

WOMEN AND POLITICS IN YEMEN

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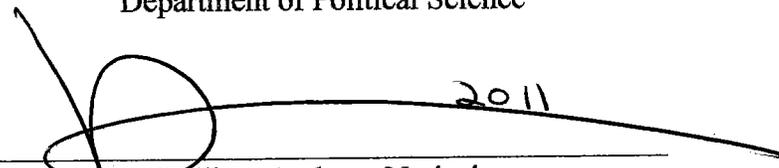
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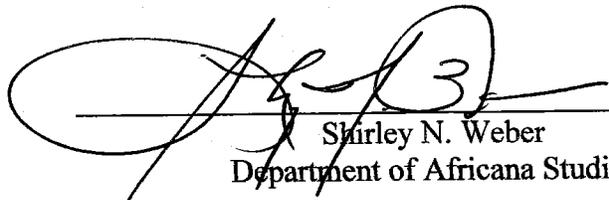
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Yemen's heroes of the revolutions and to both my mother, Ruqaiya Ahmed Munasr, and my father, the innovative Nasser Al-Gumae, who made my education possible. I also dedicate this work to those oppressed generations whom were denied the right to education. My parents supported me even when I was the only girl in my school. They sent me to schools wherever they lived, including Taiz, Sana'a, and the state of Kuwait. I gained their trust and love, which created my individuality and gave me enthusiasm for life. When I had to travel fifteen miles a day to attend school, I only was terrified of seeing big animals and the burning smoke of war. The battles were near the town of my first school, Al Rahida, Hogaria, which is near a British military base. I remember it was a supreme feeling for my father to see me learn to read and write so quickly. As a child, I dreamed of a bright future, while the world was dragging into warfare and oppression. My studies in social sciences, sociology, philosophy, and political science prepared me to analyze my place in the world. The conditions of isolation and warfare furthered my understanding of sociopolitical realms in factual human relations. I also dedicate this work to Dr. Richard Epps, Dr. William Nericcio, and Dr. Shirley N. Weber who encouraged me to write this essay. I promised my parents to be dedicated for others and do what is good for our humanity. To the Yemenis, women and men, I say: It is only wise for Yemen to be ruled by women, for it is never any other time proven to be thrived like when women rule in Yemen. "She said: Lo! Kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and make the honor of its people shame. Thus will they do" (Qur'an 27:34)..

It is only wise for Yemen to be ruled by women, for it is never any other time proven to be like the rule of women. Thus, the Qur'an values it and disparages kings' rule in the same verse, [27:34]; it speaks of the Queen of Sheba, who speaks to her people: "She said: Lo! Kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and make the honor of its people shame. Thus will they do."

--Qur'an 27:34

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Women and Politics in Yemen
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Women and politics in the history of Yemen, past and present is the focus of this essay, and it sheds light on the evolution and devolution of women's rights for over 3,000 years in the Arabian Peninsula. Starting with Bilqis in the 10th century B. C. to the queens of the 15 century and ending with the "Arab Spring" of 2010, the ways in which the nature of these rights is consistently interrupted by violence will be explored. The main contention of this paper is that women's rights were ultimately dismissed in Yemen since the 18th century British colony dismissed the role of law and implanted force and a "learned culture," which expelled women from their natural role in sociopolitical leadership. Chapter one introduces the historic region of Yemen and women's political heritage in the larger Arabian Peninsula. Chapter two discusses Yemen's history in terms of ancient politics and women's rule. The Queen of Sheba's democratic or "*shura*" rule is examined closely because of its influence on Arab politics throughout the ages. The legacies and contributions of subsequent queens of Yemen are also discussed through the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the consolidation of Arab political rule. Chapter three discusses Yemeni women's political alienation because of British colonialism, which started in the early 1800s. It focuses on how traditional Yemeni culture was supplanted by British culture, and this fundamentally changed the roles and rights of women. Chapter four is on the Yemeni revolutions of 1962 and 1967 as well as the covert war the British fought against Yemeni revolutionary nationalists. In addition, U.S. neocolonialism and the Cold War made a heavy impact on Yemeni women and their political rights during this period. The impacts of the U.S. "War on Terrorism" and the "Arab Spring" on women's activism in Yemen are also analyzed. The great number of wars fought in Yemen in such a short period of time led to further alienation of women and the creation of governments that did not rule with the people's best interests in mind. Chapter five summarizes the role of women in Yemen's political history and offers a look toward the political future for Yemeni women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	vi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 YEMEN’S REGION, RULE AND HISTORY	6
Ancient Political History.....	7
The Queen of Sheba, Bilqis (520 to 570 A.D.).....	7
Democracy Is Women’s Rule	8
Queen Asma and Queen Arwa.....	10
Early Yemeni Education and Women’s Literacy	12
Shura Influence on Arab and Women’s Rule	13
The Reality of Democracy, <i>Shura</i> in Islam, and Practice.....	14
Ancient Arab Women as Economic Developers of Agriculture and Trade.....	15
Queens of Yemen in Mecca and Iraq.....	16
The Arab Democracy: “ <i>Shura</i> of Saba, <i>Almbaia’a</i> ”	17
Women’s Rule and Democratic <i>Shura</i> in Contemporary Arab Society	18
3 WOMEN LOSE POWER.....	19
The Erosion of Women’s Rights.....	19
British Colonization (1839-1967).....	21
Women, Economy, and Colonization	23
Colonial Destruction, Women’s Isolation, and a “Learned Culture”	25
The British Women’s Club: Colonial Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender.....	26
Colonialism Kills Democracy and Women’s Rights	27
The Last Battle: Alienation of Women and Communities.....	28
4 THE REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH.....	31
Revolution and Self-Determination (1940s-1962 and 1967).....	31
Women’s Organizations, Political Activism, and the Revolutionary Movement	32

Women’s Education and the Revolution	33
Britain and Neocolonialism: Launching a Covert Counterrevolution (1962-1970).....	34
The British War on Republic of Yemen (1967-1973)	36
Neocolonialism and the Cold War Killed Democracy and Women’s Rights (1974-1990).....	37
The Effects of the Cold War in Yemen	40
Government without Governing (1973-2011)	42
The First Vote for Women in Sana’a (1993-1994).....	44
Arab Women and American Attempts to Spread Democracy (1994-2000)	46
The Effects of Current Economic Conditions on Yemeni Women	47
From International Trade of Oil to the Arab Spring	50
The 2011 Revolution in Yemen and Women’s Politics.....	53
Recommendations to Reform the Political System and Achieve Equality.....	55
5 CONCLUSION.....	56
WORKS CITED	61

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why this study is important? For centuries, the Arabian Peninsula centered attention in Yemen, which has been coveted by ambitious traders, rapacious merchants, sultans, kings, and queens as well as those who sought to establish civilization in the Arabian Peninsula by extending their powers. Yemen is, indeed, one of only four countries in the world—laterally with Egypt, Persia, and China—that can legitimately claim three millennia of continuous culture and statehood. To know Yemen's politics today, economic growth, women's alienation, and the reduction of women's political rights, is to know the long state of foreign aggression that changed Yemen politically, culturally and geographically. Yemen has been under invasions since the Roman Empire in the 1st century A.D. Later, the Portuguese, Italy joined Germany, the Turks, and the British, who then divided the country. Under the leadership of Qasim, the Great, the Turks were driven out of Yemen in the seventeenth century (1628-1849). However, the British were better armed against the Imam dynasties, which ruled on all of Yemen from Najran near Mecca and the Indian Ocean.

The Yemeni policy strategizes to hold-on to people's freedom, it is excessive in its treatment of women, which provides an example of the Arab dogma to limit humans' liberal activities. Thus, the level of women's political participation will only increase if this dogma and its leaders are changed. We see women's political activities freely increase during revolutions similar to that we see today during the "Arab Spring Revolution," as happened during past Arab revolutions. Internationally, it has consistently drawn attention to it at national and international forums. In short, this will help to initiate an intensive effort to better understand how women in Yemen could re-invent their role in the political responsibility of their nations and help to restage some political policies toward women in general.

The historical records of women are not as complete as those of men counterpart, but we have enough to explore. When we examine history, it is well known that great social changes are impossible without female contributions. Social progress can be measured

according to the social position of women. Miles writes, “it would be hard to find much support for this proposition from the historical record...In fact, the women of the world other ways have had a history for themselves and more comprehensive story richer and eccentric than we are ever led to think” (xiv).

However, the mass of colonization, wars, and oppression disturbed the growth of women’s role. It also altered the historical trajectory of women’s roles, and it disturbed the typical social and political life for both men and women. Yemen had dealt with foreign and local mislead and disorders. Thus, many of the Arabian Peninsula’s leaders were not chosen by their people; often they were selected to serve “colonies.” People lost their rights to leaders who were not of their chosen. As if there weren’t any leaders responsible responding to social issues; in addition, there was not much communication between the leaders and the nations; and this is still the case in Yemen as well as in many Arab states. Therefore, there is not much difference between the Arab women and men’s rights; they both live the political system of exclusion rather than inclusion.

Oppressive rulers support the strong and subjugate the weak, especially with regard to women, and this further segregates men and women. As a result, women’s history was ignored and not recorded. This essay will speak about women and politics in Yemen, colonial and neocolonial politics and some Muslim women queens. These are merely instances, and we will later see some examples. Human history is full of tales of women warriors in Assyrian and Arabic history. However, women’s mindfulness of peace and serenity lead them to insist on their equal rights. Wars strengthen men at the expense of women’s rights, which in turn reduces their equality and leadership status. Where is the role of great women in history? Their role hasn’t been recorded throughout history as much as the male which become the buildup of male power. Men, therefore, dominate women warriors, but men are strengthened later through colonialism, which puts the Arab and Yemeni populations in deep and long isolation. Women are oppressed and excluded from ordinary life and their history is forgotten.

Without an Arab republic neighbor state supporting the new republic of Yemen, the Yemeni revolution reversed its democratic independence; as a result, Yemen allied with its Arabian surrounding dictatorships. It became a region with almost no government; this lead to women’s deprivation and oppression. This nation has struggled to lead itself out of the

colonial era and rusty time, and has allowed this situation to expand in a hope of improvement into a better life and democracy that were taken from the *shura* (chapter) of the past of the Queen of Sheba. The British colonization was the longest and the most instrumental agent in enforcing a backward cultural learned against the advance civilization of Yemen and Yemeni women. Due to the deficiency of public education, during British colonization; many Yemenis were deceived and failed to realize their rights.

The promises of the revolution in building the country soon was interrupted by the Cold War and neocolonialism, and with all the attention it replaced the physical colonial Britain; this took the country into instability and the unknown future. What has sustained the Yemeni people, despite the periodical absence of national political control during invasions, is the legacy of their ancient civilizations, which influenced the Yemeni social and ancient political statehood and nationalism, in which is rooted the pride in their culture. Women governed in the past and are now challenged from all directions, external and internal. Women need to work hard and lead their society and not allow them-selves to be the victims of any aggression. If they can do this, they will succeed the revolution.

Its logical proclamation signifies the exchange of political power between women and men as a democratic rule. This will introduce the oldest regional politics and in the international economic and political hegemony and how this affected the free nation that deny women's sociopolitical heritage. The establishment of the first democratic rule of "*shura*," credited to women, and the Arab used it throughout history even today. They name their parliaments or counsels by the *shura* counsel. In addition, we will explain the external erosion mixture mingling and changes of politics that first subjected women at all costs. Nevertheless, the fabrication glued to the Yemeni culture to be learned within the prospective of colonial isolated control. Yet, women lead the need of basic economic fulfillment and advance achievement in public and the private sectors; such as commercial, domestic, emotional, social and politics. We talk about the British colony and the Yemeni revolution occurred in two parts, in 1962 and 1967 becoming an important event to Yemenis and the origin of a long instability with the British cover war against it with the help of Arab tyrants. The outcome was political assassinations of leaders and the distraction to Yemen's democratic system that left the region with a weak government today. Women suffer economically, with less education and less opportunities.

Yemen has not changed much throughout its history in regard to people's way of life; they keep their past alive in name and practice. Also, many parents name their daughters after Arabic queens, and the popularity of Arabic poetry demonstrates how much people still adore these queens. Even though there is a strong tradition of honoring ancient Yemeni queens, women in Yemen must work continuously in both light and heavy labor because the typical Yemeni family is split over a great distance. Women take care of children, milk the cattle, till the fields, wash the clothes, cook the meals, bake the bread, clean the home, sew the clothes, heal the sick, and care for the dying. Men leave their rural homes to seek work in the big cities.

Yemeni women often live in a harsh and difficult environment without the help of the government for roads and water. The United Nations estimates that 74% of the Yemeni population lives in rural areas ("Middle East > Yemen"). Historically, the population sought to live in mountainous rural regions where it was difficult for invaders to penetrate. The downside is that there is little transportation to help women move between their homes and their work as farmers in the fields. Women usually have to travel by foot, carry food, haul water, and carry their children. The rural areas are without hospitals, schools, or any government institutions. While these types of institutions can be found in towns and cities where men live, the majority of Yemeni people live far from those places.

Based on my own personal observations, Yemeni woman who possesses land and tools for farming does not wait for her man to send money or other resources to her and her children. Yemeni women must be self-sufficient and grow their own food and raise their own livestock. This does not mean the land is completely hers; it can be owned by both husband and wife or belong to the husband only. But, women do this work, and women can even hire men to work for them during the cultivation season. Husbands might, for example, send money to pay for those workers. However, when husbands return from the cities to live with their wives and children on the farm, they all tend to have a better life. Similarly, women in the city with the right job are more than likely to be self-sufficient and a supporter of the local community. Women's occupations are not particularly limited to any specialties or fields, but women need education, financial support, and political access.

Though Yemen possesses many traits of a modern nation, the people's dedication to preserving cultural traditions is very strong. Daniel Martin Varisco and Umar Ibn Yusuf in

their 1994 book, *Medieval Agriculture and Islamic Science*, discuss the Yemeni past and present, including its agricultural system. Varisco and Yusuf found that “of all Arab-speaking countries, the Yemenis have preserved the rich heritage of Arab and Islamic civilization, which has been least affected by the changes brought by the external world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (ix). Thus, Yemen is a worthwhile topic for research on Arabic political culture in its past and present, especially as it relates to the history and status of women. It is an important study ground.

CHAPTER 2

YEMEN'S REGION, RULE AND HISTORY

The Arabian Felix region is one of the oldest human civilizations to inhabit the Earth. It is also the home of the first liberal government in which women's rule resembled that of men. This type of government became the blueprint of Yemen's rich and sophisticated history, which was documented in folklore and biblical references. The city of Sana'a is the capitol of Yemen today, and it is thought to be founded by Shem, the son of Noah. Thus, the Saba kingdom (950 B.C.-300 B.C.), the Qataban kingdom (ca. 400 B.C.-100 B.C.), the Hadhramaut kingdom (ca. 400 B.C.-200 A.D.), and the Himyar kingdom (ca. 100 B.C.-500 A.D.) formed alliances with the rulers of the Assyrian and neo-Babylonian empires. The history of Yemen and women's political role in the country did not come from a nonentity since the human civilization was well established and built upon over time (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*). Yemen was a flourishing kingdom, and it is one of the earliest civilizations known for its achievements in all aspects of life, such as agriculture, art, and architecture. However, it declined after the seventh century B.C., during an influx of foreign traders and invaders.

Classified as Adnan and Kahtani Semites, the descendents from Himyar, great-grandson of Adnan and Kahtan, were descended from Shem, the son of Noah. Yemenis were prominent receivers and defenders of Islam. Ancient Yemen was known to the Romans as the *Arabia Felix* (Happy Arabia), and it was known as *Yemen Al-Kadra* (Green Yemen) due to its fertile soil and hospitable attitudes toward trade. This civilization extended to include most of the Arab region in Al Gazeera alArabia and the *Belad al-Shem*, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine. Many Arabs today trace their families' genesis to Yemen. In the third century and again in the early seventh century, many of the Sabaean and Himyarin inhabitants migrated to North Africa and the northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula after destructive floods that ruined agriculture and the Ma'rib dam (*Sadd Ma'rib* in Yemen).

In terms of geography, contemporary Yemen is located in southwest Asia and northeast Africa. It has an estimated population of more than 23 million people. It also shares

borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman from the north and the east, the Red Sea to the west, and the Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean to the south. Yemen is a vast country, and its territory includes over 200 islands. The largest island is Socotra, which is about 415 kilometers (259 miles) to the south. It is located off the coast of Aden, Somalia, and Ethiopia.

ANCIENT POLITICAL HISTORY

Ancient Yemen was ruled by women and men; a culture was aggressively alienated because of foreign invaders. Sheba and others, who ruled this vast region, tried to keep it with one language, history, religion, and culture. This political system is explained in *Politics and Change in the Middle East* by Roy R. Andersen, Robert F. Seibert, and Jon G. Wagner and *The Middle East in World Affairs* by George Lenczowski. In ancient times, the region was ruled mostly by one strong ruler who was either a man or a woman. Sheiks governed at the local level, and Maiers controlled provinces but their true honesty made them too nice weak to invaders that lost the country's sovereignty. The time of the Qataban, Hadhramaut, and Himyar kingdoms is deeply rooted in Yemen's past, and these kingdoms influenced the creation of the modern state. The earliest historical record describes the Arisen and later kingdoms, which were ruled by wise and unifying women. Their confidence made them strong leaders who consulted their people and exchanged power similar to Queens Asma and Araw. The Queen of Sheba or Saba, whose name is "Bilqis," ruled this region from her capitol Ma'rib, which is near Sana'a, the capitol of Yemen today. She was one of the rulers of Saba in the (10th century B.C.), who ruled endured for about 14 centuries.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA, BILQIS (520 TO 570 A.D.)

When women and men rule in an exchangeable way, this is a democracy. In fact, women, as heads of state in the Arabian region, involved their people in decision making from an early time. The kingdoms of Sheba created the greatest civilization in southern Arabia, and it is the point from which the Arab people traveled to the rest of the world. According to the Encyclopedia of Islam as well as historic evidence, there were queens in this region long ago. This is also mentioned in *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* by Fatima Mernissi who gives some examples and historical explanations from the most original Arabic literature. For example, she uses a quotation from the Qur'an where it speaks of 'women ruling over "the people of Sheba," *surat al-Naml*. Historians and commentators, such as

Mas'udi and Tabari, have revealed the name of Bilqis as the unnamed female sovereign in the Qur'an (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*).

The Queen of Sheba worshipped the Sun in her Arabian temple called *Mahram Bilqis*, which was located in Ma'rib, Yemen. Her rule extended to all people in the region, and her time in power was prosperous and generously peaceful, and it continues to be remembered this way in the Arab mind. Nowadays, Ethiopians refer to her "Greatness" because the Queen of Sheba left the greatest history on earth for humanity. Her democratic rule leaves a legacy for women's rights around the world. Her rule was a democratic one because of its treatment of both men and women. Bilqis' reign is seen as supreme in Arab poetry today. The Yemenis are proud to name their country as the land of Sheba, and they name their daughters after her name, Bilqis, as well as other queens.

Mernissi, using extraordinary Arab and international sources, speaks extensively about the Queens of Islam, who were called the "little queens of Sheba" (*The Forgotten*). She exemplified Sheba's queens as being a model for the women queens who came later. According to the many redresses, Mernissi calls them the "Little Queens of Sheba." The Yemenis of the eleventh century did not have to question women's leadership ability. They compared the women who ruled them—particularly Queens Asma and Arwa—to the strong Sheba. Sheba's prosperous time was valued and later observed by other important Arab and Yemeni queens during the reign of Islam. With this, and as an important issue of our time, I will explain how women remain entitled to political rule from the time of Sheba and her first experiment with democracy.

DEMOCRACY IS WOMEN'S RULE

Democratic rule does not expel women from political participation or equal rights; this was Sheba's main policy. However, the modern Arab world has confused the role of women. This has led to a disregarding of history, so many now ask: "Can a woman rule?" The answer will be "yes" to this question; this is according to our discussion to the human culture and according to the Qur'an. In the article, "Women & the Interpretation of Islamic Sources," by Heba Raouf Ezzat, arguing from central texts of Islamic jurisprudence, she finds strong precedent for women's participation as leaders in public life as long as they are capable.

The Qur'an tells us the story of Sheba, not only to show us that women can rule, but that they seem to be favored in their confident, democratic rule. It does not do so just for entertaining us, but to educate us by examples from the Qur'an: "We narrate to you the most accurate history through the revelation of this Qur'an. Before this, you were totally unaware." (*Al Qur'an* 12:3). "In their history, there is a lesson for those who possess intelligence" (*Al Qur'an* 12:111). "The role of an important woman in the history of the old world as much as Muslims are concerned, is shown in the story of Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba" (*Al Qur'an* 27:22-44). The Qur'an revealed her decree with great acceptance to her example of democratic or *shura* rule (mutual consultation); accordingly, the ruler of an Islamic country can be a woman or a man.

Therefore, I use the example of the Queen of Sheba because she represented a democratic ruler who consulted with her people before making important decisions. To illustrate this point, when King Solomon requested to meet with the Queen of Sheba on the subject of submitting to God and becoming a Muslim, she first talked to the local state officials of Yemen. She did not fear Solomon or any man, and she made this important decision only after communicating with the people of Yemen.

The story of Sheba's conversion in the Qur'an is significant to examine because contemporary Muslim republicans and autocrats use the Qur'an to ignore women's rights (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*). In fact, Sheba's conversion to Islam is given in detail:

After witnessing what God gave Solomon, Sheba became a submitter (Muslim). "She was told, 'Go inside the palace.'" When she saw its interior, she thought it was a pool of water, and she (pulled up her dress) exposing her legs. He said, "This interior is now paved with crystal." She said, "My Lord, I have wronged my soul. I now submit with Solomon to God, Lord of the universe" (*Al'Qur'an*, Al-naml: 31, 32, and 33).

Furthermore, Islam asserts that all men and women are equal in rights and duties. This also contradicts the interpretations of the Qur'an that strip away women's rights. The following examples demonstrate the importance of women in Islam: (1) Islam encourages education and work equally for all women and men, including teaching and guidance as well as social and political leadership. In contemporary times, the shamefulness in Islam is because of the exclusion of women from leadership. (2) Arab women figures that were important example: (a) Queen Bilqis, the Queen of the Sheba (Saba); (b) Mariam, the Qur'an speaks a whole chapter about her; (c) Khadijah, Prophet Muhammad's first wife, who stood

for him and his cause when he declared to be the Messenger of God; his second wife, Aisha, was called the “*Om Almo'mnin*” (mother of the faithful) for her respectable teaching and the telling of the Islamic Hadith.

Queen of Sheba and those who came after her became the model for women of all times. Muslim women have long had important leadership roles. For example, Aisha, a wife of Muhammad, led an army and taught people the worth of human within the legacy of Sheba and religion. The queen lived on, then, in catalogues of exemplary women of the past and present. For example, the article, “Needle, Scepter, Sovereignty: The Queen of Sheba in Englishwomen’s Amateur Needlework” by Ann Rosalind Jones demonstrates the depth at which Sheba’s power and legacy made an imprint on English women. In the contemporary period, the greatest evidence of women’s political rights is in the numerous political leaders who are women. This includes parliamentarians, ministers, diplomats, and other officials in Yemen, Egypt, and in the rest of the Arab and in the world. More than that, many prime ministers are Muslim women. In Sri Lanka, there was Sirimavo Bandaranaike, who was Prime Minister and head of state three different times (1960-1965; 1970-1977; 1994-2000). There was Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan who served as head of state twice (1988-1990 and 1993-1996), Tansu Çiller of Turkey (1993-1996), Sheikh Hasina Wajed of Bangladesh who served as prime minister twice (1996-2001; 2009-present), Cissé Mariam who was prime minister of Mali (2011), and President Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004) of Indonesia. The history of women as head of states should encourage women to have no doubt in their leadership abilities. Women have ruled around the world, and the majority of all Muslims in recent history live in countries that have, at times, elected women as their leaders. Indeed, the three most populous Muslim-majority countries have had women as leaders: Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

QUEEN ASMA AND QUEEN ARWA

Yemen is exceptional in the Arab world, not only because many women exercised political power there, but because Queen Asma and Queen Arwa, enjoyed the privilege and unquestioned power of a head of state. The *khutba* (public sermon) proclaimed the queens’ names in the mosques. No other Arab women have had this honor. The two queens bore the same royal title: *al-sayyida al-hurra*, which means “The noble lady who is free and

independent; the women sovereign who bows to no superior authority.” We know the precise wording used by the believers all over Yemen when the *khutba* was said in Arwa’s name: “May Allah prolong the days of al-Hurra the perfect, the sovereign who carefully managed the affairs of the faithful” (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 115-117). In an extensive research, Mernissi affirms that this was the most fascinating historic fact about Asma and ‘Arwa, who effectively passed power from one to the other during most of a century-long reign of the Sulayhi dynasty, “is the complete amnesia that affects people today. No one remembers them! No one has ever heard of them!” (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 116). Women are responsible in reading their history.

Both Queen Asma and Queen Arwa ruled Yemen during a thriving period of trade in which Islam traveled the globe. Both queens were from the Sulayhi dynasty, which was established by Ali bin Sulayhi (1046-1138). Surrounded by horsemen, Queen Asma ruled, but only briefly in 480/1087, and jointly with her husband “Ali,” the founder of the Sulayhi dynasty. During this period, Asma trained the 17 year old Arwa, who in contrast, held power for almost half a century (1085-1138 A.D). Queen Arwa Ali Al-Soulaishi; she was the daughter of Imam al-Zayd al-Nasir Ali Din and the daughter-in-law of Queen Asma directed the affairs of state and planned war strategies until her death. “Saba Ibn Ahmad al-Sulayhi who had all the qualities needed for taking power and who was in the prime of life, but no one thought of him when the cortege entered San’a. Queen Asma took over the management of the country until her death in 1087,” (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 147).

Queen Arwa was the most religious leader of her time, and she is one of the most outstanding figures in the history of Yemen during Islam. Historians usually describe Queen Arwa as Bilqis the II, and her contemporaries called her “Bilqis the Younger,” which referred to the Queen of Sheba. The comparison was made because of Arwa’s wisdom, far-sightedness, and charismatic character. The reign of Queen Arwa was one of the most glorious stages throughout Yemen’s history. Queen Arwa was esteemed in the lives of her people. She is still remembered for her long rule and, for the most part, peaceful reign. She is also remembered because of the many monuments she built and for the political stability she gave to the country. Some of her constructions were roads, schools, and mosques buildings that still stand today, (Marnissi, *The Forgotten* 116, 120, 147).

Queen Arwa associated her leadership with the Fatimid caliphs in Cairo, Egypt. The Fatimid asserted their authority as descendants of Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohammad. After the death of al-Mucarram, Arwa assumed power, and there was *a priori* a more egalitarian society toward women. Either men or women could rule during this time, and the job was done in a free environment (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*).

For Muslims, the death of a head of state is a moment of rupture when the only thing that is certain is anxiety about the unforeseen. And it was the tradition of the Prophet that made this inevitable (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*). By refusing to designate a successor from his own family despite pressure to do so, the Prophet Muhammad gave a very strong signal that the will of God was against the Arabs' aristocratic tradition of power, which had been the rule during the jahiliyya (time before Islam) (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*). In this action, the Prophet expressed the essential point of the egalitarian principle of Islam.

Whenever there is exchangeable rule and power between men and women, there can be fairness and equality with equal freedom. There were also smooth transformations of power similar to democracy during the time of Queen Asma and Queen Arwa. They gained their political power vividly and vigorously; they implicated the transformation of their own lives, nation, and world. Both early and modern historians do not refer to these queens as scandalous; rather, they are seen as prestigious and, above all, the leaders of prosperous moments in history. According to Mernissi, historian Abdullh al-Thawr affirms that the reign of Queen Arwa was a predominantly beneficent and peaceful period in the history of Yemen:

It is enough for an honest historian to compare the reign of the imams... to the relatively very short period of the reign of a Yemeni woman who held fast to her principles, loved her people, and was faithful to them, namely *Sayyida* 'Arwa Bent Ahmad al-Sulayhiyya.' (*The Forgotten* 117)

Abdullh al-Thawr confesses in reflecting on the recent history of San'a, which was governed by imams from 1591 to 1925. In fact, the imams or kings continued until the recent revolution and the establishment of the republic in 1962 (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 117).

Given this history, can we say that women's rule is preferable to men's aggressive order in Yemen? Should we choose women head of states from now on?

EARLY YEMENI EDUCATION AND WOMEN'S LITERACY

Early Yemeni education from the medieval period was based on the traditional Islamic disciplines of law, religion, history, and poetry. Yemen provided a sophisticated and

widespread educational system for a country of its size and terrain. The Yemeni people contributed nobly to medieval Islamic civilization, which spread with trade especially during the time of Queen Arwa. She encouraged education across Islamic teaching through travelers who frequently came to Yemen. The best known educational center of that time was in Zabeed, and starting from the 10th century it attracted students from nearby countries such as Ethiopia, Arabia, Somalia, and others. Al-Azhar University of Cairo was an extension of Zabeed. Medieval Islamic scholar Ibn ‘Asakir in his book, *History of Damascus*, wrote of many opportunities for Arab women to become educated during this period. Asakir wrote during the 12th century, but even before then Arab women were spreading education. For example, Fatima al-Fihri’s founded the University of Al Karaouine in the 9th century in what is now Morocco. Because the Prophet Muhammad emphasized education for both men and women in the Qur’an, Arab societies enjoyed fairly high rates of literacy compared to rest of the world (Al-Marayati). This tradition endured until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century and the rise of European colonization in the Middle East.

SHURA INFLUENCE ON ARAB AND WOMEN’S RULE

The Qur’an contains the concept of *shura* (mutual consultation) or democracy, which Sheba used for the public interest. As such, historically, a traditional Arab tribal leader was not given license to rule arbitrarily. He would customarily consult with the *majlis* (tribal council), which is composed of men. The message is that the Qur’an never put restrictions on a woman serving in a ruling position. The great Queens “Bilqis, Arwa, and Asma”—who became legends among ancient and contemporary women—were successful during their eras. But, these were not the only queens who ruled during ancient times. In the broader ancient Islamic world, there were women who ruled like men, and many queens ruled the Arab-Al-Sham, Syria, Egypt, and Yemen.

Women played important historical roles with or without their husbands, and this was marked by the women adding titles of respect to their names. For example, the title of Khatuns (Queens) is most often found in Asian Islam, particularly in the Turkish and Mongol dynasty (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 20-21). Among the Turks and the Tatars, their wives enjoyed a very high position. When an issue was ordered, one would say it as “By command of the Sultan and the Khatuns” (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 21). Khatun was also the title of the

queens of the Kutlugh-Khan dynasty of Kirman, and this was the case for the Turkan Khatun of the fourth and sixth sovereigns of the dynasty in 1257 and 1293. There is a list of additional titles given to women who exercised political power in Muslim history. These titles include *Malika*, *Sultana*, and *Al-hurra*.

Despite the importance of these women rulers, religion has erased them from recorded history. “Historians have made a fetish of ferreting around in pipe rolls and laundry lists to track down the dirty linen of great men in preference to the great deeds of infamous women” (Miles xii). In other words, contemporary society has hyped men with swords and maces as symbols of respectful masculinity and political power, and this elevates what men have most valued about themselves. Unfortunately, this tendency to glorify war, conquest, and violence has emphasized undemocratic forms of government and marginalized women rulers of the past.

THE REALITY OF DEMOCRACY, *SHURA* IN ISLAM, AND PRACTICE

Tyrants say that Arab people and Muslims do not know the rule of democracy, but this is not true. Islam in general specifies people’s freedoms as individuals and as rule as it was mentioned in the *al naml on Sheba* verse of the Qur’an. *Rida al awam* is a popular consent and a prerequisite to the establishment of legitimate political authority, and *ijtihad*, *jama’i* is collective deliberation and a requisite to the proper administration of public affairs. Furthermore, Islam stipulates *mas’uliyah jama’iyyah*, which is a collective responsibility for maintaining the public good of society. By affirming that all humans are equal before God, Islam codifies equality before the law. Finally, by rejecting man’s subservience to anyone but God, Islam stipulates freedom as the natural state of man; hence, liberty within the limits of law is an Islamic tradition. The famous rhetorical question asked by the second Khalifa, Omar Ibn Al Khattab, is “When (implying by what right) ... when did you enslave people knowingly they were born free by their mothers?” (Sulaiman 69). This speaks volumes about the democratic rule of the Arab’s and Islam’s distinctive resentment of anything that arbitrarily violates personal freedom. With this understanding, we can see why the Qur’an valued the democratic rule of Queen of Sheba and was well revered by Khalifa Omar and the Arab people.

Arab conservatives and liberals acknowledge *shura* as a legacy of Sheba because it is in both the Qur'an and Arab history. But, they have yet to recognize women's cultural and national right to rule. Even though change is needed now, the Yemeni people are proud of their civilization as it concerns women's leadership in particular. Their nation keeps its past alive through memories, history books, and the popularity of naming daughters after their queens. Because of the legacy of this great civilization, Yemenis think of themselves as free people. Their state parliament is even called the *Shurawi*. Thus, the Queen of Sheba left a blueprint for a democratic ruling system.

ANCIENT ARAB WOMEN AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS OF AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

Historically, Yemen's economy consisted of trade and agriculture. Both flourished under government rule of women *and* men. The richness of the land was the most prominent of any other kingdoms during the reign of Queen Bilqis of Sheba. Historically, Yemen was known to be the first region where human beings discovered and established agriculture, and the Yemeni women are still more enduring in this field than men. Likewise, under the Kingdom of Queen Araw, for a half century between (479-532 *Hegira*, 1085-1138 A.D) her administration invigorated trade and education. Her government built the country's infrastructure and schools. This era was a foundational human era in Arab history relative to later eras where there was interference in the local's life. Women's work was incorporated with politics; women not only governed, but they also regulated trade.

Women's sophisticated role encompassed business work along with their social and political involvement at different levels in the public sphere. For example, Khadija bent Khoilid (555-619 A.D.) was the Prophet Muhammad's first wife, and she was a confident and shrewd businesswoman who worked in trade before being married. She hired Muhammad to lead her trading caravans after she tested his honesty. Khadija achieved much in her sociopolitical and spiritual life, and she proposed marriage to Muhammad, although she was in her 40s and he was in his 20s. A woman proposing marriage to a man was rare in the Arab world back then, and it is equally rare now. During a period of great danger, Khadija became her husband's main supporter and consultant for spiritual and political issues.

The example of Khadija demonstrates the capability of women's economic, spiritual, and political leadership. Women were important economic actors who contributed to the development of successful livelihoods. Women worked in farming, trade, and artisanal labors, such as making clothes and furniture. Women also created and maintained small businesses on their own, such as family shops or markets. In addition to women's economic independence, their political leadership was also important to the historical development of the region.

QUEENS OF YEMEN IN MECCA AND IRAQ

Queen Khyzuran, who was a Yemeni born in Mecca, became head of state in Iraq in 775 A.D. She ruled, commanded, and governed the Muslim empire under three caliphs: her husband al-Mahdi, the third Abbasid caliph; her elder son al-Hadi; and her younger son Harun al-Rashid. Queen *Sharifa* Fatima was a strong religious Yemeni queen who was the daughter of Imam al-Zayd al-Nasir li-Din Allah, and she took Sana'a, Yemen, by force of arms in the middle of the fifteenth century. She was given an unusual title in Islam that carefully distinguishes between spiritual and secular (or more precisely military) power (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*). The title she bore was *Sharifa* Fatima, or the honorable Fatima (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*). This demonstrates that women are not only democratic leaders but also shrewd military commanders.

Ghaliyya al Wahabiyya of Tarba near Ta'if in modern-day Saudi Arabia led a military resistance to defend Mecca against foreign invasion in the early eighteenth century. She was given the title of *Amera*, which is the title of a military general. The *Amir* of the army is called *Amir al-umara*. Her audacity and strategic ability led her battlefield enemies to credit her with the magic gift of making her forces invincible (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 20).

The triumphs of these great queens eventually came to an end, and this negatively impacted on the political influence of Yemeni women. As Mernissi argues, Yemeni women will not give up their political rights easily: "Yemeni women are known for never agreeing to leave men in sole charge of politics. Was it because the memory of Sheba remained vivid despite Islamicization?" (*The Forgotten* 52). She also talks about the perspective of historian Ibn Battuta who "emphasized the difference between the man/women relations among the Mongols and those in the Sunni tradition that he, an Arab, knew so well; the Mongols never

went as far as making concessions in matters concerning women” (Mernissi, *The Forgotten* 104). Perhaps this is why the great legacy of Yemeni and Arab queens came to an end: it was caused by a downward spiral set by foreign invaders.

THE ARAB DEMOCRACY: “SHURA OF SABA, ALMBAIA’A”

The term *shura* means it is the rule of many, and everyone responsible. In addition, *shura* means the same as democracy according to Ja`far Idris. *Shura* was practiced together in one form or another long before Islam. In his article, “Shoora and Democracy: A Conceptual Analysis,” Idris argues that there is nothing in the concept of democracy that makes it inherently Islamic. For example, an Arab Bedouin is reported to have said: “never do I suffer a misfortune that is not suffered by my people” (Idris). When asked how come, he replied, “Because I never do anything until I consult them, *astasheeruhum*” (Idris). Idris also says that Arab noblemen used to be greatly distressed if a matter was decided without *shura*. Non-Arabs also practiced it. The Qur’an states that the Queen of Sheba said: “*O chieftains! Lo pronounce for me in my case. I decide no Case till you are present with me*” (*Al-Qur’an*, Al-naml: 31, 32, and 33). This particular statement was made after Queen of Sheba had read the letter of the Prophet Solomon to her people in which he asks her to become a believer (a Muslim). Queen of Sheba was, according to history and the Qur’an, in the habit of never making a decision without always consulting her chieftains (Idris).

This is a true political legacy, and without a doubt democracy or *shura* is the legacy of the Queen of Sheba. An independent tradition of statehood is exalting the call for people’s self-determination under, not only as a democratic rule, but as civilization. Before she answered Solomon’s letter to convert to Islam, she gathered her people to discuss with them the matter. Only after consulting with her people did the Queen of Sheba visit King Solomon. Her sophisticated rule gained her universal acknowledgment as the most famous, powerful, and wealthy queen in world history (Mandaville). The Queen of Sheba was mentioned in Christianity and in the Qur’an. This means that women’s leadership is valued and permuted in religion.

The Qur’an presented Sheba’s way of governing as a favorable example for human society. *Shura* rule has been valued without exception by Arabs and Muslims, but it is not implemented today. *Shura* rule is the most important aspect of Sheba’s legacy because it is

the principle of self-government. Thus, *shura* rule or democratic rule, was established by a woman. Without a single doubt, Arab people and all Muslims acknowledge this in the Qur'an.

In addition, the idea that political positions are not stations to be inherited and owned by individuals is consistent with *shura*. Using political positions for the purpose of gaining wealth is also frowned on. Instead, it is the responsibility of leaders to serve others. In such an environment, women have the right to retain their political freedom and to participate in constructing their society. Public law and the codes of ethics should be issued through the mechanisms of democratic rule similar to that of Sheba.

WOMEN'S RULE AND DEMOCRATIC *SHURA* IN CONTEMPORARY ARAB SOCIETY

The point being argued is that democracy and women's leadership are related to one another. It is important to remember that democracy was historically known to the Arab people as "*al-muba'a*" or elections experienced in Mecca and al-Madina. Voters were not limited to one geographic area, and the election included all who attended the vote. Historically, *al-muba'a* corresponds with the *shura* that was established by the kingdom of Sheba as a form of self-government. It was appreciated and approved by the Qur'an. It also became the Arab's ground rule: they acknowledge it, speak it, and make government promises, but in reality they do not practice it today.

On the one hand, Queen Araw ruled during Islam's infancy, and she was one of the greatest supporters and contributors to it. On the other hand, the Queen of Sheba's rule was regarded as the best of any leader in the Qur'an. In both cases, the women led with wisdom, strength, and devotion. We should rightfully remember these women for the benefit of humanity and our families. We should seriously examine the inhumane treatment of Arab women today, which leads to the creation of inhumane societies. How and why does the ill treatment of women continue? What is most important to tyrants? Is it nation building? If so, then they should not have any trouble implementing democracy and securing women's rights. But, if all they want to do is to sit on the wealth of the Arab people, then we see there is not any nation building occurring, nor any positive recognition of any kind of the people's needs. Thus, the masses have nothing. There is no proper government or historical acknowledgment of women's autonomous rights.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN LOSE POWER

Women established the first state democracy in the world in Yemen. What happened? Why did Yemeni women change from being heads of state to losing almost all political power? The answer is that their role hasn't been recorded throughout history in the same way as men, and this has led to the consolidation of male power.

THE EROSION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

As written about my Mernissi, Egyptian historian Dr. Ali Ibrahim Hasan represents an effort within Arab academia whereby women rulers of the past are painted in a negative light. For example, Hasan writes about how the size of Bilqis' throne and the value of her jewels are overestimated, and this reduces her importance as a queen (Mernissi, *The Forgotten*). The effects of this type of scholarship are important to recognize because Bilqis is one of the few Arab women that is difficult to hide or veil, since she is mentioned in the Qur'an and built a powerful sovereign state with a robust economy (Mernissi). Hasan further describes the example of women who overtook dynasties that permit women to interfere in the affairs of state. He also wrote 33 biographies of important women in Islam, but he characterizes them in a way that makes their leadership unattainable for modern Arab women (Mernissi). For example, he lauds the women who provided support to the Prophet Muhammad in the early days of Islam, but this can make it seem as if it is women's duty to support men. Plus, the historical circumstances in the Middle East have changed a lot since the time of the Prophet.

Besides the need to recognize efforts to push the stories of historical Arab women leaders to the margins, we must understand why Arab men feel compelled to do this injustice. In short, I propose that Arab men learned to suppress women in this particular way through contact with European colonizers. The process of colonial militarization was strengthened at the expense of women, and Yemeni women unfortunately fall into this category. Most European soldiers were men, and they expected women to serve them at

home because men did not want to do that work. In addition, colonization brought extensive violence and isolation to Yemen, and this led to the denial of women's rights.

Dismantling women's political rights has helped to keep power in the hands of a few men in the Arab world. This procedure leads us to analyze this fact of the inequality and its complexity. The limitation of exercising political power for both men and women led to the limitation of freedom. Both of these combine to limit the rights of women, which influence cultures, laws, and policies that favor men. The needs of men become more respected than the needs of women. Thus, men try to satisfy their need for power, and Arab governments allow this at the expense of women's rights. As a result, men become more concerned with winning social fights with women over their behaviors, education, and clothing because they feel they can exercise power over women but not influence the government. Thus, some men become overly concerned with how women talk and what they wear, so they can have the upper hand over women as coworkers, wives, and sisters. Women have to not only satisfy men's needs for power, but they must follow the implementation of unjust cultural laws concerning women in every way possible to the degree that some do not have time for education, political affairs, or exercising their rights.

According to Hawkesworth many of these injustices against women were institutionalized in laws and rooted in policies that yield rights, opportunities, privileges, and immunities to men. At the same time, they are methodically denied to women. Hawkesworth uses an analysis providing an overview of feminist field research in feminist policy studies. The feminist political movement in Yemen, which was stimulated by the conviction of basic equality of men and women, continues to be nourished by organizations and government institutions such as the Yemeni Women's Union. The Union aims to end gender-based injustice.

The European invasion of Yemen in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries changed the equation and the norm of women's statuses; we know that the English men during the time of colonialism didn't believe in women's rights. This became an encouraging point to Arab and Arab politicians to do so too. That point was also well taken by the desperate majority of Arab men whose freedom and dignity was stolen by similar men, but through forced invasion. When the English colonized the world, the masses of

humans under their control suffered from slavery and treatment as cheap labor. Besides these conditions, there was also a lack education in Yemen.

Who were dominating organizations and government institutions? Is it those who limit the roles of others? Historically male colonial power, as it was dominating the Arab world as I noted before, has controlled women culturally. Locals learned from comers and were kept in the last few hundred years under domination within closed doors in Yemen. All levels in the Yemeni society learned this new culture and particularly young generations who are always looking for something new about others and continue to travel. Therefore, Yemeni women are similar to the rest of the Arab world, are much less represented today or are entirely eliminated from political representation; power concentration encourage the misleading propaganda made against women; usually it is said that women lack experience, knowledge, or they are with less physical abilities. As such, women always are unequal, misunderstood, and the family and women's social laws are short of woman's completion views.

BRITISH COLONIZATION (1839-1967)

The British seized the region of Aden, Yemen, by force in 1839 and spread fear, limited political participation, limited the freedom of movement, and isolated the country. The British used the ports of the south and the north, including Hodeida and Aden. These sophisticated and extensive ports were used as a coaling station for ships traveling between Egypt, India, and Europe, and they were administered as part of India with a great British military base in Yemen. These central transit ports were continually used by the British from 1875 to 1956 as well as before, during, and after the construction of the Suez Canal. In the early years of British colonization of Yemen, Britain was transferring soldiers from war to war as it tried to increase and maintain its global empire. In addition, they maintained a strong military presence in Yemen to battle the Imam for territorial control.

The British military entered Yemeni cities and towns, and women were not in any way safe. This weakened the local and the state rule; therefore, it led the Imams to isolate the country and its people. Indeed, the protective leaders of Yemen, the Imams, eventually sided with the British and depended on England for support. In turn, the Imams acted cruelly to the Yemeni people and practiced the same type of politics as the British invaders. Yemen was

mainly a transportation hub for the British Empire, and it was run by chartered monopoly companies and defended by the Royal Navy. In *Near & Middle East: Records of Yemen, 1798–1960*, Doreen and Leila Ingrams write binding information and books that carry the Yemeni crest in a Britten's Library binding with glut. In other words, the British government covered up or hid most of the historical documents that concern its colonial rule in Yemen because British colonization led to economic oppression, cultural alienation, political distraction, and the devastation of women's rights.

Colonization limited the Imam's authority and that impacted the Yemeni society negatively and limited any government connection with the British yielded the real political power and fought anyone asking for freedom. As a result, Yemen remained isolated from the international community for a long period. This further isolated the Yemeni tribes within the country, and the dysfunction of the Yemeni government cut off people's communication with the outside world, disrupted their social lives, stifled the development of transportation, and curtailed the development of schools. Especially during the frequent battles and wars, usually women suffer.

The French, Italians, and British also skirmished over Yemen, Egypt, and the Suez Canal in the 19th century. By the early 20th century, as cited by Adams, V. I. Lenin described this in especially blunt terms during the First World War. Adams points out to Lenin's definition of economy and war; he says: what our difference amid war and the fundamental culture of war which Lenin calls as "the entire system of European states in their economic and political interrelations" (104). Yemen was a pawn in this game of constant European conquest and war.

Moreover, the conflict and competition between Britain and Italy over commerce in Yemen was exacerbated by 1937 because of the lead up to World War II (Lenczowski). For example, "British had come to regard the whole of the Arabian Peninsula as her exclusive sphere to which something like a British Monroe Doctrine should apply" (Lenczowski). During World War II Britain and Germany fought to control Middle Eastern resources. Yemen again played a big part in the war. A great conflict between the Europeans allied and Axis powers was undertaken in El Alamein, Egypt, and Libya. Both groups used the Yemeni shorelines and land for fighting.

WOMEN, ECONOMY, AND COLONIZATION

Women were still economically independent in their fields; however, a new culture in this region began to form during the colonial period. Women no longer enjoyed the same freedoms in urban areas, and of course, they were forced to leave territories around British military bases and war zones. These militarized areas often appeared in cities, and women were kept at home or concealed away by the male members of their family before they had to fight, so they wouldn't be injured by fighting or harassed by British men. Moreover, middle-class women's lives were increasingly molded by an ideology of home-life that made Yemeni women fragile, dependent, and weak. This practice was replicated in Egypt where the British and French also had a strong colonial presence. Keddie writes the following:

The usual dividing line for major Western influence and control is Napoleon's 1798 invasion of Egypt...In Cairo, Napoleon and his officers introduced unveiling and Western treatment of some women, but there was a backlash against this and against the women after Napoleon left. For a time the presence of Western foreigners reinforced veiling and seclusion, as a reaction to the presence of outsiders, much as the coming of strangers to rural localities continues to do. (61)

Thus, the situation described in Cairo, Egypt, by Keddie was no different from the situation of Yemeni women who were living in urban areas. During British colonial rule, men were used for labor in most of the port cities. Management and political positions were filled by the supporters of Sheikhs and Sultans who were sympathetic to the British and who helped maintain colonial rule. During this period, trade occupations were usually limited to men, and all supervisory positions were occupied by men. Keddie writes, "Many scholars have reacted against the simplistic view and have stressed the positives for women and men in premodern ways and the negatives brought by the Western impact, such as economic deprivation for many and the loss of much of the support given by same-sex networks and extended families" (60). Keddie's discussion concludes by saying: "The Western impact seems to have reduced women's independent role in trade, landholding, and other activities, owing to both socioeconomic and cultural interactions" (61). A new tradition stemming from British colonialism replaced the earlier standard for women's participation in school and work.

With the absence of a responsible national government during colonialism, indigenous Yemeni businesses gradually diminished. For example, many manufacturing

businesses were destroyed by the arrival of low-cost English goods. As a result, men from the rural areas of Yemen tended to migrate to the cities in search of work. They often left behind women in the rural areas with little or no financial support. Joseph and Slyomovics write about how women's economic participation in the agrarian economy in Yemen was substantial, and it intensified due to massive male migration. As a result of the economic changes brought on by colonialism, the women of Yemen had to manage a far greater range of demands on their skills. Rural women often had to work very hard in these difficult conditions, and they had little access to education. The situation made them very poor (Keddie). Even though women worked hard in agriculture and produced enough food to feed a family for a year, Yemeni men often overlooked this labor and took it for granted. Miles writes, "the work of a woman who can produce the annual output of her husband, for example, his total of meat, milk, eggs or grain, without ever questioning how much of that was produced by his wife's labor" (122). In other words, a woman who cultivated the land and produced enough food to feed her entire family was not recognized by her husband as a contributor to the household economy. Additionally, female farmers in Yemen were responsible for supplying the water and energy used in the home. They also had the full responsibility of raising children.

In comparison to urban women in Yemen, Keddie thinks that, rural women are less private than in cities, nonetheless, this does not mean that they have superior lives anyhow. Because women were excluded from working in cities where many social and political institutions exist, they were effectively excluded from the public sphere and all political practices. Moreover, rural Yemeni men were embarrassed to walk with or bring their women to the cities, even if a woman needed care at a hospital. It was considered dishonorable for men to expose women to foreigners and warfare during this period. This demonstrates the level of exclusion that Yemeni women experienced in the cities. This demonstrates the level of exclusion that Yemeni women experienced in the cities.

The situation and status of women during the colonial era intersected with economic and cultural changes brought on by colonies. Woollacott specifically argues that British conceptions of masculinity were closely linked to episodes of imperial adventuring and war, which saturated the popular culture of the Victorian and Edwardian British Empire (136). The effects of this culture were long lasting because a cultural lesson based on bias and the

division of men and women became ingrained in society. Likewise, women's rights became marginalized. The people of Yemen, especially women, suffered from the consequences of British colonialism and Yemeni tyranny. Such divisions between the sexes and the isolation of women grew to be accepted as a culture in Yemen.

COLONIAL DESTRUCTION, WOMEN'S ISOLATION, AND A "LEARNED CULTURE"

British economic domination in Yemen replaced stability with aggression, and the British instituted a new "learned culture" that marginalized women, restricted their freedoms, and negated their historical roles as leaders. The legal status of British women was based on the law of covertures, which was derived from English common law. The law covertures stated that a wife has no legal identity of her own; it is derived entirely from her husband (Clifford and Pearce). The spirit of this law was extended over all Yemeni women at the time of British colonization. This served to further alienate them from their historical rights and roles.

Moreover, the British politically divided Yemen in order to isolate the leadership and people from one another. The British also isolated Yemeni women from men by instituting travel restrictions within the country. This made it easier for the British to create a supply of cheap labor. The Imam, who was supposed to be the political leader of the Yemeni people, also isolated many Yemenis in an attempt to lessen the impact of British expansion. The Imam made this decision in response to the Sultans and Sheiks that were employed by the British to control the local populations, sustain the division of the country, serve British interests, and stand against the Imam and their own people's autonomy and rights. All of these changes combined to strip away the privileged position of Yemeni women as political leaders.

The British forces used an interconnected system of bonded labor, outright slavery, and gender discrimination to implement their rule (Woollacott, 140). Yemeni women were directly and indirectly pushed into the system of slavery because their political and educational rights were curtailed. Woollacott also found that the British Empire's interconnection with racial and class hierarchies as seen in daily practices shaped relations between women and men both historically and culturally. Specifically, these systems worked to support the structure of the empire. Thus, as Britain progressed with innovation and

economic development through colonization, Yemen remained underdeveloped, both politically and economically. This was especially true in terms of the decay of women's position in society. The foundations of the British Empire's wealth, as well as its disciplinary and punitive regimes, according to Woollacott, depended on social stratification along gender and racial lines. Thus, Woollacott thinks that if colonial employment traditionally has been the focus of economic and labor history, it is clear that gender and racial hierarchies were fundamental to systems of unpaid labor (138). In other words, British colonialism not only changed the Yemeni economy in a drastic and permanent manner, but it also changed gender relations and roles in an equally strong manner (Woollacott 142).

THE BRITISH WOMEN'S CLUB: COLONIAL INTERSECTIONS OF CLASS, RACE, AND GENDER

The intersections of class, race, and gender as they relate to British colonization of Yemen are no more apparent than in the British Women's Club. It was an organization founded in Yemen in the first quarter of the twentieth century in Aden. The idea of the club was to create a space where elite British women (who were the wives of the British officers and political leaders) could meet Yemeni women of the aristocratic and upper classes. British women participated in club activities, made speeches, and served as club leaders. However, the Yemeni women were not in positions of decision making. They were also not recognized as citizens with rights and duties.

The British Women's Club shows how gender, class, and race played an important role in the culture of Britain's colony in Yemen. Social activities and participants are carefully chosen to serve the colonial system. The participation of the Yemeni Women's rights and political participation were reduced across the British Empire, and Acker specifically examines the role of gendering in organizational practices. She argues that inequality involving organizations contributes to historical male/female inequalities. Acker writes, "Feminists have looked at the gendering of organizations and organizational practices to comprehend how inequalities between women and men continue in the face of numerous attempts to erase these inequities" (442). In the British Women's Club, class, gender, and race categorization damaged Yemeni women's natural rights and disregard historical identity.

British colonizers gave no political rights to Yemeni women or men to create their government in accordance with their needs. For example, the British military taught its soldiers not to respect others, especially the weakest (who were almost often women). The British acknowledged no rights to the Yemeni public as they acknowledged no political rights for women that were injected into the Yemeni society as a learned culture, which led to government without government of the people today. Yet, Ottaway argues that in the early 20th century Britain was expanding the political opportunities for men but restricting them for women, and the same could be seen in the British colonies. Nevertheless, the British men oppressed both Yemeni women and men without hesitation for their profit; the same convenient culture remained suitable to Arab dictators today.

COLONIALISM KILLS DEMOCRACY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Queen Araw governed the Arabian *Filak*, Yemen with full sovereignty; right after her *Al Solihi* dynasty era ended, the following Imam dynasty failed to protect the sovereignty of country from invaders, such as the Europeans and the Turks. Since then, Yemen and its women are trying to regain their wellness. Colonialism is part of a system of enslavement and aggression, thus, if male enslavement is particularly cruel, female enslavement is twice as worse since women's rights are nonexistent. If men aren't full citizens with full political rights and an ability to participate in government, then their women are oppressed by men's disenfranchisement and the society as a whole. Centuries of increasing monopolization of the culture of war by the state, invasions of external conquest, and economic exploitation were caused by colonialism (and neo-colonialism) in the Arab region, and this resulted in women's oppression. Adams writes about the years of increasing monopolization of the culture because of the many wars by the state. Even though Yemen joined the United Nations in 1940, the U.N. declaration on the protection of member states did not suspend actions of the British forces in Yemen.

Under all these circumstances, the lives, labors, spirits, and time of generations of the Yemeni women were wasted to profit British colonial aggressions for 130 years. Without rights to education, work, or self-government, the Yemeni women had no opportunities for advancement. In fact, some influential local leaders were employed by the British, such as Sheiks and Sultans, to help oppress the Yemeni people and prevent them from seeking

freedom. Britain did not seek the submission of the Yemeni people through peaceful means; they used force and wars instead. The teaching of indifference and brutality was taken by the unelected Arab leaders from the British, and they used these tactics against their own people as if they were enemies. Nehru Jawaharlal describes the British ruling class in the following manner: “a class accustomed to a barbarous criminal code, a narrow and intolerant university system, a government conceived as a huge aggregation of jobs and privileges, a contempt of men and women who toiled in field and shop, a denial of education to the masses...” (292). It seems that this ideology transferred from the British colonial rulers of Yemen to the local Imams, Sheiks, and Sultans. In my estimation, there cannot be democratic rule and free women in an occupied country whose leaders subscribe to these beliefs and practices.

THE LAST BATTLE: ALIENATION OF WOMEN AND COMMUNITIES

The well-known strategy used by colonizers is “*divide and conquer*” and this is especially true in the British colonization of Yemen. The British succeeded in alienating Yemeni communities and tribes as well as alienating Yemeni women. British rule in Yemen not only isolated the people from governing themselves, limited their access to public services, and divided the social classes to promote the security of British control over the colony. Consequently, the people and the Yemeni rulers were alienated from their country and from one another.

Manea argues against the idea that the tribal situation in Yemen exacerbated problems during British colonialism. While it may seem that the tribal structure of Yemeni society makes it easier to *divide to conquer*, Manea found that during the ancient rule of Yemen’s kings and queens, the tribal system was a positive factor that helped the state control and defend its territory. A possible reason for this positive situation is that the tribal institution was integrated in the structural body of the state. According to history, the Yemeni realms recognized the familial tribal nature of the social structure, and they invented a method of control that accommodated each tribe’s differences. In other words, Yemenis did not have deep conflicts without political resolutions until the British disturbed the Yemeni sociopolitical system and shattered its economic structure. This situation caused an eruption of new negative teachings against women and against the original Yemeni culture, which

prized the wisdom and rule of women. This new culture was characterized by male domination and propagation of armed conflict.

We see such sociopolitical examples when people's rights to life and liberty are disregarded, and this is an especially unacceptable situation for women. Often they struggle just to stay alive during a state of war or invasion. Indeed, their customary lives are being downgraded, disregarded, and their rights are altered from the original sociopolitical and cultural traditions. We, the contemporaries of earlier generations of Yemeni women, did not read or witness all of the occurrences of what happened in the past, but we may safely say that these conflicts did not allow women's political leadership and participation in society. In our life time, let us look at what happened within ten years of the U.S. War on Terrorism. We see the greatest suffering among women during the United States' and Britain's invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Women were being abducted and killed by the thousands. Women became refugees by the millions, and they were driven out of their homes and sociopolitical states. We see the brutality of war and women's exploitation. Certainly, women in Afghanistan and Iraq lost whatever they had rebuilt after the first waves of British invasion and European colonization, especially the women of Iraq. Nothing can be swiftly implemented to replace this destruction with normality, and this is the exact same thing that Yemeni women faced at the end of British colonization.

The Imams of Yemen, such as Yeha and later Ahmen Hamid al Den, continued to mount occasional rebellions and attacks against British rule. They disagreed over sovereignty and went to war with Britain. The British established supremacy over the small sheikhdoms and sultanates on the eastern and southern coasts of Arabia. The sad thing is that neither side saw women's safety in any way important. These clashes between the Imams and the British continued off and on for 130 years. The security of Yemen was destroyed during the fighting, and Yemen's social and political structures were changed forever. British colonialism left Yemen without a responsible national government. Going from strong heads of state exemplified by the ancient queens of Yemen to a few weak Sheiks and Imams who were sometimes under British control, the political future of Yemen looked dismal. Neither the Imams nor the British offered strength or protection to people; they were in a constant state of war. Nevertheless, they continued to weaken the state at the expense of the people, and the effects impacted on many future generations.

Naguib and Okkenhaug argue that women had no particular role in public life, Britain made no effort to transform gender relations, and segregation and gender avoidance were commonplace during the period (142). Only after independence were these things changed. When the people in Sana'a and Taiz succeeded to bring down the Imam in 1962, Britain started to talk about education for women in articles like "Aden's Suffragette Demands Rights," which were published in English-language newspapers such as the *Aden Recorder*. Naguib and Okkenhaug state that the Yemeni woman activist Fatat Shamsan was reported to have criticized the pace of progress in the field of women's education in Aden, and she demanded, as a matter of urgency, the immediate attention of the British authorities.

It seems far strange and alien for women to advance their rights socially and politically, as if some truly were disconnected from their world or if they were ignorant. We will always return to the question that why did women lose the rights they once had as heads of state? Was their time more advanced or more decent and steady than ours today? I think so. But, can Yemeni women and the rest of women in the Arab region be in control of their political affairs? They should; as they are recovering from all forms of an unpleasant past. How serious was the disruption that disconnected the current from the past world? In the next chapter we will explore this very question.

CHAPTER 4

THE REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH

During the course of the late 1940s to the 1960s, Yemen's northern and southern regions became the scene of a revolutionary campaign where both male and female nationalists rose against British colonial rule. These revolutionaries were called *terrorists* by the British, but the people of Yemen considerate themselves they were fighting for self-determination. When the spirit of revolution gathered around the country, tribal uprisings also began, and the tribes began to form a national identity. Needless to say, the British resistance to the national revolution caused the death of thousands of lives under the greatest military machines in the world. Moreover, the British recruited Yemenis to fight against other Yemenis in an effort to put down the revolution. Yemen finally saw freedom from both the Imams and British rulers with a successful revolution that occurred in two parts: the first against the Imam in the north on September 26, 1962 and the second against the British in the south on October 14, 1967.

REVOLUTION AND SELF-DETERMINATION (1940s-1962 AND 1967)

A few of the greatest revolutionaries of the period (1945-1967) were Ali Al-Thulaa, Ahmed Muhammed Al-Zubiri, and Ahmed Muhamed Noman. The first two men were killed during the revolution and the last one became the prime minister of the first republic. Other revolutionaries who made the successful transition to national office included three Yemeni presidents: Qahtan al-Shaabi (1967-1969), Abdul Fattah Ismail (1978-1980), and Ali Salim al-Beidh (1986-1989). Some of the women heroes of the revolution were Khadija al-Hawshaba who was killed by the British soldiers. Daara Bint Saeed was martyred. Najwa Makawi drove a British tank on 20 June 1967, which was the day of the fall of the town of Crator. She was detained by the British with her colleague Fawzi Jaafar. There were also other women who became patriotic symbols and torches that lit the road for the coming generations. See the web site: "The woman Participation in the Yemeni Revolution" by Hanan Mohammed for more information.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS, POLITICAL ACTIVISM, AND THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

Women's role was declared to be alongside their 'brothers' in building up the new society, and during the revolution in Aden both women and men took up arms and fought in pitched battles chasing out the British military. It was a dangerous and important task because they had to move and carry weapons within the war zone. To find inspiration, women followed role models from the dawn of the Islamic age, such as Salaym Bint Malhan and Khawlah Bint al-Azwar al-Kindiyah, who were female warriors.

During this time, Yemeni women also harmonized their active national movement with the larger Arab women's movement. The women's movement organization allied with the Arab Women Organizations, particularly the Egyptian one that was popular during the time of Huda Sharawy who was an activist woman in the first half of the 20th century. She created the first Arab Women's Union in Egypt in 1923. During the revolutionaries, women and men's movement existed in the 1940s and the 1950s as a revolutionary one, which was against the Yemeni monarchy and the British control over the country's political affairs (Nadje and Pratt)

One of the important Yemeni women leaders of this time was Dr. Radhia Ihsan who obtained her education in Arabic literature and taught Islamic law at Aden University. She also worked as a journalist and writer. Dr. Ihsan founded the Arab Women Association in Aden and then in Sana'a (MacDonald and al-Mamari). The association had an important role in the struggle for independence, but it sometimes would close during and after the revolution because of pressure from the Imam and the British (MacDonald and al-Mamari).

In 1958, the Arab Women Association established the first mutual relations with the Egyptian Women's Union. Members of the association attended events arranged by the Arab Women's Union at its headquarters in Cairo. The Arab Women's Union, which was chaired by Hoda Sha'rawy, was a major player in the Yemeni revolution against the Imam of 26 September 1962.

In the 1960s, the Arab Women Association also supported the Arab women's revolution from the *Shiader* or "women's black cover." The Arab Women Association led a protest in which women burned their *Shiaders* because they wanted freedom to work and obtain education. The association also sponsored many activities such as political lectures,

musical events, and women's sporting events. On the local level, Rokia Mohammed Nasser helped to found the Adeni Women Association with other women. The association promoted women's right for education and employment.

The Yemeni Women's Union (YWU) or *Ittihad Nisa al-Yaman* was created in 1965 without official government recognition as a pro-independence organization. In her study of Yemeni Women's Union, Dahlgren writes how the YWU was founded and subordinated by the Nationalist Front (an armed organization resisting the British occupation) ("Women in the Republic of Yemen"). It contributed toward the successful 1967 revolution. In addition, the YWU's main task was to promote literacy and job skills among women.

The General Union of Yemeni Women was formed in 1968 to continue the work of two other women's organizations (the Arab Women's Club and the Aden Women's Association). It played a vital role in empowering women and promoting the politics of women's emancipation. In February 16, 1968, women populist communities were formed on a neighborhood level and then on a national level for women's union in which nationalist Aida Ali Said was the chairwoman (Dahlgren, "Women in the Republic"). In 1974, the constituent congress for the General Yemeni Women's Union was instigated in Aden by a republican decree as a support for women and their leading role in the revolution and the armed confrontation (Dahlgren, "Development"). Today, these women revolutionaries are historically honored by the people of Yemen. Some witnesses, like Radia Shamsher, Ngla Shamsan, and others, who were revolutionary participants, are still speaking about women's roles during the war for independence against the British.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND THE REVOLUTION

Prior to the 1962 revolution, no proper educational system for women had been in place in Yemen during the British colony for nearly 130 years. The situation was not much better for men. Al-Ameria school and Zabid University, which had played an important role in educating Arab and Muslim men for many centuries, declined during this time. Civil war and internal political upheaval only worsened the situation for women in education. When the isolationist Imam Ahmed Hammed al-Dean and the British finally lost power in 1967, the new Yemeni government decided that education was the first building block to start with after the revolution. Yet, women's illiteracy was a major problem.

They had to learn how to read, write, and replace the knowledge that was lost to them. A great effort was put forth to educate Yemeni women after the revolution. The revolution was seen as an open door for girls' futures, and the ambition of women for education was great. For a brief spell in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Yemen was able to provide decent education. There were challenges in establishing schools in impoverished neighborhoods and rural areas. The mountainous areas of Yemen also posed a difficulty for the educational system, and many students had to meet in outdoor classrooms.¹ Despite these problems, educational reform accomplished a great deal in a short period of time. As a result, there are now masses of women teachers and doctors in Yemen who are the products of this improvement in education after the revolutions of 1962 and 1967. Mernissi writes about the importance of education for Arab women to gain a foothold in politics. She writes how the best guarantee to access power for women is to be close to it, such as through a family member or intellectual. As such, Mernissi writes, "the domain in which Muslim women of today have been able to get a foothold is the university" (*The Forgotten* 43). Sadly, this situation of success did not last long because of Britain's covert actions that largely destabilized the newly formed Yemeni nationalist government and because of worsening economic conditions starting with the Cold War.

BRITAIN AND NEOCOLONIALISM: LAUNCHING A COVERT COUNTERREVOLUTION (1962-1970)

Despite the success of the Yemeni first revolution, Britain launched a covert war against the new government in an effort to re-establish its control in the country. The British war to stop the liberation of Yemen also shifted the regional and international balance of power in the Middle East. Mawby contends that from 1945 to 1965 the British were forced to switch their political and military strategies from the conduct of a total war to instigation of small wars based on counter-insurgency in defense of their imperial interests. Furthermore, the escalation of these efforts coincided with British efforts to hand over power to pro-Western elites, but this proved challenging because few elites were vying for power amongst themselves (Mawby).

¹ See www.everyculture.com.

In addition, British war profiteers found a ripe market to sell and supply a lot of weapons that were used to kill Yemenis by the thousands in the cities of Aden and Sana'a. The brutality of the British military response was especially explicit. Imagine Yemeni women and children working or walking everywhere through terrifying artillery emplacements and foreign soldiers running around; their normal lives were severely interrupted. Women were often ordered by men to hide or stay inside their homes to avoid any possible harm. The documentary film, *Aden the Last Battle June 1967*, by Jimikamal shows the aggressiveness of British soldiers attacking the Yemeni civilians in Yemen's cities and targeting them from above mountains and jets.

International law that was represented by the United Nations failed to stop what the British were doing against Yemen and other nations. Curtis discusses how Britain is a systematic violator of international law and the United Nations as well as a key ally of many repressive regimes and a consistent condoner of human rights abuses. Curtis even describes how Harold Macmillan, who was British Prime Minister from 1957 to 1963, admitted that it was "repugnant to political equity and prudence alike that we should so often appear to be supporting out-of-date and despotic regimes and to be opposing the growth of modern and more democratic forms of government" (Curtis). The British Foreign Secretary at the time, Alec Douglas-Home, also conceded that the Yemeni Republicans' "attraction for the average Yemeni will be greater than" the Imams', and this would "cause us [Britain] a great deal of trouble" (Curtis). Thus, the British were engaged in a war that even their leader admitted was aimed to suppress democracy and modernity.

In the latter part of 1967, in the face of uncontrollable determination on behalf of the Yemeni Republicans, British troops in Aden began withdrawing, but they continued to fight along the northern border with Saudi Arabia. As a result, Yemen was left divided, its people felt alienated again, and women were once more without rights. The northern region of Yemen became the Northern Arab Republic (or North Yemen), and the southern region became the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (or South Yemen). Laws promised during the revolution were not in place during the split despite women's insistence for judicial and political positions, subsequently, they lost out once again.

In other words, women's capacity for self-determination was disregarded mostly by foreign interference. While still in its infancy, Britain managed to kill the democracy

achieved in Yemen in 1962. The secret war and weapons supplied to French and British mercenaries were used against the desire and rights of this newly formed democracy. The British supplied arms to those willing to fight against the Republic of Yemen and for the tyrant Imam. Clive Jones writes about how the covert operations designed by Colonel David Smiley and Lt. Col. (Billy) McLean, who were not conducting official British operations in Yemen, managed to form “Aden’s Group,” which was a syndicate of operatives who were principally former British and French intelligence. Essentially, their operations were a sustained mercenary involvement in the Yemen Civil War, which was paid for mainly through Saudi largesse (C. Jones). With Saudi Arabia supplying money and part of an arms deal from Britain worth £26 million, a private company began to train Saudi pilots. This newly formed air force also recruited former Royal Air Force pilots as mercenaries on missions against Egyptian and Yemeni targets along the Yemeni border. In 1965, MI6 made a secret agreement with Israel to use its territory for launching attacks against the Yemeni Republicans. As Mawby notes, around 200,000 Yemenis died in the British effort to stop the Yemeni revolution, and it is rarely mentioned in British history.

THE BRITISH WAR ON REPUBLIC OF YEMEN (1967-1973)

After the Republic of Yemen was established in 1967, the British instigated a covert war to keep the port city of Aden. The National Liberation Front (NLF) of Yemen and the Arab nationalist Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY) were two political organizations that armed themselves and fought for control of the country. In addition to fighting the British, the organizations clashed as well. The NLF had a Marxist ideology while FLOSY emerged from trade unions and received backing from Egypt. The radicalization of Southwest Arabian politics can therefore be traced to the conflicts of the late colonial era and, more particularly, to British counter-insurgency campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s. C. Jones (“The International History Review”) describes how British covert—both official and unofficial—involvement provided cash and materials for the Yemeni Royalist forces from North Yemen to achieve the objectives of destroying the republican government of South Yemen.

The radicalization of Southwest Arabian politics can therefore be traced to the conflicts of the late colonial era and, more particularly, to British counter-insurgency

campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s. C. Jones (“The International History Review”) describes how British covert—both official and unofficial—involvement provided cash and materials for the Yemeni Royalist forces from North Yemen to achieve the objectives of destroying the republican government of North Yemen. In his article “The Covert War in Yemen,” Mark Curtis said, “Britain soon resorted to covert action to undermine the new Republican regime, in alliance with the Saudis and Jordan, the declassified files are interesting in showing that British officials were completely aware that they were – by any standards of moral behavior. They were supporting the ‘wrong’ side.” For instance, Christopher Gandy, who was Britain’s top official in Taiz in North Yemen, noted soon after the revolution that the rule of the Imam was unpopular with large elements of the population. This statement by the top British official in Taiz proves the physical British control over all of Yemen, not only the South, but also the North, despite of the Imam’s extant before the revolution. Massive of Yemeni official assassinations followed, “an extraordinary top secret document in the government files went even further in considering the options open to Britain. Entitled ‘Yemen: The range of possible courses of action open to us’, it considers ‘assassination or other action against key personnel’ involved in subversion in the federation” according to Curtis.

Within this tangle of covert warfare and the struggle to establish control in the region, British neocolonialism arose in the form of protecting Arab tyrants who avoided democratization and denied women’s rights. Clive Jones found that the British identified support for their efforts in Yemen from the Jordanian, Iranian, and Saudi monarchies, which felt just as threatened by the establishment of an authentic republic in Yemen. Clive Jones describes how the revolution in Yemen could be seen as a Nasserist thrust into the Arabian Peninsula given the support lent from Egypt to FLOSY. According to Clive Jones covert action was regarded as a legitimate tool of foreign policy as Britain attempted to secure the future of South Yemen against the temperament of the Yemeni’s revolution. The British trained the local Yemeni leaders to become warlords, and their plan succeeded. An action leads to divide the country and its people for a long time.

NEOCOLONIALISM AND THE COLD WAR KILLED DEMOCRACY AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS (1974-1990)

The pattern of superpower intervention during the Cold War deeply affected and exacerbated regional and civil wars in Yemen and troubled women throughout the Middle

East. Without a doubt, any war in the Arabian Peninsula hurts Yemen and affects its women, but the Cold War was especially destructive in terms of women's rights. As was seen in the revolutionary struggles of the 1960s, the Yemeni people preferred democratic rule. One of its benefits is that it gives autonomy for both women and men to claim sociopolitical rights.

Unfortunately, the Cold War slowed down what women had briefly achieved in the revolution. At the same time, the assassination of the greatest democratic revolutionaries in Yemen, such as President Ibrahim al-Hamdi, who was, to the Yemenis like John F. Kennedy to the American people, disturbed the development of the country, especially in women's education. President al-Hamdi briefly saved the revolution after the covert war. He seized power in North Yemen in a coup in 1974, and he quickly abolished tribal affiliations and the traditional caste system by proclaiming all Yemenis equal. He also launched a major project to develop infrastructure in Yemen, such as public schools, hospitals, and roads. President al-Hamdi also was working toward the unification of North and South Yemen, but he was assassinated in 1977, and it is believed that the murder was carried by those who were against the modern democratic rule in Yemen.

To make matters worse, a series of backward Yemeni leaders assumed power amidst a great deal of turmoil. Al-Hamdi's successor, Ahmed bin Hussein al-Ghashmi, was assassinated only eight months after taking office. After al-Ghashmi was assassinated, Abdul Karim Abdullah al-Arashi took power, but his rule only lasted for 25 days. Consequently, none of these leaders had a chance to set the stage for a lasting governmental plan for the country after the revolution, which left the Yemeni people to grieve for a real government. Such a case of a government in name only without real governmental function continued under Ali Abdullah Saleh from 1978 to the present. In effect, a wave of new Arab dictators, like Ali Abdullah Saleh, became an extension of the old colonial way, and Saleh made the mistake of involving Yemen in the Cold War. Because Britain already had colonial and neocolonial ties to Yemen, the United States used British influence in the region to contend for natural resources, secure strategic territory, and leverage the use of local guerrillas. In pursuit of Western goals in the region, the U.S. and Britain sought to be more comfortable with the Afghan resistance and Arab "Freedom Fighters" who were trying to drive the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. While this fighting is known as the Cold War in the West, in the Middle East it is regarded as both a Cold War and a real hot-boiling war. Because of its

colonial and neocolonial ties to Britain, Yemen allied with the United States in the Cold War, and both Yemen and Saudi Arabia offered young soldiers to fight in Afghanistan as well as financing for the Afghan “Freedom Fighters” seeking to oust the Soviet Union. In a PBS News Hour report from 1985, Jim Lehrer stated the following:

The Soviets didn't come into Afghanistan until December 1979, which was months after the U.S. began supporting the “freedom fighters” against the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, a pro-Soviet movement, which became the ruler party. This was followed by Soviet occupation in 1979. A lot (not all) of the early ‘freedom fighters’ were conservative Muslims outraged that the new government wanted to institute laws on women's rights and give girls and boys equal educational opportunities. (“Afghanistan: War without End?”)

The young Arabs and Yemenis, who were recruited as freedom fighters, were often underage boys who were sent to Afghanistan with the support of their leaders. Some families did not know where their children went to fight, and some children were taken without their permission. The freedom fighters who lived to return to Yemen or Saudi Arabia brought with them the ultra-conservative form of Islam practiced by the Taliban. These returning fighters had a new way of life that they wanted to impose on women and children. Joseph and Slyomovics wrote of some of these troubles. For example, when a young Yemeni soldier came back from Afghanistan he would teach religion to his own parents. He would tell them that their marriage was illegal and was not properly performed in accordance with *sharia* law, and that you need to remarry. In the same way, this young soldier would interfere with the personal life of his sisters and other women. Thus, women in the Arab world, like women of Afghanistan, were forced to pay a huge price for the Cold War in terms of enduring the subjugation of women called for in ultra-conservative life. The effects of this change were huge on women in Yemen. This overturned the hope that was spread during the revolution.

In addition, the new ultra-conservative teachings brought from Afghanistan as well as the West's anti-communist ideology turned into aggression aimed at Yemeni women and families. Russia's war in Afghanistan increased the isolation of women in Yemen as well as the whole of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Like the age of British colonialism, the Cold War changed Arab culture. It altered men's and women's understanding of freedom. It also made things more difficult for women in terms of getting an education, participating in politics, and enjoying freedoms in the public sphere (Joseph and Slyomovics).

Did the Cold War start and end in the Middle East? Did the Cold War start while the British were fighting against Yemeni nationalist revolutionaries? Women, human rights, democracy, and values were undermined worldwide because fighting shifted resources and wealth from trying to build up the Middle East to destroying a foreign army (the Soviet Union) within it (Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis*). One could further argue that the Cold War destroyed women's hope of democratic values and progress gained in Yemen and in the Arabian region.

THE EFFECTS OF THE COLD WAR IN YEMEN

By the time the Cold War ended in 1990, the Arab people were really too exhausted to advance their own economic, political, and cultural interests because of too many wars started by Europeans in the Middle East. I, as one of the most loving to life, in the world, could have used it better than only being witnessing too many disappointing wars and distractions to the Arab people. Everyone experimented with weapons and technology on the Arab people, such as Britain, Europe, Israel, and the United States. Nearly every major war fought among the European powers somehow involved the Arab people and Yemen's lands. This state of constant war attached many troubles to Yemen, and it did not allow a chance for building freedom, democracy, or human institutions. It seems that it is tough, if not impossible, for any women to have a life or improve the lives of her people.

Within the framework of Adams' culture of peace, he argues that peace reigned in Europe because domination over hundreds of millions of people in the colonies by the European nations was sustained only through constant, incessant, interminable wars. Adams adds that Europeans do not regard these conflicts as wars at all, since all too often they resembled, not wars, but brutal massacres or the wholesale slaughter of unarmed peoples. Unfortunately, Yemen and its women seem to have borne the brunt of this cost for peace and prosperity in Europe.

In the case of Yemen, colonialism and neocolonialism benefitted Britain economically but stifled the growth of indigenous wealth in Yemen. Colonialism oppressed local rulers and societies as a whole, and it subjugated men, women, and defenders of freedom. This subjugation complicated the relations between the ruled and the rulers. I argue that this situation caused men to take out their frustrations on women. The circumstances of

oppressed men are to adapt into the new culture, which is imposed from above by colonial authorities. This new culture is not one native to the Arab people, and it forces women to be unequal to men. Arab men in the formerly colonized regions remained without political autonomy or self-sufficiency even after colonialism ended. This is because native leaders retained the same system of culture of isolation and oppression that outsiders had perpetrated from the colonial period through neocolonialism.

The absence of a responsible and fair governing system, instability accompanied by neocolonial trade expansion, and increased social destruction in Yemen affected women's lives in a way similar to the case of women in Afghanistan who have few rights. This gives dictators and religious leaders a chance to further ignore Yemeni and Arab women's rights. This has gradually collapsed the earlier call for Arab women's freedom that originated from 19th-century Egyptian men, such as Ahmed Fariss Al-Shdaq and Qasim Amin, who wrote several books on women. For example, one of the books was Amin's *Tahrir Al-Marah Wa-Tamdon Al-Islami (Women's Freedom and the Islamic Evolution [1894])*.

After 1970s, gradually slowed women's activism, and sometimes stopped intermittently. Instead of building on the efforts of those early women in Yemen and Egypt, the world became complicated. Despite the efforts of Arab feminists, the pressure on women to withdraw from the public sphere became so intense that these organizations could barely survive. Again, this is very similar to what happened to women in Afghanistan. The region was still trying to recover from invasions, World Wars I and II, and the Cold War. All of these conflicts severely damaged women's status in the society. Because Yemeni women were forced to live among foreign soldiers, it led Yemeni men to be too protective of their women. This had an isolating effect on women, and their rights suffered as a result. The outcome of this legacy of warfare left a powerful strain on the regions' cultural integrity and Arab women in general. Gains in women's rights that had been made from the 1920s to the 1960s were reversed because of the wars that rocked Yemen. The violence of war and its uncertainty caused the Yemeni people to sympathize with the "learned culture" imposed during the British colonial era. This was a culture where daughters stayed at home rather than went to school. The tendency for Yemeni women to live in isolation not only accompanied a dark period characterized by degradation, which shut down economic growth, but it also

increased illiteracy, and that is what effectively caused Yemeni women to lose their roles as leaders.

Perhaps the most negative effect of the Cold War on Arab governance is illustrated by Fattah, as cited in Hayajneh, when he writes that “In 1975, Arab countries were responsible for 20 out of 101 authoritarian systems (almost 19.9 %) (“The U.S. Strategy” 28). In 1999, these countries were responsible for 47% of the total number of authoritarian regimes in the world. In other words, while the West may have won the Cold War and defeated communism, they did so at the expense of freedom and democracy in the Middle East. The political rights of the Arab people were suppressed, and authoritarian regimes have flourished since the mid-1970s.

According to Olimat, the George H. W. Bush Administration spoke of democratization in the Middle East, especially after the first Gulf War fought between the U.S. and Iraq, but the discussion faded quickly as two key leaders in the region—Mubarak of Egypt and Abdullah of Saudi Arabia—resisted such processes. Mubarak and Abdullah both refused to include the opposition in government and incorporate it into the political process. Olimat further describes how Middle East expert Tim Niblock attempted as early as 1998 to change the debate by calling for an examination of the instruments of democratization instead of investing in decades of fruitless debate about “why” Arabs can never be “democrats.” Unfortunately, Niblock’s call fell on deaf ears.

GOVERNMENT WITHOUT GOVERNING (1973-2011)

The Yemeni people fail to unite their country after the assassination of committed President Ibrahim Al-Hamdi. The political infighting and divisiveness that characterized relations between North and South Yemen finally thawed after both governments of North and South Yemen reached an agreement to unite. Yemen proclaimed itself a presidential republic and a multiparty parliamentary democracy on May 22, 1990. The parliament consists of the House of Deputies and an appointed Upper Chamber or Senate.

The government without a government of being responsible to its people, heavily arrived and instituted: The approved constitution by the referendum of 1991, it was amended in 1994 to benefit the ruling party. The Supreme Court heads the judicial branch, this should be separate, but sadly the president allowed interfering. The press is among the freest in the

Arab world; but some journalists have been executed. Gender disparity is widespread despite constitutional rights guaranteed and obligated equally to women and men:

Dr. Abdullah Al-Faqih, a professor of political science at Sana'a University in Yemen, wrote an article in the *Yemeni Times* about the constitution of the Republic of Yemen and how it tries to include the principle of "equal citizenship." Article 27 of the constitution stipulates that "[all] citizens are equal before the law, equal in rights and duties, without discrimination on the bases of sex, color, origin, language, social status or profession or belief," with article (41) of amended Constitution of 1994, to state that "[all] citizens are equal in rights and public duties" (Mawby). These emphasize on equality has clearly declines, but the plan is to return to the previous article after the Arab Spring, (the Yemeni constitution). The constitution is the supreme law of the land, and all rights and duties are derived from constitutional and legal rules. Clause 27 explicitly states that rights and duties in society are conferred equally for men and women, blacks and browns, rich and poor, workers and entrepreneurs, and Muslims and non-Muslims.

However, the constitution does not necessarily translate into social behavior in everyday life. In a multiethnic, multicultural, tribal, class-based, and sectarian society like Yemen, "equal citizenship" must come from a compromise among competing, broad-based social coalitions. Many Yemenis embraces a liberal view of the world whereby individuals, regardless of biological and social differences, are equal in terms of rights and duties. Others are deepening the holds on conservative view of social relations and class. Government officials extend these matters, and tension has profound influences on the ways in which the Yemeni Constitution is implemented, particularly Article 27. While this Article guarantees equality, anyhow, Yemeni women are still trying to overcome the "learned culture" from the colonial period that separates the sexes and places women under the control of men, but they can choose to be free, which is similar to being free to choose polygamy.

Some people may understand Islam as endorsing polygamy, but in reality it is not permissible under *Sharia* law. There is specific personal freedom given in the Qur'an, but it is with great restrictions. For example, it limits marriage for a man to only one wife. For a man to marry more than one wife, he has to treat them with exact equality in everything. The Qur'an says: "two and three and four [wives]; but, if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one" (*Al-Qur'an* 4:3). Thus, it is only one woman for one

man, for it is impossible for a man to uphold the exact marriage responsibility for several wives.

THE FIRST VOTE FOR WOMEN IN SANA'A (1993-1994)

During the parliamentary election of 1993, Fuzia Noman and I lectured around the country for six months before the elections, and we concentrated on the North. Our candidacy was for the state of Sana'a (the capitol of Yemen). We had eleven women in parliament from the South, and we aimed to increase the number of women and engage women of the North, who campaigned for the first time. However, we not only focused on our campaign but we also focused on encouraging the public participation through political representation. We found acceptance and attendance to the cause among people. Many knew Fuzia, who was the daughter of Ahmed Mohammed Noman, one of the Yemeni revolutionaries of the 1960s. He also became a prime minister of the first Republic of Yemen after the end of the Royalists.

Including myself, there were eight women who were parliamentary candidates competing alongside men who did not believe women should hold political office. But, these eight women received the first ever governmental permission for women's right to run for office in the capitol. The difference between receiving permission to run and actual governmental support was great. As a result, Fuzia and I stepped down from the ruling General Party, and we become independent candidates after we realized that the party did not really support us or any of the women's applications for office. From then on, we decided to educate the public of their constitutional rights, especially women.

The outcome of the elections was that all eight women candidates in Sana'a lost. In the country as a whole, only two women out of eleven were elected to the 301-seat "Shura" parliament that year. Yet, women's candidacy affirmation in Yemen was a significant and crucial proclamation for their political future, not only in Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula, but for all women in the Arab region.

Even though my colleagues and I lost, we were pleased by the steps accomplished, both culturally and legislatively. The steps and roles we went through became an essential legal record and process that entered into government precedence. It is a right for women to vote and ensure their political participation. The learned colonial culture

was not easy to battle. There was a fight and hard work against the total denial of the constitution, women's history including the Qur'an, and the United Nations' support of women's rights. Therefore, women's candidacy became a national right in Yemen again for the first time since around the reign of Queen Arwa.

On one occasion, a man told me that "women do not rule according to Islam." I immediately quoted passages of history and the Qur'an as evidence, and I let it be known that women will not continue to be silenced on their rights. Knowledgeable Yemenis know that they cannot deny the *Shura*, the "democratic" rule originated by Bilqis the Queen of Saba, nor they can deny the pledge of the 1962 and 1967 revolutions for equality, independence, and democratic rule. The Yemeni society does not resist the idea of women's political role. Yet, men who discriminate and drive women away from basic jobs are those who dislike competing against women, and the same goes in politics. But, there is a need to educate societies to respect the rights of people.

Even though women were not responsible for the country's situation, in the past or present, women have to bear its ills. They attend to those who tell women that whatever opportunities women in Yemen have, are still good compared to the short time of the revolution. Some say that there are enough women who are driving cars, seeking employment and owning businesses, so others should not be encouraged to follow in their footsteps. In reality, women's roles in the public sphere remain limited, such as in the judiciary and the parliament. If men truly understood their sociopolitical role in building a nation, they would not distinguish which gender does what work to advance the nation. Unfortunately, this is not the case. All that we are speaking about, and the troubles of the past and the present in Yemen, lead to a disabled government.

For example, Yemen plunged back into civil war in 1994. The former president of South Yemen, Ali Salim Al-Beidh, withdrew from his position of vice-president in the newly formed reunification government. Al-Beidh was angry over violent attacks against members of his Yemeni Socialist Party as well as the continued economic underdevelopment of southern Yemen. After two months of fighting between the North and the South, President Salih regained control of southern Yemen, but this was not without substantial damage to infrastructure and casualties.

ARAB WOMEN AND AMERICAN ATTEMPTS TO SPREAD DEMOCRACY (1994-2000)

Numerous pieces of evidence point to heavy U.S. involvement in the Middle East in terms of spreading democracy, but they seem to be contradictory given “Operation Enduring Freedom” within the so-called “War on Terror,” which further asserts global-neocolonialism. The U.S. Department of State defines democracy as government in which power and civic responsibility are exercised by all citizens directly or through their freely elected representatives, and the George W. Bush administration supported NGOs to help Arab women achieve rights and democratic leadership in the hope of changing their autocratic society (Ottaway). Ottaway further argues that the U. S. government has made the promotion of women’s rights and the empowerment of women to assert democracy in the Arab world a priority.

Nevertheless, U.S. government does not seem to stand by its promises to the Arab people and those who seek democracy through protest. The West seems to stand behind dictators who are willing to tolerate or promote U.S. interests in the region. Mubarak in Egypt, Ben Ali in Tunisia, and Gaddafi in Libya are just a few examples. Arab people hope that the international community will support their peaceful call and demonstrations rather than support dictators. Despite the U.S. call for democratization, it has been reluctant to exert pressure on dictators whom it feels are allies. In the article “Is the World Too Big to Fail?” Noam Chomsky says:

To mention just one case that is highly relevant today, in internal discussion in 1958, President Eisenhower expressed concern about “the campaign of hatred” against us in the Arab world, not by governments, but by the people. The National Security Council (NSC) explained that there is a perception in the Arab world that the U.S. supports dictatorships and blocks democracy and development so as to ensure control over the resources of the region. What the National Security Council wrote in 1958 could be restated today in almost the same words.

Chomsky says that the “U.S. fear of the Muslim Brotherhood is really a fear of democracy in the Middle East, and examines the role of U.S. corporations in a ‘stable’ Egypt in the Middle East” (“Is the World Too Big to Fail”). With the status of U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Palestinian problem, and the support of dictators, some Arabs wouldn’t accept talking about democracy as a true intention of the U.S., but the Arab people hope this perception is wrong. Through the U.S. or NGOs, women’s rights cannot flourish in

non-democratic states. The UN says that world democracy will not work without U.S. support. The requirements for a democratic state are being free of foreign militarization, being free from imposing other nations' interests, ending foreign interference in state affairs, and stopping deals or support to political leaders who consistently undermine democracy and human rights. Ending the U.S militarization is one of the first steps to democracy and freedom for Arab women. Getting rid of this support is the prerequisite of self-determination and for freedom and the building of a true and honest democracy.

The democracy-promoting efforts of the U.S. and its mission announced to improve women's rights in the Arab world cannot be empirically accomplished in the midst of conflicts in which it supports tyrants in power and uses them as allies. Ottaway doubts the success of U.S.-sponsored NGOs in the Arab world that try to advance democracy and women's rights. She further sees confusing the advancement of women and the advancement of democracy as not only incorrect, but also dangerous in the atmosphere of the deep distrust of the United States that already exists in the Middle East (Ottaway). In other words, America cannot be for democracy and women's rights while also supporting the rule of one family in a lineage system of governance. This is a contradictory position, which disagrees with American democratic values to not deny people's rights.

In the post-colonial era both Arab men and women have been deprived of political representation. Arab women are unable to improve their lives due to the absence of self-determination; they are greatly oppressed and isolated. The current revolutions sweeping the Arab world are active in demanding equal representation from government, gaining political freedom, and achieving equal rights for both men and women. They hope that the international community will support these revolutions and isolate the oppressors and dictators, yet that support has been slow in coming, despite the fact that the U.S and the international community claim to support women's rights, democracy, and human rights.

THE EFFECTS OF CURRENT ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ON YEMENI WOMEN

Despite the dire outlook for Yemeni women, there are a few who are educated and own businesses in cities and towns. However, it is not easy for many women to achieve this lifestyle because services and government organizations are unobtainable where they are most needed. There are women struggling with a short-sighted government that is not

offering innovations and opportunities for women to transform society alongside the masses of laboring men. There are some new businesses created by women's independent efforts. Usually, newly educated women contribute to the society. For example, Al Jundi speaks of Dr. Najat Al-Jumaan who is a pioneering Yemeni businesswoman and professor of administration science at Sana'a University. She owns a commercial trading company and a consulting company that provides marketing studies. Sarah Zabarah is the owner of Sazra Chocolatier in the Sana'a Trade Center. She currently makes all the chocolates herself, but business is growing, and she is in the process of training a few chefs to assist her. In addition to being a chocolatier, Zabarah has launched a new project: YoO Magazine (Al-Jundi). What this demonstrates is that educated Yemeni women can contribute to entrepreneurship, job growth, and the development of the service-sector economy.

Sadly, these educated and upwardly mobile women are the exception and not the rule. Al Jundi explains how Yemeni women provide more than 75% of the household food, but this huge contribution is met with unpaid wages. It does not help women's personal finances in any way, but it helps to compensate the family's needs. It is very similar to what is happening in Egypt where El Saadawi describes how millions of women who work on the land or as part of family or household enterprises are not remunerated for their work because the proceeds go to the man. El Saadawi also reminds us that "man's work ends at setting sun, yet woman's work is never done" (246, 252). Miles found that the harder the conditions, the harder women have to work to maintain their families and create the best environment they can for themselves (121).

A study on women in Yemen, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, and Cyprus indicates that women spend long hours in daily labor-intensive work in all aspects of agricultural production (between 12-16 hours a day). Up to 5 hours a week are spent on collecting firewood and up to 4 hours daily are spent fetching water and fuel for domestic use ("Women, Agriculture, and Rural Development").

Al Jundi also adds that women play a key role in household food provision and hence food availability. Agriculture is largely a woman's effort and the main basis of the economy (Al Jundi). Women produce grains, fruits, vegetables, coffee, cotton, dairy products, livestock (sheep, goats, cattle, and camels), poultry, fish, and handicraft. The industries in Yemen are crude oil production and petroleum refining; small-scale production of cotton,

textiles and leather goods; food processing; handicrafts; cement, rock, salt, marble, and coal. The exports include \$3.92 billion (“Free On Board [F.O.B.]”) consisting of crude oil, coffee, dried and salted fish. Imports include \$3.042 billion (F.O.B.) of food and live animals, machinery and equipment, and chemicals.

Women are responsible for more labor-intensive work that requires careful physical effort, tolerance, and persistence. Women use their hands or simple tools to broadcast seeds and fertilizers, hand weed and harvest, and carry produce on their head or backs. These heavy workloads leave very little time for rest, leisure, or the pursuit of activities other than work. Yet, women earn two-thirds of wages earned by men, and for many women the share in decision making is not proportionate with the amount and nature of their agricultural work (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD]).

Since the revolutions of 1962 and 1974, Yemen has developed in some capacity, but the Millennium Development Goals report shows that Yemen still has a long way to go. The “World Human Development Report” of 2001 and 2004, shows that about 42 percent of all households live below the poverty line in Yemen (WDR 2004 - World Bank). The longer hours of work, which is usually unpaid subsistence agriculture, are accompanied by much less freedom, social access, and economic opportunity. The landless women are the most vulnerable members in the society. This wide gender gap placed Yemen at 131 among 146 countries rated on the Gender Development Index for 1999. These and other factors contribute to Yemen’s low ranking - 133rd among the 162 countries that were rated - on the 1999 “Human Development Index” cited in the “World Human Development Report of 2001 and in 2004” (IFAD)(WDR 2004 - World Bank).

The IFAD “Yemen Rural Poverty” report indicates the gender gap deficiency is more common in the highlands such as Tihama, close to the Red sea, and villages on the Arabian Sea. Most of the country’s poor rural people are concentrated in the six governorates of Sana’a, Taiz, Ibb, Hodeida, Dahmar and Hadramwt, which also has the largest population. Fundamental social, cultural, and religious constraints affect efforts to improve women’s status and condition.

But, the greatest development challenge of all remains the educational deficiency of Yemeni women. Al-Jundi found a female illiteracy rate of 75%. Education is a crucial part of approaches to improve individuals’ well-being and societies’ economic and social

development. A close study by the UN in 2010 also shows that illiteracy among women and girls is particularly high—70% of females and 29.5% of males are illiterate—which is a social deficiency with serious implications for economic development in Yemen.

As most populations live in rural areas, the IFAD's "Yemen Rural Poverty" report shows that rural women's collecting water for the household is one of the heavier burdens and a disproportionately large workload. In highland and mountain areas women and girls typically spend up to seven hours daily collecting water. As a result, girls are deprived of an opportunity for education; so many rural families remain without new income, which affects the overall national economy. Significant economic and political strides were made since political reunification, but civil war and political conflict are still present today. In addition, at least 800,000 Yemeni workers were forced to return from Kuwait during the first Gulf war in 1991 to join an already bad economy. Yet, with a sagging gross national product and per capita income of \$380 in 2004, Yemen's 19.7 million people remain, on average, among the poorest in the world.

FROM INTERNATIONAL TRADE OF OIL TO THE ARAB SPRING

Poverty in countries like Yemen seems all the more alarming given the vast oil reserves found in the Middle East, but the international oil policy is as a circle blocking political changes in the Middle East, and it inhibits economic progress. According to Ozarowski, 66% of oil resources are situated in the Arab world and Iran. He also concludes that oil is connected with power security, which today is becoming the main great powers' policy. On Amy Goodman's "Democracy Now" web site, Chomsky said:

...it was not a matter of importing oil from Saudi Arabia, but just ensuring the maintenance of control over the world's major energy resources. And that, as the National Security Council concluded correctly, was leading to the campaign of hatred against us, the support for dictators, for repression, for violence and the blocking of democracy and development. ("This is the Most Remarkable...")

Given Chomsky's statements, can we say that the Arab women's rights and freedoms are taken away because of the U.S. is willing to support oil dictators? Women in Yemen as well as women in Saudi Arabia are greatly affected by such a policy. How long will the Arab people be held captives to oil? Will they have to wait for the rest of the world to satisfy their needs? These questions need answers, and scholars who study this matter suggest that the

Arabs' oil wealth helps explain their failure to democratize. Ross writes that many observers claim this is due to the region's Islamic traditions. But, she suggests that oil, not Islam, is at fault; and that she sees oil production in many other countries explains why women lag behind. Oil production reduces the number of women in the labor force, which in turn reduces their political influence. In this manner the Middle East, including Arab world, is treated by the rest of the world instrumentally. Irrespective of domestic or human rights issues, regular oil and gas supplies are the most important (Ozarowski).

In his speech to the Islamic World on June 2nd, 2009, U.S. President Obama stated: "I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideals; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere" ("Cairo Speech"). President Obama is not alone in issuing this kind of rhetoric. Former U.S. President George H. W. Bush also said similar things when he was in office, especially concerning the idea that "These are not just American ideals they are human rights."

Given these two positions—one pointing out how the oil industry dictates the West's policies in the Arab world and the other suggesting that the West's interests concern a humanitarian trajectory—the contradiction seems obvious. Under global scrutiny, Western decision makers seem traumatized by the recent developments occurring in the Arab world now called "The Arab Spring." The Obama Administration did not forcefully support the "Arab Spring," neither did the Saudi King Abdullah.

All over the news in the U.S. and on Al-Jazeera, stories and photos show protesters, both men and women, being suppressed or killed in Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain in this recent uprising. It is interesting to see that the Saudi military went in to help the Bahraini dictator fight and kill protesters without the U.S. interference like we saw when the Iraqi military went into Kuwait (Bortot). Bortot writes:

The Yemeni protesters are against all interferences and interventions in Yemeni domestic political affairs... We call on Saudi Arabia and the United States not to intervene in the affairs of Yemen and the abortion of popular revolution... as we condemn and strongly condemn all their positions, recent efforts to dilute the demands of the rebels... and prevent the establishment of a democratic system based on justice, freedom and equality. ("A New Group of Arab Americans...")

Arab people know that the U.S. needs to maintain its credibility among its people and nations as people, and not dictators.

James Gundun is a U.S. spokesman for Yemen's Coordinating Council for the Youth Revolution of Change (CCYRC). Gundun says that President Barack Obama recently received a letter from Yemen's Coordinating Council for the Youth Revolution of Change (CCYRC). The letter states the following:

One of the leading street coalitions demanding freedom and equality in a country divided by its ruler, the nebulous Ali Abdullah Saleh, CCYRC celebrated America's Independence Day and wished prosperity on "his Excellency" Obama. Yemen's revolutionaries, CCYRC counseled, seek the same freedom that American revolutionaries fought and died so valiantly for. The people of Yemen had really expected that the President, Government and people of the United States will recognize these genuine aspirations of the Yemeni people. ("America's Open War...")

CCYRC's letter was dated July 6th, and Gundun argues that the White House and concerned administration departments seemed to totally and almost deliberately avoid taking account of the great sacrifices made by the protesting masses of Yemenis.

The problem is that President Salih operates outside the democratic institutions in Yemen. Real power is exercised through a network of personal relations, patronage, and clientele ties that involve family, class, and local affinities. Since a multiparty system was not allowed before reunification, the strength of party leadership matters today more than does ideology. Among forty Yemeni political parties and organizations, the dominant party in government is the General People's Congress (GPC) of the president.

As it is today, neither the reunification of South and North Yemen nor the democratic process and the elections can withstand the interference of the Kingdom of Al-Saud; thus, it is easy to undermine the democratic process and elections in Yemen. Consequently, instability due to international and regional interference contributes to the dysfunctional government.

Perhaps the best illustration of the political dysfunction in Yemen is the 2006 elections. Using the "war on terrorism" as a backdrop, Salih included his rival Faisal Ibn Shamlan as a presidential candidate. Supported by women and moderates, Faisal Ibn Shamlan was elected, but President Shalih did not allow him to enter the Presidential Palace. The dictator Salih refused to accept the democratic elections results that favored Ibn Shamlan,

and Salih intended to bomb the Presidential Palace if the new elected president wanted to take office. These statements were said by General Al-Ahmer to the Yemeni people in 2011.

The essence of the revolution in the 1960s was to build a democratic government with equality and freedom for all, but this was turned back to serve a few people associated with a tyrannical system controlled by the dictator Salih and the Imam Ahmed. The people's plans and goals, agreed upon during the revolution, have been terminated for the last 50 years. When one looks back at Yemeni history from the 1960s to the present, there is little to indicate social reform. This is why the "Arab Spring" revolutions occurring in the region represent the yearning of the Arab people for freedom and dignity. For so long, the world has ignored the wishes of the Arab people prolonging the reign of dictatorships in the region. Maybe, the world should put the Arab people, their human rights, and dignity ahead of oil interests at least for one single time. Is it right that the Arabian Peninsula will be home to weapons to protect the oil and not people's rights and freedom? Women and men's autonomy is held captive by a few international business interests. Can we do this, because it is clear that "the oil—the lifeblood of the world's economy" is in their homeland? (Ozarowski). The people aren't allowed politically to be a part of their society. The women are the most oppressed in the world; they are mostly without education or earnings. Can we leave most of the Arab children hungry by keeping dictators in power?

Women have no place in the Arab dictatorship system; it is the most troubling scheme in the world. But, the current wave of democratization and political development in the Arab world is smoothly accommodating all political forces in the region including women and religious differences. The main instrument for such stability is democracy, the rule of law, transparency, employment, and good governance.

THE 2011 REVOLUTION IN YEMEN AND WOMEN'S POLITICS

Like other nations involved in the "Arab Spring," Yemen currently is in a state of revolution with the population demanding a new government, but President Salih does not want to leave power. Yemen is the only republic on the Arabian Peninsula and also the only country on the peninsula where the leader is elected by the people. Yemeni women were the first to receive the right to vote in the region. Will Yemen bring about change on the Arabian Peninsula? Dahlgren writes about how it is a shame that the global community will not act

against what's happening in Yemen in terms of removing the dictatorship ("Democratization"). Peaceful demonstrators are being fired by government forces now, but the international community is still slow to intervene.

While the momentum of the "Arab Spring" seems to be continuing in Yemen, those who were against the revolutions of 1962 and 1967 are still opposing democracy. In 1962, after the revolution prevailed in Sana'a, the Saudi royalists helped Britain in a fight to return Yemen's Royalists to power. Just as there were Royalists against the Republic many years ago, they are still around today. Though the British are not the target of Yemeni protesters in the "Arab Spring," they are demonstrating against the same tyrannical system. The protestors threaten the authoritarian system and its international supporters. All revolutions are not equal. While Libya is deemed worthy of the West's "humanitarian intervention," such as express delivery of B-2 bombers, F-15 fighters, and cruise missile, protesters elsewhere have been denied such Western largesse. In response to the atrocities in Yemen, for example, President Obama has sent mere words. The reason, as one astute commentator notes, is that Yemen's dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh is a "useful tyrant" (Media Lens).

For the Yemenis, democracy is just as important now as it was in ancient times. The Yemeni women's democracy is receiving substantial recognition as Tawakul Karman shares the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize along with Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowe (Karman). Karman is a journalist, activist, and one of the few female members of parliament in Yemen. In 2005, she founded the organization, Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC), which is a non-governmental organization that works towards promoting civil rights, particularly freedom of opinion and expression, and democratic rights. Because the Yemeni government refused her organization a license to publish its views, Karman began a protest that continues to this day. She is also actively involved in promoting the "Arab Spring" or "Jasmine Revolution."

She also requested the Doha Centre for Media Freedom's assistance to set up a television and radio station, which would be named Bilqis, in honour of the Queen of Sheba. In fact, some already call Karman the Bilqis of the present-day Arab people. As the example of Karman illustrates, the Yemeni women assume a dominant role in the protests in Yemen. This role has been celebrated extensively. The tent camp that has been in place for months close to Sana'a University is inhabited by both men and women, and women are also seen

leading demonstrations. The current government in Yemen has returned to isolation, suppression, and murdering demonstrators. In *Contesting Realities: The Public Sphere and Morality in Southern Yemen*, Dahlgren wonders whether Saudi Arabia will have time to introduce changes to women's position before tent camps are pitched there too. With the Arab Spring hitting in Yemen, the Saudi king has, in fact, promised to give Saudi women the vote and the right to stand for office in the local elections in 2015, but nothing came out of it. Nevertheless, women continue their protests, demanding, for example, full citizenship and the right to drive a car (Dahlgren, "Will Yemen"). One could see the current situation in Yemen as both half-full and half-empty. While the protestors have not given up on their demands for the removal of Saleh, he too will not give up power.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO REFORM THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AND ACHIEVE EQUALITY

1. Women need to review their sociopolitical role in its original and restate the law.
2. Political offices must be equally sought to riven between women and men, not between political parties; such as equal parliamentary members, presidential cabinet, government ministries, diplomatic representations, and all the rest.
3. The government must realize its responsibility in the implementation of this fact; it should work with individuals, organizations, and legislators to amend laws.
4. The government needs to create a nationwide mechanism for women to report cases in which were discriminated against on the basis of their gender.
5. The government, women's rights NGOs, and human rights NGOs should implement women's rights awareness programs to educate women on their rights and protections under Yemen's laws constitution.
6. The government must implement the suggestions made by the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination 2of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at a local level by conveying national laws in conformity with CEDAW.

Some of these recommendations were mentioned in Nazir and Tomppert's book, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice*.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Within historical fact, women and politics in Yemen convey a goal of encouragement through the memory of past struggles, accomplishments, and aspirations of Arab and Yemeni women as they assume leadership roles and political rule. Yemen's civilization is one of the oldest on earth, and women were its central creators. Throughout its history, women played significant roles in politics and held a high position in the Yemeni culture. The Queens of Yemen, such as Bilqis or Sheba, are a source of pride for the Yemeni nation. Queen Asma and then Queen Arwa ruled Yemen longer than any other leaders in advanced Islamic history. Historians document their rule as a time of prosperity and command because of the queen's attention to building water stations, schools, and agriculture. Nonetheless, for a long time after Arwa and others, the state of Yemen was colonized and divided. Many rounds of insiders and invaders have struggled for control. They have been continuously changing the nature of the original order and steady rule that was in place from the time of Bilqis.

The geographically strategic location of Yemen made it an active economic trading zone for three millennia. The green and wealthy ancient Yemen was ruled by women when world trade was established among the Arab region, India, and China along the "Silk Road" in the 10th century B.C. The most famous Yemeni women governed until the 12th century. In the 15th and 16th centuries, the region became the place of the great European voyages of trade and discovery, which facilitated the jump-start of the European industrial revolution (Boyle, *European Voyages*). Before and after the Europeans came, global trade was being channeled through Yemen, and it enhanced the flow and exchange of spiritual and scientific ideas, religious pilgrims, great philosophers, and military adventures and conquest.

An open and free civilization with its wealth and natural greatness was placed under colonial war between several European nations and Britain during the 19th century. In their fields and towns, the Yemenis found themselves under sudden attack; ever since then they have been under constant threat of conflicts and in the hands of oppressive Sheiks, Imams, and presidents. This situation has left Yemen without a well-established government. As a

result, the Yemeni people could not get over the British colonial era, its covert war, the Cold War, and the War on Terrorism. The Yemenis were banned from self-determination, education, and economic development. To women, it is known that conquests and wars affect women's chances for improvement. In Yemen, these conflicts slowed women's political participation and general participation in the public sphere.

The Yemeni civilization's original and natural culture was replaced by a learned culture—introduced by foreign invaders—that emphasizes masculinity, violence, and war. These changes limited women's natural public role and leadership. The British colonization was the longest and the most instrumental agent in imposing a retrograde cultural change that functioned against the advanced civilization of Yemeni women and men. Even though we acknowledge the greatness of women building civilizations, some do not hesitate to destroy this legacy by subjugating women's rights and opportunities. The learned culture is against women's political involvement, and this trend is being renewed over and over again by invaders and wars.

The importance of women in political history is undeniable, but women need to prevail against colonization, isolation, and ignorance. This is the story of human history and the advancement of civilizations, and it is a fundamental human right. The richness of this subject deserves academic attention from disciplines such as women's studies, political science, and history. This context aims to connect the missing forgotten theme to the present factor of women in politics. What expelled, isolated, and interrupted women from their natural sociopolitical role is violence and distractions made by invaders, such as Britain. Yemen's independence was tarnished, and its people's standard of living has been greatly disturbed by invasions and wars, cultural changes, and mostly by ignorance to human rights.

Human advancement cannot stop by itself; it only stops when someone interferes with it. For this reason, women must not give up to the learned culture, and Yemen must defend its past. The recent re-appearance of women in Yemeni politics, like Nobel Peace Prize winner Tawakul Karman and many others like her, is a standard right that is rooted in centuries of history and culture. Faced with stagnation and indifference, the new generation will reconstitute the importance of women's role in government. The Yemeni people must reverse what was denied to them and reclaim their rights to self-determination. This is what the Yemeni and Arab people are asking through the "Arab Spring." The problem is that

governments are disconnected from their people and reality. They do not offer real leadership, development plans, or solutions to political problems. This must change. It is a fact that there are masses of jobless women (far more than men), and Yemen lacks all kinds of necessary development institutions, which creates a self-perpetuating cycle of economic dependency.

Moreover, the deterioration of the Yemeni social structure involved the complexity of an intentional and systematic abuse of historical misinterpretation. With women's absence from academic fields, Arab historians have long neglected modern theoretical approaches, and their recent interest in past social and economic developments are solely a post-World War II (and post-revolutionary) phenomena. The depressed status of the Arab region as a whole is caused by a lack of the right leadership and the downing of education. It is consequently not astonishing that historians of Arab women have arrived at a late interest in the subject. Also, there are still imperialists who use political and historical arguments to show that women's position in the Arab world and the Middle East was dreadful until the region came under the watch of the Western "enlightenment." Nonetheless, women in all social and political aspects were, and still are, ignored.

The spirit and legacy of Yemen's political struggles as well as women's historical role in leading the nation still exist today in new forms. Women fought during the revolution and died. The recent "Arab Spring" uprising and awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Tawakul Karman are testaments to the longevity of these beliefs. Nationalist women in Yemen have had to face a tough opposition in politics, men, and learned culture that was created by a long period of colonization attached to isolation of Arabian women. Women were denied political rights, education, and self-determination throughout the colonial and postcolonial times. However, women equally extend enthusiasm attached to their sense of a rightful past and the hope for a future sovereign nation.

Women's nationalism means to free the country from dictatorship and authoritarianism, achieve political rights for all, and broaden the people's passion to improve economic and social matters. Women again need to be in a position in which they can make their own social and family laws. They do not desire to have laws made for them by Yemeni men or colonizers. Given the need for governmental transparency and responsibility in a time of war and self-determination, women's nationalism carries with it a sense of accountability,

rights, and duty. It builds on women's political tradition as heads of state and protectors of rights, which reflect deeply in enhancing Yemeni women's nationalism. The prosperous time of women's leadership in people's memories and in the books of history, unlike the history of imperialism and isolation, is being acted out in daily life. Imperialism makes no room for women or Yemen's tradition of having female leaders, but democratization is what nationalists wish to constitute.

The world has changed since the time of British colonization, and Arab leaders with their systems of government need to change too. Some leaders are blaming religious extremists for the lack of power being transferred to the people, but the recent events in the "Arab Spring" do not indicate that religion is the problem. The people's discontent originates from Arab leaders and their constant wars. Specifically, I am pointing to their wars against the people's development and education. I am pointing to the absence of democracy and the transfer of rule. There are a host of other political problems, such as colonialism, imperialism, the covert war in Yemen, and the Cold War. Today Yemen and the Middle East as a whole are grappling with the consequences of creating international soldiers who were motivated by ultra-conservative Islam to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. It is so shameful on the West and East that religion was allowed to be used in this way. It seems that these European nations and the United States intend to engage the Arab people and the Arabian Peninsula in all their wars and more, like they did during World War I and World War II. The Arab people are still facing the effects and results of these two world wars in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, for example.

Similar to the rest of the Arab world with its leftover-leaders of foreign conquests, Yemen has been cut off from its past values, and women are alienated from leadership as a result. The long subjugations caused Arab women and men to be deprived of knowledge about themselves and their natural history. Familial connections in the form of nepotism and outsiders' interference have kept people as strangers in their own society, and it has kept the worst tyrants on earth in power. They aren't up to the task of truly leading their people to peace and prosperity like the queens in the past. Yemen is part of the Arab world, which has seen great revolutions and the failure of those revolutions to bring the intended political changes. The leaders of the Yemeni revolutions of 1962 and 1967 ultimately failed to reform

the Republic and its economy; they failed the people's expectations and trust as if the colonial era was still in place.

The Arab people built highly advanced civilizations enriching our world with science and technology that are still present today. An open government and *Hokm Shurawee* or *shura* is the original Arabian culture of governmental rule; it was used to structure ancient civilizations and practiced in Mecca and Medina. The Yemeni and Arab demands of full practice of citizenship are a lawful right that the colonial and tyrannical isolated system could not offer over the years. Colonial and Arab tyrants disrespected human rights, their past, and the international laws. Arab tyrants discriminate to divide and repudiate self-rule in order to rule. On the other hand, Arab women, as heads of state, made *shura* a public ruling. This cannot be removed from living history within the Yemeni people's minds. This was not only stated in human history, but it is mentioned in the Bible and the Quran, *Sorah al-naml* (*Al-Qur'an* 379).

Those who speak of democracy, believe in democracy, and shout for human rights ought to stand by their wards and detach themselves from tyrants, particularly those who are killing their own people. Rather than accepting peoples' rights to reform their governments, these tyrants curtail people's rights in order to stay in power. In the eyes of the people, they are incapable leaders who cannot steer their nations responsibly. It is the intent of this study to help recall women's historical record of leadership and re-invent women's contemporary role in the political responsibility of their nations. In turn, this will help to restage some political policies toward women. The challenge is that the historical records of women are not as complete as those of their male counterparts, but we have enough to explore and change the colonial learned culture. More effective leadership can be provided by those who acknowledge the righteousness of all humans; therefore, the role and duty in politics should be equally executed by women and men in accordance with past legacy and the recommendations in this study.

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