

Desert Narratives in Ibrahim Al-Koni's The Bleeding of the Stone in light of Augé's Theorization of 'Place' and 'Non-Place'

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of desert narratives in shaping the characters of insiders and outsiders in Ibrahim Al-Koni's The Bleeding of the Stone. Drawing on Marc Augé's anthropological concepts of "place" and "non-place", it examines how the desert is portrayed as a "place" for insiders like Asouf and his family, who find a space for constructing their genuine identities and as a "non-place" for outsiders like Cain, who fails to assimilate with the narrative of the desertic landscape and its inhabitants. The analysis reveals two distinct desert narratives in the novel: one that presents the desert as a symbolic, contemplative space for those who belong, and the second one portrays it as a wasteland of mystery for outsiders. The study highlights the desert's significance as a site for identity construction and the contrasting experiences of insiders and outsiders in navigating its landscape.

Keywords: Al-Koni, desert narratives, Marc Augé, The Bleeding of Stone.

سرديات الصحراء في رواية إبراهيم الكوني نزيف الحجر في ضوء تنظير أوجيه للمكان
واللامكان

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الملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الدور الذي لعبته سرديات الصحراء في تشكيل شخصيات المحليين والدخلاء في رواية إبراهيم الكوني "نزيف الحجر". وبالاعتماد على مفاهيم مارك أوجيه الأنثروبولوجية عن "المكان" و "اللامكان"، تقوم الدراسة على كيفية تصوير الصحراء باعتبارها "مكاناً" للمحليين مثل "عاصوف" وعائلته، الذين يجدون مساحة لبناء هوياتهم الحقيقية، في حين "لا مكان" للدخلاء مثل "كين"، الذي فشل في الاندماج مع سردية البيئة الصحراوية وسكانها. يكشف التحليل عن سرديتين صحراوييتين متميزتين في الرواية: إحداهما تقدم الصحراء كمكان رمزي تأملي لأولئك الذين ينتمون إليها، والثانية تصورهما كأرض قاحلة غامضة للدخلاء. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على أهمية الصحراء كموقع لبناء الهوية والتجارب المتناقضة للمحليين والدخلاء في التنقل عبرها. الكلمات المفتاحية : الكوني، سرديات الصحراء، مارك أوجيه، نزيف الحجر.

INTRODUCTION

The desert, a vast and enigmatic landscape, has captivated human imagination for millennia. Auden argues in his book *The Desert in Modern Literature and Philosophy: Wasteland Aesthetics* (2020) that the desert is not a place but a way of being and a way of thinking. It is the space of the unknown, the uncharted, the unmapped. It is the place where the old world is left behind, and the new one emerges. It is the place where thought can roam free, unencumbered by the constraints of history and tradition. It is the place where the absolute can be apprehended, where the void can be stared into, and where the self can be lost and found (Tynan, 2020). On the other hand, Bahaa Taher, in his novel *Sunset Oasis* (2006), stated that "The desert is a space in which people discover themselves" (24). According to Taher, the desert is a vast, desolate space characterized mainly by an unbroken expanse of desert sand that stretches to the horizon and where the individual is forced to confront the harsh realities of life and death.

The desert has long held significance as both a space and place in literature. As an unfamiliar environment characterized by scarcity and hardship, the desert landscape provides authors with symbolic opportunities to explore themes of isolation, struggle, and human

resilience. Several scholarly works have examined the desert in different literary works from different disciplinary perspectives. For instance, Yeh's "Travel and Desert Landscape in The Sheltering Sky" (Yeh, 2016) presents a multifaceted perspective on the desert as both a tangible geographical place and an abstract, imaginary landscape in *The Sheltering Sky*. However, analyzing the representation and impact of the desert as "place" on characters in Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990), particularly in light of Marc Augé's (1995) concepts of "place" and "non-place" has been overlooked in past examinations.

This paper uses two theoretical constructs to shed light on contrasting narratives of the desert portrayed in the novel. The first is Augé's concept of "place", exemplified by how Indigenous desert people like Asouf experience the desert as their "place". Asouf demonstrates an intimate bond with and reverence for the desert as an inherent part of his identity and culture. He defends this sacred "place" with his life due to his profound sense of belonging and connection to the desert. Augé further elaborates on the distinction between place and non-place, stating, "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place". (Augé, 1995, 77-78)

The second construct employed is Augé's related idea of the "non-place". This is used to analyze the outsiders who fail to appreciate the desert's deep significance as a "place". Characters such as Cain enter the desert lacking genuine historical or cultural ties to the desert. As such, they disrupt desert people through actions motivated by self-interest rather than respect for the desert as a meaningful "place" intrinsically tied to indigenous identity and spirituality. Drawing upon Augé's differentiation of "place" from "non-place", he explains how differing levels of attachment to and understanding of a setting influence its portrayal. This theoretical framework effectively highlights alternative narratives of the desert

emerging from insider versus outsider perspectives represented in the selected literary work. The current study is significant as it applies Auge's concepts of "place" and "non-place" to the study of desert narratives in Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* (1990). By closely analyzing the narratives of the desert through the lenses of "place" and "non-place", new insights will be gained into the novel's representation and metaphorical uses of this space and their role in shaping the characters' identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Bleeding of the Stone is a 1990 novel by Libyan author Ibraheem Al-Koni that explores the mystical, spiritual traditions of the desert and is set entirely within the immense sands of the desert. The nonlinear narrative of the desert impacts the characters. The desert takes on symbolic meanings concerning concepts like fate, spirituality, community, and humanity's relationship with the natural world. Through magical realist storytelling, Al-Koni presents the desert as integral to understanding characters and their outlooks within an Arabic cultural context, which reflects the Arabic narrative of the desert and its impact on the characters. In this section, we review the past studies that have been conducted on Ibraheem Al-Koni's novel to identify areas that could be further examined.

Mythologically, Amira El-Zein's "Mythological Tuareg Gods in Ibrahim Al-Koni's Work" (2015) approaches the novel analytically to interpret the role of Tuareg mythology within this novel. She focuses on how Al-Koni weaves the myths of the Tuareg people through "a system of literary symbols and metaphors" to explore universal themes. Similarly, Elena Imen Carruba's "Mythical Realism in North African Fiction: Ibrahim Al-Koni's *Gold Dust* and *The Bleeding of the Stone*" (Carruba, 2018) examines the works also from the perspective of mythical realism. She argues that "myth is the main feature of magical realism in Al-Koni's

work". Carruba seeks to move beyond the concept of magical realism and defines Al-Koni's style as mythical realism. Furthermore, Göran Larsson's "Sufism in the Contemporary Arabic Novel" (2014) approaches the study of Sufism in contemporary Arabic novels by analyzing works from seven prominent Arabic authors. He examines "how these leading figures in contemporary Arabic literature make use of Sufism and Islam as references or focal points in their literary works". (Larsson, 2014)

In different terms, Susan Mchugh's "Hybrid Species and Literatures: Ibrahim Al-Koni's 'Composite Apparition'" (2012) investigates Ibrahim al-Koni's novels *The Bleeding of the Stone*, *Gold Dust*, and *Anubis* through the lens of animism and human-animal hybridity. She outlines how Al-Koni "uses scenes of humans transforming into animals" (Mchugh, 2012). In similar terms, Fatima Moolla's "Desert ethics, myths of nature and novel form in the narratives of Ibrahim Al-Koni" (2015) approaches Al-Koni's novels through the lens of desert symbolism and environmentalism. In her analysis of *The Seven Veils of Seth*, *Anubis*, and *The Bleeding of the Stone*, Moolla examines how "the natural world is viewed through the lens of the mythical, encompassing the religious worlds of both Tuareg animism as well as monotheism represented by Islam and early Christianity". (Moolla, 2015, 241)

In a different sense, Meg Furniss Weisberg, in his research paper, "Spiritual Symbolism in the Sahara: Ibrahim Al-Koni's Nazīf al-Ḥajar" (2015), provides a nuanced interdisciplinary reading of how the Tuareg author employs Saharan Islamic mystical, and Buddhist traditions to challenge Western literary and philosophical paradigms. Furthermore, Jehan Farouk Fouad, Saeed Alwakeel's "Representations of the Desert in Silko's *Ceremony*, and Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*" (2013) provide a comparative analysis of the representations of the desert in Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* and Ibrahim Al-Koni's novel *The*

Bleeding of the Stone. Both novels are seen to transcend the physical depiction of the desert, transforming it into an existential realm that raises ontological and epistemological questions about human existence. From a postcolonial point of view, Lava Asaad, in her article "A Sacred Covenant: Islamic Environmentalism in Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*" (2020), Asaad asserted an insightful analysis of Islamic environmental themes in Al-Koni's novel *The Bleeding of the Stone*. He situates the novel within postcolonial and ecocritical frameworks. Although there have been some studies about Ibrahim Al-Koni's novels, including *The Bleeding of the Stone*, from different perspectives such as postcolonial, Sufism, Tuareg mythology, and composite apparitions, none of them have adequately highlighted the desert as a 'place' and space for its people and how it really matters for them or its positive impact on the characters in shaping their identity. While some papers slightly discuss the desert setting, there has been no research, according to available sources, focusing specifically on the desert in Al-Koni's work or its constructive influence or applying Auge's concepts of "place" and "non-place". All these reviewed articles differ from the current paper in terms of the framework applied and point of interest.

DISCUSSION

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

Ibrahim Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* vividly depicts the lifestyle and hardships faced by the Tuareg people living in the Libyan deserts. Through lyrical descriptions of the desert landscape, Al-Koni illustrates the deep interconnectedness between the Tuaregs and their desert as a place. He says in the novel that "No one sees into things as desert people do, no one can match them in reading the secrets of the unknown" (Al-Koni, 1995,71). This quote offers insights into how indigenous desert communities perceive and relate to their desert as a

narrative of space.

It highlights the profound connection and interdependence between these people and the desert. Thus, desert peoples have developed a narrative of intimacy with the desert as a space for articulating their being, whereas outsiders fail to see this connectedness. In Augé's view, places are supposed to provide their people with shelters, refugee camps, or shantytowns threatened with demolition, which offer their inhabitants provisional protection, while "non-places are inhabited by individuals who go through them or pass them by, but they are not meant to occupy a non-place infinitely. It is mainly because non-places are perceived as transitory points; they are measured in units of time." (Augé 1995, 78) Moreover, Al-Koni employs a powerful metaphor to convey the Bedouin's deep connection to the desert and their unwavering determination to protect it and their way of life due to its impact on their lifestyle. Augé (1995) states, "Place and non-place do not integrate. This non-integration makes the nature and quality of connections between places problematic. The important question is not so much whether to search for genuine physical solutions for connections between places and non-places" (79). The desert in the novel can be seen as both a real homeland (place) and an empty space (non-place).

For the native people, it is very much a home – they are deeply connected to this land because their lives and culture are rooted here, and the desert matters to them. Nevertheless, for outsiders just passing through or doing any temporary job there, the desert does not feel like a true place at all. It is more of a vacant non-place that they are not part of and do not belong to in the same way. The narratives of the desert are going to be examined in Al-Koni's novel through the characters of Asouf, his father, and his mother as representatives of the Tuareg people, as well as the desert visitors Cain, Masoud, and John Parker.

Asouf, the central character in Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone*, is established as a solitary inhabitant of the desert region of Massak Saffat in the Libyan desert. Having grown up isolated from other people in the desert with his father and mother, Asouf comes to embody the ideals and worldview of traditional desert people. Throughout the novel, Al-Koni uses Asouf to present the narratives of desert life and perceptions of the desert from the viewpoint of someone who considers it as home. I am running a few minutes late; my previous meeting is running over. 'place' and has an intimate knowledge of its nature. Asouf's character also explores the impact of living alone in the desert space for so long and the significance that the desert holds for him both physically and spiritually. From the very beginning of the novel, Asouf has been raised in utter solitude, having grown up isolated in the desert with only his parents for company. This upbringing shaped him to value independence and self-reliance above all else. When first introduced, Asouf is depicted herding his goats alone as a young man:

It was only when he started praying that the male goats decided to butt one another right there in front of him. Even so, he had no neighbors to help him, or to take care of his needs when he was ill. There was only this endless wilderness all around. (Al-Koni, 1995, 7)

The novel establishes Asouf's harmonious relationship with the desert's rhythms through simple acts like him beginning his prayers in the evening when "the flaming disk of the sun sinking slowly down from the depths of the sky". His spirituality is intertwined with the natural world surrounding the ancient "Wadi Matkhandoush" where "through thousands of years had faced the merciless sun." (Al-Koni, 1995, 9). According to Augé, the "non-places" that characterize hypermodernity can be defined in contrast to places. Specifically, Augé asserts that if a place can be understood as having relational, historical, and identity-forming dimensions, then a space lacking these defining qualities can be

considered a non-place. (1995)

This conceptualization of place and non-place provides useful context for understanding Asouf's relationship with the desert. Asouf lives in harmony with the desert environment, with which he shares long-standing historical and cultural connections stemming from his ancestral heritage. Through these relational and historical dimensions, the desert takes on significance as Asouf's homeplace rather than merely a non-place devoid of meaning.

Likewise, Foucault (1984) describes the heterotopia space as "privileged or sacred or forbidden places that serve as sites of exclusion for those in a state of crisis in relation to broader society" (26). Such spaces offer a feeling of belonging within a sheltered location while also rendering one exposed and vulnerable. Asouf's role as a guardian of the desert in the novel represents a form of heterotopic space, although Asouf is not an outcast of society. Yet, throughout the novel, Asouf takes on the task of protecting the desert's secrets and inhabitants from outside intrusion. This is evident when the archeologist asks Asouf to safeguard the ancient paintings in Wadi Matkhandoush, leading Asouf to understand the cultural and historical importance of preserving the desert's heritage. In assuming this guardian role, Asouf at once belongs to the sheltered space of the desert while also standing apart from other spaces as one charged with its exposed protection. Thus, through Foucault's lens, Asouf personifies a heterotopia by virtue of his liminal position guarding the desert.

"From now on," the department official told him, "you're the guardian of the Wadi Matkhandoush. You'll be our eyes here. A lot of people will come from all races and religions to look at these ancient things. You must watch them. Don't let them steal the stones. See they don't spoil the rocks. These rocks are a great treasure, and these paintings are our country's pride. Keep your eyes open. People are greedy, ready to grab

anything. If they can, they'll steal our rocks to sell them in their own country, for thousands, or millions even. Keep your eyes peeled! You're the guardian." (Al-Koni, 1995, 13)

Asouf refuses monetary payment for his guarding role, which comes under the influence of the narratives he is raised by in the desert that he is spiritually united with it. Thus, protecting the desert is more than a job for Asouf – it is a personal responsibility and commitment to his way of life. Living freely in isolation like his father taught him, he does not want to be financially dependent on outsiders. As an insider with extensive knowledge of the desert, he feels a duty to shield it from harm through tourism and treasure hunters. When Christian tourists start visiting the site, Asouf ensures they respect the desert by not damaging the rock paintings. He welcomingly shares his culture's history but remains wary of outsiders, continuing to spend much time alone in the desert even after taking the guardian role. This portrayal suggests that Asouf feels a deep spiritual and cultural connection to the desert that he lives to protect for future generations.

Moreover, Fouad and Alwakeel asserted that Asouf demonstrates an ability to care for himself without relying on others, which stems from his upbringing in isolation. "When his parents die, leaving him utterly alone, he is forced to assume full responsibility for himself from a young age" (Fouad and Alwakeel, 2013, 50). However, he also demonstrates resilience, managing to survive on his own through hard work and an intimate understanding of desert survival gained from his father. After his father's death, Asouf continues living a solitary existence. His intense discomfort around other people also suggests he has become uncomfortable with any intrusion on his solitude after so long living apart:

He didn't sleep at all that night. How was he, who'd never mixed with people, to talk with them, make his case to others? How could he, who

was afraid of people, to go near them, when the mere thought of going among them terrified him? (Al-Koni, 1995, 31)

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

Further, when outsiders like Cain entered Asouf's desert space, they disrupted Asouf's way of life and sense of safety in the wilderness he knew so well. Even as modern technology like helicopters started penetrating the desert, Asouf resisted seeing the desert transformed from an empty, spiritual place into one claimed and used by outsiders. Susan Rasmussen (2005) has noted that the imposition of boundaries and national identities has severely limited Tuareg practices and culture, often in ways directly involving their environment. They pointed out that "the French colonial administrators disrupted many local systems of adaptation and the natural ecological balance of the Sahara and Sahel" (Susan Rasmussen 2005, 69). For Asouf, the desert is a sacred ground that holds secrets and spirits from ancient times, a space in which he finds meaning, peace, and identity that he struggles to protect from encroachment. Asouf's isolation in the desert causes him to develop a deep connection with the desert and animals. He comes to see the Waddan not just as a beast but as "his father." The harsh desert environment is also what ultimately leads to Asouf's mother's death and pushes him to interact with others he normally avoids, like Cain.

As we mentioned before, Cain is introduced as an outsider to the desert, whose presence disrupts the harmonious relationship between Asouf and the desert. Cain's fascination with the desert is not one of reverence or spiritual attunement but rather a commodifying attachment

through his carving of meat, especially the 'Waddan' meat. According to Augé, non-places refer to places that serve as transit hubs, where individuals do not necessarily establish meaningful connections with one another (1995). Al-Koni presents the character of Cain as an outsider of the desert place through his outsider perspective and exploitation of the desert as a 'non-place' and its people. Cain has no meaningful connection to the desert, unlike Asouf, who represents a deep connection and understanding of the desert as a 'place' and home.

This contrast is established from Cain's first appearance, as he asks Asouf about the ancient rock art paintings, revealing his ignorance of their profound significance: "Have you come to look at the sights?" Asouf innocently asks to which Cain answers with derisive laughter: "The sights," he said scornfully when he'd finally recovered. "What business do we have with sights?" (Al-Koni, 1995, 10). Cain's disdain for the "sights" that captivate tourists and spark wows in the locals like Asouf previews his violation of the desert's sanctity. This can be further understood through what Augé asserted that "non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social" (1995, 94). Moreover, non-places evolve in areas where humans from diverse, frequently distant places and backgrounds connect, traverse, and encounter one another. Non-places are created by the interactions between humans and the areas they occupy. (Augé 1995)

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

impending violation of the desert's sanctity, as he fails to grasp or respect its profound meaning and significance.

Moreover, Cain's failure to understand the symbolic and spiritual significance of the animal 'Waddan' proves his "non-place" attachment to the desert. He could not understand the presence of the Waddan, which embodies the untamed essence of the desert space, evoking a sense of mystery and reverence. Through the actions of the central character, Al-Koni skillfully weaves a narrative that celebrates the inextricable connection between human beings and their natural surroundings:

Then what Asouf had been fearing all day happened. From behind a rock, just opposite him, a Waddan peered out, following their movements in the wadi. Asouf quickly turned away, thanking God Cain and Masoud hadn't noticed the mighty animal. To hide his confusion and distract their attention, he raised his head and began his afternoon prayer with a loud "God is great!" He sensed the animal was still there behind him, watching them from the hollow in the rock. The poor beast had scented his presence and felt safe from the guests, for the Waddan had begun to trust him now, grazing close to him in large herds. Ever since he'd stopped eating meat. (Al-Koni, 1995, 63)

Asouf's fervent desire to protect the Waddan from harm reflects his deep reverence for the desert and its inhabitants. The Waddan, described as a "mighty animal," is revered as a sacred entity, and its appearance fills Asouf with a sense of responsibility. Asouf's swift actions to divert Cain and Massoud's attention from Waddan's presence, even at the risk of confusing them, highlight the profound respect he holds for Waddan. Knowing Cain and Massoud had a craving for eating the meat of the Waddan, Asouf was pretending he did not see the animal because he wanted to save it from them. Asouf's decision to abstain from eating meat further solidifies his bond with the Waddan and the desert and reflects the narrative of the desert people. This gesture symbolizes a

harmonious coexistence between the human and the desert, which reflects how the desert still matters. It is also reflected when Asouf was praying for the failure of the outsiders in noticing the Waddan, for he knows well the narrative of the "non-place" people, who are not interested in the narratives of the desert, instead in their exploitative narratives. That's why, the author entitled this chapter "Prayer" to signify the sacredness of the desert for the "place" people. Through this narrative, Al-Koni invites readers to contemplate the desert in a way like Augé's concept of "place". The desert, with its unique characteristics and the presence of the Waddan, becomes a profound "place" – a space imbued with cultural, historical, and personal significance. It is a space that holds meaning and identity for Asouf and his people, a place that demands reverence and protection. In contrast, the "non-place" can be interpreted as the encroaching forces of modernity and industrialization that threaten to disrupt this delicate balance.

Asouf's actions, therefore, transcend mere animal protection; they represent a broader effort to safeguard the desert as a "place", a repository of cultural heritage, ecological balance, and spiritual reverence. By shielding the Waddan, Asouf is not only protecting a symbolic creature but also preserving the very essence of the desert, a place that holds deep personal and collective meaning. The final chapter of the novel, entitled "The Bleeding of the Stone," sums up the end of Asouf's life. It underscores how deeply the desert still matters to Asouf and how devotedly he protects it until his dying breath. When Cain crucified Asouf on the rock, in his final moments, "his body was thrust into the hollow of the rock, merging with the body of the Waddan painted there" (Al-Koni, 1995, 7). This symbolizes how Asouf has become one with the desert spirit, sacrificing himself to safeguard its sacred lands and creatures. As the passage states, "The Waddan's horns were coiled around his own neck like a snake. The masked

priest's hand still touched his shoulders, as if blessing him with secret rites." (Al-Koni, 1995, 99). This quotation illustrates Asouf achieving spiritual unity with the desert through his martyrdom. The desert remains a powerful, almost mythical force in the lives of its inhabitants, personified by Asouf. As a "protector" of the desert and its creatures, Asouf's death takes on symbolic significance – he sacrifices himself to safeguard the desert. This reflects the enduring narrative of 'place' desert peoples for whom the desert is inextricably tied to their identity and way of life. Cain, as an outsider lacking an understanding of the desert's significance, sees only its resources as something to be exploited. He urges Masoud:

"Are you mad?" he shrieked. "Or is this your idea of a joke? We've crossed deserts, we've put up with hunger and thirst. And now we're supposed to go back to the oases, without any Waddan? Go back there empty-handed? Get off! Get away from me!" (Al-Koni, 1995, 98)

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

Then Cain climbed the rock from the flatter side and, laughing wildly into the face of the sun, bent over the herdsman's head where it hung bowed. Taking hold of the beard, he passed the knife over Asouf's neck in the manner of one well used to slaughter, one who'd slaughtered all the herds of gazelles in the Red Hamada. (Al-Koni, 1995, 99)

This atrocious crime against Asouf highlights how Cain fails to understand the desert and its "place" people. Asouf embodies the guarding of the desert spirit, and with his death, the desert unleashes its

wrath, the "jinni maidens" lament, and "the mountain was rent" by storms. This vividly conveys how the desert avenges the violation of its sacred protector. Cain and Masoud, as outsiders, are driven by an almost obsessive "carving for meat," particularly the Waddan, which represents the desert's essence. Their escalating frenzy leading to Asouf's murder highlights their inability to comprehend or respect the desert's sanctity, viewing it merely as a source to exploit.

Still the blood poured over the surface of the stone buried in the lap of the sand. The murderer had no eyes to see how the sky had darkened, how clouds had blocked out the desert sun ... Masoud leaped into the truck and switched on the engine. At the same moment great drops of rain began to beat on its windows, washing away, too, the blood of the man crucified on the face of the rock. (Al-Koni, 1995, 100)

This quote vividly describes the tragic death of Asouf, the protector of the desert, who is murdered by Cain. Asouf's bloody sacrifice symbolizes how the desert still profoundly matters despite encroaching threats from outsiders. The quotation effectively captures Asouf's final moments as his "blood poured over the surface of the stone buried in the lap of the sand." He is literally crucified, taking on Christ-like imagery as a savior who died for the greater cause of preserving the desert landscape and way of life as described through Augé's concepts of "place" and "non-place". For Asouf, the desert is a revered, identity-conferring "place", imbued with personal and cultural meaning. However, Cain and Masoud view it as an anonymous "non-place", their singular desire to acquire Wadden strips the landscape of any deeper significance. Through Asouf's martyrdom, the novel reasserts the desert's continuing relevance as a "place" intrinsically linked to certain communities, resisting the encroaching forces that would reduce it to a barren "non-place". His death does not occur in vain but serves to protect the desert's spiritual dimensions from those who cannot fathom

its essence.

Notably, as Asouf takes his final breaths, "the sky had darkened" and "clouds had blocked out the desert sun" – a dramatic shift in the natural order suggestive of the desert mourning its fallen protector. The rains then arrive to "wash away" both Asouf's blood and any evidence of Cain's crime, continuing the desert's role in absorbing the costs of humankind's transgressions upon the desert. Through his noble sacrifice, Asouf did not truly die but rather lives on as a symbol of the resilient desert dwellers refusing to relinquish their ancestral home to exploitation by outsiders. His tragic death underscores how profoundly the desert still matters to the identity narrative of its people.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Al-Koni's *The Bleeding of the Stone* presents two contrasting narratives regarding the desert. The first depicts the desert as a space for the articulation of identity and belonging for its people. The desert people demonstrate a profound connection to the desert as their home, willing to defend and sacrifice themselves for the desert, which is exemplified by the characters of Asouf, his father, and his mother. These characters embody a sense of unity with and protection for the desert "place", even at the cost of their own lives, as symbolized by Asouf's crucifixion by Cain. The study introduces Asouf's crucifixion as a powerful metaphor, paralleling the Christian belief in Christ's sacrifice for humanity's salvation. Likewise, Asouf's death symbolizes his willingness to sacrifice himself for the preservation of the desert and its indigenous way of life. Considering Augé's "place", the desert narrative matters profoundly for the 'insiders', transcending its physical boundaries to become an integral part of their identity and culture.

On the other hand, drawing from Augé's framework of "non-place", the second narrative views the desert through the lens of outsiders, the perspective of the wasteland desert narrative. Cain, Masoud, and John

Parker enter the desert without the same motivations or connections as Asouf and his family have. Their presence in the desert is driven by external interests, rendering them unable to grasp the sacredness of this place as a space that matters in shaping their destiny. The study shows that Al-Koni juxtaposes these two contrasting narratives to highlight the invisible narrative of the desert as a "place" that shapes the identities and cultures of its people. In contrast, the other narrative is introduced through the "non-place" Cain, Masoud, and Parker, whose greed fails them to understand the positive impact and spirit of the desert.

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