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For thousands of years, the fate of humanity has been closely tied up with travel. The impact of travel could be huge that it opens a new era for human history, for instance the exploration and conquest of the New World in the 16th century, or it could be personal that invokes memory and nostalgia. In the novel *Cities of Salt* by Abdelrahman Munif, traveling is an indispensable part of people’s life. Caravans are the only means to connect villages that are scattered over the obdurate desert. The arrival of the Americans enhances external connections between different places by introducing technology, but at the same time, breaks down the internal connections between people and their original religion, culture, and what is inside their blood. In *Running in the family* by Michael Ondaatje, the whole story is based on his travel experiences to homeland Ceylon, where he tries to trace the past in order to gain insight into his father Mervyn Ondaatje’s life and the marriage between his parents.

Travel is presented as, if not the only, an essential source of knowledge and information. In the novel *Cities of Salt*, the ability for a young boy to travel around the dessert with elders symbolizes his transition from adolescence to manhood, for travel is seen as a thorough test for a man (Munif 5). Travel is an unlimited source for new ideas. People who travel to different places are often treated as knowledgeable and respectable, hence are in a better position to pursue their own interest than those who don’t. Abu Dabbasi is a good example. He observes that the emir is a huntsman, and then quickly outshines Ibn Rashed to become the emir’s favorite by feeding the emir with vast amount of hunting information. He pours out the information he accumulates over long years: the right places and the right seasons; how in Egypt he’s seen uncounted birds filling the sky like black cloud; how on one of his trips to Gaza he’s seen birds massing near the shore; all of the sand grouse, gazelles and bustards he has seen (Munif 275). The emir, who is fascinated by Dabbasi’ s tales, then asks Dabbasi to come nearer, which signifies that Dabbasi has moved one step up the social ladder as a newcomer in Harran.

In the book *Running in the family*, travel is also recognized as a source of information. Michael Ondaatje for the first time goes back to Ceylon, where his memory of childhood lies on. He tries to find the missing part of his identity by visiting his relatives and having conversations with people who know about his family. Michael Ondaatje becomes more informed after he travels around Ceylon and collects anecdotes. He has heard stories about his father’s wildness and drunkenness, and his mother’s eccentric style of living. However, those stories are often exaggerated and inconsistent. They don’t really help Michael Ondaatje get insight into anything about his father’s thoughts and experiences, anything about the relationship between his mother and his father, anything underlies their divorce, and anything about his father’s life before death. It seems to Michael Ondaatje that he has failed to get a deeper understanding of his family, especially his father, through this trip. But in the book, He manages to use his faith and imaginative insight to fill the part about his father that he doesn’t understand, and hence fill the empty space in his own identity (Peck).

In the novel *Cities of Salt*, travel is also presented as an ultimate resolution of people’s fantasies and desires towards adventure. In Wadi al-Uyoun, all kinds of tales and stories, told by people who return from travel, are like seeds sown onto the soil. Every traveler has his own expectations and fancies different from everyone else’s. Often the travelers who return with innumerable tales and long nights of dreams remain poor, but they could not desist from telling dozens of stories about their adventures (Munif 6). Nonetheless, the excitement and mixed emotions that one experiences along the journey can’t be replicated by merely listening to tales. When Suweileh and Fawaz visit Ujra for their employments, they reach the sea. They are overcome by unexplainable confusion and excitement when they see this “blue dessert” for the first time, “They stopped and looked in disbelief: water...endless water, as far as the eye could see. It was the sea! The sea, like the dessert in its breadth and volume, the very sight of whose fabulous expanse of expanse of water flooded a man with joy and terror” (Munif 181). They could never believe that water, which is extremely scarce and valuable in Wadi, even exists in this stupendous amount. In some degree, travel opens a new world for Suweileh and Fawaz.

Travel also leaves room for mystery and spiritual power. After the Americans’ machines start to raze down the trees in Wadi al-Uyoun, Miteb al-Hathal leaves Wadi despite that his wife Wadha pleads and falls to the ground to ask him to stay. Miteb is never an advocate of traveling. he believes that life alone educates a man (Munif 37). No one can imagine that Miteb, who always curses the Americans furiously and strives to protect Wadi al-Uyoun at any cost, would leave Wadi. Initially, His mysterious travel raises confusion among people in Wadi. As the story goes on, Miteb becomes the very symbol of rebellion against the Americans. He continues to haunt the Americans and inspires Harran workers and townspeople to fight against oppression of the Americans and the emir government. At the end of the story, when Harran’s people charge towards Johar, in the face of gunshots, many of them say that they see a man from afar attacking the main gate of compound, and they are sure that it is Miteb al-Hathal (Munif 616). Miteb al-Hathal might not be such an influential figure had he stayed in Wadi.

Travel brings as much sorrow as joy. In the novel *Cities of Salt*, travelers' trips often last years or a lifetime that even themselves are uncertain about when they will return; Some of them might never come back because they settle down far away home. Hence, women suffer the most on those departures. They must stay at home to take care of children, waiting endlessly for the news of their dear husbands or sons. Abdullah al-Saad returns to Harran after years of travel, only to discover that his mother has lost her sight; The moment he embraces his mother, he feels wretched, guilty of a misdeed so great that he could never forgive himself (Munif 314). Umm Khosh is used to be a strong and loved woman in Wadi. Her life is completely changed after her son Khosh’s disappearance. She would take all day waiting at the entrance to the Wadi for a caravan that might bring news of Khosh. If a single member of the caravan has never heard of Khosh, she would tell stories about him for hours. Eventually, her mental health breaks down and died before Khosh’s returning (Munif 54). The novel spends a great length on Umm Khosh, which reveals the suffering that travel has caused on women.

After the arrival of the Americans, people in wadi and Harran undergoes a major transformation in their lifestyle. The novel describes how relocation has disturbed their peaceful life. People in Wadi al-Uyoun are forced to move to other places. They find out that water in other places is too bitter to drink. Wadha soon loses her power of speech after the relocation. Men are brought to a centralized place to work for capitalism, where they are surprised that people are no longer hospitable as before(Munif 137). They sell their “useless” camels and start to travel by trucks instead. The emir, who is fascinated by the radio, completely changes his idea about travel, “Why should a man race all around from place to place? It’s much better to let the world come to him” (Munif 457). The novel indicates that people have lost more than their lands after the relocation, which can never be compensated.

**Work Cited**

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