

The Culture of Exile and Narratives of Resistance: A Study of Munif's Cities of Salt and Naipaul's the Middle Passage

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Abstract

Fictional texts still remain a forceful medium in understanding the turbulent global culture at the end of the millennium. The language of literature is greatly affected by the struggle between two mutually opposed forces: the oppressor and the resisting power of the oppressed. The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty, through resistance. The biggest weapon against this defiance is to annihilate their belief in their past, roots, culture, or even their names and ultimately in themselves. It makes them want to identify with that which is remote; for example other people's language. Ideas are implanted that any possibility of success or triumph is a remote ridiculous dream. This in turn creates a collective despair and a wasteland where the oppressor presents himself as the cure.

Remembering, looking back in anger or even imagining are all acts of resistance and of lending coherence and integrity to a history and a homeland interrupted, divided or compromised by instances of loss. Redressing forcibly forgotten experiences, allows the silences of history to come into word, and makes us imagine alternative scripts of the past, hence invariably changes our understanding of the present.

The present paper aims at investigating narratives that recuperate losses incurred in migration, exile and dislocation. Forced or voluntary immigration is discussed as part and parcel in the narratives that originate at border crossings and that cannot be bound by national borders, languages or traditions through Naipaul's *The Middle Passage*, and Munif's *Cities of Salt*, where the chaotic dynamics of a world constantly on the move creates resistance and possibly confrontations, mirroring the fragmented consciousness of postmodern culture elucidated by Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon.

Keywords: resistance literature, literature of exile, cities of salt, the middle passage, postmodernism, politics and literature

1. Introduction

With the advance of the twentieth century a considerable body of literature and theoretical analysis of political, cultural and ideological struggle for national liberation was produced. Peoples in those areas of the world on which Europe and North America sought political control and cultural dominance expressed their suffering in a significant corpus of narrative and poetic writing. This enormous production needs recognition and analysis since it presents a serious challenge to the oppressor. It does not only document for the colonial practices and role in exploiting the land and the people, but illustrates and documents the several movements and various forms of resistance in the part of the colonized-normal man or authors.

Resistance Literature has not been paid enough recognition in the postmodern studies, "it has been largely excluded or ignored not only in traditional departments of literature organized according to the 'traditional' criteria... But even in comparative literature which tend to restrict itself to the more Northern parts of the globe when seeking material for comparison" as Barbara Harlow maintains (1981, xvi). On the other hand, the twentieth century witnessed a rapid and varied advance of literary critical theory, and it is important to examine the applicability of these theories outside the cultural tradition that produced them.

The definition of the term "Resistance Literature" can only be achieved through a thorough reading of the texts themselves, together with an analysis of the ideology and the culture of the authors who produced them as part of their struggle against colonization, alongside the diplomatic efforts and the gun. Resistance literature continues

to wage war against imperialism and continues to struggle for liberation on different levels: political and cultural. Many writings are either ignored by publishers and publication institution, and therefore are not distributed “well” in the “first” or “third” worlds due to censorship. Worse still is that many of these works are confiscated for political reasons. Resistance is not only deployed in the content of these writings but in the choice of language in which these writings are published. Many authors believe that although English is the global, most commonly used language nowadays, it is still the language of one colonial-if not the major-power. However, many of the narratives and the poetic works are still translated for reasons involving readership and publicity, such as the works of Palestinian authors or writers from Algeria and the African Colonies.

The word Resistance implies struggle, therefore, it proposes the existence of two opposing powers: a people’s collective relationship to a certain land or ideology, a common identity or even a common cause, as well as an oppressor or a threat to that political, social or cultural existence. The tension between these two binaries results from the pressure practiced by the occupying/suppressing power to subjugate this people. In some cases subjugation develops into a more severe act of exile of the oppressed or the dispossessed people or their representatives. In order to approach the resistance literature of a given people or culture, one has to investigate “the resistance movement” within which this literature is produced as Ghasan Kanafani maintains in his article *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine* (1986, p. 12). All narrative of resistance in the contemporary national liberation struggle is directed to the imperial domination of different parts of the world; physically, culturally, or ideologically. It is the attempt of the oppressed to have a voice. Opposite to the literature of the imperialist about the different colonies which ignores many facts such as the historical and the cultural background of these colonies, resistance literature presents a legend of the national resistance which exposes the manipulation of the colonizer as much as it demystifies its power.

Ngugimaintains in his essay “*Literature in Schools*” that “in literature there have been two opposing aesthetics: the aesthetic of oppression and exploitation and of acquiescence with imperialism; and that of human struggle for total liberation” (1981, p. 38). This leads the discussion to a very crucial point where even the decolonized nations are left dwelling under the ideological impact of imperialism since most of the educated elite are the product of Western Culture and education. The discussion can go even further to consider the different literary genres and conventions which are primarily a product of the West. Ngugi insists on the need for a “different” approach and a different analysis of literature in colonized or post colonized lands, since each culture has its own signifying character that produces different narratives.

Resistance Literature is thus the collective opposition to the pragmatic, cultural imperialism which accompanied Western economic, military and political domination of the Third World. There is, undoubtedly, a direct relation between armed resistance and resistance literature; “culture plunges its roots into the physical reality of the environmental humans in which it develops” (Cabral, 1970, p. 42). Hence, resistance literature is the natural and direct product growing in a land that resist imperialism. It is “the natural, logical and necessary product of resistance in its broadest sense: as refusal and as a firm grasp of roots and situations” as Kanfani asserts (1987, p. 11). In his obituary *The Daily Star* described Kanfani as a “commando who has never fired a gun”, which emphasizes the power of the pen and the power of Resistance Literature on the imperialist. Like other authors of resistance narrative, he identifies himself with his people’s culture and aspirations, and writes to express these.

Thus, in all narratives and movements of resistance, the authors struggle for national liberation that could only be achieved through political and economic liberation of the people under imperial power. However, along with fighting for national and cultural liberation, those writers are fighting to bring about awareness and transformation in the existing social structure and way of thinking. Governments and political powers-which are usually oppressive, especially in the newly decolonized countries-are usually not in favour of such change and awareness. Therefore, they resist any movement or force that might cause change. And since freedom and liberty are basic human needs whose loss might cause severe consequences to the level of trauma on both the personal and collective levels, the easiest way for such governments is to demolish such movements and detain/exile such writers.

Aware of the cruelty of detention and exile, the oppressive regimes inaugurated political jail or political banishment to consolidate the pillars of their existence. Banishment here is the ultimate manifestation of power since it forces the individual away from all that he has been fighting for. Ironically enough these oppressive acts paved the way for a huge corpus of resistance narrative. Resistance Literature published in the twentieth century reflects the dramatic events that many parts of the Arab region and Worldwide witnessed: the Two World Wars, apartheid, the Palestinian trauma, and many other dramatic events. In the Arab countries, like in many other parts of the world, decolonization brought about more dictatorial oppressive regimes aspiring to manifest power by force at the expense of the peoples’ freedom, which in turn provoked people’s resistance. That is why, as Joan

Davis argues, “the twentieth century has produced as many prisoners and prison writers as in the entire history of Man” (1990, p. 7).

A thread goes in both Naipaul’s *The Middle Passage*, and Munif’s *Cities of Salt*; as they both centre on the actual and metaphorical meaning of “home”, as well as political and cultural resistance in search for identity, a true one. Though the form of the two narratives differs, the analogous events, themes, representation of different types and different categories of societies, and above all the confining atmosphere locate the two novels in the category of Resistance Literature. In addition, the autobiographical and the historical contexts are important features of resistance narrative since they are an interplay of fiction and actuality, a fact that Jost justifies in his belief that “however determined or striking a writer’s talent may be, his work necessarily reflects a literary zeitgeist because it was conceived and born at a specific stage of the culture that helped shape its intellectual and artistic personality” (1974, viii). Both Munif and Naipaul find themselves, like their heroes, standing on the threshold of a metaphorical or actual jail/exile which they have to resist and fight back against.

While Naipaul gives a map for the movement between London and Trinidad, Munif sets his *Cities of Salt* in an imaginary, nameless desert country where a primitive regime crushes whoever dares to oppose it. Although defining the setting in Naipaul’s narrative confines the topic’s universal scope, Munif considers generalization of the setting “the ultimate specificity” (2003). The most strikingly significant aspect in both narratives is the title; “*Cities of Salt*” and “*The Middle Passage*” are both places where man loses his sense of being and suffers a state of uncertainty and loss. This sense of loss is reflected all through the narrative of both authors as well as in the setting after imperialism: the existence of mimic governments in *The Middle Passage*, and the rapid, violating and destructive change in *Cities of Salt* under the rule of oppressive authorities.

Cities of Salt is a quintet that consume 2500 pages, and each volume has a different title. The first part with which we are mainly concerned here is entitled *Al-Tih*, which can be fairly translated into “wilderness”. The English Translation though is *Cities of Salt* to reflect the nature of the place and the state of dryness and which implies the impossibility of a meaningful life there. The Arabic title is reflected in the narrative in different ways; the first reference to “the desert” appears in Munif’s description of Wadi Al-Uyoun; an oasis in the middle of the desert full of palm trees and enjoys serenity and peace that can’t be found anywhere else in this nameless desert country. However, if one stands at the border of the Wadi “by the last palm tree, there you find the endless salty desert”. Endless as it is, travellers can never find a way out of this vast clueless area and they therefore get lost, and eventually die since there is nothing but the dry, salty sand and the shocking heat.

The main plot in *Cities of Salt* reflects a major problem in the Arab, particularly the Gulf region: Oil. The problem is not only about the sudden great wealth that hit the people of the place, but about the great change that struck the region in the past seven or more decades. A change that affected not only the Gulf region but the Arabs and eventually the whole world. Al-Nabulsi maintains that the title is an emblem of the “great loss and disappointment that awaits [our] societies which are manipulated by a great power”. This loss can be depicted in the tragedy of two major groups in the desert country described in the narrative who used to lead a peaceful life: those of Wadi Al-Uyoun, a once upon a time solid community, whose people were forced to evacuate the place for the exploring American company; and those of Harran, a once upon a time neglected, rarely visited desert. Both are tremendously affected by the arrival of the Americans who settle down and construct their own compound houses and workplace. Wadi Al-Uyoun is reconstructed to suit the American life style, demolishing ancient features and destroying the natives’ life. Harran, on the other hand, suffers the non-stopping arrival of new strangers looking for jobs in the Oil Company. The result in both cases is the ultimate loss of geographical, social and cultural identity. The natives of the land became strangers in their own communities, they dissolved like salt and disappeared in the accumulating crowd. *Cities of Salt* is a narrative where “the desert” is the major character to whom people lose their own identity and metamorphose into salt to dissolve.

Naipaul’s narrative on the other hand, holds another significant title; “*The Middle Passage*” is an emblem of all the suffering that slaves from Africa to America have been through on their way to the West Indies, Brazil or North America. “*The Middle Passage*” is the second rout of a three way trip from and to Europe. The first one starts in Europe where ships loaded with glassware, silk, guns, cloth and different goods went to Africa and traded these for slaves. The second rout or “*The Middle Passage*” is when these ships left Africa loaded with slaves-men and women- to their destiny and traded them for rum, sugar, and other types of goods. In this middle passage slaves suffered the most. They were considered as personal “commodities”, which reinforces their sufferings. A slave’s plight included that his master has every right of “ownership”; including capture, acquisition or disposal, selling, or exchanging him for another slave. Klein pointed out that “about two thirds of all slaves arrived during the months of summer and fall. The seasonal pattern seems to be related more to sailing conditions for Africa and conditions of supply within Africa than to seasonal demands for labour” (1978, p. 79).

This of course affected the mortality rates for slaves crossing “*The Middle Passage*”: adult males and females experienced almost identical rates of mortality according to Klein’s study. In this sense “*The Middle Passage*” witnessed the perishing of the African slaves not only their sufferings. Hence the title of Naipaul’s novel that highlights not only the past suffering of transported slaves, but the then current situation of the perishing of a whole culture and a whole nation dissolving in that of the colonizer’s and the mimic governments after decolonization.

Thus the two narratives have a lot in common; starting from the ambiguous titles that are very much related to significant places where disruption and therefore resistance takes place, passing by the controversial topics they discuss and which invite a lot of criticism whether for or against them. The theme in the two novels is almost the same and the point of view of the authors is that of an omniscient narrator who is both an insider and an outsider at the same time. Both novels can be categorized as post-modern narratives, not only because of the theme they discuss, but because both depend on existentialism as a perspective through which this theme is handled.

In his novels Naipaul shows a continuous search for “self” and identity, which marks the autobiographical strand in his writings, along with the philosophical and thematic strands. The philosophical strand according to Sarfin is associated closely to “the existential ideas of nothingness and dissolution, which in turn are closely connected to a state of pessimism and nihilism” (2008, p. 153). This philosophical notion of nothingness has pervaded most of Naipaul’s narratives such as *The Middle Passage*. His use of that strand is a clear indication of deep pathos about life that ends in panic and frustration, about the future of the people and the place, and may be about himself as well. In *The Middle Passage*, and especially in the part related to Trinidad, there is a general mood and tone of decay with all its connections: nothingness, corruption, futility and demise. Life in *The Middle Passage*—especially in the post-colonial era- becomes futile. The people of the independent colonies become lost in a world that marginalizes them and where they are in continuous search for identity. Naipaul’s philosophical strand projects and constructs a deep pessimism about the world and its inhabitants who are viewed as totally absorbed in futility. This is what Doerksen describes to be “the futility of the search for the meaning of existence in both the past and the future” (1981, p. 108). This sense of futility and dissolution is embedded in all of Naipaul’s narrative as Sarfin maintains.

There are many terms used in *The Middle Passage*, like other writings by Naipaul, which relate between pessimism and Existentialism. Naipaul uses images, and concepts like “nausea”, “nothingness”, and “panic” which are fundamental constructs in Existential thought and which have been used by Existentialist writers like Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, and Earnest Hemingway. In Naipaul’s writings, and especially in *The Middle Passage*, these images and concepts represent the sufferings of humanity because of life itself, not only because of the oppressor. One of the main concerns in his narrative is to present characters who reflect this kind of mental and spiritual desolation and dereliction and that relates him directly to the philosophical notion of “nothingness” and therefore to Existential thought. For Naipaul, the world “is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it” (1985, p. 3).

A scrutinizing reading of Naipaul’s narrative shows the doctrine of existential thought: one’s existence is of value when one becomes committed and involved in society and the world. People who are not quite involved are useless and become non-entities. They become worthless; they have “allowed themselves to become nothing”. Panic is another aspect that relates Naipaul to existential anxiety. The panic that he felt since his youth and that is referred to in *The Middle Passage* as “nerves” or “anxiety attacks”, is that of an individual who does not want to end up in anonymity, who is fighting for identity: an ever present feeling of insecurity. In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul delves deep into this sense of existential pessimism; the novel contains many negative observations about the people of the Caribbean in general. The way Naipaul describes all places as tinged with malaise provokes a more general assumption about existential decay and ruins, and about the nothingness of life in general. Every place he visits involves this feeling: “for nothing was created in the British West Indies, no civilization as in Spanish America, no great revolution as in Haiti or the American colonies. There were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect: the size of the island called for nothing else” (2001, p. 27). The use of the word “nothing” is essential here. Naipaul’s criticism here is more philosophical than personal. He is referring to the exploitation, plunder, rape and slavery of the island that amounts to “a rather depressing Caribbean Journey” (Bedford, 1963, p. 1). This depressing sense is one of the existential angst; Naipaul uses terms like “dereliction”, “desolation” and abandonment in his report about Surinam:

A derelict man in a derelict land ... lost in a landscape which had never ceased to be unreal because the scene of the enforced and always temporary residence: the slaves kidnapped from one continent and abandoned on the unprofitable plantations of another, from which there could never be more escape. I was

glad to leave Coronie, for more than lazy Negroes, it held the full desolation that come to those who made *The Middle Passage* (2001, p. 190).

The passage represents a search for self that is tinged with a sense of a doom, demise and dereliction, one can but notice the pessimistic sense that envelopes Naipaul's observations. It is a gloomy, dark, fatalistic vision of things. It is not only the localized pessimism that is negotiated here, but rather a deeper generalized pessimism about the darkness of life and of a world where goals are never achieved and things never settle down for the better.

Even though *The Middle Passage*, like many of Naipaul's texts, deals mostly with the post-colonial state of man, it represents more fully the universal dilemma of man and his existential condition where the end is of an ultimate decay and desolation. It is essential here to know that V.S. Naipaul, of an Indian extraction but from Trinidad, arrived in Britain in 1950 to escape his cultural background. He describes his experience in Britain as a very "odd situation ... an Indian writer writes in English for an English audience who talk their own sort of English" (1985, p. 25). What established him as a well-known author was his 1961 novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* which presents the tension of an Indian man suffering the struggle between his independence and the irresistible pull of his Hindu family structure, all presented in the post-colonial Trinidad setting-unique in its local flavour yet universal in its indication.

In the days of the Empire, everyone who ended his service was expected to return home (England) for retirement. To stay on in India and become "jungle" or native, as Nicolas Wong maintains, was strongly disapproved of. Ironically enough, the English novel, which is considered as one of the standards of English civilization, has gone "jungle"; with novels of non-native writers like Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdi, V.S. Naipaul and many others who have added to it the complicated voices of their native language, traditions and culture.

One of the major themes in the Indo-Anglian writings is the concept of selfhood in the post-modern era. Hybridity created a strong sense of identity. The central dilemma for most Indo-Anglian narratives is whether to act as a coloured and remain a representation of the stereotype, or escape this and act as an Englishman; in other words "authentic or phony". This seems to be one of the major obstacles that encountered Naipaul in *The Middle Passage*. He agrees to visit his homeland as a mere reporter or commentator on life there, yet at a certain point cannot help but act the opposite. *The Middle Passage* constitutes a major turning point in Naipaul's literary career. From this novel onward his autobiographical persona changes from that of West Indian writer to a controversial chronicler of chaotic post-colonial conditions, opposite to the ironic, though warm and sympathetic depiction of his homeland as Shizan Ozawa observes (2012). In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul appears confused; he positions himself as a cultural insider who values the innate characteristics of his homeland and sympathizes with its people, realizing the negative effect of the colonized on the natives. While in other parts he distinguishes himself as an outsider who sees no value of the people or the land and who refers to Victorian metropolitan travellers as his cultural affiliation.

The novel is a result and an outcome of a journey back home in 1960 in a fellowship offered by the government of Trinidad and Tobago. Ironically enough, the novel presents a drastic change of perspective of Naipaul's country of birth; opposite to the exclusive focus on the tragicomic lives of the Indian community in Trinidad discussed in his previous novels, Naipaul starts in *The Middle Passage* to deal with the socio-cultural problems of the Caribbean regime in general. Rob Nixon argues that "by diversifying into non-fiction, he has achieved a reputation of unique order, not only as a powerful imaginative writer, but as a mandarin and an institution" (1992, p. 5). At the beginning of his writing Naipaul was perceived as an important contributor to "the new wave of West Indian writing" (Barthwaite, 1961, p. 275). *The Middle Passage* however, points to a rapidly widening gap between Naipaul and his homeland—the Caribbean region—which provoked other Caribbean authors' hostility: "Mr. Naipaul personal tragedy is that he believes his panic to be unique, or rather that the society from which he fled in panic is uniquely and horribly worthless" (Hearne, 1977, p. 65). This harsh point of view is a result of the great change of perspective that Naipaul adopts in *The Middle Passage*. He is one moment an insider of the culture and another an outsider:

In 1960 I was still a colonial traveller to far off places that were still colonies, in a world still more or less ruled by colonial ideas [...]. To travel was glamorous. But travel also made unsuspected demands on me as a man and a writer, and perhaps for that reason it soon became a necessary stimulus for me. It broadened my world view; it showed me a changing world and took me out of my own colonial shell; it became the substitute for the mature social experience—the deepening knowledge of a society—which my background and the nature of my life denied me. My uncertainty about my role withered; a role was not necessary. I recognized my own instincts as a traveller, and was content to be myself, to be what I had always been, a looker. And I learned to look in my own way (1985, p. 11).

The above extract shows a lot about Naipaul. It is very distinctive here that he claims that travel got him out of the “colonial shell” and provided him with “the substitute for the mature social experience”. It is obvious here that he generalizes about those who have been colonized and those who have not witnessed the colonial experience, making the latter more socially mature, and conceptualizing travel as a method of self-formation. The details of *The Middle Passage* expose an author in search for identity, starting from the preface to the book, Naipaul explained his unease and anxiety about writing a travel record:

To analyze and decide before writing would rob the writer of the excitement which supports him during his solitude, and would be the opposite of my method as a novelist. I also felt it as a danger that, having factually analysed the society as far as I was able, I would be unable afterwards to think of it in terms of fiction and that in anything I might write I would be concerned only to prove a point (1985, p. 5).

All through his journey he defines himself as a novelist, not as a travel writer. He himself was in search for an identity and struggled to find a voice appropriate for a travel writer. The “return” to his homeland unexpectedly exposes a great anxiety.

As soon as the Francisco Bobadilla had touched the quay, ship’s side against rubber bumpers, I began to feel all my old fear of Trinidad. I did not want to stay. I had left the security of the ship and had no assurance that I would ever leave the island again. I had forgotten nothing: the wooden houses, jalousied half-way down, with fretwork along gables and eaves, fashionable before the concrete era ... The years I had spent abroad fell away and I could not be sure which was the reality in my life: the first eighteen years in Trinidad or the later years in England. I had never wanted to stay in Trinidad. When I was in the fourth form I wrote a vow on the endpaper of my Kennedy’s Revised Latin Primer to leave within five years. I left after six; and for many years afterwards in England, falling asleep in bedsitters with the electric fire on, I had been awakened by the nightmare that I was back in tropical Trinidad (2001, pp. 33-34).

Opposite to the first part of the narrative where Naipaul seems very comfortable and self-confident about his voyage and affiliation, the above extract shows great anxiety about his identity and his persona and sense of belonging. It is this in-between space, “*The Middle Passage*” of his journey that mundane objects assume different cultural connections. The same effect can be seen on different passage in the novel: “As England receded, people prepared more actively for the West Indies. They formed colour groups, race groups, territory groups, money groups” (2001, p. 13). Naipaul here is very sensitive to the cultural transformation he is going through, and this alone is an indication of his loss of affiliation.

Mary Louis Pratt points out that the arrival scenes articulate the relationship between the traveller and the place he visits, thereby defining the characteristic of the travelogues (Pratt, 1992, pp. 79-80). In *The Middle Passage* we find Naipaul as a reluctant returnee. This reluctance reflects the struggle between the foreign visitor and the returning local; yet, this double identity enables Naipaul to speak better as a cultural insider and an outsider. His ambivalence results from too much knowledge about his culture as an insider, he is yet able to realize the effect of the colonizer on the natives and the culture, and criticizes this as “flowed modernity”. He criticizes the natives’ liability to abandon their own culture for the consumerist culture of the United States, regardless to its worth:

To be modern is to ignore local products and to use those advertised in American magazines. The excellent coffee which is grown in Trinidad is used only by the very poor and a few middle-class English expatriates. Everyone else drinks Nescafé or Maxwell House or Chase and Sanborn, which is more expensive but is advertised in the magazines and therefore acceptable. The elegant and comfortable Morris chairs, made from local wood by local craftsmen, are not modern and have disappeared except from the houses of the poor. Imported tubular steel furniture, plastic-straw chairs from Hong Kong and spindly cast-iron chairs have taken their place (2001, p. 40).

Here Naipaul exposes the Trinidadians blindness to the American Cultural influence epitomized in the magazines advertisements, and at the same time the manipulation of the latter’s power of the resources of the country which Naipaul the insider knows the value of. It is a harsh critique of the Trinidadians who, in his opinion, have been brain washed as to choose unquestionably what is advertised for:

“modernity in Trinidad, then, turns out to be the extreme susceptibility of people who are unsure of themselves and, having no taste or style of their own, are eager for instruction” (2001, p. 41). This is Naipaul’s interpretation of Trinidad’s long colonial history. For him the country “never hardened around the institution of slavery as it had in other West Indian islands [...] Trinidad was and remains a materialistic immigrant society, continually growing and changing, never settling into any pattern” (2001, pp. 48-49).

Naipaul is an autonomous and self-conscious individual who represents the colonized as uncritical mimics, two facts which define and reinforce each other in Nixon's opinion. Nixon criticizes Naipaul's definition of West Indian Literature as:

Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands. Here the West Indian writers have failed. Most have so far only reflected and flattered the prejudices of their race or colour groups. Many a writer has displayed a concern, visible perhaps only to the West Indian, to show how removed his group is from blackness, how close to whiteness [...] To the initiated one whole side of West Indian writing has little to do with literature, and much to do with the race war (pp. 64-65).

Believing that in this sense Naipaul differentiates himself not only from Western critics unfamiliar with the political and cultural conditions of Trinidad, but from other Caribbean writers who have been allegedly too much occupied with "the prejudices of their race or colour group", so, unlike them, it is implied that he is not conditioned by the "prejudices", and freely pursues a more "authentic" literature.

On the other hand, Edward Said opines that "the most attractive and immoral move [...] has been Naipaul's, who has allowed himself quite consciously to be turned into a witness for the Western prosecution" (Said, 1986, p. 153). This is definitely a direct accusation of confirmed treachery, or of being the colonial interpreter whose word must be carefully questioned. This controversy about Naipaul has been intense and multifaceted, it also invites for a historical analysis to ground the analysis. There are more than one part in the novel that invites such opinions; the first part which evokes a lot of debate is his analysis of the 1946 elections in Trinidad which is full of personal reminiscences from his childhood experience as a 14 years old in Trinidad then. In the chapter titled "Trinidad-The Picaroon" which discusses the 1946 elections, Naipaul compares his countrymen to "the sixteenth century picaroon of Spanish Literature, [who] survives and triumphs by his wits in a place where it is felt that all eminence is arrived at by crookedness" (2001, p. 72). Naipaul in this part accuses his countrymen of uniting not out of solidarity or loyalty, but due to a rootless, mercurial self-interest leading to the formation of political alliances. Or what Aaron Eastley calls "Blatant Pragmatism [where] everyman had to be for himself [and specifically] had to group [or use] whatever dignity and power he was allowed" (2009, p. 3). Naipaul's tone in this section is that of an emotionally detached insider whose experience of the society makes it transparent for him, so that opportunism is "not unexpected" (2001, p. 72). Said and other critics like Nixon and Eastley think that Naipaul misrepresented the 1946 elections in *The Middle Passage* either out of ignorance, or depending on the fact that the reader does not know better information. In both cases, this proves Said's point of Naipaul's misleading representation of subaltern experience originating with Western writers (Said, 1986). However, it should be mentioned here that Naipaul was not ignorant historically or rhetorically as Chakrabarty asserts (2000, p. 28). *The Middle Passage* makes claims that are rather personal, reflecting more on the people of Trinidad where Naipaul asserts, for example, that universal suffrage was declared in Trinidad "after no popular agitation" (2001, p. 72) which implies the general satisfaction of the people with their own conditions. The problem here is that the insider's perspective tempts the reader to give extra credit to the lived experience and in doing so the reader may, as Gayatra Spivak cautions, "allow the complicity of the investigating subject [...] to disguise itself as transparency" (1994, p. 90).

Another controversial issue is that Naipaul frequently quotes from Victorian travel writers such as Anthony Trollope, Charles Kingsley and James Anthony Froude, especially in what they have to say about the Caribbean region without realizing the imperialistic dimension of their texts. He uses Froude's as an epigraph for *The Middle Passage*, a quote which ends with the remark that "there are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own" (2001). This quotation was very controversial and brought about a lot of argument; Nixon condemns such a quotation and argues that "the effect of such rhetorical manoeuvres is to support his [Naipaul's] contention that 'no attitude in the West Indies is new', and more dangerously his insistence that the West Indies are permanently 'half-made' societies, devoid of history and sealed against the possibility of change" (Nixon, 1992, p. 45). Ozawa on the other hand, pinpoints that Naipaul "conceptualizes travel as a means of sloughing off his colonial back ground. Quoting Victorian travellers approvingly seems to be a way of associating himself with the metropolitan culture [...]. The crucial separation between Naipaul and the Victorian writers lies in what they focus upon. While Naipaul offers his devastating critiques of the so-called cultural myopia of the colonized, most of the passages he quotes as supporting evidence for his observation actually refer to the European settlers' in the Caribbean" (2012, p. 6). Thus, although Naipaul acquires enough self-confidence from the British culture that enables him to generalize, his identity inevitably emerges as different from metropolitan travel writers, simply because he discusses the cultural conditions of the colonized as a returnee. The farther he travels, the more personal the narrative becomes, because "the metropolitan

assumptions are reduced” as Thieme affirms (1982, p. 146). Naipaul presents his judgement more freely once he is away from both England and Trinidad. In the chapter about British Guiana and Surinam he speaks freely of the “racial antagonisms, endlessly acting and reacting upon one another” (2001, p. 134). Or of “Surinamers [who] have little idea of the diversity and richness of their own country” (2001, p. 175).

In *The Middle Passage* Naipaul also emphasizes how colonialism influences and distorts nationalism in the region. Highlighting the brutality of slavery in British Guiana, he writes that:

The African, as a result, is passionate for independence, and for him independence is not so much an assertion of pride as a desire to be left alone, not to be involved. Hence the number of African prospectors in the interior of British Guiana, who never make a fortune but live happily beyond the claims of society and just within the law (2001, p. 118).

Even in Surinam, where there are apparently “no inflammatory political issues, no acute racial problem[s]”, he finds the damaging effects of colonialism:

Colonialism distorts the identity of the subject people, and the Negro in particular is bewildered and irritable [...] Nationalism in Surinam, feeding on no racial or economic resentments, is the profoundest anti-colonial movement in the West Indies. It is an idealist movement, and a rather sad one, for it shows how imprisoning for the West Indian his colonial culture is (2001, p. 169).

Naipaul’s tone is particularly harsh when he discusses what he regards as the racial inferiority complex of the Afro-Caribbean that is historically determined. His prejudice against the black majority, which might derive from Naipaul’s own Indian background (Thieme, 1982, p. 142), gravely damages his vision. Gordon Rohlehr rightly points out that, while the writer realizes that the self-contempt of the Afro-Caribbean is a product of history, he completely fails to notice their efforts to regain their lost dignity (1968, p. 131). As a result, the Caribbean people, and particularly the Afro-Caribbean majority, are described as totally determined by colonialism and therefore devoid of any potential for political and cultural autonomy. Interestingly, however, there is one moment in which Naipaul’s confident tone is very much, if not completely, diminished. This occurs at the very end of the chapter on Surinam. Naipaul visits the rural district of Coronie, feeling curious about its African-Caribbean inhabitants who are reputed to be “the idlest people in Surinam” (2001, p. 193). There, he is disappointed to find that there is nothing special about the town. Nevertheless, what truly surprises and disturbs him there is the presence of an old Indian man. Born in India, the man had come to British Guiana as an indentured labourer, returned to India after his indenture, and, indenturing himself again, came back to the Caribbean. Despite the man’s abundant travel experiences, his worldview remains very limited, so he claims: “he could scarcely conceive a world outside British Guiana and Coronie ... even India had faded, except for a memory of a certain railway station [...] but he felt that the outside world was the true, magical one, without mud, mosquitoes, dust and heat” (2001, p. 196). This leaves a strong impression on him:

A derelict man in a derelict land; a man discovering himself, with surprise and resignation, lost in a landscape which had never ceased to be unreal because the scene of an enforced and always temporary residence [...] I was glad to leave Coronie, for, more than lazy Negroes, it held the full desolation that came to those who made *The Middle Passage* (2001, p. 197).

Here, Naipaul seems to face the concrete manifestation of colonialism which he has discussed in a generalized manner. His attempt to characterize himself as a self-confident traveller like Froude is temporarily disrupted, perhaps because the Indian man’s life inevitably reminds him of his own background. However hard he tries to dissociate himself from the Caribbean, it continues to haunt him; he is forced to admit that he is affected by “the full desolation that came to those who made *The Middle Passage*”. While Naipaul does not elaborate further on the impact of this encounter, it is certainly true that the issue of cultural rootlessness becomes a major theme in his subsequent works, such as *The Mimic Men* and *In a Free State*. The last two chapters on Martinique and Jamaica can be read as a kind of damage-limiting exercise, wherein Naipaul seeks to re-establish his narrative authority. For this purpose, he pays particular attention to the destructive effects of tourism. He critically observes that speculative land buying by US-Americans steadily dispossesses local people. Nevertheless, his criticism once again targets the latter, rather than the larger inequality of power. He asserts:

Every poor country accepts tourism as an unavoidable degradation. None has gone as far as some of these West Indian islands, which, in the name of tourism, are selling themselves into a new slavery. The élite of the islands, whose pleasures, revealingly, are tourist’s pleasures, ask no more than to be permitted to mix with the white tourists (2001, p. 198).

Using the phrase “selling themselves”, Naipaul attributes all the present problems to the Caribbean people themselves. By doing so, he seeks to articulate a distance between himself and the islanders. The ending of *The Middle Passage* one more time repeats the gesture of differentiating himself from both the Caribbean and the West. Naipaul concludes his travel narrative with a report on his vacation at a very expensive tourist resort. The cordial invitation by its owner who wishes “to offer hospitality to someone connected with the arts”, suggests that Naipaul was treated as a minor celebrity during his travels. Nevertheless, he cannot enjoy his stay there. In the end, he states, “I couldn’t be a tourist in the West Indies, not after the journey I had made” (2001, p. 240). While one critic reads this episode as a “scene of metamorphosis where he ceases to be a local and becomes instead a visitor” (Mustafa, 1985, p. 87), it is important to consider what type of “visitor” the writer has become. Here again, he sets himself apart from the putatively insensitive Western tourists who are able to enjoy their tourist experience despite the serious political and cultural situations that he describes. At the same time, a sense of detachment from the Caribbean is implied by his high-sounding conclusion that Jamaica “was only generating selfishness, cynicism and a self-destructive rage” (Naipaul, 2001, p. 234).

To conclude, most of Naipaul’s cultural verdicts in *The Middle Passage* are problematic in that he interprets one-sidedly- problems in the Caribbean societies as self-inflicted, rather than as imposed from outside (Nixon, 1992, p. 64). Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that such dubious observations have been highly evaluated by a certain readership. Stephen Schiff’s view is typical: “it is true that Naipaul has regarded most indigenous Third World liberators with a cold eye, but history has borne him out on that point” (1994, p. 151). One reason for the popularity of Naipaul’s travel writing, as Ozawa suggests, is that he manages to present his analysis with apparent conviction by switching his cultural positions rhetorically (2012, p. 8). While many critics view Naipaul as simply getting rid of his West Indian identity, he, when necessary, strategically retains his position as a cultural insider and uses it to the maximum extent. The title *The Middle Passage* can certainly be read as referring to the struggle that the Caribbean went through to establish a new sense of cultural identity at the time of Naipaul’s journey (Rohlehr, 1968, p. 128). With the benefit of retrospection, it is also possible to read the title as pointing to his own transition from a promising West Indian writer to a controversial chronicler of the chaotic postcolonial world. As if attempting to solve his ambivalent relationship with the Caribbean, from *The Middle Passage* onwards, he fashions himself more determinedly as an assertive analyst of the so-called Third World.

Raby maintains that postmodernists view power and resistance, not necessarily as oppositional, but rather as a complex of diverse, fragments and transitory relationships between individuals. Thus power is diffused and dominance and resistance are integral parts of each other as Foucault thinks (2005, p. 161). In this sense, postmodern views of power seem to offer but little hope for the traditional societies to defend their own culture; that’s especially so in the case of the societies where its existence is dependent on that of its dominator. In this respect Brecht has asked the famous question cited in Kershaw: “What would happen to the hole when the cheese has gone?” (1991, p. 1). This postmodern theory echoes Munif’s resistance narrative; what would happen to all the Gulf countries and the Middle East countries when the dominator (in this case the imperial hegemonic American power) has gone after draining them from their Oil reserve? What would happen to the Arab communities that depend on the American dream of consumerism that offers abundance of goods, democracy of choice of these goods and novelty in a changing market, rendering them incapable of production? What would happen if one of the desert countries suddenly loses the ability to provide distilled water, or enough electricity in its huge industrial cities and for its highly consuming people? These questions, and many more are approached in Munif’s narrative *Cities of Salt*.

The Saudi Arabian Abdel Rahman Munif (1933-2004) one of the prominent Arab novelists of the 20th Century is best known for his fiery political writings in which the issue of freedom, detention, and torture overtly recur. An inevitable consequence of his opinions concerning politics, economy and society in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, was his deportation from Iraq in 1955, and the revocation of his Saudi nationality in 1963. This was especially executed for identifying with the Marxist ideology and for criticizing the regime (Munif, 2003, pp. 4-5). Munif considers political jail the biggest shame and dirtiest stain on the history of Arab World. He claims that his jail novel, *East of The Mediterranean* alongside *Cities of Salt* laid the foundations for jail literature and resistance literature in modern Arabic literature (2003, p. 9). According to Saleh Ibrahim, jail in Munif’s novel “has its clamorous, painful presence ... it is deep rooted in the novel and its hero, and it expands to encompass the homeland itself ... it also pervades exile and exceeds it to be ingrained in the human psyche” (2003, p. 37).

In *Cities of Salt*, Munif succeeds in transforming the literary landscape of the Arab world by making the novel central to its cultural and political concerns. The narrative examines the transformation of the Arabian Peninsula from ancient Bedouin homeland to a hybrid tribal Kleptocracy floating on oil. He depicts the surprise, fear,

uneasiness and tension that gripped Saudi Arabia after the discovery of Oil. Munif writes about the oasis and towns that are lost in the tidal wave of oil and are replaced by symmetrical blocks that have nothing to do with the environment or the nature of the region. He depicts how the Saudi dynasty, with the help of the Anglo American powers, possessed the peninsula as sole proprietor and authority. Their voices silenced everyone else's and their presence crushed all around them: contrary or different opinions were forbidden, literature discouraged and free inquiry suffocated.

Munif's books are banned in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Gulf and Arab countries. However, they are obtained and read. Though his books are only novels, they resonate in the Arab streets as he penetrated the lives of people rich and poor. Since his books primarily criticize the effect of the Americans on Saudi Arabia under economic cover, American critics like John Updike disapproved of the quality and technique of the quintet. Updike famously denounced *Cities of Salt* as having little to resemble the fiction he was used to reading. In his article in *The New Yorker* 1988, Updike criticized Munif to be like a "campfire storyteller" who has all the time in the world to relate his story. His point of view is that Munif is:

insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels like that we call a novel... his characters are rarely fixed in our minds by face, or a manner, or a developed motivation; no central figure develops enough reality to attract our sympathetic interest [...] its focus might be described as sociological, and its sociological point as the single insistent one that Arabs are discomfited, and deranged by the presence of the Americans in their midst (1988, p. 117).

However, it is particularly this aspect which distinguishes Munif's narrative and reflects the Bedouin way of life especially in *Al-Tih*, the first part of the quintet. In *Cities of Salt*, Munif is not concerned with the presentation of a single version of the events, and he is not at all concerned with how long it would take him to unfold the events of the story. He, like all the storytellers of the Arabic traditional literature, is not the least concerned with time; his environment allows him all the time he needs. Unlike the nature and cultural milieu in many other societies, there is no need to meet the pressures of the contemporary life style. Munif is presenting the desert life where the tale is allowed to unfold at its own natural, comfortable pace. Updike in this article allows himself and his own culture expectations to predominate and stand as a measure against which all narratives should be evaluated. The article claims some implicit right to prescribe the nature and parameters of the novel within a different culture of which he is totally unaware. It is particularly Munif's detailed account of the natural surroundings and the nature of life in this desert that relates him to post-modernist tendency to relate more to the indigenous narrative tradition and the indigenous culture. Munif sets out a flocence of character and place, of fabulous places and times, of great confusion, traditions clashing, resistance, rebellion and death.

Wadi al-Uyoun: an outpouring of green amidst the harsh, obdurate desert, as if it has burst from within the earth or fallen from the sky. It was nothing like its surroundings, or rather had no connection with them, dazzling you with curiosity and wonder: how had water and greenery burst out in a place like this (1987, p. 3)?

With this marvellous beginning Munif introduces us to the setting only to explain later on that the inhabitants of this marvellous setting were part of it; the wadi is familiar to the inhabitants, "exciting no strong emotions, for they were used to seeing the palm trees filling the wadi and the gushing brooks surging forth in the winter and early spring" (1987, p. 3). With the mesmerizing invocation of a natural born, and experienced storyteller, Munif floats the image of the wadi before us, almost mythic to those who come upon it, and even more so to those who do not know it. For caravans, "Wadi al-Uyoun was a phenomenon, something of a miracle, unbelievable to those who saw it for the first time and unforgettable forever after" (1987, p. 4).

Cities of Salt are those cities that offer no sustainable existence for their citizens according to Munif in his interview with Tariq Ali. These are cities that retain no resistance in the face of the first wave of water that attacks it; they simply dissolve and disappear. This point of view proves to be correct since all the world views the Middle East and the Gulf region in particular as a source of oil and petrodollars. The economic transformation has had a significant impact on social, familial and individual values and attitudes. It has changed the construction of the whole region. Munif finds the story of oil and its effect on the people a great story to tell and a fertile soil to study and scrutinize. He gives an illustrative story of a community before and after the discovery of that magic black liquid, his narrative reveals the frustration of the people due to the transformation in social and political stance. He reveals the fragility of the desert community and opines that "oil as a world and a topic can help us uncover some novelistic aspects in our contemporary life in the Arab world" (Munif, 1979, p. 188). Munif has proved the validity of his opinion by writing the long quintet. In the first volume *Al-Tih*; translated as *Cities of Salt*, we are given the image of a peaceful portrait of the traditional Bedouin society in that

unnamed desert country before the discovery of oil. This image changes to the ultimate opposite after a while and we find the inhabitants of the country frightened and confused when the American company starts buying and digging the land in search for oil and consequently displacing them and destroying their residences.

Foreign guests staying with another family in the wadi. They were busy all day long. They went places no one dreamed of going. They collected unthinkable things. ... They placed wooden markers and iron poles everywhere they went, and wrote on them, and wrote things no one understood on the sheets of paper they carried with them everywhere [...] He [Al-Hathal] sensed something terrible was going to happen [...] The Americans leave, and then they return. Strange machines are erected. Fences and lights. Men working shirtless in the blazing heat (1978, p. 115).

The protagonist, Mutib Al-Hathal, the almost mythical figure, warns against this immense unprepared for change. His disappearance in the middle of the events is simultaneous with the change of the “old world” to a totally new setting. The recurring idea that he was seen in different times at different places can be considered symbolic of the disappearance of “the good old days”. News of the foreigners’ development in the desert country spread widely and travel fast and far, together with news of that indolence and lasciviousness of the Prince of the country. The men from the wadi who have been brought to work are terrified, at first, of the sea itself:

[...] in spite of the long hours each of them spent submerged in endless contemplation, the mystery grew with each passing day: Where had all this water come from? Why was it here instead of other places where people needed it? ... Those who had come from the interior, from the depths of the desert, were lost in a whirlpool of thought and bewilderment. ... a phase of work began that never slowed or stopped. It was like madness or magic. Men raced back and forth with the raging yellow machines that created new hills racing behind them. They filled the sea and levelled the land; they did all this without pausing and without reflection. After the first pay day, it is time to sell the camels—they are of no use here. Barracks are built for the workers, with tin-roofs in the hot Arabic sun. Arabic Harran takes shape. Across a fence a fine American Harran with swimming pools, sidewalks and air conditioning. The men are pressed to work harder. Rules and regulations are set out. Fingerprints are taken. Interviews and personal data required (1987, p. 123).

The narrative technique mocks the notion of the idyllic oasis dwellers who believe in the word of foreigners’ digging up their land claiming at the beginning that they were searching for water. Considering the back ground of the Bedouins, this is a completely unbelievable story; since desert Arabs excel in discerning water places. Those are the people of the land working hard and in bewilderment. Munif’s representation here records the opposite directions in which the citizens and the foreigners move. The picture drawn is very critical and presents a detailed account of the venality and moral corruption of the rulers. The prince is totally mesmerized by the luxurious life awaiting, he never listens, and puts the complaints of the people aside affirming:

You will be among the richest and happiest of all mankind, as if God saw none but you. Miteb, the head of the family, argues they do not want these people. The emir tells him if he does not like it [...] then know that the earth is wide [...] They have come to help us [...] There are oceans of oil, oceans of gold [...] oceans of blessings beneath this soil (1987, p. 125).

And so the scene is set. The wadi is transformed. Families are told they have to move. Munif tells his story in a detailed manoeuvre with the ultimate determination to give it a leisurely pace that reflects the type and nature of life at that time which contradicts with the rapid sequence of the events later on. The change was great not only in the new terminology that invaded the people’s everyday life but in the social structure. Modernization, industrialization, oil production, needle, oil company, oceans of oil, richness and wealth became the governing terms in the Bedouin’s life. The citizens lose their tranquil traditional life. These concepts did not only change their life style, but made them act according to the style of new industrial cities. The young men no longer wanted to go out on the caravans but to work with the machines. The focus changes to a small port town, Harran, close enough to build a pipe-line from the wadi. Harran is transformed overnight. The most significant incident is the dramatic encounter between angry citizens and their helpless, clueless prince Khazael who resolves nothing and tells angry Miteb Al-Hathal that if he does not like things the way they are in the Wadi. “Know that the earth is wide”, in a direct denotation that wealth is more valuable than Man.

Roger Allen notes that while “the city and its middle-class people have served as the primary topic of the novel genre in the West, the largest proportion of the populace in the Middle East has resided outside the city” (1995, p. 94), that is because it was busy and occupied with middle class comers who served in the oil company. Rising aspirations among the people of the city, of consumerism resulting from the increase in wealth lead to the existence of a fragile community which Munif criticizes as Peter Theroux, the translator of Munif’s quintet

thinks. Theroux maintains that the plot mechanism “allowed the author to create a Belzician panorama cast in a society” (2012). He is here referring to the Arabian Peninsula that has never found a representation in modern Arabic Literature. Munif was known as a dedicated foe of the monarchy and dictatorship at a time and a place when autocrats controlled the Middle East’s oil. Therefore, the oil issue was woven into his narrative to tell the Arab stories as well as the stories of the Anglo-American competition in the Gulf region over oil. The quintet of *Cities of Salt* exposes the monarchs who were busy with oil wealth rather than modernizing their societies, pilfering huge amounts of that wealth in collaboration with western governments and backward religious establishments.

The appearance of metal machines bulldozing the oasis is seen through the natives’ eyes as unbelievable, unthinkable and apocalyptic. The more the number of machines increase, the greater the disruption and displacement. Poverty, as well as the concept of real estate crystallize rendering the Bedouins frustrated. *Al-Tih* generalizes the clash between the native and the multi-national or global. “The words ‘rich’, and ‘gold’ hung in the air like smoke, and like a black banner the big question arose: had they come to stay? [...] oil? The Naphtha we find is enough to light these lamps of ours that choke you with fumes before they shed light” (1987, p. 126). This was the answer provided by the Prince, quite unconvincing for the displaced Bedouins. However, together with promised wealth, oil gradually sheds light but promises disaster, disruption, losses, corruption, displacement and a distorted modernity. It is ironic how the protagonist Mutib Al-Hathal is exiled like Munif at the end of *Al-Tih* to give us a real meaning of the true price of wealth.

The Narrative of *Cities of Salt* is recounted by a native in exile, and the non-native trying to familiarize himself with the landscape and culture. This authorial double gaze through the native/non-native characters presents views and expectations from the land that stand in sharp contrast to each other. Each part of the quintet has a central character on whom the reader dub the Ecological Bedouin and who dies at the end of the novel: Khoraybit, Hathal, Assaf and Fanar, each of them cares deeply in his own way and is a part of the place and recalls its history frequently; knows its geography, climate and cherishes everything about it. Al-Hathal, in the first part, encounters and is assaulted by greedy, insatiable outsiders equipped with modern machines and technology for a quick loot of minerals and gold and whatever the desert offers. Munif’s novel is nevertheless by no means “pastoral”, in the sense of idealizing rural life at the expense of urban life. Yet, the reader encounters a variation of a classical plot where the idyllic is suddenly disrupted and torn apart by the machine and the corrupt power and wealth of the city, that is particularly clear in *Al-Tih* which witnesses the arrival of the foreigners in search for Oil.

The desert in *Cities of Salt* is accorded a fundamental significance. Munif does not treat it as a mere setting or a metaphor to express human actions and emotions, or even as a background to the events. The desert is a place with specific geographical details that shapes and moulds its inhabitants, who in turn inscribe their identity and values on the landscape-the place that is under assault by the greedy outsider intending to plunder its resources. In *Endings*; the fifth part of the quintet, Munif significantly starts with “Drought. Drought again... When drought seasons come, things begin to change, Life and objects change. Humans change too, and no more so than in their moods! Deep down, melancholy feelings take root. They may seem fairly unobtrusive at first. But people will often get angry. When that happens, these feelings burst out into the open, assertive and unruly” (Munif, 1988, p. 3). The emphasis on the desert, intense heat, the dangers of travel, the search for food, all these features and others set this novel apart from others works which tend to a large degree to take the city and its inhabitants as their subjects, and particularly the bourgeoisie, thus imitating at least the initial stages in the development of most of the Western novel traditions. Here, it is the desert and drought that impose themselves on every chapter of the novel. The emphasis in this part is on the nature of the desert life: the harshness of the desert, the constant movement of the tribe from one place to another in search for water and herbage, the anxiety experienced as a result of the unstable life. The intense heat and many other characteristics give the desert its importance and set it far from being just a setting; It is rather the major protagonist of the quintet. The approach and importance Munif gives to this segment of the Arab society takes the Arabic novel to a previously unexplored venues. The scope through which Munif explores the desert country and presents the -once upon a time- tightly knit community is more of a snapshot, or a panoramic view that first generalizes then zooms in later to focus on details. In this approach space and time are necessarily given special attention. The omniscient narrator in *Cities of Salt* has a scrutinizing eye for details that notices and notes down any variation or deviation from the normal. This immense concern with details recalls Roman Jakobson’s comment on Munif: “he is fond of dwelling on unessential details in the classical judgment passed on the innovators by consecutive critics of every era” (1987, p. 22). However, it is this particularity that characterizes the Bedouin life style. *Cities of Salt* focuses on depicting the hardships implicit in the ragged life that the community faces on a continuing basis after

oil. In each part of the quintet Munif presents a character who is always a loner and is known to be a fanatical fighter for the preservation of the fragile community where he lives. Starting with Al-Hathal in *Al-Tih-Cities of Salt*, passing by Fanar in *Desert of Darkness*, then finally Assaf in *Endings*. Those characters are able to survive the worst caprices of weather or nature of the desert they live in, and this makes their relationship to the place a unique one. Significantly, they all die at the end of the novel. Yet their deaths marks new beginnings for a new way of thinking or a new era. In some cases, like in the character of Al-Hathal in *Al-Tih*, who is said to be seen by many in different places, invites the idea of resurrection to guard the place. Assaf's death in *Endings* marks a beginning for saving the environment by building a new dam to avoid drought with which the novel starts.

Munif's *Cities of Salt* presents more than just the "discomfited people", unhappy with the Americans. It is more about the challenges that await the *Cities of Salt* where the main source of life is not water like other countries, but oil and natural gas which created life in cities like Riyadh, Bahrain, and Kuwait after generating electricity and distilling water. Munif dwells on describing the simple life of the Bedouin as opposite to the complicated life of the city to imply and warn against too much dependence on wealth increasing instead of developing these cities to face life if natural resources end or dry up. It is not logical for him that such cities where the infra-structure of life; water, food, and electricity, depend mainly on oil and the revenue of petrodollars should go on constructing and building new huge cities and attracting dwellers to live there. This in his opinion makes such cities fragile and vulnerable like cities made of salt which will inevitably collapse with the first wave of water, or in such case its absence. When he was asked about the title of his quintet, Munif replied that his main concern was these huge communities which were suddenly and unnaturally brought to life without real foundation. Such cities for him are like huge air balloons liable to explode at any moment; they are not natural incubators for civilization or even solid grounds for new generations to build their future on or even develop it, and change life for the better. It is worth noting here that the oil race in *Cities of Salt* divided the society into the mobile rich class, and the poor nomads. The whole series gives a picture of the deep transformation of Arabia from tribal societies to the present state. All of Munif's dreams of democracy were crushed by autocratic rulers who were allies of the Anglo-American oil companies. "Our crisis is a trilogy of: Oil, Political Islam and dictatorship". Munif summarizes in one of the interviews published in *Al-Jadid Journal* (2003). It is true that this trilogy is what led to the deterioration, collapse and confusion which many Arab countries witnessed in their search for modernity.

According to Munif, official history falsified Arab experience, particularly that of ordinary people. Munif saw that the Novel offers an opportunity for an alternative historiography. Therefore *Al-Tih*, the title of the first part of the quintet means wildernesses. It refers to the wilderness and loss as an existential human condition. Munif himself was banished from his own country, and therefore became a displaced voice who responded with his novels. *The Trench* portrays Mooran which has attracted profiteers from the Middle East and other places who take advantage of the inexperienced Sultan Khazael. Gradually, as the narrative advances, the reader can see how capitalism inevitably turns against and replace traditional tribal ways. The Machiavellian thought is definitely behind the change, yet it turns against the plotter; the young Sultan's chief advisor who is detained to Europe. In *Variations on Day and Night*, Munif describes tribal rivalries, battles and intrigues in royal palaces with Sultan Khuraybit who attacks his neighbours backed by Anglo- American powers. *The Rootless* continues the story of the weak king Khazael, who was then, detained in Germany, and how he plots against his brother Sultan Fanar. The final book *Desert of Darkness* goes back in time and follows the career of Sultan Fanar who is later assassinated. Munif's primary target seems to be the Arab rulers who threw away their own heritage and ignored the needs of their people in their greedy search for wealth, rather than the Americans who Munif depicts as aloof and "money minded bumblers".

The strength in *Cities of Salt* results from Munif's sharp satirical edge. Satire that results not from ridiculing but from exposure, as if he was revealing the real sequence of what really happened at that time in that place, and commenting that it was really ugly and unacceptable and will result in tragic ends. He exposes the number of victims affected by this irrationally rapid economic growth, and how those in power use progress to enrich and protect their own interest not to protect such victims. Munif is implying that without cultural, linguistic or social grounding those cities will vanish by the passing of time. However, "Despite the nightmarish atmosphere in most of Munif's narrative [...] there is always a glimmer of hope and a strong belief that while it may be possible to crush man, it is impossible to defeat him" as Sabry Hafez maintains (1993).

In the light of the given analysis, both Naipaul's *The Middle Passage* and Munif's *Cities of Salt* highlight the oneness of the experience of detention-willingly; like Naipaul's or forcefully like Munif's. It is a humanitarian experience that unifies setting, blurring the boundaries between the present and the past. The two narratives are comparable regardless to difference in setting and approach. Each of them renders the topic of displacement and

resistance and the worth of an individual in a materialistic world. The two works expose the experience of authors who reside outside “home”, yet are very much preoccupied with the problems and the meaning and value of a homeland for each of them.

The two works acquire a different meaning when they are categorized under the umbrella of resistance literature. Resistance here is not necessarily against an occupier, but against the manipulation of the imperial power and the consumerist philosophy that overwhelmed the world since World War II, as well as against the representatives of the mimic governments and the rulers who pelf the wealth of the countries, leaving it exposed to the dangers of uncalculated modernization and globalization at the expense of the authentic culture and identity. Both works invite for cultural resistance through valuing shared customs, circumstances and patterns of behaviour; factors that might offer a better insight into one’s own culture, valuing it in contrast to other dominating forces. Resistance then becomes an integral part of the power relations of domination and subjugation against authenticity.

Modernists tend to view this resistance as an oppositional force to a dominant power as Raby maintains (2005, p. 153) and therefore it depends on interpretation. It might be safely concluded that the impact of cultural resistance is as powerful as armed resistance. It might as well be “seen positively as a space for developing tools for political actions” as Duncombe suggests (2007, p. 42). Duncombe proposes that cultural resistance can change the dominant political situation. Writers of Resistance Literature play a crucial and critical role in what Edward Said called “repressed resistance history” (p. 49). It does not draw attention to itself but to the struggle of a certain nation or the loss of an identity. It is resistance against all forms of hegemonic domination and oppression. Yet, part of this resistance is to show the inner contradictions and conflicts which both writers demandingly did.

In both novels, the sense of estrangement creates a greater sense of anxiety and urges the need for selfhood. The native outside home has other concerns and preoccupations than those at home. Alienation is even more complicated in a New World Order that makes use of every means of power to erode identities and weaken beliefs and patterns of life. Identity crisis is real as it has never been before, and the challenge to formations and malformations has created new narrative strategies that try to come to terms with the complications in the encounter between the nation-state and the post-capitalist power, their joint projects and hidden agendas, which end up not only in the victim’s mistrust of the state, but also in a sense of alienation and absurdity.

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