

**The London School of Economics and Political Science**

**Citizen Revolt for a Modern State:**

Yemen's Revolutionary Moment, Collective Memory  
and Contentious Politics *sur la longue durée*

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A thesis submitted to the Department of International  
History of the London School of Economics for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, London, 2015

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## ABSTRACT

2011 became a year of revolt for the Middle East and North Africa as a series of popular uprisings toppled veteran strongmen that had ruled the region for decades. The contentious mobilisations not only repudiated orthodox explanations for the resilience of Arab autocracy, but radically asserted the 'political imaginary' of a sovereign and united citizenry, so vigorously encapsulated in the popular slogan *al-sha'b yurīd isqāt al-niẓām* (the people want to overthrow the system). In the Republic of Yemen, revolting citizens precipitated the resignation of perennial President 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ and demanded a fundamental reconfiguration of the prevailing social contract into a modern civil state (*al-dawla al-madanīya al-ḥadītha*). It is tempting to situate the root causes of these historic citizen revolts in the political inertia and moral bankruptcy of (neo)patrimonial Arab autocracies, their neoliberal economic policies, unemployment and social inequality, a youth bulge or new media technologies – all of which doubtlessly constituted crucial enabling factors.

For the historian, however, the story runs much deeper than such 'presentist' interpretations suggest. Adopting a dynamic, process-oriented approach, this doctoral dissertation examines *why* and *how* the revolutionary mobilisation in 2011 transpired in relation to Yemen's history of contentious politics. The narrative is built around the argument that the revolt was the result of three parallel, dynamic processes: the erratic and limited liberalisation process since Yemeni unification in 1990, the 'oligarchisation' of power since the 1994 war, and the 'politics of calculated chaos' – a paradoxical propensity of the Ṣāliḥ regime to foster disorder and dissent in order to position itself as the defender of republicanism and Yemeni unity. When regime changes in North Africa precipitated a shift in political opportunities, these processes culminated in the formation of a loose, temporary and heterogeneous opposition coalition that mounted a singular contentious challenge against the regime. Traditional powerbrokers, however, soon stifled this brief revolutionary moment as they politicised, co-opted and superseded the citizen movement.

Loosely inspired by the *histoire de la longue durée*, the thesis contextualises the emergence and trajectory of the Yemeni citizen revolt in the political economy imperatives, deep-seated regional divisions and collective memories of past regimes and revolutions, such as the pre-Islamic South Arabian kingdoms, the millennial Zaydī Imamates or the twin revolutions of the 1960s. It thereby reveals some striking historical parallels to earlier episodes of contention in terms of longstanding demands, ideas and repertoires, which continue to constitute frameworks of reference for contemporary contentious politics.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deep-felt gratitude to all those who have supported me with intellectual impulses, encouragement and friendship along the emotional rollercoaster ride of pursuing this doctoral project. First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Kirsten Schulze for her continuous mentorship, assistance and latitude throughout the process, during which she helped me organise the fragments of my research into a (hopefully) coherent narrative. If I have said something worth knowing about contentious politics in Yemen, it is largely owed to Iris Glosemeyer, Galāl al-Halālī, ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Iryānī, Gabūl al-Mutawakkil and Ḥasan Shuja al-Dīn. Other supporters include Rāfat al-Akḥālī, Amal al-Bāshā, Nadwa al-Dawsarī, ‘Abd al-Rashīd al-Faqīh, Khālīd Fattah, Marie-Christine Heinze, Philip Holzapfel, Bilqīs al-Lahabī, Maṣṣūr al-Madhḥajī, Muḥammad al-Maytamī, Fārī‘a al-Muslimī, the late Ibrāhīm Muthanā, Tim Petschulat, ‘Alā’ al-Qāsim, Maḥmūd Qayāh, Muḥammad al-Qubāṭī, the late Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Malik al-Mutawakkil and his children Inṭilāq, Raydān and Raḍīya, Jamīla ‘Alī Rajā, ‘Abd al-Wāsa’ al-Saqqāf, Fawwāz Ṭrābulsī, Aṭiyāf al-Wazīr and Anna Würth. In the course many discussions, they were so kind as to share their extensive knowledge with me, provide constructive feedback on my ideas or help me obtain access to documents and people. I am furthermore indebted to geographic information system (GIS) guru Martin Neussel for his technical support in creating the maps that accompany this thesis during many late night sessions. My profound gratitude moreover goes to Arwā Shamsān and Sawmār Almīr Maḥmūd, who have answered many linguistic questions that arose when navigating through Arabic sources. I also greatly appreciate the support of my life companion Asmara Achcar and my close friend Mehtab Dere, who were naturally held to the responsibility of last minute proofreading. Apart from showing remarkable endurance in coping with a frequently irritable and absent-minded partner, Asmara stood by my side and – far beyond what I could have expected – took much work off my shoulders so I could focus on completing my dissertation. I dedicate this work to our daughter Amália-Leila without whose wonderful presence the thesis would likely have been completed months earlier. I would furthermore like to thank my parents Maria and Walter, sister Katharina and parents-in-law Hanane and Paul for their unconditional support and encouragement in pursuing this project. I am moreover (figuratively) indebted to the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the LSE International History Department and the Emirates Foundation without whose generous financial support I would hardly have been able to

complete this dissertation. Last, but certainly not least, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the Yemenis – both the people mentioned above and those that have remained unnamed – which have warmly welcomed me in their country and homes. Their politicians and the world have failed them. I hope that they will attain the more dignified, just, civil and prosperous socio-political order that they aspire to and deserve.

### NOTE ON transliteration

Any researcher of the Arab world faces daunting challenges of transliteration, which leave uniformists in a perpetual state of frustration. This thesis relies on the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) system for Arabic transliteration with minor modifications. These adjustments include diacritics for all personal names (‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ), places (Ṣan‘ā’), as well as concepts, institutions, parties and organisations (*al-dawla al-madanīya*, *majlis al-shūrā* or *Iṣlāḥ*) in Yemen. The *nisba* ending is moreover rendered as *īya* rather than *īyya*. In some instances, for the sake of brevity, the latter are interchangeably referred to by their English acronyms (JMP for *aḥzāb al-liqā’ al-mushtarak*). Standard English names are used for Arab countries and cities outside of Yemen (Saudi Arabia instead of al-Sa‘ūdīya) to improve readability. The names of Arab authors of English publications are kept as found in the original, even though the vowels *e* and *o* technically do not exist in Arabic; however, they are properly transcribed if the original text is in Arabic. In the footnotes and bibliography, Arabic book, article and newspaper titles are transliterated and translated.

## INTRODUCTION

### Yemen's Revolt in Regional and Historical Perspective

2011 became a year of revolt for the Middle East and North Africa. Driven by their desire for *karāma* (dignity), *hurriya* (freedom) and *ʿadāla ijtimāʿiyya* (social justice), millions of angry Arabs took to the streets to dislodge veteran strongmen and their sycophantic cronies from their palaces and remove the quasi-feudal structures constituting the backbone of their regimes.<sup>1</sup> The transnational diffusion of the uprisings and rapid deposition of leaders in Tunisia and Egypt repudiated orthodox explanations for the resilience of Arab autocracy: rentierism, solidified military control of the state, sophisticated regime strategies of division and co-optation, and Arab political culture. As the popular slogans *al-shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ al-nizām* (the people want to overthrow the system) and *irḥal!* (Leave!) reverberated across the region, youth, urban middle class and poor – armed with mobile phones and social networks, rather than Kalashnikovs – rose up in public squares, proclaiming their insubordination to be nothing less than *thawrāt al-shabāb* (revolutions of the youth).

Revolts, however, are not revolutions. While revolutions comprise the rapid, forcible and durable eradication of an existing socio-economic and political order, as well as its replacement by an alternative system; revolts, rebellions and uprisings merely denote the sustained contestation of such an order. Revolutionary *situations*, the latter moments of deep fragmentation in state power, must therefore be distinguished from revolutionary *outcomes*, the actual overthrow of an existing order. A full-fledged revolution worthy of the term, then, designates any extensive combination of both.<sup>2</sup> Even as the history of the Arab uprisings continues to unfold, few would dispute that the events marked a momentous rupture – perhaps the beginning of a new era – in the politics of the region. Nevertheless, much of the historical verdict is predicated on whether they will indeed durably transform the patchwork of ailing Arab autocracies into more pluralistic or democratic systems of governance, generate new authoritarian regimes or evolve into alternative, hybrid orders.

<sup>1</sup> In contrast to common usage, the term 'regime' is neutrally connoted in political science. A political regime refers to the formal and informal organisation of political power and its relations with society. A regime is less permanent than a state, but more durable than a government. See Jeroen Van den Bosch, 'Political Regime Theory: Identifying and Defining Three Archetypes', *The Copernicus Journal* 4, no. 2 (25 December 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).



With vital questions about the nature, origin and consequences of the phenomenon unresolved, the popular contentious mobilisations posed an immediate challenge of conceptualisation. Journalists, and later, academics, began to variously describe the events as 'Arab Spring,' 'Arab 1989,' 'Arab Awakening(s),' 'Arab uprising(s),' and 'Arab revolution(s),' each of which carries distinct interpretive implications.<sup>3</sup> Numerous observers moreover juxtaposed the 'Arab Spring' with historic milestones in European democratisation, notably the Spring of Nations in 1848, the 1968 Prague Spring and the revolutions of 1989.<sup>4</sup> The ensuing debate about similarities and differences with 1848/1968 or 1989 centred on whether the uprisings might fall prey to revanchist reconsolidations or would indeed succeed in generating genuine democratic transformations in a region long considered an exception to global democratisation trends.<sup>5</sup>

Although the 'Arab Spring' or 'Arab 1989' frames aptly capture the momentous nature of the revolts, these occidentocentric metaphors are fraught with numerous fallacies. A term originally coined by US conservatives to designate an alleged blossoming of Arab democracy movements in 2005,<sup>6</sup> the 'Arab Spring' label implicitly defines the phenomenon based on a yet uncertain democracy teleology, rather than by its aims, participants or their vocabulary of motives. Based on the exaggerated assumption of European and Middle Eastern uniformity, the term conflates the rebellion against an unjust political order with the pursuit of Western-style democracy, thus misleadingly imputing an inherently democratic or secularist<sup>7</sup> ontology to the revolts.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, this criticism of the 'Arab

<sup>3</sup> Martin Bunton, "'Spring', 'Awakening' or 'Revolution': Frames of Reference for Understanding the 2011 Arab Uprisings", *Bilge Strateji* 5, no. 9 (Fall 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mary Kaldor, 'Civil Society in 1989 and 2011', *openDemocracy*, 7 February 2011; Mark N. Katz, '2011: The Arab World's 1989 or 1848?', *Global Studies Review* 7, no. 2 (August 2011); Michael D. Kennedy, 'Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and Historical Frames: 2011, 1989, 1968', *Jadaliyya*, 11 October 2011; Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Authoritarianism: Lessons from the Arab Uprisings', *Mediterranean Politics* 16, no. 2 (July 2011); Robert Springborg, 'Whither the Arab Spring? 1989 or 1848?', *The International Spectator* 46, no. 3 (2011); Lucan Way, 'The Lessons of 1989', *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 4 (2011); Kurt Weyland, 'The Arab Spring: Why the Surprising Similarities with the Revolutionary Wave of 1848?', *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (2012); Henry E. Hale, 'Regime Change Cascades: What We Have Learned from the 1848 Revolutions to the 2011 Arab Uprisings', *Annual Review of Political Science* 16, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Eva Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective', *Comparative Politics* 36, no. 2 (2004); Larry Diamond, 'Why Are There No Arab Democracies?', *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Krauthammer, 'The Arab Spring of 2005', *The Seattle Times*, 21 March 2005; Joshua Keating, 'Who First Used the Term Arab Spring?', *Foreign Policy Blogs*, 4 November 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Fisk, 'These Are Secular Popular Revolts – Yet Everyone Is Blaming Religion', *The Independent*, 20 February 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Asher Susser, 'The "Arab Spring": The Origins of a Misnomer', *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, April 2012.

Spring' frame is not meant to overstate the cultural 'otherness'<sup>9</sup> of the Middle East and North Africa or to deny the pluralistic or democratic aspirations that indubitably formed part of the uprisings; it merely contests the adequacy of this fundamentally occidental and essentially ahistorical epistemic framework.

The widespread failure to predict<sup>10</sup> the popular revolts invites questions about their origins and causes. Numerous attempts have been made to render the uprisings intelligible in terms of the political inertia and moral bankruptcy of (neo)patrimonial Arab autocracies, their neoliberal economic policies, unemployment and social inequality, a youth bulge or new media technologies – all of which doubtlessly constituted enabling factors. It is tempting to situate the root causes of the revolts in these pathologies. In light of the ubiquity of such structural conditions, however, grievance-based approaches remain too static to account for specific episodes of contention. Similarly, social media or demographic pressures, besides diverting attention away from the agency of the protagonists, fail to account for dynamic processes and relations. Without careful contextualisation, Facebook and Twitter cannot explain the Arab revolts any better than the audiocassette the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the fax machine Tiananmen Square,<sup>11</sup> or – as relevant to the present study – the transistor radios the Yemeni revolutions in the 1960s.

For the historian, the story moreover runs much deeper than such 'presentist' interpretations suggest. The striking omission to contextualise the uprisings within regional histories, such as 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-colonial resistance, the intellectual renewal of the *nahḍa*, Arab nationalist revolutions of the 1950s/60s<sup>12</sup> or the 1979 Iranian Revolution, contrasts with the auto-descriptive references *thawra* (revolution), *intifāḍa* (uprising), *ṣaḥwa* or *nahḍa* (awakening) used by Arab revolutionaries. The dominant Western discourse, which has failed to anchor the uprisings in their own idiosyncratic vocabulary and intellectual heritage, arguably dismisses the possibility of an authentic Arab postmodernity, which –

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<sup>9</sup> Edward Said's powerful plea against cultural essentialisation should not be taken as a rejection of cultural specificity. As Hudson succinctly remarked, 'we should be careful not to throw out the political culture baby with the Orientalist bathwater.' Michael C. Hudson, 'The Political Culture Approach to Arab Democratisation: The Case for Bringing It Back In, Carefully', in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World*, ed. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Noble (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), 65.

<sup>10</sup> F. Gregory Gause III, 'Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability', *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (August 2011); Jeff Goodwin, 'Why We Were Surprised (Again) by the Arab Spring', *Swiss Political Science Review* 17, no. 4 (December 2011) One might debate whether prognostication is indeed a province of academia.

<sup>11</sup> Mona Eltahawy in Paul Danahar, *The New Middle East: The World after the Arab Spring*, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Egypt (1952), Iraq (1958), Algeria (1962) and North Yemen (1962), Syria (1963), South Yemen (1967), Sudan and Libya (1969).

though, perhaps, similar to its Western counterpart in its ontology – will surely espouse distinctive cultural narratives.<sup>13</sup> A number of scholars have shown that the uprisings draw on a rich regional repertoire of contention, resistance and activism that ranges from silent, individual, non-confrontational everyday forms of resistance to formalised social movements.<sup>14</sup> Julia Clancy-Smith has moreover illustrated the value of grounding an explanation of the Tunisian ‘revolutions’ in *longue durée* patterns of contentious interactions between previous regimes and their challengers.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Robert Zaretsky drew some lessons from Fernand Braudel’s *histoire de la longue durée* about the Egyptian uprising in February 2011 that appear all the more pertinent several years later: pyramids crumble slowly, centuries-old political and social practices often persist, albeit under new guises, and change – far from irreversible – may come in various material or philosophical forms.<sup>16</sup>

There are good reasons indeed to heed Braudel’s warning not to fall into the treacherous traps of *l’histoire événementielle*, or event-based history, that fuelled the initial euphoria. After the rapid, unexpected deposition of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn bin ‘Alī in Tunisia and Muḥammad Ḥusnī Mubārak in Egypt, optimism about the advent of Middle Eastern democracy soon began to wane. The regimes in Tripoli, Manama, Damascus, Ṣan‘ā’ and elsewhere proved much more durable than commonly anticipated. The uprisings became a perilous endeavour as protestors lacked ample material force to back up their demands vis-à-vis the military preponderance of incumbent regimes. Sobering analyses reminded enthusiasts that patrimonialism (the salience of kin and patronage in the consolidation and perpetuation of power) and religious solidarity had weathered each of the modernist-secularist political projects of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: pan-Arabism, various forms of nationalism, republicanism, socialism and communism.<sup>17</sup> The revolutionary trajectories revealed that patrimonial and religious loyalties prevailed amidst heightened uncertainty,

<sup>13</sup> Ueli Staeger, ‘The Arab Uprisings, Globalisation and Postmodernity’, *E-International Relations Students*, 5 August 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, eds., *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust, eds., *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Julia Clancy-Smith, ‘From Sidi Bou Zid to Sidi Bou Said: A Longue Durée Approach to the Tunisian Revolutions’, in *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East*, ed. Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Zaretsky, ‘Egypt and the Longue Durée: What Braudel Has to Teach About the Crisis’, *Foreign Affairs*, 10 February 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Sami Zubaida, ‘The “Arab Spring” in Historical Perspective’, *openDemocracy*, 21 October 2011.

and even grew in salience. Long suppressed by Arab despots with Western complicity, Islamists emerged from the shadows of state repression and seized control of social movements and transition periods. Their ascent not only contested the erroneously assumed liberal-secular, Western orientation of the uprisings, but gave rise to alarmist voices that warned of a tidal wave of Islamist takeovers. Within the span of a few seasons, the bloomy 'Arab Spring' had purportedly turned into a gloomy 'Islamist Winter.'<sup>18</sup>

The ensuing debate about the impact of the Arab uprisings in terms of 'democratisation and authoritarianism *paradogma*,'<sup>19</sup> however, has not helped shed much light on the popular uprisings. Therefore, it is crucial to widen the scope of inquiry beyond the immediate impact of the revolts on the Middle Eastern states, institutions and political regimes.<sup>20</sup> Despite the widespread absence of meaningful institutional transformations of Arab political systems to date, the brief revolutionary moment in early 2011 has heralded the birth of a new, albeit fragile 'political imaginary.'<sup>21</sup> Although rooted in the modernist constitutionalism and Arab nationalism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the reappraisal of 'the people' as a united and sovereign political entity – vigorously encapsulated in the popular slogan *al-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ al-niẓām* and the vernacular of dignity, social justice and the civil state – forms the core of this political subjectivity. As people reclaimed popular sovereignty and coalesced around these civic demands, they were able to muster a temporary coalition to challenge incumbent dictatorships.

Apart from serving as a powerful weapon in dislodging despotic regimes, this political consciousness has broken with culturalist attributions of 'Arab exceptionalism.' It has shattered the defeatist imagery of the submissive Muslim under the thumb of a quietist

<sup>18</sup> Hussain Abdul-Hussein, David Schenker, and Michael J. Totten, 'Arab Spring or Islamist Winter? Three Views', *World Affairs Journal*, February 2012; Tamara Cofman Wittes, 'Learning to Live With the Islamist Winter', *Foreign Policy*, 19 July 2012; James Phillips, 'The Arab Spring Descends into Islamist Winter: Implications for U.S. Policy' (The Heritage Foundation, 20 December 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Morten Valbjørn, 'Three Ways of Revisiting the (Post-) Democratization Debate After the Arab Uprisings', *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 1 (2014): 158; See for example, Michael Sakbani, 'The Revolutions of the Arab Spring: Are Democracy, Development and Modernity at the Gates?', *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2011); Seth G. Jones, 'The Mirage of the Arab Spring: Deal with the Region You Have, Not the Region You Want', *Foreign Affairs* 92 (2013): 55; Jeffrey Haynes, 'The "Arab Uprising", Islamists and Democratization', *Mediterranean Politics* 18, no. 2 (2013); Frédéric Volpi, 'Explaining (and Re-Explaining) Political Change in the Middle East during the Arab Spring: Trajectories of Democratization and of Authoritarianism in the Maghreb', *Democratization* 20, no. 6 (2013).

<sup>20</sup> Omar Munif Al-Razzaz, 'The Treacherous Path Towards a New Arab Social Contract' (Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, 2013); Nora Stel, 'Governance and Government in the Arab Spring Hybridity: Reflections from Lebanon', *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice* 6, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>21</sup> Benoît Challand, 'The Counter-Power of Civil Society and the Emergence of a New Political Imaginary in the Arab World', *Constellations* 18, no. 3 (2011).

Islamic doctrine alien to the right to resist bad government – a myth popularised by Bernard Lewis<sup>22</sup> despite ample historical evidence to the contrary.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of whether or not the uprisings will turn into full-blown revolutions, they administered a *coup de grâce* to the orientalist phantasmagoria of a ‘clash of civilisations,’ which gained much currency as the antithesis to American post-Cold War triumphalism and with the post-9/11 security agenda of the United States.<sup>24</sup> More crucially, however, the reconceptualisation of *al-shaʿb* epitomises a novel post-ideological ideal of pluralism in the Arab world.<sup>25</sup> It illustrates a paradigmatic, albeit nonlinear shift from the old pursuit of partisan, sectarian or ideological group interests towards a national will to underwrite a more inclusive social contract based on a refined sense of citizenship. Although perhaps only a transient phenomenon, this spirit is most pertinently captured by Rami Khoury’s term ‘Arab citizen revolt,’<sup>26</sup> which stresses both the civic essence of the popular mobilisations and their incomplete achievements.

Although a shared sense of common predicament, solidarity and layer of Arab collective identity facilitated the transnational diffusion of the 2011 uprisings, it remains questionable whether the grand narratives that treat the uprisings as a singular or coherent ‘Arab’ phenomenon yield much explanatory value. Protestors did not mobilise around pan-Arab or pan-Islamist paradigms, but self-identified along nationalistic lines as Bahrainis, Egyptians, Libyans, Syrians, Tunisians or Yemenis. The citizen revolts moreover unleashed vastly divergent trajectories, which contrasted change-resilient kingdoms with decapitated Arab republics. None of the monarchies from Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Oman to Morocco and Jordan experienced regime changes, much less revolutions. Their rulers proved able to fend off popular pressures through various combinations of reformist concessions, (petrodollar) buy-outs, co-optation and repression. In the republics – or as Saʿd al-Dīn Ibrāhīm more appropriately put it, *jumlūkīyāt*

<sup>22</sup> Bernard Lewis, ‘Islamic Concepts of Revolution’, in *Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies*, ed. Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis (Allen & Unwin, 1972).

<sup>23</sup> Nikki R. Keddie, ‘The Revolt of Islam, 1700 to 1993: Comparative Considerations and Relations to Imperialism’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36, no. 3 (1994); Jane Hathaway, *Mutiny and Rebellion in the Ottoman Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratisation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Fawwāz Trābulṣī, ‘No Freedom Without Equality’ (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, March 2012); Sari Hanafi, ‘The Arab Revolutions; the Emergence of a New Political Subjectivity’, *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2012); Benoît Challand, ‘Citizenship against the Grain: Locating the Spirit of the Arab Uprisings in Times of Counterrevolution’, *Constellations* 20, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>26</sup> Rami G. Khoury, ‘An Extraordinary Week of the Arab Citizen Revolt’, *Agence Global*, 23 March 2011. For reasons elaborated below, I use Khoury’s term as a plural: ‘Arab citizen revolts.’

(‘republarchies’)<sup>27</sup> – of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, on the other hand, autocrats were overthrown. This preliminary balance sheet is not so much predicated on the capacities and cohesion of contentious movements as on the ability of regimes to absorb and re-channel political pressures, the degree of elite and societal fragmentation, the behaviour of security forces and foreign interventions.<sup>28</sup>

Upon closer examination, the political dynamics in each local context were even more diverse. The deposition of the Tunisian president inaugurated a comparatively smooth transition process spearheaded by moderate Islamists, which led to the issuance of a balanced constitution that paved the way for parliamentary and presidential elections. After the fall of Mubārak in Egypt, conversely, the military toppled the democratically elected Muslim Brotherhood in a popular *coup d’état* that strongly polarised national politics. In Algeria, the protest movement largely burned out in the face of economic concessions by the government. The movement for a constitutional monarchy in Bahrain was cruelly suppressed by a Saudi-led intervention, but revived with a more sectarian character. Even if protestors occasionally crossed accepted boundaries of activism, Jordan’s Palestinian majority population remained docile and the mobilisation failed to get off the ground. The war in Libya overthrew Mu‘ammar al-Qadhāfi’s quasi-fascist regime and led to reasonably fair elections, but widespread insecurity prevails.

The Moroccan king was able to appease Islamists with political concessions, while Saudi Arabia pacified its population through a massive cash infusion. Although protests did not pose a serious threat to the rule of Sultan Qabūs, he nevertheless set the Omani state on a track of political reform. In Qatar, where the GDP per capita amounted to \$448,246 for each of its 220,000 citizens,<sup>29</sup> political apathy prevailed. As protests gained traction in Syria, the country collapsed into a protracted civil war that led to the almost complete failure of the state. Finally, in Yemen, fears of a civil war led outside powers to a negotiated power transfer, which gave rise to a fragile political transition that ultimately broke down in

<sup>27</sup> Sa‘d al-Dīn Ibrāhīm, ‘Iqtarāh bi-Inshā’ Malakīyāt Dustūriya fi al-Jumhūrīyāt al-‘Arabīya ‘ala al-Umma ān Tuḍāif Muṣṭalaḥ “Jumlūkīya” ila Qāmūshā al-Sīyāsī (Proposal for the Establishment of a Constitutional Monarchy in the Arab Republic and for the Nation to Add the Term “Jumlūkīya” to the Political Dictionary)’, *Markaz Ibn Khaldūn li-l-Dirāsāt al-Inmā’īya*, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Lisa Anderson, ‘Demystifying the Arab Spring’, *Foreign Affairs*, June 2011; Muriel Asseburg and Isabelle Werenfels, ‘Tunesien: Einzelfall Oder Erster Dominostein?’, SWP-Aktuell (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, January 2011); Sharon Erickson Nepstad, ‘Mutiny and Nonviolence in the Arab Spring: Exploring Military Defections and Loyalty in Egypt, Bahrain, and Syria’, *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013); Sean Burns, ‘One Hand: Military Structure and Middle East Revolts’ (Ph.D., Northwestern University, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> 2008 Figures. Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, ‘Qatar and the Arab Spring’, *openDemocracy*, 12 April 2011.

the face of rivalries over local power-sharing. These highly diverse trajectories not only demonstrate that explanations of the Arab citizen revolts require a thorough grasp of each country's political dynamics, social fabric and long-term histories, but affirm the value of in-depth explorations of individual case studies.

### ***Research Focus, Significance and Originality***

The principal objective of this thesis is to examine *why* and *how* the Yemeni citizen revolt in 2011 transpired. In relation to this exploration, the theoretically informed historical narrative draws on insights from the study of contentious politics to trace and analyse the emergence, dynamics and demise of the revolutionary movement. Loosely inspired by Fernand Braudel's *longue durée*, the initial chapters serve to contextualise the popular uprising of 2011 within Yemen's broader history of contention, focussing especially on the period from the run-up to the parallel revolutions of the 1960s to the political processes unfolding in the aftermath of Yemeni unification in 1990. This serves to assess in which ways previous mobilisations and repertoires of contention, collective memories, historical demands and longstanding grievances have shaped the trajectory of recent events.

Few would doubt the significance of studying the uprisings that swept the Middle East and North Africa in 2011. Irrespective of their impact, they mark both a watershed moment in the history of the region and a major world-historical event. The case study of Yemen provides an equally fascinating, illustrative and understudied episode of this phenomenon. Unique in its interaction with the country's local political configurations and distinctive social fabric, the study of Yemen's revolt helps verify, refute, revise and refine the larger metanarratives that typify much of the existing literature. With its exploration of the intricate dynamics of the Yemeni revolt and their contextualisation in contemporary history, this dissertation moreover aspires to provide a meaningful contribution to the understanding of current political affairs in Yemen – a country that has generated little interest among academia and remains poorly understood by decision-makers.

This thesis is original in both its focus and historical approach. Apart from a few edited volumes and journal articles, literature on the Arab uprisings has only sparsely included the Yemeni case and no book-length study of Yemen's uprising exists to date. None of the currently available literature has moreover endeavoured to explain the citizen revolt of 2011 through the political processes that have unfolded since Yemeni unification, let alone to ground it within Yemen's more wide-ranging history of contention.

### ***Chapter Overview***

The remainder of this *Introduction* is concerned with delineating the methodical approach, sources and limitations of this dissertation. It provides a review of existing literature, which serves to discern the original contribution of this study and is split into three parts. The first part surveys literature on social movements and contentious politics to furnish the narrative with a coherent analytical framework. The second part deals with general histories of the Arab uprisings published in the period between mid-2011 and mid-2014. The final section reviews a number of major works on Yemeni politics and history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the few available book chapters and journal articles on the Yemeni citizen revolt.

*Chapter 1* examines structural regularities and major historical transformations in Yemen's longstanding civilisational history. Loosely inspired by Braudel's *longue durée*, this fast-paced chapter traces the changing political configurations from the ancient states to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It thereby identifies long-term patterns and major historical transformations – e.g. regionally bounded modes of production, divergent doctrinal foundations of political authority or the role of economic expansions in the formation of historical polities – which have continued to shape the power dynamics in the Republic of Yemen after 1990. The chapter moreover describes some key characteristics of historical polities, such as pre-Islamic South Arabian kingdoms or the millennial Imamate, which constitute frameworks of reference and have shaped the collective memories in Yemen.

*Chapter 2* provides a history of the so-called 26 September 1962 and the 14 October 1963 revolutions in North and South Yemen, delineating their driving forces, emergence and distinct trajectories, which engendered fundamental changes in the nature of contentious politics in Yemen. With the influence of new regional ideologies, contention in both the Mutawakkilite Kingdom and British-ruled South Yemen became increasingly politicised, which allowed the development of two heterogeneous nationalist movements out of the few tolerated forms of assembly and organisation. Due to the different nature of incumbent regimes – the stagnant Imamate and the dynamic colony with its neglected hinterland – both movements traversed through divergent trajectories that established a bourgeois-tribal and socialist political order in the North and the South, respectively. Despite their political differences, however, the two post-revolutionary republics not only altered the foundations of political legitimacy and bequeathed a powerful legacy of political demands, but exhibited some striking historical parallels with the citizen revolt of 2011.

*Chapter 3* is concerned with contentious politics in the republican era. After a brief section about the parallel state-building processes and power struggles in the YAR and the



PDRY, the central focus lies on the period between 1990 and 2010. It then expands on the erratic and limited liberalisation process since Yemeni unification in 1990, the creeping 'oligarchisation' of power since the 1994 war, as well as what I describe as the 'politics of calculated chaos' of 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ's regime. The chapter illustrates the significance of these processes in laying the groundwork for the formation of a temporary coalition of diverse political actors in the Yemeni citizen revolt of 2011. Not unlike earlier coalitions in the 1940, 1950s and 1960s, this loose network of civil society activists; opposition parties; political, economic, military and tribal elites; and two contentious movements, the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk, became united in little but their goal to overthrow the Ṣāliḥ regime.

*Chapter 4* traces the trajectory of Yemen's citizen revolt from its inception to the demise of the movement with the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Initiative. It describes how, in mid-January 2011, Yemen's 'early risers' seized the new political opportunities generated by the overthrow of despots in North Africa. Unable to stifle the initial protests, the regime's containment strategies, particularly the increasingly brutal repression that culminated in the 'Friday of Dignity' massacre on March 18, helped catalyse contention into a full-blown revolutionary movement and propelled the fragmentation of the intra-regime elite. However, the involvement of these powerbrokers politically polarised, and soon eclipsed, the grassroots movement. Amidst a parallel track of negotiations between ruling party moderates and traditional opposition elites under the aegis of the GCC, episodes of violence erupted between regime loyalists and the backers of the revolution. After months of foot-dragging, tit-for-tat and internecine violence brought Yemen to the verge of a civil war, Ṣāliḥ finally signed the power transfer agreement in November 2011, which led to the demobilisation of the movement. However, the exclusion of some of the most prominent components of the citizen revolt in the ensuing transition process and its failure deliver the promised reforms caused the deal to break down in 2014.

### ***Methodical Approach, Sources and Limitations***

This doctoral dissertation adopts a dynamic, process-oriented and historicised approach in order to examine the structural conditions, historical antecedents, causes, emergence and dynamics of the Yemeni citizen revolt. In contrast to the grievance-based approaches prevalent in narratives about the Arab uprisings, the thesis bases itself on conceptual insights from the study of social movements and contentious politics. This literature serves to construe the citizen revolt as the result of dynamic, relational processes, which form part of Yemen's broader history of contentious politics. The theoretically informed narrative

thereby affords analytical primacy to the shifting relations between political actors (agency), as well as their interaction with the environment (structure).

The thesis is moreover loosely inspired by the wide-angle historical periodisation of Fernand Braudel's *histoire de la longue durée*, which distinguishes diverse historical temporalities – the *longue durée*, *conjuncture* and *histoire événementielle*, or geographical, social and individual time. In contrast to the traditional event-focused histories or grand narratives that characterise much of the existing literature about the Arab uprisings, this periodisation serves to abstract aspects of structural continuity from historical conjuncture and the immediate trajectory of events.<sup>30</sup> The narrative also draws on specialised secondary literature from anthropology, archaeology and geography to illustrate deeper geographical and social structures, such as trade, technology, migration or resource cycles.

Occasionally, this narrative draws on the concept of collective memory elaborated by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs.<sup>31</sup> While memory denotes 'the central faculty of human existence in time through which we negotiate past and present experience',<sup>32</sup> it refers in its collective variant to the selective, socially constructed remembrance, recreation and interpretation of the past by a group: nations, social classes, families, tribes, religious groups, social movements, etc..<sup>33</sup> Collective memory is not a static container for relaying the past into the present, but a dynamic process through which groups construct, adapt and erase memories in response to present day concerns.<sup>34</sup> Collective memories can result from a state-driven manipulation of representations of a national past and thus perpetuate the hegemony of modern nation-states<sup>35</sup> or, as in the form of Michel Foucault's 'counter-memory,' contest dominant state narratives.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fernand Braudel, 'Histoire et Sciences Sociales: La Longue Durée (History and Social Sciences: The Long Duration)', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 13, no. 4 (1958); Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et Le Monde Méditerranéen à L'époque de Philippe II (The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II)* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1949).

<sup>31</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Sune Haugbolle and Anders Hastrup, 'Outlines of a New Politics of Memory in the Middle East', *Mediterranean Politics* 13, no. 2 (20 June 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey T. Kenney, *Muslim Rebels: Kharijites and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ussama Makdisi and Paul A. Silverstein, *Memory And Violence in the Middle East And North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Judy Barsalou, 'Recalling the Past: The Battle over History, Collective Memory and Memorialization in Egypt', *Jadaliyya*, 22 June 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998).

The dissertation is based on a wide range of primary and secondary Arabic and English-language sources, in addition to relevant documents in other European languages, which have been collected during intermittent field research in Yemen between 2010 and 2014. The primary sources include around 65 in-depth interviews with movement participants, political figures and observers; first-hand observations of events; a plethora of local and regional newspaper articles; British archival sources and United States' diplomatic cables; Yemeni government documents; political pamphlets and declarations; and documents from Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (NDC).

In a culture that places little trust in paper and individuals transmit important information predominantly orally, interviews constitute a crucial source to obtain otherwise inaccessible information. In contrast to the more confined public spheres in Egypt or Syria, governed by a fear of the *mukhābarāt* (internal intelligence services), Yemen enjoys – especially behind closed doors, but also beyond – a vivid and open culture of discussion. This manifests itself most prominently in the form of *qāt* chews, the customary private gatherings, which evolve around (political) conversations and the consumption of mild narcotic leaves, and range from loose, informal meetings to structured assemblies with carefully allotted speaking time. Among middle-class youths, recent years moreover witnessed the proliferation of a vibrant discussion culture in coffeehouses, not entirely unlike Jürgen Habermas' description of their 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> European counterparts.<sup>37</sup>

During interviews and group discussions in these and other settings, interviewees were extremely welcoming and eager to share information. While sources are identified whenever ethical and feasible, numerous interviewees have asked to remain anonymous for fear of political or other repercussions. In these cases, the interview is not cited in the thesis as academic guidelines generally disallow anonymous sourcing, except for a few cases in which a description of the identity of the person provides some information that adds to the credibility of the claim. While the dynamics ranged from comparatively formal, semi-structured interviews to informal conversations, most interviews lasted an hour, and often longer. The selection of interviewees was made to ensure – as much as possible – the balanced representation of the most relevant national political groups.

Although oral history is increasingly recognised as a methodical tool for historical research, it is not, however, without its limitations. Unlike other sources, oral history is

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<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*) (Berlin: Luchterhand, 1962).

dialogic, relational, and spontaneous, and relies on the unreliability of memory, which necessitates a particular awareness of its theoretical implications. Evidence from oral history interviews must be placed in context, verified for internal consistency and crosschecked with documentary evidence wherever possible. The interviews must hence be analysed in terms of 'not just *what* is said, but also *how* it is said, *why* it is said and *what* it means,'<sup>38</sup> and even more importantly, what is *not* said and *why*.

This subjectivity manifests itself in different, albeit no less salient, ways in written sources. Despite the pluralism and comparative openness of Yemen's press landscape, most newspapers are owned by influential personalities or affiliated with political parties. They thus frequently prioritise the promotion of special interests over aspirations to meet journalistic standards of 'objectivity.' Many Yemeni journalists moreover lack adequate training and are underpaid so that they often depend on the payment of expenses by those whose stories they cover. Documents from British Public Record Office (PRO) and United States' archives, including the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) and 3,208 cables from the Kissinger and Carter period released by Wikileaks, are primarily a reflection of Yemen through the eyes of British and American diplomats. The 1,591 cables from the US Embassy in Ṣan'ā' released by Wikileaks covering the period from 2000 to 2010 moreover offer a rare glimpse into an 'archive of the present.'<sup>39</sup>

Official documents and development reports of the Yemeni government are often unrealistically skewed towards future ambitions, rather than actual realities. While many of these sources are by themselves highly problematic, taken together, they provide a colourful panorama of the political positions of their protagonists. Lastly, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC), a pluralistic forum of 565 representatives from various national political groups, was held from March 2013 to January 2014 to deliberate about past conflicts and the parameters of the future state. The frequently heated deliberations at the conference and political position papers provide rare insights into mentalities and collective memories that would otherwise have been impossible to access.

No study is without limitations. First, it is beyond the scope and ambition of this historical research to contribute to debates about the theoretical literature it draws on; instead, this dissertations 'merely applies' these concepts hoping that this case study may generate ideas for those concerned with theory building. A second limitation relates to

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<sup>38</sup> Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1.

<sup>39</sup> On the ethics of using leaked documents in research, see Gabriel J. Michael, 'Who's Afraid of Wikileaks? Missed Opportunities in Political Science Research', *Review of Policy Research*, *Forthcoming*, 22 December 2014.

sources. With the *markaz al-waṭanī li-l-wathāʾiq* (National Documentation Centre) closed to researchers, this dissertation relies for archival materials almost solely on Western sources. Similarly problematic is the reliance on local interviews marred by urban and cross-cultural biases. Due to security considerations, the bulk of the field research was conducted in Ṣanʿāʾ – apart from a few brief research trips to Taʿizz and ʿAdan. Even though these cities constituted the main hubs of political activity during ‘the revolution’, more than 70 percent of Yemenis reside in rural areas. Although the events of 2011 brought a plethora of political groups to Ṣanʿāʾ, the voices of numerous groups may not be adequately reflected. Furthermore, interviews in a cross-cultural setting are problematic in that they may elicit responses based on the perceived identity of the interviewer, which can only partly be mediated through trust-building or introductions by trusted third parties.

### ***Literature Review: Social Movement Theory and Contentious Politics***

Contentious politics is a constituent part of social relations. It occurs when actors collectively make claims, which – if realised – bear on someone else’s interests, involving a government as party.<sup>40</sup> Contentious claim-making can assume diverse manifestations, but is primarily effected through words, deeds and guns – ranging from petitions, subversive graffiti and poetry, etc.; to civil disobedience, protests, strikes, marches and sit-ins; as well as riots, revolts, rebellions, revolutions, guerrilla wars and insurgencies. Despite its ubiquity, contention is a highly contested phenomenon that has resisted theory building in the social sciences. Although historians are rarely concerned with issues of theory *per se*, the process of selecting and interpreting facts – the raw materials of history – invariably commits them to a certain theoretical framework with inherent assumptions and causal propositions that structure the mode of inquiry. A history of Yemen’s citizen revolt therefore requires cognisance of the implicit theory assumptions that guide its approach. Set against this task, this section provides a brief overview of social psychology and political sociology literature on contention to furnish the historical narrative with a cogent analytical framework.

### Hardship Theories: From the ‘Madding Crowd’ to Relative Deprivation

When contemplating the origins of contention, scholars frequently seek causality in political, economic or social grievances – succinctly captured in the truism ‘misery breeds revolt,’ whose causal logic undergirds most narratives about the Arab uprisings in 2011.

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<sup>40</sup> Charles Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 5.

This conceptualisation of contention as a response to a particular set of grievances arose in the 1960s in opposition to theories of crowd psychology, which dominated the understanding of collective behaviour in first half of the century. Concerned with popular disruptions, riots and rebellions in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century England and France, the works of Charles Mackay and Gustave Le Bon treated popular upheavals – in their words, the ‘madding crowd’ – as pathological or criminal aberrations from conventional social behaviour.<sup>41</sup> In a study on suicide, Emile Durkheim introduced the idea that uncertainty and strain resulting from rapid structural adjustment processes, such as industrialisation or urbanisation, dissolved existing societal controls over antisocial behaviour – a concept he described as anomie.<sup>42</sup> Neil Smelser deduced the Durkheimian concept to the group level and devised a *Theory of Collective Behaviour* around the idea that anomie caused contention:<sup>43</sup>

Within the economy itself, rapid industrialization – no matter how coordinated – bites unevenly into the established social and economic structures. ... This unevenness creates *anomie* in the classical sense, for it generates disharmony between life experiences and the normative framework which regulates them. ... Under these conditions, virtually unlimited potentialities for group conflict are created. Three classic responses to these discontinuities are anxiety, hostility, and fantasy. If and when these responses become collective, they crystallize into a variety of social movements – peaceful agitation, political violence, millenarianism, nationalism, revolution, underground subversion, etc.<sup>44</sup>

Samuel Huntington applied the same logic to the political sphere; he argued that the lag in the development of political institutions in responding to demands for participation and an expanding political consciousness bred social instability.<sup>45</sup> In a seminal work with the gender-insensitive title of *Why Men Rebel*, Ted Robert Gurr challenged this frustration-aggression-nexus. Instead of strain and grievances *per se*, Gurr argued that contentious behaviour resulted from relative deprivation, which he defined as the discrepancy between unmet expectations and actual conditions. Its intensity and scope determined the potential

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<sup>41</sup> Charles Mackay, *Memoires of Extraordinary Popular Delusions And The Madness Of Crowds*, vol. 1 (London: Robson, Levey and Franklyn, 1852); Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1896).

<sup>42</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1951); Bert Useem, ‘Breakdown Theories of Collective Action’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998).

<sup>43</sup> Neil J. Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: The Free Press, 1962).

<sup>44</sup> Neil J. Smelser, *Essays in Sociological Explanation* (Prentice Hall, 1968).

<sup>45</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

for collective action and could be measured on a J-curve.<sup>46</sup> However, in successive rounds of empirical testing, the relative deprivation model received only scant support.<sup>47</sup>

### From Deprivation to Political Process: Resources, Opportunities and Frames

Due to the inability of breakdown and relative deprivation theories to explain the 'new social movements' of the 1960s and 1970s, critics pointed out that grievances and relative deprivation constituted insufficient causes for collective action.<sup>48</sup> Building on Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, social movement scholars proposed new approaches to contention, which emphasised the rationality, normality and goal-orientation of contentious behaviour. These resource mobilisation theorists posited that movements require resources and mobilising structures (money, organisation, entrepreneurs, networks, communication, etc.) to translate grievances, which would otherwise remain at the individual level, into overt collective action. As organised manifestations of collective action, they asserted, social movements should primarily be understood in terms of costs-benefits, opportunities-constraints and interests.<sup>49</sup>

However, with its focus on resources and organisation, resource mobilisation was unable to account for the socio-political environment in which social movements operate – a void the concept of political opportunity structures came to fill. First used by Peter Eisinger and Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam incorporated political opportunity structures – together with resource mobilisation – into a political process model of social movements.<sup>50</sup> The concept revolves around the idea that movements develop as reactions to environmental shifts in opportunities and constraints, which affect the social and political

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<sup>46</sup> Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>47</sup> Clark McPhail, 'Civil Disorder Participation: A Critical Examination of Recent Research', *American Sociological Review* 36, no. 6 (1 December 1971); Stephen G. Brush, 'Dynamics of Theory Change in the Social Sciences: Relative Deprivation and Collective Violence', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 40, no. 4 (1996); Mohammed M. Hafez, *Why Muslims Rebel: Repression And Resistance In The Islamic World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> David Snyder and Charles Tilly, 'Hardship and Collective Violence in France, 1830 to 1960', *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (1972).

<sup>49</sup> Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Harvard Economic Studies (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict And Social Movements* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1973); John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977); Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978); J. Craig Jenkins, 'Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements', *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983).

<sup>50</sup> Peter K. Eisinger, 'The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities', *The American Political Science Review* 67, no. 1 (1973); Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*; Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

costs of activism, such as the degree of access to political institutions, the stability of elite alignment, the prevalence of allies and foes, as well as the capacity and propensity of the state for repression.<sup>51</sup> The major contribution of the resource mobilisation and political opportunity approaches was not only their incorporation of a stronger role of politics into hitherto predominantly economic explanations of contention, but – most crucially – the restructuration of the inquiry from *why* to *how* movements emerge.

While the earlier strain models accorded a large role to ideology as a codification of grievances, this link became less compelling with the growing importance of resources and opportunities.<sup>52</sup> Movement scholars drew on Erving Goffman's concept of 'frames' – interpretive schemata to contextualise events within a greater meaning system – to investigate the use of former experiences and knowledge in collective action.<sup>53</sup> David Snow and Robert Benford identified three ways in which movement entrepreneurs employ frames for mobilisation: 'diagnostic framing' (problem determination and attribution), 'prognostic framing' (suggested solutions) and 'motivational framing' (calls to engage in collective action).<sup>54</sup> However, frames did not fully supplant ideologies. Theorists asserted that the social construction of ideologies involves framing processes, while frames, in turn, are grounded in ideologies and other extant cultural resources. Through various frame alignment processes, social movements tap the reserve of familiar beliefs, values, ideologies, meanings, practices, symbols, histories, myths, narratives, identities, memories, etc. and link them to movement goals and activities to mobilise and sustain collective action.<sup>55</sup>

Alongside resource mobilisation and political opportunity structures, frames came to be regarded as part of a central analytical triad for understanding the dynamics of social

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<sup>51</sup> Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*; Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*; Enrique Laraña, Hank Johnston, and Joseph R. Gusfield, eds., *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

<sup>53</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

<sup>54</sup> David A. Snow et al., 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation', *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 4 (1986); David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance and Participant Mobilisation', *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988); David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000).

<sup>55</sup> Pamela E. Oliver and Hank Johnston, 'What a Good Idea! Frames and Ideologies in Social Movement Research', *Mobilization: An International Journal* 5, no. 1 (2000); David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Clarifying the Relationship between Framing and Ideology', in *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective*, ed. Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 205–12.



movements.<sup>56</sup> The increased focus on the interrelation between various concepts in the political process model led McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly in the mid-1990s to expand the scope of inquiry from social movements to the full range of 'contentious politics'.<sup>57</sup>

### From Structure to Relational Dynamics: Repertoires, Performances and Cycles

Due to its structuralist tradition, the political process model came increasingly under fire from social constructionist critics.<sup>58</sup> In *Dynamics of Contention* and subsequent works, Tilly, McAdam and Tarrow radically revised many of the traditional, and predominantly structural, social movement concepts in favour of a single, dynamic and 'relational' explanatory framework for all types of contentious politics. At its core was a process-based understanding, which focussed on small-scale mechanisms, such as repression, polarisation, extraction, mobilisation and boundary activation, which allowed opportunities to translate into collective action or governed the dynamics of contention.<sup>59</sup>

As early as 1976, Charles Tilly observed that the predominant routines of collective action vary decisively by time and place. To describe these recurrent patterns of contentious claim-making, he developed, and later modified, the concept of 'repertoires of contention'.<sup>60</sup> These finite sets of culturally learned established routines, Tilly argued, provide approximate scenarios for movements to engage in collective action and are themselves an outcome of the contentious interactions.<sup>61</sup> Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht complemented this idea with a model for the cross-national diffusion of movement ideas and tactical repertoires, which reveals how activists consciously borrow tactics, organisational forms, slogans, songs, etc.<sup>62</sup> In *Contentious Performances*, Tilly later refined the repertoire concept by relating it to performances and episodes, which allowed him to

<sup>56</sup> McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*; Ruud Koopmans, 'Political Opportunity. Structure. Some Splitting to Balance the Lumping', *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999).

<sup>57</sup> Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, 'To Map Contentious Politics', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1996); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>58</sup> Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, 'Caught in a Winding, Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory', *Sociological Forum* 14, no. 1 (1999).

<sup>59</sup> Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Charles Tilly, Doug McAdam, and Sidney Tarrow, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Charles Tilly, 'Getting It Together in Burgundy, 1675–1975', *Theory and Society*, 1976.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Tilly, 'Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834', *Social Science History* 17, no. 2 (1993); Mark Traugott, ed., *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, 'The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528, no. 1 (1993).

demonstrate that incremental innovations in repertoires result from 'accumulating experience and external constraints,' while epochal shifts in these limited sets of available choices occur only seldom.<sup>63</sup> Repertoires of contention therefore provide a useful tool to embedding collective action in its societal context, demonstrate the scarcity of available practices and reflect on the identities of actors.

Based on the observation that social movements frequently emerge in broader waves of sweeping social unrest – 'moments of madness,' when everything appears possible – Sidney Tarrow introduced the notion of the 'cycle of contention,' as

a phase of heightened conflict across the social system: with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors; a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention; the creation of new or transformed collective action frames; a combination of organized and unorganized participation; and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities.<sup>64</sup>

Shifts in perceived political opportunities are central to the explanation of how cycles begin: as 'early risers' signal the vulnerability of the authorities, they facilitate the spread of contention to other sectors of society and geographical locations. This diffusion not only accelerates innovation, including the dissemination of themes, symbols, frames, repertoires and tactics; but identifies possibilities for new alliances and alters the strategic cost-benefit calculations that govern the relations between challengers and power holders. This affects the interests of other actors with rival, adjacent or aligned interests, which compels them to build coalitions, fight for control, suppress their rivals or negotiate with authorities.<sup>65</sup>

The outcomes of contentious cycles are dynamic and range from exhaustion, polarisation, repression, radicalisation, violence (and particularly terrorism) to the institutionalisation of movements and successful revolutions. With the discussion of the cycles of contention of the 1848 revolutions and the 1968 student movement, Tarrow creates a bridge between social movements, cycles of contentions and the body of literature on revolutions by Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol, Jack Goldstone and other theorists. Tarrow argues that revolutionary situations resemble cycles of contention, but turn revolutionary only if some challengers seize state power and fortify their new position through new alliances against other contestants. The latter are forced to choose between

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<sup>63</sup> Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006); Tilly, *Contentious Performances*.

<sup>64</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 142.

<sup>65</sup> Sidney Tarrow, 'Cycles of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and the Repertoire of Contention', *Social Science History* 17, no. 2 (1993); Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.

cooperation, confrontation and demobilisation, until finally repression, co-optation and fragmentation initiate the return to the regular, slow-paced patterns of contention.<sup>66</sup>

Academic literature on social movements and contentious politics in the Middle East and North Africa is scarce. Only few studies, including the edited volumes by Quintan Wiktorowicz, as well as Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, have applied these concepts in the context of the region.<sup>67</sup> The latter authors have persuasively demonstrated that contentious manifestations in the MENA region can indeed be understood in rational terms and with the same tools of science as the rest of the world, albeit in their historical and social context – perhaps an obvious point to some, but nevertheless not universally accepted.<sup>68</sup>

### ***Literature Review: The Arab Uprisings***

Few topics have generated in as short a time a body of literature as rich as the transnational revolts that swept the Arab Middle East and North Africa in 2011. This literature review surveys accounts of the Arab uprisings from such disciplines as political science and Middle East studies, as well as a number of contemporary histories. The focus thereby lies on competing interpretations about their historical significance; explanations of their causality, dynamics and preliminary outcomes; as well as the main academic debates. Numerous narratives have heralded the transnational uprisings as part of a fourth global wave of democratisation, repudiating the wealth of literature on the persistence of authoritarianism over the last decades.<sup>69</sup> Others remain more cautious, sceptical, or outright pessimistic, about their ability to engender fundamental political transformations. Notwithstanding this multitude of interpretations, most scholars of the region concur, as summarised by Fawaz Gerges, that a major ‘psychological and epistemological rupture has occurred in the Arab Middle East that has shaken the authoritarian order to its very foundation.’<sup>70</sup> The narratives can moreover be classified along the lines of causal hypotheses, which differ between voluntaristic, structuralist, class-based and process-centred interpretations with various degrees of historical depth, yet few accounts fit neatly into these categories. Other debates encompass questions of predictability, inevitability, homogeneity, as well as the role

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<sup>66</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*.

<sup>67</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Beinin and Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*.

<sup>68</sup> Beinin and Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*.

<sup>69</sup> Larry Diamond, ‘A Fourth Wave or False Start?’, *Foreign Affairs*, 22 May 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, ‘Introduction: A Rupture’, in *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, ed. Fawaz A. Gerges, 2013.

of Western or regional powers, new media technology and Islamist actors, which are discussed in subsequent sections.

### Spring, Awakening, Revolution: The Arab Struggle for Democracy?

Concordant with its portrayal in the mass media, two journalistic accounts neatly typify the optimistic strain of narratives. In *The Arab Uprisings: The People Want the Fall of the Regime*<sup>71</sup>, Jeremy Bowen provides a vivid and hopeful account of the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria. The voices of people, frustrated by the realisation that Arab leaders were turning dictatorships into dynasties, are the centrepiece of Bowen's narrative. With the backing of Western countries determined to keep Islamists out of power, domestic rule was thus far distinguished by low levels of legitimacy, but moderate degrees of consent. The causes for what Bowen describes as localised reactions to authoritarian regimes can be found in the youth bulge, unemployment and the breakdown of communicative barriers due to social media and mobile phones. Loosely based on Ted Gurr's theory of relative deprivation, *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era*<sup>72</sup> explains the uprisings through a 'combination of economic hopelessness with political powerlessness.'<sup>73</sup> Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren trace the uprisings back to regional food price protests in 2008 and argue that youth unemployment, cronyism and economic injustice constituted the most salient causal factors. Due to their uncritical treatment of the notions of Arab malaise, exceptionalism to democracy and the function of social media, however, they lapse into (well-intended) Orientalist clichés. In times of counterrevolution and Islamist takeovers, the authors remain optimistic about the prospects for Arab democracy. Although both narratives convey a lively and sympathetic sense of the popular activism in 2011, they are largely descriptive, based entirely on English-only sources and lack a vigorous causal explanation and historical exploration of root causes.

In contrast to these contemporary accounts, Adeed Dawisha and Marwan Muasher embed the uprisings in the long-term historical continuum of an inevitable politico-cultural renewal in the Arab world. Dawisha's *The Second Arab Awakening: Revolution, Democracy, and the Islamist Challenge from Tunis To Damascus*<sup>74</sup> provides an enthusiastic country-by-country

<sup>71</sup> Jeremy Bowen, *The Arab Uprisings: The People Want the Fall of the Regime* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Lin Noueihed and Alex Warren, *The Battle for the Arab Spring: Revolution, Counter-Revolution and the Making of a New Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>74</sup> Adeed I. Dawisha, *The Second Arab Awakening: Revolution, Democracy, and the Islamist Challenge from Tunis to Damascus* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013).

overview of the 2011 upheavals beginning with the rise of populist-nationalist military regimes in the 1950s and 1960s. Although it put an end to Western colonialism, this first Arab awakening engendered decades of predatory authoritarianism. The frustration about the unfulfilled promises of this awakening, when combined with social media, led to the eruption of popular protests. Overwhelmed by the masses of protestors, security forces were unable to prevent the toppling of dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. Apart from the argumentative void in Dawisha's descriptive and prophetic narrative, it is astonishing that the author makes no mention of the conventional historical treatment of the first Arab awakening, notably the period the *nahḍa* (cultural renewal), which was driven by Arab intellectuals in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Muasher places the Arab uprisings in continuity of the *nahḍa*, which – he argues – failed when independence struggles merely replaced colonial rulers with domestic autocracies, rendering the second awakening inevitable. Its immediate reasons, according to *The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism*<sup>75</sup>, can be found in economic discontent, rentierism, despotic government and a frustrated youth bulge. Muasher has confidence in the moderation of Islamists and argues that the zero-sum duopoly of (elected) Islamists and secular forces must be broken by the rise of a 'third force' committed to respect diversity and pluralism. However, his narrative reads like a mixture of policy paper and nuanced political manifesto, but falls short of a comprehensive explanation of the Arab uprisings.

James Gelvin's *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know*<sup>76</sup> is a non-specialist introduction to the series of uprisings in a question and answer format. Although his participant-driven account places the people at the heart of the events, Gelvin only cursorily discusses the role of organisational networks, such as Tunisian trade unions, in mobilisation. The brief volume is grounded in four structural factors for the vulnerability of Arab regimes, including neoliberal economic policies, the youth bulge, food price inflation, and the nature of the unrepresentative regimes. The author links the uprisings through transnational inputs, but divides them by national outcomes into four clusters according to regime cohesion: Tunisia and Egypt, where institution-building has given rise to independent militaries; Yemen and Libya, where weak institutions splintered; Syria, Algeria (and Bahrain), where regimes stood united; and the remaining monarchies, where protests were limited in both scope and demands. Given this variation, Gelvin rejects the

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<sup>75</sup> Marwan Muasher, *The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> James L. Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

label 'Arab Spring' as premature and cautions not to attribute too much importance to social media or essentialise the uprisings as an inevitable worldwide democratic transformation. In *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*<sup>77</sup>, Marc Lynch conversely places strong emphasis on social media in continuation of his earlier work about the transformation of the Arab public sphere with rise of broadcast media as counter-narratives to state propaganda (discussed in more detail below). Lynch takes the reader back to the Arab Cold War of the 1950/60s, the aborted democratisation of the 1980s/90s and the 'turbulence' of the 2000s, which he describes as 'one long wave of intense popular mobilization spanning the entire region.'<sup>78</sup> Although his long-term approach makes a case for the existence of an active civil society before the uprisings, he does not expand on the ways in which this shaped the events of 2011. Lynch, who finds the label 'Arab Spring' untenable, argues that democratic transitions did not (yet) materialise in the face of counter-revolutionary efforts by incumbent regimes. While his analysis rests largely on Tunisia and Egypt, he theorises the revolts as incomplete revolutions. While Gelvin's and Lynch's narratives are good early attempts at a multifaceted and nuanced explanation of the Arab uprisings, they unfortunately rest on English-only sources. In some places they appear hastily cobbled together – most notably in Lynch's 3-page excursion to Yemen's 'forgotten revolution,' which is full of factual errors and misrepresentations.

In *Roots of the Arab Spring: Contested Authority and Political Change in the Middle East*<sup>79</sup>, Dafna Hochman Rand ventures a process-based explanation of the underlying forces that gave birth to the 'Arab Spring.' Based on the case studies of Bahrain, Morocco and Tunisia, she argues that the uprisings originate in a triad of political dynamics, which have unfolded over the preceding two decades. First, the rise of new technologies precipitated a tacit opening in the freedom of expression, which saw its reversal in the mid-2000s as it generated unwanted pressures on incumbent dictatorships. Second, Arab despots' appropriation of institutions and constitutions to consolidate their autocracy and limit political rights, including 16 instances of anti-liberal constitutional revisions in the region from 1990 to 2010, signalled that incremental reform was futile. Third, the failure to enact liberal economic and political reforms after leadership successions in Morocco, Jordan, Qatar, Syria, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia gave rise to a discrepancy between the

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<sup>77</sup> Marc Lynch, *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>79</sup> Dafna Hochman Rand, *Roots of the Arab Spring: Contested Authority and Political Change in the Middle East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

language of democracy and authoritarian practice. Despite the persuasiveness of this liberalisation-reversal-frustration logic, the author does not explore the mechanisms through which this frustration translated into collective action, while the selection bias in the case studies limits the validity of its findings. Formerly a member of the US National Security Council, Rand accords an untenably favourable role to Western reform pressures and technology, which not only disparages the agency of the Arab street, but ignores the detrimental role of Western powers in the perpetuation of Arab dictatorships.

Marwan Bishara and Amaney Jamal provide an antidote to such US-centric interpretations of the Arab uprisings. Bishara's *The Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolutions*<sup>80</sup> is an enthusiastic, yet incautiously written, account of what he describes as Arab revolution(s). Brutalised and humiliated by the 'sadistic paternalism' of Western-backed military dictatorships, 'the invisible Arab' has come to challenge local despots and the neoliberal world order. The author's fierce critique of the West is not limited to foreign aid and military support, but he rebukes 'Western arguments' that the struggle of non-ideological youths for rights and democracy is driven by social media or American democracy promotion. An anchor at al-Jazeera, Bishara highlights the role of broadcast media in the forging of a new Arab identity and provides a brief history of labour unions, religious and women's groups, as well as community organisers in Egypt and Tunisia in the 2000s to corroborate this narrative. Although a welcome counterbalance to occidental narratives, Bishara's account lacks a clear central thesis, is riddled with lazy generalisations, while the section on Yemen is grounded in the very Orientalist depictions and Western sources he so fiercely criticises throughout the book. In her empirical study *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?*<sup>81</sup>, Jamal evaluates the prospects for Arab democracy. Based on the case studies of Jordan and Kuwait, with some additional lessons from Morocco, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, Jamal demonstrates that the normal Arab voter – though striving for democracy – makes conservative electoral choices for stability out of fear that democratically legitimated, anti-American Islamists will endanger her country's relationship with the US, and thus threaten her economic interests. The thoroughly researched study thereby substantiates how the United States supports Arab dictatorships beyond military cooperation and foreign aid, notably through fostering

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<sup>80</sup> Marwan Bishara, *The Invisible Arab: The Promise and Peril of the Arab Revolutions* (New York: Nation Books, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Amaney A. Jamal, *Of Empires and Citizens: Pro-American Democracy or No Democracy at All?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

bottom-up support for authoritarianism, which provides a powerful explanatory for the resilience of pro-American monarchies to the Arab uprisings.

The structural accounts by Rex Brynen et al. and Roger Owen explore Arab democratisation through the traditional prism of literature on authoritarianism. In *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World*<sup>82</sup>, Brynen, Moore, Salloukh and Zahar revisit theories for the 'unique' persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world. Their structural approach creates a notion of continuity between pre-2011 theories about authoritarianism and Arab democratisation. Considering the 'catalytic and synergistic effects [that] different variables and levels have on each other,'<sup>83</sup> the authors conclude that coercion, coping strategies, rentierism and political alliances, rather than political Islam or political culture, are responsible for the persistence of authoritarianism. Although a thorough account of the functioning of Arab authoritarianism, the authors fall short of the explanation of the roots of the uprisings of 2011 promised in the introduction. Roger Owen's *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life*<sup>84</sup> is a comparative historical analysis of 'authoritarian statecraft' in the postcolonial Middle East and North Africa. Born out of mistrust of neo-colonial interventions and domestic challenges, by the 1980s, monarchic presidents had used geostrategic and oil rents to coup-proof their regimes through centralised security apparatuses, managed elections, cronyism and patronage. The section on Yemen would have benefitted from a deeper analysis of Ṣāliḥ's masterful command of such survival strategies. Key to Owen's analysis is the 'Arab demonstration effect,' the diffusion of authoritarian management techniques by example. Suffering from the 'King Lear syndrome,' these presidents lived in mirror states, which encouraged them to see what they wanted to see. Written largely before the uprisings, Owen briefly explains the events of early 2011 by recourse to internal regime divisions that came to the fore as they collapsed. Although an overall well-crafted book, Owen merely synthesises from specialised literature rather than engaging in original research. A common problem with both structural accounts, however, is their narrow attention to the conditions and strategies of authoritarianism to explain the persistence of regime stability. This focus is precisely the reason why Middle East studies were largely unprepared for the Arab uprisings.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Rex Brynen et al., *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>84</sup> Roger Owen, *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>85</sup> Gause III, 'Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring'.



One of the most comprehensive monographs on the popular mobilisations, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*<sup>86</sup> by Gilbert Achcar theorises the uprising as a singular 'revolutionary shockwave,' rather than a series of anti-authoritarian movements. The narrative is based on a straightforward Marxist analysis of the relations of factors of production. According to Achcar, the homegrown upheavals were no sudden awakening, but a peak in a protracted revolutionary struggle against autocratic systems, which deprived the Arab people of 'bread, freedom and social justice.' The revolutionary mass protests resulted from the combination of arrested socio-economic development and un(der)employment, the specific modalities of financial capitalism in the MENA region, and conjunctural factors, including Western imperialism and the transformation of Arab media. The persuasive critique of 'politically determined,' neopatrimonial, rentier capitalism, which encouraged short-term profit over long-term productive investment, is centred on its retardation of investment and economic growth. Achcar thereby draws a useful distinction between patrimonial (Libya and Syria) and neopatrimonial (Tunisia, Egypt) states; whereby in the former, the overthrow of the regime meant the dismantlement of the state, while the merely *neopatrimonial* states were able to depose the regime while keeping the state intact. Although the author discusses some trade unions and labour movements in Tunisia and Egypt, the predominantly structural approach leaves little room for the agency of political actors that championed these changes.

Often treated as no more than a side theatre to Tunisia and Egypt, Yemen's citizen revolt does not fit neatly into the explanatory schemata of most of these narratives. A sizable youth bulge and many of the immediate grievances, such as rentierism, high unemployment, economic injustice and the succession question, were ubiquitous and salient in Yemen – both in 2011 and throughout the preceding decade. In the absence of an explanation of the mechanisms through which the prevalent discontent translated into collective action, the underlying frustration/deprivation-aggression logic not only fails to explain *why*, but detracts from the question of *how*, contention erupted. In this sense, much of this literature is grounded in theories of collective behaviour from the 1970s and 80s, rather than more recent insights from the study of contentious politics, perhaps owed to the bird's eye angle of the metanarratives.

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<sup>86</sup> Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, trans. Geoffrey Michael Goshgarian (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

### The Restructuration of the Arab Public Sphere: Facebook/Twitter Revolutions

One of the most prominent debates in accounts of the 2011 uprisings is the role that digital technologies played in fomenting the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere. With much of the pre-2011 debate characterised by an essentialisation of technology, a number of academics discussed the emancipatory promise of new technologies with reference to the Arab and Muslim world. Dale Eickelman, Jon Anderson and Marc Lynch argue that new technologies – at the time encompassing satellite TV, mobile phones and fax machines as tools of dissent – facilitated the emergence of alternative public spheres outside of the reach of state control. This restructuring of the public sphere, the authors argue, engendered a transformation of Arab or Muslim political culture and supported democratic openings,<sup>87</sup> an argument based on Jürgen Habermas' technologically deterministic analytical paradigm that linked the printing press with European democratisation.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, digital evangelist Clay Shirky posits that social media create more participatory, complex and faster communication landscapes, which facilitate new forms of group formation and provide novel opportunities to undertake collective action.<sup>89</sup> However, he cautions not to theorise social media purely in 'instrumental' terms, but as a long-term 'environmental' factor.<sup>90</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, Evgeny Morozov harshly criticises the cyber-utopian vision that 'technology empowers the people who, oppressed by years of authoritarian rule, will inevitably rebel mobilising themselves through text messages, Facebook, Twitter, and whatever tool comes along each year.'<sup>91</sup> In *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, he argues that there is no sustained evidence about the ability of digital media to foment a revolution or effect long-term social or institutional change, even though it does play a role in the coordination and organisation of social movements. In like manner, Malcolm Gladwell argues that the messy, non-hierarchical social media networks are ill-suited to motivate people to engage in high-risk activism. Drawing on Doug McAdam, Gladwell argues that revolutionary actions are traditionally 'strong-tie'

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<sup>87</sup> Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>88</sup> Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.

<sup>89</sup> Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008); Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).

<sup>90</sup> Clay Shirky, 'The Political Power of Social Media: Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change', *Foreign Affairs* 90 (February 2011).

<sup>91</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (PublicAffairs, 2011), xii.

phenomena, and thus require both close personal ties and hierarchical organisation.<sup>92</sup> According to Morozov, Bruce Etling et al. and Diamond, autocratic states are not only able to simply 'pull the plug' when online activism becomes threatening, but their mastery of ICT increases the capabilities for government surveillance and repression.<sup>93</sup> Although correct in their approach to dampen the unrestrained optimism of digital evangelists, the techno-realists propagate an equally essentialising view of ICT, which ignores some of the opportunities it has provided in eroding the information monopoly in authoritarian states.

With the advent of the Arab uprisings, the cyber-optimist camp gained in prominence, which is more aptly reflected in the banalisation of the popular revolts as 'Facebook/Twitter Revolutions.'<sup>94</sup> The 'Internet Freedom' agenda of the US Department of State played a crucial role in popularising the notion that the Internet promotes global democratisation.<sup>95</sup> Its objectives are illustrated by Hillary Clinton's statement, 'we want to put these tools in the hands of people who will use them to advance democracy and human rights,' and that of her senior adviser Alec Ross, who in June 2011 labelled the Internet the 'Che Guevara of the twenty-first century.'<sup>96</sup> Apart from the weak empirical basis of this assumed causality,<sup>97</sup> Martin Bunton cautions that the narrative of 'a region lying dormant until awakened by the kiss of modern Western technology'<sup>98</sup> forms part of an Orientalist imagery that seeks to place the 'Arab Spring' in the context of Western democracy promotion. However, it remains clear that the revolts, which coalesced around the overthrow of Western-backed dictatorships, were not the outcome of these two-decades-long efforts, but a fatal symptom of their failure.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, 'Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted', *The New Yorker*, 27 September 2010; Malcolm Gladwell, 'From Innovation to Revolution: Do Social Media Made Protests Possible: An Absence of Evidence', *Foreign Affairs* 90 (2011).

<sup>93</sup> Morozov, *The Net Delusion*; Bruce Etling, Robert Faris, and John Palfrey, 'Political Change in the Digital Age: The Fragility and Promise of Online Organizing', *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 30, no. 2 (2010); Larry Diamond, 'Liberation Technology', *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>94</sup> Catherine Smith, 'Egypt's Facebook Revolution: Wael Ghonim Thanks The Social Network', *Huffington Post*, 11 February 2011; Chris Taylor, 'Why Not Call It a Facebook Revolution?', *CNN.com*, 24 February 2011; Andrew Sullivan, 'Could Tunisia Be The Next Twitter Revolution?', *The Atlantic*, 13 January 2011; Abigail Hauslohner, 'Is Egypt About to Have a Facebook Revolution?', *Time*, 24 January 2011.

<sup>95</sup> 'Tweeting Toward Freedom? A Survey of Recent Articles', *The Wilson Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1 April 2011).

<sup>96</sup> Hillary Clinton, 'Remarks on Internet Freedom', *U.S. Department of State*, 21 January 2010; Josh Halliday, 'Hillary Clinton Adviser Compares Internet to Che Guevara', *The Guardian*, 22 June 2011.

<sup>97</sup> Ekaterina Stepanova, 'The Role of Information Communication Technologies in the "Arab Spring"', *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo* 159 (May 2011).

<sup>98</sup> Bunton, "'Spring'", "Awakening" or "Revolution"', 24.

<sup>99</sup> Sheila Carapico, 'Foreign Aid for Promoting Democracy in the Arab World', *Middle East Journal* 56, no. 3 (Summer 2002); Marion Dixon, 'An Arab Spring', *Review of African Political Economy* 38, no. 128 (June 2011);

Denis Campbell, Andy Carvin and Dan Thompson echo this cyber-optimism in the trivialised narratives about the uprisings. Campbell provides a clichéd account of the Egyptian revolution, framed as an epochal battle between youth activists and evil regimes. Claiming that ‘140 characters can remove a dictator in 18 days,’<sup>100</sup> he attributes the uprising to static grievances and social media. Similarly, Carvin traces the events (together with many non-events) in each of the Arab uprisings as they unfolded in the ‘tweets’ of local revolutionaries and journalists. Due to the lack of any critical scrutiny of these sources, Carvin is persuaded to be experiencing the revolutions ‘live’ from his office in Washington, D.C., but in reality, the bulk of the Anglophone activists he follows present marginalised voices in the uprisings.<sup>101</sup> Thompson, who became inspired by the crucial role that ‘tweets’ played in the ‘Iranian Green Revolution’ in 2009 (long proven to be false<sup>102</sup>), argues that social media was key to the nonviolent struggle in Egypt.<sup>103</sup> Characterised by platitudes, tautologies and simplifications, these accounts form part of a theoretically and methodically impoverished, albeit popular mythology about a causal correlation between new media and the Arab revolts. With none of the authors on the ground, these narratives are sourced solely on social media feeds and bear little relation to reality.

In *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power*, Egyptian activist and Google executive Wael Ghonim provides a fascinating, locally grounded, insight into the world of cyber-activism in Egypt. As the founder of *Kullanā Khālīd Saʿīd* (We are all Khaled Said), a popular Facebook group in protest of the killing of an Alexandrian youth by Egyptian secret policy, he became instrumental in mobilising the January 25 protest at Cairo’s Tahrīr Square. Social media, according to Ghonim, induced the new model of the leaderless ‘Revolution 2.0,’ in which – compared with version 1.0 – ‘no one

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Oz Hassan, ‘American Democracy Promotion and the “Arab Spring”’, *The United States After Unipolarity*, LSE Ideas Special Report, no. 9 (December 2011).

<sup>100</sup> Denis G. Campbell, *Egypt Unshackled: Using Social Media to @#%& The System* (Carmarthenshire: Cambria Books, 2011). The online social networking service Twitter limits the lengths of messages sent by its users, commonly referred to as ‘tweets,’ to a maximum length of 140 characters.

<sup>101</sup> Andy Carvin, *Distant Witness: Social Media, the Arab Spring and A Journalism Revolution* (New York: CUNY Journalism Press, 2013).

<sup>102</sup> Golnaz Esfandiari, ‘The Twitter Devolution’, *Foreign Policy*, 7 June 2010; Marcus Michaelsen, ‘Linking Up for Change: The Internet and Social Movements in Iran’, in *Social Dynamics 2.0: Researching Change in Times of Social Media and Convergence*, ed. Nadja-Christina Schneider and Bettina Graef (Berlin: Frank & Timme Verlag, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> Dan Thompson, *Away with the Gatekeepers: Social Media as a Tool Facilitating Nonviolent Struggle During the 2011 Egyptian Revolution* (Boston: Create Space, 2013).

was *the* hero because *everyone* was a hero.<sup>104</sup> Though a vivid memoir of Internet activism and oppression by state security, the narrative squarely elevates social media to the engine of political change, but explains little about the intricacies of Egyptian revolution. Although beyond doubt that *Kullanā Khālid Saʿīd* became a hub activism in Egypt, Ghonim's account does not offer proof that the Internet rendered the uprising possible, let alone inevitable.<sup>105</sup>

In light of new empirical evidence from 2011, academics have re-theorised the role of new social media and examined the mechanisms through which it functions. Based on an extensive database of online activity in Tunisia and Egypt, Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain's *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring*<sup>106</sup> unearths three key functions to support their claim that social media was consequential for the 'Arab Spring': the shaping of socio-political debates before the eruption of contention, the mobilisation of collective action, and the diffusion of information globally. Despite their recognition of the complex mixture of causal factors, the authors argue that new social media is one of the most crucial *necessary* and oftentimes *sufficient* predictors for regime instability and the success of social movements. Based on the experience in Egypt, Marc Lynch contends that new technologies can reduce transaction costs for communication and organisation, create information cascades that break fear barriers, raise the costs of repression, diffuse information to regional and global publics, and erode international support for the regime. However, he rejects a technologically deterministic framework.<sup>107</sup> Others concur that social media were 'instrumental' in mobilising collective action and social movement formation<sup>108</sup> or, at least, served as a powerful accelerant and facilitator crucial to mobilisation in Arab countries.<sup>109</sup> However, all of these studies are largely based

<sup>104</sup> Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 235; Smith, 'Egypt's Facebook Revolution: Wael Ghonim Thanks The Social Network'.

<sup>105</sup> Gladwell, 'From Innovation to Revolution'.

<sup>106</sup> Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Muzammil M. Hussain and Philip N. Howard, 'What Best Explains Successful Protest Cascades? ICTs and the Fuzzy Causes of the Arab Spring', *International Studies Review* 15, no. 1 (1 March 2013); Philip N. Howard et al., 'Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?', *Project on Information Technology and Political Islam*, 2011.

<sup>107</sup> Marc Lynch, 'After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State', *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 2 (2011).

<sup>108</sup> Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest, 'Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory', *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011).

<sup>109</sup> Christos A. Frangonikolopoulos and Ioannis Chapsos, 'Explaining the Role and the Impact of the Social Media in the Arab Spring', *GMJ: Mediterranean Edition* 8, no. 1 (2012); Nadine Kassem Chebib and Rabia Minatullah Sohail, 'The Reasons Social Media Contributed to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution', *International Journal of Business Research and Management (IJBRM)* 2 (2011).

on anecdotal evidence and often focus exclusively on online activism, rather than examining the 'complex interactions between society, technology and political systems.'<sup>110</sup>

Critics have therefore called for more nuanced approaches to assessing social media's contributions to the political transformations in the Arab world. Stepanova elaborates a number of preconditions for social media to have an impact, including the availability and affordability of the Internet access, low regime legitimacy and a young IT-savvy population.<sup>111</sup> William Youmans and Jillian York illustrate a number of architectural and legal ways, in which social media platforms limited contentious collective action and forced dissents to work outside of social media structures.<sup>112</sup> With regard to the uprising in Egypt, Jon Alterman claims that satellite television, rather than social media, has led to the expansion of protests from thousands to millions.<sup>113</sup> Other scholars argue moreover that much of the effect of social media is predicated on the extent of its synergy with traditional media<sup>114</sup> and the ways in which the latter re-airs and frames social media content.<sup>115</sup>

According to the systematic analysis conducted by Gadi Wolfsfeld et al., a significant increase in social media activity more frequently *follows*, rather than *precedes*, protests, suggesting its use for documentation and information sharing, rather than mobilisation.<sup>116</sup> This view is congruent with Alok Choudhary et al., whose extensive analysis of Twitter feeds in Egypt shows that a significant portion of discussion consisted of the re-tweeting of broadcast news for others.<sup>117</sup> Based on the analysis of the extensive 'Tahrir Data Project,' Christopher Wilson and Alexandra Dunn contest the predominance of social media in the Egyptian revolution, even though they admit that Internet media

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<sup>110</sup> Francesca Comunello and Giuseppe Anzera, 'Will the Revolution Be Tweeted? A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Social Media and the Arab Spring', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 4 (October 2012).

<sup>111</sup> Stepanova, 'The Role of Information Communication Technologies in the "Arab Spring"'.

<sup>112</sup> William Lafi Youmans and Jillian C. York, 'Social Media and the Activist Toolkit: User Agreements, Corporate Interests, and the Information Infrastructure of Modern Social Movements', *Journal of Communication* 62, no. 2 (1 April 2012).

<sup>113</sup> Jon B. Alterman, 'The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted', *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Fall 2011).

<sup>114</sup> Miriyam Aouragh and Anne Alexander, 'The Egyptian Experience: Sense and Nonsense of the Internet Revolution', *International Journal of Communication* 5 (January 2011).

<sup>115</sup> Heidi A. Campbell and Diana Hawk, 'Al Jazeera's Framing of Social Media During the Arab Spring', *CyberOrient* 6, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>116</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segev, and Tamir Sheafer, 'Social Media and the Arab Spring Politics Comes First', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 18, no. 2 (1 April 2013).

<sup>117</sup> Alok Choudhary et al., 'Social Media Evolution of the Egyptian Revolution', *Communications of the ACM* 55, no. 5 (May 2012).

encouraged networking and inspired protesters.<sup>118</sup> While Elizabeth Iskander maintains that online spaces were not representative of the overall political voices in the Egyptian street,<sup>119</sup> others have conversely argued that social media provide new spaces for expression to ordinary people, which facilitate the formation of leaderless social movements.<sup>120</sup>

In the nuanced account *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, Paolo Gerbaudo theorises social media as 'part of a project of re-appropriation of public space.'<sup>121</sup> The comparative study of social media in the Egyptian uprising (and two non-Arab protest movements) regards the symbolic construction of online public spaces as complementary, rather than substitutive, to face-to-face interactions. In this sense, the Egyptian *shabāb al-facebook* (Facebook youth) was a springboard to Tahrīr protests, which gradually lost some its relevance as street protests gained momentum. Gerbaudo moreover points out that protests were not leaderless, but driven by an activist elite and characterised by soft, non-hierarchical leadership style. The strength of Gerbaudo's account lies in its bridge between online media and offline street-level activism, which is neglected in the majority of studies despite their obvious synergy during the Arab uprisings.

Although social communication technologies constituted a prominent feature in selected citizen revolts, one must not overstate the role of social media in terms of a catalyst or causal agent. While empirical data is predominantly drawn from Egypt, and to a lesser extent from Tunisia and Bahrain, no mention is made of Syria, Libya, Yemen and other countries, where Internet usage rates are significantly lower. This location bias raises serious concerns about whether the (far from consensual) conclusions can be extrapolated to the Arab uprisings at large. As Chapter 4 discusses in greater detail, in light of its low literacy rate, low Internet usage rate and comparatively open media culture, the limited use of new media technology in the Yemeni uprising reveals a fundamentally different picture.

<sup>118</sup> Christopher Wilson and Alexandra Dunn, 'Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Sets', *International Journal of Communication* 5 (January 2011).

<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Iskander, 'Connecting the National and the Virtual: Can Facebook Activism Remain Relevant After Egypt's January 25 Uprising?', *International Journal of Communication* 5 (January 2011).

<sup>120</sup> Doreen Khoury, 'Social Media and the Revolutions: How the Internet Revived the Arab Public Sphere and Digitalized Activism', *Perspectives* 2, no. 2011 (2011); Aouragh and Alexander, 'The Egyptian Experience'; Frangonikolopoulos and Chapsos, 'Explaining the Role and the Impact of the Social Media in the Arab Spring'; Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, 'Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt', *Journal of Communication* 62, no. 2 (1 April 2012).

<sup>121</sup> Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), Cover.

Islamist Winter, Reformation of Islam or Post-Islamist Awakening?

With the rise of influential Islamist parties in Tunisia and Egypt as well as the emergence of militant Islamists as central actors in the conflicts in Libya and Syria, new narratives emerged as the antithesis to the hitherto underlying wisdom about the 'Arab Spring.' At the heart of these 'Islamist Winter' or 'Islamist hijacking' narratives lies the notion that Islamists exploited the events of 2011 for their ascent to power. Two utterly trivialised versions of this discourse are Raphael Israeli's *From Arab Spring to Islamist Winter*<sup>122</sup> and Andrew McCarthy's *Spring Fever: The Illusion of Islamic Democracy*. According to Israeli, Arab publics face a dichotomic choice between the tyrannical dictatorships of the past and a new order of *sharī'a* (Islamic law), as 'Islamic fundamentalist' governments will fill the power vacuum generated by the 'Arab Spring.' In contrast to forward-looking Western movements, regressive Islamist actors across the Muslim world are vying – despite their moderate rhetoric – for the restoration of the iron rule of the caliphate. Israeli thereby conflates the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qā'ida, Islamic Jihad and the Taliban into the same category, arguing that the differences between them are only 'a matter of temperament and pace [rather] than any real doctrinal gap.'<sup>123</sup> In the same vein, McCarthy's *Spring Fever*<sup>124</sup> claims to be an 'antidote for the obsession with ... the obdurate portrayal of the "Arab Spring" as a triumph of freedom.'<sup>125</sup> According to McCarthy, Islam is the only salient factor in the Middle East and shapes the self-perception of every single Muslim as member of a civilisation, whose intrinsic goal is to destroy America. The Muslim notion of freedom thus entails the precise opposite of its meaning in the West: the freedom found in the utter submission to Allāh and the *sharī'a*. Israeli and McCarthy thereby promote an uninformed, essentialist interpretation of Islam based on a literalist reading of the Qur'ān – akin, perhaps, only to the most extremist Islamist groups. Although their alarmist and Islamophobic doomsday prophecies hardly merit the serious discussion that an honest scholarly account deserves, these narratives draw a sizable readership.

John Bradley's *After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolts*<sup>126</sup> similarly disputes that the democratic transitions will eradicate authoritarian regimes and bring about Western-style freedoms and pluralism. The author argues that the Arab

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<sup>122</sup> Raphael Israeli, *From Arab Spring to Islamic Winter* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>124</sup> Andrew C. McCarthy, *Spring Fever: The Illusion of Islamic Democracy* (New York: Encounter Books, 2013).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Preface.

<sup>126</sup> John R. Bradley, *After the Arab Spring: How Islamists Hijacked the Middle East Revolts* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).



uprisings are rooted in economic malaise and mass unemployment, rather than a desire for democracy or human rights. Notwithstanding the corrupt and oppressive nature of the old regimes, Bradley contends, they maintained law and order, promoted education and women's rights, were socially moderate, and kept religious extremists out of power. Little convinced by the elections in Tunisia and Egypt, he claims that Islamists – despite their marginalisation in the initial revolutionary wave – hijacked the uprisings. Their ostensible 'moderation' is accordingly nothing but a myth designed to fool both Arab voters and the West. In Libya, Syria and Yemen, militant Islamists that fly the al-Qā'ida flag are poised to take over. Worst of all, as the 'Arab Spring' has become a tool of the radical antagonism between Saudi Arabia and Iran, it will beget regressive and repressive theocracies of their kind. Although Bradley is correct that the 'Arab Spring' was not simply a call for Western democracy, he fails to discern the uprisings' potential long-term effects on democratisation and ignores empirical evidence of pragmatic behaviour of Islamist parties and movements.

In *The Sharia State: Arab Spring and Democratization*<sup>127</sup>, Bassam Tibi examines Islamist conceptualisations of the *sharī'a* state (usually referred to as Islamic state), which, he argues, has been elevated to the top of the political agenda of Islamist movements with the Arab uprisings. According to Tibi, in the absence of signs of democratisation, the rebellion against unjust autocratic dictatorships is neither a spring, nor a revolution. Instead, the rise of far from moderate Islamist leaders with the agenda of instituting a *sharī'a* state stands in a value conflict with pluralism and democracy. Islamist movements, according to Tibi, have authoritarian and patriarchal structures, adhere to a totalitarian ideology, demand blind obedience from their members, and are, as such, inherently undemocratic. The author explicitly rejects Olivier Roy's notion of 'post-Islamism' and Gilles Kepel's propagation of the 'end of Islamism.' He conversely argues that Islamism is not only 'alive and kicking,' but that 'Islamists have successfully hijacked the "Arab Spring"'<sup>128</sup> and its promise for democratisation. In their various versions, these accounts make the mistake of focusing on doctrinal issues of Islamism, rather than the actual practice of Islamist movements. In a brief article in the New York Review of Books, Hussein Agha and Robert Malley provide a considerably more nuanced, albeit shorter, narrative, which highlights the complexities and contradictions of diverse Islamist movements in their national and regional dimensions. Although the article similarly confers a sense of an Islamist take-over, the authors argue that Islamists have come to accept to leave core Western interests untouched in exchange

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<sup>127</sup> Bassam Tibi, *The Sharia State: Arab Spring and Democratization* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 16.

for economic aid and political support. Rather than vying for short-term political goals, they focus on the incremental transformation of Islamic societies.<sup>129</sup>

From the fatalists to the reformists, *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the New Middle East*<sup>130</sup> (originally published in French as *L'islam et le réveil arabe*) by Tariq Ramadan conversely makes an ambitious call for a fundamental social and cultural renewal of Islam. Cautiously optimistic that this will succeed, Ramadan avoids both a premature celebration and the pessimistic dismissal of the 'Arab awakening.' He considers the term 'Arab Spring' ahistorical and imperialistic for suggesting that its popular demands were mere replica of Western values and that the Middle East had 'joined the advanced, civilized detachment of the Western-led onward march of history.'<sup>131</sup> Writing for an Arab and Muslim readership, Ramadan posits that the uprisings were genuinely Arab, rather than manipulated by Western democracy promoters. His key concern is to overcome the polarisation between secularists and Islamists in order to situate a reformed Islam as a religious and ideological reference in the contemporary Arab world. Inspired by the Turkish model, Ramadan rejects the concept of an 'Islamic state' and argues for a 'civil state' de-linked from religious authority. Accordingly, he interprets the *sharī'a* as a call for dignity, social justice, freedom and pluralism, rather than a rigid, sanctified legal structure. However, the book adds little to the understanding of the origins of the uprisings, but serves foremost to clarify the author's politico-religious positions. With a similar reformist outlook, Jean-Pierre Filiu predicts a major transformation of Islamist politics. In *The Arab Revolution: Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising*<sup>132</sup>, Filiu draws on events in early 2011 to debunk common stereotypes about the Arab world. He explains that the Arab world is no exception in its desire for democracy and argues that social networks galvanised unemployed, angry, but peaceful youths, into a singular, leaderless pro-democracy movement. Islamists, according to Filiu, face the choice between embracing democracy and becoming irrelevant. The author is optimistic that the former will occur as religious discourse did little else than serve as an ethical justification of the revolutionary efforts. According to Filiu, the 'Arab revolution' thus marks the closure of a negative period of history since 9/11 and will engender democratisation, even if some temporary setbacks are to be expected.

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<sup>129</sup> Hussein Agha and Robert Malley, 'This Is Not a Revolution', *The New York Review of Books*, 8 November 2012.

<sup>130</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *The Arab Awakening: Islam and the New Middle East* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>132</sup> Jean-Pierre Filiu, *The Arab Revolution: Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

In the tradition of Olivier Roy's 1994 thesis about the failure of the Islamist project to engender a true political alternative, Farhad Khosrokhavar, Hamid Dabashi and Asef Bayat – three sociologists of Iranian descent – argue that the uprisings mark the beginning of an era of post-Islamism.<sup>133</sup> Khosrokhavar's *The New Arab Revolutions That Shook the World*<sup>134</sup> is an optimistic, anti-culturalist approach to Arab democratisation. The author ascribes the causes for the Arab revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt to economic openings, as well as major regional demographic and educational developments. He thereby emphasises the role of previous mobilisations and activism, such as union action, workers strikes and Internet campaigns. In the context of an irreversible trend marked by major symbolic innovations, Khosrokhavar claims, a fragile new actor has been shaped: the non-political and secularised 'netizen,' who has come together in leaderless protest movements, demanding dignity, individualisation and the reformulation of social contract with the state. Within the framework of a new civil society, the debates between secularist and Islamists, as well as between Muslim Brothers and Salafists, thus manifest themselves in what Khosrokhavar construes as part of a dynamic process of secularisation.

In a similar vein, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*<sup>135</sup> contextualises the transnational revolutionary uprisings in Dabashi's broader narrative of 'liberation geography' in the Islamic world. The new epistemology of liberation, for Dabashi, ushers in the end of post-coloniality and the clichéd binaries of Orientalism. At the heart of his narrative lies the triumph of *ethos* over *ethnos*, epitomised in the new democratic vocabulary of dignity, freedom and social justice. The uprisings assert Arabs and Muslims as subjects, rather than objects of history, and should be theorised as post-ideological constructions that resist and dispose of the regressive, authoritarian and imperialistic projects of Islamism, the 'new American Century' and colonial Zionism. As the binary opposition between Islam and the West, as well as their respective ideologies, have epistemically exhausted themselves, Islam has retrieved an innate, but latent, 'cosmopolitan worldliness,' which signifies the end of political Islamism. The sympathetic account shows little concern for some of the questions raised by the resilience of Arab monarchies. The thought-provoking, forward-looking and, at times, counterintuitive account relies on Dabashi's unshakable certitude about the liberation geography, but does not incorporate empirical evidence which contradicts this narrative.

<sup>133</sup> Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994).

<sup>134</sup> Farhad Khosrokhavar, *The New Arab Revolutions That Shook the World* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

<sup>135</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (New York: Zed Books, 2012).

In *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*,<sup>136</sup> which first appeared in 2010 and was then updated two years after the beginning of the Arab Spring, Bayat describes how ordinary people generate meaningful change through dynamic grassroots protest and everyday action. The book's main theme is 'post-Islamism,' as Bayat believes that the growth of a democratic consciousness and movements, such as the 2004 *Kefāya* movement in Egypt, transcend the Islamist politics that have reigned the region for decades. In his view, the remarkable absence of religious rhetoric in the 2011 revolutions reiterates this new, inclusive post-Islamist politics. However, post-Islamism, Bayat argues, is neither anti-Islamic nor secular, but simultaneously upholds an inclusive religion and citizens' rights – in other words, a pious society within a democratic state. The author provides convincing examples for such post-Islamist movements, notably the Tunisian *ḥizb al-naḥḍa*, Egypt's *ḥizb al-waṣaṭ*, as well as the Moroccan and Turkish Justice and Development Parties, which are set to supersede undemocratic Islamist movements, even if 'Islam continues to serve as a crucial mobilizing ideology and social movement frame.'<sup>137</sup>

Fawaz Gerges strikes a middle ground between these approaches to the politics of Islamism. His assessment of the governance experience of Islamists in Egypt and elsewhere leads him to conclude that – although Islamism has failed in both theory and practice – final obituaries of political Islam are premature.<sup>138</sup> Unconvinced by the alarmist fears about the hijacking or Islamisation of political systems, he argues in an extended journal article that Islamist parties are gradually abandoning the traditional 'Islamic state' agenda in exchange for a civil Islam within the framework of a (vaguely defined) pluralistic 'civil state.' This shift is accompanied by an orientation towards social services provision in order to gain legitimacy for elections, and a propensity to work with Western powers on issues of mutual interests. This view directly challenges Tibi's claims about the *sharī'a* state, and is congruent with Bayat's analysis, but Gerges is rightly careful not to construe either of these pragmatic turns as the ideological demise of Islamism, as parties continue to invoke doctrinal values to appeal to its conservative constituency.<sup>139</sup>

Despite these early signs of Islamist pragmatism and a tacit convergence around notions of pluralism and the civil state, country-to-country variations remain significant. In

<sup>136</sup> Asef Bayat, 'The Post-Islamist Revolutions', *Foreign Affairs*, 26 April 2011; Bayat, *Life as Politics*; Asef Bayat, 'The Arab Spring and Its Surprises', *Development and Change* 44, no. 3 (1 May 2013).

<sup>137</sup> Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 8.

<sup>138</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, 'Premature Obituaries for Political Islam', *Foreign Policy*, 16 July 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, 'The Islamist Moment: From Islamic State to Civil Islam?', *Political Science Quarterly* 128, no. 3 (September 2013).

contrast to its long-suppressed North African counterparts, the Islamist Iṣlāḥ has been tolerated as an integral element of Yemen's post-unification multiparty system for two decades, both as part of a coalition government between 1994 and 1997 and as an opposition force, which has had a positive effect on its moderation. In the context of cross-partisan cooperation under the umbrella of the JMP, Iṣlāḥ has moreover demonstrated considerable pragmatism – even if the party has not moderated its core political ideas. Despite its appropriation of the revolutionary movement as a vehicle for political influence, fears of a hijacking of the political system are therefore misplaced. Iṣlāḥ, but also other faith-based parties, such as the Salafi Rashad Union Party and the Ḥūthī-affiliated Anṣār Allāh, remain salient partisan forces in the political landscape, suggesting that the era of post-Islamism has not (yet) dawned in Yemen.

### ***Literature Review: Modern Yemen***

In contrast to the wealth of literature about Arab uprisings, the Republic of Yemen (RoY, 1990-) is an academic orphan in the landscape of Middle Eastern studies. One can only speculate about the reasons for this marginalisation, but the difficulty of conducting research due to security concerns, the scarce availability of written sources and language barriers, as well as the absence of compelling economic interests are surely elements of an explanation. Nevertheless, security concerns and geostrategic interests in the Horn of Africa have raised attention to Yemen in recent years. The first section of this review about Yemen is concerned with prevalent interpretations of Yemen's modern history, political affairs, civil society, state-building and multiple conflicts, while the latter half surveys narratives of Yemen's revolutionary uprising in 2011. These works originate from the disciplines of political science, history and Middle East studies.

### ***Beyond Qur'ān and Kalashnikov: State, Politics and Civil Society in Yemen***

From its buzzing market labyrinth in the alleyways between Ṣan'ā's old city mud brick skyscrapers to Socotra's extra-terrestrial landscapes, Yemen's oriental charm and apparent anachronism have mesmerised historical and contemporary visitors alike. In the context of the post-9/11 security agenda, however, Yemen has gained notoriety as a politically dysfunctional, violence-riddled, tribal, anarchic and underdeveloped country. Publications about Yemen almost hypnotically recite its multiple conflicts: a civil war in the North, a secessionist movement in the South, and al-Qā'ida. They have moreover predicted since around 2005 that the Yemeni state – 'on the brink' of collapse – will fail, a prophecy that is

yet materialise.<sup>140</sup> Al-Qā'ida in the Arabian Peninsula/Anṣār al-Sharī'a, in particular, have generated immense interest. Besides some nuanced and critical narratives,<sup>141</sup> most accounts have varying portrayed Yemen as a 'breeding ground for terrorism,' a 'threat to America' or a 'refuge for jihadists.'<sup>142</sup> Few Yemenis, however, accord the same prominence to these militant Islamist groups. They have for long considered al-Qā'ida either a myth or a government ploy to extract counterterrorism support and cloak the repression of domestic insurgencies in a veil of legitimacy – even if the growth of al-Qā'ida between 2012 and 2014 has altered this image.<sup>143</sup> This focus on Yemen's excesses in violence, fragility and jihadism is understandable for political reasons; however, its reductionism detracts from the remarkable accomplishments and challenges in other domains – post-unification electoral politics, civil society activism or humanitarian malaise, to mention but a few – and thus diverts attention from arguably more consequential themes.

Despite this unfortunate prioritisation, numerous scholarly works have explored the politics, history and civil society in Yemen in a different light over the past three decades. Robert Stookey's *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*<sup>144</sup> constitutes the standard reference work of Yemeni history, a macro-history of Yemen from the deep roots of pre-Islamic polities to the 1962 revolution, its ensuing civil war and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). The work details major changes in political and social configurations throughout successive regimes with the overall argument that the country has failed to achieve national integration. In *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development, 1962-1986*<sup>145</sup>, which the

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<sup>140</sup> 'The Failed States Index' (Fund for Peace, 2005); Robert D. Burrowes, 'Yemen: Political Economy and the Effort against Terrorism', in *Battling Terrorism in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005); Ginny Hill, 'Yemen: Fear of Failure', Briefing Paper (Chatham House, November 2008); Brian Whitaker, 'Yemen – The Next Failed State?', *The Guardian*, 27 July 2009; Christopher Boucek and Marina Ottaway, *Yemen on the Brink* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010); Thomas Juneau, 'Yemen: Prospects for State Failure - Implications and Remedies', *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>141</sup> Camille Pecastaing, *Jihad in the Arabian Sea* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2011); Gregory D. Johnsen, *The Last Refuge: Yemen, Al-Qaeda, and America's War in Arabia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012).

<sup>142</sup> Ramzy Mardini, ed., *The Battle for Yemen: Al-Qaeda and the Struggle for Stability* (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2011); Edmund J. Hull, *High-Value Target: Countering Al Qaeda in Yemen* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2011); Kirk Lippold, *Front Burner: Al Qaeda's Attack on the USS Cole* (New York: Public Affairs, 2012); Brian Glyn Williams, *Predators: The CIA's Drone War on Al Qaeda* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013); Michael W. S. Ryan, *Decoding Al-Qaeda's Strategy: The Deep Battle Against America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>143</sup> Mona El-Naggar and Robert F. Worth, 'Yemen's Drive on Al Qaeda Faces Internal Skepticism', *The New York Times*, 3 November 2010.

<sup>144</sup> Robert W. Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978).

<sup>145</sup> Robert D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development, 1962-1986* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

author updates in a journal article four years later,<sup>146</sup> Robert Burrowes traces the political history of the YAR based on contemporary theories of development and political economy. He describes the failures and modest successes of the successive post-revolutionary presidential regimes of Presidents al-Sallāl, al-Iryānī, al-Ḥamdī, al-Ghashmī and Ṣāliḥ. The structuring theme of this narrative about the quest to consolidate state structures and promote economic development is the tension between traditionalist and modernist forces. Iris Glosemeyer's *Politische Akteure in der Republik Jemen: Wahlen, Parteien und Parlamente* (Political Actors in the Republic of Yemen: Elections, Parties and Parliaments)<sup>147</sup> is an in-depth analysis of Yemen's political landscape, institutions and social structure. A major contribution to democratisation literature, Glosemeyer juxtaposes the role of political actors – shaykhs, military officers, high official, entrepreneurs, teachers, etc. – before 1990 with their participation in the multiparty electoral competition of Yemen's post-unification political system, which she describes as an 'inclusive oligarchy.'

In *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia*<sup>148</sup>, Sheila Carapico explains the dynamism of 'traditional' (such as tribalism and Islam) and 'modern' (the formalised articulation of variegated interests) manifestations of civil society in Yemen in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The empirically rich survey of the activism of labour unions, self-help projects, local development co-operatives, clubs, private schools, welfare associations, political parties and discussion groups refutes the essentialist view that modern civil society does not exist in Yemen. In the absence of a strong state, Carapico argues, economic and political circumstances stimulated three openings during which civil society flourished – the British colonial era in the South (1950s/1960s), the post-revolution period in the North (1970s/early 1980s) and the post-unification period (1990-1994) – even if each of these phases witnessed subsequent contractions in the face of repression. Following Carapico's landmark study, Lisa Wedeen analyses the performative practices in an incipient democratic public sphere in Yemen in *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*.<sup>149</sup> In the shadow of a quasi-autocratic state, the author finds everyday, community-imagining practices that construct national attachments and religious identities

<sup>146</sup> Robert D. Burrowes, 'Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic, 1962 - 1990', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991).

<sup>147</sup> Iris Glosemeyer, *Politische Akteure in der Republik Jemen: Wahlen, Parteien und Parlamente* (Political Actors in the Republic of Yemen: Elections, Parties and Parliaments) (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 2001).

<sup>148</sup> Sheila Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen: The Political Economy of Activism in Modern Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>149</sup> Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2008).

in unfamiliar forms and places, such as *qāt* chews, tribes, oral or tape-recorded poetry, religious sermons and movements, national celebrations, pseudo-democratic elections, sectarian resistance, etc. These fluid and episodic solidarities, Wedeen argues, are not necessarily continuous, stable and exclusive, but explain identity-making beyond the state, and thus the paradoxical existence of a strong, communal people in a weak polity, which relies on spaces of disorder to exercise control. In fact, public resentment of failing governance, according to Wedeen has a unifying effect.

Four authors provide modern histories of North and South Yemen. Building on his earlier structuralist account of tribal society in North Yemen *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen*, Paul Dresch provides a comprehensive, anthropological history that ranges from the early 1900s to the late 1990s. *A History of Modern Yemen*<sup>150</sup> is based on the notion that three cardinal events paved the way for Yemen's transition to modernity: the British occupation of 'Adan (1839), Ottoman re-conquest of Ṣan'ā' (1872) and the accession of Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (1904). Thoroughly researched and abundantly sourced with original Arabic sources, the fast-paced history delves into the minutiae of everyday life and the shifting allegiances between tribal, religious, intellectuals and other social actors, rather than political matters of rulers, armies and state. In the absence of a clear hypothesis and explanatory framework of change processes, however, the history of state formation is illustrative, and lacks the analytical vigour of other works. Temporarily set before Dresch's work, *Unmaking North and South: Cartographies of the Yemeni Past*<sup>151</sup> by John Willis provides a well-crafted and painstakingly sourced history of the spatial construction of modern Yemen through state governing practices in the late Zaydī Imamate and the 'Adan protectorate between 1839 and 1934. The author juxtaposes intellectual debates on nationalism and Islamic reform as well as everyday practices of rule in Ṣan'ā' with those in the South, and analyses them with regard to their role in fostering the parallel trajectories that defined the geographical imagination of 'modern' Yemen. The densely written text constitutes not only a major contribution to the colonial history of Yemen, but is useful as a background to current debates on unity in the context of the Southern Movement, Ḥirāk.

In contrast to Dresch and Willis' expert histories, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*<sup>152</sup> by Victoria Clark is a vivid, non-academic historical account of Yemen, mixed with a personal memoir of the 'Adan-born author, from the first Ottoman conquest in

<sup>150</sup> Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>151</sup> John M. Willis, *Unmaking North and South: Cartographies of the Yemeni Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>152</sup> Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).



1538 to 2010. Based entirely on English-language sources and a few local interviews, Clark provides a historical narrative of Yemen through the eyes of foreigners. Clark thereby frequently falls into clichés and trivialisations, including a propensity to overreliance on a monolithic categorisation of tribes to explain ‘Yemen’s failure to thrive as a modern nation state.’<sup>153</sup> Although a highly readable and sympathetically inclined narrative, the book contributes little to historiographical debates. In *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen: A Troubled National Union*<sup>154</sup>, Stephen Day outlines a geographically structured history of republican Yemen. Based on the notion that regionalism is necessitated by an imbalance in the distribution of resources, he argues that the origins of Yemen’s instability lie in a quasi-primordial federalism rooted in the Qāsimī and Mutawakkilite dynasties and a power concentration in the northwestern highland tribes. However, Day reduces the motivations of political actors to a largely static 7-region framework, whose underlying principles remain somewhat ambiguous. At times, he resorts to brute force to make facts complacent with these geographical identities and is prone to careless generalisations, such as that ‘Yemen will endure as a fragmented polity, just as it has for millennia.’<sup>155</sup> Concerning the 2011 uprising, the author argues that the Ṣāliḥ regime lost its illegitimacy due to its lack of promoting development and the exploitation of patron-client relationships, which is regrettably simple given his otherwise neat historical contextualisation of current events.

Fred Halliday, Helen Lackner and Noel Brehony provide three authoritative historical studies with focus on South Yemeni affairs. Halliday’s *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987*<sup>156</sup> is a masterful study of the foreign policy of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in relation to its internal political transformation – the key determinant for this policy. Beginning with the 1967 revolution, he traces the power struggles and turmoil of the infant, post-revolutionary one-party state, which ensured the hostility of its wealthy neighbours through its policy of exporting its revolution, but then grew increasingly pragmatic. His description of the unifying tendencies of Yemeni nationalism throughout the book rightly debunks the idea that unification was merely a by-product of the demise of the Soviet Union. The timing of its publication in 1987 is unfortunate – though, of course, not the author’s fault – as it came too early to fully

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>154</sup> Stephen Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen: A Troubled National Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>156</sup> Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

assess the devastating effects of the 1986 intraparty bloodbath on the PDRY, yet too late to include the last three years of short-lived polity before its unification. *P.D.R. Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia*<sup>157</sup> by Helen Lackner is a vivid, well-sourced social account of the PDRY from its revolutionary struggle in the 1960s to the mid-1980s. Highly sympathetic to the political and social programme of the PDRY, the author discusses its ideology, theory and policies at length, but adds comparatively little to the understanding of actual local practice, despite her prolonged residence as a teacher in the PDRY. Lackner's main argument is that the lack of resources and the pre-existing, pre-capitalist social structure constituted the primary obstacles to the social development of South Yemen. The first extensive history of South Yemen since 1990, Noel Brehony's *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia*<sup>158</sup> examines socialist politics, institutions and leadership rivalries of South Yemen's Marxist regime, based on elite interviews, archival research and first-hand observations as a British diplomat in the PDRY of the early 1970s. The detailed and subtle account covers the power struggles between nationalist movements in the 1950s and 60s, as well as the successive leaderships during the 1970s and 80s, which culminated in the 1986 civil war; the demise of the socialist regime; and its failed attempt at resuscitation. The narrative, however, lacks a clear historical argument or theory (apart from the 'failed state' concept) and only cursorily engages with historiographical debates. Nevertheless, Brehony provides a good sense of Northern domination post-1990 and includes a useful discussion about the continuities between revolutionaries of the 1960s and the southern secessionist movement after 2007, which has not been dealt with elsewhere.

In light of the scant literature about Yemen's far north, the only recent book-length accounts are Gabriele vom Bruck's monograph on the Yemeni Zaydiyya and a Think Tank-commissioned study about the Ḥūthī rebellion. Determined to abstain from recent historical conflict that began a year before the publication of *Islam, Memory, and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition*<sup>159</sup>, Vom Bruck's impressive ethnography of Zaydī *sāda* families (those, who trace their genealogy to Prophet Muḥammad's daughter Fatima) helps elucidate the socio-political underpinnings of the Ḥūthī movement. She details the accommodation, integration and coping strategies of socially and politically demoted *sāda* in North Yemen's post-1962 revolution republican environment, whose relative tolerance in the 1970s turned into hostility with the growing influence of Salafi and Wahhabi

<sup>157</sup> Helen Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen: Outpost of Socialist Development in Arabia* (London: Ithaca, 1986).

<sup>158</sup> Noel Brehony, *Yemen Divided: The Story of a Failed State in South Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

<sup>159</sup> Gabriele vom Bruck, *Islam, Memory, and Morality in Yemen: Ruling Families in Transition* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

doctrines in the 1980s. Vom Bruck thereby explores processes of memory formation, explains the doctrinal evocation of the ritual of *taqlīd* – a ‘moral rearmament’ for self-preservation – among the *sāda*, and remains optimistic that Yemen will forge a more inclusive national identity. Barak Salmoni et al. begin, where vom Bruck ends. In *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: the Huthi Phenomenon*<sup>160</sup>, the authors provide an empirically rich, political account of the *shabāb al-mū'min* (Believing Youth) and the emergence of the Ḥūthī conflict (1980s-2001), the escalation of tensions (2001-2004) and the six regime-Ḥūthī wars (2004-2010). The authors promote the view of a ‘rolling’ conflict, rather than an insurgency, and argue that the conflict is likely to persist unless the Yemeni government fundamentally restructures centre-periphery relations and addresses underlying grievances.

Lastly, Sarah Phillips and Isa Blumi deal with the topic of authoritarianism in Yemen from a political and historical angle, respectively. *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism*<sup>161</sup> by Phillips examines the transformation of power structures, institutions and public political space in the period between 1990 and the run-up to the 2006 elections. The author attempts to reconcile two strains of democratisation literature: on the one hand, the view that the normative commitment to democracy can promote democratisation; on the other, the argument that the veil of democratic norms and institutions can legitimise, and thus reinforce, authoritarian regimes. A weak state with limited resources, Phillips argues, that the ‘politics of survival’ of Yemen’s post-1994 ‘neopatrimonial’ and ‘pluralised authoritarian’ regime rely on a combination of legitimisation, managed pluralism, and coercion. Accordingly, the Yemeni regime tolerates expressions of discontent, but prescribes political mobilisation; co-opts the opposition through inclusion in patronage networks funded through oil revenues; and selectively coerces those who do not play by the ‘rules of the game.’ The argument could have been strengthened if the author had contextualised the Yemeni experience in a comparative perspective and treated the literature on ‘Arab exceptionalism’ more critically. However, this does not detract from the insightful and nuanced study, which reveals a deep understanding of Yemen’s political scene. Isa Blumi’s narrative *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism*<sup>162</sup> provides a comparative historical account of Yemen before 1934 and after the 1980s, wherein the author juxtaposes the rebellion of ‘Asīrī ruler

<sup>160</sup> Barak A. Salmoni, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen the Huthi Phenomenon* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2010).

<sup>161</sup> Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>162</sup> Isa Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism* (Routledge, 2010).

Muḥammad al-Idrīsī against Imam Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn with post-unification politics, including the Ḥūthī rebellion and the North-South conflict. The authoritarianism and disorder fostered by the 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ represents, according to Blumi, an aberration from Yemen's traditionally deliberative politics. This policy is designed to position the regime as the sole source of stability in order to extract resources from the United States and global financial institutions. The author attacks the reductionisms of the 'strategic mainstream,' which obscures Yemeni political dynamics in concepts such as 'regionalism, tribalism and sectarianism.' Blumi's most persuasive argument in this regard is the primacy of temporary coalitions of local communities around micro-level material interests over collective tribal, religious, doctrinal or other primordial group loyalties. While the work fulfils high historical quality standards, his frequent time travel and virtual omission of the years between 1934 and 1980 makes it difficult to read for a non-specialised audience.

#### The Other 'Arab Spring': Citizen Revolt in a Fragile, Tribal State?

Almost four years after the beginning of the revolutionary upheaval in 2011, narratives of Yemen's citizen revolt remain scarce. In the absence of any book-length account, only a few policy reports, chapters in edited volumes and journal articles examine the events. In the course of 2011, a number of high-quality policy reports, for example by the International Crisis Group (ICG), the Middle East Policy Council or the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), emerged; however, none of these contemporary analyses of the early protest dynamics and regime responses could aspire to provide a systematic overview.<sup>163</sup> The edited volumes about the Arab uprisings by Khair El-Din Haseeb, Mark Haas and David Lesch, Anna Agathangelou and Nevzat Soguk, Kjetil Fosshagen, as well as Annette Jünemann and Anja Zorob do not dedicate chapters to Yemen, even though she was one of four countries that experienced a regime change to date.<sup>164</sup> Other compilations contain only extremely brief, and largely descriptive,

<sup>163</sup> 'Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (II): Yemen between Reform and Revolution', Middle East/North Africa Report 102 (International Crisis Group, 10 March 2011); Khaled Fattah, 'Yemen: A Social Intifada in a Republic of Sheikhs', *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 3 (2011); Iris Glosemeyer, 'Der Jemen ohne Ali Abdallah Salih?', in *Proteste, Aufstände und Regimewandel in der Arabischen Welt: Akteure, Herausforderungen, Implikationen und Handlungsoptionen*, ed. Muriel Asseburg, SWP Studie (Berlin, 2011).

<sup>164</sup> Khair El-Din Haseeb, ed., *The Arab Spring: Critical Analyses* (Routledge, 2013); Mark L. Haas and David W. Lesch, eds., *The Arab Spring: Change and Resistance in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2013); Anna M. Agathangelou and Nevzat Soguk, eds., *Arab Revolutions and World Transformations* (London: Routledge, 2013); Kjetil Fosshagen, ed., *Arab Spring: Uprisings, Powers, Interventions* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Annette Jünemann and Anja Zorob, eds., *Arabellions: Zur Vielfalt von Protest und Revolte im Nahen Osten und Nordafrika* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013).

newspaper articles or political commentaries, such the collections by Bassam Haddad et al. with articles from Jadaliyya, Toby Manhire's assemblage of articles from *The Guardian*, or David McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers accounts from MERIP.<sup>165</sup>

Two brief publications by Marie-Christine Heinze and April Longley Alley trace the Yemeni protest movement from its genesis in January 2011 into the first year of the negotiated transition process. Meticulously researched and characterised by expert knowledge of the subject, these two stocktaking efforts, however, lack a larger interpretive ambition to elucidate the origins, causes and significance of the uprisings.<sup>166</sup> Conversely, Vincent Durac argues that 'Yemen's Arab Spring' emerged in response to socio-economic distress, high levels of poverty and unemployment, with a significant role played by social media. Although driven by actors outside the traditional centres of power, the organised political opposition, most notably the JMP, soon superseded the grassroots movement. Due to the GGC Agreement, Durac concludes that the authoritarianism of the old regime remains largely intact, albeit with different actors. Although an overall well-informed analysis of the dynamics of the uprising, the article is based on little original research, subscribes to the flat grievance hypothesis and fails to fully contextualise the uprising in Yemen's antecedents of contentious politics.<sup>167</sup>

Two peer-reviewed articles contextualise the Yemeni uprising in the state failure and security narratives – characteristic of the stability-centred literature on Yemen before 2011. In what is largely a cursory recycling of American newspaper coverage on Yemen, its multiple conflicts and challenges, Ibrahim Sharqieh argues that the uprising raises Yemen's potential for a civil war or state failure. While highlighting the non-violent character of Yemen's youth uprising and the need to engage Yemen beyond the issue of counterterrorism, the author essentialises tribalism as a primordial violent feature of Yemen political affairs.<sup>168</sup> His focus on instability and the dubious concept of state failure overshadow concerns with the authoritarianism of the Ṣālīḥ regime, a trait reflected in

<sup>165</sup> Bassam Haddad, Rosie Bsheer, and Ziad Abu-Rish, eds., *The Dawn of the Arab Uprisings: End of an Old Order?* (London: Pluto Press, 2012); Toby Manhire, ed., *The Arab Spring: Rebellion, Revolution and a New World Order* (London: Random House, 2012); David McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers, eds., *The Arab Revolts: Dispatches on Militant Democracy in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

<sup>166</sup> Marie-Christine Heinze, 'Zeitenwende im Jemen?', in *Der Arabische Frühling*, ed. Thorsten Gerald Schneiders (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013); April Longley Alley, 'Yemen Changes Everything... And Nothing', *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>167</sup> Vincent Durac, 'Yemen's Arab Spring – Democratic Opening or Regime Maintenance?', *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (July 2012).

<sup>168</sup> Ibrahim Sharqieh, 'Yemen: The Search for Stability and Development', in *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011).

Thomas Juneau's account. Juneau's article is structured around the idea that the Yemen uprising, which arose in response to the country's dire economic, social and security situation, exacerbated the already high levels of instability grounded in prevailing conflicts. In the face of insurmountable obstacles to stability, he posits that Yemen is likely to continue along the road of state collapse, fragmentation and Hobbesian anarchy.<sup>169</sup>

The book chapters by Yemeni academics 'Ādil al-Sharjabī and Gamal Gasim both focus on mobilisation in Yemen. 'Ādil al-Sharjabī traces the emergence of various student and youth groups in Ṣan'ā' and Ta'izz from their emergence after 15 January 2011, to the formation of coalitions, and finally their gradual demise with the JMP takeover. As explanation for the revolutionary mobilisation, the author offers Ṣāliḥ's policy of building a family regime since 1994 and the loss of confidence of the youth in political parties since 2007. Sharjabī does not explain why he chooses this date, but it likely comes a result of the 2006 elections in which the GPC won a landslide victory. He rightly situates the failure of the 'historic bloc' in the discord among revolutionary groups and their alliance with traditional forces after the 'Friday of Dignity' massacre on 18 March. Although the detailed, but somewhat erratic, account attests to the author's thorough insights as a participant in the revolutionary movement, Sharjabī focuses solely on mobilisation and thus fails to embed the events into a larger explanatory framework.<sup>170</sup> In an edited volume on Arab activism, Gamal Gasim explores the Yemeni uprising through a continuum of collective action since the unification of Yemen in 1990. He traces various forms of contentious strategies through three phases (1990-1994, 1994-2006, 2006-2011), which – he argues – are distinguished by political conditions and patterns of activism. Although the author sketches a shift from party-based to mass movements and then grassroots activism, the categorisation remains conceptually vague. Gasim affords a questionably large role to traditional forces, notably tribes and 'ulamā', and portrays activism as nothing more than a response to grievances. While the overall approach is well-conceived, its execution is

<sup>169</sup> Thomas Juneau, 'Yemen and the Arab Spring: Elite Struggles, State Collapse and Regional Security', *Orbis* 57, no. 3 (2013).

<sup>170</sup> 'Ādil Mujaḥid Al-Sharjabī, 'Al-Kutlat al-Tārīkhīya li-Thawrat al-Hurrīya wa-l-Taghīyr fī al-Yaman: Min al-Tashkil ilā al-Taḥkāk (The Historic Bloc for the Revolution of Freedom and Change in Yemen: From Formation to Disintegration)', in *Al-Rabī'a al-'Arabī: Thawrāt al-Khilāṣ Min al-Istibdād (The Arab Spring: Revolutions for Deliverance from Authoritarianism)*, ed. Hassan Krayem, The Arab Network for the Study of Democracy (L'Orient des Livres, 2013).

mediocre as the text is riddled with generalisations and factual errors, while the author often fails to back up statements with empirical evidence.<sup>171</sup>

Three short pieces demonstrate conceptual strength and intricate knowledge of the political dynamics of Yemen's revolt. Stacey Philbrick Yadav's insightful article on the 'antecedents of the revolution' locates the groundwork for the Yemeni revolt in the history of cross-partisan cooperation under the umbrella of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) in the 2000s. Although the JMP was a latecomer to the protests, the author persuasively argues that the ties and networks created around this ideologically diverse coalition were instrumental in the development of 'post-partisan nationalism [as] a necessary antecedent of the revolution.'<sup>172</sup> Although Philbrick Yadav demonstrates little familiarity with the revolutionary coalitions and intra-movement politics, this may be owed to the early timing of the article. The predominant focus on the JMP moreover detracts from the complex role of other 'antecedents of the revolution,' including such political forces as the Ḥūthīs, Ḥirāk, civil society groups, professional associations, unions, tribes, religious scholars or political powerbrokers, but this does not detract from an otherwise convincing argument.

Gabriele vom Bruck, Atiaf al-Wazir and Benjamin Wiacek trace the Yemeni revolt from the rise of the protest movement to the 'Friday of Dignity' massacre on March 18 – a turning point that marked the beginning of the takeover by the 'establishment' – and finally the negotiated transition process. Elite rivalries, both in the decade preceding the uprising and among the different forces of the revolutionary movement, constitute a major theme of the brief chapter. The latter tensions lead the authors to question whether the 'revolution' had been 'suspended.' As two of the co-authors actively participated in Ṣan'ā' Change Square, the chapter fully subscribes to the perspective of independent youth activists and its underlying intellectual premises. Although some claims, for example those concerning the motivations of elite powerbrokers for certain decisions, are not backed up by sources, the overall analysis is sound and provides the reader with a good introduction to the events.<sup>173</sup>

Laurent Bonnefoy and Marine Poirier's narrative on the structuration and dynamics of the Yemeni revolution provides the perhaps best overview of Yemen's citizen uprising to date. Going beyond a simple cause and effect relationship, the authors argue

<sup>171</sup> Gamal Gasim, 'Explaining Political Activism in Yemen', in *Taking to the Streets: The Transformation of Arab Activism*, ed. Lina Khatib and Ellen Lust (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

<sup>172</sup> Stacey Philbrick Yadav, 'Antecedents of the Revolution: Intersectoral Networks and Post-Partisanship in Yemen', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (December 2011): 551.

<sup>173</sup> Gabriele vom Bruck, Atiaf Alwazir, and Benjamin Wiacek, 'Yemen: Revolution Suspended?', in *The New Middle East: Protest and Revolution in the Arab World*, ed. Fawaz A. Gerges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

that the uprising formed part of a continuum of crises, conflicts and social relations. Based on Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, they argue for the 'duality of revolutionary structure,' which encompasses both the grassroots revolutionary project and the parallel reassertion of power by traditional political players. Although one might question the revolutionary nature of the latter, the article is sharp in its analysis and based on thorough field research and an intricate understanding of Yemen's revolutionary politics. Unfortunately, the comparative brevity of the two (very similar) articles does not permit an in-depth exploration of historical structure or a thorough overview of all revolutionary actors. However, this theoretically informed approach is more refined than any of the other narratives about the Yemeni citizen revolt.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Laurent Bonnefoy and Marine Poirier, 'La structuration de la révolution yéménite: essai d'analyse d'un processus en marche (The Structuration of the Yemeni Revolution: Preliminary Analysis of a Process in Motion)', *Revue Française de Science Politique* 62, no. 5–6 (2012); Laurent Bonnefoy and Marine Poirier, 'Dynamics of the Yemeni Revolution: Contextualizing Mobilizations', in *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa: Second Edition*, ed. Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).



# 1

## Configurations of Political Order *sur la longue durée*

The nature of political order in Yemen is surrounded by much confusion. Although a modern nation state on paper,<sup>175</sup> the weakness of formal institutions and prevalence of plural power centres have led political commentators to variably frame the Republic of Yemen as a politically dysfunctional, violence-riddled, tribal, anarchic or underdeveloped country – a depiction frequently conflated with a *fragile, failing, failed* or *collapsed* state.<sup>176</sup> This paradigm has gained traction with the post-9/11 security agenda of the United States and has since dominated the policies of the international community.<sup>177</sup> Although political order indeed differs considerably from the Weberian ideal type,<sup>178</sup> scholars have advocated abandoning this inherently occidentocentric conception of state for its inadequacy in explaining governance in Yemen.<sup>179</sup> Instead of aspiring to emulate this Western state model, Lisa Wedeen argued, the Ṣāliḥ regime deliberately kept formal institutions weak due to its perception that state-building ran contrary to regime survival.<sup>180</sup>

Others have advanced a more fundamental critique of the notion of state failure based on conceptual fallacies, such as analytical fuzziness, the conflation of peace and state capacity, inherent Western policy agendas, as well as the paternalistic and teleological assumption that nations will converge into a singular model.<sup>181</sup> The concept of state failure

<sup>175</sup> *Dustūr al-Jumhūrīya al-Yamanīya (Constitution of the Republic of Yemen)*, *Jarīda Rasmīya* 1, 1990.

<sup>176</sup> Author's observations. This perception is echoed in Sarah Phillips, 'Yemen: Developmental Dysfunction and Division in a Crisis State', Research Paper (Developmental Leadership Program, 2011).

<sup>177</sup> See footnote 140.

<sup>178</sup> Weber defined the state as a political community that monopolises the legitimate use of physical force. See Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf (Politics as a Vocation)*, 11th ed. (Duncker & Humblot, 2010).

<sup>179</sup> Sheila Carapico, 'No Quick Fix. Foreign Aid and State Performance in Yemen', in *Rebuilding Devastated Economies in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 153–76; Sophia Dingli, 'Is the Failed State Thesis Analytically Useful? The Case of Yemen', *Politics* 33, no. 2 (2013); Reena Nadler, 'Yemen: Moving Beyond the "Failed State" Narrative', *Al-Qawl*, 15 May 2013.

<sup>180</sup> Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*; Lisa Wedeen, 'Don't Call Yemen a "Failed State"', *Foreign Policy*, 30 March 2010.

<sup>181</sup> Aidan Hehir, 'The Myth of the Failed State and the War on Terror: A Challenge to the Conventional Wisdom', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 1, no. 3 (2007); Charles T. Call, 'The Fallacy of the "Failed State"', *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (2008); Tobias Hagmann and Markus V. Hoehne, 'Failures of the State Failure Debate: Evidence from the Somali Territories', *Journal of International Development* 21, no. 1 (2009);

moreover fails to distinguish between *statehood*, the statutory properties of a state predicated on its recognition by other states; and *stateness*, the ability of states to fulfil certain functions, in other words state capacity, efficiency and administrative performance.<sup>182</sup> In reality, however, few states meet the presumed legal criteria for recognition in international law,<sup>183</sup> while Weberian stateness seldom exists beyond the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>184</sup> The state failure discourse therefore results at least as much from frustrated expectations rooted in specific normative ideas about *stateness*, as from the actual, empirically observed breakdown of state institutions.<sup>185</sup>

Weber's state-centric model moreover does not capture the myriad forms of informal governance.<sup>186</sup> As in other traditional societies, customary institutions in Yemen (e.g. tribes, extended families or sectarian solidarities) have not only proven historically resilient and adaptive, but are often more capable than the central state at providing public goods, such as local security, political representation or social safety nets for kin groups. New actors (civil society organizations, warlords, Islamist movements, etc.) have moreover – for better or worse – come to fill the void left by poor state performance. Böge, Brown and Clemens have described this amalgamation of old and new, state and non-state actors as a *hybrid* political order.<sup>187</sup> In this order, traditional structures coexist, blend, overlap, compete and permeate modern legal-rational bureaucracies – a concept defined by Shmuel Eisenstadt as *neopatrimonialism*.<sup>188</sup> The Republic of Yemen is thus most accurately characterised as such a hybrid, neopatrimonial political order, in which authority is shared between the state and traditional as well as emergent governance actors.

In order to delineate specific features of the environment in which Yemen's citizen

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William Easterly and Laura Freschi, 'Top 5 Reasons Why "Failed State" Is a Failed Concept', *AidWatch*, 13 January 2010; Stein Sundstøl Eriksen, '"State Failure" in Theory and Practice: The Idea of the State and the Contradictions of State Formation', *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 01 (2011).

<sup>182</sup> John Peter Nettl, 'The State as a Conceptual Variable', *World Politics* 20, no. 4 (1968); James Crawford, 'The Criteria for Statehood in International Law', *British Yearbook of International Law* 48, no. 1 (1977).

<sup>183</sup> Christopher Clapham, 'Degrees of Statehood', *Review of International Studies* 24, no. 2 (1 April 1998).

<sup>184</sup> Volker Boege, M. Anne Brown, and Kevin P. Clements, 'Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States', *Peace Review* 21, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>185</sup> Jennifer Milliken and Keith Krause, 'State Failure, State Collapse, and State Reconstruction: Concepts, Lessons and Strategies', *Development and Change* 33, no. 5 (2002).

<sup>186</sup> Governance can be defined as 'institutionalized modes of social coordination to produce and implement collectively binding rules or to provide collective goods,' see Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, 'Governance without a State: Can It Work?', *Regulation and Governance* 4, no. 2 (2010): 114.

<sup>187</sup> Boege, Brown, and Clements, 'Hybrid Political Orders, Not Fragile States'.

<sup>188</sup> Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Traditional Patrimonialism and Modern Neopatrimonialism* (London: Sage Publications, 1973); Gero Erdmann and Ulf Engel, 'Neopatrimonialism Reconsidered: Critical Review and Elaboration of an Elusive Concept', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 45, no. 1 (2007).

revolt transpired in 2011, this chapter traces the evolution of the changing political configurations from the ancient pre-Islamic kingdoms through the millennial Imamate to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Loosely inspired by Braudel's *longue durée*, it identifies both structural features and major historical transformations to abstract permanent from ephemeral aspects of the multiple historical political orders in Yemen. This fast-paced survey thereby provides insights not only into the historical polities that constitute frameworks of reference for the divergent political visions and collective memories of different components of the revolutionary movement of 2011, but into the regional divisions and contradictions that have shaped the power dynamics in Yemen in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### ***Ancient Trading Kingdoms: Geographical Foundations and Economic Divisions***

One of the most suitable places for human life on the Peninsula, South Arabia became known in antiquity as 'Arabia Felix' for its immense wealth and prosperity. In contrast to the pastoral nomadic Northern Arabs, the predominantly sedentary tribes of South Arabia – mythologically believed to be the progeny of Noah's descendant Qaḥṭān and his grandson Sabā'<sup>189</sup> – formed basic communities of subsistence farmers since at least the sixth millennium BCE.<sup>190</sup> In the early first millennium BCE, two technological innovations became major engines for social change: increasingly sophisticated modes of irrigation-based agriculture and the domestication of the camel.<sup>191</sup> These advancements facilitated the rise of the kingdoms of Sabā' (ca. 950 BCE-270 CE), Ma'īn (ca. 500-100 BCE), Qatabān (ca. 400 BCE-200 CE) and Ḥaḍramawt (ca. 400 BCE-290 CE), which prospered as agrarian societies and a major trade centre of the ancient world.

Intriguingly, these city-states did not emerge among the dry farmers in the fertile southwestern highlands, but at the capitals Mā'rib, Qarnaw, Timna' and Shabwa in *wādīs* (riverbeds) along the flat, easily passable plateaus at the margins of the Ramlat al-Sab'atayn

<sup>189</sup> Hans Kruse, 'Tribal Systems and Social Stratification: The Case of North Yemen', *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 3 (1979).

<sup>190</sup> Michael J. Harrower, Joy McCorriston, and A. Catherine D'Andrea, 'General/Specific, Local/Global: Comparing the Beginnings of Agriculture in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia/Eritrea) and Southwest Arabia (Yemen)', *American Antiquity* 75, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>191</sup> Jan Retsö, 'The Domestication of the Camel and the Establishment of the Frankincense Road from South Arabia', *Orientalia Suecana* 40 (1991); Julien Charbonnier, 'L'agriculture en Arabie du Sud avant l'Islam (Agriculture in South Arabia before Islam)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 15 (2008); Julien Charbonnier, 'Les barrages-poids des régions montagneuses d'Arabie du Sud au cours de la période préislamique (Gravity Dams in the Mountainous Regions of Southern Arabia during the Pre-Islamic Period)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 17 (2012).

desert, which harboured few natural obstacles.<sup>192</sup> A coordinated water management system was not only indispensable to exploit the brief, albeit heavy biannual rainfall in these semi-arid areas, but required a high degree of social organisation conducive to the formation of complex communities.<sup>193</sup> Sabā', the most powerful and long-lasting of these kingdoms, boasted the impressive construction of the 600-meter-long Mā'rib Dam, the heart of an extensive hydraulic irrigation network that provided the lifeline for its sedentary population from the seventh century BCE until its final collapse in the late sixth century CE.<sup>194</sup>

The strategic control of the trade routes through these flat plains to places such as Alexandria (Egypt), Gaza (Palestine) and Palmyra (Syria), allowed the kingdoms to establish a commercial monopoly on frankincense and myrrh. Locally grown in Ḥaḍramawt and Zūfār (Oman), these precious, high-demand commodities fetched high prices on Mediterranean and Mesopotamian markets, which allowed the kingdoms to accrue colossal wealth.<sup>195</sup> Due to their strategic location at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, India and East Africa, the kingdoms moreover benefitted from the transit trade of eastern (luxury) goods. Brought into the port of Qāni' by primitive sailing boats on the back of the seasonal monsoon winds of the Indian Ocean, they were trans-shipped on camels and sent along the northbound caravan trails.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>192</sup> Peter Kühn, Dana Pietsch, and Iris Gerlach, 'Archaeopedological Analyses around a Neolithic Hearth and the Beginning of Sabaeen Irrigation in the Oasis of Ma'rib (Ramlat as-Sab'atayn, Yemen)', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 37, no. 6 (June 2010).

<sup>193</sup> Abdul Kareem Abdullah S. Al-Ghamedi, 'The Influence of the Environment on Pre-Islamic Socio-Economic Organization in Southwestern Arabia' (Ph.D., Arizona State University, 1983); Mohammed Maraqtan, 'Some Aspects of the Formation of the State in Ancient South Arabia', in *Alternatives of Social Evolution*, ed. Nikolay N. Kradin, Andrey V. Korotayev, and Dmitri Bondarenko, 2nd ed. (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011), 309–33.

<sup>194</sup> Jürgen Schmidt, 'Die sabäische Wasserwirtschaft von Mārib (The Sabā'ean Water Management of Mā'rib)', in *Jemen: 3000 Jahre Kunst und Kultur des glücklichen Arabien*, ed. Werner Daum (Innsbruck: Pinguin, 1987); Michael J. Harrower, 'Is the Hydraulic Hypothesis Dead yet? Irrigation and Social Change in Ancient Yemen', *World Archaeology* 41, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>195</sup> Mats Thulin and Ahmed Mumin Warfa, 'The Frankincense Trees (*Boswellia* Spp., *Burseraceae*) of Northern Somalia and Southern Arabia', *Kew Bulletin* 42, no. 3 (1987).

<sup>196</sup> Gus W. van Beek, 'Frankincense and Myrrh in Ancient South Arabia', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 78, no. 3 (1958); Alessandro de Maigret, 'La route caravanière de l'encens dans l'Arabie préislamique (The Frankincense Caravan Trail in Pre-Islamic Arabia)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 11 (2003); Michel Mouton, Paul Sanlaville, and Joël Suire, 'A New Map of Qāni' (Yemen)', *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19, no. 2 (2008).



Map 1: Ancient South Arabian Kingdoms, 950 BCE-100 CE. Trade routes are based on trade relations and suitable geographic conditions.

In the seventh century BCE, Karib'il Watar of Sabā' united the kingdoms in a federal structure under his leadership that spanned over most of South Arabia. He adopted the title *mukarrib* (unifier), which became a ruling title for subsequent Sabā'ean and other rulers. Inscriptions reveal that theocratic kings and a tribal council held authority in Sabā', based on a basic legal code.<sup>197</sup> Agricultural surplus production gave rise to some form of market economy based on craft specialisation, which included stone masonry for the construction of large religious and hydraulic constructions. Although Sabā' was able to sustain an army based on the taxation of trade, its territory remained an inherently unstable construct.<sup>198</sup> On the one hand, the rugged mountain terrain limited Sabā''s ability to project power across long distances, leaving it in control of little more than strategic trade infrastructure. On the other, the territorial expansion and exploitation of farmers – imperative for imperial sustenance – engendered resistance, which allowed Ma'in, Qatabān and Ḥaḍramawt to reassert their independence in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.<sup>199</sup>

The first century BCE became a historical watershed moment for South Arabia. The aborted Roman siege on the Sabā'ean capital Mā'rib in 24 BCE and the establishment of a regular maritime link between the Mediterranean, Arabia and India precipitated the decline of the caravan cities of the interior and enhanced the role of coastal ports. This shifted power from the trading states to the Kingdom of Ḥimyar (ca. 110 BCE-550 CE). Based in the more fertile southwestern mountains in proximity of the Red Sea coast, the Ḥimyarites successively conquered the other kingdoms and expanded their sphere of influence as far as Mecca and the southern Ḥijāz (Saudi Arabia). The Ḥaḍramī Kinda tribe effectively became a protectorate of the interior. In 295 CE then, the Ḥimyarite ruler Shammar Yuḥar'ish proclaimed himself 'king of Sabā' and Dhū Raydān and Ḥaḍramawt and Yamanat,' reflecting that – for the first time in history – most of the territory of contemporary Yemen had nominally been united under a single, centralised rule. It is here that the geographical marker *yamanat* (Yemen) appeared first in historical writing.<sup>200</sup>

<sup>197</sup> Mohammed Maraqtan, 'Legal documents recently discovered by the AFSM at Maḥram Bilqīs, near Mārib, Yemen', *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 36 (2006).

<sup>198</sup> Maraqtan, 'Some Aspects of the Formation of the State in Ancient South Arabia'.

<sup>199</sup> Walter W. Müller, 'Skizze der Geschichte Altsüdarabiens (Sketch of the History of Ancient South Arabia)', in *Jemen: 3000 Jahre Kunst und Kultur des glücklichen Arabien*, ed. Werner Daum (Innsbruck: Pinguin, 1987).

<sup>200</sup> Some historians claim that 'shām' (left) and 'yaman' (right) originate as geographical markers in early Islamic period in relation to the Ka'ba, a view difficult to corroborate with historical evidence. Suliman Bashear, 'Yemen in Early Islam an Examination of Non-Tribal Traditions', *Arabica* 36, no. 3 (1989).

From the late fourth century onwards, the transformation from polytheistic cults to monotheism constituted a unifying factor for the hitherto religiously and culturally fragmented South Arabian tribes. Initially assuming a non-denominational form, the worship of a single deity became a powerful tool to legitimate the hegemony of the by contemporary measures robust and centralised Ḥimyarite state.<sup>201</sup> Faced with the irredentist expansionism of the Byzantine-backed Christian Kingdom of Aksum (Ethiopia) in a bid for hegemony over the Red Sea, the Ḥimyarites, who declared Judaism as state religion in 518, became increasingly entangled in inter-religious strife as they began subjecting Christians to persecution and forced conversion.<sup>202</sup> In 525, the Aksumites conquered parts of South Arabia and installed a Christian vassal king. This engendered resistance among the highland tribes and encouraged Ḥimyarite princes to seek assistance from Persia, which incorporated South Arabia as a satellite into the Sassanid empire around 570-575.<sup>203</sup> Due to the spread of Christianity, the demand for aromatic resins fell sharply causing trade incomes to dry up.<sup>204</sup> The disintegration of Ḥimyar, the last of the indigenous South Arabian kingdoms, marked the beginning of centuries of foreign rule.

The prevalent modes of production under Sabā'eo-Ḥimyarite rule left a differential impact on tribal structures in the southern and northern highlands.<sup>205</sup> In the fertile southern highlands, the Ḥimyarite state superimposed a feudal system that diluted ties among the Ḥimyar and Madhḥaj tribes. Allegiance to the state came to replace tribal affiliations, as land possession became contingent on the fulfilment of tax obligations, rather than customary tribal law (*ʿurf*). The decline of the Ḥimyarite polity gave rise to multiple feudal entities, which continued to levy taxes on peasants in exchange for the protection against incursions by predatory northern tribesmen. In the northern and central highlands, conversely, the decline of the Sabā'ean state and concomitant irrigation system bereft subsistence farmers of their economic base. The northern tribal peasantry became compelled to supplement its sparse harvests through emigration, pastoralism and raids into

<sup>201</sup> Iwona Gajda, 'Monothéisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique (Monotheism in pre-Islamic South Arabia)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 10 (2002).

<sup>202</sup> George Hatke, 'Africans in Arabia Felix: Aksumite Relations with Himyar in the Sixth Century C.E.' (Ph.D., Princeton University, 2011).

<sup>203</sup> Sa'if 'Alī Muqbil, *Waḥidat al-Yaman Tārīkhīyan (Yemeni Unity in History)* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ḥaqā'iq li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzī', 1987).

<sup>204</sup> In order to distance itself from pagan and Jewish rituals, Christianity restricted the use of incense for sacrificial purposes and cremation. See Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>205</sup> 'Ādil Mujāhid Al-Sharjabī, 'Al-Qaṣr wa-l-Dīwān: Al-Dūr al-Sīyāsī li-l-Qabīla fi al-Yaman (The Palace and the Court: The Political Role of Tribes in Yemen)' (Ṣan'ā': Al-Marṣad al-Yamanī li-Ḥoqūq al-Insān, 2009).



the southern highlands and coast. They relied on the tribal system of the Hamdān – known as Ḥāshid and Bakīl – for protection, which strengthened tribal cohesion and structures.<sup>206</sup>

The prestigious ancient city-states, especially the Kingdom of Sabā', bestowed a powerful national myth upon successive generations of Yemenis and still occupy an ample space in collective memory of Yemenis today. The state news agency Sabā' or the cellular provider Sabafon attest to the presence of this symbolism in daily life. The Queen of Sabā', Bilqīs, serves as the role model of an astute political leader among contemporary Yemeni gender activists, even if this part of Jewish Yemeni history was suppressed, demonised or vulgarised in medieval Islamic imagination.<sup>207</sup> From the Qāsimī Imams to the revolutionaries in the 1960s and republican leaders in both North and South Yemen, the ancient kingdoms have moreover been selectively invoked to conjure up primordial legitimisations for Yemeni unification or – as it has often been framed – reunification.<sup>208</sup>

### ***Medieval Islamic Dynasties: Transient Politics and Doctrinal Divisions***

The charismatic religious movement of the Prophet Muḥammad (609-632) marked the beginning of a new era for the Arabian Peninsula. In the late 620s, Yemen became nominally Muslim when the Persian governor Bādhān converted to Islam, as did numerous tribes from the Tihāma, 'Adan, Ḥaḍramawt, al-Mahra and other regions in the South, as well as the Hamdānite tribes of Ḥāshid and Bakīl.<sup>209</sup> These Sunnī areas (all except the Hamdān, which later adopted the Zaydīya) gradually turned between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries to the Shāfi'ī *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence). Islam did not become a major force in Yemen until the consolidation of the Islamic empire under the first caliph, Abū Bakr (632–634), however, when the centre of power shifted from the bygone trading kingdoms northwards to the Ḥijāz. Yemeni recruits, mostly those unable to subsist in the northern agricultural economy, played a crucial role in the Islamic armies of the Caliphate,

<sup>206</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*; Kruse, 'Tribal Systems and Social Stratification'; Qā'id Nu'mān Al-Sharjabī, *Al-Sharā'ih al-ḥijmā'iya al-Taqlīdiyya fi al-Mujtama' al-Yamanī (The Traditional Social Strata in Yemeni Society)* (Dār al-Ḥadātha li-l-Ṭabā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1986); Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Elham Manea, 'La tribu et l'Etat au Yémen (The Tribe and the State in Yemen)', in *Islam et changement social (Islam and Social Change)*, ed. Mondher Kilani (Lausanne: Payot Lausanne, 1998).

<sup>207</sup> Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>208</sup> Thomas Schick, *Fragen zur jemenitischen Einheit: Texte und Literaturhinweise aus dem Nachlaß von Thomas Schick (Questions about Yemeni Unity: Texts and References from the Bequest of Thomas Schick)*, ed. Iris Glosemeyer and Anna Würth (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2000); Willis, *Unmaking North and South*.

<sup>209</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).



which facilitated cultural exchange with other parts of the Peninsula.

Islam did not supplant pre-Islamic patriarchal culture and tribal customs, but mostly adapted to, and occasionally conflicted, with indigenous tribal systems. Political authority remained sparse, fragmented and contended; economic life remained local in the absence of political integration. For about two centuries, the Islamic caliphates of the Umayyads (661–750) and the Abbasids (750–822) left Yemen ‘governed, then misgoverned, and at length ... virtually ungoverned.’<sup>210</sup> Even though the conversion to Islam by co-optation, rather than conquest, instilled an abstract, albeit superficial, sense of Islamic unity, Yemen became somewhat delinked from the developments in the broader Islamic empires when it ceased to be part of the Abbasid caliphate in the ninth century. The rule of Yemeni lands became a chronic game of thrones among local dynasties, city-states and tribal warlords, whose rule sparked frequent separatist movements, rebellions and resistance, and thus failed to sustain political authority for long periods.

Invited to settle a conflict between rivalling Khawlānī tribes in Ṣa‘da, Yaḥyā bin Ḥusayn al-Rassī migrated with 50 descendants of the prophet from the Ḥijāz to northern Yemen in 897. A descendant of Ḥusayn, the Shī‘a martyr, who died in the Battle of Karbala in 740, he was a disciple of the Zaydīya, which has its roots in an early schism within Shī‘a Islam after the death of ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. His cunning manoeuvring allowed al-Rassī to secure the allegiance of the Hamdānite Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes, and thus subject Yemen’s far north to his control. Adopting the title *al-hādī ilā-l-ḥaqq* (he who directs towards the divine truth), al-Rassī proclaimed himself Imam – a spiritual and political leader with the obligation of *khurūj* (coming out against oppression) – and laid the doctrinal, legal and political foundations for the millennial rule of Zaydī Imams in Yemen.<sup>211</sup> Placing strong emphasis on the personal qualities of the Imam, the Zaydīya maintains that only descendants from the *ahl al-bayt* (house of the Prophet) through Muḥammad’s daughter Fāṭima and his cousin ‘Alī, who are both prolific in Islamic sciences and able with the sword in order to ‘command right and forbid wrong’ (*al-amr bi-l-ma‘rūf wa-l-nahī ‘an al-munkar*), can hold authority.

It was not until the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, however, that the Imamate became a formidable political force in Yemen and its sphere of influence thereafter remained confined to the northern and central highlands, only sporadically encompassing Ṣan‘ā’,

<sup>210</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*, 33.

<sup>211</sup> No Imams proclaimed themselves between 1066–1138 and 1171–1187. A. B. D. R. Eagle, ‘Ghayat Al-Amani and the Life and Times of Al-Hadi Yahya B. Al-Husayn: An Introduction, Newly Edited Text and Translation with Detailed Annotation’ (M.A., Durham University, 1990).

until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Geographical and doctrinal factors moreover made Imamic rule inherently unstable. Throughout its entire history, the Yemeni Zaydiyya remained unable to wed the fleeting charismatic authority of the divinely mandated Imams and the warlike traditions of the Hamdānite tribes with the institutionalisation of a stable central authority. Hamid Dabashi characterises this paradox in terms of the differential modes of authority in Islam that emerged after the decline of Prophet Muḥammad's charismatic authority: while Sunnīs *routinised* and *traditionalised* authority in accordance with pre-Islamic patterns, Shī'a opted to *perpetuate* the inherently transient charismatic rule in the form of Imams.<sup>212</sup> Due to the process of self-selection by bloodbath, Imami rule in Yemen was riddled by succession struggles; in the period between 897 and the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, the authority of 39 out of 42 Imams was disputed either within or between ruling families.<sup>213</sup> As a Yemeni scholar succinctly put it, 'conflict became a tradition that shaped political and social life, characterised by division and infighting among the aspirants and contenders of the Imams of the ruling house until society was exhausted, the central state lost control and the country drifted into long years of chaos.'<sup>214</sup>

Motivated by commercial interests in the trade route from Egypt to India, the Ayyūbīds invaded south Yemen in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. They united most southern territories and the Tihāma, hitherto held by a series of either transient or inconsequential local city-states and regionally confined dynasties – the Zīyādīds (818-1018), Yu'firīds (847-997), Najāhīds (1021-1156), Ṣulayhīds (1047-1138), Sulaymānīds (1069-1173), Zuray'īds (1080-1173), Hamdānīds (1099-1173) and Mahdīds (1159-1173) – with varying leanings towards the 'Abbāsīd, and later Ismā'īlī Fāṭimīd, powers in Egypt. The Ayyūbīds ruled from the city of Zabīd in the Tihāma, which had with the Zīyādīds become the administrative centre for many successive Islamic dynasties. They forged a short-lived, but comparatively stable state with a solid political administration and feudal economic structure, supported by both agriculture and increasing income from trade through the port of 'Adan.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Authority in Islam: From the Rise of Muhammad to the Establishment of the Umayyads* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989).

<sup>213</sup> Salwā 'Alī Qāssim Al-Mu'ayad, 'Al-Assas al-Fikrīya li-l-Tanāqīṣāt fi al-Sulṭa al-Zaydiyya: Dirāsāt Tārīkhīya li-Zāhira Ta'āriṣ al-A'ima al-Zaydiyya fi al-Yaman (284-840h) (The Intellectual Foundations of the Contradictions in Zaydī Authority: A Historical Study of the Opposition to Zaydī Imams in Yemen (897-1436))' (Ph.D., University of Ṣan'ā', 2008).

<sup>214</sup> 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad Batūl, *Khuyūṭ al-Ḥalām: 'Asr al-Imāma al-Zaydiyya fi al-Yaman, 284-1382h (Rays of Darkness: The Era of the Zaydī Imamate in Yemen, 897-1962)* (Ṣan'ā': Markaz Nashwān al-Ḥimyarī li-l-Dirāsāt wa-l-Nashr, 2006), 44.

<sup>215</sup> Gerald Rex Smith, 'The Ayyūbīds and Early Rasūlīds in the Yemen: A Detailed Study of Ibn Ḥatīm's Kitāb Al-Simt and Its Historical Setting' (Ph.D., University of Cambridge, 1976); G. Rex Smith, 'Have You

In the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Ayyūbīds were eclipsed by their former slaves, the Rasūlīds. Excelling at statesmanship, Rasūlīd Sultans – especially al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Yūsif (1249–1295) – expanded the domain of the state and ushered in a period of stability and prosperity. They established an effective bureaucracy, state enterprises and a well-organised army, expanding the territory under their control as far to the east as Ẓufār (Oman). Though unable to regulate the lives of their subjects in the same way as modern states, the Rasūlīds implemented an elaborate tax scheme. They amassed great wealth from custom levies on transit trade through ‘Adan, which – strategically located at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and Europe – prospered in this age of increasing commercial exchange. The Turkic Rasūlīds popularised the Shāfi‘ī *madhhab* in Yemen, which had gained a foothold in the area of Ibb and the southern coast since the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. They moreover attempted to instil a sense of cultural unity, to the point of fabricating their own genealogical roots as Qaḥṭānites (southern Arabs) to be perceived as local rulers.<sup>216</sup>

The distinct ruling systems of the Imamate in the northern highlands, and the Ayyūbīd (1174–1228), Rasūlīd (1228–1454) and later Ṭāhirīd (1454–1517) states in the southern highlands and coastal areas, thus led to the consolidation of two different *madhāhib* in these areas. It was not by pure coincidence that this Zaydī-Shāfi‘ī split became largely synonymous with the earlier division along modes of production during Sabā’eo-Ḥimyarite rule, of which it was but an epiphenomenon. The basic tenets of the Zaydiyya and the Shāfi‘īya fit the needs of respective northern and southern geographic communities. Apart from the imposition of a modest *zakāt* (religious tax), the Zaydī Imamate, which relied on the tribal codes of the Hamdān for protection, changed little in the social order of the northern highlands. The Shāfi‘ī theory of state, conversely, helped legitimise the quasi-feudal economic system of successive southern states.<sup>217</sup> As the differences between the Zaydī Shī‘a and Sunnī Shāfi‘ī sects were primarily regional and political, rather than doctrinal, the division served to perpetuate and reinforce pre-existing political economy factors. Even if both ruling systems occasionally clashed with each other during this period, sectarian relations between these two moderate sects remained predominantly amicable.<sup>218</sup>

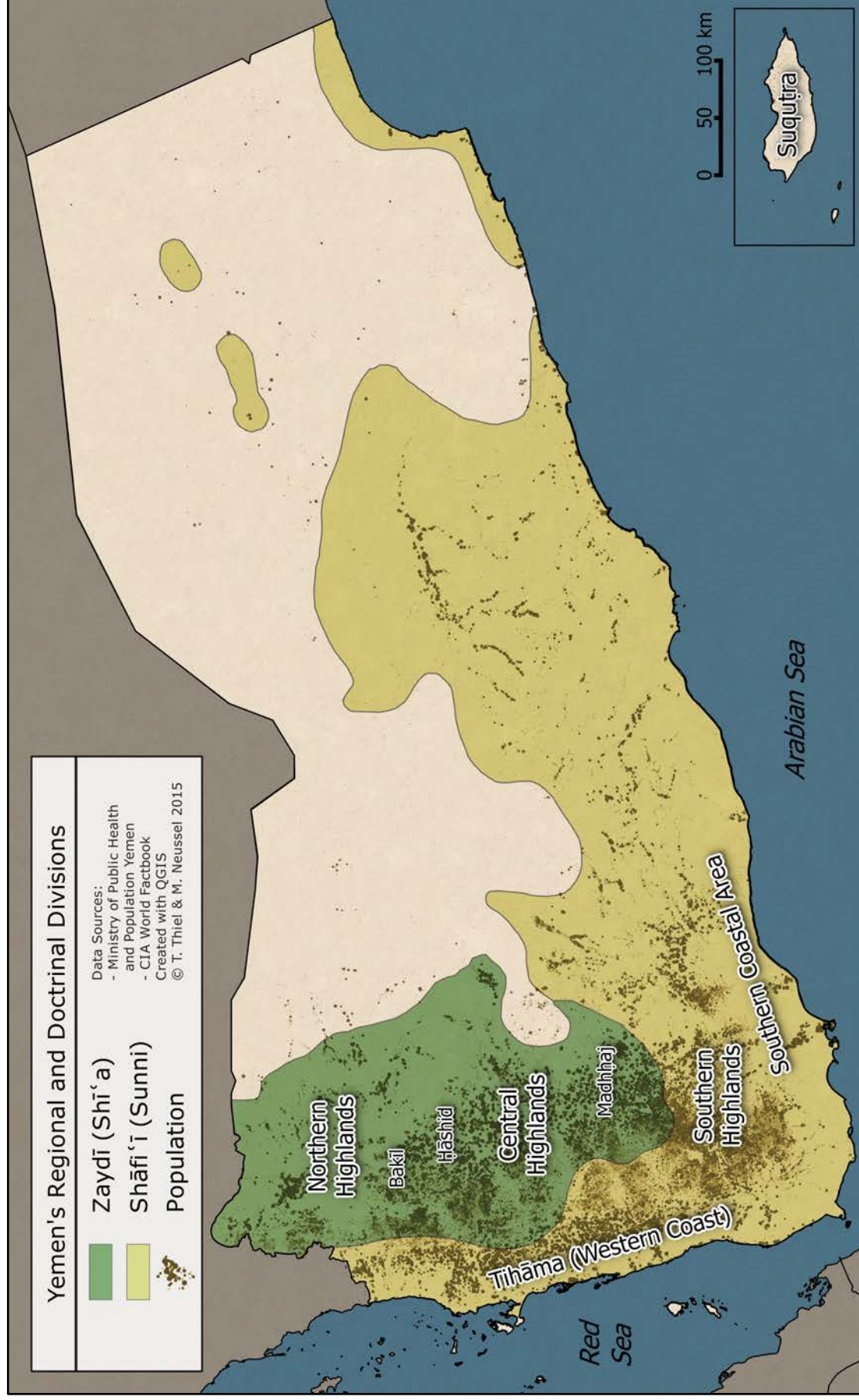
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Anything to Declare? Maritime Trade and Commerce in Ayyubid Aden Practices and Taxes’, *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 25 (1995).

<sup>216</sup> Daniel Martin Varisco, ‘Texts and Pretexts: The Unity of the Rasulid State under Al-Malik Al-Muzaffar’, *Revue Du Monde Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 67, no. 1 (1993); ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm Muḥammad Thābit Saddām Al-‘Arāshī, ‘Al-Jaysh fī al-Yaman fī ‘Aṣīr al-Dawla al-Rasūliya 626-858H/1228-1454M (The Army in Yemen in the Era of the Rasulid State 626-858AH/1228-1454CE)’ (Ph.D., University of Ṣan‘ā’, 2009).

<sup>217</sup> Kruse, ‘Tribal Systems and Social Stratification’.

<sup>218</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.



Map 2: Yemen's Regional and Doctrinal Divisions, Major Tribes and Population.

Spurred by imperial competition with Portugal over maritime superiority in the Red Sea, the Mamlūks invaded 'Adan in 1515, dismantled the Ṭāhirīd state and proceeded to seize Zaydī-ruled territory. Invoking the obligation of *khurūj*, the Imams of the Sharaf al-Dīn dynasty (1507-1597) seized the opportunity to rally northern Zaydī tribes around a *jihād* (holy war) to repel the Mamlūk encroachment.<sup>219</sup> Due to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, the centre of the Mamlūk Empire, in 1517, the Imam was able to bring most of Yemen's territory (except 'Adan and Zabīd) under his control by 1530 – only to lose it again to a Turkish force that occupied the Tihāma in 1539 and the central highlands in 1547. Although their arbitrary and draconian rule sparked tribal revolts and persistent resistance, the Sharaf al-Dīns remained unable to reconquer the territory from the Turkish invaders. Where the Sharaf al-Dīns had failed, the succeeding Qāsimī dynasty (1598-1852) proved more capable. Imams al-Manṣūr al-Qāsim (1598-1620) and al-Mu'ayyad Muḥammad (1620-1644) mobilised northern tribes for a relentless *jihād* that culminated in the expulsion of the Ottomans in 1635.<sup>220</sup> The conquest of al-Bayḍā', Yāfi' and the eastern Ḥaḍramawt as far as Ḍufār (Oman) allowed Imam al-Mutawakkil 'alā-'llā al-Ismā'īl (1644-1676) to unify all of Yemen and establish a hitherto unprecedented level of administrative control.

Representing an aberration from the anti-statist tendencies of the Zaydīya, the Qāsimī polity became comparatively stable and durable construct due a major economic expansion and the Imamate's ideological adaptation. Imam al-Ismā'īl assumed control of strategic trade infrastructure – ports and overland routes – whose proceeds he used to compensate the Zaydī tribes that had enabled his territorial expansion.<sup>221</sup> The conquests moreover allowed prominent Ḥāshid and Bakīl families to acquire fertile lands in the south, which laid the foundations for the great shaykhly families that have ever since played a pivotal role in Yemeni politics.<sup>222</sup> From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, coffee trade brought immense wealth to the Imamate. With the rising popularity of coffee houses in Turkey and Europe in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> and mid-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively, demand for coffee rose sharply. Yemen held a world monopoly on the highly priced crop, which was exported

<sup>219</sup> Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>220</sup> Quṭb al-Dīn Al-Nahrwālī, *Al-Barq al-Yamānī fī al-Faṭḥ al-Uṭhmānī* (*Yemeni Lightning in the Ottoman Conquest*) (Ḥamad al-Jāsir al-Kitāb, 1967); Sayyid Muṣṭafā Sālim, *Al-Faṭḥ al-Uṭhmānī al-Awwal li-l-Yaman (1435-1538)* (*The First Ottoman Conquest in Yemen (1435-1538)*) (Al-Qāhira: Ma'had al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-'Arabīya, 1969).

<sup>221</sup> François Blukacz, 'Le Yémen sous l'autorité des imams zaidites au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: une éphémère unité (Yemen under the Authority of Zaydī Imams in the 17th Century: An Ephemeral Unity)', *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67, no. 1 (1993).

<sup>222</sup> Richard Neel Tutwiler, 'Tribe, Tribute, and Trade: Social Class Formation in Highland Yemen' (Ph.D., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1987); Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen*.

predominantly through the port of al-Mukhā. The British East India Company was the first to establish a trading post at the southern port in 1618, followed by the Dutch. The trade peaked in the 1730s, but largely declined by 1800 in the face of competition from the Netherlands and France, who had planted smuggled shrubs in their colonies.<sup>223</sup> From 1820 to 1880, however, slave trade began to peak in the Red Sea and the Gulf of 'Adan, providing an alternative source of revenue for the ports in the region.<sup>224</sup>

With the expansion of the polity over a sizable and productive Shāfi'ī population with a greater agricultural potential and share of the tax base, the centre of state power shifted south and the Qāsimī Imams faced the challenge of reconciling the warlike tradition of the Zaydī tribes in the north with those of the more fertile and prosperous southern highlands. With this objective in mind, they invoked the collective memory of the caravan trade, which provided a powerful national imagination of the prosperous unity between north and south.<sup>225</sup> More crucially, the Qāsimīs relied on the theological underpinnings of a distinctly Sunnī theory of rulership, which helped consolidate the rule of the Imams and bridge the *madhhabīya* (doctrinal divide) between Yemen's two major doctrinal groups to a considerable degree. The works of Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (1759?-1834), the *qāḍī al-quḍā'* (chief Islamic judge and scholar) during the later years of the Imamate, epitomise this *sunna*-oriented tradition. By resorting to Sunnī *ḥadīths*, Shawkānī lowered the stringent criteria placed on the Imam by separating the worldly ruler from the religious scholar and reinterpreting *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahī 'an al-munkar*; legitimised dynastic succession, which is traditionally rejected in the Zaydiyya; and argued that *khurūj* (the rebellion against a despotic ruler) – regardless of the injustices experienced – was strictly prohibited.<sup>226</sup>

Despite its relative prosperity, the Qāsimī state entered a political and ideological crisis by the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>227</sup> As the Imams of former Zaydī dynasties, the Qāsimīs

<sup>223</sup> Husayn bin 'Abd Allāh Al-'Amri, *The Yemen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Political and Intellectual History* (Ithaca Press, 1985); Michel Tuchscherer, 'Coffee in the Red Sea Area from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century', in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500-1989*, ed. William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>224</sup> Jonathan Miran, 'Red Sea Slave Trade in the 19th Century', ed. Siegbert Uhlig and Alessandro Bausi, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010).

<sup>225</sup> 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Karīm Al-Jarāfi, *Al-Muqtaṭif min Tārīkh al-Yaman (Excerpt from Yemeni History)* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-Ḥadīth, 1984).

<sup>226</sup> Bernard Haykel, 'Al-Shawkānī and the Jurisprudential Unity of Yemen', *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 67, no. 1 (1993); Bernard Haykel, 'Order and Righteousness: Muḥammad 'Alī al-Shawkānī and the Nature of the Islamic State in Yemen' (Ph.D., University of Oxford, 1997).

<sup>227</sup> 'Abd Allāh Al-Shamāḥī, *Al-Yaman: Al-Insān wa-l-Ḥadāra (Yemen: People and Civilisation)* (Bayrūt: Manshūrāt al-Madīna, 1975).

remained unable to consolidate their military advances through institution-building.<sup>228</sup> In the absence of an accepted mechanism of power transfer, authority was riddled with succession struggles and tribal rebellions. The state began to fragment along divisions in the ruling family because the Imams entrusted provinces of their realm to family members, who transformed these into largely autonomous fiefdoms. Even though the Imamate nominally existed until 1852, its disintegration gradually gave way to local rulers and warlords as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Yāfi' tribes revolted in 1681, followed by Laḥj and 'Adan in 1728, and the Imam's governor of the western coastal area of Abū 'Arīsh progressive expanded his domain over the Tihāma from the 1730s onwards. By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the territory of the Imamate was confined to little more than Ṣan'ā', and the central highlands south of the territories of the Ḥāshid and Bakīl.<sup>229</sup>

### ***Foundations of Modern Statehood: Imperial Incursions and Political Divisions***

Apart from the coffee trade, Yemen had few interactions with the outside world between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Imamate thus not only remained at the margins of the major technological and social transformations that industrialisation engendered in Europe, but initially aroused little interest among European powers that began expanding their imperial domain around the globe. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, however, the weakness of the Qāsimī state invited numerous foreign invasions in the western coastal areas. In the early 1800s, the Wāhhābis, a religious revivalist movement originating in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century through the Faustian amalgamation of Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Wāhhāb's proselytisation and the military cunning of the House of Sa'ūd,<sup>230</sup> conquered the Tihāma. Driven by his appetite for the proceeds from Yemen's coffee trade, Muḥammad 'Alī Pāshā of Egypt, nominally a vassal for the Ottoman Sultan, soon ousted the Wāhhābis and occupied the Tihāma between 1830 and 1840.<sup>231</sup> When British diplomatic efforts forced him to evacuate, local tribes under the leadership of Sharif Ḥusayn of Abū 'Arīsh (1841-49) filled the power vacuum generated by the Egyptian departure. In 1848, tribal forces loyal to Imam al-Mutawakkil bin Yaḥyā (1845-1849) wrested control over the

<sup>228</sup> Jeffrey R. Meissner, 'Tribes at the Core: Legitimacy, Structure and Power in Zaydi Yemen' (Ph.D., Columbia University, 1987).

<sup>229</sup> Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien und andern umliegenden Ländern (Travels through Arabia and other Countries in the East)*, 2 vols. (Kopenhagen: Hofbuchdruckerei Nicolaus Möller, 1774); Sir Robert Lambert Playfair, *A History of Arabia Felix Or Yemen* (Byculla: Education Society's Press, 1859).

<sup>230</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

<sup>231</sup> 'PRO FO 195/119' April 1834; Playfair, *A History of Arabia Felix Or Yemen, from the Commencement of the Christian Era to the Present Time*.

Tihāma from Ḥusayn, only to lose it the following year to an Ottoman invasion force.<sup>232</sup>

The Wahhābi-Egyptian contest rekindled the strategic interests of the British Crown and the Ottoman Porte, which had hitherto paid little attention to Yemen. Determined to limit Muḥammad 'Alī and in need of a midway coaling station for its new steam ships *en route* from Suez to Bombay, Britain invaded 'Adan in 1839.<sup>233</sup> For a century under the rule of the Sultan of Lahj, 'Adan had meanwhile deteriorated into 'a sort of international colony for Indian Ocean pirates.'<sup>234</sup> With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, traffic through the strategically located Gulf of 'Adan greatly increased. Although the port promoted the development of 'Adan as a commercial *entrepôt*, administered as part of British India for a century (1839-1937), it remained a neglected colonial backwater until after World War I. In 1873, Britain informed the Ottomans, which had meanwhile established a presence in northern Yemen, that it considered the nine tribal regions around 'Adan – 'Abdalī, Faḍlī, 'Aqrabī, Ḥawshabī, 'Alawī, 'Amirī, Subayhī, Yāfi' and 'Awlaqī – part of its sphere of influence.<sup>235</sup> Through some 90 'protection' treaties with local tribes designed to preserve the political *status quo*, Britain consolidated its indirect control over 'Adan's hinterland, which provided the aquatic and agricultural lifeline of the city. These treaties offered modest subsidies and British protection of the 'sovereignty' of local rulers in exchange for their refusal to cooperate with foreign powers. Although the treaties made local rulers liable to the charge of being agents of British imperialism, they provided the needed political control with a minimum of responsibility.<sup>236</sup>

In order to contain the British expansion in the Red Sea region, Ottoman forces occupied the Tihāma in 1849 and signed an agreement with Imam al-Mutawakkil, which effectively turned him into a vassal of the Porte.<sup>237</sup> The agreement came at a time when al-Mutawakkil was losing control in the highlands, which led him to invite Turkish forces into Ṣan'ā'. Upon their arrival, a tribal uprising crushed the Ottomans and deposed the Imam, who had allowed an occupation force to enter the city. Amidst succession struggles, we are told, North Yemen plunged into lawlessness and tribal feuds, causing notables in Ṣan'ā' to

<sup>232</sup> Caesar E. Farah, 'Anglo-Ottoman Confrontation In Yemen: 1840-49', *İstanbul Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, 1983, 73–118.

<sup>233</sup> Alexander Blackwood, ed., 'Occupation of Aden', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 53, no. 330 (April 1843).

<sup>234</sup> Richard Harlakenden Sanger, *The Arabian Peninsula* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954), 203.

<sup>235</sup> 'PRO FO 424/32' 10 February 1873.

<sup>236</sup> Joe Stork, 'Socialist Revolution in Arabia: A Report from the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen', *Middle East Report*, no. 15 (1973); Simon C. Smith, 'Rulers and Residents: British Relations with the Aden Protectorate, 1937-59', *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 3 (1995).

<sup>237</sup> Caesar E. Farah, 'Ottoman Return to the Highlands of Yemen 1872-1882', *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 28 (1998).



plead with the Turks to return.<sup>238</sup> In 1872, a few years after the opening of the Suez Canal, a contingent of Ottoman reinforcements conquered much of the northern highlands. From 1904 to 1906, they worked out a treaty with Britain, ratified in 1914, to secure their respective spheres of influence along the Anglo-Ottoman line, which came to define the division between North and South Yemen until 1990.<sup>239</sup> Although control extended little beyond the range of Turkish canons, divide-and-rule tactics and punitive raids allowed them to effectively rule.<sup>240</sup> The conduct of Ottoman administrators had much improved from three centuries earlier. Like the British in 'Adan, they ruled in alliance with local notables and tribes. Their ruling style was adapted to the local population; in contrast to elsewhere in the empire, they refrained from applying military conscription, cadastral surveys or the secular *nizamiye* courts.<sup>241</sup> Innovations in administration, education and health – though relatively modest – became widely established as functions of the state.<sup>242</sup>

Despite the adaptation of their rule to local conditions, Turkish overtaxation and misrule engendered fierce and persistent resistance. Following the example of his recalcitrant Qāsimī ancestors three centuries earlier, Imam al-Hādī Sharaf al-Dīn (1878–1890) launched a sustained guerrilla campaign against the Ottoman occupation in 1879. After al-Hādī's death, a new dynasty of Imams from the Ḥamīd al-Dīn family (1890–1962), a branch of the ninth century al-Rassī dynasty, carried on the armed struggle. While skirmishes between Ottoman forces and pro-Imamate tribesmen continuously transpired throughout the 40-year campaign, major rebellions erupted in 1884, 1891–92, 1898–99, 1904–7 and 1910–11. Negotiations for a truce between the Imam Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn (1904–1948) and the Ottomans failed in 1905. The Imam demanded significantly greater measures of autonomy than the Ottomans were prepared to grant and – coherent with Zaydī thought – refused to recognise the Ottoman suzerain as caliph.<sup>243</sup> The battle, we are told, resulted in casualties ranging into the 100,000s.<sup>244</sup> As a contemporary Ottoman

<sup>238</sup> Al-Jarāfī, *Al-Muqtaṭif min Tārīkh al-Yaman* (Excerpt from Yemeni History).

<sup>239</sup> Richard Schofield, 'The Last Missing Fence in the Desert: The Saudi-Yemeni Boundary', *Geopolitics and International Boundaries* 1, no. 3 (1996).

<sup>240</sup> Vincent Steven Wilhite, 'Guerrilla War, Counterinsurgency, and State Formation in Ottoman Yemen' (Ph.D., Ohio State University, 2003).

<sup>241</sup> Thomas Kühn, 'Shaping and Reshaping Colonial Ottomanism: Contesting Boundaries of Difference and Integration in Ottoman Yemen, 1872–1919', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>242</sup> Fū'ād Al-Shāmī, 'Al-'Alāqāt bayn al-Idāra al-'Uthmāniya wa-l-Imām Yaḥyā, 1904–1918 (The Relations between the Ottoman Administration and Imam Yaḥyā, 1904–1918)' (Ph.D., University of Ṣan'ā', 2009).

<sup>243</sup> Doreen Ingrams and Leila Ingrams, eds., *Records of Yemen, 1798–1960* (Archive Editions, 1993), Vol. 5, 508.

<sup>244</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

official put it, 'Yemen has become now the graveyard of Muslims and money.'<sup>245</sup>

As part of this struggle against the Ottoman Empire, Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn entered into an alliance of convenience with Sayyid Muḥammad al-Idrīsī (1876-1923), the heir of a local Ṣūfī dynasty in the far northern province of 'Asīr. Due to his cunning politicking and spiritual leadership, Idrīsī was able to establish an Imamate in 'Asīr in 1907.<sup>246</sup> In 1911, however, a military stalemate led Yaḥyā and the Ottomans to sign the Treaty of Da'ān, which conferred authority over the Zaydī areas in northern and central highlands to Yaḥyā under Ottoman dominion as a *quid pro quo* for unchallenged Turkish rule in Ṣan'ā' and the Tihāma.<sup>247</sup> Although the Turkish-Imami pact constituted a first step to the independent statehood of North Yemen, it pitted the Imam and Idrīsī – formerly a united local front against Ottoman occupation – against each other and reconfigured their alliances with other regional powers, notably Britain, Italy and Saudi Arabia.<sup>248</sup> Italy and Britain signed a series of contradictory friendship and protection treaties with the Imam and Idrīsī, providing stipends and weapons to both, but Yaḥyā eventually gained the upper hand as key Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes shifted their allegiance from Idrīsī to the Imam.<sup>249</sup>

After the defeat of the Central Powers in World War I, the Ottoman Empire withdrew its forces from Yemen in 1918. In the void left by their disengagement, Yaḥyā declared the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen and assumed the title His Majesty (*jalālathu*) Imam Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ḥamīd al-Dīn, King of Yemen.<sup>250</sup> Amidst a turbulent flux of alliances, he began to forge a dynastic and autocratic theocracy in North Yemen in the 1920s and 1930s, thereby laying the structural foundations for a sovereign state. Although the Imamate has in retrospect often been portrayed as a moribund anachronism,

<sup>245</sup> Caesar E. Farah, *The Sultan's Yemen: 19th-Century Challenges to Ottoman Rule* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 248.

<sup>246</sup> Besides gaining substantive military and financial aid from Italy, Idrīsī managed to secure a considerable tribal following as a *mutaḥā'il* (miracle-monger) through the performance of cheap tricks, such as electrocuting shaykhs with a battery (*sundūq kahrabā'i*), or appearing before them – thanks to Egyptian make-up – variably as 'an old man, a youth, a negro, or even ... a woman.' G. Wyman Bury, *Arabia Infelix or The Turks in Yamen* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 22; Harold F. Jacob, *Kings of Arabia: The Rise and Set of the Turkish Sovereignty in the Arabian Peninsula* (London: Mills & Boon, 1923).

<sup>247</sup> See Sayyid Muṣṭafā Sālim, *Takwīn al-Yaman al-Hadīth, 1904-1948 (The Formation of Modern Yemen, 1904-1948)* (Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Amīn li-l-Ṭabā'a wa-l-Nashir wa-l-Tawzī', 1993) for a full text of the agreement.

<sup>248</sup> John Baldry, 'Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation 1849-1914', *Arabica* 23, no. 2 (1976); Johannes Reissner, 'Die Idrīsīden in 'Asīr: Ein historischer Überblick (The Idrīsīds in 'Asīr: A Historical Overview)', *Die Welt des Islams* 21, no. 1/4 (1981); Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen*.

<sup>249</sup> 'PRO WO 95/5434' August 1915; 'PRO CAB 23/25' 15 April 1921; John Baldry, 'The Power and Mineral Concessions in the Idrisi Imamate of Asir 1910-1929', in *Arabian Studies*, ed. Robert Bertram Serjeant and Robin Leonard Bidwell, vol. 2 (London: Hurst & Co., 1975); John Baldry, 'Anglo-Italian Rivalry in Yemen and Asir 1900-1934', *Die Welt Des Islams* 17, no. 1/4 (1976).

<sup>250</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*.

this was less true for the political construction of the early years.<sup>251</sup> Yaḥyā's advances in securing borders, pacifying Yemen's interior and expanding the domain of the state afforded the Mutawakkilite Kingdom (1918-1962) a hitherto unprecedented degree of sovereignty. Tax collection, record keeping, administration of justice and the delegation of selected functions to provincial administrators became a social reality.<sup>252</sup> While the Imam commanded moral, but only marginal physical, authority in the areas of the Zaydī tribes in the northern and central highlands, the opposite was true for Shāfi'ī areas.<sup>253</sup> For the maintenance of public order, he had to rely on tribal levies from the Ḥāshid and Bakīl – often suggestively described as *jinnāḥī al-imāma* (wings of the Imamate) – as well as an elaborate *nizām rahā'in* (hostage system). The Imamate reproduced itself through a political economy of exploitation: proceeds from the overtaxation of Shāfi'ī areas were used to subsidise northern Zaydī tribes, whose tribal levies in turn provided the military backbone to rule the former.<sup>254</sup> To secure tribal allegiances, Yaḥyā kept male family members of leading families hostage, who – depending on the kind of relations with the tribe – were either educated in the comfort of his palace or thrown into the notorious dungeons.<sup>255</sup>

In contrast to many emergent post-colonial states, the Mutawakkilite Kingdom did not inherit much of an institutional legacy from the Ottoman administration. The Imam quite literally embodied the state; he held all reigns of executive power in his hands and personally administered justice in his daily *majlis* (hearings).<sup>256</sup> Yaḥyā's legitimacy rested on a combination of Zaydī doctrine and Sunnī legal justifications of monarchical rule, as well as his resistance against the Ottoman Empire until 1911 and the British presence in 'Adan.<sup>257</sup> Preoccupation for the independence of the newly forged state was at the heart of Yaḥyā's rule, as epitomised by the policy of isolationism (see next chapter) and in his efforts to create the *jaysh al-muẓaffar al-nizāmī al-malikī* (Victorious Regular Royal Army), a modern professional army that numbered 12,000 troops by 1936.<sup>258</sup> The Imamate synthesised two

<sup>251</sup> Sālim, *Takwīn al-Yaman al-Hadīth, 1904-1948 (The Formation of Modern Yemen, 1904-1948)*.

<sup>252</sup> Willis, *Unmaking North and South*.

<sup>253</sup> John E. Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

<sup>254</sup> Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth*.

<sup>255</sup> Günther Pawelke, *Der Yemen: Das verbotene Land (Yemen: The Forbidden Land)* (Düsseldorf: Econ Verlag, 1959); Amīn Muḥammad 'Alī Al-Jabr, 'Nizām al-Rahā'in fī al-Yaman fī 'Aḥad al-Mamlaka al-Mutawakkiliya al-Yamāniya (1918-1962) (The Hostage System in Yemen in the Era of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen (1918-1962))' (M.A., University of Ṣan'ā', 2005).

<sup>256</sup> Ahmed A. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>257</sup> Wilhite, 'Guerrilla War, Counterinsurgency, and State Formation in Ottoman Yemen'.

<sup>258</sup> This army was no match to the northern tribes forces of the Hashid and Bakil in terms of size, military skills or reliability. Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State*.

modes of governance: regularised and bureaucratised forms of disciplinary power based on the modern Ottoman model of military organisation and older monarchical ritual with reliance on the *sāda* and *quḍā'* – two literate social groups of sublime social status.<sup>259</sup> In 1931, the Imam instituted a governmental system and established several ministries, which were all headed by his sons.<sup>260</sup> Although the new administrative structure incorporated a greater number of people into the body politic, the rudimentary ministries remained virtually unable to administer anything, much less provide state services to the public.<sup>261</sup>

Not until the mid-1930s, however, did the Imamate consolidate the borders with its northern and southern neighbours. Nurturing ambitions to expand the newly independent Imamate southwards based on the vision of a unified Yemen, Imam Yaḥyā launched frequent raids across the Anglo-Ottoman line between 1918 and 1934. A renewed alliance with the Idrīsīs of 'Asīr, whose hitherto autonomous province was annexed by Saudi Arabia in 1930, dragged the Mutawakkilite Kingdom into a limited interstate war with Saudi Arabia in 1934. The war with the northern neighbour led Imam Yaḥyā to quickly settle the border dispute with Britain in order to avoid a conflict on two fronts. To this effect, he signed the Treaty of Ṣan'ā' in February 1934, which reiterated the Anglo-Ottoman line of 1906.<sup>262</sup> The hostilities with Saudi Arabia ended a few months, but only when the Imam relinquished claims to 'Asīr and turned over members of the Idrīsī family to King Ibn Sa'ūd. The Treaty of Tā'if in May 1934 came to define the western part of the Saudi-Yemeni border and legally enshrined the permanent loss of the 'Asīr to Yemen.<sup>263</sup>

Disturbed by the Imam's southward incursions, Britain placed the Air Ministry in charge of the defence of the colony in 1927.<sup>264</sup> Although the bombing raids of the Royal Air Force (RAF) managed to limit these endeavours, they did not cease until the British departure from Yemen in the 1960s.<sup>265</sup> Driven by the strategic need for bases further inland to extend the range of the RAF raids, Britain became increasingly involved in the indirect rule of 'Adan's immediate hinterland through restructuring treaty relationships and financing local rulers. In 1937, 'Adan became a British Crown Colony directly

<sup>259</sup> Willis, *Unmaking North and South*.

<sup>260</sup> Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State*.

<sup>261</sup> Sālim, *Takwīn al-Yaman al-Hadīth, 1904-1948 (The Formation of Modern Yemen, 1904-1948)*.

<sup>262</sup> Schofield, 'The Last Missing Fence in the Desert'.

<sup>263</sup> Baldry, 'Anglo-Italian Rivalry in Yemen and Asir 1900-1934'; Sayyid Muṣṭafā Sālim, *Wathā'iq Yamanīya: Dirāsa Wathā'iqīya Tārīkhīya (Yemeni Documents: A Documentary Historical Study)* (Al-Qāhira: Al-Maṭaba'a al-Fannīya, 1982).

<sup>264</sup> 'PRO CAB 38/27' 4 July 1927.

<sup>265</sup> 'PRO CAB 65/35' 30 August 1943; 'PRO CAB 129/42' 31 October 1950; 'PRO CAB 129/69' 29 June 1954; 'PRO CAB 129/92' 14 April 1958.

administered from London, rather than, as during the preceding century, from India. The hinterland, which consisted of 23 sultanates and shaykhdoms, was structured into the Western Aden Protectorate (WAP), the area largely congruent with the governorates of Lahj, Abyan and Shabwa, and the Eastern Aden Protectorate (EAP), including Ḥaḍramawt with its Kathīrī and Qu'aytī domains, as well as al-Mahra. By the late 1930s, the external boundaries of Yemen were established (apart from minor border revisions) and its territory split into two separate spheres of influence, which came to define the political division between North and South Yemen throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Regional Divisions, Structural Features and Historical Transformations***

In tracing the ebb and flow of the plethora of historical states,<sup>266</sup> this *longue durée*-inspired survey has highlighted the most pertinent regional divisions, structural features and historical transformations. In the course of its documented history of more than 3,000 years of continuous, autochthonous civilisation, Yemen has – in contrast to the Nile River Valley or Mesopotamia – existed only occasionally as a coherent political, economic and cultural entity under a single central authority. The extent of historical polities has been contingent on the balance of power between two rival forces: those, who derive economic or political advantages from the existence of a rule of law-based state; and the beneficiaries of an alternative, less formalised political order. This dichotomy is rooted in geographic factors that have played a determinant – albeit not deterministic role – in the emergence of two distinct regions in the western part<sup>267</sup> of the country: the *balād al-jaysh* (land of the army) and the *balād al-ʿaysh* (land of bread, livelihood, production), which are associated with the northern and central highlands, as well as the southern highlands and western coastal areas, respectively.<sup>268</sup> Although these territories have subsequently acquired distinctive doctrinal and political features that have overlapped and, to some extent, intersected with these differential geographies, the division between upper and lower Yemen is *not* based on sectarian differences, but essentially economic and social in nature.

The northern and central highlands are distinguished by their unsustainable, semi-sedentary mode of agricultural production. The inability to subsist on this agricultural base

<sup>266</sup> These were based on strongly divergent conceptions of 'state' – an analytical category that has no absolute transhistorical meaning.

<sup>267</sup> Due to resource scarcity, the eastern part – beginning with the Ramlat al-Sab'atayn – harbours only a small fraction of Yemen's population and thus played only a minor role in Yemen's contentious politics.

<sup>268</sup> In *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen*, Stephen Day introduces a finer regional classification. Although a pertinent categorisation, it does not advance the understanding of the power dynamics between statist and anti-statist forces in Yemen beyond the two-region distinction.

has given rise to various coping strategies, including emigration, pastoralism and tribal raids into the southern highlands and western coastal areas. From the caravan trade to the Islamic caliphates, northern Yemen has predominantly cultivated economic, political and cultural ties and networks with the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, albeit remained internationally much more isolated than the southern and western coastal areas. From the ninth century onwards, the Zaydīya gradually took hold in Yemen's northern and central highlands since its conceptualisation of political authority suited the needs of this local geography, rather than determining them. Although the Zaydī Imamate endured in various shapes for more than a millennium, it proved remarkably unstable due to the absence of an adequate mechanism for power transfer and its reliance on the Hamdānite tribal system to exercise authority. Driven by a quest for survival, material interests and the claim to authority in the Zaydīya, highland tribes have formed the powerbase of historical polities in northern Yemen, which has hindered polity formation but served as a bulwark against foreign domination. This trend, which constitutes the most cogent historical determinant for the persistence of centuries-old patrimonial structures, plural power centres and hybrid political regimes, has continued well after the demise of the Imamate.

The northern system contrasts with the more prosperous communities of the southern highlands and western coastal areas. Sufficient rainfall has turned these regions into the agricultural resource base of the country, while successive states have diluted tribal ties among the Ḥimyar and Madhḥaj. Due to their location at the crossroads between East Africa, Asia and Europe, the ports of Qāni', al-Mukhā and 'Adan along the coast of the Arabian and Red Seas have moreover generated considerable wealth through the maritime trade of incense, coffee and transit goods. Trade interactions have linked these areas with the Red Sea, which – like Braudel's Mediterranean – constitutes a relatively coherent cultural and economic subsystem.<sup>269</sup> This strategic location and the absence of strong tribal ties has made these areas prone to domination by local, regional and foreign powers, while trade taxation and the quasi-feudal mode of production have enabled the rise of relatively stable and strong polities, such as the Ḥimyarites or the Rasūlids. The consolidation of the Shāfi'ī *madhhab*, especially during Rasūlīd rule, established a system of authority that has legitimised these quasi-feudal property relations. In contrast to the Zaydīya, the Shāfi'ī

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<sup>269</sup> Jerry H. Bentley, 'Sea and Ocean Basins as Frameworks of Historical Analysis', *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999); Philippe Beaujard, 'The Indian Ocean in Eurasian and African World-Systems before the Sixteenth Century', *Journal of World History* 16, no. 4 (2005); Jonathan Miran, 'Space, Mobility, and Translocal Connections across the Red Sea Area since 1500', *Northeast African Studies* 12, no. 1 (2012).

theory of rulership was conducive to the maintenance of state authority and the Qāsimī and Ḥamīd al-Dīn dynasties of the Zaydī Imamate, in fact, adopted elements of it.

Political authority has been characterised by a constant quest for survival in Yemen's mountainous and resource-scarce environment, which has limited the ability of successive states to muster the means to project power across long distances and thus unify Yemen under a single political authority. The maintenance of authority has thus been predicated on the ability to control strategic infrastructure and safeguarding the flow of revenues. The rise and decline of durable historical polities – Sabā', Ḥimyar, the Rasūlids and early Qāsimī rule – has been associated with external impulses. Most notably, these included economic expansions due to commodity booms, such as the aromatic resin and coffee trade; technological innovations, including the domestication of the camel, the steam ship or the opening of the Suez Canal; as well as foreign incursions by Islamic empires, the Ottomans and European colonial powers. Although foreign powers have introduced most innovations in public administration and state structures, their institutional legacy remains weak. Still, the Anglo-Ottoman occupation from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to early/mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries did institute a political partition between North and South Yemen that persisted until the unification of 1990. This division did not, however, follow earlier economic and doctrinal lines as the North – roughly evenly split between Zaydīs and Shāfi'īs – comprised most of the northern, central and southern highlands, as well as the Tihāma, while the South encompassed almost 100 percent Shāfi'īs from the southern coast and deserted east.

Despite these divisions, the geographical concept of a logically bounded 'Yemen' has endured as a 'political imaginary' for three millennia from the *mukarribs* of the Iron Age until the present day. The collective memories of historical polities, such as the Kingdom of Sabā', the Imamate or British rule, not only conjured up primordial justifications for Yemeni unity that preceded the advent of modern nationalism, but continue to constitute frameworks of reference for the divergent political visions of different components of the 2011 citizen revolt. Nevertheless, centuries-old social and economic practices are difficult to uproot. The inherent contradictions between the tax farming Zaydī Imamate with its militarised tribes in the semi-arid northern mountains and the predominantly agricultural, commercial and later industrial Shāfi'ī areas in the *minṭaqa al-wuṣṭā* (central area) around Ta'izz have continued to shape Yemen's power dynamics. This becomes apparent in later chapters, as the latter area became not only an epicentre of contentious politics in revolutions of the 1960s, which fundamentally altered the basis of legitimacy of the Yemeni states, but also the revolutionary movement of 2011.

## 2

### **The Politicisation of Contention and Birth of the Republics**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century ushered in transformations of historic magnitude. Whereas contention in Yemen's traditional society had for centuries been driven by a competition for material gain and political power among local leaders, as well as between them and foreign powers, new social actors – independent of the traditional power-holding social strata – asserted themselves in an atmosphere of increasing politicisation. Stimulated by developments in Egypt and Iraq, Nāṣirism and anti-imperialism, the stagnant Imamate and the dynamic British colony became somewhat belatedly part of the broader wave of Arab nationalism in the region,<sup>270</sup> which culminated in two almost synchronous revolutionary upheavals.

Though not delinked from each other, both revolutionary movements traversed through divergent trajectories within the context of distinct local political configurations. In North Yemen, old and new actors merged into a heterogeneous amalgamation of urban nationalist-modernist intellectuals, disgruntled Zaydī aristocracy, military officers, northern tribes and Shāfi'ī merchants, with variable ties to the Egyptian *ikhwān al-muslimīn* (Muslim Brotherhood) and the regime of Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir. Initial attempts in 1948 and 1955 to overthrow the Imam but retain a reformed power structure of Imamate foundered. On 26 September 1962, then, Egyptian-backed revolutionaries proclaimed a republic, but were soon dragged into a protracted civil war with Saudi-supported royalists.<sup>271</sup>

In South Yemen, conversely, sweeping socio-economic change in the Colony of 'Adan facilitated the rise of a burgeoning trade union movement that began to challenge British rule. The ideological clash between Arab nationalism and British imperialism increasingly politicised the movement, which espoused a socially radical Marxists-Leninist ideology.<sup>272</sup> Facilitated by the fundamental contradiction between modern 'Adan and the neglected hinterland, a sustained guerrilla campaign culminated in Britain's retreat in 1967. Although both revolutionary movements harboured aspirations for a united Yemen,

<sup>270</sup> Fred Halliday, 'The Formation of Yemeni Nationalism: Initial Reflections', in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East*, ed. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>271</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>272</sup> It was 'radical' in that it aspired to a complete transformation of society, not in the sense of 'extremist.'



they established two fundamentally incompatible republican regimes in the North and the South – one bourgeois-tribal, the other socialist.

### ***The Emergence of the Free Yemenis in a Changing Regional Environment***

Contentious challenges to the Imamate went through three main stages in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the period from 1918 to the early 1930s, opposition against the regime of Yaḥyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn emanated mainly from rival claimants to the Imamate – fellow Zaydī *sāda* – and landholding shaykhs from rural areas, who felt threatened by the Imam's heavy land taxation, military conscription and the hostage system.<sup>273</sup> Between the mid-30s and the mid-40s, a nascent urban nationalist movement – influenced by events in Egypt and Iraq – gradually began to develop an identity distinct from that of the literate-bureaucratic and landholding social strata: *sāda*, *quḍā'* and shaykhs.<sup>274</sup> From 1944 to 1948, then, reform groups converged into a heterogeneous contentious movement. Collectively known as *al-aḥrār* (the Free Yemenis), the movement transformed social and political discontent into revolutionary collective action, which culminated first in the failed constitutional coup of 1948 and then the overthrow of the Imamate in 1962.

Similar to its Qāsimī precursors in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Mutawakkilite Kingdom was soon beset by succession struggles when the call to *jihād* against the Turks, which had fostered a traditional variant of Yemeni nationalism, declined as a unifying factor after 1918.<sup>275</sup> To forestall dynastic instability, Imam Yaḥyā designated his son Sayf al-Islām Aḥmad (1891-1962) as crown prince in 1927. However, this decision accomplished exactly the opposite: infighting emerged between the Imam's sons, while the sentiments of the Zaydī *sāda*, who traditionally reject dynastic primogeniture, swayed against his regime. Yaḥyā further antagonised this key pillar of his authority by ignoring the *shūrā* (consultation) principle of the Zaydiyya, which mandates the Imam to consult with fellow Zaydī *sāda*.<sup>276</sup> Fearing that the power wielded by the *sāda* might threaten his regime, Yaḥyā increasingly consolidated political control around his close kin.<sup>277</sup> In 1939 and 1940, he replaced Sayyid 'Alī al-Wazīr and Sayyid 'Abd Allāh al-Wazīr, the governors of Ta'izz and

<sup>273</sup> Abdualaziz Kaid Al-Msaodi, 'The Yemeni Opposition Movement: 1918-1948' (Ph.D., Georgetown University, 1987).

<sup>274</sup> Aḥmad Qāid Ṣā'idi, *Die Oppositionsbewegung im Jemen zur Zeit Imām Yahyās und der Putsch von 1948 (The Opposition Movement in Yemen at the Time of Imām Yahyā and the Coup of 1948)* (Berlin: Baalbek Verlag, 1981).

<sup>275</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>276</sup> Mohammed Ahmad Zabarah, *Yemen: Traditionalism vs. Modernity* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982).

<sup>277</sup> Al-Tayyib Zain Al-Abdin, 'The Free Yemeni Movement (1940-48) and Its Ideas on Reform', *Middle Eastern Studies* 15, no. 1 (1979).

al-Ḥudayda during the 1930s, with his sons Aḥmad and 'Abd Allāh, which drove the former into the arms of the reform movement. Unsurprisingly, 'Abd Allāh al-Wazīr became the reformers' candidate for Imam after the 1948 constitutional coup.<sup>278</sup>

In the changing regional environment of the 1930s, the Imamate, which had been forged out of the armed struggle against the Turks, became an increasingly anachronistic construct. Preoccupied with safeguarding the independence of his kingdom, Yaḥyā's xenophobic isolationism effectively shut off North Yemen from the non-Arab outside world.<sup>279</sup> Although the isolation was far from absolute and has been exaggerated in Yemeni and Western accounts,<sup>280</sup> it did preserve the Imamate as a traditional, pre-capitalist agrarian society with low social mobility. The policy crippled social development and led to economic stagnation and inflation, which triggered large-scale emigration to 'Adan in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. It particularly alienated Shāfi'ī merchants, who already resented the trade oligopoly of the Ḥamīd al-Dīn princes and the exploitative commercial tax regime.<sup>281</sup> The kingdom actively discouraged modernisation in order to avoid dependencies on foreign powers, which the Imam judged might provide a pretext for imperialism. Yaḥyā is related to have told a Syrian visitor that he 'prefers that [his] people and [he] remain poor and eat cane (*qaṣab*) than let foreigners in or give them concessions, regardless of what advantages or wealth would result thereof for the country.'<sup>282</sup>

The creation of a modern military was exempted from this policy of self-reliance. Skirmishes with Britain between 1918 and 1934 and the watershed defeat in the Saudi-Yemeni War of 1934 convinced Yaḥyā of the need for a professional, state-of-the-art army.<sup>283</sup> He elicited foreign support for an arms factory, a military telegraph line and a textile factory (to manufacture uniforms). Most crucially, the Imam sent two groups (1935-37 and 1936-39) of cadets – mostly Zaydī teenagers from urban areas of low, non-sayyid, birth, which he reckoned might pose no threat to his authority<sup>284</sup> – on training missions to the Baghdad Military Academy. Shortly after their arrival, the young officers witnessed

<sup>278</sup> Majid Khadduri, 'Coup and Counter-Coup in the Yaman 1948', *International Affairs* 28, no. 1 (1952).

<sup>279</sup> Robert Bertram Serjeant, 'The Yemeni Poet Al-Zubayri and His Polemic against the Zaydi Imams', *Arabian Studies* 5 (1979).

<sup>280</sup> A few foreign experts, including Italian doctors resided in Yemen, the Imam maintained bilateral relations with a number of Arab countries and Yemen became a founding member of the Arab League in 1945. See also James Spencer, 'The Myth of Isolation', *Journal of the British-Yemeni Society* 20 (2012).

<sup>281</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>282</sup> Naẓī Mu'ayyad Al-'Aẓm, *Rihla fī Balad al-'Arabīya al-Sa'īda: Min Miṣr ilā Ṣan'ā'* (*Journey in Arabia Felix: From Egypt to Ṣan'ā'*) (Bayrūt: Dār al-Tanwīr, 1986), 190.

<sup>283</sup> Sālīm, *Takwīn al-Yaman al-Hadīth, 1904-1948 (The Formation of Modern Yemen, 1904-1948)*.

<sup>284</sup> William Harold Ingrams, *The Yemen: Imams, Rulers and Revolutions* (New York: Praeger, 1964).

Bakr Ṣidqī's 1936 coup d'état – the first such military upheaval in the Arab world.<sup>285</sup> The Imam promptly withdrew the mission and instead brought Iraqi instructors to Yemen in 1940. It is difficult to exaggerate how fateful these exchanges became for the stability of the Imamate. The first Baghdad mission included 'Abd Allāh al-Sallāl and Ḥasan al-'Amrī, who became key protagonists of the 1962 revolution. The second group encompassed Aḥmad al-Thulāyā, the mastermind of a coup against Imam Aḥmad in 1955, and Ḥamūd al-Jā'ifī, a leader of the 1962 revolution. Finally, among the Iraqi instructors was Jamāl Jamīl, who – unable to return to Iraq for his implication in the Ṣidqī coup – remained in Yemen after the end of the mission and became instrumental in the 1948 coup.

Lagging development became the main precipitant for the foundation of a plethora of reform groups. As the late J. Leigh Douglas demonstrates, the Free Yemenis were more than the short-lived *ḥizb al-aḥrār* (Free Yemeni Party, 1944-45) from which the movement drew its name. It was a loose network of dozens of fleeting organisations and individuals that were active politically between 1935 and 1962, united in little but their dissatisfaction with the *status quo* under Imams Yaḥyā and Aḥmad. The first clandestine organisation, Sayyid Aḥmad al-Muṭā's *hay'at al-niḍāl* (Organisation of Struggle), emerged in Ṣan'ā' in 1935. Although its name suggests a more forceful approach, the group of young, urban *sāda*, *quḍā'*, and shaykhs merely sought to counter Zaydī conservatism by supporting the liberal Princes 'Abd Allāh and al-Ḥusayn. Other prominent groups, encompassed the *nāḍī al-iṣlāḥ* (Reform Club), an organisation of Shāfi'ī labourers in the Hujjariya; the *fatāt al-fulayhī* (al-Fulayhī Youth) and *majallat al-ḥikma al-yamanīya* (Yemeni Review of Wisdom), both consisting of Zaydī *shabāb* in Ṣan'ā'; and Muḥammad al-Akwā' and 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī's *jam'aīyat al-iṣlāḥ* (Reform Association), a Zaydī-Shāfi'ī group in Ibb. These organisations were linked to each other through individuals with multiple memberships.<sup>286</sup>

The most influential *aḥrār*, however, were Yemeni students Qāḍī Muḥammad Maḥmūd al-Zubayrī and Aḥmad Muḥammad Nu'mān, who – seeking a modern education in Cairo – founded the *katibat al-shabāb al-yamanī* (Battalion of Yemeni Youth) in 1940.<sup>287</sup> Upon his return to Yemen a year later, Zubayrī presented Imam Yaḥyā with a programme for political reform entitled *barnāmij al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahī 'an al-munkar* (Programme for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice). Appealing to key obligations in the

<sup>285</sup> Khaled Fattah, 'A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen', *Alternative Politics*, Special Issue, no. 1 (2010).

<sup>286</sup> See John Leigh Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement: 1935-1962* (Beirut: The American University of Beirut, 1987) for a full overview of these organisations.

<sup>287</sup> 'Qānūn Katibat al-Shabāb al-Yamanī (Law of the Battalion of Yemeni Youth)' 9 September 1940.

Zaydīya, it contained 37 reform principles, which encompassed the expansion of education to fight ignorance, the awakening of the true Islam, economic reforms and Muslim unity.<sup>288</sup> When Zubayrī delivered a sermon in the Great Mosque in Ṣanʿāʾ and members of the *katibat*, then renamed to *shabāb al-amr*, distributed leaflets about the programme, the Imam jailed Zubayrī and launched a nationwide clampdown on the reformers.<sup>289</sup> Released only nine months later, Zubayrī joined Nuʿmān and other reformers at Crown Prince Aḥmad's court in Taʿizz, hoping that the next generation of princes might be more susceptible to their advice. However, the Free Yemenis soon became disillusioned with the crown prince's refusal to enact reforms that would have fundamentally altered the political and economic power structures of the Imamate. In March 1944, they fled Taʿizz and set up base in ʿAdan when the ill-tempered Aḥmad unexpectedly announced, 'God willing, I shall not die before I drench my sword in the blood of these modernists (*al-ʿaṣrīyīn*).'<sup>290</sup>

The ideas of the *nahḍa* – the Arab cultural and intellectual renewal of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – as well as the Egyptian *ikhwān al-muslimīn* (Muslim Brotherhood) were influential among the *aḥrār*. They had access to smuggled magazines and books with the writings of Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838/9-1897), Muḥammad ʿAbdu (1849-1905), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1855-1902) and Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935). The common theme of these writers, notably that the poor condition of the Arab world in comparison with Europe was grounded in its deviation from Islam, predictably resonated with the Yemeni reformers. This explains why most of their criticism of the Imamate was couched in religious terminology. Decrying that the Imam had deviated from the path of Islam because he levied excessive *zakāt* (religious taxes) and violated the *shūrā* (consultation) principle in government, the Free Yemenis declared a *jihād* (holy struggle) against Yaḥyā's regime.<sup>291</sup> Zubayrī and Nuʿmān's *katibat* moreover maintained direct links with the Muslim Brotherhood and the 1941 *barnāmij* reveals, in both language and content, clear parallels to and influences of the publications of the *ikhwān* in Egypt.

By the mid-1940s, ʿAdan had become the main hub for North Yemeni modernist-nationalists intellectuals, not least because it was home to some 25,000 guest workers, many

<sup>288</sup> Muḥammad Maḥmūd Al-Zubayrī, 'Barnāmij al-Awwal min Barāmij Shabāb al-Amr bi-l-Maʿrūf wa-l-Nahī ʿan al-Munkar (First Programme of the Youth Programmes for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice)' 1941.

<sup>289</sup> Ḥusnī Ḥamāda, *Hasan al-Bannā wa-Thawrat al-Yaman 1948 (Hasan al-Bannā and the Yemeni Revolution of 1948)* (Al-Qāhira: Maktabat Bayrūt, 2008).

<sup>290</sup> Al-Shamāḥī, *Al-Yaman: Al-Insān wa-l-Ḥadāra*, 209.

<sup>291</sup> Al-Abdin, 'The Free Yemeni Movement (1940-48) and Its Ideas on Reform'.

of whom were Shāfi'īs from the Hujjariya region located between 'Adan and Ta'izz.<sup>292</sup> In 1944, Zubayrī and Nu'mān founded the *ḥizb al-aḥrār* (Free Yemeni Party), the first modern constitutional reform movement in Yemen, in the colony.<sup>293</sup> The 'Adani local weekly *fatāt al-jazīra* (Youth of the Arabian Peninsula) initially provided a platform to the *aḥrār*, but Yaḥyā's remonstrance led the governor of the colony to prohibit publications hostile to the Imamate. To circumvent British censorship, the Free Yemenis reorganised under the new name of *jam'āyat al-yamāniya al-kubrā* (Greater Yemeni Association), which had a solid organisational foundation. With the help of Shāfi'ī merchants, they raised £7,000 (approx. £300,000 today) to launch North Yemen's first partisan newspaper.<sup>294</sup> Licensed provisional on 'good behaviour and on abstention from any incitement of Yemenis to rebel,'<sup>295</sup> the *ṣawt al-yaman* (Voice of Yemen) began publication in October 1946. Early issues of the paper declared five conditions under which the *aḥrār* would have supported the Imam: the appointment of technocrats, the transfer of responsibility for Yemen's treasury to this ministry, the establishment of a *majlis al-shūrā* (Consultative Council), the removal of the Imam's sons from power, and the admittance of Arab experts.<sup>296</sup>

In the autumn of 1946, the Imam's authority began to wane as his health deteriorated. Succession struggles arose among members of his family and contention spread even across the more conservative segments of Yemeni society. In late 1946, Yaḥyā's son Sayf al-Islām Ibrāhīm defected to the dissidents in 'Adan, which constituted a major blow to the regime. At the same time, prominent cleric Sayyid Zayd al-Daylamī issued a petition on behalf of the *ʿulamā'* of Ṣan'ā', which called on the Imam to lower the excessive taxes, rehabilitate political prisoners and exiles, prohibit royal princes to engage in trade, raise the salaries of public employees and eradicate corruption. Some of the demands were – as Stookey points out – not only reminiscent of claims made by the Imam to the Ottomans some decades earlier.<sup>297</sup> They were close to those of the *aḥrār*, who seized the opportunity to publish the petition in the *ṣawt al-yaman* to gain religious legitimacy for their cause.<sup>298</sup> Two months later, an article by Zubayrī declared Imam Yaḥyā unfit to rule,

<sup>292</sup> Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement*.

<sup>293</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>294</sup> Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik Al-Mutawakkil, 'Al-Ṣiḥāfa al-Yamanīya: Nasha'tuhā wa-Taṭawwuruhā (Yemeni Press: Origins and Evolution)' (Ph.D., Jāmi'at al-Qāhira, 1983).

<sup>295</sup> 'PRO FO 371/68334' 10 January 1948; 'PRO FO 371/61435' 26 November 1947.

<sup>296</sup> *Ṣawt Al-Yaman*, 31 October 1946; *Ṣawt Al-Yaman*, 25 June 1947.

<sup>297</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>298</sup> *Ṣawt Al-Yaman*, 5 December 1946.

calling on him to abdicate.<sup>299</sup> Amidst rising fervour, British diplomats speculated that if the Imam did not pass away soon, he might be assassinated.<sup>300</sup> Indeed, it was in this climate of heightened political mobilisation that some components of the *ahrār* contemplated a more forceful strategy. As early as October 1946, al-Muṭāʿ and Wazīr solicited assurances of support from King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz of Saudi Arabia for Yaḥyā's deposition, albeit unsuccessfully.<sup>301</sup> Although the Imam officially decreed an end of isolationism, sent some students abroad for education, hosted foreign experts and entered into development contracts with foreign powers in 1947,<sup>302</sup> these reforms were too little, too late.

Free Yemeni organisations struggled to appeal to both Zaydīs and Shāfiʿīs, not so much because of doctrinal differences, but due to the particular social and regional backgrounds of their constituents. Only the short-lived *jamʿiyyat al-iṣlāḥ* in the religiously mixed city of Ibb had a balanced membership from both *madhāhib* (doctrinal schools). To counter the defamatory accusation by the Imam that the Free Yemenis were a sectarian movement of Shāfiʿīs, the *ahrār* attempted to overcome these divisions by recourse to the concept of the *ʿabnāʾ qaḥṭān* (sons of Qaḥṭān). This collective identity marker united northern Zaydīs and southern Shāfiʿīs around the collective memory of their common origins as southern Arabs. Most importantly, however, it was designed to drive a wedge between the Qaḥṭānite Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes on the one hand, and the *sāda* and the family of the Imam, which trace their lineage to ʿAdnān (Northern Arabs) on the other. After 1962, the Qaḥṭānite reference designed to marginalise the Zaydī aristocracy became an integral part of the propaganda of the Yemen Arab Republic,<sup>303</sup> as the regime frequently invoked the memories of the Kingdom of Sabāʾ in radio programmes.<sup>304</sup>

The well-travelled Algerian member of the Muslim Brotherhood al-Fuḍayl al-Wartālānī came to play an important role in the preparation and execution of the 1948 coup. Establishing himself as an import-export trader in Yemen in 1947, the well-spoken Wartālānī gained Yaḥyā's trust and was tasked to provide a report on developing the economy. He proposed several reform measures to the Imam, including the establishment

<sup>299</sup> *Ṣawt Al-Yaman*, 20 February 1947.

<sup>300</sup> 'PRO FO 371/61435' 26 May 1947.

<sup>301</sup> Al-Abdin, 'The Free Yemeni Movement (1940-48) and Its Ideas on Reform'; Luṭfī Fuʿād Aḥmad Nuʿmān, 'Bibliūghrāfiyā Thawra 48 fi Ṣahīfa Ṣawt al-Yaman (Bibliography 48 Revolution in the Voice of Yemen Newspaper)', *Nashwān News*, 21 February 2011.

<sup>302</sup> Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement*.

<sup>303</sup> Day, *Regionalism and Rebellion in Yemen*.

<sup>304</sup> David Hirst, 'Tribal Problem for Yemeni Republicans', *The Guardian*, 9 December 1967.

of a *majlis al-shūrā* to 'relieve the burden off his shoulders'.<sup>305</sup> However, as Zubayrī some years earlier, he soon lost hope of swaying Yaḥyā to set Yemen on a course of reform. Wartālānī liaised between North Yemenis and their compatriots in exile, keeping the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Ḥasan al-Bannā, informed about Yemeni affairs.<sup>306</sup> In 1947, he helped the Free Yemenis draft the *al-mithāq al-waṭanī al-muqaddas* (Sacred National Pact), which can be considered the first ever draft of a modern Yemeni constitution.<sup>307</sup> It proposed a governmental system with a cabinet, a *majlis al-shūrā* (consultative council) and a *jamʿiyya al-tāʾiṣiyya* (Constituent Assembly), which would have selected the Imam. It was designed to limit the powers of, rather than abolish, priestly rule, as none of the *aḥrār* conceived supplanting the Imamate with a republican system.<sup>308</sup> They initially approached Prince Aḥmad with the document, but when he refused, Sayyid ʿAbd Allāh al-Wazīr was designated as future Imam.<sup>309</sup> In November 1947, al-Muṭāʿ and Wazīr signed the document in Ṣanʿāʾ, after consultations with Zubayrī and Nuʿmān in ʿAdan.<sup>310</sup>

Although the putschists were initially determined to wait for the ageing Imam to pass away, events came to a head in early 1948. After Yaḥyā failed to appear for prayer on 15 January, false rumours reached ʿAdan and Cairo that he had died – apparently spread by one of Aḥmad's agents.<sup>311</sup> Anticipating an impending coup, the Free Yemenis in ʿAdan and Cairo prematurely published the Sacred National Pact and a list of the new government, which revealed the names of each and every conspirator, including that of Wazīr.<sup>312</sup> The list was mostly composed of Zaydīs from the traditional power holding *sāda* and *quḍāʾ* strata (53 out of 70).<sup>313</sup> It soon turned out, however, that Yaḥyā was still alive.

<sup>305</sup> Mohamed Al-Ahnaf, 'Al-Fudhayl al-Wartilani, un Algérien au Yémen (Al-Fudhayl al-Wartilani, an Algerien in Yemen)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 6–7 (1999).

<sup>306</sup> Al-Abdin, 'The Free Yemeni Movement (1940-48) and Its Ideas on Reform'.

<sup>307</sup> Shaykh ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥakīmī, who became the head of the Yemeni Union, authored a progressive draft constitution that may have predated the *mithāq al-waṭanī*, but was less influential. See Qāʾid Muḥammad Ṭarbūsh Radmān, 'Muswadat al-Dustūr al-Muʿqat ilatī Aʿdahā al-Shaykh ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī al-Ḥakīmī wa-Muqārīnatuhā bi-l-Mithāq al-Muqaddas (The Draft Interim Constitution Prepared by Shaykh ʿAbd Allāh ʿAlī al-Ḥakīmī as Compared to the Sacred National Pact)', *Majalat Dirāsāt Yamanīya*, no. 74 (July 2005).

<sup>308</sup> For an Arabic version of the *al-mithāq al-waṭanī al-muqaddas* see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt al-Raʾīs al-Qādī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Yaḥyā al-Iryānī (1910-1962) (Memoirs of President Judge ʿAbd al-Raḥmān bin Yaḥyā al-Iryānī (1910-1962))* (Maṭābaʿ al-Ḥaʾiʾa al-Maṣriyya al-ʿAma li-l-Kutāb, 2013), Vol. 1, 454–465; for an English translation see Ingrams and Ingrams, *Records of Yemen, 1798-1960*, Vol. 10, 86–90.

<sup>309</sup> Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement*.

<sup>310</sup> Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Yamanīya, *Thawra 1948: al-Milād wa-l-Masīra wa-l-Muʾaththirāt (The 1948 Revolution: The Birth, Trajectory and Consequences)* (Bayrūt: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1982).

<sup>311</sup> Al-Shamāhī, *Al-Yaman: Al-Insān wa-l-Ḥadāra*; Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Yamanīya, *Thawra 1948: al-Milād wa-l-Masīra wa-l-Muʾaththirāt*.

<sup>312</sup> 'Yemenese Ruler Is Reported Dead', *The New York Times*, 16 January 1948.

<sup>313</sup> Al-Msaodi, 'The Yemeni Opposition Movement: 1918-1948', 222–226.

Following Wartālānī's advice to 'eat him [the Imam] for lunch before, he eats you for dinner',<sup>314</sup> the Free Yemenis had to act quickly as they feared the Imam's wrath. On 17 February, the Imam and three of his sons were assassinated on a field trip outside Ṣan'ā'.<sup>315</sup> The inner circle of plotters in Ṣan'ā' consisted of members of the Wazīr family; Wartālānī, who had supplied the car for the assassination; and Jamāl Jamīl, who procured the machine gun. Although Zubayrī and Nu'mān had been consulted, the Free Yemenis in 'Adan were not involved in the plot and, in fact, opposed assassination as a means to further their cause. The next day, 'Abd Allāh al-Wazīr declared himself Imam and numerous tribal and religious leaders, including Yaḥyā's grandson Muḥammad al-Badr (1926-1996), pledged their *bay'ā* (allegiance). Jamāl Jamīl deployed around 3,000 soldiers to safeguard Ṣan'ā' against a counter-coup. Although Wazīr appointed a cabinet and proclaimed a 60-member consultative council in accordance with the Sacred National Charter, rifts in the movement began to emerge between conservatives and reformers, as some doubted Wazīr's willingness to fully adhere to the *mīthāq al-waṭanī*.<sup>316</sup>

While many initially believed that Yaḥyā had died a natural death, word soon spread that he had been brutally murdered. Although assassination was the norm, rather than the exception, in matters of Imami succession, the killing of the frail, semi-crippled, octogenarian Imam, who on top everything was Wazīr's father-in-law, backfired.<sup>317</sup> In Ta'izz, Crown Prince Aḥmad escaped his assassins and found refuge in Hajja's tribal areas from where he mobilised a counter-coup with support from the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes. Only 12 days later, a war ensued between Aḥmad's tribal irregulars, and the Imam's army and a few loyal tribes from the Tihāma and the southern highlands. Zubayrī and Wartālānī left for Saudi Arabia to plead with an Arab League delegation and King 'Abd al-'Azīz for their intervention on behalf of the Imam, but their request fell on deaf ears. With Aḥmad's troops rapidly advancing towards Ṣan'ā', the Kings of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia disapproved of the coup for it set an unwelcome precedent of regicide. After a three-day siege on Ṣan'ā', the Imam's army defected to the crown prince, whose forces sacked and plundered the city on 13 March.<sup>318</sup> Aḥmad executed all the ringleaders of the coup,

<sup>314</sup> 'Itghadda bīhu qabl mā yat'asha bīk,' Interview with Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik al-Mutawakkil (Prominent Politician of the Union of Popular Forces Party and Professor at Ṣan'ā' University), Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>315</sup> 'Yemen Head Killed With 3 Sons, Aide', *The New York Times*, 19 February 1948.

<sup>316</sup> Khadduri, 'Coup and Counter-Coup in the Yaman 1948'; Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement*.

<sup>317</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>318</sup> Khadduri, 'Coup and Counter-Coup in the Yaman 1948'.



especially Zaydīs, and declared himself Imam. Zubayrī and Wartālānī, who remained in Saudi exile, survived, while Nu'mān and Iryānī – both Shāfi'īs – were imprisoned.

Largely composed of a small urban intellectual elite, the *aḥrār* failed to articulate their modernist-nationalist goals in an accessible and conservative language that resonated with the Northern tribal constituency, which gave a semblance of credibility to Aḥmad's claim that they were trying to 'shorten the Qur'ān.'<sup>319</sup> They moreover failed to inspire mass mobilisation since they merely sought to retain their dominant positions, rather than abolish social hierarchies. The most serious mistakes of the Free Yemeni movement, however, were the assassination of the Imam and their misreading of the political outlook in the northern highlands, which – despite its history of rebellions against successive Imams – had sided with Aḥmad. Zubayrī later admitted that they had failed to capitalise on popular grievances, underestimated Aḥmad's ability to mobilise rural support for a counter coup and, in fact, only further exacerbated social cleavages between the urban bourgeoisie and rural tribesmen.<sup>320</sup> While Yemeni historiography has frequently labelled the events as an *inqilāb* (coup), al-Iryānī and others later described it as a *thawra dustūrīya* (constitutional revolution), arguing that it had fundamentally changed the ideological basis of Yemeni politics and provided a political model for the 26 September revolution.<sup>321</sup>

After ransacking Ṣan'ā' – the city that had killed its Imam – Aḥmad ruled from Ta'izz. He tacitly opened up the kingdom to trade and modernisation; with foreign assistance, he built a few roads, airports, hospitals and factories and imported a number of generators. These very limited advances did not, however, deviate significantly from Yaḥyā's abolished policy of isolationism. They altered little about the economic crisis and developmental paralysis in North Yemen; corruption, nepotism and poverty remained endemic. Paranoid, perhaps not without reason, Aḥmad centralised power to a degree at which the Imam controlled every matter of state and beyond. He had to personally approve every entry and exit visa, seat on the national air service or minor government procurement.<sup>322</sup> As his son al-Badr succinctly put it in an interview after Aḥmad's death,

<sup>319</sup> François Burgat and Marie Camberlin, 'Révolution: mode d'emploi (Revolution: User Manual)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 9 (2001).

<sup>320</sup> Muḥammad Maḥmūd Al-Zubayrī, *Al-Muntalaqāt al-Niḍariyya fī Fikr al-Thawra al-Yamanīya (The Theoretical Foundations of the Thought of the Yemeni Revolution)* (Bayrūt: Dār al-'Awda, 1983).

<sup>321</sup> Ibrahim Al-Rashid, *Yemen Enters the Modern World: Secret U.S. Documents on the Rise of the Second Power on the Arabian Peninsula* (Chapel Hill: Documentary Publications, 1984); Nu'mān, 'Bibliūghrāfiyā Thawra 48 fī Ṣaḥīfa Sawt al-Yaman'; Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>322</sup> Colin Legum, 'Yemen—A Lovely Land in Shackles', *The Observer*, 9 February 1957.

'my father distrusted the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.'<sup>323</sup> Although the depiction of Aḥmad in British documents as an 'ignorant, suspicious, tyrannical, bigotted savage'<sup>324</sup> is almost certainly an exaggeration owed to the skewed colonial optics of the time, his increasingly despotic and arbitrary rule caused widespread resentment among his subjects.<sup>325</sup>

In 1955, Iraqi-trained Lt. Col. Aḥmad al-Thulāyā conspired with Aḥmad's brother Prince 'Abd Allāh, the Foreign Minister of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom, to launch a coup against the Imam. Exploiting an incident in which soldiers had looted and burned down the houses of villagers near Ta'izz in defiance of the Imam's orders, which incurred them his wrath, Thulāyā convinced the soldiers to overthrow Aḥmad. Despite some contact with the *aḥrār*, including Muḥammad al-Zubayrī, Aḥmad Nu'mān, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī and 'Abd Allāh al-Sallāl, who were divided over the issue, the coup was only a sideshow to the Free Yemeni movement.<sup>326</sup> With little planning and preparation, Thulāyā besieged the royal palace in Ta'izz with around 1,000 soldiers and extracted a letter from Aḥmad in which he agreed to abdicate in favour of his brother. Although Prince 'Abd Allāh hastily proclaimed himself Imam, most notables withheld their pledge of allegiance waiting to see how events would play out. Drawing a lesson from the failed coup of 1948, the conspirators refrained from killing Aḥmad, which gave his son al-Badr enough time to descend – as his father had done only seven years earlier – on Ta'izz with 8,000 Zaydī tribesmen.<sup>327</sup> By the time he reached the city, Aḥmad already secured his own release with the help of his bodyguards. Firmly back on the throne only a week after the coup, he executed Thulāyā, had his brother poisoned in jail and named al-Badr crown prince.<sup>328</sup>

### ***The Revolution of 26 September 1962: From Palace Coup to Civil War***

While the executions and arrests after the failed coup of 1948 had shattered the very foundations of the Free Yemenis, the movement began to regroup around the *ittiḥād al-yamanī* (Yemeni Union) in 'Adan. Founded in 1952 ostensibly to promote the welfare of the Yemeni community in the colony, it soon established branches in the United Kingdom and Cairo. Although a number of groups claimed to uphold the banner of the 1948 movement, the *ittiḥād*, which counted Zubayrī and Nu'mān among its members, became the principal

<sup>323</sup> George De Carvalho, 'Yemen's Desert Fox', *Life Magazin*, 19 February 1965.

<sup>324</sup> 'PRO FO 371/114795' 16 November 1955.

<sup>325</sup> 'Yemen: Arabia Felix', *Time*, 26 October 1962.

<sup>326</sup> Al-Shamāhī, *Al-Yaman: Al-Insān wa-l-Hadāra*; Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>327</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>328</sup> 'Yemen Reported Restoring Ruler', *The New York Times*, 6 April 1955; 'Yemen: Revolt & Revenge', *Time*, 25 April 1955.

successor to the *aḥrār* and main opposition movement against the Imamate between 1952 and 1962. However, in the mid-1950s, internal divisions emerged between the older generation of the predominantly Zaydī reformers and a new generation of mainly Shāfiʿī progressives in the Yemeni Union.<sup>329</sup> They came to a head when Zubayrī and Nuʿmān agreed with Crown Prince al-Badr that the Yemeni Union would support his succession if he agreed to introduce a constitution and political institutions along the lines of the Sacred National Pact. After the publication of the draft constitution in 1955 under the title *amalnā wa-amānīhā* (Our Hopes and Aspirations)<sup>330</sup>, progressives openly revolted against Zubayrī. When Imam Aḥmad announced the establishment of a cabinet and a *majlis al-shūrā* shortly after, he managed to divide and co-opt parts of the movement. The Free Yemenis in Cairo and ʿAdan moreover became increasingly familiar with pan-Arab nationalist ideologies, which furthered the politicisation and radicalisation of the Yemeni Union. Although the transnational dimension of Nāṣirism and Baʿthism found little appeal among Yemeni nationalists, young members were attracted by the statism and republicanism of these ideologies, which older Zaydī traditionalists either rejected or thought politically unfeasible.

Unwittingly, Imam Aḥmad himself invited the challenges that led to the overthrow of the Imamate. Under pressure to modernise, he sought to generate legitimacy through foreign development assistance. He initially embarked on a few projects with Germany, Italy and the United States, but by the mid-1950s turned to Egypt, the Soviet Union and China for foreign aid and experts, economic cooperation and military aid.<sup>331</sup> In 1956, Aḥmad signed the Jidda Pact, a mutual defence treaty with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Imam's efforts to modernise the armed forces in the framework of Yemeni-Egyptian military cooperation not only politicised Yemeni officers by introducing them to Arab nationalism and Nāṣirism, but attuned them to the traditionally strong role that the armed forces played in Egyptian political affairs. As a result, secret cells began to emerge in the military, which provided the seeds for the Yemeni *ḍubāṭ al-aḥrār* (Free Officers), an organisation of mid-level officers modelled after the Egyptian officers of 1952.<sup>332</sup>

<sup>329</sup> These were only tendencies. Although the older generation was predominantly Zaydī, they included prominent Shāfiʿīs, such as Aḥmad Nuʿmān and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī, while the new generation encompassed such important Zaydīs as Muḥsin al-ʿAynī.

<sup>330</sup> Ittiḥād al-Yamanī, 'Amalnā wa-Amānīhā (Our Hopes and Aspirations)', May 1955. For an English translation of the pact, see Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement*, 399–404.

<sup>331</sup> 'The Situation in the Middle East: Conditions, Dangers and Prospects' (NATO PO/58/990, 21 August 1958); 'The Threat to NATO's Southern Flank Arising from Soviet Military Penetration of the Middle East' (NATO SG 255/2, 14 August 1958).

<sup>332</sup> Fattah, 'A Political History of Civil-Military Relations in Yemen'.

Imam Aḥmad moreover continued the policy inaugurated under his father in 1947 of sending young, mostly Shāfiʿī, boys to study in countries across the region, particularly Egypt and Lebanon, where they came in contact with the Yemeni Union and Michel ʿAflaq and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Bayṭār's Baʿth movement. The exposure to foreign ideas was formative; as one of the Famous Forty remarked, 'we went abroad as innocents in 1947, knowing only Allah and the Imam.'<sup>333</sup> In contrast to subsequent groups composed mostly of Zaydīs, the first generation of these educational migrants became known as the 'Famous Forty,' or simply *al-arbaʿīn* (the Forty), for the role its members came to play in Yemeni political affairs.<sup>334</sup> When the group returned to Yemen in the mid-1950s, they soon became alienated by Aḥmad's distrust towards them and his refusal to enact reforms. The Famous Forty included nine military officers out of which five<sup>335</sup> helped execute the 1962 revolution. Other prominent members encompassed Muḥsin al-ʿAynī, ʿAbd Allāh al-Kurshūmī, Ḥasan Makkī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʿAbd al-Ghanī and ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Iryānī, who assumed the highest civilian positions in the government of ʿAbd Allāh al-Sallāl (1962-1967) and every subsequent government in the Yemen Arab Republic.<sup>336</sup>

By the mid-1950s, the Free Yemenis abandoned aspirations to reform the Imamate and advocated a fundamental transformation of Yemen's social contract. Marginalised by the infighting in the Yemeni Union in Cairo, Nu'mān and Zubayrī published *maṭālib al-shaʿb* (Demands of the People), a political manifesto in the form of a letter to Imam Aḥmad, in 1956. Although it shared some features with the 1947 Sacred National Pact, *maṭālib al-shaʿb* radically departed from the earlier political thought and language of the Free Yemenis. It rejected the entire political structure of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom, including the office of the Imam, in favour of a modern constitutional order. The manifesto also proposed to establish a transitional government to lead the affairs of the state, reorganise the army, release political prisoners, as well as restructure and decentralise the public administration. Meanwhile, an elected *jamʿiyya tāʾsīsiyya* (constituent assembly) would be entrusted with drafting a new constitution for a decentralised political system based on a charter of civil rights and freedoms. The document contained references to pan-Arabism and affirmed the grievances of the Shāfiʿī population, such as the excessive tax burden and

<sup>333</sup> Robert D. Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 170–171.

<sup>334</sup> See *Ṣawt Al-Yaman*, 24 July 1947 for a full list of the students.

<sup>335</sup> ʿAbd Allāh al-Juzaylān, Muḥammad al-Hanūmī, ʿAlī al-Kuhālī, ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Dhayfalla, and ʿAlī Sayf al-Khawḷānī.

<sup>336</sup> Robert D. Burrowes, 'The Famous Forty and Their Companions: North Yemen's First-Generation Modernists and Educational Emigrants', *The Middle East Journal* 59, no. 1 (2005).

unequal social status.<sup>337</sup> Apart from its theoretical significance, *maṭālib al-sha'b* marked a major turning point in the movement. It caused traditionalists to split off, thus leaving the Yemeni Union as a more coherent organisation with a more clearly defined identity and set of demands.<sup>338</sup> These demands not only shaped the political outlook of the Yemen Arab Republic, but successive generations of Yemenis would, with slight variations, repeatedly invoke these claims – ranging all the way until 2011.

Preoccupied with the construction of a united, republican state that could guarantee economic development and modernisation, the *aḥrār* drew heavily on the collective memory of Yemen's ancient past. In *Battles and Plots against the Cause of Yemen* (1957), later Prime Minister and Yemeni Union member Muḥsin al-ʿAynī develops the collective national identities of *al-sha'b* (the people), *muwāṭinīn* (citizens) and *abnā' al-waṭan* (sons of the nation). His stated goal is thereby to overcome the prevalent divisions between Zaydīs and Shāfiʿīs, Hāshimīn and Qaḥṭānites, tribesfolk and urbanites, traditionalists (*ʿamāʾim*, lit. turbans) and modernists (*muqabaʿīn*, lit. hats), costal people (*tihāmiyīn*) and mountain folk, as well as soldiers and peasants (*raʿāyā*).<sup>339</sup> In the same book, ʿAynī advances the fantastic argument that the *Kingdom* of Sabāʾ was – in fact – not a *malikīyā* (monarchy), but a *jumhūrīya* (republic), whose prosperity was grounded in its progressive governmental system.<sup>340</sup> Zubayrī echoes ʿAynī's concern about factionalism in *The Imamate and its Threat to Yemeni Unity* (1958), a short booklet that – based on Muḥammad al-Shawkānī's writings – harshly criticises the Imamate for fomenting sectarian strife between Zaydīs and Shāfiʿīs.<sup>341</sup> In his popular tragedy *Māʾsā Wāq al-Wāq* (1961), he similarly idealises the Sabāʾean period as a golden age of unity and the rule of law, which – like ʿAynī's book – reveals more about the outlook of the Free Yemenis at the time than this period of ancient Yemeni history.<sup>342</sup>

In March 1958, Yemen entered into a bizarre and largely superficial confederation with the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria, UAR) – the United Arab States. Aḥmad intended the union with the UAR as the most effective means to protect the Imamate

<sup>337</sup> Muḥammad Maḥmūd Al-Zubayrī and Aḥmad Muḥammad Nuʿmān, 'Maṭālib al-Sha'b (The People's Demands)' (ʿAdan, 1956).

<sup>338</sup> Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement*.

<sup>339</sup> Muḥsin al-ʿAynī, *Maʾārik wa-Muʾamarāt dudd Qaḍīyat al-Yaman (Battles and Plots against the Cause of Yemen)* (Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Shurūq, 1999).

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>341</sup> Muḥammad Maḥmūd Al-Zubayrī, 'Al-Imāma wa-Khaṭaruhā ʿalā Waḥīdat al-Yaman: Min Tarāthna al-Waṭanī (The Imamate and its Threat to Yemeni Unity: Of Our National Heritage)' n.d.; See also Serjeant, 'The Yemeni Poet Al-Zubayri and His Polemic against the Zaydi Imams'; Haykel, 'Al-Shawkānī and the Jurisprudential Unity of Yemen'.

<sup>342</sup> Muḥammad Maḥmūd Al-Zubayrī, *Māʾsā Wāq al-Wāq (The Tragedy of Wāq al-Wāq)* (Al-Qāhira, 1961).

against the rising tide of revolutionary Arab nationalism through co-option. Although the union with the United Arab Republic bought Imam Aḥmad 'a few years of peace from Radio Cairo,' as an astute contemporary reporter observed, it 'probably made the end of the Imamate only more certain.'<sup>343</sup> During the accession negotiations to the UAS in February 1958, Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir had tried to recruit al-Badr to carry out a coup against his father, but the crown prince merely pocketed £25,000 (approx. £500,000 today) and two cases of pistols without honouring his side of the bargain.<sup>344</sup> Although Nāṣir had not abandoned his aspirations for a republic in Yemen, under the veneer of amicable relations, he curtailed the activities of the Yemeni Union. Zubayrī's regular broadcasts on the Cairo-based radio station *ṣawt al-ʿarab* – a transnational foreign policy instrument of post-revolutionary Egypt akin to Qatar's al-Jazeera today – were stopped. Zubayrī and many of the new generation therefore oriented themselves towards Michel 'Aflaq and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Bayṭār's Ba'th movement in Syria – an anathema to Nāṣir. By 1959, the Cairo branch of the Yemeni Union had largely collapsed and many members shifted their base to 'Adan, where they established close contacts with the Aden Trades Union Congress (ATUC).

In the years preceding the revolution, levels of social and political unrest in North Yemen reached hitherto unseen heights. In April 1959, the ageing Imam travelled to Rome for medical treatment, leaving his son al-Badr – at the time an admirer of Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir – as regent. The crown prince ventured some tacit reform steps: he established a representative council to monitor the administration, founded the *waḥīdat al-shabāb al-yamanī* (Yemeni Youth Union) to link youths to the political system and strengthened Egyptian influence in Yemen.<sup>345</sup> He moreover promised a pay rise to soldiers, which he soon had to retract due to insufficient funds in the treasury. The ensuing army mutinies forced him to rely on the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes, which, in a rare show of force, descended with 50,000 to Ṣan'ā' in return for a handsome subsidy.<sup>346</sup> Upon his return in August, Aḥmad reversed some of these reforms, expelled Egyptian advisors and demanded that the Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes repay the subsidies that his son bestowed upon. These decisions caused widespread discontentment and led to the convergence of the interests of the Free Yemenis, the army as well as important Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes. In a secret

<sup>343</sup> David Holden, 'Yemen Pawns May Balk Arabian Knights', *The Guardian*, 1 December 1962.

Typographical errors corrected.

<sup>344</sup> Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965: Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins: Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

<sup>345</sup> Douglas, *The Free Yemeni Movement*.

<sup>346</sup> Al-Shamāhī, *Al-Yaman: Al-Insān wa-l-Ḥadāra*.

meeting in Ṣan'ā', Ḥāshid and Bakīl shaykhs Ḥusayn and Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar, Sinān Abū Laḥūm and 'Alī Nājī al-Shā'if; 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī and 'Abd al-Salam Sabra for the Free Yemenis; as well as the foreign-educated army officers 'Abd Allāh Sallāl, Ḥamūd al-Jā'ifi and 'Abd Allāh al-Juzaylān coordinated a tribal uprising and plotted to assassinate the Imam.<sup>347</sup> The tribal rebellion erupted in January 1960 and continued throughout most of the year, but nothing came of the assassination attempt. In a flagrant breach of tribal codes, the Imam had Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar and his son Ḥamīd murdered at a tribal mediation effort and sent a force of 2,000 soldiers against the Ḥāshid when another son, 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar, announced his intention to overthrow Aḥmad.<sup>348</sup>

A survey of Arab and Western newspaper coverage throughout 1960 and 1961 reveals the wide-ranging repertoires of contention during the period. Contentious collective action encompassed student protest marches, a teachers' strike, civil disobedience by a 'blind poet' and religious leaders, the distribution of subversive leaflets, officials at the royal court acting without approval of the Imam, the refusal to pay taxes in northern towns, as well as a rumour campaign about Aḥmad's deteriorating health. More serious incidents encompassed acts of sabotage, including the arson of a fuel depot, and several instances of bombings or throwing hand grenades at the Imam's premises. In addition, there were at least seven unsuccessful attempts on the Imam's life, both from within the royal family – due to a competition between his son al-Badr and his brother al-Ḥasan – and from outside. His recalcitrant refusal to die at the hands of his assassins earned Aḥmad the nickname *al-jinn* (the Jinn). The gravest attempts was in March 1961, when three Yemeni officers, one of them a disciple of Jamāl Jamīl, shot Aḥmad at the hospital in al-Ḥudayda, which left the Imam crippled and forced him to entrust power to his son al-Badr a few months later.<sup>349</sup>

In December 1961, in a move likely designed to win the support of conservatives in Yemen, Aḥmad recited an inflammatory poem in which he defamed Nāṣir's socialism and nationalisation as incompatible with Islam. The enraged Nāṣir revoked the union under

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.; 'Abd Allāh Juzaylān, *Asrār al-Thawra al-Yamanīya (Secrets of the Yemeni Revolution)* (Dimashq: Dār al-Fikr, 1984); Sinān Abū Laḥūm, *Al-Yaman: Ḥaqā'iq wa-Wathā'iq 'Ishtuhā, 1943-1962 (Yemen: Facts and Documents I Lived Through, 1943-1962)* (Ṣan'ā': Mu'assasat al-'Afif al-Thaqāfiya, 2004).

<sup>348</sup> 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt al-Shaykh 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar: Qadā'iya wa-Muwāqif (Memoirs of Shaykh 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn Al-Aḥmar: Issues and Propositions)* (Ṣan'ā': Dār al-Kutub al-Yamanīya, 2008).

<sup>349</sup> Yitzhak Oron, ed., *Middle East Record: Volume 1* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1960); Yitzhak Oron, ed., *Middle East Record: Volume 2* (Jerusalem: Israel Program for Scientific Translations, 1961).

the United Arab States and blatantly put his support behind the Yemeni republicans.<sup>350</sup> Disillusioned with Zubayrī, Nu'mān and the Yemeni Union, which he considered too independent, Nāṣir gave the Yemeni-Egyptian 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Bayḍānī free hand to launch a propaganda campaign against the Imam. In the summer of 1962, Bayḍānī broadcast the series *The Secrets of the Yemen* on *ṣawt al-ʿarab* in which he slandered Aḥmad for his morphine addiction, called on Yemenis to rebel against him and fomented sectarian conflict. While Imam Yaḥyā had been able to shield himself against foreign radio broadcasts by prohibiting radios, the smaller and affordable transistor technology of the new generation of radios made smuggling them into the Imamate easy; according to some reports, the Egyptians had introduced as many as 100,000 transistor radios in Yemen.<sup>351</sup> Bayḍānī even claimed that the radio was used to launch the revolution on 26 September 1962 by broadcasting the secret code 'Friday is Friday, the sermon is the sermon.'<sup>352</sup>

In mid-1962, the Yemeni *ḍubāṭ al-aḥrār* (Free Officers), a group of young, Egyptian-trained officers established in December 1961, received assurances from Nāṣir that Egypt would support the overthrow of the Imam.<sup>353</sup> In need of a senior leading figure, they approached Brigadier-General 'Abd Allāh al-Sallāl, an Iraqi-trained officer and Nāṣir sympathiser, who had spent years in the Imam's dungeons.<sup>354</sup> The officers conceived a plan to oust Aḥmad on 30 September.<sup>355</sup> On 18 September, however, Aḥmad died of the aftereffects of the Ḥudayda assassination attempt and was succeeded unopposed by his son Muḥammad al-Badr. The reform-minded al-Badr immediately began to enact pledges for political reform. He abolished the tribal hostage system, decreed a general amnesty for political prisoners and exiles, and instituted a 40-member advisory council, one half elected, the other selected by him. Most ironically, al-Badr also appointed Sallāl as commander of the 4,000-men strong Royal Guard. Fearing the imminent return of al-

<sup>350</sup> 'Document 38: Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Hilsman) to Secretary of State Rusk' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, 13 September 1962).

<sup>351</sup> Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Al-Ḥadīdī, *Shāhid 'alā al-Ḥarb al-Yaman (Witness to the Yemeni War)* (Al-Qāhira: Maktabat Madbūlī, 1984); Yahya Abu Bakr, Saad Labib, and Hamdy Kandil, 'Development of Communication in the Arab States: Needs and Priorities', Reports and Papers on Mass Communication (UNESCO, 1985).

<sup>352</sup> Other sources neither corroborate nor contradict this claim. Laura M. James, 'Whose Voice? Nasser, the Arabs, and "Sawt Al-Arab" Radio', *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 16 (2006).

<sup>353</sup> Ṣālīḥ 'Alī Ashwal, *Ḥaqā'iq Thawrat Sibṭimbir al-Yamanīya: I'dādān wa-Tanfīdhān (Facts of the September Revolution: Preparation and Implementation)* (Ṣan'ā': Mu'assasat al-'Afif al-Thaqāfiya, 2001); Jesse Ferris, 'Egypt, the Cold War, and the Civil War in Yemen, 1962-1966' (Ph.D., Princeton University, 2008).

<sup>354</sup> Juzaylān, *Asrār al-Thawra al-Yamanīya (Secrets of the Yemeni Revolution)*.

<sup>355</sup> Samar Qaed and Amal Al-Yarisi, 'From Their Eyes: The 1962 Revolution', *Yemen Times*, 27 September 2012.



Badr's tribally well-connected uncle Prince Ḥasan from his post at the UN and that these reforms might reduce the revolutionary resolve, the conspirators advanced their timetable.

In the night of 26 September, they captured the radio station in Ṣan'ā' and secured the city's army barracks. They then surrounded al-Badr's palace with tanks and began to shell it. Although the officers shortly after announced the Imam's death, they were unable to quell rumours that al-Badr had managed to escape through the blockade.<sup>356</sup> Members of the royal family either fled or were executed due to their role in oppression under Aḥmad's rule. In his first official communiqué, 'Abd Allāh al-Sallāl announced the establishment of a modern republic, the *jumhūrīya al-'arabīya al-yamanīya* (Yemen Arab Republic, YAR) with the *majlis qiyāda al-thawra* (Revolutionary Command Council) as its most powerful organ.<sup>357</sup> The United Arab Republic (Egypt) and the Soviet Union immediately recognised the YAR, followed by many Arab republics. Although Sallāl's threat 'I warn America that if it does not recognize the Yemen Arab Republic, I shall not recognize it!'<sup>358</sup> surely left Washington unimpressed, on 19 December the United States – at odds with British policy vis-à-vis Arab nationalism – recognised the YAR.<sup>359</sup> Driven by Tory hardliners in London, Britain refused to recognise the new regime,<sup>360</sup> as did the Saudi and Jordanian monarchies.

Sallāl assumed the presidency of the *majlis al-qiyāda* and Bayḍānī, who had returned to Yemen together with other exiled leaders from Cairo and 'Adan, became his deputy. The council instituted a provisional constitution to govern a 5-year transition period. While the official constitutional declaration of 30 October 1962 contained ten principles, they have subsequently been subsumed under six major revolutionary goals, which were largely congruent with those formulated by Nu'mān and Zubayrī in *maṭālib al-sha'b*:<sup>361</sup>

- (1) Liberation from despotism (*istibdād*), colonialism (*ista'mār*) and its remnants, as well as the establishment of just republican rule and elimination of class (*tabaqāt*) privileges and differences;

<sup>356</sup> 'Yemen Capital Quiet 11 Days After Revolt', *The New York Times*, 9 October 1962.

<sup>357</sup> Jay Walz, 'Yemen Rebel Leader's Declared Aim Is a Modern Republic', *The New York Times*, 5 November 1962.

<sup>358</sup> 'Yemen: Pax Americana?', *Time*, 28 December 1962.

<sup>359</sup> W. Taylor Fain, "'Unfortunate Arabia": The United States, Great Britain and Yemen, 1955–63', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>360</sup> 'PRO CAB 129/112' 10 January 1963; Christopher Gandy, 'A Mission to Yemen: August 1962-January 1963', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 2 (1998).

<sup>361</sup> 'Abd Allāh Al-Sallāl, 'I'lān Dustūrī min Majlis Qiyādat al-Thawra li-l-Jumhūrīya al-'Arabīya al-Yamanīya (Constitutional Declaration of the Revolutionary Command Council of the Yemen Arab Republic)' 31 October 1962; 'Abd al-Raḥmān Bayḍānī, *Asrār al-Yaman (Secrets of Yemen)* (Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Qawmīya li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1962), 129–132.

- (2) Create a strong national army for the defence of the country and safeguarding the revolution and its achievements;
- (3) Raise people's economic, social, political and cultural standards;
- (4) Build a democratic, cooperative and just society based on the orders of the true spirit of Islam (*al-rūḥ al-islām al-ḥanīf*);
- (5) Work on achieving national unity (*al-waḥida al-waṭanīya*) in the overall framework of Arab unity;
- (6) Respect the Charter of the United Nations and international organisations and adhere to the principles of positive neutrality (*ḥayād al-ijābī*), non-alignment (*adam al-inḥiyāz*) and work for world peace and promoting peaceful co-existence among nations.<sup>362</sup>

Within only days of al-Badr's overthrow, Egyptian troops arrived in the port of al-Ḥudayda. Even before their arrival, Egypt established an airlift with the help of Soviet planes and pilots, which allowed Nāṣir to rapidly project power in Yemen.<sup>363</sup> The timing and circumstances suggest his possible collusion in, or at least connivance of, the coup.<sup>364</sup> The Egyptian deployment was driven by Nāṣir's aspirations for supremacy in the Arab world, which was waning after the humiliating secession of Syria from the UAR in late 1961.<sup>365</sup> During the first year of operations, 18 vessels made 122 trips with troops and heavy equipment, while the Soviet Union assisted with construction projects and the despatch of 1,000 service personnel.<sup>366</sup> By November 1963, the CIA estimated that Egypt had no less than 30,000 troops on the ground in Yemen with the declared goal of sheltering the revolution against reactionary forces.<sup>367</sup>

With al-Badr presumably deceased, Imam Aḥmad's brother, Prince Ḥasan, declared himself Imam on October 9 and appealed for support to northern Zaydī tribes and Saudi Arabia. A few days later, however, al-Badr reappeared, having escaped the siege of his palace disguised as a common soldier. At a press conference, he portrayed the republican movement as nothing but the stooges of an Egyptian occupation, construing the conflict as one between Yemen and Egypt, rather than royalists and republicans. He directly addressed the Egyptian forces: 'Had you come as friends we would have opened to

<sup>362</sup> Author's translation. The six goals are widely publicised in the Yemeni press.

<sup>363</sup> Jesse Ferris, 'Soviet Support for Egypt's Intervention in Yemen, 1962–1963', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10, no. 4 (2008).

<sup>364</sup> Asher Orkaby, 'The Yemeni Civil War: The Final British–Egyptian Imperial Battleground', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26 September 2014.

<sup>365</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, 'The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen: Co-Opting Arab Nationalism', *The Middle East Journal* 49, no. 2 (1995).

<sup>366</sup> 'PRO FO 371/162945' 5 October 1962; 'PRO FO 371/162945' 8 October 1962; 'Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Bayḍānī, *Miṣr wa-Thawrat al-Yaman (Egypt and the Yemeni Revolution)* (Al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1993).

<sup>367</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 'The Situation and Prospects in Yemen' (Special National Intelligence Estimate 36.7-63, Washington, D.C., 6 November 1963), Declassified Document.

you our homes and our hearts. But since you came as invaders we can open for you only your graves.<sup>368</sup> Far from a monolithic block, a competition emerged within the royalist movement, which sought to restore the Imamate, between Muḥammad al-Badr, his uncle Ḥasan and later his militarily gifted cousin Muḥammad bin Ḥusayn. Although Ḥasan had a strong standing with numerous Zaydī tribes and conservatives, the principal powerbase of the royalist camp, al-Badr was kept as a figurehead in order to present a united front.<sup>369</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Saudi Arabia began to provide covert support to the royalists – primarily in the form of money, arms and an operating base. Although the kingdom was determined to contain Nāṣir, a more compelling motivation for King Saʿūd and Crown Prince Fayṣal was their perception that republicanism and Arab socialism posed a threat to the domestic stability of Saudi Arabia.<sup>370</sup> ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī recounts a meeting with Fayṣal in 1960 in which the Crown Prince declared ‘not to stand by idly and fight until the end’ if they proclaimed a republic in Yemen.<sup>371</sup> Great Britain was violently opposed to the new regime as it deemed “[t]he consolidation of the republican regime in the Yemen ... a serious threat to our interests in Aden, and thus also in the Persian Gulf.”<sup>372</sup> Although Prime Minister Harold Macmillan lamented that it was ‘repugnant to political equity and prudence alike that we should so often appear to be supporting out-of-date and despotic regimes and to be opposing the growth of modern and more democratic forms of government,’<sup>373</sup> recent accounts based on partially declassified archival sources reveal the scope of British support to the royalists. In collusion with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, as well as Israel, Britain not only channelled arms and substantive funding into North Yemen, but also provided air support, military intelligence through the MI6 and deployed mercenaries that trained royalist tribesmen in techniques of sabotage, terrorism and fighting a ‘dirty war.’<sup>374</sup> Between 1964 and 1966, the Israeli military successfully conducted at least 14 clandestine airlifts of arms and supplies, and on occasions

<sup>368</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, ‘Imam Reappears; Warns Egyptians’, *The New York Times*, 11 November 1962.

<sup>369</sup> ‘Document 69: Memorandum from the Department of State Executive Secretary (Brubeck) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy)’ (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, 5 October 1962); Dana Adams Schmidt, ‘Yemeni Royalists Seriously Split Into 2 Factions’, *The New York Times*, 24 November 1968.

<sup>370</sup> Gerges, ‘The Kennedy Administration and the Egyptian-Saudi Conflict in Yemen’.

<sup>371</sup> Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt*, Vol. 1, 38.

<sup>372</sup> ‘PRO FO 371/162947’ 8 October 1962.

<sup>373</sup> ‘PRO CAB 130/189’ 5 February 1963.

<sup>374</sup> Mark Curtis, *Unpeople: Britain’s Secret Human Rights Abuses* (London: Vintage, 2004), 299; Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965*; Duff Hart-Davis, *War That Never Was* (London: Century, 2011).

rescued royalist commanders from the battlefield.<sup>375</sup> This support allowed the Ḥamīd al-Dīn family to launch a sustained insurgency against the newborn republic.

With Egyptian, Saudi, British, Jordanian and Israeli involvement under American or Soviet patronage, Yemen's civil war became internationalised and escalated into a dominant episode of the Saudi-Egyptian 'Arab Cold War'.<sup>376</sup> Manipulated by their proxy clients and competing for their favours, neither superpower was particularly successful in exerting its influence.<sup>377</sup> On the battlefield, the war was mainly fought between irregular fighters from pro-royalist tribes and the Egyptian army, whose commanders soon noticed that the new republican army was as likely to shoot at them as at the royalists.<sup>378</sup> In the cover of Yemen's northern mountains, the royalists withstood a five-year onslaught by as many as 70,000-75,000 Egyptian troops at the height of the conflict in mid-1966.<sup>379</sup> Ill-suited for a counterinsurgency in the mountainous terrain, Egypt had to mobilise considerable force only not to be overrun by tribal insurgents and employed its air force to use mustard gas and napalm against the monarchists.<sup>380</sup> At no point in the conflict did the republican camp manage to achieve anything more than a stalemate.<sup>381</sup> The war turned into a neo-medieval carnage, which left – according to Halliday's estimate – 250,000 casualties in a population of barely five million inhabitants.

The labels 'royalists,' 'republicans' and even finer distinctions, such as 'progressive royalists,' 'Septembrists' or 'pro-Egyptian republicans,' obfuscate a more complex reality. Not only were these categories fluid as the conflict evolved, but alliances routinely shifted. In fact, two wars transpired in parallel: a royalist-republican and a Yemeni-Egyptian war. As is often the case in Yemen, the role of tribes was complex. Tendentially, however, Zaydī tribesmen sided with the monarchy due their traditional values, for fear that the republic

<sup>375</sup> Orkaby, 'The Yemeni Civil War'.

<sup>376</sup> Richard E. Bissell, 'Soviet Use of Proxies in the Third World: The Case of Yemen', *Europe-Asia Studies* 30, no. 1 (1978).

<sup>377</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

<sup>378</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>379</sup> 'Document 253: Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XVIII, 24 November 1965).

<sup>380</sup> Joseph D. Salvia, 'Gas in Yemen', *Scientist and Citizen* 9, no. 7 (1967); W. Andrew Terrill, 'The Chemical Warfare Legacy of the Yemen War', *Comparative Strategy* 10, no. 2 (1991); 'Document 294: Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, 11 July 1963); 'Document 449: Telegram from the Mission at the European Office of the United Nations to the Department of State' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXI, 6 June 1967).

<sup>381</sup> David M. Wittey, 'A Regular Army in Counterinsurgency Operations: Egypt in North Yemen, 1962-1967', *The Journal of Military History* 65, no. 2 (2001).

might compromise tribal autonomy and the presence of a foreign invasion force on Yemeni soil. Their Shāfiʿī counterparts, conversely, who saw themselves as the victims of Zaydī discrimination, were inclined towards the republic.<sup>382</sup> Still, some collaboration transpired between the republicans and northern shaykhs, which included such prominent figures as Amīn Abū Ra's (Bakīl) or 'Abd Allāh al-Aḥmar (Hāshid).<sup>383</sup>

Nevertheless, tribal alliances should not be misconstrued as the result of either rigid ideological allegiances or static commitments. Although concerns about livelihood and security prevailed, the war economy made such alliances highly fluid. Tribes regularly switched sides, merely pretended to fight or fought for both sides on the same day.<sup>384</sup> Indeed, a reporter on the ground details a case in which a tribe collected \$2 million from Egypt and – before the battle with the Imam's forces – called to inform their supposed enemy that they would shoot to miss.<sup>385</sup> In other cases, tribes switched allegiances mid-battle and attacked their Egyptian comrades. Though difficult to substantiate with empirical evidence, tribes may likely have purposefully aimed for a stalemate to perpetuate patronage payments.<sup>386</sup> As one observer put it, 'Yemeni tribes are loyal to no one but themselves and given gold, ammunition and technical direction will fight for either side.'

Only one year into the conflict, the republican movement came to crumble in the face of internal divisions. Progressive ideas were not widely shared in the republican army and, paralysed by the war, the ineffective Sallāl government failed to build a domestic support base.<sup>387</sup> Entirely subservient to Egypt, Sallāl and Bayḍānī's puppet government did not pursue its declared goals, but entirely endorsed a Nāṣirist agenda of Arab socialism, industrial development and centralism, which alienated tribal and moderate liberals in the republican camp.<sup>388</sup> In his memoirs, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī accused Sallāl to have 'proven his loyalty to the Egyptian policy even if it was against the interests of Yemen.'<sup>389</sup> Nāṣir's ambitions for South Yemen, though shared in principle by Yemeni republicans,

<sup>382</sup> 'Former Scourge Is Hero to Yemeni Regime', *The New York Times*, 11 January 1969; John E. Peterson, 'The Yemen Arab Republic and the Politics of Balance', *Asian Affairs* 12, no. 3 (1981).

<sup>383</sup> Al-Aḥmar resented Aḥmad for executing his father Ḥusayn and brother Ḥamīd. Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>384</sup> 'Document 141: Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume XVIII, 24 January 1963).

<sup>385</sup> De Carvalho, 'Yemen's Desert Fox'.

<sup>386</sup> Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>387</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 'The Situation and Prospects in Yemen'.

<sup>388</sup> 'Abd Allāh 'Abd al-Ilāh, *Naksat al-Thawra fī al-Yaman (Setback of the Revolution in Yemen)* (Bayrūt, 1964).

<sup>389</sup> Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt*, Vol. 2, 163.

were not high on the agenda given the priority of the war against royalists.<sup>390</sup> The movement split into three main political camps: Sallālists, who supported the government's pro-Egyptian course; moderate republicans, who opposed both Sallāl and the Egyptian involvement; and the leftists, such as Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) affiliates, Marxists and Ba'athists.<sup>391</sup> The latter camp developed in response to regional ideological trends and their disillusionment with Egypt's compromises with Saudi Arabia. A year after the beginning of the war, the simpleminded Sallāl suffered a nervous breakdown in this complex political tangle; the diagnosis of the Egyptian doctor was that the disease was 'political' and could only be cured with good news from Yemen.<sup>392</sup>

While the Egyptian presence enabled the survival of the republican movement, it distorted the early development of the YAR. By 1963, opposition had mounted against Sallāl's unpopular military leadership as well as the ineffectiveness and pro-Egyptian course of his government.<sup>393</sup> In 1964, republican minister 'Abd al-Malik al-Ṭayyib published a book entitled *Setback (naksa) of the Revolution in Yemen* in which he bitterly criticised Sallāl.<sup>394</sup> The same year, Zubayrī, Nu'mān and Iryānī resigned from the government, followed by six other ministers in solidarity – a major blow to Sallāl.<sup>395</sup> Efforts to build a 'third force' to overcome the royalist-republican antagonism moreover emerged from the early 1960s on, most prominently Sayyid Ibrāhīm al-Wazīr's *ittiḥād al-quwā al-sha'bīya al-yamanīya* (Yemeni Union of Popular Forces) and Zubayrī's *ḥizb allāh* (Party of God).<sup>396</sup> Instead of the hoped-for conciliatory effect, however, they made enemies on both sides by calling for Egypt's withdrawal and the removal of the Ḥamīd al-Dīn family. The latter had Zubayrī assassinated in April 1965<sup>397</sup> and the rest of the 'third force' was either marginalised in the subsequent royalist-republican reconciliation process or co-opted by Saudi Arabia. Under the threat of internal revolt, Sallāl appointed Aḥmad Nu'mān as Prime Minister, who

<sup>390</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 'Nasser's Problems and Prospects in Yemen' (Office of National Estimates, Special Memorandum 9-65, Washington, D.C., 18 February 1965), Declassified Document.

<sup>391</sup> Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>392</sup> 'Middle East: The Mess in Yemen', *Time*, 13 September 1963.

<sup>393</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 'The Yemen Revolution: Disengagement or Continued Conflict?' (Office of National Estimates, Memorandum for the Director, C03386748, 2 July 1963).

<sup>394</sup> 'Abd al-Ilāh, *Naksat al-Thawra fī al-Yaman (Setback of the Revolution in Yemen)*; Robert Bertram Serjeant, 'Yemen Inside Out', *The Guardian*, 26 January 1967.

<sup>395</sup> '6 Reported to Quit Cabinet of Yemen', *The New York Times*, 27 December 1964.

<sup>396</sup> 'Document 361: Memorandum of Conversation' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XXI, 24 February 1965); Interview with Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik al-Mutawakkil, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>397</sup> Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt*.

formed the first of several moderate republican governments, but resigned only two months later over a disagreement with Sallāl and was succeeded by General Ḥasan al-ʿAmrī.

A military stalemate prevailed between 1963 and 1965, which incurred Egypt heavy losses of troops and finances.<sup>398</sup> At the time, Nāṣir, who described the entanglement in Yemen as Egypt's very own 'Vietnam',<sup>399</sup> confided in American diplomats:

I am having as much trouble with them [the Republicans] as with the Royalists. I don't really care who is in charge there as long as the Hamid ad-Din family is not involved. One group is the same as the other to me except for the family. That was no real revolution in Yemen. It was only a plot. But I just found that out lately.<sup>400</sup>

By late 1965, relations had deteriorated so far that the Egyptians publicly executed seven prominent republicans at Taḥrīr Square in Ṣanʿāʾ, including two original leaders of the revolution.<sup>401</sup> When 52 top-level republican leaders, including Prime Minister al-ʿAmrī and half of the government, went to Cairo in August 1966 to plead for Sallāl's removal, Nāṣir put them under house arrest for a year and installed a new puppet government.<sup>402</sup>

Parallel to the war on the ground, a dual track of local-tribal and international diplomatic efforts attempted to find solutions to the conflict. At a tribal conference in ʿAmrān in September 1963, royalist and republican shaykhs proposed 28 resolutions to Sallāl and Nāṣir for a national settlement, but their efforts heeded no concrete result.<sup>403</sup> King Fayṣal and Nāṣir then met in September 1964 in Alexandria and declared their joint desire to end outside interference in Yemen, but disagreement persisted about the form of the future state. While Saudi Arabia forced its local clients to agree to the neutral designation *dawla* (state), Egypt would accept nothing less than a *jumhūrīya* (republic).<sup>404</sup> At a conference in Erkowit, Sudan in November 1964, Zubayrī and royalist Foreign Minister Aḥmad al-Shāmī – who knew each other from their joint membership in Free Yemenis – agreed in principle that any solution must entail the expulsion of both the Ḥamīd al-Dīn family and Egypt. The conciliatory spirit of Erkowit was echoed at the Khamr conference in May 1965, which revealed the disillusionment of the republicans and their desire to

<sup>398</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 'Nasser's Problems and Prospects in Yemen'.

<sup>399</sup> 'Document 208: Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XVIII, 18 April 1965).

<sup>400</sup> 'Document 253: Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the Department of State'.

<sup>401</sup> Serjeant, 'Yemen Inside Out'.

<sup>402</sup> Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>403</sup> Aḥmad Jābir 'Afīf, *Al-Ḥarakat al-Waṭanīya fī al-Yaman (The National Movement in Yemen)* (Dimashq: Dār al-Fikr, 1982); Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>404</sup> Ferris, 'Egypt, the Cold War, and the Civil War in Yemen, 1962-1966'.

overthrow Egyptian rule.<sup>405</sup> In August 1965, Fayṣal and Nāṣir agreed in Jidda on a ceasefire and a detailed roadmap for the formation of a national assembly and an interim government to prepare a plebiscite that would determine the final shape of the future state.<sup>406</sup> Yemeni leaders, who had not been consulted about these terms, met three months later at a conference in Ḥaraḍ to determine the preliminary shape of the state, appoint an interim government and decide on the modalities of a plebiscite in order to settle the dispute by ballots rather than bullets. The consultation started out amicably, but as a contemporary reporter observed: 'It [was] the dialogue of the deaf. Both sides talk, but neither side listens.'<sup>407</sup> Deadlocked over the nature of the state, the conference broke down.

While Egypt provided material support to liberation movements in 'Adan to attack British forces in order to put pressure on their departure, Nāṣir justified the interventions as retaliation for British support to the royalists.<sup>408</sup> In its February 1966 Defence White Paper, the British Labour government announced its departure from 'Adan by 1968. In order to exploit the British commitment politically, Nāṣir announced that Egypt would stay in Yemen for another 20 years – the so-called *siyāsāt al-naḥās al-tawīl* (long breath policy) – and consolidated his troops around the Ṣan'ā'-Ta'izz-al-Ḥudayda-triangle.<sup>409</sup> However, the policy did not come to fruition as Egypt experienced a devastating military defeat in the Six Day War of June 1967 at the hands of Israel. With the retreat of troops in motion, Egypt and Saudi Arabia concluded a mutual withdrawal agreement in September 1967 at Khartoum. By early November 1967 – four weeks before the British – most Egyptians had left Yemen. Ferris and Orkaby have suggested, in fact, that Israel may have exploited Egypt's weak strategic predicament: with about one third of Egypt's army bogged down in Yemen, which was likely to be reduced after the British withdrawal by November 1967, Israel may have used the window of opportunity to attack Egypt in June.<sup>410</sup>

Without Egyptian backing, the Sallāl government faced imminent collapse. On November 3, the day the Egyptian troops evacuated Ṣan'ā', Sallāl informed 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī that he was leaving to Iraq and would not return; he was ousted in a bloodless coup two days later. The 'November 5' correction movement established a new government under Iryānī, including Aḥmad Nu'mān, Muḥsin al-'Aynī, Ḥasan Makkī and

<sup>405</sup> Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State*.

<sup>406</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 'Military Activity: Harad, Yemen' (C05058902, 26 May 1966).

<sup>407</sup> 'Yemen: Dialogue of the Deaf', *Time*, 17 December 1965.

<sup>408</sup> 'PRO FO 371/174636' 12 May 1964.

<sup>409</sup> Hedrick Smith, 'Nasser Now Expected to Keep Troops in Yemen a Long Time', *The New York Times*, 14 April 1966; 'Long Breath in Yemen', *Time*, 13 May 1966; Orkaby, 'The Yemeni Civil War'.

<sup>410</sup> Ferris, 'Egypt, the Cold War, and the Civil War in Yemen, 1962–1966'; Orkaby, 'The Yemeni Civil War'.



later Ḥasan al-ʿAmrī, which marked the end of Egyptian proxy rule.<sup>411</sup> Left without effective military protection, however, the republican government faced what contemporaries remember as an epic battle for its very survival. With the support of Saudi Arabia and hundreds of British and other mercenaries, more than 50,000 royalist tribal forces surrounded Ṣanʿāʾ to recapture the capital from the republicans<sup>412</sup>; they laid a 70-day siege to the city from 28 November 1967 to 8 February 1968. While President Iryānī, Foreign Minister Ḥasan Makkī and much of the rest of the political elite had fled abroad, Field Marshal Ḥasan al-ʿAmrī deployed a courageous, albeit brutal defence under the slogan *al-jumhūrīya aw al-mawt* (the republic or death).<sup>413</sup>

Several key Ḥāshid (al-Aḥmar, Mujāhid Abū Shawārib), Bakīl (Abū Laḥūm) and al-Bayḍāʾ (ʿAwāḍī) tribal leaders and their followers joined the 3,000-strong regular army.<sup>414</sup> Marxist-Leninist volunteers, most prominently from the left branch of the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN), which was, in turn, backed by the southern National Front (NF), formed two structures that proved instrumental in breaking the royalist siege. While the regular army took positions around the capital, the MAN staffed and equipped the *quwat al-muqāwama al-shaʿbīya* (Popular Resistance Forces, PRF), a Ṣanʿāʾ-based citizen militia with additional units in Taʿizz and al-Ḥudayda. On the other hand, leftist forces organised *liḡān falāḥīya* (peasant leagues) in Taʿizz, Ibb and elsewhere, aimed at mobilising the peasantry in defence of the republic and against 'feudal republicans'.<sup>415</sup> The low intensity of clashes during Ramadan moreover allowed enough time for the Soviet Union to aid the republican war efforts by means of a massive airlift of 10,000 tons of war material and a squadron each of MiG-17 fighter jets and bombers.<sup>416</sup> Due to the stern support from the PRF and the Soviet Union, as well as a number of miscalculations by the Imam's generals, the republicans were able to repel the preponderant northern force against all odds.

<sup>411</sup> Eric Pace, 'Army Coup Ousts Yemeni President', *The New York Times*, 6 November 1967; Al-Iryānī, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>412</sup> Gordian Troeller, 'Guns and Gold: A Good Life for Yemeni Warriors', *The Guardian*, 24 January 1968; 'Söldner-Krieg im Jemen (Mercenary War in Yemen)', *Die Zeit*, 19 January 1968.

<sup>413</sup> Muḥammad ʿAlī Al-Shahārī, 'Ḥaṣār Ṣanʿāʾ .. al-Muqadimāt wa-l-Natāʾij (The Siege of Ṣanʿāʾ ... Introductions and Results)', *26 September News*, 31 January 2008; 'Yemen: The Siege of San'a', *Time*, 15 December 1967.

<sup>414</sup> Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>415</sup> Fred Halliday, 'Counter-Revolution in the Yemen', *New Left Review*, no. 63 (1970).

<sup>416</sup> Ḥamūd Muḥammad Al-Shibāmī, 'Shihādat ʿan Waqāʾaʾ Ḥarb al-Sabaʾin Yawmān (Testimony about the Facts of the 70-Day War)', *26 September News*, 16 February 2008; 'Söldner-Krieg im Jemen (Mercenary War in Yemen)'; Fred Halliday, 'North Yemen Today', *Middle East Report*, no. 130 (1985).

Although the siege of Ṣan'ā' ended on 8 February, clashes continued throughout the rest of the year. In mid-1968, Qāsim Munaṣṣar, one of strongest royalist shaykhs in the siege, deserted with 15,000 tribesmen and military equipment to the republican camp. His defection became a major setback for the royal family and decisively shifted the balance of power against them.<sup>417</sup> In the far north, fighting continued as long as March 1969, when the changing tide forced Imam al-Badr to flee to Saudi Arabia. With the royalist defeat, however, tensions within the republican camp soon came to a head. The leftist, predominantly Shāfi'ī-based PRF emerged out of the republican victory as an autonomous opposition group with an embryonic military, which – in line with the radical-progressive outlook of the MAN and the NF – opposed conservative tribal republicans as much as it rejected reconciliation with the royalists.<sup>418</sup> On 22 March 1968, Prime Minister al-'Amrī thwarted an attempt by the PRF to appropriate a major Soviet arms shipment destined for pro-republican tribes that arrived in al-Ḥudayda for the regular army.<sup>419</sup> While the left regrouped around the *ḥizb al-thawrī al-dīmuqrāṭī* (Revolutionary Democratic Party, RDP) in June, conservative republicans and tribal leaders decided in July on a plan to eradicate the PRF. The removal of several young Shāfi'ī army commanders sparked a three-day battle in August 1968, which marked the beginning of a concerted campaign to purge the left from the YAR and thus shifted the centre of gravity towards tribal republicans.

At the Jidda Peace Conference in March 1970, royalists and republicans signed a reconciliation agreement, which resulted, with the sole exception of the Ḥamīd al-Dīn family, in the incorporation of all royalists into the power structures of the republic. This deal came at the cost of excluding the modernist, predominantly Shāfi'ī left, which limited the prospects of forging a strong, modern state.<sup>420</sup> Without a powerful national army, authority in the YAR was mediated, as during the times of the Imamate, through northern Zaydī tribes. As a journalist on the ground observed, 'never before, it would seem, had so much gold ... circulated among the tribes as during the years of heavy fighting... The gold

<sup>417</sup> Rudolf E. Bollinger, 'Im Jemen ruhen die Waffen', *Die Zeit*, 25 April 1969; Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>418</sup> In 'Counter-Revolution in the Yemen', Halliday sums up their goals as following: 1. Rejection of the Khartoum resolutions and of attempts to reach a compromise with the royalists; 2. The constitution of a central army to form the military basis of the republic; 3. The extension and strengthening of the PRF; 4. Equality for Shāfi'īs and Zaydīs in the government.

<sup>419</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, 'Attempted Coups by Extreme Leftists Foiled in Yemen and South Yemen', *The New York Times*, 16 April 1968.

<sup>420</sup> Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*.

has remained with the tribes and has given them a new sense of importance.<sup>421</sup> The Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes attained a stranglehold over the state, which is exemplified by the central roles that such shaykhs as 'Abd Allāh al-Aḥmar or Sinān Abū Lahūm played in subsequent regimes.<sup>422</sup> Although the revolution altered the legitimation from a theocratic monarchy to an Arab republic, and concomitantly gave rise to a new landscape of political institutions, the YAR remained a weak, traditional state with a tribal powerbase.

The 26 September revolution began to emerge as the central event in the collective memory of North Yemenis largely as the result of state-sponsored efforts. It provided a powerful standard for republican politics, whose achievements were measured against its goals.<sup>423</sup> The official narratives of successive republican regimes in newspapers, radio and television programmes, public monuments, musea and schoolbooks depicted the republic as the very antithesis of the Imamate. They contrasted the religious domination, tyranny, unfair social hierarchies, inequality and anachronistic 'backwardness' of the Zaydī Imams with the republican efforts towards education, justice and modernisation.<sup>424</sup> A particularly illustrative example of this is a 1980s children's programme on state television, which portrayed the old days of Imam Aḥmad: a morphine addicted tyrant playing with imported toys in the isolation of his palace before being overthrown in the revolution.<sup>425</sup>

Streets and public squares in North Yemen carry names in reference to 1962, such as *mīdān al-tahrīr* (Liberation Square) and the colossal *mīdān al-sabʿaʿīn* (Seventy Square) in Ṣanʿāʾ, which serves as a permanent reminder of the successful resistance during the 70-day siege.<sup>426</sup> Three major monuments moreover commemorate the revolution: first, a major memorial on Seventy Square exhibits its six main goals. Second, the *mizān al-hajjar* (stone scale), located in close proximity, honours the unknown soldiers of the revolution. Third, the Egyptian soldiers memorial in Ṣanʿāʾ honours the sacrifices made by Egypt in defence

<sup>421</sup> Dana Adams Schmidt, 'After Years of Civil War, Yemen Seems to Be at Peace', *The New York Times*, 4 August 1969.

<sup>422</sup> Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen*.

<sup>423</sup> Ghamdān Al-Yūsufī, 'Tasāuʿlāt hawal mā tabqā min al-Ahdāf al-Sitta li-Thawrat al-Yaman (Questions about the Remainder of the Six Goals of the Yemeni Revolution)', *Marib Press*, 26 September 2010; Muḥsin Al-ʿAynī, 'Die September-Revolution 1962: Ihre Ursachen, ihre Rechtfertigung, ihre Ziele, Fehlschläge und Erfolge (The September 1962 Revolution: Its Causes, Its Justification, Its Goals, Failures and Successes)', in *Jemen: 3000 Jahre Kunst und Kultur des glücklichen Arabien*, ed. Werner Daum (Innsbruck: Pinguin, 1987).

<sup>424</sup> Nadia Haddash, 'What Do Yemenis Know about the 1962 Revolution?', *Yemen Times*, 29 September 2012; Willis, *Unmaking North and South*.

<sup>425</sup> Halliday, 'North Yemen Today'.

<sup>426</sup> Al-Shahārī, 'Ḥaṣār Ṣanʿāʾ .. al-Muqadimāt wa-l-Natāʾij (The Siege of Ṣanʿāʾ ... Introductions and Results)'; Al-Shibāmī, 'Shihādat ʿan Waqāʾaʿ Ḥarb al-Sabaʿīn Yawmān (Testimony about the Facts of the 70-Day War)'.

of the republic. The *mathaf al-ḥarbī* (military museum) retells a partial history of the events of 1948, 1955 and 1962, including a room dedicated solely to the Egyptian involvement. Yemeni schoolbooks in the early 2000s naturally accord a crucial role to the 1962 revolution, while devoting many pages to ancient and early Islamic history that serve as a basis for primordial claims about the Yemeni nation and its inherent unity.

As elsewhere, however, collective memory is selective, politically motivated and far from universally shared. Yemeni textbooks contain a gap of almost a millennium between the early Islamic empires and the first Ottoman occupation of Yemen, thus completely ignoring the historical evolution of the Zaydī Imamate. Although the modern history section deals with the 20<sup>th</sup> century Imamate, it merely does so to highlight its 'injustice, tyranny, backwardness, and seclusion' to provide the *raison d'être* of the 1962 revolution.<sup>427</sup> In a similar vein, Ottoman rule between 1849 and 1918 is diminished in Yemen's collective memory as evidenced by the autobiographies of political leaders, such as Aḥmad Nu'mān, 'Abd Allāh al-Juzaylān or 'Abd Allāh al-Aḥmar. Despite the reformist impulses that Turkish rule provided, they sought to avoid association with a foreign power that had so effectively been vilified by the Imamate, whose legitimacy rested on conflating independence from the Turks with Arab nationalism.<sup>428</sup> Amidst dissent, the Ṣāliḥ government began to reverse this trend and erected a monument to commemorate the lives of Turkish soldiers in 2011 in Ṣan'ā' in a bid to improve diplomatic relations.<sup>429</sup>

Yemenis have not uniformly embraced the official narrative of the 26 September revolution. Although 1948 and 1962 continue to serve as reference dates, some groups have reinterpreted their meanings. Southerners have increasingly come to dispute that the events of 1962 constituted a *thawra* (revolution), but instead categorised them as an *inqilāb 'askarī* (military coup).<sup>430</sup> An Iṣlāḥ-affiliated journalist, for example, drew a number of parallels between the 1948 movement and the Yemeni opposition after the 1994 war. He argued that the search for a common political programme – the Sacred National Pact of 1948 and the Joint Meeting Parties post-1994 platform – and the preference for a non-

<sup>427</sup> Elizabeth L. Young, 'Writing the Past: An Examination of History and National Narratives in the Republic of Yemen's Textbooks', *International Journal for Education Law and Policy* Special Issue (2010).

<sup>428</sup> Juliette Honvault, 'Une génération après... La mémoire du passé ottoman dans l'autobiographie yéménite contemporaine (One Generation Later... Memories of an Ottoman Past in Contemporary Yemeni Autobiography)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 15 (2008).

<sup>429</sup> Majid al-Shu'aybī, 'Faḍīḥa: Niṣba Tadhkārī bī-Ṣan'ā' Ya'zum al-Iḥtilāl al-Turkī (Scandal: Memorial in Ṣan'ā' Glorifies Turkish Occupation)', *Yemenat*, 5 August 2012.

<sup>430</sup> Adīb Al-Zayd, 'Taḥqīq ba'd Nuṣf Qarn .. "26 Sibṭimbir 1962m" - Hal huwa Thawra am Inqilāb 'Askarī ..? (Investigation after a Half-Century ... "26 September 1962" - Is it a Revolution or a Military Coup ...?)', *Yāfa' News*, 26 September 2013.

radical, peaceful opposition despite regime repression by the Imam and 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ, respectively, likened both movements.<sup>431</sup> Finally, journalist 'Alī Abū Laḥūm depicted the citizen revolt of 2011 as a corrective movement to the 1962 revolution, thereby legitimising the uprising in terms of the goals of 26 September revolution.<sup>432</sup>

### ***South Yemen's Path to Independence and the 14 October 1963 Revolution***

Throughout its 128-year rule, Britain lacked a clear strategy to govern the areas of South Yemen under its control. Although British governors in 'Adan were predominantly able figures, inconsistent decision-making in London led 'Adan to be variably ruled as a settlement, a municipality and a crown colony; first as part of the British Raj, then from London; initially separately from the protectorates, then urged into a federation after 1959. After Whitehall took over from India in 1937, British rule was based on nourishing the loyalties of 'Adani minorities.<sup>433</sup> The limited experience in governing 'Adan left Britain unprepared for the political struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. With most administrative posts and trade monopolised by Indians, society in 'Adan became segmented between locals and foreigners, while the differential treatment of the protectorates further increased the urban-rural contradiction. British administrators, in fact, actively fostered this dichotomy, falsely believing that such a policy would help preserve imperial control.<sup>434</sup>

'Adan underwent crucial socio-economic and political transformations in the 1940s and 1950s. With post-war commerce booming, the colony attracted significant investments into the port, power, water and telephone infrastructure, as well as the banking, insurance and refining sectors. These developments generated large-scale employment opportunities, most significantly in the port, the refinery and by the British navy. By 1955, 'Adan had become one of the busiest ports in the world – second only to New York.<sup>435</sup> The construction of the £45 million British Petroleum Refinery in Little 'Adan employed 10,000 workers between 1952 and 1954, and 2,000 staff thereafter; it was the largest capitalist-industrialist project in 'Adan and engine for the emergence of a working class.<sup>436</sup> After the 1956 Suez invasion, Britain dramatically expanded its naval presence based on

<sup>431</sup> Zāid Jābar, 'Al-Mu'āraḍa al-Yamaniya Khilāl 60 'Āmān (The Yemeni Opposition after 60 Years)', *Al-Ṣaḥwa*, 16 October 2010.

<sup>432</sup> Ali Abulohoom, '1962 Revolution Rectified by 2011 Uprising', *Yemen Times*, 25 September 2014.

<sup>433</sup> Ziad Mahmoud Abu-Amr, 'The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: The Transformation of Society' (Ph.D., Georgetown University, 1986); Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen*.

<sup>434</sup> Fred Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).

<sup>435</sup> 'Colonial Office List' (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1958).

<sup>436</sup> Stork, 'Socialist Revolution in Arabia'; Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*.

the 1957 Defence White Paper, which recommended establishing a troop presence 'East of Suez'.<sup>437</sup> Although the expansion provided as many as 25,000 jobs and a quarter of the colony's Gross National Product (GNP), the presence of 17,000 foreign troops by 1965 aroused anti-colonial sentiments.<sup>438</sup> Combined with incentives to leave the stagnant Imamate, these economic pull factors triggered a wave of immigration from North Yemen in the 1950s.<sup>439</sup> 'Adan's population more than quadrupled within a generation, from 51,500 in 1931 to 120,000 in 1955 and 225,000 in 1963, turning this agglomeration of fishing villages into an international colony, and finally an Arab town.<sup>440</sup>

The situation in the protectorates was fundamentally different. As Sir Bernard Reilly, a long-term resident and the colony's first governor (1937-1940), noted, 'Adan was regarded 'merely as a military outpost, a fortress on the sea route from Europe to India, with the Protectorate as a kind of glacis or vacuum surrounding it, and keeping unwanted neighbours ... at a distance.'<sup>441</sup> The economy of the hinterland remained unaffected by developments in 'Adan. Although agriculture and pastoralism on the vast and barren land of which only about 0.5 percent were cultivated generated two thirds of all employment in South Yemen, it contributed less than 10 percent to its GNP. Unless 'oil were to be found,' the protectorates had no strategic value to Britain except as a buffer zone against North Yemen and Saudi Arabia.<sup>442</sup> While British investment in basic services in 'Adan, such as schools, roads and health facilities, remained limited; in the Protectorates, conversely,

up to 1940 not a penny had been spent on the hinterland, and what followed was a mean trickle allocated to projects like cotton-growing which served Britain's imperial interest. Between 1946 and 1960 only 1.4 million pounds was spent on hinterland development and even in the final period 1965-8 only 7 million pounds was spent. Before 1939 the British had spent 100,000 pounds a year on bribing hinterland chiefs, and after 1950 this went up to 800,000 pounds; but even in 1967, when the British departed, the country had only fourteen tarmacked miles of road outside Aden, three Yemeni doctors and 950 hospital beds. Educational facilities hardly existed outside Aden. In the final period of their occupation the British did make increasing payments to the Federal budget; but this was for so-called 'defense' – that is, political repression and stabilization.<sup>443</sup>

Driven by the need to rechannel mounting discontent, Britain permitted a tacit political

<sup>437</sup> 'Defence: Outline of Future Policy,' March 1957. Enclosed in 'PRO CAB 129/86' 1 April 1957.

<sup>438</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>439</sup> Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-1967: Last Outpost of a Middle East Empire* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>440</sup> R. J. Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule, 1839-1967* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975).

<sup>441</sup> 'PRO CO 725/96/4' 7 February 1949.

<sup>442</sup> 'PRO PREM 11/2616' 30 October 1955.

<sup>443</sup> Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*, 174.

opening in 'Adan. Trade unions were legalised as early as 1942, but they only emerged in the late 1940s, leading to the first union strike in 1948.<sup>444</sup> In 1949, propertied male 'Adanis gained voting rights for a limited number of seats on the Municipal Council, followed by more expansive rights to elect members of the Legislative Council in 1959. As part of this controlled colonial opening, Britain began to tolerate new forms of association and social activism, which led to a considerable expansion of civil society in the colony, and to a lesser extent in the protectorates. Along the continua of urban-rural, left-right or local-national-pan-Arab, the types of civil manifestations ranged from cultural clubs, syndicates, associations, independent presses, labour unions, rural activism and local self-help.<sup>445</sup> As restrictions on political organising, strikes and the opposition press remained in place, most of these organisations focused on social, cultural or welfare objectives, which remained within the tolerated boundaries of activism during this late and limited colonial opening.

In the 1950s, however, civil society in South Yemen became increasingly politicised in response to local conditions and regional developments. The expansion of education and the press, continued political discrimination, the foreign military presence, an employment contraction due to the completion of major infrastructure projects and massive post-World War II inflation provided an incubator for this transformation. At the regional level, the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, the Anglo-American *coup d'état* against Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, the reverberations of Nāṣirism and anti-colonialism after the Egyptian and Algerian revolutions, as well as the Suez invasion of 1956 contributed to the politicisation of the trade union movement in the colony.<sup>446</sup> Despite the comparatively late arrival of modern political ideologies, 'Adan became a marketplace of information and a hub of ideas. 'Adani intellectual circles were not only – as their Free Yemeni counterparts – well acquainted with the works of Islamic revivalists, but with translations of the works of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Zedong and Franz Fanon. The Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) and the Ba'th Party established local cells in 'Adan in the late 1950s.<sup>447</sup> The broadcasts of Cairo and Ṣan'ā' radio stations moreover called on 'Adanis to revolt and encouraged tribal rebellions, which frequently occurred throughout the 1950s.<sup>448</sup>

<sup>444</sup> Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*.

<sup>445</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> T. Bernier, 'Naissance d'un nationalisme arabe à Aden (The Birth of an Arab Nationalism in 'Adan)', *L'Afrique et l'Asie* 44 (1958); Gavin, *Aden Under British Rule, 1839-1967*; Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>448</sup> 'Letter from Executive Secretary to Secretaries of Delegations' (NATO RDC/19/57, 16 January 1957); Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-1967*.

In this context of heightened politicisation, a plethora of nationalist opposition groups emerged out of existing civil society structures, especially the trade unions, and began to agitate against British rule.<sup>449</sup> The core of the movement revolved around four principal organisations. First, the urban, modernist *jam'āyat 'adan* ('Adan Association), which was founded in 1950 from among members of the Arab Reform Club, the Arab Literary Club and the Islamic Association. Under the slogan 'Adan for the 'Adanis,' this exclusionary and anti-Nāṣirist *jam'āya* pursued 'Adani independence from the rural hinterland (rather than from Britain) and advocated self-government for the colony within the Commonwealth. Second, the more radical Lahj-based *rābiṭat al-abnā' al-janūb al-'arabī* (South Arabian League, SAL, 1951), the first mass organisation, which advocated independence in the context of a sovereign Southwest Arabia. Sometimes described as a 'party of deposed sultans,' however, it lacked a social base for its Nāṣirist positions. Third, the amalgamation of a number of smaller social, cultural and youth associations in the *jabhat al-waṭanīya al-muttaḥida* (United National Front, UNF, 1955), which aspired to unity with North Yemen.<sup>450</sup> Fourth, the *al-mu'tamar al-ummālī* ('Adan Trades Union Congress, ATUC, 1956), a conglomerate of about half of the 25 unions with a registered membership of 20,000 in 1956. Its power base was comprised of Yemeni immigrants from the Imamate and, as the UNF, maintained close contact with the branch of the Free Yemenis in 'Adan.

The 1950s came to be defined by syndicalist militancy and mass mobilisation in the form of persistent demonstrations and paralysing strikes. Headed by its charismatic Secretary-General 'Abd Allāh al-Aṣṇaj, the ATUC organised more than 200 strikes in the span of a few years of its inception, which reached at times tens of thousands of workers. Although a Commission of Enquiry in 1956 established that 'these strikes had a genuine and justifiable industrial basis,'<sup>451</sup> the affiliation of union leaders with nationalist political movements led British investigators conclude that it was difficult 'to know whether at any given moment the industrial or political motive [was] predominant.'<sup>452</sup> Although primarily expressed in the form of tolerated labour activism, the union struggle was indeed not so much social as it was political. As in the North, opposition politics in the South was driven by nationalist aspirations for independence, as well as Arab and Yemeni unity. While

<sup>449</sup> Ṣāliḥ Aḥmad 'Issā, *Al-Harakat al-Ummālīya fī 'Adan wa-Dawruhā fī Taṭawwar al-Harakat al-Waṭanīya 'Ām 1945-1963m* (*The Workers Movement in Aden and its Role in the National Movement 1945-1963*) (Ṣan'ā': Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2009).

<sup>450</sup> 'PRO PREM 11/2616' 8 June 1956; 'PRO CAB 129/82' 17 July 1956; Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen*; Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*; Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-1967*.

<sup>451</sup> 'PRO CAB 129/82' 25 June 1956.

<sup>452</sup> 'PRO PREM 11/2616', 8 June 1956.



Northerners espoused a more traditional form of nationalism that was directed against the Imamate, the more complex class structure in British-ruled 'Adan and the protectorates, including conservative rural rulers, Yemeni migrants, merchants and foreign elites caused the southern independence struggle to be defined by an element of social radicalism.<sup>453</sup>

Colonial officials pursued a dual policy that relied on repression, while gradually allowing self-rule under British protection to rechannel nationalistic sentiments. The former encompassed arrests, publication and strike bans, deportations – such as that of SAL leader Sayyid Muḥammad 'Alī al-Jifrī in the late 1950s to Cairo<sup>454</sup> – and, finally, martial law. Although these measures managed to temporarily quell union activities, the strikes seriously damaged the economy of the colony throughout the decade. As part of the latter policy, the governor welcomed the foundation of political parties in the mid-1950s and held Legislative Council elections in 1955 and 1959, which the pro-British 'Adan Association, renamed National Union Party in 1960, won.<sup>455</sup> Determined to retain 'Adan as a strategic base, which 'would be the keystone of the new Imperial system, the fortress protecting Britain's position in the Gulf regardless of Adeni or Arab nationalism,<sup>456</sup> Whitehall sought to incrementally grant self-rule to the mostly conservative rulers of the protectorates in the framework of a federation. The rationale was to create a conservative counterweight to the burgeoning nationalism in 'Adan that would protect British interests.

Britain therefore initiated deliberations with sultans, emirs and shaykhs of the Western 'Adan Protectorate (WAP) about the establishment of a political unit with the promise of granting independence 'in the fullness of time.'<sup>457</sup> The remote Ḥaḍramawt and Mahra provinces of the EAP were deliberately excluded from these discussions, as they were perceived as a lawless periphery, and thus irrelevant to the position of 'Adan. In February 1959, protracted negotiations culminated in the foundation of the 'Federation of Arab Emirates of the South' (FAAS), which comprised initially six entities of the WAP. The federation subsequently grew by four additional sultanates, including the Sultanate of Lahj, whose ruler 'Alī 'Abd al-Karīm Britain first had to be deposed in favour of a more complacent successor. Setting up base in Cairo, Karīm, together with al-Jifrī, whose SAL also vehemently opposed the federation, later came to play an important role in fomenting

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<sup>453</sup> Halliday, 'The Formation of Yemeni Nationalism'.

<sup>454</sup> 'PRO CAB 129/82', 25 June 1956.

<sup>455</sup> Saif, *A Legislature in Transition*.

<sup>456</sup> 'PRO CO 1015/1910' 10 March 1959.

<sup>457</sup> 'PRO CAB 128/32' 26 June 1958.

strife in the protectorates.<sup>458</sup> In 1961, the 'Adan Protectorate Levies were turned into the Federal Army under the command of the Minister of Defence of the Federation. The ATUC and the People's Socialist Party (PSP), an affiliate created in July 1962, rejected the heterogeneous federation for its undemocratic and tribal structures.<sup>459</sup>

Strikes intensified in the period from 1958 to 1960. In April 1958, the ATUC – which had by then become the strongest nationalist opposition force in 'Adan and drawn closer to Cairo – launched a concerted campaign of strikes in clear pursuit of political, rather than industrial, objectives.<sup>460</sup> In November, the governor declared the state of emergency, and fighting between activists and the police in Crater led to mass arrests. In the course of 1959 alone, 84 strikes transpired which cost 'Adan's economy nearly 150,000 labour days.<sup>461</sup> They continued in the first half of 1960, but the government – amidst protests from Cairo, the Soviet block and foreign trade unions – enacted an anti-strike bill in August and threatened to expel North Yemeni workers, which effectively quelled the ATUC strikes thereafter.<sup>462</sup> In the protectorates, sustained uprisings erupted in Yāfi', Upper 'Awlaqī and Lahj over questions of local authority, which continued throughout most of 1960 and 1961. After the September 1962 revolution in North Yemen, independence for the South became a more realistic possibility and the opposition, increasingly limited by British measures in 'Adan, spread to the countryside, where an active guerrilla movement began to develop.

In the face of growing nationalism in 'Adan, which had become a modern, urban city-state, Britain decided in May 1961 to join the enclave with the conservative hinterland. Colonial administrators reckoned that otherwise 'independence for the Colony could probably not be delayed much beyond 1965.'<sup>463</sup> Although the Legislative Council adopted the merger proposal in a narrow vote on 26 September 1962 – the day of the revolution in the North – resistance in 'Adan against the accession to the federation was on the rise.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Oron, *Middle East Record: Volume 1*.

<sup>459</sup> Peter Jenkins, 'Opposition to Aden Federation', *The Guardian*, 31 October 1962; 'Police Open Fire on Aden Rioters: One Killed, Protest Against Federation', *The Guardian*, 25 September 1962.

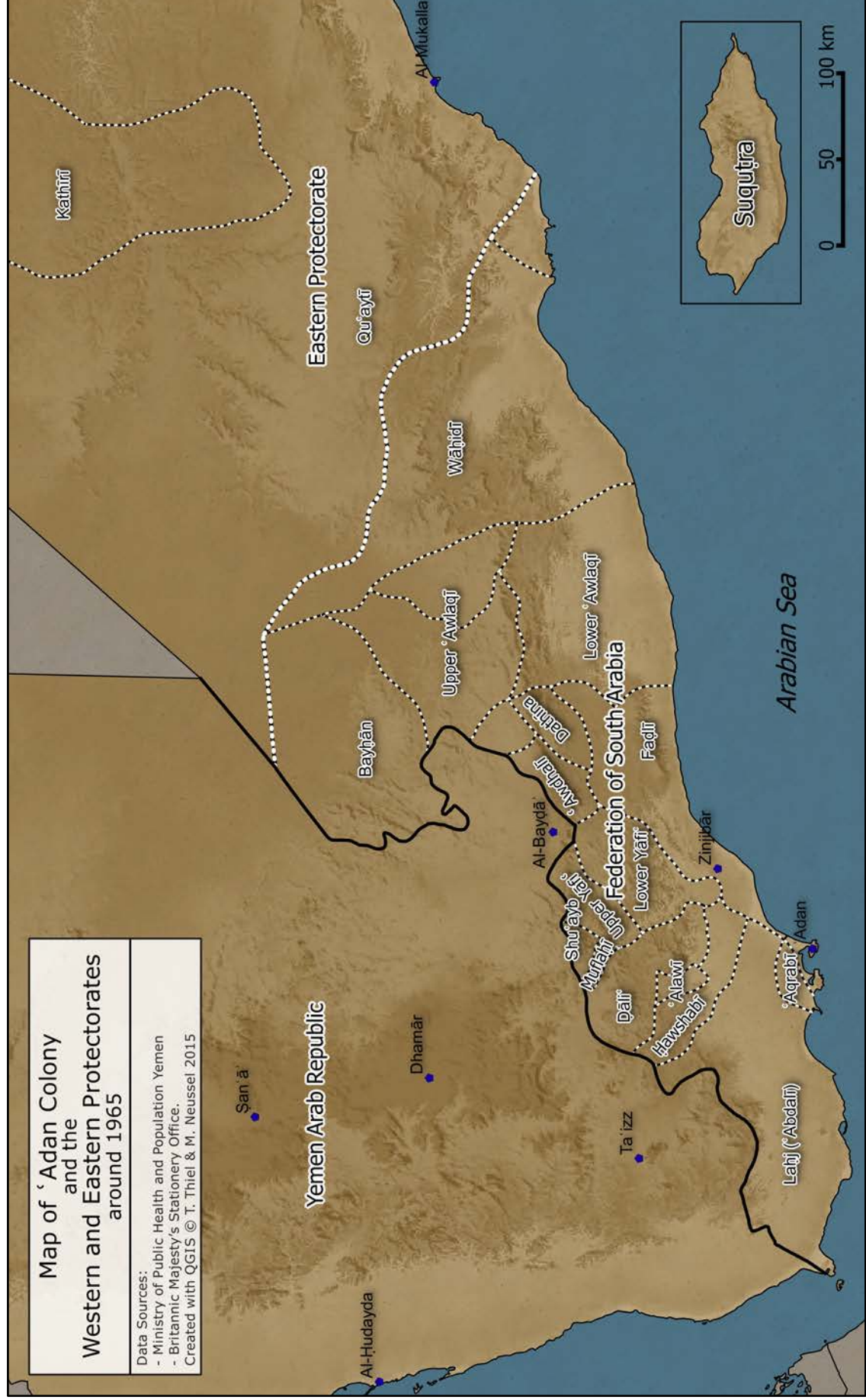
<sup>460</sup> 'PRO CAB 134/1558' 5 May 1959.

<sup>461</sup> Ségolène Samouiller and Marie Camberlin, 'Chronologie du Yémen contemporain (1904-1970)', *Chroniques yéménites*, no. 9 (1 July 2001).

<sup>462</sup> Oron, *Middle East Record: Volume 1*.

<sup>463</sup> 'PRO CAB 128/36' 1 August 1962, 3.

<sup>464</sup> 'Yemen Revolt Stiffens Aden's Resistance to Federation', *The Guardian*, 13 October 1962.



Map 3: The Federation of South Arabia and Eastern Protectorate around 1965.

In January 1963, 'Adan was incorporated into the federation, which had been renamed into the Federation of South Arabia (FAS) a year earlier, and was liberalised through a number of modern constitutional amendments.<sup>465</sup> Although the decentralised, treaty-based architecture of the protection agreements and the federation indeed undermined, rather than promoted, state-building, it fostered a culture of legalism, judicial culture and rule of law in 'Adan and in the WAP (less so in the EAP). The effects can still be felt today, as Yemenis from the southern, mostly Shāfi'ī areas often contrast their *dawla al-nizām wa-l-qānūn* (state of law and order) with the *fawḍa* (chaos, anarchy) of the North.<sup>466</sup>

Regardless of its merits or pitfalls, the FAS remained stillborn due to the events that transpired in South Arabia in the months after its inception. On 14 October 1963, a date that has since become a symbol for the revolution of South Yemen, the newly founded *jabhat al-qawmīya li-tahrīr* (National Liberation Front, NLF<sup>467</sup>) launched a guerrilla campaign from the Radfān Mountains, which are located northeast of 'Adan in the al-Ḍālī' protectorate. The fighting arose over a local issue involving the Quṭaybī tribes, which the NLF managed to successfully frame as a liberation war against colonialism, and later class struggle. In December, the UAR, which was committed to expel British imperialism from the Arabian Peninsula, announced its support for the rebels, which it provided in the form of intelligence, training and arms. In the spring of 1964, the Federal Army launched a successful counter-campaign against the tribes, which had received arms from the YAR, only for the rebellion to re-emerge once the British-led troops retreated from the region. Britain saw the insurgency as part of a larger proxy war with the UAR, and thus not only supplied pro-British tribes in the FAS, but also royalist tribes in North Yemen with arms.<sup>468</sup> The events marked the beginning of a fierce four-year liberation war, which completely transformed the repertoires of contention from politicised, albeit peaceful strikes to a violent armed struggle that encompassed guerrilla warfare in the federation and terrorist<sup>469</sup> tactics against authorities and civilians in 'Adan.

<sup>465</sup> 'Accession of Aden to the Federation of South Arabia: Exchange of Letters between Federal and Aden Ministers and the Secretary of State for the Colonies: Draft Treaty and Constitutional Documents' enclosed in 'PRO CAB 129/110' 21 August 1962.

<sup>466</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>467</sup> According to the *mīthāq al-waṭanī* (National Charter, 1965), the full name of the group is *jabhat al-qawmīya li-tahrīr janūb al-yaman al-muḥtal* (National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen) and should not be confused with FLOSY.

<sup>468</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-1967*.

<sup>469</sup> I use the term 'terrorist' in a technical sense to describe a strategy that is – in contrast to guerrilla warfare – designed to provoke an emotional response, rather than aimed at military gain.

In the period between 1963 and 1967, the nationalist movement underwent a crucial organisational transformation. While the ATUC and its PSP affiliate still dominated the opposition in 1962 and 1963, they fragmented over the question of the armed struggle waged by the NLF against the British. The rural-based, initially pro-Egyptian NLF grew out of the branch of George Ḥabbash and Nāyif Ḥawātma's Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) in 'Adan in June 1963. It comprised nine different tribal Arab nationalist and youth groups (its leadership and most of its members were in their 20s), and enjoyed much support from workers and trade unionists.<sup>470</sup> The NLF was headed by Qaḥṭān al-Sha'bī, who had been a leading figure in SAL, and his cousin Fayṣal 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Sha'bī, as well as 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'īl, 'Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad and Muḥammad 'Alī Haytham. At its First Congress in Ta'izz in June 1965, the NLF proclaimed a radical *mīthāq al-waṭanī* (National Charter), which strongly relied on Leninist ideas, and set up a 42-member national council for policy-making and an executive committee composed of its bureau chiefs.<sup>471</sup> The National Charter positioned the *jabhat al-qawmīya* as the sole representative of people of South Yemen, declared armed struggle the only route to independence and laid out a plan for land reform, the nationalisation of foreign-owned assets and the end of the free zone status for the Port of 'Adan.<sup>472</sup> Intriguingly, it invoked the glorious pre-Islamic and Islamic past, which it juxtaposed with contemporary backwardness. While the charter construed Arabs as one *sha'b* (people), Yemenis were a subgroup with an inherent, but thus far unachieved drive towards unity.<sup>473</sup>

The fragmentation of the ATUC-PSP resulted in the merger of the PSP and SAL into the Organisation for the Liberation of the Occupied South (OLOS) in February 1965, which was led by such personalities as 'Abd Allāh al-Aṣṇaj and Muḥammad 'Alī al-Jifrī. The group held close ties to Egypt, which forced OLOS and the reluctant NLF to merge into the Nāṣirist *jabhat taḥrīr janūb al-yaman al-muḥtal* (Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen, FLOS). Although the core constituency of the more radical 'Marxist-Leninist' NLF, whose fighters engaged in struggle against the British on the ground,

<sup>470</sup> Joseph Kostiner, 'Arab Radical Politics: Al-Qawmiyyun Al-Arab and the Marxists in the Turmoil of South Yemen, 1963-1967', *Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 4 (1981); For a full list, see Brehony, *Yemen Divided*.

<sup>471</sup> Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen*.

<sup>472</sup> 'Mīthāq al-Waṭanī wa-Wuḥīqā 'alayhu fī Mu'tamar al-Awwal li-l-Jabhat al-Qawmīya li-Taḥrīr Janūb al-Yaman al-Muḥtal al-Mun'qad fī al-Fitra 22-25 Yūniyū 1965 (National Charter according to the First Congress of the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen Held in the Period from 22-25 June 1965)' ('Adan, n.d.).

<sup>473</sup> Muḥammad Damāj, 'Al-Mīthāq al-Waṭanī li-l-Jabhat al-Qawmīya Akid Waḥīdat al-Yaman mundhu 'Uṣur al-Ba'īda (National Charter of the National Front Affirms Yemeni Unity since Distant Eras)', *al-Thawra*, 14 October 2013.

opposed this merger, it was agreed in January 1966. This defiance – coupled with personal and ideological rivalries between Aṣṇaj and Shaʿbī, as well as between al-Jifrī and the left wing of the NLF, whose main advocate was ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl – led the NLF to break away only ten months later. The NLF and FLOSY thus not only fought the British, but began competing against each other in ʿAdan and the countryside. Although the FLOSY enjoyed support from Cairo, it was the NLF's tight organisation and powerbase in the neglected hinterland that allowed the latter to prevail. Although the NLF was in reality much more prominent, the British believed that the Egyptian-backed FLOSY, which was constantly featured on Cairo radio, posed the real threat. This misconception not only reveals the limited awareness that British officials had at the time, but also explains why the NLF so quickly defeated FLOSY after the withdrawal of British forces.<sup>474</sup>

In October 1964, a Labour government replaced the Conservatives in London and began pursuing a dual policy of confronting anti-British forces in the protectorate, while accommodating public opinion in ʿAdan. Although much has been made of the reappraisal of British policy, as Spencer Mawby has correctly argued, the changes were subtle and ambiguous.<sup>475</sup> Around the same period, armed struggle intensified as the NLF launched a terrorist campaign in ʿAdan that encompassed (rocket-propelled) grenade attacks on soft civilian targets, which polarised the conflict and prevented a rapprochement between moderates on both sides. Violent incidents rose from 36 in 1964 to 286 in 1965, 510 in 1966 and 2,900 by October 1967.<sup>476</sup> In September 1965, the British governor suspended the Federation of South Arabia government and imposed direct colonial rule over ʿAdan. Military expenditure almost doubled from £7.93 to £14.64 million between 1963 and 1965, while the total commitment was projected to increase to £35 million in 1969-70.<sup>477</sup> Due to the deteriorating security situation and rising military expenditure, the Wilson government agreed in mid-1965 to abandon the base in ʿAdan by 1968, which was publicised in the February 1966 Defence White Paper.<sup>478</sup> The overriding objective became an orderly handover that would prevent a Nāṣirist takeover in South Yemen.<sup>479</sup>

In June 1967, British troops began to evacuate from the hinterland. The void was quickly filled by the NLF, which took over state after state, seizing the assets of tribal

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<sup>474</sup> Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen*.

<sup>475</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-1967*.

<sup>476</sup> Halliday, *Arabia Without Sultans*.

<sup>477</sup> 'PRO CAB 130/213' 8 November 1965; 'PRO CAB 130/213' 13 November 1965.

<sup>478</sup> 'PRO CAB 129/124' 11 February 1966; 'PRO DEFE 13/505' 23 February 1966.

<sup>479</sup> Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955-1967*.

leaders in the protectorates. Amidst intensified armed struggle, the federal government collapsed in August 1967, which led Britain to move up its departure from January 1968 to late November 1967.<sup>480</sup> In several brief but fierce battles between August and November, the NLF defeated FLOSY, which had been weakened by the Egyptian withdrawal, causing many of its members to go into exile in North Yemen. On 8 November, the NLF declared it had full control over the territory of South Yemen.<sup>481</sup> Thus far refusing negotiations with the British, the NLF officially requested to be recognised as the sole legitimate authority of South Arabia. A deal was struck in Geneva on 29 November, the day the British withdrawal was completed, to transfer sovereignty to the NLF and provide £12 million in aid to the new state.<sup>482</sup> On 30 November 1967, South Yemen attained independence under the control of the NLF. The NLF, which then became known as National Front (NF) since the L (or rather *ta*) for liberation had become obsolete, ruled the country in various guises until 1990. Qaḥṭān al-Shaʿbī became the first President, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the *jumhūrīyat al-yaman al-janūbīya al-shaʿbīya* (People's Republic of South Yemen, PRSY) and appointed an 11-member cabinet of leading NLF figures.<sup>483</sup>

After its split with FLOSY in 1966, the NLF continued to embrace a vaguely leftist platform of anti-imperialism, Nāṣirism and Arab socialism. At its Fourth Congress in Zinjībār from 2 to 8 March 1968, the NF underwent a crucial ideological transformation. Tensions mounted as the left wing of the party attacked al-Shaʿbī for his 'petit bourgeois' leadership and succeeded in imposing views on a number of topics, including the party's commitment to Marxism-Leninism, economic principles and unity with North Yemen. On 20 March, the army arrested several hundred members of the party's left wing, including 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl, then Minister of National Guidance and Yemeni Unity, and Minister of Defence 'Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ – allegedly in order to prevent a coup.<sup>484</sup> The leftists were defeated in armed clashes that broke out in May, but could subsequently infiltrate the army.<sup>485</sup> After months of fragile coexistence, the leaders of the left faction – Sālim Rubayʿ 'Alī (Sālmayn), 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl, 'Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ, Sulṭān Aḥmad 'Umar, 'Alī Ṣāliḥ

<sup>480</sup> 'PRO CAB 128/42' 30 October 1967.

<sup>481</sup> John de St Jorre, 'How 15 Took over Aden', *The Observer*, 26 November 1967; Gordian Troeller, 'NLF Spreads the Idea of a Revolutionary Struggle in the Yemen—and Beyond', *The Guardian*, 25 January 1968; J. B. Kelly, 'Hadramaut, Oman, Dhufar: The Experience of Revolution', *Middle Eastern Studies* 12, no. 2 (1976).

<sup>482</sup> 'PRO CAB 128/42' 30 November 1967.

<sup>483</sup> Ian Wright, 'Cabinet of 11 Named to Rule South Yemen', *The Guardian*, 2 December 1967.

<sup>484</sup> Schmidt, 'Attempted Coups by Extreme Leftists Foiled in Yemen and South Yemen'. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl and 'Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ were released shortly after.

<sup>485</sup> David Hirst, 'South Yemen Split Ends in Revolt', *The Guardian*, 16 May 1968; Stork, 'Socialist Revolution in Arabia'.

‘Ubād (Muqbil) – purged Sha‘bī and his affiliates from the party in what became known as the *al-khuṭwa al-taṣḥīḥiyya al-majīda* (‘Glorious Corrective Move’) of 22 June 1969. They installed a new five-member Presidential Council consisting of Sālim Rubay‘ ‘Alī (Chairman of the Council), Muḥammad ‘Alī Haytham (Prime Minister), ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-‘Awlaqī and ‘Alī ‘Antar al-Bīshī, which embraced a more radical domestic and foreign policy. The left further consolidated its hold in August 1971, when they ousted Muḥammad ‘Alī Haytham and established a three-member Presidential Council consisting of Sālmayn, Ismā‘īl and ‘Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad.<sup>486</sup>

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century engendered fundamental changes in the nature of contentious politics in Yemen. With the influence of new regional ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, Nāṣirism and anti-imperialism, contention in the Mutawakkilite Kingdom and British-ruled South Yemen became increasingly politicised, which allowed the few tolerated forms of assembly and associations to coalesce around a single purpose into heterogeneous nationalist movements. Due to the different nature of both regimes – the stagnant Imamate and the dynamic colony with its neglected hinterland – both movements traversed through divergent trajectories that replaced the political order in the North and the South by a bourgeois-tribal and socialist regime, respectively. While the PDRY turned further left due to the 1969 and 1971 leadership purges, the YAR veered to the right with the royalist-republican reconciliation and the exclusion of the Shāfi‘ī left. These diverse post-revolutionary orders for the next 20 years thwarted ambitions to unify both countries. Despite their political differences, however, both republics altered the foundations of political legitimacy and bequeathed a powerful legacy of political demands that would repeatedly be invoked by subsequent generations of Yemenis.

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<sup>486</sup> Brehony, *Yemen Divided*.



# 3

## Contentious Politics in Republican Yemen

As throughout Yemen's longstanding civilisational history, where state authority and governance were differentiated and defined by economic, doctrinal and political divisions, the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's (Democratic) Republic of (South) Yemen followed divergent paths of state-building with different institutional cultures and ideological foundations in the post-revolutionary period. Despite these parallel developments, the two young republics – like most developing countries that emerged between the 1950s and 1970s – both adopted the Russian model of state with a one-party system and centrally planned economy,<sup>487</sup> which meant that few institutional mechanisms existed in either state for conflict resolution within the political system. As neither regime managed to find a stable equilibrium that allowed accomplishing the goals of its revolution, political authority remained tenuous and marred by frequent power struggles.

Having inherited a complicated legacy from the civil war of the 1960s, the politics of YAR came to be defined by a constant tension between traditionalists, notably Saudi-backed northern tribal forces, and modernists. As republican regimes variably confronted (Sallāl, al-Ḥamdī), accommodated (Iryānī), or embraced (al-Ghashmī, Ṣāliḥ) tribalism, these centre-periphery tensions left state structures weak and turned governance into a struggle for political survival. Consistent with historical experiences, the revolutionary regimes in South Yemen proved much more successful in building state structures. They failed, however, in socially engineering the transformation into a socialist society as its national project was severely undermined, and ultimately thwarted, by the frequent power struggles within the ruling party, most prominently the short-lived civil war of 1986.

It seemed paradoxical to observers at the time that the two inexperienced republics – diametrically opposed in ideology and engaged in a series of border wars – would time and again invoke the rhetoric of a common Yemeni nationalism and profess their

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<sup>487</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm Al-Iryānī, 'Yemen: The Role of the State in a Traditional Society' (Conference Speech, Exeter, 1998).

intentions to unify their political systems. As both regimes faced a crisis of legitimacy and economic growth in the late 1980s, however, decades of alternating tensions and rapprochement eventually culminated in the historic merger of North and South Yemen into the Republic of Yemen (RoY) on 22 May 1990. Despite the vibrancy of the democratic political opening, the unification honeymoon was short-lived; by 1994, political tensions had culminated in yet another war between North and South. The war ended with the victory of Northern forces, which shifted the premise of unity from a consensual to hegemonic project, and triggered the reversal of the commitments to political liberalisation.

Contentious politics in the RoY between 1990 and 2010 came to be defined by three principle processes: the erratic and limited liberalisation since the Yemeni unification of 1990; the creeping 'oligarchisation' of power since the 1994 war; and the 'politics of calculated chaos.' These processes laid the groundwork for the emergence of a loose and heterogeneous opposition against the regime, which included political parties; networks of civil society activists; political, economic, military and tribal elites; and two main contentious movements – the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk. Not unlike coalitions during the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, these groups – in response to events in North Africa – temporary coalesced around overthrow of the regime of 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ, thus setting the stage for the citizen revolt of 2011, which is the topic of the following chapter.

### ***State-Building and Political Survival in the YAR and the PDRY***

The civil war of the 1960s frustrated the aspirations of the early regimes of the YAR to build a modern, republican state. Unable to project authority beyond the Ṣan'ā', Ta'izz and al-Ḥudayda triangle, the authority of President Sallāl's (1962-67) government remained weaker than during the late Imamate. Although Sallāl expanded the existing ministries of justice, foreign affairs, education, health, agriculture, public works, communications and industries; and created the ministries of war, local administration, interior and economy,<sup>488</sup> these efforts resulted in ill-suited and ineffective carbon copies of their Egyptian counterparts.<sup>489</sup> The public administration remained an empty shell and state-building advanced little until the royalist-republican reconciliation of 1970. Nevertheless, the 1962 revolution inaugurated crucial changes in the power structures of North Yemen. The Ḥamīd al-Dīn family went into exile in Saudi Arabia and the republic disempowered the around 300,000 *sāda*, which had constituted the aristocracy of the

<sup>488</sup> Peterson, *Yemen: The Search for a Modern State*.

<sup>489</sup> Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*.

Imamate. Most *sāda* were moved from key political posts to diplomatic, symbolic or remote postings, where they held little real influence.<sup>490</sup> Nevertheless, with the notable exceptions of the royal family and the *sāda*, millennial patterns of traditional leadership and social hierarchies, such as the role of the *quḍā'*, *ʿulamā'* and shaykhs, remained in place.<sup>491</sup>

Absorbed by the siege of Ṣanʿā' and the republican-royalist reconciliation, the first half of the presidency of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī (1967-74) was dedicated to restoring normalcy. Iryānī convened an inclusive forum that produced a compromise for a permanent republican constitution, which entered into effect on 28 December 1970.<sup>492</sup> Though liberal-democratic in principle, it prohibited political parties since partisanship was seen as divisive. The limited political construction during the Iryānī era evolved around the 159-member *majlis al-shūrā* (Consultative Council), as well as financial and economic governance institutions. The priority of absorbing substantial amounts of foreign aid led Iryānī to strengthen the Yemen Bank for Reconstruction and Development (YBRD, founded in 1963) and create the Central Bank of Yemen (YCB, 1971), the Central Planning Organization (CPO, 1972), and the Treasury Ministry (1974, later the Ministry of Finance). Commensurate with the CPO's national three-year plan (1973-1976), the state apparatus massively inflated in order to manage hundreds of foreign-sponsored development projects. The civil service expanded from an estimated 4,000-6,000 people in 1962 through more than 13,000 in 1969 – including 775 governmental employees with the rank and salary of a minister – to 30,000 in the mid-1970s.<sup>493</sup> However, without a tradition of modern public administration, the bureaucracy of the YAR was marred by difficulties, ranging from chronic capacity shortages to rampant corruption.<sup>494</sup>

Perceived as a transitional president, Iryānī's legitimacy was grounded in his accommodationist approach, which produced an uneasy synthesis of traditionalist and modernist interests at the expense of the left. A Shāfiʿī from Ibb and the only ever civilian

<sup>490</sup> The government of ʿAbd Rabbu Maṣṣūr Hādī has pursued a similar approach in the military restructuring of 2012 and 2013, in which it redeployed Ṣāliḥ loyalists to diplomatic missions or remote regions.

<sup>491</sup> William R. Brown, 'The Yemeni Dilemma', *Middle East Journal* 17, no. 4 (1963); Robert W. Stookey, 'Social Structure and Politics in the Yemen Arab Republic', *Middle East Journal* 28, no. 3-4 (1974).

<sup>492</sup> Dustūr al-Dāʾim Jumhūrīya al-ʿArabīya al-Yamanīya, 28 December 1970. For a translation, see 'The Permanent Constitution of the Yemen Arab Republic', *Middle East Journal* 25, no. 3 (1971). Under Egyptian guidance, President Sallāl promulgated the first 'permanent' constitution of the YAR on 27 April 1964, which failed to gain tribal acceptance and remained largely ignored as the legal foundation for the YAR.

<sup>493</sup> Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*; Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*.

<sup>494</sup> Stookey, 'Social Structure and Politics in the Yemen Arab Republic'; Klaus König and Friedrich Bolay, 'The Evaluation of an Administrative Co-Operation Project in North Yemen and Its Significance for German Aid Policy', *Public Administration and Development* 2, no. 3 (1982).

president of the YAR, Iryānī lacked a firm support base in either the military or among influential northern tribes. He faced a considerable challenge from leftists, whose exclusion in the late 1960s compelled them to pursue their goals outside the formal political system. Apart from the creation of a number of Marxist, communist and Baʿthist parties, members of the former RPF founded the *munaẓamat al-muqāwamīn al-thawriyyīn al-yamaniyyīn* (Organisation of Yemeni Revolutionary Resisters, OYRR) in 1970, a predominantly Shāfiʿī group from the southern highlands that was backed by the PDRY. The OYRR launched protests along the border, which culminated in an inter-Yemeni war in late 1972. As leftist guerrillas claimed victory over Saudi-backed tribal irregulars and the army of the YAR, a ceasefire agreement affirmed the mutual desire for Yemeni unification in October.<sup>495</sup>

With the royalist-republican reconciliation, Saudi Arabia and tribal powerbrokers increasingly encroached on the state. Bent on containing the military power and threat of its republican system to monarchical rule at home, but in need of a buffer against the PDRY, the kingdom has used its financial leverage to keep the YAR 'not too strong, not too weak.'<sup>496</sup> Tribal leaders obtained high-level military positions for their allegiance to the republic and have dominated the legislature of the YAR since the foundation of the *majlis al-shūrā*, which was headed by ʿAbd Allāh al-Aḥmar.<sup>497</sup> Besides massive Saudi sponsorship, they moreover received handsome subsidies from the Yemeni government equal to four times the sum collected in *zakāt* (religious taxes) in the fiscal year 1971-72.<sup>498</sup> Their power ranged so far that Iryānī is alleged to have announced at a tribal conference: 'If ever you want me out, you won't have to do anything to me. Just tell me to go and I'll go. There'll be no need to kill me.'<sup>499</sup> And so they did: enraged about the appointment of Bāʿthi Prime Minister Ḥasan Makkī, al-Aḥmar (Ḥāshid) and Sinān Abū Laḥūm (Bakīl) supported a bloodless military coup against Iryānī by Colonel Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdī on 13 June 1974.<sup>500</sup>

<sup>495</sup> Marc Pellas, 'Yémen du nord: La lutte des forces révolutionnaires (North Yemen: The Struggle of Revolutionary Forces)', *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 1973; 'Document 196: Intelligence Note Prepared in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research: YAR-PDRY: War Clouds Darken' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXIV, 13 October 1973).

<sup>496</sup> Mark N. Katz, 'Yemeni Unity and Saudi Security', *Middle East Policy* 1, no. 1 (1992); Bernard Haykel, 'Saudi Arabia's Yemen Dilemma: How to Manage an Unruly Client State', *Foreign Affairs* 14 (14 June 2011); Stig Stenslie, 'Not Too Strong, Not Too Weak: Saudi Arabia's Policy towards Yemen', Policy Brief (Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, March 2013).

<sup>497</sup> Fāri'a Al-Muslimī, 'Tribes Still Rule in Yemen', *Al-Monitor*, 10 October 2013.

<sup>498</sup> Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic*; Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth*.

<sup>499</sup> Clark, *Yemen*, 101 quoting ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Iryānī.

<sup>500</sup> Wikileaks, 'Situation Report' (1974SANAA01211, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 16 June 1974).

The era of President al-Ḥamdī (1974-77) came to be defined by his pursuit of a sovereign and centralised state, in which firm military rule would guarantee state-sponsored developmental modernism. Although he initially filled government positions with the conservative tribal forces that had backed his ascent to power, the increasingly confident al-Ḥamdī began to curtail the power of shaykhs from early 1975 onward.<sup>501</sup> He suspended the 1970 constitution and concentrated executive and legislative power in the *majlis al-qiyāda* (Military Command Council), which replaced the tribally dominated *majlis al-shūrā*. Al-Ḥamdī moreover expanded the armed forces and installed a government of Western-trained technocrats. He replaced the Prime Minister Muḥsin al-ʿAynī, the son-in-law of Sinān Abū Laḥūm, by the apolitical technocrat ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ʿAbd al-Ghanī and dismissed tribal leaders from influential army and government posts, manoeuvring them out of Ṣanʿā to regional governorships or appointments abroad.<sup>502</sup> To improve basic social services and infrastructure in rural areas, al-Ḥamdī empowered the local self-governance movement of *al-taʿāwun al-ahlī* (local development associations, LDAs).<sup>503</sup>

Though able to consolidate power at the centre, tensions with tribal conservatives curbed al-Ḥamdī's influence. The YAR's financial dependence on Riyadh, which heavily meddled in its domestic affairs, and his desire for a rapprochement with Sālim Rubayʿ ʿAlī's PDRY led al-Ḥamdī to waver in his foreign policy between the northern and southern neighbour. This course ultimately undermined his efforts to re-admit the Shāfiʿī left into the power structures of the republic, which had been excluded since the suppression of the PRF in 1968. As a result, the North Yemeni branches of various leftist groups, including the remnants of the Revolutionary Democratic Party, united in February 1976 under the umbrella of the *al-jabhat al-waṭanīya al-dīmuqrāṭīya* (National Democratic Front, NDF), which called for socialist reforms, unity with the PDRY and independence from Saudi Arabia.<sup>504</sup> On 11 October 1977, two days before planned unification talks in ʿAdan, al-Ḥamdī was assassinated with the connivance of his successor Aḥmad al-Ghashmī

<sup>501</sup> Jim Hoagland, 'Sana'a Shakes off the Sheikhs', *The Guardian*, 8 August 1975; Robert D. Burrowes, 'The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abdallah Salih Regime: 1978-1984', *The Middle East Journal*, 1985.

<sup>502</sup> Wikileaks, 'Removal of Abu Luhum Brothers' (1975SANAA00996, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 28 April 1975); Wikileaks, 'Further Military Changes' (1975SANAA01026, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 30 April 1975).

<sup>503</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>504</sup> These groups included the *al-ittiḥād al-shaʿbī al-dīmuqrāṭī* (Popular Democratic Union, 1958, communist), the *al-ḥizb al-dīmuqrāṭī al-thawrī al-yamanī* (Revolutionary Democratic Party, 1968, MAN), the *al-ḥizb al-ʿamal* (Labour Party, 1969, Marxist-Leninist), the *munaẓamat al-muqāwamīn al-thawriyyīn al-yamaniyyīn* (Organisation of Yemeni Revolutionary Resisters, 1970, former PRF) and the *al-ḥizb al-ṭalīʿa* (Vanguard Party, Baʿthist, 1971). Al-Hamdani, 'We Must Be Realistic about Our Goals', *Middle East Report*, no. 130 (1985).

and a Saudi envoy.<sup>505</sup> The reasons behind this assassination lay in al-Ḥamdī's efforts to build a modern centralised state that would curb the influence of northern tribal powerbrokers and the Saudi determination to thwart a rapprochement between the YAR and the PDRY at any cost.<sup>506</sup> Although never independently established, a number of Yemenis with personal knowledge of the events and involved officers have implicated al-Ghashmī's right-hand man as the assassin – 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ.<sup>507</sup>

Al-Ḥamdī was succeeded by al-Ghashmī, a pro-Saudi military officer with strong tribal ties. Amidst deteriorating relations with the PDRY, he installed a tribally dominated *majlis al-sha'b al-tā'sīsī* (People's Constituent Assembly, PCA), which withdrew the legal basis of the *majlis al-qiyāda* and assumed most functions of the earlier *majlis al-shūrā*.<sup>508</sup> In the absence of recognised models for political retirement, however, his presidential term ended like that of his predecessor eight months later. Al-Ghashmī was killed by a suitcase bomb delivered by a man, who was purportedly the envoy of PDRY President Sālīm Rubay' 'Alī.<sup>509</sup> Until today, the incident remains shrouded in conspiracy theories. Whether Sālmayn or the machinations of the southern power struggle were responsible for his death, the PDRY was blamed. While al-Ghashmī's assassination prompted a leadership change in the YAR, where respected jurist and head of the PCA, 'Abd al-Karīm al-'Arashī, became a caretaker until a new presidential appointment, it had wide-ranging consequences in the PDRY, where Ismā'īl's pro-Soviet faction ousted Sālīm Rubay' 'Alī.

<sup>505</sup> Al-Ḥamdī, his brother 'Abd Allāh and two French prostitutes were found dead after a dinner at al-Ghashmī's house. Wikileaks, 'Hamdi Assassination: The "Facts"' (1977SANA04096, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 18 October 1977); Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>506</sup> Wikileaks, 'Opposition to Hamdi' (1975SANA03016, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 30 October 1975); Wikileaks, 'Hamdi Assassination' (1977SANA04534, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 16 November 1977).

<sup>507</sup> Wikileaks, 'Assassination of YAR Chief of State Hamdi' (1978STATE000111, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 3 January 1978); Suhayl TV, *Interview with Major-General Naṣār 'Alī al-Ḥarbānī*, 2011; Thābit Al-Aḥmadī, 'Ra'īs al-Ḥamdī wa-l-Malik Fayṣal kānuwā Aṣḥāb Mashārī'a Waṭanīya Ṣādiqa fa-Qutīlā (President al-Ḥamdī and King Fayṣal had Sincere National Projects so They Were Killed)', *Al-Jumhūrīya*, 11 October 2012.

<sup>508</sup> Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>509</sup> Wikileaks, 'Assassination of YAR Chief of State' (1978SANA03055, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 24 June 1978).

Heads of State in Yemen during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

North Yemen			South Yemen		
Leader	Time	Power Transfer	Leader	Time	Power Transfer
Yahyā Ḥamīd al-Dīn	1904-1948	Assassinated			
Aḥmad Ḥamīd al-Dīn	1948-1962	Died at age 71 (After effects of assassination attempt)			
Muḥammad al-Badr al-Dīn	1962 (One week)	Ousted, exiled			
Republican Revolution, Foundation of the YAR (26 September 1962)					
‘Abd Allāh al-Sallāl	1962-1967	Fled to exile	Independence, Foundation of the PRSY/PDRY (30 November 1967)		
‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Iryānī	1967-1974	Ousted, exiled	Qaḥtān al-Sha‘bī	1967-1969	Ousted, exiled
Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdī	1974-1977	Assassinated	Sālīm Rubay‘ ‘Alī	1969-1978	Ousted, executed
Aḥmad al-Ghashmī	1977-78 (8 months)	Assassinated	‘Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad	1978 (6 months)	Interim
‘Abd al-Karīm al- ‘Arashī	1978 (3 weeks)	Interim	‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl	1978-1980	Ousted, exiled
‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ	1978-1990	President of the RoY	‘Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad	1980- 1986	Fled to exile
			Haydar al-‘Atṭās / ‘Alī Sālīm al-Bīd	1986-1990	Vice-President of the RoY
Yemeni Unification (22 May 1990), Foundation of the Republic of Yemen (RoY)					
‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ	1990-2012		Negotiated resignation		
‘Abd Rabbu Maṣṣūr Ḥādī	2012-		Incumbent		

Table 1: Heads of State in Yemen throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

With the backing of Saudi Arabia, the PCA elected al-Ghashmī's young protégée 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ president on 24 June 1978. A 36-year-old, semi-literate army officer from a modest family, Lieutenant Colonel Ṣālīḥ had served as military governor of Ta'izz. His presidency became a quest for political survival from the outset. Within the first 100 days in office, he faced a coup attempt by Nāṣirists and an insurgency by the National Democratic Front in the borderlands of the two republics.<sup>510</sup> This confrontation dragged Ṣālīḥ into a full-scale border war with the PDRY in early 1979, which ended with the victory of the South and a renewed commitment to unification in March 1979. Tribal conservatives and Saudi Arabia opposed this rapprochement and demanded that Ṣālīḥ deal firmly with the NDF and the PDRY.<sup>511</sup> Instead of drifting deeper into their arms, Ṣālīḥ instead defied all expectations and attempted to create a counterbalance to the Saudi patron. He normalised relations with the PDRY, concluded a major arms deal with the Soviet Union in mid-1979 and forged an agreement with the NDF in January 1980.<sup>512</sup> The YAR eventually abandoned the latter deal due to Saudi pressures and was able to militarily defeat the NDF in May 1982, which ushered in a period of relative stability.<sup>513</sup> Notwithstanding a CIA prediction in early 1979 that Ṣālīḥ would not outlast another six months in office, his rise to power put an end to a period beset by frequent assassinations and *coups d'état*.

Given its firm support from within the military, low public legitimacy and the inheritance of al-Ḥamdī's extra-constitutional framework, the Ṣālīḥ administration was liable to be labelled a military regime. In order to shore up political support, Ṣālīḥ reinstated the 1970 constitution with slight amendments in 1978, instituted the *al-majlis al-istishārī* ([Presidential] Advisory Council) and strengthened the quasi-legislative PCA. He furthermore espoused al-Ḥamdī's stillborn idea to launch a national dialogue, which culminated in the foundation of the *mu'tamar al-sha'bī al-'am* (General People's Congress, GPC) in October 1982, which – in the absence of party politics – served as an articulated political mechanism for state-society relations. From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, LDAs, self-help communities, village clubs, co-operatives, unions, charities and regional conferences proliferated in areas beyond the reach of the state.<sup>514</sup> In 1985, the GPC absorbed these grassroots initiatives, which were after 1990 turned into a part of the public

<sup>510</sup> Martin Buckmaster, 'The Yemen Arab Republic Today', *Asian Affairs* 14, no. 3 (1983).

<sup>511</sup> Burrowes, 'The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abdallah Salih Regime'.

<sup>512</sup> Christopher Van Hollen, 'North Yemen: A Dangerous Pentagonal Game', *The Washington Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (1982).

<sup>513</sup> Burrowes, 'The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abdallah Salih Regime'.

<sup>514</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.



sector as *al-majālis al-maḥaliya* (local councils). This expansion of bureaucracy at the provincial level allowed the state in North Yemen – for the first time – to project more than a nominal presence into rural areas and expand its reach to the full borders of the YAR.<sup>515</sup> In accordance with the 1978 constitution, Ṣāliḥ held the promised elections for the hitherto suspended *majlis al-shūrā* in 1988, which ended the 10-year interim existence of the PCA.

Although these efforts engendered far-reaching institutional changes on paper, they failed to provide a meaningful contribution towards state-building. Power was not vested in the legal-rational authority of formal governance institutions but predicated on relations with the president and a small circle of elites. State institutions thereby served as mere means to accommodate, reward, co-opt and formalise patronage ties with tribal, military, political and economic elites. Ṣāliḥ allocated government jobs, import and export licenses, public procurement contracts, direct payments from state coffers, smuggling rights, etc. to secure the allegiances of allies and the acquiescence of opponents. While the GPC allowed the state to co-opt the LDA movement and its resources, the Advisory Council served as an instrument to incorporate elites into the body politic.<sup>516</sup> Sarah Phillips has argued that this inclusionary approach might stem from Ṣāliḥ's realisation that all of his predecessors were unable to retain power because they made themselves too many enemies.<sup>517</sup> Although Ṣāliḥ did most among the presidents of the YAR to advance state institutions, the concentration of power in personal relationships concurrently turned them into empty shells.

The cornerstone of his 33-year rule became the tribal-military complex,<sup>518</sup> which was based on a pair of power-sharing agreements<sup>519</sup> that Ṣāliḥ forged with 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar and 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar in 1978.<sup>520</sup> In exchange for their allegiance, Ṣāliḥ granted 'both men a wide berth to run their affairs with informal armies, courts, and economic empires... and ma[de] direct payments from the treasury to the two men's tribal

<sup>515</sup> Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*.

<sup>516</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>517</sup> Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment*.

<sup>518</sup> Robert D. Burrowes and Catherine M. Kasper, 'The Salih Regime and the Need for a Credible Opposition', *The Middle East Journal* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2007).

<sup>519</sup> It is not clear whether this arrangement was formalised in writing, but shaykh al-Aḥmar alludes to an accord and the development of a strategic partnership with President Ṣāliḥ in *Mudhakirāt*.

<sup>520</sup> There is no close blood relationship between 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ (al-Aḥmar), 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar and 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar. The family of 'Abd Allāh al-Aḥmar originates from 'Amrān, while Ṣāliḥ and 'Alī Muḥsin come from the village of Bayt al-Aḥmar. 'Alī Muḥsin is not – as is frequently misreported – Ṣāliḥ's half-brother, but either a distant cousin of Ṣāliḥ himself or of his half-brothers. Wikileaks, 'Yemen: Hamid Al-Ahmar Sees Saleh As Weak And Isolated, Plans Next Steps' (09SANAA1617, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 31 August 2009); Gregory D. Johnsen, 'Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee' (Washington, D.C.: United States Senate, 20 January 2010).

and military constituencies,<sup>521</sup> according to a secret US Embassy cable. The association with ‘Abd Allāh al-Aḥmar, the paramount shaykh of the Ḥāshid confederation, to which Ṣāliḥ’s Sanḥān tribe belongs, is emblematic of the former president’s strategic partnership with key Zaydī tribes. After Ṣāliḥ assumed the presidency, al-Aḥmar became a member of the Advisory Council and has occupied high political positions in the YAR and the RoY, most notably that of Speaker of the Parliament from 1993 until his death in 2007. The mutual respect and pragmatism of this long-term relationship is epitomised in a phrase often attributed to Ṣāliḥ: ‘You’ll be my sheikh, and I’ll be your president.’<sup>522</sup> He also re-established the *maṣlaḥat al-shū’ūn al-qabā’il* (Department of Tribal Affairs), which was founded in 1963 to transfer subsidies to royalist tribes but then abolished by al-Ḥamdī.<sup>523</sup>

The partnership with ‘Alī Muḥsin began after al-Ghashmī’s death, when he and a number of military officers and tribal figures, predominantly from the Sanḥān tribe of Ḥāshid, proposed to Ṣāliḥ to assume the presidency.<sup>524</sup> In what regime insiders refer to as *al-‘ahd* (the covenant), they agreed to back Ṣāliḥ in exchange for his patronage. Given the short-lived tenure of previous presidents, they designated ‘Alī Muḥsin as Ṣāliḥ’s successor. Within days of al-Ghashmī’s passing, ‘Alī Muḥsin managed to secure the Central Military Command in Ṣan‘ā’ and win over the support of the military through bribery.<sup>525</sup> He also played an instrumental role in crushing first the Nāṣirist coup in October 1978 and then the NDF in the early 1980s. His loyalty earned ‘Alī Muḥsin the position of commander of the powerful tank unit *al-firqa al-ūlā al-mudara’a* (First Armoured Brigade) and later head of the Northwestern Military District.<sup>526</sup> The alliance with ‘Alī Muḥsin was part of a larger

<sup>521</sup> Wikileaks, ‘Will Saleh’s Successor Please Stand Up?’ (05SANAA2766, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 17 September 2005).

<sup>522</sup> Burrowes, *Historical Dictionary of Yemen*.

<sup>523</sup> ‘Ādil Mujāhid Al-Sharjabī, ‘Al-Taḥawilāt fī Kharīṭat Tawzī’a al-Quwat al-Sīyāsīya li-l-Qabā’il al-Yaman (Shifts in the Map of the Distribution of Political Power for Yemeni Tribes)’, *Al-Safīr*, 27 July 2012; ‘Bi-l-Irḡām: Ma’lūmāt Tanshur li-Awwal Mara ‘an Maṣlaḥat al-Shū’ūn al-Qabā’il: Man Asashā wa-Kif al-Ghāhā al-Ḥamdī wa-Limādhā A’āduha Ṣāliḥ (In Figures: Information Published for the First Time about the Department of Tribal Affairs: Who Founded It and How Ḥamdī Abolished It and Why Ṣāliḥ Restored It)’, *Masa Press*, 26 July 2013.

<sup>524</sup> Fayṣal Makram, ‘Al-Liwā’ ‘Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar: Naṣhatu al-Ra’īs bi-l-Tanaḥī qabl Mudhbaḥat “Jum‘at al-Karāma” (Major-General ‘Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar: I Advised the President to Step Down before the “Friday of Dignity” Massacre)’, *Yemen Press*, 11 June 2011; ‘Al-Aṣṇaj li-“l-Yaqayn”: ‘Awdatī ilā al-Yaman washīka wa-l-Janūb Muṣiraha Yaḥddha Abnā’ha al-Dākhil (Asnaj to “Certainty”: My Return to Yemen is Imminent and the Fate of the South is Determined by its Sons at Home)’, *Aden Press*, 2 January 2012.

<sup>525</sup> Sarah Phillips, ‘Who Tried to Kill Ali Abdullah Saleh?’, *Foreign Policy*, 13 June 2011; Interview with a Close Confidant of ‘Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar, Ṣan‘ā’, November 2013.

<sup>526</sup> ‘Arif Al-‘Amārī, “Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar Karajul Iṭīfā’ li-Ḥarā’iq al-Nizām (‘Alī Muḥsin Al-Aḥmar as a Man Who Extinguishes the Fires of the System)’, *Marib Press*, 1 July 2010; Muḥammad Jumayḥ, ‘Al-Liwā’ Al-

effort of 'Sanḥānisation' to coup-proof the military-security apparatus.<sup>527</sup> Ṣāliḥ filled key positions with close kin and trusted allies; he appointed his brother Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ as chief of the *quwāt al-amn al-markazī* (Central Security Forces, CSF) in 1980,<sup>528</sup> his half-brother Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Aḥmar as commander of the Air Force in 1986 and his half-brother 'Alī Ṣāliḥ al-Aḥmar as the head of the Republican Guard in 1988.<sup>529</sup> By the late 1980s, he had solidified a hold over the mightiest military posts through family and Sanḥān members. Today, Yemenis often joke that *Sanḥān*, rather than the name of a tribe, is an acronym for *sa'wfa naḥkum ḥatā ākhir nafas* ('We will govern until the last breath').

The al-Ḥamdī, al-Ghashmī and Ṣāliḥ period coincided with sweeping changes in North Yemen's political economy as the YAR transformed first into a remittance-based financial system in the mid-1970s and then into a rentier state in the mid-1980s. After the 1973 oil boom, a third of its male workforce migrated to oil-rich states in the region. While the government of the YAR remained heavily dependent on foreign aid from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, the massive influx of remittances precipitated an economic upturn in the late 1970s. By 1981, the 1.4-million-strong workforce in exile actually outnumbered that inside the YAR and generated \$1 billion, or 40 percent of GNP, the same year.<sup>530</sup> As these funds accrued mainly to private accounts, they became the financial engine behind the LDA movement. The expansion of self-help governance in areas beyond the reach of the state not only filled some of the void left by the weakness of the central government, but also laid the basis for a comparatively autonomous civil society.<sup>531</sup>

This equation changed with the historical coincidence of plummeting global oil prices during the first half of the 1980s and the discovery of commercial quantities of oil and gas in the Mā'rib Basin in 1984. The oil price bust triggered a collapse of private

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Aḥmar .. Dara' al-Mutaḏāhirīn (Major-General Al-Aḥmar ... Shield of the Protestors)', *Al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 1 April 2011.

<sup>527</sup> Interview with 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Iryānī (Political Analyst), Ṣan'ā', July 2013.

<sup>528</sup> *Qarār Jumhūrī Raḡam (107) li-Sana 1980 al-Khās bīnashā' Waḥida Amnīya Tasmā al-Amn al-Markazī Tāb'a li-Wizāra al-Dākhilīya al-Yamanīya (Republican Decree No. 107 of the Year 1980 Regarding the Establishment of the Security Unit named Central Security Forces under the Yemeni Ministry of the Interior)*, 1980; 'Al-Liwā' Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ (Major-General Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ)', *Al-Yaman Al-Jadīd*, 3 July 2009; 'Maḥaṭāt fī Ḥayāt al-Faqīd al-Liwā' Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ (Stations in the life of the Deceased Major-General Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ)', *Website in the Honour of Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ*, 2010.

<sup>529</sup> 'Alī Al-Sha'bānī, "Alī Ṣāliḥ al-Aḥmar al-Generāl Iladhī Afqad Al-Munshaqūn 'An al-Jaish al-Saītara ('Alī Ṣāliḥ al-Aḥmar, the General Who Lost Control of the Army Defectors)', *Mā'rib Al-Yawm*, 12 December 2012.

<sup>530</sup> Halliday, 'North Yemen Today'; The World Bank, 'Yemen Arab Republic: Development of a Traditional Economy', Country Study (Washington, D.C., January 1979) estimated that labour remittances rose from \$40 million in 1969/70 to over \$800 million in 1976/77.

<sup>531</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

remittances and foreign aid by 1986,<sup>532</sup> which was reinforced by the punitive expulsion of close to one million Yemeni guest workers from the Gulf States for Yemen's stance in support of Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>533</sup> The discovery of hydrocarbons, conversely, generated a new source of export revenues that accrued directly to state coffers. Although modest by regional standards, this income, which fully materialised by 1989 when annual production reached 200,000 barrels a day valued at about \$600 million,<sup>534</sup> amplified the regime's freedom of manoeuvre. As the Sabā'ean and Qāsimī states, which expanded on the back of incense and coffee profits but collapsed when resource flows receded, the reliance on patronage to manage the affairs of the state created a dependency on oil rents.

The oil wealth furthermore allowed the Ṣāliḥ regime to establish a comprehensive state-sponsored patronage (*maḥsūbiya*) system, which was used to co-opt tribal, military and political leaders. The inclusion of northern shaykhs in oil-financed patronage, however, primarily enhanced Ṣāliḥ's personal power at the expense of state-building as well as the stability of the age-old tribal system.<sup>535</sup> As under the rule of the Imams, tribal leaders remained at the centre of state patronage.<sup>536</sup> However, the rentier system distorted traditional patterns of resource distribution since it led to the alienation of tribal shaykhs from their constituencies (*tabā'ud*) and weakened tribal cohesion, egalitarianism and solidarity.<sup>537</sup> While the brief interlude of remittance-driven growth had promoted local self-governance, rentier patronage artificially expanded state power and fostered centralisation in Ṣan'ā'. On balance, the substitution of the revenues from labour migration by oil rents thus shifted the balance of state-society relations from an autonomous, remittance-rich citizenry and a poor state, to an oil-rich state with an impoverished society.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> Jon C. Swanson, 'Emigrant Remittances and Local Development: Co-Operatives in the Yemen Arab Republic', in *Economy, Society and Culture in Contemporary Yemen*, ed. Brian R. Pridham (London: Croom Helm, 1985); In *The Price of Wealth*, Chaudhry shows that foreign aid dropped from more than 90 to 2 percent of the national budget, while remittances declined to 40 percent of its 1981 levels.

<sup>533</sup> Burrowes, 'Prelude to Unification'.

<sup>534</sup> 'North Yemen: Oil Economy', Daily Brief (Oxford: Oxford Analytica, 7 March 1989).

<sup>535</sup> Dresch, *Tribes, Government and History in Yemen*; Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

<sup>536</sup> Sarah Phillips, 'What Comes Next in Yemen? Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building', in *Yemen on the Brink*, ed. Christopher Boucek and Marina Ottaway (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010).

<sup>537</sup> Paul Dresch, 'The Tribal Factor in the Yemeni Crisis', in *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Jamal S. Al-Suwaidi (London: Saqi Books, 1996); Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment*.

<sup>538</sup> Nora Ann Colton, 'Yemen: A Collapsed Economy', *Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (2010); Clark, *Yemen*.



Map 4: The YAR and the PDRY, 1970-1990.

In neighbouring South Yemen, where the avowed Marxist-Leninist revolutionary regime aimed at nothing less than a fundamental social transformation, state-building followed a different trajectory. The construction of the new socialist state was predicated on the demolition of the British colonial order, which precluded structural and personal continuity between the pre- and post-independence era. The prospects for the success of the newborn state appeared dim as its main sources of revenue vanished virtually overnight. The temporary closure of the Suez Canal after June 1967 brought the income from the Port of 'Adan to a quarter of its 1966 level and was never to fully recover. British subsidies as well as the expenditures of the army, the expatriate community and associated businesses broke down with decolonisation. With the exception of the refinery, the economy became paralysed, leading to the loss of 25,000 jobs. Paul Dresch estimates that about a quarter of South Yemen's population fled the country within weeks of the British departure.<sup>539</sup>

The modest aid from the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Union and China was not only unable to make up for these losses, but came at the expense of a generous West German aid package.<sup>540</sup> As the only Arab state with a self-styled Marxist regime, which was on top of that openly committed to export its revolution, the PRSY became isolated in its relations with other states in the region. According to a CIA estimate, 'the South Yemen regime is virtually without friends in the Arab world... Most other Arab states, even those of a radical bent such as Libya and Algeria ... have been repelled by the shrill extremism of the South Yemen Government.'<sup>541</sup> Writing from the other side of the Cold War in early 1970, an American observer succinctly summed up the challenges of the PRSY with a mixture of condemnation and admiration:

The ruthless and cunning young men of the NLF, emboldened as well as handicapped by an irrelevant ideology, have sought to govern a land without assets, a people with no prospects. They have been forced to create a nation out of feuding medieval tribes and an economy out of barren rocks. That they have so far failed is hardly surprising; that they have persisted if not prospered is impressive.<sup>542</sup>

Despite these difficulties, state structures became much more rooted in South Yemen than in the North. Three years after independence, on 30 November 1970, the PRSY adopted a progressive constitution, which exhibited a striking similarity to the 1968 constitution of the

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<sup>539</sup> Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*.

<sup>540</sup> Except in 1981, Arab and Western aid to South Yemen eclipsed that from the Eastern Bloc at any time.

<sup>541</sup> 'Document 182: Special National Intelligence Estimate' (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976 Volume XXIV, 11 February 1971).

<sup>542</sup> J. Bowyer Bell, 'Southern Yemen: Two Years of Independence', *The World Today* 26, no. 2 (February 1970).

German Democratic Republic.<sup>543</sup> In contrast to the 1965 Charter of the NF, which refers to Arabs as *sha'b* (people) and Yemen as an *iqīm* (region, territory) composed of *shaṭrayn* (two parts), the 1970 constitution construed Yemenis as a distinct *sha'b* within the larger *umma* (Muslim community). To reflect this intrinsic Yemeni unity, it changed the name of the state to *jumhūrīyat al-yaman al-dīmuqrāṭīya al-sha'bīya* (People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, PDRY).<sup>544</sup> The socially liberal constitution and derivative laws instituted universal suffrage, equality of all, far-reaching women's rights and a progressive family code that banned polygamy and child marriage. It moreover legally enshrined the state structure, at whose heart lay the 101-member *majlis al-sha'b al-ʿaliyā* (Supreme People's Council, SPC), which was amended into a 111-member parliament with a presidium eight years later. Real political power, however, remained with the leadership of the National Front.

The NF began to socialise the economy and institute a wide range of social reforms. In 1969, the regime started to nationalise foreign-owned enterprises. As part of a major land reform, half of the PDRY's little arable land was redistributed to around 27,000 poor families between 1970 and 1973, though the measure reduced food production and caused rural conflicts.<sup>545</sup> Within the confines of its modest resources, the NF implemented several infrastructure projects and enacted wide-ranging social welfare, education and health care reforms. With assistance from the Eastern Bloc, the PDRY instituted a number of central-planning institutions that laid the foundations for a command economy. This planning machinery, which was upgraded into the Ministry of Planning in 1973, embarked on a three-year industrial development plan (1971-1974), followed by another five-year plan (1974-1978). During this period, the civil service expanded from 13,274 in 1970 through 19,500 in 1974 to 35,183 in 1977.<sup>546</sup> Despite the high degree of political centralisation, local administrative development was advanced through the popular defence committees, which exercised basic state functions at the local level from the mid-1970s onwards.<sup>547</sup>

Consistent with state ideology, the NF regime was committed to eliminate *ʿashāʾīrīya* (tribalism), which it wrongly equated with *iqṭāʿīya* (feudalism). Although the 'detribalisation'

<sup>543</sup> *Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Constitution of the German Democratic Republic)*, 1968; *Dustūr Jumhūrīyat al-Yaman al-Dīmuqrāṭīya al-Sha'bīya (Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen)*, 1970.

<sup>544</sup> *Dustūr Jumhūrīyat al-Yaman al-Dīmuqrāṭīya al-Sha'bīya (Constitution of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen)*; M. Ali Hachicho, 'Die Verfassungsentwicklung der Volksdemokratischen Republik Jemen (1839-1970) (The Constitutional Development of the PDRY (1839-1970))', *Die Welt des Islams* 17, no. 1 (1976).

<sup>545</sup> John Ishiyama, 'The Sickle and the Minaret: Communist Successor Parties in Yemen and Afghanistan after the Cold War', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 1 (March 2005).

<sup>546</sup> The World Bank, 'People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: A Review of Economic and Social Development', Country Study (Washington, D.C., March 1979).

<sup>547</sup> Lackner, *P.D.R. Yemen*.

of the 1970s and early 1980s remained of limited effect in uprooting the supposedly 'primitive' and 'backward' tribal structure of South Yemen,<sup>548</sup> it led to gross injustices, such as the persecution of minor shaykhs as feudal landlords.<sup>549</sup> The National Front adopted a similarly hostile stance towards religion, which is best illustrated by the words of the chief ideological architect and later President of the PDRY, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'īl:

Islam was exposed to extreme distortion and falsification... In the Abbasid and Umayyid eras, the aristocratic forces were able to divert Islam to goals and concepts other than that for which it had come. They did that to serve their interests and to serve the thrones, the kingdoms, and the hereditary caliphate which had nothing at all to do with Islam. Islam, which came essentially as a revolution, was transformed by feudal and aristocratic forces [robbing] Islam of its revolutionary essence and diverting it to serve other goals.<sup>550</sup>

The politics of the 1970s were overshadowed by a power struggle between Sālim Rubay' 'Alī (Sālmayn) and Ismā'īl, which was fuelled by competing visions, different leadership styles, personal ambitions and policy disagreements. Apart from Sālmayn's criticism of the PDRY's central planning apparatus and Ismā'īl's pro-Soviet creed, the most ardent dispute concerned Ismā'īl's long-held vision for the creation of a national vanguard party, the Yemeni Socialist Party, which Sālmayn opposed.<sup>551</sup> A major step in this regard followed the Sixth Congress in March 1975, when the National Front allied itself with technically illegal but previously tolerated leftist parties, including the *al-hizb al-ṭalī'a* (Vanguard Party, Ba'thist) and the People's Democratic Union (communist). Together, they formed the *al-tanzīm al-sīyāsī al-muwaḥhid* (Unified Political Organisation of the National Front, UPONF), which was dominated by the NF, but granted limited decision-making power to the other parties.<sup>552</sup> Ismā'īl's triumph on party development, mounting criticism against Sālmayn's economic management and increasingly personalised rule, as well as the PDRY's growing dependency on Moscow, eventually led the pro-Soviet faction to gain the upper hand.

After al-Ghashmī's assassination on 24 June 1978, which remains shrouded in conspiracy theories, the Politburo pressured Sālim Rubay' 'Alī to step down for his alleged

<sup>548</sup> Fawwāz Ṭrābulṣī, 'Les transformations des structures tribales depuis l'indépendance du Yémen du Sud (The Transformation of Tribal Structures after the Independence of South Yemen)', *Cahiers du Gremamo* 10 (1991).

<sup>549</sup> Dresch, 'The Tribal Factor in the Yemeni Crisis'.

<sup>550</sup> 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'īl 'Nidā' al-Waṭan, June 1978, quoted in Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986), 165.

<sup>551</sup> Brehony, *Yemen Divided*.

<sup>552</sup> John Duke Anthony, 'The Communist Party of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: An Analysis of Its Strengths and Weaknesses', in *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*, ed. Brian R. Pridham (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984).



involvement in the affair. Some claim that Sālmayn took revenge against al-Ghashmī for his connivance in the murder of al-Ḥamdī, a political ally and personal friend; this narrative fails to explain, however, why ‘Alī might have concealed his involvement so poorly.<sup>553</sup> To his supporters, on the other hand, the affair was a design to remove both al-Ghashmī and Sālmayn from power by ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl, who allegedly substituted the envoy when he discovered evidence that the two were plotting against him.<sup>554</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter, Sālmayn tendered his resignation to the Central Committee on 25 June as his position had become untenable.<sup>555</sup> Later the same day, however, he launched rockets at the Central Committee building and the residences of Ismā‘īl and ‘Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad to oust the pro-Soviet faction. The coup failed, though, as units loyal to Ismā‘īl took control of ‘Adan. While his supporters were purged from their positions, ‘Alī, together with two co-conspirators, was arrested, tried and executed by firing squads.<sup>556</sup>

The remainder of 1978 witnessed crucial political changes. Sālmayn was replaced by an interim regime consisting of a triumvirate of ‘Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad, ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl and ‘Alī ‘Antar, as well as several other NF leaders.<sup>557</sup> Under Ismā‘īl’s leadership, the UPONF was transformed into a Leninist ‘vanguard party’ – the *al-ḥizb al-ishtirākī al-yamanī* (Yemeni Socialist Party, YSP). Later the same year, Ismā‘īl was elected as head of state while Muḥammad became prime minister. The Supreme People’s Council ratified a number of changes to the constitution. The amended version put the YSP at the heart of the state structure and turned the SPC into a 111-member parliament with a presidium, which replaced the Presidential Council. The language of the 1978 constitution moreover made a firmer commitment to Yemeni unity: it construed the two Yemens as *shaṭrayn* (two parts) of a natural *waṭan* (homeland).<sup>558</sup> Under Ismā‘īl, the PDRY moreover moved closer to the East and – for the first, and only, time in 1981 – aid from the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc and China eclipsed Arab and Western assistance.<sup>559</sup>

<sup>553</sup> Sālmayn informed al-Ghashmī on June 23 of the arrival of his envoy, who directly traces back to him. Wikileaks, ‘Political Developments in YAR’ (1978SANA03172, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 29 June 1978).

<sup>554</sup> Ibid. Al-Ghashmī’s *qāt* deliveries to Sālmayn allegedly contained large sums of money to strengthen the latter’s position vis-à-vis his opponents.

<sup>555</sup> Brehony, *Yemen Divided*.

<sup>556</sup> ‘South Yemen Chief Reported Slain, But Pro-Red Group Stays in Power’, *The New York Times*, 27 June 1978.

<sup>557</sup> ‘3 Marxists Said to Share Power in Southern Yemen’, *The New York Times*, 28 June 1978.

<sup>558</sup> *Dustūr Jumhūrīyat al-Yaman al-Dīmuqrāṭīya al-Sha‘bīya* (Constitution of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen), 1978.

<sup>559</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ‘South Yemen-USSR: Outlook for the Relationship’ (National Intelligence Estimate 36.9/11-84, Washington, D.C., 5 April 1984), Declassified Document.

Although ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl and ‘Alī Nāṣir Muḥammad had overall similar ideological leanings, a contest for power emerged between the two leaders. The former, an ‘Adan-educated émigré from the Hujjārīya (YAR), advocated the replication of the Soviet model and a hard line towards the YAR. The latter, who – like Sālmayn – originated from Dathīna (rural PDRY), favoured a mixed economy and a rapprochement with the northern neighbour. In April 1980, ‘Alī Nāṣir managed to drive Ismā‘īl into Russian exile with the help of ‘Alī ‘Antar, whom he deposed only a year later.<sup>560</sup> As Ismā‘īl’s successor, Muḥammad pursued a more pragmatic policy. He normalised relations with Saudi Arabia and Oman, moderated the official stance vis-à-vis tribes and religion, and loosened controls over the economy.<sup>561</sup> Although Sālmayn’s downfall had sent a strong message about the monopolisation power, ‘Alī Nāṣir, who retained his earlier positions, consolidated the three most powerful offices in his person: Secretary-General of the YSP, Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and President of the Supreme People’s Council – ritually repeated after every mention of his name.<sup>562</sup> This excessive power concentration and his ideological pragmatism alienated hard-liners, who engineered Ismā‘īl’s return in February 1985.<sup>563</sup>

In early 1986, the leadership struggle between Ismā‘īl and Muḥammad exploded into a ferocious factional battle for control of the state. The *aḥdāth janāyir* – the events of January – became a defining moment for the PDRY: at a politburo meeting on 13 January, ‘Alī Nāṣir’s bodyguards opened fire on the rival faction, killing ‘Alī ‘Antar, ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl and two others.<sup>564</sup> In preparation for the political murder, Muḥammad had distributed leaflets in which he claimed to have pre-empted a *coup d’état* by his opponents. The events triggered a bloody two-week civil war between ‘Alī Nāṣir’s followers and the partisans of ‘Alī Sālīm al-Bīḍ and ‘Alī ‘Antar.<sup>565</sup> The conflict, which was mainly fought out along regional and tribal lines, pitted the former faction from Abyan, Shabwa and ‘Adan against the latter, which had its power base in Radfān, al-Ḍālī‘ and Ḥaḍramawt. Around 10,000 South Yemenis, including 55 senior party figures, lost their lives before ‘Alī Nāṣir

<sup>560</sup> Christopher S. Wren, ‘Big Power Rivalry Echoed In Latest Yemen Shake-Up’, *The New York Times*, 27 April 1980; ‘South Yemen Replaces President’, *The New York Times*, 22 April 1980.

<sup>561</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, ‘South Yemen-USSR: Outlook for the Relationship’.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.; Halliday, ‘North Yemen Today’.

<sup>563</sup> ‘Alī Al-Ṣarrāf, *Al-Yaman al-Janūbī: al-Ḥayā al-Siyāsīya min al-Isti‘mār ilā al-Waḥīda* (South Yemen: Political Life from Colonialism to Unity) (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis, 1992).

<sup>564</sup> Confusion persists about the circumstances of ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl’s death. While Brehony claims that Ismā‘īl was killed during his escape in a tank that was shelled by naval forces, Ismā‘īl’s own son claims that his body was never found. Khālīd ‘Antar, ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl .. Qiṣat Istishhād Ghayr Ma‘lūmat al-Makān (‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā‘īl .. The Story of a Martyrdom in an Unknown Place’), *26 September News*, 27 April 2006.

<sup>565</sup> Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy*.

fled with as many as 30,000 supporters to the YAR.<sup>566</sup> Besides the massive loss of life, the conflict literally decapitated the PDRY and ideologically ruined the ruling YSP. After the initial dust had settled, a new leadership was formed with Haydar al-ʿAṭṭās as chairman of the presidium, ʿAlī Sālīm al-Bīḍ as secretary-general of the YSP and Yāssīn Saʿīd Nuʿmān as prime minister, which managed the affairs of the state. Until the end of the decade, the politics of the YAR were characterised by collective leadership and political weakness.

The series of power struggles within the NF and the Yemeni Socialist Party severely undermined the efforts of successive regimes in South Yemen towards a genuine social transformation. Although tribes continued to permeate the system of the PDRY in similar ways as they had during British rule, tribalism had little causality in the internal factional strife. The 'Glorious Corrective Move' of June 1969, the leadership purge in 1971, the execution of Sālīm Rubayʿ ʿAlī in 1978, the expulsion of ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Ismāʿīl in 1980 and the bloody civil war in 1986 were primarily motivated by ideological and personal differences. Nevertheless, they all had regional dimensions.<sup>567</sup> In each of these of power struggles, a parochial *manāṭiqīya* (regionalism) became a central factor in defining alliances, as political groups had strong regional affiliations and ruling elites looked to their home provinces for support.<sup>568</sup> The political, economic and ideological devastation of the PDRY in 1986 shifted the political landscape towards increased political pluralism and ironically helped set the stage for the unification of 1990, which – for the first time in centuries – brought both parts together under a unified leadership.

### ***The Unification of the Two Yemens and the 1994 War***

The enduring idea of a united state in South Arabia, which had last been briefly realised in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, was popular with both regimes. Both republican regimes expressed aspirations for unification, as seen in the declaration of goals of the 1962 revolution and the 1970 constitution of the PDRY. Unity discussions and commitments began as soon as both countries emerged from the turmoil of the 1960s. In 1972, and again in 1979, the leaders on both sides committed themselves to join the two republics. Not until the late 1980s,

<sup>566</sup> Fred Halliday, 'Catastrophe in South Yemen: A Preliminary Assessment', *Middle East Report*, no. 139 (1986); Jean Gueyras and Diane James, 'The Last Days of ʿAlī Nasir', *Middle East Report*, no. 141 (1986); Ted Grant, 'The Colonial Revolution and Civil War in South Yemen', *In Defence of Marxism*, 1986; Robert D. Burrowes, 'Oil Strike and Leadership Struggle in South Yemen: 1986 and Beyond', *Middle East Journal* 43, no. 3 (1989).

<sup>567</sup> Ṭrābulī, 'Les transformations des structures tribales depuis l'indépendance du Yémen du Sud'.

<sup>568</sup> Al-Ṣarrāf, *Al-Yaman al-Ḥanūbī: al-Ḥayā al-Sīyāsīya min al-Istiʿmār ilā al-Waḥīda* (South Yemen: Political Life from Colonialism to Unity).

however, did these efforts mount into a concrete roadmap. The reasons for Yemeni unification have generated considerable debate in academic literature. Most agree, however, that a conjuncture of historical circumstances, including the crisis of political legitimacy facing both regimes, especially after the events of January 1986; potential gains from economic cooperation, particularly after the 1984 oil discovery in the border area of Mā'rib and Shabwa; the 1986 recession of oil prices; the narrowing of the ideological chasm of the Cold War; global assistance cutbacks, particularly the termination of aid from the Soviet Union; and an impending payment crisis in the PDRY, enabled unification.<sup>569</sup> After an intense 2-year period of negotiations, Ṣāliḥ proclaimed the Republic of Yemen (RoY) on 22 May 1990 from 'Adan. Addressing the Yemeni people as *ahfād sabā' wa-ḥimyar* (decendants of Sabā' and Ḥimyar), the speech invoked primordial legitimisations for what Ṣāliḥ framed as a historic reunification of the Yemeni homeland.<sup>570</sup>

The final proposal of the *lajnat al-tanzīm al-sīyāsī al-muwaḥhid* (Committee on a Unified Political Organisation), which was tasked to determine the parameters of the unification agreement, laid the foundations for a democratic opening and political pluralism. The 50-50 power-sharing arrangement between the northern GPC and the southern YSP and the 3-2 North-South ratio in the 5-member Presidential Council was equitable in principle, particularly since the northern population outnumbered that of the South by a factor of four-to-one.<sup>571</sup> The Consultative Council of the YAR and the Supreme People's Council of the PDRY merged into a strengthened interim parliament of 301 seats, the *majlis al-nuwwāb* (Council of Deputies). The parliament appointed 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ and 'Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ as President and Vice-President, respectively, and debated the new constitution, a national charter and laws codifying political liberalisation. Driven by the need to accommodate political forces, the cabinet expanded from 25 members in the YAR and 11 in the PDRY to 39 members in 1990, which were evenly split

<sup>569</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 'North and South Yemen: In Search of Unity' (Directorate of Intelligence, Washington, D.C., 19 January 1990), Declassified Document; Burrowes, 'Prelude to Unification'; Charles Dunbar, 'The Unification of Yemen: Process, Politics, and Prospects', *Middle East Journal* 46, no. 3 (1992); Sheila Carapico, 'The Economic Dimension of Yemeni Unity', *Middle East Report*, no. 184 (1993); Gerd Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond', in *The Middle East in the New World Order*, ed. Haifaa A. Jawad, 2nd ed. (MacMillan Press, 1997).

<sup>570</sup> 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ, 'Khitāb Fakhāmat al-Ra'īs bi-Munāsibat I'lān al-Jumhūrīya al-Yamaniya (President's Speech on the Occasion of the Declaration of the Republic of Yemen)' ('Adan, 22 May 1990).

<sup>571</sup> The merger of the YAR, which was evenly balanced between Zaydīs and Shāfi'īs, with the PDRY's almost 100 percent Shāfi'ī population turned Zaydīs, which held power in the North for millennia, into a minority.

between the GPC and the YSP.<sup>572</sup> The Republic of Yemen adopted multiparty pluralism, hitherto inexistent on the Arabian Peninsula. It was implicitly enshrined in the first constitution, which was adopted in a nationwide referendum in 1991, and later explicitly the 1994 constitution.<sup>573</sup> The law on Parties and Political Organisations (1991) put this principle into practice and paved the way for the first parliamentary elections in 1993, in which around two-dozen parties participated. The Yemen of early 1990s became a vibrant transitional democracy, full of euphoria and optimism over the impending democracy experiment and the promise of oil-driven prosperity.

However, three factors severely undermined the political process from the outset: legal-procedural difficulties, an economic setback and the escalation of tensions between political forces, especially socialists and Islamists. Hastily cobbled together by a gentlemen's agreement between the 'two 'Alīs' – 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ and 'Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ – the final form of the new republic (unitary state, federation or confederation) and details about how to merge two substantially diverse political systems were not resolved until a few months before the official unification date. The promised popular referendum was suspended and the decision for unification formally legitimated by both ruling parties, even though a constitutional plebiscite followed in May 1991. Elections for the parliament were deferred until the end of the 30-month long transition process in November 1992, and then again to early 1993. The merger of the two armed forces was similarly postponed to a later time. Furthermore, the transition period suffered from its extra-constitutional legal status and the transitional nature of state institutions.<sup>574</sup> These shortcomings, however, did not deter Ṣālīḥ from offering at a press conference: 'If the Germans ask us, we are ready to send our experts for unification matters to Germany in order to advise and assist the German people in realising their national unity.'<sup>575</sup>

The hoped-for economic dividends remained elusive. This was due to external conditions, rather than the incompatibility of the two economies, which were, in fact, much

<sup>572</sup> Jane Smiley Hart, 'Supplement to the Chronology: Basic Chronology for a History of the Yemen', *Middle East Journal* 17, no. 1 (1963); Ian Wright, 'Cabinet of 11 Named to Rule South Yemen', *The Guardian*, 2 December 1967; Fred Halliday, 'Saudi Shadow Hangs over Yemeni Union', *The Guardian*, 22 June 1990.

<sup>573</sup> *Al-Mawād Kamā Aqarathā Al-Lajna Bi-Ṣiḡhatihā Al-Nihā'iya (Articles as Approved by the Committee in its Final Form)*, *Bill to the Parliament*, 1994; Iris Glosemeyer, Najib Abdul-Rehman Shamiri, and Anna Würth, 'Yemen: A Burgeoning Democracy on the Arab Peninsula?', in *Constitutionalism in Islamic Countries: Between Upheaval and Continuity*, ed. Rainer Grote and Tilmann J Röder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>574</sup> Al-Ḥizb al-Ishtirākī al-Yamanī, '18 Niqāt al-Maṭrūha li-Ḥal al-Azma (18 Points Raised for a Solution of the Crisis)', August 1993; Iris Glosemeyer, 'The Development of State Institutions', in *Le Yēmen Contemporain*, ed. Rémy Leveau, Franck Mermier, and Udo Steinbach (Karthala, 1999).

<sup>575</sup> Schick, *Fragen zur jemenitischen Einheit*, 64.

more similar than the socialist-capitalist dichotomy suggests.<sup>576</sup> The most crucial factor was Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. At the time a member of the UN Security Council, Yemen voted against the resolution approving the US-Saudi-led operation to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait in November 1990.<sup>577</sup> US Secretary of State James Baker's remark that 'Yemen's permanent rep. just enjoyed about \$200 to \$250 million worth of applause'<sup>578</sup> for his speech against the intervention was a profound understatement. Besides the cessation of American support, the Gulf States retaliated by cutting all aid and forced the around 800,000 Yemeni migrant workers, about 30 percent of the male workforce, to return to Yemen in 1991. The majority of these workers returned to al-Ḥudayda and Ḥajja (45 percent), as well as the northern and southern highlands (35 percent).<sup>579</sup> Though a complex economic phenomenon, the repatriation had an overall negative effect and Yemen claimed to have lost \$1.7 billion in foreign assistance, foreign trade, oil supplies and workers remittances,<sup>580</sup> which put severe strain on the newborn state. While the proceeds from the new oil production supported the state budget, they were unable to offset the slump in income caused by the Iraq-Kuwait crisis. Although oil production more than doubled from 190,000 to 440,000 barrels per day between 1990 and its peak in 2001, the best years of Yemen's production coincided with a period of low prices on the international oil markets.

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<sup>576</sup> Carapico, 'The Economic Dimension of Yemeni Unity'.

<sup>577</sup> *Security Council Resolution 678*, 1990.

<sup>578</sup> Alan Elsner, 'Flashback to 1990: Jim Baker's Quick Trip to Yemen', *Huffington Post*, 25 May 2011.

<sup>579</sup> Nicholas Van Hear, 'The Socio-Economic Impact of the Involuntary Mass Return to Yemen in 1990', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 7, no. 1 (1 January 1994): 18–38.

<sup>580</sup> *Middle East Economic Digest (MEED)*, 21 September 1990; Thomas B. Stevenson, 'Yemeni Workers Come Home: Reabsorbing One Million Migrants', *Middle East Report*, no. 181 (1993).

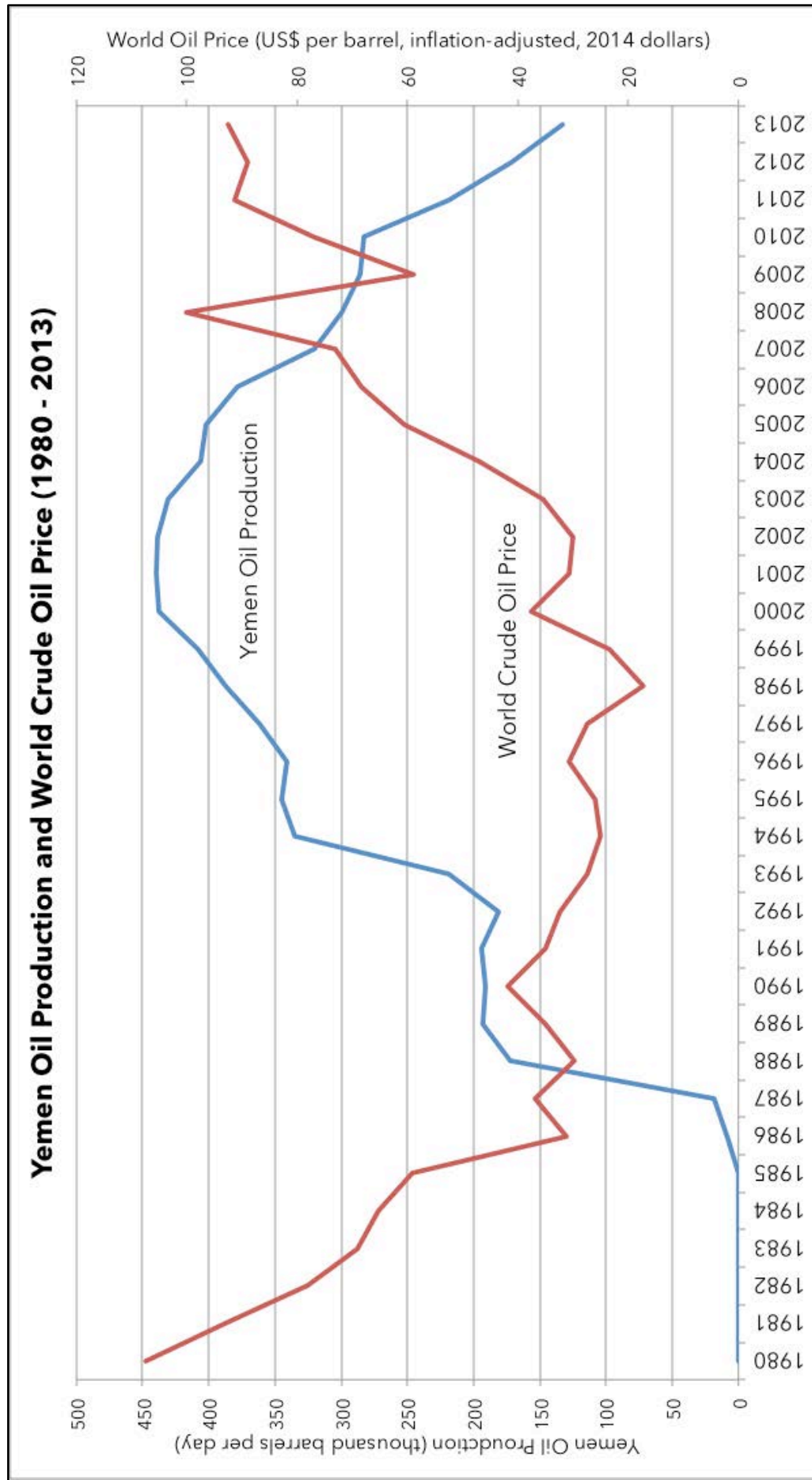


Figure 1: Yemen Oil Production and World Crude Oil Price (1980-2013), Source: US Energy Information Administration, 2014.

Although the framework of unification did provide the legal and political foundations for a genuine democratic opening, beneath the veneer of cooperation and reforms, the Ṣāliḥ regime exploited the mounting tensions between northern and southern political forces as a tactical gambit to increase northern hegemony over South Yemen. Though often construed variably as a contest between the GPC and the YSP or between the two 'Alīs, the confrontation mainly arose between northern Islamists and southern socialists. The unification with the PDRY was an anathema to powerful Islamist elites, such as 'Abd Allāh al-Aḥmar and 'Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī, and their Saudi patron. Although al-Aḥmar announced his rejection of partisan politics *in principle*, he founded – together with Zindānī and 'Alī Muḥsin – the *al-tajammu' al-yamanī li-l-iṣlāḥ* (Yemeni Congregation for Reform, Iṣlāḥ) in September 1990. A conservative, religiously based party,<sup>581</sup> Iṣlāḥ was a diverse amalgamation of moderate and hardline Islamists with a tribal and religious power base. Its members came from existing Islamist groups in North Yemen, including the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Front, a militant group that had proved instrumental in the defeat of the NDF in the early 1980s. In his *mémoires*, al-Aḥmar describes how the creation of Iṣlāḥ, whose members were largely drawn from the GPC, was part of a conscious plan to increase the influence of the GPC and disempower the YSP:

At that time, when we were still members of the GPC, the president requested from us, particularly from those in groups with Islamic leanings, which I was part of, that we form a new political party. He said that the party would be a synonym for the GPC, we would be one block, we would not disagree, and we would be supported by the GPC. Ṣāliḥ moreover said that he could not fulfil some agreements between himself and the YSP, and that with our existence as a strong organisation, we would coordinate to build opposing positions and work against some wrong points that were agreed upon with the YSP. It was on this basis that we established the Yemeni Congregation for Reform.<sup>582</sup>

Influenced by ideas from the *salafīya* and the *wahhābīya* movements, Iṣlāḥ rallied under al-Aḥmar and Zindānī's leadership against the constitution of 1990 for not being sufficiently Islamic in character.<sup>583</sup> Iṣlāḥ launched a verbal onslaught against the YSP, in which it branded its members as *al-murtadīn al-khawana* (traitorous apostates). The main bone of contention, however, became an assassination campaign that began in 1991 against

<sup>581</sup> Though officially registered as a political party, the choice of *al-tajammu* (congregation), rather than *al-ḥizb* (party) reflects the ideological rejection of partisan politics.

<sup>582</sup> Al-Aḥmar, *Mudhakirāt*, 253–254.

<sup>583</sup> The key issue for Islamists was that the *sharī'a* was only mentioned as a principle source of legislation (*al-maṣḍar al-ra'īsī li-l-tashrī'a*), rather than – as in the 1994 and all subsequent constitutions when Iṣlāḥ had its way – as the source of all legislation (*maṣḍar jamī'a al-tashrī'āt*).



members of the YSP by Ṭāriq al-Faḍlī's radical Islamic Jihad, whose aim was to drive Marxism from South Yemen and destroy the PDRY.<sup>584</sup> The socialists were convinced that Ṣāliḥ and members of his Sanḥān tribe were implicated in the assassinations,<sup>585</sup> in which 150 party members lost their lives.<sup>586</sup> In the run-up to the April 1993 parliamentary elections, shaykh al-Zindānī moreover issued a strongly worded *fatwā* (Islamic legal opinion) entitled the 'Fifty Evident Evils of the Evils of Democracy, Elections and Party Activities.' Although Iṣlāḥ participated in the elections, the *fatwā* held that political pluralism and elections were an 'infidel game' that opened the door to sin (wine, sex and pornography) and constituted part of an imperialist plan to divide the Muslim *umma*.<sup>587</sup>

That the YSP came a mere third after the GPC and Iṣlāḥ in the elections took the party by surprise, as it had considerably moderated its electoral platform by renouncing socialism and espousing social democratism. The electoral defeat cost the YSP the privileged position it had held in the interim government, which only added to the frustrations with the democracy experiment and, by mid-1993, spiralled into an 'acrimonious "war of declarations."' <sup>588</sup> In August 1993, 'Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ retreated to 'Adan in protest, began to actively work on maintaining separate institutions, and called for the establishment of a federation. By early 1994, other YSP leaders had joined al-Bīḍ and constituted a *de facto* government in 'Adan. As a condition for his return to Ṣan'ā', the YSP issued an 18-point list of demands in October 1993. The document read like an indictment of the GPC for government terrorism and endemic corruption, proposed measures to limit the power of the presidency, and complained about the lack of commitment to the unity agreements, particularly decentralisation and the rule of law.

<sup>584</sup> Ṭāriq al-Faḍlī is the son of the last ruler of the Faḍlī Sultanate (Abyan), who lost many lands and power with the creation of the PDRY. Growing up in Saudi Arabia, he was among the Arab *mujāhidīn* that fought in Afghanistan during the 1980s. He was imprisoned. His sister is married to 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar.

<sup>585</sup> 'Usra Malikīya Jadīda fī Ghilāf Jumhūrī (New Royal Family in Republican Garb)', Pamphlet, (1993).

<sup>586</sup> Brian Whitaker, 'Security Incidents in Yemen, 1990-94', *Al-Bab*, n.d.; Nonneman, 'The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond'.

<sup>587</sup> 'Abd al-Majīd Al-Zindānī, 'Khamsūn (50) Muḥsidat Jalīya min Mafāsīd al-Dīmūqrāṭīya wa-l-Intikhābāt wa-l-Ḥizbīya (Fifty (50) Evident Evils of the Evils of Democracy, Elections and Party Activities)' (Fatwā, 11 February 1993).

<sup>588</sup> Sheila Carapico, 'From Ballot Box to Battlefield: The War of the Two 'Alis', *Middle East Report*, no. 190 (1994): 25.



Map 5: The Republic of Yemen after 1990.

The exasperated GPC responded with a 19-point plan of its own, which demanded from the YSP respect for the constitution, laws, institutions and elections, and the restitution of looted state assets.<sup>589</sup> The two lists became the basis for a mediation effort by the *lajnat ḥiwār al-quwā al-sīyāsīya* (National Dialogue of Political Forces), which was constituted from members of the three major parties at the initiative of shaykh Sinān Abū Laḥūm and other notables. The committee worked intensively from December 1993 to February 1994 to devise solutions to the political impasse. It produced the *wathīqat al-‘ahd wa-l-ittifāq* (Document of Pledge and Accord, DPA), which laid down several principles and priorities for a way out of the crisis: restoring public security, restructuring the security sector, redefining the functions of state institutions, limiting the power of the executive branch, combating corruption and stabilising the economy. Most notably, it strongly emphasised decentralisation and implied the establishment of a quasi-federal system.<sup>590</sup> Although both parties signed the DPA on 20 February 1994 in Amman, it did nothing to resolve the crisis as both sides accorded a different significance to the document: while al-Biḍ demanded its implementation, Ṣālīḥ insisted on upholding the unity commitments and the constitution.

Within hours after the signing ceremony, small skirmishes ignited in Abyan between military forces from the former YAR and PDRY. The decision in the unity agreement to postpone the merger of the two armed forces had led to the placement of five southern military units in the North and two northern military units in the South.<sup>591</sup> This ‘five-and-two’ principle meant a strategic disadvantage to the South, which would immediately lose six *liwā’* (brigades) if conflict broke out.<sup>592</sup> On 27 April, President Ṣālīḥ gave a provocative speech from the Great Mosque in Ṣan‘ā’, which the southern leadership took as ‘tantamount to a declaration of war.’<sup>593</sup> The same day, a major tank battle erupted in ‘Amrān, which escalated the level of violence from skirmishes to a conventional war

<sup>589</sup> ‘Niḳāṭ al-Ishtirākī al-Maṭrūha li-Ḥal al-Azma, Niḳāṭ al-Mu’tamar al-Maṭrūha li-Ḥal al-Azma (Points Raised by the YSP and the GPC for a Solution of the Crisis)’, *Al-Waḥdawī*, 10 October 1993.

<sup>590</sup> Lajnat Ḥiwār al-Quwāt al-Sīyāsī (Political Forces Dialogue Committee), ‘Wathīqat al-‘Ahd wa-l-Ittifāq (Document of Pledge and Accord)’, 18 January 1994.

<sup>591</sup> Jemera Rone and Sheila Carapico, ‘Yemen: Human Rights in Yemen during and after the 1994 War’, *Human Rights Watch* 6, no. 1 (October 1994).

<sup>592</sup> David Warburton, ‘The Conventional War in Yemen’, *Arab Studies Journal* 3, no. 1 (1995): 20–44.

<sup>593</sup> *Khutāb Al-Ra’īs ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ Fī 27 Abīl 1994 (The Speech of President ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ on 27 April 1994)*, YouTube, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mWeWSsD6JBM>; Michael C. Hudson, ‘Bipolarity, Rational Calculation and War in Yemen’, in *The Yemeni War of 1994: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Jamal S. Al-Suwaidi (London: Saqi Books, 1996).

between two professional armies.<sup>594</sup> Fighting erupted again on 4 May, when northern forces in Dhamār began a major assault towards ‘Adan, which only ended on 5 July, and was followed by further campaigns in Ḥaḍramawt and Shabwa. On 21 May 1994, the day before the fourth anniversary of the Republic of Yemen, a group of southern leaders, including ‘Alī Sālim al-Bīḍ, Haydar Abū Bakr al-‘Aṭṭās and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Alī al-Jifīrī, proclaimed the breakaway Democratic Republic of Yemen.

The South lost the conflict both militarily and politically. Although the forces of the former PDRY maintained air superiority throughout the hostilities, neither the hoped-for tribal support from the Bakīl, nor the international rescue materialised. The stalling tactics of the Ṣāliḥ regime thwarted international support for the South,<sup>595</sup> and most foreign countries waited on the sidelines to see which way the war would turn.<sup>596</sup> Saudi Arabia, which was invested in Iṣlāḥ, but loathed Yemeni unity, supported both sides. Ḥāshid tribesmen and former Yemeni *mujāhidīn* from the Soviet war in Afghanistan joined the northern forces against the South Yemeni army. Their war efforts were legitimised by numerous *fatāwā* of ‘Abd al-Waḥhāb al-Daylamī, ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī and other *‘ulamā*, which called for the killing of the southern *al-mutamarudīn al-murtadīn* (apostate rebels) or – to the same effect – invoked *takfīr* (excommunication).<sup>597</sup> Al-Bīḍ’s unilateral cancellation of the agreement lacked widespread support, as unity remained a popular idea – even within the YSP. This translated not only into strengthening the determination of northern forces, but also enabled them to buy off officers and commanders in the YSP.

When North Yemeni forces captured ‘Adan on 7 July, the war was over, and so was Yemen’s brief democracy experiment of the early 1990s. The victory of the North imposed unity by force; it transformed the consensual unity into the Northern hegemony over the South, which had last occurred with the Qāsimī conquest in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. This domination had a lasting impact on intra-Yemeni relations and gave rise to two competing collective memories: while the Ṣāliḥ regime framed the events of 1994 as a war in defence

<sup>594</sup> ‘Dhākira Gheir Mustamāgha ‘Ind al-Janūbiyīn: 27 Abīl 1994 .. Tafāṣīl Awwal Fuṣūl Ḥarb Ṣāif 1994 Sī’a al-Ṣāit (The Southerners’ Unpleasant Memory: 27 April 1994... Details of the First Chapter of the Notorious Summer 1994 War)’, *Marib Press*, 27 April 2011.

<sup>595</sup> ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Al-Saqqāf, ‘A Politico-Military Analysis of Why Sanaa Won the War How the War Was Won!’, *Yemen Times*, 11 July 1994.

<sup>596</sup> Warburton, ‘The Conventional War in Yemen’.

<sup>597</sup> *Ṣawt Al-‘Imān*, 21 June 1994; ‘Ākhir Fatāwā ‘Ulamā’ al-Yaman ‘an al-Waḥida (The Last Fatāwā of Yemen’s Religious Scholars about Unity)’, *Marib Press*, 13 July 2009; ‘Ṣūra Nādirā li-Fatwā ‘Abd al-Waḥhāb al-Daylamī ‘an al-Ḥizb al-Ishtirākī fī Sana 1994 wa-Radūd al-‘Ulama’ (A Rare Picture of ‘Abd al-Waḥhāb al-Daylamī’s Fatwā About the Socialist Party in 1994 and the Responses of Religious Scholars)’, *Yemen Press*, 11 November 2011.

of unity, for the people of the Southern governorates it signified the beginning of a North Yemeni occupation.<sup>598</sup> While the former narrative was deeply engrained in educational curricula, the latter collective memory has been completely marginalised in the official discourse.<sup>599</sup> This led to a gradual estrangement between Yemenis from both parts, which is best captured in a phrase that is often heard in the South today: 'Before unification, we were one people in two states; but after unification we became two peoples in one state.'<sup>600</sup>

### ***The Dynamics of Democratisation: Civil Society and the Joint Meeting Parties***

Although the war of 1994 abruptly ended Yemen's progress of the early 1990s on the democratic front, the transformation of civil society set in motion by unification proved irreversible. The roots of 'modern'<sup>601</sup> forms of civil society can be traced back to the associative structures that emerged in British 'Adan in the 1920s and the colonial opening of the 1950s/60s, as well as to the cooperative movement in the post-revolution YAR during the 1970s/80s.<sup>602</sup> The post-unification period from 1990 to 1993 offered yet another vibrant scene of expanding political and social activism.<sup>603</sup> These advances laid the social foundations, structures and networks for the emergence of one of the most open and pluralistic political spaces in the region, which became crucial in the revolt of 2011.

Driven by a consideration for domestic and international legitimacy, the legal cornerstone for this socio-political opening was provided by article 39 of the 1990 constitution, which explicitly guaranteed the right to freedom of assembly:

<sup>598</sup> Ilhām Muḥammad 'Alī, '27 Abīl .. Yawm al-Ḥarb wa-l-Dīmuqrāṭīya fī-l-Yaman (April 27 ... Day of War and Democracy in Yemen)', *Al-Muḥīṭ*, 26 April 2013.

<sup>599</sup> 'Alī Sālim, 'Fī-l-Yaman Qalb li-l-Waqā'a' wa "Muntāj" li-l-Ṣuwar (Yemen in the Heart of the Facts and the "Montage" of Images)', *Al-Ḥayāt*, 20 September 2010; 'Al-Manāḥij al-Ta'limīya fī-l-Yaman 'āliqa bayn "Thawrat al-Sittīn wa-Azmat al-Saba'in" (Educational Curricula in Yemen Caught between "the Revolution of the 60s and the Crisis of the 70s")', *Yemen Press*, 6 February 2012.

<sup>600</sup> 'Qabl al-Waḥida Kunnā Sha'b Wāḥid fī Dawlatayn Lakinunā Aṣḥābnā ba'dhā Sha'bayn fī Dawla.' Jumāna Farḥāt, 'Al-Yaman: 'Indamā Inqalib al-Ḥalam ka-Būsān (Yemen: When the Dream Became a Nightmare)', *Al-Akḥbār*, 12 November 2012.

<sup>601</sup> In contrast to their traditional (parochial or patrimonial) counterparts, modern civil society can be defined as political, economic, legal and cultural projects and organisations, which articulate and promote the variegated interests of the populace independently of state institutions. See Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>602</sup> Ibid.; Asmahān Al-'Alas, 'Al-Ḥarakat al-Ahliya fī 'Adan, 1839-1967 (The Civil Movement in 'Adan, 1839-1967)', in *La société civile au Yémen: associations et pouvoir local*, ed. Jean Lambert, Sara Ben Nefissa, and Maggy Grabundzija (Ṣan'ā': CEFAS, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2008), 95-102.

<sup>603</sup> Iris Glosemeyer, *Liberalisierung und Demokratisierung in der Republik Jemen, 1990-1994: Einführung und Dokumente (Liberalisation and Democratisation in the Republic of Yemen, 1990-1994: Introduction and Documents)*, Aktueller Informationsdienst Moderner Orient 14 (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 1995).

In as much as it is not inconsistent with the provisions of the constitution, citizens across the republic have the right to organise themselves along political, professional or union lines. They have the right to form scientific, cultural, social associations and national unions in a way that serves the goals of the constitution. The state shall guarantee these rights, and shall take the necessary measures to enable the citizens to exercise them. The state shall guarantee all freedoms to the political, cultural, scientific and social organisations and unions.<sup>604</sup>

Despite a number of limitations, the Yemeni law on the Press and Publaw on Parties and Political Organisations (1991) complemented this provision and allowed for a lively and, by regional standards, free press and multiparty political landscape.<sup>605</sup> Although political parties, media outlets and a number of regional or national mass conferences under tribal or political party auspices collectively applied pressure on the two sides during the 1993/94 crisis to fulfil promises of political reform, these initiatives failed as societal safeguards in preventing the escalation of the crisis into a full-blown war.<sup>606</sup> In contrast to the self-help development movement of the 1970s and early 80s, which was co-opted by the GPC, the Ṣāliḥ regime attempted to stifle the political opening of the 1990s when the burgeoning civil society began to threaten central hegemony.<sup>607</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1994 war, the space for tolerated political and social activism narrowed.<sup>608</sup> The government increasingly clamped down on the media, political parties – especially the YSP – and civil organisations. Founded by presidential decree in 1992 under the name *al-jihāz al-markazī li-l-amn al-sīyāsī*, the Political Security Organisation (PSO) became an instrument to harass, threaten, beat, interrogate and arbitrarily detain civil society activists and journalists without any judicial or other formal accountability. Forced closures of civil society organisations (CSOs), branches of the YSP and media outlets further contributed to a general atmosphere of intimidation.<sup>609</sup> Despite the authoritarian backpedalling, the Ṣāliḥ regime remained however unable to reverse the

<sup>604</sup> *Dustūr al-Jumhūrīya al-Yamanīya (Constitution of the Republic of Yemen)*.

<sup>605</sup> *Qānūn Raqam (25) li-Sana 1990 bishān al-Ṣaḥāfa wa-l-Maṭbūʿāt (Law No. 25 of 1990 on the Press and Publications)*, 1990; *Qānūn Raqam (66) li-Sana 1991 bishān al-Aḥzāb wa-l-Tanzīmāt al-Sīyāsīya (Law No. 66 of the Year 1991 Concerning Parties and Political Organisations)*, 1991.

<sup>606</sup> Sheila Carapico, 'Elections and Mass Politics in Yemen', *Middle East Report* 23 (1993).

<sup>607</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*; Sharon Beatty, Ahmed No'man Al-Madhaji, and Renaud Detalle, 'Yemeni NGOs and Quasi NGOs, Analysis and Directory' (Ṣan'ā', 1996).

<sup>608</sup> François Burgat, 'Les élections présidentielles de septembre 1999 au Yémen: du "pluralisme armé" au retour à la "norme arabe" (The Presidential Elections in September 1999 in Yemen: From "Militant Pluralism" Back to the "Arab Norm")', *Maghreb Machrek*, no. 168 (2000).

<sup>609</sup> 'Yemen: Human Rights Developments', Human Rights Watch World Report 1995 (Human Rights Watch, 1995); 'Yemen: Human Rights Developments', Human Rights Watch World Report 1997 (Human Rights Watch, 1997); 'Yemen: Human Rights Developments', Human Rights Watch World Report 2001 (Human Rights Watch, 2001).

most crucial achievement of political liberalisation: the introduction of political parties and various forms of civic organisations. An indication of this new reality is best depicted by the reaction of GPC insider Sulṭān al-Barakānī, to the suggestion that the YSP 'should be given the coup de grace.' Barakānī repeatedly explained that such a move was 'inconceivable.'<sup>610</sup>

In the early 2000s, however, Yemen witnessed a tacit re-opening of the political space. Driven by the growth of international development assistance for state-building, which the regime needed to enhance its low legitimacy after the war of 1994, the legal framework was strengthened to promote the emergence of developmentalist CSOs. The Yemeni parliament ratified the 2001 law on Civil Associations and Organisations, and its bylaw in 2004, which stipulated that organisations would automatically be registered if the authorities did not deny their request for registration within one month on the basis of legal grounds.<sup>611</sup> In practice, however, the treatment of CSOs exhibited the government's preference for welfare or community-oriented organisations over those dedicated to political issues, including the promotion of human rights and fighting corruption.<sup>612</sup>

The 2003 law on the Organisation of Demonstrations and Marches and the abolishment of jail sentences for journalists in 2004 complemented these progressive steps towards a further expansion of civil society.<sup>613</sup> Due to international pressures, Yemen moreover ratified the UN Convention against Corruption in 2005, which led to the establishment of the *al-hay'a al-waṭanīya al-'aliyā li-mukāfāḥat al-fasād* (Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption, SNACC) in 2007, which helped open discussions about government corruption and promoted the growth of a number of active CSOs in the field.<sup>614</sup> Most importantly, however, in response to strong donor pressure and declining oil production, Ṣāliḥ launched the National Reform Agenda in 2006, which addressed public management and economic reforms, among other issues, to free resources for the state.<sup>615</sup>

The number of civil society organisations registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) increased from 2,786 in 2001 to 4,142 in 2004, 4,567 in

<sup>610</sup> 'Yemen: Human Rights Developments', 2001.

<sup>611</sup> *Qānūn Raqam (1) li-Sana 2001 bishān al-Jam'aīyāt wa-l-Ahlīm (Law No. 1 of the Year 2001 Concerning Civil Associations and Organisations)*, 2001.

<sup>612</sup> Interview with Gabūl al-Mutawakkil (NGO Leader and Youth Activist), Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>613</sup> *Qānūn Raqam (29) li-Sana 2003 bishān Tanzīm al-Muzāharāt wa-l-Masīrāt (Law No. 29 of the Year 2003 Concerning the Organisation of Demonstrations and Marches)*, 2003.

<sup>614</sup> Wikileaks, 'Yemen Launches New Anti-Corruption Board' (07SANAA1528, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 6 August 2007).

<sup>615</sup> OECD, *Progress in Public Management in the Middle East and North Africa: Case Studies on Policy Reform* (OECD Publishing, 2010).

2008 to 7,045 by early 2010, and finally 9,132 by the end of 2012.<sup>616</sup> While these numbers must read as a cumulative figure of registrations,<sup>617</sup> rather than an indicator of active organisations, they provide nonetheless an indication of the growth of civil society in Yemen during the period. While MOSAL classifies these organisations according to their field of activity, Bonnefoy and Poirier's typology as 'party-oriented,' 'proto-state,' and 'independent' is more useful, as the boundaries between those that defend political causes (human rights, freedoms, women empowerment) and social or community-based 'service-providing' non-governmental organisations (education, health care and welfare, relief and reconstruction, etc.) are not clearly distinguishable in practice.<sup>618</sup>

As in Tunisia and Egypt, where labour unions, religious associations or civil society organisations played a major role in the coordination and mobilisation of the 2011 revolts,<sup>619</sup> the contentious mobilisations in Yemen did not emerge in a political vacuum, but were grounded in previously tolerated associative structures and networks. CSOs figured in a variety of ways in the Yemeni citizen revolt of 2011. Many of the well-established organisations mobilised their constituents for demonstrations and a number of prominent human rights defenders actively led protest marches. As the next chapter will reveal, coordination through civil society networks increased in pace and quantity as CSO members discussed protest strategies, aligned their demands and provided ideological frameworks for the revolts. In addition, civil society organisations provided thousands of trainings to youths, women and other groups in the 2000s on such topics as leadership skills, human rights awareness, women's rights or political participation.

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<sup>616</sup> Ayman Omer Ali and Stephan Baas, 'Lessons Learned and Good Practice: Community-Based Organizations in Yemen', Case Study, Rural Institutions and Participation Service (Şan'ā', Rome: FAO, 2004); Anahi Alviso-Marino, 'Islamic Social and Political Activism: Porosities and Demarcations Between the Islah Charity and the Islah Party in Yemen', *Associations Au Yémen 1991-2004: émergence Ou Continuité de La Société Civile ?* (CEFAS, 2009); Thabet Bagash, 'Civil Society in Yemen: A Participatory Review' (Şan'ā': European Union Delegation, March 2010); The World Bank, 'A Mapping and Capacity Assessment of Development-Oriented Civil Society Organisations in Five Governorates', June 2013; Lina A. Eryani and Arwa Al-Deram, 'The 2012 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Report for the Middle East and North Africa' (United States Agency for International Development, 2013).

<sup>617</sup> Many CSOs may have ceased their activities without de-registering from MOSAL.

<sup>618</sup> Laurent Bonnefoy and Marine Poirier, 'Civil Society and Democratization in Contemporary Yemen: Enhancing the Role of Intermediate Bodies', Working Paper, Knowledge Programme Civil Society in West Asia (University of Amsterdam, 2009).

<sup>619</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, Amaney A. Jamal, and Kevin Mazur, 'Who Participated in the Arab Spring? A Comparison of Egyptian and Tunisian Revolutions' (Working Paper, Princeton University, 2012).



The political deliberalisation of the post-war period war equally manifested itself in the increasing preponderance of the GPC in the political landscape.<sup>620</sup> Barely two months after the end of hostilities, the GPC-Iṣlāḥ coalition passed a series of constitutional amendments that retracted some of the institutional reforms of the early 1990s. On 1 October 1994, the Yemeni parliament effectively rubber-stamped these amendments, which concentrated increasing power in the hands of the president.<sup>621</sup> With the YSP out of politics after the war, Iṣlāḥ was no longer useful as an ally to President Ṣāliḥ, who had encouraged its foundation in order to weaken the YSP in the context of the post-unification period.<sup>622</sup> Despite maintaining patronage links with the upper echelons of the party, such as shaykh ‘Abd Allāh al-Aḥmar and ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī, Ṣāliḥ began to systematically exclude Iṣlāḥis from influential positions, while GPC officials instigated a campaign to stigmatise the party as one of religious radicals with anti-democratic ideals.<sup>623</sup> Although the party received nine posts in the post-war cabinet, these ministries were the most difficult ones to run due to their service nature and the high level of expectations they generate.<sup>624</sup> In a manner characteristic of him, Ṣāliḥ held out an olive branch to southern leaders in exile, declaring amnesty and allowing all but a handful of them to return, which was part of a strategy to build a counterweight to Iṣlāḥ – now the GPCs main challenger.<sup>625</sup>

By 1996, Iṣlāḥ had experienced a considerable decline in political influence, which led the party to tacitly explore alternative options for alliances. On 27 August 1996, Iṣlāḥ and the Supreme Coordination Council of the Opposition (SCCO), a coalition of the YSP and several smaller parties, issued a joint programme of cooperation under the name of *aḥzāb al-liqā’ al-mushtarak* (Joint Meeting Parties, JMP).<sup>626</sup> They expressed ‘grave concern for the direction of democratic development in Yemen’ and harshly criticised ‘the state’ – a

<sup>620</sup> Burgat, ‘Les élections présidentielles de septembre 1999 au Yémen: du “pluralisme armé” au retour à la “norme arabe”’; Jillian Schwedler, ‘Yemen’s Aborted Opening’, *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 4 (2002).

<sup>621</sup> Carapico, *Civil Society in Yemen*.

<sup>622</sup> Jillian Schwedler, ‘The Islah Party in Yemen: Political Opportunities and Coalition Building in a Transnational Polity’, in *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>623</sup> ‘Qanbala Al-Mawsim: al-Ḥākim Yaḡṣum Ṣāḥar al-M’uāraḍa bi-Ta’dilāt Tanqil al-Yaman li-l-Niṣām al-Ri’āsī (Bomb of the Season: Ruler Breaks Back of the Opposition with Amendments to Move Yemen to a Presidential System), *Nabā’ News*, 29 December 2010; Marine Poirier, ‘Imagining Collective Identities’, *Chroniques Yéménites*, no. 1 (30 March 2013).

<sup>624</sup> Iṣlāḥ was given the following ministries: Health, Supply and Trade, Religious Affairs, Justice, Fisheries, Local Governance, Electricity and Water, and Education, cited in Schwedler, ‘The Islah Party in Yemen’.

<sup>625</sup> Nonneman, ‘The Yemen Republic: From Unification and Liberalization to Civil War and Beyond’.

<sup>626</sup> Iris Glosemeyer and Hesham Sallam, ‘The JMP Alliance: New Political Pragmatism in Yemen?’, in *Conflict, Identity, and Reform in the Muslim World: Challenges for U.S. Engagement*, ed. Daniel Brumberg and Dina Shehata (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2009).

synonym for Ṣāliḥ and the GPC – for fragmenting the political opposition. As an ideologically unlikely marriage of convenience between Iṣlāḥ, the YSP, the conservative Zaydī Al-Ḥaqq (Truth) Party and the liberal Zaydī Union of Popular Forces (UPF), the Popular Nāṣirist Union Party, Arab Socialist Baʿth Party and the Constitutional Liberal Party, no serious cooperation emerged in the framework of the JMP during the period.

As a result, the GPC won a landslide victory in the 1997 parliamentary election. While the YSP boycotted the elections, Iṣlāḥ's share of seats decreased from 62 in 1993 to 53 in 1997, leading the party to forsake its place in the government for the opposition benches. In the strongly rigged 1999 presidential elections, Ṣāliḥ won with a 96.3 percent of the vote against the puppet-contender Najīb Qaḥṭān al-Sha'bī, the son of the first president of South Yemen, who despite being a member of the GPC, ran as an independent candidate. The election was, as Wedeen has argued, a show of force, in which Ṣāliḥ proved that he had the power to do as he pleased.<sup>627</sup> When asked whether he voted in the elections, opposition leader Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik al-Mutawakkil responded: 'I went to the mosque instead to mourn the death of democracy in Yemen.'<sup>628</sup>

Results of Parliamentary Elections	1993	1997	2003
General People's Congress (GPC)	123	187	238
Yemeni Congregation for Reform (Iṣlāḥ)	62	53	46
Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP)	56	0	8
Arab Socialist Baʿth Party	7	2	2
Popular Nāṣirist Union Party	3	3	3
Al-Ḥaqq Party	2	0	0
Independents / Vacant / Other	48	56	4
Total	301	301	301

Table 2: Results of the 1993, 1997 and 2003 Parliamentary Elections. Source: Al-Bab.com.

The murder of YSP deputy secretary-general Jārāllah ʿUmar in December 2002 provided a catalyst for tacit cooperation within the JMP, which had meanwhile persisted as an empty umbrella. ʿUmar, the main architect of the opposition alliance, was assassinated after a conciliatory speech in front of Iṣlāḥ members, for which many JMP members blamed the ruling party.<sup>629</sup> With only few months until the 2003 elections, however, it was too late for serious electoral coordination, which allowed the GPC to consolidate its dominant position.

<sup>627</sup> Lisa Wedeen, 'Seeing like a Citizen, Acting like a State: Exemplary Events in Unified Yemen', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 4 (2003).

<sup>628</sup> Faiza Saleh Ambah, 'Low Turnout, Attacks Mar Yemen Vote', *Associated Press*, 23 September 1999.

<sup>629</sup> Sheila Carapico, Lisa Wedeen, and Anna Würth, 'The Death and Life of Jarallah Omar', *Middle East Report* 31 (2002).

In the run-up to the 2006 presidential and local elections, however, the JMP agreed on a common political programme and fielded a joint opposition candidate, Fayṣal bin Shamlān. As Glosemeyer and Sallam have pointed out, the JMP platform, which called for decentralisation and easing the concentration of power in the hands of the president, was strongly reminiscent of opposition demands in the pre-1994 war period.<sup>630</sup> Although a joint JMP candidacy was an effective strategy to undermine the divide-and-rule strategy of the Ṣāliḥ regime, Shamlān received only 22 percent of the vote. Ṣāliḥ's victory with 77 percent was partly owed to the fact that senior Iṣlāḥ figures, such as 'Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī, who maintained close links to the regime, supported the GPC over the candidate of their own party.<sup>631</sup> Although a European Union report commended the elections, a member of the monitoring team privately indicated that there was considerable reason to doubt their fairness.<sup>632</sup> The issue was not so much a manipulation of the ballot but, as the secretary-general of Iṣlāḥ 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ansī described, that the election was a competition not among political parties, but between the opposition and the state.

In February 2009, the GPC and the JMP jointly agreed to postpone the upcoming parliamentary elections for two years until the enactment of electoral and constitutional reforms, which were to be worked out in a National Dialogue. Amidst a wide range of stalling and obstruction tactics, the National Dialogue did not materialise until August 2010. When it did commence, the bilateral talks between the GPC and the JMP became a public performance in which the former proved only to be seeking to garner legitimacy, while the latter appeared more interested in political concessions than genuine reforms.<sup>633</sup> The dialogue ultimately foundered as Ṣāliḥ, who held control over the GPC, rejected the recommendations by the quartet composed of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Iryānī and 'Abd Rabbu Maṣṣūr Hādī for the GPC and 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ansī (Iṣlāḥ) and Yāssīn Sa'īd Nu'mān (YSP).<sup>634</sup> The failure of the dialogue, in late 2010, led to a general feeling among the

<sup>630</sup> Glosemeyer and Sallam, 'The JMP Alliance'.

<sup>631</sup> Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment*.

<sup>632</sup> European Union Election Observation Mission, 'Presidential and Local Council Elections', Final Report, (20 September 2006); Interview with Member of the 2006 European Union Election Observation Mission, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>633</sup> Wikileaks, 'All Talk: Saleh's "National Dialogue" Holds Little Hope For Progress' (10SANAA14, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 6 January 2010); Wikileaks, 'More Talk, Less Action: "National Dialogue" Process Stalled In Yemen' (10SANAA137, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 25 January 2010); Nasser Arrabyee, 'Yemen Debates Constitutional Reform', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 12 August 2010.

<sup>634</sup> Muḥammad Al-Ghābarī, 'Qarā' Khāṣa li-l-Thawra al-Yamaniya: Asbāb Thawra 11 Fibrāyir (2) (Special Reading about the Yemeni Revolution: The Causes for the Revolution of the 11 February Revolution (2))', *al-islam.net*, 13 February 2014.

opposition that they had been cheated and that Ṣālīḥ could not be trusted to enact political reforms.<sup>635</sup> By late 2010, there was a profound sense that economic modernisation and social development had derailed, and Ṣālīḥ was either unable or unwilling to bring it back on track. In this environment, GPC parliamentary majority leader Sulṭān al-Barakānī announced that his party would 'remove the clock' of presidential terms limits. Although the move appeared to be a bargaining tactic, the announcement triggered furious responses from the JMP and the al-Aḥmar family.<sup>636</sup> On 11 January 2011 then, Hillary Clinton made a surprise visit to Ṣan'ā', the first by a US Secretary of State in 20 years. In a meeting with opposition and civil society leaders, Clinton reopened the succession debate and signalled US support for the opposition stance on the question of presidential succession.<sup>637</sup>

### ***The Post-War Era: Regime Oligarchisation and the Politics of Calculated Chaos***

The erratic dynamics of liberalisation and the increasing domination of the GPC in the electoral politics of the post-1994 period were accompanied by crucial changes in Yemen's system of power-sharing and patronage.<sup>638</sup> The main legacy in this regard was the consolidation of power around Ṣālīḥ's immediate family at the expense of a number of Sanḥān and Ḥāshid tribal elites, most notably 'Alī Muḥsin and the al-Aḥmars. After the 1994 war, Ṣālīḥ stopped supplying 'Alī Muḥsin's *al-firqa al-ūlā al-mudara'a* (First Armoured Division, FAD) with military hardware (except ammunition) and instead bolstered the *ḥaras al-jumhūrī* (Republican Guard), then under the command of his half-brother 'Alī Ṣālīḥ al-Aḥmar.<sup>639</sup> As part of a broader empowerment of a younger generation of his family, Ṣālīḥ appointed his eldest son Aḥmad 'Alī as commander of the Special Forces in 1999 and shortly thereafter as commander of the Republican Guard. Although Ṣālīḥ's half-brother resisted the transfer, he was appeased with a position as military attaché in Washington, D.C. and later as Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

<sup>635</sup> Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar, who was on the Preparation Committee for the National Dialogue strongly expresses this frustration in a widely publicised interview. 'Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar Ma' Qanāt Suhayl al-Faḍā'iya (Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar with the Suhayl Satellite Channel)', *Marib Press*, 6 January 2011; Makram, 'Al-Liwā' 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar'.

<sup>636</sup> 'Qanbala Al-Mawsim: al-Ḥākim Yaḡsum Ṣāḥar al-M'ūāraḍa bi-Ta'dīlāt Tanqīl al-Yaman li-l-Niṣām al-Ri'āsi'; Ma'īn Al-Salāmī, 'Al-Shaykh Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar Yuḥadhir min ay Ta'dīlāt Dustūriya Tanāl min Thawābit wa-Muktasibāt al-Sha'b (Shaykh Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar Warns of any Constitutional Amendments that Affect the Foundations and Achievements of the People)', *Al-Ṣaḥwa*, 10 January 2011; Hammoud Mounassar, 'Yemen Adopts Principle of Constitutional Amendment', *Agence France Presse*, 1 January 2011.

<sup>637</sup> Ghattas Kim, 'Clinton's Historic Visit to Yemen', *BBC News*, 12 January 2011.

<sup>638</sup> April Longley Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen', *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>639</sup> Interview with a Close Confidant of 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

## Key Family Relatives in Yemen's Armed Forces

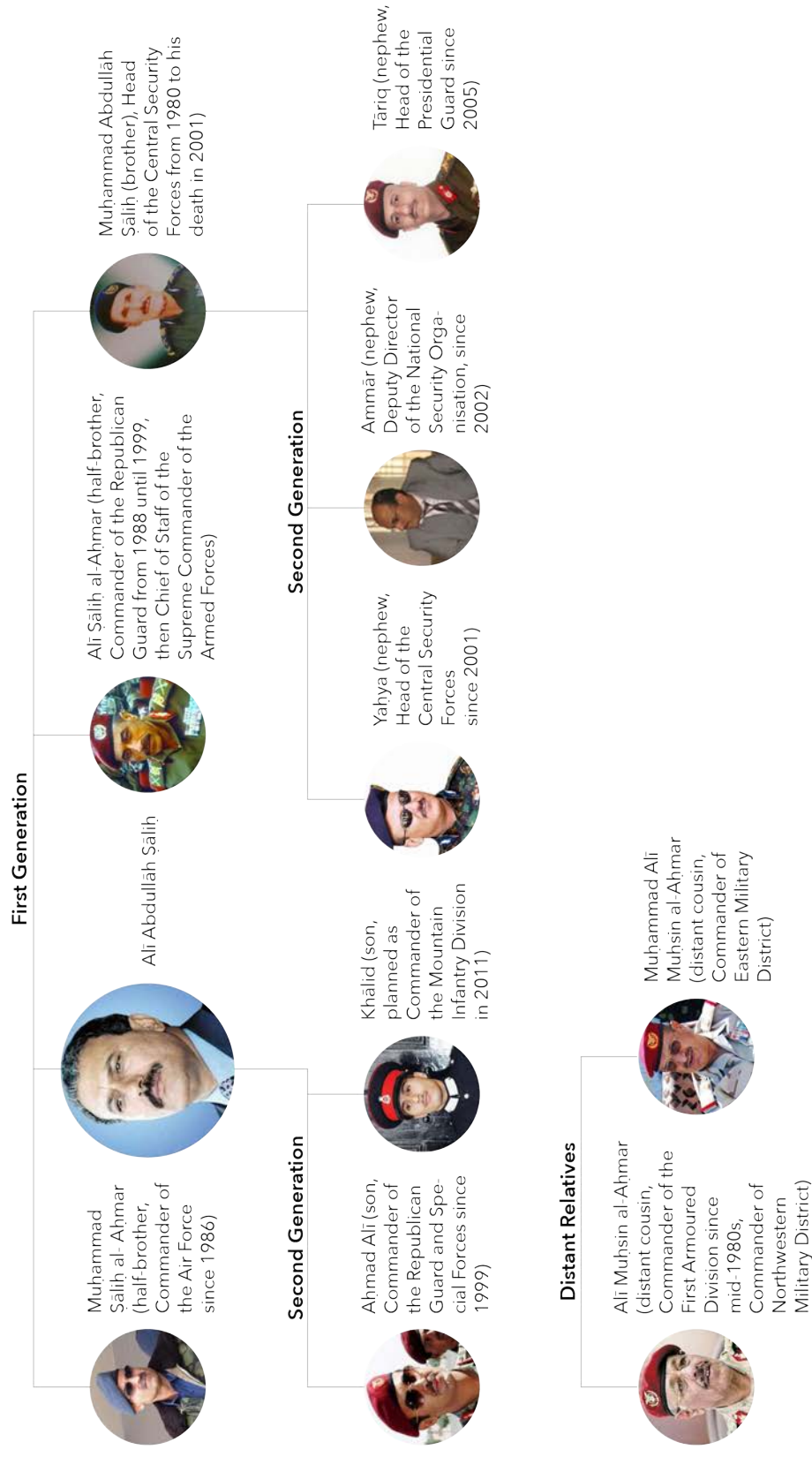


Figure 2: Key Family Relatives in Yemen's Armed Forces.

Aḥmad 'Alī's promotion was widely interpreted as an attempt to groom him for the presidency. Ṣāliḥ simultaneously appointed three of his nephews, Yaḥyā, 'Ammār and Ṭāriq, as commander of the Central Security Forces in 2001, deputy-head of the National Security Organisation in 2002, and commander of the Presidential Guard in 2005, respectively. Constitutional amendments in 2001, which granted Ṣāliḥ the authority to dissolve the parliament and extended presidential term limits further exacerbated the fears of regime insiders that his family would come to rule Yemen by itself.<sup>640</sup> In January 2011, documents surfaced with a plan to create the *firqa mushā jabalī* (Mountain Infantry Division) under the command of Ṣāliḥ's youngest son Khālīd – a direct competition to the *firqa* and thus the missing piece to cement the family's military command in the capital.<sup>641</sup> Numerous regime insiders, especially 'Alī Muḥsin and the al-Aḥmars, were strongly opposed to this kind of dynastic politics.<sup>642</sup> They felt that the curtailment of their influence constituted a violation of the power-sharing agreement struck in the late 1970s.<sup>643</sup>

As beneficiaries of Ṣāliḥ's patronage system, however, neither 'Alī Muḥsin nor the al-Aḥmar sons openly broke their relationship with Ṣāliḥ. While the share of oil revenues had risen from 30 percent of the state budget in 1990 to around 70-80 percent in the 2000s,<sup>644</sup> Yemen's oil wealth remained the principle source of economic patronage, which was distributed mainly through subsidies and oil concessions. The smuggling of subsidised diesel to Saudi Arabia became a profitable trade that allowed 'Alī Muḥsin – jointly with Ṣāliḥ's nephews Yaḥyā and 'Ammār – to amass hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>645</sup> According to a 2008 study, around half of the \$3.5 billion allocated to diesel subsidies were creamed off by smugglers.<sup>646</sup> Another lucrative source of income for 'Alī Muḥsin was the about 50-50 production-sharing agreement with the Canadian oil company Nexen for the Masila field (Block 14) in Ḥaḍramawt, whose local operations were managed by his son.

<sup>640</sup> 'Yemen: Country Profile 2001' (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2001).

<sup>641</sup> 'Al-Ra'īs Ṣāliḥ Yunshā' Quwa 'Askariya Jadida wa-Yaslam Qiyādathā li-Najla al-Aṣghar al-'Aqīd Khālīd (President Ṣāliḥ Creates a New Military Force and Hands its Leadership to his Youngest Son, Colonel Khālīd)', *Al-Maṣdar Online*, 29 January 2011.

<sup>642</sup> Wikileaks, 'ROYG Insiders Increasingly Frustrated With Saleh Clan' (05SANAA1352, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 23 May 2005); Wikileaks, 'Saleh And Cronies Draw Fire From A Broadening Swath Of ROYG Critics' (09SANAA1014, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 31 May 2009); Wikileaks, 'Another ROYG Insider Speaks Out: "He Won't Listen To Anyone"' (09SANAA1611, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 31 August 2009).

<sup>643</sup> Interview with a Close Confidant of 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar, Ṣan'ā', November 2013; Wikileaks, 'Another ROYG Insider Speaks Out'.

<sup>644</sup> 'Yemen: Country Profile 2008' (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 26 June 2008).

<sup>645</sup> Wikileaks, 'ROYG Insiders Increasingly Frustrated With Saleh Clan'; Yehya Salih Mohsin, 'Map of Corruption in Yemen: Influential Parties' (Yemen Observatory for Human Rights (YOHR), 2010).

<sup>646</sup> 'Yemen Economic Update' (The World Bank, Summer 2008); Sarah Phillips, 'Al-Qaeda and the Struggle for Yemen', *Survival* 53, no. 1 (February 2011).

Due to economic imperatives, however, Ṣāliḥ began to curtail the patronage privileges of close regime insiders from 2006 onwards. With oil production steadily in decline after its peak at around 440,000 barrels a day in 2001, the resources available for patronage became more limited.<sup>647</sup> In order to free additional resources for the state, Ṣāliḥ launched the National Agenda for Reform in 2006, which was promoted by a technocratic elite close to Aḥmad 'Alī.<sup>648</sup> As part of the same effort, Oil Minister Khālīd Baḥaḥ initiated a 'Yemenisation' campaign of the oil sector, which – though extremely slow in progress – let the Ministry of Oil to confer the operations of Block 14, whose contract was set to expire in December 2011, to the state-operated company PetroMasila.<sup>649</sup> Although early attempts to lift diesel subsidies in 2001 and 2005 caused riots that forced the regime to reverse much of the cuts, a tax reform law and some modest fuel subsidies were passed in 2010. Taken together, these measures caused an increasing rift between Ṣāliḥ and 'Alī Muḥsin, who was disproportionately disadvantaged by these cutbacks in patronage.

Another split emerged between Ṣāliḥ and Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar, the politically most ambitious of shaykh 'Abd Allāh's ten sons. In the mid-1990s, Ḥamīd used his father's influence to secure a predominant position in oil sales. As the local agent for the London-based Arcadia Petroleum Ltd., Ḥamīd bought crude at below-market value, sold it abroad and scared off competing companies by threatening to kidnap their representatives. These oil revenues, his ownership of Yemen's first mobile telecommunication company Sabafon and a major share in the Saba Islamic Bank turned Ḥamīd into a billionaire.<sup>650</sup> When Ṣāliḥ began grooming Aḥmad 'Alī – whom Ḥamīd has considered a political rival – for the presidency, the tribal billionaire started manoeuvring against Ṣāliḥ. In the run-up to the 2006 elections, he threw his financial and political weight behind Shamlān, bankrolling his campaign and organising rallies in his support in the Ḥāshid heartland.<sup>651</sup>

In March 2009, Yemen introduced a more competitive mechanism for oil sales under the direction of Aḥmad 'Alī, which opened the market to foreign companies and their local agents. The move severely curtailed his business empire under which Ḥamīd

<sup>647</sup> Although total government revenues rose in the period between 2002 and 2006 from 560 billion rial to 1.45 trillion rial due to the rise in oil prices, the share of the oil sector in Yemen's GDP shrank from over 17 percent in 2000 to only 11 percent in 2006. See 'Yemen: Country Profile 2008'.

<sup>648</sup> Peter Salisbury, 'Yemen's Economy: Oil, Imports and Elites' (Chatham House, October 2011).

<sup>649</sup> Raidan Al-Saqqaf, 'A New Era for Yemen's Oil Industry', *Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections*, 10 August 2006; 'Asbāb Inshiqāq 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar wa-Āl al-Aḥmar 'alā al-Ra'īs al-Yaman al-Sābiq 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ (The Reason for the Split between 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar and the al-Aḥmar Clan, and Former President 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ)', *al-Bayḍā' Press*, 27 December 2012.

<sup>650</sup> Wikileaks, 'Parliament Flexes Muscles, Challenges ROYG On Corruption' (05SANAA2920, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 10 October 2005).

<sup>651</sup> Longley Alley, 'The Rules of the Game'.

had amassed fortunes.<sup>652</sup> He therefore aggressively criticised Ṣālīḥ in August 2009 on al-Jazeera for turning Yemen into a family business, urging him 'to step aside.'<sup>653</sup> Later the same month, Ḥamīd smeared Ṣālīḥ in front of US Embassy officials and claimed that 'he would organize popular demonstrations throughout Yemen aimed at removing President Saleh from power unless the president "guarantee[d]" the fairness of the 2011 parliamentary elections, form[ed] a unity government with leaders from the Southern Movement, and remove[d] his relatives from positions of power by December 2009.'<sup>654</sup> When al-Aḥmar boasted to US Embassy staff about his efforts to coordinate between Ḥirāk and the Ḥūthīs to challenge the Ṣālīḥ regime, the US *chargé d'affaires* noted that '[t]he feverish pace of al-Ahmar's anti-Saleh plotting, along with his almost schizophrenic change in attitudes towards his would-be political allies from one meeting to the next, gives the impression that Ahmar considers politics as much a game as a vocation.'<sup>655</sup>

'Alī Muḥsin and Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar are only the two most noteworthy personalities in a larger trend of long-time regime insiders that grew increasingly impatient with the ever-growing concentration of power around the Ṣālīḥ family since the early 2000s. Other examples include such prominent figures as Ṣādiq and Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar, Muḥammad Najī al-Shā'if, Muḥammad Sālim Bāsindwa and Ṭāriq al-Faḍlī. These powerful elites, which all enjoyed direct access to the president, complained about Ṣālīḥ's intransigence, characterising him as immune to advice as well as 'unrealistically and stupidly confident.'<sup>656</sup> Although none of them openly broke with Ṣālīḥ, their steadily mounting discontent led

<sup>652</sup> Wikileaks, 'New Crude Oil Sales Mechanism Sparks Tribal Rivalry' (09SANAA1782, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 30 September 2009).

<sup>653</sup> Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar, *Al-Mushahid al-Siyāsī Fī-l-Yaman* (The Political Scene in Yemen), interview by Lawna al-Shabl, *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, 5 August 2009; 'Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar Wa-Barnāmeḥ Bilā Ḥodūd (Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar and the Without Borders Programme)', *Marib Press*, 10 August 2009; Wikileaks, 'Yemen: Hamid Al-Ahmar Sees Saleh As Weak And Isolated, Plans Next Steps'.

<sup>654</sup> Wikileaks, 'Yemen: Hamid Al-Ahmar Sees Saleh As Weak And Isolated, Plans Next Steps'; Wikileaks, 'Tribal Leader Hamid Al-Ahmar Stirs Up Yemeni Politics' (09SANAA1486, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 11 August 2009).

<sup>655</sup> Wikileaks, 'Hamid Al-Ahmar Tries His Hand At Coordinating Houthi, Southern Movement Efforts' (09SANAA1882, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 12 October 2009).

<sup>656</sup> Wikileaks, 'ROYG Insiders Increasingly Frustrated With Saleh Clan'; Wikileaks, 'Another ROYG Insider Speaks Out'; Wikileaks, 'Saleh And Cronies Draw Fire From A Broadening Swath Of ROYG Critics'; 'Khilāfāt Ḥāda bayn Awlād al-Shaykh 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar bi-Sabab Taṣrūfāt Ḥamīd wa-Ḥusayn Tam Faṣli min al-Ḥizb al-Ḥakim 'Ām 2005 bi-Qarār min Amāna al-Lajna al-Dā'ima (Sharp Differences between the Children of Shaykh 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar because of the Actions of Ḥamīd and Ḥusayn as he was Dismissed from the Ruling Party by Decision of the Secretariat of the Standing Committee)', *Lahj News*, 27 February 2011; 'Asbāb Inshqāq 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar wa-Āl al-Aḥmar 'alā al-Ra'īs al-Yaman al-Sābiq 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ'.



them to tacitly manoeuvre against the president, which laid the foundation for the rapid fragmentation of the political, military and tribal elite in 2011.

Following the relatively quiet second half of the 1990s, during which Yemen slowly recovered from the 1994 war, challenges from non-state actors came to the fore in the 2000s. In the wake of the USS Cole attack in 2000 and 9/11 attacks in 2001, Ṣāliḥ positioned Yemen as an ally of the United States in the 'war on terrorism.'<sup>657</sup> Due to the lessons from the 1991 Gulf War, he actively fostered cooperation with the American government to receive military assistance that would fortify the hold of his regime.<sup>658</sup> The main beneficiaries of US counterterrorism support became the Counter-Terrorism Unit of the CSF, the Yemen Coast Guard and the Republican Guard. In exchange, Ṣāliḥ pursued a policy of 'maximum cooperation,'<sup>659</sup> which gave the United States a free hand to launch drone strikes. Even though it caused a strong backlash when the US exploited a covert drone strike for public relations purposes in 2002, US-Yemeni counterterrorism cooperation was effective and by 2004, al-Qā'ida was believed to be under control.<sup>660</sup>

Instead of the anticipated praise for his cooperation against al-Qā'ida, Ṣāliḥ was publicly rebuked for endemic corruption and the failure to enact political and economic reforms when he visited Washington, D.C. in November 2005. The United States suspended Yemen from the \$20 million bilateral aid Millennium Challenge Account Threshold Programme, while World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz informed Ṣāliḥ that its aid to Yemen would be cut from \$420 to \$280 million.<sup>661</sup> As reported by one of his advisors on the return flight, the lesson from the visit was clear to Ṣāliḥ: 'Without an al-Qaida problem in Yemen, Yemen was just one more poor country in a world of beggars.'<sup>662</sup> Three months later, 23 incarcerated al-Qā'ida suspects escaped from a maximum-security prison. The prison break was widely suspected to have received assistance from the regime, which had maintained close relations to jihadists since the 1980s. In 2007, some of these

<sup>657</sup> Jonathan Schanzer, 'Yemen's War on Terror', *Orbis* 48, no. 3 (Summer 2004).

<sup>658</sup> François Burgat, 'Le Yémen Après Le 11 Septembre 2001: Entre Construction de l'État et Rétrécissement Du Champ Politique', *Critique Internationale*, no. 3 (2006): 9–21.

<sup>659</sup> Wikileaks, 'Abizaid Meeting With Saleh: Ct Ops In Yemen, Pakistan And Afghanistan; Iraq; Economic Assistance' (04SANAA680, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 24 March 2004).

<sup>660</sup> Azmat Khan, 'Understanding Yemen's Al Qaeda Threat', *PBS Frontline*, 29 May 2012.

<sup>661</sup> Wikileaks, 'President Saleh, After Washington Visit: "I Get It!"' (05SANAA3364, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 27 November 2005); Wikileaks, 'U.S. Convenes Donor Group To Confront Corruption In Yemen' (06SANAA3610, Embassy Sanaa, Yemen, 2 January 2006).

<sup>662</sup> Neal Conan, 'Al-Qaida In The Arabian Peninsula In Yemen', *Talk of the Nation* (NPR, 4 November 2010).

militants established al-Qā'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which set the path for Yemen to become one of the most notable theatres in the 'war on terrorism.'<sup>663</sup>

In light of the stalled political liberalisation, the regime faced a crisis of legitimacy in the mid-2000s. While al-Qā'ida proved a useful card to be played with the United States and its European allies, it was domestically of limited value. Soon, however, social protests by the *shabāb al-mū'min* (Believing Youths) provided Ṣāliḥ with an opportunity to deflect from pressing domestic problems and bolster the legitimacy of his regime. The movement, which emerged in the early 1990s against the Wahhābi proselytism that threatened the politico-religious identity of Zaydīs, the marginalisation of the northern territories, as well as the government's perceived subservience to the United States, gained momentum in 2002. Concerned by their adoption of the infamous *ṣarkha*<sup>664</sup> in 2003, which posed a direct challenge to his rule, Ṣāliḥ accused the movement of espousing an extremist ideology and misconstrued their goals as seeking to re-establish the Zaydī Imamate.<sup>665</sup> Although their leader Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī, a former Member of Parliament of the al-Haqq party, was as a Zaydī Sayyid theoretically qualified to lay claim to the Imamate, he demanded basic citizenship rights and religious freedoms, rather than a return to the pre-republican era. Rather than fearing the Imamate, however, Ṣan'ā' was alarmed that the *shabāb*'s protest might, in line with Zaydī tradition, be interpreted as *khurīj* against an unjust ruler.<sup>666</sup>

Although al-Ḥūthī showed goodwill to enter negotiations with the government, the regime – instead of addressing the grievances of the *shabāb al-mū'min* – clamped down on a Ḥūthī demonstration at the Grand Mosque in Ṣan'ā' in June 2004. Ṣāliḥ then tasked 'Alī Muḥsin with capturing Ḥusayn al-Ḥūthī, who launched a heavy-handed military incursion into Ṣa'da. After the *firqa* failed to quell the burgeoning rebel group, a small Special Forces unit under the command of Aḥmad 'Alī killed al-Ḥūthī in September 2004, whose martyrdom only further catalysed the movement. This uncharacteristically belligerent move was the first of a series of six Ṣa'da wars as northern governorates intermittently became the theatre of a war in 2004, 2005, 2005/2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009/2010. The lack commitment of the regime to resolve the conflict has frequently been criticised, as Human Rights Watch report from 2008 explained:

<sup>663</sup> Phillips, 'Yemen: Developmental Dysfunction and Division in a Crisis State'.

<sup>664</sup> The slogan *Allāhu Akbar / al-Mawt li-Amrīkā / al-Mawt li-Isrā'īl / al-La'na 'alā al-Yahūd / al-Naṣr li-l-Islām* means 'God is the Greatest / Death to America / Death to Israel / Damned be the Jews / Victory to Islam.'

<sup>665</sup> John E. Peterson, 'The Al-Huthi Conflict in Yemen', Arabian Peninsula Background Notes, August 2008.

<sup>666</sup> 'Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb', Middle East Report 86 (International Crisis Group, 27 May 2009).

The government in February 2007 and July 2008 has even arrested persons it had officially appointed to mediate between itself and the Huthis, in an attempt to suppress their activities, when they were about to criticize the government's commitment to come to a peaceful solution.<sup>667</sup>

The Ṣa'da conflict presented an opportunity for the regime to bolster its domestic legitimacy, which was built on the principle of republicanism. By conjuring up the internal threat of a Hāshimī Zaydī movement that sought a return to the Imamate, Ṣāliḥ managed to gain legitimacy for his regime as the defender of Yemen's republican system. He moreover reckoned that the conflict would deflect American pressures to purge the military and security apparatus from Islamist militants: an open war against the Ḥūthī movement allowed the regime to argue that it could not afford to open a second battlefield.<sup>668</sup>

While the brutal repression of the Ḥūthīs became emblematic of the increasing authoritarianism of the period, the conflict moreover became part of a strategy to reduce the influence of 'Alī Muḥsin. Although some have advanced the claim that the Ṣa'da wars were created in order for Ṣāliḥ to rid himself of 'Alī Muḥsin, such a reading ignores the historical roots of the conflict.<sup>669</sup> Nevertheless, the First Armoured Division, which was sent into war without reinforcements, became enmeshed in an unwinnable proxy-war designed to deplete and dislodge 'Alī Muḥsin's from their bases in Ṣan'ā', as well as discredit or even physically remove the major-general.<sup>670</sup> In the fifth Ṣa'da war, the Republican Guard gave anti-tank rockets from their arsenal to the Ḥūthīs that dealt a serious blow to the *firqa*. When the FAD retreated, it left arms depots for the Ḥūthīs to loot that were used against the Republican Guard in the sixth Ṣa'da war, which was designed to showcase Aḥmad 'Alī.<sup>671</sup> At the peak of the conflict in 2009-10, Ṣāliḥ provided the Saudi Air Force, which flew bombing raids against the Ḥūthīs, with targeting recommendations for an alleged

<sup>667</sup> Christoph Wilcke, 'Disappearances and Arbitrary Arrests in the Armed Conflict with Huthi Rebels in Yemen' (Human Rights Watch, 24 October 2008); Interview with 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Faqīh (Human Rights and Terrorism Researcher), Ṣan'ā', March 2013.

<sup>668</sup> Interview with 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Iryānī, Ṣan'ā', July 2013.

<sup>669</sup> Hussein Al-Laswās, 'Hal Sa-Yulāqī Al-Genarāl 'Alī Muḥsin Maṣīr Al-Mushīr 'Abd al-Ḥakīm 'Āmer?' (Will General 'Alī Muḥsin Suffer the Same Fate as Field Marshal 'Abd al-Ḥakīm 'Āmer?'), *Al-Maṣdar Online*, 6 October 2009; 'Abd al-Razāq Al-Jamal, 'Hal Arad Al-Nizām An Yatakhalaṣ Min 'Alī Muḥsin?: Wathā'iq "Wikīlīs" Tu'kid Ṣirā' Al-Ajniḥa Dākhlil Al-Usra Al-Ḥakima (Did the System Want to Depose of 'Alī Muḥsin?: "Wikileaks" Documents Confirm the Conflict Factions Within the Ruling Family)', *Al-Ḥadath*, 13 December 2010.

<sup>670</sup> 'Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb'.

<sup>671</sup> Interview with a Close Confidant of 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar, Ṣan'ā', November 2013; Interview with 'Alī al-Bukhaytī (Anṣār Allāh Representative in the NDC), Ṣan'ā', November 2013; 'Al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ: Ṣāliḥ Mutaḥim Bi-D'am al-Ḥūthiyyīn Bi-l-Dabābāt Wa-Rājimāt al-Ṣawārīkh Wa-Nahīb Makhzūn al-Ḥaras Min al-Asliha (Middle East: Saleh Accused of Supporting Hūthi with Tanks and Rocket Launchers and Looting Stocks of Guard Weapons)', *Yemen Voice*, 2 September 2012.

Hūthī site that turned out to be 'Alī Muḥsin's headquarters. Although the Saudi pilots aborted the mission, the incident left major-general Muḥsin to nurse a lethal grudge.<sup>672</sup>

The Southern Movement, *ḥirāk al-janūbī*, provided Ṣāliḥ with another opportunity to bolster the legitimacy of his regime. Although its origins are often traced back to 2007, Ḥirāk was a continuation of previous contentious episodes that transpired in the aftermath of the 1994 war.<sup>673</sup> From 1996 onwards, popular committees launched frequent protests in the southern governorates. Not coincidentally, al-Ḍālī' and Lahj, which had been the epicentre of the NLF insurgency that began on 14 October 1963, became a hotspot for protests and clashes with northern security forces.<sup>674</sup> In late 2001, the *multaqā abnā' al-muḥafazāt al-janūb wa-l-sharq* (The Forum of the Sons of the Southern and Eastern Provinces) began to demand equal opportunities, strengthening local government, as well as ending the marginalisation and exploitation of South Yemenis.<sup>675</sup> Once again, rather than ameliorating grievances, Ṣāliḥ ignored their demands; the marginalisation of the Southern governorates continued unabated, while Southerners were treated as second-class citizens.

In 2007, protests by former army officers against their forced retirement and low pensions mounted in the creation of the South Yemen Retired Army Officers Committee. In the polarised political environment of the Southern governorates, this single-issue group drew a larger following from other segments of society that culminated in the foundation of a full-blown movement on 7 July 2007 – *ḥirāk al-janūbī al-silmī*. Although its protests remained predominantly peaceful, the regime responded with utmost severity to Ḥirāk.<sup>676</sup> The sustained, heavy-handed regime repression over the following months escalated the movement's goals from rights-based demands, including equal access to the state, local autonomy, rule of law and a just distribution of land and resources, to full-fledged calls for independence by late 2008.<sup>677</sup> Although negotiations transpired between Ḥirāk leaders and the government, the former repeatedly complained that the latter did not act in good faith,

<sup>672</sup> Wikileaks, 'Saudi Arabia: Renewed Assurances On Satellite Imagery' (10RIYADH159, Embassy Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 7 February 2010).

<sup>673</sup> Interview with Khālīd BāMudhaf (Retired Brigadier-General and Founding Member of Ḥirāk), Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>674</sup> 'Yemen: Coping with Terrorism and Violence in a Fragile State', Middle East Report 8 (International Crisis Group, 8 January 2003).

<sup>675</sup> Sa'īd Thābit, 'Multaqā al-Janūbīyīn Hal Yaḍ'a al-Yaman fī Wajhat al-'Awāṣif Muḥadadān? (Does the Forum of Southerners Put Yemen in the Face of Storms again?)', *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, 20 January 2002.

<sup>676</sup> Peter Bouckaert, 'In the Name of Unity: The Yemeni Government's Brutal Response to Southern Movement Protests' (Human Rights Watch, December 2009).

<sup>677</sup> 'Abd al-Ghanī Al-Iryānī and April Longley Alley, 'Southern Aspirations and Salih's Exasperation: The Looming Threat of Secession in South Yemen', Viewpoints: Discerning Yemen's Political Future (Middle East Institute, June 2009).

but attempted to co-opt the movement.<sup>678</sup> Ḥirāk's calls for independence, in turn, allowed Ṣāliḥ to champion the narrative that its regime was a much-needed bulwark against the threats to Yemeni unity. Ṣāliḥ has not only repeatedly invoked this threat in his public speeches,<sup>679</sup> but put up huge billboards across the country in 2010, which showed his face next to the slogan: *al-waḥida aw al-mawt* – unity or death.<sup>680</sup>

The conflicts with the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk, as well as al-Qā'ida, are emblematic of the politics of calculated chaos that Ṣāliḥ employed in the first decade of the 2000s. While he might not have deliberately nurtured these conflicts, he certainly refrained from attempting to resolve these challenges, as they remained useful instruments of domestic and foreign policy.<sup>681</sup> They followed a simple logic. While al-Qā'ida primarily served as a cash cow in his dealings with foreign powers, the internal threats of the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk allowed Ṣāliḥ to position the regime as the defender of republicanism and Yemeni unity. In other words, they suggested – as Ṣāliḥ repeatedly invoked during the citizen revolt – that there were no viable alternatives to his rule. Taken together, the erratic and limited political liberalisation process since the Yemeni unification of 1990, the creeping 'oligarchisation' of power since the 1994 war, and the 'politics of calculated chaos' gave rise to a temporary coalition of political actors that tipped the scales against the regime in the citizen revolt of 2011. Although these actors, which encompassed civil society organisations, opposition parties, disgruntled powerbrokers, as well as the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk, had little in common, their interests converged in a single goal: the overthrow of the regime of 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ.

<sup>678</sup> Interview with Khālīd BāMudhaf, Ṣan'ā', November 2013; 'Breaking Point? Yemen's Southern Question', Middle East Report 114 (International Crisis Group, 20 October 2011).

<sup>679</sup> See for example, 'Bi-L-Fīdīyū: Al-Ra'īs Al-Yamanī Al-Sābiq Ya'ūd Li-Khiṭāb Al-Histūrī: "Al-Waḥida Aw Al-Mawt"' (On Video: Former Yemeni President Returns for a Hysterical Speech: "Death or Unity"), *Najam Al-Mukalla*, 17 October 2014.

<sup>680</sup> Nicole Stracke and Mohammed Saif Haidar, 'The Southern Movement in Yemen' (Gulf Research Center and Sheba Center for Strategic Studies, April 2010).

<sup>681</sup> Tobias Thiel, 'The Middle East Despot's 13-Point Guide to Longevity and Prosperity', *Middle East Report*, no. 269 (Winter 2013).

# 4

## **Yemen's Citizen Revolt: Revolution, Counterrevolution and Elite Hijacking**

Although triggered by the political earthquake in Tunisia, the emergence and distinct local trajectory of Yemen's citizen revolt in 2011 were the culmination of the abovementioned processes. This chapter describes how the mobilisations in North Africa broadened opportunities for contentious collective action, which were seized by early risers in mid-January – initially with only tacit support from the established political opposition. In February and March, when the Joint Meeting Parties bandwagoned with the revolution, the largely uncoordinated youth groups developed organisational structures, innovated contentious repertoires, aligned their demands in reference to historical experiences, and eventually catalysed into a full-blown revolutionary movement. The Ṣālīḥ regime pursued numerous strategies to contain the uprising, ranging from political and economic concessions, the mobilisation of a counter-revolutionary movement, to downright violence. Propelled by the regime's increasingly brutal repression, which culminated in the 'Friday of Dignity' massacre on 18 March, the traditional elite structure held together by Ṣālīḥ's narrowing patronage system fragmented – a process that had its origins in the mid-1990s.

However, the ensuing wave of political, military, tribal and religious elite defections between became a double-edged sword for the movement. On the one hand, the mutiny provided political backing, coercive means, and financial support to a movement with few resources. On the other hand, elite powerbrokers – many of whom had constituted the very backbone of Ṣālīḥ's 33-year-long rule – hijacked and polarised the uprising for their own political gain. Amidst a parallel track of political negotiations between ruling party moderates and opposition politicians under the aegis of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) from March to November 2011, episodes of heavy violence erupted between regime loyalists and the backers of the revolution, and in early June, 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ incurred heavy wounds in an attempted assassination. After months of foot-dragging, tit-for-tat and internecine violence that brought Yemen to the verge of a civil war, Ṣālīḥ finally signed the power transfer deal in November 2011. The deal granted him immunity in exchange for his resignation and set down an ambitious 2-phase roadmap for stabilisation and reforms.

***Shifting Paradigms: The Tunisian Catalyst and the Revolt of the Youth***

The spark for the Yemeni uprising did not originate in the country's plethora of long-standing grievances, but about 4,000 kilometres away in Tunisia: on 17 December 2010, Muḥammad al-Bū'azīzī, a 26-year-old vegetable vendor with a useless university degree, humiliated and without recourse to redress, covered his body in petrol and set himself on fire.<sup>682</sup> Soaring commodity prices in late 2010 and the actions of corrupt officials provided the immediate trigger for his desperate act of public suicide.<sup>683</sup> Al-Bū'azīzī became a symbol for the Arab predicament. His self-immolation unleashed a wave of nationwide protests in Tunisia that culminated in the ouster of President Zayn al-Ābidīn bin 'Alī less than a month later on 14 January.<sup>684</sup> As satellite television, newspapers and social media diffused the news about the political earthquake, sustained mass protests rapidly spread across the Arab world.<sup>685</sup> Social conditions in late 2010 were similar, but even more precarious in Yemen, which became one of the first countries to emulate the Tunisian experience. The impacts of a triple food, fuel and financial global crises had led to a decline in food security and living standards. Although the effects of the 2007/8 food and fuel crises were not immediately felt because oil-driven growth temporarily outbalanced their macroeconomic pressures, the drop in oil prices with the financial crisis of 2008/9 led poverty rates to increase from 34.8 percent in 2005/2006 to 42.8 in 2009 in Yemen.<sup>686</sup>

However, those most affected by these trends, the predominantly rural poor, were not among the early risers of the emerging citizen revolt. Traditionally predisposed to contentious mobilisation, urban intellectuals, political activists, as well as university students and unemployed graduates were the first to organise collective action against the regime of 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ. Although 11 February 2011 is celebrated as the official beginning of Yemen's revolution, these societal segments began challenging the regime as early as 15 January, when the student organisation of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) at Ṣan'ā'

<sup>682</sup> Yesmin Ryan, 'The Tragic Life of a Street Vendor', *Al Jazeera English*, 20 January 2011.

<sup>683</sup> Marga Peeters and Ronald Albers, 'Food Prices, Government Subsidies and Fiscal Balances in South Mediterranean Countries' (European Commission, General Directorate Economic and Financial Affairs, 20 March 2012).

<sup>684</sup> Yesmin Ryan, 'How Tunisia's Revolution Began', *Al Jazeera English*, 26 January 2011.

<sup>685</sup> Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Mauritania, Palestine, Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Sudan (January), Iraq, Bahrain, Libya, Kuwait, Morocco and Western Sahara, Oman (February), and Syria (March).

<sup>686</sup> Clemens Breisinger et al., 'Impacts of the Triple Global Crisis on Growth and Poverty: The Case of Yemen', *Development Policy Review* 29, no. 2 (2011); Clemens Breisinger, Olivier Ecker, and Perrihan Al-Riffai, 'Die wirtschaftlichen Ursachen des Arabischen Frühlings: Der Weg von der Revolution zu Transformation und Ernährungssicherheit (The Economic Causes of the Arab Spring: The Road from the Revolution to Transformation and Food Security)', IFPRI Dossier (International Food Policy Research Institute, May 2011).

University issued a declaration in which it called on youth to draw on the revolutionary experience in Tunisia.<sup>687</sup> Well-known political activists and intellectuals, such as Tawakkul Karmān, Bushrā al-Maqtārī, Sāmīya al-Aghbarī, Bilqīs al-Lahabī, Arwā 'Uthmān, Amal al-Bāshā, Khālīd al-Ansī, Aḥmad Sayf Ḥāshid, Shawkī al-Qādī, Ḥussām al-Sharjabī, Aḥmad bin Mubārak as well as 'Alī and Muḥammad al-'Imād moreover began organising regular protest marches. Many of these local leaders were affiliated with CSOs, and could thus draw on pre-existing mobilising structures and networks that spun across Yemen.<sup>688</sup>

Even though they lacked a singular leadership figure, the protests were neither fully spontaneous, nor acephalous during the pre-movement phase due to the role of these organisational structures and activist elite in funnelling popular resentment. With few exceptions, the early marches fell short of full-blown calls for toppling the regime, but focused on unemployment, poor living conditions and a controversial package of constitutional amendments that would have allowed President Ṣāliḥ to be re-elected indefinitely.<sup>689</sup> The early activism was conducive to the emergence of a popular movement as it exposed the vulnerability of the regime and lowered political opportunity costs for those less prone to mobilise politically. The contextualisation of the events as *thawra shabābiya* (youth revolution), which began in early February, moreover provided a collective action frame that resonated with the Yemeni public in unison with regional events. Even though most protestors were in their 20s and 30s, the concept of youth was less related to age than family status, professional accomplishments and reformist political attitudes.<sup>690</sup>

Between 17 and 20 January, activists organised daily protest marches (*masīrāt*) in Ṣan'ā', Ta'izz and 'Adan, which brought a few thousand demonstrators into the streets of the major cities. Although such marches were no rarity in Yemen, civil society groups had – with the exception of South Yemen – rarely been able garner more than a few hundred participants. In the early morning hours of 23 January, plain-clothed security forces arrested protest leader Tawakkul 'Abd al-Salām Karmān, the co-founder of *ṣaḥāfiyāt bilā quyūd* (Female Journalists Without Chains) and daughter of a former Minister of Legal and Parliamentary Affairs who resigned in response to the 1994 war, for organising unlicensed demonstrations. She was released only 30 hours later as the seizure of the mother of three

<sup>687</sup> Al-Sharjabī, 'Al-Kutlat al-Tārīkhīya li-Thawrat al-Hurrīya wa-l-Taghīr fī al-Yaman'.

<sup>688</sup> Interview with Rāfat al-Akḥālī (Independent Youth Activist, later Minister of Youth and Sports), Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>689</sup> 'Qanbala Al-Mawsim: al-Ḥākim Yaqṣum Ḍahar al-M'ūārāḍa bi-Ta'dīlāt Tanqīl al-Yaman li-l-Niḍām al-Ri'āsi'; Mounassar, 'Yemen Adopts Principle of Constitutional Amendment'; Al-Salāmī, 'Al-Shaykh Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar Yuḥadhir min ay Ta'dīlāt Dustūrīya Tanāl min Thawābit wa-Muktasibāt al-Sha'b'.

<sup>690</sup> Interview with Amal al-Bāshā (NGO Leader and Women's Rights Activist), Ṣan'ā', February 2013.



in a night raid without an arrest warrant only further fuelled the determination of protestors.<sup>691</sup> Karmān became an international figurehead of the movement and was later awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace prize, but remained controversial within the movement.

On 25 January 2011, a small group of activists gathered in front of the Egyptian Embassy in Ṣan'ā' in solidarity with the masses that had begun flooding the streets of Cairo. Emboldened by the transnational diffusion of protests from Tunisia to Egypt, they directed – for the first time – the popular slogan *al-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ al-niẓām* (the people want to overthrow the system) against the regime of 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ.<sup>692</sup> Even though small pockets of independent activists already demanded Ṣāliḥ's deposition by late January, calls for political reforms still eclipsed demands for regime change. Many Yemenis feared that the overthrow of the regime could lead to a power vacuum, or worse, civil war, while the prospect that the revolt could bring the conservative Iṣlāḥ party to power left liberals, leftists and women with ambiguous feelings. Nevertheless, the following days witnessed a steady increase in the number of protest marches across Yemen. The early protest phase culminated on 3 February as organisers called for a *yawm al-ghaḍab* ('Day of Rage') that drew tens of thousands of demonstrators into the streets of the major cities.<sup>693</sup>

Although Yemen's tapestry of longstanding grievances provided a fertile breeding ground for the burgeoning protest movement, they did not provide the necessary impetus for the emergence of contention by themselves. It was Bin 'Alī's unanticipated departure on 14 January that ushered in a paradigm shift in the perception of political opportunities. The news of his overthrow exposed the vulnerability of authoritarian governments in the region – conventionally believed to be resilient against popular activism – and confirmed that ordinary people could topple the veteran strongmen that had ruled the region for decades. Activists testified that the events in North Africa helped break the psychological fear barrier, which had inhibited collective action: 'We felt that if Egypt couldn't suppress the protestors, neither could Yemen.'<sup>694</sup> The fall of Bin 'Alī on 14 January and the resignation of Mubārak on 11 February generated expectations for regime change in

<sup>691</sup> 'Al-Niyāba Tanfī Amar al-Dākhiliya bi-I'atiqāl Tawakkul Karmān (Prosecution Denies that the Ministry of the Interior Ordered the Arrest of Tawakkul Karman)', *Al-Waṭan*, 23 January 2011.

<sup>692</sup> Interview with Ranā Jarhūm (Independent Youth Activist), 'Ammān, September 2012; Interview with Ibrāhīm Mothanā (Independent Youth Activist), Ṣan'ā', March 2012.

<sup>693</sup> 'Akhir Taṭawarāt Muẓāharāt "Yawm al-Ghaḍab" Fī-l-Yaman (Taḥdīth Mubāshir) (Recent Developments of "Day of Rage" Demonstrations in Yemen (Live Update))', *Al-Maṣḍar Online*, 3 February 2011.

<sup>694</sup> Interview with Ibrāhīm Mothanā, Ṣan'ā', March 2012; 'Masīrat Mu'ida li-l-Thawra al-Maṣriya Taṭḥawl Ila Muẓahara ḍud Niẓām Ṣāliḥ fī Ṣan'ā' wa-A'taqāl 6 Ashkhāṣ (March in Support of the Egyptian Revolution Turned into a Demonstration against the Ṣāliḥ Regime in Ṣan'ā' and the Arrest of 6 People)', *Al-Maṣḍar Online*, 11 February 2011.

Yemen, which led to a surge in demonstrations in the days after the events. In a bold interview on al-Jazeera Arabic in early February, journalist and activist Bilqīs al-Lahabī put the Tunisian catalyst in a nutshell: ‘Şāliḥ threatens us with Somalisation, Iraqisation and Afghanistanisation, but we will now threaten him with Tunisisation.’<sup>695</sup>

A shared sense of predicament and solidarity prevailed among protest movements across the Arab region. Yemeni demonstrators held up portraits of Muḥammad al-Bū‘azīzī during the early marches, while a young man from al-Bayḍā’, as well as several others, emulated al-Bū‘azīzī’s act of desperation. Activists wore purple bandanas to express their solidarity with Tunisia’s Jasmine revolution. Most noticeable, however, was the diffusion of tactics, slogans and repertoires of contention across the region. The success of the Tunisian and the Egyptian movements provided a powerful blueprint for defeating Arab dictatorships with non-violent mass protests and civil resistance. The popular slogans *al-sha‘b yurīd isqāt al-niẓām* and *irḥal!* (Leave!), first used by the Tunisian revolutionaries, became central rhetorical devices of the Yemeni movement.

Notwithstanding the Tunisian catalyst, the burgeoning movement was deeply grounded in the existing organisational structures of well-established civil society organisations, social movements and political parties that had emerged since the early 1990s. The first category included such groups as Iṣlāḥ-affiliated *ṣaḥāfiyāt bilā quyūd*, whose chair Tawakkul Karmān became one of the most active organisers. Similarly, Amal al-Bāshā of the Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights acted as a major *agent provocateur* against the regime. The National Organisation for Defending Rights and Freedoms, whose members are affiliated with the Iṣlāḥ party, monitored human rights violations against protestors. Members of the Youth Leadership Development Foundation later organised a series of workshops among youth representatives to agree on a joint set of demands.<sup>696</sup> The Tamkeen Development Foundation published a short citizen guide, which informed about basic concepts for the *al-dawla al-madanīya* (civil state).<sup>697</sup>

The Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk declared their support for the citizen revolt within weeks of the first protest. On 15 February, ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī, the 33-year-old Ḥūthī leader, gave a speech in front of tens of thousands of supporters in which he accused the Şāliḥ

<sup>695</sup> ‘Şāliḥ Yuhadiddunā bi-l-Şawmala wa-l-‘Iraqana wa-l-Afghana wa-lakin Nahnu al-ān sa-Nahadidduhu bi-l-Tūnisa,’ February 2011.

<sup>696</sup> Interview with Gabūl al-Mutawakkil, Şan‘ā’, November 2013.

<sup>697</sup> Maḥmūd Al-Bukārī, Munīr Al-Ghārātī, and Murād Al-Ghārātī, ‘Dalīl al-Muwāṭin ila al-Dawla al-Madanīya: Mufākira al-Dīmūqrāṭīya (Citizen’s Guide to the Civil State: Democratic Pocket Book)’ (Mu’assasat Tamkīn li-l-Tanmīya (Tamkeen Development Foundation) / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, September 2011).

regime of having lost its sovereignty to the United States and called on people to protest against the tyranny and oppression of the authorities in order to bring down the system.<sup>698</sup> After this announcement, the Ḥūthīs began establishing a presence in Ṣan‘ā’. A number of prominent Southern personalities, including former PDRY president and self-proclaimed leader of Ḥirāk in exile ‘Alī Sālīm al-Bīḍ, moreover announced his support for the revolt and members of Ḥirāk began to organise anti-regime demonstrations.<sup>699</sup>

The JMP's initial response, which was primarily influenced by the political position of the Iṣlāḥ party, remained cautious and ambivalent. Members of the junior partners in the coalition tacitly welcomed the largely street revolt from the sidelines to sound out the government response. Iṣlāḥ, on the other hand, had much to lose from a direct confrontation with the regime, as many in its top leadership continued to benefit from Ṣāliḥ's patronage network. Still, many party members supported or engaged in the protests in their individual capacity or through affiliated civil society organisations. The most prominent example is that of Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar, a tribal billionaire and influential member of Iṣlāḥ, who had for years manoeuvred against Ṣāliḥ. Even though he did not publicly associate with the movement, al-Aḥmar bankrolled protests and directed youths to the streets, while his television channel Suhayl provided favourable news coverage.<sup>700</sup>

Although the JMP remained a latecomer to the uprising, Philbrick Yadav argues that the ties and networks created around the ideologically diverse JMP was instrumental in the development of ‘post-partisan nationalism [as] a necessary antecedent of the revolution.’<sup>701</sup> Weighing the risks and benefits, the JMP remained in the background and primarily conceived of the protests as a means to strengthen their bargaining position and extract concessions for political reforms.<sup>702</sup> In the early stages, the JMP thus continued to negotiate with the GPC over resuming the 2010 national dialogue and a resignation deal before the end of Ṣāliḥ's 7-year term in September 2013. Outraged by the opposition's acquiescence, the protestors on the street demanded that the JMP abandon such

<sup>698</sup> ‘Abd al-Malik Al-Ḥūthī, ‘Speech on the Anniversary of the Prophet's Birthday’, 15 February 2011.

<sup>699</sup> Fawwāz Ṭrābulṣī, ‘.. wa-Ṭāghīya Ākhir Yajib an Yasqaṭ (... and Another Tyrant Must Fall)’, *Al-Safir*, 13 March 2011.

<sup>700</sup> ‘Shaykh Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar: Kul Arāḍīnā Muliknāhā bi-Ṭuruq Shara‘īya..wa-Ḥumaītu al-Naḥl al-Yamanī min Aṭīmā’ (Ṣāliḥ) li-Akthar min ‘Ashar Sanawāt (Shaykh Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar: All of Our Lands Were Obtained in Legitimate Ways...and I Protected Yemen's Oil from “Ṣāliḥ's” Ambitions for more than 10 Years)’, *Yemen Today*, 14 May 2013.

<sup>701</sup> Yadav, ‘Antecedents of the Revolution’, 551.

<sup>702</sup> ‘Ṣa‘da Rallies Repeat “The People Want the Fall of the Regime”’, *National Yemen*, 26 February 2011.

negotiations, which was best captured in the popular slogan *'lā tafāwad, lā ḥiwār / istiḡāla aw firār'* ('no negotiations, no dialogue / resign or escape').<sup>703</sup>

### ***Revolutionary Honeymoon: Movement Formation, Demands and Repertoires***

In February, a concerted revolutionary movement developed to overthrow the Yemeni regime. Hundreds of small youth groups emerged, began forming alliances, and eventually connected with other groups across the country. Countrywide participation reached the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, even if the *qāt* routine regularly dispersed the protests around lunchtime. In order to maintain the momentum of the protests and prevent fatigue as the conflict protracted, activists in major cities began sit-ins (*i'ṭisām*), in which they occupied public squares. On 3 February – the so-called Day of Rage – a few hundred protestors erected tents on the public square in front of Ṣan'ā' University and relabelled it *sāḥat al-tagḥīr* (Change Square). Security forces attempted to remove the squatters on several occasions, but to no avail. By the end of the month, the square had become the epicentre of the popular uprising and a large sign that read *marḥabān bikum fī awwal kīlūmitir karāma* ('Welcome to the first kilometre of dignity) adorned one of its entrances.

On 28 February, the JMP officially reneged on continued dialogue with the regime.<sup>704</sup> Although backchannel meetings continued, Iṣlāḥ reconsidered its official position in light of the increasingly violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters, Ṣāliḥ's reluctance to yield substantial concessions and the unpopularity of negotiations among the youth. Although elections were still the preferred way of power transfer, the party argued, the history of election fraud necessitated a peaceful revolutionary approach.<sup>705</sup> At Change Square in Ṣan'ā', a 20-person committee – the so-called *al-lajna al-tanzīmīya li-thawra al-shabābīya al-sha'bīya* (Organising Committee of the Popular Youth Revolution) – was formed, which reflected the four main currents in the revolutionary movement: the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), particularly Iṣlāḥ, Ḥirāk, the Ḥūthīs and independent individuals.

Iṣlāḥ was represented by the new-founded *al-munasiqīya al-'aliyā li-l-thawra al-yamanīya* (The Higher Coordination Body of the Yemeni Revolution), while the Ḥūthīs participated under the umbrella of the *shabāb al-ṣumūd* (Steadfast Youth), which, in theory, provided people from Ṣa'da with a rare chance to have their voices heard in the Yemeni

<sup>703</sup> 'Ādil Muḥāhid Al-Sharḥabī, 'Al-Thawra al-Baṭīy'a: al-Namūdḥaj al-Yamanī li-Isqāt al-Niḡām wa-Binā' al-Dawla al-Madanīya (The Slow Revolution: The Yemeni Model to Overthrow the Regime and Build a Civil State)', *Al-Safīr*, 17 April 2013.

<sup>704</sup> Laura Kasinof, 'Opposition in Yemen Supports Protesters', *The New York Times*, 28 February 2011.

<sup>705</sup> Muḥammad Al-Ghābarī, 'Al-Tajammu' al-Yamanī li-l-Iṣlāḥ wa-Thawra Fibrāyir 2011 (The Yemeni Congregation for Reform and the Revolution of February 2011)', *al-islāh.net*, 29 March 2014.

capital. Although different branches of Ḥirāk were represented by their own youth groups, they were mainly active in the southern governorates.<sup>706</sup> While the Ḥūthīs and Iṣlāḥ, and to a lesser extent Ḥirāk, had relatively coherent command structures, the independent camp consisted of hundreds of small groups and coalitions without a unified leadership. The most influential independent coalitions were the *al-taḥāluf al-madanī li-l-thawra al-shabābīya* (Civic Coalition of Revolutionary Youth, CCRY), the *al-majlis al-tansīqī li-shabāb thawrāt al-taghīyr* (Coordinating Council for the Youth Revolution of Change, CCYRC), the *al-kutla al-madanīya* (Civil Bloc) and the *majlis shabāb al-thawra al-silmīya* (Youth Council for the Peaceful Revolution). While this horizontal leadership structure prevented the independent camp from being co-opted by political parties, it also meant that these groups were unable to assert their demands with the same force as the more seasoned political actors.

Apart from these political blocs, sit-in participants were organised along regional, tribal, professional or other lines. What had started by a few independent students and activists became a diverse mass movement of tens of thousands protestors: Islamists, socialists and Ḥūthīs; doctors and engineers next to illiterate tribesmen; *akhdām*, a socially marginalised group of dark complexion; *sāda*, elderly shaykhs and adolescent students; women's rights activists and military deserters. In a country unknown for progressive attitudes towards women, tens of thousands of Yemeni women played an active and important role in the everyday activism of the movement, even if their leaders were largely marginalised in the decision-making of (post-)revolutionary politics. For many of these female activists, the goal to overthrow the regime was but a vehicle for a social revolution to improve the status of women in Yemeni society.<sup>707</sup>

<sup>706</sup> Interview with Badr BāSalama (Ḥirāk Representative in the NDC), Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>707</sup> Zakarīyā Al-Kamālī, 'Tā' al-Tānīth Tathabut Ḥuḍḥūriha fī al-Yaman (Feminisation Proves Its Presence in Yemen)', *Al-Akhhār*, 8 October 2011.

**List of Major Coalitions at Change Square in Ṣan‘ā’**









Name	Role / Affiliation	Logo	Principle Members
<i>al-lajna al-tanzīmiyya li-thawra al-shabābiyya al-sha ‘biya</i> (Organising Committee of the Popular Youth Revolution)	Principle organisers of Ṣan‘ā’ Change Square		Representatives from independent coalitions, <i>al-munasiqiyya</i> and <i>shabāb al-ṣumūd</i>
<i>al-majlis al-tansīqī li-shabāb thawrāt al-taghīr</i> (Coordinating Council for the Youth Revolution of Change, CCYRC, Arabic acronym: ta-na-wa-‘ayn)	Independent coalition		Aḥmad bin Mubārak, Wamīḍ Shākar
<i>ḥarakat aḥrār li-l-taghīr fi-l-yaman</i> (Free Movement for Change in Yemen)	Coalition of independent and leftist groups		-
<i>al-taḥāluf al-madanī li-l-thawra al-shabābiyya</i> (Civic Coalition of Revolutionary Youth, CCRY)	Independent coalition		Aḥmad Sayf Ḥāshid, Ḥussām al-Sharjabī, Rāfat al-Akhalī
<i>al-kutla al-madanīya</i> (Civil Block)	Independent coalition		‘Abd al-Rashīd al-Faqīh
<i>majlis shabāb al-thawra al-silmīya</i> (Youth Council for the Peaceful Revolution)	Independent coalition with links to Islāḥ		Tawakkul Karmān, Khālīd al-‘Anīsī
<i>al-munasiqiyya al-‘aliyā li-l-thawra al-yamaniyya</i> (The Supreme Coordination Body of the Yemeni Revolution)	Islāḥ		Yāsir al-Ru‘aynī
<i>shabāb al-ṣumūd</i> (Steadfast Youth)	Hūthī Movement		Khālīd al-Madanī, Ḥabīb al-‘Arīqī

Table 3: List of Major Coalitions in Ṣan‘ā’.

Apart from Ṣan'ā', tent camps arose in Ta'izz, 'Adan and at least five other provincial capitals. In July 2011, the Yemen Polling Centre (YPC) counted 1,750 tents of various sizes in Ṣan'ā', 750 in al-Hudayda, 468 in Ibb, 155 in 'Adan, as well as 23 tents at Ta'izz's *sāḥat al-hurriyya* (Freedom Square).<sup>708</sup> The latter number does not adequately reflect the strength of the uprising in Ta'izz since security forces had massacred dozens of protestors and burned tents in a night raid on 29 May, which forced most of the remaining activists to evacuate the square.<sup>709</sup> On the contrary, sometimes described by Yemenis as the 'heart of the revolution,' the city, which has between 500,000 and 1 million inhabitants, became one of the liveliest sites of the citizen revolt. Located in the fertile southern highlands of the *minṭaqa al-wuṣṭā*, Ta'izz became Yemen's unofficial industrial and mercantile capital. Due to its relatively large educated, urbanised elite, Ta'izz became an incubator for movement and simultaneously a site of the harshest regime repression. As the powerbase of Shāfi'i merchants, it draws on a rich historical legacy of contention. Ta'izz became the epicentre of Free Yemeni Movement in the early 1940s and the birthplace of both the YSP and Iṣlāḥ. The threat emanating from political movements in Ta'izz has led Ṣāliḥ to stifle any traces of emerging political activism over the last decades, albeit with modest success.<sup>710</sup>

The tent cities, which provided a variety of social services that catered to the every need of protestors, were key to sustain mobilisation. They became vibrant centres of art, dance, comedy, satire, caricatures, graffiti and even family celebrations, such as weddings. Public stages broadcast political speeches, music, theatre and poetry. Academics provided free lectures and courses on topics ranging from good governance to civil disobedience through to constitutional principles. Doctors set up field hospitals to tend to those wounded in clashes with security forces or *balāṭiga* (regime thugs). Imams led prayers for the faithful. A public relations task force was established under the *al-lajna al-tanzīmīya*, which became an interface with the media and the international community. Through its 20,000-member Facebook group, the CCYRC publicised human rights violations, mapped independent youth groups and coordinated among them. Volunteers provided food, organised garbage disposal and bathrooms, while *qāt* vendors supplied the campers with the popular, mild narcotic leaves. A volunteer-based security system helped keep the area free of weapons.

<sup>708</sup> Heinze, 'Zeitenwende im Jemen?'

<sup>709</sup> Letta Tayler and 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Faqīh, 'No Safe Places: Yemen's Crackdown on Protests in Taizz' (Ta'izz: Human Rights Watch, 6 February 2012).

<sup>710</sup> Laura Kasinof, 'Yemeni City Feeds Unrest's Roots', *The New York Times*, 25 February 2011; Sudarsan Raghavan, 'Outside Yemen's Capital, Anger and Grievances Run Deep', *The Washington Post*, 1 March 2011; Robert F. Worth, 'Yemen on the Brink of Hell', *The New York Times*, 20 July 2011.

However, these social services were largely compartmentalised by political groups. Iṣlāḥ's *munasiqīya*, which was bankrolled by Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar, provided water, food and tents to its own members.<sup>711</sup> The Ḥūthīs had their own feeding system, computer stations, a small tent clinic and an office with a representative of 'Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī. Despite the volunteer-based approach, services required substantive funding. Political parties mobilised funds from influential members. Tribal billionaire Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar was the prime financier for the activities of Iṣlāḥ-affiliated groups in the squares, but the party also received donations from Qatar.<sup>712</sup> Through its extensive network and resources, Iṣlāḥ helped establish a number of provincial protest squares, which was part of a larger strategy to assume control of the movement. Independents received donations mainly from the disgruntled business community, such as members of the billionaire Hā'il Sa'īd family or Yemeni businessmen in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, India or Malaysia.<sup>713</sup>

From the first demonstrations in mid-January to the mass protests in mid-March, the demands of the movement escalated from political and socio-economic reforms to Ṣāliḥ's resignation and the overthrow of the entire political system. Initially, many protests focused on the controversial constitutional amendment, but the overall political vision remained vague. When asked about their motivation, protestors often alluded to everyday malaise, such as unemployment, corruption, lack of health services and education, insecurity and administrative discrimination. The demand for the removal of the old regime – as encapsulated in the popular slogans *irḥal!* (leave!) and *al-sha'b yurīd isqāṭ al-nizām* (the people want to overthrow the system) – therefore constituted the lowest common denominator, and provided a degree of cohesion in the movement.

In mid-March calls for Ṣāliḥ's ouster matured into a more comprehensive political vision with concrete demands. The CCYRC issued an open letter on 16 March to donor countries ahead of a 'Friends of Yemen'<sup>714</sup> meeting in Riyadh later that month. The letter stated that millions of Yemenis had decided to overthrow the Ṣāliḥ regime for its 'corruption, tyranny and injustice' and urged the international community to boycott it.<sup>715</sup>

<sup>711</sup> Al-Ghābarī, 'Al-Tajammu' al-Yamanī li-l-Iṣlāḥ wa-Thawra Fibrāyir 2011 (The Yemeni Congregation for Reform and the Revolution of February 2011)'; Interview with Ranā Jarhūm, 'Ammān, September 2012.

<sup>712</sup> Interview with Ranā Jarhūm, 'Ammān, September 2012.

<sup>713</sup> Interview with Ibrāhīm Mothanā, Ṣan'ā', March 2012.

<sup>714</sup> The Friends of Yemen is a donor coordination group that was established in January 2010 at a meeting of ministers in London to help bolster international political support for Yemen and help mitigate causes of instability. Co-chaired by the Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Yemen, it has 39 countries and international organisations as members. The pledges of the group amount to several billion dollars.

<sup>715</sup> Al-Majlis al-Tansīqī Li-Shabāb Thawrāt al-Taghīr (CCYRC), 'Risāla Ila Majmū'a Aṣḍiqā' al-Yaman (A Letter to the Friends of Yemen Group)', Important Declaration, (16 March 2011).



A week later, the CCRY similarly issued a declaration to dismantle the Ṣāliḥ regime, in which it laid out a comprehensive political agenda. A national interim council should be established to manage a one-year transition phase, hold a dialogue for conflict resolution, and oversee elections and the making of a new constitution to establish a *al-dawla al-madanīya al-ḥadītha* (modern civil state). The state was to entail a parliamentary democratic system, tripartite separation of powers, an independent judiciary, civil and political rights, development and social justice, as well as free and fair elections based on a proportional list-based system. Among other points, the long list of demands encompassed a political solution to the North-South and Ṣa'da conflicts, the prosecution of human rights violators, the freeing of political prisoners, the reform of anti-corruption legislation and stolen asset recovery, as well as the merger of security and intelligence agencies under parliamentary oversight and of armed forces under the Ministry of Defence.<sup>716</sup>

Based on a series of workshops with a number of loosely allied youth activists between mid-February and April, the CCYRC issued a similar statement of demands.<sup>717</sup> Its core demand was the removal of the *ancien régime*, including all members of the Ṣāliḥ family from leadership positions in military and civil institutions. The group demanded a six-month transition process under the leadership of a five-member Transitional Presidential Council and a cabinet composed of technocrats. The focus of the transition was to be on a solution to the Ṣa'da and North-South conflicts, new elections and the drafting of a new constitution for a republican parliamentary system based on social justice, equal citizenship and a proportional list-based electoral system. The list of demands further included the restructuring of the judiciary to guarantee its independence, the replacement of the information and human rights ministries by independent authorities, the prosecution of corrupt individuals and those involved in the killing of protestors, the release of political prisoners and restructuring the security and military organisations under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defence.<sup>718</sup> Dozens of coalitions acceded to this list of demands, while others prepared their own adaptations of this declaration – an indication of the large degree of agreement within the revolutionary movement.<sup>719</sup> Discussions with youth activists

<sup>716</sup> 'Yemeni Youth Organisations Unite to Spark Historic Regime Change', *France 24*, 22 March 2011, 24; Al-Taḥāluf al-Madanī Li-l-Thawra al-Shabābiya (CCRY), 'Mashrū' Wathīqa Al-Taḥāluf al-Madanī Li-l-Thawra al-Shabābiya (Draft Document of the Civic Coalition of Revolutionary Youth)', 23 March 2011.

<sup>717</sup> Interview with Gabūl al-Mutawakkil, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>718</sup> Al-Majlis al-Tansīqī Li-Shabāb Thawrat al-Taghīr (CCYRC), 'Draft Document: Demands of the Youth Revolution', April 2011.

<sup>719</sup> 'Naṣat alā Ḍarūrat Isqāṭ al-Nizām Kāmīlā Bikāfh Shabakāt Maḥsubīyat Wa-Aḍmān Ḥokum Fīdirālī Wa-Ḥal 'Ādil Li-l-Qaḍīya al-Janūbiya .. Ḥaḍramawt Ta'lin 'An Mashrū' al-Wathīqa al-Siyāsiya Li-l-Thawra al-Yamaniya (Given the Need to Overthrow the Entire System with all its Networks of Favouritism, and to

from different components reveal, however, that the broad consensus on a modern civil state was facilitated by a lack of convergence around the meaning of the concept. Various socio-political segments laid claim to the civil state; some took *madanī* (civil) to mean *ghayr ʿaskarīya* (non-military), others interpreted it as *ʿalmānī* (secular), many Islamists used it to dissociate themselves from both secularism and theocracy, yet others saw it as the basis for a system of governance based on equality, rule of law and civil rights.<sup>720</sup>

The demands of the citizen revolt revealed a remarkable resemblance to previous contentious demands in Yemeni history, such as Zubayrī's *maṭālib al-shaʿb* or the opposition demands in the post-unification period, particularly the *wathīqat al-ʿahd wa-l-ittifāq* (Document of Pledge and Accord, DPA, 1994).<sup>721</sup> An amalgamation of the YSP's 18-point and the GPC's 19-point plans, the DPA was a declaration to build a modern state based on constitutionally enshrined civil and democratic principles, such as party pluralism, decentralisation, freedom of speech and association, and human rights. The DPA's goals were to disempower the executive by limiting the responsibilities of the 5-member Presidential Council, enact judicial reform, revise the elections law to a proportional-list based system, replace of the Ministry of Information by an official media council, as well as arrest and prosecute those involved in killing members of the opposition. In the security sector, proposed reforms encompassed the creation of a new intelligence organisation and the merger of security forces under the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>722</sup>

Despite the popularity of these liberal, non-partisan aspirations, components of the movement continued to pursue group-specific goals that were incompatible with the overall demands of the movement. Although Ḥirāk asked its constituents to temporarily put aside calls for southern secession and refrain from raising the Southern flag, the struggle for an independent state in the South took precedence over building a civil state in the framework

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Ensure Federal Governance and a Just Solution to the Southern Issue .. Hadhramaut Declares a Draft Political Document for the Yemeni Revolution', *Voice Yemen*, 22 September 2011; Majlis Shabāb al-Thawra al-Shaʿbīya, 'Mashrūʿ al-Wathīqa al-Sīyāsīya Li-l-Thawra al-Yamanīya (Draft Document for the Political Revolution in Yemen)', 4 October 2011.

<sup>720</sup> Al-Bukārī, Al-Ghāratī, and Al-Ghāratī, 'Dalīl al-Muwāḥiḥ ila al-Dawla al-Madanīya: Mufakira al-Dīmūqrāṭīya (Citizen's Guide to the Civil State: Democratic Pocket Book)'; Interview with Gabūl al-Mutawakkil, Ṣanʿāʾ, November 2013.

<sup>721</sup> Mohamed Qubaty, 'Dodging Chaos: Yemen's Destiny Is on the Ropes', *Al-Arabiya English*, 28 September 2011.

<sup>722</sup> 'Niḡāṭ al-Ishtirākī al-Maṭrūha li-Ḥal al-Azma, Niḡāṭ al-Muʿtamar al-Maṭrūha li-Ḥal al-Azma (Points Raised by the YSP and the GPC for a Solution of the Crisis)'; Lajnat Ḥiwār al-Quwāt al-Sīyāsī (Political Forces Dialogue Committee), 'Wathīqat al-ʿAhd wa-l-Ittifāq (Document of Pledge and Accord)'.

of a unified Yemen.<sup>723</sup> The participation of the Ḥūthīs in the revolution posed an equally puzzling contradiction: the belief in the special right to rule of the house of Ḥūthī, as reiterated in a declaration of principles signed by ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī and several Zaydī *‘ulamā’* (religious scholars), inevitably negates the principles of equality and popular sovereignty propagated in the revolution.<sup>724</sup> In the view of some segments of Sunni Islamists, including many members of the Iṣlāḥ party, the uprising provided an opportunity to establish an Islamic state in Yemen, which led them to either reject the notion of a civil state<sup>725</sup> or nominally agree to the concept, but fundamentally recast its meaning.<sup>726</sup>

Notwithstanding these differences, the early months of the uprising evoked a strong sense of patriotism around the *waṭan* (nation, homeland). The modern conception of pluralistic citizenship thus temporarily trumped narrower sectarian, secessionist or religious goals.<sup>727</sup> The *al-lajna al-tanzīmīya*, a coordination mechanism for the Change Square in Ṣan‘ā’, exemplifies the desire to put political differences aside for the sake of *al-talāhum al-waṭanī* (national cohesion). Ideologically opposed groups, such as Iṣlāḥ, the Ḥūthīs and leftists, coexisted peacefully at the squares, a remarkable departure from the politics of the past, in which individual group interests were paramount to the national project. Yadav pertinently argues that the political articulation of such a post-partisan, crosscutting oppositional national identity had its origins in the networked, informal activism of intersectoral actors from the member parties in the formative years of JMP.<sup>728</sup>

The popular slogan *al-sha‘b yurīd isqāṭ al-niẓām* among Yemen’s revolutionaries, which was inspired by Tunisian poet ‘Abd al-Qāsim al-Sha‘bī,<sup>729</sup> signified much more than ‘down with the regime.’ It exposed a paradigm shift in the foundation of Arab politics: the imaginary birth of a new political entity – *al-sha‘b* (the people) – that had been absent

<sup>723</sup> Jamāl Jubrān, ‘Fī Dhakarī Ḥarb 94: al-Janūbīyūn Yaṭlabūn “Fak al-Artibāt” (In Memory of the 94 War: Southerners Ask for “Disengagement”’, *Al-Akhbār*, 8 July 2011; ‘Breaking Point? Yemen’s Southern Question’.

<sup>724</sup> ‘Abd al-Malik Badr Al-Dīn Al-Ḥūthī et al., ‘Al-Wathīqa al-Fikrīya wa-l-Thaqāfiya (Intellectual and Cultural Document)’, 14 February 2012.

<sup>725</sup> ‘Maktab al-Shaykh al-Zindānī Yarudd ‘ala al-Duktūr Muḥammad al-Mutawakkil Hawla al-Dawla al-Madanīya (Office of Shaykh Zindānī Responds to Dr. Muḥammad al-Mutawakkil about the Civil State)’, *Marib Press*, 26 July 2011.

<sup>726</sup> Ismā‘īl ‘Alī Al-Suhaylī and Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Al-Zindānī, *Muqārabāt Fī-l-Dawla Al-Madanīya Wa-l-Islāmīya: Al-Sīyāqāt al-Fikrīya Wa-l-Istrāṭījīya (Approaches to the Civil and Islamic State: Intellectual and Strategic Context)*, 2011; Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Al-‘Amrānī, ‘Ismā‘īl al-Suhaylī Wa-Aḥmad al-Zindānī Fī Ḥiwār Mushtarak ‘An al-Dawla al-Madanīya Wa-l-Dīnīya (Ismā‘īl al-Suhaylī and Aḥmad Al-Zindānī in a Joint Dialogue on the Civil and Religious State)’, *Nashwān News*, 12 May 2011.

<sup>727</sup> Challand, ‘Citizenship against the Grain’.

<sup>728</sup> Yadav, ‘Antecedents of the Revolution’.

<sup>729</sup> ‘Tunisian Poet’s Verses Inspire Arab Protesters’, *Special Series* (NPR, 30 January 2011).

during the Imamate, in the YAR and under the Ṣāliḥ regime's divide-and-rule politics. *Al-sha'b yurīd* (the people want) was not only a symbol for the agency of this collective 'political imaginary,' but implied a notion of popular sovereignty, self-determination, citizenship and the collective will to underwrite a more inclusive, social contract.<sup>730</sup> Hence, the people emerged as an autonomous actor on the political scene: nationalistic, rather than sectarian or parochial; political, but unaffiliated with political parties.

Protestors moreover framed the movement as a *thawra shabābīya silmīya* (peaceful youth revolution). The concept of *thawra* (revolution, from the root *th-ā-r*: to rise, to be aroused) has been negatively connoted throughout most Islamic history as it contradicted the Ḥanafī theory of state, which holds that a tyrannical ruler is better than no ruler at all, for the risks that *fitna* (civil strife) or *fawḍa* (chaos, anarchy) posed to the Muslim community. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it slowly acquired a neutral meaning with some positive characteristics. After the Egyptian uprising of 1919, military leaders in the Middle East began to use the term *thawra* to lend a veil of legitimacy to some forty military *coups d'état* in the 1950s and 1960s, including the 26 September and 10 October revolutions.<sup>731</sup>

Collective memories of republican leaders played a crucial role in the citizen revolt. As a fervent nationalist and assertive advocate of state-building, Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdī became a unifying figure for many North Yemenis, who began commemorating his assassination, for which they blamed Ṣāliḥ, for the first time on 11 October 2011. Despite his firm military rule, al-Ḥamdī became a symbol for the 'civil state' due to his efforts to modernise institutions and purge them from tribal influence.<sup>732</sup> Protestors in Ta'izz carried posters of al-Ḥamdī that read 'We are not of your generation ... but we love you.' At demonstrations in South Yemen, people similarly raised banners of former president 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ismā'īl, who – like Ḥamdī – symbolised the very antithesis of Ṣāliḥ's tribal power base.<sup>733</sup>

The contentious repertoires of the movement – sets of routine forms of contentious interactions within a social system – thus became a hybrid mixture of local and regional influences with some marginal innovations. While non-violent tactics had been prevalent in the run-up to the revolutions of the 1960s, these episodes of contention soon turned into

<sup>730</sup> Uriel Abulof, 'What Is the Arab Third Estate?', *Huffington Post*, 10 March 2011; Challand, 'Citizenship against the Grain'.

<sup>731</sup> Ami Ayalon, 'From Fitna to Thawra', *Studia Islamica*, no. 66 (1987); Thomas Mayer, *The Changing Past: Egyptian Historiography of the Urabi Revolt, 1882-1983* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1988).

<sup>732</sup> 'Al-Nā'ib al-Qāḍī: Iḡtiyāl al-Ḥamdī Kān Naksa Kabira la Yuḍāḥihā ilā Inhiyār Sud Mā'rib (Deputy Judge: The Assassination of Al-Ḥamdī was a Major Catastrophe Matched Only by the Collapse of the Mā'rib Dam)', *Marib Press*, 12 June 2011.

<sup>733</sup> Zakariyā Al-Kamālī, 'Ma'rka Ṣuwar fi al-Yaman: Al-Sāḥāt Tastanjid bi-l-Ramūz li-Iṭāḥat Ṣāliḥ (The Battle of Photos in Yemen: The Squares Invoke Symbols to Overthrow Ṣāliḥ)', *Al-Akḥbār*, 31 October 2011.

ferocious battles between challengers and the authorities. Although in some rare instances components of the citizen revolt resorted to violent means, the movement by and large refused to draw on many of the standard claim-making routines, such as riots, kidnappings, assassinations, sabotage, armed attacks against government installations or guerrilla warfare. With the exception of self-defence, the protestors remained committed to non-violence even under severe provocations. A few months before the uprising, a Yemeni journalist aptly explained the rationale of this strategy: the opposition needed to avoid being dragged into a cycle of violence with the regime, which would have squandered its legitimacy and given Ṣāliḥ a justification to violently suppress the movement.<sup>734</sup>

Instead, the movement's repertoires of contention predominantly consisted of non-violent means, such as peaceful protest marches, civil disobedience, strikes, the occupation of public squares, public relations campaigns and lobbying outside actors. Even though such means formed an integral part of Yemen's historical repertoires – whether in the 1960s or with Ḥirāk in the 2000s – the inspiration for these tactics came from the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, which provided a powerful blueprint for regime change through non-violent mass protests and civil resistance. In fact, Egyptian activists shared a manual of collective action tactics with their Yemeni counterparts, which had originated in Tunisia.<sup>735</sup> The most innovative, visible and significant form of collective action, however, became the occupation of public squares. Apart from the practical ways in which this tactic benefitted movement mobilisation and organisation, the creative spatio-temporal occupation of a public sphere had a further dimension: the defiance of authoritarian time and space and the symbolic construction of a centre in which a different set of rules applied. As part of a civil disobedience campaign, activists moreover called on Yemenis to refuse to pay taxes and bills to government institutions. Other groups, such as *akhdam* street cleaners employed under degrading conditions, launched strikes that were only resolved when the government paid them compensation.<sup>736</sup> During the marches and sit-ins, the movement exhibited a plethora of collective ritualistic practices commonly found during the formation of social movements. Similar to rituals that strengthen the social cohesion of militaries, synchronised slogans, singing, dancing, and praying in a coordinated manner helped generate an *esprit de corps* and forge a layer of common identity among its participants.<sup>737</sup>

<sup>734</sup> Jābar, 'Al-Mu'āraḍa al-Yamanīya Khilāl 60 'Āmān (The Yemeni Opposition after 60 Years)'.

<sup>735</sup> Interview with Ranā Jarhūm, 'Ammān, September 2012.

<sup>736</sup> Tom Finn, 'In Revolt, Yemeni Untouchables Hope for Path out of Misery', *Reuters*, 7 March 2012.

<sup>737</sup> Tarak Barkawi, 'Ritual in the Revolution?', *Al Jazeera English*, 6 October 2011.





Photo 1: Collective Prayers of Male Protestors in Şan'a', April 2011. © Abdulrahman H. Jaber, [www.ajaber.com](http://www.ajaber.com).

Tired of waiting for Ṣālīḥ to abdicate as the conflict protracted, protestors faced numerous difficulties, such as frequent power cuts, gas, water and food shortages, as well as the disruption of studies.<sup>738</sup> Hard pressed to constantly produce action in order to keep up the momentum, organisers sought to prevent fatigue by organising marches to 'peacefully escalate' tensions. Although protestors followed non-violent routines, these marches often led to violent clashes with pro-government thugs or security forces that left several activists dead. Tawakkul Karmān, for example, was at one point strongly criticised for calling to a march on the presidential palace in which several protestors lost their lives.<sup>739</sup> Yet, this could not prevent that fatigue gradually began spread among protestors in the long period of uncertainty that transpired between April and November 2011.

Important as it was, one must be careful not to overstate the role of new communication technologies in the revolt. Although such technologies have the potential to undermine repressive state monopolies or mobilise collective action, their role was strongly limited in Yemen due to the low social media usage rates. As a senior GPC member succinctly put it: 'If you think Facebook will change Yemen, you're crazy. We don't even have electricity.'<sup>740</sup> With a literacy rate of 62 per cent of the adult population, Internet access was largely confined to Yemen's educated, urban social strata. Internet penetration was the lowest in the region: only 10 per cent of Yemenis had internet access in 2010 as compared to 24, 34 and 53 per cent in Egypt, Tunisia and Bahrain, respectively. Yemen's approximately 180,000 Facebook users represented only 0.74 per cent of the total population.<sup>741</sup> In Yemen's pluralistic media landscape with low levels of censorship by regional standards, the need to create alternative public online spaces was much lower in Yemen than in the highly repressive regimes in North Africa. Despite this, activists did open thousands of Facebook groups, fan pages, blogs, YouTube videos and Twitter pages to facilitate networking, raise awareness, generate international legitimacy and brief foreign journalists. Nevertheless, text messages, pamphlets and local distribution systems, such as *qāt* chews, families, tribes, markets or companies remained the most salient instruments for exchanging, debating and discarding information, as well as mobilising collective action.

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<sup>738</sup> Ginny Hill, *Inside Yemen's Youth Movement*, Chatham House, 2011; Fakhri Al-Arashi, 'Sana'a University: Another Arena for Political Revenge', *National Yemen*, 22 October 2011.

<sup>739</sup> Nasser Arrabyee, 'Revolution in the Revolution', *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 19 May 2011.

<sup>740</sup> Chip Cummins, 'Yemeni Web Activists Clash With Opposition', *Wall Street Journal*, 9 February 2011.

<sup>741</sup> The World Bank, 'Literacy Rate, Adult Total (% of People Ages 15 and Above)', World Development Indicators (Washington, D.C., 2011); 'Arab Social Media Report' (Dubai School of Government, January 2011); Jeffrey Ghannam, 'Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011', *Center for International Media Assistance/National Endowment for Democracy* 3 (2011).

Television and print media also played an important role in spreading information and shaping the expectations of protesters. Foreign and opposition-owned television stations, such as the Qatar-based al-Jazeera Arabic or the local Suhayl TV, as well as newspapers, including al-*Ṣaḥwa*, Mā'rib Press or al-Maṣḍar, framed events in Yemen as a *thawra* (revolution), which state media (Yemen TV, SabaNews, al-Thawra, 26 September News) portrayed the situation as *fawḍa* (chaos, anarchy) or *azma* (crisis). From the outset, al-Jazeera, the most prominent 24-hour news channel, took a favourable stance towards the popular uprising. Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar's propagandistic local channel Suhayl made no secret of its support for the revolutionary movement. The channel advanced the absurd claim that 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ had contracted 'Israeli poison gas experts' to suppress protesters and hurriedly – but wrongly – reported Ṣāliḥ's death after an attack on his compound in June. According to the channel's director, Muḥammad Qissām, 'Suhayl is the voice of the Yemeni revolution,' but more accurately, it constitutes an equally distorted counterweight to the official state media and political instrument in the hands of Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar.<sup>742</sup>

Islamic and tribal contentious traditions resonated with the movement. Friday's religious ceremonies and funeral processions for martyred protesters turned into catalysts of political mobilisation.<sup>743</sup> From mid-February onwards, Friday prayers often drew large gatherings in major cities; they were ideally suited given that any government attempt to limit the freedom of congregation could have been interpreted as preventing Muslims from going about their religious duties. Most Fridays were dedicated to a revolutionary theme, which defined the priority of the week and helped contextualise or frame the uprising. Examples include the Friday of immovability (25 February); Friday of dignity (18 March); loyalty with martyrs (29 April); loyalty with people of the South (6 May); commitment to the objectives of the peaceful revolution (10 June); revolution until victory (1 July); rejecting foreign custody (8 July); the civil state (15 July); supporting the national council (19 August); revolutionary decisiveness (2 September); and female martyrs (18 November).

The Iṣlāḥ party encouraged protesters to sacrifice for the revolution by invoking the Islamic concept of martyrdom. As part of the *mashrū' shahīd* (martyr's project), scores of young men enlisted themselves (and sometimes their children) to become martyrs. Even

<sup>742</sup> François-Xavier Trégan, 'Suhail TV, La Lucarne de La Révolution Yéménite', *Le Monde*, 8 October 2011; 'Yemen's President Saleh Killed, Says Suhail TV, but Govt Insists He Is Alive', *International Business Times*, 3 June 2011; 'Yemen Shells TV Station, News Agency, Online Newspaper' (New York: Committee to Protect Journalists, 26 May 2011); 'Hujūm Yawqaf Bath Qanā Suhayl al-Faḍā'iya wa-Iṭalāq Nār Qurb Sabāfūn (Attack stops broadcast of Suhayl satellite channel and fire breaks out near Sabafon)', *Al-Waṭan*, 26 May 2011; 'Government Raids Suhail TV Station and Newspaper', *Yemen Post*, 26 May 2011.

<sup>743</sup> 'Yemeni Protesters Rally, Bury Their Dead', *Agence France Presse*, 4 November 2011.



though the concept has in practice often included strategies of violence by Islamist movements, *Iṣlāḥ* successfully reconciled martyrdom with the revolution's non-violent approach. Those wearing *mashrūʿ shahīd* T-Shirts walked in the front rows of the marches and thereby risked running into the barrage of government forces' gunfire. The readiness to die for a political struggle served – as was the case with Muḥammad al-Būʿazīzī – to confirm the commitment to the cause and by implication its righteousness.<sup>744</sup>

In the first months of the uprising, many tribesmen vowed to protect the revolution and astonishingly laid down their weapons and professed to non-violent principles, relinquishing century old traditions of self-defence and breaking with the stereotype of the conservative, backwards and violent tribesman. These tribesmen often found themselves in the front rows of demonstrations, albeit for a different reason: the calculus was that security forces would be hesitant to shoot tribesmen for fear of *thār* (blood revenge). In Taʿizz, where tribal ties are much weaker, women often made up the front rows.<sup>745</sup> In the face of systematic regime repression, women, who traditionally enjoy a kind of immunity from verbal or physical abuse in tribal culture, invoked tribal customs for protection. In October 2011, they publicly set their *maqārim* (traditional veils) on fire. This ritual of last resort was a symbolic cry for justice, which obliged male tribesmen to come to their aid. The practice evoked polarised reactions from within the movement: liberals rejected the invocation of tribal customs, which they judged as contrary to the values of a modern, civil state, while others, who perceived tribal code and civil laws as compatible, supported the move.<sup>746</sup>

### ***The Regime Strikes Back: Ṣāliḥ's Counterrevolution and Elite Fragmentation***

A master in the art of *divide et impera*, President Ṣāliḥ – who once likened ruling Yemen to 'dancing on the heads of snakes'<sup>747</sup> – has survived countless challenges in Yemen's notoriously ungovernable political landscape since his ascent to power in 1978. As the Yemeni street tapped into the repertoires of Egyptian protestors, the Yemeni regime emulated some of the coping strategies of the Egyptian government, such as the use of thugs and security forces, restrictions on the media, as well as propaganda designed to

<sup>744</sup> Andrew Silke, 'The Role of Suicide in Politics, Conflict, and Terrorism', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 1 (2006): 35–46; Nādiya Al-Saqqāf, 'Yemen's Revolution: The Lack of Public Reasoning', Perspectives (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, May 2011).

<sup>745</sup> Atiaf Alwazir, 'In Yemen, the Life March Revives the Debate on Immunity for Saleh', *Muftah*, 22 December 2011.

<sup>746</sup> Jamāl Jubrān, 'Al-Aʿrāf al-Qabalīya Malādhān Akhīran li-Nisā' al-Yaman (Tribal Customs a Last Resort for Yemeni Women)', *Al-Akhhbār*, 27 October 2011.

<sup>747</sup> Ghassān Sharbil, 'Alī ʿAbd Allāh Ṣāliḥ Lī-l-Ḥaīyāt: al-Tansīq al-Yamanī - al-Saʿūdī Mumtāz (ʿAlī ʿAbd Allāh Ṣāliḥ to al-Ḥaīyāt: Yemeni-Saudi Coordination is Excellent)', *Al-Ḥayāt*, 28 March 2009.

create an alternative reality. Determined to stay in power, Ṣāliḥ unleashed the full spectrum of the dictator's toolbox. Ṣāliḥ initially tried to appease and co-opt reformers, offer political concessions, buy political support and reframe the uprising as a foreign plot. However, as the movement's challenge began to grow, he created a counter-revolutionary movement and began intimidating, provoking and brutally repressing protestors.

During the early protests, Ṣāliḥ attempted to pacify the discontent through economic 'reforms,' which came mostly in the form of cash transfers to strategic segments of Yemeni society: salary increases for civil servants and security personnel; waiving tuition fees for university students; halving the income tax; new subsidies and price controls, and paying new money into the social welfare fund. The Ministry of Civil Service moreover announced that it would initiate plans to employ 60,000 recent graduates at the order of the president.<sup>748</sup> However, neither of these concessions was credible to the Yemeni public as it was unclear how Yemen's ailing economy would have funded these measures. In closed-door meetings, Ṣāliḥ tried to bribe opposition politicians and tribal chiefs with material and cash benefits in exchange for political and military support.<sup>749</sup>

When economic measures failed to quell the discontent, he attempted to co-opt reformists through political concessions. Following the recommendations of moderate GPC insiders, Ṣāliḥ proclaimed in an emergency session of the parliament and the *majlis al-shūrā* on 2 February not to rerun for elections in 2013 or have his son succeed him, and offered to 'freeze' the implementation of the controversial constitutional amendment that would have eliminated term limits on the presidency. Ṣāliḥ moreover promised to form a unity government, introduce direct elections for provincial governors – a major step towards decentralisation – and reopen negotiations with the JMP on terms the government had previously refused. For this purpose, he tasked the Quartet Committee, consisting of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Iryānī and 'Abd Rabbu Maṣṣūr Hādī for the GPC, as well as 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ansī (Iṣlāḥ) and Yāssīn Sa'īd Nu'mān (YSP) for the JMP, with finding a solution to the impasse.<sup>750</sup> Although Ṣāliḥ's proposal nominally met opposition demands, the JMP – weary of his unfulfilled promises in the past – reneged on the offer. The coalition called for more

<sup>748</sup> 'Government Announces Employment of 60 Thousand Graduates', *Saba News*, 19 February 2011.

<sup>749</sup> 'Al-Ra'īs Yukrim Shuyūkh Al-Qabā'il Al-Muḥīṭa Bi-l-'Aṣimat Ṣan'a'...Wa-Akhirūn Yarfaḍūn Liqā' (The President honours tribal shaykhs around the capital Ṣan'a'...and others refuse to meet)', *Marib Press*, 17 February 2011; Oliver Holmes, 'The Tribe Has Spoken: Yemen's Power Brokers Step In', *Time*, 27 February 2011.

<sup>750</sup> 'Ra'īs Al-Jumhūrīya Ya'lan Tajmīd Mashrū'a' Al-Ta'dīlāt Al-Dustūrīya Wa-Yada'ū Al-Rubā'īya Li-Ista'nāf A'mālha (President of the Republic Announces Freezing of the Constitutional Amendments Project and Calls on the Quartet to Resume its Work)', *Saba News*, 2 February 2011.

systemic solutions on 13 February, refused dialogue with the regime on 19 February and rejected the offer to form a unity government on 28 February.<sup>751</sup> On 10 March, then, Ṣāliḥ offered to put a new constitution to a referendum that would have transformed Yemen into a parliamentary democracy.<sup>752</sup> The JMP believed that the proposal was a tactical gambit to change the media discourse and expose the opposition as unwilling to compromise.

In January, Ṣāliḥ initially apologised to all Yemenis 'in case he erred or failed them...[because] nobody is perfect but God'<sup>753</sup> and argued that 'Yemen is not Tunisia.' However, days after offering major economic and political concessions to appease the opposition, Ṣāliḥ struck a harsher tone. In a fiery speech to commanders of the armed forces in late February, he accused the protestors as apostates, who pursued a hidden, foreign agenda against the security and stability, unity, freedom and democracy in Yemen. Ṣāliḥ branded the uprising with the strongly pejorative terms *fawḍa* (chaos, anarchy) and *inqilāb* (coup), and stigmatised protestors as *khawana* (traitors) and *ʿumalāʾ* ([foreign] agents).<sup>754</sup> In another speech, Ṣāliḥ claimed that the demonstrations were orchestrated from 'a media control room in Tel Aviv for destabilizing the Arab world [... that is] managed by the White House.'<sup>755</sup> Throughout many speeches between February and May, he followed a simple but effective communication strategy based on binary opposition between his regime, the upholder of the republican system, unity and territorial integrity of Yemen, and the rebels. Ṣāliḥ consistently stressed that his government, which had been elected in 2006 for a 7-year term, enjoyed *sharʿiyya dustūrīya* (constitutional legitimacy).

Another regime strategy was to divide the movement into its individual components. Ṣāliḥ cunningly framed the uprising as a dual conspiracy by appealing to

<sup>751</sup> 'Al-Muʿāraḍa Fi-l-Yaman Tarfuḍ Mubādarat al-Raʾīs Ṣāliḥ Wa-Taʿlun Majmūʿat Maṭālib (Yemen Opposition Rejects the Initiative of President Ṣāliḥ and Declares a Number of Demands)', *Marib Press*, 14 February 2011; 'Al-Muʿāraḍa al-Yamanīya Tʿalin Rafuḍhā min Jadīd Ījrāʿ Ḥiwār maʿ al-Sulṭa (Yemeni Opposition Declares Its Rejection of a Dialogue with the Regime)', *Al-Taghīyr*, 19 February 2011; Kasinof, 'Opposition in Yemen Supports Protesters'.

<sup>752</sup> 'Arafāt Mudābish, 'Al-Yaman: Ṣāliḥ Yaqtaraj Taʿdīl Al-Dustūr Wa-Nizām Barlamānī .. Wa-l-Muʿāraḍa Turafaḍ (Yemen: Ṣāliḥ Proposes to Constitutional Amendment and Parliamentary System ... and Opposition Rejects)', *Al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 11 March 2011; 'Yemeni President Presents Reform Initiative', *Saba News*, 11 March 2011.

<sup>753</sup> 'Ṣāliḥ: Al-Yaman Leisat Tūnis Wa-Lan Nasmaḥ Li-l-Fawḍa Al-Khalāqa Bi-Tadmīr al-Bilād (Saleh: Yemen is not Tunisia and We Will Not Allow Creative Chaos to Destroy the Country)', *Al-Taghīyr*, 23 January 2011.

<sup>754</sup> *Speech by Alī ʿAbd Allāh Ṣāliḥ* (Ṣanʿāʾ, 2011); 'Raʾīs Al-Jumhūrīya: Al-Muʿtamar Sa-Yaṭal Al-Hizb Al-Qāʾid Fi-l-Ḥaṣr Wa-l-Mustaḡbal (President of the Republic: The GPC Will Remain the Leading Party in the Present and Future)', *almotamar.net*, 21 May 2011.

<sup>755</sup> Muḥammad Ṣadām, 'Rāʾīs al-Yaman Yantaḡed Taṣrīḥāt Ūbāmā ʿAn al-Aḡdāf Bi-l-Dūal al-ʿArabīya (President of Yemen Criticizes Obama's Statements about the Events in the Arab World)', *Reuters*, 1 March 2011.

deep-rooted fears engrained in Yemen's collective memory: the first plot, which 'dates back to the 1994 war... seeks to divide North and South Yemen,' while the second one aims to 're-establish the priestly Imamate' – a reference to Ḥirāk and the Ḥūthīs.<sup>756</sup> In an attempt to sow regional strife, regime thugs in Ta'izz reportedly provoked protestors using the strongly pejorative term *barāghila* (weakling), which was coined by northern tribesmen in the 1960s for people of the *minṭaqa al-wuṣṭā*.<sup>757</sup> Ṣāliḥ stirred up fears about a future Iṣlāḥ-led government, targeting a domestic audience afraid of Islamist conservatism and a United States weary of losing their complacent ally in the war on terrorism. In a much publicised speech on April 15, Ṣāliḥ vilified women engaged in protests and enlisted pro-regime Imams to issue *fatāwā* (legal opinions) against the mixing of women and men in demonstrations in a bid to appeal to religious conservatives. Given that Ṣāliḥ is considered little devout among Yemenis, the move received little credibility.<sup>758</sup> These efforts yielded little results in quelling the protests, but only further fuelled the determination of protestors.

The regime sought to maintain sovereignty over the media coverage of the events. In an information war, state media countered the coverage of al-Jazeera and Suhayl by reiterating conspiracy theories about the protestors. Ṣāliḥ recalled the Yemeni ambassador to Qatar in protest over al-Jazeera's alleged incitement of unrest, violence and sabotage in the Arab countries: 'What the channel is doing only serves the Zionist entity and terrorist groups such as al Qaeda as well as the enemies of the Arab seeking to ignite dissent and threatening the future of the next generations.'<sup>759</sup> While a number of foreign journalists were deported from the country, local journalists were often beaten and had their footage confiscated. Government hackers managed to close down a number of websites in support of the revolution, albeit without consequences for the movement. The regime response to Suhayl was particularly harsh. Initial death threats and arrests of journalists were soon eclipsed by armed attacks and, on 25 May, gunmen devastated Suhayl's office.<sup>760</sup>

Security forces, particularly Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ's *quwāt al-amn al-markazī* (Central Security Forces, CSF), arrested thousands of unarmed protestors and tried to contain the marches and sit-ins with water cannons, teargas, riot guns and rubber bullets. From early February on, demonstrators increasingly complained that *balāḥiga* – plain clothed police and tribal

<sup>756</sup> 'Ra'īs al-Jumhūrīya Yatrās Ijtimā'ā li-Qādat al-Quwāt al-Musallaḥa (The President of the Republic Chairs a Meeting for the Commanders of the Armed Forces)', *Saba News*, 26 February 2011.

<sup>757</sup> Lārā Al-Iryānī, 'Yemen's Turn: An Overview', *Jadaliyya*, 20 February 2011.

<sup>758</sup> Deborah Lutterbeck, 'Yemen's Saleh Defiant amid Protests', *Reuters*, 15 April 2011; Laura Kasinof, 'Women Irate at Remarks by President of Yemen', *The New York Times*, 16 April 2011.

<sup>759</sup> 'Saleh Calls Qatar Emir, Attacks Al-Jazeera', *Saba News*, 27 January 2011.

<sup>760</sup> Trégan, 'Suhail TV, La Lucarne de La Révolution Yéménite'.

thugs – attacked them with batons, knives and rocks in order to disperse marches.<sup>761</sup> Leaked government documents, such as a letter from a local council, which details the spending of around \$90,000 for enlisting bullies on two Friday demonstrations, confirm that these bullies were not only tolerated but, in fact, hired by the regime.<sup>762</sup> The strategy was designed to create a culture of fear and provoke protestors into abandoning their moral high ground. If protestors had reciprocated the violence, it would have given the regime a pretext to crush the uprising with military force. Employing *balāṭiga* had a decisive advantage over regular security forces: it provided deniability to regime and seemingly put it in the position of neutral arbitrator between rivalling factions.<sup>763</sup>

On 3 February, the day after ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ had announced wide-ranging political concessions, he mobilised a counter-revolutionary movement of thousands of government loyalists. The government had erected large tents for the crowd, many of whom were shipped in on government buses, at *mīdān al-tahrīr* (Liberation Square) in central Ṣan‘ā’. Their aim was to preventively occupy the square to pre-empt anti-government protestors taking it over as their peers had done in Cairo. The pro-Ṣāliḥ movement consisted of three groups: faithful long-time allies of the president; opportunists attracted by free food, stipends and *qāt*; and civil servants, who were in one way or another compelled to show support. The author witnessed a quarrel between a GPC official and a tribal spokesperson, which illustrates the opportunism. The tribesman shouted: ‘You promised us money, you promised us *qāt*. If we don’t receive our money and *qāt* in the afternoon, we will join the protestors at Change Square.’ Nevertheless, the relatively modest incentives of YR 800 (approx. \$4 at 2011 exchange rates) per day do not suffice to explain the massive attendance at pro-Ṣāliḥ demonstrations.<sup>764</sup> A few thousand Ṣāliḥ loyalists remained for months in control of *mīdān al-tahrīr*. In a bid to show his ability to mobilise his constituency, Ṣāliḥ held a speech in mid-February at a large stadium in Ṣan‘ā’. In March and April, he also entertained a number of rallies with several tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of supporters at Sab‘aīn Square in Ṣan‘ā’, as well as parallel events in Ta‘izz, Ibb, Ḥudayda, Dhamār and ‘Amrān. As the Friday marches of the anti-regime

<sup>761</sup> ‘Al-Yaman: Takrīs al-Ifḷāt min al-‘Aqāt wa-Taḥdīd ‘Amlīya Intiqāl al-Sulṭa (Yemen: Granting Impunity and Threatening the Process of Power Transfer)’ (La Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de L’Homme (FIDH), February 2012).

<sup>762</sup> Muḥammad Muḥammad Al-Qāḍi, ‘Letter from the President of the Local Council in Sha‘ūb Directorate to Minister of State, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Akw‘a’ (Ministry of Local Administration, 27 March 2011).

<sup>763</sup> Shatha Al-Harazi, ‘All You Need to Know about the Youth Movement’, *Yemen Times*, 29 December 2011.

<sup>764</sup> Tom Finn, *Twitter*, 20 February 2011. The local journalist cites a case where a person received YR 4,000 for 5 days of protest. It is likely, however, that incentives were not standardised.

protestors, each event was dedicated to a theme: 'Unity,' 'Brotherhood,' 'Loyalty to Our Leader,' 'Indebtedness to the Saudi Monarch,' and 'Yemeni Wisdom.'<sup>765</sup> The extensive state media coverage of the crowds, which at one point exaggeratedly claimed that five million people gathered in Ṣan'ā' and another five in the rest of the country,<sup>766</sup> reveals the intention of this public relations stunt: to suggest that the 'silent majority' was behind Ṣāliḥ.

While the regime initially pursued a strategy of stalling coupled with light repression in the hope that the revolutionary fervour would burn out, hardliners grew increasingly impatient by late February. With the political opposition on board, the movement had become a serious threat to regime survival. As political and economic concessions, buy-offs, negotiations, intimidation, verbal onslaught and arrests of activists failed to subdue the street protests, the response turned progressively heavy-handed. Security forces began spraying demonstrators with sewage and shooting live bullets into the crowds. Doctors accused security forces of using nerve, rather than tear, gas as demonstrators suffered from muscular convulsions; however, these claims were never independently verified and it is more plausible that the riot control agent had exceeded its expiry date.<sup>767</sup>

According to the *al-hay'a al-waṭaniyya li-l-difā' al-ḥuqūq wa-l-ḥurriyāt* (National Committee for Defending Rights and Freedoms, HOOD), between January and October 2011, close to 1,000 activists were arrested across the country, often sequestered from hospital beds after demonstrations, and many of them tortured. The discovery of mass graves suggests that several dozens, perhaps hundreds, of them have died of their wounds or were killed. Some of the dead were stripped of ID cards to prevent the deceased's relatives and friends from organising funeral marches that could turn into protests.<sup>768</sup> By mid-March, the death toll amounted to at least 40 protestors with hundreds wounded.<sup>769</sup> 'Adan and Ta'izz bore the brunt of these violations, including the murder of protestors, limiting access to medical assistance, arbitrary arrests, and forced disappearances. Based on human rights documentation, conservative death toll estimates for the year 2011 range

<sup>765</sup> Laura Kasinof, 'Yemeni President Tries to Avert Revolution as Protests Escalate', *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 February 2011; Abdul-Aziz Oudah, 'Masses of Pro-Government Supporters Gather in Taiz', *Yemen Observer*, 22 February 2011; 'Muhrijānāt wa-Masīrāt fī 'adad min al-Muḥafaẓāt li-Tā'īd Mubādara al-Ra'īs (Festivals and Marches in a Number of Provinces to Support the President's Initiative)', *Saba News*, 5 March 2011; Amal Al-Yarisi, 'Saleh Loyalists Pledge to Stay in Tahrir Tents', *Yemen Times*, 8 November 2012.

<sup>766</sup> 'Millions of Yemenis Unite for Friday of Brotherhood', *Yemen Observer*, 4 April 2011.

<sup>767</sup> 'Al-Amn Al-Yamanī Yustakhdīm Ghās Al-A'ṣāb Li-Qama' Al-Mutaẓāhirīn (Yemeni security used nerve gas to quell protesters)', *Yemen Nation*, 9 March 2011; 'Yemen Refutes Claims on Use of Toxic Gas against Protestors', *Saba News*, 15 March 2011.

<sup>768</sup> 'Jailed Protesters on Hunger Strike in Yemen', *Yemen Post*, 31 October 2011; Sharifa Ghanem, 'Yemen Report: Over 1,000 Missing, Possibly Tortured', *Bikyasasr*, 8 November 2011.

<sup>769</sup> 'Yemeni Protesters Killed in Violent Attacks', *Amnesty International*, 14 March 2011.

between 270 and 484 civilian casualties, while the Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights put the figure at more than 2,000 killed and more than 22,000 people wounded.<sup>770</sup>

The increasingly brutal repression fuelled the uprising and began alienating traditional regime allies. In the course of February, the street protests expanded into the 100,000s. As a result, opportunity structures became more conducive to defections, which encouraged dozens of politicians from the ruling party, key tribes and part of the religious establishment to leave the sinking ship. By early March, a few dozen GPC officials, including thirteen members of parliament, resigned from their posts and the party, while another 59 threatened to do so if the attacks on protestors continued.<sup>771</sup> Vulnerable to the waning support in its own rows, high-ranking party members described the resignation of 'opportunists' from the ruling party as a 'purification of the GPC from parasites.'<sup>772</sup>

Tribal responses to the uprising varied greatly, as many pragmatic tribal leaders observed the tug-of-war and waited how it would play out. As early as 1 February, a number of influential Bakīl shaykhs, Yemen's largest tribal confederation, which encompasses around 15 major tribes, assumed the role of mediators. They issued a statement that accused both the government and the opposition parties of intransigence and called on all parties not to drag the country into *fitna* and *fawḍa*, revive the stillborn national dialogue with Ḥūthī and Ḥirāk participation, and stop any marches and rallies.<sup>773</sup> However, with neither side willing to compromise, they soon abandoned the initiative.

The tribes in Mā'rib and al-Jawf, many of which have historically been in conflict with the central government, were quick to support the revolutionaries. On 17 and 18 February, the *taḥāluf al-qabā'il mā'rib wa-l-jawf* (Alliance of the Tribes of Mā'rib and al-Jawf) and the *multaqā abnā' mā'rib* (Forum of the Sons of Mā'rib) issued statements in which they condemned the violence perpetrated against protestors, and pledged to support and protect

<sup>770</sup> 'Days of Bloodshed in Aden' (Human Rights Watch, March 2011); 'Al-Yaman: Takrīs al-Iflāt min al-ʿAqāt wa-Taḥdīd ʿAmlīya Intiqāl al-Sulṭa'; Tayler and al-Faqīh, 'No Safe Places'; Laura Kasinof, 'Yemeni Official Puts Killings at More Than 2,000', *The New York Times*, 19 March 2012.

<sup>771</sup> 'Alā Khalfīya Istiqālat "11" ʿAḍwān Barlamānīyān Min al-Ḥākīm Wa-Akthar Min "59" Akharīn Yatadārisūn al-Istiqāla (In the Face of the Resignation of 11 Parliamentary Members of the Ruling [Party], Another 59 Consider Resigning)', *Akḥbār al-Yawm*, 24 February 2011; 'Al-Yaman: Astaqāla Sab'a Min Nuwāb Al-Ḥizb Al-Ḥākīm Aḥtajājān ʿAlā Qam'a Al-Mutaẓāhirīn (Yemen: Seven MPs Resign from the Ruling Party in Protest Against the Crackdown on Demonstrators)', *Al-Rīyād*, 24 February 2011; 'Al-Ḥizb al-Ḥākīm Yuhājīm A'ḍā'h al-Mustaḥqīlīn wa-Yaṣfahm bi-l-Intihāziyīn (Ruling Party Attacks Independent Members and Calls them Opportunists)', *Al-Taghīr*, 27 February 2011.

<sup>772</sup> 'A Number of GPC Members Resignations Reveal Their Opportunism', *Almotamar.net*, 27 February 2011.

<sup>773</sup> 'Mashaykh Bakīl Yad'awn al-Ḥizb al-Ḥākīm wa-l-Mushtarak wa-kul al-Quwā al-Sīyāsīya wa-Sha'b al-Yamanīya ʿAdam Jar al-Bilād ilā Fitna wa-Fawẓā sa-Takūn wa-Khaīma wa-Mudmara (Bakīl Shaykhs Call on the Ruling Party, the JMP and all Political Forces as well as the Yemeni People not to Drag the Country into Disastrous and Destructive Civil Strife and Chaos)', *Laḥj News*, 1 February 2011.

the movement.<sup>774</sup> Many tribes in Mā'rib and al-Jawf reiterated such statements on various occasions, held local rallies and sent some of their members to join the Change Square in Ṣan'ā'. Their resentment of the lack of development in the oil-rich province, tribal leanings towards either Iṣlāḥ or the Ḥūthīs, and the fact that their tribal territories were largely beyond government control facilitated their stance against Ṣāliḥ.

In the course of February and March, Ṣāliḥ and the al-Aḥmar family began to compete over the allegiances of the major Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes. Following Ṣāliḥ's tour through tribal areas in mid-February, at least eleven tribal shaykhs pledged their allegiance to the president in exchange for cash and material benefits in the 100,000s of dollars.<sup>775</sup> Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar toured the heartland of the Ḥāshid to pre-empt meetings with Ṣāliḥ and rally tribes against him. On 26 February, he rallied 10,000s of Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribesmen in 'Amrān and – in an unusually strong language – announced his resignation from the GPC and support for the popular uprising. His speech accused Ṣāliḥ in no uncertain terms of betraying the republican revolution, upon which his regime based its claim to legitimacy:

Down with the regime! Down with the liar! Down with the deceiver! Down with injustice!  
We launched a revolution in 1962 against the Imam, and now we are faced with a new  
Imam, who has been ruling us for 32 years.<sup>776</sup>

Due to his powerful position in the Ḥāshid tribal confederation, Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar enjoyed virtual impunity. State media denounced him as a 'black sheep,' who had gone rogue several years earlier over a lost nomination in the GPC. However, the tribal gathering was little more than a media stunt and did not accurately reflect tribal allegiances. None of the attending tribes knew why Ḥusayn had summoned them, and some of the same tribesmen had rallied only two days earlier in support of Ṣāliḥ in a neighbouring province. Astounded by Ḥusayn's resignation, several Bakīl shaykhs later distanced themselves from Ḥusayn's

<sup>774</sup> 'Majlis Taḥāluf al-Qabā'il Yustankar Madhbaḥat 'Adan wa-Yaḥyā Shabāb Ta'izz Muḥṭa al-Taghīr wa-Qaṭār al-Ḥurriya (Council of the Tribal Alliance Condemns Massacre of 'Adan and Salutes The Youth of Ta'izz's Change Station and Freedom Train)', *Marib Press*, 17 February 2011; 'Multaqā Abnā' Mā'rib Yū'aīd Shaykh al-Aḥmar fi Ḥumāid al-Mutaḏāhirīn al-'Azal (Forum of the Sons of Mā'rib Supports Shaykh al-Aḥmar in the Protection of Unarmed Protestors)', *Marib Press*, 18 February 2011; 'Qabā'il min Mā'rib wa-l-Jawf wa-Ṣan'ā' wa-l-Bayḏā' wa-Dhamār Ta'lun Inḏmāmḥā li-l-Iḥtijājāt al-Silmīya al-Maṭālibat bi-Taghīr al-Nizām (Tribes of Mā'rib, al-Jawf, Ṣan'ā', al-Bayḏā' and Dhamār Announce their Accession to Peaceful Protests for Change of the System)', *Marib Press*, 20 February 2011; 'Multaqā Abnā' Mā'rib wa-l-Haī'a al-Sha'bīya li-l-Ḥurriya Ta'lunān Da'mḥā al-Kāmil li-Maṭālib al-Taghīr (Forum of the Sons of Mā'rib and the Popular Committee for Freedom Announce Their Full Support for the Demands of Change)', *Marib Press*, 26 February 2011.

<sup>775</sup> 'Al-Ra'īs Yukrim Shuyūkh Al-Qabā'il Al-Muḥṭa Bi-l-'Aṣimat Ṣan'ā'...Wa-Akhirūn Yarfaḏun Liqā (The President honours tribal shaykhs around the capital Ṣan'ā'...and others refuse to meet)'.

<sup>776</sup> Hashem Ahelbarra, 'Major Yemen Tribal Figure Joins Protests', *Al Jazeera English*, 27 February 2011.



statement, claiming that he only spoke for himself. Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar was reportedly displeased about his brother's sleight of hand with which he had attempted to create the false impression that Ḥāshid and Bakīl opposed the regime.<sup>777</sup>



Photo 2: Photomontage at Change Square Ṣan'ā'.  
'The Imām 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣālīḥ. 32 Years of Service to Yemen.' © Tobias Thiel

The complex and fluid dynamics of the intricate web of tribal allegiances that underpins Yemen's political structure make it difficult to accurately trace tribal allegiances, and even harder to determine the balance of power. By mid-March, a split in the tribal landscape along regime-opposition lines began to emerge among tribes with various levels of power,

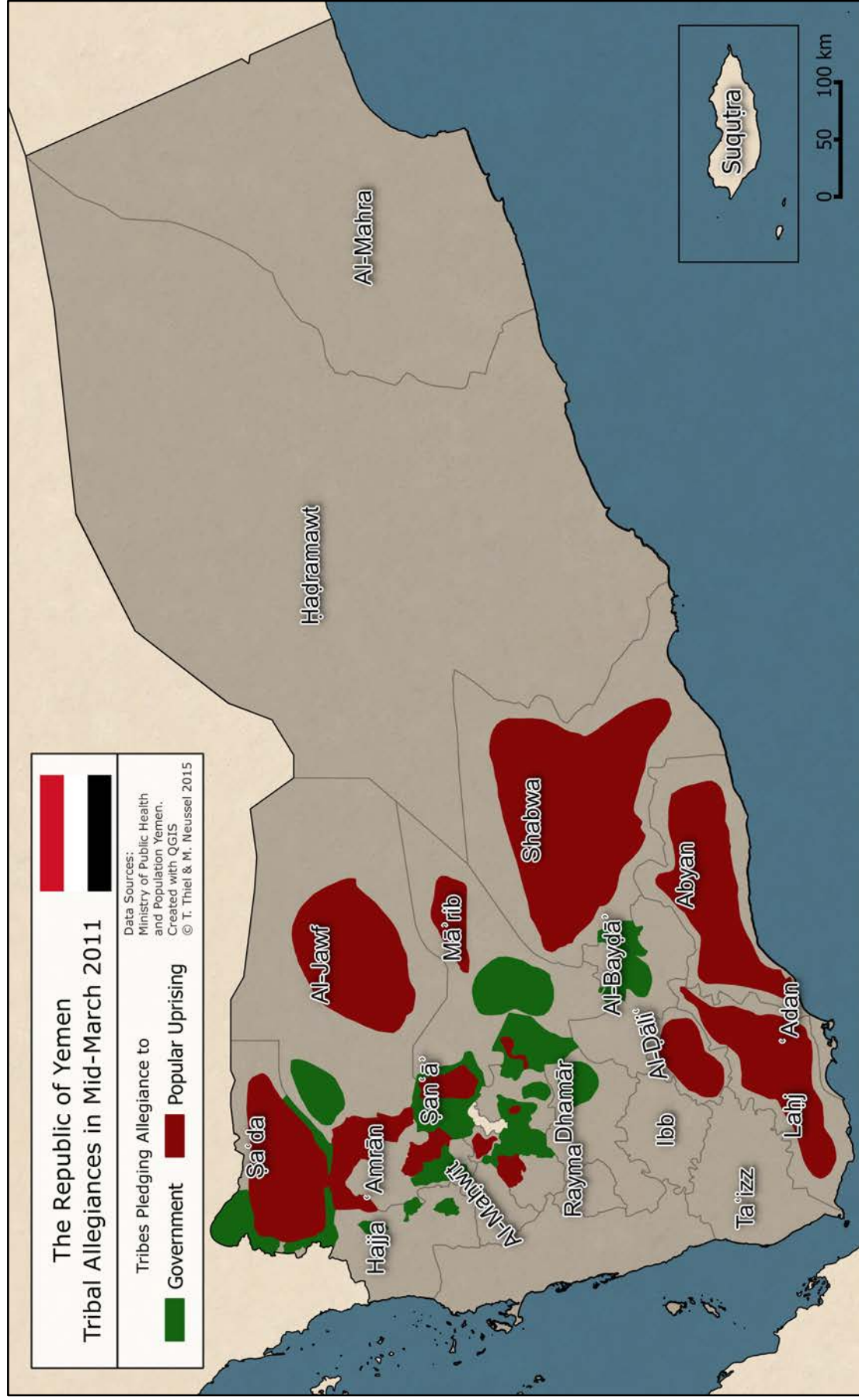
<sup>777</sup> 'Khilāfāt Ḥāda bayn Awlād al-Shaykh 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar'; Holmes, 'The Tribe Has Spoken'.

strategic significance and commitment. A significant number of tribes from the Ḥāshid and Bakīl, as well as the regionally dispersed Madhḥaj, confederation, issued support declarations to the citizen revolt, organised rallies or sent some of their members to Change and Freedom Squares across the country, while others pledged allegiance to the government or remained neutral. The strategically important governorates of Ṣanʿāʾ and ʿAmrān, the heartland of Ḥāshid, were split in their allegiances. Tribes in Ḥajja, Dhamār and al-Bayḍāʾ remained strongly allied to the government. In Ṣaʿda, Māʾrib and al-Jawf, the most powerful tribes supported the revolution, while their local opponents by implication remained with the Ṣāliḥ regime. The majority of southern tribes in Lahj, Abyan, Dālīʿ and Shabwa opposed the Ṣāliḥ regime, however, the salience of tribal identity, membership and resources in these areas was very weak.

However, pledges of support may not accurately reflect the real allegiances, as tribal shaykhs – primarily concerned with political survival – may issue them as a bargaining chip to extract concessions or resources from the central government, hedge bets, or a combination of the above. Such political manoeuvring is characteristic of Yemen's Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes, who, in the words of one analyst, 'get paid in the morning from one guy, pledge allegiance to him, then get paid from the other side in the evening and pledge allegiance to him.'<sup>778</sup> For a majority of tribes, local political considerations trump national level politics, which an episode from Māʾrib illustrates. In mid-March, the bodyguards of Māʾrib governor Nājī al-Zaydī killed an anti-government protester from the ʿAbīda (Madhḥaj) tribe. Fellow ʿAbīda tribesmen stabbed the governor and forced him to flee the eastern province. In response, hundreds of tribesmen from governor's Jahm tribe flocked to his office building in the city of Māʾrib, only to find themselves surrounded by armed ʿAbīda and Ashrāf opponents. In order to prevent a potentially destructive tribal war, leading Jahm and Ashrāf shaykhs agreed to stay out of the conflict between the regime and the opposition, and the Jahm retreated to their territory.<sup>779</sup>

<sup>778</sup> 'Key Tribes Abandon Yemen President', 26 February 2011; Holmes, 'The Tribe Has Spoken'; Charles Schmitz, 'Yemen's Tribal Showdown', *Foreign Affairs*, 3 June 2011; Fattah, 'Yemen: A Social Intifada in a Republic of Sheikhs'.

<sup>779</sup> 'Ṣāliḥ Yazūr Muḥāfiẓ Māʾrib Baʿd Taʾruḍihi Li-l-Ṭaʾn (Ṣāliḥ visits Governor of Māʾrib after being stabbed)', *Māʾrib Al-Yawm*, 14 March 2011; Nadwa Al-Dawsari, 'Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen' (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 2012).



Map 6: Tribal Allegiances in mid-March 2011. Mapping is based on public declarations and tribal analysis by 'Abd al-Wasa' al-Saqaf.

Yemen's religious establishment also split over the uprising. Due to their divergent political affiliations, Yemen's two main organisations of *ʿulamāʾ* – the official *jamʿiyyat ʿulamāʾ al-yaman* (Association of Yemeni Scholars) and the non-governmental *hayʾat ʿulamāʾ al-yaman* (Committee of Yemeni Scholars) – advanced competing positions over the legality of the protests. The *jamʿiyya* initially remained silent on the question of legitimacy and, when the regime requested an advisory opinion, upheld the traditional Sunnī doctrine that allows the departure of the guardian only if he fails to uphold the faith. The group argued that the protests constituted *fitna* (civil strife) and their demand for the *khurūj ʿalā walī al-āmar* (departure of the guardian) was illegal.<sup>780</sup> Headed by ʿAbd al-Majīd al-Zindānī, the *hayʾa*, on the other hand, affirmed the peoples' aspirations for reforms and rejection of tyranny in a carefully worded statement on 21 February, and urged Ṣāliḥ to install a unity government.<sup>781</sup> Ṣāliḥ tasked theologians from both groups to mediate the crisis, who worked out a seven (according to Zindānī) or eight (according to Ṣāliḥ) points agreement at a meeting in the Ṣāliḥ mosque in Ṣanʿāʾ on 28 February. A special committee of seven *ʿulamāʾ* and seven tribal elders, which was entrusted with the mediation, conveyed these points to the JMP, which made a 5-point counterproposal. Although Ṣāliḥ initially signalled agreement, the initiative failed in mid-March over the president's insistence of prohibiting demonstrations and his refusal to resign by the end of 2011.<sup>782</sup> At the same time, the tide shifted more and more against Ṣāliḥ. On 13 March, twenty high-ranking Zaydī scholars – under the leadership of the deputy mufti of the republic, Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Manṣūr – issued a strong-worded statement for the overthrow of regime:

We not only call the military, security services and police to protect our brethren, but also to join them for the sake of bringing down this corrupt and unjust regime. We also call all sons of the Yemeni Muslim people to descend to the 'Square of Change' – the square of

<sup>780</sup> 'Taqaṛīr ʿAn Thawrat al-Taghīr (3) Mūwāqif al-Islāmīyīn Wa-Khunādīqhum (Reports on the Revolution of Change (3) Positions of Islamists and Their Trenches)' (Markaz Al-Jazīra Al-ʿArabiya Li-l-Dirāsāt Wa-l-Buhūth, April 2011).

<sup>781</sup> 'Naṣ Biyān Haṛʾa ʿUlamāʾ Al-Yaman Bishān al-Aūdāʾ al-Rāhina Fi-l-Balād (Text of a Statement by the Committee of Yemeni Scholars about the Current Situation in the Country)', *Munbar ʿUlamāʾ Al-Yaman (Yemeni Scholars Forum)*, 21 February 2011.

<sup>782</sup> 'Raʾis Al-Jumhūrīya Yaḥmal al-ʿUlamāʾ Masuʿūliya Tawḥīd al-Ṣaf Min Ajal Rāb al-Ṣadʾa Wa-Tajnīb al-Waṭan al-Fatīn (President of the Republic Holds Scholars Responsible to Unite to Heal the Rift and Spare the Country Strife)', 28 February 2011; 'Biyān Hām Ṣadr min ʿUlamāʾ wa-Mashāykh al-Yaman al-Sāʿin fi-l-Iṣlāḥ bayn Raʾis al-Jumhūrīya wa-l-Liqāʾ al-Mushtarak wa-Sharikāʾha (Important Statement Issued by Yemeni Scholars and Shaykhs Who Seek Reform Between the President of the Republic and the Joint Meeting Parties and their Partners)', *Munbar ʿUlamāʾ Al-Yaman (Yemeni Scholars Forum)*, 8 March 2011; 'Abd al-Malik bin Ḥusayn Al-Tāj, Haṛʾa ʿUlamāʾ al-Yaman Badhlāt Juhūdā Kabīra Fi Muʿālīja al-Aḥdāth (Committee of Yemeni Scholars Made A Great Effort in Dealing with Events), interview by Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Al-ʿAmrānī, 14 May 2011.

honour and dignity – in order to support our brethren in repelling the *fitna* that only happened due to some people's negligence in coming out to protest, which encouraged the regime to carry out these attacks.<sup>783</sup>

In governorates of the former south Yemen, including Ḥaḍramawt and 'Adan, religious scholars widely affirmed the peoples' right to demand reforms through peaceful protests since early February, and later called on Ṣāliḥ to leave office.<sup>784</sup>

By mid-March, Ṣāliḥ had lost dozens of members of the ruling party, key tribes and a substantial part of the religious establishment. However, neither of these groups fundamentally altered the balance of power. As formal political institutions lacked salience, turncoats from the ruling party did not wield significant political power independent of their positions in the government. With the notable exception of members of the al-Aḥmar family, tribal defections were largely business as usual. Religious scholars, though influential on public opinion, held little material power, while the bifurcation of the country's clerical elite moderated their influence on the course of events. However, these early cracks in the system<sup>785</sup> of regime alliances foreshadowed a grand mutiny that would change the course of Yemen's revolutionary movement.

### ***The Friday of Dignity and the Collapse of the Pillars of Regime Power***

18 March 2011 – known as *jum'at al-karāma*, the Friday of Dignity – became a watershed moment in the Yemeni revolution. At around one o'clock, when Ṣan'ā's Dā'irī Road was filled with thousands of protestors after Friday prayers, regime thugs set fire to a pile of tires that was located behind a wall, which residents had erected to contain the expansion of the Change Square protest camp. In the cover of the smoke, plain-clothed sharpshooters opened fire from the roofs of surrounding buildings, including the house of Aḥmad 'Alī al-Aḥwal, the governor of Maḥwīt, a long-term Ṣāliḥ ally. In a matter of minutes, the professionally trained assailants killed at least 45 peaceful demonstrators, including three children, and wounded more than 200 before they were overpowered by the sheer mass of protestors. A Human Rights Watch investigation into the killings revealed evidence that key confidants of President Ṣāliḥ in collusion of the Central Security Forces had carefully

<sup>783</sup> James King, 'Statement from Zaydī 'Ulamā' in Support of the Revolution', *The Yemen Peace Project*, 17 March 2011.

<sup>784</sup> 'Biyān 'Ulamā' 'Adan wa-Ḥaḍramawt wa-Du'āthā Ḥawal al-Aḥdāth al-Akhīra fī al-Yaman (Statement of the Scholars of 'Adan and Ḥaḍramawt about the Recent Events in Yemen)', *Munbar 'Ulamā' Al-Yaman (Yemeni Scholars Forum)*, 18 February 2011; 'Majlis 'Ulamā' Āhal al-Sunna Bi-Ḥaḍramawt Yad'ū al-Ra'īs Ṣāliḥ Īlā al-Raḥīl (Council of Sunnī Scholars in Ḥaḍramawt Calls for President Ṣāliḥ to Leave)', *Munbar 'Ulamā' Al-Yaman (Yemeni Scholars Forum)*, 2 June 2011.

<sup>785</sup> Sarah Phillips, 'Cracks in the Yemeni System', *Middle East Report* 28 (2005).

planned the massacre.<sup>786</sup> Whether the president personally authorised the brutal attack himself or not, the attack was carefully planned. Ṣāliḥ was quick to mourn the *shuhadā' ad-dīmuqrāṭīya* (martyrs of democracy), but there was no ambiguity among Yemenis, who have known Ṣāliḥ for over 33 years, who bore responsibility for the massacre. The Joint Meeting Parties quickly issued a powerful statement condemning Ṣāliḥ, and categorically excluded the possibility of any further dialogue with his government:

The bloody regime led by President Ṣāliḥ and his children and the children of his brother committed a massacre and crime against humanity by using violence and excessive force... in the deliberate murder of peaceful protesters in Change Square... The heads of JMP call on all classes and segments of Yemeni society, who have not yet joined the peaceful sit-in squares, to condemn and denounce this crime, which revealed the bloody path of this regime... and invite them all to join the peaceful protest squares... The JMP calls on all honourable officers and armed and security forces personnel, sons of this country and her protectors and protectors of all her people, to express their condemnation of these crimes and to refuse to participate in killing their peoples' sons and assume responsibility for their own blood before God and the nation...<sup>787</sup>

The atrocity was part of a shrewd political calculation that Ṣāliḥ had applied to Ḥirāk since 2007: if he managed to drag his opponents into a cycle of violence, it would squander the legitimacy of the revolution, and render the conflict into a military battle he could win.<sup>788</sup>

In anticipation of further resignations, the president – for the first time since the outbreak of war in 1994 – imposed a 30-day state of emergency and dismissed the government in accordance with article 121 of the Yemeni constitution.<sup>789</sup> The massacre's blatancy became a symbol for the moral bankruptcy of the regime. Amidst an international outcry, domestic political support for the president haemorrhaged virtually overnight. Contention rapidly diffused from the early risers to the traditional triad of regime power: the military, the tribe, and political Islam.<sup>790</sup> As individuals are frequently members in

<sup>786</sup> 'Yanshur 38 Min Asmā' Shuhadā' al-Jum'a al-Dāmīya fi Ṣan'a' (Publishing 38 Names of the Martyrers of Bloody Friday in Ṣan'a'), *Marib Press*, 19 March 2011; 'Documented Names of Martyrs of the March 18th Massacre in Sana'a', *Yemen Rights Monitor*, 31 March 2011; Jonas Ahrens, 'Das Massaker Vom »Platz Des Wandels«', *Zenith Online*, 19 March 2011; Letta Tayler, 'Unpunished Massacre: Yemen's Failed Response to the "Friday of Dignity" Killings' (Human Rights Watch, February 2013).

<sup>787</sup> 'Biyān Aḥzāb al-Liqā' al-Mushtarak Bishān Majzara Ṣāliḥ fi Sāḥat al-Taghīr bi-Ṣan'a' (Joint Meeting Party Statement on Ṣāliḥ massacre in Change Square in Ṣan'a'), *Al-Shahwa*, 18 March 2011.

<sup>788</sup> Interview with 'Alī al-Bukhaytī, Ṣan'a', November 2013.

<sup>789</sup> *Qarār Jumhūrī Bi-I'ālān Ḥāla Al-Ṭuwāra' Fī Jamī'a Anḥa' Al-Jumhūrīya Wa-Limuda 30 Yawmān (Republican Decree to Declare a State of Emergency all over the Republic for 30 Days)*, 2011; 'Istbāqā Laniya Kathīr min al-Wuzarā' Taqdīm Istaqālathum: Ṣāliḥ Yaql Ḥukūma Mujawwar wa-Yaklāfhā bi-Ṣarīf al-Shu'un al-Āma al-Ādiya (Anticipating the Intention of Many Ministers to Resign: Ṣāliḥ Sacks the Mujawwar Government and Entrusts it with the Normal Conduct of Public Affairs)', *Marib Press*, 20 March 2011.

<sup>790</sup> 'Abd al-Ghanī Al-Iryānī, 'Yemen's Counterrevolutionary Power-Play', *Foreign Policy*, 16 September 2011.



multiple groups, the boundaries between political parties tribes and religious scholars were blurred. The case of Zindānī, a Sunnī religious scholar, shaykh in the Arḥab tribe, and former member of Iṣlāḥ with close ties to Ṣāliḥ, illustrates this point.

The fragmentation of the political, military and tribal elite was the culmination of Ṣāliḥ's failed alliance policy since the late 1990s, when the president began consolidating power around his immediate family.<sup>791</sup> The appalling slaughter brought these intra-elite rivalries, which had been simmering under the surface for years, to the fore and provided a welcome opportunity for 'a coalition of unlikely anti-regime bedfellows'<sup>792</sup> to bandwagon with the movement. Ironically, none of the most prominent supporters of the movement – 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar, the al-Aḥmar family<sup>793</sup> and shaykh 'Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī – were known for their democratic ideals, but had a reputation of corruption and a hardline approach to religious minorities, the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk. On 20 March 2011, scores of senior officials tendered their resignations from their official positions and the ruling party. These included three government ministers, seven further members of parliament, more than 20 ambassadors (roughly half of the diplomatic corps) in addition to dozens of other senior diplomats, as well as at least a hundred military officers, provincial governors, deputy-ministers, advisors, and local government officials, union leaders, and others.<sup>794</sup>

However, the most important blow to Ṣāliḥ was the defection of Major General 'Alī Muḥsin Ṣāliḥ al-Aḥmar, the Commander of the Northwestern Military Zone – widely considered the second most powerful man in the country. On 21 March, Muḥsin announced his support for the revolution and deployed tanks and armoured vehicles from his *fırqa al-ūlā al-mudara'a* (First Armoured Division) in strategic locations in Ṣan'ā'. Muḥsin's desertion opened the floodgates for military resignations; within hours, several top commanders, including Muḥammad 'Alī Muḥsin, the Commander of the Eastern Military Zone, as well as dozens of high-ranking officers resigned.<sup>795</sup> The breakaway

<sup>791</sup> Glosemeyer, 'Der Jemen ohne Ali Abdallah Salih?'

<sup>792</sup> Longley Alley, 'Yemen Changes Everything... And Nothing'.

<sup>793</sup> Despite the similarity of names, there is no family relation between 'Alī Muḥsin Ṣāliḥ al-Aḥmar and the son's of Shaykh 'Abd Allāh bin Ḥusayn al-Āḥmar, Ṣādiq, Ḥamīd, Ḥusayn and Ḥimyar.

<sup>794</sup> 'Inḥiyār Li-Mukawanāt al-Ḥizb al-Ḥākīm, Wa-Tā'yīd Wāsa' Li-Thawrat al-Taghīyr (Breakdown of the Components of the Ruling Party, Widespread Support for the Revolution for Change)', *Al-Ṣaḥwa*, 21 March 2011; 'Akthar Min 20 Safīrā Yanḍimūn Li-Thawrat al-Shabāb Wa-Yaṭalībūn Ṣāliḥ Bi-l-Tanaḥī (More Than 20 Ambassadors Join the Youth Revolution and Call on Ṣāliḥ to Step Down)', *Al-Ṣaḥwa*, 21 March 2011; 'Akādīmīya al-Shurṭa Wa-Akthar Min 10 Alawīya Ta'lun Ta'yīdhā Li-l-Thawra al-Sha'bīya (Police Academy and More Than Ten Brigades Announce Their Support to the Popular Revolution)', *Al-Ṣaḥwa*, 21 March 2011.

<sup>795</sup> Ahmed Al-Haj, 'Rival Tanks Deploy in Streets of Yemen's Capital', *Associated Press*, 21 March 2011; 'Top Army Commanders Defect in Yemen', *Al-Jazeera English*, 21 March 2011; 'Akādīmīya al-Shurṭa Wa-Akthar

military units encompassed around 10 brigades with an average size of about 1,500 troops. 'Alī Muḥsin's defection thus effectively led to a split in the army between the most powerful units: on the one hand Muḥsin's *firqa*, and on the other Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ's Republican Guard and Yaḥyā Ṣāliḥ's paramilitary Central Security Forces.

The longstanding alliance between Ṣāliḥ and Muḥsin had begun weakening in the latter half of the 1990s, as Ṣāliḥ felt threatened by Muḥsin's political and military power and was angered over his refusal to support the grooming of Aḥmad 'Alī as presidential successor. The two remained allies, but began manoeuvring against each other. In a 2011 interview, 'Alī Muḥsin's criticised Ṣāliḥ for not heeding to the advice of the trusted associates grouped in the so-called *al-maṭbakh al-sīyāsī* (political kitchen), trying to pass on power to his son as well as 'tyranny, backwardness, corruption, and chaos.'<sup>796</sup> This criticism is, in fact, coherent with Zaydī doctrine and coterminous with the earlier criticism levelled by Zaydī *sāda* and Free Yemenis against the Ḥamīd al-Dīn Imams for abandoning the *shūrā* principle, hereditary rule and Yemen's backwardness.<sup>797</sup>

After 'Alī Muḥsin's defection, the tribal tide shifted decidedly against Ṣāliḥ. Despite Ṣāliḥ's efforts to secure tribal backing or, at least, neutrality, in exchange for large cash transfers, the absence of long-term benefits, the marginalisation of tribes, as well as pejoration of prospects for Ṣāliḥ's political survival led to successive tribal splits. Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar, the head of the powerful Ḥāshid confederation, which encompasses Ṣāliḥ's own Sanḥān tribe, joined his brothers Ḥamīd, Ḥimyar and Ḥusayn in their open opposition to the president. While the eldest of the al-Aḥmar brothers had initially assumed a neutral position as the 'brother of all' in the preceding months, he now put his full weight behind the uprising.<sup>798</sup> Later the same month, Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar raised the stakes by calling on Ṣāliḥ to step down and leave the country.<sup>799</sup> The family shifted from hedging bets to wait how events will turn out to outright support for the revolutionaries in order to preserve their political status in a post-Ṣāliḥ regime. Amīn al-'Akīmī and 'Abd Rabbu al-'Awāḍī, the leading shaykhs of the Bakīl confederation and of the al-Baiḍā tribes, respectively, as well as two influential long-term allies from the Bakīl, Majalī bin 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Shā'if and Sinān

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Min 10 Alawīya Ta'lun Ta'yīdhā Li-l-Thawra al-Sha'bīya (Police Academy and More Than Ten Brigades Announce Their Support to the Popular Revolution)'.

<sup>796</sup> Al-Istibdād wa-l-Takhlif wa-l-Fasād wa-l-Fawḍa.

<sup>797</sup> Makram, 'Al-Liwā' 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar'.

<sup>798</sup> 'Sīra Dhātīya: al-Shaykh Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar - Taīyār Taḥawwul min Wasīṭ bayn al-Mu'āraḍa wa-l-Niḍām ilā Khaṣm li-Ra'īs Ṣāliḥ (Resume: Shaykh Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar - The Pilot Turned From a Broker Between the Opposition and the System to an Adversary of President Ṣāliḥ)', *Marib Press*, 26 May 2011.

<sup>799</sup> 'Yemen's Hamid Al-Ahmar Urges President Saleh to Leave', *BBC News*, 31 March 2011.



Abu Laḥūm, defected. Although Ṣādiq's claim that *all* Ḥāshid tribes supported the uprising is exaggerated, many powerful Ḥāshid and Bakīl tribes did side with the revolution. These included, among others, the strategically located Arḥab and Nihm tribes in the outskirts of Ṣan'ā', the Sufiyān, Hamdān and Khawlān, al-Ḥayma, 'Iyāl Surayḥ and Yazīd, Banī Bahlūl, Banī Hushaysh, Banī Maṭar and al-Ḥaddā.

Apart from the Ḥāshid and Bakīl, many tribes in Mā'rib, al-Jawf, Shabwa, Abyan, al-Bayḍā', Ḥaḍramawt and al-Mahra, for example the 'Abīda (Mā'rib), 'Awlāq, Ḥawārith (Shabwa), the Radā', Qīfa, Rīāshī, Ṣabāḥ, 'Awād (al-Bayḍā') send their members to the protest squares. In some instances, they founded *lijān sha'bīya* (popular committees) to maintain security as the regime withdrew much-needed troops to Ṣan'ā'. Short-term tribal alliances, such as the *multaqā abnā' mā'rib* (Forum of the Sons of Mā'rib), *tahāluf al-qabā'il mā'rib wa-l-jawf* (Alliance of the Tribes of Mā'rib and al-Jawf), *majlis al-taḍāmūn al-waṭanī* (National Solidarity Council) and the *multaqā abnā' al-manāṭiq al-wusṭā* (Forum of the Sons of the Central Regions) helped in coordinating among anti-government tribes.<sup>800</sup> On 30 July, some 750 tribal and social figures from across Yemen founded the *tahāluf qabā'il al-yaman* (Alliance of Yemeni Tribes) with the declared goal of 'protecting the revolution, unity and defence of the security and stability of Yemen' against the 'remnants of the family regime.' The alliance committed itself to the principles of a civil state and shaykh Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar, a major force behind the initiative, was appointed as the head of its 116-member-strong consultative council. The *tahāluf qabā'il al-yaman* served the dual purpose of coordinating military action against the regime and politically representing member tribes. It called on security forces to refuse orders and evoked tribal codes for protection by equating attacks on the protestors with an aggression against the allied tribes themselves.<sup>801</sup>

Tribal resistance against the central government emerged virtually everywhere in late March and April. In the week following 19 March, in the far north, Ḥūthīs – who had joined forces with the popular arms dealer Fāris Manā'a – captured the city of Ṣa'da in a battle with pro-government al-'Ābidīn tribesmen led by shaykh 'Uthmān Majalī. They expelled pro-Ṣāliḥ governor Ṭaha Hājir, and a newly constituted local committee, composed of Ḥūthīs, residents and defected military commanders, appointed Manā'a as

<sup>800</sup> 'Al-Qabā'il Taqūḍ Nizām Ṣāliḥ: Taghīrāt al-Khāriṭa al-Qabaliya wa-Tā'thīrā 'alā Zakhm al-Thawra al-Sha'bīya (Tribes Undermine Ṣāliḥ's System: The Tribal Map Changes and Impacts the Popular Revolution', *Marib Press*, 16 April 2011.

<sup>801</sup> Ṣāliḥ Al-Qā'dī, 'Ishhār "Tahāluf Qabā'il al-Yaman" Wa-Tawqī'a Wathīqa Li-Nuṣra Thawrat al-Shabāb (Declaration of the "Alliance of Yemeni Tribes" and Signature of a Document in Support of the Youth Revolution', *Al-Maṣdar Online*, 30 July 2011; 'Naṣ Biyān Tahāluf Qabā'il Al-Yaman (Text of the Statement of the Alliance of Yemeni Tribes)', 17 August 2011.

the new governor of Ṣa'da on 26 March. Manā'a, who resigned his membership in the ruling party only shortly before, had been a loyal ally to the president throughout the six Ṣa'da Wars, but relations with Ṣāliḥ had soured over his imprisonment in the first half of 2010.<sup>802</sup> On 25 March 'Abd al-Malik Badr ad-Dīn al-Ḥūthī entertained a huge victory rally of reportedly more than 100,000 followers, in which he called for Ṣāliḥ's departure. The Ḥūthīs subsequently expanded into parts of neighbouring Ḥajja, 'Amrān, and al-Jawf governorates. In the same weeks, al-Bayḍā's 'Awāḍ tribes expelled the Republican Guards from a base in al-Jawf and captured its weapons depot. They formed a popular committee for the governance of the province to pre-empt an 'administrative vacuum.'<sup>803</sup> The same day, Arḥab tribes, which are strategically located in the proximity of Ṣan'ā' International Airport, announced their support to the revolution, and a few days later prevented a brigade of the Republican Guards from moving heavy weaponry to the capital.<sup>804</sup>

Despite initial wavering, 'Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī turned against Ṣāliḥ, and dragged part of Yemen's religious elite with him. While still involved in the clerical mediation initiative, Zindānī had visited Change Square in Ṣan'ā' on 1 March, where he slammed Ṣāliḥ for his authoritarian rule and proclaimed the advent of an Islamic state in Yemen.<sup>805</sup> A week later, he announced in an interview on the opposition channel Suhayl TV that 'it is not permitted to go out and protest against the authority.' The relationship between the two had traditionally been close: Ṣāliḥ had used Zindānī on several occasions, be it for a fatwa against southerners in the 1994 war, to use radical Islamists to extract counterterrorism funding from the United States, or in the 2006 elections, when Zindānī supported Ṣāliḥ rather than the candidate of his own party. On 12 March, however,

<sup>802</sup> Aḥmad Makhtafī, 'Sa'ada Governorate between Ideological Wars, a New Government and Lack of State Control', *Yemen Times*, 14 February 2011; 'Houthis Control Sa'ada, Help Appoint Governor', *National Yemen*, 29 March 2011.

<sup>803</sup> 'Al-Qabā'il Tasāṭir 'Alā Madīnat al-Jawf Wa-Taṭarud al-Ḥaras al-Jumhūrī (Tribes Dominate the City of al-Jawf and Expel the Republican Guard)', *Akhbār al-Yawm*, 24 March 2011.

<sup>804</sup> 'Biyān Ṣādr 'an Mashāykh wa-A'īyan Qabīlat Arḥab wa min Ma'hum min Qabā'il al-Yaman (Statement Issued by Shaykhs and Dignitaries of Arḥab and Other Yemeni Tribes)', 22 March 2011; Kamāl Al-Salāmī, 'Qabā'il Arḥab Tamana' Liwā' 'Askarī Taba' bi-l-Ḥaras al-Jumhūrī min al-Taḥrak bi-Asliḥathu al-Thaqīla Naḥū Ṣan'ā' (Arḥab Tribes Prevent a Military Brigade of the Republican Guards from Moving its Heavy Weapons to Ṣan'ā')', *Al-Maṣdar Online*, 26 March 2011.

<sup>805</sup> 'Al-Shaykh al-Zindānī Yuḥayī al-Mu'ataṣimīn bi-Sāhat al-Taghyīr wa-Yubārik Thawrathum, wa-Ya'tabirtha Ḥāla Jadīdān, wa-min Āfḍal al-Jihād 'Ind Allāh (Shaykh Zindani Greets Protesters In Square Change and Blesses Their Revolution, And Considers It A New Solution, And The Best Of God's Jihad)', *Marib Press*, 1 March 2011; Laura Kasinof and Scott Shane, 'Radical Cleric Demands Ouster of Yemen Leader', *The New York Times*, 1 March 2011.

Zindānī left Ṣan‘ā’ for his hometown in Arḥab in protest over the suppression of the protesters and called on security forces to disobey orders to kill citizens.<sup>806</sup>

After the Friday of Dignity massacre, Sunnī scholars from the *hay‘at ‘ulamā’ al-yaman* issued a strong-worded declaration against the regime. The statement called on Ṣāliḥ to comply with peoples’ demands, attributed the full responsibility for the massacre to Ṣāliḥ and demanded the prosecution of the perpetrators. The *hay‘a* moreover refused his declaration of the state of emergency, urged to dissolve the *jihāz al-amn al-qawmī* (National Security Agency), demanded to remove the Republican Guards from Ṣan‘ā’, and encouraged security forces to disobey orders.<sup>807</sup> Shaykh al-Barāk, a cleric with close relations to the regime, rebuffed this declaration and framed the uprising as a temptation that must be resisted in order to avoid *fitna* or bloodshed, which are forbidden in Islam, and asked protestors to cease their activities.<sup>808</sup> The exchange of *fatāwā* and counter-*fatāwā* across Yemen, which continued into the latter half of the year, manifests the politicisation of *‘ulamā’*, which allowed each side to justify their actions in religious terms.<sup>809</sup>

By late March, Ṣāliḥ’s three-pronged support base had become a house of cards. With ‘Alī Muḥsin’s defection, he had lost a substantive part of the military, even if he maintained firm control over the Republican Guards and Central Security Forces. Significant parts of the religious establishment followed ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī, which adversely affected the religious legitimacy of the government. With the al-Aḥmar brothers standing united against Ṣāliḥ, tribal backing dwindled. Historically, the Ḥāshid and Bakīl have often rebelled against the central state when it was seen to be overreaching its

<sup>806</sup> ‘Alā’ ‘Iṣām, ‘Is This Sheikh Zindani’s Double Game?’, *Comment Middle East*, 17 March 2011; ‘Ba’d Inbā’ ‘an Muḥāwalāt al-Nāil minhu: al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī Yughādir al-‘Aṣimat Ṣan‘ā’ ilā Muṣqaṭ Rāsihi bi-Qabīlat Arḥab wa-Tadfaq Alālāf min al-Qabā’il al-Musalaḥ ilā Manzalhu (After the News about Attempts to Undermine Him: Shaykh ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Zindānī Leaves the Capital Ṣan‘ā’ to his Native Arḥab Tribe and Thousands of Armed Tribesmen Stream to his Home)’, *Marib Press*, 12 March 2011.

<sup>807</sup> ‘‘Ulamā’ wa-Shuyūkh al-Yaman Yaḥmilūn Ṣāliḥ Mas‘ūliya Mujzara Sāhat al-Taghīr wa-Yaṭālibūna Bi-l-Istijāba Li-Muṭalab al-Sha‘b (Yemeni Scholars and Shuyūkh Attribute Responsibility for the Massacre in Change Square to Ṣāliḥ and Urge Him to Respond to the Demands of the People)’, *Al-Maṣdar Online*, 19 March 2011.

<sup>808</sup> ‘Al-Shaykh al-Barāk: Mā Yuḥarī fī al-Yaman min al-Fatan ilatī Yajib Ajtinābihā (Shaykh al-Barāk: What Is Happening In Yemen Comes From Temptation That Must Be Avoided)’, *almoslim.net*, 22 March 2011.

<sup>809</sup> ‘Biyān Ha’ā ‘Ulamā’ Al-Yaman Li-Idāna Wa-Istankār al-A’tidā’āt ‘Alā al-Mu’ataṣimīn (Statement by the Committee of Yemeni Scholars Condemning and Denouncing Attacks on Protestors)’, *Munbar ‘Ulamā’ Al-Yaman (Yemeni Scholars Forum)*, 30 March 2011; ‘Religious and Tribal Leaders Demand Saleh Step Down’, *National Yemen*, 18 April 2011; ‘Biyān ‘Ulamā’ al-Yaman Bishān al-Taṭawarāt Wa-l-Aḥdāth al-Akhīra Fī-l-Balād, Wa Intiqāl al-Sulṭa Dustūriyān (Statement by Yemeni Scholars on Recent Events and Developments in the Country, and Transition of Constitutional Power)’, *Munbar ‘Ulamā’ Al-Yaman (Yemeni Scholars Forum)*, 15 June 2011; ‘Naṣ Biyān Jama‘īa ‘Ulamā’ Al-Yaman Iladhī Yatḍman Fatwā Bi-Taḥrīm Al-Muzāharāt (Text of a Statement by the Society of Yemeni Religious Scholars That Includes a Fatwā Prohibiting Demonstrations)’, *Yemen Press*, 30 September 2011.

authority. In the past millennium or so, a ruler's ability to stay in power was directly predicated on his ability to maintain friendly relations with both tribal confederations.

As traditional regime allies turned against the regime after the 18 March massacre, the self-inflicted wounds of the past decades, described in chapter 4, came to haunt Ṣāliḥ. The challenges posed by the Ḥūthīs, Ḥirāk, disgruntled tribes, as well as radical jihadists became all the more pertinent as Ṣāliḥ stood without allies. Curiously, it was regime repression, which gave the largest boost to the movement. The outrage caused by the *jum'at al-karāma* not only provided a welcome excuse for disgruntled elites, but – as Yemenis united against Ṣāliḥ – transformed the mobilisation into a mass movement.

### ***Hijacking the Revolution: From Polarisation to Militarisation***

Aware that a new regime dominated by old elites would be all too similar to the one they sought to oust, youth protestors faced a difficult political choice. The bandwagoning of the JMP and traditional Ṣāliḥ allies with the movement became a double-edged sword for independent activists. On the one hand, political parties' resources, networks and experience spurred the organisational development and professionalisation of the movement. On the other hand, an internal struggle between the independent youths and those, who saw the movement as a vehicle for political influence, polarised the squares.

Before the JMP joined the protests, youth groups were scattered and had very few resources. Despite its attempts at building organisation structures, its members lacked the political experience to institutionalise the movement. Political parties and elites brought along financial resources that allowed keeping up the political momentum and provided military protection from abuses by *balāṭiga* and security forces loyal to the regime. While Ḥamīd funded a variety of social services through Iṣlāḥ-affiliated organisations in the squares, 'Alī Muḥsin's *firqa* recruited and provided basic military training to Iṣlāḥi youths.

However, early signs of internal quarrels began in February with the sit-ins, even before the JMP had officially endorsed the movement. The most salient dividing line in Ṣan'ā's Change Square emerged between members of Iṣlāḥ on the one hand, and independent youths, women and Ḥūthīs on the other. Determined to overthrow the regime the activists sought to 'peacefully escalate' the situation, while Iṣlāḥis preferred to wait for the outcome of negotiations between the opposition parties and the GPC. However, as long as the threat was perceived to emanate from the outside, particularly the Central Security Forces, relations were relatively amicable and even ideologically opposed groups,

such as Iṣlāḥ and the Ḥūthīs, coordinated with each other. Protestors largely agreed to deal with these issues internally in order not to weaken the movement.<sup>810</sup>

In the two-month period from March to May, however, internal conflicts came to the fore. Iṣlāḥ turned into the strongest force at Change Square in Ṣan'ā' and other squares across the country. The party tried to impose its ideology, such as the prohibition of music and dancing or gender-separated marches, but soon backpedalled as its rigid stance cost the party popularity. The public stage at Change Square became the centre of many quarrels. Fights over airtime emerged as Iṣlāḥ began to assume control of the stage. After failed negotiations over speaking time among various groups, socialists and independents built their own stages, which were vandalised by Iṣlāḥīs.<sup>811</sup> Party members also tried to ban groups from distributing documents that were not in line with Iṣlāḥ's ideology. They viewed the pluralism of the squares as a problem and, by reference to the Islamic concept of *shaq al-ṣaf* (lit. divide the row), equated internal criticism to breaking ranks.<sup>812</sup>

After *jum'at al-karāma*, internal oppression became blatant. Backed by two cunning political entrepreneurs – Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar and 'Alī Muḥsin – Iṣlāḥ came to dominate the *lajna al-tanzīmīya* and took over the security of the squares. A number of independent youths, some of which had been camping since 3 February, refused to recognise the self-imposed authority of the *lajna*. They faced constant harassment from the *lajna* and soldiers acting on its behalf. In one instance, when decided to march on 60 Meter Road in defiance of the *lajna*'s directives, they were stopped and beaten by soldiers from 'Alī Muḥsin's *firqa*. After Ṣāliḥ denounced the mixing of women and men in demonstrations, Muḥsin's soldiers beat women, who failed to obey orders not to participate in marches with their male counterparts.<sup>813</sup> Protestors that arrived with the life marches from Ta'izz in Ṣan'ā' were also severely beaten. Iṣlāḥ's control of the squares crystallised in the construction and maintenance of a prison designed to discipline insubordinate youths.<sup>814</sup> As the second strongest group in Ṣan'ā's Change Square, the Ḥūthīs clashed on various occasions with Iṣlāḥīs, who had sabotaged their media tent and clinic.<sup>815</sup>

<sup>810</sup> Interview with Aṭiyāf al-Wazīr (Independent Youth Activist and Writer), Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid.

<sup>812</sup> Interview with Ranā Jarhūm, 'Ammān, September 2012; Interview with Gabūl al-Mutawakkil, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>813</sup> Interview with Aṭiyāf al-Wazīr (Independent Youth Activist and Writer), Ṣan'ā'; Interview with Ranā Jarhūm, 'Ammān, September 2012.

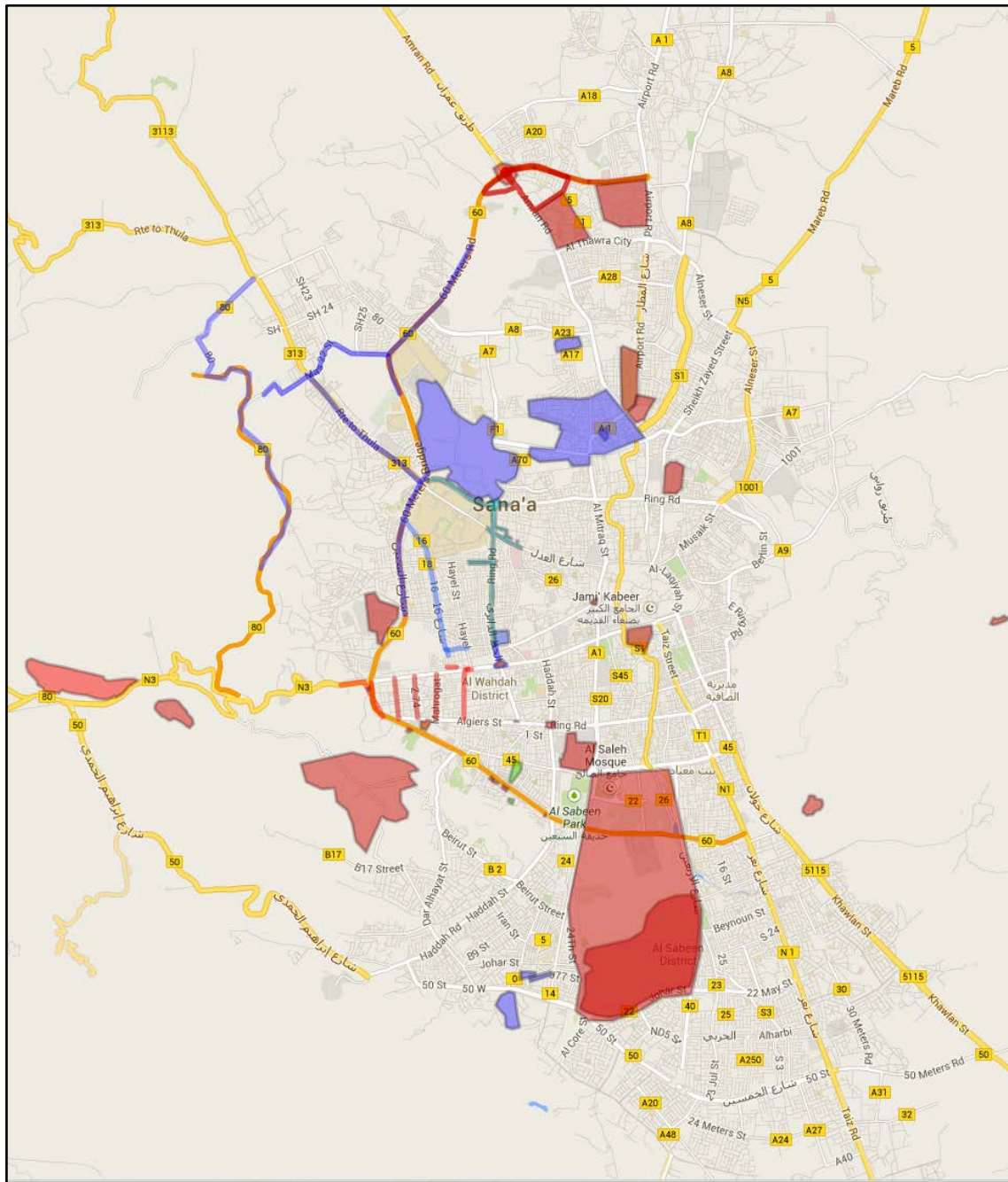
<sup>814</sup> 'Bi-l-Fidiyū: Sijīn Ḥizb al-Iṣlāḥ fī Sāḥat al-Taghīr wa-Ṣama 'Āra 'alā Jubayn Kul Yamanī (On Video: Iṣlāḥ Party Prison in Change Square and Shame on the Forehead of Every Yemeni)', *al-Bayḍā' Press*, 31 December 2011.

<sup>815</sup> Interview with Ranā Jarhūm, 'Ammān, September 2012.

‘Alī Muḥsin was perhaps the most divisive figure in the squares. After his defection, protestors were asked to change the slogan *al-sha‘b yurīd isqāṭ niẓām!* (The people want to overthrow the system!), of which Muḥsin had been an integral part, by *ihḥal!* (Leave!), which focused only on ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ. Those, who failed to comply, were either beaten or imprisoned. ‘Alī Muḥsin’s name moreover disappeared from lists of corrupt individuals that were to be overthrown, while youths and activists wanted to hold him accountable.<sup>816</sup> Southerners refused to stand side-by-side with Muḥsin for the role he had played in the 1994 war, and intensified calls for southern independence, while Ḥūthīs held a grudge for his involvement in the Ṣa‘da wars. The president’s supporters tried to capitalise on the emerging rifts in the movement and with slogans, such as ‘No Muḥsin; No Ḥamīd.’ Conspiracy theories emerged among the protestors over whether the Ṣāliḥ regime had planted ‘Alī Muḥsin as a Trojan horse to divide the movement and Zindānī – who had made it on the US Treasury Department’s Specially Designated Global Terrorist list in 2004 – in order to foreshadow an Islamist takeover. Such theories, however, proved unfounded, as both were trying to position themselves for a post-Ṣāliḥ future.

By late April, many centrist and independent activists felt that their revolution had been hijacked. A deep sense of disillusionment and exclusion led to the political demobilisation of many early risers, which withdrew from the squares. Less than four months later, the once vibrant squares filled with revolutionary enthusiasm had decayed into dull places, in which co-demonstrators seemed more preoccupied with each other than the regime they aspired to overthrow. While Iṣlāḥ’s role in the squares led to the internal politicisation of the movement, ‘Alī Muḥsin and Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar contributed to its militarisation. Ṣan‘ā’ was divided into areas of military influence. Most of Ṣan‘ā’’s neighbourhoods south of Zubayrī Street and east of Sāyla Road remained under the control of forces loyal to Ṣāliḥ (red), the Republican Guard or the Central Security Forces. ‘Alī Muḥsin’s *firqa* controlled the northern and western parts of the city, especially the area around Ṣan‘ā’ University, where its base was incidentally located, and al-Aḥmar’s tribal fighters and al-Ḥaṣaba (both purple). At various locations, for example at Zirā‘a Street or the area between the Ministry of the Interior and al-Aḥmar residency soldiers from opposing factions faced each other with as little a buffer as a few meters.

<sup>816</sup> Interview with Gabūl al-Mutawakkil, Ṣan‘ā’, November 2013; Interview with Aṭīyāf al-Wazīr (Independent Youth Activist and Writer), Ṣan‘ā’.



Map 7: Areas of Control in Şan'a', 30 September 2011.<sup>817</sup>

Amidst predictions that Yemen was at the verge of a civil war, moderate GPC insiders and members of the JMP actively engaged in negotiations behind the scenes from March 2011 onwards. In mid-March, Yemen's foreign minister Abū Bakr al-Qirbī travelled to Riyadh to discuss a Saudi-led mediation initiative by Arab Gulf States. On 25 March, Şāliḥ announced his willingness to 'hand over the power to safe hands, and not to malicious

<sup>817</sup> Source: <http://goo.gl/maps/KwpJC>. Author unknown. Data verified by author.

forces who conspire against the homeland,<sup>818</sup> which was widely interpreted to mean his political allies and exclude political antagonists, such as 'Alī Muḥsin and the al-Aḥmars. At an extraordinary meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Riyadh on 3 April, the foreign ministers of the GCC states announced the council's role in mediating the conflict in Yemen. The final statement urged Ṣāliḥ to announce a power-transfer to his vice-president and form a national unity government under opposition leadership, which was to oversee the drafting of a new constitution and new elections.<sup>819</sup> The president welcomed the initiative in the state media, but selectively focused on continued dialogue and avoided the issue of a power transfer. The JMP initially rejected the deal as it contained an immunity clause for Ṣāliḥ, but then sent a delegation headed by Muḥammad Bāsindwa (independent), including 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ansī (Iṣlāḥ), Yāssīn Sa'īd Nu'mān (YSP), Sulṭān al-'Atwānī (Nasserite Union Party) and Ḥasan Zayd (al-Haqq Party), to meet GCC foreign ministers in Riyadh on 17 April. According to the state news agency, Ṣāliḥ welcomed and repeatedly confirmed his readiness to sign the Gulf Initiative in April and May. In reality, however, he stalled behind the scenes, while driving up fears that his departure would lead to a grab power, or worse: plunge Yemen into a civil war.

After painstaking process of consultations and several drafts of the agreement, Gulf negotiators secured a workable compromise: the formation of a unity government within seven days, a power transfer from Ṣāliḥ to the vice-president within 30 days in exchange for immunity from prosecution, followed by presidential elections. Ṣāliḥ insisted that the signing ceremony be split over two days and exclude officials from Qatar, whose news station al-Jazeera he blamed for the turmoil in the region. The opposition conversely announced that its appointees to a unity government could not swear an oath to the outgoing president, nor were they able to halt street protests. Despite these reservations, Ṣāliḥ and the opposition declared their readiness to sign the deal on 23 and 26 April, respectively. The 30-day transition and immunity clause ran diametrically opposed to the demands for Ṣāliḥ's immediate departure and prosecution. These on-going negotiations exacerbated the disillusionment among youths and the disconnection between them, the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk and the political establishment.<sup>820</sup> In their own language the JMP's acquiescence to the accord amounted to an 'an insult to the blood of the martyrs.'<sup>821</sup>

<sup>818</sup> Laura Kasinof, 'Yemeni Leader Would Yield Power Only to "Safe Hands"', *The New York Times*, 25 March 2011.

<sup>819</sup> 'GCC Foreign Ministers Hold Meeting in Riyadh', *Al-Ri'yād*, 4 April 2011.

<sup>820</sup> Nādiya Al-Saqqāf, 'Tasyīs Thawrat Al-Shabāb Fi-l-Yaman (The Politicisation of the Youth Revolution in Yemen)', *Ṣadā*, 27 April 2011; Sudarsan Raghavan, 'Yemeni Activists Press Government to Abandon Saleh',



The signature of the deal became a cat-and-mouse game. Despite being publicly supportive of the initiative, Ṣāliḥ refused to sign the agreement on three different occasions. Each time, the president raised new procedural obstacles or reneged on the deal at the last minute. With the signature scheduled 30 April, GCC Secretary General ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Zīyānī met with Ṣāliḥ four times in Ṣan‘ā’, but each time the president had another excuse for not signing the deal. Zīyānī eventually left Ṣan‘ā’ over Ṣāliḥ’s refusal to sign in his capacity as president, but only in his role only as the chair of the GPC. On 12 May, Qatar announced its withdrawal from the mediation process in order to remove another obstacle to the signing ceremony ahead of a visit of Zīyānī in Ṣan‘ā’ to revive the deal the next day.<sup>822</sup> Another ceremony was scheduled for the afternoon of 18 May, but – once again – the deal broke down in the last hours. This time, Ṣāliḥ recalcitrantly insisted on signing a deal only with ‘legally recognised parties,’ which excluded the independent Muḥammad Bāsindwa – the opposition’s choice for prime minister of the bipartisan government. Even though they agreed to replace Bāsindwa with the YSP’s Yāssīn Sa‘īd Nu‘mān as first signatory, their refusal to drop Bāsindwa from the list led Ṣāliḥ to renege on the deal.<sup>823</sup> However, the next day – likely because of international pressures – Ṣāliḥ changed his mind and another signing ceremony was scheduled for 22 May.

The third failure to sign the agreement occurred on 22 May, the anniversary of Yemen’s unification. The political drama unfolded as Zīyānī and a group of Western and GCC member country ambassadors gathered at the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Ṣan‘ā’. JMP leaders, who had signed the agreement at the house of opposition leader Muḥammad Bāsindwa a day earlier, waited to move to the Presidential Palace if word was received that Ṣāliḥ would sign the agreement. It never came to this, however, as hundreds of armed Ṣāliḥ loyalists surrounded the embassy and trapped the diplomats in the building. A move widely believed to have been orchestrated by Ṣāliḥ, the diplomats remained under siege for 10 hours until Ṣāliḥ dispatched two old Soviet military helicopters to the scene to evacuate the envoys. They were brought to the Republican Palace, where GPC vice-president ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Iryānī and three assistant secretaries of the ruling party signed

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*The Washington Post*, 9 June 2011; Maḥmūd Al-Bukārī and Munīr Al-Ghārāfī, ‘Al-Itijāhāt al-Sīyāsīya li-l-Shabāb wa-Ruṭyathum li-l-Taghīyr al-Dīmūqrāṭīya fi-l-Yaman (Political Trends of Youth and Their Vision for Democratic Change in Yemen)’ (Ṣan‘ā’: Mu‘assasat Tamkīn Li-l-Tanmīya (Tamkeen Development Foundation) / Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, November 2011).

<sup>821</sup> Media Council of Change Square Ṣan‘ā’, ‘Concerning the JMP’s Signature of the Gulf Initiative Demand’, 21 May 2011.

<sup>822</sup> ‘Qatar Withdraws from Yemen Mediation Bid’, *Al Jazeera English*, 13 May 2011.

<sup>823</sup> Mohammed Ghobari and Mohamed Sudam, ‘Yemen Transition Deal Falls through at Last Minute’, *Reuters*, 18 May 2011.

the agreement.<sup>824</sup> Ṣāliḥ, however, objected to signing 'behind closed doors' and insisted on a public ceremony with opposition leaders, speculating that they would refuse to attend due to the unpopularity of the deal with the protestors.<sup>825</sup> By the end of the day, the GCC announced the suspension of the initiative and Ṣāliḥ apologised on behalf of its supporters.

The incident had – once again – exposed the stalling and attrition strategy of the regime. Ṣāliḥ was determined to escalate the situation and drag his opponents into a cycle of violence. The embassy siege, which was a slap in the face of its oil-rich neighbours from the Gulf and the international community, caused widespread outrage in Yemen. Revolutionary youths blamed Ṣāliḥ for the failure of the initiative, even if they had themselves rejected the initiative, and called for a peaceful escalation of the protests.<sup>826</sup> Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar publicly proclaimed that he was ready to free the diplomats with his bare hands and accused Ṣāliḥ of committing *ʿayb aswad* ('black shame') – a tribal concept for crimes that cannot be pardoned. On the day of the siege, pro-regime mobs roamed the city and cordoned off the roads to Change Square and other places. Ṣāliḥ moreover deployed loyal troops at strategic locations across the city, including in the neighbourhood of al-Ḥaṣaba, home to the al-Aḥmar family. According to al-Aḥmar, forces from the Republican Guards and the police tried to enter al-Aḥmar's residence, but were repelled by his guards in a shootout – a move widely interpreted as an attempt by the regime to escalate the situation. The provocation, which was supposed to send a message to al-Aḥmar, constituted nothing short of a *casus belli*. Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar responded that he did not believe that Ṣāliḥ's madness went this far, but 'if civil war breaks out, we are ready for it.'<sup>827</sup>

The last week of May, which marked the beginning of the militarisation of the conflict, became a crucial turning point for the citizen revolt. The day after the GCC negotiations broke down, skirmishes erupted in Ṣan'ā's al-Ḥaṣaba neighbourhood between units of Aḥmad 'Alī's Republican Guard and tribal fighters loyal to Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar. Within a few hours, Ṣādiq's fighters, which were stationed in the Ḥāshid stronghold of 'Amrān north of the capital, took over the buildings of the Ministry of Industry and Trade,

<sup>824</sup> 'GPC Signs Gulf Initiative', *Saba News*, 22 May 2011.

<sup>825</sup> Robert F. Worth, 'Yemeni Leader's Allies Blockade Embassy as He Refuses Peace Deal', *The New York Times*, 22 May 2011; Mustapha Ajbaili and Dina Al-Shibeeb Al Arabiya with Agencies, 'Siege in Sana'a: Western and Arab Envoys, Trapped by Saleh Gunmen, Leave UAE Embassy as GCC-Brokered Deal to Ensure President's Exit Seems to Fail Again', *Al-Arabiya English*, 22 May 2011.

<sup>826</sup> 'Al-Munasiqīya al-'Alīyā li-l-Thawra Tuṭālib al-Khalīg al-Takfīr 'an al-Khaṭī'a al-Sīyāsīya wa-Tuṭālib 'Umum al-Jumhūrīya al-Bad' fi al-Jānīb al-'Amalī li-Barnāmej al-Taṣ'īd (The Supreme Coordination Body of the Revolution Asks Gulf for Penance for the Political Sin and Demands the General Public to Begin the Programme of Peaceful Escalation)', *Marib Press*, 24 May 2011.

<sup>827</sup> Jamāl Jubrān, 'Fī al-Ṭarīq Ilā al-Ḥarb al-Ahlīya: Ṣadām Ṣāliḥ wa-Āl al-Aḥmar (On the Path to Civil War: Clashes between Ṣāliḥ and al-Aḥmar Clan)', *Al-Akhbār*, 25 May 2011.

the Ministry of the Interior, Yemenia Airways and the Saba News Agency next to al-Aḥmar's residence. In accordance with tribal customs, Ghālib al-Qamish, the head of the Political Security Organisation, brokered a short-lived ceasefire by placing 100 loaded guns at Ṣādiq's disposal.<sup>828</sup> On Ṣāliḥ's initiative, tribal mediators then gathered at al-Aḥmar's mansion on 25 May. During the meeting, the Republican Guard attacked the building with light arms and mortars, killing seven mediating shaykhs and their relatives.<sup>829</sup> The incident was tantamount to a declaration of war. Heavy fighting raged over the following two weeks in al-Ḥaṣaba, Banī al-Ḥārith and Ṣūfān, which involved heavy artillery and the Yemeni Air Force. Although this battle for Ṣan'ā' was mainly contested between Ṣāliḥ and al-Aḥmar, 'Alī Muḥsin's First Armoured Division was soon drawn into the conflict.

The withdrawal of loyalist troops from bases across the country to bundle their forces in the major cities triggered violent episodes all over Yemen. On 25 May, the Bakīl tribes of Arḥab and Nihm some 30 kilometres north of Ṣan'ā', which had been preventing the Republican Guard from moving heavy weapons into the capital since March, became entangled in a protracted war with Aḥmad 'Alī's forces that lasted until June 2012.<sup>830</sup> In Ta'izz, regime repression reached hitherto unseen heights. On 29 May 2011, security forces and plain-clothed thugs (some of which were disguised in *'abāyas*, the black robes Yemeni women wear) launched a relentless six-day assault against protestors.<sup>831</sup> After the massacre of dozens of protestors at Freedom Square, local tribes led by shaykhs Ḥamūd al-Mikhlāfi (Iṣlāḥ) and Sulṭān al-Sāma'i (YSP) came to the defence of the protestors and seized public buildings, which was welcomed by the activists.<sup>832</sup> As the conflict protracted, government forces began to shoot mortars into demonstrations or used anti-aircraft guns against people and buildings. In both theatres of war, 'Alī Muḥsin sent trusted commanders and arms to anti-regime tribes behind the scenes in a bid to weaken pro-Ṣāliḥ forces.<sup>833</sup>

<sup>828</sup> Ibid.

<sup>829</sup> Lārā Al-Iryānī, 'Crafting Chaos: Presidential Games and Yemen's Escalating Violence', *Jadaliyya*, 2 June 2011.

<sup>830</sup> Al-Salāmī, 'Qabā'il Arḥab Tamana' Liwā' 'Askarī Taba' bi-l-Ḥaras al-Jumhūrī min al-Taḥrak bi-Asliḥathu al-Thaqila Naḥū Ṣan'ā' (Arḥab Tribes Prevent a Military Brigade of the Republican Guards from Moving its Heavy Weapons to Ṣan'ā'); Kamāl Al-Salāmī, 'Taqrīr Ḥuqūqī Yaṭlāb bi-Lajnat Taḥqīq al-Dawliya fi Jarā'im Quwāt al-Ā'ila bi-Arḥab wa-Nihm wa-Banī Jarmūz (Human Rights Report Calls for an International Commission of Inquiry into the Crimes of the Family Forces in Arḥab, Nihm and Banī Jarmūz)', *Al-Ṣaḥwa*, 7 April 2012.

<sup>831</sup> Tayler and al-Faqīh, 'No Safe Places'.

<sup>832</sup> Kareem Fahim, 'Grasping at Peace, War Zone of a City Tests Yemen', *The New York Times*, 11 December 2011.

<sup>833</sup> Nasser Arrabyee, 'At Least Four Killed in Semi-War Supported by Defected General in Taiz', 16 July 2011; Sudarsan Raghavan, 'In Yemen, Tribal Militias Flex Muscles', *The Washington Post*, 29 June 2011.

Meanwhile, on 27 May, some 300 members of Anṣār al-Sharī'a, a local rebranding of al-Qā'ida in the Arabian Peninsula that first surfaced in April 2011,<sup>834</sup> exploited the security vacuum and took control of Zinjibār, the capital of Abyan governorate. 'Alī Muḥsin and several defected generals accused Ṣāliḥ of colluding with the militants in order to stir up fears of an al-Qā'ida takeover.<sup>835</sup> Although difficult to corroborate with facts, the abandonment of the city by government troops without resistance and the Ṣāliḥ regime's longstanding manipulation of Islamists renders this claim credible.<sup>836</sup> During the fierce three-month battle for Zinjibār, the rebels repelled numerous offensives to recapture the city and free the besieged 25<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Brigade, including a massive campaign on 17 July supported by local tribesmen, tanks shelling and naval rocket strikes.<sup>837</sup> However, only a joint operation on 10 September by units loyal to Ṣāliḥ and 'Alī Muḥsin, together with local tribesmen, was able to uproot Anṣār al-Sharī'a from the city.<sup>838</sup>

The Zinjibār episode not only repudiated the common assumption that al-Qā'ida was among the losers of the Arab uprisings, but revealed the group's new strategy to seize and govern territory.<sup>839</sup> The militants declared Abyan an Islamic Emirate and began to provide public services, such as water, electricity and local justice in line with the *sharī'a* (Islamic law). In 2012 and 2013, Anṣār al-Sharī'a fought further battles with security forces, local tribes and the *lijān al-muqāwama al-sha'bīya* (Popular Resistance Committees) in Abyan and Shabwa.<sup>840</sup> In January 2012, Ṭāriq al-Dhahab, a local tribal leader with ties to AQAP, seized control of Radā', a town in al-Bayḍā' about 100 kilometres south of Ṣan'ā'. Ultimately, however, al-Dhahab was ousted by his own tribe, which disapproved of his links to al-Qā'ida. In March 2012, Anṣār al-Sharī'a launched a massive attack in Zinjibār, which triggered a major army offensive to uproot the group between May and June.<sup>841</sup>

<sup>834</sup> Interview with 'Abd al-Rashīd al-Faqīh, Ṣan'ā', March 2013; Ludovico Carlino, 'Are Yemen's Ansar Al-Shari'a and AQAP One and the Same?', *Terrorism Monitor* 10, no. 13 (5 July 2012).

<sup>835</sup> 'Naṣ al-Bīyan Raqam (1) li-l-Jaysh al-Yamanī al-Mu'ayda li-Thawra al-Shabāb al-Silmīya al-Sha'bīya (Text of Statement No. (1) by the Yemeni Army in Support of the Popular Peaceful Youth Revolution)', *Yemen Press*, 29 May 2011.

<sup>836</sup> Interview with 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Iryānī, Ṣan'ā', July 2013.

<sup>837</sup> Andrew McGregor, 'The Battle for Zinjibar: The Tribes of Yemen's Abyan Governorate Join the Fight against Islamist Militancy', *Terrorism Monitor* 9, no. 32 (12 August 2011).

<sup>838</sup> 'Yemen Troops Free City, Army Base from "Qaeda" Control', *Al-Arabiya English*, 10 September 2011; 'Yemeni Army Fights off Islamists; Official Says at Least 230 Soldiers Killed in Battles with Qaeda', *Al-Arabiya English*, 11 September 2011.

<sup>839</sup> Kamil al-Tawil, 'Al-Qaeda Is Too Weak to Seize Control of Yemen, US Asserts', trans. Rani Geha, *Al-Monitor*, 28 March 2012.

<sup>840</sup> Sasha Gordon, 'Tribal Militias in Yemen: Al Bayda and Shabwah', *Critical Threats* (American Enterprise Institute, 7 February 2013).

<sup>841</sup> 'Abyan Governorate Emerges from War', *IRIN*, 16 July 2012.

In Yemen's north, the Ḥūthīs significantly expanded their territorial control from 2011 onwards, which turned the movement into the preponderant military and political force in the area. After *jum'at al-karāma* on 18 March, they seized government institutions in Ṣa'da and assumed full administrative control of the governorate. Throughout the rest of the year, the Ḥūthīs further expanded their sphere of influence in al-Jawf, Ḥajja and 'Amrān by overpowering Salafi groups and pro-government or Iṣlāḥ-affiliated tribesmen, as well as persuading local Zaydī tribes to join them. By early 2012, the temporary alliance of convenience with other components of the citizen revolt – Iṣlāḥ, the al-Aḥmars, 'Alī Muḥsin – had fractured. The fear of a post-Ṣāliḥ regime dominated by the former prompted the Ḥūthīs to expand further into 'Amrān and Maḥwīt, allegedly in pre-emptive self-defence,<sup>842</sup> which led to increasingly frequent clashes between February and September 2012.<sup>843</sup> Large-scale fighting flared up again in Ṣa'da between October 2013 and January 2014 as the Ḥūthīs besieged the Dār al-Ḥadīth, a Salafi religious institute in Dammāj, with which they had already engaged in combat in the final months of 2011.<sup>844</sup>

On 3 June 2011, only a week after the outbreak of war in al-Ḥaṣaba, events in Ṣan'a' took an unexpected turn. During Friday prayers at a mosque on the presidential compound, 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ was severely injured<sup>845</sup> in an assassination attempt. The blast, which was later determined to have emanated from an improvised explosive device (IED), rather than a rocket or mortar, suggested an inside job.<sup>846</sup> Ṣāliḥ blamed 'Alī Muḥsin and the al-Aḥmars for the attack, but the identities of the perpetrators were never revealed. With Ṣāliḥ flown out to Saudi Arabia for medical care, Vice-President 'Abd Rabbu Maṣṣūr Ḥādī was designated as acting head of state. Real power, however, remained with Ṣāliḥ's family, especially Aḥmad 'Alī. In a televised speech in July, Ṣāliḥ called for dialogue with his rivals, but his resolve to cling on to power appeared unshaken.<sup>847</sup>

While President Ṣāliḥ remained injured and under house arrest in Saudi Arabia, whose leaders had grown wary of his manoeuvres, fierce conflicts raged across Yemen in the summer of 2011 that challenged the regime on all fronts: Arḥab and Nihm, Ta'izz, Zinjibār, Radā' and the northern governorates. Nevertheless, the Ṣāliḥ clan proved a

<sup>842</sup> Interview with 'Alī al-Bukhaytī, Ṣan'a', November 2013.

<sup>843</sup> 'Houthi Says Saudi Arabia Prepares To Attack Yemen Area', *Yemen Post*, 6 May 2012.

<sup>844</sup> 'The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa', Middle East Report 154 (International Crisis Group, 10 June 2014).

<sup>845</sup> Ṣāliḥ incurred a deep shrapnel wound, a collapsed lung and burns on over 40 per cent of his body. Several senior officials, including caretaker Prime Minister 'Alī Muḥammad Mujawwar and head of parliament 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Abd al-Ghanī, were wounded. The latter died in August 2011 of the consequences of his injuries.

<sup>846</sup> Scott Steward, 'Dispatch: Tactical Breakdown of the Saleh Assassination Attempt' (Statfor, 8 June 2011).

<sup>847</sup> *Kalimat 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ Min Al-Riḡād Ilā Al-Sha'b Al-Yamanī* ('Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ's Speech from Riḡād to the Yemeni People) (YemenTV, 2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwKs33-Uwrs>.

remarkable ability to stay afloat. The coalition of the citizen revolt, whose political activities were by then almost entirely dominated by the Joint Meeting Parties, and particularly *Iṣlāḥ*, attempted to form a transitional government to break the political deadlock. In June, they established a 17-member Transitional Presidential Council and elected the 142-member *al-majlis al-waṭanī li-quwāt al-thawra al-silmīya* (National Council for the Forces of the Peaceful Revolution). Although both bodies encompassed a balanced membership that encompassed the JMP, the *Ḥūthīs*, defected tribes and army units, as well as the Southern Movement *Ḥirāk*, the initiatives remained stillborn.<sup>848</sup>

After months of deadlock, *Ṣāliḥ* authorised *Hādī* to negotiate a settlement with the opposition in line with the GGC deal in mid-September.<sup>849</sup> While Saudi Arabia wavered over how to best deal with *Ṣāliḥ*, he unexpectedly arrived in *Ṣan'ā'* on 23 September amidst rumours that he had outsmarted his Saudi hosts.<sup>850</sup> His return concurred with a campaign to violently suppress peaceful protests and a renewed onslaught by loyalist military units against al-Aḥmars positions and the headquarters of 'Alī Muḥsin's *firqa* in the third week of September. The hostilities not only proved that the ailing regime was still a force to be reckoned with, but also set a powerful sign that *Ṣāliḥ* would only leave on his own terms, rather than be forced out. In an attempt to fashion himself as the only viable game in town, *Ṣāliḥ* insisted that he would not sign the GCC deal unless 'Alī Muḥsin and *Ṣādiq al-Aḥmar* left the country so that he could transfer power to 'safe hands.'

In October, however, the balance of power shifted decidedly against the regime. Local tribes made major advances against the Republican Guard and the Central Security Forces in *Ta'izz*.<sup>851</sup> In clashes with 'Alī Muḥsin's *firqa* in *Ṣan'ā'*, the Republican Guard incurred heavy losses.<sup>852</sup> Around the same time, Tawakkul Karmān was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which was construed as an international nod to the Yemeni revolution.

<sup>848</sup> 'Naṣ Biyān Tashkīl Majlis Ri'āsi Intiqālī fi-l-Yaman (Text of the Statement Establishing the Transitional Presidential Council)', *Al-Maṣḍar Online*, 16 July 2011; 'Al-Jama'īya al-Waṭanīya li-Quwāt al-Thawra al-Silmīya Ta'qud Ijtīmā' thā al-Tāsīs bi-Ṣan'ā' wa-Tantakhab A'dā' al-Majlis al-Waṭanī (National Assembly of Forces of the Peaceful Revolution Holds Its Founding Meeting in *Ṣan'ā'* and Elects Members of the National Council)', *Al-Ṣaḥwa*, 17 August 2011.

<sup>849</sup> *Qarār Ra'īs al-Jumhūrīya Raqam (24) li-Sana 2011 (Presidential Decree No. (24) of the Year 2011)*, 2011.

<sup>850</sup> Angus McDowall, 'Analysis: Saudi Arabia Hesitant in Pressing Saleh to Quit', *Reuters*, 21 September 2011; Sarah El-Deeb, 'Yemen President's Return Hikes Fear of Escalation', *The Guardian*, 23 September 2011; Fakhri Al-Arashi, 'Saleh "Tricked Saudis" Over Return to Yemen', *National Yemen*, 28 September 2011.

<sup>851</sup> Sasha Gordon, 'Taiz: The Heart of Yemen's Revolution', *Critical Threats* (American Enterprise Institute, 12 January 2012).

<sup>852</sup> Tom Finn, 'Yemen Uprising: Sana'a Rocked by Night of Fierce Fighting', *The Guardian*, 17 October 2011.

The opposition successfully stepped up its efforts to garner international support.<sup>853</sup> With the backing of the GCC, the EU and the United States, the UN Human Rights Council and the Security Council passed resolutions on 14 and 21 October, which called on President Ṣālīḥ to move forward with negotiations over an 'inclusive' and 'Yemeni-led' political transition process 'without further delay.'<sup>854</sup> Following three failed signing attempts and numerous revisions of the agreement, Ṣālīḥ finally bowed to international pressure and signed the deal on 23 November under the custody of King 'Abd Allāh in Riyadh. His decision was likely motivated by a fear of international sanctions and the critical concessions that gave him protection from prosecution and a face-saving exit.<sup>855</sup>

### ***The Architecture, Politics and Failure of an Exclusive Transition Process*<sup>856</sup>**

The signature of the GCC deal opened a new chapter in Yemeni politics. The agreement granted Ṣālīḥ immunity in exchange for his resignation and set down an ambitious 2-phase roadmap that was governed by its implementation mechanism.<sup>857</sup> In the first, 90-day phase, executive authority was transferred to Vice-President 'Abd Rabbu Maṣṣūr Hādī, but Ṣālīḥ maintained the honorary title of President until early presidential elections; this symbolic gesture implied that Ṣālīḥ was unseated by the ballot, rather than ousted by protests. As specified in the agreement, Hādī (GPC) appointed Muḥammad Bāsindwa (Independent) as Prime Minister and swore in a bipartisan national consensus government on 10 December.<sup>858</sup> The ministerial portfolios were evenly split between the GPC and the JMP, whereby neither side would control both the Ministries of Defence and of the Interior, and vice-ministers were of the opposite political affiliation as the minister. Treating Yemeni revolt as a simple conflict between two contending parties, however,

<sup>853</sup> Sudarsan Raghavan and Michael Birnbaum, 'Tawakkol Karman, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee Win Nobel Peace Prize', *The Washington Post*, 7 October 2011.

<sup>854</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, 'Resolution 18/19' (A/HRC/RES/18/19, 14 October 2011); United Nations Security Council, 'Resolution 2014' (S/RES/2014, 21 October 2011).

<sup>855</sup> 'Yemen: Enduring Conflicts, Threatened Transition', Middle East Report 125 (International Crisis Group, 3 July 2012).

<sup>856</sup> Excerpts of this section have previously appeared in Tobias Thiel, 'Yemen's Negotiated Transition between the Elite and the Street', *LSE Middle East Centre Blog*, March 2014; Tobias Thiel, 'The House of Saud's War in Yemen: A Looming Afghanistan?', *LSE Middle East Centre Blog*, April 2015; Tobias Thiel, 'Yemen's Imposed Federal Boundaries', *Middle East Research and Information Project*, 20 July 2015.

<sup>857</sup> 'Al-Āliya al-Tanfīdhīya al-Muzmina li-l-Mubādara al-Khalījīya (Implementation Mechanism of the GCC Agreement)', 24 November 2011.

<sup>858</sup> 'Ḥukūmat al-Wifāq al-Waṭanī Tū'dī al-Yamīn ad-Dustūrīya Amām Nā'ib Ra'īs al-Jumhūrīya (The Government of National Reconciliation is Sworn in Front of Vice-President of the Republic)', *almotamar.net*, 10 December 2011; 'Al-Maṣḍar Ūnlāyn Yanshur al-Sīrat al-Dhātīya li-Wizarā' Ḥukūmat al-Wifāq al-Waṭanī (Maṣḍar Online Publishes the Biographies of the Ministers of the Government of National Reconciliation)', *Al-Maṣḍar Online*, 7 December 2011.

meant that the non-signatories of the agreement – the Ḥūthīs, Ḥirāk and independent youths – were excluded from what was supposed to be an inclusive transition government.

Although the GCC initiative brought about Ṣāliḥ's resignation after a staggering 33 years in power, it left many Yemenis with mixed feelings. Conceived by a club of reactionary monarchies to 'avert a civil war' in Yemen, the deal transformed Yemen's brief revolutionary moment into a transition roadmap that prioritised peace and stability over retributive justice and systemic change. Due to Ṣāliḥ's insistence to deal only with 'legally recognised parties,' the agreement lacked popular legitimacy as it was signed into force by the 'old' JMP on behalf of the revolutionaries.<sup>859</sup> However, the JMP was not representative of the revolutionary coalition and lacked the vigour and independence of a true opposition, as many in its leadership, especially Iṣlāḥīs, had been beneficiaries of Ṣāliḥ's patronage system. To make matters worse, the agreement granted Ṣāliḥ and officials who had served during his rule impunity for the crimes committed. Although UN human rights chief Navi Pillay urged lawmakers to respect the prohibition in international law against granting amnesties for gross human rights violations,<sup>860</sup> the cabinet referred the controversial immunity law to GPC-dominated Yemeni parliament, which passed it in early January.<sup>861</sup>

Apart from the dubious legality of the immunity deal, the agreement contained a fatal flaw: it retired Ṣāliḥ from the presidency, but not politics. He not only remained the chair of the GPC, but wielded considerable power through informal patronage, while his family members and allies continued to hold key positions in the military and security apparatus. The early presidential elections, which inaugurated the second phase of the GCC roadmap, were another source of controversy. The ballot on 21 February went relatively smooth and remained uncontested; with a 99.8 percent majority and a voter turnout of 6.5 out of Yemen's approximately 10 million registered voters, the elections gave acting president Ḥādī a broad mandate for his two-year term.<sup>862</sup> However, with Ḥādī as the only candidate, they were merely a referendum with a pre-determined winner. Although the weak and uninfluential Ḥādī was an acceptable compromise candidate to warring factions and powerbrokers, his background as Ṣāliḥ's deputy for 17 years and a

<sup>859</sup> In earlier drafts, the signature was to be given by 'the JMP and their Allies.' In the final version, this was amended to 'the National Council for the Peaceful Revolutionary Forces, including the JMP and their Allies.'

<sup>860</sup> 'Pillay: No Amnesty for Gross Human Rights Violations in Yemen', Press Release (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 6 January 2012).

<sup>861</sup> *Qānūn Raqam (1) Li-Sana 2012 Bishān Munah Ḥaṣāna Al-Mulāḥaqa Al-Qānūniya Wal-Qazā'ra (Law No. 1 of the Year 2012 on the Granting of Immunity from Legal and Judicial Prosecution)*, 2012.

<sup>862</sup> 'Al-Intikhābāt al-Ri'āsiya al-Mubakira 2012 (The Early Presidential Elections 2012)', *Al-Lijna al-'Alīyā li-l-Intikhābāt wa-l-Istiftā'* (Supreme Committee for Elections and Referendum), 22 February 2012.



military leader from Abyan, who had helped crush the Southern insurgency in the 1994 war, made him hardly the fresh choice the revolutionary coalition had hoped for.

The lack of inclusion, the immunity deal and the single-candidate election thus prompted the Ḥūthīs, Ḥirāk and many independent youths to reject the GCC deal.<sup>863</sup> While these groups boycotted the presidential elections,<sup>864</sup> the revolution thus continued unabated, but with crucial tactical changes, in parallel to the transition process. Youth groups launched the so-called *thawra al-mu'assasāt* or *thawra muwāzīya* (revolution of institutions or parallel revolution), an effort to purge hitherto untouchable Ṣāliḥ loyalists from public institutions. They were able to expel corrupt officials from more than 19 institutions, such as the national airline, the state news agency, the Sana'a police or the Central Organisation for Control and Audit. Mutinies broke out in various security institutions, including the Republican Guard, the Central Security Forces, the Air Force and the Coast Guard.<sup>865</sup> Most crucially, youth activists organised so-called *masīrāt al-ḥaīyā* (life marches) from Ta'izz and Ḥudayda to Ṣan'ā' in December 2011 and January 2012, which swelled to more than 100,000 participants along the 200-250km trails. The caravans were designed to reinvigorate the revolution and broaden its constituency by appealing to rural Yemenis, which – despite constituting about 70 percent of the population – had only marginally participated in the predominantly urban protest camps.<sup>866</sup>

Only hours after Hādī was sworn in as president on 25 February, a massive blast rocked a presidential palace in al-Mukalla. Three months later, a suicide bomber killed 120 soldiers and wounded 350 during a rehearsal for the Unity Day parade in Ṣan'ā'. Both attacks, for which Al-Qā'ida in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility, reiterated the paramount challenge of the transition process: to re-establish public security.<sup>867</sup> Although the Committee on Military Affairs for Achieving Security and Stability, which commenced

<sup>863</sup> Elham Manea, 'Putting the Cart before the Horse', *Qantara*, 29 November 2011; Atiaf Alwazir, 'Yemen's GCC Initiative: Cosmetic or Comprehensive Change?', *Al-Akhbār*, 30 November 2011.

<sup>864</sup> 'Al-Taḥāluf al-Madanī Ya'lan Muqāṭ'ata li-l-Intikhābāt al-Ri'āsiya wa-Yad'u la al-Istmrār fi-l-Thawra (Civic Coalition Announces Boycott of the Presidential Elections and Calls for the Continuation of the Revolution)', *Yemen Voice*, 12 February 2012; 'Al-Yaman: Ittifāq Ḥūthī Ḥirākī 'alā Rafḍ al-Intikhābāt al-Ri'āsiya al-Mubakara (Yemen: Ḥūthī Ḥirākī Agreement to Reject the Early Presidential Elections)', *Yemen Press*, 29 January 2012.

<sup>865</sup> Rishād Al-Shar'abī, 'Thawrāt al-Yaman: Min al-Sāḥāt Ilā al-Mu'assasāt (The Yemeni Revolution: From the Squares to the Institutions)', *Al-Masdar Online*, 22 December 2011; Sasha Gordon, 'The Parallel Revolution in Yemen', *Critical Threats*, 6 March 2012.

<sup>866</sup> Alwazir, 'In Yemen, the Life March Revives the Debate on Immunity for Saleh'; Saleem Haddad, 'Life Marches and Other Innovative Demonstrations: A New Tactic for Yemen's Pro-Change Activists?', *Muflah*, 10 January 2012.

<sup>867</sup> Ahmed Al-Hajj, 'Yemen: Car Bomb Kills 25 in Southern City', *Associated Press*, 25 February 2012.

its work in early December,<sup>868</sup> was able to remove some armed manifestations in the cities, the government had little control in large swathes of territory and the armed forces remained fragmented. In a game of musical chairs, Hādī step by step removed Ṣāliḥ's family and allies from key military posts. In several rounds of presidential decrees between April 2012 and April 2013, he dismissed Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ as Air Force chief, reshuffled Ṭāriq from the Presidential Guard to a remote brigade in Ḥaḍramawt, purged 'Ammār from the National Security Organisation and discharged Yaḥyā from the Central Security Forces. Although Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ shut down Ṣan'ā' airport in protest over his discharge and 1,000 Republican Guard troops besieged the Ministry of Defence for some days in August 2012, the backlash of the dismissals remained relatively contained.<sup>869</sup>

Hādī moreover decreed some fundamental changes in the order of battle. As part of a reorganisation of units and regional command structures, he dissolved Aḥmad 'Alī's Republican Guard and the First Armoured Division under 'Alī Muḥsin's command, redeploying a number of their brigades to the newly created Presidential Protection Force. Nonetheless, 'Alī Muḥsin emerged relatively unscathed out of the restructuring. Although the major-general lost much of his power of order, he was appointed as a military advisor to President Hādī, who – without a strong domestic power base of his own – required 'Alī Muḥsin's political and military backing. The rotation decisions disproportionately affected the Ṣāliḥ camp.<sup>870</sup> Aḥmad 'Alī was posted as ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and several members of the Ṣāliḥ family to positions as military attaches abroad, which left them with little choice but to surrender their posts. Hādī thus successfully employed the same strategy that republicans had used to rid themselves of the *ancien régime* in the 1960s – to rotate them to diplomatic, symbolic or remote posts where they could do little harm.

The centrepiece of the GCC-sponsored transition process, however, was the *al-muṭamar al-ḥiwār al-waṭanī al-shāmil* (the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference, NDC), which was to be an inclusive political forum to discuss Yemen's future. Originally scheduled to commence in November 2012, the 565-member conference opened its gates on 18 March 2013. In accordance with the parameters specified by its preparatory

<sup>868</sup> 'Nā'ib al-Ra'īs Yuḥadid Li-l-Jana al-ʿAskariya Mahāmiḥā Fī Shahr Dīcembir (Vice-President Determines the Functions of the Military Committee in December)', *almutamar.net*, 10 December 2011.

<sup>869</sup> 'Al-Yaman: Akhū Ṣāliḥ Yunḥī Tamarudh wa-Yuslim al-Quwāt al-Jawīya (Yemen: Ṣāliḥ's Brother Ends his Rebellion and Delivers the Air Force)', *Al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ*, 25 April 2012; 'Al-Jaysh Yajbaru Mutamarudīn mīn al-Ḥaras al-Jumhūrī 'alā Inḥā' Ḥaṣārhum li-Wizārat al-Difā' bi-Ṣan'ā' (The Army Forces Rebels of the Republican Guard to End Their Siege on the Ministry of Defence in Ṣan'ā')', *Yemen Press*, 10 August 2012.

<sup>870</sup> 'Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?', Middle East Report 139 (International Crisis Group, 4 April 2013).

committee, the NDC encompassed nine thematic working groups: the Southern issue, the Ṣa'da issue, national reconciliation/transitional justice, state building, good governance, military and security, independent bodies, rights and freedoms, as well as sustainable development.<sup>871</sup> The composition of representatives – political parties, social movements (Ḥūthī and Ḥirāk), Southerners, youth, women and civil society, as well as direct presidential appointees<sup>872</sup> – provided for a diverse mix, which prioritised inclusiveness over effectiveness.<sup>873</sup> Given the need to generate a wide-reaching national ownership, this prioritisation made sense, but inevitably made reaching consensus in official NDC deliberations more difficult and thus dependent on elite back-channel negotiations.

In practice, however, the NDC was marred by difficulties from the outset and scored poorly in terms of outreach, effectiveness, inclusiveness and transparency. Located in the Mövenpick Hotel, a 5-star fortress on a hill overlooking Sana'a with daily room rates that exceed the monthly salary of a mid-level ministerial employee, the conference remained as remote to Yemenis as its venue. While Yemen's poverty rate increased from 42 to 55 percent between 2009 and 2012,<sup>874</sup> the \$40,000,000 conference, which paid daily stipends of \$100 to \$180 to delegates, stirred resentment.<sup>875</sup> Its meagre public outreach did little to improve community relations in a country in which 7 out of 10 inhabitant live in rural areas. The conflict along Ḥūthī-Salafi/Ḥāshid lines, clashes with Ḥirāk, an assassination campaign against security officers, the tribal demolition of energy infrastructure, and the expansion of drone strikes against al-Qā'ida, which committed a barbaric attack on a military hospital in Ṣan'ā' in December 2013, made the optimistic progress reports of the conference appear utterly out of touch with reality. Further complications arose when two Ḥūthī members, 'Abd al-Karīm Jadban and Aḥmad Sharaf al-Dīn, were assassinated, the latter during the drafting of the NDC's final report.

Despite these difficulties, some working groups made considerable progress. The Ṣa'da group agreed on a number of common principles for a solution to the conflict, such as a commitment to freedom of worship, promoting economic and social development, and

<sup>871</sup> The document, in fact, lists 11 thematic committees, but four of these groups were later merged into two.

<sup>872</sup> 50 percent were of the delegates were to be Southerners, 30 percent women and 20 percent youths.

<sup>873</sup> Al-Lajna al-Fannīya, 'Final Report of the Technical Committee for the Preparation of the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference' (Ṣan'ā': Al-Lajna al-Fannīya li-l-Idād wa-l-Taḥdīr li-Mu'tamar al-Ḥiwār al-Waṭanī al-Shāmil, 12 December 2012). See Larry Jay Diamond, 'Three Paradoxes of Democracy', *Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 3 (1990) on the trade-off between inclusiveness and effectiveness.

<sup>874</sup> Defined as the percentage of the population that lives below the national poverty line. The World Bank et al., 'Joint Social and Economic Assessment for the Republic of Yemen', September 2012.

<sup>875</sup> 'Budget of the National Dialogue Conference' (Al-Lajna al-Fannīya li-l-Idād wa-l-Taḥdīr li-Mu'tamar al-Ḥiwār al-Waṭanī al-Shāmil, n.d.). Unpublished. Copy with the author.

the rejection of foreign interference. Notwithstanding their conciliatory positions, the Ḥūthīs created realities on the ground in the northern governorates. Politically-savvy liberals of Anṣār Allāh's political wing in Ṣan'ā', such as 'Alī al-Bukhaytī or 'Alī al-'Imād, acknowledge this as a problem, but explain that the movement cannot afford to ignore the different rules of the game – the law of the strongest – in the northern governorates.<sup>876</sup> The military and security group concurred on the depoliticisation, professionalisation and centralisation of the armed forces under the Minister of Defence. Transitional justice was extremely controversial and torpedoed by GPC delegates. The quite viable guidelines by the state-building and independent institutions groups contrasted with the long wish lists of the freedoms and rights, good governance and sustainable development groups. Many proposals, however, such as the disarmament of all militias and tribes or establishing health and unemployment insurance bore little relation to available resources and constraints. Overall, the densely written 352-page final report was an optimistic but convoluted repository of 1,500 recommendations that lacked prioritisation and a strategy for effective implementation.<sup>877</sup> As a Yemeni youth leader sarcastically summed up, 'the NDC resolved all of Yemen's problems – except for the secessionist strife in the South, the Ṣa'da conflict in the North, national reconciliation, transitional justice and state-building.'<sup>878</sup>

The inclusiveness of the NDC was jeopardised by insufficient attention to the buy-in of Ḥirāk in the conference. Set on the restoration of a state in the South, most Southern factions rejected any participation in the NDC since it was held under the premise of preserving Yemeni unity. Instead of a sustainable political solution, Hādī provided a quick fix: he appointed allies from his home governorate of Abyan (former South Yemen). While these delegates lacked the legitimacy to represent the South at large, those who did participate on behalf of Ḥirāk frequently boycotted NDC sessions and lacked a popular mandate to make meaningful concessions. As one delegate dramatically remarked in a personal interview, 'we will be killed if we bring anything less than independence back home.'<sup>879</sup> When an NDC delegation visited 'Adan in May 2013, protestors tried to sabotage their arrival at the airport and later trapped the group in their hotel.<sup>880</sup> Hādī

<sup>876</sup> Interview with 'Alī al-'Imād (Anṣār Allāh Politician), Ṣan'ā', June 2013; Interview with 'Alī al-Bukhaytī, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>877</sup> 'Wathīqat al-Ḥiwār al-Waṭanī al-Shāmil (Document of the Comprehensive National Dialogue)' (Ṣan'ā': Mu'tamar al-Ḥiwār al-Waṭanī al-Shāmil, 25 January 2014).

<sup>878</sup> Personal Correspondence with Gabūl al-Mutawakkil (NGO Leader and Youth Activist), February 2014.

<sup>879</sup> Interview with Badr BāSalama, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>880</sup> 'Fariq Mu'tamar al-Ḥiwār al-Waṭanī Taltaqī bi-l-Ṣulṭā al-Maḥaliya fi Muḥafazāt 'Adan wa-Abyan wa-Lahj (Team of the National Dialogue Conference Meets Local Authorities in the Governorates of 'Adan, Abyan and Lahj)', *Marib Press*, 26 May 2013.

eventually sought to address the problem; he issued an apology to the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk for past crimes, which – though a welcome step – was too little, too late.<sup>881</sup> In November 2013, tensions within Ḥirāk's leadership surfaced as a faction led by former Interior Minister Muḥammad 'Alī Aḥmad pulled out of the dialogue.<sup>882</sup> Delegates from Ḥirāk cited 'political manoeuvres' by Ḥādī, who was eager to bulldoze a final agreement, as their motive.<sup>883</sup>

As the NDC approached its closing date without a deal on the future state structure in sight, Ḥādī – undisturbed by NDC rules – simply delegated the most contentious issue of the conference to the 8+8 Committee. An exclusionary subcommittee with eight delegates from each North and South, the 8+8 were handpicked by the president himself. In its final report, the committee announced its decision to transform Yemen from a unitary state into a federal structure.<sup>884</sup> This represented a compromise between the position of Iṣlāḥ and al-Rashād, which agreed to abandon their insistence on a unitary state in favour of a federation with five or six regions, and Southerners, which had moderated their demands for independence to a two-region federal entity.<sup>885</sup> Unable to reach consensus, the 8+8 delegated the decision on the number of regions to the equally exclusive Regions Committee. Established shortly after the release of the NDC's final report, this 22-member committee took less than two weeks to delineate six federal regions – Azāl, Sabā', al-Janad, Tihāma, 'Adan and Ḥaḍramawt.<sup>886</sup> The process lacked broad consultation and was too short to commission detailed studies. Neither the agreement on federalism in principle, nor its regions were ever revisited or approved by the NDC, but simply accepted as a *fait accompli* and submitted to the Constitution Drafting Committee, which its work in March.

<sup>881</sup> 'Naṣ A'tidhār al-Ḥukūma al-Yamanīya li-Abnā' al-Muḥāfazāt al-Janūbiya wa-l-Sharqiya wa-Muḥāfazat Ṣa'da (Text of the Apology by the Yemeni government to the People of the Southern and Eastern Governorates and the Governorate of Ṣa'da)', *Al-Maṣdar Online*, 21 August 2013.

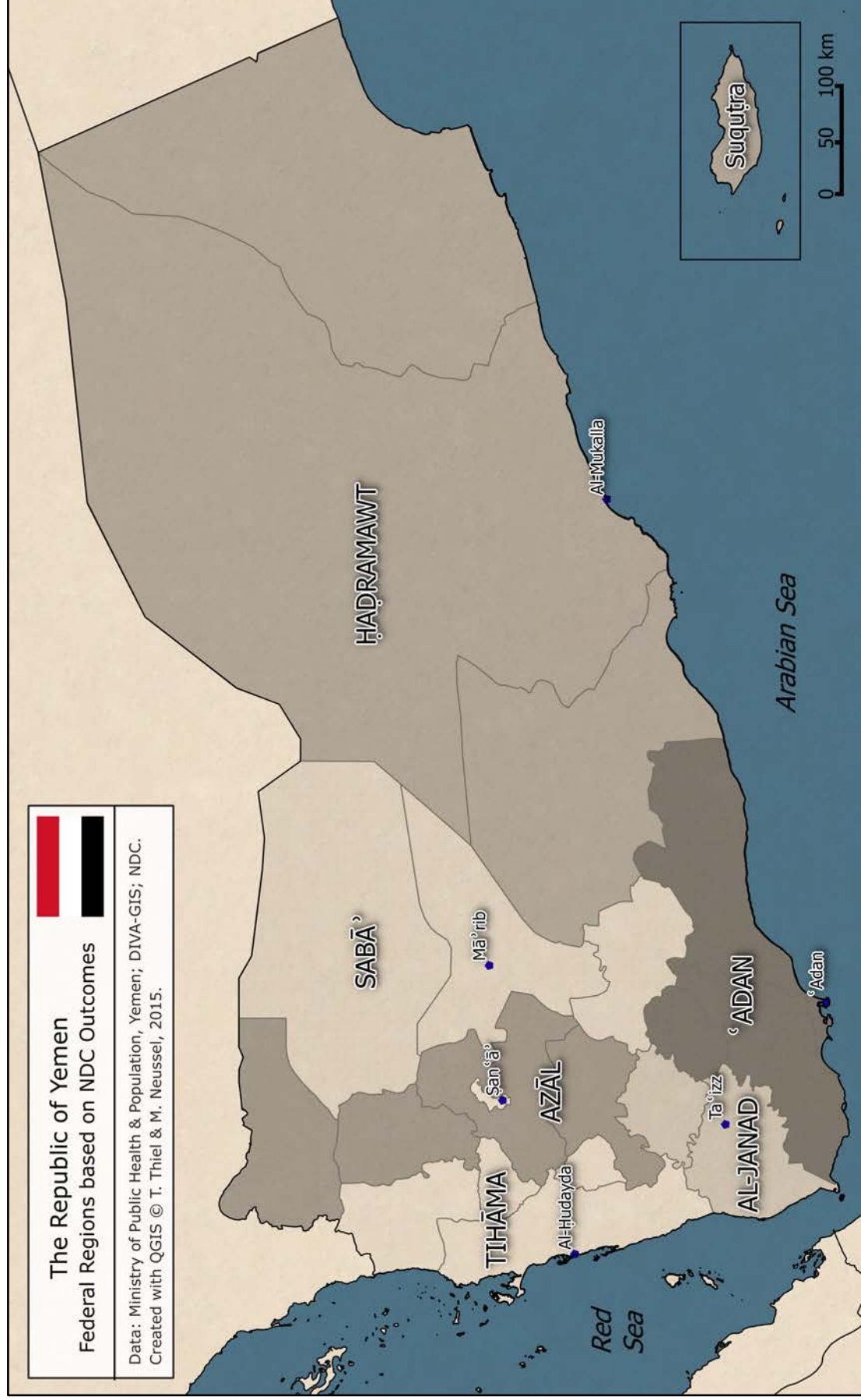
<sup>882</sup> 'Yemen: National Dialogue in Doubt over Al-Hirak Divisions', *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 28 November 2013.

<sup>883</sup> Interview with Badr BāSalama, Ṣan'ā', November 2013.

<sup>884</sup> 'Ittifāq Ḥawal Ḥal 'Ādl li-l-Qaḍīya al-Janūbiya (Agreement on a Just Solution to the Southern Question)' (Ṣan'ā': Mu'tamar al-Ḥiwār al-Waṭanī al-Shāmil, 23 December 2013), -.

<sup>885</sup> Nabil Al-Ṣūfi, 'Binā' al-Dawla: Qaḍāiyā al-Ittifāq wa-l-Ikhtilāf bayn al-Aḥzāb (State-Building: The Points of Agreement and Disagreement between the Parties)', National Dialogue Support Program (Berghof Foundation, May 2013).

<sup>886</sup> 'Al-Taqrīr al-Nihā'i li-Lajna Taḥdīd al-Aqālīm (Final Report of the Regions Committee)' (Ṣan'ā': Lajna Taḥdīd al-Aqālīm, 10 February 2014).



Map 8: Envisioned Federal Regions according to NDC Outcomes.

Although the reasons for the breakdown of the GCC Initiative were complex, the transition regime's imposition of crucial political decisions through intransparent committees and the misgovernance of the transition significantly contributed to its unpopularity and ultimate demise. Even though all but the Ḥūthī representative had signed off on the new map,<sup>887</sup> the Yemeni Socialist Party and the Salafi Rashād Union expressed reservations about the six-region federal division, while the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk publically rejected the plan.<sup>888</sup> Although principally in favour of a federal state structure, the Ḥūthīs argued that the six-region partition distributed natural wealth unevenly. It deprived the Azāl region, in which the Ḥūthīs' historical homeland of Ṣa'da was situated, of significant resources and access to the sea.<sup>889</sup> Here they were referring, respectively, to the hydrocarbon-rich governorate of al-Jawf<sup>890</sup> and the Red Sea province of Ḥajja, which the movement has traditionally considered within its sphere of influence. For its part, Ḥirāk rejected the proposal claiming that it divided the South according to the partisan benefits of the 'warlords' of the 1994 war (the GPC and Iṣlāḥ) and resulted in the re-production of a British colonial scheme that divided the Federation of South Arabia from Shabwa, Ḥaḍramawt and al-Mahra.<sup>891</sup>

While the NDC completely monopolised the national scene, Yemenis became increasingly disillusioned with the transition regime. Although its governance markedly departed from the Ṣāliḥ era, national politics turned into a scramble for power and the transition regime undermined public institutions and the rule of law.<sup>892</sup> As political parties vied for control, patterns of political appointments either resembled the quotas of the GCC agreement or were flat-out based on partisan loyalties irrespective of merit or standardised criteria. The GPC and Iṣlāḥ, which had been political allies in the early 1990s, dominated successive cabinets and planted party members in civil and military institutions. Despite their inclusion in the NDC, Ḥirāk, the Ḥūthīs, smaller political parties and youth groups were thus marginalised in the governance of the transition. The Hādī administration made virtually no progress in addressing popular demands for social and economic development, fighting corruption or the release of political prisoners, while legislation for transitional

<sup>887</sup> Nādiya Al-Saqqāf, 'Yemen Celebrates New Map of Six Regions', *Yemen Times*, 11 February 2014.

<sup>888</sup> Saeed Al-Bataī, 'Reluctant Support for Yemen Federalism Plan', *Gulf News*, 22 February 2014.

<sup>889</sup> 'Yemen Shiite Rebels, Southern Group Slam Federation Plan', *Al-Arabiya English*, 11 February 2014.

<sup>890</sup> 'Yemen's Oil and Gas Resources, a Tale of Money and Politics', *Yemen Post*, 3 March 2014.

<sup>891</sup> Yaḥyā Al-Sudmī and Aḥmad Al-Shamīrī, 'Al-Ra'īs Hādī Yasta'd li-'Alān li-Lajnat Ṣīyaghat al-Dustūr wa-Bin Mubārak Yu'akid Wujūd Ishkāliyyāt (President Hādī Prepares to Announce Constitutional Drafting Committee and Bin Mubārak Confirms the Existence of Problems)', *Al-Balad*, 12 February 2014. This is historically somewhat inaccurate as Shabwa was part of the FAS, rather than the Eastern Protectorate.

<sup>892</sup> Tobias Thiel, 'Governance in Transition: The Dynamics of Yemen's Negotiated Reform Process', in *Building the New Yemen*, ed. Marie-Christine Heinze (London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming).

justice and the creation of a national human rights institution stalled. Hādī moreover leveraged the transition framework to undermine constitutional provisions, legislation and institutions, such as the Yemeni parliament, the Supreme National Authority for Combating Corruption or the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation.<sup>893</sup>

After the closure of the NDC, tensions continued to simmer under the surface, which soon escalated into a full-blown national crisis. As part of a reform package to avert an economic meltdown, the transition government decided to remove fuel subsidies in late July 2014.<sup>894</sup> The government hastily pushed through the deal without consultation, reckoning that this approach would stir less dissent. With remarkable political shrewdness, the Ḥūthīs tapped into the ensuing wave of popular discontent to position themselves as the champions of subaltern aspirations. Under the theme '*al-thawra mustamira* ..' ('the revolution continues ...'), they launched a civil disobedience campaign, established protest camps in Ṣan'ā' and rallied against corruption, misgovernance, poor public service delivery as well as the domination of old elites, which widely resonated among Yemenis. President Hādī agreed to dismiss his government and reduce the subsidy cuts – a move Anṣār Allāh rejected. After mediation attempts failed, fighting broke out in Ṣan'ā' between the Ḥūthīs and troops loyal to 'Alī Muḥsin al-Aḥmar on 17 September.<sup>895</sup> Tacitly backed by 'Alī 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ, who sought to take revenge against 'Alī Muḥsin, the al-Aḥmars and Iṣlāḥ; the Ḥūthīs managed to capture government buildings in the capital with relative ease.

The move radically altered the political landscape. Instead of seizing power in a *coup d'état*, however, Anṣār Allāh signed the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) with President Hādī and the JMP on 21 September.<sup>896</sup> In the PNPA, they committed to withdraw from Ṣan'ā' and 'Amrān, as well as cease hostilities in al-Jawf and Mā'rib. In exchange, Hādī was to reinstate fuel subsidies, replace the prime minister and government, as well as appoint one Ḥūthī and Ḥirākī each as presidential advisor.<sup>897</sup> Articles 8, 9 and 10 of the agreement moreover demanded the reconstitution of the National Body for the Implementation of NDC Outcomes to align the state structure in the constitution with NDC results (rather than the conclusions of the Regions Committee). Within days of signing the PNPA, Hādī nominated the two presidential advisors and raised fuel subsidies in accordance with Ḥūthī demands. The formation of a new government

<sup>893</sup> Ibid.

<sup>894</sup> The new policy caused diesel and petrol prices to double from 100 to 195 and 125 to 200 Yemeni rials.

<sup>895</sup> Ahmed Al-Haj, 'At Least 340 Killed in Yemen's Week-Long Fighting', *The Daily Star*, 22 September 2014.

<sup>896</sup> 'Ittifāq al-Salam wa-l-Shurāka al-Waṭaniya (The Peace and National Partnership Agreement)' 21 September 2014.

<sup>897</sup> Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki, 'Houthis Sign Security Annex', *Yemen Times*, 30 September 2014.



proved more difficult, but by late October Hādī established a balanced cabinet under Prime Minister Khālīd Baḥaḥ in which the GPC and JMP held nine, and the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk six, posts each.<sup>898</sup> Although the PNPA temporarily defused the crisis and led to a more equitable transition government, it deeply polarised the political landscape.<sup>899</sup>

In mid-January 2015, matters came to a head. Reassured by international backing, Hādī circumvented the PNPA in an attempt to advance the constitutional process. On 17 January, he tasked his office director Aḥmad bin Mubārak to deliver the draft constitution to the National Body, which had not been reconstituted in accordance with the PNPA. Enraged by this political intrigue, the Ḥūthīs kidnapped Mubārak to thwart the six-region federal order contained in the document.<sup>900</sup> In the ensuing standoff, the Ḥūthīs seized the presidential palace and placed Hādī under house arrest. Although the state news agency reported that the contenders had reached an agreement, which stressed adherence to the NDC outcomes,<sup>901</sup> on 21 January, President Hādī and the Baḥaḥ government tendered their resignation the next day. ‘Abd al-Malik al-Ḥūthī then called for a national conference to discuss a power-sharing deal, but negotiations faltered, as all factions but Ṣāliḥ’s GPC boycotted the meeting.<sup>902</sup> Amidst countrywide protests, the Ḥūthīs’ Revolutionary Committee issued a ‘constitutional declaration’ on 6 February, which overthrew the by then only nominally existing GCC-sponsored transition process. It replaced the Yemeni parliament by a 551-member Transitional National Council with the power to elect a 5-member Presidential Council to rule over a new two-year transition process.<sup>903</sup>

The slow-motion power grab not only completely polarised Yemeni politics, but cost the Ḥūthīs many of the sympathies they had earned beyond their core constituency. Anṣār Allāh supporters, conversely, lauded the movement’s role in confronting corruption, filling the security vacuum and eradicating al-Qā’ida in the Arabian Peninsula. As part of the latter struggle, tensions flared up again on 20 March when Sunni extremists set off coordinated bombs in two Ṣan‘ā’ mosques used by Zaydī worshippers, which killed at least 137 and wounded more than 350. The attacks, for which *dā’sh* (the Islamic State) claimed responsibility, prompted the Ḥūthīs to advance their southward conquest, capturing the

<sup>898</sup> Khalid Al-Karimi, ‘Prime Minister Allocates Ministries, JMP Opposes’, *Yemen Times*, 28 October 2014.

<sup>899</sup> April Longley Alley, ‘Yemen’s Houthi Takeover’, *International Crisis Group*, 22 December 2014.

<sup>900</sup> Bassam Al-Khameri, ‘Hadi’s Office Silent on Bin Mubarak Kidnapping’, *Yemen Times*, 19 January 2015.

<sup>901</sup> ‘Ijtimā’a Ra’īs al-Jumhūrīya ma’ Mustashārīya Yutawij bi-l-Tawṣil ilā Ittifāq izā’ Mukhtalif al-Qāḍāīya (Meeting of President of the Republic and his Advisors Culminates in an Agreement on Various Issues)’, *Saba News*, 21 January 2015.

<sup>902</sup> ‘Yemen’s Houthis Hold Boycotted Talks with Single Party’, *Al Jazeera English*, 31 January 2015.

<sup>903</sup> ‘Al-I’lān Al-Dustūrī (Constitutional Declaration)’ (Al-Yaman TV, 6 February 2015),

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNkMhj3O13w>.

city of Ta'izz on 25 March, followed by al-Ḍālī' and Laḥj governorates. The events forced the hand of the House of Saud. The same night, the kingdom launched concerted air raids against Ḥūthī positions and military infrastructure. Hādī, who had meanwhile fled to 'Adan and rescinded his resignation, issued a plea for a military intervention at an Arab League summit on 28 March. The Saudi-led military campaign against the Ḥūthīs engulfed Yemen's domestic power struggle in a protracted inter-state war, which became the final nail in the coffin of a modern civil state.

## CONCLUSION

To return to the principal question with which this study began – to examine *why* and *how* the citizen revolt of 2011 transpired in relation to Yemen's longstanding history of contentious politics – one might conclude that the roots of the revolt are more localised, varied and run deeper than commonly suggested in general accounts of the Arab uprisings. Rather than grievances, relative deprivation or new technologies, its emergence and distinct trajectory primarily stem from a particular conjuncture of historical structures and contemporary political processes. Precipitated by events in North Africa, shifts in political opportunities gave rise to a temporary, cross-partisan coalition around the overthrow of the Ṣāliḥ regime, which drew on existing mobilising structures and espoused longstanding historical demands. Even though elite powerbrokers and political parties soon superseded the short-lived revolutionary moment, it represents but the latest episode in a long-term struggle over a more inclusive and equitable power-sharing arrangement in Yemen.

Although the geographical concept of a logically bounded 'Yemen' has endured as a 'political imaginary' for three millennia, it has only sporadically existed as a coherent political, economic and cultural entity under a single central rule. Instead of categorising Yemen as a failed state, however, an analytically more precise characterisation is that of a hybrid, neopatrimonial order in which traditional patrimonial structures coexist, blend, overlap, permeate and compete with modern, legal-rational forms of organisation. Rulers' limited ability in Yemen's resource-scarce environment to muster the means to project power across long distances forced them to rely on the acquiescence of the country's multiple power centres, particularly selected northern tribes. The maintenance of state authority has thus primarily been predicated on their ability to control strategic infrastructure to generate the revenues required for a distributive, rather than taxation-based, political economy. The rise and decline of durable polities – Sabā', Ḥimyar, the Rasūlids and early Qāsimī rule – has hence been associated with external impulses, such as commodity booms, technological innovations or foreign incursions. The same is true for the Ṣāliḥ regime, which reached the pinnacle of its power after the transformation from a remittance-driven political economy to an oil-exporting rentier state in the mid-1980s, but then became increasingly unstable as oil rents contracted in the first decade of the 2000s.

Deep-seated regional divisions have moreover shaped the course of Yemen's citizen revolt. The most prevalent of these contradictions is that between the *balād al-jaysh* (land of the army), the tax farming Zaydī Imamate (897-1962) with its militarised tribes in the semi-arid northern and central highlands; and the *balād al-ʿaysh* (land of bread, livelihood, production), the agricultural, commercial and later industrial Shāfiʿī areas of the *minṭaqa al-wuṣṭā* around Taʿizz, as well as the western and southern coast. While the former areas constitute Yemen's military powerhouse, but are characterised by an unsustainable, semi-sedentary mode of agricultural production and unstable political authority; the agricultural and resource base of the latter regions has underpinned the stability of political authority, but simultaneously made them susceptible to foreign domination. Although each of these territories has become associated with distinctive doctrinal characteristics of the Shīʿī Zaydīya and the Sunnī Shāfiʿīya, the divisions between upper and lower Yemen are *not* of sectarian, but mainly of economic and social, significance. The Anglo-Ottoman partition, the split between the YAR and PDRY, as well as Southern aspirations for independence after 1994 have furthermore added a political dimension. These divisions not only explain why Taʿizz became a major engine of the uprising, but also illustrate the heterogeneity and divergent interests of the various components of the revolutionary movement.

Despite the persistent impact of these historical structures, the narrative of Yemen's citizen revolt is, of course, not primarily a story of age-old geographies. Nor was the uprising a direct consequence of the short-term causes frequently cited in accounts of the Arab uprisings: the political inertia and moral bankruptcy of (neo)patrimonial Arab autocracies, neoliberal economic policies, unemployment and social inequality, a youth bulge or new media technologies. Although grievances, relative deprivation, demography and technological advances constituted crucial enabling factors, given the ubiquity of these conditions, they do not sufficiently account for the emergence of collective action. Instead, Yemen's citizen revolt resulted from three dynamic processes unfolding between 1990 and 2010: the erratic and limited liberalisation since the unification of the two Yemens in 1990, the creeping 'oligarchisation' of power since the 1994 war and what I term the 'politics of calculated chaos' – a paradoxical propensity of the Ṣāliḥ regime to foster disorder and resistance in order to position itself as the defender of republicanism and unity.

First, the unification of 1990 caused the newborn Republic of Yemen to undergo an erratic process of political liberalisation, which – though limited in its overall achievements – laid the foundation for the gradual expansion of a modern and independent civil society. Despite the reversal of democratisation after the 1994 war, a vibrant landscape of civil

society organisations – dedicated to such issues as social development, fighting corruption, and promoting human rights – (re-)emerged in the 2000s. The 1990 and subsequent constitutions moreover enshrined a multi-party system that promoted the establishment of a plethora of political parties. After 1996, these parties gradually began to cooperate under the umbrella of the *aḥzāb al-liqā' al-mushtarak* (Joint Meeting Parties, JMP), which became Yemen's main opposition alliance. Not only did activists from their ranks play a crucial role in organising early anti-regime protests in 2011, but the mobilising structures of CSOs and political parties became key to their transformation into a sustained mass movement.

Second, after the intra-Yemeni war of 1994, President Ṣāliḥ not only abandoned the democratisation project and the power-sharing arrangement of the unity agreements, but also began consolidating political, military and economic power around his immediate family at the expense of powerful regime insiders. The strongest dissent mounted over the grooming of his son Aḥmad 'Alī Ṣāliḥ for the presidency. After the bombing of the USS Cole in the port of 'Adan in 2000 and the 9/11 attacks, Yemeni-American counter-terrorism cooperation further reinforced Ṣāliḥ's increasingly personalised, kleptocratic and repressive ruling style. Amidst dwindling state revenues, the creeping oligarchisation of power, the appropriation of state resources and Ṣāliḥ's autocratic conduct propelled the progressive fragmentation of the inner circle of regime insiders and prompted increasingly frequent popular protests. By 2011, elite powerbrokers – particularly 'Alī Muḥsin and the al-Aḥmars, who had already tacitly begun manoeuvring against Ṣāliḥ – saw the popular protests as a window of opportunity to defect and throw in their weight against the regime.

Third, the policies of the Ṣāliḥ regime triggered resistance, which crystallised in two contentious movements: the Ḥūthīs, also known as *Anṣār Allāh* (Partisans of God), and *ḥirāk al-janūbī* (the Southern Movement). The former conflict came to the fore in 2004 when the *shabāb al-mū'min* (Believing Youths) spearheaded social protests in defence of their politico-religious Zaydī identity, to remedy the marginalisation of northern territories and contest the government's alliance with the United States. Although these disagreements left ample room for compromise, the Ṣāliḥ regime instead accused the *shabāb* of seeking to re-establish the Zaydī Imamate and responded with uncharacteristically brute force, which culminated in a series of six wars between 2004 and 2010. Following the failure of initiatives to reform the fraught North-South relationship after 1994, protests by retired Southern army officers mounted in the formation of the Southern Movement in 2007. Initially an issue-based movement that contested the appropriation of land and resources, government inaction led Ḥirāk to escalate its demands to the reestablishment of an independent state in South

Yemen. With the legitimacy of his regime in decline, Ṣāliḥ – rather than addressing Ḥūthī and Ḥirāk grievances – paradoxically opted to fuel these conflicts in order to position himself as the defender of two central pillars on which his claim to legitimacy rested: the republic and unity. The Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk therefore lost no time in seizing the opportunity to bring down the Ṣāliḥ regime that arose with the burgeoning protest movement in 2011.

When demonstrations emerged in major cities in early 2011, the interests of these socially and ideologically heterogeneous groups – civil society organisations, opposition parties, disgruntled regime insiders, the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk – converged. United in little but their conviction that incremental reform was futile and the regime beyond remedy, they formed a temporary coalition to overthrow Ṣāliḥ. Although the three processes that gave rise to this marriage of convenience specifically pertain to the post-unification period, they mirror earlier contentious episodes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Imam Yaḥyā's concentration of power around his family, lagging social development, economic retardation and regional military exchanges in the 1930s and 40s led to the development of the equally diverse and transient *aḥrār* movement. In stark contrast to the traditional succession struggles of the Imamate, this nationalist movement consisted of an amalgamation of urban modernist intellectuals, Shāfi'ī merchants, Zaydī aristocracy, northern tribesmen and army officers. Although the constitutional coup of 1948 eventually failed due to historical conjuncture and counter-revolutionary forces, it set the stage for the 1962 republican revolution.

The emergence of the revolutionary coalition of 2011 was precipitated by shifts in political opportunities and constraints. As the news of the regime change in Tunisia and Egypt exposed the vulnerability of Arab autocrats to peaceful mass protests, Yemenis were among the first to emulate the contentious mobilisations. As early as mid-January 2011, civil society activists and party-affiliated students organised protests that soon grew into a concerted movement. The 1948 coup, the 26 September and the 14 October revolutions similarly drew their inspiration – albeit at a much slower pace – from the broader wave of revolutionary upheavals in the Arab world during the 1950s and 60s, particularly the Free Officers coup of 1952 in Egypt. In Sidney Tarrow's terms, both the Arab nationalist revolutions and the Arab uprisings in 2011 formed a cycle of contention in which collective action rapidly diffused across a social system from the early risers to other segments of society. By relaying news about the revolutionary events across the region, powerful media organisations, notably the Egyptian *ṣawt al-ʿarab* in the 1950s/60s and Qatar's al-Jazeera in 2011, thus fuelled the spread and innovation of contention.

Although the citizen revolt transcended traditional ideological affiliations, including the Arab nationalist and Nāṣirist ideologies that inspired the revolutions of the 1960s, there was a striking continuity of demands between these episodes of contention. The calls for *al-dawla al-madanīya al-ḥadītha* (a modern civil state) in 2011 strongly resembled the 1956 political manifesto *maṭālib al-shaʿb* (Demands of the People) and 1994 *wathīqat al-ʿahd wa-l-ittifāq* (Document of Pledge and Accord), whose objectives encompassed a modern, constitutional and republican order, equal citizenship and decentralisation. Similarly, the modern civil state was, among other aspects, to be a democratic polity with constitutional safeguards, civil and political rights, as well as a decentralised or federal state structure. However, not every component of the citizen revolt subscribed to this vision. The lowest common denominator thus remained the deposition of the Ṣāliḥ regime as epitomised in the popular slogans *al-shaʿb yurīd isqāṭ niẓām* and *irḥal*. As former heads of state in Yemen's 20<sup>th</sup> century history, all of which were either ousted and exiled, assassinated or executed, the concentration of power around his family was the most prevalent bone of contention. In line with a longstanding Zaydī tradition that rejects dynastic primogeniture, the grooming of Ṣāliḥ's son Aḥmad as successor for the presidency generated the same fierce resistance as Imam Yaḥyā's appointment of his son Aḥmad as crown prince.

Throughout Yemeni history, political forces have invoked competing collective memories to further specific political aims. At various instances, they have recalled the unifying collective memories of the ancient kingdoms of Sabā' and Ḥimyar, as well as the common southern Arab ancestry of the *abnā'* qaḥṭān, which includes all but the Zaydī *sāda*. In the republican era, state-driven educational efforts turned the 26 September revolution into the central event in the collective memory of North Yemen. This provided a powerful standard for republican politics, but marginalised the millennial Imamate and Ottoman rule, except as a pejorative contrast to and *raison d'être* for the republic. In 2011, this dichotomy backfired, as protestors were quick to liken Ṣāliḥ's rule to the tyranny of Imam Yaḥyā. Ṣāliḥ moreover instrumentalised the collective memory of the 1962 revolution by portraying the Ḥūthīs, whom he accused of seeking to re-establish the Imamate, as a threat to the republic. Similarly, the war of 1994 provided a divisive memory as it symbolised the defence of unity in official discourse, but the imposition of Northern hegemony to many Southerners. Although the most recent revision of Yemeni schoolbooks has incorporated

medieval Islamic history and civic values, the historical marginalisation of the millennial Zaydī Imamate and the Southern grievances persists in the 2014 editions of these books.<sup>904</sup>

Mobilising structures and resources were instrumental in translating prevalent grievances, which would otherwise have remained at the individual level, into collective action. As other revolutionary episodes in Yemeni history, the citizen revolt drew on previously tolerated organisational structures. Resembling the politicised associations, syndicates, clubs and trade unions of the 1950s and 60s in both North and South Yemen, the structures and networks of the civil society organisations and political parties that have emerged since the early 1990s turned them into vehicles of the movement. Powerful political entrepreneurs, such as Ḥamīd al-Aḥmar or 'Alī Muḥsin, moreover provided finances, security and other resources to protestors, which led to their professionalisation and transformed grassroots activism into a mass movement. Simultaneously, however, the participation of former regime insiders caused major cleavages between independent youths, civil society organisations, the Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk on the one hand, as well as established political parties and elite power brokers on the other, as the latter eventually co-opted and superseded the initially acephalous grassroots movement.

While social movements often employ repertoires of contention based on historical experiences, the citizen revolt resorted to a hybrid mixture of local and regional claim-making routines with marginal innovations. Although the revolutions of the 1960s initially pursued a range of peaceful means, they soon adopted guerrilla or terrorist tactics. Inspired by the peaceful mass mobilisations in North Africa, the citizen revolt departed from these prescribed claim-making routines. Although some of its components occasionally resorted to violence, particularly in self-defence, the overall movement remained committed to peaceful methods. In Yemen's predominantly pre-digital society, text messages, pamphlets and local distribution systems, such as *qāt* chews, families, tribes, markets or companies – rather than social media – became the most salient instruments for exchanging information and coordinating collective action. The contentious repertoires of the citizen revolt encompassed protest marches (particularly after Friday prayers), civil disobedience, strikes, purges of public institutions, 'life marches,' public relations campaigns and lobbying outside actors. Its most prominent and innovative theme, however, became the occupation of public squares, which propelled mobilisation, symbolically defied authoritarian time and space and ultimately became instrumental for the overthrow of the Ṣāliḥ regime.

<sup>904</sup> Author's review of the 2014 editions of secondary school textbooks in the subjects of national education and history between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade.



In light of the dynamic trajectories of cycles of contention, the outcome of each Arab citizen revolt was largely predicated on regimes' ability to absorb and re-channel political pressures, the degree of elite and societal fragmentation, the behaviour of security forces and foreign interventions. In Yemen, counter-revolutionary efforts proved futile in quelling the peaceful upheaval; instead, the regime's recourse to repression only accelerated its downfall. Ironically, the fragmentation of the political, military and tribal elite became the greatest strength of the revolt and simultaneously the reason for its demise. Although opposition parties and elite powerbrokers enabled the protests to evolve into a mass movement, the involvement of largely Iṣlāḥ-affiliated powerbrokers, such as the al-Aḥmars and 'Alī Muḥsin, polarised and superseded the grassroots movement, as well as militarised the conflict with the regime. With the most powerful tribes and security forces locked in military stalemate, the intervention by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) tipped the balance of power against the Ṣāliḥ regime. However, the GCC initiative stifled Yemen's revolutionary moment in exchange for the promise of an orderly power transfer and a transition process in which some of the most prominent components of the revolt – youths, Ḥūthīs and Ḥirāk – were marginalised. Although Ṣāliḥ was eventually ousted from the presidency, the transition process precipitated the radicalisation of the Ḥūthīs, thereby setting the stage for a protracted civil war with regional involvement.

Rather than a revolution in a narrow definition, Yemen's contentious mobilisation in 2011 was a cross-partisan movement of citizens, which sought to eradicate the *ancien régime* in favour of a more dignified, just, civil and prosperous socio-political order. Although it precipitated a brief revolutionary moment, elite powerbrokers and opposition parties soon superseded this citizen revolt and sold its aspirations short in the GCC Initiative. Despite this setback, the uprising marked the beginning of a long-term struggle over a new social contract in Yemen. Its central demands for *al-dawla al-madanīya al-ḥadītha* are thus part of a gradual historical drive to expand the realm of the state. In the medium term, however, the negotiations over this new social contract have not only been contested among multiple forces in the political arena, but constitute an underlying cause of political violence. Seen in this way, the citizen revolt of 2011 represents but the latest contentious episode in a long-term quest for a more inclusive and equitable power-sharing arrangement within the state, as no party can rule Yemen singlehandedly.

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Al-Ḥayāt	Ṣawt Al-Īmān
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Al-Jazeera Arabic	Al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ
Al-Jumhūrīya	Suhayl TV
Laḥj News	Al-Taghīr
Marib Press	Al-Thawra
Masa Press	Al-Waḥdawī
Mā’rib al-Yawm	Al-Waṭan
Al-Maṣdar Online	Yāfa’ News
Almoslim.net	Al-Yaman al-Jadīd
Almotamar.net	Yemen Nation
Al-Muḥīt	Yemen Press
Munbar ‘Ulamā’ al-Yaman	Yemen Voice
Nashwān News	

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Bikyamasr	The New York Review of Books
Christian Science Monitor	The New Yorker
CNN.com	The Observer
The Daily Star	openDemocracy
Die Zeit	Qantara
Foreign Affairs	Al-Qawl
Foreign Policy	Reuters
France 24	The Seattle Times
The Guardian	Time
Gulf News	Washington Post
Huffington Post	Washington Quarterly
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