The British Yemeni Society Journal

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THE BRITISH YEMENI SOCIETY
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Arabic language transliteration follows a simplified version of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) guidelines, apart from widely used conventional spellings, and personal names.

Members of the public are encouraged to submit their contributions for consideration or comments to the Journal Editor at the e-mail address: editor@britishyemenisociety.org.uk.

The British Yemeni Society Journal

Vol. 33 (2025)

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EDITOR'S NOTE

NOEL BREHONY

The Society is pleased to present the 33rd issue of its Journal. I would like to thank the Editorial Committee for its hard work and support and the authors who proposed contributions or responded to our request for articles, reviews, and obituaries.

We asked members after the last edition what they would like to see in future journals. We have tried to reflect the outcome in the selection of articles for 2025. We have stuck to the format introduced in 2021, but will need to make changes from next year to reduce the escalating costs of the Journal without undermining its quality in appearance and content. I encourage readers to look at previous issues of the Journal – available on the website – as there are many timeless articles covering the suggestions made in the survey.

Inevitably, the Political Update (valid up to 5 September) is already out of date following the dramatic developments in Gaza which should improve the prospects of a resumption of the stalled road map for a settlement in Yemen. Much could go wrong but at long last there is hope of a better future for Yemenis. Tensions within the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) have increased, possibly with a shift in the balance of power towards the Southern Transitional Council. One piece of good news has been the Saudi allocation of $368 million to the PLC to help deal with the causes of protests in the main cities.

Our readership survey showed that there was a significant demand for more articles on the British Yemeni community and Yemeni diaspora. Laura Cretney's article, based on her PhD research at Durham, looks at the "evolving identities, cultural expressions, and political engagements of the Yemeni British diaspora in the context of migration, war, and digital transformation."

Jean Franco, the recipient of the BYS Academic Research Grant for 2024, has produced an article on another part of the diaspora: that of the Hadhrami-Hyderabadis, which will be of particular interest to the Friends of Hadhramaut. His thesis, unusually, is in the form of a film and he has shown how it was made, the continuing influence of the Hadhrami-Hyderabadis, and how they have become part of India whilst maintaining strong links to the homeland..

I am delighted that Noha Sadek agreed to write an account of the Rasulid dynasty's achievements in medieval Yemen. It is not an easy topic to cover in three thousand words, but she has done so splendidly. As her illustrations show, the Rasulids created a golden age in commerce and culture. It is tragic that many of their monuments have been destroyed.

When Sam Bollier suggested doing a translation of another book, this time on the memoirs of an Egyptian officer who fought in the war of the 1960s, we jumped at the chance to cover an important topic from a directly-involved soldier. It provides a compelling glance at the realities of the war as seen from a non-Yemeni combatant.

The deputy editor, Luca Nevola, writes on his conversation with Dr. Nader al-Sakkaf, who has spent the "last decade juggling his calling as a medical doctor with his belief in the Baha'i principle of building a better society." He describes the plight of Baha'is under the Huthis (and shows how differently they are treated by the PLC), arguing for a country that embraces all as full participants in society.

Roy Facey is well known to members of the Society for his briefings on the port of Aden and more widely for his role as an adviser on ports and navigation. We thought it would be useful to have a record

of the role, character, and capacities of the main Yemeni ports whilst also setting those ports within their historical context, especially as it relates to Yemen's international trade. We hope you will agree that Roy has done exactly that.

James Spencer – in reviewing two recent books by former British military officers in South Arabia, one a memoir and the other a fictionalised account based on the author's experiences – has provided an overview of a period that is little known to many younger members of the BYS. There is nobody better than James to do this and we hope you will find his summing up of the period enlightening and that future historians will benefit from his note on sources.

This year we have only four book reviews (compared with 15 last year) but we have also included notes on other books, reintroducing a feature last used in 2020. Thank you to Martin Jerrett, Helen Lackner, James Spencer, and Janet Watson for taking the time to read and review.

We celebrate in our obituaries the lives and achievements of eight people. Abdulla Bujra, the grandson of a Hadhrami who became a major figure in Africa. Gillian Vaudrey Chubb lived in Aden as one of the backroom staff of the Aden Intelligence committee in the 1960s. Paddy Coulter had only recently joined the BYS committee to which he brought his many distinguished qualities. Werner Daum was a regular reviewer of books for the BYS and known for his intellectual rigour and passion for Yemeni culture. Waheeba Farea was a pioneer of women's rights. Brian Lees did so much to foster understanding of Yemen. Ahmed Massoud was known both to many BYS members for his association with Sheba restaurant in London but also for his great humanity. Sultan al-Suraima was "a principled intellectual, and a tireless advocate for Yemen's soul and identity."

Many thanks – as ever – to Jane Taylor for her outstanding images decorating the journal's covers.

I would like to record a special thank you for Luca Nevola, who is standing down, after doing so much to help to re-design the journal and to support the work of the committee.

The editorial committee will begin planning for the 2026 Journal before the end of this year. We welcome proposals and suggestions for authors and articles. Please send yours to editor@britishyemenisociety.org.uk

CHAIR'S REPORT FOR BYS 2025

TAHER QASSIM MBE, CHAIR AND FRANCES GUY, VICE CHAIR

This report was delivered at the BYS AGM on 25 June 2025

Reflections from Yemen – April 2025

Taher's recent visit to Yemen painted a deeply sobering picture of the current state of the country.

The political and economic situation remains stagnant. After years of conflict and foreign intervention – particularly by the US, UK, and Israel – public trust in both local political figures and international efforts has significantly eroded. News of airstrikes is met with resignation rather than shock. For instance, the burning of Yemenia planes at Sanaʿa airport and the 10 June bombing of Hudayda port spread quickly across social media, yet generated little public protest beyond Huthi-organised demonstrations in Sanaʿa.

A shift came on 6 May 2025, when the Trump administration brokered a deal with the Huthis, halting US airstrikes on Yemen. While this was widely welcomed for potentially reducing civilian casualties, the broader implications of the agreement for the rest of Yemen remain unclear.

Daily conversations in Yemen revolve around basic necessities: water, petrol, and cooking gas. Gas-powered vehicles line up at any whisper of a shortage, which in turn affects water distribution, as water trucks struggle for fuel supply. In Taʿizz, Taher saw hundreds of children queuing at water tanks donated by local businesses or charities.

The cost of living has skyrocketed. Rent and property prices are typically calculated in Saudi riyals or US dollars, not Yemeni riyals. Notably, in Huthi-controlled areas, only the pre-2017 Yemeni riyal is accepted. Printing of new notes is banned, and possession can lead to fines or imprisonment. The pre-2017 riyal is now worth 4.5 times the new currency in other parts of the country.

Despite the hardships, markets in Taʿizz and Aden remain vibrant. Goods ranging from food to clothes, jewellery, and even arms are readily available. The reopening of the Jawlat al-Qasr crossing in Taʿizz has spurred economic activity on the Islah-controlled side of the city, where prices are generally lower due to differing exchange rates. With increased movement came traffic congestion, placing further strain on city services like sanitation, water, and electricity.

Taher's journey from Aden to Taʿizz took five hours and involved 45 checkpoints. Most served little purpose other than to slow traffic, though a few caused real disruption. The checkpoints displayed different flags depending on the territory – those of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in Aden and the Internationally Recognised Government in Taʿizz. The fatigue and confusion visible on soldiers' faces raised questions about their sense of purpose in these roles.

In contrast to these bleak realities, Taher met inspiring young people determined to build a better future. Some were pursuing higher education, others already had degrees, and a few were launching businesses or creative projects. One teenage girl had completed her first novel; another was running a design business online. Football remains a popular escape – Spanish clubs like Barcelona and Real Madrid dominate the conversation, though Liverpool FC has a modest following.

The report

Journal, we commend Noel Brehony and the editorial team for delivering the 2023/24 journal on time. Thank you, Noel, for your leadership in ensuring its publication.

Events, Michael Burns hosted an outstanding online event, 'The Perfect Human:' Sufis & Centres of Learning in Rasulid Yemen, featuring Professor Fitzroy Morrissey of Pembroke College, University of Oxford. Our sincere thanks to Michael for organising this intellectually enriching session.

Finance, the Society's finances remain stable. Considerable effort has gone into ensuring continuity and robust processes during the transition between treasurers. We thank Robert Wilson and John Huggins for their dedication in supporting this handover. Going forward, the financial system will operate with three authorised signatories: the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Treasurer.

Membership, a separate report accompanies this one, focusing on membership and subscription fees. At the last committee meeting, it was agreed that proposed increases in fees would be brought to the AGM for member discussion and decision-making.

Loss of a Valued Member, we were deeply saddened by the passing of Paddy Coulter on 3 November 2024. Paddy was a cherished friend and an invaluable contributor to BYS. He is greatly missed.

Website, we are grateful to Asma Ibrahim for agreeing to review our website and work closely with Feras Dammag, Shehab Dammag, and Louise Hosking to implement improvements.

Committee Roles and Elections, as part of the preparation for the 2025/26 term, all committee members were contacted regarding their willingness to continue.

- **Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Editor** remain unchanged.
- **New Treasurer:** Ian Pett has joined as the new Treasurer – welcome, Ian.
- **Outgoing Members**:
  - Moneef Al Azraki has stepped down as Treasurer and trustee but remains as a BYS member. We thank him for his service.
  - Michael Burns has stepped down as Events Lead but will remain on the Committee and the editorial sub-committee.
  - Sarah Clowry due to international relocation. We wish her well and thank her for her valuable contributions.
  - Shady Qubaty has moved to Qatar but remains a trustee and hopes to continue supporting BYS as his schedule permits.

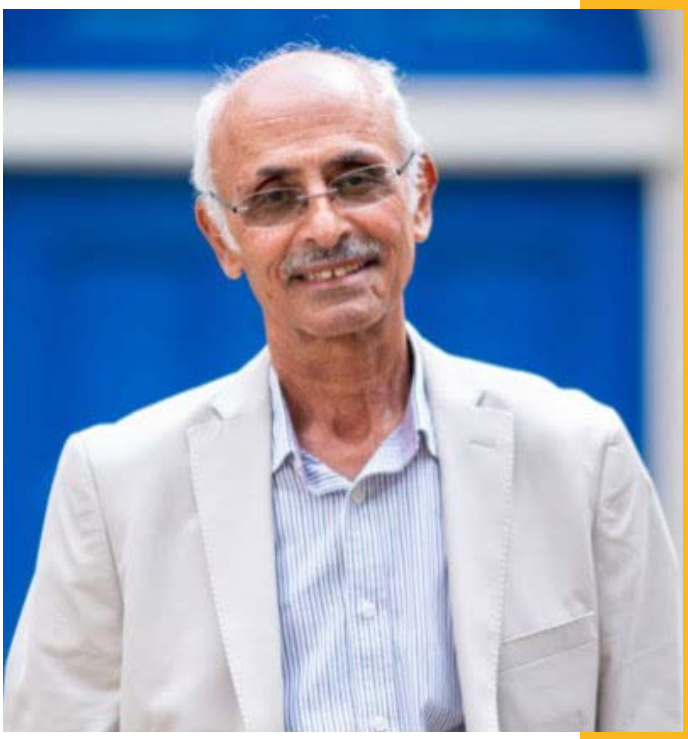
We extend our gratitude to all committee members for their commitment and voluntary service. Special thanks to:

- Louise Hosking for her dedicated secretarial work and contributions to the newsletter
- Noel Brehony for leading the journal's publication
- Robert Wilson and John Huggins for their support with financial matters
- Michael Burns for organising events
- Asma Ibrahim for website development
- Shehab Dammag and Feras Dammag for their website support

Looking Ahead, the BYS thrives because of its members. We recognise the personal and professional commitments of all involved and deeply appreciate the time they give to support the Society.

Looking ahead to the next twelve months and beyond, we are fortunate to have a diverse and committed team. A few committee vacancies remain, and we warmly encourage members to get involved in whatever capacity they can.

Let's continue building a stronger, more connected community through shared purpose and meaningful contributions.



Taher Ali Qassim MBE



Frances Guy

Dirhem Saeed - Acknowledgement and Update by Taher Qassim

Following the circulation of this year's AGM papers, I was delighted to learn that Dirhem Abdo Saeed has been appointed Chairman of the Hayel Saeed Anam Group (HSA) and will soon be relocating to Dubai. Dirhem has long been a dedicated supporter and esteemed contributor to our society. His steadfast belief in the mission of BYS has been evident through his generous support, encompassing not only annual corporate contributions but also the provision of his office for in-person committee meetings during times when suitable venues were scarce.

At our most recent committee meeting in April, held while I was in Yemen, Dirhem kindly introduced me, in my role as Chair of BYS, to the leadership team at al-Saeed University in Ta'izz. This introduction facilitated a fruitful exchange of ideas concerning potential collaborations between the university and UK-based academics.

Upon my return to London, I had the opportunity to meet with Dirhem to further discuss these initial concepts. As a result of these discussions, two dedicated working groups were established – one representing al-Saeed University in Ta'izz and the other comprising distinguished members from the UK, including representatives from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, the Yemen Specialist Interest Group (Faculty of Public Health UK), the University of Edinburgh, and the University of Portsmouth.

In June 2025, these teams convened via Zoom, reaching an agreement to explore collaborative opportunities in greater depth. Leaders like Dirhem inspire us to expand our horizons, and their influence creates limitless possibilities for making a meaningful impact.

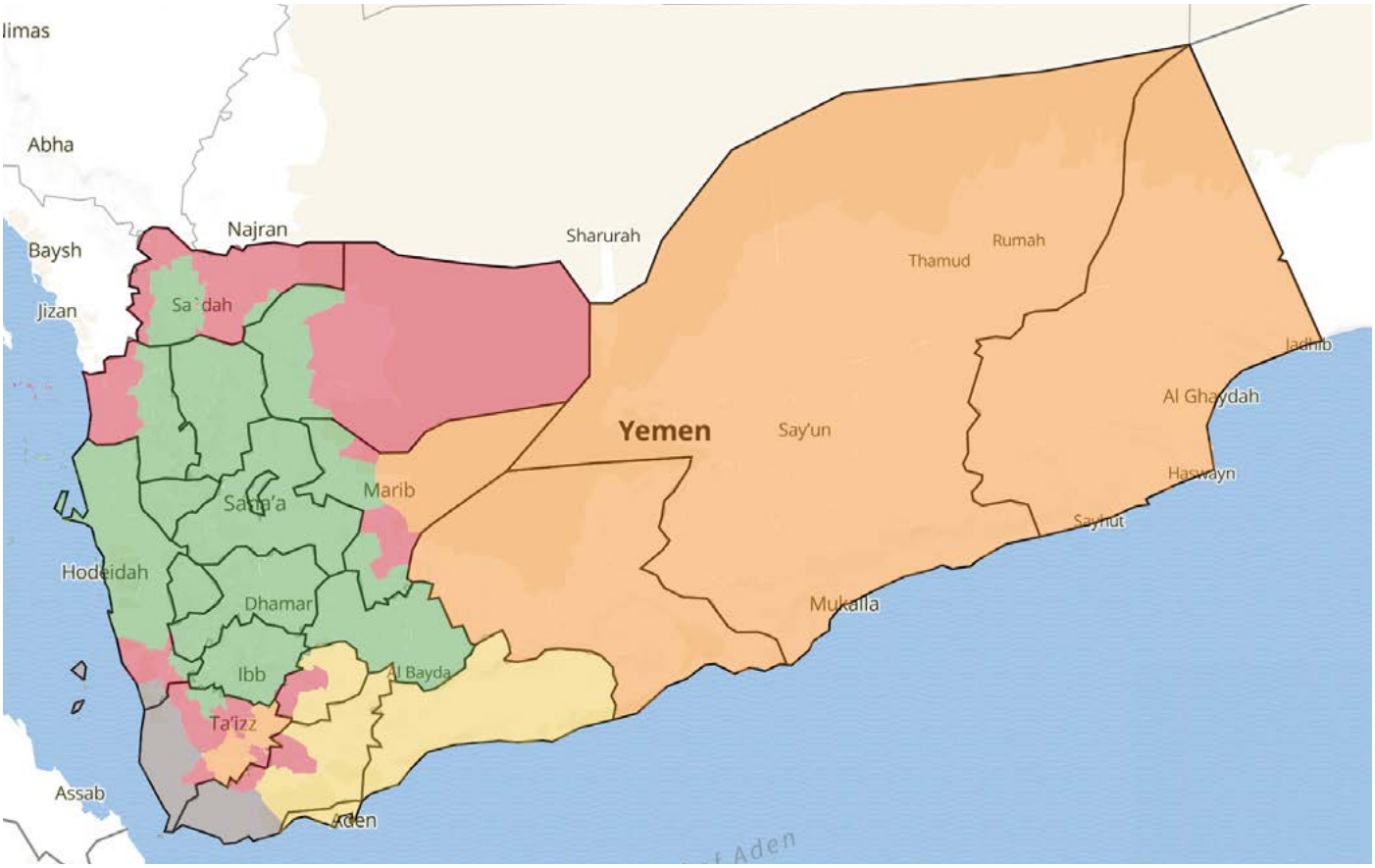
On behalf of BYS, I extend our heartfelt congratulations to Dirhem on his prestigious appointment as Chairman of Hayel Saeed Anam Group. We are profoundly grateful for his invaluable support over the years and will deeply miss his presence as a cherished member of our committee.

YEMEN POLITICAL UPDATE FOR 2025[1]

[1] *Up to 5 September 2025*

NOEL BREHONY

The political and military turmoil in and over Gaza prevented progress on the UN's proposed 'road map' that would lead to negotiations over the future governance between Ansar Allah ('the Huthis') and the internationally recognized government led by the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC). Riyadh and the Huthis remained in contact via Oman, and the UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg did what he could to keep the peace process alive. Until the Gaza crisis is over the current stalemate will continue with the risk of increasing violence, a shrinking economy, and a worsening humanitarian situation especially in the area under Ansar Allah control.



Areas of Control in Yemen as of February 2024.
Copyright Armed Conflict Location & Event Date Project (ACLED)

The Red Sea, Gaza, and Ansar Allah

Huthi missile attacks on Israel continued into 2025, with Israel responding by launching air strikes, mostly on civilian infrastructure including the Hudayda ports, Sanaʿa international airport, and associated power stations. Mr. Grundberg spoke to the UN Security Council in August of "the near destruction of Yemen's west coast port facilities." However, the Israeli attacks seemed reactive and improvised in contrast to its attacks on Iran in the so-called Twelve-Day War in June which were based on deep intelligence penetration and long-term preparation. That appeared to change in late August when one of a series of Israeli airstrikes killed Ahmed Ghaleb Nasser al-Rahawi, prime minister of the Huthi Government of Change and Construction, and eleven other ministers and officials. Several, like the prime minister (who was from Yafaʿ in the south) were members of the General People's Congress (GPC), not Ansar Allah; they had little say in Huthi internal or external strategy. Israel attacks will continue.

Immediately after his inauguration President Trump signed an executive order designating Ansar Allah as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO). When it came into effect on 4 March 2025 sanctions were imposed on top Huthi leaders, including Muhammad Abdul Salam, the main Huthi interlocutor (based in Oman) with Saudi Arabia – and, according to the US, the mastermind of networks used to evade sanctions and smuggle weapons. On 15 March, the US launched Operation Rough Rider against Huthi targets in Saada, Hudayda, and Sanaʿa including military training facilities, weapons depots, and command-and-control sites. Bombing continued on an almost daily basis until 5 May when President Trump announced that the Huthis had "capitulated." That followed mediation by Oman leading to the US and Ansar Allah to stop targeting each other. The Huthis had been firing missiles and drones at US naval ships in the Red Sea and had shot down several US Reaper drones. The high cost of defending US naval assets in the region was a factor incentivising the US to agree to a ceasefire.

Ansar Allah announced that the deal applied only to US shipping in the Red Sea. There had been a pause on attacks since late 2024 but in early July 2025 the Huthis, using new tactics, sank two container ships whose owners had no current, identifiable link to Israel. The Huthis announced a new phase in their operations that included "targeting all ships belonging to any company dealing with the ports of the Israeli enemy – regardless of that company's nationality – in any place within the reach of the armed forces." Subsequently the Huthis issued information on the nationality of shipping companies involved with all Israeli ports to deter regional states that continue to trade with Israel and followed up with an attack on a ship that was sailing from a Saudi port to Egypt. Any lingering hope that it would be safe to navigate the Red Sea evaporated, although some countries may have reached individual deals with the Huthis to avoid attacks. The PLC and separately the Southern Transitional Council (STC) had been lobbying for Western support for a ground offensive to capture Hudayda (as was planned but abandoned in 2018) but there was no interest for it in Washington.

The Huthis have clearly not been deterred by the bombing and even claimed victory over the US. They seem unworried that the destruction of facilities and infrastructure will have a significant impact on humanitarian supplies and food imports. It is ordinary Yemenis that pay the price of Ansar Allah's 'successes.'

Ansar Allah's strategic position has been adversely affected by the weakening of Iran's military. The 'axis of resistance' of which Huthi Yemen is a part has been undermined by the demise of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the change of regime in Syria, and the damage done to Hamas. However, its anti-Israeli stand wins support in the wider region. Arguably, Ansar Allah could be more important to Iran following the demise of Tehran's other allies. A large shipment of Iranian arms destined for the Houthis was intercepted in July by Tareq Saleh's National Resistance Forces. Also intercepted by PLC forces was Chinese-made drone equipment, suggesting that the Huthis might be enhancing domestic manufacturing capacity. Cooperation between the Huthis and al-Shabab in Somalia and al-Qaʿida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is growing, in part because of their mutual antipathy toward Israel.

A new government in Aden exposes the weakness of the PLC.

The prime minister of the internationally recognized government Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak resigned on 3 May and was replaced by the finance minister, Salem Saleh bin Braik. Tensions between bin Mubarak and the chair of the PLC, Rashad al-Alimi, had been paralysing the effectiveness of the cabinet and delaying the implementation of essential reforms. Inflation, deteriorating government services, deepening humanitarian problems, and long power cuts during very hot weather provoked outbursts of popular anger and protest in Aden and Mukalla. The use of force to suppress protests in Aden and the leakage of information on the elevated salaries received by PLC members and ministers only exacerbated popular resentment.

Bin Braik with the National Bank of Yemen in Aden took bold steps to enhance the value of the riyal in PLC areas by compelling banks in Sanaʿa to relocate their operations to Aden in order to avoid the impact of the US-imposed FTO restrictions, taking administrative measures against unregulated money exchange companies, and by forcing the use of riyals for domestic transactions. In late July the Yemeni riyal was trading at 2,900 per US dollar – in early September it was 1,632. The prime minister and the bank governor will now have to overcome the problems that plagued previous government: divisions over policy within the PLC; lack of revenue from oil exports which have ceased as a result of Huthi threats to target exports sites and ships; and intermittent payments from Saudi Arabia out of concerns for corruption but leading to haphazard payments of state sector salaries. Bin Braik noted that this is not a time for "political rivalries or narrow calculations." He is right, but the PLC has to operate by a consensus that does not exist. The recent expansion of militias linked to members of the PLC – for example, the National Shield Forces responsive to al-Alimi, and the Emergency Forces associated with the Islah Party – does not bode well.

The STC faced unusually harsh criticism even from within its own ranks. It has been in control of Aden and much of Dhali, Lahej, and Abyan since 2019 and its president, Aidarus al-Zubaidi, along with two of its vice presidents, are also vice presidents of the PLC. As the most influential member, the STC cannot escape blame for the failings of the PLC and government. It can seem too focused on the long-term political aim of restoring a southern state instead of dealing with the desperate problems of the here and now. The leadership is facing increasing internal demands to leave the PLC, but it cannot do so without losing support of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia which would be too high a financial and political price. However, there is so much frustration that the STC leadership may feel the need to distance itself further from the PLC and take unilateral action in Aden.

Political fragmentation

Whatever the shortcomings of the STC, it is far larger and better organized and financed than any other southern organisation. Like all political parties it is having to contend with a rise in the growing power of local leaders, who have their own agenda: for example those in al-Dhali, Lahej, and Abyan, influenced in part by the divisions inherited from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen before 1990. This is now reinforced by the way that local leaders have had to find practical solutions to local problems that the PLC and cabinet lack the resources and administrative capacity to tackle.

This atomisation is currently most visible in Hadhramaut where there has long been tension between, on the one hand, the STC, which is strong and well organised in Mukalla and the coastal area, and, on the other, Islah and the Yemeni army units in Wadi Hadhramaut. Over the past year it has been exacerbated by the activities of ʿAmr bin Habrish, leader of the Hadhrami Tribal Alliance (HTA) which has a significant membership from the Humum tribes. The HTA is not an alliance of all Hadhramaut tribes or even all the major ones, though many are sympathetic to its aims. Bin Habrish also leads the Hadhramaut Inclusive Conference. The STC and Bin Habrish were quite close in early 2025, but fell out over the way that the STC was trying to extend its reach in the governorate. Saudi Arabia has a close interest in the security of northern Hadhramaut with which it shares a long border and encouraged the emergence of the Hadhramaut National Council, in which bin Habrish is also involved. Riyadh supported the recruitment and deployment of the growing National Shield Forces (under the command of al-Alimi) for deployment in the Wadi and the north, but has been blocked from the coastal areas by the STC, backed by the UAE. Bin Habrish has created the Hadhramaut Protection Forces which has the ambition to control access routes to key oil fields (which are protected by the Hadhrami Elite Forces originally created by the UAE and linked to the STC). There is

a wider aspiration in Hadhramaut for greater autonomy, including control of its oil fields. STC leaders say they are sympathetic – the STC vision for a new southern state provides for much greater autonomy for each of the southern governorates, though such devolution is not always visible in the management of the STC itself. In al-Mahra there are also divisions complicated by the additional factor of Omani influence and a degree of Huthi penetration linked to smuggling networks (which also affects northern Hadhramaut).

In contrast Ansar Allah, despite the damage done by bombing, is firmly in charge of two-thirds of Yemen's population and has used the Gaza crisis to recruit and train many more armed men and enhance its prestige as being the one Arab polity to defy Israel. However, the economic problems are more severe in the Huthi area and may soon lead to protest – which will be put down ruthlessly. There are tensions between the Huthis and their allies in the GPC and evidence of increasing resistance to the Huthis in some tribal areas. Analysts speak of growing paranoia within the Huthi leadership.

Economy and the humanitarian crisis

The economic crisis has been exacerbated by the loss of USAID funding due to cuts made by the Trump administration; similar cuts have also been made in the aid budgets of other major donors. Add to that the explosive damage to infrastructure, inadequate financial assistance to the PLC from Saudi Arabia, the imposition of 'fees' by local groups at roadblocks, flatlined oil exports, and interruptions to internal fuel deliveries. The protests in Aden are but one symptom of the problems. In the Huthi areas there are added difficulties caused by the FTO designation and its follow-up which has affected the way that banks operate.

By mid-2025 the UN Response Plan for Yemen was only 9% funded according to OCHA. It is rarely anywhere near being covered fully, but this is very low. Add to that the difficulties of working in the Huthi area as vividly shown by the detention of UN staff following the Israeli killing of al-Rahawi, adding to the arrest of at least nineteen UN staff over a year earlier. Hans Grundberg has said that over forty are in detention. UN humanitarian agencies are increasingly wary of operating from Sanaʿa and several have transferred their headquarters to Aden. The UN has warned that up to half of the population in PLC-controlled areas will face hunger by 2026. Yemen remains among the world's most insecure countries, and what food is available is often unaffordable. There is some hope: the recent opening of roads in Taʿizz and al-Bayda will inspire more such pragmatic moves to relieve the suffering.

Noel Brehony *is an honorary Vice President of the BYS and editor of its journal.*

ROOTS AND RESISTANCE: IDENTITY AND ACTIVISM IN THE YEMENI-BRITISH DIASPORA

LAURA CRETNEY

Introduction

The migration of Yemenis to the UK is a living, evolving story – one that cannot be understood through a single narrative or generational lens. Stretching across time, regions, and lived experience, the Yemeni diaspora in Britain encompasses the descendants of Yemeni seafarers who settled in British port cities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, individuals and families displaced by recent waves of conflict, and young people born in the UK navigating what it means to belong to a homeland they may never have seen. It is a community connected not only by origin, but by culture, care, and acts of resistance – shaped as much by the memory of Yemen as by the realities of British life.

This article offers a portrait of the Yemeni-British diaspora today – not as a static community, but as one continuously reimagined through layered identities, shifting relationships to Yemen, and diverse forms of engagement with the homeland. While longstanding community networks remain vital, younger generations are rearticulating what it means to be Yemeni-British on their own terms – whether through activism, creative expression, or everyday assertions of cultural and political identity.

Drawing on PhD research and interviews with members of the diaspora, the article explores four key themes that illustrate these transformations. First, it considers how identity evolves across generations – through inheritance, embodied experience, and legacies of conflict. Second, it examines the role of cultural production and storytelling in affirming and reclaiming Yemeni identity and community. Third, it highlights the political and humanitarian engagement of diaspora members in response to the ongoing conflict. It considers and integrates throughout the role of digital platforms in connecting, amplifying, and at times fragmenting the diaspora. Peppered throughout the article are stories of Yemeni-Britons who are each engaging with their homeland in unique and remarkable ways. Together, these themes and stories offer a glimpse into a diaspora that continues to adapt – and resist – in the face of both loss and possibility.

Migration Histories and Generational Shifts

Yemeni migration to the United Kingdom dates back to at least the nineteenth century, with the arrival of seafarers from Aden and its hinterlands who settled in British port towns and cities like South Shields.[1] As early as the 1860s, Yemenis were establishing Arab-only boarding houses and taking up jobs in British maritime and industrial sectors.[2] Over time, growing communities emerged in Liverpool's Granby Street, Cardiff's Tiger Bay, and later, the industrial centres of Birmingham and Sheffield. Migration increased in the post-war period as Yemenis sought economic opportunity in Britain's steel and automotive industries – while escaping political and economic stagnation under colonial rule in South Yemen.[3]

Today, the Yemeni population in the UK is estimated to number at least 70,000–80,000, with Birmingham home to the largest community.[4] Sheffield's Yemenis largely trace their roots to Ibb and Taʿizz, while Liverpool's community is heavily linked to al-Bayda[5]. In London, the picture is more fragmented, encompassing both older business families and more recent arrivals, including students-turned-asylum seekers who fled the war, many reaching the UK through the Chevening Scholarship programme.[6]

[1] *Al Jazeera World, 'Britain's First Yemenis', YouTube video posted by 'Al Jazeera English', 29 April 2015, accessed 7 December 2020 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFZAVySjxUI; Charlene Rodrigues, 'Yemenis in Britain: 'The war is like a fence between us', Middle East Eye [online] 27 January 2017, accessed 18 July 2024, https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/yemenis-britain-war-fence-between-us; Baraa Shiban, 'Over the mountains, across the oceans: How Yemenis became the most prominent Arab community in the UK', The New Arab [online], 17 December 2021, accessed 17 December 2021. https://english.alaraby.co.uk/features/yemenis-longest-established-arab-community-uk.*

[2] *Al Jazeera World, 'Britain's First Yemenis'; Fred Halliday, Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community (London: IB Tauris, 2010).*

[3] *Halliday, Britain's First Muslims, 12; Rodrigues, 'Yemenis in Britain'; Shiban, 'Over the mountains, across the oceans'.*

[4] *Al Jazeera World, 'Britain's First Yemenis'; Maysaa Shuja Al-Deen, 'The Long Shadow of War: Mobilization Dynamics of the Yemeni Diaspora Since 2011', Arab Reform Initiative [online] 26 July 2021, accessed 18 July 2024, https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-long-shadow-of-war-mobilization-dynamics-of-the-yemeni-diaspora-since-2011-2/; Halliday, Britain's First Muslims, x.*

[5] *David Harrison, 'Yemeni, Muslim, and Scouse: Ethnicity and Religion, Hybridity and Locality in Contemporary Liverpool' (PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 2020), 129; Kevin Searle, From Farms to Foundries: An Arab Community in Industrial Britain (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 24-25.*

[6] *AB3, interview with the author, 21 2023 via Zoom; ID5, interview with the author, 19 May 2023, via Zoom.*



Yemeni UK collage (© Laura Cretney)



Amina Atiq exhibiting her work at the 'Rage, Riot and Revolution' exhibition in Liverpool

Despite being one of Britain's oldest Muslim communities, Yemenis have often felt marginalised and rendered invisible, their contributions to British society overlooked, and their voices unheard.[7] Some have felt the arrival of new migrants following the outbreak of war in 2015 to be revitalising, bringing new energy to the Yemeni community in Britain: 'The Yemeni community … it was just stagnant,' said one of the participants for this research. She continued, 'there were a lot of internal issues of communication. People just weren't progressing, there was a lack of ambition. We needed something to shake us up.'[8] Others, meanwhile, spoke of social and political fragmentation occurring in recent years, with long-standing communal spaces and traditions falling into decline and rifts emerging among local communities, reflecting conflict and divisions in the homeland.[9]

Like communities themselves, Yemeni identity in the diaspora is not fixed, but dynamic – shaped by lived experience, memory, distance, and return, and refracted through the personal, familial, and political landscapes each individual inhabits. Poet and performer Amina Atiq was born in Yemen and moved to Liverpool at the age of four with her parents, after the birth of her younger brother. She experiences a relationship to Yemen that is emotional and embodied, but also imaginative and mediated through the stories of her loved ones. She speaks of fragmented oral histories and a cultural inheritance at risk of erasure: 'There's a lack of value attached to the story of Yemeni migrants.' Her Yemeni-British identity is shaped through both direct experience of the homeland and through her parents' memories, communal rituals, and her own creative interpretation.

[7]Lisa Rand, 'The 'unheard voices' of Liverpool's Yemeni community that risked being lost forever', Liverpool Echo [online] 28 November 2020, accessed 18 July 2024. https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/unheard-voices-liverpools-yemeni-community-19355204; Rodrigues, 'Yemenis in Britain'.
[8]SV5, interview with the author, 12 October 2023, via Zoom; VZ7, interview with the author, 26 September 2023, via Zoom.
[9]Ibid., VZ7, interview with the author, 26 September 2023, via Zoom

In contrast, Amal Redman grew up in Birmingham with little personal connection to Yemen until adulthood. Her understanding of her Yemeni identity was, for many years, distant – shaped more by the stories of her parents than by direct experience. It was only when she moved to Taʿizz, got married, and gave birth to her daughter that this identity took on a fuller, more tangible form. Living through the outbreak of war profoundly reshaped her relationship to the country. The experience of conflict – not as a distant concern, but as lived reality – created a visceral attachment that differed markedly from the inherited cultural memories of her youth. Amal's perspective reflects a Yemeni-British identity that is not inherited, but built through exposure, collective trauma, and active re-engagement. Since fleeing the war in Yemen in 2015, she has fundraised and delivered thousands of pounds worth of lifesaving aid to communities in Taʿizz.

Where Amina's story exemplifies the imaginative and intergenerational work of identity negotiation and rearticulation, Amal's highlights the ways in which personal experience of trauma and upheaval can forge new, often painful, forms of connection to one's homeland. These contrasting experiences reveal the complex layers of diasporic identity. For some, Yemen exists in fragments – a collection of stories, rituals, sounds, and smells. For others, it is a visceral landscape of loss and resistance. Different generations carry distinct emotional, cultural and political ties to their homeland, shaped by geography, memory, and embodied experience.

Identity Expression in an Age of Conflict and Social Media

If identity is shaped through experience, it is expressed through culture – and across the Yemeni-British diaspora, this expression has long found form in everyday practices. Traditionally, Yemeni identity was sustained and expressed in homes, community centres, and mosques – through language, faith, fragrance, and food. Rituals like chewing qat, burning *bakhūr*, or gathering for weddings have helped maintain a sense of cultural continuity and belonging over time, with communities coming together in common spaces like clubs, mosques, restaurants, and people's homes.[10] One Birmingham-based interviewee for this research describes the importance of food as an anchor of his Yemeni identity in daily life:

> *You might see me out dressed in a track suit, dressed in a suit, not speaking a word of Yemeni [Arabic], hanging around with non-Yemenis. And then all of a sudden, when it's food time – damn, there's fahsa on the table, there's ruz on the table, there's salta on the table... The food part of the Yemeni culture can never be taken out of a Yemeni.*[11]

Today, some believe these practices and spaces are in decline – particularly after the lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic period. Today, longstanding communal venues are disappearing, and the cohesion once felt in cities like Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, and Sheffield has become harder to sustain, particularly amid generational change and political fragmentation. This has accelerated after more than a decade of violent conflict in Yemen, with political divisions and tensions – often amplified online – spilling over to affect local communities of Yemenis in the UK. One participant for this research, for example, mentioned witnessing a disagreement between two young Yemeni men that had originated on social media and turned into a physical fight on the streets of Sheffield.[12] Another mentioned how polarising political narratives convinced her father against taking to the streets to protest UK involvement in Yemen's conflict, fearing he would be labelled 'pro-Huthi,' with implications for his relations with the local community in Balsall Heath.[13]

Such political divisions have also manifested themselves at the level of the everyday cultural practices that traditionally anchored and unified Yemenis in the UK, with potential implications for cultural continuity and heritage preservation in the diaspora as a whole. One member of the Yemeni community in Liverpool – home to a large number of families originating from south Yemen – described how community spaces such as language schools in the city were becoming increasingly segregated between northern and southern Yemenis. She expressed concern that northerners would feel unable or 'not allowed' to send their children to Arabic language schools that were increasingly labelled and perceived as 'Southern Yemeni,' thus compromising their ability to pass on their Yemeni language and heritage to future generations.[14]

[10] *VZ7, interview with the author, 26 September 2023, via Zoom.*
[11] *ZO2, interview with the author, 13 September 2023, via Zoom.*
[12] *VZ7, interview with the author, 26 September 2023, via Zoom.*
[13] *AF0, interview with the author, 2023, via Zoom.*
[14] *SV5, interview with the author, 12 October 2023, via Zoom.*

At the same time, younger Yemenis are finding new ways to express, reimagine, and assert their identity – often through creative and public acts of storytelling. Cultural production has become a space of reclamation and visibility, increasingly amplified by digital platforms. Poet and performer Amina Atiq and fashion designer Kazna Asker are two such examples. Both use their practice to navigate and articulate the nuances of being Yemeni, British, and Muslim. Through spoken word, performance, and film, Liverpool-based Amina weaves together memories of her family in Yemen, experiences of racism in Britain, and meditations on identity, resistance, and loss. Her poetry is deeply political, connecting her to her homeland, challenging societal perceptions, and creating space for dialogue in the face of political polarisation.[15] She simultaneously challenges stereotypes and expectations of Yemenis and Arabs in the UK, while also creating space for dialogue with other Yemenis about their culture and heritage.

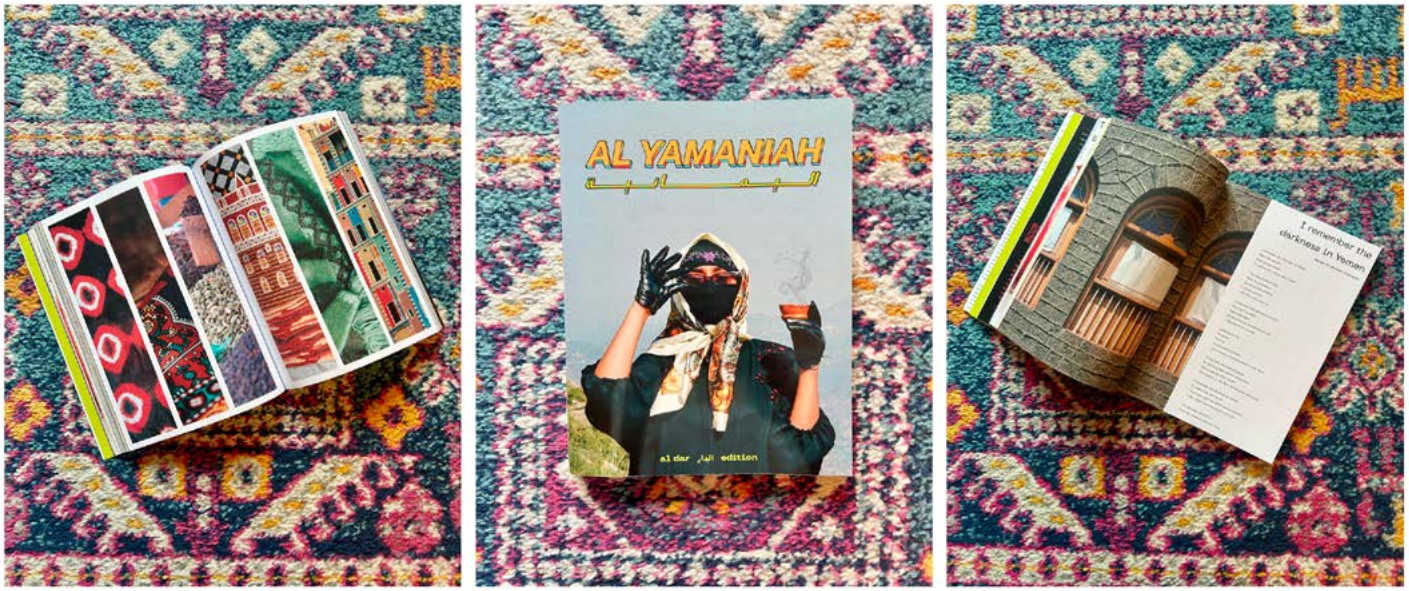
Kazna's fashion, meanwhile, fuses traditional Yemeni attire with contemporary streetwear inspired by Sheffield's working-class culture. Her designs – worn proudly on the runway at London Fashion Week and featured in global campaigns – are rooted in the everyday, weaving together pop culture, modest wear, and a myriad of motifs that reflect her own dual heritage and multi-layered identity.[16]

Both artists use their work to carve out space for Yemeni identity in the British public sphere – not through nostalgia or assimilation, but through bold, intersectional storytelling. Amina speaks proudly of her Scouse upbringing and her Arabness in the same breath, rejecting the idea that her identity must be singular or diluted. Kazna's work, too, embodies a refusal to choose between identities – instead holding them both in creative tension.

Cultural events like the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival also provide platforms for this kind of expression – community-making spaces and events that simultaneously revive and build on the traditional sources and locales of identity and togetherness sustained by earlier generations. In 2016, Yemeni youth and filmmakers collaborated for the Festival to produce *Anadeek Ya Yemen* (I Call You Yemen) – a participatory video project capturing diaspora memories and calling attention to the war. Centred on Yemeni youth across conflict divides, it included workshops that connected and trained emerging filmmakers and community groups in Liverpool and Yemen, culminating in a screening at a local sports academy.[17] Such projects and spaces centre voices that are often marginalised – including women, young people, and working-class artists – and celebrate complex, multi-layered identities.

Another initiative that exemplifies the intersection of identity, creativity and transnational solidarity is *Al Yamaniah* – a digital platform and community founded by Yemeni-British musician Noha Al Maghafi that champions the creativity of women with Yemeni heritage. Coordinated from the UK, the initiative brings together an intersectional community of Yemeni women across the diaspora – spanning the UK, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Europe, North America, Asia, and Yemen – united by lived experiences of displacement, gendered expectations, and cultural heritage.[18]

[15] *Amina Atiq, 'Home' [online], accessed 23 July 2025, https://www.aminaatiq.org/.*
[16] *Jonelle Awomoyi and Jessica Sherwood, 'London Fashion Week: The British Muslim designer trying to be the future', BBC News [online], 22 September 2023, accessed 24 July 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-66821139.*
[17] *Liverpool Arab Arts Festival, 'Anadeek Ya Yemen: I Call You Yemen', 2016, accessed 24 July 2024, https://www.arabartsfestival.com/anadeek-ya-yemen-i-call-you-yemen/.*
[18] *Sahar Esfandiari, 'Online platform Al Yamaniah seeks to change the narrative surrounding Yemeni women', The New Arab [online], 29 May 2020, accessed 24 July 2024, https://www.newarab.com/features/al-yamaniah-subverting-stereotypes-about-yemeni-women.*



Al Yamaniah's first print magazine - photos by Laura Cretney



Kazna Asker at London Fashion Week
(© Sandra Nagel)

In 2024, *Al Yamaniah* released its first print magazine – an ambitious, almost 300-page collection of creative works including poetry, photography, stories, and digital art. While the magazine is nominally focused on exploring Yemeni culture and identity – the inaugural issue is themed Al Dar (Arabic for 'home') – the imprint of the war is palpable throughout its pages. It is visible in the raw honesty of its poetry ("My friends are now scattered like pigeons in search of crumbs"[19]), the preservation of visual heritage through collage, and the editors' reflections on the duality of diasporic life. In her Editor's Letter, UK-based Asma Ibrahim reflects: "Our daily reality as part of the diaspora is different, but I can promise that Yemen is not forgotten. Yemen is etched deep into our bones."[20] By creating space for Yemeni women to reclaim and redefine how their stories are told – not just in opposition to conflict, but in celebration of their strength and creativity – Al Yamaniah offers a powerful counter-narrative to dominant portrayals that have often marginalised or stereotyped Yemeni women. It also exemplifies how cultural production can facilitate transnational collaboration and political expression – highlighting the role of UK-based diaspora communities as hubs for organising, storytelling and resistance.

[19] *Bara'a Qirbi, 'My Dar', Al Yamaniah, February 2024, 36.*
[20] *Asma Ibrahim, 'Editor's Letter', Al Yamaniah, February 2024, 1.*

For Yemenis in Britain, culture and heritage are not simply aesthetic – they are dynamic, emotional, political, and subversive. For many Yemeni-British women and youth in particular, creativity – often amplified through digital tools and social media – becomes a vehicle for negotiating race, gender and faith in contexts that often render them either invisible or hyper-visible. Through film, fashion, poetry, and performance, they challenge dominant narratives – both in the UK, where Muslims and Arabs are often stereotyped, and in Yemen, where gendered expectations may silence or constrain them. Storytelling becomes a form of resistance – a way to express and reimagine one's identity and positionality, and to make space for more expansive definitions of what it means to be Yemeni. This creative reimagining lays the groundwork for new forms of political consciousness and solidarity – explored in more detail below.

Digital Mobilisation for the Homeland

The creative reimagining of Yemeni identity naturally informs how members of the diaspora engage and mobilise in response to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Yemen – often blurring the lines between cultural connection, community care, and political activism.

For some, political exile has created space for, and sometimes been a direct driver of targeted political engagement. Hamid,[21] a long-time human rights advocate who left Yemen and claimed asylum in the UK during the years since 2011, described how operating outside of Yemen's fragmented and constrained civic space allows him to remain vocal and critical of political forces and parties to the conflict in his homeland. From the relative safety of the UK, he can engage with global actors while remaining virtually grounded in Yemen's internal political complexities. Like others in the diaspora, particularly those who have left since the outbreak of the ongoing war, he uses his relative personal security and digital access to research and speak out on rights abuses and to represent Yemeni civil society in international forums.[22]

But this does not come without risk or trauma. His case illustrates how the conditions of his exile – including both physical distance and digital connectedness – can create new avenues for advocacy, but also complex challenges and moral dilemmas. On the one hand, there is a particular kind of guilt experienced by those who left Yemen during the years since 2011, who have seen firsthand the consequences of conflict and political instability but managed to find safety overseas themselves. This dual experience creates a sense of responsibility that drives many to engage in political activism and advocacy work overseas. Yet even in politically open host states like the UK, such work can carry extreme risk – not necessarily for oneself, but for those left behind who remain at the mercy of local authorities and parties to the conflict. Hamid explains: 'It became very clear that it would be impossible for me, at least in the short term, to go back to the country – basically because of the threats and intimidation that was directed towards my family members who are still living in Sanaʿa.'[23]

For activists and advocates like Hamid, digital connectivity is both a blessing and a curse. The internet and social media provide continuous access to information about what is happening on the ground, as well as a direct line to affected communities that facilitates evidence collection and documentation for advocacy work. Yet at the same time, these digital tools make it impossible for activists in the diaspora to 'switch off' from the suffering and trauma they experience indirectly everyday through messaging apps and online content. Nada,[24] a protection specialist who sought asylum in the UK, explains the dissonance of witnessing the war from afar:

> *The first thing to do when you wake up is open WhatsApp. You [check] WhatsApp groups to understand what's happening, or you [message] your family to make sure they're okay, they're safe, they're fine. [You see that] there is a battle here, or people died there, and so you try to check all these WhatsApp groups to see if everything is okay – and then you move on with your life. So, even though you're away, these political changes on the ground will shape your life as well.*[25]

[21] *Name has been changed to maintain anonymity.*
[22] *SK3, interview with the author, 24 April 2023, via Zoom.*
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Name has been changed to maintain anonymity.*
[25] *ID5, interview with the author, 19 May 2023, via Zoom.*

For second- and third-generation diaspora activists, the experience can be different. For those who have not directly experienced the war and whose families are also physically safe overseas, the intersectionality of their identity often plays a more central role in shaping their activism. Yemeni-British social justice activist Fatma,[26] for example, draws heavily on her experiences as a Muslim Arab woman in British public life, using her online platform to advocate for peace, justice, and solidarity for Yemen, while at the same time participating in campaigns on anti-racism, gender justice, and Palestine solidarity. Her work has directly addressed the situation in Yemen and the UK's role and responsibility, while simultaneously engaging with broader questions of belonging, discrimination, and diaspora identity, especially in response to rising anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK. She, like others, articulated how being Yemeni-British cannot be neatly separated from being Arab, Muslim, racialised, or working-class, and how her political engagement is shaped by this multi-layered experience.[27]

Many diaspora activists operate at these intersections, forming solidarities that extend beyond the homeland and mobilising across multiple causes online, where campaigns are easily networked and shared. Sometimes solidarity and collaboration emerges with other diaspora communities in the UK, such as the Palestinian and Syrian diasporas, drawing on shared experiences of conflict, displacement and '*ghurba*' – which means strangeness in Arabic, but is often used to express a feeling of longing for one's homeland.[28] These layered engagements demonstrate how diaspora mobilisation is not always singularly homeland-oriented, but rather embedded in wider movements for political and social justice – often catalysed and sustained through digital tools and virtual connectivity across movements.

Across the Yemeni diaspora in the UK, political and humanitarian engagement often go hand in hand – shaped by a deep sense of responsibility and care, and enabled by the accessibility and speed of digital platforms. After being evacuated from Yemen in 2015, Amal Redman channeled the trauma of her experience of the war into fundraising and delivering life-saving aid to communities in Ta'izz. She raised thousands of pounds online, using Instagram to share her mission and coordinating the delivery of food baskets, water tanks, and other lifesaving aid via WhatsApp from her living room in Birmingham.[29] Her model of activism – rooted in personal networks and digital infrastructure – highlights how diaspora-led humanitarianism can be agile, informal, and responsive.

And she is not alone – online crowdfunding campaigns are becoming increasingly common thanks to the rise of platforms like GoFundMe, with social media and instant messaging apps becoming central for raising awareness and building support. The individuals running the campaigns do not always have the backing of a formal charity or registered organisation, which creates both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, as participants for this research have indicated, there is a lack of trust in large charities and international NGOs, with Yemenis in the UK often preferring to donate directly to other Yemenis fundraising individually for specific communities or causes – even if they do not know them personally. Digital platforms facilitate this process, enabling those fundraising to share stories and images of the beneficiaries directly with their virtual community of donors, as well as to oversee the deployment of the funds in real time in coordination with trusted contacts (often family members) in Yemen via messaging apps.[30] However, the benefits of these online campaigns do not obscure potential risks, with such projects inevitably raising critical questions around transparency and accountability, as well as safeguarding and consent of beneficiaries.

Another challenge that emerges for both political and humanitarian activists in the UK diaspora is burnout – worsened by the constant connectivity of the digital age. Multiple participants for this research described feeling overwhelmed by the constant access to information and content from the ground in Yemen, including graphic and violent video content on platforms like Instagram and X (formerly Twitter).[31] Activists hover between the risk of becoming desensitised to such content when they consume it regularly, and the survivors' guilt they often experience when they take a break or a digital detox to process and heal their own trauma.

Together, these examples demonstrate how political and humanitarian action among Yemeni-British diaspora actors is deeply interconnected – shaped by digital access, moral obligation, intersectional experiences, and often a sense of urgency born of personal trauma and collective suffering. The experiences highlighted here show how diaspora actors in Britain are using digital tools not only to campaign, donate or volunteer, but to reimagine their own roles as agents of transnational solidarity and activism.

[26] *Name has been changed to maintain anonymity.*
[27] *SV5, interview with the author, 12 October 2023, via Zoom.*
[28] *ID5, interview with the author, 19 May 2023, via Zoom; SV5, interview with the author, 12 October 2023, via Zoom.*
[29] *Amal Redman (@4redm4n on Instagram), interview with the author, October 2023, via Zoom.*
[30] *GH6, interview with the author, 6 October 2023, via Zoom; ZO2, interview with the author, 13 September 2023, via Zoom.*
[31] *AB3, interview with the author, 21 September 2023, via Zoom; ID5, interview with the author, 19 May 2023, via Zoom; SK3, interview with the author, 24 April 2023, via Zoom.*

Conclusion

The Yemeni-British diaspora is not a static or monolithic community, but a dynamic and evolving one, shaped by layered histories, fractured geographies, and the interplay of cultural inheritance and lived experience. This article has explored how diasporic identity is negotiated across generations, from those with direct memories of Yemen to those who inherit the homeland through stories, rituals, and imaginative expression. It has shown how digitally-mediated cultural production, from poetry to fashion, can serve not only as a means of self-expression, but as a form of political resistance and reclamation – particularly among younger generations who are redefining what it means to be Yemeni in the UK.

At the same time, digital platforms have opened up new possibilities for connection, activism, and care – enabling diaspora actors to fundraise, advocate and bear witness in real time. Yet these same tools carry significant risks, from burnout to the spread of misinformation and the reinforcement of polarisation and division. As shown through the stories of interviewees, digital engagement is often deeply personal, shaped by trauma, guilt, and a sense of responsibility – but also complicated by the need for ethical practice, beneficiary safeguarding, and collective cohesion.

Through this exploration, it becomes clear that the Yemeni-British diaspora is not only maintaining ties with the homeland but actively reshaping them – leveraging digital technologies, creative practices, and intersectional solidarities to engage in transnational politics on their own terms. These acts of engagement – whether cultural, humanitarian, or political – are often acts of resistance, grounded in memory, solidarity, and a desire for justice. They reflect a diaspora that is not simply reacting to crisis, but imagining new ways of being and belonging in the face of conflict and instability; a diaspora whose roots are deep, but whose multi-layered identities continue to evolve.

Dr Laura Cretney *(X / LinkedIn) is a researcher, practitioner and social entrepreneur specialising in peacebuilding, development and diaspora engagement in the Middle East. Her academic work focuses on the engagement of diaspora communities in homeland conflict, with a particular emphasis on Yemen and the wider MENA.*

THE RASULIDS IN YEMEN (1229-1454): AN ENDURING LEGACY

NOHA SADEK

Encountering Yemen

Two years after he brought an end to the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (Saladin) sent a military expedition to Yemen in 1173-74, which established Ayyubid domination for nearly sixty years over vast areas of the country's southern and central highlands as well as the Tihama coastal plain. This conquest brought to an end Yemen's territorial fragmentation into several competing dynasties, although it did not succeed in eradicating the Zaydis, entrenched in northern highlands since the ninth century. Among the officers of the Ayyubid army was a family of Turkmen origin organised around a patriarch, Ali ibn Rasul, and his four sons, whose rise within the Ayyubid administration culminated in the appointment of the youngest son Nur al-Din ʿUmar in 1228 as deputy to the last Ayyubid governor, who left Yemen in order to claim a new appointment as governor of Damascus. Upon the latter's death in Mecca on his way north, Nur al-Din ʿUmar wasted little time in taking possession of the most strategic forts and towns, replacing loyal Ayyubid officials with his own followers, and arranging a truce with the Zaydis. As no new Ayyubid governor was appointed, he declared himself sultan and received formal recognition of his sultanate from the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. For the following two centuries, Nur al-Din ʿUmar's successors (sons and grandsons) succeeded in turning Yemen into a regional power, primarily through the control of the east-west trade, the promotion of diplomatic ties with the rulers of Egypt, India, Persia, Africa, and China, and the pursuit of a leading role in the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. Rasulid dominion extended over the same territories conquered by the Ayyubids, which extended as far as Hadramaut and Dhofar (present day Oman), while the northern highlands beyond Sanaʿa remained under the control of the Zaydis, their staunch and enduring political and religious rivals. Sanaʿa became the focus of both Rasulid and Zaydi aspirations and was ultimately lost to the Zaydis by the mid-fourteenth century.

The Construction of the New State

The new administrative structures introduced in Yemen by the Ayyubids, including the development of the port of Aden, became the foundation for the new Rasulid state. Since trade and taxes levied on merchandise transiting through the port of Aden were the most important sources of revenue, the Rasulids developed the port and its administrative system, as well as ensuring the safety of merchant ships with a fleet of patrol boats, during the long reign of the second sultan, al-Muzaffar Yusuf (1249-1295), who succeeded his father Nur al-Din ʿUmar. Among Sultan al-Muzaffar Yusuf's early decisions was the choice of Taʿizz as capital, a fortress constructed in the second half of the eleventh century during Sulayhid rule (1047-1138), situated on a strategic outcrop at the base of the northern slopes of Mount Sabir. It was subsequently used as a stronghold by the Ayyubids because of its strategic location and its proximity to the great emporium of Aden. The first Rasulid sultan does not seem to have made a clear choice for an official capital for his newly founded state, probably because he was greatly occupied by his efforts to establish his authority having declared independence from his Ayyubid predecessors. Unlike other towns, such as Jibla or Zabid, which had served as

capitals for previous dynasties, the fort of Taʿizz and its surrounding terrain offered a relatively pristine location for the establishment of the Rasulid state's capital. The attributes of Taʿizz were acclaimed by the Persian merchant Ibn al-Mujawir, who travelled in Yemen at the transition between Ayyubid and Rasulid rule and wrote a fascinating account of his observations, describing it as the "hill of gold since the wealth of the whole of Yemen is amassed in it."

Several royal residences were constructed in the Taʿizz citadel, which permitted the sultans and their families to be separate from the bulk of the population, in accordance with the Ayyubid model of using a fortress as a court-citadel. Nevertheless, they constructed other palaces and residences in the environs of Taʿizz whose names are only known from historical accounts as they are no longer extant. The most famous of these was the palace of al-Maʿqili located in the village of Thaʿbat, three km south-east of the Taʿizz citadel. Constructed by Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Dawud (r. 1297-1321) in 1309, Rasulid historical sources mention that it was considered an architectural wonder with its immense reception hall decorated with marble and gold, and a pool, around which were arrayed brass figures of birds and wild animals whose mouths spurted water. The pool and the fountain were important features in palaces around the Islamic world, attested in textual descriptions and by the example of the Alhambra's Fountain of the Lions . On completion of his palace, the Rasulid sultan ordered general rejoicing and all the people paraded before him as he looked down from the upper floor of the building. He distributed gifts to his subjects, with the poets of the time composing congratulatory and laudatory verse in honour of the occasion.

The Rasulid sultans also constructed palaces in Zabid on the Tihama coastal plain, which they often used as their winter residence, as well as pavilions in the lush Wadi Zabid, among the date plantations, which they used as retreats during the hunting season and the date-gathering festival known as *subūt al-nakhīl.* According to the Rasulid court historian, al-Khazraji (d. 1409), great numbers of foreign and local craftsmen were employed (masons, carpenters, brass and marble craftsmen, gilders, and painters) in the construction of these palaces. It is probable that the sultans employed both local and foreign craftsmen also to work on their palaces and religious monuments, such as al-Khazraji himself. In his youth he worked as an architectural painter in royal palaces and religious buildings commissioned by Sultan al-Afdal al-ʿAbbas (r. 1363–1377), such as the Madrasa al-Afdaliyya, on whose walls he inscribed his name. However, since this monument is no longer extant, his signature is forever lost.

Architectural Patronage

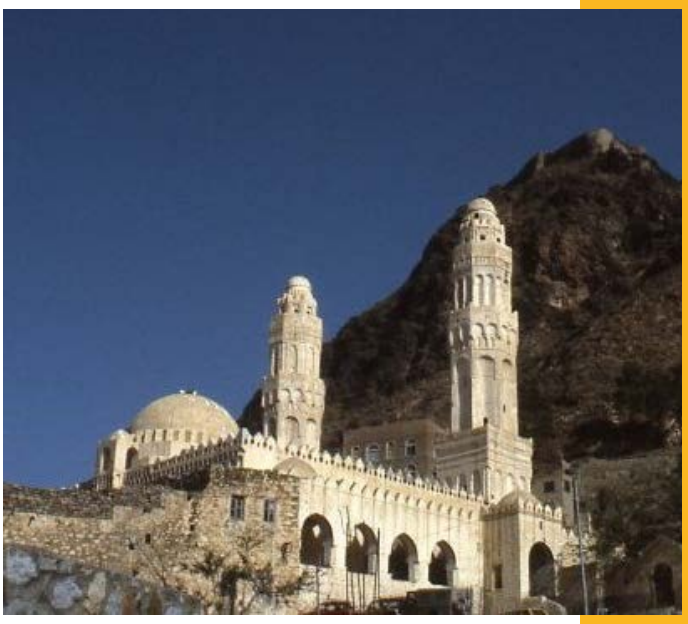
The Rasulids' arrival to power in the thirteenth century not only brought a new political order. It also marked the landscape of Yemen's southern highlands and the Red Sea coastal plains with a new architectural style that emphasised the use of domes, carved stucco, and painted decorations. The patronage of religious constructions, primarily mosques, *madrasas* (Islamic schools), and *khānqās* (Sufi lodges), was promoted by the Rasulid sultans and their family members for which they provided generous endowments and offered institutional and financial structures that maintained the activities of the religious class. According to Rasulid historical sources, about one hundred and fifty religious foundations were constructed during the Rasulid period, forty being religious monuments built in Taʿizz up until the reign of Sultan al-Zahir Yahya (r. 1427–1439). They constitute the largest group of architectural projects in one location. However, only the first nine Rasulid sultans are known to have sponsored architectural projects, while the remaining seven who ruled during the last twenty-seven chaotic years before the end of the dynasty did not leave such architectural legacies. The patrons can be divided into three groups, the most prolific being the sultans – for their complete control over the state's economy and its administration – with fourteen foundations in Taʿizz (eleven *madrasas* and three mosques).

The Rasulids followed the trend established since the eleventh century by the Seljuqs, and later championed by the Ayyubids in Syria and Egypt. The latter were also the ones to introduce the *madrasa* to Yemen. Not only did the Rasulid sultans recognise the need to train a new Sunni religious elite in Yemen in order to serve the administration, but also to combat the heterodox thought of the two strands of Shia Islam present in Yemen, namely the Isma'ilis and Zaydis. Until that period, the teaching and transmission of knowledge, and more specifically religious learning, was conducted in mosques and in the homes of learned men. Now, education was conducted in a clearly defined institutional setting controlled by the state, and specifically designated for the teaching of the Shafi'i school of Islamic law.

The large number of Rasulid *madrasas* indicates that there was significant population growth, and particularly among the ulema who provided the Rasulid state with religious clerks and administrators. This group helped to strengthen the state's control over its territories and acted as intermediaries between the urban environment and rural and tribal areas. Yemen's location at the intersection of trade and pilgrimage routes attracted merchants, craftsmen, chancery administrators, and legal scholars from more distant regions, many of whom sought employment opportunities at the Rasulid court. The endowment funds established for the *madrasas* in Ta'izz and elsewhere attracted many religious scholars from other parts of the Islamic world, thus contributing to their development as important centres of learning. Among these distinguished visitors was the renowned Iranian lexicographer al-Firuzabadi (d. 1415), who was appointed chief judge in 1398 by Sultan al-Ashraf Isma'il (r. 1376-1400).

The construction of *khānqās*, which were sometimes attached to *madrasas* and used for worship and for lodging the followers of a Sufi mystical order, was another institution promoted by the Ayyubids since Saladin founded one in Cairo in 1173 as part of his efforts to recruit Sunni scholars. The Rasulid sultans in Yemen also exploited Sufism, cultivating Sufi leaders and showering them with gifts and charitable donations to secure a broader popular basis for their power. They constructed for them *khānqās* in Ta'izz and other regions. The sultans encouraged Sufi devotional and musical gatherings (*dhikr* and *samā'*), which were held in their monuments, such as in the al-Ashrafiyya *madrasa*, which housed a *khānqā*. These gatherings would occasionally spill out into the streets in the form of festive processions. However, these sessions drew the anger and criticism of the conservative jurists, who viewed them both as a frivolous pastime and as infringing on the proscription of music and dancing in a religious setting. Contemporary Rasulid sources document scores of heated confrontations between the Sufis and their opponents over the lawfulness of these loud sessions as well as philosophical disputes.

Although the Rasulids adopted the Ayyubid strategy of establishing *madrasas* and *khānqās*, they did not seek to replicate Ayyubid or Mamluk architecture in Egypt and Syria. Through their energetic construction programme, the Rasulids visually marked their own territory, with the dome distinguishing their monuments from those built by their rivals, namely the Zaydis who ruled over Yemen's northern highlands and who continued to build their mosques with flat roofs. Consequently, the absence of domed mosques in Zaydi regions confirms a clearly defined architectural separation along religious lines. Just as the Zaydis used the dome sparingly in specific areas, such as above a *miḥrāb* (prayer corniche) or for a mausoleum, the Rasulids adopted them as emblematic covers for the prayer halls of their religious buildings, perhaps as a way of signalling their political and religious differences. Similarly, they opted for locally established crafts such as paint and stucco instead of the inlaid marble, carved stone, or tiling predominant in Mamluk architecture. This enabled Rasulid architecture to reflect the wealth, symbols of sovereignty, and religious affiliation of their rulers.



Ta'izz, the Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya and the Citadel in the background (© Noha Sadek)



Ta'izz, the Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya (built by Sultan al-Ashraf Ismā'īl between 1398 and 1400, central dome decorated with painted and stuccoed decoration (© Noha Sadek)



Ta'izz, the Madrasa al-Mu'tabiyya (built by Jihat Mu'tab before 1392), painted dome (© Noha Sadek)

Unfortunately, much of Rasulid architecture has disappeared as a result of wars, neglect, and natural disasters such as earthquakes and fires. Three monuments have survived in Ta'izz: the congregational al-Muzaffar mosque (built by Sultan al-Muzaffar and enlarged periodically over the following centuries), and two *madrasas* – al-Ashrafiyya (built by Sultan al-Ashraf Isma'il between 1398 and 1400) and al-Mu'tabiyya (built by Jihat Mu'tab, the wife of Sultan al-Ashraf Isma'il, before her death in 1392). These monuments are the most important evidence for this architecturally dynamic period, providing us with enough information to shed light on their role and meaning in the urban landscape. No other surviving Rasulid buildings in other regions match their scale or opulence, and their interiors and domes are adorned with painted and carved stucco decorations, inscriptions, and the Rasulid emblem: the five-petalled rosette. The intricate composition of the large central dome of the al-Ashrafiyya *madrasa* is a masterpiece of fourteenth century architectural painting. Its background features an intricate arabesque design, an epigraphic sun-disc, and a complex gold inscription, as well as roundels and whirling rosettes. Many of these decorations belong to the general repertoire of Islamic art, including the medallions, the ogival forms with finials, the star patterns, and various geometric configurations. These are similar to motifs found on luxury objects, such as enameled glass, inlaid metalwork, book bindings, and illuminated manuscripts. They may have been inspired by objects acquired by the Rasulids from Mamluk workshops and elsewhere.

The Rasulids were collectors of precious objects and there are today over forty inlaid metal and enamelled glass objects made in Mamluk workshops as gifts or as special commissions for five consecutive Rasulid sultans, who reigned from 1249 to 1376, held in museum collections around the world. While most of the objects are inscribed with the names of the sultans, the presence of the Rasulid emblem, the five-petalled rosette, is sufficient to attribute an object to that dynasty. Furthermore, some of the metal objects bear undated graffiti inscriptions in the names of Rasulid women. Some objects display the names of two or three women from different generations, confirming their transmission within the Rasulid family. Despite their limited aesthetic appeal and cursory nature, these incised graffiti provide us with important insights into the status of women in Rasulid Yemen and the circulation of these highly prised luxury items in courtly life.

The Rasulid sultans were also bibliophiles who collected books and their libraries held thousands of manuscripts produced in Yemen and beyond. Several Rasulid sultans engaged in scholarly activities, authoring texts in various fields. The third sultan, al-Ashraf ʿUmar (r. 1295-97), was one of the most prolific, writing more than ten treatises on subjects ranging from agriculture and genealogy to astronomy, astrology, and medicine. Given that he ruled for only two years, it is clear that his scholarly activities predated his ascension to the throne. Al-Ashraf ʿUmar is also known to have written a treatise on astronomical instruments and to have constructed at least six astrolabes before he ascended the throne; one of these, signed by him, is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Al-Ashraf ʿUmar's substantial output was matched by that of Sultan al-Afdal ʿAbbas, to whom are attributed about a dozen treatises on various topics, including one on agriculture in Yemen.



The astrolabe made by ʿUmar ibn Yusuf, dated 690 AH/1291 CE, brass; cast and hammered, pierced, chased, inlaid with silver; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 91.1.535a–h.



Tray Made for the Rasulid Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Dawud ibn Yusuf (r. 1297-1321), made in Egypt early 14th century, brass; engraved and inlaid with silver and black compound; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 91.1.605. The back of the tray is incised with the name of Jihat Muʿtab (d. 1392), wife of sultan al-Ashraf Ismaʿil (d. 1400)



Enameled and gilded glass bottle made for the Rasulid Sultan Dawud. Detroit Institute of Arts, City of Detroit Purchase, 30.416.

The Role of Women

Throughout Yemen's history, the piety of royal women was expressed through the patronage of religious foundations. The Rasulid royal women were the most prolific of these patrons, commissioning a large number of religious foundations and providing generous endowments, thus constituting the second largest group of patrons after the sultans. Although they were part of royal patronage, Rasulid women should be considered separately because their architectural patronage was distinct from that of the sultans, as they managed their own finances independently of their male relatives. While many monuments have disappeared, historical and biographical sources, as well as endowment deeds (*waqfiyya*), provide insight into women's patronage. The surviving monuments display architectural and decorative features similar to those built by Rasulid male patrons, including the use of the dynasty's heraldic emblem, except that they are smaller in size. Furthermore, Rasulid women had the privilege of having painted decorations on the inside of their buildings, a practice otherwise restricted to the monuments commissioned by the sultans, a fitting example of which is the al-Muʿtabiyya *madrasa* in Taʿizz.

Conversely, only one monument in the Rasulid capital is mentioned in the sources as having been sponsored by a male relative: a madrasa built by one of Sultan al-Muzaffar's brothers. The limited patronage of male relatives may be connected to the tight financial and political control that the sultans exercised over them, as they were seen as potential rivals for the throne. Indeed, the Rasulids were plagued by infighting and dissent within their own family. The remaining fifteen monuments constructed in Taʿizz are attributed to the third group of patrons, the various officials and religious figures who held important positions in the Rasulid administration and subsequently had the means to undertake and maintain such projects.

Beyond Yemen

Rasulid politics were heavily influenced by their interactions with neighbouring states, particularly the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria. They competed with the Mamluks for control of the Red Sea trade routes and the cities of Mecca and Medina. Following the Mongol invasions and the destruction of the Abbasid caliphate in 1258, Sultan al-Muzaffar Yusuf became the first Muslim ruler to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and provide the *kiswa*, the veil that drapes the Kaʿba. This preceded the Mamluk sultan Baybars by two years, signalling his desire for regional leadership. The Rasulids attempted to assert their independence and to challenge the Mamluks' political and religious authority in the Holy Cities, to varying degrees of success. This rivalry was manifested through specific symbols of power and religious pre-eminence, the most important of which were the *kiswa* and the *maḥmal* (a ceremonial palanquin). Considered a sign of their importance, privilege, and influence, the Rasulids regularly sent the *maḥmal* from Yemen, in addition to gifts and supplies. Several Rasulid sultans restored the Kaʿba and the Haram, and three of them constructed *madrasas* in their vicinity (Sultans al-Mansur ʿUmar, al-Mujahid ʿAli, and al-Afdal ʿAbbas). A fourth Rasulid monument in Mecca, a *ribāṭ* (hospice) for poor women, was built in 1404 by Jihat Farhan (d. 1432-33), the mother of Sultan al-Zahir Yahya (r. 1427-39). The Rasulid foundations in Mecca were endowed generously, but by the end of the sixteenth century, they had fallen into ruin or disappeared entirely.

The Rasulid-Mamluk rivalry was also evident in the threats and reprisals relating to trade and the heavy taxation of merchants, which one party or the other considered abusive. The situation became more complicated in the early fifteenth century when the Mamluk sultan, Barsbay (r. 1422-38), introduced a new policy in response to a significant decline in trade. This policy involved proclaiming a Mamluk state monopoly over the spice trade and replacing Aden with Jeddah as the main Red Sea port. During this period, several Indian merchants bypassed Aden in order to avoid the heavy taxes imposed by the Rasulid sultan.

The Rasulid state was affected by the dwindling trade revenues, as well as by several rebellions of the Tihama tribes, which disrupted the economic life in the region until the end of the Rasulid period. During the last twelve years of Rasulid rule (1441-1454), the region was torn – in strife between five candidates vying for the sultanate and who were supported and manipulated by different power groups. Both Taʿizz and Zabid suffered greatly from the battles which raged in and around them. It was during that period that Thaʿbat was largely destroyed. The progressive weakening of the Rasulids allowed the Zaydis to extend their control as far as Sanaʿa and Dhamar, and to conduct raids in other regions. This situation enabled the Tahirids, the Rasulids' governors in Aden, to take over and establish themselves as the new rulers of Lower Yemen. Although much of its architecture and cultural heritage has been lost, the Rasulid period is still regarded as a golden age in Yemeni history.

Noha Sadek *is a specialist of Yemen's material culture. She obtained her doctorate from the University of Toronto with a thesis on the architectural patronage of the Rasulids. Her latest publications include "More on Yemeni Manuscripts: Review Article" in Journal of Islamic Manuscripts 15 (2024): 377-387 and "Engraved Property: The Titles and Names of Rasulid Women on Ayyubid and Mamluk Metalwork" in Journal of Material Culture in the Muslim World 4 (2023): 97-17.*

DIARY OF AN OFFICER IN THE YEMEN WAR

MAHMOUD MABROUK
Introduced and translated by Samuel Bollier

In 1962, a coup led by Abdullah al-Sallal, a military officer, overthrew the imamate that had ruled northern Yemen for centuries, and founded the Yemen Arab Republic. Imam Muhmmad al-Badr Hamidaddin, who had succeeded his father Imam Ahmad only a week before the coup, narrowly escaped. He rallied royalist forces that fought the new republican government, with the support of Saudi Arabia (and the United Kingdom).

The Egypt of Gamal Abdel Nasser was a staunch supporter of the republican government, and within days of the coup had launched a military intervention to help defeat the royalists. Though Egyptian forces arrived with high hopes, the troops became bogged down in fighting that Nasser once referred to as his 'Vietnam.' Nasser withdrew troops from Yemen following Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War of 1967. The civil war in Yemen did not end until 1970.

Though much has been written about North Yemen's civil war and Egypt's role in it, direct accounts from soldiers who fought on the ground are less common. Mahmoud Mabrouk, an Egyptian student with a literary bent, registered for the military draft in 1962, expecting to be excused due to his young age. He was surprised to be enlisted instead. Given his education, he was sent to a training school to become an officer before being deployed to Yemen.

Mabrouk's account of his wartime experiences, *Yawmiyyāt ḍābit fī ḥarb al-Yaman* ("Diary of an Officer in the Yemen War") was published in Arabic in 2014 by the General Egyptian Book Organization. The diary sheds light on how the war was fought: the counterinsurgency tactics used by the Egyptian army, their complicated relationships with Yemen's tribes, the deadly ambushes, and the tribulations of day-to-day life in the field.



Correspondence (©Mahmoud Mabrouk)

The following is an English translation of selected entries from the diary, from Mabrouk's arrival in Yemen in March 1964 to his post-war reflections.

Sunday, March 22, 1964

The beginning of my active service in Yemen. The nature of this service, the reason for my presence here, is that I'm fighting in an army to save the revolution. The revolution is being confronted by a reactionary, colonialist alliance that wants to turn back time and keep an entire people in history's freezer, and to prevent history itself from progressing.

Our commanding officer ordered us to prepare to move to Sanaʿa, with the mission of securing al-Rawdah Airport, next to the city. We passed the orders down to the lower ranks and stayed for two hours overseeing the preparations. There was no fixed date for when we would move, although tomorrow appeared to be the most likely.

When we started worrying that we were more likely to die than live, we decided to enjoy the time we had left as best we could. … I recalled the famous saying of the Arab poet and warrior, Imru al-Qais. He was drinking wine when he was informed that his father had been killed. The people who gave him the news were surprised to see him continue drinking, instead of getting up to avenge his father's death. He uttered his famous words: "Today is for drinking, tomorrow is for serious matters."

Tuesday, April 7, 1964

The War Against the Flies. The flies in Yemen kept me from sleeping at night. They were so numerous that it defied description, and they were more revolting than the flies in our cemeteries. They attached to your skin and didn't let go unless you killed them. It seemed like the flies had a good system of communication, because when you tried to get rid of a few dozen of them, they had summoned tens of thousands more. You would find the air around you packed with flies and hear a threatening buzzing.

Once I complained about the flies of Sanaʿa, in the presence of a comrade who had been on the Saʿada front. He laughed and swore to me that the flies here were good-hearted by nature. They were polite and well-behaved compared to the flies on the front lines, which stung and bit and were twice as big as the flies here. They sold overpriced "anti-fly liquid" similar to Sheltox, before we knew about Pyrosol.

I mention the flies here, because I read that one of the first things that Field Marshal Montgomery did, after taking command of the Eighth Army in the Western Desert campaign, was to task his soldiers to fight against the flies, by removing the conditions for their presence and reproduction. He considered this to be among the primary factors of victory since morale is the main ingredient in winning battles.

Being one of those people obsessed with cleanliness, I bought plastic fly swatters at my own expense for everyone in my platoon. I ordered them to keep the fly swatters with them during waking hours, and to try to kill at least 20 flies every day. That was my approach to resist the flies – and as a preventative measure, I ordered the platoon sergeant to assign two individuals the daily task of gathering trash and leftover food, especially canned vegetables and preserved meat. They were to carry this trash to a hole behind and downwind from our position and burn it. On a weekly basis they were to fill in the hole and dig a new one.

Thursday, June 19, 1964

Reconnaissance of the Arhab front north of Sanaʿa. It became clear this was where we would be based during our deployment in Yemen. There were several villages in the area, but the most important were Bayt al-Adhri, al-Awmara, al-Makarib, and Bayt Maran. Units of the Sixth Infantry Brigade were positioned in each of these villages except al-Makarib.

We spent two days visiting these units and getting to know their situations, both in terms of combat readiness and living conditions, and their relations with the tribes in their area. I noticed how close the ties between us and them were to the point that some shaykhs and supporters were permitted to pass through our positions. It's worth noting that each unit, at the battalion level, has an officer for tribal relations. This officer communicates with the tribes, coordinating with the shaykhs about any matter concerning both parties, inviting them to attend conferences they called *majmaʿ*, and visiting them in their villages.



Tribal affairs officer with colleagues (©Mahmoud Mabrouk)

Saturday, July 11, 1964

... In late 1963, Lieutenant General (later Colonel General) Abd al-Muhsin Kamil Murtaja was appointed as the general commander of forces in Yemen. ... He was slim with noble features and looked no older than forty. He relied on Yemeni forces (whose cause this was) to take the lead in major operations. The first line of support for these operations was Egyptian air power – a unique strength since we had complete air dominance – and artillery fire. Our troops followed as the second line of support. These soldiers were tasked with securing the area of operation, since although tribal forces occupied some summits and commanding positions, they would abandon them for trifling reasons like a delay in their salaries.

Murtaja adopted an uncompromising policy to pacify the tribes, in which "corrupt" tribes (i.e., tribes feigning loyalty to the republican cause but then joining the royalists) were disciplined one after the other, though they were not all hostile to us at the same time. He used a carrot-and-stick approach, paying them salaries and giving gifts to guarantee their loyalty or withdraw their opposition. This was cheaper than counterinsurgency operations, which he only resorted to when necessary.

He also adopted a hostage policy with some of the tribal shaykhs' sons, sending them to Egypt to be educated, thus ensuring their fathers wouldn't switch sides while their sons were in Cairo. Meanwhile, their sons would be impressed by Cairo and grow emotionally attached to the country, and the final episode in this connection might be the father going to visit his son there. Trips were arranged for many of the shaykhs to visit their sons in Egypt, and to stay there for some time.

When our forces traveled on a road secured by tribes, we paid salaries to them, and we would honour the tribe's shaykh by reserving him a seat in a vehicle at the front of our convoy. This ensured they would not allow mines to be planted on the road.

Thursday, September 24, 1964

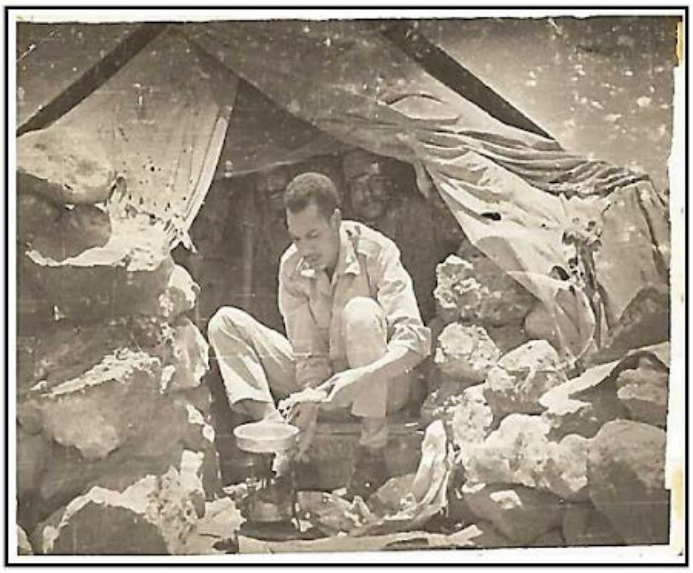
Another in a series of episodes involving land mines. A mine exploded beneath the right rear wheel of the armoured vehicle accompanying the column, while people were gathered in the market in the nearby village. Four individuals were seen rushing into some farmland. So, the soldiers chased after them and captured them. They beat them up, then brought them to the brigade headquarters for investigation. An ambulance was sent, as well as a mechanical rescue vehicle, and a replacement armoured vehicle for the wounded. The unit continued under the leadership of Captain Muhib Shahin, who paid our salaries this month in Yemeni currency. After he returned, he informed me that First Lieutenant Muhammad al-Sayyid had been evacuated to Cairo for treatment.

News from Sanaʿa: explosions in the city, disputes within the Yemeni ministry. A visit from Field Marshal [Abdel Hakim] Amer to Sanaʿa yesterday, and his return to Cairo today. Instructions from leadership forbidding soldiers to enter Sanaʿa unless absolutely necessary, and only when armed and carrying the needed permissions. Military police fanned out on the streets of Sanaʿa to enforce the order. Shops are empty. The situation is very tense.

Two years have passed since the revolution. The world had been expecting a revolution, and they had awaited news of one from Damascus given the explosive situation there. I was listening to music on Radio Cairo, when the song was interrupted by an announcement that a revolution had taken place ... in Yemen. Yemen?! No more than a week had passed since Imam Ahmad bin Yahya Hamidaddin died, his son Muhammad al-Badr succeeding him as imam. Days passed, and the revolution found itself faced with difficulties and grave threats. They sought help from Egypt, the only revolutionary force in the Arab world. In just days (October 1, 1962) we had troops in Yemen. They were the first Egyptian troops to fight outside the country's borders since the battles in the Levant, Sudan, the Hijaz, and Navarino during the era of the great Muhammad Ali, in the beginning of the 19th century...

Tuesday, January 12, 1965

The road between us and Sanaʿa is blocked for the eleventh day now. Our rations ran out days ago, and our water supplies before that. But the Egyptian genius that built the pyramids millennia ago can devise a solution to even the trickiest problems. The harshly cold nights, which we often complain about, turn water to frost. The soldiers set up metal sheets to collect the frost, so that when morning arrived and the sun came out, the frost melted into water. We drank, washed ourselves and our clothes, and our cooking pots too, if we had leftover food. Necessity is truly the mother of invention.



Kerosene stove to heat food (©Mahmoud Mabrouk)

Today I named the wadi below us, whose name we don't know, "Hellfire Valley." Under the cover of heavy fire, we attacked hostile tribal forces in fortified positions in their villages. Our troops attacked them mercilessly, and the tribes resisted fiercely. Victory in this operation would be crucial, because the royalists had planned well for this, gathering a large force to try to secure the monarchy's return. "Victory or death" was our motto.

I followed the operation by signals and by radio. One of the soldiers who participated in the attack on Bayt Sawa returned, extremely tense, frowning, and exhausted. I asked him what happened, and he told me that one of his comrades had died. I was greatly sorrowed and asked God to take pity on him. I know that this is what we came here to do; I know this is the price of victory. But I was upset because I knew this would happen while at the same time being unable to prevent it. Thank God, our losses were kept to a bearable level.

The ill-fated Yemeni tank also joined in the attack, and although it came under heavy fire, its commander did not retreat. But he eventually withdrew under threat, after losing control of his crew. Then a company of general reserves attacked the main hill that the royalists were occupying. Despite losing some men, they were able to inflict on the enemy what were assessed to be heavy losses.

Evening came, and the lights of victory drove away the darkness cast by the morning's battles. A group of artillery, tanks, infantry units, and tribesmen loyal to us completed their advance towards us, clearing enemy forces and mines from the territory until they arrived at our front lines.



In front of the door of my pill box (©Mahmoud Mabrouk)

Tuesday, July 20, 1965

From the mountaintop we see small arms and artillery fire along the al-Sirr front. The troubles on the neighboring front mean the fighting will likely come our way. War's evils don't only affect the weaker side, but all sides to varying degrees. War is woe and destruction for everyone involved.

For example, look at what the United States, the world's biggest power, has experienced in Vietnam, one of the world's smallest countries. This is evidence that war is merciless, and nobody can claim to be able to stop it when they want. War is like love that is easy to start, but nobody knows when or how it will end. Watch this evening for clashes in Bayt al-Sayyid, on the al-Sirr front.

Sunday, October 10, 1965

I had a long sit with Shaykh Muqbil, and an in-depth conversation about war and peace. "Why are you all fighting us," I asked him, "when we've come here to offer you help?"

He responded by asking, "What do you mean by 'you all' fighting against you?"

I said, "You all, as in Yemenis."

"This is what your problem is," he said. "You Egyptians interact with Yemenis as if they are the Muqbil

family, who can be taken under your wing and led in the direction you want. But Yemen is a big country: there are many tribes, and each tribe consists of many families. Each one has its own stance: one might be loyal to the house of Hamidaddin by force of habit and long-standing tradition, while another has interests that are bound up with the royalists. A third wants a republic and dreams of entering a new world. And a fourth is tempted by Saudi gold.

"If this were all there was to the situation, it would still be comprehensible. But what has happened is that it's become a game, a game everyone plays to make money – lots of money. For example, one shaykh might announce his loyalty to the republic. So, you Egyptians shower him with gifts: riyals, fabric, medical care, and education for his children. Meanwhile, his brother or nephew joins the royalists, and they are given Saudi riyals and gold. After a while, the loyalties switch: the royalists become republicans and the republicans, royalists. To ensure their loyalties stick, the new master lavishes them with whatever can buy their support and confirm their allegiance."

Shaykh Muqbil stopped suddenly and asked me: "Do you know about the game with the land mines?"

"Has this become a game?" I asked.

"Yes. One of them goes to the royalists and they deliver him a mine and tell him where to place it on the road that your vehicles use and explains to him how to plant it. After they check that he has planted the mine, they pay him 50 riyals. The man then goes to you Egyptians and tells you he knows where the royalists have planted a mine to target you. So, you pay him 50 riyals for him to remove it and send someone with him to make sure has done it. So, the man removes the mine and prepares to walk away with it. Your representative bargains with him for the mine, fearing it may be replanted otherwise. So, he demands 50 more riyals for the mine. With that, the man has taken 50 riyals to plant the mine, 50 more to remove it, and 50 more for you to buy it from him. Do you understand? You will see people who in the daytime are loyal to you, and you give them credit for that. You do not realize that Yemen is a republic by day, but a monarchy by night..."

Tuesday, December 7, 1965

The day and part of the night passed as usual, until a soldier came to inform me about torches he saw in nearby villages. I went out and saw thousands of torches, all the way from the horizon to the villages just below us. I reviewed everything the shaykhs had told me, adding to this my own information and the link between religious events and the enemy's military activity, since tonight was Mid-Sha'ban [a religious celebration].

But I decided to consult the shaykhs closest to our position, who informed us that the royalists had agreed to make a show of force, by lighting torches in all the villages at the same time. They called this participating in a demonstration to show off their numbers. Their message was sent that there were still many royalists, and Saudi money was still at work, as well as the American and British intelligence services, and mercenaries. Yet our weapons are still in our hands.

The Future Illuminates the Past

When we fought in Yemen, the initial thought was that we were fighting some counter-revolutionary tribes, and my personal assumption was that these were only a backward minority of the tribes (and this was the case). But as we gained experience, we learned more information:

First: Backing these tribes was mighty Saudi Arabia, showering gold and weapons on the tribes, and exploiting its relationship with the great powers to support these tribes under the leadership of Prince Hassan and Imam Badr.[1]

Second: The revolution in the north disturbed the British on the [Republic of Yemen's] southern borders, and the presence of Gamal Abdel Nasser's troops in the neighboring land was especially disturbing to them.

Third: The tribes that proclaimed their loyalty to the revolution were not steadfastly loyal and were susceptible to pressure and seductive offers from the other side – such that loyalty became, throughout the course of the fighting, a mainly commercial act.

This informed us how we fought against our shadowy enemy.

But the fact was that our leadership didn't provide us with additional information. I don't know the reason for this – whether this information wasn't known (though I doubt this, since the Egyptian intelligence apparatus was at the peak of its powers), or whether it was for reasons of morale, and leadership did not want to disturb us with information that might affect us negatively.

These truths began to become apparent to us, especially after the end of our service in Yemen, and after the complete withdrawal of Egyptian troops in the year 1968.

Mahmoud Mabrouk *is a writer and author of Diary of an Officer in the Yemen War.*

Samuel Bollier *translates prose from Arabic, and has previously worked as a journalist and editor in the Middle East.*

Note: a complete English version of Mabrouk's diaries, translated by Dr. Ahmed Mohamed, is available on the Amazon website as a Kindle e-book, and can be purchased for around £6.

[1] *Prince Hassan was the uncle of Imam Muhammad al-Badr and served as his prime minister.*

WHERE ARE YOU? WHERE ARE YOU?: A VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF IDENTITY FORMATION, GENEALOGY, AND INDIAN OCEAN COSMOPOLITANISM AMONG HADHRAMI-HYDERABADIS

JEAN FRANCO

Where are you? Where are you? is the first visual ethnographic contribution to the study of the Hadhrami diaspora in the Indian Ocean. Inspired by the ethnographic and historical research done by Engseng Ho, Ulrike Freitag, Stephen Dale, Huub de Jonge, and many others, this research project focuses specifically on the Hadhrami diaspora in Hyderabad (henceforth 'Hadhrami-Hyderabadi'). Filippo and Carolina Osella's work on neoliberal networks in the Indian Ocean has also been immensely helpful in thinking of the region through its wider connections. This project in part continued my undergraduate research on Arabic-speaking communities in India. The film's core themes are genealogy as an anchor to history, regional cosmopolitanism, and the diaspora's diversity.

My research and film project was envisioned as an analytical film, in the truest sense of the word – a film that breaks apart material gathered and experienced throughout fieldwork in order to reach some kind of understanding of Hadhrami-Hyderabadi lives in the city. This film is not carried by plot, narrative, or character arcs. Rather, by working through thematic associations and dense visual clues and references, it became possible to weave together a varied collection of narratives that bear witness to Hadhrami identity formation and self-perception in Hyderabad. Analysis, allusions, and reference-making across disciplines were the guiding principles of this research project. Throughout my fieldwork, I came to appreciate that my research – and perhaps this is true of most fieldwork – did not take place in any linear way, and that perhaps forcing anthropological material, relationships, and experiences to fit something similar to a three-act structure and a hero's arc is a disservice to what one can do as a social scientist. In this vein, I found experimenting with the theoretical and technical tools at our disposal as visual, filmmaking anthropologists to be far more fruitful than 'hunting for plot.'

Many long and fruitful conversations with Sultan Ghalib al-Qu'aiti, without a doubt the best example of and a true authority on Hadhrami-Hyderabadis, brought me to Hyderabad for the first time in January 2025. Despite having studied Urdu in Pakistan the year before, it was my first time in India and first attempt at carrying out academic fieldwork. Having set myself the blissfully ignorant task of studying 'visions of Arab identity among Hadhrami-Hyderabadis' – spawned during my MSc in Visual Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam – I came to realise that I was woefully ill-prepared to answer what I was to learn was a far more variegated and elusive question.

Hadhramis and Hyderabad

Any student of Hyderabad must contend with a history that bears the scars of a fallen state and its violent annexation by a postcolonial India that few at the time identified with. Naturally, these more recent events only made more complex a story of migration that had been ongoing for several centuries, and while the history of Arab migration to the Deccan is beyond the scope of this brief article, those interested would find Sultan Ghalib al-Qu'aiti's volume *Arabian and Other Essays*[1] invaluable, as well as Omar Khalidi's work on the Arabs of Hyderabad.

Hadhramis were brought over in large part as trusted mercenaries (James Spencer gives 1797 as the earliest date for the arrival of Arabs, and 1817 for Hadhramis more specifically)[2]. They fought on the losing side in the Third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-1818) and, under peace terms, were deported to Arabia if Hadhrami-born; those of mixed Indian-Hadhrami ancestry, *muwalladīn*, were offered refuge by the Hyderabad's ruler, the Nizam. Many of these creole

[1] *Arabian and other essays was published privately in Hyderabad Deccan in 1998 .but had previously been published as articles in Arab News, Jeddah.*
[2] *James Spencer, "Scimitar for Hire: Yemeni Fighters Abroad," in Hadhramaut and Its Diaspora: Yemeni Politics, Identity and Migration, ed. Noel Brehony (London: I.B. Tauris/Bloomsbury, 2017), chapter 7.*

muwalladīn settled, continued intermarrying, and several became wealthy by being awarded *jāgīrs* (feudal landholdings) or through moneylending. The Yafaʿi *jamadār* (group military commander) ʿUmar bin Awadh al-Quʿaiti, patriarch of the future Quʿaiti state in Hadhramaut, was one of those who made their fortune in Hyderabad. The calculation of the Nizam, Hyderabad's ruler, was that Arab, and particularly Hadhrami, soldiers would be more loyal to his dynasty than the majority Hindu population. Nonetheless, Hadhrami ties to their homeland remained incredibly strong.

In the words of Sultan Ghalib al-Quʿaiti:

> Hadhramis found Hyderabad a lush green land of cheap abundance, contrasting distinctly with their own barren homeland […]. They welcomed the splendour and ceremony of Mughal court etiquette […]. Sonorous titles in courtly Persian were conferred on them from time to time: Jānbāz Jang (the fearless in war), Shamshīr al-Dawla (the sword of the realm), Muqaddim Jang (the foremost in war), and the like.[3]

Hyderabad's eventual defeat in 1948 by the Indian army – Hyderabad's surrender was confirmed by a Hadhrami-Hyderabadi Commander-in-Chief Sayyid Ahmad El-Edroos – ended centuries of Muslim political and cultural dominance, ushering in a major shift in the balance of power in the city. Following Hyderabad's integration into the Republic of India, the ruling Muslim minority lost a significant amount of power. Many Hadhramis fell from being moderately wealthy landowners, tax collectors, and soldiers into destitution. Although it is a more extreme example, it is a common sight nowadays to spot fruit sellers across the city wearing the typical Hadhrami/Indian Ocean garment, the lungi/fūta/maʿwaz with batik prints. Negative stereotyping of the community is unfortunately common, although Hadhrami-Hyderabadis are always keen to combat this.

Hadhramis in Hyderabad today

Although Hadhrami-Hyderabadis are scattered across the city – by which I mean Hyderabad's Old City, the district surrounding the Charminar up to the river Musi, yet upon whose boundaries I found only disagreement – they are predominantly concentrated in Barkas, an area south of the Old City. The story of this area is probably best told through its names: Barkas, a corruption of barracks, unsurprisingly was the area where the Nizam's Arab regiment was first settled. Before this, however, the area was known as Maisram Lines, this time a corruption of a French name: Monsieur Raymond, a late-eighteenth-century mercenary general in the army of the second Nizam, Nawab Mir Nizam Ali Khan. Raymond's tomb, bearing the inscription 'faithful unto death,' is still easily found in Malakpet, not too distant from present-day Barkas. Hadhrami-Hyderabadis historically have also inhabited King Koti, also near one of the main Nizami residences.

Nowadays, Barkas is a relatively unassuming residential and mercantile area in the outskirts of the city. Its shops are mostly named after places or families in Yemen or the Gulf, with many restaurants boasting their Arab, and often Hadhrami, heritage. It is visited mostly by Hyderabadis keen to try 'authentic Arabian mandi' or to purchase imported goods from the Gulf. On the Barkas Market Road there are dozens of shops with names such as 'Makkah Restaurant,' 'Arabian Boutique,' 'Dubai Mall,' 'Dubai Plaza,' 'Ballesharam Fashion,' or 'Bawazeer Collections.' Almost everyone here will have either lived in the Gulf for many years or have relatives who have done so.

Although some older men have travelled to Yemen, the majority have not. Interestingly, official ties between Hadhrami-Hyderabadis and the Yemeni government are usually taken care of by a local community organisation known as the Jamʿiyyat al-Yamaniyya bi-l-Hind (Association of Yemenis in India). Unfortunately it was undergoing some reorganisation while I was there, but I was told that its function is primarily to arrange visas for those seeking to visit Yemen.

Nearby there is the Salalah area of Barkas, named after the Omani city. After a few decades of migration to the Gulf, Barkas has become unsuspectingly wealthy – expensive cars and expanding businesses are a common sight. During the month of Ramadan, Barkas Market remains open from *maghrib* until *fajr* – a special dispensation issued by the city government for the most popular Ramadan markets. People flock from all over the city to try *harees, haleem*, and *gahwa* after *iftar*.



Abdulrahman bin Walan's family restaurant on the Barkas Market Road (Courtesy of Jean Franco).

[3] *Omar Khalidi, "The Hadhrami Role in the Politics and Society of Colonial India, 1750s-1950s," in Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s–1960s, ed. Ulrike Freitag and William G. Clarence-Smith (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 67-81.*

When I mentioned to Sultan Ghalib al-Qu'aiti that I was interested in studying the Hadhrami-Hyderabadi community in his city of birth, he immediately put me in touch with one of his childhood friends, Habeeb Mujtaba al-Aidroos. Habeeb Mujtaba is the shaykh of the Ba 'Alawi *ṭarīqa* (Sufi order) in Hyderabad. Habeeb Mujtaba has five sons, although only two were consistent interlocutors and appear in the film: Habeeb 'Umar and Habeeb Abubakar. The Haba'ib, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (*sāda*), do not live in Barkas, but in Hyderabad's Old City proper, near the former Nizam's residence. Their *dargāh* (family mausoleum) is in Nampally, north of the Old City. Built and gifted to their great-grandfather Habeeb Aidroos al-Aidroos by the Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan, it is a beautifully peaceful *dargāh* in an otherwise busy part of the city. *'Urs* (death anniversaries) are convened there, as well as *dhikr* ceremonies on Sundays. The family's historic and contemporary high standing in Hyderabadi society – stemming from the Nizam's patronage – is clear. The *'urs* and *dhikr* ceremonies regularly draw large crowds of people who have had longstanding spiritual ties with the family. It is not unusual to find some Hindus in attendance, a marker of the easy syncretism (on the part of individual believers, not the Haba'ib) that India's religious landscape has often permitted. Usually, *dhikr* is held at the Old City home of the Haba'ib during the week. The Haba'ib were generous with their time and allowed me to see how the *ṭarīqa* works away from Hadhramaut and how it has settled into the city's religious life. Tangible ties to Hadhramaut are weak, but they are nonetheless felt emotionally. The *dhikr* follows the recitation of Arabic *nashīds* (religious chants) and *qaṣīdas* (poetic odes) composed and collated by their ancestors. Key figures in Hadhrami and *sāda* history and lore, such as Muhammad ibn 'Ali Ba 'Alawi (known as al-Faqīh al-Muqaddam, 'the foremost mendicant') and Abu Bakr al-'Adani al-Aydarus, are regularly mentioned throughout. Genealogy, of the kind explored by Engseng Ho in *Graves of Tarim*, is a constant subject of discussion with even the youngest members of a family having a clear grasp of their ancestry.



The 'Urs – or death anniversary – of the Haba'ib's great grandfather Habeeb Ahmad (Courtesy of Jean Franco)



The Khitte Saleheen Dargah in Nampally: the Aidroos family shrine (Courtesy of Jean Franco)

The film[4]

In *Where are you? Where are you?,* these different ways of understanding Hadhrami-Hyderabadi lives are undoubtedly underpinned by a strong sense of history, largely by way of genealogy. A diaspora is historically constituted even through its contemporary daily practices[5] – repeating and maintaining rituals of times gone by is an essential part of identity formation for any community. My intention with this

[4]*Those interested in viewing should contact editor@britishyemenisociety.org.uk.*
[5]*Avtar Brah, Cartographies of the diaspora (Routledge 1996).*

film was to create a sense of simultaneity between past and present, integrating historical and ancestral narratives with personal accounts of migration and perceptions of Hadhrami-Hyderabadi identity formation. In the background, I have attempted to situate this research project in the broader field of Indian Ocean studies, emphasising that the relevant migratory routes (of goods, capital, and people) here are from East Africa to the Malay Archipelago, from the Gulf to South Asia. As it was succinctly put to me by my supervisor Patrick McKearney, 'the important flight to catch isn't from London to Dubai, but from Dubai to India.' Summed up in this way, *Where are you? Where are you?* aims to reaffirm Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism as a long-standing feature of the region, rather than a post-globalisation necessity: monsoon winds consistently carried people from shore to shore long before air travel, and the Hadhrami diaspora is one of the best examples of this. Genealogy and cosmopolitanism go hand in hand, as Engseng Ho writes:

> As naming practices and as gifts, genealogies incorporate both universal religious values and particular kinship relations. In providing collective representations for both realms, Hadhrami genealogies are not only linear instruments that point back to origins. They have evolved to become, in theory and in practice, complex languages of cosmopolitanism in which the foreign and the local negotiate coexistence in vital ways. This negotiation is ongoing today in numerous places. Throughout the Indian Ocean world, the genealogies underwrite the existence of persons whom I call local cosmopolitans.[6]

Despite their different social standings, each of my interlocutors had their own relationship to genealogy. The Haba'ib have their family tree engraved in marble in their family shrine in Nampally; Abubakar Bawazeer, a shaykh, has his on his wall; Abdulrahman bin Wahlan, of tribal descent, has what he remembers and does not have it written down.

I carried out my fieldwork through a mix of participant observation and informal interviews usually taking place in homes or workplaces. Spending time with the Haba'ib necessitated regular, weekly participation in *dhikr*, especially during the month of Ramadan. Generally, however, I would go to Barkas to spend time with my interlocutors while filming our conversations. For Abdulrahman bin Wahlan, I would spend time in his uncles' restaurant in Barkas where he worked, as he could not take time off. As for Shaykh Abubakar Al Abdulsamad Bawazeer, we often spent time at his home or shop in Barkas market. All my interlocutors were men between the ages of twenty and seventy-five, although the majority of them who will feature in my film are between the ages of twenty and forty. With regards to communication with my interlocutors, although I speak both Arabic and Urdu to a decent level, I found that the vast majority of people spoke excellent English and so rendered the use of these languages often redundant. Some of the interactions I have contain Arabic and Urdu; however, the meat of most conversations was in English. In practical terms during my fieldwork, my positionality was that of me being a Muslim convert, and so I went by my Muslim name, Yahya. By the end of my fieldwork, I had focused on three main groups: the religious elite, which I explored in the form of the family of the al-Aidroos; *mashāyikh* traders, whom I explored through the Al Abdulsamad Bawazeer family, owners of several shops in the area but most notably the shop of an import-export Arab clothing and general lifestyle product business; and Hadhrami immigrants (*qabā'il*) from Saudi Arabia to India, restaurant worker Abdulrahman bin Wahlan and his two uncles Faisal and Salem, who were born in Mecca and moved to India eight years ago as the result of high taxation for non-citizen residents in Saudi Arabia. Despite being born and raised in Mecca, Abdulrahman's father is a Hyderabad-born *muwallad*. A complicated picture, but one that encapsulates this constant two-way traffic between India and the Arabian Peninsula perfectly.

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Jean Franco *is the recipient of the BYS Academic Grant for 2024. Following his MSc, Jean is now working in publishing, although he intends to continue his research on Hadhramaut, India and the Indian Ocean.*

[6] *Engseng Ho, The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p.4.*

"YEMEN IS LIKE A MOSAIC:" A BAHA'I DOCTOR'S STORY OF FAITH, SERVICE, AND EXILE

LUCA NEVOLA

When I spoke with Dr. Nader al-Sakkaf, he wanted the record to be clear: His story is at once ordinary and extraordinary – the life of a doctor and community volunteer, and the life of a member of a persecuted minority who was forced to leave his country. A Yemeni ophthalmologist now living in Luxembourg, al-Sakkaf has spent the last decade juggling his calling as a medical doctor with his belief in the Baha'i principle of building a better society for all. This commitment, however, has come at a price. Persecuted by Ansar Allah – also known as the Huthis, the *de facto* authority in Sana'a – for his faith, he was imprisoned multiple times before deciding, with a heavy heart, to leave Yemen in 2017.

The Baha'i Faith in Yemen

"Baha'is believe that in the middle of the nineteenth century God summoned Baha'ullah – the nickname of the prophet of the Baha'i faith," al-Sakkaf begins. "He delivered a new revelation to humanity," he continues, focused on "the oneness of God and religion, the oneness of humanity and freedom from prejudice," harmony between religion and science, "the fundamental equality of sexes," and the idea that religious truth is progressive.

The Baha'i faith entered Yemen in three main phases. The first dates to 1844, when a religious leader and forerunner to Baha'ullah called 'the Bab' (literally, 'The Gate') – born Ali Muhammad Shirazi, – passed through the port of Mocha en route to Mecca. "By interacting with the Bab at that time, a few Yemenis became Baha'is." Later, during Baha'ullah's exile imposed by the Ottoman Empire, Yemeni ports like Aden and Mocha became transit points for Baha'is travelling to visit him in Acre. Finally, in modern times, the internet facilitated access to religious texts and global communication, leading more Yemenis to explore and join the Baha'i faith.

Today, thousands of Baha'is live across Yemen – from Sana'a and Aden to Ta'izz, Socotra, and Hadhramaut. "Baha'is are an integral part of the Yemeni social and national fabric," al-Sakkaf says. Baha'is come from diverse backgrounds, including tribal and urban communities, and are involved in all sectors, from education and healthcare to commerce and construction.

Growing Up in Aden, a Religious Mosaic

Nader al-Sakkaf was born and raised in Aden which he describes in nostalgic detail as "a warm-hearted city that embraced all differences" – where diverse communities once lived and worked together. "We had an old synagogue in Shari' al-Sabil, actually. I had friends from the Bohra sect, from the Hindu religion over there." However, his family's roots are from Hadhramaut: "we come from Tarim," he says. Al-Sakkaf's father studied engineering in the United Kingdom and embraced the Baha'i faith there; his mother, a midwife, came from a Baha'i family.

Al-Sakkaf made his own decision to embrace the Baha'i faith as a teenager, around the age of fifteen, after reading and reflecting deeply. "Let me give you this analogy: truth is like a light glowing in a lamp. In the Baha'i principle, the essence is the light, not the lamp." For him, that meant an "independent search for truth" – a decision to embrace beliefs that answered his questions about society and justice, rather than simply inheriting them from his parents.



Dr. Nader al-Sakkaf in Aden in 1997

Medicine and Service: A Shared Calling

After completing his degree in medicine and having volunteered for two years at al-Jumhuriya Teaching Hospital, al-Sakkaf specialised in ophthalmology. "I loved my work in the eye department. I later received a professional master's in eye medicine by 2009."

He volunteered in hospitals and supported private clinics. In 2011, as Yemen's political crisis intensified, he received a job offer from a pharmaceutical company in Sana'a . "They needed a country manager for eye medicines and surgical equipment, so I decided with my family to move to Sana'a."

Al-Sakkaf met his wife, a pharmacist from Sana'a, through community initiatives. She was a Baha'i and passionate about education and community service. "I thought, you know, our visions are similar, and that is one of the things that attracted me more to her." They married in 2004.

Together, they led service initiatives in Sana'a – health campaigns in rural areas, women's empowerment projects, educational events, and social dialogues on justice and cohesion. These were not solely Baha'i efforts. "My belief as a Baha'i puts a bit more emphasis on it, but there were a lot of other like-minded friends, and they are not Baha'is, but they would participate in these projects."



Dr. Nader al-Sakkaf with his son

From Inclusion to Repression: The Huthi Crackdown

Al-Sakkaf's private faith collided with public politics after 2014. Under Saleh's rule, Baha'is faced occasional local incidents but were not persecuted by the regime. Yet, after the takeover of Sana'a by the Huthis, these sporadic episodes escalated into systematic persecution.

From the spring of 2015 onward, he and other Baha'is were targeted by the security services. Describing one early episode, al-Sakkaf recalls being detained after attending a court hearing: "They came with a car, picked us from the court, and detained us in the political security office. I was in solitary confinement for three days over there." He was interrogated repeatedly about his beliefs and about other members of the community, until local pressure and the absence of a legal basis eventually secured his release.

Detentions escalated. A major raid by the National Security Bureau in August 2016 targeted a youth empowerment program; many participants – including minors – were swept up. Al-Sakkaf says the raids landed him in the Bureau's Saraf detention centre and later its headquarters: "I stayed over there for around four and a half months." He recounts an airstrike that struck the Saraf facility while he was inside, a chaotic moment that included a breakout by al-Qa'ida prisoners.

Despite the harsh conditions, he tried to help medically: "I used my medical expertise over there because they did not have a lot of doctors. So I tried to help others, for example, by administering injections to prisoners when they were suffering from severe colic pain, or distributing their medications."

Exile and Advocacy: A New Chapter in Luxembourg

In 2017, facing renewed threats and placed again on an arrest list, al-Sakkaf and his wife made the painful decision to leave Yemen, relocating to Luxembourg. "At the moment I work as the director of the Office of Public Affairs of the Baha'is of Yemen," he tells me. In this role he engages Yemeni and international stakeholders on topics such as justice, coexistence, women's empowerment, and media responsibility.

Though no longer practicing medicine, he channels his energy into advocacy and education. "I am finalising my master's thesis in human rights at the University of London. Previously, I also served as a senior fellow for the UN Minority Fellowship Programme."



Dr. Nader al-Sakkaf with his brothers and his mother

Resilience and Hope: The Baha'i Community Today

The situation in Yemen remains dire. In May 2023, 17 Baha'is – including five women – were arrested in Sana'a. Baha'is in Huthi-controlled areas remain under surveillance, with bank accounts frozen and properties seized; many are unable to travel without permission or to change phone numbers for fear of being tracked.

Despite the hardship, most Baha'is have remained in the country. Only a few families were forced into exile. The rest continue quietly contributing to Yemeni society. While the internationally recognised government has made positive public statements, the Huthi-led media continue to vilify Baha'is, branding them traitors, spies, or apostates, reflecting allegations also used in Iran. "It's a coordinated effort to dehumanise us," says al-Sakkaf.

A Mosaic of Diversity

Al-Sakkaf closes with a vision: "Yemen is like a mosaic and a mosaic is formed from different beautiful pieces. This is the diversity we have in Yemen, all these different pieces are forming this beautiful mosaic," he says, arguing that the country will not develop unless all components – Jews, Christians, Hindus, Baha'is, Muslims of all sects, and other Yemenis – are embraced as full participants in society.

Dr Luca Nevola *holds a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Milano-Bicocca and has conducted extensive fieldwork in northern Yemen. He works as Senior Analyst for ACLED and as Regional Advisor for the European Institute of Peace. He is Deputy Editor of the Journal of the British Yemeni Society.*

YEMEN'S PORTS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

ROY FACEY

International trade has benefitted from the use of the Suez Canal since it was opened in 1869, making the canal a vital component in reducing shipping costs between the United States and Europe, on the one hand, and countries south and east of the canal, on the other. Yemen, especially Aden, was a major beneficiary. In the 1950s and 1960s, Aden ranked as the world's second busiest bunkering port, after only New York. The closure of the Suez Canal in 1967 for eight years, political upheaval in Yemen, new ship designs, and Gulf port growth cost Aden its leading role. From 2015, the Huthi takeover of northern Yemen divided the country and generated greater competition between Red Sea and Gulf of Aden ports. Since November 2023, Huthi attacks on Red Sea shipping have massively disrupted global trade.

Aden was the centre of Yemeni port development for millennia. It was first recorded as a trading centre some 3,000 years ago, with subsequent mention in the first-century Periplus as well as the writings of Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta. Captain Haines seized the port at 'Front Bay' (Seera Island) in 1839 for the British. Under British security, merchants from the Gulf and India set up warehouses in Aden to anchor their trade with Somalia. By 1840, 300 local vessels and 21,000 camels were reported to be involved in Aden-based trade. The Aden Pilot Service was established in 1848. By 1848, the harbour at Back Bay – the present port area – was being used by shipping, with Aden being designated a Free Port in 1850.

Prior to this period, Aden had been on the wane since the early sixteenth century. Following the Ottoman occupation of Yemen Mocha became both the main Yemeni international port and centre for the coffee trade. Mocha gradually declined with the demise of Yemen's coffee trade; what then remained of this trade moved mostly to Aden though some to Hudayda, which in 1849 became the chief port on Yemen's Red Sea coast.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 greatly increased Aden's importance to maritime trade, cutting the London route to 4,567 nautical miles from 10,065 around the Cape. In 1869, coal cargo from Cardiff arrived at Aden via the canal for bunkering steamships and a growing number of shipping agencies were established in Aden. The first serious effort to dredge the port area started in 1891, with berths at Aden subsequently kept one foot deeper than the Suez Canal so that ships could bunker at Aden and sail north to safely transit the canal with a full cargo load after burning off some of their bunkers. By 1917 the British Navy had set up oil bunkering facilities in Aden. Coal continued to be used as ships' fuel, and the coaling station on Perim island (Mayyun) was in competition with sources at Aden until 1935, when the Perim station was closed.

By this time Aden had been dredged to 31ft and was handling 150 ships per month. Many passenger ships operating between the UK, India, the Far East, and Australia called at Aden, which became a world-class shopping port thanks to its tax-free status. By 1956, Aden's oil refinery and harbour were completed, the harbour dredged to 36ft, and the Home Trade Quay for coastal vessels constructed. By 1964, three deep 'dolphin' (piled) berths supplying oil fuel and an 800-tonne slipway for harbour tug maintenance and repair were in operation.

Meanwhile in the Red Sea, the Soviet Union constructed the modern Hudayda Port, greatly improving its capacity by dredging a 22km-long approach channel and building eight berths at depths of 9.4m (31ft), with repair facilities for harbour craft, and navigation aids, allowing the port to handle ships of up to 30,000 Deadweight Tonnage (TDW[1]).

In 1967, the canal was closed due to conflict in the Middle East, South Yemen gained independence, and traffic at Aden fell dramatically. When the canal reopened in 1975, ports in the Gulf had grown in importance, cargo was moving to container ships, and ships generally could carry larger tonnages of fuel, eliminating the need for a middle-distance port at which to bunker. Aden's first deepwater berths at

[1]*Deadweight is the ship's carrying capacity in tons, including cargo, fuel, water, stores, lifeboats etc.*

Ma'alla were completed in 1990, but traffic levels remained modest.

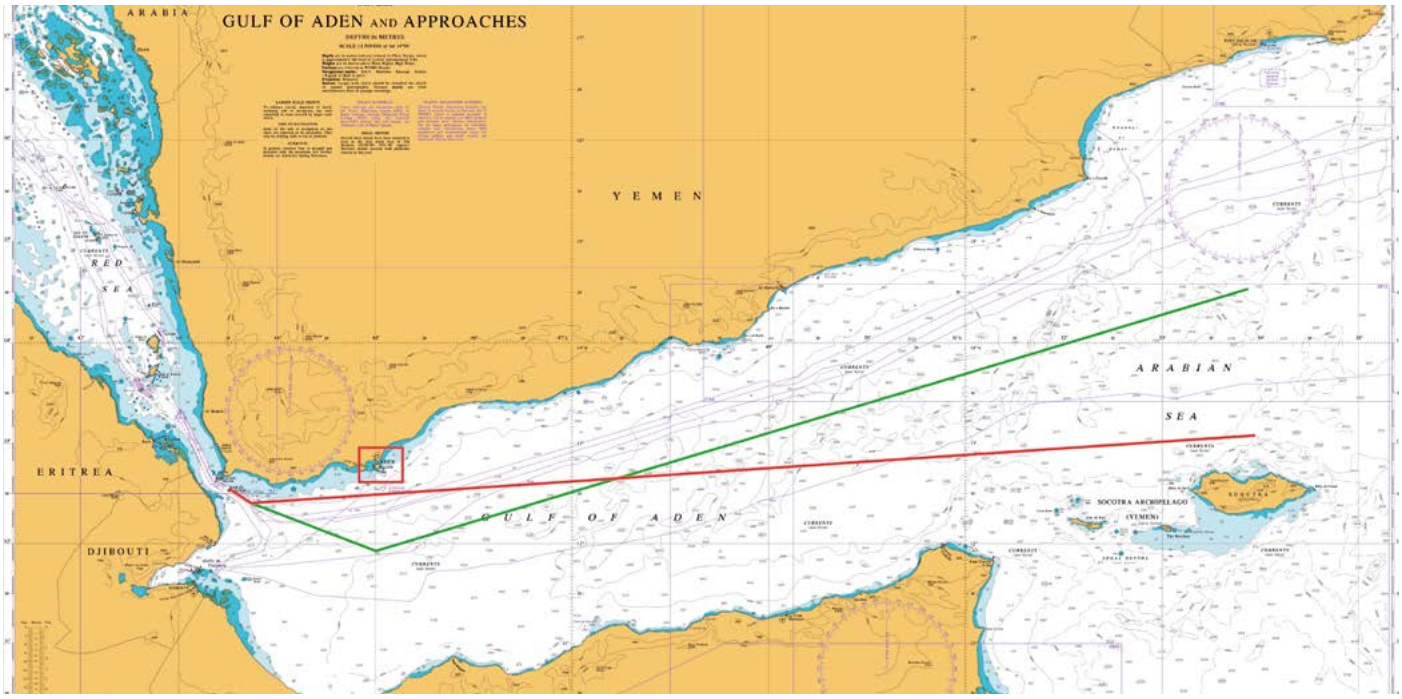
By the time of Yemeni unification in 1990, other ports had been developed along the Yemeni coast. Significantly, a 450m-long quay was completed at Salif with an alongside depth of 13.0m, allowing much larger ships to be handled in Kamaran Bay. Salif had already been growing its trade in rock salt for export, while the new quay allowed significant bulk grain import facilities to be added. Mukalla and Nishtun ports in the Gulf of Aden were constructed in the 1970s and 1980s, supporting cargo handling and fishing business development in the eastern part of South Yemen.

In Aden, the need for better facilities became apparent as container handling business at the Ma'alla Terminal increased, particularly trans-shipment. An agreement was signed to build the Aden Container Terminal (ACT) to provide 700m of quay at a depth of 16.0m and 45 hectares of container working area. This resulted in container handling at Aden growing eventually from 9,000 TEUs[2] to over 500,000 TEUs per year, with 60% of these being trans-shipment boxes. Traffic was seriously affected by the attack on the French tanker, MV *Limburg* in 2002 – leading to a rapid escalation in war risk insurance levels.[3] ACT's trans-shipment business moved to other ports until a War Risk Bond was set up for ships calling Aden and War Risk rates returned to 'normal'. In 2005, the Aden Gulf Terminal was completed by the Hayel Saeed Anam Group (HSA), providing highly efficient bulk grain import and storage facilities and a flour mill.

When piracy threatened shipping in the Gulf of Aden in 2005, ships in transit through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden took protective measures, including carrying armed guards. While these attacks did not directly affect cargo working at Aden, one outcome was the decision to advise ships to use the 'Internationally Recognised Transit Corridor' (IRTC) through the Gulf of Aden. Part of Aden's attraction for shipping was its proximity to the main shipping route that passed only five miles south of the pilot station. The IRTC, in contrast, takes ships to a point some 50 nautical miles (nm) south of Aden, with the corridor then running near the centre of the Gulf of Aden towards Salalah. Piracy also revealed a gap in nautical chart coverage of Yemeni waters, which was rectified when the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) produced a new chart, 'Gulf of Aden and Approaches', covering Yemeni waters between Socotra island and Yemen's border with Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea. The effect of the change is illustrated in the extract from this chart below. It shows eastbound ships following the recommended transit corridor steering southeast from Bab al Mandeb to a position some 50 nm south of Aden, instead of heading approximately east to pass close to Aden, and then north of Socotra[4].

[2]*A TEU is a 20 Foot Equivalent Unit, the 'standard' size of a 20-foot-long container.*
[3]*The tragic attack on the USS Cole at Aden in October 2000 had little impact on Aden's business as it was not a 'commercial' vessel.*

[4]*Similar routes were and are followed by westbound ships. Pre-piracy some ships passed between Socotra Island and the Horn of Africa, again passing close to Aden both eastbound and westbound*



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Meanwhile, after using a series of private operators at the ACT during the 'piracy years', Aden Port took over ACT operations in 2012 and installed two new ship-to-shore container gantry cranes. Fighting in Yemen in 2015 saw Aden being invaded by forces from the north, who were expelled from the city by July the same year. The distribution of traffic volumes in Yemeni ports varied between 2018 and 2025 as restrictions on ports in the Red Sea were imposed and then removed at various times[5]. Currently, Aden handles the vast majority of national container traffic, while fuel imports at Ras Isa are reduced due to military attacks on the terminal, and both Hudayda and Salif have suffered from attacks, as shown below. The situation in Yemen remains 'fluid'.

[5]*Restrictions imposed by the 'Coalition' led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, cover cargo types Red Sea ports are allowed to handle, while double customs duties charged by the Huthis on goods in transit between Aden and 'the north' are intended, inter alia, to push traffic to Red Sea ports. See also below.*

The main Yemeni Ports and their capacities

The ports of Yemen are distributed along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coasts of Yemen. They vary in terms of their capacities, depth of water alongside, berth length, method of construction, and more. These important factors are considered in this section.

Most ships call at Yemeni ports to discharge cargo as there are few non-oil exports. Crude oil was exported from the Rudum and the Al-Shihr terminals until November 2022, when drone attacks on these terminals by the Huthis stopped the exports and, consequently, the flow of hard currency to the internationally recognized government based in Aden. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) was briefly exported from the Balhaf gas terminal (close to Bir Ali) until the start of the current conflict. Occasional modest bran shipments, as the by-product of wheat milling, are exported from Aden and Hudayda as animal feed. Container ships discharge full containers at Hudayda, Aden, and Mukalla and load mainly empty containers, as less than 10% of boxes loaded in Aden are reported to contain exports. A few full containers are loaded in Mukalla.

From 2023 to 2025 the Huthis put pressure on merchants and importers to route their cargoes via Red Sea ports, using a mix of threats and incentives to achieve this. These increased the flow of cargoes of all types into Red Sea ports, increasing Huthi receipts via higher port revenues and customs charges to fund their objectives.

Cargoes consigned to Yemen's Red Sea ports must first be inspected by staff at the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) in Djibouti.



Yemen's ports and terminals map

Salif

The port has two berths on a quay length of 450m and with a depth of 13.0m alongside. It can handle ships of up to 65,000 TDW. Salif has the advantage of natural deep water in port approaches – 20m or better – and is adjacent to a deep anchorage area sheltered from the Red Sea by Kamaran Island.

Salif has four ship-to-shore automatic discharging gantries for unloading (mainly) bulk grain and corn to silos at the berths. The Fahem Group silos have a storage capacity of 400,000 MT and a milling plant capacity of 3,750 MT/day, served by two rail-mounted gantries at Berth 1 (on the west end of the quay) adjacent to the silos and flour mill. These gantries had a combined discharging capacity of 24,000 MT per day, but one gantry was destroyed during recent attacks on the port. Berth 1 was also very heavily damaged, and no food ships used it in September 2025.

Berth 2 (on the east end of the quay) is adjacent to the silos and flour mill operated by the Al Habbari Company, served by rubber-tyred gantries. These silos have a storage capacity of 110,000 MT and the plant a milling capacity of 350 MT/day. Salif also handles bulk imports of raw sugar for HSA that is refined and bagged at the company's facility at Ras Isa. The port also handles clinker, timber, cement, and steel imports.

In spite of the damage to the sheet-piled berths and reported destruction of one bulk unloader at Salif, the port continues to function, with seven ships berthed in August 2025 to discharge 286,000 MT of bulk wheat, corn, clinker, steel, and soda.

Ras Isa

The Ras Isa bulk fuel import terminal at the southern end of Kamaran Bay was opened in July 2015 as a private sector operation with one berth. The terminal benefits from very sheltered deep water, with depths greater than 30m within about 50m of the shoreline. It was closed from July 2016 until the Saudi-led coalition gave permission for it to be reopened in January 2023. Calls by tankers of up to 32,000 DWT started in February 2023 and imports grew, with tankers of up to 70,000 DWT calling at the terminal recently. Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carriers of up to 50,000 DWT have also discharged at Ras Isa and it became Yemen's most important fuel import terminal in 2023-25. But recent attacks by the United States and Israel on the terminal's fuel storage tanks and the marine craft serving the ships, have cut imports. The Huthis have shown their resilience by constructing five rubble 'jetties' along the coast of Ras Isa, and discharging LPG, diesel, and gasoline directly from the ships – moored stern to these jetties – to road tankers. Seven ships discharged 158,000 MT of LPG and gas oil (diesel) in August 2025.



'Jetties' at Ras Isa Terminal (Google Earth image)

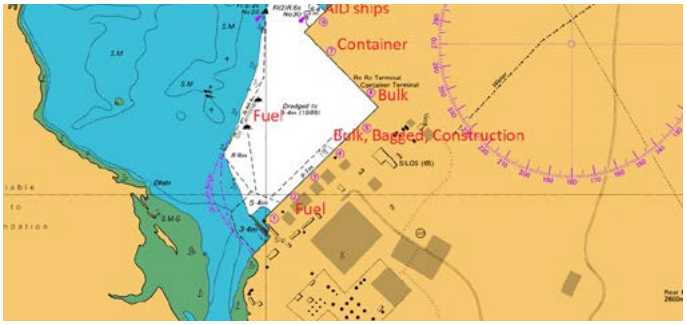
FSO *Safer*

The Ras Isa crude oil export terminal has stored and exported crude from the Marib fields via the FSO *Safer* from 1988. FSO *Safer* is a 400,000 DWT single-hulled tanker purchased by the Yemeni Government in 1987 and moored for thirty-seven years in water more than 30m deep south of Ras Isa. *Safer* supplied Marib light sweet crude to the Aden Refinery until 2013 using shuttle tankers, and also to third-party purchasers. It has not been operational since mid-2015.

The 1.14 million barrels of Marib oil on board the *Safer* when operations stopped in 2015 was deemed to be a threat to the marine environment. UNDP provided a replacement tanker, the 2008 built double-hulled vessel *Nautica*, now re-named the *MT Yemen*. This allowed *Safer*'s cargo to be transferred to the *MT Yemen* between May and August 2023 and the tanks on *Safer* to be water-washed. *Safer* is now empty apart from an oil-water mix and sludge in the tanks. Both tankers remain moored off Ras Isa.

Hudayda

The port berths lie at the southern end of a 22km long access channel with a dredged depth of 9.4m, leading to a basin at the same depth. Water depth limits the size of ship that can use the port, and consequently larger bulk vessels part-discharge at Aden or Salif before they call at Hudayda to complete unloading. HSA frequently charters large ships to carry bulk grain cargoes to Yemen, part-discharging them at their 14.0m deep terminal in Aden, then sailing to Hudayda at a reduced draught to discharge the balance.



Hudayda berths © Crown Copyright and/or database rights. Reproduced by permission of The Keeper of Public Records and the UK Hydrographic Office (www.ukho.gov.uk/copyright).

Cargoes of bulk wheat and other grains, for several large importers, are discharged using ships' cranes fitted with grabs to load grain into hoppers on the quay. Hoppers fill trucks that transport grain to silos outside the port gates, allowing ships to unload around 6,000-9,000 MT per day.

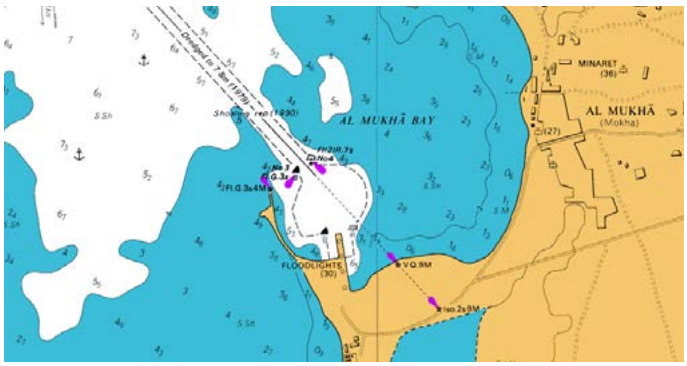
The port consists of two quays at right angles to each other. Berths 1-5 are located on the NE/SW quay and Berths 6-8 on the NW/SE quay. The port was equipped with five Ship-to-Shore (STS) container cranes at the two main container berths (Nos. 6 and 7). Four of these were in service until mid-2015, with one idle. Attacks on the cranes in 2015 damaged them extensively and three were scrapped in 2019, leaving only the two newest 'Liebherr' cranes. These two remaining cranes were under repair (one operational) in 2024/25, when further attacks on the port damaged them beyond repair. Containers can now only be handled using ships' cranes, and handling equipment in the yard that is provided by ships' agents.

The attacks on Hudayda in 2024 resulted in extensive damage to fuel storage tanks and a halt to fuel imports. Subsequent attacks have left only three of the eight berths at the port, Berths 4, 6 and 8, operational after the concrete decks between the front and rear piled walls were destroyed. With the Huthis continuing to attack Israel, further attacks on Hudayda port can be anticipated.

Mocha

The ancient port of Mocha provides a gateway for cargo to the well populated Ta'izz area. It was closed in 2015. In 2017 it was taken over by the coalition and has since been under the control of the Joint Forces for the West Coast. Protective measures were installed in port approaches to prevent attacks by small boats.

The port was reopened in August 2021 and has since received calls by cargo dhows and coasters. The port has a channel depth of 7.8m and imports general cargo, plus livestock from Eritrea and Somaliland. Fuel oil for the power station north of Mocha is delivered by tankers that anchor close to the power station.



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Aden

Aden has the best facilities of any port in Yemen and is closest to international shipping routes. The port access channel is around 6km long from the pilot station to the Inner Harbour entrance, with a depth of 15.0m and width 183m. The channel serves both the inner harbour and Aden Oil Harbour. From the inner harbour breakwater, a 225m wide channel leads to a 700m diameter and 15.0m deep turning area south of the Aden Container Terminal.

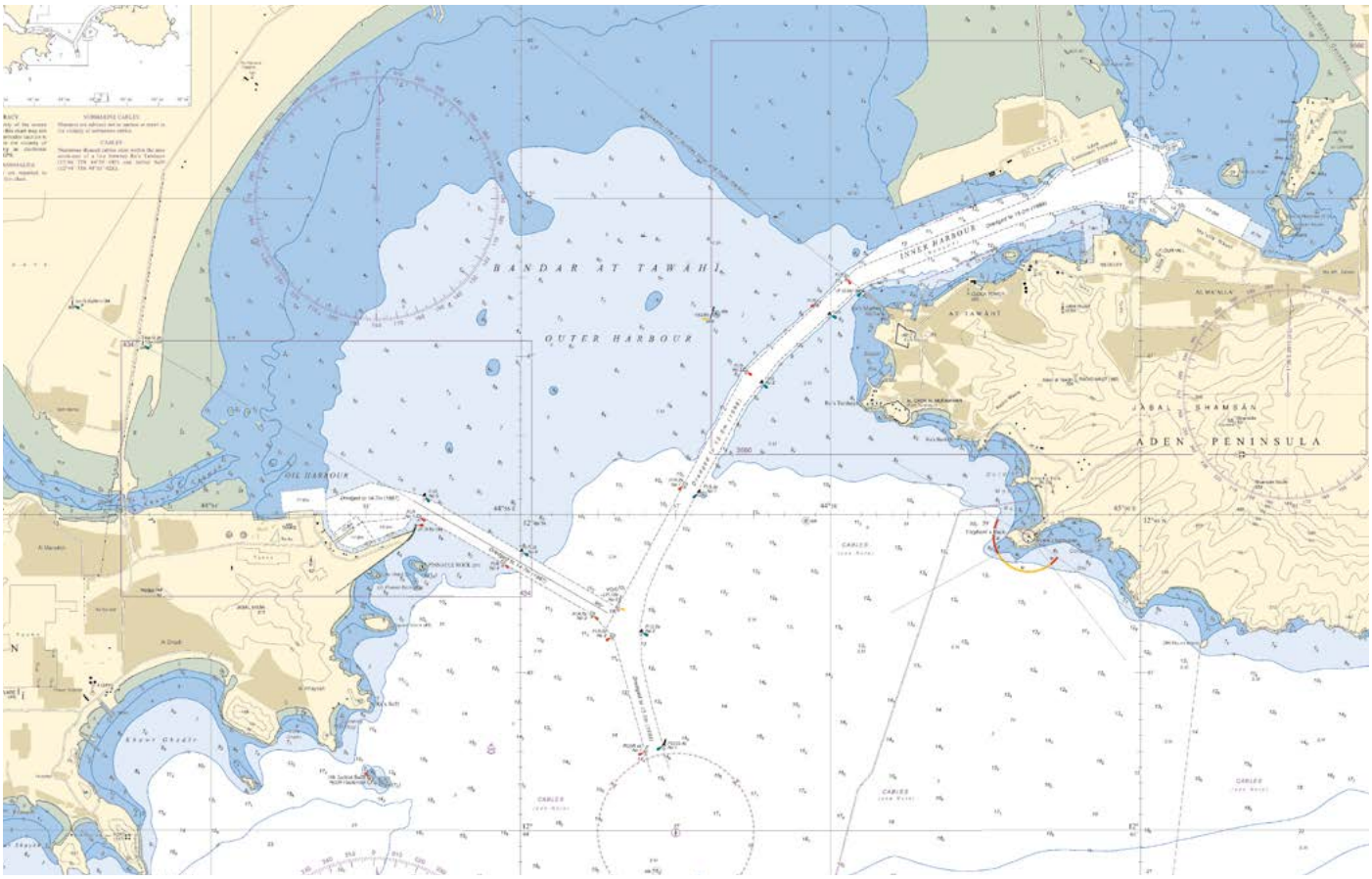
The port control tower was equipped with a Vessel Traffic Management Information System (VTMIS) in 2022, with AIS transponders fitted to navigation marks. Virtual AIS transponders have been installed at key navigation points in the harbour to further improve safety.

The Home Trade Quay at Ma'alla handles dhows, bulk cement imports, aid cargo, and seasonal livestock imports. It was built in the 1950s using mass concrete 'T' blocks to provide alongside berths for regional ships and dhows. The Ma'alla Terminal, built 1987-1990, gave Aden its first deepwater alongside berths, ending reliance on barges for inner-harbour transfers. Ma'alla's four main berths are built in mass concrete, with a depth alongside of 11.0m. It includes a RoRo berth (for Roll-on Roll-off cargo) and connects at the eastern end with the Home Trade Quay. Ma'alla handles bulk and general cargo, including bulk grain, bagged flour, clinker, coal, steel, timber, cement, and vehicles, and can berth ships of up to 42,500 TDW.

The Aden Gulf Terminal (AGT), owned and operated by HSA, handles bulk dry cargo (wheat, coal, clinker, etc.), liquid vegetable oils used in food manufacturing, and fuel imports for company use. AGT has two berths: AGT1 with a depth alongside of 14.0m to handle vessels with draughts of up to 12.8m, carrying bulk grain cargoes of up to 75,000 MT; and AGT2 with a depth alongside of 12.0m. Both berths handle ships of up to 300m in length. Grain silos at the AGT can hold 227,000 MT and the adjacent mill has a milling capacity of around 1,800 MT per day. Two other companies import grain at Aden, with the most recent silos constructed in March 2023.

The Aden Container Terminal (ACT), completed in 1999, has a mass concrete quay wall 700m long with a depth alongside of 16.0m in a 60m wide 'pocket' along the edge of the wall. It can berth container ships of up to 8,000 TEU with draughts of up to 14.8m. It has six STS cranes, with rubber tyred gantry cranes to handle containers in the yard.

The separate Aden Oil Harbour has berths and storage for imported oil products. The approach channel is 14.7m in depth, leading to a 14.7m deep turning area. No. 1 berth, 15.8m deep, can accommodate fully loaded tankers of 110,000 TDW. There are three other berths with depths of 11.6-13.5m. The refinery no longer refines crude oil, and only refined products have been imported into Aden since late 2014.



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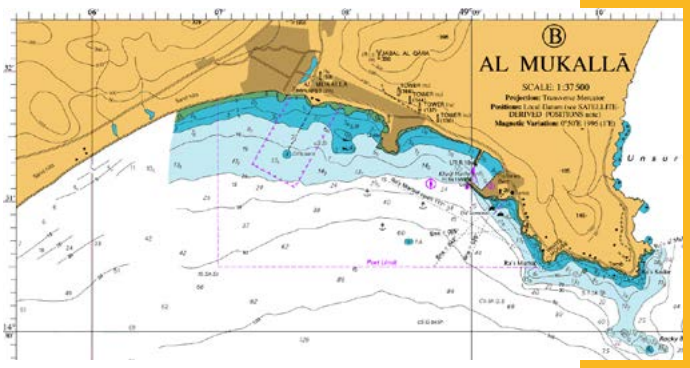
Rudum

The crude oil export terminal at Rudum (also called Nushaymah, Rudhum) handles oil exported from fields in Shabwa governorate. It re-commenced operations in July 2018 after being shut down for around fifteen years. Operations ceased in November 2022 following drone attacks by the Huthis on the terminal and there is no indication at present of when it may re-open.

Balhaf

Balhaf LNG Export Terminal started exporting LNG in 2009 but ceased operations early in the current conflict and remains closed. The main jetty is built in water depths of 20-40m, aligned so that LNG carriers head into the wind and waves during the southwestern monsoon. There is no commercial activity at the terminal at present.

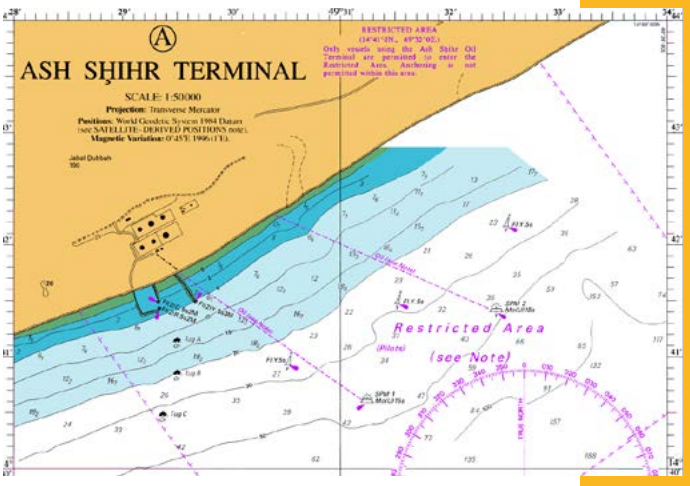
Mukalla



Al Mukalla © Crown Copyright and/or database rights. Reproduced by permission of The Keeper of Public Records and the UK Hydrographic Office (www.ukho.gov.uk/copyright).'

Mukalla is the main port for the eastern part of Yemen, handling containers, bulk cement, coal, bulk and bagged grain, flour, livestock and oil imports of fuel oil, diesel, and gasoline. Three alongside berths are available in the harbour. Berths 1 and 2 have a minimum depth of 9.1m. Berth 3 has a depth around 4.5m and is an extension of Berth 2 but is used by dhows and occasionally small vessels. Oil imports are handled either via the pipelines laid inside the concrete breakwater wall adjacent to Berth 1, or via a sea-bed line from moorings to onshore tanks. A very high number of dhows call at Mukalla carrying livestock from Bosaso in Somalia, returning with building materials, packaged food, and other goods. The Mukalla-Bosaso dhow trade is very active. Cargoes from Salalah in Oman are also taken to Mukalla by dhow.

Ash-Shihr



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The "Ash Shihr Terminal" exports crude oil piped to the coast from fields in the Hadhramaut to storage tanks, then via seabed pipelines to two single-point moorings (SPM) for loading to tankers. The largest crude oil storage tank at Ash Shihr holds 1 million barrels. Exports ceased for a short period at the outbreak of fighting in May 2015, but then resumed until November 2022, when Huthi drone attacks on the terminal while a tanker was being loaded resulted in heavy damage to one of the SPMs. There is no indication of when it may re-open.

Nishtun

Nishtun lies between Mukalla and the Omani-Yemen border and was built mainly to serve as a base for fishing boats. Dhow/general cargo/vehicles and fuel imports are handled at the port. As with Mukalla, dhow traffic forms an important part of the port's business. The port is well sheltered during the northeast monsoon but exposed to swell and siltation during the summer months when the southwestern monsoon prevails.

The Impact of Huthi Actions on Global Shipping

Since November 2023, attacks on commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden instigated by the Huthi movement have dramatically affected global shipping, the economy of Egypt, and international trade and business. The attacks have resulted in the sinking of four ships so far, with loss of life and severe disruption to international maritime trade. They have forced a re-evaluation of long-established shipping routes.

The attacks have included, *inter alia*, missile strikes, attacks by aerial and sea drones, and the use of small boats and Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPGs) against merchant vessels. The sinking of four ships both underscores the threat and heightens insecurity among shippers and insurers. War risk rates for western vessels using the Red Sea route and Yemen's ports have risen sharply. The majority of global shipping companies have been forced to divert their vessels away from the Red Sea, with Suez Canal transits and revenues – critical for Egypt – falling sharply as a result. The Suez Canal Authority reports that container ships, oil tankers, and bulk carriers now overwhelmingly favour the longer but safer route via the Cape. It exposes the vulnerability of this – and other global trade arteries – to regional instability.

The main economic and logistical consequences of re-routing from Suez are:

- Increased costs: The diversion via the Cape of Good Hope adds thousands of nautical miles to journeys, raising fuel consumption, crew wage costs, and higher insurance costs because of the additional sailing time. This results in higher shipping costs, which add to overall production costs and drives up inflation.
- Emissions: Increased sailing times result in higher levels of emissions from ships, with an adverse impact on the world environment.
- Delays in global supply chains: The longer route adds up to two weeks to shipping times between Asia, Europe, and the Americas, and even longer for ships with cargoes for ports in the Mediterranean. This delays the delivery of goods, raw materials, and potentially perishable items, thus putting pressure on companies to re-think the structure of their supply chains.
- Container ship overcapacity: Perversely, this increase in sailing times has rescued large container companies from over capacity issues as large numbers of huge new container ships are being delivered, allowing them to maintain ocean freight rates at higher levels than would otherwise be the case.
- Pressure on logistics networks: Ports along the Cape route have experienced increased congestion, while those in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden have seen a significant drop in traffic, impacting local economies that rely on maritime trade.
- Insurance: Marine insurance rates have risen for ships in transit along the canal route and those using Yemeni ports.
- Geopolitical tensions: The attacks have prompted international naval responses, with several nations deploying warships to try and protect commercial traffic and improve regional security.

The Huthi attacks since November 2023 and the sinking of four ships have had a profound impact on global shipping, forcing a major rerouting of vessels and triggering a cascade of economic, logistical, and geopolitical challenges. There is, at present, no prospect of this situation being resolved in any foreseeable timescale. Attacks on Yemen's Red Sea ports in 2024 and 2025 have inflicted serious damage on port infrastructure, equipment and marine craft, and have severely impacted port operations.

Roy Facey *first visited Aden on a Glen Line ship in 1958. He returned to Aden in 1988, initially with the IMO, and stayed to 2011, advising on developments at all the main ports during that time. He designed the current Traffic Separation Scheme for shipping between Bab al Mandeb and the Hanish Islands in 2001, which has since been used by over 600,000 ships.*

Review article

SKIRMISHES AMONG THE BARREN ROCKS OF ADEN

JAMES SPENCER

The 1960s was a period of profound geostrategic and societal change. The British Empire that had been the main superpower for a century was in its death throes, after decades of quickening decline. Globally, there was a sense of the old order passing, with aspirant global and regional hegemons snapping at its heels; but within the Empire, some were trying to halt the decline. Societally, the 1960s brought the countercultural decade, with its challenge of norms and authority, social and political; wider access to higher education; and subsequent demands for political access. The ideological struggle between the Eastern Bloc and the West was at its height, while advances in air travel, commercial radio, television, and increasing access to telephones made communication much easier and, with it, organisation.

The British Army, which had captured many of the territories on which 'the sun never set', was institutionally a bastion of the conservative attitude. While junior servicemen were often very young, many of the senior ranks, particularly the more senior officers, had begun their military career in World War II, and had then seen active service in a range of theatres as the UK withdrew serially from its colonies and protectorates.

Two recent books tell the tale of this era, from unusual angles; they are described further in at the end of this article. Nicholas Beard's *Aden Mutiny* is a broadly contemporaneous account, drawn mostly from his letters home to his parents, alongside photographs he took then. Despite being a logistician (a vital, if usually unsung, military calling), he had the dubious privilege of being in the 'killing area' of the South Arabian Army mutiny which started the final phase of the withdrawal. By complete contrast, Shaun Leavey's *The Camel Killer* is a fictional account of the same period through the eyes of Ahmed Hussain, a soldier-cum-officer of the Federal Regular Army, giving a rare oblique view of the period.

Aden had been the UK's key military and trading hub east of Suez since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. It had formed a vital element on the 'string of pearls' out to India and the Far East, as well as supporting operations in the Horn of Africa and East Africa. However, as those territories were relinquished and carrier-led sea-basing became possible, the military need to retain the Aden Protectorates and Colony reduced, prompting the question: did the UK still need to retain it?

British Counter-Insurgency strategy in the 1960s would be relatively recognisable to a modern audience familiar with recent Coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, the basic military concept – rear HQs, Forward Operating Bases and Patrol Bases: "Ink Spots" – can be traced back through the Malaya Campaign, the North West Frontier, the Scottish Highlands, the Thirteen Colonies to the Roman Empire. With some exceptions – principally aircraft and radio communication – changes have been surprisingly limited.

From those fixed locations, there would be routine area domination patrols, route picquets, and sometimes ambushes or punitive patrols. The former might be tasked with a 'hearts and minds' effort – such as taking a medical officer or company medic around the villages – and often to collect intelligence on the local area, such as pattern of life information, and indeed, atmospherics from 'chat-ups' with the local inhabitants. Ambushes and punitive patrols might be assisted by Royal Air Force 'aerial policing,' which usually involved bombing the home of the perpetrator – either in person or in command – of an incident. Usually, this was preceded by ample advance notification so that the object of the lesson could evacuate his household, and thereby avoid casualties and the cycle of revenge.



Blowing up of a dissident's house in Wadi Yashbum, Upper ʿAulaqi Shaykhdom, in the 1960s (© Jim Ellis Collection)



Re-forming the desert before entering Wadi Matlah, Radfan (Courtesy of Nick Beard)



Mineplated Landrover (Courtesy of Nick Beard)



A Saladin armoured car on the road between Habilayn and al-Dhali' in 1965 (Courtesy of Shaun Leavey)

Such a dispersed force, particularly in harsh terrain like Yemen's, requires a major logistic effort to support it (one figure often quoted is eight 'tail' soldiers to keep one 'tooth' in the field). However, since the time of Sun Tzu, attacking the supply chains has been a favoured option to defeat or degrade the fighting force, since logisticians tend to be less well protected and less able to fight back. Similarly, there are usually few main supply routes to a location – making mining them easier – and convoys often try to 'laager up' in a Forward Operating Base overnight, which often narrows windows of time, making the convoys predictable in time and space, and thus much easier to attack. Given those constraints, there were (and remain) limited options to protect the convoys, as Beard recounts. Routes may be picqueted by friendly forces providing overwatch (whether on the ground, or airborne) and/or convoy packets can be escorted by armoured vehicles with more offensive capability. However, neither of those will prevent a previously laid Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detonating as a vehicle crosses it. Finally, the vehicles themselves may be protected, either by organisational design or local inventiveness; Nick Beard describes both. His 'bathtub' vehicle cab would be familiar to those who improvised 'Hajji armor' in Iraq and Afghanistan. (In Aden, the British appear not to have implemented the other option – bribing the enemy not to attack – but whether this was from principle, lack of imagination, or lack of funds is unclear. Such practice did, however, occur in Pakistan / Afghanistan.)

Crown forces being more expensive and in short supply, the British – like the French, Spanish, and later, the Americans – raised units of locally recruited auxiliaries, for both the police and the ground forces. There were secondary benefits to such forces: they also functioned as a channel of communications into the local community (sometimes back to the British as well), and also established, trained and developed a cadre of local nationals who – *ceteris paribus* – might take over from the British when the latter withdrew. However, where hierarchies of power and influence exist, there will be efforts to capture it, particularly in a tribal society. Oddly, while individual Britons – often Scots or Irish – might understand tribes, institutionally the British habitually seem to have difficulty comprehending tribal cultures, and managing the politics of them. Traditionally in South Arabia, a soldier had been exempted tribal politics for the duration of his service, but both Beard and Leavey (as well as other contemporaneous writers) note the increasing role that tribal politics played in the final days of British rule in Aden – as well as after it, for all that it was disavowed.

'Intelligence' in those days was mostly Human Intelligence (HUMINT), that is, derived directly from human sources, which applied both to military and civilian intelligence. Often this consisted of a rumour – Leavey has Stephen Carr discover the maiming of two deserters from "talk in the Harib souk" – but sometimes directed sources, as well as information gleaned from the interrogation of prisoners. There was a little Imagery Intelligence (IMINT), in the form of aerial photographs – for a cordon and search operation in Dhali', Leavey's Ahmed is supplied with air photographs taken in 1948. However the more exotic forms of modern satellite and other imagery were unavailable, and would have been of limited use given the nature of the conflict and the pattern of life in which the enemy operated. Similarly, Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) – a stalwart of today's counterinsurgency and counterterrorist campaigns - was also of limited availability and use as, at the tactical level, most enemy communication was by messenger rather than radio.

Two key decisions governed the conduct of the Aden campaign's final stages. The first was whether the intention was to remain in theatre indefinitely (as with Northern Ireland, Cyprus or Malaya (initially)); or to withdraw (as with most former British possessions, Iraq, and Afghanistan – but not the Occupied Palestinian Territories). While the military could probably have retained control indefinitely of Aden Colony as a Sovereign Base Area (like those in Cyprus), this would have been at some enduring cost in British and Adeni lives, as well as adverse publicity, particularly from Cairo's *Ṣawt al-'Arab* ("Voice of the Arabs") radio station (as Leavey notes following Ahmed's Improvised Explosive Device attack in Ta'izz.) The desired end state clearly has an impact on the morale of one's own troops, logistic issues around phasing and extracting important equipment, and how to continue to provide support to front line troops until the last moment. As pertinently, it also has a profound impact on the political calculations of the local inhabitants, both ruled and rulers, particularly minorities and clients (as Leavey's Wakil Quaid Maiseri sardonically observes.) For partly ideological reasons, the Labour Government chose to withdraw from Aden completely.

The second key decision was whether the withdrawal should be conditions-based (that is, the security or governmental situation meeting pre-agreed, measurable standards, as in Iraq) or time-bound (that is, with a set date provided for withdrawal, as in Afghanistan.) In the case of Aden, crucially, the political decision was that withdrawal from Aden would be time-bound: that is, set for 30th November 1967.

The departing power often fondly imagines this epochal end-date as the start point for domestic politics to begin. However, domestic factions usually see it as the finishing line, and regard the announcement of the date as a starting gun, with more than sharp elbows being wielded to achieve advantage for their particular faction by the day of departure. Such an announcement is also likely to encourage external sponsors who can see the payday for their support arriving. Rather than reduce that never-ending provision, particularly if there are other distractions – such as the Six-Day War in the case of Egypt – they are likely to stay the course once the finish line is in sight.

And so it was in South Arabia. The rulers tried to reason with the perfidious British, invoking their treaties of protection, to no avail. Given the leftist views of many of the leading actors in Aden, coming to an accommodation with the likely leaders was a fool's errand, and so many rulers made preparations to leave; minority groups were no exception. The two main revolutionary groups – Front for the Liberation of the Occupied South (FLOSY) and National Liberation Front (NLF) – almost ignored the British as they fought each other for dominance in the city of Aden. But the most painful and obvious result –

as detailed in the two accounts – was the reaction of the local police and military units, among whom tribal politics, personal opportunity, and fear of revenge fermented to a witch's brew of strife. The most infamous expression of this was what would now be termed 'green-on-blue' incidents (that is, local force on British force combat), such as the ambush in which Nicholas Beard was involved, or the grenade lobbed into a Hussar sangar by one of Ahmed's Federal Regular Army company. Those who followed the Coalition withdrawal from Afghanistan will have seen much of this scenario reprised: politicians fleeing with their loot; the Taliban fighting with Islamic State-Khorasan Province; multiple green-on-blue incidents; and then the descent of an ideological straitjacket by the new rulers.

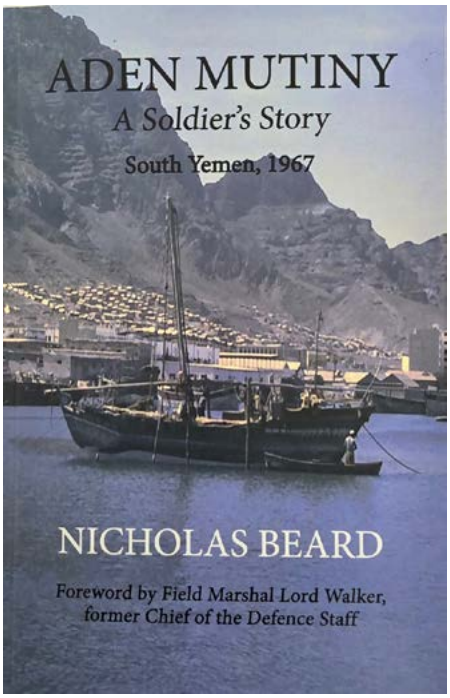
Just as there is continuity in counterinsurgency doctrine over the centuries, so too human nature – and the (mis)calculations of politicians, who seem to learn little from historical example – is little changed. Rarely do such politicians pay the price of their actions. Rather, it is those like Beard and Ahmed, and the many who are written off as 'collateral damage,' who bear the brunt. These two books are in their own ways useful reminders of that sad situation.

A note on sources of military records.

As a field, military history can be interesting but frustrating – particularly in the apparent dearth of records. There are contemporary newspaper accounts – many now digitised – which provide details of engagements; sometimes there are books by journalists recounting a conflict, often detailing information not included in 800-word articles, such as Stephen Harper's *Last Sunset*. Decades later, some official documents will be declassified and released to the Public Records Office, for example, although these documents tend to be at the strategic level (tactical and operational documents are often destroyed by units when no longer needed, in great part to reduce the number of classified documents which must be accounted for!) From these – as well as interviews with veterans – academics have often synthesised accounts of a specific campaign, like David Ledger's *Shifting Sands: The British in South Arabia, Jonathan Walker's Aden Insurgency, or Frank Edward's The Gaysh – A History of the Aden Protectorate Levies 1927-61 and the Federal Regular Army of South Arabia 1961-67.*

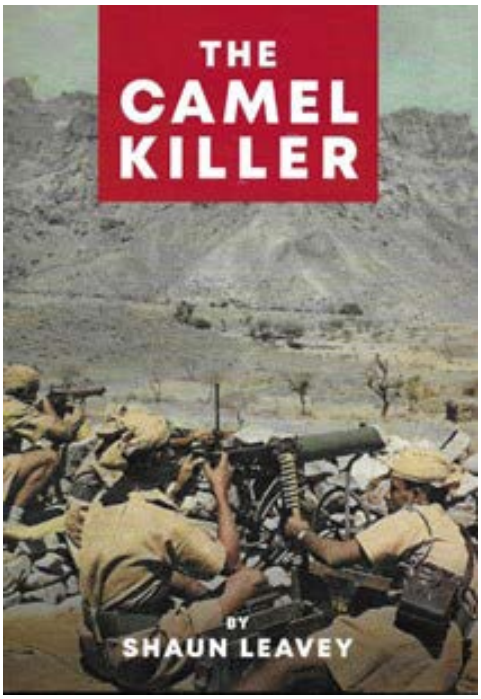
There are other records extant, although they tend to be harder to identify and sometimes to source. There are in-house journals – such as British Army Review – which might contain articles on a specific aspect or period of service life, though they are often operational (such as RJR Campbell's *"A Rifle Company In Aden or Sqn. Ldr. CMC Watson's Field Intelligence Officers in the Aden Protectorate.)* In addition, there are the regimental and other magazines of units serving in a particular theatre at a particular time, although these are likely to be self-censored for security reasons, and to avoid upsetting the families. In addition, there may be regimental histories (such as C.T. Atkinson's *The Royal Hampshire Regiment Vol I; Description of Operations in Aden Hinterland 1903.*) Defence and security think-tanks may publish articles on military issues, such as in the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* (including Maj. Gen. James Lunt's "Evolution of an Army" JRUSI CX No. 638 & 639 and Lt. Col. T.M.P. Steven's "Operations in the Radfan, 1964" JRUSI CX No. 640), although these tend to be written from a more professional point of view. In pre-radio and television years, there were more magazines, such as Blackwood's, which would carry accounts such as W.B. Harris's "The account of the Yemeni rebellion against the Turkish government in 1891" (CLIII, No. 928.)

Some senior soldiers, like diplomats, write their memoirs, although often a single three-year posting will be relegated (and compressed) into a single chapter of a four decade career – James Lunt's magisterial *Imperial Sunset* being typical – requiring the researcher to know the identity of key commanders at a certain period. There are also vanishingly rare first-hand accounts of a particular event or period such as Julian Paget's *Last post Aden 1964-1967* – from which Beard quotes key passages – and Lionel Folkard's *The Sky and the Desert* (which contains both his RAF service and as an intelligence officer in South Arabia), being unusual for their focus and contemporaneity. These later accounts are sometimes refreshed by contemporaneous records (such as the 2013 *The Actions of "J" (Sidi Rezegh) Battery Royal Horse Artillery in the Aden Protectorate 1963-64.*) Happily, with the publishing revolution (and the earlier photographic one), there is also an increasing number of self-published or short-run publications by veterans – like Nick Beard – which tell the story from a grassroots view point, often with contemporary photographs, providing previously unknown detail. Finally, there are a few military novels, of which the semi-autobiographical versions (such as Shaun Leavey's) are more informative than the truly fictional ones, such as Shaun Clarke's *Soldier J : SAS - Counter-insurgency in Aden.*



Aden Mutiny - A soldier's story- South Yemen 1967
Nicholas Beard
Milestone Press
Wiltshire, 2023
PB 198
pp. xi + 201.
Foreword. Introduction. Prologue.
7 maps / sketches. 147 photographs.
8 Chapters. Epilogue.
To obtain a copy contact
editor@britishyemenisociety.org.uk

This is a fascinating snapshot of a crucial time from an unusual point of view. The initial chapter is a brief history of the background to the situation. (It is unclear whether this was the British military in-brief, or Beard's own subsequent precis.) The book is a broadly chronological account of his time in Aden, with sympathetic vignettes of his fellow officers and men, interspersed with revealing notes on mundane issues of the time. There are excellent accounts of running a supply convoy to the Forward Operating Bases and Patrol Bases upcountry. However, the core of the book is something akin to a post-incident report, replete with sketch maps and some photographs, of the South Arabian Army mutiny, which is both personally moving and historically fascinating. Beard notes the almost complete absence of mental health awareness, in particular of what would now be termed Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. There are a few typographic errors, one minor factual one (it was the East India Company which took Aden, not the British government) but is otherwise an engaging read. The second edition would benefit greatly from a table of contents and an index.



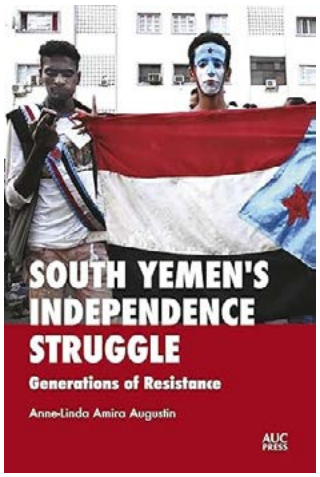
The Camel Killer
Shaun Leavey
Self-published, 2021
PB.
pp. 300
Foreword. 19 chapters. Glossary.
To obtain a copy contact
editor@britishyemenisociety.org.uk

The Camel Killer is a fictional account of Ahmed Hussain, a Yemeni-Eritrean soldier commissioned from the ranks as part of the Adenisation process. The first two thirds of the book describe his background and service in the Federal Regular Army (FRA) in South Arabia and a cross-border assassination operation in Ta'izz. The latter third of the book concerns his time after leaving South Arabia: as a civilian in Eritrea and then undercover with the Force Reconnaissance Unit in Northern Ireland (interesting in its own right!). Leavey says that this is a work of fiction – with the exception of WOI (RSM) Brake – yet it is keenly observed (particularly from the South Arabian side), from its inter-ethnic relations, petty pilfering,endemic corruption, and the loneliness of overseas cadets in UK, to the nitty-gritty of operational soldering, with its hours of tedium and moments of terror – to say nothing of the Belfast interlude – all suggesting a vivid imagination or excellent first-person sources. The characters are representative of the populations (British and South Arabian, as well as Eritrean and Italian): some sympathetic; others less so. While the detailed descriptions of the environment fifty years ago are interesting, it is the thoughts of Ahmed and his fellow FRA officers about the political situation, the Federal National Guard (FNG), the enemy, local notables, the Egyptians, and the British which are insightful. Of particular note is the awareness among the local population of the Egyptian role backing the insurgents.

There are a couple of minor errors: *qat* (or khat as Leavey has it) is a stimulant not a narcotic; and FLOSY is the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen – but they are irrelevant to the tale. With citations, this might have made a useful ethnographic study to accompany British (colonial) accounts; as it is, it makes an interesting and unusual read.

South Yemen's Independence Struggle: Generations of Resistance

Anne-Linda Amira Augustin



The American University in Cairo Press
Cairo/New York, 2021
pp. XVI+306
Figures. Abbr. Maps. Acknowledgement. Bibl. Index. Pb
£45
ISBN 978 1 649 03108 2

Dr. Augustin brings a unique perspective as a scholar with family roots both in what were the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), each of which unified with larger neighbours in 1990. As a student at Aden University in 2007 she witnessed the birth of what became the Southern Movement, in reaction to the defeat of the south in the 1994 civil war and its perceived marginalisation by the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. She examines why the Southern Movement attracted so much support from young people who had had no personal experience of life in the PDRY but were influenced by the memories, real or perhaps imagined, of family members who had lived in an independent South Yemen – and some who experienced the South Arabia of the colonial era.

South Yemen's Independence Struggle: Generations of Resistance is an ethnographic study based on field work for her PhD conducted in Aden and the surrounding area from 2014-15. The author interviewed a large number of activists and worked with focus groups from all parts of the south. She was herself a participant in the events. She devotes a chapter analysing the diverse types of actors (including female activists from their homes) in the movement and what drove them, followed by a valuable chapter examining the competing narratives of Yemeni unity and south Yemeni nationalism and how these were expressed and exploited by the regime. She looks at what she calls South Yemen's inter-generational resistance by adding chapters on the spaces in which activists operated, the role of the media and the importance of symbols such as the PDRY flag appearing throughout the south, and the growing activism and protest.

The southern movement extolled the achievements of the PDRY without talking about how leaders of the PDRY and Yemeni Arab Republic (YAR) in the 1970s and 1980s called for unification. South Yemenis often had different memories of Yemen before and after unity; there was nostalgia for the superior government services provided by the PDRY and pride in its achievements as a state. Others recalled the divisions that led to the tragic events of January 1986 which left a divided south little option except unification with the north – accelerated by the demise of the Soviet Union to which the PDRY had attached itself strategically.

Unification was greeted with great joy (as I recall from a visit made in late 1990) even if that was followed by profound disillusionment in the south with the realities of being united with a more populous and powerful north led by a president determined to impose his rule on the south. This led to the 1994 war (and an attempted secession by the south in May of that year) and the final destruction of what remained of the PDRY state apparatus with the sacking of tens of thousands of military officers and civil servants. Dr. Augustin helps explain a factor that I noted in the book published in association with the British Yemeni Society, *Why Yemen Matters*,[1] that southern nationalism strengthened after unity.

After completing her studies, Dr. Augustin became an adviser at the Southern Transitional Council (STC) office in Berlin but consciously seeks to avoid bias – mostly successfully – and use her privileged access to enlighten the reader. Today, there are dozens of southern 'organisations' calling for the restoration of an independent southern state, but there are also others that want the south to remain as a self-governing region within a unified Yemen. In Hadhramaut and al-Mahra, many prioritise maximum self-governance for their regions, whether as part of a united or south Yemen. The STC, whatever its shortcomings, dwarfs the other organisations in its resources, structures, and reach. It is in *de facto* control of Aden and parts of its surroundings and is an essential element of the Presidential Leadership Council. Dr. Augustin shows the strength of what it represents. What she does not cover is the role of the United Arab Emirates as an enabler of the STC and what might happen if Emirati support were withdrawn.

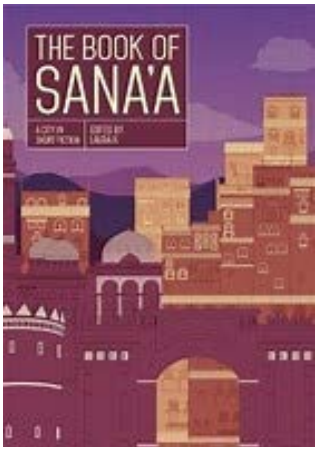
The main strength of the book is in the extent and depth of the fieldwork by a researcher who gives an insider's analysis of the birth and generation and growth of the southern movement. There are no other books on South Yemen in English like this, and it should endure as a testimony and analysis of the south and its independence movement at a critical time in Yemen's history.

NOEL BREHONY

Noel Brehony *is Editor of the BYS and Honorary Vice President of the BYS.*

[1] *Lackner, Helen (ed.). Why Yemen matters: A society in transition. Vol. 10. Saqi, 2014.*

The Book of Sanaʿa
Edited by Laura Kasinof



Comma Press
2025
pp. 96 1-X11
£10.99
ISBN-13: 978-1912697977

This delightful compilation of original short stories around the Yemeni capital, Sanaʿa, forms part of the Comma series Reading the City (in translation). The book comprises an introduction by the editor, ten short stories in English translation with, in most cases, notes, as well as details about the authors and translators. Each story is authored by a different author and translated by a different translator, a factor that necessarily produces some inconsistencies both in style and in translation decisions. Reading the compilation, I kept asking myself why certain Sanaʿani terms were transliterated and explained in footnotes, and others not. *Zurgaif*, for example, is transliterated but not translated as 'marbles' or explained in a footnote. The transliteration is frequently incorrect – *muathin* for *muʾadhdhin, ustaaz* for *ustādh*, *Surah Ad-Duhaa*ʾ for *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥā* – or inconsistent, with long vowels sometimes transliterated, other times not, initial capitals sometimes used, sometimes not. However, the book works well as a whole, and it would have taken a heavy editorial hand indeed to produce a truly coherent text, a hand that would have removed the individuality of the translator.

The editor writes that during the thirty-three-year-long Saleh regime, writers could mostly write what they wished. Although she qualifies this statement, it is somewhat misleading. One just has to remember the death of Dr. Abdulaziz al-Saqqaf, the founder of the *Yemen Times,* in 1999. Until unification there was effectively only one newspaper, *Al-Thawrah*, in which the most newsworthy item was invariably the cartoon at the back produced by Mohammed Al-Shaibani.[1]

The stories describe aspects of the supernatural, earlier and contemporary violence and conflict, the difficulties of relationships and being a woman, dissimilation and adopting the persona of a boy to bring food for the family, prison, the violent death of a child during a family drive, corruption, checkpoints, disappearance, smells of the Old City, and beyond. Many have the sounds of gunshot or missiles.

I visited Sanaʿa for longer and shorter periods between 1985 and 2008. The places mentioned bring the city and the country back to me: Bab al-Yaman, Old Sanaʿa, the Great Mosque, the salt suq, the narrow alleys of the Old City, Hayel Street, Bani Hushaish. And smells of the Old City: vegetables, roasting meat, fireworks, coffee, incense, basil, and sweat, mixed now with smells of blood. The events described frequently resonate: *Borrowing a Head* begins with a minibus ride through Sanaʿa, bumping over potholes, heads rolling, and then describes sharing heads, sharing memories. This brought back for me a terrifying *dabbāb* (minibus) ride in the early 2000s, with passengers screaming, the driver not listening. *The Girl of the Fountain* involves a midwife's daughter taking a very young girl's baby and placing it in a sack-cloth on the branch of a tree, to be adopted by a judge. This reminded me of a story told by friends of when they had taken their baby sister and left her by the corner of the Great Mosque. They ran around the mosque a few times and then discovered their sister had been taken – luckily back to their mother.

I have followed the news of conflict since the Arab Spring of 2011, greater since the rise of the Huthis in 2014, but rarely through the eyes of those who have experienced it at close firsthand. Many of these stories present conflict and pain from the eyes of the experiencer, underlining the importance of creative art in conveying the sensation behind the information, and highlighting different ways in which people deal with pain. This is most stark in *The Road to Destiny*, the story of a beautiful child who insists on swapping places with her sister in a hired car, who is then fatally shot when the driver

[1] *Mohammed Al-Shaibani: "Yemenis do not see cartoons as an art." [Archives:1997/48/Interview] - Yemen Times, 1 December, 1997. https://yementimes.com/mohammed-al-shaibani-archives1997-48-interview/.*

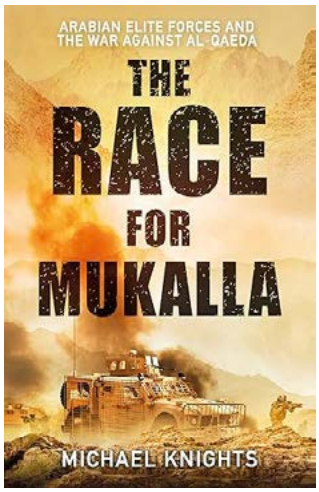
refuses to pull aside. We know from news reports, for example, that weddings have frequently been targeted by the Saudi coalition. The final story in this collection, *Sana'a's Missiles*, made my blood run cold as I wondered why the groom's family grieve and describe the groom as experiencing a nervous breakdown. He describes his wedding, his lovely bride and his happiness, but it is only at the end that we learn – as he remembered – that missiles had rained down on the wedding venue, killing the bride and well-wishers. Literature has always played a strong role in Yemen's history: Muhammad al-Zubairi's poetry, created during the 1962 revolution, returned as an emblem in the 2011 Arab Spring. Poetry has led to the beginnings and ends of tribal conflicts. And the short stories of Yemeni writers have brought hidden personal aspects of Yemen to the outside world. Congratulations to the editor and to all the authors and translators for bringing these stories to light.

JANET WATSON

Janet C.E. Watson FBA *is Professor Emerita at the University of Leeds and Honorary Professor at the University of St Andrews. Until retirement she headed the Centre for Endangered Languages, Cultures and Ecosystems at the University of Leeds. Her research focuses on Modern South Arabian and Yemeni Arabic dialects, particularly San'ani.*

The Race for Mukalla: Arabian Elite Forces and the War against Al-Qaeda

Michael Knights



Profile Editions
2024
pp. 320
Acknowledgements. Maps. Glossary. Index
HB £19.35. Kindle
ISBN 9781805222491

This book is about Task Force 291, an elite Emirati force that was key to ejecting al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) from Mukalla in 2016. It serves as a military study of Emirati military capabilities rather than a book about Yemen itself.

The Race for Mukalla takes up where Knights' first book, *25 Days to Aden*, ends. The thrust is how a small Emirati unit managed to pull off an operation in hostile territory (more successfully than US and British forces in Afghanistan) by blending Emirati expertise with the capabilities of local Yemeni tribes to eject AQAP from an entrenched position in coastal Hadhramaut. He terms this approach "local alliances alongside precision force application." The formula is not new, but Knights asserts that the Emiratis performed admirably well in achieving their operational goals in the circumstances.

The events described in this substantial but accessible book took place at a time when social media, particularly Twitter, was in its infancy in Yemen; news disseminated through local newspapers, with either their own websites or dedicated pages on Facebook. In consequence, it was difficult to follow events in real time from distant Hadhramaut. Knights' book uses first-hand accounts, particularly from privileged Emirati military commanders, to produce the fullest narrative of these events.

BYS readers will find plenty to engage with as Knights even records an Emirati commander name-checking Harold Ingrams on his reading list. The listing of various subtribes of the Manahil and Humum tribes demonstrates the depth of engagement the Emiratis developed. Other nice touches include the detail of the geology of the rock formations and archaeology around Marib. This was the first

time I was aware of the existence in Yemen of 'desert kites' – ancient stone-wall structures to trap game – that are predominantly found in the Levant, Jordan specifically.

There are relatively few publications on Yemen that are as comprehensive as this book. Knights has taken a rigorous approach and seems to have interviewed almost all the participants in the operation on the Emirati and government of Yemen sides; the only part lacking is – for obvious reasons – the perspective and affidavits from the AQAP fighters.

Knights details how the Emiratis secured their rear base in Marib first before contemplating an assault on Mukalla. Early in the war, over fifty Emirati servicemen had lost their lives in a single Huthi missile attack on Marib. He shows how this devastating loss of life motivated the Emiratis to reassert national pride in their armed forces. The desire for success drove their intense preparation for the assault on Mukalla. Task Force 291 visited thirty-two villages belonging to members of the Humum tribe to secure local support to drive out AQAP. Good relations with local actors are not the only ingredient for success, as numerous examples from British involvement in Afghanistan can relate. In both Afghanistan and in Yemen, military units sought to engage with tribal leaders to understand the human terrain – the Emiratis, Knights assesses, were more successful in doing that. We can speculate that the lack of a shared language and political goal condemned foreign intervention in Afghanistan to defeat. Not so in Mukalla where many of the Emiratis participating in the operation could claim distant kinship and a common language and religion. Yemen and the UAE are neighbours separated by modern, imposed boundaries but, in reality, their 'backyards' are attached via the Empty Quarter.

There are a lot of tales of battle in here, of derring-do and bravery under fire. These passages certainly add flavour and a sense of dynamism to the account of how Task Force 291 took the entire coast of Hadhramaut. Stylistically some readers will take issue with that approach but personally I enjoyed it. This is very much a military history. Though it has enough for those in the BYS interested in contemporary Yemeni history it is primarily an account of the Emirati military involvement in their campaign in Yemen.

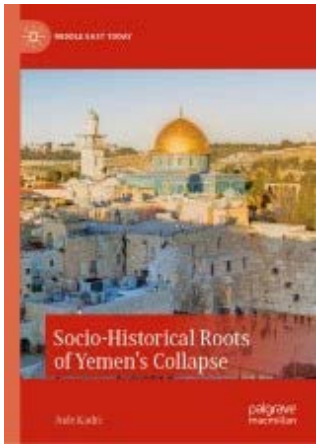
MARTIN JERRETT

Martin Jerett *is a member of the BYS Editorial Committee.*

Book reviews

Socio-Historical Roots of Yemen's Collapse

Jude Kadri



Palgrave MacMillan,
Springer Nature
Cham, Switzerland, 2023
pp. 280
ISSN 2945-7017, e-version
ISSN 2945-7025, index,
bibliographies by chapter

While a good Marxist analysis of the origins of the Yemeni crisis would be very welcome, this isn't it. According to its title, a reader might expect to read a volume focused on developments in Yemen in a chosen historical period and, given the fairly considerable amount of information available on its crisis, to find a reasonably accurate account of events in recent decades. Instead, this book is a brief and useful introduction to a range of modern Marxist approaches to world events where Yemen appears as a partial country case study, rather than an analysis of Yemen. Her arguments focus on the different Marxist approaches to the economy and international relations, concentrating on the development of poorer states, supporting the dependency theory of development. The last part focuses on the rise of China in competition with the US, using the issue of the former's Belt and Road Initiative and the latter's control of the Bab al-Mandab strait and the Red Sea as the prime example.

In the author's world view, Yemen features rightly within the Arab context, but its history is presented as one of many elements of regional events of the past half century, ranging from the Cold War up 1990 and the War on Terror in the current century. When discussing the Cold War, the author failed to separately discuss it in the extremely different contexts of the US-aligned Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the Soviet-aligned People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). More details on that period differentiating between the two states would have been very relevant in such a book given that, after all, the PDRY was the only Socialist-aligned state in the Arab world. In its earlier historical section, the author fails to use two of the major references written before that regime ended with the unification of the two states in 1990 under the new Republic of Yemen.

A multiplicity of errors suggests the author's lack of concern with details of Yemen. Some are more sig-

nificant than others: one of them is to refer to the two previous states as 'countries' rather than states [p. 47], a significant difference in Marxist analysis; both the Social Welfare Fund and the Cooperative and Agriculture Credit Bank (CACB) are misnamed [p. 138]; Yemen being 'neutral' at the UNSC vote in 1990 [p. 56]; equating the Islah party with Wahhabism [p. 58, among others]; calling the 1980s Yemen's 'oil decade' [p. 132]; describing the Abraham accords as 'peace agreements' [p. 150]; and more. The liberal use of the word 'famine' to describe Yemen's humanitarian crisis is both technically incorrect and demeaning at a time when a real, live famine is being perpetrated in Gaza as one strategy of the Israeli genocide. There is no doubt that Yemenis are suffering a deep and lasting hunger crisis, but it should not be mis-labelled. On reading the description of Saudi military involvement in the current war, uninformed readers would be led to believe that large numbers of Saudi troops are actively involved on the ground in Yemen [p. 173].

The discussion about dependency in the development sector addresses Yemen as a single entity failing to distinguish between the policies of the YAR and PDRY, or going into any details of the changes in economic circumstances brought about by unification. It does not address the fact that development policies had a very different impact on the living conditions of Yemenis as a result of the two states' strategies connected with their respective international alignment. Although the word 'class' appears very frequently, there is no discussion of Yemen's social structure in relation to the concept of class in Marxist approaches.

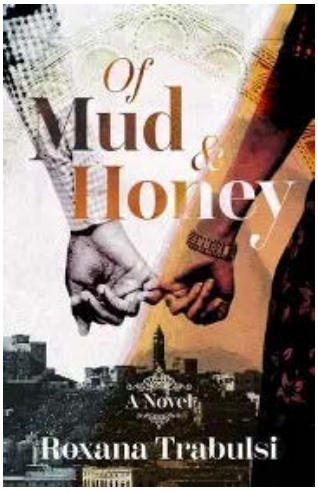
The twists and turns of the analysis lead the author to conclude that the Huthi movement is anti-imperialist and a successor to the earlier Arab 'socialist' regimes, i.e. Egypt and Syria which are presented as anti-imperialist simply because of their international alliances, regardless of their domestic policies. Shi'a Iran, merely by its opposition to Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia due to sectarian difference, is transformed into an anti-imperialist force, leading to the conclusion that 'the Iran-backed Houthis have formed a de facto state in North Yemen (alongside Saleh's party – the GPC) to represent Yemen's anti-imperialist interest, but they are disadvantaged by their Shiia [sic] identity' [p. 191]. She does, however, go on to admit that 'divisions based on identities harm the unity of the workers' – certainly a relevant point. Nonetheless, the concept of 'worker' in the context of the GCC states deserves discussion, as the majority of people normally associated with this description are migrant workers without any rights; this is not discussed in this book.

The end of the book is devoted to addressing the role of China in the Bab al-Mandab strait and the threat it presents to US imperialism in that region. Here again, the overall theme only barely mentions Yemen or the role of the various states and forces competing for its control.

HELEN LACKNER

Helen Lackner *has been involved in Yemen for more than half a century and her two recent books are Yemen in Crisis: Devastating Conflict, Fragile Hope ((Saqi, 2023) and Yemen, Poverty and Conflict (Routledge, 2023).*

Of Mud & Honey
Roxana Trabulsi



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Waukesha, Wisconsin, 2023
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Kindle and audio editions.
pp. 315
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20 Chapters. Epilogue.
ISBN 9781645384557

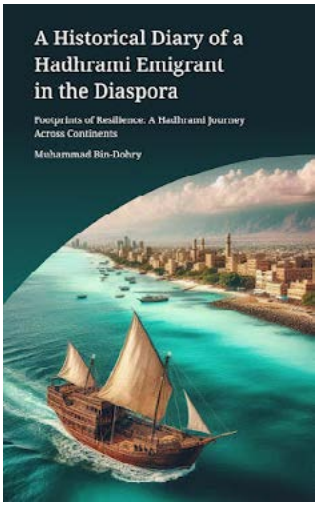
In 1971 the government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), as part of a wider nationalisation programme, inspired the takeover of businesses in the name of the people and socialism. Among those affected was a well-known trading concern in Aden set up by its Parsi owners – Roxana Trabulsi's family – and being one of the very few that decided to continue trading after the end of British control in 1967, when perhaps as many as 100,000 people left Aden. The city, first administered from British India, became a Crown Colony in 1937 at a time when India was widely expected to gain independence before too long. Roxana Trabulsi has based her award-winning novel on the experiences of her parents as they related them to her many years later. I was at the British Embassy in Aden in 1971 and remember how the family business was taken over by its employees in what was called a popular uprising but was ordered by figures within the PDRY ruling party. Members of the family were at times held in jail or confined to their homes, and at others, cut off from communication with each other. The author skillfully reveals to readers the atmosphere at the time: the ideological differences driving some political leaders into seemingly callous actions whilst other politicians took a more humanitarian and pragmatic view. – showing how the shifting balance between them impacted the family. This all took place in what seemed to me in 1971 an atmosphere of fear caused by the cross-border attacks of the regime's rivals in exile and enemies in neighbouring states, exacerbated by sometimes violent rivalries among the PDRY leadership. I do not want to spoil the plot by revealing too much of what happened but the book shows the importance of never giving up hope in the face of what might seem to be the most intractable difficulties. Anyone who is interested in learning more about Aden at the time will find much of interest. For others, it is a readable, compelling, and well-narrated story.

NOEL BREHONY

Noel Brehony *is an Honorary Vice President and editor of the British Yemeni Society journal.*

A Historical Diary of a Hadhrami Emigrant in the Diaspora. Footprints of Resilience: A Hadhrami Journey Across Continents

Muhammad Bin-Dohry



Published by Amazon
Paperback £8.15. Kindle £2
pp. 181
Forward. Acknowledgment. Appendices. Illustrations.
ISBN 9798343246407

A long-time member of the BYS and erstwhile committee member, Muhammad Bin-Dohry has published an account of his upbringing in Kenya and his path back to his ancestral home in Hadhramaut.

This is a story about roots and movement. It seems appropriate that a quarter of the book is about the author's father and his exodus from Yemen to start a new life in Kenya in the wake of the devastating famine in Hadhramaut during the 1940s. From his trade as a simple carpenter, his father rose up to become the owner of a large business supplying timber and furniture to schools and businesses across Kenya (and into Tanzania and Uganda). It adds detail to the stories of similarly successful Hadhrami emigrants of that period who, like Bin-Dohry, were forced to seek a new life elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa or South-east Asia. As his father grew in wealth his social status also rose and by the 1960s he found himself heading Hadhrami and Arab societies in post-colonial Kenya providing support to the anti-colonial forces in South Arabia. This period comes alive with family photographs showing Hadhramis in the diaspora welcoming revolutionaries such as Muhammad ʿAli Haytham, Muhammad ʿAli Ahmad, and ʿAli Salim al-Beidh.

As for Muhammad Bin-Dohry himself, he was a young witness to these social and political meetings and this gave him a continual point of contact with his distant homeland. The memoir is a series of episodes and through these the reader is given a sense of his longing as a nomad in East Africa and Saudi Arabia (where he worked in the British Embassy) and Europe (where he worked for a time in the Saudi embassy in London). These meanderings always led, figuratively, back to Hadhramaut, the place that gave him a sense of home. The book describes some of Muhammad's work with the education sector in Hadhramaut, where he continues his father's legacy of charitable work. Muhammad was instrumental in creating the Hadhramaut Research Centre with the late Professor ʿAbdulla Bujra.

One small criticism of the book is that it could have been shorter by editing down some of the appendices, which would make the book feel more focused. Older BYS members will enjoy reading of Muhammad's interactions with John Shipman when both worked in the embassy in Jeddah. There is a wonderful description of their first meeting when John was able to speculate on the Bin-Dohry family geography in Hadhramaut, all of which was new information to Muhammad.

MARTIN JERRETT

Martin Jerett *is a member of of the British Yemeni Society committee.*

Unfinished War – A Journey through Civil War in Yemen

Asmaa Waguih



Helion & Company
Warwick, 2024
Paperback. £25
pp. 138
1 colour map.
156 colour photos.
10 chapters.
ISBN 9781804515860

Asmaa Waguih is an Egyptian photojournalist, who began covering the civil war in Yemen from 2016. The book begins with a simple map of the territory held by various factions in 2022, followed by an outline of events leading up to and into the conflict, beginning in 1990. The meat of the book is the ten chapters which follow. As the spread of these chapters show, she has covered the conflict from all sides, across most of the country (although not al-Mahra, al-Jawf or Saʿada, while Abyan gets short shrift.) Each chapter starts with an introductory overview, followed by numerous photographs.

While billed as a journal of the civil war, this book is less about the fighting, and more about what happens in the shadow of the conflict – before, behind, and after engagements. Being less headline grabbing, her subjects are rarely photographed and even more rarely published. There are many photographs of armed men, often administrating themselves before or after fighting; there are a few pictures of casualties – both military and civilian – and many of the detritus of war; and in a mildly surreal contrast, photographs from Hadhramaut with an almost touristic feel.

This is not a detailed survey of the conflict, either textually or photographically. Those hoping for close-up photographs of unusual weapons, or action-packed pictures will be disappointed. Those wishing to have a better understanding of the traumas that civil war inflicts on individuals and on society will come away sadder but wiser.

JAMES SPENCER

James Spencer *is a member of the BYS committee.*

Professor Abdalla Said Bujra al-Nahdi (1938-2025)



Abdalla Bujra (Courtesy of Muhammad bin-Dohry)

Professor Abdalla Said Bujra al-Nahdi was a distinguished African social scientist whose scholarship and leadership significantly shaped intellectual and political discourse across Africa. Among members of the BYS, he is best remembered as the author of his landmark book *The Politics of Stratification: A Study of Political Change in a South Arabian Town* (Clarendon Press, 1971). This seminal work, rooted in his PhD research conducted at SOAS through fieldwork in Hurayda in Hadhramaut, exemplified his deep commitment to his Yemeni heritage and his profound academic rigour.

As a trailblazer in development policy, Prof. Bujra was the founding Executive Director of the Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF), a pan-African institution based in Nairobi, Kenya, and affiliated with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He was a member of the Organisation of African Union (OAU)'s Panel of Eminent Africans, a select group of leaders providing strategic advice to the OAU, and he chaired the African Centre for Economic Growth (ACEG).

From 1998 to 2000, Prof. Bujra served as CEO of the International Panel of Eminent Personalities (IPEP), appointed by the Organization of African Unity to investigate the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Under his stewardship, the panel produced a comprehensive report presented to the OAU Heads of State Summit. Earlier, he was Executive Secretary of Management of Science and Technology for Development in Africa (MANSCI) and contributed his expertise to the UNDP's African Futures project in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, focusing on sociology and human resource development.

As a co-founder and the first full-time Executive Secretary of the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in Dakar, Senegal, Professor Bujra launched the influential journal Africa Development and oversaw the publication of numerous important works. In recognition of his exceptional contributions, he received the CODESRIA Distinguished African Social Scientist Award.

Prof. Bujra's visionary leadership and enduring dedication to Africa and his Yemeni roots left an indelible mark on scholars, policymakers, and future generations alike. He remained deeply engaged with his homeland in later years. In 2013, alongside Muhammad Bin-Dohry and in collaboration with al-Ahgaaf University in Mukalla, he co-founded the Hadhramaut Research Centre (HRC), promoting scholarship on Hadhramaut's history, identity, and diaspora. The Centre's inaugural international conference, "Rediscovering Hadhramaut: Paradigms of Research," took place at SOAS in London in 2015, resulting in the publication of *Hadhramaut and its Diaspora: Yemeni Politics, Identity and Migration* (I.B. Tauris, 2017).

Beyond his professional achievements, Professor Bujra was known for his humility, warmth, and sharp intellect. Those who worked closely with him recall his insistence on accuracy and his good humour in the face of challenges. A cherished memory includes presenting him, at his home in Malindi, Kenya, in May 2023, with the Arabic translation of *The Politics of Stratification, a testament to his enduring legacy*.

Prof. Bujra is survived by his wife and two sons residing in Canada, as well as by brothers, a sister, cousins, and extended family across Malindi, Lamu, Mombasa, Yemen and beyond. The global Hadhrami community has lost a revered son whose contributions continue to resonate across Africa, Europe, and the world.

MUHAMMAD BIN-DOHRY

Muhammad bin-Dohry *co-founded the Hadhramaut Research Centre. His autobiography is reviewed in this journal.*

Gillian Vaudrey Chubb (1935-2022)



Gillian Vaudrey Chubb as a young woman (Courtesy of Michael Bernard)

Gillian Vaudrey Chubb, formerly of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in Aden, died in East Sussex at the age of eighty-seven on 5 July 2022. Her years in Aden remained the most influential period throughout her life.

Open, curious, and always ready with a smile, Vaudrey Chubb was born in Paget, Bermuda, to an adventurous mother who had travelled Europe on clandestine business for the FCO, and a stern, decorated artilleryman father. She would follow in her mother's footsteps. Joining the FCO in 1956, Vaudrey Chubb was first posted to Bahrain in 1958, there meeting her future husband and lifelong love, Peter Chubb, a passionate Arabist and then intelligence officer in the Trucial Oman Scouts. Both intelligent and social, she found her FCO work stimulating – and took good advantage of its perks, turning her flight home from Bahrain into a solo jaunt through Kuwait, Isfahan, Beirut, Cyprus, Athens, and Rome before returning to London.

Soon engaged to Chubb, the couple had only a short time in England before he was posted by the Colonial Office in September 1962 to work at al-Ittihad's Aden Intelligence Committee under Hillary Colville-Stewart. Luckily for Vaudrey Chubb, she had not been forgotten; in June, an FCO official known to them from Bahrain, asked if she would work as his private secretary. She agreed, and from late 1962 to July 1967, in between two pregnancies and accordingly long leave, Vaudrey Chubb would take on work much in the same vein, employed, as she put it, as "cheap labour" – but, rather usefully, with FCO clearances.

She and her husband were in the thick of the efforts to combat Egyptian subversion and support for the National Liberation Front (and Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen) in South Arabia. "I never did anything clandestine like my mother [...] I was a cog. And cogs, although small, can often see the whole picture: I was working on Egypt." Much of her work was seemingly pedestrian but she saw at first hand the active efforts in Operation Rancour to counter Egyptian operations in Aden and the protectorates.

By July 1967, however, the game was up for Britain in Aden, and Vaudrey Chubb was forced, reluctantly, to leave, and the family settled in East Sussex where she retrained to teach English and Latin. In 2013, after fifty years of marriage, she was widowed. In her latter years, undaunted by increasing infirmity, she would retain her gregarious, intellectually curious nature. She is survived by her two children, Francis and Catherine, and four grandchildren, Christopher, Henry, Dominic, and Marina.

MARTIN JERRETT

Paddy Coulter
(1946-2024)



Paddy Coulter

Paddy Coulter, a trustee of the British Yemeni Society and a long-term friend of Yemen, campaigned for an honest portrayal of peoples' lives in the world's poorest countries and of the challenges they face, and for giving them their own voice.

Conflict and famine are seldom now out of the news headlines, with this year Gaza and Ukraine pushing Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Myanmar off the front pages. We have just passed the fortieth anniversary of the Ethiopian Famine of the 1980s in countering which Paddy played a central role, initially in drawing the attention of the world to the unfolding disaster, and later in standing up against the portrayal of Africa and Africans in the western media. This was but one case where Paddy's input was truly game-changing, in a life marked by extraordinary commitment, deep humanity, clear sightedness, and his unique ebullient character.

Paddy's strong moral sense, derived perhaps from his Presbyterian father and Quaker mother, was reinforced by the radical post-colonial thinkers of the 1960s and 1970s – Paolo Freire and Franz Fanon on the human consequences of colonialism, Fritz Schumacher on community-scale development, Ivan Illich and David Werner on health for all, and Edward Said on cultural misrepresentation. Paddy's long and varied career began with programmes in Ethiopia and Yemen, and later headed Oxfam's communications before finally stepping out of the humanitarian NGO world with all its constraints. He moved to run the International Broadcasting Trust promoting documentaries highlighting environment issues and development, and then on again to direct the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism and as Chair of the Board of ARTICLE 19. Here he could actively promote and empower young journalists to tell their own stories, especially from where free speech was under threat.

It was Paddy who made the decisive contact with Michael Buerk and Mohammed Amin at the BBC in 1984, leading to their extraordinarily powerful television report exposing the famine conditions in northern Ethiopia: "a biblical famine, now in the twentieth century." This set off the largest ever popular fundraising effort with Band Aid, Live Aid, and later –again thanks largely to Paddy – Comic Relief. But Paddy had the courage to recognise that the spectacular, noisy success of these celebrity initiatives was leading to a larger but silent failure by portraying those caught up in the twin tragedies of conflict and drought as passive victims, to be 'saved' by western interventions. In 1989 Paddy wrote a seminal piece in the New Internationalist and in 1990 resigned as a founding Trustee of Comic Relief with the words "I for one would rather accept a smaller return for a more educated pound."

The aid agency world has always faced difficult and at times heart-rending choices. It has the business imperative to raise funds to sustain its operations, including its educational and awareness-raising role. But this can lead to both self-censorship and massive over-simplification. Dramatic images of 'starving babies' continue to be the most powerful way of raising money. The conflicts and weaponisation of food are downplayed or unmentioned. For over a century it has never been drought alone that leads to famine. Shortly before his death, Paddy was involved in the recent *Live Aid at 40* documentary and together we sought – not very successfully – to ensure the full story of the 1980s Ethiopian Famine came out. Forced resettlement was briefly covered, but the raging civil war and the major operations and calls for safe passage to bring supplies directly to the rural areas most affected went unmentioned.

Paddy also had a lifelong interest in Yemen. In 1971 he joined the Catholic Institute for International Relations, a source of anxiety to some in his Ulster Protestant family, first as a volunteer teacher in Ethiopia before moving with his wife, Angela, to Yemen in 1972 to set up one of the first NGO programmes that followed the opening of the country after (North) Yemen's civil war during the early days of the Republic. Yemen proved a challenging but rewarding location. Few Yemenis spoke English or had any experience of foreigners, and public services were minimal with, for example, only a handful of doctors in the country. Much later, Paddy provided invaluable media advice and contacts for the Yemen Safe Passage Group, set up in 2015 to lift the Saudi food blockade. He joined the British Yemeni Society Committee in 2023, but sadly his death cut short the events he was planning, including a talk by Egyptian photojournalist Asmaa Waguih that took place a couple of weeks after he died.

Through his experience in Yemen, Paddy became engaged with another vulnerable part of the Arab world – Palestine. Through the 1970s he worked closely with Ghada Karmi and Palestine Action – no link with the currently proscribed organisation – campaigning for a single inclusive democratic state, with the Palestinian right of return a dominant issue. In the 2010s Paddy joined the International Humanitarian Law Project in Oxford, highlighting Israel's systematic flouting of its legal obligations in the Occupied Territories. The two-state solution, now seen as more realistic, is belatedly garnering much-needed political support from the British government (although many would argue lacking the actions to make this a viable reality). Paddy would have enthusiastically approved but would have reflected sadly that it is the recent images of starving children in Gaza that have been most decisive in shifting the political dial, when decades of land occupation, diversion of water resources, physical destruction of villages, and most recently the targeting of Palestinian journalists have failed. Finally, though, in this case, the horrific weaponisation of food aid has finally attracted world-wide media attention.

JAMES FIREBRACE

James Firebrace *is an Honorary Vice President and former Chair of the British Yemeni Society.*

Werner Daum
(1943-2025)



Werner Daum. Photo By Roman Deckert,2000 is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

I first met Werner Daum in 1980s Munich, where I lived with my husband, Gerhard Behrens. At that time, Werner, the diplomat who had become an expert on Yemen, was working on the memorable Yemen exhibition, which was a huge success.

During his time in Yemen, Werner acquired a remarkable collection of Yemeni traditional jewellery; I was myself interested in traditional jewellery of the Arab world and had a collection from Egypt and other Arab countries, which was modest in comparison to his. When Werner decided to donate his collection to the Museum für Völkerkunde ("Museum of Ethnography"), now the Museum Fünf Kontinente ("Five Continents Museum"), in Munich, the museum director asked me to assess it. It was quite an experience to see this amazing and dazzling collection which was beyond my expectations and anything I knew about Arab traditional jewellery. Werner told me that he used to travel extensively in the villages in search of collectible items. He acquired masterpieces in complete sets in pristine condition. He was later very disappointed by the way the museum treated the collection, disregarding their agreement to consult him whenever items were exhibited or published. I had great sympathy for his concerns.

After we moved to London in 2000, we met him again as a diplomat in this country; after he returned to Germany he would get in touch when he visited London. We were always impressed by his unique, unconventional and undiplomatic way of expressing his political views – and acting accordingly – although his views were not always in alignment with the official German positions, for which he had to pay a price but willingly dealt with the consequences. Because of his strong beliefs and straightforwardness, he could be undiplomatic in his social environment, as well. My husband and I thought this was part of his charm and originality and we held him in high esteem. He was erudite; his scholarly interests in the arts and culture of the Arab world led to many encounters in lectures and other academic events, and sometimes he consulted me about objects of his interest. His curiosity and interest in other cultures were not confined to the Arab world; after his death, I learned that he was as passionately interested in Albania, where he had been stationed as diplomat. What a character! He surely leaves a big void. I will miss him.

DORIS BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF

Editor's note

Professor Dr. Werner Daum who was a former Deputy Head of Mission at the German embassy in San a'a, and, subsequently, *Chargé d'Affaires en pied* in Aden, was well known to readers of this journal and particularly to its editors. As Professor Doris Behrens-Abouseif mentions, part of his charm was his honest, straightforward, and often undiplomatic comments to the editors. When we did something right, he praised us; when he thought we or our contributors had erred, he would also let us know with advice on how to do better. It was always exhilarating, and his motives were to help make Yemeni arts and culture better understood. In an email sent to me on his current research on Yemen in January 2025 he wrote:
"I concentrate on those very few subjects, where I have material that is not available anywhere, realities that nobody has consciously seen, i.e. notes concerning anthropologically observed rituals and customs of a religious (non-Islamic) nature, that I have witnessed, but that have since died out. They allow not only a glimpse into the intellectual world of the Yemeni people, as it has been for the last several thousand years, but, taken together, make the reconstruction of their ancient (popular) religion and world-view possible. I have almost completed the reconstruction of the pre-Islamic religion of Yemen, as observed from such rituals that have survived to more or less the present day (more precisely: until a generation or so ago). Nobody else could do this research, even if there was no war, and generous funding available."

Professor Doris Behrens-Abouseif *is Research Professor at SOAS, (Professor Emerita), specialised in Islamic art and culture in Egypt and Syria.*

Professor Dr. Waheeba Farea: Pioneer for Yemeni Women and Champion of Human Rights (1956-2024)



Waheeba Farea (Courtesy of Hamdan Dammag)

Prof. Dr. Waheeba Farea, a pioneering advocate for women's rights and a distinguished academic, passed away in Cairo on 24 January 2024. Her death marks the loss of one of Yemen's most influential female leaders, whose life and career embodied courage, intellect, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Born in Ta'izz in 1956, at a time when opportunities for Yemeni women in public life were virtually non-existent, Waheeba Farea rose to prominence as an educator, reformer, and champion of human rights. She earned her doctorate in education and educational planning from Ain Shams University in Cairo in 1987, one of the few Yemeni women of her generation to achieve such academic distinction.

She served as Yemen's Minister of State for Human Rights from 2000 to 2003, becoming the first Yemeni woman (and one of very few in the Arab world) to hold such a position. In office, she worked tirelessly to promote justice, dignity, and the protection of human rights for all Yemenis, inspired by the vision of her late colleague, Professor 'Abdulaziz al-Saqqaf. Despite considerable challenges in a political environment resistant to reform, she remained steadfast to her principles and dedicated to raising awareness of human rights across society.

Her achievements extended far beyond her ministerial tenure. In 1996, she founded Queen Arwa University in Sana'a (Yemen's first private university) and served as Chair of the Board of Trustees and Rector. Through her leadership, she championed access to education, particularly for women and girls, believing that the path to a more just Yemen began in the classroom. She inspired generations of young Yemenis to dream beyond traditional boundaries and contribute meaningfully to their society.

From 2006 to 2011, she headed Yemen's National Institute of Administrative Sciences, where she focused on building the capacity of public servants and improving administrative efficiency. She also published extensively on education, administration, and women's empowerment, with notable works including *Girl's Education in Yemen: Between Reluctance and Equal Opportunities (1983), Working Children in Yemen* (1997), and *Women's Socio-economic Participation in Yemen* (1999). Her scholarship reflected her lifelong commitment to inclusive development and social justice.

During Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (2013-2014), she led an academic initiative to support the dialogue process, contributing research papers on state-building and governance. She believed strongly that the conference outcomes offered Yemen a roadmap to stability and prosperity. The subsequent collapse of these agreements, and the country's descent into conflict and civil war, deeply saddened her. Forced into exile in 2015, she never returned to Yemen, her final years marked by grief at her homeland's suffering.

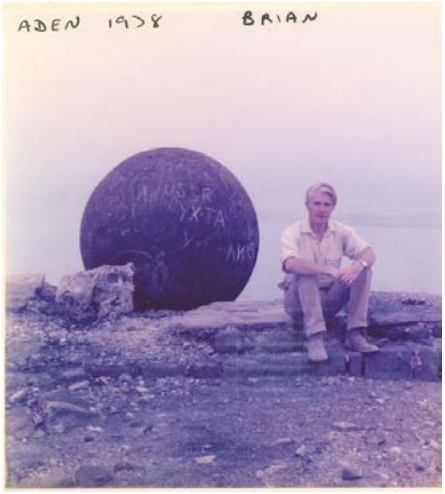
Even in exile, despite illness and depression, she continued to advocate for reconciliation among Yemenis torn apart by war, holding fast to the national spirit and values she had championed throughout her life.

Waheeba Farea will be remembered as a wise leader, a principled politician, and a tireless advocate for human rights and education. She exemplified the strength and vision that Yemeni society so urgently needs, demonstrating that women are not only capable of leadership – they are indispensable to it. Her legacy lives on in the countless lives she touched, in her writings, and in the example she set for future generations.

HOORIA MASHOUR

Hooria Mashour *is a former Minister of Human Rights and Co-founder of the National Peace Movement.*

Colonel Brian Musson Lees LVO OBE
(1931–2023)



Brian Lees on Shamsan in Aden, 1978. (Courtesy of Thanos Petouris)

Brian Lees, a longstanding member of this Society and committed friend of Yemen, died in London on 12 June 2023 at the age of ninety-one. After joining the British Army he experienced first-hand some of the fiercest conflicts Britain fought in the era of decolonisation in Kenya, Cyprus, and South Arabia before becoming British Defence Attaché in Saudi Arabia (1975-79 and also accredited to the then-Yemen Arab Republic, and Defence Attaché in Oman (1984-87) following a stint as Head of Defence Intelligence at the British Embassy in Washington (1982-84). In this latter position, he played a significant role in Anglo-American relations, particularly during the Falklands campaign.

Brian's first contact with Arabia came in September 1955 after his battalion was sent temporarily to Aden from Kenya to deal with a mutiny within the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL). Instead of the expected six days, he and his comrades spent six months in Aden and al-Dhali in the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP). A second opportunity to return to South Arabia appeared just as the Army took command of the APL from the Royal Air Force (RAF'). Brian was first sent to London to study Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), a skill that would serve him for the rest of his life. At SOAS he received one-to-one instruction in Adeni Arabic from Professor R. B. Serjeant.

As Brian got back to al-Dhali' in April 1958, he took charge of an APL company in a battalion made up mostly of Yafa'i tribesmen. It had three platoon commanders: one each from the Yafa', 'Awlaqi, and 'Awdhali. He remembered the APL as a very disciplined force, being composed of tribesmen who considered it honourable to be part of it, and as a light infantry unit that could quickly cover considerable distances in the rugged south Arabian terrain.

Securing the porous border between Northern Yemen and the Protectorates of South Arabia, his APL battalion garrisoned Jabal Jihaf above the town of al-Dhali', moving later to a camp in the border village of Mukayras, in the 'Awdhali Sultanate. Mukayras is located near the town of al-Bayda, from where northern Yemeni tribesmen, with the support of Yemen's authorities, raided the 'Awdhali side trying to cause instability and foster resentment against the colonial authorities. It was during his time in Mukayras that he was ambushed and came under heavy fire by local tribesmen as he returned to camp one night. The local British Political Officer, George White, concluded that this had been set up by the Na'ib, Jabil b. Husayn OBE, who had been asking the British for extra arms and ammunition to deal with the alleged perpetrators. A characteristic lesson in local politics; "the local rulers seemed to want to keep the British busy," he used to say.[1]

He moved with his battalion to 'Ataq, capital of the Upper 'Awlaqi Shaykhdom, where his detachment would come under fire every evening at eight o'clock! He then moved north to Bayhan, where the Sharif Husayn b. Ahmad al-Habili CMG OBE and his brother Sharif 'Abdallah were better at controlling the tribes, but had also to contend with regular incursions by Yemeni tribesmen from Harib. Wanting to teach them a lesson, Brian drew up a plan together with the locally recruited Bayhani Tribal Guards. The night of the ambush, nobody came across from Yemen. Repeating the operation in secrecy, the operation developed into a full-blown battle, with the RAF nonetheless bombing closer to the British than the Yemeni side!

Although Brian had to return to the UK to attend Staff College, get married, and promote his career, his life remained inextricably linked to Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula. And he passed his love for this part of the world to his wife, Caroline, an accomplished painter, who accompanied him in his various future postings and whose pictures of all parts of Yemen adorn many a home, including those of members of this Society.

During one of his visits to Yemen as non-resident Defence Attaché, he was to dine with Major General Ahmad al-Ghashmi (1935-1978) who became president after the assassination of President Ibrahim al-Hamdi. On 24 June 1978 al-Ghashmi received a southern Yemeni envoy in his office whose briefcase exploded killing them both.[2] Brian's assistant Tom

[1] *Interview by the author; London, 02.09.2016.*
[2] *see: Noel Brehony, Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011): 97.*

Walcot was waiting to be received by the president in the room below and was taken to safety. A curt phone-call Brian subsequently received that day – "the Yemeni president has been assassinated, and your assistant is involved" – did not help to put him at ease![3]

His only visit to the socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen was in 1978 with the task of photographing the Soviet fleet and its facilities in the port of Aden – especially submarines.

As Defence Attaché in Muscat, he once again got involved in Yemeni affairs by supporting the evacuation of Russian families from the beach in Khormaksar to the Royal Yacht Britannia just as the South Yemeni capital descended into the fratricidal civil war of January 1986. Brian himself would summarise his participation in the various military ventures of the British Empire as "putting fingers in the holes of the Imperial dyke."[4]

Even so, Saudi Arabia will always be the country whose history, politics, and complex social and tribal fabric Brian understood with expert insight. Right after relinquishing his post in Jeddah, he published the inimitable A Handbook of the Al Sa'ud Ruling Family of Saudi Arabia (Royal Genealogies, London 1980). For succeeding "in establishing an unique rapport with the Saudi Arabian authorities – he has overcome prejudice and broken through bureaucracy [...] the military understanding between our two countries has never stood higher."[5] Brian earned an OBE in 1978. Shortly afterwards, he became a Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order (LVO), for his contribution to the historic visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Saudi Arabia, the first time a woman head of state had visited the Kingdom. In 1996 he was appointed Officer of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem.

A rounded man of many parts, Brian Lees was the epitome of the homo universalis. Besides his abiding interest in Arab history and politics, his interlocutor would find a person with a great sense of humour and a deep knowledge of opera, cricket, and Ancient Greece. Through his friendship with Leonard Ingrams (1941-2005), during the latter's time with the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency, Brian became a founding member of Garsington Opera when Ingrams held the first opera performances in 1989 in the garden of his home, Garsington Manor.

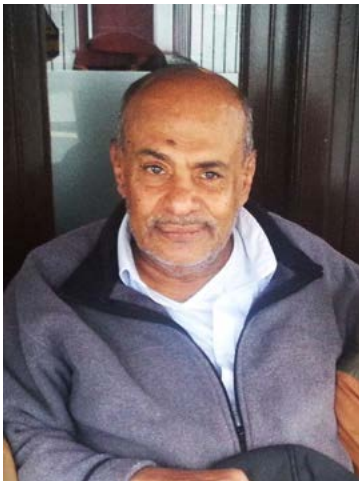
Brian Lees was fortunate to have indeed 'lived in interesting times,' to have seen the Arab world at a time of profound change, and to have experienced momentous historical events. He is survived by his wife Caroline, their two daughters and five grandchildren.

THANOS PETOURIS

[3] *Interview with the author; London, 02.09.2016.*
[4] *Interview with the author; London, 02.09.2016*
[5] *The National Archives, WO Recommendation for Award for Less, Brian Musson Rank: Lieutenant Colonel, 8 August 1977, WO/373/176/479.*

Thanos Petouris *is a former editor of the BYS Journal.*

Ahmed Massoud: An Extraordinary Yemeni Life in Britain (1942-2023)



Ahmed Massoud (Courtesy of Hamdan Dammag)

Ahmed Massoud, the politician and businessman affectionately known as Abu ʻAwad, was an extraordinary man in every sense; the kind of figure one might expect to encounter in novels but rarely in real life. That rare quality made his presence so enduring in the memory of all who knew him.

Born in Aden on 2 April 1942, Massoud was the son of ʻAwad Massoud of al-Wahat village in Lahej and Saʻida of the al-Sayʻar tribe in Hadhramaut. At the age of three, his father emigrated with the family to Tanzania, settling in Dar es Salaam. There, ʻAwad ran a poultry farm in the coastal suburb of Mbweni, a place that drew both local and migrant investors, especially Yemenis.

Ahmed grew up in this environment, which shaped his character and sharpened his entrepreneurial instincts. As a schoolboy in Dar es Salaam he showed an early talent for business. With his father's support, he established a small petrol station that flourished during a nationwide fuel crisis, as he was among the few able to secure imports from abroad.

In the 1970s, Massoud returned to Aden, where he quickly emerged as one of the city's most ambitious businessmen. His relationship with President Salim Rubaya Ali ("Salmeen"), who had begun to encourage economic openness, proved decisive. At Salmeen's request, Massoud helped to plan a tobacco factory, co-founding with entrepreneur Saleh Salim Bathawab the National Tobacco and Matches Company, which produced the popular Radfan and Pall Mall brands. Salmeen also dispatched him to Sanaʻa to meet President Ibrahim al-Hamdi, then in the process of establishing North Yemen's tobacco company, later known as Kamran.

The decision of the government in South Yemen to nationalise industries led to the confiscation of Massoud's investments, forcing him to leave the country. He settled in London, where he embarked on a career in real estate while completing a PhD in Economics at the University of London.

Yet Massoud's influence in Britain extended well beyond commerce. He became a central figure within the Yemeni diaspora, maintaining close ties with key Yemeni decision-makers who sought his candid, sometimes disarmingly blunt, counsel.

I came to know him personally during my doctoral studies in London in the early 2000s, when I would attend the Saturday *maqīl* he hosted in one of his unlet flats in Paddington. These weekly gatherings were far more than afternoons of chewing *qat*: they were genuine salons, where academics, graduate students, journalists, and politicians from Yemen and across the Arab world met to exchange ideas. At that time, *qat* was still legal in Britain, before Theresa May's ban reclassified it as a narcotic in 2014.

Massoud was renowned for his generosity. He hosted dinners for students before the *maqīl*, assisted members of the Yemeni community, helped with paperwork, paid off debts, and provided interest-free loans. He also played a role in facilitating the purchase of the Yemeni embassy building in London, which still stands today. For years, almost daily, he extended spontaneous hospitality, inviting friends, neighbours, and even strangers he met on Edgware Road to dine and drink with him at The Heron, a nearby bar and restaurant. He always insisted on paying the bill himself, a gesture that became, over time, both his signature and his joy, regardless of the wealth or status of those at his table.

At the Saturday *maqīl*, it was common to find prominent Yemeni personalities visiting Britain for medical treatment, business, or official duties. The

conversations flowed across history, politics, art, and economics, and Massoud always made a point of keeping the furnishings very humble, the setting deliberately austere. He treated all guests and friends alike, whether ministers or students, and enforced his rules, most notably a ban on smoking indoors. This was unusual at the time, as smoking was still permitted in the UK. For visitors from Yemen, accustomed to smoking freely in *maqīls*, the rule came as a shock. Many tried to ignore or resist it, but his firm insistence always prevailed. As younger students, we sometimes felt embarrassed during these confrontations, yet we came to admire the principle behind his resolve.

Massoud was widely read, thoughtful, and articulate, yet never pretentious. These qualities were not always apparent at first glance but became clear upon knowing him more closely. He was active in the Conservative Party, with many friends among Members of Parliament, and openly dismissive of Labour, an unusual stance among Yemenis in Britain that earned him the teasing nickname 'Lord Ahmed'. Despite his openness to discussing sensitive issues, he became uncompromising when it came to Mahatma Gandhi and Gamal Abdel Nasser, figures he revered beyond criticism, to the exasperation and amusement of his guests.

Despite his wealth and legendary generosity, Massoud chose to live with deliberate simplicity. His modest dress, food, and home only deepened the respect and affection of those around him.

In his later years, as his health declined, his public presence faded. The man who had once been at the centre of so many gatherings gradually withdrew from social life. He passed away on 28 October 2024 at St. Mary's Hospital in London. He will be remembered for his achievements, but above all for his warmth, generosity, and humanity; qualities that bound him to both Yemen and Britain and made him unforgettable.

HAMDAN DAMMAG

Hamdan Dammag *is a trustee of the BYS, a researcher, prize-winning novelist and peace advocate. He is currently Vice Chair of the Liverpool Arab Arts Festival.*

Sultan al-Suraimi A Biography Through Three Songs (1948-2024)



Sultan al-Suraima (Courtesy of Mohammed Abdulwahab Al- Shaibani)

When he migrated as a ten-year-old boy, the Yemeni poet Sultan al-Suraimi could already sense the stark contrast between the homeland he left – suffocating under the isolationist Imamate – and the country he settled in across the Red Sea, Djibouti, then still a French colony. This early experience shaped his worldview and his enduring commitment to modernisation and change.

Like thousands of Yemenis fleeing the tyranny of a theocratic regime that impoverished and silenced its people, al-Suraimi followed his father into exile. His father ran a small shop in Djibouti, a city where French, Arabic, and Afar intertwined in daily life.

This migration left a deep mark on him, inspiring one of his most memorable works more than a decade later. His poem "Masoud Migrated", first performed in Hudayda in 1972, became an anthem for rural Yemeni women left behind by husbands forced into exile. Many never returned, leaving wives in bitter solitude. The song gave voice to their grief: a wife lamenting Masoud's absence to her mother-in-law.

Born in Ta'izz in 1948, al-Suraimi spent only a few years in Djibouti before returning with his father to Aden, then a bustling port city. Like many children from the countryside, he worked – delivering groceries – while attending school.

When the September 1962 Revolution broke out, he joined the National Guard in Ta'izz, a volunteer force defending the fledgling republic from monarchist forces. This revolutionary spirit – and the conspiracies mounted against it – were later immortalised in his long poem "Alphabet of the Sea and Revolution", adapted into an operetta performed in Aden in the mid-1980s by the Al-Ṭarīq troupe, under composer Hamid al-Basri, with singers Shawqiya al-'Attar and Najib Saeed Thabet. The work blended love, resilience, and exile – a uniquely Yemeni mix of passion, rebellion, and sorrow.

Like many of his generation, he was inspired by Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, joining the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, but later gravitated toward Marxism. In 1973, he co-founded the Popular Vanguard Party (al-Tali'a) in North Yemen at a time of deep economic and political crises. When the northern government renewed the controversial 1934 Taif Agreement with Saudi Arabia – extending Saudi control over Asir and Najran – he voiced nationalist outrage in his celebrated poem "Nashwan", later set to music by Mohammad Murshid Naji.

Al-Suraimi's humble origins, rooted in a farming family, instilled in him a deep affinity for the land and its people. Many of his most enduring songs, performed by 'Abdul Basit 'Absi, celebrated the dignity and struggles of Yemen's rural poor. Their decades-long collaboration produced some of the richest and most popular songs in modern Yemeni music.

His professional life was equally distinguished. In 1990, he was elected Secretary-General of the Yemeni Writers Union, underscoring his stature among Yemen's cultural elite. He resigned in 1992, then turned to public service, winning a seat in Parliament in 1993, representing his home district in Ta'izz. He served until 1997, championing cultural and social causes.

In 2000, he became Editor-in-Chief of *al-Thawri*, the Yemeni Socialist Party's newspaper, while also serving on its political bureau. Earlier, he had founded the Canary Center for Cultural Studies and Consultancy, which launched *Durūb*, a journal dedicated to literature and folk heritage.

Academically, he excelled as well: travelling to Russia, he earned a Master's in Folk Literature in 1985, followed by a PhD in the Philosophy of Social Sciences in Moscow in 1990. His diplomatic service began in 2012, when he was appointed Media Advisor at the Yemeni Embassy in Cairo, a post he held until 2017.

The final years of his life, from 2017 until his death in late 2024, were spent in Sana'a, where he continued to write despite serious health challenges.

Al-Suraimi leaves behind a profound literary and cultural legacy, with several poetry collections including *Rhythmic Sorrows, Alphabet of the Sea and Revolution, and Nashwan and the Sorrows of the Sun*. He also authored essays and studies on women's issues and folk heritage, cementing his place as one of Yemen's foremost cultural figures.

He will be remembered as a poet of the people, a principled intellectual, and a tireless advocate for Yemen's soul and identity.

MOHAMMED ABDULWAHAB AL- SHAIBANI

Mohammed Abdulwahab Al- Shaibani *is a well known writer and poet.*



Taʿizz suq (1995 © Jane Taylor)



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