



## Speaking above Yemenis: a reading beyond the tyranny of experts

Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict, by Marieke Brandt, London, Hurst, 2017, 480 pp., \$45.00. ISBN: 9781849046466.; Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia, by Ginny Hill, London, Hurst, 2017, 320 pp., \$29.95. ISBN: 9780190842369.; Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1968, by Asher Orkaby, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, 312 pp., \$27.95. ISBN: 9780190618476.; Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State, by Helen Lackner, London, Saqi Books, 2017, 342 pp., \$24.95. ISBN: 9780863561931.; Yemen and the World: Beyond Insecurity, by Laurent Bonnefoy, London, Hurst, 2018, 256 pp., \$49.95. ISBN: 9781849049665.; Shari'a Scripts: A Historical Anthropology, by Brinkley Messick, New York, Columbia University Press, 2018, 536 pp., \$70.00. ISBN: 9780231178747.; Islands of Heritage: Conservation and Transformation in Yemen, by Nathalie Peutz, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2018, 368 pp., \$30.00. ISBN: 9781503606395.

Isa Blumi

To cite this article: Isa Blumi (2021) Speaking above Yemenis: a reading beyond the tyranny of experts, *Global Intellectual History*, 6:6, 990-1014, DOI: [10.1080/23801883.2019.1699332](https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2019.1699332)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23801883.2019.1699332>



© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 11 Dec 2019.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1909



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data 

---

## Speaking above Yemenis: a reading beyond the tyranny of experts

Isa Blumi

Department of Asian, Middle Eastern, and Turkish Studies, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

**Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict**, by Marieke Brandt, London, Hurst, 2017, 480 pp., \$45.00. ISBN: 9781849046466.

**Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia**, by Ginny Hill, London, Hurst, 2017, 320 pp., \$29.95. ISBN: 9780190842369.

**Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1968**, by Asher Orkaby, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, 312 pp., \$27.95. ISBN: 9780190618476.

**Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State**, by Helen Lackner, London, Saqi Books, 2017, 342 pp., \$24.95. ISBN: 9780863561931.

**Yemen and the World: Beyond Insecurity**, by Laurent Bonnefoy, London, Hurst, 2018, 256 pp., \$49.95. ISBN: 9781849049665.

**Shari'a Scripts: A Historical Anthropology**, by Brinkley Messick, New York, Columbia University Press, 2018, 536 pp., \$70.00. ISBN: 9780231178747.



**Islands of Heritage: Conservation and Transformation in Yemen**, by Nathalie Peutz, Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2018, 368 pp., \$30.00. ISBN: 9781503606395.

### 1. Introduction

Although rarely making the headlines, concerned employees of international organizations privately admit that since March 2015, Yemen has been the world's worst humanitarian disaster.<sup>1</sup> Year by year the situation gets worse as a coalition of financially-strapped regional powers and their US and UK facilitators continue a siege of the entirety of the North of the country while fighting it out among themselves over control of the resource-rich South. The result of this multipolar war of attrition is that upwards of 18 million Yemenis face starvation and disease.

Under the cover of a media silence that disregards the warnings of health providers, more than 63,000 children living in the besieged northwest of the country died in 2016 alone (the last year UNICEF dared to count). With no visits from Hollywood movie stars to touch the charitable hearts of the First World public, few know that, since the

---

**CONTACT** Isa Blumi  [isa.blumi@su.se](mailto:isa.blumi@su.se)  Department of Asian, Middle Eastern, and Turkish Studies, Stockholm University, SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2019 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

beginning of 2017, over a million have been infected by cholera. More up-to-date approximations are even more horrific.<sup>2</sup>

How will historians a generation or two from now write about this war on Yemen? Will there be any interest in inspecting more deeply what happened, why, and under whose watch such a crime was committed? Or will future historians resort to repeating the dominant frames used to characterize (or ignore) this war on Yemen used today?

No doubt those considering a deeper look will first consult the media's archives. What they will be surprised to see, perhaps, is how much this disaster in Yemen has been kept out of the daily news. By all accounts, those committing hundreds of billions of dollars to a war on Yemenis would prefer that little to no attention be spent on its atrocities. Corporate media have been happy to oblige.<sup>3</sup>

Trying to answer why the images of emaciated children and the upwards of 18 million civilians threatened by starvation are not making headlines across the world could itself become the heart of any future study on Yemen's war. Such a task will require, however, moving beyond the security-centered, international relations' frames of analysis prevalent in the available scholarly literature today. Present-day scholars and experts whose salaries are paid by the very regimes imposing this war may prove unhelpful in explaining the journalistic omerta future historians will wish to study.<sup>4</sup>

The conventional narrative about the war unleashed by 'coalition' forces positions the US-led 'global community' as a benevolent agent simply aiming to reinstate the 'legitimate' presidency of one Abd-Rabbu Mansur Hadi for the sake of regional stability. Rarely highlighted any longer, this politically meek former vice president was the anointed partner to interests that, in reaction to uprisings in 2010–2011 against globalization, sought to suppress what is known as 'the Arab Spring' by imposing a reliable 'interim government.'<sup>5</sup> Appointed in 2012 as an alternative to the no longer useful Ali Abdullah Saleh (president since 1978) and a barrier to 'radical' populist groups pushing for the reversal of austerity policies, the Obama and May administrations gave Hadi the task of continuing Yemen's highly unpopular integration into the global economy that had been interrupted by those 2010–2011 'change' uprisings.

Mischaracterized as 'support' for America's imposed counter-revolutionary solution, most of those protesting in 2011 were willing to give the US-directed process a chance considering they faced treats of perpetual violence from various factions vulnerable to populist demands for radical change. The trouble proved to be that Hadi's actual mandate was to push even more aggressively the very 'structural adjustments' against which Yemen's people protested in the first place. The violence and economic destitution this interim 2012–2014 period produced is all but forgotten in 2019. Such amnesia is critical as it makes it possible today for think tank employees to insinuate that there was no justification for Hadi's removal from the seat of the Yemeni government after his interim two-year period ended in mid-2014.

While future readers of the extant analysis of Yemen will note that Hadi's arrest in late 2014 constitutes a 'coup' by 'Iranian-backed Houthi rebels,' rarely does the background to these events extend to acknowledging the justifications for the nation's collective outrage expressed against the IMF-austerity Hadi imposed. Indeed, if relying exclusively on the published material today, future historians will be strained to learn that Hadi's ready cooperation in the 2012–2014 period extended to implementing unpopular IMF and World Bank austerity programmes, tearing up previous leases benefiting UAE-based

companies and granting new ones to Saudi and Qatari companies instead. In availing Yemen's primary assets to reliable American business partners, Yemen proved equally safe from China, which had secured with the previous Saleh government access to the country's agriculture, oil/gas and fisheries assets. Worse still for many who had originally formed in 2010–2011 a cross-sectional alliance to reverse Yemen's economic liquidation, Hadi and his American/Saudi/Qatar benefactors gave free reign to armed groups linked to Muslim Brotherhood affiliates known as *Islah*. Partnering with trusted members of the US-trained special units in the Yemeni army, foreign fighters and local loyalists actively chased down and murdered Yemeni leaders hostile to the globalist project they and Hadi's government were charged to impose.<sup>6</sup>

In this respect, large numbers of Yemenis, be they in the North or South, recognized the US-backed Hadi project as a reactionary, neo-colonialist disaster that needed addressing. To those behind his arrest, a larger coalition of actors from across the political, socio-economic and regional spectrum who were willing to take up arms to steer Yemen back toward real reform, the objectives of the interim government were clearly servicing outsiders' interests. Selling off Yemen's future to benefit the US Embassy were grounds for termination on perfectly logical patriotic, moral, and/or legal lines. The problem is few of the vetted analyses produced today acknowledge that armed intervention by self-declared defenders of the 2011 'change' revolution as either justified or patriotic. This proves debilitating in today's scholarship and threatens to distort future historical inspections: millions of people, after all, have declared support for a revolution (September 21, 2014) that remains as vigilant in 2019, despite five years of war.

## 2. Yemen (re)presented

Future historians will discover that it is rare to come across any analysis acknowledging, let alone explaining, the huge popular support for the armed rebellion led to halt Hadi's ruinous economic 'reforms.' Never mentioned as such, the biased catch all references to 'the Houthi militias' as the ones behind 'the coup' actively erases the possibility that there are deeper and broader sources of legitimacy for those resisting what has since March 2015 become a US-facilitated war on Yemen. Indeed, future historians may be hard pressed to understand at all what motivates those engaged in this now almost five-year war if left with this crude binary of 'Houthi militias' vs. the 'legitimate government of Hadi.' Revealing, this misleading characterization is not for a lack of material.<sup>7</sup>

While the scholarship today largely ignores local Yemeni justifications for resistance, a brief investment in studying the statements made by various activists forming the alliances around the 'national salvation government' based in Sana'a throughout the war would reveal some intriguing characteristics. Firstly, from as far back as 2003, many of the key actors involved in the resistance against the American-directed coalition frame their organizational structure along old anti-imperialist, revolutionary lines. Calling their units 'popular revolutionary committees' that regularly meet hundreds of locally organized councils, they all explicitly characterize their struggle as one not based on religious sect, regional affiliation, clan attachment (tribe), or class loyalties. Theirs is a principled struggle, forming a 'national salvation government' that aims to reinstate an administration willing to fight for justice against capitalist exploitation and imperialism. These overt uses of old Cold War-era terminology to emphasize ecumenical solidarity aspire

to highlight the ideological origins of the leadership and their commitment to framing their struggle as part of a global one.<sup>8</sup>

They have remained so throughout the war. On 28 July 2016, for instance, the ever evolving conditions due to war led to the creation of a Supreme Political Council (al-Majlis al-Siyasi al-'Al'a'), one that would attempt to address the problems of governance in areas under daily bombardment. This council replaced the Al-Lajnah al-Thawriya, which operated under the banner 'intisaar iradah sha'ab' (Triumph of the People's Will) since it secured Sana'a from the corrupt Hadi state in late 2014. Emblematic of the technicalities of discourse adopted by those leading such a disparate but still, after 5 years, unified resistance, this body actually runs a government in Sana'a'. One would never know it reading the material published in the Western media and academy but there is a president named Mahdi al-Mashat who holds daily consultations with representative councils from the countryside as the 'revolutionary government of the Republic of Yemen' tries to pay salaries, hosts delegations from the international community, and even holds diplomatic negotiations throughout the world (when representatives can find a way to travel) in attempt to stop this war.



The inferences found throughout mainstream think tank material is that those producing such material are mere 'tribal militias' driven by religious 'fanaticism' that, on behalf of Iran, defy the world. As such, analysis completely misrepresents what kind of politics is going on inside besieged Northern Yemen. Such an internal perspective is no longer allowed space in the analysis on Yemen, where all the complicated political intrigues are focused on events in the South.<sup>9</sup> Odd, considering the emphasis by many experts on the need for careful differentiation of various actors who are fighting the Northern government based in Sana'a'. 'Salafist' groups, for instance, have long received special attention with scholars basing their entire reputation on arguing for avoiding sweeping generalizations about those fighting on behalf of the 'coalition.'<sup>10</sup> While it is an important gesture to not cluster Sunni Muslim factions in the web of associations with al-Qa'ida, ISIS, and 'Salafism' more generally, why the same Yemeni experts cannot extend such concern to those resisting the coalition is a question future historians will need to explore.

The National Salvation Government claiming authority over the Republic of Yemen since September 2014 is composed of the political coalition of AnsarAllah (NOT 'Houthis') and large numbers of people from most of the political parties in Yemen

prior to the war – Saleh’s General People’s Party (GPC), the southern separatists Hiraq, the Yemeni Ba’athist party, the Nasserists, Socialist, and Communist parties of Yemen.<sup>11</sup> Not one of the experts and their scholarly produced publications, let alone any media, concedes this coalition with a mention. Rather, the entity that has been able to organize resistance against US-led armies and air forces (even protecting Yemen’s coasts from illegal fishing boats) while also somehow maintain an approximation of a government that extends from managing Yemen’s Hudaydah port, trying to run hospitals, to attempting to keep a number of ministries operating, are simply ‘Houthis.’ The reference constituting a slur in rival party media since the 2000s means those experts dominating the discussion on Yemen are excessively partisan, refusing to recognize the complexity of that entity resisting a coalition of powerful global interests while eagerly demonstrating a will to differentiate between different self-declared takfiri groups all aiming to kill ‘Zaydi infidels.’<sup>12</sup>

In recognizing patterns of association certain actors in and out of Yemen make, and more importantly, the patterns of omitting possible alternative ways of referencing them, future historians may help begin to expose not only a residual colonial-era praxis in the discourses on Yemen (denying vilified or rebellious indigenous people the ability to speak for themselves), but also what is actually at stake in this war. No mere ‘civil war,’ future investigations into our present will invariably note that there are other factors at play even if the available literature makes discovering what these other factors are difficult to ordain. For one, the often very eloquent iterations of Yemeni solidarity with the larger world’s poor, disenfranchised, and colonized is never acknowledged.

The evocation, and often open display of 1960s and 1970s anti-colonialist images and themes by those in the north are not recognized for what they are. In the many public demonstrations that attract hundreds of thousands to North Yemen’s city streets, participants regularly draw parallels between their fight with previous struggles. They openly display pictures of Che Guevara next to those of national heroes of socialist merit like former president Ibrahim Hamdi (murdered in 1977) while waving placards evoking the common struggle among the ‘revolutionary’ peoples of Bolivia and Palestine, for example. In other words, those millions under siege today, many chanting ‘God is Great, Death to America, Death to Israel ...,’ a slogan that first took its public place when the US invaded Iraq in 2003, also embrace the link of their struggle against global finance capitalism and imperialism.

And yet, none of the recent scholarship will countenance giving Yemenis the chance to share their message to the larger world, let alone acknowledge that they have made this claim. When mentioned, it is only their slogans decrying the United States, Jews, and Israel which are described, references exclusively tailored to frighten the outside world and disqualify those evoking them. Even when scholars did acknowledge that the intellectual roots of this resistance extended to demanding rights for people in face of the ‘political and economic empowerment of a small elite that served as the northern mainstay of the republican order’ after 2004, these same demands were only cynically ‘dusted off’ when deemed politically useful to those rebelling against the US-imposed Hadi government order after 2012.<sup>13</sup> Why the hesitance to at least give voice to those hundreds of thousands showing up for rallies in Sana’a’ to show solidarity to the Palestinians under siege, to Syria, or the peoples of Venezuela/Chile/Bolivia? This will require deep future investigation.

Future historians should identify the trend of caricaturing the imperially convenient party and then make sure not to replicate it. It is a contemporary gesture of elitist dismissal

of millions who do not deserve a place in history. It is also an attempt to imply a ‘causation’ that designates a unitary groups responsible’ – ‘the Houthis’ – for the violence (and thus deserving of violent suppression).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one could argue that this labelling constitutes a residual orientalism. To (re)present the violence in the country as lingering pathologies long extinguished by ‘modernity’ elsewhere, the use of ‘Houthis’ reaches for old colonial-era tropes about the resilient patterns of social exchange found in ‘traditional’ societies throughout the non-European world. A classic sociological trope originally mobilized by Clifford Geertz or Ernest Gellner (referencing Ibn Khaldun), the suggestion was that the Middle East faced a timeless battle between the Arab ‘tribes’ and the civilized urban king, whose twentieth century equivalent, in Yemen at least, is the secular ‘republic.’ Future students of Yemen’s present disaster should appreciate the extent to which even Middle Eastern Studies has gone beyond such tropes. Once realized, it is possible to then value how those claiming exclusive knowledge about Yemen today are refusing to consider the consequences of their retrograde mobilization of the very same tropes – primordial associations linked to ‘tribes,’ ‘sects,’ or ‘personalities’” – that in 2019 are impossible to evoke any longer in the larger academy.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. The echo chamber of global power: a state of the art in Yemeni studies

To some powerful, and rarely explicitly mentioned interests, the war in Yemen is of such global significance that how it is represented warrants extra strategic care. The obvious importance of keeping media coverage shallow, never fully representing the human costs of an American-organized war and referring to Northern Yemeni motivations as fanatically sectarian, for instance, also means this media and scholarship is partisan. In this respect, future historians will wisely invest time exploring as much what is said differently, and when, as what remains unsaid. Crucially, there will become a clear pattern of narrative, largely enforced by ‘gatekeepers’ who become the primary source of information as the chosen ‘experts’ on Yemen.<sup>16</sup> These ‘usual suspects’ are repeatedly consulted to provide the parameters of analysis for those rare moments when Yemen’s war is actually making the press, and they have exclusive access to representatives of the major institutions persecuting this war, be it at lavish conferences, lectures, or closed door consulting sessions.<sup>17</sup> A sampling of this reporting will result in a conclusion that most mainstream and self-declared ‘alternative’ press merely echoes the reports, executive summaries, and press releases of well-funded think tanks based in Washington DC, London, and Brussels.<sup>18</sup>

The careful reader will begin to realize that the same think tank orthodoxy reducing Yemen’s violence to a Cold War-era dialectical struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and/or tribes versus modern state officials also resonates in the current body of scholarship entrapped in a security studies (SS) or international relations (IR) discursive vacuum.<sup>19</sup> What remains missing is the underlying causal factors contributing to the duress of Yemeni actors. The strategic neglect of, for example, an analysis of the political economic factors behind the violence demands adopting the kinds of multipolar challenges to these think tank enforced paradigms inspired by critical observers of a previous era of transitional politics at the end of the Cold War.<sup>20</sup> Appreciating an explicitly counter-narrative, the reader (and future historian) could begin to recognize alternatives to lingering colonial



epistemologies that have retained unquestioned hegemonic status in subfields of the academy like Yemeni Studies.

In what follows, I demonstrate how the authors of seven recent books on Yemen make critical methodological and rhetorical decisions in accounting for aspects of Yemen's modern history. Although they are written from the perspective of different disciplines, of these works, the works of anthropologists prove distinctively helpful as historical studies of the dynamic communities otherwise reduced in conventional IR and SS accountings. In each, the future historian will find important corrective narratives that need to be read in tandem with the material purportedly written to account for the current violence in Yemen. While Nathalie Peutz, *Islands of Heritage: Conservation and Transformation in Yemen* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2018) and Brinkley Messick, *Shari'a Scripts: A Historical Anthropology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) almost entirely resist commenting on the current events in Yemen and its post-2011 origins, Marieke Brandt's *Tribes and Politics* (2017) takes a different, and at times problematic route when offering historic depth to events after 2014. Not the first time that anthropologists who have spent years in the country have ventured to writing modern histories of the Yemen – Paul Dresch, Steve Caton, Gabriele vom Brock, Martha Mundy come to mind – the works of Brinkley Messick and Nathalie Peutz are explicitly methodologically corrective projects, while Brandt's claims to offer nuance and qualifications to already established tropes about those revolting against the US-directed (with Saudi Arabia as surrogate) policy toward Yemen.

Dr. Peutz's monograph is a rich ethnography of how the inhabitants of the Indian Ocean island of Soqatra (commonly read as Socotra), a UNESCO natural (but not cultural) World Heritage Site, have navigated a rapidly changing relationship with both the rest of (mainland) Yemen and the larger world. Highlighted throughout this well-crafted account of how invasive the larger world has proven to be in Socotra, the story of the island is equally one of many other Yemenis' experiences with the changes brought since unification in 1990. The most aggressive forces of change prove to be the Saleh dominated government that emerges since the unification of the Yemen in 1990. Corresponding with the end of the Cold War, Yemen's state and its ministries were compelled to invest coercive power into integrating Socotra into both a national sphere of regulatory authority and then, by extension, pushing the island, its nature, and its people into the global economy.

To make her observations more significant, Peutz mobilizes archival sources to juxtapose historic forms of governmentality that prove starkly different in the twentieth century relationship Socotra's inhabitants have with the world. The conflicts that arise as expansionist global interests like international NGOs invested in 'environmental conservation' worked with the post-1990 central state prove in Peutz's study to have created a far more contentious relationship between the indigenous population and the distant state than during the previous British and Marxist South Yemeni eras prior.<sup>21</sup> No longer 'isolated,' Socotra's natural resources begin to serve a national economic policy (one dominated by the North since 1994 when the Saleh government violently secured absolute authority of the formerly independent south) that works in tandem with international interests to 'develop' the island for tourism, mining, and fishing.

The response from local populations proves invaluable to gleaning more broadly (and thus comparatively) how communities throughout both North and South Yemen could

have, and did, react to the same expansionist forces working with the Yemeni state under first Saleh and then Hadi.<sup>22</sup> Rarely framed in these terms, as both the Northwestern coalitions formed with AnsarAllah and the Southern Separatists Hiraq demonstrate today, Yemenis throughout have been, and still are, resisting globalization.

While not entirely written to make this larger comparative claim, future historians about the current war in Yemen need to consider how communities like those studied on Socotra absorbed and adapted to myriad changes afflicting different areas since at least unification. Peutz adds depth to her observations of tensions in the more volatile 2010s, when the Saleh government pushed for neoliberal reforms per the advice of think tanks and consultancy firms linked to the IMF, World Bank and US Embassy, by consulting British and UN archives.<sup>23</sup> In mobilizing the past, Peutz helps the reader appreciate the context of the periodic tensions during the previous British era and the Marxist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen attempts at better integrating the island with the mainland. They are distinctive to the new confrontational approaches induced by globalization for previous governments were averse to upsetting local stability.<sup>24</sup>

Here Peutz's work stands out from the others dealing with the recent history of Yemen. While other studies will pay lip service to deeper imprints left by the historic struggles between the state, the larger world and local communities, we cannot fully extend our analysis of the present without returning to a concern with the misrepresentations of the past, as often the case in Yemen. Indeed, Peutz's excellently weaves her narrative through the ways in which Soqotrans, be they locally based, or scattered as diaspora, resort to forms of 'heritage politics' as an attempt to leverage some of their remaining authority against the encroachments of globalization as represented by international organizations, investors, and the central state.<sup>25</sup> This aspect of her study makes it stand out from its peers. More importantly, it serves as a model for future research into how peoples besieged now for five years in the North are still resisting neoliberal economic policies.

In a similar respect, Brinkley Messicks' historical ethnography of reading, orating, and writing law in the highlands of North Yemen is equally valuable. Even less invested in linking his deep analysis of the pre-1962 North Yemen to the current state of affairs, Messick nevertheless offers methodological guideposts to upset the cliché-ridden depictions of today's crisis. In short, Messick uses a variety of commentaries, debates, and other writings on the law that date to an era supposedly ended with the 1962 coup and subsequent civil war. Messick upsets the entrenched, perhaps only recent polemic in which so-called Sunni revivalists and the scholars who study them have accused pre-republican era Zaydi institutions of negligence of 'the law' as codified in 'the Shari'a'.<sup>26</sup>

What Messick's historical anthropology accomplishes to reveal is a deeply engaged local system of texts that intersect along never fully realized formal/informal, institutional and private binaries. In analysing forms of text writing and contrasting with the ways they are read, be they produced and engaged in 'the library' (the individual zones of debating, rethinking, rewriting) or those of more immediate power/authority that rules on the law (recorded and preserved in the archive), Messick invigorates a methodological debate about his discipline's reliance on observation and the seemingly unique skills anthropologists have to engage interlocutors in the colloquial and not formal mediums of communication.<sup>27</sup>

Creating the case for the need to study the Shari'a in Yemen as a 'working' and thus mobile body of documents, Messick manages the analysis of an 'architectural structure' behind texts through a complex interweaving of readings, writings, and studies. The point of itemizing various documents and their mobility in different institutional settings is due to the fact that the very individuals using them recognize that they are, as individual texts, cumulative fragments of knowledge. But crucially, they also a part of 'situated histories' that both entrench and set loose the law in pre-1962 Yemen.<sup>28</sup>

Methodologically, there are ways to discern illuminative linkages of operations to forming a text left for posterity. Messick's interlocutors, for instance, are those jurists who leave as historic records their engagements with not only legal commentaries established in venues as austere as the library,<sup>29</sup> but also routinely recorded courtroom proceedings and transactions.<sup>30</sup> The clusters of resulting texts, harboured in the 'library' and the 'archive,' reveal an interdependency. Messick's insistence that what operates within realms of experience often treated by Yemeni experts as segregated entities, must be thought of as 'cosmopolitan' rather than binary constructs.<sup>31</sup> This is a lesson that extends to how we must interpret the manner in which Yemenis, even in the so-called 'tribal peripheries,' help bring into view a 'multiplicity' of factors contributing to the larger resulting resistance to capitalism I suggest is at play today in Yemen.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Corporate social sciences

Drawing from Messick's work, those of us writing on Yemen must regain a need to maintain an indigenous context to why conflict is necessary in face of overwhelming 'global opinion.' That may entail actually engaging the country's past, the present, and its future in a variety of settings that both recognize the malleability of what is too often in Yemeni Studies fixed affiliations and practices (tribal custom, sectarian mores, loyalty to charismatic political leaders) and appreciate that power is mediated by different moments of human engagement, both with each other and through texts that are never 'dead.' In other words, we should read what actors in Yemen's current struggles say and write rather than accept that practice is equivalent to what formal knowledge about, say the reception of the Shari'a, tribal customs, or neoliberal values and thus unidirectional.<sup>33</sup> That is especially important when considering how misleading it is to refer to the dynamic enterprise of resisting global capitalism as a simple act of following the dictates of Iran via the 'Houthis.'

Messick's deep investment in exploring how varied teachers, judges, imams, and courtroom clerks attended to 'the law' during a supposedly 'dictatorial' era under the 'medieval' imamate, offers a critical corrective to more conventional methods of ethnographic research on Yemen. Again, anthropologists have long secured a primary seat in Yemeni Studies, often as the only ones with long-term access to the region. They have thus helped entrench the terminology, range of accounting for Yemen's social structures, and historicized their fixture in Yemen's story. They have made old colonial-era epistemologies, in other words, part of Yemen's human 'nature.' Future historians will have to note some of the structural reasons for this.

Critical is the fact that the most informative ethnographic research took place during the Cold War, with North Yemen becoming a vital arena. As a region still largely unknown to foreign intelligence agencies and long an area of potential natural resource

wealth, the primary assumption interested parties were willing to fund anthropological research in Yemen was the access they would gain to previously unexplored zones.<sup>34</sup> Long deemed 'isolated' and inaccessible, the politics of intelligence gathering and the enterprise of scholarly fieldwork is especially relevant in respect to North Yemen. Unfortunately, funds for research were available only to those projects that promised funders information on unexplored regions. Usually the projects that took the form of PhD dissertations, development 'aid' project reports, or agricultural surveys all hired at least one social scientist whose role would be to offer unique insights into the behaviours of peoples deemed to be living in strategically valuable lands. Many of those young scholars became leaders in Yemeni Studies.<sup>35</sup>

Most who took on these roles have refused to recognize the long tradition of using anthropology field work as cover for intelligence gathering.<sup>36</sup> A similar intersecting role has been played by journalists, 'development consultants,' individuals attached to the many United Nations committees that have almost unhindered access to places like Yemen, and 'aid' (the USAID being the most notorious) agencies that provide cover for dual-purpose intelligence gathering. While most scholars today no longer believe their fieldwork is explicitly valuable for further use, the debates about whether or not it is ethical to share the results of fieldwork to intelligence agencies remains a hot topic among anthropologists.<sup>37</sup> Members of the American Anthropological Association explicitly issued a statement about such dual use research. Regardless, social scientists remain willing to accept think tank consultancies, join UN committees, and often repackage their earlier fieldwork in a new, far different light if a 'market' for such insights demands it.<sup>38</sup>

The previous is not an attempt to disparage the invaluable fieldwork written on Yemen nor to suggest any particular work was used for unethical, never divulged intelligence gathering purposes. That said, the information gathered and then shared to audiences in workshops paid for by think tanks and university departments with overt links to governments and/or corporate interests needs to be mediated by a recognition of this past (and current) use of such information. In respect to Marieke Brandt's fieldwork conducted during the 2000s in the strategic Sa'adah Northwest, as her interlocutors are now on the frontiers of a war, her work is vulnerable to misuse. The seemingly unprecedented details Brandt offers about actors in an area today at the centre of a resistance against Saudi-American objectives makes her book potentially serviceable to violent agents of state and/or corporate power. That the publishers of her book, nevertheless, explicitly market it as an ethnographic study that offers insights into who the main belligerents in the current war are (and are not), makes this an ethically problematic book. That it may function, whether she likes or intends it or not, as 'intelligence' is a question worthy of exploring and an issue one wished Dr. Brandt explored more.<sup>39</sup>

Historians of the current era's intellectual production, therefore, may find it worthwhile to consider the way the future reproduction of Brandt's research makes its way into how the war on Yemen has been reported, interpreted, and even conducted. What is sorely lacking in the meantime is a larger engagement with the field of anthropology that is explicitly concerned with how postcolonial critiques of certain terms, concepts, and the methods that rely on them require adjustments with how we engage our interlocutors.<sup>40</sup> Remarkably, Brandt uses without fair warning openly partisan sources to situate and then interpret events she deems important to historicize the people she will dangerously associate (and dissociate) as Houthis. As mentioned earlier, the so-called 'Houthi' are the

primary targets of well-funded media and think tank visceral these days. This has been the case in the local and then regional Arabic media since the late 1990s. They are also the ones being murdered by ‘precision ordnances’ and stalked by drones for the last 15 years at least.<sup>41</sup>

In these sources, the ‘Houthis’ are unquestionably associated with the cause of this war, a position Brandt seems ready to share. As such, the misleadingly monolithic, omnipresent ‘Houthis’ are at once doctrinally rigid, and yet, under Brandt’s clever analysis, equally amorphous.<sup>42</sup> Problematically, Brandt’s work is thus tailored to avail more insights into what had been a neatly distinguishable group of actors based in a territory confined by their assumed narrow affiliations that are all deeply entrenched in Yemen’s ‘traditions’ – tribalism, sectarianism, and strong urban/rural divisions – and not the preferable ‘core’ dynamics of state building and the enforcement of international standards of law.<sup>43</sup>

What is important here is the positioning of this book as one helping to bring a ‘hybrid conflict’ that is specific to a certain era and region to a readership seeking information on what has now clearly become something entirely different.<sup>44</sup> In well-crafted chapters that each try to resist simply evoking clichés to account for the rise and continued popularity of this so-called Houthi constituency, we observe an information-rich reanimation of what she claims is ‘anthropology’s traditional preference’ for studying ‘peripheries.’<sup>45</sup> The Sa‘adah and al-Jawf provinces in which much of this story takes place constitute the distant roots to the larger ‘Houthi Conflict,’ as Brandt characterizes the war on Yemen today.<sup>46</sup> Alas, Brandt’s study proves to be the most adamantly invested in using terminology that anthropologists in North America largely decry today. From references to ‘tribal’ constituencies forging periodic but fragile alliances across the region, the colonial-era categories long criticized in her discipline remain necessarily functional.<sup>47</sup> No different from those who are not expected to know better, the explicitly ‘local’ perspective that Brandt is able to bring on account of her fieldwork in the 2000s, is thus presented as a useful toolkit to understanding why ‘Houthis’ fight. The reasons are, whether intentionally or not, equally local, marginal and, by logical extension, not central to the larger issue of Yemen’s future.

They are ‘messy’ however, a classic narrative ploy that leaves appreciating the nuances of these complicated alien processes the job of the expert. Oddly, there are times when Brandt’s impeccable instincts recognize that a myriad of allies joining a larger movement still entrapped by the reference to them as ‘Houthis’ does provide for different characterizations. Dispersed throughout her detailed narrative are suggestions that those joining the struggle constitute a ‘social revolutionary movement [that] had arisen, directed against the political and economic empowerment of a small elite that served as the northern mainstay of the republican order.’<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, that struggle remains local, one that makes the subsequent support for AnsarAllah throughout Yemen impossible to recognize.

What is happening is a lot of describing of what Houthis are and the allocation of very little space to allow them to speak in a manner Messick’s historical readings afforded to scholars once equally reduced in Yemeni Studies to orientalist clichés. Others in Brandt’s text are doing most of the talking, especially those who self-identify as enemies of ‘the Houthis.’ The most used sources are local newspapers, texts that are potentially misleading as they often sustain a bias that at the very least requires acknowledgement. The press Brandt cites is most often during the 2000s referring to ‘the Houthis’ in openly derogatory ways. The constant use of local news outlets like the pro-Islah *Mareb*

*Press*, notoriously hostile to AnsarAllah, invites the reader to develop a biased perspective without help appreciating the source. The unfortunate way these media are used in Brandt's most detailed sections on the wars in the 2000s suggest they are supporting facts and not the source of opinions.<sup>49</sup> Here the ethical requirement of contextualizing these reports needs to accompany any citation of newspaper articles that were written by journalists paid for by local rivals seeking to justify the violence directed at 'Houthis.' The impression left is that strong sectarian, regional, and class divides in Yemen make the future wars inevitable.<sup>50</sup>

As noted by Lisa Wedeen reading Yemeni Studies scholarship from the benefit of an outsider, the tendency to ignore how categories like those reducing complex associations to 'Houthis' take for granted, and contribute to, the process of group making, leaves the subsequent analysis of violence in the country rigid.<sup>51</sup> And self-serving, I would add, in an era where the production of knowledge on Yemen is expected to serve as support for a war, an enterprise that requires simplistic generalizations to better justify the violence against those resisting. In this regard, all the books here prove lacking. None offer an open engagement with the state of the art in writing about the global south, from the perspective of first, a western-based academic or think tank employee, and then the methodological complications caused by not critically reconsidering the colonialist-era epistemologies their disciplines continue to abuse when writing about Yemen. This resiliently complex set of human interactions that Messick identifies in the past is unfortunately surrendered when experts of Yemen (who are not Yemeni) try to tell a coherent story that is more political scientific than ethnographic. As such, the mobilization by Brandt of newspapers and recorded testimonials, often recorded years after the events under scrutiny, are not themselves read along 'the archival grain' and thus misleadingly authoritative.<sup>52</sup> Again, she is not the only one.

The strategies behind not referencing those resisting the coalition in terms that could suggest some legitimacy is understandable from the perspective of state propagandists wishing to secure absolute narrational hegemony over Yemen by eliminating the voice of their opponents. It is even expected from think tanks, and their claims of being 'impartial' is a universally recognized lie. After all, they are hired to shape the conflict. As such, the refusal of employees of Brookings, ICG, Carnegie, various Rockefeller and Ford Foundation funded institutes to refer to the manner in which 20 million Yemenis organize as a 'government,' is ultimately expected since they are hired to promote certain agendas.<sup>53</sup>

Our concern is with those stealth productions marketed as objective. Crucial to future readers, there are comparative uses to Brandt's book beyond the immediate 'intelligence' it provides on the primary rivals to the American/KSA agenda in Yemen. In part allowing her sources to reflect on the impact a changing world has on the lives of those compelled to rebel, what Brandt proposes as the primary causal factors to war in 2015 is not dissimilar to what Dr. Petuz identifies in Socotra. What is distinctive is the strategic value readers (and the publishers who helped develop the book) give to the 'local insights' Brandt's book offers on those who eventually will bring their rebellion against globalization to Sana'a' itself. What Brandt uses her sources to ultimately say is that 'traditional' Yemeni society is being forced by modernity to face the larger world and we need to read their acts of violence accordingly.

This association of crumbling traditions in face of new (global, natural, modern) economic structures is replayed in Helen Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State* (London: Saqi, 2017). Trapped in a logic of

developmentalism that sees the collapse of ‘sociocultural ecologies’ that survived the twentieth century as inevitable, Lackner’s suggestive observations about how disruptive neoliberalism proved to be to Yemeni society does not consider the underlying problems with the retrograde framing of what is at work.<sup>54</sup>

The new social order unleashed by globalization invariably upsets old social hierarchies representing ‘changes in both the nature and evolution of different social entities.’<sup>55</sup> The resulting reshuffling of ‘traditional’ Yemeni associations will mean new opportunities for entrepreneurs now unleashed from their traditional loyalties, a free-wheeling agent who could and invariably would avail his/her considerable abilities to political parties, Salafist groups, and foreign invaders when the time came.<sup>56</sup> This juxtaposition of tradition with the modern world does not, however, upset the historic place of something used throughout Yemeni studies but deemed in the larger scholarship as retrograde colonialist logic. As such, Lackner’s investment in the use of ‘tribe’ serves as emblematic of the larger problem with how Yemen is presented in the literature today.

To Lackner,

[t]ribes remain the fundamental element of Yemeni society though the importance of tribal norms decline markedly; tribal leaders have either consolidated their positions throughout the political connections or lost power and position when perceived to be dissident... Although tribes constitute the majority... changes in the country’s social and economic structure in the past half century have expanded political allegiances beyond their remit.<sup>57</sup>

This framing of Yemen’s present to how it has changed from the past services equally less critical references to tribal Yemen as authors want old orientalist tropes to do the heavy lifting of explaining conflict, alliance, and politics in the 1960s. Constitutive of that critical process of change from the ‘medieval’ Imamate to the modern world is the ‘modern state’ against ‘traditional’ tribes trope found also in Asher Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War: The International History of the Yemen Civil War, 1962–1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).<sup>58</sup>

These transformations of a ‘traditional society’ and their resulting violent consequences has a deep history in Middle Eastern Studies.<sup>59</sup> In the case of the war unleashed by a military coup and rival external interests trying to steer the results to their favour, a multiplicity of modern factors ultimately set the stage for the events in Yemen’s 2010s. War, in other words, broke apart traditional Yemen, forcing disruptions in how society functioned. For Orkaby it is the 1960s, however, that explains the ensuing decades of chaos, a clear sign of a broken timeless order experiencing its first pangs of modernization in the Cold War.

In Orkaby’s use, ‘traditional Yemen’ (with all its ahistorical, essentialist references to ‘backward tribal’ loyalties) is a platform to what the author argues was the real significance of the proxy wars pitting Egypt, the US, Israel, the Soviets and KSA against each other. Rather than being a continuation of the ‘Arab Cold War,’ however, it was an ‘internationalized civil war’ that was ‘overrun by foreign interests, interventions, and politics.’<sup>60</sup> Adopting a ‘bifocal’ approach that integrates perspectives about regional rivals (informing the Arab Cold War) with global interests and policies, Orkaby claims to discover a plethora of previously ignored actors in this war, a conflict which made North Yemen ‘an open field for individuals, organizations, and countries to peddle their agendas in this remote region of South Arabia.’<sup>61</sup> In contrast to a rival close study in North Yemen by Jesse Ferris, which identifies the events in South Arabia as crucial to understanding

why Egypt fared so poorly in the 1967 Six-Dar War, Orkaby invests time researching a selection of foreign archival material, including Soviet and Israeli, to assert North Yemen's wars were as much a struggle between great and regional powers as an interne-cine war between Arab states.<sup>62</sup>

What is important here is that the book's study of war is positioned to function as a marker of departure for a traditional society to one more resembling the chaotic state of Yemen today. Seemingly unaware of the theoretical undertow that his presentation of such a neat binary creates, the failure to take more than a cursory look into that period immediately prior to 1962 makes this a shallow history of the era. As demonstrated recently, Imam Ahmed's 'traditional, isolated' state was deeply invested in the larger world and played competing international forces to secure leverage far beyond anything suggested in Orkaby's study.<sup>63</sup> The failure to recognize the other possible reasons for such a heavy investment into North Yemen, including supporting rival factions during and after the coup, points to a lack of interest in pushing deeper clichés about Yemen's peripheral role in history.<sup>64</sup>

This line of presentation is a far older one that, without much consideration for the problems such logic implies, other monographs under scrutiny here also mobilize. With some variation and considerably different narrational skills, all three of the remaining books rightly identify the most recent violence in Yemen as extensions of larger, global factors that go back to the 1990s. Laurent Bonnefoy, in *Yemen and the World: Beyond Insecurity* (London: Hurst, 2018), makes the perfectly acceptable corrective argument that extends Yemen's interactions with the larger world to even earlier periods. As someone who has long invested in telling Yemen's story through a complication of Sunni Muslim political (or apolitical) relations with the Yemeni state and neighbours, Bonnefoy's hastily composed book, first published in French a year earlier, reflects a scholarly instinct that is both eager to correct as well as impose narratives about the country's present conflict. Extending his examples back two centuries, the underlying premise of Bonnefoy's corrective study is to '... transnationalise' Yemen and recognize the multiple interactions that structure and establish relations between this country [Yemen] – viewed as a society, as institutions and as a symbol – and the exterior, taken in a broad sense.<sup>65</sup>

Bonnefoy does successfully itemize some of the many exchanges between Yemen(s) and the larger world over these last two centuries. The method of seeing Yemen as holding a complex and 'active role in globalization, beyond its apparent relegation to the margins,' is welcome more generally.<sup>66</sup> In six chapters, Bonnefoy offers some quick-paced guideposts to appreciating Yemen's trajectory over the last 200 years through the larger historic force of globalization.

The reader, for instance, will be introduced to the 'many divisions of the Yemeni state'<sup>67</sup> that Bonnefoy contrasts with 'armed Islamism,' a critical 'challenge' in the country's international relations.<sup>68</sup> As an attempt to complicate further Yemen's place in the larger world, long assumed to be 'passive' vis-à-vis Cold War powers, Bonnefoy ends rapidly his short book by offering reflections on historic emigrations from Yemen that helped tie the country to the larger world.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps more intriguing is how the various experiences of immigrants to Yemen shaped subsequent constituencies, including Salafist groups, who have been recognized as primary actors in Yemen's violent recent history.<sup>70</sup> The resulting summary study of Yemenis' 'cultural creativity' seems to mistaken the



mentioning such individual dynamism for a way to help readers understand the origins of violence on Yemen.<sup>71</sup>

In a similar gesture, Helen Lackner, a consultant and longtime resident of South Yemen and frequent participant in British-based round tables, has also offered, in a disappointingly circumspect manner, that interaction with the outside world changed Yemeni society over the Saleh era. Lackner pinpoints the forces of change as neoliberalism, which floods the country via the Saleh state. The resulting changes lead to the crisis in government about which her entire book then proceeds to explain. Whether the pressures from the 'market' are also those of empowered local surrogates servicing these economic forces is not entirely explained in this book written to fill a perceived gap in the mainstream accounting of Yemen's recent history.

Lackner's tightly narrated story reads like a history in bullet points. It offers accessible conclusions that nevertheless require evoking some of the more problematic tropes about Yemen's 'unique' cultural heritage to make the crisis legible. While reflecting on the socio-economic consequences of neoliberalism, for instance, the disruptions they make are that of tearing down 'traditional' structures, namely tribal and rural peasant communities.<sup>72</sup> The premise that the broken shells of old Yemen societies initiate crisis proves too neatly linked to the solutions offered in the think tank reports that the book presumably corrects. Restoring old Yemeni structures are implicitly the only solution, conveniently supporting a role for powerful local interlocutors who can reinstate order by bringing in line 'tribes' against 'foreign' influenced 'Houthi' militias.

Here then Ginny Hill offers a richer narrative that provides far more information to the reader about the political events leading to the 2011 uprising, the course external powers took to suppress it, and then the process by which the previously mentioned Hadi interim government operated.<sup>73</sup> In this veteran journalist's hands, details of intimate, behind-the-scenes political negotiations constitute a story of conflict with authorial flare. Indeed, the author's own dynamic personality made her one of the better-connected journalists writing on Yemen prior to 2014. This charisma is omnipresent throughout the book.

Hill's charm spilling over the page proves a problem, however, as the accountings of what happened to Yemen in face of the regional and global pressures (rarely mentioning the United States, however) proves top-heavy with information gathered from elites. Here, the book thus needs to be read in tandem with Brandt's and Peutz's closer ethnographies of two regions most directly impacted by the events Hill colourfully summarizes. Like Bonnefoy's earlier work, somewhat reproduced in his hastily written offering here (and repeated to a larger extent by Lackner, who cites Bonnefoy extensively), Hill also helps fill in details about Salafists/takfiris. In Hill's hands, the 'revivalists,' and their Houthi rivals are too narrowly defined, serving as such, mere tools to tell a larger story of perpetual conflict.<sup>74</sup> In this respect, Bonnefoy's careful differentiation of Salafist groups is mirrored by Lackner's excellent summary of Southern Separatist ambitions after 2007, offering a clear example of how personal commitments to certain actors in Yemen result in different analytical results from more general approaches.<sup>75</sup> In fact, both Bonnefoy and Lackner have deep professional investments in writing about Salafists and Southerners respectively; Houthis, however, remain flat and generic.

What distinguishes Hill's from all the other works explored here is the heavy presence of Saudi Arabia (KSA).<sup>76</sup> None of the other books have been written with this crucial detail discussed with the welcome exception of Brandt's more nuanced analysis.<sup>77</sup> Hill's

important addition extends to arguing the spillover effect of an explosion of radical Islamic groups and eventually southern separatists, who could all claim KSA support at one point since the 2000s.<sup>78</sup> As such, Hill's very readable account of Yemen's violent recent past does an important added layering of complexity that compliments the other works under study here that either ignore or explicitly deemphasize the role of the KSA.<sup>79</sup> While Hill is accurately representing KSA as a primary agent of Yemen's long history of violence, it is not the only regional state playing such a destabilizing role, although it would be hard to guess reading these books. It is from this observation of crucial points of intersection and shared exclusions that we proceed to contextualize the production of knowledge on Yemen.

## 5. Reading right through the executive summary's grain: a war's origins

While the ideological commitments of those writing about Yemen are seemingly very broad, the remarkable uniformity to how certain key aspects of the Yemeni tragedy unfold in these narratives prove that scholars today are trapped by convention. Who enforces the parameters of this conventional wisdom is critical, just as it is when we today critically read say British or French colonial-era scholarly works on the so-called 'Third World.'<sup>80</sup> Yemen's imbrications with the larger world since at least World War II certainly also reflects a political economic context that remains foreign to the kind of scholarly attention paid to it today. The more Yemen became the focus of great power interests during the Cold War, for example, the more that the way scholars subsequently wrote about South Arabia also changed. Perhaps supporting Yemen became less strategic and more oriental, exotic, Arab.

The very fact Yemen would only become of greater 'strategic' value also shaped the way research projects were designed and what institutions in the West funded them after the Cold War. A case in point is certainly the fact that much of the work today on Yemen no longer treats events there as isolated. While a welcome improvement from previous suggestions that Yemen was isolated from the larger world, as is evident throughout the current scholarship on Yemen, the manner in which such synergies are depicted, no matter how obscure or quaint the anecdote, surrenders Yemen to the larger implication that it is of strategic concern for reasons removed from the global economic context. Yemen is not interminably poor vis-à-vis the world, as implied in the scholarship. It has become poor by the very fact of its integration into the global economy.

The nuance is crucial and is best revealed in Lackner's critique of neoliberalism because it falls short by assuming Yemen was always poor. Other studies of globalization suggest a different way to understanding transformations of once rural societies like Yemen. In the context of criticizing development in Guatemala, I believe J.T. Way's corrective is crucial to rethinking Yemen's history with globalization:

The story of Guatemala development ... debunks a popular and pernicious notion, namely, that capitalist development left countries like Guatemala behind because there simply wasn't enough of it. In fact ... capitalism simply cannot develop places like Guatemala [Yemen] because it also develops the poverty and need and chaos that stymie its very rationality. Capitalist development, then, should be reread: when unmitigated by socialist measures that redistribute wealth, it is not *against* third-world conditions, but a cocreator *with* and of third-world conditions.<sup>81</sup>

In other words, Yemen became poor. It was a systemic process of integrating development policies initiated by Saleh's government, in power since 1978, that led to the water crisis to which Lackner refers, and the alienation of farmers from lands by the 1990s used almost exclusively for cash crops (by 2000s Yemen imported 90 percent of all food consumed).<sup>82</sup>

Future readers, therefore, need to reflect on the impact of this ostensible echo-chamber of knowledge production created by institutions with deep connections to the very structures of power that have brought Yemen to the state of destruction. There are correlations to how Yemen has been framed by studies as an arena of strategic concern (or its poor cousin, a source of humanitarian anxiety), and the economic and thus strategic/security objectives of those funding/consuming such 'research'-based knowledge production. Future historians thus need to remember that the major think tanks operating out of Washington DC, Brussels, London, and New York dictate the parameters of discourse on Yemen-as-crisis today because of what is at stake. Their gatekeeping role suppresses coverage of Yemen in economic terms. What distracts us is Yemen as a security concern with Jeremy Scahill (now, like Iona Craig, reporting for the Qatar-funded *Intercept*) and Gregory D. Johnston selling Al-Qa'ida as Yemen's key strategic concern. This discourse constitutes an epistemic 'mastery' of the country, its peoples, and the causal forces that need to both be disciplined (by way of expert study) and then recalibrated in order to 'save' Yemen.<sup>83</sup>

As such, the organizations fuelling a functionary discourse that necessarily subordinates Yemenis to being objects in need of rescue are also all funded by powerful interests that have targeted places like Yemen for economic exploitation. In other words, those preaching the need for 'humanitarian' intervention promote a regime of post-crisis 'reconstruction ... [that is] inseparable from the production and reconstruction of global relations and identities.'<sup>84</sup> Read in this way, there is plenty to suggest the framing of the war as an intervention to save Yemen invariably disciplines those 'Iranian-backed rebels' ('Houthis') who previously resisted Yemen's economic subordination while promoting those willing to cooperate as partners for the future. While the mainstream scholarship refuses to frame the role of 'independent' experts in this way, enough critical analysis of other cases of institutional attempts at shaping the way we can currently write about the world is available for future historians to help them read how we write about Yemen today and tomorrow.<sup>85</sup>

Current and near future scholarship on Yemen will all bear the imprint of think tanks aggressively writing on Yemen today and omitting the voices of those actually resisting for four and a half years the American-led coalition. To properly contextualize the resulting approaches to accounting for events (and ways the scholarship does not frame Yemen's crisis) it is necessary to link the paymasters of these sites of knowledge production with what is published, circulated, and promoted as the country's past, present and future. Global financial actors like George Soros, who 'donated' the seed money for the creation of the International Crisis Group based in Brussels (ICG), the New York-based Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) established with Rockefeller money in the 1920s, the Carnegie Foundation, the Middle East Institute, The Arab Gulf Studies Institute, The Atlantic Council, The Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) in London, the Brookings Institute and RAND, both primarily funded by the Qatar Foundation, and others have framed events in Yemen to service specific policy objectives.<sup>86</sup>

These frames of analysis, written to fit the confines of the executive summaries most readers admit reading while ignoring the rest, have insinuated themselves into the recent, presumably 'independent' scholarly works on Yemen. Read in its entirety, it may be concluded that scholars claiming special expertise in Yemen find it almost impossible to write beyond the parameters of analysis that has strategically been reconstituted by powerful interests based in the North Atlantic world. Yemen constitutes a 'foreign policy' concern, one in which Western 'security' and regional 'stability' become coeval to Yemen's multiple conflicts, the resulting analysis using a variety of seemingly different academic disciplines echoes those enforced by the well-funded, now hegemonic think tanks which frames the world in the narrowest international relations/security studies terminology.

Future scholars will need to pay closer attention to the pressures that shape such studies. Again, it is not by mistake that the coalition was treated as an uncomplicated monolith, and then, with Qatar's formal expulsion in late 2017, the war on Yemen took on different references, depending on who was funded by whom. Qatar's deep investment in the production of knowledge about the modern Middle East is clearly producing results, even in places like Yemen when it is no longer mentioned by its beneficiaries writing on the region. The almost invisible role of Qatar in the current war in Yemen is critical for future historians.

Entrenched in their think tanks, well-funded and given broad powers to vet out trouble-making Yemenis and even write the final texts of official declarations, the contributions of fellows, in-house scholars, and attached faculty was to perpetuate mistrust and the lack of confidence in these processes and ultimately insert (and still today publishing advocacy for them) policies that threatened the very people who revolted in the first place. In one of the only available studies of the process, Helen Lackner captured the fraud that was the internationally sponsored 'transition' meant to reconcile demands of Yemenis who revolted in 2010–11.<sup>87</sup> Far from being a process of reconciliation, the interim period 2012–2014 in Yemen proved the debilitating role of outsiders, whose servicing of global capitalist interests, either overtly or by stealth, is not only an issue affecting Yemen, but the larger world.

Of course, the global shadow cast over the world by the neoliberal world order is not only perpetuated by think tank employees by the forms of knowledge they reproduce. Their applications of expertise into policies and the rewriting of state laws also helped create the very conflicts on which they build their business models in subsequent crises. Crisis becomes the exclusive domain of these same think tanks which then charge fees to clients to explain and then resolve the violence. The responsibility of scholars critical of such an incestuous production of knowledge about Yemen is to undermine the analytical infrastructure so unquestionably mobilized by those 'writing security.'

Deconstructing the concepts, analytics, and praxis of these entrepreneurs of violence warrants a deeper investigation, one that adopts recent innovations in the ethnography of reading that which is written; a critical reinterpretation of the context in which the reproduction of long condemned colonial epistemologies takes place in the past and present framework of government policies and think tank 'recommendations.' As evidenced throughout, few working on Yemen today have engaged the postcolonial critique of how traditionally western-based scholars reported on Yemen. The remarkable silence over the methodological debates about writing on contentious political spaces may suggest a hostility to a generation of 'subaltern' pushback that in Yemen takes the form

of locals very hostile today to the very presence of corporations/governments which fund the current research produced on the country. That the few brave Yemeni scholars who have embraced a critical rereading of representations of their country, made almost exclusively in the Western academy, but people who have conflicted loyalties to say the least, means what is taking place in the mountains as Yemenis face off American built planes is the same struggle for sovereignty that scholars such as Kamilia Al-Eriani are engaged 'behind enemy lines.'<sup>88</sup> The possible conflict of interests should inform how we begin to contextualize the recent spate of publications on Yemen, often in the hasty attempt to reflect more on a war that otherwise receives very little, persistent media coverage.

## 6. Conclusion

Throughout we surveyed the recent production of knowledge on Yemen to note some striking patterns of narrative that stabilize Yemen by referring to its state of conflict, chaos, and crisis. In its very state of instability, the role of the expert becomes necessary as s/he, based in Brussels, London, New York, or Washington, first accounts for 'what is going on' and then offers a solution to assuage the anxieties such analysis strategically produces in the first place. In other words, Yemen seems to be marketed as what it should not be, recently that includes a safe haven for al-Qa'ida, an Iranian outpost, or humanitarian disaster. The prescription, coming from the same well-paid think tank 'experts' offering the diagnosis, invariably advises more of the same expertise moving forward as real solutions are implemented by force.

Yemen is thus understood as a negation of what experts report is its current state, a formula of narrative that is self-serving for those careers dependent on the very instability in Yemen they are expected to help resolve. In other words, understanding Yemen's crisis 'requires an emphasis on the unfinished and endangered nature of the world ...' In this way think tank '... discourses of 'danger' are central to the discourses of the 'state' ...' that the same think tank experts promise to help save, thereby restoring order to the world upset by Yemen's ontological condition of chaos.<sup>89</sup>

This exercise of constituting Yemen through descriptions of what threatens 'it' reflects a way of writing 'security' that prevails throughout the academic, journalistic and think tank communities claiming expertise. Yemen present's (perpetual, stereotypical) states – violence, hunger, environmental destruction, sectarianism, pre-modern tribal loyalties – serve as the critical antonyms that help constitute what is the ideal state that the 'intervention' think tankers and their funders hope to instil there. Moreover, those writing Yemen into the security concerns of larger interested parties' – 'states,' corporations, international organizations – have no idea what Yemen actually is (rare references to actual statements from peoples living there), but they do know what it is not. And this, as critical theory has helped us understand in the larger context of modern colonial epistemologies, is the same constructive process where White Mythologies about the Enlightenment and Western 'difference' originate.<sup>90</sup>

Revealingly, each of the recent monographs on Yemen exhibit methodological choices that ignore this generation of criticism of what is normatively known as colonial epistemologies that helped constitute ideas of what civilization and 'the West' were by the process of identifying what it is not, Muslim, Eastern, Yemen. Developed in any number of valuable interventions on colonial-era discourses, historiographies, and epistemologies about

the ontological ‘other,’ it is suggestive to note that none of this literature is engaged in the work on Yemen under review. This demonstrable unwillingness to confront the discipline’s complicity in ‘Western’ knowledge production becomes an obvious impediment to reading ethically events in the world as pressing as Yemen.

After reading much of the material recently written about Yemen (and the larger region in fact), an explicitly unorthodox research approach and a method of ‘reading along an archival grain’ will be necessary. Recognizing that certain ‘epistemic anxieties’ flow through the narratives of Yemeni experts whose characterizations of the war at once elide any reference to those foreign interests that also financially back their institutions – think tanks, media corporations, universities – while also silencing Yemeni anger as it explicitly articulates itself in solidarity with Chileans, Haitians, Ecuadorians, Papuans, and French workers protesting daily against the same (as they understand it) banking/corporate oligarchs. As such, Yemen’s seemingly ‘unique’ condition proves far more part of a global uprising against global capitalism, a message Yemenis under daily bombardment and suffering from disease and starvation repeat day after day in their public statements. None of the think tank experts writing about this war, nor the journalists or independent scholars offering their own analysis, will ever note this narrative.

What these sometimes inconvenient, if not uncomfortable, questions coming out of how experts write about Yemen show us is there is an urgent need for more active reading and then dialogue across disciplines. Clearly much more empirical social research, and soon historical archival work, remains to be done before we can ever hope to understand how a post Euro-American centric imperial fuelled globalization leads to new kinds of conflicts as witnessed today in Syria, Congo, West Papua, Haiti, and Yemen. What is certain is Yemen is today trapped inside an echo chamber of narratives that necessarily shuts out alternative ways of framing the many Yemen constituencies and their concerns, as well as the extent to which Yemen is implicated in the events of the larger world. Until that stranglehold over how we can write about Yemen is broken, future historians will face an especially obvious case of manipulative, and sadly, retrograde scholarship that is neo-imperialist in content if not intent.

## Notes

1. United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG), ‘Opening Remarks at Press Encounter on Yemen’ (2 November 2018). <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2018-11-02/remarks-press-encounter-yemen>.
2. According to recent approximations of the destruction, in late 2018 18 million people were food insecure and 8 million of them “severely” insecure. “The Situation in the Middle East,” special report presented to UNSC by Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, September 21, 2018, S/PV.8361, page 2/17. In this report and throughout the scholarship discussed below, blame for this catastrophe remained directed at Yemenis themselves.
3. An analysis of reports aired on a US cable station MSNBC stated that up to April of 2018, a full year of daily bombardments of Northern Yemeni had not once received mention. This contrasts with the same channel presenting during this period 455 separate stories related to a domestic scandal that turned out to be false. <https://www.salon.com/2018/07/25/msnbc-has-done-455-stormy-daniels-segments-in-the-last-year-but-none-on-the-war-in-yemen/> [last accessed October 22, 2019]. In another comparison, it has been found that corporate and official state media outlets have reported 10 times more on the violence in Syria

- than in Yemen during the same period. The question future historians will have to seek to answer is why violence in Yemen was not considered of equal value to service larger agendas. See Amanda Guidero and Maia Carter Hallward, *Global Response to Conflict and Crisis in Syria and Yemen*. New York: Springer, 2019, 55–72.
4. The lack of coverage on the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Yemen exposes “major news media [as] an intrinsic component of this system run for the benefit of elites. The media are, in effect, the public relations wing of a planetary-wide network of exploitation, abuse and destruction.” David Edwards and David Cromwell, *Propaganda Blitz: How the Corporate Media Distort Reality*. London: Pluto Press, 2018, 207–208.
  5. Most scholars have been compelled to acknowledge that events in 2011 throughout the Middle East, if not harnessed and managed by reliable assets, constituted a threat to US interests that resulted in heavy American intervention. Framed universally as “the Arab Spring,” in Yemen, as with Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Tunisia, and Libya, the US and its regional partners sought to coopt the spirited calls for change in the region in order to assure such outbreaks did not result in long-term Anti-American threats to their political economic interests. Steven Salaita, “Corporate American media coverage of Arab revolutions: The contradictory message of modernity.” *Interface* 4, no. 1 (2012): 131–145 and Gamal M. Selim, “The United States and the Arab Spring: The Dynamics of Political Engineering.” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2013): 255–272.
  6. Isa Blumi, *Destroying Yemen: What Chaos in Arabia Tells US About the World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018, 193–200.
  7. When still a novelty (and prior to the war), there were some attempts to engage those who overthrew Hadi’s regime. Among other things readers in early 2015 could learn they demanded elections and a fair process of negotiating a new constitution. On the basis of such demands, it would be difficult to argue for war as the only option. Rob Nordland, “Rebels in Yemen Say They Intend to Form a New Government,” *NYT* (Feb 7, 2015). [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/07/world/middleeast/yemen-rebels-say-they-will-dissolve-parliament.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/07/world/middleeast/yemen-rebels-say-they-will-dissolve-parliament.html?_r=0). [Last consulted November 21, 2019].
  8. The complex government resisting a coalition of American allies regularly announces budgets and releases “state vision” statements that reflect the agenda to create “a just and equal democracy, recognizing female empowerment, sustainability, and anti-corruption as top priorities.” <https://www.fort-russ.com/2019/05/yemen-national-salvation-government-reveals-new-development-plan/>.
  9. See Andrea Carboni and Emile Roy, “Yemen’s Fractured South: Shabwah and Hadramawt,” ACLED, 2019. <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/05/09/yemens-fractured-south-shabwah-and-hadramawt/>; and Emile Roy, “Yemen’s Fractured South: Socotra and Mahrah,” ACLED, 2019. <https://www.acleddata.com/2019/05/31/yemens-fractured-south-socotra-and-mahrah/>.
  10. Laurent Bonnefoy and François Burgat, “Avec ou sans les Frères. Les islamistes arabes face à la résilience autoritaire.” *Critique Internationale*, Presses de science po, 2018. Halshs-02137724.
  11. Called the Peace and National Partnership Agreement of September 21, 2014, the agreement signaled a fresh start to the difficult process of creating a new Yemen after the decades long Saleh regime. Even Hadi, along with the UN special envoy to Yemen at the time, were parties to this agreement. When the moment offered it, Hadi and those threatened by representative socialist-orientated government arising betrayed the agreement. This crucial fact, never mentioned any more in the literature, will be a point necessary for future historians to reinsert into the Yemeni story. For the full text of the agreement, consult <https://www.saba.ye/en/news369204.htm>. [Last accessed November 21, 2019].
  12. The careful historian of this period’s coverage of the war will note how all the scholarship and think tank material liberally cites the contents of World Bank Reports, the New York Times, and quote US/Saudi/Qatari-backed sources to help account for the events none have access to since 2015, but never reference how those representing 20 million or more frame those events. See <https://www.saba.ye/en>.
  13. Marieke Brandt’s, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthis Conflict*. London: Hurst, 2017, 349.

14. Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Chapter 11 cf. Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 182–185.
15. Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 158–185 and Joseph A. Massad, *Islam in Liberalism*. University of Chicago Press, 2016, 157–165.
16. Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015, 118–120.
17. For state-funded media like Qatar's, a country that has contributed greatly to Yemen's political violence despite it being largely immune from any critical attention, shaping the narrative of what were the original objectives of the war necessarily changed in December 2017. This is the critical moment when the Qatari leadership fell out of its alliance with other members of the "coalition" that launched the war in early 2015. While the primary villains of the war remained the same, first Iran-backed Houthis and more and more the UAE, the Qatari media support for the war's persecution dramatically changed its tone regarding other issues. Gamal Gasim, "The Qatari Crisis and Al Jazeera's Coverage of the War in Yemen." *Arab Media & Society*, February 15, 2018. Qatar's narrative about Yemen is also repeated in the *Washington Post*, *Associated Press*, *Middle East Eye* and *Intercept* outlets.
18. Perhaps the most successful provider of content to the media is the Brussels based International Crisis Group (ICG), which has invested considerable resources to control the narrative on Yemen. As crisis knowledge brokers and gatekeepers on behalf of often undisclosed financial backers, ICG "experts" are ubiquitous to any media report on Yemen since the late 2000s. See the 2014 special issue on the organization, introduced by Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, "Studying the International Crisis Group." *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2014): 545–562.
19. David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992.
20. George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics*. Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2017.
21. Peutz, *Islands of Heritage*, 130–51.
22. In the case of Socotra, that could entail new investment in the island's nature, the uniqueness of their cultural heritage, and new chances to reach beyond the island for political and economic patronage, including the United Arab Emirates. Dr. Peutz's deep knowledge of the conditions shaping Socotra's inhabitants enable her study to contribute to a larger web of scholarship, hopefully attracting the attention of scholars interested in transnational migration, the politics of development, environmentalism, and heritage preservation.
23. Peutz, *Islands of Heritage*, 101–105.
24. *Ibid.*, 76–93.
25. *Ibid.*, 199–277.
26. For some further thoughts on how efforts to delegitimize the authority of past governments in the North of Yemen has distorted the analysis of its modern history, see my Isa Blumi, "[What You Should Read] What is Happening in Yemen," *Maydan: Teaching & Learning* (November 15, 2017). <https://www.themaydan.com/2017/11/read-happening-yemen/>.
27. Messick, *Shari'a Scripts*, 33–40.
28. *Ibid.*, 20–26.
29. *Ibid.*, 57–214.
30. Positioned in the "archive" these formal and day-to-day registrations of law being enforced provide the critical "translations" of the idealism found in the "library." Messick, *Shari'a Scripts*, 216–403.
31. Messick, *Shari'a Scripts*, 25–32, 126–29.
32. *Ibid.*, 419n.115.
33. *Ibid.*, 246–346.
34. Suspiciously marketed as "resource poor" in the mainstream literature, a recent study in the US and British archives suggested key actors in shaping Western relations with region thought otherwise since at least the 1920s. See Blumi, *Destroying Yemen*, 37–42, and later global corporate interests focused on Yemen's mining potential, see *Ibid.*, 131–62.
35. Blumi, *Destroying Yemen*, 131–38.



36. See also the last of his trilogy exploring the entanglement of the social sciences with the military-intelligence (and corporate) complex, David Price, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology*. Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2016.
37. In fact, the United States Government (USG) initiated the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) in 2004, with the Obama administration making it permanent in 2009, a scholarship program that funds US students' education in return for a commitment to join intelligence agencies for at least 18 months upon graduation. Those who have benefited from PRISP are not required to share this information and fears are US students conducting research abroad are suspect because of this lack of transparency. See Kathleen Gallagher, "Anthropology, the Military, and the Risks of Ethical Inertia." *Human Organization* 76, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 150–159.
38. Never, however, sharing with the reader that it may also be used as intelligence. Price, *Cold War Anthropology*, 276–300.
39. Whole sections are allocated to justify the use of certain questionable references to describing the nature of social organization in the region, including referring incessantly to "tribal" affiliations, but not the ethics of such references, Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 15–20.
40. Lara Deeb and Jessica Winegar, *Anthropology's Politics: Disciplining the Middle East*. Stanford University Press, 2016 and Nadia Fadil and Mayanthi Fernando, "Rediscovering the 'everyday' Muslim: Notes on an Anthropological Divide." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5/2 (2015): 59–88.
41. In the meantime, evidence points to American and coalition partners guilty of genocide, Jeffrey S. Bachman, "A 'synchronised attack' on life: The Saudi-led coalition's 'hidden and holistic' genocide in Yemen and the shared responsibility of the US and UK." *Third World Quarterly* 40/2 (2019): 298–316.
42. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 131–50.
43. *Ibid.*, 99–191.
44. In this respect, Brandt's final pages lay out in great clarity a narrative of events from 2011 to the formal arrest of Hadi in late 2014. Perhaps better outlined in this section than in any other of the texts under review, it is highly recommended that these last observations be read as the insights of a still deeply invested scholar, while also recognizing it does nothing to move forward our understanding of what happens since September 2014, a serious flaw to a book marketed today as useful for a need to know about the actual war. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 337–54.
45. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 3–4. An odd choice of positioning the peoples of the Northwest, considering their central role in rebelling against the economic malfeasance and continued exploitive behavior of the representatives of the Yemeni state and the global economic actors supporting its war on them. Indeed, it is the very framing of those in Sa'adah adopted by a study funded by the notorious think tank RAND Corporation. Baral A. Salmani, Bryce Loidolt, and Madeleine Wells, *Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon*. Santa Monica: RAND National Defence Research Institute, 2010, 45–78. The failure to navigate these deeper insinuations and the consequences of this failure make this a critically dangerous book from the perspective of those resisting KSA and American military power.
46. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 11–38.
47. *Ibid.*, 153–191. In the context of highland Yemeni society specifically, the distinction between "tradition and custom" that was synonymous to "tribal polities" and "settled, Sharia'a-based" communities was that "the law" was orally transmitted and not written. In the brief moments Messick explicitly evokes "tribal" settings, he reassures the reader that the dichotomy is false. Very much dependent on the community itself, many so-called tribal contexts also reflected the dual oral and written legal practices normally reserved for practiced legal in written form. While leaving aside the methodological opportunities created by discarding the British colonial terminology of "tribes," Messick's intervention nevertheless explicitly upsets the clichés that Brandt support and journalists like Ginny Hill and those enchanted by political Islamic

- revivalist movements like Laurent Bonnefoy neatly situate in a conceptual borderland inhabited by tribes and Zaydism. Messick, *Shari'a Scripts*, 30, 85, 456n71.
48. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 349.
  49. *Ibid.*, 193–334.
  50. *Ibid.*, 337–54.
  51. Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 157–185.
  52. Reference to Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press, 2010.
  53. Greg Simons, “The International Crisis Group and the Manufacturing and Communicating of Crisis.” *Third World Quarterly* 35/4 (2014): 581–97.
  54. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 190–216.
  55. *Ibid.*, 191.
  56. *Ibid.*, 122–146.
  57. *Ibid.*, 214.
  58. Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 6–29. The mistake with the scholarship is failing to invest time into studying the previous generation in Yemen. A hostage to post-Imamate historiography, scholars trained in Egyptian, Iraqi or Western universities all conform to the unquestioned defilement of the Imamate. What closer inspection of sources suggests, to the contrary, was a far more progressive government that embraced Arab nationalism and was at the forefront of anti-colonialism and a founding member of the United Arab Republic. This lost connection to the radical global struggles against capitalism extends to hosting radical groups who infiltrated British-occupied Aden as well as allowing Soviet, Yugoslav, Maoist Chinese and others to help develop North Yemen’s infrastructure in the 1950s. Blumi, *Destroying Yemen*, 76–107.
  59. Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
  60. Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 79–105.
  61. *Ibid.*, 178–96.
  62. *Ibid.*, 106–28. Somewhat dismissively, Orkaby only references Ferris’ book twice. A praxis of ignoring rival scholarship that is prevalent in Yemeni Studies. Jesse Ferris, *Nasser’s Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013.
  63. Orkaby, *Beyond the Arab Cold War*, 6–29.
  64. Plenty of documents found in the US and British archives, both consulted by Orkaby, suggest that Imam Ahmed’s regime was much more invested in regional politics than the cliché of his “isolated” medieval kingdom would imply. See Blumi, *Destroying Yemen*, 57–112.
  65. Bonnefoy, *Yemen and the World*, 14.
  66. *Ibid.*, 15.
  67. *Ibid.*, 43–70.
  68. *Ibid.*, 71–102.
  69. As migrants, merchants, and refugees, Yemenis have for centuries been dispersed throughout the world. See Bonnefoy, *Yemen and the World*, 103–26. For far less helpful reflections, a mere paragraph, see Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 251–52. An excellent ethnographic accounting of emigration from Socotra is offered by Peutz, *Islands of Heritage*, 44–47, 68–69, 202–08.
  70. Bonnefoy, *Yemen and the World*, 127–54. Journalist Ginny Hill offers a very readable investigation into how the smuggling of Ethiopian and Somali migrants contributed to new economies-of-scale in Yemen prior to the collapse of the Saleh regime, Ginny Hill, *Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia*. London: Hurst, 2017, 87–104.
  71. Bonnefoy, *Yemen and the World*, 155–72.
  72. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 190–216, 261–85.
  73. For events in early 2011 taking place on “change square” see Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 203–17. On how threatened elites once attached to Saleh’s government began to forge new affiliations,

- abandoning his sinking ship, see *ibid.*, 234. And finally, on the 2012–2014 process, Hill proves yet again the most interesting narrator: *Ibid.*, 235–53.
74. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 119–34, 175–202.
  75. Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 167–89. Hill’s accounting is trapped by the bias of her sources, all products of the time and place in which she was conducting her interviews with separatists, a far less pedestrian perspective than Lackner’s, Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 155–74.
  76. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 286–90.
  77. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 75–97.
  78. On her depiction of US use of drones to suppress some of these Saudi funded assets, see Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 135–53.
  79. The exception being Bonnefoy, who is in his element when writing about political Islam in Yemen. Bonnefoy, *Yemen and the World*, 71–100.
  80. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2004.
  81. Emphasis in the original. J.T. Way, *The Mayan in the Mall: Globalization, Development, and the Making of Modern Guatemala*. Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2012, 43.
  82. I made this observation in Blumi, *Destroying Yemen*, 119–200. On the environmental consequences of Yemen’s economic decline, see Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 217–60.
  83. Recent confrontations with Western “public worry” that justifies intervention exposes how discursive projections of Yemen as a “weak” or “failed” state are but other forms of violence against Yemenis. Constituting a neatly defined, if not monolithic at least coherent, object of “worry,” Yemenis are positioned analytically as incapable of maintaining, let alone (re)building Yemen and thus must be rescued from themselves by the West (or regional surrogates like the current coalition dropping bombs on the North). Kamilia Al-Eriani, “Mourning the Death of a State to Enliven It: Notes on the ‘Weak’ Yemeni State.” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (September 2019).
  84. Lisa Smirl, “Building the Other, Constructing Ourselves: Spatial Dimensions of International Humanitarian Response.” *International Political Sociology* 2/3 (2008), 236–253, 237.
  85. Yemen as crisis folds into a larger “humanitarian fetishism” of societies still needing to subordinate to North Atlantic power. For several parallels consult Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements*. Raleigh: Duke University Press, 2018, 95–120.
  86. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/06/qatars-ramped-up-lobbying-efforts-find-success-in-washington/> and <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-how-gulf-states-entangled-dc-think-tanks-in-their-fight-for-influence-1.5480528>.
  87. “[T]he UN Department of Political Affairs had a significant role in the management of the NDC, despite claims that the process was entirely Yemeni ... [i]n reality UN personnel attempted to influence nominations and decisions, while denying involvement whenever things went wrong. Among UN responsibilities was the provision of experts on different issues.” Lackner, *Yemen in Crisis*, 47.
  88. As emphatic and equally sophisticated as Dr. Al-Eriani’s work is (and has been), her voice is drowned out by Western scholars who have the power to monopolize the concern over Yemen’s fate. As her critique of not only policies but scholarly approaches clash with the performative range allowed in the study of (and advocacy for) Yemen, her voice is silenced by scholars refusing to engage her.
  89. Marking places like Yemen as the new source of perpetual concern enabled powerful interests in the Euro-American world to sustain “the long crisis” in an era of possible austerity. See Campbell, *Writing Security*, 48.
  90. Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge, 1990.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.