

Good cities of salt essay example

[Environment](#), [Water](#)



Cities of Salt is a rare kind of book, of Arab history, written by Abdurrahman Munif, in which an inanimate concept, a community or culture, tells its own story, a story of hypocrisy of the involved nations, after a poor oasis was discovered as an oil source. The disturbed landscape and the rural oasis towns of the Arab world are sketched in an exemplary way that any one from the region can relate well with the places. The destruction of the community as well as the countryside after the oil mining activities began is explained as “a breaking off, like death, which nothing and no one could ever heal.” The impact of technologies brought to Arab world by the Americans, the Arabs’ acceptance of the ways of Americans giving up their traditions are vividly pictured in this story, which speaks through a number of interconnected characters, through the many years. There is the flow, of the clashes and the disorientations, and of the resistance and the death of that Arab city from the start to the end. The fatalism throughout the story ends with a lot of unrest in the region.

The picturesque beauty of the oasis in that unnamed city of the Arab world is put in a fantastic way:

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? (p. 1)

The image of Wadi with “palm trees and the gushing brooks surging forth in the winter and early spring” help those readers who aren’t used to an oasis, to get a vivid imagery of the place so easily.

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 (p. 17).

We can see that the place was a good location for the primary requirements. Though the ‘ good years’ and ‘ bad years’ were determined by the mercy shown by the seasonal rains, the date palms and livestock supported the life of the inhabitants. The famous orchards and water of the Wadi served as a much-needed relief to caravans crossing the bitter landscape of the Arabian Peninsula.

Water was plentiful in Haran, and there was no need to fetch it from Arab Haran or anywhere else. (p. 593).

After the American intrusion for exploring oil, Wadi gets transformed; the cities of Harran and Muran get transformed in all possible ways. Families are asked to relocate and young men start work with new machines to build pipe-line. Harran, the coastal village was chosen as the headquarters of the American company.

Their amazement of the sight of the sea is put so well:

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.(p. 417)

The noisy environment and the unloading boats.

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 leveled the land; that did all this without pausing and without reflection. (p. 574).

They watched everything done by Americans with terror and sorrow. The town's geography, hills, sea coasts was reorganised according to the needs of the foreigners. With the rules and regulation, the collection of personal information, Wadi was changed overnight. The workers were provided barracks; the tin-roofed aggravated the terrible heat of the Arabic sun. American Harran that was developed from the Arabic Haran had many things like gadgetry, culture and motives, which were quite strange to the natives. For the Americans, Haran was an unfriendly, rude environment. To withstand the features of the place and extract oil, they needed air-conditioners and swimming pools. But, for the Arabs desert was their home, the sun and the winds of the place had moulded them into the individuals they were, hardening them enough. For the Americans, it was just a foreign land, where they were free to destroy anything and everything that hindered oil exploration, as they were counted as useless. As Dabbasi puts it:

And that, explains every intrusion that had happened in the history.(p. 589)

Throughout the story, the author has placed attention to the terrific metamorphosis of a rich, desert oasis with its idyllic living and non living components, from its inherent virginity to a scurry metropolis.

Reference

Munif, A. R. (1987). Cities of Salt. New York, United States: Random Publishing, Inc.