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Profile

Introduction

Yemen is a Muslim Arab country of strong tribal and religious traditions. The Republic of Yemen, its official name, has only existed as a state since 1990, when the independent states of North and South Yemen merged. Differences between the two regions remain pronounced. North Yemen, called the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) from 1962–1990, encompassed the Red Sea coastal plains and much of the adjacent highland region. The highlands are the historic home of the Zaydi *imamate*, a Shi'ite Muslim state that ruled portions of the region from the late 9th century until 1962. Tribes remain strong in the highlands, especially in the north. This region is also the base of the central government, which maintains its capital at Sanaa and exercises limited or no authority in rural areas.



© kebnekaise / flickr.com
Dar Al Hajar (the Rock Palace), Wadi Dhar, Yemen

South Yemen, encompassing not only southern but also central and eastern Yemen, was known as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) from 1970–1990. Formerly occupied and governed by the British, this region became a socialist state with a command economy administered by the government after independence. These influences weakened tribalism in the region, especially along the southern coast. Followers of the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam are predominant in the former South Yemen, which is also the site of most of the country's oil reserves—the government's chief source of revenue.

Since unification, the country has been headed by President Ali Abdallah Saleh, who first came to power in 1978 as the President of the YAR (North Yemen). His regime has maintained power via the support of an extensive network of political and tribal alliances. Such alliances are largely secured through the government's patronage network in which resources, such as jobs and oil revenues, are distributed to clients and allies.¹ Yet, as oil revenues decline, the Yemeni government faces serious challenges regarding its limited and fragile authority. The inequitable distribution of increasingly scarce resources has contributed to conflict, including a recurrent insurgency in the north, a secession movement in the south, and Al Qaeda terrorist activity.² Most of the large and rapidly growing Yemeni population has limited access to education, health care, and job opportunities. Poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy are rampant, food insecurity is increasingly severe, and water supplies are quickly diminishing.

Area

¹ Center for Global Development, University of California, Berkeley. Egel, Daniel. "Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [pp. 7–8]." 12 January 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Analysis: Yemen's Rebellions Fuelled by Economic Meltdown." 4 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87996>

Yemen is located in the Middle East, on the southern Arabian Peninsula, across from the Horn of Africa. It borders two countries: Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the northeast. To the east and south, Yemen borders the Arabian Sea and its inlet, the Gulf of Aden, which separates the Arabian Peninsula from the Horn of Africa. Across the Gulf of Aden lies the African country of Somalia and its autonomous region known as Somaliland. Off the southwestern tip of Yemen lies the



© Bruno Befrestv
A village on Hajjaz Mountains in Yemen

Bab el Mandeb, a narrow strait that connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea. The small African country of Djibouti lies directly across the strait from Yemen. Yemen's western border runs along the Red Sea; across the sea lies the African country of Eritrea. Yemen possesses more than 100 islands scattered throughout nearby waters, including Perim (Berim) Island in the Bab el Mandeb strait.³ Socotra (Suqutra), Yemen's largest island, lies in the Arabian Sea off the northeastern tip of Somalia.⁴ Yemen's total land area, including the islands of Perim and Socotra, is 527,968 sq km (203,850 sq mi), making it slightly larger than Colorado and Wyoming combined.⁵

Geographic Regions and Features

Yemen demonstrates stark contrasts in its topography. Desert plains line the country's long coastline. A rugged and fertile highland region occupies the west. The east is dominated by a high, arid plateau dissected by *wadis*, or valleys that intermittently flow with water. Desert covers portions of the north.

Coastal Plains

Yemen's extensive coastline is lined with plains that range from 8 to 65 km (5 to 40 mi) in width.⁶ Hot and humid, the western coastal plain on the Red Sea is known as the Tihamah. Although it receives little rainfall, several *wadis* carry seasonal runoff to the plain from the nearby mountains. These *wadis* support limited agriculture in irrigated plots interspersed throughout the plain's large network of sand dunes.⁷ Stony expanses and salt flats (*sabkhas*) also mark the terrain. On its eastern edge, the Tihamah rises sharply into the cliffs and foothills that form the western escarpment of the mountainous interior.



© Tom Allen
Public beach of Aden, Yemen

³ *Yemen in Pictures*. DiPiazza, Francesca Davis. "The Land [p. 8]." 2008. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group.

⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: Land." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45252>

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Yemen." 28 December 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: Land: Relief and Drainage." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45252>

⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Tihamat al-Yaman." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9072460>

The plains lining the southern and eastern coasts (on the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea) are generally narrower than those on the west coast. They are also bounded by a rugged escarpment, which in some places reaches the sea.⁸ Fishing industries are based in Yemen's coastal areas. Its major ports are Aden (on the southern coast), Al Hudaydah (on the Tihamah), and Al Mukalla (on the southeastern coast).

The Yemen Highlands

Inland from the Tihamah, the terrain rises sharply to a mountainous highland region that runs north–south along the Red Sea coast and eastward along the southern coast. The western escarpment of the highlands is steep and rugged. Thousands of small villages are situated on rocky outcroppings on this slope, which is cultivated via an elaborate terracing system.⁹ The tallest peak in the highlands is known as Jabal an-Nabi Shu'ayb, which reaches 3,760 m (12,336 ft) in the mountains west of the Yemeni capital, Sanaa. East of the western escarpment, the highlands contain rolling plains and basins interspersed among mountains, massifs, and some volcanoes.¹⁰ These areas are the site of settlement and agriculture, which benefit from a temperate climate, fertile soils, and moderate-to-abundant rainfall. Because of their advantageous conditions, the highlands are home to the majority of the Yemeni population. At their easternmost edge, the highlands gradually descend into the arid plateau of the east, where the change in climate is stark.¹¹

Eastern Plateau and Desert

From the highlands, the terrain slopes down into arid plateau and desert. The Ramlat as Sab'atayn, a large sand-dune desert, occupies west-central Yemen, just east of the highlands. The Jawl (Jol), an expansive limestone plateau, covers much of central and eastern Yemen.¹² It is dissected by numerous *wadis*, the largest and most well known of which is Wadi Hadramawt.¹³ This extensive



© Franco Pecchio
Al Mawhit province

⁸ World Wildlife Fund. "Terrestrial Ecoregions: Arabian Peninsula Coastal Fog Desert." 2001. http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/at/at1302_full.html

⁹ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. "Chapter 1: The Land [p. 8]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹⁰ "Towards a Sociology of the Islamisation of Yemen [pp. 6–7]." Gochenour, D. Thomas. In *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*. B.R. Pridham, Ed. 1984. New York: St. Martin's Press.

¹¹ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. "Chapter 1: The Land [pp. 9–10]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹² King Saud University. *Quaternary Research*, No. 50. Lézine, Anne-Marie, et al. "Holocene Lakes from Ramlat as-Sab'atayn (Yemen) Illustrate the Impact of Monsoon Activity in Southern Arabia [pp. 290–291]." 1998.

[http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/archaeology/Publications/General/Holocene%20lakes%20from%20Ram%20as-Sab%E2%80%99atayan%20\(Yemen\).pdf](http://faculty.ksu.edu.sa/archaeology/Publications/General/Holocene%20lakes%20from%20Ram%20as-Sab%E2%80%99atayan%20(Yemen).pdf)

¹³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Arabia: The Land: Relief, Drainage, and Soils: Yemen." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45287>

valley runs through the Jawl from central Yemen to the Arabian Sea on the southeastern coast. The seasonal runoff and fertile soils of the upper valley and its branches have long supported settlement and agriculture.¹⁴ The greater region is itself known as Hadramawt (Hadhramaut). South of Wadi Hadramawt, the Jawl reaches a high point of 2,185 m (7,169 ft) in a series of low mountains and hills that run parallel to the coast. The plateau's southern escarpment sharply descends to the coastal plain. North of Wadi Hadramawt, the plateau gradually descends into the southern reaches of the Rub al-Khali, or Empty Quarter, an inhospitable sand desert that covers some 650,000 sq km (250,000 sq mi) of the Arabian Peninsula.¹⁵ Outside of Wadi Hadramawt, much of the eastern region is sparsely populated, with large expanses of unforgiving, uninhabited terrain.¹⁶

Islands

Yemen possesses more than 100 islands in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Arabian Sea. Topography and climate conditions vary from island to island; those in the Red Sea generally share the hot and humid conditions of the Tihamah. Many Yemeni islands are rocky, barren, and lack freshwater. Most of them remain undeveloped, although efforts have been made in recent years to harness their potential as tourist destinations.¹⁷



© Tom Allen
Teenage boys swimming and diving

Strategically, the islands are important for their locations amid the busy shipping lanes of regional waters. Perim Island is located in the Bab el Mandeb strait. In 2009, Yemeni and French officials issued plans to construct an artificial harbor on the island, at which to moor boats, to combat regional piracy.¹⁸ A company has also proposed building a bridge across the Bab el Mandeb strait that would use the island as a stopover.¹⁹ Yemen's largest island, Socotra, is located in the Arabian Sea, some 340 km (210 mi) southeast of the Yemeni coast. Measuring approximately 3,600 sq km (1,400 sq mi), the remote island has a mountainous interior surrounded by coastal plains.²⁰ Travel to the island is greatly hindered during the southwest monsoon.

¹⁴“South Yemen: Geography and Population [p. 223].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Arabia: The Land: Relief, Drainage, and Soils: The Rub’ al-Khali.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45285>

¹⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. FAO Country Profiles and Mapping Information System. “Yemen: Population.” No date. <http://www.fao.org/countryprofiles/Maps/YEM/10/pt/index.html>

¹⁷ Yemen Observer. Al-Qairy, Mohammed. “Yemeni Islands: The Gate to Yemen’s Future.” 4 December 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/environment/10013379.html>

¹⁸ Arab News. Agence France-Presse. “Yemen Plans Port to Help Combat Piracy.” 22 February 2009. <http://www.arabnews.com/?page=4§ion=0&article=119468&d=22&m=2&y=2009>

¹⁹ The Herald (Scotland). “Bin Laden’s Brother Aims to Bridge the Red Sea.” 31 May 2008. <http://www.heraldscotland.com/bin-laden-s-brother-aims-to-bridge-the-red-sea-1.829714>

²⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Socotra.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9068481>

Climate

Climate conditions vary widely according to region and elevation. The highlands experience a temperate climate with dry, mild winters and warm summers that see moderate-to-abundant rainfall. In Sanaa's central highlands, the average temperature is 14°C (57°F) in January and 22°C (71°F) in July.²¹ Occasional frosts and light snowfall may occur at upper elevations during the winter. Spring and summer monsoons bring rain to the highlands in two cycles: March–May and July–September. The western escarpment and southern highlands receive the most rainfall.²² Precipitation often creates localized storms and can vary considerably across short distances.²³ The coastal plains experience a tropical climate, with low rainfall and high heat and humidity. In this region, temperatures range between 27°C (81°F) and 42°C (108°F).²⁴ The eastern plateau and deserts are similarly hot and dry. Wadi Hadramawt receives around 5 cm (2 in) of rainfall each year—typically in short, periodic downpours that occasionally cause floods.²⁵ In the deserts, rain may fall only once every several years. Daytime temperatures in the desert can reach 50°C (122°F), although nights can be cool.²⁶ Nationwide, rainfall is erratic, frequently resulting in drought.²⁷ Sand and dust storms fueled by strong northwesterly winds known as *shamal* may sweep through the region in winter and early summer.²⁸

Drainage

Yemen has no permanent rivers. Seasonal drainage occurs through *wadis*, which are valleys and dry riverbeds that periodically flow with runoff. *Wadis* run from the highlands and the upper elevations of the eastern plateau to the coastal plains and interior deserts and lowlands. Because the highlands receive the majority of



© Raphaël Fauveau
Washing clothes

²¹ *Yemen in Pictures*. DiPiazza, Francesca Davis. “The Land [p. 12].” 2008. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group.

²² “North Yemen: Geographic and Demographic Setting: The Physical Environment [p. 98].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²³ Country Pasture/Forest Resource Profiles, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Ali Abdulmalek Alabsi. “Yemen.” November 2001.

<http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/Yemen/yemen.htm>

²⁴ Aquastat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. “Yemen.” 2009.

<http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/countries/yemen/index.stm>

²⁵ “South Yemen: Geography and Population [p. 223].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²⁶ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. “Chapter 1: Background Information [p. 3].” 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

²⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Yemen: Land: Climate.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45253>

²⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Arabia: The Land: Climate.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45290>

the country's rainfall, the surrounding lowland regions are dependent upon their runoff.²⁹ While Yemen has no lakes, a dam at Marib, on the eastern slope of the highlands, has a capacity of some 400 million cubic meters. Hundreds of smaller dams in the highlands either store water for local use or channel it into increasingly diminishing aquifers.³⁰ A major project, funded by the United Arab Emirates, is underway to build another large dam, named the Wadi Hassan Dam. The project, located in the southern province of Abein, is aimed at harnessing the massive rainfall of the wet season to provide irrigation to local villages and foster more productive farming in the area.³¹

Bodies of Water

Yemen is strategically important due to its location along vital shipping lanes in nearby waters. These bodies of water include the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el Mandeb strait, and the Red Sea. Together, they form a network that links the Mediterranean Sea with the Indian Ocean. Integral to global trade, this network is a major route for shipping goods in between Europe and Asia,³² as well as transporting oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe and the U.S.³³ The Bab el Mandab strait that links the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea is only 29 km (18 mi) wide at its narrowest point. It is therefore a chokepoint for traffic moving in and out of the Red Sea. Regional waters have been increasingly affected by piracy, with many pirates based in nearby Somalia.³⁴



© Tom Allen
Offshore fishermen in Aden

Major Cities

Sanaa

Sanaa, the capital and largest city of Yemen, is situated in the central highlands at an altitude of more than 2,200 m



© Ammar Abd Rabbo
Sanaa old city

²⁹ *Sharecropping in the Yemen: A Study of Islamic Theory, Custom, and* J. "Chapter 1: Introduction: 1.2: The Yemen: A Contextual Overview [p Brill.

³⁰ Aquastat, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. "Yemen." 2009. <http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/countries/yemen/index.stm>

³¹ "Abu Dhabi-funded Wadi Hassan Dam Largest Water Project in Yemen," *UAE Interact*, 23 April 2008, http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Abu_Dhabi-funded_Wadi_Hassan_dam_largest_water_project_in_Yemen/29711.htm

³² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Arabian Sea: Economic Aspects: Transportation." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-22722>

³³ Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy. "World Oil Transit Chokepoints: Bab el-Mandab." January 2008. http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/World_Oil_Transit_Chokepoints/Bab_el-Mandab.html

³⁴ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Ploch, Lauren, et al. "CRS Report for Congress: Piracy off the Horn of Africa." 28 December 2009. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40528.pdf>

(7,200 ft). Historically isolated, the city sprawls across a fertile upland basin near the foot of a mountain known as Jabal Nuqum. It has expanded rapidly over the last several decades, growing from a population of around 35,000 in the early 1960s to more than two million today.³⁵ The continual influx of people to the city has caused urban sprawl and strained infrastructure and resources, especially water. Amid a national water crisis, the city could run out of water by 2025—or even earlier—if the depletion of local aquifers continues at the current rate.³⁶ Surrounded by a high wall, the old quarter of the city retains multistoried tower houses that are over 1,000 years old. Historic mosques, bath houses (*hammam*), and traditional marketplaces (*souk*) are also located in this sector.³⁷ As the nation’s capital, the city is home to government offices and workers. Its airport is a major hub for travel in and out of the country.

Aden

The former capital of South Yemen, Aden is a port city situated on a small, volcanic peninsula on the southern coast. Its natural deep-water harbor has long made it an important shipping and trade center. In the 19th and 20th centuries it was developed as a British protectorate, later becoming a colony. Today, it is the commercial capital of Yemen and a strategic center. It is reputedly a more liberal city than Sanaa. The city comprises several districts, including Ma’alla (the natural harbor) and Crater (the old quarter). The latter district is located on the eastern side of the peninsula, just below Aden’s inactive volcano, Jabal Shamsan. To the north, an international airport and former Royal Air Force base is located at Khormaksar.^{38, 39} Aden has approximately 589,000 residents (2004 census).⁴⁰



© Raphael Fauveau
Aden skyline

Ta’izz

Ta’izz is located in the fertile and rain-fed southern highlands at an altitude of 1,400 m (4,500 ft). The city served as Yemen’s administrative seat from 1948–1962, when Imam Ahmed, the second-to-last Zaydi *imam*, was in power.⁴¹ Ta’izz lies within a temperate agricultural zone where coffee and *qat* (a mild stimulant) are the main crops. It also hosts some light industry, as well as a university-level *madrassah*, or Muslim theological school. The city is a regional transportation hub. It is linked via highway with Aden on

³⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Sanaa.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9065400>

³⁶ Reuters. Lyon, Alistair. “Water Crisis Threatens Yemen’s Swelling Population.” 30 August 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE57T0HK20090830>

³⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Sanaa.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9065400>

³⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Aden.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9003715>

³⁹ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Gordon, Frances Linzee, et al. “Aden [p. 401].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

⁴⁰ City Population. Brinkhoff, Thomas. “Yemen.” 17 April 2009.

<http://www.citypopulation.de/Yemen.html>

⁴¹ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Gordon, Frances Linzee, et al. “Ta’izz [pp. 398–399].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

the southern coast and the port of Al Hudaydah on the western coast. Another highway runs northward from Ta'izz through the highlands to Sanaa.⁴² With a population of 467,000, Ta'izz is Yemen's third-largest city.⁴³

Al Hudaydah (Hodeida)

Al Hudaydah is a major port city on the central coast of the Tihamah. It grew to prominence during Ottoman control, when it served as a point of entry for Ottoman troops.⁴⁴ In the 1960s, Al Hudaydah and the surrounding region underwent extensive reconstruction and development with the aid of the Soviet Union, which built a new deepwater port just north of the city. Around the same time, Chinese engineers built an all-weather road linking the city with Sanaa in the highlands. Today, the port remains vital for Yemeni trade and its major exports—coffee and cotton. Fishing is an important local industry, with catch sold in a bustling fish market. While much of the city has been built over the last several decades, a small (Ottoman) Turkish quarter remains. Al Hudaydah's population is approximately 403,000 (2004 census).⁴⁵



Ibb

Ibb is situated in the southern highlands, north of Ta'izz, at an elevation of 2,050 m (6,725 ft). The city and surrounding territory benefit from abundant rainfall and rich volcanic soils, making the region green and agriculturally productive. Crops such as grains, coffee, *qat*, and various fruits and vegetables are grown in terraces lining the hillsides. Animal husbandry is also important to the local economy. The region's rich agricultural produce and animal products are sold in the local *souq*, or marketplace. The old city is walled and filled with tower houses and mosques.⁴⁶ The city is home to around 213,000 residents (2004 census).⁴⁷

Al Mukalla

Al Mukalla is located on the Gulf of Aden, on the southern coast of the Hadramawt region. It is Hadramawt's administrative seat and largest city, as well as its major commercial hub. The modern city has expanded along the coast for 20 km (12 mi). A series of low mountains surrounds and splits the city into three distinct sections: an old

⁴² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Ta'izz." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9070994>

⁴³ City Population. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Yemen." 17 April 2009.

<http://www.citypopulation.de/Yemen.html>

⁴⁴ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Gordon, Frances Linzee, et al. "Al-Hudayday [p. 393]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

⁴⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Al-Hudaydah." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9041383>

⁴⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Ibb." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9041882>

⁴⁷ City Population. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Yemen." 17 April 2009.

<http://www.citypopulation.de/Yemen.html>

city and eastern and western suburbs.⁴⁸ One part of the city's water-front boardwalk is reserved for women and the other for men.⁴⁹ Al Mukalla is the primary port city for southeastern Yemen and is a center for the country's fishing and fish processing industries.⁵⁰ The city has a population of approximately 182,000 (2004 census).⁵¹

History

The Ancient Era

Ancient Yemen was the site of several prosperous and powerful kingdoms that benefited from the region's natural resources and strategic location.⁵² From approximately 1200 B.C.E. to 575 C.E., the most notable kingdoms were those of Saba (Sabaeans), Qataban, Ma'in (Minnaeans), Hadramawt (Hadramis), and Himyar (Himyarites). These kingdoms, which coexisted and competed for power, largely depended on trade to generate wealth.⁵³ The most important commodities were the aromatic resins of frankincense and myrrh. These resins were in extremely high demand in the ancient Mediterranean world, where they were widely used in religious and funerary rites, as well as for curative and cosmetic purposes. The trees that produced them grew almost exclusively in South Arabia. The extracted resins were shipped via camel caravans on overland trade routes running through the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean region. South Arabia also served as a vital transit point for Asian and African products bound for Mediterranean markets. Many Mediterranean consumers mistakenly believed that South Arabia was the source of all of these precious goods, not only frankincense and myrrh, but Indian spices, Chinese silk and ivory, and Ethiopian gold.⁵⁴



© Bernard Gagnon
The Bar'an Temple near Marib, Yemen

The most powerful of the ancient Yemeni kingdoms was that of the Sabaeans, who near the end of the 5th century B.C.E. ruled over most of South Arabia.⁵⁵ Their most famous

⁴⁸ Cities Alliance. "Mukalla: Gateway to the Hadramout." 2008.

<http://www.citiesalliance.org/ca/sites/citiesalliance.org/files/mukalla.pdf>

⁴⁹ Foreign Policy Research Center. Kaplan, Robert. "A Journey to the Future." 31 July 2003.

<http://www.fpri.org/enotes/20030731.americawar.kaplankuehner.journeyintothefuture.html>

⁵⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Al-Mukalla." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9054191>

⁵¹ City Population. Brinkhoff, Thomas. "Yemen." 17 April 2009.

<http://www.citypopulation.de/Yemen.html>

⁵² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: The Pre-Islamic Period." 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45271>

⁵³ "Pre-Islamic History [pp. 30–32]." Daum, Werner. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

⁵⁴ "Historical Setting: South Arabia in Pre-Islamic Times [pp. 7–9]." Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

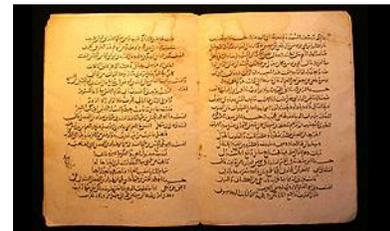
⁵⁵ "Historical Setting: South Arabia in Pre-Islamic Times: [p. 10]." Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

ruler was the Queen of Sheba (Saba), who is mentioned in the Bible and the Quran, the holy book of Islam. The Sabaeans were capable engineers and architects. Their most significant project was the Marib Dam, which was located near present-day Marib on the eastern slope of the highlands. The dam was first built around 750 B.C.E. and later expanded around 500 B.C.E. It comprised an extensive network of irrigation canals that expanded the area under cultivation and contributed to the growth of the farming population.⁵⁶ The Himyarites, a tribe within the Sabaean kingdom, gradually overtook the Sabaeans. They became independent around 115 B.C.E. and consolidated control over South Arabia in the late 3rd century C.E.⁵⁷ Their rise corresponded with the decline of overland trade, as sea routes were increasingly used to bypass the South Arabian interior.⁵⁸

In the 1st century C.E., the Romans, who had conquered Egypt, studied the monsoon wind patterns and corresponding sea routes formerly dominated by South Arabian powers. Their use of maritime routes to sail directly to Asia undercut South Arabia's role as a transit point between Asian and Mediterranean markets. The prosperity of the South Arabian kingdoms was further threatened after the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the new state religion in 323 C.E. The limited use of frankincense in Christian churches and a corresponding ban on traditional funerary rights throughout the empire dealt a major blow to the region's economy. Economic insecurity contributed to the decline of the South Arabian kingdoms, which were exposed to foreign invasion and occupation.⁵⁹ In the 6th century, the end of the Yemeni trading kingdoms was marked by the fall of the Himyarite dynasty and the bursting of the Marib Dam.⁶⁰ The Sassanids of Persia took control of the region around 575.

Muslim Powers

In the early 7th century, Islam spread from Mecca and Medina (in what is now Saudi Arabia) to South Arabia. Badhan, the Persian (Iranian) ruler of the Yemen region, converted in 628. Over the following centuries, the establishment of Islam in Yemen was complicated by competing sectarian factions and ideologies. From the 7th through early 9th centuries, portions of the region were under the control of the Damascus-based Umayyad



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Arabic manuscript from the Abbasid Era

⁵⁶ *The Hydraulics of Open Channel Flow: An Introduction*, 2nd Ed. Chanson, Hubert. “A Study of the Marib Dam and Its Sluice System (BC 115 to AD 575) [pp. 533–534].” 2004. Oxford, England: Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

⁵⁷ “Pre-Islamic History [pp. 33–34].” Daum, Werner. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

⁵⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Himyar.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9040502>

⁵⁹ “Historical Setting: South Arabia in Pre-Islamic Times: [pp. 10–12].” Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

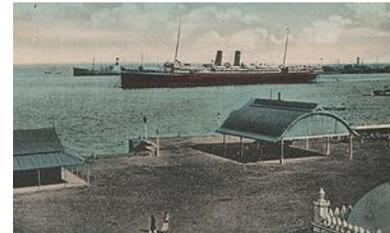
⁶⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Yemen: History: The Pre-Islamic Period.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45271>

dynasty (661–750), followed by the Baghdad-based Abbasid dynasty (750–822).⁶¹ A string of smaller, mostly local Muslim dynasties followed, including the Ziyadid dynasty (819–1018), which was founded by a representative of the Abbasids and based in Zabid on the Tihamah.⁶²

The most important local Muslim power was the Zaydi *imamate*, founded in the northern highlands in the late 9th century. Comprising a sect of Shi'a Islam, the Zaydis followed a spiritual and political leader known as an *imam*. Although its range of authority varied widely, the Zaydi *imamate* persisted into the 20th century while serving as the dominant cultural force for northern Yemen.⁶³ The *imamate*'s survival was remarkable given the region's volatile political environment. From the 11th through 15th centuries, various Muslim factions competed for power, including the Najahids (1022–1158), Sulayhids (1047–1138), Ayyubids (1173–1232), and Rasulids (1229–1454). The latter dynasty was important for cementing Sunni Islam in the coastal plains and southern highlands, where the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam remains predominant today.⁶⁴ While the Rasulids competed with the Zaydis for influence, their period of rule is considered a time of "relative peace and prosperity" as trade and scholasticism flourished. The Rasulids were succeeded by the Tahirids (Tafirids), whose relatively short rule ended with the coming of imperial powers in the 16th century.⁶⁵

The Imperial Age

By the early 16th century, foreign powers such as the Portuguese and Egyptian Mamluks were competing for influence in the Yemen region, which was targeted for its natural resources and strategic location along shipping lanes. In 1517, the rising Ottoman Empire (based in what is present-day Turkey) took control of Egypt, which only two years earlier had claimed sovereignty over the Yemen region. To stave off the Portuguese, the Ottomans took direct control of areas of coastal Yemen in 1538. They subsequently made inroads into the highlands, capturing Ta'izz and Sanaa but never fully suppressing the Zaydis, who actively resisted the Ottoman occupation. Meanwhile, Yemen was the site of a flourishing coffee trade. Arabica coffee was grown exclusively in the highlands and shipped out of the Red Sea port of Al Mukha, or Mocha, whose name would thereafter be associated with coffee. Yemeni coffee growers and traders maintained a virtual monopoly



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Harbour of Aden in Yemen, 1910

⁶¹ "Table A: Chronology of Important Events [p. xiii]." In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁶² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Ziyadid Dynasty." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9078412>

⁶³ "Historical Setting: Islam: The Zaydis [pp. 27–28]." Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁶⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: The Advent of Islam." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45272>

⁶⁵ "Historical Setting: Early Islamic Rule in Yemen [pp. 33–34]." Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

on the coffee trade until the late 17th century.⁶⁶ (By the early 18th century, the coffee plant had been transplanted and developed around the world as a cash crop.)⁶⁷ The Ottomans maintained control of portions of Yemen until 1636, when they withdrew following Zaydi resistance. Freed from the Ottoman occupation, the Zaydis extended their domain to include all of modern-day Yemen. Yet the consolidation of the region—completed in 1658—was short-lived, as outlying areas soon broke off under independent control.⁶⁸

The British, who were involved in the Yemeni coffee trade since the early 17th century, captured the port of Aden in 1839. Ten years later, the Ottomans reentered Yemen, pushing their way into the highlands, where they again faced resistance and revolt from the Zaydis. The British, in competition with the Ottomans, extended their influence in the south through various treaties of friendship and protection with local tribes.⁶⁹ With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, Aden's significance as a major port grew dramatically. In 1905, the Ottomans and the British signed a treaty demarcating the border between the Ottoman north and the British south.⁷⁰ In 1911, the Ottomans and the Zaydi *imam* signed a peace agreement that placed the northern highlands under Zaydi control, the Tihamah under Ottoman control, and other areas under shared administration.⁷¹

The Two Yemens

The Ottoman Empire, which had long been in decline, dissolved following the end of World War I. The Ottomans evacuated Yemen in 1918, leaving the north under the control of the Zaydi *imam*, Imam Yahya, who would remain in power for another three decades. His assassination in a 1948 coup followed years of unrest and opposition to his repressive, insular rule. Dissent stemmed not only from the Shafi'i community but also from various segments of the Zaydi population. Yet, with tribal support, Yahya's son, Ahmad, staved off rebellion and succeeded his father as *imam*. He moved the Zaydi



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Prince Hassan, outside his cave in Wadi Amlah, 1962

⁶⁶ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 1: Background Information: History [p. 17]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, England: Bradt Travel Guides.

⁶⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: The Advent of Islam." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45272>

⁶⁸ "Historical Setting: Foreign Domination and the Beginnings of Yemeni Nationalism [pp. 35–36]." Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁶⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: The Age of Imperialism." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45273>

⁷⁰ *A History of Modern Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. "Chapter 1: Turkey, Britain and Imam Yahya: The Years Around 1900 [p. 10]." 2000. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

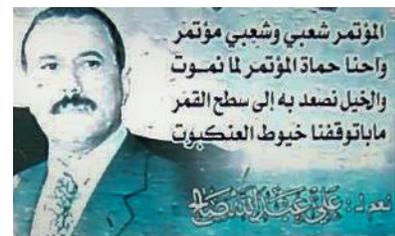
⁷¹ "Historical Setting: Foreign Domination and the Beginnings of Yemeni Nationalism [pp. 39–42]." Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

capital from Sanaa to Ta'izz, where he ruled until his death in 1962.⁷² From 1958–1961, during the latter years of Imam Ahmad's rule, North Yemen temporarily joined with Egypt and Syria to create the United Arab States. Imam Ahmad's death in 1962 sparked a power struggle. His son, Badr, succeeded him as *imam* but was overthrown one week later in a military coup, whose leaders declared the founding of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). A long civil war (1962–1970) ensued between supporters of the *imamate* (who were backed by Saudi Arabia and Jordan) and supporters of the new republic (who were backed by Egypt). After the interested foreign parties withdrew, the opposing sides reconciled in 1970 under the banner of the YAR.⁷³

Meanwhile, the British expanded their influence in the south. Previously administered as part of British India, Aden became an official colony in 1937. Through additional treaties, the British established Western and Eastern Protectorates over the whole of South Yemen. The latter protectorate included the Hadramawt region, which British representatives helped pacify by negotiating with many tribes engaged in longstanding feuds. While they made treaties with the tribes of the hinterland, the British focused their economic development efforts in Aden. In 1963, Aden officially merged with several smaller states of the Western Protectorate to form the Federation of South Arabia. Yet, a movement for independence was building. In early 1966, amid growing unrest, Britain announced its impending withdrawal from the region. A violent power struggle ensued, with the Marxist National Liberation Front (NLF) emerging as the dominant faction.⁷⁴ British troops completed their withdrawal on 29 November 1967. The People's Republic of Yemen was established the following day. After internal power struggles within the NLF, South Yemen became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) on 1 December 1970.⁷⁵

Competing States

The northern YAR and southern PDRY pursued drastically different policies in the 1970s. With the aid of the Soviet Union, the PDRY restructured itself as a socialist state with a command (government-controlled) economy. The YAR began to modernize its political structure and initiate economic development, but this effort was hampered by limited resources, social unrest, and political upheaval. The assassinations of consecutive presidents in 1977 and 1978 resulted from these upheavals. Ali Abdallah Saleh assumed



© Osama Al-Eryani
Ali Abdullah Saleh election poster

⁷² “Historical Setting: Growing Opposition and the Assassination of Imam Yahya [pp. 60–62].” Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁷³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Yemen.” August 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

⁷⁴ “Historical Setting [pp. 53–59, 72–75, 84].” Baynard, Sally Ann, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁷⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Yemen.” August 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

the role of president of the YAR in 1978. Relations between YAR and PDRY ranged from tense to hostile. Short border wars occurred in 1972 and 1979. In 1986, following a period of violent civil unrest, a change in leadership occurred in the PDRY. Haydar Abu Bakr al Attas came to power as PDRY president and Ali Salim al Baydh took over the ruling party, the Yemen Socialist Party (YSP).⁷⁶

Unification: One Yemen State

In the years that followed, the PDRY and YAR moved toward reconciliation and unification. In 1988, the two governments agreed to demilitarize and open their border to increased traffic. In May 1990, they developed a draft unity constitution, which was followed by the formal declaration of the unified Republic of Yemen on 22 May. Saleh became the president of the republic, with al Baydh serving as vice president, and al Attas installed as prime minister.⁷⁷ Sanaa was chosen as the nation's capital, and Aden became the commercial capital. The states merged for largely economic reasons. The PDRY was losing its primary supporter, the Soviet Union, a decaying state which finally dissolved in December 1991. The recent discovery of oil reserves in both countries, including the unresolved borderland between them, also compelled them to unite. Yet economic decline soon contributed to unrest and upheaval in unified Yemen. A major cause for the economy's contraction was the loss of remittances from Yemenis working abroad. The government's refusal to support the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq in the Persian Gulf War (1990–1991) led Saudi Arabia and several Gulf States to cut foreign aid and expel several hundred thousand Yemeni workers.⁷⁸

Conflict, Unrest, and Resource Scarcity

Legislative elections held in April 1993 led to the establishment of a coalition government. Yet parliament was dominated by the General People's Congress (GPC), the ruling party of the north. YSP's marginal representation soon led to a breakdown in power sharing as Vice President al Bayd left Sanaa for the south. In the spring of 1994, tensions between the north and south erupted in civil war. Al Bayd and other YSP leaders declared secession, but northern troops soon seized Aden, marking the south's defeat and the end of the war. YSP leaders fled, and Saleh, who was reelected president in October 1994, filled his cabinet and ministries with GPC and Yemeni Islah Party (YIP) members.⁷⁹ Later, the YIP emerged as the opposition party to the GPC, which dominated



© Dana Adams Schmidt
Prince Abdullah Hussein

⁷⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: Two Yemeni States." 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45274>

⁷⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen." August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

⁷⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: Unification of Yemen." 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-273073>

⁷⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen." August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

the legislative elections of 1997. Two years later Saleh was reelected in Yemen's first presidential election. Throughout this time, power and wealth were increasingly concentrated with the Saleh regime and its network of allies and supporters, comprising members of the political and tribal elite, the military, and business circles.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, despite the influx of oil revenues, the Yemeni economy remained underdeveloped, contributing to widespread deprivation and growing insecurity.⁸¹ Territorial disputes with Eritrea (over the Hanish Islands in the Red Sea) and Saudi Arabia (over their unresolved border) were settled in 1998 and 2000, respectively.⁸²

In October 2000, the American naval destroyer U.S.S. Cole was attacked by suicide bombers at the port of Aden, resulting in the deaths of 17 sailors. The attack reflected heightened security concerns in Yemen, where a weak economy and the limited authority of the central government posed serious challenges to stability. In 2004, an insurgency led by members of the Al Houthi family, "a prominent Zaydi religious clan," erupted in the northern governorate of Sadaa. The conflict has since involved several periods of fighting punctuated by occasional cease-fires.⁸³ A truce brokered in early 2010 followed a period of violent conflict in 2009, which left substantial damage in the north and displaced much of the regional population.⁸⁴ In 2007, a loosely organized secessionist movement, known generally as the southern movement, emerged amid worsening economic conditions. The ongoing unrest in the south has largely been driven by the perception that the region has been politically and economically marginalized by the northern-based government.⁸⁵ Yemen has also experienced a resurgence of terrorist activity led by Yemeni-based Al Qaeda operatives, whose presence drew increased attention following the failed bombing of a U.S.-bound jet-liner on 25 December 2009.⁸⁶ All of these security threats have been partially attributed to rampant poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and resource scarcity.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: Economic Challenges." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-280865>

⁸¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: Unification of Yemen." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-273073>

⁸² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: History: Territorial Disputes." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-280864>

⁸³ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Sharp, Jeremy M. "CRS Report for Congress: Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations [pp. 16–17]." 13 January 2010. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>

⁸⁴ The New York Times. Reuters. "Yemen Declares End to War with Shi'ite Rebels." 19 March 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2010/03/19/world/international-us-yemen.html>

⁸⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Yemen on the Brink: A Carnegie Paper Series. Middle East Program, No. 108. Day, Stephen. "The Political Challenge of Yemen's Southern Movement." March 2010. http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_south_movement.pdf

⁸⁶ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Sharp, Jeremy M. "CRS Report for Congress: Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations." 13 January 2010. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>

⁸⁷ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Analysis: Yemen's Rebellions Fuelled by Economic Meltdown." 4 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87996>

Economy

In the ancient era, Yemen, in contrast to the rest of Arabia, was renowned for its prosperity. The situation has reversed in the modern era, as Yemen has been surpassed economically by Saudi Arabia and the surrounding Gulf States. They enjoy far greater reserves of oil and natural gas, the revenues from which have allowed them to achieve higher levels of development.⁸⁸ Today, Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world.⁸⁹ The Yemeni



Courtesy of Wikipedia
DNO drilling for oil in Yemen using a land rig

economy is heavily dependent on the extraction and export of its hydrocarbon reserves. Oil production alone accounts for approximately 70–75% of government revenues and 90% of export earnings.⁹⁰ Yet production levels have been declining since 2001, falling from a peak of 440,000 barrels per day (bbl/d) to 300,000 bbl/d in 2008 and an anticipated 260,000 bbl/d in 2010.⁹¹ While the government is trying to expand its fledgling natural gas industry, it faces serious and potentially disastrous budgetary shortfalls due to declining oil revenues.⁹² The World Bank has estimated that, by 2017, oil revenues will fall to zero as Yemen exhausts its reserves.⁹³ Shortfalls in revenue not only affect the government's capacity to provide basic public services, but could also seriously disrupt the patronage network that the Saleh regime uses to support itself through political and tribal alliances.⁹⁴

While the government depends on oil revenues, much of the Yemeni population relies on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihood, especially in rural areas. Price instability along with low profits and wages associated with agriculture contribute to rampant poverty and underemployment. The country's limited fertile land has been increasingly planted with cash crops, which are more lucrative than food crops. The major cash crop is *qat* (*Catha edulis*), a shrub whose leaves are widely chewed by Yemenis as a mild stimulant. The expanded production of *qat* (at the expense of food

⁸⁸ United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report 2009*. "Human Development Report 2009 – HDI Rankings." 2009. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

⁸⁹ AlertNet. Reuters. Karam, Souhail. "Yemen's Saleh Hopes to Woo Gulf Cash in Saudi Visit." 23 February 2010. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LDE61M0DT.htm>

⁹⁰ Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas (ASPO) – USA. Andrews, Steve. "Yemen's Oil-Deadly Decline Rate." 18 January 2010. <http://www.aspousa.org/index.php/2010/01/yemens-oil-deadly-decline-rate/>

⁹¹ Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy. "Country Analysis Briefs: Yemen: Oil." March 2010. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Yemen/Oil.html>

⁹² Energy Information Administration, U.S. Department of Energy. "Country Analysis Briefs: Yemen: Natural Gas." March 2010. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Yemen/NaturalGas.html>

⁹³ BBC News. Plaut, Martin. "Yemen 'Faces Crisis as Oil Ends.'" 20 November 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7739402.stm>

⁹⁴ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *Yemen on the Brink: A Carnegie Paper Series*. Middle East Program, No. 107. Phillips, Sarah. "What Comes Next in Yemen? Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building [pp. 2–3]." March 2010. http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribes.pdf

crops) has contributed to both food and water insecurity.⁹⁵ Aside from oil refining, the country's manufacturing sector is largely limited to small-scale operations that produce goods for the domestic market. Fishing is an important industry for coastal communities. Lacking a developed banking sector, Yemen has a cash economy with many people eking out a living in the informal sector.⁹⁶

Government

Officially, Yemen is a republic with executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In practice, power is concentrated with President Ali Abdallah Saleh and his party, the General People's Congress (GPC), which in 2010 maintained a dominant majority in parliament (the legislative body). Saleh has been President since unification in 1990 and was previously the President of the Yemen Arab Republic from 1978–1990. He overwhelmingly won the most recent presidential election in 2006; his current seven-year term is slated to end in 2013.⁹⁷ Saleh's presidential powers give him commanding control over the central government. As president, he appoints the vice president and prime minister and, in consultation with the prime minister, appoints the 32-member Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers develops and drafts legislation, which is then submitted to parliament for deliberation.⁹⁸ The president has the right to dissolve parliament, "which is generally perceived as an ineffective check on executive-branch power."⁹⁹ Saleh has further consolidated power by placing extended family members in key positions in both the military and intelligence services.¹⁰⁰ In this manner, Saleh "controls and uses the military and security services in a way that enables him to circumvent the country's formal institutional bodies."¹⁰¹



© Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Yemeni Foreign Minister

Administratively, the country is divided into 21 governorates, which are further divided into districts, sub-districts, and villages. Approved in 2000, the Local Authority Law established popularly elected local councils at both the district and governorate levels. These local councils were endowed with significant budgetary and administrative power. They have mostly been dominated by existing elites, usually tribal leaders. Some

⁹⁵ The New York Times. Worth, Robert F. "Thirsty Plant Dries Out Yemen." 31 October 2009.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/world/middleeast/01yemen.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

⁹⁶ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen." August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

⁹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Yemen." 4 March 2010.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

⁹⁸ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Arab Political Systems: Baseline Information and Reforms – Yemen." 2006. http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Yemen_APS.doc

⁹⁹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen." August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Sharp, Jeremy M. "CRS Report for Congress: Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations." 13 January 2010.

<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>

¹⁰¹ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Arab Political Systems: Baseline Information and Reforms – Yemen." 2006. http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Yemen_APS.doc

observers view local councils as a way to incorporate traditional tribal authority into the central government.¹⁰² It is easier than working to extend state authority into tribal areas, a process which would likely generate conflict as indigenous tribal leaders found their power challenged by government administrators. Thus, the authority of the central government remains limited outside of Sanaa and contingent upon the support of certain tribes, many of whom operate independently. President Saleh, himself a member of the Hashid tribal confederation, maintains tribal support via an extensive patronage system that rewards allies and supporters with jobs, resources, and political appointments. This system has led to rampant corruption in the central government while, at the same time, weakening traditional tribal authority that historically regulated society in rural Yemen.¹⁰³

Media

Freedom of speech and the press are stipulated in the Yemeni constitution, but only “within the limits of the law.” The 1990 Press and Publication Law is loosely defined and open to official interpretation. This contributes to an environment in which freedom to take positions contrary to official policy cannot be assumed by members of the Yemeni press corps. All Yemeni television and radio outlets are controlled and operated by the central government via the Ministry of Information. The Ministry of Information typically does not permit broadcasts that are critical of the government. Print media consist of both independent and state-run outlets, as well as outlets associated with political parties and civil society organizations. The government influences independent press organizations by imposing annual licensing requirements, subsidizing newspapers, and controlling many printing presses. Surveillance, harassment, imprisonment, and physical attacks on journalists have been frequently reported, and many independent newspapers have been shut down. Under these conditions, independent journalists often opt to self-censor given the risks of criticizing official policy. An opposition journalist was seized on the streets of Sanaa by state security personnel in 2009 and held for six months after he accused the military of war crimes in fighting the Houthis.¹⁰⁴



© eesti / flickr.com
Sana'a houses with satalite dishes

The government also restricts internet use through direct control of Yemen’s two major internet providers. Internet access is filtered and a number of political and religious sites

¹⁰² Center for Global Development, University of California, Berkeley. Egel, Daniel. “Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [pp. 22–25, 32–33].” 12 January 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

¹⁰³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Yemen on the Brink: A Carnegie Paper Series. Middle East Program, No. 107. Phillips, Sarah. “What Comes Next in Yemen? Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building.” March 2010. http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribes.pdf

¹⁰⁴ Foreign Policy in Focus, Middle East and North Africa. Bouckaert, Peter and Christoph Wilcke. “The Problem with Partnering with Yemen.” 7 April 2010. http://www.fpif.org/articles/the_problems_of_partnering_with_yemen

are blocked.¹⁰⁵ Much of the controversy surrounding the government's media restrictions, especially those on foreign correspondents, has stemmed from its restrictions on coverage of the northern insurgency and secessionist unrest in the south.¹⁰⁶ In areas not under the control of the central government, cell phone service may be cut to prevent dissemination of information about clashes with government troops that contradict Sanaa's version. This happened in the south, when unrest intensified, in March 2010.¹⁰⁷ In the same month, a law allowing expanded private media in Yemen was in consideration, although it remained unclear whether it would be approved and implemented.¹⁰⁸

Ethnic Groups and Languages

The Yemeni population is predominantly Arab. Many residents of coastal communities are Afro-Arab or otherwise diverse in culture and ancestry due to a legacy of foreign contact and occupation. Yemen is home to a sizable population of Somali refugees, as well as communities of South Asians (Indians) and Europeans. A very small population of Jews lives in the north, but emigration has significantly reduced their number.¹⁰⁹ Arabic is the official language of Yemen and the first language of nearly all Yemeni citizens.¹¹⁰ Two small ethnic groups speak other languages. The Mahri (Mehri) live in Al Mahrah governorate, in the east, near the border with Oman. They speak Mahri. Socotrans, the residents of Socotra, speak Socotri (Soqotri). Members of both of these ethnic groups are said to also speak Arabic.¹¹¹ Some reports indicate that many Socotrans speak only Socotri, however.¹¹² Yemen's dark-skinned residents, who are of African ancestry, face discrimination and persecution as



© BBC World Services
Jewish man in yemen

¹⁰⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. "2009 Human Rights Report: Yemen." 11 March 2010.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136083.htm>

¹⁰⁶ Los Angeles Times. Daragahi, Borzou. "Yemeni Government Upset Over Foreign Media Coverage." 13 March 2010. <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/mar/13/world/la-fg-yemen-censor13-2010mar13>

¹⁰⁷ Yemen Post. "As Crackdown on Rioters Continues, Yemen Cuts Cell Phone in South." 9 March 2010. <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=1955>

¹⁰⁸ Yemen Observer. Al-Mamari, Iscander. "Private Media Coming Soon." 23 March 2010. <http://www.yobserver.com/front-page/10018383.html>

¹⁰⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. "Yemen." 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127361.htm>

¹¹⁰ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen." August 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

¹¹¹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 13]." 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

¹¹² Ethnologue.com. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16th Ed. "Soqotri." M. Paul Lewis, Ed. 2009. Dallas: SIL International. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=sqt

Akhdam (poor, low-class “servants” and sanitary workers)¹¹³ or *abid* (the descendents of slaves).¹¹⁴

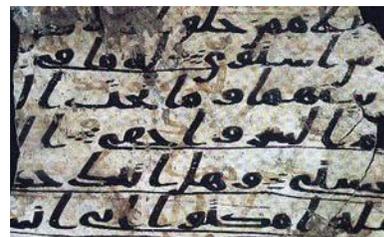
¹¹³ The New York Times. Worth, Robert F. “Languishing at the Bottom of Yemen’s Ladder.” 27 February 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/27/world/middleeast/27yemen.html>

¹¹⁴ “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [pp. 123–124].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Religion

Introduction

Islam is the predominant religion in Yemen, where the population is almost entirely Muslim. The religion first made inroads in the 7th century C.E., during the diffusion of Islam throughout the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. In Yemen its spread was complicated by competing Islamic sects, which, over several centuries, strove for political and spiritual dominance in the region.¹¹⁵ Today, Yemen is home to two major Muslim groups, the Shafi'is and the Zaydis, each of which follow a different school or sect of Islam. The Shafi'is take their name from the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam, while the Zaydis are a Shi'ite Muslim sect. A third group, known broadly as Isma'ilis, also lives in Yemen, although its numbers are relatively few. Yemen's small non-Muslim population consists mainly of Jews and Christians, the latter of whom are typically foreigners. Jews are the only native non-Muslim people in Yemen. Their once-large population has greatly diminished due to emigration, mostly to Israel.¹¹⁶



© Gerd R. Puin
The oldest known copy of the Qur'an,
found in Sana'a in 1972

Islam shapes not only the daily lives of Yemenis but also the country's social organization, politics, and government. It is the state religion and its legal code (Shari'a) is enforced by Yemeni law. The spread of religious extremism is a pressing concern. An insurgency in the north (led by the Al Houthi family) and a growing terrorism threat (led by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) are partially fueled by religious motivations.¹¹⁷ Yet, for many observers, the spread of religious extremism and insurgency stems from the country's serious economic troubles.¹¹⁸ In any case, Islam is the foundation of Yemeni society.

¹¹⁵ "Towards a Sociology of the Islamisation of Yemen [pp. 8–17]." Gochenour, D. Thomas. In *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*. B. R. Pridham, Ed. 1984. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

¹¹⁶ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. "Yemen." 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127361.htm>

¹¹⁷ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Sharp, Jeremy M. "CRS Report for Congress: Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations." 13 January 2010. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>

¹¹⁸ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Analysis: Yemen's Rebellions Fuelled by Economic Meltdown." 4 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87996>

Islam

Basic Tenets

Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning its followers believe in a single God. In the Muslim community, or *ummah*, God is known as Allah. The Arabic term *islam* means “to submit” or “to surrender.” A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits to the will of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad the last of a long line of prophets that included Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Esa). In this way, Muslims share the lineage of the Judaic and Christian traditions. However, they believe the message relayed by Muhammad is the final revelation of the faith. This message is recited in the Quran, the sacred scriptures of Islam. Additional sacred texts include the *Hadith*, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the *Sunnah*, which describes the practices of Islam shown in Muhammad’s example.¹¹⁹



© Franco Pecchio
Taizz Al-Ashrafiya Mosque dome roof

The essential beliefs and rites of the Islamic faith are encapsulated in the five pillars of Islam. The first, foundational pillar is the sincere recitation of the Muslim declaration of faith, or *shahada*: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” The remaining pillars include: the performance of ritual prayers five times per day (*salat*); the giving of alms to the poor and needy, typically through a tax on income (*zakat*); fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (*sawm*); and the undertaking of a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy city of Mecca (*hajj*).¹²⁰ Muslims believe that Allah will judge them for their actions on earth, assigning them to spend their afterlife in heaven or hell.¹²¹

Sunni and Shi’a

Islam has two major branches: Sunni and Shi’a. The two sects formed in the 7th century C.E., shortly after the introduction of Islam. They divided over a disagreement about selecting the successor, or caliph (*khalifa*), to the Prophet Muhammad, who died in 632 C.E. The Sunni, as they came to be known, believed Muhammad had not definitively selected a successor; they decided the first caliph should be elected from among the leaders of the Muslim community. They chose Abu Bakr, Muhammad’s father-in-law, as the first caliph. The opposing group, later called the Shi’a, believed that Muhammad



© Franco Pecchio
Reading in the Mosque

¹¹⁹ BBC. “Religions: Islam: Texts: The Qur’an.” 8 September 2009.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/texts/quran_1.shtml

¹²⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Islam: Fundamental Practices and Institutions of Islam: The Five Pillars.” 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-69149>

¹²¹ BBC. “Religions: Islam: Beliefs: Basic Articles of Faith.” 3 September 2009.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/beliefs/beliefs.shtml>

designated his son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, as his successor. They believed that only Muhammad's descendants held a rightful claim to the caliphate. For Shi'ites, the role of caliph was eventually conceived as an *imam*, or spiritual leader, who many Shi'ite sects believe possesses special insight.

Ali was eventually selected as the fourth caliph (from 656–661 C.E.), but his appointment was not universally accepted within the Muslim community. The unresolved issue of succession created a deep divide between the two groups, leading to infighting and the assassination of Ali.¹²² The Sunni–Shi'a divide was cemented by the death of Hussein ibn Ali, the son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad. He was killed in the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. amid continued power struggles for the caliphate. While the two sects share the fundamental tenets of Islam, their separation resulted in a divergence of practices and beliefs. Over time, several splinter groups arose within the two major branches. Today, Sunnis comprise approximately 85% of the global Muslim community.¹²³

Sufism: Mystical Faith and Devotions

Sufism, known in the Islamic world as *tasawwuf*, is a mystical form of Islam. Its purpose is to obtain a direct, personal connection with Allah. Followers seek to achieve this by adhering to the Sufi path, or *tariqah*, a long-term course of study that involves devotion and practice. Sufi practices include ritual prayer, meditation, and various ascetic or ecstatic activities. Sufi spiritual leaders are known as *shaykhs*. Viewed as living saints, these holy men are believed to possess special spiritual power known as *baraka*. They act as mentors and spiritual guides to students who form brotherhoods (also known as *tariqahs*) around their teachings. Globally, Sufi practitioners are found among both Sunnis and Shi'ites.¹²⁴ In Yemen, Sufi mystics played an important role in spreading Sunni Islam in the Tihama and southern highlands. They were not accepted in the northern and central highlands, however, where the dominant Zaydi Shi'ites rejected their practices.¹²⁵ Sufi mystics are said to have initiated the consumption of both coffee and *qat*, a leaf which is chewed as a stimulant, in Yemen.¹²⁶



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Shaykh Habib Umar

¹²² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Islam: Islamic Thought: Theology and Sectarianism." 2009.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-69163>

¹²³ BBC. "Religions: Islam: Beliefs: Sunni and Shi'a." 19 August 2009.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml

¹²⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Sufism." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9105856>

¹²⁵ "Towards a Sociology of the Islamisation of Yemen [p. 19]." Gochenour, D. Thomas. In *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*. B.R. Pridham, Ed. 1984. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.

¹²⁶ *The Republic of Yemen: Developmental Challenges in the 21st Century*. Colburn, Marta. "Glossary: Sufi [p. 78]." 2002. London, UK: Catholic Institute for International Relations.

Religious Divisions in Yemen

Shafi'i

The Shafi'is take their name from the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam. This distinction primarily rests on differences in the interpretation of Islamic law. The Shaf'i school is named for an Islamic legal scholar, Muhammad al Shafi'i, who lived from 768–820 C.E. In general, Shaf'is follow the basic guidelines of Sunni Islam, which is typically described as the orthodox (traditional) form of the religion. While exact figures are unavailable, Shafi'is are thought to comprise approximately 55% of the Yemeni population.¹²⁷ They are predominant in most areas except the northern and central highlands including: the Tihama, the southern highlands (from Taizz to the southern coast), and central and eastern Yemen.¹²⁸ A distinguishing feature of the Shafi'i school in Yemen is its close connection with Sufism. (Orthodox Muslims traditionally reject Sufism as impure or un-Islamic.) Many Shafi'is in Yemen continue to incorporate elements of Sufism into their religious practice. One such element is the tradition of visiting the tombs of Muslim saints or *shaykhs*.¹²⁹ Yemeni Shaf'is maintain a center for religious study at Zabid, on the Tihama.¹³⁰



© Franco Pecchio
Zabid mosque

Zaydi

Zaydis are followers of the Zaydiyyah sect of Shi'a Islam, which emerged in the 9th century.¹³¹ They take their name from Zayd ibn Ali, the grandson of Hussein ibn Ali, who was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Followers of the movement recognize Zayd as the fifth *imam*, rather than his brother, Muhammad al-Baqir, who is recognized by most Shi'ites. The Zaydis are thus sometimes known as "Fivers."¹³² The Zaydis became dominant in the highlands of Yemen in the late 9th century, giving rise to a Zaydi state and a long succession of Zaydi *imams*.¹³³ In the modern era, from 1918 to 1962, Zaydi

¹²⁷ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. "Yemen." 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127361.htm>

¹²⁸ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W.

"Chapter 2: People and Culture [p. 29]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹²⁹ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 1: Background Information: Religion [p. 22]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

¹³⁰ "Islam [p. 75]." Daum, Werner. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

¹³¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Shi'ite: Early Development." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-272010#951982.hook>

¹³² *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 1: Background Information: Religion [p. 23]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

¹³³ "Historical Setting: South Arabia in Pre-Islamic Times: The Zayids [p. 27]." Baynard, Sally Ann et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

imams ruled North Yemen.¹³⁴ Today, Zaydis dominate the northern and central highlands. They comprise an estimated 45% of the Yemeni population.¹³⁵

While the differences between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims have been widely reported, "different Shiite groups have historically disagreed among themselves on the identity, nature, and sequencing of the Shiite Imams."¹³⁶ The legitimacy of *imams* derives in part from being descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, or *sayyid*, a privileged group. Yet a distinguishing feature of Zaydi doctrine is that the position of *imam* could be filled by descendants of either of Ali's sons, Hussein or Hassan. More importantly, Zaydis believed candidates for the role of *imam* needed to distinguish themselves by demonstrating proper character, leadership, and Islamic scholarship. In contrast, other Shi'ite sects believe *imams* of certain lineage inherently possess special spiritual insight and other qualities. In other sects, the *imamate* was traditionally passed down from father to son. While heredity was a factor for Zaydis, they did not believe *imams* possessed or inherited supernatural qualities or were infallible.¹³⁷ For this and other reasons, Zaydis have been described as pragmatic and rationalist, rather than extremist or ideological.¹³⁸ The Zaydis' appreciation of individual merit (rather than just heritage) allowed competition and politics to play a role in the selection process. Zaydi *imams* were thus elected from an elite class by community leaders.¹³⁹ The Zaydi *imamate* formally ended in 1962, when it was overthrown in a revolution that led to the founding of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen).¹⁴⁰



© Alexandre Baron
Waiting for prayer

Because of its practical and relatively orthodox nature, the Shi'ite Zaydiyyah has been called the "fifth school" of Sunni Islam. The differences between the Zaydis and the Shafi'is of Yemen are relatively minor in comparison to the broader Shi'a–Sunni divide. Both groups place great importance on religious scholarship, and both typically avoid extremist religious views.¹⁴¹ Ironically, the Zaydis reject any mystical or folk application

¹³⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Zaydiyyah." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9078280>

¹³⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. "Yemen." 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127361.htm>

¹³⁶ "The Passion of 'Ashura' in Shiite Islam [p. 119]." Aghaie, Kamran Scot. In *Voices of Islam: Voices of the Spirit*. Vincent Cornell, Ed. 2006. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.

¹³⁷ CRS Report for Congress. Blanchard, Christopher. "Islam: Sunnis and Shiites." 11 December 2006. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/78715.pdf>

¹³⁸ "Islam [pp. 72–73]." Daum, Werner. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

¹³⁹ "Historical Setting: South Arabia in Pre-Islamic Times: The Zayids [pp. 24– et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁴⁰ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. "Chapter 2: People and Culture [p. 27]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

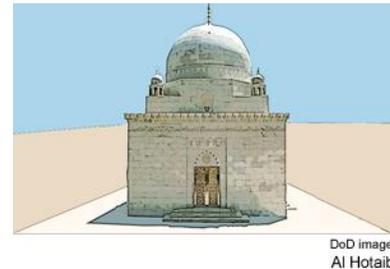
¹⁴¹ "Islam [p. 75]." Daum, Warner. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Höfer, Hans, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

of Islam, while the Shafi'is embrace Sufi traditions.¹⁴² These circumstances reverse the common pattern of the Shi'a-Sunni relationship, in which Shi'ites are seen as more mystical and Sunnis are more orthodox.¹⁴³

Because they view *imams* as human rather than divine, Zaydis believe that unjust or illegitimate rulers can and should be overthrown. Such practice is seen as both a right and a duty.¹⁴⁴ In recent years, an insurgency in northern Yemen has been spearheaded by a powerful Zaydi family, the Al Houthi. Among various motivating factors for the rebellion, the Al Houthi family has questioned the legitimacy of the Yemeni government. The government has been headed for several decades by President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who is also a Zaydi, although not a *sayyid*.¹⁴⁵ While the rebels have consistently denied it, the Saleh government has accused them of trying to restore the Zaydi *imamate* which was abolished after Republican troops seized control of Sanaa in 1962.¹⁴⁶ This forced the *imam* to flee to the northern mountains, where he mounted a counter-offensive in the same locale as the Houthi rebellion.¹⁴⁷

Ismaili

Yemen is also home to a small group of Ismailis, a sect of Shi'a Islam. The sect emerged in the 8th century over disagreements concerning the selection of the seventh Shi'ite *imam*. The Ismailis, as they came to be known, recognized Isma'il, the eldest son of the previous *imam*, Ja'far ibn Muhammad. They were in the minority, however, as most Shi'ites recognized Ja'far's younger son, Musa al Qasim, as the seventh *imam*. (The larger group of Shi'ites ultimately became known as the Imamis, or Twelvers, who are today the predominant Shi'ite group in the Muslim world.)¹⁴⁸ Over the following centuries, many schisms occurred within the Ismaili sect, resulting in varied beliefs and practices.



The Ismailis who live in Yemen are divided into two subgroups: the Dawoodi (Daudis) Bohras and the Sulaymani Bohras. They are offshoots of the Musta'lian (Tayyibi) branch

¹⁴² *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. "Chapter 1: Introductory: A Sketch of Physical and Conceptual Geography [p. 11]." 1993. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹⁴³ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 1: Background Information: Religion [p. 23]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

¹⁴⁴ "Historical Setting: South Arabia in Pre-Islamic Times: The Zayids [pp. 24–27]." Baynard, Sally Ann et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁴⁵ Federation of American Scientists. Congressional Research Service. Sharp, Jeremy M. "CRS Report for Congress: Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations [pp. 16–17]." 13 January 2010. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ Google. Agence France-Press. Handley, Paul. "Saudi and Yemen Battle Zaidi Rebels." 7 November 2009. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5imeeJ9igAWZzVyXkyN75kZRjhV7A>

¹⁴⁷ BBC News. Hill, Ginny. "Cold War Roots of Yemen Conflict." 17 September 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8261867.stm>

¹⁴⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Isma'ilite." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9042936>

of the Ismailis. (These distinctions are important because of the wide range of beliefs among Ismailis.) In Yemen, the Sulaymanis are the larger of the two groups. They are also known as the Makarima after the name of their ruling family.¹⁴⁹ The Sulaymanis live in the Haraz region and parts of the northern highlands, including along the border with Saudi Arabia (around the Najran region). Sulaymanis have historically isolated themselves from the Zaydis. They are known as a progressive Muslim group.¹⁵⁰ The Dawoodi Bohras of Yemen represent a small portion of the larger Dawoodi community based in India. In Yemen, they are concentrated in the Haraz Mountains, which remain a major site of pilgrimage for the international Dawoodi community.¹⁵¹

Although they split over issues of succession, the Sulaymanis and Dawoodis share a complex and often esoteric (hidden or mysterious) belief system. They follow the Ismaili tradition of *taqiyya*, the practice of hiding certain elements of one's religious belief system and practices. Their spiritual leaders are known as *da'i* rather than *imams* because they believe, like some other Shi'ite groups, that *imams* live in hiding. *Da'i* are viewed as messengers for the hidden *imams*.¹⁵² Both groups follow the Fatimid Ismaili tradition of observing seven (rather than five) pillars of Islam. These include: offering love and devotion to Allah and the prophets, *imams*, and *di'a* (*walaya*); ritual purity (*tahara*); daily prayers (*salat*); the giving of alms to the poor and needy (*zakat*); fasting (*sawm*); undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*); and holy struggle or war (*jihad*).^{153, 154}

Religion and the State

Islam is the state religion of Yemen, and Shari'a, or Islamic law, is the basis of the country's legal system. These conditions are decreed by Yemen's constitution, which neither restricts nor protects religious freedom. Citizens and foreign nationals are free to practice a religion other than Islam, but non-Muslims comprise only a very small percentage of the population. According to Shari'a, it is illegal for Muslims to convert to another religion, and it is illegal for others to proselytize, or attempt to convert, Muslims to other faiths. These restrictions are enforced by the Yemeni government. Yemeni law also



© Bill Lyons/ World Bank
Students taking year end exams at Kardi School in Sana'a.

¹⁴⁹ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. "Chapter 2: People and Culture [p. 28]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹⁵⁰ *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*. Daftary, Farhad. "Chapter 5: Mustalian Ismailism [pp. 321–323]." 1990. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵¹ Yemen General Tourism Development Authority. *Yemen: Haraz Mountains: Nature, Culture, Trekking*. Kasperek, Max. "The Populations [pp. 17–20]." 2007. Heidelberg, Germany: Kasperek Verlag.

¹⁵² "Historical Setting: South Arabia in Pre-Islamic Times: The Ismailis [pp. 29–30]." Baynard, Sally Ann et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁵³ *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines*. Daftary, Farhad. "Chapter 4: Fatimid Ismailism [p. 250]." 1990. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵⁴ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 1: Background Information: Religion [p. 25]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

requires all elected government officials to be Muslim. The constitution states that the Yemeni president, in particular, “must practice his Islamic duties.” Religious groups do not have to register with the state, but government permission is required to construct new places of worship. Islam is taught in public schools. Muslims and non-Muslims have the right to attend private schools that may or may not teach the religion.

To limit the spread of religious extremism, the government monitors mosques for “sermons that incite violence or other political statements...considered harmful to public security.” Likewise, the government closed more than 4,500 unlicensed religious schools and institutions due to concerns that they encouraged militant ideology or deviated from the government-approved curriculum.¹⁵⁵ Despite the government’s efforts, Yemen remains susceptible to the spread of Islamic extremism and militancy. The government’s power is weak beyond the Sanaa region. This allows an unknown number of unlicensed schools and mosques that promote Islamic fundamentalism to operate unchecked. The country has been described as an “easy haven” for those wishing to study and train in militant Islam.¹⁵⁶ Rampant poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy have been identified as major factors contributing to the spread of religious extremism and militancy in the country.¹⁵⁷

Islam and Gender

Islamic law and custom calls for strict boundaries between men and women. This notion, along with tribal customs, has contributed to the development of a patriarchal culture in which the respective roles of men and women are distinct. One of the most pervasive practices in Yemen is the segregation of the sexes. Yemeni men and women typically do not mix socially in public, especially if they are unrelated. Gender boundaries are also observed in the home, among the extended family. Many Yemeni women are restricted to the home through *purdah*, or the seclusion and veiling of women. This practice is partly tied to the traditional association of men with public spaces and women with domestic spaces. Circumstances vary by location and family, but many Yemeni women rarely leave the family compound or its immediate vicinity.¹⁵⁸ In public, most women wear a *balto* (a long cloak) and a *hijab* (a headscarf) and/or *niqab* (veil) to conceal themselves. Or they may wear a traditional outfit known as the *sharshaf* (sheet),



© Francesco Veronesi
Married couple

¹⁵⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. “Yemen.” 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127361.htm>

¹⁵⁶ Google. Agence France-Presse. Moutot, Michel. “Yemen an Easy Haven for Foreigners Drawn to Militant Islam.” 21 January 2010.

¹⁵⁷ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Analysis: Yemen’s Rebellions Fuelled by Economic Meltdown.” 4 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87996>

¹⁵⁸ “Chapter 2: North Yemen: Gender Roles [pp. 125–127].” Krieger, Laurie et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

which has even greater coverage.¹⁵⁹ *Purdah* is tied to Islam’s general code of modesty for women, who are traditionally seen as more susceptible to sexual urges and advances than men.

When North Yemen and South Yemen were separate, *purdah* was more widely practiced in the North than in the South.¹⁶⁰ Women in the South, which was known as the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) from 1970 to 1990, received greater rights and freedom of movement under the socialist PDRY government. However, since unification in 1990, conservative Islamic law and practices (such as *purdah*) have reemerged across the south. This trend has, been partly tied to the influence of Saudi Arabia, which has promoted its conservative brand of Islam across the peninsula.¹⁶¹

Although excluded from group prayer at the mosque, Yemeni women gather instead at Quranic study groups known as *nadawat*. These informal gatherings may be held at a women’s home or, occasionally, at a mosque. The meetings typically include a lecture on religious themes—presented by a woman—followed by socializing. This trend has been observed, in particular, among middle class women in Sanaa. Such meetings were tied to an Islamic charity organization.¹⁶²

Islam in Daily Life

The daily lives of Yemenis revolve around the basic duties of Islam. Foremost among daily rituals, Muslims must perform a series of prayers, known as *salat* (the second pillar of Islam). These prayers are performed at five times of the day: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. As prayer times correspond with the position of the sun (and thus vary throughout the year), Muslims are called to prayer by the *muezzin* (or *muadhdhin*). The *muezzin* typically announces the call for prayer from the minaret of the local mosque. Prayers can be performed individually or with fellow Muslims at the mosque. Prayer at mosques is traditionally reserved for male Muslims. Women typically pray at home; if they do pray at mosques, they are segregated from men. The noon prayer on Friday, the Islamic holy day, is the most important prayer. It is performed communally



¹⁵⁹ “Traditional Dress and Fashion [p. 98].” Buringa, Joke. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

¹⁶⁰ “North Yemen: Gender Roles [pp. 125–127].” Krieger, Laurie. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd edition. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁶¹ Reuters. Laessing, Ulf. “Women of Southern Yemen Port Remember Better Times.” 22 January 2010. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE60L2ZD20100122>

¹⁶² *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen*. Clark, Janine A. “Chapter 4: The Islah Charitable Society in Yemen: Women’s Social Networks, Charity, and Da’wa [pp. 115–116].” 2004. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

by male Muslims at the mosque. All prayers must be offered in the direction of Mecca, the holy city of Islam, which is located in Saudi Arabia, to the northwest of Yemen.¹⁶³

Before prayer, Muslims are required to perform ablution, or *wudu*, as a form of ritual purification. This process involves washing one's hands, face, arms, neck, and feet, as well as rinsing out the mouth and nose. Muslims may also recite the *shahada* at this time.¹⁶⁴ *Wudu* is not performed only for physical cleanliness, although this is important. Rather, the rite is meant to spiritually and mentally cleanse the participant to perform a holy action in a pure and concentrated state. This state of ritual purity may be broken by any one of several acts, such as defecating or urinating, breaking wind, or, for many Muslims, simply touching a person of the opposite sex. The necessity of performing multiple daily prayers encourages Muslims to maintain ritual purity throughout the day. In Yemen, where water is extremely scarce, a family's water supply may be wholly reserved for drinking and performing *wudu*.¹⁶⁵ In the absence of water, symbolic elements, such as sand or a stone, may be used, or a person may simply perform the motions.¹⁶⁶

Ritual purity is known as *tahara*, and it extends to avoiding impure substances (such as bodily fluids) and foods considered unclean (such as pork). Muslims are considered impure following sexual intercourse or childbirth, or during menstruation. In these instances, full ablution, known as *ghusl*, is required to reach a state of ritual purity. *Ghusl* typically consists of washing the entire body in a ritual manner. This may be performed at a *hammam*, or bathhouse. Only after *wudu* or *ghusl* are performed can prayers or religious rites be conducted in good faith and righteous action.¹⁶⁷

While *zakat* funds generally play a prominent role in improving social welfare in Muslim societies, their impact in Yemen is more limited. As is true in other Islamic countries, collection of *zakat* is a government responsibility handled in Yemen by local councils. There have been complaints most of it is spent on administrative costs, including council member travel, and little actually reaches the poor (*al-mustahiqqin*), the intended beneficiaries. Those who refuse to pay or underpay according to council calculations, the minimum being the equivalent of 2.5% of a family's annual income, can be prosecuted. Charities also collect *zakat* since merchants may retain 25% of their obligatory contribution and disperse it to organizations of their choice.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Esposito, John L. "Salat [p. 275]." 2003. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

¹⁶⁴ *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, 3rd Ed. Glassé, Cyril. "Wudu [pp. 553–555]." 2008. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

¹⁶⁵ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Drought Displaces Thousands in Mountainous Northwest." 5 May 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=78048>

¹⁶⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Tahara." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9474562>

¹⁶⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Tahara." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9474562>

¹⁶⁸ Yemen Times. Saeed, Ali. "The Absence of Zakat's Impact on Yemen's Economy." 14 October 2009. <http://www.zawya.com/Story.cfm/sidZAWYA20091014103548/The%20absence%20of%20zakat%27s%20impact%20on%20Yemen%27s%20economy>

Religious Events and Festivals

Yemenis observe Islamic events and festivals according to the Islamic lunar calendar, which is 10 days shorter than the standard Gregorian calendar used in the U.S. and other countries. The dates of these events on the standard calendar thus change from year to year.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the major religious event for Muslims. It is during this period that observant Muslims fulfill the third pillar of Islam, undertaking a fast (*sawm*). This event commemorates the initial revelation of the Quran to Muhammad, which according to Muslim tradition was performed by the Angel Gabriel (Jibril) during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan provides an opportunity for Muslims to show their devotion to the Islamic faith. Throughout the month, observant Muslims must abstain from eating, drinking, and engaging in sexual intercourse during daylight hours. Restrictions also apply to smoking and chewing gum. These prohibitions are observed to demonstrate piety and self-restraint. Muslims are also expected to enhance their study of the Quran during this time. Ramadan, in short, is a time of spiritual and physical purification. It is also when *zakat* is paid.



© Carpetblogger / flickr.com
Young man prepares for iftar

Exchange 1: When will Ramadan start?

Soldier:	When will Ramadan start?	ayHeen 'ayibtadee ramaDhaan?
Local:	Tomorrow.	ghudwa

Known as *iftar*, large meals are typically served after sunset to offset the rigorous demands of daytime fasting, which can cause fatigue and irritability. The pace of everyday life slows considerably during this holy month. Muslims generally work fewer hours, and businesses and shops follow irregular schedules. Within the Muslim community, young children and the sick and infirm may be exempted from the fast. Non-Muslims, including foreigners, are not required to fast, but they are expected to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, or chewing gum in public.

Eid al Fitr

The end of Ramadan is celebrated with a multi-day festival known as Eid al Fitr, or the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast. During this time, Muslims share traditional meals and exchange gifts with family and friends. This holiday is also sometimes known as Eid as Sagheer, or the Lesser Festival.



© Franco Pecchio
Slaughter in the square during 'Id

Exchange 2: Will you be celebrating Eid?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating Eid?	'atiHtafalo bil-'eed?
Local:	Yes!	aywa

Eid al Adha

The Islamic festival Eid al Adha occurs in the 12th month of the Islamic lunar year, known as Dhu al Hijjah. This month is the time for Muslims to observe the fifth pillar of Islam, the undertaking of a holy pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*). Marking the end of the pilgrimage, Eid al Adha, or the Festival of the Sacrifice, commemorates Ibrahim's offer to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. As told in the Quran, Ibrahim prepared to sacrifice his son to Allah, but Allah intervened at the last moment and revealed that it was a test of faith. In an act of mercy, Allah allowed Ibrahim to sacrifice a ram instead. During the multi-day festival, Muslims sacrifice animals, primarily goats and sheep, to provide feasts for family and friends. They also provide a portion of the food to the poor and needy. Eid al Adha is also called Eid al Kabeer, or the Greater Festival.

Other Events and Holidays

While Ramadan and the two Eids are the most important religious events, Yemeni Muslims observe additional holidays of religious significance. Muharram is the Islamic New Year. It is celebrated on the first day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Mawhid al-Nabi commemorates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims observe this holiday on the 12th day of the third month of the Islamic calendar, Rabi' al Awwal. Both of these events, as well as the two Eids, are national public holidays. *Ashura*, the anniversary of the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali, is a major religious event for most Shi'ites. It occurs on the 10th day of the month of Muharram, a

period of mourning for the Shi'ite community. The Zaydis, however, reportedly do not commemorate this event to the extent that other Shi'ite sects do.¹⁶⁹

Places of Worship

A mosque, or *masjid*, is the traditional site of Muslim worship. The largest and most important mosques are known as *jama* (or *jami*) *masjid*. These mosques, also called Friday mosques, host large communal prayers on Fridays (the Islamic holy day) and holidays. They are found in city or town centers. Smaller mosques are scattered throughout villages and rural areas, so each community has one if not several mosques. Mosques have several basic features. The main prayer hall is where Muslims meet to worship. They remove their shoes and then they sit on the floor, which is covered in mats or carpets. The *mihrab* is a niche in the wall of the prayer hall that faces the direction of Mecca, and is known as *gibla*. Islamic prayer is always directed toward the holy city. To the right of the *mihrab* is the *minbar*, or pulpit, where the prayer leader stands during services. Minarets are towers attached to the mosque from which the *muezzin* calls Muslims to prayer. Mosques contain designated areas for Muslims to remove their shoes and wash rooms where they perform their ritual ablution (*wudu*) before prayer.^{170, 171} In addition to holding prayer services, mosques often serve as schools and communal meeting centers.



© Pim Pim
Al'Ashrafyia Mosqu

The Great Mosque, or Jama al Kabir, in the capital, Sanaa, is one of Yemen's most well-known and culturally significant mosques. It dates to the 7th century and is thought to be among the world's oldest *masjid*.¹⁷² It has long functioned as a center for Islamic studies. The compound houses a library containing a large collection of ancient manuscripts.¹⁷³ Another, newer mosque in Sanaa is known as the Saleh Mosque, after the country's president, Ali Abdallah Saleh. Capable of holding some 40,000 people, this massive mosque opened in 2008 to some controversy.¹⁷⁴ Its cost of USD 60 million was seen by many Yemenis as an extravagant use of government resources considering much of the population remains poor and lacks basic



© Francesco Veronesi
Entering the Great Mosque

¹⁶⁹ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. "Chapter 2: People and Culture [p. 29]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹⁷⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Mosque." 2008.
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/393679/mosque#>

¹⁷¹ BBC. "Religions: Islam: Prayer and Worship: Mosque." 18 August 2009.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/prayer/mosque.shtml>

¹⁷² *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. "Chapter 2: People and Culture [p. 23]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹⁷³ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Gordon, Frances Linzeel. "Sana'a: Mosques [p. 376]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

¹⁷⁴ BBC News. "Yemen's New \$60m Mosque." 24 November 2008.
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7745708.stm>

social services.¹⁷⁵

Women are typically not allowed to attend prayer services at mosques. An exception to this norm is seen among the Bohras (the Yemeni Ismailis), who reportedly permit their women to pray at mosques.¹⁷⁶ Female worshippers are nonetheless relegated to a separate section. Most mosques in Yemen do not allow entry to non-Muslims.¹⁷⁷ (Cemeteries may also prohibit non-Muslim visitors.)¹⁷⁸ Non-Muslims should receive express permission from mosque officials before entering a mosque.

Exchange 3: May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	May I enter the mosque?	mumkin adKhul al-masjid?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Yemenis wear conservative clothing, especially when visiting a mosque. Men generally wear skull caps and women wear headscarves.

Exchange 4: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	laazim aghaTee raasee?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Visitors should dress conservatively. Men should wear loose-fitting pants and long-sleeved shirts. Women should wear loose-fitting clothing that covers everything above the ankles, including the arms and shoulders. They should also wear headscarves. Finally, and of great importance, shoes must be removed before entering a mosque.

¹⁷⁵ Fox News. Associated Press. "Yemen's Poor Outraged by Massive Mosque for President." 23 November 2008. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,456506,00.html>

¹⁷⁶ Yemen Observer. Al-Kibsi, Mohammed. "Bohra Celebrate 96th Birthday of Da'i al-Mutlaq Syedna Burhanuddin." 8 May 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/front-page/10012153.html>

¹⁷⁷ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Mosques [p. 62]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

¹⁷⁸ VisitYemen.com. Oriental Tours. "ABC for Visitors." No date. <http://www.visityemen.com/index.html>

Exchange 5: Must I take off my shoes?

Soldier:	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?	laazim aKhla' jazmatee daaKhil al-masjid?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

For the Shafi'is, the tombs of Sufi saints also serve as sites of pilgrimage and religious veneration. The practice of visiting these tombs is known as *ziyara*.¹⁷⁹ Such tombs can be found in regions where the Shafi'is are predominant: the Tihama, the southern highlands, and central and eastern Yemen.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ American Institute for Yemeni Studies. *Yemen Update*, No. 39. Buchman, David. "The Underground Friends of God and Their Adversaries: A Case Study and Survey of Sufism in Contemporary Yemen." 1997. <http://www.aiys.org/webdate/sufi.html>

¹⁸⁰ "Islam [p. 73]." Daum, Werner. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

Traditions

Introduction

Yemeni society is deeply rooted in *adat wa taqalid*, or “customs and traditions.”¹⁸¹ These range from basic codes of interaction to methods of social organization, such as tribe, class, and gender. Combined with the beliefs and practices of Islam, these customs make Yemen a conservative, traditional society. Circumstances may vary significantly from a southern urban center like Aden, for example, to a remote *wadi* (valley) in the eastern plateau. Yet, in all regions, Yemenis place great value on customs and manners. As in many Muslim cultures, such practice relates to preserving individual and familial honor, which are highly valued, and closely linked in Yemeni society. This is especially true among Yemeni tribes, for whom heritage and perceptions of character determine social status. These factors not only affect everyday social relations but also economic and political matters within the community.



© Francesco Veronesi
Veiled woman

In many areas of Yemen, the tribal order operates independently of the central government, which has limited authority beyond the Sanaa region.¹⁸² The very absence of modern state government in these mostly rural areas contributes to the need for strong, traditional forms of local organization. As one writer described it, “This narrow and almost inflexible social order both demands and supports the solidarity of the community.”¹⁸³ At the same time, tribal traditions and politics play a major role in central government.¹⁸⁴ Yemen is thus characterized by the coexistence and interaction of a strong tribal society and weak state administration.¹⁸⁵

Traditional Social Groups

Social organization varies widely in modern Yemen, where different regions have unique histories and cultural influences. Social structures may even vary from village to village within a distinct region. Traditionally, there are several types of social groupings

¹⁸¹ “Islam, Custom and Revolution in Aden: Reconsidering the Background to the Changes of the Early 1990s [pp. 329–330, 341].” Dahlgren, Susanne. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Mahdi, Kamil A. and Anna Würth, Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

¹⁸² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Yemen [p. 19].” August 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

¹⁸³ “The Tribes – The Backbone of the Nation [p. 115].” Meissner, Jeff. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

¹⁸⁴ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 35–38].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

¹⁸⁵ Yemen Observer. Al-Alaya’a, Zaid. “Tribes Should be Social Entities not Political Participants, Says al-Dhaheri.” 22 September 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/reports/10012989.html>

recognized throughout much of Yemen. Although these structures have broken down to some extent, they remain influential.¹⁸⁶

At the top of the traditional hierarchy are the *sayyids*, or *saada*, an elite group of well-educated and often wealthy families. They trace their lineage to the Prophet Muhammad, a heritage that carries immense prestige. Men from their ranks served as religious leaders and conflict mediators. The Zaydi Shi'ite *imam* was chosen by the *sayyids* from among their own class. Just below the *sayyids* in the hierarchy were the *qadis* (*qada*), a class of Muslim scholars who distinguished themselves through education rather than heritage. *Qadis* could transmit membership in the class to their offspring, however. The term *qadi* is broadly used in the Arab world as the name for a traditional Islamic judge; Yemeni *qadis* have held other esteemed scholarly and professional positions as well.¹⁸⁷ In the modern era, *qadis* have, to some extent, surpassed *sayyids* in stature. *Qadis* now play a greater role in central government than *sayyids*. Some *sayyids* have aligned themselves more closely with tribes following the diminished importance and, in some cases, rejection of their class in post-revolution Yemen.¹⁸⁸



The largest social group is that of the *qabili* (*qabail*), or tribesmen. Most tribesmen are sedentary agriculturist landowners. (Landless farmers, or peasants, who traditionally have a lower social status than tribesmen are known as *fellahin*.)¹⁸⁹ Tribesmen provided protection or sanctuary (*hijra*) for the elite *sayyids* and *qadis*, and for lower-class non-tribesmen who they took on as clients. As landowners and warriors, tribesmen were seen as independent and self-sufficient. They have a similar reputation, today. Tribesmen continue to carry weapons to mark their tribal identity. Members of a tribe often claim a common heritage—either through blood or political alliances—that can be traced back to pre-Islamic times. This gives them significant social esteem.¹⁹⁰ Yet, for many tribes, especially those in the highlands, territory plays a greater role in shaping tribal identity.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 12].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

¹⁸⁷ “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [pp. 113–115].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁸⁸ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 4: Estates of Society within the Tribal Peace [pp. 140–141].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

¹⁸⁹ *The Flower of Paradise: The Institutionalized Use of the Drug Qat in North Yemen*. Kennedy, John G. “Chapter 2: History and Social Structure of North Yemen [pp. 46–47].” 1987. Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel Publishing Company.

¹⁹⁰ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. “Chapter 2: People and Culture [p. 33].” 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹⁹¹ “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [p. 116].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

The Hashid and Bakil—two tribal confederations—are the most powerful and influential tribes in Yemen. Based north of Sanaa, the Hashid confederation is the more politically dominant of the two; it plays a strong role in central government.¹⁹² Yemen’s president, Ali Abdallah Saleh, is a member of the Hashid.¹⁹³ Among the *qabili* is an elite group of families known as the *mashayekh*, from which tribal leaders, or *shaykhs*, are traditionally chosen.¹⁹⁴ Locally-elected *shaykhs* have been increasingly incorporated into the central government in recent years.¹⁹⁵ Tribalism remains strongest in the northern highlands and areas of the eastern plateau. In the coastal plains it is “weak or virtually non-existent.” In the south, the promotion of socialism under the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (1970–1990) played a significant role in weakening tribalism.¹⁹⁶

The lowest social group in Yemen has historically consisted of persons without a traceable ancestry—an essential source of identity and esteem in Yemen. Its members are sometimes known generally as Bani Khums.¹⁹⁷ This group comprises people who work in various service or commercial positions, which were typically passed from generation to generation. This includes shopkeepers, artisans, butchers, barbers, bathhouse workers, and street-sweepers, among others. Such positions were deemed lowly by tribesmen and the elites.¹⁹⁸ Members of this group were landless and dependent upon tribesmen for protection. They were thus considered “weak” and without *‘ard*.¹⁹⁹ In urban areas, state services (e.g., education) and a cash economy have increased economic mobility and broken down many of the traditional prejudices against people working in these service positions.²⁰⁰



© Martin Sojka
Manakha man

¹⁹² Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 12].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

¹⁹³ The Atlantic. Kaplan, Robert D. “A Tale of Two Colonies.” April 2003.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200304/kaplan>

¹⁹⁴ “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [pp. 115–121].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁹⁵ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 36].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

¹⁹⁶ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 13].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

¹⁹⁷ “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [pp. 123–124].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁹⁸ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W.

“Chapter 2: People and Culture [pp. 34–35].” 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

¹⁹⁹ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 4: Estates of Society within the Tribal Peace [pp. 118–123].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²⁰⁰ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 13, 28].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

While social change has dissolved and modified the traditional hierarchy to some degree, one group that remains severely marginalized is known as the Akhdam, or “servants.” Typically dark-skinned and poor, they work as street sweepers or cleaners and live in slums. They prefer to be called “al Muhamasheen,” or “the marginalized ones.”²⁰¹ Another low-status group is known as the *abid*, the descendents of slaves.²⁰²

Honor and Values among Yemeni Tribes

In Yemen, as in most Islamic societies, the notion of honor plays a major role in shaping traditional codes of conduct. This is especially true among Yemeni tribes, who follow a code of customary or tribal law known as *urf*, or *urf qabili*. This social code has also historically been called *taghut*, a derogatory reference to the code’s pre-Islamic foundations and its deviations from Shari’a, or Islamic law.²⁰³ Yet *urf* operates alongside Shari’a to regulate Yemeni tribal society. While Shari’a addresses religious custom and family law, *ulf* pertains to conduct, responsibility, and relations among and between tribes.²⁰⁴ The specifics of customary law are not universal among Yemeni tribes, who agree on general notions of right and wrong but may differ in terms of process or interpretation.²⁰⁵



© Kate Dixon
Yemeni men in At-Taweela

Honor and Shame

The central theme of tribal custom is the maintenance of honor (*sharaf*). For tribesmen, honor is the defining characteristic of a person’s self-worth and reputation within society. It is a vulnerable quality that must be protected at all times. A tribesman’s honor is bound to that of his family, ancestry, and tribe. Those with a more noble ancestry are seen as possessing greater honor. Individually, the acquisition and maintenance of honor depends upon a tribesman’s character and behavior. Courage, religious virtue, hospitality (generosity), strength, integrity, and self-possession (composure) are some of the most highly valued attributes.²⁰⁶ A tribesman’s honor is dependent upon his ability to protect the honor and sanctity of his land, home, and family. This aspect of honor is known as *ard*, which is associated with the defense of what is seen as vulnerable or weak,

²⁰¹ The New York Times. Worth, Robert F. “Languishing at the Bottom of Yemen’s Ladder.” 27 February 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/27/world/middleeast/27yemen.html>

²⁰² “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [pp. 123–124].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²⁰³ U.S. Institute of Peace. Al-Zwaini, Laila. “State and Non-State Justice in Yemen [p. 3].” December 2006. http://www.usip.org/files/file/zwaini_paper.pdf

²⁰⁴ “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [pp. 121–122].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²⁰⁵ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 3: Tribes and Collective Action [pp. 107–108].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²⁰⁶ “*Peaks of Yemen I Summon*”: *Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*. Caton, Steven Charles. “Chapter 2: *Gabyilah*: Ideologies of Tribalism, Language, and Poetry [pp. 26–30].” 1990. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

particularly land and women. (Yemeni tribes have a saying: “*al-ard ‘ard*” or “land is honor.”) Bound by tribal code and his honor, a tribesman is responsible for the protection of guests and refugees.²⁰⁷

While these two conceptions of honor, *sharaf* and *‘ard*, are inextricably connected, subtle differences can be seen in perceptions of how they may be lost. A Yemeni tribesman’s honor is tarnished by committing or suffering a disgraceful or demeaning act. The concept of disgrace or shame is known as *‘ayb*. As it refers to *sharaf*, acts of *‘ayb* include cowardice or stinginess, or any failure to adhere to basic social codes of propriety. It also refers to insults and gossip that question or slight a tribesman’s character. In this sense, a man’s face is said to be a reflection of his *sharaf*: “What ‘breaks’ a man’s *sharaf* is said to ‘blacken’ his face...By contrast, the face is ‘whitened’ by courage, generosity, and honourable [*sic*] conduct.”²⁰⁸ Tribesmen thus make promises on their honor, or “face,” by drawing their finger down their face or grasping their beard. This indicates that they are giving their word.²⁰⁹

A tribesman’s *‘ard* is damaged by acts that violate the sanctity and privacy of his land, home, or family. This includes any actions that limit his ability to protect such assets. This happens if he is relieved of his weapons. Acts of trespass, physical assault, or murder are attacks on a tribesman’s *‘ard*. In such instances, a tribesman’s damaged *‘ard* is seen as “ravaged,” “violated,” or “exposed.”²¹⁰ Tribesmen are therefore territorial and extremely protective of anything that falls under their domain.

Mediating Conflict and Making Amends

Yemeni tribes possess a strong sense of shared responsibility which is the product of a strict honor code that discourages dishonorable action by tying a tribesman’s honor to that of his family and community. Yet, infractions and conflicts often occur, and tribal law has mechanisms for mediating and resolving them.²¹¹

Tribal leaders, or *shaykhs*, traditionally serve as conflict mediators. When an act of insult or injury has damaged a tribesman’s honor, amends are sought to restore “balance” (*mizan*) to the situation. Settlements are negotiated through an often lengthy and complex arbitration process overseen by one or several *shaykhs*. Amends most often take the form of a payment in



© Franco Pecchio
Old friends

²⁰⁷ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 54–55, 59–61].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²⁰⁸ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 54–55, 59].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²⁰⁹ *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. Weir, Shelagh. “Chapter 2: Social and Political Inequality [p. 42].” 2007. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

²¹⁰ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 54–55].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²¹¹ U.S. Institute of Peace. Al-Zwaini, Laila. “State and Non-State Justice in Yemen [p. 3].” 10–14 December 2006. http://www.usip.org/files/file/zwaini_paper.pdf

cash or goods. The size of the payment depends upon the seriousness of the insult or injury (*'ayb*). Minor offenses may result in small cash payments, while a serious offense, such as the killing of a fellow tribesman, requires a large payment. For the latter, a payment known as “blood-money” (*diyah*) is required to make amends for the “blood-debt” (*dayn al-dam*).²¹²

Guarantors who represent the parties involved ensure the amends are made. Some payments, such as *diyah*, may be supplied by the whole tribe or part of the tribe.²¹³ Tribesmen who commit a serious breach of tribal law may be expelled from their tribe and left to fend for themselves.²¹⁴ While the central government operates official courts, this traditional form of conflict resolution remains in practice in tribal areas.²¹⁵ Here official channels of state government may be out of reach, and attempting to resolve disputes through them may be a source of shame.²¹⁶

Blood Feuds

Not all conflicts are resolved quickly or peacefully. While most settlements are made through material compensation, revenge is perceived as an honorable option and necessary for restoring one’s “good-name” (*naqa*).²¹⁷ Revenge can develop into a bloody cycle in which each act of violence is met with a reciprocal response. The tribal mediation process is designed to prevent these conflicts from spiraling out of control and from wreaking long-term social and economic instability on a community. Yet disputes over land, water, and selection of marital partners frequently result in murder, often compelling the relatives of the deceased to seek revenge. Revenge killings have even spread to urban areas, where tribal members who migrated to the city may live without the protection of their rural counterparts. Some observers have tied the spread of revenge killings to a decline in tribal values that once limited the practice. One such factor is the perceived corruption of the *shaykh*’s role. According to some sources, the *shaykh* has been incorporated into central government, thus reducing his accountability to his people.^{218, 219} Whereas in the past he may have had a vested interest in restoring harmony

²¹² *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 47–53, 55–56],” and “Chapter 3: Tribes and Collective Action [pp. 92–94].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²¹³ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 3: Tribes and Collective Action [pp. 84–85].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²¹⁴ “The Tribes – The Backbone of the Nation [p. 118].” Meissner, Jeff. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

²¹⁵ The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 13, 28].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

²¹⁶ U.S. Institute of Peace. Al-Zwaini, Laila. “State and Non-State Justice in Yemen [pp. 3–4].” 10–14 December 2006. http://www.usip.org/files/file/zwaini_paper.pdf

²¹⁷ Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Phillips, Sarah. “What Comes Next in Yemen? Al Qaeda, the Tribes and State Building.” March 2010. http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/yemen_tribes.pdf

²¹⁸ Yemen Observer. Al-Alaya’a, Zaid. “Tribes Should be Social Entities not Political Participants, Says al-Dhaheri.” 22 September 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/reports/10012989.html>

to demonstrate his leadership skills, now he does not. The widespread availability of guns also makes it difficult to prevent disputes from degenerating into blood feuds (*tha'r*).²²⁰

Weapons

Reflecting their history as a warrior class, tribesmen (*qabili*) carry weapons as a sign of their status. This right was traditionally reserved for tribesmen and some elites while the lower classes were excluded. Weapons are not only a means of defense, but a personal symbol of a tribesman's honor, masculinity, and strength. This is especially the case with the *jambiya*, a curved dagger that is widely carried throughout Yemen. The dagger is sheathed and typically worn upright, front and center, on a tribesman's belt. (This placement specifically marks a tribesman.) The sheath and the handle of the *jambiya* are usually decorated. *Jambiya* are highly prized by their owners, with some worth a fortune depending upon what materials they are made from and their age. A tribesman's social status is evident from the value and design of his *jambiya*. These daggers play an important role in the coming-of-age cycle for males, who carry them regularly as adults. According to one *shaykh*, "To this day a number of people would rather die than be seen in public without their *Jambiyas*."²²¹ A tribesman may touch or draw attention to his *jambiya*, a symbol of his honor (*sharaf*), when he represents himself or feels his honor is in question or under assault.²²² To unsheathe the dagger in a hostile manner, dramatically signals potential conflict.²²³



© Manogamos, Algunas veces Mujeres Violentas No guns sign

Firearms are also commonly carried by tribesmen. These are highly prized possessions and symbols of a tribesman's strength and masculinity. As one Yemeni community leader said, "... a tribesman can give up everything except his gun."²²⁴

²¹⁹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, Middle East and North Africa, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 38]." 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

²²⁰ U.S. Institute of Peace. Al-Zwaini, Laila. "State and Non-State Justice in Yemen [pp. 8, 10, 13–14]." December 2006. http://www.usip.org/files/file/zwaini_paper.pdf

²²¹ Yemen Post. Al-Shawthabi, Abdul Rahim. "Jambiya: Deep-Rooted Tradition." 12 March 2009. <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=100&SubID=170&MainCat=5>

²²² *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. "Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 32–33, 35–36]." 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²²³ *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. Weir, Shelagh. "Chapter 2: Social and Political Inequality [pp. 37–42]." 2007. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

²²⁴ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. *Guns Out of Control: The Continuing Threat of Small Arms*. "Yemen: When Cultural Norms Underpin Gun Ownership." May 2006. <http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=8&ReportId=41050&Country=Yes>

Exchange 6: Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	bitiHmil ayi seelaaH?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

According to tribal custom, guns are necessary for defense but should be carried and used with restraint. While they are fired at celebrations, they are not to be discharged with “hostile intent” during times of peace.²²⁵ Gun ownership is widespread, especially in the northern highlands and eastern plateau. Small arms proliferation is a serious issue in Yemen. In 2009, a low estimate placed the number of small arms in the country at nearly 10 million, with most of them in private hands. Some estimates made in the last decade place this number as high as 60 million, or almost three guns for every Yemeni.²²⁶ Only in 2007 was the open carrying of guns banned in the urban capitals of each governorate, or administrative region, of the country.²²⁷ Yet, this law has been difficult to enforce and, according to reports, has merely moved the country’s thriving gun trade from open markets to private homes and shops.²²⁸

Gender Roles and Relations

Traditional Roles

In Yemen, the respective roles of men and women are defined by custom and local interpretation of Shari’a, or Islamic law. Likewise, interactions between the sexes are strictly regulated. Like most Muslim Arab cultures, Yemeni society is strongly patriarchal, meaning authority lies with the male head of household. Yemeni society is also patrilineal, meaning lineage is traced on the father’s side of the family. Men enjoy more rights and greater social status than women, who are subordinate to their husbands and male relatives. As the head of the household, men are expected to be strong-willed providers and protectors for their family. They make the important decisions for the family and represent its interests in the



© Francesco Veronesi
Husband and wife

²²⁵ *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*. Weir, Shelagh. “Chapter 2: Social and Political Inequality [pp. 42–43].” 2007. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

²²⁶ BBC News. Engel, Richard. “Yemen’s Weapon Culture.” 22 January 2002. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1775938.stm

²²⁷ Yemen Observer. “Weapons Ban Makes Historic Progress; Unity is Crucial to Enforcement.” 1 September 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/editorials/10012860.html>

²²⁸ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Small Sales Heading Underground.” 14 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88094>

public sphere.²²⁹ Women, on the other hand, are expected to be good Muslims and mothers, preferably to sons. Their role is often limited to the domestic sphere, where they care for children and perform essential duties for the household. They are expected to be chaste and modest.²³⁰

Gender and Honor

The secondary status of women in Yemeni society is a product of traditional views and kinship systems. In a patrilineal system, women earn their status by producing male offspring who carry on the family's name and wealth. Yet, while Yemeni men trace their heritage through their father, their honor is inseparable from that of their female relatives. Women are also representatives of a family's honor, and their character and actions reflect not only upon themselves but their family. This custom follows the tradition of shared honor and responsibility among Yemeni families and tribes. By custom, women are under the domain of their male relatives, whose honor (*'ard*) depends on their ability to protect them. Women are seen as weak and vulnerable, not only to external threats, but to their own desires. This is especially considered true when it pertains to feminine chastity and the preservation of virginity before marriage.

A woman's "sexual honor" is known as *namus*, which is closely related to the notion of *'ard*. Both are vulnerable qualities (and assets of the family) that require fierce protection by male relatives.²³¹ In this way, a woman's *namus* is bound to the honor of her male relatives, who are bound to protect her. In addition, male relatives monitor or control a woman's behavior because according to tradition women are less responsible and more susceptible to impulse than men.²³² Yet even incidents that are beyond a woman's control, such as cases of assault, bring disgrace to both her and her family. Any damage to a girl's *namus* may hinder her family's ability to secure a marriage partner for her—a process that has both social and economic implications.

Segregation and Seclusion

These traditional views shape the daily lives and interactions of men and women in Yemeni society. The segregation of men and women is common practice. Members of the opposite sex do not mix socially in public, especially if they are unrelated. Gender



²²⁹ "North Yemen: Gender Roles [p. 125]." Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²³⁰ "Islam, Custom and Revolution in Aden: Reconsidering the Background to the Changes of the Early 1990s [pp. 340–342]." Dahlgren, Susanne. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Mahdi, Kamil A. and Anna Würth, Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

²³¹ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. "Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 44–45, 54–55]." 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²³² "Islam, Custom and Revolution in Aden: Reconsidering the Background to the Changes of the Early 1990s [pp. 340–342]." Dahlgren, Susanne. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Mahdi, Kamil A. and Anna Würth, Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

boundaries are also observed in the home, among the extended family. Physical contact between unrelated men and women is taboo; even friendships between members of the opposite sex are seen as inappropriate. The public realm is a male-dominated space. Many Yemeni women are restricted to the home through the practice of *purdah*, or the seclusion and veiling of women. Circumstances vary according to location and family. Urban women and those from wealthy rural families were the most secluded, because their participation in the public workforce was not necessary. Today, many Yemeni women remain restricted to the family compound or its immediate vicinity.²³³

Women may be escorted by male relatives in public. A woman's interaction with members of the opposite sex is often limited to her male relatives within the domestic realm. All of these practices serve to protect a woman's *namus* and the honor of her family. They also reflect the Islamic custom of maintaining boundaries between the sexes. In the region comprising the former South Yemen, such practices were loosened under the socialist government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (1970–1990). However, since unification in 1990, conservative customs such as *purdah* have reemerged across the South.^{234, 235} The seclusion of girls and women to the home contributes to a wide gender gap in Yemen. Yemeni women, for example, have substantially lower rates of literacy and workforce participation than Yemeni men.²³⁶ Because the legal system is weak, female propriety is enforced by the community.²³⁷

Abuse and Honor Killings

Women who fail to comply with the social code—such as wearing an inappropriate outfit—may face verbal harassment from men in public. Domestic abuse is considered a private family affair and thus goes undocumented. The stigma of shame encourages this practice. Abused women are expected to seek help from a male relative, so as to keep the matter within the family. Rape is illegal but rarely prosecuted, because such charges are difficult to prove. Without a confession, Yemeni law requires testimony from four female witnesses or two male witnesses to verify its occurrence. (The higher value of a male witness reflects traditional perceptions of gender.) More often, rape victims are themselves charged with “fornication” while the suspect is released. As a result, rape often goes unreported.

²³³ “North Yemen: Gender Roles [pp. 125–127].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²³⁴ Reuters. Laessing, Ulf. “Women of Southern Yemen Port Remember Better Times.” 22 January 2010. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE60L2ZD20100122>

²³⁵ “Islam, Custom and Revolution in Aden: Reconsidering the Background to the Changes of the Early 1990s [pp. 340–343].” Dahlgren, Susanne. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Mahdi, Kamil A. and Anna Würth, Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

²³⁶ World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report 2009*. “Country Profile: Yemen.” 27 October 2009. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap2009/Yemen.pdf>

²³⁷ Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. Hill, Ginny. “Yemen Divided on Vice and Virtue.” 11 August 2008. http://pulitzercenter.typepad.com/untold_stories/2008/08/yemen-divided-o.html

“Honor killings” are also thought to occur in Yemen, although they are rarely reported or documented. These killings are carried out in extreme cases in which a woman or girl is thought to have shamed her family. Serious offenses include committing adultery, engaging in pre-marital sexual relations, or suffering rape. The death of the shamed woman in an honor killing is thought to restore the family’s honor and “good name” (*naqa*).²³⁸ Male relatives usually carry out the killings themselves, and they are often supported by the male community in doing so. Indeed, Yemeni law grants leniency to persons convicted of committing violent crimes against women in the name of restoring honor.²³⁹

Female Genital Mutilation

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the practice of partial or complete removal of some or all parts of the female genitalia. Known as *khitan al-inath*, this practice is performed in the belief that it accords with religious and cultural custom. While justifications for the practice vary, its practitioners say it curbs a woman’s sexual impulses, marks her entry into womanhood, and/or ensures cleanliness. In actuality, FGM has no doctrinal foundation in Islam and no medical benefits. Rather, the procedure can be extremely painful and lead to a variety of serious and long-term health complications, particularly in relation to childbirth. It can also cause psychological trauma.²⁴⁰ The practice is most often identified with communities in Yemen’s coastal regions, but some reports indicate it is widespread.²⁴¹



In 2001, the Yemeni government barred healthcare personnel from performing the procedure. Yet it still occurs frequently within the home, where it is often performed in an unprofessional manner in unsanitary conditions. As UN officials described it, “the practice persists because it is sustained by social perceptions, including that girls and their families will face shame, social exclusion and diminished marriage prospects if they forego cutting.” In 2010, Yemeni officials announced tentative plans to pass a more comprehensive ban within four years, following further study.²⁴² In Yemen, FGM has

²³⁸ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [p. 49].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²³⁹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. “2008 Human Rights Report: Yemen.” 25 February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119130.htm>

²⁴⁰ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Eradicating FGM Will Be a Slow Process, Experts Say.” 14 November 2005. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25685>

²⁴¹ Yemen Times. Al-Ariqi, Amel. “Female Genital Mutilation, the Taboo Subject.” 12 August 2009. <http://www.yementimes.com/DefaultDET.aspx?i=954&p=health&a=1>

²⁴² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: New FGM/C Law Possible “within Four Years” – Minister.” 10 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88058>

been described in the local press as “a very sensitive issue.” FGM is often ignored or denied despite its continued practice.²⁴³

Qat Chewing

Qat is a shrub whose leaves are chewed as a mild stimulant. It is not a narcotic, as is often claimed.²⁴⁴ Its chemical compounds are more closely related to amphetamines.²⁴⁵ *Qat* is widely consumed in Yemen as part of daily afternoon social gatherings. For men, these gatherings are known as *maqil*. *Maqil* provide an opportunity for male community members to share conversation, conduct business, settle disputes, discuss local economic and political issues, and exchange lore and poetry.²⁴⁶ For women, who consume the drug less often or not at all, *qat* chewing may occur as part of female social gatherings known as *tafrita*. These gatherings also take place in the afternoon.²⁴⁷



© Francesco Veronesi
Young man

Maqil are held in the entertaining room (*mafraj*) of the host’s home, where guests arrange themselves according to social status. Guests bring their own *qat*, which is purchased freshly cut, on a daily basis, in the markets. (*Qat* must be consumed no later than 24–36 hours after its harvest, a condition that has limited its export.) Chewers carefully pick their *qat* leaves, which are amassed in a large lump on the inside of the cheek. The juices take effect within an hour. While it may vary from person to person, the initial effect is said to be a “feeling of excitement and elation” that lasts for a couple hours. This is followed by a “dreamy, contemplative mood” that “lasts an hour or more.” During the initial stage of the *qat* chew, conversation is lively and animated. As the feeling of euphoria fades, so does the conversation, leading to periods of silence and quiet contemplation. The drug suppresses the appetite but provokes thirst. Drinking water or soda during the process is therefore common, as is smoking. Beginning after lunch in the early afternoon, these gatherings typically last until early evening.²⁴⁸

²⁴³ Yemen Times. Al-Ariqi, Amel. “Female Genital Mutilation, the Taboo Subject.” 12 August 2009. <http://www.yementimes.com/DefaultDET.aspx?i=954&p=health&a=1>

²⁴⁴ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. “Chapter 1: The Land [pp. 12–13].” 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

²⁴⁵ “Passing the Time with Qat.” Piepenburg, Fritz. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

²⁴⁶ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 1: Introductory [p. 20].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

²⁴⁷ “North Yemen: Geographic and Demographic Setting: Qat [pp. 106–108].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²⁴⁸ “North Yemen: Geographic and Demographic Setting: Qat [pp. 106–108].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Although *qat* chews have a long history in Yemen, widespread daily consumption of the plant has been increasingly identified as a serious social problem. Heavy use has been tied to illnesses such as kidney and liver disease. In some Muslim Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia, *qat* chewing is outlawed for being un-Islamic.²⁴⁹ In Yemen, the plant is generally not considered a drug, even by officials. Yet *qat* chewing can be an everyday habit that absorbs much of a Yemeni's afternoon and disposable income. In a country with high poverty and unemployment, some observers view *qat* chewing as a waste of productive labor hours and precious funds.²⁵⁰ Some farmers may spend more than half their income on the plant, which is widely consumed by all levels of society. High demand for the plant makes it Yemen's primary cash crop, creating an incentive for cultivators to replace food crops with *qat*, a water-intensive crop. This contributes to domestic food shortages, as well as increased strain on the country's dwindling water supply.²⁵¹

Greetings and Interaction

Yemenis greet others in a formal manner that respects status and gender. A common formal greeting is the standard Arabic blessing used throughout the Muslim world:



© Charles Roffey
Men talking

Exchange 7: May peace be upon you.

Soldier:	May peace be upon you.	as-salaamu 'aleykum
Local:	And upon you be peace.	wa-'aleykum as-salaam

When exchanging this blessing, Yemenis may place their right hand on their chests as a show of sincerity. They may also bow slightly.

²⁴⁹ Arab News. Al-Batati, Saeed. "Yemeni Social Worker Calls for Clampdown on Qat Dens." 25 January 2009. <http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=4§ion=0&article=118498&d=25&m=1&y=2009>

²⁵⁰ Yemen Observer. Ghanem, Suzan and Jowhara Zindani, Zinadine Zindani. "Qat: The Plague of Yemen." 26 February 2008. <http://www.yobserver.com/sports-health-and-lifestyle/10013815.html>

²⁵¹ Reuters UK. Noueihed, Lin. "Qat Draws Water and Life from Impoverished Yemen." 29 May 2007. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKNOA93814520070529?sp=true>

Exchange 8: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	SabaaH al-Khayr
Local:	Good morning.	SabaaH an-noor

Men greet each other with a light handshake using the right hand. Handshakes are typically extended to foreigners.

Exchange 9: Good evening.

Soldier:	Good evening.	masaa al-Khayr
Local:	Good evening.	masaa an-noor

Close male friends may hug and kiss each other on the cheek. They may also hold hands, which in Arab culture is a sign of friendship, not homosexuality. Same-sex romantic relationships are illegal in Yemen where the death penalty can be imposed on offenders.²⁵²

Exchange 10: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	keyf Haalak
Local:	Fine, very well.	bi-Khayr al-Hamdu lilaah

When greeting a group, Yemenis first greet elders and men of high status. For small groups, handshakes are offered to each man, while a nod and a general greeting may be used to meet large groups.

²⁵² Refworld, UNHCR. "Situation for Homosexuals in Yemen, Including Societal Attitudes." 16 July 2004. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,,QUERYRESPONSE,YEM,4562d8cf2,41501c7615,0.html>

Exchange 11: Hi, Mr. al-Akhmar.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. al-Akhmar.	ah-lan ya aKh al-aHmar
Local:	Hello!	ah-lan
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	anta bi-Khayr?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Eye contact is appropriate and important during communications between men. Yemenis may communicate indirectly about delicate matters so as not to cause offense or shame. It is inappropriate for men to ask each other specifically about their female relatives.

Exchange 12: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	keyf al-usra?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	hum bi-Khayr, shookran

Yemeni women greet each other with a handshake. If they are close, they may hug and kiss each other on the cheek or hold hands.

While interactions between members of the same sex can be friendly and physical, interactions between men and women are formal and reserved. Physical contact is either limited or wholly restricted, especially between unacquainted men and women. In conservative communities, Yemeni women might not be introduced to unfamiliar men. In these settings, it is inappropriate for men to make direct eye contact or stand close to such women. When women are introduced to men, men should wait for the woman to initiate a handshake or any conversation beyond a formal verbal greeting. Eye contact should be minimal; staring is inappropriate. Formality and propriety should be maintained at all times so as not to



© Richard Messenger
Sanaa children

cause shame or offense, which can bring serious repercussions. Foreign women should not take offense if a Yemeni man will not shake her hand.^{253, 254}

Right Hand vs. Left Hand

As in most Muslim cultures, Yemenis maintain an important distinction between the right and left hands. The right hand is used for all public interactions, including shaking hands, eating, drinking, making a payment, presenting or receiving a gift, and other actions. The left hand is associated with matters of personal hygiene conducted in the bathroom and is thus considered unclean. It is therefore highly inappropriate to use the left hand for eating, passing things to others, or performing other public acts. Even left-handed visitors should observe this custom to avoid causing offense.

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Generous hospitality (*karamah*) is a tribal tradition and matter of great pride among Yemenis. Acts of hospitality bring honor to both the guest, who is treated with respect and generosity, and the host, whose generosity earns him esteem from his peers.²⁵⁵ Common demonstrations of hospitality include invitations for tea, a *qat* chew, a meal, or a social event. Social engagements are segregated by sex. Men who visit a Yemeni home, for example, might not meet or even see the host's female relatives. Guests should wear clean, conservative attire when visiting a Yemeni's home for such an event. Yemeni homes have a special room, known as a *diwan*, for entertaining guests. They may also have a *mafraj* (*mafradsh*), a lounge used to host *qat* chews. The *mafraj* is often on the highest floor of the traditional tower house and it is typically the best decorated. Here, the hosting family and guests sit on cushions on the floor. Guests are expected to remove their shoes when entering the home.



© Anduxe traveller / flickr.com
Home of a fishing family

In Yemen, gifts are only exchanged between close friends and family members. It is appropriate, although not obligatory, for guests to bring a small gift for the host or his children when visiting the home. Small food items such as sweets or pastries are appropriate. When giving gifts, foreigners should respect Islamic dietary customs that prohibit Muslims from consuming pork or alcohol. Gifts should be wrapped and presented with the right hand or both hands. By custom, Yemenis may once or twice refuse to accept a gift before doing so with gratitude.

²⁵³ Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies. "Yemeni Culture: Social Relations." 2009.

<http://www.ycmes.org/culture.html>

²⁵⁴ Federation of American Scientists. Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. "TRADOC DCSINT Handbook No. 2: Arab Cultural Awareness: 58 Factsheets." January 2006. <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/arabculture.pdf>

²⁵⁵ "Peaks of Yemen I Summon": *Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*. Caton, Steven Charles. "Chapter 2: *Gabyilah*: Ideologies of Tribalism, Language, and Poetry [p. 28]." 1990. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Exchange 13: This gift is for you.

Soldier:	This gift is for you.	teeyeh hadeeya lak
Local:	I cannot accept this.	maa-agbalhaash

Following the Yemeni way, foreigners should also initially refuse a gift before accepting it, and it should be received with the right hand or both hands.²⁵⁶ Gifts are not opened in front of the giver.²⁵⁷

Eating Habits

While eating habits vary according to family and region, the mid-day meal is the largest and most important meal for Yemenis. It is held in the early afternoon, after the mid-day prayer and before the daily qat chew. Evening dinners are small, in part due to the appetite-suppressing qualities of *qat*. Meals are served on a large cloth on the floor of the dining or entertaining room. Any invitation to join Yemenis for a meal at home ensures it will be a lavish spread. It's advisable not to eat much beforehand as declining successive servings could be taken as a sign the guest does not like the food.



© Franco Pecchio
Eating Habits

Exchange 14: I appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	shookran 'ala Dheeyaafatkum
Local:	It is nothing.	maaheesh shey

After removing their shoes, guests should wait to be seated by the host; they will likely be seated in a particular place. Guests should be careful not to step on the dining cloth or

²⁵⁶ Federation of American Scientists. Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. "TRADOC DCSINT Handbook No. 2: Arab Cultural Awareness: 58 Factsheets." January 2006. <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/arabculture.pdf>

²⁵⁷ Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies. "Yemeni Culture: Social Events." 2009. <http://www.ycmes.org/culture.html>

in front of anyone already seated. People sit cross-legged, sometimes atop cushions. Guests should avoid pointing the soles of their feet at others, which is considered rude. Before and after eating, guests will be provided the opportunity to wash their hands. This is an important custom that meets Islamic guidelines for ritual purity and cleanliness. It is also a matter of basic hygiene, as Yemenis typically eat with their fingers rather than use dining utensils.²⁵⁸

Tea (*shay*) is served before the meal, a time for conversation. After a prayer, little is said during a meal since that would dishonor the food. Individuals might have their own plates for some dishes. Food should be taken from the dish and eaten with the right hand only, as the left hand is considered unclean. Likewise, dishes should be passed to and received from others using the right hand. Guests should avoid licking their fingers. Lacking utensils, bread is used to scoop food. Guests will be encouraged to eat heartily from a variety of dishes. It is polite for guests to express their satisfaction with the meal as well as expressing appreciation for the amount of food served.

Exchange 15: The food tastes so good.

Soldier:	The food tastes so good.	al-akl Haalee gawee gawee
Local:	Thank you.	shookran

Guests should leave a small portion of food on their plate as a sign that they are full and satisfied. Such practice reflects well upon the host’s ability to provide a bountiful meal. The last course is a beverage; most likely coffee or tea but perhaps water. The guests are expected to depart shortly thereafter.²⁵⁹

Food and Drink

Yemeni dietary habits are shaped by Islamic custom. Like most devout Muslims, Yemenis generally limit their intake to foods deemed *halal*, or acceptable according to Islam. Prohibited foods are deemed *haram*.²⁶⁰ Most notably, Islam prohibits the consumption of pork and alcohol. These prohibitions are widely observed in Yemen, where pork is practically nonexistent and alcohol is severely restricted. Islamic custom

²⁵⁸ Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies. “Yemeni Culture: Food Etiquette.” 2009. <http://www.ycmes.org/culture.html>

²⁵⁹ Federation of American Scientists. Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. “TRADOC DCSINT Handbook No. 2: Arab Cultural Awareness: 58 Factsheets.” January 2006. <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/army/arabculture.pdf>

²⁶⁰ Islamic Food and Nutritional Council of America. “What is Halal?” 1999–2009. <http://www.ifanca.org/halal/>

requires animals to be slaughtered in an appropriate manner by Muslim butchers. Although much of the Yemeni population works in agriculture, the majority of Yemen's food supply is imported due to a lack of domestic food crops.²⁶¹

Meat, vegetables, rice, and bread are the core components of the Yemeni diet. Yemenis use many distinctive spices that reflect both Middle Eastern and South Asian (Indian) cuisine. These include cumin, turmeric, coriander, cardamom, caraway, and fenugreek. Common types of meat are chicken, goat, and lamb, the latter of which is the most prized. Kebabs, or grilled meat chunks, are typical of Middle Eastern cuisine. Meats, especially beef, are a luxury for poor Yemenis, and they are used to the fullest extent. Flavorful broths and soups are made from boiling meat or bones with spices.²⁶² One type of spicy meat and vegetable soup is known as *shoubra*.²⁶³



© Franco Pecchio
Fish market in Bait al Faqi

Exchange 16: This food is very good.

Soldier:	This food is very good.	Theeyeh al-akl 'ees gawee
Local:	It's Marag.	Theeyeh marag

Coastal areas enjoy fresh fish, commonly baked in a clay oven and served with rice.²⁶⁴ Bread, available in numerous varieties, accompanies practically every meal or is a meal in itself. Breakfast is typically small, often consisting of tea (*shay*) and bread, with eggs and/or beans. Lunch is the primary meal of the day. The characteristic lunchtime meal is known as *saltah*, which is often described as Yemen's national dish.

²⁶¹ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Food Insecure Face Double Whammy." 2 February 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82687>

²⁶² Things Asian. "The Exotic Cuisine of Yemen – The Ancient Happy Arabia." 29 March 2006. <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/3576>

²⁶³ Things Asian. Salloum, Habeeb. "Recipe: Shoubra – Meat Soup." 29 March 2006. <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/3580>

²⁶⁴ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Gordon, Frances Linzee, et al. "Yemen: Food [p. 371]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

Exchange 17: What is the name of this dish?

Soldier:	What is the name of this dish?	eysh ism al-akla teeyeh?
Local:	This is saltah.	teeyeh saltah

Saltah is a spicy meat stew containing eggs and various vegetables, such as tomatoes, onions, potatoes, beans, and/or lentils. Served very hot, this stew is seen as the best meal to eat before the afternoon qat chew.²⁶⁵ *Saltah* is flavored with fenugreek, a bitter seed used to make a common cooking paste known as *hilbah* (*hulba*). This whipped paste is incorporated into *saltah* and other dishes, and may also be used as a dip.²⁶⁶ Another common sauce is *zhug*, a spicy relish also known as *zahawag*.²⁶⁷

Exchange 18: What ingredients are used?

Soldier:	What ingredients are used to make zhug?	keyf bita'maloo as-saHaawig?
Local:	Tomatoes, garlic, salt, pepper, cardamom and coriander.	aT-Tamatees ma' thom wa-miliH wa-basbaas aKhDhar wa-heyl wa-kazbara

Dinner dishes, which are typically small, include *fasouliya* (beans) and *ful*, a bean paste made with spices and vegetables.²⁶⁸ *Asid* (*asit*) is a sorghum porridge commonly eaten by peasants in the countryside. Yogurt and honey are popular condiments. The latter is used on desserts such as *bint al-sahn*, a layered pastry. Tea (*shay*) is usually served sweetened. Mocha, a famous local variety of coffee, is available but expensive. Many Yemenis thus

²⁶⁵ In Mama's Kitchen. Serbe, Diana and Elinor Moore. "Dining with the Queen of Sheba: Ethiopian Cooking and Yemeni Cooking." No date.

http://www.inmamaskitchen.com/FOOD_IS_ART/mideast/ethiopia_yemen.html

²⁶⁶ Things Asian. Salloum, Habeeb. "Recipe: *Hulbah* – Fenugreek Paste." 29 March 2006.

<http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/3577>

²⁶⁷ *The Oxford Companion to Food*, 2nd Ed. Davidson, Alan and Tom Jaine. "Yemen [pp. 860–861]." 2006. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

²⁶⁸ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Gordon, Frances Linzee, et al. "Yemen: Food [p. 371]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

drink *qishr*, which is made using ground coffee husks rather than beans; it often comes spiced with ground ginger.²⁶⁹ Fruit juices (*aseer*) are also available.²⁷⁰

Dress Codes

Styles of dress vary according to region and social group. Yemenis dress modestly, although not without appreciation of style and trends. This is especially true for women, most of whom practice some level of *pardah*. A common garment for women is a long coat called a *balto*, known as an *abaya* elsewhere in the region. This is usually paired with a *hijab*, or headscarf, and/or a veil (*niqab*). Providing even greater coverage than the *balto*, the *sharshaf* consists of “a pleated wrap skirt, a triangular hood draped over the head and shoulders...and a translucent black face covering.” This outfit has been seen as a mark of “urban sophistication” in Yemen. In the highlands, rural women may wear a shawl (*maswan*) over their heads while walking outside their village. Although considered less fashionable today, some elderly Yemeni women wear a *sitara* (*setarrah*), which is a colorful, patterned cloth draped over the body.²⁷¹ Underneath their outer garments, women typically wear dresses, with either pants or leggings worn underneath. Western clothing is relatively common in urban areas. In rural areas, women’s dress has traditionally been more colorful than that of their urban counterparts. Jewelry (usually gold or silver) and traditional or modern forms of makeup are also common.²⁷²



© Cicillia Priscilla
Woman in the window

For men, traditional dress consists of a *futah*, or a pleated kilt that reaches below the knees, and a shirt. In the highlands, where temperatures are cooler, jackets and vests are also worn. Another traditional garment for men is the *thawb*, a long, loose-fitting robe, often worn over pants. Turbans are the most common form of headgear, although some men may wear a traditional *kofia*, a conical bamboo hat that carries formal significance.²⁷³ Footwear typically consists of sandals. Belts are a standard accessory; they are needed to carry the *jambiya*, the most important accessory for Yemeni men. A *jambiya* carried toward the front, in the center of the belt, is the mark of a tribesman. *Sayyids* and *qadis* carry their *jambiya* to the right, toward the hip. They also wear all-

²⁶⁹ *The Oxford Companion to Food*, 2nd Ed. Davidson, Alan and Tom Jaine. “Yemen [pp. 860–861].” 2006. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

²⁷⁰ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. “Chapter 2: Eating and Drinking [p. 55].” 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

²⁷¹ Yemen Observer. Al-Jarady, Eman. “The Setarrah: An Endangered Species?” 28 August 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/news-varieties/10012842.html>

²⁷² “Yemen [pp. 47–48].” Adra, Najwa. In *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, Vol. 3: Family, Body, Sexuality, and Health*. Joseph, Suad and Afsaneh Najmabadi, Eds. 2006. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.

²⁷³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Yemen: Cultural Life: Daily Life and Social Customs.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-273063>

white clothing.²⁷⁴ Men may also wear elements of Western clothing, especially in urban areas.

Following Yemeni fashion, foreigners should dress conservatively. Both sexes should wear loose-fitting clothing that covers the arms, shoulders, and legs.

Exchange 19: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	eysh ilbas?
Local:	Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.	ilbis libs muHtaram yighaTee jismak

Foreign women are not required to wear a *balto* and *hijab*, although headscarves are recommended.²⁷⁵

Exchange 20: Is this acceptable to wear?

Soldier:	Is this acceptable to wear?	Theeyeh libaas muHtaram?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Non-Religious Holidays

While not as important as religious holidays, Yemenis recognize several secular holidays of political and historical significance. Unlike Islamic holidays, these secular events are marked on the standard (Gregorian) calendar rather than the Islamic lunar calendar. Held on 22 May, National Unity Day commemorates the merger of North and South Yemen, in 1990, to form the current Republic of Yemen. Two holidays recognize respective revolutions in the North and South. Revolution Day (26



© Nick Leonard
Matla'a Shibam" Shabwani play dancers in front of Shibam Hadhramaut

²⁷⁴ *The Yemen Arab Republic: Development and Change in an Ancient Land*. Wenner, Manfred W. "Chapter 2: People and Culture [p. 46]." 1991. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

²⁷⁵ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Woman Travellers [p. 50]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

September) marks the overthrow of the last Zaydi Imam in 1962, which led to the foundation of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen). National Day (14 October) commemorates the Yemenis' initial rebellion against the British in the south, in 1963, which eventually led to the formation of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen). Held on 30 November, Independence Day commemorates South Yemen's official independence from the British in 1967. The Yemeni government also recognizes Labor Day (1 May), an international holiday.²⁷⁶

Do's and Don'ts

Do greet Yemenis in a formal manner.

Do dress conservatively and avoid tight or revealing clothes.

Do treat elders with utmost respect.

Do take your shoes off when entering a home or mosque.

Do leave a small portion of food on your plate after a meal.

Don't eat or pass items with your left hand.

Don't initiate handshakes with women.

Don't stare at or approach unfamiliar women.

Don't enter a mosque without expressed permission.

Don't show the soles of your feet when sitting.

Don't take photographs of people, especially women, without their permission.

²⁷⁶ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Public Holidays and Festivals [pp. 56–57]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, UK: Bradt Travel Guides.

Urban Life

Introduction

As of 2009, approximately 31% of the Yemeni population lived in urban areas.²⁷⁷ While the population remains predominantly rural, rapid urbanization over the last several decades has produced a large-scale demographic shift. In 1975 approximately 90% of Yemenis lived in rural areas. Urbanization has been fueled by several trends since then, including rural-to-urban migration and rapid population growth.²⁷⁸ The population of Sanaa, for example, has expanded from approximately 135,000 people in 1975 to more than 2 million today.²⁷⁹ With a high urban growth rate (averaging 4.9% from 2005–2010), this trend is expected to continue. Moreover, the country's high population growth rate of 2.9% (average from 2005–2010) will increase Yemen's population of 23.6 million (2009) in coming years.²⁸⁰



Rapid population growth is a serious concern in Yemen, where farmers face increasing difficulties in supporting their families. Lack of access to water—for either consumption or crop cultivation—has become a common cause for migration from the countryside to the city.²⁸¹ In 2008, for example, prolonged drought forced thousands of rural residents from the northwestern highlands to abandon their villages and migrate to urban areas.²⁸² Yet this influx of rural migrants to cities has exacerbated pressure on urban infrastructure and resources, in particular water. Sanaa could run out of water by 2025, or even earlier, if the depletion of local aquifers continues at the current rate.²⁸³ Government officials have speculated Yemen's capital city could become “a ghost town” when residents are

²⁷⁷ United Nations Population Fund. *State of the World Population 2009: Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate*. “Demographic, Social and Economic Indicators [p 90].” 2009.

http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/en/pdf/EN_SOWP09.pdf

²⁷⁸ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 28].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

²⁷⁹ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Rapid Urbanisation Threatening Capital's Water Supplies.” 14 August 2007.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73716>

²⁸⁰ United Nations Population Fund. *State of the World Population 2009: Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate*. “Demographic, Social and Economic Indicators [p 90].” 2009.

http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/en/pdf/EN_SOWP09.pdf

²⁸¹ Yemen Today. Murdock, Heather. “Already Thirsty and Drying Fast: The Yemeni Water Crisis.” 2 February 2010. <http://www.yemen-today.com/go/general/3619.html>

²⁸² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Drought Displaces Thousands in Mountainous Northwest.” 5 May 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=78048>

²⁸³ Reuters. Lyon, Alistair. “Water Crisis Threatens Yemen's Swelling Population.” 30 August 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE57T0HK20090830>

forced to find water elsewhere.²⁸⁴ In response, urban planners have suggested raising the cost of living to deter new arrivals.²⁸⁵ Since many migrants seek work in the unregulated informal economy, it is unclear whether such a move would deter migration. At the same time, many urban residents remain closely linked to the rural economy. Migrants may return to rural areas for seasonal agricultural work or send their earnings to their families in their village. Some land-owning urban residents derive a significant portion of their income from their holdings or interests in the countryside.²⁸⁶

Urban Conditions

Urban Livelihoods

Unlike most rural areas, many Yemeni cities offer a range of occupations and services. The development of a diversified cash economy in urban areas allows greater economic mobility among the population. This trend serves to erode Yemen’s traditional social hierarchy by raising the status of market and service positions, which were formerly deemed lowly by tribesmen and elites. A low-status individual from a rural village, for example, might be able to make a new life for himself and his family by moving to a city. Although mobility has increased, economic and occupational status differences remain pronounced in urban areas.²⁸⁷



© Richard Messenger
A lot of men in Sana'a

Exchange 21: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	anta trabeyt haanaa?
Local:	No.	ma'

Public sector jobs are among the most sought after in urban areas, where the central government typically maintains a presence and some level of authority (in contrast to

²⁸⁴ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Rapid Urbanisation Threatening Capital’s Water Supplies.” 14 August 2007.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73716>

²⁸⁵ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Alarm Bells Over Water.” 14 August 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=79819>

²⁸⁶ The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 28–33].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

²⁸⁷ The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 12–13, 28–33].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

rural regions). These positions are desirable because they provide a stable income. Yet knowing someone in power with whom a job seeker can claim shared affiliation, whether it be family, tribal, or political, is often crucial to being hired. Even those who land such jobs often must seek additional work to supplement their low salaries. Civil servants, for example, moonlight as taxi drivers.²⁸⁸ Most families remain reliant on male breadwinners. The majority of females in urban areas perform unpaid labor on behalf of their households, such as waiting in line to purchase cooking oil, a task that can take hours when there is a shortage.²⁸⁹ Social prohibitions restrict women from joining the formal workforce.²⁹⁰

Housing and Living Conditions

While the traditional social hierarchy has eroded to some extent, a widening gap has emerged between a small class of wealthy urban elites and a large class of working or underemployed poor. This divide is evident in urban settlement patterns. Most Yemeni cities have a busy and densely inhabited old city center surrounded by modern suburbs and sprawl, including industrial areas and shantytowns.²⁹¹ In recent years, the United Nations has estimated that approximately 67% of Yemen's urban residents live in *mahwa*, commonly translated as either slums or shantytowns.²⁹² Such a household is defined as “a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking one or more of the following conditions: access to improved water; access to improved sanitation; sufficient living area; durability of housing.”²⁹³



© Jialiang Gao
High-rise architectures at Shibam, Wadi Hadhramaut

Less than half of all urban households are linked to public water distribution systems.²⁹⁴ Lacking direct access to the municipal water supply, a large percentage of urban residents buy their water from privately owned tanker trucks that tap wells in the surrounding

²⁸⁸ Yemen Post. Al-Showthabi, Abdul Rahim and Moneer Al-Omar. “Old Taxi Drivers Complain of Competition from Big Officials.” 2 June 2008. <http://www.yemenpost.net/32/Reports/20083.htm>

²⁸⁹ Globalpost. Stephens, Paul. “Yemen Economy Bullish, But Where’s the Money?” 16 March 2010. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/middle-east/100302/yemen-economy-bullish>

²⁹⁰ Yemen Post. Al-Omari, Moneer. “Most Yemeni Women Work in Unpaid Jobs; Women’s Unemployment on Rise.” 5 July 2009. <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=100&SubID=1006&MainCat=5>

²⁹¹ The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 2, 31].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

²⁹² United Nations Statistics Division, UN. Millennium Development Goals Indicators. “Series Details: Slum Population as Percentage of Urban, Percentage.” 14 July 2008. <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/SeriesDetail.aspx?srid=710>

²⁹³ United Nations Statistics Division, UN. Millennium Development Goals Indicators. “Series Metadata: Slum Population as Percentage of Urban, Percentage.” 2008. <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Metadata.aspx?IndicatorId=0&SeriesId=710>

²⁹⁴ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Rapid Urbanisation Threatening Capital’s Water Supplies.” 14 August 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=73716>

region. This is especially the case in Sanaa. Those who cannot afford to buy water fill buckets at public spigots, usually at mosques, and carry them home, sometimes over long distances.²⁹⁵ Most homes that are not linked to the water system also lack sewer service. For those who can afford them, homes in newer housing developments in the suburbs have both water and sewer systems. Yet, slum residents often live in makeshift structures built from low-cost or found materials.²⁹⁶ Without functional toilets and water for basic hygiene, residents of slums face serious health complications due to a lack of sanitation.²⁹⁷

Members of the hereditary underclass known as the Akhdam, or “servants,” are disproportionately represented among *mahwa* dwellers. (The term “Akhdam” has been increasingly used by some Yemenis to label all residents of shantytowns.)²⁹⁸ Subject to unfounded rumors about their heritage and practices, Akhdam continue to face discrimination and persecution. Since few hold title to the land on which they built their homes, often little more than huts, they cannot claim municipal services afforded, in theory, to other city residents. These include essential public goods such as water, sanitation, and police protection. While both Islamic and Yemeni civil law accord ownership of unoccupied land to settlers, the low social status of the Akhdam, who sometimes refer to themselves as *muhamasheen*, or marginalized ones, and focus on daily survival makes it hard for them to collectively press their case.²⁹⁹ In 2008, an American journalist described the conditions of an Akhdam shantytown on the outskirts of Sanaa: “...more than 7,000 people live crammed into a stinking warren of low concrete blocks next to a mountain of trash. Young children, many of them barefoot, run through narrow, muddy lanes full of human waste and garbage.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁵ Los Angeles Times. Edwards, Haley Sweetland. “Yemen Water Crisis Builds.” 11 October 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/oct/11/world/fg-yemen-water11>

²⁹⁶ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Residents of Sanaa Slum Battle Disease, Lack of Water. 3 January 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76075>

²⁹⁷ Yemen Today. Murdock, Heather. “Already Thirsty and Drying Fast: The Yemeni Water Crisis.” 2 February 2010. <http://www.yemen-today.com/go/general/3619.html>

²⁹⁸ The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 31].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

²⁹⁹ Urban Health Updates. “Ancient Class System Haunts Yemen’s Shantytowns.” 24 August 2009. <http://urbanhealthupdates.wordpress.com/2009/08/24/ancient-class-system-haunts-yemeni-shantytowns/>

³⁰⁰ The New York Times. Worth, Robert F. “Languishing at the Bottom of Yemen’s Ladder.” 27 February 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/27/world/middleeast/27yemen.html>

Telecommunications

Yemen's telecommunications infrastructure and capabilities are relatively limited. The country has a small number of landline telephone connections: 1.1 million in 2008. Landline service has been outpaced by the rapid growth of the mobile phone industry. As of 2008, the country had an estimated 3.7 million mobile or cellular phone users.³⁰¹ This is up from around 2 million in 2006.³⁰²



© Kevin Burden
Ancient city skyline, plus satellite dish

Exchange 22: What is your telephone number?

Soldier:	What is your telephone number?	kam ragm talafonak?
Local:	My phone number is 765-4321.	talafonee sab'a sita Khamsa arba'a thalaatha ithneyn

Many Yemenis remain too poor to purchase either a landline or mobile phone, and many live in areas where such service is unavailable.³⁰³ Urban areas have greater wireless coverage than rural regions. During times of unrest, the government may cut cell phone service to prevent the spread of information by those challenging state authority. This happened in the south, where there is a secessionist movement, in March 2010.³⁰⁴

Exchange 23: May I use your phone?

Soldier:	May I use your phone?	mumkin astaKhdim talafonak?
Local:	Sure.	tafadHal

³⁰¹ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Yemen." 4 February 2010.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

³⁰² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen [p. 17]." August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

³⁰³ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen [p. 17]." August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

³⁰⁴ Yemen Post. "As Crackdown on Rioters Continues, Yemen Cuts Cell Phone on the South." 9 March 2010. <http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=3&SubID=1955>

Providers of high speed wireless service have catered to the country’s lucrative industries, such as oil and banking, and wealthy residents.³⁰⁵ Internet connectivity remains limited, due to a lack of infrastructure and clientele. Most Yemenis are also too poor to afford computers and related equipment. As of 2008, the country had only 370,000 internet users.³⁰⁶ Urban areas are home to local television and radio stations, which are controlled by the state.³⁰⁷ Less than half (43%) of Yemeni households have a television.³⁰⁸ Wealthy Yemenis might have satellite service.³⁰⁹

Health Care

Yemen’s health care system is underdeveloped and poor in both coverage and quality. The country lacks sufficient health care personnel and facilities. Nationwide, there are only 3 doctors and 7 hospital beds for every 10,000 Yemenis. While professional medical attention is often unavailable in rural areas, approximately 80% of urban areas are, in theory, covered by health services.³¹⁰ Yet the quality of such care is often poor and access is uneven. Ambulance service and blood banks, which require refrigeration, are extremely limited.³¹¹



© Manogamo / flickr.com
Al-thwra Hospital

Exchange 24: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	beh mustashfa gareeb min haanaa?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	na'am bi-wasaT al-madeena

³⁰⁵ Yao, Huawei Julia. *Voice from Operators*, Issue 46. Interview with Mr. Mousleh. “Yemen Mobile is Aiming High.” January 2009. <http://www.huawei.com/publications/view.do?id=5724&cid=10558&pid=61>

³⁰⁶ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. “Yemen.” 4 February 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

³⁰⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Yemen [p. 20].” August 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

³⁰⁸ eStandardsForum, Financial Standards Foundation. “Country Brief: Yemen [p. 13].” 13 October 2009. <http://www.estandardsforum.org/system/briefs/330/original/brief-Yemen.pdf?1257782049>

³⁰⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Yemen: Economy: Transportation and Telecommunications.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45262>

³¹⁰ World Health Organization. “Country Profiles: Yemen.” September 2009. <http://www.emro.who.int/emrinfo/index.asp?Ctry=yem>

³¹¹ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Yemen [pp. 7–8].” August 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

Yemen has private, semi-private, and public (government-run) health care facilities. While public facilities are designed to provide a less expensive treatment than private hospitals, corruption is said to be rampant at such facilities. Mismanagement and low salaries compel medical staff to charge unofficial fees for services. Moreover, “patients must wait a long time to be seen in emergency rooms. Once diagnosed, they are immediately sent out to buy their own drugs from pharmacies.”³¹² Those who lack the means to pay simply forgo treatment. Preference is given to wealthier patients and those who have social ties with staff or important public figures.³¹³ Some public facilities operate as low-cost public providers in the morning but function as “for-profit, fee-for-service” facilities in the afternoon. The conditions and quality of medical personnel at these hospitals are notoriously poor, frequently resulting in misdiagnoses and unnecessary deaths.³¹⁴



© Francesco Veronesi
Mother and child

Exchange 25: Is Dr. al-Sahani in?

Soldier:	Is Dr. al-Sahani in?	ad-daktor as-sanHaanee mawjood?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

The best care is found at modern facilities in Yemen’s two major cities, Sanaa and Aden.³¹⁵ But private facilities are relatively high-cost and remain too expensive for most Yemenis. Moreover, the quality of service remains mediocre or even poor by international standards. As a result, Yemenis who can afford to travel abroad for health care, especially for serious issues, will typically do so.³¹⁶

³¹² Yemen Post. Al-Showthabi, Abdul Rahim. “The Poor Ponder at Saleh’s Mosque.” 26 January 2009. <http://www.yemenpost.net/65/Reports/20081.htm>

³¹³ Yemen Post. Almasmari, Hakim. “Government Hospitals Suffer under Widespread Corruption and Mismanagement, Study Says.” 7 July 2008. <http://www.yemenpost.net/37/Health/20081.htm>

³¹⁴ The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 45–46].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³¹⁵ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Yemen: Country Specific Information.” 19 February 2010. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1061.html

³¹⁶ The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 45–46].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

Exchange 26: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	anta daaree eysh haSal?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Unequal access to basic medical care is a serious problem in urban areas, where poverty and lack of sanitation and clean drinking water contribute to the spread of sickness and disease. Diarrhea, flu, measles, malaria, and meningitis are widespread in slums.³¹⁷ In addition to malnutrition and acute respiratory infections, these illnesses contribute to the country's high rates of infant and child mortality.³¹⁸ Diarrhea alone is responsible for "20–25% of the 84,000 annual deaths among children under five" in Yemen.³¹⁹ According to Yemeni law, all children are entitled to free medical care. Yet, this law is not always acknowledged or enforced. Many children do not receive standard childhood immunizations. Male children are said to receive better care due to traditional gender preferences in Yemeni society.³²⁰ Neonatal mortality rates and maternal mortality rates are also high, due to poor prenatal care. The young age at which many Yemeni women, particularly adolescents, deliver their first child contributes to these high rates.³²¹ Skilled medical professionals attend only 36% of births (2006) in Yemen.³²² Women suffer from the lack of trained female health professionals, who—unlike male physicians—can treat women while respecting Islamic gender boundaries.³²³

³¹⁷ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Residents of Sanaa Slum Battle Disease, Lack of Water." 3 January 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76075>

³¹⁸ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: New Drive to Reduce Child Mortality." 5 October 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86442>

³¹⁹ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Drive to Promote Handwashing, Reduce Child Mortality Rates." 20 October 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=81001>

³²⁰ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. "2008 Human Rights Report: Yemen." 25 February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119130.htm>

³²¹ Choike.org. Lobe, Jim. "Most at-Risk Mothers? Girls Having Children." 4 May 2009. <http://www.choike.org/2009/eng/informes/1879.html>

³²² World Health Organization. "Country Profiles: Yemen." September 2009. <http://www.emro.who.int/emrinfo/index.asp?Ctry=yem>

³²³ The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 45]." 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

Education

According to the law, education is free, compulsory, and universal for all Yemeni children ages 6–15. This includes both primary and secondary schooling, for a total of nine years. Logistically, it's easier for urban residents to enroll.³²⁴ Here too, the government does not enforce its own laws. Associated fees for books and uniforms, along with incidental expenses, often prevent poor children from attending even if there is a school close by.³²⁵ In short, access to education is uneven and heavily dependent on family income. While children of wealthy families can attend private schools that provide higher-quality education, poorer children often cannot attend even low-quality public school. They frequently must cut short attendance to work; either around the house if they are girls or in the informal sector if they are boys.³²⁶ A 2006 survey revealed that 46% of primary-school age children in Yemen were not enrolled in school.³²⁷ Potential pupils can also be turned away for poor hygiene, an endemic problem for those who families lack access to water.³²⁸



© Raphaël Fauveau
School girls

The starkest gap in access to education is by gender. Girls have substantially lower rates of enrollment and attendance than boys, with the gender gap increasing from one educational level to the next. For example, while approximately 85% of boys enroll in primary school, only 65% of girls do so. At the secondary level, only 26% of eligible girls enroll, in contrast to 49% of boys.³²⁹ This trend is fueled by traditional views and practices that mandate the segregation of the sexes and the seclusion of women to the home. A lack of female teachers and girls-only schools prevents many young female students from attending. Child brides may be ineligible to attend school since they presumably possess sexual knowledge that could be corrupting to their female classmates. Nor would the families they married into likely see much benefit to the household in their continued schooling. In sum, education is more highly valued for males because girls are expected to limit their activities to the home. Such practices contribute to a wide gap in

³²⁴ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen." August 2008. <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

³²⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. "2008 Human Rights Report: Yemen." 25 February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/nea/119130.htm>

³²⁶ Los Angeles Times. Fleishman, Jeffrey. "In Yemen, Tribal Tradition Trumps Education." 24 December 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/dec/24/world/la-fg-yemen-school24-2009dec24>

³²⁷ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Concern over Increasing Number of School Dropouts." 27 November 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=75528>

³²⁸ Urban Health Updates. "Ancient Class System Haunts Yemen's Shantytowns." 24 August 2009. <http://urbanhealthupdates.wordpress.com/2009/08/24/ancient-class-system-haunts-yemeni-shantytowns/>

³²⁹ UNICEF. "At a Glance: Yemen: Statistics." 2008. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/yemen_statistics.html

literacy rates between adult men (76%) and women (39%).³³⁰ Literacy rates among urban women (59.5%) are much higher than those of rural women (24%).³³¹

Urban areas are home to Yemen's higher educational facilities, such as the University of Sanaa, University of Aden, and their satellite schools. Yemeni students from wealthy families often study abroad.³³² Access to higher education is limited due to poverty and the poor quality and availability of lower-level education. As a result, less than 6% of Yemeni students enroll at the college or university level. Moreover, the quality of higher education is often poor.³³³ Because of the country's weak economy, employment opportunities are scarce even for college graduates, many of whom become job seekers.³³⁴

Daily Life

Bath Houses

A feature of urban areas is the public bath house, or *hammam*. Although found throughout the Arab world, these facilities are a necessity in a country where running water is not widely available in homes. *Hammam* allow Yemenis to bathe for purposes of hygiene and Islamic custom (ritual purity). Many are found at mosques, where *wudu*, or ritual ablution, must be performed before prayer. Yet, bath houses are also important social centers for Yemenis, especially women. They are strictly segregated by gender. This is often done by restricting access to a specific gender on each day of the week. Women are typically allowed three days of access each week. On these days, women gather at the *hammam* to wash and purify themselves through scrubbing, hair removal, and steaming. Bath house attendants assist in the process, which involves vigorous scrubbing of the skin with rough pads. Both men and women use the time for conversation and socializing. For some women, this may be one of the few opportunities during the week to socialize with female friends outside the home.³³⁵



© Charles Roffey
Men in a bath house

³³⁰ World Economic Forum. *Global Gender Gap Report 2009*. "Country Profile: Yemen." 27 October 2009. <http://www.weforum.org/pdf/gendergap2009/Yemen.pdf>

³³¹ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Female Education Remains Key Challenge." 6 September 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74159>

³³² Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: Government and Society: Education." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-45267>

³³³ Yemen Post. Kahtan, Bo-Madyan. "Less Than 6% Make It to College." 18 February 2008. <http://www.yemenpost.net/17/Reports/1.htm>

³³⁴ The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 42–44]." 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³³⁵ Women Speak Online. "Yemeni Baths Offer a Dip into Culture." November 2008. <http://www.womenspeakonline.org/archive/2008/11/yemeni.html>

Restaurants

Yemen’s major cities have a variety of restaurants and food vendors, including some international chains. Dining establishments are busiest during lunch, the most important meal of the day. They typically close for the afternoon—during the daily *qat* chew—but reopen for dinner. During Ramadan, the holy month during which Muslims fast, restaurants are closed throughout the day but open after dusk for large, fast-breaking meals known



© Alexandre Baron
Friends at a Sana'a restaurant

as *iftar*. In Yemen, restaurants often have two sections: a private “family” section, where women and children eat with their male relatives; and a public section that is limited to male patrons. The male section is commonly on the first floor of the restaurant, with the family section located upstairs.³³⁶ Foreign women are advised to sit in the family section.³³⁷ Restaurants usually have sinks for customers to wash their hands, as food is typically eaten without utensils. Diners may sit around tables or on carpeted floors.

Exchange 27: May I have a glass of water?

Soldier:	May I have a glass of water?	mumkin tideenee galaS maa?
Local:	Yes, right away.	na'am fi al-Haal

Visitors should take care to drink only bottled water. Tap water and ice should be avoided. Fruit juices sold by street vendors might contain tap water.

Exchange 28: I would like tea.

Soldier:	I would like tea.	ishtee shaahee
Local:	Yes.	na'am

³³⁶ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Ham, Anthony and Frances Linzee Gordon. “Food and Drink [p. 60].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

³³⁷ Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies. “Yemeni Culture: Food Etiquette.” 2009. <http://www.ycmes.org/culture.html>

Tea is a common beverage; it is usually served sweet. Yemenis typically eat light breakfasts consisting of tea (*shay*) and bread with eggs and/or beans.

Exchange 29: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast?	'aad beh faToor?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Lunch often begins with a bowl of meat broth known as *marag* (*maraq*).³³⁸

Exchange 30: I'd like some hot soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some hot soup.	ishtee marag Haamee
Local:	Sure.	HaaDhir

Common types of meat are chicken, goat, and lamb. Kebabs, or grilled meat chunks, are typical of Yemeni street fare. The most common lunchtime meal is known as *saltah*, a spicy meat stew often described as Yemen's national dish.



© Francesco Veronesi
Breakmaker

Exchange 31: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	eysh min shirka teeyeh?
Local:	Lamb.	ghanamee

³³⁸ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 2: Eating and Drinking [p. 55]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, England: Bradt Travel Guides.

Yemeni deserts are typically flavored with honey. A favorite is known as *bint al-sahn*, which is a layered pastry.

Exchange 32: Do you have a dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have a dessert?	beh 'indakum shee niHalee beh?
Local:	Yes, we have bint al- sahn.	na'am beh 'indana bint aS-SaHan

Coffee is commonly served after the meal. Regular coffee (*bunn* or *qahwa*) can be expensive for the average Yemeni. A cheaper and more common variety, known as *qishr*, is brewed from coffee husks rather than beans.



© Alexander Sheko
Yemeni ginger coffee

Exchange 33: I would like coffee.

Soldier:	I would like coffee.	ishtee gah-wa
Local:	Sure.	HaaDhir

In Yemen one person pays the bill for the entire party, although diners typically fight to have their money accepted first. As credit card service is limited, cash is the required form of payment.

Tipping is not common practice in Yemen, although it may be expected at hotels and restaurants catering to tourists and wealthy patrons. Restaurant bills may instead include a service charge.³³⁹

³³⁹ Lonely Planet. "Lonely Planet World Guide: Destination Yemen." 2004.
http://www.statraveluk.lonelyplanet.com/middle_east/yemen/index.html

In accordance with Islamic law, the consumption of alcohol is highly restricted in Yemen. Its sale is typically limited to upscale hotels. Public consumption and intoxication are strictly prohibited.

Marketplace

The traditional marketplace in Yemen is known as the *souk*, or bazaar, open from Sunday through Thursday from 8 a.m–9 p.m. with an extended afternoon break.³⁴⁰ Typically located in old city centers, these open-air markets comprise numerous individual shops, stalls, and vendors. A wide variety of goods are available, including food, crafts, souvenirs, and consumer products.



© eesti / flickr.com
Sana'a marketplace

Exchange 34: Is the bazaar nearby?

Soldier:	Is the bazaar nearby?	hal as-soog gareeb min haanaa?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	na'am, haanaa 'ala al-yameen

The central market in Sanaa is known as the Souk al-Milh, or “Salt Market.”³⁴¹ Located in old Sanaa, it comprises approximately 40 smaller markets that each specialize in a certain product, such as spices, produce, qat, jewelry, or carpets.³⁴² One of the most common products at any *souk* is the *jambiya*, a curved dagger widely worn by Yemeni men.

Exchange 35: Do you sell *jambiya*?

Soldier:	Do you sell <i>jambiya</i> ?	bitbee' janaabey?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

³⁴⁰ Yemen Blog. “Souks in Yemen.” 3 October 2009. <http://yementribune.com/blog/?p=456>

³⁴¹ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Ham, Anthony and Frances Linzee Gordon. “San’a [pp. 375–376].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

³⁴² Lonely Planet. “Lonely Planet World Guide: Destination Yemen.” 2004. http://www.statraveluk.lonelyplanet.com/middle_east/yemen/index.html

Although bargaining is common practice throughout the greater Arabian Peninsula, it is less so in Yemen. Prices are often open to some negotiation, but shoppers should not expect huge markdowns from the initial price. Excessive haggling may cause offense.³⁴³

Exchange 36: Can I buy a jambiya with this much money?

Soldier:	Can I buy a jambiya with this much money?	mumkin ashtaree jambeeya bi-teeyeh az-zalaT?
Local:	No.	ma'

It is important for customers to familiarize themselves with the market and its practices by visiting a number of different stalls and comparing prices and qualities of goods.

Exchange 37: May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	May I examine this close up?	mumkin a'ayin teeyeh?
Local:	Sure.	akeed

With an understanding of local pricing norms, foreigners will be able to better conduct negotiations with vendors.



© Francesco Veronesi
Suq shop

³⁴³ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Ham, Anthony and Frances Linzee Gordon. "Bargaining [p. 443]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

Exchange 38: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	beh 'andak zalaT Khayraat men haaTholaa?
Local:	No.	ma'a

After agreeing to a price, customers should follow through with the transaction; it is inappropriate to withdraw an offer that has been accepted or to bargain if there is no intention to buy.

Exchange 39: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	law samaHt ishtaree minee ayi Haaja
Soldier:	Sorry, I have no money left.	aasif, KhalaSat az-zalaT

The basic unit of Yemeni currency is the Yemeni Rial (YER). Banknotes are available in denominations of YER10, YER20, YER50, YER100, YER200, YER500, and YER1000. Coins come in denominations of YER5, YER10, and YER20. In early 2010, the exchange rate was USD1 to YER204.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
200 Yemen rial

Exchange 40: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	mumkin tiSrif lee teeyeh?
Local:	No.	ma'

While U.S. dollars and Euros are accepted in Yemen, some merchants may require payment in YER. Those vendors who accept foreign currencies will likely want payment in small bills owing to fears that larger denomination bank notes may be counterfeit.

Exchange 41: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	batigbal 'umla amreekeeya?
Local:	No we only accept riyals.	ma' maa nigbal ilaa ar-reeyaal

Markets and other businesses typically close from approximately 1–4 p.m. At this time locals partake in the daily *qat* chew after bargaining for the best leaves from sellers in *souks* that specialize in *qat*.³⁴⁴

Exchange 42: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	kam baagee lak tigliis haanaa?
Local:	Three more hours.	thalaath saa'aat

Due to rampant poverty, beggars are widespread in busy urban venues such as marketplaces. They are often children or refugees.³⁴⁵

Exchange 43: Give me money.

Local:	Give me money.	ideenee zalaT
Soldier:	I don't have any.	maabesh ma'ee shee

³⁴⁴ Travel Blog. Fox, Robert. "A National Obsession." 16 March 2010. <http://www.travelblog.org/Middle-East/Yemen/Sanaa/blog-482776.html>

³⁴⁵ Arab News. Al-Batati, Saeed. "In Yemen, Somali Refugees Beg to Survive." 13 January 2010. <http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=9§ion=0&article=131099&d=13&m=1&y=2010&pix=community.jpg&category=Features%22>

Many Yemeni children have been trafficked into the major urban areas of Sanaa and Aden, or nearby Saudi Arabia, to work as street beggars for their captors.³⁴⁶

Transportation

Yemen’s road network is limited and often in poor condition. Roads within and between major urban centers are paved, but maintenance is haphazard and conditions vary from good to poor. The best intra-urban highways are in the west, running between Sanaa and Ta’izz in the highlands, and from those cities to Al Hudaydah on the Tihama.³⁴⁷ Driving conditions in urban areas are often unsafe. Traffic lights and police are present, but basic traffic laws are not obeyed or enforced except to solicit bribes from offenders. Vehicles are often in poor condition; many lack basic features such as working headlights, taillights, and turn signals. Hazards include both pedestrians and animals.³⁴⁸



Foreigners can drive in Yemen with an International Driving Permit.³⁴⁹ Rental vehicles can be hired with or without a driver. Hired drivers may also serve as navigators, interpreters, and basic mechanics.³⁵⁰

Exchange 44: Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	Where can I rent a car?	men feyn asta-gir sayaara?
Local:	Downtown.	bi-wasaT al-madeena

Diesel fuel is subsidized by the government in Yemen. Subsidies can promote overuse by those with preferential access and can lead to shortages for the unconnected. Shortages are periodically reported in the Yemen press.³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. Department of State. *Trafficking in Persons Report 2009*. “Country Narratives – Countries Q Through Z.” 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/123139.htm>

³⁴⁷ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Yemen.” August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

³⁴⁸ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. “Yemen: Country Specific Information.” 19 February 2010. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1061.html

³⁴⁹ United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office. “Yemen Travel Advice.” 21 January 2010. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/yemen/>

³⁵⁰ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Ham, Anthony and Frances Linzee Gordon. “Transport in Yemen: Getting Around [p. 430].” 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

Exchange 45: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	beh maHaTat batrol gareeba min haanaa?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Mechanics and parts stores are less widespread and may be difficult to find.³⁵²

Exchange 46: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	beh mikaaneekee gareeb min haanaa?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Yemen has 55 airports, 18 of which have paved runways.³⁵³ Four of Yemen's major cities host international airports: Sanaa, Aden, Ta'izz, and Al Hudaydah.



© Dean Morley
Yemen airlines

³⁵¹ Yemen Times. Al-Ashmouri, Saddam. "Government Denies Diesel Crisis." 28 April 2008. http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/yemen-times-sanaa/mi_8204/is_20080428/government-denies-diesel-crisis/ai_n52148260/

³⁵² *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Ham, Anthony and Frances Linzee Gordon. "Transport in Yemen: Getting Around [p. 429]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

³⁵³ Central Intelligence Agency. The World Factbook. "Yemen." 4 February 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

Exchange 47: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	eysh min shaari' yiwadeenee laa al-maTaar?
Local:	The road heading east.	ash-shaari' ash-shargee

Yemen has no rail network. Plans have been made to construct a railway running southward from Saudi Arabia through the Tihama, and then eastward through Aden and along the southern coast to Oman. While a proposed start date for the project was set for July 2010, instability in both the north and south threatened to hinder construction.³⁵⁴

Exchange 48: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	beh maHaTat geeTaar gareeba min haanaa?
Local:	No.	ma'

Bus service provides relatively inexpensive transport between urban areas. Cheaper bus lines often have poorly maintained vehicles.³⁵⁵ Minibuses typically provide local bus service within cities.³⁵⁶



© Francesco Veronesi
Sana'a taxi

³⁵⁴ The National. Reuters. "Yemen to Launch \$3.5bn Railway." 17 January 2010. <http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100117/FOREIGN/701179964/1107/FORIEGN>

³⁵⁵ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Getting Around [pp. 53–54]." 2007. Buckinghamshire, England: Bradt Travel Guides.

³⁵⁶ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Ham, Anthony and Francis Linzee Gordon. "Transport in Yemen: Getting Around [p. 430]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

Exchange 49: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	eysh 'ayigee al-baaS ba'd galeel?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Taxi service is available between and within urban areas. Shared taxis (*bijous*) are typical, usually consisting of station wagons holding 8–10 people. Pick-up stations are known as *furzat*. Taxi drivers usually only leave with a full load, unless payment is made for empty seats.³⁵⁷

Exchange 50: Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	Where can I get a cab?	feyn 'alaagee taaksee ?
Local:	Over there.	haanaak

Taxis can also be contracted for travel between cities, but customers pay the price of any empty seats.

Exchange 51: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	mumkin tashulnee laa haanaak?
Local:	Yes, I can.	na'am agdar

³⁵⁷ *Yemen: The Bradt Travel Guide*. McLaughlin, Daniel. “Chapter 2: Practical Information: Getting Around [pp. 53–54].” 2007. Buckinghamshire, England: Bradt Travel Guides.

Fares between cities are usually fixed. Fares around town in contracted taxis (rather than shared taxis) should be negotiated beforehand, as meters are not used. Motorbike taxis are also available.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ *Arabian Peninsula*, 1st Ed. Ham, Anthony and Gordon, Frances Linzee. "San'a: Getting Around [p. 382]," and "Transport in Yemen: Getting Around [p. 430]." 2004. Footscray, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications.

Rural Life

Introduction

The majority (69%) of the Yemeni population lives in rural areas.³⁵⁹ Rural Yemen is characterized by tribalism, limited central government, and low levels of development. Yet while the central government lacks authority outside of Sanaa, rural Yemen is not an ungoverned or lawless place. Rather, tribal institutions and customary law organize society, often rigidly.³⁶⁰ Moreover, tribal leadership in rural areas has developed closer ties with the central government. This has weakened traditional tribal structures and customs designed to maintain order and equity. For example, the incorporation of tribal leaders, or *shaykhs*, into central government has reduced their accountability to their local communities and exposed them to corruption.³⁶¹ Tribes have mechanisms for managing resources and preventing, mediating, and resolving conflict. For example, most land was communally owned. All households in the community shared the right to graze livestock, collect firewood and pick fruit from trees in places where orchards existed. This did not necessarily extend to the right to plant crops requiring irrigation, however. The rights to runoff [rainfall] water could be held by down-stream communities. Customary law upheld the right to use runoff over the right to cultivate crops.³⁶² However, rapid population growth, a weak economy, widespread poverty and the privatization of scarce resources have all intensified the competition for access to water and land. The situation has contributed to conflict and the spread of extremism by actors such as al-Qaeda who can appeal to a disenfranchised population by weaving a narrative of injustice which plays on notions of tribal honor. Essentially, a collective defense must be mounted against a central government which has appropriated Yemen's national wealth, in the form of oil revenues, and used it to oppress the people and keep them poor.³⁶³



© Charles Roffey
Yemeni hill village

³⁵⁹ United Nations Population Fund. *State of the World Population 2009: Facing a Changing World: Women, Population and Climate*. "Demographic, Social and Economic Indicators [p. 90]." 2009. http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2009/en/pdf/EN_SOWP09.pdf

³⁶⁰ Council on Foreign Relations. Patrick, Stewart M. "Are 'Ungoverned Spaces' a Threat?" 11 January 2010. http://www.cfr.org/publication/21165/are_ungoverned_spaces_a_threat.html

³⁶¹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 38]." 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁶² SOAS Water Issues Study Group, University of London. Lichtenhaler, Gerhard. "Adjusting to the Extreme Shortage of a Common Resource: Runoff, Resource Capture and Social Adaptive Capacity." June 2000. <http://www.aiys.org/webdate/pellich.html>

³⁶³ Lowy Institute for International Policy. Phillips, Sarah and Rodger Shanahan. "Al-Qa'ida, Tribes and Instability in Yemen." November 2009.

http://www.humansecuritygateway.com/documents/LOWY_AlQaida_Tribes_Instability_Yemen.pdf

Tribes: Organization and Distribution

The presence and strength of tribal organization varies from region to region. It is considered “weak or virtually non-existent” in much of the Tihama and southern coastal plains. Along the southern coast, in particular, tribalism weakened during the British colonial era and, later, under the socialist government of the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (1970–1990). Here people are organized according to locality rather than tribe.³⁶⁴ Tribal



© Nick Leonard
Two Yemeni men discussing livestock

organization is strongest in the highlands (especially in the north) and the adjacent eastern slope. Tribes define themselves by locality, genealogy (ancestry), and customs. Many scholars of Yemen assert that locality plays the dominant role in defining tribal identity. Indeed, current tribal boundaries are thought to date back several centuries or even a millennium or more.³⁶⁵

Exchange 52: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	biti'rif teeyeh al-manTiga gawee?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Genealogical ties are meaningful, whether they are based on blood or political alliances.³⁶⁶ It is common for tribes to be named for an ancestor or their geographic region.³⁶⁷

While levels of organization and strength vary, many tribes maintain their own political, economic, and judicial structures, as well as militias. Tribes define themselves in opposition to surrounding tribes, with whom they may occasionally come into conflict. However, tribes that oppose each other locally often unite in defense against more distant

³⁶⁴ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 13].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁶⁵ Center for Global Development. Egel, Daniel. “Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [pp. 6–7, 9].” 12 January 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

³⁶⁶ “North Yemen: Social Class and Tribe [p. 115–116].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

³⁶⁷ “The Tribes – The Backbone of the Nation [pp. 116–117].” Meissner, Jeff. In *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Hans Hofer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

tribes if they present a threat to local interests. Strong and well-organized tribes form small, autonomous “nation-states” within greater Yemen. Tribal confederations, or alliances between multiple tribes, represent a higher level of organization.³⁶⁸ These alliances formed to allow tribes to share resources and protect mutual economic interests, such as regional trade routes and markets. Today, tribal confederations represent the interests of their constituent tribes in interactions with the central government.³⁶⁹

The country’s two most important and influential tribal confederations are known as the Hashid and Bakil. Their constituent tribes are based around Sanaa and throughout the northern highlands.³⁷⁰ Both of their names date to pre-Islamic times, and each confederation has constituent tribes with long histories.³⁷¹ The Hashid confederation is the more politically powerful of the two, and it plays a strong role in central government.³⁷² Yemen’s president, Ali Abdallah Saleh, is a member of the Hashid.³⁷³ There is great diversity among Yemeni tribes. As one Yemeni scholar observed, “There are fighting tribes and there are peaceful tribes, there are tribes in fertile land and tribes in barren land, there are tribes with strong fanaticism and there are tribes who are less [fanatical]. There are tribes that are loyal to the ruling system and those in opposition to it... There are places where tribes still cling to their tribal norms and... places where tribes have lost these norms.”³⁷⁴

Tribal Leadership and the State

Rural administration varies from region to region, depending upon the strength of tribal organization and/or state influence in that region. Many tribes operate independently from the central government, whose authority is weak outside of Sanaa. The central government is thus dependent upon the support of tribes to maintain stability. Tribes are political entities that are not divorced from the state, contribute to



© Franco Pecchio
Village soldiers near Jibla

³⁶⁸ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 12].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁶⁹ Center for Global Development. Egel, Daniel. “Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [pp. 5–6, 10–11].” 12 January 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

³⁷⁰ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 1: Introductory [pp. 24–25].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

³⁷¹ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 9: The Morphology of Tribal Self-Definition [p. 320].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

³⁷² Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 12].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁷³ The Atlantic. Kaplan, Robert D. “A Tale of Two Colonies.” April 2003.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200304/kaplan>

³⁷⁴ Yemen Observer. Al-Alaya’a, Zaid. “Tribes Should be Social Entities not Political Participants, Says al-Dhaheri.” 22 September 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/reports/10012989.html>

its existence, and influence its operation.³⁷⁵ Yemen has been described as a “tribal republic” in which “a weak central government is supported by a network of alliances between key tribes, tribal leaders, and the president.”³⁷⁶ The cooperation of tribes is largely secured through the government’s patronage network—resources (e.g. oil revenues, jobs, political appointments, etc.) are distributed to clients and supporters. Conflicts and rebellion often occur when tribes feel they have been unfairly denied access to such resources.

The patronage system has allowed the central government to incorporate, to a certain degree, tribal leadership into its fold. This has occurred via the Department of Tribal Affairs, which has formally recognized nearly 6,000 tribal *shaykhs* around the country. These *shaykhs* receive a cash stipend and other forms of patronage from the government.³⁷⁷ Some are elected to higher government offices, such as the national parliament. In the past, their leadership was evaluated on the basis of their ability to resolve conflicts and maintain harmony with surrounding tribes. Now it is judged by their ability to bring resources into the community which is distributed according to the *shaykh*’s (sheikh’s) discretion. Needy community members thus have an incentive to seek material benefits from tribal leaders rather than advocating for changes to the existing system.

Exchange: 53: Does your sheikh live here?

Soldier:	Does your sheikh live here?	eysh sheyKhukum ya’eesh haanaa?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

The extent to which this shift has occurred is a matter of scholarly debate while the specific circumstances vary according to tribe. Yet there is broad agreement that the patronage system has discernibly weakened traditional tribal mechanisms for electing and regulating tribal leadership. The tribes of the northern highlands have traditionally held the right to both elect and remove their *shaykhs* by way of a communal vote. This mechanism is meant to ensure that



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Yemeni man

³⁷⁵ Yemen Observer. Al-Alaya’a, Zaid. “Tribes Should be Social Entities not Political Participants, Says al-Dhaheri.” 22 September 2007. <http://www.yobserver.com/reports/10012989.html>

³⁷⁶ Center for Global Development, University of California. Berkeley. Egel, Daniel. “Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [pp. 7–8].” 12 January 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

³⁷⁷ Center for Global Development, University of California. Berkeley. Egel, Daniel. “Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [pp. 1, 7–8].” 12 January 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

shaykhs remain accountable to their people while they conduct their traditional duties, which include resource management and distribution. However, the patronage network has provided *shaykhs* with alternative means of support outside the community, thereby reducing the incentive to be accountable to their people. Moreover, their wealth and connections to central government and the patronage network allow them to wield great influence over the community. One Yemeni *shaykh* remarked upon the situation, “Once a Shaykhh [sic] enters the government, he erodes tribal authority and can turn into a despot unless he respects the tribal law that his grandfathers swore by.” Tribes that are well-organized and mindful of tradition retain the ability to remove their *shaykhs*. Many *shaykhs* remain unregistered with and/or opposed to the government.³⁷⁸

Exchange 54: Can you take me to your sheikh?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your sheikh?	mumkin tashulnee laa sheyKhukum?
Local:	Yes.	mumkin

Shaykhs retain their customary duties to mediate conflicts and manage and distribute resources within the community. They mobilize the community in times of need, and act as intermediaries between the government and the tribe.

Exchange 55: Respected sheikh, we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected sheikh, we need your help / advice / opinion.	ash-sheyKh al-muHtaram nishtee musaa'adatcum / naSeeHatcum / raayakum
Local:	Yes.	HaaDhir

³⁷⁸ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 35–38].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

Land Tenure

Land is highly valued by Yemenis. This is due in part to the limited supply of agricultural land in Yemen, where less than 3% of land is arable (suitable for farming). An additional 3.7% is classified as “marginal farmland.”³⁷⁹



Most Yemeni tribesmen are sedentary agriculturists; their livelihoods depend on a recognized claim to land (and related water resources). Moreover, Yemeni tribal culture associates territory with tribal identity and the protection of that territory with tribal honor. Yemeni tribes have two sayings to this effect: “*al-ard ‘ard*” or “land is honor,” and “*man aqdam li-ard-uk aqdam li-‘ard-uk*,” or “whoever transgresses against your land transgresses against your honor.”³⁸⁰ For these reasons, Yemeni tribesmen are fiercely territorial. Conflicts over land are a common source of blood feuds.³⁸¹

Exchange 56: Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	eysh Khawafook haaTholaa an-naas?
Local:	No.	maashey

In Yemen, land is classified into four major categories: privately owned land (*mulk* or *mulk khas*), state-owned land (*aradi al-dawla*), communal land, and land endowed to a religious trust (*aradi waqf*). The majority of the country’s landholdings are privately owned.³⁸² Such land is managed according to customary law (*ulf*), and tenure is typically documented through deeds and contracts authorized by a local *shaykh*, or tribal leader.³⁸³

³⁷⁹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 15].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁸⁰ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. “Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 54–55].” 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

³⁸¹ U.S. Institute of Peace. Al-Zwaini, Laila. “State and Non-State Justice in Yemen [pp. 8, 13].” December 2006. http://www.usip.org/files/file/zwaini_paper.pdf

³⁸² “Land Tenure and Resource Management in the Yemeni Highlands [p. 182]” Al-Sanabani, M. Mosleh. *In Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Kamil A. Mahdi, Anna Würth, and Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

³⁸³ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 15].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

Exchange 57: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	teeyeh al-bug'a mulkak?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

However, conflicts over boundaries and ownership occur due to lack of a national surveying system and registry, as well as a process for authenticating customary deeds and contracts. (The state’s Survey and Land Registration Authority only administers urban land.) State-owned land often lacks detailed records and is thus subject to illegal seizure, or land grabbing.³⁸⁴ This is the case in the former South Yemen, where land was nationalized during the socialist era but reopened to individual claims after unification. While this policy allowed former landowners to regain their property, many small farmers who received land during the socialist era lost their property rights. Moreover, many claims made on public land were unsubstantiated but secured through patronage. This ongoing practice hurts small farmers; land has been increasingly accumulated by wealthier and better connected landowners. Land is more likely to be fairly distributed in regions where tribal organization remains strong (such as certain areas of the highlands).³⁸⁵



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Carrying water

Traditionally, *shaykhs* are responsible for managing communal land. According to the World Bank, “as land speculation has increased...there is growing confusion over communal land entrusted to *shaykhs* and the land that they hold privately. Some *shaykhs* have sold land alleged to be communal to private owners outside the tribe, a contravention of customary norms.”³⁸⁶ *Shaykhs* traditionally serve as mediators in conflicts over private land. However, their increased involvement and profiteering in land speculation, through which they may have personally acquired choice parcels, has tarnished their reputation as neutral judges. The opportunity to profit is the result of privatization. This has given rise to new categories of ownership which supersede customary user rights that has disproportionately benefited those in power. It has also

³⁸⁴ “Land Tenure and Resource Management in the Yemeni Highlands [p. 183]” Al-Sanabani, M. Mosleh. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Kamil A. Mahdi, Anna Würth, and Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

³⁸⁵ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 15–16, 24].” 11 January 2006.
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁸⁶ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 15].” 11 January 2006.
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

contributed to the unsustainable exploitation of aquifer water resources since restrictions on well drilling on formerly communal land are no longer enforced by tribal authorities.³⁸⁷

A lack of sufficient records also affects the administration of *waqf* land, or land that is donated to the Muslim establishment. Comprising approximately 10–15% of Yemen’s agricultural land, *waqf* land is typically cultivated by tenant farmers who pay their rent with a share of their crops. Such land is also subject to illegal procurement or seizure by powerful landowners.³⁸⁸ The lack of a national survey and record system for rural land has contributed to the increasing ownership of land by a small number of wealthy and well-connected families. The arbitrary combination of customary and state law in land management practices has also fueled this trend.³⁸⁹

Inheritance

Private land usually passes from a father to his sons. Young men thus have to wait for their fathers to die before becoming landowners, unless they can secure it through patronage or cash payment. Inheritance customs contribute to smaller plots because land is successively divided from generation to generation.³⁹⁰ Although they play an important role in the agricultural economy, women have limited opportunity for land ownership. Islamic law entitles women to half a share of land from their father’s estate and smaller increments from the estates of their sons and husband. However, Yemenis follow customary practices in which women relinquish their land rights in exchange for guaranteed lifetime support from their male relatives. Under this arrangement, for example, a woman may move back in with her male relatives in the event of widowhood or divorce.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ SOAS Water Issues Study Group, University of London. Lichenhaler, Gerhard. “Adjusting to the Extreme Shortage of a Common Resource: Runoff, Resource Capture and Social Adaptive Capacity.” June 2000. <http://www.aiys.org/webdate/pellich.html>

³⁸⁸ “Land Tenure and Resource Management in the Yemeni Highlands [p. 183]” Al-Sanabani, M. Mosleh. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Kamil A. Mahdi, Anna Würth, and Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

³⁸⁹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 15].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁹⁰ “Land Tenure and Resource Management in the Yemeni Highlands [pp. 185–186].” Al-Sanabani, M. Mosleh. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Kamil A. Mahdi, Anna Würth, and Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

³⁹¹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 16].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

Rural Economy and Resources

Most rural residents earn their living through sedentary agriculture and livestock herding. In rugged areas of the highlands, cultivation occurs in terraces cut into steep hillsides. This ancient system allows farmers to harness fertile soils on the mountainside and to maximize limited rainfall. Modern irrigation techniques commonly used in flatter areas, however, result in the abandonment of hillside terraces which will contribute to soil erosion, if they are not maintained. Land holdings in the highlands are typically small and fragmented, but small-scale farmers often own their own land. While the sale of produce was formerly limited to weekly markets, small permanent market towns have emerged in the rural highlands, replacing the traditional barter system with one based on cash and commercial services.³⁹²



© Franco Pecchio
Hay donkey

In the Tihama, one of Yemen's poorest regions, the majority of agricultural land is held by a small number of landowners. Such land is cultivated by wage laborers. Small-scale fishing has grown increasingly viable with the expansion of regional highway networks and the use of refrigerated trucks. Agricultural land along the southern coast is also mostly concentrated with wealthy landowners. Many small farmers in this region lost their property rights following unification in 1990 and now work as wage laborers, transient farmers, and unskilled construction workers. In the sparsely populated eastern plateau, sedentary agriculture occurs in oases and *wadis* such as Wadi Hadramawt. While the Yemeni oil industry is based in this region, it provides few jobs. Informal cross-border trade, or smuggling, is a major economic activity in this region. Nomadic pastoralism, or seasonal migration with livestock, was once relatively common but is now limited to small populations.³⁹³

The instability and low profits and wages associated with agriculture contribute to rampant poverty and unemployment. Nationwide, more than 45% of the population lives on less than USD 2 per day.³⁹⁴ Seasonal or permanent migration to urban areas or abroad is a common response to rural poverty. Male children are commonly sent out to work in the informal economy rather than attend school. In Wadi Hadramawt, for example, teenage boys customarily migrate to Oman to work with male relatives already

³⁹² Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 20–22]." 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁹³ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 12, 20–25]." 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁹⁴ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Poverty, Lack of Education Boosting HIV/AIDS – Experts." 5 March 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82235>

established there. They then send a portion of their wages home to their families. Many Yemeni children are trafficked (often arranged by their parents), into Saudi Arabia.³⁹⁵

Qat Cultivation

The Yemeni agricultural sector has increasingly centered on the cultivation of *qat*, a shrub whose leaves are widely chewed by Yemenis as a mild stimulant. This is especially true in the highlands, where in the 1970s most farmers worked in subsistence agriculture, namely the cultivation of grains and other food crops. However, the market for *qat* has greatly expanded because consumption has increased, becoming more widespread. More and more farmers have replaced their food crops with *qat*, a cash crop. Between 1970 and 2000, the area of *qat* cultivation in Yemen grew from 8,000 hectares (19,768 acres) to 103,000 hectares (360,773 acres).³⁹⁶ By 2008, this area had surpassed 146,000 hectares.³⁹⁷



© Charles Roffey
Kawkaban woman carrying qat

Farmers have embraced *qat* cultivation for several reasons. While it is a water-intensive crop, it is highly resistant to pests and disease and it requires limited labor. Due to high demand, the *qat* market is lucrative. While low quality *qat* may cost around USD 1 per bushel, the best *qat* can reportedly draw more than USD 100 per bushel at market.³⁹⁸ Moreover, local distribution networks are highly developed and the domestic market is protected by a restriction on imports of the plant. Overall, yearly returns from *qat* are three times higher than those of coffee, another important cash crop.³⁹⁹ Diesel fuel, used to illegally pump underground water for *qat* irrigation, is also subsidized, however.⁴⁰⁰ This reduces the production cost of a crop that is marketed daily year round. Were the government to phase out this subsidy, the profit margins for *qat* cultivation would shrink and could create market incentives for farmers to shift production to other crops.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁵ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 18–19].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

³⁹⁶ Yemen Observer. Ghanem, Suzan and Jowhara Zindani, Zinadine Zindani. “Qat: The Plague of Yemen.” 26 February 2008. <http://www.yobserver.com/sports-health-and-lifestyle/10013815.html>

³⁹⁷ Yemen Observer. Oudah, Abdul-Aziz. “Qat Absorbs More Than Yemen’s Depleting Water.” 16 February 2010. <http://www.yobserver.com/front-page/10018176.html>

³⁹⁸ Reuters UK. Noueihed, Lin. “Qat Draws Water and Life from Impoverished Yemen.” 29 May 2007. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/idUKNOA93814520070529?sp=true>

³⁹⁹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 20].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴⁰⁰ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Boucek, Christopher. “Yemen on the Brink: Implications for U.S. Policy.” 3 February 2010. http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/0203_testimony_boucek.pdf

⁴⁰¹ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Alarm Bells Over Water.” 14 August 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=79819>

Food and Water Shortages

The expanded cultivation of *qat* at the expense of food crops has contributed to severe food insecurity in Yemen. Drought and conflict are also responsible for shortages. Although a large share of the Yemeni population works in agriculture, the majority of Yemen's food supply is imported due to insufficient domestic food production. Even most rural households are net food buyers rather than sellers. High prices for food imports often prevent poor families from purchasing necessary supplies.⁴⁰² The lack of food, as well as the lower nutritional value of food imports, has contributed to malnutrition and other health issues among the Yemeni population. Because they receive higher cash returns, *qat* farmers are "more than twice as likely to be food secure than those not doing so."⁴⁰³ In 2010, an estimated 32% of the country was food insecure, meaning they were "suffering from acute hunger."⁴⁰⁴



© Charles Roffey
Water hole

Water shortages are also serious. Agriculture is the chief consumer of Yemen's water supply. It accounts for roughly 90% of the country's annual water withdrawal, leaving only 10% for domestic and industrial use. Approximately 40% of annual water use goes to *qat* cultivation.⁴⁰⁵ Cultivation of this water-intensive crop has been discouraged by the Yemeni government. Yet the crop's high profit margin has ensured its continued (and expanded) cultivation. The proliferation of illegally drilled wells to water crops has contributed to the rapid decline of groundwater levels. In 2008, a report indicated that these levels are dropping by 6–20 m (20–65 ft) per year—an extraordinary rate. Erratic rainfall, drought, and higher temperatures have hindered the replenishment of aquifers and surface storage systems.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, an estimated 20–30% of the country's rainfall is thought to be wasted through faulty collection and poorly maintained dams.⁴⁰⁷

Water supplies are therefore extremely limited. In rural areas, people often hike long distances to tap local wells or springs. In 2009, lingering drought in the northwestern highlands forced residents to hike some 10–15 km (6–9 mi) over rugged terrain to reach

⁴⁰² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: 'The Most Food-Insecure Country in the Middle East.'" 17 February 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82966>

⁴⁰³ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 20–21]." 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴⁰⁴ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Food Security Takes a Knock." 25 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=88235>

⁴⁰⁵ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Unprecedented Water Rationing in Cities." 16 August 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85734>

⁴⁰⁶ United Press International. "Yemen's Water Crisis a Mideast Warning." 29 October 2009. http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2009/10/29/Yemens-water-crisis-a-Mideast-warning/UPI-52511256844951/

⁴⁰⁷ The New York Times. Worth, Robert F. "Thirsty Plant Dries Out Yemen." 31 October 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/01/world/middleeast/01yemen.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

high mountain springs. Some 40,000 women and children, who traditionally collect water, were thought to be affected. While some residents in the region had rainwater catchment systems, most could not afford them.⁴⁰⁸ Water scarcity is a common cause for rural to urban migration; urban areas maintain a public water supply—albeit limited and rapidly decreasing—as well as a network of private sellers.⁴⁰⁹ Water shortages have increasingly been tied to social unrest and conflict.⁴¹⁰ The resource is traditionally managed according to Islamic and customary law, but the growing inequities that have affected land distribution have similarly affected access to water. Large farmers have the resources to dig more and deeper wells. But the wells of nearby small farmers have dried out due to breaches of customary law, which requires wells to be spaced at certain distances.⁴¹¹ Rural areas have increasingly been forced to truck in water for both agricultural and domestic use.⁴¹²

Health Care

Yemen's health care system is severely inadequate in terms of both coverage and quality of service. Rural areas in particular suffer from lack of access to basic medical services. Tribal conflicts have deterred outside medical personnel from traveling into areas not under government authority.⁴¹³ As of 2003, only 25% of rural residents had access to local medical care.⁴¹⁴ This reflects a severe shortage of qualified medical personnel and health care facilities across Yemen. The majority of rural residents are forced to travel for professional treatment, either to a regional clinic or urban center. High costs, poor transportation networks, and a lack of modern transport can slow or impede this process. Pregnant women, for example, may be forced to ride long distances on camels to give birth at the nearest clinic.⁴¹⁵



© Hugh Macleod / IRIN
/ 201003170828560681
UNICEF doctor
examines a sick boy

⁴⁰⁸ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Clambering Up Mountains to Find Water.” 3 November 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?Reportid=86847>

⁴⁰⁹ Los Angeles Times. Edwards, Haley Sweetland. “Yemen Water Crisis Builds.” 11 October 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/oct/11/world/fg-yemen-water11>

⁴¹⁰ The Christian Science Monitor. Kasinof, Laura. “At Heart of Yemen's Conflicts: Water Crisis.” 5 November 2009. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2009/1105/p06s13-wome.html>

⁴¹¹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 16–18].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴¹² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Southern Rural Areas Forced to Rely on Trucked-In Water.” 14 January 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87733>

⁴¹³ Yemen Times. Mojalli, Almigdad. “Tribal Conflicts Cause Political, Social and Economic Loss.” 4 March 2009. http://www.ndi.org/files/ye_2009Feb_TribalConflictsArticle.pdf

⁴¹⁴ World Health Organization. “Country Profiles: Yemen.” September 2009. <http://www.emro.who.int/emrinfo/index.asp?Ctry=yem>

⁴¹⁵ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 45].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

Exchange 58: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	beh mustawSaf gareeb min haanaa?
Local:	Yes, over there.	na'am haanaak

Conditions at rural clinics are typically poor and unsanitary. Staff members are often poorly trained, in short supply, or entirely absent. Many rural facilities do not have electricity and thus lack basic equipment and supplies, including medicine.⁴¹⁶ While public health care facilities are supposed to provide free or low-cost care to the poor, corruption is said to be rampant at such facilities. Mismanagement and low salaries compel medical staff to charge unofficial fees for services. Many rural residents cannot afford such fees, which are expected upfront. Poverty, lack of trust, and long travel distances compel many rural inhabitants to seek alternative treatment, such as traditional healing practices.⁴¹⁷

Exchange 59: My arm is broken, can you help me?

Soldier:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	Theraa'ee iktasar mumkin tisaa'idnee
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	na'am agdar asaa'idak

Women and children are disproportionately affected by the poor quality and unavailability of health care services. Malnutrition, acute respiratory infections, and various food, water, and insect-borne illnesses contribute to high infant and child mortality rates.⁴¹⁸ Diarrhea alone is responsible for “20–25% of the 84,000 annual deaths among children under five” in Yemen.⁴¹⁹ Yemeni women suffer from high maternal

⁴¹⁶ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 45].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴¹⁷ Yemen Post. Al-Omari, Moneer. “Government Hospitals Suffer under Widespread Corruption and Mismanagement, Study Says.” 7 July 2008. <http://www.yemenpost.net/37/Health/20081.htm>

⁴¹⁸ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: New Drive to Reduce Child Mortality.” 5 October 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86442>

⁴¹⁹ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Drive to Promote Handwashing, Reduce Child Mortality Rates.” 20 October 2008.

mortality rates. Less than half (45%) of expectant mothers receive prenatal care, and even fewer (36%) receive the attention of a skilled medical professional during the birth.⁴²⁰ This is due in part to the lack of female health care professionals in Yemen, where traditional gender boundaries often prevent women from visiting male physicians.⁴²¹

Education

Officially, public education in Yemen is free, compulsory, and universal for children ages 6–15. This includes a total of nine years of primary and secondary education.⁴²² Yet poverty, gender discrimination, and lack of availability prevent many Yemeni children from enrolling or attending. Schools are relatively widespread but are still only present in about 1 out of every 3 villages nationwide.⁴²³



© Nick Leonard
Yemeni boys at a ruined village north of Sana'a

Exchange 60: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	beh madrasa gareeba min haanaa?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Quality of education, however, is affected by corruption. Public schooling is underwritten by the government which, in theory, recruits teachers based on their qualifications. In reality, it is one of the main distribution networks in the government’s patronage system. A significant portion of funding allocated for education is simply channeled into the pockets of personnel rather than to the institutions. Approximately 40% of employees in the Ministry of Education are thought to be “ghost workers,” or persons who receive a

⁴²⁰ World Health Organization. “Country Profiles: Yemen.” September 2009.

<http://www.emro.who.int/emrinfo/index.asp?Ctry=yem>

⁴²¹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 45–46].” 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴²² Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. “Country Profile: Yemen.” August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

⁴²³ Center for Global Development, University of California, Berkeley. Egel, Daniel. “Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [p. 29].” 12 January 2010.

http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

paycheck but do not actually work.⁴²⁴ As a result, educational facilities are often in poor condition and lack electricity, running water, and sanitation.⁴²⁵

Exchange 61: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	juhaalak beeseeroo al-madrasa?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Although basic schooling is technically free, associated costs of attendance (e.g., uniforms) are too high for many families to afford, especially if they have many children, as is the case for most rural households. Likewise, poverty forces many children, especially those in rural areas, to drop out of school to work, either in the informal sector or within the household.⁴²⁶ Moreover, many rural families see limited practical value in education considering the agricultural nature of the rural economy and the limited opportunities for work which requires knowledge of subjects taught in school. As one young man from rural Yemen remarked, “What good is it to continue with secondary education when all you can be is a *qat* farmer?”⁴²⁷



Girls have limited access to education, especially in rural areas. This is due to customs that enforce the segregation of the sexes and isolate women in the home. A lack of female teachers and girls-only schools prevents many young female students from attending. Moreover, education is more highly valued for males, as girls are not expected (and often not allowed) to have a career outside the home. Girls may be sent to school just to learn basic reading and writing. Yet, even this is not always the case. Low enrollment and attendance rates translate into a very low literacy rate for rural females aged 10 and above:

⁴²⁴ Center for Global Development, University of California, Berkeley. Egel, Daniel. “Tribal Diversity, Political Patronage and the Yemeni Decentralization Experiment [p. 18].” 12 January 2010. http://www.cgdev.org/doc/events/Post-Doc%20Seminars/Daniel_Egel.pdf

⁴²⁵ “The Education Sector in Yemen: Challenges and Policy Options.” Al-Abbasi, Mutahar A. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Kamil A. Mahdi, Anna Würth, and Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

⁴²⁶ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Concern over Increasing Number of School Dropouts.” 27 November 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=75528>

⁴²⁷ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. “Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 44].” 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

24%, as of 2005. This is significantly lower than the literacy rate for urban females: 59.5%. Rural boys are also less likely to be literate than their urban counterparts.⁴²⁸

Private schools exist in Yemen, but enrollment is usually limited to children from wealthy families. Private education is more common in cities than in rural areas.⁴²⁹ Yemen is home to an unknown number of unlicensed religious schools, some of which teach fundamentalist and extremist doctrine. The rise of these schools has been partly attributed to the failure of the public system to provide comprehensive coverage and quality education.⁴³⁰ The Yemeni government has closed more than 4,500 unlicensed religious schools and institutions due to concerns that they encouraged militant ideology or otherwise deviated from the government-approved curriculum.⁴³¹ Yet many such institutions remain in operation.

Transportation

Yemen's road network is poorly developed, especially in rural areas. The construction of all-weather (paved) highways only began in the 1960s.⁴³² Today, according to some estimates of the country's 71,300 km (44,300 mi) of roadway, only 6,200 km (3,850 mi) are paved.⁴³³ Reports that account for recent improvements in infrastructure estimate the length of paved roads at around 14,000 km (8,700 mi).⁴³⁴ Highways running between the country's major urban centers are in the best condition. These include the highway linking Sanaa and Ta'izz in the highlands, and those connecting Sanaa and Ta'izz to Al Hudaydah on the Tihama. The highway from Aden to Ta'izz is also said to be in decent condition.⁴³⁵



© Franco Pecchio
Young shepherdess riding a donkey

⁴²⁸ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Female Education Remains Key Challenge." 6 September 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74159>

⁴²⁹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 44]." 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴³⁰ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Analysis: Yemen's Rebellions Fuelled by Economic Meltdown." 4 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=87996>

⁴³¹ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department. *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*. "Yemen." 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127361.htm>

⁴³² Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 10]." 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴³³ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Yemen." 4 February 2010.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ym.html>

⁴³⁴ Relief Web. The World Bank. "Project Information Document: Republic of Yemen: Rural Access II Additional Financing." 19 February 2010.

[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SMAR-82X3EB-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SMAR-82X3EB-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf)

⁴³⁵ Federal Research Division, Library of Congress. "Country Profile: Yemen." August 2008.

<http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Yemen.pdf>

Outside the primary highway network, conditions are poor. Most rural roads are unpaved, consisting only of dirt or desert track. In the highlands, unimproved roads passing over rugged terrain can be treacherous. Unpaved rural roads “are in very poor condition, allowing travel only under exhausting conditions at extremely low speeds, and entailing high vehicle operating costs.” Four-wheel-drive and high-clearance vehicles are typically required for travel throughout rural Yemen. Many unimproved roads are entirely impassable during the rains. Yemen’s incomplete and often poor-quality road network leaves many rural residents isolated. An estimated 75% of the rural population lacks access to paved roads.⁴³⁶ Services are scarce in these areas.

Exchange 62: Is there lodging nearby?

Soldier:	Is there lodging nearby?	beh fanaadig gareeba min haanaa?
Local:	No.	maashey

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Travel in and out of Yemen is monitored and regulated at official border crossings. Yemen’s borders otherwise remain porous and highly susceptible to smuggling and trafficking. Travel within Yemen is restricted. Foreigners typically need permits from the Yemen Tourist Police to travel outside of Sanaa.⁴³⁷



© La Imagen / flickr.com
Border crossing

Exchange 63: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Soldier:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	ayn agrab nugTat taftesh?
Local:	It’s two kilometers.	ithneyn keelo min haanaa

⁴³⁶ Relief Web. The World Bank. “Project Information Document: Republic of Yemen: Rural Access II Additional Financing.” 19 February 2010.
[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SMAR-82X3EB-full_report.pdf/\\$File/full_report.pdf](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWFiles2010.nsf/FilesByRWDocUnidFilename/SMAR-82X3EB-full_report.pdf/$File/full_report.pdf)

⁴³⁷ United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office. “Yemen Travel Advice.” 21 January 2010.
<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/yemen/>

Checkpoints are common, especially on the outskirts of urban areas.⁴³⁸ Travel in rural Yemen is considered high risk due to the very real threat of kidnapping, carjacking, terrorism, and armed conflict.

Exchange 64: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	haaTholaa kul al-baTaayig alee ma'ak?
Local:	Yes.	na'am

Yemenis receive official IDs, but forgeries are common. Those seeking additional IDs may wish to create a false identity to get a second government job as a ghost worker to draw an additional salary. Or procuring IDs for non-existent members can increase the number of benefits available to a household.⁴³⁹



© Kate Dixon
Security checkpoint

Exchange 65: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	Khruj min as-sayaara law samaHt
Local:	OK.	naahee

Tribes also independently monitor and regulate travel within their territories. They occasionally block travel through their territory while making demands from the government. Some engage in kidnapping for similar purposes.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁸ Google. Agence France-Presse. Moutot, Michel. "Yemen an Easy Haven for Foreigners Drawn to Militant Islam." 21 January 2010.

http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jziujTwf4jWeaTbCaGclpiNAru_g

⁴³⁹ Yemen News Agency. "Yemenizing African Refugees Through Election Cards." 21 March 2010.

<http://www.sabanews.net/en/news209304.htm>

⁴⁴⁰ Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Yemen: Country Specific Information." 19 February 2010. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1061.html

Exchange 66: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	raweena awraag tasgeel as-sayaara
Local:	OK.	naahee

Landmines

Yemen is a signatory of the Mine Ban Treaty, also known as the Ottawa Treaty. Established in 1997, the pact requires all signatories to cease the “use, stockpiling, production, and transfer of anti-personnel mines.” Signatories are also required to clear all mines from their territory within 10 years of signing the agreement.⁴⁴¹ (The U.S. is not a signatory of this agreement.) Yemen signed the agreement in 1999 but has received an extension on



DoD image
Landmines

its deadline—now 1 March 2015—for clearing mines from its territory. Although Yemen has destroyed the vast majority of its known stockpile, there are unconfirmed reports that both the Yemeni army and rebel forces in the north have used antipersonnel mines as part of the Al Houthi conflict. Thus, the government and independent actors such as insurgents may still be planting landmines. According to a May 2007 report, mines were among the various types of weapons purchased from the public by the Yemeni government as part of an arms reduction and collection program. Entities who relinquished weapons in the program included “regular civilians, tribal sheikhs and clans from around the country.”⁴⁴²

Periodic armed conflict since 1962 has left Yemen contaminated with mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The majority of mines were laid along the border of North and South Yemen prior to unification. Despite years of mine clearing efforts, Yemen still had more than 520 sq km (200 sq mi) of suspected hazardous area (SHA) at the end of 2008. However, only a small portion of this area (12 sq km, or 5 sq mi) was thought to need full clearance. Some contaminated areas remain “permanently marked” as such, although others are not marked at all.

⁴⁴¹ Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. “The Issues: Mine Ban Treaty.” 1998–2009. <http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/LM/The-Issues/Mine-Ban-Treaty>

⁴⁴² Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. *Landmine Monitor Report 2009*. “Yemen.” 2009.

http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2009&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=yemen&pqs_section=

Exchange 67: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	hal teeyeh al-manTiga mulaghama?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Among remaining SHA are small portions of Lahij, Abyan, and Hadramawt governorates, including areas where mines may be buried up to 6 m (20 ft) deep in sand dunes. Although unconfirmed, reports of recent land mine use as part of the Al Houthi conflict pertained to the Saada governorate of the north. Casualties from land mines continue to occur. At least 20 casualties, including 7 deaths and 13 injuries, were recorded in 2008 alone. Most victims of land mines are civilians, namely farmers and herders. The rainy season is considered the most dangerous time due to the potential shifting of mines during floods.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴³ Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. *Landmine Monitor Report 2009*. "Yemen." 2009.
http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?act=submit&pqs_year=2009&pqs_type=lm&pqs_report=yemen&pqs_section=

Family Life

Introduction

A Yemeni's first allegiance is to his or her family. Marriage and raising children are essential rites of passage for all Yemenis. It is neither practical nor socially acceptable to be without family. In such a poor country as Yemen, most households need to pool the assets, labor, and support of all family members to survive. Extended families, which are the norm, serve as lifelong support systems, both socially and economically.

Exchange 68: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	hal tiskun usratak haanaa?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Families are closely bound through shared honor and responsibility. The reputation and actions of each family member reflect upon the household unit as a whole. For tribesmen, individual honor is bound to the ability to protect the sanctity of the family and its assets.⁴⁴⁴ The preservation of individual and familial honor is tied to Islamic and tribal customs. Family life is thus organized according to traditional gender roles and relations. Women are subordinate to men. Economic insecurity and labor migration have modified these norms, however. Households increasingly do whatever is necessary to ensure the perpetuation of the family line, which is passed down through male members. This includes marrying off daughters at a tender age.



© Richard Messenger
Family photo

The Typical Household

The traditional Yemeni household consists of a large extended family. Several generations of relatives often live in the same home or compound. Following patrilocal norms (kin living in the house of a male relative), male offspring (and their wives and children) stay with their extended family. Female offspring are married off and live with their husband's extended family.



© Kate Dixon
Yemeni family

⁴⁴⁴ *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen*. Dresch, Paul. "Chapter 2: The Language of Honor [pp. 54–55]." 1993. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

Exchange 69: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	haaTholaa kul 'ayiltak?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Sometimes each nuclear family unit within the extended family will occupy different floors of a multistoried home.⁴⁴⁵ Some spaces within the home may be divided according to gender.

Exchange 70: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	kam beh naas yaskunoo bi-teeyeh al-beyt?
Local:	Ten.	'ashra

Multistoried stone or mud brick homes are common, especially in the highlands. These tower houses can be seen on the rugged ridgelines of the western mountains and escarpment, for example. They often have a *diwan*, a room used to host guests or special events, and a *mafraj*, a lounge used to host qat chews. The latter room is typically located on the top floor.⁴⁴⁶



© Charles Roffey
Wadi Daar mafraj

Exchange 71: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	haaTholaa an-naas min 'ayiltak?
Local:	No.	maashey

⁴⁴⁵ Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies. "Yemeni Culture." 2009. <http://www.ycmes.org/culture.html>

⁴⁴⁶ *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Lingenau, Werner. "Towers To Live In [p. 125]." Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

Families living in coastal areas, especially the Tihama, live in round huts with thatched roofs.⁴⁴⁷ The majority of homes—especially those in rural areas—lack running water, indoor plumbing, and electricity.⁴⁴⁸ Wealthier families may live in newer homes that enjoy municipal services and amenities. These homes are found in the suburbs of urban areas.

Family Roles and Responsibilities

Gender Roles

Yemeni families are traditionally patriarchal, meaning that household authority lies with the eldest male. Lineage is traced on the father's side of the family. Men enjoy more rights and greater social status than women, who are seen as subordinate to their husbands and male relatives. As the head of the household, men are expected to be strong-willed providers and disciplinarians for their family. They make the important decisions for the family and represent its interests in the community, including political matters.⁴⁴⁹ Men protect their children and female relatives, who are seen as weak and vulnerable. They also ensure their family's adherence to social codes.



© Charles Roffey
Kawkaban woman gathering water

Women are expected to be good Muslims and mothers, preferably to sons. Their role is often limited to the home, where they care for children and perform essential tasks around the household. They are expected to be chaste and modest.⁴⁵⁰ Boys and girls learn their respective gender roles while contributing to the household. They are to be respectful and obedient to their elders, especially their fathers. The elderly are well-respected and cared for by their offspring in their old age.

Division of Labor

As providers for their families, men dominate the public workforce. Men work in the public sector (government), professional fields (such as medicine or banking), commerce, and wage labor positions. In rural areas, men typically work as farmers and herders. They frequently



© Francesco Veronesi
Breakmaker

⁴⁴⁷ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 13]." 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴⁴⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: Government and Society: Housing." 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-273071>

⁴⁴⁹ "North Yemen: Gender Roles [p. 125]." Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁴⁵⁰ "Islam, Custom and Revolution in Aden: Reconsidering the Background to the Changes of the Early 1990s [pp. 340–342]." Dahlgren, Susanne. In *Yemen into the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*. Kamil A. Mahdi and Anna Würth, Helen Lackner, Eds. 2007. Reading, UK: Ithaca Press.

cultivate cash crops such as *qat*, which is marketed on a daily basis.⁴⁵¹

Exchange 72: Where do you work?

Soldier:	Where do you work?	ayn bitishtaghil?
Local:	I am a farmer.	aana ra'awee

Women's participation in the public workforce is limited, due to traditional beliefs and practices that prevent many women from receiving an education or pursuing a career outside the home. In 2009, Yemeni women comprised only 23% of the official workforce, leaving most women to work in unpaid support jobs, either around the house or elsewhere in the informal sector.⁴⁵² Females who work in the formal sector generally occupy positions associated with women. These include jobs as teachers, nurses, secretaries, clerks, and other social and customer service positions.⁴⁵³

Exchange 73: Are you the only person who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	ant al-waHeed alee bitishtaghil bi-usratak?
Local:	No.	ma'

Professional women are more common in urban areas, where the economy is more diverse and women have greater access to education. Female employment in the workforce was especially high in the former South Yemen, where women received more equitable rights under the socialist government. This was particularly true in the city of

⁴⁵¹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 6]." 11 January 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴⁵² Yemen Post. Al-Omari, Moneer. "Most Yemeni Women Work in Unpaid Jobs; Women's Unemployment on Rise." 5 July 2009.

<http://www.yemenpost.net/Detail123456789.aspx?ID=100&SubID=1006&MainCat=5>

⁴⁵³ International Labor Organization. "Policy Brief 5: Women in Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Yemen." October 2009. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_114217.pdf

Aden.⁴⁵⁴ Yet, since unification, the spread of conservative ideas and practices from northern Yemen and Saudi Arabia has reversed this trend.⁴⁵⁵

Women's work remains informal, especially in rural areas. Standard household duties include child care, cooking, cleaning, gathering firewood, and collecting water.⁴⁵⁶ The latter can be particularly strenuous and time-intensive due to the growing scarcity of water. It is increasingly common for women to spend long hours hiking or climbing to distant water sources. This practice causes low female attendance rates at school because girls aid their mothers in water collection.⁴⁵⁷ Rural women also contribute to the household's agricultural and herding activities. They are often charged, for example, with caring for livestock and sowing, harvesting, and processing grains and other food crops. In this way, the division of labor is more blurry in rural areas than in urban centers.⁴⁵⁸



© Manogamos,
Algunas veces Mujeres Violentas
Village soldiers near Jibla

Labor migration and a changing economy have affected women's roles. Yemeni men have increasingly migrated to cities or abroad in search of work, in some instances leaving their wives to manage the household. Rural women who are left alone typically work in subsistence agriculture. Some rural women work as wage laborers for male-dominated cash-cropping operations, but usually at half the wages of men. Yemeni women are less likely to migrate for labor, although women from the Tihama work seasonally in Saudi Arabia. Female-headed households are more common in cities than in rural areas.⁴⁵⁹

Children, especially those from poor families, often take on responsibilities at a young age. Girls learn their household duties by caring for younger siblings and helping their mothers with chores. Boys may learn trades from their fathers. Poverty forces many children to work in the informal sector. Boys, in particular, may be sent out, sometimes abroad, to work as street vendors, wage laborers, or beggars. While children from wealthier families may enjoy a full education in preparation for a professional career,

⁴⁵⁴ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 30]." 11 January 2006.
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴⁵⁵ Reuters. Laessing, Ulf. "Women of Southern Yemen Port Remember Better Times." 22 January 2010.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE60L2ZD20100122>

⁴⁵⁶ "North Yemen: Gender Roles [p. 127]." Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁴⁵⁷ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Clambering Up Mountains to Find Water." 3 November 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?Reportid=86847>

⁴⁵⁸ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 19, 21, 64]." 11 January 2006.
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

⁴⁵⁹ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [pp. 19, 21, 23, 33]." 11 January 2006.
http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

many Yemeni children are forced to quit school because their family needs their labor contribution.

Marriage, Childbirth, and Divorce

Marriage

In Yemen, marriages are social and economic contracts between families, rather than romantic unions between individuals. Parents arrange marriages for their offspring; the bride and groom may have little or no say in the matter. The groom and his family traditionally pay a bride-price (*mahr*) to the bride’s family. This negotiated sum may consist of a combination of cash and gifts.⁴⁶⁰ Increasingly high bride prices pose a problem to Yemeni men who may not be able to afford them.



DoD image
Marriage contract

Exchange 74: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	ant mutzawij?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Marriage between cousins is still common practice in Yemen.⁴⁶¹ According to the Yemeni Ministry of Health, some 47.5% of Yemeni marriages are between relatives. Known as “blood marriages,” these arrangements are low-cost marriages that keep resources (e.g., the bride-price) within the family. Proponents of the practice believe that such marriages are easier, safer, and more successful due to the high level of trust and familiarity among the extended family.⁴⁶² Some brides prefer such marriages because they move into the home of a known relative (an uncle, usually) rather than that of a stranger.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ “Gender Roles [pp. 125–126].” Krieger, Laurie, et al. In *The Yemens: Country Studies*, 2nd Ed. Richard F. Nyrop, Ed. 1986. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁴⁶¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Yemen: Cultural Life: Daily Life and Social Customs.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-273063>

⁴⁶² Yemen Observer. Mejalli, Wojoud Hasan Ali. “The Marriage of Relatives in Yemen, a Problem or a Solution?” 3 March 2009. <http://www.yobserver.com/reports/10015901.html>

⁴⁶³ Yemen Post. Al-Showthabi, Abdul Rahim. “Couples Still Prefer to Marry Relatives.” 7 April 2008. <http://www.yemenpost.net/24/Reports/20082.htm>

Early marriage is common in Yemen, where more than half of all females are married before the age of 18. Many girls marry in their early teens or, in some reported cases, as young as eight or nine years old. Because Yemeni women of any age commonly marry older men, child brides often marry men who are significantly older than themselves—sometimes by several decades. A law formerly setting the minimum age for marriage at 15 was modified in the late 1990s. The revised law allowed younger girls to be married with the permission of their guardians, so long as the marriage was not consummated until the girl reached age 15.⁴⁶⁴ Yet, the loosely defined law has not been regularly obeyed or enforced, especially in rural areas.⁴⁶⁵



© Raphael Fauveau
Sana'a mother

There are several motivating factors behind the practice of early marriage, both economic and cultural. Poverty has motivated many families to marry off their young daughters in order to obtain the bride price and relinquish financial responsibility for them.⁴⁶⁶ Early marriage also enables girls to be trained in their responsibilities as a wife and daughter-in-law while from a tender age. This is captured in a tribal saying: “Give me a girl of 8, and I can give you a guarantee [for a good marriage].”⁴⁶⁷ Exchange marriages, in which family exchange daughters are also common. In this case, a single ceremony is held for two siblings who are married to a brother and sister from a different family. It is viewed as a better use of limited resources since the two families only have to pay for one wedding, not two separate ones.⁴⁶⁸ For Muslims, a woman’s sexual honor (*namus*) is considered both highly valuable and highly vulnerable. As a result, many Yemenis try to marry off their daughters at a young age to reduce the risk of the girl losing her honor through assault or shameful behavior. The loss of such honor would tarnish the reputation of the entire family and hinder the parents from finding a marriage partner for their daughter—an outcome that has both dire social and economic consequences.

Early marriage itself has a number of undesirable consequences. An officer for the non-governmental organization Oxfam observed child brides “face serious physical and psychological problems because their minds



© Francesco Veronesi
Father and daughter

⁴⁶⁴ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Government Body Calls for End to Child Marriage.” 3 August 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=79584>

⁴⁶⁵ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: ‘I’d Rather Die than Go Back to Him.’” 21 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88138>

⁴⁶⁶ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Early Marriage Hampering Country’s Development, Says Report.” 26 March 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=77454>

⁴⁶⁷ The New York Times. Worth, Robert F. “Tiny Voices Defy Child Marriage in Yemen.” 29 June 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/29/world/middleeast/29marriage.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

⁴⁶⁸ Yemen Times. Mojalli, Almgidat. “Economic Situation Encourages Exchange Marriages.” 16 October 2008. http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/yemen-times-sanaa/mi_8204/is_20081016/economic-situation-encourages-exchange-marriages/ai_n52149178/

and bodies are not developed enough for them to become wives and mothers.” Child marriages have been associated with increased domestic violence and higher rates of divorce.⁴⁶⁹ In a highly publicized case that garnered Western media attention, a Yemeni girl named Nujood was 10 when her poor father married her off to a 30-year old man. The young girl’s husband forced himself upon her, beat her, and made her drop out of school. However, Nujood later won a divorce from her husband after personally seeking out a judge at the courthouse. Her father claimed he only consented to the marriage because he had already lost two daughters to kidnapping and forced marriage.⁴⁷⁰ Nujood, who engineered her own escape from her husband, has become an international poster child for girls in her situation. Strangers have contributed money so she can resume her education. Yet she has not re-enrolled in school and her parents have made excuses such as transportation difficulties. Others believe “Nujood is being victimized by her own family because they believe Nujood’s fame should bring them fortune.”⁴⁷¹ In short, the family will spend the money to maximize household welfare rather than to help her achieve her potential as an individual. This decision illuminates the Yemeni custom of pooling assets to ensure the survival and perpetuation of the family unit.

In early 2009, the Yemeni Parliament passed a bill establishing a minimum marriage age of 17. This bill was later rejected by Yemen’s Islamic Shari’a Codification Committee, which deemed it a violation of Shari’a, or Islamic law.⁴⁷² In early 2010, the Yemeni parliament was again considering the passage of a minimum marriage age bill, yet it remained unclear if the law would be approved and implemented.⁴⁷³



© Kate Dixon
Two veiled woman on the top of Dar al-Hajar

Exchange 75: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	teeyeh maratak?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

⁴⁶⁹ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: Early Marriage Hampering Country’s Development, Says Report.” 26 March 2008.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=77454>

⁴⁷⁰ The New York Times. Worth, Robert F. “Tiny Voices Defy Child Marriage in Yemen.” 29 June 2008.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/29/world/middleeast/29marriage.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1

⁴⁷¹ CNN. “Child Bride’s Nightmare After Divorce.” 28 August 2009.

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/08/26/yemen.divorce/index.html>

⁴⁷² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Yemen: ‘I’d Rather Die than Go Back to Him.’” 21 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88138>

⁴⁷³ Voice of America. Murdock, Heather. “Yemen Marriage Laws Under Scrutiny.” 11 March 2010.

<http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/human-rights/Yemen-Marriage-Laws-under-Scrutiny-87362567.html>

Educated, professional women have reportedly faced difficulties in finding marriage partners, with many of them staying unmarried into their late thirties. Perceptions of older, educated women as less easy to control may explain this trend. The local press has described the situation as one in which Yemeni women marry young or not at all.⁴⁷⁴

Islamic custom allows men to marry up to four wives, although it is not widespread in Yemen.⁴⁷⁵ Men who take multiple wives must by custom treat them equally. They should also possess the resources to provide for additional wives and offspring. Polygamy has been seen by some Yemenis as a means of absorbing unmarried or widowed women who may otherwise be without a means of support. A common reason for a man to take a second wife is because his first wife is unable to bear children.⁴⁷⁶

Childbirth

Children are highly valued in Yemeni culture. They are seen as gifts from Allah,⁴⁷⁷ and they expand the family and contribute to its wealth. Boys are more highly valued than girls. Boys carry on the family's name and inherit its assets, while girls are married off to other families. Yemeni women thus gain social status by producing sons, who secure their mother's place in the family.



© Kate Dixon
Yemenite woman and her child

Exchange 76: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	haaTholaa juhaalak?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Yemeni women commonly have a large number of children, especially in rural areas. The practice of early marriage contributes to this trend, as many brides begin their childbearing years at an early age.

⁴⁷⁴ Yemen Post. Al-Showthabi, Abdul Rahim. "Marriage Choice for Women in Yemen: Early Marriage or No Marriage." 19 January 2009. <http://www.yemenpost.net/64/Reports/20081.htm>

⁴⁷⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: Cultural Life: Daily Life and Social Customs." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-273063>

⁴⁷⁶ Yemen Post. Al-Showthabi, Abdul Rahim. "Polygamy Marriage Seeing More Acceptance in Society." 10 March 2008. <http://www.yemenpost.net/20/Reports/20082.htm>

⁴⁷⁷ *Yemen (Cultures of the World)*, 2nd Ed. Hestler, Anna and Jo-Ann Spilling. "Chapter 7: Lifestyle [p. 76]." 2010. Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish.

Exchange 77: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	beh 'indak aKhwaan?
Local:	Yes.	aywa

Childbirth remains a dangerous process in Yemen, where a high fertility rate, insufficient medical coverage (doctors and nurses), and widespread poverty contribute to high maternal mortality rates. Eight Yemeni women die each day during childbirth. Most births take place at home and without a trained birth attendant. Early marriage greatly contributes to maternal mortality. Young brides often experience birth complications because their bodies are not fully developed.⁴⁷⁸ In 2009, a 12-year-old Yemeni girl died from severe bleeding after three days of labor. She had been married at the age of 11; her baby was stillborn.⁴⁷⁹

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a practice in which some or all parts of female genitalia are partially or completely removed. The procedure is performed on baby girls shortly after birth. While justifications for the custom vary, its practitioners say it curbs a woman's sexual impulses, allows her entry into womanhood, and ensures cleanliness. Yet FGM has no doctrinal foundation in Islam and no medical benefits. The procedure itself can be extremely painful and lead to a variety of serious short and long-term health issues.⁴⁸⁰ The practice is most often identified with communities in Yemen's coastal regions, but some reports indicate it is relatively widespread. FGM has been described in the Yemeni press as "a very sensitive issue"—often ignored or denied despite its continued practice.⁴⁸¹ According to UN officials, "[t]he practice persists because it is sustained by social perceptions, including that girls and their families will face shame, social exclusion and diminished marriage prospects if they forego cutting."⁴⁸² It becomes self-reinforcing



© Richard Messenger
Little girl

⁴⁷⁸ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: What is Blocking Progress on MMR." 20 January 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=82463>

⁴⁷⁹ ABC News. Setrakian, Lara. "The Painful Death of a Yemen Child Bride." 14 September 2009. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/Health/painful-death-yemen-child-bride/story?id=8568884>

⁴⁸⁰ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: Eradication FGM Will Be a Slow Process, Experts Say." 14 November 2005. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25685>

⁴⁸¹ Yemen Times. "Female Genital Mutilation, the Taboo Subject." 12 August 2009. <http://www.yementimes.com/DefaultDET.aspx?i=954&p=health&a=1>

⁴⁸² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Yemen: New FGM/C Law Possible "within Four Years" – Minister." 10 February 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=88058>

since marriage is the only way for most Yemeni girls to secure their future as a member of a household.

Following Islamic custom, Yemeni boys undergo circumcision shortly after birth. Both the births and circumcisions of boys are joyously celebrated, especially if they are first-born males.⁴⁸³ They represent the continuation of the family through the male line.

Divorce

Yemeni men and women have unequal access to divorce. Divorce is a right for both sexes, but it is easier for men to initiate. Yemeni men can request a divorce without justifying the separation or even asking their wife's permission. They can simply go to the court and have the divorce approved by local authorities. Women, on the other hand, have to justify the divorce to authorities.⁴⁸⁴ Among the acceptable reasons for divorce are prolonged absence, drug or alcohol abuse, adultery, impotence, disease, taking a second wife without permission, and "deep hatred." Women who request a divorce must return the bride price (*mahr*) to the groom and his family. This requirement, combined with the loss of social and economic support from the husband's family, prevents many women from initiating divorce. They also face social stigmatization, as women are expected to be unconditionally faithful and obedient to their husbands.⁴⁸⁵ One survey found nearly half of all Yemeni women had experienced domestic violence, but this is not a socially acceptable reason to dissolve a marriage.⁴⁸⁶



© BBC World Service
Nujood was married at nine,
divorced at ten

Yemeni women maintain ties with their natal (birth) family after marriage. This practice allows them to turn to their male relatives for support in the event of divorce. Yemeni women traditionally relinquish their land tenure rights for such support.⁴⁸⁷ Educated, professional women can more likely support themselves in the event of divorce. Divorcees may also secure support through remarriage, which is relatively common.

⁴⁸³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Yemen: Cultural Life: Daily Life and Social Customs." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-273063>

⁴⁸⁴ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State. *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. "2009 Human Rights Report: Yemen." 11 March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136083.htm>

⁴⁸⁵ *The Republic of Yemen: Developmental Challenges in the 21st Century*. Colburn, Marta. "Chapter IV: Development Challenges Today: Gender and Development [pp. 66–67]." 2002. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations.

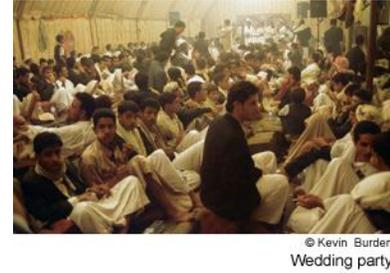
⁴⁸⁶ BBC News. "The Dark Side of Children's Lives in Yemen." 30 January 2010. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/8487346.stm

⁴⁸⁷ Water, Environment, Social and Rural Development Department, The World Bank. "Republic of Yemen: Country Social Analysis [p. 16]." 11 January 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BOLIVIA/Resources/Yemen_CSA.pdf

Social Events

Weddings

Yemeni weddings are elaborate affairs that serve to display familial wealth and hospitality. The wedding ceremony follows several previous meetings in which the marriage is negotiated and approved by the families involved. This includes the betrothal ceremony in which the bride price is established and the engagement is made.⁴⁸⁸ Weddings are large communal events that involve several stages. The traditional Yemeni wedding lasts three days, usually Wednesday through Friday. However, as part of a growing trend of extravagant and extremely expensive weddings, some may last for 10 days.⁴⁸⁹



© Kevin Burden
Wedding party

Exchange 78: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	mabrook az-ziwaaja
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	'anitsharaf beHuDhoorukum

On Wednesday of the traditional three-day wedding, the bride and groom sign the marriage contract in the presence of a *qadi*, or Islamic legal scholar. The major celebration occurs on Friday, when family, friends, and community members gather for a feast and festivities. Wedding events are segregated by gender. After the men gather for the noon Friday prayer at the mosque, guests attend a large mid-day meal followed by an afternoon *qat* session. Music, dancing, and poetry are performed in celebration, and the party spills out into the street when the groom is carried out in an ornate chair.⁴⁹⁰ By contrast, the women's celebration occurs inside a private home. The bride wears a bridal gown, ornate jewelry, and henna (traditional makeup) on her hands and feet. The

⁴⁸⁸ *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Piepenburg, Fritz. "A Traditional Wedding [p. 121]." Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

⁴⁸⁹ Yemen Times. Alasmari, Hakim. "Yemeni Weddings Then and Now." 12 August 2009. <http://www.yementimes.com/DefaultDET.aspx?i=949&p=report&a=2>

⁴⁹⁰ Blogpot.com. Tyler. "Yemeni Wedding." 22 July 2007. <http://dukeengage2007yemen.blogspot.com/2007/07/yemeni-wedding-by-tyler.html>

wedding formally concludes with a procession in which the groom and, later, the bride cross the threshold of his family home, signifying her entry into the family.⁴⁹¹

Exchange 79: I wish you both happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both happiness.	nitmana lakum as-sa'aada
Local:	We are honored.	netsharaf

Wealthy Yemeni families increasingly throw huge, extravagant weddings that cost small to large fortunes. These celebrations involve sumptuous gifts for guests and the wedding party, as well as expensive catered meals at wedding halls and hotels. Processions may include limousines and new cars. Such extravagant events are said to go against Yemeni tradition, as weddings were formerly much simpler and more humble affairs.⁴⁹²

Weddings and other social events are celebrated with gunfire. A ban on weapons in urban and semi-urban environments has limited their use at social events in cities. However, weapons remain an essential feature of celebration in rural Yemen, where not only guns but artillery may be used in the festivities. In urban areas, fireworks have replaced the traditional weapons discharge.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹¹ *Insight Guide: Yemen*, 2nd Ed. Piepenburg, Fritz. "A Traditional Wedding [pp. 121–123]." Hans Höfer, Ed. 1992. Singapore: APA Publications.

⁴⁹² Yemen Times. Alasmari, Hakim. "Yemeni Weddings Then and Now." 12 August 2009. <http://www.yementimes.com/DefaultDET.aspx?i=949&p=report&a=2>

⁴⁹³ MinnPost. Edwards, Haley Sweetlands. "The Yemeni Tradition of Firing Automatic Weapons at Weddings Succumbs to Public Safety." 17 November 2009. http://www.minnpost.com/globalpost/2009/11/17/13502/the_yemeni_tradition_of_firing_automatic_weapons_at_weddings_succumbs_to_public_safety

Funerals

Yemeni burial rites are shaped by Islamic custom. The death of a family member draws relatives, friends, and community members to the household of the deceased.

Exchange 80: I would like to give my condolences.

Soldier:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	ta'aazeena lak wa lil-usra
Local:	Thank you.	shookran

The body of the deceased is washed and shrouded in white linen as part of its ritual preparation for burial. This rite may be performed by family members or appointed members of the community. In any case, it is performed by persons of the same sex as the deceased.

Exchange 81: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	Khaaleek gawee
Local:	We will try.	'anHaawil

Men customarily carry the body on a covered stretcher to the burial grounds. Women may be restricted from attending the burial ceremony, which typically includes the recitation of Islamic prayers. Muslims are traditionally buried on their side, facing Mecca. Women may visit the gravesite after the men have departed.⁴⁹⁴

Mourning usually takes place inside the deceased's home or the nearby homes of other family members. Men and women gather in different rooms of the house. *Qat* may be chewed at such gatherings.



© Franco Pecchio
Cemetery

⁴⁹⁴ Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation. Caton, Steven C. "Chapter 11: Travel Advisory [pp. 329–330]." 2005. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Naming Conventions

Arabic names reflect a person's genealogy. This custom shows the importance of lineage in Yemen and the greater Arab world. Important terms used in Arabic names are *Abu* ("Father"), *Ibn* or *bin* ("Son"), and *Abd* ("Slave" or "Servant"). Examples of these include: Abu Ibrahim (Father of Abraham), Ibn Mohammad (Son of Mohammad) and Abd Allah or Abdullah (Servant of God). The term *Abd* is typically used with one of the many names or descriptions for Allah. The term *Abu* is used in honorific titles that identify a man in relation to his son (usually the first-born son), such as Abu Mohammad, or Father of Mohammad. The feminine equivalent of this title is Umm Mohammad, or Mother of Mohammad.⁴⁹⁵ Women use *bint* rather than *Ibn* or *bin* to signify "Daughter of..."⁴⁹⁶



Arabic names consist of several parts, typically beginning with a personal name (*ism*). Names of historical and religious significance are common, such as Mohammad, Ahmed, and Ali, or, for women, Aisha and Fatima. Yemeni personal names derive from natural objects, the time or conditions of a baby's birth, willed attributes or qualities (often of a religious nature), a baby's physical or behavioral characteristics, place names, and even weapons.⁴⁹⁷ Descriptive names such as Abdullah (Servant of God) are also used. The personal name is usually followed by the *nasab*, or patronymic name, which denotes paternal lineage. The *nasab* is the personal name of one's father, which may also be followed by the name of one's grandfather. The next and often last name is the family name (*hisba* or *nisba*), which frequently derives from a person's tribe or homeland.⁴⁹⁸ The family name often begins with *Al* or *El*.⁴⁹⁹

An example of a full name following this structure is Ali bin Muhammad bin Ahmed Al-Sulayman, which translates to Ali, son of Muhammad, son of Ahmed, of the tribe of Sulayman. The term *bin* is not always used before the names of the father and grandfather. The same name could thus read Ali Muhammad Ahmed Al-Sulayman. Not all Yemeni

⁴⁹⁵ BankersOnline.com. Richards, James. "Know Your Customer – Naming Conventions for Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Western African, and Hispanic Cultures [pp. 4–5]." 14 January 2002. <http://www.bankersonline.com/tools/namingconventions.pdf>

⁴⁹⁶ Financial and Banking Information Infrastructure Committee, U.S. Government. United Kingdom. "A Guide to Names and Naming Practices [p. 34]." March 2006. http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf

⁴⁹⁷ *GEMA Online Journal of Language Studies*, Vol. 2. Abdul Wahed Qasem Ghaleb Al-Zumor. "A Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Analysis of Yemeni Arabic Personal Names." 2009. http://pkukmweb.ukm.my/~ppbl/Gema/pp%2015_27.pdf

⁴⁹⁸ BankersOnline.com. Richards, James. "Know Your Customer – Naming Conventions for Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Western African, and Hispanic Cultures [pp. 4–5]." 14 January 2002. <http://www.bankersonline.com/tools/namingconventions.pdf>

⁴⁹⁹ Financial and Banking Information Infrastructure Committee, U.S. Government. United Kingdom. "A Guide to Names and Naming Practices [p. 34]." March 2006. http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf

names follow this structure; many only have three parts: a personal name, father's name, and family name. Various combinations are used both within Yemen and throughout the Arab Muslim world. Nicknames (*laqab*) and occupational names may also be used.