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PETROFICTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL COLLAPSE: AN ECOCRITICAL STUDY OF ABDULRAHMAN MUNIF'S 'CITIES OF SALT' AND THE FUTURE OF ARAB ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper will give an ecocritical reading of the Cities of Salt by Abdulrahman Munif focusing on how the novel challenges oil-based development and brings out the environmental impacts of the development process. Thematically discussing the issue of land exploitation, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss, the research proves that the narrative by Munif is the reflection of the ecological degradation of the Arab Gulf region during the rapid industrialization and oil mining. The novel describes the breakage of the old desert communities, which has always preserved the harmonious relationship with the surrounding nature, which is the ecological harmony and the devastating effects of oil imperialism and unrestrained urbanization. The paper underlines the need to incorporate the literature into the discourse on the issue of environmental sustainability, demonstrating how Cities of Salt can help to make the population more aware and encourage the right approach to the use of resources. The research connects the concept of literature critique and the aims at sustainability in the real world to show that literature can be used as an informational source in education and policy programs regarding the environment. The research has also provided suggestions on future research proposing that more work is done to investigate other Arabic literary texts, interdisciplinary strategies of sustainability and how literature is influencing the development of environmental policies.

KEYWORDS: Cities of Salt, Ecocriticism, Oil-Based Development, Environmental Degradation, Sustainability, Arabic Literature, Vision 2030, Popular Consciousness, Resource Control, Ecological Criticism.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The Arab Gulf economies have experienced rapid development largely due to their heavy reliance on petroleum resources, which have significantly contributed to modernization, infrastructure growth, and economic prosperity in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. However, oil-driven development has also created serious ecological challenges, including carbon emissions, water scarcity, land degradation, and biodiversity loss. These environmental concerns are critically examined in Abdulrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt*, a significant literary work that portrays the transformation of Gulf societies following oil discovery. The novel highlights environmental destruction and social displacement, offering an important ecocritical perspective on oil dependency and sustainability.

Economies of the Arab Gulf are so reliant on petroleum, and this oil wealth has been at the centre of economic growth and urbanization, as well as modernization of the economies of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Oil production has brought great wealth to the countries and enhanced the infrastructure and living standards, but it has also brought about a lot of ecological threats. Several oil mining practices, such as intensive extraction, lead to environmental degradation in the form of carbon emissions, water scarcity, land degradation, desertification, and loss of biodiversity. Both the deserts in the Gulf region are specifically susceptible to these environmental forces, which amplifies the interrelation between the economic prosperity and the ecological sustainability in the long term.

Cities of Salt by Abdulrahman Munif is generally considered a historical masterpiece of literature that is rather critical about the environmental and social effects of the oil discovery in the Arab world. The novel represents the remodeling of the traditional desert communities that used to coexist with nature into industrialized societies that are influenced by oil extraction and high rates of modernization. Munif vividly depicts the effect of oil-fueled development that destroys the environment, such as land degradation, water depletion, and erosion of biodiversity, as well as the problem of displacement of the natives and erosion of cultural identity. By its potent storytelling, *Cities of Salt* offers an ecological price tag of economic development and makes an excellent addition to the ecocritical discussion by promoting the idea of environmental sustainability and resource management.

1.2 Research Problem

The aggressive economic transformation of the Arab Gulf region has been robustly shaped by its reliance on oil resources, which has brought both a lot of economic prosperity as well as leading to grave environmental predicaments. Extraction of oil and industrial growth have resulted in ecological challenges like land degradation, water scarcity, pollution, and climatic vulnerability. Even though there is ample literature that deals with economic and environmental impacts of the oil-based development, relatively scant scholarly interest has been directed towards literary representation as a critical approach to interpret the environmental transformations. Literary texts, especially those of Abdulrahman Munif, *Cities of Salt*, can provide valuable cultural and human insights by describing the ecological and social impacts of oil modernization in terms of the destruction of nature, community displacement, and loss of traditional ecological knowledge. Thus, this paper is devoted to studying the conflict of oil dependence and environmental degradation with the literary representation, with the aim of realizing how literature can help people be environmentally aware and promote sustainable discussion within the oil-dependent societies.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions that will lead to this research look into the ecological concerns that are presented in the cities of salt by Abdulrahman Munif, and how they apply to the sustainability of the environment. The following research questions are the main ones:

What does *Cities of Salt* tell us about the environmental cost of oil exploration and industrial development of the Arab Gulf region?

How does the novel reflect ecological degradation, which includes land destruction, water scarcity, and loss of biodiversity?

What is the social and cultural impact of environmental change due to the oil modernization as depicted by Munif?

What is the way in which the ecological messages of *Cities of Salt* can be relevant to the modern discourse on environmental sustainability and responsible resource usage?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- To conduct an ecocritical analysis of *Cities of Salt*.
- To examine the environmental degradation presented in the novel in the context of modern Arab oil economies.

- To explore how literature can voice environmental concerns in Arab social consciousness.
- To suggest possible solutions and sustainable pathways inspired by the literary critique and modern environmental thought.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review will analyze the available academic literature on the economic development of oil, the environmental destruction, and ecocritical literary studies. Past studies have pointed to the ecological issues that come with petroleum-related economies, such as vulnerability to climate change, loss of resources, and environmental injustice in the oil-producing countries. Ecocritical theory is a theory of studying literary works that represent human relations with nature and attentiveness to ethical responsibility and sustainability. Several articles have identified *Cities of Salt* by Abdulrahman Munif as a major eco-literary work that criticizes the modernization of oil and its effects on Arab societies. Through the review of interdisciplinary studies of environmental studies, literary criticism, and sustainability discourse, the section provides a theoretical and contextual background for the analysis of environmental issues brought up in the novel.

2.1 Arab Gulf, Oil, Economy and Environment.

On the discovery of petroleum, the economies of the Arab Gulf state were greatly changed, oil became the main economic growth, modernization, and development of infrastructure in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The oil wealth has enhanced living standards and led to the rapid urbanization, but on the other hand it has posed ecological problems of serious nature. Industrial growth and petroleum extraction have led to the emission of carbon, air and water pollution, land degradation as well as biodiversity loss. Moreover, water has become a serious problem in the region because of low freshwater availability and the high needs of the industries. These environmental issues underscore the complicated relationship between economic growth and environmental sustainability in the Gulf economies that are dependent on oil.

2.2 Environmental Literary Critique and Ecocriticism.

Ecocriticism is a literary theory which studies the connection between literature and the natural world, how literary works reflect ecological concerns and the way man can relate with nature. It facilitates environmental awareness through examination of how the stories articulate environmental crisis, sustainability

issues and ethical responsibility of natural resources. Another approach that ecocriticism uses to explore cultural and social practices as they impact on ecological attitudes and conservation of the environment. Ecocriticism has become an even more significant issue in Arabic literature as researchers analyze works of literature dealing with environmental issues associated with modernization, industrialization, and extravagance of resources, especially in oil-based cultures. Numerous Arabic writings also emphasize the ecological and cultural changes due to the unpredictable growth of the economy and depletion of the folklore ecological knowledge. Literary authors like Abdulrahman Munif in *Cities of Salt* are very emphatic of these themes since they depict the destruction of the environment, displacement of the indigenous people, and disruption of the ecological balance through oil expansion. With the help of such narratives, ecocriticism offers a good platform to interpret environmental issues in Arabic literature and initiate debate about sustainability, environmental responsibility, and cultural awareness in the Arab world.

2.3 *Cities of Salt* as an Eco-Literary Text.

Cities of Salt by Abdulrahman Munif is generally considered to be one of the most important eco-written works that explores the environmental and cultural impacts of oil exploration and industrial modernization in the Arabian world. The novel reflects the changes of traditional desert communities that used to have a symbiotic relationship with nature into industrialized societies that are based on the exploitation of oil. Munif demonstrates devastation of natural landscapes, loss of water resources, and loss of biodiversity due to fast oil development through the use of a detailed narrative description. A good cultural critique is also evident in the novel through the portrayal of how economic development that is fueled by foreign oil companies is a disruption of the traditional social construct, it moves the native populations, and it is a destruction of the cultural identity. *Cities of Salt* connects the environmental degradation with the social and cultural transformation to represent the wider environmental issues that have to do with oil economies. Not only does the text criticize the unsustainable development practices, but it also invites one to think more about ecological responsibility and environmental protection, which makes it an effective addition to the ecological literature and ecocriticism.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This paper takes the qualitative research design

with the focus on ecocriticism as the analytical instrument. The qualitative method will enable a detailed explanation of the environmental themes, as well as socio-ecological changes, which are depicted in *Cities of Salt* by Abdulrahman Munif. Ecocriticism is used to analyze the connection between literature and the environment, and the extent to which the novel signals the environmental degradation and modernization through oil, the change in cultural context, and sustainability.

3.2 Data Collection

The main data in this research is gathered using the close reading of *Cities of Salt*. The study aims at determining the major environmental themes, which include land exploitation, water scarcity, population displacement, and ecological disturbance. Textual evidence that points to the degradation of the environment and the social and cultural impacts thereof is interpreted by using thematic analysis.

3.3 Comparative Analysis

The paper also contains a comparative discussion, according to which the ecological themes identified in the novel are related to the environmental policies and sustainability programs in the real world. Special focus is placed on the environmental policies and strategies, like the Vision 2030 and climate adaptation policies adopted by Gulf countries, to resolve the environmental issues and support sustainable development.

3.4 Supplementary Sources

The secondary data is gathered in scholarly articles, environmental reports, and literary criticism

regarding environmental sustainability and ecocriticism, as well as Arab literature. Where feasible, the analysis is supported by commentaries on environmental scholars and Arabic literary critics as well as government policy documents to give the analysis a wider contextual perspective.

4. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF CITIES OF SALT

4.1 Environmental Degradation Thematic Analysis

Cities of Salt by Abdulrahman Munif is a powerful depiction of the damage caused to the environment by oil exploration and an industrial boom that has hit the Arab Gulf region. The novel clearly shows how land and water resources are exploited, with foreign oil companies bringing huge infrastructure and industrial processes into the once untouched desert areas. Munif depicts the process whereby fertile lands and natural habitats are converted into oil mining areas, causing ecological damage that you can never repair. The annihilation of plants and animals, disturbance of the habitat of wildlife and pollution of the soil illustrate the environmental cost of high-growth-rate economic development. The issue of water scarcity is revealed to be one of the main ecological problems in the story because oil drilling pollutes wells and decreases the supply of freshwater resources needed to support communities living in deserts. These repetitive environmental motifs, such as land abuse, water pollution, and environmental disequilibrium, are syntactically summed up in Table 1, which gives a thematic decomposition of the environmental problems that were depicted during the novel.

Table 1: Thematic Breakdown of Environmental Issues in Cities of Salt

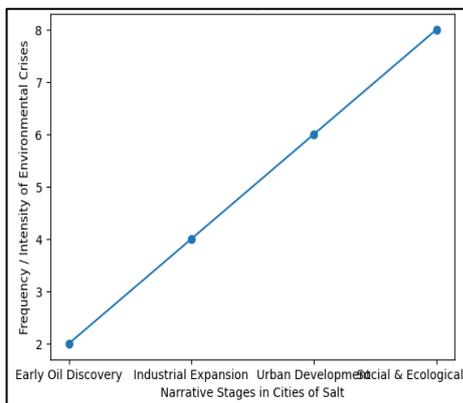
Environmental Theme	Literary Representation	Ecological Impact
Land Exploitation	Construction of oil facilities and infrastructure	Habitat destruction and soil degradation
Water Scarcity	Contamination and depletion of wells	Reduced access to freshwater resources
Displacement	Forced migration of local communities	Social fragmentation and cultural loss
Industrial Pollution	Expansion of oil production activities	Air, water, and soil contamination

4.2 Imperialism of oil and urbanization

Munif is highly condemnatory of oil imperialism through depicting the socio-economic and environmental impacts on traditional Gulf societies when oil corporations are taking part in the entry. The novel depicts how the oil-based growth is oriented to the economic gain against the ecological and social well-being. Rapid urbanization is due to the fact that oil wealth is promoting the development of modern cities, industrial estates, and transportation infrastructure. Nonetheless, the transformation has led to the displacement of the

indigenous population and loss of the traditional livelihood practices which include agriculture, fishing and pastoral activities. Development in industry leads to more pollution, degradation of land and disturbance of the ecosystem, which exacerbates the instability in the environment. The other cultural effects of oil imperialism presented by Munif are the substitution of local cultures and practices in preserving the environment with foreign influence. Figure 1 shows the force and occurrence of environmental crisis represented in the various phases of the story, which demonstrates graphically the numerous times that oil-related

urbanization leads to environmental and social instability in the novel.



4.3 Loss of Ecological Harmony

The destruction of the ecological balance between humans and nature after the discovery of oil is one of the major themes in *Cities of Salt*. Munif describes pre-oil societies as having a sustainable and harmonic relationship with nature by carefully tending to their water resources, seasonal migration, and stewardship of their land. These ancient ecological cultures are slowly being substituted with industrial ways of life and urbanization, which is leading to the increased disconnection that exists between human beings and the natural environment. In the novel, the annihilation of the ecological balance is not only associated with environmental degradation but also with the disintegration of social order and the erosion of culture. The modern industrial values that emphasize economic profitability subdue the formerly existing systems of indigenous knowledge that were sustaining environmental sustainability. The thematic ecological factors that add to this ecological

detachment, such as displacement of communities and resource exploitation, are further explained in Table 1, which supports the sustainability development criticism in the novel. Moreover, the frequent instances of ecological crises presented in Figure 1 show that the ecological disturbance is getting increasingly stronger as the narrative develops, and the oil modernization erodes the connection between man and nature multiple times.

5. SOLUTIONS TO THE ECOLOGICAL CRITICISM AND GOVERNMENT.

5.1 Government and Ecological Sustainability: Vision 2030.

The ecological criticism of *Cities of Salt* is indicative of numerous ecological issues that the Gulf countries are experiencing today, such as diminishing resources, pollution, and climate susceptibility. Bearing these concerns, the Gulf governments have launched sustainability programs, especially within the development frameworks like the vision 2030. These policies aim to lessen reliance on fossil fuels, enhance renewable energy, enhance water conservation, and promote sustainable urban development. The Vision 2030 initiatives emphasize the need to ensure a balance between the growth of the economy and environmental sustainability through investing in solar and wind energy projects, increasing green infrastructure, and applying environmental conservation programs. These are good indications that the governments of the Gulf are increasingly realizing the need to support the notion of environmental degradation and ecological sustainability of the long-term. Table 2 is a summary of the major sustainability goals and implementation strategies related to Vision 2030 as the key environmental objectives and policy strategies are outlined.

Table 2: Overview of Vision 2030 Environmental Policies

Policy Area	Environmental Goal	Implementation Strategy
Renewable Energy	Reduce fossil fuel dependency	Development of solar and wind energy projects
Water Conservation	Address water scarcity	Expansion of desalination technology and water recycling
Sustainable Urban Development	Reduce environmental pollution	Construction of green cities and eco-friendly infrastructure
Environmental Protection	Preserve biodiversity and ecosystems	Wildlife conservation and environmental regulation programs

5.2 Incorporation of Literature in Environmental Education

Literature has a great influence on creating environmental consciousness and sustainability education. Other pieces of literature, like the *Cities of Salt* by Abdulrahman Munif, offer strong narratives that depict the ecological and social impacts of oil-led modernization and render ecological problems closer to

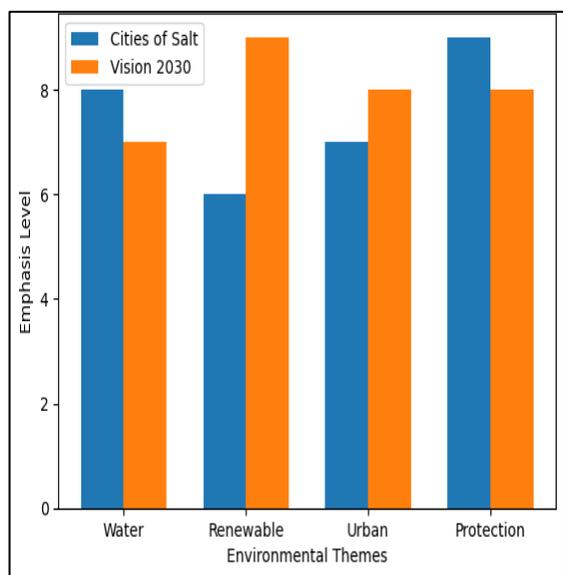
the readers and more emotionally captivating. Through the inclusion of literary texts in the learning programs, policymakers and teachers will be able to improve the level of awareness among people on the issue of environmental problems and promote responsible environmental practices. The cultural and historical insights presented by literary narratives can be used to supplement scientific and policy-driven environmental debates, and this can contribute to the building of

ecological consciousness in society. The issues of the environment portrayed in *Cities of Salt* could be applied as educational resources to spread the principles of sustainability, social responsibility, and cognizant resource saving. The similarities between issues of environmental protection in the novel and the current policy of government sustainability are represented graphically in Figure 2 that shows that the literary criticism corresponds to the real-world environmental policy.

6. POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DIRECTION

6.1 Ecological Values of Curricular Education

To enhance environmental sustainability in the



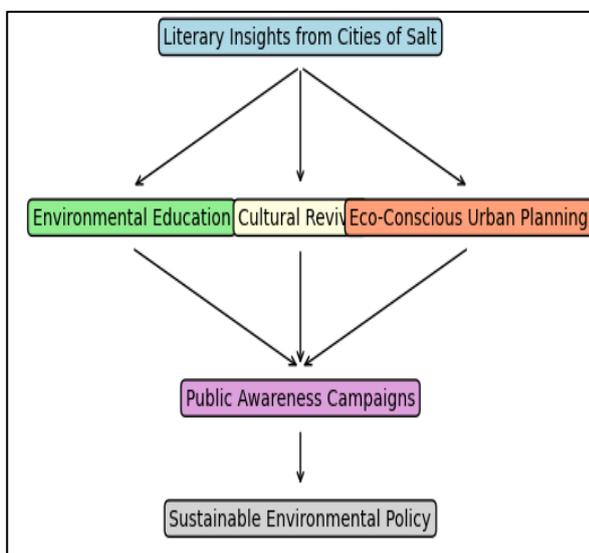
Sustainable land and water management practices such as seasonal migration, community-based water sharing, and conservation-based farming practices were practiced in traditional Arab societies. The restoration of these cultural practices can offer practical advice on how contemporary sustainability in the Gulf countries should be. *Cities of Salt* underscores how the ecological knowledge traditionally sustained the balance of the environment before the industrial oil development altered such systems. The combination of ancient conservation and the latest environmental technology may enhance ecological resilience and advocated sustainable development in the present Arab communities.

6.3 Environmentally friendly City Planning.

Rapid urbanization caused by oil wealth has been one of the causes of environmental degradation in most Gulf countries. The issue of unregulated

long run, it is important to incorporate ecological values in educational curriculums. This is because the environmental issues brought out in *Cities of Salt* can be useful learning materials in educating the students on the effects of resource exploitation, environmental imbalance and environmental responsibility. Literature-based environmental studies can be included in educational institutions in integrating the scientific knowledge with cultural and historical views. Through the analysis of the story of *Munif*, the students can become able to form an awareness concerning sustainable management of resources, climate responsibility and environmental ethics.

6.2 Arab Environmental Traditions Revised



industrial and urban growth in *Cities of Salt* which is criticized by *Munif* highlights the necessity of eco-friendly urban development. The development of sustainable cities needs to be considered in relation to green infrastructure, integration of renewable energy, efficient water, and reduction of pollution. Environmentally friendly building designs, increased green areas, and promotion of sustainable transportation can be assumed by urban planners to achieve an environmentally friendly city. These programs contribute to the sustainable environmental protection and align with the national sustainability agendas like the Vision 2030.

6.4 Public Awareness Campaigns

Awareness programs are very important in enhancing environmental sustainability through educating the people on environmental issues and conservation of resources. Literature and narrative,

including literature like *Cities of Salt*, can be useful in creating awareness on the subject of environmental degradation and sustainability. Literary narratives can be employed in cultural programs, community reading and media campaigns to influence communities to participate in conservation of the

environment. The sustainability solutions suggested and their correspondence with the national environmental initiatives are summarized in Table 3, whereas the inclusion of the literature-based solutions into the modern environmental policy frameworks is depicted in Figure 3.

Table 3: Proposed Solutions Based on Literary Critique

Proposed Solution	Insight from <i>Cities of Salt</i>	Practical Application	Alignment with Vision 2030
Ecological Education	Highlights environmental destruction caused by oil exploitation	Integration of environmental literature and sustainability studies into school and university curricula	Promotes environmental awareness and sustainability education programs
Revival of Traditional Environmental Practices	Demonstrates importance of indigenous land and water conservation methods	Reintroduction of traditional water management and sustainable agricultural practices	Supports cultural sustainability and natural resource conservation
Eco-Conscious Urban Planning	Critiques uncontrolled industrial expansion and environmental damage	Development of green infrastructure, renewable energy use, and sustainable transportation systems	Encourages sustainable city development and environmental protection initiatives
Public Awareness Campaigns	Uses storytelling to highlight ecological and social consequences of oil dependency	Cultural programs, media campaigns, and public environmental education initiatives	Strengthens public participation in sustainability and environmental conservation efforts

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Findings

This paper has explored *Cities of Salt* by Abdulrahman Munif using an ecocritical approach in order to discuss how the novel raises environmental decay and criticizes the oil-based development in the Arab Gulf world. The discussion has revealed that Munif gives a strong literary image of the environmental change brought by petroleum exploration and industrialization. The novel expressively gives a picture of the natural landscapes destruction, water resources exhaustion, biodiversity loss, and displacing local populations as a direct result of an extremely fast modernization of the economy. By presenting viewers with the image of a society of traditional deserts who live in harmony with nature, Munif compares ecologically sustainable society with the destruction of nature through the spread of the industrial oil extraction. The thematic analysis also displayed that the oil imperialism and unchecked urbanization did not only lead to the degradation of the environment, but also, to the fragmentation of culture and disintegration of the society. The paper has also underscored the idea that *Cities of Salt* serves as a cultural story and a cautionary effort to point out the ecological dangers that can be experienced in the long term as a result of dependency on fossil fuels and the development paradigm that relies on non-sustainable trends. Altogether, the results prove that literary criticism offered by Munif is a good contribution to understanding the environmental issues of societies with the oil dependency and emphasizes the necessity of the sustainable management of resources.

7.2 Contribution to Sustainable Development Discussions

The study will add to the current debate related to sustainability in the Arab world by showing how literature may be used as an addition to scientific and policy-oriented environmental research. Although the quantitative data and technological solutions are essential in the context of environmental policies and economic analyses, the human-centered approach provided in literary work like *Cities of Salt* reveals the social, cultural, and ethical aspects of the environmental change. Combining the techniques of literary criticism and sustainability discussion, the given paper will deepen the insight into the environmental problems beyond the technical models and will focus on the significance of cultural awareness in addressing ecological responsibility. The study also confirms the fact that literature stories may be used as educational and awareness-raising measures that help people participate in sustainability programs. Further, the paper relates the environmental criticism of Munif to the current development models like the vision 2030, and how the insights of the literary can support the government sustainability targets on renewable energy, water conservation, and environmentally conscious urban planning. This work helps close the gap between literature, environmental research and policy discourse and therefore has value in interdisciplinary studies and the role of cultural attitudes in the development of sustainable development in the Arab region.

7.3 Future Research Recommendations

As much as this paper gives an ecocritical discussion of *Cities of Salt*, there are still a number of

regions where further study can be conducted. The literature analysis can continue to be broadened in future cases with a focus on other works of Arabic literature that discuss the issue of environmental change, industrialization, and sustainability. A larger picture on the world environmental issues relating to fossil fuel economies could be achieved by comparative studies of petrofiction in other cultural and geographical settings. Interdisciplinary research on sustainability that could be developed by combining literary studies with environmental science, sociology and political ecology can also be investigated by researchers. Moreover, the study may be extended in the future by performing the research on how the literary narratives contribute to the development of the environmental policy and

environmental awareness of the people, especially of the societies that are oil-dependent. Including such empirical research as surveys or interviews with policymakers, educators, and environmental activists can be of assistance in assessing the practical impact of literature on the sustainability discourse. Also, the effectiveness of the implementation of literary texts in the environmental education programs and the public awareness campaigns could be studied with further research. Investigating those areas, the future scholarship can reinforce the relationship between literature, environmental policy, and sustainable development, and add to more inclusive and culturally informed approaches to environmental sustainability in the Arab world.

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