Minorities in Yemen

Reality & Challenges

INSAF Center for Defending Freedoms & Minorities Publications 2019

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First edition

1441 AH / 2019 AD

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About the Center

INSAF Center for Defending Freedoms & Minorities is a non-profit and non-governmental Yemeni organization, established in 2019. It seeks to defend public freedoms and minority rights in Yemen by documenting violations, providing support tools and advocacy, and conducting research and studies related to minorities, freedoms and human rights, as well as conducting capacity building in this field through organizing courses and workshops and holding seminars and events that enhance awareness regarding the importance of freedoms and protecting minorities.

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Introduction:

Yemen is located in the southwestern part of the Arabian Peninsula; it belongs to the Group of Arab States, and is a member of the Group of Islamic States. Historically, it has been home to the three Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). These three religions were each at one time the official religion of the country, starting from Judaism, up until the emergence of Islam, which was introduced to Yemen at the beginning of the seventh century. Islam has since become the religion which dominates political and social life in the country.

The constitution of the Republic of Yemen stipulates that Islam is the official religion of the state, and that the Islamic Shari'a is the source of legislation. Recent estimates indicate that the percentage of Muslims in Yemen is close to 99%, most of whom are Sunni Muslims of the Shafi'i doctrine, distributed among the major governorates in northern Yemen, such as Taiz, Al Hudaydah, Ibb, Marib, Al-Jawf, and almost all of the southern governorates. Muslims belonging to the Zaydi (Shi'a) sect make up approximately 30–40% of the population, and are mainly found in Sana'a, Sa'ada, Hajjah, Amran, and Dhamar. Ismailis are located in limited areas in Sana'a, Haraz, and in some areas of the Ibb governorate.

The religious structure in Yemen can be characterized as being harmonious at times, and discordant at others. Despite the fact that Shafi'is and Zaydis have coexisted and lived together in peace for centuries, this peace and coexistence turns into conflict and contempt from time to time, especially when it comes to political conflict and who gets to rule. In addition to the existence of these two large sects, there are sub-sects within each doctrine. For example, within the Shafi'i ideology there are a number of Sufi groups that exist in different areas of Yemen, especially in Zabid and Hadramawt. These groups have been subjected to harassment and violence, especially with the rise of radical Islamic organizations that take "takfiri" ideological positions against other sects, including Sufism. Political conflict occurs on the Zaydi side as well, not only between the Zaydi and other sects, but within the Zaydi sub-sects themselves. These conflicts have sometimes ended in murder, displacement, and the destruction of the homes of their competitors.

Yemen is also home to other religious minorities, which amount to around 0.5% of the total population. A minority of Jews remained for centuries alongside the Muslims, however, as a result of persecution and descrimination their proportion within the community had diminished, so much that this group of indigenous Yemenis are almost extinct. The Baha'i minority, which is currently estimated at 2,000 individuals, has also

been repeatedly harassed and abused by Yemeni authorities.

In addition to these religious minorities, there is another minority group which represents the largest percentage of minorities within the population. It is the minority that has faced socially organized marginalization and racism. They are known as al-Muhamasheen (the marginalized) or as they are locally known Akhdam (servants), a negative term which takes a racial dimension towards this group. Despite there being different narratives on the historical origins of this group's presence in Yemen, which are characterized by their dark skin, historical records confirm their presence in the country for centuries. However, they are subjected to the highest levels of discrimination, violations and deprivation, at all levels of life.

As a result of the constitutional article which states that Islam is the official religion of the Republic of Yemen, many laws have been subject to various interpretations, which ultimately affects the rights of minorities as citizens of the country.

In this book, which includes brief reports on the situation of minority groups in Yemeni society, we seek to shed light on the situation of these minorities, as this is an essential part of our work at INSAF Center for Defending Freedoms & Minorities. We believe that information is the initial step in order to be able to find suitable solutions to rectify the situation, especially when it comes to the rights and freedoms of minorities.

The book contains five reports on five minorities, four of which are religiously based; Judaism, Christianity, Baha'i, and Ismaili, and the fifth on a racially social basis, the Muhamasheen, which is treated differently on ethnic grounds. We have relied on a number of historical sources (books & scientific research papers), as well as a number of reports issued by international and local organizations concerned with the defense of minorities. A number of private sources interviewed were also used, which were obtained from individuals that belong to those groups as either spokesmen or were fully aware of the details regarding them.

We do not claim that this book contains detailed information regarding the conditions of all minorities, however, it does provide basic information about them. Starting with their historical backgrounds, explaining their social, political and economic reality, up to reviewing the violations against those minorities at the present time. This will help in the planning of more in-depth research, or in the designing of practical programs to either raise awareness of the rights of these minorities and ways to protect them, or to support them and prevent any further abuses. This will not only protect these minorities, but will help to create a harmonious society that believes in coexisting and cooperation, for a better and more peaceful future.

Al-Muhamasheen

(The Marginalized)

Al-Muhamasheen & the Roots of Marginalization:

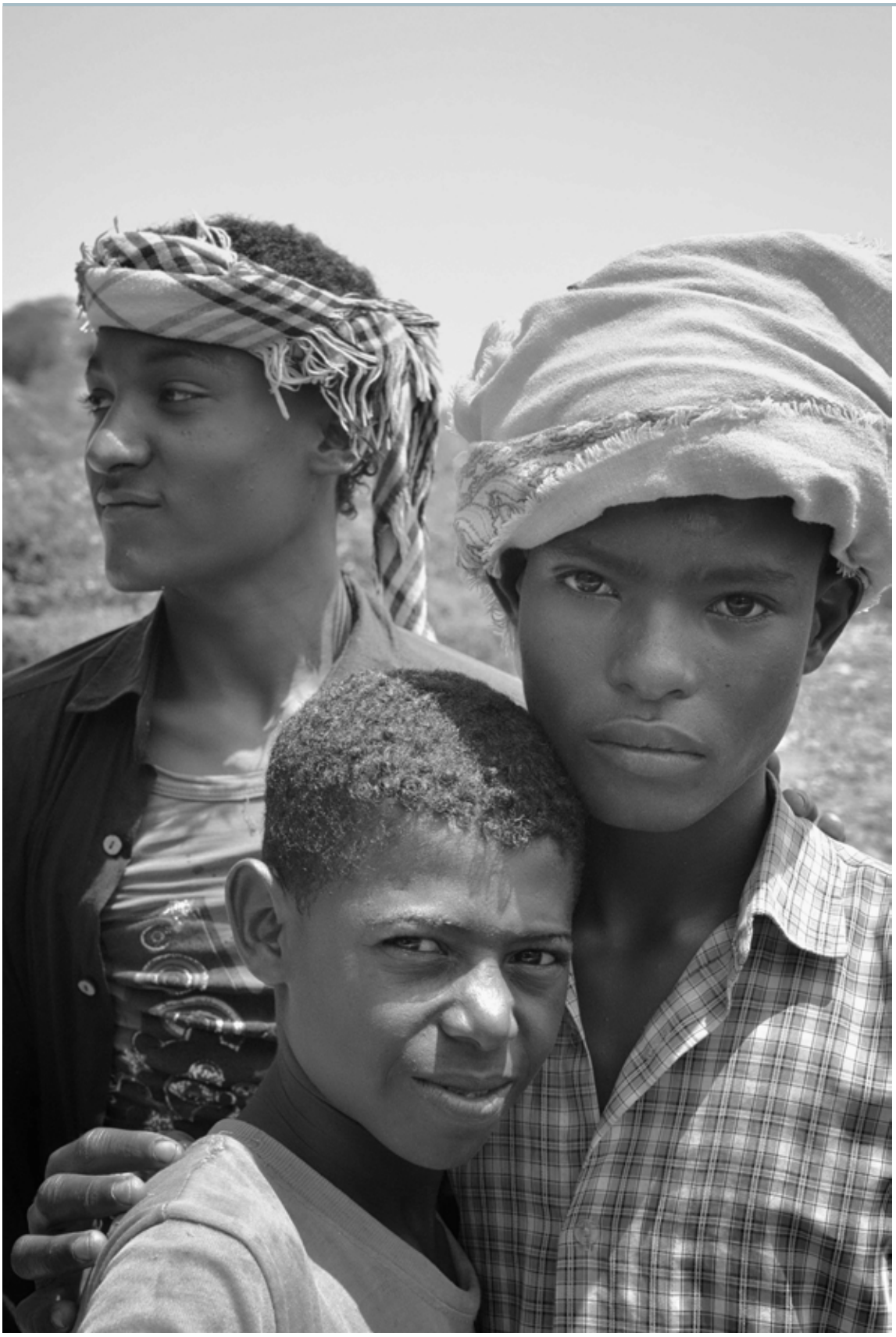
Al-Muhamasheen (the marginalized) are a group within the Yemeni society that are often pejoratively referred to by the term al-Akhdam (the servants). This group has been systematically targeted and discriminated against more than any other group in the history of Yemen. Not only have they been treated as second class citizens, but sometimes they are not considered citizens at all.

They live on the margins of social, political, and economic life in Yemen. This has led them to retreat and live in semi-isolated settlements, often living in huts made out of straw, tin, or other cheap materials, which do not protect them from the cold of winter nor the heat of summer (especially in extremely hot governorates, such as Hodeidah, Aden, Lahj, Abyan, and Hadramout). They are also susceptible to deadly diseases and epidemics as a result of their dire situation, where they mostly live without electricity, clean water, sanitation, clean food, and are deprived of health and education services.

Despite the existence of other Yemeni minorities that are discriminated against on religious and sectarian grounds, this group is marginalized on the basis of the color of their skin and their ethnicity. Although the historical origins and presence of this group in Yemen is not known, they lived in the country for centuries. Nevertheless, they are still considered and treated by many as non-Yemeni, and are often dealt with in an inhumane manner.

The Yemeni government, in most of its legislation and documents, says that there are no ethnic groups in Yemen, that Yemeni society is homogeneous, and that there is no racism among its groups. This was the official stance of the Yemeni government in response to accusations against it at the UN[1]. However, it treats this group of people as a different race, and its members are at the bottom of the caste system in Yemen. This treatment is not based on individual actions, but rather on institutionalized racism imposed by a social reality based on historical backgrounds, and reflected in practices of the community and official institutions.

1 UN, (2010), Reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention Seventeenth and eighteenth periodic reports of States parties due in 2009, 14 June 2010.



Historical Background:

When talking about their historical origins, the Muhamasheen are divided into two categories. While one group believes that their origins date back to Ethiopia and migrations to Yemen in the fifth and sixth centuries CE, the other believes that they are indigenous to Yemen, and that they trace their lineage back to that of the Himyarite Kingdom[1].

Many of the Muhamasheen believe that they are of Yemeni decent from the region of Zabid. Historical sources mention that they are some of the remnants of Ethiopian soldiers who invaded Yemen in 525 CE, and were later enslaved by the Ziyadia state in the city of Zabid. The Bani Najah dynasty ruled over Zabid since 403–553 AH / 1012–1158 CE, a state founded by Prince Najah Mawla Morjane Al-Habashi, Prince Bani Ziad's chamberlain, after he had killed his sire Murjan and his rival Nafis, who both killed the prince Abdullah Ibn Abi Al-Jaish Al-Ziyad. He declared himself the Sultan of Tihama, and was able to seize control over all of the Tihama plains. As for the mountainous areas, which were once submissive to his ancestors, they were able to elude falling under his control but were nevertheless tamed by him[2]. This meant that this state was founded primarily from this group of society, taking advantage of tribal and sectarian conflicts.

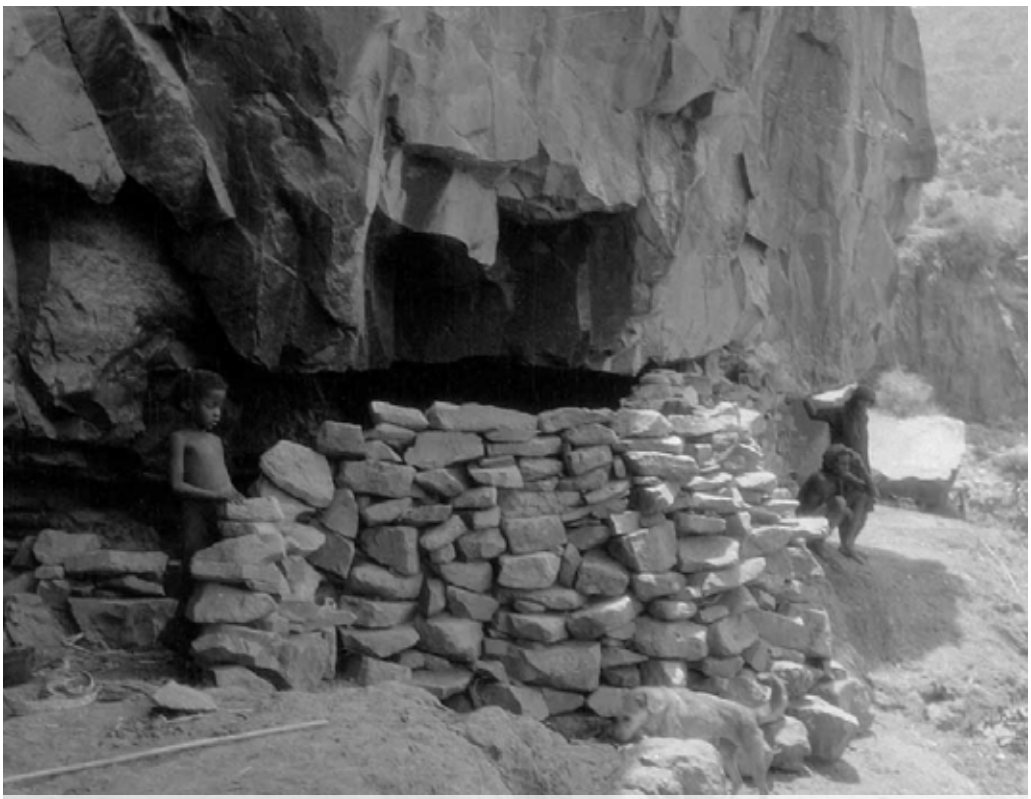
When the Najah dynasty took power in Zabid and the Tihama plains they brought in more people from Ethiopia. They persecuted the Yemenis, looted their property, took women as captives, and enslaved the indigenous Yemeni population. This led the people to form resistance groups against the Najahi state, led by the rebel Ali Bin Mahdi Al-Hymiari Al-Zabidi, who rallied Yemenis from the Tihama plains and the mountainous areas. After a four-year war, Ali was able to overthrow the Najah dynasty, and sentenced them to a life of slavery in which they would become servants of Yemeni society. He also issued a decree that forced them to build their homes on the outskirts of cities and villages, and was the first to call them Akhdam in recorded Yemeni history[3].

1 Equal, (2018), From Night to Darker Night, Equal Rights Trust, the Equal Rights Trust Country Report Series: 9, London.

2 Al-Muheet, (2017), The Najah Dynasty. Al-Mamalik Kingdom in Yemen, "*Bano Najah, Dawlat Almmalek Fi al-Yaman*", Al-Muheet Encyclopedia.

3 The Social Democratic Forum (2006), Marginalized Groups in Yemen (Al-Akhdam), printed publication, 25/7/2006.

Regardless of what all of these historical accounts say, whether they attribute the Muhamasheen to the remnants of migrations from the Horn of Africa, to the remnants of the Ethiopian campaign against Yemen, or claim that they are dark skinned indigenous people, no-one can deny the fact that they have lived in Yemen for hundreds of years. One generation after next, the Muhamasheen have inherited racism and contempt from society, which treats them as a pariah class when compared to all other classes. This is unique when compared to other groups which have claims to descend from migrants. Yemen is filled with people from various origins, with some descendants of the soldiers of the Ottoman Caliphate, and some tracing their lineage back to the Persian expeditions that came to Yemen after the Ethiopian occupation. There are also Yemenis of Indian or Kurdish origin and other ethnicities, but only the Muhamasheen are subjugated to constant prejudice and racism, and still suffer today from this unjust marginalization in various forms of their daily lives.



A photograph from the early 1940s of a Muhamasheen house, who used to make homes for themselves out of caves in the mountains near Sana'a

The Muhamasheen & Yemeni Society:

Ethnic divisions might not be clearly visible in Yemeni society, however, there is a complex class division on social grounds, with unknown but long ago origins. Yemeni society can be divided along these class lines, which were active in the past and are still influential today: Hashemites, Tribesmen, Bedouins, Sheikhs, Boys or Weaklings, Mazaina, and the Muhamasheen (Akhdam). There are also other class divisions that vary from one region in Yemen to another, some of which depend on the genetic sequence and lineage of a group, and some depending on the type of craft or workmanship which the families work in. However, it is clear that all these class divisions place the Muhamasheen at the bottom of the class ladder, which allows all other classes to abuse them.

Muhamasheen women who are known to work as musicians

There are no accurate statistics on the number of Muhamasheen in Yemen for several reasons. First, there is no effective system in place for collecting statistical data from the relevant ministries and government statisti-

cal offices, and the existing statistical system is too general and not detailed[1]. Second, the collection of official statistics has stalled since the last census in Yemen in 2004, when the population reached 19,685,161, according to the National Information Center of the Republic of Yemen[2]. Third, even these outdated statistics do not provide any data related to race or religion, as the ruling regimes in Yemen have historically believed that addressing such details will create conflicts that could lead to division in society. This makes it difficult to obtain accurate information on the reality of this group, making estimates the only data available for researchers. There are different estimates of the numbers of Muhamasheen in Yemen, with estimates ranging from 500,000 to 3.5 million individuals, anywhere between 1.8% and 12.7% of the population[3].

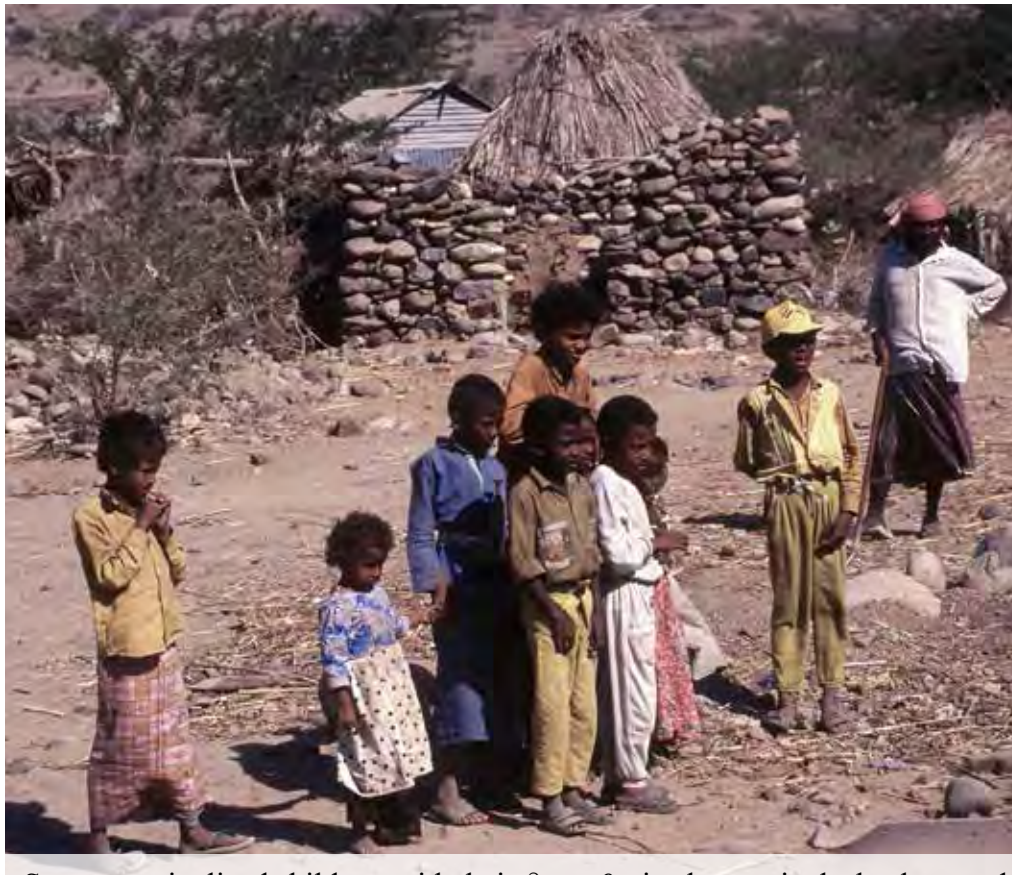
1 Ministry of Human Rights, (2013), Third National Report of the Republic of Yemen on the Level of Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, June 2013.

2 National Information Center, (2019), Overview of Yemen, 17/9/2019: http://www.yemen-nic.info/sectors/popul/

3 Equal, (2018), p. 196.

The Social Situation:

The Muhamasheen are among the poorest in the country, and it is rare to find one in a job outside of the cleaning sector, a field of work that other social groups are reluctant to engage in. Furthermore, the Muhamasheen are governed by an unwritten social isolation system, a system which society strictly follows with no need for regulation, assisted by government policies. This explains their living in overcrowded and isolated camps on the outskirts of cities or in remote and closed gatherings in rural areas, with minimal public services[1]. This social isolation applies to the various aspects of their social, economic, and political life.



Some marginalized children, with their straw & zinc houses in the background

1 Mwatana, (2016), From the Margins of Life, into the Heart of War, A documentary by Mwatana Organization for Human Rights on the suffering of the Marginalized (Muhamasheen) in Yemen who Found Themselves at the Heart of the War, Mwatana Organization for Human Rights: http://mwatana.org/from-the-margin/

A survey of the Muhamasheen community in Yemen prepared by UNICEF[1], which covered 9,200 households (51,406 people), revealed high levels of poverty and low levels of literacy and school enrollment. It revealed very poor family living conditions and poor access to basic social services. Only one in five people aged 15 or older can read or write, and only half of the children aged 6 to 17 are enrolled in school. As for birth registration, it was found to be as low as 9%. When it came to housing, three-quarters of the households surveyed live in one-room houses. Half of these households depend on exposed water sources such as dams, streams, or wells. Less than a tenth of them receive water from major water projects, and only two out of five homes were found to contain a toilet. Although one-third of the country's citizens receive social assistance, only one-fifth of the Muhamasheen families receive social assistance, because the poor and needy from other groups are given priority over them.

1 Unicef, (2015), UNICEF Yemen Situation Report, Key focus: Muhammasheen mapping update, January 2015.

Forms of Racism Against the Muhamasheen:

Racism against the Muhamasheen is evident in the intolerant and prejudiced dealings of other groups with them, especially from people of lighter color skin. This intolerance comes in different forms, including verbally insulting them by using degrading labels such as Akhdam. This abuse is not limited to adults, but is used on children on the street, in schools, and everywhere else. It is a kind of curse that reminds those belonging to the Muhamasheen community that they do not belong in Yemeni society, a society in which many prejudices are drawn and adopted on a linguistic basis.

The Muhamasheen are marginalized from any political or administrative role, and are always confined to jobs within the cleaning sector. Despite the participation of a representative of the Muhamasheen in the national dialogue conference that was held in Yemen under the auspices of the United Nations after President Ali Saleh stepped down from power in 2012, and despite the demands to allocate 10% of jobs to this group brought by the president of the Muhamasheen Union, the final draft of the new constitution did not contain any quota allocated to them[1]. Even if society has begun to absorb the concepts of racism, it has yet to lay any foundations to overcome it in the future.

In a society proud of its tribal affiliations, the Muhamasheen are seen as a group with no origins, and are dealt with accordingly. The Muhamasheen have always been deemed by society in Yemen having no true origins, and thus are viewed as unworthy of having many social rights. They are not given the freedom to discuss their social issues, and are viewed by some as being there for the sole purpose of serving others, and are even viewed sometimes as animals.

Although the constitution and law in Yemen give every citizen the right to own land, community practices, especially in some tribal areas, forbid Muhamasheen individuals from owning or acquiring land, allowing them only to work on it and pay the owners part of the proceeds. They also usually do not have any identification documents, which naturally hinders the land-purchase process[2].

1 Equal, (2018), p. 202.

2 Equal, (2018), p. 202.

Many of the members of the Muhamasheen are subjected to torture, beatings, and insults, while the law and its agencies turns a blind eye at the violence directed against them. The judicial and security system often tolerates perpetrators in cases of the systematic rape of Muhamasheen men and women, since the victim is often not viewed as human according to their racist perspectives, helping to exacerbate crimes against them. According to organizations involved in monitoring violations against the Muhamasheen, judicial and security services are notified in many of these cases, but do nothing[1].

Furthermore, sometimes perpetrators destroy the homes of the Muhamasheen and force their families to leave[2]. These heinous crimes are always vilified by society when they occur to a member of one of the other classes in Yemen, but when the victim is of the Muhamasheen group, society chooses to not only ignore it, but sometimes punish the victim.

1 Equal, (2018), p. 204.

2 Witness, (2010), Taking on Discrimination Against Women in Yemen; https://www.witness.org/portfolio_page/taking-on-discrimination-against-women-in-yemen/

The Suffering of the Muhamasheen in the Current War:

While the ongoing conflict has affected the lives of all Yemenis, it has affected the Muhamasheen and other vulnerable groups disproportionately. Documented cases by UN experts show that they have been exposed to additional risks, such as working near front lines, moving to uninhabitable areas, or joining various armed groups in the conflict (UN, 2019, 285). This is in addition to other serious risks, some related to the plight of war in general, and others related to being subjected to deliberate violations relating to their marginalization, which makes their lives an unbearable hell.

In a study prepared by researcher Aisha Al-Warraq from the Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies[1] on the situation of the Muhamasheen in light of the now nearly five-year conflict, Al-Warraq found that the war has exacerbated their suffering, and, despite their prominence in humanitarian publications, they are largely excluded from aid campaigns and deliberately removed from humanitarian lists. They have also been removed from their already low-wage jobs, especially in the cleaning sector and other jobs that the wider Yemeni society classifies as inferior. Large groups of Muhamasheen have been displaced by the conflict in Aden, Taiz, and Hodeidah, and have struggled to reach refugee camps due to racism by refugees from other groups, having instead to take shelter in public institutions such as schools. Muhamasheen women are also more vulnerable to sexual violence and harassment by combatants, especially at checkpoints.

According to UN reports, one of the direct effects of the conflict is the recruitment of Muhamasheen to various frontline armed groups. Experts were able to document cases in which individuals were forcibly recruited into the groups, while others voluntarily joined for financial incentives. The report also mentions cases of arbitrary arrests, kidnappings, beatings, and torture, often ending in death[2]. The war was able to attract children and other vulnerable groups in society to join it, either by force, intimidation or

1 Warraq, Aisha, (2019), The Historical & Systematic Marginalization of the Muhamasheen Community in Yemen, Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies, June 10, 2019: https://sanaacenter.org/ar/publications-all/analysis-ar/7532#_ftn1

2 UN, (2019), Situation of Human Rights in Yemen, Including Violations & Abuses Committed Since September 2014, UN High Commissioner Annual Report for Human Rights, 9 - 27, September 2019.

financial incentives. All these factors make the Muhamasheen among the most vulnerable groups that surrender to the will of the conflicting armed groups.

The National Union of the Marginalized issued a detailed report which monitored the violations that occurred to the Muhamasheen from 2015 to 2019[1]. These violations included abduction, forced displacement, the demolition of houses, and the injury and killing of some members of the group, including children, women, and the elderly. Several members of the group were also subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment and harassment by some tribes and armed thugs affiliated with the government and the Houthis. The leadership of the Transitional Council described the Muhamasheen "Akhdam" as mercenaries, which could incite violence, hatred, and genocide against them. Some of these violations, as documented by the monitoring and preparation team at INSAF, can be summarized as follows:

First, the violations committed by the Arab coalition forces through air strikes, which killed a number of Muhamasheen in the bombing of the Al-Mazraq camp on March 30, 2015. On April 11, 2015, coalition warplanes targeted Muhwa Al-Dahra with two airstrikes, which killed ten people and wounded 13, most of them Muhamasheen children, women, and elderly people. The next day, coalition warplanes targeted the homes of some Muhamasheen in Dimna Khedir, killing five and wounding eight others. "Madinat Al-Umal" in Sa'wan, Sana'a, was also targeted on July 13, 2015, which led to the killing of 30 people and the wounding of 50 others. In addition to that, ten houses were completely destroyed and 143 others partially damaged. The area of Al-Rubaie at Al-Bahabeh village in Taiz was targeted on March 9, 2016 by an aerial bombardment by the Arab Coalition warplanes, which resulted in the death of five people from the Muhamasheen group and the injury of four others. An aerial attack on the Al-Dabab area in Taiz also resulted in the deaths of eight Muhamasheen individuals on March 27, 2016. This is only mentioning the targeting of individuals of this group in their homes and communities, not to mention the dozens of other victims killed in bombings of markets, vehicles, or other areas (Al-Mahwa).

1 The National Union of the Marginalized (Muhamasheen), (2019), Human Rights Violations in the Poorest Areas in Yemen, Against the Marginalized Akhdam Group in Yemen during the period 2015 - 2019, Prepared by the Field Monitoring and Documentation Working Group, August 2019.

Second, the violations committed by the Houthis, whose rebellion has led them to take control of a large part of the north of the country including the capital, Sana'a. In Thursday October 1, 2015 seven Muhamasheen individuals, including four children, were killed after a projectile fired by the Houthis hit a residential area in Baarara, Taiz governorate. 22 Muhamasheen individuals, including eight women and six children, were killed and 47 wounded by Houthi snipers in Taiz governorate between April and December of 2015. Some houses were also destroyed and others damaged by Houthi shelling from several areas such as the Harir area, and Al-Jahim station in Taiz, which led to the displacement of all residents in the area of Al-Mahwa Al-Shamasi, with only a few residents remaining due to their financial circumstances and fear for their children and homes. On July 22, 2015, Houthi forces started shelling Aden during their advance to take over the governorate, which led to the demolition and burning of many houses of Muhamasheen families in the eastern district of Dar Saad at the northern end of the governorate. This also led to the killing and wounding of many civilians, including a number of children, and forced the displacement of more than 300 families that were housed at the Masmoum School for Basic Education in the neighborhood of Sisban in the nearby district of Sheikh Othman. On the second of October 2017, Houthi forces raided the homes of Muhamasheen refugees in eastern Aurdain, Al-Udain in the governorate of Ibb, and assaulted and arrested men, women, children, and elders. Among them, Noman Al-Huthaifi, president of the National Union of the Marginalized. This is in addition to a number of cases of arrests, torture and forced recruitment of children from this group in Houthi controlled areas, such as Sana's, Hajja, and other places.

Third, violations committed by forces of the legitimate authorities and armed groups loyal to them, where nine Muhamasheen individuals were killed by armed groups that follow the military brigades of the legitimate government. Torture was also committed against Muhamasheen individuals since the beginning of the war in brigades inside Taiz and in the Samiqa district of Al-Shamaitin district in Al-Torba, in addition to the kidnapping and torture committed against this group in other areas under the control of these forces in Taiz.

Fourth, abuses by armed militias in the south. The report shows a number of serious abuses suffered by this group at the hands of armed militias in the southern areas. For example, on June 8, 2019, five Muhamasheen individuals of the Mahareik neighborhood working as porters in the Ben Atef shop in Sila Al-Gharbiya were abducted by an armed group. They were later released on July 1, 2019, after being beaten, humiliated, and inhumanely treated by their kidnappers. During the recent armed confrontations that occurred in the Mahareik neighborhood (which is considered to be the largest gathering of the Muhamasheen group in Sheikh Othman Directorate, Aden governorate) on July 5, 2019, these confrontations resulted in the carrying out of prosecutions, kidnappings, field executions, and the abduction of captives from some families, most of whom were of the Muhamasheen group. This was all carried out under the pretext of getting rid of this group, according to a number of reported witnesses, including the author of the report himself.

Fifth, violations committed by other parties on racial grounds. For example, on July 7, 2017, seven tribal gunmen forced 22 Muhamasheen families to leave their homes in the Ghash area. The displaced families then settled in the Zubayriat area in Al-Fakher district of Qataba. On June 22, 2019, the local authorities in Zanzibar, Abyan governorate, displaced 100 Muhamasheen individuals, leaving them homeless and forcing them to sleep on the street in front of the local authority's headquarters in Zanzibar City.

Conclusion:

Just as the war has exposed the vulnerability of the Yemeni society, it has also exposed the vulnerability of these defenseless groups. They are arguably the most vulnerable within this society, especially the women and children. Women and children need political, educational and health programs to help strengthen their role, however, this is different when it comes to the marginalized, where we are facing a cultural issue dating back several centuries, with deep social and cultural backgrounds that are difficult to overcome.

The search for a comprehensive peace in Yemen should address several issues, not only reconciliation between the different warring parties, but also among society as a whole. This is something policymakers should be aware of. Leaving gaps for differences and the marginalization of particular groups in society helps cement the concept of marginalization in the consciousness of people as a natural behavior, and is thus reflected at other levels within society, leading to a fragile peace.

Jews

Who are the Jews of Yemen?

There are no historical documents that irrefutably define the nature of the presence of Jews in Yemen. However, Yemeni Jews (known also as Yemenites) have been an integral part of society, and are considered to be indigenous Yemenis. Judaism was a religion with a large following in ancient Yemen, which a society that believed in different local religions, as was the case during the reign of the Kingdom of Sheba, Himyar, Qataban and other ancient kingdoms of Yemen. Judaism was widely spread among a wide segment of the people over several centuries, alongside the Muslims who made up the vast majority of Yemenis.

Jewish youth from Sa'da, Yemen

Jews in Yemen; from Rulers to Minorities:

The earliest historical inscription bearing the characteristics of Judaism is the Grinian inscription of Beit Al-Ashwal (1), which dates back to the late 4th century and early 5th century, during the reign of the Himyarite king (Dara'a Amr Ayman), the brother of the famous Himyarite King Abkrab Asa'ad Al-Kamel. This indicates that Judaism was widespread to a certain degree at the time[1]. These inscriptions indicate the existence of Jewish communities with a prestigious social and economic status, but there are no indications that the kings of the fourth and fifth centuries embraced Judaism. However, this changed during the sixth century, with King Yusuf Asar Du Nuwas. It is also worth noting that these Jewish communities were comprised of indigenous people who converted to Judaism and were not Jewish people that came from another country[2]. This means that Judaism was presented as an idea but its adherents were indigenous.

According to Jewish documents, a large group of Jews left Jerusalem a few years before the destruction of the First Temple after Jeremiah's prophecies. They first settled in several areas in Yemen, such as Sana'a, Tar'im and Dhamar. According to Jewish traditions, the Jews of Yemen rejected Ezra's invitation to return to the Holy Land because they foresaw the destruction of the Temple for a second time[3]. Some Jewish myths also attribute the entry of the Jewish faith to southern Arabia to a very early period, precisely at the beginning of the relationship between south Arabia and the Jewish kingdom during the reign of King Solomon, following his contact with the Queen of Sheba. This myth states that King Solomon sent Jewish groups to give the child of the Queen of Sheba a Jewish upbringing.

The earliest historical accounts of the introduction of Judaism into the region was found in the writings of the geographic explorer Strabon about the Roman expedition—lead by Galius—to Yemen, which mentions the par-

1 Jaber, Ayman Shamkhi, and Hussein, Salama Abdul-Reza, (2015), The Impact of the Jewish and Christianity Religion in the Fall of the State of Hymiar (Raydan), Journal of Arts of Basra, Vol. 74: p: 156-157.

2 Al-Naeem, Noura Bint Abdullah, (2000), Legislation in Southwest Arabia until the End of the State of Hymiar, King Fahd National Library, Riyadh, 2000: p 80.

3 Jewish Virtual Library, (2019), 9/9/2019:
https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yemen-2

ticipation of a Jewish band in that campaign. All these accounts, however, do not have strong historical evidence to support them. Philostorgius pointed out that Theophilus—Emperor Constantine's (361–337) envoy to preach Christianity—found a Jewish community in the Himyarite Kingdom. Another account states that the land of Sheba received a number of fleeing Jews after the Romans seized the Kingdom of Judea in 70 CE[1].

In his biography of the Prophet, Ibn Hisham wrote about the origin of Judaism in Yemen. He stated that Judaism in Yemen came through the Himyarite King As'ad Al-Kamil, who visited Mecca and Yathrib, and returned to his people with two Jewish rabbis. His people, however, did not approve of this and resorted to judgement through fire (an ancient pagan custom in

1 Al-Naeem, Noura Bint Abdullah, (2000), p 327.

Yemen), which resulted in a decision in favor of the rabbis. After this, Judaism spread in the Himyarite Kingdom[1]. However, this account lacks any supporting historical documents or inscriptions.

It can be said with more confidence that the entry of Judaism into Yemen was not through official delegations or missionary missions but through individual efforts. This was evident in the ruling class of the Himyarite state, up until the king himself became a Jew, such as Himyarite King Yusuf Asar Du Nawas[2]. However, there are some scholars who found historical evidence to suggest that King Nawas was not necessarily Jewish, but rather was a monotheist who believed in the existence of one God. The sixth century CE historian, Theodore Lector, did not mention that the Himyarite king was Jewish. This itself is evident that Du Nawas did not embrace Judaism. He probably tried to encourage Judaism because it was not associated with the Romans, and encouraged the people of Yemen to embrace it to find a doctrine that contradicts that of the Byzantine Empire. He may have even persecuted Christians, not for religious reasons, but for political and economic objectives and to stand up to foreign interferences[3]. Nevertheless, it can be asserted that Judaism at that time, whether the king was Jewish or not, was an essential part of the governing system and thus had the power to give it the necessary protection to be practiced and spread.

According to the inscriptions found, Judaism continued to be the predominant religion in Yemen for over 150 years, after which a bitter conflict between Judaism and Christianity emerged in the country. This conflict reached its peak during the reign of King Yusuf Du Nawas (522–530), with the invasion of the foreign Axum army, the dominant Christian force in Ethiopia at the time, in response to Nawas's punitive campaign against rebel Christians in Najran. This brought an end to the strong Jewish authority in Yemen, and Jews lost their strong foothold in southern Arabia. However, Judaism remained widespread among many Yemeni tribes[4]. The spread of

1 Ibn Hisham, (1990), Biography of the Prophet, investigation, "*al-Sserah al-Nnabawyah*", Omar Abdul Salam Tadmari, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut, 1990, c 1, p: 42.

2 Al-Naeem, Noura Bint Abdullah, (2000), p 328 - 329.

3 Jaber, Ayman Shamkhi, and Hussein, Salama Abdul-Reza, (2015), p 163.

4 Al-Bahsh, Abdo, (2016), The History of the Jewish Religion in Yemen Prior to Islam, "*Tarikh al-Deyanah al-Yahodia Qabl al_Islam*", Rai Al-Youm, February 23, 2016. https://www.raialyoum.com/index.php/د-عبده-البحش-تاريخ-الديانة-اليهودية-في/

the religion was also slowed down, especially after the introduction of Islam to Yemen, after which many Jews began to convert to the new religion. The remaining Jews after that came under the Dhimmah system, which entitled Jews and Christians to live within the Islamic realm after paying the jizya tax.

We know almost nothing about the Jews in Yemen during the first Umayyad and Abbasid eras, up until the end of the ninth century, when the Zaydi Imamate was established in northern Yemen in 897 by Imam Yahya Al-Hadi. That is when a series of organized and unregulated abuses against Jews began, which have continued over the past 1,000 years. This transformed the Jewish population from being a large part of society to a smaller number of people deprived of the most basic elements of citizenship.

Areas of Jewish Presence in Yemen:

Jews have existed in different parts of Yemen and were concentrated previously in major cities because of their professions as craftsmen and traders. Nowadays, they are found in specific mountainous areas in Rida and Naat in Arhab. A number of them also moved into the "Tourist City" in the capital Sana'a, after they were attacked in their homes located in other remote areas of the country. According to an interview with the current head of the Jewish community in Yemen, the number of Jews in the country now does not exceed 43 individuals[1]. They are distributed as follow: nine in Raida, two in Arhab, and 32 in Sana'a.

A mid-twentieth century portrait of the family of the current Rabbi of Yemen

1 Yahya, (2019), interview with Rabbi Yahya Yousef, 9/9/2019.

Newlyweds on their Wedding day

Jewish women making handicrafts

Religious Rites & Education:

Yemeni Jews used to practice their religious rituals in temples, but nowadays they practice them in their homes, after the destruction of their synagogues and the harassment and abuse by extremist groups (such as al-Qaeda and the Houthis). Dogmatically, Yemeni Jews are the closest to the Ashkenazi Jews, based in the state of New York, USA.

Among the religious rites practiced by Jews in Yemen are:

1- The Holy Saturday of every week.
2- Passover.
3- Yom Kippur.
4- New Year.
5- The Feast of Lights.

Jews in Yemen teach their children the Hebrew language and the Torah from the age of three under the supervision of a rabbi (a senior figure in the Jewish community chosen for his knowledge not age). At the age of six, they are sent to the United States or Israel to continue their religious studies, and usually return to Yemen after that. The rate of education for males is very low and is virtually null with females. Despite many offerings and temptations offered by the Jewish community in the United States to the Jewish community living in Yemen, some Yemeni Jews refuse to leave their country and prefer to return to live in their native homeland.

Jews in Yemen study abroad with the support of a number of interna-

The Grand Synagogue in Aden during the early 1940s

tional organizations as, due to the financial difficulties they face, they cannot pay for the costs of private schools in Yemen. There was a special school for Jews in Reedah called the Shabazi School which taught the teachings of the Jewish religion, the Torah, and the Hebrew language. This school was passed on to the community and looked after for generations, and had the permission and approval of the government and the security services. However, the school closed in 2013 following the departure of Jews in large numbers from the Reedeh governorate of Amran.

As for the Al-Salem Jews displaced from the governorate of Saada to the "Tourist City", their children were enrolled in Yemeni schools and were exempted from attending and studying the Quran and Islamic subjects.

A group of female students of the Jewish school in Aden

Their Relationship with the Authorities & Society:

Across almost a thousand years, Imams in the north of Yemen considered the Jews to be among Ahl Al-Dima'a, who had to pay a tribute jizya to the Imam. The jizya was a sum of money paid for each individual. Yet they were treated differently and in an inferior way to the rest of society. In the Yemeni Jewish tradition, a Jewish person would distinguish himself with a Payot, a lengthened part of the head hair at the ears to distinguish themselves from Muslims, and as a religious manifestation that distinguishes Jewish males.

During the British occupation in the south of Yemen, the Jews had a good relationship with the British authorities. They lived and learned with Muslims and other religious and ethnic communities, especially in the protectorate of Aden, and had classes that taught Hebrew. These communities had many similar traditions, and differed only by religion. The Jews in the south of Yemen had their own temples where they practiced their rituals freely. This however, changed after 1947, with the birth of the State of Israel and the intensification of the conflict in the Arab region with Israel. By 1967, the south had virtually no Jewish presence.

Jews from Haban - Shabwah Governorate

Politically, the Jews of Yemen Between the Present & the Future:

During successive regimes in Yemen, the Jews have suffered from marginalization, exclusion and discrimination, and they had no political representation. Their role remained confined to the artisanal and trade fields, and they were not allowed to play any political or administrative role. Even in modern Yemen, in which the constitution states that it is a pluralistic state, no Jewish citizen was ever allowed to be a member of parliament. Even though they presented a candidate during the last parliamentary elections in 2003, he was rejected because the Yemeni constitution requires any member of parliament to be committed to his religious obligations. This was interpreted to mean that non-Muslims are not eligible to run in a country whose constitution states that Islam is the official religion of the state.

During the national dialogue that took place in 2013, which followed the events of the Arab Spring, Jews were excluded for their religious beliefs despite the inclusion of all other segments of society. A dispute emerged between the cleric Abdul Majid al-Zindani (Chairman of the Association of Yemeni Scholars) and Abdul Karim Al-Eryani, who was an adviser to the president at the time and a member of the dialogue conference. President Abd Rabbo Mansour granted five seats to the Jewish community, but al-Zindani objected, arguing that he was being equated with a Jewish cleric. This forced the Jewish community to give up participation in the dialogue in order to avoid any problems[1].

Throughout all the current political fluctuations and political conflict in Yemen, there seems to be no indication either by political players at home or abroad that they will include this group in the political fabric of Yemen. This means that the marginalization of Yemeni Jews will continue for the foreseeable further.

1 Yahya, (2019), interview with Rabbi Yahya Yousef, 9/9/2019.

Jewish Culture & Literature in Yemen:

It is difficult to present a complete picture of Jewish literature in Yemen, much of which remains hidden in unpublished manuscripts. Available sources cannot prove that Jewish literature existed in Yemen before the 10th century CE. Nevertheless, it is possible that the writings of the Elders in Israel and Babylon, i.e. the Talmud (Babylonians, not the Palestinians), and the Madrasim, arrived in Yemen and were preserved there in carefully copied manuscripts. Yemeni Jewish literature is an integral part of Jewish literature in the Muslim Arab world. The first Hebrew-Arabic translation was done by Zechariah ibn Sa'ad Al-Yamani, who translated works from the history of Eusebon during what the Jews call the second destruction of the Temple. There was also a Hebrew publication written in Italy in 933, or the unknown Mabrit Hagan, a summary of the rules of reading the holy book according to Eastern tradition[1]. Many of these manuscripts have been looted and smuggled, the last of which took place in 2017, when a historical manuscript of the Torah was taken to Israel. Yemeni Jews have developed rich traditions in all aspects of culture, such as in music, dance, architecture, clothing, embroidery, and gold and silver crafts. Many of Yemen's Jews around the world continue to carry their own Yemeni customs and traditions that they are trying to preserve and protect from extinction, despite their presence in other societies which are quite different from the culture they grew up in. Many of these Jews around the world continue to be proud of their culture and their affiliation to Yemen, despite their displacement and exclusion over the past decades, especially during the last century.

Jews have contributed greatly to enriching Yemeni society culturally and artistically, and their artistic touches and style are still influential in the field of architecture, as can be seen in Sana'a and in other governorates around the country. People have been influenced by their lyrical art which is now part of the Yemeni heritage, and many Jews still retain it even in their distant exiles in different countries around the world, including in Israel.

Jews were also renowned for their excellent handicraft skills in fields such as silver crafting, janabi (daggers), embroidery, sewing, carpentry and blacksmithing, along with trade. They were also known for their punctuality,

1 Jewish Virtual Library, (2019), 9/9/2019:
https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yemen-2

professionalism in their work, and for having good relationships with the rest of the community.

The remaining Jews in Yemen are unable to practice the trades which they inherited from their ancestors, due to the lack of resources and concern for their safety. Under the late President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the government approved $23 a month for each Jewish individual, along with other food aid[1].

A wedding of a Yemeni Jewish immigrant family in full traditional attire

1 Yahya, (2019), interview with Rabbi Yahya Yousef, 9/9/2019.

Violations:

We will divide the violations against this sect into three stages:

The first occurred during the seventeenth century CE, specifically during the reign of Imam Al-Mahdi Ahmad Ibn Al-Hasan Ibn Al-Qasim (Imam of Yemen from 1676 to 1681), where the Jews of Yemen were subjected to abuse and arbitrary measures and were victims to one of the largest mass exile operations in Yemen. It all started in about 1677, when the Imam ordered the demolishing of all the synagogues in Sana'a and other cities, on charges of collaborating with the Ottoman Empire. By the summer of 1679, the Imam gave his Jewish subjects three months to decide between converting to Islam and remaining in the country, or facing death by the sword. Several Yemeni tribal elders felt distressed by the difficult choices facing the Jews and decided to intervene. So, they went to meet the Imam and asked him to pardon the Jews or commute their punishment, as they were loyal subjects of the Imam and did not offend the Imam or Islam or do anything worthy of death. The Imam agreed but stipulated that those who did not accept Islam within 12 months would be exiled to the town of Zilaa in Somalia. The Yemeni tribal elders returned once again to the Imam to mediate on behalf of the Jews, so that they would not be exiled outside the country, and the Imam agreed to exile them to Moza'a (located in Taiz governorate, some 20 kilometers from the town of Mocha). This exile is known as the "Exile of Jews to Moza'a"[1]. Imam Al-Mahdi Ahmad Al-Qasim then issued a decree banning all Jews from living in most cities and towns of the country, sending them to this dry and barren area. Only a few Jewish communities survived this fate, who lived in the eastern regions of the country (such as Niham, al-Jawf and Khulan), where the tribes refused to obey the Imam's orders. Many Yemeni Jews died along the hard road to their exile in Moza'a. However, after about one year in exile, the Jews were summoned back from their exile to perform their usual duties, after Muslims complained to the Imam about the lack of goods and services that were well provided and performed by Jews.

At the start of the 19th century, the situation of the Jews of Yemen was very miserable. Subjected to the authority of the local Imam at the time, they

1 Al-Khamisi, Adeed Jawad, (2014), The Plight of the Jews in the Land of Arabia Felix, "*Mehnat al-Yahood Fi Arth al-Yaman al-Ssaed*", free thinker, December 26, 2014:
https://mufakerhur.org/محنة-اليهود-في-أرض-اليمن-السعيد/

were prevented from wearing new or good clothes, prevented from riding donkeys and mules, forced to walk to the left of the road and to not build houses more than one story high, as well as prohibited from wearing weapons or janabi (daggers). They were also prohibited from working in the field of financial transactions, and were all artisans who were mainly employed in carpentry, construction and blacksmithing. Yemen's Jews had experience in a wide range of professions that tribesmen avoided in different regions (especially Zaidi regions). Occupations exclusively practiced by Jews included; silver crafts, blacksmithing, repairing weapons and tools, weaving, pottery, construction, carpentry, shoe making and sewing. In return, the Muslims oversaw the production and supply of food, while Jews provided them with all the manufactured tools needed by the Muslim farmers.

A Jewish Blacksmith with his children holding a device used for plowing

Other reports point to the systematic abuses carried out by some regimes in northern Yemen, including the so-called orphan law, which was imposed during the reign of Imam Yahya Hamid Al-Din in early 1920. This law stated that Jewish orphans would be adopted and raised to become Muslims. This idea arose earlier in time but became applicable in the early 20th

century[1]. Another notorious law enacted by Imam Yahya required Jews to clean streets and remains[2].

Secondly: The immigration of Jews from Yemen to Palestine began in 1881 (in which Jewish immigrants sailed the Red Sea to Egypt, then sailed the Mediterranean Sea to the port of Jaffa, and then continued on foot until they reached the city of Jerusalem). These migrations continued until 1914. During that period, only about 10% of Yemeni Jews left their country, with some accounts suggesting that one-third of the Jewish community left before the establishment of the State of Israel[3]. In 1947, following the vote to divide the British Mandate for Palestine, bloody riots took place in Aden, killing 82 Jews and destroying many Jewish homes. The Jewish community in Aden was paralyzed by what happened, as most of their shops and businesses were destroyed. This situation led to the emigration of most of the Yemeni Jewish community between June 1949 and September 1950, during which time over 50,000 Jews emigrated to Israel.

Thirdly: Began with the wars of the Yemeni government with the Houthi movement in mid-2004 until the present day. The Houthi movement have always been hostile to the Jews. This is reflected in their well-known slogan "Death to Israel, Curse the Jews", which they chant in all their activities and events. At the beginning of the Houthis' displacement of the Jewish community, 70 members of the Al-Salem tribes in Sa'ada—the last remaining members of the Jewish faith in the area—were expelled to Sana'a. The Houthis have practiced in intimidation and threats against members of this community, and there are allegations that some members of the Houthi group abducted women from their husbands and married them to some of their followers, an act which violates all customs and laws[4].

With the expansion of the Houthis in 2011 to Amran and the killing of the preacher (Masha Yaish Nahari), the Jews of Amran fled the region with only four families remaining, including three families in Kharf (governorate

1 Eraqi-Klorman, Bat-Zion, (2001) The Forced Conversion of Jewish Orphans in Yemen, International Journal of Middle East Studies, 33(1), pp. 23-47.

2 Jewish Virtual Library, (2019), 9/9/2019:
https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/yemen-2

3 ibid.

4 Yahya, (2019), interview with Rabbi Yahya Yousef, 9/9/2019.

of Amran), and one family in Arhab, numbering only 11 individuals.

In 2013, a Jew in Sana'a by the name of Harun Yusuf al-Zindani was murdered. And with the Houthis taking control of Sana'a, the Jews feared for their lives, forcing 30 individuals to escape and travel to Israel. A member of the Jewish community was also arrested on charges of smuggling an archaeological manuscript. This accusation came about through false allegations that had no basis in truth. According to INSAF's findings from reliable sources, the rest of the defendants in this same case were released, but the Jewish individual remains to this day in custody due to his religious affiliation.

With the financial aid provided by the government cut off, the rest of the Jews in Yemen prepared to leave. The noose was further tightened around the Jewish community after the death of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which many Jews speak of favorably, seeing that he has pledged financial assistance to them and provided them with adequate housing in Sana'a after being evicted from their villages in the province of Saada'a[1]. The rhetoric of violence, incitement and hatred then multiplied to the point that the Houthi leader gave a clearly inflammatory speech targeting members of the Jewish community during a televised lecture he gave this past Ramadan[2].

These violations were followed by attacks and other serious incidents, including the confiscation of property and arbitrary arrests. This was all due to the absence of a fair justice system and any form of governmental protection, as well as the absence of international or local organizations concerned with the affairs of this ancient religious minority. It became the first religious sect in Yemen that had all its members forced to leave their country of origin to settle in several countries in exile.

1 Yahya, (2019), interview with Rabbi Yahya Yousef, 9/9/2019.

2 Hunah Al-Masyriah, (2019), The 24th Ramadan Lecture by Abdulmalik Badreddine Al-Houthi For the Year 1440 AH 01-06-2019, YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7hvXI6ixaA&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR0IuuHd99Iu-CLAaIi9yaSumSm7-fRqm9M5pisClZ5bQJYB8WClKXcou1Q8

Yemeni Jewish Migrations to Israel Since 1881–2016:

Despite all that has been said regarding the strong connection that the Jews of Yemen have to their country, historical facts prove that there have been serious violations against them. In addition to the difficult economic and political conditions that helped encourage them to emigrate to Israel, there are also fundamental religious reasons. According to their beliefs, they were promised to return to the promised land on "Winged Eagles". The "Magic Carpet" operation, was one of the most important stages in which Jews emigrated from Yemen. For this, the Jews of Yemen flocked from different parts of the country to Aden, despite the harsh conditions at the time, with some of them arriving to Aden on foot. Operation "Magic Carpet" came to an end on the 24th of September 1950, which involved 450 flights carrying around 50,000 Yemeni Jews to Israel between 1949 and 1950[1].

A travel document that was given to Jews to travel from Aden to Palestine during Operation Magic Carpet

The immigration of Yemeni Jews to Israel cannot be blamed only on their status in society and violations, but there are several political and religious factors to consider. For example, the desire of the State of Israel to attract Jews to its lands, which they see as part of the salvation of the children

1 Ahroni, Reuben, (2013), Jewish Emigration from the Yemen 1951-98, Routledge, New York. p: 1.

Jews of Aden leaving their homes on their way to Palestine

During one of the “Magic Carpet” flights

of Israel according to their teachings, in addition to other factors related to the sectarian conflict within Yemen and other surrounding Arab countries[1].

Despite all the temptations offered to the Jews of Yemen, only 400 people emigrated between the period since the "Magic Carpet" operation and the 1962 revolution in northern Yemen (Ahroni, 2013, 1). After these immigration journeys, there was not much left of the Jewish community in Yemen. While some 2,000 Jews were distributed in different areas among the Muslim community, some families dispersed, while some preferred to convert to Islam in order to cope with the new reality. Others left to join their families in Israel, which caused a drift between some members of the community[2].

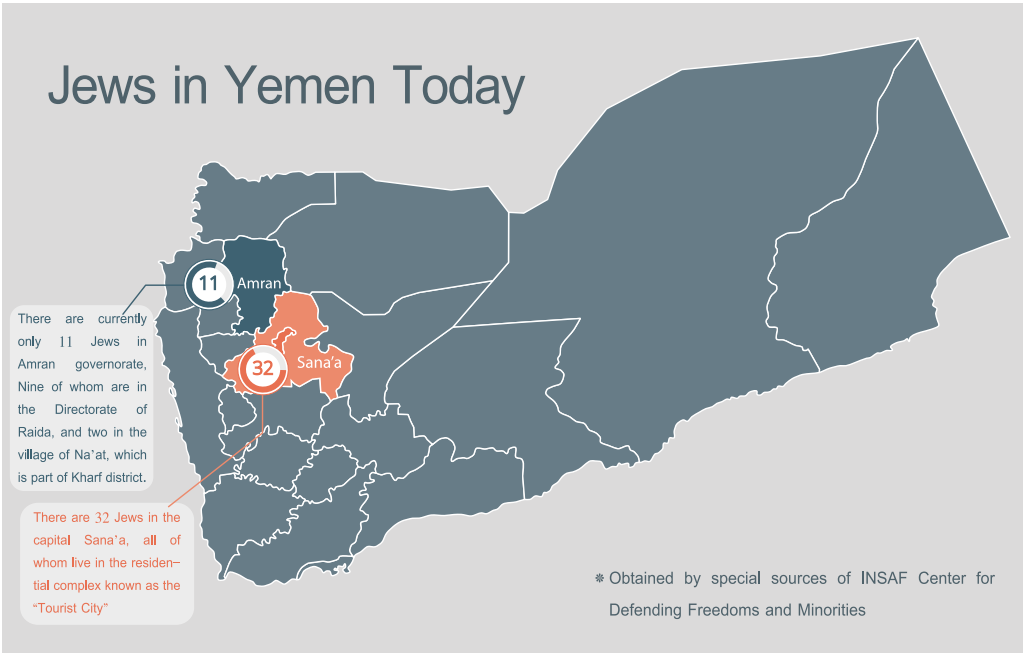
Forty-three members of this religious group remain now in Yemen clinging to their homeland, while all the conditions around them and invite them to emigrate. This requires the community to protect this small minority, which is an important part of the of Yemeni society, culturally and intellectually.

1 Ariel, Ari, (2014), Jewish-Muslim Relations and Migration from Yemen to Palestine in the Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Brill, Leiden, p: 13.

2 Anzi, Menashe, (2013), Agunot and Converts to Islam: Jews and Muslims in Yemen from 1950 to 1962.

Conclusion:

Yemeni Jews are an essential part of the fabric of society, and although historically no social conflict has emerged between Jews and other segments of Yemeni society, persecution was persistent for political reasons. This persecution was carried out by some Yemeni regimes at different political periods, often with ideological and political dimensions that were not directly related to Yemeni society. However, it is undeniable that there has always been some form of discrimination against the Jews socially and culturally, and even though they have been in this country for thousands of years, there has always been a virtual wall between the Jewish community and the Muslim community, in a society where the ruling authorities were unable to build a feeling of equal citizenship among the various people of the same country. This has not only negatively affected the Jews, but also caused divisions within society that ultimately led to war and conflict. Racism, discrimination and a lack of acceptance of others are deadly diseases that ravaged society, leaving it weak and unable to resist any unrest it faces.



Ismailis

Who are the Ismailis?

Ismailis are the second largest Shiite Muslim group after the Twelver sect (Athnāʿashariyyah). They have witnessed an eventful history dating back to the middle of the second century AH—the eighth century CE—during the formative period of Islam. They have since split into several major branches and subgroups[1]. Modern Yemen is acquainted with two of these main divisions, the Daoudi Ismailis (known also as Bohra) and the Sulaymaniyah Ismailis (Known also as Makaremah).

A man from the Ismaili Sect

1 Daftary, Farhad, (2016), Dictionary of Ismaili History, *Mojam al-Tarikh al-Esmaili*", T: Saif al-Din Kassir, Dar al-Saqi, Beirut, p: 36.

The history of Ismailism dates back to early times in Islamic history. In 148 AH/765 CE, following the death of Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq, who unified the Shiite Imams, most of his followers recognized his son Musa Al-Kadhim as their new Imam. Other groups of Imamate Shiites acknowledged the Imamate of Musa's half-brother, Ismail, or Ismail's son Mohammed. There is little information regarding the life and biography of Mohammad ibn Ismail, who went into hiding. This in turn began the secrecy which has overshadowed Ismaili history, and lasted until the founding of the Fatimid state, when the Ismaili Imams appeared publicly as Fatimid caliphs[1]. From this historical perspective, it can be said that Ismailism had multiplied and diversified its knowledge and religious sources, depending on the historical developments it faced. But it is clearly linked to influential figures who tend to disagree on the origin from which they originate. This is why each of these groups were named after their founder, starting with Ismailism, and to the contemporary groups that exist around the world today.

Ismaili Mosque in Haraz

1 Daftary, Farhad, (2006), "Ismailis" Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia, The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

The History of Ismailism in Yemen:

Ismailism was introduced into Yemen at an early stage. The spread of its teachings was pronounced in Yemen in 270 AH/883 CE as a result of the activities of the preacher Ibn Hoshab Mansour Al-Yemen and the preacher Ali ibn al-Fadl. When Ibn al-Fadl conquered Sana'a in 293 AH/905–906 CE, almost all of Yemen fell under the control of the Ismailis, but they later lost most of the territories they conquered to the Zaydi Imamate and other local dynasties. With the death of Ibn Hushib (302 AH/924 CE) and the collapse of the Ismaili state in Yemen, the spread of the Ismaili teachings continued secretly for over a century, which is considered to be the dark period of Ismaili history in Yemen. Clandestine support for the cause continued to come from various tribes, especially the Hamdan tribe, and the names of its Yemeni preachers were kept secret. During the reign of the Fatimid caliph Al-Imam Al-Dahir (411–427 AH/1021–1036 CE), while the Zaydis and other local dynasties ruled Yemen, the preacher Sulayman ibn Abdullah al-Zawahi –who lived in the mountainous region of Haraz—was authorized to lead the spreading of the Ismaili teachings in Yemen. Suleiman Ali bin Mohammad Al-Sulaihi chose his successor, the son of the Judge of Haraz and an important Hamdani commander from the Yam clan who became the preacher's assistant. In 429 AH/1038 CE, the preacher Ali ibn Mohammad Al-Sulaihi rose to power in Mazar, located in Haraz, where he built fortresses to mark the founding of the ruling Ismaili Sulayhid dynasty. With the support of the Hamdan, Hemyar, and several other tribes, Ali ibn Mohammad immediately began a swift campaign to conquer Yemen, which he was able to do in 455 AH/1063 CE. After recognizing the sovereignty of the Fatimid caliph, Ali chose Sana'a as his capital and approved the sermon in the name of the Fatimid Ismailis throughout the territory under his rule[1]. Hence, Ismailism in Yemen changed from a small religious sect, to the official religion of a full-fledged state that lasted for a considerable amount of time.

It would be impossible to mention the history of Ismailism in Yemen without highlighting one of the most important historical figures of Yemen, Lady Arwa bint Ahmed Al-Sulaihi, also known as the "Noble Lady". Born in the year 440 AH/1048 CE (and in a different account 444 AH/1052 CE) in the region of Haraz. She assumed power after the death of her husband

1 Daftary, Farhad, (1999), Sayyida Hurra: The Isma'ili Sulayhid Queen of Yemen, Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies, I.B.Tauris Publishers, London.

Queen Arwa's Mosque in Jibla, which dates back to about 1085 AD

Ahmed Al-Mukarram and became Queen of Yemen. Famous not only for her stunning beauty, but for her courage, integrity, piety, independence and intelligence, with an extensive background in the sciences of the time. She took control of the Sulayhid state, and her name was mentioned in sermons, following orders from the Fatimid caliph, Imam Al-Mustansir. In addition to her effective political power, she played an important religious role in the country, culminating in her appointment as the Hija of Yemen by the Fatimid caliph Al-Mustansir shortly after her husband's death[1]. This helps provide us with a better overview of the historical era of Ismaili rule in terms of political and social tolerance, especially towards women, as it allowed for a woman to play a major role in society, a role that is usually preserved only for men. Lady Arwa also made some fundamental changes on the political scene, such as the transfer of the capital to Jibla in Ibb, and remnants of her cultural impact can be found throughout the country.

It can also be argued that the Sulayhid period was one of the brightest eras in Yemeni history in the fields of thought, writing and literature, and witnessed the emergence of a prominent interest in various scientific and educational fields[2]. All this would not have been possible without the pres-

1 Daftary, Farhad, (1999).

2 Al-Ansi, Ahmed Ahmed, (2016), Courses in Yemen During the Era of the Sulayhid State, "*Al-Moqarrarat Al-Deraseyah Fi al-Yaman Fi Ahd Al-Dawlah Al-Solaiheyah*", Journal of Social Studies, University of Science and Technology, p 50.

ence of political, economic and social stability, as well as reasonable religious freedom and tolerance.

In addition to Haraz and Ibb in Yemen, Ismailis are also found in Najran, a fertile plain of land that stretches across the Saudi—Yemen border, and which came under Saudi rule in 1934. This is the spiritual center of the Sulaymaniyah Ismailis, with followers there numbering in the tens of thousands. Najran is also known for being the center of the supreme preacher of this sect. Their status in the region—with a few exceptions—dates back to 1640. Ismailis have lived in Najran for over a thousand years and were one of the many faiths that existed in early Islam[1]. The Ismailis in Najran have social and religious relations with the rest of the Ismailis, both in Yemen and abroad in India, Pakistan and the rest of the world.

The Ismailis in Yemen are divided into two main denominations: The Dawoodi sect(also known as Bohra), named after their founder Dawood ibn Qutb, and the Sulaymani sect (also known as Al-Makarima in relation to the Makrami family in Najran). These two divisions were once one under the name Tayyibis, who believed that their line of Imams remained in the offspring of the Al-Tayyib. However, in the event of the absence of an Imam, the supreme preacher looks after the affairs of the Tayyibi sect and its community. As in the Imamate system, every supreme preacher chooses his successor before his death. The Tayyibis in Yemen were able to maintain their unity in the country, gaining increasing numbers of followers to their doctrine in western India. These were known as the Bohra, which is thought to be derived from the term Vohruvo, which means "to trade", seeing that the spread of their teachings started among the Gajjar commercial group. After the death of the 26th supreme preacher Da'ud ibn 'Ajabshah in 997 AH/1589 CE, a dispute over his succession led to the Dawoodi—Sulaymani division at the Musta'li Tayyibi University and its community[2]. Despite the presence of followers of the two denominations in Yemen, the most prominent presence is that of the Dawoodi, who have many shrines and holy places that attract members of the sect from different regions around the world to Yemen.

1 HRW, (2008), The Ismailis of Najran Second-class Saudi Citizens, September 22, 2008; https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/09/22/ismailis-najran/second-class-saudi-citizens

2 Daftary, Farhad, (2016).

Religion, Politics, & Their Integration into Society:

There are no official statistics that show the actual number of Ismailis, but according to a statement by the Ismaili Sheikh of Yemen, Ahmed Ali Abdullah Al-Mahalla, in an interview with Al-Mashhad Al-Yemeni, they number about half a million, and are based in Haraz in Sana'a, Arras, Al-Udain in Ibb, Waila in Sa'ada and to a lesser degree in Hamadan[1]. However, these estimates lack any official confirmation, and appear to be exaggerated and are partly used for political reasons. According to INSAF researchers, who have reached out to prominent figures in the Ismaili community in Yemen, the Ismailis are actually estimated at 195,000, located as follows: 50,000 in Haraz, half of whom are Sulaymani and the other half Dawoodi; 15,000 in the area of Aras in Yarim, Ibb governorate, of which most are Sulaymani; 3,000 in the directorate of Al-Udain; 184 in the village of Tibah in Hamadan; and 45 in the village of Al-Amir[2]. It should also be noted that several Ismailis live in the capital Sana'a, but they are originally affiliated with their area of Haraz or the rest of the areas to which they are still associated with.

Other than buying and selling, Ismailis social integration is virtually non-existent. Marriage only takes place between members of the same sect. They do not interfere in politics and have always had a good relationship with the rulers of Yemen. Their focus is mainly on religious and charitable matters, in addition to working in the field of trade. They have also been active in several community activities; they adopted and paid for a campaign to clean the streets of Sana'a in 2015. In 2018, they launched an initiative to replace qat trees with coffee trees in their main stronghold of Haraz by order of their current sultan, Mufaddal Saifuddin[3]. The Dawoodi's economic and societal activities are not limited to Yemen, but to wherever they are located in the world.

1 Al-Mashad Al-Yamani, (2019), After the Banner "We Are the Catholics of Yemen.. We Love You" Learn about Christians in Yemen (Special Report), "*Bad Lafetat Nahno Katholik al-Yaman… Nohebbok, Tarraf Ala al-Masyheen Fi al-Yaman, Tqreer Khas*", February 5, 2019: https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/126687

2 Anonymous sources from Ismaili Sect, (2019), An Interview with a Scholar of the Ismaili Community in Yemen, 15/9/2019.

3 Duqimi, Ghamdan, (2019), Facts on Who are the Bohra?, "*Haqaeq Man Hom al-Boharah?*", Irfaa Sawtak, June 26, 2019: https://www.irfaasawtak.com/a/500558.html

The Dawoodi sect is headed today by their 53rd preacher (Al-Mufadal ibn Mohammad Burhan Al-Din), and are mainly present in Haraz, about 90 km from Sana'a. The neighboring villages are home to the shrine of the sect's preachers, where tens of thousands of Dawoodis come to visit each year. Of these shrines, is the tomb of Hatim ibn Ibrahim Al-Hamidi among many other shrines. In the capital Sana'a, the Dawoodi Ismaili community have a religious center in the Haddah area, known as Al-Faid Al-Hatimi. As for the Sulaymani Ismailis, they have a mosque in the Nuqum area, where they hold their ceremonies like the rest of their centers around the world.

Al-Faid Al-Hatimi in Sana'a

Violations Against the Ismailis in Yemen:

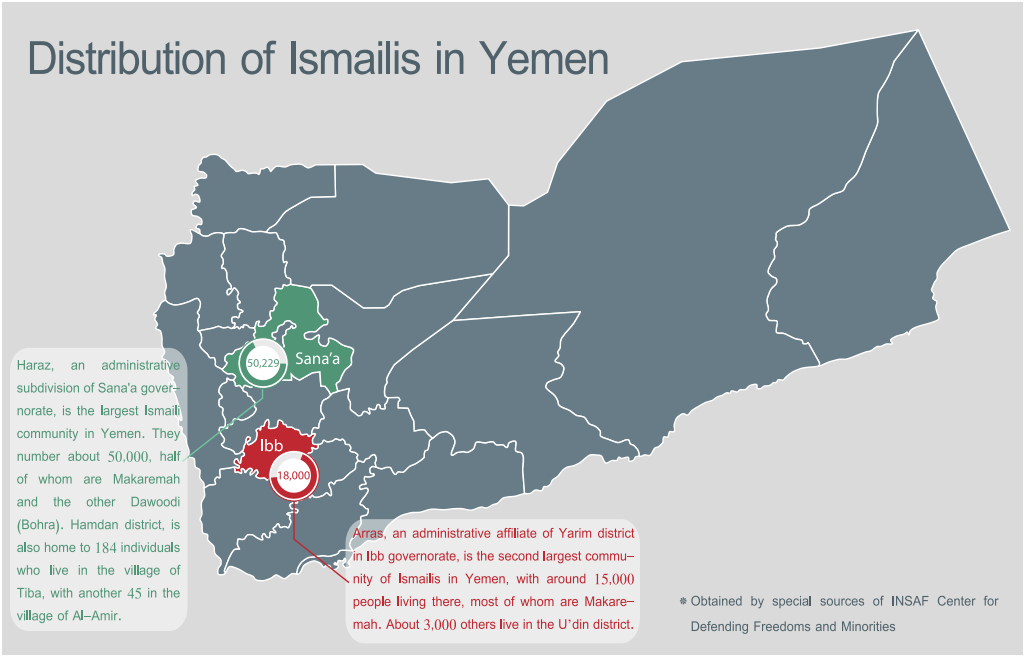
Ismailis in general, and Ismailism in Yemen in particular, have been subjected to an ongoing stream of violence. This was helped by waves of continuous and systematic distortion by different sects and other religious groups, due to several factors as mentioned by the researcher Ahmed Abd Saif regarding the Ismaili sect[1]. These include: the internal divisions within the same sect from time to time, their obscurity and the doctrine of taqiyya that raises questions and uncertainty, the secrecy of their philosophical and intellectual ideas which has kept their intellectual projects unpublished and away from the general public, and the continued political targeting of this group by successive governments and religious groups.

As a result of these hostile views and incitements towards followers of this doctrine, the Ismailis have been subjected throughout history to killing and extermination, with more than 50,000 Ismailis killed by the Zaydi sect during the days of Abdullah bin Hamza, Yahya bin Hamza, Mutawakkil, Hamid Al-Din and others[2]. The sect has been subjected to many violations in the recent years, first through some of the preachers belonging to the Islah Party (Muslim Brotherhood) who consider the Ismaili's teachings as blasphemy. This was followed of the Houthis, who in 2019 attacked Ismaili worshipers inside a mosque.

The war has created a fertile environment for extremist groups that are hostile to all of those who have different religious views. It also placed many obstacles in front of this community to practice its rituals, such as the visiting of shrines in both Haraz and Jableh, where followers of the sect used to come from different regions within Yemen and abroad. It has also now become impossible for many Dawoodi from outside Yemen, or those in areas far from the capital Sana'a (especially the southern regions), to perform

1 Saif, Ahmad Abdo, (2012), A Working Paper on Ismailis in Yemen and the Right to Equal Citizenship, Al-Muhammadiyah Al-Hamdania for Studies and Research, April 8, 2012: http://dmhsr.blogspot.com/2012/08/blog-post_6236.html

2 Al-Mashad Al-Yemeni, (2013), Ismaili Leader: Zaydis Promised to Apologize for Past Abuses and We Await for Them to Fulfill Their Promise, "*Shaikh al-Ttaefah al-Ismailiah Lel Mashhas al-Yamani: al-Zaidion Wadona Be al-Etethar An Entehakat al-Mathi W Nantather al-Wafa*", 2013-09-30:
https://www.almashhadalyemeni.net/6013



their usual pilgrimages due to the closure of Sana'a International Airport by the Arab Coalition forces. Not to mention the obstacles faced by travelers on the road from areas under the control of the government of President Abdu Rabbo Mansour Hadi, to areas under the control of the Houthi group[1]. This is in addition to the direct abuses they endure that threaten their lives and their freedom.

The Dawoodi have been affected by the repercussions of the ongoing war in Yemen since March 2015, which has led many members of this sect to leave the country. In 2015, a car bomb exploded in front of the Al-Faid Al-Hatimi center in Sanaa, killing at least three people. This center was previously raided by the Houthis and closed. In Aden, a Dawoodi businessman and his son escaped a kidnapping attempt by Islamic extremists in 2015. . In a recent violation, an explosion was set off at the Al-Kawaja mosque in Aden. The most recent violation occurred this year (2019) where gunmen threatened the owner of the Remi restaurant (one of the most famous restaurants in the Crater area) to either pay money or close shop. These harassments, prosecution, and abuses have all led many of the Ismailis to leave Yemen from fear of themselves or their property being targeted by extremist

1 Al-Shalali, Aladdin Hussain, (2019), The Bohra Sect in Yemen, Rituals Suspended Due to War, "*Taefat al-Boharah Fi al-Yaman Toqos Moalaqah Besabab al-Harb*", Altra Sawt, 23 June 2019: www.ultrasawt.com/طائفة-البهرة-في-اليمن-طقوس-مُعلّقة-بسبب-الحرب/علاء-الدين-حسين-الشلالي/مجتمع/عشوائيات/

groups operating under the insecurity and lawlessness the country is in at the moment, and the lack of a government that is able to protect minorities.

Conclusion:

Although the Ismailis are an integral part of the fabric of Yemeni society, they are known for their relative isolation. Their beliefs are confidential and are only disclosed to devoted followers. This in turn has helped to reinforce and encourage the spread of rumors, distortion and incitement against them, and has certainly led to promote hatred and racism against them, whether by the ruling authorities or by society itself, which does not accept the idea of pluralism or diversity.

The presence of the Ismailis and other old and modern sects in Yemen embodies the principle of coexistence and social peace, and contributes to the strengthening of the economy in the country, whether through direct business and economic activities or through religious tourism, where every year thousands of Ismaili visitors come to visit their shrines, in Haraz, Jabla and others places. However, it seems that the war has not only stopped many of these economic benefits, but has also led to the fleeing of many of them outside of Yemen. As the war wages on, it is feared that the Yemeni society could forever lose this part of its intellectual and cultural diversity.

Baha'is

Brief History:

Although the existence of Baha'ism in Yemen has only been known in recent years, the religion arrived in the country as early as the 19th century. According to the official website of the Baha'i faith in Yemen[1], Baha'ism was first introduced to Yemen with the advent of an Iranian young man named Ali Muhammad Al-Shirazi, known also as Al-Bab, preaching this new religion in 1844, who crossed into Yemen through the port city of Mocha during his journey. Another historical incident that ties Baha'is historically to Yemen (according to their website), is when the Ottoman Empire ordered Baha'Allah imprisoned in Acre, Palestine. This led to the frequent visit of Bahais to Yemen's harbors, during their transit stops to visit Baha'Allah.

Documents belonging to the Baha'i sect mention that Baha'is in Yemen were found in many Yemeni cities and villages such as Aden, Mukalla, Sana'a, Taiz, Hodeidah, Ibb, Socotra, Lahj, and others. They have also contributed to the health sector in a number of major and have participated in laying the building blocks in several important developmental projects in different fields such as education, health, urbanization, and trade. These documents also show the names of several people in Yemen, such as Kamal bin Haidara, who was honored by the Sultan of Al-Mahra Issa bin Ali bin Afrar in Qishn and Socotra and was awarded the special title of Al-Haidara in recognition of his love for and dedication to serving his country and fellow citizens, and for volunteering to provide medical services to the people of one of the most remote islands in Yemen for over 60 years. There are other similar examples, such as Sheikh Mohammed Mahdi Mawlawi in Aden and Haj Abdullah Anwar in Sana'a, who were either native to Yemen or came from foreign lands[2]. These documents only provide insights to certain elite figures, and historical statistics on wider adherence to the religion are unavailable. The sect has, however, in recent years witnessed a significant development in terms of the number of its followers, who are able to declare their religious affiliation now more than ever despite the harassment, persecution and violations against them by the different regimes, especially the Houthis, who have thrown many Baha'i in prisons and detention centers and have sentenced some to death.

1 Baha'is in Yemen, (2019), the official website of Baha'is in Yemen, 13/9/2019: http://www.bahaiye.org/AR/About/Default.aspx

2 Ibid.

Baha'ism in Yemen Today:

Although Baha'is in Yemen state that their presence in Yemen dates as far back as the 19th century, public acknowledgement of their presence came much later. In November 2015, Baha'is officially announced their presence in Yemen. According to the website of the Yemeni Initiative for Defending Baha'i Rights, sources do not agree on the specific number of Baha'is in Yemen today. Several human rights and media sources estimate the number to be around 1,000, which include estimates by Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2016), while others estimate several thousands. Baha'is are made up of a mixture of well-known Yemeni tribes and some of the urban population. Very few of them are of non-Yemeni origins and were born and lived in Yemen for decades, having become part of its social fabric. Baha'is work through several service and social institutions, perhaps most importantly the Nida'a Foundation for Building & Coexistence, which initiated the implementation of service programs and cooperated with dozens of civil society organizations. However, Houthi forces closed this institution and others like it in other cities during the summer of 2016, in conjunction with the wave of arrests of dozens of Baha'is, including women and children[1].

The Baha'i are now publicly present in major cities, but more clearly in the capital Sana'a, where some cultural, intellectual and social events are held despite the tightening of the noose by the ruling Houthi authorities.

Photo from the "Yemeni Initiative for Defending Baha'is Rights" website of a Baha'i event

1 Baha'is in Yemen Today, (2019), Yemeni Initiative for Defending the Rights of Baha'is, 14/9/2019:
https://www.defendingbahairights.org/albhaeywn-fy-alymn

Abuses Suffered by This Sect:

Muslim Yemeni religious scholars view Baha'ism as an infidel and malicious sect, whose aim is to destroy Islam, considering that its book is different from the Qur'an and that their prayers and prophet are different. Baha'is are therefore viewed as apostates, an offense which carries the death penalty.

According to the Yemeni Initiative for Defending Baha'i Rights, the harassment of Baha'is in Yemen dates back to 2008. However, events have clearly demonstrated that the Houthis are the main culprits responsible for the current persecution of Baha'is in the country. The situation of Baha'is in Yemen is by no means comparable to what was happening before the Houthis came to power in Sana'a, and to what is happening to them now under Houthi control. Violations and persecutions have increased from individual cases to a systematic and well-defined process targeting all members of this belief. It should also be noted here that the figures behind the previous persecution of Baha'is are themselves the central figures who are currently leading this pursuit. Many clues also point to an Iranian role behind the Baha'i persecution in Yemen. Several local and international human rights organizations have expressed concern regarding Iran's increasing role in the persecution of this religious minority in Yemen. The Iranian embassy in Sana'a seemed to play a role in this affair and has tried more than once to convince the Yemeni side to hand over Baha'i detainees. It should be noted that the Iranian regime carries a hostile attitude against Baha'is inside Iran, where it has arrested, imprisoned, tortured and killed thousands of its followers since the Islamic revolution in Iran.

The Yemeni Initiative for Defending Baha'i Rights website provides a list of the violations committed against this sect, including, in 2008, the beginning of the first wave of arrests against the followers of this sect by national security forces. On 3 December, a well-known Yemeni Baha'i, Hamid bin Haidarah, was detained. National Security forces came to his office in the port city of Balhaf and arrested him at his job at the Yemen LNG company. In 2014, criminal prosecutors began an intensive media campaign against Baha'is aimed at tarnishing their reputation and intimidating public opinion regarding this minority through the illusion of a dangerous global scheme being woven against Yemen through Baha'is.

In 2015, Akram Saleh Ayyash was arrested for one day in a police station on charges of spreading the Baha'i faith, and was only released after intense pressure from human rights activists. On 10 August 2016, national security forces raided an event organized by a licensed Baha'i institution celebrating World Youth Day. This raid resulted in the arrest of 67 individuals, including women and children.

On 17 April 2017, and with the approach of Eid Al-Radwan (the most important holiday on the Baha'i calendar), national security forces began a new large-scale campaign of arrests against Baha'i men and women, displacing entire families from their homes and forcing them to find alternative accommodation, During this campaign, Walid Ayyash, Badiullah Sanai, Wael al-Ariqi and Akram Ayyash were arrested and remain in detention. On 2 January 2018, Judge Abdo Ismail Hassan Rajeh sentenced Hamid bin Haidara to death and ordered the confiscation of all of his of property. The judge also ordered the closure of all Baha'i institutions and forums in the country. On 11 October 2018, the spokesman for the Baha'i community in Yemen was arrested just one day after a group of UN experts condemned the charges brought up against over 20 Baha'is in Yemen, who were accused of apostasy and espionage, and demanded that the charges be dropped immediately[1].

A celebration of the feast of Radwan

1 Abdullah Al-Alfi, (2019), Special Interview with The Baha'i Spokesman in Yemen Abdullah Al-Alfi , September 5, 2019.

As a result of these abuses and increased violence against the group on the basis of their beliefs, the issue has gained international attention, as UN experts have called for the immediate release of Baha'i detainees. On 15 September 2018, criminal proceedings against 24 people including at least 22 Baha'is, eight of whom were women and one of which was a minor, began at the Special Criminal Court in Sana'a. The detainees were not investigated and received no legal notice from the prosecutors regarding the charges against them prior to the commencement of trial proceedings.

Charges against them included apostasy, the spreading and teaching of the Baha'i religion, and espionage, which are all punishable by death if convicted. UN human rights experts have condemned these proceedings and have called for the charges to be dropped. They have also called upon the de facto authorities in Sanaa to put an immediate end to the persistent persecution of Baha'is in Yemen and to release detainees detained based on their religion or beliefs, while stating that international human rights obligations apply to de facto authorities exercising effective control[1].

Baha'is are subjected to considerable and systematic pressure from the ruling authorities, especially in Sana'a, where the Houthi group is dominant. This was especially clear after the Houthi leader's televised speech in March 2018, in which he attacked the Baha'is as a demonic movement and called upon his followers to confront the Baha'i religion as one of Israel's soft tools of war, claiming that it was no less dangerous than military aggression. Friday sermons and official satellite channels, such as Yemen TV and its weekly program Besarah, were used to launch attacks and target the reputation and integrity of defenders of Baha'i rights (be it individuals or organizations). The Houthi leader also made a direct statement against the sect, accusing it of infidelity and falsehood.

One of the most famous Baha'i detainees was Hamed bin Haidara whose father, Dr. Kamal bin Haiderah, was mentioned earlier. He was abducted by the Houthis in 2014 and held captive without trial. In 2015, his trial before the Sana'a Criminal Court began on charges of communicating with Israel through the "House of the Supreme Justice". These charges are directly relat-

1 UN, (2018), Yemen: UN experts calls for immediate release of Bahá'ís, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner;
https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23704&LangID=E

ed to his beliefs. Since his arrest, the Public Prosecutor has accused him of "working for Israel to spread the Baha'i faith in Yemen and incite Yemenis to convert, and that he was seeking to establish a national home for the Baha'is in the county", according to the prosecution, which also claimed that Haidara was an Iranian national and that his real name was Hamid Mirza Kamali Sarostani[1]. In 2018, the court sentenced him to death, and confiscated all of his assets, as well as ordering the closure of the Baha'i institutions. Another 24 Baha'is are on trial on the same charges, which carry the death penalty, and there are five others detained with the national security forces.

Hamed bin Haidara

1 Azam, Ismail (2018), Yemen's Baha'is: A Religious Minority "Seeking Peace" prosecuted by the Houthis, "*Bahaaeo al-Yaman Aqalliah Deniah Tanshod al-Sslam Yolaheqoha al-Hothion*", DW, 21/1/2018:
www.dw.com/ar/بهائيو-اليمن-أقلية-دينية-تنشد-السلام-يُلاحقها-الحوثيون/a-42154884/

Conclusion:

The Baha'i community represents one of the newest sects in Yemen. However, they appear to be the most vulnerable due to systematic, religious, ideological, and political violations by the Houthi authorities ever since their control of Sana'a and other northern regions in 2014. There are currently five Baha'i detainees in Houthi prisons, not to mention the confiscation of their property, the closure of their institutions and the prosecution of 24 other people, under the pretext of different charges, but the real reason is their religious and intellectual beliefs.

The violations against the Baha'is in Yemen are intertwined with political and social ideology, as well as internal affairs and abroad. Iran is directly accused of overseeing this matter, where it is the most known country in the world to oppress this sect. This explains why they were subjected to such abuses in Yemen after the Houthis took control of Sana'a.

The protection of the Baha'is and the demand for the release of their detainees is a protection of human rights, as well as the protection of society and is vital to having an advantageous culturally and socially pluralism society.

Christians

Christianity in Yemen—A Historical Background:

It would be very difficult to discuss ancient Yemen without mentioning the religious origins of the spread of the monotheistic religions in Arabia, including Christianity. In research by Muhsin Al-Hajjaj on Christianity in Yemen before Islam[1], Al-Hajjaj chronologically demonstrates how Christianity was introduced to Yemen and how it survived until the rise of Islam, which in turn made Christians in Yemen a minority in society. Advocates of Christianity found their way to the Himyarites in Yemen through commercial caravans traveling from the land of Syria (Al-Sham) to the land of the Lakhmids, from where they traveled to Najran and Yemen. Christian missionaries became more active after Emperor Constantine II (337–361 CE) sent the evangelist Theophilus to Yemen in 354 CE. He arrived in the land of the Himyarites that year and was able to convert some Arab princes to Christianity and start the spread of the religion in Yemen. He was also able to establish churches in Aden, Raydan (Dhofar)—the capital of the Himyarites at the time—and a third in Hormuz. Theophilus then installed a bishop in Dhofar to oversee the affairs of Christians. Christianity was also spread to Yemen via land and sea through trade relations with Greece and Abyssinia, as there were strong ties between Yemen and the other ancient Christian civilizations of the time.

Raydan (Dhofar) embraced Christianity during the reign of Tharan Yehanim (340-350)[2], who played a major role in spreading Christianity. He allowed for the building of churches and monasteries for Christians to hold their rites in Najran, Dhofar (Raydan), and Aden, the largest of which was in Najran, which its followers called the "Kaaba of Najran"[3]. However, there is no evidence to support the spread of Christianity before the sixth century. The Byzantine emperor sent a Christian mission to primarily build churches for Byzantine merchants and other adherents of Christianity, and there are no indications to confirm that the Himyarite king converted into Christianity himself. There is another narrative that states that Christianity was first spread in Najran by a local resident who converted to Christianity during

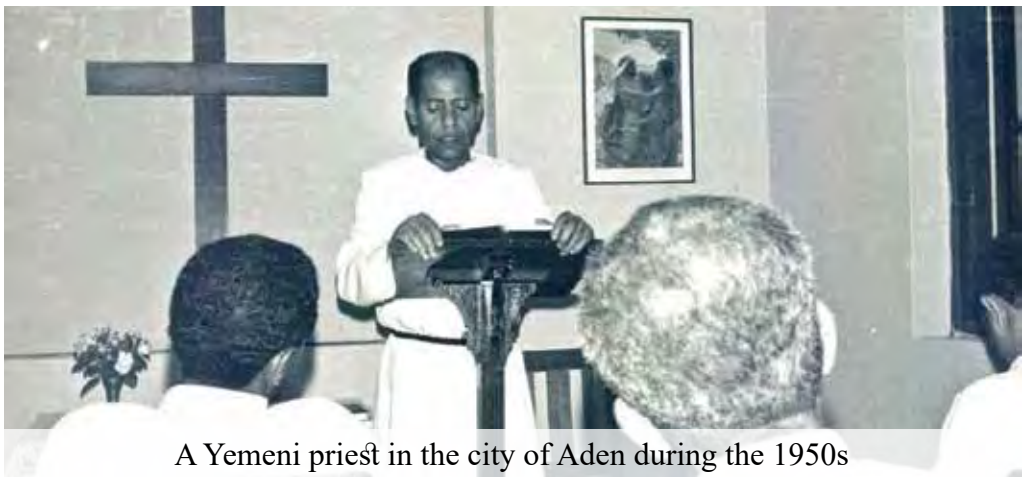
1 Al-Hajaj, Mohsen Mukhal Fahd, (2017), Christianity and Christians in Pre-Islamic Yemen, "*al-Masyhiah wal Maseyhion Qabh al-Eslam*", Arab Gulf Magazine, vol. 45, p. 1,2.

2 Ali, Jawad, (2019), A Detailed History of Arabs Before Islam, "*al-Mofassal Fi Tarikh al-Arab Qabl al-Eslam*", from the comprehensive encyclopedia on the Internet, 10/10/2019, c / 1, p: 124.

3 Jaber, Ayman Shamkhi, and Hussein, Salama Abdul-Reza, (2015), P: 158.

his stay in Al-Hirah, and that it spread from there to the Himyarite Kingdom[1], meaning that its spread was not sponsored by the Himyarite state.

The Byzantines were able to secure a foothold on the west coast of Yemen as early as 435–515. According to Philostorgius, Emperor Constantine I obtained permission from the Himyarite King Abu Karb As'ad Al-Kamil to build three churches, one in Aden, one in Dhofar, and the third in an undetermined town at the entrance to the Arabian Gulf[2]. However, there is no clear historical evidence to support the presence of Christianity before this date in the Himyarite Kingdom. In addition to the ambiguity of the existence of actual Christian Himyarites, the history of the Ethiopian campaign is sporadic and does not provide any details about the initial stages of their journey to southern Arabia. The references categorically state that the Himyarite king was defeated by the Ethiopians and forced to retreat to the mountains of Yemen. According to Martyrium, after the departure of Najashi (the Ethiopian leader), the Himyarite king attacked and killed Ethiopian Christian soldiers and began the systematic persecution of all Christians in his domain[3]. Historical accounts do not provide any details regarding the conditions of Christians in the period of Islam's introduction into Yemen or the period beyond that, but we do have documents that indicate the continuation of Christian presence due to the relationships between Yemen and other countries at the time.



A Yemeni priest in the city of Aden during the 1950s

1 Al-Naeem, Noura Bint Abdullah, (2000), p: 79.

2 Christides, Vassilios, (1972), The Himyarite-Ethiopian war and the Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia in the acts of Gregentius (ca. 530 A.D.), Annales d'Ethiopie. Volume 9, année 1972, p: 115.

3 Christides, Vassilios, (1972), p: 118.

Christianity Nowadays:

According to a press report, unofficial statistics indicate that the number of Christians in Yemen is around 2,500 people, in addition to 700 Yemeni Christians living outside of Yemen. The majority of Christians in Yemen practice religious rituals in a semi-secret fashion. The report notes that Roman Catholic leaders, for example, were waiting to hear back from the government before the current war on a decision on whether to allow them to build institutions belonging to their community, that would be officially recognized by the government in Sana'a[1]. The numbers of Christians may have been greatly influenced by the current conflict, and their numbers may have been altered by the war; as there are now no active foreign missions in the country and far fewer foreign companies operating in the Yemen.

According to Human Rights Watch, Yemen's Christians are estimated to number around 41,000 native Yemenis and refugees from abroad, including indigenous Yemeni Christians who dare not speak out, some of whom are threatened every day as apostates[2]. The US State Department report indicates that there are 3,000 Christians throughout the country, most of them refugees or temporary foreign residents[3]. The ambiguity in determining the exact number of Christians in Yemen is due to several reasons. First, the absence of any official presence of this sect, which is spread either by the presence of foreign Christians or by Yemeni Christians who themselves converted secretly into Christianity. Second, the increased religious extremism of recent years in Yemen, especially with the continuation of the civil war which has dissolved the existence of the state and has in turn allowed for the rise of many armed militias and extremists. Many of these groups reject the idea of coexisting with any other group belonging to another religion.

Previously, there were some Christian associations and establishments

1 Al-Mashad Al-Yamani, (2019), After the Banner "We Are the Catholics of Yemen.. We Love You" Learn about Christians in Yemen (Special Report), February 5, 2019: https://www.almashhad-alyemeni.com/126687

2 Wille, Belkis, (2016), Christians Among The Victims in an Unstable Yemen, Human Rights Watch, May 10, 2016: https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/05/10/christians-among-victims-unstable-yemen

3 U.S Department of State, (2019), International Religious Freedom Report, Yemen, 12/9/2019: https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2007/90224.htm

that provided services through various bodies, including Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christian organizations, throughout Sana'a, Aden and other cities without government interference. Christian and Jewish services were regularly held in private homes or facilities, such as schools, without harassment[1].

A Church in Aden in1968

There are currently only four churches in Yemen, which was once the cradle of Christianity in Arabia. However, there were once many churches spread across the country, such as the Church of Al-Qalis in the capital Sana'a, which was built by Abraham the Abyssinian during the Ethiopian presence in Yemen. There is also a Christian village located in central Yemen today called Maria, which has been since renamed the "Garrison of the Village of Maria" near the capital of the Himyarites Kingdom, Dhofar (100 km south of the capital Sanaa). The style in which this ancient village was built in follows the pattern of buildings found in ancient fortified monasteries. The village is said to date back to the fifth century CE, which makes it the

1 Ibid.

oldest surviving Christian monument in Yemen and Arabia[1]. There are also remains of a church on the island of Socotra in an area known as Al-Souk[2]. Sana'a is devoid of any churches, so Christians must practice their rituals in private homes. Our center is still researching and monitoring the state of the Christian minority community in Yemen.

There are currently four churches in Aden, which include the Church of St. Anthony, located in the city of Al-Tawahi, known locally as Ras Al-Musabat, the name of the area the church was built in. The church dates back to the British presence in Aden in the middle of the nineteenth century, and has a medical center attached to it which provided health services to Yemenis. In the city of Crater in Aden, there is also the Badri Church or Baptist Church, called the Church of St. Mary Garrison, which only performed cultural activities and housed several shrines. The other two churches, the Bangsar and Hafun, have since been closed.

1 Taqi, Abdul Ilah, (2015), Christians of Yemen.. Presence in the Arabian Peninsula Since the Fourth Century AD, "*Masihio al-Yaman.. Hothor Fi al-Jazirah al-Arabiah Month al-Qarn al-Rrabe al-Miladi*", Al-Araby Al-Jadid, 14 September 2015:
www.alaraby.co.uk/miscellaneous/مسيحيو-اليمن-حضور-بجزيرة-العرب-منذ-القرن-الرابع-الميلادي/

2 Naumkin, Vitaly, (2015), Socotra Island of Legends, T: Khairi Al-Damen, Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority.

Ras Al-Musabat Church at Al-Tawahi during the 1950's
including a modern picture of the church today

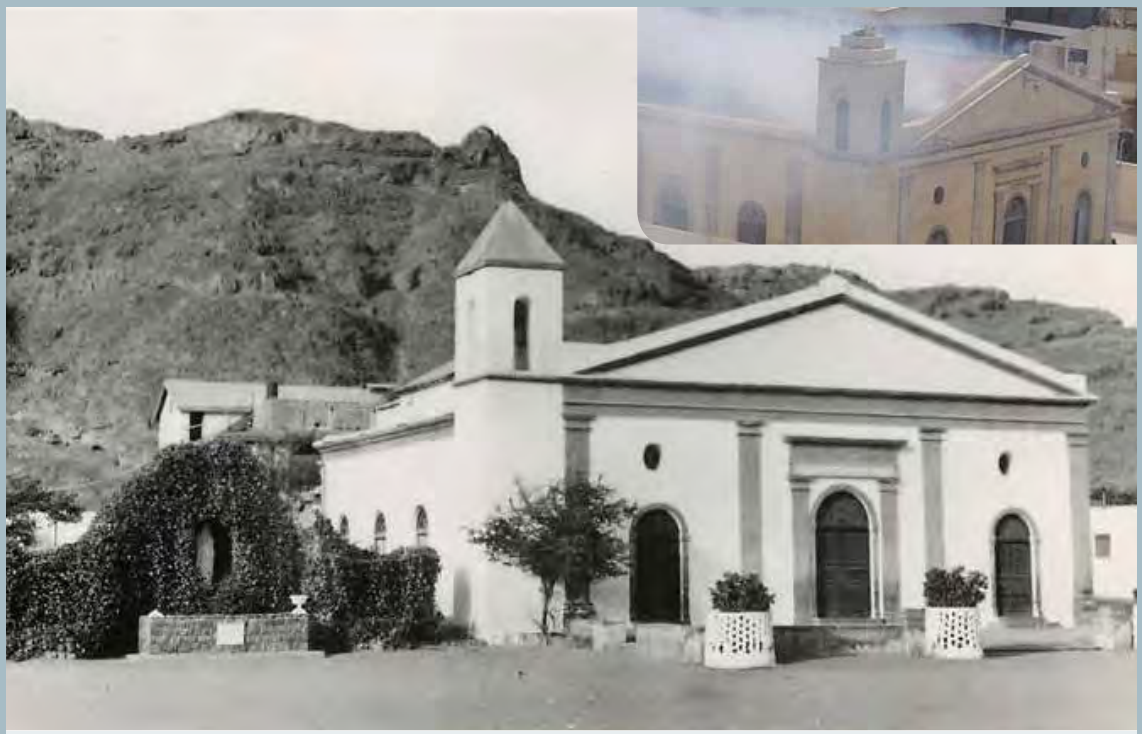
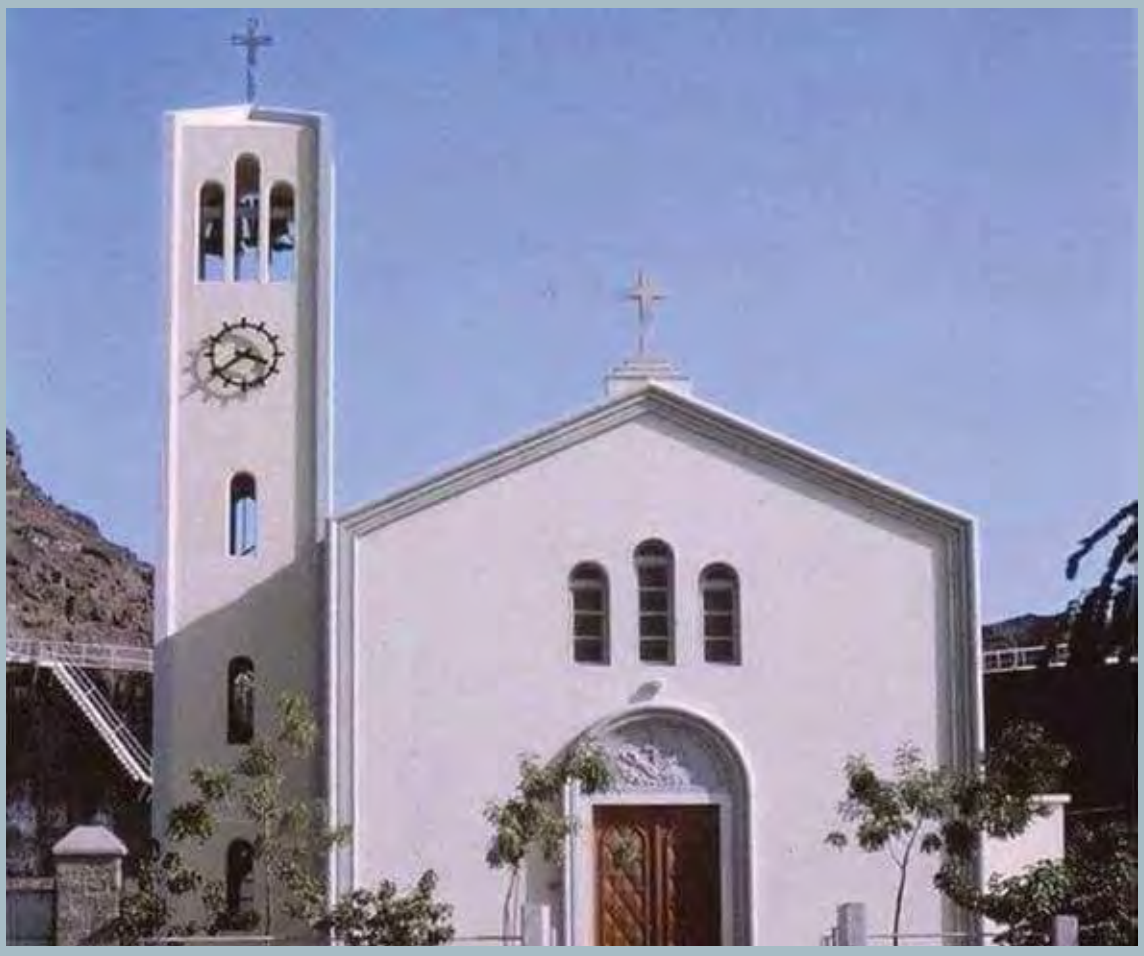


Photo of Badri Church at Crater during the early 20th century
including a modern picture of the church today

Al-Bangsar Church during the 1960's (above), and a modern picture of the church today



Hafun Church at Al-Mualla during the 1960's (above), and a modern picture of the church today

Abuses Against Yemeni Christians:

When talking about the abuses suffered by Christians in Yemen, it is worth mentioning that Raydan—the capital of the Himyarite Kingdom—was ruled by a pro-Ethiopian king, whose inhabitants were Christians at the time. The forces of King Yusuf Asar (Du Nawas) faced fierce resistance when they tried to take over Raydan. King Yusuf abandoned trying to enter the city by force and sent a message to the Ethiopians in the city offering them safe passage out of the city. The Ethiopians believed him, and their leader (Abu Al-Aba'a) left the city along with the grand priest and about three hundred men. However, King Yusuf ordered his men to kill them as soon as they left the city. Those who choose to remain inside the city (around 280 of them) were burned inside the church. The inscriptions found do not mention the details of the fall of Raydan, and mentioned only the burning of the church and the elimination of the Ethiopians. The persecution of Christians and the burning of their churches occurred in various areas in Hadramout, Marib and Najran (Jaber and Hussein, 2015, 164–165). King Yusuf's policy of abuse against the people of Najran was justified by his believe that they were agents of the Abyssinians, as his army had many pagans and Yemeni Christians[1].

The abuses that Christians face in Yemen are rooted not only in the orientation of the state, but in the general orientation of the society, which is very conservative and generally rejects the different and unfamiliar groups and considers them a threat to its existence. Christians do not face open persecution by the government, but the general orientation in society must be Islamic[2]. Among the crimes against Christians in contemporary Yemen were the deaths of three American doctors in December 2002, at the South American Baptist Church in the city of Jibla in the governorate of Ibb, 200

1 Al-Tai, Anwar Karim Naji, and Abdul Husseini, Khaled Musa, (2019), The Jewish-Christian Conflict and its Reflection on the Internal Situation in Yemen Before Islam, "*al-Serah al-Yahwodi al-Masihi Wanekasateh Ala a-Wade al-Dakheli Fi al-Yaman Qabl al-Islam*", Kufa Journal of Arts, ch 38; p: 160.

2 Zaimov, Stoyan, (2019), What you should know about Yemen and its tiny Christian population, Christian Post, 2 February, 2019;
https://www.christianpost.com/news/what-you-should-know-about-yemen-and-its-tiny-christian-population.html

kilometers (125 miles) south of Sana'a[1]. The incident was then attributed to al-Qaeda, which had previously targeted Western interests in Yemen and started targeting charities and foreigners in general after that.

According to a 2015 report by Al-Falahi[2], the British cemetery in Al-Mualla (a popular neighborhood in the city) was demolished, and St. Joseph's Catholic Church, the second church established in Aden (established in 1854), was burned down. The war that erupted in Aden caused the caretakers of the Ras Mosbet Tawahi church, who were providing medical services to the people of the area, to leave. On 16 September 2015, Islamist militants burned down the Badri church in Crater (one of the city's most famous neighborhoods). The Houthis stormed the Church of St. Mantinos in the city of Al-Tawahi, and looted and vandalized parts of it. Shortly thereafter, an armed group believed to be affiliated with al-Qaeda stormed the Catholic Church after firing a barrage of bullets into the air, looting and dismantling the church's bells, and then threatening to blow it up at any moment. The same group also vandalized the statue of Christ located on the roof of the church, breaking its head and hands in an effort to obliterate the symbol of the cross on it.

Among the documented abuses in Aden during 2016, gunmen stormed and burned St. Joseph's Church, and another church in the city was blown up in the same year. On 4 March 2016, four unidentified gunmen entered a Christian retirement home in Aden, killing at least 16 people including guards, drivers and four nuns, according to media reports. The gunmen are said to have also kidnapped an Indian priest and destroyed all of the Christian symbols at the site[3].

Until this day, attacks and harassment continue to target anyone associated with medical missions and humanitarian missions provided by Christian associations in Yemen. For example, the only elderly home in Sana'a

1 BBC, Arabic, (2002), US Investigators Investigate the Deaths of Three Americans, "*Mohaqeqon Amrikion Yohaqeqon Fi Maqtal al-Arikeen al-Thalathah*", 31/12/2002: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/news/newsid_2617000/2617573.stm

2 Al-Falahi, Ashraf, (2015), Yemen's Decaying Religious History, Al-Monitor, October 27, 2015; https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/10/yemen-aden-historic-landmarks-churches-destruction-war.html

3 Wille, Belkis, (2016).

is run by the "Catholic Charity Mission", which has its headquarters in the Indian city of Calcutta[1]. The targeting of this group or any other religious minorities will continue as long as the dominant ideas rejecting others continue.

Conclusion:

Four churches in the city of Aden are a great witness to the presence of this minority and its active presence in society. It also sheds the light on an era of coexistence with other communities in this city. However, the reality nowadays is quite different from this positive outlook. The report highlighted the fears that many of this minority's individuals face, who are either leaving the country or hiding out of fear of the unknown fate they could face if they were ever exposed to the public.

Christianity has been a part of the fabric of society in Yemen, as either part of the ruling power or as part of society. But for the time being, the Christian presence in Yemen has shrunk to a limited extent, confined to foreign workers and undercover believers at home, medical missions and humanitarian charities active in providing services to Yemeni society in general.

Baptism jar at Church in Aden - 1965

1 Al-Duqimi, Ghadman, (2018), In Sana'a... A Single Elderly Home That Was Not Spared from the Attacks of Extremists, "*Haqaeq Man Hom al-Boharah?*", Irfaa Sawtak, April 10, 2018: https://www.irfaasawtak.com/a/431203.html

Final Conclusion:

The reports in this book reflect the dire situation of minorities in Yemen. It is clear that some minorities have lived in this country for thousands of years, but the main problem is in the relationship between the ruling political class and its religious beliefs, which it tries to impose on other minorities. This in turn, is reflected in the behavior towards other groups in society, such as Jews who have been subjected at various times to a number of violations that amount to murder, displacement, and forced exile. Perhaps the modern era we live in today is the cruelest that the Jewish community had faced. Both external and internal factors have led to the emigration or displacement of Jews in Yemen to Palestine. The same fate has also befallen the Christians, Ismailis and Baha'i sects.

The reports also show that society in general deals with al-Muhamasheen (the marginalized) by placing them at the bottom of the social class ladder. This is mainly the result of a lack of proper social awareness. To challenge this requires everyone to join hands to rebuild people's awareness of the concept of citizenship, in which people transcend color, race, and belief, and belong to one land governed by one law and one constitution.

The report also reflected the interdependence of factors between internal and external, between political and social, and between religious and ideological, which in general promotes the spirit of intolerance, hatred and abolition of others. This means that the violence against minorities is based on a structure of hatred towards all that are different, whether for religious, sectarian, ethnic or even gender differences. This should be a point of focus when considering future solutions, particularly when it comes to peace-building and post-war planning.

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