

# National Identity and Sense of Belonging of the Yemeni Migrants in Ethiopia: A Critical Analysis of Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers*

Riyad A. Manqoush<sup>1</sup>, Ahmed M. Al-Hawtali<sup>2</sup> and Ahmed A. Al-Sakkaf<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant professor of English literature  
Department of English, Faculty of Education  
Hadramout University, Yemen

<sup>2</sup> Assistant professor of English literature  
Seiyun Community College, Yemen

<sup>3</sup> Ph.D Candidate (English Literature)  
School of Language Studies & Linguistics  
National University of Malaysia, Malaysia

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**ABSTRACT**— *This paper examines the national identity and sense of belonging of the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia as portrayed in Mohammad Abdul-Wali's They Die Strangers (1971). Using the theoretical discussions of Adnan Zarzour, Raymond Williams, Ernest Renan, Kamaludin Rifaat, Gastanteen Zureiq, Timothy Brennan and John McLeod, the research attempts to uncover the issue of nationhood in Yemen at the period of the advent of September Revolution in 1962. In addition to that, it sheds light on the loss of identity and living in between spaces that the Yemeni migrants experienced in Ethiopia. The paper concludes that They Die Strangers is one of the Yemeni novels that express the internal feelings of the Yemenis who lived inside and also for those who lived outside the country at that time. It also reflects the suffering of the Yemeni migrants who could not live amongst their own nation in Yemen because of the backward regime of the imam. In contrast, when they left their homeland to Ethiopia, they felt alienated there. They lived in between spaces; they neither belonged to Yemen nor to their land of domicile.*

**Keywords**— National identity, sense of belonging, Yemeni migrants, Mohammad Abdul-Wali, *They Die Strangers*.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to examine the national identity and sense of belonging of the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia as portrayed in Mohammad Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers* (1971). Appropriating the theory of nationhood as a framework for the analysis, we will attempt to uncover the issue of nationhood in Yemen at the epoch of the imam's backward rule. We will also shed light on the loss of identity and living in between spaces that the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia experienced. The paper will be divided into six sections. Firstly, this introduction presents the objectives of the research. Secondly, we will discuss some information about the author and his literary productions because these details can be used as a background for our study. Thirdly, we will discuss some critical works on the writer and his novel to show how the current paper fills in the gap that the previous critical works overlooked. Fourthly, the concept of nationhood as discussed by Adnan Zarzour, Raymond Williams, Ernest Renan, Kamaludin Rifaat, Gastanteen Zureiq, Timothy Brennan and John McLeod will theoretically be appropriated to frame our analysis. In other words, the discussions of those theorists will be the theoretical framework of the study. Fifthly, our analysis of the novel will be achieved. And finally, we will give a conclusion summarizing our findings.

## 2. MOHAMMAD ABDUL-WALI AND HIS LITERARY PRODUCTIONS

Shelagh Weir (2001: 1) writes that "Mohammad Abdul-Wali was born in Ethiopia in 1940, and spent his childhood there. His mother was Ethiopian and his father, Ahmad, was an émigré from North Yemen." In fact, his father, Ahmad Abdul-Wali was a shopkeeper in Ethiopia. He lived in a Christian-African community and environment. Therefore, he sent his son, Mohammad, "to the Yemeni Community School in Adis Ababa" in order to maintain his Islamic, Arabic, and Yemeni identity (Weir 2001: 1). In 1954, when Mohammad Abdul-Wali was about fourteen years old, he was sent to an institute of Islamic studies in Aden, and there he married his cousin. At that time, Abdul-Wali has begun writing short stories. In 1955, he went to Cairo where he studied at Al-Azhar University, and after that, he went to Moscow where he learned Russian and attended a literature course at the Gorki Institute.

Mohammad Abdul-Wali wrote approximately two novels and various short stories. His two novels are Sana'a, *an Open City* (1966) and *They Die Strangers* (1971), which is the center of the current research. In addition to that, his short stories

are written in two collection books. The first collection was published in 1966 and the other one in 1972 (Subai 2005). His novels and short stories deal with the problems that existed in Yemen during the oppressive political regime of the Imam. His works criticize the tribal traditions and female oppression in Yemen at that time. Since Mohammad Abdul-Wali is a Yemeni migrant in Ethiopia, his literary works reflect the problems of national identity and sense of belonging that the Yemeni migrants experienced in Ethiopia.

*They Die Strangers* is about a young Yemeni, Abdou Said, who leaves his wife, son, parents, nation, and homeland because of the bad economic and political situation. He migrates to Ethiopia in Africa where a lot of Yemeni migrants live. In Ethiopia, he establishes a small shop and succeeds in his job. Like some migrant people, when they are far away from their culture, Abdou Said explores his sexuality. He involves in illegitimate relationships with some women in the city where he works. Although Abdou Said works all the time, he always longs for his homeland and his family as well as he does not lose his Yemeni identity. However, since he suffered of poverty in Yemen, he attempts to forget thinking about going back home until he collects a countless amount of money. In other words, he wants to become a rich man before he goes back home. One day, one of his Ethiopian girlfriends gets pregnant and gives birth to an Arab-looking child that completely looks like him. Abdou Said refuses to recognize the son. Just then, the story becomes tragedy. The protagonist is driven crazy, and subsequently, he stops working in his small shop. In fact, that woman is Christian and after her death one of her friends publicizes her relationship with Abdou among the Yemeni community in Ethiopia in order to force Abdou to take care of the boy. The story ends when Abdou is found dead in his shop. No one knows what happened to him. He died a stranger in a strange land. He died far away from his wife, children, and parents.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW: CRITICAL WORKS ON *THEY DIE STRANGERS*

*They Die Strangers* is one of the Yemeni problematic and controversial novels because it encourages the Yemenis to recall what they experienced in the past. It also provides a question of loyalty and sense of belonging. These characteristics have encouraged many critics to study and analyze the novel. For instance, Mansour Al-Sururi (2006) argues that Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers* and *Sana'a, an Open City* possess new themes compared to the themes that exist in Yemeni fiction of their time. The two novels' themes are considered to be modern for the reason that the two novels portray the facts that were hidden because of the political oppression or the oppressive traditions, as deduced from this the quotation: "the Yemeni novel – from its beginning to the present – is just preoccupied by two themes: writing about the past or the present except Mohammad Abdul-Wali's two novels; *They Die Strangers* and *Sana'a, an Open City*. In the two novels, Mohammad Abdul-Wali attempts to recall the past that his characters experienced" (Al-Sururi 2006). In addition to that, Al-Sururi (2006) analyzes the title of the novel, *They Die Strangers*. He claims that "the word 'die' in the title signifies the death which subsequently symbolizes the people's absence" (Al-Sururi 2006). People were probably absent because they left their homeland or they were ignored and marginalized in their land. In other words, people are identified as dead because they were not free. Furthermore, Al-Sururi (2006) adds that "the pronoun 'they' probably shows the reader that many Yemeni citizens left Yemen to stay and then die abroad." This argument seems to be a factual reflection of the Yemeni society. For instance, during the era of the British colonization and the oppressive regime of the Imam, a large number of Yemenis migrated to different countries around the world, especially to Southeast Asia and Southeast Africa. Most of those people died abroad before Yemen gets free.

*They Die Strangers* mirrors the Yemeni migrants' problems. In his essay, *A Combination of Two Worlds: A Critical Reading on They Die Strangers*, Abdul-Bari Taher (2004), highlights that "*They Die Strangers* reflects the problems of Yemeni migrants who leave their homeland, children, and family because of the immortal poverty, hard nature, and injustice of the government during the period of the Imam. They migrate to faraway countries in search for freedom and a good life." This confirms that the Yemenis at that time left Yemen because of its oppressive political regime, tribal fights and poverty. However, it is not easy for people to leave their homeland, nation, culture, family, and identity. It is also difficult for them to live in another land. This will be made clear when analyzing the novel in the next few pages. Somewhere else in the same essay, Taher (2004) stresses on the significance of the decade in which the novel was written, arguing that "Mohammad Abdul-Wali wrote his novel, *They Die Strangers*, at the beginning of the 1970s when the country was in a violent political conflict." In fact, that period was full of a racial and regional violence. People who were half-cast such as the author, Abdul-Wali, as well as the protagonist of the novel, Abdou Said, "were racially discriminated" (Taher 2004). This discrimination has consciously or unconsciously been echoed in *They Die Strangers* as will be discussed later.

Shelagh Weir (2001: 11) illustrates that *They Die Strangers*, "is Abdul-Wali's most cautionary and didactic tale." This is probably because it can be seen from different angles. It can be considered as a literary work that resists the political subjugation as well as the oppressive traditions that existed in Yemen at that time. In contrast, the novel can be considered as a work that criticizes the Yemeni migrants themselves for some of them lose their Arabic and Islamic identity when they are abroad. The novel seems to convey both meanings at the same time. Weir (2001: 11) adds that "Mohammad Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers* dwells on the negative aspects of long-term emigration: the anguish of long separations

from families and homeland, the loneliness and moral hazards of living in an alien culture, and the tension between the migrant's desire to assimilate in the host country and his yearning to return." Hence, *They Die Strangers* highlights the problems that the Yemeni migrants faced when they left their homeland and their own nation. For instance, they experienced a sense of loss, loneliness, and alienation. However, the majority of those migrants preserved their Yemeni, Islamic, and Arabic identity. Although some migrants who, as Weir (2001: 11) elaborates, "strive to preserve their Yemeni identity and Muslim values in the context of an African and Christian environment, and regret their lapse and compromises, Abdou Said emphatically does neither". In fact, the protagonist of the novel, Abdou Said, is represented as a loose and materialistic character, despite the fact that he is sometimes depicted in the text as a victim. Weir (2001: 11) illustrates that Abdou "is an extreme example of a 'fallen' émigré who ruthlessly betrays the ideals of his native culture and religion without remorse, fatally corrupted by his selfish, materialistic goal. By inflicting on him such tragic end and denying him absolution, Abdul-Wali delivers an uncompromising verdict on the dangers and delusions, as such he saw them, of Yemeni men living abroad alone."

The papers discussed earlier show *They Die Strangers* as a significant Yemeni novel that present a wonderful reflection of the Yemeni society. This reinforces what the Malaysian writer, K. S. Maniam, reveals about the reflection of facts into fiction. He believes that literature cannot be separated from facts and the writer's feeling is a part of the society's experience and history (Maniam 2001: 263). The cohesion between facts and fiction will be discussed in detail when analyzing the novel in the next pages.

#### 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NATIONHOOD

Since *They Die Strangers* reflects the Yemeni migrants' search for identity in Ethiopia and their sense of belonging to their homeland, the analysis of the novel requires a sufficient knowledge of the word "nation". However, in his book *The Origins of the National and Secular Thinking*, Adnan Mohammad Zarzour (1999: 43) illustrates that "the word 'nation' refers to a group of people who speak one language and have the same origin such as the Arabs, the Persians, and the Turks." These elements make them one nation. This argument does not coincide with Raymond Williams (1983: 87) who identifies the "nation" "as a term radically connected with 'native'." He adds that "we are born into relationships which are typically settled in a place." In fact, the definitions of Zarzour and Williams seem to be short and insufficient to explain the meaning of the "nation" and the word "nation" is still ambiguous and maybe involves numerous meanings. This ambiguity leads Ernest Renan to provide another definition. He argues that "a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in the undivided form" (Renan 1990: 19). Unlike Zarzour's definition that focuses on language and origin, Renan elaborates some extra elements that people should share in order to become a nation. For instance, they are supposed to have a desire to live together. Besides, they have to share the same heritage and memories. This is consistent with Kamaludin Rifaat (1966)'s argument that the term "nation" refers to "a particular group of people who might be different to a certain extent but they all together share some characteristics, features, and elements such as a specific language, geographical land, history, interest, and similar ideology." Hence, if these elements are shared by a group of people, even though they are from different countries, those people can be identified as a nation.

By the same token, Gastanteen Zureiq (1994) scrutinizes that "the 'nation' is a group of people who share some elements and features such as language, culture, history, ambition, pain, and interest." These elements contribute together to make that group of people a united nation. People may also share some myths that are relevant to the nation. The word "myth" conveys an ambiguous meaning. Timothy Brennan (1990: 44) identifies the 'myth' as a "distortion or lie; myth as mythology, legend, or oral tradition; myths as literature prose; myths as shibboleth." The correlation between the nation and the myths may reinforce the national sense of belonging. It creates the national identity that is, later on, shaped as "nationalism" which Brennan (1990: 57) defines as "a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state". However, in spite of the national enthusiasm that nationalism connotes, John McLeod (2000: 68) argues that "most commentators agree that the idea of nation is Western in origin. It emerged with the growth of Western capitalism and industrialization and was a fundamental component of imperialist expansion." Even though "nationalism" was created in the West, it has been developed appropriated to suit the different cultures and nations in the world.

To summarize the previous discussions, we can claim that the "nation" is as a group of people who share some characteristics and components that make them feel connected to each other. For instance, they speak the same language, experience the same history, have similar culture, inhabit in the same land or perhaps in attached lands, adopt analogous ideology and ambitions, and in some cases, they have the same religion. In contrast, living among people who possess different culture, language, myths, or goals may create a sense of loss, alienation, and displacement. This makes people live in between spaces; they neither belong to the new nation, nor to their own nation. For instance, the Yemenis who

sailed to Ethiopia suffered from identity's problems and a sense of loss. To them, Ethiopia was a new land with different language, religion, culture, history, experience, and race as well. The experience of losing their original identity is so painful to them, especially, to those who feel proud of their ancestral land, nation and culture.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

*They Die Strangers* reveals the Yemeni migrants' national identity and sense of belonging to their homeland. The protagonist of the novel, Abdou Said lives in Ethiopia but he is still preoccupied by memories about his nation and homeland. In his explanation of how the protagonist is still connected to Yemen and cannot lose his Yemeni identity, the narrator tells that, "now, twelve years later, he knew very little about home, except for what was revealed in the letters he received two or three times a year. Still, he was happy despite the long periods of waiting. In his heart, he lived not in Sodset Kilo, but in faraway village in Yemen" (Abdul-Wali 27). Abdou's sense of belonging to Yemen provokes him to recall pleasing or traumatic memories about his ancestral land. Since he cannot easily lose his Yemeni identity and assimilate himself in Ethiopia, Abdou yearns for going back home. When he finds it is difficult for him to return to Yemen, home becomes an image in his mind and memories. One day, while he is chewing qat in his small shop in Ethiopia, he remembers his homeland, childhood and family in Yemen:

As a boy, he had been a shepherd. He used to drink only goat's milk, which he milked secretly in the cool mountain breeze. Perhaps he ate some fruit that grew on village trees or dates that grew in the valley or bananas that he stole from a garden near the valley or bananas that he stole from a garden near the valley. Abdou treasured memories were of that valley, the trees ripe with fruit, goats lowing. These were things he remembered when he chewed leaves of qat and a far-off expression came into his eyes (Abdul-Wali 25).

As seen above, Abdou remembers his suffering in his place of birth. When he was a boy he worked as a "shepherd" and he used to drink secretly "goat's milk" in the "cool mountain breeze". He remembers the "trees ripe with fruits" in the valley where his family's house exists. Thus, just like the protagonist in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1838) who represents the author, Charles Dickens, himself, Abdou Said symbolizes the writer of the novel, Mohammad Abdul-Wali, as well. The novel goes beyond the fictional work to reflect the writer's own experience for, as mentioned earlier, the novelist was a Yemeni migrant in Ethiopia. He also lived in a village in Yemen during the decades of the backward ruling of the Imam before he migrated to Ethiopia, escaping from the political oppression and poverty in his homeland.

*They Die Strangers* portrays the Yemeni liberal movements and nationalism. For instance, the problems and pains, which most of the Yemenis experienced due to the oppressive political system in Yemen led the Yemenis to achieve a revolution. Their national goal is liberating Yemen from the tyrant Imam and the British colonization. This has been reflected in the story when Hajji Abdul-Latif "had played a role in the 1948 revolution, for he was one of the Yemeni liberals" (Abdul-Wali 42). Conversely, the secretary does not believe Hajji Abdul-Latif and other liberals, who claim that they intend to liberate Yemen. In fact, they always declare that there are immense forces obstructing the Yemeni revolution. However, the secretary thinks that he and some half-cast Yemenis can perform this revolution honestly and successfully. They can perform this because they need a homeland and a nation to protect them from the racial discrimination and political oppression. This can be seen when the secretary tells Hajji Abdul-Latif that the Yemeni half-casts can achieve what the liberals failed to do: "Yes, us! We're searching for a homeland, a nation, a hope. You don't know what it's like to feel like a stranger. We'll try to liberate the land of Yemen. We might succeed, but we will never make the excuse that others are blocking our way" (Abdul-Wali 58). Although the secretary has never been to Yemen, his dialogue shows that his national identity towards Yemen is apparent and evident. In other words, despite the fact that he was born in Ethiopia, his sense of belonging is still to his nation, culture, and homeland. The secretary utilizes a metaphorical language when he says that: "we will destroy the Ka'aba" (Abdul-Wali 58). In fact, the Ka'aba that he means is not the one that exists in Mecca. It is just a symbol of injustice in Yemen. He perhaps utilizes this comparison because both the Ka'aba and the political regime in Yemen are black because of the people's sins. The dialogue between the secretary and Hajji Abdul-Latif below illustrates what has been discussed previously.

We will destroy the Ka'aba of injustice, corruption, and feudalism. We will destroy the myth you ran away from. We will bring back tranquility. Don't worry; God will protect the real Ka'aba but not the one that enslaves people who were born free. As for us abandoning our religion, drinking alcohol, and chasing women, you very well that there's no difference between you and me in this matter (Abdul-Wali 58).

It seems that the secretary represents the nation for he utters the slogans which are raised by most of the Yemenis. These national slogans, which are subsequently shaped into national goals and dreams, intend to resist the injustice,

corruption, and feudalism in Yemen. The secretary also reveals that the Yemenis are oppressed by the British colonization and the tyrant imam because they abandoned their religion and they were perhaps “drinking alcohol, and chasing women”. These sins, according to the secretary, stands as obstacles in the path of the Yemeni revelation.

Although the secretary has never been to his homeland, Yemen, he feels alienated in Ethiopia. He experiences a sense of lost identity as realized in his reaction towards the mixed-blood boy that is claimed to be Abdou’s son. The boy’s mother is an Ethiopian woman whose friend, after her death, tells Sayyid Amin, a Yemeni pious sheikh in the city, that Abdou Said is the son’s real father. Thus, Sayyid Amin asks Hajji Abdul-Latif to force Abdou Said to take care of his son. Despite the fact that the boy looks like him, Abdou Said refuses to confess that the boy is his. However, the situation of the boy reminds the secretary of his own life. For instance, like the boy, the secretary was “born without a country, a stranger in a strange land” (Abdul-Wali 56). The secretary’s sense of alienation, living in between spaces, and his lost identity are reflected in the novel when the narrator, in the excerpt below, describes his problems and experience.

He used sarcasm as a weapon, a way of justifying his feelings of alienation. The secretary’s father dreamed of his homeland, of a future in Yemen, someday when it was ‘liberated’ from oppression. He had a foundation to stand on and dreams to support him. He wasn’t a stranger, despite being an expatriate. He had a country to go home to one day. But, his son, the secretary, was like a rootless tree; he was no one. Yes, no one (Abdul-Wali 56).

As discussed earlier, the secretary is given a voice, despite the fact that he is a half-cast person and he is just an employee in Hajji Abdul-Latif’s company. This voice is obvious within the story, especially when he argues with Hajji Abdul-Latif. Unlike his employer, the secretary has a different view about how to liberate Yemen. For instance, he believes that the liberals must not leave their homelands. According to him, leaving the land means that it will not be liberated. He says to Hajji Abdul-Latif that “you dream of a myth, but we live a reality! You talk twenty-four hours a day about freeing your homeland, but you will never liberate it. You ran away” (Abdul-Wali 57). He also adds that “from here you will never do anything but shout at the top of your lungs, ‘you despot, we will revolt.’ But you’re just opening your mouths, and no one hears you but us. And we’re surprised by your pain. We smile when we hear you shouting for liberation, because you’ve never convinced us of the reality of the freedom for which you fight” (Abdul-Wali 57).

However, the secretary emphasizes on the element of the nation’s braveness. This courage can lead people to fight their colonizers and tyrant rulers. For instance, he tells Hajji Abdul-Latif that “liberating your country requires first that you liberate yourselves, that you not cower, that you fight your enemy face to face” (Abdul-Wali 57). The voice of the secretary is clear, even though he is a minor character in the text: “No, sir, you didn’t come to liberate your country. You escaped from the ghost of the Imam. You were afraid. If you really wanted to liberate your country, why did you get married and have children? I tell you frankly, you’ll never be the ones to liberate your country. If it is liberated, it will be by those who stayed there, or perhaps by us” (Abdul-Wali 57-8). The secretary refuses Hajji Abdul-Latif’s claim that the Yemeni liberals migrated from their country to Ethiopia with the aim of liberating Yemen from abroad. The discussion between the secretary and Hajji Abdul-Latif shows that the latter lost his Yemeni identity in Ethiopia. He just talks about Yemen, but does nothing to liberate it, although he was once one of the liberals who performed the Yemeni revolution in 1948 and killed Imam Yahya. However, the revolution was aborted by the elder son of that Imam, Ahmad, who, after his father’s death, announced himself as the new ruler of Yemen. Since the political regime of the new Imam was more aggressive than his father’s, people felt disappointed and, like Hajji Abdul-Latif, they preferred to leave Yemen. When he came to Ethiopia, he has become a businessman; he has no time to do something for his country except talking about the revolution in his spare time with his employees in the company.

The state of living in between spaces is noticeably reflected in the character of the secretary who lives as a stranger in Ethiopia. He lives in a different culture, religion, traditions, and society. He does not know his homeland very well because he has never been to Yemen. He was born and brought up in Ethiopia, but practices the Yemeni culture and traditions as an Arab Muslim. He believes that if he returns to Yemen, the Yemeni people will spit him out. They may call him *muwallad* - a word used in Yemeni dialects for a half-breed person. Thus, he experiences a state of limbo. He does not know where he belongs to; to Ethiopia or to Yemen. This sense of living in between spaces can be seen when the narrator tells that the secretary “was a stranger; he could not even say he was Yemeni, for he did not know Yemen. He had never seen it. He had heard a great deal about it, but did not know it. If he went there, how would it receive him? Would it spit him out as this land had, even though it was his mother’s homeland? Then who was he? They called him *muwallad*, ‘half-breed’. Where was his land? Who were his people?” (Abdul-Wali 56). This excerpt highlights the question of identity; “who was he?” or in other words, where does he belong to? Does he belong to Yemen or to Ethiopia? In fact, these questions are too sensitive to answer. He believes that he belongs to Yemen, but he has never been there. In contrast, he attempts to assimilate himself with the Ethiopian society, but he is alienated for being Yemeni, Arab, and Muslim. This makes him displaced and lost.

Like the secretary of Hajji Abdul-Latif, the protagonist of the novel, Abdou Said, feels displaced and alienated from the Ethiopian society. This is obvious in the quotation below when the narrator of the story portrays the sense of displacement and alienation that Abdou Said experiences in Ethiopia: “He stays home on Fridays, giving himself a couple of hours of leisure in which to work on his garden and to mend what the children from the quarter had ruined. Everyone called him ‘Camel Jockey,’ a term they used for all the Yemeni immigrants. This didn’t disturb him as it did others” (Abdul-Wali 18). Though Abdou is a successful man, he cannot tolerate the Ethiopian children who look at him as the “other”. He is always called “camel jockey” by those children. In fact this noun phrase is used to call the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia as revealed in the story. However, by the time Abdou can manipulate and tolerate those Ethiopian naughty children. Although the quotation above reflects the sense of alienation and displacement in the land of domicile, it also shows that Abdou Said cannot divest himself of the Yemeni identity. He consciously or unconsciously belongs to Yemen. This illustrates that the “home” is not merely government, people, culture, or traditions, but also feeling and identity. This coincides with John McLeod’s argument that “the concept of ‘home’ often performs an important function in our lives. It can act as a valuable means of orientation by giving us a sense of our place in the world. It tells us where we originated from and where we belong. As an idea it stands for shelter, stability, security and comfort” (2000: 210). The significance of “home” for Abdou Said drives him to dream of his return to Yemen, although he was a successful shopkeeper in Ethiopia.

In contrast, Abdou’s home becomes an image that is recalled and remembered. These memories center around the oppressive ruling regime that Abdou experienced when he was in homeland. He remembers the backward and oppressive decades of the Imam. He recalls the people’s pain during that period. His mother and a large number of people died in his village because villagers could not find a hospital or a doctor when the epidemic struck the village. The novel shows that “his father was a simple peasant who owned several terraced fields on the mountainside and two-story house he had inherited through a long chain of ancestors. Abdou did not remember his mother. She died when an epidemic struck the village, an epidemic whose name and color he had forgotten. The village had faced many such epidemics” (Abdul-Wali 25). Similarly, Abdou recalls traumatic memories about his grandmother who was sick for many days. In fact, the traumatic experience of bereavement and epidemic, which Abdou encountered in Yemen, has a noticeable effect on him. This can be noticed below in his description of his grandmother’s death:

His grandmother had died like his mother, after being sick for days. He still remembered the sound of her death rattling in her throat as she lay in a corner of her room, saying; “Son, I’ll get over this quickly and be well again soon.” But that wasn’t to be. She died without saying a word, her throat constricted. He was asleep by her side; when he awoke in the morning he felt her hands digging into ribs. He had said to her, unwittingly, “Grandma, Grandma...you’re hurting me” (Abdul-Wali 25).

Abdou utilizes a metaphorical language such as “the sound of her death” that reflects the sorrow, bereavement, and trauma which haunted Yemen at that time. Somewhere else in the novel, Abdou has experienced, in the excerpt below, he remembers his traditional arranged marriage: “when Abdou Said was fifteen years old, he married. All he knew was that he went to the market and bought two goats, some food and clothes, and returned to the village to sit in the corner of the house” (Abdul-Wali 25-6). This illustrates that marriage of the majority of the Yemenis at that time was arranged by their parents. Abdou got married at the age of fifteen and he knew nothing about his fiancée. He just remembers that he went to the market to bring two goats and food for the wedding ceremony. He also bought some clothes for him and his concealed wife.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion and analysis in this paper, we can conclude that Abdul-Wali’s *They Die Strangers* (1971) uncovered the elements that led the Yemenis to achieve their national revolution. These elements are poverty, famine, political corruption, oppressive regime and British colonization in Yemen. The research also deduces that a large number of the diasporic Yemenis cannot forget their nation, land, and culture. In other words, they preserve their national identity as well as sense of belonging to Yemen. In contrast, the traumatic experiences that the Yemeni migrants encountered in their homeland made some of them stop thinking about going back home, though their sense of belonging is evident in the way they practice their culture in the hostland. In short, the paper concludes that Abdul-Wali’s *They Die Strangers* is one of the Yemeni novels that express the internal feelings of the Yemenis who lived inside and also for those who lived outside the country at that time. The novel also reflects the suffering of the Yemeni migrants who could not live amongst their own nation in Yemen because of the corrupt regime of the imam. In contrast, when they left their homeland to Ethiopia, they felt alienated there. They lived in between spaces; they neither belonged to Yemen nor to their land of domicile.

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