



## BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY JOURNAL

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**THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY**

c/o The Hon. Secretary  
210 Stephendale Road, London, SW6 2PP  
Tel: 020 7731 3260 Email: [allfreea@gmail.com](mailto:allfreea@gmail.com)

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## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(Twenty-first Annual General Meeting, Wednesday 18 June 2014)

The objectives of the Society are “to advance public education and knowledge concerning the Republic of Yemen, its history, geography, economy and culture.” The BYS tries to steer a course that reflects the intense interest in the current political, security and economic concerns and the constant desire to illuminate Yemen’s historical, cultural and artistic contributions and diversity.

Huge expectations and hopes were raised by what was called the Arab Spring for the rapid transformation of Arab countries from autocracies to democracies inspired by the young people that went to “the squares” in vast numbers from late 2010. In the early optimistic days, all failed to recognise the enduring strength of the regimes largely created in the mid-20th century built around alliances embracing military, security and civil services held together by networks of patronage. The hopes of 2011 have been disappointed by the current realities: the civil war in Syria, the re-emergence, albeit reformed, of the previous Egyptian state, the exposure of the underlying divisions in Libya that I saw as a PhD student when it had a king.

I am saying all this because Yemen – with Tunisia – may be one of the few places that might be transformed over time by the Arab Spring. It came close to civil war in 2011 when the regime and its networks fractured, allowing the opportunity for the international community led by the Gulf Cooperation Council to mediate a solution that led to the resignation of President Saleh, a National Dialogue Conference (NDC) that was completed in January 2014, the restructuring of the military and the promise of substantial international aid.

The process has been led by Yemenis with the international community in support. The future of Yemen can only be determined by Yemenis. The NDC ended with some 1,800 recommendations which a Constitutional Drafting Committee is currently trying to turn into a new constitution. This will not be easy as the NDC could not decide on some key issues. It agreed that there should be a federal system but though the NDC concluded there should be six regions many object to how this decision was reached and insist Yemen should be a federation of two – the old north and south. The constitutional drafters also have to define what powers will be given to federal, regional, governorate and local authorities and how resources will be distributed. For example, one of the suggested regions is

a new Hadramaut that will consist of the current governorate of that name plus Shabwa and Mahra and will have most of Yemen's oil and gas resources.

New democratic structures will be set up but it will take much more than writing a constitution to eliminate the influence of the very powerful networks which remain in place and will seek to manipulate whatever system emerges unless there are robust safeguards. The moves to restructure the military and security, which appear to be proceeding well, are essential to the dismantling of inherited networks.

These are major challenges that have to take place against a very difficult background:

- The emergence of al-Huthi from Sa'ada is transforming the politics of the region north of Sana'a in a way, which may have profound consequences for Yemen.
- Many in the south still want a single southern region, if not independence. The government is trying to deal with this by showing how southern grievances can be met and offering a range of other concessions. It hopes to mobilise the support of the many south Yemenis now living in the north and those in the south that accept that a wider federation is needed.
- The army launched a major offensive against AQAP in April and this is continuing. It will take time given the nature of Yemen's terrain and the capacity of the military but it clearly shows that Yemen's counter terrorist actions are led by Yemenis, not by outsiders.

There are then Yemen's enduring problems of under development, poverty, food insecurity and the poor level of government services. Humanitarian organisations are campaigning to ensure that the UN programme to support Yemenis that need assistance is fully funded. Political transition requires that ordinary Yemenis see a tangible improvement in their lives.

The BYS welcomes the role that the British government is playing in the transition progress and in supporting Yemen's economic and social development. Both Nicholas Hopton, now in Qatar, and Jane Marriott, the current ambassador, have helped lead the effort. It is good to see the Yemeni-British relationship thriving in a year which was marked by the 60th Anniversary of HM The Queen's visit to Aden in April 1954.

One of our members, who would have been here tonight – Rashid Al-Kaf – was appointed Yemen's Minister of Oil on Monday. We would like to congratulate him and wish him every success.

## **BYS activities**

The highlight was on 17 February when we organised three events to mark the publication of our book “Why Yemen Matters” edited by Helen Lackner and itself based on the highly successful conference we put on with the London Middle East Institute at SOAS in 2013. The book has been well received. On 17 February, we arranged a seminar to discuss current political and economic issues, inaugurated the first BYS Annual Lecture and gave a reception. The lecture given by Amat Alalim Alsoswa, now head of the important Executive Bureau, was outstanding and made a great inaugural event.

The BYS is most grateful to the MBI Al Jaber Foundation and to Sheikh Mohamed Bin Issa Al Jaber personally for their strong support for these events – which, with the 2013 conference, would not have been possible without their support. We also want to acknowledge the help given by Nexen Inc and the Seven Pillars of Wisdom Trust and the partnership of the London Middle East Institute at SOAS and its staff.

Other events organised by us were:

- Dr Adel Aulaqi’s talk on “Remembering camels in Sheikh Othman 1946–1967”
- Professor Nora Colton’s lecture “The Economic Realities of the Yemen Conflict”
- Reception at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre to celebrate and honour Nouria Nagi on the same day as she received the OBE from HM The Queen. Thanks to Safa Mubgar for her support for that event.
- Thanos Petouris’s talk on “Soqotra: Life in the Arabian Periphery” held jointly with the Royal Society for Asian Affairs
- Talk by Fernando Carvajal: “Post Dialogue Yemen: Prospects for a Stronger Union or Expanded Fragmentation”.
- Talk by Jane Marriott on current events.
- Film show of Nawal al-Maghafi’s “The President’s Man and his Revolutionary Son”.

There was a function at the House of Commons sponsored by Keith Vaz MP, who was born in Aden and chairs the British-Yemeni parliamentary group, launching his initiative to link Yemeni and British institutions so that they can assist each other.

The first BYS Committee meeting held outside London: we went to Liverpool where one of our committee members Tahir Qassim Ali MBE intro-



duced us to the Lord Mayor and invited us to stay for the opening of the Annual Arab Arts Festival which he helps to organise. It features several Yemeni artists, not least a band from the Awdhali tribe of Abyan and Sheffield.

### **New books about Yemen**

*Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba* by Marjorie Ransom.

*The Last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain 1836-2012* by Dr Mohammad Seddon (history of Britain's oldest Muslim Community).

*Mad Mitch's Tribal Law: Aden and the End of Empire* by Aaron Edwards.

Two of the authors, whose books are reviewed in this journal, will be talking to the Society about their books later this year.

### **BYS members in the news**

Last month, the Yemeni ambassador organised a celebration when The Brain Trust, a UK organisation for the highly intelligent, presented its Avicenna Award to Dr Manahel Thabet, a Yemeni born in Taizz with two PhDs and a distinguished career – and she is only just into her 30s.

BYS members contributed to conferences, workshops and the media. We are organising with the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh a workshop to be held at Cambridge on 25-28 August on the Future of Yemen. Dr Salma Samar Damluji gave this year's inaugural lecture on Hadrami mud brick building at the Ecole de Chaillot in Paris.

We hope to announce the programme for the rest of the year during the summer. Apart from Aaron Edwards and Muhammad Seddon, Lis Kendall from Pembroke College Oxford will give a talk about Youth activism in Mahra. Helen Lackner will be giving a lecture at SOAS as part of its Tuesday evening series in December.

### **Membership**

Helen Lackner has proved a worthy successor to John Shipman as editor of the journal – and the 2013 issue was the first produced under her guidance. We are very grateful that she took on this position, which can be very demanding.

We have had another significant increase in membership by twenty-two new members – reflecting, we think, the greater level of activity of the BYS. Thanks to the support of Safa Mubgar, we have produced a new leaflet on the Society and will be revising the web site later this year.

It is with sadness that we note the death of two of our members:

- Mrs G. James
- Mr Nigel Groom (author of among other books *Sheba Revealed*). Several leading newspapers published obituaries of this remarkable man.

Patrick Seale was not a member of the Society but in November 1995 he lectured us on his “Recollections of Yemen in 1962”, one of the best (or most polished) ever delivered to the Society. He told me shortly before his death that he had prepared a manuscript on Yemeni-Saudi relations which he wanted to send me for comment. So we may hear more from him.

### **Yemen British Friendship Association**

We enjoy the best of relations with our opposite number in Sana‘a, the Yemen British Friendship Association whose chair has just stepped down as Yemeni foreign minister. The BYS would like to send Dr. Abu Bakr al-Qirby our best wishes for the future and our thanks for the support he has given personally to the BYS.

### **Congratulations**

Congratulations to Amr Sufian, who was awarded the BYS grant in 2013, on finishing his PhD on aspects of bee keeping. An article by him will appear in the journal later this year. We are pleased to announce that due to the high calibre of applications this year, we will be awarding two Academic grants to Joana Cook of King’s College London, and Marie-Louise Clausen of the University of Aarhus in Denmark.

### **The Committee**

The Committee wants to honour Dirham Abdo Saeed for his outstanding support and contribution to the BYS over many years by proposing that he is elected as Vice President to join Douglas Gordon, who is here, and Dr Abdullah Nasher, now based in Canada but continuing to take an active interest.

John Shipman stood down as editor last year but agreed to remain a member of the committee. I am delighted to see him here this evening. He now requests to retire from the committee but we are reluctant to lose his counsel and support. Whilst respecting his decision we want to offer him honorary membership of the committee. It will enable us and him to remain in touch and for him to be able attend meetings whenever he wishes and to see minutes and papers if he wants to comment on them. I am

delighted that he has agreed.

Otherwise all current members of the committee will stand for re-election – under the constitution there is no limit to the terms served by committee members though there are for honorary officers. The committee propose that the following be elected as new members:

- Robert Wilson. He was until recently the Political Counsellor at the British Embassy in Sana‘a and has long been an active supporter of the BYS
- Peter Welby. He first got to know Yemen when he lived in Aden for eight months from 2007-8, working as a volunteer for Christ Church and the Ras Marbat clinic. After returning to the UK for a degree in Politics and Philosophy at York, he moved to Egypt where he studied Arabic for two years. He now works on issues around religion and conflict in the Middle East and North Africa at the Tony Blair Faith Foundation.

We would be happy to co-opt one or two new members and if anyone is interested please let us know

I want to thank Audrey Allfree, Helen Balkwill-Clark and John Mason for their work as secretary, events secretary and treasurer respectively.

Finally, I would like to thank our host HE Abdullah Al-Radhi, the Yemeni ambassador, for his hospitality and his constant support for our activities and his understanding and patience of the way we operate.

NOEL BREHONY



Street art in Sana‘a: ‘I Want to Live in Peace’

photo Larissa Alles

## YEMEN'S NATIONAL DIALOGUE CONFERENCE – A TRIUMPH FOR OPTIMISM?

ROBERT WILSON<sup>1</sup>

This is not intended to be an “official history” of Yemen’s National Dialogue Conference (NDC), but a few personal impressions drawn from my time in Sana’a, from February 2012 to January 2014, as political counsellor at the British Embassy in Sana’a. This is not an official UK government view.

### **Background**

In the spring of 2011 Yemen almost spiralled down into civil war or the cycle of conflict that we have seen in other “Arab Spring” countries, notably Syria, Libya and Egypt, and perhaps to a lesser extent in Tunisia and Bahrain. That potentially precipitous descent was suddenly halted in March 2011 by the defection to the opposition of the powerful commander of the north-western military region and the First Armoured Division, General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, a relative of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. This effectively split the ruling regime, changing the confrontation between the regime and the people into a wary stand-off in which all parties recognised that there was no predictable way to end the country’s political crisis by force.

With what I hope it is not ungenerous to call unusual speed, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stepped forward with a proposal for a peaceful handover of power by Saleh to his deputy, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. As Saleh continued to hold out against signing up to a deal, the UN weighed in with Security Council Resolution 2014 in late October 2011 which called for all parties “to commit themselves to implementation of a political settlement based upon this initiative”. Passing through several versions, this short framework document was to become the GCC Initiative. Extensive negotiations continued until, on 23 November 2011, an Implementation Mechanism for the GCC Initiative was agreed which provided for the election of a state president, the formation of a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Wilson studied Yemen in the 1970s and has since then maintained his interest in the country’s development. He worked as a diplomat in a number of countries. His last position before retirement was as political counsellor at the British Embassy in Sana’a. He has just joined the Executive Committee of the Society.

government of national unity, and stipulated that “the President-elect and the government of national unity shall convene a comprehensive Conference for National Dialogue for all forces and political actors, including youth, the Southern Movement, the Huthis, other political parties, civil society representatives and women”.

### **Setting it up – the preparatory committee**

Hadi, Saleh’s Vice-President and deputy as head of the General People’s Congress (GPC) party, was elected President in an unopposed national ballot in February 2012. One of his first challenges was to appoint a preparatory committee to set the proposed National Dialogue Conference (NDC) in motion. When politicians started competing to influence the composition of the committee (fearing, or alleging, that its deliberations would shape the composition, the agenda or the outcomes of the NDC itself) it was re-branded as a technical preparatory committee.

The preparatory committee, consisting of 25 members soon increased to 31, could not possibly represent every party or faction with an interest in their country’s future, but it had a reasonable cross section of political and social opinion. Most observers were surprised – and relieved – that sworn enemies seemed prepared to sit together and have constructive discussions about the shape that the NDC should take. But it was at this stage that the “Southern Issue” began to develop as one which would dog the NDC until its conclusion in January this year (and arguably continues to influence the process of implementing the NDC’s many recommendations). Many in the south, harbouring justified grievances that went back to unification in 1990 of the old North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic) and South Yemen (People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen) as well as the treatment the south suffered in 1994 (and subsequently), when their attempt to regain independence was put down by northern forces. Grievances had coalesced in the emergence of the Hiraak movement in 2007, initially as a rights movement, but later calling anew for separation or secession. The development of the southern issue over the two years from 2012 to 2014 cannot be dealt with here: suffice it to say that many southerners rejected the NDC in principle, arguing that it could not credibly address the fundamental problem of the relationship between Sana’a and the people of the former PDRY, particularly as the GCC Initiative/Implementation Plan and UN resolutions pointed to the solution of Yemen’s political crisis firmly within the context of a unified state. Southerners had to be reminded again and again that the GCC



Initiative was the only option available, and it was up to them to use it in the best and most constructive way they could.

The Preparatory Committee took on board the fact that they were not fully representative of the Yemeni population but that they had a responsibility to design a conference that could fairly represent all Yemeni people. It was not an easy task: many were under considerable pressure from the political parties of which they were members. There were disputes about who was representative – the protest movement that had developed in Yemen’s own “Change Squares” had been progressively politicised so that it became increasingly difficult to distinguish who were bona fide members of non-partisan civil society organisations, and who were actually mouth-pieces for the political cliques that the protest movement was trying to dislodge. Additionally, new political parties had started to form, but they faced obstacles to becoming officially registered. Some of those which were registered were regarded by many as fronts for existing political movements.

The key task of the Preparatory Committee was to set down who should take part in the National Dialogue Conference. A recurrent problem throughout the conference and the preparatory phase that preceded it, was an unwillingness to take hard decisions and, particularly, to make difficult compromises. I don’t think this is unique to Yemen or its social and political leaders, but time and time again throughout the political process of the past two years, it was clear that Yemeni participants and observers were looking for someone to take decisions for them. Often they would look to president Hadi to provide leadership or offer specific direction. The President could, at times, have been more clearly directive, but he probably recognised that intervention could open him up to charges of bias from those who disagreed with him; but more critically, he showed no inclination to usurp the right of the NDC to determine the shape of Yemen’s future. However, both at the preparatory stage and in the NDC proper, participants often found it difficult to discuss issues without a structured proposal to debate. Whoever came forward with a proposal would be suspected of having their own agenda, or of trying to deprive the group of its right to reach decisions.

The Preparatory Committee had great difficulty completing its task. The full National Dialogue Conference was supposed to start in November 2012, but the months slipped by without a decision on who should take part. Ultimately they failed to reach a consensus, and the decision was

referred to the President. It was not until 16 March 2013 that Hadi, with strong prompting from the international community, the “Group of Ten” (the representatives in Yemen of the permanent 5 members of the UN Security Council, GCC states, and the EU) and the direct, but discreet, intervention of the UN Special Adviser, Jamal Benomar, issued a Presidential Decree listing the names of 565 delegates drawn from different political parties and sectors of society. The NDC was formally opened by the President on 18 March, at a ceremony attended (amongst others) by Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Dr Abdullatif Zayani, and UN envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar. The ceremony coincided with the second anniversary of “*Jum’at al-Karamah*” (Friday of Dignity) when more than 50 young Yemeni protesters were killed in Sana’a. A short and deeply moving documentary of the massacre, “*Karamah has no Walls*” was nominated for the 2014 Oscars awards.

### **The National Dialogue Conference**

This is not the place to go into a detailed account of the conference itself. In the broadest terms, the members of the conference were assigned to nine working groups. They were each provided with a table of topics that they were responsible for discussing and providing recommendations on. A work programme issued around this time allowed three weeks for the opening plenary session, followed by two months for outreach, discussion, and presentation of initial recommendations. A second plenary session followed in June-July 2013 to review progress to date. This was supposed to be followed up with a further two months’ discussion by the working groups, with a closing session starting in September. In fact, this second working group phase was drawn to a close only a little behind schedule on 3 October. The closing session for the NDC opened on 8 October.

But problems remained and the session could not reach resolution. Some of the working groups had finalised their reports or were close to doing so, but three key ones remained mired in controversy – the Transitional Justice working group, the Southern Issue working group, and the State Building working group. Transitional Justice was bogged down in debate about who should be held to account for past wrongs; which wrongs should be included; and how the perpetrators should be held to account. The debate was complicated by the amnesty that outgoing President Ali Abdullah Saleh had negotiated as a condition for signing up to the GCC Initiative. The Southern Issue group was locked into an apparently irresolvable



dispute. Northerners, particularly from Saleh's GPC party, were reluctant to cede any of the control that Sana'a had imposed over the south since the failed war of secession of 1994, or risk losing the substantial economic assets they had acquired over the past two decades. Southerners' views ranged from those calling for secession to those arguing for substantial autonomy within a federal structure. As discussion converged on a federal solution, the argument became one over the number of federal regions: southerners arguing for two, along the lines of the old PDRY-YAR border, whilst northerners argued that this would be tantamount to secession or a shortcut to it. The State Building group argued that they could not complete their work without agreement on what sort of state they were being asked to build.

The "closing session" was re-named the third plenary session while these issues were being hammered out. It was finally drawn to a close on 11 January of this year so that the 1800 or so decisions or recommendations of the working groups could be drawn together in the final document by the Conference's Consensus Committee for formal adoption. The plenary session took place shortly afterwards to adopt the "Document of the Comprehensive National Dialogue", and the formal closure of the NDC was marked by a ceremony on 25 January attended by representatives of the UN, the GCC and the G10 countries.

Only history will be able to reveal whether the National Dialogue Conference has paved the way for the successful development of Yemen as a modern state. The 1800 recommendations contained in the final document (some constitutional, some legislative, and some broad statements of principle) are suitable building blocks but it will be a challenge to work those recommendations into a viable constitution and legislation. The real challenge, though, will be to secure implementation and genuine support from the political classes and society more broadly.

Pessimists point to the fact that significant elements of Yemeni society were not satisfactorily represented in the NDC; or that some issues were fudged right up to the end – for example, the number of federal regions that should make up a reformed Yemeni state.<sup>2</sup> This was only set after the

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2 The proposed six regions (with the current governorates in brackets) are Aden (Lahej, Dhala' and Abyan), Aljanad (Taizz and Ibb), Azal (Amran, Sa'ada, Sana'a and Dhamar), Hadramaut (Shabwa, Hadramaut, Socotra and Mahra), Saba (al Jawf, Mareb and al Baydha) and Tihama (Hajja, Mahweet, Hodeida and Raymah). Sana'a and Aden cities are expected to have special status.

formal closure of the conference, in a presidential decree issued on 10 February defining four regions in the old north (YAR) and two in the former PDRY. They also point out that the NDC's recommendations cannot address all of Yemen's problems, which, in any case, long pre-date the "Arab Spring". Other question marks are raised by, for instance, the involvement of Huthi militias in what has seemed like an attempt to maximise the area under their control in the north, fighting a sectarian and tribal war against current and potential rivals, and destroying government offices and schools whilst their representatives were playing a largely positive part in the political process. Much needs to be done to persuade southerners that they can live with their northern brothers without being steamrollered by the weight of numbers – 80% of Yemen's population is in the north. Despite much prompting, northerners have done little or nothing to assure southerners that they have turned over a new leaf, whilst criticising or ridiculing those calling for secession. Above all, the past two years have highlighted the weakness of the state and the inadequacies of government and the political class.

Optimists point to a number of highly important and positive aspects – the fact that Yemen did not descend into civil war, though there are continuing and considerable challenges from al-Qaeda aimed at undermining the state's political process and national security forces. Al-Qaeda also threatens international support by attacking and kidnapping foreigners. Optimists also argue that participation in the NDC was very largely constructive, and the involvement of youth, women, and civil society organisations opened up the political arena, challenging traditional political and social elites. Whether or not people were confident in the dialogue process or the outcomes it would produce, it has been broadly acknowledged, if sometimes negatively, as the only vehicle for change.

Some real stars have emerged from the Dialogue. One could highlight the central role played by Ahmed bin Mubarak, a young Aden-born and US-trained expert in business administration who filled the role of secretary general of the NDC. But there is a whole host of others, including some impressive women, who have played leading roles in shaping the prospect for a better Yemen. More significant, however, is the education that the NDC has provided much more widely, in lobbying, negotiating, communicating and persuading through peaceful means. Even in rural areas, it has opened the way for people to think about the relationship between citizen and state, and what sort of state they might want.

The NDC brought out the extraordinary resilience of Yemen and its people, faced as it was with recurrent challenges: the horrific attack on a military parade in Sana‘a, killing almost 100 soldiers, assassinations and kidnappings, attacks on the security apparatus, constant sabotage of the oil and electricity infrastructures. This is perhaps because Yemenis’ expectations of the state are low, and their expectations of traditional politicians even lower. But there has been real frustration at the decline in security, and the lack of improvement in the economy.

It has also brought out Yemen’s reliance on external support and intervention. Though Yemenis were keen to stress that this was a Yemeni process and to avoid any suggestion that a solution to Yemen’s problems was being imposed by outsiders, it is unlikely that this could have come about without the broad framework offered by the GCC Initiative; the support of the international community, including through the “Friends of Yemen” group which met in late April 2014 in London, the “Group of Ten”, and the United Nations itself, represented by Special Adviser Jamal Benomar and his substantial team working alongside the traditional UN agencies.

Yemen’s National Dialogue has now ended and Yemen’s political process has moved on to the stage of drafting a new constitution and accompanying legislation guided by the recommendations of the NDC. It has not solved Yemen’s problems, nor should it have been expected to. A good and detailed constitution may emerge from the present stage, but that will be much less important than its implementation. Will a new politics emerge in Yemen? Or will the old centres of political and social power reassert themselves, so that things drift back to the way they were before?



Street art in Sana‘a: ‘Sectarianism’

photo Larissa Alles

# CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN IN THE YEMENI POLITICAL TRANSITION

AMBASSADOR AMAT ALALIM ALSOSWA<sup>1</sup>

FIRST ANNUAL LECTURE OF THE BRITISH-YEMENI SOCIETY<sup>2</sup>

## The National Dialogue Conference

Although most of my lecture concerns the role of women in the political transition, I will also give my views on other features of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC ) as it has recently ended. It successfully brought together many social, political, and tribal groups, as well as women and youth from all these social sectors. This achievement must be balanced with the fact that it excluded some important and very influential groups and figures, mainly the previous president Ali Abdullah Saleh and his former closest associate and current adversary General Ali Mohsen, senior Muslim scholars such as Abdul Majid Aziz Al Zindani and other religious leaders. Finally and most importantly, ordinary non educated men and women were not represented although they form the majority of the population. Similarly, the main groups of southern separatists also failed to participate, though they were invited.

Women, youth and civil society were very effective in their participation in the NDC and were the only non-traditional political forces represented. While youth and civil society had 20% of representatives, women only had 28% rather than the 30% which had been agreed.

Procedurally, the NDC also did not live up to expectation. Its agenda was too long, and the items were insufficiently coordinated; as a result, discussion was superficial and did not allow for real engagement and debate. Politics were the major subject, leaving economics on the back burner

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1 Ambassador Amat Alalim Alsoswa was the first woman minister in Yemen, then Assistant Secretary General at the United Nations. She is currently the managing director of the Executive Bureau which was established as the arm of the transitional regime and Friends of Yemen to speed up disbursement of development and humanitarian assistance.

2 As Ambassador Amat improvised considerably on her originally prepared speech, the text presented here was finalised after the conference when she kindly found the time in her busy schedule to add the substance of her actual talk to provide readers with the full range and flavour of her views. The written version was completed in May 2014, thus covering a few events which took place after the presentation on 17 February.

despite its great importance for the livelihoods of the Yemeni people. The issue of the distribution of power between the north and the south took up most of the debating time at the expense of other, more fundamental, issues.

To the dismay of many in the country, the dialogue took place in a vacuum outside its environment, while the security situation in the country continued to deteriorate; for example Abyan, Shabwa and Hadramaut reached a situation where they were almost entirely out of the control of the central state. At the same time, there was a strong disconnect between the NDC and the government, which was not empowered to implement the GCC initiative. This was demonstrated by the Prime Minister's boycotting the dialogue throughout its entire period. It is also shown by the fact that government failed to implement the 10 and then 21 points of action, which had been agreed to address the problems of the South and Sa'ada. Among other external events during the period was the establishment of at least six new Salafi political parties.

### **Challenges for Women.**

First, there are many challenges facing women in Yemen's political transition. Over the past five years, according to the Global Gender Gap report of 2013, women in Yemen have ranked the lowest of 136 countries covered, and the unemployment rate for adult Yemeni women is estimated at 41%. Adult female literacy in Yemen today is only 49% compared to 82% for men. Since two-thirds of Yemen's population of over 25 million are rural, the critical shortage of water, lack of health facilities and overall economic decline are especially hard on Yemen's women and children.

In the uprisings against the former regime that began in January 2011, women and youth played an exceptional role and this led to the death of a number of women as well as youth. And despite Tawakkol Karman's Nobel Peace Prize in honour of the role of Yemeni and Arab women, I am obliged to mention the following observations, which show the actual situation of women and girls in my Yemen:

- Women have had negligible influence at the negotiating table that led to the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative in Riyadh in November 2011. Only one woman from the then ruling party was present at the signature ceremony. The opposition Joint Meeting Parties delegation did not include a single woman.
- In the interim Consensual Government there are only two female minis-



ters and one female state minister. (The latter resigned over a dispute with the Prime Minister's office).

- The preparatory committee for the NDC did not fulfil its quota of 30% women, achieving only 26 to 28%. The NDC presidium included only one woman as a vice rapporteur. None of the political parties participating in the dialogue nominated a woman to chair their negotiating delegation, except the group of independent women. Despite this, women chaired three of the nine NDC committees.
- While it is true that this is the first time in the history of modern Yemen, that women were involved in the negotiations for a new government, their effectiveness was minimised from the start. For example the recommendations of most of the conference committees called for the elimination of discrimination against women and confirmed their right to equal citizenship as stated in the constitution and in the law. There was a call for the State to bear its responsibility to promote equality in drafting the new constitution and the need to, at least, meet the 30% quota in the new legislative, executive and judicial bodies. However, less than a week after the conclusion of the dialogue, the President of the Republic named the Commission on Federalisation including only two women among twenty-two members.
- A presidential decree is soon expected to appoint the Constitutional Drafting Committee. It is not expected that he will appoint 30% women. The newly formed Consensus Committee has decided, in contradiction with the internal by-laws of the conference, to change the proposed percentage of members in the Constitutional Committee. There is no reference to the agreed-upon 50% representation from the South, nor to the 30% quota for women. Hopefully, both the National Authority, the expanded Consensus Committee and the expanded Majlis al Shura<sup>3</sup> council, will re-instate these negotiated percentages.

In short, while women and youth have played important roles during the uprising and subsequent calls for government reform, the victorious are still the old and traditional political elites who dominated the agenda in the dialogue. During the past two years, in which I participated in the NDC, there has been no positive change which could lead to the improvement of women's status, improve health conditions, reduce the high illiteracy rate of women, malnutrition and discriminatory practices against girls and

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3 The Majlis al Shura is the non-elected second chamber of Yemen's legislative structure.

women. Most importantly, the participation of women in the economy has deteriorated, as has their access to higher education. Unemployment rates have risen due to the level of insecurity and armed conflicts which threaten stability and lead to high numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs). While women may have a role to play in future political participation, the most difficult issue facing them right now is the deterioration in the economy. The easiest role could be seen in women's political participation. The most difficult to sustain is their economic participation.

### **NDC outcomes for women.**

The second issue I would like to address today is the outcome of the NDC in supporting women's rights. Most of the conference participants and committees agreed on the need for a constitutional provision to protect women's rights, although it took different forms. The basic principle is that citizens, men and women alike, are equal before the law in rights and duties without discrimination due to sex, race, origin, colour, religion, sect, belief, opinion, economic status, social or political affiliation or geographical location. It was further noted that the state must take the necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls, including child marriage. The formation of an independent body to achieve this aim was proposed. The text was enhanced so that "the State is obliged to work according to the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international conventions and treaties ratified by the legislative authority in Yemen, the Arab League Charter and norms of international law". Beyond this, it was recognised that national laws need to be harmonised with international conventions and treaties.

Regarding the women's quota in the political process, the majority of committees agreed on the percentage of representation for women in all legislative, executive, and judicial and elected local councils. The Freedoms and Liberties Committee affirmed that the quota should be constitutionally established. The text of the Sustainable Development Committee reads: "women should be represented at least by 30% and youth by no less than 20% of the three higher state authorities" while the Independent Institutions Committee stipulated that women should be represented in the membership of independent bodies, at a ratio of at least 30%. The Good Governance Committee proposed a "women's quota of 30% in top positions in all fields of civil and military sectors". The State Building Committee proposed a women's quota of 30% in the legislative and the



electoral boards and party lists. This relates to the quota for women in the national and local legislative bodies. Since females constitute 51% of Yemen's population, the goal of reaching equal citizenship rights must emphasize a quota of not less than 30% as a minimum, or go for parity.

In terms of citizenship, men and women have the same rights to participate actively in political life, including voting and running as candidates for public office. The State is committed to include every citizen in the electoral register when s/he fulfils the required qualifications. The State shall ensure women's full civil, political, economic and cultural rights and is committed to enable women to exercise equal citizenship. State laws should eliminate discrimination and provide protection from all forms of violence and inhuman practices. Since the majority of the conference participants agree on the protection of all citizens' rights, the words citizen or citizens should be further defined to specify men and women. This should preferably be inserted in the Preamble of the Constitution as an overarching principle.

A major social issue debated within Yemen is early marriage. The majority of committees specified a minimum age for marriage at 18 years for both sexes, while the Development Committee, in its resolution no. 44 stated: "all measures must be taken in order to avoid early pregnancy." This loosely written provision is contrary to what was approved and leaves open the prospect of marrying at a younger age, even before puberty. Some committees provided clauses for the criminalisation of early marriage, such as resolution 167 of the Freedoms and Liberties group that was passed with full consensus. Most of the conference committees agreed on the criminalisation of the violation of the physical integrity of girls (female genital mutilation) and of sexual harassment. The majority also called for the activation of the medical certification of appropriate age before marriage, and the criminalisation of the exploitation of women in commercially humiliating activities.

The majority of conference participants demanded that the state provide separate prisons for women, and establish care and rehabilitation centres for women prisoners after serving their sentences. The conference also called for the government to provide care for women and children victims of armed conflicts as well as the criminalisation of the exploitation of children in armed conflicts. The majority agreed on the criminalisation of forced labour and all types of slavery, oppression, human trafficking (especially of children and women) and of all forms of violence against women.

Participants confirmed women's economic and financial independence,

right to property ownership and inheritance, parental rights and a woman's ability to be her own civil entity.

The majority of participants confirmed the State's duty to protect motherhood, childhood and the elderly, and to provide care for children and youth. It should also provide women with the appropriate conditions to develop their talents and abilities. Other issues raised included women's entitlement to privacy with respect to pregnancy and childbirth, as well as state protection of their reproductive function. A majority of committees called for the strengthening and activation of primary and reproductive health care services including construction and adequate staffing of all facilities.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up this aspect of the NDC's work, a number of resolutions and recommendations promoting women's rights have been approved, as well as the creation of mechanisms to achieve them within the scope of government plans and programmes. It is very important that these be included in the new constitution of Yemen. The NDC agreed on the establishment of a national authority to monitor the implementation of the outcomes document of the NDC, as well as the expansion of the Shura Council to include people from the political parties, which are not currently represented.

Now that the dialogue is over, it is worth noting its main achievements and failures. On the achievements side, its final document provides guarantees and solutions for the southern issue, including the proposal to restructure Yemen into six regions. It agreed terms of reference for the Constitutional Drafting Committee and that the new political system should be parliamentary, but does not specify that the presidential position would be limited to two terms.

On the down side, the NDC has brought about another transitional period, which has no limit to its duration, nor are its obligations clear. Currently the southern separatist movement is growing; this is not because it has a clear political agenda, but rather because there is a complete absence of government services or indeed of government in the southern provinces.

A major failure of the NDC was that it did not adequately address the country's fundamental problems, in particular the shortage of water. Development is the answer to Yemen's fundamental problems, and the real challenges to the outcome of the NDC and to the country's stability are water scarcity, the depletion of oil reserves, the lack of development

policies and investment, in addition to the humanitarian situation and the continued IDP crises resulting from the different conflicts.

In conclusion, we must realise that dignity and equality, freedom and justice are the foundations which underlie the guaranteeing of democratic systems built on equal citizenship. Realisation of the principles of the rule of law and the elimination of gender discrimination must inform the formal inscription of these rights in the new constitution in a special chapter on freedoms and human rights. Human rights are a collective responsibility and require a shared endeavour involving family and official institutions, political groups and civil society organisations, the private sector and individuals. Freedom from fear and oppression must be established in order to build peace and understanding between the diverse cultural and political groups within Yemen. There is no social justice without respect for human rights and their promotion. The NDC has presented a blueprint for achieving equal human rights for the women of Yemen. With full awareness of all the obstacles to achieving such a vital goal, I believe this blueprint can lead to what we all want, a peaceful and thriving Yemen where its citizens, women, men and children, can enjoy one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world and contribute to the renewal of a great civilization's history, a history that spans the flourishing kingdoms of ancient South Arabia through the Islamic era to the present. This is my hope for the blossoming of Yemen's spring.



Amat Alalim Alsoswa (second from left) at a Women's Rights workshop

photo Larissa Alles

## YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF YEMEN'S TRANSITION IN MID-2013

LARISSA ALLES<sup>1</sup>

Three years after the uprising in Yemen, the country is still deep into its transition period (which was due to last only two years). Its people look back at the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), and find that the country is paralysed by intra-elite struggles and lacks an effective government. This article presents the views of a few participants in the uprisings, two years on, as told to me during fieldwork in the summer of 2013.<sup>2</sup>

I am sitting with a friend in one of Sana'a's coffee shops. We got to know each other during the uprising, and I followed her and her friends' work closely via Facebook. She was involved with a group of young people in education work on Sana'a's famous Change Square, informing people about human rights. I vividly remember her enthusiasm back then, her posts and many photos that gave the impression that 'change' was not just near, it was within reach, and she was in one of the groups working to bring it about.

Three years later, she eagerly remembers these first months of the revolution. What was framed in the media around the world and in many experts' reports as an 'uprising against the authoritarian regime' included for her and her friends another, maybe even more important aspect: the opening up of perspectives. For the first time in Yemen's history (at least since unification in 1990), there was a space where creativity was allowed, and where new perspectives seemed to be possible. Yemen's population is very young and prospects for higher education and subsequent jobs have been very low, for both men and women. In addition, there is little that young people can do after school or university, nor are there places where they can meet. For many people the Change Squares, throughout the country, suddenly opened up spaces where they could experience and express themselves in a variety of ways, including different forms of art (music, painting, photography etc.) and, perhaps even more importantly, exchange opinions in discussions. The atmosphere was relaxed enough for both men and women to engage in discussions on political and social issues, a new experience for many in Yemen's very conservative and largely gender segregated society.

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1 Larissa Alles is a Doctorate student at the University of St. Andrews

2 This fieldwork was kindly supported by the BYS Academic Grant 2012.





‘The Walls remember their Faces’ campaign

photo Larissa Alles

Yet, many of the very youths who, like my friend, eagerly participated in these activities say today that the revolution has failed. The turning point for them was the involvement of members of the political elite in the revolution, turning it into an arena of intra-regime struggle. But then, what is left? Although at the forefront of the protests in 2011, today youth feel excluded from the negotiations of the transition period. They feel their voices remain unheard, and perspectives are at least as scarce as before the uprising. However, despite the political elite’s neglect of the youth’s demands, young people have retained some of the spirit from the days of the uprising and express it in different art forms. A whole new scene of young musicians, photographers, painters, etc. emerged and continues to flourish in newly established cultural centres, coffee shops and online. It might not be as open as it used to be at the time of the protests, but it seems to have just started.

Yet, art also took to the streets after the uprising. My friend and I leave the coffee shop and walk through the busy streets of Sana‘a. She tells me how she participated in the campaign to remember disappeared political prisoners. Organised by street artist Murad Sobay who has now gained recognition beyond Yemen for a number of his campaigns, ‘The Walls remember their Faces’ campaign started in 2012 with spraying on the walls of Sana‘a the portraits of political prisoners who disappeared in the last

40 years. It is a tribute to those whose fate remains unknown and to their families. My friend recalls that, thanks to this campaign, a few of the disappeared, who were believed to be dead were found, some twenty or thirty years later. Murad's new projects include the Twelve Hours Campaign, addressing twelve socio-political problems in Yemen such as sectarianism, drone strikes, the kidnapping of foreigners or the spreading of weapons.

Much of the feeling in Change Square that everything was possible may have vanished once people returned to their homes, but the spirit of creativity among some of the young people remains. They express their criticism and views of their society in new ways, and they are not keeping silent. Another way they use to make their voices heard is a kind of grass-roots civil society activism. Every other week, someone comes up with a new event: a conference against the death penalty in Yemen with particular emphasis on the issue of underage defendants, a campaign against child marriage named 'Warda' which has a significant presence on Facebook, or a workshop on the definition of women's rights in the new constitution. All these activities take the form of full-day conferences with fairly prominent speakers, exhibitions, and online campaigns. Facebook has retained its importance as a tool for communication and mobilisation. Thus, lack of activism does not seem to be cause for the lack of development since 2011; rather the main political actors are caught up in power struggles and ignore the potential and demands of youth and other civil society actors.

Change of scene. It is now sometime around the 30th June 2013, and no matter what *qat* chew I walk into, only one topic is discussed: Egypt. I am stunned that the political upheaval in Yemen and the latest phase of the NDC seem to barely be of any interest to the circles of journalists, social workers and others whom I meet. But what strikes me is not simply the fact that people discuss what is happening in Egypt, but the intensity and enthusiasm with which they do it. If *qat* had not been involved, I might have thought I was in Egypt. Although the whole spectrum of opinions on the Tamarrod and the related events are discussed, there are only two positions: people see it as either a 'second revolution' in Egypt, provoking the ouster of the gruesome regime of the Muslim Brotherhood, or it is seen as a *coup d'état* that overthrew a democratically elected government. One can only be "for" or "against" the Tamarrod movement. I only heard one person say, "Yemenis are crazy. They make the Egyptian problems their

own”.<sup>3</sup> So, what is making Yemenis so passionate about Egypt? It seems that Egypt, more than any other Arab country, serves as some sort of role model for Yemenis. One reason might be that Egypt is one of the very few countries which Yemenis can visit without a visa, making it more accessible than other places. Another is the presence of thousands of Egyptian teachers since the 1970s at all levels of the educational system, even in the remotest villages, thus having considerable influence on youth.

The comparison with Egypt is almost inescapable. Egypt is admired for being a ‘proper state’ with working institutions and binding rules. Yemenis acknowledge that these things are relative, but despite problems such as corruption, Egypt is seen as a much more developed state, one in which tribalism, for example, does not play the same role as it does in Yemen (this argument is most frequently made by people from the Taizz area and the south). “In 2011, Egypt gave us a new role”,<sup>4</sup> I am told when asking why there is a constant reference to the country. Egypt served as a role model even during the days of the uprising. The revolution there happened fast, relatively smoothly and successfully with the ouster of president Mubarak. Since 2011, Yemenis have experienced being on the brink of civil war, a deterioration of the security situation in the country, worsening shortages of water, diesel and electricity, a food crisis, and a transition process that appears to be slow, tedious, and which seems to take place mainly within the existing power structures. Unlike in Egypt – regardless of *how* these processes developed there – no one in Yemen has been held accountable for the many dead from the uprising. A new constitution still seems to be far away, the transition government weak, and the ousted president is said to still yield considerable influence.

For the people in the *qat* chews, the aims of the revolution have not been achieved. Yes, they say, the atmosphere right after the uprising was free, including freedom of the press, but now, they perceive that everything is back to the starting point. The real issue for them appears to be the state of paralysis. During the protests, there was something to do, to plan, to spread information; somewhere to go, to organise, to protest. There was work to do in order to contribute to a larger project. Now, for many, there is nothing much to do anymore other than wait for decisions from the NDC that do not come. The fact that there is some action in Egypt, regardless of the opinion people had about the Morsi government, is what makes events

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3 Interview with founder of a Yemeni human rights organisation, Sana‘a, July 2013.

4 Interview with Yemeni journalist, Sana‘a, July 2013.



there so attractive to follow and to discuss, rather than developments in Yemen. When I ask how they think events in Egypt in June and July 2013 are likely to influence what will happen in Yemen, the standard answer is: “What happens in Egypt will also happen in Yemen.” I hear this a number of times. Further explanations on that remain vague. The Muslim Brotherhood does not have its own party in Yemen. Instead, many are sceptical of the growing political influence of Islah because they fear Yemeni politics may become ‘more religious’.

Whether or not an exact parallel between the events in these two countries can be drawn seems to be of less importance here. What is more decisive in these discussions is the momentum of change that occurred once again in Egypt. The perception is that, in Egypt, a political process is unfolding which is once again giving the population the opportunity for direct involvement. To many, this looks like the exact opposite to the apparent paralysis of politics in Yemen.

Of course these reactions are not representative of the entire Yemeni population. One needs to remember that the rural population probably experience this transition period differently. My observations are typical of Yemen’s northern urban centres. In the south, the post-2011 period is perceived very differently. Whilst drone strikes and the unclear presence of Ansar al-Sharia remain rather abstract topics in the *qat* chews in Sana‘a, they pose a very clear living reality for people in the eastern provinces.

By the summer of 2013, conditions in Yemen had not changed for the better since the 2011 uprising, and no one knows that better than Yemenis themselves. But the uprising has changed the self-perception of Yemenis.<sup>5</sup> People have developed a new creativity and energy to bring about social change. But with the disappearance of the country’s change squares, the arenas to channel this energy also vanished. With elite politics adopting the themes of the transition, conventional norms once again dominate social life. But the uprising’s creativity and spirit of change remains, whether on the walls of Sana‘a or in the *qat* sessions.

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<sup>5</sup> Interview at the Journalists’ Syndicate Sana‘a, 12 July 2013.

#### CORRECTION

Further to our article last year on the origins of the BYS, I have been asked to make sure that members are aware of the fact that Dr Francine Stone was one of the founding members of the BYS and of its Executive Committee until 1999.

Editor

## CONTEMPORARY URBAN ISSUES

FRANCK MERMIER<sup>1</sup>

Yemen has been known since ancient times for its cities. Today, Yemen's urban structures continue to distinguish it from its neighbours in the Arabian Peninsula. By contrast with the highly urbanized Gulf states, where the urban population sometimes exceeds 90%, Yemen's population remains largely rural with less than a third urban, close to 8 million city dwellers out of a population of 25 million.<sup>2</sup> In 2011, the capital's population was estimated at around 3 million.<sup>3</sup> Estimates for Hodeida, Taizz and Aden, is over 600,000 inhabitants each, while Mukalla's exceeds 400,000 inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> Yemen's urban landscape continues to have little in common with that of the rest of the Arabian Peninsula. In fact, the process of metropolization has transformed the Arabian peninsula's urban landscapes into spectacular cities dominated by huge towers and shopping malls. Yemen has been spared this vertical urban expansion, and its cities are still strongly connected to their environment and to their cultural and historical heritage. One of the most striking consequences of the metropolization process is also found in the drastic changes which affected the hierarchy of cities. Dubai, now the "focal point of a global economy",<sup>5</sup> is the most emblematic site of a new regional configuration in which Yemen is a marginalised economic actor. However, significant urban growth has provoked in Yemen what geographers call an urban transition, a process of ruralization of the cities and urbanization of the countryside.

Rural exodus, which has greatly increased the population of Yemeni cities, has often made a detour via the other countries of the Arabian Peninsula with Yemeni migrants returning to live in cities, notably in Sana'a, Taizz and Hodeida, and investing in commerce and construction. In the early 1980s, the German geographer Eugen Wirth noted the

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1 Franck Mermier is Director of Studies at the CNRS-EHESS [Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales] Institut Interdisciplinaire d'Anthropologie du Contemporain, Paris

2 Roman Stadnicki, 'Le Yémen vers la transition urbaine', in Laurent Bonnefoy, Franck Mermier and Marine Poirier (ed.), *Yémen. Le tournant révolutionnaire*, Paris, Karthala/CEFAS, 2012, p. 201.

3 'Mayor announces new city-wide infrastructure projects', *Yemen Times*, 18 April 2013.

4 Roman Stadnicki, 'Le Yémen vers la transition urbaine', *op. cit.*, p. 205.

5 Fuad K. Malkawi, 'The New Arab Metropolis: A New Research Agenda', in Yasser Elsheshtawy (ed.), *The Evolving Arab City. Tradition, Modernity and Urban Development*, Londres, Routledge, 2008, p. 32.

development of the building sector as a consequence of ex-migrants settling in Sana'a.<sup>6</sup> In the 2000s, urban spread led to the proliferation of commercial zones. *Qat* markets located in the periphery of Sana'a symbolize the connection between the rural world and the city's new gates,<sup>7</sup> while Sana'a and Aden's shopping malls remain pale replicas of those in the Gulf. Yemen's urban expansion is closely linked to the country's relations with its neighbours since it was largely sustained by workers' remittances and the oil monarchies' support for the regime. Yemeni cities were also affected by the region's political turmoil, including the expulsion of close to 800,000 Yemenis from Saudi Arabia in 1990, and the consequent expansion of informal housing and economic sectors.

One of the main consequences of this urban pressure is the shortage of water, particularly in Sana'a where the water table continues to shrink. Another significant problem concerns urban services, such as water supply networks, electricity, schools, and medical facilities, which lag behind this urban expansion. Their chaotic management by often rival administrations is aggravated by unregulated urbanization and the State's unclear urban strategies.<sup>8</sup> Local authorities are tools for state security control, such as Sana'a's *Amânat al-âsima* which has been administered by an army officer since it was created in 1984, as well as the system of neighbourhood leaders known as *'âqil* which was introduced in Aden after the 1994 civil war.<sup>9</sup> The new government seems to follow the same pattern as President Hadi in 2012 appointed another officer, General Abdul Qader Hilal, as mayor of Sana'a in place of Abdul-Rahman al-Akwa', ex-army officer and the son-in-law of ex-president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

One of the main phenomena during the last decades has been the rise in social and spatial segregation inside the cities. The new political and

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6 Eugen Wirth, 'Les forces économiques et sociales de l'aménagement de Sana'a' in Jean Métral, Georges Mutin (ed.), *Politiques urbaines dans le Monde arabe*, Lyon, Maison de l'Orient-EMA, 1984, p. 451-460.

7 Franck Mermier, 'Le qât à Sana'a', in Samia Naïm (ed.), *Yémen. D'un itinéraire à l'autre*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2001, p. 23-29.

8 For Sana'a, see Roman Stadnicki and Vincent Martignon, 'Quand la marge passe au centre. Le cas des périphéries de Sana'a (Yémen)' in Nora Semmoud, Bénédicte Florin, Olivier Legros et Florence Troin (ed.), *Marges urbaines et néolibéralisme en Méditerranée*, Tours, Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2014, p. 213-231.

9 For Sana'a, see Franck Mermier, 'Sana'a, métaphore de l'Etat yéménite', in Gilbert Grandguillaume, Franck Mermier and Jean-François Troin (ed.), *Sana'a hors les murs*, Tours, URBAMA/CFEY, 1995, p. 37-70 ; for Aden, see Eric Mercier, *Aden, un parcours interrompu*, Tours, URBAMA/CFEY, 1997

economic elites' tendency to regroup has led to new socially homogeneous neighbourhoods of walled villas. In Sana'a, beyond Hadda district, the elite invested in land leading to Bayt Baws (at the southern outskirts of Sana'a) while informal neighbourhoods have sprung up along the Wadi Dahr and Taizz roads. In Aden, neighbourhoods similar to gated communities were constructed after the 1994 war on the city's borders, particularly on the road to Bab al-Mandab, while urban slums have increasingly encroached on the slopes of Mount Shamsan. Mosques and new commercial spaces, notably malls, are as much monumental markers of political and economic power as they are symbols of a pronounced dissociation between these powers and urban societies. Examples are the extravagant Saleh mosque in Sana'a (inaugurated in 2008), and the Abban mosque in Aden (pictured), which was completely rebuilt in a modern style by Hayel Said after the 1994 war, as well as Aden Mall, which belongs to the Hayel Said family and was inaugurated in 2005.



The Abban mosque in Aden

photo Thanos Petouris

The marginalization of traditional urban identities and their cultural models has gone alongside the transformation of the urban fabric resulting from the rural crisis and the growth in mobility similarly affecting both the unqualified and the educated. In the context of growing regional claims, a new inter-urban hierarchy has recently emerged, raising the question as to

whether these regional urban centres have become competing political poles reflecting different cultural and social polarizations. Sa'ada, Aden, Taizz and Mukalla have consequently become bastions of contested politics and identity.

In Aden, the sentiment of having been marginalised first by the socialist regime and then by the northern authorities is shared by large segments of the population. The loss of its status as capital was aggravated by the laying off of numerous government officials after 1994 and the transfer of government administrations to Sana'a. Aden's population is largely composed of three main groups: descendants of northern workers from the Hujjariya region and Taizz, most of whom settled there during the British colonial period, families who originated from other regions in the South, and thirdly people of Indian and Somali origin. This diversity has had an impact on political positions. Recently, groups defending Aden's interests were formed, reminiscent of the Adeni organizations which, during the British occupation period, demanded that Adeni citizenship exclude northerners and inhabitants from the Protectorates, while petty traders from the North have recently been harassed by some fractions of the Southern Movement.

Mukalla, which benefited considerably from economic investment by Hadrami emigrants, has become a major urban centre and a stronghold of the Southern movement, whereas "the Hadrami uprising" (*al-habba al-hadramiyya*), an autonomist movement, spread in the cities of the Hadramaut interior such as Tarim. On the other hand, Hodeida, the economic capital of the Tihama Red Sea coastal region, has suffered political marginalization. Today, the Tihama Movement makes demands which were taboo under the previous regime. Taizz's social, economic, and political importance goes well beyond the Hujjariya region. The massive participation of Taizz youth in the protest movement in Sana'a and in the city's impressive demonstrations is connected to the feeling of political marginalization felt by Taizzis. In the Northern Highlands, Sa'ada has become the political capital of the Zaydi Huthi movement which also has a strong presence in Sana'a and its suburbs.

Located at the crossroads of seven tribal areas belonging to the two major Hashid and Bakil confederations, Sana'a has long been identified with the military tribal establishment which characterized the Northern regime. Since February 2011, the city's symbolic and political status has changed. The mosaic of the nation's public sphere was revealed through the



mobilization of diverse political and social forces which compose Sana‘ani society. Change Square demonstrated both the possibility of joint political events such as inter-city solidarity marches and the persistence of social, cultural, ideological and identity compartmentalization as seen in the organization of the tent camps.<sup>10</sup> Is the division of the capital in two during the clashes between ex-president Saleh’s supporters and those of the opposition an indication of future trends? For example, in January 2014 Sa‘wan district received thousands of Salafi refugees from Dammaj which had been besieged by the Huthis, while al-Khafaji district around Khawlan street and the suburbs of al-Jiraf and Hizyaz are considered Huthi strongholds.

A similar phenomenon is found in Aden, where the neighbourhoods of Mansura and Ma‘alla are strongholds of the Southern Movement, which on 27 April 2014 organized in Ma‘alla a large demonstration of militants from all the southern provinces to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the 1994 civil war. In this city, many Islamists live in Qallu‘a district, which in the 1980s was home to fighters from the northern National Democratic Front.

The celebration of Ashura Day in summer 2012, permitted for the first time since its prohibition in the YAR in 1962, was targeted by a bomb attack in Sana‘a that caused many casualties. The November 2013 Huthi procession in Sana‘a, was an impressive and militant event. Both are symptomatic of the use of urban space in the expression of new political and religious identities on the streets through posters, banners, wall paintings, and graffiti.

The 2013 National Conference Dialogue dealt with the different political formulas which might emerge to solve regional claims, particularly the southern one. The threats of southern separatism and of Huthi expansion in the north led to consideration of mechanisms to distribute power between Sana‘a and the rest of the country. The planned federal state of Yemen is one of the major outcomes of the NDC. Its recommendations, which should be included in the new constitution being drafted at the time of writing, include a special status for Sana‘a and Aden. The new division of Yemen into six federal regions might suggest that the main cities, Sa‘ada, Taizz, Hodeida, Mukalla, Aden and Sana‘a will increase their role as political and identity poles for their hinterlands.

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10 Marine Poirier, “De la place de la Libération (al-Tahrîr) à la place du Changement (*al-Taghyîr*): transformations des espaces et expressions du politique au Yémen”, in Amin Allal and Thomas Pierret (ed.), *Au cœur des révoltes arabes. Devenir révolutionnaires*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2013, p. 31-51.

## FAYSAL AL-'ATTAS: THE MAOIST SAYYID

THANOS PETOURIS<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting on what socialism had in his opinion achieved ten years after the South Yemeni revolution against British colonialism, Faysal al-'Attas famously quipped: “*We’ve made the Mahris speak Arabic, made the Hadramis think they’re Yemeni, and made the people ask for a lower salary*”.<sup>2</sup> But as controversial and short-lived as these achievements were, what proved more contentious was al-'Attas's own political career. In essence, his life reflects the tumultuous historical period during which he lived, and the frustrations of a generation that sought the answer to the underdevelopment of its homeland in an alternative socio-political organisation.

Sayyid Faysal bin 'Ali bin Muhammad al-'Attas was born in 1938<sup>3</sup> in the village of Nu'ayr in Wadi 'Amd, Hadramaut, to which he owes the nickname *al-Nu'ayri*. The region formed part of the Qu'aiti Sultanate of Shihr and Mukalla in the British Eastern Aden Protectorate. A scion of the distinguished al-'Attas family of the Ba 'Alawi sayyids, he was born into a family and social group which has provided Hadramaut and the Hadrami diaspora in Southeast Asia with a number of important political, religious and scholarly figures.<sup>4</sup> Traditionally, the sayyid families of Hadramaut stand at the top of an elaborate, but well-defined, social structure, which has endowed them with spiritual, and at times temporal leadership over

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1 Information for this article was collected during fieldwork in Hadramaut in April 2010. The author would like to thank the Bin Dohry family of Mukalla, especially Muhammad Mubarak Bin Dohry and Khaled Salim Bin Dohry, and the poet Najeeb Sa'id Ba Wazir and his family in Ghayl Ba Wazir for their kind hospitality, and indefatigable support during what were difficult conditions for research.

2 cit. in: Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p. 311.

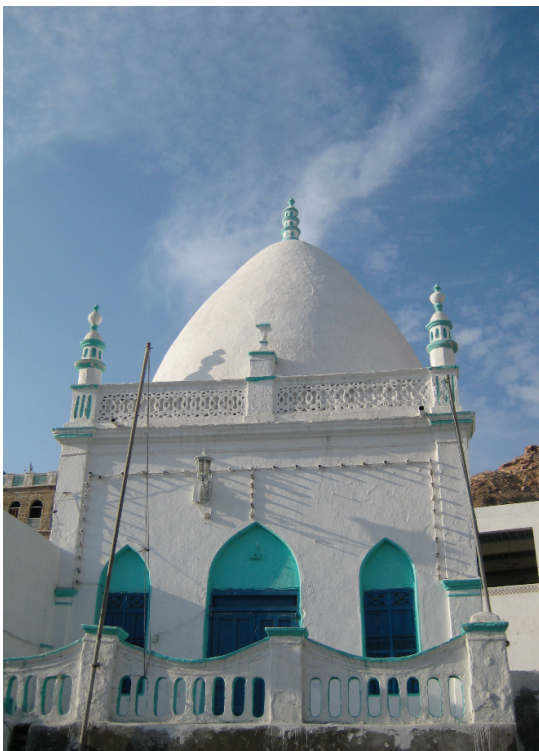
3 Although, obituaries in Arabic place his year of birth in 1934, 1938 is reported in the *Who's Who in the Arab World* (Beirut: Publitec, 2006); this is more consistent with the actual dates of his schooling and graduation.

4 Notable examples are the Mansabs of the towns of Huraydha and Mashad; the last Qu'aiti wazir Ahmad bin Muhammad al-'Attas; the former president of South Yemen and first prime minister after unification Haydar bin Abu Bakr al-'Attas; the Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas; et al. More on the al-'Attas family in: Kazuhiro Arai, *Arabs who Traversed the Indian Ocean: The History of the al-'Attas Family in Hadramaut and Southeast Asia, c. 1600 - c. 1960* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Michigan, 2004).





Clockwise from top left: Faysal al-Attas; The Madrassah al-Wusta in Ghayl Ba Wazir (photo Thanos Petouris); Modern replica of the Western Gate (photo Thanos Petouris); Mukalla: a *wali*'s tomb (photo Thanos Petouris)



local communities because of their claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>5</sup> Although their social standing did not necessarily translate into material wealth, the exclusive character of the group, and the prohibition of their womenfolk from marrying outside their ranks was a constant source of resentment in Hadramaut and the diasporic communities during al-‘Attas’s childhood. This resentment, exemplified by the Irshadi-‘Alawi rivalry, spilled over to the homeland from the communities in the Dutch East Indies, and was fuelled by the increasing contacts of Hadramis with the egalitarian tenets of Communism and Maoism in Zanzibar and Southeast Asia.<sup>6</sup>

In this evolving socio-political environment, al-‘Attas received his elementary schooling at the *Madrasah al-Wusta* (Intermediate School) in the town of Ghayl Ba Wazir.<sup>7</sup> By the time of his graduation in 1955, the school had become a hotbed of anti-British, and anti-establishment activity, and a recruiting ground for the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) among members of the student group *al-Zaytuna* (The Olive Branch), with the tacit support of the teaching staff.<sup>8</sup> Among them were also other sayyids, including Abdullah Ba Faqih, and the Sudanese Ahmad Niqdala, who was eventually deported by the British because of his communist leanings.<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, al-‘Attas continued his secondary education at Aden College, where he spent four years without, however, sitting the O’ Level GCE Exams.<sup>10</sup> Instead, by the end of the 1950s he was in Cairo and a member of the Yemeni nationalist contingent of the MAN, set up by the Palestinian George Habash.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout this period, he developed his political ideas, positioning himself on the radical left after experiencing Maoism during visits to

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5 More on the origins and role of the sayyid class in: Robert Bertram Serjeant, *The Saiyids of Hadramawt: An Inaugural Lecture* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1957).

6 cf. Joseph Kostiner, “Arab Radical Politics: Al-Qawmiyyun al-Arab and the Marxists in the Turmoil of South Yemen, 1963-1967”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 17:4 (1981), p. 466.

7 For more on the school and its impressive roll of graduates, see: Muhammad Sa‘id Mudehij, *al-Madrasah al-‘Am: al-Madrasah al-Wusta bi Ghayl Ba Wazir* [The Founding School: The Intermediate School in Ghayl Ba Wazir] (Aden: University of Aden Press, 1998).

8 Interview with Hadrami historian, and graduate of the Madrasah, Abd al-Rahman al-Milahi in Shih, 13.04.2010.

9 Interview with former PDRY president, and graduate of the *Madrasah*, Haydar bin Abu Bakr al-‘Attas in London, 28.02.2011.

10 E-mail communication with former schoolmate at Aden College, Ashraf Girgirah, 02.07.2014.

11 cf. Robert Bertram Serjeant, “The Two Yemens: Historical Perspectives and Present Attitudes”, *Asian Affairs*, 4:1 (1973), p. 12.

Hadrami communities in Zanzibar, and via contacts with Third World Communist parties. Opting to drop the honorific ‘sayyid’ from his name, he took up the *nom de guerre* ‘Abu Khalid’. By the 1960s al-‘Attas had worked as a bank clerk, and subsequently became a teacher at the Western Intermediate School in Mukalla, the capital of the Qu‘aiti State.<sup>12</sup> Together with Abbas al-‘Aydarus, another prominent Maoist sayyid and teacher, he was able to infiltrate the Hadrami trade unions, and promote Maoist ideology among the students. Soon, red flags and Maoist placards became increasingly visible during demonstrations in Hadramaut.<sup>13</sup> In Mukalla, he was also secretary of the short-lived Arab Socialist Party (1965-66), whose membership eventually split because of disagreements over the use of armed struggle. He joined the radical wing of the party following Ali Salim al-Bidh into the People’s Democratic Front (PDF), but its moderate contingent formed the Ba‘athist Union of Popular Forces. About the same time, the PDF declared its support for the National Liberation Front (NLF), thus joining the nationalist struggle.

At the NLF’s Second Congress in Jibla (June 1966) he was elected to the fifteen-member General Command, and the five-member Executive Committee, which was tasked with working with local organisations.<sup>14</sup> He originated from the so-called Secondary (or Internal) Leadership (*al-Qiyada al-Thaniyyah*): a group of young, educated cadres that had risen through the rank and file, and joined the organisation by way of its numerous constituent movements. They were disillusioned with the ideological emptiness of Nasserism, and its inability to provide a realistic framework for the expansion of the anti-colonial struggle throughout South Arabia. A shift within the MAN leadership towards Marxism reflected similar disillusion. At the Third Congress in Khamr (November 1966), the Secondary Leadership was successful in defining the nature of the nationalist movement by effectively blocking the attempted merger between the NLF and the Egyptian-backed FLOSY (Front for the Liberation of South Yemen), and reaffirming its radical, and popular character. This shift towards Marxism, and guerrilla warfare, modelled on

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12 cf. Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadramaut: Reforming the Homeland (Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia 87)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 521.

13 cf. Joseph Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 122.

14 cf. ‘Ali al-Sarraf, *al-Yaman al-Janubi: al-Hayat al-Siyasiya min al-Isti‘mar ila al-Wahdah* [South Yemen: Political Life from Colonialism to Unity] (London: Riad el-Rayyes, 1992), pp. 185.



Chinese and Vietnamese paradigms, facilitated the NLF's ability to win control of the British Protectorates over the summer of 1967.

On 31 August of that year the British abandoned their Residency in Mukalla in the "heat of the post-lunch rest-period, without any notice",<sup>15</sup> in response to which the Qu'aiti, Kathiri, and Mahra sultans hastened back to their states from Geneva, via Jeddah. The resultant power vacuum allowed al-'Attas, at the helm of sixty NLF men, to initially take control of the town of Qatn in the Wadi, and eventually of Mukalla on 16 September.<sup>16</sup> This was expedited by early negotiations between the Hadrami Bedouin Legion (HBL) commanders and Abbas al-'Aydarus. Subsequently, on 2 October with a group of twenty militants he seized the initiative in raising the revolutionary flag above the Kathiri government secretariat in Say'un. This unilateral action, in contravention of NLF arrangements, upset his comrades, but gave an early indication of the manner in which al-'Attas was going to use political power.<sup>17</sup>

Heading the Supreme People's Council that was set up after liberation in Hadramaut, his position was such that he was able to realise his radical programme of social and economic reform even before the whole of the South became independent.<sup>18</sup> One of his first moves was to nationalise the few local economic institutions such as cinemas, the power and fuel supply companies, and trading houses, and confiscate the property of the former sultans and their ministers.<sup>19</sup> This Hadrami exceptionalism, which went as far as attempting the redistribution of land, continued well into the first two years of the nascent People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY) insofar as al-'Attas, who controlled both the party and government apparatus in what became the Fifth Governorate, openly defied central authority.<sup>20</sup> He purged the local civil administration, marginalised moderate NLF leaders,

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15 cf. Peter Hinchcliffe, John T. Ducker, & Maria Holt, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), p. 147.

16 cf. Faysal al-'Attas, "Jabhat Hadhramawt" [The Hadramaut Front], in: *Wathaiq Nadwat al-Thawra al-Yamaniyyah* [Documents of the Seminar on the Yemeni Revolution] (Sana'a: Guidance Press, 2004), p. 319.

17 cf. 'Abd al-Qader Ahmad Ba Kathir, *Mudhakirat 'an Marahil al-Nidhal wa al-Tahrir 1960-1969 Hadhramawt* [Memoir of the Stages of the Struggle and the Liberation, 1960-1969 in Hadramaut], Vol. I (al-Mukalla: Maktaba al-Shafa'i, 2008), pp. 155.

18 cf. Helen Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), pp. 46.

19 cf. al-Sarraf, op. cit., p. 214.

20 cf. Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), p. 37.

and deported from Mukalla the officially appointed governor, Salim Ali al-Kindi.<sup>21</sup>

Overall, events in Hadramaut reflected the power struggle within the NLF between the radical left wing, and its more moderate leadership. They were also indicative of the challenges faced by a new and inexperienced government in running a hastily set up unitary state. Situated at its eastern corner, Hadramaut had enjoyed a comparatively independent socio-economic development under British rule, which reinforced existing state structures and institutions. Local conditions maintained and strengthened a sense of identity and separation from the rest of the South Arabian Protectorates. Coupled with the ideological differences between revolutionaries in Aden and Mukalla, incorporating the region into the new state was to prove challenging. Moreover, its relative geographical proximity to Dhofar at the height of the local revolution meant that Hadramaut came to the forefront of the revolutionary process in the peninsula. Nayef Hawatimah of the MAN extolled its early accomplishments, and the socialist credentials of its population.<sup>22</sup> It was at this time that the Chinese-built Aden to Mukalla road was conceived as ‘a strategic path to revolution’<sup>23</sup> to help support the Dhofari rebels, though it was completed in the late 1970s, after the uprising was defeated.

After the Fourth NLF Congress in Zinjibar (March 1968), at which al-‘Attas supported the radical left under Abd al-Fattah Isma‘il, he began unilaterally implementing his Maoist revolutionary programme by setting up Popular Councils in Hadrami towns, and Popular Guard units. At the same time, his visits to China prompted fears of a leftist coup.<sup>24</sup> The region gradually became a refuge for the NLF radicals, a few of whom hailed from there. The local NLF newspaper *al-Shararah* (The Spark) set out what was to come in its first editorial, explaining that to make a revolution means among others ‘to transform the existing social relations and establish

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21 cf. ‘Internal Struggle in the Fifth Governorate – Hadramawt’, in Daniel Dishon, *Middle East Record*, 1968 (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1973), pp. 699. al-Kindi was to be arrested and executed en route to Aden in June 1969, a casualty of the *Glorious Corrective Move*.

22 cf. Vitaly V. Naumkin, *The Red Wolves of Yemen: The Struggle for Independence* (Cambridge: The Oleander Press, 2004), p. 307.

23 Christopher D. Lee, “Soviet and Chinese Interest in Southern Arabia”, *Mizan*, 13:1 (1971), p. 42.

24 According to the Communist Party in Indonesia; cit. in. Joseph Kostiner, “The Impact of the Hadrami Emigrants in the East Indies on Islamic Modernism and Social Change in the Hadramawt during the 20th Century”, in Raphael Israeli & Anthony Johns (eds.) *Islam in Asia, vol. II: Southeast and East Asia*. (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), p. 230.



revolutionary ones'.<sup>25</sup> With Chinese political support al-'Attas set up the short lived People's Democratic Republic of Hadramaut, which lasted for two months (May-June 1968) before being quashed by Qahtan al-Sha'bi's government, sending him fleeing back to his village, where he was arrested alongside the dismissed Minister of Defence al-Bidh.<sup>26</sup> Although this "Chinese adventure born of Cultural Revolution politics, and a phenomenon never duplicated elsewhere in the Middle East"<sup>27</sup> did not affect relations with China, al-'Attas was unsurprisingly not a member of the first South Yemeni delegation to the People's Republic.<sup>28</sup>

Competition between the moderate and radical wings of the NLF continued to plague the party throughout the history of the PDRY, but first came to a head in 1969, when the left took over both party and country through the Glorious Corrective Move of 22 June. As his comrades came to power, al-'Attas was released from prison, returned to the General Command, and was appointed governor of the Fourth Governorate (Shabwa) for 1969-70. He then became governor of the Fifth Governorate (Hadramaut) until 1973, after which time physical attacks on sayyids and religious men started to subside.<sup>29</sup> He maintained close ties with the communist party of China, occasionally leading delegations of Yemeni peasants to the country.<sup>30</sup> To this day, the legacy of his own 'cultural revolution' is remembered in Mukalla for the unannounced demolition of the Western Gate of the city, known as *al-Siddah*, and his attempts to level the cemeteries both there, and in the al-'Attas seat of Huraydha. More importantly, for a region with deeply rooted religious traditions, under his leadership the *ziyarat* to the tombs of local *walis* were banned, a few mosques and tombs were destroyed, and members of sayyid families persecuted in the name of scientific socialism, and fighting Islamic influences.<sup>31</sup>

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25 1st editorial of *al-Shararah*, March 1968, cit. in: Jean-Pierre Viennot, "Aden: de la Lutte pour la Libération à l'Indépendance", *Orient* (Paris), 44:4 (1968), pp. 39.

26 cf. Lillian Craig Harris, *China Considers the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993), pp. 115; and Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (London: Saqi, 2002), pp. 235.

27 Harris, op. cit., p. 116.

28 Details on the first PDRY delegation to China can be found in: Hashim Behbehani, *China and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: A Report* (London: KPI Books, 1985), p. 9.

29 cf. Norman Cigar, "Islam and the State in South Yemen: The Uneasy Coexistence", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26:2 (1990), p. 186.

30 cf. *Peking Review* No 23, 9 June 1972, p. 23.

31 According to Knysh the pilgrimages lost their spiritual essence and were gradually transformed into secular folk festivals used by the regime for the propagation of socialist ideas; Alexander Knysh, "The Cult of Saints in Hadramawt: An Overview", *New Arabian Studies* I (1993), pp. 147.

Although the Move brought to power the radical left under the premiership of Salim Rubai‘a ‘Ali, known as *Salmin*, al-‘Attas was viewed with suspicion in Aden because of his prominence and influence in Hadramaut due to his social origins, his role during and after the anti-colonial struggle, as well as his cavalier attitude towards central authority. In the words of one of his former comrades, he was lucky to have escaped with his life during the *Salmin* years. Instead, he was kept ‘under control’ by joining the government as deputy minister of Housing and Public Works, a portfolio then held by his kinsman Haydar Abu Bakr al-‘Attas. As inter-regime rivalries intensified during the last decade of the PDRY, he spent this period in relative political obscurity, never to regain his earlier influential role.

With the unification of Yemen in 1990, Faysal al-‘Attas joined President Saleh’s General People’s Congress (GPC) as a member of its Standing Committee. Like many former southern politicians, he was also appointed adviser to the Yemeni president. This seemingly opportunistic and uncharacteristic shift in political allegiances has been rather typical of former southern leaders, and a testament to the ideological bankruptcy of the later years of the PDRY, and the disappointments generated by its failures. Co-optation by the Saleh regime, and membership of the GPC was a way of remaining politically relevant and gainfully employed in united Yemen. At the same time, al-‘Attas remained a staunch defender of the achievements of the South Yemeni revolution and his role in it.<sup>32</sup>

Today, al-‘Attas’s legacy in Hadramaut remains contentious. He is widely remembered for the high-handed, arbitrary, and callous treatment of others, even his own NLF colleagues.<sup>33</sup> During his time in office, the region witnessed an unprecedented wave of authoritarianism and violence particularly against the old social institutions and religious elites.<sup>34</sup> As a young revolutionary, al-‘Attas tried to push his nationalist agenda of bringing Hadramaut into the twentieth century.<sup>35</sup> However, this programme of

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32 cf. al-‘Attas, op. cit., pp. 315.

33 cf. Ba Kathir, op. cit., pp. 154-159; 162-163 & 205.

34 Engseng Ho recounts in his *Graves of Tarim* (op. cit., pp. 311) an incident whereby, during a visit by the then PDRY president *Salmin* to the town of Say’un the presidential motorcade was dragging along tied in ropes the bodies of local sayyids, a sight which left many ill for days.

35 Characteristic of the spirit of the time are the decrees on the ‘Regulation of Social Customs and Traditions in the Fifth Governorate’ issued by the People’s Committees, a collection of which can be found in: Mikhail Rodionov & Hanne Schönig, *The Hadhramawt Documents, 1904-51: Family Life and Social Customs under the Last Sultans* (Beiruter Texte und Studien No 130) (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2011), pp. 245.

forced and rapid modernisation not only left local society in a state of suspense, but it also precipitated the return of old traditions once the socialist regime disintegrated. Al-‘Attas’s own trajectory bears witness to this. Towards the end of his life he reasserted his Islamic credentials, and readopted the title of ‘sayyid’, even wearing the characteristic white *amamah*, a symbol of his descent from the Prophet Muhammad. And he did so with the same heartfelt fervour that he had embraced Maoism during his youth.

The paradox of a Hadrami sayyid championing Maoism, however unconventional, is not unique, as quite a few young sayyids of al-‘Attas’s time participated in the anti-colonial struggle albeit in different political movements. What set those young sayyids apart from the rest of Hadrami society, was their unusually high levels of education.<sup>36</sup> In forging a popular movement, the NLF succeeded in attracting the support of the majority of hitherto un-mobilised social groups, such as the educated youth, which had an interest in overturning the existing traditional social order.<sup>37</sup> As happened with al-‘Attas, membership of the sayyid class was not in itself enough to fulfil the aspirations of a literate generation which saw in the ‘Anglo-Sultanic’ establishment the source of its privations. Still, it found in Maoism the ideological language and practice that promised to uproot the very traditions and social norms which obstructed the application of its modernising plan. The resurgence of South Yemeni identity experienced in the country today is the manifestation of a similar set of grievances and frustrations, but lacking a comparable political leadership with a vision for their resolution. It has also led to uncritical considerations of both the colonial and socialist pasts. Already, al-‘Attas appears to have found a posthumous place in the pantheon of southern heroes among the modern secessionists.

Faysal al-‘Attas died in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 28 March 2014 in his late 70s, and is survived by three sons: Akram, a Colonel in the Yemeni Army, Anwar, and Muhammad.

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36 This is particularly exemplified in the case of the al-‘Attas family, where according to Abdullah Bujra male literacy was as high as 80%, compared to 45.5% in other sayyid families. cf. Abdullah S. Bujra, *The Politics of Stratification: A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 30.

37 cf. Helen Lackner, “The Rise of the National Liberation Front as a Political Organisation”, in B. R. Pridham (ed.) *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), p. 50.

## A MEDICAL STUDENT IN YEMEN – FIFTY YEARS AGO

MARTIN JOURDAN

*The following is an abridged version of an article published in 'Apothecary', 2013, the journal of The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London. We are most grateful to the editor of 'Apothecary' and to the author for permitting it to be published in the British-Yemeni Society's journal.*

In late 1963 the International Red Cross (IRC) set up a tented hospital at Uqd in the Yemeni desert south of the Saudi Arabian town of Najran. Its purpose was to provide medical support to Yemenis injured during the Civil War which erupted following the overthrow of Imam Badr in September 1962<sup>1</sup>. But because most of the fighting occurred in the surrounding mountains, few serious casualties survived long enough to be treated in the hospital. Medical support was however sought by ordinary Yemenis for all manner of local conditions.

The Red Cross wished its staff to have an international image, and so recruited to some extent in the United Kingdom. Two of us students, at what was then Guy's Hospital Medical School, asked the Dean for permission to go and work as 'Junior House Doctors' in the IRC hospital. This was outside the clinical curriculum at that time, but he agreed to our going for just over three months, missing part of our psychiatry course and half of ophthalmology.

We travelled to Beirut in a VC10 airliner and from there to Jeddah in a modest Middle East Airlines Dakota. Finally we landed at our destination on the floor of a United Nations Caravelle freight carrier loaned to the UN by the Canadian Air Force. The tented hospital was largely staffed by Swiss doctors, nurses and support personnel doing their obligatory national service, but at any one time there were at least two of us medical students from the UK. Apart from the tents there was only one solid structure and that was our operating theatre, or Clinobox as it was known. This had air conditioning and we were able to spend half a day from time to time

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1 All equipment for the hospital was airlifted in November 1963 from Geneva via Jeddah to Najran whence it was trucked south across the Saudi/Yemeni border to Uqd. The hospital's inviolability was tacitly recognised by both sides in the conflict and it was never attacked. Red Cross personnel moved freely between royalist and republican-controlled territory.





Red Cross tented hospital at Uqd, North Yemen  
photo Martin Jourdan

working in its environment, a welcome relief from the desert heat. However there was no air conditioning within the tents and at night it was often more comfortable to sleep out under the stars. We were encouraged to blend in with our surroundings which time allowed us to do.

There were, however, casualties from battle. Fractured femurs were managed by traction, and other broken bones were managed, where possible, with plaster casts after reduction to an appropriate position. Apart from compound fractures, open surgery on bones was far too dangerous in the conditions existing within the hospital.

The only Egyptian patient was a prisoner of war or possible deserter who had suffered a major pelvic injury necessitating a colostomy and a permanent catheter. Surprisingly the sepsis involved was controlled by judicious use of debridement and a very limited stock of antibiotics. What happened to him eventually when the hospital closed I do not know.<sup>2</sup> He was regarded by the Egyptians as a deserter to be shot on his return, while the Yemenis regarded him as enemy to be similarly dispatched if the opportunity arose.

The majority of the patients coming to the hospital had conditions unrelated to the war.<sup>3</sup> Hundreds were seen at the Polyclinic, a sort of Casualty/General Practice unit, sited at the entrance to the tented

<sup>2</sup> The hospital closed in early 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Patients were attracted to the hospital from as far away as Jeddah, Aden and Bahrain; the Saudi medical authorities in Najran would refer their most difficult cases to the Swiss.



encampment. Chronic anaemia associated with a whole variety of intestinal worms was common and in particular the dog tapeworm producing hydatid disease was frequently seen. Bilharzia (schistosomiasis) affecting the bladder and intestines was common, as was tuberculosis. This would often present itself as a cold abscess sometimes with the marks of cautery, the local treatment for chronic pain. The most horrifying condition that I saw and have never seen again was leprosy. In many of these cases there was nothing that we were able to do in the long term. Occasionally snake bites were seen but no anti-serum was available and dental problems were common but no orthodontics was possible. Painful teeth were simply removed.

In fact most visitors to the Polyclinic were not looking for treatment but rather social contact, and perhaps for an opportunity to indulge a mild curiosity about their condition or deformity. Many patients were seen with inguinal hernia but very few wanted anything done about it, much to the frustration of our resident Swiss surgeon. Life was sometimes spiced up with dramatic moments such as when I had to rush to the ward tent to see a patient who had had an amputation of the upper leg following a severe blast injury, to find him pouring blood from a torrential secondary haemorrhage from the amputation stump. In fact he made a remarkable recovery following further surgery. The Yemenis who had survived to adulthood were a robust group.

There were some lady patients in the hospital – a few with injuries but most with women's complaints. They were looked after by two Swiss lady medics, and the only occasion I remember seeing the patients was when a snake got into their ward tent and left them screaming in terror. There was very strict segregation between the men and the women.

Nurses in the conventional sense were not needed. Each patient had with them many family members who attended to their personal needs such as feeding and movement, and at least two would sleep under the camp bed at night and raise the alarm if anything untoward happened. Dressings such as intravenous drips and catheters were looked after by us 'trainee doctors'.

The staff themselves were not immune to injury or illness. On one occasion the hospital's Swiss Quartermaster decided to taunt a scorpion with a ring of fire. Contrary to expectation the scorpion escaped and stung him such that he had to be swiftly evacuated by air to Jeddah. On another occasion one of my colleagues developed a nail infection on his index finger, which very rapidly involved the terminal phalynx producing osteomyelitis.

He was hurriedly returned to England where he made a speedy and complete recovery.

The patients' food was provided by their relatives and friends, but our meat came on the hoof. There were always a few sheep tied up in the camp environment which would regularly disappear and turn up on the table suitably prepared. Fresh fruit and vegetables were brought in from the Saudi town of Najran, but although camel's milk was available, there was some uncertainty about its safety. We had to make do with processed milk. Our water came from one of the local wells in the desert. These wells were shared with the camels, goats and sheep, and chlorine tablets were added to make the water suitable for human use. Even so we were very careful about salads but I do not remember any significant problem arising during my time in Uqd.

Although we were often visited by Western photographers on their way home from covering the war we never saw any journalists despite articles appearing in the Western press. The story was that they wrote their copy in the bars of Beirut based on information filtering through via photographers and others. There were no obvious embedded journalists.<sup>4</sup>

On a few occasions the Imam's uncle, the Emir Abdullah, who was the general in charge of the royalist forces, would pass by the hospital with his retinue to seek some medical advice from the Swiss physician. The Emir had several large boxes of George V gold sovereigns and silver Maria Theresa dollars and any payment to the Red Cross would be made with a small handful of appropriate coins.

At the end of three months, after what for me had been an exciting and unrepeatable experience, the whole camp was replaced by a new influx of personnel. The previous departure of a UN peace-keeping group, which had been camped on a sand dune about a mile from the hospital, meant that we had to drive across the desert to Najran to catch a plane to Jeddah and beyond. We sadly parted and went our various ways. The British Red Cross, which was responsible for my journey back to London, clearly felt I was in need of some luxury after all my privations, and flew me first class.



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4 In the later 1960s the occasional Western correspondents did visit North Yemen: Dana Adams Schmidt for the New York Times; and Wilfred Thesiger for the London Times.

## RECOLLECTIONS OF YEMEN IN 1962

PATRICK SEALE

*The following is an abbreviated version of the talk given by Patrick Seale to the BYS in November 1995. A journalist at the Observer and based in Beirut for many years, Patrick Seale, who died earlier this year, was a well-known analyst of the region, but his connections to Yemen were largely limited to the episodes he recalls in this talk. Anyone wishing to consult the original document which includes sketched portraits of some of the leading royalists should contact the editor who has a copy of the full transcript.*

It was in my role as an itinerant correspondent that I was fortunate enough to have had something of a ring-side view of two great defining moments in recent Yemeni history – the civil war which followed the overthrow in 1962 of the 1,000 year-old Imamate and the winding down and inglorious extinction of a century and a quarter of British rule in Aden and South Arabia. But two things were very clear even then: firstly that the revolution in Sana‘a, and the immediate military support it received from Nasser’s Egypt, represented a huge upset in the politics of the Arabian Peninsula; and secondly, that Britain – post-Suez Britain, uncertain and defensive – was in for a tough time in Aden and the south.

The broad political backdrop to these events was the great regional contest between Nasser and his enemies, both Western and Arab. First Nasser had managed to freeze the Baghdad Pact – Britain’s scheme to clip Nasser’s wings and confer regional leadership on its ally, Iraq. Then, the Suez expedition designed to destroy Nasser turned sour and he survived to snatch political victory from the jaws of military defeat. He became the idol of the Arab masses, the champion of Arab nationalism, and as such a threat to every British position in the region and to every conservative Arab regime. For a moment in the late 1950s, he seemed unstoppable.

On hearing of the fall of the Imamate and of Nasser’s immediate support for the new republican regime, everyone’s first thought was that this was Nasser’s revenge for Syria’s secession.<sup>1</sup> He had opened a new front, switched his umbrageous attention from the Levant to Arabia, bringing immediate

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<sup>1</sup> Syria had ‘united’ with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic in 1958 and Syria seceded from that agreement in 1961.

pressure to bear both on the Saudi monarchy and on the British in Aden.

In mid-October news trickled up to Beirut that Imam Muhammad al-Badr was not dead as the Republicans had claimed, but had escaped from the rubble of his palace to surface in a camp close to the Saudi frontier. There he proceeded to rally the northern Yemeni tribes and take the lead of a royalist counter-revolution. Was the ancient Imamate now gone for good or would Badr manage to resuscitate it? Would revolution now spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula? In any event, I was sorely tempted to go and take a look.

It must have been sometime in November 1962 that I flew down to Aden before making my way up to Bayhan on the Yemen frontier in what was then the Western Aden Protectorate. I found Bayhan swarming with royalist tribesmen seeking aid from somewhat reluctant and sceptical British officials. The British had little sympathy for the new Yemeni Republic, and they certainly did not want Nasser to chalk up another victory. But the mood was generally pessimistic. Few thought the tide in Yemen could be reversed.

### **My time in royalist Yemen**

I found a guide willing to take me to the field headquarters of prince Abdullah bin Hassan at al-Arush near Mareb. That was the start of a fascinating journey. I spent several weeks in Yemen, visiting the various fronts and travelling largely on foot except for the rare occasions when I managed to hire or 'borrow' a donkey or a mule. I witnessed various skirmishes. It was easy to see that Egyptian troops were not at ease in the rugged Yemeni mountains where they faced deadly ambushes and constant harassment. On several desolate mountain tops, we came upon Egyptian positions which had been overrun, the corpses of the luckless defenders blackened by the sun. Burned out Egyptian vehicles littered the *wadis*.

From what I could gather, Egyptian troops had been defeated all over north-east Yemen and were falling back towards Sana'a. But against well-fortified fixed positions defended by tanks and artillery, the tribes had been less successful. Egyptian troops still commanded several strongpoints such as Sa'ada and Sirwah in royalist-held territory. In pressing their attacks against republic strongpoints, the royalists' tactics were not brilliant. The royalists did not have the heavier or longer-range weapons to interdict air traffic or to protect themselves from Egyptian air raids. These raids were lethal against royalist towns and villages, we saw several that had been

partially destroyed and their population put to flight. Egypt's monopoly of air power prevented the concentration of large royalist forces and restricted movements by day; its effect on morale was considerable. The royalists longed for some protection against air attack.

Mostly we hid from the Egyptian bombing during the day and marched at night when, to provide some warmth at our infrequent pauses, someone would put a match to a bone-dry bush and we would huddle around it as it roared into flame. I admired the stamina and cheerfulness of my Yemeni companions, their ability to live on little more than a handful of dates, and the fast pace they set as we marched in single file on the mountain trails.

On that journey I was privileged to meet some of the key personalities on the royalist side, notably several of the younger Hamid al-Din princes, veteran officials such as the Qadi Ahmed al-Sayaghi, grandees of the al-Wazir and Kibsi families and highly individualist, even eccentric, Western well-wishers of the royalist cause such as the British adventurer Billy McLean and the American Bruce de Bourbon Condé, an honorary Yemeni and self-appointed postmaster general of the royalist forces.

McLean was part of a lobby which campaigned hard for the British Government to withhold recognition from the new Yemen Republic on the grounds that it did not control the full territory of the state. McLean's first-hand experience on the battlefields of Yemen gave his views considerable authority in London. Christopher Gandy, then British Minister in Taizz called such champions of the royalist cause 'romantic diehards who apparently believed that if only all the king's horses and all the king's men could push hard enough they could fit Humpty Dumpty together again and restore the Imamate.'

In the field, the young Hamid al-Din princes projected a very different and far more attractive image from that of their forebears. To a man they vowed to overhaul the cruel and primitive system of government and modernise the country. In the event of victory, there would be no return to the old autocratic, inward-looking rule of the Imams. Yet, the members of the royal family I met appeared far less conservative than the tribes whose support they needed and who seemed passionately attached to the tenets of Islam, to the Imamate as a system of government and, more particularly, to their own traditional semi-autonomous tribal way of life.

Such was the lack of any real communication or coordination between the different royal armies – I don't think I ever saw a field telephone or a wireless – and such was the shortage of long range weapons that the noose



around the capital was never really tightened, even when in 1968, after the Egyptian withdrawal, Sana'a came under royalist siege in the final stage of the civil war.

### **Return to Beirut; a few analytical points**

Towards the end of December, after a few weeks of living rough, I reached Najran in Saudi Arabia where I hitched a lift up to Jeddah on a Pakistani plane which had brought in a consignment of arms for the royalists. After the exertions and Spartan diet of the Yemeni mountains, I was glad to rest and fatten myself up for two or three days in the relative luxury of the Kuraysh hotel in Jeddah before flying back to Beirut where I returned convinced that the Yemeni republic would soon be overthrown and the Imamate restored. I was wrong.

In a footnote to another story – that of Kim Philby – I might add that at a party in Beirut that Christmas of 1962 I had a public slanging match with Kim about events in Yemen, our first and last quarrel because he escaped to Moscow a few days later. While I had visited royalist areas, he had been on the republican side, and vigorously defended the republican cause. With hindsight, his staunch defence of the republic and his severe judgement on the royalists and their backers, might have alerted us to his ideological stance. But at the time it seemed just a tiff between two reporters who were defending what they had witnessed and the conclusions they had reached.

The evidence I had seen – the dead Egyptians in their foxholes, the burned out vehicles, the high morale of the royalists and their tribal support – all seemed to point to an ultimate royalist victory. Sallal's Yemeni army had virtually melted away. Several hundred of his troops had been taken prisoner, others had defected to the royalists or simply deserted and gone home. In none of the major engagements of the war had Republican Yemenis played a prominent part. All the real fighting was being done by Egyptians. But the Egyptians themselves were losing ground and would, I believe, have to be reinforced considerably if they were to hold on to Sana'a and the south, let alone regain the initiative in the north and east. I did not think Sallal's regime could survive an Egyptian withdrawal. My views were shaped by what I had seen in the east and north of the country, the traditional homeland of the Zaydi tribes. I had no knowledge of the more populous Shafi'i south and no way of assessing its attachment to the new republic.

In spite of my somewhat prejudiced view of the situation, I recognised

that the royalists would need more aid - from Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the British in the Aden Protectorates – in the form of rifles, ammunition, cash and a few heavy weapons with which to subdue Sana‘a before the final assault. But I assumed that such aid would be forthcoming. It seemed so much in the interests of both Saudi Arabia and Britain to snuff out the young republic that I did not imagine they would be niggardly. What I had not understood was that the Saudis were in no shape to take on the Egyptians. They had no defence against Egyptian air power and did not want an all-out confrontation. In giving the royalists just enough to survive but not enough to win, Riyadh was evidently being careful not to provoke Nasser unduly. Britain, meanwhile, had its own preoccupying troubles in Aden and South Arabia, which were to relegate the struggle in Yemen to second place.

Other factors which contributed to the royalists’ failure to take Sana‘a and triumph, had to do with the nature of Yemeni society itself. The Imamate had long since been undermined from within by indigenous forces clamouring for change and for a chance to join the modern world, only brutal repression had kept the lid on this ferment for so long. Moreover, split by republican and royalist allegiance, the tribes were not united. All they had in common was a yearning for independence; they wanted to be ruled neither by the Hamid al-Din nor by the republic. A few months later al-Sayaghi told me ‘Nasser was right in believing that the Yemenis hated the royal family, but he was wrong in believing that they loved him. We are ready to have a republic in Yemen if the Egyptians withdraw.’



Sana‘a Old City

photo Thanos Petouris

## HONEY MONITORING IN YEMEN

AMR TOWFICK SUFIAN<sup>1</sup>

Honey is a natural, sweet substance with specific flavour, odour and nutritive value produced by honeybees. Honey has been used not only as a nutrient but also as a medicine. It has been associated with improved antioxidant capacity, modulation of the immune system and antimicrobial activities among other benefits. The major use of honey in healing today is its application in the treatment of wounds, burns and infections.<sup>2</sup>

Honeybees have been invaluable pollinators and are important to mankind because they have the ability to provide mobile pollination services, which aid crop production. However, most beekeepers keep bees in the fervent hope that they will produce large crops of honey.

### Yemen and Honey

Honey and bees have been deeply rooted in Arab culture for centuries. A whole chapter in the Holy Quran is named 'The Bee'<sup>3</sup> to draw attention to this small insect and its journey in the wild to produce honey of different colours and with healing benefits. Honey also features in Arabic poetry dating back hundreds of years, where it is praised as an embodiment of love, beauty and pleasure. Honey has been a valuable commodity for centuries, but few places have a stronger tradition of honey-making than Yemen, where beehives dot the country's landscape. The diversity of the fertile environment of Yemen as well as the variety of climate and pastures give Yemeni honey its unique and highly prized flavour.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, there are over 40,000 beekeepers in Yemen and an estimated 1.3 million traditional beehives that produce around 2,500 tons a year.<sup>4</sup> Honey is also a source of revenue for many families in Yemen. About 30% of the honey produced by Yemen is exported, generating an annual revenue of about £5

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1 Dr Amr Sufian was the recipient of the BYS Grant for 2013. In May 2014 he obtained his PhD from the Centre for Intelligent Monitoring Systems at the University of Liverpool.

2 Munn P., Jones R., 2000. Honey and Healing. Cardiff, UK, International Bee Research Association IBRA, pp. 1-4

3 The Qur'an, Sura 16 'The Bee', ayahs 68-69

4 The Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, annual report for the agriculture sector 2012, [online]. Available: <http://www.agriculture.gov.ye>.

million during the last five years.<sup>5</sup> Government figures suggest the country's honey production is on the rise, so that as a result, honey is regarded as one of the "strategic" products for the Yemeni economy.

Yemen is traditionally the largest honey producer in the Arabian Peninsula, and its highest quality honey is from the *Ziziphus spina-christi* bush. Yemeni honey is highly priced on the international market and amongst the most expensive in the world. People resort to Yemeni honey as a medicine because it is free from any artificial additives. Most types of Yemeni honey are highly prized not only for their flavour but also for their purity (they are made using traditional methods and without chemicals or fertilisers) and rarity.<sup>6</sup>

A kilogram can be sold for up to US\$100 (£60+) in Yemen, while prices reach US\$200 in places like Dubai and other Gulf states (the largest market for Yemeni honey), where sheikhs feed it to their camels before a race, believing in its energy-boosting qualities.<sup>7</sup> This combination of rational explanations and mysterious beliefs make it a genuine liquid gold.

The name of honey in Yemen has been associated with different types of nectar from different districts, for example the "Sidr Daw'ani" (*Ziziphus spina-christi*) and "Sommor Daw'ani" (*Acacia mellifera*) from Hadramaut Wadi Daw'an in the eastern parts of Yemen.

There are many other varieties of honey produced locally. Each has a different taste, odour and colour and may also differ according to its nutritive and therapeutic benefits. The quality, variety and price of Yemeni honey have increased considerably over the past decade, as it has become something of a status symbol among the elite. At weddings, family reunions or with guests, it is a sign of prestige and a welcoming gesture.

### The Price of Success

The international fame acquired by Yemeni honey for its high quality and demand locally and globally, created a parallel market for fraudulent imitations. Various methods have been used and continue to evolve. For

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5 International Trade Centre Statistics, 2012. Available: <http://www.intracen.org>

6 Reuters, Sana'a, 2012, December. Yemenis take pride in honey production. [Al Arabia News], [Online]. Available: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/20/256156.html>. and Al-Muraqab, A., 2012, December 13. Liquid pot of gold, Yemen's honey trade. [*Yemen Times Business*], [online]. Available: <http://www.yementimes.com/en/1633/business/1736/Liquid-pot-of-gold-Yemen's-honey-trade.htm>.

7 Pitron, Guillaume., 2012, September. Nectar of Allah. [National geographic], [Online]. Available: [http://www.geographical.co.uk/Magazine/Yemen\\_honey\\_-\\_Sept\\_08.html](http://www.geographical.co.uk/Magazine/Yemen_honey_-_Sept_08.html).

example, original honey is blended with other less expensive components including inverted sugar (syrup).<sup>8</sup> There have been some concerns lately that pure Yemeni honey could be mixed with imported honey (e.g. Kashmiri honey which is from Pakistan, or even Chinese honey), ruining its quality.<sup>9</sup> Alternatively bees are intentionally fed sweeteners to increase their production in order to seek a quick profit during periods of drought.<sup>10</sup>

These honeys are fraudulently marketed as pure and natural. Adulteration of honey causes serious problems for pure honey producers and vendors as it reduces customer trust as well as negatively affecting consumers' nutrition and health. If ways of monitoring the honey are not urgently implemented, the reputation of the famous Yemeni industry will be destroyed.

Unfortunately, traditional methods currently used in Yemen to examine the honey to ensure quality through taste or smell are no longer effective due to the development of new means and ways to adulterate honey. Although other methods are available to test the quality of the honey (e.g. using different chemical procedures and spectroscopy) they are expensive (cost of equipment, laboratory infrastructure) and time consuming (samples need to be sent to laboratories for testing) because of the complexity of the composition of such a liquid.<sup>11</sup>

## Honey Composition

Honey is a very complex liquid composed of major compounds – including sugars such as glucose, fructose, and water – and minor components such as amino acids, enzymes, vitamins and minerals.<sup>12</sup> The composition and

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8 Pilizota, V., Tiban, N., 2009. Advances in Honey Adulteration Detection. [Food Safety Magazine], [online]. Available: <http://www.foodsafetymagazine.com/magazine-archive1/augustseptember-2009/advances-in-honey-adulteration-detection/>

9 Reuters, Sana'a, 2012, December. Yemenis take pride in honey production. [Al Arabia News], [Online]. Available: <http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/20/256156.html>.

10 Ibid. and Hassan, S., 2012. Yemeni honey's reputation faces risk of fraud. [Aljazeera.net], [online]. Available: <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/pages/477e1613-8e42-4d9e-b401-7e1864715e30>. Trans available: <http://www.yemenfox.net/day/2012/10/09-10-2012/4.pdf>.

11 Roshan, A., El-Ahmady, S., el., 2013. Authentication of monofloral yemeni sidr honey using ultraviolet spectroscopy and chemometric analysis. *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, 61(32), pp. 7722-7729; Bogdanov, S., 2002. Harmonised methods of the International Honey Commission. *IHC responsible for the methods: Swiss Bee Research Centre FAM, Liebefeld, CH-3003 Bern, Switzerland*, International Honey Commission; and Alzorekey, N., Alza'amey, A., Alhmiari, A., 2001. Quality spectrum of Yemeni honey. *Journal of Agricultural Science, Damascus University*, 17(2), pp. 110.



quality of honey are influenced by a number of factors such as geographical origin, botanical sources of nectar, environmental and climatic conditions as well as processing techniques, handling and storage.<sup>13</sup> Monitoring such a complex liquid is of great importance to the food industry.

### A Novel Monitoring Approach

A new method for optical monitoring which has been tested in Yemen is based on chromatic methods developed at the University of Liverpool.<sup>14</sup> Chromatic methods are based on changes in white light as it passes through a honey sample. A simple example of this is the manner in which human beings perceive colours which depends upon responses of the human eye. Other species see “colour” in a different way; for instance the colours seen by honeybees are different to those seen by humans. Figure 1 illustrates an example of three flower images obtained with three different systems, two from nature and one technically produced. The colours of the flower observed by the human eye (figure 1(a)) are different from those observed by the honeybee (figure 1(b)) because of the latter’s quest for pollen. An electronic system can be produced to give yet a different rendering depending on the information sought (figure 1(c)).



Figure 1: A flower colour image observed by: (a) Human eye, (b) Honeybee, (c) Chromatic system  
all images Amr Towfick Sufian

12 White, J. W., 1975. Composition of honey. *Honey: A Comprehensive Survey*. Heinemann: London, UK, pp. 157-206.

13 Anklam, E., 1998. A review of the analytical methods to determine the geographical and botanical origin of honey. *Food Chemistry*, 63(4), pp. 549-562 And Martin, P., Bogdanov, S., 2002. Honey Authenticity: a Review. *Swiss Bee Research Centre, Dairy Research Station, Liebefeld ; Q. P. Services, Hayes, Great Britain*.

14 Jones, G. R., Deakin, A. G., Spencer, J. W., 2008. *Chromatic Monitoring of Complex Conditions*. Florida, USA: Taylor and Francis.

The chromatic approach provides a means for addressing the light in different ways in order to highlight the effect of different components. This can be used to address different light properties (Transmission, Scattering, Polarization, Fluorescence). The significant aspect is that this can be done efficiently and cost effectively using a simple webcam with a portable computer whose screen not only displays the honey image but also provides software tuneable light for analysing the honey sample.

Figure 2(a) shows example images of 10 different Yemeni honey samples transparent in test tubes. Figure 2(b) shows examples of images of such honey using the new monitoring system.

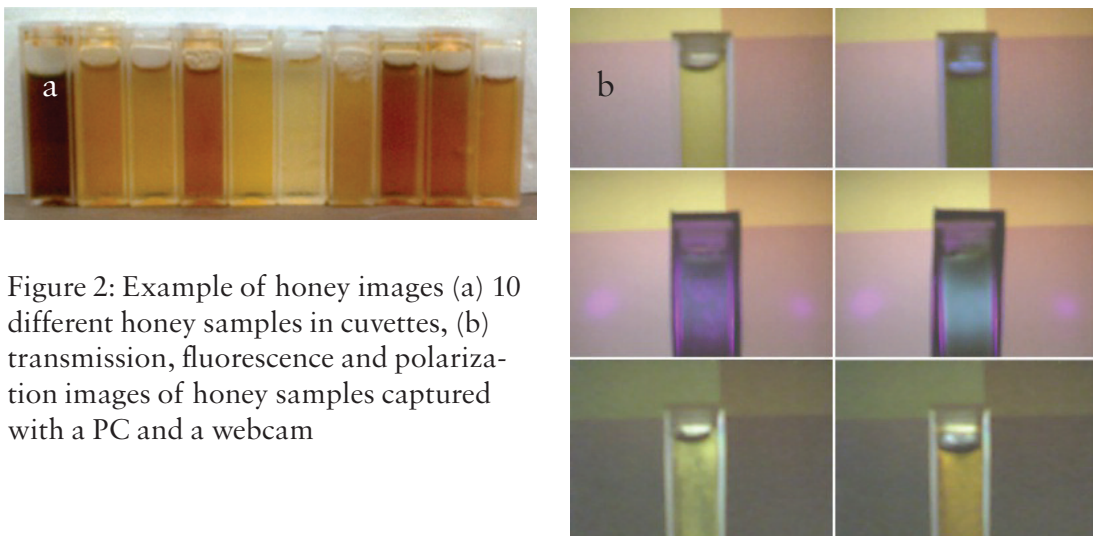


Figure 2: Example of honey images (a) 10 different honey samples in cuvettes, (b) transmission, fluorescence and polarization images of honey samples captured with a PC and a webcam

The monitoring system examines the honey sample by capturing the output light by a web camera. The outputs from the camera detectors are then chromatically processed via computer software.

### Monitoring at remote site with the portable system

Because of its cost effectiveness and portability, this honey monitoring system is suitable for use on site at beekeeping farms, shops etc. The developed system has been used in field tests for monitoring the quality of honey at various locations across Yemen using only a portable PC, an LED source and a webcam. Locations where tests took place are:

- A beekeeping farm in the outskirts of the town of al-Mahweet, in al-Mahweet Governorate – West Yemen
- A beehive site in Tubasha‘a village, Sabir mountain, Taizz Governorate – Southern Uplands Yemen
- A honey shop in Sana‘a – Northern Yemen

A typical example of a honey farm is shown in Figure 3(a), whilst Figure 3(b) shows a beehive site located on a house rooftop at Tubasha‘a Village in Sabir Mountain). Figure 4(a) shows the monitoring system being used at such a remote location whilst Figure 4(b) also shows the system being deployed at a local honey shop in Sana‘a, Yemen.

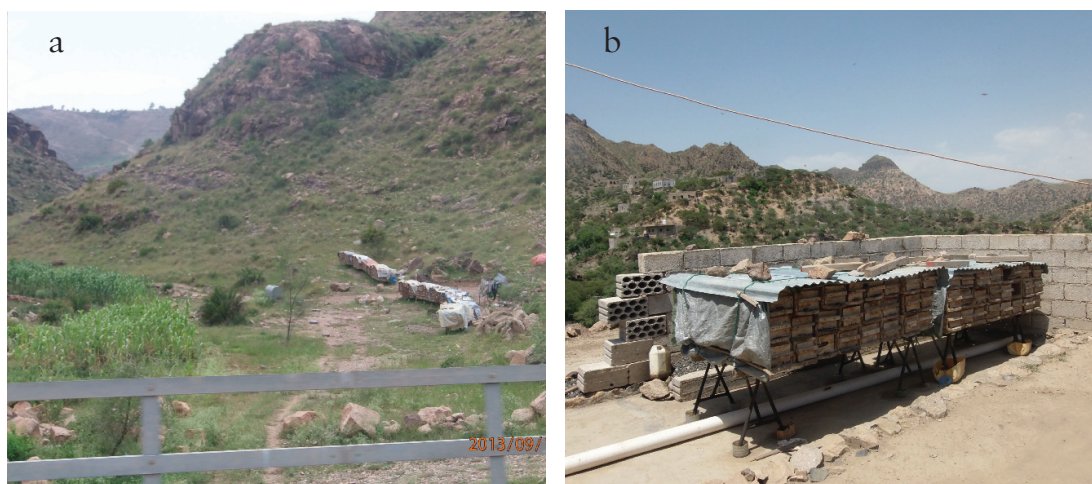


Figure 3: (a) Mahweet site (b) Taizz site



Figure 4: (a) Onsite Honey monitoring with a PC in Tubasha‘a Village (b) Onsite honey monitoring with a portable PC in a shop, Sana‘a, North – Yemen

### Mapping different types of Yemeni Honey

Different types of Yemeni honey can be compared using “Chromatic Maps”. These show the relative amounts of light in different parts of an optical spectrum, which has been affected by a honey sample. The proportion of light in these different parts is governed by the type of plant from



which the honey is derived, the amount of water, sugar and the impurities in the honey. Light properties, which can be used for such purposes, include the absorption of light by the honey samples, their polarization and fluorescence, all of which are analysed chromatically to compare different wavelength groups.

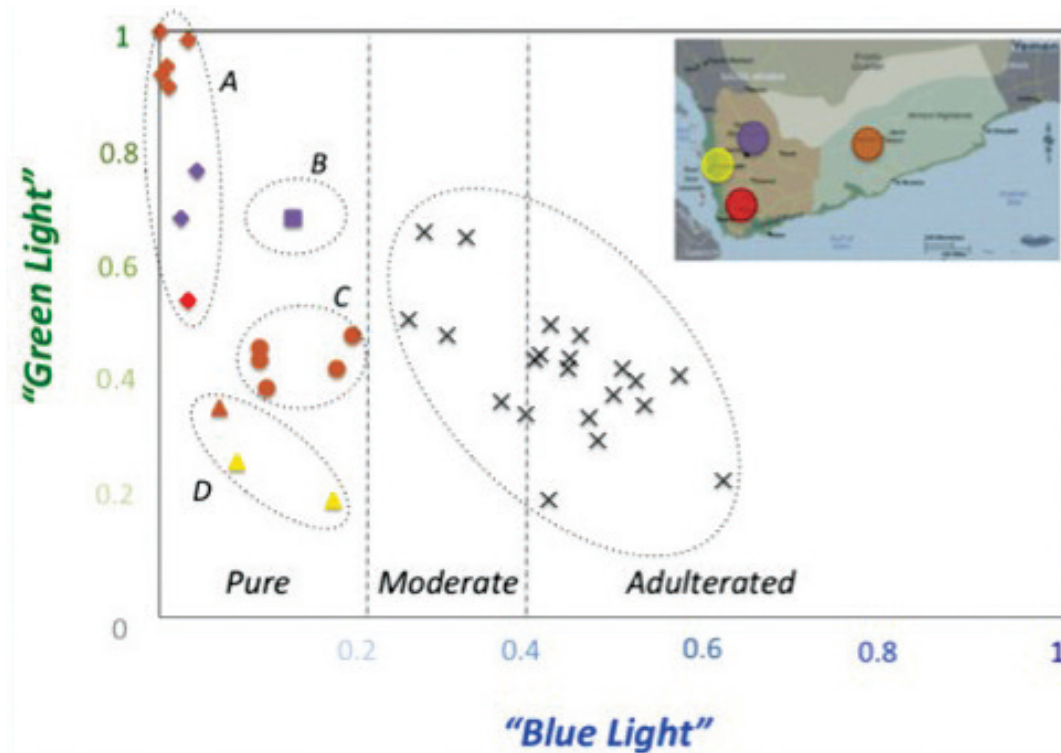


Figure 5: Chromatic fluorescence map of different honey samples from Yemen showing: X: Adulterated honeys (indicated by more intense blue light) A, B, C, D Indicate different plant sources of pure honey (lower levels of blue light and higher levels of green light; A: *Ziziphus spina-christi* (Sidr), B: Almond (Lowz), C: *Acacia* Spp (Sommor), D: Multi-floral (Mara'ee). Red, Yellow, Purple, and Orange data colours indicate the geographical source of pure honey; Red: Midlands (Taizz/Ibb), Yellow: West (al-Mahweet/Tihama), Purple: North (Sana'a/Amran), Orange: East (Hadramaut/Daw'an)

An example of such a map for fluorescent light is shown in Figure 5 as the relative amounts of “green” (long wavelengths) to “blue” (short wavelengths) light. This shows how adulterated honey samples may be broadly distinguished from pure samples and how pure honey from different plants can be broadly indicated. It also shows the kind of plants from which honey was extracted in four different regions of Yemen.

### Future Perspectives

The support provided by the British-Yemeni Society allowed me to evaluate

the use of this new method for honey monitoring in remote areas of Yemen including beekeeping farms and honey shops, in order to obtain a rapid indication of the condition of the honey. As such it has provided an insight into conditions important to the food industry.

Future possibilities include adapting the technology to an even simpler, more portable and more cost effective method by using mobile phones instead of computers (Figure 6).

This would open doors for more honey monitoring in Yemen and encourage the government, non-governmental organisations and private

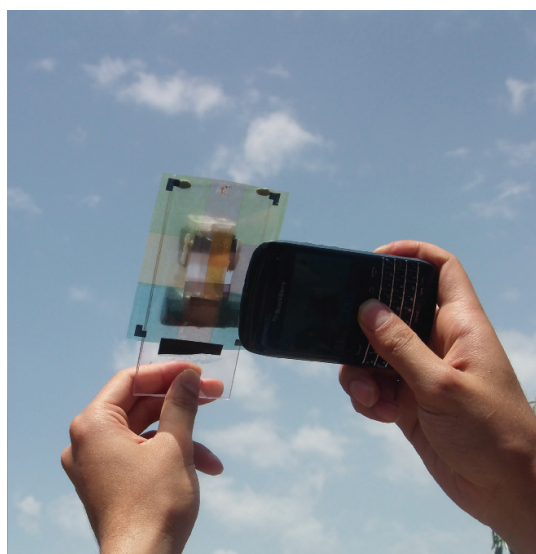


Figure 6: Honey Monitoring using a mobile phone device

photo Amr Towfick Sufian

laboratories to form a national honey monitoring and quality control hub or even implement a quality certification system that guarantees the integrity and traceability of Yemeni honey in order to help maintain its reputation.<sup>15</sup>

Other potential applications of the developed chromatic approach can also be explored for honey monitoring in the UK and Europe to give insights and provide early indications of health and other conditions affecting the honeybee population which have led to its decline resulting in loss of valuable pollination services for many types of crops.

Evolving conditions include viruses, which spread in the beehive due to the use of toxic pesticides<sup>16</sup> or due to sudden changes in the nutrition of honeybees, which affects honey colour and influences the mortality rate and low honey production in honeybees.<sup>17</sup>

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15 Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, 2012. *A Promising sector for Diversified Economy in Yemen*. Cabinet Decree No. (37 – 2012). National Agriculture Sector Strategy 2012-2016- Republic of Yemen: Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.

16 Morelle, R., 2013, March 23, Neonicotinoid pesticides “damage brains of bees”. [BBC News, Science and Environment], [Online]. Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-21958547>.

17 Andries, K., 2012, October 11, Colourful Honey [National geographic], [Online]. Available: <http://news.nationalgeographic.co.uk/news/2012/10/pictures/121011-blue-honey-honeybees-animals-science/>



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam – The Legacy of Ahmad Ibn ‘Alwan**, by Muhammad Ali Aziz, I. B. Tauris, London & New York, 2011, pp 296, £ 62 ISBN 978184 885 4505

*This book deals with a towering early Sufi figure, Ibn ‘Alwan (d. 665/1266). It lacks discussion of the most influential Sufi movement in Yemen, the sayyids of Hadramaut which would have situated him within the wider spectrum of Yemen’s history. The value of the book lies in the detailed presentation of Ibn ‘Alwan’s writings, thought, and poetry.*

Sufism is usually associated with Sudan, Morocco, Egypt and Libya, but Yemen is a rather forgotten *terra incognita*. This should not be so, but the reasons are obvious: Sufism and the veneration of saints (*walis*) are a strong marker of the Sunni (Shafi‘i) regions of Yemen (Hadramaut and Tihama). In the puritan highlands of the Zaydi North, it has left only a few anthropological traces. Another reason for this scholarly neglect is that, in the last four decades, most foreign scholars lived in Sana‘a, thus not coming into contact with this vibrant part of Yemen’s religious tradition. Aziz’s book is therefore welcome, despite its limitations.

The first two chapters deal with the political history of medieval Yemen, and Sufism prior to the seventh/thirteenth century. On this topic, scholars would be better advised to consult G. Rex Smith’s magisterial presentations in the two standard works on Yemen (Serjeant/ Lewcock, *Sana‘a*, and Daum, *Yemen*) As for the earlier period, Aziz comes to the correct conclusion that Sufism did not exist. Aziz mentions Abu al-Ghayth (d. 651/1253), Ibn ‘Alwan (d. 665/1266), and the Hadrami Sayyid, al-Faqih al-Muqaddam (d. 653/1256) as the true initiators of the Sufi movement in Yemen. This context should have been discussed to situate the incipient Sufi wave more clearly in time and space. It is basically right to connect early Sufism in Yemen with these three names but, as Alexander Knysh and Esther Peskes have shown, the claim that Muhammad b. ‘Ali al-‘Alawi al-Faqih al-Muqaddam al-Ustadh al A‘zam introduced Sufism into Hadramaut is rather debatable and should be accepted with caution. This is an opportunity to point out Aziz’s rather uncritical use of sources: Knysh and Peskes’ scepticism might have been more appropriate.

Regardless of this debate, one thing is certain: Sufism was not an indige-

nous development in Yemen, but came as part of the fundamental changes witnessed by the southern half of the country with the advent of the Rasulid dynasty (626/1228 to 858/1454). Overnight Yemen was catapulted from a political and intellectual backwater to the mainstream of the Islamic (and the wider) world. Travellers and ideas moved back and forth, including the search for mystical union with God through individual and communal practice as then found in Spain, Egypt and elsewhere.

Chapter 3 is possibly the book's best. It is the first detailed presentation of the life and written legacy of Ibn 'Alwan who established his *ribat* in Yafrus, near Taizz, where his splendid mosque remains today the region's architectural and social landmark. His family was well placed with the Sultans as his father was a royal scribe, but he chose the path of learning, devotion, and poverty. Courageously, Ibn 'Alwan also played a political role, urging the Sultan to abolish new taxes, and be content with taxes in kind rather than in *dinars*:

The days of your life are the days that have a price: justice.  
Justice should prevail, and actions which are good ...  
Continue to practise justice so that people may say:  
"Blessed is the king and blessed is Yemen" ...  
This is Tihama that has no money, neither have Lahij, Abyan, Sana'a, nor Aden.  
What is the fault of the poor of the mountains? ...  
Have pity on them; God's eye is watching...  
Shame on you! You have erected palaces, but your subjects live in shacks!  
Do not take pleasure in accumulating money without knowing where it came  
from ...  
Whenever revenues increase, you should know that they were exacted by force or  
injustice ...

Chapters 4 and 6 concerning Ibn 'Alwan's theological views are rather obscure. Sufi literature is often arcane, and almost cabbalistic – and this is reflected in Aziz's presentation of Ibn 'Alwan's thought. We must emphasise that Sufism is *not* primarily a *literary* corpus of concepts and ideas, but rather a devotional practice that addresses the human being beyond his intellect, involving his body, his sentiments, and above all music, *sama'*. Aziz mentions the last two, but does not elaborate. Ibn 'Alwan's (and Yemeni Sufism's) picture thus remains incomplete. The daily reality of the Sufi world view is missing.

In chapter 5, Aziz discusses the relationship of Ibn 'Alwan with the great (non-Yemeni) masters of Sufi thought of his time, al-Ghazali, Ibn 'Arabi,

and al-Hallaj; both Massignon and al-Hibshi consider Ibn ‘Alwan to be the latter’s follower. Aziz differs: he argues that Ibn ‘Alwan was aware of the wider realm of Sufi literature but was not influenced by it, developing his thought in a purely Yemeni context. However, stylistically and thematically speaking, Aziz’s textual quotations from Ibn ‘Alwan’s works intended to support his thesis achieve the opposite. Ibn ‘Alwan’s esoteric language and focus on the “union of existence” leave no doubt that he was profoundly influenced by those great Sufi masters. As Aziz himself points out, it is part of Sufi tradition not to reveal secrets. Ibn ‘Alwan considered himself to be a leader equal to Ibn ‘Arabi, as is clear from some of his poetry where he competes with his master Ibn Jamil, asserting his supremacy in the path of knowledge: this shows that Ibn ‘Alwan was substantially influenced by Ibn ‘Arabi, but avoided mentioning it.

Chapter 7 deals with the highly important question of the place of Sufism and the cult of saints in Islam, and the struggle of a number of Islamic political and religious movements against these two forms of popular devotion. The question is as relevant today as it ever was. It was of particular relevance for Shafi‘i Yemen dotted with *walis* (tombs of Muslim saints), and Sufi lodges (*arbita*, plural of *ribat*). Sufi communities have thrived in Yemen for over 700 years. *Walis* have been an integral part of Yemen’s religious landscape for much longer, going back in direct continuity to the pre-Islamic period. The opposition of puritan Islamic movements was therefore bound to stir violent passions on both sides, with ordinary Yemenis unwilling to bow to the iconoclasts. The Wahhabi creed is the most prominent of these movements: in the early 19th century, one of their raiding parties even destroyed the *qubba* of prophet Hud in Hadramaut, the prophet so prominently present in the Qur’an, second only to Muhammad himself. Aziz throws a new light on fundamental features of Yemen’s 20th century history in his description of the most spectacular event in the struggle against Sufism and *walis*, namely the destruction by Crown Prince (later: Imam) Ahmad of Ibn ‘Alwan’s tomb in 1942 (p. 153-164, and ch. 8). It is an eye opener to see how the poet of the revolution, Muhammad Mahmud al-Zubayri, oscillated between approval and condemnation of the destruction. The same is true for the famous poet Ibrahim al-Hadrani.

Readers could reasonably have expected an introductory overview of Sufism in Yemen. Chapter 9 attempts to do that, unfortunately too briefly and with very little focus on Yemen. There is no discussion of the sayyids

of Hadramaut, the Ba ‘Alawi, the most important and successful Sufi movement in Yemen and beyond. The ‘Alawiyah, as it is commonly known, was established in Hadramaut and is associated with Sayyid Muhammad b. ‘Ali Ba ‘Alawi (“al-Faqih al Muqaddam”), and Shaykh Sa‘id b. ‘Isa al-‘Amudi of Wadi Daw‘an (d. 671/1272). This Sufi order (*tariqah*) actively propagated Islam in South East Asia and East Africa and its Hadrami ‘Ulama’ deeply influenced the spiritual and social life of Southern Arabia and large parts of Asia and Africa. The ‘Alawiyah remains the most powerful Sufi trend in Yemen thanks to its revival in the 1990s through Habib ‘Umar b. Hafiz.

Westerners usually regard the sayyids of Hadramaut as similar to North Yemeni sayyids. While both groups trace their ancestry to Prophet Muhammad, they could not be more different, including in their contemporary political and economic status. The Hadrami sayyids converted to Sufism in the 7th/13th century (or slightly later), while North Yemeni sayyids reject Sufism and the cult of saints. Hadrami sayyids, as a group and as religious leaders are very much alive: for instance in 2014, the pilgrimage to Qabr Hud, nowadays seen as a Sufi event, attracted several tens of thousands of pilgrims. Those interested in the wider history of Sufism in Yemen are advised to consult Knysh’s works and Esther Peskes’s “*Al-‘Aidarus und seine Erben*” (2005). Aziz’s bibliography presents numerous problems: for example Peskes’s meticulous study is not mentioned, but Trimingham’s book *A history of Islam in West Africa* (irrelevant to the subject) is included while his relevant *Islam in East Africa* is missing.

As mentioned earlier, the writings of the masters are only half of the Sufi way of life. Let us conclude with an excursion to Yafrus which Aziz should have undertaken and explore something of the reality of Ibn ‘Alwan’s legacy, a reality which is completely missing from Aziz’s study. Al-Nabhani in his *jami‘ karamat al-auliya’* (p. 145) tells us: “A group of people led an elephant (belonging to the Sultan) to Ibn ‘Alwan’s *ribat* in search of fodder. Only human food, reserved for his followers, was available, and the elephant’s leaders wanted to take it, but Ibn ‘Alwan refused. When they tried to take it by force, he pointed at the elephant causing it to sink into the ground.” Aziz criticises the story, arguing that al-Nabhani was speaking about another saint – which would of course do away with the tradition, and the fundamental question of miracles. The story is however no thing of the distant past – it lives on in the areas around Yafrus. In the village of al-Man‘am, near Yafrus, the complete version is sung through the praises of their Wali Ibn ‘Alwan who pointed at the elephant making him sink in the

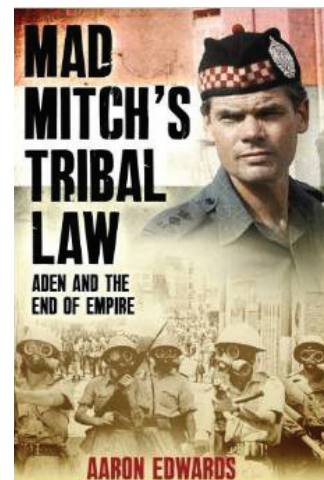
ground only to emerge again in the Red Sea near Mocca (al-Mukha).

More interestingly, al-Nabhani, following al-Munawi, attributed this story to another Sheikh named Ibn ‘Alwan, who lived in the 9th/16th century. According to Aziz, this version has not a “shred of evidence from either hagiographical sources or historical ones”. We can only say that if Aziz had visited the region, he would have found that it does have more than a shred of evidence: in al-Zarah village (Lahij) there is another saint named Ibn ‘Alwan whom people still visit and venerate (we visited the place on April 28, 2014). Up to now, people from near and far set out annually to visit Ibn ‘Alwan’s shrine seeking his blessings. Barren women visit asking the Saint’s help to have children. In various regions of contemporary Yemen, ordinary people appeal to him (“ya Ibn ‘Alwan!”) when losing, rejecting, or requesting something. A number of popular legends and stories revolve around his life.

Until twenty or thirty years ago, ecstasies (called *a‘lawinah* or *majathib*) would come from unknown places and perform miraculous acts in villages, such as stabbing knives or swords in their bellies without being harmed or bleeding. They would dance very swiftly moving the knives within their bodies again without wounding themselves. People would reward them with some money or food as an appreciation of their miracles derived from the great original miracles of Ibn ‘Alwan himself, pointing to the saint’s enduring powers.

ABDULSALAM AL-RUBAIDI AND WERNER DAUM

**Mad Mitch’s Tribal Law: Aden and the End of Empire**, by Dr Aaron Edwards, Mainstream Publishing, 2014, pp. 336, 4 sketch maps, 23 B&W photographs, Table of Contents, Notes, Dramatis Personae, Glossary and Abbreviations, Bibliography, Index, Hb £20. ISBN: 978-1780576282.



*Mad Mitch’s Tribal Law* is a thorough – if partly misnamed – account of the final years in British Aden. Most of the book is given over to a nuanced and detailed examination of the strategic and operational political environment, with details that were either not then apparent, or have faded with time (in particular the imperial role of Gamal



Abd al-Nasser and his agents in what is now billed as a national liberation struggle). It is only the last third of the book which focuses on the tactical re-taking of Crater; presumably marketing requirements for name-recognition trumped a more accurate but boring title.

The book also reveals that, unknown to the press – and quite possibly Lt Col Mitchell – at the time, the British Middle East Command had secretly agreed the re-occupation of Crater with the National Liberation Front. Both sides stage-managed the events without their subordinates' knowledge. Later, and less secret, was Lt Col Mitchell's challenge of maintaining control of a volatile situation without either committing a massacre, or losing any more of his soldiers than could be avoided, all in the face of restrictive Rules of Engagement and fractious relations with Brigade HQ.

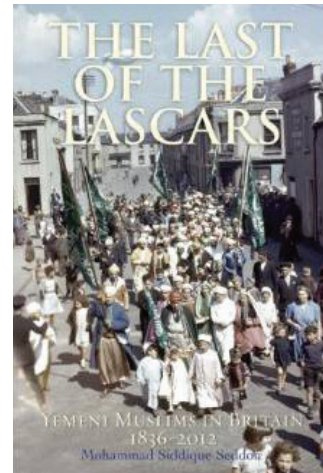
The book is chock-full of lessons learned (and unlearned) for later operations, such as Ulster, the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan: the lack of formal pre-deployment training, party-political imperatives undermining military strategies, interfering neighbouring countries, principled national patriots and nihilistic foreign lackeys, the value of Special Branch Squads / Close Observation Platoons, anti rocket-propelled grenade cages for observation posts, poorly protected "protected" vehicles, framework and surge operations, poor intelligence and worse local understanding, allegations of torture, friendly fire incidents, host nation forces shooting friendly forces, foreign propaganda, *agents provocateur*, terrorist atrocities and their local apologists, terrorist factional infighting over the spoils, tribal imperatives trumping national interests, a methodical military withdrawal following a political shambles, abandonment of loyal local colleagues and vicious score settling among the new rulers.

This is a book with a bit of everything – narrative and analysis, pace and detail, villainous politicians and heroic fighters – although it is perhaps less critical of UK failings than it might have been. Possibly because it was written *ab initio* as a book or because it is by an academic who tries to teach soldiers, *Mad Mitch* is written in clear English, with notes and references limited to the essential and confined to the rear, although a map of Aden as a whole – showing all the areas named on one map – would greatly have helped those less familiar with Aden and its environs. The Arabic – English transliteration follows T. E. Lawrence's 'convention', and unconventionally, Dr Edwards refers familiarly to Lt Col Mitchell as "Colin" throughout. There are, regrettably, numerous typographic errors (mostly of Arabic names), and there are also a few minor factual errors

(Aden only became a colony in 1937; Col Sallal was not commander of the Imam's *Republican* Guard etc), but these detract little from the overall value of the book. If there is one complaint, it is that this study was not available earlier: as a guide to how to do (and not do) low-intensity operations in the Middle East, it would have been invaluable 15 years ago. Strongly recommended for the general and military reader.

JAMES SPENCER

**The Last of the Lascars: Yemeni Muslims in Britain 1836-2012**, by Mohammad Siddique Seddon, Kube Publishing, 2013, pp. 328, £ 14.99. ISBN 978-1-84774-036-6. Foreword by Professor Humayan Ansari.



Dr Seddon is Lecturer in Islamic and Religious Studies and Associate Director, Centre for Faiths and Public Policy, at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Chester. In *The Last of the Lascars*, he traces how Yemeni immigrants, almost invisible elements in much wider migratory movements, established themselves in the

UK, often in the face of discrimination, to survive and finally become recognised for their role in pioneering Arab settlement in the UK and establishing Britain's first mosques. The book is based on solid personal research.

Lascars were originally sailors from the Indian subcontinent employed on British and other European ships from the 16th century onwards. The number of Yemeni lascars increased markedly after 1850 thanks to the development of Aden into a major international port. Many of the lascars were from the Imam's Yemen and were initially attracted to Aden by the job prospects, particularly at times of drought in the Yemeni highlands and even the Tihama.

Yemeni lascars congregated in the ports of Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields and Hull. Many continued to work on ships but increasing numbers found other work in the docks and other port facilities in the early 20th century. The entrepreneurial ones set up boarding houses offering a range of support and brokering services – even money lending – to other lascars. The owners of some of the boarding houses became quite prosperous and set up networks – often on tribal lines – linking the growing communities

in the port cities. Dr Seddon notes that Yemeni-owned cafes became community centres for Yemenis, places where transients and residents could meet, exchange information and news and find support. By the early 20th century Yemeni communities were firmly established in the port cities. It was never clear how many Yemenis were present but in 1918, for example, there were 4,500 in South Shields.

Yemeni immigration declined after the First World War (in which perhaps 1,000 Yemeni seamen in British ships were lost as a result of enemy action). In the 1920s barriers, some little more than ill-disguised racism, were constructed to deter the employment of migrant labour. The established communities were affected by, and influenced the politics of their homelands. One of the most important examples was the role of Sheikh Abdullah Ali al-Hakimi, whose life story Dr Seddon examines. Born in a village near Taizz, he moved to the UK in 1936 to help spread the teachings of the Sufi 'Alawi "*tariqa*". He began his work in South Shields before settling in Cardiff, where he became known for his strong support for the Free Yemen Movement – opposed to the policies of the Imamic regime - and setting up the first Arab language newspaper in the UK. He later encountered much resistance to his reformist ideas among the quite conservative Yemenis then in Cardiff and this led to a major split in the Yemeni community. In 1952, al-Hakimi closed down his newspaper in the UK and moved it and himself to Aden to continue his opposition to the Imam but he fell ill and died in 1954. In *Britain's First Muslims*, Fred Halliday gives a more detailed analysis of Hakimi's contribution.

Yemenis were also a less visible part of the substantial immigration movement to the UK from the Commonwealth after the Second World War. The new arrivals went to industrial centres – Birmingham, Sheffield and Manchester and “satellite” communities in Sandwell (Birmingham) and Rotherham (Sheffield). Dr Seddon details the transformation of the new arrivals from “sojourners” in the UK to make money and return to Yemen to residents of “diaspora villages”, now breaking up as second and third generations want to be British but retain a Yemeni identity.

Dr Seddon discusses the career of Sheikh Said Hassan Ismail, the adopted son of one of Hakimi's most prominent followers – and then rival. Ismail's Yemeni father died at sea in the Second World War but his English mother agreed that he could be taught Islamic studies in Cardiff and then in Yemen. He became a prominent Imam and community leader helping Yemenis – in Dr Seddon's words to “ground the faith and its adherents in a

new socio-political and geo-cultural setting”. When he died in 2011, the then First Minister of Wales, Rhodri Morgan, described him “as a truly significant figure in the shaping of modern Wales”.

Dr Seddon differentiates the patterns of life of the “assimilated” in the port cities and the “acculturating” in the industrial cities. He looks at how the attempts to mobilise Yemenis politically in the 1970s failed in part because of the difficult relationships between the YAR and the PDRY. This failure, however, led to a greater focus on local matters: Yemeni community associations were set up and qualified for local government support. These have enabled Yemenis to play leading roles not just among other Yemenis but also within the life of the cities in which they live. He sees in the 1990s the emergence of a proud “British Yemeni-ness” personified at first in the achievements of the boxer Prince Naseem but now in a diverse range of personalities. The final chapter, aptly titled “Becoming Visible” shows how Yemenis now embrace both tradition and modernisation. Looking back he shows, as did Halliday, that the invisible lascars are now seen as “Britain’s First Muslims”.

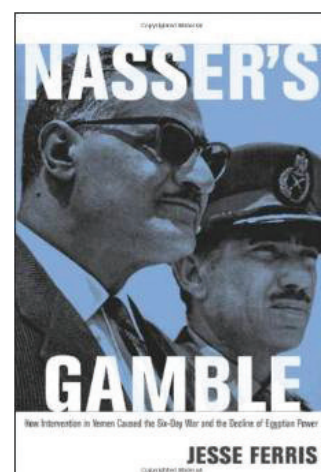
The book sets the British Yemenis in the context of Yemen’s history and politics. It is illustrated throughout by anecdotes from Yemenis recording their experiences of arriving, surviving and thriving. It is best read in conjunction with *Britain’s First Muslims* but greatly adds to Halliday’s pioneering research with a focus on the last few decades and an epilogue looking at British Arabs.

NOEL BREHONY

**Nasser’s Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power**, by Jesse Ferris, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012, pp 352, 18 halftones, 2 maps, £30.95, ISBN: 9780691155142.

There are three things, which immediately strike the reader about this book. The first – which should be obvious from the title – is that this is really a book about Egypt’s international relations with various regional and global powers in the 1950s and 1960s.

As a result, Yemen plays only a relatively small part in the scheme of things (and that mostly about the relations of the Egypt-based Republicans), such



as Chapter 1: “The Road to War” and Chapter 2: “The Soviet-Egyptian Intervention in Yemen”. Most of the emphasis goes on Egypt’s bilateral relations with the US (Chapter 3: “The Breakdown of US-Egyptian Relations”), with the USSR (Chapter 4: “The Unravelling of Soviet Egyptian Relations”), and with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Chapter 6: “Saudi-Egyptian Negotiations”). Only Chapter 5 is principally about the conflict in Yemen, and that is tempered with the reaction in Egypt: “On the Battlefield in Yemen – and in Egypt.”

The second is that this book is an adapted doctoral thesis. It has been extensively researched, using declassified documents from Israeli, UK, US, and USSR diplomatic and intelligence archives, as well as various Arab sources, mostly books and newspapers of the day. Egyptian military archives remain sealed, however Ferris uses what published Egyptian military and civilian memoirs are available. As might be expected with such an origin, Ferris’s footnoting is usually good – although on occasion, it runs to half a page and more! Explanatory and reference notation is, as so often, mixed together in the footnotes, rather than references being relegated to endnotes.

The third issue is that Dr Ferris “is vice president for strategy at the Israel Democracy Institute”. This pro-Israel theme runs throughout the work, resulting in some “[b]old and provocative” conclusions, leading the publisher’s review to claim “that the most important Cold War conflict in the Middle East was not the clash between Israel and its neighbours. It was the inter-Arab struggle between monarchies and republics over power and legitimacy”. These conclusions are not always substantiated by the evidence provided, and indeed, some of the opening claims are undercut by facts later in the book. For instance, the role of both Israel and the UK in the conflict (as both objects and participants) is glossed over in the introductory framing (albeit later briefly mentioned in the body, and sometimes smuggled into footnotes) and conclusion, thus Ferris “provocative[ly]” skews the narrative from the generally accepted Revolutionary vs *status quo* struggle (“the road to Tel Aviv lies via the Gulf and Riyadh” as Nasser was wont to declare) into a “bold” claim of solely intra-Arab conflict. The causative connection of the subtitle is similarly “bold” without being proven.

Coupled with the pro-Israel theme, runs a pervasive anti-Arab one: many of Ferris’s statements and (declared) suppositions seem grounded in negative viewpoint. As well as sleights such as “the so-called Ramadan



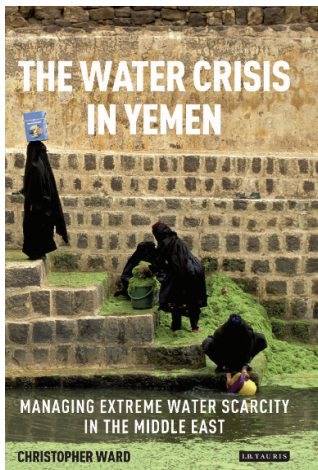
Offensive” (p.115), a more substantive example is over Egyptian casualties (p.84), whose undeclared numbers Ferris ascribes to Egyptian sensitivity, yet it is equally possible that – like the Argentinians in the Falklands – the Egyptian High Command did not know (or care) how many “Masris” had died in Yemen. This automatic bias is a pity, as it taints the analysis of otherwise detailed research.

Physically, the book handles well. The three-tone dust-cover has an almost cameo illustration of Nasser meeting “the Yemeni People”, and a tactile feel to it. There are the expected tables of content, an un-tabulated scattering of illustrations (many of them cartoons from Arab newspapers) in black and white, a bibliographic note and two detailed bibliographies in Semitic languages (in which Hebrew titles are translated into English, while Arabic titles are not), and European languages (which also remain in their source languages). The volume concludes with a reasonably detailed index.

The sole detailed map on p. vi (repeated on p. 180 with a basic overlay of the Ramadan Offensive) is approximately A5, in black and white / grey shading to denote relief in metres. The map details international boundaries, tracks, mountains (or more accurately, peaks), airfields and major ports of the YAR. Although various physical features of Aden and the Protectorates are shown, Aden was apparently lacking an airfield or major port, which will come as a surprise to many, nor are any airfields shown up-country; Ethiopia’s then coast apparently had no installations either. The detailed map has a 2” sketch map inserted to place the YAR in the regional context, which is almost completely useless as it omits all regional towns, including those mentioned in the text as of military / political significance, such as for the air bridge. A cross section of Yemen (as per Dresch’s *Tribes* (1993)) would have been far more useful – or a regional map showing significant locations.

*Nasser’s Gamble* is a useful book, which draws together many references on an under-studied topic; indeed, as Ferris was writing his thesis many of the Egyptians’ mistakes in Yemen were being replicated in Iraq, Witty’s then recent work notwithstanding. If a second edition is considered in 15 years – possibly even with Egyptian archival material – it will likely be less ideologically tainted and the better for it. At the moment, *Nasser’s Gamble* comes across as “intended to influence as much as to inform”. Recommended, with *caveats*.

JAMES SPENCER



**The Water Crisis in Yemen: Managing Extreme Water Scarcity in the Middle East**, by Christopher Ward, London: I B Tauris, 2014, pp. 455, £68.00. ISBN 978-1-780769-20-2.

As mentioned in the preface, Ward's first target audience is the Yemeni nation. He wants the book to be useful to Yemenis 'in regaining control over their most precious and scarce resource' [p xxii]. His other intended readers are development practitioners and analysts. His purpose is to 'provide a comprehensive case study of a water management crisis in an arid country' addressing the institutional, environmental, technical and political economy aspects of the problem [p xxi]. The book achieves these objectives, as it presents an extremely detailed description of all features of the country's current water crisis. Ward was responsible for water related policies with the World Bank in Yemen for well over a decade up to 2011 and thus had considerable influence on the policies devised by government in the sector. His World Bank involvement is noticeable throughout the book which focuses on issues on which the World Bank promotes neo-liberal policies; he addresses the problems well within the ideological framework of mainstream development discourse (decentralization, Integrated Water Resources Management, public-private partnerships, privatisation, subsidies) looking at details and problems with the implementation of projects, accepting the fundamental premise that the policies are the right ones. He also puts a strong emphasis on poverty and the fact that many projects, to date, have failed to reduce poverty.

The book starts with basic background information, including physical/geological aspects, followed by a history of the country starting with pre-history. Chapters 2 and 3 give the author's interpretation of Yemen's recent history, politics and economic development. Chapter 4 on water resources presents the current state of knowledge on current water availability, including data from most of the main sources used in development programmes. He thus brings together in one place much otherwise scattered information, including some useful definitions for non-hydrologist readers. The next chapter gives a historical background and description of the many mechanisms for water management used from the earliest days onwards, including the different types of irrigation, terracing and other

water-saving technologies used in the country. He has examined all available literature and clearly presents the findings of archaeologists as well as more recent studies.

Parts 2 and 3 of the book are largely based on the author's involvement and role in the preparation of policy studies, and the design and management of water related projects in the past two decades. He outlines the various steps in policy and practice relating to both rural and urban water, as well as the many problems faced in agriculture. These sections provide a detailed discussion of the implementation problems of mainly World Bank supported agriculture and irrigation projects. They also provide overall surveys of the situation as found in the course of preparing the National Water Sector Strategy and Investment Programme and in particular the related Poverty and Social Impact Analysis. Daily reality of the water crisis features prominently in the book through illustrations as well as in the many boxes presenting examples and Ward's experiences during his field-work at different times mostly in the first half of the decade 2000-2010. They focus on a few successes but mainly on the many problems. Given his close involvement - which is explicitly acknowledged in footnotes and elsewhere - it is not surprising that his criticisms focus on implementation aspects rather than on the underlying policies themselves. He pays considerable attention to the fact that current policies fail to address the particular difficulties experienced by the poor.

His main argument is that water management should be returned to local communities rather than be centralised and top down. His faith in 'community' control fits in to a widespread developmental philosophy of empowering communities. These are well within the neo-liberal agenda and unfortunately they neglect the impact of existing power relations at all levels of society, treating communities as homogeneous entities working in the interests of the majority, something which is rarely found in reality. He believes that the 'traditional' management mechanisms can be adapted to modern technological changes as well as to the many political and social transformations undergone by Yemen.

In conclusion, the book brings together in a single volume all the basic information necessary for people to understand Yemen's water crisis, ranging from geological and archaeological data to a clear outline of the policies decided and, in some cases, implemented in the past two decades. It clearly describes the processes through which the different official water management policies have emerged. While the book largely fulfils its stated

aims, it would have a far greater readership and impact among its target audience if it were in Arabic, rather than English. The book ends with events in 2011 and makes a number of recommendations for future water management policy. It will be interesting to see whether the post transition regime has a similar understanding of the solutions to Yemen's fundamental water problem, though it is likely that most will agree with Ward's description of the causes and current situation.

HELEN LACKNER

**Yemen Proud: Past and Present**, by Gamiel Yafai and Abduallem Alshamery, Gilgamesh publishing, 2013, pp 128, Pb £14.95, ISBN 978-19-008531-36-0; **Des Vues sur le Yemen**, by Hélène David-Cuny e-publishing by Blurb.com, 2014, pp 99, Hb €43.24, Pb €34.54, ISBN 979-10-91825-06-1; **Le Yemen qui grandit, portraits d'enfances**, by Helène David-Cuny, e-publishing by Blurb.com, 2012, pp 99, Hb €42.76, Pb €30.24, ISBN 979-10-91825-02-3..

In spite of years of negative publicity, and the ongoing political and humanitarian crises that have befallen it in recent times, Yemen remains what many have termed a "photogenic" country. And although safe travel throughout Yemen has become all but impossible, not only for foreigners but also for Yemenis, there has been a steady output of photographic books on the country and its people. This year's crop includes three books of excellent quality, which include the photos their authors took over a shorter or longer period of time. For those of us who know the country well to reminisce and remind us of the wonders we all miss, for others who have not had the opportunity of visiting Yemen more recently, or who have not been everywhere, these books help to understand the melancholy and sadness so many of us feel at the current state of affairs in the country.

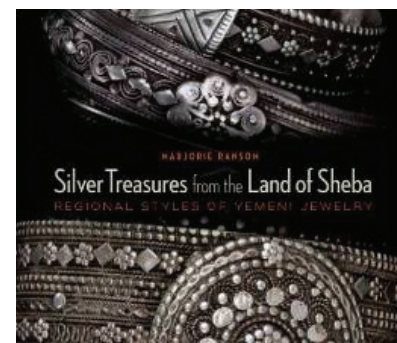
Two active members of the Yemeni community in Britain, and regular attendees of BYS events, Gamiel Yafai and Abduallem Alshamery, have compiled the first book. Their aim was to present in a single tome the main sights of Yemen with the rest of the book devoted to the lives of Yemenis in Britain. As the title denotes, the authors attempt to restore a sense of pride among their compatriots who live in the UK by juxtaposing their heritage from their original home, with their achievements in their adopted homeland. The strength of this publication lies in the photographic coverage of important episodes in the life of the Yemeni-British community with photos of sailors' pass books, the aftermath of the riots in South

Shields in 1930, and photos of life of Yemenis in different UK cities mainly through major community events up to the 1960s. In its final section it illustrates aspects of contemporary life in Yemeni communities in Britain. A useful and educational record of great value to youth of Yemeni origin in the UK, it should also be of interest both to BYS members and to Yemenis in Yemen. The book, originally obtainable from the authors, is now also available in major bookshops online.

Archaeologist and technical photographer H  l  ne David-Cuny has compiled the second and third publications. She has worked in Yemen for decades, and been particularly involved in the preservation, such as it is, of the city of Zabid, one of the few UNESCO World Heritage sites in the country. Her first book, *Des Vues sur le Y  men* (Visions of Yemen), presents a series of photographs of different locations, events and activities in many parts of the country, giving a great visual illustration of daily life, with buildings, sceneries, market places at different times and decorated or otherwise for different occasions, with a particular focus on architectural elements. The second, *Le Y  men qui Grandit* (Yemen Growing) contains portraits of children taken in the first decade of the 21st century, again revealing the social and cultural context of different circumstances and times. With the median age in the country being 18.5 years, documenting the lives of Yemeni children provides an insight into what has become the largest and most deprived segment of Yemeni society. The author has published both books through an e-publisher, which makes it possible to create such high quality photo books at reasonable cost and price, as they are printed on demand. Readers of the Journal may well choose to order one of them via the webpage [www.blurb.co.uk](http://www.blurb.co.uk).

THANOS PETOURIS

**Silver Treasures from the Land of Sheba, Regional Yemeni Jewelry**, by Marjory Ransom, American University of Cairo Press, 2014, pp. 246, Hb   35.00, ISBN 978-9-774166-00-6; distributed in the UK by I B Tauris, London.



This major work will gain the attention of all those interested in Yemeni silver and women's costumes. It is really a photo book with short paragraphs of explanation and could well end up as a



coffee table book providing pleasure to many who have the opportunity of seeing it. As it is really affordable for such an illustrated volume, it will hopefully adorn many homes. For people who hear little about Yemen other than current insurgency and counter insurgency episodes, this book provides an alternative introduction, focusing on some of the country's wonders. This will help those who have not visited Yemen to understand the determined commitment and affection which so many foreigners working or visiting Yemen develop for the country and its people.

Primarily focusing on silver, the title is somewhat misleading insofar as a wide range of women's costumes are also illustrated and, to some extent, discussed; these have little, if any, silver in them. The main benefit from the brief introductions to each governorate are the photos, as the information is really insufficient to provide adequate background to understanding the role and importance of silver or costume in the specific context of the area. Ransom has successfully traced a number of silver artisans in different parts of the country, adding very interesting details to her descriptions, and one wishes she had given them more space to describe their work and its changes over time. However, her determination to address the subject on a governorate by governorate basis is less convincing. For those of us who have also collected much similar traditional crafts, the attribution of both silver and costume to certain governorates is not always in agreement with what we were told of the origins of our own collections.

Additional historical analysis of the origins of the different types of silver jewelry and of their use over time, as well as of its decline in the 20th Century and very slight revival in recent years would have added to the book's value as a prime reference on both silver and costume, as would have greater precision in dating the items photographed. Though there are many cases where precise dating would be difficult, if not impossible, at least attributing things to one or another decade would have been of interest. Finally ensuring the accuracy of descriptions is particularly important when using material in the various Yemeni museums which, in many cases, are rather careless in this respect: an example is in photo n 317 which attributes the clearly Yafi' head coverings to Habban in Shabwa. While such coverings could still be bought in specialised shops in Aden up to about 10 years ago, they are now almost impossible to find. Other items, such as Dhala'i woven belts had vanished from the markets by the early 1980s.

Regardless of such minor failings, the book is a great contribution to the knowledge of neglected and largely disappearing crafts and arts, and will

hopefully bring about increased interest in their preservation as well as revival in Yemen, neighbouring Gulf states and beyond. While widely available in the old souq in Sana'a, many similar items, old and more recently made, currently decorate the shops and wait, forlornly, for the next influx of visitors and tourists. Hopefully this will happen sooner, rather than later. Meanwhile, people will have to be content with this exceptionally well-illustrated volume.

HELEN LACKNER

## OBITUARIES

### MAJOR-GENERAL AHMAD NOWAH BA RASHAID (DIED 22 JULY 2013)

He was born c.1920 into the powerful Ba Rashaid section of the Nowah tribal confederation in western Hadramaut and brought up in the Ba Rashaid tribal settlement at Libna on the stony tableland south of Wadi Daw'an and north-west of Mukalla. The Ba Rashaid also had land, further west, in Wadi Hajr – famous for its date palms and perennial water – to which they and other tribes would flock during the date season. Instead of linking his given name with that of his father (Abdullah), he was widely and simply known as Ahmad Nowah – the intention perhaps being to emphasise his tribal affiliation.



photo J. N. Ellis

Ahmad enlisted in the Hadrami Bedouin Legion (HBL) within a few years of its establishment in 1938 by Harold Ingrams. It was an inter-tribal force, commanded in its early days by Jordanian officers, to keep the peace in the desert borderlands where the writ of the local states in treaty relationship with Britain, did not run. Ahmad joined the HBL before it had developed an educational wing, and remained largely illiterate throughout his career. He was a member of the HBL camel patrol which escorted Doreen Ingrams on her 500 mile trip across Hadramaut in 1944.

During the 1950s the British built a chain of forts along the desert fron-

tier on the southern fringe of the Empty Quarter. These were garrisoned by the HBL with the object of guarding water holes, preventing tribal raiding and cross-border incursions. Ahmad's career with the HBL spanned the long and uneven transition from patrolling on camelback to patrolling in 4x4 vehicles. When, as a company commander, Ahmad had responsibility for protecting the oil company prospecting in the northern deserts, he acquired a deep knowledge of the territory and its tribes, which many years later would prove of service to the Yemeni government. In 1960 Ahmad was offered overseas training but declined for family reasons in favour of a short course in Aden. In 1964 he left the HBL on transfer to the British Residency as Bedouin Affairs Assistant to the Resident Adviser. He was a source of valuable advice on tribal issues until the British withdrew from Mukalla in 1967. On independence Ahmad retired to his tribal fastness in Libna, fortunately unmolested by the new regime and its Marxist successors.

In the 1990s, when the Yemeni government was negotiating a border agreement with the Saudis (culminating in the Treaty of Jedda, 2000) it sought Ahmad's advice on his operational experience of where the border lay during his service with the HBL. In return for this advice he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier. During a visit to Mukalla, ex-President Saleh, in an apparent political gesture for local consumption, had Ahmad promoted to Major-General.

Like many unlettered members of his generation, Ahmad had an astonishing memory and was a wonderful *raconteur*, bringing vividly to life events of his early service with the HBL, notably his encounters with marauding tribesmen, Abida and Dahm from North Yemen, and Yam from Saudi Arabia. The HBL used to patrol a wide area to deter such intruders, penetrating deep inside territory that the Saudis would now regard as their own but in which they took little interest in the late 1940s. Ahmad remembered the time when the desert clans of the Hadrami Sei'ar tribe used to graze their camels near the slopes of the barren ridge which later became the site of the Saudi township of Sharura, today a city of considerable regional and strategic importance.

He visited London for medical treatment in 2002, when friends and former colleagues had the opportunity to entertain him at the Travellers Club, an occasion which he greatly appreciated. He was well into his nineties when he died in July 2013.

JOHN SHIPMAN

## NIGEL GROOM OBE

(1924–2014)

With the death of Nigel Groom on 5 March the Society has lost one of its most distinguished members, albeit one who regrettably in recent years has been prevented by ill health from attending Society events.

Educated at Haileybury and Cambridge, he served during the war with the Indian army in the sub-continent and Burma. When the war ended he joined the Colonial Administrative Service. After a period of preparatory training he found himself posted to Aden where he arrived by troopship in January 1948. He was twenty three. It was only after his arrival that he



photo Tina Rose

learned that he was to be sent as political officer to Bayhan, the most remote part of the Western Aden Protectorate. The staff vacancy which he filled was created by the death in a gunfight in Dhala' the previous year of a political officer of exceptional ability, Peter Davey. Davey had preceded Nigel in Bayhan, and during his six years there had kept detailed notes on every aspect of local life. In the absence of any other written reference about the area, Nigel was to find Davey's notebook - handed to him by the Ruler of Bayhan - invaluable.

During his few weeks in Aden, Nigel's briefing for his new posting was 'random and spasmodic' but he learned soon enough that Bayhan was a trouble spot where tribal dissidence and feuding were rampant. At that time, there were no roads in the Protectorate so Bayhan was only accessible by air (or several days on camelback). Flights by small RAF Anson aircraft using a landing strip marked out on sand with whitewash, provided a vital link with Aden. Life was spartan. Nigel had the use of a small mud-brick tower in one corner of the compound occupied by his *gendarmerie* of Government guards. It contained a living room, which was also his office, with tiny unglazed windows, reached by a stairway above a store room. On top was a tiny bedroom and a flat mud roof with parapets, where he could wash in his canvas basin unobserved. Apart from the folding chair and bed which he had brought with him, the sparse furniture was mostly made out of the orange boxes in which stores came from Aden. His stalwart Yemeni

cook, Ahmad, had a very small windowless kitchen, with charcoal for fuel and an old kerosene tin for an oven. They shared a lavatory, a deep hole in the floor, with the Arab soldiers. In the far corner of the quadrangle an Arab wireless operator sent out messages in morse, Nigel's only means of communication. He travelled locally on horseback, or occasionally by camel.

Nigel's initiative and nerve were to be severely tested when, within a few days of his arrival, he was required to direct a bombing operation against the Bal Harith tribe which had rebelled against the authority of the Ruler of Bayhan, Sharif Hussain. The operation, involving Tempest and heavy Lincoln bombers, continued for several days until the Bal Harith concluded that sufficient damage had been done to their evacuated homes and property for them to submit without loss of face. Nigel, whose Arabic was then still very limited, had the temporary assistance of a seasoned Arab Political Officer during the operation and the peace negotiations which followed.

Nigel's main duties in Bayhan were to persuade the local ruler to govern his country for the benefit of his people, to seek to maintain peace in a huge, uncontrolled tribal area to the east, and to deal with the many problems arising from Yemeni intrigues across an un-demarcated border to the west. His relationship with the Ruler, Sharif Hussain, who later became a leading figure in the ill-fated Federation of South Arabia, was crucial. Their relationship developed amicably until the British put pressure on the Sharif via Nigel to introduce constitutional and financial reforms as a *quid pro quo* for aid. The Sharif, a forceful personality whose political skills Nigel greatly admired, regarded this as an assault on his authority and '*sharaf*' ('face'), chose to blame the messenger, and ultimately had Nigel removed. A few years later when he and Nigel met in Aden, he admitted that he had been wrong and apologised.

During his time in Bayhan, Nigel hosted the first visit by a doctor, and witnessed the arrival by plane of the first motor vehicle – a harbinger of profound change in local communications. Before he left the area he assisted in planning and overseeing the construction of Bayhan's first primary school.

The life of relative privation which Nigel led had its compensations: the loyalty and support of Bayhani friends; and the world of antiquity around him to explore. In his engaging and beautifully written account of his time in Bayhan, *Sheba Revealed* (2002), Nigel singles out two men for special mention: Sharif Saleh bin Nasir, 'the only man to whom I could bare my



thoughts', and Sheikh Qassem Ahmad, a widely esteemed Bayhani elder, whom Nigel described as 'my guide and mentor'. Sharif Saleh's son, Haidar bin Saleh al-Habili, is well known to several members of the Society.

Bayhan encompassed the ruin fields, irrigation works, rock-cut mountain passes and other engineering marvels of the ancient incense kingdom of Qataban. Nigel had the satisfaction of being able to explore and map some of these sites. This experience inspired his lifelong interest in Arabia's incense trade, one of the fruits of which was his archaeological map of south-western Arabia published in 1976 by the Royal Geographical Society. His notes and personal enthusiasm helped to persuade the American entrepreneur, Wendell Phillips, to organise a team of archaeologists to excavate the Qataban capital of Timna in 1950/51.

In 1950, Nigel was posted to 'the angry mountains of Dhala' which, like Bayhan, shared a porous and disputed border with Yemen. The main political drama of his time there was the attempted assassination of Basil Seager, the British Agent for the Western Aden Protectorate. Seager and his wife had arrived to spend Christmas in Dhala'. The plot, unknown to them, was to assassinate Seager and Groom when they called on a local Sheikh on Christmas Day. While out for a walk on Christmas Eve with his wife and armed guards, Seager by chance met his would-be assassin and confederates on their way to their assignment. After an exchange of greetings in which Seager identified himself, the assassin, a religious fanatic, stabbed Seager with his dagger, slashing him to the bone from cheek to lower ribs. In the gunfight which followed Seager's assailant was killed. Nigel signalled to Aden to send a doctor by plane to treat Seager's injuries and those of his escort. He also took immediate precautions to guard against the possibility of a local uprising. In his initial report on the incident which was hand-written, Nigel regretted his inability to type the report as 'the noise of a typewriter would disturb the wounded'. His later, more detailed account of what happened reflects the forensic eye which was to serve him well in his second career. On the basis of evidence implicating the corrupt and wayward Ruler of Dhala' in the plot, Aden agreed to Nigel's strong recommendation that he should be replaced by an enlightened young kinsman, Amir Sha'aful bin Ali.

In 1952 Nigel married Lorna Littlewood (died 2009) who joined him for the rest of his tour in Dhala'. They then moved to Aden where Nigel was appointed Assistant Chief Secretary. In 1958 they left for Nairobi, a relaxing change after Aden. There, Nigel was appointed to a senior post in

the colonial secretariat involving naval and intelligence responsibilities. On independence they returned to England with their son and daughter. In 1962 Nigel joined the Security Service and played an outstanding role in the field of counter-espionage. He was too discreet and modest to discuss his work but his important contribution was recognised with the award of an OBE in 1974.

In retirement the pre-Islamic history of Arabia remained for Nigel a source of inexhaustible curiosity and fascination. He contributed numerous papers to the *Arabian Seminar* and to the *Bulletin of the Society for Arabian Studies*, and many of the former were incorporated in his study of the Arabian incense trade, *Frankincense and Myrrh* (1981). This study attracted the attention of an Omani company intending to launch a new and distinctive perfume under the name of 'Amouage'. Nigel agreed to advise them on the historical background of potential ingredients. This triggered his encyclopaedic research of the global perfume industry published in *The Perfume Handbook* (1992), later revised as *The New Perfume Handbook* (1997). Earlier he had published *A Dictionary of Arabic Topography and Place Names* (1983). He also contributed to the *British-Yemeni Society Journal*.

In 2005 the Society arranged an exhibition at the Yemeni Embassy of a selection of Nigel's striking black and white photographs of Bayhan in the late 1940s. The exhibition was repeated the following year at the National Museum in Sana'a under British Council auspices and attracted widespread local interest.

Nigel was a man of many parts and his qualities of mind and character, embodied in the wealth of material that survives him, he will be much missed.

JOHN SHIPMAN

### RAMZIA ALERYANI

1967–2013

Ramzia Aleryani was born in 1954 in Eryan a village in Ibb governorate, from which many Yemeni civil society leaders have emerged. She completed high school in Taizz, and then studied philosophy at Cairo University, receiving her bachelor's degree in 1977 followed by a master's degree in Arabic literature in 1986. In 1979, Aleryani was the first woman to join the Yemeni diplomatic corps and served in different positions until becoming

an ambassador in 2000. Upon her return to Yemen, she decided to get involved in civil society work and in 2004 was elected as the head of the Yemeni Women's Union. Later she was elected Secretary General of the General Arab Women's Union.

Under her leadership, the Yemeni Women's Union became the largest grassroots NGO in Yemen. It grew from a few thousand to more than six hundred thousand members. She was able to expand its outreach from eleven governorates and twenty districts to all the governorates of Yemen and 130 districts. She opened the first and, to date, only women's shelter in Yemen which was recognized by the government where former women detainees were able to stay and be trained in a life skill. Before the "home" as she liked to call it, women were held indefinitely in prison if no male relative came to claim them. Aleryani was able to expand the YWU's activities to include micro loans and livestock loans which enabled thousands of women to benefit and reduce their poverty levels.

In 2010 the International Women's Alliance recognized Ramzia Aleryani as one of 100 women from around the world whose work has improved the economic status of women; they gave her the World Difference Award. She later that year served along the head of UN Women and other international figures as member of an advisory group for the World Bank on gender and economy until 2013.

Aleryani was the first Yemeni woman novelist. Her first novel was published in 1970 when she was only 16. Since then she published several books, short stories, articles, children books and novels that won many regional and local awards. Her main published works are *Dhahiet al-Jasha'a* [1970], *La'alaho Ya 'awood* [1981], *Dar Al Saltana; qissah tareekhia* [1998], *Al Qanoon 'aroos* [1998] and *Ra'idat Yemeniyat* [1990]

Aleryani made it her life-long ambition to empower women and help them break social and cultural barriers as she herself had been able to overcome the barriers of isolation and discrimination and break out of social constraints at a very early age. In her premature death, Yemen has lost a brilliant woman leader who contributed greatly in advancing women's rights, improving civil liberties, and developing Yemen's feminist movement. Her remarkable achievements serve as a testament to her distinguished thinking and resilient character.

MAI ABDULMALIK