| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Translating Local Literature: The Limits of Conveying Realia from ʿAbd al-Raḥman Munīf's *Mudun al-Milḥ* to Peter Theroux's *Cities of Salt*

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| ABSTRACT

This paper examines the challenges of translating realia (elements of local reality deeply bound up with the universe of reference of the original culture) in the translation of *Mudun al-Milḥ* (*Al-Tīh*) by ʿAbd al-Raḥman Munīf, as rendered into English by Peter Theroux. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Sergei Vlakhov, Sider Florin, Lauren Leighton, Peter Newmark, and Susan Bassnett, the study compares and analyzes the original Arabic text and its English translation from the perspective of a bilingual (Arabic/English) Saudi. The paper argues that the concept of "realia" plays a critical role not only in understanding the novel's cultural setting but also in conveying the complexities of the Saudi/Bedouin identity and worldview. It examines how the translation process transcends linguistic equivalence, encompassing social, cultural, and historical realities that are challenging to transfer. The analysis emphasizes that the local reality in *Al-Tīh* extends beyond culturally specific terms to encompass the unique ways language is used within the community, and it reflects the lived experiences of its members in a way that can only be truly comprehended by those who are part of that community. The paper shows that these aspects result in varying degrees of cultural and linguistic untranslatability, where certain aspects are inevitably lost in translation. By examining key examples from both the original Arabic text and the English translation, it is demonstrated that differences in the "universe of reference" between Munīf's and Theroux's versions contribute to distortions in the portrayal of realia, ultimately affecting the representation of the novel's cultural and social contexts.

| KEYWORDS

Realia, universe of reference, untranslatability, cultural translation, literary realism, local color, dialect, Saudi.

1. Introduction

ʿAbd al-Raḥman Munīf wrote one of the most exceptional and important series of novels in the history of Saudi Arabia and the Arab world. These novels are commonly referred to as *Mudun al-Milḥ*, after the name of the first volume in the series. The first volume, subtitled *Al-Tīh*, was published in 1984. *Mudun* is set in a fictional location in Saudi Arabia, both before and after the discovery of oil by an American company. It portrays the rapid economic, cultural, and social changes brought about by this discovery, replacing Bedouin life with that of a modern city. Each volume in the series covers a different time period, has a different plot, and thus reveals different aims. However, *Mudun* is deeply rooted in Saudi culture and depicts traditional practices and cultural heritage. Munīf uses precise, extensive details to describe the Bedouins' food, clothing, tools, folklores, habits, rituals, practices, and places. Munīf reinforces this locality with a unique narrative technique that blends standard Arabic with vernacular speech and Bedouin dialect. *Mudun*, being originally published in Lebanon, gained considerable fame and celebration in other Arab regions and internationally.

The international success of *Mudun* is linked to the publication of its English translation by Peter Theroux, titled *Cities of Salt*. Theroux translated only the three first volumes, with the first volume specifically subtitled *The Wilderness* (1987). The English translation of *Mudun* sparked significant international interest, particularly in the United States, leading to widespread exploration of the novel. This also prompted the publication of a German translation of the first three volumes in 2004, titled *Salzstädte* and translated by Larissa Bender. However, as this research later demonstrates, the novel's depiction of the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula, which was an important historical event that "radically changed the physical, human, and political geography of Saudi Arabia, the Middle East, and the world" ("Oil Discovered in Saudi Arabia", National Geographic Society), can be regarded as the major reason for *Cities'* international popularity.

The international recognition of *Cities of Salt* is underscored by its ranking as number 76 in Daniel Burt's *The Novel 100: a Ranking of the Greatest Novels of All Time*, where it is praised as "the most ambitious project ever attempted in Arabic fiction since *The Arabian Nights*" (354). Burt highlights its significance in offering insight into the Arab world, noting the "perplexing challenge" the Arab region poses to Western readers, and suggesting that *Cities* serves as one of the best "fictional resources to help readers come to grips with the region, its tensions, and values" (354). However, Burt is not the only scholar who regards *Cities of Salt* as both a historical document and a reflection of a community. The novel's cultural dimensions and portrayal of local context are crucial for non-Arabic, non-Saudi readers. This raises an important question: to what extent can a translated version of a deeply rooted local novel capture the realities, tensions, and values that are intimately tied to the world of a specific community?

The intersection of postcolonial studies, translation studies, and comparative literature has led to an understanding that languages are inseparable from their historical, social, and cultural contexts. This awareness has given rise to serious and controversial issues related to the "question of loss and gain in the translation process" that is generated from the widely acknowledged principle that "sameness cannot exist between two languages" (Bassnett 38). This "loss and gain" is a direct result of linguistic and cultural differences between the source language (SL) and target language (TL). However, Sergei Vlakhov and Sider Florin give special emphasis to cultural differences between the SL and TL as "they affirm the 'otherness' of the original in the midst of the most idiomatic use of the target language" (Florin 164). Vlakhov and Florin argue that translation affects the reality that is "intimately bound up with the universe of reference of the original culture," or in other words, what they referred to as "realia," the Latin *'realis'* [1]: real things (Florin 163). They argue that realia, which in their definition are: "words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another" cause translation problems because they express local and historical realities that have no exact equivalents in other languages and require special treatment in translation (Florin 164). Thus, *Mudun*, a work that is deeply rooted in Saudi culture that features vernacular and dialectal speech while portraying an authentic local reality, is rich in realia that present significant challenges for translation and the accurate conveyance of this reality into another language.

The implications of globalism have resulted in an increasing awareness of the need for intercultural understanding and cross-cultural communication. As a consequence of this awareness, recently considerable attention has been given to investigating the translation of realia, specifically in local novels. Scholars like Lauren Leighton (1991) Alexander Burak (2013), Alla Kharina (2018), and Ana Maria Toro (2020) have further developed Vlakhov's and Florin's theoretical framework on realia and draw attention to the role and importance of realia in intercultural communication and in providing authentic perceptions of a given community. Their contributions emphasize that translations of local works have a significant function as they mirror cultures and history, promote knowledge about different countries and peoples, and represent an effective channel for cross-cultural dialogues. For these reasons, exploring the translation of *Mudun al-Milḥ*, which "[circulates] out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin" (Damrosch 6), is both necessary and urgent.

2. Literature Review

Theroux's English translation of *Mudun al-Milḥ* has contributed significantly to the novel's global recognition. However, the transnational dimension of Munīf's work is deeply political, especially in its portrayal of the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula by an American company. This political dimension is largely shaped by Munīf's activism, which focused on issues like oil exploitation, political Islam, and dictatorship. Munīf's writings have significantly influenced the way *Mudun* is perceived, with many scholars drawing on his activist views to interpret the novel. The theme of oil, more than any other, has been central to global academic discussions of *Cities of Salt*, drawing attention from socialists, postcolonial critics, and ecocritics, who often categorize it as part of the 'oil literature' genre. In addition to the research conducted around the notion of the oil encounter in *Cities*, there has also been some engagement in exploring the cultural encounters between Arabs and Americans as well as Munīf's narrative techniques. However, most non-Arab scholars have based their interpretations on Theroux's English translation, in isolation from the original Arabic text. These tendencies in the study of *Cities*, especially *Al-Tīh*, have overshadowed its status as a deeply local novel rooted in Saudi culture, leading to a neglect of its exploration of local realities and cultural dimensions.

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[1] 'Realia,' according to Alla Kharina, is neuter plural of "realis" and became a noun through nominalization. She proposes to use 'realia' for both singulars and plurals alternating it with such terms like "realia word/expression" or "realia lexical item" (53).

To the best available knowledge, only two studies have specifically examined the translation of cultural dimensions in *Cities* (*The Wilderness*): one by Ali Adamat (2004) and another by Ali Odeh Alidmat and Kaur Manjet (2020). Adamat solely focused on exploring the translation of the Bedouin dialect while Alidmat and Manjet's analysis only investigated the problems encountered when a culturally different translator translates a text. Their observations benefit the aim of this research, but this research aims to broaden and strengthen them by providing an in-depth examination of the translation of realia. Moreover, Abd Allah Al-Shehabat (2000) also examines the translation of proverbs in the third volume of *Cities*, and while the third volume does not fall under the scope of this research, Al-Shehabat's analysis is considerably useful as he suggests that proverbs serve "as a means of social contact [. . .] within one given society by giving some knowledge about the ethical standards of people and their method of thinking" (3). Accordingly, examining the translation of proverbs in *Al-Tīh* is crucial as a component of local reality.

The first critic to conduct a review of *Cities* (*The Wilderness*) was John Updike (1988). In his article, Updike emphasizes the importance of exploring the implications of the oil discovery in the Persian Gulf and suggests that *Cities* "performs a needed service in dramatizing the impact of American oil discovery and development upon an unnamed Gulf emirate" (117). With this assertion, Updike drew critics' attention to the discovery of oil in *Cities* and this became regarded by many scholars as its major theme. Concerning the style of Munīf's writing, Updike criticizes the novelistic form of *Cities* in terms of narration and characterization saying, "it is unfortunate, given the epic potential of his topic, that Mr. Munīf [. . .] appears to be [. . .] insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel" (117). He argues that *Cities'* narrator resembles that of "a campfire explainer," in which the characters are "rarely fixed in our minds by a face or a manner or a developed motivation," and that they do not represent "enough reality" to attract sympathy and interest (117). Moreover, Updike describes the major focus of the novel as sociological, being connected to the Arabs' disorientation and distress caused by the presence of Americans (117). Updike analyzes a few scenes to highlight cultural conflicts, giving special emphasis to the encounters between the Bedouins and American women and one of the character's (Ibn Naffeh) speech. It seems likely that Updike selected these scenes deliberately, as they likely evoked in him a reaction akin to culture shock. For instance, he expresses surprise that one of the "cruelest scenes" in *Cities* is the scene where the American boat docked at Harran, laden with nearly naked American women, which made the Bedouins angry and lustful. Updike questions this, saying: "what is happening actually? Would thirties costumes look so scanty, even to Arabs? These women seem clad in the sixties minimum" (118). Updike's arguments are based on his understanding of Theroux's translation and clearly demonstrate his lack of knowledge of cultural difference. He states that he cannot fully comprehend *Cities* and suggests this may be due to a "lack of familiarity with the Arab world" (119). This directly proves the claim that the cultural and linguistic differences between Munīf's and Theroux's texts affects *Mudun's* perception and that such text contain some cultural dimensions that are not comprehensible to a non-Saudi Arab, let alone to someone from the west.

Another scholar who has played a pivotal role in drawing critics' attention to Munīf himself and the notion of oil in *Cities* is Roger Allen, one of the most notable English scholars in Arabic literature. In his book *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*, Allen responds to Updike's criticism by arguing that Updike made his judgments based on reading the translation and that in so doing, he failed to realize "the issues involved in generic transfer between cultures" (9). He further states that Updike made an inaccurate judgment by allowing his cultural reference to predominate and that he "claims some implicit prerogative to prescribe the nature and parameters of the novel within a different culture" (230). Allen's response validates the claim of this research that cultural and linguistic differences between Munīf's and Theroux's texts influence the perception of *Mudun* and underscore the importance of a comparative analysis of both versions. Regarding Munīf's narrative technique, Allen explains that it resembles actual Saudi Bedouin speech and responds to Updike's "campfire explainer" comment by noting that it reflects the traditional Arabic oral literary form of *Hakawati* (storytellers) (123). Allen also describes *Mudun* as a historical novel that captures the Saudi reality, aligning it with literary realism (63). These points reinforce the argument that *Mudun* is rich in realia which require an investigation of their translation.

Amitav Ghosh (1992) also played a key role in drawing international attention to *Cities* and, like Updike and Allen, primarily directed scholarly focus to the theme of oil in the novel. Inspired by *Cities*, Ghosh coined the term 'Petro-fiction,' which refers to works that depict the role and impact of oil, or as he terms it, "The Oil Encounter" (29). In his analysis of *Cities*, Ghosh highlights the importance of petroleum by arguing that the oil industry is the twentieth-century counterpart to the spice trade. He states that there is a notable silence on this issue as very few people have written about the oil encounter (30). He demands to pay attention to this issue, saying that the world "[does] not yet possess the form that can give the Oil Encounter a literary expression" (30-1). As such, Ghosh considers *Cities* highly significant, as it is one of the first works to address the "oil encounter" (31). Ghosh's work led to the development of a new field of study worldwide that examines the oil encounter in literature in general, and *Cities* in particular. While praising *Cities*, Ghosh acknowledges that 'Munīf's prose is difficult to translate, being rich in ambiguities and unfamiliar dialects, but argues that Theroux, by altering punctuation and typography, has "[produced] a more 'naturalistic' text than the original" (31). However, Ghosh does not specify what kind of naturalism he is referring to, leaving it unclear whether he means the narrative form of a novel, as suggested by Updike, or the natural form of speech. In either case, this assertion is paradoxical and invites examination of the translation. If "Munīf's prose is extremely difficult to translate, being rich in ambiguities and unfamiliar dialectical usages," it is inevitable that the translation would lead to some degree of incomprehension. A central question for this research is: if Munīf's text is so deeply tied to the Bedouin Saudi reality, how can Theroux's translation be regarded as 'much more naturalistic' than the original?"

Nedal Al-Mousa (2001) explores the narrative technique of *Mudun* (*Al-Tīh*), but, unlike Updike, as an Arab with direct access to the source text, his analysis offers a distinct understanding of the novelistic form. Al-Mousa's findings support those of Allen's, particularly regarding *Mudun* as a work of literary realism, but he adds that even the mythical, legendary, and superstitious elements in Munīf's narrative are grounded in historical reality, which widens the scope of realism (154). Al-Mousa first states that Munīf experimented with new narrative techniques and modes of writing that are "suitable for rendering new aspects of reality in contemporary Arab society in the Gulf area" to reflect national concerns related to the discovery of oil and the arrival of the Americans to the area (145). He argues that Munīf gave *Mudun* (*Al-Tīh*) an authentic local color in terms of content and form that "[highlights] the inner realities of the processes of social change" within the local community (146). Al Mousa's research describes with great precision how *Mudun* is a culturally rooted text.

Rob Nixon published several essays concerning the environmental impact of the petroleum industry using *Cities* as one of his major sources. It is essential to highlight here that Nixon used Munīf's political writings to interpret *Cities*. Nixon asserts that *Cities*, "[gives a] transnational life to the forbidding subject of oil" and to the early encounters "between our planet's biggest petroleum players: Saudi Arabia, the leading producer; and the United States, the principal consumer" ("Environmentalism "73). Nixon's observations about *Cities* align themselves with the recent ecological attention to energy resources and countries' national income, which gives *Cities* a new perspective. This perspective presented by Nixon further contributes to the transnationalism of *Cities*. However, by focusing on the impact of oil and using Munīf's non-fiction political writings, Nixon has made serious misinterpretations and generalizations. In his 2002 review, he misinterprets the Bedouins' cultural adherence as "Islamic repression," but he fails to provide any insights or evidence as to how the novel reflects Islamic repression. This misinterpretation further demonstrates the necessity of exploring the translation of the local reality in *Cities*. A reader of the source text understands the cultural dimension and its connections to oil and the American encounter, and they can see the lines separating the Bedouins' cultural practices from their Islamic practices. Although their religious practices did primarily shape their cultural practices, they are not one and the same. As this research later demonstrates, the difference can be recognized through the narrative and there is a difference between the words (sheikh) and (emir), which Nixon failed to recognize. Interestingly, Nixon himself comments that the translation can result in misinterpretations saying, "it feels apposite that the first volume of Munīf's quintet, a work enlivened by scenes of cross-cultural misreadings, should itself be known in English through an act of mistranslation – or rather, by an inability to translate the untranslatable" (*Slow Violence* 89). Here, Nixon's misinterpretations and generalizations prompt us to reconsider how translations can accurately capture the realities deeply rooted in the world of a specific community, especially without prior knowledge.

The exploration of the Arab-American encounter as a primary theme in *Cities*, is also another common area that is observed by scholars as each of the scholars mentioned above touch briefly upon this issue. However, one scholar who merely focuses on the Arab-American encounter is Mohammed Al-balawi (2015). Al-balawi, an Arab with access to the source text, provides an analysis that is especially useful as a response to cross-cultural misinterpretations like those made by Updike and Nixon. He states that *Cities* portrays the Arab-American encounter as "a cultural confrontation rather than a political one" (194). He argues that it is not only the discovery of oil that changes the Bedouin society and makes its inhabitants distressed and disoriented, but the fact that it is accompanied with imposing upon them the American lifestyle and culture, which is seen as a form of cultural imperialism (198-9). Al-balawi highlights the radical differences between the Bedouin and American cultures that can be misinterpreted in a cross-cultural reading. This also validates the point that the cultural and linguistic differences between Munīf's and Theroux's texts affect *Mudun*'s interpretation.

As demonstrated in this literature review, there are significant differences between the findings of scholars with direct access to the source text (Allen, Al-Mousa, and Al-Balawi) and those who have relied on the translation (Updike, Ghosh, and Nixon). This discrepancy supports the research's claim that the translation influences the interpretation of the novel and the perception of the Saudi/Bedouin community. Furthermore, the novel's cultural dimensions and depiction of local reality are central to *Mudun al-Milḥ*, shaping how the story is comprehended. The lack of knowledge about these elements has led to cross-cultural misinterpretations. *Mudun* is a work of literary realism rich in realia, and these factors highlight the necessity of a comparative analysis of Munīf's and Theroux's texts to explore how local realities are conveyed.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a descriptive, analytical, and comparative methodology, grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Sider Florin, Lauren Leighton, Peter Newmark, and Susan Bassnett. The scope is limited to the first volume of Munīf's quintet, *(Al-Tīh /The Wilderness),* as it provides the foundational cultural context and depicts the cultural, social, and economic changes from the Bedouin life in Wadi Al-Uyoun to the early days of the development of a modern city in Harran. Furthermore, many cross-cultural studies focus on this volume rather than the others, underscoring its significance for this research. The study investigates specific instances of mistranslation, omissions, and additions in Theroux's translation, focusing on how differences between the Arabic and English versions affect the portrayal of realia. Following the comparative approach, this paper refers to the English translation as *(Cities)* and to the original Arabic text as *(Mudun)*. The paper specifically examines the translation of elements related to Saudi/Bedouin material and intellectual culture, the natural environment, and social realities. Further analysis explores the

translation of vernacular speech and culturally bound descriptions of characters. The research is driven by the need to understand how these translations influence the portrayal of Saudi culture and how the translation process challenges cultural boundaries.

4. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of Munīf's Mudun al-Milḥ and Theroux's English translation, Cities of Salt, with a particular focus on the translation of realia, the conveyance of the original environment's atmosphere, and the portrayal of local color. Drawing from comparative literature and translation studies, this paper aims to explore how the translation process captures or distorts the cultural, social, and historical realities embedded within the original text. The paper argues that the concept of "realia" plays a critical role not only in understanding the novel's cultural setting but also in conveying the complexities of the Saudi/Bedouin identity and worldview. Through this lens, it examines how the translation process transcends linguistic equivalence, encompassing social, cultural, and historical realities that are challenging to transfer. This research emphasizes that the local reality depicted in *Al-Tīh* extends beyond culturally specific terms to encompass the unique ways language is used within the community. It reflects the lived experiences of its members in a way that can only be truly comprehended by those who are part of that community. It is important to note that the critique in this paper does not target the quality of Theroux's translation, which is widely regarded as competent. Rather, this paper approaches the work from a literary analysis perspective, focusing on the images that translations of local literature reveal. The paper argues that the cultural and linguistic differences between Munīf's original text and Theroux's translation, particularly their differing "universes of reference," have influenced the portrayal of realia, resulting in a distortion of some of the realities and images intended in the source text (ST). These distortions arise from the inherent challenges of cultural and linguistic untranslatability, which often lead to cross-cultural misinterpretations. This study aims to broaden the understanding of Saudi culture by analyzing a literary work that extends beyond its linguistic and cultural origins, and thus contributing to a deeper appreciation of its global resonance.

5. Discussion

The Notion and Scope of Realia in *Mudun*:

The Bulgarian scholars Sergei Vlakhov and Sider Florin provide a culture-oriented analysis of translation in their book *Neperevodimoe v perevode* (The Untranslatable in Translation) that was published in 1970. In this book, they discuss culture-specific lexical items, which they refer to as realia, as elements that hinder translation. Florin, in an essay translated into English, entitled "Realia in Translation," summarizes the main premise of their book. He explains how he and Vlakhov approach realia as untranslatable elements that affect the conveyance of local reality in Russian and Bulgarian works. In 1991, the concept of realia was first adopted into Western translation studies by Lauren Leighton, and the notion and scope of realia are still controversial in English translation studies today (Kharina 44). The varying interpretations of the concept of culture, particularly in relation to what qualifies as culture-bound aspects, coupled with the dynamic nature of culture and the fact that many linguistic issues in translation are intertwined with cultural factors, have led to disagreements over what should be considered realia. Some scholars criticize the concept for being vague and confusing while other studies on realia are critical of Vlakhov's and Florin's definition of realia as "words and combinations of words" or purely lexical items, arguing that limiting 'local reality' to words and fixed types of words is problematic since it varies from one culture to another and encompasses many aspects beyond lexis.

To situate the focus of this research in the context of this controversy, Lauren Leighton suggests that realia can extend beyond lexicon to include phraseology and syntax (228). He notes that realia are elements that reflect "the atmosphere of the original environment and epoch in a work," and are mostly connected with vernacular speech (221). He states that translation errors are often a result of cultural ignorance, not linguistic ignorance, as many texts require the translator to be knowledgeable of their historical and cultural contexts. This idea is compatible with Florin's assertion that the subject of local and historical contexts is "closely connected with the problem of background knowledge." Hence, Florin notes "the bulk of that background knowledge we expect the general reader to possess or acquire consists of realia" (164). Leighton argues that the most evident proof of "realia as more than the word" is seen in realist literary works, saying that such works "rely to a great extent on the author's expert knowledge of the subject, and intricate weaving of the words and syntax into the very style of a work" (228). He explains that in literary realism, the reader does not need to know everything to understand what the author aims to reveal. Rather, the authors help their readers understand everything through the narrative in such a way that the style "need not 'say' what is meant, but rather 'show' what is meant" (231). Leighton proceeds to note that translators of such works often find themselves obligated to explain to the reader "to make the implicit explicit" or to change the ST's style and narrative lest part of the context be missing. Thus, he argues that "realia are not only words; however, they exist also in phrases and whole sentences" as there is a clear "connection between realia at the lexical level and realia at the syntactical level" (231).

Leighton's assertions are especially applicable to *Mudun* (*Al-Tīh*) as a work of literary realism that expertly portrays the atmosphere of a Saudi Bedouin community. Munīf never once explicitly states that the events take place in Saudi Arabia or that its characters are Saudi Bedouins, but his readers understand this to be true because his writing is based entirely on Saudi realities. Even the major aim of this volume, the change of traditional values, is not explicitly 'told' but is 'shown' through a series of descriptions that are identifiable in the real world of Saudi readers. Munīf's involvement in political activism kept him from explicitly revealing certain aspects, but he relied on his expert knowledge to draw on local and cultural connotations and implications that

are recognizable to the average Saudi reader. Furthermore, as Allen asserts that "the author's use of language lends realism to the environment" (The Arabic Novel 176), the local reality in *Mudun* (*al-Tīh*) is indeed not limited to culture-bound words. Rather, it is mostly tied to the narrative style that reveals the features of Saudis' speech and how they use language and communicate. That said, a considerable number of events in the novel are described using dialectal proverbs and metaphors that, as mentioned earlier by Al-Shehabat, provide knowledge about the ethical standards of Saudis and their method of thinking. In other words, they reveal genuine aspects of local reality. Most of these culture-bound expressions and descriptions are distinctively Bedouin, which brings to light Florin's categorization of 'microlocal realia' - words that belong only to a certain group inside a community, and 'local realia' that are primarily associated with dialects (166). In the case of *Al-Tīh*, entire phrases—rather than just single words—belong to a specific group and reflect their unique methods of communication (Saudis/Bedouins). This demonstrates that local reality is not only conveyed through words but also through the way language is used.

The interpretation and comprehension of Munīf's *Mudun* rely heavily on the reader's knowledge of Bedouin social and cultural contexts and the history of Saudi Arabia. Theroux did not include any footnotes in his translation to explain the culture-bound aspects or areas that might be inapprehensible for the English reader. Cross-cultural misinterpretations of the narrative style and portrayal of characters, as described earlier, are seen as further proof that these aspects are significant elements in creating a local reality woven from the actual Saudi Bedouin community. These misinterpretations, as Leighton and Florin have asserted, are connected to the problem of missing background knowledge of historical and cultural contexts. In *Al-Tīh*, not only do some depicted local realities require prior knowledge, but some realities seem peculiar to the English reader despite the quality of translation for being local-specific. Moreover, as Ana Maria Toro notes, realia are not fixed; "their existence depends on a language comparative analysis and on the languages that are being compared" (90). Thus, in approaching a comparative analysis of Munīf's and Theroux's texts, comparing a dialectal variety of a Semitic language to an Indo-European language result in a considerable number of linguistic and cultural differences. Taking into consideration everything mentioned above and in the light of Florin's emphasis on realia as a dynamic category (166), this research draws on Leighton's claim, and regards the scope and notion of realia in *Mudun* (*Al-Tīh*) as extending beyond words to include the implications of the narrative style – dialectal/vernacular speech and the cultural-bound descriptions of characters, or to put it another way- the way in which language is used.

Realia and Untranslatability:

For Florin, realia are "untranslatable as a rule" (166). He argues that although there are, in the broad sense, many techniques that can be used to convey the meaning of realia, realia are untranslatable because the main challenge is to "communicate the objective meaning of realia to the target reader along with their local and historical color, or connotation" (166). Florin notes that regardless of the quality of a translation, "realia constitute those points in the translated text at which the translation is showing" (163). Technically speaking, Theroux's translation is effective in terms of conveying the overall messages, and some aspects that are lost or affected by the translation can be prevailed over if the English reader has some knowledge of Saudi culture and history. However, following Florin, the notion of untranslatability is critical in examining the local reality when approaching Munīf's and Theroux's texts comparatively.

Untranslatability primarily occurs as a result of cultural and linguistic differences between two languages where "the relation between the creative subject and its linguistic expression cannot [. . .] be adequately replaced in the translation" (Bassnett 41). In this context, linguistic untranslatability "occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the [target language] for [source language] item," whereas cultural untranslatability "is due to the absence in the TL culture of a relevant situational feature for the SL text" (39). Applying this concept to *Al-Tīh*, the novel's unique nature inevitably leads to degrees of untranslatability on both cultural and linguistic levels. As a local novel within the genre of literary realism, rich in realia, it presents cultural translation challenges. Additionally, the depiction of vernacular and dialectal speech creates complications on both linguistic and cultural aspects. Non-standard language varieties often pose difficulties in translation, as they involve "difficult to find parallel social sets" and "similar modes of expression" (Mattiello 65). As this research later proves, the major translation issues in Theroux's text are connected to the implications of using vernacular and dialectal speech as a narration technique.

In this issue, the choice of translation strategies that are adopted to overcome the difficulties posed by cultural elements, reveals either the "subversiveness of the translator," by which prioritizing the readership, or "the resistance and maintenance of the [source culture]," by which prioritizing the ST (Guerra 22). When prioritizing the readership, the translator applies strategies that lead to a domestication of the SL text in the target culture – "translating in a fluent and invisible style so as to minimize the foreignness of the text," whereas by prioritizing the ST, the translator applies strategies that lead to a foreignization of the SL text – "maintaining the dominant cultural values of the SL and the ideological dominance of the SC" (Guerra 22). Nevertheless, in the case of *Al-Tīh*, the use of either domestication or foreignization strategies have its own complications regarding the perception and interpretation of the local reality since both Munīf's and Theroux's texts require a certain level of prior knowledge about cultural aspects. As this research later demonstrates, Theroux mostly used domestication strategies to convey the local reality which affects the perception of the novel, nevertheless, there are few cases where he has used foreignization strategies, which, considering that he has not provided any explanatory information, leave these areas inaccessible to the English reader.

Conveying the "Atmosphere of the Original Environment:"

In *Al-Tīh*, Munīf's primary aim is to depict the social, cultural, and economic changes brought about by the discovery of oil, as the Bedouin village of Al-Uyoun is gradually abandoned in favor of the flourishing modern city of Harran. While Munīf never directly states this goal, his detailed descriptions of the Bedouin community before and after the oil discovery emphasize these profound shifts. Through his rich portrayals of Bedouin life—covering aspects such as clothing, food, tools, practices, and places—Munīf provides a vivid picture of their way of life. These descriptive elements, which reflect "the way of life and its manifestations peculiar to one speech community" (Newmark 103), play a crucial role in conveying the authenticity of the local reality, lending *Al-Tīh* the identifiable elements that belong to the real world of Saudi Arabi. For these elements to be accurately represented in translation, it is essential to maintain the integrity of the local reality portrayed. However, most of these images pose translation problems at the cultural level, especially since most of them are portrayed through vernacular speech. This is not only in regard to appropriate equivalences, but also in that a foreign reader may "have a concept of the term based on his or her own cultural context, and will apply that particularized view accordingly," thus misinterpreting them (Bassnett 41).

Florin regards a great deal of these culture-bound descriptions as realia and proposes classifying them into certain categories. Newmark and Toro each also suggest using similar categories to refer to elements in the construction of the ST that portray the culture of a given community. This research uses the cultural categories proposed by Newmark and the categorizations of realia proposed by Florin and Toro to provide a comprehensive exploration of how Theroux conveys -what Leighton's claim that realia reflect- the atmosphere of the original environment in *Mudun* (*Al-Tīh*). These categories are: (material culture, ethnographic realia, material heritage realia), (ecology, geographical realia, and natural environment realia), and (social culture, social and territorial realia, and social interactions realia). Given the large number of images in Munīf's text that reflect the atmosphere of the original environment, this study focuses on specific examples that truly capture the essence of the Saudi/Bedouin community and their local realities. Munīf's portrayal of social, cultural, and economic changes is not directly stated but is instead conveyed through these descriptions that would be immediately recognizable to Saudi readers. It is important to clarify that the aim of this critique is not to question the quality of Theroux's translation. Instead, it examines what Florin identifies as the untranslatable aspects of *realia*—their inherent meaning, local color, connotations, and the specific associations that these elements carry in the minds of the original readers (Florin 166).

1. Material Culture, Ethnographic Realia, Material Heritage Realia:

These three terms proposed by Newmark, Florin, and Toro respectively, refer to the objects, terms, tools, phenomena, etc. of material and intellectual culture. Newmark limits his category to artefacts, but Florin's category includes any terms that relate to everyday life, work, art, religion, mythology, and folklore (165). Toro emphasizes cultural heritage and regards the "features belonging to a particular society, that were created in the past and still have historical importance" as realia (93). *Al-Tīh* depicts several details of the material and intellectual culture of the Saudi/Bedouin community. Thus, it is essential to trace the translation of certain elements that belong to any of the above-named categories proposed by Newmark, Florin, and Toro, which play an important role in revealing certain images about the economic and cultural changes.

1.1. Clothing:

To begin with clothing, Munīf portrays cultural clothing to reflect the social, financial, and physical states of characters and to reveal the cultural change after oil discovery. However, Newmark points out that "clothes as cultural terms may be sufficiently explained for TL general readers if the generic noun or classifier is added," while distinctive national costumes are transliterated (97). In *Cities*, Theroux uses general terms to describe the Bedouins' clothing, which limits the depiction of local reality and the perception of the novel.

As for Bedouins' clothing in *Al-Tīh*, the traditional Saudi male apparel "Thobe: ثوب" that is distinctive in both Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries is conveyed simply as "robe" in Theroux's text. The word robe is indistinct compared to the culture-specific "Thobe." Furthermore, some Bedouin men also often wear head covering named "Ghutra: غترة" and formal black cloaks named "Bisht: بشت", which are also specific to their culture, but in Theroux's text they are conveyed as "headcloth" and "cloak." These are as general as "robe" is. Nevertheless, Munīf does not use the word "Bisht" but rather uses the word "'abaya: عباية", which is a vernacular word that reveals a sense of informality related to the spoken form of language. However, these kinds of clothes depict the true essence of the Saudi community, but the Thobe, Ghutra, and Bisht are likely unfamiliar concepts for most English readers, therefore, conveying them using general terms is a form of domesticating the ST. The depiction of this type of clothing in the novel gives the reader a real view of the Saudi community, not only in terms of being cultural clothing, but also Munīf reveals certain cultural-bound implications associated with them that provide the reader with the social, financial, and physical states of characters. For example, the novel reflects the fact that the Bisht is only worn by men of high social and financial status or at occasions, but this image is not explicitly revealed. To demonstrate, in the ST, Miteb al-Hathal (the head of the Atoum tribe and Wadi al-Uyoun) and Harran's Emirs always wear Bisht. In contrast, Dabbasi only wears the Bisht in his wedding (an occasion) and Ibn Rashed only begins wearing a Bisht after he starts cooperating with the Americans and accompanying the emir; in other words, as he grows richer and becomes more empowered. These images are not clearly or properly conveyed in the translation. Moreover, concerning the physical states of characters, when Ibn Rashed's physical health and financial state decline, this portrayal is partially

revealed through the way he dresses. For instance, he is once seen "putting a cap on over his headcloth in an effort to disguise himself" (Theroux 384). In Munīf's text, this description connotes an image of homelessness and abnormality as putting a cap over a Ghutra is abnormal in Saudi culture. In Theroux's text, using the general term "headcloth" instead of "Ghutra" seems vague and does not reveal the same image as the original.

Following up on all that has been discussed, the importance of the portrayal of clothing lies in that it reveals how the American encounter impacted traditional clothing. Munīf reveals the seriousness of this change by incorporating metaphorical cultural-bound images into the narrative. This further emphasizes the importance of realia in the interpretation of the novel. To demonstrate, in one sequence of events, the Americans require the Arab employees to wear "overalls and caps" instead of their traditional clothing in order to work for the company. Ibn Rashed expresses surprise at seeing their new clothing saying (vernacular speech): "قلت لنفسي: الامريكان ما يغيرون أولاد العرب لو طلعت بروسهم نخلة" (Munīf 211), (my trans.; LT [2]: "I said to myself: Americans could never change the sons of Arabs, even if a palm tree grew out of their heads"). Theroux modifies the original statement to make it more comprehensible to the English reader as: "I said to myself, the Americans could never change the sons of Arabs – never!" (Theroux 209). Although Theroux's translation reasonably reveals the message, Munīf's metaphorical culture-bound image offers an instant suggestion concerning Arabs' adherence to their cultural traditions. Munīf uses a culture-bound image rooted in Bedouin reality and Saudi readers' understanding of their environment, connoting an absolute impossibility in that a palm tree could never grow out of someone's head. However, this graphic cultural-bound imagery is missing in Theroux's translation.

Another example of how Munīf emphasizes the impact the American oil company had on Bedouin culture using clothing is the situation with Daham Al-Muzil, who appears in the early days of the constitution of the American oil company as Ibn Rashed's personal assistant. Daham is one of the first Arab workers to willingly wear pants instead of the Thobe, and his wearing of pants seems to be as an expression of his pride overreaching a higher social position after working with the Americans and his desire to be seen as a role model of accepting change. This idea is not explicitly stated in the ST but is revealed within the narrative through connotation and figurative meaning. This kind of connotation and figurative meaning is notably absent in the translation. One instance where this is revealed in the ST but not the TT is when Ibn Rashed's physical health and financial state decline to the point that Daham has to meet the Emir on his behalf. Daham wears his Thobe and Bisht to visit the Emir, which is another image of the cultural implication of wearing Bisht, and after Daham departs, the Emir says (dialectal speech): " يا جماعة الخير...ما هو ذا العوج اللي كان معبي روحه بينطرون؟" (Munīf 380), (my trans. LT: "oh people of good deeds... isn't he the crooked who proudly shoved himself in pants?"). In Theroux's text, this phrase is translated as: "What's this, my friends? ...What's happened to his pants?" (Theroux 383). The Arabic phrase emphasizes Daham's pride over wearing pants, and the dialectal word "ʿawaj: عوج" has a demeaning connotation that implies his actions are peculiar and despised as it means "weird" in this context. Theroux's translation lacks this connotation for it appears as a general question.

1.2. Food:

Concerning the depiction of food, in *Al-Tīh*, food does not only function as part of the local reality but also portrays economic change. The Bedouins move from living a harsh, impoverished life before the discovery of oil to living in prosperity and wealth afterwards, and this portrayal is partially revealed through their food. However, Newmark notes that "food terms are subject to the widest variety of translation procedures" but are usually given one-to-one equivalents or referred to by "a relatively culture-free generic term or classifier" (97, 95). In Theroux's text, the conveyance of local food is greatly modified and does not reveal the same images intended by Munīf. In one instance that illustrates the poverty of Wadi al-Uyoun's people, Munīf describes their hunger by saying that they desired to eat " الأدام و إلى القليل من اللحم لكي تقوى اجسادهم" (Munīf 17). Theroux translates this phrase as "they needed more meat to strengthen their bodies" (9). Here, Theroux omits "al-idam: الأدام" and although such an omission is not major, mentioning a dish like "al-idam" reveals their severe poverty and lack of natural sources because it is simply a dish of bouillon into which they dip bread. Nevertheless, after the discovery of oil and the growing wealth of the emir and his companions, this image of a simple dish is contrasted with the huge celebration that Emir Khaled Al-Mishari holds in honor of the Americans. For this celebration, Al-Mishari orders his companions to place "رأس جمل [...] أمام رئيس المعسكر، في منتصف المناسف ، ثم روؤس الخراف" (Munīf 283), Theroux's translation states: "a camel's head is placed in front of the camp chief among the other dishes, with the sheep's heads" for dinner (Theroux 282). In Theroux's text, using "other dishes" is general and culture-free in contrast to the ST, which specifies the kind of dish that is served – "Manāsaf: مناسف"– a traditional Arab rice dish that consists of many ingredients. Using a culture-free description changes the image intended in the ST since "Manāsaf" has a culture rooted implication that Munīf seems to intentionally illustrate. At the time of this event, only wealthy people could afford to serve Manāsaf, and it was served to people of high social status to express that they were worthy of generosity and respect. Munīf, by drawing on this culture bound reality, aims to portray the great wealth of the Emir and his intention to show respect to the Americans, but such image is virtually lost in Theroux's text.

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[2] Literal translation.

1.3. Objects and Tools:

Turning now to the depiction of objects, tools, and terms, Munīf portrays the economic and cultural changes by presenting a variety of items that are associated with desert life and others that are brought from Western countries. However, Newmark points out that such elements follow different translation procedures. First, he states that if a culture-bound word does not have an appropriate equivalence, it can either be transliterated or transferred coupled with a classifier if the name is not likely familiar to TL readership (81, 216). He further suggests that some culture-bound objects can be given descriptive or functional equivalents or referred to by culture-free generic terms (95). In the case of *Al-Tīh*, although some objects and tools are common in different cultures and using a descriptive/functional equivalent or a culture-free generic term reasonably denotes their meanings, some objects and tools depicted in the novel are particularly related to desert life. These cultural objects and tools reflect contextual and historical realities that reveal the conditions in which they existed, were used, and were needed. Whereas Western objects and tools are depicted using metaphorical descriptions that require special translation techniques to convey the same imagery intended in the ST. To begin with cultural objects and tools, one example of a tool that reflects desert life is the "Rabāba: ربابة," -a musical instrument. The novel depicts how Bedouins enjoy their free time and express their sorrows and feelings by drinking coffee and singing poetry accompanied by a Rabāba (Munīf 272). In Theroux's text, the "Rabāba" is conveyed using the descriptive equivalent "stringed instrument" (269). Replacing "Rabāba" with "stringed instrument" affects the portrayal of desert life as "Rabāba" was created under the condition of nomadic life. A Rabāba, in line with Toro's emphasis on historical importance, It is a distinctive instrument in Bedouin heritage and considered one of the oldest in the Arab world. It was first "created by the nomadic Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula" and the fact that they use it in specific and not any other instrument "lies in the fact that it is commensurate with the nomadic nature in terms of its manufacture and suitability to the desert climate" ("Rabāba: Art of the Desert" my trans.). Nevertheless, the term Rabāba is likely unfamiliar to most English readers, thus conveying it using a descriptive equivalent that generalize it, is seen as a form of domesticating the ST.

Concerning Western objects, Munīf uses images of the new objects, tools, and innovations brought to the Bedouins' lives through the cross-cultural and cross-continental encounters to reveal the cultural and economic changes that occur after the oil discovery. An important part of this portrayal is revealed through metaphorical descriptions. For instance, one time, Hassan Rezaie, who travels often and gains great wealth by being a trader, returns with a radio, which is a brand-new object for the Bedouins. Munīf provides a detailed description of how the Bedouins, and specifically the Emir, react to this innovation. The radio causes feelings of wonder and fear all over Harran to the extent that some Bedouins name it "the jinn's steed" (Theroux 436)/ "ḥāʾṣān al-jinn: حصان الجن" (Munīf 434) because they had never heard of or seen anything like it. Considering Florin's categorization of ethnographic realia that includes mythology, the notion of "Jinn/جن" is part of *Mudun*'s local reality. Theroux uses a foreignization strategy by transliterating "جن" because it has no appropriate functional or descriptive equivalents that can convey its meaning and reality. As far as the notion of Jinn is concerned, such belief is deeply rooted in Arabic and Islamic mythology, and although the term has been included in some English dictionaries, Arab/Muslim's reality of Jinn is different than its closest equivalent in English: 'supernatural spirit' or 'demon' ("Jinni" Britannica). The image and figurative meaning of naming the radio as "ḥāʾṣān al-jinn" reflect the Bedouin mentality and their attitude toward it as something that causes feelings of wonder and fear. It is crucial to note that the Bedouins also constantly refer to the Americans as Jinn, but with a connotation that reveals feelings of loathing. Thus, the English reader must have prior knowledge of the reality of Jinn to fully comprehend these images; otherwise, these images, as Theroux conveys them, are peculiar and meaningless. In addition, there is one context in which Theroux mistranslates "Janāt ʿadn: جنات عدن" (Munīf 219), as "the Jinns of Eden" (217), but the more correct translation is "gardens of Eden." Perhaps Theroux thought " Janāt: جنات" is the plural form of "جن: Jinn." Such mistranslation altered the meaning of "Jinn" and the "gardens of Eden" in terms of their meaning, reality, connotation, and comprehension.

In the same vein, the Emir also repeatedly refers to the radio as "al-maʾḵāuḏ: المأخوذ." For instance, when he plans to show the radio to Harran's nobilities but is "a little afraid that it would not be possible to move the device outdoors" (Theroux 438), he says to Rezaie (dialectal speech): "نسيت اسألك .. اليوم .. مجلسنا بالفلا، هنا، قريب، نقدر نشيل المأخوذ ويانا؟" (Munīf 435), which is translated as "I forgot to ask you [...] Today, our majlis is in the desert, here, right nearby. Can we take *the thing* out with us?" (Theroux 438, my emphasis). Theroux translates "al-maʾḵāuḏ: المأخوذ." as "the thing," which changes the image intended by Munīf. To explain, both "المأخوذ: al-maʾḵāuḏ" and "الشيء: al-šaʾ" -the actual equivalence of Theroux's translation- are used to refer to random objects, but "al-maʾḵāuḏ," in the vernacular context, has a negative connotation and register different from "al-šaʾ." "المأخوذ: al-maʾḵāuḏ" is derived from the dialectal word "يأخذه: yaʾḵāḍah",(may it be taken away), that is used by Saudis to express condemnation. The metaphorical image of perceiving the radio as something that causes negative feelings of wonder and fear is connected to the dialectal word "al-maʾḵāuḏ" as it, by itself, reveals the attitude of the speaker. Thus, this vivid image is completely lost by conveying it, using a general description, as "the thing." In this context, it would be more effective if Theroux used a description that reveals the attitude of the speaker, for example: "the wicked/cursed thing." In addition, Munīf draws attention to certain objects brought from Western countries by depicting them using English loan words. These English words are spelled phonetically in Arabic script according to Saudi pronunciation and modified to fit the Arabic pronouns, for instance: "barracks: بركسات," "pipe: بيب," "Mack: ماك," and "pickup truck: سيارة بيك أب." The presence of these objects depicted in this style, highlights the social and cultural changes of the Bedouin community, the effect of Western concepts, and the consumption of Western goods

in Saudi Arabia after the oil discovery. This sense is lost in Theroux's translation as he uses the English words without conveying their foreignness or allowing the reader to consider that English is a foreign language within the text.

2. Ecology, Geographical Realia, and Natural Environment Realia:

The first two terms, proposed by Newmark and Florin respectively, refer to the local reality depicted through the geographical features, while the last term, proposed by Toro, includes the depiction of animals and vegetation as aspects of the natural environment reality. *Al-Tīh* portrays vivid images that capture the natural environment of the desert in order to stress the reality of Bedouin life. According to Newmark, geographical features are usually value-free and "would normally be transferred, with the addition of a brief culture-free third term" or may be subjected to naturalization (96-7). Newmark proceeds to note that ecological features are a shared reality but that there are some irregular or unknown natural environmental features that may not be understood denotatively or figuratively in translation (97). Theroux uses culture-free terms and naturalization to convey natural environmental features, however, in Munīf's text, such type of terms either have figurative meanings or are local-specific, which require special translation techniques to convey the same imagery and purposes intended in the ST.

1.2. Natural Environmental Features with Associative Names:

Munīf reflects a genuine aspect of Bedouin life by emphasizing that "names [are] so important in the desert" (Theroux 3). One of the most important aspects of the portrayal of natural environment in *Mudun* is the way the Bedouins give names to geographical features and locations based on how they help them during their travels to determine the features, location, and importance of each place (Munīf 4). This Bedouin method of naming is also applied to time periods as they give names to seasons, periods in a year, and years, which depicts their method of recording dates and events. In *Mudun,* the names given for geographical features, e.g. hill "Umm al-Athal:أم الأثل " (LT: the mother of tamarisk), locations, e.g. seaport "Manal: منال " (LT: the desired destination), and time periods, e.g. "Sanat al-Jarād: سنة الجراد" (LT: the year of locusts) have associative meanings and, thus, play significant roles in the perception of the novel. Concerning local reality, Alexander Burak emphasizes the importance of figurative names, arguing that "names that have preserved some denotative, metaphorical, or emotional connotations evoking special associations in the minds of the speakers of a given ethnic and/or sociocultural community," which he refers to as "talking names," are considered realia (99). Nevertheless, in Theroux's translation, most of these names are rendered through a foreignization technique (transliterated), which can alter the meaning and impact the reader's perception of the novel, especially if the English reader is unfamiliar with Arabic pronunciation and vocabulary. While Munīf uses proper names for these features, making Theroux's translation technically accurate, these names on themselves carry implicit meanings that are crucial for fully interpreting the scene. To explain, Munīf does not provide the reasoning of each name nor their meanings, but these names conjure up special associations in the minds of Saudi readers, so it is immediately apparent, for instance, that in the context of naming a hill (Umm al-Athal) means that it is filled with tamarisks. In Theroux's text, the transliteration obscures the implicit messages, making these names meaningless to an English reader, and so does the idea that names are important in the desert. Nevertheless, the transliterations of environmental features can also be confused with the names of people, as seen in the above examples. "Manal" is a female name, while "Umm al-Athal" is derived from the traditional Arabic form of addressing mothers by referring to them as 'mother of their eldest son.' For this issue, it would be more effective if Theroux conveyed the figurative meanings of names given for natural environmental features to communicate the importance of names in the desert and avoiding the confusion with people's names.

2.2. Local-Specific Natural Environmental Features:

Another example of a local-specific reality associated with desert life, is the depiction of distinctive desert animals. Considering Toro's argument that animals should be included as an aspect of the natural environment reality, an important example of a poor translation of an animal term is the depiction of "Ḍabb: ضب" -a distinctive desert animal only found in Saudi Arabia and in a few desert areas of countries that share borders with Saudi Arabia (Mandaville Jr. "The Toad-Head"). The use of "Ḍabb" does not only reveal local reality but also stresses local differences. In the story, Majalli Al-Sirha, one of the Arabs who works for the American company, constantly plays practical jokes on the Americans to scare them. In one instance, during one of Mr. Hamilton's visits, Majalli puts a large Ḍabb in one of the American's toolboxes. When the worker opens the box, he screams and runs away. Meanwhile, Hamilton's face turns yellow, and he is unable to move. Hamilton and the American worker are terrified because they have never seen such a creature before, and "they had no idea what it was" (Theroux 508). Theroux translates "Ḍabb" as "lizard" and provides no explanation of its distinctive nature. Lizards are not the same as "Ḍabbs," and while it is true that the "Ḍabb" is most likely unknown to English readers and may not be understood denotatively or figuratively in translation, such a conveyance affects the depiction of local reality, the distinctiveness of this creature in Saudi Arabia, and the image of it being completely unfamiliar to the American workers as lizards are quite common.

3. Social Culture, Social and Territorial Realia, and Social Interactions Realia:

These three terms proposed by Newmark, Florin, and Toro respectively, describe social culture. However, the social reality in *Al-Tīh* is not distinctly determined, unlike the material and environmental, because it is a mixture of cultural, social, and religious practices. Nevertheless, it is even more difficult to establish *Al-Tīh* 's social reality under a fixed category, as Newmark, Florin, and Toro take different approaches to cultural, social, and religious practices. For these reasons, this research regards any aspect that reflects true insights into Saudis' practices and belong to any of the above-named categories proposed by Newmark, Florin, and Toro as part of social reality and, thus, explores their translations. Nevertheless, this research greatly draws on Toro's proposed definition of social realia for being quite comprehensive, as she defines it as elements "representing any event that takes place in the sphere of contacts and relations between people" in a given community (92).

In order to properly explore the translation of social reality in *Al-Tīh*, it is important to establish that Newmark and Florin approach religious terms that describe religious practices and practitioners, rituals, etc., differently. Newmark proposes three different sociocultural categories: gestures and habits; organization, customs, and activities; and social culture. He classifies religious terms under the second category, whereas Florin regards religious terms as ethnographic realia that describe everyday life. This research draws on Newmark's classification of religious terms because Islamic practices have shaped Saudi cultural and social practices to a great extent and provide a system of common values that legitimizes the social order. Moreover, Newmark points out that the optimal translation technique for any aspect under the above categories primarily depends on the target readership "of whom the three types - expert, educated generalise, and uninformed," not "on collocations or the linguistic or situational context" (102). Certainly, Munīf's text does not appeal to an "uninformed" readership since it reflects deep local realities and requires a certain level of knowledge of Saudi culture and history. This then requires employing translation strategies that educate the reader. However, as an analysis of the way social reality is translated follows, the social reality in *Al-Tīh* emphasizes the cultural differences between Munīf's and Theroux's realities as, despite the quality of translation, the depicted social-religious and social-cultural practices are inextricably linked to Saudis' realities, mentality, and common knowledge.

1.3. Social-Religious Practices:

Some social practices depicted in *Al-Tīh* are influenced by Islamic beliefs or have a religious color. This overlap between social and religious practices reveals a genuine aspect of Saudis' realities and, thus, its conveyance in the translation is important. Nevertheless, it appears that Theroux's approach to communicating such a reality requires that the English reader have prior knowledge to be able to detect the intersecting lines between cultural practices and Islamic practices as well as to properly interpret Islamic practices. To demonstrate, the novel reveals the social customs influenced by Islamic beliefs that surround sick and dying people through Khazna al-Hassan. Khazna is known in Harran as someone who visits sick and dying people to help them recite the "Shahāda:شهادة" (the Islamic declaration of faith) and certain Qur'anic verses. In order to make this more understandable to English readers, Theroux renders these specific acts simply as to "pray with them" (550). However, in Islam, praying and reciting the Shahāda are two different acts that have two different purposes, especially when related to dying people. Theroux's choice of terminology alters the intended Islamic meaning of the scene. This is seen as a form of domesticating the ST to fit with the English readers' realities, yet the context requires prior knowledge to comprehend this social religious practice and its moral dimension.

The novel also reveals Saudis' social customs of addressing people, which, likewise, are influenced by Islamic beliefs or have a religious color. Toro regards culture-bound forms of address "that people use to refer to each other, according to their relationship, their status, their occupation, among others" as an aspect of social interactions realia (92). *Al-Tīh* depicts two important formal address forms that are often used interchangeably and thus may result in misinterpretations, "Sheikh: شيخ " and "Emir:امير". Theroux uses a foreignization strategy by transliterating these forms of address, however, the issue of comprehending them is not related to Theroux's conveyance but rather connected to the reader's background knowledge of local reality. "Sheikh" is used in tribal groups to refer to the head of the tribe or to men of high social status, but due to the overlap between social and religious practices, the word also refers to religious men or religious leaders. Nevertheless, since most Emirs descend from or receive high social status, they are also sometimes called Sheikhs. Updike's and Nixon's above-mentioned misinterpretations are connected to their failure to comprehend these differing forms of address as they constantly use the word "Sheikh" when they actually mean "Emir." To understand the difference between the social and religious connotations of "Sheikh," the English reader is expected to have prior knowledge. For instance, in *Mudun*, al-Hathal and Manawar are both referred to as Sheikhs, but "Ibn Hathal, [is] the sheikh of the wadi" while Manawar is "the imam of the mosque in Wadi al-Uyoun" (Theroux 77, 204). Here, identifying the differences requires the English reader to be knowledgeable of the implications of being an Imam and of the hierarchical system of tribal groups. Moreover, the novel depicts another vernacular form of address that is influenced by religion, which is "al-bani ādam: آدم البني." This term is used by Saudis to refer to a stranger or to any person in general, but it means "a son of Adam." In Theroux's text, this expression is mistranslated as "The prophet Adam" as seen in al-Hathal's dialectal speech, " البني آدم كل شيء يعلّمه" (Munīf 44) that is translated as "The prophet Adam learned everything" (Theroux 38). Nevertheless, this phrase, not only the address form, is mistranslated due to the features of the vernacular/dialectal language. As this research later discusses, vernacular/dialectal language is characterized by an incorrect syntax that requires an excellent comprehension of the local-specific ways in which language is used.

2.3. Social-Cultural Practices:

Some social practices depicted in *Al-Tīh* truly reveal the Bedouin culture and mentality for being heavily influenced by the nature of tribal communities. One instance of a traditional social activity that originally arose and developed in connections to the nature of tribal life is, in Munīf's terminology, the "raqṣat al-seef: رقصة السيف" (Munīf 283). *Al-Tīh* depicts this local dance that is practiced in celebrations and weddings as an aspect of Bedouin's social life. Theroux uses the word-to-word translation "sword dance" (Theroux 282) to convey this concept. However, Munīf relies on the identifiable realities of Saudi readers and their background knowledge to understand that this dance refers to (al-ʿarḍah: العرضة), as Saudis understand that Munīf's phrasing is a literal description of how "al-ʿarḍah is performed." This is an implicit example that guides the reader to locate the setting of the novel since "al-ʿarḍah" is a folkloric dance performed in the Najd region of Saudi and commonly associated with the Saudi royal family. Munīf further hints at this by portraying Emir Khaled as the one who intends to perform this dance. Arguably, Munīf's description is general and culture-free, so technically, Theroux's translation is accurate, but the local reality of Munīf's description is not connected to the lexical units but to the special association it evokes in the minds of Saudis. This is another example in which the comprehension of the novel is connected to the reader's background knowledge of local reality as the intended image of this description is easily grasped by a Saudi reader but seemingly vague and meaningless to an English reader.

Another aspect of social reality that is also connected to the nature of tribal communities, is the Bedouin hierarchal social system as *Al-Tīh* does indeed reflect it. Florin's social and territorial realia were further developed by Kharina to include forms of social stratification (76). Although social stratification is mostly connected to classes, Andrew Gardner argues that tribalism, which is recognized as a segmentary lineage system, "is a form of political and social organization frequently interwoven with arid environments and, more precisely, oftentimes tied to pastoral nomadism as a mode of production" ("On Tribalism and Arabia"). He notes that a segmentary lineage system is a form of social order that allows individuals to construct individual and collective identities and to "socially place almost anyone they encounter, and to maintain asabiya," or a sense of belonging ("On Tribalism and Arabia"). Certainly, *Al-Tīh* portrays the segmentary lineage of Bedouin tribal families and reveals how they develop a sense of honor and belonging accordingly.

The scene in which Ali Iqbal, Naim, and three American managers bring together Arab workers to interview them and gather information for research reveals the segmentary logic of Arab tribalism. Ibrahim al-Faleh, the first person to be interviewed, is asked the name of his tribe "قبيلة: qabilah" and then the name of his "fakāʾḏ:فخذ " -the fifth origin in lineage system- (Munīf 321). Theroux translates "فخذ" as "branch" (322), which, compared to the original image, is very general and vague, as the original suggests something more resonant. This scene reflects an essential aspect of Arab and Saudi local realities, but Gardner notes that the Arab segmentary lineage system and its logic and mode of belonging are strikingly foreign to westerners ("On Tribalism and Arabia"). Accordingly, this whole scene as translated is meaningless and inapprehensible to the English reader because some practices occur in some cultures and not in others.

Another instance that shows the Bedouin pride of tribal lineage is depicted in Dabbasi's speech when he criticizes Ibn Rashed for being a hypocrite saying (dialectal speech): "والأمير يعرف أن كل واحد من اللي يركضون حوله هذه الساعة يقول: أنا تميمي" (Munīf 274), which is translated as "The emir knows that everyone chasing around him now is saying, 'I'm so-and-so" (Theroux 272). Munīf's description is figurative connoting the act of pretending to belong to a tribe of high social status. Such a portrayal is immediately apparent to Saudis as the tribe Munīf refers to "Al-Tamimi: تميمي," is one of the most well-known and prestigious families of Saudi Arabia -bani Tamim: بني تميم-. Munīf's purpose in using this name is to reveal the Bedouin's mentality of assessing honor and morality. This intended image that is deeply local is lost by substituting the Al-Tamimi name with the general description "I'm so-and-so."

The Conveyance of Local Color and Linguistic Culturally Bound Features:

Dialect, a unique culture-specific feature of a community, is a genuine aspect of people's realities. In Adamat's study of the translation of the Bedouin dialect in *Cities*, he notes that "dialects reflect the kaleidoscopic shades of language and culture" because they "play a vital role in people's lives as they show the ways people of one nation handle their environment" (4). Considering Munīf's narrative technique that combines vernacular speech and the Bedouin dialect with standard Arabic, *Mudun* is an authentic depiction of Saudi community. Munīf's narrative style gives the novel a unique local color and lends it another element from the real world of Saudis that aids the reader in identifying Saudi as the intended context. Furthermore, combining the spoken form of Arabic (vernacular and dialectal) with the written form (standard Arabic) creates overlapping layers of formality and informality. These overlapping layers in *Al-Tīh* reveal an important aspect of Arab reality regarding the way in which Arabs use their language. Munīf's omniscient narrator recounts events using standard Arabic, but each of the characters in the novel use distinct dialectal forms of speech and registers that accurately resembles the spoken form of speech, which helps readers connect with them as if they were real people. However, this realistic stylistic technique makes translation complicated. Updike's criticism of the narrative style and of the characters lacking "enough reality" (117), as demonstrated earlier, can perhaps be attributed to the challenges of accurately conveying the dialectal speech and overlapping layers of formality and informality in English.

Newmark notes that "literary genres which in translation necessarily suffer varying degrees of loss of meaning are poetry, sonorous prose, texts with a large proportion of word-play or cultural content, and dialect" (194). He states that some SL words

cannot be found in dictionaries, which he refers to as "unfindable words," because they are primarily associated with spoken forms of language such as dialect, idioms, slang, etc. (176). These words that are associated with dialects fit into Florin's categories of microlocal realia and local realia. In *al-Tīh*, vernacular/dialectal speech affects the perception of the local reality and interpretation of the novel as it is integral to the portrayal of the characters. Furthermore, many of the vernacular/dialectal words and expressions have specific connotations and registers that are different from their equivalences in standard Arabic. The challenge of translating these vernacular/dialectal expressions is further complicated by the fact that many of them are poetic, being metaphors, proverbs, idioms, etc., or have figurative meanings, connotations, and associations that are already established in the minds of Saudi readers. Certainly, most of the images describing the original environment mentioned earlier, which intended meanings are deduced from social and local contexts, are associated with vernacular and dialectal language.

1. The Differences between Vernacular/Dialectal Arabic and Standard Arabic:

Munīf purposely uses non-standard Arabic to communicate certain images and dramatize effects. However, Theroux's text significantly modifies the authentic Saudi speech forms by employing different domestication strategies to adapt Munīf's text to English readers' linguistic and cultural knowledge. Theroux's translation does not denote the differences between expressions in standard Arabic and vernacular/dialectal Arabic, nor does he apply any translation strategies that make the English reader aware of the layers of formality and informality. This approach significantly affects the perception and interpretation of the ST. Alidmat and Manjet's study on the translation of *Cities* addresses the fact that translating Munīf's narrative style requires the translator to be both bilingual and bicultural because vernacular/dialectal expressions necessitate an excellent command and knowledge of the cultural-bound implications in which they operate (353-4). Certainly, most people communicate using non-standard varieties of a language, thus a complete understanding of any language requires acknowledging the cultural and local use of language beyond its linguistic features and dimensions. In *Mudun*, the differences between vernacular/dialectal Arabic and standard Arabic play a crucial role in shaping the intended meaning and interpretation of certain words and expressions. However, this seems to have posed a challenge for Theroux in translating both culturally and linguistically.

Beginning with the cultural-bound connotations associated with vernacular/dialectal Arabic, the distinction between vernacular/dialectal and standard Arabic plays a significant role in revealing the images behind certain expressions used by the characters and in creating dramatic effects. For example, similarly to the way that using "al-maʾḵāuḍ: المأخوذ" as opposed to "al-šaʾ: الشيء" reveals the attitude of the speaker as described previously, so does using the vernacular word "al-ḥāʾrīmah: الحريمه" as opposed to its root "al-ḥāʾurmah: الحرمه" and its equivalent in standard Arabic "imraʾa: امرأة." "Al-ḥāʾrīmah" is primarily used to refer to Umm Khosh (أم خوش) but it has a demeaning and rude connotation to describe her as being a senile woman who is not taken seriously. This description of Umm Khosh is intended to evoke empathy in the readers, particularly since she is often dismissed or silenced by saying: "خذوا الحريمه ... خذوها" (Munīf 66), translated in Theroux's text as "take *this woman* away. Take her" (Theroux 60). The significance of this vernacular word is not conveyed as al-ḥāʾrīmah, al- ḥāʾurmah, and imraʾa are each translated as "woman" without any indication of the demeaning connotation associated with al-ḥāʾrimah. Thus, some of the portrayal of Umm Khosh's character is lost in translation. Another example is the use of the vernacular term of endearment "waliydi: وليدي," derived from "waladi: ولدي" (son), which is intended to reveal the emotional states of characters. Al-Hathal uses this term to refer to his sons to express affection, but he does not use it when he is angry with them, such as when his son Fawaz insists on traveling outside the village when he is still young. In Theroux's text, this term is always rendered as "son," with no indication of the emotion associated with the vernacular word (for example: dear son), so the conveyance of the emotional state is missing.

The distinction between vernacular and standard Arabic plays a noticeable role in the interpretation of prayers, curse words, and words influenced by religion or that have religious connotations. Most of these expressions have figurative meanings and pragmatic connotations that are established in the minds of Saudis, which requires the translator to be aware of the meaning that lies beyond the linguistic features. For instance, the vernacular register of the prayer "wakkel Allah: وكّل الله" is different from its standard Arabic equivalent "tawakel ʿala Allah: توكل على الله" and both forms appear repeatedly in the novel. In standard Arabic, these prayers mean "seek the help of Allah" or "trust in Allah," but the expression "wakkel Allah" in the vernacular context has acquired a figurative meaning that implies telling someone to calm down, for example: "وكّل الله يا أبو محمد، المسألة كلها بسيطة و لا توجب القتل و البارود" (Munīf 401). However, Theroux translates both the vernacular prayer and the standard form as "trust in God," which alters the intended meaning and image of the vernacular prayer, as seen in the translation of the example above: "*Trust in God*, Abu Muhammad. The matter is much simpler than you think – it doesn't call for gunpowder and bloodshed" (Theroux 404). In this scenario, it would have been more effective if Theroux conveyed the cultural-bound connotation of the vernacular prayer as "for God's sake, calm down" so that the different connotations are more precisely delivered. Similarly, the vernacular curse expression "*alʿaan* walid walidīyhim: العن والد والديهم" which appears in the novel multiple times, is literally conveyed as "curse their grandfathers." The meaning of this expression is not literal because the word "alʿaan: العن" (curse) in the vernacular context has acquired a figurative meaning that implies physically attacking someone. For example, Theroux translates the following sentence: "أريدكم تعلموهم الموت الأحمر شلون يكون. كسروا عظامهم العنوا والد والديهم و لا ترحموهم" (Munīf 581) as: "I want you to teach them what red death is. Break their bones. *Curse their grandfathers* and have no mercy" (583). Theroux's conveyance affects the intended image, especially in this context, as Johar uses this expression to command his troops to end Arab revolts by using violence, and

the literal conveyance seems obscure. In this example, the translation would be more accurate if Theroux conveyed the figurative dramatic effect of the expression by saying something such as "beat the hell out of them."

Vernacular/dialectal Arabic is heavily influenced by the interaction patterns of speakers and the way people express themselves orally, which is often characterized by incorrect syntax, unfixed sentence structure, and an informal usage of words beyond their actual meanings. Munīf's narrative style reflects these characteristics, and Saudi readers can easily understand them because they resemble the features of their speech. Theroux seems to have faced some difficulties in conveying the characteristics of vernacular/dialectal speech that require an excellent comprehension of the local-specific ways in which language is used. This directly supports Leighton's claim of the connection between realia at the lexical level and realia at the syntactical level (231). One such example is the mistranslation of "البني آدم <u>كل شيء يعلّمه</u>" (Munīf 44), (my trans.; LT: "son of Adam *everything makes him learn*"), as mentioned earlier. This phrase does not follow the standard syntactical structure of verb-subject-object form by being subject-object-verb, but the Saudi reader understands it because it resembles the spoken form of speech. For Theroux, this phrase poses certain complications at the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic levels, thus being mistranslated as "the prophet Adam learned everything" (Theroux 38). Another example is seen in the following phrase:

"دواء العربان أحسن من دواء الامريكان، <u>إذا انكوى، إذا انفصم، يمكن العله تطلع منه</u>" (Munīf 350), (my trans.; LT: "the Arabs' medicine is better than the American medicine, *if he gets cauterized, maybe the problem will leave him*"). Munīf's phrasing does not follow the standard syntactical structure of noun phrases and verb-subject-object form, and each part of the sentence is separated by a comma to reflect the pauses that occur while speaking. For these reasons, Theroux mistranslates this phrase as "the Arabs' medicine is better than American medicine. *It can cure burns, and injuries, and illnesses*" (Theroux 354). Munīf's phrasing implies that the traditional Bedouin remedy, moxibustion (انكوى), is better than pills, not that "it can cure burns." Such a serious mistranslation not only alters the meaning but also affects the representation of an aspect of local reality. In addition, the dialectal phrase: " قال لهم:

"راجي و اكوب: يوك³، اقتلوهم، اصدموا بهم على الطريق، <u>و اللي ما يروح موت الله يروح موت العبد</u>
(Munīf 489) (my trans.; LT: "he told them: Raji and Akoub: youk³, kill them, crash into them on the road, *and if they did not die by God, they will die by a servant of God*") also resembles spoken speech. Munīf's phrasing does not follow the standard syntactical structure of verbal phrases and conditional sentences, and he again uses non-standard punctuation to reveal the pauses that occur in natural speech. Due to this structuring, Theroux mistranslates this phrase as "get rid of Raji and Akoub. Kill them, crash into them on the road, and *they'll die God's death or end up slaves*" (490). Along with the mistranslation at the syntactical level, Theroux's translation is perhaps based on a linguistic knowledge of the word "al-ʿaabed; العبد" rather than a cultural knowledge. This word has two meanings: "slave" and "a servant of God." In this context, the word "al-ʿaabed," similarly to "al-bani ādam" that is described earlier, is a form of address that is influenced by religion. This term is commonly used by Saudis to refer to a stranger or to any person in general, but its meaning originates from the Islamic belief that all people are "servants of God." Such a mistranslation not only alters the meaning but also brings to the English reader's mind a completely different reality that does not exist in the Saudi community during this time period.

2. Religious Color as Part of Local Reality:

As demonstrated throughout this paper, the narrative in *Al-Tīh*, both in vernacular and standard Arabic, reveals how Islam has shaped the culture and mentality of Saudis. This gives the novel a religious color that helps the reader grasp the implications of the Arab-American encounter. The cross-cultural exoticization of the Arab-American encounter and viewing the idiolects of characters as signs of "Islamic repression" can perhaps be attributed to the serious loss of the religious color in Theroux's translation.

Munīf depicts how Islam has shaped the Saudi mentality in the way that the characters casually use Qur'anic verses and the prophet's sayings in their daily conversations as forms of expression. However, because these phrases are used as forms of expression, Munīf does not use the standard form of citing Qur'anic verses or sayings but blends them with the narrative. A Saudi/Muslim reader would easily recognize these excerpts and their interpretations as well as the images that they are meant to reveal within the plot. However, Theroux does not use any strategies to make the English reader aware of the existence of these verses or sayings, rendering them impossible to recognize as quotations. Thus, an important aspect of the Saudi/Muslim community is completely lost for English/Western readers, and most of these phrases would seem peculiar and incomprehensible since their interpretation requires recognition and prior knowledge. One such example occurs after Raji wins a game that he had been playing with Akoub. Raji shouts "[...] إذا أردنا أن نهلك قرية أمرنا مترفيها ففسقوا فيها [...]" (Munīf 478), which is chapter 17:16 in the Qur'an. The verse is translated as "should we wish to destroy a village we will use ease and luxury so that its people stray [...]" (Theroux 478) without any indication of being a Qur'anic verse. In Munīf's text, the Saudi/Muslim reader recognizes that this Qur'anic verse is used out of context and understands that the scene reveals that even rude, non-religious people such Raji use Qur'anic verses whenever they wish based on their own interpretations of them. In Theroux's text, this verse is confusing and devoid of meaning, especially because the narrative style resembles informal/spoken speech with no fixed sentence structure, so

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3 An aspect of spoken speech, it is a sound to express the act of pointing to someone.

the verse starts in a new paragraph with no explicit identification that this it spoken by Raji. This interrupts the sequence of the scene. It is worth emphasizing that the recognition of Qur'anic verses and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad helps the reader perceive how some characters exploit Islam to gain authority. The fact that they are undetectable and meaningless in the translation explains the cross-cultural confusion over the so-called "political Islam" and "Islamic repression."

Another important religious aspect is the concept of "ḥāʾalal: حلال" and "ḥāʾaram:حرام" which is a central element of Muslim mentality and morality. Theroux does not convey this notion as he either replaces it with a cultural equivalent or omits it. While the notion of ḥāʾalal and ḥāʾram is admittedly likely unfamiliar to most English readers without prior knowledge, making Theroux's approach appear reasonable, it is fundamental in understanding how the Saudi/Muslim community differs from the American/Western community. First, in Theroux's text, the religious belief of "ḥāʾalal" and "ḥāʾaram" that determines the actions and morals of Muslims is rendered to fit the English reader's perception of morality. For instance, the vernacular expression: "هؤلاء التجار شياطين في ثياب بشر، لأنهم ما يعرفون الحلال ولا يخافون الحرام" (Munīf 16) is translated as "these traders are devils in men's clothing – *they haven't the slightest idea of right and wrong*" (Theroux 7). Munīf's phrasing reflects Muslim moral norms around earning money without sin, whereas Theroux's translation omits the religious context that frames the traders' actions as a great mistake, potentially leading to sin and divine punishment. Similarly, the expression "ḥāʾram ʿaliek/um: حرام عليك/م" that is used when warning someone not to commit a sin is rendered using the cultural equivalent "shame on you," which radically alters the religious color and meaning. Furthermore, the word "ḥāʾalal: حلال" is repeatedly used in the vernacular context to refer to one's belongings. The term indicates that these belongings have been earned without committing a sin and were given by Allah. The Bedouin use this word figuratively to refer to their camels or their other possessions as seen in the following instance: "شعلان كان يسرح بالحلال، لا شاف و لا سمع" (Munīf 42). For this dialectal expression, Theroux omits the word "حلال" and translates it as "Shaalan *was just wandering around*. He didn't see or hear anything" (Theroux 36). Theroux's phrase lacks the religious color and is considered a mistranslation because the original denotes that Shaalan was busy feeding camels or sheep not "just wandering around." The mistranslation of this phrase is further proof that conveying the characteristics of vernacular/dialectal speech require an excellent comprehension of the local-specific ways in which language is used, as it appears that Theroux's translation is based on his understanding of the word "yasrraḥāʾ: يسرح" in standard Arabic that literally means "wandering." Florin argues that if realia is important in its context, the translator should then communicate it to the target reader through transcription that can be combined with the use of footnotes (167-8). Florin's assertion is especially useful regarding conveying the above-mentioned critical religious aspects in *Al-Tīh*. Theroux's translation would be more effective if he used footnotes to make the reader aware of the Qur'anic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad as well as to explain the notion of ḥāʾlal/ḥāʾram and then transliterate the words in the text.

3. Poetic Expressions:

Al-Tīh is full of poetic expressions, proverbs, idioms, and metaphors in both formal to vernacular language but are contextualized and would be inapprehensible if the reader, either Arabic or English, is not familiar with them. Newmark suggests that cultural proverbs and metaphors "are harder to translate than universal," and that they sometimes require a sided interpretation (106). In addition, Bassnett states that "the translation of idioms takes us a stage further in considering the question of meaning and translation, for idioms, like puns, are culture bound" (32). However, Newmark argues that the preferred way to translate these kinds of expressions is by reproducing the same image in the TL or by "replac[ing] the SL image with another established TL image" (109). In Theroux's text, the poetic expressions in standard Arabic are either translated using the communicative approach to create the same image as in the ST or using cultural equivalences to create an established TL image. Nevertheless, Theroux faced some difficulties in conveying vernacular/dialectal poetic expressions due to the local-bound implications in which they operate.

Theroux, for instance, literally translates the proverb "إذا كبر ولدك فخّاوه" (Munīf 15) as "If your boy grows up, *give him a brother*" (Theroux 17), which is a mistranslation since a more accurate translation is "If your boy grows up, be his brother" – meaning to act like his friend. The maxim: "أكل الرجال، يا أبو صالح، على الرجال دين... و على اللئام صدقة" (Munīf 265), (my trans.; LT: "feeding men, oh Abu Saleh, is seen as a loan to true men...and is a charity for wicked men") is seriously mistranslated as Theroux's text reads "Food for the men, Abu Saleh. *Men have faith and the wretched have charity*" (264). This mistranslation is further proof that Munīf's narrative style requires comprehension of the local-specific ways in which language is used. Theroux fails to understand the characteristics of informal/spoken speech as he mistranslates the vernacular register of "دين" (lending) as "faith," and misinterprets the non-syntactical sentence structure. Furthermore, the idiom "نصف الألف خمسمائة" (Munīf 360) (my trans.; LT: the "half of one thousand is five hundred"), which is commonly used to comfort someone by encouraging him or her not to worry or overthink, is translated using the communicative approach as "you can't change the past" (Theroux 363). Although this conveyance is reasonable, in the ST, the Emir says this to Ibn Rashed when he is worrying about Hajem's uncle's threats, not because he is worrying about the past. Therefore, the context is jeopardized.

When it comes to poetic expressions, characters like al-Hathal, Najma, Mufaddi, and Khazna, portrayed as the elderly of Wadi Al-Uyoun and Harran, often use pure Bedouin poetic expressions in their speech, revealing their culturally-shaped mentalities and extreme loyalty to cultural traditions. For instance, Najma delivers many moral sayings in the scene when she is dying. Her sayings are all poetic, rhythmed, and have connotations, as they are intended to reveal an image of the future of the modern city,

emphasize the consequences of the American oil encounter, and criticize the Emir. However, despite Theroux's attempts to convey Najma's sayings through different translation techniques, the translations remain peculiar, imprecise, and contain mistranslations. One example of this is when Najma says:

"كل يوم من الأيام التالية بسنة من هذي الأيام. أولها خير يعم البلاد و آخرها العباد تلهم الحراد" (Munīf 166) (my trans.; LT: "every day of the upcoming days equals a year of these days. At first blessings will cover the land and by the end servants of God will eat locusts"). Theroux mistranslates this phrase as "every day a year from now. First all the land will be blessed, and *then worshipers followed by locusts*" (165). Munīf's phrase does not follow the syntactical structure of verb-subject-object form and lacks punctuation. This phrase resembles the spoken form of speech and it is rhythmed, thus providing a literal translation as done by Theroux is incomprehensible and imprecise. In addition, Theroux misinterprets the dialectal word "talham: تلهم" (eating) as "followed," which is further proof that vernacular/dialectal words require cultural knowledge.

The conveyance of local reality associated with the portrayal of characters:

In the same manner that Najma's dialectal speech gives the reader insight into her character, the reader can learn much about other characters from their speech patterns and the narrative. While Updike's criticism that the characters are rarely fixed "by a face or a manner" (117), is true to a certain degree, it appears that Munīf has deliberately chosen this style. Munīf's focus on deep local details, such as the name of characters' "فخذ: faḵāʾḍ," rather than on their physical characteristics, clearly proves that his characters are intended to depict the local reality of the Saudi community. Munīf's portrayal of his characters includes culturally specific elements that resonate with Saudi/Arab readers, allowing the characters to be recognized as real Saudis. Many of these cultural implications embedded in the narrative create translation challenges due to the linguistic and cultural differences between Munīf's and Theroux's 'universes of reference.' As such, these culturally specific characters' descriptions qualify as realia.

1. The Familial Structure of the Bedouin Community:

Al-Tīh masterfully presents the Bedouin community as being a family-oriented group. A key method that Munīf uses to convey this idea is the use of particular terms that describe family ties within the portrayal of the characters. These terms are primarily connected with the linguistic structuring of Arabic and the family-centered mentality of Arab tribes. Firstly, Munīf draws largely on kinship terms since the fact that Bedouins live in clans requires demonstrating the connections between them. Kinship terms are among the most distinctive lexical items that reveal the cultural and linguistic differences between languages. Ke Ping states that "lexical mismatches," which he defines as "cases of non-correspondence," arise "due to differences in the ways in which languages classify the world," and he uses kinship terms as critical examples of such cases (166). Certainly, Theroux faced challenges in conveying the family connections described in the ST due to the complex nature of Arabic kinship terms as compared to the simplicity of English terms. For example, terms like "abn ḵāʾāli: ابن خالي" and "abn ʿamati: ابن عمتي" are both conveyed using the word "cousin," which is the technical English equivalence, but they are lexical mismatches. These terms describe different family ties and have paternal and maternal distinctions as "abn ḵāʾāli" refers to the son of the mother's brother and "abn ʿamati" refers to the son of the father's sister. While it is true that these terms do not have a major effect on the interpretation of the novel, they are integral to the portrayal of the characters and the Bedouin sense of unity, specifically of those who have multiple relatives mentioned in the story, such as Shaalan and Fawaz.

Other terms that describe family ties are "the father of: ابو," "the mother of: أم," and "the son of: ابن, بن." These terms are commonly used by Arabs as forms of address and are used in daily speech as a sign of respect. These terms are also connected to the lexical and structural differences in the ways in which languages classify the world. However, Theroux uses a foreignization technique by transliterating these terms as seen in the following examples: "*Abu* As'ad': أبو اسعد," "*Umm* Othman: ام عثمان," "*Ibn* Naffeh: ابن نافع," and "Fawaz *bin* Miteb: فواز بن متعب." Although this conveyance is reasonable, it requires the English reader to have prior knowledge to fully understand their meanings; otherwise, they may be interpreted simply as names or considered peculiar when observed from the perspective of an English reader.

In Munīf's portrayal of the Bedouin community as being family-centered, he uses the term "آل: ĀL," such as in the phrase "آل عون: ĀL 'Aoun" (Munīf 19), which is different than the definite article (al-: ال) that is used for family names. In standard Arabic, ĀL refers to the family as a group, but historically, it has been uniquely associated with Arab tribes as being linked with the name of origin in the segmental lineage system, indicating a wide range of individuals who descended from the same family. The notion of this term has acquired exceptional significance among Arab tribes as a means of maintaining and fostering a sense of identity, honor, and belonging. Munīf intentionally aims to reveal this idea by portraying al-Hathal as a descendant of ĀL Aoun, who ruled over Wadi Al-Uyoun for centuries. In Theroux's text, this term is conveyed as "the al-Aoun clan" (Theroux 11). This conveyance further emphasizes the linguistic and cultural differences between Munīf's and Theroux's 'universes of reference' as despite its accuracy, it does not reveal the same image and purpose.

2. Arabic Names and Nicknames:

Munīf demonstrates a genuine aspect of local reality by depicting the Bedouin practice of naming children based on the situation or emotions they experienced at the time of their children's births. The novel also portrays the tendency to assign

nicknames to one another based on their views and feelings toward each other. Consequently, in light of Burak's concept of "talking names," some character names carry associative meanings that are vital to interpreting the novel. As the case with the family ties terms, these associative names emphasize the lexical and structural differences between Munīf's and Theroux's languages, and this important feature of the portrayal of characters is missing in Theroux's text. Concerning this issue, Allen points out that it would be more effective if Theroux's "transliteration of the names of some of the participants in the story replicated either the sounds or symbols of the original" ("review" 359). Although this approach would help capture the correct pronunciation, the English reader would still be expected to have an excellent command of Arabic pronunciation and understanding of names to fully comprehend the intended images, otherwise the details surrounding the characters' names would seem meaningless and peculiar.

Regarding the Bedouin practice of naming children, al-Hathal gives his last-born child the name "Meqbel: مقبل" because he was born during the last days of hunger. Al-Hathal explains "انتهت أيام الجوع و أقبلت أيام الخير" (Munīf 26). In Theroux's text, the English reader cannot comprehend the intended image and purpose of the name as the phrase is translated as "'the bad days are over; the good times are coming.' It was to emphasize that conviction that he had named him Mugbel" (18), without a sided explanation. In this portrayal, the English reader has no access to the pronunciation and morphological similarities between "aqbalat: اقبلت" and "Meqbel: مقبل" as the associative meaning is related to the pronunciation and the formation of the words. Both "aqbalat" and "Meqbel" are derived from the noun "eqibal: إقبال," which means "is coming," but "aqbalat" is the verb form and "Meqbel" is the adjective form. Another situation in which the English reader has no access to the intended portrayal of a given name, is seen in names that are associated with different regions. For example, in the scene about Daham's pants that is described above, when Abdullah al-Zamel notices that Daham is wearing a Thobe instead of pants to meet the Emir, he says mockingly,"راح منير و جاء مناور" (Munīf 382), which is translated as "Munir leaves and Munawar comes in his place!" (Theroux 385). "Munir:منير" is a common name in the Levant and Egypt, but "Munawar:مناور" is purely a Bedouin name. This statement highlights al-Zamel's resentment by emphasizing Arab cultural differences and Bedouin traditions. While these implications would be readily understood by a Saudi reader, they may appear peculiar and meaningless to an English reader unfamiliar with regional names and cultural context.

A similar problem can be seen regarding the nicknames given to certain characters. These nicknames serve to describe the characters, but their meanings and images are derived from the way these words are pronounced and used in Arabic, and such features cannot be conveyed in a translation. For example, Niam is given the nickname "al-nuṣayīṣ: النصيص" and Dabassi is given the nickname "al-maṭuwuṭ: المطّوط." Niam's nickname describes his outward appearance as being short and has a demeaning connotation (Munīf 234-5). Dabassi's nickname describes the way he speaks as he speaks slowly, and it has a rude connotation (Munīf 389). Munīf provides the reasons for these nicknames but does not explain the formation of these words or their meanings. That said, it would be immediately apparent to the Saudi reader that the meanings of "النصيص" and "المطّوط" are informal/vernacular and inferred from the roots of the words themselves. "النصيص" is derived from "nuṣ: نصّ" (half), and "المطّوط" is derived from "maṭ: مط" (extend). In Theroux's text, the intended images and meanings of these nicknames are not conveyed since Niam's nickname is transliterated as "Nusayis" with no explanation of the meaning, while Dabassi's nickname is completely changed to "donkey." It is worth emphasizing that changing Dabassi's nickname in the translation not only affects the portrayal of his character but also alters the interpretation of the scene in which some of Dabassi's enemies tease him by mimicking his speaking manner saying: "المطّوط...المط... ـوط...ة" (Munīf 407), (al-maṭuwuṭ...al-maṭ...uw... uṭ), conveyed as "The Donkey! Look at the Donkey! Saleh the Donkey" (Theroux 411). In addition, Hamilton, the head of the American company, is also given a nickname that reflects a reality that is tied up with the source culture and thus, causes translation complications related to cultural knowledge. The Arab workers give Hamilton the nickname "Abu Lahab: أبو لهب," referring to Prophet Muhammad's infidel uncle. This name evokes a unique association in the minds of Saudi/Muslim readers because this is common knowledge in Islam, and so the reference and historical context of this name are already established. Unlike the other nicknames, Munīf does not provide any details about this name or explain it in any way because its image is immediately apparent to the Saudi/Muslim reader. In the case of the translation, Theroux also does not provide any sided explanation, so the English reader must have prior knowledge of Abu Lahab to comprehend the reasoning behind this nickname and its image, otherwise this cultural-bound description is meaningless, and part of Hamilton's portrayal is affected.

6. Conclusion

'Abd Al-Raḥman Munīf's *Mudun al-Milḥ* (*Al-Tīh*) is a work of realism that immerses readers in the culture and local reality of Saudi Arabia, portraying not just the setting but the unique features of Saudi speech and social life. *Mudun* attracted international interest after it was translated into English by Peter Theroux. However, according to Vlakhov and Florin, the reality that is "intimately bound up with the universe of reference of the original culture," what they refer to as 'realia,' evokes translation complications on both the cultural and linguistic levels (Florin 163). This research builds on Florin's concept of the untranslatability of realia and Leighton's assertion that realia extend beyond lexical elements to include phraseology and syntax. It focuses on the objective meaning of realia, their local color, connotations, and associations as understood by the original audience, as well as the reality tied to the source text's cultural universe.

This research shows that Theroux primarily used domestication strategies (e.g., communicative translation and cultural equivalence) to convey the local reality. However, he occasionally employed foreignization strategies and literal translations,

particularly for vernacular and dialectal speech. Despite Florin and Leighton's emphasis on the importance of background knowledge, Theroux included no footnotes to explain culture-bound elements or concepts unfamiliar to the English reader. As a result, a considerable portion of *Al-Tīh*'s realia become obscure, virtually meaningless, and inaccessible to the English reader. Theroux's translation impacts the perception of the Saudi community and the interpretation of the novel. While his portrayal of the environment is reasonable, it distorts the images Munīf intended. Munīf uses culture-bound elements to depict desert life and the socio-economic changes from oil discovery and the Arab-American encounter. These elements evoke specific connotations for Saudi readers, but Theroux's version generalizes, modifies, or omits them, preventing foreign readers from fully grasping the local reality. Furthermore, Theroux's translation of Munīf's narrative style includes mistranslations, omissions, and additions, making parts of the text incomprehensible. The vernacular and dialectal speech in *Al-Tīh* is closely tied to how Saudis communicate, and translating it requires recognizing its cultural and local contexts. This aligns with Leighton's claim that errors in translating realia stem from cultural, not linguistic, ignorance. Finally, Theroux's handling of the characters' cultural descriptions highlights the cultural and linguistic divide between Munīf's and Theroux's realities.

This paper highlights the importance of realia in the interpretation of *Al-Tīh* and in the perception of the Saudi/Bedouin community and contributes towards widening the understanding of Saudi reality. However, the current study was not designed to solve the translation issues that Theroux faced, particularly since the research relied heavily on Florin's notion of the untranslatability of realia. Therefore, this research did not provide appropriate alternatives for all of Theroux's translations. Nevertheless, the concept of realia has recently received much attention, and it is possible that it will be further developed in the future to provide solutions to render realia properly. Accordingly, this research suggests future research be conducted regarding enhancing Theroux's translation of *Al-Tīh,* using translation studies, and investigating the translations of the two remaining volumes.

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