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THE MARGINALIZED VOICES IN MOHAMMAD ABDUL-WALI'S NOVEL  
'THEY DIE STRANGERS'

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Yemeni novel, a phenomenon that emerged recently following the Yemeni revolution in 1962 and the emergence of the modern nation state in Yemen. However, in contemporary postcolonial studies, this new form is severely marginalised. The novel's publication in English in 2001 serves a variety of literary and cultural functions. Taking into account Yemen's cultural particularity and marginalisation, the novel is both informative and imbued with meanings that participate in and contribute to the process of creating new identities of literacy practises by opening up new horizons for reading multicultural literary texts such as the Arabic novel. This paper aims to discuss the dilemma of social marginalization that Yemenis were subjected to during the Imam's rule in northern Yemen. It also aims to discuss the reasons that led to this marginalization and the consequences of this marginalization. The researcher also discusses the types of marginalization that the novelist Mohammad Abdul-Wali talks about in his novel *They Die Strangers*, which takes place in Ethiopia, through an analysis of the novel based on the post-colonial theory, which deals with the discussion of such issues.

**Key words:** marginalization, postcolonial, Yemeni, Imam's rule, dilemma, Mohammad Abdul-Wali, *They Die Strangers*.

Introduction

Marginality is a term that first appeared in a political and social context in 1928. It refers broadly to inequalities such as facing discrimination, social exclusion, and poverty. This term also has more specific meanings, such as "the state of being outside mainstream culture". Robert Park (1928) introduced the concept of marginality, which was explained as a minor theme in Park's analysis of the causes and consequences of human migrations (Web 03/02/2023). Marginality can be defined as being different and less powerful than others. 'Being marginalized' has been used both literally and metaphorically to mean feeling or experiencing disadvantage because of one's identity or attributes.

Marginality can also be defined by scholars in terms of power. Marginal communities with relatively weak power therefore concern themselves with the preservation of their culture and beliefs while simultaneously helping to promote them in a more dominant culture. This preserves the cultural identity while helping to ensure

its survival through various means, such as education and influencing policy. It is important that the marginalised community is not seen as anti-mainstream but instead aims to make mainstream ideas more progressive. Marginality refers to the state of being on the edge or periphery of a group or society. It can also refer to the status of a subgroup within a larger group that experiences less power, privilege, or resources compared to the dominant group. In the context of social sciences, marginality is often used to describe the experiences and challenges faced by groups that are marginalized by society, such as racial minorities, immigrants, low-income individuals, and those with disabilities. Marginality can also be used to describe the experiences of individuals who do not conform to societal norms or expectations. Marginality as defined by Joachim and Gatzweiler is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary concept integrating poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion; the degradation of ecosystem function; and access to services, markets, and technology. (Joachim and Gatzweiler 2014)

The term "marginal" is usually applied to people who are left out of society, but that is not always the case. It can also apply to people with mentalities and social positions outside of the mainstream. Marginality can result from differences in socioeconomic status (SES) or other demographic variables such as gender, race, ethnicity, or age. These factors can affect how an individual views themselves and their community because they may determine factors such as education opportunities or the level of access to resources necessary for survival. Oliver has defined the marginal persons as "those who live in two worlds, but do not feel well integrated into either and those who live in societies which are in the process of being assimilated and incorporated into an emerging global society" (Oliver). Merriam Webster dictionary defines the marginal as those who are "excluded from or existing outside the mainstream of society, a group, or a school of thought." (Merriam Webster)

Marginalized voices refer to the perspectives and experiences of individuals or groups that are marginalized by society. Marginalized groups are typically those that have less power, privilege, or resources compared to the dominant group, and their voices and perspectives are often underrepresented or not heard in mainstream discourse. Examples of marginalized voices include those of racial minorities, immigrants, low-income individuals, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. It's important to amplify marginalized voices in order to ensure that all perspectives are heard and that society is more inclusive and equitable. Marginalized people are typically excluded from the major institutions that make up society, such as religion, government, and employment. They often do not have a voice in public places due to the simple fact that they are not part of the majority. If they speak out, they face the risk of being persecuted or even killed. Examples of marginality include but are not limited to racism, sexism, and cultural bias.

#### **Mohammad Ahmed Abdul-Wali as a Yemeni writer**

The Yemeni story in the life of Mohammad Ahmed Abdul-Wali witnessed unprecedented prosperity. He owes this to the diversity of his experience, culture, and artistic talent, which he honed by studying the art of the story. He did not rely on his individual effort, which he gained from continuous reading, but rather, during his studies in Egypt, he followed all the seminars and lectures, and studied at the Gorky Institute of Literature in Moscow for two years. He was closely acquainted with the great Arab and foreign masters of the short story. He heard evaluation from senior professors for his fictional production translated into Russian. At the beginning of his fictional life, he loved Chekhov, Youssef Idris, Hanamina, and others to the point of madness. Despite this, he did not, like other young people, fall into the network of imitation and simulation. And he continued to write in his own way, without paying attention to his cultural outcome. It was the bitterness of the experience that he lived through in childhood and boyhood that was the primary control over all his production. Mohammad Ahmad Abdul-Wali has harnessed his culture to express this treasure of observations in the Diaspora first and then the homeland, especially in recent years. He enriched the Yemeni short story. And he proceeded with his colleagues Ali Bathib, Ahmed Mahfouz Omar, Ali Mohammad Abdo and others on this path, which he did not hesitate for one day since 1954 AD. Mohammad Abdul-Wali is a political and social storyteller. His novels and short stories deal with the problems that existed in Yemen during the oppressive political regime of the Imam. (Manqoush et al., 37)

Since the end of the thirties, the Yemeni story has taken on the character of rhetoric and social and political preaching, or has taken a romantic turn later on. The first Yemeni story writer, Al-Buraq, was influenced by Al-Manfalouti's style of preaching. Until 1956, story writers in Aden were mere narrators of tender love whose source was culture, not reality. Al-Dukhan wrote small poetic pieces in the Aden newspapers, and then printed them in a booklet, ending his relationship with the story. Ali Batheeb began writing the direct political story in a modern style. All these were attempts. It was the beginning of the Yemeni short story, which Muhammad Ahmed Abd al-Wali, Ali Bathib, Ahmed Mahfouz Omar, Muhammad al-Zarqa, Zaid Muti` Dammaj, Ali Muhammad Abdo and other young people went on and developed in earnest. Our martyr storyteller was the most productive and ambitious Yemeni storyteller. He released his first collection, "The Land, Salma," in which he collected his early productions and his impressions of home and exile. And he released another collection called "Something Called Nostalgia" at the end of 1972.

Critics consider him the true pioneer of the short story in Yemen, especially during the sixties, when this narrative form gradually took shape in Yemen. This is because his creative genius, which lasted until the early seventies (the time of his death), was most evident in the artistic treatment of a number of social issues: the issue of emigration from the homeland in particular, and the resulting problematic issues and "situations" such as issues of existence and his position on religion, God, and women; all resulting from social injustice and political oppression. The latter is considered, as the Yemenis date, the main reason for the migration of the Yemeni person outside the homeland, as a decision of the imam's oppression and oppression imposed on people in various forms of isolation, backwardness, ignorance and poverty, all of which lead to the emergence of the phenomenon of Yemeni migration in search of livelihood and self-proof that is lost inside the homeland, for example For example, his position on the issue of the woman who was left by her migrant husband outside the homeland, and she suffers from the horrors of loneliness, and he held her responsible for raising children and caring for the land.

Likewise, the woman who belonged to what was called the "Muwallad", who are the children of immigrants from Yemen born to Abyssinian mothers, as all of this illustrates Abdul-Wali's position, which is considered exceptional from a social point of view. Therefore, our test was for Abdul-Wali without other Yemeni story writers. An intentional choice and comprehension of the size of the exceptionalism that characterized Abdul-Wali's position and his artistic point of view, as long as we understand the vision in highlighting its critical meanings synonymous with the term point of view that stems from the narrator's technique in his relationship to his storytelling world (the storyteller or the novelist).

#### **Discussion of the novel:**

The writer Mohammad Abdul-Wali talks in his novel *'They Die Strangers'* about one of the types of marginalization that many may not have touched upon before him, which is the marginalization of the Muwallad category, who, according to the writer's opinion, belong to nowhere. The writer discusses this dilemma as he is one of those marginalized people, as he is a Yemeni Ethiopian, as he was born in Abyssinia in Africa to a Yemeni father and an Ethiopian mother. The writer felt the suffering of this group and tried to portray his suffering through his writings that may express, even partially, the suffering of this group. In addition to the above, the author discusses other types of marginalization that simple Yemenis were subjected to during the Imam's rule in Yemen. The rule of the Imam and his family in Yemen depended on marginalization, as the society was divided into several classes, the highest of which was the ruling class, which belonged to the imam's family, and which had the right to what other groups of society did not have. The common people in Yemen were the labour force to serve the ruling family. In addition, depriving of the general public of education and government jobs, and exploiting them in the worst way to please the ruling family. The Imam's injustice was not limited to depriving the public of education and employment only, but the situation reached them to impose exorbitant taxes on the subjects, i.e., those who own agricultural land or animal wealth, and made them pay annually to the state a large part of their agricultural or animal crops, and whoever opposes or tries not to pay, his fate is prisons, which was filled with the oppressed during the rule of the Imam in Yemen. Another type of marginalization is the non-interference in politics or discussing any of the Imam's decisions, which forced many people to emigrate and

flee from the oppression of the Imam and the hunger that loomed over the heads of Yemenis to Africa due to its proximity to Yemen. According to the text, the main reason for the Yemeni male character's departure is not to pursue cultural and educational endeavours. Rather, he flees his homeland to avoid the extreme poverty and drought that followed the Ottoman Turks' withdrawal, which left Yemen a "wasteland" after four centuries of rule and dominance. (Wenner, 1986)

Through these fugitives and immigrants, some voices opposing the Imam's rule began to emerge, calling for the overthrow of his rule. Most of the events of the novel take place in Ethiopia, to which the protagonist fled from the oppression of the Imamate, as well as to seek livelihood. Through the protagonist of the novel, Abdo Saeed, the writer depicts for us the suffering of the Yemeni in his homeland, and how the individual cannot work and provide a living or adequate housing to live in, and that whoever wants to build a house for him He must migrate and move away from his family and his homeland so that he can collect the largest amount of money in order to return and rest a little in his homeland. However, the expatriate does not escape the oppression of the Imamate, so he must pay part of what he collects to the ruling family until he is allowed to build a house or open his own project.

The events of the novel begin with the sudden appearance of Abdou Sa'id, who landed in Sodset Kilo, Addis Ababa. The residents of the neighbourhood did not know anything about him except that he was Yemeni, but how did he come and where did he come from and where did he get the money to open the shop. All of his questions did not find an answer, and therefore the writer clarifies some ambiguities for the reader to understand the reason for Abdo Sa'id's departure from Yemen to Abyssinia. The injustice and marginalization of the Yemeni citizen are two main reasons that made many Yemenis resort to fleeing Yemen and searching for a safe country where they can work and earn money so that their families can live in dignity in light of the dire situation in Yemen. As we explained earlier, the rule of Imam perched on the breasts of the Yemenis and made them servants of the ruling family, which prompted them to flee to the neighbouring country, or as the Yemenis called it in the past, the country beyond the seas.

Abdou Sa'id lived in Abyssinia and worked in his small shop and made a lot of money, although he saw that he thought he was not earning anything because he was using only one suit full of dirt. Also, no one knew where his money went despite the large number of his customers, but the writer intervened here as well and clarified the mystery. His servant Saeed, who came to Abyssinia to collect the largest amount of money to build the largest house in his village, returns rich until people say about him that he has the best house and people mention his name. As is the case with the man who returned before him and his biography was on the lips of all the villagers. The picture becomes clearer when Abdou Sa'id receives a picture of the new house which resembles a palace, which was attached to a letter from his son asking him to go back home, where the dream has been fulfilled, and he has a huge house, many lands, and a shop in the city, from which they can earn money and live in peace. Abdou Sa'id did not dare to share his happiness with anyone, especially since he had competitors in the market and he evaded paying taxes, so he suppressed his happiness to himself and did not share it with anyone.

Abdou wanted to tell everybody that the house was his, but he feared doing so for many reasons. Perhaps they wouldn't believe him and would want to know why he said it was the Shaykh's house. He decided it was enough that he knew the truth. He didn't want the others to know, especially these days when he found himself suspicious of every new customer who entered his store, especially the men. He rarely talked to them unless they initiated the conversation. He always complained that he wasn't making any profit, that actually he was losing money. (Abdul-Wali 29)

The novel takes another turn when a girl named Ta'atto comes, whom Abdou Saeed made into a woman, as he was known to have sex with many women, and she is one of those women. She tells him that he has a son, and his mother died after six months of illness, and he is left with only his father, who is Abdo Said. Here, the man goes crazy and denies that he is his son, despite the great similarity between them, but he does not want to take responsibility for his actions with the excuse that all women will bring their illegitimate children to his

shop to say that they are his children. However, this justification was not the real reason for his refusal to adopt the child. Rather, there is another reason, which is that the child is illegitimate or a son of adultery (bastard).

He had seen the boy several times, playing with the other kids in the quarter; the child even looked like him. Then he remembered the proverb, "A bastard always looks like his father." He was white like Abdou, with the same innocent baby face, though he had his mother's kinky hair and full Negroid lips. But what could he do? He had decided to leave everything and go back home, to escape to his new house, to his land, which he had bought with years of hard work. To see his son, yes, his real son, his lawful son, but this, oh God, what was to be done? He could not love this son. (36)

In addition to the above, there is another social reason that made Abdou Sa'id deny his illegitimate son, for fear of what society and people would say, especially when he goes back to Yemen. There is also the view of the Yemeni society, which will not accept the idea of having a child outside marriage. The Yemeni society is a conservative and religious society and has customs and traditions that are committed to it, and it is not in its customs that you have an illegitimate son. Abdou Sa'id, who dreams of returning to his homeland and people say about him that he is the richest man and that he has the best house and has his position in a society languishing in poverty, how does he return with an illegitimate child? This is what make him categorically refuses to adopt his illegitimate son. There is also his wife, his legitimate son, and his grandchildren, whom he has not seen yet, and they are all waiting for his return day and night, and they have been very patient.

Goddamn the dirty animal who brought this upon him. Why did this woman have to give birth when she knew that her son would be a bastard? He repeated the word in his head. What would people say when they knew that the child was his son, no, that he grown was his bastard son? What would his wife say, she who prayed and waited patiently for his return? What would he say to his son, who had into an important man? He must get rid of this matter...he must. (36)

Abdou Sa'id's refusal is only the beginning of a series of refusals to adopt a child by many Yemenis, and even by those who speak in the name of religion and revolution. Sayyid Amin, who is considered a religious authority for many Muslims and even some Christians, evaded saving the child by lying in the name of religion and handing over the role to Hajji Abdul Latif. Hajji, too, always speaks in the name of the revolution and the liberation of Yemen and the Yemenis from the oppression of the Imam and the marginalization that many suffer from, but when the choice falls on him to adopt and raise the child, the world becomes dark in his eyes and he insults the master and his servant Saeed in his secret because of the poor child. They considered him a disgrace and did not accept that he be raised among their children because he was illegitimate and would defile the honour of their families.

He mentally cursed Abdou Sa'id. He was about to curse the Sayyid, but was still afraid of him. He returned, distressed, to his store. How too, would he add a boy he didn't even know to his extended family? All to save him from becoming an unbeliever. What had he done to deserve this? Hadn't God created this child? Shouldn't He take care of him? If God wanted to save the boy's soul, why did He put him in the hands of unbelievers? (55)

In the previous quotation and other conversations that take place in the novel, the societal hypocrisy and the dilemma of marginalization that the writer is talking about appear clearly in people's view to this class of half breeds (Muwallad) who were not accepted by society. According to the narration, the class of half breeds (Muwallad) is divided into two groups, the first group are recognized by both parents, but their parents are a mixture of a Yemeni father and an Abyssinian mother, or vice versa. The second group are not recognized by both parents or by one of the parents for the child is a result of an illegal relationship, so they call him an illegitimate child or a son of adultery and this group come at the bottom of the list of societal marginalization that the novel discusses. The second marginalized group do not find acceptance in society except from the marginalized of the first category, as is the case with Abduh Saeed's son, who was abandoned by everyone and only the hajji's secretary accepted him, being mixed blood or marginalized like him, but the difference is that he is a legal and accepted by his parents. The hajji's secretary announces the adoption of the child whom he has

not seen, but he feels love towards him and feels the suffering that the child is going to face in the future, and accepts to raise him as his brother.

The secretary smiled. He himself was of mixed blood, so he harboured no ill feelings toward this child whom he had not seen. In fact, he loved the boy, for, like the boy, he had been born without a country, a stranger in a strange land. He used sarcasm as a weapon, a way of justifying his feelings of alienation. The secretary's father dreamed of his homeland, of a future in Yemen, someday when it was "liberated" from oppression. He had a foundation to stand on and dreams to support him. He wasn't a stranger, despite being an expatriate. He had a country to go home to one day. But, his son the secretary was like a rootless tree; he was no one. Yes, no one.

The secretary's mother also 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?

So, the secretary felt kindly toward 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 and belonged to the same people. They were the lost ones who were stuck in the middle, pulled by both sides they would always be strangers. (56)

The above lines sum up the whole problem and dilemma that this paper discusses. The child, who is not accepted by his father or by other Yemeni migrants, finally gets acceptance by the secretary who feels that they are sharing probably the same situation of being marginalized by society or even by their land.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the writer was able, through his narration, to artfully discuss a problem from which Yemenis suffered greatly, namely, social marginalisation by the ruling family, especially during the rule of the Imam. Although the novel discusses the problem of marginalisation during the rule of the Imam, which was in the first half of the twentieth century, the same problem returns to the fore in the twenty-first century after the rule in the north was usurped by the same Imam dynasty. This group believes that the ruling is not entitled to anyone but them or those who descend from the same dynasty. In addition to the first dilemma, the writer was also able to discuss another dilemma, which is the result of the first dilemma. And because the marginalisation of the Yemenis was the reason for their displacement or flight to the neighbouring country, which resulted in leaving children behind in the country of exile, these

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