

# The Traumatic Experiences of Abdou Said in Abdul Wali's Novella *They Die Strangers* from the Perspective of Trauma Theory

**Ali Ahmed Mused Al-Subari**

Department of English , University College of Addayer  
Jazan University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
Email: aliahmedmused1977@gmail.com

**Abstract** The study is an attempt to expose the traumatic events experienced especially by the protagonist in the novella from the perspective of trauma theory, its implications and the transformation that the protagonist achieves. Trauma can be experienced in life due to many adverse situations that encounter the modern man. The objective of the research is to answer the following research questions: what are the traumatic events that Abdou Said has faced? What are the effects of trauma on Abdu Said? To answer these questions, an analysis of the traumatic experiences of the protagonist in the novella is made with reference to Trauma Theory. Traumatization approach has often shed light on the language and practice of different types of traumatic events, such as childhood suffering, bad impacts of immigration, and isolation not only on the protagonist of the novella but also all people in Yemeni society. It is concluded that Abdul Wali has shown the traumatic experiences of Abdou Said's childhood, immigration, isolation, that stemmed from past and present tough circumstances in two different places in Yemen and Ethiopia to be healed. The traumatic experiences that Abdou Said undergoes in the novella are experienced not just in Yemen but also throughout the Arab world.

**Keywords** childhood; immigration; isolation; trauma theory; Yemen

**Author** **Ali Ahmed Mused Al-Subari** is currently working as Assistant Professor of English Literature, at the English Department, University College of Addayer, Jazan University, Saudi Arabia. His main research interests include English literature, Postcolonial literature, and Comparative literature.

## Introduction

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Yemeni people emerged as sufferers, exploited, op-

pressed and lived in poverty. These bad conditions impacted the Yemeni lives since they witnessed many tough experiences and bad condition that made their life unstable. Trauma as a theme has attracted the attention of Yemeni writers who made this topic the center of their works. The growing number of novels published during the last decade and a half indicates that fiction in Yemen is the dominant genre in responding to these decisive historical transformations (al-Rubaidi 123). In fact, Many Yemeni writers were interested in trauma because they have already experienced some traumatic experiences as Abdul Wali, Ali Al-Maqri, Wajdi Al-Ahdal, Zaid Dammaj and others. The novella explores the human life experiences, and is connected to Abdou Said's painful experiences that caused him many social and psychological problems. Abdul-Wali's career as a Yemeni novelist was short, as he died at the age of 35. However, he was the leading character in the Yemeni novel. Among his many novels, the novella, *They Die Strangers* is perhaps the best known, and it has been translated into several languages including English, French and German. It got a great reputation in Yemen as well as in the Arab.

In Albalawi's studies, *They Die Strangers* is a great representation of the tough period of Imam Regime. Abdul-Wali wrote this novella after having discovered the critical incidents of Yemenis during the Imam regime that recounts the story of Abdou Said who was dead in Ethiopia as a stranger. "The novella takes place in a critical period in Yemen's history during which the North Yemen Civil War (1962-1970) was fought. The trauma of war and its psychological and economic impacts on individuals constitute deeper dimensions to understand how one may end up virtually unknown in strange places despite the dreams and hopes of gaining any financial or spiritual success" (Albalawi 100). In Manqoush's words, *They Die Strangers* is one of the Yemeni problematic novels. The most important theme of the novel is to expose "the factual worst conditions of Yemenis that was hidden because of the political oppression in Yemen" (Manqoush 461). It also depicts the difficult conditions of Yemenis who leave their homeland, their children, and their families due to hunger, illiteracy, ignorance and injustice from the tyrannical government. They travelled abroad in search of a good life. In Chelalass article, *They Die Strangers* depicts the lives of men and women who live solitary life in their own societies or abroad as strangers. All immigrants are strangers in a strange country. In this novella, the author depicts the dreams, disappointments, distress, hopes, and lives of Yemenis affected by isolation. "It is about poor, marginalized and sometimes forgotten Yemenis living in difficult circumstances. Their experiences reflect the universality of the struggles of migrants and living in complete isolation" (Chelala 2002). In Mohammed's articles, the novella deals with the feeling of isolation and the search

for identity, while observing its dispersion between places and cultures. For example, Abdou Said feels isolated and *is* stuck in Ethiopia (Sidist Kilo), while feeling nostalgic for his village in Yemen for which he desires. He permits memory to fill that space with aspirations and fantasies, in an effort to restore it and reclaim the self that sought exile in Ethiopia in order to raise money and return to his country to construct a house in his village. “However, he (Abdou) falls into the trap of exile and is stuck there until he dies” (Al-Bakery 2019).

### Trauma Approach

Due to the pervasiveness of trauma in the lives of individuals and societies, trauma was conceptualized as a theory and system during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to trauma theory, “trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language” (Balaev 1). The concept of trauma is usually referred to a psychological state of the individual who becomes a victim of terrifying event such as, Family problems, accidents, war, poverty, isolation, or shock after a negative event can also change victim’s behavior. The victim’s behavior will begin to change. For example, Abdou Said starts doing something unusual and gets flashbacks of what happened to him. The problems and pains experienced by most Yemenis due to the repressive political system in Yemen led Yemeni people to emigration. This may be due to memories of the traumas Abdou Said experienced in Yemen as well as Ethiopia. This appears in the story when Abdou recalled the backward decades in Yemen.

Trauma theory helps survivors demonstrate the effects of trauma, anxiety and understanding the value of knowing these effects. People get traumatized when they encounter horrific and frightening events in their lives and are hurt by others and not necessarily something. The painful experiences will be viewed in trauma theory. This theory helps us to expose the symptoms and effects of these traumatic experiences. As immigrant, Abdou Said’s suffering lies in the core of trauma theory and pain studies. His painful experience is full of hardships in his country and abroad. His case moves from physical pain to psychological distress due to impacts of his childhood, immigration and social isolation. In many ways, “the sufferings that immigrants and refugees experience are more quotidian and chronic in nature and may include such experiences as isolation, alienation, discrimination, poverty, or violence” (Kurtz 288). Abdul Wali was able to reveal traumas and its physical and psychological effects not only on Abdou Said but also on all Yemenis in Yemen or abroad at that time. According to trauma theory, Abdul Wali’s novella has been able to achieve its goal to show not only the traumatic history of Abdou Said but also the

traumatic history of all Yemenis. The trauma is considered “as the enigma of a human agent’s repeated and unknowing acts as well as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound” (Caruth 3). Abdul Wali also narrates the stories of Yemenis’ tortures, sufferings, and pains in an attempt of healing these wounds that have been caused by poverty and injustice of political regime during the Imam rule. This work adopts Trauma theory as a theoretical approach to prove how the traumatic experience of the protagonist can affect his life.

#### Childhood Trauma

*They Die Strangers* is a novella that shows the physical and psychological harm of Abdou Said as the cause of the historical and cultural traumatic experiences in his homeland abroad. Thus, trauma theory is considered as crucial source to study and investigate the traumatic experiences of the protagonist, and show how he turns into undesirables on account of his experiences. Through the analysis of the protagonist’s traumatic experiences, Abdou Said recalled the severe traumatic experiences when he was chewing qat in his small store in Ethiopia. As a child, he was a shepherd. He also remembered the critical living conditions of Yemenis during Imam’s repressive regime. He did not know his mother, so he did not remember her either. His mother died as well as a large number of people died in the village due to a pandemic disease at that time. He recalled his traumatic and painful experiences since his childhood. When he was child, he used to drink the milk of the sheep secretly, to eat some fruits that grow on the trees of the village, such as the elderberries and dates in the valley. He used to eat bananas that he often stole it from garden next to the valley. The writer could expose the difficult conditions of Yemenis’ life due to poverty, hunger, outbreaks of diseases and injustice of the political regime in Yemen at that time. As Abdou Said says:

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. (Abdulwali 25)

The recollections Abdou Said’s childhood indicates a painful and traumatic feeling when he was in Yemen. Poverty, scarcity, want and hunger are the most prominent features of Yemen during the Imamate era. Leaving people to die silently in a country that is closed off completely from the world. This means that these famines and disease that killing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Yemenis each time. “Reliving a traumatic experience, whether in the form of intrusive memories,

dreams, or actions, carry with it the emotional intensity of the original event. The survivor is continually buffeted by terror and rage” (Herman 52). In *Sodest Kilo*, Abdou wants to relieve himself by showing us his traumatic moments from his past and never neglects this part of life even after spending years away from his country. But Abdou decided to hide these feelings from his childhood because he never understood them.

Abdou had recollected the two painful and traumatic memories of his childhood. He had two tragic incidents in his childhood. He remembered them while chewing qat leaves in Ethiopia. Despite Abdou never recognizes his mother, he also missing his grandmother whose presence seemed to give him a sense of motherhood. The loss of the two women is the traumatic thing in Abdou’s childhood. But his grandmother’s death was more traumatized as Abdou described the incident vividly. According to trauma theory, “his own early childhood, poverty, hunger, neglect, domestic violence, and his mother’s untimely death had influenced the direction of his intellectual pursuits and allowed him to identify with the traumatized soldiers” (Herman 53). Indeed, the traumatic experience of sadness and plague, which Abdou Said’s trauma had a remarkable effect on him. He remembered the sound of her death as he depicts death as evil person. As Freud explains that, “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (Freud 243).

The description below is an important because it reflects the grief, loss and trauma that were haunting the Yemeni people at that time. The word sound embodies death as an evil human that steals people’s souls. His mother and a large number of people in his village died because the people could not find a hospital or a doctor when the epidemic struck the village. As the narrator says:

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. (Abdulwali 25)

In the above lines, Abdou recalls the painful memories of his grandmother who had been ill for several days. Indeed, the traumatic experience of loss and epidem-

ic, which Abdu faced in Yemen, had a remarkable effect on him. He remembered the backward and oppressive decades of the Imam regime. He also recollected the painful conditions of his living in Yemen during Imamate era. The tyrannical and repressive regime of Imam tortured the Yemeni people different types of fear and terror, hunger, wretchedness and ignorance until Yemen became an example of backwardness, ignorance and poverty among the peoples of the world. "All death is, to a greater or lesser extent, traumatic for the living, and yet some deaths are more shocking and catastrophic than others and they require different kinds of memorialization" (Balaev 158). While Abdou does not know his mother's death, his grandmother's death appears to have left a clear mark on his life. It is no secret that the absence of motherhood affects the life of the child. According to trauma theory, "Survivors of chronic childhood trauma face the task of grieving not only for what was lost but also for what was never theirs to lose. The childhood that was stolen from them is irreplaceable.

Also, Abdou Said remembered the miserable events of not only his living conditions but also all Yemenis during the political regime of the Imam who ruled North Yemen at that time. It was a regressive and tyrannical regime that made people suffer from poverty, starvation, illiteracy and diseases. Abdou also recollected the traumatic memories of the people's famine during the period of Imam Regime. He remembered the kind of the bread that his grandma gave him and sometimes porridge, especially when it has milk mixed with ghee in the middle. These kinds of food symbolize poverty and famine of Yemeni people at that time. "He still remembered the bread his grandmother used to make, spiced with fenugreek seeds, how delicious the bread was with fenugreek pudding or sometimes with porridge with yoghurt and ghee in it. Those were the days" (Abdulwali 25).

In above lines, Abdou recollected his traumatic experiences that happened in Yemen since his childhood. He recalled things he actually encountered when he was child in Yemen. After the death of his grandmother, Abdou married a girl he didn't know. He also didn't know what marriage meant. Thus, his father sent him to the market to buy two goats, some food and clothes. And he comes back to the village to sit in the corner of the room that his grandmother and mother died. The most important reasons that push children to accept the offer of marriage is the ignorance, backwardness, old habits, poverty, and illiteracy that had applied by the Imam regime at that time. As the narrator says:

And he was fifteen.. and got married. All he knows is that he went to the market and bought two heads of sheep, some food and clothes, and returned to the

village to sit in a corner.. the same corner where his grandmother died, and perhaps his mother before. And sit next to him is a little girl.. is his wife. ( 27)

The protagonist recovered from his childhood trauma via migration, breaking traditions, and transforming his life into a new set of variables while developing an interest in exploring human motivations. He faced traumatic acts when he was child in Yemen during the decades of the backward imam's rule. "Although in many cases the children are unable to resolve their traumatic experiences, they are able to cope with them through their imaginations" (Lejkowski 66). Abdou suffered during that time, so he decided to leave Yemen to Ethiopia, escaping from the political oppression and poverty in his homeland. Abdou, on the other hand, chooses to keep his feelings about his childhood's painful experiences hidden since he hadn't known how to deal with it perfectly.

### **Immigration Trauma**

*They Die Strangers* as the voice of Yemenis trauma bears the traumatic memories of immigration and the passionate grief that Yemenis have suffered from. Abdou Said was the mostly victim of many traumatic incidents in the novella. However, many reasons like the loss of his mother and grandmother, sufferings, ignorance, poverty, political injustice and diseases were led Abdou to leave his country. In Foster words, "Seeking safety, shelter, food, farmable lands, and human freedom, people have sought to escape hunger, incarceration, torture, and oppression of the spirit" (Foster 153). Abdou's life was tied to his grandmother's remembering of his painful past. On the other hand, he was emotionally and physically overwhelmed by the tyrannical and oppressive regime of Imam which was a reason of his distress and suffering.

*They Die Strangers* highlights the story of a Yemeni shop owner, Abdou Saeed, the main character in the novella, who immigrates to Ethiopia and lives in Sodest Kilo, a neighborhood of Addis Ababa. He spent 10 years fighting assimilation in to host culture and traditions in Ethiopia, and maintaining his connection to his country. He left behind a wife and a child, and devoting his life to the idea of returning as a rich man to his homeland. He lives in tatters in the back of his shop in Addis Ababa, decreasing his expenses to shockingly low levels in order to send all his profits home. His traumatic suffering of spending low for himself enables him to have a wonderful house, and he only put his house's picture on his shop's wall. According to trauma's perspective, "Survivors whose personality has been shaped in the traumatic environment often feel at this stage of recovery as though they are refugees entering a new country" (Herman 203). In fact, Abdou Said's traumatic experiences

in his homeland and abroad seemed to represent not only the author himself but also the traumas of Yemeni people as well as Yemeni immigrants in all over the world.

Abdou had remembered the traumatic incident that drove him to leave his country. When Abdou Saeed was working with his wife for a man in the village, he heard some women whispering about a rich emigrant, named Saleh. There were discussing about the happiness of Saleh and his family. They were saying Saleh will return this year and entering his new home. “Their words stabbed him in the heart, and he saw his little boy playing in the ground, half-naked—and he was torn.. and he felt the fenugreek seeds burn his lips” (Abdulwali 27). The ladies were talking bitterly about the owner of the house that came a few days later, and Abdou was in the village. Everyone came to see him, and the children were in the foreground. Abdou’s son is among those who went to celebrate this occasion. When the son returned, he showed his father some dates he got from the rich man. The narrator describes this moment, “He (his son) showed them to his father and said, ‘Look, Baba, he gave these to me.’ As he nibbled at them, he added, ‘Why don’t you emigrate and bring me something like this?’” (27). In Abbasi’s words, “immigrants coming from war-torn countries have often faced violence, rape, or the loss of family members” (Abbasi 2021). From this time, Abdu felt an increasing desire to leave his homeland in order to support his family and be able to give them what they needed. The narrator explains that Abdou felt the sharp pain in his heart after hearing his son’s words. Abdou immediately went to his father and telling him about his decision to leave:

What about our land, Abdou?

You can take care of it.

But I’m getting old.

My wife will help you.

I’ll work there and send you money to hire men to help. (Abdulwali 27)

In the above lines, Abdou Said remembered the traumatic moment when he heard his son words. He decided to meet his father to satisfy him about his decision to leave. As result of this, Abdou’s father feels shock and confusion at his son’s decision. So the author exposes the fear and desire of Abdo’s father. Thus, his father knows that due to his old age, he will not be able to take care of the family land. However, he does not want to stand in the way of his son. Abdou realizes that his presence will reduce his sense of self-esteem. According to immigration trauma, Foster says: “The immigrants’ loss of family, community, and physical environment are themes that reverberate through both clinical and creative literatures, alike” (154).

The traumatic experience of losing original identity is extremely painful for Abdou Said who is proud of his native homeland. Abdo's homeland becomes a visual representation that may be remembered and recalled. Abdou recalled events that he actually witnessed in Yemen when he chewed leaves of qat in his small shop. According to trauma theory, "memory involves past events—more correctly, interpretations and representations of those events—that profoundly impact how we live in the present. Like trauma, memory is inveterately connected with identity" (Kurtz 9). Thus, Abdulwali depicts the case of Abdou Said as, "these were things he remembered when he chewed leaves of *qat* and a far-off expression came into his eyes" (Abdulwali 25). For example, the protagonist in the above passage is shown as addicted to the habit of chewing qat. The narrator's portrayal of Abdou's eyes when chewing qat leaves as a drug addiction exposes recollections of tragedies that he had backward decades in Yemen. This is because the traumas of Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia, which are portrayed in *They Die Strangers*, emphasize the Yemeni people's suffering as a result of their immigration, traditions, and customs.

In order to build his self-worth, Abdou feels the need to migrate and stay away from his family. Throughout these years of immigration, Abdou had painful moments because he knew very little about his family. He only knew from the letters he received two or three times a year. Abdou was happy to receive the message despite the longtime of waiting. As the narrator says: "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" (Abdulwali 27). In these lines, the only things that brought happiness and pleasure to Abdou were the letters from his homeland. Whenever he opened a letter, he felt connected to his family as well as homeland, as if he never left. In order to show how Abdou has been emotionally connected to his beloved country, "in his heart, he lives not in Sodest Kilo, but in his faraway village in Yemen" (27). Abdou's sense of belonging to Yemen prompted him to recall pleasant or painful memories of his ancestral land.

Abdou Said had faced traumatic act in Sodest Kilo when his beloved Ta'atto paid him a visit. One of Abdou's girlfriends, Ta'atto, visits him one evening while he is at his shop to bring the bad news. This visit becomes an obstacle preventing him from integrating with Ethiopian society. It also leads him to feel that he is rootless and homeless. This can clearly be seen when Abdou Said refuses to recognize the illegitimate son. She tells him about the death of her friend Fatimah, and leaving a boy who is rumored to be Abdou's son. She informs Abdou that Fatimah has no relatives and that the son is alone in order to elicit pity from him. He's your son,

Abdou, she adds tenderly. You must help him in some way. Abdou is traumatized as he has “never before faced a problem like this” (Abdulwali 36).

Abdou becomes scare that the rumor will spread and reach his family, which will finally lead to the breakdown of his family. He doesn't know how to deal with this unexpected matter. He realizes that if he accepts this child, many women will come and “throw their children” at him (36). Later, he denies Ta'atto's accusations, saying, “I work very hard for my living, to earn a few coins. 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). When Ta'atto blames Abdou for not having a heart, he says furiously:

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 die after I've done good things for my son and wife...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. (37)

In the above lines, despite Abdou is traumatized, he denies Ta'atto's accusations, and telling her that he came to this place to work hard to earn money for his family. She asks him to join a bastard to his name, but he told her that he couldn't do anything for her. As a result of this, Abdou is confused and traumatized after Ta'atto's leaving. He thinks intensely of what will happen for him in the next days. His confusion is shown clearly in the way he deals with his first customer after Ta'atto's departure. When the client requests cigarettes and matches, Abdou answers nothing. He shouts at him, “I'm all out,” despite the fact that the cigarettes are in the shop, the customer says, “what happened for you today?” (Abdulwali 39) The man is perplexed by Abdou's reply. Abdou is traumatic and distressed over Ta'atto's insult. According to trauma, “Immigrants and refugees face numerous stressors when they leave their homelands and acculturate into a new host environment” (Kurtz 289). By anyhow, the immigration is a complex psychosocial process associated with emigrant's trauma. The transformation of Abdou Said from an ordinary man into a beast without remorse is because of the effects of immigration on him.

Abdou becomes traumatized because he is not expected that Ta'atto's threat would reach a point to make his Yemeni friends challenge him. Abdou's trauma destroys his relations with everyone in the quarter and even Yemenis. “Language links human beings to one another, making it possible to explain one's experience

to another and thereby reducing isolation. Trauma devastates that link” (Kurtz 308). Abdul Latif uses strong words to fear and shock Abdou to accept the illegitimate child. As he tries to respond, Abdul Latif blames him with a threatening speech: “People know, and you’ve got to take your son and rear him. Isn’t it forbidden... to leave him orphaned, living a life of loss?” (Abdulwali 49) Abdou is shocked when heard the speech and the word son has started to move his mind to remember his legal son in Yemen. Abdou’s family is the only thing that directs his thinking.

However, Abdul Latif’s words run into his mind, Abdou realizes how serious the matter is. He has to stop the accusations. He tells him ironically that he is surprised that Abdel Latif believed the prostitute’s words. The author writes, “I thought you were thinker, but...” (50). Abdou’s main goal is to use humiliation as a weapon to destroy Abdul Latif, so the purpose of his visit becomes futile. And he also wants to get him out of the accusation. Abdou Said laughs at himself when he recalls his homeland and village. When he will return to his village, the villagers will sing, “What house is the beat in the village?” And they’ll say to themselves, “Abdou Said” (62). It is clear from the title that the immigrants are experiencing an identity crisis as they live and die as strangers. Yemenis seek to maintain Islamic ideals in a Christian environment, but some are unsuccessful. Abdu Said is one among those who has misguided the right way. He is an extreme example of a “‘fallen’ émigré who ruthlessly betrays the ideals of his native culture and religion without remorse” (Weir 11). Thus, immigration trauma affects Abdou Said when he is found in Ethiopia. Because it was impossible for him to return home, he only remembered his ancestral homeland. These memories can be happy or painful. Abdou alternated between recollections of his original homeland and reality of his current home. As a result, Abdou feels estranged from his host country, and his identity is shattered. By any way, the immigration is trauma.

### **Isolation Trauma**

Abdou Said had traumatic experiences due to tough living conditions in his homeland, and the need to rebuild his identity as key factor to relieve the psychological pressure and distress that was in Yemen during that time. For this reason he decided to emigrate, hoping to find work and a new life abroad, only to be confronted with isolation in his small store in Ethiopia. In Shelagh’s words, *They Die Strangers* concentrates on “the anguish of long separations from family 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” (Weir 11). These critical difficulties painfully compound the distress experienced by many who

have already suffered persecution in their countries. From the early days of Abdou Said's in abroad, he is always an isolated from his environment because he did not accept the way of life that other people did. But in Balaev's words, the traumatized victims are "those denied their rightful place in society, and those that have chosen isolation from society in reaction to the oppressive controls" (Balaev 126). Even though Abdou Said tried to distance himself from the people around him. As the narrator describes the situation of Abdou Said: "He lives among them, but he is as far from them as the distance between his black dirty clothes and his smiling white face. No one remembers that there has been a change in the man's face, for he was ten years ago, still a young man, dripping with affection and a smile" (Abdulwali 17).

The above lines illustrate the contradictions in Abdou's life by dividing Sodest Kilo into two worlds. In Sodest Kilo, there are both rich and poor people who live there. He, on the other hand, is unconcerned about his life's divergence. Despite the fact that he physically interacts with people, he is spiritually isolated. His separation is reflected in his detachment from people whose presence is nothing more than dirty black clothes that reflects his soul's isolation. Thus, the writer depicted the suffering of individuals living in cultural isolation under authoritarian governments' oppressive and terrible economic problems. "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" (Weir 11). Isolation is one of the most problems that Yemeni migrants faced after leaving their birthplace and country. He focuses on Yemeni men leaving their homes, families, and children, who pay a tremendous price for doing so.

Abdou is traumatized in Ethiopia due to a long-term separation from his family and his homeland. He doesn't have personal interpersonal communication, so he couldn't tell anyone about his pains and sorrow. He hasn't any relationship with other men, which lead to increase his distress and psychological trauma. "Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship" (Herman 62). Abdou was an introverted person in Sodest Kilo that led him to lose the enthusiasm for living luxuriously, but also lost his hope for homecoming. He becomes traumatized to everything around him, and assuring that the world is an evil and could not be changed. Abdou Said feels isolated among Ethiopian people and culture. This is evident in the following passage, which depicts Abdou Said's sense of isolation in Ethiopia. As the narrator says:

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. (Abdulwali 18)

In the above lines, Abdou sleeps in his shop, which is very small. He spends his leisure time tending to the garden of his store. Through the entrance that leads to his wonderful garden, where he is isolated from everyone. According to isolation trauma, he is unable to accept Ethiopian children who regard him as a stranger. Those kids always refer to him as camel jockey. In reality, as shown in the story, this clause is used to refer to Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia. However, Abdou will be able to control and endure those Ethiopian misbehaving children by then. The above lines indicate a sense of isolation and exile in his host country. “Social isolation is the distancing of an individual psychology or physically, or both, from his or her network of desired or needed relationships with other persons” (Luskin & Nicholson 85). In spite of Abdou Said is in Ethiopia, he feels isolated from the people around him. He only thinks about his family as well as homeland. This demonstrates that “home” encompasses more than just government, people, culture, or customs; it also encompasses feelings and identity. Although Abdou Said was a prosperous trader in Ethiopia, the significance of home led him to fantasize about returning to Yemen.

Abdou is dissatisfied in Sodest Kilo because he is separated from his loved ones. This dissatisfaction appears to be the result of the war in his homeland, which has caused many people to seek work elsewhere. But the yard was more orderly and beautiful than the place he called his room. When you see the land from behind the wall that he made himself, you realize from the first glance that a great effort has been made to take care of his yard. “The yard was more organized and more beautiful than the area he called his room. A considerable amount of effort had gone into his yard” (Abdulwali 18). Abdou appears to find relief in his own backyard. His disorganized shop represents his lack of interest in establishing a sense of self. Abdou doesn’t put much effort into the shop because it permits him to interact with other people. Despite the fact that people love him, Abdou chooses to isolate himself because he feels he is different. He’s not supposed to be in this place, but the work is what brought him to Ethiopia and it is the only important thing to him.

After building his dream home, he doesn’t seem to care much about what people would say if they knew this news. Abdou hangs a picture of his house in the middle of his shop and is anxiously waiting for someone to ask him about the house

owner. The narrator describes situation of Abdou Said: “Abdou waited on his customers, tending to their orders, all the while following their eyes, which were fixed on the photo. Deep inside, he was anxious. What would they say if they knew this was his house, his own house?” (Abdulwali 18) It is clear that Abdou had isolated himself due to his strict dedication to secrecy regarding his personal life. “Social isolation ranges from the voluntary isolate who seeks disengagement from social intercourse for a variety of reasons, to those whose isolation is involuntary or imposed by others” (Diana and Nicholas 85). The author describes Abdou as a mysterious figure in the eyes of the residents of Sodest Kilo. He is like a tomb that people see, but they are unable to tell the story behind it. Now, it’s different as Abdou feels he has fulfilled his ultimate dream of having a home for his family. Accordingly, Abdou’s contradictory behavior stems his isolation from the people around him. Abdou is unable to integrate into the new society as well as culture. Hence, he is physically present among the inhabitants of Sodest Kilo, but he is not present emotionally and mentally. Abdou seems as a traumatic figure because he doesn’t have any relation to anybody in Sodest Kilo.

Abdou’s schizophrenic view of his existence in Ethiopia is reflected in his dependence on masculinity rather than integration. Abdou emerges as a man who doesn’t know how to fit in doing emotional bonds. His trauma creates his emotional isolation. One of the women describes Abdou as an animal that hasn’t any kinds of affection towards his mistresses. One of the critics states that, “emotional isolation is initiated by the absence of a close emotional attachment” (Weiss 33). After one intimate night, Abdou does not seem to show any kind of emotions and feelings towards his lover who wrathfully says, “You’re an animal with no heart and no taste. All you want is to screw like a dog” and later adds, “nothing concerns you, not even a woman in your arms. You quench your thirst. You live in a mirage, my friend, a mirage” (Abdulwali 34). Clearly, Abdou is isolated from his surroundings completely when he spends much of his time alone in his garden. Because of his trauma, he doesn’t care of his passionate love relationships with Ethiopian women that may represent a sense of emotional isolation to this place. He only had sexual intercourse out of marriage as a result of his isolation from his family as well as the world around him in Sodest Kilo.

Abdou is not only isolated from the Ethiopian society in Sodest Kilo but also from the Yemeni community in Ethiopia. Abdul Latif asks Saleh to go with him to meet Abdou for convincing him to take care for his child. Saleh appears hesitant, believing that Abdou will never accept the child. On the way, Saleh thinks over approach he would take to persuade him because Abdou is a baffled and tough man.

As Saleh describes Abdou to Abdul Latif, the narrator describes that, “How many times had Saleh Saif seen Abdou fold up the newspapers in his shop without even thinking to read them? He never gave donations or attended community meetings. He lived in complete isolation” (47). This is the real description of Saleh views about Abdou Said. Not only has Abdou isolated himself from everyone, even his fellow emigrants, but he has also refused to give any financial donations to the Yemeni revolutionary government. In Kurtz’s words, “if humanity is achieved through community, to be separated from that community is to experience the loss of one’s own sense of selfhood. That loss is the fundamental trauma” (Kurtz 312). Abdou’s trauma is the real loss that has isolated him from his Yemeni community.

In the above lines, Abdou has never said which side he believes in. His lack of sympathy for the war is demonstrated by his isolation from any political activity. Abdou’s decision to isolate himself from any political activity is not something new. According to that, isolated people are less likely to be political activists. He has just been thinking about his family. The war has led him to leave the most valuable things in his life. Even if the war is wreaking havoc on Yemen’s people, Abdou and his family desire to live together. The war is the, “traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death” (Herman 43). Perhaps the war’s trauma has changed Abdou into someone different, someone who is missing pieces of his personality. Abdou is indifferent by the revolutionists’ calls for social change. He is not concerned about the political movements in his country. His trauma reflects his isolation from the world around him.

### **Conclusion**

Like Muhammad Abdul-Wali, Abdou Said has suffered from various traumas such as, childhood, immigration as well as isolation, struggled bravely from poverty, ignorance, diseases, sufferings and injustice of Imam Regime, and finally died in stranger land. Muhammad Abdul-Wali dedicated his life to the cause of Yemenis’ liberation from the tyrannical regime of Imam. He has experienced trauma himself, which is extremely valuable for readers to analyze this novella. He not only depicts the suffering that most contemporary Yemenis have experienced, but also provides them a way to comprehend the trauma and walk away from it. Actually, many Yemenis are unaware that they have been traumatized. Just like Abdou Said, they are used to everything and accept it traumatically in their homeland and abroad. More Yemenis are forced to leave after realizing that they have been deeply traumatized. The traumatic analysis of the novella will surely enable more Yemenis recognize

and pay more attention to the suffering that has occurred in their lives.

Through his novella, Muhammad Abdul-Wali was successful to convey his message concerning the traumatic reality of the Yemeni expatriates not only in Ethiopia but all over the world. Like Abdul-Wali, Abdou Said lives far away from his country where he doesn't find a way to live a decent life. He lives in a strange country, an unstable life, and waiting to return one day to his homeland. His dream dies and buries in abroad and he dies as stranger from his homeland. The novella sheds light on traumatic experiences and sufferings not only of Abdou Said but also all Yemenis in and out of Yemen. Thus, the author has dreamed of a modern civil state and his dream did not come true until now.

According to the writer, the painful experiences Yemenis faced inside and outside the country are the result of the repressive and tyrannical regime of the Imam at that time. Yemenis leave their homeland due to the harsh conditions of life in it. As a result of their departure, families, lands, identities, ideals, religion, and mores have all been lost. The initial traumatic experiences of Abdou begin since his childhood, his immigration to Ethiopia, and isolation from everything he loves in his life. Abd al-Wali's novella reconstructs the public issues of Yemenis to create a new life in society. He uses the image of Abdou Said to depict trauma, sadness, and suffering, so that he creates awareness not just among Yemenis but also among Arabs.

### Works Cited

- Abbasi, Farha. "Immigration, Trauma, and the Power of Faith." July 19, 2021. Retrieved from <https://careforyourmind.org/immigration-trauma-and-the-power-of-faith/>
- Abdul-Wali, Mohammad. *They Die Strangers*, translated by Bagader, A. & Akers, D.. USA: University of Texas, 1971 (2001).
- Al-Areqi , Rashad . "Yemeni Narrative In Postcolonial World." *Research Journal in Organizational Psychology & Educational Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2015, pp. 102-111. Retrieved from [www.emergingresource.org](http://www.emergingresource.org)
- Al-Bakry, Mohammed . "Mohammad Abdul-Wali and Something called Nostalgia." 2019. Retrieved from <https://almaidaniyamag.com/2019/07/07/mohammad-abdul-wali-and-something-called-nostalgia/>
- Albalawi, Mohammed. "Losing Identity, Abandoning Values, and Alienating Self: The Impact of Immigration in Mohammed Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers*." *Linguistics and Literature Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2015, pp. 100-110. DOI: 10.13189/lis.2015.030304
- Al-Rubaidi, Abdulsalam . *Identity Constructions in Contemporary Yemeni Novels*. Forschung: Abgeschlossene, Dissertation, 2019.

- Balaev, Michelle. *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*. Palgrave Macmillan: England, 2014.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. United States of America: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Chelala, ilvia. "The Stories of the Forgotten." 2002. Retrieved from <https://www.aljadid.com/content/stories-forgotten>
- Diana Luskin Biordi and Nicholas R. Nicholson. *Social Isolation. In Chronic Illness: Impact and Intervention*. Jones & Bartlett Publishers, 2011, pp. 85-115.
- Foster , Perez R. M. "When Immigration Is Trauma Guidelines for the Individual and Family Clinician." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 71, no. 2, 2001, pp. 153-170.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Mourning and Melancholia. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strackey. London: Hogarth, 1953. pp. 243-258. Print.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- Kurtz, Roger J. *Trauma and Literature*. United Kingdom: Cambridge UP, 2018.
- Lejkowski , Richard. *Childhood Trauma and the Imagination in American Literature*. Thesis of Master degree. Camden, New Jersey, 2012.
- Manqoush, Riyad Abdurahman. "The Cultural Dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese Migrants: Mohammad Abdulwali's They Die Strangers." Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club. *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, vol. 3, no. 6, 2015, pp. 461-471.
- Manqoush, Riyad, et al. "National Identity and Sense of Belonging of the Yemeni Migrants in Ethiopia: A Critical Analysis of Abdul-Wali's They Die Strangers." *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2014, pp. 36-42.
- Rashed, Redhwan Q. G. "Socio-Political Realities in Modern Yemeni Short Story: A Critique of Mohammad Abdul-Wali' s Short Stories." *Forum for World Literature Studies*, vol.14, no.3, 2022, pp. 459-487.
- Weir, Shelagh. *An introduction to They Die Strangers*. They Die Strangers. USA: University of Texas, 2001.
- Weiss, R. S. *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973.