

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.11425119

COFFEE AS MOTIF IN SAUDI FICTION: RITUAL, HOSPITALITY, HERITAGE, AND MEMORY

Faiz Algobaei¹ and Elham Alzain^{2*}

¹Sciences and General Studies Department, Al-Fayha Private College, Jubail, Saudi Arabia,

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3446-1353>

²Applied College, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6330-3100>

Received: 11/11/2025

Accepted: 18/11/2025

Corresponding Author: Elham Alzain

(ealzain@kfu.edu.sa)

ABSTRACT

*This article investigates coffee (al-qahwa) as a recurring literary motif in contemporary Saudi fiction, focusing on Badriah Albeshr's *Hend wa Alaskar* (Hend and the Soldiers, 2006) and Mohammed Hasan Alwan's *Al-Qundus* (The Beaver, 2011). While coffee is widely recognized as a ritual and heritage emblem in Saudi Arabia, it has received limited scholarly attention as a literary device. This study addresses this gap by examining how coffee, as a recurring motif, shapes narrative meaning and cultural identity in Saudi fiction, thereby contributing a new intersection of motif theory and cultural semiotics to Arabic literary studies. Drawing on motif theory, semiotics of culture, heritage studies, and memory studies, the analysis situates coffee as more than descriptive detail: it is a recurrent sign that encodes cultural values and structures narrative meaning. Close readings of the novels show that coffee functions in four interrelated ways. As ritual code, it organizes hospitality and initiates storytelling. As a spatial marker, it mediates thresholds of belonging between home, workplace, café, and life abroad. As a heritage token, it encodes continuity through Najdi preferences, Khawlani cultivation, and household variations. As a mnemonic anchor, it evokes memory and nostalgia, linking taste and aroma to kinship, inheritance, and life away from home. The study demonstrates that Saudi fiction mobilizes coffee motifs to dramatize hospitality, belonging, continuity, and memory, enriching motif research and cultural criticism. It suggests comparative research on other everyday practices in Gulf and Arabic literature.*

KEYWORDS: Coffee Motifs, Saudi Fiction, Ritual and Hospitality, Cultural Heritage, Memory and Nostalgia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coffee (al-qahwa) is among the most enduring emblems of Arabian culture. In Saudi Arabia, it is not merely a drink, but a practice steeped in ritual, hospitality, and memory. Its preparation and serving mark occasions from family gatherings to public ceremonies, while its aroma and etiquette have become deeply embedded in the cultural imagination. In 2015, UNESCO inscribed Arabic coffee on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list, acknowledging its significance as a cultural expression of generosity and continuity within Saudi Arabia and the wider Arab region (Alshehaby, 2024). National initiatives such as the Saudi Ministry of Culture's "Year of Saudi Coffee" in 2022 further highlight its centrality to identity and cultural policy (Alnafissa et al., 2024). Agricultural and economic studies confirm this significance: Khawlani coffee cultivation in Jazan and Aseer for centuries, passed across generations, embedded in tradition, and supporting livelihoods. (Al-Asmari et al., 2020; Mehrez et al., 2023).

Despite its cultural prominence, coffee has received little systematic attention as a literary motif in Saudi fiction. Motif theory defines motifs as recurrent, concrete elements gestures, objects, or images that acquire interpretive weight through repetition (Daemmrich, 1985). Frye (1957) situated motifs within archetypal criticism, linking them to shared cultural imagination, while Culler (2011) emphasized that motifs derive power from recurrence and variation across contexts. Arabic literary studies have embraced motif analysis: El-Shamy (2005) catalogued recurring units in *Alf Laylah wa Laylah*; Almujaalli (2024) demonstrated the narrative centrality of food and drink in the *Maqāmāt*; and Al-Saadi (2025) highlighted the symbolic use of comestibles in modern Arabic fiction. However, coffee has rarely been examined as a sustained narrative motif in contemporary Saudi novels despite its ubiquity.

Alshhre (2023) observes that Saudi fiction often blends local concerns with global literary forms through hybridization processes. Building on this insight, the present study examines how ritualized practices, such as coffee preparation and serving, function as cultural codes that negotiate between tradition and modernity. Coffee, materially grounded yet symbolically dense, provides an ideal case study for exploring how cultural practices are reconfigured in narrative. Its recurrence across scenes suggests that it is not a decorative detail but a motif encoding ethical relations, spatial thresholds, heritage continuity, and nostalgic memory.

This article focuses on two influential Saudi novels: Badriah Albeshr's *Hend wa Alaskar* (*Hend and the Soldiers*, 2006) and Mohammed Hasan Alwan's *Al-Qundus* (*The Beaver*, 2011). Alshhre (2023) situates *Hend and the Soldiers* within the broader project of Saudi literary hybridization, noting how Saudi writers adapt Western forms while retaining local themes. From this perspective, Albeshr's use of domestic practices, including hospitality and ritual, can be read as narrative strategies of cultural negotiation. Alwan's novel, by contrast, is celebrated for its poetic language and exploration of memory, displacement, and identity (Jawad & Zafar, 2020). Both works prominently feature coffee, though in distinct registers: *Hend and the Soldiers* foregrounds coffee as a communal practice of ritual hospitality, while *The Beaver* deploys it as a symbolic anchor of inheritance and nostalgia.

Drawing on motif theory, semiotics of culture, heritage studies, and memory studies, this study examines coffee as a literary motif in Saudi fiction. It interprets coffee through four interrelated lenses: ritual & hospitality, space and belonging, heritage and continuity, and memory and nostalgia. By analyzing these novels across the four lenses, the study aims to demonstrate how coffee functions as a recurring narrative device that dramatizes hospitality, situates belonging, preserves cultural continuity, and evokes memory, thereby enriching our understanding of how Saudi literature transforms everyday practices into motifs of narrative and cultural significance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Coffee (al-qahwa) in Saudi culture is not merely a drink but a practice that carries ritual, spatial, heritage, and mnemonic meanings. This section integrates research from literary theory, semiotics, anthropology, heritage studies, and cultural criticism to understand how Saudi fiction mobilizes coffee as a literary motif. Organized into four thematic lenses ritual and hospitality, space and belonging, heritage and continuity, and memory and nostalgia it establishes a conceptual framework that situates coffee as a narrative motif and cultural code.

2.1. Motif Theory and Narratology

Motif theory has long provided literary scholars with a framework for understanding how recurring images, objects, or actions acquire significance within narrative. Early foundational efforts, such as Aarne's (1961) motif index, treated motifs as catalogued

narrative units, while Propp (1968) analyzed their structural functions within folktales, laying the groundwork for later theoretical developments. As Daemmrich (1985) observes, motifs are concrete, recurrent units, whether gestures, words, or material objects, that serve as recognizable anchors in the text. Unlike abstract themes, motifs remain materially grounded, contributing to narrative coherence while carrying cultural codes. Frye (1957) situates motifs within an archetypal framework, showing how their recurrence across works links individual narratives to broader mythological and cultural patterns.

Later developments have emphasized recurrence as the source of interpretive weight. Culler (2011) argues that repetition produces “interpretive pressure,” as readers are compelled to discern meaning from reiterated elements. Grunina and Saltymakova (2023) refine this perspective by distinguishing between a motif as a scenario act, a repeated event such as the pouring of coffee, and a motif as an ideologeme. This cultural signifier encodes values and ideologies. This duality is particularly useful for examining Saudi fiction, where coffee appears as an observable ritual and a bearer of cultural meaning related to hospitality, belonging, continuity, and memory.

Arabic literary studies further demonstrate the applicability of motif theory to Middle Eastern texts. El-Shamy's (2005) *A motif index of Alf Laylah wa Laylah* catalogued recurrent narrative units in *The Thousand and One Nights*, illustrating how motifs transmit cultural codes across generations. Almujaalli (2024) has shown that in *Maqāmāt al-Hamadhānī*, meals and drinks are not peripheral but central to narrative organization, symbolizing wit, survival, and generosity. Similarly, the collective volume *Eating Words* (Al-Saadi, 2025) highlights how comestibles in modern Arabic fiction function as markers of memory, belonging, and cultural critique. These studies confirm that food and drink, materially grounded yet symbolically charged, operate as narrative devices of cultural expression.

Building on this theoretical and regional scholarship, the present study treats coffee in Saudi novels not as incidental description but as a recurrent motif. Its repetition across narrative scenes is read as a signal of thematic coherence and cultural embedding, encoding ritual practice, spatial belonging, heritage continuity, and mnemonic memory. Thus, Motif theory provides the foundation for interpreting coffee as a literary device mediating between narrative form and cultural meaning.

2.2. *Ritual and Hospitality*

Hospitality is one of the most enduring cultural

codes in the Arab and Islamic world, and coffee has long been its emblem. Hattox (1988) traced coffee's introduction from Yemen into Arabia and the Levant in the fifteenth century, highlighting the rise of coffeehouses as spaces of sociability and ritualized leisure. From the outset, coffee functioned as a ritual code, embodying generosity and social decorum.

Anthropological research provides theoretical grounding for this role. Douglas (1972) conceptualized meals as ordered systems that regulate inclusion and exclusion. **Coffee operates within a similar logic** its preparation, pouring, and refusal encode welcome or boundary. Stephenson (2014) extends this insight, showing that Islamic hospitality integrates ethical and cultural obligations, with coffee as its most visible practice.

Architecture and spatial studies further illustrate how hospitality is embedded in social life. Othman et al. (2015) highlight the majlis as the central hospitality space in Muslim domestic architecture, symbolizing honor and social openness. Extending their insight, the novels depict rituals of serving coffee within the majlis as a literary signal of respect and recognition. Lotman's (1990) concept of the semiosphere, as revisited by Lorusso and Sedda (2023), conceives culture as a network of sign systems. Extending this framework, the dallah, finjān, and sequence of pours in Saudi coffee rituals can be read as cultural texts, legible signs of generosity and belonging. Similarly, Albalawi (2025) shows that Saudi fiction often encodes hospitality rituals and social surveillance as narrative signs, particularly in depicting the morality police's interventions in cafés and domestic gatherings. His work underscores how ritualized practices become semiotic codes of authority, boundary, and cultural negotiation in Saudi narrative.

Recent research shows that these ritual codes adapt without losing their symbolic weight. Azzaz and Elshaer (2024) find that Arabic coffee among Saudi students continues to serve as a stimulant and bonding ritual. Urban cafés replicate these dynamics in commercial form. Hazaea and Qassem (2025) show how coffee shop signage along the road to Mecca employs semiotic resources such as dallah motifs and calligraphy to brand cultural identity, which can be read as the commercial translation of ritual symbols. In a related vein, Alshebami et al. (2024) examine how the Saudi coffee sector has become embedded in broader entrepreneurial initiatives, situating coffee within emerging networks of innovation and enterprise. Scientific analysis confirms that Saudi qahwa is typically a light roast often infused with cardamom (Rezk et al.,

2018). In ritual contexts, these sensory features are imbued with cultural meaning, functioning as signs of generosity and hospitality in practice and narrative representation.

Applied to literature, these findings suggest that coffee scenes function as ritual tokens. **Their recurrence dramatizes hospitality as a cultural script** the offering of a cup, the act of refusal, or the lingering aroma all operate as semiotic signs. Saudi novels thus transform everyday coffee rituals into motifs that stage generosity, sociability, and negotiation, linking narrative structure to cultural codes.

2.3. Space and Belonging

Coffee in Saudi culture also serves as a space and belonging marker, mediating thresholds between private and public, home and guestroom, homeland and life abroad. In domestic settings, Othman et al. (2015) show that the majlis functions as a semiotic hospitality domain, directly accessible from the entrance and thus mediating the relation between public and private spheres. In the novels, this spatial threshold is dramatized through coffee rituals that enact the transition from outside to inside. Serving coffee in such spaces is not incidental but a sign of recognition, converting architectural thresholds into semiotic boundaries of inclusion.

Urban research adds another dimension. Hazaea and Qassem (2025) demonstrate that Saudi coffee shop signage extensively uses Arabic calligraphy, dallah motifs, and other cultural references. Extending their analysis, these semiotic choices can be interpreted as scripting urban belonging through visual and textual cues, constructing space as distinctly Saudi and reaffirming cultural identity in the cityscape. Albalawi (2025) complements this view by showing how Saudi novels fictionalize the morality police's regulation of public cafés and restaurants, where encounters around coffee dramatize thresholds of belonging, surveillance, and exclusion. Such depictions highlight that coffee scenes in fiction are inseparable from broader negotiations of authority in social space.

Stylistic research reinforces this reading. Jawad and Zafar (2020) underscore the poetic and metaphorical quality of Alwan's prose, while Al-Qarni (2021) highlights the role of focalization and narrative enunciation in shaping meaning. Building on these insights, this study argues that Alwan's prose also invests everyday objects such as coffee with spatial and philosophical resonance.

In literature, tracking the recurrence of coffee across sites thresholds, guest rooms, cafés, airports

reveals how it encodes belonging. Coffee motifs situate characters within social and spatial orders, linking ritual hospitality to domestic architecture, urban identity, and memories of life abroad. They demonstrate how Saudi fiction transforms everyday practices into signs of spatial recognition and cultural continuity.

2.4. Heritage and Continuity

Coffee is a powerful emblem of heritage and continuity, embedded in Saudi cultural, agricultural, and policy frameworks. Its recognition by UNESCO as "Arabic coffee, a symbol of generosity" on the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2015) situates the practice within a global safeguarding discourse (UNESCO, 2015). Alshehaby (2024) analyzes Saudi Arabia's alignment with the 2003 UNESCO Convention, noting achievements and challenges in integrating community practices into sustainable frameworks. At the national level, the Ministry of Culture's designation of 2022 as the "Year of Saudi Coffee" institutionalized the beverage as a symbol of identity (Alnafissa et al., 2024). Alshebami et al. (2024) extend this by showing how coffee is embedded in Vision 2030's entrepreneurial agenda, positioned as a heritage emblem and a catalyst for economic diversification.

Agricultural and economic studies underscore this depth. Al-Asmari et al. (2020) document centuries of Arabica cultivation in the southwest, especially Khawlani coffee, tied to local pride and intergenerational transmission. Mehrez et al. (2023) trace the value chain of Khawlani coffee in Jazan, showing how cultivation, marketing, and consumption link economy and heritage.

Globalization introduces new negotiations. Maspul (2023) compares Saudi and Indonesian specialty coffee, showing how international protocols are balanced with local roasting and spice traditions. Whereas Hazaea and Qassem (2025) analyze coffeehouse signage as a semiotic practice negotiating identity, Alshebami et al. (2023) emphasize policy-driven entrepreneurship as another site where coffee mediates between heritage preservation and economic participation.

Urban semiotics illustrates continuity in visible form. Hazaea and Qassem (2025) document how signage across Saudi Arabia prominently deploys dallah and cup motifs as public markers of cultural identity. At the literary level, Albalawi (2022) argues that Saudi fiction is undergoing "rebranding," mobilizing heritage emblems to position itself within global literary markets. Coffee thus emerges as both a cultural practice and a symbolic shorthand for

national heritage.

In literary representation, coffee motifs in Saudi novels function as heritage tokens. References to Khawlani beans, dallahs, finjāns, and cardamom-infused brews encode continuity, linking fictional worlds to longstanding agricultural practices while reflecting modern heritage discourses. **Such motifs dramatize literature's engagement with cultural continuity** affirming the past even as they negotiate its place in a globalized present.

2.5. Memory and Nostalgia

Coffee also operates as a motif of memory and nostalgia, activating personal and collective remembrance through its sensory intensity. Food and drink are widely recognized as mnemonic triggers in literature. *Eating Words* (Al-Saadi, 2025) demonstrates how comestibles in modern Arabic fiction encode temporality, identity, and memory, staging the past within the narrative present. With its distinctive aroma, bitterness, and ritualized context, coffee exemplifies this process and emerges as a literary device for evoking continuity across generations.

Alwan's *The Beaver* is particularly illustrative. The narrator's description of coffee's bitterness as "seeping into my blood like a stubborn hereditary disease" (p. 11) frames taste as a metaphor for paternal inheritance and intergenerational memory. The differentiation of cups Sheikha's, the aunt's, or airport coffee transforms vessels into mnemonic devices that structure remembrance. Stylistic analyses highlight how Alwan elevates such material detail into philosophical reflection. Jawad and Zafar (2020) and Al-Qarni (2021) emphasize how his prose invests everyday objects like coffee with existential and spatial significance, turning sensory description into narrative meditation.

Sociocultural studies corroborate the link between coffee and embodied memory. Maspul (2025) argues that Saudi coffee rituals sustain cultural identity through repetitive practice, ensuring continuity amid globalization. Azzaz and Elshaer (2024) similarly note that among Saudi students, Arabic coffee fosters sociability and evokes continuity with cultural traditions, anchoring participants in inherited codes of belonging.

In Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers*, coffee similarly structures memory and storytelling. Morning rituals of roasting, brewing, and sharing cups generate narratives, with women's stories described as "woven around coffee" (p. 9). These scenes show how the ritual of drinking coffee becomes a framework for remembering and retelling communal histories. Memory is not only embodied in taste and aroma but also sustained in the cultural performance of coffee

gatherings.

Literary implication. Coffee's recurrence in Saudi novels produces mnemonic loops, binding the narrative present to remembered pasts. Its taste recalls kinship, its aroma evokes home, and its vessels embody continuity across generations and geographies. In this way, coffee motifs function as narrative anchors of nostalgia and remembrance, dramatizing how cultural memory is preserved, embodied, and transmitted through everyday ritual.

2.6. Integrative Synthesis and Research Gap

The review of research across four lenses demonstrates how coffee operates as a richly layered cultural sign. First, as ritual and hospitality, coffee in Saudi culture and in the novels functions as a codified practice, its preparation and serving governed by etiquette that scripts generosity, decorum, and welcome. Building on Douglas's (1972) analysis of meals as ordered systems of inclusion and exclusion, and Othman et al.'s (2015) account of the majlis as a structured space of hospitality, this ritualized serving of coffee can be read as a cultural and literary code that dramatizes belonging and respect. Within literary studies, Algobaei and Alzain (2025) identify metaphorical patterns in *Hend and the Soldiers*, including imagery such as "tales woven around coffee" (p. 9), which they interpret as embedding domestic ritual within narrative form.

Second, as space and belonging, coffee operates in literature as a threshold marker between domestic and public life, and between homeland and transnational contexts. While Hazaea and Qassem (2025) focus on signage that scripts belonging in urban Saudi settings, these insights can be extended to transnational settings in the novels. Building on this, Jawad and Zafar (2020) underscore how *The Beaver* foregrounds displacement and identity, themes that suggest the potential for reading coffee references as markers of spatial belonging. Alshhre (2023) similarly highlights how *Hend and the Soldiers* stages everyday cultural practices within a hybrid literary framework influenced by global and local dynamics. While coffee is not mentioned explicitly, such findings open interpretive space for considering coffee rituals as part of this negotiation of belonging.

Third, as heritage and continuity, coffee embodies national and local identity Khawlani cultivation (Al-Asmari et al, 2020), UNESCO recognition (Alshehaby, 2024), and cultural branding (Mehrez et al., 2023) situate it as an emblem of continuity transmitted across generations. Literary research situates *Hend and the Soldiers* within depictions of inherited practices (Aldeeb, 2021, 2022; Almuthaybiri, 2024), while Jawad

and Zafar (2020) highlight *The Beaver's* preoccupation with displacement and poetic representation of continuity. These perspectives together suggest that coffee motifs may be interpreted as tokens of cultural transmission.

Finally, as memory and nostalgia, Al-Saadi (2025) shows how comestibles in modern Arabic fiction function as mnemonic anchors, while Jawad and Zafar (2020) emphasize the thematic centrality of memory and identity in *The Beaver*. Such findings indicate that coffee, with its sensory associations, can be studied as a potential literary device that links present experience with inherited memory.

Despite this rich interdisciplinary scholarship, a clear gap remains. Studies in anthropology, heritage, and cultural policy establish coffee's centrality in Saudi life, while literary research recognizes the symbolic role of everyday objects. Yet no study has systematically examined coffee as a recurring literary motif in Saudi fiction. Its patterned recurrence across narrative scenes structuring hospitality, mediating belonging, affirming continuity, and triggering memory has not been mapped in detail.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing Badriah Albeshr's *Hend wa Alaskar* (Hend and the Soldiers, 2006) and Mohammed Hasan Alwan's *Al-Qundus* (*The Beaver*, 2011). Applying a four-lens framework ritual code, spatial marker, heritage token, and mnemonic anchor it demonstrates how coffee operates simultaneously as cultural practice and literary device, dramatizing the intersection of everyday ritual and narrative form in Saudi fiction.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Corpus and Sampling Rationale

This study examines two Saudi novels in which coffee is narratively salient yet mobilized differently: Badriah Albeshr's *Hend wa Alaskar* (Hend and the Soldiers, 2006) and Mohammed Hasan Alwan's *Al-Qundus* (*The Beaver*, 2011). The selection follows a maximum-variation purposive strategy. *Hend and the Soldiers* integrates coffee into domestic rituals of sociability, whereas *The Beaver* channels coffee through mnemonic work and threshold spaces in contexts of migration and life abroad. The contrastive pairing operationalizes the four analytic lenses outlined in Section 2 and enables testing motif behavior across distinct narrative ecologies.

3.2. Data and Extraction

Primary readings were conducted in Arabic, with available English translations consulted only to stabilize phrasing in quoted segments; Arabic pagination is used for citation. All explicit references

to coffee were extracted if they met at least one of the following criteria

1. Preparation and serving (roasting, brewing, dallah 'coffee pot,' finjān 'small cup,' thermos, accompanying dates);
2. Ritual actions and etiquette (offering, receiving, refusal, refill signals);
3. Spatial marking (majlis 'guest space,' workplace, café, airport/transit);
4. Figurative or sensory cues (aroma, bitterness, steam) linked to memory, belonging, or continuity;
5. Marked absence or withholding of coffee in otherwise hospitable settings.

Generic mentions without narrative function were excluded. The final dataset comprises ten extracts from *Hend and the Soldiers* and eleven from *The Beaver*.

3.3. Coding Scheme and Analytic Procedures

A four-code scheme was applied, with extracts eligible for up to two codes when functions overlapped

1. Ritual and Hospitality: sequences and etiquette structuring inclusion or exclusion;
2. Space and Belonging: uses of coffee to mark thresholds between domestic, public, and transnational spaces;
3. Heritage and Continuity: references to cultivation, emblems, spice or roast profiles, or heritage discourse;
4. **Memory and Nostalgia** figurative or sensory mobilizations of coffee as remembrance or inheritance.

Close reading operationalized each code at three levels (1) narrative function (scene structuring, pacing, transition), (2) semiotic function (what the sign communicates welcome, refusal, belonging, continuity, memory), and (3) motif recurrence (how repetition consolidates meaning within and across novels). To make recurrence visible, each coded coffee instance was counted and logged by novel, allowing a simple descriptive comparison of how often each motif function appeared. These counts served only to illustrate relative prominence, not to generate statistics. Cross-text comparison then tested how the same code behaved differently, for example, majlis coffee versus airport coffee, or thermos-and-dates versus differentiated household cups.

3.4 Reliability, Validity, and Scope

The novels were read in full with a second-pass verification to ensure systematic coverage. Codes were defined a priori from the framework in Section

2 and adjusted after a pilot application. Ambiguous cases were revisited after initial coding to stabilize assignments. **Validity was supported through triangulation** theoretical (use of four lenses), textual (cross-checking Arabic originals with English translations), and contextual (reference to scholarship on heritage and space).

The scope of the study is interpretive rather than statistical findings generalize to the behavior of a motif rather than to all Saudi fiction. Nonetheless, the contrastive design offers a robust test of the analytic framework across divergent narrative contexts.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Ritual and Hospitality

Coffee in Saudi fiction often appears first and foremost as a ritual code of hospitality, embodying structured etiquette and signaling welcome, sociability, and shared narrative space. Both *Hend and the Soldiers* and *The Beaver* embed coffee in scenes where ritual is not simply a backdrop but a narrative trigger stories unfold, relationships are mediated, and social cohesion is staged through the pouring, drinking, and commenting on coffee.

One of the richest depictions occurs in the opening pages of *Hend and the Soldiers*, where Ammousha, the mother's companion, meticulously roasts, grinds, and brews coffee in the morning (pp. 8-9). **The description foregrounds detail** beans roasted to light brown, ground coarsely, boiled three times, and blended with cardamom. This highlights regional specificity "the people of Najd do not like their coffee dark; they prefer it light brown, like the Bedouin's face tanned by the sun" (p. 8). The simile links color preference to desert identity, embedding ritual in the cultural landscape.

The ritual is narrated almost liturgically roasting, boiling, resting, repeating, until coffee is ready to be shared. The smell spreads through the house "like fire on a hot summer day" (p. 8), enveloping the family in sensory anticipation. The narrative voice emphasizes how these ritual structures time and space coffee marks morning transition, cleanses "the night's murky dreams" (p. 9), and inaugurates the day. **The communal act of drinking anchors storytelling** "We luxuriate in it, expanding under the countless stories birthed by bitter coffee and sweet dates" (p. 9). Coffee here is more than a drink; it is a narrative catalyst, creating conditions for oral histories to emerge.

The following extract reinforces this point "The histories of this household's women are tales woven around coffee. Each woman has a story living in the heart of her cup" (p. 9). Coffee becomes a

metaphorical vessel for memory and oral storytelling. Drinking is simultaneous with narration; ritual service is inseparable from the circulation of stories. The grandmother's tale, introduced while Abdul-Muhsin follows the smell of coffee to Salem al-Dhal'an's house, shows how coffee scent initiates a narrative trajectory. Coffee's aroma draws the grandfather into encounter, as its taste elicits recollection and narrative exchange.

Beyond domestic space, the novel situates coffee as a ritual of respite and bonding. During a caravan stop, "everyone wanted to enjoy talking over a longed-for cup of coffee" (p. 55). Coffee here is the communal punctuation mark of travel, a ritualized break that binds companions together.

At the hospital, coffee takes on a more modern form. The narrator prepares coffee in a thermos, straining cardamom husks, packing it with dates, and carrying it to work (pp. 66-72). Colleagues recognize her by the ever-present thermos: "Everyone at the hospital associates me with my coffee thermos" (p. 72). The thermos an emblem of modern practicality nonetheless retains ritual significance. **The smell that fills the office becomes a social cue** "anyone passing by comments on the scent, a thinly veiled request for a cup" (p.72). Hospitality remains encoded in the ritual act, even in a professional environment.

The novel also deploys figurative exaggeration to highlight the cultural aura of coffee. *Hend's* reputation for having the "best coffee birds fall out of the sky when they smell it" (p. 101) exemplifies ritual hyperbole, where the quality of coffee becomes exaggerated to cosmic proportions. Similarly, coffee is personified: "When I wake up, coffee receives me like the smiling face of a mother glad to be blessed with a child" (p. 179). **These depictions highlight ritual's affective dimension** coffee does not simply accompany life but welcomes and affirms existence.

In Alwan's *The Beaver*, ritual hospitality appears in more understated but equally coded ways. **One striking scene describes the father shaking his cup twice to signal sufficiency** "My father shook his cup twice, the sign of sufficiency, and Shafiq promptly picked it up and left the room" (p. 276). This narrative detail encodes a ritual of hospitality.

Alwan depicts the coffee pot boiling "My Arabic coffee overflowed from the dallah on the stove, evaporating little by little, leaving behind threads of residue and pale" (p. 215). Here, ritual intersects with neglect the ritual code disrupted, producing residue rather than hospitality. The extract metaphorizes excess and transience, suggesting fragility in continuity. Leisure moments reinforce ritual's role:

the narrator spreads his mat, unpacks coffee and dates, and selects music on his iPod (p. 131), enacting a modern, individualized variation on collective hospitality.

Taken together, these scenes confirm that both novels mobilize coffee as a ritual motif. Hend and the Soldiers foregrounds communal ritual as a generator of stories and continuity, adapting into professional life while retaining traditional etiquette. The Beaver presents ritual through gestures, residues, and leisure routines, emphasizing fragility and adaptation. Across both, ritual anchors narrative structure, initiating mornings, punctuating journeys, and organizing social interaction. **Across both texts, coffee ritual organizes narrative coherence** it initiates mornings, structures gatherings, punctuates journeys, and signifies completion.

By staging ritual in this way, the novels dramatize what Lotman (1990) semiotics of culture frames as the translation of cultural practice into a narrative sign. Coffee's recurrence is never incidental; it is ritualized narrative punctuation, encoding hospitality as ethical relation and literary structure.

4.2. Space and Belonging

If ritual encodes hospitality, coffee also marks spatial belonging in Saudi fiction. Scenes of drinking coffee occur at thresholds between domestic and public, private and professional, homeland and abroad. These depictions extend Othman et al.'s (2015) account of the majlis as a semiotic space, showing how hospitality codes are dramatized in literary settings. In literary representation, the smell, taste, and circulation of coffee serve to orient characters within these spaces, signaling who belongs, who departs, and who lingers at the edge.

The novel, *Hend and the Soldiers*, opens with a spatial threshold: "As I opened my bedroom door, the smell of coffee wafted from the kitchen; it spread throughout the house like fire on a hot summer day" (p. 8). The act of moving from bedroom to communal space is marked by coffee's aroma, which fills the home and signals collective life. The smell here is spatially performative; it reorients the narrator from private dream to social presence.

The grandmother's story of Abdul-Muhsin discovering coffee while searching for a lost camel further dramatizes belonging through smell "He heard the pounding of a pestle breaking roasted beans. The smell leaked out the door to where Abdul-Muhsin stood" (p. 10). The scent crossing a threshold draws the character inside, transforming an outsider into a guest.

The narrator's hospital thermos exemplifies

coffee's spatial adaptability. **Once tied to the majlis, coffee is transported into a workplace** "Everyone at the hospital associates me with my coffee thermos. Anyone passing by comments on the scent, a thinly veiled request for a cup" (p. 72). The thermos is a portable majlis: its aroma reconstitutes communal space within professional settings.

By pouring coffee for Shaza in porcelain cups, the narrator performs belonging within a modern office, affirming collegial intimacy. Coffee anchors not only in traditional households but also in bureaucratic workplaces, showing its resilience across spatial contexts.

In Alwan's *The Beaver*, coffee belongs explicitly to the majlis domain. **The narrator reflects on his new habits** "Since when have I gone to the majlis every day, drinking one serving from my aunt's dallah and another from Sheikha's?" (p. 142). The juxtaposition of two cups one prepared by the aunt, the other by Sheikha marks differentiation within belonging. Later, this distinction becomes explicit: "Our widowed aunt continued to live with us. Every day she would enthrone herself in the majlis before Sheikha arrived, savoring her coffee flavored with ajowan so unlike Sheikha's coffee, laced with cardamom" (p. 200). Here, flavor functions as an identity marker. Ajowan and cardamom signify personal styles of hospitality, delineating micro-communities within the same household. Coffee is not simply consumed; it encodes social geography, differentiating spaces of intimacy and preference.

Other scenes dramatize disrupted belonging. The narrator recalls "I bought coffee, called a taxi, and sat at the café entrance like an abandoned suitcase" (p. 165). **The simile underscores alienation** coffee accompanies him, but instead of anchoring belonging, it highlights dispossession. Sitting at the threshold of a café without entry, the narrator becomes luggage rather than a guest. Coffee underscores estrangement, marking the gap between public sociability and private exclusion.

Other extracts highlight belonging in flux. In quiet contemplation, the narrator drinks "more than two cups as I gazed at the still surface of the river" (p. 12), where coffee mediates thought and solitude rather than community. In a practical register, ordering coffee while leafing through a notebook "to recall what I needed to do in the coming days" (p. 74) situates him in a workspace defined by routine. At the airport, the farewell scene transforms transit into intimacy: "The coffee I drank at the airport, as I waved goodbye to Ghada, was affectionate and kind" (p. 305). Coffee personified as friends transforms a liminal, transient space into belonging. The paper

cup, emblem of global café culture, acquires intimacy in transnational contexts, where familiar rituals sustain a sense of belonging across borders.

Comparing both novels reveals complementary uses of coffee as a spatial marker. **Hend and the Soldiers emphasizes domestic and workplace belonging** aroma filling the home, the thermos recreating collegial space, and narrative memory anchoring women's gatherings. The Beaver highlights precarious belonging: differentiated cups in the majlis, estrangement at the café door, reflective solitude by the river, and companionship in an airport paper cup. Across both, coffee mediates the porous thresholds of space, dramatizing belonging as mobile, fragile, and context-dependent.

4.3. Heritage and Continuity

Coffee in Saudi fiction is not merely a matter of ritual or sociability but also a heritage token, embedded in practices that signify continuity across generations and link narrative space to national identity. Both *Hend and the Soldiers* and *The Beaver* use coffee to articulate cultural inheritance, from the color of roast preferred in Najd to the differentiation of saffron, ajowan, and cardamom in household brews. These literary depictions resonate with broader heritage discourses: UNESCO's (2015) designation of Arabic coffee as intangible cultural heritage, Saudi Arabia's declaration of 2022 as the "Year of Saudi Coffee" (Alnafissa et al., 2024), and scholarly analyses of Khawlani cultivation as an emblem of continuity (Al-Asmari et al., 2020; Mehrez et al., 2023).

In *Hend and the Soldiers*, the novel's opening description of Ammousha's preparation, the narrator specifies that "the people of Najd do not like their coffee dark; they prefer it light brown, like the Bedouin's face tanned by the sun" (p. 8). This comparison elevates roast color into a marker of regional identity. The Bedouin simile encodes desert heritage, embedding taste in geography and ethnography. What might appear as a culinary detail becomes a cultural shorthand for Najdi belonging.

The precision of Ammousha's method three boils and no more, careful timing to prevent overflow anchors continuity in ritualized technique. **This corresponds to what Al-Asmari et al. (2020) document in Khawlani cultivation** practices transmitted through generations are framed not as innovation but as faithful continuity. In literature, Ammousha's brew is simultaneously a domestic act and a preservation of Najdi taste heritage.

The grandmother's tale begins with Abdul-Muhsin drawn by the smell of coffee pounding in

a mortar "The smell leaked out the door to where Abdul-Muhsin stood" (p. 10). Here, heritage is transmitted not only through the beverage itself but through oral tradition sparked by its aroma. The story embeds coffee in the genealogy of the family, linking hospitality to ancestral encounter. In this way, the making and serving of coffee sustains not only social order but also historical memory.

The thermos scene (pp. 66-72) dramatizes the adaptation of heritage to modern settings "I used a strainer to stop the cardamom husks poured the bitter coffee into the thermos, put dates into a plastic container, and placed them together in a basket" (p. 66). While the vessels are modern plastic, thermos, strainer the pairing of coffee and dates is continuous with centuries of Arabian hospitality. The scene suggests that heritage practices persist even as they adopt new forms of packaging and mobility, underscoring how tradition is carried forward in altered material contexts.

In The Beaver, household coffee practices differentiate between individuals The narrator notes "our widowed aunt savoring her coffee flavored with ajowan so unlike Sheikha's coffee, laced with cardamom" (p. 200). These flavors mark parallel traditions within one family, suggesting authenticity is plural rather than monolithic.

Another image reinforces fragility "My Arabic coffee overflowed from the dallah on the stove, evaporating little by little, leaving behind threads of residue and pale" (p. 215). The dallah, emblem of heritage, becomes a vessel of loss. The boiling over signifies discontinuity, as tradition evaporates into residue. This image echoes Alshehaby's (2024) caution that intangible cultural heritage, though celebrated and safeguarded in principle, remains vulnerable to erosion under the pressures of globalization and insufficient legal protection. In narrative terms, the dallah scene functions as an allegory of endangered continuity, reminding readers that preservation requires vigilance.

Both novels embed heritage practices that resonate with UNESCO-style framing. The emphasis on light roast, cardamom, and pairing with dates echoes the heritage narratives Saudi Arabia deploys in its cultural policy. **The Beaver further engages with branding** the narrator's aunt's and Sheikha's cups could be read as microcosms of national coffee branding strategies, where spice variation becomes market differentiation.

These novels show coffee as a heritage token that encodes continuity across domestic, familial, and national scales. *Hend and the Soldiers* emphasizes Najdi taste preferences, thermos adaptation, and

ancestral stories transmitted through aroma. The Beaver highlights plural traditions (ajowan vs. cardamom), dallah fragility, and household differentiation as symbols of continuity.

In both, coffee links literature to broader heritage discourses: UNESCO recognition, agricultural genealogies of Khawlani beans, and national branding. By embedding heritage tokens in narrative, Saudi novels represent continuity and participate, ensuring that cultural practices persist as literary memory.

4.4. *Memory and Nostalgia*

If coffee in Saudi fiction encodes ritual and heritage, it also serves as a mnemonic anchor, binding characters to memories of kinship, lineage, and longing. The recurrence of coffee motifs in *Hend and the Soldiers* and *The Beaver* exemplifies what Al-Saadi (2025) terms the mnemonic function of comestibles: food and drink trigger recollection, stage temporality, and embody identity. Coffee's aroma, bitterness, and vessels activate loops of remembrance where private memory converges with collective nostalgia.

In *Hend and the Soldiers*, the narrator declares: "The histories of this household's women are tales woven around coffee. Each woman has a story living in the heart of her cup" (p. 9). This metaphor frames coffee not as an accompaniment to narrative but as its vessel. Every cup contains a life story; bitter taste is sweetened by narrative invention. Heritage, here, is transmitted not through archives but through coffee-mediated memory. The grandmother's tale exemplifies this. Abdul-Muhsin, searching for his lost camel, is drawn by the aroma of pounding beans. Coffee's smell is the threshold into ancestral narrative. The scene recalls embodied memory: sensory stimuli here aroma trigger stories that transmit identity. Coffee operates simultaneously as a material beverage and a mnemonic device, ensuring memory circulates with each cup. Later, the narrator personifies coffee as a maternal presence: "When I wake up, coffee receives me like the smiling face of a mother glad to be blessed with a child. 'Good morning,' I hear it say" (p. 179). This personification links daily ritual to the memory of maternal care, transforming the beverage into affective continuity. Coffee does not merely start the day; it renews kinship bonds, conjuring the comfort of being welcomed.

Alwan's *The Beaver* foregrounds coffee as a metaphor of paternal inheritance. The narrator confesses: "I poured myself another cup of Arabic coffee cautiously without cloves so I could get used

to its pure taste each sip made me feel my father seeping into my blood like a stubborn hereditary disease" (p. 11). This translation captures the layering of sensory, medical, and mythical imagery. The bitterness of coffee is equated with hereditary disease, its taste inseparable from the father's memory. Coffee thus becomes a metaphor of lineage and memory, where each sip enforces continuity, whether desired or resisted. Similarly, after two cups by the river, the narrator reflects on absence and anxiety (p. 12), situating coffee as both comfort and catalyst of introspection.

Other scenes emphasize differentiation within memory. The narrator recalls "I became a man I had never been before Since when have I gone to the majlis every day, drinking one serving from my aunt's dallah and another from Sheikha's?" (p. 142). Later, the narrator contrasts ajowan versus cardamom flavors (p. 200). These cups embody distinct strands of memory, each sip recalling a different woman, a different style of hospitality. Coffee functions as an archival memory, preserving plural traditions within household life.

The dallah scene "coffee overflowed from the dallah on the stove leaving behind threads of residue and pale" (p. 215) also carries mnemonic significance. Residue is a material trace and a metaphor for memory: what remains after ritual evaporates. The fragility of continuity is mirrored in the fragility of memory.

The farewell scene epitomizes memory's immediacy: "the coffee I drank at the airport stroked my forehead, patted my shoulder, and held my hand as if a group of friends had slipped into the tall paper cup" (p. 305). The globalized cup becomes an intimate companion, mediating the pain of parting. Memory is activated in real time nostalgia felt even before separation. This reflects resilience practices in contexts of life abroad, where coffee rituals help sustain belonging even in unfamiliar environments.

Across both novels, coffee is not merely consumed but remembered, personified, and narrativized. *Hend and the Soldiers* situates memory in women's oral traditions and morning rituals that re-enact maternal blessing. At the same time, *The Beaver* frames memory as an ambivalent inheritance at once a bitter, haunting, and nostalgic companion in exile. In both, coffee functions as a mnemonic device, dramatizing how Saudi fiction encodes memory through the sensory register of a ritual beverage. Whether tied to maternal personification, paternal bitterness, communal storytelling, or moments of departure, coffee motifs stage nostalgia as personal and collective. Their recurrence turns narrative

episodes into acts of remembrance, underscoring that memory in Saudi novels is not abstract but embodied, enacted through the taste, aroma, and ritual of coffee.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of *Hend and the Soldiers* and *The Beaver* demonstrates that coffee (al-qahwa) functions as more than a descriptive backdrop in Saudi fiction. It operates as a recurrent motif whose repetition encodes cultural codes and organizes narrative meaning. By reading the extracts through the four interpretive lenses ritual and hospitality, space and belonging, heritage and continuity, and memory and nostalgia the study has shown how everyday practices become literary devices that dramatize ethical relations, spatial belonging, cultural identity, and mnemonic inheritance.

5.1. Ritual and Hospitality

The first finding is that coffee motifs consistently serve as ritual tokens. In *Hend and the Soldiers*, Ammousha's ritualized preparation, Hend's thermos in the hospital, and hyperbolic praise of her coffee dramatize hospitality as code. These rituals structure time (morning initiation), punctuate social events (caravan stop), and generate the narrative itself (stories spun during coffee gatherings). In *The Beaver*, ritual is distilled into subtler gestures: the father's shaking of the cup to signal sufficiency, or the dallah boiling over. These episodes confirm Douglas's (1972) thesis that meals operate as systems of order, and Stephenson's (2014) claim that Islamic hospitality integrates ethical and cultural obligations. Lotman's (1990) semiotics of culture, highlighted by Lorusso and Sedda (2023), emphasizes how cultural practices function as sign systems within the semiosphere. In the novels, this perspective helps illuminate how ritual gestures such as pouring, refusing, or signaling with a cup become legible signs within the narrative.

Coffee thus emerges as narrative punctuation: scenes begin, pause, or close with ritual coffee, reinforcing that motifs organize textual coherence while signaling hospitality codes.

5.2. Space and Belonging

The second finding is that coffee functions as a spatial marker of belonging. In *Hend and the Soldiers*, the aroma that fills the house and the thermos that transforms the hospital office show how coffee situates individuals in communal spaces. In *The Beaver*, the aunt's ajowan coffee versus Sheikha's cardamom brew articulates differentiated belonging

within the majlis, while the airport farewell cup reconstitutes intimacy in transit. Yet belonging is not always secure: the narrator sitting outside a café "like an abandoned suitcase" dramatizes estrangement.

These findings align with Othman et al. (2015) on the majlis as a semiotic space and Hazaea and Qassem (2025) on coffee-shop signage scripting urban belonging. Maspul (2025) highlights resilience practices in Saudi coffee culture under globalization; extending this framework, airport coffee in the novels can be read as sustaining continuity even in a globalized form. The novels confirm that belonging is mediated through architecture and portable ritual codes: thermos, paper cup, and dallah all operate as spatial signs.

5.3. Heritage and Continuity

The third finding is that coffee motifs consistently encode heritage continuity. In *Hend and the Soldiers*, Najdi's preference for light roast, stories initiated by aroma, and the pairing of thermos coffee with dates all signal continuity with longstanding traditions. In *The Beaver*, ajowan versus cardamom differentiation and the dallah's residue mark plural heritages and fragile continuity.

These motifs resonate with UNESCO's (2015) designation of Arabic coffee as intangible cultural heritage, which affirms its role as a cultural symbol of generosity and continuity (Alshehaby, 2024), and with Saudi cultural policy initiatives such as the Ministry of Culture's declaration of 2022 as the "Year of Saudi Coffee" (Alnafissa et al., 2024). They also align with studies of Khawlani cultivation in the southwest, which document centuries of intergenerational practice tied to local pride and identity (Al-Asmari et al., 2020; Mehrez et al., 2023). The novels embed these heritage cues not as mere ornament but as narrative structure, positioning literary fiction as a participant in heritage preservation.

The tension between continuity and fragility is also evident. Maspul (2025) shows how global specialty standards negotiate with local practices in Saudi coffee culture. Extending this framework to literature, the dallah scene in *The Beaver* symbolizes heritage at risk of evaporation. Fiction thus reflects broader anxieties about commodification and preservation.

5.4. Memory and Nostalgia

The fourth finding is that coffee motifs are consistently deployed as mnemonic anchors. In *Hend and the Soldiers*, women's stories are "woven around coffee" (p. 9), and morning coffee personified

as maternal presence embodies continuity of care. In *The Beaver*, the bitterness of Arabic coffee becomes a metaphor of paternal inheritance, while airport coffee, personified as friends, embodies nostalgic companionship.

These depictions confirm Al-Saadi's (2025) claim that food and drink in Arabic literature stage temporality and identity. They also align with Maspul's (2025) emphasis on ritual continuity and resilience in Saudi coffee practices, which can be interpreted as embodied memory. Alwan's metaphoric elaborations illustrate how memory is layered: coffee as a hereditary disease, genie in the cup, or affectionate friend. These images confirm what Culler (2011) calls the interpretive pressure of repetition: each recurrence of coffee pushes readers to read it as a memory device.

Across both novels, coffee anchors memory in sensory detail, whether maternal blessing, paternal bitterness, or moments of departure. This demonstrates that in Saudi fiction, memory is not abstract but embodied enacted through aroma, taste, and ritualized repetition.

5.5. Integrative Synthesis: Motif as Cultural-Semantic Matrix

Across both novels, coffee emerges as a cultural-semantic matrix that binds ritual, space, heritage, and memory. As ritual code, it scripts hospitality and punctuates narrative events. As a spatial marker, it mediates thresholds between home, workplace, café, and life abroad. As a heritage token, it encodes continuity across generations while reflecting anxieties of fragility and commodification. As a mnemonic anchor, it binds characters to maternal blessing, paternal inheritance, and nostalgic longing.

This integrated reading affirms motif theory's claim that recurrence endows objects with interpretive weight (Daemmrich, 1985; Frye, 1957) and supports Grunina and Saltymakova's (2023) distinction between motif as scenario act and motif as ideologeme. It also highlights the value of semiotic approaches: Lotman's (1990) model of the semiosphere, as revisited by Lorusso and Sedda (2023), explains how gestures and sensory cues in coffee ceremonies pouring, refusing, or savoring bitterness function as cultural signs within narrative. Heritage scholarship situates these practices within national and transnational frames (Alshehaby, 2024; Al-Asmari et al., 2020; Mehrez et al., 2023), while memory studies (Al-Saadi, 2025) clarify why repetition of aroma and taste generates nostalgia and continuity. Coffee, therefore, exemplifies how Saudi fiction transforms everyday ritual into a symbolic

system that links narrative design with cultural life.

5.6. Contribution and Implications

This study makes three contributions. First, it demonstrates how motif theory applied to material culture reveals the literary significance of quotidian practices: coffee, though ordinary, structures narrative events and thematic coherence. Second, it bridges literary analysis with semiotics and heritage studies, showing that motifs resonate beyond the page in agricultural practice, cultural policy, and memory work. Third, it advances Saudi literary criticism by foregrounding how local cultural practices are mobilized to negotiate global modernity, heritage preservation, and diasporic memory.

The findings also suggest comparative pathways. Just as *Eating Words* (Al-Saadi, 2025) shows how food encodes temporality and identity, coffee demonstrates how other culturally saturated objects dates, incense, bread may act as narrative anchors. Extending motif analysis to such objects could enrich our understanding of how Saudi fiction embeds cultural practice within narrative structure, offering a broader model for studying the interplay of material culture and literary form. In sum, coffee in Saudi fiction is not a decorative detail but a structuring motif, a literary vessel through which everyday ritual becomes narrative meaning and cultural memory.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has examined how coffee (al-qahwa) functions as a literary motif in two influential Saudi novels: Badriah Al-Bishr's *Hend and the Soldiers* and Mohammed Hasan Alwan's *The Beaver*. Using a four-lens framework ritual and hospitality, space and belonging, heritage and continuity, and memory and nostalgia the analysis has demonstrated that coffee is not a decorative detail but a structuring device that organizes narrative events, mediates social relations, and encodes cultural meaning.

The readings highlighted distinctive deployments across the two novels. In *Hend and the Soldiers*, coffee rituals enable communal storytelling, preserve Najdi preferences for light roast, and extend into professional contexts through the portable thermos, thereby staging tradition within modern institutions. In *The Beaver*, coffee becomes a metaphor for inheritance and fragile continuity, differentiating household practices while dramatizing nostalgia, loss, and displacement. Across both works, gestures such as pouring, refusing, or savoring bitterness function as cultural signs, dramatizing how everyday

rituals shape narrative coherence and cultural identity alike.

The study makes three key contributions. First, it extends motif theory by showing how material culture objects embedded in daily life acquires literary significance through patterned recurrence and variation. Second, it bridges literary criticism with semiotics, heritage studies, and memory studies, demonstrating that motifs resonate beyond the page in agricultural practice, cultural policy, and embodied ritual. Third, it enriches Saudi literary criticism by foregrounding how local practices ritual hospitality, domestic taste, sensory memory are mobilized to negotiate broader cultural currents, including global modernity, heritage preservation, and diasporic identity.

At the same time, certain limitations must be acknowledged. While illuminating, the focus on two novels cannot represent the full breadth of Saudi fiction. Reliance on English translations, even when cross-checked with the Arabic originals, risks some loss of idiomatic nuance. Moreover, concentrating on

motif recurrence necessarily excluded other approaches such as discourse analysis or reader reception that could illuminate further dimensions of meaning. Future research might extend this framework to a larger corpus of Saudi and Gulf fiction, exploring how other culturally saturated objects such as dates, incense, or traditional garments function as motifs. Comparative inquiries could also examine how coffee and related practices are narrated across Arab and world literatures, tracing convergences and divergences in the literary representation of hospitality, heritage, and memory.

Ultimately, the analysis affirms that Saudi fiction transforms everyday rituals into symbolic systems that link narrative design with cultural life. Coffee, in particular, emerges as a literary vessel through which hospitality is enacted, heritage is sustained, and memory is embodied. By attending to such motifs, scholarship can better appreciate how Saudi novels weave the textures of daily life into enduring structures of narrative meaning and cultural identity.

Funding: This work was supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [Grant No. KFU253565].

REFERENCES

- Aarne, A. (1961) *The types of the folktale: A classification and bibliography* (2nd ed.; S. Thompson, Ed. and Trans.). Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Al-Asmari, K. M., Abu Zeid, I. M., and Al-Attar, A. M. (2020). Coffee Arabica in Saudi Arabia: An overview. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and Phytopharmacological Research*, Vol. 10, No. 4, 71–78.
- Albalawi, M. (2022) The hidden treasure: (Re)branding Saudi fiction. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2022.2041276>
- Albalawi, M. (2025) The fictionalization of morality police in Saudi novel: a new historicist approach. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 826. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-05237-5>
- Albeshr, B., 2006. *Hend wa Alaskar*. Beirut, Dar Al Saqi.
- Albeshr, B., 2017. *Hend and the Soldiers*. (S. Dhahir, Trans.). Austin, University of Texas Press.
- Aldeeb, N. R. (2021) An intersectional feminist reading of the Dove's Necklace and *Hend and the Soldiers*. In F. Jussawalla and D. Omran (Eds.), *Memory, Voice, and Identity*. New York, Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003100164>
- Aldeeb, N. R. (2022) The voice of silent toxic mothers in Morrison's *A Mercy* and Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers*. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 10–17. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2022.5.1.2>
- Algobaei, F. and Alzain, E. (2025) Metaphors in translation: A study of figurative language in Badriah Albeshr's *Hend and the Soldiers*. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 8, 740–763. <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i8.9434>
- Almujalli, H. A. (2024) Food, drink, and the trickster: A literary exploration of cultural themes and values in the *Maqamat al-Hamadhani*. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2382539>
- Almuthaybiri, A. M. (2024) Breaking the chains: Women's writing against patriarchy in Saudi narratives. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2024.2421504>
- Alnafissa, M., Alagsam, F., Almojel, S., Alamri, Y., Algarini, A. and Ismail, A. (2024) Segmentation and spending patterns in the Saudi Arabian coffee market. *Cogent Business and Management*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2369214>

- Al-Qarni, M. B. A. (2021) Expressive and narrative study of linguistic enunciation of Mohammed Hassan Alwan's Qundus (Beaver): A narrative enunciation study. *Arts for Linguistic and Literary Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 8, 407-432. <https://doi.org/10.53286/arts.v1i8.301>
- Al-Saadi, T. (Ed.) (2025) *Eating words: Food in modern Arabic literature*. Leiden, Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004732698>
- Alshebami, A. S., Alamri, M. M., Alzain, E., Algobaei, F., Seraj, A. H. A., Al Marri, S. H. and Al-duraywish, A. A. (2024) Caffeinating entrepreneurship: Understanding the factors driving coffee farming entrepreneurial intentions among potential entrepreneurs. *Sustainability*, Vol. 16, No. 17, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16177824>
- Alshehaby, F. (2024) Assessing the legal protection of intangible cultural heritage in Saudi Arabia: A critical analysis in the context of the 2003 UNESCO Convention. *Laws*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws13020013>
- Alshhre, M. A. (2023) Probing Saudi Arabia's literary complexity: Combining global and local narratives for a hybrid national literature. *Asiatic: IIUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, Vol. 17, No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.31436/asiatic.v17i1.2791>
- Alwan, M. H. (2011). *Al-Qundus [The Beaver]*. Beirut, Dar Al Saqi.
- Azzaz, A. and Elshaer, I. (2024) The impact of Arabic coffee consumption on academic performance in Saudi Arabia. *The International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 25-42. <https://doi.org/10.21608/ijthsx.2024.289178.1095>
- Culler, J. (1997) *Literary theory: A very short introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Daemmrich, H. S. (1985) Themes and motifs in literature: Approaches, trends, definition. *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4, 566-575. <https://doi.org/10.2307/406945>
- Douglas, M. (1972) Deciphering a meal. *Daedalus*, Vol. 101, No. 1, 61-81. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024058>
- El-Shamy, H. (2005) A motif index of Alf Laylah wa Laylah: Its relevance to the study of culture, society, the individual, and character transmutation. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 235-268.
- El-Shamy, H. (2018) Folklore of the Arab world. *Humanities*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 67. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h7030067>
- Frye, N. (1957) *Anatomy of criticism*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Grunina, L. P. and Saltymakova, O. A. (2023) Motif in fiction: A new research methodology. *SibScript*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 119-127. <https://doi.org/10.21603/sibscript-2023-25-1-119-127>
- Hattox, R. S. (1988) *Coffee and coffeehouses: The origins of a social beverage in the medieval Near East*. Seattle, University of Washington Press.
- Hazaea, A. N. and Qassem, M. (2025) On the road to Mecca: Branding discourses and national identity on coffee shop signage. *PLOS ONE*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0309829>
- Jawad, F. A. J. and Zafar, F. W. S. (2020) Poetic language in Muhammad Hassan Alwan's novels. *Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities*, Vol. 27, No. 6, 182-199. <https://doi.org/10.25130/jtuh.27.6.2020.09>
- Lotman, Y. M. (1990). *Universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture* (A. Shukman, Trans.). London, I.B. Tauris.
- Lorusso, A. M. and Sedda, F. (2022) For a semiotics of culture as a critique of culture. *Social Semiotics*, Vol. 32, No. 5, 577-587. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2022.2157169>
- Maspul, M. (2023) Cultural exchange and resilience: Shaping coffee consumption in Saudi Arabia's coffee shops. *J-CEKI: Jurnal Cendekia Ilmiah*, Vol. 2, No. 6, 1-15.
- Maspul, M. (2025) Discovering Saudi Arabia's cultural and economic legacy through coffee. *Journal of Business and Halal Industry*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v8-i1-18>
- Mehrez, H. K., Khemira, H. and Medabesh, A. M. (2023) Marketing strategies for value chain development: Case of Khawlani coffee Jazan Region, Saudi Arabia. *Journal of the Saudi Society of Agricultural Sciences*, Vol. 22, No. 7, 449-460. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssas.2023.04.004>
- Othman, Z., Aird, R. and Buys, L. (2015) Privacy, modesty, hospitality, and the design of Muslim homes: A literature review. *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 12-23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foar.2014.12.001>
- Propp, V. I. (1968) *Morphology of the folktale* (2nd ed., Vol. 9). Austin, University of Texas Press.
- Rezk, N. L., Abdel-Rahman, H. A., Al-Ghamdi, M. A. and Abdel-Hameed, E. A. (2018) Comparative evaluation of caffeine content in Arabian coffee with other caffeine beverages. *Journal of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 107-112.

- Stephenson, M. L. (2014) Deciphering Islamic hospitality: Developments, challenges and opportunities. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 40, 155-164. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.05.002>
- UNESCO (2015) Recommendation concerning the preservation of and access to documentary heritage including in digital form: UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme. Paris, UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-concerning-preservation-and-access-documentary-heritage-including-digital-form>