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THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

THE TRIBE DURING PRESIDENT SALEH: A FRIEND OR A FOE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

DR. WALID KAZZIHA

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

BY

WALEED DERHEM

SPRING 2020

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Chapter 1
On Tribe and Tribalism

Introduction

The field of comparative politics operates on several levels one of which is institutionalism, and often has been the case that a top-down approach in which the state and only formal institutions has been the subject of study. This has set a norm that defined those state-societal relations as a one way direction where the formal (state) governs the informal (society). Some scholars however, argued that informal institutions also play an important role in this relationship and tried to dissect informal structure and investigate their prominence¹. This was attempted in regions like Latin America, Eastern Europe and recently in the Middle East where informal structures like clientelism, civil society, and patronage has played a role in defining state-societal relations. The study of informal structures has resurfaced the literature produced on the Middle East with the awaking of the Arab Spring therefore highlighting the role of informal structures like the youth, civil societies, and Ultras groups.

In the context of the Middle East little if any emphasize was directed towards tribalism as an informal societal structure that plays a role in the state-societal relations. One integral societal structure that would help in understanding the internal dynamics of the Middle East is looking at the tribal structure that has reemerged to be a unique factor is dissecting state-societal structures.

1. Helmke. G and Levitsky S. 2004: 734. "Since James March and Johan P. Olsen declared that "a new institutionalism has appeared in political science," research on political institutions has advanced considerably. Yet because the comparative politics literature has focused primarily on formal institutions, it risks missing many of the "real" incentives and constraints that underlie political behavior... We have sought to provide a framework for incorporating informal rules into mainstream institutional analysis." (Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: A Research Agenda) in *Perspectives on Politics*.

Research Problem

Having mentioned the fact that the informal structure of the tribe is understudied opens a Pandora Box and offers a plethora of questions to be explored while conducting a study in the Middle East. When the concept of the tribe is mentioned within the context of the Middle East certain instances in the literature were highlighted and therefore established an understanding of the tribe that is not applicable to all cases. For example; the basis of tribal structure in Libya is completely different to that in Iraq, with the former relying in kinship ties, while the latter has an element of sectarianism. The conceptualization of the tribe and tribalism also presumed the state-tribal relations. Without thorough analytical study of this informal structures scholars tend to prematurely define the state-tribal relation as conflictual in nature like in Yemen or cooperative like in Jordan without studying this overlaying societal structure. Some presumptions also give a negative connotation to the concept of tribalism and always associate it with backwardness and primitivism. Therefore, in order to test these presumptions this research will revisit the concept of the tribe and tribalism within the context of the Middle East, and investigate state (formal) - tribal (informal) interaction through evaluating the case of Yemen during the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. However, as my research highlights this sphere of interaction it will focus mainly on the way it affects official politics. This study aims to answer the research **question of: Did tribalism govern the relationship between the tribe and the state in Yemen during rule of Saleh 1978 - 2011?**

In trying to answer this question, comparative historical analysis will be conducted while testing the following hypothesis: **Tribalism has persisted as an informal structure that governed the state's official internal politics during the rule of Saleh in Yemen.** In

this single case study tribal structure appears as a prominent actor in the state-societal relations and influenced state internal policies. In the next section this universe of interaction between the state and the tribe will be explored in general and later would focus on Yemen as a case that can tease out answers to the following questions: what is the tribe and tribalism in the Yemeni context? How does tribal structure interact with the state? This research aims to disentangle the dynamics that govern the state-tribal constellation, and project how it has changed through time, if it did.

Literature on Tribalism and State-Tribal Relations in the Middle East

When we explore the scholarship on tribes and tribalism we find diverse definitions and meanings provided by anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. It is worth noting that the definitions differ from region to another; the notion of a tribe in Africa is not the same as that in the Middle East for example, and that has contributed to the vagueness of the terms 'tribe' and 'tribalism'. Firstly, what is a tribe? And what is tribalism? Lapidus stated that the concept of tribe is "unclear and controversial" holding that it can be used to refer to "a kinship group, an extended family, or a coalition of related families" leaving the term open and loose to all sorts of groupings.² An anthropologist seconds that statement and maintained that "the nature of the concept of tribe has been a confusing and ambiguous one from its earliest period of utterance" and therefore conforming to the vagueness of the term.³ As this section progresses it will

2. Ira M. Lapidus, "Tribes and State formation in Islamic History," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S. Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 26.

3. Leon Sheleff, "Tribalism- Vague but Valid," in *The Future of Tradition: Customary Law, Common Law and Legal Pluralism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 38.

display some of the definitions of the tribe and tribalism in the existing literature of anthropology, ethnography and political science in an attempt to refine and better conceptualize the term. What is important to note is that the previous definitions are mostly Eurocentric and cannot be applied to regions like the Middle East as sources of examining the social and economic basis of tribal systems are limited, or provided by an outside who cannot escape biases.⁴

Now after attempting to refine the tribe as a term, the concept of tribalism must be clarified in relation to politics. In general, tribalism is known as "acting or causing action on basis of membership of a specific tribe or family".⁵ Another scholar defined tribalism as "the manifestation of over-riding group loyalties by members of a culturally affiliated society to locally based interests which involve tradition, land, and opportunities for survival and growth".⁶ If the latter condensed definition of tribalism is evaluated one can locate the rational language of 'interests', 'opportunities', 'survival and growth' that can translate in political terms to be the optimal gains of the tribe as a structure. Tapper better redefines this tribal structure in the context of the Middle East as "a state of mind, and a construction of reality, a model of organization and action".⁷ In order for this notion of tribalism to make sense in the context of the Middle East, historical episodes of interaction between the tribal structure and other formal structures- namely the states-

4. Richard Tapper, "Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople on Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S. Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 56.

5. Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party* (Bloomsberry Academic, 1996), 167.

6. Sheleff, "Tribalism- Vague but Valid," 50.

7. Tapper, "Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople," 56.

will be reviewed, to grasp a better definition of the term and its importance in understanding the Middle East in a political and societal context. This will be fulfilled by a detailed research that will generate an understanding on the state-societal universe, based on the interaction between these two structures: the state and the tribe.

After reviewing these many definitions of the tribe we will have to bridge between the two terms, the tribe and the state, at the same time differentiate between them in meaning. One has to go back to the emergence of the state as a structure and try to evaluate how the tribal structure managed to coexist with that of the state. Lapidus in his chapter *Tribes and State formation in Islamic History* stated that there were three institutional structures that dominated in the Middle East during the Islamic era namely, the “tribal, religious, and empire- later state – collectivities”.⁸ These structures displayed a degree of interrelation that modified and pushed each structure to evolve respectively. The Middle East as a region cannot be evaluated using one of these institutions alone, but as Lapidus maintained the tribe witnessed the great degree of “construction, reconstruction and deconstruction along with the imperial entities” present at the time.⁹ The tribe as an entity is a societal structure band also a political (informal) structure that coexisted with the empires, and states, at a later stage. In fact Lapidus maintained that the Middle East as a system “involved two types of political and cultural entities, often on the same territory, competing for power and legitimacy”.¹⁰

8. Lapidus, “Tribes and State formation in Islamic History,” 26.

9. Ibid., 27.

10. Ibid., 28.

Machiavelli considered tribalism besides the two other elements of a strong military and the incorporation of religion, when he compared between the success of the Ottomans and the failure of Europe. Ibn Khaldun however made that notion of tribalism clear through highlighting the term ‘asabiyya’ which explains the “natural cohesion when a group is bound to administer and defend itself”.¹¹ Though this form of natural “tribal-urban” cohesion that was praised by Machiavelli when describing the Middle East, Gellner in his article titled *Tribalism and State in the Middle East* mentioned that this cohesion was tested and maintained that tribalism did not weather away but “reemerged as the empire declined”.¹² Ever since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire severe changes have occurred and Ibn Khaldun’s “three effective principles of political order: the natural cohesion of tribal life; the principle of military-administrative slavery; and religion”¹³ were all challenged as we saw tribes split and fight each other, warfare atomized, and religion evolved.

The 20th century has carried a lot of changes to the Middle East and Bassem Tibi in his text titled *Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-States* argued that these changes with the concepts of “nation-states” and “sovereignty” challenged tribalism and created a deep contradiction between the tribe and the state.¹⁴ This does not imply that the tribe will

11. Ernest Gellner, “Tribalism and the State in the Middle East,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 123.

12. *Ibid.*, 125.

13. *Ibid.*, 122.

14. Bassam Tibi, “Nation-State in the Modern Middle East,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 127.

have to submit to the state and lose its autonomy because in some instances the tribes “become holders of state power” like in Saudi Arabia and in some other instances they get integrated into the modern nation-state like in Jordan.¹⁵ Tribalism was not erased but rather integrated, challenged or oppressed by the concept of nation-state and Watt maintained that even the prophet Mohamed when establishing the new Islamic Umma “he brought unity but did not overcome the tribal element as rivalries were only subdued”.¹⁶ This can only mean that the tribal identity persisted with the rising notion of the Islamic Umma and still persisted with the modernization of the Middle East as Hudson puts it “the tribal way of life has been waning, however a far large portion of the Arab population retains a degree of tribal identity”.¹⁷

The complex relationship between the tribe and the states was investigated by many scholars two of whom are Khoury and Kostiner who presented that the two entities will either try to “sustain each other or seek to destroy each other” depending on various other factor.¹⁸ This interplay can vary from employing tribalism to take charge of marginalized areas in the deserts and mountains or rather, as Tapper noted: “control the tribes by nominating leaders, keeping chiefly members as hostages, establishing marriage alliances between chiefly and royal families, or fostering dissension between rivals for

15. Ibid.

16. Tibi, “Nation-State in the Modern Middle East,” 134.

17. Ibid., 136.

18. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner, “Tribes and Complexities of State Formation in the Middle East,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 7.

leadership”.¹⁹ The response of the tribe will either be to comply or resist the centralized administration but “Arabian-style tribes were not perceived as major threats to the stability of the states” as Barfield claims. He further points that “they were only marginal in terms of political control, for there was constant interaction between tribes and states in trades, and they share similar culture and religious traditions”.²⁰

The interaction between the state and the tribe was not limited to the period of state formation but evolved with the regimes ruling in the Arab region. Many scholars discussed the political influence of tribalism in consolidating or maintaining the authoritarian rule of state in the Arab region. Kostiner in *Tribe and State in Saudi Arabia* highlights that “tribal modes of behavior and values [tribalism] prevailed in society alongside new state institutions and bureaucratic procedures” and were regarded as a necessary political power for the expansion of the Saudi state.²¹ Paul Dresch, an expert in the Yemeni affairs, expressed that tribalism has always been a factor in determining the fate of the new nation-state to an extent “it was heavily involved in the proxy war between Cairo and Riyadh in 1967” as they would rally troops in return for enormous amounts of cash from both sides.²² Tribalism in fact constituted a major role in the

19. Khoury and Kostiner, “Tribes and Complexities of State Formation,” 13.

20. Thomas J. Barfield, “Tribe and State Relations: The Inner Asian Perspective,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 163.

21. Joseph Kostiner, “Transforming Dualities: Tribe and State Formation in Saudi Arabia,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 243.

22. Paul Dresch, “Imams and Tribes: The Writing and Acting of History in Upper Yemen,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 258.

consolidation of rule in the Saudi state and helped shape the political sphere in the Yemeni case. On the other hand, Anderson in *Tribe and State: Libyan Anomalies* displayed that during the early days of Qaddafi who “made it clear that he was opposed to tribalism as a principle of political organization [and] restructured the administrative units to free them from tribal sheiks” has contradicted himself by assigning members of his own family to key positions and consequently, the small tribe of the Qadadfa benefited from his position.²³ Tribalism in the Iraqi state with the Ba’athist regime, which lacked sufficient legitimacy and representation of the different factions, was reconstructed of and gave rise to new tribalism. The new tribalism coined by Jabar as “Etatist tribalism; which is the process of integrating the tribal lineages and primordial fictive systems into the state to enhance the political power of a certain vulnerable state elite” served for some time and was once again reconstructed.²⁴

This literature on tribal structure and its interplay with the state in the Middle East partially reviewing the phase of modern state formation and the phase of power consolidation by Arab regimes helps in illustrating the integral role of the tribal structure. It further clarifies the notion of tribalism as an informal societal structure during different episodes of history. It is important at this point to clarify that this thesis will adopt an institutionalist perspective when looking at the state, making clear distinctions between formal and informal structures. This account on the early interaction between the state (formal) and the tribal (informal) poses questions on whether this interaction is displayed

23. Lisa Anderson, “Tribe and State: Libyan Anomalies,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, ed. Philip S, Khoury, and Joseph Kostiner (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 297.

24. Faleh Jaber, “Sheikhs and Ideologues: Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Tribes under Patrimonial Totalitarianism in Iraq, 1968-1998,” in *Tribes and Power Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East*, ed. Faleh, Jabar and Hosham Dawood (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 71.

as a result of power relations between the two entities. At this stage, many questions are left unanswered, like; does the tribal structure influence the state policies? Can the tribal structure be integrated within the state structure, or in other words formalized? These questions and the role of tribalism, as an informal structure of organization and collectiveness with its attributes to the political context, remain to be a gap in scholar literature. Therefore, an extensive research will try to answers these questions and will attempt to explore tribalism and its interaction with the state in the Middle East through studying the case of Yemen.

Tribalism in Yemen

As detailed in previous section, various definitions are assigned to the concept of the tribe and tribalism in general, but as the scope of this research has been narrowed down to studying the case of Yemen the concepts of the tribe and tribalism within the context of Yemen need to be explained. The uniqueness and sensitivity of the concepts can be spotted in the literature that has been produces on Yemen societal structures. Lisa Wedeen an expert in Yemen's civil society, in *Peripheral Visions* has strongly discarded the common definition of the tribe, as kinship group acting on basis of affiliation, and it's applicability in Yemen by stating, "tribes often denote territorial political arrangements made up of (grain and qat) farmers or ranchers living in villages".²⁵ Swagman further emphasized that "the *Qabili* (tribesman) is still a fighter when faced by the threat of too much outside control, or in a way if his person, property or family is in some way

25. Lisa Wadeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 171.

slighted".²⁶ Another contextualization of the concept of tribe - *qabilah*- is offered by Blumi in stating that "the *qabilah* in a Yemeni context, actually constitute social and political units within a given territory that do not neatly fit within a presumed social hierarchy mediated by local laws –*urf*- and loyalty claims that completely ignore numerous local contingencies".²⁷

Wedeen in describing the categories that identify politics and conflict in Yemen stressed that "tribal affiliation is one component of sociopolitical identification for many Yemenis, and this is especially true in areas where the state is institutionally weak".²⁸ These areas are mainly in the Highlands of Yemen like the provinces of *Sada'a*, *Amraan* or *Aljawf*, but there also exists a different understanding of the tribe and tribalism in the hinterland and the middle regions which was echoed by some scholars. Blumi through reviewing the works of Dresch pointed out that the tribal bodies did not comply with the notion of "collective political action" but rather had "no fixed moral focus"²⁹, therefore adding to the complexity of the concept of the tribe in Yemen. Wedeen in a section titled "The vexed category of the Tribe" also expressed that "people in the middle region, do not identify as tribal, although, mirroring certain practices attributed to tribes, they do have important extended family relationships, carry arms and settle disputes out of

26. Charles Francis Swagman, "Social Organization and Local Development in the Western Central Highlands of the Yemen Arab Republic," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1985), 73.

27. Isa Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen: Societal Collapse and the New Authoritarianism* (London: Routledge, 2011), 23-24.

28. Wadeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 171.

29. Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen*, 24.

court".³⁰ Arda quoted in Swagman's work mentioned how "the tribal- *qabili*- status is maintained through the genealogical idiom and, more importantly, through adherence to a tribal ethos –*qabayla*- which is the cultural code of morals and proscriptions for behavior which defines the social status thus putting more emphasis on the tribal ethos than genealogy in defining a tribesmen".³¹ These accounts and many more have added to the complexity yet uniqueness of the terms tribe and tribalism in the Yemeni context, and therefore establish the fact that tribalism is deeply embedded in the Yemeni traditions and cultural norms. This notion of tribalism appears in every day politics in Yemen and is not strictly a practice of the tribal elites –*Shaykhs*- but a practice performed by "individuals (*Shaykh, Imam, or Qadi*) who command a hierarchical superstructure".³² Wadeen maintained that "tribal identity is not fixed at birth; tribesmen can cease to be tribesmen when they move away from tribal territory, and people can switch tribes", and this adds to the fluidity of the concept of the tribe and tribalism.³³ This research is designed to expose the term tribalism through studying specific historical periods and locating its interaction with the formal structures.

Theoretical Framework

Revisiting the research question of this study [**Did tribalism govern the relationship between the tribe and the state in Yemen during rule of Saleh?**] leads to the next step of conceptualizing the terms; tribalism, official politics, informal/ formal institutions. But

30. Wadeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 172.

31. Swagman, "Social Organization," 73.

32. Blumi, *Chaos in Yemen*, 25.

33. Wadeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 173.

first, one need to highlight that as institutionalism is the main school of thought that will steer the progression of this research, the interaction of informal institutions with formal institutions will be the cornerstone through which the research will offer an extension to institutional analysis as school of thought. This approach will offer this research the richness that can be teased out through analyzing these interactions and ultimately help in understanding the real political behavior in Yemen. This section will also pinpoint the key concepts and how these are employed throughout that research.

To start off, one needs to point a specific definition for the concepts that will appear constantly throughout the study. This research study will rely on Morton Fried's definitions of tribe and tribalism; the tribe as "the largest group within which warfare is forbidden, distinguished by a common name and the exercise of force", and tribalism as "the manifestation of over-riding group loyalties by members of a culturally affiliated society to locally based interests which involve tradition, land, and opportunities for survival and growth".³⁴ The two definitions help in constructing the notion of the tribe as homogenous structure, and locate the rational language of 'interests', 'opportunities', 'survival and growth' that will appear throughout the single-case historical analysis. However, when using the term formal/informal institutions, Helmke and Levitsky's definitions will be used in this research design. Both institutions are defined as follows; formal "Rules that are openly codified, in the sense that they are established and communicated through channels that are widely accepted as official... and the informal as "socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and

34. Sheleff, "Tribalism- Vague but Valid," 50.

enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels".³⁵ I chose to analyze tribalism in as one of the informal structures in Yemen mirroring the work of some scholars with clans and mafia as informal structures in Latin America. The difficult task in this research will be in trying to define [official politics], and here I will be using Benedict Kerkvliet's conceptualization of official politics that stated; "official politics is one of those two. It involves authorities in organizations making, implementing, changing, contesting, and evading polices regarding resource allocation... Official politics also occurs in churches, universities, corporations, political parties, non-governmental organizations, labor unions, associations and revolutionary associations, where authorities are the primary actors" (Kerkvliet, 231).³⁶ In using this definition of official politics the research will be specifically targeting the sphere of interaction between the state as the authority and the informal structure of the tribe and will categorize this interaction according to the typology of formal-informal interaction as discussed in the section below.

Methodology

Helmke and Levitsky highlighted the role of informal institutions and the powerful analysis that these structures can produce if studied rigorously. As stated in their research agenda, "informal institutions have always remained in the margins of comparative politics and this risk in missing many of the real incentives and constraints of the political behavior".³⁷ Trying to engage the role of informal institutions in cases obtained from

35. Gretchen, Helmke and Steven Levitsky, "Introduction," in *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 5.

36. Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, "Everyday Politics in Peasant Societies (and Ours)," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36,1 (2009): 231.

37. Helmke and Levitsky, "Introduction," 5.

Latin America provided another lens that helped in better understanding several arenas of politics like; the executive-legislative relations, electoral politics, judicial politics and political regimes. This research however; will emphasize on the importance of studying informal institutions in the Middle East through presenting a historical analytical study of the interaction between the state and tribalism as one integral informal institution.

Helmke and Levitsky proposed a wider scope of looking into this universe of interaction between the formal and informal that is dependent on two dimensions; the effectiveness of the formal and the compatibility of both institutions. In another words, instead of looking at the interaction as “problem-solving” or “problem-creating” they uncover the complexity of “the informal institutions that seem to reinforce or substitute the very formal institution they undermine”³⁸. This brought about a typology that defines the four patterns of interaction between the informal and formal institutions. Helmke and Levitsky list these interactions as follows; 1) complementary: one in which the informal “fill in the gaps” and boost the efficiency of the formal, 2)accommodative: exists when the formal is effective but the actors choose the informal as “a second best strategy” for rules that can’t be changed or broken to achieve a final good, 3)substitutive: occurs when the formal is ineffective and the informal takes its place to achieve a common goal, 4)competing: happens when “goals are conflicting”³⁹. These interaction patterns project the many possibilities of studying the informal institutions and how they have “mutually transformative effects”.

38. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 3-5.

39. *Ibid.*, 13-16.

As this study on the state (formal)-tribalism (informal) interaction progresses, the typology of four patterns of formal-informal institutional interaction proposed by Helmke and Levitsky will be utilized. These patterns will be located in a historical analysis conduct on Yemen the single case study, and will later test the hypothesis raised in this study. The center of this study will revolve around identifying the actors and their interests in these interactions, and will try to identify the mechanisms of change, if any.

This will help in deriving an answer to the RQ: Did tribalism as an informal structure governed state institutions to bring about the official politics during the rule of Saleh. In conducting a historical analysis throughout the period of Saleh's rule in Yemen, documented historical events will be evaluated, while engaging in a debatable narrative that will answer the 'How' question. However, primary sources will be of major importance to strengthen the analysis on the single case study and help a conclusion leading to prospective research. Finally, this study will undertake only qualitative historical analysis, as there is no data or statistics on the topic of tribalism in Yemen.

Research Advantages and Limitations

Conducting this research in Yemen will be a daunting task for any researcher trying to infiltrate the fabric of the tribal structure; however a local researcher familiar with the social dynamics will have the access to information. There will be barely any language barrier as this research will thoroughly analyze a wide range of resources in English and Arabic. Tracing the emergence of tribalism as an informal institution is difficult to achieve due to the limited resources, thus reference will be made to the already existing literature. Challenges may arises when a focal point is to be established as the existence of the tribe and tribalism supposedly predates formal institutions, therefore the aim of this

research is to study the period that is relevant to the political scene nowadays. The third and more stressing challenge will be in trying to identify and measure tribalism as an informal institution, hence; the scope of this study will try to focus on the political arena where state should be present by default. At the current phase of the study field research appears to be an almost impossible option due to the ongoing conflict, therefore instances in which the interaction between the formal and informal resulting in different outcomes will be at the core of this research.

Historical episodes will focus mainly on the state-societal interactions in the northern Yemen, and this geographical specification was decided to offer an accurate account on the tribal structure that can be different than the tribal structure in the southern or eastern – mostly desert – tribal structure. The history of the southern Yemen and its tribal structure offers another avenue of exploration that will not be the subject of this research. Therefore this research, in its historical analysis sections below, will start with the *Zaydi* rule in northern Yemen and underline the major historical events leading to the formation of the modern state, and the rise of Ali Abdullah Saleh as president of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) before the unification.

Chapter 2

Historical background on State-Tribal Relations in Yemen

In the introductory chapter the basis of this research were laid out and an overview presented the directions this research can take. State-tribal relations were explored on the larger scope then were narrowed down and focused on Yemen as a case that will be studied within the abovementioned framework. The path this research will undertake requires an extensive historical background to highlight the overall importance of the tribes in Yemen throughout different regime styles and to put the reader in perspective. It would be difficult to trace back the history of the tribes in Yemen as they predate the formation of the state by thousands of years, but few accounts of history relevant to the study will be mentioned to reflect the influence of the tribal structure on ruling formal structures.

Hence, this background will be divided into five sections, the first of which would discuss the tribe during *Zaydi* rule in Northern Yemen and will form the take off point in this analysis. Secondly, a section on the organization and leadership of the tribe will display the internal dynamics within the tribe(s) and open the gates to conceptualizing tribalism as an informal structure. Following that brief sections on the tribe and the first republic will pinpoint the role of the tribe in the years of mayhem between the 1960s and 1970, and capture their dominance. Finally, a background on Ali Abdullah Saleh will be provided illustrating how the tribesman has become the head of state; accordingly placing the first piece of puzzle in order. Before proceeding into the sections of this chapter, the below quote by Paul Dresch, speaks volumes about the universe yet to be explored;

“The tribes in any case have no unified story to tell, only the indefinitely fragmented body of heroic tradition... We are engaged, inevitably, with a partial view

that has been abstracted from a reality that may well be more complex; and what can be tribal is what histories leave as their residue."⁴⁰

The Tribe and *Zaydi* rule in Yemen

Tribal existence in Yemen was not restricted to the Northern Highlands but they stretched from the hill to the valley across Yemen's cultivated mountains and abandoned deserts. However, as the *Zaydi* rule was well established in the North. Southern Yemen was under the British imperial control, mainly the town and port of Aden, and the historical accounts on the tribes living in southern Yemen are limited to the interaction that existed between the sultans of the south and the colonial power. Northern Yemen was more vibrant with tribal quarrels, documentation of tribal agreements and events which presented a rich resource that could be reviewed and reflected upon. Therefore, choosing to study tribes in the Northern Highlands is based on two factors; the availability of historical accounts of tribes in the north during the *Zaydi* rule, and to showcase the tribal interaction with the Imamate rule that was welcomed as formal structure back at the time. Thus, this section will be focusing on the rise of the *Zaydi* rule in the Northern Highlands and their interaction with the tribes in the region.

Yemeni historians claim that both the rise and fall of the *Zaydi* rule in Yemen was bound to the rulers' established relations with the tribes. The stretching millennial relationship between the tribe and the *Zaydi* state was both harmonious and conflicting. But as these structures maintained their political and military presence, they established an internal system of balance of power that governed this relationship, so no structure would be able

40. Dresch, "Imams and Tribes," 258.

to overrule the other.⁴¹ The political and tribal fiasco that existed in Yemen in the ninth century set the basis for the establishment of the *Zaydi* rule in Yemen. Historical archives claim that Imam Al-Hady (founder of the *Zaydi* rule), who was also a well known religious scholar, met Yemeni tribal leaders during pilgrimage in Mecca, the latter convinced him to come settle in *Saada*, Northern Yemen, and resolve their difference; therefore, inaugurating the *Zaydi* rule in Yemen 897 AD.⁴²

Taking a step back will help in understanding how the Imamate rule consolidated power in Northern Yemen. Tribal leaders mainly from *Hamdan* believed that the best way to put out the fire of an everlasting conflict is to appoint a neutral religious mediator to settle their differences, and there came the role of Imam Al-Hady, founder of the *Zaydi* religious sect and later a founder of a dynasty that grew roots in northern Yemen.⁴³

Throughout his rule, Imam Al-Hadi won the tribal support necessary to start his vision of a *Zaydi* state, and was wise enough in earning their trust to gain the political and military support needed to widen the base of the *Zaydi* rule that lasted for almost a thousand years.⁴⁴ This shows how the tribal structure has played a key role in the rise and fall of dynasties, and states south of the Arabian Peninsula. Though surviving for almost a millennial, the state established by Al-Hady was weak and fragile as it fell in the swamp of internal conflict either by the number of coups attempted by the rivalries within, or by tribal uprisings against the unjust Imam of the throne, or facing outside threat. It is worth

41. Fadl Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah fī al-yaman* (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Manār, 1990), 95.

42. *Ibid.*, 99.

43. *Ibid.*, 95.

44. *Ibid.*, 102.

mentioning that as much as the tribes supported the establishment of the *Zaydi* rule it was, in the contrary, much of an obstacle and threat to the stability and the welfare of the *Zaydi* state as evident in the political scene and their relations with the different ruling Imams.⁴⁵ Various incidents will support these claims, and will illustrate how the tribe was an independent structure during the Imamate. They helped in defeating the colonial Turkish forces and mobilized men and support every time they felt threatened by their neighbors and this chapter will unfold few of those historical episodes.

Dresch in his account on Yemen simplified the social structure in Upper Yemen during the early 1900s by dividing the society broadly to “peasants as opposed to tribesmen”⁴⁶, as their presence translated to both social and political influence. During that period the Imamate was in the hands of Yahya Bin Hamid Al-Din; “Yahya, (himself of course a *sayyid*) gave many *sayyid* families a stake in what emerged as a state, and then a dynasty... and claimed a place of its own on the world map”.⁴⁷ *Sayyids*, descendent of the Prophet, held a status that gave them religious legitimacy and a higher social ranking than the peasants and the tribesmen. However, this status was abused at times and soon differences started to appear between the tribe and the Imamate. Abu Ghanim, however; explains that the essence of the tribal system contradicts to some extent that of the Imamate rule as the first is independent in nature while the latter adopts the traditions of dynastic rule.⁴⁸ This was not the case with all tribes in the north as some of them were in

45. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 109.

46. Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24.

47. *Ibid.*, 27.

48. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 103.

line with the Imam and offered support in exchange for more power or merely survival. Dresch better supported this claim by stating that “*shaykhs* of northern tribes, who in 1918 has entered Sana’a beside Yahya, were less important, [but] retained their lands and a certain precedence, and many received a percentage of tax they gathered” and that’s how the independence of some of these tribes was “circumscribed” by the ruler.⁴⁹

On the other hand, resistance was manifested by other tribes even before the reign of Imam Yahya that saw some clashes erupt, and rebellion attempts were on the rise few of which took place in tribal-dominant regions like *Hashid*, *Arhab* and Sana’a.⁵⁰ Taking this into consideration, successive Imams would first try to settle differences with the tribes and guarantee their loyalty to ensure power consolidation. Thus, Imam Yahya employed certain techniques that made him win the tribes to his side, while on other occasions helped him tame their threat. After raising the banner of resisting the Turkish presence in Sana’a, he appeared as a hero and consequently won the support of many tribes in the north that supplied his campaign with men and resources.⁵¹ Internally, however; the reality as described by Dresch; “the Imam was a ruler straightforwardly. Hostages, fines and punitive action produced public order. Rivalries [between tribal *shaykhs*] were not discouraged, and the Imam in person intervened as he saw fit”.⁵² Imam Yahya’s strong grip on power in Northern Yemen and his appointment of his sons as governors in other provinces created major discontent even among supporters leading to a coup attempt in

49. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 32.

50. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 113.

51. *Ibid.*, 115.

52. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 38.

1948. The instigators of this coup that led to the killing of Imam Yahya, but failed in toppling his son Ahmed based in Taiz, included tribal *shaykhs* of *Dhu Muhammad* and *Dhu Husayn*, who were later executed by Imam Ahmed.⁵³ This brief display of the Imamate rule shows the extent of which the tribal structure was the tipping point in the survival of some Imams and the failure of others. It also stretches the discussion towards investigating the tribal structure, and whether it was a factor in the rise and fall of the infant state in Northern Yemen.

Socio-political Organization and Leadership of the Tribe

The Interplay between the tribe and the Imamate state in Northern Yemen was not limited to the incidents mentioned previously, but provided the basis to investigating the integral role of the tribe in relation to the state and the society. This section will aim at studying the tribe as a unit and describing the organizational and leadership structure mainly in Northern Yemen. "The tribe has been and will always be the main unit of the Yemeni society not only because it can range in size between an extended family to forming a tribal confederation, but also because it has always been a unit of war, economic production and societal organization" as put by Abu Ghanim.⁵⁴

This general statement can only be confirmed if the origins and the hierarchal structure of the tribes in Northern Yemen are thoroughly explained. Swagman in his anthropological work in the Yemeni highlands stated that the leadership of the tribe is represented by the *shaykh*, who is an "elected representative of the tribal group and hold his office through consent of the tribesmen", highlighting that leadership of the tribe is processed through

53. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 57.

54. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 47.

some form of democracy and acceptance.⁵⁵ In addition, Shelagh Weir stated that “a *shaykh* consolidates his domestic position by gaining the trust and the confidence of the seniors, who act as counselors... and in order to retain [their] loyalty he needs to call tribal councils and consult them regularly”.⁵⁶ Moreover, Abu Ghanim reaffirms that “tribal leaders whom we would call *Al-Mashayekh* are considered the highest ranking within the tribe and they hold a great political power, through heading the tribal council that runs the political and societal affairs of the tribe”. Moreover, *Al-Mashayekh*, plural of *shaykh*, were known for their political influence not only within their tribe but extend that influence to the state.⁵⁷ This social status is not only recognized among tribesmen, but also other neighboring tribes, non-tribal communities in tribal regions and local administrators. They use “their economic and political influence mostly through persuasion and squeezing those whom they wish to influence, as described by one *shaykh*”.⁵⁸ Most importantly, and as the *shaykh* seeks acknowledgment from other tribal leaders, he must maintain good relations with tribal allies, through inviting them to key tribal events as witnesses or guests.⁵⁹ This inauguration-like process is supposed to send the message to state representatives and other tribes that there is a new *shaykh* in charge of the political role of the respective tribe.

55. Swagman, “Social Organization,” 75.

56. Shalegh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen*, Modern Middle East Series (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 110.

57. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 45.

58. Swagman, “Social Organization,” 76.

59. Weir, *Tribal Order of Yemen*, 111.

The social role, however, is not any different as *Al-Mashayekh* are positioned at the top of the social ladder as accounted by Abu Ghanim: “Historians argued that pre-Islamic society in Yemeni was divided mainly into three social classes: 1) The upper class that consisted of the king, religious leaders, tribal leaders and administrative workers protecting trade routes. 2) The middle class made up of the peasants who are mostly tribesmen and those account for largest majority of the population. 3) The lower class included the traders, artisans and slaves. This social structure has almost remained the same up until the collapse of the Imamate rule in 1962”.⁶⁰ The social structure that remained unchanged for a long time suggests that there were social norms and values that were developed by the society, mostly tribal, and managed to sustain the social, political and economic affairs of the inhabitants. Weir also added that “even in punitive mode, the state acknowledged, depended upon, and reinforced tribal structures and practices”.⁶¹ These norms, known as tribal customs, survived the successive dynasties, caliphates and states ruling in Yemen, and had been the product of the tribe that outlived the state in Yemen, thus suggesting that these norms adapt to the political landscape surrounding the tribe.

The survival instinct of the tribal customs is owed to several factors and Abu Ghanim, rephrasing Bafaqeeh’s historical work on Yemen, stressed on the point that the difficult topography helped in creating scattered settlements called *Sho'ob* which were controlled by local leaders; and these made the formation of a central administration a complicated

60. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 47.

61. Weir, *Tribal Order of Yemen*, 263.

task ever since the rule of Kingdom of Sheba centuries ago.⁶² *Hamdan*, known as the original tribe of all major tribes in Yemen, better illustrates the role played by the tribe in deciding the political fate of the Yemen throughout different historical episodes. The tribal council, led by *Al-Mashayekh*, was the body through which the tribes will exert its political influence on the successive dynasties, and had always been an independent structure in the process of decision-making of the empires that ruled Yemen. The Emperor/king did not have the absolute power and had to get the support of the tribal leaders in matter of war or peace and in other economic issues that concerned the state. Besides their effective role in the tribal council, *Al-Mashayekh* also had the complete authority of the local affairs.⁶³ This complex formula inherited by ancient Yemeni states and kingdoms had put any form of central administration in a position where they would be dependent on tribal leaders in matters of war or territorial expansion, and thus would have to cater to the interests of tribal leaders. This has ultimately led to weakening the central administration represented by the king and encouraged tribal leaders to create their independent lordships as seen in the final period of the kingdom of *Sheba*.⁶⁴ Knowing that *Al-Mashayekh* had this political influence proves that the tribe was rooted in Yemeni political and social life. It survived through the ages and evolved with different successive regimes types and below is a brief account on the stability of the tribal structure.

62. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 51.

63. *Ibid.*, 49.

64. *Ibid.*, 53.

The consecutive states in pre-Islamic Yemen, like *Sheba*, *Maeen*, *Hemyar*, were composed of independent tribal confederations, like *Hashid* and *Bakil*, each of which would control a specific territory but is also composed of smaller tribal entities that are bound by shared interest.⁶⁵ Similarly, Aston quoted Wilson's claim on tribal stability, which held that "substantial traces of the pre-Islamic (tribal) order continued to exist well into the Islamic period. Over the past ten centuries there is little or no evidence of any major tribal movements in this part of Yemen".⁶⁶ Both of these accounts stress on the idea of the survival of the tribes and the tribal order in the face of the successive states, and reaffirm the notion of tribal dominance as independent institutions. It also suggests that post-Islamic period of Yemen did not witness much change as the political and societal structure remained intact, and isolated as a geographical unit. Moreover, "when sectarian split started infecting the Islamic *Umma* with internal conflicts, Yemeni tribes focused on maintaining the unity and were the first to go against change of the Islamic caliphate system from abandoning the *Shura* to adopting the monarchical structure as seen during the *Umayyad's* and the *Abbasid's* rule".⁶⁷ This, in fact, has further marginalized Yemeni tribes from the political and historical context, as they instinctually refuse being controlled by authoritarian rulers and believe in the freedom of choice that they have in the tribal order. The constant state of conflict in Yemen in general can be better explained by the rebellious nature of these tribes that would usually mobilize

65. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 53.

66. Warren P. Aston, "The Origins of the Nihm Tribe of Yemen: A Window into Arabia's Past," *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4, 1 (June 2014): 135, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2014.918372>.

67. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 70.

against any authority trying to impose itself forcefully. The purpose of this research is not to go into details of outlining the tribal structure in Yemen during the several Caliphates, but to establish the notion the tribe as basis to understand it's socio-political interaction with different regime types in Yemen.

After briefly tackling the tribes' interaction with pre Islamic and Islamic empires and states in Yemen, and understanding the effective role of tribal leaders; some emphasize should be paid to the tribesman -*Qabili*- in relation to the tribe. This will set the path for understanding the tribesmen lifestyle and reflect on the societal interaction of this social group with the state. Dresch explained that the "world outside the towns was complex as that within them. Tribesmen, the vast majority of many regions' population, bore arms. Most were farmers, few are nomads, and nearly all were extremely poor".⁶⁸ Keeping in mind that the majority of the population is composed of tribal peasants indicates that most of these tribesmen collaborated to sustain their living. In addition, the complexity is spotted in the fact that they bear arms and take matters of security to their own hands. Swagman, however; pointed out that the peasantry system in Yemen is unique in a way as it is "mediated by strong tribal social organization... [which] provides for the formulation of social groups which are larger, more structured and capable of more cooperation".⁶⁹ The institution of the tribe thus, implements a system within the tribe that regulates the social life of tribesmen known as the tribal code - *Urf*- which has been passed by ancestors.

68. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 26.

69. Swagman, "Social Organization," 57.

Weir elaborated on the latter concept by stating that “*Urf* embraces a wide range of activities and situations, some of which are: rules and procedures, penalties and modes of enforcement, the conduct of political relations, constitutional events such as accession to *shakhly* office and political defection, and the rights and responsibilities of individuals and groups”.⁷⁰ Regulating the scattered complex tribal peasant societies of northern Yemen was eased by implementing this tribal code through the office of *Al-Mashayesh*, each in his own tribe. Without going into the different sections of this regulation system, it is important to know that the *Qabili* are bound by the tribal code and would submit to its outcomes, regardless of the administration that represents the formal institution of the state. This feeds to the previously mentioned argument of the tribe being a societal organization self-reliant and independent from the state.

Another unique fact about the tribes in Yemen is that the *Qabili* or tribal status is not restricted to lineage but it can be earned and conversely its can be taken away. Swagman explained: “membership in tribes hinges on the observance of tribal ethics, with their emphasis on honor, bravery and protection”.⁷¹ He added: “failure to adhere to these standards by fleeing blood feud, seeking protection of another tribe and taking refuge in the marketplace can cause one to lose social recognition of his status and be absorbed into lower ranked non-tribal people”.⁷² As this account listed some of the major values of the *Qabili*, it also exemplified the possible social mobility, whether upwards or downwards, granted by the tribal code that supersede the social class, family or origin.

70. Weir, *Tribal Order of Yemen*, 147.

71. Swagman, “Social Organization,” 63.

72. *Ibid.*,

The previous chapter has delved into the different perspectives on the notion of the tribe in Yemen. This section, however, highlighted the tribal status in the social context in the northern highlands specifically and in the period that preceded the formation of the first republic in the Northern Yemen, and established their effective social and political role. The forthcoming section will however, study the tribe within the context of the new political dynamics following 1962, and provide another angle of the interaction with the major regional powers and newly established state.

The Tribe Post 1962

The period between the 1960 and 1970 witnessed a wave of political unrest that swamped both northern and southern Yemen and shook all the existing socio-political structures. Few of those institutions eroded, some rose from the ruins to compete for power, and others reemerged as key players in shaping the modern states. One of these major institutions was that of the tribe, and this section will focus on the role tribe in the revolution of 1962 that ended the Imamate rule in the north. This section will move on to discussing the influence of the tribes, and introduce tribalism as an informal structure that played a role on the sequence of events during the civil war that culminated into a proxy war between the two regional powers, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The 1962 revolution led to toppling the Imamate rule and ignited the first spark of change in Northern Yemen which was regarded as the building block for the modern state declared by President Abdullah Al-Sallal. However, prior the revolution resistance was already mounting towards rejecting the Imamate rule supported by tribes of the north. In addition, several coup attempts initiated by the Egyptian-backed free officers utilized this internal dissatisfaction as a motive to carry on further assassination or coup attempts

against the Imamate. Dresch, explained that “in early 1958, certain network of discontent in *Tai'zz* were coordinated by wealthy merchants [while] among the *shaykhs* one finds Husayn al-Ahmar, Qasim Abu Ras, Muti al-Dammaj” yet the discontent of these prominent tribal *shaykhs* translated to mobilization in deciding the fate of the state through pushing for change from within.⁷³ During this period Al-Badr, *Imam Ahmad's* son, replaced his father in running the affairs of the state given the latter's deteriorating health. The young successor hoped to adopt a shy liberal approach to win prominent local leaders and contain the growing resistance nurtured by Egypt, but *Imam Ahmed's* restoration of power late in 1959 ended Al-Badr's efforts. He forcefully stated in his return speech broadcasted by Sana'a Radio “there will be some whose heads will be cut off...” few months later, news spread that some tribal *shaykhs* from *Hashed* and *Khawlan* were executed while many others had fled.⁷⁴ This punishment produced resentment among some tribes and their allies who, according to the tribal law, must rally in defense of the affected tribe(s). The incident troubled the Imamate rule and made an enemy out of *Hashed*, one of the largest tribal confederations in the north. Abu Ghanim elaborated on the substantial manpower of *Hashed* by stating that this tribal confederation consists of a group of tribes, each of which holds a population that ranges between 10,000-50,000 tribesmen, which can be mobilized to respond to any offence on a tribe within the confederation as per the tribal customs.⁷⁵ This account illustrated the weight the tribes have in terms of military power and reaffirms that it had always been a political player

73. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 83.

74. *Ibid.*, 84-85.

75. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 164.

and a unit of war in shaping the features of the state of Yemen. Furthermore, it posed the question of how the tribe adapted to the changes that saw the end of a dynastic rule and the rise of the new republic in the north.

The 26th of September 1962 revolution led by junior army officers and long-awaited by the peasants and supported by the tribes, was a turning point in the history of Yemen. It saw the declaration of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and proclaimed Abdullah Al-Sallal, an army officer backed up by Nasser's Egypt, as the first president of the newborn state. On the 13th of April president Al-Sallal oversaw the announcement of an interim constitution which established the basic state institutions that would serve to achieve the revolution goals.⁷⁶ It is important to mention that the shift from dynastic rule to republic rule was a rough transition, and paving the road towards a functioning state required the engagement of all societal structures, one of which is the tribe. Therefore, the very first presidential executive order by Al-Sallal aimed at regulating the local affairs by announcing the formation of tribal councils which can channel tribal concerns and support from the tribes through the provinces and all the way to the capital.⁷⁷ The decree announced the formation of three bodies to represent the tribes. First, local tribal councils composed of the tribal *shaykhs* of each respective tribe. Secondly, these local tribal councils elected *shaykhs* who will represent their body in a provincial tribal council. The latter will finally be represented by elected *shaykhs* in a supreme tribal council based in the capital Sana'a.⁷⁸ Al-Sallal attempted to engage the tribes in the process of state-

76. Yemen Arab Republic, *Yemen Arab Republic Annual Book 1963* (Sana'a: Shu'bat al-I'lam wa al-Irshad, Presidential Council, 1963), 17.

77. *Ibid.*, 27.

78. *Ibid.*, 27-34.

building from the beginning, and this reflected their societal, as well as the military power that can be employed to the benefit of the state. But if these efforts were mishandled then this tribal power can hamper the process of state-building. And the remainder of this section will delve into this interaction between the new state and the tribes.

Al-Sallal, though “unconnected with the details of local demands or with locally known names” as claimed by Dresch,⁷⁹ appeared to leave the tribal system as it is, while the purpose of the first presidential decree was to reassure tribal *shaykhs* that their position will be maintained within the system of the new republic. The situation on the ground was different, as some of the tribes were wary about Al-Sallal’s project of a state that was heavily sponsored by Egypt. This has resulted in clashes that blocked the rather young Yemeni army from advancing into tribal areas like *Hajjah*, *Al-Jawf* or *Khawlan*.⁸⁰ The major Egyptian presence was not welcomed by some tribes and these clashes were seen by the Saudi neighbor as a window of opportunity to halt Egypt’s republican project that can spillover and threaten the Kingdom’s existence. Amid this growing tension between two regional powers, the tribes were not only involved as an entity to protect its own members or interests, but rather some tribes employed their military capacity in the form of troops or navigation services in return for cash or weaponry incentives from the conflicting sides.⁸¹ This internal bipolarity developed into “a battle by proxy between Riyadh and Cairo...and enormous expenditure of wealth by both sides [was] passed

79. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 89.

80. *Ibid.*, 90.

81. Abū Ghānim, *al-Qabīlah wa-al-dawlah*, 184.

mainly through the hands of tribal leaders, who rallied the troops”.⁸² Consequently, two internal warring parties, branded as royalists and republicans, were both fighting on behalf of the pro-imamate Saudi Arabia on one side and pro-republican Egypt on the other side. The constellation of tribes involved in each side of this civil war was confusing as some tribes switched sides for a number of reasons. Some tribes held tribal grievances towards the execution and detention of their leaders, while some others simply disapproved of the foreign agendas of the state. Dresch provided a better illustration of this tribal mosaic in his account on the republican forces advancing north;

“... a series of Egyptian offensives pushed north and in a hook through Marib to Harib to cut off the royalist supply-lines, then into the Tihamah and the western mountains also. As these spearheads moved on, there closed up behind them an indigenous world of alliances, disputes and shifting truces”.⁸³

Another point of view by Swagman suggested that tribal alliances during the civil war correlated with the religious sectarianism, claiming that the royalists were mostly *Zaydi* and the republicans were *Shafi'i*.⁸⁴ This correlation, however, cannot be generalized as some *Zaydi* tribal *shaykhs* fought on the side of the republicans, as Dresch explained that the split was interpreted by Yemeni authors as “a split between moderate and extreme republicans”.⁸⁵ A third perspective by Umar Ghalib, a Yemeni researcher argued that the tribal leaders distanced themselves from the leadership of the republican camp in Sana’a

82. Dresch, “Imams and Tribes,” 275.

83. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 93.

84. Swagman, “Social Organization,” 86.

85. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 94-103.

and took matters of war to their own hands, as discontent towards the Egyptian policies grew deeper.⁸⁶ Tracing the network of the tribal alliances during the civil war in the 1960s appeared to be a difficult task, and this reaffirmed the idea of tribal independence and the fact that they could not be manipulated or strong-armed. However, it confirmed that the tribal role as a unit of war in the civil war, and a decisive force that initiated talks between the warring parties. The ambiguity during the 1960s rests on whether the tribe should be regarded as structure that challenged the formation of the modern state, or a societal structure that helped in its creation; and no simple answer can be obtained. An alternative approach should not look at the tribe per se, but rather at tribalism as an informal institution that has governed this chaotic constellation of alliances during the civil war in the 1960s and the forthcoming sections will provide answers to these complexities through understanding tribalism in context.

Tribalism, previously defined by Legum as “the manifestation of over-riding group loyalties by members of a culturally affiliated society to locally based interests which involve traditions, land, and opportunities for survival and growth”,⁸⁷ can offer an explanation to the actions of the tribes and tribal *shaykhs* during the years following the revolution of 1962. Those tribal *shaykhs* fought the Imamate rule and were considered republicans, but also generally disliked the deep Egyptian intervention and were the first to oppose president Al-Sallal, as the latter “appeared to some as Egypt’s puppet”.⁸⁸ This

86. Umar Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-siyāsīyah lil-Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥusayn al-Aḥmar min ‘ām 1948-2007* (Sana'a: Awān lil-Khadamāt al-lāmīyah, 2010), 92.

87. Leon Shellef, “Tribalism- Vague but Valid,” in *The Future of Tradition: Customary Law, Common Law and Legal Pluralism* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 50, Adobe PDF eBook.

88. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 89.

resulted in major splits within the republican camp especially after the arrest and execution of republican *shaykhs*, or as shocking as *Khawlan* tribe being mostly royalist even though “*Khawlan* in 1960 never had quite submitted to Imam Ahmad”.⁸⁹ Unexpectedly, tribes do not fight for a specific political ideology, nor do they accept being manipulated; but the tribes engage in political and war activities, if there exist “locally based interests” and “opportunities for survival and growth”.⁹⁰ As the civil war provided the tribes with an opening to reemerge as an effective political entity, tribalism was the framework around which tribal alliances were formed following the revolution of 1962. Some tribal leaders who saw an opportunity in the 1962 revolution were frustrated afterwards by the overwhelming Egyptian presence and the “survival” instinct translated to splits within the republican camp as mentioned above. On the other hand, some tribal *shaykhs* saw an “opportunity for growth”,⁹¹ for example; “in the countryside, great names were made in the fighting, and such republican *shaykhs* as Mujahed Abu Shawarib of *Kharif* in *Hashid* became as widely known”.⁹² Hence, both instances maintain the argument that tribalism, though vague as a concept, qualifies as the structure that governed the set of alliances during the civil war. Tribalism as a structure will be revisited throughout the course of this study, providing the reader a better re-conceptualize of the state-tribal relation in Yemen.

89. *Ibid.*, 93.

90. Shellef, “Tribalism- Vague but Valid,” 50.

91. *Ibid.*,

92. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 105.

After establishing tribalism as an effective structure throughout the civil war period that stretched from 1963-1970, it is important to note that other instances of the tribal engagement in the modern state exhibit tribalism as a framework. Most prominent of which are; the announcement of the tribal councils as a formal body of representation, the appointment of the paramount *shaykh* of *Hashid* Abdullah Al-Ahmar as minister of interior,⁹³ and the tribal mediation with the royalists to end the civil war exemplified by the *Taif* conference in Saudi Arabia 1965.⁹⁴ These instances and many others display how the role of the tribe was effective in shaping the dynamics of the modern Yemeni state in the north, and prove tribalism to be the medium through which the interaction with the state has taken place.

Tribal Dominance of the State

Victoria Clark, a freelance journalist and writer, in her book *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, displayed how Egyptian intervention in Yemen came to an end. She stated how some “republican and royalist tribes made a powerful coalitions against the foreign invaders”, and how “many of them are inconsistent in their affiliation, pragmatic and flexible, happy to receive guns and supplies from anywhere”.⁹⁵ It is important to note that the tribal coalition opposing Egyptian policies was essential in uniting the republican camp especially after the Khartoum Resolution of 1967 that ended the proxy war between Egypt and Saudi Arabia.⁹⁶ The resolution, as described by Ghalib, resulted in an

93. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 103.

94. Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-sīyāsīyah lil-Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh*, 131.

95. Victoria Clark, *Yemen: Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 98.

96. Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-sīyāsīyah lil-Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh*, 141.

agreement to withdraw both; Saudi aid for the royalists and Egyptian troops in Yemen, which consequently announced the end of Al-Sallal's term as president of YAR and the win of the conservative republicans.⁹⁷ However, Dresch suggested that pro-Sallal crowds caused tension, and rivalries did not settle amongst the republican camp as "those who ejected Al-Sallal had worried primarily about a counter-coup not from trade-unionists, merchants ... but from a Shafi *shaykh* of *al-Bayda*".⁹⁸ Evidently, tribal *shaykhs* influenced this period of consolidation of the republic, and competition amongst them reemerged as soon as the defeated royalists were integrated in the national reconciliation that took place in 1970. The tribal leaders who came out as winners after the civil war, emerged as dominant governmental figures like; "*Shaykh* Abdullah Al-Ahmar of *Hashid* who chaired the Consultative Council established in 1971", and Sinan Abu Luhum of *Bakil* "governor by self-appointment of *Hudaydah* province".⁹⁹

The transition period following President Al-Sallal was not any peaceful as turmoil was again on the buildup not only internally but also with the neighboring PDYR, People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, in the south. During the rule of *Qadi* Abd Al-Rahman Al-Iryani, who headed the presidential council, tribal *shaykhs* played a major role in fueling these skirmishes between YAR and southern PDYR, as many *shaykhs* and exiled southern activists were at the receiving end of "Saudi stipends" that aimed to challenge the socialist regime in the south.¹⁰⁰ Tribal *shaykhs* from their position as conservative

97. Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-sīyāsīyah lil-Shaykh 'Abd Allāh*, 141.

98. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 117.

99. *Ibid.*, 124,122.

100. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 124.

republicans saw an opportunity for growth and sensed a threat from the left republican wing in this transition period, even if these translated to siding with Saudi Arabia that eminently fought the rising left in YAR. Al-Irayani was incapable of controlling the wave of chaos, administrative corruption and multiple assassinations amongst notable tribal *shaykhes*, and was pressured by *Shaykh* Al-Ahmar to resign.¹⁰¹ This reiterates the notion of tribalism as an informal structure that regulates tribal interaction with formal structures, in this case KSA and Al-Irayni as head of the state. Chaos in YAR was the dominant feature and the state was struggling; as Lisa Wadeen, an expert in the Yemeni affairs, perfectly sums up the 1970s period as follows:

*“The YAR was embroiled in two wars with South Yemen in 1972 and 1979 and endured two dramatic presidential assassinations that were filled with plot twists. The first involved the populist military officer, President Ibrahim Al-Hamdi, whose body was discovered along with the corpses of his brother and two other French women in 1977. His successor Ahmad Al-Ghashmi, died six months later when an envoy from Aden exploded a briefcase in his office.”*¹⁰²

Presidency of YAR was an institution that was heavily affected by the interests of the tribes which saw in the formation of a state an opportunity to reemerge as a societal and political force, but also a threat to their survival. Therefore the tribalism guided their interactions with the formal institutions of the state led by the president.

A tribesman Head of State

101. Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-sīyāsīyah lil-Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh*, 153.

102. Wadeen, *Peripheral Visions*, 51.

The President of YAR following *Qadi* Al-Iryani was Lieutenant Ibrahim Al-Hamdi, who led the correction movement against Al-Iryani after cooperating with the prominent tribal *shaykhs* and military commanders, in what was referred by some Yemeni historians as a soft coup.¹⁰³ Al-Hamdi, who served in office from 1974-1977, was as a charismatic leader who vowed for administrative development, and was the first Yemeni leader to “master mass politics” and brought “ebullience” to Yemen as described by Dresch, which made him Yemen’s Nasser in terms of popularity.¹⁰⁴ Many stories, though, loomed around the reasons and powers behind his assassination. Some accounts maintain that Riyadh was discontent with his unification agenda with the south, and his aid talks with the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁵ While another account suggests that Al-Hamdi’s decision to dissolve the Consultative Council lead by *Shaykh* Al-Ahmar of Hashid, and the ruling out of Abu Luhum of *Bakil* from military positions were perceived as a challenge by the most prominent tribal confederations in Yemen.¹⁰⁶ These may qualify as factors that led to Al-Hamdi’s assassination, but Ghalib claims that the arguments, which stirred up between Al-Hamdi’s and his military commanders, Al-Ghashmi exclusively, are widely suspected to be the reasons behind the assassination.¹⁰⁷

103. Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-sīyāsīyah lil-Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh*, 156.

104. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 130-132.

105. Edward Burke, “‘One Blood and One Destiny’? Yemen’s Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council” (Research paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, LSE, June 2012), 9.

106. Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-sīyāsīyah lil-Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh*, 160-161.

107. *Ibid.*, 172.

Al- Ghashmi announced himself as president of the YAR, but did not survive the political fiasco that dominated the 1970s and was assassinated after six months from taking office in a plot that was believably implicating his counterparts in the PDYR. Clark described in novelty that the newly established state of YAR witnessed different personnel in leadership and all failed miserably; “Al-Iryani’s *qadi*-run republic had failed and so had Al-Hamdi’s military-run republic”, but mentioned that “Al-Ghashmi’s tribal-military republic”, though short, has “proved to be the winning formula” decades later.¹⁰⁸ Clark’s statement was complemented by *shaykh* Al-Ahmar’s narrative that pinpointed how Al-Hamdi entrusted Al-Ghashmi with the commanding of the military, because the latter also enjoyed tribal affiliation in Hamadan.¹⁰⁹ The tribal-military republic was tested again during the rise of Colonel Ali Abdullah Saleh of *Sanhan*, a sub-tribe of Hashid, who became president of YAR, afterward the Republic of Yemen [RoY]. The intention here is not to suggest nor claim that the tribal-military republic was the best mode of ruling of modern Yemen, but to portray the role of the tribe and tribalism as mechanism to run the state and govern the relations between the political players in different regime contexts. The interaction between the informal [tribalism] and formal [state] structures in Yemen, will unveil the nature of political activity and the period during which Saleh ruled will be disclosed in hopes to know if the tribe is a friend or a foe. The upcoming chapters will analyze these formal-informal interactions using the typography of informal institutions proposed in the previous chapter. The exploration of various converging and diverging interactions will form the guiding steps towards

108. Clark, *Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, 111.

109. Ghālib, *al-Adwār al-sīyāsīyah lil-Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh*, 161.

answering the main question of whether tribalism governed the relationship between the state and the society during the Saleh era.

Chapter 3
“Two players, one goal”

Unlocking the State-Tribal Relations during Saleh

The previous chapter provided a detailed account on the interaction of the tribe with the formal institutions, embodied by the Imamate or the modern state of YAR between the 1960s and the 1970s. Each of these historical episodes witnessed tribal political activity that shaped the political culture in Yemen. The analysis withdrawn from these interactions revealed the decisive role of the tribe during periods of upheaval, but also displayed inconsistency in this interaction. In some instances the tribe acted as the peacekeeper, while on other instances it was as the war wager. The inconsistency of tribal activity and the change in the mode of interaction with the formal institution was driven by several factors, and these accounts reaffirm the claim that tribalism is the dominant medium through which these interactions occur.

Tribalism, outlined in the preceding chapter, is translated to a set of uncharted rules within a tribal community driven by an opportunity for growth or survival.¹¹⁰ The objective of this chapter is to further explore the interaction between the state and the tribe in Yemen during the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and test how tribalism qualifies as the informal structure that governs the relationship between the state and the tribe.

As vague as the definition of tribalism can be, the interaction between the state and the tribe cannot be exclusively determined as good- or- bad, but it is bound by many factors, one of which is the effectiveness of the formal institution. “By effectiveness we mean the extent to which rule and procedures that exist on paper are enforced or complied with in

110. Sheleff, “Tribalism - Vague but Valid,” 50.

practice”.¹¹¹ Measuring effectiveness would require a wider ethnographic research that target case(s) throughout time. However, it is necessary to clarify that this research aims at investigating the relationship between the state and the tribe in Yemen, and display the nature of these interactions within the framework of tribalism as an informal institution. Helmke and Levitsky’s typology of interaction between the formal-informal institutions will be employed throughout this study. The typology of informal institutions proposed by Helmke and Levitsky produces an outcome that is either convergent or divergent; in other words, the formal-informal interaction either works harmoniously in achieving a goal or; conversely, adopt different methods in reaching two different results.¹¹²

Figure 1
A typology of informal institutions

Outcomes	Effective formal institutions	Ineffective formal institutions
Convergent	Complementary	Substitutive
Divergent	Accommodating	Competing

Figure 1 in Helmke and Levitsky’s *Informal Institutions and Comparative Politics: Research Agenda* displays the four types of informal institutions.¹¹³ This research will tackle the relationship between the state and the tribe during the rule of President Ali Abudllah Saleh through exploring the universe of interaction between the formal [state] and informal [tribal]. Therefore, in applying the abovementioned typology this research will evaluate and analyze formal-informal interaction in various sectors like; executive-

111. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 13.

112. Ibid., 14.

113. Ibid.,

legislative relations, electoral politics, judicial and military politics. This analysis will examine how tribalism's informal rules and structures leads to convergent outcomes, divergent outcomes, or is peculiarly a universal informal institution in its interaction with the state during the rule of President Saleh.

Tribalism in Yemen: Between Convergence and Divergence

*“There are two prevalent clichés about Yemen’s tribal system and political development: one is that tribalism facilitates the persistence of authoritarianism; and the other that is already a well-established, culturally specific form of democracy”.*¹¹⁴

Sarah Philips in her account on *Yemen’s Democracy Experiment* portrayed the rigid categorization of tribalism by the literature as either; an entirely “dysfunctional” structure to democracy in Yemen, or as a locally perfect “functional” structure that holds the spirit of democracy.¹¹⁵ But between these two streams the typology by Helmke and Levitsky provides new avenues of interaction whereby; tribal informal rules can, for example; **substitute** formal rules and help prevent local skirmishes from turning to conflicts. On the other hand, this informal rule of tribesmen bearing arms is mainly **accommodated** in the outskirts of cities as long as they provide security in their respective regions. This formal-informal trade-off is not consistent and is often sensitive to the political and societal context as well as actors on both sides of this interaction. Najwa Arda, similarly, highlighted the misconceptions on tribalism as a hurdle to development in Yemen and listed in her ethnographic work cases that demonstrate tribal customs as **complementing**

114. Sarah Philips, “Tribalism in a weak state,” in *Yemen’s Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 89.

115. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 16-17.

informal institutions to local development.¹¹⁶ Conversely, a study conducted by Yemen Polling Center (YPC) surveying the public opinion on “the state of security in Yemen” displayed that “63.5% of Yemenis consider tribal conflicts as very serious threat to the security of the country”.¹¹⁷ And as much as Arda denounced the use of violence by the tribes in “blood feuds” which is a clear *competition* with the state on the use of violence, she reiterated that “throughout, tribes and states have been dependent both economically and politically”.¹¹⁸ Thus, these accounts suggest that state-tribal relations are governed by a set of informal institutions that are not necessarily in line with the formal rules but can serve a greater good to the local community, or the desired political agenda of the state.

YPC presented another study on *citizens’ local council members experience in Yemen*; and when asked the question: “Does Yemen benefits from the local councils?”¹¹⁹ 70% of the sample responded with a “Yes”. However, almost 51% of this sample responded with a “No”, when asked if “local councils provide citizens’ basic needs”. However, remarkably, around 32 % of the sample selected the “tribal *shaykh*” as the most popular of the “personalities who are able to serve in their areas”.¹²⁰ This reflects two points; the public lack of confidence on the local councils as formal institutions, but also suggests the figure of tribal *shaykh* as credible local representative who can deliver services. This

116. Najwa Arda, “Tribal Mediation in Yemen and its Implications to Development,” *Working Papers on Social Anthropology*, no. 19, (2011): 10, Austrian Academy of Sciences.

117. Yemen Polling Center (YPC), “The State of Security in Yemen: Great Challenges and Inherent Weaknesses,” *YPC Data Powerpoint Presentation* (March 2012): 7, <https://bit.ly/2K2w7ws>

118. Arda, “Tribal Mediation,” 10.

119. YPC, “Local Council Members Experience in Yemen,” *YPC Data on Civic Activism* (April 2007): 31, <http://www.yemenpolling.org/local-council-members-experience/>

120. *Ibid.*, 33.

illustrates a degree of convergence in terms of the desired outcome both by the tribe and the state.

However, what should be pinpointed is that the if convergence and divergence in relations between these separate structures is governed by the informal institution of tribalism, as claimed earlier, then the question to be answered is how does that process take place? Therefore, following the typology provided by Helmke and Levitsky, informal structures and rules constituted within tribalism will be investigated in relation to the formal institutions and actors of the state.

In reference to figure 1,¹²¹ **complementary** and **substitutive** tribalism will be analyzed respectively through the examination of specific formal structures in relation to the tribe. These interactions by default will reflect convergence “employed by actors who seek outcomes compatible with formal rules and procedures.”¹²² Party politics and rural development will serve as the two main formal structures to be tested in relation to the tribe when examining complementary tribalism; however substitutive tribalism will be tested through the two formal structures of security and conflict resolution. These do not indicate the exclusivity of these interactions as convergent, but provide incidents that match the framework of the study. The line drawn to differentiate between convergence and divergence will be vague, but the main purpose of this study is to unveil this complexity and dig deeper to explore the state (formal) –tribal (informal) universe during the rule of Saleh.

121. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,”14.

122. Ibid.,16.

Tribalism as a Complementary Institution

Complementary informal institutions suggest that there are existing formal institutions that are “functioning and complied with” by actors. Thus, informal institutions would only exist to “fill in the gaps” of formal institutions; while in other instances they act as the base on which formal institutions are established.¹²³ To evaluate the Middle East in general, and Yemen in specific, in the context of established complementary informal institutions, many cases would lack presence of complementary informal institutions as formal institutions are mostly ineffective or weak. But another understanding offered by Helmke and Levitsky of complementary informal institutions provides that they “serve as the underlying foundation for formal institutions,”¹²⁴ and this understanding qualifies for the studying of formal-informal interaction in the Yemeni context as tribal customs persisted throughout the different stages of state building.

In this regard the question that poses itself in relation to studying formal-informal interaction would be: To what extent tribalism has served as a complementary institution to the formal institutions of state? To answer this question, **formal institutional contexts will be examined in relation to the tribe**. This formal-informal interaction can first be examined in the executive-legislative relations displayed **in party politics**, which emerged in Yemen during the rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh. **Rural development** will serve as another example to investigate the convergence of outcomes in the interaction between the tribe and the state.

123. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 13-14.

124. *Ibid.*, 14.

In pursuit of Legitimacy: Party Politics

Saleh, who linked between both a military and tribal background, was quickly promoted by the People's Constituent Council (PCC) to a higher military rank and directly elected by the interim Presidential Council as President of YAR in July 1978.¹²⁵ "The period 1978-1981 was one of widespread political pessimism as well as one during which President Saleh labored to improve his political prospects" as described by Robert Burrowes.¹²⁶ Saleh had to guarantee survival first to perform in his role, and therefore had to employ a circle of family members in key military and governmental positions. This inner circle may have guaranteed his survival in the early years, but Saleh needed to do more to maintain his grip on power in YAR, or unified Republic of Yemen later on. Saleh "had to create a ruling formula that could deal with contradictory aims...one of which was the major tribes and their complicated external ties... another was legitimacy and public support" as elaborated by Saif.¹²⁷ Major tribes, which were marginalized by Al-Hamdi, demanded their share of the state back, and therefore; valued the constitution of 1970 "that was weighted strongly towards the interests of the leading tribalists".¹²⁸ On the other hand, as Saleh sought legitimacy, and in order to "broaden the regime's base and strengthen its statist orientation", both the traditionalist tribes and the modernist left

125. Ahmed A. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001), 48.

126. Robert Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development 1962-1986*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 94.

127. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 48.

128. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development 1962-1986*, 99.

had to be incorporated in one body for Saleh's regime to flourish.¹²⁹ Prior to Saleh, the tribes enjoyed their share of power through the Consultative Council that was established by Al-Irayni in the 1970 constitution; before it was abolished by Al-Hamdi, and ultimately contributing to his assassination. Therefore, Saleh was occupied with restoring this balance of power internally in order to strengthen his legitimacy and chances of survival.

During his early years, Saleh played safe domestic politics, and did not consider ruling out any political player out of the game amongst which were the tribes. In fact, it was believed that the "appointment of *Shaykh* Mujahid Abu Shawareb as deputy prime minister for internal affairs" was seen as "a big step towards the long-predicted reconciliation with the major tribes".¹³⁰ This was followed by a decree by Saleh to enlarge the only legislative body, the People's Constituent Council (PCC), and established an Advisory Council that included the Paramount *Shaykh* Abdullah bin Hussain Al-Ahmar of Hashid.¹³¹ The strategy of incorporation of all adopted by Saleh was risky, but cruised him to a safe harbor in the unstable climate surrounding domestic politics in YAR. As legitimacy became the ultimate goal after survival of the regime; Saleh reached out to a wider audience of notables, local leaders and tribal *shaykhs* through convening of the General People's Congress (GPC) in 1982. This new body described by Saleh as "the latest stage in the expansion of democracy and political

129. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development 1962-1986*, 99.

130. *Ibid.*, 109.

131. *Ibid.*, 110.

participation”¹³² saw the light in hopes to carry on with the national dialogue leading to the formation of the legislature besides serving as a platform for political participation.

Saleh’s invitation of tribal *Shaykhs* to join the GPC indicated his need for the support of tribesmen in the isolated rural areas inaccessible by the state. This informal form of exchange hinges on tribalism as a structure that provided both sides the opportunity for growth; in this case legitimacy for Saleh’s regime in return for participation and inclusion of the tribes in domestic politics. A further illustration of this form of informal exchange can be expressed in fragments of a letter sent by the paramount *Shaykh* of Bakil Naji Al-Shayif to all *shaykhs* of Bakil in 1980:

*“Despite the expenditure and the contribution that Bakil had made, and its ample share in the course of events... we are still looking for a return on that great contribution and that excellent share in so many fields...”*¹³³

The Saleh regime at its early stage was looking for legitimacy, and tribal *shaykhs* along with technocrats appointed or elected in the GPC can guarantee the support of their respective tribes, but in exchange for returns. Given his influence, the paramount *Shaykh* of *Bakil* was “[invited] to Sana’a, where he built a huge house, and providing him no doubt with a generous stipend, and at the same time giving responsibility for popular army units directly to different *Bakil shaykhs*”.¹³⁴ The GPC, however; slowly grew to become a regime’s social club where rewards and incentives were distributed. As the

132. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 48.

133. Paul Dresch, *Tribes Government and History in Yemen*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 370.

134. *Ibid.*, 372.

regime was seeking legitimacy and political actors were seeking political participation this interaction between the informal-formal was administered by the GPC as the political organization - not a political party yet- in charge of bringing all political factions and trends together. It was only after the unification that the GPC was declared as a political party that represented the ruling regime of the former YAR, as they were banned before then; however remained “without coherent interests, structure or discipline.”¹³⁵

The tribal structure managed not to only “serve as the underlying foundation”¹³⁶ of forming the GPC as a political party but also the formation of other political parties in unified Yemen. On the other hand, tribal *shaykhs* saw in party politics a way to secure a seat in the new political configuration that followed the unification. Therefore, prominent tribal *shaykhs* raced towards joining or forming new political parties. *Shaykh* Abdullah Al-Ahmar of Hashid led the Yemeni Congregation of Reform (Islah), *shaykh* Abu Lahum of *Bakil* established the Republican Party, copying the US model, while *shaykh* Mojahed Abu Shawareb joined the Ba’ath party, and many others who were scattered all over the political spectrum.¹³⁷ This mix-and-match approach was experimental and reflects the political euphoria that followed the unification, however; it also displayed how tribalism can serve as a complementary institution regulating the formal structure of party politics in relation to the informal structure of the tribe. Another formal institution will be outlined in the next section and attempt to solidify the notion of tribalism as a complementary institution during the rule of Saleh.

135. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 83.

136. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 13-14.

137. Samir Al-Abdalī, *thaqafat-al-dimuqratiyah-fi-al-hayah-al-siyasiyah-li-qabail-al-yaman-dirasah-maydaniyah*, (Beirut: Center of Arab Unity Studies, 2007), 127.

Complementary Tribalism and Rural Development

The interaction between the state and the tribe was not limited to the political sphere, but was extended and are deeply rooted in the society. As Northern Yemen was isolated during the imamate rule, many developmental projects; like schools, hospitals and other public services were in demand in the rural areas and the relatively new state was weak and incapable of carrying these projects. Therefore, “from the 1960s, and most dramatically after the civil war scores of small, grassroots, self-help Local Development Associations (LDAs) sprang up spontaneously”.¹³⁸ Swagman added: “the shaykh of the community, in association with the important families organized their own workforce and collected money from the residents for these public projects”.¹³⁹ The rise of the LDAs as a model of development was embraced by tribes and tribal *shaykhs* in the north proving that tribalism can extend beyond political sphere to societal and community engagement. Moreover, in 1973 when the LDAs were incorporated to the central government under the Confederation of Yemeni Development Associations (CYDA), tribal shaykhs showed enthusiasm towards joining this governmental body whose members were elected and, in fact, participated in the elections.

This demonstration of another level of interaction between the state and the tribe illustrated by LDA model displays the complementary interaction between these two institutions in the field of development. Projects such as schools, hospitals and roads were a common interest both for the state and the tribes respectively; as the formal institution of the state seeks access to these isolated rural areas, while in return the rural

138. Weir, *Tribal Order of Yemen*, 289.

139. Swagman, “Social Organization,” 179.

population, mainly tribal, will have accessible healthcare, services and roads to link their villages.

“What sets the tribe aside in Yemen is that it had filled the gaps unoccupied by the state historically, through setting the norms and tribal rules that have regulated societal relations in their regions, imitating the role of civil society organizations particularly in the absence of democracy”¹⁴⁰

The above quote extracted from an official report published by the Ministry of Planning and Development in 1998 illustrates the nature of this complementary interaction between the state and the tribe that goes beyond the political. In fact, Arda reiterates in her account on development in Yemen that “Yemeni tribes and tribal segments are essentially cooperative units that can mobilize easily to perform tasks deemed important to the community.”¹⁴¹ As evident in the accounts on party politics above convergence in outcomes between the formal (state) and the informal (tribe) can be attained when tribalism serves a complementary institution moderating this interaction. Convergence will be outlined in the upcoming section through examining tribalism as a substitutive institution as this research is progressing to analyze whether tribalism governed the relationship between the state and the tribe during the rule of Saleh.

Tribalism as a Substitutive Institution

Substitutive informal institutions exist in areas where the state is absent, weak or is unable to exercise its authority or implement its formal rules. Helmke and Levitsky

140. Al-Abdalī, *thaqafat-al-dimuqratiyah*, 120.

141. Arda, “Tribal Mediation,” 11.

clarify that “substitutive informal institutions are employed by actors who seek outcomes compatible with formal rules and procedures.”¹⁴² Applying this explanation to the state (formal) – tribal (informal) configuration in Yemen during the rule of Saleh will yield many incidents, some of which can be studied to evaluate how tribalism can serve as a substitutive institution. The prerequisites for substitutive institutions, namely tribalism, to thrive are present in Yemen. Saif elaborates that “due to the state’s weakness and its limited capabilities, society has developed its own legal framework which mixes Islamic law and tribal customary law.”¹⁴³ On the other hand, a recently published YPC policy report maintains that “tribes, tribal law and conflict regulation in many parts of the country serve as substitutes for a weak state with a limited reach.”¹⁴⁴ In that regard, two formal state institutions will be evaluated in the remainder of this section to answer the question of how tribalism has served as a substitutive institution to the formal institutions of state. This formal-informal interaction can first be tackled through examining **local security**, and secondly through evaluating the **process of tribal mediation**, during the rule of Saleh. The interactions between the state and the tribe that will be outlined will mirror complementary institutions in how they arrive to outcomes that are desired by the formal institutions, hence reaching convergence. The only significant difference between complementary and substitutive informal institutions is that the latter acknowledges the weakness of the formal institutions of the state and the following sections will dissect such institutions in relation to the tribe in Yemen.

142. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 16.

143. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 109.

144. Dimitris Soudias and Mareike Transfeld, “Mapping Popular Perceptions, Local Security, Insecurity and Police Work in Yemen” *YPC Policy Report*, (14 July 2014): 19, <https://bit.ly/2RCXK3f>

The Tribe and Local Security

*“The term security seems to describe one of poor people’s major concerns. In general, security implies stability and continuity...”*¹⁴⁵

Yemen is one of the poorest countries that has witnessed various political challenges affecting the livelihood of the local population most of which live in the rural areas. YPC’s poll on the *Public Perceptions of the Security Sector and Police Work in Yemen* showed significant results in this realm of state-societal relations some of which are as follows; 89% of the sample living in the rural areas declared that there are no police stations in the area¹⁴⁶, while 31% of the whole sample believe that the first actor to react to security incidents are tribal leaders.¹⁴⁷ These numbers reflect two things; the inability of the state to infiltrate rural areas and the strength of the tribal *shaykhs* in these regions. However this substitution of roles is mostly evident in rural area where the tribes are dominant and the state is weak, thus setting the stage for tribalism to serve as a substitutive institution. Few cases will be outlined to clarify this interaction in which the final outcome is favored by both the formal (state) and the informal (tribe).

Taking the case of *Sa’da*, one of the most underdeveloped governorates in Yemen, one can review the security situation in a governorate that has witnessed six wars between the government and the Houthis during the rule of Saleh. Based on YPC poll results, 40% of

145. World Bank Report, “Voices of the Poor: Crying out for Change” *World Bank Poverty Division* (January 2000): 152, <https://bit.ly/2RAJoAI>

146. Yemen Polling Center (YPC), “Public Perceptions of the Security Sector and Police Work in Yemen,” *YPC Data Major Survey Findings Powerpoint Presentation* (January 2013): 36, <https://bit.ly/2XAfjow>

147. *Ibid.*, 74.

the sample from *Sa'da* “believes that tribal leaders should be the first to deal with security issues...” and 28% actually believe that tribes are providing the security in the rural governorate.¹⁴⁸ Contrary to that “Not a single respondent stated that the police provide security”¹⁴⁹ supporting Shiela Carapico’s argument that “Yemen has autonomous space” which can never be controlled by the state, but rather be ruled through the “incorporation of local strongmen.”¹⁵⁰ The YPC poll projects the same notion as 66% of the whole sample “wants the police to seek the assistance of tribal *shyakhs* in resolving security issues.”¹⁵¹ Consequently, tribalism as a substitutive institution can serve the interest of both the local communities and the state in maintaining the security in rural areas.

Another case that can be highlighted is the state’s war against Al-Qaeda and how the tribal structures can be mobilized to help the state against its war on Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). “On a number of occasions, tribes in southern Yemen have battled alongside government forces to push out al-Qaeda and other extremist Islamic groups in order to ensure their communities’ safety.”¹⁵² YPC poll results also display results of residents from governorates affected by AQAP who prefer if the security

148. Soudias and Transfeld, “Mapping Popular Perceptions, Local Security,” 32-33.

149. *Ibid.*, 33.

150. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 112.

151. YPC, “Public Perceptions of the Security Sector,” 81.

152. Hannah Porter, “Why Yemen’s tribes may succeed where the UN has failed,” (Cairo, 2016).

apparatus use the assistance of the tribe and tribal *shyakhs* in leading the war against AQAP.¹⁵³

On Tribal Mediation

*“Specifically in Yemen there is considerable flexibility and adaptability in indigenous tribal procedures and decisions, more so than one usually finds in state justice systems, and decisions are restorative rather than coercive.”*¹⁵⁴

This quote by Arda in *Tribal Mediation in Yemen and its Implication on development*, shed the light on another state-societal interaction that can be performed using the informal substitutive institution of tribalism that saves the dignity of the parties in conflict and without the use of force. Previous chapters have highlighted major role played by the tribal *shaykhs* in leading negotiations or mitigating internal conflicts. At the local level the inaccessibility of the state in rural regions and the long processes of the justice systems maintained that communities resort to the quicker and more efficient option provided by tribalism to seek justice. The notion of *Urf*-tribal customes- that was discussed previously translates to a code of honor that is respected by all parties involved in the conflict and is overseen usually by a third party neutral to the conflict. Moreover, *“conflicts between the state and tribes are usually also resolved through mediation, as if the state is a tribal party within the conflict”*¹⁵⁵ and this proves that tribal mediation can replace the formal structures of the state in conflict resolution.

153. Soudias and Transfeld, “Mapping Popular Perceptions, Local Security,” 40-44.

154. Arda, *Tribal Mediation*, “1.

155. Soudias and Transfeld, “Mapping Popular Perceptions, Local Security,” 20.

Saleh's regime resorted to tribal mediation to end conflicts that erupted within the state structure or those skirmishes that challenged the state in the urban setting. But tribal mediations cannot resolve all conflicts or negotiate settlements as it needs willingness and commitment from all conflicting parties to honor the agreement reached.

To exemplify how tribal mediation process works one of Arda's cases will be displayed below:

“a man is fined heavily for attacking someone who had wronged him. Yaḥyā accidentally crushed a crate of tomatoes belonging to Ṣāliḥ as he was backing up his truck. He offered to pay for the tomatoes, but Ṣāliḥ refused, then took out his knife and stabbed Yaḥyā in the back as he walked away. Ṣāliḥ, who initially had been the victim of Yaḥyā's carelessness, had to pay Yaḥyā reparations of 65,000 Y.R. (\$14,444 in 1978) to cover his medical costs and a sacrifice of two cows. Not only did he try to take the law into his own hands when he should have registered a formal complaint, but he had stabbed a man in the back, a highly dishonorable act.”¹⁵⁶

Salih, the truck driver, in this case turned from a victim to a culprit mostly because he broke the tribal code that shames any persons who attacks a man from the back, and hence had to pay the reparations instead of being on the receiving end. The formal judicial system might have ruled otherwise or at least a ruling with lighter reparations. Tribalism can be substituting the formal rules and structures but sometime comes short when the conflict is complex or involved many factions.

156. Arda, “Tribal Mediation,” 5.

Tribal mediation was also evident during the *Sa'ada* wars that stretched from 2004-2010, but all those attempts of de-escalation or mediation did not reap any fruit. Marieke Brandt, a specialist on the Houthi affairs listed the main reasons that led to the failure of all negotiations and attempts of mediation; firstly, the Houthi conflict was not a tribal conflict at the beginning and thus applying the tribal code will be invalid, secondly, president Saleh blocked all attempts for mediation at the national level though appointing large team of negotiators who were not neutral and could not work together, and finally was the lack of leadership at both sides to prevent respective sides from sabotaging any ceasefire or attempt for mediation.¹⁵⁷ The *Sa'ada* wars mediation attempts might have also failed due to the many geopolitical factors that are entangled with the conflicting parties, in this case the state and a political faction. Tribalism as an informal substitutive institution can provide the answer sometime, but not all the time as changing variables can result in different state-societal configurations.

Conclusion

*“The language of tribalism is not that of the state... and a man, who is fluent in both, as are several great political figures, must portion his competence out according to place and circumstances.”*¹⁵⁸

Dresch, quoted above, summarized the notion of convergence as the interactions between the formal (state) and informal (tribe) take place, tribalism can serve as the “language” that complements or substitutes the formal structure to reach the desired goal. Tribalism

157. Marieke Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen: A History of the Houthi Conflict*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 162-163.

158. Dresch, *Tribes Government and History in Yemen*, 393.

as an informal structure is a wide universe that is yet to be discovered and the objective of this study is to explore the different arenas governing the state-tribal relations. The following chapter will display other levels of interaction between state and the tribe, where divergence will be the unifying theme. Saleh “*a man who is fluent in both [languages]*” is the main political actor to be analyzed in relation to interacting with other state institutions, political and tribal figures. It is yet to be discovered whether Saleh manipulated tribalism as an informal structure during his reign as a president of Yemen.

Chapter 4

Tribalism –but not the Tribe- to Blame

Introduction

The previous chapter has outlined the emergence of the informal institution of tribalism interacting with the formal institutions of the state to achieve convergent outcomes.

Tribalism, whether complementary or substitutive as demonstrated in the previous chapter, “may be explained as a historically contingent, and ultimately path-dependent, process” as labeled by Helmke and Levitsky.¹⁵⁹ Political participation, local security and development, and conflict mediation were illustrated as areas that use preexisting tribal rules in molding formal state rules and structures. However outcomes arising from state-tribal interactions in Yemen cannot be solely convergent. Informal institutions of tribalism can similarly derive divergent outcomes. These informal rules can be employed by actors in order to compete with the formal structure of the state, or to accommodate personal gains and interests different than those sponsored by the state’s formal structures.

The emergence of tribalism as an informal institution is considered a historical given as studies on Yemen have suggested, but they also have failed to capture how these informal structures and (unwritten) rule of tribalism were recreated and reestablished by political actors in Yemen. The modern state represented by its political parties, head of state, military establishment and judiciary body, to name few, sustained this interaction with the informal institution of tribalism. Yemeni citizens, not necessarily tribal members, have also exercised tribalism in their dealings with state formal institutions. This highlights that the interaction can go both ways” sometimes dictated by “small members

159. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 21.

of the [political] elite” while in other times “it is linked to border societal values or cultural patterns”.¹⁶⁰

Figure 1. of Helmke and Levistky outlines the typology of informal institutions in which divergent outcomes are represented by accommodating and competing informal institutions in relation to their interaction with formal institutions.¹⁶¹ In order to understand the upcoming episodes of interaction, the next section will define accommodating and competing institutions and pinpoint their relevance within the wider universe of state (formal) - and tribal (informal) interactions.

What Counts as Divergence

The merit of using the typology proposed by Helmke and Levitsky has unveiled a different cosmos that can be studied to get a better understanding of complicated state-societal relations. It is important to note that the objective of this study is to shed the light on this interaction, and detect whether the informal institution of tribalism has governed this universe during the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh. This study will explore state-societal interaction, but cannot present or validate answers as this would require a wider ethnographic research that stretches beyond the scope of this paper.

Helmke and Levitsky in their extensive introduction on informal institutions in Latin America emphasized on the difficulty of labeling informal institutions and expressed the fluidity of the typology and how, for example; “indigenous laws may fall into all four

160. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 18.

161. Ibid., 14.

categories”.¹⁶² As this research focuses on tribalism - an indigenous law in its essence - some of these informal rules and institutions can apply in any of the four typology quadrants in relation to the formal institution that is studied. However in this chapter the goal is to display divergence of outcomes resulting from formal-informal interactions.

According to Helmke and Levitsky, divergent outcomes occur in two general scenarios; 1) When effective formal institutions interact with accommodating informal institutions, and 2) When ineffective informal institutions interact with competing informal institutions.¹⁶³ Accommodating informal institutions “are created by actors who dislike the outcomes generated by the formal rules but are unable to change or openly violate those rules”.¹⁶⁴ An example of accommodating informal institution mentioned earlier illustrated how at one point the Yemeni security apparatus applied gun control in major cities¹⁶⁵ but loosen the grip in rural areas where the state has limited administrative presence. On the other hand, competing informal institutions “structure incentives in ways that are incompatible with the formal rules: to follow one rule, actors must violate another”.¹⁶⁶ For example the tribes in Yemen resort to the competing informal rule of carrying firearms to challenge the state institutions in applying the law in some parts of the country.

162. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 17.

163. Ibid., 14.

164. Ibid., 15.

165. Al-Abdali, *thaqafat-al-dimqratiya*, 111.

166. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 15.

This categorization presented by Helmke and Levitsky is applicable in evaluating the case of formal-informal interaction in Yemen during the rule of Saleh. **Studying the emergence or origins of accommodating and competing informal rules within the executive and military sector will help in unveiling whether tribalism governs the relationship between the state and the tribe in Yemen.**

Accommodating Informal Rules and Saleh's Regime

In previous chapters the definition of informal institutions were identified “as socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside official sanctioned channels”.¹⁶⁷ Tribalism has also been established earlier as an informal institution that has been employed by actors in Yemen to achieve their desired interests of growth and survival. However, if these interests diverge in outcome from the formal institutions of the state, accommodating informal institutions or rules are created or employed by actors to “help reconcile these actor’s interests with the existing formal institutional arrangements”.¹⁶⁸ This section will display the emergences of tribalism as an accommodating informal institution that featured the political reality in Yemen during the rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

*“As an army officer I can be sacked just like any other governmental employee can be sacked. As a member of my tribe, however, I remain forever.”*¹⁶⁹

167. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 15.

168. Ibid.,

169. Zoltan Barany, “The Challenges of Building a National Army in Yemen,” *Working Draft*, (July 2016): 13, Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Thorough observation to the abovementioned statement by Saleh reveals the key to his clinch to power for more than three decades. Saleh managed to maintain imaginary regime stability and survived in power considerably longer than anticipated, after years of upheaval and political chaos. Saleh's appointment as president of YAR brought the equilibrium necessary to guaranteeing the sought for stability in YAR in the late 1970s. The interaction between the formal institution of the military establishment led by President Saleh and the informal institution of tribal membership was manipulated by Saleh. As the head of state he played the informal institution of tribalism as means to an end - remaining in power – for as long as possible. The loyalty of tribesmen and the effect of tribal membership constitute how Saleh maintained influence in the political sphere in Yemen even after departure from office. This marriage between the military and the tribal identities, mentioned earlier by Clark as the tribal-military republic, proved to be effective in strengthening Saleh's regime.¹⁷⁰

The detailed account on *Accommodating Informal Institutions and Chilean Democracy* by Siavelis, suggests that accommodating informal institutions are “most likely to be found where political actors face difficulty operating within formal institutions, or where there is lack of congruence between political reality and formal institutional arrangements.”¹⁷¹ This description of accommodating informal institutions can be applied to the Yemeni context in very limited examples, as there are few efficient state institutions similar to the complementing informal institutions, but actors from within

170. Clark, *Dancing on the Heads of Snakes*, 111.

171. Peter Siavelis, “Accommodating Informal Institutions and Chilean Democracy,” in *Informal Institutions and Democracy*, ed. Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 34.

these institutions employed accommodating informal rules to be able to challenge the rising influence of the tribes in the political domain in Yemen. Therefore, a top-down accommodating informal rule was the **tribalization of the military** initiated by president Saleh after coming to power following the assassination of the two former military-ranked presidents. This accommodating informal rule will be evaluated within the framework of formal (state) – informal (tribal) interaction and provide further understating of tribalism.

Tribalization of the Military

One stark informal rule that appeared after the inauguration of Saleh as President of YAR was the process of tribalizing the military institution. This accommodating informal rule that “violate the spirit of the formal rules” had emerged and “was viewed as broadly beneficial” by the political actors.¹⁷² This section will trace the emergence of the process of tribalizing the military, as an accommodating informal rule. This formal-informal interaction will be analyzed to demonstrate the role it played maintaining the Saleh regime for more than three decades.

Informal institutions are more likely where all actors gain equally from their creation, where there are shared expectations about potentially negative and positive outcomes, and where the shadow of the future makes their maintenance worthwhile for the long term¹⁷³. As the main political actor Ali Abdullah Saleh a tribesman himself, was clever to manipulate some of the tribal informal rules and practices into the modern political

172. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 17.

173. Siavelis, “Accommodating Informal Institutions”, 34.

scene of Yemen. Saleh's survival in office was not a miracle but an example of how he used tribalism, which constitutes by definition survival and growth, as an accommodating informal institution. "Because of his own tribal affiliation and the well-established political structures and coterie he encountered when he came to power, [he] moved to accommodate especially the major *Hashid shaykhs*."¹⁷⁴ Saleh carried on the process of recruiting army officers from his own *Sanhan* tribe, a small tribe that is part of the *Hashid* tribal confederation. Through using this informal rule of tribal affiliation he embedded personal loyalty to him as a *Sanhani* more than to his political figure as the commander-in-chief of the army forces. This process of tribalization of the military institution was an accommodating, top-down informal rule that was initiated by Saleh to create formidable inner-circle in a state missing the monopoly on violence.¹⁷⁵

The idea of tribalization of the military institution was not a new practice, but one that has existed during the Imamate rule; as Fattah elaborates that "the Imam had a third army, the so-called *Jaysh al-Barani*, a tribal or desert army, which was a non-regular military force, comprised of tribesmen from the *Zaydi* highlands"¹⁷⁶. The Imamate rule collapsed however because interests of the tribes were no longer met by the authority of the formal structure represented by the Imam. On the other hand, Saleh who "has thrown a *Sanhan* ring of steel around his palace" in Sana'a but was abandoned in his final days by his *Sanhan* tribe and other tribal allies when their interests of survival and growth

174. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 331.

175. Khaled Fattah, "A Political History Of Civil-Military Relations In Yemen," *Alternative Politics, Special Issue 1*, (November 2010): 25, <https://bit.ly/39Z4Wx1>

176. Fattah, "A Political History," 27.

pointed a different direction.¹⁷⁷ Looking down the memory lane of Saleh's regime of the unified RoY or earlier as a president to the YAR tribal shaykhs were mainly harbored by Saleh in the military institution, legislative branch, and at a later stage the commercial complex.

The military institution played an important role in shaping the history of modern Yemen, as one analyst puts it; "Yemen's military (and particularly that of North Yemen) has evolved from kingmaker, to regime change facilitator, to a side-lined shell of an institution."¹⁷⁸ Salah, a son of the institution, recognized its importance and worked towards building a strong army that will hold the same mindset of tribally "remaining forever."¹⁷⁹ The emergence and persistence of this accommodating informal rule was successfully described by Fattah; who stated that "in post-revolutionary north Yemen, the military at its top levels has turned into a base for tribal power, while at its lower levels, it has turned into a wide arena for recruiting tribesmen as a part of the regime's politics of survival and co-optation."¹⁸⁰ Tribalization of the military established Saleh's resilient regime and gave specific tribal *shaykhs* access the state resources. But not all *shaykhs* were included in Saleh's inner circle. Brandt explain that certain tribal *shaykhs* from other regions, specifically *shaykhs* of *Sa'dah* region, showed support to Saleh in protecting the northern borders but "never gained direct access... to the upper echelon of

177. Ginny Hill, "Yemen: Fear of Failure," *Middle East Programme Briefing Paper 8*, no.3, (November 2008): 3, Chatham House Publication.

178. Florence Gaub, "Whatever Happened to Yemen's Army?," *Brief Issue, European Union Institute for Security Studies*, no.9, (April 2015): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2815/535754>.

179. Barany, "The Challenges of Building," 13.

180. Fattah, "A POLITICAL HISTORY," 34.

the political executive and military command”(59).¹⁸¹ What became to be known as *Sanhanism* of the military institution was also well opposed by other tribal confederations of *Bakil and Madhhij* whom in the *Saba’* Conference in 1992 gathered to voice their objection to the “hundred-officials-from-only-one-house-and-family” rule.¹⁸² This accommodating informal rule intimidated other tribes who knew that they were excluded from the opportunity of growth, but it solidified Saleh’s control over the political landscape in the first decade of his reign.

Survival and growth are the objectives of both sides of this formal-informal interaction, and this accommodating informal structure “helped reconcile these actor’s interests with the existing formal institutional arrangements”.¹⁸³ The unification of Yemen presented another opportunity of creating a national army that should include the armed forces of both the YAR and the PDYR, and Saleh’s process of *Sanhanism* in the military institution was denounced by his southern counterparts. In clear protest “a list of thirty-three names in the military... from a handful of *Sanhani* villages” was published in the Southern newspaper (*Voices of the Workers*)¹⁸⁴, echoing voices for reform in the military institution. Sponsored talks and agreements initiated attempts for reform after unification, but the mounting distrust amongst the leadership of both sides sparked the war of secession in May 1994 in which Saleh came out victorious. This war was test to the resiliency of Saleh’s regime and it demonstrated that the “tightly sealed family-tribal

181. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 59.

182. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 192.

183. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 15.

184. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 189.

based military commanding structure [was] one of the major factors behind the victory of the northern army”.¹⁸⁵ The northern tribal-military leaders of from Hashid confederation were gifted the bounties of this victory by Saleh in the form of properties in the waterfronts of Aden or control over provinces in the south; for example “*Hadramawt* was controlled by Mohamed Ismail of *Sanhan*... and *Abyan* was controlled by the President’s son Ahmad”.¹⁸⁶

The lead up to unification of northern and southern Yemen “saw a lack of congruence between the political reality and formal institutional arrangements,”¹⁸⁷ and therefore the tribalization of the military institution employed by Saleh was the deciding factor in his regime’s survival and resiliency after the war of secession. Saleh recognized that there is a gap between the state and informal power of the tribe and he worked towards welding the two entities into a “military-tribal complex”.¹⁸⁸ The informal rule of tribalizing the military was the accommodating informal rule that built this formidable complex of the Saleh regime. The interaction outlined above affected a group of actors positively (Saleh-selected tribal *shaykhs*), and tribalism as an informal rule governed this relationship between President Saleh and tribal *shaykhs*, but diverged widely from the goals of formal institution that oppose favoritism. However the next section will highlight tribalism as an informal institution that presents itself at odds with the formal institutions of the state but was employed by actors to arrive to their interests. This should be the last piece of the

185. Fattah, “A Political History,” 39.

186. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 197-98.

187. Siavelis, “Accommodating Informal Institutions”, 34.

188. Fattah, “A Political History,” 41.

puzzle that will answer the question of whether tribalism governed the relationship between the state and tribe in Yemen during the rule of Saleh.

Tribalism as a Competing institution

Tribalism was earlier defined as "the manifestation of overriding group loyalties by members of a culturally affiliated society to locally based interests which involve tradition, land, and opportunities for survival and growth."¹⁸⁹ In relation to interactions with formal institutions Dresch in his accounts on Yemen has mentioned how tribalism in Yemen was widely portrayed by different scholars as a competing informal institution; in a way "that tribes and the states must somehow be opposites"¹⁹⁰, or "tribalism identified with endemic treachery."¹⁹¹ Some other academics even took the path of identifying tribalism as a hurdle to democracy; in how tribal affiliation restricted the functioning of the formal institution of the parliament,¹⁹² or how tribal *shaykhs* manipulated party-politics in Yemen.¹⁹³ These illustrations, bearing in mind that Yemen is a weak state with generally ineffective formal institutions, identified tribalism mainly as a competing informal institution. Hence the meat and bones of the scholarship on the tribe and tribalism in Yemen represented the divergent outcomes yield by this formal (state)-informal (tribal) interaction.

189. Shellef, "Tribalism Vague but Valid," 50.

190. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 5.

191. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 99.

192. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 8.

193. Al-Abdali, *thaqafat-al-dimqratiya*, 127-28.

Helmke and Levitsky identify two types of competing informal institutions; “a) Particularistic norms such as corruption, clientelism, and patrimonialism, b) Traditional or indigenous institutions¹⁹⁴ both of which “structure incentives in ways that are incompatible with formal rules... and often said to subvert formal state institutions”.¹⁹⁵ The history of the modern –and weak- state of Yemen displayed many episodes of interaction between the state and the tribe where subversion of the latter prevailed once opportunities for survival and growth were at stake giving rise for the emergence of tribalism as a competing institution. As established in previous sections of this research the tribes clashed with the Imamate rule, dismissed the first officer President of YAR, and manipulated both the republican and royalist sides during the proxy war of the late 1960s. The Saleh regime, searching for survival during its inauguration, was keen on the inclusion of the tribes through party politics or drafting in the military institution, to name a few examples. This interaction saw the emergence of competing informal institutions when tribal rules clashed with the regime and vice versa.

Under the umbrella of tribalism as an informal institution there exist several competing informal rules or structures that persisted or emerged when the tribe is challenged by the formal institution of the state. Al-Mutawakel quoted by Al-Abdali elaborated on notion of the tribe as a separate entity which can provide the political balance and curb the regime dictatorship with its gun power or restore law and order in the absence of the state.¹⁹⁶ This notion however does not capture the political reality of the tribe during the

194. Helmke and Levitsky, *Informal Institutions and Democracy*, 276-77.

195. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 15-16.

196. Al-Abdali, *thaqafat-al-dimqratiya*, 111.

rule of President Saleh. In the last few decades the tribal unit witnessed major changes in its structure that resulted in the weakening of the tribal leadership represented by the *Shaykhs*. Particularistic competing informal structure, such the phenomenon of urban *shaykhs*, which emerged as part of Saleh's regime complex weakened the tribal shaykhs, and ultimately the tribe as a unit. On the other hand, one indigenous (tribal) competing informal rule that violates the formal rules of the state is tribal roadblocks. These two competing informal institutions will be evaluated to further understand the role of tribalism within the framework formal (state)–informal (tribal) interaction.

The Phenomenon of Urban *Shaykhs*

Helmke and Levitsky's attempts of exploring the creation process of informal institutions arrived to one suggestion that observe this creation "through the lens of coordination." They elaborated further by stating that: "coordination often takes place in a context in which power and resources are unevenly distributed [therefore] informal institutions are cast as the culmination of the bargaining process in which actors seek to maximize their benefits".¹⁹⁷ The phenomenon of urban *shaykhs* as a particularistic competing informal structure will be evaluated through this 'lens' and the interaction between Saleh's regime and the tribal *shaykhs*, as main actors, will be outlined to understand how interests or benefits were maximized, thus resulting in divergent outcomes.

Perhaps shedding the light on the economic and societal structure before Saleh time in office in the late 1970s will provide perspective to the emergence of the phenomenon of urban *shaykhs* and help explain how it is considered a competing informal institution.

197. Helmke and Levitsky, "Introduction," 21.

Dresch in his study of estates of society in tribal life in Yemen identifies non-tribal people, who were considered by tribesmen as weak people or *mazayinah*, and those were mainly the barbers, butchers, and traders. In fact “for a tribesman to sell his own [grain] produce himself at market was, until perhaps the end of 1960s, reckoned as ‘*ayb* disgrace... it has to be sold through the weak intermediaries”.¹⁹⁸ These estates of society are better studied by sociologist and anthropologists, but were referenced here as they played a great role in understanding the changing state-societal relations and tap into the informal rules that once stood but are now perished. Lancker paraphrasing Tutwiler’s observation, expressed that with the emergence of a commerce economy in the 1980s and the source of wealth it provides “gradually changed the status of traders... as more tribesmen seek to enter petty commerce”¹⁹⁹, therefore starting a move to towns amongst those were major tribal *shaykhs*.²⁰⁰ The phenomenon of urban *shaykhs* however flourished and was cemented during the Saleh era, and served as a particularistic informal rule that enhanced regime survival, growth, and consequently weakened the tribe.

This move by the tribesmen and mainly tribal *shaykhs* to the towns and centers of power like the capital Sana’a and other major cities was seen as an opportunity of growth. On the other hand Saleh’s access to financial power derived from oil revenues and the rise of a new cash economy presented an opportunity for further regime stability through accessing tribal territories. The bargaining process between both the state and the tribe in this sense is exercised by the Saleh regime on one side and the tribal *shaykhs* on the other

198. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 119-20.

199. Helen Lancker, *Yemen in Crisis: Autocracy, Neo-Liberalism and the Disintegration of a State* (London: Saqi Books, 2017), 201.

200. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 133.

side of this interaction. “The main criterion to retain or increase power was the extent to which *shaykhs* supported the regime”.²⁰¹ Unlike previous presidents of YAR, President Saleh managed to tip the balance of power to the state’s side. Burrows identified how the military institution was strengthened through series of reform, and gained prominence in the 1980s, especially the recruitment of “soldiers from President Saleh’s own tribal region”.²⁰² As power and resources are unevenly distributed, in fact concentrated at the Saleh regime center, coordination between the Saleh and the tribes were to take place in the capital Sana’a or major cities thus giving rise to the phenomenon of urban *shaykhs*. Interests were gained by the main actors; Saleh was “successful [in his] attempt to increase presence and sway over areas historically controlled by the great tribes”²⁰³ while the tribal *shaykhs* gained access to wealth and political participation concentrated at the center of the regime.

Brandt’s account on elite transformation in *Sa’dah* province, exemplified how the developmental projects in the province were awarded by the state to tribal leaders as a form of economic patronage in return for the state access to this province located in the periphery.²⁰⁴ The wealth accumulated by the tribal *shaykh* from these projects was not shared with their constituent, at least not every time; thus creating a social and economic gap between the tribal *shaykhs* and their people. Secondly, Saleh’s political party (GPC)

201. Lancker, *Yemen in Crisis*, 206.

202. Robert D. Burrows, “Prelude to Unification: The Yemen Arab Republic, 1962 – 1990,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, no.23, 4 (Nov. 1991): 488. Accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163881>.

203. *Ibid.*,

204. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 72.

served as the political tool to draw more *shaykhs* into the center. Brandt's analysis of tribal politics in the province of *Sa'dah* displayed the dominance of the GPC in the 1997 elections yielding parliamentarians all of whom were "big tribal *shaykhs*".²⁰⁵ These regime tools created the particularistic competing informal phenomenon of urban *Shaykhs*, who served in official posts such as MPs in the capital Sana'a, but were distanced from their social core within the tribe, hence decreasing their influence over their constituents. Lancker, further supported this observation by stating that "many *shaykhs* became 'city *shaykhs*' so their constituents either have to wait for their visits home, or travel to Sana'a themselves to seek their support".²⁰⁶ Saleh's regime co-opted tribal *shaykhs* to gain access to the tribal territory, through economic and political patronage which in a consequently established the phenomenon of urban *shaykhs*. The latter provided access to Saleh in the periphery in return for wealth and political participation, but shaken their societal role as leaders in their own communities. Hence urban *shaykhs* strengthened the rule of Saleh but weakened their rule and influence within their tribes. Yet again, tribalism was the medium through which this formal-informal interaction took place and in this case Saleh maintained his grip while succeeding in weakening the social structure of the tribe.

Tribal Roadblocks

Competing informal institutions and are widely projected as an indication of state weakness, if not failure in the case of Yemen. Whether these competing informal institutions are particularistic or indigenous, tribal in this context, they can "be

205. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 127-28.

206. Lancker, *Yemen in Crisis*, 214.

communicated through highly visible episodes of rule breaking and sanction”.²⁰⁷ The evaluation of state-tribal interaction in Yemen during the rule of Saleh cannot turn a blind eye to competing informal rules that are tagged to the tribe which in many occasions ‘visibly’ contested the formal rules of the state. In this section, “episodes of rule-breaking” will be outlined within the scope of state-societal relations in another attempt to locate tribalism as a medium.²⁰⁸

The previous section tapped into the dynamics that explained how President Saleh managed to tip the balance of power to his side but that did not mean that his rule was not challenged or contested by the tribe. In fact, he was vocal about this notion of contestation as one well-known quote of his expressed that “ruling Yemen is difficult... it is like dancing with snakes”.²⁰⁹ Tribal competing informal rules, like “roadblock, kidnapping, or hijacking by tribesmen, also suggested that the state authority did not always go unquestioned”.²¹⁰ Al-Abdali quoting Abu Isba’ pointed out how “the gun culture of the tribe provided it with the leverage to compete with the state on the monopoly of violence thus maintaining the tribes’ political role”²¹¹, and was ultimately the enabler for these tribal competing informal rules to be sustained.

207. Helmke and Levitsky, “Introduction,” 21.

208. Ibid.,

209. New York Times, “An Interview With President Ali Abdullah Saleh,” *New York Times*, June, 28, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/28/world/middleeast/28saleh-interview.html>

210. Burrowes, “Prelude to Unification,” 488.

211. Al-Abdali, *thaqafat-al-dimqratiya*, 112.

Roadblocks have always been a competing informal rule performed by the tribe either against other opposing tribes or against the central authority of the state. History of this tribal informal rule can be traced all the way back to the Imamate rule in Yemen. Dresch elaborated: “the constant disputes between the Imam and tribes over passages on the roads produced different outcomes according to the respective strength of those involved, but their significance in histories is always the same and perhaps cumulative”.²¹² The significance of roads to the tribe is linked to territorial autonomy, and roadblocks are rather imposed by the tribes as an exercise of power against another entity being it an opposing tribe or the state. In addition; Al-Abdali further attested that roadblocks are performed by the tribes as a form of protest, and those do not only occur in roads that run through tribal territory but are also performed close to the city gates like the capital Sana’a.²¹³

This tribal competing informal rule of roadblocks clearly contested the formal institution of the state and during the Saleh era it persisted as an informal rule for protesting or settling disputes. “From the point of view of an Imam (or indeed of the present state) interference with free passage is tantamount to secession”.²¹⁴ Yet the weakness of the state puts it in a situation where it has to comply with the demand of the roadblocks’ instigators or make the necessary payments to their respective tribal *shaykhs* to solve the situation.²¹⁵ Dresch summarized how this episode of ‘rule-breaking’ ensues:

212. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 187.

213. Al-Abdali, *thaqafat-al-dimqratiya*,112.

214. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 187.

215. Al-Abdali, *thaqafat-al-dimqratiya*,113.

“Roadblocks are up (qata’), access to territory is denied by men ‘guarding the borders’, delegations are formed to provide ‘mediation’ (wasitah), rifles are proffered, guarantors appointed, and arbitration pursued by the same means as were used before the new economy came to Yemen.”²¹⁶

Roadblocks persisted as competing informal rule performed by the tribes against the formal rule; hence, yielding a divergent outcome and pronouncing the weakness of the state security institutions that were heavily invested in by the Saleh regime. Another insight that could be gathered is that the state recognizes, and accepts (out of weakness) this form of tribal protest and acknowledges the tribal methods of lifting up roadblocks. Yet again, the relationship between the formal – informal locates tribalism at the heart of state-societal relations.

Tribal competing informal institutions/rules, such as roadblocks, succeeded in getting their interests met, and sometimes were employed to convey a message straight to president Saleh. Well-established journalist Hill maintained that “the tribe knew that the best way to get something from the patronage network was to foment a crisis and ask the regime to resolve it. If tribesmen blocked a road, blew up an oil pipeline or kidnapped a foreign tourist, the president’s representatives would show up with cash and cars to settle the problem”.²¹⁷ This account displayed the different competing informal rules that can be observed as indicators of state ineffectiveness and also Saleh’s reluctance to challenge them. The tug-of-war between Saleh’s particularistic informal structures and the tribal

216. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 312.

217. Ginny Hill, *Yemen Endures: Civil War, Saudi Adventurism and the Future of Arabia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2017), 53.

competing informal rules are taking place under the umbrella of tribalism; which shelters the overriding interests and opportunities for survival and growth.²¹⁸

218. Sheleff, "Tribalism – Vague but Valid," 50.

Chapter 5

The Unbounded Universe of Tribalism

*“The shaykhs... were the Republic”*²¹⁹

Using Helmke and Levitsky’s typography of informal institutions; tribalism was, firstly, explored as complementary informal institution ‘filling the gaps’ required for the formation of the modern state. Secondly, tribalism was investigated as a substitutive informal institutions acting like a state at the local level - mainly in the rural areas- in matters related to security and conflict mediation. Thirdly, tribalism was examined as an intricate accommodating informal institution utilized by president Saleh to create his ‘military-tribal’ regime complex that secured brief political stability. Last but not least, tribalism was observed as the competing informal institution capable of discarding formal rules producing zero-sum relationships between the state and the tribe. Diving into the universe of tribalism in Yemen one can safely say that tribalism was ill-defined and put into rigid frames. However, the historical episodes of interaction between the state and the tribe outlined during the rule of president Saleh helped in establishing tribalism as an overarching informal institution, and lucid medium that governed the state-societal relations in Yemen.

Formal-informal interactions in Yemen cannot be reduced to tribalism, but tribalism can be used to analyze these interactions ever since the inauguration of the republic in 1962. The unlocking of these interactions, mainly through analyzing events in northern Yemen, appears to have complicated more than elucidate. The deeper one dives into exploring these institutional relation the more entangled it gets. Tribalism was the key to president Saleh’s survival for three decades but also the horseshoe stampeding over his castles of

219. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 345.

sand. The next section will discuss the reasons leading to the uprising of 2011 from the perspective of the tribe, which accounts for the majority of the Yemeni population.²²⁰

The Role of the Tribe in the 2011 uprising

...The tribe had some praiseworthy characteristics, such as cooperation, courage (najdah, also 'mutual aid'), and generosity. Similarly the upheavals (intifadat, rebellions) of the tribes were part of resistance to foreign invasion and to the rule of tyrants in Yemen... The new Yemen, Unified Yemen, needs the efforts of all its citizens in the towns, the countryside and the mountains.²²¹

This excerpt from the old *Medieval History of Yemen for the sixth year of primary school* briefly portrayed tribal characteristics as part of the glorious past, but did not dwell into their continuity and inclusion into future of the unified Yemen. The tribes – mainly in the northern highlands- under the rule of Saleh suffered exclusion from national development efforts, and effective societal disintegration. The Saleh regime maintained survival and growth through a strategy that incorporated tribal *shaykhs* as local leaders managing the affairs of their tribal constituents. However, with the increased cash payments poured by the Saleh regime to buy the loyalty of many tribal *shaykhs*, there grew an increase in economic disparity between the tribal *shaykhs* and their constituents which created grievances towards the state and distancing the tribal *shaykhs* from their constituents. Brandt's maintained how there were exceptions to this rule of cooptation in some northern provinces like *Sa'dah*, but stressed on how “the politics of patronage was a double-edged sword... [which] left parts of the population virtually detached from the state influence”.²²² Therefore the ‘new Yemen’ headed by the Saleh regime promoted

220. Lancker, *Yemen in Crisis*, 36.

221. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 390.

222. Brandt, *Tribes and Politics in Yemen*, 346.

inclusion on paper but implicitly employed informal rules such as; the new elite of urban *shaykhs*, who left their communities and moved to the urban areas. Hence, *shaykhs* who are representatives of their tribe at the state centers, engaged with the patronage that kept Saleh in power and participated in widened the gap between the state and the tribe.

This build up is necessary to understand the role of the tribe in the 2011 uprising which led to the removal of Saleh from office, but not from the political scene, yet. The Saleh regime witnessed moments of rise and fall and the tribe played a great role in Saleh's regime maintenance. Delving into these moments in detail would be the subject of another study; however, previous sections of this paper have highlighted the critical role of the tribes and tribal *shaykhs* throughout the history of modern Yemen. For example, party politics, the military sector, and the legislative institution of the parliament were all arenas of interaction and indicators of the rise and fall of the Saleh regime.

The formation of political parties was first allowed in the first decade of Saleh's rule, which was observed as an opening towards political participant and offered a glimpse of a democracy in the making. Similarly, the restructuring of the military sector and the introduction of conscription when Saleh took office was indicated as a sign of building strong state institutions.²²³ Equally, "the establishment of the parliament represented a watershed in the evolution of legislature in the Yemen".²²⁴ These brief moments of regime rise and state building were a façade to an intricate military-tribal patronage system employed by Saleh. With hindsight; firstly the General People Congress party,

223. Burrowes, "Prelude to Unification," 487.

224. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 3.

became “the president’s apparatus more concerned with the politics of notables”²²⁵. Secondly, the military institution witnessed reform that was geared towards creating an inner and formidable circle of “the infamous tribal-military complex, [which became] the pillar of Saleh’s authoritarian and resilient system of power”.²²⁶ And thirdly, the parliament was inefficient and was “only maintained to reflect a democratic image for the international community and to legitimize the political system”.²²⁷ These were all indicators that the states institutions were manipulated by the Saleh to increase his chances of remaining in power forever, while impoverishment and underdevelopment were becoming the norm in Yemen.

Saleh perceived the state as a tribe and employed tribalism as an informal institution with rules and structure that can complement and substitute his formal institutions, but the dynamism of these informal rules and structures was the very same factor leading to his regime fall. Tribalism, amongst other informal institutions like the youth, for example, saw in the 2011 uprising an opening to break free from the Saleh regime and contributed to the fall of Saleh. Tribesmen, among other factions, joined the protests against Saleh in Change Square (*Mayydan al-tagheer*) which was building up after the fall of Arab authoritarian regimes in what was referred to as the Arab Spring. Their grievances echoed in a comment expressed by a tribal *shaykh* who said: “The government does nothing in

225. Dresch, *History of Modern Yemen*, 176.

226. Aldwin White and James Spencer, “Rehabilitating the Yemeni Defence and Security Establishment: Then and Now” *The RUSI Journal* 163, no. 4 (August/September 2018): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2018.1529901>.

227. Saif, *A Legislature in Transition: The Yemeni Parliament*, 239.

my province... we have our own army. We even organize our own legal system. We ask, but the President gives us nothing".²²⁸

Lancker highlighted other "underlining trends" that contributed to these tribal grievances, one of which is "rural poverty, [which] undermined the status of tribes as institutions and upholders of social behavior as people compared their deteriorating conditions with those of the few connected to the rewarding patronage system".²²⁹ In other words, the disparities within the tribal structure, and the rise of urban *shaykhs* who distanced themselves from the constituents led to further discontent. The 2011 uprising presented an opportunity for the tribes to break free from Saleh who employed tribalism as means to an end (remaining in power), while disadvantaging the tribes in the process.

The 2011 uprising did not only present an opportunity for the rural tribesmen but also the tribal elite that was harmed or disadvantaged by Saleh's remaining in power, and therefore mobilized to capture a seat at the Change Square. This tribal elite mobilization was demonstrated by the defection of *Al-Ahmar* family of *Hashid* tribal confederation from Saleh's tribal alliance. Hill described in detail how the "tensions had grown increasingly between the two families in the late 2000s" as Saleh was attempting to consolidate power within his direct family.²³⁰ *Al-Ahmar* sons of the late *shaykh* Abdullah bin Hussain *Al-Ahmar*, leader of the *Hashid* tribal confederation, announced their support to the democratic uprising though they were considered one of the main beneficiaries from the Saleh regime. The result of this defection by "regime veteran insiders" was a

228. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 206.

229. Lancker, *Yemen in Crisis*, 205.

230. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 220.

byproduct of “Saleh’s failed alliance policy” that discarded the unwritten agreement of shared rule and concentrated the power in the hands of direct family members.²³¹

Therefore the 2011 uprising presented an opportunity for these tribal elites to vanquish Saleh’s familial rule and be part of the post-Saleh political configuration. While the protest were raging in Change Square Hamid, the most prominent of *Al-Ahmar* brothers, challenged Saleh directly and mentioned in an interview that “Saleh and his family should leave the country for their own safety”.²³² This warning by an influential tribal member and the brother of Sadiq Al-Ahmar, *Shaykh* of *Hashid* tribal confederation, was enough to shaken Saleh’s power in the capital Sana’a. In fact, in May 2011 armed clashes between the Saleh forces and tribal militants loyal to *Al-Ahmar* erupted in the neighborhood of *Al-Ahmar* family complex in the capital Sana’a, before a tribal mediation was set to contain the situation. But when the mediation meeting that took place at *Al-Ahmar*’s complex was attacked by Saleh’s forces in complete defiance to tribal customs enmity was declared between *Al-Ahmar* of Hashid and Saleh.²³³ The tribal prominence and weight of *Al-Ahmar* in Hashid was a one of the main factors that pressured Saleh not to continue using force and alternatively seek a negotiated exit plan.

“The series of war in the far north against the *Houthi* rebels... [the] numerous localized military conflicts, increasing tension between official opposition and the regime, [and

231 . Tobias Thiel, “After the Arab Spring: power shift in the Middle East?: Yemen’s Arab Spring: from youth revolution to fragile political transition,” *LSE IDEAS- Special Report*, no. 11 (May 2012): 44, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/43465/> .

232. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 222.

233. *Ibid.*, 223.

the] worsening poverty... led to the paralysis of the formal political system”.²³⁴

Therefore, “*resistance to the rule of tyrants*” which is a manifested characteristic of the tribe²³⁵, was again in effect. Overthrowing Saleh became an interest to the tribe looking for survival, and the tribal elite looking to break free from the Saleh’s familial rule.

Therefore the unit of the tribe played a major role in shaping the uprising of 2011. This desire for societal change took place “with rural tribesmen leaving their guns at home and travelling to *Sana’a* to participate in the demonstrations as unarmed civilians”.²³⁶ But when force was used by Saleh’s forces against unarmed protestors in one incident and in targeting a mediation meeting in another incident, tribalism as a competing institution defined the interaction between these tribal elements and Saleh’s forces.

These are glimpses of the tribal influence on the 2011 uprising; however, the contribution of the tribe in the popular uprising is a subject of another research paper. The aim in this section was to highlight the state-societal interaction governed by tribalism as an informal institution. The tribe did not dominate the scene during the 2011 uprising, but tribalism as an informal institution dominated the actions of tribal members and the tribal elite. As illustrated in previous historical episodes, the 2011 uprising presented an opportunity for the resurgence of the tribe that was weakened by Saleh, and presented the tribal elites like the *Al-Ahmar* family with an opportunity for survival and growth in the post-Saleh era. The next section will conclude the Saleh impact on the transition phase following the 2011

234. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 33.

235. Dresch, *Tribes government and History*, 390.

236. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 212.

uprising while exemplifying the overarching prominence of tribalism as governing structure.

Conclusion

The Saleh era revealed the provenance of tribalism in governing the relations between the state and the tribe. Opportunities for survival and growth outlined through episodes of interaction showcase the interplay between these two structures, and provided an understanding to the political reality in modern Yemen.

Dynamism is one feature of formal-informal relationships²³⁷; and the nuance of tribalism as an overarching informal institution was illustrated across the four types of informal institution proposed by Helmke and Levitsky. The perseverance of the tribe in Yemen is owed to tribalism, embodied as rules and structures, which reemerge with each interaction with formal institutions of the state. Saleh's regime maintenance was also explained through the same informal institution of tribalism. However, in the last few years of his presidency, Saleh discredited 'group loyalties', monopolized the 'opportunities for survival and growth', and broke the cultural code of the tribe. Elie elaborated further on the latter point by stating that the "political environment was characterized by the fragmentation of social control between the state, its venal retainers [tribal *shaykhs*]... and a politically indifferent population that is conditionally amenable

237. Helmke and Levitsky, "Introduction," 17.

to political mobilization through the state's episodic mass clientelism".²³⁸ This fragmentation reached a point of no-return where any attempts of fusing these components seemed to be a daunting task.

Unlike any other oust Arab leader, Saleh's departure from office was split into two episodes. The first was an assassination attempt plotted by one of the many enemies manifest in the Change Squares, one of which is the tribe. The second episode was a negotiated exit, where the Gulf Cooperation Council presented an initiative that granted him immunity. Saleh's instinct for survival as a tribesman presented to him an exit deal that was not granted to any oust Arab leader. Again, tribalism as an informal institution negotiated a "transition agreement [which] kept the regime intact while politely inviting Saleh to transfer the rein of power to Hadi".²³⁹ This presented another 'opportunity' for Saleh to be part of the polity deciding the fate of Yemen in the years following his formal departure from office.

Following the transition of power the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) represented a democratic process that included all political players, formal and informal, deciding the future of Yemen. However this process of dialogue is not new to the polity in Yemen, in fact it was "an established tradition of resolving conflicts or addressing issues of national importance".²⁴⁰ Additionally, Al-Abdali highlights how the practice of conference-staging by the tribes has always been a political tool used to convey tribal interests and

238. Serge D. Elie, "State Politics in Yemen: Antinomies of Nation and State," *Global Journal of Anthropology Research* 5, (June 2018): 14, <http://dx.doi.org/10.15379/2410-2806.2018.05.01.01>

239. Stacy Philbrick Yadav, and Sheila Carapico, "The Breakdown of the GCC Initiative," *Middle East Report* 273, (Winter 2014): 6.

240. Elie, "State Politics in Yemen," 21.

demands.²⁴¹ The formalization of this informal rule rooted in the tribe displays another state-societal interaction that can be analyzed through the lens of tribalism as a complementing informal institution. “Hooria Mashoor, minister for justice and human rights, believed the conference ‘voiced [the participants’] national consensus because all political and social constituencies were present in the talks”.²⁴² As the NDC progressed, Lancker highlighted that one of its recommendations was to adopt a federal state system, which was rejected mainly by the *Houthis* and the Southern movement, therefore leading to its failure at its final stage.²⁴³ The *Houthis* sabotaging of this formal process through military confrontation was a display of a competing informal rule to voice the interests and demands of the *Houthi* insurgents. Hence tribalism, as an informal institution continued to govern the formal-informal relationships post the Saleh era.

With the collapse of the national dialogue and the failure of the transitional process the Republic of Yemen is heading towards the unknown. The chaotic roll of events following the failure of implementing the recommendations of the national dialogue can be analyzed using the language of tribalism. Snippets of major episodes that overcomplicated the already complicated political scene will outline Saleh’s reemergence and demise.

Saleh have merged forces with the *Houthi* insurgents helping them capture of the capital *Sana’a*, “as their ascendancy also contributes to the rout of his own opponents,” one of

241. Al-Abdali, *thaqafat-al-dimqratiya*, 102-103.

242. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 261.

243. Lancker, *Yemen in Crisis*, 45-46.

which is Hadi, whom he also “denounced as a traitor”.²⁴⁴ In 2016, Saleh’s political party the GPC jointly with the *Houthi* political arm famous for *Ansar Allah* formed the Supreme Political Council (SPC) in an attempt to formalize the *Saleh-Houthi* alliance and create “a government in *Sana’a*”.²⁴⁵ However, the Saudi-led coalition that was formed to stop the *Houthis* from capturing the temporary capital Aden in the south presented itself as a major player in deciding the fate of Yemen. The Saudi involvement has dictated the battle against the *Houthis* while undermining a weak Hadi government based in Riyadh; and this has lured Saleh to grapple for a future political role as he grew weaker in comparison to his current *Houthi* allies.²⁴⁶ Saleh’s tribal mentality of ‘remaining forever’ tempted him to challenge the *Houthis* and openly asking the Saudi neighbors for a helping hand to defeat the *Houthis* in Sana’a. Towards the end of 2017 Saleh went into an uncalculated military face-off with the *Houthis* in *Sana’a*. Saleh tribal allies abandoned him and decided not to come for his rescue after calculating the risk that would threaten their own survival. The early days of December 2017 saw the elimination of Saleh from the political game after the *Houthi* declaration of containing what was referred to as a coup.

Saleh employed the flaccid informal institution of tribalism to **complement** the *Houthi* control over Sana’a. Saleh, through his political party, **substituted** the *Houthi* presence on the ground for the common goal of the alliance and to gain political and societal legitimacy beyond Sana’a. Saleh **accommodated** the dominance of *Houthi* polity in

244. Hill, *Yemen Endures*, 269-70.

245. Lancker, *Yemen in Crisis*, 163.

246. *Ibid.*, 164.

policy and decision-making in order to maintain his presence in the political scene; but when he chose to **compete** with the *Houthis*, for a better political bargain, he committed political suicide that did not only end his life but appeared to have dismantle the GPC party that he left behind. Tribalism was employed again by Saleh, but this time this structure failed him and turned against him. Tribalism by definition is founded on group loyalties that share same interests, and Saleh's abrupt switching of allies left him with group and therefore was abandoned in his final days to meet a horrible destiny.

The political factions currently dictating the politics of Yemen should invest into learning the language of tribalism. This informal structure can provide an alternative approach to the formally institutionalized approach that has its shortcoming. If tribalism has governed the state-societal relations during the Saleh era, it can be further investigated and thus employed to governing formal institutions in Yemen that are mostly on the brink of failure because of the absence of the state.

There are multiple arenas in which the informal institution of tribalism can inform state and regional policies defining the political and humanitarian situation featured in Yemen. Tribalism is not limited to the tribe as established earlier and therefore state actors and other non-state actors including international organizations can tap into the nuances of tribalism and employ it as complementary or substitutive informal institutions. An example that illustrates the effectiveness of this interaction can be derived from the mechanism that International organizations have adopted in order to reach out to the affected persons in local communities. As these organizations are working towards alleviating the dire humanitarian situation of these local communities they established channels of communication with local community leaders, like tribal *shaykhs*, who can

facilitate passage of aid workers in rural regions and oversee the distribution of aid.

Using the same example one can also locate the fluidity and limitations of employing tribalism as an informal institution. Actors on the other side of this interaction dealing with formal institutions like international aid organization can employ tribalism as accommodating or competing structures that can give rise to bribery and embezzlement by local leaders to accommodate the requests of aid workers, or use extortion and force to block efforts of aid workers.

History has provided incidents that have highlighted the prominence tribalism as an informal institution in dictating the dealings of the state at the national level. Tribalism is also a set of unwritten rules, where opportunities of survival and growth are dynamic and actors at both sides of the state-societal interaction play a major role in deciding the outcome of these interactions. This research has widened the scope of state-societal interaction through the exploration of tribalism as governing informal institution.

However it raises further questions on the feasibility and sustainability of incorporating tribalism where formal institutions are weak and fragile like in the case of Yemen.

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