

Power, legitimacy and sovereignty in Hadramawt, Yemen

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This thesis is submitted for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy.

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It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the social dynamics of political and social life in the Yemeni province of Hadramawt, focusing specifically on Wadi Hadramawt. This location is known for the strong presence of the sada social class which comprises the religious elite and which, through the use of land control and deployment of implicit and explicit violence, often by proxy, dominates this valley. By unbundling the various strategies used by whole social classes or tribes and families within them, the dissertation identifies the tools deployed in securing a favourable social position in the context of three competing systems of governance – state, religious and tribal.

The first section of the dissertation focuses on the most powerful tool, the ownership and control of land. By controlling land and entering into share-cropping agreements, the sada can easily influence the behaviour of the public under the implicit threat of being allocated a less fertile piece of land, thus severely decreasing the harvest and putting one at risk of falling into poverty. The tribes then use the control of land both as a basis of their identity and a way of securing a living and influence for themselves. By facilitating smuggling through their territory, they can earn significant amounts of cash, but more crucially they are likely to be seen as an entity worthy of being incorporated into the state - sponsored patronage system.

While the sada possess access to sources of funds and the tribes' control of territory is based on armed capability, both of these classes rely on legitimacy and the signalling of their status in order to subjugate the population and avoid violence and potential revolts. To this end, a number of social norms are observed which serve to maintain the status quo through relatively peaceful means, although always under the implicit threat of violence. These include a strict observance of the kafa'a, a concept of marital equivalence which is designed to keep the Prophet's bloodlines pure and extend to the cultural and intellectual arenas, which are a part of the public relations machine indoctrinating the Hadrami population.

The efforts extended by the sada would be complicated without the support they receive from the diaspora. By remaining a coherent and cooperative group, the sada have managed to increase their influence and maintain a strong link between the homeland

and the diasporic destinations. These links allow them to survive at times of peril, as was the period of Marxist rule between 1967 and 1991, and to withstand other less severe crises. In contrast to the behaviour of the sada in the diaspora stand the actions of the other social groups which, due to differing incentives, tend to disassociate from their kinship groups in the homeland and thus weaken them.

The last two sections of the dissertation focus on the changing role of the tribes, their post-Marxist revival and the involvement of armed nonstate groups in governance. These armed nonstate groups, most notably Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, have found a utility in the political landscape of Yemen and their local perception reflects this as it significantly differs from the international one. As such, the group's takeover of the Hadrami towns of Mukalla and Al Shihr between 2015 and 2016 was not seen as disastrous by the local population and the organization appears to have considered itself to be a legitimate sovereign ruler. The dissertation concludes by exploring the possibility of effective governance by a militant nonstate group and whether this might constitute a fourth pillar of governance in Yemen.

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INTRODUCTION

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Over the past century, the social, political and religious structures in what is today the Republic of Yemen experienced a number of shocks. These events, ranging widely from improvements to infrastructure, peace initiatives leading to an increased cooperation between tribal units, influx of cash from the diaspora and most significantly ideology-driven regime changes resulted in significant alterations to the hybrid governance system present in Yemen before, during and after these exceptional events. This dissertation explores the use of political agency through an analysis of the tools and strategies deployed by various social groups in the province of Hadramawt in order to establish whether forms of legitimate authority have changed or been resilient, since the unification of Yemen in 1990.

1. Location, environment and history

The province of Hadramawt is the second most eastern region of unified Yemen. It is bordered by Al Mahra in the east, Shabwa, Marib and Al Jawf in the west and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the north. Hadramawt very nearly borders Oman as well, with its north-east corner placed some 200 meters from Oman. Being the largest province of Yemen, it covers almost 200 thousand square kilometers of land although in the past, the area was even larger, encompassing all the neighboring provinces and roughly covering the land that would later become known as “South Yemen”. The modern-day demarcation coincides with the territories claimed by the Kathiri and Qua’ity sultans who semi-governed the province until 1967. After the abolition of the sultanates by the authorities of the People’s Republic of South Yemen (PRSY), which later became the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), the region was renamed “Zone 5” as part of a set of policies designed to reset the social and political order in the area.

The removal of tribal names and re-naming of places and institutions with inherent symbolic value was intended to help the transition to a classless society.

The province is sparsely populated. According to 2011 census, over 2 million individuals resided in Hadramawt. These individuals occupy three distinct areas of Hadramawt: the Coast, the most urbanized and developed part of the province, which includes the towns of Mukalla and Shihr, both with vital ports, and extends into the Hamumi tribal territory; the Wadi, an area including the urban centers of Seyiun, Tarim, Shibam, Al Qatn and extending through Wadi Do'an to the border with Shabwa; and the Desert, which includes plateaus that morph into the Empty Quarter and consists of inhospitable desert land inhabited by Bedouin tribes. The only permanent town-like settlements in this area are Thamud and Rumah, although they are little more than trading outposts and service stations located on the Shihr – Tarim road. For administrative and military purposes, the region is divided into two “Military Districts”, which are often used to indicate location. The first district covers the Wadi and the Desert, while the Second military district covers the Hadrami Coast.

The society of Hadramawt is shaped by its environmental conditions. For a large part, Hadramawt is an inhospitable desert, where concentrated effort is needed in order to produce sustenance. While on the coast, fishing is an option, in the hinterlands of Wadi Hadramawt and beyond, cultivation of crops requires careful planning, development of agricultural infrastructure, especially wells and dams, or control over large areas of land where animals graze low quality forage. Consideration of these conditions is crucial to the understanding of the Hadrami society, the value it places on land, and the migration from Hadramawt. Hadramis have migrated in such large numbers that their society cannot be properly understood without its “satellites”, diasporic destinations that shape and influence the life in Hadramawt itself. The main diasporic destinations of the Hadramis enjoy environment very different to that of the homeland itself – both East Africa and Southeast Asia are locations with generous rainfall where the likelihood of survival is significantly higher than in Hadramawt of the past.

position of the diaspora to where it became an active part of the domestic politics. Events in Hadramawt would echo in East Africa and across Southeast Asia, while conflicts occurring there would have real consequences for Hadramis staying in the homeland.

The ongoing civil war, which started with the Houthi takeover of Sana'a and the consequent flight of President Abdurabbuh Mansur Hadi to Saudi Arabia in 2015 is the most recent chapter of the Yemeni and Hadrami history. This period of instability and failure of the state to deliver services expected of it, at least in the limited fashion of the pre-2015 times, led to a social and political shakeup which is useful for uncovering the intricacies of political and social life in Hadramawt, but comes with the tragic cost of nearly 400 thousand dead, both direct and indirect victims of the conflict. Even though the conflict touched Hadramawt in a number of ways, the province saw very little active combat and serves as one of the locations receiving internal migrants.

2. The multiple governance systems in Hadramawt

Governance and the ordering of public affairs in Hadramawt are the result of interaction between multiple governance structures, each with its own legal system and enforcement mechanisms. The state is the most conventional governance structure, officially relying on codified law and institutions tasked with enforcing the rule of law. However, Yemen uses an altered version of a democratic process and largely ignores the norms and regulations usually self-imposed by states. This form of state is reliant on patronage networks, co-option of local strongmen¹ and the state's leading figures are often heavily involved in illicit activities. To represent the state translates to access to foreign funds, lucrative diplomatic posts for kin and members of the patronage networks, and to a number of other benefits. Prior to the civil war which started in 2015, the state possessed overwhelming enforcement tools, including heavy artillery and air force, not to mention the ability to exchange information on militant organizations for

¹ Brandt, Marieke, 'The Irregulars of the Şa'dah War: 'Colonel Shaykhs' and 'Tribal Militias' in Yemen's Hūthī Conflict (2004–2010)', in *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, SOAS Middle East Issues, July 2014.

advanced military equipment and other forms of assistance further strengthening the position of the state.

Given that the power of the state is backed by its ability to enforce the directives of the officials running the state's government, the option of selective enforcement allowed the Yemeni state to appear in charge. There are multiple ways of achieving the goal of enforcing policies and not all of them are violent, but the state must have the threat of violence at its disposal in order to make the lesser and softer means of enforcing its will credible. Up until the start of the current conflict, the state possessed the most advanced means of enforcement in the country, but it had to carefully choose the locations in which it would deploy these tools out of fear of spreading its resources too thin. This situation is altered by the ongoing civil war, but the fundamentals remain the same – the state needs to pick and choose its battles and rely on other parties establishing the rule of law by obtaining a monopoly on violence, with or without the assistance of the state. As alternative governance structures in Hadramawt are parallel to the state, they do not need to scramble to create rules and institutions in situations when a governance void needs to be filled, as these institutions have long complemented the state's governance efforts.

The parallel governance structures interact and intersect with the state on a regular basis. These systems, one tribal and the other religious, have their own institutions and means of enforcement and in certain locations, their power supersedes that of the state. The sheikh al mashaikh, or paramount sheikh or a tribal confederation might have as many men at his disposal as the entire Yemeni Army and it is in no one's interest to attempt to compare which armed force is superior. Similarly, every statement made by the leading religious figures, whether Sufi, Zaydi or Salafi, needs to be read as a political proclamation as these individuals are religious actors as much they are political ones. Each of these three structures relies on its ability to enforce its will but is mindful of the cost of direct physical involvement. Instead, they rely on their legitimacy to achieve their goals.

As I will show in the following chapters, each governance structure bases its legitimacy on a different source. For the sada, lineage and learning are paramount on the outside,

while an influx of funds from the diaspora greases the wheels; the tribesmen present their control of territory, their ability to act violently and point to the 'urf, a tribal code of conduct, to make the case for their legitimacy. The state claims legitimacy based on electoral victories, but supports its claim by the provision of public services. What all the governance systems share is their reliance on the use of symbolism and public relations for the purpose of extending the tenure of its leading figures while keeping all kinds of costs minimal. The state does so by appealing to the national pride of its citizens, but its efforts are largely unsuccessful as the desirability of the state system is only as large as the benefits it provides to its citizens. The message of national pride and unity fails as it needs to compete with symbols of familial and religious nature, which are closer to the everyday existence of a Hadrami citizen. The tribal and religious figures and their institutions rely on social custom and historical precedent to signal to their followers and wider public why they should be entitled to their privileged positions. In doing so, they amplify and exaggerate the achievements of their predecessors and attempt to dominate the public sphere. As the state is the most recent addition to the governance system of Yemen, and still seen as a foreign concept by many, it needs to borrow elements of legitimacy from the other two governance systems. Therefore the Republican state has been very active in sponsoring the tribal and religious elites in exchange for support or at least the lack of undermining of its rule.²

3. Sovereign or ungoverned and its parallel in scholarship

Every square centimeter of the Earth's surface falls under some sort of a regulation and nearly all the land mass is administered by sovereign states. Disputed areas may fall under the rule of two or more parties, but unclaimed land is exceedingly rare. The regulation of rights within a given territory is commonly ascribed to states, which are seen as the basic administrative unit capable of possessing sovereignty and having a legitimate claim to external representation of the individuals inhabiting the territory. The international reliance on the state is understandable given the simplicity of such an ordering and the historical context in which the countries establishing the system were

² Alley, April Longley. "The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen." *Middle East Journal*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2010, pp. 385–409.

typical nation-states. And yet, reality on the ground is often different to the legalistic appearance of the state. For many societies located in developing states, the external representation does not reflect the internal situation, where the struggle for supremacy and sovereignty continues.

A contrary perspective is the repeatedly debunked myth of ungoverned spaces. To call a location “ungoverned” suggests that the only way for a location to have any sense of order is if state authorities administer it. Such designation disregards the manifold other actors who might be ordering public affairs in a given location and completely omits the possibility of alternative political orders in which the governance is fluid and does not rely on centralized administration. Where the state fails to provide security, judicial services or education, other parties are compelled to fill this void, thus de facto taking on some of the roles of the state and in some instances, replacing the state altogether. In doing so, they attain legitimacy which can then be translated to real power rivalling that of the state. Despite being seen as legitimate authorities by the local population, these individuals and groups are dismissed by the international community, which not only prevents the population from attaining proper representation in external affairs, it likewise complicates the internal functioning of the affected societies. The International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Organization for Migration did manage to obtain a limited permission to work with “local sovereigns”³, but for the likes of the United Nations, such cooperation is out of the question.

The way of presenting a territory as either under the sovereign control of a government or ungoverned has implications within international law, especially in justifying foreign interference. In the case of Yemen and its ongoing conflict, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has every incentive to support the internationally recognized government, to the point of allowing key government officials to “administer” the country from exile in Riyadh. In doing so, they secure the approval of the Yemeni government to intervene on Yemeni territory, which allows the Saudi government to fight the Houthi movement, its

³ Interview with Abdullah al Jumaily, 2014, Sana’a.

enemy. Therefore the image Saudis present is that of Yemen as a sovereign state, with a functioning administration that is currently going through some internal issues.

At the same time, the United States, an ally of Saudi Arabia which provides critical intelligence and logistical support to the coalition fighting the Houthis, portrays large parts of Yemen as “ungoverned” territory.⁴ This is done to justify the intervention of the US forces in Yemen in the form of drone strikes, air strikes and even operations conducted by the Special Forces directly on the ground. The counter-terrorism operations of the US, without invitation, approval or participation of the Yemeni forces, indicate that the state authorities do not possess sovereignty over their territory. In this situation, the country is then presented as both under sovereign governance and ungoverned.

This example unveils a phenomenon which is reflected in the scholarship on Yemen and that is that the social system in Hadramawt is fixed, based on unchanging categories of tribal order. And so as the government of Yemen continues to represent the citizens of that state, despite not being seen as legitimate by a sizeable part of the population, so does scholarship on Yemen continue to seek categorization and definite answers in an environment where any conclusion is merely a snapshot of the situation in a given place and time.

An example of this is the academic treatment of the social class system of Hadramawt. Although still influential, the system has been changing, without mainstream academic literature taking much note of these changes. Initially through the Communist takeover

⁴Headquarters of the United States Central Command (2018). *CENTCOM updates counterterrorism strikes in Yemen*. [online] Available at: <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/1523709/centcom-updates-counterterrorism-strikes-in-yemen/>

Update on recent counterterrorism strikes in Yemen. U.S. Central Command. (2017, December 20). Retrieved June 20, 2022, from <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/1401383/update-on-recent-counterterrorism-strikes-in-yemen/>

US CENTCOM's posture in the region. Wilson Center. (n.d.). Retrieved June 20, 2022, from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/us-centcoms-posture-the-region>

Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel. A false foundation? AQAP, Tribes and ungoverned spaces in Yemen. Military Academy West Point NY Combating Terrorism Center, 2011.

and establishment of an anti-classist government, later through globalization and urbanization, the social class system is being challenged by the more conventional system of classes based on wealth. Yet the system continues to be presented as a given reality, drawing particularly on the works of Harold Ingrams^{5 6} and Abdalla Bujra⁷. These staples of academic literature continue to be mentioned in numerous papers on Hadramawt, often as a way of “addressing the social class system” without needing to conduct much research on it. There are isolated voices raising this issue, but their audience is minimal. Rodionov⁸ correctly notes that “the stratal structure is not uniform”, with similar claims made by Camelin⁹ in her chapter on the issue of perceived universality of the stratification system in Hadramawt. Swagman¹⁰ then talks of “natural” Yemen (in his case North Yemen) undergoing changes in the wake of the Imamate’s fall and the establishment of Republican structures.

The issues of a repetitive mentioning of the social structure of Hadramawt and the presentation of anecdotal evidence in support of overarching themes and theories can be explained in two ways. Firstly, the lack of access to Yemen and the discomfort of conducting research there mean that researchers are lucky to gather at least some useful information while this has become the accepted standard in the academic community. Field research on the scale conducted by Dresch¹¹, Adra¹² and others is no longer expected or indeed desired by academic institutions which now due to their duty of care limit the locations in which their students can conduct research. Partially due to tribal and specifically Yemeni tribal studies being of minor interest to the wider scholarly

⁵ Ingrams, Harold. "Political Development in the Hadhramaut." *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 21.2 (1945): 236-252.

⁶ Ingrams, Harold. *Arabia and the Isles*. Murray, 1966.

⁷ Bujra, Abdalla S. *The politics of stratification: a study of political change in a South Arabian town*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

⁸ Rodionov, Mikhail. "Social Restratisation in Modern Ḥadramawt." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (2006): 181-190.

⁹ S. Camelin, "Reflection on the System of Social Stratification in Hadhramaut", in *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s - 1960s*, in U.Freitag and W. Clarence-Smith (Eds), Leiden: Brill, 1997 ("Social, Economic, and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia"), pp. 147-156

¹⁰ Swagman, Charles F. "Tribe and Politics: An Example from Highland Yemen." *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1988, pp. 251–61

¹¹ Dresch, Paul. *Tribes, government, and history in Yemen*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

¹² Adra, Najwa. *Qabyala: The tribal concept in the central highlands of the Yemen Arab Republic*. Temple University, 1982.

community, such findings are rarely challenged and academics can often get away with presenting erroneous information, sometimes for decades.

This dissertation begins by acknowledging that it is also a snapshot of a time and place, an interpretation of data provided by parties with their own agenda to a researcher who relied on them for access, comfort and security. All possible efforts were made to disentangle the motivations of informants and the literary sources used and interpret the data provided by them through this lens. With keeping this in mind and working from the realization that Hadramawt is neither governed by the sovereign state of Yemen, nor is it ungoverned in the absence of any authority, I embarked to understand the mechanics of the processes ordering the Hadrami society.

4. Mechanics of self-ordering and governance

Even though each of the governance structures in Hadramawt strives for dominance, its representatives also understand that too much pressure, especially if applied in areas where the given structure is not seen as legitimate, can have disastrous consequences. In a society where violence is seen as an acceptable form of dealing with issues, one needs to navigate the balance between dominance and safety. Behind the hard shell of an institution is the soft human body running the institution and even when taking all possible precautions, the strongest of strongmen can be betrayed and assassinations are common. Therefore each structure and each party within these structures needs to remain vigilant and establish its value to other parties and on the basis of this enter into alliances with them. A number of elements contribute to the self-ordering of the Hadrami society, but as some of them shift in importance, one constant remains.

This constant is land, access to it and denial of access to others. Despite being of low value in agricultural terms, control of land remains the goal of many, as whoever controls territory controls its people, which in turn strengthens their claim to this land in an ever-stronger circle of affirmation. Only truly exceptional moments and shocks have the potential to disrupt this circle and one of them was the Marxist takeover of South Yemen in 1967. One of the early policies of the new state was the stripping of land ownership from the former elites and the redistribution of land among the proletariat.

This act was as practical as it was symbolic and it signified the arrival of a classless society as a response to the monopoly on land and power previously held by the sada and qabail social classes.

For the Hadrami tribesmen, control of land is at the very basis of their identity.¹³ Their ability to claim and defend a piece of territory is what makes them true tribesmen, in a contrast with the “government sheikhs” installed by President Saleh following the unification of Yemen in 1990. These sheikhs could claim some popular support but could not claim control of land and despite their support by the central government, they were never accepted as leaders of the qabail class. For the sada, their control of hawtas, sometimes referred to as sacred enclaves and treated as sovereign territories, was also a crucial element of their identity and a way of signaling to the world that they were on the same level as the nominal rulers, if not above. In the more recent times, the sada have used land extensively to control the population by buying up large tracts with money obtained in the diaspora and then offering share-cropping agreements to their followers, while preventing their opponents from accessing lucrative land.

The lower classes of the Hadrami society, anyone not of tribal or sada lineage, can hardly aspire to own land. In the view of the tribesmen and the sada, it is only themselves who has a legitimate claim to land ownership and control and as such, they refuse to sell land to anyone standing outside of these two classes. This inequality and institutionalized discrimination locks individuals in circumstances that are unfavourable and which might make them more likely to seek membership of groups and organizations that are not organized according to lineage, but rather capability and merit.

In a system as closely controlled by one social group, these merit-based organizations cannot be public, official or even completely legal. They range from criminal groups, mostly involved in the smuggling of goods and people across international borders, with their activities spanning from the Horn of Africa to the borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman, armed nonstate groups commonly seen as terrorist and anything in between.

¹³ Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. *Tribal governance and stability in Yemen*. Vol. 24. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012.

The reality on the ground is that no one group perfectly fits into a category, these groups have fluid membership and overlap in many instances. One thing they share however is their ability to use land to their advantage and negotiate access to it. As these groups function in a competitive environment, one where they not only fight each other, but also face prosecution from international actors, they must organize themselves according to merit and not ancient right to prominence.

Within this gray area where land, crime and governance overlap is the patronage system used to rule Yemen by the late President Saleh. In this system, individuals are rewarded for their ability to contribute to the state, commonly by controlling their territory and the individuals residing there.¹⁴ They use their ability to control territory, whether given to them through traditional means of inheritance, negotiated or temporarily granted on the grounds of providing services sought by the ruler of the area to advance their position in the eyes of the state, provide it with desirable services and in doing so, put themselves in a position of being protected by the state and supported in maintaining and growing their network.

The patronage networks span from territory, land control and brute force as a means of enforcing land claims to the second “pillar” of the Hadrami governance system. This second pillar is the soft padding that sets the scene of the inter-class struggle in Hadramawt and covers race, social custom and the practice of kafa’a, competition in the religious, intellectual and institutional areas as well as partisan politics. In this area, symbols are used extensively in order to deter any potential competition in lieu of violence, as the threat of violence, ideally made implicitly while maintaining a generous and friendly front, is far better than needing to prove one’s readiness to inflict damage. Mampilly¹⁵ covered the use of symbolism instead of violence in war, but in Hadramawt this practice is common even at peace time, potentially because what is considered to be “peace” there is a time void of open armed conflict, but certainly not of competition and struggle.

¹⁴ Alley, April Longley. “The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen.” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2010, pp. 385–409.

¹⁵ Mampilly, Zachariah Cherian. “Rebel rulers.” *Rebel Rulers*. Cornell University Press, 2012.

The various ideological and religious labels are used as a puzzle when reconstructing one's identity. This might seem opportunistic, but for many an adoption of a new social identity is a means of survival. This explains why religious and political affiliation is so fluid and how come that a hardline Marxist can, when exposed to pressure from the returning Sufi community, turn into a Salafi.¹⁶ Where a few years ago this individual would have persecuted the religious man he became, he is now forced to accept this new identity as without it, he would be left alone, without allies, community and the safety net it provides. Even membership of Al Qaeda can be seen through this lens, as either an opportunistic attempt at improving one's living conditions or as a realization of a need to belong. The various elements of one's identity are carried by a given individual even when leaving the Hadrami society and establishing themselves in the diaspora.

Migration, diasporas and Hadramawt are nearly synonymous, to the point where articles and stories about the phenomenon of Hadrami migration made their way into mainstream Arabic textbooks for non-native speakers, such as *Al Kitaab*. The harsh environmental and social conditions in the province made migration the logical choice for many who sought better life and could not achieve their goal in Hadramawt, with the numbers of migrants so large as to influence the political and social life in the homeland. In the province, a revolt against the ruling classes could bring on severe consequences, but in the diaspora, it was much safer to expose the unfairness of the class-based social order and in doing so, attempt to block its replication in the receiving destination.

These conflicts taking place in the diaspora would echo in Hadramawt and influence the debate there, while the opposite was just as true. A significant event taking place in Tarim or Mukalla would be discussed across Jakarta, Mombasa or Cairo as quickly as the news of this event reached them. In some cases, an incident taking place in Hadramawt could be isolated from its social and political context and resolved in the diaspora, which aided with the peacemaking back in Hadramawt.

¹⁶ Interview with Abdul Rahman Hassan Al Saqqaf, 18 April 2018, Seyiun

The experience of migration was different across social classes and remains so to this day. While for the lower classes and a majority of the tribesmen migration presented a means of escape, for the tribal elites and the sada, it was a means of diversifying in all possible ways. The sada especially, being a cohesive and centralized group, used their migration to grow their wealth and legitimacy, spreading the message of Islam across Southeast Asia while investing heavily and then using these funds to buy land and influence back in Hadramawt. To this day, a member of one of the lower classes is much more likely to assimilate in the receiving society and adopt its ways and values than a sayyid, who will use his unique social position for advancement in the receiving society. The Hadrami diaspora is perhaps the best covered topic of modern-day research on the province, with publications by Manger¹⁷, Walker¹⁸, Slama¹⁹ and volume edited by Freitag and Clarence-Smith²⁰, and another by Brehony²¹ devoted purely to this phenomenon.

In a stark contrast, tribalism in South Yemen is rarely talked about. Scholars, including Lackner²² and Walker²³ have argued that tribalism in Hadramawt is not nearly as significant as it is in the former North Yemen, but from the work of colonial officers of the British Empire we know that this has not always been the case. When Harold Ingrams was sent to collect signatures for a peace agreement, the expectation was that he would return with two signatures of the “sovereign” leaders in Hadramawt. Inspecting the conditions on the ground, Ingrams realized that he needed the signatures of close to 1400 men who had at least somewhat legitimate claim to sovereignty over a certain area.²⁴ John Shipman, another colonial officer residing in Hadramawt, remarked that in

¹⁷ Manger, Leif O. *The Hadrami diaspora: community-building on the Indian Ocean rim*. Berghahn Books, 2010.

¹⁸ Walker, Iain. "The Hadrami diaspora: a "diaspora for others" in the Indian Ocean." *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 4.2 (2021): 188-211.

¹⁹ Slama, Martin. "Translocal networks and globalisation within Indonesia: exploring the Hadrami diaspora from the archipelago's north-east." *Asian Journal of Social Science* 39.2 (2011): 238-257.

²⁰ Freitag, Ulrike, and William G. Clarence-Smith, eds. *Hadrami traders, scholars and statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s to 1960s*. Vol. 57. Brill, 1992.

²¹ Brehony, Noel, et al. *Hadramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. IB Tauris, 2017.

²² Interview with Helen Lackner, 17 September 2019, Oxford

²³ Walker, Iain. "Hadramis, Shimalis and Muwalladin: Negotiating Cosmopolitan Identities between the Swahili Coast and Southern Yemen." *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2.1 (2008): 44-59.

²⁴ Smith, G. Rex. "'Ingrams Peace', Hadramawt, 1937-40. Some Contemporary Documents." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-30.

the east of Yemen “practically every tribe, town and village is a law unto itself.”²⁵ In summarizing the conditions in Yemen around the time of the formation of the Federation of South Arabia in 1959, Noel Brehony claims that the entity comprised of “emirates, sultanates and sheikhdoms in which ‘rulers’ often struggled to manage their tribal ‘subjects’”²⁶ and was “a hotchpotch of entities at different stages of political and economic development and not a nation state or even much of a state at all.”²⁷ Although all three of these men made their observations while employed by the British state and therefore they had an incentive to present the British system as an improvement on the previous situation, the evidence their writings offer indeed suggests that despite the nominal rule of a sovereign, the position of the tribes has historically been very strong. The amount of time between the presence of these men in Yemen also suggests that the weak “state” institutions and strong tribal entities were not an anomaly and instead presented the norm.

The thought that the tribal system in Hadramawt is weak to non-existent likely comes from research conducted during the Marxist period between 1967-1990. Apart from the bias inherent in research carried out by foreigners, this belief has another source. The state implemented policies designed to move to society into classless existence and provided a plethora of incentives for the population to cease identifying as tribal, or at least to claim so. However, a case study of the armed and security forces in South Yemen suggests that tribalism was alive and well, with the “state” being used to alter the power balance and promote certain tribes to positions of influence through holding influential offices. The influence of tribalism can also be seen in analyzing the power bases of the most prominent politicians at the time. Without a fail, these would be on the home territory and therefore while the name of the tribe might not have been used, the tribe as a geospatial entity continued to exist and provide its members with support and security.

²⁵ John Shipman to parents, Seyiun, 15 November 1963 as quoted in Thanos Petouris (2018) Britain and Yemen: The End of British rule in South Arabia through the eyes of a young political officer, *Asian Affairs*, 49:1, 56-81.

²⁶ Brehony, Noel. "From Chaos to Chaos: South Yemen 50 Years after the British Departure." *Asian Affairs* 48.3 (2017): 428-444.

²⁷ *ibid*

The period following the unification of Yemen in 1990 was a tumultuous time in Hadramawt as the society was in a social, political and economic transition, saw previously exiled individuals returning to the province with incomparable wealth and changing the religious landscape altogether. As former Marxists turned into Salafis, highlighting the use of both religion and ideology as unifying banner which can be swapped as needed, so did many tribesmen begin to use their class membership as a tool for alliance-building. In all these instances, an element of one's identity is used to mobilize self and others against and outside "threat" and increase the size of one's circle of allies. Whether through kinship, partisanship or religious affiliation, the purpose of this remains the same.

What changed in the 1990s was the way the tribes viewed themselves and the way they were viewed by the unified state. Learning the need for a wide power base, the tribes began a process of incorporating others under their umbrella.²⁸ In doing so, they offered the previously unattached individuals a chance of adopting another "label", one backed by the armed forces of the tribe, while increasing the number of its followers for use in both partisan politics and the creation of patronage networks. Some tribes, such as the Say'ari, appealed to the historic nature of their group in an effort to signal their legitimacy, while others, including the Kathiri, created cultural institutions. These institutions were designed both to revive the tribal spirit and identification with the group among the members of the tribe and to signal the health and might of the tribe to outsiders, without having to resort to violent means. The state also realized the importance of the tribal environment in governance as it began to sponsor tribal sheikhs by stipends and even attempted to create a new class of "government sheikhs" from among popular tribesmen who lacked the legitimacy in terms of lineage and control of territory.

In an environment ripe with inequality and social change, the presence of militant nonstate groups is not only understandable, it is inevitable. There is demand for their existence, primarily as a fighting, enforcement or sabotage tool where the state, a tribe

²⁸ Rodionov, Mikhail. "Social Restratisation in Modern Ḥaḍramawt." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (2006): 181-190.

or an influential individual would prefer to maintain plausible deniability while there is also a generous supply of cadres ready to join these groups. These men are usually marginalized in some way, they could be veterans of the Afghan jihad whose utility for the Yemeni state ceased to exist with the elimination of the Socialist elites in the early 1990s, Saudi citizens of Yemeni origin who were never fully accepted in Saudi Arabia, tribes such as the Sa'yari, always immediately assumed to be the source of trouble and treated as such by the other tribes and finally the lower social classes, locked in perpetual poverty with little room for any sort of growth.

Although frequently associated with religion, only a minority of the members of these groups are hardline religious fanatics. For many, the identification with a religious message and even the message of a global jihad is opportunistic and simply allows them to be part of a powerful organization judging its members on their merit, without having to fight preconceived notions of their ability and worth. As Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula grew in strength and eventually took over Mukalla and Al Shihr in 2015, so did the number of followers of the organization grow as seeing the organization become stronger and more publicly visible convinced them that they could partake in the new order offered by the group and shed the constraints to which they were born.²⁹

As for the group itself, there is evidence that its leadership indeed considers itself to be a force capable of administration of a territory.³⁰ In fact, the takeover of Mukalla and Al Shihr proved that Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is capable of administering territory and that were it not for its connection to heinous acts of violence in the past, they could be seen as a successful grassroots governance initiative. The group saw itself as a legitimate ruler and attempted to establish connections with foreign NGOs and INGOs, in some cases successfully, but most of its efforts failed as it was not a recognized "state" that the international organizations were used to dealing with.

²⁹ Interview with Saleh Mullah Dawilah, 9 December 2016, Tarim

³⁰ Al-Ganad, Tawfeek, Muhammed al-Katheri, and Gregory D. Johnsen. "387 Days of Power: How Al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City." (2020).

The hybrid governance of Hadramawt is divided between three separate governance structures which co-exist and interact, each taking precedence in some locations and shifting in importance over time. Individuals and collective entities use tools at their disposal to advance their position within these structures and in doing so, make life more comfortable for themselves and their kin. The most desirable outcome, which is itself a tool, is the control of land through which others can be controlled and an invitation to join a patronage network is likely. In order to achieve territorial control, each party needs to show its capacity for violence, but this can be done in non-violent ways, such as through the signalling of the strength of one's alliance. While the state uses its ability to represent Yemen externally as its main source of legitimacy, the sada use their religious legitimacy and funds from the diaspora. The tribesmen are adapting and attempting to use their ability to provide a sense of belonging to unaffiliated members of the society. Militant nonstate groups offer useful services to all of the involved parties, while hoping to establish territorial control of their own and become legitimately „sovereign“.

5. Methodology

5.1. Introduction of terms

The terms in the title of the dissertation are used in their most basic, common sense form. Power is understood as the ability to coerce others into acting in accordance with one's will, while legitimacy is the ability to uphold a belief within the society that one's prominence or position of power are deserved and just. Sovereignty, perhaps the most controversial of the three terms is again used in its most uncomplicated and least “unbundled” form, that is as the ability to control all that happens on a given piece of territory, make decisions and have these decisions respected or alternatively use force to have these decisions enforced.

While engaging the topic of sovereignty with its most basic form in mind, the definition is at times widened to fit specific circumstances. For example, the state's sovereignty is “distributed”, meaning that the state delegates responsibility for certain areas to agents, while retaining the option of intervening if needed. Similarly, the sada not only enjoy sovereignty over the hawtas they run, but sovereignty “travels with them”, meaning that

the most prominent religious figures are seen as legitimate sovereigns in many areas they travel to, even if these are otherwise under the sovereign rule of another entity. This concept, however, lacks experimental verification as the situations which uncovered the fact that the most prominent sayyids can be superior to the usual sovereign in a given location are rare and usually take place during religious celebrations or at other similarly exceptional events.

The one twist to the territorial definition of sovereignty is the historical understanding of the sovereignty of the munsib of the original hawtas over his subjects regardless of their location. A person whose domicile fell within the boundaries of the hawta was tied to it and under the sovereign rule of the munsib even when travelling. While the implication is negative and it appears as though this person was figuratively shackled to the hawta, this concept of sovereignty also came with a degree of protection and meant that one was on a “known ground” in legal and punitive terms wherever they might have travelled to. These alterations of sovereignty are niche and fall outside of the mainstream academic debates on the topic, which include the concepts of Post-Westphalian Sovereignty, Popular vs State Sovereignty or “Shared Sovereignty” in the context of global governance.

Tribalism and tribe are other important terms used throughout this dissertation. Tribe, or qabilah in Arabic, is used to describe a kinship-based geospatial unit. Members of this group occupy or claim a given territory and this, along with their shared lineage binds them together. The tribe is a social and political entity which has its own internal hierarchy and represents the interests of its members externally. These structures are joined by other similar units to form tribal confederations and alliances, thus coordinating political efforts.

As units defined both by the territory they control and the kinship ties between members of the group, the eradication of tribalism in the short-term is impossible. That is why during the Socialist period in DPRY, despite the removal of place names, tribal names and a ban on tribal rituals, these units persisted, only to re-invent themselves following the unification of Yemen. In simple terms, the state could issue bans and directives, but it could not remove the collective memory nor could it undo familial ties.

The social group of masakin, “the poor ones”, is accurately titled given the social and financial standing of their members. While there are continuous debates regarding the social order of the Hadrami society, it is agreed that this group holds the least desirable position in the social hierarchy. Occasionally used interchangeably with the muhamaseen, “the marginalized ones”, at other times differentiated from this group on the basis of skin tone or seen as an umbrella term encompassing both the muhamaseen and others who could not fit into the other, more attractive, social groups, this class is created by exclusion rather than anything else.

While each of the other classes in the Hadrami society coordinate their activities and are united by lineage, shared history, rituals and other elements tying them together, the masakin are grouped together simply by not being allowed to join any of the other groups. With poverty being the common denominator of the members of this group, this group cannot be seen as an informal institution of which the other social classes are reminiscent. This in turn dictates the position of the masakin social class in the political and social life of the province – its members operate as individual agents and as such, their influence in the public life is extremely limited.

5.2. Methodological approach

This dissertation is the result of research which began in 2010 when I first travelled to Yemen to study Arabic. I returned to Sana’a several times, visited the surrounding areas as well as the city of Taiz, where I spent time with the town’s business elite. Since 2012, I have been visiting Hadramawt, with all my visits based in the city of Tarim. There I based my research for my MSt dissertation (2017) at the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Cambridge. As part of this degree, I undertook several research trips to Al Mahra and Hadramawt and was hosted by the Sufi community in Tarim, Seyiun, Shibam the villages between them. Despite the volatile situation in Yemen, my security was assured by the authority of the leading clerics in the Wadi but unfortunately, this brought the standard research problem of having a limited pool of interview candidates. I attempted to counter this by reaching out to tribal sources and individuals associated with the Salafi movement in Wadi Hadramawt but most importantly, I attempted to keep the inherent bias in mind as I evaluated the information

provided by my informants. In the later stages of my research, I was approached by the “resistance” structures in Al Mahra which hoped to find a foreign academic who could come to Yemen, observe the situation in their province and pass the message to media outlets in Europe. This provided an unprecedented opportunity to spend time with tribal sources, gain an understanding of their operations and cooperation and experience the reality of smuggling and counter-smuggling in Al Mahra.

Archives were extensively consulted, although these of course come with their own bias. The National Library in London hosts a collection of colonial documents, while St. Anthony’s College in Oxford holds private papers of a number of individuals who led the British colonial effort in Arabia. Unfortunately, the papers of John Shipman were not yet available to the public at the time of research. Some of the papers of Harold Ingrams are held by Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge, but these are not pertaining to the period Ingrams spent in Yemen. I had high hopes for the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Prague, as it could have provided a valuable insight into life and politics in Aden after the departure of the British in 1967. While this archive was helpful, it betrayed the second-rate role of the Aden embassy as few reports concerned politics of South Yemen and most centered on cultural events. However, the MFA archives also held numerous volumes of papers from the Czechoslovak embassy in Cairo, where the communication between South Yemeni opposition groups and the embassy was lively. In addition to papers authored by foreigners, Arabic archival documents were obtained from the works of those who consulted them originally. The authors who engaged with original documents are Shelagh Weir, Linda Boxberger and most importantly Mikhail Rodionov, whom I was fortunate enough to meet and interview at a workshop in Vienna.

In spring 2020, I obtained funding from the Department of Politics and International Studies and Corpus Christi College to travel to Mombasa, Kenya, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and the Comoros Islands. There I conducted numerous interviews with members of the Hadrami tribal class who reside in East Africa. In Comoros Islands, the society is heavily influenced by Hadrami Sufism, but the actual number of Yemenis residing there is low. The influence is however palpable in the religious life on the island. During the trips to Yemen, I used the transit routes to interview influential

Yemeni figures in Oman. Lastly, I travelled to Aurangabad in India, where extensive community of Yemenis resides and where the class system of Yemen began to replicate itself in reaction to the domestic events in Hadramawt and elsewhere in Yemen. One of the advantages of conducting research in the United Kingdom is the number of Yemenis who live there and academics who research Yemen and topics of tribalism. I used this opportunity to interview sources in Oxford, Cambridge and London. The Yemeni community in Leeds, Birmingham and Sheffield was somewhat challenging to approach and ultimately I realized it is either too detached from the events in Yemen or that I have already spoken to its active members elsewhere.

Invitation to workshops on tribalism and the Houthis, organized by Dr. Marieke Brandt at the Academy of Science in Vienna were invaluable for my research as they brought together a very limited number of academics and practitioners who narrowly focus on Yemen, albeit from a more anthropological perspective. This opportunity also highlighted the pace at which this sub-section of academic work was declining as a result of strict security protocols and the resulting abandonment of the society in Yemen as a topic of research. Equally valuable were the Yemen Exchanges, one hosted in Beirut and the other online. At these events, I was able to interview a number of informants and establish contact with organizations which would be otherwise difficult to reach, including the Houthis. Due to the contemporary nature of some of the research conducted, several events attended were conducted under the Chatham House rule, which complicates the use of material collected there due to the difficulty of sourcing this information. Other workshops and conferences were usually too wide in their focus to significantly contribute to this dissertation.

A workshop organized by Corpus Christi College led to an introduction into the open source intelligence community and eventually resulted in work for Bellingcat's Yemen Project and BBC Africa Eye. The skills and experience obtained through this work altered the chapter on religious radicalism in Yemen as it allowed me to use advanced digital investigative techniques in order to verify and cross-reference many claims. These techniques make use of publicly available information, such as user-generated content, satellite imagery, compilations of claims of drone and other aerial attacks, data

on maritime traffic and analysis of extremist propaganda transmitted through Telegram and other communication tools. Of this information, only the data set on maritime traffic at the port of Mukalla had to be purchased, again with the help of Corpus Christi College.

While obtaining information on events related to such a niche topic is challenging, even more challenging is the verification of such data. My most important task was the critical evaluation of all the data obtained and the filtering of all ideological bias. The archival documents consulted, whether colonial or Communist, were authored at a time where the individuals writing them had little oversight and every motivation to present facts in a way that inflated their influence. These individuals were also sent to the area by regimes built on strong ideological foundations and therefore any document originating from this era has to be seen through this lens. Similarly, as this dissertation focuses on events of historic significance, many of the informants carry their own grievances and consequently a subjective vision of the truth. In the specific case of Hadramawt, even literary sources are questionable as they are tools of propaganda and there is no established system of academic peer-review.

CONTROL OF LAND

1. Introduction

1.1. Historical overview

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1. Introduction

In the province Hadramawt, the concepts of sovereignty, superiority, marginalization, and occupation are inherently tied to the ownership and control of land. Even though arable land continues to be utilized for its original purpose, to produce crops for human consumption or to be grazed by ruminant animals, this use has become secondary to more sophisticated utilization of land ownership and control. This chapter will show how land, access to it and the option of denial of access to others are used in order to derive and maintain power and how territorial control, however fragile, can be turned into real political and social influence. In doing so, this chapter will highlight land and its control as powerful pieces making up the Hadrami social dynamic, establishing one's identity and indirectly contributing to the formation of identities of all those comprising the Hadrami society.

1.1. Historical overview

The Hadrami relationship with land can be broken up into three stages – prior to the Agrarian Reform of the early 1970's, during the reign of the Communist regime in South Yemen and after the unification of Yemen in 1990, when the Agrarian Reform was reversed via Council of Ministers Decree 65³¹ and property, including land, returned to its previous owners.

Prior to 1967, the environment of Hadramawt made land the paramount resource. Owing to the harsh climate, limited irrigation and poor soil quality, control of land and the defence of one's right to a piece of territory made the difference between life and death. This in turn influenced the social and political life in the area as it led to the continued prominence of tribes, and kinship groups in general, as the main avenues of self-preservation. Bonded by the sharing of benefits arising from the claimed land and the duty to defend this land, the tribes acted as de facto sovereign units, with their own judicial proceedings and systems of internal administration.

An important event, influencing life in Hadramawt to this day, was the arrival of the sada, a social group comprising of religious leaders tracing their heritage to the Prophet Muhammad, from Basra in 932 CE.³² This group, originally landless and entering a hostile territory, exchanged their services, particularly judicial, clerical and educational, for access to land and property. As a cohesive unit capable of growing their wealth in the diaspora and using Hadramawt as the focal point of their activities, the group eventually established itself as the wealthiest and most influential, partially due to owning the most lucrative pieces of land in the province.

The sada use of land was twofold – firstly the use was commercial, within a share-cropping system, but secondly and more importantly land was used in order to establish hawtas, sacred enclaves, devoted to various saints and serving as sanctuaries under the control of the sada. As the tribes control their territory, but still fall under the influence of the sada „guiding“ their tribe, in operating these hawtas, the sada control their own territories, but without the interference of any other party. The hawtas of the

³¹ Lackner, Helen in Brehony, Noel, et al. *Hadhramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. IB Tauris, 2017.

³² Ho, Engseng. *The graves of Tarim*. University of California Press, 2006.

past functioned as sovereign territories and were widely respected as locations where negotiations could take place and no harm would come to any party present there. This made the sada very valuable to any state-like entity, be it the Kathiri and Qu'aiti Sultanates or the British Empire, which in turn allowed the sada to expand their wealth and influence.

The old system of land control was completely dismantled with the victory of Marxist forces in South Yemen and the withdrawal of the British administrators in 1967. Following in the footsteps of their Communist counterparts in Europe, the Yemeni Marxists actioned an Agrarian reform – not only in order to redistribute wealth, but also to shake up the social system and break up old leadership structures. This strategy proved effective in marginalizing those previously in power, although this marginalization, frequently mentioned by those affected by these policies, only appears to be so in contrast with the comparatively luxurious lifestyles the prominents were accustomed to.

The Communist period, overtly promoting the unity of the proletariat, did not succeed in eradicating kinship-based groups. These remained, but the level of prominence of different units was changed. The tribes whose position was previously weak often rose through joining the Communist cause at the expense of the tribes aligned with and profiting from the past leadership. The relationship of the tribes with their land was difficult to eradicate for one simple reason – unlike material objects which can be taken away or banned, the tribesmen continued to reside on their claimed land, even if they were not allowed to refer to it as „their land“.³³

The importance of land control for the formation of one's identity in Hadramawt was highlighted by the reversal of the Agrarian Reform in 1991. This policy came with social consequences manifesting themselves in the religious arena – with Communism no longer the uniting banner of the landless, many decided to form opposition to the sada and their allies, the qabail, by turning to Salafism. As the returning elites scrambled to

³³ Interview with Muhsin Hamid Ahmad Al Haddad, 30 April 2018, Hawi

reclaim their property, the „lower classes“ disputed the legitimacy of their claim to every last barren plot and fought over the control of mosques and sacred enclaves.³⁴

This development was partially supported by the late President Saleh whose attempts at running the South according to the tribal governance tools he was accustomed to from the North relied on land in two ways. Firstly, it utilized the anger felt by the lower social classes at having their land taken away and channeled these emotions into creating an opposition to the returning sada. In a balancing act, he also used the connections and wealth of the returning Hadramis in exchange for allowing the reversal of the Reform to continue. Thus, he neutralized the political scene in Hadramawt, established an opposition group under the influence of the Islah political party, which was controlled by his tribal allies in the North, and at the same time formed friendly relations with the influential sada.

Secondly, Saleh’s form of governance relied heavily on his patronage network and for this, he needed all sorts of entities capable of controlling territory and people. Some of the members of his patronage network derived their power from being respected as tribal sheikhs and controlling certain lands, while others used their access to smuggling routes as a bargaining chip. This use and control of land led to a hybrid governance system in which the state exchanged its exclusive right to territorial control for influence and allowed local strongmen to generate their own revenue from smuggling and illegal taxation.

In a never-seen-before development, Saleh established criteria for the status of a „sheikh“, which traditionally relied on heritage and territorial control. Under Saleh’s definition, anyone with popular support would be entitled to a recognition as a sheikh, which would allow them to collect a stipend from the government, administered by the newly established Bureau of Tribal Affairs.³⁵ This created a state of tension between the „traditional sheikhs“ and „government sheikhs“³⁶ and kept both groups busy, while neutralizing another potential base of opposition to Saleh. However, these individuals

³⁴ Interview with Zain Al Haddad, 12 December 2016, Tarim

³⁵ Interview with Hassan Al Barqi Al Kathiri, 21 April 2018, Al Ghurfah

³⁶ *ibid*

did not control territory, which led to a deterioration of their influence once the government ceased to be able to intervene on their behalf and they were forced to seek other ways of retaining their position.

The period of the DPRY (1967 - 1990) which saw the sada focus most of their activities abroad, marked a vast increase in the wealth of the sada as it coincided with a general economic boom in the countries where the sada established their foreign outposts. Returning to Hadramawt with incomparable capital, the sada were in an ideal position for social, economic and indirectly political domination of the province. They quickly adapted to the new realities and began to utilize their hawtas as sites of religious pilgrimages, while monopolizing access to locations previously of both religious and folk importance. Attendance of events held at these locations could translate into improved access to land and opportunities to the lower classes, but it also marked them as individuals following the sada doctrine and accepting the sada as a leading social class.

Despite the decrease in comparative value of Hadrami land, if measured by its productivity against the cost of importing food, it has become a tempting investment opportunity and started to be seen as a stable vehicle for storing value. Land in areas adjacent to urban centers has been increasing in value dramatically, with the growth fueled by funds from Southeast Asia and the diaspora in Saudi Arabia. In the absence of a stock market, banking and other avenues in which one could store wealth and work to increase it over time, land has provided the best option for the transfer of wealth between generations. While physical objects, such as precious metals, were available, their value was limited to the wider population and they were prone to being stolen in a society void of a centralized security system. Other objects, such as books, weapons and jewelery, came with the same limitations, while livestock was, apart from rustling, exposed to depreciation through neglect and a risky asset in times of drought.

1.1.1. Agrarian reform

The passing of the Agrarian Reform in 1970 in South Yemen was an echo of similar policies being codified in other Communist countries. It was a practical way of redistributing land, breaking up old alliances formed around the ownership of land and

providing the population with a social restart, where each individual would be judged on their merit and not on inheritance, be it in terms of lineage, finances or anything else. To see the reform purely in the context of establishment of Socialist rule would be misleading – at the same time, similar reforms were taking place across the Arab world³⁷ and in East Africa, where old feudal structures were being broken, often as an attempt to rid the countries of their colonial legacy and return land to its native population.

Lackner³⁸ and Bujra³⁹ agree that prior to 1967, land ownership was limited to the sada and qabail social classes. The Qu'aiti Sultanate, founded in 1858, provided the legal framework for a theoretical equality and thus opened the possibility of land ownership to the lower classes. In practical terms however, such ownership was exceedingly rare and Bujra⁴⁰ reports that the only exceptions he found were in the western Wadi Hadramawt, where a specific social class of *harthan* (a fringe class recognized only by some academics and defined by the very ability to own land despite their non-dominant lineage) was able to possess and control land. The continued existence of slavery in the Qu'aiti Sultanate highlights the limitations of the supposed legal equality.

Even prior to the Agrarian reform, patterns of land ownership in Hadramawt were changing as migration played a significant role in the consolidation of land ownership. Due to the differing organization and priorities of the two leading social classes, the sada were able to increase their power and territorial control by purchasing arable land from those landowners who lacked foreign remittances and for whom land was often the only tangible and liquid asset. This practice led to the sada and a small group of elite qabail families with foreign connections owning large swathes of arable land, which they could use to control the population and further increase their wealth.

³⁷ Baali, Fuad. "Agrarian reform policies and development in the Arab world." *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 33.2 (1974): 161-173.

³⁸ Helen Lackner in Brehony, Noel. *Hadramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

³⁹ Bujra, Abdalla S. *The politics of stratification: a study of political change in a South Arabian town*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

⁴⁰ *ibid*

Following the departure of the British and the establishment of the People's Republic of Yemen in 1967 (which was later changed to People's Democratic Republic of Yemen), a discussion began on the need to rectify the land ownership situation. President Sha'abi announced plans for a land reform law on 25 March 1968, however the more radical wing of the National Liberation Front opposed it on the grounds of a refusal to allow for any compensatory mechanism for the elites and promoting the creation of state farms and farming collectives as opposed to individual land ownership.⁴¹ The law was eventually passed, but its implementation was sparse. In November 1970, a second piece of legislation regarding land ownership, the Agrarian Reform Law (no. 27 of 1970) was decreed. It limited the amount of land each family could own.⁴² While sources marginally differ on the amount of land each family was allowed to own, this appears to be the result of differing conversions of the *feddan*, a unit used in the Land Reform Law. Each family was entitled to just over 8 hectares of irrigated land or 16 hectares if these were irrigated only by rainfall.

This law was designed to re-distribute land among a larger group of owners in order to improve their chances of producing a marketable product and thus improve their quality of life, but at the same time it was also intended to symbolically humiliate the sada, especially when peasants were encouraged by the more radical elements of the National Liberation Front to remove the former owners from their land physically.⁴³ These evictions took place between 1970-1972 and in many instances, they turned violent, occasionally with fatal results on both sides.⁴⁴ The physical removal of former land owners from their land was accompanied by the removal of symbols of their status and standing. One of the most prominent advisors to the Qu'aity sultan, Ahmad bin Nasir Al Batati, had his *jambiyah* (a ceremonial dagger associated primarily with the class of tribesmen) confiscated in a show of irrelevance of his social status.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Ismael, Tareq Y., and Jacqueline S. Ismael. *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics, and Society: the Politics of Socialist Transformation*. Lynne Rienner Pub, 1986.

⁴² Molyneux, Maxime. "Legal reform and socialist revolution in Democratic Yemen: Women and the family." (1985).

⁴³ Interview with Zain Al Haddad, 17 April 2018, Tarim

⁴⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁵ Interview with Saleh Al Batati, 15 October 2019, London

The Agrarian Reform Law of 1970 included no compensatory mechanism for the landowners whose land was being dispossessed and crucially also included the confiscation of waqf land. The *awqaaf* were to be administered by the central state authorities.⁴⁶ This practice was not limited to Yemen, or even to countries with Socialist leadership – the British authorities in Zanzibar likewise discouraged the practice of waqf connected to specific families and insisted that public and religious institutions should be the responsibility of the state, thus severing the link between the patron and the institution, or rather replacing the patron with institutions of the state.⁴⁷ In replacing the patron, the state usurped the legitimacy coming from an association with a waqf.

As is common throughout the Yemeni history and today, the state did not possess the capacity to enforce its own directives and had to delegate the eviction of the former landlords to the citizens receiving the land. While the state generously distributed the land among the lower classes, it made sure to guarantee its position by nationalizing all the water sources and limiting the ownership of drilling equipment to the state alone.⁴⁸ This policy gave power to the directors of the state farms and managers of the agricultural co-operatives as they acted as de facto agents of the Ministry of Irrigation and could decide which projects were to be given priority.

Religious and tribal elites were both affected by these policies and although it would seem logical for them to choose exile in their diasporic strongholds, the situation in these locations was also changing drastically as both South-East Asia and East Africa became unwelcoming to the Hadramis. In South-East Asia, immigration policies of Singapore were re-designed to curtail the influence and wealth of the Hadramis, while in East Africa, the tide was turning against the Arabs and foreigners in general in the wake of the African nationalist movements.⁴⁹ Since the Zanzibar Massacre of 1964, many Hadramis in East Africa and especially those in the newly established Tanzania, chose

⁴⁶ Ismael, Tareq Y., and Jacqueline S. Ismael. *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics, and Society: the Politics of Socialist Transformation*. Lynne Rienner Pub, 1986.

⁴⁷ Oberauer, Norbert. "'Fantastic Charities': The Transformation of 'Waqf' Practice in Colonial Zanzibar." *Islamic Law and Society*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2008, pp. 315–370.

⁴⁸ Helen Lackner in Brehony, Noel. *Hadhramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

⁴⁹ Interview with Karama Tamimi, 12 February 2020, Mombasa

to return to Hadramawt due to the fear of further escalation of the conflict and hatred against the Arabs. Instead, the tribal and religious elites migrated primarily to countries of the Gulf, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.⁵⁰

The Agrarian reform was not only an opportunity to deal with the former elites and reduce their appeal by stripping them of their wealth. It also allowed the state to tie the wellbeing of the masses to the survival of the regime and therefore provide incentives for popular support of the Communist leadership.

1.1.2. Return of land to previous owners

Land tenure prior to 1967 was repeatedly labelled as “feudal”⁵¹ as was a common practice throughout the Arab world.⁵² The significance of land ownership in Hadramawt however goes beyond the ability to control the mode of production as the events surrounding the reversal of the Land Reform Law following unification in 1990 betray the extent to which land ownership is tied to notions of status and identity. The Council of Ministers Decree number 65, passed in 1991, stipulated the need to return farmland to its previous owners. It also included a compensatory mechanism which should have theoretically provided each family whose land was being taken away with 5 feddan of arable land.⁵³ This directive was non-sensical from the outset as it promised an amount of land far exceeding that which the government had at its disposal. While the return of the land to its previous owners took place without much delay, the compensation kept being delayed until finally it became apparent that very little would be provided. Lackner⁵⁴ reports that of the initial 20000 families entitled to the compensation, only 1950 were included in a “poverty alleviation scheme” and only 190 actually received the compensation, thus creating a new grievance among thousands of families.

⁵⁰ Interview with Abdul Rahman Belfaqih, 23 April 2018, Tarim

⁵¹ Amin, Sayed Hassan. *Law and justice in contemporary Yemen*. Glasgow: Royston (1987).

⁵² Baali, Fuad. “Agrarian Reform Policies and Development in the Arab World.” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1974, pp. 161–173.

⁵³ Lackner, Helen in Brehony, Noel. *Hadhramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

⁵⁴ *ibid*

The reasons for the failure of the compensatory scheme were manifold, among them the lack of available irrigated and immediately arable land possessed by the government and fit for redistribution, the administrative difficulty of running such a large program, the civil war between the former South and North in 1994 and the deteriorating financial situation of the state which was directly tied to the falling oil revenues⁵⁵ and the halting of aid from the Gulf Cooperation Council in the light of the Yemeni refusal to condone the 1991 military action to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

The shifting political landscape and a campaign of targeted assassinations of the Southern elites saw the influence of the Yemeni Socialist Party diminish and with that, the willingness of the central government to devote its funds and time to the program. Crucially, the compensatory mechanism failed because of the strong opposition from the sada and the qabail⁵⁶ who viewed land ownership as a divine right bestowed upon them and regarded any legal land ownership by the lower classes as an offence against themselves.

Even where funds could be potentially made available (such as from the World Bank) to make land that fell out of use arable or to irrigate plots that never historically had access to water, these initiatives were met with a strong opposition. Firstly, the sada and the qabail objected to any possibility of a legal, recorded ownership of land being opened to the lower classes. The sada and qabail realised the difficulty of revoking ownership once a systematic land registry, holding titles of land ownership, was to be created. Secondly, the plan was met with an opposition in the form of land claims on practically every plot of land that the government suggested might be included in the scheme, which fulfilled its goal of overwhelming the administrators in charge.

Even for some weaker members of the privileged classes, reclamation of land was difficult. For example the sub-tribe of Al Marsaf hid their land deeds with their respective

⁵⁵ International Monetary Fund (2001): Republic of Yemen: Selected Issues.
<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2016/12/30/Republic-of-Yemen-Selected-Issues-4036>

⁵⁶ Interview with Muhsin Hamid Ahmad Al Haddad, 30 April 2018, Hawi

sayyids in 1967 and these sayyids were under instruction not to disclose the possession of these documents to anyone until a regime change. When this happened, they produced documentary evidence which in theory should have enabled the swift return of property to its pre-1967 owners. However, despite some families having up to 50 separate documents certifying the ownership of land and even individual trees on the property, some cases were still pending as of 2020 due to the inefficiency of the courts in Hadramawt.⁵⁷

To speed the process up, or in situation where the legal status of the land was unclear and original deeds were unavailable, the land could be reclaimed by brute force. After gaining physical control of the land, new documentation could be issued by the state authorities, in essence crafting a new deed and in doing so, dismissing any other documents that might surface at a later date. Gaining possession of land through this process was dubious and there were fears that this mechanism would not hold up in court at a later date, not to mention the ever-present risk of another physical takeover of the land and the potential of starting a wider conflict. Such land was quickly sold to individuals with strong connections to the government who could rely on the enforcement provided by the police and the military and influence the rulings made by courts in any potential future disputes regarding the land.⁵⁸ Those who resorted to this form of regaining possession of their land were paid a fraction of the value of the land.⁵⁹

The issue of confiscation, re-distribution and the subsequent return of land and other property to its previous owners continues to shape the society of Hadramawt. It paved the way for increased state involvement and interference, polarized the society and created a cause which can be exploited by militant nonstate groups. The smooth return of property to the elite social groups meant that members of the non-elite groups were faced with two options – become followers of the wealthy and hope to benefit from their holdings or join the opposition.

⁵⁷ Interview with Karama Tamimi, 12 February 2020, Mombasa

⁵⁸ Interview with Awadh Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

⁵⁹ *ibid*

2. Derivation of power from land

2.1. Rights of ownership

In order to continually and sustainably derive power from any resource, one needs to obtain and retain access to it. While sounding trivial, this is in fact a complex process involving a number of social contracts and interactions at the core of which are two prerequisites: legitimate claim to the resource and the ability to enforce this claim. As the two upper classes of the Hadrami society work in unison and the state is chronically weak, most of the work is done by the mutual recognition of each other's claims.

Documentary evidence exists or is created in order to support these claims and "sell" them to the wider public. The ability to defend the claim to the land is easily imaginable for the qabail, but more nuanced for the sada as they need to convince the society that any offence against the class is an offence against Allah and also maintain a relationships with the tribes in case their claims are ignored and a physical enforcement is needed.

The tribes have an incentive to provide this service or at least the threat of it as the sada religious legitimacy lends the whole system of selective right to own land credibility and lessens the need for physical enforcement of all land claims, including those made by the qabail. Due to the overwhelming power of the leading classes, the need for physical enforcement is rare. Firstly, the system of governance in Hadramawt provides incentives against pursuing a claim not seen as legitimate in signaling to any party considering the making of such a claim that most of the province would actively oppose this. In the next stage, much of the potential violence is avoided by the coherent use of symbols of power by the leading social classes, which are most likely to make any territorial claims. This use of symbols complements the threat of physical violence and serves to amplify it. This use of symbolism, exceeding the level of propaganda or PR,

was written about by Kalyvas⁶⁰ and later Mampilly⁶¹ and while the sada and the qabail are not rebel movements involved in a civil war, similar concepts are used.

Once a claim is secured, recognized and defended, there are multiple ways in which an entity can derive benefits from the control of land. Some of these benefits are reaped by the very fact that a claim is recognized by the society – it makes the division between the classes obvious, makes membership of a class desirable to its members and thus serves to instill discipline. The lack of friction seen by the public and the concentrated effort to present the class as cohesive and continually achieving its goals increases the acceptance of the privileged position of the class by the public.

In a more physical sense, land serves to control people. Despite its low agricultural value, it still serves as a primary resource for many in the society who sustain themselves by partaking in share cropping. The ability to deny access to fertile land to these individuals is very powerful, as such individuals could find themselves in a precarious position, possibly even facing starvation. On tribal lands, the control of people is more direct – a recognized sheikh orders his men to carry out tasks in a fashion similar to any military unit. His ability to issue and enforce orders on a given territory gives him the ability to allow or disallow the passage of individuals and vehicles and to grant asylum, among other privileges.

Given these benefits, both the sada and the qabail have every incentive to retain control of land and refuse to allow “outsiders” to own any. The easiest way of achieving this is through refusal to sell land outside of the elite, and by increasing the inequality in the society and thus placing the purchase of land outside the realm of possibility for the lower classes. By operating a feudal system of land ownership and crop cultivation, the system achieved its goal effortlessly – the poor remained locked in Hadramawt and unable to increase their wealth, while the rich became richer by sending members of

⁶⁰ Kalyvas, Stathis 2003. “The ontology of ‘political violence’: Action and identity in civil wars,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1: 475–94

⁶¹ Mampilly, Z. (2015). Performing the Nation-State: Rebel Governance and Symbolic Processes. In A. Arjona, N. Kasfir, & Z. Mampilly (Eds.), *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (pp. 74-97). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

their class abroad and collecting benefits from the ownership of means of production in Hadramawt.

On the non-financial side of retaining ownership of land stand two elements. Firstly, the *sada* and the *qabail* do not allow any discussion on whether the other classes should have an option of purchasing land, invoking tradition and presenting the potential discussion as offensive to the very spirit of Hadramawt.⁶² For those who might not be deterred by this, it is made clear that ownership of land alone does not qualify one for social advancement. This disincentive reminds members of the society that in order to be considered a member of the upper classes, one needs to present the correct familial credentials as well, which makes the purchase of land unappealing. As there is little value to be extracted from a plot of land itself and no social advancement is guaranteed, it would be a waste of resources. Should a member of the lower classes obtain funds sufficient to purchase land in Hadramawt, the logical option for them would be to emigrate and use these funds to start a new life elsewhere.

Attempts at denial of access to land go beyond purchasing power and social pressure. Following the reversal of the Agrarian Reform in the early 1990s, the „higher“ classes engaged in a systematic effort to establish the criteria for legal ownership of land.⁶³ These regulations and the rhetoric surrounding their establishment did not attempt to hide the belief of the upper classes that their lineage predisposes them to land ownership, in fact they were used as their chief argument. Even if one was determined to purchase land and had the funds to do so, there is very little land on offer. The historical consolidation of land holdings means that land ownership does not come with any recurring expenses, debt or other obligations that might motivate the owners to sell their land. Additionally, members of the upper social classes face pressure, implicit and explicit, not to entertain offers of land purchase from those outside of their own social class. This internal pressure has led to the creation of a saying claiming that „*sayyids only sell land to other sayyids*“.⁶⁴ There are, however, two notable exceptions to this.

⁶² Interview with Abdul Rahman Belfaqih, 29 April 2018, Tarim

⁶³ Lackner, Helen in Brehony, Noel, et al. *Hadhramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. IB Tauris, 2017.

⁶⁴ Interview with Abdul Rahman Belfaqih, 29 April 2018, Tarim

The first group consists of foreign nationals standing outside of the Hadrami class system. These are usually members of the Sufi community who travel to Hadramawt since roughly 1995 in order to study under the local Islamic teachers. Some of these students reside in Yemen for a decade or longer and attain a significant status within the local community. These men may then be allowed to purchase land in the proximity of the Islamic seminaries, often with funding provided by Hadramis with diasporic connections.⁶⁵ This sale of land does not have a negative effect on the ruling classes as it continues to deny access to land to the „lower“ classes while simultaneously achieving the goal of tying a given individual (mostly white and Western) to the community even tighter and allowing the Sufi leadership to exploit their propaganda value on a more systematic basis. Those individuals who did purchase land in Tarim are regularly taken on foreign trips with the leadership of Dar al Mustafa and serve to affirm the status of the clerics as people capable of attracting western audiences, which is received very warmly in East Africa and Southeast Asia.⁶⁶

The second group is formed by individuals with exceptional wealth. Since the unification, revival and founding of Sufi institutions in Wadi Hadramawt, there have been some cases when a Hadrami residing abroad, usually a member of the mashaikh class, was allowed to purchase land not only in the proximity of the sada strongholds, but even from the sayyids themselves. These cases are centered around the leading Islamic seminaries and it is not difficult to guess the motivations of the sellers. Firstly, the buyer is almost inevitably a long-term resident of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and seldom makes trips to Yemen, therefore their direct involvement and influence in local politics is limited. Secondly, the amount of money these individuals have at their disposal is so great as to exceed the wealth of the sada diaspora in Southeast Asia. Allowing them access to the sada locations results in the ability of the sada to access these funds through their charitable foundations and therefore increase their reach and social prominence. The Bin Maghfoud development on the hill directly overlooking Dar al Mustafa is a primary example of this phenomenon.

⁶⁵ Interview with Ja'afar Al Saqqaf, 18 April 2018, Seyiun

⁶⁶ *ibid*



Bin Maghfoudh compound in blue, Dar al Mustafa in purple. The distance between these two compounds is less than 200 meters. Source: Google Earth

The importance of land ownership for the construction of one's identity is apparent when looking at the diaspora members for whom the continued ownership of land provides an

„anchor“, helps them retain their connection with the homeland and establishes them within the receiving society as „legitimately“ Hadrami, with the fact of ownership not only proving one’s connection to Hadramawt, but also their likely belonging to the upper social classes. As such, members of the diaspora refuse to sell their land in Hadramawt, even if they have not visited Yemen in decades and have no up-to-date information on the state of their land.⁶⁷ It is often dubious whether these diaspora members possess the deeds for the land or whether their land was correctly returned following the reversal of the Agrarian Reform. This suggests that the symbolic value of claiming ownership of land in Hadramawt is often more important than the actual right to this land. The very physical matter that is land becomes an abstract symbol, which positions one within their community despite the fact that the core of the symbol may or may not be real.

2.2. Control of borderlands

Yemen’s state authorities’ powers of enforcement enable it to regulate land ownership and control in a limited form and usually only to the extent it is needed for the efficient operation of the patronage system. The state focuses on key locations, those with natural resources, those controlled by the regime’s allies and those controlled by the regime’s enemies. Only in the areas of known natural resources does the state operate on a permanent basis, in a manner not dissimilar to the Kathiri sultans who would signpost the area they were capable of defending using white planks.⁶⁸ The state concentrates its troops and resources into these locations, but in order to keep hold of them, it cooperates with a range of other actors and exchanges services both on the government – tribe or government – individual level and through individuals who are incentivized to create their own versions of patronage networks.

This kind of governance is decentralized and seemingly chaotic. As the state lacks the ability to control all of its land, it is forced to „deputize“ other parties to step into its place and fill the governance void. This process is not formalized or official, it is rather the tolerance for the way an individual or a party govern their claimed territory while the

⁶⁷ Interview with Awadh Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

⁶⁸ Boxberger, Linda. *On the Edge of Empire: Hadramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s*. SUNY Press, 2002.

government retains the option of intervening. The individual in charge, or anyone benefiting from the status quo on a given territory, is then provided with two incentives – to act in accordance with the wishes of the central government, which could step in and spoil their operation, and to keep control of the land and individuals residing on this land. Otherwise, the government might be compelled by pressure exerted by local residents and foreign parties to take over the control of the location and thus hamper one’s ability to derive benefits from their position.

The situation is even more complex when it comes to the borderlands, as the control of these is crucial in order to continue enjoying the recognition as a sovereign state and to collect revenue for the state. At the same time, the border has since roughly 1934, when the first Saudi-Yemeni war took place, become a major source of income for powerful tribal and criminal groups which utilize it to smuggle goods and people and make considerable sums of money in doing so.⁶⁹ The governance of borderlands is then a balancing act of the government attempting to be seen in charge while at the same time allowing others to bypass government regulation in order to benefit financially. In return, the government gains the services of the tribal groups residing in the borderlands who then enforce border control as it both keeps them favoured by the government and because not doing so would lead to the rise of competitors in the smuggling business.

As the patronage network is more welcoming to those already in possession of a valuable resource in any form, those tribes resident in the vicinity of the border, or ideally those with presence on both sides of it, are in a better position to derive power and benefits from their control of the land. Raeymaekers and Korf note that “*border has become a resource rather than an obstacle*”⁷⁰ and that has certainly held true since the demarcation of Hadramawt and the establishment of a more conventional border following the 2000 Jeddah border treaty. There are at least two ways in which the ability to control land in the borderlands can be translated into tangible benefits.

⁶⁹ Interview with former intelligence chief, 2018, Al Mahra

⁷⁰ Korf, Benedikt, and Timothy Raeymaekers. *Violence on the margins: States, conflict, and borderlands*. Springer, 2013.

Firstly, the “domestic” patronage network may be willing to co-opt the controlling party into its system – in exchange for loyalty, the network then allows an individual, small group of tribal elites or the entire tribe to use their territory to smuggle goods and traffic individuals. In doing so, the state does not need to part with any of its limited resources and the benefit is derived by the clients themselves. At the same time, the state’s weak law enforcement capabilities remain strong enough to selectively conduct operations against rogue clients and by implying this threat, keep them loyal to the system. This solution is elegant in its simplicity and presents a form of a hybrid security system, where the client is self-motivated to provide the service (in order to limit potential competition), regulate their own activities (as the overt smuggling of individuals hostile to the government would elicit a response which would hamper the business) and yet there is no cost to the government.

Secondly, the “external”, that is international, patronage networks have been known to co-opt tribes residing in the border areas and offer them funds and weaponry in exchange for curbing certain behaviour or controlling a third party via tribal proxy. It appears that sometimes the external patronage networks are sustained in the interest of guaranteeing “future considerations” without any clear immediate goals and are often long-term, multi-generational affairs. As the financial incentives can be quite significant, co-option into this system is highly desirable.

For example, a foreign power, most likely the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia or the Sultanate of Oman, but allegedly also Iran in the case of the Houthi sect and more recently the United Arab Emirates, provide a range of benefits to those considered of use and influence. These benefits range and include anything from a provision of health care in Salalah to Yemeni Mahris, assistance in major infrastructure projects, to supplying weapons to select tribes in exchange for these tribes stopping the movement of extremists into the country. Oman especially is known for its soft power projects in the province of Al Mahra, using the networks already established by the Mahri tribes residing on both sides of the border.⁷¹ These projects include infrastructure investments,

⁷¹ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, Aurangabad, 1 July 2018

contributions towards cultural events in Al Ghaydah and the transfer of Mahri patients to the hospital in Salalah for treatment.⁷²

An interesting case highlighting many of the elements of international patronage is that of Ali Salim Al Hureizi, a strongman in Al Mahra. Al Hureizi is a former deputy governor of the province and director of border security, who is accused to be a smuggler by his enemies⁷³, a claim that is not denied by his followers. It is the definition of smuggling that they differ on. In the local understanding of smuggling, the movement of humans is acceptable and does not constitute “smuggling” whereas the movement of drugs and weaponry is considered undesirable. As Al Hureizi is connected to the illicit trade in vehicles, his actions are not considered harmful by the local population. Al Hureizi claims that he has in the past closed a deal with Al Qaeda where its members would not be sought out and attacked in exchange for the organization not conducting operations in Al Mahra or maintaining overt presence in the province.⁷⁴ After the takeover of Mukalla and Shihr, AQAP considered expansion to Al Mahra as evidenced by members of the organization saying so directly to an informant (unrelated to Al Hureizi or his associates),⁷⁵ but ultimately no such development took place, likely owing to the deal Al Hureizi struck with AQAP.

Al Hureizi is open about receiving funds from Oman and operating a patronage network in Al Mahra.⁷⁶ The actions and behaviour of his associates in Oman certainly prove his connection to the Omani government as they can transport individuals across the Omani border with ease and always seem to have the right phone number to call in case of a run-in with Omani state security. Al Hureizi himself maintains a residence in Oman.⁷⁷ In exchange for the benefits provided by Oman, Al Hureizi prevents the movement of militants across the border from Yemen. His ability to liaise and cut deals with Al Qaeda is especially valuable as Oman frequently acts as a mediator in cases of kidnap for ransom. Al Hureizi’s influence only grew after the forces of Saudi Arabia

⁷² Participant observation in Al Mahra and Salalah, 2018 and 2019

⁷³ Interview with Badr Kalshat, 16 November 2019, Al Ghaydah

⁷⁴ Interview with Bashir Hagi, 8 November 2019, London

⁷⁵ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 1 July 2018, Aurangabad

⁷⁶ Interview with Abdullah Al Mahri, 16 November 2019, Al Ghaydah

⁷⁷ Participant observation, November 2019

entered Al Mahra and started arming some local tribes – suddenly Al Hureizi was elevated to the position of a leader of the resistance against the Saudi influence in Al Mahra and generously supported in doing so by Oman.

This anecdote illustrates the merging of different patronage networks and how the control of land makes one likely to be co-opted. Al Hureizi's ability to maintain control over the Mahri tribal territories was rewarded by the Yemeni government turning a blind eye to his illicit activities. His utility was later recognized by a neighbouring state, which rewarded his services with various benefits, including access to the Omani state administration. This in turn strengthened his position and made him more widely respected in Al Mahra. At the same time, Al Hureizi's activities were motivated by the threat to his core business as the incursion of the Saudi forces to Al Mahra came with the dismantling of the illicit trade infrastructure and replacement of key figures with Saudi nationals.⁷⁸ Al Hureizi showed considerable commercial acumen, as his complex enterprise engages in the trade of control for influence and does so in a diversified fashion, meaning that when one sponsor party (the Yemeni state) collapses, there are other parties willing to sponsor his network.

Saudi Arabia has likewise engaged in the co-opting of individuals capable of controlling land and people into its sphere of influence, long before they could provide value in joining the fight against the Houthis. Saudi Arabia has been known to provide stipends to leading sheikhs in the border areas in a strategic preparation for a potential future conflict⁷⁹. This practice is an echo of the way in which state conducted its business with the “local sovereigns” in the past and reminiscent of Saleh's attitude towards tribal leaders. This practice is organic as evidenced by Saudi Arabia losing part of its influence in the Yemeni borderlands after the passing of King Salman, who insisted on the continuation of this policy.⁸⁰ The exchange of funds and opportunities for the control of land and local population, despite being an established practice, remains transactional for the Yemeni tribal population. Abdullah Al Jumaily, a leading tribal sheikh from the province of Al Jawf, claimed: *“I take a salary from the Saudis as well as*

⁷⁸ Interview with former intelligence chief of Al Mahra, November 2019

⁷⁹ Interview with Abdullah Al Jumaily, 2014, Sana'a

⁸⁰ Interview with Noel Brehony, 15 September 2019, London

from the Yemeni government. Well, it is not so much a salary as a gift... All of the sheikhs receive this money... it is the system” but added that “renting is just temporary.”⁸¹

In saying so, he indicated that he felt as though his loyalty would only be guaranteed as long as the payments from the Saudi state continued to flow. Indeed the feeling is mutual as the loss of control over territory and men would translate into the loss of Al Jumaily’s position and consequently loss of the Saudi stipend.

Apart from the provision of funds, weapons and occasionally intelligence, Yemen’s neighbours build patronage networks on granting citizenship to families of influence. This is usually the case with politicians and members of former royal households, but the same procedure is in place for existing and emerging strongmen. As the sada commodify their descent, the tribesmen commodify the territorial control they wield. In some cases, the family which originally received Saudi citizenship in return for control has established itself in Saudi Arabia and uses its money to perpetuate the system back in Yemen and provide the Kingdom with the services it seeks, in effect creating its own patronage network in an ever-growing pyramid of control and governance.⁸²

In several exceptional cases, Saudi Arabia used its negotiations regarding the Mecca Agreement (1926), the Treaty of Taif (1934) and finally the Treaty of Jeddah (2000) to co-opt entire towns with Yemeni tribal populations. The lack of clear demarcation of the Saudi – Yemeni border in the north of Hadramawt allowed this and the population of the towns in question did not rally to be given Yemeni, instead of Saudi citizenship. Members of the wider Say’ari tribe, and even individuals not previously associated with the tribe, took advantage of this exceptional moment and sought to settle in the area in the hope of receiving a Saudi passport.⁸³ The Treaty of Jeddah included a provision which allowed a degree of agency in so far that the local populations affected (which

⁸¹ Filkins, Dexter. “After the Uprising.” *The New Yorker*, 4 Apr. 2011, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/04/11/after-the-uprising.

⁸² Interview with Ja’afar Al Saqqaf, 18 April 2018, Seyiun

⁸³ Interview with Karama Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

included some scattered desert settlements as well) could voice their opinion as to which state they would like to belong to.

The main towns affected by their location on the Saudi – Yemeni border are Sharurah and Kharakhir. These towns are of immense strategic importance to the Saudi state as they serve as a de facto forward operating base of the military, security and intelligence services and allow the Saudi state to involve itself in Hadrami affairs through the Say'ari tribe. The towns also provide utility to smugglers and therefore are a tool the state can use in rewarding members of the patronage network.

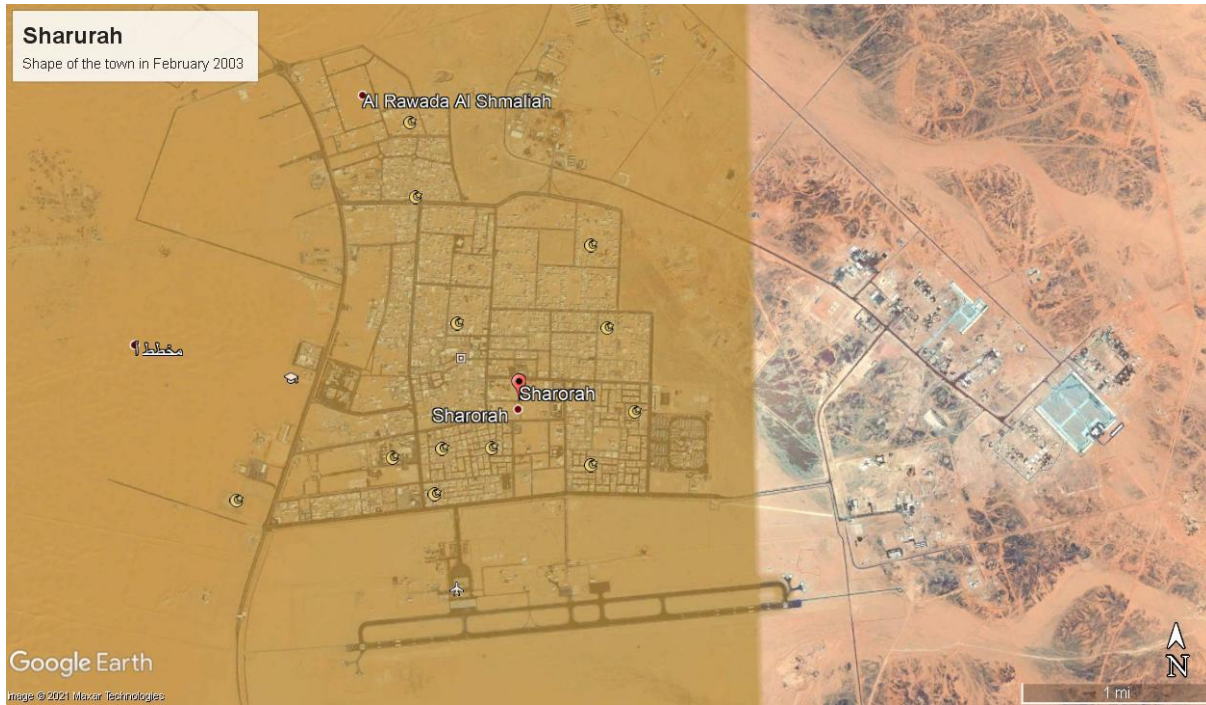
This is hinted at by the developments that took place since Al Enazy published the following statement in 2002, two years after the signing of the Treaty of Jeddah:

„...the Saudi border towns of Sharawrah, Wadi'ah and Kharkhair,... remain under Saudi sovereignty according to the terms of the treaty. However, under the military redeployment provisions of the treaty, the military bases in these villages are to be dismantled, consequently forcing the relatively large civilian population whose livelihood depended on the bases to relocate and abandon these once-thriving desert settlements.“⁸⁴

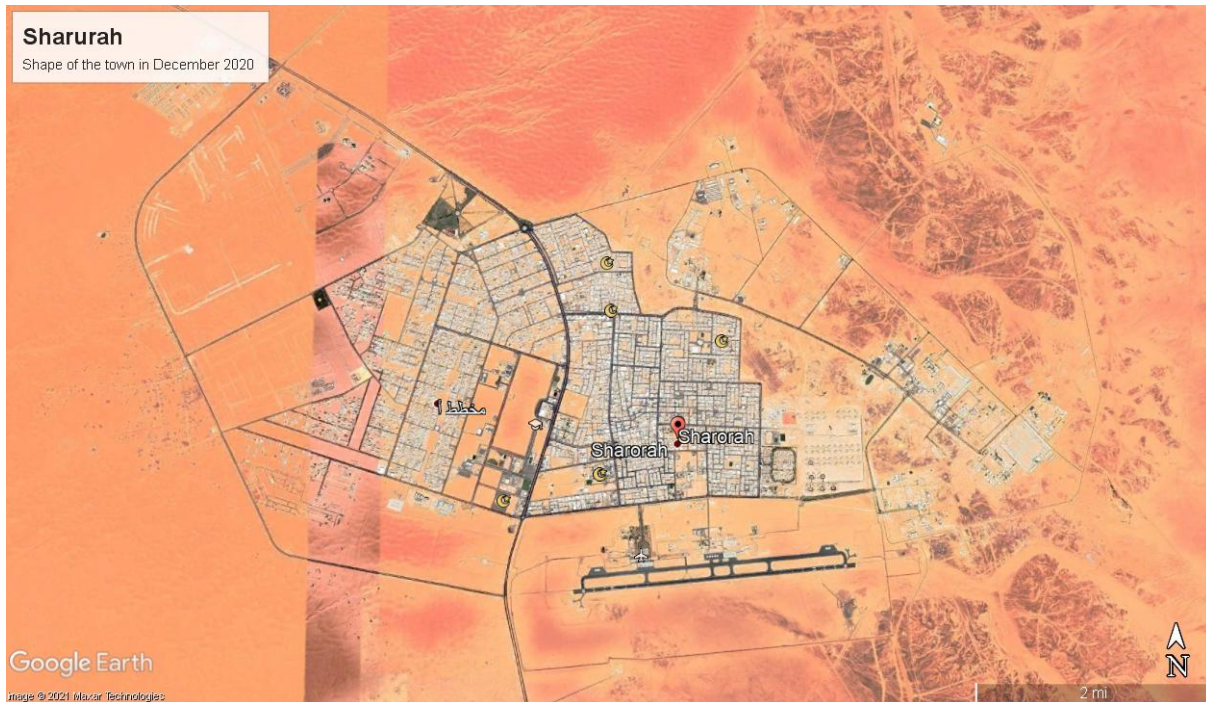
Comparison of satellite imagery conclusively proves that these towns were not attractive to the local population due to the opportunity to obtain service jobs at the local military bases. The town of Sharurah remains attractive, and has in fact significantly expanded since 2002, due to its involvement in security work and cross-border illicit trade. UN expert called the towns, and the nearest Yemeni towns of Rumah and Thamud “smuggling central”⁸⁵ - this description succinctly sums up the raison d'être for the towns.

⁸⁴ Al-Enazy, Askar Halwan. “‘The International Boundary Treaty’ (Treaty of Jeddah) Concluded between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni Republic on June 12, 2000.” *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 96, no. 1, 2002, pp. 161–173.

⁸⁵ Interview with Henry Thompson, Oxford, 18 September 2019



Shape of the town of Sharurah in February 2003, source: Google Earth Pro.



Shape of the town of Sharurah in December 2020, with new developments clearly visible and infrastructural preparation made for further construction, source: Google Earth Pro.

Much like the Yemeni state rewarded its loyal subjects with high military ranks and thus obtained a way of funnelling money to them⁸⁶, the Saudi state used its influence in the border regions in order to recruit a border security force manned by the local tribes. These units wore uniforms, were well-organized and the personnel were exclusively Yemeni citizens, albeit with officer ranks occupied by Saudi nationals. This unit was primarily active on the Saudi side of the Saudi-Yemeni border, in locations bordering the provinces of Sa'adah and Al Jawf. Along with security provided by the co-opted tribes on the inside of the Yemeni territory, the Saudi state established two layers of security, although they served more as permeable membranes rather than concrete walls. This unit was disbanded at the beginning of the Houthi rebellion as it was feared that the pressure the Houthis could exert on the families of those serving in these units made the whole force a liability in times of open conflict.⁸⁷

2.3. Control over militant armed groups

Yemen is plagued by violence surrounding issues of land. A useful background on the various kinds of land disputes was compiled by Kambeck⁸⁸, while Muggah published a short research report regarding social violence connected to land issues.⁸⁹ A post-2001 phenomenon connected to land control and the new political realities is the increase of acceptance of using one's territory to host members of armed groups, in Hadramawt's case particularly Al Qaeda and its offshoots. Hosting a radical group on one's territory is advantageous to both sides, the group receives the hospitality of a tribe, which also provides it with protection while on the tribal territory, while the tribe obtains means of plausible deniability when engaging in inter-tribal conflicts. The hosting of elements of an armed group was likely also viewed positively by the government which used the threat of Al Qaeda to elicit funds from foreign governments under the pretense of

⁸⁶ Brandt, Marieke. "The Irregulars of the Sa 'Ada War: 'Colonel Sheikhs' and 'Tribal Militias' in Yemen's Huthi Conflict (2004–2010)." *Why Yemen matters: A society in transition* (2014): 105-122.

⁸⁷ Lenz-Ayoub, Lisa. "From Bordering to Ordering: The Tribal Factor in Managing the Yemeni-Saudi Border." (2021): 109-120.

⁸⁸ Kambeck, Jens. "Land disputes in Yemen." *Why Yemen matters: A society in transition* (2014): 197-212.

⁸⁹ Muggah, Robert. *Under Pressure: Social Violence over Land and Water in Yemen*. Edited by Emile LeBrun, Small Arms Survey, 2010.

fighting against terrorism.⁹⁰ Establishing the conditions for continued international aid certainly made an individual more likely to be incorporated into the patronage system.

The importance of land and access to it is highlighted by the speeches of the late leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Qasem Al Raymi, which frequently reference land issues.⁹¹ This extremist group is well-versed in the Yemeni social dynamic and utilizes the rhetoric of land both in its tribal and Islamic context. As the identity of a tribesman comprises of two elements, his religion and his ability to control territory⁹², the symbolism of both literal and figurative transgression against this „land“ is well received.

Al Raymi's speeches point to Yemen as *dar al Islam* (abode of Islam) as opposed to *dar al harb* (abode of war) and as such, they stipulate that its status needs to be protected against external threats, while it should be simultaneously used to create the conditions for the conquest of the „abode of war“. Transgressions committed by external forces (national or foreign governments) on tribal lands are used to highlight the injustice against the residents of the areas both as tribesmen and as Muslims and serve as a recruitment tool. The repeated calls onto the „noble tribes“ and their „tribal honour“⁹³ are intended to rile up the tribes and remind them of the days when their control was complete. Importantly, the „incursion“ of foreign elements onto the tribal and Islamic lands does not need to be represented by an actual invasion or occupation. In Al Raymi's speeches, foreign ideas and lifestyles are just as important as physical aggression.

Militant involvement in land issues does not stop with exploiting its propaganda value. AQAP has managed to use opportunities created by the numerous land-based conflicts in Yemen by providing practical solutions and thus winning public approval.

⁹⁰ Interview with Eric Jeunot, 26 October 2019, Beirut

⁹¹ Helmore, Edward. "Trump Appears to Confirm Killing of AL-QAIDA Leader in Yemen." *The Guardian, Guardian News and Media*, 1 Feb. 2020, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/feb/01/trump-al-qaida-leader-yemen-qassim-al-rimi.

⁹² Adra, Najwa. *Qabyala: The tribal concept in the central highlands of the Yemen Arab Republic*. Temple University, 1982.

⁹³ Phillips, Sarah. *What Comes Next in Yemen?: Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building*. Vol. 107. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, during its stints controlling urban territory (Zinjibar and Jaar in 2011 - 2012 and Mukalla and Shihr in 2015-2016) capitalized on its ability to bring swift justice, backed by its own enforcement mechanisms. The public courts in Yemen deal with issues of land ownership as frequently as tribal mediators, if not more, but they are famously bogged down by bureaucracy and incompetence. Therefore the clearing of the backlog of cases related to land ownership quickly wins AQAP favour with the local population, especially since the judgements can be made in accordance with public opinion of favouring a party with stronger local influence, rather than on the merits of the cases presented. The importance of land ownership, the lack of a centralized system for the recording of land transactions and the issues surrounding the return of land to its previous owners following the reversal of the Agrarian reform guarantee that the judicial system will be overrun by land dispute cases and therefore provide AQAP with an opportunity to show its „effectiveness“. The Houthi sect followed the same pattern upon taking over large parts of North Yemen in 2015, it resolved long-standing land issues, stripped former government officials of land holdings they fraudulently obtained and redistributed these according to their interests.⁹⁴

The vast majority of inter-tribal conflicts surround land, its ownership and utilization. Land is a critical resource, but at the same time the consequences of getting involved in an inter-tribal dispute can be costly and long-term, including retaliatory killings, hostage taking and other undesirable repercussions. Given these two facts, it makes sense for an entity controlling a territory to retain links with groups outside of its own kin which can, in return for safe haven, act on behalf of the entity. The most obvious example would be the utilization of radical groups in order to assassinate the leader of an opposing tribe, whilst retaining plausible deniability and perhaps even the option of coming to the „aid“ of the victim’s tribe and thus overcoming the underlying issue by extending a helping hand in a time of crisis. This mechanism of solving local disputes is not well-documented, but anecdotal evidence and the patterns observed in Wadi Do’an,

⁹⁴ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 1 July 2018, Aurangabad

where inter-tribal disputes were frequently followed by „unrelated“ terrorist attacks⁹⁵ on one of the parties suggest that this is a commonplace form of utilizing one’s land for the protection and defence of said land and the individuals residing on it.

2.3.1. Transgressions on tribal lands

Governance in Yemen is a result of interactions within a web of interconnected negotiations, truces and agreements, which give an illusion of lawlessness and disorder, with the US State Department advisory frequently discouraging travel to Yemen on the grounds of „general lawlessness“. Although conditions may be dangerous for a casual traveler, it is safe to say that every bit of land in Yemen is governed and that were a piece of land to be seen as not under someone’s control, a different party would swiftly move in and make a claim to this land.

A former British colonial officer John Shipman once remarked that *“practically every tribe, town and village is a law unto itself.”*⁹⁶ Despite Shipman’s service in the Western Aden Protectorate taking place in the 1960’s and serious social and political changes occurring since then, his observation is very valid to this day, as shown by anecdotal evidence from the Wadi. One informant described the attitude of his tribe towards state involvement thus: *“The community of Sum in central Wadi Hadramawt continues to refuse electricity, claiming that with government services will come taxation and government enforcement. Previous attempts to station policemen outside of the village to man a checkpoint led to the “disappearance” of the corrupt police officers and their burial in the desert.”*⁹⁷

However, the US Central Command has repeatedly justified armed action in Yemen on the grounds of these taking place in “ungoverned spaces”.⁹⁸ The reason for this

⁹⁵ During the period of research in Yemen, the local community in Tarim grew to expect a terrorist attack in Wadi Do’an as soon as the news of a inter-tribal squabble emerged. These attacks were mostly centered around the Budda checkpoint.

⁹⁶ John Shipman to parents, Seyiun, 15 November 1963 as quoted in Thanos Petouris (2018) Britain and Yemen: The End of British rule in South Arabia through the eyes of a young political officer, *Asian Affairs*, 49:1, 56-81.

⁹⁷ Interview with Karama Salim Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

⁹⁸ For example: US Central Command. (20 December 2017) *Update on recent counterterrorism stikes in Yemen*. <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/1401383/update-on-recent-counterterrorism-strikes-in-yemen/> and US Central Command. (16 May 2018) *Update on recent counterterrorism*

discrepancy is twofold: the US, and other western states, struggle to recognize hybrid governance and where they do acknowledge its existence, they fail to engage the local sovereigns in charge of the territories on which sought men hide. A simpler explanation is that western states possess overwhelming technological means for conducting warfare without the need to engage local actors and a certainty that there is no authority which could penalize their actions. It is therefore easier both legally and morally to present a territory as having no ruling entity than to create a framework for engaging unconventional sovereigns.

Since 2010, drone warfare has become part of life in Yemen.⁹⁹ Forces of the United States have conducted strikes against members of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and those associated with the organization and its affiliates. Legally, these strikes are justified on the basis of pre-emptive self-defence¹⁰⁰, essentially claiming that the individuals targeted are known to have hostile intentions towards the United States and as such, they can be targeted. The legal cases are not made public and serious doubts have been expressed as to the thoroughness and reliability of the evidence presented.¹⁰¹

The Yemeni government, when led by President Saleh, was known to participate in at least some of these strikes. Due to the nature of the strikes and intelligence collection leading up to the identification of the targets few details are available, there are however several publicly known facts which betray the Yemeni participation in the strikes. Firstly, the Yemeni government would at times claim responsibility and issue statements indicating that the strikes were conducted by the Yemeni Air Force in order to shield the American involvement and perhaps keep face in front of the Yemeni population. These claims were however not always properly coordinated with the US authorities who

stikes in Yemen. <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/1523709/centcom-updates-counterterrorism-strikes-in-yemen/>

⁹⁹ There was one documented drone strike in 2002 and then none were detected until 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Reisman, W. Michael, and Andrea Armstrong. "The past and future of the claim of preemptive self-defense." *American Journal of International Law* 100.3 (2006): 525-550.

¹⁰¹ Scahill, Jeremy. *The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program*. Simon and Schuster, 2017.

would sometimes admit responsibility for the same incidents.¹⁰² At times, remnants of ammunition identified following the strikes claimed by the Yemeni state betrayed the true identity of the attacking party as this ammunition was not part of the Yemeni arsenal.¹⁰³

The flaws in the „ungoverned spaces“ claim were exposed as early as 2011 in a report published by the US Military Academy West Point.¹⁰⁴ Despite this publication focusing on the provinces in the north of Yemen, its findings are similar to those in Hadramawt. Rather than ungoverned, the locations in which AQAP sometimes hides are governed by individuals or entities which are difficult for the international actors to grasp and communicate with. To label these locations as „ungoverned“ denies agency to the local leaders. Indeed, for actors capable of conducting aerial operations, sovereignty of the local actors is irrelevant in the short term. As none of them possess modern and effective anti-aircraft defense systems, they do not pose threat to the aircraft and even if they did, the use of drones significantly cheapens the conduct of warfare. Potential losses are financially limited and do not affect personnel at all. While in the short-term, this policy is successful in neutralizing potential threats, it creates a sense of resentment and serves as a recruitment tool for extremist organizations.

Aside from the obvious anger over the loss of life of members of the tribe, aerial attacks put the local sovereign into a position of de facto enemy and decide his position and allegiance by default. An attack on the tribe’s territory is seen as disrespectful and hostile as under all variations of the *‘urf* (tribal law), anyone seeking refuge on a tribe’s territory is guaranteed safety. Similarly, the lack of consultation with the present tribal authority hints at the lack of recognition of this authority. Indeed, this authority is not recognized by the international actors, but to many of the tribal subject this is the only authority *they* fully recognize. As such their perception of a drone attack is then not that

¹⁰² Terrill, W. Andrew. *Drones over Yemen: weighing military benefits and political costs*. Army War College Carlisle Barracks PA Strategic Studies Institute, 2013.

¹⁰³ Interview with Rawan Shaif, 5 March 2019, London

¹⁰⁴ Koehler-Derrick, Gabriel. *A false foundation? AQAP, Tribes and ungoverned spaces in Yemen*. Military Academy West Point NY Combating Terrorism Center, 2011.

of a selective neutralization of a pre-selected target, but rather as attack on the tribe's land, sovereignty and honour.

Due to the interconnectedness of tribal units within the wider system of tribal governance, an attack on one tribe is felt by members of other tribes. This takes place both in a sense of an "alliance failure" where all tribes of a certain alliance consider themselves to be attacked and violated, and a wider violation of tribal sovereignty, which resonates throughout the tribal social class across Yemen. In the case of drone strikes and conventional airstrikes, the response of the tribal community is difficult to immediately decipher as an attack takes a very short amount of time and owing to its overwhelming force, does not allow the attacked community to respond in terms of physical violence.

Raids conducted by ground forces personnel (in this case with aerial support provided by helicopters), do allow for a response. The 2017 US Navy SEALs raid on Al Ghayil in Yakla in Al Baydah province was just such a case, in which the US forces attacked the village in an attempt to kill or capture a number of AQAP members spending the night in the village.¹⁰⁵ Despite the obvious advantage on the side of the US forces, mainly exemplified by the attack helicopters, many in the neighboring settlements rushed to help the hamlet under attack, despite realizing the futility of their efforts and the high likelihood of getting killed. It needs to be stressed that these tribesmen were unlikely to be linked to AQAP and their attempted help was a piece of the puzzle of tribal solidarity and honor. A village provided housing to AQAP fighters according to a custom of hospitality, this elicited a response from the US forces which in turn triggered a reaction of the nearby tribes.

To assume that militant groups find refuge due to a complete lack of local governance is flawed. Individuals and groups do not aimlessly roam across Yemen – their presence is almost always by design, they exchange their utility for access to land and form a part of the governance landscape of Yemen.

¹⁰⁵ Craig, Iona. "Women and Children In Yemeni Village Recall Horror of Trump's 'Highly Successful' SEAL Raid." *The Intercept*, 9 Mar. 2017, theintercept.com/2017/03/09/women-and-children-in-yemeni-village-recall-horror-of-trumps-highly-successful-seal-raid/.

2.4. Recognition of tribal rights

When discussing the tribal lands of Hadramawt, the use of the term “ownership” would be misleading. The majority of the land in Hadramawt is claimed, rather than owned in the conventional sense of the word. The effectiveness of these claims is dictated by the extent to which they are recognized by other parties as there is no centralized system of record-keeping and enforcement. Documents and deeds serve to provide legitimacy, but do not on their own guarantee the recognition of a claim. Unless a party, that is a family, section of a tribe, sub-tribe or a tribe possess the ability to inflict truly devastating damage upon the party whose land it desires to control, it is ill-advised to ignore the claims made by another entity. In doing so, the offending party risks retaliation, the sparking of a wider conflict involving the whole tribe or a confederation, an intervention of a third party (either non-violent, which is still bound to blemish the reputation of the offending party, or a violent intervention by a state actor). The respect for tribal rules of conduct is partially based on the fear of the dismantling of the ‘urf and general organization of the tribal class if a large enough number of parties ceased to recognize these norms of behaviour as binding. This would jeopardize the status of the tribal class and complicate the extraction of benefits available to them due to their class membership.

The study of land claims in Hadramawt, and in Yemen in general, is made more complicated by the fact that terminology is always location-dependent and the lack of a centralized registry equals the lack of common language regarding land and its use. However, the oral tradition does offer an interesting insight into the duration of tenure of the tribal lands. Upon discovery of archaeological artefacts displaying Hadramautic and later Sabaean language inscriptions, it was proven that the modern-day names of the locations mostly correspond to the ancient names for the same locations.¹⁰⁶ The retention of this information through oral tradition suggests that the same kinship group has been laying claim to a certain location for a very long time, centuries at the very least. The tenure of land control was more easily achieved in the past, when members of a tribe were not tempted to leave the tribal unit in search of a better livelihood in town

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Abdul Rahman Hassan Al Saqqaf, 18 April 2018, Seyiun

or abroad and when the physical difficulty of moving around Hadramawt aided in retaining tribal members in one location.

The claims to control and “ownership” of tribal land are rooted in the historic control of these territories by members of the same tribe and they are passed down the generations. Bedouins learn to recognize the boundaries of their territory using natural landmarks and regularly maintained artificial landmarks, usually in the form of mutilated tree trunks.¹⁰⁷ These “brands” signal to outsiders that they are entering the grazing land of another tribe and serve to both protect the harvest available on this land for the use of its “owner” and to prevent conflicts. The demarcation of one’s territory (at least of the part of it that can be demarcated using permanent markers) strengthens the tribe’s claim to this area as members of other tribes grow accustomed to them and the recognition of another tribe’s claim becomes part of their own tradition and rhetoric. The tribe’s claim to a territory can be recognized implicitly by another tribe when they describe their own territory as being located “between the territories of tribes A and B” instead of describing their territory as extending from marker A to marker B.

Some of the tribal lands are settled permanently, while others experience circular migration of its inhabitants. Generally, the pastoralists will stay in one area for 3 months to two years, but the length of their stay is not necessarily dictated solely by the amount of fodder available to their animals. The pattern of migration within the tribal territory is likewise informed by the need to strengthen and consolidate the claim over some parts of the territory and to prevent others from attempting to encroach on the land. The continued use of the land and the presence of pastoralists in the location make a statement to others that the land is not available and they should not attempt to use it. Strategic movement of the Bedouins also serves to prepare “arguments” in case of a potential mediation. Should section of the tribe’s land be at risk of takeover by another tribe, it would be helpful in mediation if the tribe laying the original claim to the land could prove that it has recently utilized the land, without anyone objecting to this.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Henry Thompson, 18 September 2019, Oxford

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Hassan al Barqi Al Kathiri, 21 April 2018, Al Ghurfah

Control of tribal territory comes with a set of rights. These rights are usually rooted in the past, when the grazing of animals was primarily utilized for sustenance, while they remain in existence due to their utility in signalling the control of the territory to members of one's own tribe and to other tribes. When these rights are exercised without interference, the tribe's claim is recognized by its neighbours and others. This can be further strengthened by the willingness of other tribes to engage in bartering and trades of rights, despite these often being symbolic and of little economic advantage to either party. The exchange of rights serves as a mutual recognition of the sovereign status over the land.

A tribe whose claim to a certain territory is recognized usually possesses the following rights over it: to graze their own animals, to allow others to graze their animals on this land, to control the water sources and allow others to use them temporarily, to let others travel through the territory and graze animals in transit or set up beehives, to let others smuggle through the territory, to host refugees and provide them with protection, to set up temporary camp or set up a small business – this mostly pertains to quarrying or mining salt.

Grazing and access to water are theoretically everyone's, but in reality the tribe controlling a given territory will restrict access to these and attempt to force the departure of those who attempt to invoke this principle in the interest of a long-term stay on the tribe's territory.¹⁰⁹

The individual rights are not as important as what they symbolize – they serve to show one's sovereignty over a piece of territory. Although the value of allowing someone to set up beehives is low, to be asked for a permission and to be pointed to when beekeepers ask from whom they should obtain the permission is a powerful affirmation of one's status. A tribal leader whose right to make these decisions is widely respected by the members of his own tribe is in a desirable position and is likely to be included in the patronage network.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Henry Thompson, 18 September 2019, Oxford

It appears a similar function of testing a tribe's health and signalling one's own was historically fulfilled by the raids and the theft of camels. Documents of the British administration of the Eastern Aden Protectorate label these as "a national sport"¹¹⁰ but given that where a formal complaint was made, the camels and stolen property were almost always recovered or an adequate amount was paid to compensate for the damages, there seems to be little purpose in these thefts other than to test the power of another party. While there might be a cultural element to the thefts that equates camel theft and violent action with masculinity, given the potential consequences to the culprit, the existence of these crimes cannot be explained by the cultural rooting of these actions alone. One of the potential explanations for the acceptability and even encouragement of these actions is that young men, unmarried and childless, were seen as suitable for the test of the defences of another tribe, in a situation where the loss of a provider could have dire consequence on the family of an older man. The raids and theft could also serve to solidify the young man's position within the tribe and establish his reputation as fearless and thus respectable individual. Likely these events were motivated by a combination of the two – the exploitation of the young man for the benefit of the tribe which in turn provided the man with credentials.

The value of land control can be amplified by the discovery of natural resources within one's territory. However, while this discovery might increase the chances of individuals controlling a given territory to be co-opted into patronage networks and provided with commercial opportunities, such discoveries also create a burden on the community controlling the territory. This burden comes in the form of state interference and the presence of the armed forces, whose leadership is also dependent on the exploitation of the patronage network. In order to extract benefits from these natural resources, attempts at creating intra-tribal divisions within tribal units whose leading sheikhs are not compliant with the interests of the state and the armed forces are made.¹¹¹ This "negotiation" between the tribe, its leaders, the military, commercial elites and the government often takes a violent form. Most commonly, a compromise is reached

¹¹⁰ Hadramawt Intelligence Summary dated 2 May 1937, written by W.H. Ingrams, accessible in the Middle Eastern Archive at St. Anthony's College, Oxford.

¹¹¹ Interview with Saleh Al Batati, 15 October 2019, London

wherein a profit sharing agreement is closed. Such an agreement might include the provision of jobs for members of the relevant tribes, government jobs for its leadership¹¹² and further contracts given to the tribe.¹¹³

Before such an agreement is put in place and periodically during the existence of the agreement, individuals feel as though they are being unfairly compensated for the role they play in the business. When the tribe is stubborn and refuses to yield to the “government”, or more precisely a group of individuals connected to the government but not in fact acting on behalf of it, violence erupts and attempts are made at the removal of the figures associated with the resistance. The Ba Moas tribe experienced this when requesting the opening of new “negotiations” and asking for a larger share of the profits. When it became apparent that an agreement could not be reached and the tribe continued to disrupt the operation of the oil installation, vehicles bearing the banner of the Al Qaeda appeared on the territory and attacked the tribesmen.¹¹⁴

Similarly the founding of the Hadramawt Tribal Confederation (or Alliance, as it is sometimes called in English) occurred after Sheikh Sa'ad Bin Habrish, leader of the Hamum tribe, found his death at a military checkpoint in Seiyun, on 5 December 2013.¹¹⁵ Although the government initially claimed that the military killed members of Al Qaeda¹¹⁶, alleging that the sheikh, a widely respected public figure, was a member of the organization, that was not the truth and the government eventually removed the announcement from its official media channels. Sheikh Bin Habrish was a proponent of the Hadrami population benefitting more significantly from the oil extracted in the province. His idea of achieving that was to replace the, in his words, corrupt Army officers from the North with local security forces.¹¹⁷ The killing of Bin Habrish was a gross miscalculation on the part of the government, as despite the Hadramawt Tribal

¹¹² Brandt, Marieke, 'The Irregulars of the Şa'dah War: 'Colonel Shaykhs' and 'Tribal Militias' in Yemen's Ḥūthī Conflict (2004–2010)', in *Why Yemen Matters: a Society in Transition*, SOAS Middle East Issues, July 2014.

¹¹³ Interview with Henry Thompson, 18 September 2019, Oxford

¹¹⁴ Interview with Saleh Al Batati, 15 October 2019, London

¹¹⁵ Bafana, Haykal. *Hadhramaut in a State of Flux - Blog | Haykal Bafana*.

web.archive.org/web/20180405104556/http://blog.haykal.sg/hadhramaut/23-lp/33-hadhramaut-in-a-state-of-flux.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*

¹¹⁷ Interview with Saleh Mullah Dawilah, 9 December 2016, Tarim

Confederation's promise that oil workers would not be attacked, the extraction of oil was all but halted in the weeks following the killing and foreign oil companies evacuated their workers. On a political side of things, the killing served as a rallying cry to the tribes, united them under one banner and further weakened the position of the central government in Hadramawt.

2.5. Politics of arable land

While the tribal lands mostly consist of grazing plots or barren land for which there is no recorded decree or title of ownership, the situation is different for land that is arable. The notion of "ownership" is more real in this case, as beyond a historic claim, there is usually documentary evidence proving the legitimacy of the claim. These titles are held by a nominated member of the community - *khayyil*, usually an older male of no particular descent but an established reputation of trustworthiness. These titles usually take the form of loose sheets of paper held in a folder or ledger in the home of the man responsible for record keeping.¹¹⁸ The existence of this individual provides another layer of administration and governance in an otherwise unregulated field, but it is important to note that the role of the *khayyil* as described by Rodionov¹¹⁹ bears no enforcement rights or duties. The *khayyil* and his assistant provide purely administrative function, primarily related to the distribution of water, and although they may be invited to mediate conflicts, this is largely due to the respect they enjoy within the community. This distinction shows that the enforcement of any claim is again left to the concerned party itself, although a proclamation made by the *khayyil* might give the claim legitimacy and make it easier to find allies. In this instance, as with many others, the *sada* have an advantage in their ability to use an already established network of allies belonging to the *qabail* class for the enforcement of their claims.

The position of a *khayyil* refers specifically to areas that are flood irrigated and although similar positions exist in areas where irrigation is provided by wells, these are limited to safeguarding land titles and do not come with the same respect as that enjoyed by the

¹¹⁸ Interview with Henry Thompson, 18 September 2019, Oxford

¹¹⁹ Rodionov, Mikhail. "Irrigation in western *Ḥaḍramawt*: *khayyil* as a social role." Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies. Vol. 29. Archaeopress, 1999.

khayyil. The administrative and governance aspect of the khayyil role is removed when there is no need for a communal coordination of irrigation. Rodionov notes: *“flood-irrigation is based on self-regulating community principles without any central apparatus of control and subordination, whereas well-irrigation promotes a relationship based on individual tenure.”*¹²⁰ Rodionov and other studies show that well-irrigation was especially prevalent in the area surrounding Al Qatn in the central Wadi of Hadramawt. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is interesting to note that the same area was a known Socialist stronghold, later became known as a Salafist-leaning location and most recently (the last decade or so) became a place of frequent Al Qaeda activity and counter-terrorism raids. This dissertation does not provide the evidence to substantiate a link between the loss of need for community organization (and the resulting loss of respect for nominated elders) and the volatility of social structures, which lead to a propensity for opportunistic re-creation of one’s identity according to the current political and social climate, but the anecdotal evidence suggests that such connection is quite possible.

In a numerical sense, the value of arable land far exceeds that of the grazing lands due to its productivity. As seen with other types of land in Hadramawt, the value of the land, however productive, is no longer in the harvest itself. In contrast to the tribal territories, the arable plots are grouped together and close to urban centres and therefore they are not suitable for smuggling or hosting armed groups; their value lies primarily in the control of the lower classes of the society, as despite the comparatively low output of agricultural production in Hadramawt, there are still some within the society whose survival depends on growing crops. These are almost exclusively members of the lower classes of the society, who do not benefit from remittances and are in no way co-opted into the patronage network. These individuals and families farm the land owned by the upper social classes for a portion of the harvest. The share-cropping agreement brings little value to the owners, perhaps with the exception of maintaining the land that would otherwise become susceptible to overtaking by other parties as it would be considered

¹²⁰ *ibid*

neglected. To those farming this land however, access to high quality soil is what stops them from sinking into poverty and going hungry.

This situation is easily exploited by the land owners, who at no cost to themselves dictate the behaviour of the share-croppers, using primarily implicit forms of enforcement. In the example of the sada of Wadi Hadramawt, instances have been noted where a share-cropping family expressing dissatisfaction with the behaviour or actions of the sada class was forced to vacate land it tended to for decades and was allocated a plot unsuitable for agriculture. Actions like these, although officially shielded by other excuses, such as the need to reconstruct the irrigation channels or similar, are clearly understood by the lower classes. It is acknowledged within the community that dissent against the ruling, or property-owning, classes leads to unpleasant consequences. The complex relationship between the sada and the tribal class allows the sada to coerce others without needing to resort to violence, which is only used in truly exceptional cases and even then, always indirectly either through state institutions or tribal proxies.

2.6. Hawtas and endowed land

The concept of a hawta offers two definitions. In the first, any place where peace is to be kept, mainly mosques and markets, are considered hawtas and acts of violence committed there constitute “black shame” under the rules of ‘urf. What is considered hawta depends largely on the local custom and on each individual’s understanding of this custom. While some see entire towns are hawtas, others can point to very unusual locations, such as the shade thrown by a specific tree on a tribal territory and claim these as hawtas, places of safe interaction and mediation.¹²¹

The other definition of a hawta is more fitting of the English translation of the term as a “sacred enclave”.¹²² As tribes derive their power from the control of territory, so do the sada base part their power on a physical location. In the case of the sada, territorial control is the result of their religious legitimacy rather than a prerequisite for it, although

¹²¹ Interview with Fawzi Mahfudh bin Zablagh, 10 December 2016, Seyiun

¹²² Knysh, Alexander. “The Sāda in History: A Critical Essay on Ḥaḍramī Historiography.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1999, pp. 215–22.

it does contribute to a loop of affirmation which includes legitimacy and dominance. As religion is often thought of in abstract and spiritual terms, at least in the case of the Hadrami sada, this is backed by the ability to impose sovereign rule on a territory.

Yet again, the use of the term “sacred enclave” primarily points to the religious importance of the location and omits its political significance. Both the Kathiri and Qu’aiti sultans of the past realized the benefits offered to them by the location of a hawta on their territory and both attempted to use it to increase the legitimacy of their rule. While the Kathiri sultan did so by inviting the sada of Tarim to establish a hawta on a piece of territory he carved out of his own land in Seyiun,¹²³ the Qu’aiti sultan attempted to establish his own hawta and in doing so, claim the legitimacy of the sayyids for himself.¹²⁴

The most enduring hawtas are the ones led by a leader called *munsib* and belonging to reputable sada families. The Tarimi munsibs claim that there are only 6 “legitimate” hawtas in Hadramawt, all conveniently located in Tarim and each belonging to one of the important sada families resident there. They agree that originally there was only one hawta, called Hawta Ba ‘Alewi, which served to provide security to the sada and shield their children from the influence of the outside world.¹²⁵ This hawta was walled – the walls were built between the various mosques in Tarim and the sada lived within them, having their own entrance to the mosques and without having to interact with the outside world, known as the *suq* (market).

The munsibs who subscribe to the term hawta only being legitimately used when talking of “sacred enclaves” often claim that “their” hawtas operate differently to all other kinds of locations considered to be hawtas. They are correct as most other hawtas are clearly defined spatially, whereas the hawtas operated by the sada families have evolved to grant certain rights and privileges to their owners outside of its territory. Only “sacred”

¹²³ According to the sada lore, Sultan Badr bin Abdallah abu Tweirk Al Kathiri begged the sada of Tarim around the year 1400 to establish a hawta in Seyiun and in doing so, affirm his legitimacy as a ruler. After negotiation, Hawta Taha bin ‘Umar Al Saqqaf was established in the town, part of the Al Saqqaf family relocated there and to this day, they continue to dominate the social and cultural sphere of the town.

¹²⁴ Interview with Abdul Rahman Hassan Al Saqqaf, 18 April 2018, Seyiun

¹²⁵ Interview with Aidaroos bin Abdullah Aidaroos, 21 April 2018, Tarim

hawtas have nominated leadership – others function merely as standalone locations respected as sanctuaries by the parties using them to conduct business there. Lastly, only the “sacred” hawtas have a set of rituals, ceremonies and literature devoted specifically to a given hawta.

The evolution of the power of sayyids is especially interesting. In contrast with the tribe, the authority of the leader of a hawta in relation to his subjects does not end at the border of the controlled territory. With this type of a hawta, anyone considered to be a resident of the location has been historically deemed to be under the authority of the munsib, regardless of where this “subject” was. Whether this individual committed an offence on tribal or “sultanic” land, his judgement would be passed down by the munsib of the hawta to which the individual belonged.¹²⁶ This clearly shows the importance of the hawta to the formation and retention of legitimacy of the Ba ‘Alewi sada in Hadramawt. To have this level of power recognized and respected by other entities, which possessed armed capabilities and there was no way of compelling them to comply with the directives of the munsib, is a strong signal to the whole community as to the credibility of the munsib and by extension, his whole family.

The importance of the hawta to the establishment of the influence of the sada social class can hardly be overstated and is evidenced in the writings of RB Serjeant who claims that *“the history of Saiyid power in Hadramawt is in some degree that of the growth of their influence through founding Saiyid hawtahs, parallel with the decline of the Mashayikh hawtahs which they eclipsed.”*¹²⁷ Serjeant’s claim shows that the concept of a hawta was not brought to Hadramawt by the sada, but it was adopted and altered to suit their needs.

The interruption of traditional life during the Communist rule in South Yemen meant that many of the old traditions were disrupted and never quite returned. The position of the hawta and the munsib fall within this category. By their own admission, the sada are now much more friendly to the general population and consider themselves to be a part

¹²⁶ Interview with Aidaroos bin Abdullah Aidaroos, 21 April 2018, Tarim

¹²⁷ Serjeant, Robert Bertram. *The Saiyids of Hadramawt*. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1957.

of it.¹²⁸ There are no longer walls connecting the mosques of Tarim and religious education (ta'alim) is offered to a wider audience, consisting of members of all classes and foreigners, who would have previously only be allowed access to training (tadrib, education in the conventional sense of the word, comprising of languages, humanities and sciences). The munsibs no longer control their subjects to the level of their predecessors and their power is much less formal. Instead, their control of a location relies on the power of their personalities. Some argue that the hawta has essentially become mobile.¹²⁹ While previously the subject was mobile, but his behaviour was controlled by the central location of the well-defined and marked hawta, nowadays the hawta itself has become mobile and even though the locations are still recognized and respected, even more respect is afforded to the individuals connected with the hawta, regardless of their location.

There are recent instances of individuals who committed a crime and then, fearing repercussions, sought refuge with Habib Umar bin Hafiz, a leading figure of the Tarimi sada.¹³⁰ Habib Umar does not lead a recognized hawta, neither his house nor the Dar al Mustafa seminary he heads are built on the land of a traditional hawta. Regardless, individuals in his presence and even more so those whose security he guaranteed are treated as if they were on hawta land. This extends beyond the neighbourhood of Habib Umar's residence and applies even when refuge is sought while he is on the road. Within the past decade, there was an incident at the Qabr Hud pilgrimage site in which a young tribesman accidentally killed a child when he lost control of his automatic rifle during celebratory gunfire. This individual immediately sought out Habib Umar bin Hafiz as he knew that in his presence, he would be treated as if he were on hawta land and would not be harmed by the kin of the killed child. Once Habib Umar agreed to mediate in the case, the man was sure he would not be harmed even when not accompanied by Habib Umar and that the case would be settled by peaceful means. This practice is similar to the sada accompanying caravans of the past¹³¹, although in that case, their

¹²⁸ Interview with Zain al Haddad, 7 December 2016, Tarim

¹²⁹ Consensus reached in an informal group discussion conducted at Qabr Nabi Allah Hud in 2018.

¹³⁰ Interview with Fahmi Fararah, 10 December 2016, Seyiun

¹³¹ *ibid*

presence was required in order to guarantee the safe passage of goods, while now the very knowledge of being under a respected man's protection affords one the same rights as if they were on hawta land.

There are practical aspects to the change of rules governing the life in the hawtas and many of these changes would have been likely to occur even if there was no interruption due to the Socialist rule in South Yemen. The rules governing the life of a munsib in the past were rather strict – he could never deny anyone an audience, he had to accept every invitation, he had to live within the hawta and he had to continue to prove his superior knowledge of genealogy. The sada of Tarim today agree that if a similar standard was applied today, there would be no munsibs left and the entire institution would crumble as it is clearly impractical.¹³²

This practice of reliance on the power of an individual is reminiscent of the times of the foundation of hawtas, before they became institutions in their own right and their establishment and operation could be predictable and conducted on the basis of recognized rules. The early hawtas were a delicate balancing act – the individual who was interested in founding one had to carefully assess his own influence and the level of protection he would be afforded. He had to demonstrate value to the location on which he wanted to establish the hawta and thus obtain a proxy access to the armed capabilities of the local residents. In order to provide value, open new markets and supposedly also due to higher ideals of their religious mission, the sada had to choose locations which required the presence of a calming influence. Residents of peaceful and well-governed areas would struggle to understand the need for a mediating body in their location. Umar Abu Bakr al Attas established his hawta in Hureidah as it was “the only location where nobody invited him to their home for refreshments and allegedly, his donkey was slapped as it was drinking.”¹³³

2.6.1. Symbolic value and reclamation of hawtas

¹³² Interview with Aidaroos bin Abdullah Aidaroos, 21 April 2018, Tarim

¹³³ Interview with Zain al Haddad, 12 April 2018, Tarim

The Agrarian reform was designed to break up old alliances and rigid power structures in Wadi Hadramawt and it did at least partially achieve its goal during the two decades it was in effect. However, the reversal of this reform meant a tighter grip on territory by the land-owning elites as, having learned of the possibility of losing their land holdings, they came back with even more resolution to dominate the life in Hadramawt. The following case study looks at events that occurred in the town of Tarim between 1989 and 1995 and highlights the importance of maintaining physical location as a prerequisite for the construction of the identity of members of the sada class.

Although the legitimacy of the Ba 'Alewis is founded on religious credentials, its continued prominence depends on its ability to exert itself politically, whether openly or through proxy actors. While the public appearance is that of a peaceful and mediating force, in reality this group is forced to use any policy instruments to guarantee its survival.¹³⁴ The exceptional event of having to reclaim the hawtas, politically and sometimes through force, shows the range of tools the sada have at their disposal in order to exert their will. The attitude of the sada class towards these incidents then says much about the emphasis it puts on public appearance and their mindfulness of what this appearance should be. The only people willing to discuss the incidents surrounding the reclamation of the hawtas were Hadramis who grew up outside of Hadramawt and who were themselves seen as not entirely "local" by the other members of the sada group.¹³⁵ Participants and witnesses of these events either preferred not to talk about them, minimized the role of the sada in the violence and in some cases, insisted that no such incidents ever took place.

The location in question is the Hawta al Haddad in Hawi (a village bordering Tarim). Established by one of the most famous Hadrami Sufis, Imam Abdullah ibn Alawi al Haddad (1634 - 1720), the enclave became a site of pilgrimages as well as a base of the entire Haddad family. To this day, the Book of Assistance, a magnum opus of Imam al Haddad, is used as a core teaching material in religious institutions following the Ba 'Alewi tariqa. Even though the Haddad family had a considerable presence in South-

¹³⁴ ibid

¹³⁵ ibid

East Asia prior to the arrival of the Communists to power, its undisputable base remained in Hawi, where the original mosque of Imam al Haddad stood and where even the most prominent foreign-based members of the family would return to prior to their demise in order to be entered into the same graveyard as Imam al Haddad himself.¹³⁶ Following the removal of the Haddad family from their hawta, residences were allocated to individuals of non-sada heritage, but none of the buildings were demolished. The modest mosque dating to the times of Imam Haddad remained in use.

As lineage is paramount to the retention of legitimacy of the sada, the family keeps meticulous records of all its members, their family trees and any publications they produced (primarily on religious matters). The volumes containing this information were smuggled into Egypt in a nighttime operation aided by some of those who despite joining the Communist cause continued to respect the sada and perhaps fear the possible consequences in the afterlife.¹³⁷ This allowed the family to continue operating as a unified entity, but throughout the decades of living in exile, the return of these records to the hawta continued to be seen as a necessity and regularly discussed during family gatherings. There were invocations (*du'a*) written specifically for this purpose.¹³⁸

Such opportunity presented itself with the downfall of the Democratic People's Republic of Yemen in 1990. As the state institutions dissolved along with the crumbling of governments in the Eastern bloc, many of the policies designed to target the elites were being revoked or at least were no longer enforced. Given the success of the Hadramis in exile, these diaspora members were seen as a suitable source of investment and an impulse for the revival of the ailing economy. While members of other social classes usually had little incentive to return to Hadramawt, the sada saw this time as an opportunity to renew their ties with the homeland, reclaim their property and strengthen their position in the many conflicts with the non-sada Hadramis in the diaspora. A triumphant return to the homeland would help the sada on all of these fronts. With the position of the sada and the Arabs generally in Singapore steadily deteriorating and the

¹³⁶ Ho, Engseeng. *The graves of Tarim: genealogy and mobility across the Indian Ocean*. Univ of California Press, 2006.

¹³⁷ Interview with Zain al Haddad, Tarim, 13 April 2018.

¹³⁸ Interview with Muhsin Hamid Ahmad Al Haddad, Hawi, 30 April 2018.

need to hide their religious practices while residing in Saudi Arabia, there was strong interest in return.¹³⁹

However, in the reshuffling that resulted from the regime change in South Yemen, many of the former Communist elements became associated with the Salafi movement as the anticipated return of the land-owning elites could be best countered on religious grounds. In addition to the pragmatic choice made by some former Communists, the popularity and rise of the Salafi movement in Hadramawt at the time can be explained by the support of President Saleh who sought to replicate the governance model he applied in the North and identified quietist Salafis as a force that could counter the anticipated influence of the returning sada. As many of the Salafis were formerly Communists, it is unsurprising that they attempted to continue some of the policies implemented by the Communists, among which was the occupation of locations seen as crucial for the legitimacy of the sada.

For a short period at the beginning of the 1990s, one of the most important mosques in the history of the Ba 'Alewi sada became a popular venue for the teaching of the Salafi doctrine as a large number of Salafis, allegedly under the leadership of a Saudi imam, used the mosque as their primary base in the Tarim area.¹⁴⁰ Logistically, Hawi would not be seen as a very good choice given its relative distance from the city centre, but the symbolic value of taking over this building was too great to pass up. As the first sada members returned to the area, a series of incidents and minor conflicts occurred, including the wiring of the doorknob of Abdul Qadir bin al Haddad who led the early returnees so that he would get an electrical shock as he attempted to leave his house to attend prayers.¹⁴¹ In a short amount of time, it became clear that the Salafis – with the support of the new government as well as the old leadership structures – were not going to respect the traditional authority of the sada.

Given the turbulent political situation, the sada could not count on the support of their tribal allies who were likewise only just returning to the country and struggling to reclaim

¹³⁹ Interview with Zain al Haddad, Tarim, 12 April 2018.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*

¹⁴¹ *ibid*

their property. At the same time, the symbolic importance of reclaiming the hawta and reversing the embarrassment of being forcibly evicted was of paramount importance to the returning sayyids. This exceptional moment showed the flexibility of the sada class as they mobilized their contact network and found a branch of their family in the province of Shabwa. The sayyids in Shabwa never renounced weapons and some went on to attain considerable positions in the military during the times of the DPRY, while the Hadrami sada comprised of unarmed clerics and returning emigrees who spent most of their lives in business and professional positions, with the leader of the returnees being a commercial pilot.

The Shabwani sada arrived armed, entering the mosque by force and engaging in a fight with the Salafis attending a lecture there. The fight did not escalate to the use of weapons, but physical violence did take place and weapons were displayed as a threat. The Shabwani leader of the reclamation effort was then appointed as the new munsib, despite not coming from the branch of the family connected to Ahmad bin Hassan al Haddad and not being a learned man, both prerequisites for the position.

The bending of the rules of sada conduct and subsequently of rules of succession of leadership highlight the ability of the sada to alter their norms to fit the situation and the importance of the location. Since then, the mosque was expanded and the old structure and its well form a small part of the new building. The new mosque and surrounding areas bear multiple banners showing the belonging of the area to the Al Haddad family. The pre-DPRY schedule of rituals and public gatherings resumed, but as only 3 members of the Ba Harmi family, previously responsible for providing the musical accompaniment to the rituals, were able to remember the chants and even then not all of them, they were joined by a member of the Mangar family who remembered some of them and in return, a member of the Mangar is now allowed to carry the Haddad flag at public celebrations, thus providing evidence for the swift return of some pre-1967, when such position would be seen as prestigious.

In addition to reclaiming property previously owned exclusively by the sada, their return was also marked by the monopolization of sites of religious and folk importance. Two most significant expressions of this process are the development of the area

surrounding the grave of Ahmad bin Isa Al Muhajir near Seyiun and the use of Qabr Nabi Allah Hud, and the annual pilgrimage taking place there, for the affirmation of the sada status and signalling the prominence of the group.

The grave of Ahmad bin Isa Al Muhajir was housed in an unremarkable structure on the side of the Tarim – Seyiun road until the return of the sada in the 1990s, their reclamation of the area and eventually a development of a religious seminary adjacent to the structure. The grave was previously freely accessible and utilized for prayers by travellers and nearby residents, but between 2003 – 2007, first new structures appear on the images and by 2012, anyone coming to visit the site must pass through a guarded gate belonging to the Sufi seminary. This puts the population in a position of having to “show their hand” in terms of political and religious affiliation, which they do both by attending the site or choosing to abandon the rituals of their forefathers so as not to be associated with the Sufi community.



The grave of Al Muhajir in 2003. Source: Google Earth



The grave of Al Muhajir in 2019. Source: Google Earth



Photo of the Sufi seminary with the grave visible on the hill on the left hand side of the image.



Photos of the Sufi seminary taken from the site of the grave.

2.6.1. Case study of Qabr Nabi Allah Hud



The town of Qabr Nabi Allah Hud. Source: Google Earth

Qabr Nabi Allah Hud, or Qabr Hud (meaning the Grave of Hud) is a location of the alleged grave of a pre-Islamic Prophet named Hud. This area, located in the Manahil territory in Wadi Hadramawt, is perhaps the best studied of the Hadrami “hawtas” and rightly so, as it continues to play a significant role in the political and social life of the entire Wadi. This location comprises of a domed mosque, a collection of historical landmarks, such as large stone which is alleged to be Prophet Hud’s she-camel who transformed into a part of the landscape upon his death, and a number of houses and compounds used to host the visiting pilgrims.

As the non-sada residents of Hadramawt trace their origin to a common ancestor, ‘Ad, the pilgrimage historically served to affirm this commonality of the province’s inhabitants, strengthen the bonds between them by highlighting the shared aspects of their identities and in doing so, establish conditions for the resolution of tribal conflicts and creation of alliances against non-Hadramis.¹⁴² Every year, the pilgrimage was attended by Hadramis and Mahris, who travelled in caravans and along the way visited the tombs of great Sufi scholars of the past. This practice made the pilgrimage a long-term commitment, as some would spend a month or more travelling to and from Qabr Hud.

Although other such pilgrimages to graves of pre-Islamic prophets existed (and continue to exist on a local basis) in Hadramawt, such as the pilgrimage to the grave of prophet Salih north of Shibam¹⁴³, none could compete with the importance of the Hud pilgrimage. Those attending these lesser pilgrimages are rarely from outside of the immediate area, sometimes the pilgrimages only attract those of a certain group or class (such as the badu in case of the Salih pilgrimage), but most importantly few of these pilgrimages are honouring an individual so significantly connected to the Qur’an, where Hud enjoys the privilege of having a surah named after him, along with mentions in others.

¹⁴² Al Sabbān, A. M., L. Boxberger, and A. Abdelrahim Abu Hulaḡqa. "Visits and customs: the visit to the Tomb of the Prophet Hud." (1998).

¹⁴³ Ingrams, Harold. *Arabia and the Isles*. Murray, 1966.

Boxberger¹⁴⁴ illustrates the significance of the Hud pilgrimage succinctly when she narrates an anecdote about competing “quarters” in the town of Seiyun, where residents of one were not allowed to cross the line onto the territory of another. The only exception, where no member of any quarter had to fear violence, was when they were returning from the Hud pilgrimage, which is when everyone was allowed to use the main entrance gate to the town. She relays another story in which the Kathiri Sultans had their legitimacy affirmed by the sada travelling to Qabr Hud and returning with the discovery of the Sultan’s direct patrilineal connection to this prophet.

Although the exact origins of power relations regarding Qabr Hud will be difficult to disentangle, there are some undisputable facts that will allow us to get a sense of the situation. Qabr Hud is located in land claimed by the Manahil tribe, falling under the wider Al Aafayan tribe, which is part of the Bani Zanna confederation.¹⁴⁵ Historical written sources mentioned by Sarjeant and others indicate, that the location has, since before the arrival of the Hashemite sada to Hadramawt, been of religious importance and that the family most prominently associated with the location is that of Ba Abbad¹⁴⁶. The Ba Abbad family is not of the sada, they belong to the mashaykh class of learned men, whose religious duties were later overtaken by the sada. Today, the Ba Abbad family is described by the sada as “custodians” of the location.

¹⁴⁴ Boxberger, Linda. *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s*. SUNY Press, 2002.

¹⁴⁵ Serjeant, Robert Bertram. *The Saiyids of Hadramawt*. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1957.

¹⁴⁶ Newton, Lynne S. “Al Qisha: Archaeological Investigations at an Islamic Period Yemeni Village.” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 37, 2007, pp. 171–186.



The main Dar al Mustafa compound used to house the students during the annual ziyarah to Qabr Nabi Allah Hud, April 2018.

R.B. Serjeant claims that according to a legend, Hud was supposed to be buried in Mahra.¹⁴⁷ At the same time it is clear that what matters more than the actual presence of the remains of the prophet is the symbol which brings together the population and provides them with something they can all feel a connection to. Some of the attendees believe the grave to be empty and have done so for some time – even Thesinger, during his travels in the 1940's, was told that Hud was not actually buried in the

¹⁴⁷ Serjeant, Robert Bertram. *The Saiyids of Hadramawt*. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1957.

dome.¹⁴⁸ To further illustrate this point, Oman's Dhofar province also claims to be the location of the grave of Prophet Hud and additionally those of his two sons.¹⁴⁹

The annual pilgrimage to this site has multiple purposes, firstly it is designed to be a festival or a fair, with camel races, colourful procession and dancing. These events accompany the religious rituals and serve to attract Yemeni audiences which would not be interested in attending if the program was purely religious. In doing this, the sada can begin to indoctrinate the population while at the same time showing that it has moved on from being an exclusive group, allowing the "others" to partake in some of the events previously reserved for the sada. The allowing of camel races to take place is likely motivated by the need to appeal to the tribal audiences in order to strengthen the bond between these sada and the qabail.

Secondly, the pilgrimage serves as a point of interest for both Hadrami diaspora abroad and their followers in the diasporic destinations. Every year, a number of pilgrims travels to Qabr Nabi Allah Hud from Southeast Asia, which increases the visibility and religious legitimacy of the Hadrami clerics in Asia, establishes a link between the pilgrims and Hadramawt which can and has in the past resulted in the pilgrims sending their children to study in Tarim and signals the power of the sada to the local population, for whom international travel is impossible.

Thirdly, the event is used to decipher the inclinations of those attending it. The choice of either attending or refusing to attend has real life consequences for those making these decisions as it clearly marks them as followers of the Sufi doctrine or at least as individuals not opposed to it. There have been a number of cases of individuals pretending to be ill or making other excuses in order not to be forced into making this decision.¹⁵⁰

Delegations from all over Yemen attend the pilgrimage these days, including the province of Sa'adah. The event, documented as being of great significance by

¹⁴⁸ Thesiger, W. "Across the Empty Quarter." *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 111, no. 1/3, 1948, pp. 1–19.

¹⁴⁹ Weeks, Lloyd. "Death and burial in Arabia and beyond." *Multidisciplinary Perspectives (2010)*: 2010-546.

¹⁵⁰ Participant observation in 2017, 2018, 2019.

Ingrams¹⁵¹ and even before him by Cochrane¹⁵², continues to bring together the entire population, but it has, like the rest of the Hadrami society, become dominated by a single group. Located within a tribal territory and having a history of association with the mashaykh class, it is now “owned” by the sada who let the mashaykh administer it and the tribe is relegated to the position of providing security. The sada have built infrastructure for themselves and their guests, while the situation of the lower classes remains unchanged – they continue to sleep under the protection of a cliff.

3. Conclusion

Land and its control heavily contribute to the formulation of the identity of individuals in Hadramawt as well as to the collective identity of their respective kinship groups. While for the tribesmen, it is the control of land and all that takes place on it that defines them, the sada use a more nuanced approach to utilizing their land holdings. By dominating locations of religious and symbolic importance, they signal their privileged status to the rest of the Hadrami society, while using the arable land in their possession in order to control the population through the threat of denial of access to desirable plots of land. For the remaining social classes, it is living under this threat that defines their existence and identity.

The system of land ownership in Hadramawt has been rather stable until 1967, when upon the departure of the British from South Arabia and the beginning of Marxist rule, an Agrarian Reform was actioned which stripped the tribal and religious elites of their land holdings and other property. Redistribution of this land among the proletariat then served to win popular support as well as dismantle the old power structures and alliances. Without access to land, the former elites quickly lost their standing and influence, in many cases choosing to migrate abroad.

Another shock to the system came in 1990 with the unification of Yemen and subsequently in 1991 when the Agrarian reform was reversed. This reversal made

¹⁵¹ Ingrams, W. H. “The Hadhramaut: Present and Future.” *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 92, no. 4, 1938, pp. 289–311.

¹⁵² Cochrane, R. A. “An Air Reconnaissance of the Hadhramaut.” *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 77, no. 3, 1931, pp. 209–216.

many poor people even poorer, especially since those returning from exile to reclaim their property often arrived with significant funds, which allowed them to solidify and even increase their holdings. This reversal was not accompanied by an effective compensatory mechanism and channelled many of those whose land was being taken away into streams naturally opposed to the returning elites, most significantly the Salafi movement. This influenced the social and political life in the province and continues to do so to this day.

The ability to own and control land is most useful in seeking incorporation into a patronage network. Given the weakness of the Yemeni central government, it has since the unification attempted to create a form of hybrid governance reliant on “distributed sovereignty” in which it rewards “local sovereigns” for controlling their areas and population. One of these rewards takes the form of not using the government’s enforcement capacities to tackle smuggling and instead giving those in control of the smuggling routes an opportunity to reap their own rewards. Such system costs the government next to nothing but provides a meaningful incentive to those controlling the smuggling routes and surrounding areas.

In a similar fashion, the control of territory gives one the option of hosting nonstate militant groups, which can be useful in a number of ways, most notably it gives the hosting party an ability to conduct operations shielded by plausible deniability and therefore gives them a powerful tool in dealing with their enemies while not risking an escalation of the conflict. The very ability and willingness to host a militant group then translates into an increased likelihood of being incorporated into the patronage network, odds of which increase further in case the host is capable of utilizing this connection to offer enforcement services to outside parties.

LEGITIMACY IN THE GOVERNANCE OF HADRAMAWT

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1. Introduction

When Harold Ingrams travelled to Hadramawt in 1937 to secure signatures of local sovereigns for the peace treaty he is known for, he was stunned to find out that there were close to 1400 individual actors claiming sovereignty over some territory.^{153 154}

These individuals had varying degrees of control and influence but were deemed important enough to become signatories of the treaty. It is therefore not surprising that the governance and power relations in Hadramawt are complex and organic to this day, despite the number of "sovereigns" having decreased due to the political changes occurring in the province since Ingrams' work there. Not only do various spheres of influence claimed by individual "territorial sovereigns" overlap, there are additional layers of governance in the form of the religious authorities, which apart from their own sovereign location exercise a degree of control over all affairs in the province, and whatever state-like entity is present at the time.

This fragmentation of loyalty to a single authority highlights the difficulty of building a nation-state in Hadramawt and Yemen in general, as it hints at the population's lack of

¹⁵³ Smith, G. Rex. "'Ingrams Peace', Ḥadramawt, 1937–40. Some Contemporary Documents1." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 12.1 (2002): 1-30.

¹⁵⁴ Ingrams, Harold. "Political Development in the Hadhramaut." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 21.2 (1945): 236-252.

identification with a nation, let alone a state. As the society of Hadramawt is not homogenous, many of its members would rather identify with their tribal or familial unit than claim belonging to a Hadrami or Yemeni identity – a constant fact which has hardly changed since Ingrams' time in Hadramawt. What has changed considerably however is the influence of Hadramawt in domestic, regional and even international politics. With the improvements in infrastructure, travel and communication technology, the isolated province became crucial for a number of political processes and debates, including its strong influence and potential for secession during the times of Marxist control of South Yemen, the headaches it gave the late President Saleh in ruling unified Yemen, its role as a base for much of Emirati activity in Yemen during the ongoing civil war and the regular presence of trans-national militant groups in the province. The increased influence of Hadramawt in regional and international politics removes the province from the category of an anthropological curiosity and creates a need to understand the social processes underpinning the mechanics of power derivation and retention.

With the many competing parties in Hadramawt and with no entity possessing a lasting monopoly on violence, there are numerous ways in which a kinship group may derive power. While the ability to hold and retain access and control of a territory is analyzed in a different chapter, this chapter focuses on the non-physical tools deployed in the search of power and influence. These are not detached from the ability to physically control and assert one's will through violence. Rather, these processes and elements form the top layer of the power retention system deployed in Hadramawt and lend it legitimacy. Additionally, these processes serve to limit the potential damage which would occur if all interactions between different individuals and groups in Hadramawt took the form of a physical altercation. We could think of these processes as an advanced form of power derivation and retention, deployed with the goal of limiting potential losses, such as property damage and loss of life, and setting the perimeters for future power struggles and negotiations, thus eliminating the potential of harsh treatment, should the power balance be altered at some point.

These processes can be abstract and manifest themselves through the insistence on social norms which are designed to highlight the deserved prominence of a given group,

attempts at dominating the social life of a certain location as well as the intellectual and educational arenas. In doing so, a group can instill the idea of its legitimate claim to power and influence without having to resort to overt hostile action. These norms and processes are accompanied by the use of symbols which serve to further streamline the public's association between a group displaying these symbols and the legitimacy of the group's access to power.

At the base of these processes are what dictates much of the daily experiences of a given individual – their social status and religious leaning, although these are often aligned. Close behind these two elements is the political preference of an individual, even if this is remarkably dependent on the group's need for a uniting banner, especially when signifying opposition to another group. Luka Nevola, during his research in North Yemen, experienced this phenomenon when part of a community of no particular political affiliation decided to side with the Houthi sect. Almost immediately, the remaining members of the community started to identify as supporters of the Islah party which was publicly known to oppose the Houthis.¹⁵⁵ Therefore the political affiliation of members of the Hadrami society needs to be viewed less through the lens of an ideological conviction and more through the prism of completing one's identity by juxtaposing one's affiliation in contrast with others.

Partisan politics often functions as a "legitimacy shield" deployed by the elite to justify their position, their actions and limit the potential for revolt, while the elected officials hold little to no power. One tangible benefit of being elected to an office anywhere in Yemen is the platform it lends to the holder of this office, while it is still up to this individual to use this platform to obtain benefits.

This chapter engages topics of social standing, race, religion and partisanship in the formation of a political life in Hadramawt. In doing so, it investigates the ways in which political actors use the elements forming their identities for political benefit of themselves and the groups supporting them.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Luka Nevola, 5 September 2019, Vienna

2. Social stratification of Hadramawt

One of the basic elements comprising the overall system of governance and social life in Wadi Hadramawt is the social stratification system based on a hierarchy of classes. Much of the scholarship on South Yemen focuses on the social stratification of the area, with the main takeaway from these studies being how location and time-specific they are. Bujra's book¹⁵⁶ on the social stratification of Hadramawt is a prime example as it attempts to use fieldwork carried out in a small area dominated by one of the social classes to make claims encompassing the whole of Wadi Hadramawt and beyond. Helen Lackner¹⁵⁷ and others have disputed Bujra's presentation of the stratification system as rigid and unchangeable, with others offering their own versions of the stratification system.¹⁵⁸

While the patterns of social stratification are broad and organically changing, they were historically of paramount importance and their legacy within the political system is easy to decipher to this day. The Hadrami system of social stratification is essentially a formalization of oppression, an explanation for the superiority of one group of people over another. As such, social class membership, as the main piece of the puzzle forming one's identity, creates the divide between the prominent and the downtrodden, the rich and the poor. The very signaling of a belonging to a certain class is a form of "soft" power technique, as every member of the Hadrami society understands that under the label of class membership lies an intricate web of power, influence and armed capabilities, with the upper classes possessing most of these and the lower classes possessing little to none.

The simple version of the stratification pyramid places the sada (plural of sayyid), descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, on top. Their prominence was historically based on the respect for their lineage and their ability to adjudicate between warring

¹⁵⁶ Bujra, Abdalla S. *The politics of stratification: a study of political change in a South Arabian town*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971.

¹⁵⁷ Helen Lackner in Brehony, Noel. *Hadhramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

¹⁵⁸ Boxberger, Linda. *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramaut, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s*. SUNY Press, 2002.

tribes. Later on, their superior education proved useful for administrative and more formal judicial tasks in the states and state-like entities led by various Sultans, sheikhs and other rulers. In the present day, their influence rests on a combination of their religious legitimacy, their overwhelming wealth originating from the accumulation of assets (especially land) and their widespread diaspora network. These three elements complement each other and the current position of the sada could not be conceivably achieved without possessing all three.

Below the sada are the mashaikh (plural of sheikh) who fulfill administrative, judicial and educational duties and are of religious learning, but cannot trace their lineage to Prophet Muhammad. Ho¹⁵⁹ claims that the mashaikh lived within the tribes and provided them with mediation prior to the arrival of the sada from present-day Iraq, which is corroborated by findings made by Sarjeant, who mentions the existence of “mashaikh hawtas” prior to the arrival of the sada.¹⁶⁰ Since then, they have been relegated to a secondary position, even though some members of this social class went on to achieve positions of considerable religious importance in the diaspora.

The position below the mashaikh is usually ascribed to the qabail (plural of qabili, meaning tribal and translated as tribesman), although occasionally they are mentioned in a reverse order, placing the tribesmen above the mashaikh. Tribesmen traditionally hold land and live in groups that claim sovereignty over a certain territory. The power of the tribesmen originates from their ability to hold and defend the given territory against external threats, while being able to enforce judgements and orders within their territory. As such, tribesmen are armed, rarely seen without a weapon and stereotypically uneducated. The varying position of the mashaikh and the qabail within the stratification system is explainable by looking at whether a given author orders the “pyramid” according to social prestige, which is closely linked to religious learning and legitimacy or whether they talk of the power each class possesses. In the former case, the mashaikh come second, in the latter it is the far more powerful qabail class.

¹⁵⁹ Ho, Engseeng. *The graves of Tarim*. University of California Press, 2006.

¹⁶⁰ Serjeant, Robert Bertram. *The Saiyids of Hadramawt*. School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1957.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I shall be disregarding the various “lower” classes, often split according to their profession, as for all practical use there is only one group of unaffiliated people of no particular religious standing. This lowest position within the stratification system has many names, but it is perhaps best summarized by Rodionov who calls this group “weaklings”.¹⁶¹ This group comprises of tradesmen – carpenters, masons, butchers, as well as soldiers, city dwellers and slaves. While the urbanization of Hadramawt meant that this class especially is going through significant changes and emancipation based on wealth, their traditional position informed their current political positioning. As they form the most marginalized group and are not backed by a common identity, which is the case with the other groups, they are most likely to be swayed by ideology in pursuit of a more comfortable life. It is perfectly understandable that members of this class would be most likely to partake in revolutions and movements promising them a more prominent social position.

While some anthropologists¹⁶² thoroughly investigate the lower classes and make distinction between tradesmen, laborers, soldiers and others, even though their political and religious leanings are usually the same, remarkably little attention is paid to the tribal class. The tribesmen are considered to be a homogenous class, but such view fails to comprehend the difference between the life led by a tribal sheikh and that of his subject. On the upper end of this class are individuals living in great comfort, with their own foreign connections and private wealth, often held abroad. Life on the low end of this spectrum is more nuanced as the life of a low-ranking tribesman could be very difficult, with his worth being reduced to his ability to carry a rifle. The sada class does have its leading families and an informal system of internal hierarchy, but at the end of the day, each sayyid is afforded the same minimal level of privilege. While encountering a begging sayyid in Tarim, it was always explained that these are individuals who either could not conclusively prove their membership of the class or that they were condemned by the group for acts unbecoming of a sayyid. This distinction dictates the opportunities afforded to the various groups and the outcomes of their efforts. While a

¹⁶¹ Rodionov, Mikhail. "Social Restratisation in Modern Ḥaḍramawt." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (2006): 181-190.

¹⁶² Boxberger, Linda. *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s*. SUNY Press, 2002.

sayyid in the diaspora is likely to find a safety net of his peers and be able to use this to nurture and grow his wealth, a tribesman will lack this network as apart from being a tribesman, this individual needs to be from a particular tribe and often a particular family within that tribe in order to be offered assistance. It is therefore not unusual to find cases of tribesmen who went abroad and returned to Hadramawt with next to nothing, while such cases are unheard of among the sayyids.

There are two main ways used by academic analysts to consider social conflict in Hadramawt. The first considers the conflict between the sada and the non-sada, that is the rest of the society. This is truer for north Yemen, where the Zaydi sada provide their own armed capabilities and act as their own protectors. Their willingness to cooperate with tribal allies is limited to times when they need the support of another group, such as in the case of the ongoing civil war, in which the Houthis face enemies who enjoy support from the regular armies of other states and their own capabilities would be insufficient. In the Hadrami context, the sada cooperate with the qabail more regularly as they need the group's armed capabilities to survive and thrive. This relationship is however exploitative as only the upper echelons of the tribes benefit, partially through commercial opportunities and partially through securing their leadership positions using the religious legitimacy lent to them by the sada. The brunt of this service provided to the sada is borne by the ordinary tribesmen.

The second possible way of looking at the class conflict in Hadramawt is to pit the sada *along* with the qabail against the other groups. In this contest, the sada and the qabail are both parties in possession of land and therefore affected by the land confiscations of the Marxist era in South Yemen. This makes them a group with a common goal, that is to protect their holdings and consequently their social position, while locking everyone else out. This cooperation has been made more obvious and prominent since the effective exclusion of the state as a relevant governance structure since the beginning of the ongoing civil war and takes the form of various PR activities, including public rallies and visits of the tribal leadership to places of residence of the leading sada. These visits paralyze the towns in which they take place, block all traffic and cannot be missed by the residents.

The two upper groups, or at least the sada and the leadership of the qabail group, continue to benefit from their privileged social standing and they undertake concentrated efforts to retain their ability to lead their lifestyles. The “cheapest” option is signaling the unique position of their class and continuing to make sure that the other classes do not attempt to elevate themselves to an equal position. This is achieved by the means of distinctive dress, public rituals and the ownership, real or perceived, of certain locations in which the sada and the qabail gather. In addition, tribal checkpoints serve as a clear reminder of who controls a certain territory and who decides whether one is allowed to enter. These are active tools, sending an impulse into the population. The response to these is just as important and serves to affirm the position of the sada and the qabail. For example by not entering a place “owned” by the qabail, one implicitly recognizes that there are public places which are only open to some, while an attendance at public rituals, where the sada sit on one side of the room and the audience on the other, show both figurative and literal division between the social classes. An individual who sees his kin behaving in this manner is coerced into behaving in the same fashion as failure to do so would result in condemnation of the individual, their family and real consequences in terms of denial of access to employment and other opportunities.

2.1. Race in social stratification

Race and complexion play a significant role in the social stratification of Hadramawt. Due to the patterns of Hadrami migration and the custom of kaf'a where a male member of the sada group may marry a female of non-sada origin and their offspring will be considered fully sada, unlike in situations where the genders are reversed, many of the Hadrami sayyids took wives from the native populations in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and elsewhere. The children born in these marriages were considered *muwalladin* (meaning “of mixed origin”) and despite being recognized as full members of the sada class, their social standing was weaker than that of “fully Arab” sada. This phenomenon is documented in Hadramawt,¹⁶³ but apparently the same situation took

¹⁶³ Ho, Engseeng. *The graves of Tarim*. University of California Press, 2006.

place in the diasporic destinations as well.¹⁶⁴ This suggests that although lineage is the most defining characteristic of the sada class, its own members and even those outside of it historically considered it to be a wider set of characteristics, including intellectual, behavioral and *physical* features.

This position of the muwalladin began to change in the second half of the 20th century. In the present day, it is desirable to be a muwallad as the Hadrami society understands that these individuals are likely to possess financial means that enabled them to travel to Hadramawt and education extending beyond religious sciences. Based on this, these individuals now enjoy unprecedented levels of respect in Wadi Hadramawt, especially since many of them led the Sufi revival beginning around 1995. Although the main faces of the Sufi community, the local muftis and directors of the religious madrassas, are of very conservative background and appear to be of purely Arab descent, the layer of Sufi leaders behind them, which comprises the financiers, facilitators, liaisons and other figures necessary for the smooth functioning of the community, are often of mixed descent. The Haddad family is one such example as the re-development of their Hawta is led by Malaysian muwalladin, but the progress of the work reflects well on the entire sada class.¹⁶⁵

The term muwallad is also used on the East African coast, where it denotes any Hadrami born abroad, even if ethnically this individual is purely Arab.¹⁶⁶ Within the diasporic community in East Africa, very few members of the Hadrami community are the product of Arab – African relationships. Where a suitable mate could not be found in the Hadrami, or wider Arab community, Hadrami men often opted to marry Indian women. The investigation of the reasoning behind this choice of spouses is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but there is ample anecdotal evidence pointing to the racism against people of African origin in the Hadrami society. The fact that during the course of this research, not a single individual of Arab – African descent was interviewed suggests that they are either prevented from attaining positions of significance or that, through continuous marginalization, they are pushed out of the community and instead

¹⁶⁴ Manger, Leif O. *The Hadrami diaspora: community-building on the Indian Ocean rim*. Berghahn Books, 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Ismail Al Khatib, 22 April 2018, Tarim

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Faraj Al Nahdi, 22 January 2020, Dar es Salaam

join the community of their spouses. In Hadramawt itself, individuals of African origin are usually members of the *muhamiseen*, who are descendants of former slaves. These people are denied educational and employment opportunities, members of this class are usually reduced to sweeping the streets, collecting garbage or begging.

As the Sufi community likes to present itself as a place of equality for all, matters of racism and discrimination based on complexion are never talked about publicly. But examples from Tarim show that racism and emphasis on physical features, most prominently skin tone, are present in this community as well. Former soldier-slaves from Yafa'a and their descendants are typically darker than most of the Hadrami society and this reduces their marriage options significantly as they are reduced to choosing from within the same group as themselves (in terms of social standing and complexion) or forced to leave the province and find spouses elsewhere. Although there are individuals of the same social standing, if they are of lighter complexion, the marriage is unlikely to be sanctioned by the family of the individual with lighter skin. The desirability of lighter complexion is exemplified by Ali Al Jifry, a leading Sufi scholar and the face of the Ba 'Alewī movement abroad as according to multiple reports¹⁶⁷ Al Jifry wears white makeup during meetings and television appearances and avoids exposure to sun in order to remain as pale as possible.

This emphasis on skin tone goes beyond simple racism. The sada use their light skin to firstly signal their belonging to this social group and secondly to show that as intellectuals and scholars, they do not get the opportunity to get tan, as their time is devoted to learning and prayer. The growing acceptance of individuals of Hadrami-Asian descent then highlights that the attitude towards a group connected by a formerly undesirable physical feature can be changed if the concerned individuals show that they have access to a desirable benefit and that the attitude can be changed if the sub-group bearing a given feature belongs to privileged group, in this case the sada. As other, non-sada muwalladin rarely return to Hadramawt, with their forefathers likely having

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Bernard Haykel, 5 September 2019, Vienna

assimilated into the societies of their diasporic destinations, to be a muwallad in Hadramawt comes with a high likelihood of belonging to the sada.

2.2. Social custom and kafa'a

Despite the muddling of the stratification rules during the period of 1967 – 1989, the existence of exceptional cases and social changes originating in the diaspora, the practice of *kafa'a*, that is a norm that allows men of sada origin to marry across the social strata, while women of sada origin are only allowed to marry males who are also sada, remains firmly in place and observed in Wadi Hadramawt. The symbolic value of this practice cannot be overstated, as the Alewi – Irshadi conflict of the early 20th century, more closely analyzed in the chapter on diasporas, shows. In comparison, the Zaydi example in North Yemen highlights that by voiding *kafa'a*, the sada may use their female relatives to forge alliances in a way that was historically done among the Yemeni tribes as well as European aristocracy. This suggests that in the absence of armed capabilities, focus on religious legitimacy becomes paramount.

Following the 1962 revolution in North Yemen and the subsequent regime change, the breaking of the *kafa'a* rule was forced upon the Zaydi sada as a way of humiliating them¹⁶⁸ and making them aware that under the new Republican regime, they would be treated no differently from any other citizen. Especially in Sana'a, the practice became nearly forgotten as the city became more cosmopolitan during the 1990s and a parallel stratification model was created. This model was not based on lineage or religious legitimacy, but rather on the income levels and overall wealth of individual families, which informed the kind of schools they would send their children to.¹⁶⁹ In these schools, friendships would be forged which later turned into marriages. Interestingly, this is not in conflict with many interpretations of the concept of *kafa'a*, which stipulates the need for equality or “equivalence” between spouses, without mentioning the Hashemite descent as one of the elements to be considered. More conventionally, this is understood to mean equality of social and financial standing, morality and values,

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Bernard Haykel, 5 September 2019, Vienna

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Rafat al Akhali, 19 September 2019, Oxford

which the Sana'ani development seems to fulfill. In Hadramawt however, the practice is almost exclusively applied to the issue of patrilineal descent.

In the north, the practice of kafa'a never fully resumed, even after the Houthi takeover of Sana'a and considerable improvement to the social standing of this group. It is questionable whether this was due to the principle being forgotten, considered obsolete or whether this was a deliberate act of the Zaydi elites designed to strengthen their position with the powerful tribes. For example, a sister of the Houthi leader Abdul Malik al Houthi is married to a member of the powerful Al Ahmar family.¹⁷⁰ As the Al Ahmars are very influential in North Yemen and Abdul Malik al Houthi is one of the most prominent Houthis, a parallel to this marriage would be that of a daughter of either Habib Umar bin Hafiz or Habib Ali al Jifry marrying one of the sons of Tamimi or Ba Hubraysh sheikhs. Such proposition would be seen as completely ridiculous in Hadramawt – indeed, instead of forging alliances outside of the sada class through intermarriage, bin Hafiz and al Jifry married their children to one another in an attempt to strengthen their power within the class and to further signal the exclusivity of the sada position.

In the East African diaspora, a similar phenomenon can be observed to that of Sana'a. The cosmopolitanism of cities such as Mombasa and Dar es Salaam creates conditions for interactions across social strata and even ethnicities. Many of the third generation Hadrami migrants to East Africa only know of the social stratification from stories, although this might be due to the marginal presence of sayyids. The experience of these migrants is that of a more liberal upbringing, where young people choose their own spouses without regard for social custom or alliance building and where females are allowed full access to secular education.¹⁷¹ Conversely, locations with strong Ba 'Alewi presence, such as South-East Asia, continue to see strict observation of the kafa'a principle.¹⁷² This disparity is yet another piece of evidence pointing to the importance the sada place on the retention of exclusivity of their group.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Luka Nevola, 5 September 2019, Vienna

¹⁷¹ Interview with Fahmi Mansour Al Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

¹⁷² Interview with Abdussalam Abdullah Al Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

2.3. Struggle in the intellectual and institutional arena

The sada, in their role as educators, judges and administrators, have long been associated with the written tradition of Hadramawt. This, along with their ability to control much of social and political life in the province, has led to their domination of the book market in the province and essentially allowed them to write the history of the province, according to what best suited them and their reputation. This phenomenon is cyclical – the power of the sada allows them to control the written word, which then becomes an official historical account, increasing the group’s legitimacy and allowing them to retain or expand their power.

This development goes together with the establishment of places and institutions where this official account of history can be taught to a wider audience. Knysh observes this policy tool becoming more widely used after the return of the sada from exile following unification in 1991 and summarizes it as such: “...several Islamic universities and colleges have been established in the province, some of them explicitly geared to promoting the sada version of Hadrami history and culture. This vision ascribes all major cultural, economic and religious achievements to the members of various sada lineages.”¹⁷³ The adoption of all achievements has long been part of the sada strategy for the retention of prominence, but this dominant role in the writing of history has become more concentrated after their return from exile. One can only speculate whether this has come as a result of more easily available avenues for the spread of information and dissemination of knowledge or whether the sada perhaps realized that their position could be challenged again and in being able to write and rewrite the history of the province, they may put themselves in a more favourable position.

Knysh argues that “the ideal of a unified and egalitarian kinship group, which has precious little to do with reality but which is firmly implanted in the minds of its members, determined how they saw and structured the world around them or, as the case may be, re-constructed and re-imagined their history. Moreover, this ideal was so ingeniously crafted and compellingly presented by the spokesmen of a given kinship grouping that it

¹⁷³ Knysh, Alexander. “Contextualizing the Salafi-Sufi Conflict (From the Northern Caucasus to Hadramawt).” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2007, pp. 503–30.

has been sometimes taken at face value by even the most sophisticated western investigators,”¹⁷⁴ There are two important points here - firstly, he alludes to the fact that the sada write and re-write their history for the other classes as much as they do for themselves. A member who believes the official account of history is likely to be committed to the group, as well as spread the message of the group’s right to prosperity and leadership further. If written and oral sources of history line up perfectly, the preferred account becomes the accepted norm.

Secondly, an account presented in a sophisticated and academic fashion, supported by interviews with local scholars, who themselves base their knowledge on the “official” books, can easily lure a foreign researcher into the trap of accepting this account and spreading it further. The complexity of the Arabic language and the difficulty of access to and in Hadramawt, along with the generally elevated level of discomfort due to heat, unfamiliar food and lack of usual social institutions found in the West, make foreign academics susceptible to relying on sada interlocutors, who then manipulate their research by choosing which locations to visit and which figures to interview. This problem is amplified by the fact that archives are either privately held, such as the Al Kaff family archive in Seiyun or public, such as Al Ahqaaf in Tarim, but administered by members of the sada group. Even where the person in charge is not of the sada, it is favourable to him to present the sada account of history as he has nothing to gain from a fringe academic publication presenting his view on Hadrami history, but much to lose should it become known that he presented an opinion differing from the account presented by the sada.

The tribal class has attempted to counter this influence by publishing the histories of their own tribes, however these lack the unity of the sada account and focus on individual tribal units, not the class as a whole. Attempts at publishing a definitive history of Hadrami tribalism was always met with opposition from the tribes which believed the account was unfavourable to their tribe or inaccurate.¹⁷⁵ These publications serve to establish the tribe, its lineage and its reputation in the society and help the tribesmen re-

¹⁷⁴ Knysh, Alexander. “The Sāda in History: A Critical Essay on Ḥaḍramī Historiography.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1999, pp. 215–22.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Hassan al Barqi Al Kathiri, 21 April 2018, Al Ghurfah

discover their origins but as the definition of the “tribal self” depends on demarcation of territory and the tribe’s position within an overall tribal system, it is understandable that the skirmishes over demarcation lines experienced in the real world would translate into the literary one as well and therefore make a unified, agreed upon version of tribal history impossible.

The turbulent political developments of the second half of the 20th century meant that the once “unchangeable” and robust position of the tribes was challenged and questioned, which gave rise to the need to make the oral tradition of the tribe’s forefathers tangible and preserved. Rodionov claims that “these local publications can be regarded as the fruit of the social restratification which has been gaining momentum since the unification of Yemen in 1990 and the 1994 civil war,”¹⁷⁶ highlighting the importance of these documents for the rediscovery of the tribal identity of members of various tribes. However, during the course of research for this dissertation, the books Rodionov mentions in his article were nowhere to be found in the bookshops in the Wadi and it is doubtful they were ever there – with high likelihood they were distributed among members of the tribe as they would be of little to no interest to anyone else. This factor means that while these publications matter to the tribe internally and may help to revive the tribal spirit and sense of belonging among its members, they do little to nothing to counter the sada version of history and politics.

The diaspora offers a platform for the countering of the official account of Hadrami politics and history, as one is generally free from repercussions, especially if his links to the homeland are not especially strong. The Ba ‘Alewi – Irshadi conflict of the 1930’s in Indonesia concerned deep social issues, which were manifested by a dispute over the exclusive right to use of the term “sayyid” by members of the sada. This was obviously only the very top layer of a social conflict which essentially boiled down to the question of whether a certain group could be destined for prominence and comfort based on their descent alone. In this fight, both sides pointed to historical examples and called upon Islamic experts from multiple countries to present arguments on their behalf, with the

¹⁷⁶ Rodionov, Mikhail. “Contemporary Tribal Versions of Local History in Ḥaḍramawt.” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 41, 2011, pp. 333–37.

sada even eliciting the help of the Zaydi Imam. The Irshadis refused to accept the sada version of history, which was summed up in a number of books essentially copying and referencing each other. To challenge these publications, the Political History of Hadramawt was published in Cairo in 1938. The author, Salah al Baqri al Yafi'i, presents an account of Hadrami history stripped of the sada bias to counter the influence of the sada books. It is very telling of the relationship between the sada and the other classes that while this book is considered rare and sold on specialty book markets in the West usually for upwards of 1000 USD, with no reprintings available in any of the Hadrami bookshops, the sada history books are sold in every bookshop at heavily subsidized prices.

3. Religious affiliation and conflict

3.1. Salafism

The religious elitism of the Sufi and Zaydi sada has led to the emergence of a Salafi movement in Yemen, both organically as a form of popular protest against the ruling groups and as a tool used by the government and foreign governments where they felt the need to provide opposition or stir local conflicts. More frequently than not, these have gone together as the grass-roots seed of Salafism was supported by the government. Laurent Bonnefoy speaks of “normalisation of Salafism” in Yemen and describes Salafis as “products of [the society’s] recompositions at the local, national and trans-national levels.”¹⁷⁷ He correctly sees this normalization as “by no means necessarily strategic, or the product of intentionally constructed centralised project imagined by the Salafi entrepreneurs”.¹⁷⁸ Alexander Knysh then observes that the rift between the two religious streams “is often construed by observers as evidence of the intractable conflict between these distinct versions of Islam. However,... behind the apparent universality and similarity of Salafi/Sufi confrontation we find a myriad local factors that shape its concrete manifestations in different Islamic societies.”¹⁷⁹ The rise of Salafism in Yemen and in Hadramawt specifically is the product of outside forces,

¹⁷⁷ Bonnefoy, Laurent. *Salafism in Yemen: Transnationalism and religious identity*. Hurst, 2011.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*

¹⁷⁹ Knysh, Alexander. “Contextualizing the Salafi-Sufi Conflict (From the Northern Caucasus to Hadramawt).” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2007, pp. 503–30.

namely the sada elite and the government who provided incentives, both intentionally and unintentionally, which enticed its growth.

The organic Salafi opposition is to be found in areas of strong sada presence, be it Zaydi in the north or Ba 'Alewi in Hadramawt. In the areas surrounding Tarim, the phenomenon of organized Salafi teaching first occurred around 1995 as members of the sada returned to the province in larger numbers and began to reclaim the property confiscated by the Communist regime. Many became poor again, stripped of land and other real estate and having lost the uniting banner of Communism, they turned to Salafism as the natural element opposing Sufism. This was noticed by the government, which, while wary of the Yemeni Socialist Party and its remnants, viewed the wealthy returnees with suspicion and sought to put them off balance and curb their influence. The import of Saudi sheikhs teaching the Wahhabi doctrine was soon accompanied by the incursion of the Al Islah party, native to the highlands of north Yemen.¹⁸⁰

Al Islah is a composite political party comprising northern tribal elites and often dubbed "Muslim Brotherhood" of Yemen. In reality, it is more akin to a catch-all party, appealing to tribesmen, Salafis and even Tawwakol Karman, a female recipient of the Nobel Peace prize. Its purpose is to complement the General People's Congress and create the illusion of a democratic political process by fielding multiple parties. In the Hadrami context, the party serves to use Salafism in an organized fashion to provide an alternative to the teachings of the Sufi clerics. Outside of the classroom, the Islahi militias, as well as some regular military units loyal to Ali Muhsin provide a safe haven for the operation of smuggling networks. The party is known to be close to AQAP militants, partly due to its connection to Muhsin and partly because of its strongholds overlapping with areas of known AQAP presence.¹⁸¹

In the north, the most obvious example of Salafism and its students being used to oppose enemies of the regime was the Dar al Hadith institute in Dammaj in Sa'ada province, which attracted many foreign students and stood out as a lighthouse of the

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Zain al Haddad, 17 April 2018, Tarim

¹⁸¹ Day, Stephen W. *Regionalism and rebellion in Yemen: A troubled national union*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

government in an otherwise Houthi-dominated territory. The cooperation of the Salafi institute and the Yemeni government went beyond antagonizing the Houthis and spreading Salafi propaganda in their areas, with the hope of recruiting individuals unhappy with the privileged position of the Houthis. In 2007, the news broke of a British and French student being killed in clashes with the Houthis, thus proving the long-suspected association between the government forces and the students.¹⁸² These allegations were further proven true with the publication of a book by an American adventurer who travelled to Dar al Hadith and spent time with the students who admitted to taking part in combat against the Houthis.¹⁸³

Following the expulsion of the Dar al Hadith students from Dammaj, they moved to Hawi in Hadramawt, where they continued operating on a much smaller scale. Multiple informants suggest that the institute hosted French students, some of whom later left to fight the Houthis on the western front near Mokha, received weapons from the government (after promising to return them once the combat operations were over)¹⁸⁴ and later appeared in Al Ghaydah in Al Mahra, where land was purchased and a large number of Salafi students started to appear as forces of Saudi Arabia and its allies began operations in the province.¹⁸⁵ This evolution of Dar al Hadith and its students highlights the utility of Salafis to the domestic and foreign governments. They are used for combat operations and their bases are strategically located in places that need to be “shaken up” and where other parties intend to loosen up the local alliances.

Dar al Hadith is not the only institution providing opposition to the Zaydi and Sufi educational centers, although it is the most notorious one. Smaller institutes, libraries and schools pop up in strategic locations, and their funding and leadership are often murky. One such example is a new “Quran school” founded in the early 2000s. Known locally to be a Salafi center, this institution is located on the road between Tarim and Seyiun, in proximity to the grave of Al Muhajir, a location which has been monopolized by the Sufi community and an access to which is only possible by passing through a

¹⁸² *ibid*

¹⁸³ Padnos, Theo. *Undercover Muslim: A Journey Into Yemen*. Random House, 2011.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Noel Brehony, 21 November 2018, London

¹⁸⁵ Participant observation in Al Mahra.

Sufi madrassa. The location is of folk importance and there is a high possibility of mobilizing opposition among those who feel as though their family and local traditions are now being used to promote the Sufi doctrine.¹⁸⁶

Dar al Mustafa, a Sufi seminary located in Tarim, and its affiliated institutes therefore face opposition from Salafi institutes, but this rivalry is a façade designed to hide the deeper social discord behind the curtain of religious differences. Interestingly, the opposition Dar al Mustafa and its clerics face abroad and online is much more strictly theological in its nature. The debate on issues of Islamic theology is purer and truly engaging the finer points of religious jurisprudence, while within Hadramawt, any such discussion has to be viewed in the wider context, with consideration given to who makes the claims, where and at what time, as these all form part of the political and social game played in Wadi Hadramawt.

3.2. Hashemite cooperation

The two groups of Hashemite descent in Yemen, the Zaydi sada in the north and the Ba 'Alewi sada in the south, differ in many aspects of their creed, outlook on governance and overall conduct. They are however bound by their shared lineage and although their cooperation is rarely talked about, in fact virtually no literature on the topic exists, it is real and significant.

Outwardly, the conduct of the two groups could not be more dissimilar – while the Ba 'Alewis present themselves as peaceful intellectuals of refined manners, the Zaydi sada are proud of their image as fearless warriors and rugged mountain men. Where the Ba 'Alewis are subtle in the ways of signalling their superiority, the Zaydis are eager to let the population know that their lineage makes them most suitable for positions of leadership. However, some rituals, such as demanding that the sayyid's hand be kissed upon greeting, averting gaze in the presence of the sada and sitting below the position of the sayyid are universal. According to those who attended meetings with Abdul Malik

¹⁸⁶ Participant observation in Hadramawt.

Al Houthi¹⁸⁷, meeting him is not much different to meeting the likes of Habib Umar bin Hafiz or Habib Ali al Jifry in terms of the expected behaviour of the guest.

During the research for this dissertation, no instances of intermarriage between the Zaydi and Ba 'Alewi sada were noted and the approach of the two groups to governance differs as well. While the Ba 'Alewis have a long history of supporting a tribal leader, namely the various Kathiri Sultans, and asserting their dominance through this non-sada leader, the Zaydis believe that a legitimate leader of the Imamate, the only legitimate form of governance, must not be anyone but a Fatimid, a descendant of the Prophet through his daughter Fatimah and her sons Hassan ibn 'Ali and Husayn ibn 'Ali. Therefore, while the sada of Hadramawt influenced the political processes of the Kathiri sultanate by selecting the new Sultan¹⁸⁸ and "guiding" him, the Zaydi sada assumed the public role of the Imam themselves.

It is perhaps the dissimilarity of the two groups that stops them from publicly acknowledging their mutual support and cooperation, as their respective followers might struggle to understand why their leaders would choose to align with the weak and soft or crude and violent, in contradiction to their own public image. There are however many instances in which the cooperation is clear. One of these is the Sufi madrassa located in the town of Zabid in the former North Yemen. This madrassa has been allowed to operate without a disruption, despite being well within the sphere of Zaydi influence. On the list of participants of the Qabr Nabi Allah Hud pilgrimage are groups both from Zabid and other places in North Yemen, even from the province of Sa'ada itself.¹⁸⁹ In a more public way, the support for the Ba 'Alewi sada can be assumed from the fact that the images of their leadership were available for purchase from Zaydi bookshops in Sana'a before the onset of the civil war in 2015.¹⁹⁰

These rather symbolic acts might appear to be signs of affinity rather than direct support, but on the political landscape of Yemen, such signs are significant and clearly

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Rafat al Akhali, 19 September 2019, Oxford.

¹⁸⁸ An original document witnessed by the author in Seyiun in 2016. The document showing the decision made by the sada as to whom the new Sultan should be is in the Al Kaff family archive held by Ali Anis al Kaff.

¹⁸⁹ A list seen on display at Qabr Nabi Allah Hud pilgrimage.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Luka Nevola, 5 September 2019, Vienna

received by the intended target audiences. Other forms of support are more covert, such as the hosting of the children of the Houthi leadership in the town of Tarim and their attendance of Sufi schools in the midst of the Saudi-led bombing campaign of Sa'ada. During the course of research in Tarim, there were several armed children, aged perhaps 10 to 12 years old, who would claim to be from Al Jawf when requesting motorcycle rides. Upon further discussion, they would usually admit to being from Sa'ada. Members of the sada group in Tarim would then privately mention that children of Houthi leadership were in town to be educated and kept safe from the war.

A very unusual, but telling case of the Ba 'Alewi – Houthi cooperation and support is the disappearance of Abdullah Mullah Dawilah, who was kidnapped en route to his office at Dar al Mustafa in August 2017. Mullah Dawilah is a pillar of the community, an unofficial liaison of the Sufi community and the armed forces, and the chief financial administrator of the most prominent Sufi madrassa in Yemen, therefore his “kidnapping” sent shockwaves through the community in Tarim, with the sada forming a committee aimed at his recovery and some allied tribes immediately blaming the Say'ari tribe for his disappearance and demanding his safe return. Despite this pressure, Mullah Dawilah was not returned, nor was his body recovered. Students of Dar al Mustafa were instructed not to speak of the case or get involved in any way, with the official story being that of the kidnapping being a criminal act, committed either by members of Al Qaeda or a gang that would seek ransom.¹⁹¹

In July 2019, Mullah Dawilah quietly returned to Tarim and resumed his previous life. No official explanation was given, with unofficial comments from the Dar al Mustafa community claiming that he was held by “an armed group”. However, media reports shortly after his release quoted anonymous Saudi intelligence officials who described the event as an “arrest” rather than a kidnapping and claimed this arrest was made on charges of smuggling. These media sources are further corroborated by informants who claim that Mullah Dawilah arranged transport of rocket and weaponry parts, which passed through the border crossings with Oman, disguised under home appliances such as fridges, washing machines and the like. Mullah Dawilah would have been able

¹⁹¹ Participant observation in Hadramawt.

to use his influence and contacts to make such transports possible and these events would correspond with the Ba 'Alewi silent but significant support for the Houthis during the war.

Mullah Dawilah's return coincided with the uptick of Saudi and Emirati operations in the province and their attempts at establishing more permanent security presence. For such developments, the support of the sada leadership in the province could be crucial. Mullah Dawilah resumed his position in the Dar al Mustafa community and continues to serve as its financial director to this day, with his two years of captivity never being talked about. In general, the ongoing civil war is a taboo topic and Habib Umar bin Hafiz has not commented on it publicly. When asked a direct question by one of the attendees of his lecture, he did not answer the question and instead provided a general statement denouncing violence and wishing for the end of hostilities. Habib Ali al Jifry, a founder of Dar al Mustafa who does not reside in Hadramawt, did not make comments in support of the Houthis, but did shoot several videos in which he complained of the security situation in the Wadi and blamed the Islah party for this.¹⁹²

A pertinent example of how this cooperation came to public attention occurred in 2014 when the Houthis were taking over Sana'a and spontaneous celebrations broke out in Seyiun, attended by a number of the sada. This was a one-time event and it is suggested that the Ba 'Alewis were subsequently warned to remain apolitical and not present such public support for the Houthi actions in the north. The celebrations were also attended by the then-commander of the 1st Military District, General Abdul Rahman Al Halili, a Zaydi northerner. This incident led to suspicions regarding the Hadrami sada and their institutions and Al Halili was accused of being "a Houthi in disguise".¹⁹³

The cooperation between the Zaydi and Ba 'Alewi sada is meaningful both in terms of its symbolic significance, where each group quietly signals their strength through the subtle presentation of their allies and in the "real world", where one group might support

¹⁹² Analysis of the media output of Al Jifry published on his Twitter feed.

¹⁹³ Al Batati, Saeed. "EXCLUSIVE: Interview with Top Yemeni General in Wadi Hadramout." Middle East Eye, 27 June 2015, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-interview-top-yemeni-general-wadi-hadramout>.

the other by hosting their children at times of crisis or even engage in the smuggling of illicit goods on behalf of the other party.

4. Partisan politics

Partisanship in the Yemeni context is an obscure concept. Most parties refuse the label of a political party, referencing the potential of partisanship for the creation of *fitna* (strife) in an Islamic society. Yet, elections are held and individuals are elected to hold offices. To the aid agencies and international organizations, the appearance of a democratic process, albeit one that could use reform and increased transparency, is a welcomed development, while in reality elections matter little and their only value is in giving platform to the elected officials, who can then attempt to influence the political process through other avenues. For most in the society, loyalty to any political party is a miniscule element of their overall identity as they realize it has little bearing on the lives they lead.

One political party that can legitimately claim to have held political power is the Yemeni Socialist Party which represented the interests of the Yemeni South in the early 1990s following the unification of Yemen. This party however learned the hard way that the electoral game can only be played on an even playing ground and only in a society that is ruled by law. After over 200 leading members were slain by the “Afghan Arabs,” veterans of the Afghan jihad working in concert with Ali Muhsin and Ali Abdullah Saleh¹⁹⁴, all appearance of a democratic society was wiped.

The platform given to those participating in the electoral process is valuable on its own, with some participating in order to promote their agenda publicly, while others hope to be co-opted into providing legitimacy for the government and for doing so, be rewarded with contracts and government jobs. For the most part, the General People’s Congress and Al Islah party, its nominal opposition, sufficed to support the government and divide the spoils obtained, but the involvement of other parties gives such a government an appearance of wider social support, not to mention its potential in diffusing potential

¹⁹⁴ Day, Stephen W. *Regionalism and rebellion in Yemen: A troubled national union*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

social and political conflicts before they escalate into open violence. By running the electoral process, the government gives the appearance of representation of groups that feel oppressed and also gives their leaders a chance to squash calls for violence by pointing to the possibility of making progress politically. As the leaders of various movements face the very real possibility of being killed in case of going into open conflict with the government, they are incentivized to calm their followers and maintain the status quo.

In terms of completing one's identity or adopting a banner in opposition to a group that has already chosen one, mostly GPC and Al Islah are used. The GPC, prior to the onset of the civil war, served to signal one's support for the government and its policies, while Al Islah presented a more "rural" and conservative avenue. The choice of siding with Al Islah was also popular in opposition to the Houthis as they despised the group and its teaching, despite the intermarriage between daughters of the Al Houthi family and leading figures of Al Islah. In addition to the GPC and Al Islah, two parties deserve a special mention as they represent minority groups which have a strong bearing on the political life in Yemen and outside.

The first of these parties is the Al Haqq party, a political platform created by the Zaydi elites following the unification and initially designed to provide opposition against Al Islah. The party became an unofficial voice of what would later become the Houthi movement, but its popular support was always minimal, with the party winning two seats in the House of Representatives in 1993 and then not winning a seat since 1997. The party is significant as it shows that the practice of creating political parties in order to oppose an existing party, rather than offering own policies and ideas, is a long established concept in Yemen. Additionally, the party is also significant for its attempt to incorporate the Ba 'Alewi sada and thus create a party representing the interests of the sada across Yemen.¹⁹⁵ This attempt eventually failed as the Ba 'Alewis realized the potential for being dragged into a conflict they did not wish to be a part of by publicly

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Adil al Nahdi, 6 February 2020, London

standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the Zaydis and recognized the benefits of continuing their practice of politics behind the scenes.

Another party of note is the Al Rashad Union, accused by the US government of being an AQAP front and having its leader, Abd al Wahhab Humayqani, sanctioned and labelled a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.¹⁹⁶ It is unclear whether the foundation of the party in the wake of the Arab Spring stemmed from a genuine belief that a parliamentary democracy could be established in Yemen and the hardcore Salafi-jihadis wanted a seat at the table or whether this was an opportunistic action born out of the exceptional moment which shook the established political practice in Yemen. The party was denounced by a number of Salafis who preferred to keep Salafism as a whole out of politics but presented an attempt at providing representation for a portion of the population which would otherwise resort to violence. The labelling of the party as a front for AQAP limited its membership as public association could be dangerous. This, coupled with the ongoing civil war meant that the party was never able to garner any real political power.

Some movements were established shortly before or even during the current conflict and despite being unable to enter elections, they hold real and tangible power. Unlike groups whose membership is dictated by the shared religious affiliation or descent of its members, these groups, of which the Hadramout Inclusive Conference is the most prominent, are based on an interest in providing viable governance solutions for specific locations. It would be idealistic in the political climate of Yemen to believe that these movements are established for the “greater good,” they usually seek to enrich its leadership while attempting to fulfil their stipulated targets as a secondary goal. The rise of such movements is a new element in the formation of the social and political identity of an individual and do not yet carry the stigma of association with any of the traditional religious, political, or social organizations.

5. Conclusion

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Department of the Treasury “Treasury Designates Al-Qa’ida Supporters in Qatar and Yemen.”, 18 Dec. 2013, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/pages/jl2249.aspx>.

The base layer of power in Hadramawt is physical, it is the ability to claim and defend a territory, protect one's property and use this property to control others. Above this is a system of signaling one's ability and willingness to enforce one's claims but not by making threats of violence. Instead, this is done by positioning oneself within the society so as to let everyone know that the position held is legitimately obtained and deserved in the hope of deterring any attacks, and setting the rules and limitations on what is considered acceptable should a conflict erupt. This is done through the control of the public discourse, which is achieved by elevating one's group to a position of control and at the same time, making sure that others are aware of their lack of access to certain benefits.

This signaling of power takes many forms, but the most basic one is the emphasis on the continued use of the social stratification system and the observation of rituals that come with it. From the kissing of a sayyid's hand and other signs of respect to a rigorous observation of the kafa'a, that is the principle of sada daughters only marrying within their own social group, making no exceptions in the organization of the society and categorizing people depending on their descent is the most effective way of achieving control through locking some individuals in a state of perpetual poverty, which they can either accept and remain a part of this system or choose to migrate abroad, likely never to return and eventually lose touch with Hadramawt. Either outcome is good for the ruling elites as it means less of a chance of their position being challenged.

The division of the social classes is perpetuated by one group, the most prominent one, which dominates the printing presses, bookshops, access to foreign analysts and academics and has the funds to operate educational institutions which present the sada version of Hadrami history. As Hadramawt is difficult to reach, and research in the province is challenging, the provision of sada interlocutors guarantees the cyclical repetition of the stories and events favourable to the sada, while those unfavourable are never talked about and are essentially erased from the public memory.

Such domination of the society is met with opposition, which takes the form of adopting labels opposite to those used by the sada. Where the sada were working closely with the Imperialists and benefiting from this cooperation, their opposition chose to become

Marxist, Communist and Socialist. Following the unification, as the sada returned and emphasized their religious credentials and the Sufi doctrine, many adopted Salafism as a way of countering their influence or at least building a platform on which the opposition could unite. The sada then sought allies which would increase the likelihood of their continued prominence and their easiest avenue was the reconnection with the Zaydi sayyids from the north of Yemen, with whom they secretly cooperated since at least before the Alewi-Irshadi conflict in Indonesia in the 1930's. This cooperation between the two groups of shared descent, but different strategies of obtaining and retaining prominence, as well as overall conduct and mannerism, is fascinating and yet only anecdotal evidence of this cooperation exists, with no academic or other publications engaging this topic.

Apart from the social and religious arena, the social conflict in Hadramawt and elsewhere in Yemen is being fought out on the political stage. Here, as with the previous elements comprising the identity of a Hadrami, the label is more important than the underlying ideology, if there is any. Due to the nature of Yemeni partisan politics, ideology rarely matters as it is again the belonging to a certain group and the position of this group against another group that is the goal of political participation. The state, prior to the onset of the ongoing civil war, monopolized the political arena by creating a governing party as well as the main opposition party and used both to control the political affiliation of the majority of the population. Small and niche parties pop up regularly, but they have little hope of achieving a position of power – they are only significant when they represent a powerful minority, as was the case with the Al Haqq party and the Al Rashad Union.

The Hadramis have long been a society of migrants, imported fighters and slaves while sending their own members abroad as missionaries and traders. Their relationship with foreigners is however uneasy as they realize that while foreigners can be very useful, they can also bring shocks to the established system of governance in the province and in doing so, endanger the position of the leading parties. It is therefore useful to engage foreign actors before coming to power and obtain their support, but once in power, contacts with all powers need to be closely monitored and used with caution.

DIASPORA AND ITS CONFLICTS

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1. Introduction

The Hadrami diaspora and its influence on the receiving societies are the primary topics of recent research on Hadramawt.¹⁹⁷ They are covered particularly well with regards to the Hadrami diaspora in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, where the general pattern of superior promotional skills of the sada class replicates that of the homeland. Other locations to which the Hadramis migrated have been researched less thoroughly. The reasons for this imbalance are several – an existing body of literature upon which researchers can build, cohesion of the diasporic communities in Southeast Asia and the resulting ease of access, as well as the the perceived political, social and economic irrelevance of some of the other diasporas, especially those in East Africa. The diaspora

¹⁹⁷ Brehony, Noel. *Hadramaut and its diaspora: Yemeni politics, identity and migration*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

Manger, Leif O. *The Hadrami diaspora: community-building on the Indian Ocean rim*. Berghahn Books, 2010.

in the Gulf is viewed as crucial from an economic and financial perspective, but its social and political importance is often overlooked.

Despite regional variations, all the Hadrami diasporic communities retain a degree of connection to the homeland and are relevant to the intra-provincial political and social processes. While some diasporic communities contribute to the religious legitimacy of parts of the Hadrami society, others contribute financially and depending on the framing of their efforts, either complement or undermine the central government. Apart from these overt and often celebrated ways in which the diaspora influences intra-political and social life in Hadramawt, it also plays a significant role in regional conflicts. It influences policy making in several of the Gulf states, operates within the ranks of foreign militaries, organizes proxy forces in Yemen and plays a significant role in smuggling, terrorism and counter-terrorism.

In terms of conflict and struggle, the role of the diaspora is not limited to events where physical force is deployed. The diaspora has long been part of the mediation, deliberation and implicit violence processes taking place in Hadramawt. Apart from the exceptional historical moments, such as the Marxist rule over South Yemen between 1967 and 1990, the sada have wielded such overwhelming power so as to render all domestic opposition meaningless. In the diaspora, the leverage held by the sada was significantly lessened.

Perhaps the clearest example of the significance of the diasporic communities to the homeland is the export of domestic conflicts into the diaspora and their escalation or resolution there. By reaching the diaspora, the conflicts are in effect isolated from the environment in which they arose and transported outside of it – by doing so, the external factors specific to Hadramawt, especially the class-based social dynamics and the precarious human security situation of the lower classes, are eliminated and the issues are dealt with in the context of a different social dynamic.

In the past, the physical distance of the diasporic destinations from the homeland and the amount of time it took to transmit messages due to a limited window of weather favourable for travel meant that there would be a significant temporal distance between the event (which was itself an echo of an event occurring in the homeland) and the

transmission of its news to the homeland. This lessened the severity which was ascribed to the event's significance and the diaspora in effect became another form of mediation between and within social classes in Hadramawt. With ascend of modern communication technology, this aspect has been largely lost and the communities within Hadramawt and outside of it essentially function as one.

Despite the speed of communication between the homeland and the diaspora, the effect of a "second layer" of deliberation and mediation is not lost entirely. Some figures in the diaspora rose to positions of influence which they could not hope to achieve in the homeland due to the structural constraints concerning both the class-based society and the underdeveloped infrastructure which limits the commercial potential of the province. Whether successful in the religious arena, such as Omar Al Chattib, who became a grand mufti of Singapore¹⁹⁸, despite not being of sada descent or numerous businessmen in Saudi Arabia, these individuals are taken seriously in Hadramawt due to their achievements abroad. Using the legitimacy attained in the diaspora, they can then influence intra-Hadrami affairs.

The dynamics within the diasporic destination change with the financial strength, general security and stability of the diasporic destination as well as major events in the homeland. While in some instances, intermarriage and assimilation to the population were a wise choice, in other instances doing so would be in effect giving up opportunities afforded to the individual and his class by the virtue of being different and seemingly superior. These conditions are not fixed within any society and changes can be observed even within the Hadrami community itself. The recent decades, roughly since the dissolution of the PDRY and unification of Yemen in 1990, have brought a trend of re-stratification of the Hadrami diasporic communities, once again replicating events occurring in Hadramawt itself. The re-stratification began as a differentiation of the sada and non-sada Hadrami migrants. Once this was mostly complete and spheres of influence were divided, further stratification began to take place, in which the tribal

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Ismail Al Chattib, 22 November 2016, Tarim

class has attempted to revive itself, organize itself along the lines of individual tribes and purge itself of those claiming tribal descent despite of not being of the correct lineage.

2. Historical differences in migration and its goals

Although exceptions exist across the social strata and diasporic destinations, there are general patterns to Hadrami migration. Migration of the sada represented a form of expansion, both in religious and commercial terms, even if nowadays the sada present their overseas efforts as “religious development aid”.¹⁹⁹ A sayyid was „pulled“ into migration as his journey was a pre-planned choice which diversified the class’s “locational portfolio” and made the survival and prosperity of his social class more likely. Owing to the retention of strong links with other locations occupied by members of the same social class as well as the homeland, the sada could draw on the experience, contacts and resources obtained or established in one location to extend their influence into another location. Due to their ease of movement within Hadramawt (as their social class membership shielded them from harm during travel), the sada social class members were not constrained in their choice of departure points, unlike tribesmen whose tribal allegiance often made crossing an area under the control of a competing tribe impossible. Financial security of the sada also meant that undertaking journeys to the Far East, while uncomfortable, was feasible.

The lower classes were “pushed” into the diaspora as it represented a means of survival. They were forced into migration due to the lack of access to land, tribal feuds, general marginalization in terms of access to education and employment and, on occasion, by famine. The departure of a member of the tribal class was a loss to his tribe as he could not be replaced as a warrior, while his earning potential was low and the likelihood of remittances significant enough to influence the life of the tribe, rather than only that of his immediate kin, was limited. More often than not, he would eventually marry locally and assimilate within the receiving society, losing connection to the tribe and Hadramawt in the process. Migration of the lower social classes was not organized or planned, it was organic and opportunistic, shaped by the conditions in the

¹⁹⁹ Freitag, Ulrike. "Hadramaut: A religious centre for the Indian Ocean in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?." *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 165-183.

homeland, at sea and in the receiving location at that very moment in time. For example in Kenya, the pattern of Hadrami settlement in the hinterland is dictated by the stage of development of the Kenyan railway. The arriving Hadrami tribesmen would travel as far as the train would take them, assuming better economic opportunities in a developing location rather than on the urbanized coast, but not knowing where they would end up prior to setting sail from Hadramawt.²⁰⁰

Part of the reasoning for the migration of tribesmen has to do with the legal practices in the governorate. As a deeply conservative society, Hadramawt's legal practices are based on Islamic principles. Particularly the Islamic laws regarding inheritance incentivized the tribesmen in favour of migration. According to an Islamic legal custom, inherited land should continue to be divided among an ever-increasing number of descendants down the generations. In combination with the general lack of willingness to sell land and the land's symbolic value, this should theoretically culminate with plots of land so small as to be unworkable. However, this was rarely the case in Hadramawt.²⁰¹ Even though the inheritance mechanisms operate as outlined and tribesmen do prefer to retain the ownership of land, the outpouring of migrants meant that the number of individuals working the land in most villages remained constant.²⁰² While one male of the family was responsible for his siblings' plots of land and enjoyed the benefits derived from this land, the others were given the chance to migrate while still retaining a symbolic foothold in Hadramawt.²⁰³

The choice of diasporic destinations was also influenced by the kind of capital the migrant would bring. The primary capital borne by members of the sada was their religious legitimacy and later the funds they would bring from other locations. For members of the lower classes, the primary capital was their labour. Le Guennec-Coppens²⁰⁴ points out that the level of acceptance and assimilation into the native communities in Kenya and the Comoros Islands were dependent on the social origin of

²⁰⁰ Interview with Awadh Ally Al Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

²⁰¹ Interview with Faraj al Nahdi, 24 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

²⁰² ditto

²⁰³ ditto

²⁰⁴ Le Guennec-Coppens, Françoise. "Social and Cultural Integration: A Case Study of the East African Hadramis." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, vol. 59, no. 2, 1989, pp. 185–195.

the migrants, as was indeed the case in other diasporic destinations. The notion of class therefore translated across the sea and the individual's identity in Hadramawt continued to shape his future in the diaspora as well. The social capital available is part of a complex calculation predicting the willingness of an individual migrant to retain or limit their connection to Hadramawt. While for all migrants, their affiliation to a group in Hadramawt provides the basis of their identity, the retention of this identity is not always desirable.

While the sayyids would stand to benefit from emphasizing their class affiliation, for other migrants travel abroad presented an opportunity to shed the label which prevented their social advancement in the homeland. Similarly, while the sada's contribution to the advancement of the class was reciprocated in the benefits derived from this advancement, the tribespeople in the diaspora were mostly expected to help their tribe while being offered little in return. This phenomenon has to do with the way these social classes are organized – while the sada, despite being sub-divided into individual families, form a cohesive unit where individual parts of the unit do not overtly compete with others, the tribal class is broken down to sub-units whose survival and identity of which is connected to the perpetual conflict between them. As the diasporic community tends to reflect the society in Hadramawt, so the conflicts and struggles were exported and it is not surprising that the tribal class operated more as a collective of individuals sharing the same class affiliation than a cohesive and cooperative unit.

Even though tribal migration was more opportunistic, individualistic and organic, there were exceptional moments when the tribe and its authorities would get involved. This was the case of the 1945 - 1948 famine which was so severe that tribesmen chose to migrate in such numbers that the very existence of some tribes was in jeopardy.²⁰⁵ As tribes base their power and influence on sovereignty over a certain territory, it is vital that the number of armed men resident in a given location is sufficient to defend it and to enforce judgments and orders of the muqaddam or tribal sheikh. The legitimacy of the sheikh is then measured by the extent to which he can both control his "subjects" and his territory. Within the Tamimi tribe, the exceptional step of establishing quotas on

²⁰⁵ Interview with Karama Said Al Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

migration was undertaken by the muqaddam as the tribesmen intended to migrate to such an extent that in some cases no adult, armed male would remain in the village, making it susceptible to attack and takeover.

Before the arrival of the British into Hadramawt and the efforts credited to Harrold Ingrams in bringing the individual actors together under a treaty which became known as “Ingrams’ Peace”, such exodus would be unthinkable because the takeover of one’s unprotected lands would be all but guaranteed. The famine, while an exceptional moment, highlights two phenomena of the life of 20th century tribesman in Hadramawt. Firstly, it shows the relative peace and security prevalent in the province which allowed the tribesmen to entertain the thought of leaving their lands less protected and it also shows the deviation from thinking as a cohesive unit in which the individual held a position of little significance and whose life was shaped by the needs of the tribe to a more individualistic approach where one could leave the tribe and make their own fortune abroad.

The division of migratory destinations, at first shaped by environmental and social factors, would later come to reinforce itself through a natural process of power consolidation along class lines. As the receiving societies and the Hadrami community within them became more stable, initiating a change within them became more complicated. If the community was sada-dominated, an arriving tribesman would face much the same challenges that constrained his advancement in the homeland. As such, he would be better off migrating to a location which did not replicate the social order prevalent in Hadramawt. As education in Hadramawt, and indeed also in the former North Yemen, was segregated according to the descent of the students, the tribesmen could obtain good education in East Africa²⁰⁶, whereas in Singapore, they would enter the same segregated educational system which constrained the advancement of their children in the homeland.

Investment and commercial involvement differs between the two main historical diasporic destinations – while the sada have a more formalized plan of diversification

²⁰⁶ Interview with Fahmi Mansour Al Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

and involvement in multiple locations across the Indian Ocean (particularly Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore), the choices made by the poorer migrants are usually shaped by immediate need and less by dynastic planning. Although there were policies aimed at curtailing the influence and wealth of the Hadrami and more generally Arab migrants in both South-East Asia and East Africa, the cohesion of the sada social class and their ability to maintain multiple location for both religious reasons (which translate into social legitimacy) and commercial purposes translated into their ability to deal with these policies better. The lower social classes and poorer migrants, even if they became wealthy through their efforts in the diaspora, lacked the geographical and social safety net of the sada.

The changing attitudes towards migration also shaped the diasporic experience of the Hadramis. The East African diaspora was heavily influenced by the events on the Swahili coast and the political and social changes there. First arriving in order to literally survive the drought and famine, the arriving individuals would accept any job and attempt to send remittances back to their families in Hadramawt. Later, some succeeded in accumulating wealth and creating surplus which they could invest. While it would seem logical to invest in the wealthier and more stable East Africa, given the anti-Arab sentiment both in Tanzania and in the newly independent Kenya, many instead elected to invest their money in land and other real estate in the homeland.²⁰⁷ The 1968 and 1970 Land Reforms and the forced collectivisation saw many of these investments diminish. Meanwhile, the sada could invest their wealth in a more diversified fashion and therefore create a more robust system of wealth retention and growth, which eventually led to a domination of land ownership in Hadramawt, but in a much safer and more sustainable manner.

Even after the return of the land to its pre-1968 owners, the volatility of Yemen made investments there risky and incentivized the diaspora members to find investment opportunities in Kenya and Tanzania instead.²⁰⁸ This was further exacerbated by the discovery of oil in the Gulf, where many of the labourers originated in the East African

²⁰⁷ Interview with Karama Said Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

²⁰⁸ Interview with Faraj Al Nahdi, 24 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

Arabic-speaking population. The money earned in Saudi Arabia or other Gulf countries could go a long way in both Yemen and Kenya. However, according to Yemeni-Kenyan informants, the historic experience of land being confiscated by the Omani colonialists has led the local population to view Arab land ownership as controversial, even when the land was acquired through a legitimate sale. Local population often takes over the land recently purchased by the Hadramis and starts a complicated legal process of regaining control of this land. The Swahili population considers land owned by the Arabs to be “fair game” and Swahili politicians entice such behaviour through a rhetoric they know will appeal to a majority of the electorate.²⁰⁹ The choice of investment in East Africa, despite the knowledge of the local attitude towards such investments, highlights the domination of the land market in Hadramawt by the sada.

Migration to the Gulf is separate from the previous migratory waves and exceptional in its lack of religious undertones. As the Gulf was a location of already established religious structures, it did not need the Hadrami migrants to bring religion. It did however need people with business acumen and labourers who could develop the societies benefitting from the discovery of oil. In Hadramawt, both could be found – the businessmen who travelled to what is today known as Saudi Arabia were predominately of the mashaikh social class in Wadi Do’an.²¹⁰ The mashaikh could not benefit from the opportunities afforded to the sayyids due to their lack of Hashemite descent, but they did tend to be well-educated by Hadrami standards of the time and were not bound to vast land holdings.

Migrants to Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Gulf were often compelled to restrict public displays of religious devotion and adopted the style of dress and worship of the receiving society. To show one’s Sufi leanings publicly would be damaging to the commercial interests of the migrants. Since the migration to the Gulf was undertaken primarily for commercial reasons, the migrants chose to suppress parts of their identity in order to increase the chances of achieving their primary goal. In the case of the Gulf, the potential payoff was large enough to dissuade the sada migrants from getting

²⁰⁹ ditto

²¹⁰ Interview with Alewi Al Kaff, 2 May 2018, Tarim

involved in missionary work that could endanger their position. The Yemeni sada community in Jeddah, a known Hadrami centre in the Kingdom, does however continue to worship according to their own traditions, but these are well-hidden from the public.²¹¹ In doing so, the Hadrami society again replicated itself in a foreign land, albeit with necessary variations and showed the resilience of its identity.

A politically important stream of migrants left for Saudi Arabia in 1967 as the former Sultans and other religious and tribal elites were being chased out of South Yemen. For this group, immediate survival was paramount as the Communist forces undertook a campaign of cleansing, which included the dragging of religious leaders behind vehicles near the town of Shibam²¹² and assassinations of others. These migrants, including the families of the Kathiri and Qu'aiti Sultans, quickly received Saudi citizenship and enjoyed some covert following in Hadramawt even after their departure into exile. Another family which escaped into Saudi Arabia was that of Sultan Bin Afraar, the ruler of Mahra and the island of Soqatra. This family remained the most politically involved, eventually resurfacing after 2015 and attempting to reclaim the throne of the former Sultanate²¹³ based on popular support still enjoyed by the family nearly 50 years after its ouster.

3. Intra-Hadrami conflict in the diaspora

The conflict between the sada and the other classes in Hadramawt is acknowledged but contained due to the overwhelming power of the sada. Through the co-opting of influential tribal and other cadres, their involvement in businesses run by the sada, supporting them in elections and by the power of their wealth, the sada have managed to make the conflict seem non-existent. Before the establishment of more efficient travel and communication channels, the diaspora's involvement in any intra-Hadrami conflict was limited, although events in the homeland did echo in the diaspora and vice versa. Since about the early 20th century, the diaspora has begun to play a significant role in the intra-Hadrami conflict both within Hadramawt and within the diasporic destinations.

²¹¹ Interview with Zain al Haddad, 22 April 2018, Tarim

²¹² Interview with Rais Attamimi, 14 November 2019, Salalah

²¹³ Interview with Badr Kalshat, 16 November 2019, Al Ghaydah

Not fearing the repercussions of open revolt and without the tribal and other leaders being able to apply pressure to the revolting parties, those of the non-sada classes who were of a reformist mindset began to organize themselves under the banner of the Irshad Union.²¹⁴ This organization had its original roots in Hadramawt, but it only became a significant actor following its revival in Indonesia in 1914. The conflict initially began with regards to the practice of kafa'a which stipulates that a female of sada descent can only ever marry a male of the same social class. This practice, universally respected in Hadramawt, was being challenged by the non-sada, who saw the inherent noble status of the sayyids as discriminatory. They sought to change this situation and one of the potential channels was the intermarriage between the various classes, which would eventually lead to a society where everyone could claim descent from the Prophet and members of the society would be, at least theoretically, equal.

On the other side of the barricade stood Hadrami scholars who sought to reinforce the practice by stipulating additional rules, limiting the marital prospects of sada women to those claiming lineage from Hussain and Hassan alone and thus effectively stratifying the Hashemites into two streams of prestige.²¹⁵ It should be noted that kafa'a is not a construct of the Hadrami sada but rather a wider Islamic principle according to which only equals should be married.²¹⁶ In most interpretations, this is understood as meaning the equality between the bride's and groom's family in terms of wealth, as it is presumed that the marriage of a female from a wealthy family to a male from a poor family would likely result in an unsuccessful marriage.²¹⁷ The Irshadis had to choose religious guidance on these matters from religious authorities in Egypt and Sudan as their traditional religious leaders, the sada, insisted on the "Hadrami" interpretation of the

²¹⁴ Bujra, Abdalla S. "Political conflict and stratification in Hadramaut—I." *Middle Eastern Studies* 3.4 (1967): 355-375.

²¹⁵ *ibid*

²¹⁶ Ziadeh, Farhat J. "Equality (Kafā'ah) in the Muslim Law of Marriage." *The American Journal of Comparative Law* (1957): 503-517.

²¹⁷ Mobini-Kesheh, Natalie. "Competing Visions of Hadrami-Ness: The 'Alawi-Irshadi Conflict." *The Hadrami Awakening: Community and Identity in the Netherlands East Indies, 1900–1942*, Cornell University Press, 1999, pp. 91–107.

custom, insisting that marriage between non-sada males and sada females was in violation of Islamic law.²¹⁸

As Engseng Ho points out, “textual worlds nurture imagined communities”²¹⁹ and so the budding conflict was well-covered in international press, especially in Egypt.²²⁰ It led to a strife within the Hadrami community and an establishment of two different groups, each with their own social organizations, educational establishments and even mosques.²²¹ The news of the conflict was spreading both through the press and through familial networks. Before long, the same issue arose in Malaysia, despite the Irshadis not establishing a formal organization there.²²² The fact that the conflict also arose there shows that the issue of sada and non-sada divide, and the access or lack thereof associated with the strength of one’s lineage, were universal within the Hadrami community, that the conditions in the diaspora lend themselves to the expression of dissatisfaction and that this conflict was not somewhat spurred on by any specific conditions within the Indonesian diaspora.

One of the external signs of the Alewi – Irshadi conflict was the use of sada-specific names and terminology. The Irshadis would purposely name their children Sayyid or Habeeb (meaning “beloved” and denoting respect towards the sada) in order to weaken the position of the Alewis and antagonize them by using a term usually reserved for the sada.²²³ In East Africa, the term habeeb is used by non-sada without much controversy. According to Hadrami tribesmen in the East African diaspora, the term is used according to the Swahili tradition and is essentially an equivalent to “grandfather”.²²⁴ The pettiness of this, as well as the overall triviality of the issue of

²¹⁸ Slama, Martin. “Marriage as Crisis: Revisiting a Major Dispute among Hadhramis in Indonesia.” *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2014, pp. 65–80.

²¹⁹ Ho, Engseng. “Names beyond Nations: The Making of Local Cosmopolitans.” *Études Rurales*, no. 163/164, 2002, pp. 215–31.

²²⁰ Bujra, Abdalla S. “Political conflict and stratification in Hadramaut—I.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 3.4 (1967): 355-375.

²²¹ Freitag, Ulrike, and William G. Clarence-Smith, eds. *Hadrami traders, scholars and statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s to 1960s*. Vol. 57. Brill, 1992.

²²² Noor, Zanariah, and Nazirah Lee. “The Conflict among Hadrami Arab Community in Malaysia Regarding the Issues of Kafā’a in Muslim Marriage.” *Hawwa* 11.2-3 (2014): 252-274.

²²³ Bujra, A. S. “Political Conflict and Stratification in Ḥadramaut: I.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1967, pp. 355–75.

²²⁴ Interview with Karama Tamimi, 12 February 2020, Mombasa

access to partners in a country where the Hadrami community constituted a small minority and many other partners were available clearly demonstrates that these were manifestations of deeper underlying issues.

A number of organizations was set up in order to promote Arab unity and represent the Arab community in Southeast Asia, but all failed to achieve its goals and sooner or later a conflict between the sada and the rest of the community surfaced. Members of the Kathiri tribe, originally part of Irshad, decided to create their own organization named “Kathiri League” in 1933. This weakened Irshad and presented an opportunity quickly seized by the sada as they attempted to appeal to the cooperation between the two entities in the homeland and convince the Kathiris to side with the sada cause in the diaspora.²²⁵

The more symbiotic relationship of the Hadrami sada and the other classes in East Africa as opposed to other locations can be explained by the need to defend the community against external threats and thus leaving limited time for intra-community squabbles. As the number of the sada migrating to East Africa and staying there long-term was relatively small, with the exception of the Comoros Islands, those who did stay could not rely on the strong and wide network available to them in South-East Asia. For that reason, they were compelled to get more involved in the community of Arab migrants, especially since this group faced pressure from the emancipating native population and unified approach was a must for the preservation of life and property. In East Africa, the conflicts are less within the Hadrami community and more against the state or other ethnical groups. In particular, the Hadrami diasporic community suffers from being lumped together with the Omani community, which is seen to be an extension of the former colonial power and as such, is despised by the local Swahili population.²²⁶ This means that the Kenyan Hadramis are less concerned about distinctions of class and tribal affiliation, as they are not competing against other tribes

²²⁵ Boxberger, Linda. *On the Edge of Empire: Hadhramawt, Emigration, and the Indian Ocean, 1880s-1930s*. SUNY Press, 2002.

²²⁶ Interview with Karama Said Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

or similar units but rather against state institutions and other well-established diasporic communities, for example the Indians.

Despite this, the community in East Africa is not perfectly homogenous. Informal sub-groups are still formed, however rather than based on social class membership or tribe, these tend to follow geographical origin of their members. During the times of the 1945-1948 famine, transport was often organized jointly by members of different groups occupying a similar area and these often tended to settle in the same neighbourhoods in the new locations as well.²²⁷ In Mombasa, the Quraya neighbourhood was so strongly Arab that it even developed its own Arabic dialect, which included words borrowed from Swahili.²²⁸ Nowadays, the neighbourhood is falling victim to its central location within Mombasa and the general cosmopolitanism of the city. Property is being purchased by outside investors (many of them originating in Somalia, which leads to the rumour that transactions are carried out using “pirate money”) and members of the Hadrami community are relocating to the suburbs of Mombasa.²²⁹

Each of these communities establishes their own social organizations, which then provide services commonly expected of the state. For example in Mombasa, the Indian social organization runs schools and hospitals, which are open to everyone, but only members of the association can access them for free.²³⁰ The Arab community formerly had its own organizations and associations, such as the Arab Welfare Society, but this organization lacked the grassroots support of some of the others and over time, it ceased to exist. Efforts are currently underway to establish a new organization, the Kenyan Yemeni Arab Welfare Association (KEYAWA) which should replicate the activities undertaken by other ethnical organizations in Mombasa. Membership of this organization is open to all those of Yemen origin and not limited to Hadramawt, despite the leadership of the organization representing the most common Kenyan Hadrami – second or third generation Kenyans citizens of Hadrami origin, all returning to Kenya

²²⁷ Interview with Ahmed Al Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

²²⁸ ditto

²²⁹ Interview with Fahmi Mansour Al Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

²³⁰ Interview with Karama Said Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

after years of working in the Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain) and not having visited the Yemeni homeland in a number of years, or in some instances, ever.

These examples point to a trend in the intra-Hadrami conflicts in the diaspora. Firstly, the community is capable of cooperation and peaceful co-existence at the time of crisis. When facing an external threat or a common enemy, the Hadramis will fall back from their polarized positions and use their common heritage or organize themselves. Relative comfort and peace creates the conditions for the resurfacing of lesser issues, ones not directly threatening the survival of the community, but significant enough that they continue to linger for centuries and wait for the right moment to appear. The second apparent phenomenon is the Hadrami affinity for creating organizations to give themselves a platform through which they can influence political processes. Even when it is apparent that a given organization is dominated by a single individual or small group, an attempt is made to make it appear as though the entity is wide and preferably open to all. This behaviour was later replicated in Hadramawt following the unification of Yemen in the early 1990s and again after the beginning of the civil war in 2014.

4. Trends in contemporary migration

Hadrami migration is currently limited by the difficulty of obtaining a visa necessary in order to leave Yemen. Those with previous connections do manage to travel, but the migratory stream has been mostly directed into two destinations: Malaysia and the Gulf. In Malaysia, Yemenis and especially Hadramis enjoy acceptance due to the influence of the Ba 'Alewi sada within the religious circles. Malaysia has been one of only a handful of countries to which Yemenis could travel visa-free even during the war which broke out in 2014. Malaysia's educational sector is considered high-quality while still relatively affordable and therefore it has become a destination of choice for members of the Yemeni middle class. Some urbanized professional Yemenis, including members of the commercial elite of Taiz for example, choose to send their sons to study in Malaysia rather than Europe, claiming the benefits of education in an Islamic country on the character of their sons.²³¹ Wealthy Hadrami émigrés who sponsor students through

²³¹ Observation in Taiz in 2012.

scholarships also prefer Malaysia both for the religious and financial reasons. It has been argued that while it may be difficult for a young Yemeni to integrate into a society in the West, even if housed within a religious community, it is considerably easier in Malaysia due to the many Malay cultural influences that have found their way into the Hadrami society.²³²

The Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and others have been a destination of Hadrami migration since the discovery of oil in these locations. Some of the most prominent Saudi business families arrived from Wadi Do'an in the wake of the oil boom. These families are now well-established in Saudi Arabia and include the Bin Laden, Bin Mahfoudh and Buqshan families, among others. While those taking part in the early waves of migration have long since received their Saudi citizenship, the "new migrants" roughly from the 1980s onwards currently have no hope of receiving citizenship and usually reside in these countries on annually reviewed employment visas.²³³ The Hadrami diaspora in Saudi Arabia was an incredibly important source of remittances which provided both a challenge to the former President Saleh's patronage network as it emancipated the opposition while at times also helping in his survival as Yemenis were less reliant on the state which had limited resources (and competency) and instead relied on the remittances to satisfy their basic needs.²³⁴ This suggests there are in fact two distinct Hadrami groups in Saudi Arabia, one long-established and elite and another of low-skilled labourers. Both these groups can be exploited in order to apply pressure on the Yemeni state politically and economically.

In 1990, Yemeni labourers were deported *en masse* from Saudi Arabia for the lack of support of Saudi actions against Iraq.²³⁵ This shocked the Yemeni economy, but labourers have since been returning to Saudi Arabia and it is estimated that up to a

²³² Interview with Shukri Ba Hubraysh, 26 April 2018, Tarim

²³³ Interview with Bashir Hagi, 8 November 2019, London

²³⁴ Okruhlik, Gwenn, and Patrick Conge. "National Autonomy, Labor Migration and Political Crisis: Yemen and Saudi Arabia." *Middle East Journal*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1997, pp. 554–65.

²³⁵ Stevenson, Thomas B. "Yemeni Workers Come Home: Reabsorbing One Million Migrants." *Middle East Report*, no. 181, 1993, pp. 15–20.

million Yemenis are currently employed in the Kingdom.²³⁶ Occasionally, there are raids targeting the Yemeni labourers and, at least prior to the beginning of the war which started in 2014, mass deportations of some Yemeni workers would take place.²³⁷ The Yemeni community in Saudi Arabia is largely apolitical and focused on its economic advancement. As such, the Yemenis pose a limited risk to the stability of the Kingdom while contributing to its economy. Those deported are rarely expelled for deeds they have done or failed to do – instead they are sent back as part of a shift in Saudi migratory policy or in order to punish the Yemeni state by denying its citizens remittances.

The dynamic of the Saudi – Yemeni relationship with regards to the diaspora has changed since the beginning of the ongoing civil war. Residents of Saudi Arabia who retain links with the homeland are under scrutiny and a Yemeni border stamp in the passport can cause serious issues for its owner upon return to Saudi Arabia.²³⁸ However, for those known to the Saudi government, members of tribes whose sheikhs receive Saudi stipends and those well-connected in the homeland, the beginning of the conflict and subsequent end of much of Saleh’s patronage network created a new set of opportunities as Yemenis were hired to organize resistance against the Houthis and otherwise help in the Saudi war effort.²³⁹ This, in a vast majority of the cases, only applies to those with previous connection to Saudi Arabia.

Migration to the former hotspots, such as Singapore and East Africa, has halted for very different reasons. Singapore’s strict migratory policies and high cost of living make it an incredibly difficult destination for new unskilled migrants, while those migrating primarily for financial reasons avoid East Africa and instead choose countries of the Gulf. Those already established in these destinations rarely return to Yemen as the opportunities presented by the current conflict require the navigation of a complex social and political

²³⁶ Wintour, Patrick. “Saudi Arabia Accused of Forcing Yemenis in the Kingdom Out of Their Jobs.” *The Guardian*, 14 Oct. 2021, www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/14/saudi-arabia-accused-of-forcing-yemenis-in-the-kingdom-out-of-their-jobs.

²³⁷ ditto

²³⁸ Participant observation at a border crossing in November 2019

²³⁹ Interview with Bashir Hagi, 8 November 2019, London

environment which is impossible for those without significant connections in all three governance structures.

The new (mostly third) generation of Kenyan Hadramis lacks any effective connection to Hadramawt. As quality of life and access to education is greater in East Africa, they choose to remain there or migrate further to Europe or to the Gulf. Some are also weary of being perceived as extremists due to being Muslim and having travelled to Yemen²⁴⁰ and so they avoid travelling there at all. The liberal stances of the East African Hadramis would most likely place them at odds with the conservative population of Hadramawt, especially the Wadi from where their forefathers originated. Although the young Kenyan and Tanzanian Hadramis still speak the language, they often fail to identify the tribe they are from and as such, they lose a crucial link to the community that could help them integrate in Yemen.

The one group that continues to migrate back and forth between Hadramawt and the diasporic destinations is the sada. For the most part, these single men or families travel to Tarim and Seyiun for religious education and, after several years, usually either return to Southeast Asia or migrate further to the West. Over the last decade, the community of Kenyan Hadramis only recalls three groups relocating back to Yemen – in all cases, these were widowed women with children whose husbands had familial links in Yemen and for whom the husband's income was irreplaceable.²⁴¹

5. Post-1990 situation in the diaspora

5.1. Case study: Al Mahra

While there is a degree of commonality in the legal, political and social processes taking place across the Yemeni governorates, there are also marked differences. That is why the migration of Hadramis to the neighbouring province of Al Mahra can be viewed through the same lens as their migration abroad. Even though Hadramis do not require a passport to cross into Mahra, the social environment there is different enough to allow for the derivation of some observations and therefore it is included here, even though

²⁴⁰ Interview with Adil Al Nahdi, 6 February 2020, London

²⁴¹ Interview with Karama Said Tamimi, 15 February 2020, Mombasa

this Hadrami community is still located within the confines of the Yemeni state's territory.

The Hadrami sada first arrived in significant numbers and without the intention to assimilate during and after the 1945-1948 drought.²⁴² They purchased or were given a farm in the provincial capital of Al Ghaydah, which is about 2/3 controlled by the Kalshat tribe and the remaining third belongs to the Kida tribe. These two tribes warred over the territory of Al Jahi, on which the farm is located, which led to the government stepping in and taking control of this land. The sada arriving in Al Mahra were usually members of the less prestigious branches of the Ba 'Alewi sada as they could not benefit as much from the cushion of wealth maintained by the leading families and the drought affected their share-cropping agreements.

These migrants from Hadramawt initially managed to gather quite a following and it appeared as though some locations within Mahra would replicate the order prevalent in Hadramawt where the sada are not only nominally on top of the social pyramid. Despite some opposition from the tribes, this co-existence continued until 1990 when Salafis entered the province in large numbers and began to preach according to a doctrine that puts more emphasis on social justice and equality. This eventually resulted in the Islah party becoming popular in Mahra and the religio-political sphere was taken over by members of the party. According to informants²⁴³, the change of atmosphere in Mahra was very palpable during that time – while previously old men would kiss the hands of sada children as a sign of respect, this practice ended abruptly as soon as a suitable religious alternative appeared.

The turn towards Salafism was partially reversed after 2015 when the coalition of Arab states under the leadership of Saudi Arabia attempted to change the social dynamics in Al Mahra by importing a number of Salafi scholars and students, reportedly formerly associated with the infamous Dar al Hadith institute in Dammaj, and attempting to establish a religious institute for these individuals in Al Ghaydah, the capital of Al Mahra. In this situation, the declared religious affiliation of those involved again became a

²⁴² Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 1 July 2018, Aurangabad

²⁴³ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 2 July 2018, Aurangabad

unifying banner and much like elsewhere in the South, those protesting the Salafi presence, despite previously being Salafi-leaning themselves, chose to rally behind the Sufi figures in the province.²⁴⁴

The community of Hadrami sada in Al Mahra has refused to integrate into the wider Mahri society. They mostly continue to live in one location, with the exception of some sada residing in Al Qishn and Seyhut and they strictly observe the rules of kafa'a when it comes to marrying off their daughters. This practice has been as controversial in Al Mahra as it is elsewhere.²⁴⁵ The non-sada Hadramis live as ordinary Mahris and one would struggle to recognize their origin without being able to interview them. These individuals usually move to Mahra due to a commercial interest or in search of employment and have no intention of establishing a separate community of any sort, instead choosing to remain connected to their community back in Hadramawt or assimilating completely into the receiving society.

The case of Al Mahra is peculiar in that it is very easy for the Hadramis to move between Hadramawt and Al Mahra. Yet, this does not mean that the community of Hadrami sada resident in Al Mahra is especially close to the one in Hadramawt. The opposite is true and the community in Mahra is more detached and independent than the communities overseas. Even relatives of leading Sufi figures, such as Habib Umar bin Hafiz, complain of their detachment from the core of the Ba 'Alewi sada.²⁴⁶ This is likely due to the fact that they struggle to be seen as a significant contributor to the well-being of the class and as such, despite geographical proximity, remain on the fringes of interest.

Of note is also the position of the Manahil tribe, part of the Bani Dhanna tribal confederation of Hadramawt. This tribe is resident on the territory which is both historically and administratively part of Al Mahra, yet it is part of a Hadrami tribal confederation.²⁴⁷ Therefore, this tribe is treated as Mahri by the Yemeni government

²⁴⁴ ibid

²⁴⁵ ibid

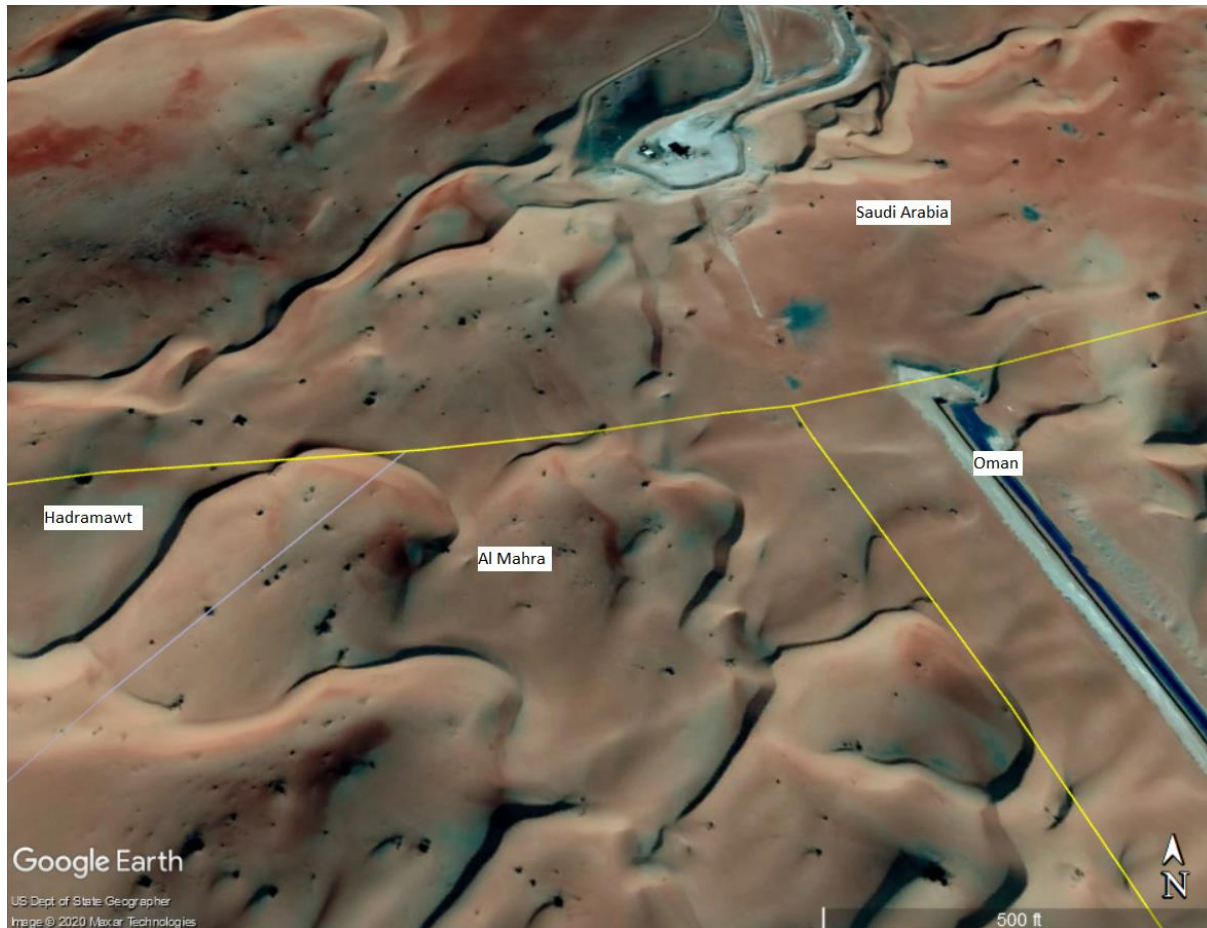
²⁴⁶ Interview with Saeed Salim, 6 December 2016, Tarim

²⁴⁷ Presentation by Dr Elisabeth Kendall, Vienna

and outside actors, while not being accepted as such by the Mahris themselves.²⁴⁸ The tribe is compelled to take part in the intra-Mahri affairs as they are being denied agency in Hadramawt on the grounds of not being located within the province. This position has led to the tribe being viewed as a “fifth column” and there is some evidence to suggest that the tribe is in fact acting in concert with the state and foreign powers and not always in the best interest of the Mahri tribal community. This position is understandable due to the precarious position of this tribe as it is forced to seek outside partners. The position of the tribe is best illustrated by the attempted establishment of the Mahri Elite Forces by the United Arab Emirates in 2017. The units were fashioned after the successful para-military group Hadrami Elite Forces, which primarily comprise of Hadrami tribesmen. As the military of the UAE sought partners in Mahra, majority of the tribes united against what they considered to be an Emirati incursion. The one willing partner was Al Aouba Al Thani, a part of the Manahil tribe, which was connected to the officers organizing the force through familial links and which eagerly provided men for the unit.²⁴⁹ This unit could then claim to be legitimately Mahri, despite representing a small fraction of the Mahris. Domination of this newly established force, supported by a significant foreign power, then gave the Manahil tribe an advantage in a tribal system hostile to them.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Badr Kalshat, 16 November 2019, Al Ghaydah

²⁴⁹ Presentation given by Dr Elisabeth Kendall at the Academy of Science in Vienna, February 2018.



Map: Detail of the situation on the Yemen/Saudi Arabia/Oman border

5.2. Case study: Dhofar

Dhofar is the western-most province of Oman. It shares a border with the Yemeni province of Al Mahra, there are two official border crossings located at Shihn and Sarfait and many unofficial ones. The Mahri tribal population spans both sides of the border and therefore Omani state focuses much of its effort in Yemen on winning the favour of the tribal population of Al Mahra by financing infrastructural and medical projects. There is however a surprisingly small number of labourers of Yemeni origin employed in the Sultanate with preference being given to workers from Pakistan and Bangladesh. While no official data exists, this is likely due to security concerns as the Omani state fears the potential import of Yemeni internal issues into the Sultanate.

The historical presence of Hadrami sada in Dhofar in Oman is confirmed by archaeological discoveries of shrines and tombs there.²⁵⁰ Available evidence suggests that Hashemites in general reached Dhofar via Hadramawt, hence they were already acquainted with the Kathiri tribe and their role was likely meant to replicate the relationship already existing in Hadramawt. As the sayyids embedded themselves within the Hadrami tribes, they naturally extended their reach into Dhofari tribes – as tribesmen intermarried and established alliances, the sada served as mediators and administrators, eventually establishing presence in today’s Oman. The official account of sada activity in Oman does not differ from anywhere else – it is presented as missionary work alone, with no business or commercial interests attached. However, the sada presence and influence in Zanzibar and the Comoros Islands is directly tied to the maritime routes used by the Omanis and it stands to reason that at least part of the appeal of the expansion to Oman was the ease of access to these destinations.

The involvement of Ba ‘Alewi sada in today’s Oman is however very different from their role in Hadramawt – either due to Al Mahra serving as a “buffer zone” of their influence or due to Oman’s governance being much more centralized, there is little need or indeed opportunity for any elite group other than the ruling family to create a supplemental governance structure. Hadramis often serve as clerics in Dhofari mosques, but their influence is limited to the religious sphere and closely watched by the state. One exception and the most visible individual of Hadrami descent active on the Omani political scene is Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs. This man comes from a family belonging to the Hadrami sada and as such, he is reported²⁵¹ to assist the Hadramis in conducting business in Oman. Bin Abdullah does not make excessive religious statements, nor does he otherwise overtly point to his origin.

There are other influential Hadramis in Oman and also residents of Hadramawt with significant ties to the Omani state. Some of these individuals are tied to Dar al Mustafa,

²⁵⁰ Newton, Lynne S., and Juris Zarins. “Preliminary Results of the Dhofar Archaeological Survey.” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 40, 2010, pp. 247–65.

²⁵¹ Interview with Rais Attamimi, 14 November 2019, Salalah

such as Habib Ali al Jifry who once resided in Salalah²⁵², before eventually moving on to the UAE and Cairo. Habib Umar bin Hafiz retains a connection to the Omani government and can freely travel through the official border crossings in order to travel to his audiences in Southeast Asia. His office is likewise capable of arranging visas to enter Oman, even at times when the border crossings are officially closed.²⁵³ It can be speculated that much like the Hashemite connection between the Ba ‘Alewi and Houthisada, this relationship is also being kept fairly private in order to prevent being seen as either agents of Omani influence in Hadramawt or conversely influenced by a foreign religious doctrine while the relationship is rational, with both parties looking out for their security interests and seeking the retention of their comfortable positions.

Oman, like other monarchies in the region, has used its ability to grant citizenships as a tool of influence in regional struggles. In this initiative, members of a targeted community are offered a citizenship in return for loyalty or other services. During the course of research for this dissertation, two such individuals were frequently mentioned as having received a citizenship recently and that is Abu Bakr Haidar Al Attas, former Prime Minister of both PDRY and unified Yemen²⁵⁴ and Sultan bin Afraar, the heir apparent of the Mahra Sultanate²⁵⁵. Both have previously resided in Saudi Arabia, with at least bin Afraar holding a Saudi citizenship²⁵⁶ and their “recruitment” by the Omanis came as part of an effort to counter Saudi influence in what it considers to be its sphere of influence – the governorate of Al Mahra.

5.3. Case study: The Tamimi tribe in Mombasa

Compared to Southeast Asia, the diaspora in East Africa has gone through a much deeper process of assimilation and the communities in Kenya and Tanzania are truly part of the Swahili coast, even if they retain (particularly religious) traditions of their own.²⁵⁷ This is likely due to the limited influence of the sada and the resulting lack of

²⁵² Interview with Naji al Zaidi, 25 October 2019, Beirut

²⁵³ Participant observation in November 2019

²⁵⁴ Interview with Noel Brehony, 21 November 2018, London

²⁵⁵ Interview with Bashir Hagi, 8 November 2019, London

²⁵⁶ ditto

²⁵⁷ Le Guennec-Coppens, F. (1989). Social and Cultural Integration: A Case Study of the East African Hadramis. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 59(2), 185-195.

ability to rely on a multipolar support system propping the promotion of Hadrami identity and replicating the political order prevalent in Hadramawt.

Hadrami presence in modern-day Kenya has been documented since at least 16th century, with the hostile environment and unpredictability of the floods being the drivers of migration from Hadramawt. The famine of 1945-1948 spurred a large wave of migration and marks the beginning of what we today recognize as the Hadrami diaspora in Kenya. As travel to Southeast Asia became complicated for legal and financial reasons, many families sent single men to Mombasa to obtain employment and send remittances to Hadramawt. The proximity of Hadramawt to East Africa also allowed for more frequent visits to the homeland and, in case of an emergency, a relocation in either direction.

The drought and resulting famine affected the Hadrami society dramatically. Within the Tamimi tribe, the number of men ready to migrate was so high that the muqaddam of the tribe had to issue quotas on the number of men who were allowed to leave their respective villages and settlements, assuring that a certain number of armed men was left behind to provide protection and enforcement.²⁵⁸ As discussed in the chapter on land ownership and control, the very basis on the tribal identity of the Tamimis would be in jeopardy should they appear not capable of defending their claimed territory.

The incoming migrants assimilated into the wider Hadrami community in East Africa, but this community was already ethnically diverse as previous waves of migrants married local women and no rules preventing assimilation into the native population of East Africa were observed. This situation affected the strength of the link between the migrants and their families and tribes in Hadramawt as they did not feel the need to support them in order to retain and improve the position of their kinship group, which would in turn benefit themselves upon return. Seeing the option of having a better life outside of Yemen, many instead focused on improving their situation locally. Such allocation of resources was difficult to understand by the remaining tribal population in

²⁵⁸ Interview with Karama Tamimi, 12 February 2020, Mombasa

Hadramawt and as such the link between the migrants and their original communities was further weakened.

In today's Mombasa, the Hadrami community is not organized along tribal lines. The current revival of the Hadrami and tribal identities is being driven by civic organizations. One such organization is the Al Jamia Al Markazie Al Arabie (Central Arab Organization) which was established by Muhammad Abdullah Shatiri, a Hadrami sayyid. The organization presents itself as encompassing all individuals of Arab descent and is not overtly connected to a specific tribe or sada family. The foundation of these organizations and their attempts at appealing to a wide audience mimic the situation in the Hadrami homeland following the unification of Yemen in 1990, when a number of entities attempted to establish seemingly unaffiliated civic organizations in order to garner popular support which could be translated into political influence.

This is not to say that the assimilation into the mainstream population and the communal self-ordering not reliant on social class or tribal membership means a complete evaporation of the power of the tribal sheikhs and qadis (judges). In this informal system, certain figures remain respected based on the strength of their personalities and "character".²⁵⁹ These figures serve to prevent or mediate conflict, but they are appointed on an ad hoc basis by parties to the conflict. Another type of a qadi also exists in the Arab community and that is a "government qadi", an individual appointed by the Kenyan government following consultation with the Arab community, who is a follower of the Shafa'i madhab and serves as a link between the government and the community in matters of family affairs and prevention of conflicts based on differing views on Islamic jurisprudence. This position is founded in history, when a Sultan of Zanzibar kept a wali (deputy) and qadi in Mombasa to provide judicial services to the community and limit the number of issues that would reach the Sultan's court.

The Tamimi tribe in Mombasa did not replicate the organizational structure found in Hadramawt, mostly due to the varying numbers and standing of those migrating. Those in a stronger position in Hadramawt had less of an incentive to migrate, which

²⁵⁹ Interview with Abdul Rahman Al Saqqaf, 23 November 2016, Tarim

conversely made them a small minority in the diaspora and therefore they lacked the local power base that could put them in power and allow them to retain this position. However, where a leading figure of the Tamimi tribe, already recognized as such in Hadramawt, migrated to Kenya, this individual might still obtain and attain a position of social influence through their standing in the homeland. Such was the case of the Bin Yamini family based in Husn As-Safira in Wadi Hadramawt even though the influence of this part of the Bin Yamini family faded (allegedly due to their powers and privileges being “neglected”)²⁶⁰ and the power centre of the sub-tribe moved to Qassam. Yet when leader of the Husn As-Safirah branch of the family, Saleh bin Aboud Bin Yamani, migrated to Kenya, he immediately assumed a position of influence within the Tamimi tribe based on the position previously held by himself and the family in the homeland.

An informal system of governance and organization is prone to disruption by unexpected events, for which such a system is not built and lacks the resilience of a more formalized arrangement. Such case concerns the influence of the Bin Yamini family in Mombasa and Kenya. Although its influence was already weakened by the social changes in East Africa, one event specifically ended the dynasty’s unofficial leadership of the Tamimi tribe in Kenya. The untimely death of Ahmed Abd al Hadi Bin Yamini left the family in a precarious situation as it was Ahmed, the eldest son, who was groomed for a position of influence, sent to Arabia “to learn the proper manners and get the right accent”²⁶¹ and always presented by his father’s side. Once Ahmed passed away, he was replaced by his younger brother Muhammad, who lacked the manners or knowledge of the tribal rituals and who was less respected by the Tamimis. While Muhammad is not forgotten, his influence is limited to the point where he cannot be considered a figure representing his tribe in Kenya.²⁶²

Although there is no clear leadership of the Tamimi tribe in Mombasa at the moment and therefore no formalized link between the Kenyan Tamimis and those in Hadramawt, those travelling to the homeland are still expected to contribute to the tribe and the affiliated sada financially. There are however specific instances in which goods may be

²⁶⁰ Interview with Abdussalam Abdullah Al Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

²⁶¹ Interview with Awadh Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

²⁶² ditto

provided in lieu of funds. These are specifically tied to arms and ammunition – if a member of the diaspora is able to obtain and transport these items to Hadramawt, these are valued above financial support.²⁶³ This transaction keeps the relationship alive as the Kenyan Hadramis are seen contributing to the tribe and therefore still considered to be a part of it. This allows them to retain affiliation to quite an influential group and not struggle with defining their identity.

The stable social and political environment in Kenya and Tanzania has in recent years allowed for the fracturing of the all-encompassing “Arab” civic organizations and the revival of interest in organizing along tribal lines. With little practical advantage to this, this reshuffling can be seen as an attempt by the young, educated and ambitious tribesmen to establish the conditions under which they could more easily attain a position of influence, without needing to wait for decades and compete against members of all the other Arab factions there. This effort has gone as far as to investigate the validity of one’s belonging to a given tribe by reaching out to relatives in Yemen and making inquiries. This “purge” again eliminates competition and allows for a quicker social advancement of the tribal youth.²⁶⁴

5.4. Case study: Aurangabad in India

India has long had a considerable influence on internal Hadrami politics. Hadramis would regularly migrate there, especially to Hyderabad, as mercenaries and in return for their services they would be allocated an area from which they could extract taxes. This in turn made them wealthy and allowed them to, directly or through their kin, partake in the conflicts and politics of the homeland. The Qu’aitiy family in particular became so wealthy and powerful that upon return to Hadramawt, they successfully challenged the status quo and managed to create their own sultanate following a fight with the Kathiri sultan, whose family members coincidentally also served as mercenaries in India.²⁶⁵ The administration of British Aden and other statelets in South Arabia was carried out

²⁶³ Interview with Karama Tamimi, 12 February 2020, Mombasa

²⁶⁴ ditto

²⁶⁵ Hartwig, Friedhelm. "Expansion, state foundation and reform: the contest for power in Hadhramaut in the nineteenth century." *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s-1960s*. Brill, 1997. 35-50.

via the colonial apparatus in India, further increasing the importance of India in Hadrami affairs.

Nowadays, both of these links are severed and there are no obvious political connections between Hadramawt and India. There is however a lively migration from Yemen to India, particularly to the city of Aurangabad, which has emerged as a destination of choice for many Yemeni students, owing particularly to the affordable tuition fees and the support of the existing community there.²⁶⁶ The students in this city are not exclusively Hadrami, there are Yemenis from many different provinces, although majority hails from Hadramawt and Mahra.

The marked increase of the number of Yemeni students in Aurangabad over the last decade follows a familiar pattern. Initially, the first pioneers cooperated across provincial and social lines as they needed to unite and navigate the new and unfamiliar terrain. This single inclusive body began to fracture once a level of stability and comfort was established, a process which was sped up by the nature of a student population – as these individuals graduated, they often left Aurangabad and thus allowed for a quicker social realignment. Not surprisingly, the main divide is the social standing of the students, with the sada especially keen to establish a „sada neighborhood“ in Aurangabad.²⁶⁷ This effort has thus far been successful and there are already voices beginning to emerge that question the fairness of the exclusivity of the sada position, suggesting that the Alewi – Irshadi conflict, albeit under different banners and in a different location, remains as current now as it was in the 1920's.

5.5. Case study: Hadrami influence in the Comoros

The Comoros Islands are geographically part of East Africa, but the Hadrami diaspora there is very different from the rest of the region in its near complete domination by the Ba 'Alewi sada and by the depth of penetration of the Comoran society by the Sufi doctrine. Many of the inhabitants of the Comoros Islands dress similarly to the way the sada in Wadi Hadramawt (and their followers) dress and their religious practices closely

²⁶⁶ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 2 July 2018, Aurangabad

²⁶⁷ ditto

mirror those of the Hadrami sada, despite not being ethnically Hadrami or even Arab. Hadras (a symbolic musical remembrance of the forefathers specific to the mosque it is taking a place at) and other such “Hadrami Sufi” rituals are widely practiced throughout the islands and mimic those in Tarim down to very specific details.²⁶⁸

The historical influence and the continued prominence of the Ba ‘Alewi sada in the Comoros Islands is symbolized by the Comorian Franc banknotes, where the highest denomination (10000 Francs) bears the image of Habib Umar bin Sumayt, a Ba ‘Alewi teacher and judge, the 5000 Franc note displays the Saïd Mohamed Cheikh, perhaps the most important political leader of the state, and it is only the lower denominations that show images of native inhabitants of the islands and the islands’ wildlife.



Photograph of a banknote valid in the Comoros, bearing an image of Habib Umar bin Sumayt.

The story of Umar bin Sumayt presents a classic example of a migrant family of sada origin in the 20th century.²⁶⁹ The son of a Sufi scholar and an Islamic judge born in the Comoros was later sent for education to Zanzibar (where his father presided over a court at the time) and eventually to Shibam in Wadi Hadramawt, before being recalled

²⁶⁸ Participant observation in Moroni, Comoros, 1 March 2020.

²⁶⁹ Martin, Bradford G. "Notes on some members of the learned classes of Zanzibar and East Africa in the nineteenth century." *African Historical Studies* 4.3 (1971): 525-545.

by his father to join him in Zanzibar again and then becoming a judge himself. His focus remained on Islamic law and bin Sumayt was instrumental in establishing the waqf system of formal financing of religious institutions and clerics. The events of 1964 forced bin Sumayt to return to South Yemen as all his possessions and property in Zanzibar were confiscated. Fearing political developments in South Yemen, he then relocated with his family back to the Comoros, where he spent the rest of his life as an Islamic scholar.²⁷⁰

Despite the historical presence of important individuals in Comoros and the resemblance of dress and ritual to those in Wadi Hadramawt, the island state never had a formalized institution responsible for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge according to the Ba 'Alewi tariqa, thus mirroring the educational system of Wadi Hadramawt prior to the establishment of Ribat Tarim and relying on individual teachers who would tutor students at their own homes. However, there are fundraising efforts underway²⁷¹ to raise the capital needed to establish an institution named Nur al Mustafa (the Light of Mustafa) which would teach the curriculum created at Dar al Mustafa and enable students from the Comoros Islands to continue their advanced studies in Tarim. Habib Umar bin Hafiz himself visited the future site of the institution in Moroni in 2018 and the project appears to have the backing of the Comorian government, as the land was donated by the state.²⁷²

Benefits of inviting deeper formal involvement of Dar al Mustafa in the Comoros are both social and financial. By allowing an institution known for its moderate teachings and lack of overt political ambition to spread its influence, the government of the Comoros lessens the chances of radicalization of its citizens by other strands of Islam which might attempt to establish presence on the island. By referencing the historical influence of the bin Sumayt family in the development of the Comoros, the native population is more likely to accept these teachings as they can be presented as an

²⁷⁰ Bang, Anne K. "Teachers, Scholars and Educationists: The Impact of Hadrami-'Alawī Teachers and Teachings on Islamic Education in Zanzibar ca. 1870—1930." *Asian Journal of Social Science*, vol. 35, no. 4/5, 2007, pp. 457–71.

²⁷¹ Participant observation in Tarim throughout spring 2017.

²⁷² Interview with Faraj Al Nahdi, 24 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

“extension” of something that has been present in the Comorian identity for at least two centuries.

As Comoros is a developing state, the establishment of a non-state educational institution also lifts part of the responsibility for the advancement of literacy and schooling off the government’s shoulders. Although there are voices in opposition to promoting religious education ahead of secular schooling²⁷³, for the government of the Comoros, this is not a matter of choice. Despite secular education and government business being conducted in French and Nur al Mustafa being expected to teach in Arabic, any contribution to the educational sector of the islands is welcomed. It is however unlikely that the curriculum, reliant on repetition and memorization, will fit with Bin Sumayt’s teaching philosophy as he was wary of such practices and criticized them.²⁷⁴

The Hadrami diaspora in the Comoros Islands is limited in the number of its members, but it presents a large opportunity for the Ba ‘Alewi sada. Firstly, an education project, directly tied to Dar al Mustafa, presents a opportunity to increase the legitimacy of the sada who can amplify it in order to illustrate their charitable activities and raise funds for other projects, Secondly, an establishment of the only significant institution of religious learning puts a firm foundation for the continued influence over the Comoran society, especially when students are expected to be given an opportunity to continue their studies in Tarim, thus undergoing further indoctrination by the Ba ‘Alewi sada.

²⁷³ Interview with Ahmed Magdy, 25 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

²⁷⁴ Ingrams, Harold. *Arabia and the Isles*. Murray, 1966.



Photos from Habib Umar's visit to the site of Nur al Mustafa in the Comoros Islands.

6. Role of the diaspora in Hadrami political life

The Hadrami diaspora continues to influence the intra-state and intra-provincial processes in many ways. While some parts of the wider diaspora wield more influence, usually owing to the favourable financial and social position of Hadramis there, all diasporic destinations have their unique areas in which they contribute to the political life in Hadramawt. In some instances, the diaspora or its influential members may not have visited Hadramawt for decades – yet through political or financial influence, they continue to remain relevant.

As a wealthy neighbour of Yemen, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia plays a very important role in the hosting of influential Hadrami diaspora members and using them as agents of its foreign policy. The former leading families in Hadramawt (along with other locations in the South) fled to Saudi Arabia in 1967. In Saudi Arabia, these figures used the loyalty amongst their former subjects to organize resistance movements and attempt to topple the leadership of the PDRY.²⁷⁵ Although unsuccessful, the Qu'aity and Kathiri families enjoyed a degree of social prestige in Jeddah with the Qu'aity family still active in charitable endeavours and fundraising for Hadramawt. The family is likewise active on the academic front, where it facilitates research into topics of relevance to the province and the family.²⁷⁶ While the Kathiri family does not overtly display any leadership ambition, the Qu'aity family never fully gave up on the idea of reclaiming the Sultanate. In Mahra, the Bin Afraar family actively works to regain its position and Sultanate, initially with the help of Saudi Arabia and currently with Omani backing.²⁷⁷

The cultivation of these relationships is important for the Saudi ability to cooperate with other entities in Hadramawt and Yemen in general. The co-opting of tribes, especially those in the borderlands, is a standard tool of the Saudi foreign policy. A system of stipends was developed which bound the (mostly Northern) sheikhs to loyalty to the Kingdom.²⁷⁸ The rationale behind these payments was clear - by paying tribes bordering territories controlled by the Houthi movement, Saudi Arabia could neutralize a potential

²⁷⁵ Brehony, Noel. "From Chaos to Chaos: South Yemen 50 Years after the British Departure." *Asian Affairs* 48.3 (2017): 428-444.

²⁷⁶ Books written during the time of the family's reign are being reprinted and are widely available in bookshops throughout Wadi Hadramawt.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Bashir Hagi, 8 November 2019, London

²⁷⁸ Interview with Noel Brehony, 21 November 2018, London

threat at a low financial and political cost, while keeping smuggling and human trafficking in check and creating its own patronage networks. In the years leading up to the Houthis conflict, this program became less organized and the Saudi forces would come to regret this after the Houthis took over Sana'a in 2015. As a prominent tribal sheikh from the northern province of Al Jawf Abdullah Al Jumaily said "renting is temporary, they cannot buy us".²⁷⁹ Jumaily meant that once the payments stopped, he would no longer feel obligated to carry out any duties on behalf or on instruction of Saudi Arabia, a sentiment shared by many of the tribal sheikhs.

The Hadrami case differs from the northern tribes as the connection between the Hadrami diaspora in the Kingdom and the province runs beyond "renting". The former royal households, combined with the wealthy businessmen originally of the mashaikh class make for a formidable group capable of influencing political and security processes in Hadramawt. The nature of the cooperation between this group and the Kingdom has deeper roots, as the commercial interests of the diaspora members mean that they are always likely to accept the wishes of the KSA leadership in order for their businesses not to suffer. To act against the interests of Saudi Arabia would put their assets at risk and therefore the level of control exerted is greater. This increased control by the state is however offset by limited ability of the former royal households and wealthy businessmen to mobilize troops, as their influence is mostly confined to social and political dealings behind closed doors.

Somewhere between direct influence on the tribal forces of the tribal leaders and political influence of social figures are the tribal sheikhs resident abroad. The power of the paramount sheikh of the Tamim tribe, Qays bin Niman al Tamimi, who has been a long-term resident of the United Arab Emirates, remains considerable, but it is very limited in tactical matters.²⁸⁰ Since this sheikh has not visited Hadramawt for decades²⁸¹, he has appointed a deputy who represents his interests in Yemen. The tribal informants insist that Qays bin Niman retains control over the tribe and its forces, this is however unlikely and it is difficult to imagine a situation where the sheikh could

²⁷⁹ Interview with Abdullah Al Jumaily, 2014, Sana'a

²⁸⁰ Interview with Rais Attamimi, 14 November 2019, Salalah

²⁸¹ Interview with Awadh Ally Al Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

mobilize the entire Tamim forces without needing to provide a thorough explanation for such an action and secure the approval of other tribal figures, as he would have historically been able to. A more likely explanation for the perceived influence of this sheikh is twofold – he is careful not to interfere in matters which gradually became responsibility of the tribesmen residing in Hadramawt, while these have an incentive to exaggerate his influence in order not to upset the current system and jeopardize their own positions.

Members of the diaspora in the Gulf often serve as an unofficial second-track diplomatic channel, either connecting foreign powers to the Yemeni government or directly linking them to their tribes and confederations.²⁸² These backstage connections evolve into an overt relationship, as is the case of the former Mahri governor Rajeh Bakrit. A long-term resident in Saudi Arabia, Bakrit was chosen by Saudi Arabia to represent its interests on an official level and appointed the governor of the province.²⁸³ Given his residency in Saudi Arabia and the presence of his family there, Bakrit could be easily controlled by the Saudis, while he retained a degree of legitimacy as originating from the province of Mahra and thus being more acceptable to the tribes.

The links maintained by the Hadrami diaspora are not limited to politics and tribal affairs, as a considerable number of individuals of Hadrami origin serve in the armed forces of states located in the Gulf. At least Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar employ these individuals, as can be summarized from publicized incidents. The Qatari case was confirmed in 2018 when a Qatari military intelligence officer Mohsen Al Karbi was detained while attempting to cross the border to Oman amid tensions between Qatar and the rest of the GCC. This officer claimed to be visiting his family in Hadramawt and not conducting any military or intelligence business in the country.²⁸⁴ The officer was released in 2019 and no charges were filed.²⁸⁵ In Wadi Do'an, Emirati

²⁸² Interview with Rafat Al Akhali, 19 September 2019, Oxford

²⁸³ Interview with Badr Kalshat, 16 November 2019, Al Ghaydah

²⁸⁴ Toumi, Habib. "Qatar Intelligence Officer Arrested over Al Houthi Links." Qatar – Gulf News, Gulf News, 7 Nov. 2018, [gulfnews.com/world/gulf/qatar/qatar-intelligence-officer-arrested-over-al-houthi-links-1.2215773](https://www.gulfnews.com/world/gulf/qatar/qatar-intelligence-officer-arrested-over-al-houthi-links-1.2215773).

²⁸⁵ "Saudi Arabia Releases Qatari National Detained for a Year: Rights Group." Reuters, Thomson Reuters, 23 July 2019, www.reuters.com/article/us-qatar-saudi-rights/saudi-arabia-releases-qatari-national-detained-for-a-year-rights-group-idUSKCN1UI0WX.

military officers were ambushed and killed, also while visiting their families.²⁸⁶ Without needing to dissect the particulars of these cases, they go to show the interconnectedness of the tribal and familial life throughout the Gulf and their utility for military action within Hadramawt.

7. Diaspora in education

The domination of the educational field is one of the key elements of the sada control over the Hadrami population and it is striking how little has changed, despite the diaspora members being exposed to foreign education and often obtaining degrees and training from secular institutions abroad. There are voices within the diaspora which advocate for more secular education, such as the educators in Tanzania and Kenya, but these men, despite being of sada origin, lack influence and their voices are marginalized.²⁸⁷ In thinking of why, despite the wealth of experience with different educational systems in East Africa and Southeast Asia, the educational system in Hadramawt remains rigid, it is helpful to turn to attempts at modernization through education in North Yemen between 1947 and 1959.

During this time, hundreds of boys were sent for education abroad where they were supposed to obtain secular skills needed by the Imamate. Most of the students were educated in Lebanon and Egypt, with some later continuing their studies in Europe and the United States. Even though most of these students returned²⁸⁸, no major advancements in the educational system in North Yemen took place. Interviews conducted by Kevin Rosser for his unpublished MPhil thesis²⁸⁹ reveal that the original forty students were individuals without strong tribal links or familial connections. Burrowes speculates that this choice was made by the Imam's agents as "men of modest backgrounds were not likely to pose a threat to the existing order when they

²⁸⁶ مقتل ضابط أمني ومواطن إماراتي في حادثين منفصلين بمديرية دوعن ... Al Mawqea Post. Retrieved November 8, 2020, from <https://almawqea.net/news/22920>

²⁸⁷ Interview with Ahmed Magdy, 25 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

²⁸⁸ Burrowes, Robert D. "The Famous Forty and Their Companions: North Yemen's First-Generation Modernists and Educational Emigrants." *Middle East Journal*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2005, pp. 81–97.

²⁸⁹ Transcripts of the interviews were consulted at St. Anthony's College in Oxford in 2019.

returned to Yemen.”²⁹⁰ This presumption proved to be correct, as most of them spent their careers as mid-level administrators.²⁹¹

The program initiated by Imam Yahya was nearly discontinued after his assassination in 1948. His successor Imam Ahmed was not in favour of allowing his subjects abroad for education and many had to sneak out of the country, with the sponsorship of various clubs, unions and societies. It could be expected that the fortunes of these men would change with the Republican revolution of 1962 and yet, even then they failed to assume positions of leadership, at least in the long term or become actual decision makers in the institutions they nominally headed. It appears that the lack of political connections and social status resulted in the marginalization of the ideas proposed by these men, despite their considerable academic achievements. Crucially, the transition from an Imamate into a Republican system only meant the replacement of the top leadership while the power base remained intact and comprised of powerful Zaydi tribesmen.

The lack of modern education in Hadramawt can similarly be explained by the maintenance of the status quo. For those with the power and means to change the educational system, these are few incentives to do so. An educated population could potentially become a threat to the status quo. As the economic base is located outside of Hadramawt and in the diaspora, the economic development of Hadramawt offers limited upside and therefore the risk of empowering the lower classes is not balanced by an equally appealing benefit. For the sada portion of the diaspora, Hadramawt is a place from which legitimacy is extracted and where the base of their identity comes from, it is however not seen as a potentially lucrative market. In fact, emphasis on religious education only strengthens the reputation of the sada as devoted to religious learning alone and reinforces the basis of their identity.

It is therefore not surprising that efforts aimed at developing the educational sector and expanding it beyond Islamic sciences are led by those whose familial links are outside of Yemen. The modern schools founded in Mukalla, Shihr and Seyiun were established

²⁹⁰ Burrowes, Robert D. “The Famous Forty and Their Companions: North Yemen’s First-Generation Modernists and Educational Emigrants.” *Middle East Journal*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2005, pp. 81–97.

²⁹¹ *ibid*

in consultation with Muhammad bin Dohry, a Kenyan of Hadrami origin, who spent most of his life in the diaspora and whose experience as an educator in East Africa led him towards charitable work in Hadramawt. For these schools, teachers had to be brought from Kenya as suitably qualified educators were unavailable in Hadramawt itself. One of these secular schools was also opened in Tarim.

8. Diaspora in smuggling and terrorism

The northern borderlands of Hadramawt, separating its territory from Saudi Arabia are where tribes originating from the Kindah proto-tribe reside and where the Saudis successfully used the policy of granting citizenships to tribesmen as a stepping stone for making a claim on the territory controlled by these tribesmen. The area is an inhospitable desert mostly controlled by the Say'ar tribe, the most well known descendants of the Kindah. This tribe was historically known for banditry and lawlessness²⁹², which was manifested in the raiding of other tribes and rustling of camels. Ingrams reports that the main concern of the signatories of his peace treaty was whether the Sei'ar would join as without their participation, the treaty was worthless.²⁹³ When the Saudi authorities realized the value of the area inhabited by the Sei'ar both in terms of potential deposits of natural resources and as a security buffer, they began to issue confirmations of citizenship and passports to members of the tribe, before annexing Al Kharakhir (practically on the border line) and Sharurah (some 60 kilometres from the border) and claiming it to be Saudi territory. Even though a significant part of the Sei'ar are Saudi citizens, they can easily travel to Yemen without any restrictions using their Yemeni national ID cards, issued to those able to prove their origin from Yemen. The same document is used for travel by members of the East African diaspora and others, who then do not require a visa to enter Yemen.²⁹⁴

Many of the Sei'aris in Saudi Arabia, despite holding the citizenship, do not consider themselves to be Saudi and believe that they will forever be treated as second class

²⁹² Ingrams, Harold. "Political Development in the Hadhramaut." *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 21.2 (1945): 236-252.

²⁹³ *ibid*

²⁹⁴ Interview with Muhammad bin Dohry, 5 June 2019, London

citizens in the country.²⁹⁵ Part of the reason for this may be in the looks and complexion of the members of this tribe, which immediately identify them as qabilis. Much like in Yemen²⁹⁶ and Oman²⁹⁷, the Bedouin are labelled as irresponsible, lawless, wild and unreliable, often suggesting that every Bedouin is a criminal of some sort, even if he presently displays no criminal behavior. This conflict between nominally equal rights guaranteed by the citizenship and the reality on the ground, combined with the ease with which the Sei'ar move between the two countries (and likely also the historical acceptance of banditry within the tribe) pushes these tribesmen towards illicit trade. A question could be asked as to why the Saudi state tolerates such behaviour. It can only be speculated that by turning a blind eye to the smuggling activities, the Saudi authorities buy at least some loyalty from these individuals along with the ability to monitor these activities and, due to the overlap between the criminal and terrorist networks, detect threats to the Kingdom.

Other smuggling routes include the Omani – Mahri border, and the Yemeni coastline. There, humans, drugs and even wildlife are smuggled by East Africans from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, while drugs are smuggled in by gangs of South Asian origin through the Mahri coastline.²⁹⁸ The cargo transported in these operations is either destined for Yemen or more commonly continues on to the Gulf states, thus connecting the international illicit trade environment with the established local routes. The Hadrami and Mahri individuals involved in these activities rarely take part in its maritime portion, instead organizing from their diasporic bases and utilizing their local contacts in Yemen to facilitate the movement of people and goods through the Yemeni territory and on into the Gulf.²⁹⁹

The understanding of terrorism and crime, along with defining who needs to be stopped and punished or whose activities benefit the community more than they harm it differs significantly from the common Western perception of these concepts. As such, the

²⁹⁵ Interview with Martin Jerrett, 14 November 2018, London

²⁹⁶ Interview with Abdullah Al Jumaily, 2014, Sana'a

²⁹⁷ Participant observation in detention, Oman

²⁹⁸ Confidential interview with the former head of intelligence for the province of Al Mahra, 2019.

²⁹⁹ ditto

overlap of crime and militant activity is organic and hardly frowned upon, instead it is judged on the effectiveness of the cooperation and seen as a natural element of the business environment. The smuggling rings facilitate funds and movement of militants, who in turn provide security and ad hoc enforcement services to smugglers. The lack of Al Qaeda operations in Saudi Arabia suggests that through an arrangement between the Saudi state authorities, the smugglers and the militants themselves, the activities of an organization bearing “in the Arabian Peninsula” are confined to Yemen alone. Should the buffer zone prove to be permeable to undesirable elements, the Saudi state could restrict the smuggling activities of the Yemeni diaspora there, restricting their access to funds and putting their position within the society in jeopardy.

Of interest is the origin of prominent Saudi citizens involved in terrorism. Osama bin Laden, the founder and most prominent leader of Al Qaeda, traced his origin to Wadi Do’an in Hadramawt, from where his family migrated to Saudi Arabia and created a construction empire there. Other members of the Yemeni diaspora in Saudi Arabia also took part in militant activities, notably the current leader of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula Khalid Batarfi, whose familial origin in Hadramawt is highlighted by his *nom de guerre* Abū al-Miqdād al-Kindī, emphasizing the connection to the Kindah tribe despite being born in Riyadh.

9. Mobilization of the diaspora for pilgrimages

The Hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca, is one of the prescribed duties of all Muslims and one of the five pillars of Islam. This pilgrimage gets a widespread media coverage, but there are number of other pilgrimages, many of which are associated with Sufism and whose religious status is much more controversial. The Sufis of Hadramawt are known for visits to the graves of their ancestors, important figures of their strand of faith and also for the reverence of a number of religious symbols. These practices often lead to them being labelled as “grave worshippers”³⁰⁰ by those who shun such practices and call them un-Islamic. For many of these pilgrimages or ziyaras, the diaspora members

³⁰⁰ McLaughlin, Daniel. *Yemen*. Bradt Travel Guides, 2008.

return to Hadramawt, often bringing the local followers of the Sufi doctrine from their diasporic locations with them.

These local pilgrimages have a twofold utility. Firstly, they serve to illustrate the stratification of the society and force individuals to choose whether they are pro-sada or anti-sada. While attendance of prayers at Sufi mosques can be justified on the grounds of fulfilling a religious duty in proximity of one's house and is accepted as such, the deliberate action of travel to a site of pilgrimage or staying behind while others travel cannot be as easily explained. The choice of attending or staying behind is a conscious decision made with the understanding that the individual's allegiance will become known or affirmed. Secondly, the pilgrimage is an opportunity for the show of wealth and power of the sada. The financial display takes the form of sponsoring these events, providing shelter and sustenance for the pilgrims, while the display of power includes the showcasing of friendships with powerful tribal leaders and other guests, including foreign pilgrims.

The most well-known event of this type is the Ziyarah Nabi Allah Hud, a visit to the site of the alleged grave of the pre-Islamic prophet Hud. This event is entirely dominated by the sada who orchestrate the whole event, use their tribal allies to screen the incoming visitors and publicize the pilgrimage on Yemeni and international media channels. These broadcasts commonly feature foreign visitors, individuals often from Southeast Asia whose trips were arranged by the sada diaspora there and whose stories are transmitted back to their native countries, which is designed to influence both the local audience and audience in the country from which the pilgrims originate. When Ali al Jifry or Umar bin Hafiz travel to Southeast Asia, they often hold meetings with significant political figures and public rallies. On these occasions, available foreigners, and especially Caucasian converts from the West, are used again to show the "spiritual power" of a given sayyid, as exemplified by bringing others to Islam and nurturing their knowledge. These rallies complete the circle of using non-Hadramis in the PR activities of the sada group and signalling the power of the sada group. In all aspects of this process, the diaspora members feature as facilitators and financiers.

10. Conclusion

Moving abroad presents a number of opportunities for the migrating individual. These include the possibility of achieving a better quality of life and obtaining financial security in an environment not bound by ancient rules of social stratification. However, a complete detachment from one's community is difficult and decreases the likelihood of achieving one's goals; a choice to remain connected to the community then translates to the continuation of the processes taking place in Hadramawt, namely the sada vs non-sada struggle, exemplified in the diaspora by the Ba 'Alewi – Irshadi conflict of the early 20th century and many reiterations of the same since then.

That is not to say that the Hadramis cannot work as a cohesive group when united by a common cause. When faced with the threat of the confiscation of their holdings in East Africa or when entering a new territory, such as in Aurangabad in India, the Hadrami diaspora cooperates very well and temporarily forgets the inter-class tensions. Once the situation becomes more stable, a process begins in which the community begins to split along class lines and literally segregate into neighbourhoods according to their affiliation. This re-discovery of one's identity can even go a step further, as is the case in Kenya where the validity of claims of belonging to a given tribe are investigated and the diasporic tribal community splits accordingly.

The diaspora influences the political life of the province, especially by liaising directly with governments and militaries across the Gulf, cooperating with them and serving as an unofficial channel not to the Yemeni government, but to the Yemeni people. Some of the diasporas, namely in East Africa but most notably in Saudi Arabia, balance on fine line between legal and illegal trade, but these activities are often tolerated by the receiving states as the involvement of the diaspora in the underworld, or at least on the edges of it, serves to detect and neutralize potential threats against the receiving countries.

In the field of education, the diaspora is likewise influential as it finances projects designed to keep the schooling of pupils in Hadramawt Islamic and in doing so, perpetuate the system of sada dominance of the province. Similarly, the diaspora is used to mobilize both itself and the followers of the Sufi doctrine in the diasporic

destination to travel to Yemen to attend televised pilgrimages, which creates a circle of affirmation of the sada power in the various locations they operate in.

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF TRIBAL REPRESENTATION IN HADRAMAWT

1. Introduction
2. Evolution of tribal power
3. Changes of the inter-class relations
4. New alliances
5. Post-unification institutions
6. Conclusion

1. Introduction

Much like the rest of social life in Hadramawt, tribes and their institutions have also gone through significant changes in the last century and even more so since the unification of Yemen in 1991. This chapter analyses those changes and their contribution to the overall political and social landscape of Hadramawt. It does so by focusing on the new alliances that were formed as a result of the new realities and the institutions created by the tribes in order to formalize and increase their power within the emerging governance system.

Tribal affiliation is the basis of the identity of the Hadrami tribesman and dictates his sense of belonging. As tribal territories and their extent depend entirely on the tribe's ability to make a claim and have this claim recognized by other tribes, so does the recognition of a tribesman depend on the willingness of others to recognize him as such. To be an accepted member of the tribal class, one needs to prove his descent from a line of tribesmen and act in accordance with tribal principles. Most importantly, a tribesman is expected to act in a manner that strengthens the tribe and makes it less susceptible to an outside attack, often by signalling the tribe's health and might through offering the public a unified and coherent account of the tribe's strength. In the modern day, this signalling does not necessarily mean that every member of a tribe needs to carry a weapon and rush to the barricades at the first sight of trouble, although maintaining such a reputation helps in seeking recognition as a tribesman and consequently serves to improve the tribe's standing. Many of the tribesmen of today

contribute in other ways – they supply the tribe with weapons and money, facilitate the travel of other tribesmen and provide them with job opportunities or they represent the tribe in dealings with the government, the military, religious and militant groups.

In exchange for his services to a tribe, a member is provided with a sense of purpose and belonging, which come with the reward of access to the kinship group and its resources. A tribesman, whether in Hadramawt or abroad, is only taken seriously if he is understood to be accepted by his own group and backed by it – a transgression against him would then invite retaliation regardless of the member's location. This explains why it is appealing for men in and out of Hadramawt to be recognized as part of a tribe and why they signal their tribal affiliation publicly. This is more nuanced in the diaspora where a member often only claims belonging to a certain tribe if it brings him tangible benefits, such as access to networks already created by other members of the same tribe. Where the member is expected to contribute more than he is able to derive from the system, he often chooses to cease contact with the tribe and assimilate in the local population, as has been the historical experience and the main driver of the difference in diasporic success between the qabail and the sada.

Apart from physical symbolism, exemplified by attire, flags, banners and many other physical expressions, tribalism is sustained by narratives. These narratives often glorify the past and in doing so, they not only define the group which presents these narratives, they also define the “others”. Many of these narratives are presented in the form of oral lore, as the tribal class has not maintained a cannon of literature as extensive as the sada, but the current tribal revival has seen the emergence of “tribal historians”.^{301 302} These accounts are distributed to members of the tribe in Hadramawt and serve to strengthen the unity of the tribe, while they are also exported into the diaspora, especially in East Africa, where they help to revive the tribal spirit of the second or third generation of migrants and “re-tribalize” them, in an attempt to tap into the resources they have an access to.

³⁰¹ Interview with Hassan al Barqi Al Kathiri, 21 April 2018, Al Ghurfah

³⁰² Rodionov, Mikhail. “Contemporary Tribal Versions of Local History in Ḥadramawt.” *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 41, 2011, pp. 333–37.

The main difference between the former North and South Yemen, in terms of its tribal class, is the uninterrupted operation of tribal politics in the North and the utility seen by the Republican government in ruling through the tribes, rather than entering into a conflict with them. Conversely, in the former South, the DPRY's government attempted to break up tribal units and erase the existence of this parallel governance system. Through attempting to remove symbols of tribalism, the government achieved the appearance of tribalism and social stratification no longer existing, but as tribes are essentially kinship groups, a complete eradication of the system was impossible. Apart from being political units, the tribes are families with shared memories and forefathers and as such, they continued to meet, cooperate and work together throughout the Communist period, which manifested itself at times of crisis, when people would organize in groups according to their previous tribal affiliations.³⁰³ Similarly, where a former tribesman achieved a position of prominence in the political system of the DPRY, he was likely to reward his fellow tribesmen with jobs and other opportunities, in defiance of the meritocratic criteria stipulated by the Communist regime.³⁰⁴

The inter-class struggle in Hadramawt is subtle and frequently covert, therefore it is helpful to look at the situation in the former North Yemen as many of the processes, expressions and struggles are similar, but much more open. The situation in the North differs from the South in one crucial aspect and that is that the Houthis, led by the Zaydi sada, act in a manner indistinguishable from the qabail, which is something unheard of in Hadramawt, where the distinction between the two classes is very clear – the sada in Hadramawt dress and act differently from the qabail and they do not, save for a minor exception of some members of the Mullah Dawilah tribe, carry arms. This makes them reliant on the tribal class for security and enforcement, whereas in the North, the sada present an integrated force in possession of both the religious legitimacy and armed power needed in order to lay and defend a claim to the leadership of their territories.

Wary of this, the Republican government in North Yemen, and later in unified Yemen, sought to present the Zaydi sada as foreigners and occupiers and instead present the

³⁰³ Interview with Hussein Al Kaff, 21 April 2018, Seyiun

³⁰⁴ ditto

glory of the pre-Islamic tribal kingdoms³⁰⁵ and embarked on a policy described as “Qahtanism”³⁰⁶, emphasizing the value of descent from Qahtan above all else. Leader of the Houthi sect, Abdul Malik Al Houthi, presented the opposing viewpoint as he attempted to cast shadow over the legitimacy of tribal leadership in Yemen on the grounds of its dubious Islamic legitimacy. His argument suggests that if “one were to go far enough into the pre-Islamic times, they might find that the tribal elites are in fact Jewish”.³⁰⁷ In the South and in Hadramawt specifically, such verbal jousting only surfaces at exceptional moments when it appears as though the balance of power is shifting, which emboldens the non-sada population to let their feelings be known. Such were the cases of the Houthi takeover of Sana’a, which were celebrated in Hadramawt’s Seyiun by chants of “we will send you back to Basrah,”³⁰⁸ or the events following the unification of Yemen which led to the desecration of sada tombs and shrines across the South.³⁰⁹

Following the fall of the Marxist regime in South Yemen, tribalism returned in its overt form, this time with heavy influence of the northern Republican elites who extended their form of rule and their patronage network to the South. The tribes had to come to terms with the new reality and the value of tribal identity and kinship, as opposed to citizenship, came to be recognized again. Influence of the previous decades was however palpable as well, as the tribes realized that popular support from non-tribal individuals could improve their chances of co-option into the patronage network. The 1990s saw several new trends in the way tribes conducted and organized themselves; the government attempted to replicate the governance model that successfully worked in the North while tribal groups in Hadramawt experimented with the establishment of social and cultural institutions designed to win them popular support and in doing so, improve their position within the new governance system.

³⁰⁵ Interview with Bernard Haykel, 5 September 2019, Vienna

³⁰⁶ Presentation given by Marieke Brandt, 5 September 2019, Vienna

³⁰⁷ Interview with Luka Nevola, 5 September 2019, Vienna

³⁰⁸ Interview with Zain Al Haddad, 12 December 2016, Tarim

³⁰⁹ Ho, Engseng. *The graves of Tarim*. University of California Press, 2006.

As a result of the turbulent political situation in the early 1990s, new alliances were formed between the sada and the qabail elites, while some of the lower ranking tribesmen opted to try their luck by associating themselves with the Republican government and becoming „1994 sheikhs“³¹⁰ as they came to be known, essentially turning to Qahtanism and attempting to portray the sada and traditional tribal elites as usurpers. These individuals were recognized as sheikhs by the government of unified Yemen and rewarded with a monthly stipend, distributed by the newly founded Bureau of Tribal Affairs. They however lacked the popular support and access to territory which defined the „legitimate“ tribal leaders. In the eyes of the population in Hadramawt, they were little more than pawns used by the government to attempt a replication of the governance through the tribes model that worked in the North, except that in the North the system relied on legitimate sheikhs with a historical claim to leadership.

It was assumed that the weakening of Southern armed capabilities, with first pistols being distributed to police officers of Southern origin only in 1996³¹¹ and much of the security environment in the province dominated by Northern soldiers would create the conditions for these new and loyal „artificial“ sheikhs to win popular support as their belonging to the patronage system allowed them to distribute jobs, contracts and funds. However, only those sheikhs who were exceptionally capable and likely to be included in the the patronage networks anyway succeeded in building up a following and using this opportunity for personal advancement. Most of these sheikhs failed to gather a following and the subjects they claimed to be supported by gradually returned to the historic tribes as these strengthened their hold of their territory and began to use the opportunities their territory offered.

The traditional tribes and their leaders adjusted to the new reality and upon realizing the power of controlling a mass of people, they began to rally not only their members, but also individuals standing outside of the tribal system. Some level of control over these individuals could be used to inflate the tribe's influence, while in return the followers would receive some of the benefits of being associated with a powerful tribe. The tribes,

³¹⁰ Interview with Hassan Barqi Al Kathiri, 21 April 2018, Al Ghurfah

³¹¹ Day, Stephen W. *Regionalism and rebellion in Yemen: A troubled national union*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

including the Kathiri and Say'ari, gathered public support by establishing cultural and social institutions which spread the lore preferred by a given tribe and provided opportunities to attract people to the tribe and indoctrinate them.

The tribes of Hadramawt have gone, over the past century, from fragmented units isolated by the environmental conditions and perpetual conflict through a period of facing anti-tribal policies implemented by the PDRY to finally having to navigate the new system of governance brought into the province by the late President Ali Abdullah Saleh. The position of the tribes during the reign of the Marxist forces in South Yemen and the new image of the tribes following the unification of Yemen has led some to question the existence or at least authenticity of the "Hadrami tribe" - however, the changes to the operation of the tribes are natural and continue to rely on the basic elements of the qabili identity, primarily the control of territory and the people residing on it.

2. Evolution of tribal power

The Hadrami society and its governance have gone through more changes in the past century than at any other point in its history. This development first came at the back of the peace negotiations and infrastructure improvements (namely the construction of roads in the 1930's). While the construction of infrastructure easing the movement of people and goods was important, even more important was the provision of security while using this infrastructure. Without the presence of an authority seen as capable of enforcing the rules, the conditions on the roads of Hadramawt would have remained dangerous and the volume of movement and resulting interaction would be likely not increase dramatically.

With the provision of security however, the amount of inter-tribal and inter-class interactions grew significantly and changed the nature of governance in Hadramawt. While the arrival of the British and their enforcement capabilities, usually deployed through local actors whose legitimacy rose due to the power of their backers, did alter the governance system and moved towards a centralization of power, it did not seek to erode the system of governance already in place. Much of the "lesser" matters of

security and law were still dealt with by “minor” sovereigns whose power could be limited to a single village or its part.³¹² The main parties benefiting from the British involvement were the sada and the Sultan, through whom the British involved themselves in Hadrami matters.³¹³

The selection of the reigning power and the religious elite as proxies was not incidental. Both of these power groups already solidified their power bases and could be valuable partners from the onset of cooperation. Additionally, the power of either of these groups was not as geographically limited as that of the tribes. The Sultan and the sada could increase their influence without conquering territory, something which the governance system did not allow to the tribesmen. As such, they were the most suitable parties and presented the best value for the spread of British influence in a way that did not require open combat but instead relied on selective enforcement, thus creating a system of governance reminiscent of the one later replicated by Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The tribes on the other hand never stood much of a chance of being the preferred party to the British. Their domestic limitations, due to reasons of geography and the makeup of the Hadrami society, were not compensated for by a strong diasporic presence which could liaise with the British outside of Hadramawt. While the Sultan and the sada both operated within the circles of wealth and power in South-East Asia and India, tribesmen struggled to break into them. Apart from the physical proximity of the British colonial officers and the Hadrami elites, the similarities of education need to be taken into account. The sada and the family of the Sultan could navigate these circles of power with ease, given that their positions relied on sophistication, planning and knowledge, unlike the tribesmen whose reliance on raw power prevented them from establishing an effective working relationship with the colonial authorities.

Apart from the incursion by a new authority altering the power balance in Hadramawt, the might of the tribes was lessened by a natural evolution of the increased security in

³¹² As is clear from a large number of documents, including the Hadramawt Intelligence Summary, held at the Middle East Archive at St. Anthony’s College, Oxford.

³¹³ Ingrams, William Harold, ed. *A Report on the Social, Economic and Political Condition of the Hadramaut: Aden Protectorate*; Issued by the Colonial Office; by WH Ingrams,... HM Stationery office, 1939.

the province – urbanization. Files of the Aden Protectorate³¹⁴ mention in passing that there are “...tribes which have lost their individuality by settling in towns or completely dispersing...”, suggesting that tribal membership, to some tribal members, was a tool which ceased to hold appeal once a more attractive option became available.

Urbanization of Hadramawt allowed tribesmen to live a life less constrained by tribal customs and with lesser risk of being dragged into violent situations due to an association with a given tribe. As the relationship between a tribe and its members constitutes an insurance policy of sorts, where the member contributes his physical ability in order to defend other members and the common territory in exchange for protection and comfort, this option becomes unattractive once the individual contribution outweighs the benefit received.

The erosion of tribal power in Hadramawt was a gradual process until 1967 when the British forces and administration left Aden (leaving behind only small cadre of experts at the BP installation in Aden³¹⁵) and South Yemen was left in the hands of a new government which sought to dismantle and replace the existing system of governance. For the first time, an actor attempting to rule Hadramawt was set on changing the very core of its governance system by centralizing power and creating a “state” as it is commonly understood. Previous shifts in power took place within the established system and did not have the ambition to remove or replace the system altogether, although an argument could be made that the social processes taking place in Hadramawt would eventually turn it into a state-like entity anyway.

Between 1967 and 1990, the anti-tribal policies of the regime were seemingly so successful that many considered tribalism in the South to be a thing of the past.³¹⁶ Some experts to this day do not believe that a real, effective tribal system survived the times of the PDRY.³¹⁷ Even though it is true that at least some part of the tribal revival of the past 30 years is due to the need of the population to find a uniting cause and therefore a tribal affiliation also serves as “brand” for a group of individuals attempting to

³¹⁴ Held under reference IOR/R/20/C at the British Library: Asian and African Studies.

³¹⁵ Interview with Noel Brehony, 21 November 2018, London

³¹⁶ Interview with Muhammad bin Dohry, 2 November 2018, London

³¹⁷ Interview with Helen Lackner, 17 September 2019, Oxford

secure a favourable position within the overall system of Hadrami governance, at least some of the beliefs held by academics are based on a rigid application of the norms that govern the northern tribes. The absence of some of these is then seen as an evidence of the non-existence of a tribal system. One frequently mentioned piece of evidence allegedly proving that the Hadrami tribal system is an illusion is the absence of “sheikh al mashaikh,” or Paramount Sheikh, an overarching figure respected by all the tribes in the province. This arbitrary definition of a tribe or tribalism as a wider concept is too narrow and omits the fluidity of the southern tribes and their historical experience. Rather than a fact, beliefs held by these academics are motivated by a longing for a bygone era of budding Socialism in the South.

In contrast to this perspective, it would be more plausible to consider how the Hadrami tribes have reformed, not disappeared. The anti-tribal policies of the PDRY were not meant to displace the tribal population, they mostly focused on the removal of tribal elites, confiscation of property and the eradication of tribal names. However even without a unifying tribal name, residents of a given area continued to identify as kin and their allegiances and actions were often identical with those of a tribal unit. This point is illustrated by the 1986 war in South Yemen which surprised some by the “swiftness with which seemingly disparate rural forces were mobilized and how quickly the combatants aligned themselves according to locality.”³¹⁸ The swiftness of mobilization is best explained by substituting “tribal” for “rural”. The fact that these forces were already armed then clearly points to their (nominally former) membership of the qabail class. It was not only the civilian population that quickly aligned itself according to tribal affiliation, Amin reports that the same process took place with members of the police and armed forces.³¹⁹ Ali Nasser Muhammad, President, Prime Minister and General Secretary of the Yemeni Socialist Party relied on the Dathina tribe from which he originated for support during the war, both in terms of relying on the paramilitary forces

³¹⁸ Swagman, Charles F. “Tribe and Politics: An Example from Highland Yemen.” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, vol. 44, no. 3, 1988, pp. 251–61.

³¹⁹ Amin, S.H. *Law and Justice in Contemporary Yemen: People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen and Yemen Arab Republic*. Royston Limited, 1987.

of the Dathina and on the loyal cadres installed into the armed forces.³²⁰ As Adra points out in her PhD dissertation³²¹, a Yemeni tribe is as much the people who comprise it as it is the location they occupy and therefore without dispersing the tribal members widely, the tribe was always going to survive.

Following the unification of Yemen in 1990 and a period of transition, the Hadrami tribes began a process of revival. In this, they would begin to use the names and symbols of their tribe again, openly mark their territory and defend their claim to it while using the tribe in a modern way as a network which could be called upon when dealing with the outside world. Such interactions are nowadays unavoidable and an attempt at isolationism would be penalized by the tribal population which recognizes the value of engagement with the outsiders. The main resource of the tribe, that is the territory under its control and the men defending this territory, remain the same, so do the challengers chipping at the power of the tribes. These are mostly the continued process of urbanization drawing tribal fighters into more conventional occupations and thus weakening the tribe and the allure of association either with the state or the sada, both of whom have access to funds and opportunities which individual tribes struggle to provide their members with.

3. Changes of the inter-class relations

The social stratification system in Hadramawt has been evolving continuously and in recent decades the pace of this evolution has been increased by the number of external forces influencing intra-Hadrami matters. These changes are not limited to Hadramawt alone, nor are they limited to specific social classes. In fact, similar processes are observable across Yemen and there are parallels that can be drawn between the use of tribal entities as a stream through which policies can be delivered and enforced in the former South and North. Similarly, the treatment of the Zaydi sada at the hands of the Republican regime and the Ba 'Alewi sada's treatment by the Communists mirror each

³²⁰ Ismael, Tareq Y., and Jacqueline S. Ismael. *The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics, and Society: the Politics of Socialist Transformation*. Lynne Rienner Pub, 1986.

³²¹ Adra, Najwa. *Qabyala: The tribal concept in the central highlands of the Yemen Arab Republic*. Temple University, 1982.

other and show the need of the state's leadership to neutralize the influence of the religious and financial elites as a prerequisite for a sovereign rule.

These changes understandably alter the relationship between the various social classes and influence the way in which they compete, or conversely form alliances in order to compete with the state and its forces. Occasionally, policies of the state designed to lessen the influence of the religious elites came to be embraced by these very elites who recognized their potential in building alliances and forging strong inter-class bonds. The practice of kafa'a is such an example. Intended to strip the sada of their claim of Prophetic heritage, the policy of forced intermarriages between the sada women and men of non-sada origin while humiliating the sada³²² was later used by the Zaydis in the North to their advantage, as it provided them with links to tribal forces that would otherwise represent the opposite side of the political spectrum. The prime example is the sister of Abdulmalik al Houthi, leader of the Houthi movement, who was married to one of the Al Ahmar tribal sheikhs, traditional leaders of the Hashid tribal confederation and the Islah political party,³²³ thus complicating the otherwise black-and-white political landscape in the North and opening opportunities for backstage dealings and unlikely alliances.

It is doubtful that the Zaydi sada would choose to enter into and maintain these relationships with the tribal class if they did not desperately need the support of the tribesmen in the crucial years leading up to the 2015 civil war. Given that the Hadrami sada were not in a position of direct and immediate danger, nor did they ever enter into armed conflict with the state, they saw no need for the exchange of their privileged bloodlines for allies. Instead, they incorporated uniquely capable individuals into their institutions and in doing so were able to capitalize on the skills and connections of these non-sada individuals, while maintaining their bloodlines, which serve as a foundation of their legitimacy, intact. These individuals are allowed a degree of influence, they are given opportunities to earn money they would not otherwise be able to earn and they

³²² Interview with Aidaroos bin Abdullah Aidaroos, 21 April 2018, Tarim.

³²³ Interview with Luka Nevola, 5 September 2019, Vienna

can tap into some of the resources possessed by the sada. However, they can never hope to become members of the class.

These processes, both in the North and the South, hint at the increased rationalization of the relationship between the classes and the bending of previously rigid rules in order to benefit a given class. This rationalization is an understandable phenomenon and a natural evolution of the developments in inter-class communication where conditions beyond the control of traditional social and political actors in Yemen forced them to confront their traditional rules and values, often resulting in increased cooperation between the classes.

This rationalization was partially imported from the diaspora and further highlights the importance of the overseas communities for the domestic political and social processes. While part of the reason for the social changes in Wadi Hadramawt mirrors that of the north, that is an effect of new ideology combined with demystification of the old elites, the famine of 1945-1948 and the Zanzibar massacre of 1964 are just as crucial in explaining the changes in the inter-class relations. Forced to leave Hadramawt due to the famine, the Hadramis found themselves in Kenya and Tanzania, locations already occupied by previous settlers and native populations. Suddenly, the inter-class conflicts became secondary to needing to survive in the diasporic locations. Cooperation became necessary and the diasporic community formed a near-homogenous group where social class membership was of secondary importance.³²⁴ Then in 1964, the Zanzibar massacre took place, followed by political changes in East Africa generally unfavourable to the Arab population. The Hadrami exodus was accompanied by the export of customs adopted in the diaspora. Apart from those engaged in commerce and maritime shipping, many of those in the diaspora would return to the homeland after nearly 20 years abroad, during which time they acted as a unified community of Hadramis, Yemenis and Arabs and had limited contact with the homeland. The mass of returnees was large enough to speed up the process of rationalization of inter-class relationships in the homeland.

³²⁴ Interview with Awadh Ally Al Tamimi, 26 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

Despite these changes, the separation of the classes still exists in Wadi Hadramawt. It does not however come close to its historical levels. During the 18th and 19th century, the sada were considered so spiritually powerful that the tribes in locations surrounding Einat (mostly Tamimi tribesmen) would name their sons Abd al Habeeb or Abd al Alawi (the Slave of the Beloved or the Slave of Alawi).³²⁵ Such practice is un-Islamic as the prefix Abd- is only meant to be used in conjunction with one of the 99 names of Allah. The altered usage of the name borders on heresy and would without a doubt be frowned upon by most Islamic scholars, yet it indicates the levels of respect afforded to the sada in the past. During the course of research for this dissertation, no individuals bearing such names were encountered and in cases of already deceased individuals it was said that they almost exclusively changed their names for everyday interactions and only retained the heretic names on their official documents.

The divisions between the social classes are no longer as strict in practice as they once were. The relationships between these classes have gone through a rationalization based on the need to cooperate once it became apparent that the possibility of being targeted based on the level of prominence enjoyed by a given social class is real. This has led to the increased cooperation especially between the sada and the qabail who use exceptionally gifted individuals to connect the two groups while maintaining distinct identities and promoting the narratives that lend them their legitimacy. The experience of having to establish oneself and their group in a new location, one with an already developed commercial and political systems, such as East Africa following the famine of the 1940's or Aurangabad in recent years, has contributed to the interconnectedness of the social classes in the Hadrami homeland.

4. New alliances

Until the late 19th century, there was no organized education in Tarim. Instead, pupils were educated in religious sciences and even that was organized ad hoc, with groups of students forming around individual teachers who dictated their own curricula. These teachers were often imams who used their mosques as teaching venues in between

³²⁵ Interview with Karama Tamimi, 12 February 2020, Mombasa

prayers. The founding of Ribat Tarim in 1886 changed this situation as religious education came to be centred around one institution, which evolved into a Sufi household name. The idea for organized education likely reached Hadramawt via the diaspora in Southeast Asia and was later expanded as the British administration arrived in Hadramawt in 1933 and began to set the groundwork for modern public administration and education in the province. Much later, in 1993, a new institute was founded in Tarim, which in 1997 evolved into Dar al Mustafa.

Dar al Mustafa serves as an umbrella for other Sufi institutions scattered around Hadramawt and prior to the Houthi insurgency, it also ran a branch in Sana'a. More significant than the education it provides is what it represents. Unlike Ribat Tarim, a conservative and closed institution focused solely on teaching, Dar al Mustafa represents a pillar of the Sufi community in many different areas. Its organization and efficient administration, relying on both local administrators and foreign students, enable it to involve itself in charitable work, cultural institutions and second track diplomacy efforts. In doing so, Dar al Mustafa established itself as a leading authority of the Sufi community and is perhaps the closest the Ba 'Alewi community has to an "organization". The statements coming from the institution, rarely public and more commonly spread by a word of mouth, are widely considered to be official stances of the entire sada social class.³²⁶

This use of an institution for the representation of the interests of a social class is a new development in the world of Hadrami politics and perhaps comes from the realization that one is more likely to be taken seriously if they are not seen as promoting their own interests and instead as working for the good of a wider community. Similar approach was taken by the Hadrami Tribal Confederation (HTC), known locally as Halaf, which despite being heavily dominated by a single tribe, the Hamum (and more specifically its Ba Hubraysh branch), elected to create an organization, complete with websites, social media profiles, logos and the like instead of acting individually as a kinship group.

³²⁶ Interview with Ismail Al Khatib, 22 April 2018, Tarim

The formation of the HTC came about following the killing of a Hamumi tribal leader Sheikh Sa'ad Ba Hubraysh in Seyiun on 5 December 2013 by government soldiers who alleged both that this individual had a connection to Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and that he refused to stop at a military checkpoint.³²⁷ While the exact details of the incident that led to Sa'ad Ba Hubraysh's demise remain obscure, the practice of disregarding military checkpoints was previously observed during a research trip to Sana'a in 2014 and so widely used that to open fire on every such vehicle would lead to a significant drop in the local population. The individuals passing through these checkpoints are usually well-known to the military and their daring to drive through a checkpoint without stopping as well as the troops' choice not to enforce the stop are part of the power jousting between the state and the tribes. Soldiers seen as too keen at enforcing the law might be attacked individually, which adds another layer of complexity to these interactions. As with the selective enforcement of anti-smuggling legislation, these events lend themselves as ready excuses in case the state wants to detain or even kill an individual interfering with the operation of the patronage network, but such move always elicits a strong response.

In response to this killing, the HTC was formed to initially pool the armed capabilities of the Hadrami tribes and ostensibly also to represent their interests in dealing with the Yemeni government. The organization, and its Ba Hubraysh leadership, soon recognized the political potential of their group and began to involve itself more heavily in governance.³²⁸ In order to increase its popular support even further, it dropped the title hinting at its affiliation to a specific class and instead called itself Hadrami Confederation. The organization became open to anyone, but its leadership remained purely tribal. There is little evidence of the Hamum following the Sufi doctrine or in fact, being very religious at all. The Hamum have been known as quite progressive, often acting in defiance of religious rules particularly with regards to the position of women.

³²⁷ Bafana, Haykal. *Hadhramaut in a State of Flux - Blog | Haykal Bafana*. web.archive.org/web/20180405104556/http://blog.haykal.sg/hadhramaut/23-lp/33-hadhramaut-in-a-state-of-flux.

³²⁸ Interview with Saleh Mullah Dawilah, 9 December 2016, Tarim

Such behaviour is at odds with the usual behaviour of the residents of Wadi Hadramawt and shows the vast gap between this tribal organization and the Sufi institutions.

The Houthi rebellion in the North of Yemen and the subsequent paralysis of the state and its institutions offered an ample opportunity for the reshuffling of old alliance or the intensification of cooperation within those already existing. In the case of the Hadrami Confederation and the group of institutions connected to Dar al Mustafa, this cooperation differed significantly from the standard sada – tribe relationship.

Traditionally, the relationship between the tribes and the sada was localized, this being caused by a combination of the need for physical proximity for the purposes of mediation and intervention, and the slow transfer of news and information. While these constraints have been lifted, first by the advent of motorized transport and secondly by the wide use of internet in the province, the change in the nature of the cooperation is rather explainable by the expectations of the involved parties. Unlike in a traditional relationship between the two classes, the HTC does not look to Dar al Mustafa primarily for guidance or mediation, it is interested in association through which it can expand its international network and crucially obtain legitimacy by proxy – by being seen as being recognized or even supported by those who possess religious legitimacy and hold power, especially in areas outside of Hamum's standard sphere of influence.

Conversely, it makes sense for Dar al Mustafa and the sada social class in general to side with a winning party, or at least one that has the potential to be a winning party. As Ba Hubraysh used his influence to secure the seat of a deputy governor of the province, it became apparent that association with him would be beneficial. And so in April 2018, the leader of the HTC Shaikh Ba Hubraysh went on a grand tour of Wadi Hadramawt, first visiting the sada in Seyiun and later arriving in Tarim, where he walked through the town to be hosted by Habib Umar bin Hafiz in Dar al Mustafa and later in his home. This visit was a public spectacle intended both for the residents of Tarim and the wider world – the town was littered with hundreds of posters welcoming Ba Hubraysh to the town and a large banner was erected at the entrance of the town. All of these propaganda materials bore the image of the old South Yemen flag. For the external audience, the

visit was well-covered by the media and live updates with photographs were posted on social media.

While this alliance, apparently one that neither party is interested in hiding, makes sense in terms of recognizing the value each side brings to the table, it still does not explain how such differing groups, with different doctrines and geographical spheres of influence could establish such an alliance. However, when the internal structure of Dar al Mustafa is analysed, the whole relationship becomes clearer. While Habib Umar bin Hafiz is the spiritual and nominal leader of the Dar al Mustafa seminary, the running of the institution is a complex affair demanding the skills of logistical and financial management, but crucially also of being able to liaise with multiple parties, resolve conflicts and establish the relationships necessary for the continued functioning of the institution. For this purpose, there is an inner circle of men within Dar al Mustafa, a combination sayyids and exceptionally capable individuals from other social groups. This inner circle includes Abdullah Mullah Dawilah and most crucially Shukri Ba Hubraysh, who is seen as an informal director of security of Dar al Mustafa and the associated institutions.

The success of these men is exemplified by the fact that Dar al Mustafa was never attacked by militants, even though it must appear to be a very tempting target, given the Salafi-jihadi view of the Sufi doctrine as an abomination. The close coordination with security services, armed forces and perhaps even elements on the fringes of militant extremism is credited with averting all possible attacks and keeping the institution and its students safe.³²⁹ The tools deployed by the security staff of the institute or individuals deputized by them include the kind of violence the sada social class would not want to be associated with. Either directly or more likely with a silent approval, actions are carried out on behalf of these men which effectively protect the organization. Documented cases mostly include the recovery of stolen property using violence³³⁰, but there is no reason to believe that violence is not utilized in other situations as well.

³²⁹ Interview with Fawzi Mahfudh bin Zablagh, 10 December 2016, Seyiun

³³⁰ Interview with Abdul Rahman Belfaqih, 23 April 2018, Tarim

As Shukri Ba Hubraysh became a highly valued member of the Dar al Mustafa staff, he came to represent the rationalization of the relationship between the sada and capable individuals of the lower classes. In a class-based social system, he could not be accepted as a member, but his skills and willingness to partake in actions the sada would not carry out themselves gave him an access to some of the resources possessed by the sada. With connections both in the sada and qabail social class, he was then able to create a link which further improved his standing in the eyes of both groups. His case highlights the changing relationship between the sada and the qabail, one where traditional rules of engagement between classes are put aside and backroom dealings secure alliances. These alliances are no longer between tribes in specific locations and sayyids attached to them, they are between recently established institutions and organizations, which claim to represent a wider group of people. These organizations are almost exclusively founded after 1991 and began to appear as popular support and number of followers came to be seen as valuable.

The current political and social realities in Hadramawt have resulted in the establishment of previously unknown kind of entities, including the Hadrami Tribal Confederation and the Dar al Mustafa seminary. These institutions now serve to represent the interests of a section of the community who would have previously relied on the leadership of the Ba 'Alewi group of sada families or on the leadership of their respective tribal confederations. The establishment of these institutions creates essentially a second track which allows gifted individuals to act on behalf of a certain group without openly challenging the legitimacy and of the core institutions whose reputation is essential for the operation of these new institutions. These new entities are not as bound by historic norms or rules of succession and can act in a more nimble manner, especially when they entities join forces and work together, thus affirming each other's legitimacy in the eyes of the public.



Image: Shukri Ba Hubraysh, in the centre of the image.

5. Post-unification institutions

Following the end of the Marxist rule in Yemen in 1990, a number of cultural and social institutions sprung up in Hadramawt. These institutions were partially an extension of two decades of systematic and regulated rule which favoured bureaucracy, unions, clubs and societies as opposed to organic and informal civic life. They were however also the result of the need to find or reclaim a long-suppressed identity or alternatively to craft a new one. In the re-shuffling of power and its partial transfer from the state to the people, the ability to revive the tribal spirit within a kinship group and ideally garner further support from the non-tribal public was seen as crucial for future prosperity.

Descent or an affiliation with those of notable descent became a commodity. For those of prestigious heritage, the ability to mobilize and influence the behaviour of others was valuable in terms of proving themselves worthy of being taken seriously in the new

political order, perhaps even being included in the patronage network. For those not of sada descent and without tribal affiliation, attachment to the tribe came with the same benefits non-sada individuals enjoy while being hired to work for Sufi institutions – increased security, a sense of achievement and the ability to tap into some of the resources available to the class to which they are attaching themselves.

Although such initiatives were manifold,³³¹ this phenomenon is best exemplified by the Kindah Society, whose foundation is mentioned by Rodionov.³³² The Kindah is widely assumed to be the “original” tribe³³³ residing in Hadramawt and therefore the claim of one’s descent from the Kindah is motivated by the authenticity it signals. As the Kindah tribesmen trace their origin to Qahtan (through Kahlan), the establishment of this society is traceable back to the concept of Qahtanism known from the former North Yemen, where the ability to trace lineage to Qahtan is used to juxtapose oneself against the sada claim of descent from Prophet Mohammad. As other tribes present in Hadramawt claim origin from other parts of the Arabian Peninsula, which includes the influential Tamimi tribe, the Kindah consistently maintain that they have been present in northern Hadramawt “since the creation of the world”.³³⁴ Such claim of originality and legitimacy is appealing to the non-affiliated Hadramis.

Nowadays, the Kindah tribe as such does not exist. There are however tribes branching out of the original Kindah, including the Say’ari who took a leading role in the establishment of the Kindah Society. This tribe has a reputation of being unruly, wild and violent. This was noted by Ingrams³³⁵ as he described the concerns of the other Hadrami tribes which believed the peace accord he helped to negotiate between 1937 and 1940 would fail because even if the Say’ari agreed to sign, they would not keep their word. In more recent times, members of this tribe have often been associated with AQAP and other extremist organizations, which is documented by the news of killings or

³³¹ Interview with Hassan Al Barqi Al Kathiri, 21 April 2018, Al Ghurfah

³³² Rodionov, Mikhail. "Social Restrification in Modern Ḥaḍramawt." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (2006): 181-190.

³³³ Mackintosh-Smith, Tim. *Arabs: A 3,000-year history of peoples, tribes and empires*. Yale University Press, 2019.

³³⁴ Interview with Hussein Al Kaff, 21 April 2018, Seyiun

³³⁵ Ingrams, Harold. *Arabia and the Isles*. Murray, 1966.

arrests of the tribe's members in connection to extremism.³³⁶ When a member of the administrative staff of Dar al Mustafa, Abdullah Mullah Dawilah, was kidnapped or arrested in Tarim in 2018, the immediate reaction of the community was to demand that the Say'aris release him.³³⁷ It would be later revealed that Mullah Dawilah was most likely arrested by the Saudi security services in connection to smuggling and that the Say'aris had no involvement in this case.

It is difficult to decipher the extent to which the Say'aris of today suffer due to the reputation created by their ancestors, but the Mullah Dawilah incident suggests that they are suspected of wrongdoing by default. In addition, the Say'aris isolation in the northern desert and poor education means that they hold few influential posts which could help prevent the arrests of their members. It is therefore possible that the image of these tribesmen is distorted by the number of incidents in which the state gets involved and which are publicized – while this might not be a reflection of the crime rate in comparison to other – better connected - tribes in Hadramawt.

The Say'aris are also viewed with suspicion due to their dark skin. Despite the emphasis on equality and one Ummah, the population of Yemen (and Oman) remains suspicious of the *badu* and one of the ways in which its members are identified is through the colour of their skin. The problem of racism is largely not addressed in Yemen, but it is obvious from the stratification of the society – in the overall system and within the individual classes, the position of individuals is at least partially ordered from the palest to the darkest. Therefore, while the Say'aris and other descendants of the Kindah nominally belong to the qabail social class, they are positioned at the bottom on this group.

All of these elements combined suggest that the Say'ari are a “weak” tribe, but their ability to deploy violence, either directly or through a proxy, made them an appealing partner to the who Rodionov calls “the weaklings”, individuals of no particular descent more concerned with immediate survival than reputation. Mindful of another social

³³⁶ A research of newspaper articles and social media posts regarding robberies, kidnappings and other violent acts in the province of Hadramawt 2014-2019.

³³⁷ Interview with Muhsin Hamid Ahmad Al Haddad, 30 April 2018, Hawi

reshuffle, they hurried to join the society in the hope that affiliation with the qabail could be used as social currency in the coming years. The men behind the Kindah Society ran their own calculation and realized the advantage of having a large following, which is useful both for popular elections and potential armed struggle. Although traditionally unaffiliated people resided within the tribal territories and under the protection of the tribes³³⁸, the Kindah Society took this concept and made it independent of a geographical location – one did not need to reside within the territory of the Say'ari in order to be part of the Society and thus the influence of the tribe could spread further south and penetrate the urban centres.

The sudden re-discovery of a connection to Kindah was tempting not just to those on the bottom of the social order. Members of the mashaikh class were also attempting to craft genealogies that would connect them to the ancient tribe, but more specifically to its royal families.³³⁹ A claim of connection to Kindah is difficult to dispute as the written records on the tribe's genealogy are not comparable to those maintained by other tribes and, as the foundation of the Kindah Society shows, the tribe itself sees value in the number of affiliates and followers. Strong tribes, such as the Hamum or Nahd, did not establish similar institutions as their political and social strength meant that association with the lower classes would erode their reputation and thus their social currency would be devalued.

While some tribes chose not to establish any such institution and some offered authenticity and potential for violence for mass support, yet other tribes chose a more nuanced path. The Kathiri tribe especially relied on a kind of a cultural awakening, which combined an effort to revive the tribal spirit of its members as well as lure in members of the wider public and turn them into followers of the tribe. Their club was called "Diwaniye Seyiun,"³⁴⁰ which despite the neutrally sounding name pushed the agenda of the Kathiri tribe through education and cultural events focused on tribal history and art, most notably tribal poetry. Diwaniye Seyiun operated as of 2019, but it no longer did so with a political or social goal in mind. It has over time morphed into a

³³⁸ Dresch, Paul. *Tribes, government, and history in Yemen*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

³³⁹ Rodionov, Mikhail. "Social Restratisation in Modern Ḥaḍramawt." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (2006): 181-190.

³⁴⁰ Interview with Hassan al Barqi Al Kathiri, 21 April 2018, Al Ghurfah

debate and social club in which older gentlemen with intellectual inclinations could meet and discuss both historical and current events. It can only be speculated that the clubs lost their appeal once the central state decided to get involved on the tribal front in the former South.

This development came in the form of a modified version of rule through tribes being imported to the South. Although both North and South Yemen had a recent experience with a removal of the elites and replacement of the existing governance system by one that was nominally more egalitarian, the Republican North never sought to end tribalism. Instead, the late President Ali Abdullah Saleh established a system of governance based on patronage. This system was effective in governing North Yemen, at least if measured by the number of years Saleh managed to remain in power. For Saleh, governance through the tribes and patronage was the preferred method and given the weakness of state institutions, perhaps the only possible method of governance. The re-emerging tribal system in the South presented an opportunity for the involvement of the government where the state would not need to seek to win over existing tribal elites, but instead it could promote and support individuals it chose, thus making them the new tribal elite.

This is a logical move as even though the Socialist regime in South Yemen failed to eradicate tribal identity and therefore the traditional tribes could technically be utilized, their attitude towards being ruled by the Northern regime was hostile.³⁴¹ In the great re-shuffling of power in the former South Yemen, Saleh could not count on support of the pre-1967 tribes which only added to his resolve to attempt to establish a “new” tribal class. This class would be built on popular support and stipends would be handed to those who could prove that they were recognized as sheikhs by at least 40 individuals resident in Hadramawt.³⁴² This process was seen as illegitimate by the recovering tribal class, but some were lured by the promise of official recognition and funds. Therefore, these “government sheikhs” were a mixture of new sheikhs (who were either tribesmen,

³⁴¹ *ibid*

³⁴² Interview with Abdul Rahman Al Saqqaf, 23 November 2016, Seyiun

but not from sheikhly families or not of the tribal class at all) and members of the traditional leadership families within tribes.

A Bureau of Tribal Affairs was established to deal with the new sheikhs and distribute stipends to them. The administration issued official ID cards for the new sheikhs and became a link between the central government and its “agents”. At the time of fieldwork in Hadramawt (2018), these payments continued and the Bureau’s branch in Seyiun operated.³⁴³ With the diminishing power of the state and weakening of state institutions, the Bureau’s influence was reduced and it was assumed that once it lost its ability to distribute the stipend, it would cease to have any influence. After all, the governance system that relied on the support of the tribes in exchange for payment largely ceased to exist with the Houthi takeover of Sana’a and with that, the tribal sheikhs lost their access to the state’s resources, thus losing much of the appeal to their supporters, entering a circle of further and further detachment of these sheikhs from the state, which can only eventually lead to the dismantling of this governance experiment.

The anti-tribal and anti-elite policies of the DPRY regime resulted in a major disruption to the life of the sada and qabail communities. The reversal of these policies and the Agrarian Reform resulted in the need to adjust to the new political realities in the province. This need led to the establishment of several organizations in the early 1990s, each designed to favourably position its founding group in the new system. The Say'ari tribe accented its authenticity and attracted unaffiliated individuals and group by claiming common descent from Qahtan, while the Kathiri tribe invoked its historically leading role in the society and focused on culture and the study of the tribe's legacy in the province. Both of these institutions were established in order to counter the influence of the returning sada and their incomparable wealth, while also attempting to gather sizeable popular support to neutralize the influence of the "government sheikhs", a class created by the late President Saleh in an effort to replicate his northern model of "governance through tribes" and extend his patronage network into the South.

6. Conclusion

³⁴³ Participant observation.

The last century was marked by significant changes to the operation of the tribal system in Hadramawt. Infrastructural improvements allowing easier travel, the peace accord credited to Harold Ingrams and the general trend of urbanization all contributed to the increased communication between the tribes. While the increased coordination and communication between the tribes lessened many tensions, the tribe as a geospatial unit remained.

This changed after 1967, when the Marxist government of the newly formed DPRY began to implement anti-tribal policies which were intended to erode the position of the tribal elites, strip them off property and create a more merit-based society which would not be separated according to social class. This effort understandably failed as, at its core, a tribe is a kinship group occupying a set territory. Even though their names and traditions may be taken away, their shared bloodlines, family history and physical proximity cannot be erased. While many in the DPRY government were happy to act as though tribalism no longer existed, it was during exceptional moments when one needed to rely on their supporters that individuals aligned according to their pre-1967 allegiances.

This experience, coupled with the cooperation between the social classes in the East African diaspora, created a new concept of inter-class cooperation. The sada no longer lived behind white-washed walls to shield their children from the common people and neither did the tribes engage in daily hostilities. The changing reality of everyday life allowed for a promotion based on skill and merit, where an exceptionally talented individual of any background could make his fortunate with lesser constraint from the traditional stratification system. Eventually, this led to the employment of these individuals by the powerful social classes and their institutions, thus building further links between the various social classes.

Following the unification of Yemen in 1990, the anti-tribal policies of the DPRY were reversed. This led to a revival of the tribal class which sought to reclaim its position. To this end, institutions were established which claimed to represent the interests of the tribal class as a whole, occasionally even the wider society, under the leadership of the tribal class. The sada social class established similar institutions, although in their case

these were commonly educational institutions that evolved into institutions with political power. A recent example of the Hadrami Tribal Council dominated by the Hamum tribal confederation, and even more specifically by the Ba Hubraysh tribal branch, is an example of an institution seeking public support through branding, despite being led by a small core group of individuals all belonging to the same kinship group. The cooperation of the Hadrami Tribal Council and Dar al Mustafa, primarily seen through public acknowledgement of the legitimacy and significance of one another, is built on the exceptionally gifted individuals from the tribal class employed by the sada. These liaison between the two entities and assure a smooth operation of this cooperative effort.

The phenomenon of institutions representing a wider group of individuals is not unprecedented in Hadramawt. In an effort to revive the tribal spirit of its members as well as attract non-affiliated members of the wider public, the 1990s saw the emergence of societies and clubs intended to promote tribalism and give individuals the opportunity to tap into some of the resources in possession of a tribe in exchange for popular support. The central government of the late President Saleh launched its own initiatives aimed at the tribes as he attempted to replicate the “rule through tribes” model he practiced in the former North, establishing the Bureau of Tribal Affairs and trading stipends for influence. In the process of doing so, Saleh attempted to establish a “new” class of tribal leaders. While these institutions paved the way for what is the hybrid governance system of Hadramawt, none of them are very influential in today’s politics of the province.

MILITANT NONSTATE GROUPS IN GOVERNANCE

- 1. Introduction**
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1. Introduction

The threat of armed conflict and violence has been instrumental to the establishment of the hybrid governance system prevalent in Yemen. While the monopoly on violence is often considered a prerequisite for the sovereign rule of a state, in the case of Yemen the more appropriate term would be limited or distributed monopoly on violence. In addition to the monopoly on violence being shared by multiple entities, the violence underlying this system of governance is much more present than it is in more stable states. In many other states, the sovereign entity's use of violence is filtered through a system of enforceable codes of conduct and courts, which come with their own appeals processes, checks and balances. The monopoly on violence in the Yemeni context is much less formalized and the "violence" part of the term translates to raw, swift and immediate physical harm.

In such an environment, where the boundaries of territorial control and the subsequent monopoly on violence are continuously negotiated and challenged and where violence is inherent in the system of governance, rather than an exceptional occurrence, conditions are set for the existence of extra-territorial armed groups. These groups are capable of deploying violence on behalf of a given client, be it tribe, section of a tribe or the Yemeni state itself, while allowing the client to maintain plausible deniability. The

complex political system of Yemen provides the “demand” for these services, while the social and religious stratification, poverty and youthful restlessness provide a cadre of eager recruits. For many of these men, a membership of an armed group presents an opportunity to belong to something “bigger”, serve a noble cause and attain a rank based on merit in spite of the position of their tribe or the tribe’s reputation. Above all else, it gives them “something to do”³⁴⁴ in a society where “the youth can only choose between religion and football”.³⁴⁵

Historically, some tribes have been known for their lack of willingness to partake in the system of governance offered to them, as documented by Harold Ingrams.³⁴⁶ In the case of Hadramawt, this is especially the Say’ari tribe residing in the north of the province, which has been known collectively as unruly with smaller groups within the tribe prone to violence and violence for hire. Once this reputation was established, participation in the political system became difficult for members of this tribe as they were always viewed with suspicion and automatically treated as untrustworthy. This situation turns into a cycle where the limited opportunities of members of this tribe drive them towards militant groups, which in turns maintains their reputation and continues to diminish the reputation of the tribe.

The dynamic of the armed groups, previously comprising of camel thieves and similar criminal elements of local significance, was altered with the improvements of infrastructure in Hadramawt and Yemen in general in the second half of the 20th century, both in terms of physical infrastructure easing travel and informational infrastructure allowing rapid transmission of news and efficient coordination. In hearing of the struggles of Afghan mujahideen against Soviet invaders, many young Yemenis chose to travel to Afghanistan from the early 1980’s, where they forged international friendships and created what later became the Aden-Abyan Islamic Army. This organization, in coordination with the government of then President Saleh, proved its

³⁴⁴ Interview with Henry Thompson, 18 September 2019, Oxford

³⁴⁵ Interview with Zain al Haddad, 22 April 2018, Tarim

³⁴⁶ Ingrams, Harold. *Arabia and the Isles*. Murray, 1966.

utility to the government and enjoyed a fruitful relationship with the state. These battle-hardened men served as the state's enforcers, primarily against the Southern elites.

A further impulse was added as the West began its War on Terror following the attacks of 9/11 in the United States. This event shaped the Western perception of what militant groups are and what they do. In short, foreign governments consider these groups, represented nowadays primarily by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its many offshoots as a categorical enemy with no redeeming qualities. The Yemeni government, at least under the leadership of Saleh, understood this position and realized it had to play along with this narrative, while retaining some of the utility of these groups, as well as finding new avenues for monetizing the groups' presence in Yemen, through military aid and access to advanced technologies. These could just as easily be used to target the regime's enemies.

The third perspective is that of the militants themselves. Save for a small group of hardcore radicals who truly do wish to hurt, maim, kill and enslave their enemies, these groups often view themselves as a viable alternative to the government, as evidenced by AQAP's takeover and attempts at territorial control in Ja'ar and Zinjibar between 2011 and 2012 and more recently (2015 - 2016) in taking over Shihr and Mukalla and establishing fairly functional local administration there. In this instance, the banner of AQAP, although veiled behind the new name "Sons of Hadramawt" came to hurt the group as without this connection, their governance experiment could be viewed as a case study of successful local governance amid widespread civil unrest and war.

This chapter focuses on three phenomena related to armed groups in Yemen and specifically in Hadramawt, firstly the varying perceptions of the group's nature and purpose, secondly their position within the system of governance in Yemen, and thirdly on their ability to provide a viable governance alternative backed by popular support.

2. Local and international perceptions

One of the most commonly misunderstood elements regarding militant organizations is the popular support they enjoy in Yemen. For western audiences, AQAP is defined by its attack on the USS Cole in Aden 2000 and of course by Al Qaeda's 2001 terrorist

attacks in the United States. Viewed exclusively through these two events, one gets an image of an inherently evil organization, which is clandestine, set on harming infidels and altogether irrational. While many of the hallmark events of Al Qaeda were cruel attacks against civilians, to most Yemenis this is not what they understand AQAP to be. To them, AQAP is an actor on the domestic political scene and although it is not represented in the official political system (with the exception of Al Rashad Union), it is a part of the tribal environment and the hybrid governance system of Yemen. Although attacks in Yemen do occur, they are aimed at the state and the military, which is often seen as “fair game” by the population, not to mention the population’s ability to decipher which units are targeted and often understand the reasoning for these attacks. In the rare instances when AQAP targeted civilian locations, the public pressure forced them to issue apologies and offer reparations to the families of the victims.³⁴⁷

The situation is made even more complex as not all military units would be considered enemies of AQAP and not all elements of the state would be seen as fighting against AQAP. This coordination and cooperation between the organization and the state leads some to not consider AQAP as a non-state actor and instead perceive it to be a on the level of a department of the government. While the organization presents itself as an independent entity with its own agenda, it has colluded with the state on numerous occasions and these events have not gone unnoticed by the population. The fact that any organization comprises of independent agents who switch allegiances, or at least vary in the level of commitment to a given cause according to the current political situation, goes to explain why the population would have a different perspective on AQAP from foreigners. While the information received by western audiences is that of attacks and gunfights, the Hadrami tribesman’s perception of AQAP is primarily shaped by the long periods of no remarkable events during which members of the organization lead ordinary lives, visit their families and give no impression of the organization being set on destruction.

³⁴⁷ Al-Qaeda apologizes for Yemeni Hospital attack (2013) Al Jazeera America. Available at: <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/12/22/al-qaeda-apologizesforyemenihospitalattack.html>.

The relationship of the central government and militant organizations takes several forms: the government either uses the services of Al Qaeda-linked militants by essentially awarding them a contract to fight the government's enemies or the forces of the government commit acts which they ascribe to AQAP in order to shed responsibility and prevent a backlash from the population.³⁴⁸ When it comes to conflicts between the tribes and the state over control of natural resources, numerous cases have been recorded where involvement of the Yemeni Army is later claimed by the government to be that of Al Qaeda.³⁴⁹ The tribe of Ba Mo'as, located in Hadramawt, had its protest against unfair distribution of profits from the state-controlled oil and gas facilities on the tribe's territory attacked by gunmen bearing the AQAP banner, only to find out later that these men were seen departing from and returning to a Yemeni Army base in the area.³⁵⁰

Conversely, the government labels many of its enemies to be AQAP, which gives it a legitimate reason to pursue political enemies and often elicit the help of foreign governments in doing so. A striking case of this use of the name occurred in December 2013 when sheikh Sa'ad Ba Hubraysh was killed at a government checkpoint in Hadramawt.³⁵¹ This event was a catalyst which, in attempting to squash the growing tribal dissent in the province, provided the impulse which unified the tribes and established the Hadrami Tribal Alliance as a serious political player in the province. The government attempted to justify the killing of Ba Hubraysh on the grounds of his alleged cooperation with AQAP, but this claim was laughed off by the population. Due to the frequency of the use of the group's name in the media and the numerous attempts to use it in the state propaganda, Yemenis jokingly refer to the organization as "Al Qaedas" or "the so called Al Qaeda"³⁵².

³⁴⁸ Interview with Saleh Al Batati, 15 October 2019, London

³⁴⁹ *ibid*

³⁵⁰ *ibid*

³⁵¹ Bafana, Haykal. *Hadhramaut in a State of Flux - Blog | Haykal Bafana*.
web.archive.org/web/20180405104556/http://blog.haykal.sg/hadhramaut/23-lp/33-hadhramaut-in-a-state-of-flux.

³⁵² Interview with Rawan Shaif, 5 March 2019, London

The government of Yemen, as well as the regional powers, understand the complex nature of militant organizations and use the various angles and opportunities to meet their policy goals. At the same time, they are mindful of the western perspective on these organizations and do what they can to utilize this to achieve their goals. Hence the governments of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in entering Yemen in 2014 in order to fight the Houthis, but being aware of the need for U.S. support set two targets: the Houthis and the militant organizations AQAP and Islamic State – Yemen. While they publicly fought against AQAP, they colluded with the organization in a fight against the Houthis, armed a militia belonging to the Dar al Hadith Islamic seminary and directly hired individuals associated with AQAP into the Security Belt forces they formed and supported.³⁵³ This is not unusual and shows the perception of what it means to belong to the “enemy” by local and regional actors. Once an individual ceases active enemy action and demonstrates his utility, he is not viewed through the stigma of belonging to a terrorist organization.

The third perspective on Al Qaeda comes from its leaders and general membership. AQAP leaders, as evidenced by their actions on the territories they held, believe that the organization fulfills all the conditions to be considered a legitimate and sovereign ruler in some parts of Yemen. It does have public support, as shown by the period when it held and governed territory, it has the religious legitimacy which the state often lacks, and it have the armed power to hold territory and enforce its decisions on this territory. All these conditions are what AQAP members would grow up seeing as crucial for the recognition of sovereignty – with popular support and religious legitimacy important for the cohesion and loyalty of its subjects and the ability to defend its territory in order to be recognized as a legitimate actor by the entities controlling nearby territories. It is perplexing to members of AQAP that this would be overlooked and its leadership and followers often resort to the easiest justification – the government, acting on orders of its western allies, is waging a war on Islam.

This clash of understanding of what Al Qaeda is and what constitutes terrorism partially explains Yemeni anger over drone strikes. Overlooking the evidently unjust and tragic

³⁵³ Interview with Noel Brehony, 21 November 2018, London

deaths of non-combatants, drone attacks on the intended targets are often perceived as unfair, overly dramatic and cruel. Many of those killed are not known criminals, they are neighbors, unemployed teenagers and tribal figures whose death is perplexing to the local population and reinforces the belief that Yemenis, Arabs and Muslims are seen as lesser beings by the West. Those Yemenis not regularly in contact with foreigners do not hide their connections to those associated with AQAP as they do not ascribe the same connotations to the organization as foreigners do. Thus Abdullah Al Jumaily, a tribal leader from the province of Al Jawf, freely admitted meeting Anwar Al Awlaqi in the days leading up to his death.³⁵⁴ The perception of AQAP within the general public is not only shaped by personal association to low-level members of the organization, but also by the case of Abdul Majid Al Zindani, a very prominent and well-known social and religious figure, sanctioned by the US.³⁵⁵ Al Zindani was accused of being a spiritual leader of Al Qaeda and of providing guidance to Usama Bin Laden. At the same time, he continued to be active in parliamentary politics, continued as the dean of Al Iman University in Sana'a and attended many public events, even speaking to foreigners at weddings to which they were invited.³⁵⁶ To many Yemenis, this case resonated especially strongly, because if Al Zindani, a public figure known for promoting Islamic virtues, could be accused of terrorism, then anyone could.

This view is not reflected in the US policy towards the organization. There are several potential reasons for why this view would be omitted in the formulation of policies towards extremist organizations. Firstly, those making these policies might be of the belief that the individuals concerned pose such extreme danger to the US that their elimination is crucial to the safety and security of US citizens. As both the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency are responsible for drone strikes in Yemen, this would suggest the seeping of militaristic thinking into the civilian intelligence, which would be intuitively more prone to involvement in Yemeni domestic

³⁵⁴ Interview with Abdullah Al Jumaily, 2014, Sana'a

³⁵⁵ United States designates bin Laden loyalist (2004) U.S. Department of the Treasury. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/js1190>.

³⁵⁶ Participant observation, 2011, Sana'a

matters and the neutralization of the group through the support of groups opposing it, as has been the case throughout the CIA's existence.

Such attempts have been made, with the opposing group supported by the US (and other states) being the Yemeni government under the leadership of President Saleh. Due to the intricacies and variations of AQAP, this policy was bound to fail as AQAP was as much a tool of internal Yemeni politics and warring as it was a genuine terrorist organization set on destroying the West.

The second potential reason for the policy is the maximalization of benefit with the smallest amount of involvement. This policy likely has its roots in the massacre in Mogadishu in 1993 and it was further formed by the US losses in Afghanistan and Iraq. This policy uses the overwhelming technological advantage of the US military and in the short term, it is "cheap" in that it puts no American lives in immediate harm. It also appears to be effective, given the very limited scale of AQAP activities outside of Yemen in the past decade, but this is likely due to a variety of factors, of which the decimation of the group's leadership is just one. In the long term, the policy creates a society which has grown witnessing violence and feeling unjustly targeted, mimicking the lives of the younger Houthi soldiers whose sentiments eventually turned into them becoming fearless and very motivated warriors.

Much like with the bias researchers are exposed to in Yemen, so are the military and intelligence services likely in contact with locals for whom the incentive is to play along and confirm the biases of the past. Through this, they secure and retain access to funds, weapons, training and foreign travel. If the only tool at the disposal of the western forces is the drone, they do not want to engage local actors in order to formulate more suitable policies. Those suggesting such approach are likely penalized by having their cooperation, and subsequent access to various benefits, terminated. As is common with diplomatic service, the development and humanitarian sectors or journalism, Yemen often serves as a career springboard, but few devote considerable amount of time to studying the country and its society. In hoping for swift recognition and a move up the career ladder (including a move to a more pleasant location), the individuals involved lack the knowledge and capacity to decipher the internal Yemeni politics as well as the

incentive to do so. Continuation of a previous policy is again “cheap” and “easy” for the incoming policy designers.

The issue with approaching AQAP in Yemen has been in the “Schrödinger’s state” which nominally both ruled Yemen and at the same time did not have the resources and legitimacy to truly govern, nor did it have the motivation to counter the group. Therefore foreign governments intending to combat AQAP would need to cooperate with the Yemeni state out of the convenience of doing so and for the fear that attempting to fight in Yemen unilaterally might steer the Yemeni government into cooperating with the extremist organization even more closely.

This precarious position is highlighted by the cooperation between foreign governments and their primary security partner in Yemen, the domestic security and intelligence agency Political Security Organization (PSO). This organization, ostensibly tasked with policing religious radicalism, was frequently staffed by “Afghan Arabs”, Yemenis with experience of waging jihad in Afghanistan.³⁵⁷ While seemingly counter-intuitive, this staffing choice is not surprising for a number of reasons that have all to do with how governance works in Yemen. Firstly, the state was primarily concerned with its own survival and the resulting continuance of benefit derivation by the patronage network sustaining it. Evidence suggests that in 2009, the Yemeni state proposed a truce with AQAP.³⁵⁸ Jihad was not a threat to the status quo as one of the distinguishing features of AQAP is their refusal to attack Muslim civilians and instead their outward looking ambitions. These ambitions, when communicated through the group’s media channels, guarantee a continued stream of benefits in the form of technical and financial assistance and training of forces used the command of those within the patronage network. Secondly, by involving the Afghan Arabs in the network, a potentially strong group of adversaries was removed and this too has to be seen as an extension of the patronage network.

³⁵⁷ Clark, Victoria. Yemen: *Dancing on the heads of snakes*. Yale University Press, 2010.

³⁵⁸ Diplomatic Security Daily (2009), paragraphs 28 and 29, available at: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09STATE45504_a.html#

The third reason has to do with the way that social relations in Yemen function. In a post-tribal society where the state exercises sovereignty over its citizens and provides them with the services usually expected of a state, the need for a maintenance of simultaneous support networks evaporates, which in turn strengthens the position of the state and its enforcement powers. In Yemen, the opposite is true, which means that the relationship between an individual citizen and the state is much more complex. Direct enforcement of judgements issued by a court does take place on occasion, but these are judgments against those of a weak social standing and those without additional functioning support networks. Attempting to carry out a judgment issued against the average tribesman creates a very nuanced situation – the tribal affiliation of the judge is questioned, the officers dispatched to arrest the individuals put their families into jeopardy and the weak state risks protests and a revolt. The creation of a group whose primary allegiance was to their ideology and own comfort rather than their tribe meant that the state co-opted a strong enforcement tool which could skillfully operate in the shadows and neutralize many of the elements the state could not risk attempting to deal with through the judicial system, lest its own weakness be exposed by the inability to enforce the resulting judgement.

The Yemeni approach to smuggling provides a parallel to its counter-terrorism efforts. While some of the smuggling into Yemen takes place illicitly under the cover of darkness and in isolated locations, much of it is carried out in a broad daylight, through an official border crossing, using the creation of miniature versions of patronage networks, intimidation and knowledge of the tribal dynamics to convince those in charge of policing the border that it is not in their interest to enforce the law.³⁵⁹ The meager pay provided to the border guards and other law enforcement officials appears to account for the fact that they will “make up the difference” by using their rank to devise other money-making avenues.³⁶⁰ The state has made a calculation which made it realize that it cannot completely tackle the issue, nor would it be in its best interest to do so. It

³⁵⁹ Participant observation, November 2019

³⁶⁰ Conversation with a border guard, November 2019

deploys the minimal possible amount of resources to provide it with some enforcement power working in favor of its patronage network and suppressing unwanted competition.

In Al Mahra, the entire border guard force comprised of 12 men and 2 vehicles in 2017³⁶¹, they could however be reinforced by other security and military forces. The police forces and the PSO work with the smuggling networks, directing and containing their activities, making sure that they do not become so prevalent as to threaten the existence of the governance system in place. Due to the prevalence of extremism in Yemen, its historical roots, popular support and its utility both to the state and actors involved in the state patronage network, state authorities have no incentive to dismantle these network so long as they do not threaten the existence of the state. Despite some rhetoric to that effect, AQAP and similar organizations never attempted to uproot the Yemeni state and take over its functions as a whole, instead focusing on isolated locations (2011) or taking territory at a time when the state administration only existed on paper (2015.)

The differing perception of Al Qaeda and what is commonly known as “extremism” in Yemen can be also illustrated by the way in which the former fighters are viewed. Once these individuals decide to leave the organization, they often become of little concern to the state, in some cases the state actually aided the former members of AQAP in leaving the country, without any charges being filed against them.³⁶² The openness with which those involved in such operations present them suggests that they do not view Al Qaeda as an existential threat to the state or consider the implications for international security too grave.³⁶³ As AQAP is careful to target “enemies of the state,” such as the Houthi movement or ISIS, they are considered somewhat acceptable. At least part of the reason for the difference in perception is explainable by the fact that many of the organization’s members are indistinguishable from common tribesmen, they share a language, religion (often down to a particular school of thought, Salafism), appearance and the bearing of arms as part of their identity.

³⁶¹ Interview with Noel Brehony, 21 November 2018, London

³⁶² Interview with former intelligence chief in Al Mahra, November 2019

³⁶³ Observation in Al Mahra, November 2019

3. The local political order and extremism

The governance system in Hadramawt, as analyzed in the previous chapters, presents the current result of an ongoing negotiation between a number of socio-politico-religious actors and the interplay of legitimacy, armed capability, access to funds, ability to deliver public services and other elements. Despite the inherent conflict between the social classes and competing tribal units, the system is robust in ordinary times and capable of withstanding minor shocks. Major shocks, usually originating from outside of the province, have the potential to shake the system to the point of making it irrelevant. At these times, the utility of extremist elements is at its peak. Although shocks to the political system come with ideological flavoring, they must be accompanied by the ability to deploy violence. Such was the case of the Communist takeover of South Yemen, supported by countries of the Eastern Bloc³⁶⁴ which provided the know-how, material support and funds, mostly through their embassies in Cairo.³⁶⁵ Similarly, the Mukalla and Shihri takeover in 2015, although veiled by a popular ideology in the area, was only possible due to the force of the AQAP members and the comparative weakness of the state institutions.

Much like the state utilizes extremist groups to achieve its policy goals, so do smaller actors. Tribes, individual families and criminal groups all exchange goods and services with extremist groups, using their armed capabilities and obtaining plausible deniability for their actions in the process. The Budda checkpoint in Wadi Do'an is a site of frequent attacks attributed to AQAP with the official explanation claiming that these take place in order to clear the chokepoint preventing AQAP members from free movement between Hadramawt and Shabwa. This story can be challenged on two grounds – it would be easy for AQAP members to bypass the checkpoint and travel through the desert, but only if they had a need for this at all. As AQAP members do not wear uniform or otherwise signal their membership of the group, they could very easily move as tribesmen on business. More likely explanation is that the checkpoint, manned by

³⁶⁴ A collection of documents held by the Czech MFA Archive in Prague describing activities of the Czechoslovak embassy in Cairo, Egypt, in the early 1960's.

³⁶⁵ *ibid*

members of local tribes, is being targeted either because of tribal feuds or due to hampering the smuggling of goods which cannot easily be transferred through the desert.

Exceptional moments, such as revolutions, expulsion of colonial powers and breakdowns of the state government present an opportunity for a more prominent involvement of militants. In some instances, AQAP and its allies can use these moments in order to expand their influence and take over territory. In these situations, the local political context must be taken into account. For instance, the tribal forces in and around Mukalla were not an obstacle to the AQAP takeover in 2015 for two reasons. Firstly, the urbanization of Mukalla and the anti-tribal policies of the DPRY, the effect of which is especially visible in the urban centers, mean that there is not a single tribe that “claims” Mukalla. By comparison, the regional capital of the province of Al Mahra, Al Ghaydah, is still about 2/3 under the control of the Kalshat tribe and even though outsiders do settle there, it is understood that the city has tribal leadership.³⁶⁶ Additionally, the functioning of the tribes is not threatened by the presence of AQAP as the organization does not seek to escalate conflicts with the tribes but rather co-opt them into their sphere of influence.

Finally, while the basis of the tribal identity is violence, armed capability and the control of territory, Yemeni tribal customs exist to control the potential escalation of conflicts and loss of life. Much of the violence is rhetorical or symbolic, expressed in poems and ritual dancing with daggers. Even real violence, where deployed, is used with caution, such as when tribal forces besieging a certain settlement will purposely aim high to cause minor damage to buildings and signal their resolute, but to avoid the loss of life.³⁶⁷ With the number of conflicts each tribe participates in, any escalation could be disastrous. Tribal conflict in its basic form is a balancing act and by nature defensive. Rarely do tribes intend to increase their territory or access to resources, instead their participation in conflicts serves to deter future encroachment and emphasize the demarcation of their territory. Considering this, it makes little sense to challenge a

³⁶⁶ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 2 July 2018, Aurangabad

³⁶⁷ Caton, Steven C. *Yemen chronicle: an anthropology of war and mediation*. Macmillan, 2005.

militant group over the control of a territory not belonging to any tribe when a mutually beneficial agreement can be struck and, in another instance of a patronage system, the tribe can access various benefits by cooperating with the power currently in charge.

The presence of significant extremist forces in any location upsets the local system of governance. As they are often outsiders to the area, without known familial links and tribal affiliations, new ways of regulating the cooperation must be devised. With the lack of familiar links comes a lack of inhibitions of tribesmen from the area who understand that any offence committed by them could be avenged against the members of their kin. Similarly to the Somali legal practice of Xeer, the 'Urf operates on assumption of self-regulation. As some conflicts are passed down the generations, an escalation would be upsetting to the established system, of which the conflict is a part. But so could the complete disappearance of a given conflict cause a stir. The status and importance of the tribal conflict as a regulating measure is illustrated by the meetings between tribes in Al Mahra (usually twice a year), which serve to affirm that a certain set of conflicts remains active and at the same time that the truce regarding these conflicts holds.³⁶⁸ Resolution to these conflicts is not sought in these meetings and over time they have evolved into something similar to a meeting of a tribal council where all the leaders of tribes in Mahra get to meet and discuss matters affecting life in the province.

While advancement with a tribe, the sada class or the Hadrami society as a whole is heavily dependent on lineage and the strength of one's affiliation, extremist groups are organized differently and allow for advancement on the basis of „merit“. The merit in this case is measured by the level of loyalty to the organization and the utility of a given member to the organization. There is evidence suggesting that AQAP runs a program designed to train and advance their local leaders, which stands in stark comparison to the rigidity of the educational system in Hadramawt and the system of social stratification.³⁶⁹ This explains the socio-economic makeup of the AQAP cadres and points to the parties most likely to cooperate with AQAP.

³⁶⁸ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 2 July 2018, Aurangabad

³⁶⁹ Zimmerman, Katherine. "Al Qaeda's strengthening in the shadows." *American Enterprise Institute* 13 (2017).

Major shocks to the system of governance are felt and discussed in the diaspora, but its involvement is minimal.³⁷⁰ The diaspora's main role at the time of immediate conflict is that of a safety net easing the escape of some of those who would be affected by the conflict. However, as the primary role of the diaspora lies in the provision of legitimacy and with armed struggle being a situation where legitimacy is secondary to physical violence (or its threat), the diaspora members cannot do much other than wait. Where the parties involved cannot be curbed by traditional means due to the lack of unitary self-enforcement of rules of customs, actors whose survival and prominence is based on their possession of legitimacy must attempt to limit their involvement and use their „currency“ once the conflict has been resolved and the governance mechanism is being re-negotiated under conditions of relative peace. Even funds from the diaspora become of little value during such situations as they cannot alter the situation on the battlefield immediately. This would perhaps be possible in conflicts over resources, but once ideology is involved, funds lose some of their appeal. Although tribesmen in the diaspora do mention that provision of ammunition is one of their contributions to the well-being to their tribe in Hadramawt, these donations are used primarily for signaling violence and enabling the tribe to continue in its semi-frozen conflicts with other tribes, they are not significant enough to enable any tribe to fight an extremist organization.

While organizations such as AQAP do not get a seat at the table, they are in fact part of the establishment by proxy. Due to the history of extremist organizations being utilized in combating enemies of the state, forcing tribes off their land in situations where natural resources are found and being allowed to reside within tribal territories in exchange for plausible deniability, non-territorial militant organizations advanced themselves and became part of the local political environment to the point where on occasion they manage to rise and control territory, effectively elevating themselves to the level of the tribes.

3.1. Violence and hostage taking

³⁷⁰ Interview with Ahmed Al Tamimi, 23 February 2020, Dar es Salaam

The practice of hostage taking is part of the political life in Hadramawt and elsewhere in Yemen.³⁷¹ The purpose of taking hostages was traditionally not related to threatening the hostage's life, in fact harming the hostage could bring very severe consequences upon the offending party. Instead the mechanism operated on two pillars – the first was the loss of freedom of the hostage caused by their captivity and secondly the shame felt by the tribe from which a hostage was taken as it appeared the tribe could not protect its members. The hostages were chosen strategically, often sons or nephews of important sheikhs were selected in order to increase the pressure exerted on the other party. The practice of retaliation guaranteed a reasonable treatment of the hostages as the hostage takers were mindful that they could become captives at some point in the future and their treatment of the hostages would be reflected in how hostages from their tribe were treated. This practice was continued in the dealings between the tribes and the modern Yemeni state. Tribes would kidnap government officials and barter their release for goods and services from the state. This often included the establishment of basic infrastructure, such as the construction of roads or the building of the electrical grid in the territory under the tribe's control. The practice of hostage taking however evolved into involving the kidnap of foreigners as a means of forcing the government's hand, which turned into a trade in captives used for fund raising and propaganda effort of trans-national militant groups.

The beginning of the kidnap of foreigners in Yemen can be traced back to the patronage network as one of the elements controlled by the Yemeni patronage system is the tourism sector. This industry is easily monopolized as the arriving foreigners need to enter through only a handful of entry points which are controlled by the state. From there they use approved transport companies which take them to approved hotels. Accommodation can be easily controlled by the state-linked patronage network as the construction and development of such establishments is dependent on a number of permits which can be granted and revoked at the patron's pleasure. The static nature of hotels and their placement in well-policed areas only increases the chances of patronage control. The development of the tourism sector in Yemen and its known link

³⁷¹ Shortland, Anja. *Kidnap: Inside the ransom business*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

to the state became a tempting target for those looking to exert pressure on the state without the undesirable side effect of potentially starting a series of retaliatory kidnappings with another tribe. Kidnappings of foreigners soon followed as they proved to be effective in getting an attention of the press, embarrassing the government internationally and causing losses to the tourism industry. As some of those involved in the patronage system began losing revenue, their loyalty to the patronage system weakened.

Given that the Yemeni tribesmen already possessed the “kidnapping know-how” and more recently became acquainted with foreigners, the locations they frequent and the security measures they deploy, it was only a matter of time before a kidnapping for ransom was attempted. This moved the practice of kidnapping from being a tool of domestic politics into the world of crime and did not come naturally to the Yemenis.³⁷² Gradually, and with the help of the returning “Afghan Arabs,” they began to see kidnap for ransom as a viable and easy way of making money. The kidnappings of foreigners became a hybrid between a purely criminal enterprise and the kind of kidnappings Yemeni tribes would use when forcing the central government to agree to their demands. The hostages were treated with respect and rarely harmed. This approach settled at the intersection of effective kidnapping for ransom and what the Yemenis could bear to commit given their upbringing and code of honour. The kidnapers could not afford to commit acts of graphic violence against the hostages as they still needed to use the tribal territories for their operations and therefore they relied on the actions of extremists abroad and their extreme violence against captives in order to signal the danger the hostages were facing. The similar branding used in publications, photographs and videos was enough to signal that the same fate that was meeting hostages in Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere could meet the foreign hostages in Yemen as well.

With kidnap for ransom came a serious influx of funds, which only helped the cooperation between militants and tribesmen who could benefit from these funds in exchange for providing a safe space where the hostages could be held. The

³⁷² *ibid*

involvement of the tribes further guaranteed the safety and comfort of the hostage as the tribe could not be seen as partaking in harming of someone “weak”. When hostages in Yemen were killed, such as the American journalist Luke Somers in 2014, it was during a rescue attempt which forced the militants’ hand and they hastily executed the hostage so as to deter possible future rescue attempts. A study conducted by Safer Yemen, investigating patterns of kidnapping in Yemen over the period of 2010 – 2014 and published prior to the killing to Somers, concluded that of the 76 foreigners held in captivity by non-state actors during that period, none were executed.³⁷³

Violence and kidnapping are not perfectly organized and predictable. It has to be remembered that there is no centralized command for criminal activity and instead it is the result of the incentives offered to the kidnappers and other criminals, set within the social and environmental context they operate in. As such, there are incidents that go against what has been outlined above, such as the 2008 bombing of Belgian tourists in the town of Shibam in Hadramawt.³⁷⁴ This incident, one of the bloodiest attacks against foreigners in Yemen, remains unexplained and confusingly there are not many theories explaining it either. After numerous interviews with actors who should have at least some idea of why this attack took place, it can only be assumed that this incident was isolated and outside of the “system”. This theory is supported by the fact that no similar incidents occurred in the following years.

The violence against foreigners and their kidnappings all but disappeared with the onset of the civil war in Yemen in 2014, simply because no foreigners would travel to the country. There were instances of the Houthis detaining foreign nationals and holding them captive, but these differ from criminal kidnappings as the Houthis consider themselves to be a de facto state authority and they often get treated as such by the intermediaries involved in the solving of these incidents. Therefore these events are closer to arrests than kidnappings. In Hadramawt, only the Mullah Dawilah kidnapping, analyzed elsewhere, took place. Here too it would appear as though the incident was the responsibility of a state actor and not a non-state group. The social and religious

³⁷³ Safer Yemen. 2014. “Changing tactics and motives: Kidnapping of foreigners in Yemen 2010–2014.”

³⁷⁴ Al Jazeera, 2008 „Belgian tourists shot dead in Yemen, News | Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera.“ Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2008/1/19/belgian-tourists-shot-dead-in-yemen-2>

environment of Hadramawt and especially Wadi Hadramawt, makes the kidnap and long-term captivity of anyone difficult, therefore militants resorted to using exceptional violence as a means of upsetting the local equilibrium. In some instances, petty criminals would be tied to electrical poles in town and flogged and beaten in order to show the swiftness of justice at the hands of the militant groups.

Kidnap has long been a tool of domestic policy in Yemen, used both by the state and those opposing the state in order to achieve their goals. More recently, it has evolved into an industry where foreign hostages can be traded and sold, which created a demand for a safe detention of the hostages, intermediaries and others who benefit from this business. This “market” is however still organized in accordance with the Yemeni kidnapping customs and through this, regulated.

4. Militant governance in Mukalla and Shihr

The idea of militant governance as a viable structure of public administration is not hypothetical, but was tested in coastal Hadramawt as Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, under various other names, including Ansar al Shariah and Abna Hadramawt, took over the cities of Mukalla, Shihr and the surrounding areas for a total of 387 days between April 2015 and April 2016. The use of alternative names suggests that AQAP is mindful of its reputation abroad and can use this to its advantage – by conducting operations under the AQAP banner, it can elicit a strong response abroad and win allies for forces deemed to be combating terrorism, while by shielding its name and amplifying connections of certain members to areas of interest, it can more easily find its way into the local political landscape and not draw the attention of foreign counter-terrorism forces.

The AQAP takeover of Mukalla and Shihr can be divided roughly into three stages. In the initial stage, the forces of AQAP moved into the two cities and established their authority in a short campaign of violence, which included the expulsion of the police and armed forces from the location and the establishment of strict religious rules. This tactic, used by AQAP elsewhere as well, is designed to discipline the population and signal the strength of the organization to them, thus intimidating any potential opposition and

neutralizing its threat. As religion is the one variable connecting almost all Yemenis and any offense against it is universally seen as condemnable, there is little risk associated with punishing the population for minor violations of the religious code as these are unlikely to elicit a backlash from the community. It is important that these punishments are comparatively lenient and not seen as brutal by the local population before the militant organizations establishes a firm hold of the location, a lesson AQAP learned from its control of Ja'ar and Zinjibar in Abyan province, where it alienated the locals by implementing rules deemed too strict and in conflict with the local custom.³⁷⁵ These "lessons learned" were formulated by the late leader of AQAP Nasser Al Wuhaysi in a letter to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb leadership in 2012, thus suggesting a long-term desire to control territory.³⁷⁶

In the second stage, AQAP asserted its authority and began to rule the city as a sovereign, altering the curriculum in schools, implementing public projects such as road and bridge repairs and establishing a police force known as the Hisba. The Hisba was designed to solidify the organization's hold of the territory and served as a combination of a police force, domestic intelligence agency and morality police.³⁷⁷ It oversaw the transfer of power from municipal and state authorities into the hands of AQAP while also enforcing rules regarding prayers, the veiling of women and observation of ritual fasting periods. Given the rather limited number of fighters at its disposal, estimated to be around 1000 men³⁷⁸, AQAP needed to be strategic in its application of violence and create local alliances. This need translated into the establishment of the Hadramawt National Council, which comprised of local leaders and Sunni scholars, but was later accused of serving as a "credibility shield" for AQAP.³⁷⁹ The co-option of the religious elites points to the importance of religious credibility for retention of power in

³⁷⁵ Al Qaeda seizes town, provincial capital in southern Yemen. (2015, December 2). Retrieved January 27, 2021, from <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/12/al-qaeda-seizes-town-provincial-capital-in-southern-yemen.php>

³⁷⁶ Al-Ganad, Tawfeek, Muhammed al-Katheri, and Gregory D. Johnsen. "387 Days of Power: How al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City." (2020).

³⁷⁷ Wuhayshi imparted lessons of AQAP operations in Yemen to aqim. (2013, August 12). Retrieved January 12, 2022, from https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/08/wuhayshi_imparts_les.php

³⁷⁸ Al-Ganad, Tawfeek, Muhammed al-Katheri, and Gregory D. Johnsen. "387 Days of Power: How al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City." (2020).

³⁷⁹ Interview with Badr Kalshat, 16 November 2019, Al Ghaydah

Hadramawt and is reminiscent of the religio-tribal cooperation taking place in Wadi Hadramawt.



The Department of Al Hisba (religious police) in Mukalla, an image taken in 2015 and circulating on the internet.

In the third stage of AQAP's control of Mukalla and Shihr, the organization attempted to gain external credibility as a sovereign entity. It focused on the development of the commercial sector and attempted to negotiate a profit-sharing agreement regarding oil installations in the area with the Yemeni government.³⁸⁰ It kept the port of Mukalla, a main source of tax revenue, operational and sought recognition by foreign and

³⁸⁰ Al-Ganad, Tawfeek, Muhammed al-Katheri, and Gregory D. Johnsen. "387 Days of Power: How al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City." (2020).

international NGOs active in Yemen at the time. In this period, leaders of AQAP began to move freely around the area, which resulted in a number of drone strikes, including that on Nasser al Wuhayshi, a leader of the organization who was killed in the open, in a stark contrast to the behavior usually expected of a wanted leader of a terrorist organization. This suggests that AQAP either felt completely sure of its security apparatus or that it enjoyed a false sense of security in believing it was beginning to be recognized as a state-like entity. The Wuhayshi drone strike resulted in the execution of two Saudi citizens accused of providing the coordinates of Wuhayshi's location, but overall the levels of violence inflicted on the civilian population during the reign of AQAP were very low – in fact available open source data suggests that number of individuals killed in drone strikes was significantly higher than the number of civilians killed by AQAP.

The coordinated withdrawal of AQAP's forces at the end of its reign also suggests that the organization matured and instead of focusing on spectacular self-sacrificial attacks chose to disperse its forces in the countryside. It has been reported that the withdrawal from Mukalla and Shihr was negotiated by the local clerics and other authorities³⁸¹, which points to the organization's capacity for negotiation and cooperation. The period of AQAP's rule is seen by those with direct involvement on the side of the international NGOs as a wasted opportunity to build an alternative governance structure under the conditions of a civil war, one which was from the beginning hampered by the association of the governing group with the Al Qaeda brand.³⁸²

4.1. External relations

Following their establishment as the sovereign force in the two towns and its surroundings, AQAP began to look outwards and sought to elicit the cooperation of international organizations in the development of the areas under their control. In order to do so, AQAP approached at least OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination

³⁸¹ "Arab Coalition Enters AQAP Stronghold in Port City of Mukalla, Yemen." *FDD's Long War Journal*, 25 Apr. 2016, www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/04/arab-coalition-enters-aqap-stronghold-in-port-city-of-mukalla-yemen.php.

³⁸² Interview with Rawan Shaif, 5 March 2019, London

of Humanitarian Affairs) and Oxfam offices in Sana'a.³⁸³ The written messages invited these organizations to Mukalla and asked them to establish educational programs in the city. While bewildering to many of the western employees of these organizations, AQAP did what they thought a sovereign should be entitled to and what they have seen the state do for decades. While it is difficult to map the organizations AQAP contacted and the stage which the cooperation between these organizations and AQAP reached, there is at least one international organization which accepted the invitation and established presence in Mukalla.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an international humanitarian organization providing medical services in conflict zones. The roots of the relationship between MSF and AQAP date to 2011 when the organization provided medical services in Abyan. There, its mobile clinics did not differentiate between the different parties to the conflicts and provided medical treatment to all who needed it. Although some of the patients would point out the injured AQAP fighters to the staff, official communication between the two organizations was taking place through an intermediary, who was an associate of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The two organizations established a respectful and professional relationship, MSF provided the organization with medical equipment and therefore it was not surprising when MSF received an invitation to establish presence in Mukalla.³⁸⁴ However, working through an intermediary and operating on territory controlled by the organization are very different and the MSF leadership did not want to allow direct MSF involvement in Mukalla.

Following damage to Mukalla by Cyclone Chapala, leadership of the MSF was finally convinced to allow the dispatch of a team to the city. One of the arguments for the dispatch of the team was that the continued safety of MSF staff in Aden, where AQAP also maintained some presence, was dependent on this decision. The team comprised of a small group of MSF staff under the leadership of a French - Moroccan man. The rest of the team comprised of Yemeni citizens, chosen with emphasis on regional and tribal origin and making sure that none of them had families in the areas under the

³⁸³ *ibid*

³⁸⁴ Confidential interview with MSF official directly involved in the operation, October 2019, Beirut

control of AQAP for security reasons.³⁸⁵ The team in Mukalla was under close supervision of AQAP throughout and avoided using cellular phones out of the fear of being mistaken for militants and targeted in a drone strike. AQAP minders accompanied MSF staff both for the safety of the organization and the MSF staff as well as to act as enforcers in dealings with the population. In one incident, a driver refused to provide services to the MSF unless he was paid more money, to which AQAP responded by making the man kneel and pretending to prepare to execute him on the spot. After an express request of the MSF staff, the man was simply dragged away and no harm was done to him.³⁸⁶

The relationship between the two organizations only strengthened in Mukalla, given the incident-free stay of the MSF staff in the city. After AQAP was driven out of Mukalla by the Saudi-led coalition in April 2016, it continued to work with MSF in Aden. MSF would, in compliance with its mandate, again provide AQAP with medical supplies. The composition of the supplies requested, especially anesthetics and other drugs commonly used in the operating theater, indicated that AQAP had the capacity to conduct surgery, which surprised the MSF staff. AQAP also suggested that it had access to advanced medical apparatus, such as mechanical ventilation,³⁸⁷ indicating access to proper medical facilities. It is possible the AQAP was combining the services and material provided by several different organizations in order to provide medical services to its fighters and obscure their location and capabilities.

Given their success in running Mukalla and the surrounding areas, AQAP contemplated a territorial expansion to the neighbouring province of Al Mahra.³⁸⁸ An informant who was accompanying a relative on a trip to Mukalla for medical treatment was informed of this intention by AQAP fighters he met in the hospital. An expansion to Al Mahra would however differ significantly from taking over Mukalla, as Al Mahra has a very strong tribal culture and the leadership of its cities is still in the hands of the tribes. As such, an incursion would be seen as a violation of a specific tribe's rights and elicit an adequate

³⁸⁵ ditto

³⁸⁶ ditto

³⁸⁷ ditto

³⁸⁸ Interview with Anwar Kalshat, 2 July 2018, Aurangabad

response. Ali al Hureizi, former deputy governor of the province and commander of the Border Guard confirms that he was approached AQAP and eventually closed a deal under which the organization would not be allowed to enter Al Mahra overtly, recruit in the province or commit any actions that could justify an invasion of the province. In return, the tribal forces would not look for and arrest AQAP members in the province and they would not hamper their smuggling operations.³⁸⁹ This again suggest an ability of AQAP to organize themselves, evaluate the position and think strategically, in a contrast with the stereotypical image of an extremist militant.

The desire to cooperate with foreign bodies is understandable as such cooperation brings tangible benefits to the population and thus increases the popularity of the entity in charge of a location. In another sense, a cooperation between INGOs and a governing entity also signals to the local population the recognition of said entity and its validation as a sovereign partner. The specific incidents described above also suggest an institutional memory of AQAP, which can use a relationship established in another location, in this case Abyan, and years later re-establish it in Mukalla, suggesting the retention of governing ability even during the years in which AQAP holds no territory.

4.2. Conducting business in Mukalla

AQAP, upon its takeover of Mukalla and Shihr, focused its effort of keeping the economy functional, improving infrastructure and making sure that residents of the areas under their control retain their jobs. In doing so, AQAP could prove to the local population that it can be an effective ruler, limit the potential for revolt against their rule and collect taxes while doing so. After raiding the Central Bank branch in Mukalla³⁹⁰, the organization was not cash poor, although it has only been speculated as to where these funds ended up and there is no evidence that they were used for the needs of the local population.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Badr Kalshat, 16 November 2019, Al Ghaydah

³⁹⁰ Al-Ganad, Tawfeek, Muhammed al-Katheri, and Gregory D. Johnsen. "387 Days of Power: How al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City." (2020).

Businesses in the area controlled by AQAP were taxed³⁹¹ and these taxes used exclusively by the new local administration, with no funds being transferred to the central state or any other party.³⁹² While these funds were welcome, the most appealing resources in Hadramawt are the port of Mukalla and the oil which flows through the terminals on the coast. Some estimates put AQAP's daily income from the port at 2 million USD,³⁹³ but this number is likely a vast exaggeration or perhaps the total value of goods which on average pass through the port of Mukalla. Regardless of the exact figure, it can be safely assumed that the collection of taxes on these goods was very lucrative and therefore a priority for the new administration.

An analysis of a data set containing the volume of traffic in the port of Mukalla prior to the takeover by AQAP and during their reign show that the amount of traffic increased after the takeover, with a period of low traffic between April and June 2015. It can be assumed that during this time, shipping companies chose different ports and routes before negotiating with the new ruling authority and feeling reassured enough to return to the port. The increased risk of conducting business in a location dominated by a militant group was compensated for by the lowering of fees for the use of the port, which likely also made the port more attractive to shippers.³⁹⁴ The data shows that after the expulsion of AQAP from the area, the volume of traffic remained constant, with the same ships frequenting the port as they did during AQAP's reign, thus suggesting that AQAP intertwined itself into the local business structures rather than replacing them altogether.

AQAP used its control of the territory for legitimate tax and port fee extraction, but it also likely involved itself in illicit activities. For example, some media outlets asserted³⁹⁵ that weapons were being smuggled to Yemen via AQAP-held coast of Hadramawt. This

³⁹¹ U.S. Department of the Treasury. 13 Aug. 2018, web.archive.org/web/20180824115405/www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/jl0601.aspx.

³⁹² Al-Ganad, Tawfeek, Muhammed al-Katheri, and Gregory D. Johnsen. "387 Days of Power: How al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City." (2020).

³⁹³ Al-Ganad, Tawfeek, Muhammed al-Katheri, and Gregory D. Johnsen. "387 Days of Power: How al-Qaeda Seized, Held and Ultimately Lost a Yemeni City." (2020).

³⁹⁴ A presentation given at the Yemen Exchange in Beirut, held under the Chatham House rule.

³⁹⁵ Al Batati, Saeed. "Houthi Weapon-Smuggling Ring Reveals Information about Routes, Techniques." *Arab News*, 14 Aug. 2022, www.arabnews.com/node/2142666/middle-east.

seems plausible as at the time when AQAP held Mukalla and Shihr, there was an official, formalized process in place for the inspection of any ships heading to Hodeidah, Mokha and Seif (even though Mokha and Seif were not functional at that time), but there was no official provision regarding the inspection of ships bound for Mukalla.³⁹⁶ It also seems likely, although there is understandably no evidence proving it, that the deal struck between Al Hureizi and AQAP also included an understanding on the honoring of smuggling routes as both parties could only benefit from the mutual recognition of each other's claims.

4.3. Legacy in Hadramawt

Given the utility of armed groups and the social conditions in Hadramawt, the expulsion of AQAP from the coast could not mean the eradication of the group from the fabric of the Hadrami society. This is made even more apparent when considering the type of governance AQAP implemented in Mukalla and Shihr, one where responsibility for the administration of the territory was shared between themselves and the local elites. While some of the members of the Hadramawt Domestic Council, also known locally as Majlis Al Ahlí, fled following the removal of AQAP forces from the city, there is still a great number of individuals who cooperated with AQAP and enjoyed some of the benefits of this cooperation.³⁹⁷

Yet others moved back to the rural areas where they resumed the lives they previously lived, but only after seeing the effectivity of militant governance and no doubt establishing new connections with the AQAP fighters. Apart from the core cadre of fighters surrounding the leader and plotting external operations, the organization survives in the form of a wide network of dormant members and sympathizers. The survival of the organization is all but guaranteed for as long as the underlying grievances and inequalities in the Hadrami society persist. The dormant individuals or small groups generally do not draw attention to themselves as they continue to live their

³⁹⁶ Interview with Michael Heller Chu, via Facebook Messenger, 11 October 2019.

³⁹⁷ Interview with Saleh Al Batati, 15 October 2019, London

ordinary lives. It is with a foreign impulse that their presence can be detected and analyzed.

One of such impulses took place in the town of Shibam in Wadi Hadramawt in September 2019. This area was long secured by the forces of the 1st Military District loyal to Ali Mohsen with some presence of the Hadrami Elite Forces. Throughout 2019, it was rumored that Hadrami Elite Forces would attempt to push the 1st Military District out of the area because of its connections to the Islah party.³⁹⁸ When the Hadrami Elite Forces established a quasi-police station within the town of Shibam (they previously only manned checkpoints), this station was shortly thereafter attacked by an explosive attached to a motorcycle.³⁹⁹ The attack injured one member of the force, but more significantly it was timed to go off around the time of the conclusion of the fajr prayer.

The strength of the explosive (judged by the limited damage caused despite the explosion taking place in a densely populated area) and the timing suggest that rather than inflicting the maximum possible damage, this attack was a signal to the local community that the presence of any outside police authority will not be tolerated and a warning against cooperation with any such authority. This elicited a strong reaction from the new force, which the following day raided a house in the town of Hawta near Shibam, allegedly chased away “AQAP loyalists” and leveled the house with the aid of explosives.⁴⁰⁰ Given the overwhelming force of the UAE-aligned force, it is difficult to justify the failure of this operation, where not a single AQAP member was captured or killed.

As the Hadrami Elite Forces are recruited from the local tribes and are acquainted with the local customs and security situation, it could be speculated that both attacks were an extension of the tribal posturing and “pretend” violence which is not intended to lead to deaths as this could elicit the same response and lead to a series of retaliatory attacks. The tribal custom was isolated from the rest of the tribal law and applied to a

³⁹⁸ Interview with Muhammad bin Dohry, 2 November 2018, London

³⁹⁹ Interview with Naji Al Zaidi, 25 October 2019, Beirut

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid*

completely new situation, one where instead of two tribal units, a quasi-military unit needed to demarcate its virtual “territory” with a non-state non-tribal armed group.

The compliance of Mukalla’s and Shihr’s citizens was secured by the threat of physical force, but the strength of AQAP was not overwhelming, and the number of its fighters alleged to reside in the area could be easily matched by fighters from several tribes or a tribal confederation. AQAP managed to secure the compliance of the residents by providing what the state ordinarily should – security, judicial services, construction and repair of public projects, oil and electricity. Following the expulsion of AQAP from the area, the reliability of the provision of these services deteriorated and led to a sense of longing for the “good old times” among Mukalla’s residents.⁴⁰¹

5. Conclusion

Militancy and religious extremism, often labelled terrorism, are what most foreigners associate with Yemen. The meaning of these terms is however very different to the international and domestic audiences, for whom a view of the acts of these groups is not reduced to brutal violence committed against innocent population. The domestic audience sees members of these groups as their neighbours and fellow tribesmen, men who usually never left Yemen or even the province from which they originate. How could they be held responsible for attacks against civilian infrastructure in Europe? To the local audience, this connection makes no sense.

What does make sense however are the methods these men deploy when operating in Yemen. Hostage taking, purely a criminal act for the western audience, is understood as a political tool rooted in tribal culture by the local audience. To take a hostage and treat them well can even be seen as an honorable act, one where the strength and at the same time the kindness of the kidnapper are both on display. Militant groups, especially Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, speak the social language of their homeland and therefore their perception by the local residents can never be black-and-white, they must be seen and understood in the wider context of the Yemeni society.

⁴⁰¹ Interview with Saleh Al Batati, 15 October 2019, London

Militant groups are immensely useful to a number of parties, which guarantees their long-term survival in Yemen. For the government, they provide a proof of the need for continued foreign assistance to the central government as without it, the state could be used as a safe haven from which attacks could be plotted while these organizations can also conduct operations of behalf of the government, fighting its enemies while the state gets to save face and even benefit from coming to the aid of the attacked party. The militant organizations fulfil a similar function to a range of other actors in the Yemeni society, fighting alongside or on behalf of tribes and tribal confederations, conducting operations against business rivals or intimidating oil companies and creating the need for local security companies.

The demand for these organizations is therefore obvious and there is no shortage in supply of willing cadres. Given the social conditions in the Hadrami society and especially its rigid class system which provides many with very little merit-based opportunities for social advancement, joining of a militant organization is one of the avenues which can be used to shed the constraints of the traditional society and feel a sense of achievement. The recent history of land grabs and confiscation of land from those to whom it was given during the times of the DPRY then creates additional grievances which can be exploited by the militant organizations when looking to recruit new members. Both of these elements, coupled with general poverty, funnel individuals into the Salafi mosques and educational institutions which provide both a wide base of dormant support and the first stage of vetting for new members.

At times, militant organizations took over territory, especially in Abyan, but they rarely stayed long enough to prove whether they possessed the capacity to administer it. In the past, such takeovers were accompanied by the implementation of strict rules and draconic punishments intended to intimidate the residents, but they often turned these residents against the militants and complicated their tenure in charge. These lessons were understood by the leadership of AQAP who avoided their past mistakes when taking over Mukalla and Shihr on the Hadrami coast, where they managed to stay in power for 387 days, before negotiating a withdrawal from the area. This period is not seen as any worse than the governance provided by the central state, in fact many who

initially feared life under the reign of the militant organization came to accept it and now evaluate it as quite effective. Militant administration therefore emerged as a potential fourth governance structure, accompanying that of the state, tribes and religious elites.

Given the association of the group ruling Mukalla and Shihr with Al Qaeda and the past crimes of Al Qaeda committed across the globe, it became apparent that such governance would never be allowed. The association with the brand name of Al Qaeda therefore aided the group in taking over the territory, but ultimately proved to be detrimental to their goals as they drew too much international attention and it was only a matter of time before they would be expelled from the coast. AQAP quietly slipped back into dormancy and obscurity and given that none of the underlying social and political conditions changed, it is bound to resurface when the winds change and the need for alternative governance structures emerges again.

CONCLUSION

The hybrid governance model prevalent in Hadramawt relies on three concurrent governance structures, each with its own mechanics of operation, processes, and rituals. These structures, which can be thought of as state, tribal and religious, carry different weight in different locations and situations and usually complement each other. The recent experience of a militant nonstate group taking over territory and then administering it, while attempting to establish relations with foreign NGOs and INGOs suggest the possible existence of a fourth stream of governance, but this isolated incident can also be viewed as the replacement of the state as a ruling authority by a group of similar qualities and basing its legitimacy on similar tools, namely the ability to inflict considerable damage in specific locations and times, without the ability to control the entire state in the long term.

Such mode of governance may give the impression of the territory of Hadramawt being under-government or ungoverned at all, but incidents which give rise to such thoughts are rather the expression of the competition between the various governance structures and their agents who each promote their own agenda. For an outsider, and even for many who were born into this system of governance, it is difficult to understand and decipher all the elements comprising it. The number of moving parts, informal arrangements and unspoken rules of conduct obscure the processes taking place, with even the overt dealings between various parties needing to be seen in their full context and analyzed against the background of the Hadrami environment and custom.

What is most needed in order to begin to understand the mechanics of self-ordering of the Hadrami society is the stripping of all layers of symbolism and signaling and exploring the interactions between all entities as exchanges in a game of survival and prominence. While the Hadrami governance system relies on a number of social norms and customs which are seemingly unbreakable, even unbendable, the recent rationalization of the relationship between various parties, again often taking place behind the façade of tradition and rigidity, proves that the system is indeed open to being altered if such alterations suit those with the power to make them accepted by the

society. Frequently, it is easier to make these changes covertly, but publicly deny their existence.

Once we acknowledge the rational nature of the interaction of all entities in Hadramawt and the overwhelming power of the social elites in the province, we can begin to understand the rigidity of the social and political system in the province. The system is rigid because it is not in the interest of the groups which have the power to change it and in doing so, upset the status quo. The most powerful group in the province, the sada, have every incentive to keep Hadramawt and especially Wadi Hadramawt as close to its traditional appearance and operation as possible. While allowing for marginal progress in order to appease the population in the area and present a certain look, they continue to use the area as a base of their legitimacy, which can then be exchanged for prosperity and tangible goods in the diaspora.

The control exercised by the elites over the province relies both on physical and abstract elements. On the physical fronts, the religious and tribal elites control virtually all land in the province, thus dominating both the fields of agriculture and illicit trade. They can use their land to allow or deny access to desirable plots and in doing so, coerce the population into following their wishes and directives. By being able to use their land as a resource in illicit trade connecting the maritime routes with the rich states of the Arabian Peninsula, they are given the opportunity to obtain astronomical funds by the standards of the majority of Hadramawt's population and then use these funds to make their grasp over the population of the province even stronger.

Control of land and by extension control of the population of the province then makes the elites likely to be incorporated into the patronage system through which the Yemeni government ruled the country before the onset of the civil war in 2014. This again strengthens their position and further solidifies their position at the helm of the Hadrami society. In addition to land used for agriculture and illicit trade, areas of folk importance have become monopolized by the sada and their tribal allies. Among the most important of these are the grave of the Muhajir near the town of Seyiun, a visit to which is now impossible without passing through a Sufi madrasa, and the location of the alleged grave of the pre-Islamic Prophet Hud. The annual festivals and other rituals connected

to these locations are now impossible to attend without at least giving the appearance of supporting the Sufi doctrine and the Ba 'Alewi clan which represents it in Hadramawt.

Many of the processes taking place in the province are not as physical and tangible as the ownership and control of land. Among these is the insistence on the application of the kafa'a principle of marital equivalence, which as understood by the Ba 'Alewis eliminates the possibility of intermarriage between sada females and non-sada males. The principle has a number of interpretations, with few being as limiting as the Hadrami one - the application of this version of the kafa'a guarantees the continued existence of an exclusive group which refuses to allow others to become its members. The exclusivity of this group is further signaled through education and the cultural sphere, where the domination of the sada translates into only one account of Hadrami history being seen as correct and indeed only one being presented to the public. With ownership of printing presses, bookshops and the subsidization of books, the sada have managed to silence most critics in the homeland.

This circle of academic and cultural domination is further spurred on by the involvement of foreign academics, whose first point of contact is usually in the diaspora, where those capable of providing contacts needed for research in Hadramawt are commonly members of the sada, as it is the only social class with a coordinated plan of intra-class cooperation in various international locations. From there, these academics and researchers rely on the sada for access and comfort, interview members of the sada class and when they do get an opportunity to interview others, it is in meetings arranged by the sada, therefore it is unlikely that the person being interviewed would challenge the sada account of Hadrami history. The presence of foreigners in the province is then used as a symbol of the privileged position of the sada and the correctness of their version of the Hadrami history.

As religion comprises part of the identity of every Hadrami resident, including the one man interviewed for this dissertation whose insistence on being an atheist was perhaps the biggest part of his identity, it naturally plays a role in the socio-political environment of the province. For the sada, their descent and religious legitimacy are the most significant commodity, one they are willing to lend to armed tribes in return for support

and security. Behind closed doors, the Ba 'Alewi sada cooperate with the other group of Hashemite descent in Yemen, that is the Zaydi sada located primarily in the province of Sa'ada. This cooperation serves to increase the chances of prominence and prosperity of both groups and extends from the symbolic and textual worlds to the very real issue of smuggling and support for the Houthi sect during the ongoing civil war.

The other significant religious conflict takes place between the Sufis and the Salafis. This conflict embodies the use of labels in Hadramawt and Yemen in general as a uniting banner of a group of people whose shared quality is either their social dominance or oppression. It is without a surprise that the Sufi-leaning individuals are recruited from the former and current land owners, while the Salafis are often people who benefited from the Agrarian Reform and the reversal of which saw them plummet back into poverty. As political partisanship in Hadramawt is nominal and elected officials do not have the ability to change the life in the province in a meaningful way, the stance against poverty and oppression is channeled through religious affiliation.

The Salafi movement in Hadramawt then serves two purposes. For the sada, it is a welcome adversary, as the comparative weakness of the Salafis makes them an excellent example of what the life of the "others" looks like, without having the potential to challenge the status quo. For the central government, at least up to the point when it could get involved in political games, it was a useful tool which could be used to prevent Wadi Hadramawt from becoming fully dominated by the sada and essentially turning into a hawta. As in Sa'ada, the involvement of the Salafis in religious life of Hadramawt gave the government an opportunity to partially balance the influence of a potentially formidable adversary.

Despite the public discourse in Hadramawt being controlled by one social group, there are still avenues though which social issues can be discussed, and progress can be achieved. Historical precedent shows that in the diaspora, issues can be isolated from the provincial context and addressed without direct threat to anyone's livelihood, thus allowing for a more free and open discussion. The diaspora also plays a significant role in the cooperation of the social classes as at exceptional moments of crises, whether it be droughts, famines or civil wars, the classes must come together and cooperate in

order to stand a chance within an already established social and political system abroad. Experience however shows that with the stabilization of the situation of the Hadrami community in a given location, these bonds begin to fracture, and the community realigns according to class affiliation again.

Even as this process takes place however, not all friendships and connections evaporate. Some survive and serve as a basis for attempts at closer cooperation between the classes in the homeland. There, this is simultaneously taking place already, but not always because of the connections made in the diaspora. With globalization taking place in Hadramawt as it does anywhere else and with the rising need for capable specialists comes increased willingness to engage gifted individuals from other social groups. These individuals then serve as bridges between the various social classes and enable increased cooperation between them on the political stage.

This cooperation takes place particularly between the sada and the tribal class, which has since the downfall of the Socialist regime in the South been going through a revival. Despite the efforts of the authorities of the PDRY at eradicating tribalism, this form of self-organization remained within the society. As such, it could have been used by the leadership of united Yemen in order to rule through the tribes, as they have previously done in the northern territories. However, the hostility of the traditional Hadrami tribes towards the North made this unlikely and led to the establishment of a concept of „government sheikhs“, men of some popular support who were ready to trade this support for a monthly stipend.

The establishment of this inauthentic sub-class created temporary chaos within the tribal class, but over time the influence of these sheikhs waned. With this challenge behind them, the tribesmen began to reclaim their position, usually by taking influence away from the state and its authorities. Naturally, conflicts erupted, especially when access to natural resources and derivation of benefits from resources found on tribal territories was concerned. The problems faced by the state authorities in the north, where they had to deal with the Houthi threat, led to the establishment of an even stronger bond between the sada and the qabail and the public acknowledgement of the existence of this alliance.

Each of the three governance structures in Hadramawt has a need for enforcement by proxy. While for the sada any connection to violence is out of the question, the state and the qabail class might choose to shield their involvement in certain cases as well. This explains the continued prominence of militant nonstate groups which are hosted by those in control of territory and in return used by them. The most politically involved group in Yemen is Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which at times outgrew its position as a tool of enforcement and established itself as a sovereign ruler of a territory. After initial attempts in Ja'ar and Zinjibar, the group managed to rule over Mukalla and Shihr in Hadramawt for over a year at the beginning of the ongoing civil war.

This exceptional moment highlighted the difference in perceptions of militant nonstate groups between Yemen and the West. The local perception, and supposedly also the self-perception of the group, was that of a sovereign ruler in legitimate possession and control of a territory and working with tribal and religious allies, in effect replacing the state as the third pillar of governance in the area. However, owing to the reputation and understanding of the group abroad, this governance experiment abruptly ended and the position of AQAP was again filled by a „state“, this time embodied by the allies of the coalition of Arab states waging war on the Houthis.

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

26.2.2020 Awadh Ally Al Tamimi, community leader, Dar es Salaam
25.2.2020 Amir Ali bin Zoo'a Al Nahdi, leader of the Nahdi tribe, Dar es Salaam
25.2.2020 Ahmed Magdy, community leader, Dar es Salaam
24.2.2020 Mansour bin Thabit Al Nahdi, community leader, Dar es Salaam
24.2.2020 Faraj Al Nahdi, amateur historian, Dar es Salaam
23.2.2020 Ahmed Al Tamimi, leader of the Tamimi tribe, Dar es Salaam
23.2.2020 Abdussalam Abdullah Al Tamimi, community leader, Dar es Salaam
23.2.2020 Awadh Ally Al Tamimi, community leader, Dar es Salaam
15.2.2020 Karama Said Al Tamimi, leader of the Tamimi tribe, Mombasa
15.2.2020 Fahmi Mansour Al Tamimi, community leader, Mombasa
12.2.2020 Karama Yaslim Al Tamimi, community leader, Mombasa
6.2.2020 Adil Al Nahdi, charity worker, London
24.1.2020 Alexis De Vivenot, explorer and Arabist, Cambridge
28.11.2019 Saleh Alnoud, expatriate, London
16.11.2019 former intelligence chief – confidential interview, Al Ghaydah, Yemen
16.11.2019 tribal sheikhs, Al Ghaydah, Yemen
16.11.2019 Badr Kalshat, deputy governor of Al Mahra, Al Ghaydah, Yemen
14.11.2019 Rais Attamimi, university lecturer, Salalah, Oman
8.11.2019 Bashir Hagi, Mahri resistance organizer, London
26.10.2019 Yahya Sewari and Badr Sewari, news journalists, Beirut
26.10.2019 Eric Jeunot, former MSF worker in Yemen, Beirut
25.10.2019 Naji Al Zaidi, researcher, Beirut
22.10.2019 Rawan Shaif, OSINT researcher and journalist, Beirut
15.10.2019 Saleh Al Batati, news journalist, London
11.10.2019 Michael Heller Chu, UN official (via Facebook Messenger)
19.9.2019 Rafat al Akhali, former Minister of Youth and Education, Oxford
18.9.2019 Henry Thompson, UN official, Oxford
17.9.2019 Helen Lackner, researcher, Oxford
5.9.2019 Bernard Haykel, university lecturer, Vienna

5.9.2019 Luka Nevola, researcher, Vienna
23.7.2019 Thanos Petouris, researcher, London
11-13.7.2019, Said Baya'ashut, researcher and Museum archivist (via WhatsApp)
9.7.2019 Stephan Heidemann, specialist in rare coins (via email)
26.6.2019 Hazem Kandil, university lecturer, Cambridge
25.6.2019 Stephan Heidemann, specialist in rare coins (via email)
5.6.2019 Muhammad bin Dohry, author and educator, London
7.3.2019 Martin Allen, specialist in rare coins, Cambridge
5.3.2019 Rawan Shaif, OSINT researcher and journalist, London
12.2.2019 Emad Badi, researcher, London
21.11.2018 Noel Brehony, author and researcher, London
20.11.2018 Tarek Magerisi, author and researcher, London
17.11.2018 Michael Marcusa, researcher, Cambridge
14.11.2018 Martin Jerrett, UK Government official, London
2.11.2018 Muhammad bin Dohry, author and educator, London
2.7.2018 Anwar Kalshat, researcher and tribal leader, Aurangabad, India
1.7.2018 Anwar Kalshat, researcher and tribal leader, Aurangabad, India
2.5.2018 Alewi Al Kaff, archivist, Tarim
30.4.2018 Muhsin Hamid Ahmad Al Haddad, munsib of the Haddad hawta, Hawi
29.4.2018 Abdul Rahman Belfaqih, printing press owner, Tarim
26.4.2018 Shukri Ba Hubraysh, employee of Dar al Mustafa, Tarim
23.4.2018 Abdul Rahman Belfaqih, printing press owner, Tarim
22.4.2018 Zain Al Haddad, student and teacher at Dar al Mustafa, Tarim
22.4.2018 Ismail Al Khatib, library manager, Tarim
21.4.2018 Hassan al Barqi Al Kathiri, tribal historian, Al Ghurfah
21.4.2018 Aidaroos bin Abdullah Aidaroos, religious figure, Tarim
21.4.2018 Hussein Al Kaff, archivist, Seyiun
18.4.2018 Ja'afar Al Saqqaf, religious figure, Seyiun
18.4.2018 Abdul Rahman Hassan Al Saqqaf, Museum director, Seyiun
17.4.2018 Zain Al Haddad, student and teacher at Dar al Mustafa, Tarim

17.4.2018 Said Baya'ashut, researcher and Museum archivist, Seyiun

Interviews conducted jointly for the MSt thesis submitted in 2017 and this PhD thesis

15.12.2016 Saeed Kalshat, Al Ghaydah

15.12.2016 Saad Makhba, Al Ghaydah

12.12.2016 Muhammad Al Kaff, Tarim

12.12.2016 Zain Al Haddad, Tarim

10.12.2016 Fawzi Mahfudh bin Zablagh, Seyiun

10.12.2016 Fahmi Fararah, Seyiun

9.12.2016 Saleh Mullah Dawilah, Tarim

7.12.2016 Abdul Rahman Al Saqqaf, Seyiun

7.12.2016 Zain Al Haddad, Tarim

6.12.2016 Saeed Salim, Tarim

3.12.2016 Zaid Abdulrahman bin Yahya, Tarim

23.11.2016 Abdul Rahman Al Saqqaf, Seyiun

23.11.2016 Ali Anis Al Kaff, Seyiun

22.11.2016 Ismail Al Chattib, Tarim

21.11.2016 Ali Anis Al Kaff, Seyiun

19.11.2016 Abdulrahman Belfaqih, Tarim

19.11.2016 Zaid Abdulrahman bin Yahya, Tarim

16.11.2016 Abdulrahman Belfaqih and Zaid Abdulrahman bin Yahya, Tarim

2014 – Abdullah Al Jumaily and Abdulhameed Amer, Sana'a

Workshops using Chatham House rule attended

26.11.2019 Muhammad Ali Luqman Academic Forum, London

20 – 27.10.2019 Yemen Exchange, Beirut

9.2019 Origins of the Houthi Power, Vienna

2.2018 Yemeni tribes, Vienna

Archives consulted

British Library, London

St. Anthony's Middle East Centre, Oxford

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archive, Prague

Al Ahqaaf Archive, Tarim

Al Kaff Archive, Seyiun

Seyiun Museum Archive, Seyiun

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