

**RESEARCH TITLE**

**Landscape of Extraction: A Comparative Study of Ecological violence  
in Abdul Rahman's *Cities of Salt* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water***

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**Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to analyse the *Cities of Salt* (1984–89) by Abdul Rahman Munif and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010) in the light of ecological violence. These novels use desert and delta as their primary setting. The two novels depict environments, whether desert or delta, as the primary victims of an economy which modifies eco-systems into zones of expropriation and conflict. The novels reveal the environmental damage, neo-imperial power, and capitalist modernity that are intertwined. Munif's vividly illustrated account of the desert depicts how the western oil interests invade and disrupt local communities and environment. Habila's narrative of the Niger delta on the other hand captures the noxious effects of oil exploitation in a post-colonial world of graft and army. This paper uses Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence, Anthony Nunes's idea of ecological imperialism, and contemporary discussions in eco-materialist thought as a theoretical framework. This paper shows how ecological violence scars the boundaries between human suffering and environmental harm which create destruction all around.

**Key Words:** Ecological Violence, Landscape alteration, Slow Violence,

## مشهد الاستخراج: دراسة مقارنة للعنف البيئي في رواية مدن الملح لعبد الرحمن منيف ورواية نطف على الماء لهيلون هابيل

### المستخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل رواية مدن الملح (1984-1989) لعبد الرحمن منيف ورواية نطف على الماء (2010) لهيلون هابيل في ضوء العنف البيئي. وتتخذ هاتان الروايتان من الصحراء والدلتا فضاءين أساسيين لأحداثهما. وتُصوّر الروايتان البيئة، سواء أكانت صحراء أم دلتا، بوصفها الضحية الأولى لاقتصادٍ يحوّل النظم البيئية إلى مناطق للاستيلاء والصراع. كما تكشف الروايتان عن الترابط الوثيق بين الدمار البيئي، والهيمنة الإمبريالية الجديدة، والحادثة الرأسالية. ويقدم منيف في تصويره الحي للصحراء وصفاً لكيفية غزو المصالح النفطية الغربية للمجتمعات المحلية وبيئتها، وإحداثها اضطراباً عميقاً فيها. أما هابيل، فيعرض في سرده عن دلتا النيجر الآثار السامة لاستغلال النفط في عالم ما بعد الاستعمار، حيث يتداخل الفساد مع سلطة الجيش. ويعتمد هذا البحث على مفهوم العنف البطني لدى روب نيكسون، وفكرة الإمبريالية البيئية لدى أنطوني نونز، إلى جانب مناقشات معاصرة في الفكر الإيكو-مادي بوصفها إطاراً نظرياً للدراسة.

وتبين هذه الورقة أن العنف البيئي يترك ندوباً عميقة على الحدود الفاصلة بين المعاناة الإنسانية والضرر البيئي، بما يفضي إلى خلق دمار يحيط بكل شيء.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العنف البيئي، تحوّل المشهد الطبيعي، العنف البطني.

## Introduction.

Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left.

-Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

The twenty-first century is currently facing problems like climate change and ecological collapse. These concerns arise from a long overdue history of exploitation and environmental harm. This crisis is not just a consequence of industrial revolution but also the result of ongoing commodification of our environment. Richard A. Marcantonio calls this damage done to environment 'Environmental Violence'. The term Environmental Violence refers to the continuous but discreet destruction of landscape, humans and non-human species by the exploitative human activities. Human activities are the main source of geological change, propelling the earth into a new geological era known as Anthropocene era (Steffen et al. 614-621). The exponential increase in human population, higher birth rates, and better healthcare facilities is the primary cause of increased demands (33,34). It has not been like this in the previous century. The current population trend differs sharply from the earlier times. It is in the last century alone that the global human population swelled nearly five times. It increased from about 1.5 billion to 7.5 billion in a very short period of time. This marks an unprecedented demographic and ecological shift in earth's history. With this, activities related to development, industrialization, and modernization also increased. The primary victim of this development is none other than our environment. The capitalist idea of development leads to catastrophic actions against the forests, the water bodies, the flora, the fauna and eventually the humans. Practices such as open-pit mining, excessive fishing and deforestation in various parts of the world leads to damage to the entire ecosystem. These unsustainable practices threaten both the environment and the human lives. These actions are carried by a myopic vision of capitalist development leading to what Garrett Hardin defines as 'tragedy of commons.' Although unregulated resource extraction brings immediate monetary benefits, it prevents fair distribution of environmental resources, resulting in poverty and suffering among the natives. Along with unfair distribution, it also damages the natural development of biological, ecological and evolutionary systems. This paper analyses the *Cities of Salt and Oil on Water* using the framework of Ecological Violence. The paper studies how oil frontiers and Niger delta exemplifies ecological as well as cultural devastation.

### **A view of Abd al- Rahman Munif and Helon Habila Ngalabak life and works**

**Abd al- Rahman Munif** is born in 1993 and dies in 2004 is one of the most significant Arab novelist of all times. He is a powerful literary figure who has written a number of novels, short stories, memoirs, journalistic excerpts and other critical works. He is considered to be a prominent voice in Arab literary society and has published considerable work in the field of politics, society, hierarchies and elitism in the Arab countries. Munif started his career as a student of law and moved to Baghdad in 1952 to study law. He earned his degree of law from the Sorbonne and later a Ph.D. from the University of Belgrade. His thesis delves into the study of petroleum economics which later helped him in writing *Cities of Salt*. He began working at the Ministry of law after he came back to Iraq. Munif later resigned from his job and distanced himself from the politics as well. He decided to pursue his career in writing and in the 1970s and became a voice of change for the people of Iraq. His life in Syria gave him multiple opportunity to explore his creative and critical abilities in writing. In the last years of his writing, he wrote several non-fiction works on the adverse impact of western commercialization of Arab resources. He died at the age of 70 due to renal and heart failure.

The novel is an unparalleled literary craftsmanship that redefines the crucial moments in

modern Arab history. This work explores how 'oil' has impacted the culture and society deeply. Munif through his novel has highlighted the fact that in order to understand the present, past and future of the country one has to definitely question the influence of oil on the country. Munif's intentions closely resembles what Amitav Ghosh has termed 'Petro-fiction', a discourse that deals with the narrative of oil and its impact on different characters and countries. *Cities of Salt* is about an imaginary Bedouin community which was self-sustained and depended on the environment for sustenance. The novel traces how the arrival of oil turned this self-dependent community into petroleum dependent community controlled by western companies. The story narrates how their indigenous lifestyle faded and their identity and culture got erased in the process. The villagers were forcefully evicted from their own homes and factories and artificial cities were created in order to cater to the needs of the foreigners. People couldn't comprehend the betrayal by their own people, the rulers who bowed down to greed and foreign invasion. Munif showcases how the greedy rulers not only sold the culture and life of their own people but destroyed the environment and the land of their country.

**Helon Habila Ngalabak** (1967) is an established Nigerian author, poet and academic who has been praised globally for his literary talents. He was born in the small town of Kaltungo, Gombe State in Nigeria. He pursued his graduation in English Literature and Languages at the University of Jos and later taught at the Federal Polytechnic for three years. In 1999 he went to Lagos where he worked with a magazine called Hints as a writer and later with the newspaper Vanguard as its literary editor. Habila witnessed the social, political turmoil of Nigeria very closely. The political instability and the military dominance experienced by him impacted his literary works very deeply. Habila didn't consider writing as his job but for him it was a form of resistance and a way to raise his voice against the injustice of the society. His writings gave him the opportunity to mend the wrong-doings of the world, especially his country and to be the voice of thousands of oppressed people. Although he tried to distance himself from the themes of politics but his stories acted as a torch bearer for justice. His fiction continues to deal with themes of injustice, exploitation, and moral corruption, positioning him as a committed literary voice of protest.

Habila's novel *Oil on Water* highlights the harmful consequences of oil, its toxic remains and industrial waste on the environment and the characters of the story. This pollution eventually leads to environmental degradation, societal fall and the collapse of society. The water sources which were once revered for its purity and life-giving powers now becomes a victim of human greed and his selfishness. The river and waterfalls which earlier brought the society together are now polluted by the extractive ideology of oil-capitalism.

The story centres around an imaginary place known as Irefeke island and the hard and rigorous life of the people of Niger Delta community. Habila has portrayed the dire consequences of the policies of international oil companies in the form of dying earth, toxic water and displaced lives of millions of people. The novel highlights that oil which was once considered to be the symbol of nation's development, in reality is nothing but a 'resource curse'. Instead of the promised development, oil has given birth to inequality, violence and environmental degradation. The novel shows that oil only helped the rich of the society become richer and the poor villagers fell deeper into the pits of poverty. This novel highly condemns the Petro-modernity and shows that the illusion of development and modernity has only destroyed the land, the communities and most importantly the environment of the country.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK-

Environmental Violence is defined as the violence caused by human activities to environment which exercising practices such as oil extraction, industrialization. Deforestation, militarization of the land etc. It impacts the nature, animals and humans all at the same time. Environment Violence is a gradual in nature and effect the environment enormously. Aftermath of the greed of human actions includes poisoning of air, water, soil along with displacement of people from their homeland. The materialization of forest is also a consequence of this violence which results in the doom of humankind. This ideology was highlighted when scholar realised that the earlier theories distinguished between the problems of humans and destruction of the environment. But the reality is that human and environment are intertwined with each other and one cannot succeed if the other is in a crisis. Many scholars and academics worked in this idea and their constant efforts gave rise to this new field of 'Environmental Violence'. Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962) was among the pioneers to work on this idea that chemical pollution not only effect flora and fauna but impair humans as well. Later Rob Nixon came up with the idea of 'Slow Violence' against the environment. Slow violence is an unhurried process which cannot even be deducted by the humans but its eventual impact damages several years of development. This violence generally targets the poor, downtrodden natives who are not even responsible for its onset. Richard A. Marcantonio and other theorists of environmental violence in the twenty-first century have called to attention that such violent activities represent a fundamental alteration of both human and nonhuman life systems under the extractive logic of modern capitalism.

The root cause of environmental violence clearly shows how the oppression of poor and the land is justified by the greed of materialistic wealth and technological development. The emergence of this violences can be traced in the era of industrialization and imperialization. The British Company looted the land and people of all the third world countries and ravaged the virgin environment of these lands as well. They didn't consider environment as integral or reverent but a treasure which should be spent to satiate their needs. They thought of themselves as superior to everything around them and considered environment to be something which is for their usage. They extracted resources, oil, timber and labour from the third world countries without taking into consideration their impact on the native environment and people. Post-colonial critics like Edward Said clearly states that colonial invasion was not just political in nature but ecological as well. It transformed the land, the rivers, the forests into tools for political and monetary gains. With the advent of industrialisation, violence took a new monstrous form. Extraction of oil, clearing of forests, unprecedented construction etc were carried out in the name of development and urbanisation. But in reality, all this was structural violence which normalised the harm caused to environment. Environmental Violence became the new reality but its impact on society isn't distributed equally. A section of society profits from this while the poor and powerless section of the society subsides under the burden of environmental violence. It costs them their land, their water and their lives as well.

Environmental Violence is layered in nature. Primarily it can be seen in 'extractive violence', in the form of loot of resources, mining of minerals, fossils fuels extractions, dam construction, deforestation etc. All these activities lead to displacement of the native communities which further disrupts the harmony of the ecosystem. Secondly, this violences takes shape in the form of air, water and soil pollution. It mainly impacts the poor and impoverished section of the society because they depend directly on the natural sources for their livelihood. These people are the least responsible for this violences but are the most impacted by it. Third and the most dominant of this violence is epistemic violence. It discards

the indigenous knowledge in favour of modern and industrial discourses. The dominant economic and scientific discourse rejects the indigenous ecological knowledge as illegal or unscientific. The western ideologies erase the non-western traditions of environmental conservation and replace them with exploitative paradigms rooted in technology. This shows that environmental violence is not just physical but ontological as well. This reshapes how humans and non-humans are imagined, valued and governed.

The consequences of environmental violence are not apparent right away, instead they are long-term and permanent in nature. The proponents of Environmental Justice clearly states that this ecological devastation mostly impacts the section of society which is least responsible for its current state. Scholars argue that this inordinate burden is a type of ecological apartheid where the poor and the persecuted becomes the target. These people have to sacrifice their land, their livelihood and at times their lives as well. Such areas gradually become uninhabitable because of pollution, extraction and militarization and it becomes impossible to live in these areas. Thus, environmental violence becomes a key instrument of neocolonial domination, perpetuating the global imbalance of power and capital that originated in the colonial era. In other words, colonial exploitation continues even today in the name of development and progress.

Environmental Violence is not just physical or economic but it has deep psychological and cultural impact as well. The landscape which was once a part of collective memory of people and provided them with spiritual identity has now become the symbol of loss and trauma for the same people. With the forced migration of rural and native people their cultural identity also fades away. This aspect brings environmental violence in close contact with theories of environmental grief and brings to attention the emotional distress caused by the transformation of one's home environment. With the increase in ecological degradation, communities not only experience physical dislocation but existential disorientation as well. They lose their identities and questions their place in the society. The traditional ecological knowledge which was crucial for the balance of their community is declared obsolete in the face of environmental transformation.

In the field of Literature and Cultural studies, Environmental Violence works as a theme as well as methodology. Both, Abdul Rahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* showcases the spiritual, physical and emotional consequences of oil-capitalism on people and environment. In these narratives, the forest, the desert and the delta are not just physical setting but actually a symbol of resistance against the plundering and extraction. These landscapes are the witnesses of histories of exploitation and has now transformed into the icon of suffering and endurance. These novel highlights the inter-connectedness of human and non-human lives and openly challenges the anthropocentric ideologies. These novels foreground environmental violence, revealing that the destruction of the environment is inseparable from the dehumanization of its inhabitants.

## ANALYSIS-

*Cities of Salt* by Abdul Rahman Munif is an exemplary novel underscoring the environmental devastation caused by Petro-capitalism and imperial modernity in the Arab countries. As Munif said, “The defeat of 1967 pushed me toward the novel not as a means of escape but of confrontation” (Hafez 47). The setting of the novel is an imaginary city named as Wadi-al-Uyoun which has been completely transformed by the advent of American oil companies. This novel foregrounds the different levels of systemic violence including Global Capitalism as well. The narrative brings to attention that the environmental ruin is not only situational but it is also deeply attached with the social, cultural and political disintegration as well. The axis of the novel is that violence which transformed an ecological sanctuary into a Petro-dystopian world. The greed of oil and the illusion of wealth brought with it, transmuted the lives and culture of several native communities. The novel very clearly shows that the environmental apocalypse is not accidental but a calculated result of imperial expansion and resource exploitation at an unparalleled rate. Munif’s sustained preoccupation with the contamination of the natural world establishes a transnational justice of environmental and cultural dimensions juxtaposed against the wasteful excesses and manipulations of the oil economy.

The novel presents the city of Wadi-al-Uyoun as an idyllic oasis highlighted by sustenance, harmony and rootedness of people as well as environment. The setting is clear reflection of Munif’s ecological ethos. The native Bedouin community of Wdi-al-Uyoun is deeply connected to its environment. Wadi is not just a place but a source of continuity as well as spiritual refuge for them. They revered their environment and expressed their gratitude in the difficult times as well. The water bodies and the flora around it is a symbol of grace and abundance in their lives. Water is not just a commodity but a temporal bridge which links their past and future, nourishes their traditions and nurtures the culture which abides by the ecological rhythms. The customs and faith of this community are in complete harmony with the nature. But the arrival of outsiders rings the bells of danger for these people. They say, “dangerous, sneaky foreigners who had come, no one knew for what reasons, or what they wanted to do, or what would happen in the end” (33). They refuse to believe that they have come in search of water. They consider it be a guise for their hidden sinister purpose. Miteb-al-Hathal discerns that they “certainly didn't come for water-they want something else”. (Munif 29). This initial deceit hides the predatory impulse of colonial intervention and their motive of commodification of land masked as benevolence. Munif himself says, “people were poor, but they were happy with the life they lived and praised it extravagantly” (p. 8).

*Cities of Salt* used instinctual and corporeal imagery to show the extent of damage caused by ecological violence. The obliteration of the entire oasis is a distinct example of the height of the destruction caused by environmental degradation. The city of Wdi-al-Uyoun which was once an exuberant and self-sustaining landscape has been destroyed or refashioned into an industrial oil site. Rob Nixon explained this transformation as “oil becomes damnation” in underdeveloped countries, he says “If ‘fossil fuel’ resonates with a sense of time borrowed against an exhaustible past and an exhaustible future, ‘Resource curse’ holds in taut suspense notions of fortune and misfortune” (*Slow Violence* 69). Munif calls this ecological devastation a butchery and insane massacre. This destruction has erased the distinction between the pains and sufferings of humans and non-human species affecting everybody with same intensity. This further widens the gap between destruction and conservation. The anthropomorphic portrayal of trees evokes their silent endurance and anguish,

The trees shook violently and groaned before falling, cried for help, panicked, called out in helpless pain and then fell entreatingly to the ground, as if trying to snuggle into the earth to grow and spring forth alive again” (106).

The tractors are likened to ravenous wolves who devour the fields and uproot the trees throwing them on earth mercilessly. This not only uproots the forest but also displaces soil and water with oil. This is a direct instance of colonial appropriation. The disappearance of the entire oasis is not just literal but symbolic as well. The city which once oozed with life and laughter is now completely uprooted. The entire episode is emotionally captured in the words of Fawaz when he says, “There was no trace of the wadi he had left behind, none of the old things remained” (Munif 135). The altered atmosphere becomes a testament to irreversible ecological contamination. The life of Bedouin community which earlier depended on the water and season cycle has been transformed into the extractive temporality of oil. This temporal regime which creates the illusion of limitless wealth and affluence in reality is the result of myopic arrogance of capitalist modernity. Foreign invaders extracted resources thinking they are inexhaustible. In this process they transform the people and the resources into fossil fuels and relics. Miteb rejects this illusion of prosperity and raises his concern against the idea of oil as salvation. The innocent villagers, confused by the new discourse of “oil wealth,” respond with irony: ““Oil? The naphtha we find is enough to light these lamps of ours that choke you with fumes before they shed light”” (Munif 95).

This Ecological Violence not only damaged the environment of Wadi-al-Uyoun but also destroyed the culture of society of the city. The community which lived there since ages which had their traditions, memories are histories attached to this land have been forcefully dislocated. All this was carried out in the name of civilisation and progress and the innocent villagers were forced to become the part of capitalist system. People who once lead a sustainable life were now forced to perform labour. Their lands and livelihood are snatched and they are pushed into poverty, working class and diaspora. The culmination of this systematic environmental devastation materializes in Harran. It is an emergent oil town which is a dystopian symbol of alienation, poverty, and authoritarian control. It has become the centre of foreign power and authoritarian control. This city is a symbol of ecological exhaustion and social fragmentation. Its environment is unstable because of the draught and even the nights are not quiet. Arab labourers are forced to live in overcrowded barracks which were poorly constructed with wood and sheer metal. They are deprived of hygiene and dignity but the Americans, on the other hand, insulated by comfort and technology where they, “retreat every evening to their swimming pool... to their air-conditioned rooms whose thick curtains shut everything out: sunlight, dust, flies, and Arabs” (Munif 391).

Amidst all this Miteb al-Hathal is the only character who holds his moral grounds. He is well aware of the deceits and pretensions of the Americans. The disappearance of Miteb is equivalent to the extinction of indigenous knowledge and lifestyle which was based on the ecological reverence and communal ethics of people. When the Americans point toward the ground beneath his feet, “he flinched... that they were pointing instead to the land he was walking on, that he was no more than a landmark to them” (Munif 103). This moment stands for the objectification of both land and native people within the extractive capitalist gaze.

*Cities of Salt* is a well appreciated critique of the Environmental Violence and Petro-modernity. This novel explains how oil-capitalism ruined a sustainable and stable water-based lives of people. The title itself becomes a metaphor for the fragility and impermanence of life in the modern world. Ali says, “When the waters come in, the first waves will dissolve the salt and reduce these great glass cities to dust” (Ali 58). The novel links the fate of land, people, and identity under the corrosive shadow of imperial extraction and global capital. Nixon connects Munif’s narratives to the term “resource curse”,

*Cities of Salt* tracks how a nascent transnational oil culture created the foundations for the resource curse, deepening the divide between a narrow class that would become

astronomically rich and the uprooted, immiserated masses from inside and increasingly from beyond the Persian Gulf. (*Nixon 75*).

Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* is an eye-opening story highlighting the horrific consequences of environmental violence. It shows the destruction caused by the oil extracting companies in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The story revolves around two journalists, Rufus and Jack who are searching for the kidnapped wife of a British officer. However, this is not a story of mere search, but shows us the detrimental repercussions of greed and power. Pollution is just an outcome of this greed, but the real hazard is bio-colonialization which is erasing the people and the environment both. Habila clearly shows how the greed for money and oil has disbalanced the society; rivers have become poisonous, lands barren, people have become the victims of diseases, migration and death. All this is an end result of capitalism where humans and nature have been reduced to objects only.

Niger Delta is Africa's one of the largest and richest ecological zones. Its mangrove forest, rainwater forest, and clean rivers are the livelihood of its residents. But with the arrival of oil-extractors in 1958, this lush green area transformed into a chemical cemetery. In the years between 2015-2021, around 4,919 oil leaks were reported foregrounding the intensity of damage caused. This is what scholars called Ecocide in real terms. Habila presents a very real image of this violence in her novel. Her story is an animate example of what Buell calls "toxic goth" (42), a genre of fiction where the land itself narrates the stories of the violence bore by her. The setting of the novel are the desolate villages which from where people have been forcefully displaced. There is deafening silence all around. Broken houses, barren land, poisonous rivers and silence all around intensifies the horror of environmental violence. When Rufus and Jack pass through these villages, they could sense the dilapidated lives and stillness of the land. This serves as a physical emblem of the ruinous aftermath of greed and pollution and the faded culture and lives of people. Rufus documents the eerie despondency,

The same empty squat dwellings, the same ripe and flagon stench, the barrenness, the oil slick and the same indefinable sadness in the air, as if a community of ghosts were suspended above the punctured zinc, roofs, unwilling to depart, yet powerless to return (Habila 8).

The most dreadful side of environmental violence could be seen in the water of Niger Delta. Earlier this water was a source of life. People used to drink this water, catch fishes and harvest their livelihood from this water. Now this water has turned into a symbol of death. It has turned into heavy water laden with oil and chemical waste. The oil leaks have suffocated the rivers which led to reduced oxygen level in water and death of fishes. The whole river turned into poison and destruction. As Rufus observes, "over the black expressionless water, there were no birds or other water creatures" (Habila 10). Death becomes a new reality, "we saw dead birds draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and silk with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots" (Habila 9). The imagery of decay is captured in the suffocation of the very landscape. Habila writes that the patch of grass growing by the water is choaked by oil, each blade is covered with blotches like the liver spots of a smoker's hands. The deteriorating condition of environment is a reflection illustrating how intimately environmental harm mirrors bodily degradation.

Other than oil spills, gas flaring is a new and invisible form of environmental violence. The constantly burning toxic gases dissolve into the air and poison the entire environment. It covers the land in soot and induces acid rain making air and soil uninhabitable for the people. Gloria, the nurse on Irikefe Island, testifies to its toll on animals and birds as well. She says that these islands used to be a habitat for bats, now only a few dozen remain. Gas flares kill them. This gas not only kills the bats but other flying creatures as well.

The direct victim of ecological destruction is the natives of the land. They witness their sources of livelihood dwindle before their eyes. For generations people of Niger delta depended on catching fishes but now the rivers become “polluted and useless for fishing” and the land “grew only gas flares and pipelines” (Habila 43). These people got stuck in the cycle of poverty and despair. Many of these people had to migrate and the rest of them were forced to undertake illegal oil bunkering. Fisherman Tamuno is a prime example of this misery. He pleads to the reporters to take his son away, “But see, what is he going to do here? Nothing. No fish for the river, nothing. I fear saying soon he will go join militants, and I do not want that” (Habila 36). This clearly shows the disintegration of the entire civilization. People who once enjoyed the bounty of nature are now struggling to keep their civilization alive.

This novel also brings to attention the impact of environmental violence on one’s body as well as psyche. This is symbolized in the character of Zaq. He is weak and suffering from an unnamed fever. Doctor tells Rufus, “Your friend, I’m sorry is dying” (141). Doctor tells him that this oil treated water is responsible for his death and he must have picked the fever from this water. The physician grimly concludes that he has been in this area for five years now he is sure that this is a place for dying. The land overrun by pipelines clearly shows the result of extraction in the form of altered environment. The militarization of these exploitative orders further increases the difficulty of innocent villagers. This is shown in the behaviour of Major when he drenches captives in petrol, declaring: “you can’t stand the smell of oil? Isn’t it what you fight for, kill for? By the time I’m through with you, you’ll hate the smell of it, you’ll hate the very name petrol” (Habila 61).

Habila’s novel traces the journey of a village which got destroyed by the greed for money and wealth. It was a simple and sustainable village which was deeply connected to its environment. Chief Ibrahim reminisces that once upon a time it was all like a paradise. They had everything. They were busy in fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children grow up before them, happy. However, Habila not only shows the destruction but also hints towards the healing power and resilience of nature. Healing of Boma shows that the nature still has regenerating power, it only takes efforts on the part of humans to cleanse it completely.

Finally, *Oil on Water* points towards the root cause of political, social and existential crisis of Nigeria, which is environmental violence. Polluted river, dying animals and toxic air is evidence of the devastation. The most poignant affirmation of ecological identity comes from the imprisoned locals who declare, “We are the people, we are the Delta, we represent the very earth on which we stand” (Habila 149). Habila’s novel thus transcends reportage, it becomes a literary ecology of resistance, asserting that the fate of the people is inextricable from the fate of their desecrated land and poisoned waters.

### **Conclusion-**

Both, Abdul Munif’s *Cities of Salt* and Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* highlights the deep-rooted relations of ecological violence, imperialism and Petro-capitalist modernity. These novels bring to attention that oil is not just a measure of development but also responsible for devastation, inequality and cultural disintegration. The settings of the novel be it Delta or Dessert became a site of destruction to show that the political and social development can’t be distinguished from ecological violence. In the novel *Cities of Salt*, Munif presents the annihilation of the environment in the destroyed oasis. The advent of American oil companies transformed this green oasis into a barren industrial site. The dying rivers, destroyed trees and displaced communities exposes the fading identity of the inhabitants. Likewise, Habila’s *Oil on Water* based on Niger Delta presents the poisoned waterbodies, annihilated biodiversity, and militarization of the land.

Both the writers shows that the destruction is not an accident but an aftermath of Petro-modernity. Munif exposes the strategical exploitation of natives by western companies and the local rulers. Whereas Habila questions the sacrifice of people and environment by the multinational oil companies. The environment becomes an unclaimed body which could be looted, commodified and silenced forever. Habila's novel, the community of Irikefe Island embodies the potential for healing and ecological restoration. This space functions as an allegorical refuge, suggesting that nature, though wounded, retains its regenerative capacity when freed from exploitation. Both authors affirm that recovery requires not merely environmental rehabilitation but also the reimagining of ethical relationships between humans and their ecosystems. Munif's character Miteb al-Hathal embodies a moral and ecological conscience that resists imperial encroachment and stands as a living archive of memory and defiance. His connection to the land signifies a refusal to surrender to the amnesia of modernization.

Ultimately, Munif and Habila come together in their portrayal of ecological violence as the defining symptom of Petro-capitalism's moral bankruptcy. Yet they also envision a future hope rooted in memory, resistance, and ecological awareness. Their narratives assert that human survival depends on restoring a reciprocal bond with the natural world, one that rejects extraction and embraces stewardship. Even amid desolation, both writers suggest that the land endures as a repository of resilience, a silent witness that holds the potential for renewal beyond the ruins of oil-driven modernity.

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