Destruction by Colonizers in *Cities of Salt* and *the Bridge on the Drina*

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Abstract

Colonialism, initially used for an economic purpose, led many powerful nations to discriminate against indigenous people, forcing them to accept their way of living. These colonialist countries brought their languages, religions, beliefs, traditions, and technologies to the native land, creating upheaval in the lives of the locals as they attempted to recreate their homelands in these new places. During this establishment process, colonizers both affected the land by exploiting it and the natives by interfering with their way of living. Many writers have represented this process of change in the lands and lives of natives in their works either in positive or negative ways. Abdelrahman Munif and Ivo Andrić are among those who characterized the effect of colonizers on changes in the cities of Harran and Višegrad, respectively. Although Andrić does not stress the impact of change in the novel as Munif does, both novelists show the negative aspects of change by the colonizers. The aim of this paper is to show how Abdelrahman Munif in *Cities of Salt* and Ivo Andrić in *The Bridge on the Drina* represent the destruction of Harran and Višegrad by the “colonizers”. Abdelrahman Munif is an Arabian writer and writes about more contemporary issues in his novel when compared with Ivo Andrić, who is a Serbian writer focused on the past of his own country. Although they belong to completely different literary canons and refer to different times within their novels, what connects them is their accounts of how the cities are affected by the colonizers.

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Tuz Kentleri ve Drina Köprüsü Romanlarında Sömürgeci Tahribatı

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.29228/JASSS.46938>**Öz**

Sömürgecilik ekonomik nedenlerle ortaya çıkmış olsa da birçok güçlü devletin yerlilere karşı ayrımcılık yapmasına ve onları kendilerini yaşam şekillerini kabul etmeye zorlamasına sebep olmuştur. Sömürgeci ülkeler yerli topraklara kendi dil, din, inanç, genel ve teknolojilerini götürmüş, yerlilerin yaşamına birçok değişiklik getirerek kendilerinininkine benzeyen yeni bir yer yaratmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu inşa sürecinde hem toprakları sömürmüş hem de yerlilerin yaşam tarzlarına müdahale etmişlerdir. Yerlilerin toprakları ve yaşamlarında görülen bu değişim sürecine birçok yazar olumlu veya olumsuz bir şekilde eserlerinde yer vermişlerdir. Abdelrahman Munif ve Ivo Andrić, sömürgecilerin etkisiyle sırasıyla Harran ve Vişegrad kentlerinde görülen değişikliklerden bahseden yazarlar arasında yer alır. Andrić değişimin etkisine Munif kadar vurgu yapmamış olsa da her iki yazar da sömürgecilerin etkisiyle ortaya çıkan değişimin olumsuz yanlarını ortaya koymuşlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, *Tuz Kentleri* adlı eserinde Abdelrahman Munif'in ve *Drina Köprüsü* adlı eserinde Ivo Andrić'in Harran ve Vişegrad kentlerinin sömürgecilerce tahribini nasıl gösterdiklerini ortaya koymaktır. Abdelrahman Munif daha çok çağdaş meselelerden bahseden bir Arap yazar, Ivo Andrić ise kendi ülkesinin geçmişinden bahseden bir Sırp yazardır. Bu iki yazar birbirinden tamamen farklı edebi kültürlerden geliyor ve farklı dönemlerden bahsediyor olsalar da şehirlerin sömürgecilerden nasıl etkilendiklerini ortaya koyan bu romanlar yazarlar arasındaki bağı oluşturan unsur olarak karşımıza çıkar.

INTRODUCTION

The child of a Saudi father and Iraqi mother, Abdelrahman Munif is an Arabian writer born in Amman and is commonly accepted as “the patriarch” of Arabian literature in the twentieth century (Enderwitz, 2010: 134). Since he uses literature to express his ideas, Munif’s works include strong political elements concerning the elite class of Saudi Arabia in the petroleum age. In *Cities of Salt* (1989), Munif introduces the audience to a traditional Arabian town which turns into a ‘modern’ petro-city with the coming of Americans. The town of Harran has experienced many changes in its political, economic, natural, and cultural life, but its citizens are not ready for such significant and sweeping changes, so the process of adaptation is painful for them. While talking about the changes in the cities of the Arabian Gulf, Ahmed Kanna states that “The people inhabiting these cities went from *bedu* simplicity to modernity overnight, scarcely knowing how to absorb the changes with destructive effects on their traditional society and supposedly heroic worldview” (2005: 60). Like Harran, these cities seem to be flourishing, but they actually create a kind of “modern dystopia” for their inhabitants (Kanna, 2005: 60) due to the great suffering the citizens seem to face.

Nobel-prize winner Ivo Andrić was born into a Croatian family in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but later went to Serbia for his studies. Due to his links to these many countries, he cannot be claimed by any one country and is thus accepted as one of the most important writers of Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian literatures. In his writings, he deals with the history of his native land especially under the Ottoman rule, and represents the multi-national aspect of the region. His renowned novel, *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), spans nearly five-hundred years and tells the story of Višegrad under both the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. What must be sustained is Višegrad’s diversity in ethnic, religious, and cultural sense during the time of colonizers. This quiet Balkan town undergoes many changes during the occupancy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which affects the inhabitants of the town. Although the town is modernised with many technological, economic, and institutional changes, this so-called utopia is destroyed by the bombing of the famous Bridge of Drina. (How is it destroyed? What happens? Expand this idea)

This literary research paper aims to analyse how these two novels, *Cities of Salt* and *The Bridge on the Drina* exemplify the destruction caused by colonization by examining the effects brought about on the lives of natives and on the towns themselves.

The Destruction of Harran and Višegrad

Despite belonging to different times and regions, these two novels clearly portray the negative effects of colonizers on the lives of natives and the town. However, the issue of colonizers differs in *Cities of Salt* and *The Bridge on the Drina* because of the time and location. In *Cities of Salt*, Munif talks about imperialism which is “the use of state power to secure economic monopolies for national companies” (Wolfe, 1997: 388). In imperialism, the state not only looks for economic profit, but also tries to dominate the inhabitants by affecting their social and cultural lives. However, in *The Bridge on the Drina*, Andrić details a kind of dynastic colonialism in which, as described by Moore, “a power conquers neighbour peoples” (1997: 118). While Munif’s colonialism comes from overseas with economic gain at the centre, Andrić’s is more local and natural considering proximity of borders. Despite the different types of colonialism in both towns, the experience of the local people is similar as the colonizers bring with them alien ideas, beliefs, and systems to the colonized land. The destruction of Harran and Višegrad should be analysed in two respects. The first is the natural, historical, institutional, and technological changes experienced by the town, while the second is the cultural, moral, and ethnic issues affecting the inhabitants

Considering the destructive effects of the colonizers on the land, natural disasters come first in

Munif's novel, *Cities of Salt*. The novel opens with the destruction of the oasis village Wadi al-Uyoun by an American oil company which bulldozes all trees, destroys the spring, and forces the villagers to leave. The destruction is expressed in the line: "The butchery of Wadi al-Uyoun had begun, and it continued until everything was gone" (1989: 106). Without trees, the desert becomes hotter, affecting the inhabitants negatively. Without the spring, their water source, the villagers cannot live in the village any longer and must obey the Americans order to leave Wadi al-Uyoun. The natural life of the village is completely destroyed by the colonizers for economic reasons and the bonds between the people of Wadi al-Uyoun and the land are broken. Munif, in his interview with Tariq Ali, explains the destruction in his fictitious town with reference to the title of his novel: "Cities of salt means cities that offer no sustainable existence. When the waters come in, the first waves will dissolve the salt and reduce these great glass cities to dust. In antiquity, as you know, many cities simply disappeared" (Ali, 2004). From a purely ecological point of view, what the Americans do to the green town of Wadi al-Uyoun is a massacre of natural habitat.

There is a similar theme of environmental or ecological destruction in Andrić's novel as well. The Austro-Hungarians cut down trees in the city for the construction of their railway and deforest the city to build their timber factory. Deforestation happens solely for the profit of colonizers who find new ways to invest in the town: "Felling began in forest and brought with it foreign contractors, engineers and workers, and provided varied sources of gain for the ordinary people and traders" (Andrić, 1977: 175). As it is clear, both Munif and Andrić represent the destruction of the nature of old towns by the colonizers for the sake of profit regardless of their reasons.

Eradication of the History

Colonizers did not only affect the habitat of the dominated land, but were also blind to the history of the local inhabitants. Compared with Andrić's emphasis on the history of Višegrad, Munif remains slightly more implicit in his representation. In *Cities of Salt*, the history of Wadi al-Uyoun is eradicated when the inhabitants are forced to leave the town. Before the arrival of the Americans, these people had a long history of caravan trade with many experiences, but their history disappeared with the scattering inhabitants of Wadi al-Uyoun. So, it is obvious that Munif connects eradication of the town with the natural disaster that fell upon it. However, the issue of the destruction of history is represented differently in Andrić's *The Bridge on the Drina*. Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha had ordered the building of a bridge and a caravanserai in his hometown during his reign. Although the bridge remained in good condition, the caravanserai or, as the locals called it, the Stone Han turned into a ruin because of years of neglect. In fact, although the interior of the caravanserai was in poor condition, its white stone walls were still whole and standing. All it required was some renovation to restore it to its former glory. Rather than renovating this historic building, the Austro-Hungarians took it down stone by stone. In its place, they built an ordinary edifice with no historical significance. Andrić regrettably explains the painful story of Stone Han and the construction of a barracks which contrasts with the originality of the town:

"A little more than a year, instead of the former caravanserai of white stone, there rose a high, massive, two-storied barracks, washed in a pale blue, roofed with grey corrugated iron and with loopholes in the corners [...] So, disappeared the lovely bequest of the Vezir and so the barracks, which the people true to ancient custom went on calling Stone Han, commenced its life on the level by the bridge in complete lack of harmony with all that surrounded it. The bridge now remained completely isolated." (Andrić, 1977: 139-140).

Andrić connects one historical artefact to another when he talks about the bridge, which is incomplete without the caravanserai. At first, the significance of the bridge is reduced with the construction of the railway since the bridge loses its duty to connect East and West. Even the locals use

the railway to travel to Sarajevo, relegating the bridge to just another ordinary construction within the town. Andrić states the tragic destiny of the bridge in the lines: "For three whole centuries it had endured and experienced everything and, unchanging, had truly served its purpose, but human needs had altered and world conditions changed; now it's task had betrayed it" (1977: 228). However, historical destruction does not end here; the most striking example comes at the end of the novel with the bombing of the Drina Bridge. Alihodja unbelievably examines the bridge after he recovers from the destruction caused by the bombs: "The *kapia* was there where it had always been, but just the *kapia* the bridge stopped short. There was no longer the seventh pier, between the sixth and eighth yawned a gulf through which he could see the green waters of the river" (Andrić, 1977: 311-312). With the destruction of the old bridge, the Austro-Hungarians destroyed one of the crucial elements of life in Višegrad as the bridge was strongly connected to the local culture as well. Clearly, colonizers in Wadi al-Uyoun and Višegrad are ignorant of historical elements; they do not respect the inhabitants' past.

Renovation of Harran and Višegrad

In many countries, colonizers bring their own industries, governmental organisations, and systems to the countries that they dominate. Generally, a great change occurs in the structure of a city with a more modernised view. In *Cities of Salt*, this change begins with the foundation of ARAMCO, the oil industry. Munif emphasizes this change in Harran in every chapter of the book by stressing the fast modernisation of the city. After the Harranis built their new homes, they began to build a city which included everything they had never dreamed of. "The original three shops doubled in size and expanded every month," (Munif, 1989: 242), "several kinds of restaurants had opened in Harran" (Munif, 1989: 247), a medical clinic was opened, and transportation between the cities of Harran and Urja commenced. These huge buildings, resembling those of the Americans, were far removed from the simplicity of Bedouin life. Every change disturbed the Harranis since they believed that all the things Americans brought were evil. In the city, the "Desert Army" is founded with the support of the Americans because the emir needed soldiers to silence rebellious workers against the American Oil Company (Munif, 1989: 557). A new judicial system is introduced in Harran where people who do not obey the rules will be punished or sent to prison. All these changes applied by the emir are actually what the Americans want. The emir is simply their puppet. The locals start to feel that their town is beginning "to be a dangerous city" with many soldiers, policeman, guards, and servants (Munif, 1989: 536). As their town changes, they feel insecure, their prophecies about the fate of the Harranis prove true and create chaos within the town.

With the dominance of the Austro-Hungarians in Višegrad, the city undergoes many changes affecting the lives of people. Many foreign people came to the city to work as civil servants. They destroyed old shops in the city centre and built modern ones; only Alihodja escaped this renovation. Andrić tells of the rapid modernisation of town:

"Indeed, the town changed rapidly in appearance, for the newcomers cut down trees, planted new ones in other places, repaired the streets, cut new ones, dug drainage canals, built public buildings. In the market-place those old-fashioned shops which were out of line and which, to tell the truth had up till then inconvenienced no one. In place of those old-fashioned shops with their wooden drop-counters, new ones built, well sited, well tiled roofs and metal rollers on the doors." (Andrić, 1977: 138).

However, the townspeople, especially the elders, are not content with the new face of Višegrad because they see "this unhealthy activity as a bad omen. Had it been left to them; the town would have gone on looking as any other little oriental town" (Andrić, 1977: 139). The empire sent many soldiers and built barracks in the town. The presence of soldiers throughout the town, especially in the *kapia*, disturbs people. They also brought their judicial system and courts to the town. Although the Austro-

Hungarian Empire seems to be bringing modernity to the town, it is not welcomed by the inhabitants. They do not want the city to lose its originality and these changes cause frustration among the townspeople. Consequently, the governmental organisations, industries and institutions of colonizers cause destruction in the originality of the town and on the psyche of its inhabitants who are not accustomed to such things.

The Process of Adaptation

Apart from the changes that destroy the cities themselves, there are other changes that destroy the lives of inhabitants. The effects of modernisation disturb the local people and they lose their ethics and morals during the process of adaptation. In both novels, technology affects the cities as well as the people's lives. The guns used by the Americans were in contrast to the Bedouin lifestyle since they were not used to machinery. In the novel, guns are used as a way of oppressing the people, of forcing them to submit. During the time of the riot, one of the soldiers shouts to frighten the inhabitants: "One step closer and we'll open fire" (Munif, 1989: 614). Technology in the form of electricity also comes to the town, although the Harranis do not make much use of it. Although brought in as a method of modernization, the Harranis feel it was more for the benefit of the Americans than anyone else. The emir becomes fascinated by the technology brought in by the Americans. With every gift they bestow upon him, he becomes so mesmerized by the 'miraculous' changes in his life that he forgets that his people are under the domination of the Americans. For example, the emir is so intrigued by the 'magic box', the radio, that he listens to it day and night. He uses the telescope he is gifted to search the American ships for naked white women. While the people of Harran are affected by the modern technologies provided by the Americans, the emir is truly under their spell. Such rapid modernization in his life causes him to break contact with his people and destroys his morals and social life.

With the changes brought about by the colonizers, morals begin to change in both cities. The inhabitants begin to get used to the looser morals of the colonizers and allow their own values to relax. The weakening of morals in Harran starts with the arrival of Americans in huge ships full of beautiful nearly naked women. When the Harrani men see those women dancing, singing, and hugging the American men, they are astonished since they have never seen such a sinful thing before. The Harrani men become restless in their thoughts: "They obsessed everyone and visited the uneasy sleep of men in the form of phantoms; their repressed desires swarmed over them as the night wore on. Those men who went to bed wide awake, whose sleep came to in uneasy fits, woke in vivid terror only to be filled with desire and warmth, fear and expectation" (Munif, 1989: 223). Again, the emir is more deeply affected by these 'loose morals'. He and his deputy appear to contract a mysterious illness, and when ships come to Harran, the emir and his deputy "spent all their time alone, unable to speak or to receive anyone" (425). It is only when these ships depart that they can return to their normal lives. The arrival of 'Satan's ship', as it is called by the locals, heralds a new era in the town. People are so shocked with the new Harran, with the loosening of their town morals, that one old man says "they may build a whorehouse over the graveyard" (Munif, 1989: 258). Clearly, the Americans have contributed to the loss of morality among the Harranis through their vulgar displays of sexuality on the ships.

The issue of morals in Andrić's town is more or less the same with Munif's town. Before the arrival of the colonizers, the townspeople satisfied their pleasures secretly. However, after the colonizers come, people were become freer in their behaviours:

"Pleasures which up till then had been stolen and concealed, could now be purchased and openly displayed, which increased their attraction and the number of those who sought them. [...] Many passions, appetites and demands which till then had been hidden in remote places or left completely unsatisfied could now be boldly and openly sought and fully or at least partially satisfied." (Andrić, 1977: 176).

Typically, in Višegrad, no woman, whether Muslim or Christian, could sit in the *kapia*, since it was considered a shame in their culture. However, with the arrival of the colonizers, this custom changed: "These idle, laughing women were a scandal to all, some more some less. The people wondered and felt insulted for a time and then began to grow accustomed to them, as they had grown accustomed to so many other innovations, even though they did not approve them" (Andrić, 1977: 142). Although they feel a kind of shock at the beginning, they get accustomed to these new habits, as they did for many other innovations. In Harran, the opening of a whorehouse is given as a condemnation of the loosening morals; however, in Višegrad it actually occurs. But again, it is not immediately accepted by the locals. Even Lotika, the hotel owner who has offered entertainment for men for years, is angered by Terdik, who blatantly opens a whorehouse in the town: "That shameless and insolent boor, Terdik, had opened his house 'under the poplars' and enticed away many of Lotte's guests, offering them easily and immediately all that they had never able to get in her hotel however much they paid" (Andrić, 1977: 258). It is clear that the rapid modernisation introduced by the colonizers destroys the morals of both towns, Harran and Višegrad. As Ibn Naffeh claims in *Cities of Salt*: "My boy, foreign lands are corrupt, and foreign people bring corruption, and money corrupts worst of all" (Munif, 1989: 335). The values of the West do not correspond with those of the East, so the locals are almost forced to swallow these new values.

The arrival of colonizers also has effects on the cultural lives of Harran and Višegrad, which have totally different cultures compared to the West. In *Cities of Salt*, there is an "enormous leap from the traditional desert life, with its Bedouin ethos and cosmic sense of time" (Hafez, 2006: 54). The Americans create a new modern culture away from the Bedouin principles. The Bedouin Harranis start to work all day and are always in a rush in their new modern cities. And this concept of rushing causes them to withdraw from their previously social lives: "In spite of the crowds and the endless flux of new people, each man became a world unto himself" (Munif, 1989: 247).

The situation is no different in Višegrad. The local people there cannot understand the endless rush of the foreign lifestyle:

"The newcomers were never at peace; and they allowed no one else to live in peace. It seemed that they were resolved with their impalpable yet ever more noticeable web of laws, regulations and orders to embrace all forms of life, men, beasts and things and to change and alter everything, both the outward appearance of the town and the customs and habits of men from the cradle to grave." (Andrić, 1977: 135).

The colonizers not only impose new cultures on the natives, but they also eradicate their old cultures. One of the most striking examples of the cultural destruction is the loss of the *kapia* culture. The, *kapia*, or the town square located on the bridge, is the most important part of Drina Bridge, where people come together, drink coffee, and socialize. Since the bridge was built, the *kapia* has been an essential part of the cultural and social life of Višegrad. With the invasion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the *kapia* begins to be occupied by soldiers, and the place begins to lose its importance day by day. People are lost in the rush of daily life, and the *kapia* culture slowly becomes extinct. Andrić expresses the loneliness of the *kapia* after so many joyful years: "On the *kapia*, instead of a festival mood and the gaiety of men released from work, there was the silence of the dead. A guard had already been mounted. A soldier in a new uniform paced slowly from the sofa to the spot where an iron manhole covered the way down into the mined pier" (Andrić, 1977: 280).

CONCLUSION

Lastly, ethnic and racial issues come into consideration with the arrival of the colonizers. In *Cities of Salt*, there is a clear-cut difference between the Americans and the Arabs. Everything is divided

into two parts in the city: American Harran and Arabian Harran. American workers do not live and work in the same areas as the Arabs. Those groups come together only when the emir wants to visit the Americans or vice versa. The Arabs do not work under the same conditions as the American workers and their barracks are in shambles when compared with the Americans' modern houses. Munif expresses the discrimination of the Arabs clearly: "When silence fell, the workers guessed that the Americans had gone into their air-conditioned rooms whose thick curtains shot everything out: sunlight, dust, flies, and Arabs" (391). On the Balkan side, after many peaceful years under Ottoman rule, there is chaos in the city. With the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Ferdinand by a Serbian nationalist, animosity ignites against the Serbs. Also, the rise of nationalism led different ethnic groups to clash, harming the multi-national structure of Bosnia. Andrić expresses the tension and discrimination in the town clearly: "The Turks went to the Turkish houses and the Serbs, as if plague-stricken, only to Serbian homes" (290). It is obvious that with the arrival of colonizers, the peace period in their homeland ends; chaos affects the land negatively.

Therefore, it is clear from this analysis of *Cities of Salt* and *The Bridge on the Drina* that any kind of colonial activity, regardless of its type, affects both the land and its inhabitants negatively and creates destructive effects. Although the two novels are set in totally different regions and times, and the colonizers are different in both, both sets of local inhabitants endure the same type of suffering at the hands of their colonizers. Starting with the destruction of the land and history, they also destroy social, cultural, and moral life. They destroy old cities and cultures under the guise of modernisation. They change the lifestyles of the local inhabitants with their alien values, forcing them to adapt in order to fit in to the newly colonized town. Consequently, it is clear that the colonizers reach their aim of dominating these new lands politically, economically, and culturally.

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