

# Reviving 'Desert Spirituality': Ecocritical Insights from Postcolonial Great Saharan Literature—A Case Study of al-Batoul Mahjoub's *Mined Places* (2016)

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## Abstract

This paper examines the postcolonial narratives of the Great Sahara with a specific focus on the southern Sahara of Morocco, analyzing al-Batoul Mahjoub's *Mined Places* (2016) to uncover how the region's literature addresses the lingering environmental impacts of colonial legacies. Employing a comparative literary framework, this analysis juxtaposes Mahjoub's portrayal of the Sahara against traditional Hassani writings and broader postcolonial literary traditions of the Great Sahara. Central to this exploration are the dual themes of spatial longing for the desert and the persistent scars of Spanish colonialism—marked by forced urbanization and the lingering threat of landmines—highlighted through the narrative lens of Mahjoub's novel. The paper argues that *Mined Places* contributes to the discourse on postcolonial ecocriticism by reinvigorating the concept of desert spirituality. This concept, as outlined by Aidan Tynan in 2022, offers a profound aesthetic and metaphysical response to the historical portrayals of the Sahara as a barren wasteland. Through an exploration of Mahjoub's evident yearning for a desert spirituality absent in contemporary society, this study highlights how Saharan literature counters imperial colonial misrepresentations, advocating for a reevaluated perception of the Sahara in modern ecological and cultural discussions. This way, the article highlights how Great Saharan literature, through its revival of desert spirituality, shapes narratives of environmental consciousness, enhancing our understanding of the Sahara's role in global and environmental justice discourses. This, by extension, also emphasizes the significant contribution of Saharan postcolonial literature to the broader dialogue on healing from the impacts of colonial and capitalist exploitations.

**Keywords:** Desert spirituality, Saharan postcolonial literature, colonial legacy, urbanization, environmental disruption