

YEMENI MOBILITY: UTILIZING A LONGUE DURÉE AND ORAL HISTORY
APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND YEMENI-AMERICAN MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Social historians tend to study Yemen migration through the lens of western capitalism. In so doing, they focus on modern events that shaped the movement of Yemenis out of south Arabia and dismiss the elements of mobility that have defined Yemen for millennia. This work aims to piece together the *très longue durée* of Yemen history and detail two structural aspects: mobility/stasis and cultural formation, in order to better understand how Yemenis constructed their society at home and abroad.

Using over ten hours of interviews conducted in the summer of 2012, I utilize the language of five Yemeni-Americans to highlight their role as migrants and how they perceive the Yemeni community in Dearborn/Detroit, Michigan. I assert that as the Yemeni-American community grew to include women and children, and thus represented a more complete diaspora, Yemenis more assertively reproduced their traditional culture in the United States. I argue that the Yemeni-American tendency to remain insular, many of their cultural constructions, and their tradition of mobility, as well as their attachment to home, are not modern entities, but have roots in antiquity.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences, have examined a thesis titled “Yemen Mobility: Utilizing a Longue Durée and Oral History Approach to Understand Yemeni-American Migration,” presented by Kipp Cozad, candidate for the Master of Arts in History, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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GLOSSARY

al fosl: In Yemen, serves as a deed for a specific property of land.

al-adel: In Yemen, similar to a mayor.

al-aql: Mid-level government official.

al-Arabi: Arabic.

al-hakem: A judge.

al-Montaqah al-Wustah: The Central Region of Yemen; source of the majority of migrants that traveled to the West.

al-tafra: A regional term referring to the oil boom in the Persian Gulf.

Arabia Felix: Was the Latin name previously used by geographers to describe Yemen, literally Happy Arabia.

Aseed: Peasant food made with flour that has the consistency of mashed potatoes.

Askeri: Soldiers.

Bab al-Mandab Strait: Narrow strait between Africa and Yemen.

“Boaters” (bahria): Derogatory term for Yemenis who are new to the American diaspora.

Boswellia: A tree in the Hadramawt that produces Frankincense.

Deauan: A room in a home used for social gatherings, typically located in the lower level of the home.

Eid: Islamic festival or holiday.

Endogamy: The practice of marrying within the community, clan, or tribe.

Fanoos: Kerosene lantern.

Ghada: Lunch.

Ghat Sarang: Recruiter and dock head man for Asian workers.

Hadith: Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed.

Hadramawt: Large dry region in southeastern Yemen, home to the Hadhramis.

Hajj: The annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. Hajj is associated with Islam but the roots of pilgrimage extend back into Arabian antiquity.

Hijab: A headscarf worn by females that covers the hair and neck.

Imam: The spiritual and political leader of Yemen; deposed in the 1962 Revolution; generically refers to a leader of a mosque.

Jumhuriyya: Arabic word for republic.

Jumlukiyya: hybridization of the Arabic *jumhuriyya* or republic and *malakiyya* or monarchy.

Janbiya: Traditional Yemeni dagger that accompanies an ornamental belt.

Khobz: Arabic word for bread.

Khokh: Arabic word for peach.

Lascar: A sailor employed on European ships from the 16th century until the 20th century.

Levant: Area of the Eastern Mediterranean that includes Syria, Palestine, Israel, Cyprus, Jordan, Lebanon, and part of southern Turkey.

Mada'a: The Yemeni term for a tobacco water pipe.

Maeeda: Small low-lying coffee table.

Majlees: Arab sitting room.

Malakiyya: Monarchy.

Masjid: Mosque.

Meshetda: Male headscarf.

Mudhan: A place at the bottom of a house, where food and grain are kept.

Mukarib: Ancient south Arabian kings, known as unifiers.

Muqaddam: Yemeni labor recruiters.

Niqab: Full veil.

Pan-Arabism: Nationalist notion of cultural and political unity among Arab countries of the Middle East.

Qabr Hud: a pre-Islamic prophet, revered by Shia Muslims.

Qat: A mildly stimulant shrub whose leaves are chewed.

Quranic: Anything associated with the Quran, the Holy Book of Islam.

Qus: white layer painted over mud in Yemeni domicile architecture.

Rub al-Khali: The Empty Quarter.

Qasimi Imams: Zaydi Imams who expelled the Turks from Yemen.

Salaam alaikum: Standard Arabic greeting, literally “Peace be upon you”.

Sayhad: The desolate rocky arid high plains adjacent to the Empty Quarter.

Sayyid: Yemeni elites who can trace their lineage back to the Prophet Mohammed.

Seltah: The national dish of Yemen, originates with a Turkish stew.

Shafi’i: Dominant sect of Sunni Islam within Yemen.

Shia: Branch of Islam, includes the Zaydis of Yemen.

Sojourner: A person who resides temporarily in a place.

Souq: Market.

Sublime Port: Central government of the Ottoman Empire

Sunnis: Branch of Islam; includes the Shafi’i of Yemen.

Syrang: Ethnic leader of hired Arab seamen on board European vessels.

Takhmin: A tax on agricultural output.

Tawdhif: Letters from Yemeni elites which provided migrants with official documentation for colonial employment.

Thobe: An Arab full length robe, worn by males.

Tihama: Low lying coastal region of western Yemen and southwestern Saudi Arabia.

Tindals: Head of the foreign workers aboard ship.

Wa alaikum asalaam: Standard reply to Arabic greeting, literally “And upon you, peace”.

Wadi: Intermittent stream.

Xenophobia: Fear of outsiders.

Zaydi: Shia branch of Islam in Yemen, also known as “The Fivers”.

Zenna: Yemeni name for the thobe (see above).

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This Thesis is dedicated to my loving mother, Maureen O'Brien-Cozad who introduced me
to the first words that I wrote in English.

INTRODUCTION

Today, if one wanders through the Old City of Sana'a, a remote village in Ibb Province, or outside a mosque following the Friday prayer in Dearborn, Michigan, he is bound to see the modern attire of Yemeni men. It consists of a long white robe, known as a *zenna* or *thobe* that is adorned with the traditional Yemeni sheath and dagger called the *janbiya* supported by a decoratively inlaid belt. Either draped neatly over the shoulders or worn as a head wrap, Yemeni men don the *mashetda*. The entire ensemble is completed with a modern European style blazer. These articles of clothing represent the distant past, the near present, and the present. In much earlier times, Yemenis wore vests in the mountains where the nights could get cool, but the blazer is a product of British colonialism. By the time of the Yemen Civil War in the 1960s, even the anti-modernist Imams wore the sports jacket over their *zennas*. In the way that Yemenis adopted an element of formal western attire, this thesis will discuss the diffusion of culture within Yemen, as well as the paradox of mobility and intractability of the Yemeni people in Yemen, across the Indian Ocean, and into the Western World.

Literature Review

For millennia, Yemen remained closed to scholars owing in large part to its geographical remoteness in ancient times, and later, by the xenophobic nature of Yemen's Imams.* Ancient scholars such as Herodotus and Pliny the Elder were unable to distance their narratives from the exotic spices that emerged from Yemen. The Greek, Eudaimon,

* Though generically an Imam is a leading mosque official, the meaning in the context of this thesis is the political and spiritual leader of the Zaydi Sect of Islam that ruled Yemen from 897-1962.

envisioned a land on the periphery of the earth that would “disappear regularly under the thick fog and violent monsoon rains.”¹

Ninth century CE Persian historian Abu Ja’far Muhammad ben Jarir al-Tabari chronicled the events of early Islam including the conflicts of apostasy in Yemen, known as the Ridda Wars, following the death of the Prophet Mohammed in the seventh century. But like his predecessors who wrote about south Arabia, al-Tabari was an outsider who used the oral narratives of prior historians to piece together an anthology of events. In some cases his discourse was anachronistic.² Later, the pro-Ottoman Meccan scholar, Qutb al-Din al-Hahrawali used the accounts of Turkish vizier Sinan Pasha to describe the Ottoman War in Yemen from 1569-71.³ Though the detail of Sinan’s prose accurately presented the beauty of Yemeni landscapes, Sinan maintained a bias against the Zaydi enemies of the Ottoman forces.

In the West, Yemen was a land of mystery until modern times. Seasoned

¹ Jean-François Breton, *Arabia Felix from the Time of the Queen of Sheba : Eighth Century B.C. To First Century A.D* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 1.

² Ṭabarī and Fred McGraw Donner, *The Conquest of Arabia*, The History of Al-Ṭabarī = Ta’rīkh Al-Rusul Wa’l Mulūk (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), xix.

³ Muhammad ibn Ahmad Nahraw*al*i and Clive K. Smith, *Lightning over Yemen : A History of the Ottoman Campaign (1569-71) : Being a Translation from the Arabic of Part Iii of Al-Barq Al-Yam*an*I F*I Al-Fat*H Al-*Uthm*an*I* by Qu*Tb Al-Din Al-Nahraw*Al*I Al-Makk*I as Published by *Hamad Al-J*Asir (Riyadh, 1967), Library of Ottoman Studies (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

wanderers such as Freya Stark⁴, Carlton Coon⁵ and Wilfred Thesiger⁶ visited Yemen during the first half of the twentieth century under the watchful eyes of the Imams' agents. They produced travelogues that focused on the perils of traveling through south Arabia along with a presentation of Yemeni culture through Western eyes. Their descriptive prose and unique photographs presented a snapshot of Yemen in the 1930s and 1940s.

At the end of the Yemeni Civil War in 1970, scholars took advantage of the new climate of openness to research south Arabia's vast history and culture. The first works to emerge were modern political histories by J.E Peterson,⁷ R.D. Burrowes,⁸ and F. Halliday.⁹ Their works reflected a top-down approach that addressed the challenges of the Yemen state such as rising food imports, a surging population, corruption and fragmented internal alliances.

⁴ Freya Stark, *The Southern Gates of Arabia : A Journey in the Hadhramaut* (New York: Modern Library, 2001); *East Is West* (London,: J. Murray, 1945); *ibid.*

⁵ Carleton S. Coon, *Measuring Ethiopia and Flight into Arabia* (Boston,: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935).

⁶ Wilfred Thesiger et al., "Arabia : A Journey through the Tihama, the Asir & the Hijaz Mountains in 1946," (London: Royal Geographical Society,, 1947).

⁷ John Peterson, *Yemen, the Search for a Modern State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982).

⁸ Robert D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic : The Politics of Development, 1962-1986*, Westview Special Studies on the Middle East (Boulder, Colo. London: Westview Press; Croom Helm, 1987).

⁹ Fred Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, New pbk. ed. (London ; New York, New York: I.B. Tauris; Distributed in the USA by Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Alessandro De Maigret¹⁰, Jean-Francois Breton¹¹, Robert Hoyland¹², and Klaus Schippmann¹³ researched ancient south Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s. These scholars cast light on lost cities and monoliths containing etchings in the ancient south Arabian script. Their research documented a distinct civilization that rose east and south of Yemen's central mountain range. One member of De Maigret's expedition to the ancient Sabaen fortified city of Wadi Yala in 1985 referred to the region as "archaeology's last frontier."¹⁴ Archaeologists found fertile ground for research in the stark eastern high plains of Yemen. Here they detailed the rise and fall of the Caravan Kingdoms in the centuries before Islam and described the gradual cultural transformation of the region from distinctly south Arabian to uniformly Arab.

Historian Michael Lecker investigated the emergence of Judaism as a dominant faith in Yemen on the eve of Islam, while G. Rex Smith studied medieval Yemeni manuscripts that challenged the Yemeni narrative that, at its origins, Islam assimilated smoothly into the fabric of Yemeni society. Smith argued that there were pockets in Yemen where Islam did not exist almost three hundred years after the emergence of

¹⁰ Alessandro De Maigret, *Arabia Felix : An Exploration of the Archaeological History of Yemen* (London: Stacey International, 2002).

¹¹ Breton, *Arabia Felix from the Time of the Queen of Sheba : Eighth Century B.C. To First Century A.D.*

¹² Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs : From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001).

¹³ Klaus Schippmann, *Ancient South Arabia : From the Queen of Sheba to the Advent of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001).

¹⁴ De Maigret, *Arabia Felix : An Exploration of the Archaeological History of Yemen*, 7.

Islam.¹⁵ Both Lecker and Smith presented a history of the area where identities shifted in response to the collapse of weak political authorities while accentuating the complexity of medieval Yemeni cultural formation. Their analyses of the fluid nature of medieval Yemeni politics is as viable today as they were during Yemen's medieval era.

Within the past two decades, historians have researched locales connected to trade. Roxani Margariti used a Braudelian approach to chronicle the medieval history of Aden. Margariti could just as easily be speaking of twentieth century Detroit, Michigan where Yemeni-Americans would later settle, rather than medieval Aden when she attests that a study of port cities can “map the particularities of natural ecologies, local and regional geographies, social and institutional realities, and unique historical trajectories onto analyses of regional unity and diversity of urban forms.”¹⁶

Nancy Um's *The Merchant Houses of Mocha*¹⁷ provides a social and economic history of the Yemeni port city of Mocha during its heyday as a sixteenth and seventeenth century coffee entrepot. Um connects Mocha with the vast maritime trade that plied both the Red Sea and Indian Ocean in pre-modern Yemen. She relied primarily on the remaining architectural structures in Mocha as a living guide to explain the manner in which the port functioned, while focusing on how non-monumental structures evoked

¹⁵ G. Rex Smith, "Yemenite History-Problems and Misconceptions," in *Studies in the Medieval History of the Yemen and South Arabia* (Aldershot, United Kingdom: Variorum, 1997), 135.

¹⁶ Roxani Eleni Margariti, *Aden & the Indian Ocean Trade : 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port*, 1st ed., Islamic Civilization and Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 8.

¹⁷ Nancy Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha : Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port*, Publications on the near East (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

historical agency. Unlike many of the scholars of Yemen history, Um not only valued underrepresented groups such as merchants, sailors, farmers and Indian brokers in Yemen, but also linked them to an urban space while detailing a narrative of mobility associated with the coffee trade.

In the 1980s, ethnographer Paul Dresch wrote the most comprehensive work on Yemeni culture, through what he termed the “autonomy in the tribal world.”¹⁸ Similarly, Steven Caton’s, *Peaks of Yemen I Summon*, addressed the ethnography of poetry in highland Yemen. Caton argued that the oral expression of the Arabic language through poetry connected the Yemeni with his ancient past.¹⁹ Dresch’s and Caton’s subjects resided in the far north of Yemen, yet the exclusivity of tribal and familial bonds, along with the unifying power of the Arabic language, finds an applicable space in the Yemeni experience in America.

Beginning in the 1990s, the British began to see the immigrant groups from the Middle East not just as migrants from a geographical space but as Muslims. With the exception of the Chinese, Yemenis made up the oldest community of non-European immigrants to England.²⁰ Seizing on these adjusted identities, social historians Fred

¹⁸ Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (Oxford England, New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1989), xi.

¹⁹ Steven Charles Caton, *"Peaks of Yemen I Summon": Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 36.

²⁰ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, x.

Halliday²¹, Richard Lawless²² and Keven Searle²³ focused their research on the small but enduring Yemeni population in the UK. Lawless, in particular, traced the origins of Yemenis who lived in the British coastal towns throughout much of the twentieth century to Yemen's central region. He dispelled the myth that most Yemenis living in the UK migrated from the Hajariya district near Taiz. Lawless argued that the bulk of the Yemeni community hail from a more expansive swath of Yemen's central region than perceived by earlier historians.

Mohammad Siddique Seddon's book, *The Last of the Lascars*, detailed the long social history of Yemenis in Britain.²⁴ Though abbreviated, Seddon correlated Yemen's ancient past to a modern identity. Seddon argued that Yemenis came to Britain in the 1830s, much earlier than other historians suggested. Writing in the post 9/11 environment, Seddon binds the Yemeni community to British soil and is critical of the view that Britain's Muslims are often viewed as outsiders.

In America, Jonathan Friedlander edited *Sojourners and Settlers*, a political and social history of the Yemeni experience in the United States.²⁵ Within this work, Friedlander provided an oral narrative of the everyday life of Yemeni farmworkers in

²¹ *Arabs in Exile : Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain* (London; New York New York: I.B. Tauris, 1992).

²² Richard I. Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century* (Exeter, Devon, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1995).

²³ Kevin Searle, *From Farms to Foundries : An Arab Community in Industrial Britain*, Cultural Identity Studies (Oxford ; New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

²⁴ Mohammed Sidiq Seddon, *The Last of the Lascars : Yemeni Muslims in Britain, 1836-2012*.

²⁵ Jonathan Friedlander, Ron Kelley, and Salt Lake Art Center., *Sojourners and Settlers : The Yemeni Immigrant Experience* (Salt Lake City, Los Angeles: University of Utah Press; G.E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1988).

California during the 1970s. This work chronicles the harsh work environment of a remote Yemeni sojourner community. Friedlander's scholarship serves as a reminder of how mobile the Yemeni diaspora had become by the 1980s.

Foremost among Yemeni migration histories is historian Engseng Ho's, *The Graves of Tarim*. Ho chronicles the movement of Hadhramis across the Indian Ocean over four hundred years, while concentrating on the relationship between Yemeni heredity and diaspora through the age of Hadhrami hegemony, European incursion, and post-colonial Asia. Ho expressed that the "bonds exist and endure, rather than atrophy, only so long as people continue to speak, sing, recite, read, write, narrate, and otherwise represent them,"²⁶ which the Hadhramis, and the Yemeni diaspora as a whole, continues to do.

Despite the wealth of research in Yemen from the 1970s through the 2000s, migration historians concentrated on specific events in Yemen's past that caused surges in Yemeni mobility: the destruction of the Marib Dam led to massive relocation, Hadhramis found inspiration in Indian Ocean trade, or economic hardship under the Imam caused many in Yemen's central highlands to seek work in British Aden. Historians turned their attention to events that caused migration and often ignored how ordinary Yemenis have constructed their diaspora in their new locales.

Theoretical Framework

Historical analyses on Yemen examined what Fernand Braudel termed the history of events. In particular, most scholars who studied Yemeni migration tracked the cause of contemporary Yemeni mobility while emphasizing modern history, especially in regard to

²⁶ Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, The California World History Library (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), xxii.

the growth of Yemeni transnationalism.

It is true that extensive modern transnationalism in the West was driven by colonial based capitalism, but scholars have not given proper credence to the connection between ancient social development and the modern Yemeni diaspora in the West. With few exceptions, scholars of Yemen history have focused on a narrow chronological window.

In order to understand how Yemenis adapt to external influences as well as interrelate within their communities abroad, I intend to articulate what Braudel coined as a *très longue durée*, a history that covers an extended length of time. Braudel argued that structure is the enduring theme over epochs, a construct that is foundational to a civilization that “time uses and abuses over long periods.”²⁷ In this thesis, there are two structures that resonate over the *très longue durée* of Yemen: mobility and cultural formation. I address the nature and development of Yemeni mobility from its origins to better understand Yemeni diaspora construction in the West.

The value of doing a *très longue durée* as it applies to south Arabian mobility is that a distinct Yemeni engagement with external influences emerges, an approach that frequently is a force of resistance or, at the very least, a cultural modelling that retains a sense of Yemeni identity. The clearest examples of the process of resistance and diffusion occurred during periods of foreign incursion in south Arabia. All invaders, whether they were Roman, Abyssinian, Sassanid, Ottoman or British, realized the limitations of ruling over Yemen. Except for pockets of control, foreign occupiers were never able to comfortably rule over Yemenis.

²⁷ Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 31.

The more than thousand year reign of the Hamid al-Din Dynasty, 897-1962 CE, is an enduring structure within the *très longue durée*. Serving as a testament to the longevity of Yemeni self-determination, the Hamid al-Din Imams were products of the Zaydi Shia and ruled as a minority group. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, the Imams faced challenges of occupation among their fellow Yemenis. In other words, even agents of authority within Yemen encountered factions and structures of resistance.

By analyzing the pre-colonial history of Yemen as it applies to the modern era, I place special emphasis on Yemenis as cultural creators long before the emergence of a dominant West. Today, Yemenis are a valued part of the Islamic community, or *ummah*, but their pre-Islamic past established a distinct south Arabian culture. In addition, studying Yemen's ancient past helps to explain how capitalistic forces that swept through the region with the British, beginning in the nineteenth century, may have changed the economic climate for Yemenis and served as a catalyst for a new era of emigration, but could not undo cultural intractability established over the *très longue durée*.

Braudel cautioned the scholar who applies a *très longue durée* framework to be careful not to overlook the “quieter” actors of history. In doing a national history, historians tend to ignore the agency of everyday people, ordinary life, and gender. In this study, I heed Braudel's warning by utilizing oral history and a subaltern approach to analyze how Yemeni-Americans remain uniquely attached to the Old World, and the ongoing friction and social negotiations the community has with their new home in America. Only through mixed methods research, applying a *très longue durée* approach combined with oral history, can we link personal experience and inquiry with an ancient narrative of mobility while bringing into the forefront the rigid social construction and a

narrowly diffused acceptance of foreign cultural elements implicit in Yemeni culture.

Though origin and destination are valuable spaces in the discussion about Yemeni migration, perhaps what is more important is how the journey itself exacts agency. In the 2000s, Mimi Sheller and John Urry solidified the idea of a mobility paradigm. They argued that social scientists undervalued the role of mobility in the world and that researchers have focused on the “a-mobile.”²⁸ Later, Thomas Faist seized on the mobility paradigm to argue that “spatial mobility, and by extension, transnationality, are important preconditions for successful navigation of social life, whereas immobility connotes stasis, decline and disadvantage”.²⁹ Placing benefit in the act of mobility, scholars serve to isolate Yemenis from those they left in the Old World and elevate the status of Yemenis within the diaspora, creating a paradox for a community that deeply values the homeland. This thesis contends that Yemenis who make the frequent return journeys to the homeland become adept at shifting between the role of successful migrant and culturally affixed villager. These behaviors serve to bridge a long heritage of stasis and the enduring Yemeni tradition of mobility.

To illustrate, we return to the formal attire in modern Yemen. Certainly the Yemeni dagger, *al-janbiya*, has deep cultural roots in Yemen. Even the curve of the sheath and the design of the belt serve as a status marker. The *zenna*, the white full length garment worn by most of the men in the Middle East, is a product of modern machinery. The *mashetda* was worn by the Bedouins since ancient times, but Yemenis frequently reveal a shared

²⁸ Mimi Sheller and John Urry, "The New Mobilities Paradigm," *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 2 (2006): 208.

²⁹ Thomas Faist, "The Mobility Turn: A New Paradigm for the Social Sciences?," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 11 (2013): 1639-40.

fashion identity with Levantine Arabs by wearing the checkered versions of the *mashetda*. The traditional *mashetdas* are embroidered with floral patterns on an earth tone background (Figure 1). The manner in which Yemenis practice cultural diffusion with Western fashion styles best exemplifies the acceptance and resistance that are endemic in Yemeni culture. Going back to antiquity, Yemenis wore a vest adorned with the wool of their herd animals. Known as a *jarm* in middle Yemen and *joakh* in upper Yemen, the wool vest was worn over an undergarment. With the emergence of the British colony in Aden and the subsequent contact between Yemenis and the British, it became popular for Yemenis to don the western-style suit jacket. This jacket may have replaced the *jarm*, but the remaining articles of clothing worn by Yemeni men identified them firmly as Arab. The combination of fashion articles also serves as a metaphor for both a Yemeni inclination to remain rooted in the homeland and the marginal acceptance of external influence that is represented by the blazer.

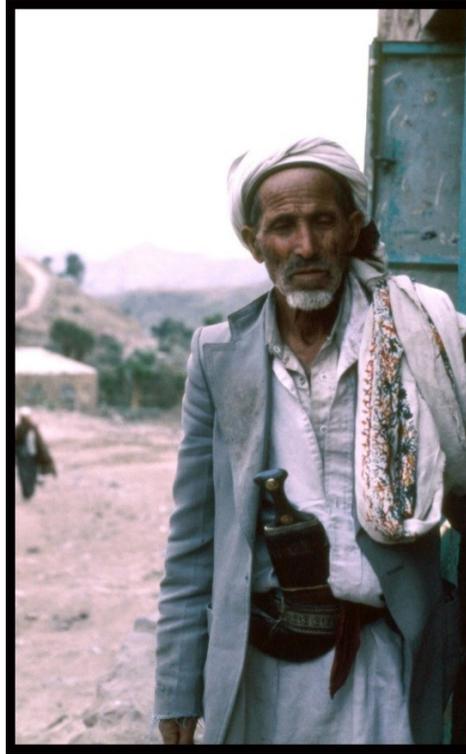


Figure 1. Yemeni Gentleman in Doorway.³⁰

For Yemenis, the suit jacket is worn at all formal gatherings, especially weddings. Its use was undoubtedly a symbol of modernity, not a modelling of the British occupiers. The jacket is also the symbol of the transnational character of the Yemeni male. From the harbor towns of England, to the rust belt cities in the United States, one can see the finely dressed men standing outside the mosque after Friday prayer dressed in the traditional clothes of Yemen — and hanging proudly on each is the western suit jacket.

Research Methods and Strategies

This work incorporates primary sources, journals, academic periodicals, academic

³⁰ Kipp Cozad, "Yemeni Gentlemen in Doorway," (1989).

websites, and cultural online content that covered over 75,000 years of Yemeni history from a variety of disciplines, many of which are listed above. In addition to the various modern studies on Yemen and mobility, I utilize research from ancient Roman as well as medieval Arab texts, and cull material from Turkish sources as they pertain to the Ottoman occupations. Braudel encouraged historians and other social scientists to value the research of those outside their field.³¹ In this way, I have borrowed from geneticists, geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, ethnographers, and dozens of historians to explain the *très longue durée* of Yemeni mobility.

This thesis was driven by the author's personal history. For two years, I lived in the mountains of Yemen, in the heart of the *al-Montaqah al- Wustah*, the Central Region, as an American Peace Corps Volunteer, where so many Yemenis made their way to the ships plying from Aden and later to the factories of the UK and the US. Frequently, SUVs would traverse the dusty road in front of the corrugated steel entryway of my rented house where Yemeni-Detroiters would first be confounded at seeing a Westerner far away from the major cities and then, invariably inviting me to their ancestral homes tucked into the mountainsides of remote villages.

The experiences I had spending select days in sitting rooms with Yemenis returning from long stays in the United States, or veterans of the British steel mills influenced my understanding of their personal journeys. I clearly remember one older gentleman who spent decades in England as a factory worker who deeply desired my company just to hear and speak English again. During this time in Yemen from 1988-1990, I spent my free time

³¹ Braudel, *On History*, 26.

visiting the cities, the market towns, and the isolated spaces which at that point in history were completely accessible to foreigners willing to explore the country. Through the experience of being an outsider in the rural spaces where many immigrants began their journey to the United States, I am able to articulate their challenges as immigrants in America.

Central to the research of this thesis is the collection of interviews I conducted in Dearborn, Michigan in the summer of 2012. I interviewed five adult males ranging in age from 25 to 50 years old. All immigrated to the U.S prior to 2001 and each claimed *al-Montaqah al- Wustah* as their ancestral home. One participant came from a sheikh's family and possessed local Yemeni tribal authority. Another participant came from a long line of judges and civil servants, thus had wealth to begin his serendipitous migration experience to the U.S. Four of the participants were chain migrants, meaning that they were not the first in their family to come to the U.S.

Conducting cross-cultural oral history interviews present many challenges. In some cases, participants often projected a positive narrative of the community to an outsider, particularly in the wake of 9/11. Language is also a barrier. The interviews were conducted in English and the participants had a good command of the language, but their ability to express precise ideas was hindered at times by communication in a second language. In addition, performing interviews in English placed me in a position of authority. To mitigate a sense of power, I conducted three of the five interviews in either the participants' home or place of business. I held the other two sessions in the neutral space of the Dearborn Public Library. Despite these obstacles, the fact that the interviewees were cognizant of the author's affiliation with the land of their birth blunted some of the defensiveness inherent

in the discourse of the oral history interviews across cultures.

Each of the interviews lasted between fifty minutes and three hours. The questions I presented served to bridge the migration narrative between the Old Country and the New. I organized the question so that the participants would contextualize their experience chronologically. In this way, the interviews were divided between life in Yemen and life in the United States. My signature aim is to identify how values and concepts of identity in Yemen affected Yemenis in America and in what ways Yemenis were rooted to the Old Country.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I used a data analysis platform to code and categorize the interviews. Influenced by Johnny Saldaña's *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, I grouped the codes into categories. For example, the codes that were titled *House Description*, *House Occupants*, and *Buying Land-Property in Yemen* fell under the category Home and Property, whereas *First Travel Experience* and *Initial Impression of America* were categorized under the title The Journey.³² I then utilized the organized pool of topics to formulate participant-driven experiential themes. What I uncovered was that mobility did not simply apply to the physical movement of Yemenis between America and the Old Country. In fact, the Yemeni-American approach to personal mobility was non-static as more Yemeni families made the United States their home.

Cultural historians, writing before the turn of the twentieth century, portrayed Yemeni-Americans as sojourners. For instance, Jon C. Swanson, writing in *Sojourner and Settlers*, detailed the practice of Yemeni-Americans returning to Yemen for lengthy

³² Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013), 13.

stays.³³ These voyages of return validated traditional Yemeni values and discouraged the application of American behaviors. As Yemenis maintain a sense of collective identity grounded in the mountains of Yemen, they validate ties to a distant past. For Yemenis, migration and return solidifies these ties. Through oral history, I will ascertain how the participants' attitudes of their American-ness and belonging in their adopted land differed from earlier Yemeni immigrants who were bound to a sojourner ethos, and how attitudes of heritage and home are applied in the twenty-first century.

Oral history has long been used as a vehicle to provide voice to the underrepresented communities. For example, in the 1930s the Federal Writers' Project utilized oral history to give voice to former American slaves. Like the freed slaves, the Yemenis uphold an oral tradition. In Yemen, Steven Caton contends that oral tribal poetry traces its roots in ancient Saba and Himyar where "the gift of the hajis (poetic genius) was as much a part of their constitution as walking or breathing."³⁴ Little has been written about the Yemeni-American community by Yemenis. Through our dialogue, Yemeni-Americans explained their identity and their understanding of Yemeni and American culture, and in so doing, overcame a deficit of agency.

Performing oral history as a methodology with Yemeni-Americans poses many challenges and presents many opportunities. By studying the lives of ordinary immigrants, the participants in this study, as members of the Yemeni-American diaspora, are authorities on their migration experience. But the migration experience and the

³³ Jon C. Swanson, "Sojourners and Settlers in Yemen and America," in *Sojourners and Settlers: The Yemeni Immigrant Experience*, ed. Jonathan Friedlander, Kelley, Ron (Salt Lake City University of Utah Press; G.E. von Grunbaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1988), 61.

³⁴ Caton, "*Peaks of Yemen I Summon*": *Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*, 37.

construction of identity as formulated in America, demonstrated through spoken English, alters the way Yemeni-Americans view their personal history and the collective identity of Yemenis in south Arabia. In other words, having gone through this experience, Yemenis in America have a much different view of their ancestral homeland than Yemenis who never left. Conversely, the experience posits the participants in a position to articulate Yemeni culture by comparing the Old World with that of the New. Finally, oral history serves as a valuable tool to connect the micro experience of individuals with the macro narrative of an ancient people across time, space and culture.

Thesis Structure

I divide this story into three chapters in order to address the Yemeni history of settlement and movement. Focusing on the ancient, medieval, and early modern history of the region, Chapter One traces the origins of Yemeni migration from Africa and the emergence of a unique civilization on the high eastern plains of south Arabia. It concludes with the Ottoman withdrawal from Yemen at the beginning of the twentieth century. I argue that, until the modern era, Yemenis exported culture primarily along latitudinal lines. Yemenis brought the written script to Ethiopia and spread Islam across the Indian Ocean, from India to Indonesia, expanding south Arabian culture across east-west lines. Alternately, Yemenis were primary recipients of cultural diffusion along longitudinal lines. The great frankincense trade flowed lucratively from south to north through the great ancient city-states of south Arabia and along the Red Sea. From the north, throughout the medieval period, Arabic slowly replaced the ancient south Arabian language of the region. Soon after, Yemenis gradually accepted Islam from their northern neighbors, solidifying both language and faith.

With the advent of Islam and the emergence of a Zaydi-Shia ruling class, static cultural behaviors played out on the political level. In the wake of Ottoman and British colonial efforts in Yemen, xenophobic ruling Imams limited contact with external forces so that Yemenis could maintain cultural and political autonomy. Yemeni rulers rigidly modeled exclusive practices at a time when migrants began leaving Yemen.

Chapter Two explores the development of Yemeni mobility in the West during the period of Imamic xenophobia, British colonialism, and revolution. I examine three elements of Yemeni mobility. First, I address how Yemeni migration to the West fits into the modern category of diaspora studies. Second, the British colonial “*lascar*” system of maritime labor recruitment established in the Indian Subcontinent provided a systemic foundation for seaborne workers from Yemen. Utilizing recruitment agents in isolated areas of the interior, Yemenis began the first modern Arab diaspora in Britain — a model that would later transfer in kind to the United States. Finally, as the new Republican regime seized control of the government following the Yemeni Civil War, 1962-1970, they legitimized Yemeni migration while ending centuries of isolation. By the end of the 1970s, the Yemeni government made emigration, and the remittances that it procured, a cornerstone of the nation’s economic policy. Leaders in the new republic stripped Yemen of an effective indigenous labor force in exchange for hard currency sent from workers abroad. The speed at which Yemeni men exited the country during the 1970s and 80s hastened the growth of the modern Yemeni diaspora. As Yemenis created larger communities in the Western world, they continued to maintain contact with the homeland and created a “level of home abroad.”

Through the experience of five Yemeni-American men who immigrated to the

Detroit, Michigan, area from *al-Montaqah al- Wustah*, the central breadbasket that was the key exporting region in the country, Chapter Three presents a narrative of how Yemenis negotiate a Western space that at times threatened their valued societal norms. Through their accounts, I explore Yemeni culture as it existed in Yemen, the experience of migration and adaptation, cultural challenges in America, and their understanding of the Yemeni diaspora. This chapter addresses how, as Yemenis made the transition from the sojourner ethos to settler status, Yemeni-Americans juxtapose movement and exclusivity, often purposefully, to buttress traditionalism. I argue that this cultural mooring, which has proven so central to their identity today as global migrants, was established over the *très longue durée*.

CHAPTER 1

ANCIENT TRAILS, SECLUDED VILLAGES AND A LITTORAL IDENTITY

In the 1930s, Rashid Abdu lived in a small village of Aireem eighty miles from the British colonial city of Aden. In the first half of the twentieth century, Yemen, in the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula, was in a period of government-sponsored isolation. The Imam of Yemen, a Shia ruler from the north of the country, possessed both political and spiritual authority. He encouraged xenophobia in the wake of Ottoman occupation and in the midst of British colonization in Aden. As a child, Rashid's mobility was confined to the hills around his village. Rashid gathered water from the well each day, and on Thursdays he would walk the three hours barefooted over rocky terrain to the market for his father.¹ As a pre-teen, Rashid rode a gimpy donkey that propelled him across the harsh landscape.² In Aireem, beasts of burden provided the most mobility that a peasant could expect. Rashid's education consisted of reading and reciting Quranic verses under a palm tree.³ In the absence of science and education, the villagers used faith and superstition to formulate their worldview.

Rashid lived in a land historically isolated from the wider world by traditional methods of transportation and rugged terrain; however, by the 1930s, the outside world was slowly encroaching on his village and challenging traditional culture. Despite Rashid's rustic surroundings and traditional ways, the men who traveled and worked in Aden

¹Rashid A. Abdu, *Journey of a Yemeni Boy* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Dorrance Pub. Co., 2005), 53.

² Ibid, 58.

³ Ibid, 46.

provided a narrative of a contemporary world. Rashid's Uncle Ali spent six months of the year working as a launderer in Aden. When Ali returned, he would tell Rashid about the trappings of modernity: running water, cars, and electricity.⁴ The draw of these mysteries propelled Rashid toward Aden. At the age of nine, he was finally allowed to travel with his father and uncle. On this journey southward, Rashid traversed the distance aboard a camel, further enhancing his mobility.⁵ The last leg of the journey to the city was by automobile, in an old Model T Ford.⁶ Rashid's move from a secluded village to a thriving modern British colony appears unique to Rashid's time and place, but his journey is typically Yemeni. In ages past, Yemenis were drawn to ancient cities that harnessed water, the wealth of the incense trade, the pull of potential wealth that arose from the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia beyond, and eventually to the wealth in such modern industrial cities as Detroit.

Origins

Scientists in the 1990s first deduced what they termed the Arabian Corridor of human migration out of east Africa into what is now Yemen.⁷ Archeologists and geneticists are in general agreement that the Red Sea region was the most likely point of

⁴ Ibid, 59.

⁵ Ibid, 62.

⁶ Ibid, 64.

⁷ Michael D. Petraglia and Jeffrey I. Rose, "Tracking the Origin and Evolution of Human Populations in Arabia," in *The Evolution of Human Populations in Arabia: Paleoenvironments, Prehistory and Genetics*, ed. Michael D. Petraglia and Jeffrey I. Rose (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 3.

earliest departure for the dispersal of mankind into Eurasia.⁸ Based on available research, the largest wave of migration across the Red Sea occurred 70,000 years ago where the earliest migrants traveled out of Africa across the Bab al-Mandab Strait.⁹ Known as the Gate of Tears for its tumultuous current, the Bab al-Mandab's sixteen mile width served more as a maritime link than a barrier. Ancient Yemeni culture and genetics bridged this narrow body of water that introduces the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean.

Genetic sharing flowed significantly from west to east across the Red Sea, but there was also a small level of genetic transmittance from east to west. Members of the Estonian Biocentre in Tartu conducted a study that identified the mitochondrial DNA of a large group of Yemenis and Ethiopians.¹⁰ From the earliest moments of human settlement in Yemen, mobility created strong bonds of heritage and culture between south Arabia and east Africa.

Migration across the Red Sea was just the beginning of significant latitudinal movement across the water. Beyond the Gate of Tears, the southwest tip of the Arabian Peninsula opened up into the Indian Ocean where powerful and dependable monsoon winds blew from west to east across the Arabian Sea toward the Subcontinent during the summer. These same powerful winds shifted direction during the winter months and moved the currents westward from the Indian Subcontinent to Arabia and Africa.

⁸ Geoff Bailey, "The Red Sea, Coastal Landscapes and Hominin Dispersals in the Evolution of Human Populations " *ibid.*, ed. Michael D. Petraglia and Jeffrey I. Rose, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.(Note: The evidence for a migration across the Red Sea prior to 70,000 years ago does not exist but many scientists believe that there was movement between Africa and Arabia prior to this date.)

¹⁰T. Kivisild et al., "Ethiopian Mitochondrial DNA Heritage: Tracking Gene Flow across and around the Gate of Tears," *Am J Hum Genet* 75, no. 5 (2004): 752–70.

Human contact was not the only exchange that transpired across the Red Sea in prehistory. Archaeological and genetic evidence suggests that cattle and other herd animals were introduced from east Africa. These early south Arabians preferred nomadic herding over integrating their herds into agricultural settlements.¹¹

Archeological evidence suggests that south Arabians lived a pastoral existence before settling in village communities. As goat and sheep herding emerged by the seventh millennium BCE and cattle herding by the fifth millennium BCE, archeologists contend that these pastoralists performed their livelihood in traditions more akin to their contemporaries in Africa than the Levant.¹² In other words, Yemenis often practiced cattle husbandry in conjunction with goat herding. Their herding practices were a hybrid of Africa to the west and the Levant to the north.

Unlike mountains in other climate zones, Yemen's highlands are temperate and form the most arable lands in all the Arabian Peninsula. Blessed with the seasonal rains of the monsoons, the Yemeni highlands are far more agriculturally prosperous than the bordering lowlands. Centuries later, invading Turks documented the visual allure and agricultural abundance of the central highlands around Ibb:

It lies on the skirts of Mt. Ba'dan, a mountain the peak of which reaches al-Simak and al-Nasran, the summit of which only the sun and the moon surmount. At its foot is a wide valley with pure air and fragrance for which sweet bay and wormwood are known, entered by a narrow pass like the neck of a pitcher. It is carpeted with anemone flowers and strewn with a bed of cornelians, a high garden with its fruits within easy reach. That valley was called Shabakah since it resembled a network, its trees entwined, its flowers entangled and its streams criss-

¹¹ Joy McCorriston and Louise Martin, "Southern Arabia's Early Pastoral Population History: Some Recent History" in *The Evolution of Human Populations in Arabia: Paleoenvironments, Prehistory and Genetics*, ed. Michael D. Petraglia and Jeffrey I. Rose (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 237.

¹² *Ibid.*, 247.

crossed.¹³

The rugged terrain slowed the process of cultural diffusion. Fernand Braudel wrote that the history of mountains “is to have none, to remain almost always on the fringe of the great waves of civilization.”¹⁴ Thus, Yemen’s mountainous interior was always moving at a restrained pace. The scattered villagers remained remote from the great stirring of events and removed from the people along her coasts. Although there was certainly contact between the mountain settlements and the populations on the high plains, highland villagers were marginalized by rugged geography.

Climatic changes influenced the nature of population dispersal in ancient times. Water defined settlement patterns in south Arabia. The Central Region of Yemen receives the most rainfall today, but climate change throughout the epochs has shifted from arid to wet periods. For example, sometime between 34,000 and 21,000 years ago, a long “humid interval” prevailed throughout much of Yemen with a strengthened monsoonal pattern.¹⁵ During wetter times, populations grew in the agriculturally rich mountains and, at the same time, people migrated into the usually dry eastern high plains near what is today the *Rub al-Khali* or Empty Quarter.¹⁶ Historically, these semi-arid plains that bordered the desert

¹³ Nahraw*al*i and Smith, *Lightning over Yemen : A History of the Ottoman Campaign (1569-71) : Being a Translation from the Arabic of Part Iii of Al-Barq Al-Yam*an*I F*I Al-Fat*H Al-*Uthm*an*I* by Qu*Tb Al-Din Al-Nahraw*Al*I Al-Makk*I as Published by *Hamad Al-J*Asir (Riyadh, 1967), 57.

¹⁴ Fernand Braudel and Richard Lawrence Ollard, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip Ii* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 34.

¹⁵ Tony J. Wilkenson, "Environment and Long-Term Population Trends in Southwest Arabia," in *The Evolution of Human Populations in Arabia: Paleoenvironments, Prehistory and Genetics*, ed. Michael D. Petraglia and Jeffrey I. Rose (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 54.

¹⁶ Geoff Bailey, "The Red Sea, Coastal Landscapes and Hominin Dispersals in the Evolution of Human Populations " *ibid.*, 21.

along the eastern edge of the mountains were home to large numbers of people and laid the foundations for many of Arabia's most advanced ancient civilizations.

The dry period that gripped Yemen around 4000 BCE altered settlement patterns in the highlands. Archaeologist Tony Wilkenson contended that large numbers of nomads abandoned pastoralism and settled in mountain villages. By this time, farmers in the highlands of Yemen had domesticated cereal grains that required less water. In this way, the population of the highlands increased even during drier periods. Wilkenson suggested that a lower incidence of malaria also led to an increase in population above 6,000 feet.¹⁷ As the Neolithic Revolution reached the south Arabian highlands, Yemenis became less mobile and established a sedentary lifestyle that bound them to land and tribe.

Antiquity

The second millennium BCE ushered in the greatest movement of people into the eastern high plains. As before, climate played a significant role but by this period, technological achievement became just as significant a pull factor for migration toward a region that once was the domain of the pastoral nomad. Beginning in the second millennium BCE, the climate became moister. Stronger monsoon rains resulted in fuller wadis that flowed eastward into the dry regions. South Arabian communities organized irrigation public works projects that required significant manpower in the Sayhad, the desolate rocky arid desert that sits astride the vast *Rub al-Khali*. Yemenis erected dams to serve the water needs of an increasing population. By the beginning of the first millennium BCE, the population of the eastern high plains became more plentiful than those in the

¹⁷ Tony J. Wilkenson, "Environment and Long-Term Population Trends in Southwest Arabia," *ibid.*, 62.

mountains.¹⁸ Ancient south Arabian kings, known as unifiers or *mukarrib*, provided political order to walled capital cities throughout Yemen: Marib in the Saba kingdom, Shabwa in the Hadramawt kingdom, Timna in the Qataban kingdom, Qarna in the Ma'in kingdom, and Zafar in the Himyar Kingdom (Figure 2).

¹⁸ Ibid.

SOUTH ARABIAN FRANKINCENSE TRADE
800 BCE - 600 CE

-  HIGHLANDS OVER 1500 METERS
-  INCENSE TRADE ROUTES (SEABORNE)
-  INCENSE TRADE ROUTES (LAND BASED)
-  AREA OF FRANKINCENSE PRODUCTION

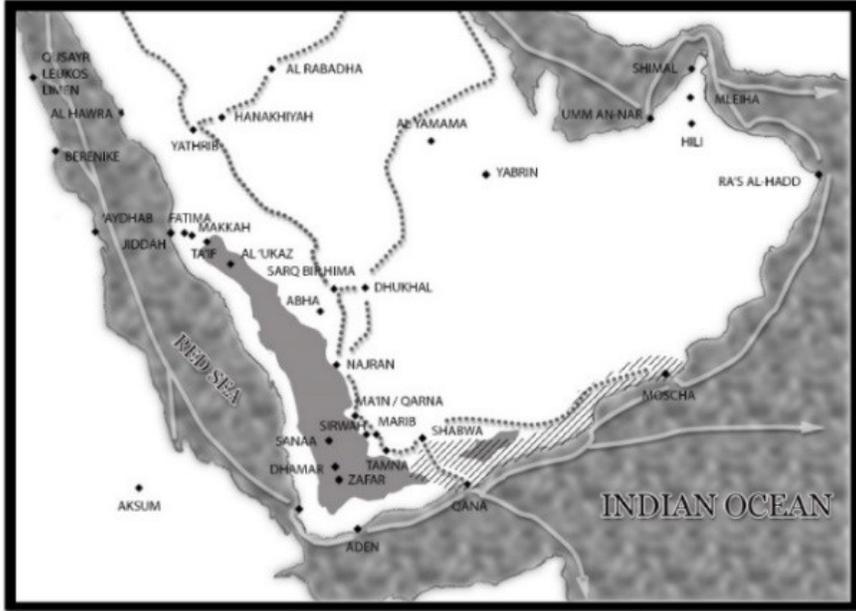


Figure 2. South Arabian Frankincense Trade 800 BCE-600 BCE.¹⁹

¹⁹ Kipp Cozad, "South Arabian Frankincense Trade 800bce-600ce," (2015).

Markers of advanced civilization emerged in south Arabia, including the development of a south Arabian written language. The spoken language of ancient Yemen, known as Old South Arabian or OSA, consisted of several dialects that were closely tied to the regional kingdoms. All of the OSA dialects belong to the Semitic subfamily of languages. Though the concept of a phonetic alphabet has its origins in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Old South Arabian script itself is unique to the lower Arabian Peninsula.

As Yemenis developed a distinct language and script, south Arabia emerged as a unique ancient culture. Though the OSA script was Semitic in origin, the people of ancient Yemen were not Arab. As Robert Hoyland points out, “ancient south Arabian inscriptions draw a clear distinction between Arabs and native peoples of Yemen.”²⁰ The ancient spoken language of the south Arabians did not give way to Arabic until the fourth century CE.²¹ Yemeni acquisition of an Arab identity, therefore, was not an ancient process but rather a more modern one, an identity solidified by the emergence of Islam during the medieval period. Old South Arabian has not completely died out. There are many words from OSA in the contemporary Yemeni dialect,²² which suggests that Yemenis today maintain an exclusive link to their ancient past through language.

Until the second millennium BCE, the direction of migration moved in a primarily

²⁰ Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs : From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, 229.

²¹ Ṭabarī and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The SāsāNids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, Suny Series in near Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 243 (see footnote).

²² Holger Gzella, *Languages from the World of the Bible* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 189.

west to east direction. The latitudinal movement of Africans into south Arabia and then south Arabians into the Sayhad defined the earliest migrations of man. In Yemen, the establishment of what di Maigret calls the “Era of the Caravan Kingdoms”²³ altered the direction of human mobility. This great current of contact between ancient Yemen and the civilization to the north charted along a longitudinal axis. Ancient seafarers continued to ply the Indian Ocean during this period, but the establishment of the longitudinal peninsular trade accelerated south Arabian cultural diffusion and regional contact, especially for those living in the Caravan Kingdoms. The development of a south-north transit in south Arabia was not a sudden occurrence but rather a slow process that needed two requisites: the domestication of the camel and the demand for the finest aromatics.²⁴

Historians debate the emergence of the camel as a beast of burden. Almost all agree that this process occurred between the twelfth and eighth centuries BCE. Prior to the camel, south Arabians used asses as pack animals, but their range in the arid geography of the Sayhad was limited. By the eighth century BCE, however, the camel altered the fortunes of the region.²⁵ The journey of the camel caravan along the advanced kingdoms of Yemen and into central and northern Arabia hastened the rate of contact between south Arabians and the rest the Fertile Crescent. Trans-Arabian trade developed on a large scale, linking key Yemeni entrepots such as Shabwa, Timna, Marib, Ma’in and Yathil before

²³ Allesandro di Maigret. *Arabia Felix: An exploration of the archaeological history of Yemen*. London: Stacey International. 2002, 198.

²⁴ Nigel Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh : A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade*, Arab Background Series (London; New York: Longman, 1981), text, 36.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

striking out in the drier stretch in what is now Saudi Arabia (Figure 2). Once arriving at the town of Najran, caravans either trekked eastward across the desert to reach Mesopotamia or continued north into the eastern Mediterranean.²⁶

Frankincense, a harvested aromatic from the *Boswellia* tree in the Hadramawt, dominated the trade of the region for centuries. Many civilizations around the Mediterranean used frankincense for funerary rituals, religious ceremonies, and medicinal purposes. Greeks used frankincense in their temples, Egyptians in their burial chambers, and Roman doctors utilized frankincense as a salve for a multitude of ailments. As cultures throughout the Near East and Mediterranean World sought the aromatic, the south Arabians established a vast network of trade to meet the demand. Lasting over a thousand years, the Arabian incense route extended seventeen hundred miles and linked the great ancient empires of antiquity.²⁷ “The great Arabian commercial route could not have existed if any one of its protagonists — northern states, southern states or nomadic peoples— had not embraced the need for ‘international commerce’. After centuries of separate and independent evolution, this convergence of intent was reached in the eighth century BC.”²⁸; the disparate groups of south Arabia colluded under a banner of economic gain fueled by the incense trade.

By the time frankincense reached distant destinations, the value of the product

²⁶ Breton, *Arabia Felix from the Time of the Queen of Sheba : Eighth Century B.C. To First Century A.D.*, 115.

²⁷ Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh : A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade*, 9.

²⁸ Alessandro De Maigret, "The Arab Nomadic People and the Cultural Interface between the ‘Fertile Crescent’ and ‘Arabia Felix’," *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 10, no. 2 (1999): 223.

clearly put it in the category of a luxury. The price of frankincense was greatly inflated by the distance involved in its transportation. Nigel Groom asserts that the large number of states that the commodity had to traverse resulted in a significant markup related to taxation.²⁹ Though frankincense was a vital trade good for key players in south Yemen and for those who moved the product, twentieth century historians tended to inflate the significance of aromatics. As archaeologist Allesandro de Maigret wrote, “The power and richness of Arabia Felix did not derive from commercial activities as the classical literature simplistically suggests, but oriented rather in the fact that its people were skilled farmers, exceptionally gifted in creating and managing highly specialized irrigation systems.”³⁰ Centers of civilization on the high plains evolved around the ingenious methods of water management and agriculture. As historians deemphasized the role of frankincense and placed agency with the Yemenis that developed a civilization through aquatic engineering and farming, only then can we see the industrious value of the culture beyond the commodity.

The Caravan Kingdoms that hosted the overland traders were highly sophisticated. Though the lands they controlled were quite extensive, the capitals themselves were relatively small. Most had prided themselves on erecting large defensive walls. Conflict between the states had necessitated the development of barricades. For example, Yathil, the second most important city within the Ma’in kingdom, constructed walls fourteen

²⁹ Groom, *Frankincense and Myrrh : A Study of the Arabian Incense Trade*, 10.

³⁰ De Maigret, "The Arab Nomadic People and the Cultural Interface between the ‘Fertile Crescent’ and ‘Arabia Felix’," 223.

meters tall.³¹ This town came under the control of the Sabaeans and then the Minaeans before succumbing to nomads and the desert in the first century CE.

During the height of the incense trade in the first millennium BCE, many towns like Yathil observed a patron deity. Until the coming of Judaism in the fourth century, Yemenis across the kingdoms were polytheists. South Arabia's gods were well documented in stone inscriptions. Yemeni deities were diverse and numerous, with over one hundred gods represented. Robert Hoyland contends that such an array of gods reveals the complexity and toleration of ancient Yemen civilization.³² The difference among the numerous deities of south Arabia seems not to lie in their function, but in their sphere of operation. Thus, there was not one dedicated rain-god, but rather there were tutelary deities responsible for the irrigation of the village, patron deities for that of the tribal lands, and 'Athtar for the whole world.³³ Fees collected during trade and funds directed toward public works projects always bore the name of the king and the patron deity, thus the deities functioned as a unifying agent in a realm that oftentimes was not as consolidated as the rulers would like. Similar to the Old South Arabian language, Yemen's distinct pantheon provides an additional marker of a unique culture that existed for over a millennium.

Movement is also associated with religion in the pre-Islamic past of south Arabia. At the same time as merchants transported goods along the well-worn passages of the incense trail, pilgrims performed ritualized journeys throughout the region as a measure of

³¹ Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs : From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, 169.

³² Ibid., 139.

³³ Ibid., 140.

their faith. The annual Hajj is associated with Islam but the roots of pilgrimage extend back into Arabian antiquity. Lynn Newton writes, “Pilgrimages with great time depth invariably bear evident traces of earlier religions, in their foundation narratives, attendant folk beliefs, liturgies, and symbolism; in the nature of the way stations along the pilgrim roads; in the location of attributes of the principal shrine; and in the positioning of their major feast days in the calendar.”³⁴ In *A Landscape of Pilgrimage and Trade in Wadi Masila, Yemen*, Newton addressed the significance of religious journeys. She studied a contemporary Hadramawt pilgrimage known as Qabr Hud. Hud was a pre-Islamic prophet and according to Shia Muslims living in the south of Yemen, Qabr Hud was the final resting place of the holy figure. By studying the contemporary annual visit to Qabr Hud, historians can better understand the role that pilgrims and pilgrimage played in ancient Yemen.

For those making the journey, the purpose was entirely experiential and spiritual, but these pilgrimages often relied on many supporters along their journey. During the height of the incense trade, these pilgrimages enhanced the exchange of goods and services. Even more significant is how these events must have drawn merchants to specific destinations during special times of the year.³⁵ Not only did the wealth generating aspects of the annual pilgrimages fortify the existing trade networks, they also created revenue separate from the traditional trade scheme. In this way, the sacred blended with the secular along the established trade routes of eastern Yemen, and in some cases, the less frequented

³⁴ Lynne S. Newton, *A Landscape of Pilgrimage and Trade in Wadi Masila, Yemen : Al-Qisha and Qabr Hud in the Islamic Period*, Bar International Series (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009), 87.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

merchant trails gained relevance through its spiritual value. All of these interactions involved large scale planning and movement.

Newton analyzed “sacred landscapes” of pathways, routes, tracks and trails. Historians traditionally focused on pilgrimage destinations, but recent scholarship evaluates sacred sites “distributionally across a landscape.”³⁶ In this analysis, the movement of pilgrims and their visitation to shrine waypoints are valued as much as the final destination. The strength of idol worship, the movement of polytheistic pilgrims, and the complexity of the Arabian pantheon combined to create a sacred landscape that defined identity in pre-Islamic Arabia where mobility through pilgrimage was a powerful theme.

Historians tend to highlight the overland frankincense trade, but seaborne commerce between the East, Arabia, and the wider Mediterranean covered a larger swath of geography and was just as vital to the trade of aromatics as camel-based trade. As early as the second millennium BCE, ships plied the waters between India and south Arabia. The contact between these two ancient peoples must have validated south Arabian polytheism. At the same time, the exchange of exotic goods was at the forefront of this contact.

Unlike the trade network along the incense trail, there was no random mercantilism across the Indian Ocean. Sailors and merchants throughout the Indian Ocean utilized the cyclical rhythms of the South Asian monsoon system. The nature of monsoonal trade precipitated a surge in preparatory activities followed by organized thrusts of movement across the Indian Ocean. Seasonal winds and destination defined ocean bound departures.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., 82.

³⁷ Margariti, *Aden & the Indian Ocean Trade : 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port*, 38.

Trade from India arrived in Yemen during late fall through late winter.³⁸ These goods joined the procession of caravans that matriculated northward along the incense trail. From the second millennium BCE onward, Indians were foreign but familiar. In Engseng Ho's landmark book *The Graves of Tarim*, he writes about the relationship between south Yemen and India. Though his analysis applied to a later period, the meaning resonates in ancient Yemen:

While such discourses of mobility developed and were transformed in the Indian Ocean from the sixteenth century on, [Hadhramis] had prior existence on land, in the homeland of Hadramawt. In both arenas, they charted the creation of new communities, which emerged from the interaction between transregional and local social groups. Such communities are composed of individuals who are creoles and local cosmopolitans, I mean persons who, while embedded in local relations, also maintain connections with distant places. They thus articulate a relation between different geographical scales.³⁹

Yemenis, who connected with the port cities along the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, had access to information from all over the known world. From China to Rome, traders made their way to the entrepots of Yemen. As Yemenis established connections that resulted in trade and cultural transference, they formed the foundation for seaborne mobility that would endure throughout south Arabian history.

The Indo-Yemeni connection grew in significance with technological improvements in navigation. The primary timber used for shipbuilding was Indian teak,⁴⁰ while the sails were lateen in shape. Historian George Hourani contends that the Arabs

³⁸ Ibid., 40-41.

³⁹ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 31.

⁴⁰ J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, Arab Background Series (London ; New York: Longman, 1979), 89-90.

utilized astronomical navigation first by crossing the vastness of the desert and then applying it later to seafaring.⁴¹ Thus, the Yemenis acquisition of navigational technology linked the aromatics longitudinal trade of the Caravan Kingdoms with the latitudinal mobility at sea.

By the first century CE, traders from Egypt, Africa, Arabia and India formed economic and social bonds throughout the Indian Ocean. Ports such as Muza, Okelis, Eudaimon Arabia, and Kane in south Arabia became central entrepôts for trans-Indian Oceanic trade. In these tropical locations, frankincense, spices, silk, and slaves were valuable exports and imports.

The dependable monsoon wind patterns across the Indian Ocean created dynamic cultural hubs. Traders remained in coastal locals for long stretches waiting for the winds to shift before returning home. South Yemenis hosted large numbers of traders across the Indian Ocean. Within these ports, foreign merchants established trading diasporas.⁴² In the classical Greek work *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, the anonymous author described first century south Arabia under the control of the Himyaris. To the southwest of Himyar, the Kingdom of Hadramawt monopolized the frankincense trade. Kanê served as Hadramawt's chief port and the incense was stored at distant Khor Rori in order to protect the inventory.⁴³ As a result of the coastal areas of south Arabia residing at the nexus of the

⁴¹ George Fadlo Hourani, *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), 106.

⁴² Ṭabarī and Bosworth, *The SāsāNids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, 60ff.

⁴³ R. B. Serjeant and Ronald B. Lewcock, *Ṣan'ā': An Arabian Islamic City* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983), 29.

great maritime trade networks of the Indian Ocean, Yemenis on the periphery experienced a high level of cosmopolitanism in ancient times.

At the dawn of the first millennium CE, Yemenis in the interior began to see more contact with outsiders. After gaining control of Egypt and the Red Sea, the Romans desired to control the Silk Road and the wider Indian Ocean trade.⁴⁴ In 26 BCE, the Roman commander Aelius Gallus, accompanied by Nabataen and Jewish warriors, led an aborted invasion of south Arabia.⁴⁵ Similar to subsequent invaders, the Romans initially had success, but the rugged geography and localized resistance from Yemeni tribesmen forced a Roman withdrawal. Although the incursion was short-lived, the Romans began a period that saw internal and regional forces erode the relative harmony of south Arabia.

From the third century CE to the emergence of Islam in the seventh century, the last great ancient south Arabian civilization of Himyar faced the pressures of changing social structures and dominant regional powers. Polytheism, which had been the mainstay of antiquity, gave way to monotheism. Judaism spread in Yemen from the north. At the time of the Prophet Mohammed, Judaism was the dominant faith in south Arabia.⁴⁶ Fueled by Ethiopian missionary zeal, Christianity emerged from the south Arabian island of Socotra in the fourth century. Though popular in areas of south Arabia such as Najran, Christianity did not resonate regionally in the same manner as Judaism.

⁴⁴ Schippmann, *Ancient South Arabia : From the Queen of Sheba to the Advent of Islam*, 59.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

⁴⁶ Michael Lecker, "Judaism among Kinda and the Ridda of Kinda," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 4 (1995): 635.

Along the Red Sea, south Arabians grew weary of Roman dominance along with their client Christian state in Ethiopia.⁴⁷ Yemenis abandoned the well-established indigenous religious structure of their ancestors for Judaism, an external faith. Though the reasons are not defined in the historical record, we can assert that the influence of foreign ideas grew in the early centuries of the first millennium CE, slowly eroding Yemen's ancient political and religious structures, while creating religious structures that aligned Yemen with the outside world.

The centuries of political isolation ended as well. Dating back to the final centuries of the first millennium BCE, the Sabaean civilization of south Yemen colonized a large swath of Abyssinia across the Red Sea. The south Arabians shared their script, architecture, and political structures. This influence was so strong that the identities of the two regions were nearly synonymous (Figure 3). Out of this construct, the Aksumite civilization emerged in Abyssinia. When the Sabaean and Himyarite kingdoms clashed in the Arabian Peninsula in the second and third centuries CE, the Aksumites in Abyssinia allied with the Sabaean to achieve a balance of power and Aksumite control of the Red Sea.⁴⁸ On the eve of Islam, Abyssinian influence surged in Yemen. The Aksumite king Ezana, accepted Christianity around 333 CE and soon the faith spread to south Arabia as the Aksumite Kingdom expanded its hold on Yemen through fortified enclaves.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ De Maigret, *Arabia Felix : An Exploration of the Archaeological History of Yemen*, 249.

⁴⁸ S. C. Munro-Hay and Thomas Leiper Kane Collection (Library of Congress. Hebraic Section), *Aksum : An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 73.

⁴⁹ Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, 296.

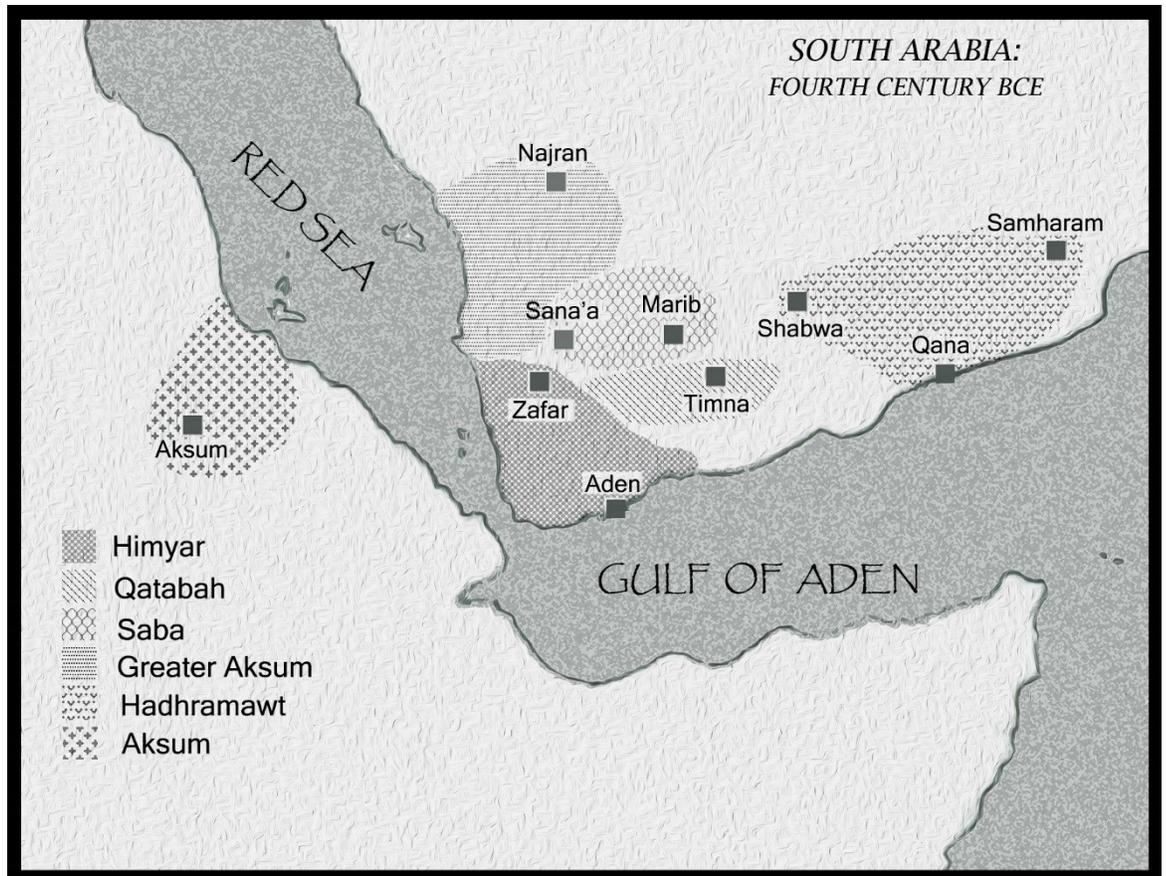


Figure 3. South Arabia: Fourth Century.⁵⁰

By the sixth century, Yemen experienced a clash of social forces that changed the culture of the region. Dhu Nuwas, the last Himyarite king and a devout Jew, led a revolt against the Abyssinians. The Abyssinian association with Christianity in south Arabia compelled Dhu Nuwas to target Christians. His forces slaughtered Christian communities, especially in the Christian center of Najran through what C.E Bosworth called a “proto-

⁵⁰ Kipp Cozad, "South Arabia: Fourth Century " (2015).

nationalist, pro-Jewish reaction.”⁵¹ The Abyssinian King Ella Asbaha responded by invading Yemen, putting down the revolt, and killing Dhu Nuwas. Abyssinia imposed a protectorate within Yemen that served as the apex of African influence in south Arabia.

The sixth century marked the end of an era. Yemen lost the ability to define its own cultural identity from a position of strength. Foreign faiths and neighboring powers crept into the fabric of Yemen politics and society. The Yemenis viewed the short-lived Abyssinian occupation as an expansion of Byzantine authority.⁵² In the midst of the turmoil, Yemen turned to the Sassanids of Persia. The Sassanids, a perennial foe of the Byzantine Empire, aided the Yemenis in removing the Abyssinian threat from south Arabia. This episode suggests that Yemenis rejected concentrated influence from Africa to the extent that they entered into an alliance with the Sassanids from a position of weakness.

The South Arabians did not achieve autonomy with the Sassanid victory over the Abyssinians. South Arabia merely unseated one regional foreign power for another. The introduction of the Sassanids, as south Arabian authorities solidified ties with Persia, hastened the demise of Christianity in Yemen. The long standing hostility between the Sassanids and the Byzantine Empire caused a continuation of oppression against Christian interests in the region. The coming of Islam in the seventh century CE removed the last vestiges of Christianity in south Arabia.⁵³

⁵¹ Ṭabarī and Bosworth, *The SāsāNids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, n194.

⁵² Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs : From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam*, 51.

⁵³ Ṭabarī and Bosworth, *The SāsāNids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, n194. The last recorded reference of Christianity in Yemen occurred in the tenth century in Sana'a.

Though polytheism continued to exist following the emergence of Islam, Yemen's cultural identity changed as a result of the upheavals brought on by foreign intervention. Throughout antiquity, the internal mountain region, representing Yemen's traditional culture, was largely untouched by forces outside of south Arabia, but the deterioration of political autonomy along the high plains allowed foreign ideas to seep into the highlands as well. During the late antiquity period, Yemeni mobility within south Arabia was caused by political chaos. As Yemen's ancient society collapsed, the strongest example of mobility resided in the external ideas and culture that penetrated beyond the coasts and into the highlands of Yemen. Many of these ideas, Islam for example, would transpose the identity of modern Yemenis.

The large Arabian Desert and the expansive Indian Ocean shielded south Arabia for millennia. Within this geographic space, Yemenis developed a civilization that included a unique language and script, a south Arabian pantheon, a vibrant trade network that was bolstered by extensive irrigation systems, and a strong opposition to external incursion. Though Islam would largely define Yemeni society in the centuries to follow, the thousands of years of a pre-Arab Yemeni identity shaped the character of a people that would expand beyond their homeland, first as missionaries and traders and then as subalterns in an expansive colonial system.

Medieval Age

The final bursting of the Marib Dam in the ancient capital of the Sabaeans in 575 CE under Sassanid rule marked the end of large scale cooperative civic development in south Arabia and ushered in the Medieval Age. Jurgen Schmidt contends that the Abyssinian conflict along with migration in the 500s doomed the old irrigation societies of

antiquity.⁵⁴ With the failure of organized governmental water projects, the population moved into the mountains.⁵⁵ With the migration of people from the Sayhad, Sana'a emerged as a cultural, political, and economic center in the sixth century. The Abyssinians used it as their base of operations and the Sassanid governors ruled from Sana'a after they accepted Islam.⁵⁶ The movement of the capital into the mountains signified a change in mobility. Though Sana'a held commercial significance, its location in the mountains slowed the pace of trade. In addition, the insular location of Sana'a in the mountains provided a more defensible site than the expansive geography on the high plains of the Sayhad.

The migration of Arabs also altered the culture of south Arabia. The Arabs, once considered inferior nomads on the fringe of the Caravan Kingdoms, increasingly infiltrated the populations within south Arabia in the centuries preceding the emergence of Islam. By the sixth century Arabization was widespread throughout south Arabia.⁵⁷ The breakdown of regional stability weakened a shared collective ancient Yemeni identity.

Ultimately, the conflict between the Sassanids and the Byzantines opened the door for Islam. On the eve of Mohammed's triumphant return to Mecca in 630, the Sassanid

⁵⁴ Jurgen Schmidt, "The Sabaean irrigation economy of Marib" ed. Werner Daum, *In Yemen : 3000 Years of Art and Civilisation in Arabia Felix* (Innsbruck Frankfurt/Main: Pinguin-Verlag; Umschau-Verlag, 1987), 62.

⁵⁵ Sana'a emerged as a byproduct of the failure of the eastern plains civilizations to maintain their historical water technology. Today Sana'a is facing a water crisis. Scientists suggest that within ten years, Sana'a could run out of water forcing the population to move in mass once again. Water has always been a transformer and an instigator of migration in Yemen.

⁵⁶ Serjeant and Lewcock, *ṢAn'ā' : An Arabian Islamic City*. (London: World Islam Festival Trust, 1983), 51.

⁵⁷ Schippmann, *Ancient South Arabia : From the Queen of Sheba to the Advent of Islam*, 66.

Empire was weakened by battle and regicide. These events in Persia eroded the authority in the outlying regions of the empire, including Yemen. The weakened Sassanid satrap of Yemen, Badhan, converted to Islam amid the chaos. With foreign, non-Arab leaders being the first to convert, Islam did not spread quickly among the population.⁵⁸ When Mohammed died in 632, a counter prophet led a rebellion in Yemen. A series of apostasy revolts known as the Ridda Wars erupted within Yemen. Although Muslim forces put down the rebellions, Yemeni tribal identities and power struggles were often stronger within the region than was faith in the early years of Islam.⁵⁹ The Ridda Wars suggest that all outside influences scratch their way into Yemeni culture rather than settle gently there.

The Abyssinian invasion, the Sassanid counter-invasion of the late sixth century, and the advent of Islam in the early seventh century signified a cultural shift in south Arabia. The pan-continental cultural link with sub-Saharan Africa was largely severed at this time, and the influence of Arabs in Yemen continued to grow through longitudinal diffusive mobility, particularly as Yemenis became part of the House of Islam. Yemenis participated in the conflicts that spread Islam, and their proximity to Mecca and Medina assured ties along a longitudinal axis.

By the end of the first millennia of the Common Era, south Arabia increasingly became receptors to outside forces. Even Yemenis in the most remote regions of the northern highlands were not immune to foreign ideas. In the ninth century, northern tribal leaders invited Yahya bin al-Husayn ila 'l-Haqq, a Zaydi religious leader, into Yemen in

⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁹ Smith, "Yemenite History-Problems and Misconceptions," 136.

order to resolve regional conflict. Yahya's Zaydi sect is also known as the "Fivers" after the Zaydis' rejection of the traditional successor of the fifth Imam within Shi'a Islam.⁶⁰ Yahya encountered a tribal populace largely void of Islam.⁶¹ Yahya's ability as a unifier solidified the faith in the northern highlands and brought about his distinct religious identity to a fiercely independent people. The Zaydi Imams served as "mediators between the tribes rather than their rulers,"⁶² and in this way, a foreign ideology established political and religious validity.

The emergence of Zaydi Islam in Yemen divided not only the north and south between Sunnis and Shias, but also accentuated the distinction between the people of the north, who had strong tribal affiliations, from those Yemenis of the Central Region, coastal regions and south, who were less bound to a tribal identity. Beyond the northern highlands within Yemen, the majority of Yemenis retained their Shafai'i Sunni faith. Despite the Zaydi conversion of northern tribesmen, the two sects shared many tenets of Islam, especially in the realm of jurisprudence. The Zaydis follow a school of Islamic thought that is closer to Sunni doctrine than traditional Shi'ism.⁶³ It is in the role of politics where Zaydis would be most influential. In 897, Yahya proclaimed himself Imam and became the

⁶⁰ John L. Esposito, *Islam : The Straight Path*, Rev. 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 44.

⁶¹ G. Rex Smith, "Yemenite History-Problems and Misconceptions," in *Studies in the Medieval History of the Yemen and South Arabia* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1997), 135.

⁶² Peterson, *Yemen, the Search for a Modern State*, 21.

⁶³ Muhammad Ali Aziz, *Religion and Mysticism in Early Islam : Theology and Sufism in Yemen*, Library of Middle East History (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011), 20.

first in a long line of Zaydi leaders that ruled Yemen until 1962.⁶⁴ Most Yemenis rejected the Zaydi faith but welcomed the modicum of stability brought by the Zaydi Imams.

The shifting authority of Islamic Empires affected the economy of south Arabia. Yemen benefited as the center of the Muslim world when the capital relocated from Umayyad Damascus, to Abbasid Baghdad, to Fatimid Cairo. Red Sea trade grew beginning in the tenth century, replacing the Persian Gulf as the regional economic waterway. With the expansion of Red Sea trade, the Yemeni port of Aden grew into one of the most vital entrepôts.⁶⁵ Islam formed the spiritual bond across the Red Sea. The vital trade links continued to be longitudinal but instead of being land-based, the Red Sea served as a nautical north-south trade route.

By the thirteenth century, seismic events in the east began the era of greatest Yemeni commercial influence. The Mongol destruction of Baghdad in 1258 shifted the locus of Islamic power westward. The south Yemenis known as Hadhramis took on the role of traders and conduits of Muslim knowledge and scholarship. Engseng Ho combines these roles into what he terms the “Alawi Way,” named after the grandson of a Sufi *sayyid* or revered descendant of Mohammed.⁶⁶ The Alawi Way is synonymous with mobility throughout the Indian Ocean and can best be described as an economic, political, and religious expansion emanating from southern Yemen.

⁶⁴ G. Rex Smith. "The political history of the Islamic Yemen down to the first Turkish invasion (1-945/622-1538) Werner Daum, *In Yemen : 3000 Years of Art and Civilisation in Arabia Felix*, 131.

⁶⁵ Margariti, *Aden & the Indian Ocean Trade : 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port*, 27.

⁶⁶ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 28.

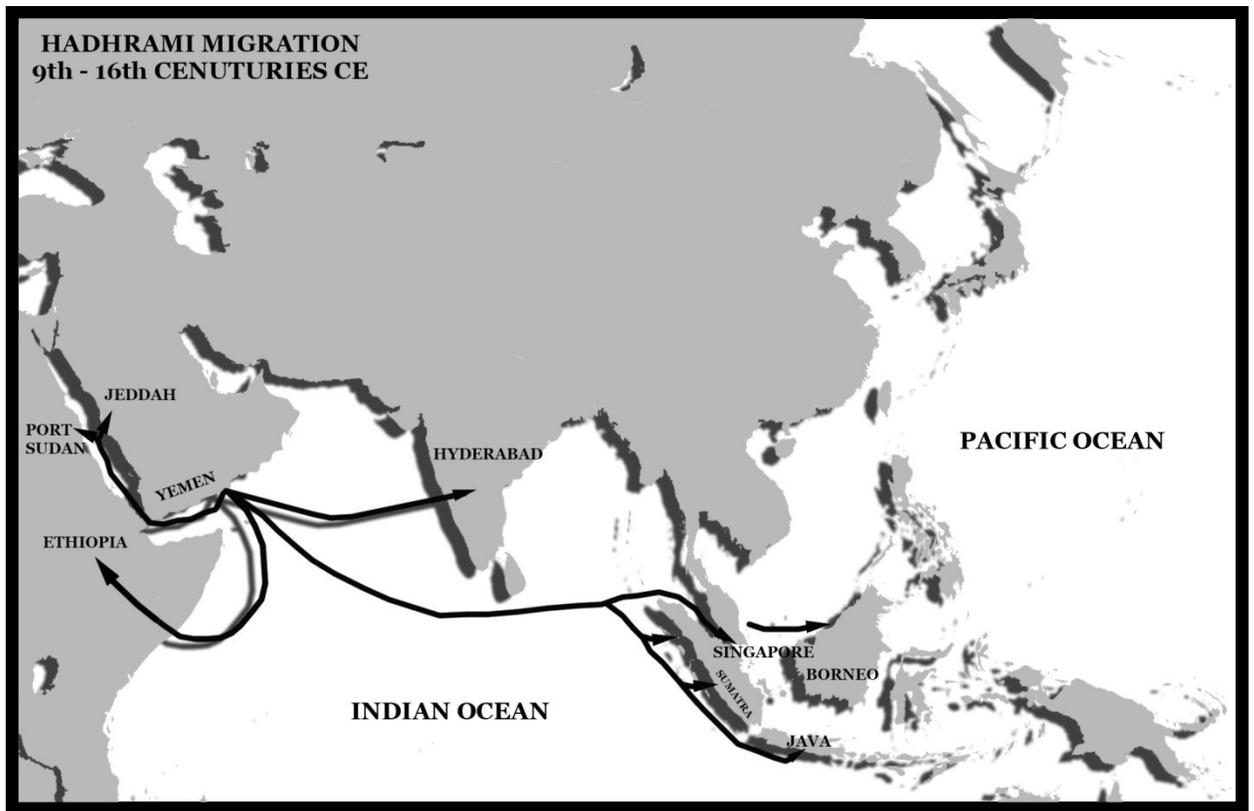


Figure 4. Hadhrami Migration: 9th-16th Centuries.⁶⁷

The Hadhramis led the way in connecting Southeast Asia with Europe. Hadhrami settlements in Sumatra served as an entrepot for spice and other riches of the Far East (Figure 4). Hadhrami sailors transported valued cargo from the Indian Ocean into the Red Sea. From there, merchants traded with Venice and brought spices, silk and other goods to the European market. In previous epochs, Yemenis certainly participated in the movement

⁶⁷ Kipp Cozad, "Hadhrami Migration: 9th-16th Centuries," (2015).

of goods, but by the fourteenth century Hadhramis were the agents of seaborne mobility and the transmitters of Islamic culture throughout the Indian Ocean world. “By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the rulers of Cambay in Gujarat were Muslim, as were those of Aceh and Melaka in the Strait of Melaka and Gresik on the north Java coast.”⁶⁸ Yemenis were no longer the regional benefactors of trade, but became the engines of trans-continental latitudinal trade and culture. Hadhrami mobility resulted in a vast diaspora throughout the Indian Ocean.

The region became a location known for its piety with the proliferation of religious Alawayin *sayyids* from such towns as Tarim in southern Yemen. These *sayyids* served as experts on Islamic jurisprudence, conflict resolution, and spiritual authority.⁶⁹ As a result of the Hadramawt serving as a center of Islamic scholarship, Enseng Ho described the Hadramawt as shifting from a destination to an origin. The root of the Alawi Way was Sufi but the predominance of the Shafi’i School of Islam filtered the faith through a Sunni prism, especially following the emergence of Egypt as the center of Islamic power under the Mamluk Dynasty.⁷⁰ The Hadhramis traversed the Indian Ocean and defined the faith throughout the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

Since antiquity, the Hadhramis traded with the great civilizations of the known world. They sailed along the great trade routes of the Red Sea and Indian Oceans. As the caretakers of the world’s most valued sources of frankincense, Hadhramis had ancient ties

⁶⁸ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 48.

⁶⁹ Linda Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire : Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s*, Suny Series in near Eastern Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 25.

⁷⁰ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 100.

to mercantilism. Later, as cosmopolitans, the Hadhramis served as traders, as well as exporters of the Islamic faith. The breadth of Hadhrami movement across the Indian Ocean serves as a discerning example of Yemeni mobility.

The rise of European and Turkish power in the sixteenth century ultimately ended Hadhrami hegemony, but not their influence within the diasporic communities of the East and certainly not the role of Hadhrami *sayyids* there; in fact, the large-scale emigration from the Hadramawt to Southeast Asia reached its peak after the sixteenth century.⁷¹

The expansive Hadhrami thrust across the Indian Ocean not only spread Islam into new regions of the world, but also established Yemen's first modern diaspora. Like Yemen's ancient mariners, the Hadhramis offered a contrasting force to the vast majority of Yemenis that lived a settled existence in the scattered villages throughout the south Arabian highlands. The paradox between the forces of mobility and the forces of stasis defined the Yemeni communities that ultimately settled beyond Yemeni shores. In the modern period, external forces reached the most remote Yemenis in the highlands and provided the structures for a new wave of Yemeni mobility.

Modern Yemen

As the Portuguese entered the Indian Ocean trade network in the early sixteenth century, the Asian practice of mercantile syncretism, blending disparate cultures together for profit, proved no match for what historian Janet Abu-Lughod calls the Portuguese

⁷¹ Ulrike Freitag and W. G. Clarence-Smith, "Hadhrmaut and the Hadhrami Diaspora: Problems in Theoretical History," in *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997), 25.

policy of “trade-cum-plunder.”⁷² The Ottoman Empire further disrupted the old order of Indian Ocean trade by overrunning Egypt in 1516-17. The Portuguese directly threatened Ottoman hegemony in both the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean by severing complex Islamic trade networks that had existed autonomously for centuries. “This was a space in which Europeans came as newcomers to a pre-existing, Muslim world of port-states, trading routes, and religious and kinship networks.”⁷³ European actions served to prevent the free flow of Arab trade and reversed the course of contact between Yemenis and outsiders.

Facing a Portuguese threat in the Red Sea, the Ottoman Empire viewed Yemen as the cornerstone of their defense of the Asian trade routes and the southern vanguard in the protection of the Islamic Holy cities in the Hijaz. Yemen, following the collapse of the Mamluks in Egypt in 1517, attempted to achieve autonomy but, as the Imams expanded their control over the southern reaches of Arabia, Ottoman Sultan Selim II in 1569, ordered an expedition into Yemen to thwart the Portuguese threat and establish authority among the Zaydis.

The Ottoman occupation of Yemen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the first of two separate incursions into south Arabia. The Turks were seen as foreign invaders despite their Islamic faith. As Sunni Muslims, the Ottoman occupiers felt contempt for the Zaydis and labeled them heretics of Islam.⁷⁴ The Zaydis in the north were

⁷² Tony Lane, "The Coloured Alien Seamen Order, 1925," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade*, ed. Diane Frost (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 361.

⁷³ Engseng Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 02 (2004): 217.

⁷⁴ Serjeant, *Ṣān'ā'*, 78.

equally appalled by the laxity with which most Turks practiced their religion. As a result of these sectarian and social differences, the greatest resistance to the Turkish presence in Yemen came from the north where tribal affiliation and Zaydiism were strongest.

The Red Sea became an Ottoman lake during the sixteenth century. The Sublime Porte managed the shipping lanes from Egypt out into the Gulf of Aden. Ottoman territorial expansion temporarily created what Engseng Ho described as “new Muslim states being created out of old ones with the arrival and incorporation of foreigners in positions of rule and influence.”⁷⁵ The foreigners were by and large Turks and they overlapped their legal traditions and culture on those they ruled.

Along the Red Sea, the Tihaman ports of Mocha, al-Hudayda, and al-Luhayya became centers to quell Yemeni uprisings, as well as the point of departure for Yemen’s primary export: coffee. With origins in Ethiopia, it was in Yemen where coffee production matured. Grown in the northwest Hiraz Mountains in Yemen between 4500 and 9000 feet, coffee became the drink of Turkish elites in Istanbul and later a prized beverage in Europe. For a time, Yemen was the only source of the coffee plant. The Ottomans protected the coffee tree in order to manage the value of coffee production and to ensure that the commodity remained a lucrative export.⁷⁶

Though short-lived, the coffee trade had parallel value with the frankincense of antiquity; it was a luxury item and a valued commodity throughout the trade networks of the known world. Foreign traders flocked to the Yemeni coast to trade in coffee. Arabs and

⁷⁵ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 101.

⁷⁶ Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha : Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port*, 39.

Turks certainly traded in coffee during the Ottoman occupation, and in later centuries. Persians, Dutch, French, English, Indians, and Africans loaded ships full of coffee beans from Yemeni ports. The Yemenis on the Red Sea coast came in contact with more disparate people while Yemenis participated in the global shipping of coffee.⁷⁷ It was also the time when Yemen became synonymous with coffee in the imagination of western Europeans.

The Ottomans faced strong opposition within Yemen during the seventeenth century, especially from the fiercely independent Zaydi tribes of the north. The Ottomans were forced westward and held only the coastal towns along the Red Sea including the lucrative coffee exporting town of Mocha. By 1635, their position in Yemen became untenable and the Ottomans made a quiet withdrawal.⁷⁸ The Ottoman occupation of Yemen was always contentious but their legacy lives on in the language of the land. Baths in Yemen are called *hammams*, sitting rooms are *deauans* and the national dish of Yemen, *seltah*, has Turkish origins.⁷⁹ The Ottomans also influenced architectural style. Though the Ottomans left traces of their civilization, they had marginal influence on Yemeni culture.

The retreat of the Ottoman Empire from Yemen in the seventeenth century signaled a new phase in Yemeni autonomy. The Zaydis, under the leadership of the Qasimi Imams, extended their rule southward and unified Yemen in ways that were unknown during

⁷⁷ Um, *Mocha*, 42-46. (For an account of Dutch, French and English entry into the coffee trade in Mocha see San'a: An Arabian Islamic City, 79).

⁷⁸ Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha : Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port*, 19.

⁷⁹ “سلتااه Saltaah”, *Yemen Kitchen: The Story of Yemen's History Right From the Kitchen* (blog), January 5, 2013. <http://yemenkitchen.wordpress.com/tag/turkey/>

earlier periods. Northern tribal sheikhs gained control of territories in lower Yemen beyond their historical control but, unlike earlier expansion, these sheikhs had to answer to the Imam.⁸⁰ The Qasimi Imams ruled over areas in the southern part of Yemen that had extensive trade ties. Imamic forces utilized their military prowess to overwhelm more agriculturally rich and economically viable groups south of Sana'a. As Nancy Um contends, "beginning in the seventeenth century the two realms—the highland Zaydi north and the largely Sunni coastal lowland with its maritime ties to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean—became tightly intertwined and economically dependent on each other."⁸¹ The seventeenth century ushered in a period of extensive migration within Yemen. As ethnographer Paul Dresch asserted, contemporary elite lineages in the south of Yemen can trace their ancestry to this period of Qasimi expansion.⁸² Limited scholarship exists on the role of internal migration in Yemen.

With the northern outlet through Egypt now unavailable to the Yemenis, in large part owing to the recent conflict with the Ottomans, once again the trade network focused on a latitudinal orientation across the Indian Ocean with Mocha serving as the demarcation point for distant destinations.⁸³ Zaydi mobility was limited to incursions within Yemen and defined by contact with their Shafi'i Sunni countrymen.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 199.

⁸¹ Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha : Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port*, 28.

⁸² Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 199.

⁸³ Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha : Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port*, 35.

⁸⁴ Serjeant and Lewcock, *ṢAn 'ā' : An Arabian Islamic City*, 79.

When the Ottomans abandoned Yemen in the seventeenth century, the Yemenis dismantled the governmental organization that had functioned in Yemen for a hundred years. The Qasimi state in Yemen erected a new political system that supplanted a century old Ottoman institution in Yemen. Centered on the Imam as a titular leader, the tribal nature of Zaydi politics resulted in frequent struggles for control, at the same time that Yemeni cultural expansion stretched across the Indian Ocean.⁸⁵ Few Zaydis living in Sana'a came into contact with outsiders. In fact, the *Statute of Sana'a*, an eighteenth century list of Sana'ani market regulations, did not mention Western goods.⁸⁶ At the periphery of colonization during a time of intense European pressure in the Middle East and throughout the Indian Ocean, Western trade goods were unknown to the mountain peoples of Yemen. As Yemenis became less involved in the vast trade networks, Yemenis living in the interior, especially in the Zaydi controlled northern highlands, depended on traditional craft-making. As self-sufficiency intensified in the highlands, Yemenis had less contact with a wider world.

As the Zaydis were expanding their hold on greater Yemen throughout the seventeenth century, the Hadhramis flourished as a diaspora in an Indian Ocean dominated by Europe. The Hadhramis established complex settlements in East Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. The Yemeni approach to cultural dissonance in these far flung enclaves, whether in response to local or European structures, laid the foundations for a Yemeni emigrant cultural identity for centuries to come. As Linda Boxberger points out in *On the*

⁸⁵ Um, *The Merchant Houses of Mocha : Trade and Architecture in an Indian Ocean Port*, 26.

⁸⁶ Serjeant and Lewcock, *Ṣān'ā' : An Arabian Islamic City*, 182-232.

Edge of Empire, the culture of Hadhrami emigration “combined social adaptability and mercantile skills with a strong identification with the southern Arabian homeland and a strong affection for it, which precluded total assimilation for most, although not all, emigrants”.⁸⁷ These associations from great distances would lay the framework for future Yemeni diasporas. Yemeni emotional ties to the homeland, resistance to assimilation, and an identity rooted in Yemen culture are values that bind Yemeni migrants across the ages.

Yemen in the nineteenth century became immersed once again in foreign imperialism. In 1839, Britain carved out a protectorate in south Arabia. Aden provided a deep water port in the Indian Ocean that served as a link to British India. When the Suez Canal opened in 1869, Britain placed more value on Aden as a strategic port. The British presence in Aden, near the outlet of the Red Sea, caused renewed concerns for Ottoman interests in the region at a time when pan-Islamists in Istanbul began to dictate an aggressive foreign policy in the Arabian Peninsula.⁸⁸

The Imams struggled politically and culturally with the presence of Britain on their soil. For much of the nineteenth century the Yemenis were feckless in the face of foreign encroachment. The Imams, throughout the period known as the Time of Corruption, dealt with a Yemen wracked with famine, disease, and tribal disorder.⁸⁹ The Zaydi Qasimis, who had gained political authority following the Ottoman withdrawal, saw their rule deteriorate. In the face of political turmoil, Yemenis suffered greatly during the nineteenth century.

⁸⁷ Boxberger, *On the Edge of Empire : Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s*, 39.

⁸⁸ R. J. Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1975), 134.

⁸⁹ Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.

The Dutch and the British established coffee plantations in Java and the Caribbean, marginalizing the once great Yemen coffee trade.⁹⁰ The loss of revenue further weakened central authority in Yemen.

With a growing British presence in the south of Yemen, the Ottomans once more invaded Yemen in 1872. Fearing both Western encroachment in Yemen as well as the threat to the Islamic holy sites in the Arabian Peninsula, the Ottomans seized the Tihama and then moved inland where the Shafi'is, who had suffered for decades under Zaydi rule, welcomed the stability of the Ottoman invaders.⁹¹ In 1879, the Ottomans forced their way into the northern highlands where they remained until their defeat in the Great War in 1918.⁹² On the edges of their empire, the Sublime Porte deemed the Yemenis “culturally inferior” and in need of civilizing.⁹³

As European hegemony grew in the waters around Yemen, contact between Yemenis and outsiders became more contentious. Both Britain and the Ottoman Empire used Yemeni weakness to secure colonial ambitions.⁹⁴ The Ottomans in particular, in their attempt to claim lands north of Sana'a, faced almost continual hostility from the fiercely independent Zaydi tribes. As in the previous occupation, the tensions between the

⁹⁰ Horst Kopp, “Agriculture in Yemen From Mocca to Qat” in *Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix*, ed Werner Daum (Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag, 1987), 370.

⁹¹ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹³ Thomas Kuehn, *Empire, Islam, and Politics of Difference : Ottoman Rule in Yemen, 1849-1919*, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Heritage : Politics, Society and Economy*, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2011), 68.

⁹⁴ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 4.

Ottomans and the tribes of northern Yemen were fueled by strong religious ideological differences. In 1905 Sana'a was devastated following a Turkish siege of the city.⁹⁵ At the same time, the Shafi'is in lower Yemen welcomed the stability brought by the Turks despite stiff Ottoman taxation policies.⁹⁶

In Aden, the British imposed the same colonial racial distinctions that they did in all their overseas possessions. As Engseng Ho wrote:

The British authorities drew an absolute distinction between "good" and "bad" Arabs. Good Arabs had sided with the British and were major landlords in Singapore, religious bureaucrats in Malaya, businessmen in Batavia, sultans in British southern Arabia, and enthusiasts of T.E Lawrence's pro-sharif policy in Arabia. Bad Arabs had sided with the Ottomans and were pan-Islamic caliphate agitators in Java, India, and Ceylon; Turkish agents in British southern Arabia; Italian ones in Ethiopia and Somalia; and fundraisers for the Yemeni imam among wealthy, diasporic Hadramis in Singapore and Java.⁹⁷

These status distinctions made by both the British and the Ottomans in Yemeni lands caused the Imam and his followers to turn inward. Unable to militarily defeat either the British in Aden or the Ottomans, the Imam's insisted on a policy of Yemeni self-reliance.

In the waning years of the conflict with the Ottoman Empire, Imam Yahya attained autonomous status for his Zaydi brethren in the northern highlands.⁹⁸ When the Ottomans withdrew following the First World War, no other nation deemed Yemen worthy of colonization. Yet again, poverty and famine were common byproducts of a land destroyed by decades of Ottoman rule and a lack of national cohesion. Yemenis, "rather resigned

⁹⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁹⁷ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 272.

⁹⁸ Peterson, *Yemen, the Search for a Modern State*, 15.

themselves to a subsistence economy in the tens of thousands of minuscule villages in the countryside.”⁹⁹ In 1918, Imam Yahya acquired legitimacy *vis a vis* his resistance to Ottoman rule. Yahya immediately engaged in a campaign to solidify his reign over lower Yemen and the Tihama while at the same time eliminating contact with outsiders.¹⁰⁰ The Hamid al Din Imams, Yemen’s dynastic family, retracted the bureaucratic formations that were so common under the Qasimi Imams. The Imam personally attempted to attend to the minutest matters of state.¹⁰¹ The court did not extend far beyond the Imam and his localized rulings, setting in motion policies that favored inclusion.

Yahya, and his father before him, sent personally selected officials to collect taxes throughout Yemen. In lower Yemen, where the agricultural output was the greatest, the Imam’s agents collected this tax, known as *takhmin*, but soldiers and other officials joined the tax collectors during the ordeal of property assessment, which could be a prolonged exercise. During their stay, the villagers were responsible for the maintenance of the Imam’s executors.¹⁰² Though *takhmin* was unpopular throughout the Imamate, the Shafi’is of lower Yemen believed the tax burden fell heaviest on them. It was in this region, during the 1930s and 1940s, that significant numbers of Yemenis from villages near Taiz, Ibb, and

⁹⁹ Manfred W. Wenner, *The Yemen Arab Republic : Development and Change in an Ancient Land*, Westview Profiles Nations of the Contemporary Middle East (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 328.

¹⁰⁰ Fred Halliday, “The Yemens in the Twentieth Century” in *Yemen: 3000 Years of Art and Civilization in Arabia Felix*, ed Werner Daum (Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag, 1987), 445.

¹⁰¹ Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 228.

¹⁰² J. Leigh Douglas and Giovanni Chimienti, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962* (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut, 1987), 13.

Rada'a began emigrating to the West.¹⁰³

Though the Imam's policies to limit contact with outsiders had the immediate desired effect within greater Yemen, the British colony in Aden served not only as a window on the wider world but also a haven for those Shafi'is looking for a respite from the Imam's harsh taxation policies. By 1955, fifty-five percent of those living in Aden were North Yemenis.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the absence of an effective central government, the growing discontent of a Yemeni population aware of a modern world, and the emergence of revolutionary movements in the Middle East worked in opposition to Imam Yahya's authority. Modern Yemeni mobility would no longer be defined by trails or the span of an ocean, but rather by non-connected enclaves far removed culturally and spatially from the mountains, plains, and coasts of Yemen.

Rashid Abdu's journey across the world was just beginning. As a boy, he navigated through the streets of Aden. He used his feet, a camel and then the modern motor car to arrive at the edge of the Indian Ocean from his secluded village eighty miles north of the British colony. During the Second World War, Rashid serendipitously obtained work at the newly formed U.S. air force base in Aden. Rashid's identity as a Yemeni villager was quickly transformed. Rashid obtained a new khaki uniform like the others on the base.¹⁰⁵ He also took English language lessons outside the hours that he delivered mail and disseminated doughnuts and coffee to the American base personnel. While making the

¹⁰³ Halliday, *Arabs in Exile : Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰⁵ Abdu, *Journey of a Yemeni Boy*, 84.

rounds, Rashid rode in the back of a truck with his feet dangling freely,¹⁰⁶ a routine that symbolized both mobility and individual action. In 1945, eleven year old Rashid was invited to join a major in the US Army Air Corps and his crew on an aerial journey to East Africa. During the flight, the major asked Rashid “to come to the front so he could show me how the thing worked.”¹⁰⁷ Rashid put on the headphones, which were oversized for his small head. As he described it, “they were very loose, and I am sure I was a laughable sight.”¹⁰⁸ This image of the Yemeni villager with ungainly headphones mirrored the state of Yemen during the time of the Imam, when technology was forbidden, thus the Yemenis’ association with modernity proved awkward. During the flight, Rashid looked down to view the Bab al Mandab Strait, the same body of water crossed by the first people into south Arabia. This journey of a small Yemeni boy symbolized Yemen’s ancient past and the future at the same time. The Imam stifled ties to the outside world and limited mobility, but he could not overcome a history of contact and movement. Even as the Imam curtailed modernity, his subjects were creating a diaspora in the western world.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 88.

CHAPTER 2

ECHOES OF THE IMAM: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MODERN YEMENI DIASPORA IN THE WEST

Hey Traveler to My Country (Yemen)

يا مسافر عالبلاد

Hey traveler to my country with my soul and
heart.
Walk away and leave me behind with all the pain
of my love.
All my beloved, folks and friends are there.
They cherish my well-being as I value their
sayings.
When I departed; I was forced to leave.

يا مسافر ع البلاد .. بروحي وقلبي
سير واتركني هنا .. بالآلام حبي
كل احبابي هناك واهلي وصحبي
يذكروني فانني على ذكرهم دوب
حين سافرت .. سافرت مغصوب

Their sayings when I am near or far.
I keep them in mind by my deepest love.
I chose no one but them and God marks my
words.
They are my demand, my target; and they are the
best I can ask for.
When I departed; I was forced to leave.

ذكرهم لا يزال .. في بعادي وقربي
لا تذكرتهم ابد .. يا عين صبي
ماتخبرت غيرهم والشاهد ربي
هم مرادي ومقصدي وهم عز مطلوب
حين سافرت .. سافرت مغصوب

Having them away from my heart, tortures and
aches.
I have had enough from their departure.
What can I do to the time that betrayed me?
I endure their passing as Job did.
When I departed; I was forced to leave.

بعدهم في الفؤاد .. يحرق ويكوي
آه من جور بعدهم .. كفاني وحسبي
كيف اعمل للزمان ليهو غدر بي
باصبر ع فراقهم كما صبر ايوب
حين سافرت .. سافرت مغصوب

Hey traveler to my country with my soul and
heart.
Walk away and leave me behind with all the pain
of my love.
All my beloved, folks and friends are there..
They cherish my well-being as I value their
sayings.
When I departed; I was forced to leave.

يا مسافر ع البلاد .. بروحي وقلبي
سير واتركني هنا .. بالآلام حبي
كل احبابي هناك واهلي وصحبي
يذكروني فانني على ذكرهم دوب
حين سافرت .. سافرت مغصوب

ابو بكر سالم

Abu Bakr Salem, Hadhrami Singer¹

The Hadhrami Abu Bakr Salem wrote the timeless lyrics to “*Hey Traveler to My Country*” in the twentieth century, yet the language of longing, brought about by distance, resonated with all Yemenis throughout time. In many ways, Yemen locked itself timelessly in the mountains of south Arabia, yet Yemenis who engaged in transnationalism, like the migrant in Abu Bakr Salem’s lyrics, struggled to negotiate the isolated culture of home with their chosen mobility abroad.

Defining a Modern Diaspora

As Yemenis migrated in increasing numbers from the shores of south Arabia and established communities abroad throughout the twentieth century, their identity as sojourners fit the modern definition of diaspora. As a result of post-colonial transnationalism, scholars transformed the meaning of diaspora beyond its ancient and religious contexts. In antiquity, the Greeks used *diaspeiro*² to signify a scattering abroad or dispersal and applied the term in a secular way to describe the mass migration of people following war.³ Social scientists once reserved diaspora to define religious groups that had endured excessive hardship in their native lands and by definition were ‘scattered’ beyond the place where they or their ancestors once resided. As Stéphane Dufoix points out in *Diasporas*, the term “always meant the threat of dispersion facing the Hebrews if they

¹ Abu Bakr Salem, "Ya Musafer," Mahib Al-Ghuranzy, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvGDCMiY9EI>. Translated by Shaamel Ragab

² Translated, speiro=to sow and dia=over. Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics : At Home Abroad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.

³ Aaron Jaffer, ""Lord of the Forecastle": Serangs, Tindals, and Lascar Mutiny, C.1780-1860," *International Review of Social History* (2013): 9.

failed to obey God's will, and it applied almost exclusively to divine acts."⁴ The New Testament extended the term to Christians who were a "dispersed community of pilgrims".⁵

It was not until the eighteenth century that scholars began to deviate from the strict religious context of the term diaspora. Anti-slave trade activists in the 1700s applied the term pan-Africanism to victims and their ancestors of the African slave trade. By the early twentieth century, Marcus Garvey was a champion of linking those of African descent to their ancestral homeland. By the 1960's, scholars used the diaspora label to denote those of African descent who were displaced via slavery.

As scholars applied diaspora to the scattering of Africans in the midst of suffering, its mooring was no longer intrinsically based in scripture. This distinction, devoid of the concept rooted in religion, provided social scientists with a framework that allowed them to redefine the word in the post-war world.

In the decades following the Second World War, decolonization and the Cold War provided conditions conducive for mass migration in the face of ethnic and religious strife in the developing world. As with the labeling of Africans abroad as diasporans, new groups gained agency within the new climate of diaspora studies including Turks in Germany, South Asians in the Persian Gulf, Palestinians and Latinos in the United States, and Pakistanis in Britain to name but a few. The attractiveness of economic opportunity in industrialized nations enticed millions to leave their homelands in search of prosperity.

⁴ Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

These diasporans had access to rapid transportation and communication that differed greatly from earlier migrations. The modern transnational paradigm provided scholars with countless ethno-national diasporas to study.

By the middle of the 1980s, social scientists no longer labeled diasporas as isolated oppressed migrant ethnic groups residing outside of their homelands. Gabriel Sheffer in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, provided a comprehensive definition of the scattering of ethnic groups in an era of globalization. He contends that ethnic groups maintain their cultural affiliations, including their religious identity, in the new lands in order to consolidate the strength of the diasporic communities. “This solidarity serves as the basis for maintaining and promoting constant contacts among the diasporas’ activists.”⁶ Sheffer contends that diasporas, in their attempt to support the homeland, inevitably come into conflict with the host country.

A Policy of Seclusion

The modern evolution in the terminology of diasporas came at a time when Yemenis were emerging from centuries of isolation. Not only were Yemenis flooding out of south Arabia, but the nature of Yemeni migration was changing as well. Diaspora scholarship enables historians to evaluate the changing character of Yemeni immigration in Britain and the United States. As is always the case with migration, the events that transpire in the homeland alter the intensity and complexion of the diasporic community abroad. For Yemen, the civil war of the 1960s divided the nation into factions and shaped the course of Yemeni emigration. Though the power structure changed little at the

⁶ Gabriel Sheffer, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 9.

conclusion of the war, the Yemeni leadership altered seismically their approach to the wider world.

The xenophobic position of the Imam in the decades prior to the Yemeni Revolution defined not only the most fundamental positions of large segments of the Yemeni interior, but also presented a liberal response that reflected a people with broad contacts among diasporic Yemeni communities and emerging bonds with fellow Arabs in the region.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Imam Yahya gained notoriety in Yemen for ousting the Ottoman occupiers in 1918. As a Zaydi leader, he assumed not only spiritual authority but his position as head of state posited him as the temporal power in Yemen. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Imam extended his control in areas of Yemen that had been outside of the political purview of Yemen authority, such as areas in the Tihama and the south-central highlands. The tax policies of the Imam shackled the Shafi'i with debt. Combined with famine, farmers in Lower Yemen migrated out of the Peninsula in growing numbers.⁷ The soldiers in the Imam's army were poorly paid and although many Shafi'i formed the majority within the ranks, they were often checked by Zaydi agents known as *barranis*. The perception was that the Imam lived in luxury, owning many houses throughout Yemen and possessed treasures in personal hidden receptacles in the mountains.⁸ Though the Imam did not impose Shia doctrine; in fact Yahya's public policies were more Sunni in design, the Shafi'i saw the execution of his policies as

⁷ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

oppressive.

Imam Yahya as a *sayyid*, or descendant of the Prophet Mohammed, defined his rule through Islamic law. As a result, he limited contact with outsiders in order to exact maximum authority as well as a means to preserve Islamic purity. Many states in the region were becoming more secular and these ideologies posed a threat to his rule. Most Yemenis during this period were illiterate and the Imam considered those that could read to be the most dangerous to his reign. The only domestic newspaper, *al-Iman*, was run by the state. Foreign newspapers were banned and radio ownership was outlawed.⁹ Only a select few non-Arabs were allowed in the country and the Imam's agents observed them closely.¹⁰ The xenophobic policies of the Imam played a major role in shrouding his subjects from the outside world, not just in regards to world events, but also an understanding of non-Yemeni culture.

The Imam's succession plan and the border conflict with Saudi Arabia created the foundation for dissent and forced actions that led to the ultimate collapse of the imamate. In the 1920s, Imam Yahya selected his second oldest son, Ahmad, as his successor. The position of Imam was not hereditary. Sayyids historically elected the Imam at the time of the succession. Shafi'i and Zaydi elements independently dissented against the Imam for his economic and political decisions.¹¹ The Shafi'i elements in Yemen grew unhappy with the increased authority of the Imam in their territories while the Zaydi elites were

⁹ Douglas and Chimienti, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962*, 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

disenchanted by Imam Yahya's monarchial tendencies.

In 1934 Yahya lost the disputed territory of Asir to the Saudis. Humiliated, Yahya's regime realized that his absolute isolationist policy was detrimental to the security of Yemen.¹² Shortly after the Asir debacle, the Imam began sending select soldiers to Baghdad for military training. He was careful, however, to send sons of mostly poor Zaydi lineage that would not grow to challenge his rule.¹³ Class distinctions would prove irrelevant in matters of rebellion. These very émigrés, along with other cadets sent to Egypt, formed the backbone of opposition to the Imam in the coming decades.

In the period prior to Yahya's assassination in 1948, a group of motivated liberals formed the Free Yemeni Movement. Many of the members were young educated men from Sana'a of noble birth who read the works of the greatest Arab thinkers of the day. Most of those in the Free Yemeni Movement were part of a small group of students allowed to study in Iraq. During the last years of his reign, Yahya closed off such missions, but the Yemenis that experienced a different way of life were already beginning to speak and write about change.¹⁴

Despite Imam Yahya's and Ahmad's attempts to stem the influence of outside forces, the currents of change seeped into Yemen from various channels. Obviously, the British Crown Colony of Aden presented a modernizing model that was anathema to Imamic policies. Nationalist and republican pan-Arabism that emanated primarily out of Egypt filtered into Yemen and influenced a liberalized opposition to the traditional policies

¹² Ibid., 24.

¹³ Ibid., 25.

¹⁴ Peterson, *Yemen, the Search for a Modern State*, 78.

of the Imam. The greatest embodiment of the conflicting struggle of modernism and traditionalism was Imam Ahmad's son al-Badr Muhammad.

During the reign of Imam Ahmed, his son, al-Badr, held sway over Sana'a while Ahmed took up permanent residence in the south-central city of Taiz. Al-Badr tried to maintain his father's link to the traditional ways of the Imamate system, but he also channeled ruling policies with a more modern design. Al-Badr attracted liberals on the heels of the 1948 crackdown following the assassination and attempted coup of al-Badr's grandfather. Unlike others within the Imam's political circle, the Crown Prince travelled abroad and experienced firsthand the changes that swept through the region. While in Cairo, al-Badr was inspired by the Nasserite revolution and imagined Yemen following the Egyptian model.¹⁵ Though the government thwarted liberal actions, the threat of revolt along with the external Arab political forces changed how al-Badr and his father, the Imam, viewed the outside.

It was under Imam Ahmad that Yemen built a road using foreign workers that linked Sana'a with the Red Sea. Ahmad approved the development of a university along with hospitals. The Imam even allowed Egyptians to analyze means to remove Yemen from its use of the Maria Theresa Thaler coins in lieu of a modern central banking system.¹⁶ As J. Leigh Douglas contended in *The Free Yemeni Movement*, much of the Imam's development agenda was window dressing. Ahmed continued to monopolize decision making and any execution of modernizing initiatives served as projects for

¹⁵ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 79.

¹⁶ Douglas and Chimienti, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962*, 171-72.

notables connected to the Imam. Yemen policy remained largely reclusive. “The ending of Yemen’s diplomatic isolation is essentially a myth perpetuated by supporters of Ahmad, for although he exchanged embassies with a number of countries, he was still determined to preserve Yemen’s isolation.”¹⁷ Despite tendencies to follow the trends in the region, the rulers of Yemen always aimed to obscure the outside world from the Yemeni populace. As a result, those Yemenis who did emigrate knew very little about their destinations.

Weakening of the Hadhrami Diaspora

While the Imam and his son were implementing policies that negotiated Yemeni connections with the outside world, the old Yemeni diaspora of the Indian Ocean was facing regional political forces that separated the far flung enclaves from their ancestral homelands. In post-colonial Singapore, Malaya, and India, nationalist sentiment demonized foreign ties or foreignness, causing many minority groups, including Hadhramis, to conform to indigenous social and cultural norms.

During the Second World War, Japanese aggression hampered ties between Yemen and Southeast Asia. As a result, Hadhramis in the region were unable to send remittances back to Yemen. Economic insecurity in the Hadramawt occurred in conjunction with severe drought. The region endured widespread starvation that required aid intervention from the British.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 174.

¹⁸ Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967*, 310. Note: The Hadhrami elites were excessively xenophobic and tried to prevent aid shipments into their lands. As a result, the British along with their colonial forces invaded the region, overthrew the leadership and ensured that food aid made its way to the starving. This event began a period of social progress according to Gavin. (see pages 310-11).

In Singapore, immigration laws in the 1950s restricted travel and hampered the traditional practice of ethnic Yemeni men marrying Yemen brides. Ethnic Arabs began to marry Malay women and some even began to adopt Malay surnames.¹⁹ In Hyderabad, India, where the Hadhrami diaspora once thrived, most Arabs discarded Arabic for Telegu, Urdu, and English following Indian independence in 1948. The nationalist message endemic in Indian education acculturated those of Yemeni ancestry in northwest India and distanced the Yemeni diaspora from their cultural roots.²⁰ The strong connection between diasporic communities and the Yemeni homeland undertaken by such influential figures as Abu Bakr al-Kaf in the 1930s faded with the advent of nationalism among former European colonies. Nationalists, across the Indian Ocean, severed ties to external entities and emphasized local identities.²¹

Migrants were forced home in increasing numbers. India squeezed out many Yemenis at independence (1947); in 1954 Indonesia forbade remittances; funds from East Africa were soon threatened too. The old diaspora world was everywhere collapsing and a parochial claim 'Hadramawt for the Hadramis', like Aden for the Adenis, came to match petty nationalisms elsewhere.²²

Indonesian Hadhramis, fueled by Southeast Asian resistance movements against the Dutch and later the Japanese, formed nationalist parties. Following the Second World War, these diasporans returned home to South Yemen and

¹⁹ Leif O. Manger, *The Hadrami Diaspora : Community-Building on the Indian Ocean Rim* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 35.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

²¹ Ho, *The Graves of Tarim : Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*, 291.

²² Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 60.

challenged British hegemony in south Arabia.²³

Despite the influence of anti-colonial diasporans from Southeast Asia, the age of Hadhrami prominence in Yemeni affairs faded as the British successfully insulated Aden by buying off the borderland tribes. As the ties to the old Indian Ocean diaspora declined, Britain served as the conduit for the modern Western Yemeni diaspora through transportation and colonial affiliations.

British Colonial Maritime Labor Recruitment in Asia

British labor recruitment in nineteenth century Aden followed a design with origins in seventeenth and eighteenth century colonial India. British colonial maritime labor shortages forced the Crown to hire greater numbers of Indian and East Asian laborers aboard their naval vessels.²⁴ East and South Asian seamen were labeled as *lascars*, a term whose root comes from the Arabic word *al-askar* or soldier. The vast majority of British-employed *lascars* from the Sub Continent were Muslims. Historian Michael Fisher argued that the Muslim *lascars* were products of a “tradition of travel through the wider Islamic world that already linked Europe and Asia”.²⁵ Furthermore, fewer Hindus ventured beyond their homelands for fear of “caste taboos”.²⁶ Asian seamen under British authority were

²³ John Chalcraft, "Migration and Popular Protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 79, no. Special Issue 01 (2011): 30.

²⁴ Michael Herbert Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism : Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black : Distributed by Orient Longman, 2004), 33.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ Humayun Ansari, *"The Infidel Within" : Muslims in Britain since 1800* (London: Hurst and Co., 2004), 33-34.

subjected to poor treatment aboard ship and their title as *lascar* alone put them in a powerless situation.²⁷ The *lascars* spent months at sea and during the Age of Sail, they spent long durations in British ports “due to the imbalanced nature of trade with the East”.²⁸ Those *lascars* that were holed up in harbor towns required accommodations. As non-white foreigners, they were relegated to segregated sections within the port.

The numbers of *lascars* that served aboard English shipping increased throughout the nineteenth century. *Lascar* wages were higher than other colonial service jobs in the Empire including serving as *sepoys* in either East Indian Company employ or later within the British Army;²⁹ however they continued to be an inexpensive labor force.³⁰ Despite their inferior status, *lascars* were neither subjected to slavery status nor victims of impressment.³¹

The experience of the *lascars* prefaced patterns that were firmly in place for their Yemeni successors. The ranks of the *lascars* were largely made up of farmers who took on work aboard ships while their crops matured during growing seasons and subsequently returned to harvest the fields. This practice tied the *lascars* to

²⁷ Norma Myers, "The Black Poor of London: Initiatives of Eastern Seamen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade*, ed. Diane Frost (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism : Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*, 35.

³⁰ Myers, "The Black Poor of London: Initiatives of Eastern Seamen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

their homeland.³² *Lascar* recruitment was initiated by a *ghat serang*, “dock or landing head man”³³ who also secured temporary shelter for transient *lascars*.³⁴ At sea, the *serang* and his retinue of *tindals*, translated roughly as the “head of a body of men”,³⁵ served as the boatswain and kept order aboard ships. These Asian seamen were paid more than their *lascar* subordinates.³⁶ In addition, the *ghat serang* was paid directly by the captain of the ship and it was the *ghat serang*’s responsibility to distribute the wages to the *lascars*.³⁷ Using their authority, the *serang* and *tindals* often exploited the *lascars* during the recruiting process.³⁸ The interaction between non-British supervisors and their subordinates left little room for meaningful social exchanges with their British shipmates.

Britain, in effect, created a fortress mentality concerning Aden. The British controlled all the political and economic activities within the walls of the port. Beyond Aden, the British established strong relations with what were labeled the nine tribes surrounding the fortress as a component of the Aden Protectorate. The British used wealth to buy treaties with the tribal leaders in the borderlands as a

³² Ibid., 10.

³³ Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism : Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*, 33.

³⁴ Myers, "The Black Poor of London: Initiatives of Eastern Seamen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 12.

³⁵ Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism : Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*, 34.

³⁶ Jaffer, "'Lord of the Forecastle": Serangs, Tindals, and Lascar Mutiny, C.1780-1860," 3.

³⁷ Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism : Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*, 35.

³⁸ Myers, "The Black Poor of London: Initiatives of Eastern Seamen in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," 12.

means of indirect rule. To further maintain stability, the British created the Yemen Light Infantry from what the British called “the martial tribes”.³⁹

Using a pattern of colonial rule developed in India and replicated in south Arabia, the British established a borderland which diffused the local economy, culture, and political system. The Colonial Office desired to maintain an influence over the local tribes in order to increase the security of Aden.⁴⁰ Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the British shifted between funding either defensive or trade infrastructures in Aden. Britain prioritized the two based on the threats they faced from the northern Yemeni authorities or Turkish incursions.

The imperial system of recruiting seamen was well entrenched by the time the British colony at Aden thrived as a coaling station in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the wake of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the French were the first European power to begin hiring Yemenis in substantial numbers out of Djibouti by way of Aden.⁴¹ The French government-owned mail carrier service, *Messageries Maritime Navigation Company*, sailed between Marseilles and China.⁴² The French recruitment of Yemenis prepared the way for a sizable Yemeni diaspora in France. In addition, Yemenis formed smaller diasporas

³⁹ John M. Willis, *Unmaking North and South : Cartographies of the Yemeni Past, 1857-1934* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 71.

⁴⁰ Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967*, 194.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴² Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 18.

in Madagascar and French Indochina.

British demand for colonial labor fundamentally changed the nature of Yemeni migration patterns. Prior to the emergence of south Arabian British colonialism, Yemenis catalyzed contact and trade throughout the Indian Ocean. By the turn of the twentieth century, Ottoman authority, a feudal political and economic system, and Imamic xenophobia weakened Yemen autonomy.

The recruitment system employed by the British in Aden proved foundational for Yemen emigration in the West. The British used seamen agents to funnel laborers to Aden. In large part, the British imitated the *lascar* system in much the same way they had for the past few centuries. In the nineteenth century, Yemenis were hired as firemen, a job that required the shoveling of coal in the stokeholds of steam ships. However, the Yemenis integrated the British system into traditional methods of labor recruitment. "...Aden was a society of contractors and brokers who contracted everything from daily foodstuffs to luxury goods and labor."⁴³

The labor recruiters, known in Yemen as the *muqqadama* or presenters, were a fixture of Red Sea ports for centuries. Coming to Aden from the once lucrative coffee port of Mocha in the nineteenth century, *muqqadams* served as valuable middlemen. Initially, the *muqqadams* served as recruiters for infrastructure improvements in the city of Aden. Soon after, they began procuring

⁴³ Susanne Dahlgren, "Morphologies of Social Flows: Segregation, Time, and the Public Sphere," in *Gendering Urban Space in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa*, ed. Martina and Kamran Asdar Ali Rieker (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave, 2008), 48.

Yemeni laborers to work aboard French and British vessels.⁴⁴ Local Arab agents received a commission for each laborer they provided for British shipping.⁴⁵

Historian R. J. Gavin in *Aden under British Rule 1839-1967*, described the complex nature of the *muqaddam* system of the 1880s:

At Aden each large employer had his chief *muqaddam* or *syrang*, and in turn had several sub-*muqaddams* who brought men forward, paid their wages, rented accommodations for them, and saw that they were fed. At all points contractors exacted remuneration for their services, and it was they who issued the wage to the workers, less the various deductions.⁴⁶

The *muqaddam* system transformed Aden from a colonial enclave where Indians made up the majority of laborers to a city that by the 1880s reflected a growing Arab identity under British rule and a zone quite distinct from the rest of Yemen. The British installed modern Western conveniences including running water and electricity in Aden. In addition, the British established a capitalist economy that, over time, developed Aden into a colonial borderland. Aden was the exception to a vast subsistence agrarian system that existed throughout Yemen. As with Rashid and his relatives in the previous chapter, Yemenis had considerable mobility between the Yemen controlled by the Imam and British Aden. The effect was to create two distinct culture zones, one rooted in Yemeni traditionalism and the other

⁴⁴ Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967*, 59.

⁴⁵Dick Lawless, "The Role of Seamen's Agents in the Migration for Employment of Arab Seafarers of the Twentieth Century," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade*, ed. Diane Frost (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1995), 39. Dick Lawless writes how the recruitment system started with the French. European powers struggled to obtain labor for their overseas trade networks. The first laborers on the seas served on French ships and Yemenis once more plied the Indian Ocean. Yemeni seamen traveled as far afield as French Indochina.

⁴⁶ Gavin, *Aden under British Rule, 1839-1967*, 191.

influenced by British colonialism.

Seamen agents thrived during the First World War when labor was scarce and lucrative pay enticed Yemeni workers.⁴⁷ Between 1914 and 1918, wages for seamen almost tripled.⁴⁸ As all able-bodied English males waged war around the globe, the British required more seaborne laborers.

Arabs, along with other colonial people from tropical climates, were seen by their European employers as better able to withstand the immense heat in the engine rooms.⁴⁹ British naval authorities favored Yemeni crewman for their sobriety and work ethic.⁵⁰ However, the crew hierarchy was racialized. Arabs rarely served as cooks or stewards. West Africans and East Asians performed these tasks. According to historian Tony Lane, the British divided the foreign workers on board the ships into “martial and non-martial” groups. Despite their small frames, the British placed the Yemenis in the martial category.⁵¹ They toiled arduously below deck and remained hidden from the view of navy elites where segregation slowed assimilation.

Yemenis at sea, and later within Britain, faced racial discrimination. Colonial power hierarchies placed Yemenis in an inferior position throughout the late nineteenth

⁴⁷ Lawless, "The Role of Seamen's Agents in the Migration for Employment of Arab Seafarers of the Twentieth Century," 40.

⁴⁸ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 11.

⁴⁹ Lane, "The Coloured Alien Seamen Order, 1925," 109.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

and early twentieth centuries. Language barriers and religious differences further exacerbated relations between Yemenis and Britons. An extreme case of abuse was recorded in an 1873 book entitled *Asiatics in England*. In that case, Arab lascars were “hung up with weights tied to their feet; flogged with a rope; pork, the horror of the Mohammedan, served out to them to eat, and the insult carried further by violently ramming the tail of a pig into their mouths, and twisting the entrails round their necks; they were forced up aloft at the point of the bayonet, and a shirt all gory with *Lascar* blood was exhibited on the trial, and all this proved in evidence.”⁵² The British courts prosecuted the culprits in this case, although the captain was able to flee England before the trial. Though the level of barbarity exhibited by the captain and his officers was rare, this case reveals the racial and religious prejudices by Westerners within the maritime hierarchy.

Yemenis in the hinterland were attracted by economic opportunities in Aden. Further afield, Yemenis were driven from their villages by Ottoman mismanagement and drought that thrust many central Yemeni villages into famine. Yemeni men migrated from their mountain villages southward into the British colony in increasing numbers in the first half of the twentieth century.

The economic situation in Yemen did not improve when the Ottomans withdrew following their defeat in the First World War. Following the emergence of Imamic rule in 1918, the Imam’s taxation policies caused economic distress within the Sunni populations. In some of the Shafi’i areas, farmers lost upwards of

⁵² Joseph Salter, *The Asiatic in England* (1873), 151.

seventy percent of their produce to the Imam's agents.⁵³ Lawless made a clear distinction between pre and post Ottoman occupation as it applied to a causation of Yemeni migration from the Central Region. Prior to 1918, Imam Yahya did not have control of the state and thus the argument that his tax policies in the area drove out the farmers is anachronistic. He suggested that sustained drought in the region caused many Yemenis to seek economic opportunities in Aden prior to the 1962 revolution.⁵⁴

Every bit as foundational as the shift of Yemeni emigration from the Indian Ocean to the West was where these new sojourners resided prior to their migrations. The great Yemen migrations during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries across the Indian Ocean came from the Hadramawt in south Yemen. The vast majority of the new migrants that traveled first to Aden and then farther afield to the West emerged from the Central Region or *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah*.⁵⁵ This region is triangulated largely between the towns of Taiz, Ibb and Rada'a. (Figure 5) The Central Region of Yemen is peopled by tribal villagers who either worked the terraced fields on the sides of rocky mountains or herded livestock such as goats. Like their predecessors from India who shared the title of *lascar*, the Yemeni

⁵³ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 80.

⁵⁴ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 43.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 40. Lawless lists the tribes where the seamen came from: Amiri, Haushabi, Shamiri, Audi, Dalali, Badani, Jubani, Dhubhani, Mureisi, Riashi, Areiqi, Sha'ibi, Khubani, Maqtari, Shari, Sharqabi and Sharabi. Most of those tribes came from the *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah* region.

maritime laborers were predominately farmers. As Lawless contends,

The Yemen highlands appear to have provided an inexhaustible reservoir of labour. It was this abundance of labour employed at low wages that enabled Aden to compete effectively with other bunkering ports.⁵⁶

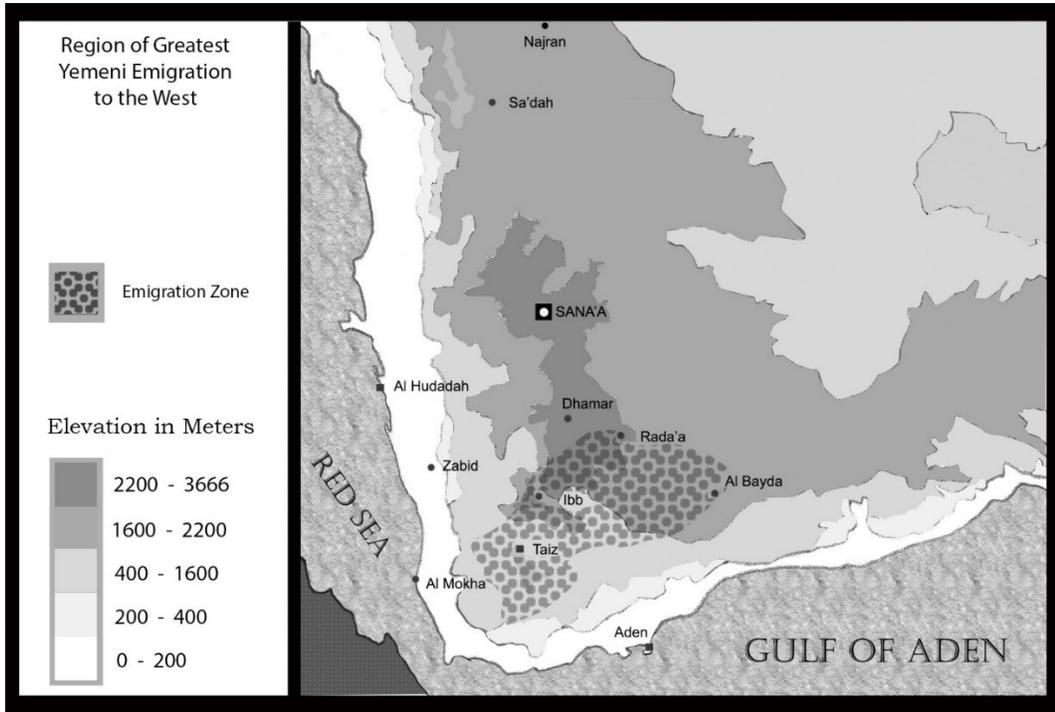


Figure 5. Region of Greatest Yemeni Emigration the West.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly, the seamen agents would need the approval of local tribal sheikhs to finalize labor recruitment agreements. In other cases, Yemenis who

⁵⁶ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁷ Map adapted by Kipp Cozad from: Lawless, "The Role of Seamen's Agents in the Migration for Employment of Arab Seafarers of the Twentieth Century," 36.

struck out on their own to Aden relied on sheikhs who resided within the British protectorate. Letters from these southern Yemeni elites, known as a *tawdhif*, provided migrants with official documentation for colonial employment and in later periods served as a pathway for Yemenis to obtain British passports.⁵⁸ The Arab agents who recruited labor in the Central Region also formed close ties between the British vessels' authorities, the laborers, and the locations where the laborers resided. In many cases, Yemeni seamen agents loaned money to unemployed laborers or gave cash advances to seamen awaiting payment. The relationship between these middlemen and the village sheikhs in the Central Region would reveal much about this vital connection with a part of Yemen shut off from Western contact until the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The villagers that lived in scattered settlements throughout the Central Region maintained an isolated existence, thus the growing exodus of Yemenis from the highlands was a unique phenomenon in Yemen history. After centuries of conflict with Ottoman occupiers and the encroachment of Zaydi forces, the Yemenis of the Middle Region became the catalysts for personal economic mobility. Having never seen the sea,⁵⁹ Ba'adanis, Amiris, Jubanis and a host of other highland peoples established their own identity as migrants, workers, and providers.

The Yemenis that followed the seamen agents to Aden broke a history of

⁵⁸ Searle, *From Farms to Foundries : An Arab Community in Industrial Britain*, 30.

⁵⁹ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 41.

regional isolation. Their journey south to the coast, as yet undocumented, revealed either the desperate state of the region during a time of environmental pressure through drought and economic oppression at the hands of the Imam's agents or the recognized possibilities of lucrative employment. Whatever the defining catalysts in their decision to migrate, the Yemenis from the Central Region were profound innovators in the transformation of modern Yemen. Their decisions helped define the possibilities of a people historically identified by conservative uniformity. Like the ancient settlers on the high plains of the Sayhad or the intrepid Hadhrami seafarers and *sayyids*, those Yemenis who worked aboard British shipping and later established Western diasporas followed a long tradition of Yemeni mobility. These migrants laid the groundwork for economic and political change by the middle of the twentieth century and developed ideas that challenged Yemeni traditionalism into the twenty-first century.

The Yemeni-British Diaspora

The port of Aden on the valuable oceanic route between England and India served as the embarkation point for Yemenis who worked as firemen and stokers in the bellies of large British steamships. Though the labor intensive act of shoveling coal into the stokeholds of ships was similar in nature to tasks the Yemenis carried out on the terraced fields of their ancestral land, the atmosphere aboard the vessels, surrounded by steel, heat, and smoke was exceptionally alien.

Trade routes inevitably led Yemenis to British ports. The movement of Yemenis to Britain increased significantly following the opening of the Suez Canal

in 1869.⁶⁰ Yemeni males resided in small immigrant enclaves of British coastal cities such as Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields and Hull.⁶¹ (Figure 6) The Yemenis that sojourned in these coastal towns established the oldest Arab communities in England.⁶² By the time the Yemenis arrived, the British had already cordoned off portions of these cities for non-European seamen dating back to the age of the *lascars* of the eighteenth century. Yemenis joined other foreign groups in the immigrant ghettos including Somalis, West Indians, and East Indians in such immigrant ghettos as Butetown in Cardiff⁶³ and the 8 District in Liverpool.

⁶⁰ Ansari, *"The Infidel Within" : Muslims in Britain since 1800*, 37.

⁶¹ Halliday, *Arabs in Exile : Yemeni Migrants in Urban Britain*, 17.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶³ *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 18. The Butetown area of Cardiff was referred to as Tiger Bay, a reference to its exotic inhabitants and to its image as a foreign community.

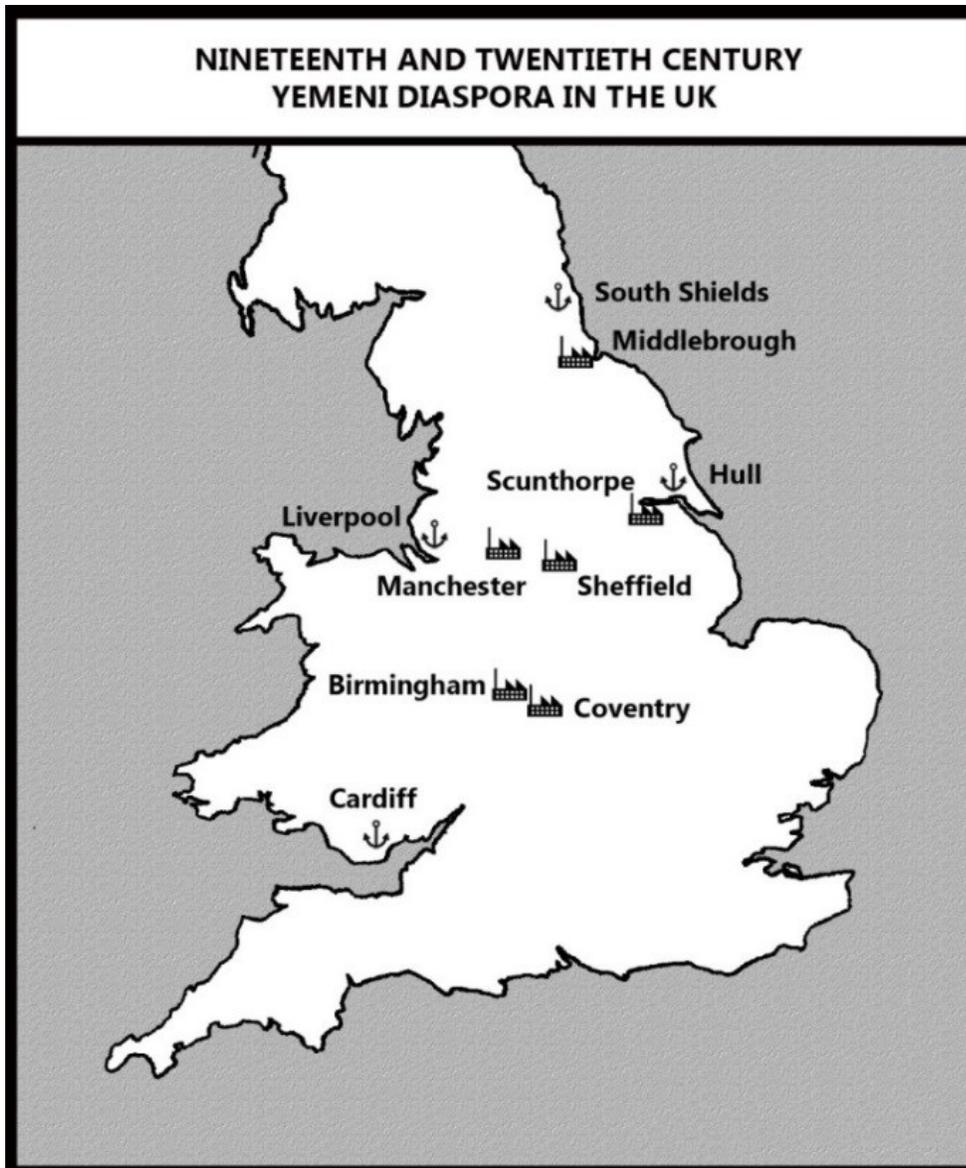


Figure 6. Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Yemeni Diaspora in the UK.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Kipp Cozad, "Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Yemeni Diaspora in the Uk," (2015).

Similar to the sending agents that existed in Yemen, there were also receiving Arab agents in Britain that serviced the Yemeni seamen during their hiatus in the immigrant enclaves. The Yemenis stayed in lodging houses that were run by Yemenis and thus the foreigners did not have to navigate British culture without guidance.⁶⁵

Cardiff and South Shields served as central ports of call for Yemeni seamen. Initially, Yemeni workers migrated smoothly between these two cities in search of work aboard departing vessels,⁶⁶ while later, other occupations related to the maintenance of the Yemeni and Arab community became available near the docks.⁶⁷ A select few Yemenis earned enough money to become entrepreneurs in the immigrant enclaves in Britain.⁶⁸ Those that found work along the docks in England established a more permanent Yemeni presence in the UK.

British laws established in the late 1800s prohibited private British citizens from taking in foreign seamen.⁶⁹ Strong social constructs of segregation made boarding houses necessary. The key agents that linked the Yemeni community in the port towns with the broader British cultural zones were the Arab boarding

⁶⁵ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 19.

⁶⁶ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 47.

⁶⁷ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 19.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 18; *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Kenneth Lindsay Little, *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society*, International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction (London,: K. Paul, Trench, 1948), 40.

house masters. Established first in Cardiff and South Shields, the boarding house masters possessed significant cultural and linguistic knowledge which gave them leverage among the Yemenis living in England. These masters “represented a key intermediary between the Arab seamen and the host society and were often well known in the town.”⁷⁰ The use of boarding house masters suggests that the early Yemeni migrants in Britain faced both cultural and linguistic barriers. Host country segregationist policies only heightened these barriers. Not to be overlooked is the fact that Yemenis came from villages that were cut off from the rest of the world, making Yemenis more dependent on those in authority and vulnerable to exploitation while in Britain.

⁷⁰Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 53.

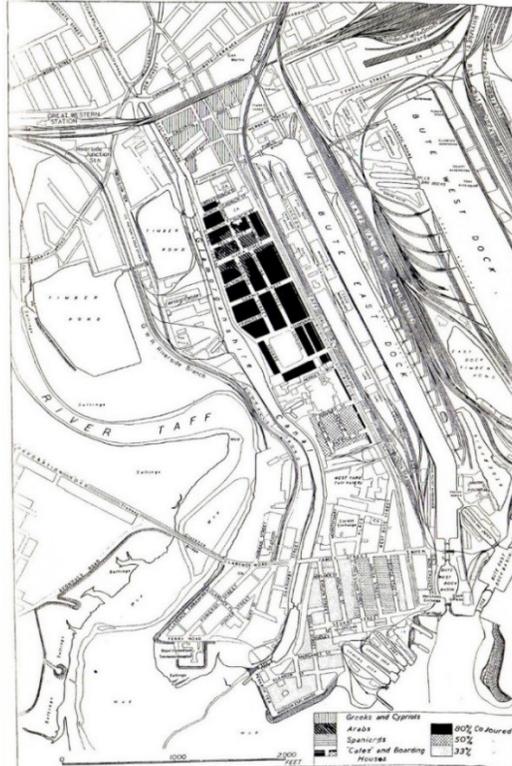


Figure 7. Bute Town – Cardiff, Wales circa 1947.⁷¹

Yemenis serving within the British merchant navy were in great demand during the First World War. As British soldiers were being consumed in the trenches of Europe, colonial manpower proved a valuable asset throughout the conflict. Yemenis and other colonial peoples took the place of Britons aboard merchant vessels while the latter were drafted into the Royal Navy.⁷² Yemenis sailing from Aden received British Protected Person status to ensure that they

⁷¹ Little, *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society*, 32. Labeled, face p. 32.

⁷² Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British*, Rev. ed. (New York, : Monthly Review Press, 1973), xix.

matriculated onto British vessels without hindrance.⁷³ Wages for Yemeni seamen rose significantly throughout the First World War from £5 10s in 1914 to £14 10s in 1918.⁷⁴ As a result, the number of Yemenis arriving in Britain increased significantly during the Great War.

Considering that most Yemenis began their journey in Ottoman occupied Yemen, the British necessity to employ maritime workers took precedent over the perception of Yemenis being possible agents of an enemy power.⁷⁵ During the conflict, Yemenis died at the hands of German submarines as well as surface engagements while some were interred at German prisoner of war camps where their ethnic status opened them up to abuse.⁷⁶

Both Yemenis and British authorities created relationships that promoted separation and interplay. These associations defined not only the two communities where they existed in coastal British cities but the same patterns would evolve similarly in the United States. For example, few Yemenis brought their wives to the West for much of the twentieth century. Early on, Yemenis established themselves

⁷³ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 26.

⁷⁴ RI Lawless, "Recruitment and Regulation: Migration for Employment of "Adenese" Seamen in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *New Arabian Studies* 2 (1994): 88. In modern wages the 1914 wage in 2011 based on the average earnings scale is \$2,773 while the average earnings scale has the 1918 wage as \$7,334. <http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/>

⁷⁵ Note: To read more about the complexities of wartime tension of Yemenis and Somalis aboard British vessels as it pertains to the Ottoman question, see: Lane, "The Coloured Alien Seamen Order, 1925.", in particular Part II, pp. 110-119.

⁷⁶ Lawless, "Recruitment and Regulation: Migration for Employment of "Adenese" Seamen in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," 88.

as sojourners, not intending to fully immigrate to Britain. The practice of being a sojourner began naturally as part of the rhythm of working aboard ships. Later, as Yemenis were employed on the docks or as shop owners, they maintained their sojourner status by traveling frequently back to their cities and villages in Yemen external to the rhythm of sea trade.

Some Yemenis married British women and had families.⁷⁷ Owing to cultural expectations in Yemen, it was common for Yemeni men to have families back home and have relationships with British women while abroad, which in some cases resulted in marriage.⁷⁸ Polygamy was an acceptable religious practice within Islam, thus Yemenis were not morally challenged by having more than one wife. As a few Yemenis bonded with white British working class women, blowback occurred among British traditionalists.

Tensions between whites and Yemenis escalated following the First World War. Around 700,000 men from the United Kingdom perished during the war. As a result, marriages between Yemenis and white women increased.⁷⁹ In the aftermath of the Great War, many Britons desired a return of prewar conditions, including British perceptions of race. Britain experienced an economic downturn following

⁷⁷ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 19.

⁷⁸ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 175.

⁷⁹ David Byrne, "Class, Race and Nation: The Politics of the 'Arab Issue' in South Shields 1919-39," in *Ethnic Labour and British Imperial Trade*, ed. Diane Frost (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 96.

the war which led to heightened frustration among the white working class.⁸⁰

Race-inspired incidents flared within port cities in England where foreign seamen resided throughout 1919. Whites damaged immigrant properties in South Shields.⁸¹ Tensions further escalated when an increasing number of white males, many of them demobilized sailors, were signing on to work aboard ships but found Arab crews preparing to take posts in their stead.⁸² In February 1919, white mobs followed Arabs to their boarding houses in South Shields where Arabs fired shots in the air to warn their pursuers while whites shouted racial slurs at the frightened foreign seamen. Local police were able to arrive before it escalated into confrontational violence.⁸³

The British government attempted to enact legislation to limit the mobility that Yemenis had experienced during the war. Parliament passed Aliens Order of 1920⁸⁴ and the Colored Alien Seamen Order of 1925 which aimed to curtail Yemeni immigration in Britain by demanding that immigrants prove their legal status through formal registration. The government aimed to distinguish between

⁸⁰ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 77.

⁸¹ Neil Evans, "Across the Universe: Racial Violence and the Post-War Crisis in Imperial Britain, 1919-25," in *Ethnic Labour British Imperial Trade: A History of Ethnic Seafarers in the Uk*, ed. Diane Frost (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 64.

⁸² Ansari, *"The Infidel Within" : Muslims in Britain since 1800*, 42.

⁸³ Lawless, "The Role of Seamen's Agents in the Migration for Employment of Arab Seafarers of the Twentieth Century," 80-81.

⁸⁴ Lawless, "Recruitment and Regulation: Migration for Employment of "Adenese" Seamen in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," 90-91.

those Yemenis born in Aden and those born in greater Yemen. Adenese were welcome, but all other Yemenis were aliens and subject to deportation.⁸⁵ Since most Yemenis had no means of identification, the authorities had a difficult time enforcing the legislation.

Many ship owners refused to enforce the Colored Alien Seamen Order of 1925 largely because the Yemenis were effective and compliant workers. Historian Tony Lane pointed out that the principal British colonial agents in Aden undermined the act. Stricter British colonial enforcement designed to curtail domestic racist policies would have surely led to widespread indigenous dissent in south Arabia. An ambiguous Yemeni work force, where some laborers came from Aden, but most originated from within the area controlled by the Imam, allowed the British authorities the latitude to ignore the Seamen Order abroad.⁸⁶ In this instance, a preliterate Yemeni population provided the ambiguity of allegiance that served the interests of the migrants.

The last great demand for Yemeni sailors occurred during the Second World War. Similar to the Great War, the general manpower shortage inherent in the conflict caused a significant rise in the need for maritime workers.⁸⁷ The clear economic benefactors of the increase demand for foreign born firemen were those living in British coastal cities. They received the full rates as the white British seamen.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Lane, "The Coloured Alien Seamen Order, 1925," 122.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁸⁷ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 21.

⁸⁸ Tony Lane, *The Merchant Seamen's War* (Manchester ; New York New York, NY, USA: Manchester University Press; Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin's Press, 1990), 157.

Yemenis served aboard ships that plied the great convoy routes of the Mediterranean and North Atlantic at a time when the German air force ruled the air and the German U-Boat offensive was most effective. There is no accurate measure of Yemeni maritime casualties but hundreds of Yemenis died aboard British vessels during the conflict.⁸⁹ Seventeen Yemenis died aboard the HMS *Fiona* off the coast of Egypt in April 1941 when the ship was sunk by Luftwaffe dive bombers. Similarly, Yemenis were killed on the British boarding vessel *Chakdina* during the Siege of Tobruk in May, 1941 when it was torpedoed by the German Air Force.⁹⁰ Some Yemeni families suffered the loss of multiple relatives during the war.⁹¹

Britons began to change their perceptions of Arabs as a result of the heroism of the Yemenis and other Arabs who fought and died for the Crown. As Humayun Ansari wrote, “their participation in the 1939-45 war effort had enhanced their prestige and status in the white communities”.⁹² The labor shortage caused many ethnic groups to be grouped together in ways unseen before the war. As a result, an air of familiarity developed from the blending of the crews in what Tony Lane termed “the cosmopolitan nature of the

⁸⁹ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 54. Note: There has not been a scholarly study that accurately assesses Yemeni war dead from naval activity in the Second World War. One website dedicated to the South Shield's Yemeni sailors puts the number at 800. Sarah Zakzouk, "Last of the Dictionary Men," *Reorient* (1913), <http://www.reorientmag.com/2013/02/last-of-the-dictionary-men/>. In Liverpool, over a hundred Arab names are engraved on a monument to the drowned sailors of WW II. Most of these undoubtedly were Yemenis.

⁹⁰ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 54.

⁹¹ Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside : An Arab Community in the North-East of England During the Early Twentieth Century*, 245.

⁹² Ansari, *"The Infidel Within" : Muslims in Britain since 1800*, 101.

workforce”.⁹³ Throughout the conflict, Yemenis served admirably. Though the Yemenis received little agency in the annals of WW II, the discipline records reveal few incidents of disorder among Arab crewmen serving on British vessels.⁹⁴

Following the Second World War, the British demand for workers aboard the ships declined. Historian Fred Halliday contended that the decline in Yemeni employment at sea was a result of policy changes in the Merchant Navy along with a pull in the demand for more lucrative industrial jobs in Britain.⁹⁵ The dismantling of the British Imperial system must have played a significant role in the demise of Yemeni sailors, as well. The British need to rebuild their country contributed to the increase in foreign labor. In 1948, Parliament passed The British Nationality Act of 1948. Under the initiative, British colonial subjects were allowed to freely immigrate to England.⁹⁶ As a result, large numbers of Yemenis traveled from the highlands of Yemen to England via Aden. Yemenis began immigrating almost exclusively to English industrial towns where they engaged in unskilled or semi-skilled labor. Yemeni communities shifted from British coastal towns to such industrial centers as Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield and to a lesser degree to Middlesborough, Coventry and Scunthorpe.⁹⁷ There, they worked arduously in the steel foundries (Figure 6).

Despite the shift in occupations, Yemeni men continued to be sojourners in Britain.

⁹³ Lane, *The Merchant Seamen's War*, 157.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁹⁵ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 23.

⁹⁶ Searle, *From Farms to Foundries : An Arab Community in Industrial Britain*, 27.

⁹⁷ Halliday, *Britain's First Muslims: Portrait of an Arab Community*, 59.

They worked long stretches of time in England and then journeyed to Yemen for a lengthy stay before returning to their industrial jobs. These men sent a substantial amount of money to their families in Yemen. They also increased their status at home by increasing the size of their land holdings and home sizes. Trading traditional agrarian labor participation for engagement in factory work, Yemenis discovered a path to prosperity by circumventing the strong economic boundaries that prevented upward social mobility.

The Birth of a Migrant State

The Yemeni migrant's desire to be away from Yemen while continuing to be a part of Yemen is also the narrative that defined those who brought about change in Yemen during the civil war of the 1960s. The Imam struggled to confine change at a time when revolutionary forces were sweeping the region. Egypt under Gamal Abdul Nasser wrestled free from British authority while also promoting pan-Arabism. Strong, independent Arab rulers throughout the Middle East took up the mantle of nationalism and pushed for modernism as a means to establish autonomous strength. In Yemen, Aden served as a haven for revolutionaries who desired that Yemen be a part of these great forces of change. Aden also served as an anchor for the transference of goods and ideas from the outside world to the hinterland. In this way, Aden, as a Western enclave and entrepot, channeled the direction of change.⁹⁸

Yemenis living abroad provided the most potent catalyst for revolutionary change. The first group of Yemenis to be sent abroad was known collectively as the Famous Forty

⁹⁸ Rachel Hertzman, "Yemen's Migrant Networks as a Critical Factor in Political Opposition to the Imamate" (University of Arizona, 2013), 97.

or *al-Arba'in*. They were followed by hundreds of others who gradually came largely from Shafi'i families in the middle and southern regions of Yemen. Many left on their own and had to do so clandestinely.⁹⁹

Most had acquired elements of a modern vision and both a desire and a need to realize parts of that vision back home, in Yemen. For some, it amounted to a general sense of mission to end Yemen's backwardness, to make Yemen a modern country, one of which to be proud... They were the vanguard of modernity and, for the most part, regarded themselves as such.¹⁰⁰

These statistes were influenced by Nasser and his pan-Arab movement, but first and foremost, they were strong advocates of Yemeni nationalism. Like most Yemenis who lived abroad, even these educated elites desired the return.

Groups in Aden, such as the Yemeni Union in the 1950s, served as facilitators for Yemenis to study abroad while defining reform in Yemen. The Yemeni Union formed close ties with the Yemeni-British diaspora. The most prominent Yemeni living in Cardiff, Shaikh 'Abdullah al-Hakimi, returned to Aden to serve as the President of the group in 1953.¹⁰¹

In contrast, the Imam of Yemen and his supporters were actively preventing change. Their Yemen was rooted in traditionalism far removed from foreign contact. By the 1960's, the forces of change were so strong in Yemen that even the Imam embraced the necessity of progress, but found it very difficult to implement authentic reform while maintaining his authority. As a result, the Imam enacted polices that both sides viewed as

⁹⁹ Robert D. Burrowes, "The Famous Forty and Their Companions: North Yemen's First-Generation Modernists and Educational Emigrants," *Middle East Journal* 59, no. 1 (2005): 86.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹⁰¹ Douglas and Chimienti, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962*, 169-70.

duplicitous. While in Cairo in 1955, Imam Ahmed publicly proclaimed “a desire of bringing his country out of its isolation.”¹⁰² Such speeches were intended for international consumption.

At home, the country deteriorated. As Yemenis in the Middle Region escaped hardship through Aden, the Imam attempted to curtail mobility by demanding that emigrants provide surrogate farmworkers in their absence.¹⁰³ Ethnographer Paul Dresch wrote, “Economically the country rotted. Peasants in many areas were now losing over 70 per cent of their crop in tax and bribes, and it was said that 30,000 pilgrims to Mecca in 1956 elected simply not to return.”¹⁰⁴ Imam Ahmad was in no position to institute reform even if he desired change; there was no money in the national treasury.¹⁰⁵

The Yemeni Civil War brought to the forefront long simmering conflicts. The historical supremacy of the *sayyid* class caused a great deal of resentment from Shafi’i quarters. Even among the northern Zaydi tribes, the leading *sayyid* sheikhs resented the emergence of a monarchial Imam and desired the return to an election of religious elites. In the south, conflict between Qahtanis and the ‘Adenis further widened dissention in the Imamate. In the Shafi’i dominated Central Region, the Imam’s heavy hand for over half a century caused growing resentment. From outside the country, strong Arab nationalist movements along with a growing Yemeni desire for a modern state created a catalyst for reform and then rebellion.

¹⁰² Ibid., 196.

¹⁰³ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 79.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 80.

¹⁰⁵ Douglas and Chimienti, *The Free Yemeni Movement, 1935-1962*, 173.

When Imam Ahmad died in his sleep in September 1962, his son, al-Badr became his chosen successor. Al-Badr did not have his father's charisma. The Free Officers, made up of a cadre of lieutenants who not only emulated Nasser's republican orientation but in fact had his direct support for the overthrow of the Imamate, seized the government in an orchestrated coup d'état.¹⁰⁶ Though Imam al-Badr was targeted, he survived assassination and fled to the north where he rallied Royalist forces. The rebels immediately established a republic led by one of the senior Free Officers, 'Abdullah al-Sallal. Within months, the Egyptians sent roughly 15,000 troops into Yemen.¹⁰⁷ Such a show of Egyptian force set off a regional war that pitted the fledgling government in Yemen and their ally Egypt against the Royalist forces backed by both Saudi Arabia and Britain. The latter two wanted to maintain the status quo in Yemen and equally wanted to weaken the recalcitrant Gamal Abdul Nasser.

Other powers soon sided with the faction that best supported their political aims. The Soviet Union backed the Republicans in an effort to bolster their relations with Egypt.¹⁰⁸ The Israelis initiated clandestine airdrops to Royalist forces in order to do their part in neutralizing Nasser's war.¹⁰⁹ The Iranians, led by Reza Shah, supported the Royalist

¹⁰⁶ Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble : How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 32.

¹⁰⁷ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 90. By the middle of the 1960's, the Egyptians forces numbered close to 60,000. See Dresch, *Modern Yemen*, 102.

¹⁰⁸ For a detailed account of the Soviet role in the Yemeni Civil War see *Nasser's Gamble* by Jesse Ferris pages 70-101.

¹⁰⁹ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble : How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*, 132.

forces in an effort to maintain Shia dominance in Yemen. The United States quickly recognized the fledgling Republican government despite the fact it went against British interests. Whether to thwart Soviet ambitions or to serve as a peace broker to end the Yemeni Civil War, “what is significant is that the United States decided that recognition of a revolutionary Arab regime with ties to Nasser was more important to US interests than acceding to the wishes of its monarchical, pro-Western, Arabian allies, notably Saudi Arabia and Jordan.”¹¹⁰ In the 1960s, Yemen emerged on the geopolitical scene after decades of isolation.

The nearly five-year Egyptian intervention escalated and prolonged the war. Egypt insisted on executing the strategic aims against the Royalist guerilla operation. As a result, the Republican Army of Yemen remained relatively small throughout the conflict, numbering no more than 10,000 largely untried troops.¹¹¹ Both Republicans and Royalists grew weary of the Egyptian presence but during the period of occupation, Egypt imported health professionals, teachers, and government officials who acquainted the Yemeni populace to a more modern approach to governance.¹¹² However, Egyptian control of Yemen’s political fortunes throughout the war stifled indigenous governmental progress.¹¹³

With the retreat of the Imam’s control in Lower Yemen, the Yemenis there began to experience modernization. The goods that were once found only in Aden were quickly

¹¹⁰ E.F. Prados and Georgetown University. Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, *The Us and Yemen: A Half-Century of Engagement* (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 2005), 11.

¹¹¹ David M. Witty, "A Regular Army in Counterinsurgency Operations: Egypt in North Yemen, 1962-1967," *Journal of Military History* 65, no. 2 (2001): 420.

¹¹² Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic : The Politics of Development, 1962-1986*, 24.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

traversing northward toward Ta'iz, the second largest city in Yemen, and made their way to Sana'a. Peter Somerville-Large, an Irish journalist who reported from Yemen during the civil war stated:

At present Ta'iz was closer in spirit to Aden than to any of the mountain cities; its shops, modern in design, and incongruous among the ancient buildings, sold all those cheap imported goods available in the Free Port, goods which had been carried up in lorries and spread through the bazaars. The jeep and lorry drivers would stay for a few days spreading Adenese news and opinions, before returning south for another load of goods or passengers. With the death of the Imam [Ahmed] those amenities which had eluded the populace for so long suddenly became possibilities, and a cinema and a petrol station were being erected as fast as possible.¹¹⁴

International players flooded Yemen with money that fueled the Civil War. The large stream of available cash made it possible for Yemenis to buy the ever increasing quantity of foreign made goods.¹¹⁵ Somerville-Large also narrated how Ta'iz was firmly in the Republican camp and filled with locals who had “passionate acceptance of the new government”.¹¹⁶ Radio ownership became the ubiquitous symbol of revolutionary Yemen.¹¹⁷ Yemenis tuned into the radio stations of the modernizing Middle East, especially Radio Cairo. The mobility of ideas and modern materialism traversed Yemen from south to north and changed the way Yemenis thought at a pace unseen in Yemen history. For the first time, villagers who would ultimately leave Yemen for economic

¹¹⁴ Peter Somerville-Large, *Tribes and Tribulations: A Journey in Republican Yemen* (London,: Hale, 1967), 24.

¹¹⁵ Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic : The Politics of Development, 1962-1986*, 35.

¹¹⁶ Somerville-Large, *Tribes and Tribulations: A Journey in Republican Yemen*, 35.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Abercrombie, "Behind the Veil of Troubled Yemen," *National Geographic Magazine* 125, no. 3 (March 1964): 445.

reasons had a marginal understanding of a wider world.

For the Yemeni diaspora, the civil war served more as a revolution. “Far larger numbers of Shafi’is from Lower Yemen arrived from Aden, where they were migrant workers, and Yemenis returned from Africa and the Middle East to support a new beginning to national life”.¹¹⁸ For others, the violence of the war prevented migrants from returning. Rashid Abdu, a trained surgeon by the 1960s and the small boy who traveled from his village to Aden in chapter one, yearned to return to Yemen from the U.S. to help his countrymen. He was dissuaded in Washington by Yemen Embassy staff from working in his war torn homeland.¹¹⁹

The demise of the Imamate flipped the role of the Aden hinterland. Aden was once the source of political unrest that targeted the Imam. During the civil war, the absence of authority beyond the Adeni hinterland gave radical elements the space to plot against British colonialism. Many Adenis joined the National Liberation Front (NLF), a socialist anti-imperialist organization made up of Yemenis who worked in Aden, but had ties to rural areas of the hinterland.¹²⁰ Gamal Abdul Nasser supported these radical anti-British Yemeni parties from Cairo. Reacting to this threat, the British carried out a clandestine effort to hinder Republican and Egyptian military aims in Yemen.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 90.

¹¹⁹ Abdu, *Journey of a Yemeni Boy*, 382.

¹²⁰ Chalcraft, "Migration and Popular Protest in the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf in the 1950s and 1960s," 33.

¹²¹ For a comprehensive study on the British clandestine effort against the Republicans see: Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962-1965 : Ministers, Mercenaries and Mandarins : Foreign Policy and the Limits of Covert Action* (Brighton ; Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

In June of 1964, the British agreed to complete a withdrawal from Aden by 1968. Despite the deadline, the NLF carried out frequent violent actions against rival parties and the British. The British position became so tenuous that the last British troops left in 1967. The British retreat from Aden not only ended over a century of British influence in south Arabia, but the succession of communist elements in South Yemen significantly halted the free flow of migration from a region that was the cornerstone of the modern Yemeni diaspora.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing throughout the civil war, Yemenis from both the far northern tribal areas, as well as from the Middle Region, migrated across the border into Saudi Arabia. The great petroleum kingdom required unskilled and semi-skilled workers to construct their oil empire. By 1970, more than 300,000 Yemeni men worked in Saudi Arabia.¹²² Though there has not been a study about the impact that migration had on the outcome of the civil war, there is no doubt that such large scale emigration curtailed the numbers of Yemeni soldiers engaged in hostilities.

Throughout the conflict, the Egyptian military faced an elusive foe that utilized tribal rules of engagement and alliances. As the war dragged on, local Egyptian military leaders began using these military concessions to keep casualties low and “established their own ties with local Royalists: they signed truces, negotiated safe conducts, transferred supplies”.¹²³ Yemeni tribal norms altered the military practices of the Egyptian invaders and slowed the progress of the Egyptian war effort. Senior Egyptian commander, Abdul

¹²² Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 119.

¹²³ Fred Halliday, *Arabia without Sultans* (London: Saqi, 2002), 115.

Hakim Amer, forced to commit suicide in the wake of Egyptian failure in Yemen, wrote in his suicide note words that resonate in most wars of occupation:

We did not bother to study the local, Arab and international implications of intervention or the political or military questions involved. After years of experience we realized that the Yemen war is a war between tribes and that we entered it without knowing the nature of the land, their traditions and ideas.¹²⁴

Amer's final words reveal the disparity in cultures between two Arab lands: Yemen and Egypt. He also suggests that even after five years of war in Yemen, the intricacies of Yemen society were lost on the invaders. Despite a common language, the Egyptians could not overcome thousands of years of social construction.

Ultimately, geopolitical events shaped the final phase of the civil war. In 1967, Egypt went to war with Israel. Not only did the Egyptian defeat in the '67 War result in the withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen, recent scholarship asserts that the Egyptian commitment to Yemen was an underlying cause of Egyptian failure against Israel. As Jesse Ferris contends, "the Egyptian military atrophied" during the guerilla war and both ground down the Egyptian army and did not prepare them for the conventional war against Israel.¹²⁵

The Egyptian retreat from Yemen softened Saudi commitment to the royalist cause leaving the door open for a political settlement. In 1968, the Royalist forces tried one last attempt to bring down the Republic by laying siege to Sana'a. At the center of saving

¹²⁴ Edgar O'Ballance, *The War in the Yemen* (London,: Faber, 1971), 89.

¹²⁵ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble : How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*, 289.

Sana'a were Yemeni migrants who served as laborers in neighboring countries. They spearheaded the relief of Sana'a through dogged élan. Their lack of political connections or tribal affiliation propelled their desire for a new Yemen.¹²⁶ When the Royalists failed to take Sana'a in 1968, the radical position among the Imam's forces collapsed. A conciliator group, known as the Third Force, favored the departure of the Egyptians as well as the end of the Imamate theocracy. In 1970, the Yemeni Civil War drew to a close. Though the Republicans were the victors, the only way for a peaceful future was a conciliatory treaty. As a result, many of the Royalists were invited into the new government,

Despite the role of the modernists in launching the civil war, in the end, the conservative forces prevailed in Yemen. The Famous Forty and their liberal contemporaries were marginalized in the new post-war government. Many of the modernists were Shafi'i with no affiliations with the powerful northern Zaydi tribes. As a result, "they had not created or been allowed to create a modernist political vehicle – i.e., a party, movement, or front – through which to defend and advance their modernist ideas and interests in a unified, forceful, and continuous way."¹²⁷

In the new republic, the *sayyids* lost their political authority to the powerful northern sheikhs. The sheikhs that fared the best in the post-Civil War period were the tribal leaders that supported the Republicans and in particular, those that backed the Third Force. Specifically, leaders from the Hashid tribe, north of Sana'a, emerged politically

¹²⁶ Claude Deffarge and Gordian Troeller, *Yemen 62-69, De La Révolution Sauvage À La Trêve Des Guerriers [Par] Claude Deffarge Et Gordian Troeller, L'histoire Que Nous Vivons* (Paris,: P. Laffont, 1969), 263.

¹²⁷ Burrowes, "The Famous Forty and Their Companions: North Yemen's First-Generation Modernists and Educational Emigrants," 94.

influential.¹²⁸ Over time, the *sayyid* class faced discrimination at the hands of their fellow countrymen leading many *sayyids* the unenviable position of being both the ancestor of the Prophet and labeled anti-Republican.¹²⁹

The experience of civil war proved that conservative values are a systemic force in Yemen. Despite a desire to open the nation to the outside world, Yemenis had little desire to change their cultural mooring, rooted in the multitude of villages in the highlands of Yemen. In addition, though the currents of revolutionary change emerged from the Central Region and funneled through Aden, the power structure following the civil war remained in the north.

As the north moved toward an open and free market system, the south radicalized. In 1971, South Yemen changed its name to the People's Democratic Republic in a clear move to align South Yemen with the Communist Block and to create distance from the Yemen Arab Republic. By 1972, the two Yemens faced off in a series of border skirmishes that served to sever any hope of a post-revolution merger. South Yemen's recent history of English colonization and the protectorate was not compatible with the North's link to the powerful Zaydi tribes.

In the 1970s, the new North Yemen government economically transformed the state away from a policy of isolation. Historian Paul Dresch referred to Yemen as

¹²⁸ Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 262. In the aftermath of the Civil War, Yemeni leaders created a Consultative Council chaired by Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Ahmar of the Hashid tribe.

¹²⁹ Gabriele vom Bruck, "Evacuatiing Memory in Postrevolutionary Yemen," in *Counter-Narratives: History, Contemporary Society, and Politics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen*, ed. Madawi and Robert Vitalis al-Rasheed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 230-31.

possessing a “sea of migrants”.¹³⁰ With virtually no manufacturing or industry, Yemeni males began leaving the country in substantial numbers. By the middle part of the decade over 630,000 Yemenis were working in the Gulf and over 600,000 more in countries beyond the Arabian Peninsula.¹³¹ The vast majority of these migrants were men; approximately one in four to one in five men were living abroad.¹³² When the oil boom known regionally as, *al-tafra*, or the leap, began in 1973, the demand for laborers in the Persian Gulf spiked.

Yemeni unskilled or semi-skilled labor filled the Saudi demand. North Yemenis migrated unhindered by the new political regime. In South Yemen, the government attempted to control its citizenry by limiting mobility in a manner similar to their fellow communist counterparts abroad by banning emigration. The South Yemeni government did not have the resources of Eastern Europe, nor the infrastructure, to contain movement. Roughly 125,000 South Yemenis lived outside the country in the mid-1970s.¹³³

From its origins, the economy of the Yemen Arab Republic was built on remittances. The amount of money that flowed into the YAR was staggering. “Remittances to North Yemen, which stood at some \$40 million in 1969-70, rose to \$800 million in 1976-7 and continued rising, to \$1.3 billion in 1978-9, dwarfing the revenue of the central

¹³⁰ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 131.

¹³¹ Wenner, *The Yemen Arab Republic : Development and Change in an Ancient Land*, 74.

¹³² Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 131. Yemen's Central Planning Organization census put this number at 1.23 million migrants living abroad. Culling data in Yemen is difficult, particularly in the 1970s. "Housing and Population Census," ed. Central Planning Organization (Sana'a, 1975).

¹³³ *A History of Modern Yemen*, 134.

government.”¹³⁴ Both urban and rural Yemenis used the new found wealth to purchase foreign goods. Televisions, telephones, vacuum cleaners, kitchen appliances, and cars were just a few of the items that flooded even the most remote areas of Yemen. Villages, far from the electric grid, purchased gas fueled generators that lit the hillsides at night and powered the modern imported goods. Western style consumerism blossomed within the new Republic.

In the town of Manakha, west of Sana’a, for example, the new economic climate blurred the traditional association of wealth and class. The new Sana’a to Hodeida road bypassed the once prosperous trading town and in response, many poor merchants closed their shops as the customers declined. Increasingly, struggling merchants migrated to Saudi Arabia during *al-tafra*. Some of these new proletarians amassed enough wealth abroad to start new shops. Others became taxi drivers who plied the new road.¹³⁵

In ‘Amran, twenty miles north of Sana’a, the oil boom created a resurgence of small retail commerce in the town. ‘Amran for centuries maintained rigid class distinctions that were defined by birth. Elites held much of the land while large numbers of farmers sharecropped their land and paid rents as high as half of their produce. The defeat of the Imamate altered the economic structure of ‘Amran.¹³⁶

Returning emigrants were at the forefront of this economic change. Having abandoned agriculture to work in the oil states, often having only limited lands to return to, and reluctant to resume the arduous peasant life, returnees tried to create

¹³⁴ Ibid., 131.

¹³⁵ Tomas Gerholm, "Market, Mosque and Mafraj : Social Inequality in a Yemeni Town" (Thesis, Stockholm., 1977), 80-81.

¹³⁶ Thomas B. Stevenson, "Migrants as a Rite of Passage in a Highland Yemeni Town," in *Sojourners and Settlers*, ed. Jonathan Freidlander (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 36.

new economic niches for themselves. The emigrants' success in establishing commercial ventures spurred the town's expansion both by encouraging others to follow their lead and emigrate and by stimulating an influx of new settlers from adjoining villages and more distant regions. Most of the new settlers were returned migrants who, like native 'Amranis, found a place to invest their savings.¹³⁷

The wave of migration and consumerism that swept through Yemen following the Civil War proved revolutionary for the traditional Zaydi population in the north. Though those males that migrated remained within the Arabian Peninsula, the new economic milieu broke down some of the longstanding social structures of the Zaydi north. For example, Yemenis who acquired wealth in Saudi Arabia were often able to gain independence from their fathers at a much earlier age and gain a level of independence unprecedented in the region. In most cases, Yemeni males improved their status by marrying earlier and buying a house separate from their father's domicile.¹³⁸ A migration economy made changes in Yemen that the revolution failed to do.

Tribal Yemenis from places like 'Amran were internationalized with their experience of living and working in Saudi Arabia. Unlike those that lived before them, these migrants came into contact with Yemenis from disparate regions as well as encountering coworkers from all over the Middle East, Indian Ocean, and the West.¹³⁹

With significant remittance income flowing into Yemen, the short term prosperity transformed Yemen. But as the Yemeni government encouraged emigration, the long term effects on Yemen proved catastrophic. The Yemenis who were the greatest risk takers

¹³⁷ Ibid.,36

¹³⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 44.

emigrated, denuding the Yemeni economy of their most productive indigenous labor force. In the absence of able bodied laborers, Yemen throughout the 1970s and 1980s imported their labor from China and South Korea to build infrastructure including roads and electrical grids. In addition, Yemen hired thousands of Arab teachers to establish a public school system modeled on the British system.¹⁴⁰ Despite the flood of cash from Yemenis living abroad, the central government proved incapable of harnessing revenue from these gains or from taxation. Infrastructure improvements were funded from either foreign aid or by incurring debt.¹⁴¹

Most of the Yemeni migrants took on unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in the Gulf, thus they did not acquire a trade that would translate to needed skills in their homeland. Instead, many returning migrants became taxi drivers or merchants who facilitated the trade of imported goods that flooded the Yemeni market. Yemenis who managed to achieve educational success abroad found neither a lucrative salary nor a modern economy in Yemen to accommodate their skills.

Following the Civil War, as Yemeni farmers migrated abroad and created an agricultural sector labor shortage, the government increasingly imported the majority of its food. "In 1965 the country imported foodstuffs and live animals for 13 million YR. Fifteen years later this item had increased a hundred-fold."¹⁴² With traditional subsistence

¹⁴⁰ In the late 1980s, the author witnessed large numbers of Chinese road maintenance crews, South Koreans widening the electricity grid. The author also visited many schools that were overwhelmingly serviced by Arabs, primarily Egyptians.

¹⁴¹ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 133.

¹⁴² N. Fergany, "The Impact of Emigration on National Development in the Arab Region: The Case of the Yemen Arab Republic," *Int Migr Rev* 16, no. 4 (1982): 771.

agriculture augmented by imports, many farmers shifted their plots from growing food to growing *qat*:

Among the things on which money was, and still is, being spent is *qat*. This is a mildly stimulant shrub whose leaves are chewed usually at gatherings in the afternoon, where general conversation goes on until a torpid quiet sets in around sundown.¹⁴³

Once a luxury, by the 1970s *qat* became ubiquitous in sitting rooms throughout the country. Growing in the climate zone that also included coffee, *qat* became the most lucrative of Yemen's cash crops. Conveniently, *qat* required less maintenance than coffee, thus the crop served as a viable alternative during the period of intense migration.¹⁴⁴ For emigrants returning home, the relaxed social setting of a *qat* chew was a conscious reminder of being home.

The proliferation of *qat* into the social fabric of Yemeni life encouraged egalitarianism by fostering the mingling of village social groups during the prolonged *qat* chewing sessions. However, Yemeni demand and dependence on the stimulant in the post-Civil War period proved detrimental. The *qat* habit presented serious health problems including increased heart ailments and gum disease.¹⁴⁵ Not only did *qat* chewing tax an otherwise weak health sector, but the act of chewing *qat* during most of the afternoon severely limited the production of the already depleted male work force.

¹⁴³ Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*, 20.

¹⁴⁴ Fergany, "The Impact of Emigration on National Development in the Arab Region: The Case of the Yemen Arab Republic," 769.

¹⁴⁵ Y. A. M. El-wajeh and M. H. Thornhill, "Qat and Its Health Effects," *British Dental Journal* 206, no. 1 (2009): 19.

The sizable trade imbalance, along with the influx of external cash deposits in the form of remittances, created inflation. The government was able to keep food prices down, but wages soared during the 1970s and 1980s. Land prices rose dramatically as well. Emigrants increasingly sought to expand both land ownership and housing expansion with their earnings.¹⁴⁶ The scarcity of available land forced rent prices higher and put a severe strain on Yemenis who were not recipients of remittances. Yemen men also experienced a surge in bride dowry prices as a result of remittance-based inflationary trends.¹⁴⁷ Higher bride dowries forced Yemeni men to marry later, while serving as an economic justification for emigration.

The Yemeni government evolved into an autocratic economic and political state that became dominant in the post-colonial Middle East. Gilbert Achcar in *The People's Want* uses the term *jumlukiyya* or a hybridization of the Arabic *jumhuriyya* or republic and *malakiyya* or monarchy.¹⁴⁸ In Yemen, the Imam was gone, but a modern form of authority arose in President Ali Abdullah Saleh. In a *jumlukiyya*, connected clans and tribes took advantage of political ties to amass wealth and political power at the expense of the general population.

The North Yemeni government continued the long standing practice of placating

¹⁴⁶ Fergany, "The Impact of Emigration on National Development in the Arab Region: The Case of the Yemen Arab Republic," 772.

¹⁴⁷ Frans J. Schuurman and Raouf Salib, "Labour Migration to the Middle East: A Review of Its Context, Effects and Prospects," *Social Scientist* 18, no. 5 (1990): 26.

¹⁴⁸ Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want : A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 63.

northern tribes through patronage. Jobs and money flowed from the central government to the tribes. Furthermore, during the 1980s, nearly half of the government's expenditures went to bolster the army.¹⁴⁹ Ties between the elite tribal families and the government were integral in sustaining the rule of President Ali Abdullah Salleh well into the twenty-first century. Yemenis wondered whether government patronage served to fortify the Zaydis as masters of the state.¹⁵⁰ Army leadership and high government positions were filled with the relatives of powerful northern sheikhs. The vast number of Shafi'is in Yemen lacked political agency in post-Civil War Yemen which led to feelings of powerlessness. Furthermore, the amount of money required to keep the tribes placated diverted funds away from government sponsored infrastructure projects. As more Yemenis became frustrated with government waste and an inability to initiate change, emigration served as a means to opt out of the confines of the Yemeni economic and political system.

In 1990, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, North and South Yemen unified. On the heels of unification, however, Yemen took the disastrous step of aligning with Saddam Hussein in the First Gulf War. Saudi Arabia punished Yemen by expelling most of its Yemeni workers in October 1990. Saudi Arabia repatriated some 800,000 Yemenis.¹⁵¹ The oil rich Gulf States replaced their Arab migrant workers, mostly Palestinians and Yemenis, with East and South Asians. In 1985, the number of Arab

¹⁴⁹ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 157.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁵¹ Nora Ann Colton, "Homeward Bound: Yemeni Return Migration," *International Migration Review* 27, no. 4 (1993): 870.

migrant workers in Saudi Arabia totaled 79% of the workforce. By 2004 that number had plummeted to 33%.¹⁵²

Most of the returning Yemenis did not go back to their farms, but rather, became migrants within their own country by seeking work in the cities.¹⁵³ Unemployment wrecked the Yemen economy. In addition, Western powers suspended humanitarian aid. Chronically handicapped by corruption and tribal payoffs, the Yemeni state treasury collapsed.

Yemeni dependence on remittance income had become so instrumental to everyday life and fluidity of the economy that the fallout from the Gulf War decision proved catastrophic. By the mid-1990s, unemployment reached forty percent. The rate of inflation skyrocketed to nearly ninety percent during the first half of the 1990s. The value of the Yemeni rial declined from 14 rials to the dollar in 1991 to 121 rials to the dollar in 1995.¹⁵⁴ As a result of the economic downturn, foreign investors shied away from the state. While the 1990s was a period of prosperity for much of the world, the opening of the decade ended the remittance based spending spree.

To further complicate the downward economic spiral, in 1994, North and South Yemen erupted in civil war. Provoked by northern military and economic transgressions against the south along with Sana'a bolstering a military presence that felt to most

¹⁵² Andrzej Kapiszewski, "Arab Versus Asian Migrant Workers in the Gcc Countries," ed. Population Division EGM, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat (Beirut: 2006).

¹⁵³ Colton, "Homeward Bound: Yemeni Return Migration," 874.

¹⁵⁴ "Yemen: A Collapsed Economy," *The Middle East Journal* 64, no. 3 (2010): 417.

Yemenis living in the south like an occupation, hostilities between the Yemen government and the southern Yemeni Socialist Party ensued. The conflict culminated in the wholesale sacking of Aden. Anything that was of value was looted by the Yemen Army in what “many at the time drew parallels with the 1948 sack of Sana’a”.¹⁵⁵ The north preserved the union but the lingering effects of wonton aggression by government forces left an unsettled opinion of the north by many southerners. This feeling was most intense in Aden, however: “through 130 years of British rule and thirty years of socialist rule, we learned the forms of a developed state. We can’t accept going back to tribal rule.”¹⁵⁶

As the century came to a close, the corruption at the highest levels of government became commonplace. Yemenis struggled to live off the meager salaries they earned as farmers, bureaucrats, or soldiers. Some began returning to the Gulf as workers once more, but the rules had changed and the special status that Yemenis once held had evaporated during the aftermath of the First Gulf War.

Across the globe, in the United States, the demographic makeup of the Yemeni diaspora changed as a result of the deterioration of the ancestral homeland. As more Yemeni-Americans were connected with their families in the U.S., the population upheld the traditional value systems of Yemen. A strengthening of a unique community with roots in antiquity combined with bonds of family, faith, and an Islamic identity resonated within the Yemeni-American community in Dearborn, Michigan. As we will see in Chapter Three, greater mobility heightened stasis and inclusiveness in the American diaspora.

¹⁵⁵ Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen*, 197.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

FROM DEAUAN TO LIVING ROOM: CONSTRUCTING YEMENI MIGRATION IN AMERICA THROUGH ORAL HISTORY

As a middle school age boy in the 1990s, Omar left his village near Ibb, Yemen and came to join his father in Detroit, Michigan. Omar was a chain emigrant, a term for someone who migrates at the behest of a relative. He entered a culture and environment that was unknown to him outside of the stories and pictures his father shared with him while on return visits from America. Omar initially went to a school in Detroit that contained few Arab students. Overcoming language in an educational environment was difficult, but Omar transitioned rapidly into his American school where he quickly learned English. Eventually, he moved to Dearborn, Michigan, and went to a school that contained many Yemeni-Americans. It was at this point that Omar became a more active participant in the Yemeni diaspora in America.

Yemeni mobility is transnational in scope. Similar to many post-colonial diasporic traditions, Yemenis are aware of their historic link to movement, both ancient and modern. In studying the Yemeni experience in the United States, the historian must negotiate the paradox of the vast Yemeni tradition of mobility, and the clannish, insular, and exclusive tendencies of the diaspora. Yemenis speak Arabic and practice Islam, thus bonds of language and faith tie Yemeni-Americans to the broader Arab community. Yemeni-Americans, however, possess cultural identifiers that are very different from their Arab neighbors in America, including food, dress, dialect, and strict adherence to gender segregation.

One overriding feature of the Yemeni-American experience is the bond between

diaspora and homeland. Omar possessed a deep love for his country of origin. Bonds between Yemeni-Americans and the homeland are passed down to family like an heirloom in what Omar describes as reinstating the “identity in their children.” Recounting his thoughts years later, Omar expressed his desire to go back to Yemen one day and improve the conditions of the village where he was born. He articulated how Yemeni-Americans born in the US perceive their ancestral homeland:

I do see a lot of people who are born and raised here who are still kind of attached and they still wanna go back to do things there. I know even two ladies who went back there and kind of participated in the revolution [in 2011] and settled there, kind of work there, ... so it is kind of nice to see that happening and how is it being done. As I said, it's the parents who... plant that in their children and the children doing the same to their grandchildren. ¹

Despite the fact that Yemeni-Americans maintain strong bonds with their ancestral homeland, the community has evolved over their short history in the United States. The Yemeni-American story connects an Islamic identity, a history of mobility, ties to British maritime trade, and American industrialism with a culture that has roots in the ancient past.

The Yemeni-American Diaspora

The Yemeni experience in the United States is a modern phenomenon. It is believed that the earliest Yemenis made their way to America following the construction of the Suez Canal in 1869. More Yemenis came to the United States around the turn of the century. There is clear evidence that the tradition of Yemenis serving as *lascars* in the British navy directly influenced their migration to the New World and the U.S. in particular. British colonial policy of seamen acquisition in the nineteenth century defined

¹ AM interview. 2012. Interview by author. Digital recording. June 26. Dearborn Public Library, Dearborn, Michigan.

Yemeni immigration structure and trajectory in the United States. Much has been made by historians about the economic factors that brought Yemenis to American shores, but less focus has been placed on the transportation networks that provided the means for mobility.

There are several references to the link between ocean-going transportation and Yemenis abruptly terminating their service aboard British shipping as it applies to North America. Historian Jon Swanson contended that Yemenis “jumped ship on one of the coasts and made their way inland”.² A few Yemeni sailors disembarked in Detroit prior to 1910 via the St. Lawrence Seaway.³ Mary Bisharat wrote that “some Yemeni sailors jumped ship in San Francisco”.⁴

The source documentation is unclear when it comes to what happened to these early migrants once they reached American shores, but where they began their sojourn is more concrete. Military records place several Yemenis from Buffalo in American uniform during the First World War.⁵ There is a link between the Yemenis as sailors and their employment in the automobile factories in Detroit. Rosina Hassoun detailed how one Yemeni-American Great Lakes mariner met Henry Ford in the early 1900s.⁶ Whether

² Jon C. Swanson, "The Consequences of Emigration Fro Economic Development in the Yemen Arab Republic" (Dissertation, Wayne State University, 1978), 30.

³ Barbara C. Aswad, "Yemeni and Lebanese Muslim Immigrant Women in Southeast Dearborn, Michigan," in *Muslim Families in North America*, ed. Earle H. Waugh, Sharon McIrvin Abu-Laban, and Regula Qureshi (Edmonton, Alta., Canada: University of Alberta Press, 1991), 263; *ibid.*; *ibid.*

⁴ Mary Bisharat, "Yemeni Farmworkers in California," *MERIP Reports*, no. 34 (1975): 24.

⁵ B. Dweik, *The Yemenites of Lackawanna, New York: A Community Profile* (Council on International Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1980), 3.

⁶ Rosina J. Hassoun, *Arab Americans in Michigan*, *Discovering the Peoples of Michigan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 1.

Hassoun's account is legend or truth, we do know that beginning in the 1920s, hundreds of Yemenis began migrating from the rural mountains of Yemen's Central Region to the Motor City in search of employment.

From the 1920s until the mid-1960s, Yemenis negotiated the international political climate as migrants. American anti-immigration tendencies and the xenophobic policies of the Yemeni Kingdom provided significant obstacles to emigration. During the inter-war years, deportations were common in the United States, especially in the wake of the 1929 Stock Market Crash.⁷ Following World War II, many Yemenis came to the United States via French Indochina. Yemenis had traversed the Indian Ocean while serving as sailors aboard French vessels and ended up in Vietnam.⁸ There they often worked as dock watchmen while others became profitable businessmen.⁹

Caught in a perilous political climate of decolonization in the 1950s and 1960s, Yemenis emigrated from Southeast Asia, and in doing so, were able to avoid US immigrant language requirements "that they be literate in their native tongue."¹⁰ Whether Yemenis came from East Asia or directly from their villages, these immigrant pioneers in America set in motion the same patterns of settlement that began in the harbor towns of England. Yemenis came almost exclusively as single men, and once established, sent for their friends and male relatives to join them. To reinforce the argument that Yemenis in

⁷ Swanson, "Sojourners and Settlers in Yemen and America," 57.

⁸ See Chapter Two and origins of Yemeni seamen with the *Messageries Maritimes Steam Navigation Company* of France.

⁹ Swanson, "The Consequences of Emigration Fro Economic Development in the Yemen Arab Republic," 85.

¹⁰ "Sojourners and Settlers in Yemen and America," 57.

America are directly connected to British migration, the Yemenis that came to the US were from the same region as their British countrymen, that swath of the Central Yemeni highlands known as *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah* (Figure 5). These intrepid migrants established a template for chain migration that exists to this day.

The 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act relaxed US immigrant laws. The law did away with the exclusive racialized policies of the past and set up a quota system. Even more important for Yemeni-Americans, the act gave preference to the sponsorship of family members of immigrants. In the midst of civil war in northern Yemen and escalating anti-colonial violence in Aden, Yemenis began immigrating to America in larger numbers in a way that strengthened chain migration. Yemeni men assisted their relatives in coming to America. With an often extensive family structure, Yemenis found creative ways to bring acquaintances from their village to the United States. In addition, with immigrant laws that encouraged chain migration, Yemenis were able to replicate strong familial structures that exist in Yemeni villages through migration to the US.

Many of these newcomers followed their relatives to Detroit and Buffalo (Figure 8). Ties to international shipping remained into the 1960s. Ethnographer Shalom Staub contended that “these immigrants, young men with wives left behind in Yemen, had worked on ships before settling in Buffalo”.¹¹ Others created ethnic pockets in New York City where Yemenis engaged in “dispersed employment” that was unique among the Yemeni communities throughout the 1960s and 70s. Roughly 5000 to 6000 Yemenis

¹¹ Shalom Staub, *Yemenis in New York City : The Folklore of Ethnicity* (Philadelphia; London ; Cranbury, N.J.: Balch Institute Press; Associated University Presses, 1989), 183.

spread out across Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx and took low skilled jobs as “guards, elevator operators, busboys, dishwashers, janitors and office cleaners.”¹² While the older Yemeni enclaves in Detroit and Buffalo settled and worked around a singular business sector, the Yemenis of New York City engaged in dispersed employment and established an employment pattern that reverberated throughout all urban Yemeni-American populations from the 1980s to the present.

Many Yemenis struggled to find work upon their arrival to the United States. Some traveled west to the vineyards of California (Figure 8). A few hundred Yemenis made their way to the San Joaquin Valley, the Sacramento Valley, and the Imperial Valley beginning in the 1960s and blended into the predominately Hispanic population within the agricultural work camps. Writer Shams Alwejude told about her father’s experience traveling out West:

He told me how, after he arrived in Detroit and was met by his cousin, he was immediately sent on a Greyhound bus that took him to California, where he would work picking grapes and asparagus stalks as a migrant farmworker. I asked him how he communicated, because I knew that he did not speak any English. My father explained that he did not speak to anyone, and that when he had left his cousin in Detroit, his cousin gave him a piece of paper with the word ‘chicken’ written on it. His cousin advised him to follow the crowd on the bus and do whatever they did. If they stopped off at a place to eat, he was to show them the piece of paper. He eventually got to the camp where he lived and worked with other Yemenis and sent whatever money he earned to Yemen to support his growing family, his parents, and his siblings.¹³

While in California, most Yemenis experienced cultural isolation. The bunkhouses where the workers lived were void of children and women. Those around them were more

¹² Ibid., 78.

¹³ Shams Alwejude, "Daughter of America," in *Arab Detroit : From Margin to Mainstream*, ed. Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 381-82.

apt to speak Spanish than English. The Yemeni farmworkers labored in fields where summer temperatures could hover above 100 degrees and where, by the early 1980s, their annual salaries ranged between \$8000 and \$11000 annually.¹⁴ Over time, the Yemenis in California moved into the nearby towns such as Bakersfield and began grocery and liquor stores.

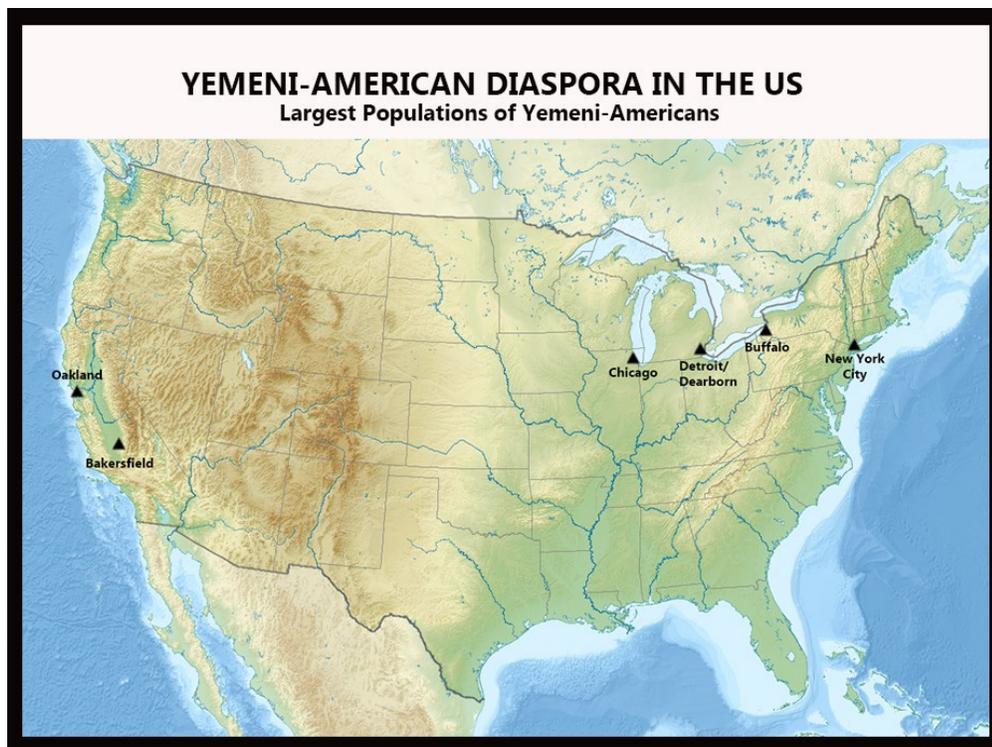


Figure 8. Yemeni-American Diaspora in the US.¹⁵

¹⁴ Ron Kelley, "Yemeni Farmworkers in California," in *Sojourners and Settlers : The Yemeni Immigrant Experience*, ed. Jonathan Friedlander (Salt Lake City, Los Angeles: University of Utah Press; G.E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California at Los Angeles, 1988), 70.

¹⁵ Kipp Cozad, "Yemeni-American Diaspora in the Us," (2015).

Yemenis formed the largest diaspora in the United States in the Greater Detroit area. By the late 1970s, as many as 7000 Yemenis lived in the Detroit/Dearborn known locally as the Southend.¹⁶ The Yemeni tradition of working aboard ships continued on the Great Lakes well into the 1970s where as many as 200 Yemenis plied the Great Lakes aboard cargo vessels.¹⁷

As Yemenis entered the automobile factories as skilled and unskilled laborers, they lived in the vicinity of the Ford River Rouge Plant in Dearborn and the Dodge Main Plant in the Detroit neighborhood of Hamtramck (Figure 9). Once a predominately Polish community, by the mid-1970s, Yemenis made up as much as 15 percent of the workforce at the Chrysler Hamtramck Assembly Line.¹⁸ Many Yemenis established grocery stores or services that catered specifically to the members of the Yemeni diaspora. The most visible strip of Yemeni owned businesses emerged along Dix Avenue in Dearborn. These stores and businesses were anchored by the Dearborn Mosque built in 1937 by Lebanese settlers to the area.

¹⁶ Nabeel Abraham, "The Yemeni Immigrant Community of Detroit: Background, Emigration and Community Life," in *Arabs in the New World : Studies on Arab-American Communities*, ed. Sameer Y. Abraham, Abraham, Nabeel (Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University, Center for Urban Studies, 1983), 110.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

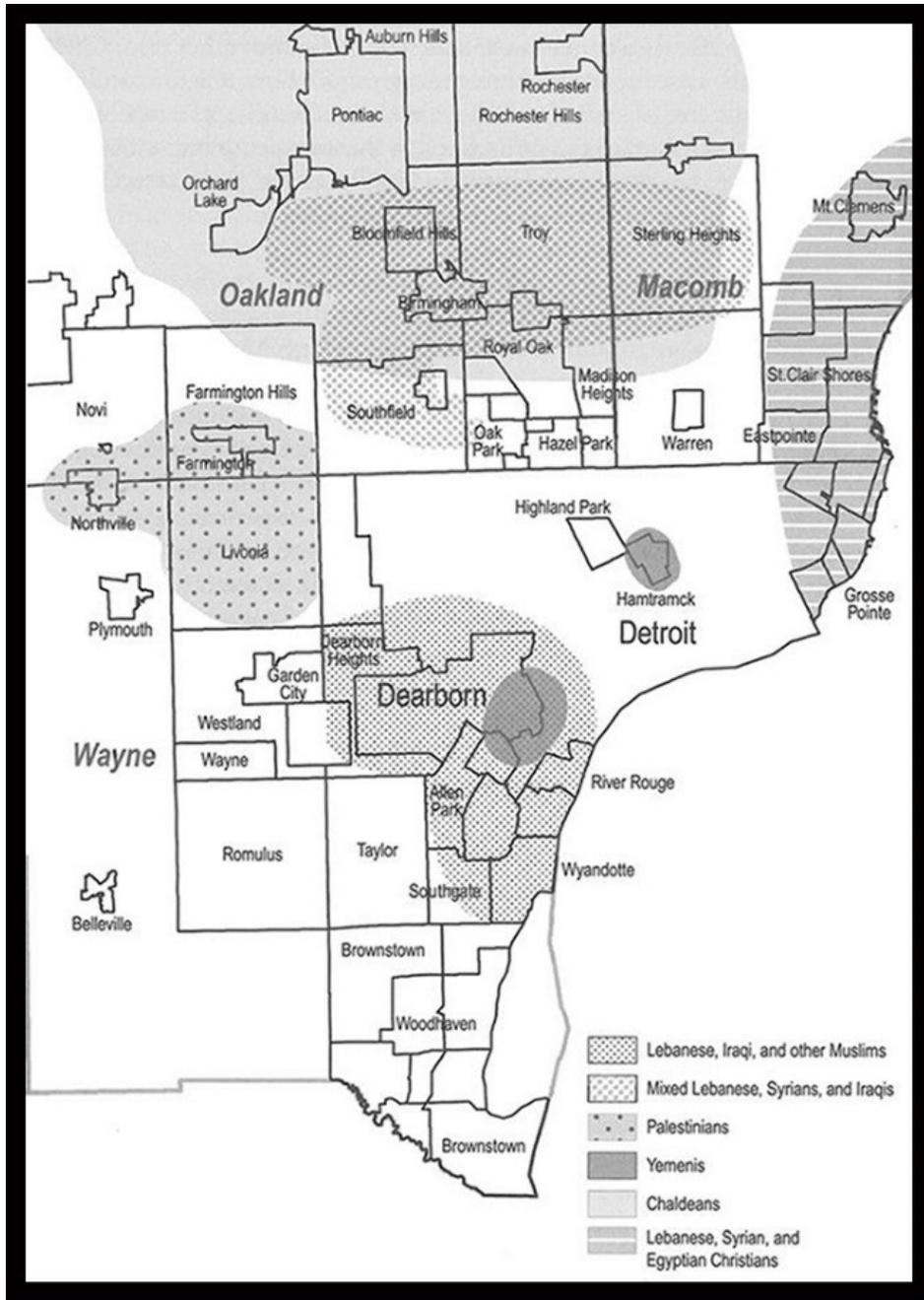


Figure 9. Arab-American Communities in Detroit/Dearborn, MI¹⁹

¹⁹ Nabeel Abraham, Sally Howell, and Andrew Shryock, *Arab Detroit 9/11 : Life in the Terror Decade*, Great Lakes Books (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), 41.

Through the 1980s, the vast majority of Yemeni migrants came to the United States as adult males. Many were single, but a significant number of other immigrants left their wives and children behind and remitted a portion of their wages back home. Used to a life of minimal conveniences, Yemenis often lived several to a dwelling and shared boarding and utilities with other Yemeni males to save money.²⁰ As anthropologist Jon Swanson articulated, “the migrant’s economic strategy reflects an orientation toward the sending country and not the receiving country”.²¹ It was during this period when the sojourner attitude was strongest. The 1970s was a relative boom decade for Yemen and the idea of returning to a prosperous Yemen was attractive to most Yemeni workers in America.

Yemeni men spent their time at work, at home or with friends, or at the nearby coffee shop. These coffee shops served as public spaces where Yemenis from the same region would play table games, drink tea, and socialize.²² Yemenis who started grocery stores or owned gas stations often hired family members to run the day to day operations, further recreating the village familial structure in America.

Ultimately, the goal of these sojourners was to accumulate wealth and property in Yemen through their economic opportunities in the United States and return to their native land. This phase of Yemeni immigration strongly aligns with the south Europeans who came to the United States around the turn of the twentieth century. A large number of these European migrants did not remain in the United States and earned the title of “Birds of

²⁰ Swanson, "The Consequences of Emigration Fro Economic Development in the Yemen Arab Republic," 94.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Sojourners and Settlers in Yemen and America," 58.

Passage”. Similarly, Yemeni males solidified their Old World associations by returning frequently for extended visits by utilizing easy access to modern transportation. Most Yemeni sojourners planned for a day when they would permanently settle comfortably in their ancestral village.

In the late 1980s and especially in the early 1990s, as economic conditions deteriorated in rural Yemen, many Yemenis reassessed their status as sojourners. Yemeni men began bringing their families to the United States. Unlike the Lebanese Muslim population which embraced their status as white Americans, the Yemenis continued the pattern of replicating their Old World structures and cultural identities in their adopted country. This occurred at a time when Yemen, along with much of the Muslim world, was becoming more conservative in response to the political failures and oppressive tactics of regional dictators. Yemenis adopted more strict social regulations. For example, women throughout Yemen began wearing the *niqab*, or the full veil in response to a more conservative climate at a time when more Yemeni women were coming to the United States.

Bringing their families to America presented challenges to Yemeni identity. With their families in Yemen, the immigrants were able to maintain their Yemeni-ness when they made their frequent trips home. With their families in America, Yemeni men were now inclined to recreate Yemeni cultural structures abroad. As in Yemen, women remained in gendered seclusion. The greatest challenge to the new Yemeni-American milieu was how best to raise children in America, taking advantage of a modern educational system, but at the same time not relinquishing traditional Yemeni societal norms.

Many Yemenis sent their young children to Islamic grade schools on weekends to maintain the Arabic language and ties to the Islamic faith. Once in secondary public schools in Dearborn and the Southend, Yemeni students clustered among their gender-segregated ethnic peers outside of the classroom. Throughout the days at school, the behavior of Yemeni girls was stringently monitored by Yemeni boys.²³ The most conservative women in the Yemeni-American community maintained the wearing of the *niqab*. Women in these homes avoided interaction with male members outside of the immediate family. For most Yemeni girls, the aim of the high school experience was to maintain their reputation, graduate with a strong GPA, and subsequently get married.

By the 1990s, the number of Yemenis in the United States had increased significantly. Several factors led to an explosion in the size of the Yemeni community. Many men either brought their families from Yemen or married Yemeni women from the Old Country and brought them to the US. Yemeni-Americans also tend to have large families. Finally, the old tradition of Yemenis permanently returning to Yemen was altered by economic and political hardships in their country of birth.

Perceptions of Home and Village

Yi-Fu Tuan in his seminal work, *Topophilia*, described the love that nonliterate societies had for their “home grounds.” In it, he wrote that such groupings of people reached back into their past by recognizing that history and loyalty are “made visible by

²³ Loukia K. Sarroub, *All American Yemeni Girls : Being Muslim in a Public School* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 35.

the monuments in the landscape”.²⁴ The vast majority of Yemenis who immigrated to the United States came from villages nestled in the undulating mountains of south Arabia. Their monuments are the terraced walls and the ancestral homes of the occupants that have lined the mountainsides for millennia.

The form and function of the home in Yemen have roots in antiquity. The great Caravan Kingdoms were supported by irrigated swaths of agricultural settlements and bolstered by tribal affiliations. Ancient Yemeni peasants formed the backbone that supported the vast network of trade. It was here that Yemenis learned the agricultural and irrigation techniques that they brought to the terraced fields in the mountains.²⁵ Today, Yemenis continue to use ancient methods of land cultivation on remote mountain terraces to grow the same crops that were grown by the ancient Yemenis.²⁶

The participants in this study were born into scattered villages in the highlands. Their homes combined agricultural, public, and private spaces. The terraced fields stretch back into Yemeni antiquity, and although in modern south Arabia it is normal to see cars ply the village roads, the fields are still plowed by animal power, connecting Yemenis with the land and their past. As Tuan wrote, “The farmer’s topophilia is compounded of this physical intimacy, of material dependence and the fact that the land is a repository of memory and sustains hope.”²⁷

²⁴ Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia : A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, Morningside ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 99.

²⁵ Lamya Khalidi, "Yemeni Heritage, Saudi Vandalism," *New York Times*, June 26, 2015.

²⁶ Schippmann, *Ancient South Arabia : From the Queen of Sheba to the Advent of Islam*, 84.

²⁷ Tuan, *Topophilia : A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*, 97.

In Yemen, nothing represents hope like water. Yasin was born in the small village of Nijdu Jimai in Ibb Province. Raised into a family whose patriarch served as *qathis*, or judges, or government officials, Yasin's lineage is one of social privilege. He described his memory of the water source for his large home:

... We have a *bier* (well) next to the house where the water would come. We would have our own water. To me it always [amazed me] how they filtered the water... how they made it, how when the rain comes down through the side of the house, the side of the building, and then it goes to a huge room right next to the house.²⁸

In a region where water is scarce, Yasin stressed the value of harnessing water through methods of water collection that trace their origin to a much earlier time. In addition, Yasin's house blended seamlessly the agricultural space and the home:

It is the house that we had our horses, cows, chickens, [which] they have on the bottom of the house. They have a *mudfen*, where they bury the food, the grains... We were so sufficient within the house.²⁹

Yasin recollected how the entry level of his home was part of the farmer's bounty. Houses in the Yemeni countryside are typically large to accommodate many family members. Hamza left Yemen when he was nine but he remembered how his family home in Milleh near Rada'a, housed the livestock:

I think the first floor on my right... had a big huge room for the cows. And then, there's another adjacent door toward that takes you to the outside, to the yard. It is where ... the donkeys and... the cows had a room inside, the first floor. And there was small little room, they kept like grass and stuff to feed the animals. Another room I think it was storage room.³⁰

²⁸ Yasin, interview by Kipp Cozad, 6/13/2012, WAV, Dearborn, Michigan, <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/44866>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

Hamza, like Yasin, came from a prominent family. Hamza's elders were Zaydi sheikhs in Milleh and many of his male family members were migrants. Both Hamza's and Yasin's houses reflected the connection Yemenis have with their ancestral land. Yemenis are not introduced to the rural space once they leave the home, but rather the rural space resides within the private living space. The bottom floors had the smell of barns. Cool and musky, these dimly lit rooms were the constant reminder of their rural surroundings.

Ahmed grew up humbly in the village of Manama in the green mountains of Ba'adan in Ibb Province. Ahmed's father, who died when Ahmed was young, emigrated to France and later to the United States. Ahmed recalled his home in Manama along the terraced fields:

We grew up in a small house, not a very big house. It's a three-story house, but it's narrow. It's not as big. And, the first floor, we used to leave it for our cattle, for cows, and we have three donkeys, one donkey male, and two female. And, then, the second floor, we have, we had two bedrooms, one hallway and the whole floor. And, the other, the third floor, we had one which is a guest room. We call it *mufraj*.³¹

Despite being around fifteen degrees latitude, many villages in the central highlands are perched along mountainsides over 7000 feet (Figure 5). There, in *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah*, the winter nights got cool. While Youssef's father worked in an automobile factory in the Southend of Detroit, Youssef grew up in the village of Bala'a near the city of Damt. Residing near a spate of dormant volcanos, the cool winters necessitated natural insulation. Over the centuries, Yemenis designed their

³¹ Ahmed, interview by Kipp Cozad, 6/19/2012, WAV, Dearborn, Michigan, <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/44866>.

homes out of the materials in the surrounding landscape. Youssef described the process:

By the time I came to my age, you know, because the way the houses were built, stones from outside and then mud it from inside, there was no cement. So it's the mud inside and then they have what's called the *qus*...It's that white layer that you put inside and what that does because the mud it brings heat in the winter and it brings cool in the summertime.³²

These ancestral homes could be large in depth and breadth and also in height.

Frequently, subsequent generations would build additions to the home to accommodate a growing family. Hamza's ancestral home had two four-story connected houses that were known as the "higher house" and the "lower house".³³

There were as many as one hundred people living in his large house and Yemeni homes often housed multiple generations.³⁴ Large families and dwelling expansions reveal the value that Yemenis place in the ancestral home, the importance of family, and the static nature of Yemeni rural life.

For those living in large rural homes, each member had a status and role to play in the household. Yasin spoke not only about those in his house, but also his status within the family:

Each floor was determined for one of the children or for the family, and my father, being the oldest, we were privileged to have his quarters right next to his dad's quarters, my grandfather's daughters, so...we were like on top....³⁵

³² Youssef, interview by Kipp Cozad, 6/21/2012, WAV, Dearborn, Michigan, <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/44866>.

³³ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Yasin, *ibid.*, 6/13/2012.

Yasin's father and grandfather were important members of the village and their status extended into the private space within the dwelling. But each home also had a public role. Homes in Yemen contain rooms for social gatherings. Depending on a family's standing in the village, these rooms could hold dozens of guests. There are two names for these social rooms. If the room rests on the lower levels of a home, it is called a *deauan*. If the room resides on the upper level it is often called a *mafraj*. Each Yemeni-American shared that the home was as much a space for social activity as it was for shelter. Hamza expressed it best:

And people never stopped coming. I've never ever seen that house, that door closed. I don't even remember that it had a door that not only for the family, but anybody that comes to the village... People that didn't have food would be the first house to come to. So always -- it was always live.³⁶

The social interplay between villagers was an everyday occurrence. Though portions of the home were exceptionally private, necessitated by strict gender segregation in Yemen, *deauans* and *mafrajes* were constantly fluid with visitors. The primary role of these rooms was the daily *qat* chew, where friends and relatives would sit for several hours and consume the mild narcotic. Youssef shared how his family's *deauan* served two functions:

So my responsibilities was to round up the workers in the morning before I go to school, ...to make sure I pass their houses or call them, so they can wake up and come over our house for breakfast and prepare them so they can go to the farm and to perform whatever tasks that was supposed to do that ... we...have the *qat* .. you have to get the *qat* for your father and the workers and you go get it and you bring it back and then during the afternoon, you know, you do your homework at the same time you have people that come over our house on a daily basis, you know, for *deauan* or for *ghada* (lunch). I am responsible to get the water, to get the *deauan* organized and to make sure that people are comfortable when they come in

³⁶ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

and each one has a [bottle of] water in front of them and they have a glass and at the same time it's clean...³⁷

Women in Yemeni villages were to remain out of sight of male visitors. Though the women would prepare the meals, in most cases the boys were responsible for serving the food and making sure the guests were taken care of while they were present. Imbedded in Youssef's words is the prevalence of hospitality within the social fabric of Yemen. Hosts were obliged to make their guests comfortable, whether they were workers on the farm or distinguished visitors. Honor and hospitality were synonymous in the routine of social gatherings in Yemen.

Yemenis do not record many events. Until the post-revolutionary period, Yemen was largely a nonliterate society. Most agreements were oral and the more significant decisions were performed in the presence of a sheikh or other authority figure. Land sales were different. At least since the Ottoman invasions of the seventeenth century, Yemenis recorded the sale of land, as Hamza explained:

When you buy a piece of land or you inherit a piece of land it's recorded like a deed here. So it explicitly state who will inherit it from to who and it can go back to three or four, four, five generations. Also it's a story by itself. It's a history, when you read this, what they call *al fosl* in our local term, you find some even the dates it goes back. You know you read, they bought this piece of land for this much money and this date from so and so, who inherited it from so and so. And so who's related to so and so. And it's amazing.³⁸

As Hamza expressed, land ownership is closely tied to lineage. These documents testify to the importance of land and how it is linked to personal history.

Like the link between the Yemeni home and the rural terrain that surrounds

³⁷ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

³⁸ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

it, Yemenis maintain strong bonds with land, family, and neighbor. These bonds link the physical and social spaces. Yemeni associations are clear in the recollections of the villagers-turned-immigrants. The man-made monuments built by hand and expanded to meet the demands of a growing extended family are tied to the identity of the Yemenis who live there.

The Yemenis that immigrated to the United States had a keen understanding of the cultural formations and value structures that were foundational in Yemen. In a strong collective culture such as Yemen, Yemenis were tied to the rigid social classes of their birth and the strong religious code that ordered all elements of life. In the case of Omar, as he drifted off to sleep, it was the faith of his grandmother that he remembers:

She was always busy but one thing that I do remember very well is going to sleep while she's praying. So she takes a long time in praying while I'm already being asleep. And I remember having her turning on the *fanoos* (kerosene lantern), which turns on at night just so she, she can see. So that's, that's one of my earliest... memories.³⁹

In public spheres, boys accompany their fathers to the mosque throughout the Arab world. The image of a boy observing his grandmother in the near darkness of their village home represents the private role that women played in the religious socialization of young Arab males generally, and with Yemeni boys whose fathers were not present, specifically.

In Yemen, as in most Islamic countries, there is a rhythm of life dictated by faith. Muslims pray five times a day. The sound of the call to prayer that reverberates off the Yemeni mountainsides, and the stillness of the five periods of

³⁹ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

day that ensues, order the faithful. Within these interviews, it was obvious that the most influential model for religious observance was the family. Youssef understood, in hindsight, that religion is an unconscious component of his culture:

So when we talk about religion there was never an awareness like here in the U.S. that you have a religion, you have to understand what your religion is. We kind of grew up knowing we think it's part of life. We thought our own religion was our religion, you know, you never know any other religion and I think being when I first see my dad pray when I was little kid and I think the one that always drove us the most impact is fasting of Ramadan because who was man enough to fast [during] Ramadan, you know.... Yemen— was not as educated, you know, as structured to reach to that level— explain to you the reason behind each thing you do, from a religion point of view. It is just you do it because it is.⁴⁰

Yemenis experienced a lack of mobility in the mountain villages of Yemen. The insular nature of Yemeni rural life guaranteed that Yemenis had little opportunities to learn about different cultures. Even during the 1980s, when there was an influx of foreign instructors that ran rural classrooms, their teachers were from the Arab world. In addition, all of Yemen's peninsular neighbors are Muslim.

Yasin's grandfather was an influential judge and a learned member of the village. He was responsible for the sermons in the mosque. Playing both a judicial and spiritual role, Yasin's grandfather's house where Yasin grew up was often filled with people during *qat* chews. It was here that Yasin was exposed to the conceptualization of Islam:

He would start with the Quran and his whole *deauan* is full of people and it is expected every day. You start with Quran, then with *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Mohammed) educating the masses. Again, it was done in a way that no one even knows whether it has a meaning or not. If you go to chew *qat* in the *deauan* with *al-hakem*, this is what happened. I'm talking about our *deauan*, in my family... The

⁴⁰ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

upper of the *deauan* where is the judge is sitting in the middle almost the people who are sitting with him, the right and the left are the highest in the village and it goes on and on and on. Why would he spend all that time to talk so? ...I think it was a way to educate the people about his things.⁴¹

Yasin described the egalitarian nature of the meetings that took place in his grandfather's *deauan*, but at the same time, he revealed the hierarchical culture configuration depicted in the seating arrangement of those in the room. Many Yemenis at that time could not read, and through this narrative, he spoke of how these prolonged social gatherings doubled as rural educational and religious venues.

The Yemeni-Americans in this study spoke of the inevitability of the Islamic faith. The Yemeni narrative of a collective devotion is driven by the immigrant experience in America where many religions coexist. Non-migrant Yemenis would never use language in relation to Islam such as "you do it because it is." Ahmed explained:

Of course, we were born Muslim as you know and we're brought up Muslim...I remember, I grew up studying Quran and studying Islamic and we used to go to Mosque every day, five times a day. And, that's how I'm brought up, you know.⁴²

Though their faith was emphasized, each shared a common story about the limited role that sectarianism played in their village. Throughout Yemen, Zaydis and Shafi'is lived side by side for centuries in certain regions of the country. In most villages in *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah*, however, Shafi'is predominated. Omar did not even know of the difference until he was a teenager:

Well, we didn't have that kind of thing in our village, since we're in Ibb, so it was all Shafi'i, but I didn't even know that myself...until I was like 14 or 15, until I started to distinguish between Zaydis...Since they are in the north and then mostly

⁴¹ Yasin, *ibid.*, 6/13/2012.

⁴² Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

Sana'a and Sada'a, so we didn't really know the distinction, but in the village, I would say most of the people were on the Shafi'i *madhhab* (Islam school of thought).⁴³

Rural Yemenis did not understand faith through a sectarian lens. Children growing up in villages maintained geographic isolation and were rarely exposed to the varying religious practices that existed in Yemen. Ahmed reiterated the absence of sectarianism in his village:

There were some Zaydi who came later after I was growing and know the differences. At that time, we didn't know any difference between Shafi'is. All we know is Muslim. But, then one guy came and married a girl from a village and he came from al-Masharab. That's I think north of Sana'a. And, that's how we know he's a Zaydi. And, that's the first thing I hear between like Zaydi and Shafi'i. Other than that, we thought everybody was the same.⁴⁴

For Hamza, who grew up near Rada'a, a Zaydi region, his experience was similar. When asked about the social dynamic between Zaydis and Shafi'is he responded, "I know I never saw that. I never experienced it. I never really saw it as an issue then or even to this point over there in the village."⁴⁵ In many villages throughout *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah*, young Yemenis had few opportunities to learn religious identifiers. A lack of religious knowledge about sectarian groups in Yemen reveals the static nature of rural life.

In Yemen, many of the judicial families were Zaydis, even in the *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah*, however, Yasin emphasized why these judges did not rule from a specific sectarian position:

⁴³ Omar, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 2."

⁴⁴ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

⁴⁵ Hamza, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 4."

My own personal experience, I did not see any difference whatsoever and even in the justice system, most of the famous judges in Yemen are what you could say we know now are *Zaydis*, but their ruling was never across any secular schools or any particular school of thought. How would a *Shami* for example or a *Mutawakil* rule in *Ibb* or in *Sada'* or in *Aden* or in *Lahajj* because if they rule [on a sectarian basis]... the locals would not accept it.⁴⁶

Yemeni oral expressions of religious consonance project cultural harmony. These feelings of solidarity that existed in the villages throughout the Central Region, and Yemen at large, were vital to the kinship among Yemenis who were migrants in the United States. Where many immigrants from the Middle East are not only divided between sects within their own faiths, some like Jordanians, Lebanese and Syrians, for example, are also divided between different religions. The Yemenis were far more homogenous than many of their Arab neighbors in their approach to the Sunni-Shia divide and thus they are more inclusive in their dealings with one another within the diaspora. Yemeni diasporans have shown much more division between those that lived in the former North Yemen state and those from South Yemen.

The villages of Yemen possess a unique localized political arrangement that, in the post-revolutionary era, interacted more frequently with the national government. When the government from outside the village asserts their authority, they must always maneuver within the context of the local government that has existed for generations. Yasin, whose father served as a form of mayor explained:

... *Al-'adel* was a kind of appointed government appointee and a public elected official. This is the person that have knowledge of every person in the village. It is called *al-'adel*. Underneath *al-'adel* there was *al-aql* who was like...someone with

⁴⁶ Yasin, *ibid.*, 6/13/2012.

a higher status. He is not a *sheikh* and he is not a farmer or whatever...*aql*. This is a person who normally is a merchant and has money or have a larger tribe or somebody and, so the problems would be solved based in that structure. When the [non-tribal] government comes...when they send a policemen or somebody to look for something or there is an issue or they need to take somebody from the village back to the center. Remember, there is no center. The village is a self-sufficient...with an absolute local government.⁴⁷

Yasin noted that the national government is external, or as he says, “a government that comes to”, not a government that resides within, the village. Yasin described how for serious crimes, the *askeri*, or soldiers, were asked to intervene, and depending on the crime, the tribal government would request an official of a certain rank to serve as the one who brought the suspect to the central region for trial. Yasin spoke about how decision making was largely localized. He eloquently noted how there was no center; that the village was self-sufficient. Youssef articulated the point similarly when he said, “In our village, you know, it is more a group consultation...a number of people, they would make a decision based on what the complaints and the defendants have in their hand.”⁴⁸His words emphasize the insular nature of Yemeni justice.

Husbands and Fathers Abroad

Over the course of the last half of the twentieth century, Yemeni emigration rapidly undermined the traditional social structures within the Central Region of Yemen. Social scientists have addressed the economic impact of Yemeni males traveling abroad and sending their wages back in the form of remittances, but less

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

has been written about the social relevance of a patriarchal culture such as Yemen having so many of their adult males far from home. As Hamza recalled:

Well, my dad -- my dad when I was little he was in the States...I didn't have any real true memories of knowing him as a kid because he was here [in America] and work and supporting us.⁴⁹

The experience was similar for Omar who spent much of his early life separated from his father:

I didn't know much about my father. My father was here in the States. So he came in '86 and that's when I was conceived. And then... he went back before I was born so when I was born, he wasn't there. And then he came when I was about four or five... I do remember him staying for a couple of months, and then he came back here and stayed until I was 11. So, I didn't know much about my father.⁵⁰

Omar described how not having a father in his village was normal since so many children had fathers abroad. By the 1980s, Yemen was a nation built on emigration. Many of the villages, especially in *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah*, had significant populations of working age men living abroad. There were times when not having a father around was challenging; it was common for school age Yemeni students to ask a relative to stand in for their fathers.⁵¹

Though bolstered by the support of their extended families, mothers of husbands abroad played more significant roles in the lives of their family. In addition, the male children of families of absent fathers on occasion would have their masculinity challenged, as Omar related:

We had to learn manners and people used to say, you know, if you're not living in

⁴⁹ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

⁵⁰ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

...a house where there's not a father, you would not...be, like, a real man or something. But, my mother was... telling us about the things that we need to know... making sure that we do go to the Mosque or... we are doing good in school. Although she doesn't read or write but, she made sure that we are the best of the students in school.⁵²

Yemeni boys of migrant fathers were seen as privileged because there was a real or perceived stream of remittance money, as well as, an understanding that the future of sons of emigrants had a brighter future abroad. Any advantage that these boys gained in relationship to mobility was tempered by peers who often teased them for not being raised by their fathers.

Mothers, who remained out of public sight in Yemeni society, took on the roles of both parents in their husband's absence. Often overseeing large families, Yemeni mothers were the moral authority within the household. Hamza remembered how his mother took on the mantle of responsibility while Hamza's father was working as an auto worker in the United States:

My mom, of course, living with nine siblings, very strong woman, very outspoken, very courageous, worked hard. It just amazed me how much she endured; she went through a lot of things in life. And mind you that she's functionally illiterate or not functionally, she's illiterate in both languages. And to be able to raise nine kids and raised them very well.⁵³

Ahmed recalled the role that women played in their gatherings in his house as a child:

When I was in the village, I remember I was a little kid and a lot of people used to be in Saudi Arabia and emigrate, you know, from the village ... If we have a traveler going to Saudi Arabia. ...Our house used to be full of their wives coming to meet, to write letters to their husbands. I used to get a full house each time a

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

person is going to Saudi Arabia.⁵⁴

For some, extended family members assisted in the rearing of Yemeni children whose fathers were overseas. Hamza's uncle was his father figure growing up. As he articulated, "I felt he was the one that raised me."⁵⁵ In a society that values traditional familial roles, the immigrant experience broke down many of the social structures that existed in villages whose men were abroad. How rural Yemen was altered by the erosion of emigration-based gender roles is a viable topic for future research.

Perception of Migration

For families who came to the United States as chain migrants, many were keenly aware of the historical tradition of Yemeni migration. For over a century, Yemenis had trickled out of *al-Muntaqah al-Wustah* and made their way to Aden, and then to the West. Though modern migration was a common theme in their villages, Yemenis were aware of much older narratives of south Arabian migration. In discussion, Youssef shared his understanding of Yemeni historical mobility:

...we have been to Indonesia and created a society in Indonesia in the early days of Islam. We have gone to India and we've created a culture in India. We have gone to China and created a culture in China so the reflection that a Yemeni can be both [Yemeni and foreigner] is there and it is always that.⁵⁶

Though from the Middle Region, Youssef was cognizant of the Hadhrami contribution to Yemeni migration. For some, family oral histories included stories of relatives who immigrated abroad. Omar shared a cherished family account of his great, great grandfather

⁵⁴ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

⁵⁵ Hamza, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 4."

⁵⁶ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

who immigrated to France and then to the United States in the 1930s:

So, my grandpa's grandpa, kind of toured the whole world; he went to France... there is even a rumor that he got married in Egypt and had children, so we may have family there... He is...a celebrity in the family...It's a joke that he comes back home and then his son...who has lived in the village his whole life, ask him, "How's France?" And, then he, kind of, like stumbles and he's like, "How I'm going to tell him I'm right now that there are trains there, people, like living a totally different life than this one." So he was looking around in the garden and then he saw a really nice cow, he was like, "You see that really nice cow? That's what France looks like!"⁵⁷

Omar's family story reveals the historical connection the region had with migration to the West, the isolation that those who lived in the village experienced, and the disparity between the origin and the destination. Family members, who had relatives abroad, knew that they were in a favorable position. If you lived in the village, you had few options if you did not migrate. Without resources to start a business, Yemenis faced bleak employment options. With so much food being imported into the country and driving domestic food prices down following the revolution, Yemenis who made a living by farming found it harder to survive on crop yields alone. Youssef explained the value of his opportunity to immigrate to the United States, "It was always that dream. It was always that I know I have a guaranteed future because my father is going to take me.....we are going to America."⁵⁸

What awaited the young migrants, however, was largely an unknown. Living in the confines of the village meant understanding little of the outside world. Often, the image of America came in the form of a few photographs or the

⁵⁷ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

⁵⁸ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

unconnected stories that they heard from elders in the villages who had ventured there. Omar remembered:

The only thing I know about the States is through my friends. And...whatever people tell you. So, I was kind of anxious and excited to see what it is, the United States. I didn't even know how houses looked like. I only saw a few photos of my father taken by the "good" places, like the Ford Building...I was literally like, "Wow!" and I said probably my father lives in some kind of hundred-floor or something. So, it was kind of that view in my head about the United States.⁵⁹

It was common for returning migrants to embellish their experience while abroad. Though many immigrants struggled financially in America, they frequently obfuscated the truth from friends and relatives. As a result, some Yemenis had an unrealistic image of an immigrant's life abroad.

Yemenis living in the village maintained a high level of dissonance between home and abroad. Yemeni migrants received no social capital for displaying Western cultural traits, thus returning migrants from the U.S. retained their role as a Yemeni villager. As a result, migrants downplayed their American experience while visiting the homeland. Paved streets, high rises, two story homes, and lines of parked cars were alien images to family and friends living in isolated settlements. In some cases, relatives shared their experiences first hand and prepared impending travelers for the journey. Hamza came from a long line of migrants to the United States that stretched back to the 1930s. Hamza's uncle gave him a lesson in American culture:

I remember my uncle givin' me an orientation the night before we left, how to use a fork when we get in the airplane...He said, "You know, you're going to get a fork and knife and this is how you cut and this is how you eat. And if somebody gives you something, you say thank you. And if you want something you say please." So those two words I learned them from him. He really gave me a very nice cultural

⁵⁹ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

orientation that helped a lot...In the street with people they're wearing shorts or a woman wear a short, this is the normal thing. Don't be shocked. Woman wear bikinis. Woman don't cover their heads, beautiful, blondes, brunettes and he named them all...It prepared me for not to be shocked.⁶⁰

Hamza's uncle prepared Hamza for a world much different from the one he left. In the village, all Yemeni food is eaten with the hands and shared communally while sitting on the floor of a *deauan*. In almost all circumstances, adult females that are not members of the immediate family hide the form of their body and cover their face with a long black dress called a *lilthma*, and the veil, or *niqab*. Even schools, following the primary levels, were segregated.

Though his uncle explained a few of the cultural differences that Hamza would experience, nothing could prepare Hamza for the magnitude of the journey before him:

I thought it was, you know, being that young, I thought it was ...just like a family trip, you know, and you're going to come back and tell all of your friends and neighbors and your family members, you know, of all the wonderful stories. So I was imagin' what I'm going to tell them when I come back.⁶¹

Departure, Mobility, and Arrival

Coming from rural domains, many Yemenis experienced a profound sense of loss through the experience of leaving. For some, like Hamza and Yasin, the feeling of grief emerged with the understanding of the distance that they traversed. Hamza recalled:

When I was on that plane, I think ... it was from Cairo to London, it hit me just

⁶⁰ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

something just hit me just like, "Wow, you're not -- you're not coming back anytime soon." And I just start crying, you know. And my mom was next to me but I don't want to hear and see me crying. I don't want to stress her. But I was like, "Wow, you know, I'm never going to see these people again, my family and my friends, for a very, very long time, and it hit me."⁶²

Hamza was a child, but Yasin was a young man when he made the flight. His father had originally planned for Yasin to study in the UK, however a visa problem upon arrival in England forced him suddenly to change his plan and travel to the United States. Yasin's father had several political connections, and abruptly Yasin was on a flight to Washington, DC. He was gripped with the reality that no one around was speaking Arabic. At first, he tried to sleep away the feelings of alienation, but sleep did not come easily. When he jarred awake the full weight of the event washed over him:

All of sudden, without no interdiction or anything, or thinking about anything I start to sob...just tears and incredible rain of tears....couldn't stop, couldn't...and there was no nothing, just...I laid back a little bit and that just started. The lady next to me was stunned. Here is that person, when we got on the plane, I was smiling and...fairly very, very young man of course and friendly....hello, thank you and then all of sudden, just crying....not crying....sobbing really, really bad⁶³

Yasin's experience of loss was traumatic. Upon arrival in the United States, he spent the first cold days in a hotel room at Christmastime, a holiday he knew nothing about. In addition, for the newcomer, the immensity of the American city was an intimidating experience. There were many foreign expats in the neighborhood where he stayed in DC which added to his disorientation. The driver

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Yasin, *ibid.*, 6/13/2012.

that took him to the hotel advised Yasin not to go anywhere. In addition to the sights and sounds of the city, there was a tremendous amount of snow on the ground, something completely foreign to a Yemeni:

I have never been into snow in my life. I have just a total disorientation. The second day into it, I haven't eaten anything. I have a few waters and stuff that I took from the embassy, that is all I have. So I was like, I went down, looked outside, walked upside down and I have a suit and tie on me, that is it, my shining shoes that is it. Don't have an overcoat, didn't have anything, I was just walking up and down. First thing, I sat my foot at the snow and just did this, like weeeeeeee and it was a curve like this, remember there was a small Lebanese grocery store, still exists today, and I just like slided, vewww, all the way, right to the store. See what a coincidence and then he was like, Oh!!! WATCH IT, WATCH IT, WATCH IT, the guy from behind the counter...in Arabic!!⁶⁴

On a cold, snowy Christmas Day in 1981, Yasin found comfort in the Lebanese Arabic of a DC shop owner. Most of the Yemenis that came to the United States entered regions that had harsh winters, like Buffalo, New York, Dearborn, Michigan, and New York City. American winters required cold weather clothes that were unknown in Yemen.

In addition to the climate, Yemenis experienced landscapes quite different from those they had seen in their homeland. Youssef recalled his earliest memories of Dearborn:

There wasn't the smoke of the cars in Sana'a, you know. You know, that smell of the smoke is not there. It is cleaner air if you compare it to the city, but we never... the heat was different. The trees, they were so green in streets when you go out. The houses are so small when you compare it to back home... The air itself, we didn't recognized that we are able to breathe, it was not that. It's a cleaner air, there is no dust⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

For Yemenis who replaced their rural surroundings with urban America, there were inherent challenges that came with mobility. For those like Youssef, whose immigration experience was softened by living within the Yemeni diaspora in Dearborn, the availability of Yemeni food created a sense of the normal. Youssef remembers the first time his brother took him to eat fast food:

When we got home, as soon we got home, we ate normal Yemeni *ghada* [lunch] which is *aseed*⁶⁶ and *khobz* [bread] and normal Yemeni dinner or lunch. I think we just crashed because we couldn't sleep on the plane. I think next morning we got up by four in the morning. We were up and my brother took us to McDonald's and he gave me a Whopper and I could not stand the smell of ranch (dressing). I still remember that burger till today. And I am looking at it like what are you giving me? There is no way I am going to eat this thing. What the heck is this? You know. This is supposed to be one of the best thing you can eat in America. Okay, let's go home and eat *aseed*.⁶⁷

As with all people, food is associated with home. The flavors, smells, textures, and presentation carry with it a memory of origin. Nothing in the Yemeni cuisine binds the Yemeni to the land like *aseed*. It is humble peasant food and served at almost all occasions. Despite eating Yemeni food at home, Yemeni-Americans negotiated the American diet when at school. Youssef continued to struggle with the food once he started school:

I think it's the type of food that you are fed at the cafeteria. We could not eat them in the first few weeks, there is no way. I could not eat that food...Even the milk. Only the Pepsi, we loved Pepsi. I think, you know, and french fries, that was it. Two things that we fell in love with from day one. But no ketchup, no ranch, no

⁶⁶ Aseed is a traditional Yemeni dish that is made with flour, butter and water that is mixed into a firm paste and has the consistency of mashed potatoes. It is usually served with a broth in the center. Served very hot, asseed is traditionally eaten communally with your hands.

⁶⁷ Youssef, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 3."

burgers, none of that stuff. Those were not in our books.⁶⁸

For the most part, Yemenis eat the same foods each day. Only during festive occasions, such as Ramadan, do Yemenis serve special dishes. Conditioned to a simple healthy diet, new migrants struggled with the complex American diet.

The simple components of Western culture such as using eating utensils provided an obstacle for Ahmed in those early days. He remembered how when he was staying in the hotel between flights to the US, the hotel restaurant served them rice. “We didn’t know how to handle fork and knives after the village. So, we were leaving the forks and knives, and used our hands.”⁶⁹ Ahmed remembers thinking that America had such abundance that all the trees he saw along the highway were fruit bearing trees.⁷⁰

Yemenis not only had to adjust to a new diet, but they also altered the size and makeup of the house. In Yemen, villagers lived in large homes with many members of their extended families. In America, they often lived with just their immediate family. Hamza discussed how he felt about the adjustment:

I thought that was in heaven even though it was smaller than the house in Yemen but, you know, I had my own room. I thought, you know, what a luxury, electricity, 24 hours, TV, a bed. It was like...being homeless, in a sense, a homeless from the street as living in the tents and putting ‘em in a four-star hotel, you know, that’s loud, you know, I loved it. I loved it.⁷¹

What amazed the new Yemeni immigrants was the technology within the home.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Hamza, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 4."

Hamza spent hours taking hot showers as he related, “Over there, we were so, you know, everything was [rationed], everything was, you know, very small amount, didn't have pipes, didn't have shower, didn't have, you know, running water.”⁷²

For all migrants, language was an obstacle. Ahmed, who had a wife in Yemen and was expected to provide for her through remittances, began work without the proper language skills. During the first day on the job, Ahmed's new boss sent him out to buy a carton of cigarettes. Neither knowing the neighborhood nor the language, Ahmed got lost. Confused by a bank elevator that he believed would take him to a shop, building security and the police soon began questioning him. He did not speak enough English to communicate properly, and when a Lebanese policeman arrived, Ahmed became angered when he misunderstood a Lebanese word to be an insult:

And, then, thank God, they had my address in Hamtramck in my wallet as in a piece of paper. And, I told him, “I live here. Take me home.” So, and then he took me home the same night. And, then the guy was waiting for the cigarette. And, then my brother, when he saw the cops, brought me home. He got scared. He thought I was...God forbid something happened. And, then when he asked me, “Why you came here? We left two hours ago. What are you doing? You're supposed to be here, to be working until 1:00 a.m.” Then I started crying. I said, “I have to study English.”⁷³

Ahmed's experience describes the level of confusion that American urban geography could present. In addition, his experience reveals how Yemenis struggled with the Arabic of non-Yemeni Arabs as a result of their exclusivity in the mountains of Yemen.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

Yemenis who came to America as adults struggled to learn English.

Typically, they remained isolated within the Yemeni diaspora and, without formal education in America, rarely put themselves in a position to speak English. Joining the workforce often forced Yemeni males to improve their conversational English, but inevitably their reading and writing skills remained negligible. Yemeni adult females who migrated to the US through marriage, in particular, remained far more secluded in their role as mothers within the diaspora. As a result, they had limited contact with the non-Yemeni-American population and spoke exclusively in Arabic.

The American public school system served as a means to overcome language barriers for those who came to the US in their youth. All Yemenis lived in isolated enclaves where they spoke the Yemeni dialect. Even among other Arab students, Yemenis would need to alter their conversational Arabic to communicate with fellow Arabs. Two in this study began their education at schools that had few Arabic speaking students. In the case of Omar, his best friend was a non-Arabic speaking Arab-American:

I went to a middle school in Detroit, Phoenix Middle School, and I would say that I had no English, so the first two months that I spent there were also very memorable because they put me in a class for the ESL, and there was no single Arab student in the school except one who spoke no Arabic. He was my buddy. He kind of spoke two words or three and I used to hang out all the time with him like during lunch What helped is that also my father was talking in English to me at home...but it was difficult days because sometimes I want to say something and they can't understand me, so like,— to the point where some days I would go home, when I am gonna understand, you know?⁷⁴

⁷⁴Omar, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 2."

In Yemen villages, the only language spoken was Arabic. Following the revolution, English became a core class in the public education system but, like French in America, it was rarely heard outside of the classrooms. In addition, those who taught English in Yemen had a marginal understanding of the language. Yemeni children, who were thrust into American schools, found an alien environment. Youssef began school with almost no knowledge of English. He not only struggled to communicate, he also had to negotiate the geography of the large school:

I was lost, the school was just—whoa, this is school, you know, back home the school was so small, it was a village school, right? And I got lost going to classes. I do not know how to get to classes, you know, and even though the teachers spoke to me in Arabic and there was students there that spoke Arabic, you still felt lost, you know, so that first day, all I remember is coming in from the bus, going to the office with someone, going back to a class in the second floor. That's all I can recall from that and then going to the bus, somebody taking me to the bus because I was totally lost.⁷⁵

Hamza, like Omar, went to a school in Detroit away from the Arab enclaves. He was put into classes with American students where no one spoke Arabic. Furthermore, the traditions were different in America. Hamza shared that it took a few months to learn the basics, “like ask for permission, how to raise your hands, how to go to the bathroom, how to walk home”.⁷⁶ Western methods of social interaction are more formal. The idea of standing in line, for example, is not something Yemenis do readily. Yemenis frequently struggled with these nuanced cultural differences.

⁷⁵ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

⁷⁶ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

The Yemenis who immigrated to the United States came from a homogenous culture. Though there was a miniscule number of Jews that resided in Yemen, they were more of a curiosity and few Yemenis came into contact with them. For the vast number of Yemeni migrants, their understanding of the Western world was limited to the stories of those who had lived there, or the few glimpses they had from Yemen media. Yasin shared his experience of living with an Iraqi Christian for months in college without realizing that he was not Muslim. In an awkward exchange, Yasin's roommate waved his crucifix at him to reveal to Yasin that he was Christian, but Yasin had never seen a crucifix. He believed that his roommate was just waving a gold necklace, so in a gesture of solidarity, Yasin waved his gold necklace. "I thought he was showing me the gold. To me... *Wallahi*, I swear to Allah, [the crucifix] did not mean anything."⁷⁷

For Yasin, the crucifix that his roommate waved at him was not religious but cultural. In Yemen, gold was given as a safety measure to redeem for cash when times were difficult. Yasin's young life spent in Yemen did not prepare him for the religious pluralism he encountered as an international college student in America. Although Christianity existed in Yemen during the medieval period, no legacy of Christianity remains among the Yemeni people today. In the way that Yasin did not know the basic icon of the Christian faith, Yemenis have little understanding of non-Islamic religions.

⁷⁷ Yasin, *ibid.*, 6/13/2012.

Maintaining a Yemeni-American Diaspora

Yemeni origins in the United States were strongly rooted in the concept of the sojourner. Most Yemenis, who worked in the auto factories in Detroit and Dearborn or ran a small grocery store, believed that one day they would return to Yemen and live out their days in the ancestral village. The sojourner ethos remains a strong arbiter of Yemeni cultural formation in America. As sojourners, Yemeni-Americans retained the cultural practices of the homeland, and as a result, they identify far more with the traditions of the homeland while living abroad than with their host country. Omar discussed how the Yemenis were successful at formulating a Yemeni social construction within Dearborn:

[The Yemenis in America] also built their own culture here, what is norm in Yemen may be not [be the] norm here and the otherwise ... When they come here, they face a lot of things, especially thinking that their children might be kind of dragged to the mainstream culture or for a better term, Americanized. So they try to keep the religious aspect and the family aspect in there and...going to Arabic school here in the weekends, just to keep that family in that roots that you are still a Yemeni. So they face...lots of issues and it is not only us, it is all the other [Arab] communities, but I think for the Yemeni –Americans, they have been the most successful ones because once they start kind of settling here, they would build their own school and try to kind of plant the Yemeni-American ... My wife ... she came from Yemen. She was four but she speaks a kind of the Yemeni dialect, like a person who was just raised in Yemen, so her parents were very concerned and very cautious about not letting her only learning English, in the same way now it's coming with the next generation.⁷⁸

Omar stressed that Americanization can be a threat to the identity within the Yemeni diaspora. Many Yemeni-Americans, especially when socializing the girls within the community, instill not only the Yemeni value system, but also the retention of the Yemeni

⁷⁸ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

dialect across generations. In order for Yemenis to be a viable member of the diaspora, they must maintain these strong cultural ties to the homeland. As more Yemenis brought wives and daughters to America, they tightened the cultural rules around upholding female virtue. Along these lines, Hamza asserted that the evolution of the Yemeni-American community from sojourner to settler status provided a justification to limit the assimilation of the population:

Out of my own experience, since I lived in the '60s, '70s and '80s. First they were males, single males, pretty much saving money and supporting their family back home. But they were able to integrate with mainstream [America]. They were able to mix in. It was easier for them to assimilate with others. And they paved the way for other generations. But I see that big difference. They were actually assimilated. If you could see old pictures, you see their dress code. You see them wearing three-piece suits. That was a part of their wardrobe. The whole feature is different. Come early '80s, mid '80s, that shift changed.⁷⁹

The emergence of the settler ethos in response to familial immigration, in many respects, slowed Yemeni-American assimilation.

The Yemeni-American community grew significantly as more families settled in the Detroit/Dearborn area. The growth in the Yemeni-American population created a larger diaspora at a time when other Arab groups relocated to other, generally more prosperous areas within Dearborn, as Yasin shared:

...Twenty years ago this same street that we are in right here [Dix Avenue], you would see Lebanese, Palestinians, and Yemenis in the same neighborhood. It would be like an Arab enclave, right here. What has happened is because of the psychological isolation that we are going through, we are moving farther from each other. So right now, in Michigan you have small Yemeni enclaves and then you move down a couple of streets or maybe ten or fifteen minutes down and here is a Lebanese enclaves.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

⁸⁰ Yasin, *ibid.*, 6/13/2012.

The migration of other Arab groups out of the neighborhood, and the Yemeni growth within it, provided the space whereby Yemeni-Americans could reside without requiring its diasporans to come into contact with non-Yemenis, as Yasin explained:

So, if I stay right here, [the Yemeni gentlemen that owns a store below me], I can tell you with confidence that him and his family, other than his kids going to school and coming back, they absolutely, positively do not live in the United States...That is the mosque (pointing out the window). This office used to be the consulate, right here. That is the school where the elementary kids go (pointing out the window), they walk and ninety-five percent of the students are Yemenis. So there is absolutely, positively nothing American in here. All of his clients are Yemenis. If you go to the restaurant right now, people will come and look at you. What is this white guy doing in here?⁸¹

Despite there being a greater Arab-American presence in Dearborn, each nationality maintains a distinct diaspora in the area. The Yemeni-Americans, because of their unique cultural identity, remain more isolated in their enclaves than other Arab diasporans. Yasin shared that the Yemeni-American youth whose parents keep them isolated within the enclave will go to American schools and learn English, but their socializing will be from within the Yemeni-American community:

...let's take the educated. The educated, because of the total social and political isolations, I didn't say educational because most of them go to school. Cultural and social isolation, they learn from their dad. The kids downstairs that you see, though they are born and raised in this country, they are exactly a copy of their dad. That is all they know and a copy of their mom. Though they are going to graduate, get degrees...Their focus is not wide it is that closed, that's it.⁸²

Yasin was critical of the Yemeni-American construct of cultural exclusivity in the United

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

States. He argued that the more conservative a Yemeni-American is in terms of abiding by strong Yemeni cultural norms, the more the community accepts him or her.⁸³ Omar suggested that these behaviors have deep psychological and cultural roots that the migrants bring from the homeland:

Yemenis usually bring a lot of kind of luggage to the United States, both kind of psychological and cultural, and also kind of tangible things, so, same way going back, but yeah they want to actually clone the [Yemeni] lifestyle there, here. They went to the point where they want to be the same, but they want to have money.⁸⁴

Omar's point accentuates the fact that most Yemenis living in America are economic migrants. Increasing personal capital has always been the driving force behind Yemeni diasporas since ancient times.

One component of American culture that Yemenis embraced was capitalism as it applied to employment and labor. Yemenis originally came to the United States to improve their economic standing; therefore, work is a valued endeavor within the community. Ahmed began working at Chrysler in 1976 and improved his English while gaining promotions:

I was assembly line for what, 16 years. And, then, they transferred me to a different plant in Sterling Heights and, then... I knew English back then... Then, I knew people in...the union and knew people in the management...I double your post as a guide and I got it. I got the post. And, I'm known of people and I was a coordinator for the ESL classes to place inside the plant for the Arab...to have them read the signs, computers. And, then I was later on appointed as a PQI, Products Quality Improvement Coordinator. And, thank God, I was there until I got my 30 years in to 2008. And, I took the early retirement...⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

⁸⁵ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

For many Yemeni-Americans who worked in the auto factories, their lack of progress in learning English prevented them from being promoted, and in some cases, resulted in layoffs.⁸⁶ Even within the egalitarian climate of the American factory workplace, most Yemeni-Americans struggled to integrate to a level that would improve their economic situation. Ahmed, however, is an example of the successful contemporary Yemeni-American settler. As he retired from Chrysler, he did not take his earnings and return to Yemen. Instead, he started his own business on Dix Avenue.

In addition to work, Yemeni-Americans embraced education in America. In Yemen, public education emerged following the revolution of the 1960s. Despite the desire of all Yemenis to be educated, the resources in Yemen limited educational effectiveness. Since most immigrants to the US came from the countryside, their learning was hampered by poor instructors and impoverished schools. Most Yemeni-American head of households realized that education in America led to financial reward.

The American school, much like the workplace, is exceptional in its egalitarian quality. As discussed above, school was where most first generation Yemenis acquired their English language skills. Despite the fact that there were many opportunities to interact with various groups of people in school, most Yemeni-Americans preferred to associate with other Yemeni-Americans. Youssef explained how there was so little interaction between Yemeni-American students and whites that friendships or rivalries did not occur:

There wasn't that sort of interaction that can explain to you animosity versus friendship... We dealt mostly with Yemenis within our groups. We played in some

⁸⁶ Ibid.

sport teams. I ran track and I had no issues. I mean at the beginning of the first year, to be honest, two months from April to June, not much can happen within two months for newly students. At that time, I didn't recognize what is a white, we knew they were Americans, we call them Americans, "American" you know, and we were supposed to be Arabic and that sort of thing. There wasn't that interaction that can tell me he is my enemy versus he is my friend, you know, as far as the white students. But there was that within us, within Yemenis, I can tell who my enemy versus who was not was.⁸⁷

The idea that Yemeni-American students called white students Americans suggests that Yemeni-Americans either viewed themselves as not American or less American than their white counterparts. Identity labeling in this way harkens back to era of the sojourner Yemeni where conceptions of a settler status were not well established. It also presents the Yemeni-Americans as outsiders. Omar explained that the division of groups at school was not only between Yemeni-American and white students, but there were also divisions between the Arabs at school, and even among the Yemenis themselves:

...When I got there it was kind of the Yemenis go especially during lunch in one corner and you have the Lebanese who speak Arabic strictly Arabic, the newcomers and then you have the people who are born here in one areas so it was very discriminated and I think it is until today...⁸⁸

The Yemenis who came to school as new immigrants suffered not only language challenges, but also because of their social and cultural naiveté, were labeled as "boaters" or "*bahria*". As Youssef reiterated, the new immigrants formed their own groups and faced a lot of bullying from those Yemenis that were born here:

We had harder time dealing with our own type than actually others...If you just came they called you a "boater", and I think that was a very offensive term and once somebody called you that name, it's a fight. The only thing that settles it. And

⁸⁷ Youssef, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 3."

⁸⁸ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

I think that was the power struggle, you don't call me a "boater", and...how do I get away from this group being called a "boater" and try to merge into the other side of the aisle. And I think that's where we seen that they had more power than us. It's because of English capabilities⁸⁹

The term "boater" has its origins in the days when Yemenis plied the seas and worked in the stoke holds of ships. The Arabic word, *bahria*, means one who is out on the sea. In contemporary Yemeni Arabic, however, it refers to someone who is new to the United States. Though there was tremendous pressure within the Yemeni-American community to follow traditional ways from the Old Country, there was also an oppositional force that encouraged Yemeni-American youth to lose the naiveté that came with being a new immigrant and learn the English language and acceptable American ways that allowed one to fit within the new environment. For Youssef, the Yemeni-American experience of being looked down upon because of the limited time one had lived in the United States extended beyond school and melded into home life:

...My nephew...on my brother, my brother's son, is older than me and my uncle's son, they were here from the age of three and four. They were the other side of aisle to me. They looked at me different whether it is from home or school, just because you just came and they call us "boaters". It carried over when we go home. We talk but we have it, you know, it's a battle and it is always that way.⁹⁰

For Yemeni-American girls, the greatest amount of freedom existed within the public school setting. In Yemen, most girls did not complete high school and in the countryside it was even rarer for girls to attend school past the sixth grade.

⁸⁹ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

There, the purpose of an education was to increase their value as a potential bride, as well as to acquire the basics that would help in early childhood development. In many families, a girl's education ended when puberty began.

In the United States, the expectations for Yemeni-American girls were higher. When Yemeni-Americans began the move from sojourners to settlers in the 1980s, more and more Yemeni women began residing in the Yemeni enclaves around Detroit. The alteration of the gender demographic complicated the patterns of settlement among the Yemeni-American population and often threatened the social expectations within the diaspora.

Loukia Sarroub in *All American Yemeni Girls* explained the complexity of Yemeni girls who attended high school in Dearborn. She described Yemeni-American girls as living in “suspense”.⁹¹ In many families, endogamy is commonly practiced. Yemenis frequently marry their cousins. As Yemeni-American girls negotiate public high school, some are already married, while those who are not are expected to marry soon after they finish secondary school. Sarroub, through the eyes of one Yemeni-American female student, assessed the challenges that Yemeni-American girls face as they live between the American and the Yemeni spaces, “She was a Yemeni Muslim, and her Muslim space, governed by ritual and sanctioned practice, permitted a view of the world that was not always satisfying to a young adolescent girl with dreams for a bright future and with exposure to

⁹¹ Sarroub, *All American Yemeni Girls : Being Muslim in a Public School*, 30.

alternative images of what she could become".⁹² Much of that which was not satisfying rested in the fact that Yemeni-American girls are often expected to give up their personal aspirations when they get married. Frequently, their families have aims for them to marry men from the family village, and oftentimes these men are their cousins.

Omar discussed his attempt at moving away from the traditional pattern of marriage when he fell in love with a Yemeni-American girl in school:

For me, it was kind of difficult, because I didn't know if I should go back or I should just pick a girl here. When I went to high school, there was a girl that I liked and she was also Yemeni and— but at the same time, her parents thought that she has to get married to her cousin back home, so it ended up that she married her cousin back home...⁹³

Traditional Yemeni social forces are very strong within the Yemeni-American community. Yemenis are expected to show reverence for their parents whose wishes often override personal freedom. The conflict between individual choice and the collective will often collide in the United States. Yasin came alone to the United States, thus the direct pressures of the family were not present throughout his experience. He strayed from tradition and married a white girl that he fell in love with while attending college. Though he kept close ties to the community and to this day serves as a leader in the diaspora, Yasin lives outside the community. As for the others in this study, they all married either Yemeni or Yemeni-American girls.

Each participant in this study discussed the challenges that arise when Yemeni-

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Omar, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 2."

American girls marry men from the homeland. Ahmed explained:

Some boys, they rather to married girls from Yemen so they can keep them in the house, you know, that there are tradition in Yemen. They didn't know the difference. And, some girls, they rather to married Yemeni-American rather Yemeni from Yemen. Why? Because they're brought up different here. They have a mentality different. If they married a boy or a man from Yemen and bring him here, I see a lot of divorces unfortunately, because the boy that want his wife and his mentality like the wife in Yemen. And, she was born in America. She wants to eat once a week out. She wants to go with her friend once in a while. She wants to go shopping. It's not a bad thing to do, but this is how she's brought up. And, sometimes, she wants to pursue her education, you know. And, some husband do not like that end up in divorces when there are already kids in the middle. And, unfortunately, the kids will pay the price.⁹⁴

It is through the practice of marriage that the Yemeni-Americans solidify the Yemeni space in America. As Ahmed stated, Yemeni-American men require their wives to replicate the gendered behaviors that exist in the Old Country. When Yemeni-American men marry women from Yemen, there are rarely challenges to these expectations. However, when Yemeni-American women marry men from Yemen, there is frequent disillusionment on the part of the Yemeni males. As Omar explained, "they have totally two different views of the world.... usually, the marriage ends up in divorce because the reason for the marriage in the first place is not only to kind of renew the identity but also to bring the other spouse here."⁹⁵

Arranged marriages are a traditional practice within Yemeni culture, blending the reverence for elders with the Islamic demand for procreation. For young Yemeni-American females who were raised in the U.S. and marry Yemeni

⁹⁴ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

⁹⁵ Omar, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 2."

men from the homeland, divorce is a serious problem. Once divorced, the community puts intense pressure on women to remarry. As women relent and remarry, marriages often crumble, as Omar shared:

I know many who are in the same status, you know, they find once they get divorced they're only kind of choice is to go back to Yemen and get married again, you know, because that's where they can be accepted because here... a guy who is his first time, he would want to get married to a girl who is her first time as well so, kind of creates that issue for them so it's a huge decision for those girls who go back and get married there.⁹⁶

As girls see the possibilities of life in the United States, it is they who are challenging the traditional conservative structures of the diaspora. Yemeni-American men realize that if they want to preserve the classic sojourner ethos, it is easiest done by marrying women from Yemen. Youssef vowed that he would not marry a girl from back home, like all of his friends did, but when he put the responsibility of finding a suitable partner in the hands of his female cousin in Yemen, he acquiesced in maintaining the bond between new land and old.⁹⁷

In the case of Omar, he followed the tradition of many young Yemeni men. After losing the girl he wanted from high school, he left the decision of whom to marry to his mother, "...She wanted a religious girl who would live with us, so in the *masjid* she kind of encountered this girl and then over time she kind of introduced herself to the family there and then we went to the family there and then

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

we went to ask for her hand.”⁹⁸

Although Omar did not marry a woman from the homeland, his wife was raised in a protected environment that strongly favored the values of Yemen, but like situations that occur in all American homes, the younger siblings were allowed greater freedom within the family.⁹⁹

Yemeni culture in America is cemented through marriage and occurs in the processes of mobility. In occurrences of endogamy, the construct is not focused merely on Yemen but is localized to the very village where the couple originated. The familial connections, dialect, traditions, cuisine, and expectations are all reformulated in America in a way that shields the settlers from the American culture. The process of endogamy also ensures that members within the family will have the opportunity to gain American citizenship and further the economic viability of the extended family.

For Yemeni-Americans, ties to the village are further bound through investment. Especially for first-generation Yemenis, the tradition of expanding land ownership and making structural improvements serve as a means to link their two worlds. Omar explained that after his family was expelled from their ancestral home before he was born, and his family moved in with his grandmother, they began to use the money that they made in the United States to improve the dwelling:

And, the house, is like, it built so many memories...in our backyard it's, very

⁹⁸ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

small apple tree and now it's like huge, as big as the house. So, I took the picture while that apple tree was as tall as like one feet. So, it's...a great picture and it reminds me of like how we started so small and then we built a big house... It was kind of, one of the best houses in the village, it has a *deauan*, it has a *muffraj*, even it has an outside kitchen.¹⁰⁰

As Omar recounted the improvements his family made to the house, his exuberance is obvious in the narrative. Though now a settler, he replicates the sojourner ethos by detailing property through memory in the Yemeni domain.

Not all Yemeni-Americans are determined to focus their economic energies in the village of their birth. Omar explained that Yemeni-Americans were challenged by their dual identities:

The one challenge is being stuck in this world of, you know, Yemen and there, and might be an issue because we don't think of, should we expand more here or should we expand more there, and we kind of stuck in the middle, but I think we have figured it out that we have to expand here more and then once we are in a better shape we can help the other side.¹⁰¹

With Omar suggesting that investment should begin in the U.S., he is asserting the settler ethos. By deciding that it is in their best interest to maintain more of their capital in America, Yemeni-Americans are consciously choosing to become permanent members of the Yemeni-American diaspora.

Over the history of Yemeni migration to the United States, Yemeni-Americans used the concept of the sojourn to experience the comforts of their investments back home, as well as to maintain their strong Yemeni identity while living in a Western environment. When the Yemeni-American community was

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

made up primarily of males, sojourners would work for several months in the US and then return to Yemen for an extended stay until their money ran out and then they returned to America. Omar recounted how his father would return to Yemen and reconstitute his identity in the homeland, and how he learned the value of returning to a Yemeni identity on his sojourns:

...But when my father comes [to the Yemeni village], he kind of, like transforms himself into the Yemeni guy. So, if he goes to the... marketplace or to *souq*, and people would not notice that he's been to the States...so, it happens even with a lots of people, you know? They start dressing the *thobe* (white robe) uh, the *mesheda* (male head scarf)... when they meet strangers, they don't want to be viewed as Americans because some people might try to take advantage of you. It even happened to me when I went back in '03... I kind of was like dressing nice and I went to the *souq*. I was asking them how much is this? And he gives me a really high price. So, the next day, when I go back, I'm just going to be normal.¹⁰²

For Omar, to be normal meant to be Yemeni, which suggests that despite the attempts of Yemenis to limit the influence of American culture, their new homeland was altering the way they saw the Old World.

For Yemeni-Americans, these return journeys to the homeland were a vital component of their transnational lives. Once Yemeni-Americans began bringing their families to America, the return became an essential cultural element for their children who were born in the U.S. Sarroub, evoking Benedict Anderson, referred to the land of the second generation immigrants as their "imagined homeland".¹⁰³ These extended trips, which I label as heritage sojourns, worked to connect the cultural construct of Yemeni-American life with its origins. In cases where Yemeni-American adolescents became either

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Sarroub, *All American Yemeni Girls : Being Muslim in a Public School*.

too Americanized or practiced behaviors that were outside the bounds of appropriateness, which might include drinking, drug use, fraternizing with the opposite sex or run-ins with the law, they could often expect their father to send them on an extended heritage sojourn where the stimuli for culturally deviant behaviors are non-existent.¹⁰⁴

Yemenis that return to Yemen on extended stays reenter the world of the familiar.

This is especially true for the first generation as Youssef explained:

As far as current Yemeni-American, you know, immigration—I call it migration—not immigration—it is, how important is it for them to go back if we are talking about their personal sense perspective makes you...creates a value inside of you that tells you, you are so valuable because when you go back home, you find that there are some people that are so eager to see you so you can say, wow, go away from all that life in the US, that you are an individual in the US. You are not an individual here in Yemen. You're one of a group, a group that really, really, really values your presence.¹⁰⁵

He contended that when an immigrant returns to Yemen, he has money which represents success. He argued that when he returns, he is always thinking about how he can assist the village and be a positive force with the wealth he had accumulated in the United States.

Ahmed initiated a heritage sojourn with his daughters in 2010, where they went to his ancestral village for the very first time. Ahmed shared the emotive nature of the visit as he toured the geography of his youth:

They've been in Yemen before, but they ... never had the opportunity to go to the village, to Ba'adan . And, when we went to Ba'adan and then down to Wadi Shinasi and they saw this beautiful views and beautiful scenes. And, then we got to

¹⁰⁴ The author spent a day with a high school graduate from Dearborn in his ancestral home in the Middle Region of Yemen. During the day, the young man revealed his prom pictures, pictures of his many Western girlfriends and one picture of him drinking at a party. He had had a run-in with the law and his family promptly sent him on a heritage sojourn to his ancestral village.

¹⁰⁵ Youssef, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 3."

Manama and then I showed them...“Well, where is your room, you know, Baba? And, I told them. But, that house looks small and old and very, very old to me in my eyes. Can you imagine to my daughters who have never been there? But, it was a very unique moments when I was there. I cried, you know. And, I went to *mafraj* and I saw the window at the back to see all the way to Wadi Shanasi...But, then we moved to another village, Warafat, with cousins and we stayed there. We ate *ghada* (lunch) there and then they saw the chickens, the donkeys, the dogs ...and they saw this beautiful garden of *khokh* which is peaches, apples, *qat*. They loved it. They went to the roof. And, these, they saw these beautiful scenes around them and they loved it. They loved the village. They don't wanna go back to Sana'a. We stayed there one night and we have to go back to Sanaa.¹⁰⁶

In telling this story, Ahmed revealed not only his daughters joy in the moment of return, but also his own. The language Ahmed used revealed his love of the homeland and their preference for the village over the city.

Hamza described the significance of Yemeni-Americans making the sojourn visit to the homeland:

I think that Yemen, it holds a special place in every Yemeni's heart, mind and soul. It is just the history, everything about it. It is identity, it is who you are. And no matter what generation you are, you always want to go to Yemen. You hear so many stories, so many things that you never ever imagined. So you want to see, you want to feel, you want to be part of what everyone has been telling you since you were an infant about this Yemen, this place. So it is who you are, it is identity, like it is part of you. No matter how much acculturated or assimilated you become, Yemen would always be part of you and that is what any Yemeni would tell you. Even if they don't go. If they never had the opportunity to go there, it is always a part of them, as part of their identity.¹⁰⁷

When Yemeni-Americans visit Yemen, they do not work. It is a time to

¹⁰⁶ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

¹⁰⁷ Hamza, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 4."

reconnect with family, socialize, and return to a Yemeni identity. In this way, the visits are leisurely, as Omar explained:

Well it's mostly the culture there and the people. Once you go there, you are being receptive and you're being welcomed and kind of also the weather and the green land and living a totally different experience. It's like a vacation land for you.¹⁰⁸

Omar's idealized perception of Yemen is not uncommon. Yemeni-Americans proudly reminisce about the homeland, and once in Yemen, the heritage visitor also idealizes America. It is common for Yemeni-Americans during their visit to Yemen to downplay or even dismiss altogether the hard work they do in America and exaggerate their life in the States. In addition, the Yemeni tradition of hospitality warrants the traveler to spend lavishly on gifts prior to the visit and exhaust their savings while in Yemen to host large *qat* chews and feasts.

Since the 1980s, the purpose for the return visits has changed. In the past, Yemeni-American males would return to Yemen to visit their wives and children, the immediate recipients of their remittances. With their families in the United States, Yemeni-Americans return to Yemen less frequently.

Hamza articulated how changes in Yemeni migration patterns along with international politics altered the nature of Yemeni-American settlement.

You see the whole family unit all of a sudden being together [in America] which means that there is going to be less visiting Yemen for the male because their immediate family is here now... So that shift changed in the mid '80s. There are a lot of families starting to reunite in the '80s. And the Gulf War also played a major role. A lot of [Yemeni] families that were expelled from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf also find their way to America or through marriages, or what have you. So it grew

¹⁰⁸ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

dramatically from the mid '80s up to the '90s.¹⁰⁹

Less money shifted from America to families in Yemen as a result of more Yemeni-Americans choosing to remain in the U.S. This choice increased capital among Yemeni-Americans, but has severely damaged the remittance-based economy of Yemen.

During the period when Yemenis were predominately sojourners, relocating the family to America was discouraged. Youssef explained that economic and political reasons have altered these barriers:

At that time when I was a little kid it was a shame to bring your wife to America. What is wrong with you? What are thinking? She is going to make you take her to America? There was always that way, you know. It is not that anymore, you know. I want my kids with me. I want my wife and kids with me. And the rest of the family should respect that. That is one thing and I think the second thing is that the immigration barriers to keep your family there and you are here and all of that and come back and how much does it cost to come back? ... And now the last few years, I think, that terrorism...that is up in the air over there, you know, how it is said, why go through the headache, why am [I] going to be questioned every time I go, I travel, just bring my family here and done with it.¹¹⁰

With the advent of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula functioning out of Yemen, the American government views Yemenis and Yemeni-Americans with more suspicion. The complexity of mobility, as Youssef expressed, makes being a Yemeni transnational difficult. For many first-generation Yemeni-Americans, like Youssef, the US has become a comfortable place and returning to Yemen for a visit has become more laborious:

¹⁰⁹ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

¹¹⁰ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

I give you an example. I think the second generation is more eager to travel to Yemen than the first generation that came, because the first generation kind of got tired of it. I already have enough of it. I have already gone through the ups and downs and the pain of being in Yemen. I don't even want to go back...¹¹¹

Even older Yemeni-Americans, the vanguard of those who practiced sojourner activity, are finding their idyllic notions of retiring in Yemen on their expanded estates and with their pensions from the auto factories, less attractive. Youssef shared his experience with his father in mind:

The older generation that wants to go and retire, they usually go to Yemen. But you know, once you get older, your needs are more, as far as you want adequate healthcare, you want peace of mind. So they go to Yemen and stay three to six months, and you find them coming back because they don't see the services they were expecting. Yes, the currency exchange is a lot better for them. They have money but they don't have a good access to health care which is very important to them so you see them coming back. A lot of them are coming back and a lot of them come back and settle for good. So that is the big shift.¹¹²

As political and economic conditions deteriorate in Yemen, Yemeni-Americans are deciding with more frequency to settle permanently in the US. With their immediate family now residing in the American diaspora, Yemenis are making choices such as going to college or becoming merchants that bind them to a future in America.

Despite the fact that Yemeni-Americans within the new settler structure have limited the influence of American culture, the growth of the diaspora is producing second and third generation Yemeni-Americans that are tied more closely to an American identity than their parents and grand-parents. As Hamza

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

articulated, education is the driving force behind assimilation:

Well the community still stays together, but it depends on how long you have been here, or which generation you are. If you are second generation, you are slowly already assimilating to that path of individualism by nature. You are already educated. You have a job. You are too occupied. Maybe your job requires you to move from outside the community or outside the States. So by nature you are already deviated from the community. Where on the other hand, you still have people in our community that still believe in stay with the family, stay within the community. So you still see two, three people in the family staying together in the same house. So it depends, it depends on your level of education, it depends on their employment status. It depends on how long they have been here. These are all factors.¹¹³

Omar described how Yemeni-American women in the US are frequently discarding the conservative fashion demands of the homeland for styles that are more fashionable among Arabs in the Southend, and only return to it when they travel to Yemen:

Here [Yemeni-American women] are...more comfortable to just wear the *hijab*. Some still keep the *niqab* which covers the whole face, but here they are comfortable because in Yemen there is a bad habit of men staring at women, especially if she is not covered...that's why Yemeni-Americans, you know, they may wear the *hijab* here and then when they go there they start wear the *niqab* because they don't want the attention and this is the whole purpose of the *hijab* is to not have the attention...¹¹⁴

Like all adults who struggle with the younger generation, Ahmed was frustrated with how Yemeni-Americans born in the United States fail to observe the most sanctioned of traditional culture—the greeting:

Yemeni-American who were born here as a second generation, they are changing. They don't have...to be generous...like a person came from Yemen. They lose that. The respect and value, they lose that, too. I'll give you an example. If you come to my house and...I'm sitting here...and you walked in, you say, "*Salaam Alaikum*," I would say, "*Wa Alaikum Salaam*." Then, I'll get up and I'll let you sit in my seat and I would offer you a drink. Now, a person who lives here, who was

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

born here and brought up here and if I go to his house and say, “*Salaam Alaikum*,” he would say, “*Wa Alaikum Salaam*” and he’s facing...the TV set with the remote in his hand. He will not get up from his seat and let you stay and sit in his seat. He will not offer you a drink. That we were losing ground there. Generosity is not there like...a typical Yemeni.¹¹⁵

These aberrations of social etiquette are rare. As young Yemeni-Americans mature and become adults, they take on the accepted behaviors of their parents. The glue that binds most Yemeni-Americans to strong social traditions is the practice of Islam. Most Yemeni-Americans that are born in the US spend some time in Islamic school where they gain a stronger understanding of the Arabic language during Quranic study and attend services at the local mosque. Omar maintained that Yemenis in America are more attached to their faith while living in America than they are in Yemen:

[Yemeni-Americans] think they are gonna lose [their religion] and that’s why they bring their children to the *masjid* and even the ones who...are not too religious and don’t pray often, they want their children to be religious and they don’t want them to pursue the same way. In Yemen, it’s kind of like, you gonna leave your kids to school and the school will teach them everything. But here it is different. You have to take that responsibility and you have to teach your children manners, the Arabic language, and the Quran and it’s kind of you take that on your own and that’s how I see them more actually attached than they are in the village...¹¹⁶

Whereas Omar discussed how the practice of Islam helps define the Yemeni-American identity in America, Youssef understands that religion is not only an alien faith to many Americans, but to some in the modern climate, it may be seen as a threat:

I have to practice in such a way that doesn’t bother [a Westerner] who is my neighbor and he is Christian. Being able to get your religion to adapt to that level where it’s comfortable for [a Westerner] to see me come out of my house, my

¹¹⁵ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

¹¹⁶ Omar, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 2."

shawl and walk on and he is reflecting on to what I have and telling me, Happy *Eid* or Happy Ramadan, I think...is huge. Back home, they do it without understanding how does it fit others...And also that, you know, like they say a Muslim is a better Muslim in a non-Muslim country than it is for one when you go back to a Muslim country.¹¹⁷

Hamza also believed that freedom of religion in America gives the Muslim the breathing space to define his practice, compared to the pressure Yemenis face from societal forces in the village:

I think practicing Islam in America make the person, the devoted Muslim, more devoted Muslim in America because they are not influenced by what the government is telling them or how to practice or how to pray, or who is going to come to preach, what is in control of the mosque. They are devoted based on their beliefs, in what they believe. And no one is telling them or influencing them to do it differently or by force. I think, and maybe a lot of people will disagree with me on this, I think back home you are almost pushed, or not necessarily pushed, but you are more influenced by everything that surrounds you. You are not freely practicing the way the individual and the Mighty or Divine should have been. Everything is orchestrated. Everything is directed by other forces over there. But here you know, you, you practice freely, you practice calmly. No one gets in your business.¹¹⁸

With the growth of the Yemeni-American community, the diaspora carved out sacred spaces that are attended exclusively by those in the community. A clear example of that is the Dix Avenue Mosque. Despite the growth of Yemeni-American enclaves in the past four decades, many Yemeni-Americans are moving outside of these boundaries. Three of those in this study live beyond the traditional boundaries of the diaspora. Yasin, who married a white American, lives in Ypsalanti. Youseff, a successful businessman, moved into an upper middle class neighborhood in southwest Dearborn, away from the classic Yemeni enclave. Omar, Hamza and Ahmed all reside in predominately Arab East Dearborn.

¹¹⁷ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

¹¹⁸ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

Many Yemeni-Americans have chosen to reconstitute a part of their American homes so that it mirrors the Yemeni social gathering space of their prior lives. It is here that we return to the home, that sacred space where land, family, and community meet. In Yemen, social rooms are called *deauans*, but Yemeni-Americans also use the traditional Arabic word *majlees*. As Ahmed described, the *majlees* have cushions on the floor for visitors along with the modern trappings of technology:

It looks like *majlees al-Arabi* (*Arab sitting rooms*),... We sit it every Friday, but because I'm leaving to Yemen, I told the guys until I come back. But, every Friday... my friends come from Hamtramck and from Dearborn, the one we usually sit every Friday in the *majlees*. We have the big screen TV. We have the dish. We have the Yemeni... satellite. We have... a new smart TV we just bought... and, a lot of entertainment downstairs in the basement... with the receiver, with the speaker to the ceiling... And, yeah... That part in the basement remind me of a *majlis* in Sanaa...¹¹⁹

Ahmed's description of this room represents the value of possessing a home abroad. Yemenis throughout Dearborn/Detroit replicate these Yemeni domains to recreate a space where they can be completely at home. It is common for Yemenis in the Southend to smoke the *mada'a* (water pipe), dress in traditional Yemeni clothes, and on occasion, chew *qat* in these rooms. In effect, these rooms create an authentic Yemeni space in America. It is in the *majlees* where the feelings of being a sojourner are the strongest.

The Yemeni *majlees* are distinct from other Arab sitting room designs. It tends to have pillowed armrests, and unlike most of the Arab world, is void of a center *maeeda* or small low-lying coffee table. As interior design scholar Cherif Amor states about the appearance of Yemeni elements in the home such as *majlees*:

¹¹⁹ Ahmed, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 5."

they “evoke a sense of history, symbolize the enduring values of the group, and, above all, constitute an illustrative model rendering the Arab-American Muslim home a place apart from the adopted society”.¹²⁰

Each of the Yemeni-Americans interviewed spoke of their young lives in Yemen with fondness, with the spirit of topophilia. Though the ties of family, friends, land, and experiences are evoked through memory, Yemeni-Americans continue to reproduce their past in the present through cultural formations in America. Each participant articulated their connection with their adopted country and the manner in which it intersected with their Yemeni identity. For some, like Youssef, identity formation reminds the historian of the original purpose of why Yemenis first came to the United States:

I think my career as an American. I think of my life, how I want to manage it as an American. I think of how I want to prepare for my kids as an American and I think of how I want to live as an American. I think and when it comes to thinking about how I want to manage my family in that little circle I want to have both but it is a lot more Yemeni.¹²¹

For others, like Omar, Yemeni-Americans negotiate the cultural elements that are not a threat to the constructions within the diaspora. His connection to his country of birth and his adopted country is largely defined by the amount of time he allocates to communication outlets:

I think I see myself, like if I take one day of my life and see how much Yemen is affecting my life and how much the United States is affecting my life, I see myself following what is going on in Yemen, what’s going on problems in my city, in my village, more than what’s is going on in Dearborn or what’s is going on in West

¹²⁰ Cherif M. Amor, "Arab-American Muslims' Home Interiors in the Us: Meanings, Uses and Communication," *Journal of Interior Design* 32, no. 1 (2006): 1.

¹²¹ Youssef, "Cozadyemeni-American Interview No. 3."

Dearborn. But I still follow Yemeni soccer, but I also at the same time follow the NBA and I follow hockey and football, too. I root for the Detroit Lions...I wanna see what's gonna happen in American politics...the American mainstream media—watching it sometimes and then flipping back to Yemen TV and seeing what is going on.... I stopped watching it after the revolution and I just communicate in forums and view news websites...I would think that I feel myself more Yemeni because of how Yemen and who I am affects myself, but I do believe I am a full American as well.¹²²

Hamza, who is the most acculturated of the participants, shared how he embraced both identities:

I think I can be as Yemeni as you can be and, in the same token, I am as American as Joe Smith in North Dakota. And I think it is a blessing too because you know both, and not a lot of people can say that. And I take pride of that because it is a great thing to have.¹²³

As the Yemeni-American community struggled with the backlash of September 11th, their social construct within the diaspora served as a reminder of their identity as the “other”. The US government made it much more difficult to bring relatives into the country, while even husbands and wives were separated for years as they awaited reunification. Prior to the conflict that began in 2015, some Yemeni-Americans, while visiting Yemen, had their passports taken and citizenship called into question by the US government, further alienating and frustrating the Yemeni-American population within the United States.

Despite the tendency of Yemeni-Americans to associate almost exclusively with other Yemeni-Americans, they have no problem articulating their loyalty to their adopted country. Omar was open in comparing the disparate situation between

¹²² Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

¹²³ Hamza, *ibid.*, 6/19/2012.

his old homeland and his new one:

Being an American is kind of being in the place where it's leading the world so it's like we really have to make a change in our communities and also affect the other communities. So I take pride in what the Americans do, especially in the areas of science and technology and advancement... Ya, but I see being like very lucky to be American, to be living in the First World and when you see the other nations who are still getting their... footsteps into the First World... they are still Third World and being very poor, you feel very fortunate to be in this land. ¹²⁴

Youssef was more analytical when he addressed his understanding of being American:

I can go back and list the nationalistic reasons behind it, but I think it's the American lifestyle, American ingredients that are built within me that we have always heard it through our education... What is difficult for me right now, as an American that is from Yemeni descents is how I can sustain the same perception of an American in front of my Yemeni society? ¹²⁵

Youssef is clear on how his upbringing in the United States has influenced his acculturation; however, it is clear in his statement that the most important element of his cultural identity and belonging is how he is viewed by those within the Yemeni diaspora.

Despite recent developments and challenges for the Arab community, the Yemeni-American population continues to grow and evolve. Though Yemeni-Americans are more conservative in general when compared to the other Arab-American communities throughout the Detroit-Dearborn area, and they acculturate slower, the Yemeni-American population has changed. It is common to see Yemeni-American doctors, pharmacists, factory workers, dishwashers, and gas station attendants in the coffee houses and *majlees* throughout the Southend. In

¹²⁴ Omar, *ibid.*, 6/26/2012.

¹²⁵ Youssef, *ibid.*, 6/21/2012.

addition, the colleges are filled with attentive young Yemeni-American women studying a variety of subjects or occasionally working in storefronts along Dix Avenue.

CONCLUSION

Yemeni immigrants to America communicate with an Arabic dialect that retains components of the ancient south Arabian language, value the maintenance of the extended family, are descendants of farmers who practiced terraced agriculture with beasts of burden and age-old irrigation techniques, and eat food that is original to Yemen. Though Islam and modern capitalism play a significant part in the identity of the modern Yemeni diasporan, the historian must peel away these elements and look to the ancient past to understand why the Yemeni community abroad tends to be different than their Arab-American neighbors.

Similar to the outlying nature of their villages, the Yemeni diaspora in America is structured as an isolated entity designed to retain the culture of the homeland. During the 1980s and 1990s, as more Yemeni families settled in the U.S., the identity of the diaspora became more representative of Yemeni culture. In this way, as it pertains to the Yemeni experience in America, mobility produced a greater measure of stasis.

Recent events suggest that the trend of a settled Yemeni diaspora in America will continue. In the summer of 2015, Yemen was a closed nation once again. The republican experiment ended and a neo-Imamic, Iranian supported group known as the Houthis seized most of the country. Saudi Arabia, along with a Sunni Arab coalition, routinely bombed strategic targets throughout the country in an effort to weaken Houthi gains. In addition, Yemen faced a virtual blockade. Due to the effects of war, few Yemenis deemed it safe enough to leave and even fewer entered from the outside.

Around the world, Yemeni diasporans watched their homeland deteriorate in the midst of bombing, internal violence, and lawlessness. Yemenis, accustomed to mobility

and the act of the sojourn, were forced to remain abroad, in some cases separated from immediate relatives. As Yemen fragmented along sectarian, regional, and political lines, so too did the Yemenis living outside of Yemen.

News and communication, the latest agent in the story of mobility, reached those of Yemeni dissent almost instantaneously. Houthi assaults, Adenese street battles, Saudi airstrikes, and failed peace talks appeared on homemade videos and cell phone photographs across social media and Arab news outlets. Images of the conflict from Yemen prompted discussions and opinions throughout the diaspora, dividing Yemenis abroad in the same way that events were tearing the country apart at home.

Missing in the narrative are the thousands of Yemeni-American sojourners who returned to Yemen and resumed their lives in the mountain villages of *al-Montaqah al-Wustah*. As their nation descended into chaos, there was little outlet for their voices to be heard. With memories of working in the automobile factories, living in North American urban landscapes, relaxing in Dearborn coffee shops, and experiencing Californian rural valleys, undoubtedly, many wish to return to the safety of the United States.

The long term effect of the current conflict on Yemeni society is difficult to predict. Since the late 1980s, the Yemeni diaspora in America evolved from a predominately sojourner population to a majority who have decided to stay. There is little doubt that the current war will create a more settled Yemeni-American population: there currently is no possibility to return. In addition, the war will produce a new type of migrant: refugees. Refugee based migration would establish members of the Yemeni diaspora who are less likely to be chain migrants, and thus will require more support from governmental agencies. These migrants might also fit into the sojourner ethos; many will desire to return

to the nation that they did not intend to leave once the fighting stops.

This study on the *longue durée* of Yemeni mobility is in no way complete. I only touched on the Yemeni diaspora in the Indian Ocean. In addition, there are thriving communities of Yemenis living on mainland Europe. With an extended oral history project that includes these populations, I could research in more depth the role that Yemen's pre-Islamic past plays in diaspora creation and the development of the modern Yemeni identity. By investigating how older Yemeni diasporas in India, Indonesia, and Britain have evolved, I would advance an understanding of the development cycle of Yemeni diasporas, especially as it pertains to the comparatively youthful Yemeni communities in America.

In the United States, I interviewed only five male members of the Yemeni-American community in Dearborn/Detroit. By extending the oral history project to include female members of the diaspora, and broaden the research to include Yemeni-American communities in Buffalo, New York City, Oakland, as well as nascent Yemeni-American communities that are growing in the American south, a detailed analysis would shed light on the future of Yemeni migration in the United States.

Finally, during my time in the remote area of Ba'adan, Yemen, in the late 1980s, I recall a day when a solar eclipse darkened the village. The locals began burning objects such as tires while the imam of the mosque chanted a series of passages from the Quran over the loud speaker for the duration of the natural phenomenon. For a few moments, the normalcy of rural life was thrown into a fit of superstitious ritual. It was clear to me then, as it is now, that these performances harkened back to a much earlier time. Though the language that bellowed from the mosque was unquestionably Arabic, this tradition reached

back into ancient south Arabia. Within the area where so many migrants left to seek their fortunes in the belly of British ships and the factories in Detroit, traditions of a past that stretch across the *très longue durée* endure.

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VITA

Kipp Cozad grew up in Liberty, Missouri where he attended Liberty High School. Kipp spent his entire professional career in education. He holds a bachelor's degree in education from UMKC. After receiving his bachelor's, Kipp served two years in the Peace Corps in the Yemen Arab Republic teaching English to village secondary students in Ba'adan, a remote area of Ibb Province.

Following his stint in the Peace Corps, Kipp worked at the Plaza Academy for 20 years as a Social Studies and lead teacher in Kansas City where he taught students with learning disabilities and social disorders.

Kipp began working on his master's in history in the fall of 2009. With his experience teaching and living in Yemen, Kipp focused his course of study on mobility within the Middle East and Yemen. By completing this thesis, Kipp left the door open to continue his studies toward a doctorate degree. In January 2013, Kipp began working at Moraine Valley Community College as the Tutor and Literacy Coordinator. He aims to pursue work as both an administrator and history instructor while continuing to write, research, and speak about Yemeni and Middle Eastern history, culture, and politics.