



**Crossing Boundaries and Encountering Strange Lands: A
Study of Diasporic Experience in Mohammed Abdul-Wali's *They Die
Strangers***

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Abstract

This article attempts to investigate diasporic experience in Mohammed Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers* and bring about its effects on the Yemeni immigrants. It engages with emigration and its attendant experiences that encompass the emigrants, their family and homeland. It explores the diverse traumatic experiences of the Yemeni expatriates in their adopted land, like the emigrants' aspirations, crisis of identity, alienation, abandoning values, the impact of emigration, the need for redemption and the collapse of the Yemeni emigres' dream. It examines the factors that contribute to their predicament. An attempt is made to read the selected narrative from a post-colonial perspective. The paper aims at unravelling the fractured, battered psyche of the protagonist and his creator. It ponders on the problems of emigration due to the on-going civil war and its catastrophic repercussions that corrode the collective Yemeni psyche. It attempts to build a connection between the current Yemeni diasporas and the diaspora portrayed in the novella during the oppressive Imamate rule of Yemen. It concludes with asserting the perils of emigration and its concomitant diasporic life and the idea that the past and the present are intertwined in Abdul Wali's fictional world which accords the novel a sense of momentum and continuum.

Key Words: emigration, diaspora, hybridity, homesickness, memory, assimilation, alienation, identity, emigrants' relationship with women, sexuality, religion, redemption, dream.

Diaspora is an old concept whose uses and meanings have recently undergone a major change. Etymologically the term diaspora has its root in Greek, made up of *dia* (through) and *sperin* (to scatter or disperse). Robin Cohen in his pioneering work *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* says that diaspora is derived from the Greek verb *spiero* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over), so its literal



translation is 'to sow over'(Cohen 1997). It refers to the movement of people or groups from their homeland to another country. Historically it denotes the movement of the Jewish people from their country to other countries. It refers specifically to the exile of Jews from Palestine to Babylon. Cohen describes the term as originally being used to describe the experience of the Jews—a group of people who were forced out of their place of residence, shunned into exile, and scattered around the world. It also refers to the historic experience of Armenians. More recently, it has been used to refer to forced or voluntary migration of people and the representation of diasporas' experiences in the new locations. Ashcroft et al. define Diaspora as “the voluntary or forcible movement of people from their homelands into new regions” (68). It includes expatriates, refugees, exiles, expellees, emigrants, alien residents, ethnic minorities and displaced communities.

Diasporic literature faithfully represents the migrated sect's life. It unveils the saga of suffering of émigrés who were uprooted from their motherland and re-rooted in strange soils. It grapples with issues like alienation, displacement, estrangement, racism, nostalgia, identity crisis and diasporic angst. It deals with the obsessions of emigrants with their original home, an obsession which problematizes their exact role and position in the adopted lands. The sense of the loss of identity is at the root of diasporic literature. Diaspora writers were initially more autobiographical, concentrating on narrating their selves. It would be apt here to adopt Tololyan's classification of diasporic writings. He makes a distinction between two types of discourses, namely the *emic* diaspora and the *etic* diaspora. The *emic* diaspora are the writers who talk about themselves (autobiographical), while the *etic* refers to scholarly works on diaspora (654). Abdul-Wali belongs to the emic Diaspora. This study belongs to etic diaspora.

Yemeni diaspora refers to the dispersal of Yemeni people from their homeland to different counties. It is either forced or voluntary migration. There are many reasons that compel Yemenis to leave their motherland, like natural catastrophes (drought and famine), man-made disasters (wars), despotic regimes, dissatisfaction with the deteriorating situation of the country, desire for lucrative jobs and proselytizing of Islam. Since the dawn of history Yemenis were destined to leave their homeland seeking better livelihood. The first incident of Yemeni Diaspora is recorded in the Holy Quran when Marib Dam collapsed about 575 A.D due to bad rain “Iram” in the land of Sheba. The two gardens which Yemenis constructed were destroyed. Hence, Yemenis scattered to different parts of the Arab World seeking a better life. Since that time Yemen has been witnessing sporadic migrations. It seems that it is Yemenis' destiny to keep shuttling between countries.

This paper is confined to examining the Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia as reflected in the selected novella. It scrutinizes the diverse experience the Yemeni



diaspora in Ethiopia have undergone. and the factors that contribute to their predicament. It ponders on the problems of emigration due to the current on-going civil war and its catastrophic repercussions that corrode the collective Yemeni psyche. The theoretical framework of this study will employ some ideas and assumptions of postcolonial theory pertinent to diaspora.

The study draws its significance from the fact that previous research studies on Abdul Wali as a diasporic writer are scarce. It also departs from the previous studies by concentrating exclusively on investigating the diasporic experiences the characters undergo and the concomitant effects of migration on the individual, the family and the society. Moreover, it attempts to build a connection between the current Yemeni diaspora and the diaspora portrayed in the novella during the oppressive Imamate rule of Yemen. The researcher hopes that this study will contribute to creating national awareness around the brain-drain that denudes Yemen from its talented youth and prodigious minds.

Yemeni diasporic literature is a part of the ever-evolving Arab and Muslim diasporic literature. It deals with issues pertaining to Yemeni Diaspora who have traversed across the national boundaries and re-located in strange lands. Yemeni diasporic writers represent experiences of Yemeni diaspora. They write about alienation, rootlessness, dispossession, loss of identity, racial and cultural conflict, struggle for adjustment and assimilation.

In this novella, *They Die Strangers*, Yemeni diaspora comprises two generations of Yemeni émigrés. The first generation people are those Yemenis who left their country seeking a better life in order to support their families, like Ahmed Abdul-Wali, the novelist's father, and the protagonist Abdou Sa'id. The second generation people are those young people of "mixed blood" (hybrids). They are half Yemeni and half Ethiopian. Mohammed Abdul-Wali (the writer), the secretary, and Abdu Sa'id illegitimate son belong to the second generation.

Generally speaking, Yemeni emigration is classified as labour emigration. But it has been brought about by difficult conditions that Yemenis experienced at home and by the lure of peace and lucre in other countries. Yemenis migrated to other countries seeking work and hoping to send the money they earned to their families. But they didn't abandon the thought of returning to their homeland. The characters in the novella *They Die Strangers* show strong proclivity to return home. Their motto is "Blessed is the man who's buried in his own soil, in his homeland" (*They Die Strangers* 65. Hereafter references to this novel are cited parenthetically with page number(s) only).

Mohammed Abdul-Wali was born in Ethiopia in 1940 and spent his childhood there. His mother was Ethiopian and his father was an emigrant from

Yemen. He is destined to be a half breed or half cast "muwallad". Living in a Christian dominated society, his father sent him to the Yemeni community school in Addis Ababa to retain his Islamic Yemeni identity. At the age of fourteen, his father encouraged him to join an institute for Islamic studies in Aden. During his stint in Aden, he got married to his cousin. In 1955, he studied at Al-Azhar University. He was influenced by the sweeping cultural, political and literary movement and theories that invaded Egypt during that time like Marxism which informed his literary oeuvre. He was expelled from Egypt for alleged political reasons. He "visited Yemen again, then he went to Moscow where he learned Russian and attended a literature course at the Gorky Institute" (Weir 2). The 1962 successful revolution pulled him to his home country where he found recognition. He was nominated as Charge d' Affairs in Yemeni Embassy in Moscow and then in East Berlin. But he was accused of spying and expelled from East Germany in 1967. During that time Yemen was engrossed in civil war which made Yemen as uncongenial environment for his aspirations. He worked as Director General of Aviation for a short time. Then he was incarcerated twice for long time for his daring political views and for his literary works that harshly criticize the oppressive policies that thwart progress in the society. But in his second stint, he succeeded to flee to Aden. His life is filled with tormenting experiences and it ends with a horrific tragedy. He died in a plane crash in 1970 while flying from Aden to Hadramaut with a group of Yemeni elites and politicians. He left a Swedish wife, whom he had married after the death of his Yemeni wife, and several children.

Abdul-Wali is storywriter, novelist and playwright. He is a talented and versatile writer. He is "admired in his parental homeland of North Yemen as a pioneer of fiction writing" (Weir 1). He is also acknowledged as one of the eminent writers in Arab literature. He wrote two important novels, *Sana'a, an Open City* (1966) and *They Die Strangers* (1971). He also wrote two collections of short stories. His novels and short stories deal with the problems and vicissitudes of Yemeni society under the theocratic rule of the Imam. Most of his short stories are set in Ethiopia or in Yemen. Basing the events of his stories in a foreign land is a feature of diasporic literature. His literary works reflect his Marxist concerns. They grapple with reflecting the social and political injustice, the degrading deprivation and stark poverty that compelled some Yemenis to abandon their homeland and emigrate to other countries.

Abdul-Wali is an apostle of Yemeni diasporic literature. He narrates the struggle of Yemeni diaspora in alien lands to make a better livelihood. He is also deeply connected to his motherland exposing the evils of the despotic imamate regime and supporting the cause of revolution and martyrs. Prior to the 1960s, Yemeni literature did not concern itself with the socio-cultural and political situation of Yemen. Instead, it aimed at edification and entertainment. Shelagh



Weir points out, “the literature of North Yemen mainly consisted of works of religious scholarships, histories, geographies, and biographies that looked to the past and idealized the achievement of the political and religious elite” (1). Abdul-Wali breaks away from the dominant tradition and gives voice to the oppressed and socially marginalized. His realistic discourse deals with the contemporary themes relevant to the ordinary people, like political oppression, social injustice and migration. As for migration, Abdul-Wali offers new insights into relocation and raises questions about what it means to be a migrant or a stranger in an alien land. His literary work is filled with the pain of being diasporic in an alien land and exiled from the motherland. The diasporic consciousness pervades his fictional world. His strong commitment to Yemeni diaspora reflects his probable personal experiences as a hybrid person who was born in Ethiopia and had spent his childhood there and as an exile and expatriate in different countries. His fictional works “have a strong autobiographical feel” (Weir 4). Most of his narratives, including the one under study, “describe situations which Abdul-Wali probably personally experienced, observed, or heard about first hand” (Weir 4). *They Die Strangers* epitomizes his autobiographical narratives and its protagonist, Abdu Sa'id, reflects the character of his creator.

They Die Strangers is set in a critical period in Yemen's history when North Yemen witnessed a civil war (1962-1970). It delineates a realistic picture of the suffering of Yemeni people who were forced to emigrate because of the socio-political and economic situation of Yemen during that period. It presents the contrasting experiences of two generations of Yemeni expatriates who do not inclined toward Ethiopianized. Through this novella Abdul-Wali depicts the complexities confronting an émigré who is suspended between two different worlds and cultures. Shelagh Weir asserts that in his fictional oeuvre Abdul-Wali “mainly wanted to spotlight people in forlorn or stressful circumstances”(4). Since Yemeni emigrants' life in foreign lands is affected by their earlier experiences at home, it would be appropriate to have a bird's eye view of their suffering at home. Yemeni Diaspora are afflicted by the traumatic experiences they have undergone in their homeland and in the adopted lands. The novel reveals the harrowing experiences the protagonist has undergone in Yemen. Abdou Sa'id is deeply affected by his early life in his homeland. His childhood had been traumatic. He lived a miserable life characterized by poverty and deprivation. The novel reads, “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” (25). He worked as a shepherd and as a farmer helping his father “to farm the terraces on the mountainside” (25). He was early bereaved. He never knew his mother because when he was a child she died due to epidemic that struck his village and killed many people. He suffered another tragic

loss, the death of his grandmother, who was his surrogate mother. His grandmother had supported him and protected him against the evils and the tribulations of life. Hence, her death greatly impacted his life and made him more vulnerable to life's cruelty. Indeed, the lack of maternal guidance and the demise of his grandmother have a lasting effect on his life. He also had to suffer the grave consequences of early marriage. His father had arranged his marriage without telling him. As a result his suffering escalates. He is unable to extricate himself from the fetters of poverty. He is psychologically devastated because he realizes that he is unable to improve his life and support his family in this impoverished area. The thought of emigration perturbs him at this point. Abdul Wali dexterously weaves the filaments of the thrusts that drive Abdou to emigrate. The abject poverty his family suffers and the changing status of those who have travelled abroad push him to think of emigration. People in the village keep talking about an emigrant, Saleh, who remittances built an elegant big house. Some women in the village keep talking about this and express their desire to enjoy his wealth. One woman states, "I wish I were his wife" (27). The belief that "Whoever goes overseas comes back rich" (27) makes him wonder "Why? Is money thrown in the streets there?" (26). Having realized the affluent life of the families of the emigrants, Abdou seriously begins to ponder on emigration. The narrator shows that he is affected by women's talk about the émigré who returns home a rich person. Their words were "like a dagger piercing his heart" (26). He is also driven by his son who blames him for not giving him some dates like those who got from Saleh. His son asks him: "Why don't you emigrate and bring me something like this" (27). All these incidents drive Abdou to emigration. He tells his father, "Father, I must emigrate" (27).

The title of the novella suggests the distressing experiences of Yemeni diaspora in a strange land, Ethiopia. The narrative abounds with various excruciating experiences that Yemeni emigrants have undergone in Ethiopia. Abdou Sa'id, the protagonist of the novella, is a typical representative of the first generation emigrants. He had spent fifteen years in Sodest Kilo in Addis Ababa as an émigré. He is "working hard as a storekeeper and living a frugal life in Ethiopia to make money and send it back to Yemen" (Chelala). As a typical prototype of Yemeni expatriates, he works hard to achieve his hopes and dreams. He struggles to achieve his grand dream to become the richest person in his village. He wants to support his family and expand his land.

Emigration displaces an individual from his native land and implants him in an alien soil where he encounters many hardships that beset his psyche. Once the emigrants' journey ends and they settle in the foreign lands, they undergo loneliness and cultural denudation. They lose their loved ones and the comforts they had enjoyed with them. They lose their heritage. Yemeni emigrants in Ethiopia suffer a severe sense of physical displacement as they are unable to



assimilate into the mainstream. They also experience cultural displacement which involves the loss of practices and rituals that they enjoyed in their homeland. This is exactly what Yemeni diaspora encounter in Addis Ababa. The first generation emigrants undergo the distressing experiences of dislocation and loneliness. Abdou Sa'id is physically and culturally displaced from his home and culture. He is in constant conflict with his self because of the incongruous worlds between which he is caught. He becomes an alien in the host land. He feels out of tune with its culture. For the second generation , these experiences are more harrowing. They are rejected by both the culture of the land into which they were born and the indigenous culture of their parents. They are dangling between two divergent worlds. Indeed, they undergo the throes of displacement.

In the narrative, Yemeni emigrants experience a great sense of loss after crossing the national boundaries. They live alone in an alien land. They are away from their families, home and culture. They are tortured by the diasporic life and its concomitant loss and psychological stress which corrode their psyche. They might feel elated at the economic benefits they could garner but their joy is nullified by the nostalgia they endure for their home and their kith and kin. Isolation is another essential aspect of diasporic experience. In fact, it is one of the defining factors of living in an alien land. It is on two levels: isolation from the other emigrants and isolation from the native people in the host country. Isolation is an experience usually felt by an individual emigrant. It produces acute sense of loneliness. Abdou suffers from isolation that incarcerates him in his dingy shop. Unlike isolation, marginalization is an experience usually felt by emigrants as a whole or as a group. Yemeni emigrants are relegated to the fringes of the society because the host culture does not accept them entirely. Like isolation, marginalization produces loneliness which causes a strong feeling of grief and loss. Abdou feels that he is marginalized by the Ethiopian community.

Yemeni emigrants scatter in different areas in Addis Ababa. Some of them live in Sodest Kilo (Kilo Six), “the quarter of small elegant villas with perpetually green gardens, the quarter of princely palaces, the quarter of the zoo, where one could hear the roar of lions competing with the shouts of drunkards ” (17). They resort to this district to assuage the pain of being torn between two different worlds. The novel gives evidence of this estrangement, “...in the winter intoxicating music played all night long, and hundreds of laborer and unemployed men sat guzzling Taja, the local alcoholic drink, while ogling prostitutes who had spent at least forty years in the business” (17). This shows that the diaspora turn to sleeping with prostitutes and drinking alcohol to alleviate the pain of isolation.

Abdou Sa'id had been living in Sodest Kilo for fifteen years. The novel presents him as a likable person. He deals with his customers kindly, always with a smiling face, “His expression was a constant mask of affability” (17). However,



there is a cleaving chasm between him and other people. He feels that everyone looks like an alien in this strange land. Hence, he lives in his mental ghetto, distancing himself physically and psychologically from the others. He takes shelter in isolation because he is unable to habituate to the host culture. He resists the idea of assimilation into the host culture because he is overwhelmed by a strong desire to return home. Hence, he insulates himself from the mainstream culture. In fact, he is the most alienated character in the novel. Though the residents welcome and appreciate his existence, he feels he is detached from them. He is tormented by a strong sense of alienation because he is far away from his homeland and family. He isolates himself from both the Ethiopian and Yemeni community because he is totally immersed in his material world. His motto is "Work first, eat later" (18). Shelagh Weir opines that "His obsession with his goal makes him shun any relationship that might enmesh him in the local community, including those with Yemenis; he does not even contribute, like others, to the Free Yemeni Movement (the Liberals Party) (10). Even though he successfully interacts with his customers and does a brisk trade, he is spiritually isolated. The novel reads, "He lived among them, but apart, like the distance between his dirty black clothes and his smiling white face" (17). It is the apex of solitude when one lives surrounded by others but he is psychologically and spiritually detached from them.

A careful reading of the narrative enables one to see many evidences of the protagonist's augmenting sense of alienation. Abdou lives in a small and dingy shop in which he sleeps. His indifference to his shop suggests that he is alienated from the community. The narrator portrays his alienation, "He stays at 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" (18). It seems that Abdou tries to build his private world where he could spend his leisure time contemplating and praying. The door from his shop to the garden is his window to relief and spiritual connection. His isolated beautiful gardens and his disorderly shop suggest that he is not interested to identify with the mainstream life. Abdou feels that he is different from the indigenous people because "In his heart, he lived not in Sodest Kilo, but in his faraway village in Yemen" (27). Another sign of his detachment from the community is his ambiguous and mysterious nature. People know nothing about him. Although women and children love him and residents appreciate his existence among them, he fails to develop a sense of belonging to the community. His determination to protect his identity from being overwhelmed by the host culture reveals a severe sense of estrangement. Unlike other diasporas who show a strong propensity to snap the umbilical cord that binds them to their motherlands, Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia strives to keep it inviolate. Abdou epitomizes the Yemeni diaspora who remain connected to their homeland.



The other representatives of the first generation emigrants, Hajji Abdul Latif, Saleh Saif and Sayyid Amin, also alienate themselves from the mainstream culture. They reject the idea of assimilation because of the divergent factors that constitute the host culture and because of their overwhelming desire to return home. They reject the idea of embracing the mainstream culture. Hence, their feeling of alienation is aggravated. The second generation, represented by the secretary, experience an augmented sense of alienation. They live in the borderland shuttling between two identities. They feel that they do not have a room in either the Ethiopian or the Yemeni society.

It is generally believed that crisis of identity is an offshoot of emigration. Emigration dilutes the various factors that forge identity. In *They Die Strangers*, it drives Yemeni emigrants into losing their identity and severing ties with their motherland. They are unable to assimilate into the mainstream culture. The first and the second generation of Yemeni emigrants experience this in varying degrees. The first generation are deeply attached to their homeland and struggle to keep their identity intact. They create their own community, Yemeni emigrant's community, where they discuss issues germane to their native country. They show a sturdy propensity to cling to their ethnic identity. But this does not mean that they don't experience identity crisis. In fact, Abdou undergoes a sense of fractured identity and experiences a state of "instability and dynamic, hybrid forms of cultural identity" (Tyson 373), as he is caught between two conflicting spaces: his homeland and the host land. He lives in "the hinterland between cultures" (Tyson 375). His problem largely stems from being a Muslim in a Christian majority society, a situation which results in serious repercussions on his sense of identity. He feels that his religious identity gets obfuscated. Hence, he begins to deform his Muslim identity by involving himself in some non-Muslim activities. He compromises his cultural and religious identity through embracing some practices of the mainstream culture. Against his religious conviction, he develops illicit relationships with various local women. But his sexual promiscuity should not be taken as a sign of assimilation because he does not integrate into the mainstream culture.

Abdou Sa'id further destroys his sense of faith when he uses sex as a means to escape tax charges and when he refuses to take the responsibility of his illegitimate son. This shows that his religious and cultural sensibilities had weakened. The crisis of identity which Abdu encounters is not confined to religious and cultural dimensions but manifests itself on different levels: religious, cultural, emotional, psychological and spiritual. He is perpetually "disfranchised, marginalized and unhomed" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 12) in Christian majority Ethiopia. His composite identity crisis contributes to his agony. It accelerates his tragic downfall as an émigré in the alien land.



The second generation *emigrants* are torn by the agonizing experiences of diasporic life because they were born and raised in a foreign land. They know nothing about Yemen. They do not carry any memory of a homeland, 'patria', and in their confusion, they fail to assimilate into the mainstream culture. They experience a sense of drifting, a sense of rootlessness, wandering, as they do, between the two worlds, the one they had never known, and the other they refuse to identify with. The Secretary represents this generation. He is physically and psychologically alienated from both Ethiopian and Yemeni communities. He has no land to belong to. The novel deems this generation as "the most lost of all" (65).

There are a number of factors which shape the identity of Yemeni diaspora. Religion is a determining factor in establishing a Muslim's identity. Despite Abdou's immersion in sexual promiscuity, he abstains from drinking alcohol because he believes that it is strictly forbidden in Islam. His dissonant demeanor leads to a crisis in his identity as a Muslim. Weir's remark on Abdou's abandoning of his Islamic values is worthy of note. He considers him as "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" (11). Masculinity is another significant parameter: Yemeni emigrants were all men, and the women and families they left behind pull them to their motherland. This helps them to persevere in their Yemeni identity. The protagonist of the novella is a typical representative of those émigrés.

Alienation and identity crisis stem from the emigrants' diasporic life. Abdou experiences alienation and identity crisis because he is caught in two conflicting worlds and cultures. Shelagh Weir, in her introduction to the novel, comments on the writer's concern with the themes of identity and alienation in the novel, stating that the novel "dwells on the negative aspects of long-term emigration: the anguish of separations from families and homeland, the loneliness and moral hazards of living in an alien culture, and the tension between the emigrant's desire to assimilate in the host country and his yearning to return" (11).

Yemeni diaspora also experience a sense of angst. In the novella, diasporic angst emerge from both the spatial and temporal conflicts which the diaspora undergo in the adopted land. They are torn between two cultures and are split between the past and the present. This amplifies their existential and psychological anxiety. The second generation emigrants experience an augmented sense of diasporic angst because they feel they are pawned to their horrible status quo. The secretary epitomizes the second generation. He typifies the diasporic angst and agony because he dwells in two disparate cultures. Abdou Sa'id, Hajji Abdul Latif, Sayed Amin, the representatives of the first generation, also undergo these harrowing experiences.



Sexuality is an overt theme in the novel. It is one of the ingredients of the experience of the Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia. Abdul-Wali audaciously expresses his views about sexuality in an open way in a conservative society which considers this issue as taboo. He uses flagrant sexual language and gives vivid graphic descriptions of Abdou's sexual intercourses with the Ethiopian whores. He highlights Abdou's sexual prowess from the perspective of the harlots. The open Ethiopian society helps him to discuss such a sensitive issue. The novel is replete with many incidents that reveal Abdou's hyper-sexuality and the Ethiopian women's sexual openness of expressing their desire to be his concubines. Women talk, "Oh! If only you knew how much of a man he is" (20). They repeat that Abdou "never has enough" (21). They add "If the woman was a prostitute, she would be more frank, "Listen. I've never been with a man like him in my life. I almost die of joy. How passionate, how sensual he is!" (21). The narrator gives his revealing comment on Abdou's sexuality, "Every one he heard about his prodigious skills wished to taste him. And though a woman might not sleep with him a second time, she would remain his customer. There was something about him that drew women to him" (21). Abdou gets entangled into a serious of adulterous relationships. He flirts excessively with women who purchase their needs from his canteen. People in the community ascribe his material success to his virility and sexual prowess. He himself brags of his sexual prowess, "I am a man" (52). But one can posit an important question visa-a vis his involvement in extra-marital affairs: Does this involvement indicate a sense of belonging or a sense of alienation? It indicates that he is estranged from the place. He finds this place free of cultural and religious constraints that curb his sexuality. Hence, he gives full rein to his sexuality in an attempt to relieve himself from homesickness and to stifle the feeling of loneliness. Mohammed Albalawi is of the opinion that "women in the Sodest Killo symbolize a temporary haven for Abdou. They bear a physical resemblance to his wife offering Abdou physical and emotional stability" (Losing Identity 103). But in reality, his alienation intensifies because he is not emotionally attached to any woman he sleeps with. His uninhibited sexuality results in an inner conflict between his sexual urges and the socio-cultural, religious and moral values that curb Muslims' sexual behaviour and limit it to the nuptial relationships. It can also be construed as a sign of his inability to assimilate into the mainstream culture.

The novel presents a shocking evidence of one of Abdou's drives behind indulging in illicit relationships. He develops a sexual relationship with the wife of a high-ranking civil servant in the office of taxes in order to evade paying the taxes due for fifteen years. He exploits her hunger for sex because her husband is impotent to quench her firing sexual desire. The novella reveals her changing attitude towards Abdou. At the moment of enjoying the sexual orgasm with him, she tells him: "Ooh! What a delicious animal you are" (31). When she is angry with him, she reveals his true character and his incentive of involving with her. She

reprimands and accuses him of being "an animal with no heart and no taste. All you want is to screw like a dog" (32). But Abdou makes it clear that he develops a liaison with her seeking her husband's help to exempt him from paying the overdue taxes. He tells her, "Oh! You know that I haven't paid any taxes for years. You've helped me a lot. But now I've learnt that that wicked Armenian wants to expose me. You know I am a poor man. I work hard to earn every cent; Will you talk to your husband for me? He is a high-ranking civil servant, he could manage my case" (33). Despite the temporary advantages he garners from this pervert practice, it dilutes his religious consciousness. Srikantabati and Shikshaniketan opine that Abdou's "sense of faith is more or less obliterated when it is used as a means of evading taxes" (31). At the end, Abdou pays an exorbitant price for immersing himself in the mire of prostitution and promiscuity. It expedites his tragic demise.

Emigration affects a grave change in Abdou's personality. It transforms him from an innocent farmer and shepherd into a beast with no remorse. He is only concerned with satisfying his material hunger and sexual impulses. He becomes a callous person, insensitive to his concubines' feelings. Though he sleeps with many women, he does not feel warmth and affection for any of them. He devours Ethiopian women and deals with them as nothing better than sexual toys. One of his concubines angrily tells him, "You're an animal. Nothing concerns you, not even a woman in your arms. You quench your thirst. You live in a mirage, my friend, a mirage" (34).

It is clear that Abdul-Wali is under the sway of the colonialist discourse that shapes his way of rendering Abdou's sexuality. He employs the Orientalist discourse that depicts the Orient as hyper-masculine in order to deconstruct the other stereotyped image of the Orient as a feminized people. But he falls prey to the Orientalist discourse because subverting the stereotype image of the Orient as a feminized people leads to fortifying the stereotype image of the Orient as a sex maniac.

Abdou Said is not the only Yemeni emigrant who turns to sleeping with Ethiopian women and drinking alcohol. Other emigrants do it in their own ways. The secretary angrily retorts to Hajji Abdul Lateef who accuses hybrids of abandoning their religion, hunting women and drinking alcohol, "As for abandoning our religion, drinking alcohol and chasing women, you know very well that there's no difference between you and me in this matter, only that each of us has his friends and his special meeting places. Our roads are different, but our destination is the same, isn't it?" (58). It seems that Yemeni emigrants are victims of the Ethiopian open and liberal culture. They could not resist the lure of sex.

Racial discrimination is an unavoidable issue in a strange land. It constitutes an important element of Yemeni emigrants' experiences in Ethiopia.



Abdul-Wali was born a hybrid person. Hence, he suffered the scorching brunt of racism as a child in Ethiopia and as a chap in Yemen, His birth status and experiences sensitized him to deal with racism in his fictional world. In *They Die Strangers*, Yemeni diaspora encounter racial discrimination and prejudice in their adopted land. The writer and the second generation emigrants are distinguished by colour line due to their hybrid complexion. They are called “muwallads”, a derogatory term for a person of "mixed blood". Ethiopians call him as “Camel Jockey, a term used for all Yemeni immigrants” (18). This pejorative term disturbs Yemeni immigrants because it suggests derision and vilification of Yemeni expatriates but it does not disturb Abdou. The narrative asserts that “Abdou responded to the slur with a friendly smile” (18). In his article “The Cultural Dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese Migrants: Mohammed Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers* vs. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*”, Riyad Abdurahman Manqoush avers that the phrase “Camel Jockey” “indicates that the Ethiopian see the Yemeni migrants as the other” (468). Hence, racism alienates the Yemeni émigrés and aggravates the isolation and marginalization they undergo.

Central to the diasporic experience is the feeling about home. The diasporic discourse revolves around the notion of home: its conception, its loss and the emigres' longing for its restoration. Home in a diasporic context can be real or imaginary. It may be a building, geographical place, a culture, a religion, a spiritual sanctuary or an imaginary refuge. Diasporas' experience about home varies. For the first generation emigrants home is a memory but for the second generation it is the memory of memory. For hybrids, home exists in imagination because they have no spatial knowledge of the home they long for. So they create their "imagined homeland" or their “imagined communities”. But Abdou has strong associations with his land. Hence, his yearning to return home never wanes or falters. When Hajj Abdul Latif tries to convince him to abandon his plan of return by claiming that “the situation in Yemen remains as it was. No one can live there. Trust me. There's no point in returning until after the revolution” (52), he replies: “But I do not care about the situation. I want to go home, to farm my land, and to live with my wife and son” (52).

Homesickness is a concomitant feeling of diasporic life. Yemeni Diaspora are filled with nostalgia and memories of the past. They develop memory and nostalgia because of the growing alienation they experience in new lands. The thought of going back to their homeland lingers in their minds. The pull of home is so strong in this narrative. Salman Rushdie states that “exiles, or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urges to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars, of salt” (76). Abdou is unable to give up the feeling of Yemeniness. His childhood memories disturb him again and again. Memories of his village and its social and cultural practices keep revolving

in his mind. The narrator employs the technique of flashback to allow the protagonist to revisit his native place in Yemen, Alhujariyah, where he was born and brought up. He idealizes his home and cherishes fond memories of it because these memories are inextricably connected to his early life in his lovable village. He is pleasantly lost in the thoughts of being able to return to his land and live with his family in his new house. He immerses himself in a nostalgic past to escape his poignant present. He gets solace from these memories but, for all the sweetness of these memories, his loneliness becomes the more acute.

The protagonist is afflicted by bitterness and homesickness of exile. His intimate relationship with his family and land is severed. His body stays in Addis Ababa but his lonely soul soars over the mountains of his village. He is strongly attached to his family and land. The letters he receives from the family twice or three times a year provide him with happiness. As a mnemonic device, the letters trigger Abdou's recollections about his village and his family and thus enable him to recall the past, and to inform his present. He was extremely happy when he received the letter which contains pictures of his house. The letter reads, "The new house was the village's bride, the letter said; it could be seen from a distance, it was so beautiful. Tears streamed down Abdou Sa'id's face, but he laughed to himself as he read the section in his son's letter" (28). He realizes that his dream is achieved. His son's beautiful handwriting sparks him to remember the time when he left his son at the age of eight. Abdou "felt the distance in time and miles that separated him from his home. He becomes a grandfather and the owner of one of the most beautiful houses in the village" (28).

In addition, Abdou is affected by the tragic losses he had experienced as a child in his village. He loses himself in recollecting these experiences. He recalls the death of his grandmother that badly affected his life. His grandmother had been a surrogate mother who helped him to face the odds of life. The novel reads:

He still remembered the sound of 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 a sleep by her side; when he awoke in the morning he felt her hand digging into ribs. He had said to her, unwittingly, 'grandma, grandma...you're hurting me'. (25)

His memories of the traumatic experience that his grandmother has undergone is an indication of his yearning for his homeland.

Abdou Said enjoys a sense of relief when he hears the news that the secretary had adopted his alleged illegitimate son. This prompts him to get involved in sweet reveries pertaining to his family and land. The act of



remembering is not an entirely pleasant experience; it also carries with it pain and agony. In his influential book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha asserts "Remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (63). Expatriates engage in remembering the past to make sense of the trauma of the present. Through reminiscence, emigrants preserve their cultural and spiritual relationship with their home. Abdou engages in a retrospective recollection of his family's traumatic experiences inflicted by the tyrannical Imamate rule. Reminiscing over the past involves the process of retrospection and introspection which alleviate his harrowing experiences and strengthen his ties with his homeland.

The experience of hybrids is an important part of the experience of Yemeni diaspora as a whole. Hybrids have undergone the ordeal of being caught between two conflicting cultures. Usually in a diasporic set-up two different worlds are jostling each other: the imaginary world and the real; and diasporas seesaw between the two. Anxiety for belonging is so clear among the second generation emigrants. They experience psychological disorientation. Abdul-Wali shows strong commitment to the predicament of people of mixed race because he himself is a muwallad, a half breed. Shelagh Weir points out that "His background made the author a muwallad, or a person of mixed blood. This birth status undoubtedly sensitized Abdul-Wali to the race issue, which is a subtext in several stories where skin colour is mentioned, and is a major theme in two stories in which muwallads prominently figure ("On the Road to Asmara", and *They Die Strangers*) (1).

Hybrids are represented by the secretary and Abdou's alleged illegitimate son. The secretary "himself was of mixed blood... In fact he had been born without a country, a stranger in a strange land" (56). Mohammed Albalawi states that Abdul-Wali does not assign a name to either the secretary or the child in order to "highlight the damage emigration causes" (Losing Identity 107). This suggests a crisis of identity and double consciousness which the secretary experiences in Ethiopia. He also experiences a sense of loneliness and alienation. This is evident from the sarcastic note with which he compares himself to his father and mother. The narrator succinctly depicts the secretary's dilemma:

He used sarcasm as a weapon, as a way of justifying his feeling of alienation. [His] 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 a dream 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 a like a rootless tree; he was no one. Yes, no one. The secretary's mother had her dreams, her roots. She had a land and a country here in Ethiopia, soil that kindly

contained her. But he was the stranger; he could not even say he was a 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? (56)

He is befuddled about his identity. His feeling of identity loss propels him to raise a pivotal question about the status of half-breeds when they return home: "...how would it [Yemen] receive him?" Would it spit him out as this land had, even though it was his mother's homeland?" (56) Would they be welcomed in Yemen or would they become pariahs as they are in Ethiopia? He is haunted by the questions, "Who was he?" (56), Where does he belong? Does he belong to Ethiopia or to Yemen? Hybrids are caught in the nebulous frontier between the alien land and the homeland. They stand bewildered and confused about their miserable lot.

Though hybrids experience the in-between position, they express their strong desire to negotiate an identity of their own in this intimidating world and show their strong concern for their "imagined community". They long for their imagined land, Yemen. They have a view of their motherland from outside as an exotic place of their origin. The novel reveals their adherence to their homeland. The secretary asserts, "We'll try to liberate the land Yemen...We will bring back tranquillity" (58). He rebels against this perplexed position. He endeavours to negotiate his hybrid identity in this inimical ambiance but his attempt ends in a fiasco. Hybrids attempt to establish solidarity among themselves. The secretary sympathizes with Abdou's illegitimate son and shows a deep concern for him because they share the same lot. Both are "muwallads" without a country, they are strangers in a strange land. The novella presents this clearly:

So, the secretary felt kindly towards the boy. The only difference was that his Yemeni father acknowledged him, whereas the other boy's father rejected him. He decided he would take him in after all, but as a brother. They were in the same situation belonging to the same people. They were the lost ones who were stuck in the middle, pulled by both sides. They would always be strangers, even if they finally find a place to grant them refuge. (56)

The secretary further explains the reasons that make him adopt the child. He says:

Yes, I've decided, and frankly it is not to save his soul or to make him a Muslim; this is something he has to decide for himself when he is old enough. I don't want him to be a stranger. Do you know



what it means to be without roots? Well, I do. So, yes, he'll be my brother. Oh, if only all the half-breeds could find a saviour, if only they could decide to find an end to the labyrinth in which they're lost. (57)

What is striking here is that Abdul-Wali does not resolve the hybrids' conflict. Hybrids continue to dwell in the nebulous area, suspended between the two dissonant worlds. They are still caught in the labyrinth of diasporic life.

Central to Abdul-Wali's delineation of experiences of Yemeni diaspora is the hybrids' consciousness about their nation. Abdul-Wali employs postcolonial theories that deal with constructing a nation and exploring the relationship between nation and narration. In his seminal book *Imagined communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that a nation is an "imagined community" constructed through literature, especially the novel (27). Similarly, In his influential book, *Nation and narration*, Homi Bhabha exhorts his readership to "encounter the nation as it is written" (2). *They Die Strangers* narrates the Yemeni nation from the perspective of the diasporic characters and suggests some significant factors that assist forging national consciousness vis-a-vis freeing the country from the Imamate despots and avoiding the discourse of emigration. It explicates the relation between narration and nation and exposes the national underpinnings that affect the diasporic experiences of Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia. Abdul-Wali depicts the hybrids characters who occupy the margin of the Yemeni community in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian society and their "imagined community" as the real advocates of liberating Yemen whereas he presents the first generation expatriates as egoistic chasing the mirage of materialism and neglecting the cause of their nation.

After the demise of the 1948 revolution, some nationalist figures are forced to escape from the country, seeking a living and a sanctum. Their futile attempt to expel the despotic dynasty sparks resistance inside Yemen and among the overseas Yemeni diasporas. The proponents of The Yemeni Free Movement claim to represent the Yemeni diaspora's preoccupation with extricating their nation from the iron fist of the Imamate rulers and building a modern state. Hajj Abdul Latif claims that he struggles to topple the Imamate despots but in reality his words are louder than his actions. Yahya Al-Wadhaf considers him a "hypocrite nationalist who escapes oppression" (22). Saleh Saif asserts that they belong to the same nation but he does not act to get his country out of the political disarray that impedes its liberation and progress. He tells Abdou Sa'id, "We're from the same country which takes us cousins. We are all Yemenis. If something hurts one of us, it hurts us all...We aren't here to call each other names, but to take hands as brothers" (50). But the Yemeni émigrés in Ethiopia do not live by these sweet words and principles as their sole preoccupation is running after the mirage of materialism. Though the protagonist is overwhelmed by a strong desire to return

home, his nation is reflected as an incessant feeling of nostalgia. He does not support the cause of his nation and never gives donation to The Free Yemeni Movement.

On the other hand, the secretary represents the realistic nationalists who show genuine commitment to build Yemeni nation though he was not born there and has never seen it. Hybrids give top priority to their homeland and to their identity as Yemenis. Their seriousness and sincerity give them a stand of respect and admiration in the narrative. Though the secretary is lost in an identity maze, he unequivocally expresses his strong concern for Yemen. He tells Hajji Abdul-Latif, “You dream of myth, but we live a reality! You talk twenty-four hours about freeing your homeland, but you will never liberate it. You ran away ” (57). He adds:

From here you will never do anything, but shout at the top of your lungs, ' you despots, 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 freedom for which you fight. Liberating your country requires first that you liberate yourselves, that you not cower, that you fight your enemy face to face. (57)

He further argues with his employer:

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 ... 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; we will never make the excuse that others are blocking our way. (57-58)

He thinks that Yemeni emigrants like Hajji Abdul-Latif live in delusion because they think they contribute to the process of freeing Yemen from oppression but they produce nothing. In his opinion, Yemenis should confront the oppression, not to escape it through emigration. He further proclaims: “We will destroy the Ka'aba of injustice, corruption, and feudalism. We will destroy the myth you run 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” (58). Ka'aba does not represent the real Ka'aba that exists in Mecca and symbolizes Islamic ideals. The secretary uses it metaphorically to symbolize the tyrannical Imamate regime. He “perhaps utilizes this comparison because both the Ka'aba and



the political regime in Yemen are black because of the people's sins” (Manqoush 39). It appears that through enacting this comparison, the secretary wants to expose the claim of the Imam that he rules the country under the name of God and he is His authoritative representative on earth. Like the holy Ka'aba, his authority is sanctioned by Allah. By doing so, the secretary debunks the spurious holy identity of the Imamate theocratic rule.

Religious hypocrisy is a significant feature of the experience of Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia. The novella presents Abdou as being ambivalent in the matter of religion. He performs dutifully his daily prayers. He tries to show himself as a devout Muslim. He abstains from drinking alcohol because he believes it is strictly prohibited in Islam. But he cannot resist the lure of fornication though adultery is one of seven big sins in Islam. He defies and defiles his faith in order to satisfy his sexual urges. What is worse is that he exploits religion in the sense that he continues his sexual adventures because he knows that Islam accords him a chance to expiate all the sins he had committed. His abstinence from alcohol and his immersion in lasciviousness reveal his double standard which thrusts him into tossing away his genuine Islamic identity and Islamizing Islam according to his needs. The Christian harlot is stupefied by his incongruous religious ideas.

Sayyid Amin uses religion as a ruse to enjoy a prestigious status in both the Muslim and the Christian communities and to gain material benefits. He claims that he can communicate with angels and know the secrets of others. Yemeni emigrants are duped by his status as a descendant of the Prophet Mohamed. Abdul-Wali is harsh in his criticism of the hypocritical religious authority epitomized by Sayyid Amin. He mocks at him and shows the discrepant nature of his character. He shows him as a materialistic person who appropriates religion to achieve his own interests. He exploits the naïve emigrants to harvest material gains. The novel asserts “no one could count the number of gifts he received during these occasions [the feast days]” (41). Abdul-Wali further subverts his spurious religious superiority and alleged miracles. The novel reads:

It was rumoured that he attended Friday prayers at the three mosques each month: at the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, from which the Prophet was taken on his nocturnal ascent to heaven, twice in Mecca, and another time in Medina. But how did he get there? Some said that angels carried him, that like the angels he was dressed in white clothes, and that they flew him there so he could say his Friday prayers. Some said that he rode the Prophet's mythical horse, al-Burak. They said the horse came and carried the Sayyid to the mosque. Despite the different reports, all agreed that the Sayyid prayed at those mosques in person. (41-42)

Hajji Abdul Latif also contradicts his religious beliefs. When he expresses his opinion about drinking alcohol by asserting that it is “ the mother of all evils” (47), the secretary replies, " We say that with our tongues, but in our hearts, we worship it” 47). Saleh Saif knows that Hajji drinks alcohol and has his own cronies. Abdul-Wali's portrayal of Abdou Sa'id, Sayyid Amin and Hajji Abdul Latif reveals that he abhors religious hypocrites who misuse religion to meet their own needs.

Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia is greatly impacted by their relationship with Ethiopian women whom they resort to in order to assuage their traumatic experiences in this alien land and by their women whom they left in Yemen and remember and cherish their fond memory. Male hegemony is rampant in Yemeni society due to the in-built androcentric culture that pervades people's mentality. Masculine overtones pervade the textual matrix of the novel and reflect the marginal position which Yemeni women occupy during that time. Abdou's wife and his grandmother are depicted as silent figures and upholders of traditional values of family and society. They play the premeditated traditional role of rearing their offspring and performing certain monotonous chores assigned to them such as filing water jars, fixing breakfast for their family and sowing, ploughing, and clearing the land. They are not given a chance to play a significant role in the social and political life. They are not assigned names. This indicates that they have no identity of their own. They are deprived of education and relegated to the margin of the society. They are afflicted and burdened by the migration of their husbands who left them behind for a long time rearing their children. Through the portrayal of women toiling in the land, Abdul-Wali presents the pangs of the deserted woman and urges his readership and Yemeni people to rethink the discourse of immigration and avoids its attended perils that lead to the destruction of the emigrants, the disintegration of their families and the deprivation of Yemeni society of its talented youth.

On the other hand, Ethiopian women characters are depicted as prostitutes. Yemeni expatriates turn to them to mitigate the harrowing pains of being far away from their family and homeland, but being immersed in extramarital sex dilutes their religious consciousness and threatens their morality and decorum. Shelagh Weir points out in her introduction to the novel that "Abdul-Wali uses African prostitutes in several stories to represent the moral danger, as he sees it, for the expatriate life in Ethiopia, and portrays them as jolly, sassy, blatantly erotic women in charge of their lives, in contrast to the Yemeni village women whom he depicts as sad, repressed, abandoned victims” (9). Ethiopian prostitutes are victims of social environment and economic destitution that compel them to be whores. They are affected by Italian colonialism that contaminated their land and culture. They were entrapped because they don't have any alternative other than selling their



bodies for those who seek sexual gratification. The narrative gives an indication of their entanglement in the mesh of prostitution and shows their desire to give up committing sins. One of these whores expresses her desire to lead a better life, “She knew she was sinning. But what could she do? Her alternative was to die of hunger” (40). Dire poverty pressurizes these women to sell their bodies in order to earn a living. Abdul-Wali depicts prostitutes as noble characters who show genuine concern for Abdou's illegitimate son whom Abdou refuses to acknowledge. It seems, through juxtaposing Yemeni and Ethiopian women, Abdul-Wali urges Yemeni and Ethiopian writers, elites and readers to rethink the terrible treatment rendered to women in their concerned society and begin to empower women to attain emancipation and equality.

Abdul-Wali's depiction of Yemeni women does not indicate his approval of relegating women to the fringe of the society and downsizing their role rather it shows his sympathy for the cause of these marginalized and deserted women. He calls for the change of women's role in Yemeni society in a way that empowers women to participate in all spheres of life. He accords them great significance in shaping the fate of Yemen through creating a strong association between women and land. The novel under scrutiny reflects this inextricable connection between women and land. Abdou establishes a strong connection between the land he longs for and his wife. Through using this trope of association between women and land, Abdul-Wali aims to “decolonise the female body from the hegemony of patriarchal discourses and patriarchal practices” (Al-Wadhaf 24).

The émigrés' dream is incarnated by Abdou's aspirations to become a rich person and to build an elegant house in his village. But Abdou is in constant conflict with his self because he is caught between two disparate cultural discourses. Diasporic life impinges upon his psyche and demeanour seriously.

Towards the end of the novella, Abdou faces a dilemma that jeopardizes his ambitious dreams and “Add[s] to his troubles and brings his nemesis” (Mohammed 33). One of his concubines is a Muslim woman, Fatima, who dies and leaves behind a destitute child. Her friend, Ta'atto, a Christian prostitute, begs Abdou to accept the responsibility of his illegitimate child but he refuses. She tries to move his heart by telling him “ It's you who can save the child; you are his father” (36). He thinks that if he “he takes him in all the other women will come throw their children at [him]” (36). Hence, he tells Ta'atto, “I work very hard for my living. By God, how can you ask me to join a bastard to my name? Who knows if he's even mine? I can't do anything for you” (36). She accuses him of being callous, numbed and insensitive human being. Her harsh criticism propels him to involve in self-probing and come out with one of the most memorable passages in the novella:

I don't have a heart, huh? If only you knew how much I suffer, how I kill myself working. I own an honest business. I would like to live in my home again. I would like to live I my home again. I would like to die after I've done good things for my son and wife. No Ta'atto, you know nothing. First I'll go to Mekkah and perform the Hajj. All my sins will be forgiven. Then I'll return to my village. There I'll stay in the mosque, worshipping God day and night. God commands us, Ta'atto, to work as hard as we can, to work for our children, our legal children, But I have only one son. God created those others, and He will take care of them. Why would He created bastards if He didn't plan to take care of them? It's not me but God who's responsible. (37)

He thinks that the harrowing experiences he had undergone while toiling in this strange land makes it unreasonable to accept the child because it will denigrate his image among the Yemeni community and the Ethiopian society and prevent his dream of returning home. Ta'atto could not tolerate Abdou's constant refusal to foster the child. Hence, she slaps his face and threatens him to deform his image among Yemenis and Ethiopians. She "slapped [his] face violently, cursing him Dog... Filthy... ass. I'll show what I'll do. I'll expose you for what you are, you animal" (38). She provokes people to condemn Abdou's irresponsible stance towards the orphan tot. She seeks Sayyid Amin's help to convince Abdou to father the child. Sayyid selects Hajji Abdul Latif and tells him that God has chosen him to perform this humane task. Abdul Latif asks Salih Saif to be his usher to Abdou's store. When they reach his shop, Abdul Latif tells him, "I have come to speak to you concerning your Son... People know, and you've got to take your son and rear him... is n't forbidden to leave for the unbelievers, to a dishonourable woman, to leave him orphaned, living a life of loss" (49). Abdou is flabbergasted because Abdul Latif believes in the whore's allegations. Hence, he defends himself and reprimands Abdul Latif through his sarcastic remark, "I didn't think you'd listen to a prostitute. I thought you were a great thinker but..." (50). The missing word (s) burn(s) Abdul Latif's psyche, "blood boiled in head. His face was bright red from the humiliation that tore at him" (50). Having restored his poise, Abdul Latif tells him, "Fear God, man. What are you saying? We came to you so that Ethiopians won't say that we leave our sons in the street for the unbeliever". Abdou is furious and retorts: "But who told you he's my son?" Abdul Latif replies: "God told me" (50). Abdou loses his temper and replied: "Then let God rear him" (50). Salih Saif intervenes and tries to alleviate the escalating discussion by telling Abdou that they are brothers belonging to the same country and the issue of the child should be resolved peacefully because if it remains unresolved it would distort the name of Yemenis in Ethiopia. Abdou becomes quiet and replies: "I'm the poor guy you had to talk to; why don't you go check on the others? You couldn't find anyone else to



go to” (51). Abdul Latif asserts that others will be under scrutiny. To thwart the obsolete on-going conversation, Abdou tells them that he is determined to return home. But they don't accept his decision and attempt to influence him to change his mind. They give him a bleak picture of Yemen in order to thwart his plan of return but in vain. In their attempt to convince Abdou to adopt the child Abdul Latif and Salih employ all means including religion, reasoning and brotherhood bond but they fail to move the flinty Abdou. On the other hand, in his overall defence, Abdou attempts to suggest that their arguments are baseless and preposterous. At this juncture, he indulges in a monolog that reveals the thoughts revolving in his mind. The monolog reads:

They talk about good deeds, they, the scoundrels who get involved in all sorts of scandals, and no one says anything to them...but we, the poor, they count each breath we take. Good deeds: if the hajji [Abdul Latif] wanted to save the boy, son of a bitch, why didn't he take him in? Why did he sentence me? Goddamn lust and pleasure; Who told her to get pregnant? Oh God, I seek your forgiveness, but your servant is wretched. God created the child, and he is the great provider. If divine inspiration revealed the situation to Sayyid Amin, that means God knows about it and so will take care of him. Yes, I could be his father, God knows, and He is the forgiving and the beneficent, and He will not take a poor man with a sin. Oh God, I'll perform the Hajj and repent for all my sins and will stay pious to the end of my life. Just help me out of this mess, Oh God. (53)

These lines reveal Abdou's thoughts about the orphan child, the need to atone the sins he had committed and his supplication to Allah to shower him with mercy and forgiveness. But his Yemeni cohorts think that his thoughts are not genuine. He just wants to evade the responsibility to take the child in and to pacify himself with his supplication to his God. Readers may feel that there is a gaping chasm between his supplication and his need to repent and the practical aspects of Islam. He does not exercise the principles and the ideals of Islam that exhort Muslims to refrain from committing the deadly sins and immediately embraces expiation if they commit any sin.

When Abdou hears the news that the secretary had adopted the child, he feels that he is out of difficulty and experiences a sense of relief. He begins to think about returning home. He imagines people in his village admiring his sacrifice. He envisages that "they would concoct legends about him, that he was a man of worth, real worth" (59). Before he goes to sleep, he dreams about his return to his homeland. Pictures of his family and the people of his village swirl in his mind. Hajji Abdu Latif tries to convince him to abandon his plan to return to Yemen. He sarcastically states, “ He [Abdou] thinks it's paradise over there, that the Imam

suddenly became a good and gentle ruler. Listen, the situation in Yemen remains as it was. No one can live there. Trust me. There is no point in returning until after the revolution” (52). But Abdou retorts: “ But I don't care about the situation . I want to go home, to farm my land and live with my wife and son” (52). Sayyid Amin tries to thwart Abdou's plan by claiming that “many emigrants preferred to emigrate again rather than remain at home” (60), but it is of no avail. This kind of thinking does not provide any form of support to the cause of revolution in his homeland. He wants to enjoy his fulfilled dreams “[b]ut (divine) punishment foils him” as Weir puts it (11).

Towards the end of the narrative, Abdou seeks redemption. He shows a strong desire to extricate himself from sexual promiscuity. He feels something inside him that urges him to devote the remaining years of his life to worshipping God and doing good deeds. He understands that he had committed some iniquitous sins in Sodest Kilo and the chance for redemption is possible because Islam accords Muslims a chance to expiate all the sins they have committed. He is filled with a severe sense of despondency. Hence, he expresses his genuine desire to rectify his past errors. Taking recourse to repentance, Abdou supplicates to Allah to redeem his misguided soul and free him from the clutches of his past sins. Yet he does not get a chance to repent since he dies a stranger and forlorn in a strange land.

On a Wintery night, Abdu lights his kerosene stove to warm himself and enjoy dreaming of homecoming and envisaging his village people celebrating his long waited return. The novel reads:

Abdou Sa'id dreamed that he had returned to his village. The roads were filled with People. Children raced by with smiles on their faces. He opened a sack he was carrying and handed out sweets to them... the men came out to receive him. Women stood upon rooftops or the comers of their homes, looking at him shyly... The men greeted him respectfully, their voices flattering. The old women moves toward him, saying, “May God protect you!” “May God glorify you!” Women strewed flowers in his path. He dreamed and smiled while smoke filled the cramped room. “Who is the richest man in the village?” The village children shouted, “He is! He is!” Cracks of gunfire welcomed him, and they slaughtered. a sheep by the door of his house. He spotted his wife, modestly hiding near one of the roads. She was shy, but he would see her at night. Men entered the guest hall. Women came in to visit His wife and busied themselves unloading the six donkeys carrying the presents he had brought from Aden. (61)



While immersing himself in these sweet memories, he inhales carbon dioxide which smothers him. He is badly hurt. In the morning, customers come to his shop and they find it closed. They suspect that Abdu is either ill or dead. They call for help. Abdou's compatriots come and take him to the hospital in a critical condition. The narrator describes his condition, "He was faint; his eyes bulged; his lips were pressed tightly to each other, as if he didn't want to talk, or as if he had some terrible torture" (63).

Abdul-Wali expresses his disapproval of emigration through the Italian physician who looks after Abdou in the hospital. The doctor is repelled by his filthy body. In a conversation with a male nurse, the irate doctor comments angrily, "How, by God, could he live in this hell? This is terrible?" When the nurse tells the doctor that these men "left their homes, country, family, to chase after a living. They die running after scraps. That's all they think about", the doctor responds: "You say they left their land. Yes, but why? Because they couldn't stand against adversity. A nation that emigrates from its land is a nation of traitors. Injustice makes treason easy. But it doesn't justify running away" (64). Interestingly, the narrator defends Abdou's dream and speaks on his behalf, "Unfortunately, Abdou Sa'id could not hear this conversation. If he could, he would have opened his eyes, amazed. What were these crazy people talking about? He would have told them of the fabulous world of his dreams, the one that has become his alone forever. It was better than anything they could ever hope to create" (64). In his thesis entitled, *Read to Change: The Role Arabic Literature Can Play to Redress the Damage of stereotyping Arabs in American Media*, Mohammed Albalawi opines that, "through these lines, the author aims to keep Abdou's dreams alive. Even if he is gone, his aspiration remains eternal" (128). The novel also presents another powerful attack on emigration through the secretary who attends Abdou's funeral and makes two poignant statements which reveal the tragedy of Yemeni emigrants. He tells Hajji Abdu Latif:

You know, when he died, he left nothing behind, a woman deserted for years there, a son he did not know, a land to which he didn't offer a drop of his blood. He died like a stranger, like hundreds of Yemeni who die in other lands. As for the grave—it's not his. It's not his land; it belongs to other people, to the Ethiopians. We even occupy their graveyards. As if it's not enough to swallow the meagre scraps meant for their mouths, we occupy their graves, too. Oh God, we are such strangers! (65).

The second speech is addressed to Abdou Sa'id's illegitimate son, "Look, my little one. Here, all over this graveyard, strangers sleep forever. This land did not give birth to them, did not rear them, but it killed them. They cheated their own land, so they forfeited their right to be buried in it. Blessed is the man

who's buried in his own soil in his home land' ” (65). Though the boy does not understand him, he starts crying because he is moved when he sees the secretary shedding tears. Finally, the secretary talks to the boy about their miserable lot as half breeds, “As for us my little one... Where's our land? We are even more strangers than they are. We have no land. We are the most lost of all” (65).

Abdou Sa'id harvests from his long-term emigration a grave that does not belong to him. The secretary sarcastically comments on this painful situation, “Are graves the final outcome of all this struggle?” (65). In his sojourn, Abdou detaches himself from others and abandons his ideals. He dissipates his energies in amassing wealth and his virility in sleeping with prostitutes at the expense of his soul, his wife and his homeland. He had worked for fifteen years to support his family and return home as a rich man. But his dreams crumble. He shows a strong desire to repent but he is denied absolution. He dies a stranger in a strange land. His untimely death terminates his futile dreams of a prosperous life and family reunion. Shelagh Weir succinctly makes his concluding remarks about Abdou. He points out that he is an extreme example of a “fallen émigré who betrays the ideals of his native culture and religion without remorse, fatally corrupted by his selfish, materialistic goal” (11). His horrible demise tossed him to the abyss of oblivion. Only his family and Ethiopian whores, especially Ta'atto and the wife of the high ranked officer, remember him because they enjoyed sexual gratification with him.

Salih Saif and Hajji Abdul Latif are two other examples of defeated émigrés. Salih Saif is a staunch exponent of the Yemenis' struggle for liberation from the Imamate regime. He supports The Free Yemeni Movement, a nationalist political movement that ushered in the Yemen Arab Republic and aimed to support Yemenis to eradicate the Imamate despotic rule. He willingly offers donation, participates in the fundraising campaign and galvanize the Yemeni emigrants into supporting the revolution against the Imamate reign. But he loses enthusiasm and faith, especially after the failure of the 1948 revolution. He stops participating in the donation campaigns. This suggests how his dream collapses. Hajji Abdul Latif is a member of The Free Yemeni Movement who has played a role in the 1948 revolution. In the beginning, he shows strong commitment to the cause of the revolution. He initiates a fund-raising campaign to collect donations from Yemeni expatriates in Addis Ababa to help the revolution in Yemen. But his long diasporic life weakens his enthusiasm for the change in Yemen. Torn by a feeling of defeat, he ends up dreaming of nothing but a grave like Abdou Sa'id's. He says to his secretary about Abdou, “He found a grave I dreamed of” (65). This shows that most of the characters in the novel are impotent, defeated and unable to fulfil their dreams.

Through the collapse of the emigrants' dreams, Abdul-Wali expresses his condemnation of emigration that divests Yemen of its youths who could fight the despotic Imamate rule, topple its theocratic rulers, initiate a reform in the society and participate in rebuilding the nation. Weir's terse remark about the protagonist's



debacle is quite pertinent here. She asserts that, “By inflicting on him such a tragic end and denying him absolution, Abdul-Wali delivers an uncompromising verdict on the dangers and delusions, as he saw them, of Yemeni men living abroad alone” (11). Abdul-Wali condemns Yemeni emigrants who are preoccupied with amassing wealth at the expense of their families and their motherland. He exposes their hypocritical religious thinking which makes them betray their Yemeni identity and abandon their Islamic values. Abdou works hard to collect money in order to lead a happy life in his motherland. But he does not enjoy his grand dream. Fate denies him his dream to return home and celebrate his partially achieved dream of constructing an elegant mansion-like house. He dies a stranger in the land of others. He is buried in a grave that never belongs to him. This indicates the pinnacle of alienation that Abdou had undergone in his voluntary exile.

Concluding Remarks:

The study proves that Mohammed Abdul Wali has unassailable identity as a diasporic and committed writer who shows deep concerns for the plight of Yemeni diaspora and genuine commitment to the deprivation and the oppression of Yemeni people under the tyrannical reign of the Imamate. It has examined the experiences of Yemeni diaspora and revealed that they have undergone displacement, alienation, bitterness, homesickness, identity crisis, hybridity, loneliness, loss, angst and suffering in a strange land. It explicates different factors that affect their diasporic experiences, sexuality, religion and the real and the imaginary presence of women in their lives. It shows that, “Meandering through the labyrinthine maze” of diasporic life and groping between past and present, Yemeni expatriates, especially the protagonist, are psychologically fractured, battered and finally ruptured. It shows that the protagonist is a pawn in the game of the complexities of diasporic experience which accelerate his death– unhonoured and unsung– in a strange land. It asserts that Abdul-Wali is concerned with the plight of the unprivileged, both the Yemeni diaspora in an alien land and their kith and kin at home. The narrative suggests that emigration is not a heaven for émigrés and their families because it bristles with difficulties which seriously affect them. Both the narrative and the study present the destructive impact of emigration on the emigrants' psyche. Abdul-Wali uses his imagination and creative skills to transform facts into fiction to present a naturalistic picture of the life of Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia. Through the narrative that is imbued with various painful experiences, he sends a clear message to people who dream of crossing the national boundaries and settling in strange lands, hoping for better prospects, without realizing the pernicious results of emigration. He shows the high price the emigrants have to pay for leaving their country and venturing into a long-term emigration in foreign lands. By doing so, he aims to edify Yemeni people, awaken social consciousness and raise awareness among them about the deleterious effects of emigration that



affects the entire nation and its attendant experiences on the émigrés in the land of domicile. He exhorts his readers and Yemeni expatriates to avoid abandoning their land. In a way, he uses his narrative as a means for change.

The study reveals that Yemeni diaspora in Ethiopia do not incline to assimilate into the main stream culture. They preserve their indigenous identity and yearn to return to their homeland. They share a collective memory about their homeland and expose a strong sense of belonging to their motherland. The novella's protagonist is a prototype of this diaspora who avoids mixing with the new culture and struggles to retain his indigenous identity. He always reminisces about his country and develops strong nostalgia of homecoming. He is pulled by a strong desire to return home in order to enjoy his realized dream. The other characters show strong longing to belong to their homeland. The alien land is a transit to their permanent abode in their motherland. They dwell in a diasporic space that incorporates the physical and the metaphorical homeland and the host land. Moreover, from the study one can discern that Yemeni emigrants in Ethiopia share some characteristics of diaspora and expatriation despite the existence of some nuanced differences between the two.

Through exposing the evils of emigration and the throes of diasporic life, Abdul-Wali has successfully deconstructed the discourse of emigration that has enticed many underprivileged Yemeni youth to travel overseas seeking better chances and has suggested the ideology of return which encourages Yemenis to remain in their country and stand up to injustices meted out to them as individuals and the people as a nation. He also exhorts Yemenis to stay in Yemen to build their nation. By doing so, he galvanizes the inarticulate masses to rebel against the ignominious tyranny of the Imam and his dynasty.

The novel's greatness rests in its potentiality to invoke in its readership sympathetic responses towards this unlucky diaspora who are afflicted by the pains of being aliens in a strange land and in its universal appeal to call attention to other diasporas who endure unspeakable suffering in foreign lands and are prone to lose their native identity. For example, the Indian diasporas in the Arab Gulf States may identify themselves with the tormenting experiences of Yemeni diaspora portrayed in this novella. But this does not mean that the study aims to homogenize diasporic experiences because they somehow differ from diaspora to diaspora, from country to country and from period to period.

The study builds a connection between this novella and the present tragic situation of Yemen which compels many Yemenis to desert their homeland and cross its boundaries into alien lands. Many Yemenis scatter over the world forming many diasporas who endure unspeakable suffering in foreign lands. The two incompetent governments that rule the country have forced the people to leave their country to seek shelter and better prospectus. The on-going war makes life in Yemen intolerable. Like their ancestral counterparts in Ethiopia, today's Yemeni



diasporas, especially those who are members of the cabinet, the parliament, the presidential office and other high-ranked officers, scattered in different parts of the world and form a unique diaspora. Yemeni youth, intellectuals, academics and professionals find emigration the only outlet for their escalating dilemmas which stem from the ferocious on-going war and the resulting despotism and the dilapidation of the country's infrastructure. Hence, they pay no heed to Abdul Wali's implicit caveat of the real perils of emigration and its concomitant, excruciating diasporic experience. In this way, the study captures the nuances of the experiences of the current Yemeni diaspora and urges its readership to ruminate on the damaging effects of the current emigration and participate in creating peace and economic prosperity in order to ameliorate the living conditions and create a congenial environment which entices the talented youth and the prodigious minds to stay in their homeland, embrace Abdul-Wali's ideology of return, rebuild their nation and contribute to its welfare and prosperity.

Touching upon the diasporic experiences of alienation, isolation, displacement, homesickness, in-between spaces and memories of the past, the narrative transcends the physical and geographical migration and deals with spiritual alienation and rootlessness. The narrative also deals with the suffering of the first generation emigrants and the identity crisis of the second generation hybrids and can be read as a parody and prophesy of the present Yemeni diasporas. The entire narrative is presented in such a way that it touches a sympathetic chord in the readers the world over about these misguided victims who run after scraps and mirages beyond their boundaries. It is also presented in a way that links the present and the past which accords the novel a sense of momentum and continuum to represent any diaspora in our rapidly changing globalized world.



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