



FICTION AS TRAVELOGUE: MEMORY, EXILIC IDENTITY, AND THE RELATIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF ALTERITY IN SA'DI YUSUF'S *NĪQŪSIYĀ*

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Travel writing has traditionally been studied through non-fictional texts, leaving a significant gap in understanding how fictional narratives can also function as a medium of travel representation. This study responds to that gap by examining the Arabic short fiction *Nīqūsiyā* as a work of travel writing, applying Carl Thompson's travel-writing framework, which emphasizes reporting the world, revealing the self, and representing the other. The study addresses how fictional narratives construct travel experiences and represent foreign space, exilic identity, and alterity within the framework of travel writing. Using a qualitative interpretive method and textual analysis, this research analyzes narrative strategies, empirical details, and comparative representation. The data in this study consist of words, phrases, and sentences from the short story. At the same time, data were collected through repeated close readings of the text, followed by systematic documentation of segments representing the travel narrative. The findings show that the world is reported through administrative, geographical, and sensory details that create a sense of factuality while reflecting the narrator's subjective framing of reality. By revealing the self, the journey serves as a medium for emotional and existential transformation, in which memory and exile reshape the narrator's self-awareness and identity. Meanwhile, the other is represented through contrasts between the foreign space and the narrator's space of origin, showing that alterity is relationally constructed through cultural memory and personal experience. This study implies that in fictional travel writing, exilic identity and alterity are relationally constructed through the interplay of memory, space, and subjective experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Sa'di Yusuf is a preeminent and highly influential figure in modern Arabic literature. Born in Basra into an impoverished and marginalized family, he witnessed from an early age the plight of oppressed seasonal laborers in his surroundings ([Ahmed et al., 2022](#)). During this period, socialist ideologies were gaining significant traction among Basra's dockworkers and landless peasants ([Kadhim et al., 2025](#)). Consequently, Yusuf aligned himself with the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) during the 1940s, joining the ranks of several prominent figures in the Iraqi literary elite ([Antoon, 2021](#)). His activism and involvement with the party placed him in direct opposition to the ruling regime. Following the collapse of the National Front, he and other ICP members faced severe persecution: many were imprisoned, while others were executed. Faced with the ultimatum of either joining the Ba'ath Party or leaving Iraq ([Jasim, 2024](#)), Yusuf chose the latter. Consequently, he fled the country and lived in exile for three decades.

Among his literary output, the short story *Nīqūsiyā* occupies a distinctive position. Unlike his vast poetic oeuvre, which has received considerable scholarly attention for its engagement with myth, politics, and exile, *Nīqūsiyā* represents a rare foray into prose fiction that is simultaneously personal, spatial, and ideological. Published in *Nizwa* magazine in November 1994, the story follows Thāhir Al-Machmūd, an Iraqi painter residing on the outskirts of Damascus, who travels to Cyprus upon receiving an invitation from his cousin Sha'bān ([Ramadhan & Rohanda, 2024](#)). The work is distinguished by its setting: the divided city of Nicosia, which has been separated by the United Nations Buffer Zone since 1974. Northern Nicosia is predominantly shaped by Turkish Cypriot culture, whereas Southern Nicosia is predominantly Greek Cypriot in culture ([Reid, 2025](#)).

This geopolitical fracture transforms Nicosia into a symbolically charged space that extends beyond its function as a narrative backdrop and mirrors the narrator's own condition of displacement and liminality. In this respect, *Nīqūsiyā* stands as a unique text within Yusuf's body of work: a short story in which geography, identity, and exile are given narrative and spatial form in ways that his poetry, however powerful lyrically, cannot fully accommodate. This growing critical interest extends to his poetry's formal innovations, as recent analysis of the cinematic montage techniques structuring his verse further attests to sustained scholarly engagement with his broader oeuvre ([Alrawashdeh & Fadhil, 2023](#); [Assadi & Naamneh, 2018](#)). The divided city itself further situates *Nīqūsiyā* within a broader literary tradition in which partitioned urban space, as seen in fictional treatments of Belfast, Beirut, and Berlin, serves as a charged symbolic terrain for negotiating political disunion and identity ([Schwerter, 2011](#)).

Political exile has long been a significant cultural and literary phenomenon in the Arab world, particularly due to prolonged political instability, colonial legacies, and authoritarian governance that compel intellectuals and writers to seek refuge abroad ([Alrashid, 2025](#); [Sharifi-Ahmadipour & Sordé-Martí, 2024](#); [Mahmudah & Tahraoui, 2024](#)). Within this context, exile literature frequently functions as both a personal expression of displacement and a broader cultural and political critique. Arab novelists have consistently employed literary narratives to interrogate structures of political oppression, social injustice, and ideological domination, even when such critiques extend beyond their own national contexts. This is evident in Najib Kailani's *Adzra' Jakarta*, where the representation of women's political rights during the Indonesian political turmoil of 1965 serves as a critique of systemic discrimination and authoritarian power ([Abyad & Nida'unnada, 2022](#)). This expanding corpus of Arabic

exile writing, particularly its post-1990s turn toward forced migration and border narratives, further illustrates how contemporary Arab authors continue to reconfigure exile as a literary and political category (Sellman, 2022; Bianco et al., 2026).

Scholars have demonstrated that exilic writing often reconstructs geographical imagination, identity, and resistance through literary representation (Al-Dahiyat & Majdoubeh, 2023; Sellman, 2018; Munif, 2018). In Yusuf's case, his transnational experiences across the Arab world and Europe shaped a literary consciousness deeply concerned with colonialism, betrayal, intellectual silence, and the search for cultural renewal. His poetry and prose, therefore, position exile as both a condition of estrangement and a productive space for negotiating Arab identity within global modernity (Hamdi, 2019). More broadly, within Arabic letters, the city itself has long served as a contested arena in which the self and the other are negotiated across genres and periods, a dynamic that similarly underlies *Nīqūsiyā*'s treatment of Nicosia (Hermes & Head, 2018).

Previous studies further indicate that Yusuf's literary works integrate mythological, psychological, and existential dimensions to articulate contemporary realities. His writings are closely associated with Iraqi and Babylonian mythological traditions, particularly the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which functions as a symbolic framework for interpreting modern sociopolitical crises (Assadi & Naamneh, 2018). At the narrative level, scholars have also highlighted recurring themes of alienation, self-reconstruction, and the pursuit of hope in the short story *Nīqūsiyā*, both through structural analysis and reader-response approaches (Rofiqi & Munjiah, 2025; Ramadhan & Rohanda, 2024). These studies collectively demonstrate that Yusuf's works transcend individual experience by representing broader questions of displacement, identity, formation, and emotional survival. A comparable poetics of exile has been identified in the work of other Iraqi writers, where displacement is similarly reconstructed as an act of resistance against the erasure of identity and homeland (Mihsin & Jasim, 2025; Jasim, 2024).

Travel writing has similarly evolved into an important literary mode for representing cultural encounter, spatial movement, and identity negotiation across diverse traditions. Travel narratives frequently mediate relationships between self and other while simultaneously reflecting ideological, historical, and geopolitical perspectives, extending beyond the simple documentation of journeys (Thompson, 2011). Within Arabic literary history, travel writing developed through commercial mobility, intellectual exchange, and religious pilgrimage, eventually emerging as a significant component of modern Arab literary works (Zarytovskaya & Al-Rahbi, 2025; Abdunabiev, 2024; Wicaksono et al., 2023). Contemporary studies further demonstrate that Arabic travel narratives engage with geographical description as well as questions of ideology, historical consciousness, and global interconnectedness (Utami & Primadani, 2024; Insani & Hindun, 2022; Johnson, 2017). This encounter has more recently been reconceptualized through the notion of the 'travellee', which foregrounds the agency of those observed within travel narratives and sharpens the analytical distinction between reporting the world and representing the other (Tarkka & Martin, 2023; Thompson, 2011).

Recent developments in travel writing studies have expanded the field toward postcolonial, spatial, and identity-based approaches. Scholars increasingly examine how travel narratives construct power relations, represent cultural difference, and negotiate regional or transnational identities (Arifin et al., 2022; Boele, 2021; Mahn, 2020). Spatial literary studies additionally emphasize the role of geography and mobility in shaping narrative meaning and cultural imagination (Zhao et al., 2022; Tally, 2020; Edwards,

2018). Other studies highlight how travel writing intersects with gender, colonial discourse, and self-transformation, particularly through representations of women travelers and cross-cultural encounters (Adhikari, 2022; Gholi & Ahmadi, 2017; Colbert, 2017). Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that travel writing functions as a complex literary space that extends beyond descriptive narration, where identity, ideology, and cultural interaction are continuously negotiated. Tally's more recent work extends this framework specifically to diasporic space, arguing that the imaginative cartography of displacement complicates any straightforward sense of place or belonging, a conceptual expansion situated within the broader project of literary cartography linking narrative mapping to questions of subjectivity and totality (Tally, 2022; Fang, 2020).

While the short story *Nīqūsiyā* has been examined through narrative-structural and reader-reception approaches, previous studies have primarily focused on its plot dynamics and the process of reader interpretation, leaving unexplored the question of how the text constructs space, displacement, and identity within the travel writing genre. Moreover, broader scholarship on Arabic travel writing has tended to privilege non-fictional travelogues and novel-length narratives, creating a gap in understanding how short fiction can function as a site of spatial and ideological representation. This study addresses that gap by positioning *Nīqūsiyā* as a travel writing text and analyzing it through Thompson's framework. Through this approach, the research shifts the analytical focus from what changes and how readers interpret the text to how the journey itself functions as both an aesthetic and ideological construction within the narrative.

Therefore, this study is guided by the following questions. *First*, how is the world constructed in reporting? *Second*, how does travel function as a medium for self-reflection and the transformation of subjectivity in revealing the self? *Third*, how is the other represented through comparisons between foreign space and the space of origin? To address these questions, the discussion proceeds in three analytical stages corresponding to Thompson's framework. The first stage examines how the narrative constructs a documentary representation of the world. The second stage analyzes how the experience of mobility triggers emotional shifts and self-awareness, rendering travel an existential space for identity development. The third stage explores how alterity is constructed through spatial comparison and memory. Together, these stages illuminate how *Nīqūsiyā* integrates claims of objectivity with subjective experience, situating the text within both the Arabic literary tradition and the broader global discourse of travel writing.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-interpretive design within the framework of travel writing studies to examine the representation of journey, identity, and alterity in the Arabic prose. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study emphasizes textual interpretation and meaning construction rather than numerical measurement. Methodologically, the research approach is grounded in interpretive literary analysis, which enables the exploration of symbolic meanings, narrative experiences, and cultural representations embedded within the text. Thompson's conceptualization of travel writing, particularly the dimensions of reporting the world, revealing the self, and representing the other, serves as the primary analytical framework for interpreting the journey. This framework, most recently reaffirmed in

Thompson's expanded account of the genre, continues to anchor its analytical dimensions in the autobiographical and relational dynamics of travel (Thompson, 2025; Thompson, 2011).

The primary data source for this study is the Arabic short story *Nīqūsiyā* by Sa'di Yusuf, analyzed in its original Arabic. All Arabic excerpts cited in this article were translated into English by the authors. The secondary data were obtained from scholarly books, journal articles, and prior studies on travel writing and exile literature to support the contextual and theoretical discussion. Data collection was conducted through several sequential stages. *First*, the text was read repeatedly using a close-reading technique to identify narrative elements associated with travel experiences, spatial movement, identity transformation, and encounters with otherness. *Second*, relevant textual units in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and narrative passages were systematically documented and categorized according to Thompson's analytical categories. *Third*, the selected data were organized based on thematic relevance to facilitate interpretive analysis.

The data analysis process involved interpretive textual analysis. The collected data were initially coded according to thematic and categorial patterns derived from Thompson's framework. The textual quotations presented in the results section were selected purposively based on their analytical relevance and representativeness of each analytical dimension. Accordingly, the number of quotations varies across dimensions, reflecting the actual distribution of relevant textual evidence in the short story rather than an equal numeric allocation. Subsequently, each data unit was interpreted in context to examine how the narrative constructs the meanings of displacement, memory, and identity through travel experiences. The final stages involved synthesizing the relationship across categories to formulate a comprehensive interpretation of how the short story positions travel as both a narrative structure and a cultural representation of existential and social experience.

RESULT

The analysis reveals three interconnected dimensions by which the text constructs its narrative of journey and displacement. The first dimension, reporting the world, examines how the narrative documents foreign space through empirical, administrative, geographical, and sensory details while remaining inseparable from the narrator's subjective experience. The second dimension, revealing the self, explores how the journey functions as a medium of self-reflection and the transformation of subjectivity. The third dimension, representing the other, investigates how foreign spaces are constructed through comparison with the narrator's space of origin, reflecting the role of memory and personal identity in shaping representations of alterity.

Reporting the World

The primary objective of travel writing is to provide insights into the wider world and its societal diversity. Such narratives may be constructed through both subjective and objective lenses. The author proceeds from the premise that travel is inherently "abnormal", as it displaces the subject from their daily routines, cultural familiarities, and habitual spatial boundaries. Consequently, it is characterized by its flexibility, openness, and continuous transformation (Quaireau & Ounoughi, 2020). Within this

framework, the manifestation of reporting the world in the short story *Nīqūsiyā* is delineated as follows:

Excerpt 1 في مطار ((لارنكا)) كانت الإجراءات سهلة، سريعة. المسافرون قليلون، فالموسم ليس موسم اصطيفاف. دفعت ليرتين قبرصيتين واختموا جواز بتأشيرة دخول. خرجت إلى الشارع، مباشرة، أحمل حقيبتي اليدوية الوحيدة. ركبت سيارة أجرة إلى نيقوسيا. (Yusuf, 1994:111)

Fī maṭāri Lārnkā kānat al-ijrā'at sahlah, sarī'ah. al-Musāfirūna qalīlūnā, falmawsimu laysa mawsimu iṣṭiyāf. Dafa'tu līratayni qubruṣīṭayni wakhtamū jawāz bita'shīrah dukhūl. Kharajtu ilā ash-shāri', mubāsharah. Aḥmilu ḥaqībatī al-yadawīyyah al-waḥīdah. Rakibtu sayyāratan ujratan ilā Nīqūsiyā.

'At Larnaca airport, the procedures were simple and swift. There were few travelers, as it was not the summer season. I paid two Cypriot pounds, and they stamped my passport with an entry visa. I exited promptly, carrying only my handbag, and took a taxi toward Nicosia.'

Excerpt 1 serves as the opening narrative of the protagonist's journey to Nicosia, beginning with his arrival at Larnaca International Airport. Since the closure of Nicosia International Airport following the division of Cyprus in 1974, Larnaca has served as the principal gateway for international travel to the island (Pieri, 2024). The excerpt foregrounds concrete observational details, including the swift immigration procedures, the limited number of travelers outside the holiday season, and the payment of "two Cypriot pounds" for an entry visa. These details construct a factual and administrative representation of travel experience, emphasizing mobility as a regulated and institutional process. The narrative progresses linearly from arrival to the taxi journey to Nicosia, reinforcing geographical movement as the story's structural basis. This passage exemplifies reporting the world through its emphasis on external reality, spatial transition, and documentary-style observation. The absence of emotional introspection further positions the narrator as an observer primarily concerned with recording Cyprus's geopolitical and material realities.

Excerpt 2 ليلتي الأولى في نيقوسيا كانت هادئة. نزلت من الغرفة.. وسألت سمير اللبناني عن مكان اسهر فيه سهرة متواضعة. أخبرني أن كل هذه المدينة أماكن، وعليّ، أنا، أن اختار، أتمنّى واختار. ثم ان نيقوسيا صغيرة، ومركزها أصغر من راحة اليد. تسير قليلا لتجد حاجز الأمم المتحدة، في وسط السوق تماما، وراء المركز، الأرض الحرام، والاتراك. لن أضيع ابدا. ولو حدث أن ضعت فما عليّ إلا أن أوقف سيارة أجرة. فندق كليوباترا، أشهر من مديرية الجمارك. (Yusuf, 1994: 111)

Laylatī al-ūlā fī Nīqūsiyā kānat hādī'ah. Nazaltu min al-ghurfati.. wa sa'altu Samīr al-Lubnānī 'an makānan isharra fīhi sahratan mutawāḍī'atan. Akhbaranī anna kulla hadhihi al-madīnah amākin, wa 'alayya, anā, an akhtar, atamashshā wa akhtār. Thumma anna Nīqūsiyā ṣaghīrah. Wa markazuhā aṣgharu min rāḥati al-yad. Tasīru qalīlan litajida ḥājiz al-umam al-muttaḥidah, fī wasaṭi as-sūqi tamāman, wara'a al-markaz, al-arḍu al-ḥarāmu, wa al-Atrāk. Lan aḍī'u abadan. Walaw ḥadatha an ḍa'tu famā 'alayya illā an

ūqifa sayyāratan ujratan. Funduqu Kiliyubātrā, asyharu min mudīriyyati al-jamāriki.

‘My first night in Nicosia felt tranquil. I came down from my room and asked Samir, a Lebanese man, about a place to spend a modest evening. He told me that the entire city is composed of various places, and I must choose for myself, wander, and select. Nicosia is small, and its center is smaller than the palm of a hand. Walk just a little, and you will encounter the UN checkpoint, right in the middle of the market, behind the city center—a no-man’s-land and the Turks. I would never get lost. And if I did, I would only need to call a taxi. The Cleopatra Hotel is more famous than the customs office.’

This excerpt represents Nicosia through concrete spatial observation and localized urban detail. The narrative begins with the city’s calm nocturnal atmosphere before shifting into the protagonist’s interaction with Samir, a Lebanese resident who explains the city’s spatial structure. Nicosia is portrayed as compact and easily navigable through the metaphor that its center is smaller than the palm of a hand, creating a vivid sense of spatial intimacy. The references to the United Nations checkpoint, no-man’s-land, and the Turk introduce the geopolitical realities of Cyprus, reflecting the territorial division between the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities (Köksald et al., 2021). The passage constructs an urban understanding through movement, landmarks, and navigational guidance, particularly through the protagonist’s confidence that he would never become lost in the city. The mention of the “Cleopatra Hotel” as a recognizable landmark further demonstrates how travelers cognitively map unfamiliar spaces through practical orientation. The passage exemplifies reporting the world through observational narration grounded in spatial and geopolitical reality.

Excerpt 3

في بافوس درنا دورة سريعة في الميناء.
البحر رائق، والشمس ساطعة.
كان طاهر يتأمل الميناء، والسفن، والنوارس، بعينين دهشتين.
قال: بافوس، ميناء أسطوري. (Yusuf, 1994: 113-114)

Fī Bāfūs darnā dawratan sarī’atan fī al-mīnā’i.
Al-baḥru rā’iqun, wa ash-shamsu sāṭi’atun.
Kāna Ṭāhir yata’ammalu al-mīnā’a, wa as-sufūna, wa an-
nawārisa, bi’aynayni dahshatayni.
Qāla: Bāfūs, mīnā’un usṭūriyyun.

‘In Paphos, we took a brief tour of the harbor. The sea was crystal clear, and the sun was shining. Thāhir gazed at the harbor, the ships, and the seagulls with amazement. He said: Paphos is a legendary harbor.’

This excerpt expands the travel narrative beyond Nicosia by presenting Paphos through vivid environmental and maritime imagery. The description of the crystal-clear sea, bright sunlight, harbor, ships, and seagulls constructs a visually rich representation of the coastal landscape, emphasizing direct sensory observation as a central narrative strategy. As a prominent coastal city known for its maritime and cultural significance, Paphos functions as an important symbolic travel space within the narrative (Farmaki et

al., 2018). The protagonist's gaze toward the harbor reinforces the passage's documentary quality, positioning the traveler as an observer of external reality. Moreover, the statement that Paphos is a legendary harbor introduces a subjective cultural evaluation, transforming the harbor from a physical setting into an imaginative spatial experience associated with memory and wonder. The passage illustrates reporting the world through observational narration grounded in environmental detail, spatial representation, and cultural perception.

Excerpt 4 حين مرورنا بپافوس، اشار شعبان الى فرع بنك قبرص، قال: غدا، تفتح حسابا في هذا البنك. لا إقامة بلا حساب. هذا هو قانون الجزيرة. (Yusuf, 1994: 114)

Hīna murūrinā bibāfūs, ashāra Sha'bān ilā far'i bank Qubruṣ, qāla: Gadan, taftaḥu ḥisāban fī hadhā al-bank. Lā iqāmah bilāḥisābin. Hadhā qanūnu al-jazīrah.

'As we passed through Paphos, Sha'bān pointed toward a branch of the Bank of Cyprus and said, 'Tomorrow, you will open an account at this bank. There is no residency permit without an account. That is the law on this island.'

This excerpt represents space through the Bank of Cyprus's institutional presence and its administrative function in the protagonist's journey. The narrative records a concise interaction in which Sha'bān points toward the bank and explains that opening an account is a prerequisite for obtaining residency on the island. Through this pragmatic exchange, the passage foregrounds bureaucracy as an integral dimension of travel experience rather than merely a background detail. The direct instruction and brief dialogue create a documentary tone that emphasizes the factual and procedural realities travelers encounter in foreign spaces. In this context, the bank functions as both a financial institution and a symbol of administrative authority regulating mobility and legal presence within Cyprus. The excerpt, therefore, demonstrates that movement across borders involves negotiation with the institutional system that determines access and belonging. The passage demonstrates how the world is reported by depicting travel as a regulated social and bureaucratic experience grounded in concrete spatial reality.

Revealing the Self

Travel writing is far more than a mere record of a journey; it also carries the emotional and psychological weight of the author (McWha et al., 2018; Thompson, 2011). When an individual chronicles their travel experiences, they inevitably embed themselves within the text. The author incorporates their own subjectivity in their perception of the situations and conditions of the places visited. At its most profound level, this self-revelation often discloses more about the traveler than about the external world being reported (Perkins, 2025; Wicaksono et al., 2023; Nasution, 2015). This phenomenon is evident in the short story *Nīqūsiyā*, as demonstrated through the following excerpts.

Excerpt 5 في تلك الأيام، كان جزائي على امساكه بي، ضحكة مجلجلة.
أما هنا، في نيقوسيا...
هنا، بعد أن امسك بي...
فقد كان جزائي نظرة حنان دامعة. (Yusuf, 1994: 113)

Fī tilka al-ayyāmi, kāna jazā'ī 'alā imsākihi bī, ḍaḥkatun mujalilatun.

Ammā hunā, fī Nīqūsiyā...

Hunā, ba'daan amsiku bī...

Faqad kāna jazā'ī naẓrata ḥanān dāmi'ah.

'In those days, my response to his successful capture of me was a loud laugh. However, here, in Nicosia... Here, after he gazes at me, my response is a gaze of compassion, brimming with tears.'

The excerpt depicts the protagonist's emotional self-revelation through a contrast between past and present affective experience. The shift from an audible laugh in Damascus to a compassionate gaze, brimming with tears in Nicosia, reflects a transformation in his psychological and emotional state, indicating how spatial relocation reshapes subjectivity. The narrative highlights how the protagonist's earlier life in Damascus is marked by emotional distance and creative stagnation. In contrast, his presence in Nicosia becomes associated with intimacy and emotional openness following his reunion with his cousin, Sha'bān. The repetition of the word "here" functions as a textual mechanism that emphasizes immediacy and anchors emotional experience within the spatial present of Nicosia. This linguistic repetition underscores the city as an affective space, whose significance extends beyond a physical location and mediates identity reconstruction. In travel writing theory, the excerpt reveals the self through the traveler's articulation of internal transformation, in which movement across space reconfigures memory, emotion, and self-perception.

Excerpt 6. لقد استعدت معه، ذكريات الصبا، ومشاهد البساتين والجداول. في البصرة البعيدة. جرينا معا، قطعنا الجداول واثيين. وعبرنا القناطر، وتسلقنا النخل. قطفنا الرطب، وأكلنا الجمار، ونمنا الظهيرة تحت عرائش العنب. شممننا رائحة ورق التين، وبحثنا عن التينة التي بكرت في النضج. (Yusuf, 1994: 114)

Laqad ista'adtu ma'ahu, dhikryāt aṣ-ṣibā, wa mashāhida al-basātīn wa al-jadāwil. Fī al-Baṣrah al-ba'īdah. Jaraynā ma'an, qaṭa'nā al-jadāwila wathbayni. Wa 'abarnā al-qanāṭira, wa tusalliqunā an-nakhla. Wa qaṭafnā ar-ruṭba. Wa akalnā al-jimāra. Wa nimnā aḡ-ḡahīrah taḡta 'arā'ish al-'inabī. Shamamnā rā'iḡata waraqi at-tīn, wa baḡathnā 'an at-tīniyyah allatī bukkirat fī an-nuḡji.

'With him, I reminisce about my childhood, the orchard landscapes, and the flow of the small river, in distant Basra. We ran together, jumping over those streams. We crossed bridges and climbed date palms, eating their (palm) hearts, and napping at noon beneath the grapevines. We inhaled the scent of fig leaves and searched for the earliest ripening figs.'

The excerpt reveals the protagonist's self through a nostalgic reconstruction of childhood memories triggered within the present spatial setting. The reunion with Sha'bān in Nicosia evokes vivid recollections of Basra, where the narrator and his companion engaged in physical and sensory experiences, including running across streams, climbing palm trees, and resting under grapevines. The accumulation of sensory imagery, touch, smell, and taste constructs an embodied memoryscape that

links identity to lived spatial experience. The phrase “distant Basra” emphasizes temporal and spatial separation, highlighting how memory operates across dislocated geographies. The narrative reactivates an idealized past rather than dwelling on present adversity, suggesting that emotional selfhood is constructed through recollection more than through immediate reality. The contrast between Nicosia, the present space, and Basra, the remembered space, illustrates how travel experience catalyzes identity retrieval. This passage demonstrates that revealing the self through memory, emotion, and subjective experience is shaped by movement across places.

Representing the Other

Beyond reporting on new locales and narrating the self, travel writing serves as a chronicle of the encounter between the self and the “other” (Thompson, 2011). It is a space where the “self” and the “other” converge. Consequently, travel writing frequently addresses the similarities and differences between cultures. In the short story *Niqūsiyā*, the representation of the other is evident in the following excerpts.

Excerpt 7 في هذه الساعة من المساء، تكون دمشق في أوج حركتها: الناس والسيارات والأسواق. أما هنا، فالشوارع شبه خالية. لا أحد يتمشى. حتى السيارات.. قليلة. لا أصوات. لا ضجة أبواق، لا باعة ينادون. المخازن أغلقت، لكن واجهاتها ظلت مضاءة.
(Yusuf, 1994: 111)

Fī hadhihi as-sā'ati min al-masā'i, takūnu Dimashqa fī awji ḥarakatihā: an-nāsu wa as-sayyārat wa al-aswāq. Ammā hunā, fashshawāri' shibhu khāliyah. Lā aḥadu yatamashshā. Ḥattā as-sayyārat.. qalilah. Lā aṣwāt. Lā ḍajjata abwāq. Lā bā'atan yunādūna. Al-makhāzinu ughliqat. Lakinnā wājihātuhā ḡallat muḍā'atan.

'On a night like this, Damascus would be at the height of its activity: the people, the cars, and the markets. But here, the streets are nearly deserted. Not a soul is on foot. Even the cars... they are few and far between. No noise, no blaring horns, no shouting vendors. The shops are closed, yet their display windows remain illuminated.'

The aforementioned excerpt constructs the representation of the other through a stark spatial and sensory contrast between Damascus and Nicosia. Damascus is depicted as a vibrant, densely populated urban space characterized by continuous movement, commercial activity, and acoustic intensity, including traffic noise and the sounds of street vendors. In contrast, Nicosia is presented as a quiet, almost empty city marked by stillness and minimal human presence. This binary opposition produces a comparative spatial imagination in which Damascus functions as a reference point of urban vitality, while Nicosia emerges as its spatial and sensory “other”. The juxtaposition of noise and silence, movement and stillness, further emphasizes how urban identity is constructed through perceptual difference. Although the streets of Nicosia are largely deserted, the illuminated shop windows suggest a residual presence of urban life, complicating the notion of absolute emptiness. The passage exemplifies the representation of the other by constructing meaning through relational comparison between familiar and unfamiliar

spaces, in which travel writing articulates difference through sensory and spatial contrast.

Excerpt 8 في الميناء القديم لبافوس، كان يسير الى النوارس، ويدكرني بالبصرة ونوارسها، بسفن
مينائها الأكثر عددا، وبخارتها الآتين من كل مكان. (Yusuf, 1994: 114)

*Fī al-mīnā'i al-qadīm li-Bāfūs, kāna yasīru ilā an-nawārisi, wa
yudhakkiruni bi-al-Baṣrah wa nawārisihā, bisufuni mīnā'ihā al-
akthar 'adadan, wa bibaḥḥāratihā al-ātina min kulli makānin.*

'At the old harbor of Paphos, he walked toward the seagulls, reminding me of Basra and its own seagulls, with harbor ships that were far greater in number, and sailors arriving from every corner of the world.'

This excerpt depicts the representation of the "other" through a comparative spatial and memory relationship between Paphos Harbor and Basra. The sight of seagulls in Paphos serves as a sensory trigger, activating the narrator's memory of Basra, where similar maritime elements are associated with a denser, more dynamic harbor environment. Through this associative process, Paphos is perceived not as an isolated space but as a relational site whose meaning emerges through comparison with a familiar geographical reference. The imagery of ships arriving from various destinations further reinforces the harbor as a transnational space of mobility and encounter. In contrast, Basra serves as an affective benchmark of familiarity, memory, and cultural rootedness, while Paphos becomes the spatial "other" interpreted through remembrance. In travel writing theory, this excerpt also shows how the representation of the other is constructed through relational geography, in which spatial identity is produced through memory-driven comparisons between familiar and unfamiliar maritime environments.

DISCUSSION

Travel writing is an inherently complex genre. Initially, it focused on scientific observation, cultural description, and the documentation of both culture and nature. Subsequently, the genre underwent a paradigm shift toward subjective experience, landscape aesthetics, and personal reflection (Thompson, 2019). Currently, travel writing encompasses both non-fictional accounts and literary works that narrate journeys to unfamiliar locales (Perkins, 2025). By applying travel writing theory, the short story *Nīqūsiyā* can be categorized as a travelogue, as it incorporates the core elements of reporting the world, revealing the self, and representing the other.

In the short story *Nīqūsiyā*, the dimension of reporting the world is realized through detailed observational narration and empirical references, which create a documentary effect and establish the narrator's authority as a witness to the travel experience (Thompson, 2019). Concrete details such as local currency, seasonal conditions, immigration procedures, and banking requirements present Cyprus as a space structured by administrative and institutional systems. These findings confirm Thompson's argument that travel writing constructs authenticity through factual observation and selective description rather than through neutral transcription. They also confirm Insani & Hindun's (2022) observation that travel narrative documents geographical and social realities through concrete description, while extending Utami &

Primadani's (2024) argument by demonstrating that spatial representation in the short story *Nīqūsiyā* simultaneously conveys ideological and geopolitical meanings. In this respect, the analysis supports Tally's (2020) concept of literary cartography, in which narrative transforms physical locations into meaningful, mappable representations.

The findings further demonstrate that the apparent objectivity of travel writing is mediated by the narrator's subjective selection of details. Descriptions of Nicosia's compact layout, the United Nations checkpoint, and the no-man's-land reconstruct the city as a legible yet politically divided urban space. At the same time, sensory depictions of Paphos render the place a tangible, experiential reality. In contrast to previous studies that primarily approach *Nīqūsiyā* as a narrative of emotional recovery, structural transformation, and reader response (Rofiqi & Munjiah, 2025; Ramadhan & Rohanda, 2024). This study shows that the text systematically constructs space as an observable, administratively regulated, and historically situated world. The findings extend the application of Thompson's framework by demonstrating that the documentary logic of travel writing operates in both conventional travelogues and modern Arabic short stories. Consequently, *Nīqūsiyā* can be understood as a form of literary cartography in which individual mobility maps broader spatial and ideological structures.

In *Nīqūsiyā*, travel experience becomes a narrative medium through which the protagonist's evolving identity and emotional consciousness are gradually revealed, demonstrating that it functions both to describe external places and to disclose the traveler's inner transformation (Thompson, 2011). The contrast between the loud laugh of the past and the tearful gaze of compassion in Nicosia signals a profound shift in the narrator's emotional disposition. Likewise, the recollection of orchards, streams, and fruit-laden landscapes in distant Basra shows how the journey activates memories that reconnect the narrator with a lost homeland and a formative personal history. These findings confirm Thompson's travel-writing framework, which holds that travel writing often reveals more about the traveler than about the places described. They also support Sharifi-Ahmadipour & Sordé-Martí's (2024) contention that displacement can intensify self-awareness and reshape identity through experiences of mobility and exile.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that spatial experience in the short story *Nīqūsiyā* does not simply host the narrator's reflection; it actively enables emotional transformation and the discovery of suppressed memories. In this respect, the findings extend Al-Dahiyat & Majdoubeh's (2023) discussion of Yusuf's exilic imagination by showing how specific locations mediate inner change, and they also extend Assadi & Naamneh's (2018) emphasis on mythic and intellectual dimensions by foregrounding the role of everyday spatial experience in shaping subjectivity. Unlike studies that focus primarily on ideological expression or symbolic structures (Rofiqi & Munjiah, 2025; Ramadhan & Rohanda, 2024). This study demonstrates that identity in *Nīqūsiyā* is constructed through the dynamic interaction among memory, emotion, and place. The short story thus repositions travel writing as a narrative practice in which mobility becomes a means of reconstructing the self and transforming exile into a site of emotional and existential renewal.

The representation of unfamiliar places in *Nīqūsiyā* is shaped through the narrator's comparisons with Damascus and Basra, demonstrating that travel writing constructs the "other" through cultural memory and prior experience (Thompson, 2011). The contrast between the lively streets of Damascus and the quiet, sparsely populated avenues of Nicosia reveals that foreign space is interpreted relationally rather than perceived in isolation. Similarly, the old harbor of Paphos evokes memories of Basra, where the image of seagulls serves as an associative link connecting the present

observation to experience. These findings confirm Thompson's argument that representations of the "other" are shaped by the traveler's own assumptions, memories, and cultural references. They also extend [Jasim's \(2024\)](#) discussion of Sa'di Yusuf's exilic memory by demonstrating that remembered places continue to structure the narrator's interpretation of new environments.

In this stage, the analysis shows that the "other" in *Nīqūsiyā* does not emerge as a neutral reality but as a comparative construction produced through acts of juxtaposition and recollection. By using home spaces as interpretive benchmarks, the narrator assigns meaning to foreign locations and organizes them within a hierarchy of familiarity and difference. The findings extend [Al-Dahiyat & Majdoubah's \(2023\)](#) discussion of Yusuf's geographical imagination by illustrating how spatial comparison becomes a narrative strategy for negotiating exile and cultural displacement. Unlike previous studies that emphasize ideological expression or emotional recovery ([Rofiqi & Munjiah, 2025](#); [Ramadhan & Rohanda, 2024](#)), this research demonstrates that the alterity in *Nīqūsiyā* is constructed through the dynamic interaction between memory, identity, and cross-cultural perception. The short story thus repositions travel writing as a relational practice in which understanding the foreign world depends upon continual dialogue between the traveler's past and present spatial experiences.

This study indicates that Thompson's framework of reporting the world, revealing the self, and representing the other provides an effective analytical model for examining the elements of travel writing in modern Arabic short stories. Methodologically, the findings show that Thompson's categories are not limited to conventional travelogues but can also illuminate how mobility, memory, and cross-cultural encounters are narrated within fictional form. Textually, the analysis repositions *Nīqūsiyā* as more than a short story about travel and exile; it emerges as a literary space in which geographical observation, emotional transformation, and cultural comparison interact to construct spatial and ideological meaning. These findings suggest that Arabic fiction can serve as a productive site for interdisciplinary studies linking travel writing, exile literature, and literary geography.

CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of the short story *Nīqūsiyā* using Carl Thompson's travel-writing framework, it can be concluded that the text exhibits the characteristics of travel writing through three fundamental elements: reporting the world, revealing the self, and representing the other. By reporting the world, the author presents a foreign world in a documentary fashion, using empirical, administrative, geographical, and sensory details, yet it remains inseparable from subjective experience. Through revealing the self, the text demonstrates that travel functions as a medium for self-reflection and the transformation of subjectivity. The experience of mobility produces knowledge about the external world and triggers emotional shifts and self-awareness within the author. Travel becomes an existential space that shapes identity through interaction with unfamiliar environments and new experiences. Furthermore, through representing the other, the text constructs representations of foreign spaces by comparing them with the space of origin, which is already an integral part of the author's memory and identity. Overall, this text integrates claims of objectivity with subjective experience. These findings indicate that travel writing is a complex genre that reports on newly visited spaces, constructs self-identity, and represents the "other" through the author's distinct perspective.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that warrant consideration in academic reflection and as a basis for future research development. Firstly, the study focuses exclusively on a single literary text. While a narrow focus allows for in-depth analysis, it limits the generalizability of the findings to other works of travel writing. Each text carries distinct historical, cultural, and narrative contexts; therefore, the results of this study cannot represent the overall characteristics of travel writing within the broader context of Arabic literature. Secondly, this research relies on a single primary theoretical framework: Carl Thompson's travel-writing framework. Although effective, a single approach restricts exploration of other dimensions that could influence the representation of space and identity within the text. Lastly, this study is centered on textual analysis. It does not extensively examine the author's historical and biographical contexts, which could provide a broader understanding of the text's production. Consequently, these limitations indicate that this study is a preliminary step toward understanding the short story *Niqūsiyā* as part of travel writing, leaving ample opportunity for more expansive and multidimensional analyses in future research.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author designed the research idea and concept, conducted the analysis, wrote the paper, and translated it. The second author contributed to data collection, analysis, and proofreading. The third author validated the Arabic-language data and their translations to ensure linguistic and semantic accuracy. The fourth author reviewed the article with particular attention to its linguistic quality and English translation.

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