Waddan peered out, following their movements in the wadi. Asouf quickly turned away, thanking God Cain and Masoud hadn't noticed the mighty animal. To hide his confusion and distract their attention, he raised his head and began his afternoon prayer with a loud “God is great!” He sensed the animal was still behind him, watching them from the hollow in the rock. The poor beast had scented his presence and felt safe from the guests—for the waddan had begun to trust him now, grazing close to him in large herds. Ever since he'd stopped eating meat. (Al-Koni 63)

Asouf's fervent desire to protect the Waddan from harm reflects his deep reverence for the desert and its inhabitants. The Waddan, described as

a “mighty animal,” is revered as a sacred entity, and its appearance fills Asouf with a sense of responsibility. Asouf's swift actions to divert Cain and Massoud's attention from Waddan's presence, even at the risk of confusing them, highlight his profound respect for Waddan. Knowing Cain and Massoud had a craving to eat the meat of the Waddan, Asouf pretended he did not see the animal because he wanted to save it from them. Asouf's decision to abstain from eating meat further solidifies his bond with the Waddan and the desert and reflects the narrative of the desert people. This gesture symbolizes a harmonious coexistence between humans and the desert, reflecting how the desert still matters. It is also reflected when Asouf was praying for the outsiders' failure in noticing the Waddan for he knows well the narrative of the “non-place” people, who are not interested in the narratives of the desert, instead, in their exploitative narratives. That's why, the author entitled this chapter “Prayer” to signify the sacredness of the desert for the “place” people.

Through this narrative, Al-Koni invites readers to contemplate the concept of “place” as defined by Augé. With its unique characteristics and the presence of the Waddan, the desert becomes a profound “place”, a space imbued with cultural, historical, and personal significance. It is a space that holds meaning and identity for Asouf and his people, a place that demands reverence and protection. The idea of a “non-place” can be seen as the progress of modernization and industrial development that threatens to disrupt the balance. (Machut-Mendecka 146) Asouf’s actions extend beyond preserving animals; they represent an initiative to maintain the desert as a sacred sanctuary, conserving its cultural legacy, ecological equilibrium, and spiritual importance. By safeguarding the Waddan region, Asouf defends a species. Upholds the essence of the desert as a place of deep personal and societal significance.

Moreover, Asouf's depiction in the novel stands in contrast to outsiders who venture into the desert. Tourists, archaeologists, and others seek to exploit or study its wonders. These visitors' luxuries and materialistic perspectives epitomize a world that Asouf has deliberately distanced himself from. Al Koni cleverly contrasts Asouf's simplicity and deep bond with the desert against the outsider's fascination and inability to grasp the essence of the desert. This comparison underscores the notion that Asouf's perspective is profoundly influenced by his immersion in the desert, a way of life that remains unfathomable to those without experience.

The final chapter of the novel, entitled "The Bleeding of the Stone", sums up the end of Asouf's life. It underscores how deeply the desert still matters to Asouf and how devotedly he protects it until his dying breath. When Cain crucified Asouf on the rock, in his final moments "his body was thrust into the hollow of the rock, merging with the body of the waddan painted there" (99). This symbolizes how Asouf has become one with the desert spirit, sacrificing himself to safeguard its sacred lands and creatures. As the passage states, "The waddan's horns were coiled around his own neck like a snake. The masked priest's hand still touched his shoulders, as if blessing him with secret rites." (99) This quotation illustrates Asouf achieving spiritual unity with the desert through his martyrdom. The desert remains a powerful, almost mythical force in the lives of its inhabitants, personified by Asouf. As a "protector" of the desert and its creatures, Asouf's death takes on symbolic significance – he sacrifices himself to safeguard the desert. This reflects the enduring narrative of 'place' desert peoples for whom the desert is inextricably tied to their identity and way of life. As an outsider lacking an understanding of the desert's significance, Cain sees only its resources as something to be exploited. He urges Masoud:

> “Are you mad?” he shrieked. “Or is this your idea of a joke? We've crossed deserts, we've put up with hunger and thirst. And now we're supposed to go back to the oases, without any waddan? Go back there empty-handed? Get off! Get away from me!” (Al-Koni 98)

This view brings Cain into conflict with Asouf, who protects the desert as both place and non-place. Asouf sacrifices himself rather than revealing the place of the waddan to the outsiders. His death reflects the nomadic desert peoples' narrative that the desert must be revered, challenging those who seek only to extract from it. Cain kills Asouf, slaughtering him in the manner of one well used to slaughter, one who'd slaughtered all the herds of gazelles in the Red Hamada:

> Then Cain climbed the rock from the flatter side, and, laughing wildly into the face of the sun, bent over the herdsman's head where it hung bowed. Taking hold of the beard, he passed the knife over Asouf's neck in the manner of one well used to slaughter, one who'd slaughtered all the herds of gazelles in the Red Hamada. (Al-Koni 99)

This atrocious crime against Asouf highlights how Cain fails to understand the desert and its “place” people. Asouf embodies guarding the desert spirit, and with his death, the desert unleashes its wrath, the “jinni maidens” lament, and “the mountain was rent” by storms. This vividly conveys how the desert avenges the violation of its sacred protector(Fändrich 337). Cain and Masoud, as outsiders, are driven by an almost obsessive “carving for meat,” particularly the Waddan, which represents the desert's essence. Their escalating frenzy leading to Asouf's murder highlights their inability to comprehend or respect the desert's sanctity, viewing it merely as a source to exploit.

> Still the blood poured over the surface of the stone buried in the lap of the sand. The murderer had no eyes to see how the sky had darkened, how clouds had blocked out the desert sun ... Masoud leaped into the truck and switched on the engine. At the same moment great drops of rain began to beat on its windows, washing away, too, the blood of the man crucified on the face of the rock. (Al-Koni 100)

This quote vividly describes the tragic death of Asouf, the protector of the desert, who is murdered by Cain. Asouf's bloody sacrifice symbolizes how the desert still profoundly matters despite encroaching threats from outsiders. The quotation effectively captures Asouf's final moments as his "blood poured over the surface of the stone buried in the lap of the sand." He is literally crucified, taking on Christ-like imagery as a savior who died for the greater cause of preserving the desert landscape and way of life. As described through Augé's concepts of "place" and "non-place".

For Asouf, the desert is a revered, identity-conferring "place," imbued with personal and cultural meaning. However, Cain and Masoud view it as an anonymous "non-place" – their desire to acquire the Waddan strips the landscape of any deeper significance (Al-Hagi 82). Through Asouf's martyrdom, the novel reasserts the desert's continuing relevance as a "place" intrinsically linked to certain communities, resisting the encroaching forces that would reduce it to a barren "non-place." His death does not occur in vain but protects the desert's spiritual dimensions from those who cannot fathom its essence.

As the rains come to "wash away" Asouf's blood and any trace of Cain's guilt, the desert continues to bear the burden of humanity's sins. Asouf didn't really die due to his selfless sacrifice; rather, he stood steadfast in defense of the ancient land of the desert dwellers who refused to be

exploited by strangers. As his sad death shows, the desert had a significant role in creating the cultural identity of its residents.

3.2.2 Asouf's Father: Guru of the Desert

The father of Asouf in the novel is one of the central characters, Because of his key role in Asouf's education and upbringing in the harsh desert environment of MassakSatfat, the father greatly influences his son's perspective and life experiences. Asouf develops a profound understanding of desert life and spirituality from his father, who imparts this knowledge. Al-Koni portrays the father as a figure of wisdom. This sage-like guy has gathered great insights and knowledge from his lonely life in the desert environment over many years. As he leads a life outside civilization, the father develops a deep affinity with and understanding the desert. He forms a unique worldview because of his experiences in the desert. Under the moonlight, he instructs his little Asouf in these virtues via storytelling, music, and conversation. In this sense, the father functions as Asouf's teacher and guide, educating him in the ways of desert life and providing direction regarding life's deeper truths and mysteries.

The desert as a “place” plays a formative role in shaping the father's character and worldview. Augé admits that “the non-places are usually characterized by the instructions for use, and these may include prescriptive, prohibitive or informative guidelines; hence, the non-place users have to adhere to and follow them” (96). In contrast, Asouf's father chooses to live far from other human settlements and develops a deep affinity and bond with the desert space. As one belongs fully to the desert, he gains intimate familiarity with its subtle workings and hidden secrets.

Foucault (1984) points out that “every single individual has the feeling of belonging to a particular sheltered place, which makes them feel isolated, hidden and protected; but on the other hand, they are exposed,

vulnerable and “allowed out in the open.” (27). Asouf's father's acute empathy and affinity for animals are part of the desert life that matters for its dwellers. It is reflected in the lessons he offers Asouf. For instance, during a conversation under the moonlight, he displays a tremendous intuitive understanding of different species' mindsets and behaviors:

> What do you think? What does the gazelle tell himself when he sees the enemy of all creatures? He says, 'the plain.' And what does the waddan say to himself when he sees the enemy of all creatures? He says, 'the mountain.' The mountain's a trap for the gazelle, the plain's a trap for the waddan. (Al-Koni 28)

Here, the father perceptively illustrates different animals' innate orientations based on their instincts - the gazelle's preference for open plains versus the waddan's mountainous habitats. His ability to precisely empathize across species reflects the deep connection with and intuitive knowledge of the desert world he has gained through solitary desert living. It is a perspective he strives to pass on to young Asouf. While the desert is considered a non-place by outsiders, for the people who live there, the desert still matters deeply as both a place and a space of cultural articulation.

Through living closely with the rhythms and challenges of the desert environment, generations have developed profound relationships with the land and intricate knowledge of living sustainably within its bounds. The desert forms a central part of Asouf and his father's identities, shaping how they understand themselves and their place in the world. Augé argues “what may be perceived as a 'place' by one person could be viewed as a 'non-place' by another, and vice versa” (61). While the desert might appear as a 'non-place' to outsiders, it is very much a “place” for Asouf and his father. Furthermore, the father goes on to offer a mystical insight into the secretive

relationships between desert flora and fauna, as when discussing seeds hidden dormant for long years:

> No sooner had the rains poured, the waters flowed to every corner, than the cruel, gloomy, drought-stricken land had turned green with plants of a thousand kinds. They simply sprang up, and the dull, dried-up trees turned green in a few days. It was as though the seeds strewn in nothingness, in the folds of the sands, among the massive rocks, had been waiting for that moment, eager for the sky to meet the earth. And when that consummation came, the seed buried in nothingness quivered and breathed out its relief, cracking earth and stone alike, stretching out its head in search of sun and life. (Al-Koni 56)

Here, the father poetically conveys an intuitive grasp of hidden desert ecologies. He perceives spiritual-mystical significances in nature's patterns - seeds' symbolic 'waiting' and 'breathing out relief' when conditions are right. This reflects a contemplative, inwardly probing perspective he has likely developed through solitary observation of the natural world over long years in the desert.

The father mysticizes the desert for its tremendous impact on shaping the person's individuality, which is suggested through his unusual interpretation of animals' behaviors and natural phenomena. For instance, he tells Asouf how the primordial enmity between the mountain and desert lands was reincarnated into animals' spirits: “Those sands found a way to enter the spirit of the gazelles, while the mountains found a way into the spirit of the waddan. And from that day on, the waddan was possessed by the spirit of the mountains.” (Al-Koni 30)

He relates further mystical tales, like how the gods grew weary of the feuding deserts' constant complaints and punished them by sending man -

“a devil called man” - to reside between the two lands. Such imaginative, symbolic interpretations demonstrate mystical tendencies in the father's thinking developed through solitary contemplation in nature. For Asouf's father, the desert represents a sacred 'place', imbued with spiritual meaning and significance, aligning with Augé's notion of places being relational, historical, and concerned with identity (Augé 77). His mystical tales also intrigued Asouf, shaping their shared perception of the desert as a 'place' rather than the 'non-place' it might be viewed as by outsiders who fail to grasp its deeper symbolic and mystical dimensions (Augé 78). Perhaps most mystifyingly, the father shares spiritual philosophies that seem gained through communion with the natural world and desert spirits. For example:

> Maybe they were from the jinn,' he said. 'But from the good jinn. The jinn are like people. They're divided into two tribes: the tribe of good and the tribe of evil. We belong to the first tribe—to the jinn who chose good. (Al-Koni 27)

This suggests that the father perceives sympathetic connections between humanity, nature, spirits, and the divine. It reflects a mystical worldview informed by intimate desert living removed from standard human society and religion. The father cultivates this unique spiritual perspective within inquisitive young Asouf. Through thoughtful guidance and leading by vibrant personal example, the father plays a profound role in Asouf's upbringing and character development. He nurtures inner qualities like patience, discernment, resilience, and emotional depth within Asouf. Perhaps most fundamentally, the father cultivates a strong affinity for the desert and isolation, giving spiritual insights from years of secluded contact with the environment. In this sense, he works as Asouf's teacher and spiritual mentor, dramatically influencing his viewpoint and fitness for desert life. The father's formative character, birthed by the soil, left a profound and mystical impression on Asouf's worldview. For them, the

desert symbolizes a significant 'place,' filled with symbolism and history and fundamental to their identities, contrasting with the idea of 'non-places', which lack such value. Their strong relationship to and spiritual knowledge of the desert demonstrates Augé's definition of 'places' as relational, historical, and concerned with identity development. (77)

Al-Koni crafts Asouf's father into a multilayered, intensely realized character. Through his solitary desert existence over many years, the father develops distinctive attributes befitting something of a desert sage or mystic. He gains a tremendous intuitive understanding of the desert through intimate observation removed from human interference. Emotionally complex and philosophical, he serves as a font of wisdom for young Asouf - imparting practical skills and deeper spiritual lessons. Importantly, the father reflects the narratives and perspectives of the desert people, for whom desert life matters profoundly. The anthropologist Augé argues that places and non-places exist in a state of constant intermixing, with attributes of each blending in any given time and space (62). To outsiders, the desert may represent a formless non-place, but for Asouf's father it is deeply imbued with meaning as his lived place of dwelling home. Having immersed himself so profoundly in desert rhythms and solitude, the father cultivates a unique relationship with landscape that allows him to see beyond surfaces and perceive interconnectivities invisible to those who pass through the desert only briefly. In this way, through his profound sense of place, he powerfully informs Asouf's upbringing and perspectives, playing a guiding role akin to that of a desert guru.

3.2.3 Asouf's Mother: Two Desert Narratives

Asouf's mother in *The Bleeding of the Stone* represents a complex, different view of life in the desert. On the one hand, her character embodies the narratives and perspectives inherent to desert living, she has spent her

entire life inhabiting this harsh, isolated environment with her family. The desert has shaped her worldview and way of life and became a space for articulating her interests as a "place" desert dweller. However, Al-Koni also reveals that, at times, she did not enjoy the intense solitude and removal from society that desert life entailed. While belonging intrinsically to the desert "place," she simultaneously experienced it as a "non-place" in a sense conceptualized by Augé - a transitory, impersonal space lacking the socio-cultural meaning. She lived the experience of an anthropological "place" (65). In one of the scenes Asouf father:

> turned to Asouf and went on in the same mysterious tone."How can I be a neighbor of men? Your mother keeps scolding me— she wants me to go back and live near the tribe in Abrahoh. She says she's lonely and she weeps at night. You know how she weeps. I'm the one, she says, who's the jinni, the devil, and not the other people. But I can't live near anyone. That's what my grandfather taught me, and that's what I must teach you. All I want is peace. Do you understand?" (Al-Koni 23)

Her characterization highlights the paradoxical nature of the desert existence, entrenchment in its stories and hardships, yet a sense of separation from the connections that localized societies provide. Al-Koni uses Asouf's mother to explore Derrida's contradictions and lack of defined paths associated with the desert realm. Derrida (1995) considered the desert a realm of contradictions, a paradoxical representation of uncertainty. He described it as lacking defined or guaranteed paths, at best offering unreliable trails that have not been fully established unless the sand has already covered them. In a heterotopic sense, Derrida viewed the desert as a decision or occurrence involving opening the way, surpassing, and moving beyond the aporia. (132)

Moreover, Asouf's mother represents the stereotypical image of a woman desert dweller who experiences desert hardships and reflects her dissatisfaction with this lifestyle, though content too. From the novel's beginning, it is established that Asouf's family lives a completely nomadic existence in the desert, moving constantly with their goat herds. They have no fixed home or neighbors and are deliberately isolated from other people. This solitary way of life is something Asouf's mother struggles with at times. When another family briefly settles in their wadi after a rare rainy season, she is delighted by the company and annoyed when her husband packs up to leave:

> It was the quarrel between his parents, provoked, he gathered, by the sudden trip. His mother had an acute sense of shame and set great store by what people thought of other people. For her the sudden departure was an affront to the new guests in the wadi and brought shame on themselves. (Al-Koni 20)

This indicates that while Asouf's mother is accustomed to the hardship of isolation in the desert, she still craves human interaction and company. Living apart from other people is a choice her husband makes rather than something she fully embraces. Later, when Asouf asks why they don't have any neighbors, she blames his father. Al-Koni presents Asouf's mother as having both narratives of the desert “place” and “non-place”. While resilient and capable of enduring its hardships, she also longs for aspects of community and social interaction that her husband's philosophy of extreme isolation denies her (Allen 68). Her critiques of his philosophy indicate that she sees value in some level of engagement with other people, even if full assimilation into the sedentary village or town life may not suit her. From this, we can discern that while fully belonging to the desert, Asouf's mother also has a more complex, nuanced view of isolation versus community than her husband expresses.

Asouf's mother is also shown to acknowledge some of the harsh realities and dangers inherent in desert life, especially as she ages. When Asouf's father begins isolating the family even further after his traumatic encounter with the possessed waddan, Asouf's mother repeatedly protests, worried for their wellbeing:

> “I'm the one, she says, who's the jinni, the devil, and not the other people. But I can't live near anyone. That's what my grandfather taught me, and that's what I must teach you. All I want is peace. Do you understand?” (23)

Through her concerns, Al-Koni indicates that while Asouf's mother embraces the desert, she also recognizes the risks that come with the extreme isolation her husband insists upon. Living apart from other people leaves them vulnerable if accidents or illness strike. Her critiques show she adopts different viewpoints; engagement with community and the solitary life her husband prefers.

Tragically, the dangers Asouf's mother acknowledged in isolation ultimately proved fatal for her. When powerful floods unexpectedly sweep through the desert, her solitary life leaves her unable to find help, and she perishes. De Certeau (1984) views that “places are never singularly defined, but rather exist in a state of “creative intercourse” between different attributes” (108). The desert homeland that gave spiritual and cultural sustenance to Asouf's mother also embodied risks due to her remoteness from other dwellings. Augé adds that identity and relation define places - they signify autonomy and integration within social and economic exchange networks that facilitate survival (79-80). In the desert environment, this could be easily ruptured by unpredictable forces of nature.

For Asouf's mother, the remote location that allowed her to nurture spiritual connections to place through solitude and craft also, tragically, severed her relations with others when help was most needed. Her death demonstrates how places contain interwoven essences of both habitation and hazard, home and unpredictable dangers arising from the very features that give locations uniqueness and meaning. Stones had torn away her limbs as she was swept on and on. Her head was disfigured, and the bushes had plucked the short silver hair from her small head, leaving it almost naked; nothing was there on the skull, but a few scattered hairs caked with mud. The right eye had gone, ripped away by the stones on that savage journey, and an empty, gaping space was left. The other eye was shining, staring up at the sky (54). Through this devastating end, Al-Koni drives home the risks inherent in the solitary desert life Asouf's mother occupied and critiqued. While deeply tied to the desert, she recognized its gifts and vulnerabilities in a way that ultimately could not protect her from tragic circumstances.

Through the character of Asouf's mother, Al-Koni provides an insightful glimpse into what it truly means to belong to the desert environment. While resilient and possessing great spiritual insight born of life-long intimacy with the land, Asouf's mother is also presented as retaining a balanced, nuanced view of isolation versus community. She acknowledges both the richness and vulnerabilities of desert life. Al-Koni uses her character to demonstrate the complexity of fully inhabiting such a harsh environment and suggests no single perspective can fully encompass what it means to belong to the desert.

3.3 Desert as a 'Non-Place' in Al-Koni's Novel

In his novel *The Bleeding of the Stone*, Al-Koni vividly depicts the harsh, arid landscape of the desert. Across the novel, the desert is firmly established as a locale alien and estranging to the transient characters of

Cain, Massoud, and John Parker. Their expedition to pursue the mythical Waddan continually underscores the desert's lack of identity, relation or history significant to these outsiders. From the outset, the desert functions unambiguously as a “non-place” in Augé's terms. Isolation pervades the characters' desert experience. Through travelling together, each man's presence in the desert is marked by disconnect and lack of deeper relation or understanding of the desert. Massoud notes to Asouf, “You've chosen to live in this empty wilderness...you don't actually live near anyone” (16). The characters experience the desert as a solitary transience rather than a ‘place’ of community. This anonymity intensifies each man's experience of the desert as an alien space. The characters repeatedly reference the desert's “emptiness,” emphasizing its lack of significant identity or relation.

For the outsiders in the novel, the desert's premodern cultural artifacts appear disconnected from comprehensible signification, reinforcing its status as an emptied, atemporal non-place. Augé suggests that spaces meaningfully function as locales or “anthropological places” and are characterized by relations invested in narrative and temporality that lend coherence and significance beyond the immediate interaction (66). Nowhere does the text present the desert as fostering such rooted relations or collective narratives for outsiders like Cain, Massoud, and John Parker. Rather, Al-Koni's characterization underscores how the desert intractably fails to anchor the characters' experience with the historical or local context, condemning them to a state of sheer non-placeness.

3.3.1 Cain: Counter Narrative of Desert

In Al-Koni's Novel, the character of Cain is introduced as an outsider to the desert, whose presence disrupts the harmonious relationship between Asouf and the desert. Cain's fascination with the desert is not one of reverence or spiritual attunement but rather a commodifying attachment

through his carving of meat, especially the 'Waddan' meat. According to Augé, non-places refer to places that serve as transit hubs, where individuals do not necessarily establish meaningful connections with one another (82). Al-Koni presents the character of Cain as a counter-narrative of the desert place through his outsider perspective and exploitation of the desert as a 'non-place' and its people. Cain has no meaningful connection to the desert, unlike Asouf, who represents a deep connection and understanding of the desert as a 'place' and home.

This contrast is established from Cain's first appearance, as he asks Asouf about the ancient rock art paintings, revealing his ignorance of their profound significance: “Have you come to look at the sights?” Asouf innocently asks, which Cain answers with derisive laughter: '“The sights,” he said scornfully when he'd finally recovered. “What business do we have with sights?” (Al-Koni 10). Cain's disdain for the “sights” that captivate tourists and spark wows in the locals like Asouf previews his violation of the desert's sanctity. This can be further understood through what Augé asserted that “non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social”. Moreover, Non-places evolve where humans from diverse, frequently distant places and backgrounds connect, traverse, and encounter one another. Non-places are created by the interactions between humans and the areas they occupy. (94)

By juxtaposing Cain's ignorant and dismissive attitude with Asouf's reverence for the ancient rock art, it highlights the clash between the perspectives of an outsider who treats the desert ‘place’ as a non-place and the desert people who recognize it as a sacred ‘place’ imbued with profound cultural significance. The desert as a place and space still matters for people like Asouf. This contrast sets the stage for Cain's impending violation of the desert's sanctity, as he fails to grasp or respect its profound

meaning and significance. Cain's true obsession is unveiled through his fixation on hunting the elusive waddan, which holds a mythical status in the desert folklore. To Cain's pragmatic capitalist mindset, the Wadden represents an exotic trophy to be pursued, killed, and commodified. This carving for the Waddan's meat crystallizes in grotesque imagery:

> The waddan is the secret of the desert. By stalking it, you can make the desert give itself to you—all of it, without a struggle.... Once you've hunted the waddan, there's nothing more to learn about the desert rocks and their colored messages. Have you ever tasted its meat?" Masoud sighed longingly. "I've never even seen a live one," he said, "not to mention tasting its flesh. (Al-Koni 19)

Here, Cain reduces the waddan to an object to be consumed, a perverse inversion of the Waddan's revered role in desert cosmology. His objectifying language of "stalking," "flesh," and "tasting its meat" casts the Waddan as a merely biological matter to be appropriated. Contrasted with Masoud's romantic sigh conveying a sense of the Waddan's mythical unattainability, Cain's utilitarianism desacralizes the desert totem. In the novel, it is evident that Cain has an intense love of meat and blood, especially waddan meat. He is notorious for his love of uncooked meat. his playmates started calling him the son of Yamya, referring to cannibalistic tribes known for eating raw human flesh (Shoniv 110). This voracious appetite is presented as almost an addiction, with Masoud noting that "there's a worm in this creature's mouth that makes him eat his very self if he finds no meat to eat" (Al-Koni 81). Cain's relationship with meat is presented as almost animalistic, driven by primal instincts rather than normal human appetites "The only thing that will cure me is meat. You know that well enough. My head's splitting. I can't take it anymore" (Al-Koni 94), which crystallizes Cain's failure of adopting the narrative of the desert.

So, we can see that Cain's relationship with the desert is one of taking rather than giving. He views it only in terms of what he can extract for his own gain and pleasure, with no thought for maintaining balance or sustaining resources for future generations. Al-Koni describes how Cain "ate the fruit and cursed what produces it" (83), showing his dismissive attitude towards the land that provides for him. His sole motivation is to satisfy his cravings for raw meats of the Waddan, regardless of the negative impact on the desert. This outlook leads him to overhunt animals until many species are continuously driven to extinction. For example, he "wiped out all the gazelles in the Red Hamada" and "all the gazelle herds in the Red Hamada" (Al-Koni 17). His selfish actions destroy the desert 'place' ecosystem and the livelihoods of others dependent on it, like passing caravans can no longer undertake trade due to dwindling resources.

For the people living in the desert, however, the desert is not a 'non-place' but rather a 'place' that really matters to them and their identities. While Cain views the desert as a 'non-place' only in terms of extraction for his own gain, the desert inhabitants rely on using resources to sustain their livelihoods for future generations. Auge points out that "The non-place interpolates no-one in particular but speaks in a generalized text where 'it deals only with individuals as customers, passengers, users, listeners, but they are identified only by name, occupation, place of birth, and address only upon entering and leaving" (11). Cain refuses to acknowledge any limits on what he takes from the desert, which represents a rejection of cultural understandings developed over generations to live sustainably. Asouf, by contrast, understands boundaries like only hunting one per trip, as in the following extract:

> Although there were plenty of gazelles in the desert then, his father had made it a strict rule never to hunt more than one gazelle each trip. That way, he maintained, the soul of the gazelle would become

> stronger and firmer. It would find itself protected by the shield of the Quran, and by the talismans of magicians and amulets of soothsayers, and by the incantations of devout sages. (Al-Koni 34)

By this, he maintains the populations of the animals. Cain's disregard stems from viewing animals or deserts only as commodities for his benefit rather than living parts of the desert. His mentality reduces complex relationships to a simplistic exchange of goods, diminishing the spiritual and cultural dimensions inherent to desert life. For example, he sees no issue in slaughtering a pregnant gazelle:

> In one raid a bullet pierced the belly of a pregnant gazelle, who took shelter in a small thorn bush, a whimper of pain passing her lips. She let her unborn calf drop, then began licking the blood and mucus from the tiny creature's body. The gazelle was bleeding, and the wounded calf was bleeding too, trying to lift up its head that the bullet had pierced. (Al-Koni 70)

Throughout the novel, Cain’ counter-narratives have a disrespectful attitude towards the desert that we can observe through his physical interaction with it. Rather than embracing its difficulties and finding harmony as Asouf does, Cain’s counter-narratives respond to challenges like the desert's harsh conditions with petulance and complaint. After their failed hunting trip in the Hasawna mountains, for example, he is” Wiping the sweat from his brow; he cursed the desert with vile words Asouf hadn't heard before—he'd never in his life heard such ugly expressions. What had the desert done to deserve all these insults?” (Al-Koni 61). For Cain, the desert is a non-place with no meaning or importance beyond what he can extract for his needs. However, for the indigenous people of the desert, it is a place that really matters in shaping their collective identity and livelihoods. Auge says that non-places encourage 'solitary' contractual obligations separate from shared cultural values and beliefs. In contrast, the

desert dwellers' relationship with their environment is based on communal obligations and stewardship of the land to ensure its sustainable use across generations. (94)

In the ‘non-place’ narratives, Arefi points out that “A clear distinction between ‘non-place’ and ‘place’ is that the former lacks any chronological connection to a broader physical, cultural or emotional context, unlike the latter” (6). Despite the spiritual and cultural significance of desert spaces, Cain reduces desert ‘place’ of natural and historical importance to resources for a ‘non-place’. For him, locations only have value based on immediate material gain rather than anything else. Cain's attachment to violence further distances him from the desert. He relishes weaponry, viewing “his black gun” as a tool for domination rather than cooperative living. His aggression escalates from harming animals to threatening humans, like when:

> Asouf started trembling, and a cold sweat broke out on his back. Cain shook his fist right in Asouf's face, until it actually touched his turban. “If you don't show us where the waddan is, you'll regret it, believe me! I'll make you see stars, and at midday too. I mean it!” (Al-Koni 72-73)

Cain is ready to attack. This disconnects him from the desert, cooperation, and non-violence symbolized by people like Asouf's namesake, the peaceful waddan. Cain destroys sacred aspects of the desert by desecrating Asouf's dead body, severing his head in a place of historical and spiritual significance. His inability to respect what he does not understand makes him unable to co-exist sustainably. While the desert represents divine plenitude for Asouf, for Cain, it mirrors a void - a soulless wasteland devoid of meaning. When Asouf or his father proclaim that “The desert is a true treasure”. (Al-Koni 20)

Arefi (2004) suggests in his research paper that “a distressed neighborhood such as Over-The-Rhine, Cincinnati becomes a non-place for ‘outsiders’ who associate it with pervasive crime, violence, and poverty. Owing to these social conditions, ‘outsiders’ might consider Over-The-Rhine as a ‘non-place,’ for ‘insiders,’ it still serves as a ‘place’” (109). In Al-Koni’s novel, Cain is introduced as a 'non-place' dweller who rejects Asouf's 'place' narrative, which reflects the understanding, interconnectedness, and patience necessary to live harmoniously in the desert ‘place’. He cares for the herd and the desert rather than singularly as resources or a ‘non-place’. Having spent his whole life remote and apart yet in tune with desert ‘place’. Asouf sees the land deeply rather than superficially, proven through knowing the significance of places and creatures like Matkhandoush and understanding waddan as the “spirit of the mountains”. (22)

He embraces difficulties and appreciates beauty in austerity, such as finding “pleasure in the jinn faces in the mountain caves” (10) rather than complaining. Cain’s counter-narrative does not match the desert narrative of Asouf, which matters much in shaping individuality. Cain's relationship with the desert is representative of someone living exploitatively rather than cooperatively. This disconnection from all life draws him towards violence, like feeling pleasure at harming a waddan or the desert.

Cain brings about a tragic climax by murdering Asouf, representing the desert's disruption coming full circle to threaten even man. However, moments before the killing, there are further hints that Cain retains a potential, unrealized connection to the significance of the desert (Aubuchon 17). When hesitating before crucifying Asouf on the rock, Cain exclaims, “I remember now. I remember! This is the animal that came to me the other night. This is the devil that flung me down in the pit” (96), suggesting an abandoned intuition of their metaphysical intersection despite regarding

Asouf as the enemy. Cain fails to embrace the desert's call to spiritual insight and ecological respect, contentiously rejecting its principles until the end.

Through Cain, the novel portrays how certain counter-narratives of the desert can become antithetical to the desert itself. Throughout the story, Cain increasingly comes to exemplify unchecked consumption and loss of connection to the desert, turning what was once a sustainable, reciprocal relationship with the desert towards destruction. In this way, Cain is an antagonist to Asouf's harmonious integration and veneration of the desert. While Asouf represents the virtues of patience, compassion, and cosmic insight nurtured by nomadic integration with the natural rhythms, Cain symbolizes increasing disruption as a counter-desert narrative pursuing unrestrained exploitation. The desert is shown to demand moderation, fortitude, and veneration for its ecological balance to yield insight, with those rejecting its call risking spiritual disenchantment and perpetrating harm, as portrayed through Cain's increasingly destructive and self-destructive trajectory ending in appalling violence. In this way, the novel utilizes the character of Cain to highlight opposing fates that can emerge from the desert landscape contingent on one's conduct within its symbolic significance and natural frameworks.

3.3.2 John Parker and Masoud: Outsiders Narratives

John Parker and Masoud are presented in the novel as outsiders and intruders in the desert. Parker and Masoud, like Cain, have no real connection to or understanding of the desert ‘place’. They view it purely as a ‘non-place’ for hunting and consumption rather than as somewhere with spiritual or cultural significance. This is evidenced through their conversations and interactions both with each other and the native desert dwellers like Asouf. Augé asserted:

> the real non-places of super-modernity – the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sit- ting in an airport lounge waiting for the next flight to London or Marseille – have the peculiarity that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their 'instructions for use', which may be prescriptive ('Take right- hand line'), prohibitive ('No smoking') or informative ('You are now entering the Beaujolais region'). (96)

Augé highlights how "non-places" in supermodernity are defined and characterized by the instructional texts, signs, and language that inhabit and give guidance within those transient spaces. This relates to the ideas about John Parker and Masoud viewing the desert as a "non-place" versus the native inhabitants for whom it is a meaningful "place". The desert itself does not contain the types of instructional texts, prohibitions, or informative signage that Augé associates with contemporary "non-places" like highways, airports, etc. It is more readable for its people, as we mentioned before; as Al-Koni says in the novel, 'No one sees into things as desert people do, no one can match them in reading the secrets of the unknown' (Al-Koni 71). For Parker and Masoud as outsiders, the desert likely represents more of a "non-place" precisely because it lacks the sense of 'place' according to their narratives, which makes the desert spaces feel anonymous. On the contrary, the desert's people imbue it with layers of cultural meaning, oral histories, and traditions that define the terrain as a rich "place".

Augé's examples of "non-places" are spaces designed for mobility, transition, and commerce, reflecting modernity's emphasis on rapid movement and consumption. Parker and Masoud approach the desert with this same exploitative mindset of a transient hunter-gatherer. From the beginning, Parker sees the desert purely through a colonial lens of

dominance and exploitation rather than respect or understanding. When he first arrives in North Africa as part of the US Marines, he brings a narrow academic knowledge of Sufism but cares little about engaging with or respecting local cultural and religious practices. Despite being "friendly" with the Qadiri shaykh Jallouli, Parker ultimately disregards Jallouli's warnings and wisdom, contributing directly to the destruction of the gazelles that Jallouli sees as a sign from God. This is evident in Parker's initial reluctance even to visit a Sufi dhikr circle with the embassy official, showing he sees local customs as something to be viewed from a distance rather than genuinely engaged with:

> Although it was strictly against Marine rules to visit "doubtful" places of religion, the embassy official had seen no harm in meeting his wish, and together they'd gone to witness the rituals of dervishes chanting and ecstatically invoking God's name. It had, though, been a wretched experience. When they'd been standing by for just a few minutes, some young boys began throwing stones at them, driving them out of the circle. (Al-Koni 80)

Parker already frames his interaction with local customs as done solely out of curiosity rather than respect. He is an outside observer, not someone willing to genuinely participate in or understand local ways of life and religion. This attitude continues as Parker grows more fascinated by the desert over time. However, his view of it remains extractive and consumerist rather than reverent. He sees the desert not as a sacred place with meaning for locals but as somewhere holding hidden "secrets" that can be unearthed and consumed for spiritual or intellectual fulfilment. For example, after being introduced to the idea that there may be some "secret" to be found in consuming gazelle meat by the obscure Sufi passage, Parker decides:

> The obscure Sufi text brought him back to these outlandish notions, which had shattered his first relationship with a woman. Now he decided to use his isolation, here in the western mountain, to try to unravel the secret: to taste the flesh of this legendary animal, in the hope that God would open the door to him, that he'd know the bliss of seeing Him as He truly was. (Al-Koni 81)

Here, John Parker frames the desert in an explorer/colonial mindset, as something to be mined and conquered rather than respected as home to others. He sees any spiritual significance it holds as extractable "secrets" there for him to take rather than as interconnected with local cultural and religious practices. This view of seeing the desert as a place only concerning fulfilling his own desires and curiosities continues when Parker grows frustrated by an inability to find gazelles. Parker sees the desert as a "non-place", something to be explored and conquered for their own purposes rather than as a place imbued with meaning and significance for its inhabitants. However, Augé offers a different perspective on place through Michel de Certeau, who:

> perceives the place, of whatever sort, as containing the order 'in whose terms elements are distributed in relations of coexistence' and, although he rules out the possibility of two things occupying the same 'spot'. However, he admits that every element in the place adjourns other, in a specific 'location', he defines the place as an 'instantaneous con- figuration of positions'. (Augé 53-54)

De Certeau defines place as an "instantaneous configuration of positions". For the local inhabitants of the desert, it is a lived-in "place" central to their cultural and religious practices rather than an empty "non-place" as viewed by outsiders like Cain, Parker and Masoud, who see it only in terms of their own desires and goals of exploration. The desert holds deeper significance as a 'place' and space for its people, embedded

with order and meaning absent from Parker's colonial mindset. Parker after being told by Cain that the last gazelles have died out locally, he demands:

> “I wonder if either of us could put up with them?” John retorted. “You can't stand the desert thorns, I know. You'd like to reap the fruits without the sun and the dust. You'd like to hunt gazelles in silk gloves”...You don't love the desert. Shaykh Jallouli, the one the other shaykhs in your town call a heretic dervish, says water cleanses the body and the desert cleanses the soul. I've never come across anyone here who's more faithful to the desert—and yet he doesn't savor its bounty the way you do. He doesn't eat its gazelles. You, Cain, eat the fruit and curse what produces it. The desert hasn't cleansed you, because you've never truly loved it. And now you demand whole fleets of vehicles to take you off in search of the waddan down in the southern deserts. You want to blackmail me the way you did with the gazelles all those years. You're not just selfish and greedy. You're lazy too. (Al-Koni 83-84)

Here, Parker directly calls out Cain to see the desert as ‘non-place’ something to exploit and take from rather than understanding and respecting it as home to others and a ‘place’ of spiritual significance locally. He argues that Cain has no real love or understanding of the desert, seeing it only as something producing “bounty” for him to consume. Whereas someone like Jallouli who Parker acknowledges as “faithful” to the desert, he does not see it this way or subsumes local spiritual practices to serve foreign interests.

It's also notable that when Parker first arrives, he makes no real effort to understand local cultural and religious practices on their own terms. He dismisses them as “doubtful” and is almost frightened away from observing a dhikr circle by local reactions. Whereas someone with genuine openness and interest in local ways would seek to have respectful discussions and

build rapport, Parker maintains an outsider stance of distant observation and consumption of knowledge solely for his own interests and fulfillment. Beyond just Parker, Masoud also exemplifies an outsider's view of the desert as a ‘non-place,’ something to be dominated and exploited rather than respected as a ‘place.’ When out hunting with Cain and Parker by helicopter, Masoud views the spotting of gazelles purely as an exciting game, rather than any acknowledgements of their cultural or ecological significance:

> Suddenly the pilot cried out.
>
> 'Look. Look there!'
>
> The mother gazelle's soft coat shone from afar, then she vanished as quickly as she'd appeared. The pilot flew toward it, hovering over the dark cranny where she was lurking, at the mouth of the opening, trying to protect her small calf with her body...Masoud routed excitedly. 'Fire! Fire!' he shouted. 'Fire!' (Al-Koni 88-89)

Rather than showing any reflection on or concern for the impacts of hunting, Masoud enthusiastically eggs the group on with cries to shoot as if they were playing a game. There is no sense that he understands or respects the gazelles or their cultural meaning to locals. He focused purely on a masculine thrill-seeking adventure in the desert as an outsider might view it. Later, when talking to Cain and Parker, Masoud further exemplifies an outsider's view of seeing the desert purely to fulfill his desires for adventure and fun rather than with any concern for local nuance or culture. “Shall we go hunting?” Masoud said. “We could take a rifle and hunt ostriches in the Hamada, or foxes in the uplands. What's wrong with a little hunting, if it's what we feel like? (Al-Koni 90)

Again, Masoud reduces the complex realities and cultural significance of the desert to simply a place for him to act out excitement

and blood sports for his own entertainment. There is no acknowledgment that the forms of hunting he suggests could disrupt local ecosystems or be disrespectful to cultural practices. His outsider view frames the desert as an empty playground for fulfilling his personal whims. Augé differentiates between places and non-places because individuals only traverse non-places, whereas they merely pass by places. A non-place is characterized by a distinct sensation, often described as “resembling freedom”.

> When an international flight crosses Saudi Arabia, the hostess announces that during the overflight the drinking of alcohol will be forbidden in the aircraft. This signifies the intrusion of territory into space. Land = society = nation = culture = religion: the equation of anthropological place, fleetingly inscribed in space. Returning after an hour or so to the non-place of space, escaping from the totalitarian constraints of place, will be just like returning to something resembling freedom. (Augé 116)

Beyond views of the desert as a ‘non-place’, both Parker and Masoud also disrupt the spiritual solitude and connection to the place that Asouf holds as a native dweller. Throughout their interactions, Asouf is clearly uncomfortable with and trying to avoid Parker and Masoud. But they repeatedly impose themselves, ultimately resulting in Asouf's crucifixion and death. One instance is when Parker, Masoud and Cain arrive at Asouf's meadow and demand he helps them hunt waddan, despite Asouf's repeated attempts to dissuade them:

> I don’t know,” he answered, in a faltering tone. “I don’t think so. They look like goat tracks.” Cain said, staring at him suspiciously. “You’re telling me these are goat tracks?” The stare remained fixed on Asouf, and there was anger and veiled threat in it. He walked on, following the tracks of the herd, and repeating: “Goat tracks? You’re telling me these are goat tracks? (Al-Koni 93)

Here, Asouf is clearly uncomfortable and tries to avoid confrontation by giving vague answers. Nevertheless, outsiders like Cain refuse to respect his boundaries, insisting on imposing themselves into his solitary space against his will. Later, when they fail to find waddan and grow frustrated, Cain lashes out at Asouf, not respecting his solitude or autonomy:

> You'll regret this, by God," he screamed, "you cursed old fool! Do you think I'm a complete idiot? You play the innocent, claim to live like some sort of hermit, and all the time you know exactly where the waddan's hiding out! Do you think I don't see right through you? (Al-Koni 72)

Again, Asouf clearly wishes to avoid conflict and maintain his solitary ways, but outsiders like Cain feel entitled to disrupt and disrespect this, imposing themselves through threats and aggression. Ultimately, this escalates to Asouf's violent death at their hands while trying to protect the space and rhythms of his isolated desert life. A further instance is when Masoud and John first take Cain to visit the Qadiri shaykh Jallouli in the oasis. Jallouli can immediately sense their disrespectful attitudes as outsiders and wants nothing to do with them:

> How can you claim," the shaykh murmured then, pain in his eyes, "to belong to the religion of Christ? You're no part of him. You've nothing to do with him, or he with you. (Al-Koni 84)

Then, the Shaykh wrapped his cloak around his head and disappeared into the crowd. Parker never saw him again, but he couldn't forget the look of pain in the man's eyes as he'd uttered those harsh words. Here Jallouli's intuitive wisdom as someone deeply connected to the desert rightly identifies that Parker and the others maintain an outsider stance of

consuming and disrespecting rather than genuinely understanding local spiritual practices.

Their imposition into sacred spaces like the dhikr ritual or visit to Jallouli is met with rejection, as their attitudes do not align with local notions of reciprocated respect through their selfish pursuits and inability to understand the desert beyond how it can fulfill their own curiosities and desires, Parker, Masoud, and Cain directly contribute to immense ecological and spiritual harm. Their hunting helps drive the regional extinction of gazelles and Waddans. Through Cain's unbridled rage and aggression, exacerbated by their influence, they culminate in the gruesome crucifixion of Asouf - disrupting the solace and belonging he had found in his isolated desert lifestyle.

In all these exchanges and interactions, Parker and Masoud maintain the perspective of outsiders viewing the desert and its people through a lens of othering, dominance, and consumerism. For John Parker and Masoud, the desert is a 'non-place' according to Augé's definitions, as it lacks a connection to history, culture, and social networks that characterize a place. However, for the local people of the desert, it is indeed a 'place' that holds immense cultural and spiritual significance on its own terms. There is no sense conveyed that Parker and Masoud genuinely seek to understand or respect this local cultural and spiritual significance. Instead, they reduce complex realities to opportunities for extraction and entertainment, ultimately disrupting what spiritual homeostasis Asouf has found through imposition, disrespect, and violence. Their attitudes exemplify how the inability to truly view or engage with others as equal partners can enable immense disharmony and harm. Augé's definitions of 'place' and 'non-place' suggest that property ownership is linked to the home, which is considered a place rather than a non-place, according to Augé. A place is characterized by its connection to history, culture, and social networks. (40)

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* presents two contrasting narratives regarding desert space. The first depicts the desert as a space for articulating identity and belonging for its people. The desert people demonstrate a profound connection to the desert ‘place’ as their home, willing to defend and sacrifice themselves for the desert ‘place’, exemplified by the characters like Asouf, Asouf’s father, and his mother. The desert shapes their sense of self, transforming from a mere place into a meaningful space reflecting their needs and desires. These characters embody a sense of unity with and protection for the desert 'place', even at the cost of their own lives, as symbolized by Asouf's crucifixion by Cain.

The crucifixion of Asouf is a powerful metaphor, like Jesus Christ's sacrifice for humanity's salvation. Like Christ, who sacrificed for a greater spiritual purpose, Asouf's death symbolizes his willingness to sacrifice himself to preserve the desert and its indigenous way of life. His actions demonstrate the enduring, sacred bond between the desert's people and their desert ‘place’, reinforcing the novel's central message, that for those who belong 'insiders', the desert matters profoundly, transcending its physical boundaries to become an integral part of their identity and culture.

On the other hand, drawing from Augé's framework of 'place' and 'non-place', the second narrative views the desert ‘place’ through the lens of “non-place”, the perspective of outsiders, or the counter-narratives. Outsiders like Cain, Masoud, and John Parker enter the desert ‘place’ without the same motivations or connections as the desert people have (Asouf and his family). To these outsiders, the desert holds no intrinsic significance; they fail to comprehend or appreciate its profound meaning. Their presence in the desert ‘place’ is driven by external interests, rendering them unable to grasp the sacredness of this space for the desert ‘place people’. This dynamic manifest itself in the climactic scene where Cain, an

outsider motivated solely by his carnal appetite, crucifies and slaughters Asouf, an act symbolic of violating the sanctity of the desert.

Al-Koni intentionally juxtaposes these two narratives. The first and dominant narrative affirms that the desert ‘place’ is a meaningful space, shaping the identities and cultures of its people. By opposing this with the “non-place” perspective, the novel highlights the desert's enduring importance for those who belong to it. Al-Koni includes this opposing narrative to accentuate, through binary understanding, the desert's positive impact on its desert characters' attitudes and values.

CHAPTER FOUR

Desert Narratives as a “Place” and “Non-Place” in Hernan Diaz’s *In the Distance*

4.1 Introduction

The desert is often portrayed in literature as a space representing mystery, danger, and timelessness. Some portrayals misread the true nature of the desert, as particular literary works have emphasized the desert's

harsh austerity and suspension outside terrestrial cycles of change, portraying it as only a sterile void. In the works of authors such as H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and T.E. Lawrence, the desert is portrayed as a vast, unforgiving expanse, a place of danger and adventure. For example, in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, the desert is a treacherous obstacle the protagonist must overcome to reach the fabled mines. Roslynn D. Haynes, for example, asserts that deserts are often portrayed as "a featureless tract of eternity in which nothing had changed or would change, emphasizing their atemporal qualities and perceived emptiness" (124).

For instance, in The Cairo Trilogy and Miramar by Naguib Mahfouz, the desert is portrayed as a place of escape from life. The existing literature on desert writing suggests that authors and scholars have not always emphasized the nuances and distinctions within desert environments. Instead, much of the writing, particularly fiction, portrays the desert as a homogeneous, threatening space that challenges conventional notions of normalcy (Campbell, 2019, p.66). Numerous descriptions continue to depict deserts in bleak and alienating terms. This phenomenon can be attributed to various factors, which merits further examination by ecocritics and scholars. McGregor points out, "In novel after novel, the aspect emphasized in descriptions of the land, quite apart from any specific features that might be invoked, is its alienness." (13)

However, Hernan Diaz introduced a different narrative of the desert in his novel *In The Distance* (2017) through its vast, unforgiving landscapes. He uses the desert as a prominent setting and backdrop in his novel. The characters must contend with the isolated environment of the desert as they travel by wagon across its empty plains and rocky terrain. Though difficult at times due to the lack of water and harsh conditions, the desert also represents an open space and the possibility of new beginnings for the novel's protagonist. Diaz describes and conveys the stark beauty of

the desert's harsh yet striking vistas, enhancing the novel's themes of endurance, survival, and renewal on the American frontier. The desert in the novel appears to be at once a danger and an opportunity. Diaz also explores how the desert space shaped lives and challenged the human spirit on the pioneering American frontier through its characters' journeys.

Thus, this chapter examines how Diaz's novel has represented the narratives of the desert, considering both visions. The desert may initially appear placeless or, as Augé conceptualizes it, a “non-place.” In addition, the desert becomes more of a “place” familiar and meaningful to people through experience, interactions, and developing relationships with this space over time. A shift in the conceptualizations of desert narratives occurs with the novel's protagonist, which can enhance the understanding of desert landscapes as living, interconnected places rather than static symbols of emptiness. This point is mirrored in Augé’s idea that “In the concrete reality of today's world, places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place”. (107)

Therefore, the reflection of Augé's concepts can be seen in the impact of the desert on the life of the main character of the novel (Håkan Söderström). He constantly shifted places on the American frontier in the late 19th century. The Swedish brothers, Håkan and Lunis, travel from their homeland to the land of dreams, 'America,' but unfortunately, Håkan loses his brother at the beginning of the journey. However, Håkan looks at the deserted frontier as a space of unknown possibilities as he travels westward, searching for new opportunities. Desert is also an unstable place, lacking the deep roots and community ties that Augé associates with an authentic “place.” The deserted frontier symbolizes transience as the central character is always on the move. Towns and settlements, he passes through, have a temporary, provisional quality. While offering the prospect of trade

and work, these deserted frontier outposts more closely resemble Augé's notion of a "non-place," characterized by anonymity and impermanence rather than enduring social bonds. The ever-changing geography of the American West, with its shifting territorial boundaries and temporary settlements, highlights how aspects of "place" and "non-place" intersect and transform throughout the novel. The dichotomy between "places" that foster a sense of belonging and attachment and "non-places" that serve primarily as transitory conduits, is increasingly intertwined as the boundaries between them become more permeable (Augé 108). Thus, these two narratives are going to be investigated next.

4.2 Håkan and the Brennans: "Non-Place" Desert Narratives

In Hernan Diaz's *In the Distance*, the protagonist, Håkan Söderström, embarks on a journey from his homeland of Sweden to America in the mid-19th century. In the crowd, he lost his brother, and "He got on a crate, short-breathed and trembling, screamed his brother's name, and looked down at the torrent of people." (Diaz 3). Håkan voyages to North America, but instead of landing in the north, it takes him to the ports of Buenos Aires before he finds himself roaming the American West. From the moment he first set foot in the immense wasteland, Håkan was struck by how it is unlike any environment he had previously known, he was "searching in vain for the landmarks Linus had described to him." (Diaz 4)

Håkan spent his life in the forests and fields of rural Sweden, a place characterized by variety, signs of human use and habitation, and demarcated transitions between different terrains. The unrelenting sameness of the desert plains was profoundly disorienting. After arriving:

> he was unable to name the trees, did not recognize the songs of the birds, and found the dirt on barren stretches surprisingly red and blue, everything (plants, animals, rocks) came together in a reality

> that, although unfamiliar, belonged, at least, to the realm of the possible. (Diaz, 7)

This quote effectively shows how Håkan's fish-out-of-water or outsider experiential perspective is conveyed through vivid sensory and perceptual details while hinting at his retention of a fundamental recognition of ecological order, even in utterly unfamiliar surroundings. It deftly establishes the dislocation and estrangement of his situation through close examination of language. Håkan wanders the seemingly endless plains that stretch farther than the eye could see in all directions; the place seems devoid of any history or lived experience; its features drained of meaning by their utter uniformity. Here, lost in this featureless void, Håkan first encountered what Augé has termed a “non-place.”. For Augé, the concept of the “non-place” refers to transit spaces of pure functionality that lack any connection to geographic place, relationships, or community, settings whose purpose is to facilitate the circulation of people and commodities (78). Likewise, Yuliia Terentieva asserts that:

> Campus can serve as proof of the fact that a university campus, similarly to an airport or a supermarket, can, in a way, be regarded as a non-place. A closer look at the premises of one of the campuses presented in the novel further proves such a possibility. (7)

Similarly, Håkan experiences of the endless desert make it clear that it is a “non-place,” just like what Terentieva said about the Campus. The depiction of a desert place in Diaz's novel supports Marc Augé's concept of “non-places.” According to Augé, contemporary spaces like airports, motorways, and large retail stores can be understood as “non-places,” locations that lack enduring significance and identity to those merely passing through them (31). Håkan sees all-consuming plains through which he wanders represent the quintessential non-place, a spatial void emptied of history, identity, and lived relations between inhabitants. Stripped of these

attributes that imbue locales with personal and cultural resonance, the desert place served only as an undifferentiated medium across which he moved without any sense of placement. Its utter homogeneity defied inhabitation and erased the possibility of establishing roots or connections. In this context, Håkan first came to know the disorienting experience of dwelling in a non-place.

The barren desert sameness of the terrain seems to erase any sense of meaningful placement within it. The desert place reveals an endless repetition of the same horizontal plane extending to the eye, annihilating any sense of progress, destination, or distinctiveness between one point and the next. “Each day resembled the last,” Håkan, as an outsider to the desert, observes that “every direction looked the same” (Diaz 198). With no distinguishing landmarks to provide reference points, chart progress, or relate one vantage point to another, his movement through the uniform landscape lacked any perceptible meaning or change. Mahyar Arefi states in his research that:

> The debate surrounding 'rootedness,' 'sense of place,' and 'manufactured meaning' captures the argument regarding the transformation of the meaning of place. Place-meaning as a social construct may assume various scales and levels, i.e. national, regional, and/or local. The concern here is to trace the transformation in the meaning of place that has contributed to the emergence of 'placelessness.' (183)

Diaz shows this quality of placelessness through Håkan, which intensifies a profound sense of dislocation. Having been torn from his familiar rural Swedish home and community and thrust into an utterly alien new world, he found himself acutely adrift, lacking any familiar signposts, institutions, or lived relations to anchor his identity or mediate his experience. It is a complete “non-place” that annulled any sense of lived

continuity between locations or connection to an inhabited social realm. Its lack of distinguishing features made orientation impossible and compounded Håkan's sense of utter dislocation.

On the ship, Eileen Brennan finds Håkan “starved and feverish” a few days after they leave Portsmouth. She and her husband, James, care for him “as if he were one of their own children,” nursing him back to health. When they arrive in San Francisco, the Brennans insist that Håkan join their prospecting expedition inland. They need help carrying their equipment and hope he'll stay to mine with them, as he needs money to get to New York. Håkan agrees to join them, understanding he can't cross the continent without horses and provisions. He plans to earn some money with them before continuing to New York to find his brother. For the Irish couple James and Eileen Brennan, the desert that Håkan wanders through is a kind of “non-place.” When they arrive in the desert of California seeking gold in their expedition, the desert place does not signify any historical or cultural meaning for them; it is simply a space to cross as quickly as possible to reach their destination. The Brennans treat the desert in a purely transactional way, focusing only on survival and movement rather than creating any meaningful relationship with the environment, which reflects what Augé maintains:

> we can contrast the realities of transit (transit camps or passengers in transit) with those of residence or dwelling; the interchange (where nobody crosses anyone else's path) with the crossroads (where people meet); the passenger (defined by his destination). (107)

The Brennans, as outsiders, exemplify Augé's concept of the desert as a “non-place” through which they use and pass, devoid of real historical or social meaning. They utilize Håkan primarily as a source of labor. After their wagon breaks down, James uses Håkan to carry supplies and haul the wheelbarrow:

> Håkan's hands slipped off, and the rough handles burned his blistered palms, tore off his scabs, and pierced his raw flesh with dozens of splinters, forcing him to let go. The wheelbarrow raced downhill with increasing speed, first rolling, then tumbling and flipping on itself, and finally turning somersaults and pirouetting with surprising grace until it smashed against a boulder … James came out of his stupor, rushed over to Håkan, and started kicking him in the gut, yelling—a wordless scream, a deep howl. Somehow, Eileen managed to contain her husband, and he collapsed on the dirt, weeping and drooling. (8)

The dynamic has deteriorated to a dangerous place at this point in the novel. James sees Håkan only as a tool to be exploited, not a fellow human deserving care or compassion. At this moment, his abusive and unstable mindset is fully exposed through his violent outburst. It hints at the rising tensions and conflict as resources remain depleted in the desert. James becomes increasingly possessive as resources grow scarce, relying heavily on Håkan's strength. This transactional view of both the land and of Håkan as a resource to be used mirrors the treatment of the desert place as simply a place to pass through rather than understand or grasp its meaning.

As the prospects worsen in the desert, James distrusts others and stresses the importance of individual property over communal cooperation. This shifting view reflects how the Brennans approach the desert as something to overcome and exploit for personal gain rather than appreciate as a shared environment. Their dwindling provisions and growing isolation in the desolate surroundings enhance James' authoritarianism, utilitarianism, and possession over family resources like Håkan's labor power. So, in this "non-place" environment devoid of history or culture, the Brennans emphasize competition and ownership over cooperation,

reinforcing their use of Håkan solely to survive rather than as a fellow traveler or even as a human being.

The desert Håkan roams serve as a prototypical “non-place.” For Håkan, as an outsider to the American desert, still searching for attachment and cut off from his homeland, the desert lacks the relational, historical, and identitarian qualities that could make it a meaningful “place” for him. It provides no social bonds, shared memories, or a way for him to root his identity, acting instead as an impersonal space he merely passes through in transition, which resembles the theorization of Augé, who points out that “a person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer, or driver.” (103)

For Brennan, the American desert is a mere “non-place.” Coming from elsewhere solely for resource trapping, the expedition members are not settled or invested in forming lasting connections to the land. It offers them no accumulated history or sense of self-reflection. The terrain remains a practical transit space devoid of the attributes Augé argues are necessary for environments to transcend from non-places to places within human experience and psyche. The desert place primarily facilitates movement for the Brennan family without fulfilling Augé's criteria for becoming a place of true relational, historical, or identitarian significance.

With the advance of the events, Håkan and the Brennan encounter a group of armed people and a woman. James and his family are reluctantly forced to abandon their mining operation. Håkan is singled out by them and told that he will not leave with the Brennans. Misusing his name (“Hawk”), the woman commands him to get into the coach. He is unable to communicate or understand what is happening. They take Håkan to Clangston, a small town that:

> was only one block long—an inn, a general store, and about half a dozen houses with their blinds shut. The rough, skewed constructions seemed to have been erected that morning (the smell of sawdust, tar, and paint still lingered in the air) with the sole purpose of being taken down at dusk. New but precarious, as if decrepitude had been built into them, the houses seemed eager to become ruins. The street had only one side—the plains began where the thresholds ended. (Diaz, 11)

Clangston also exhibits characteristics of a non-place, just like the desert place. It is a transitory space that people are passing through on their west journeys. As the novel develops, we see many transients come and go through Clangston, from the prospectors to Håkan himself. The town lacks a real sense of history or identity; it seems to have just recently sprung up to serve the needs of passing travelers. It is a temporary settlement without any true permanence or Community (Brown 93). People go through Clangston, but no one truly belongs or establishes roots. The town exists purely to service those passing through on their way elsewhere, which fits Augé's "places" and "non-places," pointing out that "the traveler's space may thus be the archetype of non-place." (86)

Just as the desert lacks history or identity, Clangston emphasizes this trait of transience and lack of roots. As an outsider, Håkan has no connections to this place. He passes through this place. The town represents dislocation and uncertainty for him. Even its name, "Clangston," seems nonsensical and unfamiliar:

> The pale evening sunshine came streaming through the conical summits of spruces and firs, was sifted by the feathery leaves of junipers and the white-green boughs of aspens, and lastly settled, like mist, on foxtails, moss, and lichen. These were the first plants Håkan

> had seen in a long time, aside from the ever-present sagebrush. (Diaz, 27)

Håkan planned an escape plot with the blunt knife he ate with. He was emboldened by his stature, which a growing number of his captors found terrifying. However, what transpired a few nights later eased Håkan from carrying out his incomplete ideas. Håkan first encounters the desert after leaving Clangston; it exemplifies a pure non-place. It is an endless, featureless void lacking any landmarks or signs of human occupation. Håkan is cut off from all familiar points of reference in this environment. It brings about a crisis of disorientation and reality for him:

> he would quickly get back on his feet and resume his blind race, panting through tight lips. Morning never broke The blackness just paled. Tossed around by the wind, Håkan could no longer tell in which direction he was going. He only hoped that he had not been taken, in an extended circle, back to Clangston. (Diaz, 34)

In this way, Diaz uses Clangston and the desert to represent both the narratives of place and non-place for Håkan - transitional spaces that lack permanence or anchors for his identity and understanding of the world. This shifting between place and non-place underscores Håkan's journey of discovery and change as he acclimates to his new environment in the American desert, “The desert, so quiet during the day, was now bustling with activity—animals growling, mating, eating, being eaten.” (Diaz 35)

As conceptualized by Marc Augé, the vast, featureless desert place Håkan crosses for a long time represents the ultimate non-place. Stretching endlessly in every direction without distinguishing landmarks, the desert lacks what Augé calls “relation and history.” No sense of a shared past or future ties people together in this barren place. Håkan journeys alone across the deserted plain; he encounters no signs of human habitation, no other

travelers, nothing to give the landscape a sense of lived experience or relation. The desert is the quintessential that defines a non-place for Augé, a space that cannot be defined as relational or historical.

Håkan, just as travelers passing through giant transport hubs, are reduced to a solitary place in an interchangeable mass. Håkan travels anonymously and sometimes alone across the empty desert. He has no connection to this place or sense of integration within a community, illustrating how the desert represents what Augé calls the solitary contractility of the individual in transit within a non-place. Moreover, the desert offers Håkan no landmarks or points of shared cultural meaning, emphasizing its lack of what Augé terms a social history or relations. (94)

In many ways, the isolated town of Clangston that Håkan encounters also embodies a non-place. On the surface, Clangston gives more signs of lived experience as a functioning human settlement with buildings, businesses, and a permanent population (Zoran 310). However, a closer examination reveals how the town lacks the qualities of place that Augé highlights. Like the featureless desert, Clangston offers “neither signification nor symbolism” for Håkan and is defined only as a temporary point of transit as he seeks to escape.

Most significantly, the endless desert and isolated town of Clangston emphasize how their transitory inhabitants exist only as solitary and interchangeable units within these larger non-places. Whether travelers pass through airports or emigrants cross the plain, people are simply units to be moved efficiently from one point to another. Both settings reduce human experience to the transient and emphasize how modernity increasingly defines people not by cultural identities or social ties but simply as individuals in motion within larger non-places of transport or transit like the desert, railroads, or motorways.

In this sense, both the desert and Clangston powerfully illustrate Augé's notion of the non-place as the defining spatial experience of modernity. They represent settings people pass through rather than exist within, lacking natural relations, history, identity, or cultural meaning beyond their temporary functional purpose . Håkan's passage through both the endless desert void and the isolated settlement of Clangston reflect how modern infrastructure and global capital increasingly define people's experience of place not through lived cultural relation but simply as anonymous units to be shuffled efficiently from point to point like objects or cogs within a more extensive system. Both settings represent the ultimate non-places for Augé, rendering his theorization of modern experience tangible.

4.3 Håkan's Shifting Narratives from a “Non-Place” to a “Place”

The distinction between “place” and “non-place,” as articulated by Marc Augé, provides a compelling framework for understanding the transformation of individual and collective experiences within various spaces. Håkan's journey exemplifies this transition, transforming an environment characterized by anonymity and transience”non-place” to be imbued with identity, history, and relational significance “places”. This shift underscores the dynamic nature of spatial experiences and the capacity of individuals to infuse meaning into their surroundings (Brown 110). However, as the novel progresses and Håkan spends more time in the desert, it transforms from a “non-place” to a “place”. Through his interactions with other people like Lorimer, Håkan connects to the desert narratives. This shows an undercurrent of concordance between what Diaz presents in his novel and what Augé maintains:

> The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place. The place becomes a refuge to the habitué of non-places (who may

> dream, for example, of owning a second home rooted in the depths of the countryside). Places and non-places are opposed (or attracted) like the words and notions that enable us to describe them. (107)

Håkan starts to grasp the nature of the desert space and its meaning and develops a sense of the desert narratives as more than just a blank void. Additionally, as Håkan learns to navigate using his compass and observe patterns in the landscape, the desert becomes a place with spatial dimensions and orientation that he can grasp. He starts to develop familiarity with specific landmarks and areas. Håkan chooses to stay in the mountains at the end for shelter rather than immediately press on the east; it shows how the desert has become a place where he can find refuge rather than just an obstacle to be crossed. In this way, the novel portrays how the desert transforms from being a "non-place" with no meaningful connection to Håkan to becoming a "place" where he starts connecting to concepts, values, and memories through his experiences. This reflects Augé's theoretical conceptualization of places that develops connections and meanings instead of "non-places" that lack history or identity. It is expressed when "Håkan had been converted. The landscape that had seemed so featureless to Håkan was now an expanding enigma he was eager to decipher." (Diaz 43)

As events unfold, Håkan wakes up untied in a covered wagon after being delirious for six days. John Lorimer, a naturalist gathering animal specimens and plants, explains that he found Håkan wandering and delusional. He invites Håkan to stay with the wagon convoy for protection from those pursuing him. Lorimer said he would like to be taught Swedish:

> And anyway, he could also use an assistant. Håkan looked at the heads in the jars with apparent concern. Lorimer laughed, told him not to be alarmed, and explained that he had caught those creatures

> for the benefit of man. With proper food, drink, and rest, Håkan made a swift recovery. (Diaz, 40)

Lorimer teaches Håkan about the desert world by examining plants and animals; the desert takes on new meaning as a place where nature can be studied and understood. In Diaz's novel, John Lorimer plays a pivotal role in shifting the desert narratives from a meaningless "non-place" to a place of significance for Håkan. He is a naturalist on an ideological quest to prove that humanity evolved from a primordial single-celled organism. Lorimer provides Håkan with a new framework for understanding his surroundings, transforming the desert narrative from a featureless expanse or a void to a location rich with meaning and connection:

> During their lessons, Lorimer often reminded his students that his remarkable talent with the scalpel would amount to nothing if the knife were not held by a loving hand guided by a truth-seeking eye. The study of nature is a barren enterprise if stones, plants, and animals become frozen under the magnifying glass, Lorimer said. A naturalist should look at the world with warm affection if not ardent love. (Diaz, 42)

Lorimer's theories and lessons about natural history, anatomy, and the correspondences between all living things morph the desert from a barrier separating Håkan from his goal into a realm representative of life itself. Lorimer enhances Håkan's observational abilities and capacity to comprehend the natural environment, allowing him to perceive the desert as a distinct location rather than a vast emptiness. However, Håkan's narratives radically shift upon meeting Lorimer; he teaches him to observe the desert with keen interest and affection rather than indifference. Lorimer illustrates how all life forms are interconnected through anatomical dissections and discussions of evolutionary theory. He encourages Håkan to approach the desert world "with warmth" and see even the lowliest

creatures as representing “the entire natural kingdom” (43). Beyond practical concerns like survival, Lorimer urges an appreciation of the ecstasy of existence itself. The desert space is transformed in Håkan's eyes from an abstract void to a living system worthy of care through these lessons.

Crucially, Lorimer demonstrates that the desert contains meaning and history if one can perceive it. Lorimer scrutinizes rocks, fossils, plants, and animals; he deciphers whole epochs preserved in the desert. The geological strata of distant eras are revealed by closely examining the terrain. Lorimer imbues the featureless wasteland desert with significance extending millions of years into the past by showing Håkan how to read the physical traces left behind. What had seemed devoid of narrative or temporal depth is revealed to radiate out to all creation through the correspondences linking all forms of life across deep time. Tynan points that:

> The desert is not primarily a kind of physical landscape but a conceptual figure that describes the spatial conditions of immanence as the field of potentials by which any kind of concrete emplacement becomes possible. ... The desert is a means of understanding how absolute space may be encountered locally; it is where absolute space is manifest in place through the nomad or schizophrenic as hypersubject. This has important political dimensions to the degree that all politics involve an assertion of some right to space. (62)

The qualities previously rendered the desert null and insignificant are inverted under Lorimer's tutelage. It gains importance precisely because of its capacity to render the long cycles of natural history legible. The desert space transforms from a barren nothing into a palimpsest containing clues to the distant origins of all beings, including humanity. Håkan realized “he had developed together with his medical skills. But Håkan

knew the desert well enough to understand that he could not venture out without provisions and animals." (Diaz 67)

Lorimer's theories encourage Håkan to approach the desert narratives empathetically rather than clinically or mechanistically, beyond recontextualizing the physical place. His aim "was to go back in time and reveal the origin of man. Knowing that Håkan had experience with sage hens, Lorimer suggested that they start there" (Diaz 41). He stresses that the naturalist's role is to observe, classify, admire, and partake in the ecstasy of existence. The lectures emphasize relatedness and continuity between all organisms across species boundaries, undermining rigid distinctions between humanity and other life forms. This philosophical framework awakens affinities in Håkan that transcend superficial taxonomic categorizations. The desert flora and fauna are no longer alien objects observed from afar but living entities with whom he shares deep ancestral roots. Through Lorimer's guidance, Håkan starts to experience a marvelous congruity between all living things, recognizing that we are all one.

Moreover, Håkan understands that each life, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, radiates veins connecting it to the whole history of life on Earth. This insight instills in the desert a sense of plenitude and richness that was absent from the novel until now. The place is not empty if one can perceive its wealth of significance embedded over time. Instead of an indifferent void, the desert becomes a place with meaning. This resembles what Augé describes that "In homogenized, illegible spaces created by sprawl, the relationship of the individual to place is contractual and objectified" (111). Through Lorimer's interpretive keys and ability to read the landscape, the desert transforms Håkan from a non-place to a place dense with significance with which he can personally connect.

As their time in the desert continues and they draw closer to Lorimer's goal of finding proof of his theory that humans evolved from an original, intelligent entity in the oceans, the naturalist's enthusiasm for sharing his discoveries with Håkan noticeably wanes. He becomes preoccupied solely with his search and guarded about revealing the conclusions he draws from each new specimen. Nevertheless, despite this shift, Lorimer's early tutorials have enduring effects on Håkan's relationship with their surroundings. Even unguided, he has acquired the skills and outlook to interpret the desert's stratigraphy, fossils, and other buried vestiges. He recognizes that it is not featureless but saturated with hieroglyphs encoding ancestral forms and forgotten eras if only one knows how to decipher them. However, They decided to depart, Lorimer decided to go back to prove his theory, and Håkan headed west. Lorimer insists on returning to the perilous salt flats alone, as he remains determined to find evidence for his evolutionary theories. Håkan is conflicted about parting ways but understands Lorimer's drive. Lorimer equips Håkan to continue his journey east alone to reunite with Linus:

> "I am going back to Saladillo. Antim has offered to help. Håkan felt his blood thinning. He breathed in and looked around the plains for something to hold on to. Lorimer put a hand on his shoulder. "Don't worry, my dear friend," he said. "You will be on your way to New York on a horse with all the necessary supplies. Antim, who feels indebted to you as well, will give you one of his ponies, and I will furnish you with all you need for your journey." (Diaz, 68)

Lorimer had a profound impact on how Håkan perceived the desert narratives. Before Lorimer, Håkan saw the desert as empty and meaningless. Nevertheless, after spending time with Lorimer and learning from him, Håkan sees the desert differently, even alone. He no longer finds it a vacant space. Instead, he sees it as significant; each plant, rock, and

bone tell the story of past life. The desert has depth and is saturated with history accumulated over geologic time. Though Lorimer is no longer there to guide him, his teachings have taken root in Håkan's mind. He understands the desert's significance and sees it as symbolic rather than inscrutable. In one of the scenes, Håkan stopped and “lay down on the warm dirt, between two clusters of sagebrush. The desert, so quiet during the day, was now bustling with activity—animals growling, mating, eating, being eaten”. (Diaz 35)

Lorimer significantly changed how Håkan sees the desert. By teaching Håkan new ways to understand and interpret his physical environment, Lorimer sparked a significant shift in perspective. Where Håkan once saw the desert as meaningless, he now sees it as having decisive symbolic and contextual significance. Lorimer reawakened the desert's ability to convey meaning and imbue understanding by showing Håkan how to read the landscape differently. Arefi says that “The concern here is to trace the transformation in the meaning of place that has contributed to the emergence of 'placelessness'. While 'placeness' embedded in rootedness connotes belonging, envisions fate and destiny, and embodies will and volition, placelessness signifies loss of meaning”. (183)

Lorimer enabled Håkan to see new meanings and narratives in the desert that allowed it to signify the past. Augé argues that there is frequently a lack of connection between travelers and the places they visit, which hinders their ability to properly comprehend these places from an anthropological perspective. They may be able to observe and comprehend some aspects of the place, but they are not necessarily able to establish a meaningful connection or sense of belonging to it (34). This reflects how Håkan initially perceived the desert as insignificant. He saw physical elements as an outsider without comprehending their deeper cultural and historical value. However, with Lorimer's teaching and new ways of

interpreting the environment, Håkan was able to develop a connection. This helped him move past seeing the desert as an opaque and meaningless "non-place." Lorimer helped Håkan establish the kind of meaningful relationship to the landscape that Augé says is needed to comprehend a place on a deeper level.

> He had not seen his own face since he had left Clangston. Only splintered reflections on blades, partial glimpses on lids, quivering images on water, or curved caricatures on glass—never a complete, truthful picture of his features. And now, there it was, lying on the desert. (76)

Håkan comes across the abandoned wardrobe in the desert and sees his reflection for the first time in a long time; it serves as a powerful metaphor for his inner and physical transformation through the desert journey. He notices how much his physical appearance has changed. This reflects the more profound changes he has undergone at a spiritual or psychological level. The desert narratives, through which he has wandered lost and alone, have altered him fundamentally. These physical changes parallel his inner transformation, how the desert narratives have worn away at who he was and revealed something new underneath. From this point, Håkan's relationship to the desert is also changed. It is no longer a place of hardship but where he has found soul renewal. Diaz further says that:

> Then the smell came. After such a long time in the odorless desert (he had long ceased to notice the few habitual scents of his body, his animals, and his fires), the stench of civilization hit him like a solid mass, rather than a vapor—a smell at once slippery and barbed, piercing and thick. However, despite the corruption and the decay, the miasma brought back a sense of life. Rancid meat, feces, sour milk, sweat, porridge, vinegar, rotten teeth, bacon, yeast, fermenting vegetables, urine, bubbling lard, coffee, disease, wax, mold, blood,

> broth. Two days, Håkan traveled against the swelling reek until he saw, drawn against the edge of the prairie, a long, low creeping line. (Diaz, 80)

This quote provides an insight into how Håkan describes the smell of urban places or “civilization” after being in the odorless desert for so long. The vivid description of the odors suggests he has developed a heightened sense of smell from his time in the desert. For example, noticing the “few habitual scents of his body, his animals, and his fires” indicates an intimacy and familiarity with the desert that arises from prolonged immersion. He notes that the smell of civilization is both “slippery and barbed, piercing and thick,” implying it is an unwelcome intrusion after becoming accustomed to the clean air of the desert. However, he also acknowledges that the smell “brought back a sense of life,” showing how he has come to associate the desert with a different way of living than just a space (Bady 13). Håkan has come to see the desert not just as a physical place but as something with an identity and stories to reveal to those open to perceiving them. Through his journey, Håkan's narratives transform the desert from a “non-place” into an essential place in his worldview.

As time goes by, Jarvis Pickett first appears in the emigrant convoy that Håkan encounters after departing Lorimer and after his horse's death. Jarvis is elected the captain of the emigrant convoy:

> “They voted for me, you know. I was elected. Captain of the party.” Jarvis never looked up from the gun. “People from other companies came to join us. ... And I know the trail. I went out west a couple of years ago and then back to fetch my wife and children. That totals three trips. So there it is: a man who knows the way and has something to deliver at the end of the journey. And yet. Contentions, dissent, distrust. Jealousy? I don’t know.” (Diaz, 89)

From the beginning, Jarvis stands out from the other travelers. He is given the position of leadership and responsibility. He tells others that he has landed over in the West that he is willing to share with select settlers, gaining their trust and loyalty, “The demanding march, the nightly procedure of driving the wagons into a circle to hold the cattle, the brief meals, the hurried morning preparations were repeated daily without change. At Jarvis’s request, Håkan carried the gun at all times, always making sure it was on full display” (89). While Lorimer imbued the desert with purpose and shape through practical understanding, Jarvis ensures it remains formless and disorienting. He retains control over the settlers by neglecting the shared history and meaningful social bonds that Augé argues transform space into place. Unable to find footing amongst such manipulation, Håkan glimpses another path forward by rejecting Jarvis's influences and reconnecting with the desert on his own terms, as he had begun to under Lorimer's guidance. Though uncertain, this offers potential renewal and a chance to rediscover his place through the self-reliant experience of the landscape. Jarvis accelerates Håkan's reversion to disorientation within the non-place, prompting a retreat that could lead to renewed understanding and identity.

When the wagon train was attacked by Native Americans, Jarvis realized that he needed Hakan's protection. He asked Hakan to ride alongside him and carry a gun for defense. Hakan began questioning whether protecting Jarvis was the right choice due to the tensions around Jarvis. Hakan also wanted to keep making progress towards his goal of reaching New York. During another attack, most of the immigrants were killed, including Helen and a child. After this, Hakan decided not to protect Jarvis specifically but to help defend anyone under attack. This effectively separated him from Jarvis's group. Jarvis was upset that Hakan did not help protect him during the attack. However, Hakan felt he had fulfilled his

obligations and was now free to leave on his own journey east towards New York. He parted ways from Jarvis and continued traveling independently. He wonders the desert:

> For weeks, the only human forms in sight had been his own extremities and his own shadow. The flats around him allowed for no ambushes or surprises. Sounds seemed to travel faster in the freezing air, and if anything happened to escape his eyes, it quickly reached his ears. His solitude was total in the shoreless plains. And yet, he felt cornered. The slightest stir in the skyline, the feeblest rustle in the scrubs sent him down with his animals. They stayed quiet with their ears to the ground and the dirt in their nostrils. (Diaz, 109)

This quote provides an insight into how the desert became a place for Håkan as he isolated himself from human interaction. As Augé discussed, a space only transforms into a place once it is invested with meaning by individuals engaging with it (75). For Håkan, the deserted plains around him had significant meaning and significance as his “solitude was total.” He was hyper-aware of his surroundings and potential threats, carefully monitoring even the “slightest stir” for danger. His life in the desert required constant vigilance, and he could find no refuge from his feared pursuers. The desert became a place defined by loneliness and the need for survival. Diaz employs the features outlined by non-places in his novels to describe and actualize his imaginary desert. Just like a non-place, a desert may be a haven for a lost individual and a threat to their identity. Like a heterotopia, the desert is a location for individuals who vary and have particular norms to follow. The non-place may affect a character in different ways, and the link between a place and a character depends on specific personal qualities and the degree of the location’s impact on the individual, as theorized by Auge. (89)

Håkan becomes paranoid and afraid that people will recognize or confront him about his wrongdoings:

> So great was his fear of running into anyone who might know about him and his deeds that, in addition to the illusory shadows that sent him diving with his animals, he started to detect signs of human presence at every turn. (Diaz, 109)

Håkan is retreating from urban areas where he might see people who know what he did. He desperately tries to find comfort and anonymity by isolating himself in the desert. His situation aligns with the idea of "non-places" as Augé asserted. The urban spaces that used to be familiar and recognizable to Håkan have now become alienating and threatening, forcing him to flee from places that no longer provide meaning or safety. For Håkan, the urban environment has turned into a "non-place" - somewhere without personal significance and full of risk that he will be exposed and judged for his actions. Conversely, the desert was a "non-place" for Håkan as a vast and unfamiliar terrain. It becomes a place that offers him refuge and familiarity. Through getting to know and spending extensive time in the desert, he has turned it into a location where he can find comfort and avoidance from the people who might identify him for his wrongdoings. The desert has paradoxically shifted from an alien place to somewhere that provides solace for Håkan as he seeks to escape scrutiny for his misdeeds.

Håkan's narrative shifted into more vigilant and scrutinizing to the desert elements:

> A few broken twigs (and there were many broken twigs throughout the sagebrush steppe) signaled, to him, the passage of a rider; a few stones in a somewhat regular pattern (and he saw patterns everywhere) represented the remnants of a campfire whose ashes had

> been scattered by the wind; a pale weedless streak on the ground (and streaks striated the plains in every direction) was taken to be a trail; a well-traced circle in the bunchgrass (and whim had drawn countless circles all over the flats) meant that cattle had been left to graze within rounded-up wagons. (Diaz, 109)

The description of “broken twigs,” “stones in a somewhat regular pattern,” “pale weedless streaks,” and “well-traced circles in the bunchgrass” highlights how Håkan's mind has become hyper-vigilant, constantly seeking out and misinterpreting natural patterns and formations as evidence of human activity and encroachment. The repetitive use of parenthetical statements, such as “(and there were many broken twigs throughout the sagebrush steppe)” and “(and streaks striated the plains in every direction),” emphasizes the pervasiveness of these natural phenomena in the desert landscape. However, Håkan's paranoia and desperation to avoid detection have distorted his perception, causing him to see potential threats and signs of human presence in even the most commonplace and harmless occurrences (Pinckney 12). Diaz effectively conveys Håkan's descent into a state of heightened anxiety and mistrust, where even the slightest deviation from the natural order is perceived as a potential danger.

> Several times a day, he dismounted and picked up some dry dung to make sure it was not horse manure—and if it happened to come from a horse, to establish how old it was. He inspected carrion and blanched bones, looking for evidence of human method in the way the bodies had been butchered. (Diaz, 110)

The image of Håkan dismounting “several times a day” to inspect “dry dung” and distinguish between different animal droppings conveys the obsessive nature of his behavior. His need to carefully analyze even the most innocuous signs of animal activity in the area underscores his

profound fear and mistrust of any potential human intrusion. The description of him examining “carrion and blanched bones, looking for evidence of human method in the way the bodies had been butchered” adds a chilling and unsettling dimension to his actions. This suggests that Håkan's paranoia extends to the fear of encountering living humans and the possibility of encountering remnants or traces of human activity, no matter how insignificant or ancient.

> Håkan kept traveling south for a few weeks. Life got easier as the air warmed up. Still, he was surprised to see that despite the milder weather, the vegetation became sparser. Hard, razor-sharp grass grew only in patches. The bushes turned bristly and hostile. Scaled animals soon outnumbered furred ones. A red desert was overtaking the brown desert. As he moved forward, the terrain acquired familiar features—the crimson dust. (Diaz, 116)

Håkan had spent a long time isolated in the desert. Over this time, he developed a deep understanding of and connection to the desert narratives. Even as the environment changed around him, with the terrain taking on new features like crimson dust and becoming more of a red desert, Håkan could adapt. For him, the changing desert continued in the same place he had known during his isolation (LeMenager 115). The alterations did not diminish the significance or familiarity he felt. According to Deleuze and Guattari, we must stay mobile in our thoughts and behaviors, much like a nomadic tribe. Such a method is required to avoid the political or ideological manipulations of mass demand that characterize modern states. The most pernicious of these mechanisms is subjectivity itself. (111)

This shows how the desert had become meaningful to Håkan through his solitary experiences and observations within its vast spaces. Though the surroundings transformed, his bond with the area endures due to his meaningful time getting to know it intimately during his isolation. As the

event progresses, Håkan first sees the town emerge on the horizon after a few months of traveling in the desert and mountains; he describes the town as “now this side of the road and that side of the road. And at the end of it, there was the town.” (126). This separation of the town from the desert by the road suggests that Håkan begins to perceive the town as separate and distinct from the landscape of the desert that he has known for so long. Rather than being integrated into the landscape as a natural part, the town stands apart. Terentowicz-Fotyga points out in her article that:

> The relationship between space and ideology in dystopian fiction implies that social and political beliefs about horrific reality find extremely clear, symbolic representations in the design of space; architecture's spatial language serves as a visible reflection of the social order. And, because dystopias tend to depict extreme visions of society and its future, the language of space is highly influenced by extreme poetics. (25)

Later in the town, A brutal and selfish sheriff captures Håkan; the sheriff falsifies narratives that Håkan is “a beast from the underworld” and “the predacious lion that butchered our flock” (133). He says that Håkan is responsible for all the fatalities in the attack on the wagon train. The sheriff aims to transport Håkan to Illinois for trial and execution. The sheriff begins tormenting Håkan, accelerating his sense of discomfort and alienation within the urban space. This situation can be interpreted as an example of a “non-place.

The sheriff punishes Håkan by making him walk down the main street like an animal. The spectators respond with “vociferous” shouts and throws of debris at the physically powerless and exhausted Håkan. The treatment of Håkan by the sheriff and the town demonstrates the socioeconomic process that Augé proposed as the cause of self-alienation, as the sheriff's response contradicts Håkan's innate human essence. The

sheriff persistently mistreats Håkan, traveling from one town to another and exposing him to more public humiliation. This solidifies Håkan's perception that the town is a place of unbelonging and alienation rather than a real place as he thinks previously.

Conversely, the desert landscapes that Håkan is familiar with invoke a sense of solace, freedom, and isolation rather than constraint and illegitimacy. Out in the desert, Håkan has faced survival through self-reliance rather than navigating complex social structures and prejudices imposed by others. Håkan is subjected to escalating terror and humiliation in the cities; this illustrates how urban space has become associated with threat and non-belonging rather than refuge in Håkan's mind. He sees cities as non-places, artificial constructs hostile to his presence and way of being that instill fear rather than comfort or acceptance.

The sheriff's deputy “Asa” knows that Håkan is innocent and helps him escape. In his prison cell, he deals with Håkan kindly, giving him medicine and caring for his wounds; it represents one of the only moments of humanitarian contact and respite from the suffering Håkan has experienced. Asa's compassion begins to affirm Håkan's innate worth and dignity at a time when he has been thoroughly debased (Smith 119). Their brief interaction highlights how small acts of human empathy can counter the societal forces that inflict harm and oppression even in the worst circumstances. However, Asa cannot shield Håkan from further brutalization at the hands of the sheriff. Håkan escapes the town with Asa's help; Håkan finds solace and refuge in the open desert rather than the town. He is:

> Traveling with someone who knew the land and had the eye of a tracker transformed Håkan’s perception of the plains. ... But more impressive than his ability to decipher the plains and his perfect sense of direction was the fact that Asa’s knowledge of the terrain,

> acquired through numerous trips, allowed him to anticipate every stage of their journey. (Diaz, 144)

The vast, empty desert landscape provides a sense of familiarity and control that is noticeably absent in the towns' confining streets. Though desolate, the desert is a comprehensible space that Håkan understands in a way he does not know the unfamiliar system of cities (Smith 120). Its solitary expanses allow him to avoid uncomfortably drawing attention as well. This preference is further exemplified after Håkan's capture when he escapes again with Asa's help. Facing the threat of recapture, Asa believes the safest strategy is to flee deep into the desert canyons. He states that their pursuers will "be looking for you already," but he says, "Maybe we can lose them" in the desert's winding chasms. Asa understands Håkan's aversion to cities and proposes hiding in the desert's more familiar, spacious terrain instead. This reflects what Auge recognizes: that both place and non-place are not static and constantly influence and shape each other practically. Edward Relph believes that a sense of place is essential to make a location relevant to people. Echoing traditional conceptions of genius loci, Relph contends that human emotions attach themselves to places through human-space interaction, which may be viewed as an investment of work and, as a result, a story of sense injected by people into place. (143)

However, there is a potential risk of attributing a negatively transformed social aspect of a place to that of a non-place. A logical outcome would be establishing a concept of space where the isolated, temporary, and contractual aspects are solidified in a reversed geography, in which standard anthropological references are conceptually neutralized (43). In this way, when Håkan first enters an American town with the sheriff, the town is presented as an unfamiliar and uncomfortable space for him because he spent most of his life wandering in the deserted plains;

Håkan lacks experience navigating populated urban areas and interacting with large groups of people. Upon their arrival in town, the sheriff's mistreatment of him accelerates Håkan's feeling that cities are non-places he prefers to avoid. On the other hand, the open desert with which Håkan is most familiar takes on the qualities of a "place," a space with meaning and personal significance. Although desolate, the desert provides Håkan with a sense of familiarity and control that is lacking in the confusing disorientation of town.

During Håkan's alone turn to collect water, he hears horses, gunfire, and Asa's screaming. For a moment, in the swirl of sounds:

> Håkan thought that Asa might have been shot already, even if his screams were still in the air. Nevertheless, as echoes surged, Asa emerged from behind the bend, galloping at full speed. ... It was not Asa. There was too much air, too much light. Hooves echoing in the distance. At a walk. Getting closer. Then, the three riders leisurely making their way down the gorge. Chatting. Laughing. Asa's horse in tow. Asa's body strapped to it. Right under Håkan. Asa's head shining with blood. Håkan remained there as the sun set, the stars came out, and morning dawned. (158)

The tragic death of his friend Asa has a profound impact on Håkan, leading him to withdraw from society and live a solitary life deep in the desert. Diaz provides insights into why Håkan regards the desert as a place of refuge that shapes his existence. According to Augé, places are relational, historical, and concerned with identity, while non-locations are transit spaces devoid of these attributes. (77–78)

Edward Relph identifies the loss of unique and authentic places and their replacement with standardized, faceless, and interchangeable landscapes, spaces, and environments (144). So, the narrative establishes

the desert as a place for Håkan that allows him to detach from his past and the reality of Asa's killing. Initially, after Asa's death, Håkan remains in the dome they lived in, with “Now-here, nowhere, his heart pounded in his ears. His disdain for himself and his destiny was complete. His pain, intense and deafening as it was, came to him as a remote echo of someone else’s scream.” (Diaz 161). He is detached from any sense of past or future, existing in an endless “now-here, nowhere” state. This suggests that even the dome has become a non-place for Håkan, as he is disconnected from any identity or relations. He nearly dies of cold; vivid memories of people from his past assail him, showing how the trauma still influences him. Håkan thus feels compelled to leave the non-place of the dome to find a new sense of identity.

Håkan's ultimate decision to journey far into the remote desert shows his desire for complete isolation and detachment from human society after the profound loss and upheaval he suffered. The desert is presented as a primeval natural landscape free from any signs of human presence or activity. Håkan “wanted no talk. Without a clear destination and no purpose other than solitude, it was easier to elude everyone.” (Diaz 162), emphasizing his self-reliant nature and rejection of civilization's comforts. Håkan eventually stops his wandering; he chooses, “A few knolls assured him that travelers would not pick that course when the surrounding grounds were flat. There was a water source nearby but not close enough for him to run into thirsty wanderers.” suitable for digging (Diaz 163).

This pragmatic reason suggests that the desert has come to shape Håkan's practical sensibilities and stripped him of past attachments. From then on, he lived there while expanding and improving his shelter; this shows how the desert becomes a place molded by and constitutive of Håkan's new identity. “Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the

imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (Soja 57). This concept of Thirdspace resonates with Håkan's experience, as his reality in the desert blends the physical and the imagined, shaping both his consciousness and his surroundings. He settles into a harsh existence "Once, the whole construction, beams, joists, and all, collapsed on him while he was sleeping. A big bough stabbed him in the leg." (Diaz 168), further subsuming his individuality into his surroundings.

Håkan's solitary existence in the subterranean tunnels he digs also reflects his refusal of the ordinary social bonds and norms he once lived in. He adopts a primordial mode of living through hunting, fishing, and subsisting at a bare minimum. He detached from any certainty about the passage of time; over the years spent in the desert, Håkan loses all thought of destinations, like "Every thought of ever finding Linus, of traveling to New York, had long abandoned him" (Diaz 164-165). He becomes something that keeps going due to habit rather than choice or will, subsumed within natural cycles of endless, menial tasks. Håkan's subsistence taps into the timelessness of the desert environment, becoming one with the place that has reshaped his subjectivity. While profoundly solitary, isolation in the desert also gives Håkan a protective obscurity, that reflects Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which emphasizes deviance as well as modernity's processes of exclusion and standardization, appears to be most suitable.

The concept of heterotopia indicates that the 'other', which may also include people in crisis or undergoing transition, is assigned to distinct limited areas, diminishing variety in 'normal' locations (26). Augé appears to see a link between heterotopia and the non-place when he provides a catalog of places, including both classical non-places and classical

Foucauldian heterotopia places, describing our society as a “world where people are born in the clinic and die in a hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating” (78). Sometimes the heterotopia is as fleeting as the transitory non-place.

Håkan is living in isolation in his underground home called “the burrow.” He has avoided all human contact for a long time. Five men unexpectedly discover his home; Håkan is terrified and sees them as a threat. The men are two civilians and three soldiers. They inspect the burrow casually, confident Håkan is alone. Their calm demeanor threatens violence. Håkan emerges dressed in his lion skin coat, astonishing the men with immense size. One soldier recognizes Håkan by his infamous nickname, “The Hawk”. The men admire his legend but want to exploit his notoriety to join their gang. Håkan refuses to join them. Later, he poisons the gang members. He stumbled, and his single hand was not enough to catch his fall:

> The gray soldier sitting next to him tried to get up but failed. All at once, the remaining man understood everything and reached for his gun. Before he could draw, Håkan hit him in the head with the pot. He never checked whether he was unconscious or dead, preferring to live with the uncertainty rather than with the knowledge of having killed another man. (177-178)

This quote depicts Håkan's isolation being forcibly disrupted by external threats, compelling him to confront the harsh realities of human interaction in the desert. This scenario can be analyzed through the lens of Foucault's social and cultural theory, which explores not only the spatiality of modern capitalist society but also the potential for resistance in marginal 'other' spaces, or 'heterotopias'. Theoretically informed work on deserts in modern literature has often emphasized their heterotopic quality, positioning them as sites of resistance and alterity (21). In this context,

Håkan's burrow can be interpreted as a self-created space representing his established sense of identity and autonomy.In contrast, the gang members, constantly on the move, inhabit what can be considered a 'non-place' - a space without a fixed identity or community. Håkan's refusal to join the gang can thus be seen as an act of preserving his place and identity.

This interpretation aligns with the concept of heterotopias as spaces of resistance, with Håkan's burrow functioning as a heterotopic space in opposition to the nomadic, identity-less existence of the gang. The confrontation between Håkan and the external threats, therefore, represents a clash between different modes of spatial existence and identity formation in the desert setting. Håkan refuses to join the gang; in essence, he is preserving his place and identity. He also protects himself from assimilating into a non-place, a space without identity or community. This refusal is a testament to his desire for independence and self-sufficiency.

4.4 Conclusion

In Hernan Diaz's *In The Distance* (2017), the concept of place and non-place is intricately woven throughout the narrative, particularly in the context of the desert. According to the theorization of Auge, and the data analysis, the desert embodies both the characteristics of a non-place and a place. The novel presents two contrasting narratives regarding desert space. The first narrative depicts the desert as a 'non-place'. Initially, the desert appears as a non-place to the central character, Håkan according to Auge's definition of non-places as "spaces of circulation, communication, and commerce" that lack a sense of community and identity (78). The desert, with its vast expanse of sand and rock, is devoid of human connection and community, rendering it a non-place. Håkan's initial encounter with the desert is marked by disorientation and confusion as he struggles to

comprehend the alien landscape. The desert's unfamiliarity and hostility serve to underscore its non-place status. This perspective is shared by most characters, such as Brennans and Jarvis, who view the desert as an alien and meaningless expanse. For these individuals, the desert lacks significance and identity, existing merely as a space to be traversed or conquered.

The second narrative transforms the desert into a real place for Håkan after he spends most of his life traversing its expanse. This shift in perception is catalyzed by Lorimer's teachings, which help Håkan grasp the desert's intrinsic meaning and significance. The desert gradually becomes a place of refuge and solace for Håkan. This transformation is facilitated by Håkan's gradual connection with the land, which is marked by his growing familiarity with the desert's rhythms and patterns. Håkan's rejection by society also facilitates the desert's transformation into a place. As a fugitive, Håkan is forced to flee from the law and seek refuge in the desert. The desert, once a non-place, becomes a place of salvation, providing Håkan with a reprieve from the social pressures that seek to constrain him. The desert's isolation and anonymity offer Håkan a sense of freedom and autonomy, essential for his survival in Auge's terms.

Furthermore, the desert's transformation into a place is also marked by Håkan's growing sense of identity and belonging. As he navigates the desert's challenges, Håkan begins to form a connection with the desert land, which matters much in his growing sense of respect and reverence. This connection is exemplified in Håkan's observations of the desert's beauty and majesty, which underscore his growing sense of belonging. The narratives portray the desert as an environmentally rich place rather than an undifferentiated blank. The main character, Håkan, develops the capacity to read and comprehend the environment.

Diaz intentionally juxtaposes these two narratives to highlight the subjective nature of the place as a space of transformative power of experience and understanding. By contrasting Håkan's initial alienation with his eventual connection to the desert, the novel underscores how perceptions of place are shaped by personal experience, knowledge, and emotional investment. This juxtaposition serves to accentuate the desert's positive impact on Håkan's character development and worldview, emphasizing that the meaning of a place is not inherent but constructed as a space through lived experience and personal growth.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Conclusions

The current study argues that the desert in *The Bleeding of the Stone* by Ibrahim Al-Koni and *In the Distance* by Hernan Diaz holds the narratives of both a “place” and “non-place” as conceptualized by Marc Augé, serving as a complex backdrop for the exploration of identity, belonging, and displacement. Moreover, it argues that the desert in these narratives transcends mere setting, becoming a space that shapes and reflects the psychological state of the protagonists. Examining the portrayal of the desert narratives in the selected novels reveals that both Al-Koni and Diaz utilize this terrain as a multifaceted space that simultaneously embodies qualities of Augé's “place” (identity-forming, relational, historical) and “non-place” (transient, anonymous, solitary).

As such, In Al-Koni's novel *The Bleeding of the Stone*, the portrayal of the desert is analyzed through the lens of Augé's concept of "place" and "non-place". The study explores how the desert narratives are represented differently for the insider and outsider characters and how the desert impacts their identity transformations. The study concludes that Al-Koni presents the desert as both a "place" and a "non-place" through the

opposition of insider and outsider narratives. For the indigenous inhabitants, the desert is a sacred "place" that matters deeply in shaping their identities and cultural narratives. Conversely, for outsiders, it is a "non-place" devoid of inherent significance. This dichotomy highlights the intricate interplay between the narratives and Augé's concept, prompting reflection on the role of place in shaping identity and preserving cultural heritage.

The desert is a "place" of cultural and personal significance for Asouf and his people. The novel portrays two contrasting narratives about the desert space. As we mentioned earlier, for indigenous inhabitants like Asouf and his family, the desert is a significant "place" that shapes their cultural and spiritual being. They considered the desert an integral part of their identity and culture and a sacred place for them. This is evident in Asouf's crucifixion at the end of the novel when Cain, the antagonist and outsider, crucifies and kills Asouf. This crucifixion is a potent metaphor likening his sacrifice to Christ's, underscoring the desert's sacredness. For these "insiders," the desert is a holy space intrinsically bound to their existence, emphasizing the novel's central message.

Conversely, the "outsiders" like Cain, Masoud, and John Parker perceive the desert as a "non-place." Lacking the deep-rooted connection of the original inhabitants, they fail to grasp the profound significance of the desert narratives and see no inherent value in it. Their presence is driven by external interests, leaving them unable to appreciate the desert's holiness. This disconnect is exemplified when Cain, driven by passion, violates the desert's purity by crucifying Asouf. The juxtaposition of these two narratives highlights the contrast between those who see the desert as a significant "place" and those who view it as a "non-place."

The dominant narrative acknowledges how the desert matters in shaping the identities and cultures of its inhabitants. The contrasting "non-

place" narrative seeks to underscore, through binary opposition, the desert's beneficial influence on its residents' attitudes and values. This dual narrative structure underscores the intricate relationship between people and geography, demonstrating how the same physical space can contain vastly different meanings depending on one's cultural background and personal connection. Through this perspective, Al-Koni prompts readers to contemplate their relationship with place and its profound influence on identity development and cultural preservation.

Regarding the second text, Diaz's *In the Distance* is also examined through the prism of Augé's "place" and "non-place". The study investigates how the desert narrative is represented differently by characters. Initially, the American desert is portrayed as a "non-place" for Håkan, resonating with Augé's notion of a transitory and anonymous environment challenging traditional notions of identity and belonging. Håkan's disorienting journey across the vast, unfamiliar terrain exemplifies how the desert materializes as an ontological "non-place," accentuating his displacement and solitude. In contrast, the Brennan family perceives the desert solely as a "non-place" to be exploited for gold extraction. Despite spending extended time there, their utilitarian view prevents them from developing a deeper connection, and the desert remains a "non-place" – a space for material gain rather than a living environment.

However, the narrative demonstrates a semantic transformation of the desert from a "non-place" to a meaningful "place." Through immersion, Håkan apprehends deeper layers of significance within it. Once a transient space, the desert gradually becomes a refuge offering sanctuary from urban constraints and mistreatment. Paradoxically, the place he once perceived as authentic embodies "non-place" qualities, while the desert, initially a "non-place," evolves into a lived "place" for him. The desert's duality as "place" and "non-place" is evident throughout. Initially a non-place for Håkan, the

Brennans, and Jarvis, an incomprehensible, hostile environment aligning with Augé's definition of spaces lacking historical identity or relational significance. However, when this "non-place" conception becomes insufficient for Håkan's experience, a new understanding of the desert as a place of refuge and identity emerges, facilitated by Lorimer's teachings and Håkan's growing familiarity with its rhythms.

Such incidents prove that when the initial "non-place" understanding seems unworthy or incomplete, new interpretations contribute to the complexity of the relationship with the environment. This perceptual shift underscores the subjective nature of "place" and "non-place," highlighting how personal experience can transform a seemingly meaningless expanse into a space rich with identity and significance.

Finally, comparing the portrayal of the desert in *The Bleeding of the Stone* and *In the Distance* through the lens of Augé's concepts of “place” and “non-place” leads to the following concluding remarks:

First, the desert narratives in both novels function as both a “place” and a “non-place,” demonstrating the complexity and fluidity of spatial relationships. For Al-Koni's Asouf, the desert is primarily a “place” imbued with cultural significance, while for Diaz's Håkan, the American desert often represents a “non-place” of displacement for outsiders, but after the experience, it transforms into a “place”. The desert's identity is not fixed but shifts based on the characters' perspectives and experiences.

Second, comparing the desert narratives in the selected novels proves that the concepts of “place” and “non-place” are not mutually exclusive but can coexist within the same geographical space. This coexistence is evident in how characters navigate and interpret their surroundings, alternating between feelings of belonging and alienation.

Third, the desert is not merely a passive backdrop but an active force that shapes the characters' identities, actions, and perceptions. This agency of the landscape is demonstrated in both novels through how the desert challenges, transforms, and sometimes destroys the protagonists.

Fourth, the various interpretations of the desert in the selected novels lead to the conclusion that the perception of desert space as “place” or “non-place” is deeply rooted in cultural, historical, and personal contexts. This understanding challenges simplified notions of place and emphasizes the subjective nature of spatial experiences.

The protagonists in both novels engage with the desert’s landscape in ways that reflect their struggle for identity and belonging. Asouf, in the Arabic narrative, seeks to maintain his connection to the desert as a “place” of cultural significance, while Håkan, in the English narrative, grapples with the desert as a “non-place” that underscores his isolation and later, it turns to be a refuge. Their interactions with the desert serve as strategies for navigating their complex relationships with their environments and societies. For Asouf, his deep knowledge of the desert and its creatures, “the waaden” represents a form of resistance against encroaching modernization and a way of preserving his cultural identity. In contrast, Håkan's journey through the desert becomes a means of surviving and adapting to a foreign place, reflecting his struggle to find his place in a new world, and he finally finds it in the desert.

Fifth, while both Ibrahim al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* and Hernán Diaz's *In the Distance* explore desert narratives and the perspectives of insiders and outsiders to desert landscapes, there are notable differences in how each novel portrays these themes. Al-Koni's Arabic novel presents characters who are intimately familiar with and deeply rooted in desert life, as it is an intrinsic part of their culture and way of being. The protagonist, Asouf, embraces a solitary existence in the desert,

living freely without attempting to urbanize or significantly alter his environment.

In contrast, Diaz's Western perspective in *In the Distance* depicts characters as outsiders to the desert who approach it through an urbanizing lens. The character Hakån, forced into desert life, immediately seeks to construct burrows and tunnels, imposing a degree of city-like structure onto the landscape. This divide exemplifies a fundamental philosophical divergence, where the Arabic novel celebrates the desert's purity and essence; and the Western view tends to systematize and engineer the desert space.

While both works recognize the profound impact of desert narratives on individuals, whether insiders or outsiders, the Arabic representation aligns with preserving the desert's inherent wildness, whereas the Western portrayal hints at an impulse to conquer and subjugate the desert through human constructs, this dichotomy invites deeper inquiry into the cultural underpinnings that shape our environmental perspectives.

Finally, both novels use the desert's dual nature as “place” and “non-place” to critique broader social and cultural issues. Al-Koni's portrayal of the desert highlights the tension between traditional Tuareg culture and modern influences, while Diaz's depiction of the American desert challenges mythologized notions of the deserted frontier and questions the concept of belonging in a vast and indifferent landscape.

5.2 Contribution of the Study

The study contributes to the existing literature on desert narratives in literature by offering a unique perspective that expands the analysis beyond traditional interpretations and into the realm of Augé's concepts of “place” and “non-place.” The idea of the desert is tackled beyond its conventional

context as a mere setting and applied to constructing identity and meaning in both *The Bleeding of the Stone* by Al-Koni and *In the Distance* by Hernan Diaz. Another significant contribution lies in the circulation of desert symbolism to explore cultural and personal displacement by suggesting a new broad interpretation of the desert. Instead of defining it as a barren, lifeless expanse, the study offers a new definition: the desert becomes a complex arena for negotiating belonging, identity, and human experience. In Al-Koni's work, the desert functions as a “place” imbued with cultural significance and spiritual meaning for the Tuareg characters, while in Diaz's novel, it often serves as a “non-place” of anonymity and disorientation and a “place” of historical ties and identity transformation for the protagonist.

Moreover, the study also reveals how these categorizations are fluid, with characters in both novels experiencing shifts in their perception of the desert landscape as their relationships with it evolve throughout the narratives.

5.3 Recommendation for Further Studies

As this study engages with the multifaceted representations of desert narratives in *The Bleeding of the Ston*e and *In the Distance*, it becomes clear that while substantial progress has been made in elucidating the complexities of this profoundly symbolic landscape, further scholarly inquiry is necessary from diverse perspectives to deepen our understanding of the desert’s literary function and its influence on narrative and character development. Therefore, this topic can be critically examined through the lens of Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism" to explore how the desert serves as a site of cultural encounter and conflict in both texts. Additionally, Gaston Bachelard’s phenomenological approach in *The Poetics of Space* could provide a nuanced understanding of how the desert

environment shapes human behavior and perception within these novels. Finally, an ecocritical analysis, drawing on Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination*, could offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between landscape and literary representation, further advancing our comprehension of the desert's role in shaping narrative and character.

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المستخلص

غالبًا ما يتم تصوير الصحراء على أنها مساحة قاحلة وخاوية ولا معنى لها في الأعمال الأدبية. تعزز مثل هذه التصويرات فكرة الصحراء باعتبارها غير منتجة وغير صالحة للسكن وخالية من القيمة، مما يعكس عقلية نفعية تفشل في تقدير القيمة الجوهرية لهذه البيئات وتنوعها. ومع ذلك، فإن هذه السرديات "القاحلة" للصحراء تتجاهل التاريخ الثقافي الغني والتعقيدات البيئية والأهمية الروحية التي تنسبها العديد من المجتمعات الأصلية إلى الأماكن الصحراوية. ركزت الدراسات السابقة في المقام الأول على سرديات الصحراء كخلفية أو تسلط الضوء على الجانب السلبي للصحراء. وبالتالي، فإن الدراسة الحالية تحقق وتقارن بين سرديات الصحراء للغرباء والداخليين في رواية إبراهيم الكوني "نزيف الحجر" (1995) ورواية هيرنان دياز "في الافق" (2017). تحلل الدراسة الحالية الديناميكيات بين "عاصوف" و"كين" في السرديات الصحراوية العربية، جنبًا إلى جنب مع تصوير "هاكان" و"آل برينان" في السرديات الصحراوية الإنجليزية، من خلال عدسة كتاب مارك أوجيه "اللامكان: مقدمة إلى الحداثة المفرطة" (1995). تستخدم هذه الدراسة افتراضات مفهومي أوجيه "المكان" و"اللامكان" كأدوات منهجية لتحليل البيانات. وبالتالي، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن السرد الصحراوي في الرواية العربية هو "مكان" علائقي يقف كفضاء ذي أهمية ثقافية وشخصية لبناء الهوية، كما في حالة عاصوف ومجتمعه، على النقيض من الغرباء مثل كين،

الذي يعتبر السرد الغربي للصحراء "لامكان" غير عقلاني مع مساحة لا قيمة لها. وبالمقارنة، فإن السرد الأميركي للصحراء في النص الإنجليزي يبدو في البداية وكأنه "لا مكان" بالنسبة إلى هاكان، وهو ما يعكس مفهوم أوجيه عن البيئة المؤقتة والمجهولة، إلا أن انغماس هاكان في الصحراء يحولها إلى "مكان" ذي معنى مهم في بناء الهوية الفردية. وعلى العكس من ذلك، فإن السرد الصحراوي بالنسبة إلى برينان يظل غير علاقي ولا معنى له باعتباره مساحة للتعبير عن الاحتياجات والرغبات، وهو ما يتماشى مع مفهوم أوجيه عن "اللا مكان".

جمهوريـــة العراق
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي
جامعـــة الانبـــار
كليـــة الاداب
قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

حياة الصحراء مهمة: دراسة مقارنة لسرديات الفضاء في روايات مختارة لما بعد الحداثة

رسالة مقدمة
الى مجلس كلية الاداب بجامعة الانبار
وهي جزء من متطلبات نيل درجة الماجستير
في الادب الإنكليزي

من طالب الماجستير

احمد خاشع ناجي عبداللطيف الراوي

بإشراف:
الأستاذ المساعد الدكتور

محمد فليح حسن الجنابي

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