

The Cultural Dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese Migrants: Mohammad Abdulwali's *They Die Strangers* vs. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

Riyad Abdurahman Manqoush

¹Assistant Professor of English Literature
English Language Department
Hadhramout University, Yemen
Email: riadmanqoush [AT] yahoo.com

ABSTRACT—This research is intended to analyze Mohammad Abdulwali's *They Die Strangers* (1971) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1990) with the aim of examining the cultural dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese migrants. Although the two novels were analyzed in some scholarly works, all previous research investigated them separately; none investigated the two novels to highlight the similarities and differences between cultural dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese migrants. The theoretical framework in this research has been derived from the notions of nation and diaspora as discussed by Jana Braziel, Anita Mannur, William Safran, Adnan Mohammad Zarzour, Kamaludin Rifaat, Gastanteen Zureiq, Timothy Brennan, John McLeod, Bill Ashcroft, Fred Riggs, Caren Kaplan and Robin Cohen. The discussion and analysis conclude that the cultural dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese migrants is analogous as shown through the characters' memories about their ancestral land in both novels, and also in their sense of displacement, fragmentation and loss in the land of domicile. In contrast, the two stories diverge in manipulating the cultural dilemma of migrants. The Chinese in the USA are different from the Yemenis in Ethiopia in their hybridity. While the Yemenis dream of homecoming, the Chinese want to forget their homeland and stay abroad forever. They try their best to mingle with the new culture. This indicates that the Chinese traditions are more oppressive than the Yemeni traditions. In short, the culture, traditions, and folklore of the two countries are obviously observed in these stories, but while *They Die Strangers* focuses on the migrants' nostalgia of homecoming, *The Joy Luck Club* centers on their hybridity and forgetting their homeland.

Keywords— Nation, diaspora, dilemma, Mohammad Abdulwali, *They Die Strangers*, Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*

1. INTRODUCTION

Home is not merely a geographical place; it is nature, culture, traditions, family, relatives and neighbors. Home is like a mother who feeds her children and gives them love and happiness. This paper is intended to analyze Mohammad Abdulwali's *They Die Strangers* (1971) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1990) with the aim of examining the cultural dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese migrants. Although the two novels were investigated in some scholarly writings, as will be cited later on, none of these writings investigated the two novels to underline the similarities and differences between the cultural dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese migrants. Due to this gap, I assume that the discussion in this paper is innovative and can provide new perspectives and attitudes towards the two works of fiction. The theoretical framework of this research has been derived from the notions of nation and diaspora as discussed by Jana Braziel, Anita Mannur, William Safran, Adnan Mohammad Zarzour, Kamaludin Rifaat, Gastanteen Zureiq, Timothy Brennan, John McLeod, Bill Ashcroft, Fred Riggs, Caren Kaplan and Robin Cohen.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A survey of the previous scholarly research can be of assistance in spotting the gap that prompted me to write this paper. My discussion of the covered studies is divided into two sections: the first covers the scholarly studies on Abdulwali's *They Die Strangers* and the second deals with the writings on Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*.

a. Scholarly writings on Mohammad Abdulwali's *They Die Strangers*

They Die Strangers is one of the Yemeni problematic novels. This controversy encouraged many critics to study it. For instance, Mansour Al-Sururi (2006) argues that Abdulwali's *They Die Strangers* and *Sana'a, an Open City* possess new themes compared to the themes that exist in Yemeni fiction of their time. The two novels' themes are considered to

be modern for the reason that the two novels portray the facts that were hidden because of the political oppression or the oppressive traditions as deduced from this quotation: “the Yemeni novel—from its beginning to the present—is just preoccupied by two themes: writing about the past or the present except Mohammad Abdulwali’s two novels; *They Die Strangers* and *Sana’a, an Open City*. In the two novels, Mohammad Abdulwali attempts to recall the past that his characters experienced” (Al-Sururi 2006). In addition to that, while Al-Sururi (2006) analyzes the title of the novel, *They Die Strangers*, he claims that “the word ‘die’ in the title signifies the death which subsequently symbolizes the people’s absence.” People were literarily absent and dead because they left their homelands or because they were marginalized and oppressed there. Al-Sururi (2006) also adds that “the pronoun ‘they’ probably shows the reader that many Yemeni citizens left Yemen to stay and then die abroad.” This argument seems to be a factual reflection of the Yemeni society. For instance, during the era of the oppressive regime of the Imam, a large number of Yemenis migrated to different countries around the world, especially to Southeast Africa. Most of those migrants died abroad.

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

Shelagh Weir (2001:11) illustrates that *They Die Strangers* “is Abdulwali’s most cautionary and didactic tale.” This is probably because it can be seen from different angles and perspectives. It can be considered as a literary work that resists the political subjugation as well as the oppressive traditions that existed in Yemen at that time. In contrast, the novel can be considered as a work that criticizes the Yemeni migrants themselves for some of them lose their Arabic and Islamic identity when they are abroad. The novel seems to convey both meanings at the same time. Weir (2001:11) adds that “Abdulwali’s *They Die Strangers* dwells on the negative aspects of long-term emigration: the anguish of long separations from families and homeland, the loneliness and moral hazards of living in an alien culture, and the tension between the migrant’s desire to assimilate in the host country and his yearning to return.” Hence, *They Die Strangers* highlights the problems that the Yemeni migrants faced when they left their homeland. For instance, they experienced a sense of loss, loneliness, and alienation. However, the majority of those migrants preserved their Yemeni, Arabic and Islamic identity. Although some migrants who, as Weir (2001:11) elaborates, “strive to preserve their Yemeni identity and Muslim values in the context of an African and Christian environment, and regret their lapse and compromises, Abdou Said emphatically does neither.” In fact, the protagonist of the novel, Abdou, is shown in the novel as a loose and materialistic character, despite the fact that he is sometimes depicted in the text as a victim. According to Weir (2001:11), Abdou “is an extreme example of a ‘fallen’ émigré who ruthlessly betrays the ideals of his native culture and religion without remorse, fatally corrupted by his selfish, materialistic goal. By inflicting on him such tragic end and denying him absolution, Abdulwali delivers an uncompromising verdict on the dangers and delusions, as such he saw them, of Yemeni men living abroad alone.”

Conversely, Yahya Al-Wadhaf and Noritah Omar (2007) utilize “a postcolonial framework to analyze the construction of the Yemeni rural society (prior to the Yemeni revolution in 1962) in the novel.” According to them, “in postcolonial fiction, the theme of identity occupies an undisputable place. Along with the concept of hybridity, identity becomes a focus of experimentation and exploration. The literary discourse in this type of fiction becomes a focus of investigation where the writers are engaged with questions such as ‘who are we?’ and ‘where do we belong?’” Al-Wadhaf and Omar (2007) end up their paper with the conclusion that *They Die Strangers* is “a parody against those who migrate leaving their women and their land behind, only to live and die as strangers.” In general, the research of Al-Wadhaf and Omar and the previous discussed critical writings agree with the notion that *They Die Strangers* presents a wonderful reflection of the Yemeni society. This reinforces what K. S. Maniam reveals about the reflection of facts into fiction. He believes that literature cannot be separated from facts and the writer’s feeling is a part of the society’s experience and history (Maniam 2001:263). The cohesion between facts and fiction will be discussed in detail when analyzing the novel in the next pages.

b. Scholarly writings on Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*

Just like *They Die Strangers*, *The Joy Luck Club* has been discussed by some critics. Nomita Loktongbam (2012:57), for instance, analyzes the novel with a special emphasis on “the experiences faced by the Chinese diaspora in America and how they are caught mentally and physically between two worlds, loss of homeland and alienation, clashes of different cultures and their search for identity.” Loktongbam’s paper concludes that “the ethnic dissatisfaction manifested in the relationship between the Chinese mothers and the American daughters is the dilemma which many immigrants, especially their descendants, are faced with that is living between two worlds i.e. native world and the immigrant world” (Loktongbam 2012:58). This “dilemma” appears because the characters in the novel “speak dual language and live in a dual cultures” (Loktongbam 2012:58). In fact, the current research investigates the “dilemma” of the Chinese migrants as portrayed in *The Joy Luck Club*, comparing it with the “dilemma” of the Yemeni migrants as depicted in *They Die Strangers*. This comparison distinguishes the current paper and makes it distinctive.

Likewise, Jing Yin (2005:149) claims that *The Joy Luck Club* “constructed Chinese culture as the sexist, oppressive, mysterious, inscrutable, exotic, and savage cultural/racial Other.” Yin (2005:170) wraps up her discussion with the assertion that “a productive reconstruction of popular texts should strive to go beyond challenging the myths associated with the negative cultural Other to provide positive and contextualized interpretations of those cultural values.” In other words, Yin alleges that the novel, whose characters are preoccupied by the painful experience in the homeland, is tedious. This argument seems to diverge from the truth for literature is the reflection of the reality as explained earlier.

Michael Delucchi (1998:59) “uses George Herbert Mead’s theory of symbolic interaction to examine self and identity among aging immigrants in Amy Tan’s novel *The Joy Luck Club*.” Through “examining self-narratives in fictional representations of the aging immigrant experience”, Delucchi (1998:59) reviews “how identity develops out of particular social conditions and is achieved through social, psychological processes.” He also concludes that “symbolic interaction offers insights into the process whereby the present brings reinterpretation of the past and individuals are compelled to assign meaning to their life histories” (Delucchi 1998:59). From this research and the previous studies covered in this section, which criticize *They Die Strangers* and *The Joy Luck Club*, one can obviously notice that those writings analyzed the novels separately. The current research distinctively emphasizes on the cultural dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese migrants as described in both novels.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My analysis of *They Die Strangers* and *The Joy Luck Club* in this paper mainly emphasizes on the concepts of nation, diaspora and dilemma. Consequently, theoretical framework is divided into three main sections:

a. Nation

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

By the same token, Gastanteen Zureiq (1994) scrutinizes that “the ‘nation’ is a group of people who share some elements and features such as language, culture, history, ambition, pain, and interest.” These components contribute together to make that group of people a united nation. People may also share some myths that are relevant to the nation. The word “myth” conveys an ambiguous meaning. Timothy Brennan (1990:44) identifies the ‘myth’ as a “distortion or lie; myth as mythology, legend, or oral tradition; myths as literature prose; myths as shibboleth.” The correlation between the nation and the myths may reinforce the national sense of belonging. It creates the national identity that is, later on,

shaped as “nationalism” which Brennan (1990:57) defines as “a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state”. However, in spite of the national enthusiasm that nationalism connotes, John McLeod (2000:68) argues that “most commentators agree that the idea of nation is western in origin. It emerged with the growth of western capitalism and industrialization and was a fundamental component of imperialist expansion.” Though “nationalism” was created in the west, it has been appropriated to suit all the nations around the world.

To summarize the previous discussions, I can claim that the “nation” is as a group of people who share some characteristics and components that make them feel connected to each other. For instance, they speak the same language, experience the same history, have similar cultures, inhabit in the same land or perhaps in attached lands, adopt analogous ideologies and ambitions, and in some cases, they have the same religion.

b. Diaspora

According to Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur (2003:1), the word “diaspora” refers to “displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through movements of migration, immigration or exile.” This definition relates “diaspora” to the “movement” of people from their “homeland” into a new land and that movement is either voluntarily or forcibly. In other words, it deals with any people or ethnic groups forced or induced to leave their homelands and disperse throughout other parts of the world. It can also refer to the way in which a group of people are scattered and spread into new and different lands and how they live there. Historically, Braziel and Mannur (2003:1, italics and brackets original) claim that the term “diaspora” was initially “used in the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures explicitly intended for the Hellenic Jewish communities in Alexandria (circa 3rd century BC) to describe the Jews living in exile.” In general, “diaspora” is generally a concept that refers to the dispersal of a group of people from the ancestral homeland to a hostland for different purposes. William Safran (1991) states “six characteristics that can be used to identify a diaspora” as quoted below:

these characteristics are dispersal from an original center to peripheral regions, perpetuated myth of the original homeland, sense of alienation in their hostland, idealization of their homeland as a place to which they will return, commitment to maintain or restore their homeland and relationships with the homeland whose existence supports their own ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity.

Safran has highlighted many traits that can be seen in the migrants. I may need to emphasize on some of these “characteristics” because they are of great significance and relevance to the present paper. Migrants remember the “myth of the original homeland”, experience a “sense of alienation in their hostland”, and they idealize “their homeland” as if it is a utopia as will be noticed when analyzing the two novels in the next pages. In contrast, Fred Riggs (2000) comments that Safran’s characteristics mentioned above are not exhibited or conformed neatly to identify the “diasporic communities”. Riggs (2000) stresses on considering these characteristics as “parameters that may exist in greater or lesser degree in all cases.” He seems to prove that differing purposes of migration reflect different characteristics which then indicate whether the migrant community is dispersed or diasporic. In other words, he makes an obvious distinction between the term “dispersion” and “diaspora” which were synonymously used when referring to diasporic communities. Riggs (2000) adds that the term “dispersion” refers to “a scattered population which is often but not always refugees and their descendants regardless of whether or not they have an existing homeland.” In contrast, Riggs (2000) elaborates that the word “diaspora” refers to “communities living outside their country and interacting with their existing homeland even if they were not originally dispersed.” He makes this claim based on the Jewish community who lived all over the world without having a homeland. Their movement at that time in the past was known as the Jewish “dispersion” as they did not have a place of origin, a state or a nation. However with the establishment of Israel, their movement has been redefined as the Jewish “diaspora” in Palestine.

Onset of globalization and the rapid movement of people, borders have become a notion in the mind rather than in reality. Caren Kaplan (1996:7) elaborates that “many may not know where home is in order to stay there.” He also continues that “for many of us there is no possibility of staying at home in the conventional sense – that is the world has changed to the point that those domestic, national, or marked spaces no longer exists” (Kaplan 1996:7). This case can be seen in the citizens of nations that have disunited and formed smaller nations such as the United Soviet Socialist Republic. Thus, the citizen’s place of origin no longer exists. Thus, it is deduced that home is not a fixed notion for it varies from community to community and from time to time. Taking into consideration this fluidity in the concept of home, home can be construed as a blurred concept or a grey area. This can probably make, as Bill Ashcroft et al. (2000:70) claim, “the diasporic communities develop their own distinctive cultures which preserve, extend and develop their original cultures.”

By the same token, Robin Cohen (1997) “describes diaspora as communities of people living together in one country who acknowledge that the old country – a notion often buried deep in language, region, customs, or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions.” In other words, Cohen defines diaspora as a group of people who live together in a new land and culture but they still remember their homeland and culture. They cannot forget their mother tongue. Not only the language but the traditions and culture in general. However, people may unwillingly leave their homeland. According to Ashcroft et. al. (2000), some of the factors contributing to the movement of people are colonization, war, slavery and indentured labor. For instance, some of the Somalis, Palestinians, Afghans, Vietnamese, and Iraqis left their homelands because of the war that outraged their homeland. They traveled to places around the world in search of peace. Their escapism from war makes them diasporic communities in the land of domicile.

Trade and labor are also other noticeable factors contributing to the construction of diaspora. For instance, many Arabs nowadays live in Indonesia because their ancestors arrived in there centuries ago for the sake of trading. Besides, a large number of Chinese diasporic communities exist in the USA and different regions of the world because of trading. In addition to that, Chinese and Indians live with their families in the United Arab Emirates because they work there. So, these migrations happen due to trading and labor. Unlikely, slave trade is considered to be the most horrific experience of the African migration to the New World and the Caribbean. Some Africans were taken forcibly from their homeland during the period of slave trade and sent to the Caribbean or the New World to serve the White colonizers there. John McLeod (2000:206) mentions that migration also takes place due to government policies such as the one adopted by Britain after the Second World War where some Caribbeans were employed in public services like health and transportation to cope with labor shortage. Moreover, some migrate “to study, to escape political or economical difficulties in their native lands, and some follow family members who have migrated before” (McLeod 2000:206). Religion also leads some communities to leave their homelands to a new land where they can practice their religion without restraints. For instance, the Yemeni, Egyptian, and Iraqi Jews left their homelands, where the dominant religion is Islam, and stayed in Israel whose official religion is Judaism.

c. The Cultural Dilemma in Diaspora

Whatever the reasons for migration are, diasporic communities experience a sense of homelessness, rootlessness, displacement, alienation, fragmentation, hybridity, living in between spaces and memories about ancestral land. These notions or concepts do not exist in isolation but rather in relation to one another. When the diasporic communities are uprooted, they experience homelessness. Since it is difficult for them to go back home, they merely recall memories about their ancestral land. These memories can be happy or traumatic. When they start to emerge themselves with the new society and culture of the domicile land, they first feel displaced, fragmented, and alienated. In fact, they live in between spaces; they do not belong to the new culture as well as they cannot practice their own culture as they were doing in their homeland. As a result, they continuously fluctuate between memories about their ancestral land and realities of the domicile land. Consequently, migrants feel alienated from the hostland and their identity is fragmented.

Over a period of time, the identity of the diasporic people develops and they merge some elements of their culture with elements from the new one. This forms a hybrid identity. The first generation’s identity is not similar to the second or third generation’s one. The young generation is always more hybrid for they are born in the hostland and have not seen their ancestral homeland. Therefore, they may consider the domicile land as their home. Migrants need to achieve a sense of belonging in the new land. Therefore, they adapt their own language, folklore, customs, and culture with the ones which exist in the land of domicile. They mix their culture with the new culture. However, the diasporic community only partially merge themselves with the new society and culture as well. They still attempt to preserve their own culture as a sign of loyalty. Furthermore, in the hostland, the diasporic communities are unable to acquire everything because there are lots of elements in that culture clashes with their own mores. For instance, the Yemenis who sailed to Ethiopia and the Chinese who migrated to the USA were in a cultural dilemma and suffered from identity’s problems and a sense of loss. To them, Ethiopia and the USA were new lands with different languages, religions, cultures and races as well. The experience of losing their original identity is so painful to them, especially, to those who feel proud of their ancestral land, nation and culture, as will be discussed in the next section.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Due to the objective of the current paper, my discussion will be divided into two main sections. In the first one, I will analyze Abdulwali’s *They Die Strangers*, and in the other, I will investigate Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*:

a. Analysis of Abdulwali’s *They Die Strangers*

To make the analysis more obvious, a brief summary of the novel can be of assistance. Mohammad Abdulwali’s *They Die Strangers* is about Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia. The story is about a young Yemeni, Abdou Said, who lives in the

city of Sodest Kilo in Ethiopia among the Africans and surrounded by Yemeni migrants there. He left his wife, son, parents, and his homeland because of the bad economic and political situation. He establishes a small shop there and succeeds in his job. Abdou explores his sexuality with some women in the city where he works. Although Abdou works all the time, he always longs for his homeland and family. Since he suffered from poverty in Yemen, he now attempts to forget thinking about homecoming until he collects a countless amount of money. He always dreams of becoming rich. One day, one of his Christian girlfriends gets pregnant and gives birth to an Arab-looking child whose father, Abdou, refuses to recognize. The story becomes tragedy when the protagonist of the story is driven crazy and stops working in his small shop. When that woman dies, one of her friends publicizes her relationship with Abdou among the Yemeni community in Ethiopia in order to force Abdou to look after the boy. The story ends when Abdou is found dead in his shop. No one knows what happened to him. He dies a stranger in exile; away from his wife, children, and parents.

One of the dominant issues of diaspora is the memories and myths about the ancestral land. These memories and myths can be happy or traumatic. Some migrants cannot easily merge themselves in the new society of the domicile land; so they yearn for homecoming. Since homecoming is difficult, home becomes an image in their minds; and hence they recall memories about it. In contrast, migrants, who suffered in their homelands, merely remember the traumas and pains in their homelands. Similar memories about homeland can be seen in *They Die Strangers* as narrated below:

But who really was Abdou Said? As a boy, he had been a shepherd. He used to drink only goat's milk, which he milked secretly in the cool mountain breeze. Perhaps he ate some fruit that grew on village trees or dates that grew in the valley or bananas that he stole from a garden near the valley or bananas that he stole from a garden near the valley. Abdou treasured memories were of that valley, the trees ripe with fruit, goats lowing. These were things he remembered when he chewed leaves of *qat* and a far-off expression came into his eyes (Abdulwali 1971:25).

The protagonist, Abdou, has the habit of chewing "*qat*". *Qat* is a tree produces green leaves smaller than the spinach. A large number of men in Yemen chew these leaves. Some people chew *qat* to give them energy to work hard, some chew it to relax and some chew it as a way of escapism. Since *qat* is not forbidden in Ethiopia, Abdou keeps the same habit of chewing these leaves which can help him forget his sentiment of displacement, unhomeliness and loss in diaspora. While chewing *qat* in his small shop, he remembers his homeland, his childhood among his family in Yemen; he even remembers his suffer in his place of birth. He asks himself about his identity in Yemen. When he was a boy he worked as a "shepherd" who used to drink secretly "goat's milk" in the cold "mountain breeze". He remembers the trees ripe with "fruits" in the "valley" where his family's house were built.

Abdou's homeland becomes an image that can be recalled and remembered. Although Abdou remembers things that he really encountered when he was in Yemen, the writer of the novel, Abdulwali gives an impression that he uses a hyperbole or he probably exoticizes the *qat*. For instance, in the previous quotation, the protagonist is portrayed as addicted to the habit of chewing *qat*. The narrator's depiction of Abdou's eyes when he chews *qat* seems to inflate the practice of chewing that type of leaves into addiction to drugs, particularly when he says, "these were things he remembered when he chewed leaves of *qat* and a far-off expression came into his eyes" (Abdulwali 1971:25). In fact, the "expression" that is seen in Abdou's "eyes" is not necessarily a result of chewing *qat*; it is probably due to the memories about traumas that he underwent in Yemen. This is shown in the story when Abdou remembers the backward decades in Yemen as the narrator explains below:

His father was a simple peasant who owned several terraced fields on the mountainside and two-story house he had inherited through a long chain of ancestors. Abdou did not remember his mother. She died when an epidemic struck the village, an epidemic whose name and color he had forgotten. The village had faced many such epidemics (Abdulwali 1971:25).

This description uncovers the miserable situation in Yemen during the political system of the Imam who ruled North Yemen from 1918 until independence in 1962. It was a backward and oppressive regime that made people suffer from poverty, illiteracy and diseases. Recalling people's pains during that period, the narrator explains how Abdou's mother died as well as a large number of people in her village because they could not find a hospital or a doctor when the "epidemic" struck the village. Not only has he reminiscence about his mother's death but also reminiscence about his grandmother who was sick for days before her death as explicated in the quotation below:

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 1971: 25).

In fact, the traumatic experience of bereavement and epidemic, which Abdou encountered in Yemen, has a noticeable effect on him. In the phrase “the sound of her death”, he personalized the “death”. This personification is significant because it reflects the sorrow, bereavement, and trauma which haunted people in Yemen at that time. The word “sound” shows the death as an evil soul who steals the souls of people.

Unlike the previous memories about the events that Abdou experienced, the narrator also shows how Abdou keeps in mind his traditional arranged marriage. As the narrator explicates, “when Abdou Said was fifteen years old, he married. All he knew was that he went to the market and bought two goats, some food and clothes, and returned to the village to sit in the corner of the house” (Abdulwali 1971:25-26). Since the marriage of the majority of the Yemenis then is arranged by the parents, Abdou knows nothing about his fiancée. He just remembers that he went to the market to bring “two goats” and “some food” for the wedding ceremony, “clothes” for him and his concealed wife. In fact, I can claim that Abdou’s remembrance of his homeland seems to represent the author himself. This is because the traumas of the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia discussed in *They Die Strangers* accentuates the Yemeni people’s suffering from traditions, habits, experiences and migration. The protagonist can represent the author’s father. This can be understood through the similarity between them. According to Shelagh Weir (2001:1), “Mohammad Abdulwali was born in Ethiopia in 1940, and spent his childhood there. His mother was Ethiopian and his father, Ahmad, was an émigré from North Yemen.” In fact, his father, Ahmad Abdulwali was a shopkeeper in Ethiopia. He lived in a Christian-African community and environment. Therefore, he sent his son, Mohammad, “to the Yemeni Community School in Adis Ababa” in order to preserve his Islamic, Arabic and Yemeni identity (Weir 2001:1). Just like the main character in Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838) whose experience assimilates Charles Dickens himself, the protagonist of *They Die Strangers*, Abdou, symbolizes for the writer’s father. Consequently, his novel may go beyond the fictional work to reflect his father’s experience. Like his protagonist in the story, Mohammad Abdulwali and his father lived in a village in North Yemen during the decades of the backward ruling of the Imam and traveled to Ethiopia to escape from the political oppression and poverty. This reinforces what was discussed earlier by Maniam (2001:263) who confirms that literature cannot be separated from the reality.

Though the Yemeni migrants recall, as portrayed in *They Die Strangers*, traumatic experiences in their ancestral land, they still yearn for homecoming. This feeling becomes an obstacle that forbids them to merge themselves with the Ethiopian society. It also leads them to feel rootless and homeless. This can obviously be noticed when the secretary argues with his boss, Hajji Abdul-Latif about Abdou’s illegal son. As mentioned earlier, the son’s Ethiopian mother died and a friend of her tells Sayyid Amin, a Yemeni pious sheikh in the city, that Abdou is the son’s real father. As a result, Sayyid Amin inquires Hajji Abdul-Latif to force Abdou to recognize the son. Although the boy looks like him, Abdou refuses to confess that the son is his. This refusal makes Hajji Abdul-Latif worry about that boy and he explains the matter to his secretary in his office. The narrator in the excerpt below enlightens the reaction of the “secretary”:

The secretary smiled. He himself was of mixed blood, so he harbored 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 weapon, a way of justifying his feelings of alienation. The secretary’s father dreamed of his homeland, of future in Yemen, someday when it was liberated from oppression.
(Abdulwali 1971:56)

The feeling of alienation, loss, unhomeliness and rootlessness, which the boy now experiences, reminds the secretary of his own twinges. The secretary is “of mixed blood” and he knows the sense of living “without a country and a stranger in a strange land”. Like the boy, the secretary’s father is Yemeni and his mother is Ethiopian. His father was dreaming of reverting to Yemen but he died before Yemen is liberated from oppressive system of the Imam. Living in between spaces makes the secretary suffer. On one hand, he lives as a stranger in Ethiopia among different culture, religion, traditions and society. On the other hand, he has never been to Yemen, his homeland. This cultural fragmentation and loss can be seen in the excerpt below:

But he was the stranger; he could not even say he was Yemeni, for he did not know Yemen. He had never seen it. He had heard a great deal about it, but did not know it. If he went there, how would it receive him? Would it spit him out as this land had, even though it was his mother’s homeland? Then who was he? They called him *muwallad*, “half-breed.” Where was his land? Who were his people?
(Abdouwali 1971: 56)

In other words, he neither belongs to Ethiopia, the hostland, nor to Yemen, the homeland. He thinks that he cannot go to live in Yemen because the Yemenis may “spit him out”. They may call him “muwallad”—a word used in the Yemeni dialect to describe a “half-breed” person. This confirms what has been discussed earlier by Taher (2004) that people who were half-cast such as the author, Mohammad Abdulwali, as well as the protagonist of the novel, Abdou, “were racially discriminated” in Yemen as well as in Ethiopia. The secretary’s situation is similar to Abdou’s for he also feels displaced and fragmented from the Ethiopian society. Similarly, though Abdou is a successful man and can accumulate a great amount of money, “everyone called him ‘Camel Jockey,’ a term they used for all the Yemeni immigrants” (Abdulwali 1971:18). The noun phrase “camel jockey” is used for all the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia as revealed in the story. This indicates that the Ethiopians see the Yemeni migrants as the other.

b. Analysis of Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*

Unlike *They Die Strangers*, which is about Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia, *The Joy Luck Club* is about Chinese migrants in the USA. It is mainly about four Chinese women who live with their daughters in the USA. The story takes place when Suyuan Woo establishes the Joy Luck Club in China during the Japanese occupation. The club consists of her and three other women playing mahjong, eating good dinners, and gambling. Suyuan sets up the club as a way of escaping from the tension of suffers which she and her friends endured at that time especially when they were in China. During the Japanese occupation of China, her husband died and she decided to leave her homeland. She left her twin baby daughters under a tree because escaping with children was thorny. On her way, she married Canning Woo and both moved to the USA. She instituted another club there—conveying the same name—with three other Chinese women the same age. The story begins after her death when her three friends, An-mei Hsu, Lindo Jong, and Ying-Ying St. Clair, remember their traumatic experiences in their homeland, China. Each of them has her own memories about China and wants to share her vision with her daughter. The daughters try to understand and appreciate their mothers’ past but they find a wide gap between the style of their lives and their mothers’ style. Jing-mei is not sure that she can replace her dead mother but she tries her best. She joins the Joy Luck Club to meet her mother’s friends. When the old women see her in the club, they remember her mother and their childhood in China and how they came to America. Jing-mei knows from them that her twin sisters, whom her mother had left under a tree in China, were found alive and now they live in China. The story has many traumatic memories. The Chinese women of the Joy Luck Club cannot forget how they suffered in their ancestral land. Nevertheless they are now in America, they still have heartbreaking memories. The trauma of the Japanese occupation of China has an obvious effect on their lives.

The Chinese in *The Joy Luck Club* suffered in their homeland and left it because they were unable to tolerate it anymore. The Chinese traveled to USA to escape from the Japanese occupation that destroyed everything and also to escape from the oppressive traditions in China. Memories about the iniquitous traditions can be seen in the character of Lindo Jong who remembers her childhood in China as quoted below:

But even if I had known I was getting such a bad husband, I have no choice, now or later. That was how backward families in the country were. We were always the last to give up stupid old-fashioned customs. In other cities already, a man could choose his wife, with his parents' permission of course. But we were cut off from this type of new thought. You never heard if ideas were better in another city, only if they were worse (Tan 1990:44-45).

Lindo was forced by her family to marry the neighbor’s spoiled son of her mother, Tyan Yu, when she was at the age of twelve. Her use of the phrases “bad husband”, “backward families” and “stupid old-fashioned customs” indicates that Lindo does not merely recall the past but also scrutinizes it with a special emphasis on the backward traditions that existed in China at that time. On one hand, these traditions resulted in giving Lindo a bad husband since she was not allowed to choose or at least to refuse. This kind of arranged marriage gives an impression that women were extremely oppressed in China. On the other hand, even men were sometimes victims of arranged marriages. This can be induced from her description of other Chinese “cities” in which “a man could choose his wife, with his parents’ permission of course.” This portrayal, which sounds a positive description, changed into sarcasm at the end for she stresses that the parents’ permission is very important.

By the same token, Lindo employs her narration of the traumatic experiences in China to scrutinize the custom of marriage at early age. Being married to Tyan Yu at the age of twelve, she did not know what love meant. This is reflected in the excerpt below when she and her husband entered the bedroom after people had left:

After everyone left, we sat there side by side without words for many minutes, still listening to the laughing outside. When it grew quiet, Tyan-yu said, “this is my bed.

You sleep on the sofa.” He threw a pillow and a thin blanket to me. I was so glad! I waited until he fell asleep and then I got up quietly and went outside, down the stairs and into the dark courtyard (Tan 1990:55).

Since both were approximately juvenile, their behaviors were childish. Despite that fact that it was the first night of their honeymoon, both did not know what to do. As a result, they “sat there side by side” saying nothing and doing nothing as well. This funny manner imperfectly develops when the husband, in a self-indulgent accent, says: “this is my bed. You sleep on the sofa”. In contrast, instead of getting angry, Lindo herself got “so glad”. This reinforces my previous claim that her narration of that experience is consciously or unconsciously intended to criticize the tradition of arranged marriage in China. This argument will also be confirmed when analyzing the scenes of the novel where Lindo lives with her husband as a brother and sister until she is divorced. During these days, Lindo suffers in her husband’s house. While her mother-in-law is greedy for a grandson, Lindo is in trouble because if she tells her mother-in-law that Tyan Yu did not have a sexual relationship with her or even did not sleep with her in bed, the mother-in-law would get angry and may slap her to stop saying something like this. This can happen due to the fact that the Chinese are a patriarchal society and the husband who does not fulfill his wife’s emotional needs will be considered as a shame for his family. Hence, Lindo keeps what she and husband do in the bedroom as a secret and refuses to reveal it to the others. As a result, her mother-in-law thinks that her son performs his wife’s emotional needs very well. This leads the mother-in-law to suspect that Lindo did not get pregnant because she had not allowed Tyan Yu to touch her. Lindo narrates her memoirs about these days when she was treated very aggressively by her husband’s mother: “She forbade me from sewing. She said I must concentrate and think of nothing but having babies. And four times a day, a very nice servant girl would come into my room, apologizing the whole time while making me drink a terrible-tasting medicine” (Tan 1990:58). Having the notion that the Chinese society is patriarchal, Lindo was quite aware that talking about the truth among the family cannot solve the problem. So, she cleverly escapes from her marriage unharmed. She behaves as if she is mad until she is divorced. Just then she migrates to USA, where she gets married to Tin Jong and have two sons and a daughter. Lindo’s experience coincides with what has been discussed earlier about Jing-Mei who narrates her mother’s traumatic experience in China. Her mother, Suyuan, “had come here [to America] in 1949 after losing everything in China: her mother and father, her family home, her first husband, and two daughters, twin baby girls” (Tan 1990:141). Since she was not able to run away with her “twin baby girls”, she put them under a tree on her way, escaping from the Japanese invasion of China.

Just like how Abdou tolerates the Ethiopians in *The Die Stranger*, *The Joy luck club* portrays similar events in which Chinese migrants live displaced, fragmented and homeless in America. Jing-mei narrates her mother’s undergo in USA: “My mother got these magazines from people whose houses she cleaned. And since she cleaned many houses each week, we had a great assortment. She would look through them all, searching for stories about remarkable children” (Tan 1990:143). This shows how her mother, Suyuan, worked hard to clean the houses of the Americans in order to feed herself and her family as well. However, her poverty does not hinder her ambition. She wants her daughter to be one of the famous ladies in the USA. She borrows magazines from the houses, in which she works, to make her daughter read some “stories” about “remarkable children”. She succeeded when her daughter becomes a talented pianist and she—Suyuan—feels so proud of her daughter at the end of the novel.

Despite the traumatic memories that Suyuan has about her homeland and the pain that she feels when she is homeless in USA, she has an incredible ability in merging herself with the American culture and society. She dreams of making her daughter a pianist. She trains her the daughter, although the daughter refuses to obey her instructions. Suyuan becomes a hybrid character who takes some element from the American culture and mixes these elements with her Chinese culture. For instance, her ambition of making her daughter a pianist is derived from the American Culture. Conversely, the aggressive way she teaches her daughter is traditional and is influenced by the Chinese habits of slapping their kids as shown below:

“Why don’t you like me the way I am? I’m not a genius! I can’t play the piano. And even if I could, I wouldn’t go on TV if you paid me a million dollars!” I cried. “My mother slapped me. “Who ask you be genius?” she shouted. “Only ask you be your best. For your sake. You think I want you be genius? Hnnh! What for! Who ask you!”
(Tan 1990: 146)

In the same quotation, hybridity of language is apparent. Since Suyuan is from the first Chinese generation who migrated to the USA, her language is still influenced by her mother tongue. She speaks English very well but the way she speaks it can easily be distinguished from her daughter’s who was born and brought up in the USA. In the excerpt above, Suyuan slaps her daughter when she refuses to play the piano and then she asks: “Who ask you be genius?” In reality her question is comprehensible and understood but the omission of the proposition “to”, which grammatically must be put before “be” in her question, gives an impression that the speaker is not a native American. However, unlike

the protagonist, Abdou in *They Die Strangers*, who does not try to use the Ethiopian language, Suyuan tries her best to utilize English even though her language is slightly different, as can also be seen in the dialogue below:

“No, this is your piano. You only one can play.”
“Well, I probably can’t play anymore,” I said. “It’s been years.”
“You pick up fast,” said my mother, as if she knew this was certain. “You have natural talent. You could been genius if you want to.” (Tan 1990: 154)

Suyuan gives Jing-Mei the piano, using her own expression of English: “You only one can play”. This sentence seems to be humorous. It shows that the speaker imitates the natives but this mimicry is not perfect. In addition to that, her use of the term “could been” clarifies the great difference between the English of the old diasporic generation and the new diasporic generation. Having not studied in American schools unlike her daughter, her grammar is not put into consideration in her talk. In fact, Amy Tan’s interesting description of the language, used by Suyuan, seems to reflect what the author herself experienced or observed among the Chinese migrants in the USA. As discussed earlier, the writer is one of the Chinese who had left their homeland and stayed in the USA.

Above and beyond the hybridity of language discussed in the previous quotations, hybridity of culture is brought to light in the text. The second generation of the migrants adopts the American culture, though they still have some elements of the Chinese traditions. For instance, Waverly Jong astonishes her mother by having her hair cut. This diverges the Chinese culture in which women rarely get their hair cut. Therefore, the mother flows into a rage and expresses her disapproval, as shown below:

I had taken my mother out to lunch at my favorite Chinese restaurant in hopes of putting her in a good mood but it was a disaster. When we met at the Four Directions restaurant, She eyed me with immediate disapproval. “Ai-ya! What’s the matter with your hair?” she said in Chinese. What do you mean, ‘what’s the matter,’” I said. “I had it cut.” Mr. Rory had styled my hair differently this time, an asymmetrical blunt-line fringe that was shorter on the left side. I was fashionable, yet not radically so.
(Tan 1990:182)

From the excerpt above, Waverly is more hybrid than her mother, and she even has an American boyfriend. In other words, she is completely different from her mother who still preserves her Chinese traditions. This widens the cultural gap between the mother and the daughter. The mother wants her daughter to be like her but the daughter prefers to be more American.

5. CONCLUSION

The comparison between the two diasporic texts, which have been chosen from different regions, concludes that the cultural dilemma of the Yemeni and Chinese migrants is similar. The characters in *The Joy Luck Club* and *They Die Strangers* have their own traumatic experiences as reflected in their memories about their ancestral land. And in both novels the characters feel displaced, fragmented, lost, rootless, and homeless in the land of domicile. This similarity is not due to the impact of one work on the other but, as Petar Petrov (2007:13) claims, it exists because of the “social evolution” and the “typological analogies” which the two nations underwent. This coincides with Abddo Abboud’s argument that “the study of literature should not be separated from the study of society. The artistic and intellectual evolutions in literature should not also be taught in isolation from the study of the social evolutions. Literary evolution does not merely occur by internal factors, but also by the interaction of literature with the society” (1999:41, translation into English mine). Since both novels echo social and cultural issues that can be found in any nation, the two novels can be identified as “world literature” for they discuss international issues. In contrast, the two novels diverge in manipulating the cultural dilemma of migrants. In other words, the Chinese migrants in the USA is different from the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia in their hybridity. While the Yemenis dream of homecoming, the Chinese want to forget their homeland and stay abroad forever. They try their best to mingle with the new culture. This is maybe because the Chinese traditions are more oppressive than the Yemeni traditions. In short, the culture, traditions, and folklore of the two countries are obviously observed in these stories but *They Die Strangers* focuses on the migrants’ nostalgia of homecoming while *The Joy Luck Club* centers on their hybridity and forgetting their homeland.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abboud, A. 1999. Al-adab al-muqaran: mushkilat wa afaq [Comparative literature: problems and horizons]. Damascus: Itihad al-Kuttab al-Arab.
- [2] Abdulwali, M. 1971[2001]. *They Die Strangers*. (trans.) Bagader, A. & Akers, D. USA: University of Texas.

- [3] Al-Sururi, M. 2006. *Scattered gusts from They Die Strangers*. (online) <http://www.ywriters.org/index.php?action=showDetails&id=50> (accessed on 7 April 2014).
- [4] Al-Wadhaf, Y & Omar, N. 2007. Identity, nationhood and body politics: pathways into the Yemeni world of *They Die Strangers*. *3L Journal of Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature*, vol.13.
- [5] Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G & Tiffin, H. 2000. *Post-colonial studies: the key concept*. London: Routledge.
- [6] Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G & Tiffin, H. 2002. *The Empire writes back*. London: Routledge.
- [7] Braziel, J. E. & Mannur, A. (ed) 2003. *Theorizing diaspora*. Malden, USA: Blackwell Publishing.
- [8] Cohen, R. 2008. *Global diasporas: an introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- [9] Delucchi, M. 1998. Self and identity among aging immigrants in *The Joy Luck Club*. *Journal of Aging and Identity*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp.59-66.
- [10] Kaplan, C. 1996. *Questions of travel: postmodern discourses of displacement*. Durham N.C.: Duke University Press.
- [11] Loktongbam, N. 2012. Chinese diaspora: a study of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol.2, no.19, pp.56-59.
- [12] Maniam, K. S. 2001. Fiction into facts and facts into fiction: a personal reflection. In Mohammad A. Quayum & Peter C. Wick. 2001. *Malaysian literature in English: a critical reader*. Malaysia: Laser Press, pp. 263-268.
- [13] Manqoush, R. 2014. Comparative Literature: historical and critical study of its schools, approaches and concepts. *Hadhrmout University Journal of Humanities*, vol.11, no.1, pp.303-310.
- [14] Manqoush, R A., Hashim, R. S. & Yusof, N. M. 2014. Islamophobic irony in American fiction: a critical analysis of Lorraine Adams' *Harbor* and John Updike's *Terrorist*. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, vol.4, no.3, pp.73-80.
- [15] Manqoush, R A., Al-Hawtali, A. M. & Al-Sakkaf, A. A. 2014. National identity and sense of belonging of the Yemeni migrants in Ethiopia: a critical analysis of mohammad Abdul-Wali's *They Die Strangers*. *Asian Journal Humanities & Social Studies*, vol.2, no.1, pp.36-42.
- [16] McLeod J. 2000. *Beginning postcolonialism*. UK: Manchester University Press.
- [17] Petrov, P. 2007. Portuguese and Bulgarian literature from a comparative viewpoint. (trans.) De Carvalho, A. R. In Cieszyńska, B. E. *Iberian and Slavonic cultures: contact and comparison*, pp. 11-26. Lisbon: Compares.
- [18] Renan, E. 1990. What is a nation? In Bhabha, H. K. (ed.). 1990. *Nation and narration*. London: Routledge, pp. 8-22.
- [19] Riggs, F. 2000. *Diasporas: some conceptual considerations*. (online) <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~fredr/diacon.htm#dimensions> (accessed on 5 April 2013).
- [20] Rifaat, R. 1966. *The Arab nation* [a lecture conducted at Ein Shams University in Egypt]. (online) <http://alnaserynewspaper.tripod.com/kamal.htm> (accessed on 28 February 2013).
- [21] Safran, W. 1991. *Diasporas in Modern Societies. Myths of Homeland and Return*. *Diaspora: Journal of Transnational Studies*, vol.1, no.1, pp.83-99.
- [22] Taher A. 2004. *The combination of two worlds: a critical reading on They Die Strangers*. (online) <http://www.ywriters.org/index.php?action=showDetails&id=55> (accessed on 8 June 2014).
- [23] Tan, A. 1990. *They Joy Luck Club*. USA: Ivy Books.
- [24] Weir S. 2001. *An introduction to They Die Strangers*. In Abdulwali M. (ed.) 2001. *They Die Strangers*. USA: University of Texas.
- [25] Williams R. 1983. *The Year 2000*. New York: Pantheon.
- [26] Yin, J. 2005. *Constructing the other: a critical reading of The Joy Luck Club*. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, vol.16, pp.149-175.
- [27] Zanzour A. M. 1999. (ed.). *The origins of the national and secular thinking*. Beirut: The Islamic Office.
- [28] Zuraïq G. 1994. *The red book*. Lebanon: Center of the Arabic Unity Studies. (online) <http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/center/rijal-zraiqt.htm> (accessed on 23 January 2012).