SOAS MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

WHY YEMEN MATTERS

A Society in Transition

Edited by Helen Lackner

HELEN LACKNER has been researching the Arabian Peninsula for over forty years and lived in Yemen for close to fifteen. She has worked as a consultant on social aspects of development in over thirty countries and specializes in rural issues, in particular water management and poverty alleviation. Her other publications include *A House Built on Sand: A Political Economy of Saudi Arabia, PDR Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia* and *Yemen into the Twenty First Century: Continuity and Change* (co-editor).

'*Why Yemen Matters* is essential reading for anyone who wants to know where the future of Yemen lies after the toppling of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Leading scholars of Yemen address a wide range of topics from the structure of the Yemeni private sector and the transformation of tribal relations in the war in Sa'ada to the geopolitics of the GCC initiative and the relationship of the youth rebellion to the traditional political parties. The authors shed light on the context of the Yemeni uprising in a way that not only helps us understand the current transitional period but also the outlines of Yemen's future.'

—Charles Schmitz, President of the American Institute of Yemeni Studies

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THIS BOOK AROSE from a conference held at SOAS and organized by the British Yemeni Society (BYS) in association with the London Middle East Institute in January 2013, under the title 'Yemen: Challenges for the Future'. It brought together experts and academics, and was the first academic conference in the UK on Yemen in over 20 years. The idea of the conference came from Noel Brehony, chairman of the BYS, and Thanos Petouris, a member of the BYS Committee, and was convened by them, working closely with an academic and organizing committee from the BYS and SOAS composed of Dr Adel Aulaqi, Dr Noel Brehony, Dr Gabriele von Bruck, Louise Hosking, Helen Lackner, Thanos Petouris and Dr Shelagh Weir. Members of the BYS Committee offered invaluable advice and assistance.

The conference itself was attended by over 300 people from many different countries, demonstrating a much wider interest in Yemen than the organizers had anticipated. Yemeni participation was high. The contributors to the book are among the 40 people who presented papers at the conference. The conference would not have been possible without the active support and the generous sponsorship of our sponsors and in particular the MBI Al Jaber Foundation. The LMEI and the BYS want to thank all sponsors for their unquestioning willingness to allow the Committee, the conference and the book to take place with absolutely no guidance or interference with our independence. They wish to thank H. E. Sheikh Mohamed bin Issa al-Jaber for both his support and his personal participation in the conference. Particular thanks are due to Dr Hassan Hakimian, MBI Al Jaber Director of the London Middle East Institute, to Louise Hosking, administrator of the LMEI, and her staff for their major contributions, and for ensuring that the conference ran smoothly despite the unexpected number of participants. The BYS is grateful to the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust, Menas Associates and to Nexen Inc for supporting the publication of this book.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND ABBREVIATIONS

ARABIC TRANSLITERATION IS ALWAYS problematic. In this book we have taken the following approach: we use one of the commonly used transliterations for the most frequently used words, whether names of places, people or organizations. With respect to people, we use the transliteration individuals use for themselves in the case of living personalities, which may lead to some inconsistencies. For words that only appear in a specific chapter, each author has used her/his transliteration system, in most cases that of the IJMES, but diacriticals have been removed to make reading easier.

ADR	adequate dispute resolution
AFAC	Arab Fund for Arts and Culture
AFESD	Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development
AQAP	al-Qa‘ida in the Arabian Peninsula
BC	basin committee
CACB	Cooperative and Agricultural Credit Bank
CCYRC	Coordinating Council of the Youth Revolution of Change
CSO	Central Statistical Organization
DHS	District Healthcare System
DPW	Dubai Ports World

FDI	foreign direct investment
FLOSY	Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen
FPFD	Future Partners for Development
GALSUP	General Authority for Land, Survey and Urban Planning
GAREWS	General Authority for Rural Electricity and Water Supply
GARWS	General Authority for Rural Water and Sanitation
GARWSP	General Authority for Rural Water Supply Projects
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	gross domestic product
GHS	Government Healthcare System
GNI	gross national income
GPC	General People's Congress
GSCP	Ground and Soil Conservation Project
HWC	High Water Council
ICRG	International Country Risk Guide
IDP	internally displaced person
IIP	Irrigation Improvement Project
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration

IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
JMP	Joint Meeting Parties
MAI	Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation
MAWR	Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MIT	Ministry of Industry and Trade
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MSE	micro and small enterprises
MSMES	micro, small and medium enterprises
MWE	Ministry of Water and Environment
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDC	National Defence Council
NLF	National Liberation Front
NLP	National Land Policy
NWRA	National Water Resources Authority
NWSSIP	National Water Sector Strategy and Investment Program
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFID	OPEC Fund for International Development
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen

PHCS	Primary Public Healthcare Service
PPP	purchasing power parity
PSIA	Poverty and Social Impact Analysis of Yemen's Water Sector Reform Program
PRSY	People's Republic of South Yemen
RPF	Resettlement Policy Framework
ROY	Republic of Yemen
SEDF	Small Enterprise Development Fund
SFD	Social Fund for Development
SME	small and medium enterprises
SMEPS	Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Services
TPAC	third-party arbitration centres
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference for Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WRAY	Water Resources Assessment Yemen
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YAVA	Yemen Armed Violence Assessment

YHRP	Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN YEMEN SINCE 1839

1839 Britain occupies Aden.

1869 Opening of the Suez Canal.

1872 Ottomans occupy Sana‘a, having ruled parts of the area at various points in the past.

1905 Border established between British Protectorates and Ottoman controlled area.

1918 Imamate re-established in Sana‘a after Ottoman defeat in World War I.

1934 Britain and Imamate agree on border. War between Saudis and Imamate, won by Saudis.

1948 Assassination of Imam Yahia. After short ‘liberal’ interlude, Imam Ahmed takes over and his troops sack Sana‘a.

1952 Egypt: overthrow of king; Gamal Abdel Nasser becomes leader.

1956 Egypt: Suez Canal nationalized, followed by invasion by Britain, Israel and France. Yemeni Imamate joins United Arab States, with Egypt and Syria.

1959 Establishment of the Federation of Emirates of the South, bringing together most of the Eastern and Western Aden Protectorates under British domination.

1962 25 September: Aden joins the Federation that becomes the Federation of South Arabia.

26 September: ten days after Imam Ahmed's death, Zaydi imamate overthrown; Yemen Arab Republic established, soon supported by Nasser's Egypt.

1962–70 Civil war in YAR; republicans defeat pro-Imamate royalists.

1963 Foundation of the National Liberation Front, and beginning of armed struggle against Britain on 14 October.

1967 June war between Arabs and Israel: closure of Suez Canal.

Britain leaves Aden and the Federation of South Arabia; handover of power to the NLF, who establish the People's Republic of South Yemen. Royalist siege of Sana'a fails to oust Republicans.

1969 22 June Movement in Aden, the left wing of the NLF, takes power.

1970s Mass out-migration of Yemenis for work in Saudi Arabia.

1970 PRSY becomes the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen.

YAR: end of civil war, government formed including many royalists.

1972 First border war between YAR and PDRY, followed by Unity agreement.

1974 YAR: Abdul Rahman al-Iryani overthrown as president of

YAR in military coup led by Ibrahim al-Hamdi.

Ethiopia: Emperor Haile Selassie overthrown, Mengistu

Haile Mariam takes control. Yemenis start returning to YAR.

1977 YAR: October, al-Hamdi assassinated in Sana'a.

1978 YAR: June, al-Ghashmi assassinated; July, Ali Abdullah Saleh becomes president.

PDRY: June, Salmeen is overthrown and executed; some of Salmeen's associates take refuge in YAR. YSP established in October. Abdul Fattah Isma'il becomes its secretary general and, in December, president, after new constitution approved by referendum.

1979 Second PDRY–YAR war, followed by unity agreement.

1980s Yemeni jihadists fight Russian occupation in Afghanistan.

1980 PDRY: Ali Nasir Mohammed becomes president and secretary general of YSP, retaining his post as prime minister.

Abdul Fattah Isma'il goes into exile.

1982 YAR: establishment of General People's Congress.

1984 YAR: commercial quantities of oil discovered near Mareb.

1985 PDRY: Abdul Fattah Isma'il returns from exile; Haydar al-Attas becomes prime minister.

1986 PDRY: 13 January 'events' lead to short civil war and exile of Ali Nasir Mohammed to YAR.

1989 Fall of Berlin Wall.

1990s Growth of Zaydi revival movement in governorate of Sa'ada partly in reaction to aggressive Salafism/Wahhabism.

1990 Unification of YAR and PDRY to create Republic of Yemen;

Ali Abdullah Saleh established as president and Ali Salm al-Beedh as vice president.

Iraq invades Kuwait; ROY votes against use of force at UNSC; 800,000 Yemenis expelled from Saudi Arabia and other GCC states.

1991 Soviet Union dissolved.

Ethiopia: Mengistu overthrown, Meles Zenawi comes to power.

Somalia: Siyad Barre overthrown; start of civil war.

ROY: commercial quantitites of oil discovered in Hadhramaut.

Formation of Islah.

1993 Parliamentary elections in ROY.

1994 Civil war and declaration of Democratic Republic of Yemen in Aden; 7 July: Saleh and his forces defeat southerners.

Changes to constitution give presidency greater powers.

1995 Regime accepts IMF advice and Structural Adjustment.

Yemen–Eritrea conflict over disputed islands; International Court decides in Yemen's favour in 1998.

1996 First Five-Year Economic and Development Plan issued, 1996–2000.

1997 Parliamentary elections.

1999 Presidential election: Ali Abdullah Saleh elected president.

2000 Saudi Arabia and ROY agree on Jeddah border treaty.

USS Cole attacked in Aden port; 17 US personnel killed.

2001 First elections to local councils.

Second Five-Year Development Plan, 2001–05.

Ali Abdullah Saleh supports Bush in 'war against terror'.

2002 French super-tanker Limburg attacked in Yemeni waters.

Publication of Poverty-Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), 2003–05.

2003 Western invasion of Iraq.

2004 Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi killed by government forces during first Huthi war.

2005 Second Huthi war.

Fuel price-rise protests – dozens killed.

2006 Formation of Joint Meeting Parties.

2007 Third Huthi war.

Formation of the Southern Military Retirees organization. Southern street demonstrations begin.

2008 Fourth Huthi war.

2009 Fifth and sixth Huthi wars (operation 'Scorched Earth').

Saudi ground and air forces intervene in support of Yemeni government.

Merger of Saudi and Yemeni al-Qa'ida to form al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

2010 Truce. Huthis control the governorate of Sa'ada.

2011 February: the anti-regime movement develops and expands throughout the country following the downfall of Tunisian and Egyptian rulers.

18 March: over 50 peaceful demonstrators killed in Sana'a by snipers suspected of being regime supporters.

3 June: Saleh seriously wounded, and many of his close allies killed and wounded in bomb explosion at the Presidency's mosque during Friday prayers.

October: UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2014 supporting GCC initiative on transfer of power, need for humanitarian assistance, and concern over activities of al-Qa'ida.

23 November: Ali Abdullah Saleh signs GCC transfer-of-power agreement. December: Government of National Unity formed.

2012 21 February: Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi elected president of Yemen for two-year transitional period. Start of reforms of security and military institutions.

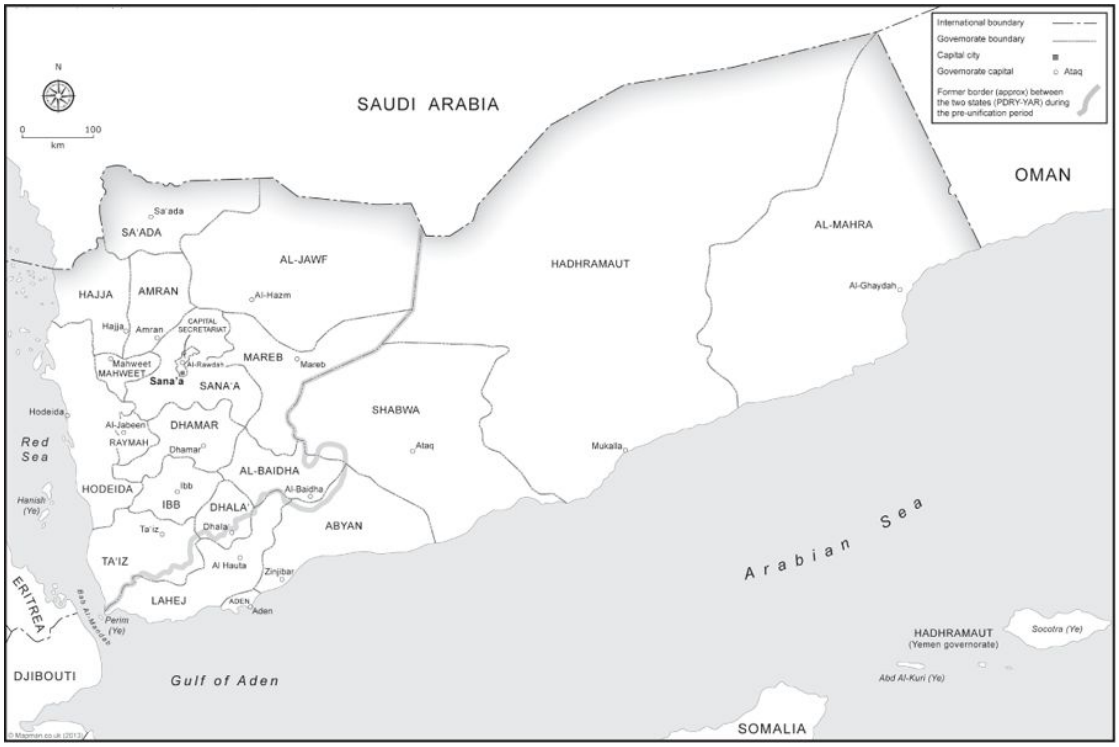
Friends of Yemen pledge US$7.9 billion in economic assistance.

June: UN Security Council adopts Resolution 2051 expressing 'readiness to consider further measures' against those undermining government of national unity. UN establishes Office of Special Adviser on Yemen for 12 months.

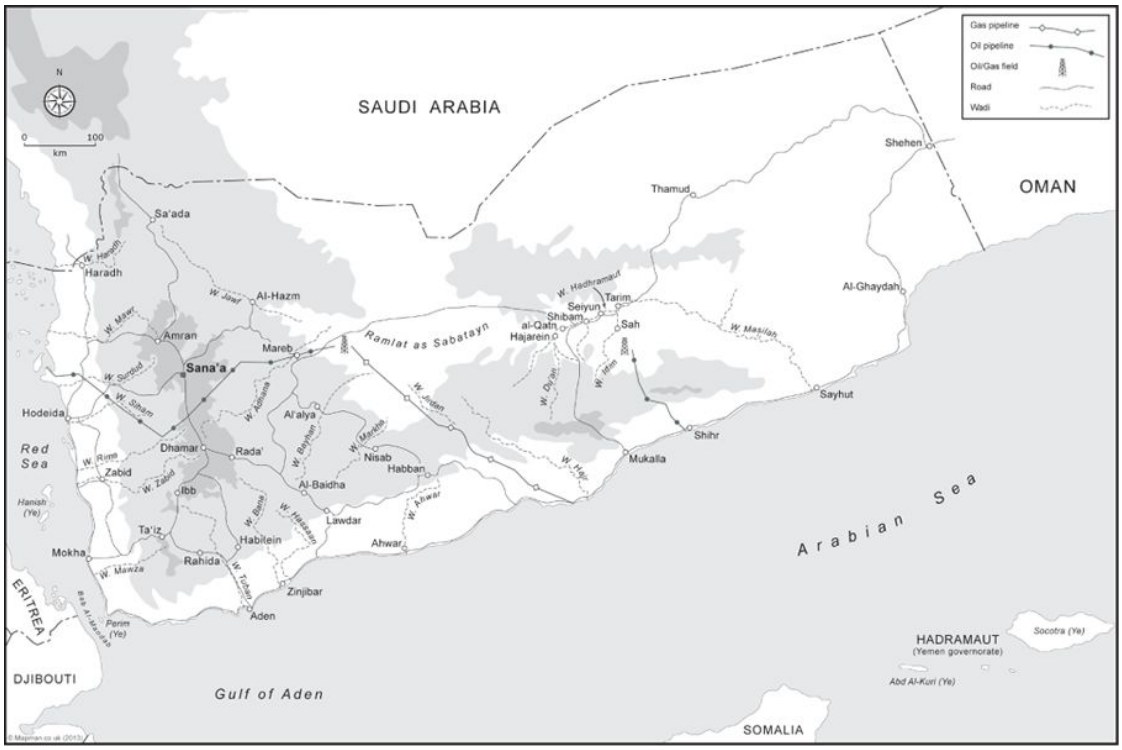
Government of Yemen issues Transitional Program for Stabilization and Development (TPSD)

2013 January: UNSC meets in Sana'a.

Restructuring of military institutions; 18 March: national dialogue begins.



YEMEN: ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANISATION



YEMEN: MAIN GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

INTRODUCTION

WHY YEMEN MATTERS

Helen Lackner

YEMEN SHARES WITH Tunisia, Egypt and Libya the recent ousting of its longstanding ruler as the chief outcome of popular uprisings in 2011. In Yemen's case, moreover, this process was relatively peaceful, and initiated a transition that may yet result in a profound political transformation. If this process succeeds despite the many challenges the country faces, it will stand as a valuable example in a region in the grip of social and political turmoil. The consequences of failure, however, are serious not only for Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula, but also in regional and geopolitical terms, to an extent that is poorly understood by key decision-makers. Yemen's strategic importance, combined with its large and impoverished population and critically limited natural resource base, renders it dangerously vulnerable to both internal upheaval and external interference. Given all of these factors, it is perhaps surprising that so little attention has been focused on Yemen in recent years. This book aims to make a contribution to correcting that neglect.

As in Libya, regime change was supported by foreign intervention, but in this case the intervention was peaceful and contributed to preventing a civil war that might well have led to killings on a Syrian scale. The popular movement that exploded in 2011 encouraged Yemenis to believe in the possibility of significant and fundamental political change. Many hoped that a new governance system would emerge from the movements which would be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the country's mainly youthful population. During the transition period (2012–14) a new balance of political forces developed, increasing the influence and participation of women and youth; but this process did not oust the traditional rival elites that have dominated Yemeni politics in recent decades.

Yemen is unique in many ways: it has the only republican regime in the Arabian Peninsula, with regular elections and some degree of pluralism. It is the poorest country in the region, with very limited natural resources. The last decade has been marked by deteriorating economic conditions alongside greater attention from the outside world – albeit focused chiefly on international jihadism and security issues rather than on the country's social and economic problems. The emergence of new political forces and the activism of ordinary citizens through the popular movements of 2011–12 have raised

many hopes. At the time of writing, the attention of Yemenis is focused on the ability of the National Dialogue Conference to create a post-transition political compact more inclusive and responsive to the population's aspirations and needs.

In coming years, Yemenis will have to address many fundamental challenges: social, with the rise of a youthful population with few employment opportunities and limited skills; economic, with high levels of poverty, water scarcity, and low industrial potential; and political, with the issues of southern separatism, sectarianism in the far north, and miscellaneous class and tribal issues everywhere.

This book will help readers understand why Yemen is in its current situation, and provide in-depth analysis to clarify developments that might otherwise appear surprising. The introduction provides an overview of Yemen's basic political, social and economic circumstances, which are pursued in more detail in the chapters that follow.

YEMEN AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Despite its large population and unique culture, outsiders mostly hear of Yemen only during bouts of political upheaval. While, a few decades ago, most Yemenis hoped that international cultural tourism would become the main reason for Yemen's fame, the reality has instead been that Yemen has become known to the world as the ancestral home of Usama bin Laden, and more recently as the training ground for a number of Islamist jihadists who have attempted to operate internationally.

For Yemenis, however, these are not the most important issues. Instead, Yemen's vision of its neighbours is primarily defined by its need, on the one hand, to export its labour and receive remittances and, on the other, to receive budget support and development aid. Saudi Arabia – Yemen's closest neighbour, whose influence predominates locally – is best known internationally for its oil exports and its autocratic regime, as well as for being home to Islam's holiest places. Saudi Arabia and Yemen share thousands of kilometres of border and similar-sized populations which, in addition to the republican nature of Yemen's regime, contribute to Saudi Arabia's perception of Yemen as a strategic threat. Saudi policy could be said to have been one of containment, at least until the 2000 signing of a border agreement between the two states. This

was achieved largely by supporting various mutually opposed political factions in the country, and by inhibiting its already weak government's ability to exert full and effective control over the country. Like the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Saudi Arabia is concerned about potential Yemeni influence on its own nationals, the example of Yemeni democracy – for all its flaws – attracting particular suspicion from the GCC states. While Saudis have ambiguous feelings about Yemenis, the reverse is also true: Yemenis want to work in the kingdom, earning money to send remittances home, but they also strongly resent being treated by Saudis like a 'servant' class. With a *fin de règne* atmosphere prevailing in Saudi Arabia, there is a heightened sense of expectation in Yemen about the changes that might come about in Saudi Arabia's policies towards Yemen under a new generation of leaders – or even a different regime.

Yemen's relations with the other Gulf States are also ambiguous, and have varied over time. Kuwait was a strong supporter of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, 1967–90) and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR, 1962–90), but has effectively not forgiven the unified Republic of Yemen (ROY, established in 1990) for its refusal to support the UN resolution calling for the use of force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1990. Qatar has played an increasing role in Yemen in the past decade, starting with efforts at mediation in the Huthi wars and continuing with some economic – and more recently political – support for the transitional regime. The involvement of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is mainly financial, and focused on allowing a few highly skilled Yemenis into the UAE for work, while avoiding mass in-migration of Yemeni workers. Oman, which had a tense relationship with the PDRY in the early years, saw it improve significantly in the 1980s, though the border between the two countries was only finally agreed in 1992 after Yemeni unification. Oman has provided considerable economic support to al-Mahra governorate on its border. Although it offers asylum to Yemeni political exiles, the Omani government has discouraged them from being politically active.

Beyond the Peninsula, the main states that play an important role are the United States and the major European powers – whose main concerns, unfortunately, are not the future of the Yemeni people, or helping them out of poverty, but rather the perceived threat posed by Yemen as a base for al-Qa'ida. US policy in the last decade has largely been defined by its counter-terrorism objectives. This goes some way towards explaining the steadfastness of its support for Ali

Abdullah Saleh who, astonishingly, was able to persuade the US of his anti-terrorist bona fides despite an absence of any serious evidence of his commitment to the project, which seemed to re-emerge faintly only when military and financial support were at stake.

While Russia and China each have growing interests of their own in Yemen, the former wants to restore its international influence, and has provided military support for all regimes over the past half-century, at the very least through sales of weapons. China earlier mainly provided aid, but is now equally involved in seeking natural resources and contracts.

Other neighbours, across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, also play important roles. Both Ethiopia and Somalia have been important destinations and sources of migration in the past, as in the present. Relations with Eritrea have varied, largely due to the erratic nature of the current Eritrean regime, which finally returned contested islands to Yemen after the International Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled in its favour in 1998. Yemeni migrants and their descendants provide the main form of contact – mostly through trade – with a variety of East African states.

HISTORY AND POLITICS

A single state within the borders of what is now the Republic of Yemen had never existed before 1990. In past centuries, a variety of states existed covering different parts of the country. After 1872 the territory was divided between what was then Ottoman-dominated Yemen and the British Protectorates. In 1934, the border separating them was finally agreed between the Imamate, which ruled the northern part of the country after Ottoman withdrawal resulting from the end of the World War I, and the British, who controlled the Protectorates in the southern part. Throughout its existence, the Imamate challenged British dominance of the tribal areas in the Western Aden Protectorates. Indeed, the very concept of a 'border' is itself problematic. In the terms understood by the area's Western colonizers, it is defined as a fixed line separating two geographical areas; but for Yemenis a border may separate areas under the control of specific tribes or other institutions, which shift with the changing balance of forces. The country's northern border remained disputed until 2000, when a final agreement was reached between the ROY and Saudi Arabia providing permanent recognition, with some

significant modifications, of the borders temporarily agreed after the 1934 war between the nascent Saudi Arabia and the Imamate.

POPULAR MOVEMENTS

A variety of popular movements have contemporary resonance as precursors of the 2011 uprisings, and clearly demonstrate that Yemenis throughout the country have maintained a long tradition of resistance to autocratic rule. In the 1940s, the Free Yemeni movement in the Mutawakkilite Kingdom was an underground modernizing group, incorporating members of the religious and commercial elites, which sought to introduce 'constitutional monarchy'. When discovered, its members were variously beheaded or sent for indefinite periods of imprisonment in the Hajjah fortress. In the 1940s survivors took refuge in Aden, where they established newspapers and became involved with migrant compatriots working in the port and elsewhere. They sought both a base for proselytizing their views and opportunities to further their political education, in an environment where literature was more readily available.

While it would be difficult to call the 1962 overthrow of the Imam a popular uprising, it certainly had popular support and came as the culmination of a number of earlier attempts at regime change intending to make it more democratic. The 1948 assassination of Imam Yahia (who had ruled since the departure of the Ottomans in 1918) had been followed by a brief period of 'modern' government, focused on expanding education and health services, and increasing international integration through trade and the construction of basic communications infrastructures. This brief 'Yemeni spring' lasted a few weeks, until Ahmed Yahia Hamid al-Din, the new Imam, sent his troops to ransack Sana'a and take revenge for the murder of his father, and then proceeded to restore a highly personalized and autocratic regime.

Within the areas of the British protectorates, popular opposition movements began in the early part of the twentieth century. In Hadhramaut the Irshadi movement saw the emergence of the idea that power should be based on merit rather than on birthright – in other words, it opposed the automatic political empowerment of the *sada* (who claim descent from the Prophet). In Aden itself a number of early organizations were established, including the Arab Literary Club in 1925 and the Reform Club in 1930. Explicitly political movements developed in Aden in the 1950s, mostly through trade

union-related activities, and later through the influence of the Arab nationalist movements. The latter were generally of Nasserist persuasion – their influence disseminated mainly through the Voice of the Arabs radio station. The Movement of Arab Nationalists emerged as a radical faction from this process, giving birth to the National Liberation Front, which was in turn the main ancestor of the Yemeni Socialist Party.

THE YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC

After the establishment of the Yemen Arab Republic in 1962, and of the People's Republic of South Yemen in 1967, the two states maintained an ambiguous relationship, and Yemeni unity remained a potent political slogan on both sides of the border – the only one, in fact, with deep and widespread popular resonance. In the context of the revival of a separatist movement in the early 2010s, it is worth recalling that unity was greeted with universal enthusiasm throughout the country, though perhaps due to the over-optimism of all concerned, each hoping that his or her dream of a united Yemen would prevail.

The Yemen Arab Republic started with an eight-year civil war between republicans and supporters of Imam Badr, whose palace was attacked and largely destroyed on 26 September 1962, ten days after he had become Imam. He escaped and took refuge in the mountains, where his supporters regrouped. It is debatable whether the term 'revolution' is appropriate for the events of 26 September 1962 in Sana'a, when Colonel Abdullah Sallal took power; the event itself took the form of a sudden military attack planned and implemented by a small clique of military officers against the recently appointed Imam, rather than a mass popular uprising. While the Republicans rapidly called for, and obtained, military and administrative help from Nasser's Egypt, the 'royalists' were given financial and political support by Saudi Arabia, and (secret) military support and advice from Britain and others. This ensured that the civil war within Yemen would have an international dimension as a proxy war between, on the one hand, Islamist Saudi Arabia in alliance with Britain and the US and, on the other, Arab Nationalism in the form of Nasserism.

After the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab–Israeli war, Nasser was greatly weakened and had to abandon his support for the Yemeni republicans. President Abdul Rahman al-Iryani (1967–74) oversaw a

brief interlude of civilian rule. He was a member of one of the few elite families that has played a continuous part in the administration of the country for several decades. Despite the withdrawal of Egyptian troops and the siege of Sana'a in 1967, the royalists were unable to win, and by 1970 an agreement was reached that maintained the republican regime while including in the government many of the elite supporters of the Imam, though no members of his family.

In 1974, al-Iryani was overthrown by Ibrahim Mohammed al-Hamdi, a colonel, who remains very popular to this day, though he ruled the country for only three years, being assassinated himself in 1977. He was briefly succeeded by Ahmed Hussain al-Ghashmi, who lasted barely eight months, before being assassinated in turn by an envoy from Aden. Although it was not obvious at the time, this marked the end of the period of instability, as another colonel – Ali Abdullah Saleh – took power in July 1978. Saleh, of course, remained in charge for thirty-three years, making him the longest-lasting ruler anywhere in Yemen since the end of the Ottoman period.

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

Faced with the emergence of nationalism in the 1950s and the need to change its approach, Britain tried to establish a Federation of South Arabia. This was an uphill struggle, thanks to the strong rivalries and socioeconomic disparities between, on the one hand, the colony of Aden, populated mostly by a migrant population from the hinterland, India and Somalia, and, on the other, the Protectorates – particularly the Western protectorates, where tribalism and tribal rule had been encouraged and fossilized through a relationship of mutual dependency between the statelets' rulers and Britain. The Eastern Protectorates had fewer sultanates, including the Qu'ayti and Kathiri, which were closer to states than the tiny entities elsewhere. The failure of this attempt to create a federation provides an interesting contrast with the situation in what were then the Trucial States of Oman, where Britain successfully established the United Arab Emirates prior to its departure in 1971, barely a decade later.

Armed struggle against the British began in 1963, and was initially coordinated by two separate groups that failed to overcome their differences. The Front for the Liberation of Occupied South

Yemen (FLOSY), led by Abdullah al-Asnaj, was the descendant of the Aden trades union movement, and was closely allied with Nasserist Arab nationalism and socialism. The National Liberation Front (NLF) was led by mostly obscure young rural people, and was ideologically close to the left of the Movement of Arab Nationalists. While this struggle might have lasted a long time, Britain's announcement in 1964 that it would withdraw its forces and bases east of Suez gave a strong boost to supporters of independence, and certainly also contributed to the failure of the Federation of South Arabia. The NLF's military strength in rural areas, its defeat of FLOSY in battles in Aden, and the support of the South Arabian army together persuaded the British to hand over power to the NLF in last-minute negotiations in November 1967 that abandoned the Federation of South Arabia to its fate.

Within two years of independence, the left wing of the NLF ousted its rivals and set up the only socialist state in the Arab world, renaming the country the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). This regime, which lasted for just under twenty-three years, was supported by the Soviet Union and China, and had difficult relations with its neighbours in the Arabian Peninsula. Its internal politics were characterized by full employment, basic food and economic security thanks to an egalitarian distribution of the state's limited resources, the development of medical services throughout the country, and a remarkable expansion of education. These developments were accompanied by progressive social policies encouraging women's education and employment, as well as attempts to reduce tribalism and replace it with allegiance to a nationalist ideology. On the negative side of the balance, the regime was oppressive towards any political opposition, and remained internally divided throughout its existence, with major flare-ups of factional infighting in 1969, 1978 and 1986.

THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN

In 1990 the YAR and PDRY merged into the Republic of Yemen following an agreement between their respective leaders, Ali Salim al-Beedh and Ali Abdullah Saleh. The details of the negotiations that led to the complete merger are still the subject of tense debate throughout Yemen, but particularly among southerners. A transition period due to last two years was extended to 1993, when elections took place confirming the dominance of the northern parties and

governance system over the whole country. The Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) was supported by only about 20 per cent of those voting – roughly equivalent to the population of the former PDRY, though more widely distributed. The YSP lost influence in favour of the conservative Islah, which joined in coalition with the dominant General People's Congress (GPC), the organization set up by Ali Abdullah Saleh to bring his supporters together, which hosted members with a variety of political views as well as social and regional backgrounds.

Although relations between the YSP and the GPC ruling clique had rapidly deteriorated after unification, with a series of assassinations of YSP leaders in Sana'a beginning in 1991, the situation worsened dramatically after the elections, reaching breaking point with the short civil war of 1994. This was decisively won by supporters of Ali Abdullah Saleh, with the assistance of many southerners – who included, on the one hand, Islamist guerrillas who had returned from Afghanistan and, on the other, forces that had taken refuge in the north after earlier internal political struggles within the PDRY. The breach between supporters of the two sides in the short civil war of 1986 is still relevant in the Hiraak separatist movement of the 2010s, with old enemies agreeing in their support for separatism if nothing else.

The period from 1994 to 2010 was characterized by a synergy of negative factors: a narrowing of political freedoms, worsening poverty, reduced state income and economic stagnation. In the realm of politics, there was a gradual restriction of the pluralism that characterized Yemen as the most democratic regime in the Peninsula in the early 1990s. Political control was increasingly monopolized by a small group surrounding President Ali Abdullah Saleh, composed of relatives and close associates mostly from Sanhan, his home area. This has been accompanied by restrictions on the freedom of public media through the prosecution and persecution of journalists.

Economically, there was a general deterioration, reflected in two main ways. On the one hand, the ruling clique intensified its appropriation of any wealth available; on the other, living conditions for the majority of the population worsened. The inability of the regime to address the country's fundamental economic problems and improve people's living conditions has resulted in increasing frustration, disaffection and dissatisfaction with the regime. While deterioration was moderated in the earlier years through a patronage system that distributed some oil income to favoured local leaders,

the other management mechanism operated through toleration of a level of insecurity and instability that distracted popular attention away from economic problems. This also helped the regime to obtain external financial and military support, thanks to its participation in the US-led 'war on terror'.

Dissatisfaction emerged in four main ways. First, starting in 2004, the deteriorating relationship between the regime and the Zaydi Shi'i elite in Sa'ada governorate erupted in a series of six wars, with the rebels led by the Huthi family, that ended in early 2010 with a ceasefire which still held in mid-2013. They were the culmination of a set of complex interrelated struggles – between Shi'i Zaydi revivalists and, on the Sunni side, Salafi fundamentalists, who had established a community and schools in Dammaj; an official struggle between the regime and the Huthis; which in turn obscured a struggle taking place within the regime against Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, officially the head of the military forces sent against the Huthis, who was actively deprived of the support he needed to win the war, thus revealing that one of the objectives of this war was to weaken, if not eliminate him; and finally a regional struggle between Saudi Sunni and Iranian Shi'i fundamentalisms; this final element is increasing in significance in 2013.

Second, from 1994 onwards, the southern question emerged as the second major issue after 1994, remaining a simmering volcano since then. Faced with widespread frustration and a perception of oppression throughout the former PDRY, rather than take action to alleviate this situation, the regime acted to worsen it. Many former military and security officers from the south were forcibly 'retired' after 1994, their pensions paid irregularly or not at all. Land-grabs by powerful northerners (often linked to various military or security institutions) as well as the appointment of northerners to senior political and security positions in Aden and elsewhere in the South did nothing to improve the situation. Internal migrants from the most populated and educated governorates of Ibb and Ta'iz sought and found employment in all sectors. Over the years, resentment increased as no solutions were found and people's living conditions continued to deteriorate. Aden, officially the 'economic capital' of the country, was neglected; its Free Trade Zone received little investment and failed to take off. Management of the port, which many southerners still see as a panacea for the country's economic problems, was contracted out to Dubai Ports World (DPW) under conditions perceived to serve the international strategy of DPW rather than that of Yemen, so it stagnated. Continued rapid population

increase, drought and floods in rural areas, and deterioration in the quality of education and health services all contributed to worsening living conditions and deepening impoverishment for the majority of the population, with only a small minority (mainly composed of northerners) benefiting from the new opportunities.

In 2007 a movement of 'retired' military officers and men emerged in Lahej and Dhala' governorates, the home areas of most PDRY military. Following the model initiated in 1996 in Hadhramaut, this movement decided to be 'peaceful', and its demands were originally straightforward and economic: reinstatement in their positions or full payment of their pensions at current rates. As if it did not have enough problems with the Huthi rebellion in the far north, Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime chose to answer their demonstrations with force rather than conciliation. It is unclear whether this was a result of incompetence or deliberate policy.

Confrontations escalated over the following two years, spreading to Aden and Mukalla, where the movement became a more widespread 'antinorth' movement, associating all northerners with the hated regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, and refusing to recognize the equally difficult living conditions of ordinary northerners. This development included physical attacks on workers and other northern immigrants to the south. By the end of 2010, Aden and parts of the south were effectively 'low-level war zones', where the state's army was retrenched behind sandbags in fortified positions fearing attack from local insurgents, and where flags of the former PDRY flew openly and were painted all over the place. In Aden, demonstrations were frequent and usually greeted with the force of guns. As a result the number of deaths increased, and each one was the occasion for further demonstrations and bloodshed. Alienation of the population was widespread, though it is notable that these movements were strongest in Aden, Lahej and Dhala'.

Third, in Abyan and Shabwa, armed fundamentalists of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and insurgents from its local franchise Ansar al-Shari'a overshadowed the southern movement in 2011–12, taking advantage of the withdrawal of army units linked to the power struggle in Sana'a. Many Ansar fighters appear to be linked to militias who at one time were used by the state to fight Marxists in the south and the Huthis in the north. AQAP itself was able to re-form in the mid 2000s, after being seriously damaged by the regime in the wake of 9/11. Its revival lent support to accusations that the regime used the so-called terrorist threat to extract support from the West. Fourth, elsewhere in the southern governorates, the

situation was less clear: in Hadhramaut and al-Mahra, while dissatisfaction with the Sana'a regime was high, it did not at that time necessarily translate into secessionist ambitions.

Elsewhere in Yemen, constant insecurity was caused by both small and large incidents of community-level, inter-tribal conflict, as well as conflict between tribes and state forces. These incidents might have reflected struggles over water or land, continuations of historic feuds, or other issues. They flourished largely because the regime did nothing to enforce state power through modern judicial or policing methods, and sometimes encouraged them.

THE 2011 UPRISINGS AND THE TRANSITIONAL REGIME

The worsening frustration and anger prevailing throughout the country culminated in the uprisings of 2011. While many had considered the regime to be in terminal decline, no one knew what would trigger change. In the end it was the example of successful popular movements and the overthrow of dictatorships elsewhere in the Arab world that encouraged the transformation of various isolated movements into a mass popular uprising in early 2011. The peaceful political movement in Yemen was more widespread and long-lasting than anywhere else in the region, and involved occupations of public spaces and political encampments – the so-called 'change squares' that emerged in cities and towns around the country in response to Saleh's appropriation of Liberation Square (Midan al-Tahrir) in Sana'a – throughout 2011 and beyond.

As late as mid 2013, there were still some tents and other temporary structures in Sana'a, and the fashion of setting up protest sites had become pervasive, often outside public institutions that had disaffected staff or clients, or outside the homes of disliked senior officials; graduate policemen, for example, set up tents outside the police academy demanding promotion to officer status, as should occur after obtaining a university degree. Others demanded back pay or salary increases, or the dismissal of incompetent and/or corrupt managers.

In the face of the steadfastness of the demonstrators, and with a split in the regime between forces loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh and those supporting the revolutionary movement, it soon became clear that the Saleh regime was no longer sustainable. This was particularly apparent once the president had to face an alliance of his

former military right-hand man Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar with his main political rivals – the Islah party, led by the main Hashid tribal leaders, sons of the late Abdullah Hussain al-Ahmar, and their broad opposition alliance, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). The GCC states, the USA, the UN, European states and other major world powers realized that Saleh was no longer their best ally in addressing the problem of Islamist insurgency, and they backed what became known as the GCC Initiative, which was designed to bring about a peaceful transition to a new regime and the departure from power of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Having successfully resisted for a number of months, but weakened by defections as well as seriously wounded by an explosion in the presidential palace's mosque on 3 June 2011, Saleh finally signed the agreement on 23 November 2011 in Riyadh, in the presence of numerous Yemeni and foreign personalities, including the UN secretary general's special envoy, Jamal Benomar.

Following on the GCC agreement, a Government of National Unity was formed including equal numbers of representatives from the GPC and the JMP, as well as representatives of youth and women. The transitional regime was intended to last two years from the election of the new president, on 21 February 2012. It had been agreed that there would only be one candidate – Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi – and his election turned out to be far more than the expected formality. High voter participation confirmed the popular desire for change.

Thanks to support from Benomar, the GCC agreement has empowered political forces beyond the two 'traditional' rival groups of the GPC and the JMP. Benomar insisted that the new institutions should give a significant role to the south, the youth who had spearheaded the street movements, and women and minorities. This was most clearly reflected in their representation in the 'Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference' – a major element of the transition process. Women represent 28.5 per cent of the 565 members, civil society 7 per cent, and youth 15 per cent. It is also balanced in favour of the south, with 52 per cent of the originally selected members being southerners – a very high proportion given that the population of the former PDRY constitutes at most 30 per cent of the country's total population today. The dialogue, due to last six months, started in mid March 2013, and involved members chosen through a variety of mechanisms – by parties, civil society organizations, and the president. It has nine subcommittees to address the following areas: state building, good governance, national issues, military and security affairs, the southern issue, the

Sa‘ada issue, development, rights and freedoms, and special entities. Each committee is meant to have members from each of the different categories of representatives.

The third-most-important element of the transition is the reform of the military and security structures. While this appeared to be making little progress in 2012, the early months of 2013 saw not only fundamental changes in personnel, with the transfer of many of the leaders most closely allied with Ali Abdullah Saleh, but also a meaningful change in the structure of the institutions. The importance of reforms to military and security structures cannot be overestimated in a country which, regardless of appearances, has been largely ruled by a military government for the past two decades or more.

The GCC Initiative has prevented the outbreak of a civil war, which was a serious risk in 2011. It is to be hoped that the transition will lead Yemen towards a new governance structure that will enable its citizenry to participate more effectively in the country’s politics and reduce the power of formerly entrenched elites. The new governance institutions must systematically give a voice to ordinary men and women, including young adults. The regime that emerges from this transition process must give priority to addressing the country’s basic social and economic development needs, focusing on water, education, health and employment. Failure to do so will ensure continuing instability and widespread popular frustration, regardless of the quality of the formal political system established. Responding to these enormous challenges will require serious commitment from all Yemenis, as well as support from the international community.

THE SOCIOECONOMICS OF POVERTY

Yemen has a population of about twenty-five million people in 2013, over 50 per cent of whom are under eighteen, and 70 per cent under twenty-five, the median age being 17.8. The economically active (those between fifteen and sixty-four) form just 54 per cent of the population, while only 3 per cent of the population are over sixty-five. Population growth is still estimated at close to 3 per cent per annum. Although cities and towns are expanding rapidly through both natural growth and rural-to-urban migration, nearly 70 per cent of Yemenis still live in rural areas.

The shift in rural income sources is a prime indicator of a fundamental social and economic transformation that is expected to develop further in coming decades. The role of rural youth in the 2011 'change squares' movement and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism are other manifestations of a shift in the perspectives and expectations of youth. The balance of power within communities and households is also undergoing change, as the authority of older men is undermined by their financial dependence on the younger generations, regardless of the ongoing low levels of income and, in many cases, worsening poverty. Young people experience the weight of financial responsibility for extended households without having adequate means to fulfil it.

Poverty has become a defining characteristic of Yemen, both urban and rural. While in the distant past 'Arabia Felix' was an apt description of the living conditions of its people, particularly by comparison with the poverty prevailing in the rest of the Peninsula, the situation is now reversed. Yemen is nowadays without doubt the poorest country in the Arabian Peninsula – an island of poverty in a region characterized by the excesses of conspicuous consumption and displays of public and private extravagance. This was not always the case. In the 1960s Aden was the most modern city in the region, surpassing by far what were then the mere villages of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and probably competing with Riyadh and Jeddah, while the northern part of Yemen was able to sustain its population of a few million thanks to the monsoon rain-fed cultivation of basic staple crops of sorghum, millet and wheat. The last fifty years have seen a complete transformation of the whole Peninsula and of the living standards of its population. While nationals of the GCC states have reached the highest per capita incomes in the world, Yemenis have joined the poorest. In 2011, Yemen's per capita gross national income (GNI) was US$2,170 while, in 2010, that of Qatar was a staggering US$86,440, the UAE's was US$47,890, and that of Oman – the next-'poorest' country in the region, with limited oil exports – stood at US$25,720.

Falling low in the rankings of the UN's Human Development indicators (160 out of 186 in 2012), poverty estimates for Yemen vary from one year to another in their details and statistical estimates. But two constant factors are that about half the population live in poverty, and that the overwhelming majority of this half – about 80 per cent – are rural residents. Food insecurity and malnutrition indicators have worsened dramatically in recent years, particularly after the 2011 uprisings and associated price rises, which

combined with lower incomes due to higher unemployment. In 2013, Yemen ranked as the eleventh most food-insecure country in the world, with one-third of the population suffering acute hunger. Half of Yemen's children suffer from chronic malnutrition, and 10 per cent of them die before their fifth birthday; Yemen's child malnutrition rate is currently the second worst in the world, after Afghanistan.

The early years of the current decade have also been marked by a dramatic deterioration in living conditions for the majority of Yemenis. The country's poverty is both the cause and consequence of a number of factors acting in synergy: political crises, a very limited natural resource base (in particular, water scarcity), few raw materials suitable for transformation locally, ongoing drought, and worsening extreme climate conditions. These objective conditions are compounded by very low educational standards at all levels, alongside extremely high illiteracy rates, with 39 per cent of the population over fifteen being illiterate (including 77 per cent of women), inadequate infrastructure, and very high unemployment and underemployment rates. On top of all this, remittances are not increasing but are significantly higher than the 'aid' the country receives, while the latter is often misallocated and mismanaged through ill-conceived programmes, corruption, and the absence of a development strategy that is effectively focused on alleviating poverty.

THE NATURAL RESOURCE BASE

In recent years, most Yemenis have dreamed of their country becoming an oil *rentier* economy. In the 1970s thousands of Yemenis from both Yemeni states worked in the oil-exporting states of the Gulf, and saw these countries gaining modern infrastructures and their citizens rapidly achieving living standards beyond anyone's wildest dreams without having to exert much effort. Yemenis refuse to acknowledge the fundamental difference between sharing among approximately twenty-five million citizens the benefits of nine million barrels of oil per day (Saudi Arabia) and those of 200,000 barrels per day (Yemen). Yemen's oil production peaked at about 450,000 barrels per day in the early 2000s and, while then and now it constituted the state's main income, little of the resulting wealth percolated through to the population as a whole, with the majority being invested in security and military hardware,

patronage payments to maintain political control, and personal consumption by the ruling clique. There was a fundamental shift of income in the period from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s, when Yemen had a poor state and relatively wealthy population, as worker remittances went directly to households, and the period from the late 1980s onwards, when most of the oil income went to the state and ruling group, while remittance income to households dropped considerably.

With the reduction in oil production, and the expectation of oil running out by the end of the current decade, hopes were transferred to the extraction and export of gas. But, again, such hopes are over-optimistic, with the overall income from gas estimated at US$25 billion over the next twenty years, with reserves estimated at 9.15 trillion cubic feet and production at 6.7 million metric tons per year. State income in the coming decades is therefore expected to stay significantly below that of oil at its peak of production. Other mineral resources are frequently mentioned, but no significant development has taken place.

Water is the main issue for Yemen and Yemenis. Its renewable sources are estimated to supply 2.1 billion cubic metres per year, while current annual extraction is estimated at 3.5 billion cubic metres. In other words, Yemen is already mining its water at an unsustainable rate. It has annual renewable water resources of about 90 cubic metres per capita, whereas the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1,700 cubic metres is necessary for reasonable living conditions. This situation not only affects health and basic survival conditions for the population, whose access to domestic water is highly inadequate, but also places significant constraints on the development of agriculture, which is currently estimated to use 90 per cent of the country's water resources. Though the irrigated areas have increased considerably in recent decades, mostly using non-renewable fossil aquifers, this water is primarily used for high-value crops, including fruit and vegetables, but mainly devoted to *qat* – a mild narcotic leaf consumed on an almost daily basis by the majority of Yemeni men and a substantial proportion of women.

THE ECONOMY

In addition to its poor resource base, Yemen also suffers from low skill levels on the part of its labour force and from a lack of investment capital. Oil sales still represent 70 per cent of

government revenue and 25 per cent of GDP. About four million people, or 55 per cent of the labour force, are engaged in agriculturally related activities, but these produce about 12 per cent of the country's GDP (estimates range from 7 to 17 per cent). Food imports are a major burden on foreign exchange, as 90 per cent of the country's staples are imported – including 93 per cent of its wheat and 100 per cent of its rice – while all tea and sugar are imported. All these foodstuffs form the staple diet of ordinary Yemenis. With increases in world food prices, Yemen's inflation rate of 20 per cent in 2012 came as no surprise, and this clearly affects all Yemenis on a daily basis. The volatility of basic food prices will continue to be an issue and provides a further argument in favour of developing agriculture, despite the major water problem.

Agriculture is no longer the main source of income for rural households, only 60 per cent of which own land, while the average landholding is very small (0.6 hectares). The usual complement of livestock is also insufficient to maintain households with an average size of seven people. The majority of farmers cultivate rain-fed crops, and are therefore subject to the vagaries of weather and the increasing unpredictability in the timing and quantity of rainfall resulting from climate change. Today the main income of rural households derives from the wages earned by their young men in the towns or cities, where they work as casual unskilled labourers in whatever jobs they can get, ranging from building work to hawking second-hand goods on street pavements. Needless to say, land – like water – is a major source of disputes and conflict.

The principal development concern is the shortage of water. In rural areas women and children spend many hours a day waiting for water at wells and springs, loading it onto donkeys or onto their heads, and carrying it uphill to their homes, using energy and time that could otherwise be used more productively in education or economic activities. Shortages of water in town and country also mean that hygiene standards are often significantly lower than people would wish and its cost is a major burden for poor families.

Industry – mostly the processing of imported food concentrates – is responsible for 42 per cent of GDP, while services – including the civil and military services – account for 50 per cent. With a per capita GDP of under US$2,500, about 45 per cent of the population are below the poverty line, with a further 20 per cent or so highly vulnerable to any shock. Not only are the vast majority of rural people underemployed, but the country also suffers an extremely high unemployment rate, estimated by the World Food Programme

(WFP) at 35 per cent overall, rising to between 60 and 70 per cent in rural areas and for young people and new graduates. The state – particularly its armed and security forces – is the main employer, with predictable effects on both the national budget and the population's attitude to state institutions. The oil sector, while providing most state income, only employs about 20,000 people. Small enterprise development is a standard mechanism through which employment shifts from agriculture to other sectors worldwide, and is seen in the same way in Yemen. Job creation is one of the country's major challenges.

Most optimistic visions for economic development are based on the hope of further oil and gas discoveries, on the development of services and processing of the few existing resources (such as coffee cultivation and processing, and some textiles), and the development of Aden and other ports, including the free zones surrounding them. Nevertheless, these sectors are all hard-pressed to compete with their counterparts in neighbouring states. Low educational standards remain a significant constraint to the development of a services sector. Tourism, particularly cultural tourism, could be a major source of income and employment, should the security situation improve. None of the forces currently involved in the transition are questioning the appropriateness of the neo-liberal economic development model. This is unfortunate as it has proved its inability to reduce poverty and has worsened inequality in numerous countries. New approaches need to be developed if Yemen is to solve its economic problems in the interests of the majority of its population.

SOCIETY

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Yemen was long known for having a social structure to some extent resembling that of the South Asian ascription system, in which status is predetermined by birth and formally unchangeable. This structure has been partly attenuated by the emergence of a new one based on wealth and power, privileging military and security personnel as well as traders and businessmen. Those involved in this new social and economic hierarchy are also members of one or other of the earlier ones – mostly tribesmen in the case of those with military or

security connections, but from all sectors with respect to the areas of trade and business.

While ‘tribalism’ is often blamed for most of Yemen’s political ills, it is a form of social organization that has both negative and positive features. Tribal solidarity provides the members of a tribe with protection, as well as imposing certain moral and behavioural norms and practices regulating relationships of people within the tribe, as well as between tribespeople and other social groups. Many blame ‘modernization’ and the deterioration of tribal structures for the increasing level of social disaffection and loss of cohesion within Yemeni society, as manifested by a degree of delinquency and the rise of Islamist fundamentalism and its associated jihadist movements. But, as we have seen above, transformation of the economy and the emergence of new sources of income due to migration and emerging economic sectors are also transforming the balance of authority and responsibility within communities and households.

The vast majority of Yemenis are tribespeople, whether belonging to larger tribes giving some allegiance to a major sheikh, as in the two main tribal confederations of the northern highlands, the Hashid and the Bakil, or part of smaller tribal groups numbering a few thousand at most, as found elsewhere in the country, many of which are loosely associated with the far less cohesive Madhaj confederation. The latter groups could also be described as ‘clans’ or very large extended families. Generally tribespeople consider themselves to be the mainstream of Yemeni society. They are predominantly settled, and have historically been rural agriculturalists mostly working their own land. This group also includes pastoralists, who were in the past probably more nomadic. In the absence of reliable statistical records, tribes are widely estimated to account for around 75 or 80 per cent of the country’s population. In recent decades their members have taken up a variety of other activities, including the professions for those who have achieved a higher education – activities that did not exist in the ‘traditional’ system. Tribespeople are near the top of the social scale, with only descendants of the Prophet and religious or legal authorities – both much less numerous – ranking above them.

The highest-ranking social stratum is that of the *sada* (singular: *sayyed*), the group claiming descent from the Prophet. They are particularly numerous in Hadhramaut, where they were also the dominant group, controlling political power and owning most of the land. Since unification, a few *sada* have recovered some political

power, thanks to support from the regime, but they have lost their former status as the most respected group. Elsewhere in the country they enjoy social and moral status, but they can also be quite poor and wield limited political influence. They can be Shafi'i Sunni (mostly in the southern parts) or Zaydi Shi'i (mostly in the northern highlands). Zaydi revivalism is a major feature of the Huthi conflict that emerged in the early 2000s, and is one of the cleavages that divide contemporary Yemen.

The *quda* (singular: *qadi*) are a group who claim authority through their religious and legal knowledge, and have traditionally occupied the positions of judges and administrators, as well as teachers. Although their status was not originally one acquired by birth, over the centuries they have been incorporated into the prevailing social strata. Moreover, while today many of them are still involved in the civil service and in tertiary-sector activities in general, they are no longer restricted to the law and administration. As a group, their political influence is probably equivalent to that of the *sada* at the national level.

After the tribes, the next-ranking group is that of traders, who used to concentrate on the marketing and trading of various produce and include the higher level of artisans. While in the past their status was lower, in recent decades this has changed as, on the one hand, the income from such activities has risen and they have therefore become wealthier, and, on the other, all kinds of other groups, including tribespeople, *sada* and *quda* have also taken up trading as a major activity, due to its capacity to generate wealth.

The lowest social strata are occupied by groups that have different names and activities in different parts of the country, and are slightly different from each other. Most of them share two characteristics: firstly, a darker skin colour that is frequently associated with a real or imagined African origin; and secondly, involvement in manual labour – in particular personal, and especially bodily, services.

They can be subdivided as follows. The first group provides bodily services, including butchers, barbers, hairdressers and henna decorators. These low-status activities are carried out mostly by individuals whose skills are passed on from their parents. Members of this group find it difficult to rise in the social structure, though it can be done through education and wealth. Second, farm labourers are given different names in different places (*hujur* in coastal Hadhramaut and al-Mahra, *zubud* in Lahej and Abyan, *fellaheen* in Wadi Hadhramaut, and so on). Some are believed to be the

descendants of slaves brought over from Africa, though their real origins are unknown. These must be clearly distinguished from members of the tribal farming group, who traditionally own land. This group is informally but effectively precluded from land ownership. The origins of the third group, the *akhdam*, or 'servants', are as obscure as those of the previous group. They are also known as *muhamasheen*, which is considered a less derogatory term. They are mostly urban, or at least currently found in urban areas, though the name is also used to describe people from the previous group who have changed occupations. Their occupations focus on the 'unclean' activities, such as street-cleaning, and in former times the collection of human waste from 'long drops' in the high-rises and other traditional Yemeni buildings. Until recently, they also dominated municipal cleaning services in Yemeni cities, as they were the only group willing to take up these positions. Many *muhamasheen* are 'professional' beggars, moving from one city or town to another and living exclusively from begging. They are clearly the most marginalized group of Yemenis in the country, and are sometimes not considered Yemeni by members of higher-status groups. They account for up to 5 per cent of the population. The last of these groups is that of former slaves, who were once the military men and administrative staff of earlier sultanates and emirates. On being emancipated they joined one or other of the above groups, as well as taking up a variety of other activities. Most of them are definitely of African origin.

These categories still retain significance with respect to social interaction, but tribal or 'ethnic' allegiance also plays a role in the various networks of mutual and professional support, and in people's appeals for assistance when faced with various bureaucratic difficulties.

Women's status is an issue of major concern. Most Yemenis, like the current Constitution, subscribe to a conservative interpretation of Islam that accepts patriarchal structures and gives ultimate authority and power to men within the household and the community. This was not always the case everywhere: the PDRY regime supported women's equality and, following the approaches of socialist states, sought to achieve it through the economic empowerment of women by ensuring their access to education, medical facilities and employment. For southern women, unification meant a distinct step backwards, as it involved the restoration of easy polygamy for men and gave cultural support to restrictions on women's movements and freedom in the cities.

While improvements in women's status and living conditions have been prioritized by foreign funding agencies since unification, this has materialized mainly through a concentration on the provision of health and educational facilities for girls. These investments have taken place against significant social resistance, as many see them as foreign interference and an attempt to influence and transform national culture. The assertion of arbitrary power over women is often a male response to weakened control over other aspects of their lives – particularly economic and political power: worsening economic conditions and increased poverty, combined with political frustration, are clear examples of this. This may explain the widespread resistance in Yemen's parliament to, for example, setting a minimum age for girls to marry.

As we have seen, the 2011 movement has afforded an opportunity for women to emerge as a social and political force. Their strong representation and positive role in the National Dialogue may help to broaden recognition of women's ability to contribute positively and effectively to solving the country's problems, and thus persuade more men to support equality.

SOCIAL ISSUES AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

A major improvement in Yemenis' way of life in the past decade has been access to telecommunications, and in particular mobile phones. Not only have radio and television given people the opportunity to see a world beyond their immediate experience, but satellite television has ensured access to world politics as well as entertainment. Mobile phones have effected a revolution in people's way of life. They enable close and frequent communications between family members in different locations; in particular, rural women and children are able to access their male relatives working in the towns and cities, as well as migrant relatives in other countries. These media played a major role in the uprisings of 2011, in a variety of ways: they enabled people to communicate with each other and mobilize rapidly at different times and places. Photographs and video clips have ensured that both Yemenis and outsiders were informed of attacks on the demonstrators, which may well have reduced the level of violence used against them. More positively, these media have helped to spread the ideas and demands of the demonstrators beyond the encampments, both through re-transmission by traditional media (television and radio) and through

the showing of video clips and messages received to the relatives of those involved.

While the road network has improved very considerably over the past two decades, it is still far from adequate. But it should be stressed that the country's topography presents impractical conditions for the provision of a good infrastructure to households as dispersed as those in some areas – on inaccessible mountains, for example. Investment in road construction has been supported by a variety of funding agencies and is a priority for the state – not only to enable public access to markets and other facilities, but also to ensure access to remote areas by security forces in times of conflict. Unfortunately, this area is also an easy source of cash for corruption through a variety of contractual mechanisms – one of the many reasons why construction is so popular with officials at all levels.

The building of schools and health centres is undertaken through a variety of agencies, some of which operate 'on demand', meaning that those with louder voices and bigger guns get more than the meek and poor. As a result, construction is not necessarily organized rationally, based on population density and the numbers of children in any given area. Moreover, the main problem in education is not that of construction; teaching can take place under trees or in people's homes. There are three major problems: low quality of teaching, unsuitable syllabi producing students with irrelevant knowledge, and the notorious mismanagement of the education system. While some efforts have been made to address these problems, none have so far been effective. Ghost teachers abound; qualified young women are not recruited, which means that girls do not attend school, as families do not want them to be taught by male teachers; funds and equipment are not made available for basic necessities like books and classroom equipment; and those teachers who work are disaffected and unmotivated.

In healthcare, the 'cost recovery' policies introduced in the past two decades under the influence of neoliberal funding agencies have resulted in a weakening of the limited medical services accessible to the population. In addition to a tendency towards over-prescribing and a misplaced faith in certain types of medication, people often spend their very scarce resources on treatments that are ineffective and unnecessary. Unlicensed pharmacies also abound, some selling fake medicines that are at best harmless and at worst dangerous.

MIGRATION

Migration has long been a major feature of Yemeni life. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Yemenis from Hadhramaut and coastal areas migrated to South and South-East Asia, including the countries that became Indonesia, India and Malaysia, where some of them still remain a distinct ethnic minority, as well as to Zanzibar and East Africa, where people with Yemeni names and of Yemeni origin are still found today. In the early twentieth century, most migration was to the advanced industrialized states, via Aden port, bringing people from various southern areas (Ta'iz, Ibb, Rada', Yafi', Dhala') to Britain and the United States, where they initially worked in the heavy steel industries, after having worked as seamen on the ships.

Later in the twentieth century, migration was mainly to the GCC states, particularly after the 1973 oil price rises. This was rudely interrupted in 1990, when Yemen failed to offer explicit support to the UN and majority Arab approach in dealing with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. As a result, over 800,000 Yemenis, some of whom had lived in the Gulf for generations, were sent back to Yemen, thus losing the country its remittance income and adding a large number of unemployed people to its problems. Since then, while the numbers of Yemenis in the Gulf has once again risen to about one million in Saudi Arabia and a few elsewhere, this has not produced an income for households comparable to what it was then, due both to the doubling of the population in Yemen and the reduced amount of money sent back by each individual.

By contrast, in the past two decades Yemen has also become a country of immigration for people whose living conditions are even more desperate than those of Yemenis. These are primarily refugees, mostly from Somalia, who have come to Yemen in the last two decades after the collapse of their central state in the early 1990s. Legally, their position is extremely favourable by comparison with that on offer to refugees in many other countries, as they are entitled to work and have access to the few services available to Yemenis. More recently female immigrants have come from Ethiopia, following an older migration of male Yemenis to Ethiopia and their return with Ethiopian wives and mixed-descent children in the past half-century.

THIS VOLUME BEGINS WITH a very hard-hitting analysis of contemporary internal and international issues by Sheila Carapico, who makes a trenchant argument on the nature of the transitional regime and its close relationship with external actors, whether in the peninsula or beyond. Her interpretation of events strongly challenges most views on the subject, which tend to be more positive about both the depth of internal changes and the benevolence of the main foreign actors. Her chapter is followed by Adam Seitz's far more mainstream analysis, focusing on the nature and role of the military. He argues that Saleh's dynastic designs resulted in a weakening of tribal and military support, and the shrinking of his base to the narrowest kin circle around him.

A completely different but highly illuminating picture of the social transformations brought about by the 2011 upheavals is found in Katherine Hennessey's presentation of Yemeni revolutionary theatre in recent years. She examines both its didactic approach, supported by funders, and some of the lively and challenging creative performances that have been staged in the past two years. She draws attention to the continued role of official and unofficial censorship.

Yemen's more long-lasting conflicts and tensions are discussed in the second section. Contrary to the widespread perception in Yemen and beyond that the independent revolutionary street movement was displaced by traditional, and in particular Islamist, parties, Laurent Bonnefoy argues that the revolution was not 'hijacked', but that the existing parties were active from the earliest moments, and that the current balance of power is an accurate reflection of the balance of political forces. This is followed by Marieke Brandt's analysis of the role of tribalism in the Huthi conflict, which points out the reasons for the shifting alliances of northern tribes in relation to both the Huthi movement and the ruling clique. Noel Brehony and Susanne Dahlgren discuss different aspects of issues relating to the current southern separatist movement. Brehony explains the rise of a south Yemeni identity encouraged and built up by the Socialist regime, and shows both its successes and failures within the context of the power struggles that took place in the PDRY period. Dahlgren looks at the consequences of such a perceived identity in the face of northern dominance after unification; she focuses particularly on the perceptions of young people, and on their aspirations and disappointments as they maintain expectations of state provision that were appropriate to the Socialist era but are clearly inappropriate in the current neoliberal political and economic environment.

Some of the constraints and achievements of economic policy are discussed in the next section. Helen Lackner and Gerhard Lichtenthäler address different features of the water question. Lackner's examination of water policies since unification reveals their weakness in addressing the urgency of the national crisis, and she argues for the need to introduce and implement strong policies in the interests of all Yemenis. Lichtenthäler presents examples of a complementary approach to managing water scarcity through the use of traditional tribal mechanisms at community level. Land and water disputes are at the heart of the multiplicity of conflicts in Yemen, and Jens Kambeck discusses both traditional conflict-management procedures and protocols and suggests modern adaptations to them. The state and funders agree that development of the non-agricultural economy is essential to reduce unemployment, and that micro and small enterprises must be at the core of new economic activities. Kais Aliriani analyses the historical development of this sector, its current status and its future prospects. His chapter also provides some basic information on the Yemeni economy as a whole.

Health issues are addressed by Adel Aulaqi, who examines the evolution of Yemeni medical services, and by Christina Hellmich, who analyses issues of women's health and fertility in relation to both the provision of services and their socio-cultural implications. Gender-related issues, while covered indirectly throughout the book, are the main focus of both Hellmich and Marina de Regt. De Regt examines the new phenomenon of Ethiopian women immigrants working as domestics. Other aspects of migration are addressed by Hélène Thiollet and Ho Wai-Yip. Thiollet presents a detailed overview of Yemeni migration in the past decades, including the economic importance of remittances, while Ho discusses the very new development of Yemenis settling in China.

As readers will note, the book includes a diversity of sometimes conflicting views and analyses. These will help the reader appreciate the range of in-depth interpretations that can be given to developments in Yemen, and should contribute to each reader's own understanding of the changes taking place in this second decade of the twenty-first century, when the country is undergoing dramatic transformations and having to address unprecedented challenges. Finally, while each author appreciates the advice of informants, readers and other commentators, each one individually retains full responsibility for the views expressed, and for any remaining errors in the text.

Helen Lackner
Oxford/Sana'a, July 2013

PART ONE

POLITICS AND SECURITY

CHAPTER ONE

YEMEN BETWEEN REVOLUTION AND COUNTER-TERRORISM

Sheila Carapico

YEMEN'S LAYERED AND COMPLEX dialectics pit twenty-first-century optimism against twentieth-century cynicism. A struggle is unfolding between, on the one hand, the demographic majority in the most populous corner of the Arabian peninsula and, on the other, entrenched elites from a bygone era, anachronistic neighbouring gerontocracies and post-9/11 American imperialism. Aspirations of the forward-looking youth are thwarted not only by an intransigent domestic ruling class seeking to preserve the status quo, but also by the larger context of the outmoded Saudi-American-GCC 'stability' pact. Neither the unarmed movement for domestic political change – blessed with many strong personalities but no overall leader – nor the armed conflicts within Yemeni borders (the Huthi rebellion, al-Qa'ida jihadis, American and sometimes Saudi airstrikes, militant elements of the southern Hiraak, and battles between rival elements in the armed forces) can be fully understood in purely endogenous terms. Instead, they reflect the profound contradictions of the Arabian peninsula between the wealth and passivity of the Gulf and Yemen's destitution and chaos.

This chapter juxtaposes these seemingly two quite different storylines – one about Yemeni aspirations for social justice and better governance and the other about American and Saudi operations undertaken in the name of combating terrorism. The so-called GCC Initiative, and in particular the National Dialogue Conference process playing out as this book goes to press, provides the link between them. From the perspective of domestic politics, the Dialogue can be read as the outcome of agitation by the new generation of 'peaceful youth', as well as an outgrowth of Yemen's tradition of dialogue – an historic effort to resolve crisis through broad negotiation between representatives of various political constituencies. In the context of the 'war on terror', however, the GCC Initiative and even the donor-sponsored Dialogue among political elites can be seen as security-driven or even hegemonic projects on the part of the US and its ally, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Fed up with three decades of corrupt, venal dictatorship, suffering from ecological and economic collapse, and inspired by the uprisings that toppled autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt, Yemenis mobilized on an unprecedented scale to express their discontent in

early 2011 and continued peacefully to demonstrate for change throughout the year, even as dissidents and loyalists within the military waged war on one another, and as the president was injured, left the country for treatment and then returned. Popular demands were only partly met when Saleh's deputy, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, was inaugurated as president on 27 February 2012, after an election organized by international donors in which he was the sole candidate, and only partly addressed by the ambitious National Dialogue negotiations. In the meantime, the Obama administration pursued a military strategy of targeted and 'signature' strikes – extrajudicial assassinations – while paying only perfunctory lip service to Yemenis' legitimate political aspirations.

A CIVIC REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

In February 2011, Tawakkul Karman stood on a stage outside Sana'a University, a microphone in one hand and the other clenched defiantly above her head, leading a crowd of tens of thousands of cheering, flag-waving protesters. On other days and in other cities, other citizens led the chants. These mass public performances enacted a veritable civic revolution in a south-west Arabia where previous activist surges had never produced democratic transitions, but nonetheless did shape national history. Drawing inspiration from the Tunisian and Egyptian examples, as well as from home-grown, often localized protest repertoires, activists occupied the national commons as never before, animating a public civic renaissance with new forms of protest and expression. Women's public participation registered seismic sociocultural change. Whether this popular uprising – wracked by intra-elite street battles, perverted by proxy petrodollar machinations and complicated by American counter-terror operations – ends in glory or tragedy, its social, psychological and political significance is inestimable. As in Tunisia and Egypt, the experience of collective, contentious mobilization 'from below' energized a veritable cultural transformation. Yemen's 'peaceful youth' (*shabab al-silmiyya*) are the frontline of revolution against the status quo in the Arabian peninsula.

Frustrations in the poorest Arab country had been mounting for years on a number of fronts. Patronage was rampant.[1] Restlessness stirred around the president's clear intention to ordain his son, already commander of the nation's Republican Guard, as his successor; postponement of parliamentary elections; widespread

unemployment, especially among young people; deteriorating standards of living for all but the upper echelons of the ruling kleptocracy; ecological depredations against a formerly self-sufficient agricultural economy, resulting in serious environmental damage and acute water shortages; abysmal educational and medical facilities, sanitation, and physical infrastructure; crude resort to censorship, harassment, arbitrary detention and brutality against journalists, dissidents and regime opponents; and profound, widespread malaise.

By late 2010, regional demonstrations or uprisings had emerged in various parts of the country with seemingly various complaints. Most dramatically, people in the former PDRY until 1990 formed a movement known simply as Hiraak.[2] For several years, its supporters had been marching and staging displays in the Arabian Sea port city of Aden and outlying provinces like Hadhramaut and Abyan.[3] The movement revived some slogans, motifs and performative elements of the old anti-colonial struggle in Aden, Abyan, Dhala‘, Hadhramaut and other communities in what were then known as the British ‘Protectorates’.[4] Again, these blended Socialist elements with locally distinctive traditions of dance, dress and dialect. Hiraak also depended on human rights organizations and municipal newspapers established during the opening that followed unification in the early nineties. Saleh and his official media could portray their agony as treasonous southern irredentist threats to national unity reminiscent of the 1994 civil war. And indeed some citizens flew the flag of the old People’s Democratic Republic even as others joined the nationalist movement to oust the national regime in Sana‘a. Over the next couple of years the irredentist element of the Southern movement swelled.[5] Moreover, there was a more openly armed rebellion rooted in complicated, sometimes counter-intuitive sectarian and tribal frictions in the far northern province of Sa‘ada, seemingly exacerbated by proximity to the Saudi border and unquestionably provoked by Wahhabi Saudi missionaries’ absolutist fundamentalism.[6]

In cities and provinces between these geographical extremes, people were disheartened by high-level corruption, nepotism, and favouritism towards the president’s Hashid tribal confederation and his own family members. It turned out that the tribulations of Southerners resonated throughout Yemen: the grotesque enrichment of regime cronies at the expense of the multitudes; obscenely bad stewardship of the commons; the skyrocketing price of meat, staples and even clean water; the lack of jobs for college and high school

graduates. In a Wikileaked cable, the American ambassador had already noted in 2005 that riots prompted by the lifting of fuel subsidies possibly presaged a mass revolt, especially but not only among the perennially restive tribes of the north-eastern provinces of al-Jawf and Mareb, where truckers and pump-farmers considered cheap fuel their lifeblood.[7] Grandiose pageants of presidential power, half-truths in the official media, indignities suffered at military checkpoints, arbitrary arrests and imprisonments: these and other daily insults fed popular alienation, despair and frustration, most notably among young people. While a privileged few cooled off in swimming pools in their luxury compounds, the water table fell, crippling the agricultural economy that remained the livelihood of the rural majority. Farmers and ranchers facing starvation flocked to the cities, where water supplies and social services were swamped. Misery became the new normal; millions barely survived on the equivalent of a dollar or two a day. The economy was in a shambles.[8]

Demonstrators took to the streets in large numbers in Sana‘a, the capital – now a teeming, sprawling, poorly laid out, still picturesque low-rise city of nearly two million mostly youthful inhabitants who have overwhelmed its schools, sewage disposal system and water supplies. Home to the ruling family and its security apparatus, Sana‘a was also most exposed to its excesses and regulations, and was the prime site for parades of presidential power. After Saleh loyalists laid claim to Sana‘a’s central Midan al-Tahrir – so that it would not follow Cairo’s example of becoming a stage for malcontents – students, faculty and other activists assembled around the university campus on the western edge of the city. They named the space they claimed Change Square (‘*Midan al-Taghyir*’), and borrowed North African slogans – *Irhal* (‘Leave!’) and *al-Sha’ab Yuridh Isqat al-Nizam* (‘The people want the downfall of the regime’).[9] Occupiers mainly represented the demographic bulge of fifteen-to-thirty-year-olds who had never known any other leadership: university students, graduates, dropouts, and those hoping for a better future. In Change Square and adjoining spaces, these ‘peaceful youth’ performed music and dance and held poetry readings, displayed posters and street art, and organized collective gestures of defiance like 50,000 pairs of clasped hands held high. The call to prayer became a call to civic engagement, and mass prayers a form of civil disobedience. The crowds around Sana‘a University swelled as villagers, farmers and other tribesmen from outlying areas joined the protests. Many of them pitched tents that

eventually grew into a sprawling encampment snaking through the neighbourhood around the university campus with its own sanitation, medical services, teach-ins, and food and water supplies. As the Yemeni journalist Fare‘a al-Muslimi later put it, ‘The tribesman laid down his weapon and came to protest alongside his like-minded civilian compatriot, thus achieving voluntarily what years of attempts at banning weapons could not.’[10]

Interestingly, unlike in Egypt where some imagined that Facebook and the internet sparked the revolution, in Yemen Facebook membership, blogs and YouTube posts proliferated from being the preserve, in 2010, of mere handfuls of the elite with friends abroad to become major means of communications a year later. It was a cyber-explosion. While thousands joined Facebook during the spring of 2011, others blogged, hundreds practised guerrilla photo-journalism, countless numbers began to tweet. A montage of photos and video images of Ali Abdullah Saleh set to the lyrics of Katy Perry’s ‘Hot ’n’ Cold’ went viral. Virtual participants among Yemeni emigrant communities overseas passed images on. Some were picked up by al-Jazeera or analysed from abroad. As in Egypt, however, for all the talk of a digital revolution, mobile phones were by far the most salient piece of technology for domestic communication, and word of mouth spread news within and between neighbourhoods.

Never in the history of the Arabian peninsula had women been so politically prominent. Many women besides Karman defied a conservative cultural norm mandating speaking softly (if at all) in public. Indeed, women were in the forefront of the movement for change.[11] For instance, Amal al-Basha, Samia al-Aghbari, Bushra al-Maqtari, Arwa Othman, Jamila Raja, Asmahan al-Allas, Bilqis al-Lahabi and Amat al-Alim Sosowa displayed leadership in their cities and towns, on the national stage, on the internet and sometimes abroad. On the streets, less famous but even more courageous women mocked Saleh’s sleazy innuendo about an un-Islamic ‘mixing of the sexes’ in protest camps. Almost all Yemeni women wear an all-encompassing black robe and veil. At one point many thousands lined up on a street in Sana‘a, covered in the customary black. One row wore white baseball caps on top of their veils, and another sported red baseball caps. As they marched, the visual effect was to create a white, black and red Yemeni flag stretching more than a kilometre down a wide road in a show of patriotism. On another occasion, after a series of attacks on female activists by security forces, urban women in Sana‘a, still wearing their

customary all-black robes and veils, staged a particularly Yemeni form of protest drawing on rural traditions: they set fire to a pile of multicoloured head-coverings called *maqrama* in a symbolic distress signal to the tribes. Their pamphlet read: 'This is a plea from the free women of Yemen; here we burn our *maqrama* in front of the world to witness the bloody massacres carried out by the tyrant Saleh.'

The counter-revolution turned violent enough to provoke massive defections from the regime after a deadly incident on 18 March 2011, when plain-clothes snipers fired from neighbouring rooftops onto Change Square, killing more than fifty mostly young and entirely peaceful protesters. In disbelief, fury and sorrow, a record 150,000 marched in Sana'a's biggest 'day of rage' so far.[12] There was an avalanche of top- and mid-level resignations from the armed forces, the foreign service, the civil service, and even the president's General People's Congress in protest at the excessive use of force against unarmed civilians. Key regime insiders, notably General Ali Mohsen, the army commander who had dealt mercilessly with Southern secessionists in 1994, and leaders of the president's own Hashid tribal confederation – including scions of the paramount sheikh – turned against Saleh.[13] Even as the regime split, however, collective rage and moral panic gradually solidified the protests into a nationwide movement. Sentiments crossed party lines, dividing not only the army and the Hashid tribe but also the conservative political party.[14] Henceforth the intra-regime struggle intensified in the streets of Sana'a and other cities, and in jockeying for representation and a voice within the National Dialogue that began on the second anniversary of the March 2011 massacre. While the GCC 'deal' was under negotiation, protesters in al-Baidha, Ibb, Aden and other cities and towns cried for Saleh's prosecution in an international court.

Instead of taking sides in intra-regime struggles, most people wanted them all to disappear from the political scene. Demonstrators in Sana'a and Ta'iz adopted the slogans 'Remaining Peaceful is Our Choice' and 'Peaceful, Peaceful, No to Civil War'. The Coordinating Council of the Youth Revolution of Change (CCYRC) issued a thirteen-point 'youth plan' in March, and later a 65-page 'Youth Vision for the Future of Yemen', both emphasizing concerns for justice and non-violence.[15] Protests swelled; multitudes massed. In Ta'iz, a bustling commercial and industrial city nestled in the verdant southern mountains of the former YAR, and the picturesque neighbouring city of Ibb, simmering discontent erupted. This populous 'middle region', a once rich agricultural zone tilled by peasants and sharecroppers, served as a bridge of sorts between the

Southern Hiraak and Sana‘a’s Change Square; some called Ta‘iz the epicentre of the popular uprising. The city’s relatively educated, cosmopolitan student body entertained demonstration participants with music, skits, caricatures, graffiti, banners and other artistic embellishments. Throngs were photographed: men and women together, men and women separately, all unarmed. On 30 October 2011, to cite one small example, women in Ta‘iz posted a YouTube video full of flowers, confetti, balloons, music and ululation commemorating each martyr to the revolution. Some weeks later, thousands of people trekked nearly 200 kilometres from Ta‘iz to Sana‘a.

Ta‘iz–Sana‘a youth march, December 2011. © Ridan Bahran

Young people and parents in al-Hodeida, the steamy Red Sea port where African-Yemenis suffer exceptional rates of poverty and political disenfranchisement, filled their own Freedom Square with banners and chants and insurrectionary wall-art. *Irhal!* (‘Go!’), they yelled; and, referring to the deposed Tunisian leader who had found refuge in Saudi Arabia: ‘Oh, Ali Abdullah, join bin Ali in Riyadh!’ They applauded Mubarak’s resignation, celebrated the demise of Libya’s dictator Muammar al-Qadhafi, and dedicated mass prayers to the martyrs of Syria. New mantras, skits and cartoons taunted Yemeni and Syrian dictators: ‘Come on Ali, come on Bashar, it’s time for you to go!’

The wide-open, semi-arid and sparsely populated plateaus and mountains north, north-west, east and somewhat south of Sana‘a are landscapes that look like the American south-west. Tribes in this region are not unlike American cowboys or hillbillies: they raise livestock, drive pickup trucks, carry firearms (in Yemen’s tribal

heartland, Kalashnikovs or even bazooka-launchers) and perennially harbour deep mistrust of the central government. In these regions, especially in the far eastern governorates of al-Jawf and Mareb, protests took the familiar form of acts of civil disobedience such as road blockages and commercial stoppages. Yet in al-Baidha province, just north of the former inter-Yemeni border, tribesmen who rarely leave home without a rifle threw down their guns to march peacefully. Again, this was highly significant: in a country known to be awash with personal weapons, the mass uprising avoided guerrilla warfare or military insurrection. In short: tribesmen with the means to launch an armed revolt resisted the temptation to open fire.

COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY FORCES

The regime showed no such restraint. Divisions loyal to the president, mostly commanded by immediate members of his family, fired on unarmed demonstrators in Sana‘a, Aden, Ta‘iz, Hodeida and the countryside. Hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries stoked rather than quelled discontent, however. Grainy, graphic cell-phone footage was uploaded to the internet. In many communities each funeral provoked more angry or grief-stricken dissenters to call for Saleh’s downfall.

More explosively, after 18 March, loyalists and dissidents engaged one another in mortal combat, especially in certain neighbourhoods of Sana‘a where Saleh’s family commands, including the Republican Guards and Special Forces trained and equipped by the US, battled the renegade brigade led by General Ali Mohsen and Hashid tribal militia headed by the sons of the late great Hashid Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar. Both the general and the sheikh had been part of the Saleh regime for three decades. In other words, powerful elements of the president’s inner circle had turned against him. At various times Saleh labelled them blood-thirsty, seditious, traitors, coup-makers, terrorists and thugs. General Ali Mohsen placed an armed cordon around the large neighbourhood surrounding Change Square to protect the protesters. There were frequent skirmishes around the al-Ahmar family compound on the airport road. The explosion in the mosque within the presidential compound that left Saleh disfigured and killed or crippled several of his deputies was almost certainly some kind of inside job.[16] This was an intra-regime squabble, among members of the same tribe.

The ‘peaceful youth’, *al-shabab al-silmiyya*, did not line up behind the general or the sons of the late Sheikh al-Ahmar. Outsiders characterizing these events as ‘tribal conflicts’ or ‘youth riots’ were emphatically wrong.

To protect his positions around the capital, and perhaps to deliberately unleash zealous militants, Saleh withdrew government forces from parts of the old PDRY, especially Abyan and its provincial capital, Zinjibar. No more than a couple of hundred Islamist fighters, many of them foreign, were able to overrun civilian officials there and in some other towns. This strange twisting of the main plot attracted American attention, and firepower was directed against al-Qa‘ida; Saleh even managed to turn this to his advantage, presenting himself as a reliable ally for the US and Saudi Arabia against militant Islamists. Washington increased military assistance, and the regime seemed to benefit. The battles for Zinjibar and other towns abandoned by Saleh’s forces, including aerial attacks that caused physical damage and civilian casualties, in turn fanned Southern rage against Sana‘a; the government, locals felt, was not protecting them either from the jihadists or from missile strikes. Exiled Southern leaders, notably Ali Salim al-Beedh – the former vice president of unified Yemen who led the failed secessionist war in 1994 – called for a restoration of Southern sovereignty.

The hegemon of the Peninsula, Saudi Arabia, was ever-fearful of chaos or revolutionary change in poverty-stricken, crisis-riven Yemen.[17] In May 2011 the kingdom and the other oil monarchies in the GCC working with Saleh’s government, and the diverse but entrenched parliamentary opposition in the Joint Meeting Parties, announced – over the heads of the protest movement – a plan whereby Saleh would relinquish presidential power in exchange for immunity from prosecution for him and his family. Saleh stalled and prevaricated for months, even after being severely injured in the attack on his compound in June 2011 and airlifted to top-of-the-line hospitals in Saudi Arabia and then the United States. The US and other Western powers joined the GCC in offering rhetorical support for this novel plan for a managed transition. During Saleh’s three-month convalescence abroad, his son and nephews in the top military commands took aim at their allies-turned-rivals. Military and civilian deaths mounted. Electricity and fuel supplies waned. City life became even more intolerable.

By all accounts, the US ambassador and visiting American military officials were actively talking with all parties to the armed conflict

between Saleh and his former colleagues, seeking to quell the street battles that disrupted life in the capital during 2011. Yet the international community did not press publicly for a ceasefire or threaten sanctions against the Saleh regime. The human rights minister, Houria Mashhour, tweeted: 'We were expecting a stronger attitude from the GCC countries towards the crimes committed against the Yemeni people, but we are extremely disappointed to see the meeting between [Saudi] King Abdullah and Saleh.' On 21 October the Security Council of the United Nations issued an ambiguous, toothless resolution – 2014 – condemning human rights violations by 'the government and other actors' and calling for 'all sides' to commit to a peaceful power transition in accordance with the GCC formula. Yemen's official Saba press agency enthused that Saleh 'welcomed' the resolution; Tawakkul Karman, in a comment piece for the *Guardian* on 1 November expressed dismay.

At a ceremony in the Saudi capital on 23 November 2011, witnessed by Gulf royalty and some Western diplomats – but none of the Yemenis who had called for his removal – a smiling Saleh finally affixed his signature to four copies of the GCC plan. Vice President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a native of South Yemen who had been acting president during Saleh's convalescence, resumed that role. After a hastily arranged but uncontested ballot on 21 February 2012, he assumed the office of president. The daunting economic, social, political and security problems facing the country were laid at his feet. Instead of the downfall of a regime, this represented only a rearrangement of it. The ceremony symbolized the influence of the Gulf monarchs in Yemen. Soon after, donors pledged aid to address the daunting humanitarian, economic and security problems facing the country, as well as to facilitate the National Dialogue.[18]

Many activists were frustrated by the GCC plan's immunity provisions and the one-candidate 'vote' for Hadi, which was itself a concession to Saleh's insistence that he would only leave office 'by ballot'. These terms were negotiated between the president and his long-time patrons in the wealthy Gulf kingdoms over the heads of the protesters, and with only marginal consultation with the multiparty political leadership in the Joint Meeting Parties of the parliamentary opposition. According to Atiaf Zaid Alwazir, it was 'a byproduct of political negotiations that excluded the vast majority on the street', leading to power grabs that shifted 'priorities for reform away from comprehensive social changes that were the demands of the revolutionary movement'.[19]

The National Dialogue was relatively more inclusive, and it drew on indigenous precedents for high-level negotiation in times of national emergency. Both South and North Yemen held mass conferences during the political transitions in the 1960s, during which some constitutional principles for post-colonial and post-Imamic regimes, respectively, were hammered out. A more direct and immediate precedent was the National Dialogue of Political Forces that had convened in 1994 in the hope of resolving the power struggle between Sana'a and Aden. Along with mass conferences in various parts of the country during 1993 and 1994, this Dialogue produced a Document of Pledge and Accord embraced by a wide segment of the political elite, even though it failed to prevent the outbreak of a civil war in which Saleh's forces effectively conquered the secessionist bid from former PDRY forces led by Ali Salim al-Beedh.

In consultations between the UN special envoy Jamal Benomar, the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party and the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), and in response to calls from women leaders, the 2013 National Dialogue Committee comprised 565 representatives of various factions, constituencies and regions. Unsurprisingly, aging male politicians from the GPC and the JMP – including veterans of the conferences in the sixties and the Dialogue in the nineties, and including Islamists, Socialists and various Arab nationalists – won the majority of seats at the bargaining table; the 'youth' group was allotted only forty positions. However – in an innovation undoubtedly pushed by the United Nations, proposed by prominent female and feminist activists, and supported by Socialists, many Southerners, and the youth contingent, against the conservative misogynist military incumbents in Sana'a – the rules accepted by all parties called for 30 per cent of delegates to be women. This was significant because they were women, but also because they came mostly from the 'middle generation' and the ranks of professionals and technocrats. They quickly rose to leadership in some of the Dialogue's nine subcommittees, including the difficult assignments dealing with the Huthi and Southern questions. On the other hand, some high-profile politicians – including several Southern separatists, a scion of Hashid's sheikhly al-Ahmar family, and Tawakkul Karman – declined their appointments unless or until specific ultimatums were met; some resigned only to return later. Old elites in and beyond the GPC positioned themselves to guard their longstanding prerogatives; Saleh and his male kinfolk remained on the scene, conniving to outmanoeuvre their many enemies. Much of this was politics and political bargaining as usual. Nonetheless,

the combination of the historical memories of some male elders, the energy of many women and young people, and the financial and moral support of international donors infused the process with some positive energy and momentum. To some scholars and pundits observing from afar the events in Yemen – alongside the absurd constitution-making in post-Mubarak Egypt and the abject bloodletting between Assad loyalists and armed militia in Syria – the National Dialogue Conference presented a hopeful, potentially fruitful path.

While this was going on, however, ordinary families were suffering. Most Yemenis were not following the Dialogue. In almost every community, power cuts were a daily occurrence. Poverty was spreading. Water tables were dropping. Jobs were scarce. Alongside the Dialogue process, protests and new forms of political expression continued, and continued to evolve. The Coordinating Council of the Youth Revolution of Change remained active even after announcing the formal end of its camp-out. Mural painters, bloggers, videographers, journalists, performing artists and others found new creative outlets. A media-savvy group of young people in Sana‘a calling themselves ‘Support Yemen’ posted some YouTube videos, including one featuring interviews with peasants more concerned with food than with the ‘National Dialogue’. Wounded protesters, dark-skinned ‘marginalized’ Yemenis and other groups staged sit-ins or other public events. Human rights groups documented violence, disappearances and arbitrary arrests. They added to their list of concerns air attacks supposedly aimed at al-Qa‘ida suspects. Bushra al-Maqtari, the feminist, Socialist youth leader from Ta’iz, who was honoured in April 2013 in Washington, took advantage of the visit to meet with American anti-drone activists there. In July 2012, human rights minister Houria Mashhour and several members of the Dialogue committee joined a hunger strike at Sana‘a’s Central Prison demanding the release of youth activists arrested during demonstrations a year or two earlier. In Aden, Mukalla and other Southern cities and towns, mass rallies continued to attract throngs of people, many of them supporting calls for separation.

COUNTER-TERRORISM

Yemen’s ‘peaceful youth’ uprising intersected with power politics in the international arena, and in particular with a globalized American military-security policy; in the meantime, the United States and

Saudi Arabia had stepped up their coordinated, secretive counter-terrorism campaign against the Yemen-based branch of al-Qa'ida – which, in turn, seemed emboldened.

Despite its intensifying involvement, the United States did not formulate a Yemen policy or even a genuinely diplomatic mission there. Instead, it clung to a policy of keeping the Saudi monarchy secure and happy, and a related counter-terrorism policy expanding the scope of the post-9/11 'Af-Pak' strategy. Washington regarded Yemen as a theatre of counter-terrorism in Saudi Arabia's backyard, as if it were not a real place where real people demanded decent governance, justice and the possibility of raising families with dignity, education and health. The Obama administration paid scant attention to these widespread popular concerns. US ambassador Gerald Feierstein, who many Yemenis saw as a major power-broker and who some called 'the Sheikh [or sometimes the Emir] of Yemen', was tapped for his counter-terrorism credentials as well as his diplomatic experience. He worked closely with intelligence and military officers. During the protracted negotiations to facilitate the presidential transition, Washington's envoy was a CIA veteran, then deputy national security advisor for homeland security and counter-terrorism, John O. Brennan – not someone with a State Department career or who had the ear of Hillary Clinton. Engagement in Yemen's transition was not a diplomatic mission, but part and parcel of security operations. Instead of providing material or even moral support to activists clamouring for social justice – much less calling for competitive elections or women's rights – Obama, Clinton, Brennan and Feierstein sought to placate Riyadh. American attention fixated on battling an enemy Americans like to call al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) – often said, sensationally and somewhat misleadingly, to constitute a grave threat to the American homeland.[20] Al-Qa'ida's local commanders and spokespersons revelled in publicity that helped recruit scores or even hundreds of jihadi wannabes from within, and especially beyond, Yemen. As is well known, al-Qa'ida's declared mission in the Arabian peninsula is to dislodge the American military from the kingdom; jihadists were drawn to Yemen because of its proximity to Saudi Arabia.

Most of the more than fifty recorded air attacks inside Yemen in 2012 were known or supposed, if never acknowledged, to have been launched by Americans. A dramatic airstrike in September 2012 near Rada', a historically distinguished but flyblown town in al-Baidha province where rogue al-Qa'ida militants had encamped, exterminated three children and nine other civilians.[21] Around

Rada‘, where armed tribesmen left their Kalashnikovs at home to demonstrate peacefully, the maddening overhead buzz of drones reminded everyone of American surveillance. On 24 December two attacks purportedly launched by the CIA or the Defense Department killed five suspected militants in al-Baidha governorate and Hadhramaut. After several more hits and constant fly-overs in the next ten days or so, dozens of tribesmen carried their rifles with them to a sit-in in front of a government building in Rada‘, convened to complain about Sana‘a’s authorization of these attacks. Later in January, tribesmen in Mareb stopped traffic after two drone strikes. Attacks on targets in Hadhramaut, Abyan and other Southern governorates increasingly enraged citizens of the South against a Sana‘a government authorizing foreign attacks on Yemeni soil, adding to simmering tensions there.

There were more drone or fixed-wing salvos in an ongoing battle since the 2002 strike in retaliation for the bombing of the USS *Cole* in Aden harbour in 2000, in which an American citizen, Ahmed Hijazi, had died. In the last days of 2009, Obama authorized bombing that left at least twenty children and a dozen women dead in the southern town of al-Majalla, along with one militant. In May 2010 a tribal mediator, a Yemeni official and other civilians lost their lives in a misguided cruise missile attack. By the time Yemen’s revolutionary movement began in earnest, several high-profile al-Qa‘ida operatives and a number of innocent civilians had been blown to smithereens by Hellfire missiles. On 30 September 2011 the American-born Anwar Nasir al-Awlaqi, a firebrand preacher accused of inspiring the Fort Hood shootings and the failed attempt to blow up a Detroit-bound Northwest Airlines plane, was killed, while both the American Fort Hood shooter and the Nigerian arrested in Detroit awaited trial in the US; several weeks later, al-Awlaqi’s teenage son was also struck dead. When even American citizens are not given due trial before execution, the US cannot claim to be standing for the rule of law.

The US had become thoroughly but haphazardly engaged in the southwestern portion of the Arabian peninsula. In addition to endless aerial surveillance and frequent bombardments, measures to ‘stabilize’ Yemen now included provision of light aircraft, armed vehicles, gadgetry and training; direct military cooperation with and command-and-control backing for Yemeni forces; coordination of the restructuring of Yemen’s military command and the military subcommittee of the National Dialogue; some humanitarian assistance, and token support for civil society initiatives; and extra

coordination with Saudi security institutions to make sure that Yemen's multiple conflicts did not spill across the border. There was also some evidence of launch-pads for unmanned Predator drones and/or Hellfire missiles at al-Anad Airbase, near Aden, and perhaps another US base in the eastern Hadhramaut desert.[22]

In addition to the remote-controlled 'targeted' attacks purportedly conducted by the Defense Department or the CIA, there were so-called 'signature strikes' that do not aim at individuals identified by intelligence agencies as enemies of the US. Instead, 'signature strikes' are robotic attacks triggered by evidence of 'suspicious activities' or 'patterns of movement' observed by electronic drones from the air, such as the loading of rifles onto pickup trucks.[23] The Obama administration's 'signature strikes' directive deemed any able-bodied men in the line of fire legitimate targets unless they were posthumously exonerated. This shoot-first-ask-questions-later policy was the very antithesis of applying the rule of law. Although lethal targeted attacks – especially those against American citizens – understandably attracted the most attention, signature attacks provoked even more outrage. In a well-armed country like Yemen, the presence of rifles or even bazookas or rocket-propelled grenade launchers does not in itself identify nearby individuals as terrorists. Nor do weapons in the hands of Yemenis pose a credible threat to the American homeland. The more immediate menace was to Saudi Arabia.

American military policies were patently contrary to the pursuit of justice, respect for human rights and cultivation of the rule of law in Yemen. The outspoken human rights minister, Houria Mashhour, told a Reuters correspondent that she would prefer to handle terror suspects through the judiciary, in a way that did not violate human rights or risk civilian casualties. 'All we are calling for is justice and reliance on international regulations with regard to human rights and to be true to our commitment to our citizens in that they all deserve a fair trial', she added.[24] The American-educated youth activist Fare'a al-Muslimi told a US Congressional hearing in April 2013 that attacks such as the one that had killed five people in his home village in Dhamar governorate were spreading intense anti-Americanism. For these two and many other supporters of the uprising, opposition to US military policy had become part of the struggle for social justice.

Long known for meddling in Yemen's domestic politics, Riyadh had many worries there: the Shi'a Huthi rebellion on the kingdom's southern frontier, which the Saudis blame on Iran; al-Qa'ida in the

Arabian Peninsula, based in Yemen since militants had been chased out of Saudi Arabia; the popular 'youth' uprising calling for democracy; the risk of chaos and/or full-fledged civil war in the Peninsula's south-west quadrant; and the very prospect of a strong, unified, mobilized country where democratic values and women's empowerment might be on the rise. In the face of popular demonstrations of an order of magnitude that had toppled dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, the kingdom sought to maintain its traditional influence in Yemen through the patronage system of payments to various Yemeni political actors in and beyond Sana'a's central government, overseen by the Saudi Ministry of Interior.[25]

Although air strikes are usually attributed to the United States, evidence indicates Saudi involvement in some operations. In 2010, Amnesty International said it was 'extremely likely' – though difficult to verify – that Tornado fighter-bombers supplied by the UK to Saudi Arabia were used in indiscriminate attacks against Huthi rebels that killed civilians as well as militants.[26] The *Guardian* suggested that some deadly bombings of Yemen were 'outsourced' to the Saudi Air Force.[27] The internet was abuzz with claims that Saudi fighter jets had conducted operations in Yemen in early 2013. Investigative journalists found evidence of an undisclosed American drone base in Saudi Arabia from which the attack that had killed al-Awlaqi was launched.[28] Perhaps the House of Saud was outsourcing its al-Qa'ida problem to the US military, rather than the other way around.

Washington supports the House of Saud, but the monarchy is wary of Yemeni aspirations for social justice. As the National Dialogue was progressing, the kingdom expelled tens of thousands of Yemeni migrant workers or small entrepreneurs as part of an effort to tighten immigration, curb smuggling and 'Saudize' the labour force. Work was begun on an 1,800-kilometre security fence along the Saudi border with Yemen, complete with massive guard towers; a Yemeni pundit, Haykal Bafana, tweeted to the effect that 'at least an effective barrier might stem the flow of jihadis from Saudi Arabia into Yemen'. Official and personal-account payments from the oil-rich GCC countries to military commanders, politicians, tribal sheikhs and other figures continued in a fifty-year-old pattern, while new actors probably including Iran and Qatar also got into the act. Furthermore while Yemeni women spoke up, led chants for regime change, performed liberation theatre, campaigned against violence and took leadership roles in the National Dialogue, the Custodians of Mecca and Medina continued to restrict women's

right to drive, ride bicycles, travel abroad or otherwise constitute themselves as functioning adults. On this front, supposedly backward Yemen put the kingdom and its GCC cousins to shame. Likewise, the Gulf monarchs' antipathy towards the Arab revolutions and aversion to democratization were hardly a secret. Riyadh had a sometimes counter-intuitive, convoluted history of backing the Zaydi-Shi'a imamate against Yemeni republicans in the 1960s, Salafi jihadists in the interim and Socialist secessionists in 1994. Historically, the kingdom has consistently sought to thwart Yemeni nationalism, self-determination, unity, welfare, poverty alleviation, workers' rights, women's empowerment and democratization. Since 2002, Saudi and American policies have been overwhelmingly concerned with the fight against al-Qa'ida, and this drove their Yemen policies which were, in turn, largely strategic. A decade later, they also worried about Iranian influence on the Huthi movement. Strategic realpolitik made good sense from both Riyadh's and Washington's point of view, but was not attentive to the consequences of building up Saleh's military machine, nor to the mounting frustrations of the Yemeni people. Lastly, then, US policy is largely concerned with supporting the interests of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – a priority that conflicts with the prospects of democratization in Yemen.

Many Yemenis question whether key foreign players and neighbouring governments appreciate the extent of popular discontent and the depth of the desire for change. Arranged under tight security at the five-star Sana'a Mövenpik, or occasionally in similarly luxurious facilities in other cities, the work of the National Dialogue Conference seems far removed from the everyday concerns of the other twenty-five million Yemenis, nearly half of whom are undernourished. The naming of the whole process as a 'GCC Initiative' (rather than a Yemeni Initiative); the direct and dominant role of the US in military restructuring; the flood of 'foreign experts' some Yemeni intellectuals refer to as 'tourists' – all of these contributed to perceptions that the Dialogue had been commandeered by international donors more interested in protecting their own interests than in transitional justice.

EARLY IN THE SECOND DECADE of the twenty-first century, Yemen is in a state of flux. After over three decades of corrupt, incompetent leadership in Sana'a and violence and uncertainty in the former

PDRY, the vanguard of a new generation who had known no other form of rule seized the initiative. Women raised their voices, and many men laid down their arms. Together, some millions of citizens in cities and towns from the Saudi border to the Indian Ocean, and from the Red Sea to the Empty Quarter, staked their claim to the public civic sphere: they seized not only the streets and plazas, but also cyberspace. They confronted the counterrevolutionary defenders of the status quo ante: first, the old men who had ruled and ruined Yemen since the 1960s; second, and indirectly, both their foreign backers and spoilers in the neighbouring petro-monarchies and the American security establishment.

The experiment of the National Dialogue Conference deserves to be seen as a Yemeni initiative drawing on indigenous precedents and activism, and thus as a possible avenue towards a new, negotiated social contract between regions, parties and stakeholders in a pluralistic and decentralized polity. At the same time, the GCC Initiative also needs to be understood as a Western-backed effort by wealthy, misogynistic and distinctly anti-democratic gerontocracies to tame popular energies, partly by co-opting key elites into a process of managed political change and security restructuring.

It is important to note that both of these different readings offer the potential to reduce or avert armed conflict. In the best-case scenario, negotiations between various Yemeni forces and interested foreign parties could put the Huthi rebellion to rest, prevent a replay in 2014 of the 1994 civil war, and perhaps even eliminate the presence of Yemeni and especially foreign al-Qa‘ida operatives in the country – thus, with any luck, removing the perceived need for American and/or Saudi airstrikes. The atrocious bloodletting in Syria, Egypt’s haphazard top-down post-Mubarak constitutional revisions, and the ignominious example of gunpoint regime change in Iraq all tend to point to Yemen as a positive model. Yemen deserves credit for drawing on its tradition of dialogue to draw representative elites into a national conversation. The role of rich neighbours and Western powers should also be acknowledged for facilitating talks rather than (or perhaps just in addition to) simply bankrolling clients. Something good might come from the Dialogue; prospects for disaster might be foreclosed.

By the same token, there is a world of difference between pursuing justice and supporting a securitized ‘rule of law’. If the GCC Initiative and the National Dialogue are to be deemed a success, they will need to deliver more than the professionalization of Yemen’s military and security forces under new commands whose primary

mission is to protect the US and the GCC from al-Qa'ida. International donors recognize that Yemen faces many daunting humanitarian, environmental, social, legal and political challenges that need to be addressed if a modicum of security is to be achieved. Dozens of development agencies are pursuing large and small projects in these and other fields. Yet security spending – including both direct military expenditures and security assistance – dwarfs all other forms of foreign aid and investment, because the two most influential foreign actors regard Yemen mainly as a battlefield in the global war on terror. These heavy expenditures do not meet the needs of starving millions for economic relief, the pleas of the 'peaceful youth' for demilitarization, or human rights concerns about extrajudicial executions. Instead, military actions and involvement, as well as weapons transfers, have provoked widespread mistrust of American motives and alienated some of the country's most articulate political activists. To the extent that the GCC Initiative is perceived by the public as a donor project aimed at stability rather than a Yemeni project for social justice, it runs the risk of minimizing rather than maximizing prospects for democratization.

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CHAPTER TWO

TIES THAT BIND AND DIVIDE: THE ‘ARAB SPRING’ AND YEMENI CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS

Adam C. Seitz

THE 2011 'ARAB SPRING' PROMPTED a wide range of reactions from military analysts across the Middle East and North Africa, highlighting significant and diverse changes in Arab civil–military relations in recent decades. In the case of Yemen, the unique brand of praetorianism – in which the military played a dominant role in political structures and institutions – that characterized the Saleh regime's relationship with the army was put to the test in early 2011, as the military and the regime were confronted by widespread anti-government protests. The fracturing of the armed forces that ensued reflected the deep-seated divisions and shifting allegiances that have long defined Yemeni society and its relationship with the state.

The Yemeni 'Arab Spring' should not be viewed as a single event to be analysed on its own, but as a culmination of shifts and changes long in the making. This is especially true when examining the military's response to the 2011 uprisings and their role in the ongoing transition. This chapter argues that shifts in civil–military relations, culminating in the fracturing of the army in 2011, came as a result of various internal and external pressures on the Saleh regime's system of tribal control and modifications to the regime's overall governance strategy over the past decade. The Saleh regime's role in the US-led 'War on Terror', attempts to reform the Yemeni security sector, and dynastic designs on the part of Saleh led to the increased marginalization of his support base, at home and abroad, challenging Yemen's patronage system and the central role the military had long played in it. Over the past decade, changes in the ruling bargain between the regime and its tribal support base shifted military loyalties in ways that favoured tribe and kin over regime, challenging the praetorian characterization of the Yemeni military.

I begin with a review of the current literature, highlighting existing gaps and somewhat outdated and misleading assumptions in the study of civil–military relations in Yemen, the tribal composition of the Yemeni military and its role in the patronage system, and the role of the military in the unification process of the early 1990s. I then discuss three areas that disrupted the Saleh regime's system of tribal control and its relationship with the military, starting in 2001, including economic strains and military reform, the impact of external patronage on the part of the US, and finally the issue of the

succession. These three areas are interconnected, and, as a result of the tribal composition of the Yemeni military and its central role in Yemeni patronage politics, contributed greatly to the shifts in civil–military relations, as highlighted in individual military commanders' responses to anti-regime protests in 2011.

MISLEADING CHARACTERIZATIONS OF YEMENI CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONS

Recent literature on civil–military relations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) points to a 'dearth of scholarly attention to the Arab Security Sector and its role in the state, politics, and society'[1] since the late 1980s. Barak and Assaf argue that, although 'a better acquaintance with the Arab Security Sector and its roles will not necessarily lead to more successful policies in the Middle East … it may lead to more informed decision-making processes, especially at critical policy junctions'.[2] The 2011 uprisings prompted a wide range of reactions by militaries across MENA, challenging widely held perceptions about coup-proofing strategies, military loyalty and regime stability, thereby highlighting significant and diverse changes in Arab civil–military relations in recent decades. Shifts in regional civil–military dynamics have led a number of academics in the field to propose a new research agenda for studying Middle East militaries.[3] Such a research agenda should be seen as all the more important as the US looks to lighten its military footprint in the Middle East, relying more on partnerships with local actors in pursuing security interests in the region.

Adding to this new imperative, much of the literature examining the 2011 uprisings suggests a number of changes to civil–military relations in the lead-up to the Arab uprisings, as well as emerging trends in civil–military relations as a number of Arab regimes are faced with the challenges of transition. In a summer 2011 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Gregory Gause argued that an overemphasis on explaining the stability of Arab authoritarianism had led many academics to underestimate the forces for change that were underway.[4] Gause points to three areas where scholars have underestimated such driving forces in the current Arab uprisings: the destabilizing effects of poorly implemented liberal economic policies, the military's response to public unrest and an emerging new brand of pan-Arabism. In relation to the military response, Gause finds two factors that drove the Arab militaries' reactions to

popular protests: '[the] composition of both the regime and its military and the level of institutionalization and professionalism in the army itself'.[5]

Zoltan Barany points out that, unlike many of the other Arab states faced with the challenges of widespread public unrest, 'Tribal affiliations … are of the foremost importance in Yemen', where appointments to positions of trust, including key military posts, have traditionally been based upon tribal and kinship ties.[6] Philippe Droz-Vincent seconds this observation, describing the Yemeni military as being characterized 'by deep penetration of tribal relations'.[7] Tribal divisions within the military and society in general are described by a number of regional scholars as contributing to commanders' decisions to fire on protestors, as ordered by the regime, or to abstain and subsequently come to the defence of protestors.[8] The tribal composition of the military and its role in Saleh's system of patronage have made it all the more difficult to rally the military behind a central ideology, undercutting any efforts to transcend Yemen's tribal sociopolitical system. As Khaled Fattah argues, 'the feeling of tribal allegiance inside Yemen's military is at least [equal] to military allegiance'.[9]

A number of works examining the 2011 uprisings in Yemen describe the military's relationship with the Saleh regime as one characterized by praetorianism, with the armed forces being 'more willing to be assigned a role in maintaining internal order on behalf of the incumbent regime'.[10] Such a characterization is due in part to the military's corporate interest in maintaining its role in, and the benefits received from, the rent-based patronage networks under the Saleh regime. This relationship has also been described as the 'tribal–military–commercial complex', in which 'high-ranking officers and a few great merchants' families all had their hands in each other's pockets'.[11] Over the past decade, however, this relationship has been challenged by what Alistair Harris describes as Saleh's adoption of 'a neo-patrimonial patronage system based upon co-optation of tribal leaders'.[12] Harris argues that 'socioeconomic and political norms exacerbated by [Saleh's] style of neo-patrimonial, corrosive patronage politics' have 'undermined traditional tribal and social structures'.[13] Saleh's promotion of family members and marginalization of rivals within the military challenged the corporate interests of the military and merchant families alike.

Furthermore, the tribal composition of the Yemeni armed forces and the military's role in the Saleh regime's patronage system have 'blurred the social lines between historically distinct groups', making it difficult to distinguish between the state and civil society.[14] Over the years, the evolution of such a system and the increasingly exclusionary policies of the Saleh regime resulted in the deterioration of tribal dynamics and power-sharing arrangements that had stood as pillars of legitimacy and stability in Yemen. Thus, while Harris's conclusion that 'current conflict dynamics in Yemen have only increased the central role tribes will play in Yemen's future'[15] does not address the issue of civil–military relations directly, the increasingly dual tribal–political role of the military has given certain tribes greater political influence in Yemen's future.

Since the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, the Saleh regime has increasingly relied on a strategy of manipulation of social dynamics, buoyed by a 'praetorian' security apparatus, to exert control over Yemeni society. While a number of scholars have discussed the challenges of merging the armed forces of the two Yemeni states, and the ensuing political and military manoeuvring that ultimately led to civil war in 1994,[16] few have addressed the impact that the war itself – coupled with Saleh's increasingly exclusionary policies – played in shifting civil–military relations thereafter. Furthermore, the impact of such divisive policies on Yemen's traditional social and administrative dynamics is a recurring theme in a number of scholarly works,[17] highlighting the development of exclusionary policies and their corrosive effects on traditional tribal dynamics. Due to the military's tribal underpinnings, such works also shed light on shifts in Yemeni civil–military relations.

The praetorian characterization of the military was grounded in the military's role in the regime's patronage networks and its ability to co-opt the tribes through inclusion within the ranks, as well as through appointments to 'leadership' positions within the armed forces. As Saleh's system of patronage evolved, the deterioration of traditional social and administrative structures led increasingly to the reduction of his tribal support base, as his kin made up a significant portion of the officer corps within the Yemeni armed forces. At the same time, such a tribal composition of the military and its role in Yemen's increasingly ad hoc rent-based patronage system was threatened by Saleh's moves towards reforming the security sector as one means of consolidating his power.

Such changes in traditional systems of local governance, and their potential impact on the role of the military, are highlighted by Nazih Ayubi in his argument that 'disintegration in the traditional (especially the patrimonial) systems in the Arab world creates a number of political "gaps" that – owing to a particularly weak polity – can only be filled by the bureaucracy, and especially its military wing'.[18] While this may not be the case in Yemen, where competing actors in society currently maintain their own 'militias' to prevent such a scenario, the military continues to feature prominently in the ongoing transition, due in large part to the disintegration of Yemen's traditional social and administrative system and the central role the military have played in Saleh-style patronage politics. It is through patronage networks within the military that tribal figures have increased their influence on Yemen's political future.

UNIFICATION AND CIVIL WAR

The military has played a key role throughout modern Yemeni history, with three of the four presidents of North Yemen and both presidents of the unified Republic of Yemen (ROY) emerging from military backgrounds. But the military had played a central role in Yemen's system of patronage since the departure of Egyptian forces in 1967. Although the newly installed president in 1967 was the only northern president without a military background, the period 1967–74 was when 'tribal penetration of all state institutions, including the military, reached to an apex'.[19] After this short interlude of civilian rule, the re-entry of the military into the political arena came in 1974, with the successful coup led by Colonel Ibrahim al-Hamdi. Al-Hamdi sought to reform the military and weaken the influence of the tribes within the government, including the military. By contrast, Saleh, like his predecessor Colonel Ahmed Hussain al-Ghashmi, adopted policies favouring their own Hashid tribal confederation – a trend that continued through unification in the early 1990s.[20] Saleh's rise through the military ranks to the presidency, following the assassination of al-Ghashmi in 1978, is reflective not only of deep tribal penetration in Yemeni state institutions, but also of the significance of patron–client relationships within the Yemeni military. The selection of Saleh in 1978, like that of al-Ghashmi the previous year, came in large part as a result of his role in the two preceding coups, and the patronage relationships he had cultivated.

From the start, the armed forces were Ali Abdullah Saleh's power base, with patronage relationships forged during his own military service giving him access to key tribal figures and alliances. Following the establishment of the Republic of Yemen in 1990, the policies of the Saleh regime became increasingly exclusionary, involving a number of moves that would ultimately lead to civil war in 1994. From the moment of unification, the Saleh regime made a number of structural changes to the government and military that disproportionately affected the southern Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) and its allies. Thus, while the merger of the armies of the southern PDRY and northern YAR was seen as a crucial step towards effective unification, the Saleh regime had no intention of allowing southerners to gain control over the military. The two militaries were never merged under a unified command, but instead 'carried out a symbolic exchange of troops, sending a few brigades from [each army] to new camps across the old borders'.[21] As part of the fifty-fifty powersharing arrangement between the northern GPC and southern YSP, Saleh left the Defence Ministry post in the hands of the southern YSP – though the position held virtually no authority, as many within the officer ranks were Saleh loyalists and kin. This lack of either a unified national command structure or of financial accountability within the Defence Ministry, combined with Saleh's divisive strategies intended to create instability within the YSP, helped pave the way to civil war in the spring of 1994.

Following the 1994 civil war, in which the Yemeni forces loyal to the Saleh regime emerged victorious over southern separatists, Saleh gradually began to sideline political and military opponents. In the months after the civil war, Saleh relied heavily on southern supporters of Ali Nasir (who had moved to the YAR after their defeat in Aden in the power struggle of January 1986) to 'reconstruct a degree of north–south power sharing', appointing several members of this group to prominent government positions, including the posts of vice president and military chief of staff.[22] At the same time, Saleh rewarded the Islamist Islah party and returning Afghan veterans for their support against southern separatists by giving them a number of cabinet appointments previously held by the southern YSP. Over the years, however, even members of Islah and Ali Nasir partisans were gradually cast aside in favour of Saleh's ruling GPC party, which came by the end of the 1990s to hold virtually all ministry positions in the government, and has increased its parliamentary majority in subsequent elections.[23]

Prior to the civil war, Saleh's relatives' control of the military was 'hidden behind a façade of nominally higher-ranked officers', giving an illusion of power-sharing with the YSP.[24] With the military victory over the southern separatists in July 1994, however, 'all pretences to conceal the presidential family's monopoly on power were abandoned'.[25] Following a 1994 mini-review of defence, Saleh issued a series of significant proclamations as he moved to disarm southern security forces and replace them with northern police and military forces loyal to the GPC, destroying any semblance of power-sharing with the south and at the same time laying the foundations for the grievances of former southern military officers, who would become a driving force in protests starting in 2007. Saleh argued that the reduction of the armed forces by 50,000 men and the removal of tens of thousands of civil servants 'were made in line with austerity measures recommended by the international lending institutions'.[26] Most observers viewed the cuts as a 'comprehensive process of purging', with a vast majority of the dismissals confined to YSP recruits and civil servants. Deepening the suspicion that Saleh was strengthening his control over the unity government was the new attention paid to purchasing advanced military hardware and modernizing the remaining military forces – especially Saleh's elite Republican Guard, which, at unification, had served as little more than a small presidential protection force. Saleh embarked on a mission to coup-proof the military by favouring his own kin for commands, while at the same time using military service and appointments to build patronage networks and forge political alliances with key tribal leaders. In the end, Saleh's overwhelming military victory over the south and his ability to co-opt the tribes in the north enabled the regime to continue to consolidate power through the military with minimal threat of either political or military reprisal.

This exclusionary trend continued throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, as Saleh increasingly used the threats posed by southern separatists, al-Qa'ida and the Huthi rebellion as pretexts for crackdowns on peaceful opposition and reformist elements in Yemeni society, as well as potential challenges within the government and military. But growing opposition to the regime came as a result of increased economic hardship, an increased reliance on divide-and-rule tactics on the part of the Saleh regime and shifts in its relations with the US.

ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND MILITARY REFORM EFFORTS

One set of factors that have put pressure on existing civil–military dynamics were the military reforms put in place by the Saleh regime in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which coincided with shrinking oil revenues and growing political opposition to the regime's increasingly exclusionary policies. Following the first popular presidential election, in 1999, Saleh faced growing political opposition. In the months leading up to the election and immediately afterwards, the Saleh regime forced a number of civilian and military employees into early retirement. Among those most affected were the partisans of Ali Nasir, Saleh's remaining southern allies.[27] In February 2001, Yemen held its first local elections alongside a constitutional referendum extending the president's term from five to seven years, and extending parliamentary terms from four to six years. This was followed by the appointment of a new prime minister from among Ali Nasir's group, Abd al-Qader Ba Jamal. While Ba Jamal was not as popular or respected as his predecessor, he was favoured by the regime as a 'GPC insider who was more amenable to working within the regime's patronage system',[28] while at the same time creating a false image of power-sharing.

The elections and referendum were followed in May 2001 by the abolition by the National Defence Council (NDC) of compulsory military service. Although the Council claimed the decision was due to the settling of outstanding border conflicts, when combined with the political and military reshuffling and constitutional referendum in February, the decision to abolish compulsory service and instead depend exclusively on a volunteer force was viewed by some as a means for Saleh to consolidate his power further, and to further coup-proof the regime by purging the ranks. At the same time, however, the announcement by the NDC came as Yemen faced an increasing threat of economic hardship resulting from declining oil revenues and a decade of international isolation, making the decision all the more controversial given the military's economic role as the country's largest employer. Whatever their true motivations, such moves challenged individual commanders' political and corporate interests and the military's role in an increasingly exclusive rent-based patronage system under Saleh, which the regime relied upon for support from a number of influential tribes.

In 2002, growing unpopularity, coupled with increasingly exclusionary policies by the regime, pushed the opposition parties of Islah and the YSP, along with several smaller parties, into an anti-GPC

coalition known as the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). Although the success of the JMP was limited at first, the coalition gained 22 per cent of the vote in the 2006 presidential elections. Increasing economic hardship and growing domestic opposition led the regime to announce the reintroduction of compulsory military service in 2007 as a means to combat high unemployment among young adult males. As the country's largest employer, the military contained an estimated 60,000 active soldiers, 40,000 reservists and an additional 71,000 paramilitary forces – the second-largest military on the Arabian Peninsula; its 2006 defence budget represented approximately 40 per cent of the Yemeni government's total budget, or around 6 per cent of its GDP – the seventh-highest rate in the world.[29] When it comes to military capabilities and force readiness, however, these numbers are deceptive, as a significant share of the budget goes towards maintaining patronage networks and the salaries of 'ghost soldiers', whose pay is pocketed by the military elite and whose equipment is sold on the black market. Some sources estimate that this might inflate the number of active Yemeni military personnel by as much as one-third.[30]

But delayed implementation only increased opposition to the regime, especially among former southern military and security personnel who had been excluded from serving in the armed forces since 1994. In May 2007 the Military Retirees Association was formed, and its coordinating council scheduled weekly sit-ins, starting on the seventeenth anniversary of Yemeni unity, 'to demand jobs and greater compensation than their virtually worthless pension funds'.[31] The Association, which later became known as Hiraak, was instrumental in organizing sit-ins and peaceful protests throughout 2007 and 2008, setting in motion a trend of increasingly open opposition to the Saleh regime by the southern secessionist movement. But violent clashes with the army remained rare before the 2011 uprisings.

THE US AND EXTERNAL PATRONAGE

Increased domestic political opposition and economic uncertainty coincided with international pressure on the Saleh regime to take action against al-Qa'ida elements operating largely unhindered on Yemen's borders following the terror attacks of 11 September 2001. With his newfound alliance with Washington in the US-led 'global war on terror', Saleh sought to exploit the transnational terror threat

posed by al-Qa'ida to build political support outside traditional spheres. Saleh used counter-terrorism aid and support from the US not only to build up his praetorian forces, but also as a means to abandon what were formerly essentially temporary alliances, including those with local tribes, various political factions, and Islamist groups, perceiving instead that 'external [US] patronage [was] enough to strengthen key alliances' within his increasingly narrow inner circle.[32] But this 'alliance' proved a double-edged sword for the regime, providing Saleh with the ability to consolidate his power with the help of US patronage and money, though at the same time marginalizing and radicalizing large segments of Yemeni society.

Throughout the 1990s Saleh opposed US efforts in the region, including the 1991 Gulf War. A combination of fear of sanctions, concern about potential US military action against Yemen – especially given the lacklustre response of the Saleh regime to the bombing of the USS *Cole* just one year earlier – and, to some degree, growing political and economic challenges, led Saleh to agree in 2002 to cooperate with the US on counter-terror operations. Saleh's decision to ally himself with the US led to a modest increase in US aid to Yemen, which had virtually ended in the 1990s;[33] but it was a decision that had serious domestic consequences. While Saleh remained tolerant of some jihadist activities, his alliance with Washington put him at odds with a number of political allies, including members of the Islamist Islah party and some Afghan Arab jihadists who had been instrumental in his victory over southern separatists in the 1994 civil war. His relationship with Washington increasingly brought domestic anti-American sentiment to bear on the regime, which came to be described as the latest Western puppet in the rhetoric of both Islamic extremists and the political opposition.

Saleh sought to manage his relationships with domestic Islamist elements, attempting to minimize his visibility in US counter-terrorism operations, while at the same time reaping whatever economic and political benefit he could from his newly forged 'alliance' with Washington. But this balancing act often put him at odds both with domestic forces and with Washington. With internal opposition to the regime growing, Saleh became increasingly dependent on the international support afforded by his role in the US-led war on terror. This was especially true as Saleh clung to power in the summer and autumn of 2011, as he repeatedly emphasized the 'indispensable' role he played in the war on terror.[34] Saleh's belief

that he could abandon and marginalize his traditional support groups and replace them with the external patronage provided by the US proved disastrous for the regime. Washington's decision to back the GCC's transition deal essentially sealed Saleh's fate by cutting off the regime's lifeline: US counter-terrorism support. The decision also served as a point of departure for the military commanders, who no longer saw their interests served by supporting the regime. As the 2011 uprisings dragged on, the US cut its aid to the regime and shifted its support away from Saleh. As a result, pressure on the regime's supporters increased, and they found that their allegiance to the regime, built on an increasingly ad hoc rent-based system of patronage, was no longer effective. Many of them therefore abandoned the flailing regime to protect their future interests, taking with them the support of their kin and clansmen, who comprised the bulk of the armed forces.

In the years following 9/11, Saleh had increasingly used US counter-terrorism funds to establish specialized units outside the existing command structure, as well as to build up units commanded by his close kin. Such moves increasingly marginalized members of Saleh's support base, including many within the armed forces. At the same time, he used counter-terrorism aid and US patronage to address emerging domestic economic and political challenges, and as means of pursuing more assertive policies in the area of political succession.

SUCCESSION, SUSPICION AND INSURGENCY

The military had become an indispensable tool of control for the Saleh regime, playing an essential role in his patronage system and an increasingly repressive tool used to marginalize potential rivals and others who might challenge his growing dynastic aspirations, including those by military commanders and even members of his own family. According to Stephen Day, confrontations over the succession were taking place within the Saleh family as early as 1996, when Ali Abdullah Saleh moved to replace his half-brother, Ali Saleh al-Ahmar, with his son Ahmed Ali Saleh as commander of the Republican Guard and Special Forces; there were also widespread rumours that Ali Abdullah Saleh had arranged the helicopter crash that killed his maternal uncle, General Mohammed Isma'il, in 1999.[35] By the late 1990s, one of the greatest causes of stress in the relationship between civilians and the military had

become the question of succession. Although Yemen was a republic, with presidential elections mandated in the constitution, in recent years more and more people had come to believe that Ali Abdullah Saleh would try to pass the presidency on to Ahmed Ali Saleh.[36] The question of succession brought with it questions of regime legitimacy, as well as fears concerning the future of Yemen's increasingly exclusive patronage system, creating opposition even among some key supporters of the regime. Adding to such anxiety, Saleh was even accused of fomenting insurgency in the far north of Yemen in an attempt to sideline, discredit and even kill General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, commander of the army's 1st Armoured Division.

General Ali Mohsen had played a crucial role in Saleh's rise to power, helping to shore up support among key tribes and also rallying support among the Afghan Arab jihadis in the 1994 civil war. As a result of his own military service, including the instrumental support he provided to Saleh in the early 1990s, it is likely that General Ali Mohsen felt his path to the presidency was assured, or at the very least that he would retain his role as kingmaker. Over the past decade, however, General Ali Mohsen had been sidelined by Saleh's promotion of his son as a potential successor.

In 2004, General Mohsen's 1st Armoured Division was responsible for putting down the Huthi insurgency in Sa'ada. Some analysts, as well as the influential Yemeni businessman and prominent member of the Hashid tribal confederation, Sheikh Hamid Abdullah al-Ahmar, have suggested that 'Ahmed Ali Saleh used his Republican Guards to support Zaydi tribal rebels against troops under the command of Ali Mohsen Al-Ahmar'.[37] Whether true or not, such perceptions were buoyed by the lack of support that General Ali Mohsen received from Sana'a to pursue the war in Sa'ada. Citing a source close to the former president, Sarah Phillips writes that Saleh had informed General Ali Mohsen that he would not receive new hardware to combat the growing insurgency at a time when the Republican Guard continued to procure arms from Russia, as well as training and aid from the US. According to the same source, Phillips writes that Ali Mohsen was also refused support from the country's best elite units, the Republican Guard and Central Security Forces, and instead sent units with inferior capabilities to augment forces under his command.[38] Adding to such speculation are reports implicating President Saleh in elaborate plots to kill General Ali Mohsen, in one instance with the assistance of a

Saudi airstrike, unbeknown to Riyadh. US diplomatic cables acquired by Wikileaks reveal that, in 2009, as the war in Sa'da spilled over the Saudi border, 'Saudi officials discovered President Saleh had given them ground coordinates to a target in Sa'da governorate, which turned out to be the location of General Ali [Mohsen's] command center just outside the fighting area'.[39] Saleh's use of the conflict in Sa'da to sideline political opponents stands as a stark example of the impact of tribal politics on civil–military relations in the years leading up to the 2011 uprisings, and also suggests at least one motive influencing General Ali Mohsen to defect and side with the opposition. The use of the Huthi insurgency to sideline General Ali Mohsen and his 1st Armoured Division challenged the ruling bargain not only between Saleh and Ali Mohsen, but also for those who benefited from patronage through General Ali Mohsen and the forces under his command, who sought a new bargain with those they perceived as emerging power-brokers as the conflict dragged on.

General Ali Mohsen's experience is but one example of the growing influence of patronage politics in military decision-making, as well as more generally in civil–military relations. Patron–client relations also influenced the decision-making and effectiveness of unit commanders with strong family ties to the Saleh regime, such as his son Ahmed. A number of units within the ranks owed allegiance neither to General Ahmed Ali Saleh nor to his father, but rather to Sheikh Hamid Abdullah al-Ahmar. This lack of cohesiveness in the Yemeni armed forces, as well as the growing precariousness of the Saleh regime, probably influenced commanders' decision-making throughout the military as they were confronted with widespread civil unrest. This included subordinate units under the command of the Republican Guard, many of which remained neutral or joined General Ali Mohsen; some reports claimed as many as 14,000 defections from the Republican Guard as the uprising dragged on into the spring and summer of 2011.[40]

THE 'ARAB SPRING' AND MILITARY RESTRUCTURING

Yemen's 'Arab Spring' experience should be viewed as a culmination of changing social and military dynamics long in the making. This is particularly noticeable when one examines the underlying causes of the response of the armed forces to the 2011 uprisings. The divisions that occurred in the armed forces highlight

the military's response to a number of internal and external stresses that had built up during a decade or more of increasingly exclusionary political trends. Previous attempts at reforms of the security sector, US patronage and Saleh's plans for a 'republican monarchy' converged to challenge Yemen's patronage system, in which the military played a central role. The collective challenges to the regime's existing ruling bargains with its military, on the one hand, and its tribal support bases on the other, ultimately led to a shift in Yemeni civil–military relations from what could once have been characterized by praetorianism to a situation more reflective of Yemen's divided tribal society.

Over the last decade or so, the exclusionary policies of the Saleh regime coincided with a reassertion of primordial and confessional identities as part of an approach on Saleh's part that came increasingly to rely on a divide-and-rule strategy. Drawing on his own Shi'i Zaydi faith and Sanhan tribal identity, Saleh maintained that he was the only person able to hold the Yemeni state together, selling himself to domestic and international audiences as the least bad alternative to anarchy and an indispensable ally in the war on terror. Such attempts to maintain his grip on power only deepened divides in an already fractured society – including within the military, which had long played a central role in uniting, and sometimes dividing, the Yemeni state. Over the years the dominant priority of the Yemeni military had shifted from regime preservation to self-preservation, while commanders and those within the ranks sought to protect their individual political, economic and social interests. For many within the military, the Arab Spring marked an opportunity to renegotiate and strike new bargains with opposition factions.

The response of the Yemeni armed forces to the Arab Spring, as well as their subsequent reaction to efforts aimed at restructuring and reforming the Yemeni security sector, underscores the influence of patronage politics, tribal identity and personal loyalty in military decision-making, as well as more generally in the shaping of Yemeni civil–military relations. While such factors ultimately challenged former President Saleh's ability to use the military as his own personal militia and tool of repression, they also stand in the way of reforms aimed at national unity. Restructuring and reforming the Yemeni armed forces remains a highly divisive, yet necessary, task. While the past two decades of Yemeni civil–military relations highlight the challenges to reforming the armed forces on the basis of national rather than personal loyalties, they also underscore the

consequences of failure. The reform of the armed forces, redefining their role, and the merging of the militaries of north and south Yemen under a unified command in the early 1990s featured prominently in the political infighting that ultimately led to civil war in 1994. Given current domestic and international realities, failure to meet these challenges once again may have profound implications both within and beyond the Yemeni state.

Although President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi has issued a number of decrees intended to chart a path towards a restructuring of the Yemeni armed forces, implementation is slow, indicating how difficult it is to transform the military away from a system of patronage and personal loyalty. Early moves involving the replacement of certain leaders led to violent clashes between military factions, and in some cases to mutinies within the ranks.[41] Such events may be repeated in the future, with far-reaching implications for a state confronting a hydra of complex national security challenges.

Divisions within the army following almost two decades of Saleh's contentious policies, continued mutinies in response to President Hadi's decrees aimed at restructuring the armed forces, and an overall under-resourcing of the military have already led to the outsourcing to local tribal militias of various security tasks – including the fight against Ansar al-Shari'a, an insurgent wing of AQAP.[42] While such a strategy may serve short-term security interests, a reliance on tribal militias and further militarization of the tribes may prove counterproductive, not only for efforts to bring the armed forces under a unified national command structure and dismantle international terror networks in the region, but – more importantly – for the monumental task of holding the Yemeni state together. In addition, the weakness of the central government and divisions within the armed forces have left Yemen vulnerable to the influence of external actors pursuing their own domestic, regional and international interests. This threat goes beyond the regime to include various military, tribal and Islamist figures as they seek to better their situation within a tribal and increasingly militarized society. This combination of a weak central government, military factionalization, empowerment of local tribal militias and increased external influence has the potential of transforming Yemeni civil–military relations into something akin to warlordism, in which military and/or tribal leaders exercise civil power at a local or regional level – either in support of or in opposition to the central government – through their control of militias. Such a scenario poses

significant challenges for long-term efforts aimed at social and economic development, institution-building and political reform, instead threatening a state of perpetual crisis-management and threat-mitigation not only for the Yemeni central government, but also for regional and international stakeholders with a vested interest in the security and stability of the Yemeni state.

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CHAPTER THREE

YEMENI SOCIETY IN THE SPOTLIGHT: THEATRE AND FILM IN YEMEN BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

Katherine Hennessey

MASSIVE AND HISTORIC DEMONSTRATIONS against the thirty-three-year reign of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh rocked Yemen in 2011. News coverage showed tens of thousands of Yemenis – young and old, men and women – marching and chanting in the streets, waving placards and posters, and painting their faces, clothing and a range of everyday objects with the slogan *Irhal!* ('Leave!'). Thoughtful observers were impressed by the levels of coordination and organization that these mass spectacles entailed. Indeed, the prominent roles played by certain protest leaders – Nobel Peace Prize recipient Tawakkul Karman, for example – have subsequently been celebrated by the media and the international community.

Less clear from the news coverage, however, was the importance of the creative contributions of artists, musicians and actors to the demonstrations. As the weeks stretched into months, as threats of violence against protesters became reality, the protests remained predominantly peaceful. It is my contention that creative activity on the streets – music, art, dance, dramatic sketches and improvisations – offered Yemeni demonstrators a form of catharsis for their increasing fear, anger and frustration. This creative activity provided activists with opportunities to experiment with unusual forms of self-expression, which ranged from the reggae, rock and blues concerts of Yemeni musician Ahmed Asery and his band 3 Meters Away, whose titles include 'Inhale Freedom' and 'I'm Staying Till the Regime Leaves', to the caricatures and slogans painted and stencilled across the walls of Sana'a by Yemeni urban artists like Murad Subai' (Subai' has since made a prominent name for himself with his 'The Walls Remember' campaign, in which portraits of individuals who 'disappeared' under Saleh's regime are stencilled by an army of volunteers on walls around the city).[1]

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other social media played a crucial role in showcasing these and other artistic endeavours. The 'pro-revolution' music of Yemeni singer Fahd al-Qarny, who has been harassed by the regime since his arrest and trial in 2008 for insulting the president and his political party, and the satirical commentary of Yemeni comedian Marwan al-Mekhlafi were among the notable beneficiaries of the novel possibilities offered by these virtual public fora.[2] In short, Yemen's Arab Spring opened up new

and potentially transformative social relationships and spaces, both real and virtual, for those who participated.[3]

In Yemen, where Islamic norms and tribal traditions have combined with poverty and lack of educational opportunities to produce a culture that – though unique and captivating – currently has a strong conservative substratum, such activities elicited both exhilaration and suspicion. Yet the fact that such forms of self-expression were daring and unusual does not mean that they were unprecedented. This chapter will outline the trajectories of various genres of performance in Yemen before, during and after the 2011 protests, and will examine the continuing significance of Yemeni theatre and film as arenas for self-expression and sociopolitical critique. Among other things, it will contend that, before dissent spilled out into the Yemeni streets in mid-January 2011, one of the places that sociopolitical discontent was being most powerfully expressed was on the Yemeni stage.[4]

DAYS OF ANGER: YEMENI THEATRE IN 2009 AND 2010

In Sana'a, in early 2010, the young Yemeni director Qasem Abbas al-Lami conducted an intriguing intellectual experiment. He asked the female actresses in the theatre company of the Shuraka' al-Mustaqbal lil-Tanmiya (Future Partners for Development, or FPFD),[5] to ponder the following question: imagine a scenario in which all of the men in your life had disappeared – fathers, brothers, husbands – carried off by an illness or a natural disaster of catastrophic proportions. Imagine that there was no need to fear retaliation – physical, emotional, or psychological. What might you suddenly be free to say to them?

The result was a script for a work of experimental theatre, which opens with two young actresses reciting the lines: 'Oh, Father … you don't know how much the sound of your voice terrified me'; 'I dreaded the sight of your face – dreaded it.' The young women then tersely describe years of endurance of domestic violence and emotional and psychological intimidation, under the Father's regime. The scene concludes with a curse: *Mut ... mut ya abi ... mut min kulli qabhak, min dhulmak, min jibrutak ... mut, mut, mut!* ('Die, Father – die from all of your ugliness, your injustice, your tyranny … die, die, die!')[6]

The play, *Hadhariyat tuyur ghadarat-ha al-ajniha* (‘The Ravings Of Birds Who Have Lost Their Wings’), was performed at the Markaz al-Thaqafi in Sana‘a in March 2010. Having been a member of the audience, I can testify firsthand to the electrifying effect not only of these lines, but of a slew of subsequent ones skewering a range of oppressive patriarchal figures, from the Father to the Stepfather to the *rajul al-din* – the ‘Man of Religion’.[7] (‘Electrifying’ does not imply a positive reaction[8] – the audience initially seemed quite stunned, and later scenes received whistles and catcalls – but certainly the actresses had galvanized people’s attention.)

Prior to this play, audiences at the Markaz al-Thaqafi had seen Yemen’s runaway theatrical hit of 2009, a musical called *Ma‘k Nazl*, performed by the Khaleej Aden theatre company, directed by a talented Adeni named Amr Jamal, and supported by the Deutsche Haus (the German Cultural Centre) in Sana‘a. *Ma‘k Nazl* featured a catchy soundtrack and boisterous comedy, but nevertheless treated a serious subject: the existential dilemma of the protagonist, a young woman who has been tricked into a ‘tourist marriage’ with a rich and unscrupulous *khaliji*, who deserts her before their son is born.[9]

The musical shows its audience Aden’s gritty urban underbelly: dirt, poverty, drug use, prostitution, the daily struggles of ordinary people to pay for food and rent. It excoriates the corruption and economic stagnation that have helped to create these desperate conditions; it portrays Yemenis from all walks of life questioning and challenging racial, class and gender stereotypes; and it concludes with a surprisingly unorthodox solution to the young woman’s dilemma. A painfully shy but goodhearted young man, appropriately enough a security guard, falls in love with her, and offers to raise her child as his own – a happy ending that audiences greeted with loud and sustained applause.

The years 2009 and 2010 also saw an Arabic-language production of Molière’s *Le Malade Imaginaire*, sponsored by the French Cultural Centre,[10] and a near-silent pantomime[11] entitled *Wain Inti al-An?* (‘Where Are You Now?’), the subject of which is a terrorist attack that kills all the characters except the protagonist, which was performed in a double bill with *Hadhariyat*. In late 2010, Amr Jamal’s theatre company performed a play called *Kart Ahmar* (‘Red Card’) in Aden, which featured a series of scenes each focused on a particularly fraught social issue: crime, domestic violence and, perhaps most strikingly, the ineffectiveness of the Yemeni healthcare system, illustrated through the tribulations of a distraught father

seeking care for his sick child in both a public and a private hospital. In the former, the father is told by two male nurses absorbed in a card game that there is no doctor, 'not even half a doctor', available to see his son; in the latter, three clearly untrained physicians squabble over the diagnosis, eventually resorting to a coin toss to decide the nature of the child's condition. By the time the doctors resolve their differences, the child has died in front of them.[12] This play premiered while Aden was hosting the Khaleeji Cup football tournament – the red card of the title referring to those held up by referees to signal fouls in football matches. The implication, of course, was that Yemeni society deserves a penalty for such infractions; the performance DVD, commercially available in Aden, even begins with a written introduction that states, among other things, that 'the role of theatre is to critique corruption in society'.[13]

Even this brief, non-exhaustive survey makes clear that many of the issues that would cause anger and frustration to boil over onto the streets in early 2011 were already simmering on the Yemeni stage in the preceding years. Yemeni drama is not a recent phenomenon, of course: it arguably reaches back half a millennium, and some authors – Sa'id Aulaqi and Abd al-Aziz al-Maqaleh among them – have speculated that it has much more ancient roots.[14] Nor is the use of theatre as a vehicle for provoking debate about Yemeni social issues novel: for this, a well-documented history exists going back to the early years of the twentieth century.[15] Moreover, the culture of theatre in Yemen is neither isolated nor limited in its geography. Over the course of the last hundred years, nearly every major urban centre in Yemen boasted at least one theatre company at one time or another; the 'theatre movement' began in Aden, and has endured there, as well as in Ta'iz, Ibb, Hodeida and the Hadhramaut, despite a plethora of obstacles.

Nevertheless, recent Yemeni plays – whether experimental, edgy and provocative like *Hadhariyat*, or an exuberant mélange of song, dance and comedy like *Ma'k Nazl* – provide compelling examples of the diverse strategies by which the Yemeni stage in 2009 and 2010 anticipated the phenomena that coalesced in 2011 into what we now refer to as Yemen's Arab Spring – namely a grave, widespread dissatisfaction with prevailing sociopolitical and economic realities, voiced powerfully and in a public forum, with the goal of promoting awareness and change. Furthermore, Yemen's youth played prominent roles in this phenomenon, both on and off the stage – as actors, directors, authors and sociopolitical commentators.

In 2011 the show went on, despite the prevailing conditions of violence and instability. Yemeni theatre practitioners tell harrowing tales about holding rehearsals against a background of explosions and artillery fire, and of raising the curtain for an audience equally determined to defy the dangers inherent in coming to the theatre. Those who participated in plays during the 'days of war' in 2011 speak of an intensified sense of mission, a belief that their work would help to heal the rifts in Yemeni society, discourage extremism and promote – in one actor's words – 'the liberal democratic revolution'. A small handful of plays were staged at the Markaz al-Thaqafi in this charged atmosphere of defiant communal feeling.

Unfortunately, however, expectations that Yemeni theatre would become even more radical or provocative, or play a more central role in discussion and debate about the future of the nation, were not fulfilled. Instead, the Yemeni theatre of 2011 was subject to two overarching trends. The first was a change to both the form and content of plays, whereby the communication of a stance on a chosen sociopolitical issue was prioritized, often at the expense of the artistic and literary components of a production. There was a palpable increase in productions of overtly didactic drama, sometimes termed *masrah huquqi*, or '[human] rights theatre' – single-issue plays about early marriage, domestic violence, the plight of children who beg on the streets, and so forth.

For instance, the play *Al-Janah al-Maksur* ('The Broken Wing') by Dr Omar Saban, directed by Mohammed Ba Saleh, and produced in 2011 in Shihr in Hadhramaut by the FPFD, shows US a little girl whose dream of becoming a doctor is crushed when her father agrees to marry her to a wealthy acquaintance recently returned from the Gulf. Ironically, the entire family gets a lesson in medical science when she is taken to the local hospital to give birth; her newborn son dies, she barely survives and her doctor solemnly lectures her family: 'This is the result of an early marriage!'.

This particular play was well acted, but, as a rule, such works are soap-opera fare – emotionally powerful perhaps, but artistically schematic and predictable. This stems in large part from the fact that the phenomenon of *masrah huquqi* in Yemen is often driven by financial concerns, specifically by the desire to obtain production funding from foreign organizations and embassies. Occasionally, Yemeni government support is available through the Ministry of

Culture, but it may come with political strings attached. Fahd Shuraih of the Khaleej Aden company, for instance, recounts receiving a pledge of financial backing from the Ministry for 'Red Card', along with a list of political messages that the ministry wanted to see included in the play. When the company refused to incorporate the requested statements, he says, the ministry rescinded its pledge (though the play went ahead with support from the friends and families of the company's members).[16]

As a result of such experiences, Yemeni theatre companies often seek grants and aid from foreign institutions; French, Dutch, German and American embassies and/or cultural centres have all sponsored theatrical productions in Yemen since 2009. Yet this too has its pitfalls: rightly or wrongly, the prevailing perception among Yemeni theatre practitioners is that such bodies are more likely to finance dramatic productions that overtly promote a progressive position on a clear, single social issue. This perception thus conditions the content of plays proposed for performance, with results that tend more towards agitprop than art.

The play *Aud Thaqab* ('The Matchstick') is one notable exception. Like *Ma'k Nazl* and 'Red Card', *Aud Thaqab* was written and directed by Amr Jamal, this time in collaboration with the FPFD. The plot revolves around a little girl named Fatima who is raped one night on the streets, and hurriedly married off to her father's wealthy friend. In both form and content, the play is a fascinating exploration of the psychology of trauma. The narrative fractures standard chronological order, unfolding instead through a series of flashbacks, with different actresses playing the protagonist at various ages – as a child, Fatima appears with combed hair, neatly dressed; as a traumatized young woman, she appears with wildly unkempt hair and heavy eye makeup, with streaks of makeup running down her face as if she has recently wept.

The play interrogates the gap between reality and memory, and asks: at what point must we admit that the lies we tell ourselves about the past, in order to make the present bearable, are simply that – lies? At one point, for example, the mother reminisces about a conversation she had with her daughter when she was ten; Fatima, now grown up, interrupts to contradict the account, especially her mother's flattering self-portrait. As though someone has pressed a rewind button, the characters freeze, then perform all of their recent actions in reverse until they arrive at the beginning of the conversation, which is acted again, but differently, this time as Fatima remembers it.

In the final moments of the play, Fatima reappears with a can of gasoline. She douses herself, then throws some on her husband and parents, who stand aghast, disbelieving. Then Fatima lights a match; they scream in unison, ‘No!’, and the stage instantly goes dark. The power and resonance of such a moment on the stage, amid the turmoil of the Arab Spring, with the images of the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohammed Bouazizi still raw in the mind, are obvious. And Jamal’s protagonist is clearly meant as a female, Yemeni Bouazizi overcome by anger and despair not merely at her own tribulations, but by the larger social context that has brought them about.

This play and others like it were performed in 2011 in cultural centres, at the universities, and in parks and other public venues across Yemen, but they also had a parallel on the streets. One feature of the Yemeni Arab Spring demonstrations – one that received little media coverage – was the dramatic improvisation of skits and sketches created and performed by demonstrators: politically oriented street theatre.[17] One skit, for example, features a pair of *balatija* (regime-sponsored goons) who threaten and rough up some demonstrators. This task completed, the *balatija* head to the office of a minister who, they understand, has promised to reward such violence in cash. But the minister refuses to pay, so the *balatija* turn their clubs on him, just as they did on the demonstrators.

In addition to this sketch with its crowd-pleasing ending, the authors also dramatized two significant insights into the political dynamics of Yemen’s Arab Spring. They have admirably avoided the temptation to demonize their opponents as bloodthirsty monsters, presenting them instead as woefully misguided Yemenis motivated not by hatred but by the mercenary hope of monetary gain. Even more importantly, this sketch illustrates the understanding that the *balatija* might well turn against the regime that has sponsored their presence in Tahrir Square, should the daily handouts of qat, food and money come to an end.

Though this example comes from Sana‘a, the most consistent manifestations of this type of ‘street theatre’ actually took place in the city of Ta‘iz. Extensive efforts were made in 2011 to bring performances to the Ta‘izi public by artists and writers like Ahmed Shawki, who heads a group known variously as the ‘Naked Poets’ or the ‘Street Artists’, which recited poetry and delivered sociopolitical reflections in Ta‘iz public squares, and Fekri al-Qasem, who organized a series of public performances called ‘Street Theatre’ in and around Ta‘iz.[18]

The second of 2011's two changing trends in the performing arts in Yemen is a shift from live theatre to film, combined with a move from the dramatic to the documentary. In 2011 Yemen saw the rise of filmmakers like Sawsan al-Ariqi, whose *Mamnu*‘ (‘Forbidden’) criticizes the hypocrisy of fanatical religious leaders. Ariqi's *Bint al-Bahr* (‘Daughter of the Sea’) examines the question of Yemeni unity and the southern separatist movement through the metaphor of a young and unhappily married couple – a domineering husband from the North and his Adeni wife, who considers leaving him and returning to Aden to pursue her own happiness.

Salim al-Sa‘dani's *Li Hana Wa Yekfi* (‘Thus Far but No Further’) reflects upon the fissures that the Arab Spring opened in Yemeni society, using a sporting metaphor: two groups of teenage and twenty-something football fans in Sana‘a whose respective passions for Barcelona and Real Madrid threaten to boil over into violent confrontation on the streets. The film is, in effect, a plea for the various factions of supporters of the revolution, and for Yemeni citizens in general, to remember the common ground that unites them, rather than the sectarian and political differences that threaten to divide them.[19]

Khadija al-Salami's ‘Destructive Beast’ exposes the phenomena of blatant corruption and extortion that helped ignite the Arab Spring protests, while al-Salami's ‘The Scream’ (filmed for the most part in 2011, though not released till late 2012) documents the participation of three female activists in the 2011 demonstrations, and their growing dissatisfaction with the retrograde Islamist influences that they fear are hijacking ‘their’ revolution. Most remarkably, Sara Ishaq's ‘Karama Has No Walls’ provides a record of the bloody violence and devastating aftermath of Yemen's ‘Day of Dignity’ (Friday, 18 March 2011), filmed with breathtaking courage and persistence by two Yemeni cameramen.

The evolution of Yemeni filmmaking has important implications for the theatre – not least because, in Yemen, writers, directors and actors move fluidly between the two media, and between television and radio. Unfortunately, the documentary is a form that provides few opportunities for actors to exercise their skills.

The year 2012 witnessed, among other things, a theatre competition sponsored by Equal Access Yemen and the FPFD.[20] There were two rounds to this competition. The first took place in six different governorates, and gave regional amateur acting companies the opportunity to compete for a place in the second and final round, which took place in Sana'a. All of these followed the grand outlines of *masrah huquqi*, with each play revolving around a sociopolitical issue and following a predictable plotline. The company from Aden focused its play on child marriage, while the one from Lahej focused on the deplorable state of Yemeni healthcare, the Hodeida company on a conflict between an oppressive sheikh and villagers who long for freedom and education, the one from Ta'iz on drug abuse and crime among young people, and the Hadhramaut company on nepotism in hiring practices.

Only the theatre company from Sana'a, performing the play 'Take My Place' by Omar Ja'dal, departed from this general rule, through the charming expedient of a *djinn* who magically transforms an abusive husband into his wife, and vice versa. This state of affairs is supposed to last only long enough to convince the husband of the detrimental effects of his abusive behaviour. However, when the *djinn* returns in the final scene, he announces the joyous news that the husband is now … pregnant.

The Ministry of Culture also organized a week-long festival to celebrate World Theatre Day in 2012.[21] Notable among the festival's productions was *Qasr al-Haudaj*, a play by Hadhrami-Egyptian playwright Ali Ahmed Ba Kathir (1910–68), which portrays a love story between two young bedouin who are temporarily separated by the heroine's father's insistence that she accept a wealthy and powerful suitor. The production had a beautiful set, and helped to reclaim Ba Kathir as a significant figure in the Yemeni literary canon. Moreover, since well-known Yemeni actress Nargis Abbad both directed it and played the central role, the production highlighted the talent of Yemeni women theatre practitioners. But, on the whole, the play came across as 'safe' and apolitical. It did not raise any provocative issues; nor did it seem to have much relevance for its audience.[22]

Happily, other Yemeni productions of 2012 broke new ground. The programme *bil-Maftuh* on the radio station FM Shabab broadcast a twenty-five-episode radio play called *Shari' Thalatha*, directed by Mohammed Sa'id al-Rawi. The plot of *Shari' Thalatha* follows the vicissitudes of the families residing on 'Third Street'; in the tradition of *masrah huquqi*, each episode focuses on a particular social issue –

drug use, tribalism, and so on – and its effects upon the residents of Third Street. But, at twenty-five episodes, this was a much more complex and sustained dramatic effort than a typical *masrahiya huquqiya*.

One of the threads that weave the episodes of *Shari‘ Thalatha* together is the evolving love story between Hasna, whose family is desperately poor, and Sami, whose wealthy family members – especially his mother – object to his choice. Happiness finally seems within the grasp of Hasna and Sami at the beginning of the final episode, when his mother announces a change of heart: the morals and honesty of Hasna's family, she acknowledges, are more important than wealth. Yet, as Sami's mother prepares to visit Hasna's to propose the engagement, news spreads that Hasna's brother Majd – whose gradual radicalization by the fanatical imam of a local mosque has been portrayed in previous episodes – has blown himself up in a suicide bombing.

Shari‘ Thalatha was not only a play, but also a springboard for discussion and analysis of each of the twenty-five issues it raised. The dramatization of each episode of the play took place at the beginning of the radio programme, and was followed by a brief analytical commentary by an invited guest – usually a Yemeni professor in a field appropriate to the day's topic. Afterwards, members of the audience could approach the microphones and ask a question about or comment upon the episode or the issue it had raised. For a given broadcast, the radio station might invite a special group – elementary or high school students, for example – to attend, thereby integrating the local community into the discussion.

A final play of 2012 deserves mention here. Performed during the Eid holiday in November (and again in March 2013), *Aismur Ma‘ish al-Siraj*[23] (‘The Lamp Will Keep You Company’, in Sana‘ani dialect) provided political commentary wrapped in fable. The play is a compilation and dramatization of three short stories from Yemeni folklore, tied together by a framing device – that of a sultan seeking an answer to a question, to which other characters respond by narrating stories to illustrate their answers, in the manner of the *Decameron* or the *Arabian Nights*. But it is also a commentary on the fraught issue of Yemeni identity, and specifically on the relationship between northern and southern Yemen, and the ways in which national unity might be preserved.

Though the title and one of the stories are Sana‘ani, the other two stories and characters in the framing device are all Hadhrami. Great

pains were taken to drill the actors to recite in flawless Hadhrami accents, and to ensure accuracy in the details of Hadhramaut-inspired backdrops and traditional Hadhrami costumes. The play thus represents an artistic response to one of the criticisms often levelled by southern separatists against the government in Sana'a: that it privileges and imposes northern norms and northern systems to the detriment of southern resources and culture.

This production thus provided a stark contrast to problematic portrayals of Yemeni unification in other fora, such as the massive, regime-sponsored celebrations of the tenth anniversary of Yemeni unity in 2000. Lisa Wedeen describes the latter as a spectacle that 'undoubtedly put forth *images* of unity', but failed to reflect or create the real thing – instead showing southern dances, for example, performed by men in northern dress. 'Despite the projection of an explicitly unified national culture', Wedeen points out, 'each region's practices were both referenced and relativized in relation to northern, and more particularly highlands, visual dominance.'[24]

Aismur Ma'ish al-Siraj, conversely, provides a vision, not of a hybrid Yemeni culture dominated by Sana'a's contributions, but of a Yemeni 'unity in diversity', in which regional specificity is maintained and even celebrated for its uniqueness and its distinctive characteristics. Furthermore, the question posed by the Sultan – 'Are men and women equal in love?' – and the play's eventual answer – 'In love, there is no victor, and no vanquished'; men and women are equals, partners – have obvious symbolic resonance in terms of the political discourse surrounding Yemeni unity. Such lines call, metaphorically but urgently, for a reconceptualization of the unequal power relations that have characterized the relationship between North and South since 1990.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

This chapter has aimed to provide a vision of the variety, power and potential of Yemeni theatre. Raw talent abounds, and performances are exuberant and enthusiastic. But the obstacles currently facing it are formidable: a dearth of technique, technical expertise, financial resources and physical infrastructure. There is a dire need for professional-level training, and for specialized training in the particular demands of different media – for example, in the characteristics that distinguish acting for television from acting for film, radio or the stage. A similar observation could be made for all

production elements – directing, lighting, sound, stage design, and so on.

Facing the continuing instability in Yemen and fiscal crises at home, foreign institutions in Yemen, which in previous years were a strong source of support for the theatre, have cut budgets and staff. The Ministry of Culture has thus become much more significant as a source of production funding;[25] and as competition for support grows fiercer, so does pressure to suppress points of view unpalatable to the government. Theatre practitioners may thus face an unenviable choice: resort to self-censorship in the service of actually seeing their work produced, or languish in principled but idle refusal.

For a compelling illustration of the nexus of challenges currently facing Yemeni theatre, one need look no further than the 2013 theatre festival in Sana‘a. Originally planned for late March as a celebration of World Theatre Day (27 March), the festival was postponed several times over the subsequent month-and-a-half, due to delays in the disbursement of promised official production funding; it commenced so late, in fact, that it was re-christened the ‘Yemeni Theatre Day’ festival. From 3 to 11 May, a different play was staged each night at the Markaz al-Thaqafi: texts by Dimitri Psathas, Angelos Terzakis and Sa‘dallah Wannous alternated with plays by Yemeni authors.

The apex of the celebration, critically speaking, was the performance of Yusuf Idris’s *al-Farafir*, directed by Saleh al-Saleh, which featured a stellar performance by comedic actor Ibrahim al-Ashmuri in the role of the Farfur. The text was brilliantly edited and adapted from the original, with Yemeni dialect replacing Idris’s colloquial Egyptian Arabic, and with the references changed to provide a welter of acerbic commentary on the current state of Yemeni society.

The festival’s nadir came halfway through the final production. The play, *Mahr al-Daudahi*, was a romance based on the historical facts of a love story between a young man and woman from opposing branches of a feuding clan – a love story celebrated in Yemen’s popular heritage in various forms, including song, poetry and theatre. The actors played the opening scenes to an audience that was even more noisy and boisterous than usual in Sana‘a; but then, to the consternation of the actors and the confusion of many audience members, the director of the Markaz al-Thaqafi rose from his front-row seat, ascended the stage and ushered the actors into the

wings, announcing to the audience that the performance would not conclude.

The director provided no explanation, but the nature of the problem quickly became clear: apparently fearing that the play would portray their clan in a 'shameful' light, armed members of the Daudahi family had entered the theatre and demanded that the production be shut down. Without a word in defence of the actors, the play or the theatre, and without confronting the intruders, the Minister of Culture absconded from his front-row seat and slipped out through a side door. Young Yemeni actress Marwa Khaled, who played a role in the aborted production, returned to the stage to deliver a powerful piece of impromptu invective against those involved in the evening's events, and to point out that the actors had rehearsed the performance for long weeks and with little remuneration. Her courageous tirade was lost on a near-empty auditorium, however, much of the audience having already followed the Daudahis outside in anticipation of additional confrontation.

It was a poignant moment: young, dedicated actors silenced in mid-performance, marginalized by a deadly combination of threats of violence by a vocal minority and an utter failure of leadership on the part of those whose role it was to promote Yemeni culture. There could be no clearer indication of the precarious state in which Yemeni theatre currently finds itself, and no more apt metaphor for the continuing lack of power and influence of young and creative Yemenis within their own society, nor for the long-established patterns of thuggery and self-interest that the revolution strove without success to efface.

In 2006, five years before the Arab Spring, a Yemeni comedy entitled *Nadi al-Kubba*[26] opened with a wonderful meta-theatrical scene, reminiscent of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, in which the characters lament the fact that they have no script. The Yemeni theatrical text is in a state of crisis, they complain: everything has already been said, every possible issue already staged. What, they wonder, can they bring to an audience that will be fresh and new and worthy of the name of theatre? Seven years and an incomplete revolution later, the question remains: how to create Yemeni theatre which is new and meaningful, which consistently strives to attain new levels of artistic and literary excellence, and which can break free from the social and political strictures that work to constrain it.

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[1] For more on Asery, see for example 3 Meters Away's interview with Nafeesa Syeed. The work of Subai' has attracted the journalistic attention of Reuters, the *Toronto Star*, the *National Yemen*, and other newspapers. Academic Anahi Alviso Marino discussed Subai' and his œuvre at the Gulf Studies Symposium at the American University of Kuwait in March 2013.

[2] For more on al-Mekhlafi, see Amira al-Arasi's article, 'Meet Marwan al-Mehklafi, the Revolution's Comedian', *Yemen Times*, 5 January 2012, available at yementimes.com.

[3] For an insightful analysis of both the possibilities and the limits of twentieth-century Yemeni constructs of community and social space, see Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For consideration of the complexities of Yemeni identity-formation and the variegated relationships of Yemeni citizens to the regime in the years preceding the 2011 demonstrations, see Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[4] Parts of this article were presented at the conference 'The Arab World in the Age of Revolutions: A Global Assessment', at Sciences Po in Paris, June 2012.

[5] This non-governmental, non-profit foundation has its roots in the Health and Culture Center (HCC), founded in 1992 by Dr Nizar Ghanem of Sana'a University. The HCC's original points of focus (psychology and music – specifically the contributions that music can make to mental health) expanded over time to include a wide range of social issues, including democracy, human rights, young people's participation in society, and promotion of the arts in Yemen. In 2008 the organization was renamed to reflect these changes as the 'Future Partners Foundation for Development' (FPFD). The HCC still exists, now as a branch of the FPFD.

[6] Quotes are taken from the unpublished script of the play (Qasem Abbas al-Lami, Nadia Mara'i, Manal al-Mulaiki, Ru'a, Ala al-Shami, Saba al-Awadhi and Ghada al-Absi, *Hadhariyat tuyur ghadarat-ha al-ajniha*, written and performed 2010); all translations are mine. My thanks to Ahmed Asery for providing me with the script, and to Dr Nizar Ghanem for giving me DVD recordings of this and the three other FPFD plays mentioned in this chapter.

[7] A more extensive analysis of this play and the two mentioned below *(Wain Inti al-An?* and *Ma'k Nazl*) is provided in Katherine Hennessey, 'Staging a Protest: Socio-Political Critique in Contemporary Yemeni Theatre', in Eyad Houssami, ed., *Doomed by Hope: Essays on Arab Theatre* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), pp. 59–76.

[8] In fact, actress Manal al-Mulaiki recounts in a press interview that audience reactions to this particular scene were so negative that, at an unspecified point in time after the first performance, the cast felt pressured to change the object of the women's anger from a father to a 'boyfriend'. Raghda Gamal, 'Not a "Lost Girl": One-on-One with Yemeni Actress Manal al-Mulaiki', *Yemen Today* (Sana'a), February 2011, p. 73. However, the film version of a later performance that is in my possession does not reflect the changes al-Mulaiki mentions.

[9] 'Tourist marriage' is the euphemism used to refer to the practice of wealthy men, sometimes Yemeni but more often from the Gulf, paying or promising large dowries to marry young Yemeni women, and then disappearing after a brief 'honeymoon'. The tourist marriage is, generally speaking, a form of sex tourism that exploits the poverty, desperation, naivety or cupidity of Yemeni families – a subject requiring a certain degree of courage to raise on the Yemeni stage.

[10] For a review of this play, see Afrah Nasser, 'Imaginary Invalid Play Wows Yemeni Audience', *Yemen Observer*, 21 June 2010.

11 This play does have a single line of dialogue, recited by the protagonist to his vanished beloved: *Wain inti al-an?*' ('Where Are You Now?').

12 'Red Card' was revived in 2011 and 2012, and recently televised. For more on the content, see Raghda Gamal's review of the play, 'Red Card: Depicting Yemen's Social Issues on the Stage', *Yemen Times*, 6 January 2011.

13 My copy of this DVD came courtesy of the genial Lutfi Hamoud, proprietor of the Hurricane Cinema ('Master Hamoud's Cinema') in Aden, where Amr Jamal's theatre company and other Adeni groups have staged much of their important work.

14 See, for example, Sa'id Aulaqi, *Saba'un 'Aman min al-masrah fil-Yaman* ('Seventy Years of Theatre in Yemen') (Aden: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 1983), p. 18.

15 For more on this subject, see ibid., in addition to Hussain al-Asmar, *Al-Masrah fil-Yaman: Tajriba wa Tumuh* ('Theatre in Yemen: Experience and Ambition') (Giza: al-Manar al-Arabi, 1991); Abd al-Aziz al-Maqaleh, *Awaliyat al-masrah fil-Yaman* ('The Elements of Theatre in Yemen') (Beirut: University Foundation for Studies, Publication, and Printing, 1999); Yahya Muhammad Sayf, *Alam al-Adab wa al-Fan al- Masrahi fil-Yaman* ('Great Names in the Literature and Art of the Theatre in Yemen') (Sana'a: General Association of Authors: 2006); and Abd al-Majid Muhammad Sa'id, *Nashu' wa Tatawur al-masrah fil-Yaman, 1910 ila 2000* ('The Growth and Development of Theatre in Yemen, 1910–2000') (Sana'a: Ministry of Culture, 2010).

16 Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC), *Field Visit to Yemen* (Beirut, March 2012), p. 5, available at arabculturefund.org.

17 The only article I have read that addresses this subject in any detail is 'From the Streets to the Stage, Yemen Finds its Voice', Agence France-Presse, 9 March 2011, available at NaharNet.com. But I was recently assured that one of the 'revolutionary committees' has video footage of every one of the hundreds of sketches performed at Change Square.

18 AFAC, *Field Visit to Yemen*, p. 8.

19 I am grateful to Sawsan al-Ariqi for providing me with a copy of her films, and to Abdallah Awadh Yasin for giving me this one, in which he plays a crucial concluding role.

20 For a brief article on the plays presented in Sana'a during the first round, see Samar Qaed, 'Plays Address Human Rights', *Yemen Times*, 17 September 2012.

21 A festival in celebration of World Theatre Day has been an annual practice for around a decade in Sana'a.

22 The play might potentially have done so, given the various abuses of the practice of arranged marriage in Yemen, the increasingly high figures demanded for dowries, and so forth.

23 For more on this play, commissioned by the Yemeni organization Meel al-Dhahab and directed by Amin Hazaber, see my article, 'Shakespeare in the Hadramaut? Adaptations of Shakespeare on the Yemeni Stage', *Arablit*, June 2013.

24 Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, p. 85.

25 Technically, while the Ministry of Culture approves, plans and organizes productions, all funding for them originates at the Ministry of Finance – an additional level of bureaucracy that allegedly facilitates corruption, thereby diminishing the funds that trickle down to Yemeni practitioners of theatre.

26 By Khaled al-Marwala and Sultan al-Ja‘dabi, performed at the Markaz al-Thaqafi as part of that year’s World Theatre Day celebration. Many thanks to Anis al-Ansi for furnishing me with the performance recording.

PART TWO

REGIONAL ISSUES

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *SHABAB*, INSTITUTIONALIZED POLITICS AND THE ISLAMISTS IN THE YEMENI REVOLUTION

Laurent Bonnefoy

THE VARIOUS ARAB UPRISINGS that started in early 2011, whether or not they succeeded in toppling authoritarian regimes, appear to have followed a similar sequence of events. Indeed, they all seem to have suffered from what many local and international actors and analysts describe as 'hijacking'. While the use of the term 'revolution' is, with good reason, hotly debated by academics, and the permanence and resilience of the region's authoritarian regimes in many cases remains a reality, I will nevertheless use this label throughout this chapter – primarily because the actors involved in the uprisings label them as *thawra* ('revolution'), and not, for instance, as *intifada* ('uprising'), but also because these processes have generated a 'revolution' in the perception of the region both by citizens of the Arab world and by external analysts. They have raised questions, aroused debates and created new topics for research, including the links between street mobilization and political mobilization. While using the label 'revolution', I am also careful to highlight the fact that the events currently unfolding are part of an ongoing and long-term process. A time will come when researchers will need to review their vocabulary, but it is now too early to do so. In most cases, revolutionary street mobilization was initiated by a group labelled or self-labelled as 'revolutionary youth' (*shabab al-thawra*), and has later been appropriated (some say 'stolen' or 'confiscated') by institutionalized actors, particularly political parties that pre-dated the revolutionary processes – chiefly the Muslim Brothers – and also by the military.

This process of appropriation has undeniably diminished the scope for change and increased control over the various political and symbolic outcomes of the movements, paving the way for much disenchantment. As a consequence, a huge gap has opened up between the enthusiastic slogans of the mobilization phase calling for comprehensive revolution, civilian government, freedom and equality, and what the transition phase is actually delivering in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen – namely, murky politics, endless debates, tensions and economic difficulties. Elsewhere, as in Bahrain and Jordan, when the challenge to existing regimes was interrupted or successfully repressed, the institutionalized opposition made concessions that considerably weakened their demands for change. In Syria, on the other hand, the peaceful nature of the uprising has been challenged through its appropriation by armed militias.

As a consequence the dominant perception is that, since the launching of the various uprisings, 'street mobilizations' have been bypassed by pre-existing institutions and actors. Many, in particular the *shabab* themselves, have lowered their expectations, expressed real disappointment, or even felt that they have truly been dispossessed. The innovative aspects of the revolutions have also been jeopardized, as the *shabab* have proved unable to determine the political and social outcomes of movements they claimed to have launched. The new power-brokers are not a new generation of leaders emerging from the movements, but neither are they necessarily the potential spoilers of a political process.

This has been demonstrated by the results of the various elections or referenda organized in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as in Yemen. The views of the *shabab* have proved rather marginal compared to the positions taken by the mass of voters. The *shabab's* preferred candidates or positions have clearly been defeated. The general impression conveyed by the media, but also widely circulated in a range of broadly sympathetic academic publications, is that the revolutions have been 'stolen' and that a chilly 'winter' of disillusionment is now following the 'Arab Spring'. A new, pessimistic narrative has become dominant, and has replaced the enthusiasm of early 2011, when most believed that Arab authoritarianism had definitively failed. Since mid 2011, countless articles and even books focusing on case-studies have already been published with titles referring to the 'stolen'[1] or 'confiscated' revolution,[2] developing and extending this analysis to current events. Thus, the Arab revolutions have seemingly disappeared, giving place to so-called 'reaction', Islamism, violence or 'counter-revolution'. This change has, at times, even allegedly been orchestrated at the regional level, particularly by countries like Qatar and Saudi Arabia,[3] or at the international level by the United States and European countries, which have sought to control the new regimes through aid and neoliberal development policies.[4]

This perception of a defeated revolutionary youth is not entirely illegitimate, and to a large extent it is accurate, but it probably needs to be nuanced and analysed more thoroughly. This chapter will try to do just this by looking at the ongoing Yemeni revolutionary process. More specifically, it will try to highlight the fact that those taking part in the movement are part of a broad spectrum that goes well beyond the group that has been labelled the *shabab*. The 'revolutionary bloc' is far from uniform. The revolution, in Yemen as elsewhere in the Arab world, is thus not the *shabab*'s exclusive

property or creation, but the complex culmination of previous mobilizations within various contexts. I will also argue that it is artificial to think of the *shabab* as a wholly new group that emerged recently and was absent from the political field prior to 2011, as well as being essentially distinct from the opposition parties or previous popular movements. Recent events cannot be simplified to mere manipulation or hijacking by traditional actors and parties – in the case of Yemen, by tribes and the Islah party (a 'catch-all' party that is also the local branch of the Muslim Brothers).

REVOLUTION IN YEMEN: WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

In order to address the issue of the allegedly 'stolen' revolution of Yemen, it is necessary to summarize what has happened in the country since February 2011. Yemen surely ranks among the least well understood countries of the region by most Arabs, as well as other foreigners. It will thus be helpful to summarize the various stages of a process that is still ongoing.

In Yemen, the situation prior to 2011 was marked by a clear deterioration of the political system combined with a severe economic crisis. The political equilibrium that had helped maintain a degree of stability since the 1970s was already in bad shape. The balance had somehow been lost in the mid 2000s. Especially during the 1990s, the system appeared to operate with some success, with the participation of many different political forces in government, a flourishing, comparatively free press, and relatively low levels of political violence and repression. By the mid to late 2000s, Ali Abdullah Saleh was confronted with a range of crises. A large number of social groups were expressing discontent and articulating grievances. Relations between the centre of power – the Sana'a region, from which Saleh and most military, political and economic elites originated – and its various peripheries were particularly tense.

First, the war in the far north of the country, in the region of Sa'ada, was far from resolved, and was drawing in increasing numbers of actors. Since 2004 the war had pitted the so-called 'Huthis', a Zaydi revivalist movement defending Shi'i identity, against the national army and its tribal allies. Second, since 2007, the reactivation of the Southern secessionist movement, which had been militarily defeated during the 1994 war, was highlighting the growing incapacity of the Saleh regime to represent and take into account the demands of the various regions and to deal with

grievances through non-repressive means. The secessionist option was growing increasingly popular in former South Yemen, and feeding the construction of a distinct southern identity.

Third, throughout the country since 2008, armed Islamist rebel movements more or less directly linked to al-Qa'ida had been increasingly targeting the Yemeni security forces and Western interests. Prior to that, a tacit non-aggression pact had appeared to exist between most jihadis and the Yemeni rulers: court rulings against armed militants were rather lax, many jihadis were reported to be roaming freely, and there appears to have been case-by-case collaboration between the regime and the jihadis against common enemies – socialists in particular, but also Zaydi revivalists. It was also suspected that certain segments of the security apparatus had been involved in the al-Qa'ida attack on the American warship USS *Cole* in Aden in October 2000; in particular, this suspicion was harboured by FBI investigators sent to Yemen to follow up on the case. This loose understanding between jihadis and the state had worked effectively during most of the 1990s and immediately after 9/11, since it reduced levels of intra-Yemeni violence. The number and prominence of attacks on Yemeni soil were surprisingly low, but the 'pact' was gradually breached both as a result of developments inside the Islamist realm and because of repression against them throughout the second half of the 2000s. In the field, the 'war on terror' in Yemen was by then quickly evolving into a guerrilla war pitting a fragmented rebellion against under-trained soldiers. The conflict allowed entire regions, particularly in former South Yemen, to slip into a dangerous spiral of violence, driving tens of thousands of civilians onto the road and justifying weekly, or sometimes even daily, American drone strikes. Jihadi operations against military barracks, targeted assassinations of officers and tribal leaders, and the near absence of attacks against random civilian targets symbolized the militants' tactical shift and their supposed will to retain a degree of legitimacy among local populations.

Fourth, the institutional and political standoff between the regime and the opposition parties united within the Liqa al-mushtarak, or Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), became increasingly resistant to compromise throughout the 2000s, and had reached deadlock by the end of the decade. Parliamentary elections were twice postponed and tensions worsened within the elite groups. These parallel, and at times overlapping, crises turned Yemen into a theatre of constant popular mobilization well before 2011, creating what Stacey Philbrick-Yadav calls the 'antecedents of the revolution'.[5]

However, in a regional context marked by the euphoria of the Arab Spring, the Yemeni uprising of February 2011 started at a surprisingly slow pace. Everyone recognized that the country was ripe for change, but traditional political actors, and particularly the JMP (comprising Islah, the Socialist party and four other smaller parties), were somehow reluctant to move too quickly. The JMP did organize a few demonstrations, but in early February 2011 its leaders accepted President Saleh's offer of dialogue in exchange for a few minor constitutional concessions.

In the meantime, the regime continued to rely on a number of assets. The obsession with security shared by the West and Yemen's regional partners – in particular Saudi Arabia – produced a shared interest in maintaining the status quo. It took months of popular mobilization for these governments to accept that things had to change, and to persuade them to provide technical and financial support for a mediation process between the Saleh regime and the JMP representatives. International actors seemed to fear that, if the revolutionaries succeeded in pushing Saleh out of office, chaos would ensue and al-Qa'ida would strengthen its position. Internally, Saleh was not entirely resourceless either, partly because his clan controlled the security apparatus and still held tremendous financial assets. Such a complex situation encouraged some analysts early in the revolutionary process to list the reasons 'why Yemen won't fall'.[6]

Despite the JMP's attitude, a protest movement emerged and gradually gained momentum in the course of February 2011. Students and recent graduates of major cities mobilized by SMS and through online social networks. They appeared to be at the forefront of the movement, and expressed a degree of distrust towards political parties, including the JMP. Sit-ins (*i'tisam*) were launched by activists who promised to remain on the streets until Saleh left office. They stressed the peaceful nature of their movement as well as its nationwide scope, and claimed inspiration from events in Tunisia and Egypt. Hundreds of tents appeared at symbolically important locations in the cities,[7] and quickly transformed the movement into a lively political festival. The activists proved to be very creative. They developed new means of communicating, chanted innovative slogans, used art, music, theatre and poetry as mobilization techniques, and managed to start bridging the existing gaps between the various political groups, new and old, traditional and urban. Much as in Tunisia and Egypt, the simplicity and radical character of the slogan *Irhal!* ('Get out!') also made it very effective.

Growing numbers were rallying behind the movement, including women and children – particularly after Friday prayers, when marches (*masirat*) were organized, and formed the climax of the week's debates. By mid February many people were expressing sympathy for the movement, but its full potential had yet to develop. The JMP's leaders remained in the background.

In Ta'iz, the country's third-largest city, the explosion of a grenade in the middle of a demonstration on 18 February, and then, in Sana'a, the attack against students camping outside the university on 23 February, encouraged institutionalized political actors to shift their positions and begin to offer their overt support to the 'revolutionary youth', as the movement had started to call itself. Things accelerated. Various blocs began to align themselves with the peaceful but steadfast 'revolutionary youth' in demanding the immediate departure of President Saleh: first, tribal figures – particularly those linked to the powerful al-Ahmar clan, which had strong links with the Islah party, the regime and the opposition; second, representatives of the various rebel groups, either those from the South or Huthis; and third, even some members of the ruling party.

A turning-point came on 18 March 2011. Pro-regime snipers posted on rooftops above the sit-in in front of Sana'a University fired on the crowd of demonstrators, leaving more than fifty dead. This bloody day illustrated how uncompromising the regime could be – but it also backfired instantly, resulting in new defections, especially among certain high-ranking army officers, including Ali Mohsen, a controversial figure who had been a close comrade of Ali Abdullah Saleh's since childhood. Many activists were not pleased to receive his support, and to this day remain suspicious of his motives. This was a result of his history as a military officer accused of crimes during the Sa'ada wars, as well as rumours that he was one of the numerous elite beneficiaries of diesel trafficking (a profitable enterprise that takes advantage of Yemeni government subsidies to export cheap fuel at vast profits to the Horn of Africa).[8] On Change Square (*Sahat al-taghiyir*) in Sana'a, some banners listing names of prominent corrupt regime figures continued to display pictures of Ali Mohsen, while some activists blacked out his face on anti-regime posters in acknowledgement of his new pro-revolution stance.

Ali Mohsen's stand and that of some prominent tribal leaders among the protesters, and the protection they offered against government repression, were central in preserving the peaceful

nature of the uprising by reducing the likelihood of attacks. What shaped the revolutionary process was clearly the alliance between street mobilization and institutionalized actors in the form of the military, the tribes and political parties.

The consequent weakening of the Saleh regime led to the intervention of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. The nature of the Yemeni popular uprising and its slogans calling for democratic change obviously made the autocratic monarchies uneasy, while at the same time their rulers acknowledged that the revolutionary process had reached the point of no return. Whatever the circumstances, Saleh would be unable to continue ruling and to ensure stability. The Gulf Cooperation Council engaged in a mediation operation in April 2011, proposing an initiative to ensure a peaceful political transition. In June the presidential mosque was bombed, and Saleh was severely wounded, along with other top decision-makers, whereupon they all fled to Saudi Arabia for treatment. In November the Yemeni president then signed the Gulf-brokered deal with the JMP representatives (and the GCC secretary general, Abdulatif al-Zayani). A government of national unity was immediately formed, with an independent figure originating from the south, Mohammed Basindwa, at its head. Saleh transferred power to his vice-president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, while he, his family and his associates were all granted immunity by parliament and were able to remain in the country.

Since his formal election in February 2012 as president for an interim period of two years, Hadi has consistently expressed a clear will to pursue reform, but has so far remained unable to transform the fundamental balance of power within the political system. His reform of the security forces has made significant progress, but its implementation remains problematic. A national dialogue has begun, and allies of Saleh – particularly his eldest son, Ahmed, and his nephews – although still able to preserve a share of their power, have been progressively marginalized. Hadi has seized opportunities to sack a number of Saleh's close aides. The restructuring of the military, which many rightly see as a priority, is nonetheless a potential cause of coup attempts. In late July 2012, clashes erupted outside the Ministry of the Interior between soldiers allegedly under the orders of Ahmed Ali Saleh and forces loyal to the new president.

Progress is tangible, but the situation remains tense. Many groups continue to express discontent – some even boycotting the National Dialogue launched in March 2013 as part of the Gulf-brokered deal, and despite the fact that the process was always likely to be slow.

Although there are obvious continuities between the Saleh and post-Saleh eras, a revolutionary process has been effectively launched by a popular uprising whose outcome remains unresolved. It will be a long time before external analysts and Yemenis alike are able to assess its achievements.

REVOLUTIONARY PRACTICES

In Yemen, as elsewhere in the region, the revolutionary uprising has favoured the emergence of a series of interesting political practices. Some of these practices are genuinely novel, though it may not be true that the revolution structured itself mainly around them. It is clear that any attempt to analyse the sociological profile of the Yemeni protesters can only be partial. The revolutionary process clearly includes a wide range of socioeconomic groups, and this is what has given it its irresistible force. Still, there is no doubt that, since early 2011, the so-called 'revolutionary youth' have played an instrumental role for a number of reasons.

First of all, the *shabab* have triggered new revolutionary practices through the mass presence of young men and women during the entire period of the uprising and well into 2013, even after Saleh had left office. This age group – already overrepresented in Yemen, where almost 75 per cent of the population is under thirty[9] – was clearly at the forefront of the peaceful uprising. The *shabab* developed as a socially constructed category defined not only by age. They initiated a number of practices, the most interesting being the peaceful sit-ins on Change Square in Sana'a and elsewhere in the country. A few activists – some of them public figures, others anonymous, but all sharing a similar (mostly liberal) profile – should be given credit for deciding at a specific moment to occupy the streets: Alaa Jarban, Mayzar al-Junayd and Jamil Subay' were among this vanguard. This activity gave them the opportunity to shape the revolutionary process and some of its slogans (which were also clearly influenced by what was unfolding in Tunisia and Egypt, and by what the pan-Arab media were broadcasting). The actions of these few young women and men and the specific challenges they faced were among the major innovations of the movement. These people were undeniably part of the core of the 'revolutionary youth', and a source of inspiration for a much wider public moved by a new dynamic.

The *shabab* played an instrumental role in Yemen because they were both the most visible group and the most photogenic, and were given credit for driving the revolutionary process. Yemeni and international journalists captured images of slogans and flags painted on faces and bodies, joyful veiled women demonstrating, children dancing and singing – all of which visually symbolized the spirit of the revolution.

As a result, the popular uprising itself has generally been labelled the 'peaceful and popular youth revolution' (*al-thawra al-shababiyya al-sha'biyya al-silmiyya*). The term *shabab* then became a kind of buzzword, with many participants claiming to be part of the youth or to represent it – including people who had long ago entered middle age! The *shabab* was quickly characterized in the minds of many experts and foreign journalists not only by the age of its members, by the fact that many of them were 'unemployed graduates',[10] or by its capacity to use modern tools of communication (the internet, Facebook, cell phones and so on), but also, and most prominently, by its allegedly liberal political agenda. The small number of individuals who had been at the forefront of the movement, and had shaped its development so innovatively, came to monopolize the whole process at the symbolic level. A dominant narrative then emerged asserting that the *shabab* could only be liberal and secular, advocating Western-style democracy, and thus the reappearance of Islamists at the forefront of the movement, which occurred in the weeks and months after the first demonstrations, could only be understood as an unintended consequence – or, to put it bluntly, a 'hijacking'. Many Westerners, but also liberal or leftist Arab intellectuals and politicians, saw the Arab Spring slip into what they described as an 'Islamist autumn' or 'winter'.

The popular mobilization in Yemen not only allowed the *shabab* to emerge as a social category, but also fostered a regional rebalancing within the country that, to some extent, displaced the opposition between north and south, which had structured Yemeni politics for decades. This symbolic rebalancing changed the terms of political competition by creating an alternative identity. While most attention focused on what was happening in Sana'a, Ta'iz actually played a central role, becoming a nationwide reference for the revolutionaries. The slogan 'We are all Ta'izis' was routinely chanted during demonstrations, including in Sana'a, as a sign of solidarity with the city's inhabitants.[11] It was indeed in this city that much of the repression was concentrated.

This regional rebalancing was encouraged by the protesters' slogans calling for a civilian and democratic regime, because Ta'iz embodies a third political identity somewhere between the highlands of the north, identified with tribalism, and the south, which is still identified with the socialist experience of the 1970s and 1980s. Over the course of the twentieth century, Ta'izis – many of whom serve as civil servants or are active merchants – have been considered the central actors of the modernization process, and thus they also came to be associated strongly with the revolution. It is telling that many of the major figures who have emerged since early 2011 are originally from Ta'iz. Most prominent among them is a young woman born in 1979, Tawakkul Karman, who in October 2011 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Her profile is very instructive: a member of the Islah party, she would easily qualify as an Islamist and has long been active in human rights organizations in Sana'a, where she grew up. Prior to 2011, she had organized a number of weekly demonstrations demanding freedom for journalists, and had been very active in the 2008 mobilization of the community of Ja'ashin – a village whose inhabitants had been expelled from their lands and houses by the local tribal sheikh, deemed the 'preferred poet' of Ali Abdullah Saleh.

By early 2012, the fact that the prime minister, Mohammed Basindwa, and the new president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, were both originally from southern governorates was interpreted by some as an indication of the benevolence of the 'new regime' towards southerners' complaints of being discriminated against. Their appointments were meant to symbolize the quest for a new political equilibrium more respectful of the peripheries. But it received little praise from most Southern movement leaders, including former vice president Ali Salim al-Beedh, who had been living in exile since 1994, and Hassan Ba'um, head of the Supreme Council of the Southern Movement (*majlis al-a'la lil-hirak al-janubi*).

COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Despite the dynamism of the revolution, it is clear that the *shabab's* slogans and practices, as defined by some of their leaders in interviews and blogs as well as on Twitter and Facebook, have not prevailed. Their calls for a new democratic regime far removed from tribalism and rejecting control by the military seem to have been discarded by those currently leading the political dialogue. There

have been clear and unsurprising attempts by pro-Saleh activists to undermine the revolutionary movement, either through repression or 'dirty tricks'. In addition, counter-revolutionary tactics have emerged within the fragmented opposition.

There is no doubt that, starting in late March 2011, over the course of weeks of mobilization, members of the Islah party became the driving force of the revolution with the help and support of people who sympathized with the socially conservative approach of the Muslim Brothers without being party members per se. Through what was known as the *al-Munasaqiyya* ('Coordination') coalition, activists close to Islah became the principal organizers of life in the sit-ins: these 'Islamist' sympathizers ended up imposing this political movement's own agenda and methods, largely at the expense of what *shabab* leaders perceived as the essential characteristics of 'their' revolution: individualism, gender equality, the free exchange of views, tolerance, and so on. The Islahis' capacity to mobilize important segments of the population was underpinned by the networks of mosques, charitable associations, schools and universities linked to the Muslim Brothers since the 1960s. Islah had been created in 1991 as an alliance between various forces: members of the Muslim Brotherhood itself, conservative businessmen and tribal leaders. Each of these groups brought the party a number of resources – whether ideological, financial, or in the form of election ballots, through the quasi-automatic political allegiance paid to local tribal sheikhs. Although nominally independent, the Islah charitable organization played a prominent role in building constituencies and client–patron relations at the local level, and in bringing credibility to the party of the same name.

Islah leaders maintained an ambiguous stance towards the Saleh regime. Between 1993 and 1997 they had participated in the government. From 1993 to 2008, the party's main figure, Abdullah al-Ahmar – who also held responsibility as paramount chief (*shaykh al-mashaykh*) of the Hashid tribal confederation – remained speaker of parliament and benefited from the votes of GPC members of parliament. But during the first decade of the 2000s, and despite internal resistance, the party gradually adopted less conciliatory positions and, through the JMP, developed an opposition platform. The party thus benefited from its involvement in both traditional and modern civil society organizations, and remained able to mobilize large numbers of people – something that would prove instrumental in shaping events in 2011. Throughout the revolutionary uprising, and in particular in May and June 2011, when fighting between the

army and Hashid tribal militias occurred – the close relationship between Islah elites and tribal sheikhs helped to restructure the peaceful uprising. On Change Square in Sana‘a, a clear indication of the shift within the revolutionary realm was the shrinking space granted to women: gender separation during the demonstrations was gradually imposed by the organizing committee, in which Muslim Brothers were overrepresented. Some female activists who opposed gender separation, or were known for their liberal stance – including the famous poet and activist, Huda al-Attas – were even beaten up.

In the spring of 2011, fighting between tribal pro-revolutionary militias linked to the al-Ahmar brothers – whose father, Abdullah (d. 2007), the founder of Islah, had served as paramount chief of the Hashid tribal confederation and as speaker of parliament – and forces loyal to Saleh in Sana‘a also contributed to the apparent marginalization of the *shabab*. This confrontation demonstrated how little the *shabab* could be considered the driving force behind the movement when violence reared its head. A similar situation arose in Ta‘iz, with the tribal leader Hamoud al-Mikhlafi, who encouraged violence by defending the sit-ins of Freedom Square against government repression, thus jeopardizing the peaceful option.

The political process launched within the framework of the GCC mediation further excluded *shabab* organizations that had been created since February 2011. The mediation process forced the ruling GPC party into discussions with the JMP. Street politics were clearly being sidelined by institutionalized actors, deemed by the mediators to be more ‘serious’ and ‘responsible’. Consequently, established parties were able to mobilize their own networks and encourage the participation of their members and supporters, and thus became the real force behind the uprising. Parties and other more informal political associations rented buses to allow their activists and sympathizers to reach Change Square. They also took care of security, and transported wounded demonstrators to nearby hospitals (in Sana‘a, the Science and Technology University hospital funded by individuals close to Islah, and located in the same neighbourhood as Change Square). Through their media outlets – in particular Suhayl television, funded by Hamid al-Ahmar, son of Abdullah al-Ahmar and an Islah member of the Yemeni parliament – they were able to build the revolutionary narrative.

As they had been built up by the GCC mediation as the two parties in conflict, the leaders of the GPC and JMP ended up sharing portfolios in the national unity government formed in December 2011. The legitimacy of these two forces was contested by some of

the *shabab*, but they nevertheless managed to remain the main power-brokers, formally excluding the newly emerging political actors.

In the framework of the National Dialogue Conference launched in March 2013, 565 representatives of all political factions were selected by a special committee headed by former prime minister Abd al-Karim al-Eryani. Huge debate surrounded the composition of the National Dialogue Conference, whose task is to propose solutions to the country's major problems of governance. While quotas for youth were planned, many of the independent *shabab* felt insufficiently represented, especially since their own revolutionary organizations were excluded. As a consequence, Nobel laureate Tawakkul Karman, for example, decided to boycott the conference process, arguing that supporters of the former regime had been granted too many seats by comparison with independent, youth and women representatives.

All the exclusionary processes discussed above can be seen as counterrevolutionary in the sense that they limited the scope for change and were, to a certain extent, making the *shabab* irrelevant. Individuals and groups that had been prominent actors on the formal political scene prior to 2011 benefited directly from a process they had initially rejected. In the end, these complex developments explained why many actors and analysts bought into the new narrative of the 'hijacked revolution'.

THE *SHABAB* AND THE SPECTRUM OF ACTIVISM

A more nuanced approach recognizes that the *shabab* and institutionalized political actors, or those commonly described as traditional, were not such distinct entities. Political parties, in particular Islah, had a significant capacity for mobilization through NGOs, schools and mosques, and included many young people among their sympathizers. These individuals had every right to be included as a significant segment of the *shabab*. Such was also the case of various tribal groups, including those that had attempted to develop a party-like structure, such as the National Solidarity Council (*Majlis al-Tadhamun al-Watani*), created by Hussain al-Ahmar in the late 2000s. No clear-cut categories existed among supporters of the revolution.

While, in early days, the leadership of the JMP, and of Islah in particular, may have been reluctant to challenge the Saleh regime, a new generation of activists and party members had developed a different approach – while they were party insiders active in civil society organizations, they were critical of party structures.[12] An example of this trend is surely Tawakkul Karman, a member of the consultative council (*majlis al-shura*) of Islah. During the uprising she repeatedly criticized Islah's leadership and tactics, remaining ambiguous on whether or not she remained affiliated to the party. For instance, she continuously advocated Saleh's prosecution (including through the International Criminal Court) despite the fact that her own party had voted in favour of his immunity deal in parliament. The emergence of Karman as a prominent public figure backfired: many *shabab* asserted that they rejected any 'cult of personality', and accused Karman of being too individualistic. Nevertheless, none of Karman's (mostly liberal) opponents among the revolutionaries could deny that she, like many of the *shabab* with an allegedly Islamist profile, had played a prominent role during the whole of the process, and that she remained a role model for many of the country's youth.

Furthermore, pre-existing networks and former movements were resources that all of the revolutionaries had to use. The *shabab* did not emerge out of the blue, but fed on previous experiences and gained momentum with the support of a broad spectrum of actors that were more institutionalized than some might like to think. They echoed grievances and forms of mobilization that had already been formulated by the political parties during the 2006 presidential election, or through various conflicts or rebellions: in Sa'ada and in the South, but also through al-Qa'ida-related militancy.

These conflicts, however various in scope and form, all expressed the same defiance towards the central state. They were all symptomatic of difficult relations between the centre of power and its peripheries, and were opportunities to formalize opposition to the government and build the narrative of a Saleh regime that was working in interests other than those of Yemeni citizens.

The allegedly new practices of the revolutionaries owed much to the southern movement that had developed in 2007. Debate during the 2006 presidential election had focused on issues of corruption and poverty, and had been surprisingly harsh and direct. Unlike in Tunisia, Syria, Libya, Bahrain, and to some extent Egypt, red lines had been crossed in public debate well before 2011. Faisal bin Shamlan, the sole candidate of the opposition, chosen by the JMP,

had then found support beyond the members of the six participating parties. A true popular dynamic had then emerged. The slogans of 2011 were thus reminiscent of those that had been chanted five years earlier.

Interestingly, the election of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi to the presidency in February 2012 found significant support among the supposedly uncompromising *shabab*. The blunt criticism of the GCC deal by most of their representative organizations did not prevent their base from participating in the ballot. Overall participation in the election was surprisingly high, officially reaching more than 60 per cent. Most actors and analysts initially believed that holding an election at such short notice would be impossible. In fact, violence during the ballot was only marginal, and calls for its boycott by southern separatists and Huthi militants had far less effect than had been expected. The surprising enthusiasm witnessed during the election highlighted the fact that the revolutionaries themselves were willing to make concessions.

While *shabab* organizations appeared uncompromising, the membership base of the revolutionary movements behaved in a less than fully consistent manner: many criticized the GCC transition deal, but participated in the election and celebrated Saleh's departure from office. Many claimed to reject political parties, but participated in the demonstrations they organized. Similarly, many of those participating in the sit-ins were simultaneously both inside and outside these newly created platforms or groups, but also inside and outside the pre-existing political parties. They had frequently been socialized or even politicized by networks and structures deemed close to the parties, or to certain centralized tribal structures. Before and during the revolution, they had participated in campaigns by civil society organizations affiliated to various parties or tribal figures, and benefited from financial support or services from such actors. Most of those on the activist spectrum and within the *shabab* occupied a multiplicity of positions, informal affiliations and identities, and did not have a clear-cut strategy. They were therefore only able to develop an essentially pragmatic approach to events.

The resilience of the pre-existing political parties – including the GPC, of which Hadi, like Saleh, remains a member – is also indicative of such a spectrum of activism. The alleged dynamism of the *shabab* did not pave the way for the creation of any significant political party that could serve as an obvious alternative. Pre-existing structures remained at the forefront of the movement, and managed to adapt to changing circumstances. New parties, such as

the Justice and Construction Organization (*Tanzim al-adala wal-bina*) established by former GPC member Mohammed Ali Abu Luhum, were not able to impose their agenda despite an apparently favourable context.[13] Salafis, such Ta'izi cleric Aqil al-Maqtari and the newly established Rashad Union (*Ittihad Rashad*), have increasingly abandoned their supposedly apolitical strategy and entered politics. But they are unlikely to see their new political movements bloom overnight, like the Hizb al-Nur in Egypt, as Salafis in Yemen remain fragmented along broadly regional lines.

Taking these various dynamics into account clearly helps in developing a nuanced and contextualized interpretation of the issues at stake in Yemen, but also in the wider Arab world. There exists a continuum of contestation that does not present the *shabab* in explicit opposition to other pre-existing and institutionalized political movements, but rather incorporates this constructed category into a wider framework.

To ask whether the *shabab al-thawra* have lost out to institutionalized politics is to pose a question that is merely rhetorical. Both types of actors are participants in a variety of loose networks of mobilization. These actors overlap, and in the end complement one another. It is the conjunction of their forces that give the revolutionary process its shape and its power. The professionalization of contestation has surely been an asset.

The revolutionary process in Yemen is thus much more diverse than was imagined by many, including the actors themselves, and cannot be limited to the impeccably liberal slogans that were received with enthusiasm by the West. Current developments are a reminder of the diversity of Yemeni society – in particular, of its dominant social conservatism and the importance within it enjoyed by religious norms and tribal affiliations, which have come increasingly to be articulated around new practices, but have not been abandoned. The category *shabab* thus often overlaps with other existing groups. Although the *shabab* enhanced the visibility of the uprising, they can by no means be considered the owners of the revolution. Like other social and political groups that took risks and mobilized for change, they own only a share of it, and will continue in the coming months and years to be a significant movement, provided they manage to unify and clarify their platform.

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This chapter is an updated and abridged version of 'The Yemeni Revolutionary Process: Have the "Shabab al-Thawra" Lost in the Face of Institutionalized Politics?', a paper written by the author for the Moulay Hicham Foundation in November 2012.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE IRREGULARS OF THE Sa‘ada WAR: ‘COLONEL SHEIKHS’ AND ‘TRIBAL MILITIAS’ IN YEMEN’S HUTHI CONFLICT (2004–2010)

Marieke Brandt

THERE ARE MANY APPROACHES to understanding the multiple dynamics of the so-called Huthi conflict (2004–10), and some of its narratives have already been elaborated elsewhere.[1] This chapter will therefore focus on a particular aspect of the conflict that has hitherto attracted relatively little attention: the dynamics of tribal involvement, and in particular the relationship between the local tribes and the regular army. The Huthi conflict offers fertile ground for analysis of the relation between the tribes and the army, because it took place in a sociopolitical environment that is largely organized along lines of tribal affiliation, and, more than many other regions of Yemen, is still dominated by the persistence of tribal values and priorities.[2]

In investigating this aspect of the Huthi conflict, two phenomena in particular will be taken into consideration: firstly, the so-called 'Colonel Sheikhs' of Sa'ada – tribal leaders who also hold an army rank – and their role in the conflict; and, secondly, the deployment of irregular militias whose members were from a predominantly tribal background. These two phenomena are closely linked.

This chapter begins by examining the emergence of the Colonel Sheikhs against the background of Yemen's recent history. It describes the reasons for the integration of influential tribal leaders, among them the sheikhs of the so-called Sa'ada Brigade (as the pro-republican sheikhs of Sa'ada were called during the 1960s civil war), into the republican security sector since the early days of the republic, and their role in the expansion of state influence into remote territories with strong tribal traditions. The Saleh government, by contrast, excluded Sa'ada's tribal elites from the higher echelons of power. Against this background, a possibly surprising feature of the Huthi conflict becomes comprehensible: during the six bouts of war, the Colonel Sheikhs of Sa'ada were not deployed as regular army officers in their home area, but exclusively as leaders of irregular militias. The reasons for the exclusion of local tribal leaders from the regular army during the Sa'ada wars are manifold: the internal balance of power in the army needed to be preserved, conflicting tribal and parochial interests needed to be kept out of the army, and the army needed to be prevented from becoming involved in local feuds.

The chapter continues by presenting the role of the irregular militias, which became essential auxiliaries of the regular army in the remote areas of Sa‘ada governorate. I analyse their composition and motivation, showing that these militias were not always ‘tribal’ forces, but rather comprised a varying ratio of tribal and other non-regular combatants. Analysts have claimed that the involvement of tribal militias contributed to a brutalization of the war; and likewise it has been suggested, from a state-centred point of view, that tribal militias were unreliable allies. This chapter offers an alternative, social-anthropological interpretation of tribal involvement. Firstly, it argues that it was not tribal involvement per se, but rather an erosion of tribal norms that contributed to the brutalization of the conflict. Secondly, it argues that many tribal militias of Sa‘ada have been reliable allies, but were badly treated by the government, which finally abandoned them.

I conclude with an assessment of the results of this analysis. The deployment of irregular militias gradually drew most areas of Sa‘ada into fratricidal warfare, leading to a long-term destabilization of the region. The conflict developed a local momentum that outlasted the latest truce between the Huthis and the government, signed in 2010 and ending the sixth and – at the time of writing – last official Huthi war. Since that time, the army has been idle in the region, and some of its local allies have been defeated by the Huthis. Disillusioned by the unreliability of the government, some have turned to the Huthis instead. Others continue to struggle against the Huthis without governmental support. The gradual consolidation of Huthi suzerainty has led to profound changes in the region, which are in large part conceived as a Huthi counter-model to the state politics of the previous decades, as they amount to the end of the patronage system pursued by the Saleh government, and an associated redefinition of ‘tribal leadership’.

SA‘ADA’S ‘COLONEL’ SHEIKHS

The phenomenon of the Colonel Sheikhs has its roots in the recent history of Yemen. Before Imam Yahia’s reign (1904–48) there was rarely any kind of regular force except the Imamic ‘bodyguard’ (*al-ukfah*). After the Da‘an treaty of 1911, Imam Yahia was given authority over large parts of the Zaydi heartland of Upper Yemen.[3] Isolated in his kingdom, he was opposed by many forces: recalcitrant tribes, the British in Aden and the Protectorates, the

Idrisi and the expanding Saudi Kingdom in the North. Imam Yahia established a precedent by creating a standing army to combat these threats.[4]

This army consisted of various forces or wings, trained and supervised by foreign military experts, and most of its officers came from the ranks of the sada.[5] The great majority of the troops, however, were tribal mercenaries led by their own leaders (sheikhs) who were recruited on an ad hoc basis for each campaign. During the 1960s civil war, the royalist army was organized according to the same pattern: the troops were commanded by the royal princes of the house of Hamid al-Din, and *sada* took leading positions in the corps, cooperating with local sheikhs whose tribesmen formed the bulk of the troops.[6] Tribal sheikhs played the role of middlemen, and none were given official administrative positions; they rarely if ever held formal office under the Imams.

On the republican side, by contrast, many sheikhs held key positions in the army, especially after the withdrawal of the Egyptian Nasserist forces in 1967. After the civil war ended in 1970, many of them were rewarded with the rank of colonel (aqid) in Sa‘ada, especially those sheikhs of Sahar who belonged to the so-called Sa‘ada Brigade (*Liwa Sa‘ada*), as the pro-republican sheikhs of the region were called. During the presidency of Abdul Rahman al-Iryani (1967–74), these sheikhs were recruited into the ruling establishment and placed in command of some key regular army units. Tribal units, which had been formed during the civil war, were also incorporated into the regular army,[7] which was not yet fully developed. The integration of members of important sheikhly families into the army enabled the state to create a common bond of loyalty and to expand its influence into remote territories with strong tribal traditions, such as certain regions of Sa‘ada.

In the early phase of the republic, however, the disadvantages of tribalism within the army also became evident. Many sheikhs and tribal units retained their tribal ties and values undiluted, bringing their rivalries and enmities into the official armed forces.[8] In the following years, the army was characterized by internal power struggles and, as Robert Burrowes put it, was ‘virtually at war with itself’.[9] President Ibrahim al-Hamdi (1974–77), who ousted the Iryani government in 1974, aimed to reduce the influence of the tribal sheikhs, and tried to build a modern army loyal to the state. During his so-called ‘Revolutionary Corrective Initiative’, al-Hamdi took action to curb the institutionalization of tribal and other

parochial influences, and hence to curtail the political and military power of the sheikhs, in particular the major sheikhs of the north. He began to modernize and reorganize the armed forces, define many military ranks, and remove powerful tribal leaders from a broad array of key military and political posts. Al-Hamdi was assassinated in 1977;[10] many Yemenis believe that Abdullah al-Ahmar (the senior sheikh of the Hashid confederation, and certainly the most influential and powerful tribal personality in Yemen) and Saudi Arabia were behind his assassination.

After the brief interlude of Ahmed al-Ghashmi and Abd al-Karim al-Arashi, Lieutenant Colonel Ali Abdullah Saleh from Sanhan, a minor Hashid section, was selected president in 1978. By astute promotion of his Sanhan kin and tribesmen into the government and the armed forces, he was able to secure his grip on power, using the void left by the dismissals and reorganizations of al-Hamdi's Corrective Initiative to give the republican government and military a Hashidi – and in particular Sanhani – hue.[11] Sheikhs and tribes from Sa'ada (the tribes of the Khawlan b. Amir confederation, and some Bakil sections such as Wa'ilah and Wadi'ah) also continued to participate in government through the patronage network. But they never gained direct and stable access to the upper echelons of political executive and military command, which were restricted to the inner power circle of the Saleh government. Hence they did not benefit from links to the centre to the same extent as leading figures of the Sanhan and certain members of the tribal elite from Hashid and Bakil. Their ostracism from executive power and their under-representation in a Sanhan-dominated government were causes for continuous dissatisfaction for the Sa'ada sheikhs. The government compensated them for their exclusion from the centre of power by giving them generous financial support and by granting them a relatively free hand in their own regions.[12]

It is common practice for most sheikhs of Sa'ada to send at least one of their sons for a period of training in one or other of the security sector institutions in Sana'a, whether the military or the police. In Sa'ada, the active recruitment in the army of first- and second-generation Colonel Sheikhs loyal to the government was a step towards state-building and state-formation. These sheikhs act as a vital link between their tribes and the republican government, and in the complex interplay of forces between Yemen, the Saudi Arabian kingdom and the former socialist state in the south. The sheikhs and their tribes have also been called upon by the regime for military support: many sheikhs and tribesmen of Sa'ada served, for

instance, in the 1994 civil war.[13] In addition, some sheikhs who had no official ties to the military or security apparatuses acted on behalf of the state, conducting smaller ‘reserve police’ operations in border areas,[14] thereby playing an important role in securing the border between Yemen and the Saudi kingdom. The ‘civilian’ counterpart of the Colonel Sheikhs were the ‘member of parliament sheikhs’, because some seats in the parliament were informally set aside for tribal leaders who were unchallenged in their representation of their tribally dominated constituencies.[15]

Many sheikhs from Sa‘ada or their close relatives have a military or security rank, some even a very high one. A member of a sheikhly line of Sa‘ada, for instance, is a brigade chief of staff in another province, another sheikh from the area has achieved a leading position in the Republican Guard, and a third was the leader of the Munabbih Border Guard until his death in 2007. Another prominent sheikh has sent a son to the British military academy at Sandhurst, where he received an elite military training similar to that of Khaled, son of former President Saleh. Many other members of Sa‘ada sheikhly lines have had advanced military training. Most, however, are not active in the army, but rather became officers of the reserve.

Despite these examples of tribal leaders holding senior military positions, it has become clear since the outbreak of the Huthi wars in 2004 that the government has avoided appointing local sheikhs as regular army officers in Sa‘ada governorate itself. There are many reasons for this. Firstly, the higher echelons of the army were mainly occupied by cadres of the regime’s inner circle, and by their associates and protégés who defended their positions against external competition. These men were well trained and certainly more loyal to the Saleh government than the local tribal leaders from Sa‘ada, who also always pursue local and personal agendas. In addition, the experiences from the early days of the republic have shown that the army cannot be a unified and hierarchical instrument of the state if it represents a collection of diverging parochial interests and mutually suspicious units each of which owes its primary loyalty to a tribal group. The two tribal groups, for example, from which the currently highest and most powerful officers in the region have emerged – Bani Uwayr of Sahar and Ruhm of Sufyan – have a history of tribal conflict, and were until recently engaged in a blood feud with each other.[16] It was advisable for the army to insulate itself from these parochial influences and their potential for creating tension and rivalry, which could challenge both its coherence and its authority.

Secondly, the exclusion of local tribal leaders served to keep the institution of the army outside the system of chain reactions of tribal retaliation and feuding. Yemenis are acutely aware that violence can spiral exponentially as a result of small miscalculations, and blood feuds can create a cycle of retaliatory violence; this is still a common problem in the tribal areas of Upper Yemen.[17] To try to avoid this outcome and restore peace after disputes, local tribes have well-established and effective mechanisms for channelling crises into negotiations and mediation, and hence preventing the outbreak of feuds.[18] In the context of the Huthi conflict, however, it was evident from the beginning that the military operations would lead to protracted battles and bloodshed, and therefore that tribal mechanisms of conflict-control and crisis-prevention would have limited application. The government's strategy was to trigger blood feuds among the local tribes, thus causing chaos and weakening them by exploiting the sequence of retaliation and revenge reactions.[19] It also wanted to protect the army as an institution and prevent it from becoming involved in these feuds. Consequently, it was not advisable to put well-known tribal sheikhs from Sa'ada in executive military positions, because that would create the risk of the government becoming a target of retaliation by the families of war casualties. Nevertheless, the government would not and could not do without the local expertise of the Sa'ada sheikhs, their capacity to organize and mobilize their men, and the combat power of their tribesmen. The army therefore appointed loyal sheikhs as leaders of irregular military units in their home areas. The result was a division of the armed forces between the regular army and the militias.

During the Huthi wars, the militias gradually increased their role until it became central to government strategy. The government's determination to defeat the Huthis at all costs, its inability to win the war with the regular army, and its desire to spread the blame for an increasingly unpopular war are probably behind its drive to pursue this strategy. The militias were recruited in order to 'spread the hate' for the war, so that the government would not be experienced as exclusively responsible for the suffering and destruction caused. With militias involved in the fighting, families of those killed in the conflict would focus their anger and blame on those directly responsible, not just on the government. Through this strategy, the government could protect the army and channel the revenge actions to the militias.

It is not surprising that, at the beginning of the armed Huthi conflict in 2004, the majority of sheikhs in Sa‘ada – among them all of the Colonel Sheikhs and most other sheikhs favoured by the Saleh regime – sided with the government. This can be regarded as the fruit of decades of patronage politics on the part of the Yemeni and the Saudi governments, both strongly opposed to the Huthis. In some cases this also had a sectarian background, as some sheikhs had either passively supported or actively promoted the spread of radical Sunni Islam (Wahhabi-Salafism) in Sa‘ada since the 1990s. Besides this, a rivalry about local leadership, power and influence over the population of Sa‘ada had emerged between the ‘big’ sheikhs and the Zaydi revivalist movement including the ‘Believing Youth’ (*muntada al-shabab al-mu’min*), which aimed at reclaiming Zaydi influence in the region by focusing on religious revival and social activism.[20] The relation between certain wealthy sheikhs and their underdeveloped tribal constituencies was characterized by alienation.[21] Through their education programmes and alternative offers of employment, as well as spiritual guidance, the Believing Youth and later on the Huthis challenged the position of the sheikhs, further undermining their stance within their tribes.

The tribes themselves wavered, taking a variety of positions from the beginning of the Huthi wars. Due to an abundance of different political, sectarian, strategic and economic constellations and motivations, they were more or less riven by conflicting interests and allegiances. Kinship ties, feuds and enmities also significantly steered the alignment of tribal loyalties; conflicting tribal groups would rarely adopt the same political stance. Even the positions within a single tribe could differ; a sheikh and his section might choose opposite sides. Sheikhs do not exert political power over their tribes, so one section of a tribe might side with the Huthis while another supported the government.

When fighting began in 2004, some tribes were neutral and wanted to stay out of the conflict, but by the time of the sixth war, in 2009–10, most had been dragged into it. Some tribal groups were opposed to the Huthis and sided with the government because of their prior exposure to Salafi influence and consequent rejection of *sayyed* dominance and/or Zaydi hereditary doctrine. But with every new bout of war more and more tribes threw their support behind the Huthis, for several reasons: anti-government sentiment as a consequence of decades of economic and political neglect,[22] anger at

the ‘collateral damage’ of civilian deaths caused by government attacks during previous rounds of fighting, or esteem for the Huthis’ achievements in using sharia law to resolve conflicts between tribes. Shifts in loyalties were also a result of historically evolved Zaydi traditions and beliefs, and contractual obligations and kinship ties between tribes and *sada*. This type of motivation was at work particularly in the Marran Mountains of the Khawlan massif, where close family relations between the large al-Huthi family and some segments of the Khawlan tribe had evolved, and where the members of the related tribal groups protected their brothers or relatives against intrusion, regardless of whether they were *qaba’il* (tribesmen) or *sada*. The imperatives of *asabiyyah* (‘spirit of tribal solidarity’ or ‘cohesive drive against others’, as Paul Dresch translates it)[23] were also at work during the second and the third bouts of war, notably in Dahyan, where the *sada* enjoyed age-old contractual protection and kinship ties with the local tribes (as elite *sayyed* families do throughout Yemen).

Since the beginning of the third war (February 2007–January 2008), when it became clear that the crisis was continuing to escalate and that the regular army alone would be unable to defeat the Huthis, the government systematically started to enlist ‘popular’ or ‘tribal’ support among those who were loyal. The government thus encouraged and supported the formation of local militias to supplement the regular army; they were given the names *jabhat sha‘biyah* (People’s Fronts) or *juyush sha‘biyah* (People’s Armies). Joining conditions for becoming a member of a People’s Army were relatively simple: all that was required was allegiance to the government’s position and the ability to use a weapon. The men who joined were ordinary people, some of them from local tribes who rallied around their sheikhs, others flocking in from other areas. None were committed to a fixed term of service or registered on the army’s payroll.

It is difficult to find a perfectly appropriate term to designate the nature of these irregular forces. Often they are called ‘tribal militias’. The term ‘tribal’, however, implies a uniform tribal background, which even in Sa‘ada, a region strongly influenced by tribal traditions and structures, seldom existed. The background of these militias varied from case to case. Some of them were clearly tribal self-defence forces, notably those of Munabbih, Ghamr and parts of Razih, Juma‘ah and Sahar, where tribesmen were rallied by some sheikhs to ward off the Huthis’ attempts to govern their territory. These militias emerged from tribal dynamics and

customary methods of military mobilization, and were supported to varying degrees by the regular army.

Other forces cannot be considered straightforwardly ‘tribal’. The term ‘tribal’, for instance, does not fit well the largest and best-known irregular force of the Huthi conflict, the ‘Popular Army’, which was gathered by the al-Ahmar clan of al-Usaymat in Qaflat Adhr.[24] The Popular Army rallied members of al-Usaymat and other Hashid tribes, but also men from other tribes and governorates, some of them mere mercenaries without any tribal affiliations. In addition, it featured an openly sectarian dimension, which became obvious when radical Sunni Islamist mercenaries among its warriors threatened to punish the Zaydi Shi‘i Huthis with ‘divine retribution’.[25] They enjoyed the backing of the commander of the northern army, General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, who had ties to radical Salafis, and during the war not only tried to convince sheikhs to send tribes into the battle against the Huthis, but also to spread Salafi Islam in the Zaydi heartlands of Upper Yemen. The more pronounced heterogeneity of this group led to a dilution and attenuation of tribal values. The specific confluence of military–governmental, tribal, economic and sectarian features that characterized the Popular Army of Qaflat Adhr led to a ‘hybridization’ of the conflict, which had complex and far-reaching repercussions at local and national levels.[26]

The government used these militias to harness tribal support for the war, and to increase its numbers and firepower in the region. In the context of the Huthi conflict, the militias performed many tasks. They could access remote areas that the army, with its heavy gear, could not reach, especially in the rugged mountains. They could move easily from one area to another because of their inconspicuous clothing. The military provided the militias with weapons and supplies. An old Arabic proverb – ‘Mecca people know the trails’ (Ahl *Makka adra bi-shi‘abiha*) – asserts that everyone knows his own area best.

Some analysts reckon that the deployment of irregular militias, which were not part of the regular army and hence not subject to internationally recognized laws and customs of war, allowed the government to delegate fighting, thereby allowing its proxies to use more unsavoury tactics against Huthis and their sympathizers.[27] In the Sa‘ada context, however, this neat formulation needs to be replaced by a more differentiated assessment. It ignores the fact that local tribal norms are orientated towards peaceful reconciliation, and

hence towards the limitation and containment of conflict and violence.

The Munabbih, for instance, a Khawlan bin Amir border tribe, initially tried to pursue a tribally regulated form of conflict (a tribal 'affair of honour') with the Huthis, but were gradually drawn into a brutal confrontation that soon surpassed the dimensions of tribal conflict and its limited potential for violence.[28] The majority of the Huthi fighters also came from the tribes of Khawlan bin Amir, thus sharing similar tribal customs and a history of cooperation. During the battles, tribal customs increasingly came to be ignored (as did the norms of the Geneva Convention) as a result of the presence of various sectarian elements in the fighting forces and, perhaps above all, because of the internationalization of the conflict, which led to bombings by the Yemeni and Saudi air forces of markets and villages. The brutalization of the war was not caused by tribal norms, but rather by their erosion. In its later stages, some battles of the Huthi conflict included mass violence, and even massacres. Their brutality was of a kind and on a scale exceeding local rules of engagement, and clearly went far beyond the maximum escalation level of tribal conflict as defined by Raymond Jamous,[29] resembling instead what Antonius Robben[30] and Mary Kaldor[31] have identified as 'new wars'.

The consequence of this government strategy of shifting the blame was an enormous expansion of the scope of the conflict. Step by step, most areas of Sa'ada were drawn into war. Fighting continued unabated during the interim period between the fourth and fifth bouts of the conflict. The increasing difficulty in distinguishing between periods of war and peace and the worsening momentum of the conflict were eventually among the reasons for the eruption of the sixth war in 2009, which the government dubbed 'Operation Scorched Earth'.[32] The deployment of militias led to longer-term conflicts that ignited chains of revenge killings and retaliation that endured beyond the sixth war.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE SA'ADA WAR

The Huthi conflict officially ended in early February 2010 with a ceasefire between the Huthis and the government, but local confrontations continue. The army has withdrawn, leaving behind a kind of 'scorched earth' – not in the usual meaning of physical annihilation of the Huthis and their affiliates, but in the sense that it

has contributed to a long-term destabilization of the entire region. It is in fact not only Sa‘ada governorate, but the whole of north-west Yemen that has been the victim of an act of war that continues to be murderous but elusive, because it does not correspond to any traditional classification of war.

The alliances between the government and some tribes and sheikhs of Sa‘ada are now broken, or no longer effective. This is often explained by the alleged ‘unreliability’ of the tribes.[33] In Sa‘ada, however, it was the government rather than the tribes that was an unreliable ally. Certainly, the army had to abide by the provisions of the 2010 armistice between the government and the Huthis. Although the army began to withdraw from the conflict zone and abandoned its local allies, the conflicts between the Colonel Sheikhs and the Huthis could not be stopped; they responded neither to tribal mediation nor to state- or foreign-brokered peace agreements. In hindsight, it is not easy to determine whether the Colonel Sheikhs were the most loyal to the government, and therefore continued to wage war against the Huthis even when the government’s army withdrew from the war zone, or whether they just became so entangled in the conflict that they were drawn ever deeper into the quagmires of tribal feuding. Where could they take refuge if things went wrong for them? Their ancestors had been sheikhs for centuries, and they had a lot to lose; everything was at stake, and they knew they were doomed men – so they fought desperately.

For years, many Sa‘ada sheikhs have benefited economically, financially and politically from their loyalty to the government. The Huthis made them pay dearly for this. All Colonel Sheikhs, and a majority of the other pro-government ‘big’ sheikhs of Sa‘ada, are now either dead or displaced; their property – houses, farms, shops, real estate – was looted, occupied or destroyed by the Huthis. The system of tribal leadership as it evolved by state patronage following the end of the 1960s civil war in Sa‘ada is faltering. In the transitional period beginning in late 2011, the Huthis have dominated almost the entire governorate of Sa‘ada, as well as parts of the neighbouring governorates of Amran, Hajjah and al-Jawf. To the extent that the Huthis are able to consolidate their suzerainty, relative stability is beginning to prevail in Sa‘ada. But some tribal groups in Sa‘ada, Hajjah and al-Jawf are still struggling against the Huthis’ attempts to govern them.[34] The state hardly lifts a finger to help. On the contrary, in 2013 rumours are circulating suggesting that groups close to former President Saleh now support the Huthis

in an effort to weaken Saleh's competitors within the ranks of the Islah and the Transitional Government, with the ultimate aim of demonstrating the validity of his claim to be the only saviour of a collapsing Yemen. The displaced tribal elite of Sa'ada struggled to win any seats in the National Dialogue, whose task is to set in motion a process of national transition and reconciliation, whereas the Huthis – now represented by the Ansar Allah party – initially won almost all the seats designated for the Sa'ada delegation.

Among the tribes, the general perception prevails that the rumours about Saleh's sympathies have been fomented and whipped up – as so often in history – by external manipulation and manoeuvring. Many tribes and sheikhs of Sa'ada are now left with nothing but the bitterness of having been duped by a disingenuous and self-serving government. At the beginning of the Arab Spring movement, when the rift between him and former President Saleh opened up, Sadeq al-Ahmar said that the participation of Hashid in the Huthi wars was a mistake. This should not be interpreted as a demonstration of sympathy for the Huthis (the al-Ahmar clan is still involved in ongoing confrontations with the Huthis in southern Amran); it was, rather, a bitter realization that the Saleh regime had achieved its goal – namely to play off Hashid and Huthis against each other, in the words of Sadeq al-Ahmar a 'despicable and dirty method' (*uslub khasis wa qadhir*) and a 'policy of division' (*siyasah farq*) to engulf and weaken both sides through a spiral of violence.[35] Sarah Phillips has described the informal ruling system used by the Saleh regime, which is based on the sponsorship and exploitation of conflict and discord among its rivals, as the 'politics of permanent crisis'.[36]

The widespread embitterment of many tribes in Sa'ada has played into the hands of the Huthis. Their movement is mainly driven and led by local *sada* whose families have vast local knowledge and centuries of experience in arbitration and mediation of tribal conflict. Behind the scenes, opaque processes have been at work in Sa'ada – huge meetings have been held with sheikhs from Sa'ada and other provinces (Sana'a, Dhamar, Mareb, al-Jawf) that have discussed a 'redefinition of tribal leadership' already taking shape here and there. Thus, Ibrahim al-Hamdi's political agenda has once again become popular, and there are calls for a renewal of the investigation into the circumstances of his death. The Huthis appear to be consciously attempting to construct themselves as an alternative to the state patronage system of previous decades, so often decried for producing division and delivering wealth to some of Yemen's sheikhs at the expense of their tribes. The coming

months and years will show how the Huthis and their tribal allies translate this new model of tribal leadership into reality.

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY CAN DOUBTLESS shed some light on the interactions that take place when government institutions encounter local realities – and, in particular, on the relation between state and tribe during the Huthi conflict. Having considered two closely related phenomena – the role of the Colonel Sheikhs and the irregular militias in Sa‘ada during the Huthi conflict – I would argue that the government's partial 'outsourcing', designed to contain the Huthis through the use of local militias, can be understood as an epiphenomenon of a decade-old policy of the Saleh regime in Sa‘ada characterized by locally based patronage of tribal elites combined with their simultaneous exclusion from the higher echelons of power.

During the wars in Sa‘ada, this policy initially generated a war momentum and destabilization of the region. At that time, this was certainly intended by the former regime, which based its survival strategy on the fomentation of crises. With the beginning of the Arab Spring in Yemen, the regime lost control of developments in Sa‘ada because it was largely concerned with keeping itself in power, and focused its attention and combat capabilities on the capital and some major cities, while the military itself was afflicted by internal friction. The sudden loss of control of the peripheries by the former regime – combined with the embitterment it caused, which led to many of the regime's tribal and military allies switching their allegiance away from it – contributed to an enormous empowerment of the Huthis. The Huthis are now a power to be reckoned with in the national arena, and they are working towards a fundamental political, ideological and sectarian reorganization of Sa‘ada and its neighbouring areas.

This phenomenon is far broader than can be encompassed by the interactions and relations examined in a single peripheral area of Yemen. These insights into Sa‘ada would be further illuminated by comparisons with observations made elsewhere. Phenomena of this kind find links in other polities within Yemen, such as the southern parts of the country, where the government has also outsourced the task of containing al-Qa‘ida to local militias.[37] Other regions hit by crises – such as Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and Mali – have also seen the emergence of paramilitary levies, some of them

tribally based. This is one of numerous reasons why, in keeping with the multi-situated ethnographies advocated by George Marcus,[38] the relatively small and peripheral area of Sa'ada loses its marginal perspective and acquires international relevance.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE ROLE OF THE PDRY IN FORMING A SOUTH YEMENI IDENTITY

Noel Brehony

THE SOUTHERN MOVEMENT – Hiraak – asserts that there is a distinctive South Yemeni identity that must be given political expression within a reconstituted Yemen, either as a separate southern state or as a federal region in a united Yemen. Even the many South Yemenis who do not want to go that far argue that unity can only be maintained if the special grievances of the south are addressed in a new political arrangement. Southern identity has been shaped by the history of the south before 1967, by the South's period as an independent state (1967–90) and by a belief that the Saleh regime after 1990 abused the unity agreements to assert northern domination and exploitation of the south. In this chapter I want to focus on the period of independence and assess its relevance for the future of Yemen.[1]

FORMATION OF THE PDRY

The PDRY was born on 30 November 1967 as the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY), a name indicating that its rule was to be confined to what had been British-administered South Arabia. It became the PDRY when the left wing of the National Front (NF), which as the National Liberation Front (NLF) had won independence by defeating the British, the Sultans and its political rivals, overthrew the more pragmatic leadership of the country's first president, Qahtan al-Sha'bi. The change in name was more than symbolic: it was an assertion that the new leaders aspired to govern the whole of Yemen. This interpretation of the PDRY's aims was shared by the leaders of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), founded in 1962 but weakened by five years of civil conflict.[2] The northern political elite viewed the south, physically larger than the north, as part of Yemen, and expected that it would, sooner or later, be absorbed by the YAR, which was four times more populous.

In the mid twentieth century nearly 40 per cent of Aden's population was from North Yemen, and people of northern origin played an influential role in the anti-colonial opposition. Abdullah al-Asnaj, for example, originally from Ta'iz, was one of the founders of the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY).

Both Yemeni states were deeply affected by the Arab Nationalism that swept the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s. The Movement for Arab Nationalists (MAN) was the dominant movement in Yemen. Yemenis recruited by the MAN while studying or working abroad established cells in Yemen and were particularly strong in the south, including among North Yemenis working in Aden. There was co-operation in Aden before 1967 between the leaders of MAN and the Ba'ath and Communist parties, which amalgamated with the National Front in 1975, and become part of Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) in 1978.

Gamal Abd al-Nasser had the greatest impact in the north. Nasserist officers overthrew the Imam in 1962 to create the YAR, and by 1965 there were around 60,000 Egyptian troops in the YAR fighting the Royalists and their allies. Nasser was determined to throw the British out of the South, and his intelligence services provided active support for those fighting for independence. Northern support for the NLF was crucial to its success, and NLF leaders of northern origin helped lead the fighting in Aden.

The NLF was formed in Sana'a in 1963, through an amalgamation of a variety of MAN organizations. Unlike FLOSY, whose main strength was in Aden, the NLF established itself in what later became the PDRY governorates of Lahej[3] and Abyan, before taking the fight to Aden where it defeated FLOSY in street battles for control of the city. The British, who had been signalling since 1964 that they were ready to leave South Arabia, were persuaded to negotiate with the NLF only in early November 1967, and at the end of the month left on the day that the PRSY was born.

The new leaders took over a South that was united only in that it had been under British control or influence. From 1839, when the British acquired Aden, their focus was on the port; their expansion into neighbouring tribal areas was driven by the need to protect trade routes, providing essential supplies, labour and security for a colonial city state. Initially tribes were persuaded to sign agreements offering 'protection', and only much later, towards the end of the British period, were they provided with often quite limited financial resources (and a few British officials) to develop their sultanates, emirates and sheikhdoms, under a series of advisory treaties. They were not part of Aden colony. The British entered Hadhramaut only towards the end of the nineteenth century, but ruled indirectly through the comparatively more sophisticated sultanates. The boundary between north and south Yemen was agreed in 1904 between the British and the Ottoman rulers who controlled Sana'a at

the time. It was reluctantly accepted in 1934 by the Imam, who was weakened by the loss of Northern territories to Ibn Sa'ud. The British gathered most of the Protectorate entities into the South Arabian Federation in 1959, and a reluctant Aden was incorporated (while remaining a colony) in 1963. Efforts to persuade the sultans of Hadhramaut and al-Mahra to join had not borne fruit by the time of independence. Many people in what was South Arabia understood their identity in terms of allegiance to their tribe, or sometimes their sultanate. Apart from the NLF and FLOSY, few spoke of a South Yemeni nationalism.

Most outside observers expected the regime to collapse. The NLF had not sorted out its ideological differences before it took power. It inherited an army that had come out in favour of the NLF but was independent of it, and strong enough to challenge it. Aden port – the main economic asset, and in the early 1960s one of the busiest ports in the world – had been hit by the June 1967 closure of the Suez Canal, which did not reopen until 1985. Aden's economy was further devastated by the loss of 20,000 jobs associated with the British base and British subsidies, and by the exodus, mostly to the YAR, of over 100,000 people fearing NLF rule – the first of several waves of South Yemenis seeking a more secure life in the north. FLOSY and the sultans continued to fight from bases just beyond the PRSY's borders.

Qahtan al-Sha'bi and his closest associates took the view that they should manage the country they had inherited, and only gradually build new political and economic systems. A majority of the NLF, led by people who had played an active role in the fighting (later called the 'historical leaders'), wanted to give the country a complete and immediate revolutionary makeover, without always agreeing on what form that should take. It took only three months for these differences to come to the surface, and after a very unstable period the left forced out Qahtan and his allies on 22 June 1969, in the so-called 'Glorious Corrective Move'.[4]

CREATING A NEW YEMENI SOUTH

The incoming leaders aimed to develop a new identity, a new ideology, and a new method of governing by a 'vanguard party', in which the individual would be subordinated to the party in order to achieve a better society for all. They turned to Moscow for inspiration, and received support for the next twenty years from the

Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the form of ideological training. Abd al-Fattah Isma'il, the secretary general of the NF and then the YSP between 1969 and 1980, wanted to create a cadre of younger leaders, and set up the Higher (later the Abdullah Ba Dheeb) School of Scientific Socialism.[5] When the YSP was established in 1978, it followed the Soviet model and was led by a Politburo and a Central Committee, with a Presidium providing the national leadership chosen by an elected Supreme People's Council.[6] The reorganized armed forces were purged, and a strong effort was made to indoctrinate the armed forces with Marxist ideology, both to ensure the loyalty of soldiers and to spread the ideology into the wider society. Though the army was subordinate to the politicians, it was disproportionately represented at all levels of leadership in the PDRY: over one-third of the YSP membership in the mid 1980s were soldiers. The party was infused with what the regime called 'democratic centralism', which was supposed to allow ordinary members to influence decisions but in reality meant that the party became a device to ensure that leadership decisions were implemented. The system was supported by mass organizations made up of trade unionists, peasants, women and young people.

The strength of the NLF in Lahej and Abyan continued in the PDRY, and the historical leaders from these regions dominated its politics and its armed and security forces throughout its existence. In the early years of the PDRY the most important Adeni politicians were North Yemenis, including Abd al-Fattah Isma'il, its leading ideologue. The NLF had been comparatively weak in Hadhramaut, and although Hadhrami politicians, army officers and technocrats occupied many key positions in the PDRY, they did not function with the same degree of cohesion as their counterparts from Lahej and Abyan.

WHAT SHAPED SOUTH YEMENI IDENTITY?

Today, many South Yemenis feel that their shared experience of the PDRY created a distinct South Yemeni identity. One major achievement of the PDRY was to extend government authority and its version of the rule of law to all parts of the country, using the administrative and legal systems that the British had created for Aden and the short-lived federal government. It created a centralized state and a government that could exercise its authority over all its territory. Its leaders built up the security services – the German

Democratic Republic (East Germany) helped set up a mini Stasi in Aden. The early seventies were later referred to as the 'difficult days', as they saw the new leaders, with ruthless brutality, eliminate threats to their regime from exile groups that were supported by neighbouring states, as well as from internal opponents – some real, and others conjured within the siege mentality that prevailed at the time.[7] This is the PDRY that many Southerners would like to forget, but it helped to give the country an internal coherence that had been absent in the YAR.[8]

After some initial hesitation, the Soviet Union provided strategic and political support to the PDRY, which became a sort of honorary member of the Soviet Bloc. Moscow supplied modern weaponry and helped reorganize and retrain the armed forces on the Russian model, at one stage deploying as many as 600 Soviet military advisers. People's Militias were formed with support from the Chinese and the Cubans. By 1980 the PDRY's armed forces had demonstrated their capacity both to defend the country and to fight successful border wars – in 1972 and 1979 – against the larger but poorly equipped and led YAR armed forces.

The regime set out to eliminate potential threats to its ideological and political aims. In complete contrast to what was happening in the YAR, the PDRY took early measures to counter tribalism, and used the education system and the period of compulsory military service to indoctrinate the young in the virtues of nationalism and Marxism. Tribal leaders were replaced by local YSP secretaries as sources of patronage and support. The large tribal confederations of the north were absent, making the effort to combat tribalism and eliminate residual loyalties to the pre-1967 sultanates and sheikhdoms more successful.

PDRY leaders made Islam a state religion, but believed it was a private matter. They fostered the ideas of 'liberation theology', which encouraged the selection of scholars and writings within the Islamic tradition that suited the YSP's ideology; only in the later days of the regime did it give greater space to religious leaders.[9] The PDRY controlled the consumption of *qat:* it could be chewed only at weekends and on official holidays in Aden and surrounding areas, and daily only in qat-growing areas. It was forbidden at all times in areas where it was not part of the traditional culture, such as Hadhramaut and al-Mahra. This contrasts with the near-universal daily *qat* chews in the YAR, and now all parts of south Yemen.

The YAR, by contrast, took some years to settle after the civil war of the 1960s, in which MAN fighters from the south took part. It was seen as a feudal and tribal entity, in which government services often barely existed until the late 1970s.

The PDRY's economic policies were less successful partly because Aden never recovered from the closure of the Suez Canal. The regime nationalized key industries and larger companies, but allowed a larger private sector to operate than its policy pronouncements might suggest. It developed state farms on the land seized from the previous rulers, and created cooperatives that brought smallholdings together. Cooperatives were also developed in a reorganized fisheries sector – the PDRY's other main resource. The PDRY could not generate investment income from internal resources, and thus had to rely on the export of people to produce remittances and on its ability to attract international assistance and investment, mostly from the UN bodies and the Soviet Bloc.

In the early years, its policies were aimed at redistributing income through improved government services. South Yemenis were given decent levels of employment, education, health and support services, putting previous colonial neglect outside Aden to shame. These services were virtually non-existent in the YAR of the 1970s. There was now transparent equality within society; the government guaranteed both jobs and prices, and thus living standards. There was only a small differential between the salaries of ministers in the lowest forms of employment. Any corruption was on a limited scale, while the PDRY did much to enhance the rights of women in terms of education, health, votes and jobs.

The PDRY's proponents now like to recall – and want the young to learn – these achievements, especially as they applied in the early 1980s, when security was relaxed and the rule of law extended to cover all levels of society. It was not a golden age, but the PDRY reached its apogee in this period, and life in the South was much better than in the North – or, in the minds of many, in the South today. In this narrative, the abuses of the early 1970s are glossed over.

STRATEGIC CHOICES

What many forget is that the PDRY was a pocket of poverty in a peninsula that enjoyed the oil booms of the 1970s and 1980s, and

whose governments shared these with ideologically compliant neighbours, including Jordan, for example – another state with limited natural resources. For many ordinary Yemenis, remittances were often the main lifeline. In the 1970s the PDRY wanted to export its revolution. It provided a base and assistance to the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf (PFLOAG), which was trying to overthrow the sultan of Oman. Saudi Arabia continued to back South Yemeni exile groups – and in times of YAR–PDRY tensions, so did Sana'a. There were attempts from the late 1970s to improve relations with the Gulf states. Kuwait became an important source of support, but Saudi Arabia, despite establishing diplomatic relations in 1976, remained deeply suspicious of the PDRY's intentions. Riyadh's policies towards the South were clearly linked to its relations with the YAR, where throughout the 1970s and 1980s its main aim was simultaneously to prevent North Yemen from becoming strong enough to pose a threat to Saudi Arabia while also contributing enough to enable Sana'a to defend itself against any possible takeover by groups allied to the PDRY regime.

The PDRY leaders constantly debated – and differed over – what adjustments to policies might be required to gain access to GCC money while retaining Soviet strategic support. The facilities offered by Aden were useful to the Soviet Union in the Cold War, but there was always a limit to what Moscow would pay. The policies of the USSR were influenced by its assessment of the degree of socialism in the PDRY. The signing of a Soviet–PDRY Friendship Treaty in 1979 qualified the PDRY as 'a state orientated on a socialist path'.[10] But the relationship never developed to a point where massive Soviet support would be provided. China helped economically until unification took place, but lost political interest after the early 1970s, when Aden drew closer to Moscow. Beijing began a shift in a more 'capitalist' direction, and Maoism failed to take off in the PDRY. Under Abd al-Fattah Isma'il in the 1978–80 period, the recipe was more socialism combined with close relations with Moscow; but under Ali Nasir Mohammed and his successors, the private sector and private investors (from the South Yemeni community abroad) were encouraged, market forces were allowed to influence agricultural and industrial policy, and growth rates improved.

The profound changes in the Soviet Union after Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985 had an enormous impact on the PDRY. The Russians maintained their support until well into 1989, but had for the previous two years been advising Aden to consider local versions of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. The process got

underway, but was overtaken by the dramatic acceleration of Soviet decline in 1989. It was then clear that Aden would lose its main ally and source of support, and had not done enough to find replacements. It proved the final blow to a regime weakened by internal conflict and division, and one that had failed to win the trust of its rich neighbours.

DIFFERENT VISIONS OF YEMENI UNITY

It is difficult to find a speech by a PDRY leader that does not speak about the goal of Yemeni unity – a theme echoed by the YAR leaders. It was enshrined in the PDRY constitution. Relations between the two states, each aspiring to unity, were always complicated by the fact that opponents of the regime in one part of Yemen would seek refuge in the other part. In times of tension they might be used as pawns in competition between Aden and Sana'a. Both states operated as if they had the right to interfere in the affairs of the other.

There were two conflicting approaches to unity in the PDRY. Presidents Salim Rubayya Ali (known as Salmeen), Ali Nasir Mohammed and Haydar al-Attas wanted to focus on the internal development of the South while taking a step-by-step approach to an inevitable but distant unity. Ali Nasir has since said that he was conscious of the much larger population, and thus potential strength, of the North, and wanted to ensure that it would not swallow the South.[11] In the 1980s he advocated that the PDRY should focus on building up its defences, raising living standards and guaranteeing personal liberties; unity was not an immediate issue. Heads of state in the PDRY and YAR privately acknowledged that their regimes were based on different principles, and that each state had to pursue its own interests. The two leaderships should work together where possible, and contain conflict when they could not prevent it.

By contrast, other leaders wanted the South to swallow the North! They argued that unity could only be achieved if the two states shared a common political system – which they saw as the extension of the Southern system to the North via the YSP. The most important of these leaders were of North Yemeni origin – notably Abd al-Fattah Isma'il, and leaders from those parts of Lahej close to the YAR border. They worked with former MAN organizations in the Shafi'i areas of the YAR, coming together in the National Democratic Front (NDF) and associated political alliances. When the YSP was formed in

1978 – and Isma'il was in the ascendant – it created a secret northern branch based on the NDF. Its leaders became members of the Politburo and Central Committee and took part in all meetings, even though this was never admitted publicly. As Haydar al-Attas put it, the YSP was a governing party in the south and an opposition party in the north.[12] The YAR leaders were fully aware of what was going on.

It was these tensions that, in 1972 and 1979, led the PDRY and YAR to fight each other in brief border wars that were followed immediately by agreements to unite their two countries. On both occasions the two governments were preoccupied with internal problems and were not interested in implementing the agreements, despite much rhetoric to the contrary. Both sides saw the accords as tactics to prevent conflict. The PDRY had its best chance of imposing itself on the North in the 1979 war, when Isma'il was at his most influential in the south and Ali Abdullah Saleh was still struggling to establish his regime; but pressure from the outside world forced an early end to the war and signalled that southern irredentism would not be tolerated. Once Saleh had secured his position in the early 1980s he was able to undermine the strength of the NDF – with tacit support from Isma'il's successor in the south, Ali Nasir.

The net effect of these contrasting approaches to unity was to reinforce the separate identities of the states. The pragmatists might want unity, but first wanted a strong, prosperous and democratic South able to preserve its distinct identity within a larger Yemeni identity. The ideologues wanted a North based on the South's system – a form of conquest of a backward North by a progressive South. Both contributed, probably inadvertently, to the view that South Yemen was special in comparison to the North.

A STATE WEAKENED BY POWER STRUGGLES

The PDRY failed to find a mechanism that could peacefully resolve the competition for power and position among its historical leaders. Policy differences were weapons of the internal power struggles, rather than their causes. Ali Antar and Salih Muslih, the two most prominent leaders from Lahej, spent most of their careers in the armed forces or dealing with security. Though they had quite different characters – Antar an uneducated but inspiring and forceful army commander, and Muslih noted for his charisma, brains and political skills – they worked closely together with allies, who included important leaders from the Yafi' tribes, to build a solid base

of support in Lahej and in the armed forces, especially in the armoured brigades. There was no ideological gap between them and the two leaders from Abyan – Salmeen and Ali Nasir Mohammed. In the 1969–78 period, when Salmeen was president, he built a strong personal power base from within the Fadhli and other tribal allies in Abyan, and for a time was the most popular and populist of the PDRY leaders, overshadowing Ali Nasir, who was a man with an emollient personality hiding a Machiavellian and well-organized political mind. His core supporters came from the tribes of the Dathina and the Awdhali in Abyan, and from sections of the Awlaqi mostly located in Shabwa governorate. They were an important part of the officer corps in the armed forces, particularly at senior levels. Thus, while the PDRY condemned tribalism, its leaders built their political and military support from their home regions, especially after 1978.[13] These were based on traditional tribal alliances within the sultanates, emirates and sheikhdoms inherited from South Arabia – and the PDRY leaders were inadvertently fostering regional loyalties partly inherited from South Arabia.

There was a much bigger gap between, on the one hand, leaders from Lahej and Abyan, and, on the other, Abd al-Fattah Isma‘il and other prominent North Yemeni leaders from Aden. These ‘northerners’ – as they disparagingly became known in the late 1970s – lacking a tribal base, saw the party as the means both of overcoming tribalism and regionalism and of providing them with a national support structure based on ideology and organization.

The key milestones in the demise of the PDRY were the bloody events of 1978 and the even bloodier quasi-civil war of January 1986. By June 1978, Salmeen had fallen out with most of his colleagues and was politically isolated. He opposed moves to form the YSP, which would undermine the powers of the presidency, but his increasing arrogance combined with indiscipline in government turned the other historical leaders into rivals, and then enemies. The pretext for his removal came on 24 June 1978, when a briefcase carried by an envoy from Salmeen to President al-Ghashmi of the YAR exploded, killing him (and the envoy). The PDRY leadership demanded that Salmeen resign, if only to avoid a war with the YAR. He did so, but organized a coup attempt on 26 June, in which over 1,000 people died. Salmeen was arrested, tried and executed in short order.[14] Though this was a power struggle between Southern leaders, it embroiled the north.

Isma‘il succeeded him as president while remaining party secretary. His demand that he keep both posts alienated historical

leaders – particularly those from the South – and he was unable to remain in the ascendant for long. Under his presidency, the YSP was formed, relations with the Soviet Union were sealed in a twenty-year Friendship Treaty, and the unity agreement following the 1979 war with the YAR was sealed. His southern rivals combined to force his resignation in April 1980.

Ali Nasir Mohammed took both of Isma'il's posts, and also remained as prime minister. He was the most authoritative, if not the most authoritarian, of PDRY leaders from 1980 to 1983, when he was able to use his power base in Abyan (where he had absorbed Salmeen's support) and in the state structures he had administered in his previous ten years as prime minister. He had also been minister of defence for most of the 1980s, and had used this to install Awdhali and Awlaqi allies in key command positions in the armed forces. He outmanoeuvred and isolated his rivals and introduced important economic reforms, achieved a greater balance in foreign relations, and built up good relations with Ghashmi's successor in the North – Ali Abdullah Saleh. The period 1980–83 represented the best years of the PDRY, though Ali Nasir was never strong enough to force the permanent removal of his rivals from Lahej.

Antar and Muslih were able to use their presence in the armed forces and the party to build an alliance to demand that Ali Nasir give up at least one of his offices and share power. A weakened Ali Nasir was forced in 1985 to appoint Haydar al-Attas, a Hadhrami technocrat, as prime minister, and then bring Isma'il (and other Northerners) back to Aden and into leading positions in the party and state. They joined forces with Ali Nasir's Lahej rivals to try to push Ali Nasir out of the presidency. From 1984, government in the PDRY was paralysed by this rivalry. By the following year, it was clear to all that both sides were preparing for a military showdown; it was merely a question of who would move first.[15]

The showdown came when Ali Nasir's bodyguard opened fire at a leadership meeting on 13 January 1986, killing Antar and Muslih; Isma'il died later. This unleashed a short civil war that fractured the regime, party and armed forces. The better-armed and better-prepared forces from Lahej defeated Ali Nasir, who left with perhaps as many as 30,000 men for the YAR. At the end of the fighting in late January, only one-third of the Politburo and Central Committee were still in Aden; nearly 5,000 people (some sources claim 10,000) had died, the economy was ruined and the PDRY's friends were in despair – though Moscow arranged for its advisers, evacuated during the fighting, to return once it was over. Ali Nasir may have briefed

President Saleh on his intentions and received some covert support – the North again being involved in Southern power struggles.[16]

Hadhramis occupied the top roles in the new leadership. Ali Salim al-Beedh, who became the YSP secretary general, was the only historical leader of the NLF left in government. He had been a firebrand in his youth, but his views had been moderated to some extent by his experience as a minister. Haydar al-Attas became president, and Yassin Sa'id Nu'man (from Lahej) prime minister. They presided over a demoralized and divided party, a damaged economy and diminished armed forces. Behind the scenes, the most powerful figures were the army officers from Lahej who had defeated Ali Nasir.

FLEEING INTO UNION?

The balance of power between the PDRY and the YAR had shifted after 1986 in favour of the north, enhanced by the presence of Ali Nasir's men and the following he still enjoyed in Abyan and Shabwa. The new PDRY leadership was uncertain whether to opt for radical political reform, including democratization, or a loose federation with the YAR. The discovery of oilfields that straddled their borders gave both parts of Yemen the incentive to work together to exploit them. In 1989 there were many in the PDRY leadership who wanted closer relations with the YAR. The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 affected attitudes on both sides of the border. By late November 1989 a majority of the PDRY leadership was ready to enter into a 'confederation' with the YAR.[17]

Still, it was a surprise to most PDRY leaders (and senior figures in the YAR) when on 1 December 1989, at the end of a private meeting between al-Beedh and Saleh, the two announced that they had agreed to full union, to be achieved after a transition period of one year.[18] Saleh offered the PDRY a tempting deal: the YSP and the YAR party, the General People's Congress (GPC), would share power equally until elections scheduled for 1992, despite the fact that the PDRY had only 20 per cent of the country's population. Sana'a was to pay for the cost of retaining the PDRY's state employees. Al-Beedh's colleagues later blamed him for acting unilaterally both in Aden in December and in Sana'a in April, when he agreed to bring forward unity by six months to 22 May 1990, but there was not much evidence of such opposition at the time.

Despite their doubts about the process, the YSP leaders tried to make it work, believing that the PDRY's superior system of government and of law and order, its social policies and its relative lack of corruption would persuade all Yemenis to vote for the YSP in free elections. In making these efforts, they envisaged a form of southern takeover of the country. There was a large element of self-deception in this assessment, which contrasted with the feelings of many ordinary south Yemenis, who had experienced the bloodletting of 1986, four years of weak government since then, a shattered economy, and shortages of basic subsidized commodities in Aden. It also underestimated the strength of the north and the guile and ruthlessness of President Saleh.

STICKING THE TWO YEMENI STATES TOGETHER

The two states were loosely glued together, not unified. Most of the negotiations over detail were carried out in a great rush after the decision to unite had been taken. The expulsion by Saudi Arabia of over 800,000 Yemenis as a result of Yemen's apparent support for Iraq's occupation of Kuwait destroyed the immediate economic gains of unity. The GPC, the recently formed Islah, led by Sheikh Abdullah al-Ahmar, and the YSP quarrelled over many aspects of policy, and when the postponed elections took place in 1993 the results reflected the population balance in the country. The YSP, with 20 per cent of seats in parliament, could no longer claim to have equal power. Relations had been made worse by the assassination of many YSP politicians, probably by Yemeni Afghan veterans but blamed on the Northern leaders.

The main effect of unity was to strengthen, not weaken, the South's identity, which led to a growing realization that the South's interests would be ignored by the Saleh regime. The almost inevitable civil war started in April 1994, with Ali Nasir's residual forces siding with the North. Al-Beedh announced the formation of the Democratic Republic of Yemen in May 1994; but the game was over, and the defeat of southern forces in July 1994, despite financial backing provided by Saudi Arabia and other GCC states, saw the extinction of an independent South. For southerners it meant the accelerating loss or reduction in their previously superior government services – which had begun with unity – and the extension to the South of Saleh's methods of governing, which disadvantaged them. Aden failed to become the commercial centre

of Yemen, as promised in the unity agreement. Regime control was legalized through constitutional changes that vested power in the presidency. The army and security forces of the South were disbanded, and there were purges of southerners from government departments and agencies. This was balanced in the mid 1990s by the co-opting of people associated with Ali Nasir Mohammed – but towards the end of the 1990s many of them were marginalized, as was the YSP. All this took place against a background of economic crisis in the immediate aftermath of the civil war, and Yemen was obliged to implement an IMF-backed austerity programme in the mid 1990s.

YEMENI, SOUTH YEMENI AND LOCAL IDENTITIES

It seems that, for many, the southern identity was strengthened, not weakened, by the experience of the South in unity. Despite the inclusion of southerners in all parts of the Yemeni political, military and economic elites, there is a widespread perception that southern interests were subordinated to those of the northern elites. With the northern victory in the 1994 civil war, there was no longer much to stop the Saleh regime and its allies from exploiting the South and creating the resentments that fed the growth of Hiraak after 2007.

Yemeni nationalism was a largely twentieth-century construct,[19] but it helped create a Yemeni identity that was loosely associated with geographical and historical Yemen. Both the YAR and PDRY regimes co-opted Yemeni nationalism, and their leaders agreed that one day there should be a united Yemen even though they differed over how it should be achieved and how long it should take. There was also the legacy of the British period when, under the India Office approach, the British ruled or exercised influence through emirates, sultanates and sheikhdoms, and only at the very end sought to bind these together into a single political entity. These residual divisions provided the power bases for PDRY leaders in their personal disputes. It is not surprising that some Hadhramis, who ran their own affairs under (and before) the British, should want to assert a Hadhrami identity (as do many Mahris for al-Mahra) that might find expression in federal regions in either a united or divided Yemen. Some Hadhramis will say that they have no wish to be ruled again by leaders from Lahej and Abyan, and would prefer complete independence for their region. In Aden, where there is still some residual nostalgia for British South Arabia, a minority of leaders

speak of Aden separating itself from the South – not that this would be accepted by the young demonstrators demanding secession from the Republic of Yemen. Al-Beedh has said that he favours an independent south made up of the six regions: Abyan, Lahej, Aden, Shabwa, Hadhramaut and al-Mahra.[20] Similar divisions in northern Yemen have encouraged proposals for a federal Yemen composed of several self-governing regions.

The history of unity shows its inherent contradictions. The unity agreements of 1972 and 1979 were preceded by short border wars; the 1990 accord led to full-scale war between the two states. If the 1979 war was an attempt by the South to impose its system on the North, the 1994 war enabled the North to impose itself on the South. In reality, the southern leaders saw unity as an amalgamation of two states, in which the ruling political parties of both would share power equally. The northern elite saw it as a restoration of an imagined historical Yemen.

THE LEGACY OF THE PDRY

There are two main discourses on the experience of the PDRY. The first, most often heard from former ministers and party officials, is that the NLF and the YSP created a viable and progressive state and competent government after overcoming major obstacles and a poor inheritance from the British. Compared with the Yemen of today, the PDRY provided its citizens with good public services and an impartial rule of law that covered the whole country. There was little corruption or nepotism, and the gap between rich and poor was very narrow. Political Islam in either its moderate or extreme forms was not present.[21] The struggle for power was regrettable, but the PDRY was still a young state struggling to grow out of the violence used by the NLF to tear the country out of the hands of the British and the Sultans.

Others, mostly victims of the policies that led to and sustained the PDRY, paint a different picture. To them, it was a state that abused the rule of law, oppressed political opponents and failed to lift the PDRY out of poverty in a period when the region enjoyed two oil booms. It clung for its own security reasons to the Soviet Union, which would not provide economic support at the level the PDRY needed. Too much authority was conferred on the historical leaders, who had used violence to win independence; they condemned tribalism while exploiting it to build their power bases. These leaders turned their

guns on each other in 1986, destroying much that the PDRY had achieved.

The highly visible support for separation in the first years after 2010 – flags, symbols, demonstrations – showed that the question of whether southern Yemenis want to live in the same state as northern Yemenis was unresolved. Hiraak leaders still regard the South and the North as equal but separate parts of Yemen, despite the population differences, the disparity between military and political power in the North, and the lack of residual PDRY institutions in the South. The North is unlikely to allow the South's oilfields and fisheries to be exploited by the South alone. Today there is little or no international or Arab support for southern secession, which governments believe would create two potentially unstable and fragile states. Like many Yemenis they would prefer a federal system, whether of two regions or several.

An equally visible legacy of the PDRY is the YSP, which is now part of the coalition government in Sana'a. Its leaders, like the many southerners in other political parties, including President Hadi, and the civil service want Yemen to remain a united country, but under a system that restores the rights of southerners, addresses their grievances and gives greater power to regions, but they do not always insist that this should consist of only two regions. It is very difficult to assess the relative strengths of these unionists (the YSP has lost much support in the South in recent years, while Islah, which obviously supports unity, has expanded its membership) and the various elements within Hiraak, given that many southerners now live in the North.

The young protesters in the South want their own state, or at least the right to determine their own future. Few have direct memories of the real PDRY, which disappeared before most were born, though some cherish an image of a utopian state. The surviving historical leaders, who continue to exert influence mostly from abroad, remain at loggerheads and have conflicting visions for the South. Ali Nasir is one leader who believes that there are still residual problems from the PDRY period, and he has financed attempts to bring about reconciliation and cooperation at a local level in Abyan and Lahej. The southern movement today remains divided on regional lines, and its leaders seem to be rooted in the politics of the past – contributing to the apparent lack of a coherent organization or leadership, which weakens its impact. This is exacerbated by the revival of tribalism since 1994 at the encouragement of the Saleh regime, which knew how to use it to divide and rule.

The rapid growth of Hiraak since 2007 masks the fact that, within South Yemen, there are many individuals who do not want a return to the days of the PDRY but prefer a system, either Yemeni or South Yemeni, that gives expression to local identities inherited from South Arabia. Part of Hiraak, clearly conscious of all this, speaks of creating an independent South Yemen of six federal regions – that is, the governorates of the PDRY. There has been almost no research carried out to try to determine the relative strength of Yemeni, South Yemeni and local identities.

THE PDRY GAVE SHAPE to a South Yemeni identity that emerged in the Yemeni nationalism of the late pre-independence period. For a majority of people in Hiraak, the experience and memory of the PDRY – whether real or imagined – are of great symbolic importance. For some the PDRY still exists as a state, and they demand that negotiations about the future of Yemen can only occur in direct talks between politicians from the North and the South. Not all southerners are seeking to re-create the PDRY, whose flaws (as well as achievements) are acknowledged, but most still want an independent South, or at least the right to determine their own future. Others, such as the YSP and the many southerners belonging to other political parties, or working in Yemeni state institutions, want to remain in a united Yemen, but one that, through a federal system, gives political shape to a distinct southern identity. A few argue for a different form of federation that will allow for other local identities to be given some form of expression – for example, in Hadhramaut. Southern identity may have been strengthened by the way the South was treated by the Saleh regime. As one Twitter user has put it: 'Before unification, we were one people in two states, but after unification we became two peoples in one state.'[22] Most Yemenis would not agree with that but it illustrates the scale of the challenge facing those trying to shape a new form of government for Yemen.

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[1] I explored some of these themes in greater detail in Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011).

[2] Muhsin Alaini, *Fifty Years in the Shifting Sands* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2004), p. 197.

[3] In 1998 the ROY government created the governorate of Dhala‘, which incorporated parts of the Lahej and Ibb governorates.

[4] For a more detailed analysis of the 1967–69 period, see Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 9–33; and Helen Lackner, *People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia* (London: Ithaca, 1985), pp. 51–60.

[5] It was set up as the Higher School of Scientific Socialism, and staffed with Russian and Arab Communist Party instructors.

[6] For a good description of this structure, see T. Ismael and J. Ismael, PDR *Yemen* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986), pp. 35–51.

[7] I found, in interviewing several PDRY leaders from the early 1970s, that all were conscious of – and regretted – the brutality of the regime in dealing with its perceived enemies. The author can personally attest to the siege mentality of the PDRY leaders in the early 1970s. Amnesty International issued several reports on human rights abuses at the time.

[8] I was living in the PDRY, which had functioning and disciplined ministries. This was in complete contrast to the YAR, where there were ministers in charge of barely existing ministries.

[9] See N. Cigar, ‘Islam and State in South Yemen: The Uneasy Co-existence’, *Middle East Studies* 26: 2 (April 1990), pp. 85–203.

[10] Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy*, pp. 197–207.

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[13] Yassin Sa‘id Nu‘man told me that tribalism had crept back into the PDRY from 1978 as a result of the rivalries between the leaders.

[14] There are conflicting versions of what happened. See Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, pp. 97–101.

[15] Interviews with PDRY leaders, who all spoke of the tensions of the 1984–85 period and of attempts to prevent the inevitable conflict from breaking out. See Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, pp. 130–6.

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[17] Interviews with members of the Politburo and Central Committee of the YSP at the time, conducted in 2009 and 2010. Brehony, *Yemen Divided*, pp. 168–82.

[18] Interviews with PDRY leaders of the time.

[19] Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 23–38.

[20] See BBC Monitoring Middle East, 'Former South Yemen Leader Rules Out Unity, UN Steps, Denies US "accusations"', 20 January 2013, available at www.biyokulule.com.

[21] See Cigar, 'Islam and State in South Yemen'.

[22] @AliElbuka

CHAPTER SEVEN

MORE THAN HALF OF SOCIETY: SOUTHERN YEMENI YOUTH, UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE QUEST FOR A STATE JOB

Susanne Dahlgren

IN YEMEN WOMEN ARE often described as 'half of society'. This expression is used to remind men that they should not forget that there are as many women as men, and that women should have the same rights as men. But young people form the majority of Yemeni society: 78 per cent of Yemen's population is under 35 years of age – the upper age limit in the UN definition of youth. In case the world was not already aware of this, the Arab Spring brought to everyone's attention the demographic time bomb faced by the Arab World. Yemen is one of the most youthful of these countries, but there are surprisingly few studies of Yemeni youth. In this chapter, I discuss the expectations for the future of Southern Yemeni young people and the role they believe the state should play in guaranteeing them a decent life. I argue that young people are demanding jobs and a decent future as a question of *rights*. This is a reflection of a global human rights discourse that Yemenis understand as meaning not only freedom of speech and assembly or the right to physical integrity, but also a social right to the state provision of people's basic needs. Young people demand the right to have a decent life, which includes a steady income and the means to get married – in short, the means to start an independent household. Moreover, the young people I met in Aden demand not just any job – they believe that they are entitled to a job in the civil service. As far as young people in Change Squares throughout the country are concerned, a government that distributes national wealth only to cronies of the regime, and that fails to secure young people's rights, needs to be changed. In South Yemen, young people demand that their ruling regime should be fair and distribute national wealth equitably between citizens.

The young people I discuss here were born during the turbulent years after Yemeni unity. In most cases their parents have told them about life in the relatively secure times that prevailed in the South before unity, when everybody had a job and there was no corruption. In the face of massive youth unemployment, disillusionment has proliferated. For young men, unemployment also means postponed marriage plans and emotional frustration. In response, the youth of Aden, the former capital of the PDRY, have developed an idealized concept of a good state by building on the imagined fairness of the previous regime. According to their parents, with a state job, every young man was able to get married, as the Family Law (1974)

ensured that marriage costs were within everyone's means. While times are dramatically different today, the ideal state, in the minds of these young people, is one that includes everyone in the happy family of a national community. This chapter explores the discrepancies between youthful expectations and economic realities. I am in particular interested in examining why young people insist on getting a state job.

THE 'YOUTH QUAKE' THAT SHOOK THE ARAB WORLD

Unemployment is a serious problem in all Arab states, but Yemen's figures are especially dramatic. Firstly, the overall adult illiteracy rate in Yemen stands at 38 per cent.[1] Among the younger generation there has been a slight improvement, as literacy among males between 15 and 29 is as high as 96 per cent – though only 72 per cent of school-age girls are literate. At the secondary level, the gender differential is greater: half of all boys and only 27 per cent of girls are registered, not all of whom attend. According to the 2008 *Statistical Yearbook*, unemployment among the population at large was 15 per cent, while in 2004 the number of people above 15 years of age who were 'economically inactive' stood at 60.8 per cent. This figure includes schoolchildren and housewives, who are hardly inactive but whose contribution is not counted as economically productive. When one examines unemployment figures from a gender perspective, the optimism of labour statistics disappears: 40.9 per cent of working-age women were without a job in 2008.

Statistics on youth unemployment can be found in a publication called *Woman and Man in Yemen* (2007), which is based on the 2004 census. Age differences in access to work are dramatic. In the 15–19 age group the unemployment rate is 51.4 per cent, and in the 20–24 age group it is as high as 53 per cent. These groups include young graduates facing unemployment right after finishing school, vocational training or university. Regional differences in unemployment are interesting, too. Statistics from 1994 show that the unemployment rate among men in Sana'a was 7 per cent, and in Aden 21 per cent. Women's unemployment in Sana'a stood at 8 per cent, and in Aden at 13 per cent. In the 2008 *Statistical Yearbook* unemployment figures are not broken down by governorate, but overall unemployment among men is estimated at 11.5 per cent, and among women at 40.1 per cent.[2] According to a report on the Mareb Press news site, by 2010 some 50,000 people were graduating

annually from universities in Yemen, while the public and private sectors combined were only able to create some 10,000 new jobs each year.[3] Thus it is reasonable to say that unemployment in Yemen is characteristically a youth problem.

Youth development can also be monitored through crime statistics. According to figures from 2007, a total of 3,610 juvenile crimes were registered. Out of these, 160 were committed by girls. Among females, adultery was a typical form of delinquency, while with boys intentional light assault was most common. In 2007, fifty-one rapes were registered in the entire country – no doubt an under-reporting of the situation. According to a report issued by the Security Media Centre of the Ministry of the Interior in 2012, the number of rapes has risen sharply. In particular, these were rapes of minors and children, and in 113 cases out of 143 reported child rapes, the victim was a boy. According to the report, most cases were recorded in Hodeida, Sana‘a and Ta‘iz, but altogether eighteen governorates out of twenty-one were concerned.[4] According to my teacher informants, in schools, these acts are perpetrated mostly by older boys, and outside schools by adult men. Various categories of juvenile homicides include attempted killings (276 cases for boys and one girl), premeditated killings (57 boys and one girl) and unintentional killings (38 boys and two girls). A variety of crimes against property were recorded: 1,003 cases among boys and 22 among girls. All crime statistics show high juvenile crime figures – a new phenomenon in the South where, before unification, the crime rate was very low in general, as my informants in criminal courts in Aden confirmed.

Naturally, young people express themselves mainly in other ways than misbehaviour: recent years have witnessed the rise of a variety of cultural activities of an entirely new kind, such as amateur theatre, hiphop and stand-up comedy posted on YouTube. Civil society and social media networks have also boomed. These all provide interesting data to monitor how political and economic insecurity in the country is affecting young people and contributing to their expectations for the future. In this chapter I look at two such indicators: the prospect of finding a job after graduation, and the potential for marriage. I argue that these are the key areas where Adeni youth experience a loss of their rights. This was one of the motivations behind the widespread enthusiasm for the 2011 protests.

Rights-based discourse in relation to the state emerged in South Yemen during the colonial period. At first, various sectors of society promoted the rights of their members, such as trade unionists and

intellectuals' movements, to promote education in the colony. Later on, these movements joined forces to call for political rights and suffrage, and finally crystallized in the fight for independence.[5] The PDRY period was marked by economic security, but civil society activity was limited to government-controlled organizations. After unification in 1990, civil society organizations mushroomed throughout Yemen to campaign for human rights and press freedom, as well as on other issues such as raising awareness about violence against women. It is only since 2000 – for the first time since the 1960s – that young people have become politically engaged and started to promote youth rights. Some of these movements saw daylight only during the 2011 uprising. In Aden, young people involved in various initiatives have also tried to join forces to promote a common agenda.[6]

As has been acknowledged in the 2013 Yemeni National Dialogue Conference, the southern governorates face particular problems that result from their marginalization after Yemeni unification. In Aden, the former national capital, this marginalization has included the downgrading of the city to the status of governorate capital. After unification, what had been central government offices became governorate branch offices working under the supervision of the new national capital, Sana'a. Large numbers of senior and middle-level administrative staff moved to Sana'a in the early 1990s. Recruitment to state jobs also moved to Sana'a. At the same time, the population of Aden expanded vastly, creating heavy pressure on the job market. In 1973, when Aden was the capital of the PDRY, its population was 290,000; by 1988 it had grown to 386,000, according to the last data available before unification. Twenty years later, in 2008, Aden's population had reached 674,000 inhabitants, and it had become a city suffering from water and electricity shortages and failing municipal services.

Some civil servants in Sana'a moved to Aden when their jobs required it. Adenis strongly resent the new recruitment policy. I once visited a housing compound built for state employees in Khormaksar, Aden, when my hostess complained about her 'semi-illiterate' next-door neighbour who had moved with his family from Sana'a, and with whom nobody in the corridor socialized. She claimed that he had taken the state job to which her unemployed graduate daughter was entitled, as she had been waiting to be recruited for years. The fact that state jobs are no longer allocated on the same principles as before unity is a source of bitterness to many

here, as there is a widespread perception that priority in recruitment is given to northerners.

STUDYING MIDDLE EASTERN YOUTH

Demonstrations on the occasion of the 2009 presidential elections in Iran, and factions of Tehran youth on the one hand, and the youth uprisings in 2011 throughout the Arab world on the other, have brought to world attention the fact that young people in this part of the world are no longer willing to accept the parameters that their parents' generation unwillingly lived within. As Linda Herrera suggested, way before the 2011 uprisings, a climate of increasing unemployment, repressive regimes, a youth bulge, and an escalation of regional geopolitical conflicts with no resolution in sight, all raised questions and speculation about the likelihood of young people entering the debates about democracy, security and radicalization.[7] In Yemen, these are topics and demands that young people have raised in different Change Squares, from Aden (since 2007) to Ta'iz and Sana'a (since 2011). Globalization, satellite television and the coming of the internet have brought to every young person's awareness the growing global gap between the so-called developed world and their own world of missed opportunities. As Asef Bayat has put it, the 'politics of possibility' emerge from manoeuvring within the constraints and making the best of what is available, and thus this manoeuvring is part of the art of being young.[8] In societies with strong youth consciousness, the discrepancy between social reality and the possibilities that the world has to offer is tangible; Yemen is no exception.

The category of 'youth' is in need of definition. Youth is a biological category but, like 'women', its meaning depends on the social and political context. On the one hand, 'youth' describes social conditions in human development – a stage between childhood and full adulthood.[9] Often the demands and delinquent behaviour of young people are interpreted discursively as a problem of the exclusion of youth from the political process, as Bayat suggests with respect to Iran. But, more than that, youth stands for a particular *habitus* that Bayat and Herrera, following Pierre Bourdieu's idea of *habitus*, call 'youthfulness'[10] – that is, a series of dispositions, cognitive structures and ways of being, feeling and carrying oneself that might be consciously or unconsciously designed. In the era of social media, youth networks are both

material and immaterial. But young people typically frame their demands as generational claims, however inarticulate those claims might sometimes be.

In the Middle East, limits for youthful interaction are set by adults, and increasingly by the autocratic state apparatus that acts as a self-proclaimed religious authority guarding public morality. There are similarities between the way societies tend to set limits to women's mobility and how they keep young people under control. As I have discussed elsewhere,[11] some twenty years ago the ideological basis for such supervision came from the tradition–modernity debate that raised concern at 'too much modernity', for instance, when women in colonial Aden joined clubs which had earlier been reserved as men's exclusive locations for activity and networking. Today's generation of grandparents took for granted a gender segregation typical of what is now seen as a traditional social convention. The generation that is currently middle-aged tends to consider segregation a hindrance to women's access to work, and to believe that women can act alongside men in all fields of life. They see segregation as an obstacle to their entry into modernity. Young people have again accepted gender segregation, but it has a radically different character to the type of segregation that was practised by their grandparents' generation; among other things, it does not advocate marginalizing women and keeping them illiterate and outside the public sphere.[12]

In today's Arab world, control of women is explained by reference to conformity with the requirements of Islam. Thus, Islam either encourages or opposes early marriage, depending on who is interpreting it. Such ideological talk is used to guide young people's behaviour and limit their self-expression; it is also used to tell them that they should accept whatever is claimed to have been allowed or forbidden by previous generations. Even though each generation has its own ways of accepting social conventions and interpreting the divine message, the use of Islamic language to set limits on women and young people is characterized by ahistorical truth and divine order, and is thus difficult to resist. Among young people gender marks a clear dividing line, but social media provide a public sphere that does not discriminate between genders, and indeed facilitates communication between them. This is one of the profoundly new aspects of life for today's young people.

In a spacious villa in Khormaksar built during the British colonial period, I met young activists in a youth club devoted to promoting young people's political engagement. The occasion was International Women's Day, on 8 March 2008, and I had been invited to the club together with a senior women's rights activist to talk to the young people about the women's rights movement. When we arrived, a young man in his early twenties approached me. He took off his headphones to greet me, and to my greatest surprise lamented how sorry he was 'that Targa had to go'. Various thoughts came to mind. First I considered the possibility that he was talking about the female president of Finland, Tarja Halonen. We were, after all, in a youth club devoted to advancing young people's political activism. But since Tarja Halonen had not to my knowledge left office, I started to think of other possibilities. I took a good look at the guy's youthful *habitus*, and came to the conclusion that he was not talking about Finnish politics but Finnish pop music. I was right; when I replied and said how sorry I was, too, that the Finnish heavy rock group Nightwish had suddenly sacked their lead singer Tarja Turunen, the boy's eyes glimmered. We then exchanged some thoughts about Tarja Turunen's music and her future career options. The boy told me he was a great fan of 'Targa', and showed me her songs on his mobile phone. The meeting I was attending had been advertised in advance, and word had spread that a person from Finland was coming. The young man saw this as a chance to talk about something important to him, and which he anticipated that I, unlike others locally, would be able to share. A similar conversation could have taken place in my home country. After all, given the way the young man was dressed – jeans and T-shirt, headphones over his ears and, typically for Adeni young men, a neatly cut short hairstyle imitating media-transmitted cosmopolitan youth culture – he was similar to the global boy-icon communicated worldwide through youth music and by transnational commercial media such as satellite TV and the internet.

We then went inside the spacious two-storey villa. The meeting brought together some twenty listeners – young men dressed in slacks and ironed shirts, the usual white-collar outfit of Adeni government officials; and young women wearing the outdoor *abaya*, with half of those present also wearing the *niqab* and others wearing the *hijab* or *mandil*. After listening attentively to our lectures and discussions, the youngsters asked me to stay on and discuss their concerns.

The club had been established by a notable Adeni intellectual who had managed to secure financing from an American donor. It was furnished like any government office: tables were arranged in the back of the room to form a podium; in front of the podium were chairs arranged freely around the small hall. Boys sat on the left side of the podium, while girls occupied the chairs next to the doorway. As in government offices here in Aden, no gender segregation was practised, and men and women talked freely to each other before the meeting started.

The young man I had met in the yard did not join in the discussion; his interests were elsewhere. Those who attended were young men and women who, I was told, all came from different political parties. There were members of the leading Islamist party, Islah, and the former Southern Yemeni ruling party, the YSP, as well as the then-ruling General People's Congress. One of the men introduced the group to me. He concluded by saying that all those present were unemployed – at which everybody nodded in confirmation. Each of the participants then spoke of their individual life-story. Most had a university degree and had been searching for a job for a while. Two of the unemployed young men then told me that they worked as journalists in the local media, and one of the women said she worked in a pharmacy owned by a distant relative. But all affirmed that they were unemployed.

That was the question that started to puzzle me, and led me to investigate further what kind of images young people, activists and others, have of the state, what their visions of a fair state are, and how they imagine the state–citizen relationship. For me, used to the idea that a person can only have one full-time job at a time, listening to these young people was perplexing.

They had a variety of family backgrounds. Some came from notable Adeni families where the father or mother had been active in public life during or after the PDRY period, and some came from more modest backgrounds. If Aden were still the national capital, these young people believed that they would have expected to be the future leaders of the country in business, the media and NGOs. But, as they put it, they came from the 'wrong part of the country' – that of the marginalized Southern Yemen – and they could not expect to be able to make use of their education, or the social networks they had built up despite their young age. All had been attracted to the youth club by its mission to promote young people's political and social engagement.

I was puzzled that they did not consider the option of working in the private sector, establishing a business of their own, or working in nongovernmental organizations. Clearly, for these young people, employment meant not just any kind of job. With university degrees or high school diplomas, these youngsters were confident that they had the right qualifications to hold a civil service job. They explained that the reason they were deprived of jobs was the corrupt system that discriminates against southerners – a system that the Sana'a regime had imposed on their lands. It was a system in which state jobs went with connections, and where patron–client relationships and membership of the right political party mattered more than qualifications and competence.

When taking a look at private-sector job vacancy announcements in a local newspaper, I considered the possibility that these young people did not have the required qualifications. No one present in the club spoke English or any other foreign language. Their computing skills were modest, too. This all bore witness to the collapse of the education system, about which my teacher friends had complained for years. It reminded me of the young woman I had met some time earlier, who had graduated from Aden University with English language as her major but could not speak a word of English, and did not understand simple questions in English. I also recalled a class in Aden University's Technical Faculty where students were instructed on how to open a computer. The weakening of the state education system in Aden was also visible in the mushrooming of private schools and universities, and in parents' complaints about the cost of private education, which they paid because they thought it was the only way to guarantee their children's future. I could sense there was more to why these young people insisted on having a state job. As all those present in the youth club were unmarried, I thought it a good idea to investigate how marriage practices had changed following unification.

'RICH GUYS JUST MARRY ANY GIRL THEY WANT'

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, I had been observing how marriage payments and the *mahr* – that is, wedding costs and dowry paid to the bride – had skyrocketed following Yemeni unity. Before unification the PDRY had officially limited *mahr* in the 1974 Family Code to a nominal 100 Yemeni dinars (one dinar was about US$3). Salaries ranged between 40 and 200 dinars a month at the end of the

1980s. Government efforts to make marriage easier also included discouraging extravagant spending on wedding parties – reforms that most men but not many women supported. After the 1974 law was replaced with a Personal Status Law, modelled more on the Northern Yemeni Family Law of 1978 than on the 1974 southern law, the sky became the limit with respect to marriage expenses. In the capital, Sana'a, *mahr* amounts among the wealthy and well-connected became the yardstick that Adenis started to follow. Thus it was no longer uncommon in the early 2000s to agree on 300,000 or 500,000 Yemeni rials for deferred *mahr* – that is, the amount due to be paid upon divorce or a husband's death. Still, for some women this was not an unwelcome development. Young women explained to me that they wanted a high amount written in the marriage contract for *mahr* in order to ensure that the man they were about to marry respected them. As amounts agreed in contracting a marriage were always a source of gossip, it was not only women who took pride in huge amounts, but men as well. Being able to agree on a high *mahr* demonstrated a man's social and economic status. In every case I came across, it was not only the young man and his immediate family who contributed but the entire lineage, depending on which branch of the extended family was wealthy. These relationships naturally created dependence and future obligations. But for those men who did not have a wealthy immediate or extended family, marrying meant labouring for years, preferably in the Gulf countries, to save enough money to be able to take a wife.

In 1991, during the first Gulf War, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh did not support the US-led coalition and, as a consequence, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries expelled Yemeni labour migrants and those business owners who did not have a local business partner. Many families in Yemen were affected by this.[13] These were the economically insecure years of the early 1990s, when the two former Yemeni states were trying to glue together two different mixed economies, both of which relied heavily on remittances from the Gulf.[14] As the Gulf states no longer welcomed Yemenis to do jobs rewarded by much higher salaries than anyone could expect in Yemen, the marriage crisis became a reality. I heard many complaints from young men about young women's 'greed', and how girls' families promoted such behaviour.

During the PDRY the concept of marriage as a partnership had spread in the cities. These were formed between colleagues or friends, and they seldom included high dowries. It was part of the *tahrir al-mar'a* ('women's emancipation') policies of Democratic

Yemen to promote such unions – policies that many men and women I met at that time in Aden respected. When marriage payments rose dramatically, families started once again to play a major role in organizing and contracting marriages. Even though a young man could always register with an internet matchmaking site such as Gawzana Yemen to find a bride on his own, he still needed his relatives' help to gather the funds needed for the party, presents and *mahr* – and for him to obtain such help, his parents needed to agree to his choice of spouse. Parents are not necessarily positive about the marriage choices of their offspring, thinking that young people are too immature to make such an important decision on their own. When I interviewed men and women in the early 2000s about how marriages were contracted in Aden, mature men and women stated that a 'love before the wedding' type of marriage was doomed to fail.[15] This was the name Adenis had for love matches in which young people find each other, fall in love and decide to marry, all without parental supervision. In the youth club, young men confirmed to me that it was only those from wealthy families who could marry any girl they wanted. It was clear that the young man I had met in the university some time earlier was a case without parallel: he told me that he had married his great love, and that they had agreed with her father to record only a symbolic one-rial *mahr* in the marriage contract. Such marriages were not uncommon during the PDRY period, when men and women were encouraged by the state to contract a marriage without economic transactions, or the involvement of families, lineages, clans or tribes. They have become a rarity in post-unification Yemen.

The contemporary marriage crisis was not the first occasion for a public debate on the high cost of getting married. Browsing 1960s newspapers in a library in Aden, I found a report about a public meeting held in 1961 at the Aden Tennis Club, located in Crater. The meeting was arranged by the youth section of the sports club, and the famous but controversial Salafi imam Sheikh Mohammed al-Bayhani had been invited to give an address. In his speech the sheikh raised the demand to limit *mahr* to a nominal sum and to stop spending on ostentatious wedding parties. The early 1960s were a period of economic boom in Aden. At that time it was one of the world's busiest ports, attracting labour from all over the Arabian Peninsula, Horn of Africa and South Asia. The sheikh condemned excessive spending as contrary to Islamic modesty. A large crowd of young men had gathered, showing that this was very important. The meeting formed a committee to follow up with the authorities about the demands made, which included not only limiting the *mahr* but

also cutting spending at weddings. An endowment was also established to collect fees to facilitate marriages of less well-off young men and to build housing for young couples. Lack of housing was one of the main social problems in Aden at that time.[16] I could hear the same angry voices raised against young women's 'greed' in this news report as those I heard when talking to young men in Aden in the early 2000s. In both periods, young men addressed their demands to the state: it was not only a question of changing the legislation to address needs more effectively, but also of accessing jobs in the state bureaucracy. In the early 1960s it was the colonial state, with its overseas recruitment campaign, that prevented young local men from getting white-collar jobs. It brought skilled labour from British India to work in administration, education and the courts, and placed even army and police force positions beyond the reach of Adeni young men.[17] Today such limitations came from Sana'a – a fact that made older people in Aden compare the current situation with the colonial experience. The young people I met in the youth club were used to hearing such discussions in their homes.

A state job is in practice a permanent job, affording the kind of security that, in the current economically insecure times, young women and their families are anxious to secure in marriage candidates. The patronage system that emerged in the south with unity, which northerners consider part of the process of integrating state employees into the administration but southerners understand as mere corruption, meant that with a state job one might receive a villa, a plot of land, a new SUV, and access to better education and healthcare. Still, getting a job that would bring such benefits seemed impossible to the young people I met in the youth club. Who would not like to achieve such security for life – especially if such a system existed?

FIFTY THOUSAND NEW JOBS

In the course of the youth revolution of 2011, such a chance finally seemed to emerge. Newspapers suddenly reported that President Saleh had announced his intention to establish 50,000 new graduate jobs in the public sector. As the government-friendly English-language weekly *Yemen Observer* put it, the 'initiative is part of a reform package that includes higher salaries for public sector employees and payouts of annual bonuses which have been frozen since 2005'.[18] The official story also stated that the jobs had been

planned in order to ease graduate unemployment and to 'improve public services'. They were aimed at helping 25 per cent of the approximately 200,000 graduate job applicants to find employment. Some holders of high school diplomas and university graduates had been waiting for state jobs for years; I met someone myself who had been waiting for ten years to get a faculty position in Aden University. The announcement was received with some suspicion and disappointment in Aden. A heated debate followed on Facebook sites such as the Adeni Youth Revolution Group. Some thought that the government was doing the right thing, but had acted too late. Others dismissed the offer outright, pointing out that a regime that was unable to pay the salaries of those already hired in the public sector would not be in a position to hire more people. Despite this, a month later, when the government's own *al-Thawra* newspaper published the list of those recruited,[19] many took the trouble to get the newspaper just to see who had succeeded. The newspaper quickly sold out, and newsagents were able to increase the price of the last remaining copies.

Saleh's announcement came at an interesting time, when there had already been significant killings of protesters in Aden, while demonstrators in Ta'iz and Sana'a in 2011 had fared somewhat better. This changed on 18 March, when demonstrators in Sana'a's Change Square were attacked by army and security units, leaving some fifty people dead. A similar slaughter of peaceful demonstrators took place in Ta'iz a few days later, and suddenly there was no turning back: promises of new jobs could no longer halt young demonstrators in their determination not just to oust Saleh, but to sweep away the entire regime of corruption and mismanagement.

The Adeni blogger 'Nuha the Revolutionary' was one of those who criticized the announcement of new jobs. She wrote, 'I am just wondering … why now? Why this huge number of jobs?? Where were all these jobs … when people were suffering of [*sic*] unemployment for decades?? Is it just to take the people out of the Change Squares around Yemen and get them into this very long unuseful procedure?'[20]

Similarly, the same day that Nuha's blog entry was posted, young journalist Haitham al-Zaghruri wrote on the independent *Aden al-Ghad* news site:

> The government was unable to recruit hundreds, or perhaps just dozens of cadres that are worth hiring – without intermediaries – even though it was at the height of its power. How can it today meet the provision of more than 200,000 jobs, 50,000 positions for 2011 only and about 150,000 posts for 2012, 2013 and 2014?? It is ridiculous that it aims to employ about 200,000 citizens only one day after the announcement by the Minister of Commerce that Yemen will have to spend nearly $5 billion, or about the full budget of the Yemeni economy, if each new recruit gets a salary worth $200?[21]

The writer asks where the government will be able to find about US$10 million a month if the central bank treasury is completely empty.

THESE ACCOUNTS SHOW how young people consider the state to be responsible for recruitment and creating new jobs. But, as the state happens to be bankrupt, the only option is to replace the regime with a fair one that can engage in distributing national wealth transparently. Without questioning the idea that it is up to the state to hire each and every person with a certificate – rather than up to the private sector to create jobs – young people are demanding a fairer system in which recruitment is not dependent on anyone's connections or loyalty to the ruling party, but on qualifications. Such a state would probably be as bankrupt as the present one, but at least it would be perceived as fair.

The young people I met in the youth club sincerely believed in the system. In their youthful enthusiasm, they criticized the present situation, in which they were treated unjustly. But they continued to believe in the principle of the state as the provider of jobs. Many young men and women in Aden have been caught up in a sense of apathy; boys hang around on the streets, or kill time in game rooms or internet cafés, and girls fight boredom by chatting and watching movies at home. Some boys go to the mosque, which recruits young militants to be sent to Iraq or Syria on one-way journeys. The young people in the youth club had not sunk into apathy; they dressed up for a state job every day, and came to the club while they continued to await their opportunity to begin lives of their own. In Spring 2011

they ceased to wait; now they were moving to take the future into their own hands.

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PART THREE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER EIGHT

WATER SCARCITY: WHY DOESN'T IT GET THE ATTENTION IT DESERVES?

Helen Lackner

WITHOUT WATER THERE IS NO LIFE. Although not at the forefront of current debates, Yemen's water scarcity is arguably the country's number one problem. This chapter summarizes the development of major water policy and governance issues since unification in 1990 in the context of a rapidly growing population and worsening water shortages. Given the importance of water usage in agriculture, and the fact that 70 per cent of the country's population still lives in rural areas, this analysis has a strong rural bias, but also deals with urban water supply. While the concept of governance has a range of definitions,[1] here I understand it as 'the use of institutions, structures of authority and even collaboration to allocate resources and coordinate or control activity in society or the economy'.[2] I will look at governance with reference to the role of the state and its institutions in the management of the country's water resources.

Until fairly recently, rural communities throughout Yemen used water from four main sources – rainfall, springs and shallow wells tapping groundwater, spate runoff and some rainwater harvesting. Since the 1970s there has been a switch to increasing reliance on shallow and deep wells. In the last century, some spate systems for irrigation have been developed through the construction of large-scale control structures operated by government agencies. The ROY inherited two very different water governance systems. In the PDRY, groundwater extraction was managed by the state, and all drilling equipment was firmly under the control of a state organization. Large-scale extraction only took place through agricultural development projects, most of which were externally financed (by the World Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, or the Soviet Union). In the YAR, by contrast, from the 1970s onwards drilling rigs were privately owned and the only control was financial: those who could afford to hire a drilling rig did so. During the late 1970s and 1980s, remittances from workers in the GCC states enabled smallholders and poorer farmers to invest in deep boreholes, and this broadened access to irrigation water beyond the small group of wealthy larger landholders. Resource management by the state did not exist as such. Rural domestic water supplies in both the YAR and the PDRY were either secondary-use from irrigation systems, or small-scale well and spring supplies managed traditionally by landowners or communities. Urban

supplies were state-managed, extracting water from deep wells without much thought being given to the impact of pumping on the aquifers. Nowhere was there any significant long-term planning of sustainable use of a scarce resource. At unification, there was no regional water-management or governance structure. The main differences between the two regimes were that one controlled the extraction of groundwater while the other did not.

To explore the challenges of water scarcity and the efforts to develop national water governance structures, I will first address the issue of data availability. This is followed by a brief description of the different phases in state water policy during the last two decades, structured around the main institutions established – the National Water Resources Authority (NWRA) in 1995 and the Water Law in 2002. A brief analysis follows of the main changes that have taken place in water governance in these periods. Finally, I summarize the current situation, and raise some possible measures that might help alleviate, if not solve, the water crisis.

BASIC 'FACTS'

A major issue in water management is the absence of accurate data. This has a numbers of causes:

- the need to differentiate between surface waters (including spate) and groundwater (again split between deep nonrenewable and renewable aquifers);
- the different conditions prevailing in the various hydrological regions of the country;
- the very nature of groundwater: it is difficult to assess the exact amount retained in any aquifer, its precise boundaries, or indeed how much water is recharged annually and how much remains available for use;
- given how localized rainfall is, it would be practically impossible to have enough rain gauges[3] to provide comprehensive data; moreover data need to be collected systematically and consolidated at the governorate and national level;
- spate flows, and thus the availability of water for agriculture, are also difficult to measure;

- quantities in deep, non-renewable aquifers are difficult to estimate, despite sophisticated satellite data.

Regardless of these uncertainties, a number of figures are widely mentioned, and they certainly give a rough indication of the situation. They show that, while Yemen is not the country with the worst water resources in the world, its situation is dire, and scarcity is extreme:

- Average annual renewable resources approximate 2.1 billion cubic metres per annum; usage is 3.5 billion cubic metres, hence the annual deficit – i.e. mining of water – is about 1.4 billion cubic metres.[4]
- With a population of about 25 million in 2013, this works out at 84 cubic metres per capita of renewable water, way below 10 per cent of the accepted scarcity threshold (1,000 cubic metres per capita) needed; this implies that much of what is used comes from non-renewable aquifers.
- Accessing the only vast and deep aquifer, the Umm al-Rudhuma, in Hadhramaut, which extends to al-Mahra in the east and Shabwa in the west, is politically and technically problematic. In addition to the political and social issues involved, transporting this water to the areas of greatest need, such as Sana‘a, Ta‘iz and smaller highland cities, would present as many technical and financial difficulties as providing desalinated water for the capital, Sana‘a, at 2,200 m above sea level.
- The widespread assertion that 90 per cent of water in Yemen is used for agriculture may be accurate.
- However, a related claim that *qat* uses 60 per cent of this water is patently an ideological statement; as *qat* is cultivated on no more than 10 per cent of cropped land,[5] it is hardly likely to use more than 25 per cent of the water.
- There is no detailed information on all the changes which have taken place in agricultural, industrial and domestic uses of water in recent decades.

PHASES IN WATER POLICY SINCE 1990

While it would be wrong to assert that international development agencies, whether bilateral or multilateral, decide Yemen's economic policies, there is no doubt that they have considerable influence. With respect to water, as in other sectors, much activity has been largely donor-driven. After the first years of systematic and uncritical support for the state's policies of increasing water extraction to 'develop' agriculture – policies which, intentionally or otherwise, effectively benefited wealthier and more powerful landowners – some changes occurred in the mid 1990s with the introduction of Structural Adjustment and 'Washington Consensus' policies that, among other things, ended the protection previously given to home-grown agricultural produce.

The main foreign players in the water sector since the 1990s have been the Netherlands, Germany and the World Bank. In addition to the institutional competition and conflicts of interest between Yemenis, policy differences between the main external donors have led to a confusion in policies that has hindered progress. This situation is tacitly recognized in the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA),[6] which asserts that

> within the donor group, there are potential tensions and disagreements as different governance models are being tested. For example, regarding NWRA, the World Bank has adopted an 'instrumental approach' integrating NWRA into operations to the extent that it can demonstrate performance and expand capacity … The Netherlands, by contrast, has adopted what it describes as an 'ownership approach' supporting NWRA capacity building directly and insisting that activities which fall under NWRA'S mandate should be entrusted to it, even when the competence was lacking …

By the late 1990s, an informal distribution of responsibilities was agreed, with Germany focusing on urban water and the Netherlands on supporting rural domestic supply, while the World Bank gave more attention to irrigation.

PHASE 1 (1990–95): THE STATE IGNORES THE ISSUE OF WATER SCARCITY

During the first years of the unified state, there was no explicit strategy to address water scarcity, while in practice a policy of

laissez-faire prevailed. At unification, the only existing institution explicitly and exclusively concerned with the coordination of water issues was the High Water Council (HWC), established in the YAR in 1981. It took over responsibility in the sector for the country as a whole. It had been established to reduce competition between three executive institutions: the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources, which promoted increased water-extraction for irrigation; the Ministry of Oil and Mineral Resources, which was responsible for hydrological studies identifying and estimating water resources; and the Ministry of Electricity and Water, which had as its primary concern the requirements for urban water. The HWC was unable to overcome the mutual rivalries and suspicions between its component institutions, and thus remained ineffective and paralysed for many reasons. These included weak leadership and the absence of sufficient authority to enforce its decisions in the face of the strong agricultural lobby, which neither the hydrologists nor the Ministry of Electricity and Water had the political clout to effectively resist.

This laissez-faire water strategy expanded beyond its former areas in the YAR, as unregulated and uncontrolled drilling started in the former PDRY. This gave further support to the perception of many southerners that they were under occupation and their natural resources were being confiscated, as much land being irrigated and developed was also appropriated or bought by influential northern figures (as well as returning southerners).

State policies during this period provided direct and indirect financial assistance to groups whose support the regime sought – in particular rural sheikhs and military and business leaders, most of whom were large landowners. They were given access to cheap water through diesel subsidies, easy credit, and other measures encouraging the over-exploitation of the limited water available.[7] While this was the practical reality of state policy, it happened in an institutional vacuum, as water conservation was no one's priority.

Terraces after rains, Amran. © Helen Lackner

Foreign financing institutions that were supposed to assist with Yemen's development (the World Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, and others) made no attempt during this period to address long-term water scarcity: 'land and water shortages will continue to severely constrain agriculture' was the best that could be managed in the first World Bank assessment of the economy of the ROY[8] in 1992. Funding agencies contributed to the state's strategy by supporting the Cooperative and Agricultural Credit Bank (CACB) in providing cheap credit for irrigation and the drilling of wells. They also invested in the modernization of large-scale spate irrigation schemes in the Tihama, through the Tihama Development Authority, and also in Wadis Tuban and Bana, in Lahej and Abyan governorates respectively. These schemes contributed to a changed pattern of access to irrigation, reducing access for smallholders.[9]

During this period, awareness of the seriousness of the water crisis was restricted to specialists, including some foreign institutions: Dutch consultants who were drilling at over 1,000-metre depths in search of water for Sana'a city tried in vain to attract attention to the problem.

PHASE 2 (1995–2000): AWARENESS OF THE CRISIS SPREADS – PIECEMEAL

By 1995 there was broader recognition of the urgency of the water situation, and the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Netherlands, 'at the request of government', prepared a water strategy.[10] This document is very representative of standard Washington Consensus approaches, with an emphasis on privatization. Although recognizing that the private sector already played a major part in domestic water supply, it recommended that 'steps should be taken to promote further development of private supply, in order to increase coverage and reduce costs'.[11] This can hardly be described as a strategy to address scarcity in a context of widespread poverty, and also neglects to mention that private costs are almost always higher than those of the public sector.

The establishment of the National Water Resources Authority (NWRA) in 1995 is the main institutional event of the period. Its mandate makes it 'the sole governmental agency in the Republic responsible for the formulation of water resources policies and development strategies and the study, planning and management of water resources at national level … [It] has all the powers and jurisdiction necessary to achieve its objectives.'[12] The NWRA started off very much on the same path as the HWC – as an institution designed to provide senior positions for redundant notables. Moreover, it failed to win sufficient support from the financiers who had promoted its establishment: the water strategy proposed to restrict its role to 'regional planning and regulation', and described its mandate as 'very ambitious'[13] (official language for unfeasible and unrealistic). Its implementation bylaws were only issued through a prime minister's decree in 2002, seven years after its creation, demonstrating the level of priority it had for government as well as the ability of its leadership to demonstrate its relevance.

The NWRA still exists today. Its mandate ensures that it is now one of the institutions that constrains the Ministry of Water and Environment from effectively addressing the water crisis. The NRWA is the only institution authorized to license well-drilling, and it is also supposed to regulate and register all drilling rigs. It is responsible for water quality and for raising awareness of the urgency of the water crisis. More controversially, it is also responsible for solving water conflicts – an inappropriate task for an institution primarily staffed by engineers.

The main policy measure adopted during this period was the increase in diesel prices – a mechanism also used in many other countries, such as India. But in Yemen this was presented as a

strategy to preserve the resource, as higher prices would reduce pumping and water use. A redistributive effect was also predicted, as reduced extraction would help replenish shallow wells, and thus favour smallholders at the expense of the large landowners. The opposite happened, however, as diesel is needed even for shallow wells, and the poorer smallholders could not afford the increases while the larger owners of deep wells could. The proposed measures met with strong resistance from the general population, and were rejected by parliament in 1993 thanks to the large landowners' strong representation in parliament. In 1995, when a tripling of the price was announced, riots led to the deaths of over twenty people, but the price still doubled. In 1996 and 1998, additional increases led to further deaths during riots.[14] In the last decade there have been more diesel price rises, mostly during the 2011 crisis. Opposition from large landowners has been reduced through measures such as subsidies (most of them through World Bank financing) for the introduction of efficient modern irrigation technology, such as drip irrigation. Most recently, the high price of diesel has encouraged those who can afford it to shift their pumps to gas, and to consider the introduction of solar pumps.[15] In 2007, an assessment of these policies found that

> leading with the reform of the incentive structure tends to distort the positive impacts, with particular negative effects on the poor if the negative incentive of the diesel price rise is not accompanied by implementation of other reforms at the same time. And this is exactly what has happened over the last two years – prices have gone up but most people have had no available response that could compensate. As a result the [National Water Sector Strategy and Investment Program] reforms so far may be saving water but at the risk of depressing the rural economy and with a particular risk to the employment and incomes of the poor.[16]

Urban water supply systems developed during this period particularly in medium-sized towns, including Yarim, Zabid and others. Once installed, those systems also included sanitation, a significant and welcome innovation. Germany focused on the towns, while the World Bank, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) and the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) financed urban water and sanitation projects in

the large cities, in particular Ta‘iz and Sana‘a; some of these projects became notorious for their slow pace of implementation and low quality of construction.

Although taking place in 2001, the restructuring of the parastatal General Authority for Rural Electricity and Water Supply into the General Authority for Rural Water Supply Projects (GARWSP) was prompted by the same philosophy of creating autonomous institutions that could later be privatized, shifting power away from central government. It is responsible for most public-sector investment in rural domestic water supply. At the time of writing, the GARWSP is due to take up responsibility for sanitation and change its name to General Authority for Rural Water and Sanitation. Dutch support has financed almost all investment and training costs, as well as government running costs, for the last two decades. A 2011 inventory of rural projects found that 30 per cent of them are not functioning; many think this is still an underestimation of the situation. Until recently, the GARWSP, alongside many other institutions in the country, was managed in an autocratic manner, affecting not only the selection of schemes but also its ability to assess its achievements and constraints realistically.

PHASE 3 (2002–11): THE STATE STRUGGLES TO INSTITUTIONALIZE WATER MANAGEMENT

Enacted in 2002 after years of discussion, the Water Law should have been a major step towards the state taking control of water management in the interests of the population as a whole. It was followed by the creation of the Ministry of Water and Environment in 2003, leading to a brief period of optimism that the water crisis would be addressed effectively.

The new ministry was to have full authority over all aspects of water management. But this was virulently opposed by both the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation (MAI) and powerful landowners. They combined forces and went straight to President Ali Abdullah Saleh. Within a week of having informed cabinet that the new ministry had full and exclusive authority to deal with all water issues, the president announced that it would only be responsible for drinking water, while the MAI would continue to be responsible for irrigation, thus retaining control over the activities using the overwhelming majority of the country’s groundwater. This effectively emasculated the new ministry, which was thus prevented

from addressing the main cause of the country's dwindling water resources. This move also demonstrated the president's determination to give priority to immediate political gains rather than to the long-term interests of the people and the country as a whole.

The Water Law's bylaws were issued on 23 February 2011, a mere nine years after the law was passed and just as the 2011 uprising was beginning to reduce the already limited effectiveness of government. The fact that issuing these bylaws took so long is one of many indications of the power struggle that went on around water governance, and of the strength of the forces opposed to state intervention in this vital sector. The bylaws make major concessions to the demands of these forces, and are therefore much weaker than they should be. Their main effects are

- to give the NWRA final authority over the resolution of disputes concerning water issues (Article 13: 2) when local water basin committees are unable to resolve them directly;
- that the NWRA is the only institution authorized to issue permits for the construction or deepening of wells, and for the construction of large reservoirs and dams (Section 59);
- providing government subsidies for the introduction of drip irrigation for all crops except *qat;*
- that the Ministry of Water and Energy is responsible for the protection of water resources from pollution (Article 78).

The bylaws provide useful information for people and institutions who know the details of the law and have the political will to try and improve the situation: in governorates where the administration wants to use the regulations, it can reduce or even stop illegal drilling. But when local government is under the control of those who are the main violators, it is unlikely to be applied.

At the time of writing, the Water Law has not been an effective mechanism to manage the country's dwindling water resources in the interests of the majority of the population by giving first priority to human needs, followed by those of livestock. The distribution of responsibility for water issues between a Ministry of Water and Environment which prioritizes sustainability and environmental issues and a Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation whose main

priority is to keep farmers happy with irrigation water is clearly a recipe for failure.

Women waiting for springwater, Dhala'. © Helen Lackner

The National Water Sector Strategy and Investment Program (NWSSIP) for 2005–09 was followed by an update finalized in 2008, intended to cover the period 2009–15. As indicated by its name, this was intended to be a strategy as well as an investment programme, and was supposed to guide action in the sector. Again, however, the influence of Washington Consensus neoliberal policies is very notable. The Programme claims to have been designed through a participatory process, but participants in the debate were drawn from a professional 'elite' – civil servants, politicians and international development officials – rather than the population as a whole. Each of these categories had institutional and political agendas of its own, whereas the interests and priorities of ordinary users such as agricultural smallholders and the (mostly poor) rural and urban population in general were barely represented, if at all.

The NWSSIP strategy is based on some deeply misguided assumptions. For example, in the key area of groundwater management, it asserts that

> [t]he state … cannot adopt (especially for groundwater extractions) a top-down command-and-control approach that would replace indigenous institutions and substitute a formal legal code for customary water laws. Historically, these institutions and norms have proven effective in regulating water

> use and ensuring sustainability. A more pragmatic approach is for government institutions to forge a partnership with decentralized community-based organizations for co-management of water resources.[17]

This approach ignores or fudges a number of fundamental technical, social and political issues, including the following:

- The indigenous institutions to which it refers existed in the past within a completely different socioeconomic and political environment.
- Technologies that had weaker extraction power were sustainable, but the situation has been fundamentally changed with the introduction of deep drilling and high-powered diesel pumps; this enables the emergence of far more acute economic differentiation, based on the capacity of the wealthier to drill deeper.
- The suggestion of having recourse to decentralized, community-based institutions, or even local government, fails to address the issue of the identity of those controlling such institutions. In practice, many decentralized local institutions are under the control of tribal sheikhs and/or military and security cadres who have consolidated their power and resources at the expense of elites that were previously more representative of the community.
- Social groups and local political institutions do not coincide geographically with 'natural' physical water basins, watersheds or aquifers.
- 'Traditional' customary water laws do not ensure equitable access, because they give priority to upstream extraction.
- The nature of partnerships is not described, and does not address the issue of who has ultimate control or authority, or who has more power or influence.

In the third year of implementation of the NWSSIP, a Poverty and Social Impact Analysis[18] (PSIA) was carried out. While it tries to emphasize the positive aspects of implementation of the reform, a careful reading of its findings, avoiding euphemisms, gives a very depressing picture. In fact, its conclusions point out that, in practice, the reform is failing to reduce poverty or increase access to water for the poor:

> the analysis … of the distributive impact of reforms suggests that farmers with land and water assets are doing better than the landless, and that larger and more influential farmers are doing better than poorer and smaller farmers and the landless in terms of coping with negative impacts of reform and in accessing subsidies. In addition, poorer rural people in general are faced with higher water costs and lower employment opportunities.[19]

At the time the study was carried out, little or nothing had been achieved, and farmers were not reducing water use except once the water had run out and their incomes were dropping: 'The hypothesis that the results of NWSSIP will be pro poor … is the weakest hypothesis, as so far the evidence points the other way (consolidation of existing wealth and income patterns, unequal access to rents and subsidies, and negative impacts on employment and incomes of the poor)'.[20]

Despite clear criticism of the strategy implied by the assessment, the 2008 NWSSIP update proposed no changes in policy, only suggesting that earlier recommendations be implemented. It updated the detailed costing of its investment proposals despite the fact that there were no financing prospects for many proposed investments.

In 2011, the water-management situation was officially summarized as having

> a public sector characterized by an impressive array of institutions and agencies but which exercises scant actual control over water resources; and a private agriculture which exerts almost complete control over the water resource … The key water resource management problems arising from this structure: an irrigated agriculture that is depleting the resource, with negative impact on equity, sustainability and availability of water for transfer to domestic and industrial use … And the most powerful influence on use of water in agriculture is the incentive structure.[21]

Economic measures implemented in previous years also included 'progressive increases in energy prices, the opening up of Yemen's border to most agricultural trade, and extensive subsidy to improve performance in the sector, notably to urban and rural water supply

and to water saving in agriculture'. But it was also officially recognized that

> the impact of these measures on the problems of groundwater depletion and water sources for settlements has so far been quite limited. In most areas, the overdraft rate continues unabated and some agricultural areas are already going out of production. Sustainable and low cost water sources have not been obtained for most Yemeni towns. Much talk these days is of the inevitable decline of Yemeni agriculture and of desalination as an option for urban water supply. In effect, the economic impact of Yemen's failure to manage its water resources is now being felt, and a grave economic crisis is threatening, unless radical improvements can be made.[22]

At this point, official ambition had shifted from solving the problem to a far more modest one of mitigating 'the impacts of the growing water crisis through integrated water resources management approaches'. While giving 'priority to bringing safe water and sanitation services and sustaining the rural and agricultural economy with priority to the poor' the state basically abdicated control. Given that it 'has little or no influence that could regulate the behaviour of the 100,000 or so well owners in the country, water resources management is to be conducted through a partnership approach between the state and all other stakeholders'. The role of the state should be restricted to providing 'law, rights and regulation and to support water management through investment and knowledge.' While 'decentralization is a natural option' that should be complemented by building 'the responsibility of individual well owners and water users to manage their own destiny, stakeholder involvement, notably through water user associations, is seen as the basic building block of water management at the lowest level, with stakeholders responsible (with appropriate support) for self-management and self-regulation at the local level'.[23]

These proposals appear to me to be little more than a wish list, politely asking those primarily responsible for over-extraction and depletion of the resource to kindly think of the poor and change their behaviour. This is unlikely to happen. Some of these recommendations are not exclusive to Yemen and have been made elsewhere, with equally poor results: the focus on decentralization is a strategy also promoted by multilateral funding agencies in other

sectors. One of the main practical consequences of its implementation is that it allows funding agencies to divert aid funds away from central government towards supposedly more representative, decentralized local institutions. In addition to weakening the central state, it is also a mechanism to increase opportunities for the private sector, as local institutions usually have limited capacity. Promotion of NGOs is also disingenuous unless these have a record of reaching all stakeholders, and especially those whose resources are at risk. Otherwise NGOs are not significantly different from private consultancy firms.

PHASE 4: THE 2011 NATIONAL WATER CONFERENCE AND THE END OF THE SALEH REGIME

By 2010, then, the water crisis had become so acute that even the top leadership had to recognize that 'business as usual' was no longer an option, given the frequency and seriousness of water conflicts on the one hand and the worsening shortages of domestic water supply in both urban and rural areas on the other. The 'Presidential National Conference on Management and Development of Water Resources in Yemen' was held in January 2011. It produced the Sana'a Declaration on the Yemeni Water Partnership, which had 'two priority objectives: a) to achieve access to safe, reliable and affordable water and sanitation services for all, with top priority to the poor and b) to maintain and improve rural livelihoods, sustainability through more income per drop'.[24] Its main proposals were based on decentralization and 'giving communities responsibility for water management, using a combination of local traditional rules with the water law', and 'top level intervention on illegal drilling', focusing on basin committees for water management and conservation.[25] While it mentioned 'top level intervention on illegal drilling', including that by local authorities and security forces, the only suggestion made was that 'nationalisation of the drilling industry should be considered'.[26] It reiterated appeals to the powerful to adopt a more socially sensitive approach to water usage. The Declaration was endorsed by the prime minister and the cabinet, but further development was halted by the uprisings that culminated in the end of the Saleh regime.

WATER GOVERNANCE: MAIN CHANGES OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES

Regardless of the limited effectiveness of the institutions established to govern and regulate the management of this extremely valuable and scarce resource, the last two decades have seen notable changes.

WATER AVAILABILITY

Clearly, water availability is one of Yemen's most significant challenges. While in the 1990s people in rural areas wanted projects that improved access to water sources where there were none, twenty years later demand for a more reliable water service is almost universal, even when there are wells or springs.[27] Household water-harvesting systems were previously found only in areas of extreme scarcity, such as the low-rainfall mountaintops of Hayfan, in Ta'iz governorate.. They are now universally popular and in great demand everywhere.[28] Villages have already been abandoned because of the exhaustion of the water supply in al-Baidha, Amran, Dhala' and Sa'ada governorates. Even when villages are not completely abandoned, families move out temporarily when their wells and springs dry up, going to stay with relatives elsewhere, mostly in towns. Everywhere people's access to domestic water is increasingly difficult and expensive. Systems break down frequently due to weak maintenance and over-use, or cease to function altogether. Many springs and wells only operate seasonally, after good rains. People are increasingly compelled to rely on expensive tanker-loads from distant locations.

In the cities, many neighbourhoods are not connected to the public network and are totally reliant on private suppliers, while others receive water from the network once or twice a week (Sana'a and Aden) or far less frequently (Ta'iz, one day in forty at most), and use tanker purchases for the rest of the time. Tanker operators spend longer and longer queuing at the wells, and are therefore unable to supply more customers despite the demand. Cities in which people used to rely on the public network are now covered in household water tanks, which are carefully locked to prevent theft. There have been improvements in medium-sized towns (Yarim and Ibb, for example), which now have a public water supply as well as sewerage, and this has been linked with efforts to recycle water and develop the use of 'grey' water. But many towns, such as Zinjibar, still lack urban water and sanitation systems.

INCREASING CONFLICT

While no figures are available (other than a Ministry of Interior estimate of 4,000 deaths in 2007 over land and water disputes),[29] there is little doubt that water is among the top causes of conflict in Yemen, which is not short of such causes. In addition, some conflicts that appear to be tribal or due to other causes may well have water shortages as their fundamental underlying reason. They include a wide range of incidents, of varying degrees of seriousness:

- Women and children squabbling over pipes, irrigation pumps and other sources, after waiting for long hours in the hot sun in some parts of the country. While this may seem trivial, it is the kind of thing that is important in daily life and can easily deteriorate over time into a disagreement between men that is 'solved' by a shootout.
- Conflicts over the ownership or control of springs and wells.
- Conflicts over payment of fees to a management group for domestic water (even when supposedly 'community-based').
- Conflicts over time-allocation of water for spate, well and spring irrigation.
- Conflicts between smallholders dependent on shallow wells and large landowners who have drilled boreholes that have depleted the shallow wells, and thus deprived the smallholders of their livelihoods.

Coverage of various conflicts has been erratic. For example, there have been more reports of conflicts in Ibb governorate because a) it is densely populated, b) high income from *qat* justifies greater determination to win control, and c) it is the home area of senior environmentally aware activists. The Dhamar/al-Baidha border is another focus for conflicts, as the main aquifer in the region overlaps the border area. Conflicts have arisen over the lack of respect for the customary rule according to which there must be a minimum distance of 500 metres between wells; this has been the case in many areas, including Amran and Sana'a governorates, as well as Qa Jahran in Dhamar. This list does not, by any means, prove that these are the areas where most conflicts take place, but it is probably an indication that there are more journalists and others in these areas concerned with bringing the issues to public attention.

INCREASED AWARENESS OF THE WATER CRISIS

Up to the mid 1990s, awareness of the water emergency was limited to specialists and engineers. Today it is widely recognized by almost everyone, largely from personal experience. This has also led to a change in public attitudes on the nature of the appropriate response: most people now favour firm and effective state intervention to regulate water usage in a sustainable way, with priority given to the basic human needs of drinking and other domestic consumption, followed by conservation. In increasing numbers, people now ask 'Where is the government? What is it doing about the water shortages?'

This awareness has emerged in public demonstrations. For example, in September 2012 hundreds of farmers surrounded the Ibb governor's office demanding that he stop unregulated drilling in the governorate. In Dhamar, public pressure has forced authorities to forbid the 'export' of tanker loads of water to irrigate the *qat* fields of the neighbouring Rada' area in al-Baidha governorate.

CHANGING POLICIES AND PRACTICES IN AGRICULTURE

Two major changes are taking place in the agricultural sector. First, international development agencies have, at long last, started to support rain-fed agriculture through research and the dissemination of drought-resistant cereal varieties with short maturing periods, which are better able to adapt to more unpredictable and extreme climate conditions.[30] This has followed decades in which the research establishment and its foreign financiers concentrated their resources on irrigation and export crops, despite the country's extreme scarcity of water resources, and regardless of the real needs, specific conditions and potential of Yemen's complex agro-ecological environment.

Second, since the mid 1990s there has been investment in more efficient irrigation methods – mostly drip irrigation. Projects funded with foreign support have subsidized farmers to introduce modern irrigation techniques; this has mostly helped larger and wealthier farmers, partly because smallholders often cannot afford the contributions these schemes require, but also because project design has not been specifically aimed at helping the poor. Like earlier investments, these projects were partly intended to ensure continued support for the regime by backing powerful rural landowners. As

yet, there is no evidence that farmers are investing their own funds in drip irrigation.[31]

To date, little effort has been focused on improving traditional small-scale and temporary spate irrigation structures, using techniques that would both provide 'more crop per drop' and increase infiltration into the water table for later and downstream use. Given its importance in Yemen, improving traditional spate irrigation should be prioritized; this would be more effective than the construction of 'permanent' cement structures that are far less durable than intended.

UNCONTROLLED DRILLING CONTINUES

Despite the law, most drilling rigs remain unregistered and operate without any control in either the agricultural or domestic sectors, and in both rural and urban areas. But it has largely changed in nature. In the YAR in the 1980s, smallholders invested their income from labouring in Saudi Arabia in boreholes and pumps. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, only wealthy landowners can afford to drill and deepen wells: in the Amran and Sana'a basins the water table is dropping at between 5 and 20 metres per year, depending on the location.

For smallholders, deep drilling is only possible for those who can form groups to finance the necessary investment. They have to overcome serious technical and social difficulties: the group must be cohesive, and willing and able to share the investment costs – a major difficulty in itself. Technical constraints include the need for fields to be contiguous, or at the very least near each other, for crops to be compatible with respect to the timing and quantity of water use, and thus of irrigation techniques. Finally, given the cost of investment as well as fuel, it is only economically viable for the highest-value crops – chief among which is *qat*.

In the cities, only the wealthy can afford to drill for domestic water, either for their own use or to set up commercial water-distribution enterprises. Groundwater in urban areas is often polluted by leakages of waste and sewerage waters, and is therefore not potable. Some urban wells are used to supply small purification micro-businesses, providing opportunities for small entrepreneurs to sell water locally.

YEMEN'S FUTURE DEPENDS ON EFFECTIVE WATER MANAGEMENT

Since 2011 the transitional government has focused its energies on solving the country's security problems and establishing a new governance system through the National Dialogue. Without effective water governance and management, however, Yemen's long-term perspective is one of worsening poverty, and therefore of further deterioration of security and safety. Sooner rather than later, this is likely to lead to civil strife on an unprecedented scale. The regime ignores the water issue at its peril: without water, there is no life.

Drastic measures are required to restore water usage in the country to a sustainable level in the context of continued population growth and limited alternative natural resources. My recommendations also address the main changes identified in the previous section. The state must retain final authority over water management and enforce decisions that protect the interests of all Yemenis, rather than bowing to political pressure from powerful interest groups. Priority must be given to ensuring sufficient water availability for human consumption (drinking and hygiene), followed by animal needs; this conforms with Islamic precepts.

Putting these principles into practice requires new approaches. First, at an administrative level, insofar as possible defining regional and governorate borders to coincide with water basins and aquifers would make effective management significantly easier. Second, each type of water source needs to be managed and institutionalized according to its specific circumstances, such as accessibility – a management mechanism suitable for a spate system is different from that needed for a borehole. Third, state control of all drilling must be enforced by whatever means are necessary. Fourth, desalination is clearly a necessary strategy for coastal and near-coastal areas – in other words, wherever it is economically realistic – thus conserving groundwater and reducing saline intrusion in the coastal plains. Agricultural policy must focus on improving yields and production of rain-fed crops through research and the dissemination of short-cycle and drought-resistant varieties. Irrigation programmes must concentrate on the development of improved traditional spate irrigation systems, as well as ensuring the accessibility of water-saving irrigation technology to poor smallholders with shallow wells. More broadly, as agriculture cannot sustain the large rural population, it will be essential in the long run to prioritize investment in education and in economic activities that are low water-users – mostly outside agriculture. Finally, despite improved public awareness, there is still room for an expansion of information campaigns on all of the aspects and implications of the water crisis,

conveyed through television serials, poetry and the other popular media.

Yemen is in desperate need of effective central and regional governance of its limited water sources, through appropriate constitutional clauses and effective government. The ROY has not yet been able to establish the country-wide management system it needs for its future development, but its future – indeed, its very existence – depends on effective water management, empowered by national attention and enforcement. This is a tough agenda for the post-transition 'new Yemen'.

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30 Self-sufficiency in basic food production is quite impossible to achieve given both the country's population and its agro-ecological conditions. Today Yemen imports 95 per cent of its wheat and 100 per cent of its rice, tea and sugar, all of which are basic foods in the country (FAO, Global Information and Early Warning System Country Briefs, 25 September 2012; FAO, 'The FAO Component of the Consolidated Appeals 2012: Yemen, available at FAO.org). But there is a strong preference for home-produced wheat and sorghum, which can fetch higher prices. Making the most of rain-fed agriculture is an essential strategy given the limited potential of the country.

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CHAPTER NINE

CUSTOMARY CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN TIMES OF EXTREME WATER STRESS: A CASE STUDY OF A DOCUMENT FROM THE NORTHERN HIGHLANDS OF YEMEN

Gerhard Lichtenthäler

YEMEN – OR ARABIA FELIX, as the region was known during Roman times – is one of the oldest irrigation civilizations in the word. For millennia farmers have demonstrated sustainable agricultural practices, harnessing available water and land resources. Thus, through a myriad of mountain terraces, elaborate water-harvesting techniques and community-managed spate (sayl) and spring (*ghayl*) irrigation systems, the country was able to support relatively large populations. However, Yemen is now facing a water crisis unprecedented in its history.

This chapter will first give some background on Yemen's water crisis, and then provide evidence of how communities in the extremely water-stressed areas of Amran basin have started to protect their water resources through consensus-based agreements and self-regulation. A tribal legal document (*marqum*) drawn up to resolve the water conflict will be examined. The case study provides evidence of local solutions and community self-regulation in dealing with water stress.

WATER SCARCITY

Yemen is one of the world's ten most water-scarce countries. In many of its mountainous regions, availability of drinking water, usually from a spring or cistern, is down to no more than 20 litres per person per day. There are clear indications that many of its cities are already running out of water. Existing wells need to be deepened periodically, as groundwater levels have fallen to alarming levels. Increasing demand for water has long outpaced renewable supply. Agriculture takes the lion's share, utilizing almost 90 per cent of the nation's water resources.

Up to the early 1970s, traditional agricultural practices ensured a balance between supply and demand. But the introduction of deep tube wells in the early 1970s led to a drastic expansion of land under production. In the period from 1970 to 2004, irrigated areas increased tenfold, from 37,000 to 407,000 hectares, 40 per cent of which was supplied from deep groundwater aquifers. Investments for drilling and agricultural expansion often came from migrants' remittances. Other incentives were in the form of agricultural and

fuel subsidies. Crop-production patterns changed from local drought-resistant wheat and sorghum varieties to water-intensive cash crops such as citrus and banana.

The emerging cash economy also led to a dramatic increase in the cultivation of of *qat* (*catha edulis*), a mild stimulant whose leaves are chewed in Yemen. It is estimated that *qat* production now accounts for 37 per cent of all irrigation water use. In the water-stressed highland basins of Sana'a, Sa'ada, Amran and Dhamar, *qat* now occupies half of the total irrigated areas. Groundwater levels in these highland regions have fallen to such dramatic levels that only the lucrative returns from *qat* justify the operation and maintenance costs of a well.

SANA'A: A CAPITAL CITY RUNNING OUT OF WATER

Today, there are between 45,000 and 70,000 wells in the country, the majority of which are under private control. No one can be certain of the exact number, as almost all were drilled without a licence. In the Sana'a basin, where close to 10 per cent of the country's population lives (two million), a total of 13,500 wells have been inventoried.[1] As early as the mid 1990s, extraction in its catchment area exceeded recharge by over 400 per cent. Available data suggest that the Sana'a aquifer will dry up within the next two decades, after which irrigated agriculture in the basin will no longer be possible.

Even though cultural norms give priority to drinking and domestic water needs, cities often lose out in the resource competition with agriculture. One third of the 125 wells operated by Sana'a Local Corporation for Water Supply and Sanitation for the supply of the capital have been drilled to between 800 and 1,200 metres. Despite the combined production of all these wells, output barely covers 35 per cent of the needs of the growing city. The rest is supplied either by small, privately owned networks or by hundreds of mobile water tankers. In recent years, as water quality has deteriorated, water-purification processing shops, using mainly reverse osmosis for treatment, have mushroomed in Sana'a city and elsewhere.

Possible future supply options are being considered, and include pumping desalinated water from the Red Sea over a distance of 250 kilometres and to an altitude of 2,200 metres. The enormous pumping cost would push up the price to US$10 per cubic metre. There may be a willingness to pay this price for domestic demand.

For agricultural water, however, this is out of the question, since the quantities required would be unaffordable and uneconomical. A person needs only one cubic metre of water per year for drinking and 100 cubic metres per year for other domestic uses, but 1,000 cubic metres per year if they were to grow their own food.[2]

Other options to supply Sana'a from adjacent regions are also problematic due to varying perceptions of water rights. Islam teaches that water is a gift of God[3] and cannot be owned. But when a person digs or drills a well on his own land, he thereby obtains the right to abstract and utilize as much of the resource as is drawn into his well. Increasing awareness about the country's water scarcity has resulted in a race to the bottom – every man for himself. Thus, a well owner will attempt to capture what remains of this valuable resource before his neighbour does. As groundwater levels have fallen, pumping costs have increased, pushing farmers continually to expand irrigated land for water-intensive cash crops, but especially qat, in order to make a profit.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Only since 2002, when the national Water Law was passed, has it become mandatory to apply for permission to drill a new well, or even deepen and repair an existing one. Efforts to register wells that were drilled before the changes in water legislation came into effect have met with very little response. Farmers are suspicious that registration will gradually lead to metering how much water they abstract. Moreover, they are alarmed at the prospect that abstraction rights might eventually be defined by the amount of land they own and historically cultivate.

The year 2003 saw the establishment of the Ministry of Water and Environment, with the mandate to supervise resource management, as well as rural and urban water supply and sanitation, through its various authorities. However, responsibility for the biggest water consumer – agriculture – has remained with the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, whose focus has largely been on irrigation efficiency measures, dams and watershed management.

Another major step forward was the adoption in 2005 of a National Water Sector Strategy and Investment Program. Addressing the sector's major issues, this strategy has a strong emphasis on decentralized water management. It transfers a certain degree of

authority to the local level, such as water user associations, local authorities and basin committees, especially with respect to the formulation and implementation of local action plans.

INITIATIVES TO DECENTRALIZE WATER MANAGEMENT

At the water basin level, responsibility for planning, coordination, regulation and monitoring is gradually shifting to water basin management committees (or simply basin committees, or BCs), as in the Amran basin, located 50 kilometres north of Sana'a at an altitude of 2,000 metres. The Amran BC was established in 2008, and is headed by the governor. Other members include the administrative directors of all the local districts that make up the basin, representatives of ministries and authorities concerned with water and agriculture, the local police chief and, most importantly, farmers and local interest groups. Meetings are usually held a few times a year to discuss water issues and to consider new applications for drilling wells.

The result of a recent water-resource assessment[4] has not only alarmed the Amran BC, but has spread fear among the basin's predominantly farming population. Over 2,600 pumps now tap the catchment's meagre groundwater deposits, in some places ten pumps to every square kilometre. As a result, wells are being drilled to deep levels – up to 400 metres deep in places. Between 1991 and 2005, most wells had to be deepened by around 90 metres in total. At the same time, well yield – the quantity of water obtained per second – has drastically decreased. The period between 1991 and 2005 saw an increase of 120 per cent in the number of wells, producing a disproportionately low gain of only 26 per cent of additional water.[5]

COLLECTIVE ACTION IN THE AMRAN BASIN

At the end of 2008, Amran's tribal communities were alarmed by the fact that over 100 new wells had been drilled, almost all of them without a permit. In response, villagers became increasingly aware of the need for collective action to enforce community self-regulation of groundwater. Although illegal drilling has been going on, especially in the wake of the 2011 uprising, the arrival of a drilling rig usually raises alarm among villagers, who then complain to the basin committee and also take action themselves.

A key message here is that, while extreme water stress and competition over available resources can at times be adversarial, it nevertheless opens up opportunities for cooperation and community-based water management. The following two examples provide evidence that Yemen retains strong social adaptive capacity for localized resource management.

STOPPING RESOURCE CAPTURE

Perched high on the crest of what remains of a long-inactive volcanic cone is the village of Bani Maymun. It belongs to the district of Iyal Surayh, home to the Bakil tribe of the same name. This area marks the watershed between the Sana'a and Amran water basins. The predominantly volcanic soil is ideal for growing high-value *qat*, and the past few years have witnessed unprecedented expansion in *qat* cultivation in the area. Large bulldozers can often be seen levelling new fields on the mountain slopes, while truckload after truckload of additional soil is then hauled from afar to fill in the newly reclaimed terraces. With rainfall unpredictable and often not exceeding 150 millimetres in a given year, irrigation water has to be transported over rough tracks by Mercedes tankers. This has resulted in new water markets just for the cultivation of *qat*. Early in 2007, the increase in the price of irrigation water due to increased demand sparked a conflict that tested the community's adaptive capacity to deal with the new situation. Well owners from the village were starting to charge 5,000 rials (US$25) for a one-hour share of irrigation water. Up to that point, the commonly accepted rate paid by farmers with no well of their own had been just half that amount – 2,500 rials. The well owners, however, argued that new demand from water tankers queuing up at their wells justified the increase. They had become water traders responding to an emerging market.

In response to this dispute, the sheikh of Bani Maymun summoned his men to discuss the problem and to reach a consensus. It was soon agreed that well owners from his community should no longer be allowed to fill up tankers for *qat* fields outside their immediate territory. Also, the price for a one-hour share was fixed at its previous level. Such agreements reached by consensus in a given community are usually honoured by all its members – which explains why, when one of the well owners later tried to breach the decision, men from Bani Maymun fired a couple of bullets at the

tyres of the water tanker. That put an end to the illegal water trade in their area.

RESOLVING RESOURCE CONFLICTS PEACEFULLY

Extreme water stress and competition, then, can create new ways for cooperation and collective action through the implementation of tribal customs. The people of Bani Maymun are a small, homogeneous group. In their case there was no need to write down the details stipulating the sale and trade of groundwater; they just reached a verbal agreement. In similar conflicts involving water resources, however, tribal communities increasingly resort to a *marqum*, as was the case in the village of Hijrat al-Muntasir. The village is located at an altitude of 3,000 metres at the western watershed of Amran basin, in a tribal region 70 kilometres north-west of the capital, Sana'a. It is one of the places where drilling has imperilled vital drinking water resources.

A drilling rig was blocking the narrow mountain road when, in 2007, I visited the village of Hijrat al-Muntasir. Some men from the neighbouring area of al-Ashmur – *qat* farmers – had gathered around the heavy equipment protectively. On the escarpment above, more than fifty men from Hijrat al-Muntasir were positioned, several with AK-47 rifles. The Ashmuri *qat* farmers, desperate after yet another one of their wells had run dry, wanted to drill deep into the limestone for water. But the villagers of Hijrat al-Muntasir were afraid that more groundwater extraction would wipe out their small mountain spring – the sole source of drinking water for 700 inhabitants – so they had mobilized to prevent the drilling. The tensions finally eased, and some Muntasiri men climbed down from the ridge for discussions on how to resolve the dispute according to tribal customs.

A short, bumpy drive took us to the village cistern, which stored the water trickling from the mountain spring. Women and children with dozens of yellow containers queued up for water, which was being carefully rationed and meticulously recorded by Ali, the cistern gatekeeper. The situation was grave. A village elder showed me a local document listing the water allocation for each family – roughly 10 litres per person per day.

Trouble for the *qat* irrigators of al-Ashmur had started when the people of a third village, al-Qarin, noticed alarming falls in the water

levels of their wells, sparking fears about the future. Despite this, influential village families had continued to deplete the water table by drilling new, ever deeper wells, and extracting water for sale to tanker owners who traded it to new *qat* farms in other areas, including Hijrat al-Muntasir. The tribal elders of al-Qarin therefore drew up a consensus-based document (*marqum*) banning the sale of groundwater from their local wells to outsiders. As this ban came into effect, the desperate *qat* farmers of al-Ashmur had decided to drill.

Negotiations took several weeks, with the parties to the dispute meeting repeatedly at the site of the drilling rig. Finally the two tribal groups clinched a formal written agreement to protect the village spring and prevent further over-exploitation of groundwater in the area. Its details are discussed below.

In the spring of 2009, I was invited back for the inauguration of a small village project. It was the first visit by the vice-governor and other dignitaries. Hijrat al-Muntasir had slaughtered two oxen for the occasion, and prepared a programme for the visitors. Banners leading up to the village welcomed the guests. I came early and drove alone. 'Welcome to our governor!' shouted some schoolchildren as I approached the village. Obviously, they had never seen their governor and, as I was wearing the local head-dress, took me to be him. There was good news: the drilling, which, it had been feared, would compromise the spring, had been prevented. In addition, the community had demonstrated other forms of collective social capacity. Each household had built a cesspit to improve overall sanitary conditions. As part of that, community mobilizers from the Social Fund for Development had paid the village a few visits to teach the benefits of better hygiene.

But there was also bad news. As Ali, the gatekeeper, unlocked the screechy iron access gate to the cistern, a number of village women came rushing down a steep path, carrying empty yellow containers. 'No water today – go home!' shouted Ali. 'Tomorrow morning, *inshallah*.' The daily flow of the spring had declined even further, and was now sufficient for only five litres per person per day. Whether this was due to inadequate rainfall or climate change, no one could say.

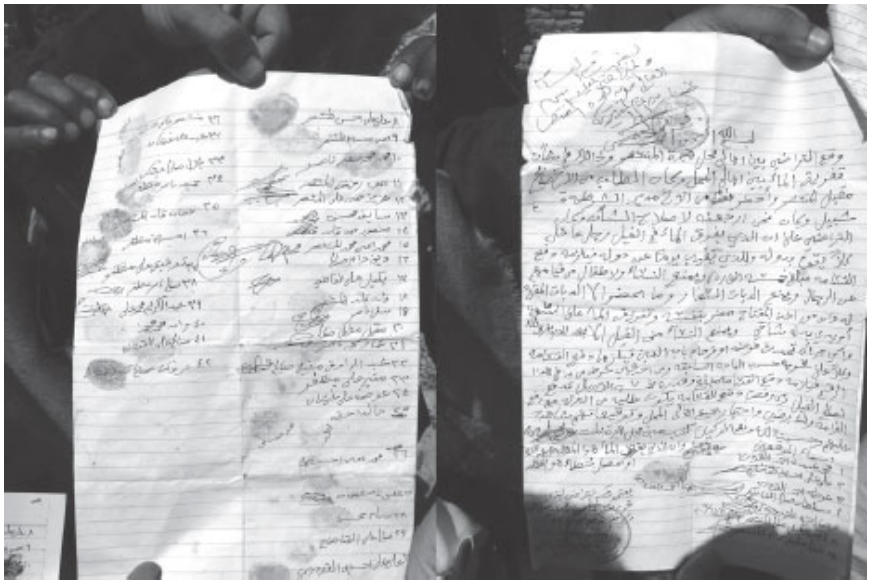
It appears that the two rainy seasons of spring and summer 2009 did not result in the recovery of the spring's flow. With the onset of the long and dry winter season, water scarcity and competition for drinking water led to strife and quarrelling, especially among the

women, whose task it is to fetch water. In response, the village elders met in December 2009 in order to regulate the use of the spring through a *marqum*, and so ensure the fair and equitable distribution of water entitlements.

THE *MARQUM*

Marqum is an Arabic word found in the Qur'an, where it carries the meaning of 'record' or 'register'. For example, the Qur'an mentions that the good deeds of people are kept in heaven in the *marqum* register. The meaning here is that of a permanent and unchangeable record witnessed by angels and securely preserved.

In Yemen, a document qualifies as *marqum* when all those concerned witness the process of reaching a consensus, agree to its wording and then endorse it with their signatures or seals. A *marqum* can reflect either an ex ante or ex post agreement between two or more parties that commit themselves to certain do's and don't's. Ex ante *marqum* agreements are preventative in nature and may regulate aspects of village life or clarify particular rights and duties without there being a conflict – as for example in the case of tribal boundaries. Sometimes such a document is simply referred to as *qa'ida*, meaning 'rule'. Ex post *marqum* agreements settle and regulate existing conflicts, usually with the help of one or more trusted and neutral mediators. A *marqum* should be signed by the people or representatives of the parties, and then endorsed by a trustee (*wakil*) – often a sheikh or any respected neutral party, such as a mediator.



Photographs of the original *marqum*. © Gerhard Lichtenthäler

THE *MARQUM* OF HIJRAT AL-MUNTASIR

As would be expected for any document in Yemen, the *marqum* begins with 'In the Name of Allah the Most Merciful and Compassionate'. It is handwritten in Arabic on two pages of lined paper. The first page spells out the rules of water distribution agreed by the people of the village of Hijrat al-Muntasir.

At the bottom of the first page and covering most of the second page, forty-two names of men are listed. They represent either households or sections of the village. About two-thirds of them have signed with their left thumb dipped in blue ink. This fact does not necessarily imply that these men were above forty years of age and thus illiterate – village school education having begun in the area only in the 1970s, after the civil war had ended. Rather, it is common in Yemen, and especially when endorsing an official document such as a *marqum*, that parties use the traditional and trusted method of signing with their thumb. The document is endorsed, signed and stamped at the top and bottom of the first page. At the top, it bears the signature and stamp of the general secretary of the district's local council – Jabal Iyal Yazid. At the bottom, the local sheikh has endorsed the agreement with his signature and official stamp. It is dated 5 December 2009.

بعقد رقم القسامة والتراضي عليه بين أهالي قرية المنتصر
عقد/ مدير عام المديرية (التوقيع)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

وقع التراضي بين أهالي محل هجرة المنتصر وذلك في شأن تفريق الماء بين أهالي المحل وكان الطلب من الأخ/ صالح مقبل المنتصر وأحضر أمر من الأخ/ مدير الشرطة (قسم شبيل) وكان نحن أرجعناه لإصلاح الشأن وكان التراضي على أن الذي يفرق الماء في الغيل رجل عاقل كلا يقوم بدوله والذي يغيب يوماً عن دوله فيلزمه دفع مبلغ القسامة مبلغ خمسة ألف ريد ويمنع النساء والأطفال من قيامهم عن الرجال ويمنع الدبات الصغار وما يحضر الا الدبات المقرره له وان من أخذ المفتاح يحضر بنفسه ويفرق الماء على السوية أو يدي له شافي ويمنع النساء من الغيل إلا بعد الذي يفرق الماء وأي امرأة تحدث فوضى او زحام باب العين فيلزمها دفع القسامة وكلا على سربه حسب العادة السابقة ومن أخل أي شرط في ما في هذا الرقم فيلزمه دفع القسامة مبلغ وقدره خمسة ألف ريد تدفع لصالح الغيل ومن رفض دفع القسامه يكون طلبه من الدولة مع دفع الغرامة وهذا برضى واختيار جميع أهالي المحل وتوقيعاتهم شاهدة عليهم وحسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل. كتب امين محل هجرة المنتصر صالح محمد (التوقيع) ٢٠٠٩. وأن الذي يفرق الماء هو المعقد عند الله وإن حصل خطأ ما فهو أبطا المعقد عند الله.

أسماء الموقعين

١. محمد عبده احمد القودري
٢. علي علي حسين القاضي
٣. عوضه احمد القودري
٤. سلطان صالح القاضي
٥. صالح حراب القودري
٦. ناجي مقبل صالح المنتصر
٧. صالح مقبل حرام المنتصر
٨. علي علي احسن المنتصر
٩. يحيى احسن المنتصر
١٠. محمد محمد صغير المنتصر
١١. يحيى رفيق المنتصر
١٢. عزيز يحيى علي المنتصر
١٣. شايف محسن
١٤. منصور يحيى قائد

بعقد رقم التراضي الذي تحرر بقلم مأمون المحل صالح محمد والرافض تدفع لصالح الدولة
الشيخ/ مظفر محسن المنتصر

Transcript of the *marqum* with some of the signatories

The *marqum* is composed of three sections. Its first sentence states that it is an agreement about the distribution of water in the village. It then goes on to say that the request for the use of the *marqum* to resolve the emerging disputes about water entitlements to the village's spring was first made from the village by Mr Salih Muqbil al-Muntasiri, in the presence of the head of the local police.

Next, the main section of the *marqum* stipulates what the community agreed to. First, a responsible adult male from each family will be assigned to ensure the task of fair distribution of available water from the spring according to an agreed rota system. Second, each person taking this responsibility must fulfil it seriously. In the event of his absence, he must either arrange for a substitute or pay 5,000 rials (US$25), which will be paid as a day's wage for his

replacement – though he is not allowed to delegate his responsibility to a woman or an underage male from his household. Third, only regular-sized 20-litre containers are allowed at the spring, to ensure the fair and transparent distribution of daily water entitlements. Fourth, women are not permitted at the spring unless the person in charge of distribution is there. This is to avoid possible quarrels and tensions. Any woman behaving in an unruly fashion or causing a disturbance at the spring will be fined 5,000 rials. This, again, amounts to the daily wage of the regulating person. Fifth, the *marqum* stipulates that anyone, not just women, must pay a 5,000-riyal fine in the event of non-compliance with the rules. This is paid into a general fund for the operation and maintenance of the spring. The text then warns that whoever refuses to pay the fine will face legal action through the government courts.

Finally, and most importantly, it is stated that the *marqum* was agreed by the entire community of Hijrat al-Muntasir, as is evident from the signatures and thumbprints that follow. The document mentions that the writer was the *wakil* (‘trustee’) or village scribe. The forty-two signatures follow at the end of the first page and fill the second page.

THE COMMUNITY OF HIJRAT AL-MUNTASIR is coping admirably with its diminishing spring. In social science terms, it retains strong adaptive capacity, which is defined as the sum of social resources available to address a situation of increasing natural-resource scarcity. Social scientists currently make a clear distinction between what are termed first-order scarcity of a natural resource and second-order scarcity of adaptive capacity. The latter is said to be much more determining of final outcomes than the scarcity of the resource itself.[6]

Especially at the village and sub-district level, where communities share social ties and values, a *marqum* comprises important principles that work very well to regulate a scarce resource. First, it is inclusive: representatives from all households or parties take part and discuss the issues at stake. They will usually be male, but this does not mean that the voices of women are not heard. The process of negotiation and deliberation can take up a number of communal meetings, and women will send their views and preferences via their husbands or close male relatives. Next, a *marqum* is consensus-based: all parties affected negotiate until they reach a unanimous decision. A *marqum* is thus transparent, as all concerned parties in a

community are involved in an open process and fully aware of how a particular outcome has been achieved. Importantly, a *marqum* is regulatory. In the case of Hijrat al-Muntasir, it stipulates many details of the social contract – including, for example, exact fines, size of containers, roles and responsibilities. Vitally, as in the case of Hijrat al-Muntasir, the *marqum* regulation also is sustainable. Every household and party from within the community agrees to take part in supervising and managing the resource. In situations of necessary travel or unavoidable absence, it is the responsibility of the person in charge for the day either to appoint a substitute or pay a day's wages. Money collected in fines is used for the operation and maintenance of the spring area.

It is very significant that a *marqum* is legally binding. In case of noncompliance or refusal to pay the agreed fine, an offender will face further legal action through the government courts. This implies a mutual recognition of both the state legal system and customary regulation. This fact is further endorsed by the witness and signature of local trustees and elected representatives from the area's local council, and by the forty-two thumbprints on the document.

This case study shows that Yemen still retains strong social adaptive capacity for localized resource management. Importantly, the country's water legislation[7] and bylaws were drafted to incorporate traditional mechanisms such as *marqum* regulation within the new system. This fact was further endorsed by the Sana'a Declaration – the outcome of a national conference held in January 2011 at the presidential level, and involving the country's top opinion- and decision-makers.[8] The text strongly emphasizes the need to combine indigenous village-level regulations and modern national water legislation by stating that water resources management 'must be regulated through a combination of local customary regulations and the water law through partnership between local communities, National Water Resources Authority, local councils and other agencies'.[9]

This is an important signal and a step in the right direction. However, reality often diverges from such plans, and raises new issues. What happens when customary regulations break down – perhaps because of influential members of district councils or basin committees turning a blind eye to illegal drilling because of personal, financial or political gain? Can *marqum* even be applied to the complexity of the water basin level? And what about incentives? Should communities that demonstrate responsible water-resources management be rewarded and given priority when asking for

development projects? These are just a few of the critical questions that need further research and analysis.

Sadly, though, time could be running out. In some parts of the Yemeni highlands, competition over scarce water resources has now reached a point at which, in order to avoid the terrible prospect of major ecological failure, the country must address major structural problems, including the draining of finite aquifers to irrigate qat. As has been stressed by Christopher Ward, a long-time observer and analyst of water issues in Yemen, 'decentralisation and the partnership approach can only be viewed as elements of a damage limitation exercise aimed at slowing the rate of resource depletion, to allow Yemen time to develop patterns of economic activity less dependent on water mining'.[10]

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From 2004 until 2011, the author worked as an advisor for the National Water Resources Authority. Data and information in this paper are based on regular fieldwork, interviews and personal communication with Yemeni and international water professionals during that period. Parts of the information in this chapter appeared first in MERIP: 254 (2010). On Hijrat al-Muntasir, I gratefully acknowledge the stimulating and helpful comments and clarifications by Abdulkhaleq Alwan, MSc, a Yemeni water professional specializing in water education and public awareness.

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CHAPTER TEN

LAND DISPUTES IN YEMEN

Jens Kambeck

POSSIBILITIES FOR LAND DISPUTES are endless. They include those relating to the identity of the rightful owner, transfer rights, the validity of sales contracts, boundary definitions, access to land, exploitation rights, rights to build, the validity of tenancy agreements, compensation for loss of rights, and many others. Land is a valuable resource in Yemen, as elsewhere, and problems can lead to highly charged disputes.

Yemen covers about 528,000 square kilometres, but less than 3 per cent of this area is considered arable,[1] and less than 0.3 per cent is cultivated with perennial crops. With just under thirty-three births per 1,000 people,[2] the country has one of the world's highest birth rates. Many people are moving to the cities on a short- and long-term basis in search of employment. Consequently, the rate of urbanization is high, at 4.6 per cent per annum,[3] with 32 per cent of the population now living in cities.

Land-related disputes are widely held to be the most common cause of armed violence in the country.[4] According to the Yemen Armed Violence Assessment,[5] the government of Yemen estimates that violence linked to land and water disputes causes about 4,000 deaths each year.[6] In the absence of more reliable data, experts believe the real figure could be even higher. Violent conflicts often lead to severe injuries, or even death, because of the high number of weapons found in many private households. There are believed to be at least eight million and perhaps more than fifty million[7] privately owned small arms: Karp ranks Yemen second of 178 countries, after the US, with 11,500,000 civilian firearms.[8] Burns estimates sixty-five million privately owned weapons.[9] The true number is unknown, as the majority of weapons are not registered and are traded on the black market. Citizens have the right to own weapons for the purpose of 'legitimate defence'.[10] It is mandatory to have a licence to carry firearms in cities,[11] but the law does not address the issue of weapons in rural areas.[12]

Solving land-related disputes is important for conflict-prevention, and can stabilize fragile or post-conflict regions. Conversely, legal uncertainty concerning land ownership can fuel disputes for decades and hinder the development of society. Nearly 500,000 Yemenis have left their homes because they were made to feel unsafe by the

Sa'ada conflict in the north, civil unrest all over the country, and increasingly active religious and other militants in the south. In Yemen there are more than 700,000 people displaced from their homes (500,000 internally displaced people, and 200,000 refugees, mostly from the Horn of Africa). Once there is stability in the country most of the internally displaced will return to their villages or cities and claim back any land they left behind. This will provide a further cause for conflict, and increases the urgency of developing efficient dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Addressing land-related disputes in the south of Yemen is critical.[13] In January 2013 President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi gave five Yemeni judges the responsibility of convening a committee to investigate and solve land-related disputes in what was the PDRY.[14] This committee is connected to the National Dialogue of 2013, and the presidential decree states that it is to support the political process, although critics argue that it is little more than a gesture of good-will meant to soothe the separatist movement.[15] Critics also question whether the National Dialogue is the best forum to resolve land-related issues in the south, as many of its members are accused of having benefited from the distribution of state-owned, and in some cases private, land during the 1990s. Land that was nationalized under socialist rule[16] was not always returned to its previous owners, nor was any compensation paid. The situation was more complicated with respect to residential property, because a PDRY law issued one day before unification granted ownership of nationalized housing units to their tenants.[17] To avoid social upheaval, the state was forced to compensate the former property owners with unserviced land plots in the urban expansion areas.[18] This distribution, often to members of the military, is considered by many to have been unlawful, and has prompted scores of rival ownership claims. Only a few people benefited from these land distributions, and the validity of the ownership transfers should be properly assessed, and adequate compensation paid. This would resolve the majority of residential land-related disputes in the south.

Land disputes in the north of Yemen are more complex. In rural areas fights occur between tribes over the question of which group owns what land, or whether land is communally or privately owned. These conflicts can date back decades, and are often violent. Urban land has become so valuable that disputes over ownership claims often turn violent or end up in court, where cases are subject to long delays and judges are often accused of being corrupt.[19]

There is no comprehensive land registry in Yemen, which complicates the situation further. A small number of land records date back to the Ottoman (North Yemen) and British (South Yemen) administrations, and a national Land Registration Law was passed in 1976 in the YAR and, with minor changes, in 1991 for united Yemen. But many land sales are not registered, for a number of reasons – for example, lack of awareness of the legal requirement, avoidance of transfer taxation payments, and the perception that registration provides few benefits or can even trigger demands for payment of sale and other taxes.[20] In 2007 the General Authority for Land, Survey and Urban Planning was established to strengthen land management and provide a reliable tool for registering land. This government entity is responsible for the development of a National Land Policy and for the comprehensive management and administration of land in Yemen. This aim has yet to be achieved – the organization is not well known in the country, and surveys indicate that it does not have adequate technical equipment.[21] Yemeni courts often have to deal with cases where land is sold several times. This is because records on the registration of deeds are inadequately linked with those on mortgages, resulting in confusion about ownership titles, so that it is often unclear whether a land parcel has been subject to a mortgage or a prior lawsuit.

In many countries, so-called 'adequate dispute resolution' (ADR) methods – such as arbitration, mediation and conciliation – are used in various fields of civil and public law to resolve individual cases. In addition, they provide fora for public participation, and reconcile complex and multi-layered conflicts. Peace agreements bringing wars or violent conflicts to an end include sections on land ownership in their legal documents and protocols. For example, the peace agreement for Burundi acknowledges property rights as fundamental,[22] and provides the explicit warning that 'legal security concerning land must be achieved'.[23] It also states that the 'National Truth and Reconciliation Commission shall … order … restoration of disputed property … through arbitration and reconciliation'.[24] Negative examples can be found in Somaliland,[25] where the phenomenon of 'land-grabbing' is a result of the absence of legal security and a functioning land-tenure system. Unlawful claims are sometimes enforced in a judicial system vulnerable to corruption, resulting in a vicious circle of disputes.

This chapter gives an overview of the legal background of land conflict resolution in Yemen, and aims to argue that ADR can be applied in the Yemeni context and might solve land-related disputes

in a fair and efficient manner, and thus might be a valuable addition to the dispute-resolution mechanisms that already operate in Yemen.

THE YEMENI LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal documents most relevant to land ownership in Yemen are:

a) Articles 3, 7c, 18,19 and 20 of the Constitution, which state that private property is respected and protected;

b) Law of Land and Real Estate, no. 21 of 1995, Articles 43–46, providing classification of private, communal and public land;

c) *Waqf* Law no. 23 of 1992, which regulates land donated to religious organizations;

d) Article 7 of the Investment Law, which allows investors to purchase or lease land from the private and public sector;

e) Civil Law Articles 118–120, defining public property, and Articles 1154, 1159, on private property;

f) customary law (*urf*).[26]

For the sake of completeness, the following relevant documents should also be mentioned:

- Articles 761, 765, 770 and 1159 of Yemeni Civil Law, concerning agricultural land;
- Articles 1161, 1163 and 1164 of Civil Law, governing neighbourhood rights;
- Law no. 21 of 1995, concerning land and real estate;
- Republican Decree 170 of 1996, on the common use of land;
- Republican Decree 99 of 1996, about lands constituting a religious endowment (*waqf*);
- Law no. 21 of 1995, concerning land and real estate, Articles 58 and 59 of which relate to squatters;
- Articles 1–7 and 12–27 of Law no. 1 of 1995, concerning issues of acquisition in the public interest.

There are four categories of land ownership in Yemen: privately owned land (*mulk*), state-owned or government land (*miri*), communal property, and land endowed to religious trusts (*waqf*). About 85 per cent of land is privately owned.[27] It is administered under customary law, and usually documented by a written deed or contract signed by a sheikh.[28] State lands are used for public and government structures. Communal land is administered by customary law (*urf*); it is set aside for grazing or the collection of firewood, and is managed by the sheikh of the area.

VARIOUS CONCEPTS OF LAND OWNERSHIP

The definition of the term 'land' differs around the world, whether it is discussed in a legal, political, economic, social or philosophical context. Notwithstanding controversial opinions on its definition, the importance of land is undisputed. Land can be a safety net for poor households – the only valuable item for the next generation to inherit; it can be a resource for development and an important asset for governments or companies; it can define identity and be an object of religious veneration. There are various concepts of how a relationship between people and land can be formed, including ownership, possession, occupation, tenure, usufruct or *waqf* ('religious endowment'). In many countries, categories such as private, communal, state and open-access can also be found. Differences are often based on the specific cultural, historical or political circumstances, and societies with a nomadic, socialist or capitalist tradition have different approaches to regulating land. Over the last century Yemen has witnessed different political systems, each with its own interpretation of the relationship between people and land.

In nomadic and semi-nomadic societies, land can be owned either individually or collectively. Rights of access to – and use of – natural resources such as water or firewood are more important for the survival of the group than ownership of the land itself. A smaller area supplied with food and water is needed for raising sheep and goats than for herding camels. Depending on the needs of the group, different types of organization are appropriate for the management of access to the resources for each area. Collective ownership of land means that the whole group is allowed to access and use it. The customary law that developed in the Arabian Peninsula was partly

inspired by the requirements of nomadic life; it gives great importance to the access and management of natural resources. Today, few Yemenis are nomads, but the nomadic tradition, where people move over a vast area, has left its footprint on the customary law of the Arabian Peninsula, and has also inspired legal principles of customary dispute-resolution in Yemen.[29] One example of this is that procedures using customary law to solve disputes are usually conducted quickly and all parties are required to participate, even in criminal cases. This is different from formal court procedures, which can last for a much longer time, because it might afford a tactical advantage for parties to delay the process, and there is a universally recognized constitutional right for the accused to remain silent – defendants cannot be compelled to testify against themselves.

A different approach to the concept of land ownership can be found in many countries with a socialist political tradition. Article 14 of the Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen stated: 'land is owned by the state as representative of the people and should serve the interests of all'. Over two decades of socialist rule in the south of Yemen, a land reform in 1970 gave rise to competing ownership and repossession claims after unification.[30] German politicians and courts had to address a comparable challenge after the unification of (socialist) East and (capitalist) West Germany. In Germany, laws have been adopted to deal with land ownership claims, and millions of euros of compensation have been paid. Yet, more than twenty years later, not all legal claims have been settled, and the issue still keeps national and European courts busy.

However, de facto circumstances can also establish property rights. Continuous possession in good faith over a period of at least ten years can ripen into ownership if land has been occupied and used under the same conditions as if it were owned, with peaceful and uninterrupted usage. This maturing of de facto ownership into de jure transfer of sovereignty of a territory is known in international law as acquisitive prescription, and is analogous to the common law doctrine of adverse possession. Ownership claims based on this legal argument were discussed by farmers in the former PDRY.[31]

In the capitalist system land can be owned by an individual. Most countries of the Western industrialized world see land as an object of business and trade, which can be owned and exploited by individuals and companies. In Yemen the constitution also protects and guarantees individual ownership.[32] The concept of individual ownership is, in the context of an Islamic state, extended to the duty

that ownership must serve the public good. It is in fact a matter of trusteeship, because God is considered to be the ultimate owner and property must be used in his name.

VARIOUS DISPUTE-RESOLUTION METHODS FOR LAND-RELATED DISPUTES

COURT-BASED PROCEDURES

Special courts for land-related disputes do not exist in Yemen, and cases are therefore heard in the Courts of first instance before a single judge, and decisions can be appealed to the Courts of Appeal, which include four divisions, each consisting of benches of three judges. The Supreme Court, with divisions of five judges, is the highest court of appeal, and is located in Sana‘a. Yemeni courts in general operate within a context of widespread distrust regarding their neutrality and independence. In some regions procedures can take an unpredictably long time, and cases of corruption are often reported.

PROCEDURES BASED ON CUSTOMARY LAW

Customary law (*urf*) is primarily designed to secure the survival of the group, and places great importance on increasing benefits while reducing disadvantages for all parties involved. Formal justice is not the primary aim of the process, and win-win solutions are preferred to the zero-sum outcome of court procedures in which one party wins and the other loses. The social dimension of a complex conflict situation is more important in customary law than in a court. An important role is played by moral duties such as the group’s responsibility to protect the weak and provide a safety net, and the concept of the collective responsibility of the group.[33]

Yemeni customary law is a captivating mixture of pragmatic rules and obligations, rather than a set of theoretical doctrines. For example, one can find rules on agricultural terrace maintenance (the tenant covers the costs of minor damages and shares with the landlord the cost of major damages caused by floods or storms; or the tenant repairs damaged terraces and recovers the cost by retaining the whole harvest for a certain period),[34] ownership of

firewood,[35] or rights to settle in any location, as well as the distance that should be maintained between houses and wells.[36] *Juwarah* is a custom practised in the north of Yemen that aims to prevent members of other tribes or strangers purchasing land in the area where the tribe has settled.[37] This has led to a situation in which areas are 'owned' mostly by one family or tribe. Although land disputes within a tribe have a tendency to be less violent because intra-tribal negotiations can be more successful, conflicts about land ownership still occur. Maintaining open access to land only for members of a community can reduce potential conflicts, but at the same time 'it can limit or prevent certain kinds of economic development that may ensue from external investment'.[38]

Two procedures based on customary law can be found in Yemen. *Takhim qabali* is similar to arbitration, whereby the parties appoint one or more arbitrators (*muhakim*) who can issue a decision against the will of the parties. Wasata is comparable to conciliation, whereby the conciliator (also called *muhakim*) offers a non-binding suggestion for a solution. *Sulh* is usually translated as 'amicable settlement', and describes the outcome of both procedures.[39] Verdicts in customary law procedures are enforceable not only because of deposit (adal) payments, but also because people fear damage to their social reputation if they do not participate or obey the decision. Parties appoint arbitrators and conciliators trusted by both sides in order to provide a fast and fair procedure. As in ADR, this participation of the parties in the appointment process of the decision-making body can lead to a better acceptance of the final judgement.

A decision based on Yemeni customary law cannot be appealed, because there is no systematic mechanism of control over the implementation of the decisions or the quality of the work of the participants. In rare cases, more influential arbitrators can be persuaded to reopen proceedings and retry a case. A procedure of this kind is costly and time-consuming, which is clearly a general disadvantage. Parties also complain that procedures based on customary law are increasingly prone to corruption. Cases have been reported in which arbitrators or conciliators (in procedures based on customary law) were at the same time sheikhs who sold land as if it were private and for their own benefit, while they are traditionally responsible for managing both communal and private land.[40] A potential conflict can arise with the legal principle of *nemo judex in sua causa* ('no one shall be a judge in his own case'). This is a legal principle that also exists in Yemeni customary law.[41] Furthermore,

there have been cases where judges in national (commercial) courts have remained involved in court proceedings while negotiating as arbitrators in *takhim qabali*. This is one way to lose public confidence in the position of judges, who are supposed to be independent and impartial and only concerned with the law. A judge and an arbitrator must not be the same person in the same case.[42] In some cases, women who have inherited land according to sharia law and sought customary conflict-resolution because they are facing social pressure from the tribal structure have been forced to sign a deed revoking their individual ownership title.[43] In a tribal context, it is considered more important to keep land together than to risk the loss of the land when a female owner marries a person from another tribe.

ADR PROCEDURES BASED ON STATUTORY LAW

ADR is a collective term for various strategies to help parties in a dispute come to a legally binding decision. It is a tool used internationally to resolve disputes. ADR includes arbitration, conciliation, mediation, guided or principled negotiation, collaborative law and many other methods, not to mention so-called 'hybrid procedures', which combine the different methods. In such agreements, parties can commit themselves to legal obligations that can be enforced by a judicial authority. Mediation is a pure communication process in which a neutral third person helps the parties in dispute to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Unlike a mediator, a conciliator may suggest how to proceed after hearing both sides and discussing potential solutions that the parties still have to accept. In this way, the conciliator is no longer neutral, and has an interest in fostering the parties' acceptance of her or his suggestions. In arbitration, binding decisions can be issued against the will of the parties. The United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) encourages countries to apply legal regulation to ADR procedures – namely, arbitration and conciliation – by issuing model laws and guidelines.

In 1981 Yemen became the first Arab country to establish a modern arbitration law. The 1981 law was repealed and replaced in 1992 (Law no. 22/1992) and amended in 1997 (Law no. 32/1997). The 2010 draft followed the model of the Egyptian Arbitration Law and the UNCITRAL Model Law.[44] Although few land-related disputes in Yemen have been solved by ADR, the number of commercial

arbitration proceedings has grown and people have become increasingly aware of this dispute-resolution method. Some fifty cases have been negotiated by the Centre for Arbitration in Sana'a – mainly commercial law cases with international participation. *Takhim qanuni* has increasingly become a market for lawyers.[45] The more legal practitioners have become aware of arbitration, the more it has become an essential element of the legal advice they give to the business community. More parties have come to trust arbitration, and have negotiated arbitration clauses in civil law contracts, with the result that competent courts are excluded. Land-related disputes can be subject to arbitration. Article 5 of the Arbitration Law (22/1992) states that only the following cases are outside the scope of arbitration: penal cases, termination of marriage, challenges to judges, disputes relating to enforcement of decisions, and matters relating to public policy. The 2010 draft Arbitration Law added all issues relating to nationality as exclusions (Article 8).

The Arbitration Law dictates that the parties appoint one or more arbitrators, who have the right and duty to conduct oral hearings, listen to expert opinions and evaluate the evidence presented by the parties. The procedure is similar to, but more flexible than, civil procedural law, and to some extent the parties can tailor it to their needs – for example, the place and language for negotiation, and the applicable type of law. This includes the option to choose customary law as the material resource for the arbitral award. Arbitral awards (in domestic arbitration between two Yemeni citizens) can be enforced through the court that had original jurisdiction over the conflict. In cases of international arbitration (cases where one party is a non-national), the Court of Appeal is competent to grant leave for enforcement. The arbitral award is not subject to recourse as stipulated in the Yemeni Code of Civil Procedure, and thus the arbitral award may not be appealed. It can only be declared void under specific circumstances (Article 53 of the Arbitration Act 22/1992, and with minor changes Article 59 of the draft Arbitration Act of 2010). Arbitrators conducting *takhim qanuni* often work together with the national courts – for example, courts can authenticate arbitration agreements and minutes of the oral hearings.

REASONS FOR SELECTION OF A DISPUTE-RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

There is a variety of dispute-resolution methods that can be chosen for land-related disputes, depending on the personal background of

the parties and the nature of the conflict.[46] *Takhim qabali* is often used in rural areas where there is no access to courts or ADR, and in cases where parties suspect that their opponent might not obey a court decision but fear social pressure to accept a decision made according to customary law. A further motive can be that customary law procedures are in general faster than court procedures.

Educated people who do not identify themselves as tribespeople have a tendency to see customary law as backward and a potential obstacle to Yemen's development.[47] They prefer court procedures despite the long delays and corruption. Knowledge of arbitration *takhim qanuni* is not widespread, but many people are interested in trying out dispute-resolution mechanisms that avoid the courts provided they are based on statutory law. Educated tribespeople prefer using customary law procedures mostly for tribal conflicts – feuds, for example, or quarrels over communal land. For personal or commercial conflicts that are not connected to tribal issues, they prefer court-based procedures or ADR because they feel that these procedures are more predictable.

INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF ADR METHODS IN LAND-RELATED DISPUTES

ADR has not yet been systematically used in resolving land-related disputes in Yemen. There are cases in other countries where ADR was successfully implemented as a dispute-resolution method in such disputes. In China, publicly owned farmland is allocated to individual households through long-term contracts. Between 2003 and 2008, more than 50,000 cases of land-related disputes were filed. A Law on Arbitration over Farmland Contract Management Disputes was introduced in 2009, aiming to reduce the number of cases coming to court.[48] Furthermore, a Rural Land Contract Dispute Mediation and Arbitration Law was introduced in 2010, providing for the Rural Land Contract Arbitration Commission to conduct mediation in disputes over rural land contracts. In order to reduce the cost and improve the efficiency of the commission, the law simplifies arbitration processes and formalities compared to the Chinese Arbitration Law. In 1995 Zambia introduced special Land Tribunals to offer a 'fast-track method of resolving land disputes that is efficient and cost-effective compared to the established judicial or court system'.[49] In 2009 the Liberian Land Commission established the Land Dispute Resolution Taskforce. A variety of organizations

are working together with the aim of combining traditional conflict-resolution methods with ADR under the umbrella of national laws. Positive experiences include the systematic participation of the community in the mediation process, which ensures factual accuracy, legitimacy and the enforcement of agreements.[50] In Samoa, ADR combined with traditional conflict-resolution and customary law has been acknowledged as essential for resolving land disputes. A system was developed combining fora for resolving land-related disputes both at the local level (village councils) and under national court jurisdiction (the Land and Titles Court). A Land Investigating Commission was established dealing with claims over individual land-ownership, and determining whether land is customary, freehold or public. A Customary Land Act provides that all disputes relating to leases for customary land be referred to arbitration.[51] In Tajikistan the public organization Arbitazh was established in 2005 aiming to support the country's land reform and improve livelihoods. The focus was to help poor people in rural areas to clarify land and asset ownership, and to bring agricultural land back into productive use through the establishment of mobile Third Party Arbitration Centres.[52] In the United Kingdom and the United States, ADR is used in land-related disputes with the positive effect that the caseload in courts is reduced, and disputes are resolved in a more timely and cost-effective way.[53]

This does not exhaust the list of countries that have successfully implemented ADR to resolve land-related disputes. Experience shows that the court workload can be reduced and legal decision-making can be made more efficient when the legal environment provides specific laws and institutions that promote ADR methods as obligatory dispute resolution methods for land-related disputes. Institutions and organizations can be established combining the expertise of local, regional, national and international actors. The creation of methods for resolving land disputes outside the courts may reduce the time and cost of disputes, and increase levels of compliance with agreed solutions. Modern ADR methods can be combined with traditional dispute-resolution procedures because their procedural design is similar in many ways. In both systems, parties appoint experts who have the authority to determine the negotiation process and adjust it to the needs of the parties within a flexible procedural framework.

LAND DISPUTES IN YEMEN are complex and violent, and need to be dealt with because they hinder the country's development. The majority of cases are negotiated either in Yemeni courts or according to Yemeni customary law (*takhim qabali*). Both customary and state law have weaknesses, and there is limited potential for improvement in the short term. ADR – in other words, arbitration (*takhim qanuni*) – is used in Yemen, and has catered for a growing market.

Worldwide, ADR has been shown to save time and reduce costs, and also has the capacity to include aspects of both customary law and modern statutory law, reconciling complex and multilayered land-related disputes. Issuing laws and establishing specialized institutions that are tailored to solve land issues can enhance the legal environment.

In order to learn from good practice in this area, a careful assessment will need to be made of experiences in other countries, and of guided discussions between a balanced number of representatives of the political, governmental and legal fields, as well as religious scholars, representatives of NGOs, and international donors.

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[13] Interview with Jamal Benomar, UN special envoy to Yemen, in *Yementimes*, 4 February 2013; interview with Dr Saeed Al-Amiri, in *Yementimes*, 4 March 2013.

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[39] The Yemeni data were collected in field research by the author in Sana'a and Ta'iz in 2012. For a description of *sulh* as a general concept in Islamic law alongside adjudication, see A. Othman, *Sulh is the Best: Amicable Settlement and Dispute Resolution in Islamic Law*, PhD dissertation, Harvard University, Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Boston, 2005, p. 314.

[40] Author interview with members of the bar association in Sana'a and Ta'iz.

41 Field research by the author, interview with Sheikh al-Harethy, Ta'iz, July 2012.

42 Compare, for arbitration based on national law (*takhim qanuni*), Article 11 of the Yemen Arbitration Act.

43 Author interview with L. al-Zwaini, Beirut, April 2013.

44 For further details on the new law from 2010, see A. H. El Ahdab, J. El Ahdab, *Arbitration with the Arab Countries* (London: Kluwer Law International, 2011), pp. 832–73; and R. Bou Aoun, 'A New Draft Arbitration Law in the Republic of Yemen', *International Journal of Arab Arbitration* 2: 2 (2010), pp. 73–96.

45 Field research by the author in 2012, in Sana'a and Ta'iz, where a growing number of arbitration cases have dealt with commercial and land-related disputes. No valid data exist, but lawyers estimate that there were between 50 and 80 land-related arbitration cases in Ta'iz in 2011 and 2012 combined.

46 The following findings are based on interviews by the author conducted in 2007, 2008 and 2012 with sheikhs, businessmen, legal scholars and legal practitioners from Sana'a, Aden, Mukalla, Mareb, al-Jawf, Mahweet, Ta'iz, Ibb, and rural areas in Lahej.

47 The interviewees held university degrees.

48 Xinhua, 'Draft Law on Rural Land Dispute Eyes Stability', *China Daily*, 20 April 2009, available at www.chinadaily.com.cn.

49 The Lands Tribunal was established under Cap. 184, Section 20 of the Lands Act of 1995 in Zambia. Further information is available at www.ministryoflands.gov.zm.

50 J. Syn, 'Mediating Land Disputes in Liberia', *Accord* 23 (2012), p. 49.

51 J. Corrin, 'Resolving Land Disputes in Samoa', in T. Levantis, M. Sullivan, P. O'Connor, J. Munro and S. Wawrzonek, eds, *Making Land Work* (Canberra: Aus-AID, 2008), p. 209.

52 For further information, see www.tpac.tj.

53 E. Sullivan and A. Solomou, 'Alternative Dispute Resolution in Land Use Disputes – Two Continents and Two Approaches', *Urban Lawyer* 43: 4 (2011).

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE ROLE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN THE ECONOMY: THE CASE OF YEMEN

Kais Aliriani

ECONOMISTS HAVE VARIOUS VIEWS regarding the actual contribution of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to the economy. Some argue that the SME sector is a vital part of any economy because it plays an important role in innovation, employment creation, and economic growth in general. Others argue that large companies are more effective in producing economic growth and development. The traditional view among economists is that small firms are not important because they account for a small portion of the economy. They may even represent a burden on the economy because they operate below the optimum scale of production, and have low productivity and higher unit costs. Researchers have also found that employees of larger firms enjoy higher wages and better benefits.[1] According to this view, policy-makers should encourage shifting the economy towards larger firms.

Another view is offered by David Audretsch, on what he called the 'dynamic role' of SMEs in the economy. In his view there is a need for a closer look at the contribution of SMEs to the economy, taking into consideration the fact that markets are in motion. He demonstrated that the 18 per cent increase in employment in the United States during the 1990s was due to the net growth in employment in small firms; there was also a net decrease in employment in large corporations within the same period. He further argued that the resurgence of the US economy during the 1980s and '90s was driven by small firms as they improved competition, served as agents of change (innovation) and contributed to employment.[2] This positive view of small firms was earlier presented by Brian Levy, who argued that small businesses contribute to the economy through new ventures, playing a positive role in economic growth and development.[3] The contributions of small businesses include the utilization of local resources, training of workers, provision of opportunities to rural people, contribution to the balance of payments, and reduction of dependence on high-capital investments. In addition, in his entrepreneurship studies, he explained that small businesses are better able to respond to the personal needs of entrepreneurs.[4]

In relation to contribution to GDP, Ayyagari and others, in a study commissioned by the World Bank, reviewed data for seventy-six countries and found there was a strong correlation between the

formal SME sector and per capita GDP. They also found that the formal SME sector contributes 16 per cent of GDP in low-income countries and as much as 51 per cent of GDP in high-income countries.[5] The 2011 Dalberg report shows that, in addition to their direct contribution to GDP, the growth of SMEs indirectly supports GDP through increased innovation and macro-economic resilience.[6]

Whether or not SMEs contribute to creating jobs is a very important question. In a review of national data in 2008, Neumark confirmed the earlier findings of Birch that small firms are the most important source of job creation in the US economy.[7] In the 1970s they created eight out of every ten new jobs. In his study across ninety-nine countries, Ayyagari found that small firms (employing 250 people or less) contributed 78 per cent of employment in low-income countries, 67 per cent in low and middle-income countries, and about 66 per cent in high-income countries. He concluded that small firms are important contributors to total employment and job creation.[8]

Galbraith denied that technological innovations are driven by small entrepreneurs, calling this idea 'a fiction'.[9] He echoed Schumpeter's belief that large corporations were the engine of progress. But Audretsch has a different view. Although large corporations might produce more innovations in absolute terms than small firms, taking into consideration that markets are in motion, and that many new small firms enter the market while others leave it, it becomes clear that small enterprises are the engine of innovative activity in certain industries. Despite the lack of formal R&D, they make use of the work of research institutions and the 'spill-over' effect from other firms. Measurement of innovation and technological change should include measurement of input, innovative ideas and output. If we take all three factors into consideration, we find that in some industries small firms are more innovative, while in others large corporations are superior. The distinction is due to the different technological regimes.[10]

A number of studies have found other ways in which micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contribute to economic growth through entrepreneurship, economic dynamism and societal development. SMEs improve income distribution in the least developed countries,[11] making it more equitable. In addition to the various achievements mentioned above, they promote economic dynamism and the creation of value chains through linkages with large firms.

In short, SMEs make a major contribution to the economy in developing and less-developed countries, where development strategies based on large-scale investments have failed. SMEs use local raw materials, generate employment, encourage rural development and develop entrepreneurship. They encourage competition, and their capacity to take risks plays an important role in economic growth. SMEs provide a foundation for the development of larger industries.[12]

THE YEMENI ECONOMY IN BRIEF

Yemen is one of the world's least-developed countries (LDCs), with per capita GDP (PPP) estimated at US$2,300 in 2011, ranking 186 among 228 countries. Over half of the Yemeni population is poor, and this combines with high annual population growth (2.7 per cent)[13] and a low adult literacy rate, estimated at 50 per cent overall and only 30 per cent among women. The Yemeni economy is unstable and characterized by high dependence on small and depleting oil resources. In 2007, oil accounted for 85 per cent of all export earnings and 71 per cent of government revenues.[14] The government's high spending and low revenues have resulted in current account budget deficits.

Unemployment in Yemen is estimated at 35 per cent overall[15] and 40 per cent among young people,[16] according to the more conservative estimates. Agriculture is the main employer, with more than 50 per cent working in that sector. Other important employment sectors are wholesale and retail trade (11 per cent), construction (7 per cent), manufacturing (4 per cent) and transport and communications (3 per cent). The oil sector's contribution to employment does not exceed 20,000 jobs.[17] The 2003 Labor Market Survey indicates that two-thirds of employment is in the informal sector. The majority of the labour force lives in rural areas, with little access to education; only 4 per cent of labour-market participants have received any form of vocational training. Although labour is plentiful, there is a mismatch between the skills in demand and those available. Each year more than 200,000 people enter the labour market and, according to estimates, only 65 per cent of them find jobs.[18]

Yemen has not been able to attract significant foreign direct investment (FDI) outside the oil and gas sectors. With growing unrest

in the country in recent years, FDI has virtually dried up. Table 11.1 shows FDI inflows to Yemen over the past six years. The trend has been negative since 2008, with an increase in outflows in 2010 and 2011. The United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) located Yemen in the fourth quartile in its FDI Attraction Index.[19]

Table 11.1: Yemen FDI Inflows and Outflows 2006–2011 (US$ millions)

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Inflows	1,121	917	1,555	129	–93	–713
Outflows	56	54	66	66	70	77

SOURCE: *World Investment Report*, 2012 (UNCTAD).

Development policies in Yemen have continuously identified FDI as a major potential source of capital. But these policies ignore the need for a more attractive investment climate, which the country has failed to provide in the past. According to the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), Yemen's rank dropped from 89 in 2008 to 121 in 2012 (of 140 countries),[20] and the Coface Business Climate Rating puts Yemen in Category D, the lowest of seven categories.[21]

Yemen's GDP has been growing slowly over the past decade, as illustrated in Table 11.2. This slow growth is further hampered by growing political unrest. In addition, inflation has generally remained within the doubledigit range over the past six years, reaching more than 16 per cent in 2011.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SMES IN YEMEN

In Yemen there is no universal definition of SMEs. The first attempt to classify enterprises was by the First Industrial Survey, carried out by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO) and the Ministry of Industry and Trade in 1996. The survey targeted manufacturing enterprises, and defined small enterprises as those with between one and four employees, medium enterprises as having from five to nine employees, and large enterprises as employing more than ten

people.[22] The Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) Baseline Survey held in 2000 categorized MSEs as self-employed (one worker), small enterprises as having two to four workers, and medium ones as employing from five to fifty people. This classification was based on survey results showing that 72 per cent of all enterprises were self-employed micros. The 2005 National Small and Micro Enterprise Development Strategy categorized enterprises as micro which had from one to four employees, small enterprises as having between five and fifty employees, and large enterprises as having more than fifty employees – all sizes including working owners. This is presumably the only 'official' definition of SMEs that is not used merely for research purposes.

Table 11.2: Yemen GDP Growth, 2005–2013

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
% GDP Growth	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.9	0.7	–10.5

SOURCE: rru.worldbank.org.

The absence of a universal definition of MSMEs reflects the government's failure to implement its development strategies. An official definition would provide a common language for those who are interested in the sector. It would help avoid confusion and duplication, direct attention to efforts that support the sector, and assist future research to understand the sector more accurately. Any definition should be precise, taking into consideration the characteristics of the sector as part of the overall economy in Yemen. Based on the experiences of other countries, it should consider the number of employees, capital investment, turnover, ownership and market share. The definition should include thresholds based on the state of development of the different industries in the country. For the purpose of this chapter, the following definition will be used: a micro enterprise has up to four employees, either formal or informal; a small enterprise is formal, with five to fifty employees; and a medium enterprise is formal, with between fifty-one and one hundred employees. These thresholds are one-third of those used in the World Bank definition of SMEs, and half of those used by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The information available about the MSME sector in Yemen is very limited. The only comprehensive database about the sector is the Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) Baseline Survey, carried out in 2000. It was nationwide and covered a wide range of enterprises, both formal and informal, with up to fifty employees. Another source of information about SMEs is the *Yemen Profile 2010*, which is one of the World Bank's global surveys covering small, medium and large companies. The survey collected qualitative and quantitative information on a representative sample of non-agricultural formal private companies to assess the business environment and the factors accommodating and constraining businesses. The most recent research is the Al-Maqaleh Survey, carried out in 2011, which sampled a randomly selected group of officially registered small enterprises with between five and fifty employees and maximum capital of 4 million Yemeni rials, all of them registered in Sana'a city. The survey used a specially designed questionnaire to capture the challenges faced by enterprises. It was completed by 364 respondents, 18 per cent of whom were women. A high ratio of businesses owned and run by women were deliberately targeted, to gain more insight into the characteristics of femaleled businesses and their challenges. In addition to the above surveys, I carried out interviews with business owners to enhance my understanding of the MSE sector.

Entrepreneurs play an instrumental role in the development of SMEs. The motivation to start a business varies from fulfilling personal needs (33 per cent) and proving oneself (33 per cent) to increasing income (23 per cent).[23] Overall, 70 per cent of the entrepreneurs depend exclusively on the income from their enterprise.[24] Most MSE entrepreneurs are middle-aged men. In 2000, 50 per cent of owners were thirty-nine or older; by 2011, however, 90 per cent of them were over twenty-two, implying a significant demographic shift towards younger people. These were distributed evenly into three groups: those between twenty-two and twenty-seven, those between twenty-eight and thirty-two, and those over thirty-three. This reflected the growing number of young people establishing their own businesses. The percentage of women-owned enterprises doubled from 3 per cent in 2000 to an estimated 6 per cent in 2010. Only 5 per cent of the enterprises had full-time female workers, and there were almost no female top managers.

Most entrepreneurs have low levels of education: 31 per cent are illiterate, while 36 per cent are barely literate and only 32 per cent have completed some form of formal education.[25] In urban areas

such as Sana‘a, and among registered businesses, the level of education is higher: 39.5 per cent of entrepreneurs have completed primary schooling, 16.5 per cent have diplomas, and 22.5 per cent have university education or higher. The low level of education among entrepreneurs is one of the constraints on the growth of SMEs.

The overwhelming majority of MSEs are self-employed micros, and only 50 per cent of them operate from specifically designed business premises. The rest are either home-based (10 per cent), in a fixed outdoor location (5 per cent), or mobile, such as taxis (33 per cent). Yemeni MSEs are concentrated in manufacturing, construction, wholesale, retail and repair, hotels and restaurants, transport and communication, and other services. On the other hand, the 2011 Sana‘a-based survey found 20.6 per cent of enterprises in the tailoring business and 13 per cent in printing, probably reflecting the specific opportunities in these sectors in the capital city.

As far as the use of technology is concerned, only 10 per cent of Sana‘a enterprises are utilizing advanced technology such as computers, and only 12 per cent of the firms have websites or use the internet to communicate with clients or suppliers. These are almost double the levels of 2000, when only 5.5 per cent of SMEs used advanced technology. The low use of technology among SMEs can be attributed to the lack of information, as well as the low skill level of entrepreneurs, which prevents them from adopting new technologies that are beyond their capacity.

Management is an important factor in business growth. Most MSEs do not have official management structures. They rely on informal job descriptions and assignment of duties by the manager who, in 45 per cent of cases, is also the owner. Businesses generally lack clarity in decision-making processes and have no management cycle. Such weak organizational structures impede the ability of SMEs to grow.

Marketing is one of the main functions of a business, and is an indicator of its level of sophistication. In Sana‘a in 2011, 21.3 per cent of SMEs lacked the expertise necessary to study consumer preferences. Many were not even aware of the importance of client feedback: according to 44 per cent of the entrepreneurs, information about consumers, suppliers and competition is not readily available. More than 40 per cent of SMEs asserted that they were suffering from a declining client base due to ‘lower purchasing power’. SMEs rely mainly on walk-in clients, so businesses that are not located in main business areas find it difficult to grow and prosper. Another indicator

of poor marketing is that 20 per cent of SMEs are technically unable to price their products correctly.

Quality is closely related to marketing. In general, SMEs' products are perceived to be of low quality: only 30 per cent of entrepreneurs evaluate their products as being of 'high quality', while the rest think they are of average or poor quality. About 49 per cent of entrepreneurs, however, think the quality of their products is adequate for consumer needs, and believe that consumers prefer 'low-priced' as opposed to 'high-quality' products. At the same time, 64 per cent of entrepreneurs find it difficult to improve quality because of their workers' low skill level. The low quality of SME products and services, as well as a general lack of awareness of these issues, is a major constraint on SMEs' growth.

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

SMEs in Yemen face tremendous challenges stemming from the environment in which they operate. Yemen's political and economic situation is fragile, and this affects SMEs' potential for growth. With high inflation and dependence on imported inputs, SMEs must constantly adjust to higher prices of inputs, energy and transport. Market stagnation and the lack of supportive government policies both affect profitability. In 2011, for example, the country was in the midst of an intense political crisis: 46 per cent of enterprises reported that profits were below expectations, and only 43 per cent were making 'reasonable' profits. It is very difficult for SMEs to make long-term plans in a situation where political volatility is combined with continuous and unpredictable changes in government policies and regulations.

Among start-ups, 28 per cent consider the lack of finance their primary problem, followed by market stagnation, taxes, and the difficulty of obtaining licences. For more established businesses, the shortage of electricity was ranked as the chief obstacle in 2011, followed by corruption, political instability, taxes, access to land, an inadequately educated workforce, and poor access to finance. Larger firms, however, are more concerned about corruption and political instability, whereas smaller firms are more concerned about tax rates.

For both start-ups and established businesses, licensing and taxation are among the most important issues: while in 2000 only 22

per cent of the smallest enterprises reported registration as a major problem, the percentage was much higher among larger enterprises (i.e. small and medium enterprises). Since the government of Yemen began its decentralization programme, in 2000, licensing has become more complicated, because both local and central authorities are now involved in the licensing process. For example, a school manager in Sana'a explained:

> It took five months to get the licence when we started and licensing is a continuous struggle. Every year we go through a process that includes the education authorities, the municipality, tax authorities, social insurance, *zakat*, the Skill Development Fund, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Trade. The process takes place at three different levels – the district, the Capital Secretariat and the ministry – and it takes around two months.[26]

This experience contrasts with the findings of the 2010 survey, which found that obtaining an operating licence took only a few days. This same survey, however, found that senior managements of SMEs spent as much as 12 per cent of their time dealing with the requirements of government regulations, and over 80 per cent of firms started operating without being formally registered. In addition to the high licensing costs, further costs were incurred due to the opacity of procedures followed by the authorities.

Another reason SMEs stay away from licensing is to avoid becoming subject to regulations and taxation. In some cases regulations discourage innovation among SMEs. The private school manager, for example, explained: 'The education authorities are not flexible. They simply want us to imitate a public sector school, not just using the curricula, but also our management system. They even dictate how we file our documents! They challenge our modern and innovative educational approach.' Once a business is registered it becomes subject to taxation. Although data are not available, it is widely believed that SMEs are over-taxed. When asked about taxation, the school manager said, 'We started paying income tax from year one. Although we are not making a profit yet, it is easier to negotiate a payment than to prove to the tax authorities that we are actually making a loss.' This was confirmed by a metal workshop owner in another interview.[27] Most SMEs are unaware of the tax regulations – of how much tax they should pay, and when.

Poor infrastructure is the third-most-important problem affecting MSEs. Yemen's infrastructure is underdeveloped: many areas of the country are still difficult to reach by road; roads are not well maintained, and are often insecure and thus unusable. It takes more than two months for a company to be connected to the public electricity network. Shortage of electricity supply is a major problem for both start-ups and existing businesses. In 2010, firms in Sana'a were suffering from an average of fifty-five outages per month, resulting in losses of about 13 per cent of sales. As part of the government's electricity-rationing measures, workshops are only allowed to operate during the daytime. As a result of the extended hours of blackouts, SMEs have to operate their own electricity backup systems to keep running. Water supply is also severely constrained. In 2012 only 40 per cent of the urban population was connected to the public network. Even when connected, supply is erratic, so water is usually purchased and delivered by tankers to business premises and stored in special containers. All these are additional costs and burdens on already poor management capacities.

Women experience even more obstacles to accessing markets because of the social norms that restrict their movements outside the home: they can only sell to other women in the neighbourhood, and have limited access to other markets as they must use male relatives, children or others as intermediaries. They are usually deprived of the opportunity of creating business networks or benefiting from business training opportunities.[28]

Staffing was a major concern for SMEs. The low skill level of workers was considered the primary staffing problem by 42 per cent of entrepreneurs, followed by a lack of staff commitment demonstrated by lateness and absences. Although 50 per cent of SMEs realized that employees did not have adequate skills, 92 per cent of entrepreneurs were unwilling to invest in employee training due to high staff turnover. It is very common in Yemen for skilled employees to leave their jobs to establish businesses in the same line of activity, either for themselves or for some other investors: in 2000, 36 per cent of SME owners interviewed had been employees in the same sector before starting their own businesses.

SMEs in Yemen are highly dependent on imported inputs: 40 per cent of firms used raw materials of foreign origin, and had difficulties in securing them at stable and reasonable prices. The high price of inputs was the third-most-important problem in 2000. The situation was similar in 2011, with a limited number of suppliers controlling the market and therefore dictating prices. Moreover, 45

per cent of SMEs did not have storage capacity for inputs. It took more than twenty days to clear imports from customs – a delay that resulted in additional cost to SMEs, interrupted production and could result in damage to supplies or products.

In order to grow, SMEs need an appropriate legal environment with strong law enforcement. In Yemen more than 70 per cent of firms were in sole ownership according to the most recent information – a much higher ratio than the average in the region. This was mainly due to weak law-enforcement, discouraging people from entering into partnerships. Corruption was a major constraint on businesses, representing both a financial and administrative burden: 70 per cent of the firms surveyed in 2010 expected to give 'gifts' to tax collectors and other officials to secure government contracts, and more than 60 per cent expected to pay bribes to secure import permits or operating licences.

An interview with a hotel manager illustrates these difficulties. In the 1980s a businessman decided to establish a hotel in Khokha, a small oasis town located on the Red Sea coast more than 100 kilometres south of Hodeida, and one of the main tourist attractions in Yemen. He bought the land and started the project. At that time the closest paved road was more than 30 kilometres away. The area had neither electricity nor any other services. In 1990 the project was launched, and became the first real hotel in the area. It used to employ more than twenty people. The manager and many of the staff were expatriates. A few of the employees were graduates of vocational training institutes, but most were trained by the manager. 'Business was good. Tourists from around the world were coming in the winter time, and Yemeni visitors used to come during the summer. We tried our best to provide top-quality services. We had our own cook and restaurant, and we maintained our hotel facilities very well', said the manager. At the time of the interview, in December 2012, the hotel had only six staff. 'We are still generating our own electricity, even though the public power lines are just a few metres away. When we asked to be connected they demanded four million rials [about US$20,000]', he explained. Despite the circumstances of political crisis in 2011 and under these unusual circumstances, SMEs are still required to follow the rules. The hotel manager commented: 'Of course we are paying tourism-support fees, taxes and *zakat* even during these difficult times. We receive very few guests, and we cannot pay the salaries of our employees regularly. It is more costly to keep the business running. For example, tonight we have a foreign guest. To make sure she is safe

we hired two security soldiers. It costs us more than what we charged her … To make things worse, a couple of months ago a group of gunmen came to claim the land where the hotel stood. After negotiations we had to pay them to go away.'

SME PROGRAMMES

The government of Yemen identified the development of small and medium enterprises as a driver of economic development and employment creation as early as the 1990s. The Yemen Strategic Vision for 2025, as well as later strategies and plans, lists SMEs as essential components of development policy. But such assertions have not been transformed into practice. Three government agencies are still involved with SME programmes – the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Small Enterprise Development Fund and the Social Fund for Development. Moreover, the government is biased in favour of large enterprises, as can be seen in the Investment Law, while the development of SMEs is seen as merely a tool of 'poverty reduction'. The following paragraphs take a closer look at the government approach to SME development. As we will see, current government programmes are not adequate to the task of supporting SMEs to reach their full potential.

The Ministry of Industry and Trade (MIT) has five strategic goals, at least two of which are relevant to SMEs: to 'establish an encouraging and attractive environment for investment' and to 'enable small and medium enterprises to compete' (Article 6). These goals, unfortunately, are not clearly reflected in the tasks and organizational structure of the ministry. According to its bylaws (2009), the MIT should provide a conducive business environment for SMEs, promote and encourage handicrafts, develop skills and traditional work methods, supervise small and medium industries, help them develop to increase their efficiency, and encourage the establishment of industrial cooperatives. The General Department of Small Industries is responsible for implementing these tasks, and is located within the Industry Section of the ministry. Its duties include the supervision of small industries, providing them with technical assistance, promoting handicrafts and home-based industrial production, establishing small industry centres, and participating in research related to small industries. All these tasks are clearly related to small enterprises within the manufacturing category. The bylaws use the terms 'enterprise' and 'industry' interchangeably. The

implication is that the ministry is responsible only for manufacturing – as is made clear by the department's location in the Industries Section of the ministry, which is only concerned with manufacturing enterprises. This again raises the issue of the need for an official definition of MSMEs. Finally, it is worth mentioning that this department is not very active.

The Small Enterprise Development Fund (SEDF) was established by Decree no. 39 of 2002. It is the only Yemeni institution specialized in financing small enterprises. The SEDF is a government agency with financial and administrative independence, governed by a board of directors composed of government and private-sector representatives. It is meant to serve as a national programme providing financial and technical services to small and medium enterprises. It is the successor to the Small Enterprise Development Unit, a subsidiary of the Industrial Bank of Yemen. It started operations in 1991 and continued to function independently after the liquidation of the bank, until the SEDF took over. Although its responsibilities include providing advice and technical support to SMEs, historically it has only provided loans. Since its establishment, the SEDF has provided funding to about 12,000 SMEs, amounting to 10 billion rials (approximately US$50 million). The SEDF operates through seven branches – in Sana'a, Hodeida, Ta'iz, Aden, Mukalla, Ibb and Dhamar. Although it plans to open five additional branches, enabling a threefold increase in the number of loans disbursed by 2015 (from less than 3,000 to over 8,000 loans per year), it is unlikely to achieve these ambitious targets due to lack of political support.

The third player in the SME sector is the Social Fund for Development (SFD), a government organization with administrative and financial independence, established in 1997. The SFD has three programmes: Community Development, Capacity Building, and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (SMED). Adding to the confusion about the definition of SMEs, the SFD refers to 'small and micro' not 'small and medium'. This is also true for the SFD's subsidiary, the Small and Micro Enterprise Promotion Services (SMEPS).

Initially the objective of the SMED programme was to help develop an enabling environment for the growth of micro and small enterprises. However, because of the nature of the SFD as a poverty-alleviation institution, it has concentrated on providing financial and non-financial services to help poor people increase their incomes. It does not provide support to them directly, but uses intermediary

organizations. In its fifteen years of operations, the SFD has initiated and led the development of microfinance in Yemen, becoming the leader in the development of micro and small enterprises. In 2005 it was asked by the cabinet to formulate and implement the first national micro and small enterprise development strategy. This brought about the establishment of the SMEPS in 2006, to provide SMEs with tools to facilitate their growth and diversification. The SMEPS is responsible for directing and coordinating activities to provide improved non-financial services to SMEs through partner organizations. Over the past six years, the SMEPS has carried out research on a number of value chains (coffee, incense, fish, honey and *qat*), supported training programmes including the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Know About Business programme, the Business Edge programme of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and Seeds Education Institute's Businesswomen's Training Scheme. The SMEPS has only three branches, and works with service providers rather than final beneficiaries. It concentrates its interventions on new business lines, subsector studies, technical advice, training, curriculum development for vocational and technical institutes, upgrading consultancy services' links to SMEs and handicrafts export promotion.

For over fifteen years, the SFD has supported the MSE sector by focusing on financial services. It has established a number of microfinance providers with a high growth potential, in addition to the programme mentioned above for non-financial services. Due to its poverty-alleviation objectives, the SFD's interventions are directed towards the lower end of the market – namely micro enterprises. These enterprises are marginal by comparison with the overall size of the MSME sector, as well as with SFD operations: in 2012, only 3 per cent of the SFD's total investments went to MSEs.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

Studies show that good access to financing is one of the driving forces of economic development. The IFC, in its Doing Business ranking, uses access to credit as one of its main criteria for ranking countries. Companies with easier access to capital are more able to exploit growth and investment opportunities,[29] and lack of financing keeps SMEs from innovating and growing. The sources of financing available to MSMEs in Yemen are limited. Banks focus their lending efforts on a small number of big clients, mainly from large business

families. The perceived risk of lending to SMEs and the high returns on government bonds make banks reluctant to lend to SMEs.

In 2000, 89 per cent of MSEs had no access to credit. In 2010 there was little evidence of improvement: 90 per cent were still dependent on internal sources of finance, 6 per cent had trade credit finance, and less than 3 per cent used bank finance for investment. Only 18 per cent of the companies depend on external sources to finance their working capital, and only around 30 per cent have bank accounts.[30] MSEs have increasingly accessed microfinance institutions as sources of finance: in 2011 around 10 per cent of MSEs borrowed from such institutions. The main obstacles entrepreneurs face in using microfinance institutions are the high interest rates (identified by 34 per cent of respondents as their chief concern), difficulties in providing collateral or guarantees (33 per cent) and the complicated procedures (22 per cent). In 2010, the survey found that banks required collateral worth 250 per cent of the value of the loans requested.

Microfinance was introduced in Yemen in 1997 by the UNDP and the SFD; the latter, according to the most recent data, provided direct or indirect support to almost all microfinance providers. In November 2012 there were more than fifteen microfinance providers in the country serving around 80,000 borrowers. The microfinance providers included NGOs, government or semi-governmental institutions and specialized microfinance banks. The average outstanding loan is about US$320. The microfinance providers mainly serve subsistence enterprises, with the exception of the Small Enterprise Development Fund, which had an average outstanding loan of US$9,300 according to the SFD's quarterly report in September 2012.

Access to finance is a particularly acute problem affecting women wanting to engage in business. In 2006 only 1 per cent of women had commercial bank loans, whereas 63 per cent relied on their own savings and family to finance their businesses.[31] Female microfinance clients receiving services from SFD-supported providers are engaged in very small, home-based activities. They work in a handful of traditional businesses, such as sewing, incense-making, buying and selling clothes and perfumes, hairdressing and animal husbandry. They lack business training and have limited opportunities to develop their businesses.[32]

Most women work to supplement their family income. They take loans either for business purposes or consumption. Although most

female clients highly value the services provided by microfinance institutions, they are not satisfied with the small entry-loan size and slow increase of loan size over borrowing cycles. Most women receive their loans on the basis of group-guarantee mechanisms, and in some cases they have to provide multiple levels of guarantees. Providing a guarantee is a burden on women, particularly if they have to provide a male guarantor. In some cases women have to pay to get a personal guarantee. Burjorjee found that some microfinance providers were defying the very purpose of microfinance by their collateral requirements, putting pressure on women and excluding many who were incapable of satisfying the requirements.[33]

With the exception of the SEDF, which provides small loans, microfinance loans in Yemen mainly support subsistence activities by women. SMEs have little opportunity to secure credit, due to the high collateral requirements from banks and the high interest rate on loans (around 25 per cent). SMEs in Yemen need access to credit, but also to advice on obtaining and repaying loans.

SMES' POTENTIAL

As we have seen, the MSME sector in Yemen is composed of a large number of self-employment enterprises and a limited number of small enterprises (those with between five and fifty employees). MSMEs are young – half of them are less than five years old. Most were founded by middle-aged, poorly educated male entrepreneurs who started from scratch. Entrepreneurs usually operate in the same line of business before establishing their enterprises.

In 2000 there were 310,000 MSEs (those with up to fifty employees), employing around 485,000 workers. The survey covered only non-primary sector enterprises (excluding agriculture and forestry, fishing, mining and quarrying), including home-based businesses, mobile businesses (such as taxis) and fixed establishments. Despite the difficult operational environment for SMEs and the challenges they face, there has been significant growth in their numbers, averaging 6 per cent annually between 1986 and 2000 – a period that also included the merger of the two parts of Yemen into one state. Assuming the same average growth rate, it is estimated that the number of MSMEs had reached 650,000 (employing more than one million people) by the end of 2012. They now represent the majority of businesses in Yemen. They are the most important sector of employment after agriculture and they

continue to create a significant number of jobs. SMEs still have great potential to contribute to economic and social development in Yemen.

SMES REPRESENT THE MAJORITY of businesses in Yemen. Over the years, they have been able to grow despite the unfavourable environment, including a stagnant economy with high inflation, a lack of skilled workers, an unstable supply of inputs and poor infrastructure. They have come to constitute the second-most-important employment sector in the country, with an estimated one million employees, and are the largest contributor of new jobs. They are a major contributor to income redistribution and social peace. With increasing concern about youth employment, SMEs could play an important role in creating new jobs for youth.

Over the years, Yemen has been unable to attract large foreign investment projects outside the oil and gas sector. For many reasons, including the unstable political situation, this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Development projects based on large investments will not succeed. The government should therefore pay more attention to the SME sector. In addition to providing short- and medium-term benefits, SMEs might also become the foundation for bigger projects in the future.

The government of Yemen should translate its strategies and policies into tangible programmes. In terms of policy, the government should support SMEs as one of its main economic development tools, providing them with incentives, and work on improving infrastructure services.

The government should prepare special legislation to define SMEs and their role in the economy, and establish a special SME agency. The agency should be in charge of carrying out research on the sector and its needs, as well as lobbying, developing a more enabling environment for SME growth, and creating projects and programmes to help the sector. This should include the creation of market linkages and the provision of support to certain industries with good prospects of success. It should also work to create the necessary arrangements to help SMEs at the company level by providing technical assistance and capacity building to upgrade their management, improve their response to the market, diversify their product offerings and upgrade their use of technology.

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PART FOUR

SOCIETY AND MIGRATION

CHAPTER TWELVE

ON THE EDGE: THE CHALLENGES OF YEMEN'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Adel Aulaqi

THE HEALTH OF A country's population has a material effect on national productivity and prosperity.[1] Numerous indicators, such as life expectancy at birth, infant and maternal mortality rates, average survival ages for men and women, and the amount a country spends on health annually per head of population are among the standard measures of national health. The number of doctors, nurses and other care workers reflect the country's economic condition, and thus its political standing. Governments neglect their citizens' health at the risk of economic poverty.[2] The type of healthcare system a country has is dictated by central political philosophies and economic realities. Developing countries such as Yemen collaborate with bilateral and multilateral donors, including agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), in setting targets for health improvement or disease eradication.[3] Yemen's healthcare services are largely the contingent outcome of the history and political thinking of its ruling elites.

In this chapter I seek to analyse the current state of health services and delivery in Yemen. In doing so, I have relied largely on published data, recent interviews with eleven Yemeni citizens,[4] and my personal observation and experience of the Yemeni healthcare system. I will argue that the government must change its policy and approach, and will offer suggestions for further reform to the service so that it can serve all Yemeni citizens most effectively.

EVOLUTION OF THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

The current healthcare system in Yemen evolved from what was inherited at unity in 1990. In the south, healthcare in Aden Colony until 1967 was based on the UK's National Health Service, offering free service at the point of care. A well-organized preventive care system was in operation. Following the creation of the Federation of the Emirates of the South in 1959, modern health services began to expand beyond Aden, and the process was greatly accelerated by the socialist policies of the PDRY.[5] Until 1990, despite harsh economic constraints, healthcare was seen in the PDRY as a citizen's right, and was offered free at the point of delivery, though actual performance suffered from the state's political and economic woes and an exodus

of valuable manpower. Private healthcare was banned. Sick citizens who needed specialist medical care abroad had their cases reviewed by specially convened medical boards whose recommendations were binding.

In Imamate Yemen medical care for the ordinary citizen was negligible or nonexistent.[6] In 1962, following the creation of the YAR, an Egyptian survey found modest urban hospitals in Sana'a, Ta'iz and Hodeida only; elsewhere there were few qualified doctors and the services were extremely elementary. Between 1962 and 1970, Egypt helped the new republic to set up a modern government-provided universal healthcare system based on socialist concepts, predominantly in the major cities.[7] The YAR opened the door to the private sector: in major urban centres private clinics, hospitals and diagnostic facilities became prime destinations for Yemenis seeking healthcare. The oil-rich Arab states built and equipped many hospitals, which were managed by Yemenis. Medical care was a predominantly urban, hospital-based and increasingly fee-paying curative service. In contrast to the strict socialist approach in the PDRY, public and private medical services sat comfortably alongside each other.

The amalgamation of the two health systems resulted in a mixture of state-funded curative and preventive healthcare, on the one hand, and a growing fee-paying, modern curative private sector. Through choice, or as a last resort, Yemenis continued to access the widely available, perhaps cheaper traditional medicine.[8] From the mid 2000s the government sought to establish a market economy led by the private sector, which impinged on the delivery of healthcare to the ordinary Yemeni citizen and affected mostly the poorest and those in rural areas. Political stirrings for change, starting around 2005 and culminating in uprisings in early 2011, further strained the country's economy, adversely affecting the already challenged government health service. In deprived areas, NGOs became an increasing feature of free healthcare delivery.

THE CURRENT STATE OF PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

Government delivers its healthcare package through both the public and private sectors, and assists in funding some patients who travel abroad for treatment. Fee-paying traditional medical care and free NGO services also contribute, to varying degrees. To deliver preventive health-related targets, Yemen collaborates with

international agencies such as the WHO, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as many donors.[9] Yemen's constitution guarantees healthcare for everyone.[10] Despite attempts to fulfil this pledge, the gap between aspiration and reality in the Yemeni Government Healthcare System (GHS) remains wide.[11] Yemen's vital national indicators (high infant mortality, a probability of dying under the age of five of 77 per 1,000 live births) highlight the need for improvement in the health of its citizens. Of all the factors that shape Yemen's healthcare services, central policy, funding and resource-management seem to be the most significant.

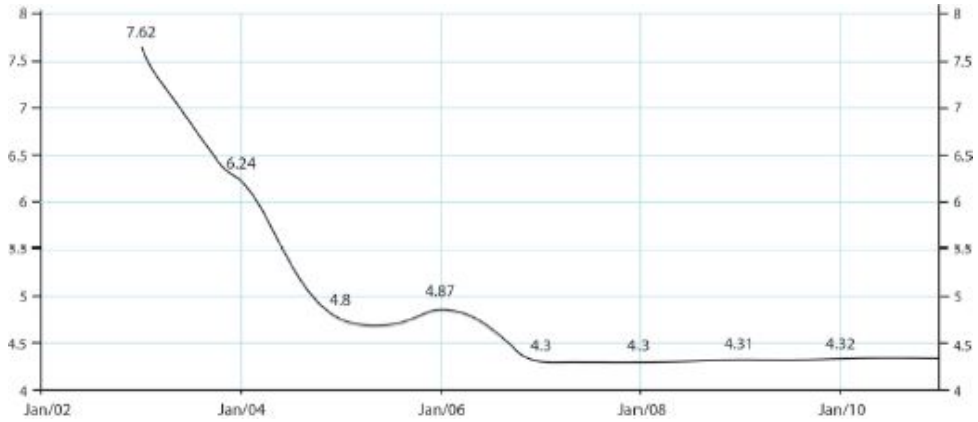
Yemen's struggling economy makes the funding of healthcare a major concern. In 2007 Yemen's total annual expenditure on health was US$1,140 million – 5.2 per cent of GDP, or US$60 per head. Government contributed 40.7 per cent, or US$463 million of this; its total annual per capita public expenditure on health was US$20.22.[12] Thus government expenditure on health in 2007 represented 4 per cent of the overall government budget. A substantial share (5 per cent) of this expenditure came from foreign aid. Overall 28 per cent of healthcare spending came from the public purse,[13] while private expenditure covered the remaining 67 per cent. By 2010, the figure for private, 'out-of-pocket' spending had risen to 71 per cent, while the Ministry of Health's share of the government budget had declined to 3.6 per cent.[14]

The World Bank gives out-of-pocket figures of over 98 per cent for each year between 2008 and 2012,[15] demonstrating a clear trend towards increased utilization of the private sector. As the vast majority of Yemenis have no health insurance cover, this represents a true burden on the Yemeni citizen. In keeping with externally imposed neoliberal policy, government's role in healthcare appears to be shrinking in favour of the private sector (Table 12.1).

Gericke has noted that 'resource-allocation practices are inequitable because about 30 per cent of total health expenditure gets spent on treatment abroad for a small number of patients, mainly from better-off families'.[16] Most Yemenis finance their own private care abroad. As the vast majority of Yemenis cannot afford private healthcare, the combination of a free market approach and the decline in public health funding could lead to the prevalence of chronic national ill health and further economic decline. The poor salary structure of government healthcare workers leads them, whether physician, nurse or technician, to seek further income in the

private sector. While such linkages positively affect interaction between the public and the private sectors, they may also potentially create divided loyalties.

Table 12.1: Yemen Health Expenditure – Fall in Real Funding 2002–2010 (% of Government Expenditure)



SOURCE: www.tradingeconomics.com (adapted).

Some of these problems were highlighted when Aden was chosen to host the 'Khaleeji 20' major football tournament in December 2010. A comprehensive review of Aden's Government Health System found serious deficiencies in all sectors. It estimated that the cost of upgrading the service to an acceptable level able to offer acute services for the duration of the games would be US $83 million.[17] Worryingly, the vital accident and emergency and ambulance services were found to be woefully in need of structural, administrative and staffing re-evaluation and modernization in order to become fit for purpose. Such limitations leave the unfortunate trauma and other emergency cases at high risk of death and morbidity. This seems to be broadly representative of a major part of the country as a whole.

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

The Government Healthcare System (GHS) hospitals, Primary Public Healthcare Service (PHCS) and associated ancillary services form the mainstay of national curative and preventive services. The system is organized on four levels:

- 2,929 primary healthcare units, offering GP-style services including maternity, childcare and immunization, as well as first-stop general medical and surgical care;
- 184 district hospitals;
- 53 general hospitals;
- two specialist referral hospitals.[18]

In practice, however, these distinctions are blurred, and there are both limitations in the services provided at particular levels and an overlapping of service delivery. Curative services are accessible to 68 per cent of Yemen's population, leaving 32 per cent without a service. For every 10,000 people there are six hospital beds, placing Yemen sixtieth out of 149 nations.[19] Access to these facilities is by direct admission from accident and emergency departments, and by referral from practitioners in the PHCS.

In principle, Yemen's public health sector can and should reach the entire population equitably, but its distribution is iniquitous.[20] Only 25 per cent of rural Yemen is covered by medical services, compared to 80 per cent of urban areas. Most of the GHS and the private sector concentrate on serving towns and cities,[21] leaving some sixteen million (70 per cent of the total population) without easy access to modern specialist medical care. When absolutely necessary, patients endure great hardship to reach vital care in the main urban centres in Sana'a, Aden, Hodeida, Ta'iz and Mukalla. In doing so, they have to spend money on transport, accommodation, and medical and associated fees, especially drugs, and absorb the inescapable loss of earnings.

In rural areas accessibility is poor, due to inadequate distribution of secondary and tertiary services. Throughout the country, GHS hospitals struggle chronically with poor staffing and a lack of clinical leadership.[22] A number of rural small and larger district general government hospitals are staffed by senior expatriate physicians and surgeons from countries such as China.[23] Others, like those in Ataq and Saeed,[24] can remain closed for months due to a lack of senior medical staff.[25]

Despite efforts to maintain a good GHS, recent WHO data suggest a deterioration in delivery – especially in rural areas, where a combination of poor drug supplies[26] and prohibitively expensive and

inadequate pharmacy services place Yemen 115th out of 163 countries with respect to accessibility of drugs, with only 50 per cent of the population able to afford them.

The inequities and inadequacies of the government service force 95 per cent of patients to resort to the private sector.[27] Patients who access government healthcare must also contribute small fees at the point of delivery of service, and have to purchase prescribed medicines. For the majority, spending on health represents an immense financial burden, especially for those who need long-term treatment for major diseases such as cancer and common chronic conditions like hypertension or diabetes. A number of charities help cover some of these costs, but never adequately.

While many of the problems of the healthcare system receive critical reporting in the media and are often officially acknowledged,[28] the daily misery and health risks often appear insurmountable. The risk of contracting schistosomiasis (bilharzia) and other worm infestations, malaria and dengue fever are real. Streets and beaches are littered with accumulated rubbish in flimsy plastic bags. People witness daily the inappropriate disposal of used medical needles, syringes and swabs in the streets near children's playgrounds. These pose risks of serious illnesses such as viral hepatitis[29] and other infections for rubbish collectors, children playing nearby, and anyone who rummages or accidently steps on them.

Every kind of rubbish lies in the streets, including discarded hypodermic needles and high-risk clinical waste material. The graffiti says 'Rubbish dumping is forbidden here'. © Adel Aulaqi, December 2012

In addition to chronically poor funding, the main factor that has contributed to the decline of the GHS is a lack of follow-through. Implementation of programmes – even of those that have been fully agreed and budgeted for – can remain incomplete. Well-researched and reasoned reports as far back as 2004 have offered credible solutions that have not been implemented.[30] According to its author, the 'Strategy for Reform' of 2000 was accepted for funding by donors and due to be implemented between 1998 and 2001.[31] Having achieved 30 per cent of its proposals, it has significantly improved the GHS. But its incomplete implementation resulted in much greater expansion of the private sector without the intended corollary of 'collaborating closely with and complementing the Government Health Service'. This strategy did not fully address the reshaping of central policy to fulfil the constitutional promises made to all Yemeni citizens. Should it be revisited, it will require updating to address these issues and meet the challenges of the new sociopolitical, economic and healthcare conditions.

The government cannot rely on the financially driven private sector to fulfil its constitutional obligation. Unless there is a robust political will to increase state funding and find a way of introducing a viable system of comprehensive medical insurance, the GHS will continue to deteriorate. Ambiguities in the GHS are demonstrated by poor adherence to strict management principles and structures.[32] Today, it would seem, patient welfare is not the first priority of the health service; instead patients are seen as a source of income.

THE PUBLIC CURATIVE SERVICE

The government curative sector is the place where Yemenis should be able to find high-quality care at different levels of specialization; it should deliver initial and continued education for healthcare workers and ancillary staff. It is the main port of call in major medical incidents, but faces similar challenges to those of the GHS in general. District and general hospitals seem to do well when initially commissioned; they then gradually fall victim to poor financing and maintenance, inadequate or under-used equipment, and lack of staff.[33] One such district hospital serves the population of some half a million people in the governorate of Mahweet with an annual budget of US$23,250. Larger general hospitals fare no better, forcing Yemenis to use the private sector.

In the early 1970s the first medical faculty and dedicated nursing and medical technology schools were established in Aden with Cuban assistance. Schools and faculties in most medical, nursing, pharmacy and dental care are now well-established in the former PDRY. Similar educational institutions were established in Sana'a, based on Western models. Yemen today should be well served by appropriate educational institutions producing sufficient qualified people in almost all modern medical fields. In 1994 the Yemeni Board of Medical Specialization was established. Hundreds of doctors graduate through the Board's three main programmes: a diploma programme with nine disciplines, a Masters degree programme and the Arab Board of Medical Specializations. Although short- and long-term fellowships are available, however, funding for higher studies in medical and associated disciplines remains very limited. Medical and health-related research is severely constrained by inadequate funding, guidance and essential supervision, there are thus not enough specialists to meet demand. Without support from other nations and international organizations, hospitals would remain severely under-staffed or close. Foreign specialist physicians and surgeons, nurses and laboratory technicians also continue to be contracted by an expanding private sector.

In 2011 there were between 6,469 and 7,629 doctors. The nationwide average of three doctors serving 10,000 persons places Yemen a credible twenty-seventh out of 148 countries.[34] However, in some remote parts of Yemen the ratio can be closer to one or two doctors per 40,000 persons.[35] A lack of detailed data makes such figures difficult to verify. Many newly qualified doctors and medical technical staff wait for a long time for what they consider geographically appropriate and acceptable government placement. While waiting for suitable posts, some female doctors turn to serving in private pharmacies, risking the loss of their clinical skills.

PUBLIC PRIMARY HEALTHCARE

In 2002 Yemen adopted the District Healthcare System (DHS) whereby primary healthcare is delivered at community-based health services through mobile clinics, health units, health centres and district hospitals. Strategically placed health units in urban areas, when well-managed and staffed by dedicated employees, have proved their worth.[36] In the absence of strong management, however, they can be undermined by absenteeism.

After a fall in child primary immunization between 1990 and 1997, there was a steady uptake until 2010, with levels reaching 87 per cent against the serious childhood diseases of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTP) and meningitis by *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), while immunization against measles reached its 1990 uptake level of 73 per cent.[37] In 2009, maternal mortality stood at 365 per 100,000 population, neonatal mortality at 32 per 1,000 live births, and infant mortality at 57 per 1,000 live births (the respective figures for the UK are 12, 3.2 and 4.6).[38] More recently, the trend in the estimated rate of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births has been commendable; it fell from 600 to 200 between 1990 and 2010.[39] The Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) aim to reduce this to 153 by 2015.

In the late 1990s, efforts were geared towards reducing poverty, advancing health education and achieving the MDGS. One example, based on the collaborative work between the World Bank, the WHO and the Ministry of Education is a very demanding programme to eradicate schistosomiasis (bilharzia), starting with schoolchildren.[40] Political conflict and the absence of an integrated school health programme had a limiting effect on delivery of this MDG.

Yemen's '20/20 Initiative' is intended to achieve all of the WHO- and UNDP-agreed targets. By 2013 it is estimated that only 30 per cent of the targets have been reached. Recent political upheavals make it most unlikely that the remaining MDG targets will be achieved by 2015.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Recent strife in Yemen has led to the increasing involvement of numerous national and international groups in healthcare, as well as humanitarian relief.[41] Such heightened dependence on NGOS is indicative of the inadequacy of government performance in vital aspects of the health and well-being of Yemenis. Many agencies send volunteer teams to rural and urban areas to deliver much-needed urgent medical or surgical care. But patients are not always fully informed of the level of expertise of volunteers, and are thus unable to assess whether the quality of service they offer is adequate. When volunteer visits are brief, clinical follow-up care is often not available, and there is no clear accountability for any failures of

procedures or treatments. Yemen and the NGOs would benefit from the publication of rigorous audits in this area.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Soon after unification in the early 1990s, faced with difficulties in improving the availability and quality of healthcare, the government looked for ways to cope with the burden of a free system by involving the private sector.[42] In 2002, ninety-two private hospitals were operating; a decade later, there were 167 private hospitals and 746 private health centres. Many of the owners and staff in the private sector are also employees of the public sector. Private care comes in the full range of institutions: minor and major hospitals or polyclinics, the ubiquitous individual doctor's clinics with linked laboratories and pharmacies, business-supported clinical investigation centres, and large and expensive multinational specialist hospitals covering most known specialisms. Travel abroad for healthcare accounts for a significant segment of the service, as does accessing of practitioners of traditional medicine.

The private sector is thriving, particularly in Sana'a, Aden, Ta'iz, Hodeida, Dhamar and the main urban centres in Hadhramaut. This sector owes its success to fully committed investment from owners and to collaboration with foreign investors in Yemen. In general it offers a good service for those who can afford it. But Yemenis staffing the private facilities are mostly employees of the GHS, which can create divided loyalties to the disadvantage of the GHS service. This is no surprise, as GHS salaries can be three to ten times lower than those offered by the private sector. In government service, a specialist consultant receives some US$400 per month, whereas in the private sector he or she would get ten times as much. Monthly salaries for GPs in the GHS have remained stagnant at US$300, while laboratory technicians receive a starting salary of US$75 per month, rising painfully slowly over the years to reach US$200.[43] In the private sector, GPs and technical staff can net salaries about five times as large. While government salaries remain fixed for considerable times, the private sector is flexible and offers healthcare workers opportunities of increased income. This can adversely affect those who cannot afford to pay, who constitute the vast majority of the population, especially in rural areas.

In urban areas, privately owned pharmacies and dental services are easily accessible. Pharmacies offer most medicines by

prescription and for purchase over the counter. Medicines are of widely variable quality, with corresponding variations in price.

The private sector has been criticized on the grounds that it is 'not regulated and does not share performance statistics with the Ministry of Health and Population'.[44] A 2012 study to help improve it found that standards were not uniform and could vary greatly. The private sector's medical and ancillary services also remain fairly unregulated, particularly with regard to fees.[45] For example, a breast biopsy for the daughter of a state-employed engineer cost one-third of his monthly salary without a follow-up consultation and expensive additional histological analysis. Families often support each other financially to pay for private care.

As far as can be ascertained, the private healthcare sector plays no active part in prevention, and its role in continued health and medical education is unclear.

HEALTH TOURISM

Yemen has a number of immensely capable and highly regarded medical professionals. Almost uniquely, the country exercises a very light touch in the control of travel abroad for treatment. A general lack of trust in the health service, and a greater faith in private health services in countries like Jordan, India and many European countries (visas permitting), are manifested in the increasing demand for access to healthcare abroad at great cost to the individual, their family and the Yemeni government.[46] Kangas notes that the Yemeni government in 1992 spent US$9,675,333 on the treatment of 2,233 patients abroad.[47] In 2006, al-Raeini suggested that the cost of overseas healthcare for Yemenis stood at US$500 million.[48] Yet treatment abroad is not an option for the vast majority of Yemenis, who are unable to afford it. Until government health policy and approaches to health tourism are re-evaluated, travel for treatment abroad, as the government has acknowledged, will continue to remain a drain on the Yemeni economy.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Finally, unlicensed but long-established traditional medicine – including midwifery, bone-setting, cupping, and the herbal treatment

of numerous ailments – remains ubiquitous, being much cheaper than the mainstream alternatives, as well as embedded in the local culture. This wide-ranging system is available throughout the country. With no available statistics on its nationwide use, analysing its full impact is impossible. Difficult as it may be, much benefit will accrue from studying this centuries-old service and, if necessary, regulating its use.

CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Despite undoubted improvements in Yemen's health system, Yemeni citizens lack a robust health service that is caring, modern, equitable and free at the point of delivery. There is also an absence of affordable private care for those who would choose to use it. Although Yemen's constitution admirably guarantees healthcare for everyone, implementation has proved to be elusive. Yemen's core health policy has increasingly been to depend on the private sector to deliver curative healthcare. Government strategy on the general question of health insurance remains unclear.

The political transition in Yemen is arduous, and will consume much time and hard work. The economy will need immense modification before it can generate income to support the development of essential institutions. The priority of health has been reaffirmed by political leaders, including President Hadi. A Chatham House report struck a note of optimism in 2012, suggesting that, with strong financial and political support from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, Yemeni elites can open the door to modernizing business practices.[49] It highlighted the imperative of paying much closer attention to the country's health services and institutions.

All interviewees for this study strongly stressed the need for the government to assume greater responsibility for a universal healthcare system, and to institute the structures that would impose better-defined management and clinical accountability. They highlighted the need to address the divided loyalties of health workers in the public and private sectors and the unaffordable prices of drugs, and to create pathways and procedures to redress injustices in the healthcare system. All sympathized with the need for a better salary structure, coupled with rigorous management, to help resolve the inequities of working in the government health sector.

I acknowledge the immense difficulties faced in managing an effective, large healthcare system designed to serve some twenty-five million people under Yemen's economic, political and socio-geographic constraints. To address the health needs of the vast majority, there is a need for unwavering political will to alter central government thinking. By creating and implementing a focused, transparent and unequivocal philosophy that places the citizen at the heart of the service, Yemen will show that it cares about its citizens equally. The necessary mechanisms for such a change must be established, empowered and appropriately funded. It is imperative that a culture of good management across the entire healthcare system emanates from the centre to reach all areas.

Yemen needs to decide upon the best method of funding such a system. The most effective would perhaps be an affordable, fair, transparent and accountable universal health tax. Alternatively, government will need to institute an insurance scheme accessible to the vast majority. Private medical insurance already exists in Yemen, but is not accessible to the average Yemeni. Another politically difficult solution is for the state to undertake to provide education and preventive care, while leaving citizens to provide for their own curative needs. At this stage of Yemen's development, it is vital for the state to take greater care of the health of its citizens within the limits of its capacity.

In order to focus and prioritize demand for healthcare in Yemen, the state needs to create and mandate an independent academic institute that, firstly, will produce skilled researchers and encourage and support high-quality research to improve human health; secondly, will advance and disseminate knowledge and technology to improve citizens' quality of life and the economic health of the country; and thirdly, promote and encourage debate and dialogue to inform the public about medical research and its true value in promoting national health and well-being.

Health professionals join the medical service because they care about healing people. Standards of care of patients in Yemen are uneven, and in need of strengthening. The state needs to create and develop robust institutions to safeguard standards of care, foster good medical practice and deal firmly with those unfit to practise. A strong, independent, wellregulated and clearly tasked disciplinary and licensing institution is a priority in Yemen. Health professionals need to take it upon themselves to organize their own robust professional institutions. Through such affiliations, medical professionals can win the trust of patients and promote medical and

allied sciences appropriately and ethically. Such associations should also maintain the honour and interests of health professionals.

Health professionals and government need to strengthen and further develop existing collaborative mechanisms to facilitate targeted research aimed at the continual improvement of healthcare delivery. The establishment of specialist advisory mechanisms or taskforces deserves serious consideration. These profound but essential reforms require that all political parties commit themselves to achieving them, and that they clearly enunciate their policies and programmes, as well as articulating the cost of healthcare to the public purse.

The private sector also needs attention. Healthcare workers need appropriate remuneration to eliminate potentially divided loyalties and the need to augment their income by working in the private sector. A better-regulated private sector, with good accountability and regulated fees, would streamline the service and enable it to play a desirable part in the healthcare system of a future Yemen.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SOVEREIGNTY OVER THEIR BODIES: RETHINKING THE DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN YEMEN

Christina Hellmich

Samira's Story

Samira was married to a distant relative nearly fifteen years her senior when she was fourteen years old. Although she did not feel ready, she did not object. Her older sister had been married just a few months earlier and Samira knew that there was nothing she could do to avoid the arrangements that had been made between the two families. However, during the first year of her marriage she not only suffered two first-trimester miscarriages, but also had to endure her husband's sexual proclivities, which she described as disgusting, demeaning and painful. Afraid of his temper, she felt unable to withdraw from physical contact with him. But her shyness and her tears only caused him to become even more upset and impatient with his young wife. Although he refrained from 'really' beating her, the angry words and curses hurt more than a hundred lashes. His persistent bad mood and his roughness were intimidating, but his repeated threats to divorce her for her disobedient behaviour and her failure to fulfil her marital obligations were even more terrifying. With this kind of shame attached to her, Samira knew that she would have nowhere to turn; her father would be deeply disappointed with her and would refuse to take a rebellious and disobedient daughter back into his home. Relations with her husband became more bearable when she became visibly pregnant, eventually carrying her third pregnancy to term. But the improvement in Samira's life did not last for long. The complications during the prolonged process of delivery were so severe that Samira intermittently gave up hope of ever seeing her child. She bled for ten days after the birth. For over two months, she could not walk or hold her baby. Now eighteen years old, she continues to suffer from intermittent abdominal pain as well as intense pain in her legs, attributed to deep-vein thrombosis caused by a loss of blood that led to insufficient blood-flow during her first childbirth. Samira continues to be too unwell to fulfil any of her marital obligations on a regular basis. She has also been unable to become pregnant again since the birth of her first child. She is afraid that, sooner or later, these issues could cause her husband to terminate the marriage. And while her marital situation is by no means the future she desires for her daughter, she does not see any alternative.[1]

WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN YEMEN: HARSH REALITIES

'Fertility High, Infant Mortality Common, Modern Contraceptives Little Known or Used' is the title of a two-page report on women's reproductive health in Yemen that was published in *International Family Planning Perspectives* in 1985.[2] Almost thirty years later, the same title remains an accurate description of the situation. In spite of significant improvements in healthcare indicators over the past decade, Yemen continues to compare unfavourably with its neighbours, ranking among the poorest in the Middle East and North Africa. The infant mortality rate of children under the age of one is now estimated at 53.5 per 1,000 births, and the crude birth rate at 32.6 per 1,000 population.[3] Equally alarming are the maternal mortality rate, with 200 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births;[4] the under-five mortality rate of 77 per 1,000 live births; [5] and the very high fertility rate of 5.2 children per woman.[6] At the same time, while the prevalence for modern contraceptive methods improved from 13.4 per cent to 19 per cent from 2003 to 2009,[7] Yemen again ranks among the lowest in the region. Notably, the leading causes of hospital morbidity (illness occurring after admission) in the total population, estimated at 19.6 per cent, are complications of pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium (the state of a woman during childbirth or immediately thereafter), highlighting the relative disadvantage of women in the context of medical care.

Yemen's healthcare system is in crisis. In preparing for the national health sector reform programme in 2000, the government acknowledged that, despite national and international efforts, the crisis 'has worsened dramatically over the past decade'.[8] Both the Ministry of Public Health (MOPHP) and international donors had 'long been aware of this situation', and initiated a number of reforms during the 1990s, such as enhanced 'cost-sharing and encouragement of the private health sector through economic incentive programmes'.[9] Yet none of these measures has produced the anticipated improvements: 'In the end, the MOPHP found it necessary to engage in a detailed analysis of the current healthcare situation in order to understand where the essential problems lie.'[10] The problems, discussed at greater length in the Health Reform Programme Report, were found mainly in 'long-term underfunding, poor management, and a health system model poorly suited to the country's needs.'[11] In response, the ongoing health sector reform

programme concentrates on improving management systems, including the decentralization of numerous organizational functions to the district level, cost-sharing with the users of health services, and strengthening the MOPHP's role in policy-making while reducing its responsibility for the direct provision of healthcare services.

A closer reading of the reform programme reveals that the current health needs of the Yemeni people are understood mainly in demographic terms, heavily emphasizing the need to reduce the country's fertility rate and embracing the principle that lower fertility rates are linked with economic prosperity.[12] Furthermore, the reforms assume that a decreased fertility rate will lead to the improvement of other healthcare indicators, such as female mortality rates (the idea being that women who give birth less often are healthier) and the under-five mortality rate (based on the understanding that having fewer children per family means that more care and attention is available to each child). On the basis of an assumption that the present need for family planning services is largely unmet, the reforms aim to lower the country's fertility rate through an improvement of both the availability and quality of reproductive health and family planning services – both in cooperation with, and with substantial financial support from, international donors.

From an analytical perspective, the national healthcare reform programme has linked the health of the Yemeni people (the social 'body') directly to the female reproductive body, removed from women's diverse social, economic and political realities.[13] It assumes an overall improvement in health outcomes – expressed and measured statistically in the form of national health(care) indicators – if women's bodies can be effectively controlled to produce fewer children. In proceeding in this manner, it excludes the experiences, perspectives and needs of Yemeni women from its analysis. In other words, women are the means rather than the end of the national health initiative, thereby rendering the case of Yemen yet another example of a reductionist view of women.[14]

In contrast to this, in 1994 the UN International Conference on Population and Development defined 'reproductive health' as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being with regard to all reproductive processes, and specifically determined that all people (both men and women) are entitled to a responsible, satisfying and safe sex life, as well as the ability to reproduce and the freedom to decide whether, when and how often to do so.[15] Thus defined, the issue of women's reproductive health does not exist in a biomedical

vacuum, and cannot usefully be addressed in isolation from social, political and cultural processes. Women's reproductive health and well-being help define the extent of women's autonomy and empowerment, affecting their participation in economic development and political processes and the construction of their identity and roles in the community, as well as influencing dynamics in the family – and vice versa. The nature of social relations within communities shapes and determines women's reproductive choices: marital relations, other familial relationships, and the realm of relationships within the workforce are each governed by a variety of ideologies and norms that may easily conflict with one another. In turn, this means that the very concept of women's autonomy has to be treated with a degree of scepticism; women's choices, from the number of children they have to the kind of contraception they use, are determined by political and medical factors as well as by the women's individual social and cultural contexts. Thus a thorough understanding of the social, cultural, religious and political context in a particular location is vital for the improvement of reproductive health outcomes.[16] In the words of Unnithan-Kumar, 'In order to provide healthcare services … we need to understand the social reality and, ultimately, the needs of those we seek to benefit.'[17]

RECONSIDERING THE DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

What, then, are the social conditions that determine women's reproductive health? What are the factors that shape the strategies and decisions that Yemeni women make about sexuality and reproduction? A closer look reveals a complex web of economic, political, social, religious and cultural factors including gender relations, family ideals, religious interpretations, traditional healthcare beliefs and practices, and power dynamics between modern, Western-trained healthcare providers and local recipients of healthcare.

AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF HEALTHCARE SERVICES

It is abundantly clear that access to good-quality healthcare facilities for most women in Yemen is either limited or nonexistent, and that improvements in this area are necessary. Several studies have shown

that improvements in the quality of healthcare services can lead to improved recognition of potential health complications, better use of services and, ultimately, better health outcomes. But relatively little is known about the link between health education and the recognition of reproductive morbidity.[18] The experiences of Samira described at the beginning of this chapter indicate very clearly that not merely the absence of healthcare services, but a myriad of other factors – from her young age and limited education to social pressure and a perceived absence of viable economic alternatives to marriage and childbearing – accounted for her reproductive health outcomes. Moreover, Yemeni women have little autonomy in their sexual relationship with their husbands. They have no legal protection, since the law demands that wives be sexually available whenever a husband wants. Situations such as Samira's are further complicated by the abuse or coercion they suffer. Thus the popular assumption that the provision of services such as contraception makes women's lives easier needs to be treated with caution. As one Yemeni woman explained, 'The threat of another pregnancy is my best hope of fending off my husband's sexual advances.'[19]

TRADITIONAL HEALTHCARE BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Medical anthropologists have repeatedly pointed out the need for cultural sensitivity with regard to the provision of medical services, emphasizing the discrepancies between traditional beliefs about the causes of illness and medical facts, as well as the often negative health consequences that these entail. At the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, illnesses are frequently attributed to factors outside the scope of biomedicine: the sun, a djinn, a bad scare or the evil eye, to name but a few.[20] As in the rest of the region, traditional Yemeni health ideology is an amalgam of pre-Islamic folk beliefs, prophetic medicine (*tibb al-nabawi*) and classical Arabian medicine (*tibb al-arabi*) derived from the ancient Hellenistic tradition.[21] While such concepts might not explain in scientific terms the pathology behind the health challenges facing Yemen, they continue to survive in the culture because they provide reassurance and help people cope with misfortune. For example, in a society in which 11.9 per cent of all newborn children will die before reaching the age of five, an explanation of disease that places blame on 'the other' – such as the evil eye, a bad scare or the sun – offers a coping strategy that microbiology and pathophysiology do not. It is psychologically

easier to come to terms with a miscarriage that can be attributed to an outside cause such as *fija*‘ (‘fright’) than to find the reasons in one’s own behaviour.

Furthermore, beliefs in traditional causes of illness such as the aforementioned *fija*‘ or *shams* (‘sun’) are linked to traditional concepts of how the human body works, which in turn explain the use of particular remedies to re-establish the perceived balance of flows within the body. From a biomedical perspective, however, these cures are often harmful. Similarly, local beliefs pertaining to the female body, such as the notion that the area between the vagina and the head is hollow, have a direct impact on women’s willingness to consider modern forms of contraception, such as the IUD.[22] Understanding notions of ethno-physiology in turn leads to an appreciation of why people might associate the idea of a medical device inserted into the vagina with headaches: it ‘travels’ up to the head and causes discomfort.[23] This social and cultural context goes some way towards explaining how coordinated healthcare programmes intended to educate patients by displacing local explanations of illness with strictly biomedical interpretations can face problems when it comes to the effective delivery of modern healthcare services, especially those aimed at women.[24] In the light of these findings, a general consensus has emerged among medical practitioners, public health advocates and others that women need access to information about reproduction to make informed decisions about their bodies. Yet practical experience over time also reveals that information alone does not suffice, but that women need to be in a position that enables them both to make decisions and to carry their decisions through to realization. Is dealing with the low status of Yemeni women the key to improving reproductive health outcomes?

WOMEN’S STATUS

The core of the rationale that links the ‘lowly status’ of women to undesirable reproductive health outcomes is perceived to operate in two mutually reinforcing ways. Firstly, lower status means restricted access to education and employment, widely regarded as the two main determinants of improved health and fertility. Secondly, the practical reality of a woman’s legal and economic dependence puts her in a precarious position in relation to her husband and his family, making the threat of divorce and polygamy more ominous, and hence limiting her choices with regard to childbearing.[25] But

examples from different contexts have undermined this otherwise compelling logic. Although education and employment are the standard components of any ranking of women's status, there is no direct correlation between good health and low fertility, on the one hand, and education and employment on the other. As Sathar explains, female education can affect fertility in several ways, and these may not be directly indicative of women's status. For example, education may not lead to a change in status if the girls who attend school come from family backgrounds where gender-based discrimination is less prevalent.[26] Moreover, education in itself does not necessarily grant greater autonomy in the sense of providing more freedom when it comes to making decisions about sexuality and fertility: in a conservative social setting such as Yemen, it is not unusual for women to end up with university degrees only to find that their options to choose a career outside the realm of marriage and motherhood remain limited. Another example is that of situations in which women work because of dire economic need. Here, employment is associated with lower status, and with even worse health outcomes for both women and their children.[27] In other words, while education, in the sense of being well-informed, is a requirement for women to make 'healthy' decisions, information by itself does not necessarily enable them to make the decisions they desire or follow them through to realization. In order to benefit from education, women need to be provided with the means to do so, not only in the economic sense, but also in terms of their position, authority and autonomy at home, and their freedom to make use of healthcare services as and when they want to.

THE EFFECT OF ISLAM

The influence of Islam as a strong political and cultural force is a common explanation for the social conditions in which women lack empowerment through formal political rights, which in turn leads to poor women's health and specifically to higher fertility. It would be simplistic to write off this rationale as Orientalist and outdated, as there are a fair number of Yemeni women who believe, for example, that contraception is un-Islamic and that a woman's natural place is the home.[28] But the essence of the argument that regards Islam as the major determinant of fertility and reproductive health outcomes does lie in the perception of Islam as a monolithic entity that provides clear guidance to believers. In reality, however, the situation is considerably more complex. While Muslims agree on the

assertion ‘There is no God but God and Mohammed is His Prophet’ as an article of faith that is not susceptible to different interpretations, the meaning of many other principles and teachings, and whether they are unquestionable and immutable, is another matter. An obvious and indeed frequently encountered response is the invocation to ‘look at the Qur‘an’, but, like all fundamental documents, its message is capable of being interpreted differently by each reader, or of having differing interpretations championed by different schools of thought. Does it support polygamy or monogamy, equality of women or superiority of men, birth control, abortion? The scope for a diversity of interpretations of the true message of Islam on any given topic is considerable.[29] Far from ever being resolved, the controversy over who speaks authoritatively for Islam has only intensified with the processes of modernization and the advent of mass education. With authoritative sources once confined to the educated few now readily available to the literate masses, the meaning of sacred scripture no longer needs to be interpreted by the *‘ulama* (Islamic scholars), but instead is in the eyes of the individual beholder.[30] Thus, in practical terms, although not in theology, we are left with the inevitable conclusion that there are as many Islams as there are Muslims.

Within this debate over the true meaning of Islam, few issues have attracted more interest – and yet proved so susceptible to stereotyping – as the question of women’s status. For many non-Muslims, the subject is characterized – often romanticized – by visions of deserts and harems, *chadors* and *hijabs*, segregation, subordination, and a general lack of freedom in terms of both physical movement and decision-making. To this negative perception, Muslims readily respond – and with remarkable vigour – by saying that Islam has served to liberate women and significantly improve their situation, thereby presenting an often idealized view that fails to take account of the problems and challenges encountered in the diversity of Muslim experience. It is ironic that both non-Muslim observers and Muslims themselves seem to fall into the same trap in cross-cultural affairs: that of using one’s ideal to measure someone else’s reality.

The subject of gender relations in Islam is highly charged not only at the popular level, but among scholars as well. If some blame Islam for the accumulated ills of Muslim women, others view it as a beacon of light and reform.[31] The arguments concerning the differences and (in)equality between male and female believers pertain to several areas, such as the preeminent position of men in

Islamic religion as expressed, for example, in the inequality of rights of inheritance between sons and daughters (sons receive twice the amount that daughters do), the inequality of men and women before the courts, or a wife's obligation to provide her husband with sexual access at all times. The same texts, however, emphasize the equality of all believers before God, and that every Muslim is judged according to his or her merit. Hence there is a range of views, not to mention a degree of ambiguity, regarding the idea of the 'equality' of men and women before God and that of 'complementarity' between the sexes in worldly affairs.[32] With respect to the status of women, the religious texts allow, above all, a great deal of flexibility of interpretation, and have been used to argue both in favour of gender equality before the law – leading to the introduction of gender-egalitarian personal status codes in Tunisia and Morocco – and against it. The real issue lies in the interpretation of the key sources: the same texts that have been used to prevent the introduction of modern contraceptives in some Muslim states have laid the groundwork for supporting such changes in others. What has received less attention is the fact that some states, such as Iran, have succeeded in their population and reproductive health policies by effectively mobilizing Islamic debates in support of their agendas.[33]

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FERTILITY AND REPRODUCTION

As we have seen, the factors that determine women's reproductive and sexual lives are complex and interrelated, and include the availability of healthcare services and the impact of religious conservatism, as well as patriarchal gender and familial relations, to name only a few. Women's reproductive health outcomes and fertility rates are the result of individuals' strategies and decisions that both reflect and are affected by the structure of power within a specific society. It is the government that establishes the availability of healthcare services and education, defines the role played by Islam, and determines whether tensions concerning the status of women are written into law and reflected in particular reproductive health outcomes. Only by understanding these dynamics can the health and demographic outcomes be understood and transformed.

The Republic of Yemen is a conservative, patriarchal society that has moved a long way from the liberal past of the former PDRY. Although women are allowed to drive and to vote, outwardly signalling a degree of progressiveness by comparison with Saudi

Arabia, political decisions, including those that affect women, are made by men. In the bargaining process that has dominated the political sphere since 1994, women's rights have become the first casualty of politics in a fragile state. A closer look at the legal reform process demonstrates an increasingly patriarchal attitude, couched in terms of 'the true meaning of Islam'. This can be seen in the changing formulations of women's rights – for example, in the case of recent amendments to the personal status law, which serve only to reinforce a heavily patriarchal system of gender roles and women's subordinate position in relation to men. This has further eroded protection for women and left them increasingly at the mercy of fathers, husbands and male legal guardians. A brief look at some of the reforms regulating marriage and divorce illustrates this point.[34]

Within a year of their first presentation, the amendments to Law 27/1998 were enacted.[35] The amendments effectively abolished the unenforceable restrictions on polygamy of the 1992 law, and annulled the right to compensation after arbitrary repudiation (*talaq mu'allaq*). The limits on recovering maintenance arrears, which worked to the disadvantage of women, were not revoked, even though the 1996 draft had condemned the provision, characterizing it as an innovation for which there was no justification.[36] In April 1999, parliament passed yet another amendment, abolishing the minimum age for marriage[37] in Law 24/1999. The new Article 15 validated the marriage of a minor girl, but stipulated that consummation should not take place until the girl attained puberty. Unlike the 1978 YAR law, the 1999 law did not enact any provisions regulating the legal consequences of sexual intercourse with a married girl below the age of puberty. It further reinforced the husband's right to the obedience of his wife with regard to everything that relates to the family. Article 15 specifically stated the wife's obligation to avail her husband of sexual access at all times (rendering legally impossible the claim of sexual abuse within marriage), to obey her husband in all matters that are not sinful, and to perform tasks in the marital home. It also forbade her to leave the house without her husband's permission, except where there was a legal excuse or for socially accepted reasons that do not violate honour or the wife's duties towards her husband.[38]

In the light of stipulations such as those of the prevailing Personal Status Code, it remains doubtful, at best, whether the right of Yemeni women to have a 'satisfying, responsible and safe sex life' is even theoretically protected, let alone facilitated in law. With no

enforceable minimum age for marriage, particularly given that 'early marriages' with significant age gaps continue to be a commonly observed social phenomenon,[39] it needs to be questioned whether sexual relations with a much older partner are appropriate and responsible, let alone 'satisfying' for young women or pre-adolescent girls. Samira's story serves as an important reminder that this is not likely to be the case. Her description of the sexual aspects of her marital life as 'disgusting, demeaning and painful' makes it clear that her situation cannot be described as a state of 'complete physical, mental and social well-being with regard to all reproductive processes'.

While there is admittedly some room for diverging opinions as far as mental and social well-being are concerned, there is no doubt, from a physiological perspective, that while women who have just started menstruating are biologically able to conceive, in the majority of cases their bodies are not yet sufficiently developed to accommodate a pregnancy. It is this discrepancy, often aggravated by the prevalence of malnutrition, that increases the risk of complications during pregnancy and delivery, and accounts for the disproportionate rates of maternal and child mortality and morbidity observed in adolescent mothers.[40] Mothers under the age of fifteen are five times more likely to die during labour than women in their twenties, to say nothing of the equally well-documented low birth weight and poor survival rates of babies born to these young mothers.

Furthermore, an increase in the minimum age for marriage is arguably also one of the most straightforward interventions by which birth rates in developing countries can be lowered with immediate effect. Women who marry later simply start childbearing later. They are also less likely to suffer from complications during pregnancy and delivery, and will be more capable, both physically and mentally, of accommodating sexual relations. However, none of these arguments seems to have swayed the political debate in favour of introducing a higher and enforceable minimum age for marriage in the Republic of Yemen.

In the absence of an enforceable minimum age for marriage, there is no fundamental legal basis for 'a responsible and safe sex life' for women in Yemen. At present, the sexual well-being of Yemeni women rests with the conscience of whoever is the dominant male in their lives. The only power Yemeni women have under the present system is that of negotiation – of appealing to the male authority figure not to take up what is his by right of law. Once a Yemeni

woman marries, her ability to have a reasonable, satisfying and safe sex life is confined to, and predicated on, her relationship with her husband. Article 40 of the Personal Status Code specifies the wife's 'obligation to grant the husband sexual access at all times'. At best, this deprives women of the right to the sexual life they want, and, at worst, it renders impossible the claim of rape within marriage. But the stipulation that entitles a husband to unhindered sexual access also affects the level of control a Yemeni wife has over pregnancy and childbearing. Her lack of freedom to decide whether, when and how often to become pregnant is further compounded by limited access to safe and affordable methods of fertility regulation and a limited ability to 'make use of appropriate healthcare services' as is the case in Yemen.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for women to be equal citizens of a state without gender-egalitarian rights that begin in the realm of the family. Women cannot maintain a meaningful level of autonomy with regard to their sexual and reproductive lives unless the legal framework that regulates marital and family affairs gives a wife the right to have the sexual and reproductive life that she desires for herself, rather than the one her husband imposes upon her. At present, there are simply no statutory provisions that would enable women in Yemen to make use of their reproductive rights. And a concentration on purely reproductive function, rather than an effort to understand and engage with the more intangible factors affecting women's reproductive experiences, will mean that attempts to improve women's reproductive health outcomes are destined to be ineffective, and will do very little to mitigate the shocking humanitarian costs of a system based on outdated and reductionist views of women.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS to improve women's reproductive health outcomes in the Republic of Yemen have traditionally focused on expanding the availability of healthcare services. This chapter has argued that meaningful improvements require a move beyond this limited focus on women's bodies. In particular, the question of women's personal and legal status within the family cannot be separated from the discussion of women's reproductive health, because only when both of these factors are working together in women's favour can they attain the state of health, well-being and freedom of choice described as basic rights

by the UN International Conference on Population and Development. It is a woman's status within the family that defines her ability to avail herself of her reproductive health rights.

If there are to be significant and sustainable changes to women's reproductive health in Yemen, there will need to be a shift from the onesidedness of the present approach that concentrates largely on improving the availability of medical services, so that social and cultural factors influencing Yemeni women are taken into account. Effective policy-making will need to encompass a much deeper understanding of the complex choices, pressures and restrictions they face. Fundamental to all of this is a much clearer commitment to recognizing, respecting and protecting a woman's right to choose what happens to her own body.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FROM MIGRATION HUB TO ASYLUM CRISIS: THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION IN YEMEN

Hélène Thiollet

HISTORICALLY, YEMEN HAS BEEN a country of emigration, immigration and transit. The fate of Yemeni society has been tied to emigration, as well as to the presence and activities of a Yemeni diaspora scattered throughout the world, in the Gulf countries mainly since the 1950s, in Asia and Africa, and also in the United States and Europe. Yemen's migration history seems to have reached a stalemate in the past two decades as, gradually since the 1990s, the borders of oil-producing countries have become largely closed to Yemenis.

Since the early 1990s the country has also had to deal with a substantial influx of refugees from the Horn of Africa, who have continued to seek asylum in a country plagued by its own political crisis. In addition, from 2000 onwards, there has been significant internal displacement as the country unravels – as a result of the Sa'ada war in the north since 2004, and the southern insurrection since 2007. Most recently, the national uprising of 2011 has also had side effects involving additional displacement. Forced and economic migration are connected in Yemen, as the country plays a strategic role in the management of migratory and trafficking flows between the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine the historical structure of mobility to and from Yemen, and assess the importance of migration as a core element of the country's domestic and international profile. In the second part, I examine refugee movements from the endemic humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa; for these refugees, Yemen represents a staging-post and, paradoxically, a 'safe haven'. Finally, I consider the local and regional impact of a new trend of mobility – internal displacement – as a consequence of the various conflicts that have been taking place in the country in the last decade.

YEMEN AS A MIGRATION HUB: MIGRANTS, OIL AND REGIONAL POLITICS

Long-term immigration and emigration patterns highlight the extent to which Yemen has been embedded in international commercial and cultural exchange networks as far back as the medieval period. Historically a commercial crossroads, Yemen sits at a junction between three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa – and two

maritime expanses – the Indian Ocean and the Red (and then Mediterranean) Sea. It is a zone of exchange and mobility, channelling economic, financial and human flows. Emigration from Yemen therefore has a long history, and has traditionally followed a number of different routes. The main overland route consists of the caravan trails to the Gulf and the Near East. By sea there have been many destinations: the maritime routes of the Red Sea to Egypt and onward to the Berber parts of the Maghreb, to Africa (East Africa and the Horn), to the Indian subcontinent and South-East Asia, to Europe and North America, and, from the middle of the twentieth century, to the oil-exporting states of the Arabian Peninsula.

Yemeni migration to Asia has been studied extensively.[1] It has mainly been in the direction of Muslim societies such as Malaysia, the western part of India, and Indonesia, where – real or imagined – descendants of the Prophet Mohammed from the region of Hadhramaut form trading and religious elites to this day.[2] In Yemen itself, the Banyan merchants from India, who first settled in the sixteenth century, have also long played a central role in retail and commerce throughout the country. The city of Aden in particular was a major port of entry for exchanges with the Horn of Africa.[3] In the seventeenth century, Yemen started to lose its status as an essential port of call on the trading sea route between East and West, and commercial activity began to subside. However, in some parts of the country social structures, cultural practices and economic development have been profoundly influenced by these various migratory movements. Before British colonization in 1839, Yemenis from Hadhramaut and Yafi‘ led the armies of the Nizam of Hyderabad in India, accumulating small fortunes that benefited their regions of origin. Hadhramaut remained outside the economic orbit of the British, based in Aden, thanks to the wealth of its emigrants and the important role they played as economic, religious and political middlemen; they remained strongly linked to Asia after the country’s formal independence.[4] Between 1914 and 1945, around 30 per cent of Hadhramaut’s population lived in India, Singapore, Indonesia or East Africa, and the island of Java was home to 70,000 Yemeni residents.

The impact and consequences of emigration could – and still can – be seen in the Asian-influenced architecture of Tarim. Likewise, emigrants have bought into the property market in Sana‘a.[5] Social credit earned by emigrants who have ‘made good’ abroad has sometimes disturbed traditional hierarchies based on tribal ties.[6] New forms of social stratification created by emigration and

urbanization are now superimposed on territorial and tribal hierarchies. In some contexts, emigration could also contribute to improving the status or living conditions of women (through additional responsibility but also a heavier workload in rural areas, due to the absence of men) and of young people (who were partially emancipated through migration from patriarchal authority), as well as men who were outcasts in the tribal system.[7] In general, however, emigration, being an almost exclusively male phenomenon, has tended to have a rather negative effect on gender balances: the wives of expatriate workers do indeed benefit from the increase in household income, but only marginally, as they often remain under the tutelage of a male relative.[8] With emigration, new transnational networks are gradually extending into local social structures, including the tribal system.

Although far less studied, migration between Yemen and the Horn of Africa has also contributed significantly to defining relations between the Arabian Peninsula and the African continent, both through the slave trade and through more conventional forms of commercial exchange. Traces of the strong political, economic, cultural and migratory bonds uniting the two shores of the Red Sea can be found embodied in mythical figures belonging both to Arab tradition (the popular Queen Bilqis) and Biblical lore (the Queen of Sheba). More prosaic realities also bear witness to the importance and longevity of ties between the Horn of Africa and Yemen, such as the occupation of Yemen by Abyssinians between 526 and 575, and the reign between 1060 and 1158 of the Banu Najah (descendants of Abyssinian slaves recruited to serve and protect the Ziyadid dynasty).[9] Political relations were further reinforced by the close economic, cultural and social links resulting from Yemeni emigration to Abyssinian lands. Settling in the cities but also on the coastal plains of Abyssinia, Yemenis integrated easily into a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society, where they worked mainly as tradesmen, entrepreneurs and ship-owners. Until 1974 and their expropriation by the regime of Haile Mariam Mengistu in Ethiopia, Yemeni merchants held the keys to commerce in the Horn of Africa. These transnational ties survive to this day in the official commercial networks, in joint African–Yemeni fishing companies, and in organized smuggling between the two shores. It is also visible in Yemen through the presence of a population of mixed heritage (the *muwalladeen*) – offspring of marriages between Yemeni emigrants and Ethiopian, Eritrean, Djiboutian and, more rarely, Somali women.[10] Cross-migration experiences ended up forging a specific

identity for Yemeni expatriates. The ethnography of mobility and multicultural families is particularly visible in the border regions of Yemen, such as the Tihama, a coastal area along the Red Sea touching the Saudi border to the north, where generations of expatriates live together in a rural society that is simultaneously mixed and intensely segregated.

CONTEMPORARY MIGRATIONS: OIL AND POLITICS

The second half of the twentieth century saw the advent of a type of shortrange mass mobility that could be referred to as 'oil emigration', when Yemen was one of the labour reservoirs for its oil-producing neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia. These migrations have been extensively studied in analyses that have largely emphasized the economic and demographic determinants of importing labour.[11] The prevailing rate of poverty and relatively high population density in Yemen contrasted with the relative 'emptiness' of the rest of the peninsula,[12] and a dearth of oil resources has meant that Yemen has remained an economic exception in the region. Left out of the oil-centred 'rich man's club' that is the GCC, Yemen benefited indirectly from the oil boom through its integration into the regional labour market between the 1960s and 1980s.[13] Studies of Yemeni migration to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf underlined the strong complementarities between the two countries, and between the regional sub-areas.[14] In 1975, of the 1.23 million Northern Yemenis who had emigrated, 80 per cent were in Saudi Arabia. In 1986, they numbered 1.17 million and in 1990 1.1 million. As for South Yemen, the 1988 census counted 233,900 labourers abroad, 76 per cent of whom were in Saudi Arabia. In 1991, around 10 per cent of the population of a unified Yemen lived outside the country, representing a full 54.5 per cent of its active population.[15]

A much smaller immigration trend combined with the massive oil emigration:[16] for the most part, immigrants came to 'replace' the local qualified and semi-qualified workers who had resettled in the Gulf countries, partly to serve Yemen's skilled-labour needs. Aden's population rose from 51,500 inhabitants in 1930 to 250,000 in 1967, including North Yemenis, South Asians, Somalis and Europeans. In the 1980s, in the heyday of programmes of Arab cooperation and economic development, nearly 80,000 Egyptians and Sudanese were recruited as teachers in North Yemen. Charitable or educational

organizations funded by Gulf or Saudi money recruited these individuals to work in primary and secondary schools, as well as in the universities of Sana‘a and Aden. In 2011, Yemen officially hosted 500,000 foreign residents, mainly hailing from Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, Iraq, the Palestinian Territories and Syria.

In the 1980s Yemeni emigration slowed down, both in absolute and relative terms, because of the rising influx of Asian immigrants into the Gulf, which was a result of the more restrictive policies applied by the oil-producing countries towards Yemenis. This change in policy was partly caused by fear of the possible influence a massive and well-integrated Arab migrant population might have on the populations and societies of the host countries. Before 1991, Yemenis were the largest national group among foreign immigrants in Saudi Arabia, making up 27 per cent of residents.[17] A small, gradual fall in numbers during the 1980s was amplified by the ‘migratory shock’ of 1990–91. The Yemeni government having indirectly sided with Saddam Hussain during the invasion of Kuwait by refusing to vote in favour of Operation Desert Storm, King Fahd and the other Gulf monarchs retaliated by taking measures against their Yemeni populations, which led to the flight or expulsion of close to one million Yemenis from the GCC states.

This episode revealed how deeply dependent the country was on emigration, as massive repatriation provoked an unprecedented economic and social crisis. The Central Bureau of Statistics in Sana‘a counted 761,979 returning migrants for the year 1991 (Table: 14.1). This homecoming process continued throughout the next three years, swelled further by Yemenis fleeing Somalia after the fall of Siad Barre in 1991. A study by the Ministry for Expatriates makes clear that the migratory shock had catastrophic economic and social consequences for a newly unified Yemen.[18] The unemployment level rose to 770,000,[19] and the loss in remittances further reduced the resources of households dependent on transfers from migrant workers. From this point on, re-establishing migratory links with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states became a foreign policy priority, alongside support for Yemeni labour abroad. Many of the labourers who had left Saudi Arabia and the Gulf in 1990–91 returned there in the second half of the 1990s, but the aggregate falloff in Yemeni emigration and the deterioration of its economic situation had by then acquired a structural character.

Table 14.1: Yemeni Repatriation and Re-emigration 1990–1999

Country of origin	Homecoming migrants	New emigrants (estimates)		
	1990–1991	1997	1998	1999
Saudi Arabia	671,571	700,000	550,000	750,000
Kuwait	46,574	4,000	5,000	2,000
United Arab Emirates	1,574	50,000	65,000	35,000
Qatar	1,763	7,000	22,000	15,000
Bahrain	551	5,000	12,000	8,000
Somalia	40,000	–	–	–
Total	761,979	766,000	654,000	810,000

SOURCE: Central Bureau of Statistics (Sana'a), and estimates from P. Fargues, *Générations arabes: l'alchimie du nombre* (Paris: Fayard, 2000).

THE ROLE OF REMITTANCES

Despite having contained two profoundly different economic systems up until 1990 – a strongly centralized market economy prevailing in the North and socialism in the South – the country's political economy has been shaped, at both the national and local levels, by the same factors: enduring migratory ties and a dependence on remittances. The political management of these flows and their effects remains controversial,[20] and successive Yemeni states (North, South and united) have remained ambiguous towards their expatriates, seeking to control their diasporas both politically and economically. From its creation in 1967, the PDRY relied on migrant remittances to fund its economic development and balance its trade deficit. The PDRY had about 300,000 citizens working abroad in the 1970s, and the socialist republic made active use of its diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia to promote labour flows towards this powerful neighbour.[21] The government's use of fiscal incentives helped increase the level of remittances received from Saudi Arabia from US$33 million per annum in 1973 to US$268 million in 1978. In addition to Hadhramaut, the regions of Dhala', Yafi' and Aden saw waves of labour migration towards Saudi Arabia – but also, to a lesser extent and much earlier, towards Great Britain and the United States.[22] Since unification, Yemen has been relying heavily on remittances and transfers from its diaspora,[23] as well as on international aid. Most of these transfers remain informal in nature: they are not processed through the banking system, and

largely avoid taxation by the Yemeni state. The few available statistics confirm the country's dependence on migration: migrant remittances represent a disproportionately large share of Gross National Income, even if recent data show that the ratio is declining.[24]

As elsewhere, there is considerable debate over whether remittances have a positive or negative impact on the economy. Capital inflows during the 1970s oil boom may have weakened Yemen's economy,[25] destabilizing the local production base by increasing imports of foodstuffs and manufactured goods, and hindering local development by inhibiting investment in productive sectors. Evidence shows, however, that the emigrants' purchasing power also fed inflation in the property market, principally in urban areas, but that it also increased the price of labour. Emigration also absorbed large numbers of unemployed youth from the 1980s onwards.

Table 14.2: Remittances to Yemen 2000–2010

	Total remittances (US$)	GNI (US$)	Population	Remittances as % of GNI	Total remittances per inhabitant
2000	1.4 billion	9 billion	17.5 million	15.7%	82
2007	1.3 billion	18 billion	22 million	6.7%	70
2010	1.5 billion	24 billion	22.6 million	6.25%	66

SOURCE: Central Bureau of Statistics (Sana'a), and estimates from Fargues, *Générations arabes*.

Yemen's position has also been affected by the 2008 global economic crisis. However, despite a fall in 2009,[26] remittances remain equal to foreign direct investment, and are five times more important than official development assistance. With good reason, migrant remittances are considered less volatile than foreign investment: migrants are less likely to stop sending funds to their families. Bled dry by internal conflicts and affected by deadly floods and droughts, Yemen relies more than ever on income from migration. Since 2011, the revolutionary upheaval has reinforced the centrality of remittances for household survival.

As a result of the growing threat from transnational movements of armed groups and terrorists since the late 1990s, and of the crises and conflicts in Yemen since 2004, migration has been constrained by the security agendas of Yemen's strategic partners – particularly Saudi Arabia and the United States. The Yemeni authorities have also used security issues as bargaining chips in negotiations with regional and Western partners alike, alternating between cooperation and turning a blind eye on cross-border trafficking of all kinds – including informal migration, which they have sometimes facilitated.

In the past, diplomatic incidents served to illustrate the importance of migration in bilateral relations: for example, in 1973 the PDRY temporarily forbade emigration to Saudi Arabia for certain categories of workers.[27] Like most states in the Middle East during the second half of the twentieth century, both North and South Yemen used migration as a diplomatic tool,[28] combining labour-export and asylum policies as major instruments in diplomatic negotiations with their powerful neighbours. Yemen lost its privileged access to the Saudi labour market in 1990. Control of the flows of goods and people across its borders became an essential goal of Yemen's relations with its neighbours and strategic partners. In practice, however, restrictions on emigration and border crossings, combined with the reduced availability of work visas for Yemenis, simply resulted in much of the migration to the Gulf countries becoming clandestine.

Moreover, with the rise of transnational jihadism in Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula, all forms of mobility have come to be viewed increasingly suspiciously, and associated with criminal activity. In this context, the flows crossing between the Horn and the Gulf became a major issue of concern for the neighbouring states – and, from 2001 onwards, for Yemen's partners in the 'war on terror'. Thus, from 2000 onwards, the strategic importance of mobility in its various forms (refugees; economic migrants, whether legal or clandestine; smugglers and political activists) was reflected in policies designed to securitize the area of transit that is the Red Sea.[29]

Negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Yemen about their borders officially recommenced in July 1992 on the basis of the Taif treaty (1934), but were interrupted by the civil war in 1994. They led to the signing in February 1995 of a Memorandum of Understanding that agreed on the creation of a common border and a demilitarized zone around it (Article 4). The two countries tried to organize joint

management of seasonal pastoral migrations in the region, and increased cooperation on the cross-border issues of trafficking in people, weapons and drugs, as well as irregular migration. The northern and southern border zones of Saudi Arabia are rife with drugs and weapons trafficking. Its border with Iraq has been a key supply line for weaponry to the Iraqi insurgency since 2003. Drug trafficking is also intense across the borders with Yemen and Iraq, which are stages on the routes used by Iranian and Iraqi networks to pass narcotics from Central Asia. Unsurprisingly, the two main issues on the agenda of the 2000 Saudi–Yemeni boundary negotiations were the allocation of contested oil fields (Mareb, Jawf, Hadhramaut, Shabwa) and gas-fields (Mareb, Jawf), and mechanisms to deal with cross-border flows of goods and persons.

In the early 2000s, Saudi Arabia's decision to build a separation barrier along the border has been strongly disputed by Yemen. The construction of the iron fence started in 2008; it was soon reinforced on the Saudi side by electric wires, video surveillance, thermal cameras and heavily armed guards. On the Yemeni side, the management of smuggling and trafficking involves border patrols and police officers, as well as networks of smugglers serving both Yemenis and immigrants from the Horn of Africa. Smuggling and irregular migration are the main concerns of Saudi border guards, but controlling the borders is also presented as an important part of Saudi Arabia's campaign against armed Islamic militant groups, and in particular al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Since 2003, AQAP has been using Yemen as a rear base and safe haven from which to strike Saudi Arabia, and in 2009 it fully relocated there. Terrorist attacks on both sides of the border – such as one targeting Prince Mohammed bin Nayif, the head of the Saudi Bureau of Internal Security – have served to highlight just how porous this border is.

Furthermore, an ongoing rebellion against the government, led by the late Zaydi political leader Hussain Badr al-Din al-Huthi, has disrupted the economy of the northern part of Yemen, as well as government efforts to manage border flows jointly with Saudi Arabia.[30] The numerous actors involved in the conflict include northern tribes, armed groups and rogue army battalions controlling the region's economy and living off the profits they draw from illegal border activities. When they are not organizing it themselves, they benefit from the smuggling of ammunition and small arms. The government's loss of control of the border creates the very conditions that allow the conflict to fester (such as an abundant

supply of accessible weapons) and pushes the local economy towards illegal activities (drugs, clandestine migration). For migrants, the cost of passage rises in direct proportion with the number of middlemen involved in controlling access to the frontier. In periods of government offensives in the mountainous northern regions of Sa‘ada, migration routes shift towards the coastal plain along the Red Sea. The flexibility of these networks makes them extremely hard to shut down effectively. As soon as one organization is dismantled or a route disrupted, others spring up. The influx of some 300,000 internally displaced people fleeing from the conflict zone to supposedly safer areas and to Sana‘a has profoundly modified the demographic and spatial distribution of populations, further complicating the task of managing migratory flows.

The border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia is a transit node in a wider clandestine and criminal circuit.[31] Large human-trafficking networks now operate on both sides of the frontier.[32] In 2004, the dismantling of an organization specialized in the use of African children as beggars on the streets of Jeddah, Medina and Mecca led to the first ever sentencing of a smuggler on charges of sexual exploitation in Saudi Arabia. He provided the brothels of Jeddah with Yemeni women recruited in the belief they would be employed as domestic workers. Child trafficking mainly affects two distinct groups: Yemeni male and female minors from rural backgrounds, and asylum-seeking minors from the Horn of Africa. The victims of this trade, whether women or children, are sold in Yemen and Saudi Arabia as slave labour or for sexual exploitation. As a side-effect of communications between the two countries, there are also cases of hidden prostitution or sexual exploitation that take the form of ‘temporary marriages’ between young Yemeni girls and Saudi men, which are frequently discussed in the Yemeni press. For ordinary Yemenis, anti-Saudi sentiment, stoked by regular accusations of misdemeanours and moral turpitude, is mixed with fascination at their neighbour’s fantastic material wealth.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS: CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL AND HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Yemen has welcomed mass influxes of refugees and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa since the 1960s and, paradoxically enough in a context of intense instability, the country continues to host increasing numbers of asylum seekers, mainly from Somalia and

Ethiopia. To this 'refugee crisis' one should add the number of internally displaced people, due to a series of conflicts and crises (Sa'ada in the north, mostly since 2009; Abyan in the South in 2011). These two crises have had different consequences on Yemen, the second one being much more dramatic and disruptive than the first. In the context of enduring instability and domestic conflict, though, the effects of forced mobility, both internal and international, continue due to a lack of international attention and support.

The war on terror and the security agenda of the GCC states have progressively altered Yemen's welcoming humanitarian policies towards asylum seekers since 2000, as the country has experienced greater difficulties in accommodating international refugees, and still serves as a transit location on the way to its richer neighbours.

WELCOMING REFUGEES? ASYLUM POLICIES AND THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

The Yemeni state's own partial unravelling under the pressure of two civil wars and the 2011 revolutionary movement, and the increase in internal and international migration flows, have contributed more than any other factor to the disruption of Yemen's benevolent approach to managing refugees' rights.

Yemen, the only country in the Arabian Peninsula to have signed the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, has been a haven for refugees from the Horn of Africa – including Eritreans in the 1970s and 1980s, and Somalis since 1991. This liberal policy towards refugees from the Horn of Africa has earned the Yemeni government a certain amount of moral credit and financial support from international organizations. Over the past ten years or so, the ever larger numbers of asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and refugees arriving from the Horn of Africa have changed the political climate in Yemen, and given rise to new legislation and judicial procedures.[33] Patterns of mobility are now challenged in a context fraught with humanitarian emergencies and security-related pressures. In September 2009, the Yemeni minister of the interior revised previous estimates to claim that there were over one million Somali 'refugees' in Yemen,[34] and in 2013 the transitional government estimates the number of refugees to be between 600,000 and 800,000. Both in 2009 and 2013, official sources expressed their concern at the continuous and rising tide of asylum seekers – Somalis, Ethiopians, and to a lesser extent Eritreans and Djiboutians

– arriving on Yemen's shores. In 2012, of the 230,000 international refugees and asylum seekers recognized by the UNHCR, only 140,000 were 'of concern' and under the agency's protection and assistance. Moreover, compared to the data provided by the Yemeni government, it could be that up to 85 per cent of the Somali population in Yemen are outside the law, either as unrecognized asylum seekers or as 'undocumented' foreigners. And though the UNHCR tries to take account of populations labelled 'mixed migrations' (a term coined in 2006 by High Commissioner António Guterres, referring to flows of asylum seekers, smuggled people and undocumented migrants), the agency itself finds it difficult to avoid the dilemmas inherent in the growing 'criminalization' of migratory flows. In fact, the blurred distinction between undocumented migration and asylum seeking reflects the rising influence of security concerns in shaping Yemen's management of mobility, as well as the changing priorities of its strategic partners. Identifying and controlling people crossing the Gulf of Aden has become a major issue on the security-dominated agenda which has made the Horn of Africa a focus of American foreign policy since the 1992–94 intervention in Somalia. After 2001 the region was designated an 'enemy bastion' in the war on terror.[35] The United States and the European Union have attempted to 'pacify' the Horn of Africa by systematically conflating humanitarian goals (the delivery of food aid and famine prevention) with political goals (conflict stabilization, peace negotiations) and security goals (containing terror and piracy). These policies imply the control and reduction of population flows, piracy and weapons proliferation in the Gulf of Aden. International refugees are deemed to be potential jihadi fighters or arms smugglers, feeding the illegal arms-trade networks between the Horn of Africa and jihadist groups in Yemen.

The UNHCR has been involved in Yemen since 1988, and has had a permanent representative there since 1992. From that date onwards, the UNHCR, in agreement with the Yemeni government, has applied the status of refugee as defined in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, and the Commissioner has administered refugee issues in Yemen in collaboration with local administrations. In the early 2000s, however, the UNHCR agreed to transfer legal and material responsibility to the host country. In 2005, the agency handed over the power to determine the status of asylum seekers to the Yemeni authorities. The creation of a Central Refugee Registration Office within the Department of Immigration, Passports and Nationality on 24 December 2005, under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, indicated pervasive official distrust of asylum seekers, who

are regularly assimilated with illegal migrants. In addition, the Registration Office neighbours a migrants' detention centre. Five centres were established in the coastal provinces (Ta'iz, Hodeida, Aden, Shabwa and Hadhramaut). Regardless of claimants' nationality, administration of asylum requests from African refugees was routinely devolved to the police. Confronted with the pitfalls of refugee status determination by Yemeni institutions, the UNHCR continued to oversee the process, especially as numbers continued to rise in the late 2000s. In spite of intense activity at the UNHCR reception centres in Ahwar and Mayfa'ah and at the transit centre at Bab al-Mandab, only a small minority of arriving refugees decide to claim asylum and are transferred to Kharaz camp. Most Africans arriving in Yemen opt for 'spontaneous settlement' or undocumented livelihood in the main urban centres, hoping to cross over to the Gulf countries, and thus avoiding registration and the Yemeni authorities.

EXILES IN TRANSIT OR LONG-TERM REFUGEES?

During much of the second half of the twentieth century, Eritreans formed the largest group of refugees arriving in Yemen. After the end of Eritrea's long war of secession from Ethiopia (1961–91), they were overtaken by Somali refugees fleeing the chaos that gripped their land. Today, Somali asylum seekers are the only ones to receive the *prima facie* status of international refugees, which implies a de facto recognition of the status of a particular group – whether national, ethnic or otherwise conceived – as opposed to individual asylum requests. This status can be conferred by the UNHCR on the basis of an assessed situation of grave risk that has caused the group in question to flee its country of origin. Since 2009, Ethiopian refugees have started to cross the Gulf of Aden to reach Yemen. In 2013, they represent the largest national group of incoming refugees. For Somalis and Ethiopians who manage to make it, their future will largely consist of being illegal migrants in Saudi Arabia or another Gulf state. In spite of their migration plans, most Africans from the Horn of Africa end up being stuck in war-torn, impoverished Yemen for much longer than they expected. With an ever-diminishing range of legal opportunities to continue the journey to GCC countries, asylum seekers tend to turn to smugglers. The securitization of mobility and anti-immigration policies at the regional and international levels eventually ends up fuelling criminal networks in a self-perpetuating cycle of insecurity.

Asylum seekers and migrants from Somalia and Ethiopia, travelling along routes run by human traffickers, arrive on the southern coast of Yemen via the Indian Ocean and filter through to a dozen or so entry points. Many of them try to reach the Gulf states directly, without going through registration either by the UNHCR or the Yemeni authorities. Bir Ali, west of Mukalla, is the most widely known entry point for illegal flows of this kind, which start from the regions of Puntland and Somaliland. Events such as the 2009 fighting in Mogadishu and central Somalia between government forces and the al-Shabab and Hizb al-Islam militias, and the famine of summer 2011, created a large exodus of Somalis. These populations, 'internal refugees' in their own country, converge in large numbers towards the eastern governorates, seeking haven in the relative stability of Somaliland and Puntland, and hoping to make their way to the GCC countries via Yemen.

Flows of asylum seekers peak every autumn: the favourable winds of late August and early September mark the beginning of the 'season of migrations'. In its earliest published statistics on the matter, in 2006, the UNHCR recorded about 25,000 people crossing the Gulf of Aden, most of them Somalis; in 2007, that figure was 77,000, and in 2011 it reached 103,000. In the single month of November 2011, 12,500 Somalis, Ethiopians, Eritreans and Djiboutians were recorded as landing on the southern coast of Yemen.[36] Overall, these statistics record that the migrants consist of 27 per cent Somalis and 63 per cent Ethiopians and Eritreans, although the ascription of nationality is sometimes haphazard and questionable.

Based on Yemeni government assumptions, we can surmise that up to 85 per cent of the refugee population in Yemen remains there illegally. Moreover, a second generation of refugees is growing up there with no clear legal status. Reactions among Yemenis range from everyday forms of xenophobia to genuine attempts at integration. Thus, in the deprived districts of Basatin in Aden and Al Safiya in Sana'a, marginalized Yemeni populations coexist with the various historical strata of immigration from the Horn.

A mafia-style economy has sprung up around illegal crossings at both ends of the journey, and has rapidly become institutionalized in areas already strongly marked by violence and criminal activity. Corruption in the local administration means that these networks operate with near-impunity. Passage across the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea is part of a larger economic system including piracy, smuggling, and the trafficking of weapons and drugs.

INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT: PROTRACTED CRISES, CONFLICTS AND THE YEMENI UPRISING

Internal displacement is not new to Yemen. It pre-dates the revolutionary 'moment' and the political turmoil that started in January 2011. Political problems in the PDRY after 1969, 1978 and 1986 had already led to significant displacements, particularly from south to north. In addition to political upheavals, there have also been numerous natural disasters, such as the floods of 2008, which affected the governorates of Hadhramaut, Lahej, al-Mahra and Ta'iz, and which displaced over 25,000 people. The first main flows of internally displaced persons (IDPS) in the 2000s were reported during the Sa'ada war (2004–10). Inhabitants of the northern governorates fled their homes, escaping combat and violence in the city and its surrounding areas but also bombings by the Yemeni state, and in 2009 by the Saudi air force. In the south a limited number of people were displaced as conflict escalated between the Hiraak al-Junubi and state troops. In 2011 part of Abyan governorate was temporarily occupied by the Islamist Ansar al-Shari'a group, which is linked to al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula; it managed to establish an enclave in March 2011, which it renamed the Islamic caliphate or emirate; the area was recaptured by government troops in June 2012. During this episode thousands of inhabitants were displaced, and most of them took refuge in Aden city.

A variety of estimates have been given for the number of people internally displaced in 2012 by the two conflicts: the government of Yemen gives the figure of 545,318, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) gives 430,000, and the UNHCR gives 310,000, of whom 175,000 have been assisted by the agency.[37] By 2013 a significant proportion of them had returned home, but the issue of the number of IDPS remains subject to considerable political pressure. More than 60 per cent of them are found in the northern governorates of Hajjah and Sa'ada, while the remaining 40 per cent are in the South, mostly in Aden, and to a lesser extent Abyan.

Displacement induced by political unrest and conflict tends to become protracted, and also to involve local economic crisis and social disruption. Ad hoc support in circumstances of natural disaster is easily obtained from various international institutions and private actors. In 2008, for example, the Organization of the Islamic

Conference, the UN, and private entities such as the oil company Total provided emergency assistance for those displaced by environmental disaster. When it comes to politically induced displacement, however, humanitarian assistance has been limited, and is very late in reaching the 'population of concern'. In Sa'ada particularly, even though displacement had been monitored as early as 2007, after the end of the third round of conflict, only a few agencies – Islamic Relief, the UNHCR, Médecins Sans Frontières – managed to maintain a presence during the fighting. No relief was provided to most of Sa'ada or to parts of Hajjah, Amran, Sana'a and Jawf governorates, which were subject to both government and rebel blockades.[38] Since the ceasefire in 2010, the political upheaval and the transition taking place in Sana'a has left the management of IDPs almost entirely under the responsibility of local NGOs and international humanitarian agencies, under the auspices of the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP). But the local population has been hosting the displaced in schools and hospitals, thus making it impossible for these institutions to function normally. In spite of international support, both IDPs and refugees remain particularly vulnerable to localized violence and predation.

Far from being solved by the relative stability restored in the north by the ceasefire, by the political transition in Sana'a, by the government capture of Abyan, or by the drone-war against Islamist insurgent groups by the US military in the south, the issue of population displacement seems to be entrenched as an aspect of the generalized social and political instability of the country, with dramatic economic consequences, including unemployment, declining household income, a lack of access to schools and health services, malnutrition, and so on.

MIGRATION IS A CRITICAL dimension of Yemen's economy and international political situation. A land of haven, exile and transit, Yemen has based part of its economic development on enduring migratory ties with its neighbours. Yemeni society and economy are intimately connected to regional and global mobility networks involving people, ideas and goods, and emigration has represented an important vector of economic and financial stability for the country. Population transfers, Yemeni emigration towards the Gulf, and immigration from the Indian subcontinent and Africa are all part of a long-standing pattern of regional and international movements.

As we have seen, however, Yemen has suffered increasing pressure from a number of sources throughout the 1990s and 2000s, which have contributed to the constriction of inward and outward migratory flows. The end result has been a weakening of the country's economic and political balance. In this respect, the loss of remittances and the abrupt return of its migrant population from the Gulf in 1990 highlighted just how dependent Yemen has been on emigration.

Two issues stand out: first, the economic and political weight of the Yemeni diaspora and the central place it occupies as a contested resource for both government and opposition; second, the implementation of asylum and integration policies, and the use of those policies as bargaining chips in the international arena. Despite its importance, the overall question of migration has remained largely absent from the political agenda, which tends to be dominated by internal conflicts and development issues.

The deterioration of political conditions in Yemen since 2004 has created a climate of instability that has led in turn to increasingly informal migratory networks and paths to exile. As a result, the security-orientated management of migration flows that has prevailed over Yemeni asylum and migration policies in the course of the past two decades, under the influence of demanding neighbours and powerful patrons, has largely failed. The distinction between, on the one hand, criminal and political networks of migration, characterized by trafficking, conflict and terrorism, and, on the other, asylum and economic-migratory networks, is increasingly hard to draw, since the former increasingly use the same routes and agents as the latter. Responsibility for securing maritime and terrestrial border crossing points has been taken over by Western powers with a military foothold in the region (NATO, the United States and the European Union), and has become less responsive to local concerns, at a time when the costs and dangers of expatriation have risen for migrants and asylum seekers alike. With the unravelling of the Yemeni state, the extension of violence on both sides of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and increasing sources of economic hardship and ecological distress, mass movements of emergency-stricken populations seem set to intensify in both Yemen and the Horn of Africa.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

‘CLOSE TIES’: GENDER, LABOUR AND MIGRATION BETWEEN YEMEN AND THE HORN OF AFRICA

Marina de Regt

'I SURVIVED A DEADLY TRIP', 'At Least 112 Drown off Yemeni Coast' and 'Irregular Migration Unabated' are the kind of headlines that appear regularly on websites and in newspapers.[1] Until the 1990s Yemen was primarily known as a sending country in migration studies, yet in the past two decades it has also become a receiving country. Hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa have come to Yemen, following the political and economic changes underway in their home countries. The outbreak of the civil war in Somalia and the end of Mengistu's regime in Ethiopia were the two main drivers of migration in the early 1990s. Exact figures for the numbers of migrants and refugees that have arrived in Yemen since 1990 are unavailable, as not all of them have been registered and many moved on to third countries. According to the UNHCR, since 2006 close to half a million people (477,000) have arrived in Yemen from the Horn of Africa.[2] Many migrants and refugees aspire to move on to the oil-rich countries of the Arabian Peninsula, North America or Europe, and only stay temporarily in Yemen. But moving on is not always easy, and they sometimes spend considerable periods of time in Yemen. Others arrive as labour migrants and hope to return home one day. Political events in Yemen since early 2011 have greatly affected not only the local population but also migrants and refugees. They have lost jobs, been accused of siding with the government or the opposition, or been the victims of abuse and discrimination. However, although the living and working conditions of migrants and refugees have deteriorated over the past two years, irregular migration from Ethiopia has increased as a result of the weakening of the Yemeni state.

In this chapter I will put contemporary migration between Yemen and the Horn of Africa in historical perspective. Contact between Yemen and the Horn of Africa is centuries old. The legendary Queen of Sheba, who lived in the tenth century BC, is presumed to have reigned over an empire stretching well beyond Yemen and Ethiopia. Ethiopians occupied Yemen in the fifth century AD, and Yemenis migrated to the Horn as merchants and traders from the thirteenth century onwards. These long historical ties have affected the population on both sides of the Red Sea. In studies of Yemen, however, very little attention has been paid to the close ties between Yemen and the Horn of Africa. The large majority of studies focus

on Yemenis of 'pure' Yemeni descent, and in particular those living in tribal areas in the interior of the country. Some research has focused on the *abeed* and the *akhdam* – two social strata with perceived African ancestry. The *abeed* are descendants of slaves brought from Africa until the early twentieth century; the *akhdam* are believed to be descendants of Ethiopian occupiers who ruled Yemen during the fourth and the sixth centuries, although their exact origins are unclear. Use of the terms *abeed* and *akhdam* is often criticized, as they reproduce existing stereotypes and stigmas.[3] Contemporary processes of migration between Yemen and the Horn of Africa have received much less attention.

I am particularly interested in the gendered aspects of migration between Yemen and the Horn of Africa, and especially Ethiopia.[4] Yemeni out-migration was largely male-dominated, but this does not mean that women were not involved in migration processes. The historical data available disguise the role of women, emphasizing men as migrants – and in particular those of higher social class who were influential as (religious) scholars and traders. But in contemporary migration women are much more visible. In the 1990s an increasing number of Ethiopian women came to Yemen as labour migrants, taking up paid employment as domestic workers in urban areas. For male migrants and refugees, employment opportunities were, and remain, more limited. The large majority of Ethiopian migrants who have arrived in Yemen since 2011 are men, while the number of Ethiopian women migrants has decreased.

I will present a chronological overview of migration between Yemen and Ethiopia, through the composite lens of gender and labour. I begin with the migration of Yemeni men to Ethiopia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I then move to the 1960s and 1970s, when many Yemenis returned home with their Ethiopian wives and children of mixed descent. The focus then shifts to women who came to Yemen as domestic workers in the 1990s and 2000s. In the last section I discuss the impact of Yemen's political crisis on migration from Ethiopia, and in particular its gendered aspects. The chapter is based on anthropological fieldwork in Yemen and Ethiopia between 2003 and 2013, media reports and secondary sources.

YEMENI MIGRATION TO THE HORN OF AFRICA

Most of the literature on Yemeni out-migration focuses on Hadhrami migration.[5] Hadhramis played an important role in the incense trade, and started to migrate to the Indonesian archipelago and East Africa in the thirteenth century. The Hadhramis, who often came from the highest social strata, had an important impact on the development of religious networks, trade and politics in the countries to which they migrated. From the end of the nineteenth century, Yemenis from other parts of the country emigrated to escape the poor living conditions under the Imamate. Many of these Yemeni migrants came from Lower Yemen, which suffered from underdevelopment and poverty as a result of conservative policies discriminating against Shafi'is, including the imposition of heavier taxation on them.

Increased out-migration was also facilitated by the British colonization of Aden (1839) and the French colonization of Djibouti (1884). Both of these colonial enclaves created work opportunities and attracted many Yemenis from the surrounding areas, but also from further inland. Yemeni migrants not only found work in the ports; Aden and Djibouti also functioned as gateways to other countries, as ships stopped to refuel and were often willing to take on Arab crewmen. British ships took the migrants to other colonies in the Far East, such as India and Singapore, and to Britain itself, where there was a demand for labourers in the growing coal-based industries. French boats took people to French colonies such as Vietnam and Madagascar, and to a lesser degree to France itself. Yemenis could easily find their way to other countries in Africa via Djibouti, in particular after the construction of the railway to Addis Ababa in 1917. Yemeni communities can be found in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea (which was not yet a separate state at the time), Somalia, Sudan, the Central African Republic, Zanzibar and Chad.

Ethiopia was one of the main destination countries. The close relations between Yemen and Ethiopia ensured that Yemenis who settled in Ethiopia were well integrated in society, dominating trade and commerce. Yemenis owned businesses, houses and land, and enjoyed considerable freedom. They occupied an economic niche and were given protection by the state in return for providing imported goods.[6] Most Ethiopians over fifty years of age still remember Yemeni merchants and shopkeepers. In the first years after their arrival, however, many migrants, and in particular those from North Yemen, worked in unskilled and low-status activities. In his study of the Red Sea port of Massawa, Miran mentions that, as early as the 1890s, Yemeni labourers worked as porters and dock-

workers. ‘Porters carried large bales of animal hides, cotton, tobacco, ivory and goods that came on board boats in the port, jugs (amphoras) full of water, and dried vegetables. Those who did not work as porters worked in shops, as servants in coffee shops and restaurants, as clerks in offices and as sandal-makers. Others were fishermen and sailors.’[7]

Noura, a woman of mixed Yemeni–Ethiopian descent who I interviewed in 2009, told me that her father, who had migrated from a village in the Tihama to present-day Ethiopia when he was sixteen years old, started to work as a porter, and later became a soldier in the Italian army: ‘All the Yemenis were in the Italian army. They were getting their salaries from them. Those who were injured are still receiving salaries from the Italians, from the 1960s until now.’ The Italian army occupied Addis Ababa and its surrounding areas from 1935 until 1941,[8] but stayed for much longer in present-day Eritrea (1839–1941). During the Italian occupation, many Yemeni men were employed by the Italian authorities ‘as rowers, domestic servants, nurses, day labourers, masons, and, last but not least, *askaris*, or colonial soldiers’.[9] These Yemenis often fought on the side of the Italians, whereas Yemenis in Ethiopia were involved as soldiers in the British army, which came to liberate Ethiopia from Italian occupation.[10] The reason was that some Yemenis had British citizenship as a result of their stay in Aden, which was a British colony from 1839 to 1967.

Yemeni out-migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was highly gendered: most migrants were young single men from the rural areas – often second or third sons who might have inherited land in the past but were now unable to do so, given the difficult economic circumstances.[11] Yet there were also adult men who left their wives and children behind. Most migrants intended to return home after a few years, and many did. Those who did not return home often married local women as first or second wives. The system of social stratification, which had determined marriage patterns in Yemen, changed accordingly; families and lineages intermarried with a much wider range of partners than they would normally have done.[12]

In the 1960s the political climate in East Africa and the Horn changed; after independence, nationalist governments came to power and Yemenis lost their favourable positions. In addition, the start of the Eritrean struggle for independence from 1961 to 1991, which was supported by a number of Arab states, increased anti-

Arab sentiment in Africa, leading to mass demonstrations against Arab migrants, particularly after the hijacking of an Ethiopian Airlines plane in Frankfurt in 1969. As a result, many Yemenis decided to return home. They were also attracted by the political changes taking place in North Yemen. The Imamate had been overthrown, and the civil war did not prevent people from returning. Most migrants from former North Yemen returned home – but those from South Yemen, and in particular those who were traders and had property, often stayed longer in Ethiopia. They left in the mid 1970s, after Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown and the military regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam (the Derg) had come to power. In 1977 Mengistu started to nationalize economic assets, with the result that foreigners lost their property, such as land and businesses. Yemenis, and in particular Hadhramis, were victims of this new policy, and decided to leave. Many Hadhramis went to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states rather than return to Yemen. The fact that South Yemen had become a socialist state after more than 150 years of British occupation was a disincentive for these merchants.

Migrants from North Yemen were also encouraged to return home by President al-Hamdi (r. 1974–77). Al-Hamdi actively promoted the equality of Yemeni citizens, and supported the rights of returning migrants to Yemen. He initiated housing and employment projects for people of lower social status, trying to improve their socioeconomic situation, and he appealed to Yemenis living overseas to return home. His main aim was to bring educated people to Yemen, and he promised returning migrants employment, free housing and a better future. These promises were attractive, and many Yemeni emigrants decided to return home. However, al-Hamdi's progressive ideas were not received enthusiastically by everyone, and he was murdered in October 1977. Little of what he had promised came to fruition.

YEMENI MEN, ETHIOPIAN WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN OF MIXED DESCENT

While Yemeni migration to the Horn of Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was male-dominated, this does not mean that women were not involved in these migration processes. A significant number of Yemeni migrants married local women, as we have seen. Most of these women came to Yemen with their husbands and children, and spent the rest of their lives there. These women and their children of mixed descent form a particular segment of

Yemen's social landscape, embodying a part of Yemeni history that has received little attention in mainstream historiography and ethnography. In this section I will focus on the Ethiopian women who returned with their Yemeni husbands and their daughters of mixed descent. What type of work did they do, and how did this shift between generations?

Most Yemeni emigrants originally came from rural areas, but few of them returned to their home villages. There was no work available in the countryside, and they had become accustomed to an urban way of life; in the cities they could make better use of the skills they had acquired abroad.[13] Another reason was that they no longer had links with their home villages. Sa'diyya, a young woman of mixed descent, told me that her father had returned to his village in the Tihama: 'My father had two brothers and three sisters. He only found one of his sisters alive. The rest had died.' Finally, some returnees did not return to their villages because their African wives were afraid of being marginalized in the village. According to Badriya, another young woman of mixed descent: 'My father could not return to his village because the people had changed, he did not know them anymore because he was small when he left the village. And on top of that, my mother had insisted that she did not want to live in a village in Yemen.'[14]

My own interest in the history of Ethiopian women's migration to Yemen was triggered when I met many women of mixed descent, and their Ethiopian mothers, in Hodeida. Most of them were living in Zabariya and al-Mughtaribeen (literally, 'the Migrants'), which were neighbourhoods that were known for the large presence of returnees established during al-Hamdi's presidency. The returnees who settled in Hodeida came mainly from present-day Eritrea and Sudan, where many Yemenis had migrated when the war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Badriya commented: 'We lived in Sana'a for a while. But we found it difficult, we were living in a very small apartment and, moreover, Sana'a is cold. In Sudan the weather is not like the weather in Sana'a. People told my father that Hodeida is better because the weather resembles the weather in Kassala. So we decided to go to Hodeida.'[15] But an additional reason to move to Hodeida was because there was work available in the port. Yemeni migrants had returned home hoping to find a better life, but were confronted with poverty, unemployment and poor living conditions. Noura's family had returned in 1963: 'My father returned because other Yemenis had told him that Yemen is now a republic. "You can eat grapes from the window and everything is in

order.” But they did not find any grapes from the window. They only found a dry land.’

Most returned men who settled in Hodeida in the 1960s and 1970s worked initially as porters, which was the same work they had done in their first years in Ethiopia. Noura told me: ‘My father started to work in the port because there was no other work available in Yemen. There were no companies yet, and the country was still in a civil war. The country was very poor.’ As a result, many Ethiopian women who came to Yemen with their husbands and children were forced to take up paid work, as their husbands’ salaries were insufficient to make ends meet. Yemeni women of lower social class were often reluctant to take up paid employment in the public domain, which was valued negatively because of practices of gender segregation and the ideology of the male breadwinner; but migrant women were willing to take up paid work in the newly developing economy in the 1960s and 1970s. They were employed as cleaners in offices and hospitals or as domestic workers, or they sold food in the street.

In 2005 I interviewed three Eritrean women who had come to Yemen with their Yemeni husbands in the 1960s. Halima was proud of her work history:

> I used to work as a cleaner in the Electricity Corporation. I was employed. I worked in the office and in the house of the director and his wife. They were very nice people. After a while I stopped working. I was ill. My husband told me to stay home and stop working. I had a child every year so I couldn’t work. Then I started to work at the office of the Military Corporation, and then at the Tihama Development Authority. I worked there for twenty-three years. I am lucky that I always find work in offices. It is better than working in houses.

But many Ethiopian women did work as domestic workers, filling up the growing demand for paid domestic labour among Yemeni and expatriate families.

In the past, people of low social status groups, such as the *muzayyin* and *abeed*, performed service and cleaning tasks for people of higher social status. With the overthrow of the Imamate, status differentials were officially abolished, and the equality of all citizens was enshrined in the constitution. As a result, Yemeni

women and men of lower social status were less willing to perform cleaning and service jobs historically associated with that status. In addition, Yemeni employers tend to prefer foreign women as domestic workers. In the old hierarchical system of social stratification, status differentials between people were very clear and well established. With the social and economic changes that have taken place in recent times, such as the abolition of slavery and the enrichment of people of various social status groups, social boundaries between people of different status have become less rigid. In particular, the new middle classes are afraid of a blurring of class boundaries, and thus prefer to employ foreign domestics. This is also partly because Yemeni domestic workers are socially and culturally too close to their employers: they speak Arabic, and can therefore follow conversations between family members; and since they are part of the local community, they might harm the family reputation by divulging its private affairs.[16]

Ethiopian women who came to Yemen with their husbands in the 1960s and 1970s met the new demand for domestic workers, in particular for the new middle classes. They did not live with their employers, and were mainly employed for cleaning tasks. But as soon as they could find other work, as cleaners in offices or working for expatriate families, they would do so. Khala Khadija, another woman I interviewed in 2005, recalled:

> I didn't work for Yemenis but only for Christians … When you work for foreigners everything is clean. But when you work for Yemenis, they are nice but there is too much work. You have to do everything – ironing, cooking – and you don't have time to clean the house. You are in the kitchen the whole day. You can only manage when you organize the days, one day for cooking, one day for ironing, but Yemenis don't want that. They want you to be busy the whole day, till you leave. And they are always home with their children. That is why I preferred to work for foreigners.

Marriages between Yemeni men and Ethiopian women produced children of mixed descent, the so-called *muwalladeen* (singular: *muwallad*). In anthropological studies on Yemen much attention has been paid to social stratification, but very little has been written about the *muwalladeen* (feminine: *muwalladat*).[17] Though the constitution of the YAR abolished all status differentials, every

Yemeni now became a *muwatin* (‘citizen’) regardless of family background; those born abroad and of mixed parentage were assigned the status of *muwallad* – an official designation used by both government officials and ordinary people. The term *muwallad* has negative connotations, leading to overt as well as covert discrimination.[18] The fact that *muwalladeen* are not of ‘pure’ Yemeni descent affects their social status, as one of the fundamental divisions in Yemeni society is the division between those who consider themselves ‘pure’ Yemenis and those denied this attribute.[19] Because of this stigma and consequent discrimination, *muwalladeen* sometimes hide their family backgrounds and deny having African mothers. They came to Yemen at a young age, or were born in Yemen, and thus consider themselves Yemeni.

Muwalladat were among the first women to enter the professions.[20] Paid employment for women had, and often still has, low status in Yemeni society, mainly because it challenges the ideology of the male breadwinner and practices of gender segregation. *Muwalladat* were to a certain extent pioneers, taking up types of work that were not yet culturally acceptable for Yemeni women. They had often been able to attend school and sometimes vocational training, in contrast with women of ‘pure’ Yemeni descent, and could take up skilled work in healthcare, teaching or administration.[21] Noura took up paid work in a bank, while Badriya and Sa‘diya became primary healthcare workers. In contrast with their mothers, *muwalladat* did not want to do domestic work, which was – and still is – associated with the low-status groups that had performed service tasks in the past. They were concerned about their social status, and thus often worked as domestics only in secret.

THE 1990S: A NEW GROUP OF ETHIOPIAN WOMEN MIGRANTS

The drastic increase in migration from the Horn of Africa in the 1990s – related to the outbreak of the civil war in Somalia – led to hundreds of thousands of refugees crossing the Gulf of Aden by boat, hoping to find a better life elsewhere. Yemen is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula that has ratified the UN Refugee Convention and its 1951 Protocol, and Somali refugees are accepted on a *prima facie* basis. In addition, an increasing number of Ethiopian women came to Yemen in the 1990s to take up paid work as domestics.

International labour migration was restricted under the dictatorial regime of Mengistu, but the government that came to power in 1991 included the right to free movement in the constitution; everyone willing and able to go abroad is nowadays allowed to do so. Young women in particular have migrated abroad, because women's access to employment is much more limited than men's.[22] One of the factors associated with women's access to the labour market is a level of school enrolment by Ethiopian girls that is among the lowest in Africa. Even when women have finished primary or secondary school, they still have fewer job opportunities than educated men, especially in the public sector. The large majority of Ethiopian women migrants travel to the economically developed countries of the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon, but some go to Yemen, which is geographically closer and easier to reach.

Yemenis of mixed descent started to bring Ethiopian women to Yemen as domestics when the demand for paid domestic labour increased.[23] Some of them are registered with official employment agencies and the Yemeni Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, while others work without an official licence. Ethiopian women also come to Yemen through relatives or friends already residing in the country. Yemen once had an open-door policy towards foreigners, with control of residence and work permits being relatively weak. It was easy to overstay on a tourist visa, or to obtain a visa on the basis of a fake employment contract. As a result, there were numerous undocumented Ethiopian women in Yemen. From 2001 onwards, it became more difficult to enter the country, partly because of the Yemeni government's involvement in the 'war on terror' and the stricter border controls. Haymanut, one of the women I interviewed in 2005, told me that she had been undocumented for eight years: 'In the past you could leave Yemen easily with an exit visa, but nowadays you need a residence permit to get an exit visa.' In 2005, the penalty for overstaying was 100 Yemeni rials (US$0.85) per day. In addition, the Ethiopian government attempted to control illegal migration because of increased human rights violations against Ethiopian women in the Middle East. Officially, women can only migrate to the Middle East when their migration and employment are organized through the Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, or a legally registered private employment agency.[24] However, the bureaucratic procedures involved in legal migration take so long that women sometimes still prefer to make use of illegal brokers, even though it may cost them more money.[25]

Domestic work can be divided into live-in and live-out work. Somali women form the largest group of live-out domestic workers in Yemen, while Ethiopian women are the majority of live-in domestic workers. There are various reasons why Somali women are not employed as live-in domestic workers. Somali women often come to Yemen with their husbands and children, or establish a family in Yemen, and therefore have their own families to take care of. Most Ethiopian women come to Yemen as labour migrants, leaving their families behind. Somali women come as refugees, and they are seen as a threat and an intrusion, which is also related to the fact that they claim civil rights based on their refugee status. According to the UN Convention on Refugees, registered refugees should enjoy similar rights to those of citizens of their country of refuge. Moreover, Somalis are socially and culturally close to Yemenis: they are Muslim, learn Arabic quickly, and share many cultural and religious values with Yemenis. Somali women consider themselves equal to Yemeni women, and do not want to work in a subservient position. They use various strategies and tactics to deal with the inequality inherent in domestic work.[26]

The majority of Ethiopian domestics in Yemen are unmarried, and most of them have completed at least intermediate schooling. Those who enter via recruitment agencies are always employed as live-in domestic workers, while those who enter through relatives or friends can also be employed as live-out domestics. They work mainly as cleaners, cooks and nannies for middle-class and upper-class families, and earn higher salaries than Somali women. Ethiopian women are seen as clean and reliable, and as socially and culturally 'close and distant'.[27] Many Yemenis are acquainted with Ethiopia through relatives or friends, or through business and travel, and often point to the close historical relationship between Ethiopia and Yemen to explain the preference for Ethiopian domestics. But this does not mean that Ethiopians have high status in Yemen. Just like Somalis, Ethiopian migrants are regularly confronted with racism and discrimination, and blamed for the increased levels of crime, prostitution and AIDS.

THE IMPACT OF THE CRISIS ON MIGRATION

The political and economic events that have taken place in Yemen since the beginning of 2011 have greatly affected migrants and refugees residing in the country. While their living and working

conditions were already far from ideal, the developments of the past two years have made matters worse. In addition, the number of Ethiopian migrants who have come to Yemen has increased dramatically since early 2011, overtaking that of Somali refugees. Yet, in contrast with the 1990s and 2000s, the large majority of new arrivals from Ethiopia are men. The political and economic crisis in Yemen has clearly had a gendered impact on migration.

One of the most immediate consequences of the uprisings and resulting political instability in Yemen was that migrant women lost their jobs as domestic workers. In particular, after the violent crackdown of 18 March 2011, many upper- and middle-class families in Sana'a decided to leave the city and return to their home villages, at least temporarily.[28] In addition, from the start of the protests, foreign agencies had sent their international staff home, resulting in a large-scale loss of jobs for migrant women. As a result of the economic situation, many businessmen left the country, and this also affected the demand for paid domestic labour. Hotels closed down, and women working for international organizations were dismissed. Most of these workers had no employment contracts, so it was difficult, if not impossible, for them to claim their rights.

Male migrants were affected in other ways in the first months of the uprisings. Both the government and the opposition blamed Somali refugees in particular, accusing them of involvement in the conflict. The opposition accused refugees of fighting on the side of the government, and of being numbered among the snipers and mercenaries hired to kill peaceful demonstrators. In July 2011, two Somalis were found killed in Sana'a, and forty Somali refugees were arrested by the opposition and accused of siding with the government. In the south, suspicion of foreigners has been fuelled by statements made by militants claiming that the Somali al-Shabab would send fighters to Yemen to help support al-Qa'ida there. The occupation of a number of villages and towns by al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula increased suspicion that Somali refugees were involved. In September 2011 the Somali ambassador to Yemen asked Somali refugees to return home, as the situation in Yemen was in his view more dangerous than in Somalia.[29] Human rights organizations in Yemen also denounced the ways in which migrants and refugees were becoming victims of the conflict.

During the crisis the Ethiopian embassy offered Ethiopians the option of returning to Ethiopia, whether they were documented or undocumented. The Yemeni Ministry of Interior facilitated the return of Ethiopian migrants by temporarily waiving the penalty charged

for each day a migrant had been undocumented. For undocumented migrants, the waiving of the penalty was an opportunity to leave Yemen in a legal way. They would receive a laissez-passer with which they could return to Ethiopia. According to the Ethiopian embassy, around 1,500 Ethiopians registered for repatriation, though not all of them left. Some decided to stay when the situation improved after a few months, and others crossed the border with Saudi Arabia.

In February 2013 I spoke to a number of Ethiopian women who had stayed in Yemen during the crisis. They had well-paid jobs as cleaners in the offices of foreign development organizations, and did not want to take the risk of losing their jobs by returning home. Although most expatriate staff had left, the offices had remained open. In an interview with a recruitment agent, I learned that many live-in domestic workers employed by Yemeni families also stayed in Yemen. They were employed on two-year contracts, and returning home would have meant a loss of their income and of the money they had invested in their migration and employment. As live-in domestic workers they were also not directly affected by the political crisis, since they lived with Yemeni families and often only left the houses of their employers when accompanied.

The political crisis of 2011 led to a weakening of the Yemeni state and a loosening of its border controls. This has turned Yemen even more fully into a transit country with regard to migration. The number of new arrivals has increased dramatically since 2011. Particularly remarkable is the increase in the number of Ethiopian migrants. According to a study by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat in Nairobi, Ethiopian migrants represented 75 per cent of all maritime arrivals in Yemen in 2012.[30] The large majority consist of adult men, but there are also women and children among the new arrivals. Brokers in Ethiopia actively recruit migrants, convincing them that migration to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states can improve their livelihoods. In exchange for large sums of money, they promise to organize their migration over land and sea into and through Yemen. Many of these migrants are unaware of the difficulties that are involved in the trip. They have to deal with drought, a lack of food, water and accommodation, and serious human rights abuses by criminal gangs: ‘Kidnap, torture, sexual violence, abduction and extortion are becoming widespread and frequent hazards, sometimes lethal, for migrants in transit to the Gulf States.’[31] The lack of rule of law in Yemen has resulted in the proliferation of criminal gangs taking advantage of the newly arrived migrants. They are detained

and forced to pay a ransom, and during the period of their detention they are physically, sexually and mentally abused. Whereas men are mostly released after having paid the ransom, few women who fall into the hands of gangs are ever seen again.[32]

When migrants are released or able to escape, they travel to small towns and urban centres in Yemen, where they perform manual labour and other unskilled jobs such as cleaning cars, collecting rubbish, working on *qat* farms, or in construction or fishing. Their final destination in Yemen is in most cases Haradh, a small town on the Yemeni–Saudi border, from where they intend to enter Saudi Arabia. Haradh has become a transit centre for Ethiopian migrants; in 2012 there were 12,000 migrants residing in the town.[33] Many migrants are stuck, unable to cross the border because of tightened security measures. While it used to be relatively easy to cross the border with the help of smugglers, the Saudi government has increased border controls and even started building a 1,800-kilometre border fence. It is meant to protect the country from drug smugglers, gunrunners and illegal migrants, but also from Yemen's political instability.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is assisting Ethiopian migrants stranded in Yemen. Among other things, it arranged the voluntary repatriation of 9,000 migrants to Ethiopia in 2011–12.[34] They receive basic clothing and a small sum of money, before returning to Ethiopia by plane. After an arrival interview in Addis Ababa, they are free to return to their home villages. Yet many of them stay in the capital because they do not want to return home empty-handed: the failure of their migration must not become known to their relatives and friends in the villages. The IOM office in Addis Ababa is actively involved in the protection and support of Ethiopian migrants who travel as irregular migrants via Yemen to Saudi Arabia. However, raising awareness about the challenges involved in irregular migration is not an easy task: most future migrants hope that they will be the ones who make it, despite all the negative stories they hear about failed migration attempts. Brokers make clever use of the aspirations of potential migrants, which is the main reason why irregular migration continues.

I HAVE PRESENTED HERE some of the twists and turns in the history of migration between Yemen and Ethiopia. Political and economic

changes on one side of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden turned the other side into a receiving or a sending state, in a dynamic that acquires particular gender dimensions. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Yemeni men left for the Horn of Africa attracted by economic opportunities there, and returned home in the 1960s and 1970s due to the unfavourable political climate in the host countries. Yemen then became a host for thousands of Somali refugees and Ethiopian labour migrants in the 1990s and 2000s. Whereas both men and women migrated to Yemen, employment opportunities in the form of paid domestic work attracted female migrants in particular – especially in the case of Ethiopia. By historical accident, the political changes in Yemen since 2011 have affected migration from the Horn in various ways. While women's migration declined because Yemen's domestic labour market was affected by the political and economic crisis, male migration increased as a result of the weaker implementation of border controls.

Moreover, the close ties between Yemen and the Horn of Africa offer a vivid example of migrants' willingness to carry out almost any work abroad, when they would only consider 'quality work' at home. The discourse of equality in Yemen affected the domestic labour market, as people of lower social status were no longer willing to take up manual and service jobs for high-status families. This offered an opening for migrants from the Horn of Africa to take up such jobs in Yemen. At the same time, however, many Yemenis migrated, and continue to migrate, to take up manual and service jobs in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. This migration has not been discussed here, but it is intricately linked to migration from the Horn of Africa. The large-scale migration of Yemenis to the oil-rich states on the Arabian Peninsula has affected Yemeni society in many different ways. Among other things, it has led to the development of a middle class with particular characteristics, needs and values – for example, with regard to paid domestic labour. The large-scale employment of migrant domestic workers in urban areas was a result not only of the availability of migrant labour, but also of the preference of middleclass families for foreign women.

Political and economic changes in both sending and receiving countries have a strong impact on migration processes. Clear examples of this include the return of Yemenis from the Horn of Africa in the 1960s, when nationalist governments came to power in the Horn and the Yemeni Imamate was overthrown, and from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states during the second Gulf crisis in 1991,

when the Yemeni government voted at the UN against a military invasion of Kuwait. The impact of the 2011 political crisis on migration to Yemen shows that these migration processes must be analysed from a historical perspective, with particular attention paid to their gendered aspects.

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[1] See www.irinnews.com.

[2] UNHCR briefing note, 26 April 2013, available at www.unhcr.org.

[3] See Huda Seif, 'Moralities and Outcasts: Domination and Allegories of Resentment in Southern Yemen', PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2003.

[4] When I speak of Ethiopia, I also mean present-day Eritrea, which became a separate state in 1993. In Arabic the term *al-Habasha* literally means Abyssinia.

[5] See, for example, Ulrike Freitag and William Clarence-Smith, eds, *Hadrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s–1960s* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s–1930s* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002); Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2006).

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE EMERGING YEMENI COMMUNITY IN CHINA: THE SOCIALIST LEGACY, THE NEW SILK ROAD AND THE CHINESE MODEL

Ho Wai-Yip

IN RECENT YEARS SCHOLARLY interest, security studies and policy analysis have focused on the geopolitical significance of China's growing involvement in the Arab world.[1] While it is important to study 'China in the Arab world', this chapter argues that the 'Arab world in China' – the emerging counter-flow of Arab traders in China, equally important to the future development of both the Arab world and China – has not been adequately studied. This chapter is an exploratory study of China's Yemeni trading community, which is the largest pioneering Arab diasporic community in China. I examine the Yemeni community in Guangzhou, South China, a city known as one of the most important commodity markets in China, alongside Yiwu in Zhejiang Province. Both are becoming gateways and homes for Arab and African trading communities in China.[2] I begin by explaining how the enduring friendship between the two countries, including ongoing infrastructure and aid programmes in the socialist era, have facilitated China's strong presence in Yemen since the 1950s. This friendship also created the basis for attracting young Yemeni elites to China since it initiated its 'Open Door Policy' in the 1980s. Based on interviews with some Yemeni traders living in China, the second part of the chapter argues that the evolving Yemeni community is becoming a cultural broker between Arab traders and Chinese industries in the new Silk Road business. Third, I discuss Yemeni perceptions of China's development model in relation to Yemen, as well as the future challenges the Yemeni diaspora is likely to face in China. Finally, seeing the Yemeni community in China as a pioneering eastward-moving Arab diaspora in China, I consider the future implications for the formation of a hybrid Yemeni–Chinese identity, and for global South–South cooperation in general.

THE SOCIALIST LEGACY: LASTING FRIENDSHIP AND BILATERAL LINKS

Undoubtedly, in the long term, China's rise and the weakening of the United States are contributing to China becoming an important player in the Middle East. Many have suggested China's growing stake in the region is driven by its interest in the sale of weapons, its thirst for energy and other natural resources, and the desire to

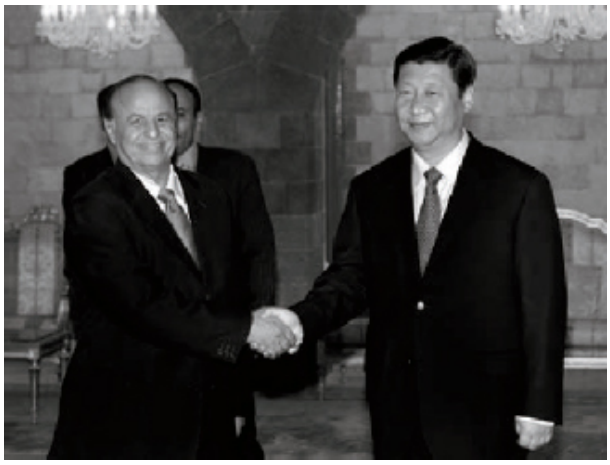
develop a better national image through public diplomacy.[3] In 2004, Yemen's oil exports to China represented 9 per cent of the oil China imported from the Middle East, ranking below the major oil producers, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Oman.[4] Are China's links to Yemen restricted to its interest in oil? In fact, this assumption ignores the deep historical links and friendly ties between the peoples of Yemen and China. This would imply that contemporary bilateral relations should be narrowly understood within the terms of geostrategic economic interests.[5] Indeed, the Yemeni people have had a long and deep historical friendship with the Chinese, starting in the period before the Tang dynasty.[6] This relationship goes beyond strategic considerations and economic interests: in the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Zhu Di sent a Chinese official, Zheng He, who was a Hui Muslim, to undertake seven voyages into Western Oceans between 1405 and 1433. According to the records of his voyages to South-East Asia and Africa, Zheng visited the port of Aden at least three times, going past Hormuz and into the Red Sea, and finally to East Africa. According to legend, Zheng was warmly welcomed by the people of Aden, who presented him with a giraffe and subsequently sent envoys to China.[7] Later on, Yemen also had strong influence on the Qing Dynasty, the last Imperial dynasty of China. According to Chinese Muslim records,[8] Ma Mingxin, the founder of the Sufi order of Naqshbandi Jahriyya in north-west China, studied under a Sufi master in Yemen. After the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, the Mutawakkilite kingdom was one of the first Arab countries with which China established diplomatic relations at ministerial level, in 1956, followed by the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1968.[9] Under China's national strategy of 'Go Global', especially since 1979, Yemen has been one of the frontier areas in which China has launched various development projects.[10] Beginning in the 1950s, examples have included the Hodeida–Sana'a road, spinning and weaving factories in Sana'a and Aden, a Friendship Bridge, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, and most recently the Typical 48th Revolution Hospital and Great National Library in Sana'a.[11] After the devastating civil war that followed the establishment of the YAR in 1962, China poured humanitarian aid resources into the country, and initiated many construction projects. Since the unification of Yemen, the Chinese government has undertaken to build roads, hospitals and schools in order to meet the needs of the Yemeni population and bring about sustainable development in the country. China helped Yemen in the reconstruction that was

necessary after the 1994 civil war. According to my interviews with Yemenis who worked with Chinese workers in the 1960s, the building of the Sana‘a-Hodeida road left a deep impact on the collective memory of Yemeni society. A Chinese cemetery has been built on the outskirts of Sana‘a as a memorial to fifty-seven Chinese who died in accidents during the construction of the road, including Zhang Qiyin, a Chinese chief engineer killed in an accident in 1961. Every year at the Ching Ming Festival, Chinese diplomatic and business representatives lay wreaths at the Chinese cemetery of revolutionary martyrs in Sana‘a.[12]

Cemetery for Chinese martyrs and gravestone of Zhang Qiyin in Sana‘a. © Ho Wai-Yip

In the mid twentieth century, a shared socialist history bound Yemen and China together. Because of the ideological rivalry between Westernled capitalism and Soviet-led socialism, China, as its strong socialist supporter, sent significant resources to Yemen. It is worth noting that China supported both the socialist PDRY and the capitalist YAR prior to their unification, and that, for example, both states had a Chinese-built textile factory. In celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of China’s Open Door Policy in 2008, one of the prime outcomes China has valued was the ‘indestructible friendship’ between the two countries.[13] According to Xi Jinping, who visited Yemen that year, bilateral ties should proceed from traditional friendship towards a deepening of mutual understanding and cooperation in trade.[14] In short, while contemporary policy-makers and academics portray a Yemen widely troubled by political chaos and economic collapse caused by authoritarianism, corruption,

jihadism, civil war, separatism and regional refugee problems,[15] China's lasting investments and positive friendship with Yemen are somehow counterintuitive. China–Yemen ties have not been weakened, and friendly bilateral relations surprisingly remain unchanged, and perhaps even strengthened.



Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (left) meets Xi Jinping (right) in Sana'a, 4 June 2008. © Xinhua News Agency

SILK ROAD BROKER: MEDIATING BUSINESS BETWEEN CHINA AND THE ARAB WORLD

The eastward movement of the Yemeni diaspora to China should not be ignored. Based on my interviews with Yemeni consular officials in Beijing, Yemeni students studying in Chinese universities, and Yemeni traders in Guangzhou, the following section introduces the rise of the Yemeni community in China, which has been the country's largest Arab community since the beginning of this century. As the Chinese government does not release any official statistics on the country's foreign population, it is difficult to estimate the number of Arabs either in total or by country of origin. Various sources all agree that Yemenis form the largest group in China's Arab community, followed by Sudanese and Egyptians.[16] As Guangzhou is one of the most important trading provinces attracting Arab traders in China, the Yemeni community there is the biggest Arab group, followed by Jordanians, Syrians, Egyptians, Algerians and Saudi Arabians.[17] According to another source, the Yemeni diasporic community in Guangzhou is estimated at up to 5,000 people, accounting for 70 per cent of the Arabs in Guangzhou.[18] Due to the rapid development of demand and the increase in Yemeni traders coming to Guangzhou for business, a new

air link was opened between Sana‘a and Guangzhou in 2010. In addition, a new Yemeni consular office is planned in Guangzhou.[19]

The Yemeni diaspora started to develop in the early 1970s, continuing into the 1980s. Yemeni students at Chinese universities, as well as Yemeni traders, now regularly travel between China and Saudi Arabia. Students take university degrees in engineering, natural sciences and medical sciences, thanks to scholarships offered by the Chinese government. Many Yemeni graduates choose to stay behind after graduation and become business brokers. Ahmed al-Yafei, for example, a successful Yemeni businessman, elected president of the Yemeni Association of China and himself educated in the United States and Canada, worked in Saudi Arabia and Dubai before eventually choosing to stay in China. His decision was brought about not only by the country’s commercial and industrial growth, but also by the way in which the Chinese government and society welcome Arab investors.[20] In comparing this to the culture of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism in the West, he explains his decision to stay in China, where he feels respected and safe:

> You know, we left our home for a second country. For me, for instance, I lived in America, Canada and England for eighteen years. And when I compare China with those countries, I feel good to be in China because of the security in China, personal security – yes, it’s a very safe country compared to America, England or Canada … And people are extremely friendly. This is the main reason why I like to be here.[21]

Besides China’s policy of welcoming traders and investment, he explained to me why Yemeni elites prefer to stay in China after graduation and work as middlemen between Chinese factories and Arab businesses:

> Actually, the Yemeni community in Guangzhou first came here in the last century, as students. Some of them came in the 1970s and 1980s, and they stayed here, building good relationships between Yemen and China. These students, some of them are graduates in engineering, some of them in medicine. After they finished their work in Yemen they stayed for a while, and then they came back here, when China started to open up to the outside world. They started to focus on businesses. They came

> here and started working as brokers between people from the countries of the Middle East and the Chinese.[22]

Dr Faisal al-Mekhlafi, vice-chairman of the Yemeni Association in China, is a food scientist who obtained his doctorate in China, and now lives there. Like many Yemeni graduates, he told me he started his studies in China by learning Chinese. Being bilingual, competent in both Arabic and Chinese, many Yemeni graduates in China have seized the chance of mediating between Arab traders and the Chinese factories:

> The Arab businessmen who come here can't speak Chinese, and the Chinese people can't speak English. And this is the chance [Yemeni graduates in China] have – they have money and you don't have money, the Arab businessmen come to you: 'Okay I open the company with you. You are the manager here. You can do the translation. You can do business in both the Chinese factories and the Arab markets.' And he can develop himself and his family. And he can have his own apartment and car, a good life for many people … Ten years ago, when Arab businessmen came, very few Chinese people could speak English, so this is the chance we had.[23]

THE CHINESE MODEL: CHALLENGES FOR THE YEMENI DIASPORA AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

China's rise as a global hegemonic power is no doubt important. Whether China will become the next colonialist, following in the footsteps of Western imperialism in Africa and the Arab world, of course deserves further investigation and analysis. In response to the Arab Spring, China, unlike the United States and European nations, has adopted a noninterventionist approach in dealing with the revolutionary moments of the Middle East, including the process of political transition in Yemen.[24] Having stressed the principle of mutual respect for sovereignty, and encouraging multilateral dialogue, China continues to provide aid to help the Yemeni people achieve their aspirations for a peaceful and orderly transition through economic reconstruction. As part of its programme of assisting Yemen to overcome its political crisis since 2011, China has signed a US$5 million agreement to provide medical equipment and furniture for the Yemeni–Chinese Friendship Hospital.[25] Far

from pulling out, China continues to expand its bilateral economic ties with Yemen. According to the Chinese embassy in Sana'a, China has become Yemen's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching a historical high of US$5.5 billion in 2012, reflecting an increase of about 31 per cent over the previous year.[26] In addition to the expansion of trade, China's medical aid has been another important humanitarian service which started during China's socialist era in the 1950s.[27] The first Chinese medical aid team to arrive in Yemen was established in 1966, and a total of 3,400 medical workers were deployed to serve Yemeni patients in Sana'a, Aden, Hodeida, Ta'iz, Ibb, Zinjibar and Seiyun, and other towns.[28] Remarkably, the medical team sent to Yemen is China's largest team sent to Africa or the Middle East, as Gao Youzhen, a Chinese consul in Yemen, stated in an interview in the summer of 2005:

> Chinese medical teams now go all over the world, mainly to countries in the Middle East and Africa … Before unification in 1990, Yemen was split into South Yemen and North Yemen … So, our medical teams were sent to two separate countries. Currently, the medical team sent to the northern part mainly comes from Liaoning; the medical team sent to the southern part mainly comes from Anhwei. At this time, the medical teams going into Yemen include 160 people.[29]

In 2013 a gathering was held in Sana'a to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of this event.[30] It welcomed the return of Chinese medical teams who had been forced to leave due to the social unrest in Yemen in 2011.[31]

While many focus on China's increasing presence in the Middle East, including Yemen, this chapter argues that the counter-flow of Yemeni students and traders in the pioneering Arab diaspora to China is part of a significant trend for Yemen's future political and economic transformation. In response to the radical transformation promised by the Arab Spring, many hope that there will be real and radical change inside Yemen. China's Yemeni diasporic community has not only found new life in China, but also brings lessons about China's development path back to Yemen for future development. This is illustrated by Ahmed al-Yafie:

You know we have a lot of Middle Eastern intellectuals abroad. They learn and bring back whatever they learned from the foreign countries. They bring dreams. You know, we should take the example of China; China is a large country but it has law and order. And no one is above the law, all are equal in front of Chinese law, and that is why we see Chinese society and economy developing very fast, even though there are problems. For example, we learn lessons about how to facilitate development in the country alongside the replacement of officials and government personnel from changes in the Chinese government, the change of power in China – how the president changes every five years … You can't be president forever in reality, you know.

Ambassador Chang Hua welcomes Chinese medical team returning to Yemen, 29 March 2013. © Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Republic of Yemen

DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS, SOUTH–SOUTH CONNECTIONS

Rather than viewing the issue of the Yemeni diaspora as a brain-drain problem for the country, Yemenis in China think their experience in China may one day contribute to the well-being and better governance of their own country. Yet they still face everyday challenges living in China. First, China's Yemeni traders do not have a strong collective voice or autonomous community life. The Yemeni community has good reasons to form an association to teach Yemeni traders the Chinese way of doing things, and how to deal with the increasing number of business disputes that are arising with Chinese factories. Based on its anxiety to maintain social stability and avoid the threat of jihadism, the Chinese government banned Yemenis from forming an association and prevented them from

holding public gatherings.[32] Possibly because of issues of security and urban planning, Yemeni traders have faced increasing difficulties when applying for residency and in acquiring short-term visas for business visits. Yemenis of the second generation, born in mainland China, have also faced difficulties with the education system. A Yemeni medical student explained the problems of the existing International School as follows:

> The International School just allocates twenty minutes to teaching Arabic, and they teach in English, and Arab students are not good at English and they don't know. My son never speaks English and if you send him to an international school, all things are in English. How he can understand?[33]

My interviewees expressed anxiety about raising their children in China. The lack of Arabic-speaking schools and Islamic *madrasas* makes transmission of Islamic knowledge and preservation of Yemeni culture difficult, as al-Yafie noted:

> As an Arabic-speaking community, we hope we can have an Arabic school under the rule and supervision of the Chinese education system, so we can keep our culture alive here, and also a teacher who will teach kids everything they need … I live in China, my kids live in China, but I have to send them to Malaysia because the education there is open for other people – they can learn Islamic studies. That is why I send them to Malaysia and they live in Malaysia.[34]

Though they face difficulties, most Yemeni respondents I interviewed identified themselves as 'Chinese', and call China home after having stayed there for more than a decade,[35] as two Yemeni respondents reflected:

> We are now Chinese. I would like to thank the Yemeni and the Chinese governments because they give US a lot of opportunities and support in China. So we can teach in China and go to schools in China. They solve the problems for us. When we sit with Chinese people they can hear your problem. They help you to solve the problems.

> We hope you know I want to stay here, become more and more comfortable in the future and have open doors with Chinese people … We here like to help ourselves and also the Chinese, you know, we are friends of China. We choose to be in China. We … choose to be here and [want a] win–win situation for everyone. You know, we make business easier for the Chinese and for people from the Middle East.

Just as the political and cultural formation of black identity in a transatlantic framework has been based on a double consciousness of being both European and black,[36] the way in which the Yemeni diaspora strives to be both Arab and Chinese in the future deserves further investigation and analysis. As the Yemeni diasporic community in China continues to grow, their lives in China and potential impact on Yemeni society will be significant in shaping the future global 'South–South' relationship.[37]

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