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Moving through the Violence: Yemeni Migrants and the Reconstruction of Lifeworlds in Cairo

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A Thesis Submitted to

the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Arts

by

Jonathan Hearn

Cairo, Egypt

August 29, 2023

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Abstract

This Master's thesis is based on an ethnographic study, following the lives of a small number of Yemeni people rebuilding their lives in Cairo. Their displacement is the consequence of many factors not least the outbreak of war in 2014. In response to this, I ask: *In the midst of ongoing conflict, how do Yemeni migrants go about reconstructing their lifeworlds in Cairo?* That is, to ask how are Yemeni migrants in Cairo responding to the violent disruption of their social realities and what sense are they making of the consequences. The reorganisation of social realities disrupted by conflict means that Yemenis are adapting their habits and the mundane aspects of life to new surroundings and according to ever-changing possibilities. Attention to the minutiae of life reveals the relations between Yemenis and a range of actors imposing themselves in their social and political lives. I describe how Yemen's social structures continue to exert considerable influence on Yemeni lives in Cairo. Furthermore, Yemeni institutions like schools and weddings are being reconstructed and reanimated from afar to ensure that Yemen continues for those who have been forced to leave. However, as Yemeni people in Cairo come to terms with the consequences of years of conflict, they must also address what the conflict means for those identifications they hold most dear. This thesis reveals the uncertainty of nationalist narratives of unity and the problematic legacy of certain nationalist symbols. For young Yemeni men and women, dealing with ambiguity and liminality of life in Cairo takes place alongside the fight for greater representation and the power to determine their place in whatever form Yemen's future social reality takes.

In loving memory of Brenda Margaret Hearn (1930-2021)

Contents

Acknowledgements

Note on Transliteration

The following conventions have been used for Arabic transliteration in accordance with the system devised by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*):

ء	ʾ		ط	ṭ
ا	ā		ظ	ẓ
ب	b		ع	ʿ
ت	t		غ	gh
ث	th		ف	f
ج	j		ق	q
ح	ḥ		ك	k
خ	kh		ل	l
د	d		م	m
ذ	dh		ن	n
ر	r		ه	h
ز	z		و	w, ū
س	s		ي	y, ī
ش	sh			
ص	ṣ		ُ	u
ض	ḍ		َ	a
ط	ṭ		ِ	i

I have diverged from the *IJMES* transliteration system for words ending in *tāʾ marbūta* which have been transliterated with a final "a" and not "h."

Where Arabic words, names, and honorific titles are found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, I have chosen not to transliterate them and follow the dictionary version instead.

Where possible I have used commonly found Anglicised versions of place names, such as Sana'a instead of Ṣanʿāʾ, and al-Hodeida instead of al-Ḥudayda.

What is Yemen?

In the caverns of its death
my country neither dies nor recovers. It digs
in the muted graves looking for its pure origins

  —Abdullah al-Baradouni, as translated by Threa Almontaser, *The Wild Fox of Yemen*

We sat in the afternoon sunshine talking about Hiba's life in Yemen. In her mid-twenties, Hiba had come to study in Cairo three years ago and was now nearing the end of her Master's degree. During our conversation, Hiba recalled an experience of war in Yemen. It was either 2016 or 2017, she could not remember exactly. She was enrolled in university and was taking her exams. The students had settled in their chairs and a hush had descended as the moment to begin the exam beckoned. Out of the blue, the silence was shattered by an almighty explosion as a missile crashed into the ground not far from the campus. The building shook. The students panicked, cries of fear echoing around the room. Hiba asked the teacher, "What should we do?" Calmly, the teacher responded, "Don't worry. You will take your exams and then we will all go home." Hiba recalled that they quietly finished their exams, took their lunch to the cafeteria, and ate together. They waited in the school for a few more hours and then they went home.

Hiba's story illustrates how war and violence can become part of everyday experience. What at first was shocking became normal. As she told the story, Hiba expressed how absurd her teacher's calm response appeared in the face of nearby destruction. But as she later told me, "We learned not to be afraid."

Later, that same afternoon she also recounted seeing a video of a man in Taiz throwing another man off the top of a tall building. Understandably, this was extremely shocking for Hiba. She could not fathom how this man was able to do something of this nature. She began to wrestle with this in our conversation and reasoned that such behaviour could only occur in the event of an extreme breach of custom, a matter of *sharaf* (honour). From the way she told the story it seemed as if she had understood that this was not the case in the video she had seen. She indicated that this was a shocking form of violence that she had never seen or experienced in this way before. It was as if something new was emerging.

This thesis is about a small number of people whose lives intersect with a tragic moment in the history of Yemen. Like Hiba, they have left behind the violence of the conflict afflicting Yemen since 2014 to build lives in Cairo, perhaps with a view to finding a more permanent home elsewhere. Yet their departure from Yemen has not precipitated a complete break from the rhythms of life they knew in Yemen; far from it. As I discovered, Yemen's social structures continue to exert considerable influence on Yemeni lives here in Cairo. Nor does the conflict mark a collapse of society, the inability of Yemenis to build lives together. Yemeni institutions are being reconstructed and reanimated from afar to ensure that Yemen continues for those who have been forced to leave.

Certainly there are a multiplicity of factors conditioning the possibilities for rebuilding a life in Cairo, factors which my research participants have various levels of control over and which, in many cases, are no different to the factors with which anyone living with in Cairo has to deal. However, in the case of Yemen, the unimaginable scale of the suffering being endured prompts me to ask how my participants live between mourning and hope. As Yemeni people in Cairo come to terms with the consequences of years of conflict, they must also address what the conflict means for those identifications they hold most dear. The overlap between group-identity and self-identity means that crises occurring

amongst the group can affect a person's sense of self. When the social and material reality of a group's identity—constructed through symbols, narratives, institutions, and practices—is torn apart, the individual may experience a crisis of the self. Perhaps, as Hiba's experience of watching the violence unfold on her screen suggests, one's understanding of the self in relation to the group is jeopardised by the incomprehensibility of violence.

This is undoubtedly one of the threads running through Threa Almontaser's collection of poems entitled, *The Wild Fox of Yemen*, which plays on the themes of origins, the current predicament of Yemen, and her own life growing up in-between cultures: which in her case leaves her feeling not quite Yemeni and not quite American. She prefaces her work with a verse from Yemen's most celebrated poet, Abdullah al-Baradouni (1929-1999). As Baradouni's verse reveals, we make claims about our relationship to people and places. Baradouni identifies himself with a particular country when he says "my country" (*bilādī*) signifying both the place, a locality, and the people whose lives overlap and intertwine in these spaces. In this verse, Baradouni's country is suspended between a state of life and death, in the darkness of the caves which presage its passing and perhaps even contain the graves of its dead ancestors. The search for this country's "pure origins" in muted graves suggests the futility of the search and the impossibility of hearing from these graves. Who lies in the graves and what does the country expect to hear from them in the first place? Is the excavation of "pure origins" that search for the justification of one's existence; for the existence of the state or nation?

I interpret Almontaser's use of this fragment of poetry as a lament for Yemen which is digging (like a fox) in the place of death, searching for its origins, the basis of its life, purpose, and being. This is an existential or ontological crisis. No voice is heard from the muted graves. But it is also a highly personalised search. If a country cannot find its place in the world, what hope is there for those who are part of it, who have their roots in it? It also

questions the utility of looking to the past for answers. What is there to be found in the past amongst those who have died? They are now voiceless. What of the voices of those in the present?

This thesis, then, seeks to discover how the violence of conflict is being dealt with by those people who have moved from Yemen to Cairo. As they reconstruct their lives in the city, what is shaping their responses to the war and what conditions are guiding the rebuilding of social realities here in Egypt. The remainder of this chapter sets out the research problem and discusses the ethnographic method which underpins my project.

Ethnography: Unravelling the Research Problem

This Master's thesis is based on an ethnographic study, responding to the displacement of people from Yemen to Cairo. I have attempted to learn how Yemenis are responding to the violent conflict which has reduced much of the country in rubble. I was especially concerned to discover how Yemeni people are reimagining their own subject positions within this world and the role that their movement to Cairo plays in such processes. The central research question that guided this project was: *In the midst of ongoing conflict, how do Yemeni migrants go about reconstructing their lifeworlds in Cairo?* That is, to ask how are Yemeni migrants in Cairo responding to the violent disruption of their social realities and what sense are they making of the consequences.

As people leave Yemen, the everyday lives of Yemenis are, being reconstructed in places like Cairo. The reorganisation of social realities disrupted by conflict means that Yemenis are adapting their habits and the mundane aspects of life to new surroundings and according to ever-changing possibilities. Attention to the minutiae of life reveals the relations between Yemenis and a range of actors imposing themselves in their social and political

lives. In the following section I expand on why an ethnography of Yemeni migrants in Cairo is suited to the situation of Yemen and how this research project intersects with other aspects of migration and mobility studies.

An Overview of the Ethnographic Approach

Ethnography is concerned with knowledge about people and thus hinges on our epistemological and ontological assumptions. A full theorisation of such assumptions is beyond the scope of thesis, however it is important to shed some light on the approach I have decided to adopt. In this thesis I assume the essential contingency of the self or subject upon others and the world we live in, recalling Husserl's use of the term "intersubjectivity." The self, or as Talal Asad (2020) puts it, the ensouled body, is constituted through its relation to other ensouled bodies and its relation to the material world. It is therefore always in process, always becoming, being shaped and moulded in a multitude of interactions. Thus the self emerges from the tension between the external factors of its constitution—the world and others—and its own propulsive volition which responds to the external, makes sense of it, and forms its own desires for its constitution. As Michael Jackson (2013, 8) writes, "[H]uman existence involves a *dynamic relationship between* how we are constituted and how we constitute ourselves, between what is already *there* in the world into which we are born and what emerges in the course of our lives within that world."

Ethnography, then, as much as it is concerned with producing knowledge about people, lies in this "transitional space between persons" (Jackson 2013, 8). And this space between persons is dynamic because no meeting is ever the same. Each subject is under constant change pointing to the irreducibility of life to either "the conditions of its possibility" or to any account that could be given about it (Jackson 2013). Indeed, this

meeting point between persons, is in fact a translational space in which we share "our most tender and fragile moments, our memories and mistakes" (Nagar 2019, 8). These "moments of translation" are marked by mutual vulnerability, love, and openness. Here ethnography becomes a matter of giving and receiving; of turning over the self and seeing it in a new light, or even through the light of the other.

However, as Richa Nagar (2019, 26) points out, this translational space represents an "unjust terrain" or "unequal landscape" where people come together from across differing geographies of power, hierarchy, and order, thus testing the foundations upon which understanding and learning are built. The challenge for ethnography, if it is predicated on knowledge about people, is to translate in such a way as to limit knowledge's potential to sustain unjust terrain. Nagar's concept of "hungry translations" is most helpful here because it turns ethnography from knowledge *about* people to knowledge *with* people.

Ethnography, then, is a critical reflection upon one's own thinking about the world. Moving in space and time, from one location to another, and dislocating oneself from familiar terrains, becomes the method of entering into the translational or transitional space which underpins the possibility of knowing the other. Without this movement the possibility of opening oneself to others is precluded. But opening oneself to such dislocations also entails suffering: "[T]he loss of the illusion that one's own particular worldview holds true for everyone, the pain of seeing in the face and gestures of a stranger the invalidation of oneself" (Jackson 2013, 11). In entering translational space one risks the loss of a part of the self. That a part which may be familiar or cherished is erased or consumed by the translation. Of course, as Nagar suggests, not to take this risk to do justice, carries the risk of consuming the other: "Every translator tries to do justice by coming as close as possible to a truth of what they are translating. . . . However, when a project of translation assumes that it can render

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transparent the meanings of complex lives or struggles, it not only consumes the other, it also annihilates that which has been othered" (Nagar 2019, 29).

In consequence, Jackson (2013) argues that the best approach to ethnography is "sustained communion": the long-term coexistence with the other in the context of their suffering moment. As he writes, "In this sense, the ethnographic method seeks not some form of abstract knowledge, but through a mix of osmosis and dialogue understands the other as oneself *in other circumstances*, and sees both self and other from the unsettling and unsettled space of the 'subjective in-between'" (Jackson 2013, 222).

I therefore find in ethnography a valid approach to the study of Yemeni lives in Cairo. It is valid for the study of *Yemeni lives* in Cairo because the displacement event, perhaps better understood as a prolonged situation whose continued deterioration has prompted the movement of hundreds of thousands of people from Yemen, provokes a critical reflection on their own lifeworlds. I use this term, following Jackson (1996, 7), because it encompasses a person's lived social reality "with all its habituality, its crises, its vernacular and idiomatic character, its biographical particularities, its decisive events and indecisive strategies." It also addresses the beliefs and concepts people construct in making sense of the world, without assuming that pages of doctrine are realised perfectly in people's lives. An ethnographic study of Yemeni lives in Cairo allows me to enter into the translational space with people who may well be at a critical juncture in trying to make sense of violence, displacement, and its effects on their lives.

Moreover, an ethnography of Yemeni lives *in Cairo* is valid because of my own personal connection to the city. In a Master's thesis project the possibility for grounding research in long-term coexistence with the other is limited given the constraints of the program and one's own desire to graduate. Having lived in Cairo for six years I felt it was

prudent to conduct research with people whom I had been able to accrue some amount of "sustained communion," which Jackson argues is essential to ethnography.

Fieldwork: From Theory to Practice

Fieldwork was begun in Cairo on 13 January 2023 and continued formally until 31 March 2023. I used ethnographic research methods as the basis of the research project, meeting participants through a snowball sampling method, beginning with contacts I had previously made while living in Cairo. I visited people in their workplaces, met participants in the coffee shops and restaurants they frequented, and joined them on trips in their free time. From this method of participant observation I compiled a rich assortment of field notes, spending a few hours each day recording my thoughts, experiences, interpretations, and questions. I would write down some of the conversations that took place and tried to pay attention to the contexts in which words were voiced and actions or gestures took place. At certain points I asked participants to do interviews which covered topics like: life in Yemen before moving to Cairo, past experiences of Cairo, challenges faced upon arrival, favourite places in Cairo. Many of these interviews revolved around the use of narrative and storytelling which can play a key role in making sense of conflict's violent disruptions to life.

Marita Eastmond (2007, 254) describes how stories can be used in the "renegotiation of the self," arising out of the "radical break with familiar conditions of everyday life" that violence-induced movement produces. Story-telling is a way for people to pick up the threads of a torn social fabric in an effort to weave meaning into their lives once again. That is not to say that conflict renders people's lives meaningless, although to the outside observer it can appear that way, but merely to acknowledge that violent conflict shakes the foundations upon which we build an understanding of the self in relation to others. In fact, "[T]hose who have

suffered extreme experiences will often find that these resist narrative ordering and verbal expression" (Eastmond 2007, 259). The resistance of suffering to embodied verbal expression is a matter taken up in Veena Das's (2007) *Life and Words*. Studying the aftermaths of two violent episodes in the life of the Indian nation, the Partition of 1947 and the riots which followed the assassination of Indira Ghandi in 1984, Das descends into the 'ordinary' or everyday dimensions of life to show how violence destroys the social worlds we build to navigate life. The fantastic nature of violence, signifying its grotesqueness and perverseness, imbues it with the power to move beyond the boundaries of normal social discourse, thus becoming unspeakable.

To the extent that certain experiences defy expression in words, researchers must be attune to the non-verbal, the gesture, or the unspoken word, something which Das attends to with remarkable poise in her work. Talal Asad, like Das, draws on the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein to explore how language and practice enfold one another. According to Asad (2020, 406), Wittgenstein did not simply argue that meaning in language was determined by use, but rather that the multiple uses of language, by sender and receiver, dictate that we must investigate the complex relationship between language and life: we must ask how the discourses we construct through words relate to the lives we live. Asad (2020, 406) uses the concept of "grammar" to describe the means by which words, phrases, discourses are connected to life: "It is grammar that helps one understand the different ways words can or can't make sense in particular forms of life. What *is* important for Wittgenstein is not simply how 'meaning' is to be determined but whether and if so how something becomes intelligible—and usable—in given situations." The bewilderment Hiba experienced as her teacher calmly instructed her and her colleagues to continue their exams, or when she tried to make sense of the violence in the video, reveals two moments in which it appeared as though the rules of grammar had been torn up. However, in witnessing these events Hiba did not lose

her capacity to understand or make sense of what had happened. As moments of unintelligibility, they provoked the need for new ways of making sense; for new grammars. The implication for this study is not merely that in the present moment the grammar of 'Yemeni life' is being rewritten. But rather that it is being rewritten not only in Yemen where the grammar is supposed to be well understood, but also in Cairo, where meanings may become intelligible in new ways.

Of course, this is not to argue that ways of determining meaning for Yemenis have never been contingent on external factors or are entirely consistent across anyone identifying with a Yemeni form of life. Just as Asad (1986, 16) has argued in relation to the discursive tradition of Islam, argument and conflict are a natural part of any social body which seeks in some way to share a life together. What is at stake, for Asad (2020, 407), and for those Yemenis who find themselves in Cairo is the need of the self "to have a world—a language [we could say grammar]—together with others (we, you, she, he, they) who are themselves persons in process of being made and remade." In sum, an understanding of the tales we tell is obtained only when we give equal emphasis to considering the life lived.

Ethnography, exemplified by its focus on participant observation, seeks to hold this balance. It also requires a sustained focus on the material space in which lives are constructed. Mobile people move through places and are thus caught up in the dynamic processes of meaning-making, whereby people and places shape one another (Lems 2016, 321). Thus the material space of Cairo becomes a subject of research itself. As Yemenis interact with the space of Cairo, new possibilities and social exigencies are created. As Ramy Aly (2015) noted in his study of 'Arab-ness' in London, the city is a contingent space, always being negotiated; it is a product of the different experiences and perspectives of the people living in it. For example, how do Yemenis navigate a city in which the "ordinary emergencies" of everyday life destabilise the migration trajectories of refugees and migrants

(Penglase 2014; Millar 2014; Pascucci 2016)? The degree to which Cairo plays a role in the formation of these lifeworlds remains to be seen, but the importance of considering the lived spaces of Yemenis and the dynamism of the city itself is well attested.

Limitations of the Research Project

One of the limitations of the research project was the lack of access to participants in mainland Yemen. Interviewing participants in their country of origin, even prior to their migration journey, would have proven a valuable source of comparison with interviews conducted in Cairo. At the time of research and despite the ceasefire, conditions in Yemen remained unstable and travelling for the purposes of research was deemed unwise. In order to mitigate this limiting factor, during interviews I made an effort to explore people's accounts of life in Yemen, whether from their own recent experience or reports they received from people still living there.

A further limitation which I encountered was the language used in interviews. Despite my strong background in Egyptian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, the Yemeni dialect is distinct enough to challenge full comprehension. Certainly, this limited my interactions with people who were unfamiliar with interacting outside of their localised context. At times, I relied on the assistance of other Yemenis to relay the information presented by those speaking in a Yemeni dialect. Otherwise, my interactions revealed some Yemeni people who had adopted Egyptian Arabic or those who conversed in Modern Standard Arabic. This allowed me to understand and interact with my participants in a much more productive and manageable way. That being said the research presented here does not display the nuances that knowledge of Yemeni dialects may well provide.

A final limitation that I experienced was in the use of snowball sampling. There is a danger that in following connections between participants that research can be focused exclusively on a single network which can limit the extent of data analysis. In an effort to mitigate this I attempted to pursue research participants in various settings. For example, I engaged with students at university under the assumption that they would have different connections from people attending a health clinic. I found that through snowball sampling I did indeed follow the threads of an entangled network, leading me to people who were connected by their socio-economic background and their involvement in cultural activities or the provision of services for those they considered less fortunate than them. Most of my participants can be said to hail from a middle-class background, sharing traits such as having completed tertiary education. This means that much of the data I present herein cannot be considered representative of a broad spectrum of Yemeni experiences. That being said, my involvement with these 'service providers' fostered interactions with people who came from alternative backgrounds to my main participants. Undoubtedly, if more time was given to the research project, I could explore the extent of this network and address the points of similarity and difference amongst its members.

Ethical Considerations

This research project received ethical approval from the American University in Cairo's (AUC) Institutional Review Board and adhered to the university's policies and guidelines. It was necessary for me to consider my positionality as a White British researcher in Cairo and the uneven relationships that can be produced when interacting with potentially vulnerable people groups (i.e. asylum seekers, people who are suffering from sickness or injury, and those who have experienced traumatic events). It was agreed that written

informed consent may deter potential participants, and so oral consent was obtained for all participants prior to their involvement. I prepared a short statement in Arabic that explained the nature of the research and what a participant's involvement would mean. In this way, every participant was made aware of the research purposes and my identity as a graduate student of AUC. When voluntary organisations or institutions become involved in the research project, I shared this information with the relevant managers and directors.

In the course of observing participants and conducting interviews, I allowed participants to choose where we would meet. On a number of occasions, participants deferred to me to decide and so I suggested public spaces such as coffee shops, restaurants, or areas within Yemeni-run initiatives. I believe this demonstrated respect for cultural norms but it also gave freedom to the participant to choose the specific place that was most convenient for them.

Of the utmost concern during this project was maintaining participant confidentiality. In an effort to protect participants I stored all related information, interview transcripts, recordings, and photographs on an encrypted hard drive with password protection. In the reporting of data collected through this research project, the names of participants have been changed to preserve confidentiality and anonymity, and further sensitive information has been altered or withheld as deemed necessary. In some cases, participants have given consent to have their real names used, such as those participants I met who were acting in a public capacity.

Yemen, Yemenis, and Yemeni-ness: A Note on Terminology

This study is indebted to the work of Rogers Brubaker, and in the context of the search for origins, a particular article authored in 2000 with Frederick Cooper entitled

"Beyond Identity." In it, the authors problematized the category of identity, suggesting that alternative terminology be used to avoid stretching the meaning of identity across too wide a conceptual field (1). They surveyed a wide range of literature from the humanities and social sciences and found that identity was used to describe significantly diverging phenomena. Identity was used to denote the grounds or basis of social or political action, a collective phenomenon, an aspect of selfhood, a product of social political action, and the product of competing discourses (6-8). Instead, they proposed three ways of approaching identity as a category of practice, placing the focus on how matters and notions of identity are mobilised and made use of by a variety of actors. The first, "identification," emphasises the processual, allowing us to ask who is doing the identifying (14). Answering this question requires a highly situational, contextual, and relational consideration of identification efforts, noting that the power to make such identifications is not equally operative across a shared social space (15). The second, "self-understanding," concerns the perception of one's self and its relation to others (17). This allows for greater flexibility in the concept of how people make use of "identities" in a way that does not assume homogeneity across a wider social sphere (17). And the third, "connectedness," is an affective description of identity, which incorporates a sense of belonging, and the notions of felt oneness and felt difference (19).

Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) alternative terminology removes the burden of judging the validity of "identities" and their coherence with a normalised vision of reality. Instead, they write, "We should seek to explain the processes and mechanisms through which what has been called the 'political fiction' of the 'nation'—or of the 'ethnic group,' 'race,' or other putative 'identity'—can crystallize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality" (5). In the present study I treat the movement of Yemenis to Cairo as a critical moment in examining how national identities and notions of Yemeni-ness crystallize as Yemenis move from Yemen to Cairo.

Having presented the approach to "identity" adopted herein, it remains to address the practical concern that using such terminology may make the present text unwieldy, or that discussions become bogged down in qualifications. For this reason, I propose to use the terms Yemen, Yemeni, and Yemeni-ness in a manner that combines the theoretical approach of Brubaker and Cooper with an attention to being concise and not weighing down the text unnecessarily. I use "Yemen" to refer to the political dimensions of the state. I use "Yemeni" to refer to those who in some way make an identification as such, either through political-legal means as citizens of the state does when using a passport, or through their discursive assent to such identifications being made about them. I use "Yemeni-ness" to describe both the affective dimension of connecting with others and the idea that there are shared or agreed upon attributes, qualities, and symbols which denote real relational ties.

As I spent time with my participants, I did not come across anyone who rejected my identifying them as Yemeni. However, I did observe moments when in certain everyday social situations a person would present themselves as "Egyptian" or resisted disclosing that they were from Yemen. In these moments, the contingency of such identifications came to the fore and the performances upon which so much of our identifications are based were revealed.

Thesis Overview

The rest of this thesis unfolds over three chapters. In Chapter One I describe the experiences of my participants through their journeys to, and daily lives in, Cairo. I analyse Yemeni mobility in the context of important regional dynamics in Yemen's past and contemporary moments which contribute the conditions in which Yemeni social realities are being rebuilt. The reconstruction of Yemeni lifeworlds often occurs through highly

transnational modes of living. In some cases, this is directly tied to the possibilities afforded to those with influential connections, the use of which can be a pathway to opening business or starting new projects. For some, the transnational experience is dominated by obligations of care which the family manages across borders. Chapter One also investigates those factors of life in Cairo which can cause separation or division, between Egyptians and Yemenis. The fragmented nature of Yemeni migration, oftentimes a result of ambiguous local policy implementation, feeds into acts of reverse stigmatisation which are responses to the feelings of alienation and stigmatisation in Cairo. This adds to the sense for many of my Yemeni participants that the lives being rebuilt in Cairo are unstable or liminal.

Chapter Two builds on these experiences to study the influence and pervasiveness of a particular Yemeni national imaginary in the rebuilding of social life in Cairo. The entanglement between tribal symbols and the state enacted through the nationalist state building of Yemen's former regime, spear-headed by Ali Abdullah Saleh, continues to appear in a variety of Cairo settings. I look at how this plays out in the Yemeni embassy, at a Yemeni art exhibition, and in a Yemeni school. This particular nationalist narrative is bound up with the role of women in Yemeni society and the symbolic work they are required to perform in maintaining this narrative's cohesion. However, in each of these venues, the nationalist imaginary is contested through the performative actions of participants themselves.

In the final part of the thesis, Chapter Three, I pick up some of the themes addressed in the previous chapters, analysing them through the lens of temporality. I discuss the background to this concept as it has appeared in migration studies literature before moving to look at three ways Yemeni life is impacted by various temporal interventions. I examine how the idea of marriage continues to dictate the rhythm of Yemenis lives in Cairo as men and women try to negotiate the 'right' times for marriage. Cairo becomes part of my participant's

tools for leverage in these discussions with their families. But it is also, at times, the space in which Yemenis are wrestling with generational differences. Ideas about what marriage is and what the ideal marriage looks like are changing. I follow this by building on the previous chapter's discussion of gender differences in Yemeni society by looking at the role of honour in the lives of several participants who shared with me their stories of sexual assault and harassment in Cairo and along the way. These women continue to feel the effects of honour despite their temporal separation from Yemen. I then turn to the experience of a Yemeni asylum seeker whose experience of Cairo life is to a great extent determined by the ambiguity of the state, raised in Chapter One. The bureaucratic comes to impinge on his temporal experience of Cairo and shapes the various responses available to asylum seekers like him.

Contextualising Yemeni Mobility to Cairo

It is two o'clock in the afternoon and I am on my way to meet Nabil, a father of four from Yemen's capital, Sana'a, who invited me to spend time with him at his creative workshop. Nabil lives in Hadayek al-Ahram, a self-contained suburb of Giza lying just beyond the pyramids. Its gates and entrances are manned by guards but there are no security checks for those coming in and out of the area. This modest housing estate sits in contrast to the growing number of exclusive compounds in which wealthy Cairenes are choosing to live. Here, in Hadayek al-Ahram, the rent of non-furnished properties starts at around 2000 Egyptian Pounds.[1] My taxi driver informs me that it is possible to live in a fairly spacious flat for a decent price. This appears to be a place for middle-income families to dwell, perhaps choosing the location because it is less crowded and quieter than parts of inner-Cairo. When I arrive to meet Nabil, he invites me through the gate of the building into a small walled area filled with plants. It is a lush green space. Palm fronds reach towards the sky and over the walls. We walk up the stairs to the entrance of the building and stand at the threshold of a room stretching further into the building. This is an 'office space' which Nabil shares with his friends' media production company. The room is filled with plastic furniture, the kind you might buy from a garden centre and usually used for outdoor spaces, like in the street-side coffee shops of Cairo. In the very back lies Nabil's creative workshop.

We enter and Nabil offers me a drink. I welcome the hot tea that Nabil makes for us. This week the temperatures have dropped to a chilly twelve degrees centigrade. Eventually

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1. At the time of writing, 2000 Egyptian Pounds is equivalent to around 50 Pounds Sterling. To give some perspective, a recent report into Egypt's education sector estimated that in 2021 the average salary of an Egyptian teacher was 3500 Egyptian Pounds per month (Sobhy 2023, 17).

we sit down and start talking. Nabil tells me a little about the local neighbourhood and the services that are available around here. There is a private school just 50 metres from his office, but the cost of schooling is quite expensive. Our conversation winds through Nabil's journey to Egypt, his experience of the asylum system in Cairo, and his passion for the creative arts. After an hour or so, his wife calls from the flat in the adjacent building. Lunch is ready. A few minutes later and she is serving up *macarona* (macaroni) bechamel, an Egyptian favourite made with layers of pasta, minced beef, and white bechamel sauce. The food is delicious and after finishing we talk more about Nabil's family. Coming to Cairo has been hard on the family, but staying in Yemen was no longer possible. When I ask him about the differences between life in Yemen and Egypt, he chuckles to himself. "What is it?" I ask, smiling at him. He says:

> Children like mine, grew up without electricity. You know the water heater? They were asking me, "What is that, Baba?" I would say, "That is something we used to use in the days we had electricity. It would heat up the water." When we first came to Egypt, the day after we arrived, my kids went into the bathroom and saw the water heater. They said to me, "Baba, it's one of those things which doesn't work." "Yes, but this one works. See the water is hot." Can you imagine there is no water in Yemen, no petrol, no electricity, there is nothing. This is one of the things that caused us to come here.

Imagining a life without basic necessities like water, petrol, and electricity would be a daunting prospect for most. But for many in Yemen it is a lived reality. The conflict which has afflicted the people of Yemen for nearly ten years now, has disrupted the everyday to such an extent that the materials used to sustain life no longer have the power to do so. This is highlighted in a recent report by Amani Alwarafi, an Islamic Relief worker in Taiz, a large city in the southwestern highlands of Yemen which has faced severe fighting since the start of the war. Amani echoes the sentiments expressed by Nabil when she writes that her son "had never seen a functioning fridge before, because in most of Taiz we don't have enough electricity to keep appliances like refrigerators running at home. The nights here are long and

dark" (Alwarafi 2022). For children like Nabil's and Amani's, who were born into a time of conflict, the long dark nights and sounds of shelling have become their normal experience. Just as Hiba—whose stories introduced this thesis—had become accustomed to violence in the course of her everyday life, these children are growing up with a social grammar that differs from their parents. One might even say that this constitutes a form of generational trauma from which the country, and a generation of children, will one day have to address. For Nabil, the absurdity that something as familiar to him as a water heater could become incomprehensible to his children, reveals how the possibility of sharing a language with others is challenged by the ongoing conflict, even in one's most intimate relationships. Coming to Egypt, then, represents an opportunity to learn a new way of doing things, or at the very least a return to the days when a water heater boiled water, rather than standing as a monument to the loss of electricity and the patterns of life lost with it.

Before descending into the everyday to see how the lives of Yemenis like Nabil are being rebuilt here in Cairo, I examine the movement of Yemenis to Cairo in light of the recent historical context and the regional political situation. I do this for two reasons. Firstly, to show how migration is entwined with political conflict as well as personal and familial migration aspirations and histories. Secondly, to trace how Yemeni migration is part of longer-term regional processes of capital accumulation. I argue that Yemeni movement to Cairo highlights the influence of regional powers in shaping the movement of Yemenis, and Egyptians, and their possibilities for life in Cairo.

The Conflict in Yemen

Nabil came to Egypt with his family after receiving threats from the Ansar Allah[2] regime which had taken over Sana'a and large swathes of the north of Yemen in 2014. Some of his family members had been vocal critics of the al-Houthi movement and had already had to leave the country. While not considering himself a political actor in any way, he felt that he could not ignore the threats. Eventually, under the cover of darkness, the family made its way south to Aden from Sana'a (see, Fig. 1). The journey was fraught with danger. Along the road, groups of armed men policed checkpoints. According to Nabil, you never knew which side these men were on. At one checkpoint you would find supporters of the al-Houthi movement. At the next checkpoint, it was another armed group. There were times when Nabil drove without his headlights on, hoping to avoid attracting unwanted attention. Eventually, the family made it to Aden.

I asked Nabil why he had considered such a hazardous journey to Cairo worthwhile. He responded, "My mum and dad are here, my brother is here, they have been here for three years. I said to myself, 'It is better that I go to Egypt.' So, I sold everything and came here." Coming to Cairo made sense to Nabil. The presence of his family members meant that he already had strong connections to the city. In fact, his father had an acute medical condition which meant that moving closer to them would mean that he could also help in providing the care needed. However, because of the escalating conflict, getting to Egypt was not as straight forward as he had hoped. "The first thing . . . [sigh]. In the airport of Aden. I had a problem

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2. Ansar Allah or "Partisans of God" is the name adopted, in 2011, by the political movement pioneered by Husayn al-Houthi and his father Badr al-Din in the 1990's. Reporting on Ansar Allah often refers to this entity simply as "the Houthis," which disguises the fact that not all members of Ansar Allah are from the al-Houthi tribe.
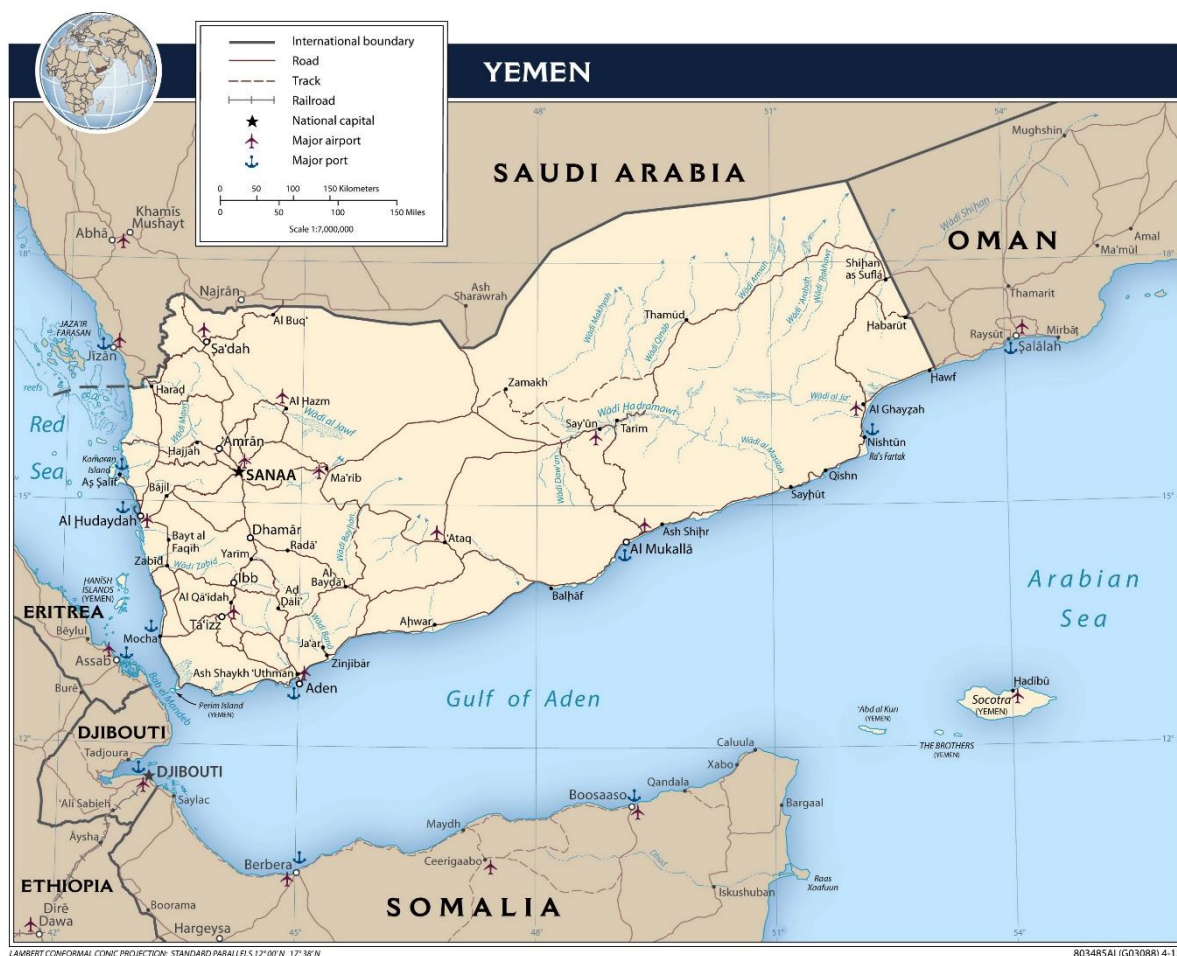
 Figure 1. Detailed political map of Yemen (Vidiani 2023).

there in the airport. It was during the days when the president [Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi]

escaped to Aden."

Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi had been appointed as acting President of Yemen following

the removal of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had barely survived an assassination

attempt in June 2011. Saleh's downfall was set in motion when, earlier that year, high levels

of dissatisfaction with increasing inequality and continued political corruption spawned

numerous demonstrations, spurred on by the protests in Tunisia and Egypt (Lackner 2017,

35). In the turmoil that followed, Mansur Hadi was elected as the President of Yemen in 2012

and led a Transitional Government, which had been proposed by the Gulf Cooperation

Council in November of 2011.[3] Mansur Hadi's government began the National Dialogue Conference in 2013, a venture intended to build a new future for Yemen, but the process was troubled by the perception that key voices in Yemeni politics were missing from discussions (Yadav 2022, 131). The Dialogue was ultimately undermined by a post-conference specialist committee which pushed through a resolution for a federalist model of governance, entrenching the power of political elites (Jalal 2022).

Work commenced on a draft constitution in March 2014, but soon afterwards, northern militias, loyal to the al-Houthi cause and allied with Yemen's former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, moved into Amran and then Sana'a. This union was startling for a number of reasons. In the 2000s the central government of President Saleh had waged a series of six wars on the northern territories, whose political dissent was spearheaded by the al-Houthi tribe. The movement established by Badr al-Din al-Houthi and his son Husayn, saw itself as the legitimate successor to the Zaydi Imamate which had ruled the north of Yemen until the armed revolution of 1962. Just as today, the revolutionary conflict of the sixties had also involved regional actors, with Egypt supporting the revolutionaries who declared the Yemen Arab Republic, and Saudi Arabia backing the royalist forces of Imam Muhammad al-Badr. After years of fighting, the Yemen Arab Republic was established.

The surprise Ansar Allah assault on Sana'a in 2014 precipitated the breakdown of governance and led to the Constitutional Declaration made by Ansar Allah in February 2015, which had resolved to oust Mansur Hadi following widespread disapproval of the Transition Government. Mansur Hadi was placed under house arrest but a month later he made his escape to Aden, the place of his birth. This was not the first time that Mansur Hadi had been

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3. The Gulf Cooperation Council was formed in 1981 and is comprised of the following six Gulf states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. It was created in response to oil crisis of the 1970s and a range of regional conflicts, including the Iranian Revolution, and was designed to effect economic integration in the Gulf (Low and Salazar 2011, 1).

exiled. In 1986, he had been forced to flee the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen following the South Yemen Civil War, a conflict fought between the ruling factions of the Yemeni Socialist Party. This time, however, he was returning home, so to speak. But once there, he set about trying to regain power, ultimately inviting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to intervene in Yemen's political meltdown.

Saudi Arabia led a coalition which initiated "Operation Decisive Storm" to restore the exiled president's government. This decision to intervene, taken soon after changes were made in Saudi leadership, marked a significant departure from the Kingdom's previously circumspect foreign policy on Yemen (see Hill and Nonneman 2011, 8-10), and revealed Muhammad bin Salman's, and the UAE's Muhammad bin Zayed's, confidence in a swift military victory (Brehony 2020, 510).

However, Ansar Allah resisted the aerial bombardment conducted by the Saudi-led coalition and consolidated their position in the northwest of the country. Indeed, there appears little prospect of removing Ansar Allah, and the northern territories are unlikely to forget the damage done by the conflict (Varisco 2018, 106). Instead, a stalemate has developed, with neither side strong enough to force a conclusive victory, despite many significant political events over the past eight years: including the assassination of Ali Abdullah Saleh at the hands of his Ansar Allah allies in 2017; the withdrawal of UAE ground troops in the summer of 2019 (Juneau 2020; Darwich 2020); and the formation of the Southern Transitional Council in May 2017 which rejected the authority of Mansur Hadi's government, creating a southern conflict within the wider scope of the war (Day 2020).

Hopes of an end to the conflict in Yemen were brought ever so slightly closer by the truce struck between the warring parties in April 2022. The failure to renew the ceasefire in October 2022 sparked doubts about this, and beckoned further violence for Yemen's inhabitants (Ahmed 2022). However, in early 2023, signs of rapprochement between Saudi

Arabia and Ansar Allah indicate that negotiations for peace may soon begin, with foreign powers now pushing hard for a peace process (Reuters 2023).

One of the barriers to progressing towards a peaceful resolution is the presence of so many different parties in the conflict and the complex histories that intertwine and overlap. The brief narrative presented above fails to do justice to the array of affiliations, identifications, and perspectives with a stake in the ongoing conflict. In the context of the wider Arabian peninsula, Yemen's state-building project appears to be violently challenged. However, Yemen's ongoing conflict is marked by significant external intervention, and the legal legitimacy of the Saudi-led coalition's "Operation Decisive Storm" is highly questionable (Buys and Greenwood-Gowers 2019). As a number of authors have attempted to show, Yemen's current plight must be understood in the context of its place in the contemporary global world (Blumi 2018; Bonnefoy 2018; Hill 2017; Lackner 2017).

The Causes of Yemeni Displacement

One of the few conceptual works on contemporary Yemeni mobility has argued that Yemeni movements are situated in the context of continued European postcolonial necropolitics: governance practices designed to limit the movement of disposable populations through neglect (Hall 2021). Hall notes the externalisation policies of Europe, such as funding the construction of walls and detention centres, and the contribution of states such as the UK and France to the material war efforts of Saudi Arabia and the UAE (see, for example, Brooke-Holland and Smith 2021). However, it appears as though regional actors in the Gulf are exerting far greater influence over Yemeni movement than these European states. For example, Niccolo Caldararo (2015; 2016) traces the current conflict's roots to Saudi Arabia's hegemony over the north of Yemen and the regime's backing of Wahhabi

Islam, whose proponents have taken their ideology to many parts of the world, including Yemen. Caldararo argues that Saudi interference in Yemen has a long history and the contemporary conflict is a continuation of past hostilities marked by internal resistance to outside control.

From a broader regional perspective, the Gulf states of the GCC have positioned themselves as the arbiters of political and economic developments across the Arab region. A large part of their dominance stems from the expansion of Gulf capital through "mergers and acquisitions, minority portfolio investments in other Arab stock markets, the establishment of cross-border subsidiaries and control over licensing and agency rights" (Hanieh 2018, 22). In addition, Yemen's geopolitical significance at the centre of international trade routes, through the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, means that it will continue to be the focus of regional and global power struggles for years to come (Hanieh 2018, 24). In many ways, Yemen finds itself standing as a barrier to the expansive interests of Gulf capital and its geopolitically significant position has seen the Gulf states going to great lengths to establish some semblance of a foothold in the country.

Indeed, the Saudi-led campaign to wrest control of the north of the country from Ansar Allah in favour of a GCC-backed Yemeni government has destroyed much of Yemen's infrastructure flinging Yemen, already facing dire straits, into an even more desperate situation. Since the beginning of the 2015 hostilities, it is estimated that "more than 150,000 people have died as a direct result of the violence, including over 14,500 civilians killed in targeted attacks" (Roy 2022). Jeffrey Bachman (2019, 299) has argued that "the Coalition has engaged in a 'synchronised attack' on all aspects of life in Yemen, constituting the crime of genocide." The destruction of hospitals, both locally and internationally run, has been widely reported (Dyer 2015; Bachman 2019; MSF 2019). A widescale assessment conducted in 2020 by the Health Resources and Services Availability Monitoring System (HeRAMS 2022, 3)

found that 49 percent of health facilities were non-functioning or only partially functioning, 35 percent of districts in Yemen had no functioning hospitals, and only three governorates in Yemen had a sufficient number of health workers according to standard World Health Organisation measures. The destruction wrought upon much of Yemen's healthcare infrastructure has exasperated an already delicate humanitarian situation.

Since 2015, Yemen has suffered a series of humanitarian crises, including acute food shortages, a cholera epidemic, in addition to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In 2021, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) Yemen reported that 71 percent of Yemen's population, around 20.7 million people, required some form of humanitarian assistance, with 12.1 million suffering an acute need (6). Yemenis have been left with little to fend for themselves and some analysts have highlighted the fact that an economic war is being fought alongside the aerial bombardments and the firing of weapons.

Indeed, there is good reason to believe that the destruction of Yemen by Saudi Arabia and the UAE is sufficient to see financial flows from Yemen continue to its Gulf neighbours in the form of post-conflict reconstruction (Hanieh 2018, 26). In imitation of Western strategies of capital accumulation, the Gulf states are tying together humanitarian relief and military intervention (Duffield 2006; 2007; 2014; Ziadah 2019). The Saudi Development and Reconstruction Program for Yemen was established in 2018, while the International Humanitarian City of Dubai seeks to position itself at the heart of relief work across the Middle East (Hanieh 2018, 26). At the same time, these states have advanced their direct foreign control of Yemeni territory, especially its ports and maritime trade (Hanieh 2018, 24). For example, the UAE has targeted ports in the south of Yemen as well as the island of Socotra—where it now has a military base—mimicking strategies it has already employed in East Africa (Hanieh 2018, 24; Juneau 2020, 188). The International Crisis Group (2022, i) argues that this "economic conflict . . . has compounded Yemen's humanitarian crisis,

accelerated its political and territorial fragmentation, and stymied peacemaking." The World

Bank (2022) reports that food prices have increased by 20 to 30 percent, the Yemeni rial has

significantly depreciated, and many keyworkers, such as teachers and healthcare workers, are

not receiving regular wages.

Given the destructive nature of the conflict and its consequences on the infrastructure

and services of the country, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Yemenis have been forced to

move under such dire circumstances. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2022)

reported that at the end of 2021 there were 4.3 million internally displaced people whose

movement was associated with conflict and violence. Coinciding with the internal

displacement, a large number of Yemeni people have fled the country altogether, heading to

countries with historic links to Yemen, such as Malaysia, India, Egypt, Djibouti, and

Somalia. Such connections highlight the transnational character of contemporary Yemeni

migration.

The Transnational Character of Yemeni Migration

Transnationalism came to the forefront of migration studies research through the work

of Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton. These authors described

transnationalism as the linking of national states through social fields of migrants whose lives

were predominantly fashioned by the sense of simultaneity (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-

Szanton 1992, 1). As an analytical concept, transnationalism was designed to account for the

entanglement observed in migrants' social, political, and economic lives. Migrants were seen

to embody these linkages produced in their movement between states. Above all else, the

transnational framework emphasised the fluidity of identifications which migrants draw

upon, revealing their accommodation of or resistance to their "subordination within a global

capitalist system" (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992, 12). Since then, Glick Schiller (2012) has further elaborated the constitutive dialectic relationship persisting between the 'local' city and the 'global' world of nation states. Inhabitants reposition the city within the global field whilst simultaneously being shaped by transnational processes of which they are a part. Cities, within the transnational perspective, are to be approached not as bounded analytical units but as generative of identity through commonality of experience, thus avoiding binary categorisations of native/foreign or citizen/outsider (Glick Schiller 2012, 28).

More recently, Glick Schiller (2018) has critiqued the under-theorisation of temporality in contemporary mobility regimes in contrast to the proliferation of spatial approaches.[4] She moves to eclipse transnational migration studies with greater attention to the new moment or "historical conjuncture" shaped through the "accumulation by dispossession" model of capitalism described by David Harvey (2004) and argues that, "Conceptualising transformations in the global historical conjuncture and its concomitant dispossession of those cast as natives as well as foreigners creates a new form of scholarship, a dispossession studies, that can not only theorise the temporality of displacements but also strengthen multiscalar movements for social justice" (Glick Schiller 2018, 208). That is to say, that the study of Yemeni national identifications in Cairo would be incomplete without reference to the modes and forms of dispossession and displacement that have occurred and been legitimised by national, racial, and gendered narratives casting the dispossessed as "other" (Glick Schiller 2018, 207).

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4. The term "mobility regimes" is used by Glick Schiller (2018, 208) "to indicate that various structures of power accord rights to move, settle, and stay in place to individuals of certain classes and racialized categories and deny both mobility and stasis to others."

What this means for Yemenis is that their movement is strongly connected to the visions shaping the development of Gulf states. Here I refer to the "Vision" projects, in particular those of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which outline the future these countries are aiming to create. Thus, 'Gulf-vision' is shaping the possibilities for life in Yemen and elsewhere in the region. Samuli Schielke (2020, 2) has used the concept of "suburbs of the Gulf" to describe the linkages created between villages in Egypt and the cities of the Gulf who employ rural young men to build their hyperreal paradises. As he writes, "This is not unique to Egyptian villages: it is a global condition" (Schielke 202, 62).

I suggest that we can view Yemeni mobility to Egypt in light of this concept, moving from one suburb of the Gulf to another. In doing so, I am not arguing that the movement of young Egyptian men from the village to the Gulf is coterminous with Yemenis fleeing violence. Rather, it is to claim the influence of a regional reordering of life according to Gulf projects of development and expansion. In fact, much of Yemen's infrastructure and personal property development was built through the remittances produced from migration to other Gulf countries, especially to Saudi Arabia (Swanson 1979; Fergany 1982; Carapico and Myntti 1991; Colton 1993). However, 'suburbanisation' occurs not only through the circular movement of migrant workers, but through the extension of Gulf capital mentioned above. Egypt is largely dependent on the Gulf to purchase Egyptian assets and stave off its financial crises, meaning that it is vulnerable to direct political influence in its affairs (England, Al-Atrush, and Kerr 2023; Jakes and Shokr 2020).

This leads us to consider the coalescences between Egyptians and Yemenis living in Cairo. Yemeni movement to Cairo highlights how regional powers shape the movement of Yemenis and Egyptians and their possibilities for life in Cairo. To live in Cairo is to live in a suburb of the Gulf, as the urban fabric of Cairo is shaped by Gulf capital and the aspirational

lifestyles of the Gulf's hypermodern dreams are replicated in Egypt's construction projects such as New El-Alamein City and the New Administrative Capital (Sweet 2019).

Before 2014, most journeys to Egypt were made for university education, healthcare, or tourism (Al-Absi 2020, 6). However, with the irruption of conflict in Yemen, the numbers of Yemenis residing in Egypt has risen almost tenfold. The Yemeni Embassy in Cairo estimates that around 500,000 to 700,000 Yemenis now live in Egypt (Al-Absi 2020, 5), although many people I spoke to in Cairo reported an inflated figure between one and two million. The difference between these figures may represent the difficulty in estimating population sizes, or even differences over who should be countable in such figures. Recent population statistics put Yemen's population at around 34.4 million, meaning that if there were two million Yemenis in Cairo this would be nearly six percent of the total population.

Whether or not this is the case, Yemenis have certainly become a more visible population in Cairo over the last five years, with the majority of Yemenis found in the Giza neighbourhoods of Greater Cairo, such as Dokki, Faisal, Muhandiseen, Sixth of October, Ard el-Lewa, and Bahooth. Before the conflict, Yemenis could enter Egypt without a visa and were able to stay indefinitely without a residency permit. However, following the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, and given Egypt's support of "Operation Decisive Storm," the authorities introduced a visa requirement for all Yemeni arrivals and the acquisition of residency permits shortly after arrival (Al-Absi 2020, 6). Since then, most Yemenis have entered Egypt by presenting a medical report upon their arrival at the airport which entitled them to apply for a six-month residency visa (Al-Absi 2020, 7). However, these conditions are always subject to revision, as I discuss below.

Once in Cairo, Yemenis make use of existing networks and social capital to find themselves accommodation, access to healthcare facilities, and familiarise themselves with the local environment. There are many Yemeni restaurants and shops where Yemenis can

find something familiar while away from home. For those who find themselves in Cairo on a longer-term basis there are a number of Yemeni schools for children, as well as local initiatives which provide informal education to teenagers and adults. Although Yemeni children can enrol in Egyptian schools, many Yemeni families find themselves without the necessary paperwork (i.e., birth certificates and education records) to process their children's applications (Al-Absi 2020, 12). For those who wish to find employment, the restrictions attached to the employment of foreigners in Egypt applies also to Yemenis which means that most Yemeni migrants have to find work in the informal sector (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020). In this respect, Yemenis enter into a similar situation with many local Cairenes who also find themselves working in the informal economy.

In summary, the involvement of a range of regional actors in Yemen during the modern period means that Yemeni mobility can be constructed as a response to continued foreign intervention and perhaps, as some have argued, the regime of global capitalism allied with development (Caldararo 2015). Highlighting the power of regional Gulf capital reminds us that the processes of displacement and dispossession experienced by Yemenis are not unique, although they have been devastating. The multi-scalar perspective allows us to see Yemeni life in Cairo in connection to broader regional processes, and transforms the space of Cairo into one of potential solidarity. Yemen has experienced the plundering of its social and economic reserves as it has been progressively brought into the world market and exposed to neoliberal economic policy making (Blumi 2018, Lackner 2017). There are parallels to be found in Egypt's own incorporation into contemporary forms of capital accumulation and its more recent reorientation towards the Gulf (Jakes and Shokr 2020). For many Yemenis and Egyptians, their place in the world system means that movement is often limited, although never completely curtailed. Transnational perspectives on Yemeni migrants in Cairo thus place mobility in response to the ongoing conflict situation alongside the extension of Gulf

capital to Egypt and Yemen. This adds to our understanding of the ways in which people reconstruct and rebuild their lifeworlds in the context of globalised processes.

Regardless of how Yemeni mobility is framed, Hall (2021) argues that "while geopolitics and devastating war animate Yemenis' lives, their personal stories and decisions to move cannot be reduced to these forces." Rather, Yemenis are moving and constructing "new social worlds" as they go. "Yemeni migration," she says, "is a project of imagination: of envisioning a better life that is otherwise and elsewhere and dreaming of movement on different terms." In the next section I look more closely at how transnational spaces between Yemen and Cairo are opened up and the ways in which transnational connectivity serves to shape Yemeni life in the city.

Transnational Yemeni Spaces in Cairo

Like many streets in Cairo, King Faisal Street is full of noise and colour. However, in appearance it shares many commonalities with other streets of its size. The road is lined with businesses on the lower and ground floors, while the upper sections of buildings comprise rented apartments. In fact, it can be hard to tell the difference between such streets in Cairo. On the surface they look and feel the same. However, on King Faisal Street, if you get far enough, a blip emerges, a distortion of the 'normal' social fabric. Migrants from across Africa and parts of the Middle East have made Faisal their home. In and around Street Twenty an assortment of Yemeni shops and restaurants have appeared, catering for the growing population of Yemenis in Faisal. Here you can dress yourself in clothing styles familiar in Yemen. Here you can dine on Yemeni food prepared by Yemeni chefs.

I visited a number of Yemeni restaurants in Faisal with a young man in his early thirties named Omar. Although he did not eat at the restaurants all the time, he found that it

was possible to eat at them affordably, especially if he chose the cheaper dishes which were still tasty and healthy, based on legumes, vegetables, and bread. He liked the fact that he could enjoy familiar food in Cairo and he brought home bread from the Yemeni bakery nearly every day. Omar had come to Cairo about five years ago with his sister, Salma, who was suffering from a debilitating sickness. The treatment she was receiving in Yemen was no longer helping her, so the family decided to send Omar as the eldest son to take Salma to Cairo and find better healthcare. Omar became his sister's primary caregiver and looked after her for several years before she sadly passed away. Omar had managed to market himself as an English language tutor working online to teach the children of well-paying elite Yemeni clients. He had made enough money to support himself, another sister, Rania, who had come to Cairo, and was even able to send roughly half his income back to his family in Yemen.

Experiences like Omar's, of living between Cairo and Yemen and feeling pulled in different directions by different family responsibilities or obligations, have often been studied through the concept of transnationalism, discussed above. More particularly, the study of transnational family life has revealed how migrant's experiences of Cairo are shaped. For the Somali diaspora in Egypt, Mulki Al-Sharmani (2010) argued that relations of obligation and reciprocity, are produced in conjunction with relations of power, conflict, and tension. Transnational life is seen in the practices of managing family mobility towards goals and needs, sharing resources across the family, and managing the family's care work. The absence of reliable institutions means that the support systems produced and maintained by families become the most effective means of addressing care work needs.

For Omar, his own mobility to Cairo was originally part of his family's caring needs and the sending of remittances. Since then, the goals of other family members have been incorporated into Omar's migration, with his younger sister, Rania, coming to stay with him and undertaking her studies in the city. As Al-Sharmani argued, the merging of migration

trajectories is not without tension. Omar explained to me that his dissatisfaction with life in Cairo and desire to move elsewhere, now has to be balanced with his family's insistence that he remain and look after his sister, Rania. Thus, the home or transnational family life becomes the setting for contestations of generational and gender power relations, unsettling the notion that home and family are havens (Brun and Fábos 2015, 7). In the rebuilding of life in Cairo for my Yemeni participants, family life in Yemen continues to exert a dominant influence, both in determining the aspirations of migrant's and their families who remained.

The transnational connections between Yemen and Cairo are also visible at an economic level as well. One night, I attended the wedding of a young Yemeni man who had come from America to marry his Yemeni bride. His wedding party had been organised by Rashad, a father of four who had set up a business arranging weddings for Yemenis in Cairo, after his arrival in the city in 2016. After the wedding, Rashad invited me to have a look around the Faisal neighbourhood.

Rashad takes me to several shops and restaurants in Faisal which are owned and run by Yemenis. For example, there is a new clothing store recently opened which sells Yemeni style abayas and even *janbiyya*s (daggers) for the men. Rashad tells me that he encouraged the owners to start this shop, having seen a gap in the market for Yemeni clothing in Cairo. In order for Yemenis to open businesses like this, they must receive a *tasrīh* (authorisation) from the Ministry of Investment and International Cooperation, with the help of an Egyptian lawyer.[5] In this process there must be an Egyptian *wakīl* (authorised representative) who can act as the signatory for the business in the eyes of the Egyptian state. This is usually the lawyer. The *wakīl* is, therefore, not a partner in the business, but works closely with the business owners. The investor also submits a business plan for inspection. Hetaba, McNally,

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5. See, Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky (2020) for more details about this process (113).

and Habersky (2020, 113) report that applications are often rejected because of failed security clearance or insufficient financial capital. From a legal perspective, this process does not distinguish between different types of foreigner meaning that in theory, refugees and asylum seekers can also submit applications.

However, the possibility of opening up businesses and ventures in Cairo does not mean that any Yemeni has the opportunity to do so. Any new business requires investors and for Yemenis in Cairo, the sources of investment have remained largely unchanged during the years of war. Political and social elites from the Ali Abdullah Saleh regime continue to shape the flow of capital in Cairo, and the investment of Yemeni-Americans also makes a significant contribution to new ventures. The Yemeni School, which I discuss further in Chapter Two, is a case in point, with at least one of the owners of the school living in America with his family, having left Yemen decades earlier.

For a number of my participants, therefore, life in Cairo did not represent the possibility of new patterns of life being crafted. Their own social status in Yemen followed them to Cairo and their means of altering this positionality were limited. In contrast, my own positionality as a British researcher in Cairo meant that, in the same day, I could have a meal with an asylum seeker in Ard el-Lewa, one of the poorer neighbourhoods of Cairo, and later shake the hand of the Ambassador of Yemen. For most Yemenis such social mobility is unthinkable, and most likely a practical impossibility.

Back in Faisal, Rashad and I end up in a sweet shop which supplies the famous sweets of Yemen to those in Cairo. We sit on a small bench opposite the shop's service counter to eat some freshly prepared sweets and drink Arabic coffee made from the husks of the coffee bean, a very traditional combination in Yemen. As we eat I ask Rashad about how he came to Cairo. Before the war began in 2015, Rashad had registered for his Masters at Cairo University. His research centred upon the traditional Yemeni clothing of four particular

governorates in Yemen. However, the outbreak of war was a concern to Rashad and his family. Rashad described how his village had come to sit between two opposing forces occupying the surrounding mountains. Day after day the rockets would be launched from one side to another, laying waste to much of the village which lay between. Once again, the absurdity of the violence made itself felt with Rashad laughing as he recounted the tale of the militia's artillery which could not climb the hill by his house. The al-Houthi militia had set their sights on this location, strategically positioned to fire upon enemy forces across the way. The truck which was carrying the missile launcher got stuck on the steep and narrow incline. They abandoned it. Rashad was quick to point out that if any reconnaissance was to spot this vehicle it might quickly become a target for attack. So, they encouraged one of the neighbours to rescue the truck and drive it away from their houses. Every time the sound of missiles carried through the air, the men would run for cover, fearing that they were the targets. Eventually, they sent the truck racing away down the hill.

The opportunity to travel came to Rashad by virtue of his scholarship to study in Cairo. Despite this it was still difficult to travel because of the war. There were limited routes out of the country. The first was by land to Saudi Arabia through Marib, which has been heavily affected by fighting. The second was by boat from the south of the country, along the coast of Aden and further east, to Africa. This was much more dangerous as the boats used were not always seaworthy and often overcrowded. The southern option was also more difficult for Rashad because of the tensions between the north and the south. The choice which confronted Rashad highlights a certain selectivity in the mobility and migration of Yemenis. Nathalie Peutz's (2019) study of Yemeni refugees in camps in Djibouti, reveals that many choosing to make the journey to East Africa are doing so to escape the social immobility they have experienced in Yemen due to their mixed Arab and African parentage. Journeys to Djibouti may be more dangerous in the eyes of Rashad, but for Peutz's research

participants it was "their family histories of transpelagic migrations, transnational marriages, and hybrid (s./pl. *muwallad/īn*: "mixed" Arab and African) ethnicities that made their flight imaginable—and, in their view, imperative" (Peutz 2019, 358). Rashad's own choice, then, makes visible the trajectories of Yemenis who have found refuge in places other than Cairo.

Ultimately, Rashad decided to go north to Saudi Arabia where he began the process of applying for his student visa to travel to Egypt. Rashad suffered long delays in the process and this was exacerbated by the fact that his residency in Saudi Arabia was limited. He spent three months trying to get the right papers signed by the right people. In the end, Rashad was close to running out of time and likely to be deported by the Saudi authorities. After being told to go away and come back another time by Egyptian officials in the embassy, Rashad began to make a scene in the reception of the Egyptian embassy: "How can you tell me to leave? I'm a student, I have a scholarship to study at your university." The scene caused such a commotion that the director of the embassy saw what was happening on one of his monitors and called down to reception to allow Rashad up to his office. Rashad explained his situation to the director and the time constraints on his travel to Egypt. The director apologised profusely, there had clearly been a misunderstanding by someone in the office along the way. As they finished talking, the director made a call to someone working downstairs to approve Rashad's documents for travel. Rashad went down and received the final stamp of approval on his papers. Apparently it was that simple. Rashad could not believe that after three months of waiting all it took was a call from the director and whatever problem had previously prevented him from taking his approval to travel had now vanished.

Rashad's experience of Saudi Arabian and Egyptian bureaucracy serves as a reminder that many people find themselves isolated as they are subject to institutional structures and systems used by states to control immigration. Bureaucratic techniques have become the means for sorting and organising populations across borders, revealing that the control of

personal data has become the means of establishing control over the body (Aradau and Tazzioli 2020). In Rashad's case, the progression of his life was halted by a piece of paper and an inked stamp. The arbitrariness of his dilemma, so quickly solved when he started to cause a disturbance in the embassy, is only emphasised by the opaqueness of the processes delaying his journey. Until this day, Rashad does not understand what was happening during those three months he chased down the approval for his Egyptian travel documents.

Having received approval to travel, Rashad booked his tickets to Cairo on the last day before his visa expired. However it turned out that the visa was based on a specific time in the day and the airline did not let him fly because that time had passed. Eventually he travelled on a later flight to Alexandria and experienced the shock of the Egyptian Mediterranean coastal winter weather having arrived in shorts and t-shirts, which the Saudi Arabian weather had demanded. By the time he arrived, he was also very hungry and needed a place to eat. Rashad assumed that if he went directly to the train station, where he would later catch a train to Cairo, he would find something to eat nearby. However, this was not the case. Instead, Rashad soon began to attract the attention of the locals, looking cold and dishevelled. Someone offered him a jacket. This was not the arrival Rashad had planned for, but compared to the rest of his journey from his hometown of Ibb, Rashad was relieved to be cold in Cairo.

Having finally registered for his Master's program, Rashad began his research and was later able to bring his family to Cairo, when his university stipend was processed a year and a half later. Alongside his studies, Rashad was able to start his own business, offering wedding services to couples unable to marry in Yemen. He supplies bridal parties with traditional dress from Yemen and has contacts to a dance troupe who perform the *barʿa*, a traditional form of dancing. At the wedding I attended with Rashad, these dancers performed as the bridegroom entered the wedding venue, escorting him to the brightly lit dancefloor in

Figure 2. *Clockwise from top left*, detail of a traditional Yemeni dress in the Sana'ani style; dancers perform the *barʿa* at a wedding in Faisal; the drums, known as the *ṭāṣa* and *marfaʿ* played during the performance of the *barʿa*; and the kitchen of a sweet shop in Faisal. (Photos by author.)

the centre of the hall. Here he was met by his close family, extended relatives, and friends who danced alongside him and shouted jubilant congratulations through the blend of drums, electronic synthesised keyboard, and oud (a lute played in Arabian countries).

I had originally supposed that the expression of shock which had adorned the groom's face for the entire evening was a result of his getting married to a girl that he did not know.

However, I later learned that during his wedding, a Yemeni man does not express any outpouring of emotion, rather he should remain composed throughout the celebration. As it was, the young man's marriage had been arranged by his father with another household from the extended tribal-familial network which spanned the United States and Yemen. The groom was born and raised in America, while his new bride had lived all her life in Yemen. The wedding event turned out to be the bridegroom's second marriage, his first having ended in divorce. One of the reasons for arranging marriages in this way is for a family member to secure access to America. Once married, the couple's family will start the application process for a spousal visa in the United States. Newlyweds will likely spend the first months of their marriage separated; one party returning to America and the other to Yemen.

Cairo has become a suitable destination to host these wedding parties. The costs of throwing a party are reasonable especially if the bridegroom's family is from America. As Nabil explained to me when I showed him my photos from the wedding I attended, "The Yemenis coming from America they have a lot of money so they can afford to spend a lot of money on the wedding parties (ʿurs). There they are traders and business men, so they have the money to throw parties, even if only 5 people turn up, they'll throw a huge party." Additionally, the ongoing security risks in Yemen mean that it is much more feasible for Yemeni-American citizens to travel to Cairo.

As Nabil's comments indicate, these Cairo weddings exhibit a certain character which reflects the power of certain Yemeni diasporas to shape the mobility of those in Yemen. American citizenship is an attractive and extremely valuable means of making connections and establishing stronger relationships between families, in a way that echoes traditional marriage practices in Yemen. Cairo, thus, becomes a transnational space for reproducing social group statuses, as marriages outside of one's social class remains relatively uncommon.

Reverse Stigmatization and Fragmented Journeys through Cairo

Rashad is annoyed. The frustration in his voice is not the most obvious thing to detect, but given his usually very calm demeanour and gregarious nature, it is clear that the man on the other end of the phone is ruffling Rashad's feathers. "Just tell me how long you are going to be. Tell me if you will be one hour, two hours, or three hours. Just tell me. Don't say thirty minutes when you don't mean it. *Ḥarām ʿalīk* (shame on you)! There is a customer waiting now for two hours, he could have gone out shopping to buy some souvenirs before his flight home instead of waiting for you at the apartment. Why did you tell me you would be half an hour if you were going to take two. I could have told him to go out for a while and be back at the flat at this time." A simple delivery has gone awry. For Rashad, it is clear who is to blame. If only the Egyptian delivery man had told him how long he would actually take to make the delivery, he could have informed his customer accordingly and everybody would have been happy.

Later that same day, Qasem, a thoughtful art student living in Giza, points to a book on the shelf. "Do you see this book? Of course, you know who the author is," Qasem says, "He's one of you, your countryman." The book in question is an Arabic translation of *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* originally published in English in two volumes in 1836 by the Royal Asiatic Society. The author in question is Edward William Lane (1801-1876), who wrote his work in Egypt between 1833 and 1835, partly using notes from his previous visits between 1825-1828. Qasem tells me in gleeful terms how Lane was able to explore the heart of Egyptian culture and expose the Egyptians (*faḍaḥ al-maṣriyīn*), despite being a foreigner. As we spend time together over the next couple of months, Qasem brings up the book again and again in our conversations. It feels like a reference point for him as he navigates his own experience of Egypt and Egyptians. He

does not enjoy spending time in their company. He shares with me a story about the supervisors of his local mosque here in Cairo who always seem to make a point of asking him for money when he goes to pray. "We don't have that in Yemen. The imam, or whoever is looking after the mosque, would never pester people for money. Yes, they accept donations— charity is part of the religion—but there is no one who asks for money like they do here. '*Kull sana wanta ṭayyib*,' what is that all about?" This expression is an Egyptian greeting shared around the time of holidays and festivals. It is also used as shorthand by people from lower social classes to request money from someone.

What appeared to be happening through the episodes described above, and others like them, was the creation of difference—in this case negative Egyptian difference—as a means of countering the uncertainty of life in Cairo. Egyptians were often cast in unflattering light in contrast with positive Yemeni characteristics and values. Magdalena Suerbaum (2018a; 2018b) has employed the concept of "reverse stigmatisation" to describe the strategies Syrian men use to make sense of their place in Egypt. She writes, "Syrian men engaged in stigmatization of the Egyptian host population by creating their own definitions of successful, middle-class masculine identity characterized by creativity, ingenuity, diligence, and productivity. Reverse stereotyping thus became a strategy to masculinize Syrian men" (Suerbaum 2018a, 378). In what follows, I suggest that the concept of reverse stigmatization helpfully accounts for the episodes recounted above.

The first episode portrays Egyptians as being dishonest, or reluctant to speak the truth. The delivery driver should not have led Rashad to believe that he was just about to make the delivery, as he did several times over a three hour period. As we spoke after the event, Rashad sensed that the man was perhaps worried about losing work with him, that another delivery driver would be ordered. The second episode, paints Egyptians as only ever interested in money. The context of the mosque, in Qasem's account also heightens the idea

that even sacred or religious spaces are not immune to the Egyptian's lust for more money. Of course, in recounting these anecdotes I am not seeking to establish these claims as fact. Rather, I share them as representative of the attitudes commonly expressed in my discussions with Yemeni participants. It was interesting to me that among the participants that I spent time with, very few had meaningful connections with people other than Yemenis. This was the case for children at the Yemeni school, which I explore as a space of performing 'Yemeni-ness' in Chapter Two, students at university, and business owners in the districts of Faisal and Dokki. In fact, one of the Egyptian teachers whose class I attended, urged his students to make the effort to get to know local Egyptians, signalling his own understanding that Yemenis had not formed strong bonds with Cairenes.

This can be partly explained by the stigmatization that Yemenis have experienced in Cairo. Despite the fact that Yemen has been devastated by conflict, many of my participants expressed frustrations with Egyptians who considered them as *khalījī*s, the nickname given to people from the Gulf. The term often connotes a particular type of Arab who has a lot of money to spend and comes to Egypt for their own entertainment, in some cases for alcohol and sex. My participants resisted these categorisations as misrepresentations of the reasons for their presence in Cairo. As one person told me, "If we could live in our country in peace, then we would! Why would I live in Cairo?" My Yemeni participants also felt that they were being used as business opportunities, describing their stigmatisation in terms of alienation or feeling socially distant using the Arabic term *ghurba*. Husayn, who lived in Cairo with his wife and daughter, said that many Egyptians would interact with him on the basis of money. He argued that Egyptians see people as "dollars on legs." Certainly the inflation of prices for foreigners is a common practice in Egypt, however, in the course of my research it became clear that many Yemeni migrants in Cairo were regularly subject to inflated prices in a range of ways from healthcare services to taxi rides to rental accommodation. In this way

stigmatisation is experienced as a process of 'othering' which is made possible through the increased visibility of migrants and asylum seekers. Andrea Brighenti's (2007) discussion of visibility reveals the asymmetrical nature of relationships produced by visibility which yields a contestation between the person seeing and the one being seen. Yemeni migrants can be rendered visible and vulnerable to exploitation if they lack the required grammar for life in Cairo. Sometimes, this means language itself, as the Yemeni dialect is significantly different from the dominant dialect in Cairo. At other times, it is the lack of knowledge about the forms of life in Egypt, like how much a taxi fare should cost.

Feeling stigmatised is something that displaced Yemenis have experienced in other countries as well. As I was talking to Nabil in his office one day, he shared reports from friends who had tried to live elsewhere:

> Many people were coming to Egypt to then go to Turkey on the basis of work. But then many complained about ʿunsuriyya (sectarianism/racism) there. The racism of the Turks against the Arabs. They would say, 'You destroyed the country.' Especially the Syrians have faced this criticism. They have a big problem there [in Turkey] with the refugees. 'You destroyed the country, the prices increased, you took all the jobs.' It's a real big problem.

Even amongst Egyptians, similar notions are held about Yemenis in Cairo. I spoke to Ahmad, a taxi driver from Faisal, who complained that Yemenis had caused local property prices to spike, forcing out many Egyptians who could not afford the higher prices.

To reduce one's visibility and, in turn, reduce one's capacity for being exploited requires embracing new forms of life and patterns for doing things. Germain T. Ngoie (2018) has discussed this in terms of social proximity and social mixity: the desire for social mixity must outweigh the transactional costs which social proximity demand. For my Yemeni participants and local Egyptians these relationships are fraught with tension as people calculate the degree of social mixity that is most beneficial to them. In many cases, the assumed "short-term" nature of Yemeni life in Cairo, that people will return to Yemen once

the war is over, has produced low social mixity between Egyptians and my Yemeni participants which casts Cairo as a transitory or transitional space.

A number of authors have described Cairo as a "transit" city. Closely related to, if not constituted by, the category of "transit" migrant, the city becomes situated in the space between origin and destination. That is, the city becomes a liminal or transitory space, where migrants can become stuck or stranded owing to the imposition of state migration controls.[6] At the current time, there are few countries, other than Egypt, that are open to receiving Yemeni migrants meaning that Cairo becomes a place where migrants feel stuck, unable to continue onwards. Collyer (2007, 668; see also, Collyer 2010) argues that the "transit" perspective offers an alternative to considering migration in strictly linear fashion, movement from A to B, which considered migrants' journeys exclusively in terms of the conditions at origin and destination, as in the push-pull theoretical models of migration. Instead, migrants (in Collyer's study, undocumented migrants crossing the Sahara) step out on "fragmented journeys," oftentimes without any destination in mind. By looking at the nature of these journeys, researchers open up the possibility for understanding migrants themselves beyond the one-dimensional characterisations that linear perspectives offer. From this perspective, migration becomes part of a person's larger life story, shaped by personal aspirations and experiences rather than simply the search for a better socio-economic status.

In this direction, Hélène Syed Zwick (2022) extends the notion of transit migration, underpinned by its attention to technology and finance, to look at the role that socio-psychological and subjective mechanisms play in determining migrant behaviour. She

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6. It is important to note that the term "transit migration" has become a widely used and politically contested expression that is largely used by the global north, such as the member states of the European Union, whose policies are often designed to restrict the movements of people and even emplace them in countries nearer to their country of origin, as much of the research on Europe's border-externalization has argued. Here, I do not enter into the debates around this term and merely take on the notion that migrants' journeys and their experiences of places like Cairo can appear transitory, or unsettled.

examines the mobility of Syrian, South Sudanese, and Libyan migrants in Cairo. For example, she studies the ways in which a migrant's intellectual movement from intention to action is complicated by changes in attitude, belief, and behaviour, or the perceptions and feelings associated with adaptation to a new environment, or experiences of discrimination (Syed Zwick 2022, 2227-2229). Changes in migrants' perceptions about life in the city are, therefore, affected by their personal interactions with other city dwellers. However, in this study, Cairo also appears as the locus of state action toward asylum seekers and migrants which creates an uncertain or ambiguous positionality for them and serves as an extrinsic motivation for migrants to continue on their fragmented journey (Syed Zwick 2022, 2232).

This suggests that the experience of stigmatization can produce attitudes or perceptions which impact migrants' decisions about their migration trajectories. As Yemenis engage in reverse stigmatisation of Egyptians, they are attempting to fashion a place for themselves in which they can legitimately belong. However, these processes may serve as extrinsic motivations for migrants to continue on fragmented journeys as they perpetuate the sense that Cairo and Egypt cannot be anything more than a liminal and transitory place. Interestingly, when I shared these episodes with a friend from Canada who had lived in Yemen for more than a decade before the 2011 Revolution, he could not help but laugh. He explained that the stereotypes created by Yemenis about Egyptians, paralleled his own experiences with Yemenis in Yemen. Is there a sense in which the process of reverse stigmatisation reveals more about one's own crises of identity than reflecting the true nature of its subjects?

In the next section I move to discuss the ways in which the search for healthcare continues to shape Yemeni movement to Cairo, as it has done for many years prior to the current conflict in Yemen.

Networks of Care

For many of my participants, the journey to Cairo was connected to the pursuit of healthcare options. Travelling to receive medical treatment and staying for three to six months is very common with Yemenis using medical visas as a primary means of entering the country, since Egypt imposed new restrictions on Yemeni movement in 2015 (Al-Absi 2020, 6, 15). Prior to this Yemenis could enter Egypt without a visa. Following the start of the conflict, Yemenis could receive a 6-month visa on arrival upon presenting a valid medical certificate. However, in April 2023, reports began to circulate amongst Yemenis that Egypt had imposed tougher restrictions on Yemeni migrants.

On Sunday 2nd April, a plane carrying passengers from Aden was forced to return with around sixty passengers who were denied entry to Egypt for failing to meet the new entry requirements (al-Batati 2023). The restrictions, imposed after the flight had departed Yemen, specify that Yemenis wishing to enter Egypt must have a valid medical report from an Egyptian hospital (al-Batati 2023). It is reported that the new medical reports cost more than double those previously procured in Yemen and validated by the Health Ministry of Yemen (al-Batati 2023). Additionally, the length of stay for the visa has been cut from six months to three. Although Yemenis have been upset at the imposition of these new regulations, with rumours suggesting that the Egyptian government was retaliating after Yemen's Foreign Minister had indicated support for Ethiopia's controversial Grand Renaissance Dam, Egypt has said that a number of nations have been included in these latest changes to its border policies.

Whatever the case, it is interesting to note that Egypt continues to shape Yemeni migration using the issue of healthcare, casting Yemenis as people in need of care, compassion, and repair. However, even where treatment at medical facilities may be accessed

by Yemenis, nearly all my participants confirmed that producing a medical report was a formality to gain entry (Al-Absi 2020, 6).

Beth Kangas (2002; 2007a; 2007b; 2010; 2011) published a small corpus of work which described the movement of Yemenis abroad to seek healthcare. For many decades, Yemenis have been travelling to access medical services which were either not available in Yemen or not perceived to be of a suitable quality. Although Kangas's research was mainly focused on Amman and Mumbai, she does make reference to Cairo as a popular destination for Yemenis seeking healthcare, between the 1962 Revolution in Yemen and the 1991 Gulf War. Egypt had a physical presence in Yemen after Gamal Abdel Nasser's intervention against the Imamate and Egyptian doctors established clinics in rural areas after the civil war had erupted. However, in 1991, a recently united Yemen backed Iraq's position in the Gulf War opposing Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which may have contributed to a downturn in healthcare treatment sought in Egypt after this time (Kangas 2002, 46).

Kangas (2002) positions the "transnational therapeutic itineraries" of these Yemeni healthcare seekers within the literature on globalisation, connecting their movement to other highly mobile products of the modern world like medical technology, finances, and information. She depicts the interweaving of global processes of capital and technological circulation and the lengths that some must go to in order to alleviate suffering and illness. This raises important questions about the interplay between capital, healthcare, and populations without ready access to medical treatment. The Saudi-coalition is said to have targeted hospitals, with up to 55% of hospitals unable to function as of September 2017 (Bachman 2019, 303). Yemenis have been forced to bear the costs of violence themselves and Cairo has become a primary location for them to find treatment.

In Behooth, a locality just west of Dokki and connected by Tahrir Street, is a small Yemeni community centre known as Happy Yemen Initiative. Here, Yemenis and other

asylum seekers and migrants participate in English classes and skills workshops. From time to time, the centre also hosts pop-up medical clinics for patients to have medical examinations with general practitioners and run simple blood tests for a symbolic fee of 25 Egyptian Pounds (see Fig. 3). A friend of mine who is an experienced nurse and was assisting at the clinic invited me along to help out and talk with the patients. There, I met Mustafa who had brought his wife to see the doctors. Mustafa was Egyptian and had lived in Yemen for several years working as a chef. He had eventually married a Yemeni woman and together they had come to start a life in Cairo. When I asked Mustafa why most of the patients attending the clinic that day were women, he responded by saying that it could be a matter of shame for a Yemeni man to bring his family or even himself to seek healthcare options at such a clinic. The nominal fees to see the doctors and the clinic's venue at the community centre may have turned people off from coming. Mustafa, however, was more than happy to bring his wife. He had heard that the doctors had a good reputation and he was impressed with the attention they gave to his wife. He described this level of care as uncommon in government hospitals and that private hospitals (where he assumed the quality of care was higher) were too expensive for him and his wife.

Recent research has revealed the extent to which many Egyptians find themselves in difficult circumstances vis-à-vis healthcare. A significant proportion of healthcare financing comes from out-of-pocket payments, which increases the risk of households suffering catastrophic expenditure. It is estimated that 20% of Egyptians encounter such catastrophic expenditures and Egypt is demonstrating greater risk than other low-middle income countries like India and Bangladesh (Fasseeh et al. 2022).[7] As Yemenis travel to Cairo in search of treatment, many Egyptians are likewise facing their own medical challenges.

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7. Catastrophic expenditure refers to "an expenditure of more than 40% of non-food household expenditure or 10% of overall household expenditure" (Shrime et al. 2015).

Figure 3. A flyer advertising the pop-up medical clinic held on the premises of Happy Yemen Initiative. The tagline reads, "Together for the sake of our health."

Ambiguous Asylum

In the course of my research I was able to speak to Sara, a former member of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Cairo staff who had conducted Refugee Status Determination (RSD) interviews for several years.[8] She explained that in 2015 and

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8. Refugee protection services, including RSD, are provided by UNHCR Cairo as per the 1954 Memorandum of Understanding between Egypt and UNHCR (Fujibayashi 2021). Hirotaka Fujibayashi's (2021) article provides a comprehensive discussion of Egypt's Accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention, arguing that that Egypt's foreign policy reforms helped to build rapport with the growing refugee regime underpinned by the 1951 Convention. See also, Alexander (1999) for further background on RSD procedures in UNHCR.

2016, the first years of the current conflict in Yemen which saw the dispersal of refugee populations from Yemen to nearby countries, short RSD interviews were conducted by UNHCR staff. However, after a short time it became UNHCR's policy not to perform general RSD interviews, meaning most Yemenis will struggle to get recognised refugee status (UNHCR Egypt 2020).[9] In the case of vulnerable asylum seekers, merged RSD/resettlement interviews may take place. This is when someone who has registered with UNHCR and has accessed some of the services provided is flagged by staff members as a potentially vulnerable case. It is only in these types of situations that a RSD/resettlement will take place.

Generally speaking, there is a perception among Yemeni asylum seekers in Egypt that the process of resettlement has effectively stalled (Al-Absi 2022, 15). Some have claimed that Yemenis are being discriminated against. Whilst this should not be dismissed outright, it is a difficult claim to prove. The lack of resettlement opportunities in Egypt is consistent with trends elsewhere. Solenn Al-Majali (2022, 9), a researcher based in Jordan, has suggested that as few as 20 Yemenis have been resettled from Jordan since 2018. Of course, UNHCR recognises that low rates of resettlement are a significant barrier to its provision of durable protection solutions (UNHCR 2022e). It is estimated that resettlement to the global north accounts for only 1 percent of the world's refugee population (Mavroudi and Nagel 2016, 132). So, whilst the lack of resettlement is unlikely to be a real case of discrimination against Yemenis, this general trend in resettlement may go some way to explaining why Yemenis are less inclined to register with UNHCR in Cairo.

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9. The *Egypt Response Plan for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers from Sub-Saharan Africa, Iraq, and Yemen* states explicitly, "While African and Iraqi asylum-seekers undergo RSD interviews, no general RSD is undertaken for Yemeni nationals in line with UNHCR regional policy guidance. However, RSD for Yemenis is undertaken if they are considered for resettlement or if they have potentially excludable profiles that require detailed examination and determination" (UNHCR Egypt 2020, 11).

Indeed, for the past few years, the number of Yemenis seeking protection status with UNHCR has decreased, and today remains fairly low compared with other refugee populations in the country. The number of Yemenis who have registered with UNHCR in Egypt stands at less than 9,000 (UNHCR 2022a). In Djibouti there are less than 7,000 registered Yemeni refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR 2022b). In Jordan there are just under 13,000 registered Yemenis with UNHCR (2022c). In Somalia there are less than 10,000 registered Yemeni refugees (UNHCR 2022d). These figures may appear surprising given the widespread destruction in Yemen and the acute political nature of the conflict. With respect to the displacement of Syrians following the irruption of conflict there, Ayoub and Khallaf (2014) suggested that the non-registration of Syrians was due to a lack of knowledge about UNCHR Cairo's protection mandate. They argued that this was coupled with a negative perception of UNHCR as an assistance agency on the part of Syrians and the rejection of the concept of "refugee" itself.

Elsewhere, Häkli, Pascucci, and Kallio (2017) have studied how Cairo has become the stage for performances of "refugee-ness."[10] The need to be recognised as a refugee in order to receive international protection requires that asylum seekers embody the "refugee" subjectivity. While some studies have analysed the adoption of such positions as demonstrative of subjugation and powerlessness, these authors regard the adoption of "refugee-ness" as a means of grasping political agency. In recognising the decision-making of asylum seekers, the authors complicate the simple bifurcation of empowered citizen and powerless refugee, imbuing the social space of Cairo and asylum seekers with political potential. They highlight the example of the Mustafa Mahmoud protest camp organised by

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10. See, Malkki (1995b) who first popularised this term.

Sudanese refugees in September 2005 to demand inclusion in discussions about their status, protection, and possible resettlement (Moulin and Nyers 2007).[11]

But, how important is the performance of refugee-ness for my Yemeni participants? It may be argued that the extent of such political potential is fairly limited given the existing regime's low tolerance for dissent or debate. In fact, compared with the estimated population of Yemenis in Cairo, the number of registered Yemeni asylum seekers is low, around 2 percent. This suggests that Yemenis are not interested in becoming refugees and that they are resisting incorporation into the international protection regime. It may however, simply be an indication that only the most disadvantaged Yemeni migrants are applying for asylum, and that most Yemeni migrants in Cairo are able to support themselves through their own networks and relationships, without resorting to assistance from UNHCR. Given that Cairo is a recognised space for the performance of refugee-ness, certain populations are perceived as people in need of help. Again, this can impact migrant's decision-making and recalls the idea that fragmented journeys are affected by a migrant's interactions with those living in the city, altering their present experience and future mobility aspirations.

One of my participants, Gary, a worker in the migration field who has performed research with the International Organization for Migration, remarked that this was likely because of Saudi Arabia's position as a major donor of the UN and therefore the political impracticality of recognising Yemenis as refugees, fleeing from a war in which Saudi Arabia has played a leading role. When I mentioned this to Sara, she replied that she was not sure about the real reason or principle behind the decision not to recognise Yemenis for refugee status, or at least to a very reduced level. She conveyed an uncertainty in her experience over the handling of the Yemeni case. She could not understand why UNHCR was still not

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11. The protesters were forcibly removed by Egyptian security forces a few months later on 30 December. Sadly, the lives of 28 protesters were lost, with half being women and children (FMRS 2006).

processing Yemeni asylum claims after eight years of war. She stated that the reason given by her superiors was uncertainty surrounding of Yemen's future, the ongoing war meant that there was uncertainty over the future of the country and perhaps the basis of asylum claims. In fact, Sara drew a parallel to the case of Sudan which underwent a political split between north and south in 2011. In this instance UNHCR paused their RSD and resettlement processes for a time for similar reasons, uncertainty about the political future of the state and therefore the basis for approving or making claims.

In the case of Egypt, this ambiguity arises out of a deliberate strategy of the state: indifference. In explaining this policy posture, Kelsey P. Norman (2019, 43) writes, "The state is aware of the presence of migrant or refugee groups, but chooses not to expend resources for engaging with them, necessitating that other actors—international organisations or domestic NGOs—step in to provide services." It is important to highlight that a strategy of indifference can lead to exploitative conditions of labour (Norman 2019, 49) and the sudden appearance of the state to intervene in migrants' lives when security concerns are prioritised (Norman 2019, 50).

The indifference of the state produces a situation of indeterminacy for Yemeni migrants in Cairo which impinges on people's ability to conceive possible futures. This transitory state promotes the sense of ambiguity my participant's experienced and the ways in which they described their experience. Nabil, whose story opened this chapter, expressed this sentiments in the following way: "In Egypt there is no stability, there is no security. This is the problem in Egypt. Will you take Egyptian citizenship after 10 years? After 50 years? Never. That's what I see the problem is. If there was to be a political problem in the future then, *maʿa al-salāma* (goodbye). We can't see a future here."

Nabil is a registered asylum seeker with UNHCR Cairo, but he feels that there is little advantage to this. He has given up on the little assistance provided by UNHCR because it

was not worth the effort on his part required to obtain it. This signals Nabil's own fortune, in that he is not entirely dependent on the services of organisations like UNHCR, however it also contributes to Nabil's sense of unease in Cairo and his lack of hope in a resolution to his status. In fact, Nabil's experience and unmet expectations about what registering with UNHCR might provide him, was enough for him to reconsider his stay in Egypt and to look for another solution elsewhere. He thought about making a journey to Europe, researching possible routes out and connections to others making similar plans. He was part of a small group of Yemenis who made preparations to leave Egypt, but as the moment of departure drew near, Nabil could not shake the feeling that it would not be right for him to leave his wife and younger children. He decided to stay, but followed the journeys of his friends to Europe via messaging apps.

Although Nabil did not undertake his planned journey, his story highlights the fragmented nature of migration to Cairo, whose indeterminate and ambiguous state heightened Nabil's desire to move again but did not supply him with the requisite safety for his entire family to make such a journey. During my research I spoke with two other young men who were just about to make the next step on their fragmented journeys. Both unmarried, and in their late twenties, they perceived Europe to be a place where "a better life" might be lived. "There, there is something," they said, referring to Europe, "but here there is nothing." The here and now of Cairo could not supply whatever it was these men were hoping to discover there, in Europe.

At times, Collyer's notion of the fragmented journey resonates with the experiences of my participants who envision their migration as part of a longer journey whose destination lies decidedly in the future. The ambiguity created by state policies permeates nearly all aspects of life and contributes to the disconnect that many of my participants expressed when describing their lives here. Uncertain legal statuses mean that the future makes its presence

felt in decisions about whether to stay in Egypt or to move elsewhere. Risky onward journeys are not for everyone, but the lack of options for Yemeni passport holders means that they be the only choice for some who cannot face life in Cairo any longer.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the sharp distinction between life in Yemen and Cairo. The ongoing conflict's disruption to the everyday provoked a movement of many Yemenis to Cairo, a city which has offered many the chance to escape the strife in Yemen. This movement is characterised by a high degree of transnationalism at multiple scales, from the family and household, to the regional politics of the state. Transnational family life is coloured by demands from back home which are balanced with the evolving aspirations of migrants in Cairo. However, the possibility that new patterns of life might emerge here has been checked by the reproduction of Yemeni social dynamics. The transnational flow of Yemeni capital appears to reinforce the power and influence of families and businessmen who prospered before the tumultuous past decade. While Cairo certainly does afford Yemenis the chance to rebuild their lives, it appears that for the most part the foundations of life remain the same.

I have argued that there are many intersecting issues through which Yemeni migrants and Egyptians may find alignment or agreement. At times, these issues do become the basis for commonality. For instance, many Egyptians and Yemenis share a desire to leave Egypt for Europe. However, more often than not, these were not powerful enough to dispel the sense of difference and stigmatisation that many of my participants experienced and discursively produced as they talked about life in Cairo. The need to create Yemeni

difference, a form of reverse stigmatisation, ran deep and was constructed around perceived failings of Egyptian character. The untrustworthy or money-obsessed Egyptian became a point of departure from which to re-establish notions of Yemeni-ness.

As I have also argued, these interactions at the highly local level have been backgrounded by the regional politics dominated by the Gulf which is shaping places like Cairo and other parts of Egypt into suburbs of the Gulf. This is taking place both through the migration of labourers to work in the Gulf and the flows of capital through investment and construction projects rebuilding the Gulf "paradises" in other parts of the region. Whereas Schielke used the phrase to describe circular migration of labour and the formation of suburbs through ideas and the flow of remittances, I use the phrase to emphasise the expansion of suburbanisation to cities like Cairo which reinforces uneven geographical relations within the country.

In the next chapter I look at how Yemeni-ness is performed in other spheres of Yemeni life in Cairo, namely through a Yemeni art exhibition, a Yemeni school, and debates about the dress of Yemeni women. I look more closely at the particular forms that Yemeni-ness takes, considering how national identifications continue to be mobilised to construct and build social relations in Cairo.

Performing Yemeni Difference in Cairo

In January 2023, a directive from Ansar Allah provided new rules for the acceptable dress of women in public. The directive was revealed in a meeting between leaders of the regime and clothes-making business-owners in Sana'a. The rules stipulated that loose-fitting black abayas without frills were the only form of acceptable dress. The directive, widely shared amongst Yemenis on social media, fomented a public debate on the nature of Yemeni identity, with pictures of women wearing traditional Yemeni dress trending on social media alongside pictures of men chewing qat or wielding Kalashnikovs and *janbiyya*s (daggers).

The backlash against these stipulations largely took place on social media and signalled a broad interest in the issue, as Yemenis from around the world engaged in the debate. In Cairo, Mohamad Saba, an academic specialist on traditional forms of Yemeni dress was interviewed by various Yemeni media outlets to present the view that loose-fitting black abayas were in fact a modern deviation or innovation. Colourful and highly ornamented clothing was a greater indicator of Yemeni dress and therefore a stronger marker of Yemeni identity. On Twitter and Instagram, women posted pictures of themselves and others wearing the traditional Yemeni dresses. The conflation of Yemeni national identity with images of women in traditional dress and discussions regarding their modesty and their acceptable presentation in the public space, reflects broader debates regarding the gendering of the modern nation and the role of women in performing national identifications (Kandiyoti 1991; Brown 1993; Nagel 1998; Salih 2003; Hayes 2005; Liloia 2019).

Before exploring the issues raised by this event, I provide some historical background to the formation of Yemeni national identifications, as well as highlighting some important

and useful theories which underpin the subsequent analysis of three settings in Cairo for the performance of Yemeni national identifications.

Performing the Nation

Lisa Wedeen's (2008) study of Yemeni political identity formation makes the argument that ideas Yemeni national identity developed through "performative practices" rather than strictly through institutional practices associated with democratic nationalism, such as elections. Studying performatives, which links the discursive with action, has the benefit of analysing how national imaginaries can be cultivated when the state's institutions are regarded as weak. The concept of performativity, first elucidated by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1975 [1955]), was most famously applied to gender by Judith Butler. In *Gender Trouble* (1999 [1990], 173), Butler describes the social construction of gender, in which idealised identities are realised through corporeal performances:

> In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.

Butler questions the internal identities which signs and discursive markers are said to express. Rather it is these signs that produce the signifying absence of the internal core on the surface of the body. To study performative practices is to read these signs not as expressive of essential identity but as the investments of people with a stake in sustaining the "effect of an internal core." We can therefore ask how practices and gestures change under certain conditions; when specific events provoke questions about these gestures and what they mean.

The applicability of performativity to national identifications is widely recognised. The nation is performed through speech and action: the things we say about the nation

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(Calhoun 1997), and those stylised performances most readily associated with 'national practices,' like singing the national anthem. Although, as Butler herself notes, such performativity also presupposes the possibility of deforming and reworking the power that underlies such practices to "alter not just the language of the nation but its public space as well" (Butler and Spivak 2007, 67). As I will discuss later in the chapter, this possibility of reworking power is important because the performativity of national identifications can be used to oppose or undermine a variety of positions and viewpoints, including conservative patrimonialism and forms of traditionalism.

In addition to these 'recognisable' national performances, performativity of Yemeni national identifications can also be read into the everyday. Michael Billig's (1995, 8) notion of "banal nationalism" highlights the "forgotten reminders" of nationhood, in which the image of "the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building" reveals how embedded in social practice the idea of the nation really is. However, Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) contention that the nation is realised in particular moments by people, helpfully returns us to the case of people performing Yemeni identifications in Cairo. Yemeni nationalism exists when it is enacted by people seeking to build a sense of 'Yemeni-ness.' Given that the performativity of national identifications has been widely attested to, what of the relationship between performative practices in Yemen and Cairo?

Wedeen (2008) frequently engages with the work of Sheila Carapico (1998, 1) who tracks the variation in Yemeni civil activism over time and "shows Yemenis participating in labor unions, community self-help projects, political organizations, and other events and associations that seem to flower under some political and economic circumstances and wither under other conditions." Like Wedeen, Carapico argues that civic activism often appears at the very moment when state institutions are missing. She highlights how civil society contributes to the upkeep of modern social services including schools, and contributes to

intellectual production and the expansion of public events (Carapico 1998, 12). As such, Carapico's work contributes to the analysis of performative practices as described by Wedeen and reveals how the civic activism of Yemenis in Cairo can be read in light of the recent history of such practices in Yemen.

Returning to Lisa Wedeen, one of the key facets of her work is in challenging the legacy of Benedict Anderson's (1991) theory of the nation as imagined community. Anderson's overriding contribution to scholarship was his neat conception of the nation as "an imagined political community—and as imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1991, 6). Anderson sought to theorise the worldwide rise of nationalisms through which people could imagine themselves as members of a national community. Wedeen (2008, 14) argues that the literature which took up Anderson's ideas had the tendency to overgeneralise the relationship between secularism and nationalism. In contrast, Wedeen states that nationalism has not replaced other ideologies or meta-narratives and has in fact combined with them. Meaning that the modularised nationalism discussed by Anderson, was rather reinterpreted and recontextualised wherever it was implemented. Alternative identifications, most commonly religious, had enduring resonance and relevance for the formation of nationalist thinking. Not only did this provide symbolic capital for new nationalist ideologies but it also incorporated an inherent capacity for national identifications to be challenged. This is an important point vis-à-vis Yemeni national identifications, as the possible affiliations and identifications open to Yemenis are many and complex. There is a large body of literature which describes the various tribal (Weir 2007; Walker 2015; Poirier 2020), kinship (Meneley 1996), religious (Messick 1993, 2018; vom Bruck 2005; Bonnefoy 2011), diasporic (Ho 2004, 2006), and political identifications which complicate the idea of Yemeni-ness.

National identities are inevitably bound together with the concept and apparatuses of the state, and the perpetuation of national identifications has often been co-opted by particular forms of political affiliation. With regards to Yemeni national imaginaries, Marine Poirier (2013) has discussed how the General People's Congress (GPC) has for many years exerted a political hegemony over Yemeni cultural identifications.[12] Representatives of the GPC have pursued a nationalist discourse to legitimise the party's rule while simultaneously concealing the international pressure exerted on its government, such as the role played by the Gulf Cooperation Council. Poirier argues that the GPC's nationalist discourse has discriminated against other competing national identifications and has effectively 'othered' anyone seeking to legitimise alternative political solidarities. She writes, "Competing over the right to manipulate the symbolic capital of Yemeni society and history, GPC representatives have in a sense appropriated if not confiscated 'Tradition' (historical, religious, tribal, etc.) as a resource for political legitimisation" (Poirier 2013, 25).

Given the extent to which the former regime attempted to construct and solidify national identifications, studying the performatives of national imaginaries in Cairo today is warranted by the fact that Yemeni nationalist discourse was formed in conjunction with international and transnational contexts and never in an isolated domestic vacuum. The ways in which national solidarities are being motivated in Cairo can add to our understanding of how identifications morph, mutate, and find life in new and alternative settings. Poirier's work also raises the question of whether these national affiliations are utilising the rhetoric of the GPC or are representative of alternative national imaginaries.

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12. The General People's Congress (GPC) was formed in 1982 by Ali Abdullah Saleh. The GPC was the ruling party in Yemen from the parliamentary elections of 1993, following the unification of Yemen, until 2015 when the party fractured as a result of Saleh's alliance with the al-Houthi movement.

A number of studies have touched upon the impact of nationalism in weakening earlier prominent identifications and solidarities, including the tribal and the religious. Paul Dresch (1990) identifies 1982 as the beginning of a new phase in Yemen's political life, with the national charter lionising the freedom and equality of each member of its citizenry. The newness of the nation was to supplant the antiquated tribalism of yesteryear. This was markedly demonstrated in the publication of new school textbooks which developed "a unified view of the national past" and urged citizens to rescind tribal clannishness (*al-taʿaṣṣub li'l-qabīla*) (Dresch 1990, 390). Writing much later, Gabriele vom Bruck (2005) has suggested that the concept of the tribe was not completely effaced by the new nationalism. The ruling party's rhetoric has often depicted the Yemeni nation as a tribe, using the tribal warrior as the symbol of Yemeni identity and appealing to the tribes distant past as a means of legitimising the state's authority and authenticity (vom Bruck 2005, 9). The argument made by vom Bruck is that rather than basing national identity in opposition to an external 'other' (as is often the case), in contemporary Yemen, it is the internal 'other' that becomes the foil. This suggests the fluidity of national identifications and the need for particular symbols to be emphasised at different moments depending on the needs of those making the claims for nation-ness.

Perhaps the most influential monograph on the formation of national identities in and through the displacement event is Liisa Malkki's (1995a) *Purity and Exile*. Her study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania charts how their diverging response to displacement depended on the context of their eventual settlement. She observed the refugees of the camp setting construct an elaborate "mythico-history" which morally classified the world around them and formed the basis of their identity as a nation in exile (Malkki 1995a, 53). In contrast, Hutu refugees of the town assumed multiple identities derived from their "cosmopolitan" social context,

preferring to forge new identities through intermarriage, legal naturalisation, and personal trajectories.

Malkki's (1995a, 1) study laid the groundwork for Migration Studies to consider the ways in which displacement events give rise to new forms of "'nationness' and history, identity and enmity." The disintegration of the Yemeni state and the movement of Yemenis away from the territorial space of Yemen does not foreclose the possibility of new national identifications being made in Cairo. Although geographically and temporally removed from the subject of Malkki's work, Yemeni mobility to Cairo affords the opportunity to discern how displaced people engage in the formation and construction of identifications which can be made in new settings.

In light of the forgoing, I argue that in the rebuilding and reconstruction of life in Cairo, many of my participants are making use of Yemeni national identifications formulated in the years of GPC rule. In one sense this serves to create a sense of 'Yemeni difference' in Egypt. Given that many of my participants experience life in Egypt as impermanent or transitory created by the ambiguity arising from Egyptian state practices, this is unsurprising. This positive instance of 'Yemeni difference' which can be seen as the corollary of the process of reverse stigmatisation discussed in Chapter One, supplements what is lacking in the negative assessment of Egyptian character as a basis for group identity formation. Just as Yemenis in Cairo are reinforcing Yemeni identifications through the discursive formation of negative portrayals of Egyptian character they are also positively drawing on forms of national affiliation tied to the former political regime which continues today albeit in an altered and limit fashion. Performances of the Yemeni nation come alive in Cairo as political elites, artists, and educators engage with the performative practices they were accustomed to in Yemen. But this performativity is not without problems.

The conflation of Yemeni national identity with images of women in traditional dress and discussions regarding their modesty and their acceptable presentation in the public space arising from the events described at the beginning of this chapter, reflect broader debates regarding the gendering of the modern nation and the role of women in performing national identifications. The performativity of national identifications is a gendered affair. Yemeni women continue to be represented as the bearers of national culture which therefore acts to restrict them from certain spaces of shaping the discourse and future discretion of their communities whether in Yemen or abroad. I link this to the debate regarding traditional dress and the wearing of the veil. Women are expected to bear the cultural heritage and if they wish to do more than this, they must exceed expectations in all areas of life, standards to which men are not held to account. Several of my participants connected the wearing of the veil to their ability to act as representatives of the imagined Yemeni community. Thus revealing that women's participation in political and social life in Cairo is not beyond obligations imposed in Yemen.

This is not to argue that in utilising symbols and language implicated in the idea of the Yemeni nation that Yemenis are organising themselves as a nationalist movement in Cairo. In fact, many of my participants in Cairo were often reluctant to make overtly political statements or actions. However, that they choose to engage national imaginaries as a primary means of representing Yemen in Egypt comes at the expense of other imaginaries, of which there are many in Yemen: tribal, pious, regional, familial. The GPC's co-optation of legitimate discourse of the Yemeni nation, as Marine Poirier (2013) has argued, has come at the expense of others who find themselves on the fringes of this imaginary. As important as it is to examine what is being represented in the Yemeni identifications in Cairo, it is equally vital to recognise that which is absent. Creating national affiliations has often been

synonymous with the pursuit of purity. The homogeneity of the nation includes some while excluding others.

The case of Yemen is highly complex but the reaffirmation of a national identification linked closely to the former regime which worked hard to cultivate the internal 'other,' whether supporters of the movement led by the al-Houthi tribe, members of the former socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, not to mention the *muḥammashīn* whose fate is decided by their African parentage, means that such identifications must not be taken lightly, or to be considered as expressive of all those claiming Yemeni affiliations. As Isa Blumi (2021, 1009) is at pains to stress, "What is certain is Yemen is today trapped inside an echo chamber of narratives that necessarily shuts out alternative ways of framing the many Yemen constituencies and their concerns, as well as the extent to which Yemen is implicated in the events of the larger world." While my participants reflected a broadly similar demographic, hailing from a middle class or upper class background, I have made a conscious attempt to consider the alternative framings within which the narratives I heard and observed can be placed.

This research builds on previous scholarship which has addressed the national identifications formed in the context of Yemen's weak state institutions. Given the breakdown of the state and descent into armed conflict, Lisa Wedeen's (2008) study of the "performative practices" of Yemenis through which the idea of national community comes into being, can be extended to address the persistence of national imaginaries under such dire circumstances of the state. This chapter, therefore, refocuses attention on the importance of studying the dynamics of national identifications, which in recent years has tended to give more attention to extreme forms of right-wing nationalism. This is unsurprising given the rise of populist nationalist movements in the United States, Great Britain, India, and many countries in Europe. My research sheds light on more modest or subtle forms of national

affiliations and the enduring, albeit changeable, contribution it is making to the forms of life being imagined today.

I also build on the existing research into Yemeni lives carried out in Cairo today. This small body of literature requires further expansion, as the lives of Yemenis remain underrepresented and the conditions of their displacement under-theorised. In analysing the socio-cultural activities of Yemenis in Cairo as inherently political, I tie these practices to the longer histories of cultivating 'Yemeni' national identifications. This analysis also allows for the connection between practices of representation and the experiences of Yemenis in Cairo to be drawn.

The chapter continues with a discussion of the various representations of Yemen and Yemeni identifications being formed in Cairo today. I discuss three settings for these performative practices. The first is the Yemen Embassy in Cairo and the 33rd anniversary celebration of Yemen's Unification in 1990. As an official Yemeni space, the embassy is designed to function as a performance of Yemen outside of the nation's territory. The celebration itself included numerous symbols attached to the idea of the Yemeni nation and sought to perpetuate the narrative of unity which was the basis of the former regime's power. I then move to the visual display of Yemeni identity in an art exhibition held in Cairo in February 2023. I consider the symbols and imagery used in the art exhibits to highlight the various ways the nation is gendered. Yemeni women are cast as the preservers of the cultural heritage of Yemen, while men are either the symbols of a passing age, or the silent protectors of women, reserving the right to represent the nation. I link this to the politics of representation through the wearing of the veil. Women must consider the various spatial dynamics of veiling practices in operation between Yemen and Egypt. I explore how women perceive the wearing of the veil in Yemen and how their veiling practices in Egypt enable them to engage in practices of representation for the social groups they aspire to belong to.

Finally, I consider the performative space of the Yemeni school which is presented as a means of preserving and upholding Yemeni identity. Here further symbols of the nation are on view for students and these new 'experts' of the nation are taught the value of unity. However, the tenuous threads which weave together the idea of a united Yemen fail to bear up to the weight of lived experience.

Reproducing the Nation at the Yemeni Embassy

The 33rd anniversary celebration of Yemen's 1990 Unification was marked by an event in the Yemen Embassy in Cairo on 23 May 2023. I was fortunate to have received an invitation to attend the celebration through my friend and fellow researcher Nahla El-Menshawy. I met Nahla outside the embassy and we made our way to the entrance. The name of Nahla's embassy contact was all we needed to pass through the gates and into the embassy compound itself. It is important to note, for many Yemenis residing in Cairo, entering the embassy is not a straightforward matter. Access to the political elites inside is oftentimes maintained on the basis of personal connections.

Once inside we were directed to a main hall which stood empty. There were a couple of men setting up a PA system for what looked like a musical performance. We looked around and then noticed a door standing slightly ajar on the far side of the hall. We pushed open the door and found a room full of people sitting in rows anticipating an opening speech by the Yemen Ambassador to Cairo, Mohammad Marem. A man attending the door motioned to two Yemeni men sitting on the opposite side of the room and they stood up to give us their seats. There were only two other foreigners in attendance who we later met, both experienced researchers on Yemen.

The Political Narrative of Unity

Almost as soon as we sat down the Ambassador stood up to address the room. I do not suppose that he had waited for us, rather we were merely fortunate that he had not already begun. He spoke about the importance of Yemen's unification in history, how two revolutionary states had opposed the colonising British in Aden, and the oppressive Imamate regime in the north, respectively. Of course it was not until 1990 that these states were unified, but they shared a revolutionary spirit. We all clapped at the appropriate times, namely when the Egyptian President was thanked for his role in welcoming Yemenis to Egypt, and when the ambassador spoke about the importance of Yemen being a united and free country. The al-Houthi regime was described as working against this unity.

Certainly, this speech was not the moment for detailed analysis of the contemporary situation, nor Yemen's complex political history. Noticeably absent was any mention of the multiple wars fought between the northern and southern states before 1990, nor the aftermath of civil war in 1994 which firmly entrenched the north's hegemony over the south. It was rather a simple and clear statement of the unity narrative which asserts that the true character of Yemen can only be realised in a unified political state. Equally prominent were the enemies of unity, the Ansar Allah regime in the north whose actions are portrayed as having no political basis or right.

It is hard to imagine that the irony of celebrating the thirty-third anniversary of Yemen's unity was lost on the embassy's guests. No one is oblivious to the fact that state institutions in Yemen have been fragmented and in some cases co-opted. Due to the war, places like Cairo have been established as satellite political hubs from which endopolitics plays out. Marine Poirier (2022, 4) defines endopolitics as "a political space located within the territory of political reference but created and maintained from abroad." In the case of

Yemen, she argues that "there is no clear break between the country's interior and exterior. Yemeni political elites think of domestically-based politics and foreign-based politics as being in constant interaction rather than blunt opposition" (Poirier 2022, 4). Certainly, the recent political context provides an interesting lens through which to view the celebration's political importance. There are signs of rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Ansar Allah and external political actors are pushing towards the start of a peace process. The anniversary celebration can be seen as a reminder, from certain Yemeni political quarters in Cairo, of the direction that any future peace agreement should take.

The event itself raises important questions about the performance of national identifications and the forms they take. The library on how Yemeni national imaginaries have been performed in diasporic or transnational life in Cairo is limited. Maysaa Shuja al-Deen's (2021, 1) report for the Arab Reform Initiative describes "the political, cultural, and social roles that the Yemeni diaspora is trying to play both towards the diaspora itself and towards Yemen, and how these are impacted by the long shadow of the conflict in Yemen." Her work argues that Yemeni migrants in Cairo focus their energies on social and cultural activities for two main reasons: Egypt's highly restrictive political space and the "fear of exacerbating internal frictions that mirror those back home" (Shuja al-Deen 2021, 1). However, Marine Poirier's (2022) recent work on Yemeni political elites in Cairo reveals that there is a great deal of political activity occurring in the city. Cairo has become the primary location for the rebuilding of Yemeni political life outside of Yemen, owing to Cairo's historical support of political refugees, its central location as a transit hub, and its affordability (in contrast to other spaces of Yemeni political activity such as Riyadh, Amman, or Istanbul) (Poirier 2022, 6, 8). In fact, she argues that politics is carried out through social and cultural activities rather than in the more familiar forms of politics. Yemeni politics in Cairo comprises "lunches, gatherings, weddings and funerals, as well as cultural events organized in collaboration with

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the Yemeni Embassy and other associations. Former ministers and advisors, as well as party representatives and MPs, frequently attend such events, which serve as venues for political discussion. . . . Cairene spaces and moments of 'ordinary' sociability provide outlets for negotiating new political alliances and initiatives" (Poirier 2022, 15). Poirier's work forces us to reshape our notion of politics and the spaces it occupies. This harmonises with the approach taken by Lisa Wedeen and Sheila Carapico, who both recognised the value of studying Yemeni politics outside of the typical venues. By adopting their perspectives, we can analyse the social and cultural activities of Yemenis in Cairo as performatives of national identifications which are inherently political and tied to the longer Yemeni history of cultivating national identifications.

Alongside the work of Shuja al-Din, are the reports produced by Qabool al-Absi (2020, 9; see also 2022), a Yemeni researcher based in Cairo, who relates how the networks of support which many people rely upon in Yemen—which she names as the family or the tribe—"become obsolete or shift, creating an additional struggle in a new country." This suggests that certain affiliations have lost their vitality in Cairo and that tribal or regional divisions are minimised. This strikes a strong contrast with research conducted in Jordan by Verduijn and al-Majali (2020) who describe how Yemenis have recreated "micro-societies with their own characteristics and dynamics, as well as tribal and ethnic divides that cut across nationalities and influence day-to-day interactions." Al-Majali (2022, 8) expanded on this research and has suggested that in Amman, one's regional affiliations and social status are the main determiners in establishing patterns of residence amongst Yemenis and employment opportunities.

In the course of my own research I observed a strong tendency amongst many Yemenis to play down the "internal frictions" recognised by Shuja al-Deen (2021). In fact, most of my participants appeared to share a broad political opposition to the Ansar Allah

regime in the north. Although, as Shuja al-Deen reported, there is little by way of overt political mobilization (in the institutional understanding of this concept) amongst Yemenis in Cairo. However, I engaged with many Yemenis involved in cultural activities or the provision of social services, which as Wedeen and Carapico have argued are vital tools of political action. In terms of formal politics, a member of the former Ali Abdullah Saleh regime hinted that there are Yemenis who gather and discuss politics, but he suggested that there was little political change that could be achieved from Cairo. He was reluctant to discuss any further details about these gatherings, but many Yemenis I spoke to expressed the futility of political involvement and a disenfranchisement with the state of affairs in Yemen.

Among my participants, those who were not part of the political elite showed little interest in the celebration of Yemeni Unification. As I sent messages to them asking about whether they knew of any events, most had heard nothing. They chose not to post about the anniversary event, in contrast to my contacts from the political elite who posted numerous videos and photos about the event. Those in attendance at the event were mostly people close to the embassy's officials or those who had been loyal to the previous regime. In many ways, it felt very much like a networking event. The embassy is of course tied to the Internationally Recognised Government whose legitimacy is based on being a mediated continuation of the former regime. So it is to be expected that they would want to continue to remember this event which has a lot of symbolic importance and urge Yemen to be united once again. And as my colleague Nahla also pointed out, the event was overwhelmingly dominated by the presence of older men. There were only a handful of women present at the event and the youngest men there were the dancing troupe who performed the *barʿa* dances. This reinforces the sense that some spheres of political life in Cairo are replications or reproductions of the status-quo in Yemen and resonates with the findings of al-Majali (2022) in Amman.

Symbols of Nationalism

Following the Ambassador's short speech celebrating Yemeni unity, the attendees were invited outside the conference room to the main hall where a large cake was waiting to be cut by the ambassador. After this, the ambassador proceeded to walk around the room as he was introduced to guests. The four foreign researchers shook hands with the ambassador and exchanged brief pleasantries. His request for a photo was met with polite acquiescence. Personally, I was thankful when someone entered the frame and stood in front of me.

Shortly after this, a time of song and dance was introduced. A woman performed, before a man took over and sang two songs, *Yā jaddatī yā ṣabāḥan* and *Ḥubbak yā waṭan*. The dancing troupe connected to Rashad's wedding business performed the *barʿa* at the event dressed in their usual traditional clothing. The connection between Yemeni dancing and the former political regime has been talked about elsewhere. Najwa Adra (1993; 1998) argued that the *barʿa* dance which has many forms across Yemen, was given a central place in the formation of the Yemen Arab Republic in the north, and after 1990 as part of the newly unified Yemen. According to Adra (1998, 90) dancing expanded the vision of the emerging national community and people learned of their commonality with others in Yemen. At the tenth anniversary celebration of Yemen's unification held in Sana'a in the year 2000, the dancing of the *barʿa* connoted a hybridisation of regional practices which ultimately subsumed them under northern pre-eminence (Wedeen 2008, 85). As Wedeen (2008, 85) states, "The choreographed folk dance part of the spectacle was the regime's effort to make Yemeni 'culture' into an explicitly national object—one that hybridized North and South, as well as the coastal and interior regions of the country." In the Yemen Embassy in Cairo, the *barʿa* dances continue to be made into national objects centred around a narrative of unity. But the ability of these performances to inculcate actual unified patterns of social

organisation is questionable. Alongside other prominent symbols of Yemeni nationalism, such as the Yemen flag plastered on the cake and sashes draped over the shoulders of many attendees, these cultural practices were deliberately intertwined with a particular political narrative to bolster the former regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh. Considered by some to be the only legitimate political narratives, the years of conflict and contestation which have engulfed Yemen and its political classes surely renders these narratives of unity questionable, to say the least.

The celebration of Yemen's unity in Cairo appears as a concerted effort to prop up an anachronistic narrative that broadly dispenses with nuances of the current crisis, not to mention the problematic moments in unified Yemen's own history. The significance for Yemenis in Cairo is that despite the distance afforded by relocating to Egypt, the possibility for imagining new means of political action and new bases of affiliation remains limited. However, as the next section shows, the symbols of the nation are not set in stone. The malleable interpretive power of symbolic imagery means that the narratives upon which identifications are founded can be tested. In the next section I move from the embassy to the art exhibition where national symbols are reproduced and further claims regarding Yemeni identity are made.

Redefining Yemen's History, Colouring Its Present

It was a Saturday afternoon and I had just finished writing up some field notes from a recent interview when I picked up my phone to check my messages. Something immediately caught my attention. One of my friends had posted a flyer for a Yemeni art exhibition taking place in the following week. Entitled "Light of Art," the exhibition of Yemeni fine art and photography ran from 18-23 February 2023 at the Cairo Opera House. Organised by the Arab

Forum for Art and sponsored by Light for Media Foundation, the exhibition was designed to showcase Yemen and the country's artistic pioneers to the Arab world. Seventy works of art were presented, each from the hand of a different Yemeni artist, including works of fine art, calligraphy, photography, and even a wooden puppet. The works were displayed over the two floors of the Salah Taher Hall.

Interpreting the Art Exhibition

Symbols are important tools in the creation of a group's shared visual language. The construction and maintenance of national imaginaries through symbolism was recognised by Anderson (1991) in his work on imagined political communities. Although in his own analysis Anderson focused on literary works such as national anthems, poetry, and song (Anderson 1991, 145), the creative visual arts play an important role in contributing to this language as artists make use of symbols in their works. Theodor W. Adorno (1997 [1970]), one of the most influential European philosophers of the twentieth century, argued that art is experienced in connection with and ultimately through the discourse of which it is a part. Art is therefore contingent on that (discourse) which it is *not*, meaning that the art object is embedded in societal discourse and can never truly be separated from its cultural context. This idea is related to how an object of art is read: via a sensory experience with the artwork which is connected to our conceptual understanding. The contingency of art therefore opens up the possibility for contestation. Art becomes the space in which the status quo, that discourse which surrounds it and suffuses it, can be challenged. This indeterminacy of art, the fact that it is autonomous and yet dependent on its social context, provides the grounds for the wider discourses it engages to be debated, discussed, disturbed, even distorted.

Challenging social discourse has been a prominent feature of Yemeni art since the advent of the protest movement in 2011. Scholars have examined the roles that various creative art forms have played in Yemen, whether in theatre (Hennessey 2015), poetry (Caton 1990; Kendall 2015), or the visual arts (al-Jeddawy, al-Kholidy, and Nevens 2021). Perhaps most famously it was street art which captured the imagination of people in Yemen. Led by the efforts of Murad Subay, many Yemenis descended on the streets in response to the campaign, "Colour the Walls of Your Street" (Alviso-Marino 2017, 124). Although the conjunction of art and public space to build political awareness was not new, the multiplication of artistic expression certainly was. However, this explosion of colour waned as conflict took hold and opposition to art increased. Today, many Yemeni artists fear reprisals for contributing to art exhibitions or sharing their work with the public (al-Jeddawy, al-Kholidy, and Nevens 2021, 22). They have experienced threats at the hands of local authorities wishing to control the production of art. The "Light of Art" exhibition in Cairo, then, provided somewhat of a safe space for Yemeni artists to display their work. Geographically dislocated from the armed conflict in Yemen, Cairo offered the possibility of engaging in art without fear of recrimination. As the space for public and civic engagement has diminished in Yemen, Cairo has become a place in which civic activism and performative practices can take place.

In a short piece written to introduce the exhibition and published in a brochure distributed amongst attendees, Ashraf al-Sami, director of Light for Media Foundation, outlines the reasons for sponsoring the event: "Our concern at Light for Media Foundation is to develop Yemeni media through the provision of valuable content, contributing to the development of society and the preservation of Yemen's cultural and civilizational values." The sponsor's remarks frame the exhibition in accordance with the foundation's own vision, crafting the exhibition space as a place in which the act of preserving Yemen's cultural and

civilizational values will take place. Al-Sami does not expand on what those values are, leaving the exhibition's visitors to discern these values for themselves.

Radfan al-Mohammadi, the president of the Arab Forum for Arts and curator of the exhibition, left Yemen to live in Cairo after the outbreak of war and the deterioration of life there. He spoke in more detail about the exhibition's aims and the role that art plays in society. In his corresponding introductory piece found in the exhibition's brochure, he speaks of art as a language of the world's peoples and societies. He elaborated on this idea as we spoke together in front of his painting entitled, *Edge of Place*: "Art is not merely about drawing. It is a medium through which we can communicate our ideas and thoughts about the world." For al-Mohammadi, Yemen's artists are those who "redefine its history and colour its present." The role of the artist is to reach back into the past, to excavate the history of a place and a people in an attempt to give meaning to the present. In this sense the art object acts as the signifier of something signified. As a person beholds a work of art, the observer moves from the material object to the meaning, the metaphysical, significant. This perspective, typified by Ferdinand de Suassure and Claude Levi-Strauss prioritizes the move to the signified and erases the object or sign itself.

I take Adorno's relation between a piece of art and its social context as a foundation to build a discussion on the "Light of Art" exhibition and the discourse with which the various artworks engaged. The exhibition's curators and sponsors framed the exhibition in such a way that encouraged a close reading between the art and the concept of a Yemeni imaginary. In this way the exhibition became a space in which Yemeni-ness was performed. However, by the same token, it also exhibited the tensions that are produced when such an idea or concept is sustained, revealing the very fault lines upon which any sense of Yemen is built. Thus the "Light of Art" exhibition was presented as a space in which the discourse surrounding Yemeni cultural and civilizational values would be brought to light. The art

would communicate a message about an assumed Yemeni perspective of the world, but art's very indeterminacy promised the possibility of contesting this imaginary. As I will argue, the exhibition demonstrated some of the ways in which Yemeni difference is being constructed in Cairo and the tensions produced in trying to sustain the concept of "Yemeni-ness."

Yemeni Women: Preserving the Tradition

The performance of 'Yemeni-ness' in the space of the exhibition hall was seen largely through the figure of the woman or girl. Highly visible representations of women in the context of protracted displacement have been observed elsewhere, where the significance of women's social and political agency becomes pronounced, mirroring the perception that men are absent from the social/cultural realm during times of war (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014, 8-9).

Nearly half of the artworks featured in the exhibition depicted a young girl or woman as the primary subject. A number of these pieces explicitly tied the image of the Yemeni woman to a concept of Yemeni identity or culture through their titles. For example, *Yemeni Heritage* (see, Fig. 4), *Hadhrami Culture*, *Identity* (see, Fig. 5), and *Yemen Culture* (see, Fig. 6), all featured images of women wearing traditional Yemeni dress. The bright colours of the women's dresses was a key feature of many art works, as in the piece by Mohammad Saba, director of the Sheba Foundation for Culture and Arts. In *Girls from Old Sana'a* three women from Old Sana'a stand together adorned in brightly coloured garments representing the traditional dress of the city (see, Fig. 7). Behind them the ornately decorated buildings of Old Sana'a stand. Each one is covered in the garment from head to toe, although each woman is covering her face to a different degree: one face is fully exposed, another hidden by a translucent material, the third reveals only the upper half of her face, covering her nose and mouth with her shawl.

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Figure 4. Alaa Al-Zubairi, *Yemeni Heritage*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 70.0 × 100.0 cm.
Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Figure 5. Hanan Al-Qubaisi, *Identity*, 2020. Acrylic on canvas, 120.0 × 120.0 cm.
Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Figure 6. Bushra Al-Haboob, *Yemen Culture*, 2020. Oil on canvas, 60.0 × 60.0 cm.
Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Figure 7. Mohammad Saba, *Girls from Old Sana'a*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 100.0 × 130.0 cm. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Figure 8. Two women reflect on the exhibition's images. (Photo by author.)

The exhibition thus presents women as the bearers of a Yemeni culture or heritage. This recalls Deniz Kandiyoti's (1991, 431) argument regarding the incorporation of women into national imaginaries as "privileged bearers of cultural authenticity." In one painting, this work is done quite literally by a woman who carries a bread basket on her head. However, this is no ordinary bread basket. Upon the surface of the container are depictions of famous Yemeni/Hadrami buildings. In another painting by Bushra al-Haboob entitled, *Yemen Culture*, a woman in the black dress of Sana'a bears the old city in her hands. The connection

between women in traditional dress and traditional architecture, along with other symbols of a Yemeni past including the Ancient South Arabian script, is made in a number of paintings suggesting that it has currency in the social discourse as a signifier of a Yemeni cultural heritage. Indeed, in *Identity* by Hanan Al-Qubaisi, the women and the architecture merge together, their forms blurring at the edges as they dissolve into one another. What does it mean that Yemeni women become equivalent to traditional forms of dress, architecture, and discarded alphabets?

As Najwa Adra (1998) has argued with respect to Yemen, the images and symbols of the tribe became the foundation for fostering the notion of national identity. She writes:

> In sum, poetry and dancing, like the *jambiyyah*, tribal clothes and rural foods, are signs of the tribe. Particular genres of poetry and dancing are iconic of various components of tribalism, and some are indexical as well. With the changing relationship of the Yemeni tribe to the central government and to other countries came a devaluation of many tribal symbols. Many of the old images were no longer satisfying; what they expressed was no longer relevant. Paradoxically, some tribal markers have been revived with considerable enthusiasm in urban contexts. They have come to symbolize a new Yemeni who is somehow both tribal and urban. This is readily apparent in the new poetry, which uses tribal imagery to discuss issues of nationhood, in *bara'*, which has come to represent identification with the Yemeni nation rather than a particular tribe, and iconically, in the new urban costume, which superimposes the indigenous *jambiyyah* on the imported *thawb* (94).

The "new Yemeni," as described by Adra, emerged as the modern Yemeni nation began to take shape, was symbolically formed through poetry, dance, clothing, and food. The images of the art exhibition and their artist's framing of these works along the lines of identity and culture, reveal the extent to which these symbols retain their symbolic power as markers of the Yemeni citizen. These markers have enjoyed mixed fortunes since the writing of Adra's text. Even then, they played a reduced role in the actual lived realities of Yemeni people and during the recent conflict have been rehabilitated to engage new audiences. But the continued presence of these cultural symbols prompts consideration of their use within

the art exhibition and what is communicated about the roles of men and women in the contemporary situation.

With respect to women, there is a sense in which the Yemeni woman becomes captured by the past. This notion is evoked in the work *Dungeon* by Saʿada Mahmoud al-Qatawi. A woman dressed in white is "in chains," she appears tired with heavy bags under her eyes. On the woman's chest, sits a *ḥudḥud*, the bird associated with the Qur'anic narrative of King Solomon and Queen Bilqis. Perhaps this woman is Bilqis herself. The mythic imaginary of Queen Bilqis is commonly found in Yemeni art and literature, and another work in the exhibit, entitled *Queen Bilqees* by Hana'a Muhammad Heba, depicts her in a more abstract form. This use of Queen Bilqis gestures to the ability of women to play a key role in leadership and governance. It perhaps invokes the Yemeni woman *par excellence* to remind the viewer of women's capabilities.

Returning to *Dungeon*, the woman, Queen Bilqis, bears the symbols of a Yemeni past on her garments. Or does she carry them within her, internalising the agricultural heritage of the sickle, coffee beans, and grapes on the vine; jewellery and famous monuments sit alongside the letters of Ancient South Arabia. As Kandiyoti (1991, 434) reminds us, although women were also granted rights of participation in political discourse in the formation of nation states, "The very language of nationalism singles women out as the symbolic repository of group identity." Scattered around the painting, these fragments of a supposedly shared past weigh heavy on the woman's heart. What is the source of the woman's misery? Could it be the past itself which has imprisoned her?

Yemeni Men: In the Absence of Youth

If nearly half of the exhibition featured women or girls as the main subject of the art work, less than a quarter of the pieces centred on men. The majority of these images depicted old men. Only three artworks featured young men as their subjects. In the first, entitled *The Musician*, we see a young man hunched over an oud, his head resting on the body of the instrument as he strums a tune. Before him stands an aluminium cup. Is he begging? His demeanour suggests the possibility. In a second painting, *Twelve Noon*, a young man strides through a marketplace carrying a black bag. A third work, a photograph by Tala al-Sabri called *Generations* shows a group of four men sitting together in an elevated position with the city skyline behind them. Two of the men are sitting in wheelchairs. The group are using their phones. Why is the figure of the young man as a subject so strikingly absent from the exhibition? The only other appearance of young men are in several neighbourhood scenes.

When men do appear as principal subjects they are primarily old men. In *Lines of the Years*, Nada al-Kainai depicts an old man peering through his spectacles (see, Fig. 9). His brow reveals the furrowed lines of old age, although perhaps the more prominent "lines" of the paintings title refer to the lines of his head scarf. The man's gaze is downward and distant. He is a man caught in reflection. Three works depict old men with wooden canes. In *Lord of the Earth* the man stands tall and proud with his hands atop his wooden staff. However, in *Parting before Meeting* and *Life is Wasted while Waiting* the men lean on the staff as a means of support. The overriding sense from these paintings, notwithstanding the man in *Lord of the Earth*, is that the old men have become signifiers of sorrow, loss, and despair. It could be that the tribal shaykh, who was idealised as the fair and equitable head of the community, has become worn down by the years of conflict. There is a frailty about this

vision of masculinity. If Yemen's artists are redefining the past and colouring its present, what role do Yemen's young men have to play?

Figure 9. Nada Al-Kainai, *Lines of the Years*, 2019. Oil on canvas, 70.0 × 80.0 cm. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

Testing the Boundaries of Yemeni-ness

Ernest Renan (1947 [1882]) once remarked, "To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more – these are the essential conditions for being a people." That the artwork displayed in the "Light of Art" exhibition made repeated use of the glorious 'Yemeni' past is unsurprising given the difficulty in constructing a harmonious picture of contemporary Yemen. Yet the desire to reflect "a common will" was very much present. The exhibition was a performance in Yemeni-ness, yet it also exhibited the stresses and tensions of sustaining such an imaginary.

The extent to which the art of the exhibition can be said to be representative of a united acceptance of Yemeni national identifications is uncertain. The exhibition itself was connected to the embassy through the attendance of three prominent officials at the closing ceremony. Muhammad Marem, the Yemeni Ambassador in Cairo, Baligh al-Mekhlafi, a journalist and political researcher who serves as the Information Counsel at the Yemeni Embassy in Cairo and Nabil Subaye, a famous journalist and poet who now works as the head of the Embassy's Cultural Center, were present to award participants with certificates. The presence of these officials and the alignment between the symbols and images of the tribe which were the basis of Yemeni Nationalism as constructed by the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh and the GPC, suggests that a particular elite vision of Yemeni national identity was being presented and performed. Again this reinforces the idea that life in Cairo is being reproduced on the basis of traditional power bases, with those of higher social status continuing to determine the nature of Yemeni-ness.

Yet as I discussed above, if we take Adorno seriously, the indeterminacy of art allows for the contestation of these dominant narratives which *Dungeon* by Saʿada Mahmoud al-

Qatawi appears to challenge. But given the overall acquiescence of most of the artwork to a narrative which sustains the notion of a united Yemen based on the national imaginary built by political elites, should we consider the artists culpable for perpetuating traditional power dynamics? As interviews with Yemeni artists have revealed, threats to life and means of income are genuine (al-Jeddawy, al-Kholidy, and Nevens 2021), meaning that artists must tread a careful tightrope through the narrowed discursive space which surrounds them. One of the artists in the exhibition explained to me that authorisation was needed for her to conduct cultural events like seminars and exhibitions. I was not able to confirm whether this was the case for the "Light of Art" exhibition, but the possibility certainly raises questions regarding how the embassy's background presence was felt in the exhibition's preparation. Moreover, another artist lamented the fact that there was not more nuance in the political narratives being represented. The presence of numerous political parties in Cairo has not led to an opening of debate and discussion regarding the political history of Yemen. In many ways, the divisions between political parties and their narratives appear to be reproduced in Cairo but without the violence which has plagued Yemen. This does not preclude the possibility that the replication of narratives of Yemen's unity or the representations of supposed national identities perform a symbolic violence on the lives of Yemenis outside of the social elite in Cairo.

The fragile idea of a united Yemen presented by the embassy's anniversary celebration of Unification was exposed by one artist who sought to erase particularity from his work. He shared with me that, "I avoided using the clothing of one particular region and tried to do something which would not offend anyone. You know here [in Cairo] we don't like to emphasise our differences." In an effort to represent a uniform or hybrid Yemeni culture, the specific customs of one area or region stood in place of the whole, recalling Lisa

Wedeen's analysis of the tenth anniversary celebration of Unification in 2000, which also performed similar functions on the dances of the *barʿa*.

Perhaps the most apparent idea expressed within the space of the exhibition, is the idea that Yemeni women are the bearers of the nation's cultural heritage. Yet this notion was contested within the exhibition itself with *Dungeon* suggesting that women become trapped or captured by this responsibility or burden. Additionally, the absence of young men from these depictions of Yemeni culture and heritage speaks volumes to the ongoing struggle over what Yemeni-ness is and highlights the complex relations between the roles of men and women in the Yemeni imaginary. If the old man represents the passing of time and the sense of loss, and women are the bearers of Yemen's cultural past, whither the young men? Perhaps they are the silent protectors whose role it is to lead the family, the tribe, and the nation.

Furthermore, the use of diaspora in any sense to describe actual entities of Yemeni belonging in Cairo, appears to be fragile. The concept of a Yemeni diaspora presupposes an agreed upon 'Yemen' from which the diaspora community derives its existence. However, this notion of Yemen appears to be consistently contested, with people prioritising their affiliations to 'the South,' 'Aden,' and 'Hadhramaut,' for example. As Wasim shared with me, "People from Hadhramaut see themselves as the best people. They have the shaykh mentality, they are better than everyone else. But this means they tend towards ʿunṣuriyya (racism, or sectarianism)." Wasim himself was uncomfortable with this perspective, sharing that his years of living abroad had reshaped his views on such modes of thinking. But he shared that many people in the region want to secede from the rest of Yemen: "They have the oil, the sea, the border with Oman, the empty quarter, they have the resources to be a state of their own making." Ramy, who left Aden with his mother after the al-Houthi regime overran their neighbourhood at the beginning of the war, described how speaking in a divisive way is a contentious issue. Any talk about a future Yemen which is not a united Yemen is shut

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down. Of course, he has often heard Yemenis talking poorly about one another and emphasising regional differences.

That matters of difference should be downplayed while in Cairo, signals the precarity of the idea of the nation as a coherent or desired identification and perhaps calls into question the motivations of those repeating the ideas of national unity. The background role played by the embassy and other political elites poses the question, is this a form or mutation of the "bourgeois nationalism" criticised by Gayatri Spivak for its entanglements with capitalism and neo-colonialism. The lifestyle and business contacts enjoyed by many of the elites in Cairo (Poirier 2022, 8-10) is in stark contrast to many Yemenis in Cairo who work numerous jobs and struggle to pay for residency visa fees, school tuition, and even rent.

Representing Yemeni Women

That the association of women with a Yemeni cultural past is part of a wider discourse, can be seen in the response to Ansar Allah's prohibitive guidelines for tailors and clothes shop owners in Sana'a mentioned in this chapter's introduction. Men and women took to social media to contest the idea that wearing the black abaya without any ornamenting or embellishments was a deviation from traditional Yemeni practice. It was perhaps unsurprising that social media played host to the everyday resistance to the new stipulations. Social media use is now an established part of everyday life and for Yemenis in Cairo and elsewhere, posting on Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook is a daily routine. In fact, social media is one of the main ways through which transnational life is lived. Yet what was surprising, or not necessarily a given, was that these restrictive guidelines were interpreted as an attack on Yemeni identity. In the days following the guidelines

introductions, social media users began posting images and captions along with the hashtag Yemeni Identity (*al-hiwiyya al-yamaniyya*). In what follows, I present a selection of social media posts that my participants shared with me, to give a sense of the reaction this news provoked.

Posted with a video depicting firstly, a group of Yemeni women in traditional attire dancing together, and then secondly, a group of Yemeni men in traditional attire dancing together, Hīfā al-Sultān (2023) wrote, "In Yemeni identity, there is a homeland, faith and dignity for all. In their faith (identity) there is an unholy subordination in which there is no homeland, faith or dignity." In a post which featured video footage of women showcasing traditional clothing, Rāniyā (2023) wrote, "Authentic Yemeni clothing and heritage. Here are the granddaughters of Queen Bilqis of Sheba." These posts again provide evidence of the connection being made between traditional Yemeni clothing and identity, positioning women as the authentic and true heirs of the ancient culture of Yemen. Tasābīḥ (2023) wrote, "This is our identity. Like a lonely colour, what is blackness but a recent intruder on a civilization possessing eternal depth. Our identity and traditional clothing are full of colour and joy. Share with us what true Yemeni identity (*al-hiwiyya al-yamaniyya*) is for you on this hashtag." Echoing the sentiment that the black abaya is somewhat of a more modern "intruder" into Yemen's cultural life, Tasābīḥ also highlights the notion that Yemen's civilisation is ancient, stretching into the depths of eternity. Interestingly, Tasābīḥ's own Twitter profile uses the old Arabic script next to her name alongside a picture of a woman leaning against a wall on which is written: "Woman. Life. Freedom." Tasābīḥ describes herself as a feminist and this combination of ideas reveals the agency with which certain Yemeni women can interact with symbols of nation-ness.

One day I decided to ask Hiba, whose stories introduced this thesis, about her perspective on the trend. Hiba first came to Egypt in 2017 with her mother and brother, who

regularly came to Cairo to receive treatment for a chronic ailment. While she was here in

Cairo, she spent time meeting people from Yemen and began to get a sense of what Cairo

was like. She learned that there were opportunities for her to live here and she began to

imagine herself living in Cairo. She left with the idea that one day she would come back and

live here. Hiba eventually did so, receiving a scholarship to study in a private university.

Since then she has worked on a number of projects training both Egyptians and Yemenis in

valuable professional skills.

When I asked Hiba about the response on social media, she interpreted the trend as

something especially positive for girls and women:

> I don't know how did it start exactly but I know that after this new law that the people
> (*al-nās*) began on Facebook and all media. They started to . . . everyone would post
> very traditional clothing with the hashtag *al-hiwāya al-yamaniyya* (Yemeni Identity)
> because our identity is not the black abaya. As Yemenis, we have several different
> customs. This is how it starts. The trend is awesome, especially for girls. They were
> fire in media. They were feeling so proud, they posted a lot of photos, which I was
> amazed at.

As in the case of the artists who combined images of Yemeni women in traditional

dress with the notion of Yemeni identity or culture, men and women made a similar move on

social media to contest the restrictions to women's dress codes. Although the guidelines

presented to tailors and vendors did not directly prevent women from dressing in a certain

way, many of my participants understood this action to be an express desire to curtail

women's freedoms. Hiba, for example, remarked on this but contested the power of Ansar

Allah to implement such restrictive politics.

> Before this new law came in, they already came up with different stuff and they
> weren't able to implement it, they had to go back on it quickly, because they don't
> have the power to do something which might provoke people against them. Especially
> in [those things related to] women. I remember one day when my Mum was driving
> the car and we were in the car, when the Houthis started the first time to rule the
> country. My mum was driving and one of the Houthis [was] in the street, it was the
> beginning of their colonial rule (*kan fī bidāya ḥaqqahum al-istimʿār*). They told my
> Mum, "Yalla drive, drive! This is your last time to drive, you will never drive again,
> driving is not for women," and so on. My mum said—I swear to God—she stopped

the car—my mum has a very, very, very tough and strong personality due to her work—after that she said, "I will drive, regardless of you and the ones who gave birth to you." *They cannot stop everything, the political things do not have a relationship with how people live.*

I understood this statement from Hiba to refer to the nature of social change, rather than an absolute statement about the separation between politics and lived reality. A number of my participants expressed similar sentiments as we discussed the role of politics in Yemen and the possibility of social transformation. They referenced cases where a law or policy was enacted but was powerless to change the behaviour of the people. This conveyed the sense that local cultures and customs ran deeper than new policies or laws. When Hiba says, "They [Ansar Allah] don't have the power" to change society she not only reveals her own political positionality, but also raises the question of civic agency in Yemen and where power lies in Yemeni society. If the possibility to resist Ansar Allah remains for their opponents in the north of Yemen and the protests which eventually ousted the former President Saleh indicate the potential to enact political change, can the same be said for the culture and customs of Yemen which are imagined to lie outside the political? In contesting or resisting the overbearing dress code of Ansar Allah in the north of Yemen, are women accepting an alternative form of bondage? What happens when women accept their role as representatives and preservers of a Yemeni national identity? Is the possibility of alternative forms of representing the idea of the nation being foreclosed? In this sense the idea of representing a Yemeni national culture in Cairo becomes entwined with women's own attempts to define the type of representing they want to do for themselves.

During a conversation with Hiba about her attitude towards clothing expectations, I asked her why sometimes people who do not feel obliged to wear a head covering still choose to do so. She shared the following:

> I don't care what I am going to wear, *kida kida* I am going to wear what I want. But since I want to have an impact, I will have it the way that my community will accept

it. It's impossible, see Jonathan, impossible. I saw it around me, whether in the campus here or outside. You are a Yemeni girl and you came to change your way. Let's take the simplest thing—let's not go to ideas—the way that you look, your clothes for example. If you went out in trousers and t-shirt to talk about the rights of women, to talk about religion, to talk about . . . I swear to God the people would never listen to you. They will never, even if you are going to give them [something] for free, they will never accept this. They will see it as, who are you to represent us as Yemenis? So I respect the context truly, I really respect it, because I'm advocating for something, I want to have an impact. I'm focusing on the impact I'm not focusing on my person.

Hiba's reasons for covering her head in public despite her own preference to no longer wear a hijab were justified by her desire to see societal transformation and her belief that she must continue to adopt customs or practices to which she personally no longer ascribes for the sake of being able to advocate on behalf of Yemenis. Here Hiba seems to suggest that there is a space for Yemeni women to represent Yemenis more generally as long as major taboos are not broken, in this case, the wearing of a head covering. Appearance and dress remains a key determiner of one's ability to participate in Yemeni society, even in Cairo, and especially for women. Of course, this also remains closely linked to social status and economic power.

Horse-riding on the Outskirts of the City

One evening two of my participants invite me to go horse-riding with them at a stable in the vicinity of Shaykh Zayed City. We take an Uber together and spend most of the car ride talking about the social changes taking place in Saudi Arabia over the past three or four years. Zeina, is Yemeni, although she has lived in Saudi Arabia for most of her life. Her grandfather was the first member of her family to migrate to Saudi Arabia for work. As the family are from Sana'a in the north it is likely that her family was part of the widespread labour migration to Saudi Arabia in the 1970s after the formation of the Yemen Arab Republic (Cohen and Lewis 1979; Swanson 1979 Carapico and Myntti 1991; Colton 1993).

Despite the family's long-term residency in Saudi Arabia, owing to the prohibitive naturalisation laws in the country, none of them have been able to take Saudi nationality. Instead they continue to be regarded as Yemeni, meaning that the family's children were not granted access to public university education and they could not afford the expensive private education. Instead, like many Yemenis living in Saudi Arabia, Zeina travelled to Yemen to study. There she became friends with Alaa who had organised our evening entertainment on the horses.

As we arrive at the paddocks a couple with a small child exit a car behind us. Later, after we had finished the horse riding and had returned back to the Arabian-style tent where we had tea and coffee, and which looked across the stables, Zeina and Alaa started talking about the other Yemenis they had seen here. They recognised the young family as Yemeni, because of the way that the wife was dressed. I told them that I thought the man "looked a bit Yemeni." They also agreed, but they said that the wife's clothing was the bigger indication. Taken together with Hiba's comments about the function of clothing in society, mentioned above, Alaa and Zeina's ability to discern from where the family hailed through the mother's dress, reveals how important a woman's appearance is, that she must be, or can be, readable in any given social context.

Later that evening, Alaa returns from the toilet with a surprised expression on her face. "There is a Yemeni family down there, by the restaurant. All the women are wearing the niqab, there are about four or five of them, and then some kids with a Yemeni man. I walked past as quickly as I could so that they wouldn't notice me." Zeina smiles and shakes her head. "Stop being stupid," she laughs. Later on, Alaa wants to go to the toilet again. She looks out of the tent. "What are you doing?" Zeina asks her. "I'm trying to see where the family has gone," Alaa replies, "I don't want them to see me." Alaa and Zeina are not covering their hair. As I have learned from my Yemeni participants in conversations about Yemen, it is

apparently unheard of for a Yemeni woman to go out in public in Yemen without some form of veil. Most will wear the niqab or even the burqa which covers the whole face. At the very least a woman's hair will be completely covered.

The wearing of the veil has been regarded as an "embodied spatial practice through which women are inserted into relations of power in society" (Secor 2005, 204). Such practices are unevenly spread across social space meaning that they are interpreted differently depending on the context. According to my participants, the norms of wearing a head covering in Cairo are spatially different from those found in Yemen. In moving from Yemen to Cairo, the spatial practices of veiling are multiplied, yet the persistence of social ties to Yemen and other Yemenis means that women must carefully consider their position vis-à-vis these informal regimes.

Alaa's anxiety appears to stem from the fact that she does not want to be recognised by the Yemeni family without covering her hair. Zeina is much more relaxed. She has not covered her hair since the relaxing of laws in Saudi Arabia and is encouraging Alaa to do the same. Alaa on the other hand, chooses to wear the veil when she goes out in public, despite the fact that her family would not mind if she chooses to dispense with it in Egypt. She feels that if she does not wear the veil then this would negatively affect her relationships with Yemenis in Egypt, and potentially Yemen, as people may be angry with her for not wearing it, may judge her morals, and could cause difficult social relations. Instead, she finds that by wearing the veil in public, she cuts out all of these challenges, and instead of losing social standing and relationships, in fact gains respect and acceptance. She says that it does not cost her anything to wear a scarf on her head, so why would she stop wearing it if it makes her life difficult?

The accounts provided by Hiba, Alaa, and Zeina, reveal the varied way that they navigate issues of dress and clothing in Cairo and their ability to play an active role in social

settings with other Yemenis. Oftentimes, my participants expressed pragmatism in their choice of clothing and decisions about whether or not to cover their hair. Far from being an issue of piety for them personally, these women regarded the wearing of the veil as a minor inconvenience that was not greater than their own desires to be instrumental in shaping the future trajectories of Yemenis, whether in Cairo or back in Yemen.

These narratives also reveal the women's own positionality within their social environments. As well-trained young professional women they are expected to think critically about women's social issues and among their peers in Cairo they experience a much more relaxed attitude to choices about personal piety and modesty. That is not to say these notions have never been present in Yemen. Alaa, who hails from Aden, reminded me that the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen instituted revisions to family law in South Yemen which were widely regarded as progressive at the time (Dahlgren 2013). Many in Aden pride themselves on their more positive approach to women's involvement in public life and in empowering women to participate in a variety of social roles.

Whether by virtue of their upbringing, family life, or education, Hiba, Alaa, and Zeina were all afforded a privileged social position from which to engage with this embodied spatial practice which connected their lives in Yemen and Cairo. In the next chapter, I explore in more depth the ways that Yemeni social time continues to invade life in Cairo. But for now, I turn to consider one final setting of Yemeni performance, the school.

Cultivating Experts of the Yemeni Nation

There is a commotion outside the office. Lamya, the director of a Yemeni School in Cairo, looks at her screen. Her expression changes as she realises the seriousness of the situation. She quickly gets up and leaves the office in the direction of the shouting. After

thirty seconds or so, one of the office assistants comes to close the door to the office. The shouting continues. Clearly this is not a situation the guest researcher should be privy to. I am left alone in the office for about ten minutes. I resist the temptation to watch what is happening on the monitor.

Earlier that morning, Lamya explained to me that the camera-feeds on her monitor allow her to watch the spaces of the school. "It's my responsibility to watch out for these children," she says, "there's no one else who will do it. I am the judge, the police, the teacher, and the friend to everyone who comes here. Each day, I have to put out the fires." Today's conflagration remains a mystery to me, as shortly after she returns to the office, Lamya politely wraps up our conversation and invites me to return another time.

Whatever the cause of the problem, it is clear that for Lamya, this is all in a day's work for the director of a Yemeni school. During our conversations together Lamya speaks of the particular difficulties that Yemeni children face in their education here. Not only are many coming from a situation of war and violence in Yemen, but many may not have had a positive experience of education before. Education has been severely affected by the conflict in Yemen and today there is a battle for the minds of the children as well, as curriculums become the means for disseminating alternative ideologies (Ghanem 2021).

For many Yemeni children, memories of education and schooling are laced with the disruptive force of violence. By way of an example, Lamya tells me that one student witnessed their father being shot outside the family home. Although he survived the attack, he was significantly incapacitated by the event. Other children at the Yemeni school have had similar experiences, witnessing death and destruction around them: rockets landing, buildings collapsing, and people being killed. For Lamya, the school becomes a space in which children can process how these events affect them. But it is not only the students who are dealing with the consequences of violent conflict. I spoke with Nourhan, a university

educated scientist now teaching English at the school. She had struggled to come to terms with the deaths of her neighbours, whose home was destroyed by a missile. In many ways, the essence of modern education appears inadequate to deal with such life experiences. What good is a quadratic equation for someone trying to make sense of the violence that drove them away from their country? It is within this context that I approach the idea of the Yemeni school as an affective space which combines with the concept of a Yemeni national identity to bind up or suture the wounds of the displaced Yemeni staff and students.

The Yemeni School where Lamya works is one of five Yemeni schools currently operating in Cairo. Three of these schools consist of two school-branches, meaning a total of eight school locations. The opening of schools based on national curriculums is not unique to Yemenis. Cairo is home to around 150 such schools.[13] Perhaps the main factor contributing to the existence of these schools is Egypt's policies on the education of non-nationals. Policies are guided by international and regional law, especially in the case of refugees and asylum seekers. Enrolment in Egyptian public schools is a possibility for Libyans, Sudanese, and some Palestinians but at a higher cost than Syrians and Yemenis who can enrol at the same cost and conditions as Egyptian students (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020). This marks a very limited range of nationalities that can access Egypt's public schooling system. In fact, the enrolment practices of schools can often be more exclusionary than these policies suggest, as the procedures do not account for the varied ways migrants arrive in Egypt.

Nabil, whose story I related in Chapter One, related to me his own frustrations at trying to enrol his sons in a local Egyptian school. He and his family had been forced to leave their home in Sana'a due to threats from members of Ansar Allah. He was able to take the most important family documents, like birth certificates, but his children's schooling

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13. Conversation with Elena Habersky, Project Coordinator for Dialogue on Migration Governance (DiaMiGo), Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, American University in Cairo, Egypt.

certificates were left behind. When he got to Egypt he discovered that his children would not be able to enrol without confirmation of their prior education in Yemen (see, Habersky, Hetaba-Sabry, and McNally 2023, 16). According to a number of my participants problems such as these contributed to the overall sense that "Egyptian schools do not accept Yemenis."

Many migrants view the Egyptian public schooling system negatively, as do many Egyptians themselves, leaving them with the option of enrolling their children in private institutions such as the Egyptian international schools which provide students with international-grade certifications but whose fees are very expensive, or the so-called community schools which, although still costly, provide students with their national curriculum. These migrant community schools have thus filled a gap in the local market, but their fees can be prohibitive for Yemenis who do not have the economic means to pay up to EGP 20,000 per student per year. Tuition fees vary depending on whether a student studies according to the English or Arabic language curriculum, and according to level of schooling, i.e., whether a student is studying at the primary school level or the secondary. Some participants identified the Yemeni School as being a school for the wealthier Yemeni families. However, Lamya was at pains to stress that the school shows a degree of flexibility in establishing the prices paid by each student's family: "Yes, the fees are expensive, but we also help many people out. For example, if someone has the card from UNHCR then we can reduce the price for them."

In the following, I discuss the ways in which national identifications were performed in the school and how the notion of Yemeni identity was discursively constructed. I also look at the ways my own positionality as a British researcher came to affect my interactions with participants at the school.

Performing Yemeni Identity in the School

The Yemeni School can be considered alongside the previous events discussed in this chapter, the anniversary celebration of Yemen's 1990 Unification in the Yemeni embassy and the "Light of Art" exhibition held in Cairo Opera House, as a space shaped around the performance of Yemeni national identity. A brief overview of the school's demographic makeup reveals that nearly all the students are Yemeni and perhaps half of the teachers are Yemeni, the rest of the teaching positions and a number of administrative positions being fulfilled by Egyptians. The curriculum used by the school is approved by Yemen's Ministry of Education.

For many parents, education and the Yemeni school become the means of creating Yemen away from the homeland, as the intangible aspects of Yemeni-ness—those Yemeni values and the Yemeni character—can be learned in an environment which celebrates Yemen. One morning, I was invited to attend a lesson about Yemeni civilisation. The lesson was taught by the school's history teacher, Rafiq, a native of Cairo. He presented a traditional historical reading of the formation of civilisations and their development over time. Interestingly though, Rafiq prefaced his lesson with a critique of the modernist approach to civilisations which discusses more or less advanced societies and civilisations, arguing that such discourse represented a latent racist approach.

At this moment I recognised the importance of my own national affiliations. Here I was, the western researcher from Britain carrying out my ethnographic observations in post-colonial Egypt amongst the descendants of Yemenis whose historical experience had been shaped by Britain's colonial intervention in Aden and the wider sphere of the Gulf in the nineteenth century. The encounter between the researcher and participants has elsewhere been described as a performance in which each party follows or deviates from a script and

approaches the other as an audience to one's own interests or "a potential ally for their own purposes" (Brigden 2018, 113). Indeed, the lesson itself came to feel very much like a performance as the standard scripts about Yemeni culture and civilization were presented. The central part of the lesson focused on the customs and traditions of Yemen. According to Rafiq, "The customs of the Yemeni people, or the traditions of the Yemeni people, which they hold onto until now—from the dawn of history until today—are a collection of numerous cultures, okay. And they have not changed at all. Just the opposite. If any change has occurred, then it has been a change for the better. The most important change was, of course, brought about by the advent of Islam." This perspective reads as the typical primordial nationalist position and can be challenged on a number of levels. The supposed continuity or unity of Yemeni culture comes under scrutiny given the continued dispute over Yemen's borders and the historical demarcations that could be made between regions of Yemen whose histories and customs do not necessitate the concept of a unified Yemeni identity.

What interested me about this lesson was the interaction between the Yemeni director, Lamya, and the Egyptian teacher, Rafiq. At a certain stage in proceedings, Rafiq expressed that he would not consider me, as a non-Muslim, in familial terms. Whereas with the Yemenis he was happy to consider them as brothers and sisters. Here, Lamya disputed his remarks, saying that Yemenis would consider me as their own. This, she later informed me, was a sign of Yemeni hospitality in distinction from the Egyptians. The lesson, which was initially framed as a discussion between the students and the teachers, soon devolved into a unidirectional lecture with both Lamya and Rafiq directly addressing me and sometimes calling upon the students to confirm their thoughts with examples. However, this alteration can be viewed as another aspect of the performance as the teachers engaged with the foreign researcher and the students participated as audience members watching on.

The Yemeni School plays an important role in building the idea of Yemeni difference in Cairo and is another venue for the performance of a Yemeni national identification. The school is presented as a means of preserving Yemeni identity for displaced Yemenis and those living in the West with limited access to Arabic language or Qur'anic education. The space of the school, the building, bears the symbols of two revolutions, thus complicating the idea of a unified simple Yemeni nation. Revolution and the overthrow of oppressive regimes become the rallying cry for Yemeni children from the north and south, with Ansar Allah posing as the latest oppressors. The curriculum and textbooks being used reflect the political aspirations of the former regime and stand in contrast to the textbooks recently published by Ansar Allah in the north. The school curriculum in Yemen has unsurprisingly become another sphere of conflict as different parties press their claims for political and religious legitimacy amongst the population, at home and abroad (Ghanem 2021).

Yet, just like the art exhibition, the Yemeni school reveals the tensions which arise when trying to sustain a Yemeni identity, as the school depends on external, transnational investment and must contend with globalized educational expectations and the continued spectre of familial, paternal, patriarchal modes of authority which appear to contradict the goals of the education offered. As Lamya shared with me after the lesson had ended, she recognised that she was performing a certain narrative for the class. The reason being that not all the children's parents would be agreeable to discovering that their children had been discussing the political situation in Yemen at one point in the lesson: "There are certain ways of talking about the situation that we have to stick to because of the parents. People's minds are not changed so easily."

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that national identifications, closely tied to the former political regime, continue to shape life in Cairo for many of my Yemeni participants. While they may not describe themselves as political and declaim any overtly political aspirations, my interlocuters and the spaces they engaged, reproduced national imaginaries which, given the years of conflict in Yemen, can be conceived as fragile. The contestation of such practices as found in the Yemeni art exhibition, or during the anniversary celebration of Unification at the embassy, takes place in a subtle fashion, as overt displays of difference are viewed as divisive and quickly shut down. As my research shows, and in line with previous theories about the nature of politics in Yemen, social and cultural practices are reshaped as venues of the political, meaning, not only, that Cairo is a highly political space for Yemenis, in the sense that it is close to official state-linked politics, but it is also a highly stratified space. The connections one has, or one's family has, are the key to opening up relations of power and incorporation into systems of decision-making. Conversely, without connections, politics takes place behind closed doors and the sense of disenfranchisement amongst young men and women is keenly felt among my participants. Their limited presence in the space of the embassy suggests that the political sphere offers little hope for them contributing to the future direction of their country.

As the signs for peace talks become ever more discernible on the horizon, this is significant. Previous political discussions like the National Dialogue Conference were ineffective owing to the underrepresentation of some parties, chiefly the youth who had been a major part of the protest movement which saw the end of President Saleh's rule (Yadav 2022). Alongside this was the post-conference deal-making which took place behind closed doors and appeared to serve only political elites. Given the persistence of narratives tied to

the former regime which underpinned much of their legitimacy through the creation of a unified nationalist imaginary, one must ask whether the issues which led to Yemen's current crisis are seriously being addressed?

In many cases it appears that the narratives being sustained in the Yemeni school or which are reproduced, albeit in a contested fashion, at the Yemeni art exhibition, do not appear to do real justice to the important and real grievances espoused by many of my participants and echoed by others in Yemen. For that reason, many of my younger participants were actively engaged in civic institutions, such as the community centres, or working for non-governmental organisations supporting migrants and asylum seekers in Cairo. They have lost trust in the political elite to build any meaningful transformation of the political landscape, let alone the social. In the final chapter, I build on some of these issues through the analytical lens of time.

The Reach of 'Yemeni-Time' in Cairo

> Is there anything more plausible than a second hand? And yet it takes only the smallest pleasure or pain to teach us time's malleability. Some emotions speed it up, others slow it down; occasionally, it seems to go missing—until the eventual point when it really does go missing, never to return.
>
> —Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*

What are we talking about when we talk about time? And why does thinking about time help us to understand the lives of Yemeni people living in Cairo? A straightforward understanding of time separates the phenomenal from the physical. Phenomenal time describes the way a subject experiences time, while physical time is connected with 'factual' events occurring in time-space. Often regarded as 'real time,' it is physical time which appears as measurable, as with the movement of the sun and the passing of the seasons (Acedera and Yeoh 2019). The concept of time's multiplicity on the other hand, a common belief in contemporary academia, arises from the multiple positions a subject may take to perceive and conceptualise time. That is, how a person organises the perception of events in time. For example, when a person organises events with sequential structuring, placing them one after the other, is that person merely describing physical time or actually imposing a structure onto physical time to build meaning and give context to their lived experience?

The challenge in conceptualising temporality lies in how readily we regard the ticking of the clock as the background to our days. The second hand marches ever onwards. Yet as Julian Barnes' narrator in *The Sense of an Ending* suggests, the malleability of time is manifest in the pleasures and pains of our lived experience. Veena Das (2007) has argued that "the particular mode in which the subject is immersed in the temporal shapes the contour of

the event" (97). Meaning that, in some sense, the subject's temporal immersion constitutes the nature of the event itself. In this light, I see Das's comment complementing the argument of Henri Lefebvre (1991) about the production of space, whereby physical space cannot be reduced to a neutral void in which subjects act. Rather, the very social space we inhabit is produced by social beings interacting with one another and the 'already-there' space they encounter.

In the previous chapter I discussed how certain national identifications were performed in three different Cairo settings. I began to explore the importance of particular national symbols and their entanglement with the political narrative of the former General People's Congress regime and broader societal dynamics, giving special attention to the issue of women's representation in Cairo. In this chapter, I draw out the implications of these Yemeni identifications to explore how Yemeni lives in Cairo continue to be shaped from afar. I explore how Yemen's social spaces, of which temporality is a key component, come to inflect and impinge upon people in Cairo when they travel outside the bounds of the physical and political territory. That is to ask, how does 'Yemeni-time' reach into and pervade the time of life in Cairo? But given the forgoing chapters, I further investigate the effects of 'Cairo-time' on Yemeni lives here in the city. The institutions of the state continue to impose a profound challenge to the temporality of Yemeni migrants in Cairo. How does this temporality connect with Yemeni transnationalism and the experience of asylum seekers? In order to answer these questions I discuss three overlapping senses of time: 'marital time,' that is how the social expectation of marriage is realised in the lives of men and women from Yemen; 'honour time,' how relationships of honour determine and shape migration trajectories; and 'bureaucratic time,' how the Egyptian state imposes its own timeframes on the lives of migrants and asylum seekers in Cairo. I begin with an overview of some pertinent points raised in the literature regarding the discussion of time and temporality in migration.

Temporality and Migration

The study of temporality has gained ever more prominence as an analytical category of migration and the migration experience. Cwerner (2001) explicitly called for greater attention to the temporal aspects of the migratory experience when he discussed several overlapping concepts to field an expansive framework for approaching temporality. Cwerner's research touched upon ideas such as temporal alienation, the extension of national temporalities, and the liminality of migrant life, to understand how migrants experienced varying temporalities as they moved between their country of origin and destination—in his research, from Brazil to the UK. His work built on the approach of Roberts (1995) who had discussed the concept of the temporariness of migrant life. Roberts distinguished between those migrants who foresaw a swift return to their origin country and those who did not. These temporal expectations held implications for the 'present' actions undertaken by migrants, including their economic choices and their management of social networks (c.f. Syed Zwick 2022). Such an approach highlighted the role that migrants' own temporal imaginations of the future intersected with the materiality of their migration.

In the years since, the literature on migration has continued to use temporalities as a facile approach to understanding the lived experiences of migrants. In particular, a number of scholars have explored the temporality of citizenship practices, a key concern for many migrants. The ability of a migrant to become a citizen, enact citizenship practices, or simply their legal juxtaposition vis-à-vis the local population in a destination country, are all linked to temporalities. Cwerner (2001, 21) used the term "heteronomous time" to describe that time which is experienced by the migrant as oppressive; time which is marked by closures for the migrant and invariably linked to the apparatuses of the state and systems of migration governance and control. The production of technologies of biopower is a key concept in this

area and the control of mobility through 'paper' has come to the fore (Gaibazzi 2014; Markó 2016; Ghosh 2019; Piot with Batema 2019). Pascucci (2016) has studied the materiality of "heteronomous time" with reference to Somali transnational migrants in Cairo. Disrupted time becomes the main way in which life is experienced in the city. It is in the very materiality of the humanitarian and asylum system, argues Pascucci, that time is disrupted or punctuated. Here Pascucci trains her eye on the physical documents which signify a person's status as a refugee and are symbolic of the legal precarity of refugees in the international protection system. Temporality is, thus, co-constituent of materiality.

Asides from the disrupted temporalities through which life in Cairo becomes characterised by the response to 'everyday emergencies' which can prompt forms of transnational solidarity (Pascucci 2016), scholars have considered how asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants are made to wait (Conlon 2011). The temporality of the global north and the asylum practices established in places like the European Union predominantly impose times of waiting upon people from the global south (Mountz 2011; Schuster 2011). To a certain extent, and notwithstanding the continued permeability of European borders, the EU's policy of border externalisation has successfully managed to keep large numbers of people in place and at arm's length. However, for some the waiting occurs in the place of asylum or migration. Griffiths (2014) argues that the immigration system in the UK has created temporal uncertainty and discord for deportable migrants (c.f. De Genova 2010). This is experienced as "a disjuncture between people (for example refused asylum seekers feeling outside the 'normal' time of mainstream society) and as a contradiction felt by individuals between different aspects of their lives (e.g. immigration detainees simultaneously contending with imminent change and endless waiting)" (Griffiths 2014, 1992). Griffiths contrasts waiting (which she describes as "sticky time") with the frantic temporality of accelerated mobility regimes which can fast-track the procedures of deportation and removal

(1999). The unpredictability of these diverging temporalities poses problems for the migrant who is unable to anticipate or plan for the future. When even the uncertainty surrounding the length of one's waiting becomes an indeterminate aspect of lived experience it is unsurprising that the minds and bodies of asylum seekers suffer (2005).

What this reveals is the use of temporal uncertainty as a method of governmentality, and the imposition of disrupted time through protracted periods of waiting as a means of ensuring the passivity of undesired populations. However, this should not be regarded as the complete submission of the migrant subject to the powers of the state. In waiting there is much to be done. As Alison Mountz (2011, 383) writes with respect to migrants in situations of enforced waiting in spaces of detention in the liminal zone between nation-states, "Migrants wait here, but they also organize, network, speak out and use technology to garner attention and collaborate." Although nation-state temporalities can suspend time for migrants, the possibility of challenging their imposition remains.

Finally, there is the matter of how temporalities traverse space, travelling with the migrant, or suddenly interrupting life from afar. James Clifford (1994) described the potential for diasporas to inhabit alternative space-times. Alice Elliot's (2021) key contribution to this discussion of time, is that the disruption of temporality by *l-brra* (the outside) is experienced by those who have not migrated. Her study argues that migration has come to pierce the most intimate aspects of villagers' lives in the Tadla, Morocco. Her participants use the concept *l-brra* in a variety of ways to denote "a geopolitical space and an 'imaginary elsewhere' (Yurchak 2005), a metaphor for technological and human advancement and a bureaucratic system erratically regulating the comings and goings of loved ones, a space of hope and possibility and an entity that can affect people's well-being and sanity" (Elliot 2021, 7). The simplicity of *l-brra* as an explanatory concept means that it stretches and morphs, yet it resists equivalence to modernity or globalization. Of importance for the present study is the

power of *l-brra* to reorder and reshape the temporal lives of people spatially distant from its centres of power. This speaks, not only to the temporal and affective quality of bureaucratic regimes, but also to the transversal possibilities of other temporalities.

I seek to build on this idea that distant regimes or imagined spaces can intimately impact people's lives and extend Cwerner's (2001) use of "asynchronous time" as an extension of national temporality seen in transnational communication and national festivals, to include the societal expectations that reach into the lives of Yemenis in Cairo.

Yemeni 'Marital Time' in Cairo

I arrived for my meeting with Riham in Ard el-Lewa a little late. Riham—in her late thirties and working at an Non-Governmental Organisation assisting refugees and asylum seekers in the city—was waiting for me in a local Yemeni initiative called Amgad al-Yemen. I found Riham sitting in the corner of the reception, speaking to someone on her phone. She continued her conversation as she got up and made her way to a classroom, down a short corridor. After finishing her phone call, Riham apologised for not greeting me properly when I arrived. We sat across from one another on plastic chairs, a low table between us and I started by asking Riham to share the story of how she came to Cairo, beginning with her life in Yemen. The story she shared was marked by a number of important events, including the death of her father when she was just one year old and the breakdown of her marriage. As I listened, it became clear to me that her story was centred around her desire to provide for her children's needs whatever the cost.

Riham was living in Aden when her future husband asked for her hand in marriage. He had to go to Sana'a to visit her guardian, the brother of her father, who had assumed responsibility for Riham after her father's death. After receiving her uncle's blessing for their

marriage, the couple were married in Sana'a before returning to Aden to live together. There were nine years between them. She felt that this age difference was important for her, that she would have someone to support her, to inspire her:

> The most important thing in getting married is stability (*istiqrār*), the building of a family. Of course, each individual has needs. A man needs a woman, and women need men. Perhaps in my case, I needed a man, because I was feeling the loss of my father. When I was little I went to the market with my mother. I saw all these men wearing their blazers. I turned to Mum, pulled on her abaya, and said, "Buy me a dad, buy me a dad." I thought that perhaps a father was something that could be bought. When she explained this wasn't the case, I went home and cried and cried.

The desire for stability is commonly expressed amongst Egyptian and Yemeni men and women who are of marriageable age. *Istiqrār* generally denotes the sense of stability provided when a man and woman marry and start a household together. Stability obtains through the fulfilment of religious and cultural duties. A *ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muhammad says, "When a man marries he has fulfilled half of the religion; so let him fear God regarding the remaining half."[1] The shortened version, "Marriage is half of religion" (*al-jawāz nuṣ al-dīn*), is a familiar refrain amongst Muslims in Cairo and getting married is an expectation incumbent upon everyone who is able. As Riham noted, though, stability has deeper meanings on an individualised level. She regarded the early death of her father as highly consequential for her personal needs in later life. Her marriage to a man nine years older than her, was a means for her to receive the fatherly care that she so desperately missed as a child.

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1. A *ḥadīth* generally refers to the sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad which were circulated by the early Muslims in order to imitate his example. Learning *ḥadīth* reports has always been a central element of Muslim life, and the collected corpus of reports is a foundational source for all Islamic intellectual disciplines.

Stretching Marital Time

In Yemen, and today in Cairo, it remains common practice for marriages to be arranged between two families: "In a kin-based social order, marriages are far too important to be left to individuals" (Abu-Lughod 2013, 117). Although the concept of "passionate love" exists in Yemeni society it is not thought to be a stable foundation for marriage through which two families of equivalent social standing will be united and a new household formed (Caton 2013, 188). The importance of marriage for fulfilling one's religious obligations is coupled with the idea that marriage is the event through which one enters into adult life (Caton 2013, 198). Marriage is therefore bound with one's temporal experience and the timing of one's marriage has implications that reach beyond the immediate husband and wife relationship to affect the performance of gender roles in Yemeni society. However, the temporal realities of marriage are malleable and can be adjusted. In general, women from higher socio-economic backgrounds may have more power to negotiate the 'time' of their marriage with their families. Pursuing tertiary education has become a common means of delaying a woman's marriage, although there exists a general expectation that marriage will only be postponed until graduation (van Oorschot 2013, 11). Several of my participants cited pursuing further education as a strategy to "buy more time" with their families and to delay getting married.

In July 2022, a man had approached Zeina's father to ask for her hand in marriage. The man appeared very respectable to her father and a promising match for his daughter. The family decided they would introduce the man to Zeina as a potential suitor. She was not as enamoured as her parents. Zeina tried to communicate to her family that she did not want to marry this man, but they told her she was being fussy, and that she was exaggerating her concerns. In fact, what Zeina understood to be an introductory meeting between the

prospective couple, actually turned out to be a "Reading of the *Fātiḥa*." Sura *al-Fātiḥa*, often referred to simply as *al-Fātiḥa*, is the first chapter of the Qur'an and its reading marks the first step for a couple on their way to marriage. It can be considered something akin to a betrothal. Zeina was understandably shocked by this turn of events.

Since then, Zeina and her fiancé have only met a couple of times, but they communicate regularly regarding their upcoming nuptials. "He has been very polite, whenever I speak with him. But I'm scared. I feel that marriage is difficult. What if he turns out to be a different person to the one I know? I'm scared." Zeina's fears are linked to her sister's experience of marriage which ended soon after it had begun and with the ignominy of having been cheated upon. Her sister, Fatima, had married for love. However, after just one month of marriage, she had caught her husband cheating on her with another woman. Her husband, a football player, was sorry. Yet the indiscretions became a regular occurrence, and eventually Fatima drew the line and separated from him. She was left looking after their newly born child as a single mother in Yemen.

The fact that Fatima had married for love was a sure reason that Zeina's father wanted a say in her marriage, she told me. "My father had been suspicious of Fatima's husband. When he knew about my sister's intention to marry him, he told her that he was not a good man. He tried to dissuade her from marrying him, but in the end he relented and allowed the marriage to go ahead. He will not let the same fate happen to me." Zeina understood her father's desire for her to marry was coming from a good heart, however, she feared being incompatible with her prospective groom.

Changing Ideas about Marriage and Intimacy

Emotional intimacy and marital love are part of the experience of gender. Differentiated gender roles in the context of love and companionate marriage have been analysed as subjects of material power structures which act upon the emotions of men and women in relationships (Scheper-Hughes 1992), and more recently how marriage and sexuality are being redefined by global political economy (Padilla et al. (eds.) 2007). Married couples, and partners who are emotionally intimate, are daily contesting and negotiating culturally and socially bound inequalities with respect to their gender. Anthropological and ethnographic research has more recently considered the ways in which an ideal of "emotional intimacy" has spread around the world. Marriage, or long-term relationships, are increasingly realised through companionship and as a project of personal fulfilment (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). Men and women are working together in pursuit of pleasure, happiness, and desired futures. Yet not everyone is able to achieve these 'ideals' and experience this modern love (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006, 6). Differing socio-economic conditions mean that the pursuit of companionate marriage is not feasible for everyone, just as the ideal itself is not always granted the status of a 'cultural value.'

However, the pervasiveness of such global marital ideals has been questioned. As Alice Elliot (2021, 103) has argued with respect to young women in Morocco, conjugal desires and gendered selves are conceived in the acts and processes of translating external ideals. Ideas about romantic love and companionship are not simply transported transnationally, but rather translated through their embodiment and are interpreted anew, in ways which engage with the particular local, generational, religious and gendered cosmologies or ideas about life (Elliot 2021, 103). As such, Yemeni men and women in Cairo are not merely vessels for modern liberal notions of emotional intimacy, any more than they

are bearers of traditional marriage customs. Rather, they are engaged in the messy and embodied process of navigating the expanding and/or contracting possibilities of love and desire which their varying degrees of social connection afford.

Returning to Zeina's situation, we see that her own uncertainties about her prospective marriage arise in the matrix between traditional expectations of marriage between Yemenis and the desire for emotional intimacy with someone she can share her life with. Zeina remarked on the age difference between her and her fiancé which incurred with it different generational perspectives about marriage:

> You know, his age is suitable for marriage. He is forty-one (Zeina is twenty-seven). But we are from different generations. In his opinion, marriage is about stability (*istiqrār*), about starting a household. He wants me to get pregnant straight away. I told him, 'No. I want at least two years, before we start a family.' . . . I am thinking about the difference between our ages, because maybe he will die sooner than me and leave me on my own.

Zeina's concerns reflect the difficulties that some of my other female participants experience as they try to negotiate marriage. There are the expectations of the suitable 'times' for marriage, as well as the expected 'times' for having children. Zeina shared her concern that there was a generational divide between her and her future husband, reflected in the difference between her own desires for marriage and the actual marriage she was entering into. The notion of stability and the founding of a new household, which is important to how many Yemenis have perceived marriage, were not rejected by Zeina outright. Rather she sought to negotiate or adapt these expectations to her own desires or aspirations for her life. For Zeina, the ideal marriage was a partnership between two people who see one another as companions for life. She wants someone to travel with, someone who will help her grow as a person and in her professional life.

Coming to Cairo was a means of creating some distance between herself and this difficult situation. But, it was also part of a larger strategy she was mulling over, to use

further studies to give herself more time to find a more permanent solution to her marriage 'problem.' "If I can enrol in a Master's program here [in Cairo], then I can at least postpone the marriage by saying that I need to finish my studies. Maybe, in that time I can talk to my family. Or perhaps I could travel to America and get away for good." For Zeina, moving to Cairo allows her to better manage the temporal expectations of her impending marriage and to negotiate the terms of her marriage. She is hopeful that the separation between her and her family will lead to a postponement or pausing of the marital clock. Although, until now, she remains unsure about her life's trajectory and whether she will have to go through with the marriage.

Certainly, it is not only Yemeni women who must deal with marital temporalities in Cairo. Marriage is also incumbent upon Yemeni men and many of my male participants also spoke with me about their experiences of these time constraints. One of the most important aspects of marriage from a male perspective is the ability of the groom and his family to provide for his wife and the new household which their marriage will create. This begins with the payment of the *sharṭ*, which goes to the bride's family, and the payment of the *mahr*, which goes to the bride herself, the amount being decided by the bridal family's social status (Caton 2013, 189). Material provision, then, is largely the responsibility of the husband and Yemeni men will need to secure work to allow them to marry in the first place, and then to sustain the family's living into the future. The following encounter highlights how some of my male Yemeni participants experience the effects of Yemeni marital temporality in Cairo.

One evening in Faisal, I had dinner with Omar, whose experience of transnational Yemeni life I discussed in Chapter One. We made our way back from the restaurant to Rashad's office where we found him in a meeting with three young men. Omar and I stood in the doorway. "Which one of you is the groom?" Omar asked them. It was clear to him that they must be discussing plans for a wedding. Rashad was responsible for arranging the

wedding parties of many Yemenis in Cairo. The men pointed to the eldest-looking one. "Congratulations!" said Omar, with a beaming smile. "What about you?" they asked Omar, "Are you married?" "No," he replied. "What do you do for work?" they asked. Omar explained that he worked as a tutor teaching English. The men seemed to understand that this was a respectable form of work with a good income. "So, why aren't you married? You are a teacher, surely you have earned enough to get married." Without any hesitation Omar replied, "Marriage is for stupid people!"

Later that night, at about 1:00 AM, Omar and I were standing in the street talking with Rashad and Qasem as they waited for a microbus to arrive to carry them homeward. We talked a little about marriage. "For Yemenis, marriage is about food and sex," Omar said. "Yemeni men want a woman who can cook them food, wash their clothes, and please them in bed." The men laughed. With a wry smile, Rashad shook his head, "Don't tell him that. He is writing about Yemenis: do you want him to get the wrong impression?"

After saying goodbye to Rashad and Qasem, Omar and I walked towards his home on King Faisal Street and he explained to me his views on life and marriage. "For me, life is two things: chaos and routine. Either everything is going on around you and you face disaster after disaster, or every day is the same. I want something different, I want something to change." As we talked more about what this change could look like, Omar's thoughts turned to marriage. Despite his protests that marriage was for stupid people, he expressed his longing for a partner to live life his life with. It was not that he considered marriage to be a futile, more that he regarded the 'Yemeni ways' of thinking about marriage as unsuitable and outdated.

By way of an example, Omar shared with me that his mother was thirteen when she had married his father, who had been either twenty-six or twenty-seven. Omar's mother gave birth to her first child at the age of sixteen. Although, the acceptable age of marriage has been

changing for some time amongst Yemenis (it is much less common for someone to marry a girl under fifteen years of age nowadays), the marriage of teenagers still takes place. Omar was clear at this point, that it was impossible for him to imagine marrying someone so young—he is now thirty-one years old. In fact, he had repeatedly refused offers of marriage arranged by his father for girls in their early twenties over the last few years: "Some of my sisters are teenagers, how could I marry someone the same age as them? They are still children."

Omar's experience of changing expectations in marriage between his generation and the generation of his parents, reveals the changes occurring in Yemeni society and the alternative ways of thinking about love and marriage. For Omar, an arranged marriage was something that he had trouble accepting, not because he was opposed in principle, but rather because he felt his family were not in the position to arrange a suitable proposition for him.

Yemeni 'Honour-Time' in Cairo

In the context of forced displacement, women have often been studied as victims of sexual violence, essentialising women as peaceful, innocent, vulnerable victims, and men as inherently violent, who prey on such women (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2014). The violence that women experience at the hands of men must continue to be the focus of research and should not be disregarded, despite the problematic dichotomies which can sometimes be produced. Matters of gender violence and can be studied from various perspectives to determine how and why the victimisation of women occurs, who perpetuates such depictions, and in what contexts does this occur.

In Cairo, I spoke to a handful of Yemeni women who shared with me their experiences of sexual harassment in their journeys to Cairo and whilst living in the city. Here

I relate their experiences and set their stories in the context of women's experiences of life in Yemen. As they shared with me their accounts, these women made frequent mention of 'honour,' which at times appeared as the underlying principle guiding the events they experienced. They wanted me to understand how their experience of honour differed with that of their male counterparts.

I met Nehal at a café in Muhandiseen. She was in her mid-twenties and from the south of Yemen. She had come to Egypt to study at Cairo University in Giza. In Yemen, she had been a high-achieving student and had even received some foreign-aid scholarships to study English and pursue a university education. Although she had some relatives living in Sixth of October City, which lies on the western outskirts of Cairo, Nehal decided to live alone closer to the university. During our conversation together, Nehal remarked that her first year in Cairo had been a difficult time for her. I later returned to this point to ask her about what had made this period so difficult in her experience? It was clear that, upon asking this question, Nehal was thinking hard about what to say. I interpreted this as her deciding how much to share with me, weighing up in her mind whether she should or not. It was clear that whatever made this period difficult for her was not easily talked about.

Before sharing her personal experience, Nehal framed what was to come by talking in general about Yemeni women facing difficult challenges in Cairo. She talked about how 'things' happen amongst the Yemeni community that you could not believe. Nehal later clarified for me that she was talking specifically about single women from Yemen, as women who travelled with their families did not generally experience the same difficulties. Nehal was concerned with how male Yemenis "used" single Yemeni women. Eventually, Nehal took the plunge and went onto disclose that an influential Yemeni man with good connections to Yemen had sexually assaulted her. This man had helped Nehal to make connections with other Yemenis upon her arrival to Cairo, providing her with local contacts working in the

humanitarian sector, in which Nehal later hoped to work. Nehal had been so thankful to receive such support. Despite her strong resolve, when she arrived in Cairo she was worried that she had overestimated her ability to survive on her own. The man's assistance allowed her to settle into Cairo life quickly and provided her with numerous opportunities to begin to fulfil her ambitions for her time here.

However, after one month, the man's behaviour toward her started to change. He became more informal in his dealings with her. He would send more messages to her. Poems and compliments started to flow. Then, one day, he invited Nehal to his office so that they could discuss something together. At some point they found themselves alone and it was there in his office that the man tried to force himself upon Nehal. Nehal resisted and refused and she was able to remove herself from the situation and made her way home. However, this was not the end of her ordeal. The man began to threaten her. He sent her messages saying that he would spread rumours about her back in Yemen. Nehal explained how this was the source of her dreadful year, which even now she struggles to believe that she was able to survive. Nehal described herself coming to Cairo as a shining flower. That flower was broken by this man. Understandably, Nehal was not only fearful about what this man might do to her relationships here in Cairo, but also back home in Yemen. She said that she had not told anyone about what had happened to her in Cairo. Not even her closest friends.

In a study on the transnational experience of shame, Papoutsi et al. (2022, 1237) argue that transnational migration conjures a stretched temporal existence which pervades the present in the form of "memories, cultural practices, and social norms" and spans the times and distances between the locations of violent events and destinations of migrant journeys. The experience of shame can become a powerful mechanism in silencing those who have experienced sexual or gender based violence. The entanglement of social practices and norms from a person's country of origin, yet separated from its temporality can undermine a

person's ability to recover. In Nehal's case her dislocation from Yemen meant that she could not draw upon her usual resources for navigating the aftermath of such an event. Furthermore, she still spatially inhabited the location of her assault yet also had to contend with the dislocated effects of any rumours spread about her reputation in Yemen. The enmeshed temporality of Nehal's migration meant that shame, and the fear of shame, became overwhelming for her.

Another of my participants shared with me her experience of harassment along her fragmented journey to Cairo. At the outbreak of war in 2015, Rana, a single mother in her late thirties, was living and managing her business in Aden. Her husband had separated from her, leaving her to look after their three children, about five years earlier. Rana loved her life but became wary of staying too long in Yemen with the increasing violence of the war. In her opinion, the Saudi-led coalition was indiscriminate in its bombing campaigns and nowhere was completely safe. A Yemeni friend in Canada was willing to send her an invitation for her to go to Canada with her children. But in order to do that she needed to get to an embassy. The war meant that this was not possible in Yemen and so the best place for her to go was Saudi Arabia.

Rana described conditions at the Yemen-Saudi border as horrific. People fleeing the war were forced to sleep outside as they waited for their papers to be processed. Rana was fortunate to be able to enter not long after she arrived, and eventually lived in Saudi Arabia for two years. She applied to travel at the Canadian embassy but was ultimately turned down for a visa. She took it upon herself to find a job in Saudi Arabia in order to support her children. They were enrolled in a school set up for Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. They were very welcoming to her children but the level of education they received was poor. However, other schooling options were unavailable or too expensive.

Rana worked in three businesses during her stay, however, at each she faced harassment from her employers. She linked this directly to her status as a single mother. When this came up in interviews, the male interviewers would immediately pick up on this. So where is your husband? You are alone here? Very soon offers of marriage would be made. Some offered for her to be their second or third wife. Others pestered her to a "customary marriage" (*zawāj ʿurfī*) which is not strictly permissible in Islamic law and is oftentimes used as a means of giving credibility to a sexual relationship outside of marriage. Still others simply offered her money in exchange for sex.

Rana told me that she would return from work, or from interviews, and cry in her house. She did not want her children to see her so upset, but it was hard to control her emotions. She was in a vulnerable position. Rana quickly learned that she would have to hide the fact of her separation. She began to tell men that her husband was in Yemen working. That he visited every now and then. She also took to wearing a *dibla*, a wedding band, on her finger. This would be a sign of her unavailability. Of course, she said, this did not stop men from harassing her, but it added to the story that she was a married woman and therefore not available to be married again.

Later I asked her about who these men were. One was a Saudi Arabian businessmen who genuinely seemed interested in marrying her, although as his second wife. Another Saudi Arabian seemed only interested in having sex with her. Another, was a Palestinian man, who was constantly asking her to marry him. Rana explained that it was hard to deal with this man's approaches. "We have always been taught to have sympathy for the Palestinians. When we see a Palestinian we honour them (lit. raise them up on our heads). When, he kept pestering me I controlled myself and did not want to upset him." Rana's response couples the vulnerabilities faced by migrants and asylum seekers in country's outside their home with societal narratives about men and women's roles. In the situation

with the Palestinian business owner, Rana felt compelled to control herself and not to let her frustrations upset the man. However, she did not expect the man to control himself. In fact, it is very common for women to keep quiet in such situations, not least because the consequences can often be worse for women than for men. However, Rana also endured harassment because she was trying to provide for her children. The precarity of her situation meant that losing employment could mean harm for her and her children. This directly affected her response towards those harassing her:

> The first man was the director of the business and he was already married. I tried to speak in a way that would not make him angry, to speak without being harsh. I needed to work and I didn't want to lose my job. This business helped people to travel to Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage and I felt that this was satisfying work: to help people visit the Holy city. However, this man was not trustworthy. He wouldn't pester me in work but outside of work he would call me. . . He didn't try to do anything illegal but still it was too much.

Here we see how Rana altered her own behaviour to maintain her employment whilst also trying to deter her harasser. Indeed, she was in an almost impossible situation having to balance the needs of family and her own safety and wellbeing. This was coupled with the fact that this man's behaviour towards her was not becoming of a man who was helping people make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Although the nature of the work should have been uplifting for Rana, she was faced with the pressure of rebuffing her boss's advances. This added to Rana's sense that "it was all too much."

Stories about Honour

These accounts of sexual harassment were retold alongside other stories about the way in which women's honour was dealt with in Yemen. For example, Nehal told the story of a girl in a village who had been the centre of a rumour about having a relationship with a man. When the father heard about this rumour he immediately went and killed her and buried

her that day. Of course, Nehal reasoned, this was a man from the village, he may not have known any better. Nehal made use of this narrative to explain what it would mean for a rumour to be spread about a woman. Even the hint of impropriety could be a death sentence for a Yemeni woman. This explained her own anxiety and fear during her first year in Cairo. What would happen if the man who had assaulted her had acted on his threat to besmirch her reputation amongst the Yemeni community? What would happen to her? Her family?

When I asked other participants about the meaning of honour (*sharaf*) they also shared similar stories to that shared by Nehal. It seemed as though each person had their own narrative with which to illustrate the concept of honour. For example, when I was speaking with Rashad one day, he shared a story which had taken place in his hometown, Ibb. A father had taken his unmarried teenage daughter to the hospital for a routine medical check-up. As they were waiting for the results of the various tests she had undergone, a nurse approached them with some documents. "Congratulations on the pregnancy," she beamed, as she handed over the papers. "Pregnancy?" the father asked, "What pregnancy?" Without hesitating, he unsheathed his *janbiyya* (dagger) and plunged the blade into his daughter's chest, in a fit of rage. The daughter bled out in the hospital reception. It later turned out that the nurse, whether out of tiredness or distraction, had handed over the wrong test results. The man's teenage daughter was not pregnant. As Rashad concluded this story he said, "Unfortunately, this is how some people deal with these issues, there is not even a moment's pause to check what has happened. They consider *sharaf* to be so serious an issue that it must be resolved immediately."

Nehal also related a story about how her father had been called upon by his family to resolve a rumour of impropriety about one of his nieces. He was responsible for his brother's children because his brother is not of sound mind (this is according to Islamic law). Her father did not react by going and killing his niece, instead he investigated the situation and

talked to the various members of the family. It turned out that there were disagreements between the male cousins and female cousins which had prompted the men to start a rumour about this particular cousin. It was essentially a quarrel among cousins which had escalated. In the end, Nehal's father rebuked and admonished the male cousins. Did these male cousins know the seriousness of their actions? Nehal was making the point that the honour of a woman is so important for a family that even if she has not done something, if there is merely a rumour, it is enough to irrevocably alter a woman's standing in society to the extent that she must die. Only her death can satisfy the impropriety.

In these stories of *sharaf* (honour) there are a number of features which become apparent, of which the temporal dimensions stand out. The speed with which matters of honour must be resolved is a common feature of the stories I heard. Those who act decisively in restoring a family's honour do so swiftly and without hesitation. There is not a moment to lose. Hiba's story about her own family adds contrast to this image. Her father took a more methodical, and one might say, more rational approach to determining this matter. Yet the overriding sense given through these stories is the swiftness with which a woman's life can be ended for a matter that may not have occurred in space. Here, the work of rumour can prove hugely consequential.

Of course, Nehal said, in Yemen, it is not acceptable for a man to attempt to rape someone. This is also a matter of honour. If a father found out that his son had done something like this he may kill him. But in Cairo, in Nehal's opinion, Yemeni men seemed to be less constrained by the reach of Yemeni society. Was it the case that Yemeni men could be freer in Cairo than Yemen? In her own experience, of course, a Yemeni man had used his position and influence not only to create an opportunity for exploiting Nehal, but also to cover up his own dishonourable actions. This gives the sense that the reach of Yemeni social temporalities continues to replicate the power of men, even in Cairo.

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Does this mean that Yemeni women are doomed to face the same conditions of social experience as in Yemen? Maysa Ayoub (2017) has argued that exile in the event of displacement can have an emancipatory effect for women, albeit one that is highly dependent on social class. Ayoub's study challenges the perception that women's vulnerability is contingent on pre-existing gender roles. Nehal told me that there are a number of Yemeni women who live in Cairo through money from their husbands, who are working in the United States or in Saudi Arabia. These women, she said, frequent bars and clubs, smoke *shisha*, and drink alcohol. In fact, there is a place in Muhandiseen that is renowned as the place where these Yemeni women go. Whether or not this can be considered as emancipation is a matter that some of my female participants were keen to contest. It is also difficult to pinpoint the reason why these women can enjoy the freedom to participate in a lifestyle that would be considered by many as dishonourable. Is it a matter of their distance from Yemeni society temporally-speaking? Or is the distance one of socio-economic power and status, affording the women possibilities which other Yemeni women would struggle to even imagine?

In Cairo, stories about women being killed for the sake of "honour" served to represent the struggles of Yemeni women and the continued backwardness of rural and tribal people. In the act of storytelling, my participants distanced themselves from the perpetrators of these killings by positioning themselves as being educated or urban (which connotes the notion of civility in opposition to the wildness of the rural or tribal). This highlights that even in the highly differentiated experience of migration to Cairo between men and women, there are also further differences between women of different social classes. This problematises the use of these stories as representative of a general experience of Yemeni women. What does it mean that middle class women use stories of countryside women to depict their situation?

In the final section of this chapter, I move from the discussion of honour to the realm of the bureaucratic and the story of Nabil who had an unfortunate encounter with the law.

Asylum Seekers and Cairo's 'Bureaucratic-Time'

Nabil, whose story opened Chapter One, had been working for a local Egyptian business helping to design and make clothes. The business owner had met Nabil through a friend and was impressed with Nabil's skillset. He decided to offer him a job and made an informal agreement with Nabil about his hours of work and pay. Egypt's ratification of the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* means that asylum seekers like Nabil—in the case of Yemenis, those who have received a *prima facie* status—should have the right to employment (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020, 93). This does not mean that they must be provided with work but that they should not be denied access to the local labour market. But the price of work permits make them prohibitive for asylum seekers like Nabil. As Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky (2020, 108) report, non-citizens or their employers are liable to pay "3000 Egyptian Pounds per year for the first three years" of employment, "5000 Egyptian Pounds for the fourth year," followed by "a yearly increase by 1000 Egyptian Pounds, up to a maximum fee of 12000 Egyptian Pounds." What this means is that refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants often find themselves working in the so-called, informal sector. This can render them vulnerable to exploitative bosses and the intervention of the state, despite acknowledgement at the political level that informal labour takes place and is, in many regards, beneficial for the Egyptian economy (Norman 2021, 48).

In Chapter One, I described how the state shapes the lives of Yemeni migrants in an ambiguous manner, imbuing the city of Cairo with a liminality that disrupts the projects of rebuilding life in which Yemenis are engaged. I now extend this analysis to the realm of temporality to tease out the material impacts of bureaucracy on the lives of my Yemeni participants in Cairo. The following story, shared by Nabil, illustrates how the temporality of

migration, constituted in part through the indifference and ambiguity of state practice, positions asylum seekers in a disjunctive time-space.

> My residency was expired and it was during the Eid[2] so everything was closed. My residency permit had expired and I was supposed to renew it. At the time, the government were sending out the police to perform raids. It was after the Eid, and I went down to open the shop for a woman who needed to collect a dress. It was a dress for someone's engagement so it was important. It was the time during Corona when the government were doing campaigns to enforce the curfew. They found me coming out of the shop. "Why are you open?" I said to him, "No, we are closed." In that moment he noticed my accent. "Where are you from?" I told him, "From Yemen." He started going through my bag and asking to see things. "*Iqāma* (residency permit)." As soon as he said this, I understood. So I took out my permit and explained to him this and that. At this point, the woman [who had collected the dress] left. "Your ID," he said to her. There was a clash between them. Who did they take? "You come with us. You don't have a residency permit, so you're coming with us." Then they concocted a charge against me: He doesn't have a work permit, and he's working, his shop. . . My shop? I am coming here to bring something for someone. When they were writing the arrest report that night, they only asked for my name. The officer was sat there writing and writing. I said to him, "Excuse me, what are you writing." "None of your business! Get over there! *Yālla*!" So I told him, "Okay, sorry."

Nabil's retelling of his arrest highlights the precarity and vulnerability of life for asylum seekers in Egypt. At any moment the state may intervene to arrest those who are not complying with the law. Nabil was in a risky situation given that he was working without a valid work permit and his residency had expired. The problem for asylum seekers is that state indifference creates a scenario in which they are forced to make decisions which can lead to their increased precarity.

As Griffiths (2014) discusses, these indifferent strategies of the state cause asylum seekers to experience a disjunctive temporality in comparison with citizens of the state. For Nabil, the act of going out to handover a dress for a customer was experienced in an entirely different way to the woman who had come to collect the dress. Nabil's positionality as a

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2. Eid al-Fitr is the celebration marking the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting for Muslims. The celebration usually lasts for three or four days. In May 2020, the Eid marked a change to the hours of curfew which started at 17:00 and ended at 06:00 and had been in force since March. The revised curfew hours, introduced at the end of May, were from 20:00 to 06:00 (Sadek 2020).

Yemeni asylum seeker meant that very similar actions had very different consequences. Notice that it was his accent which prompted the police officer to question Nabil further. Having spent a good deal of time with Nabil, I can attest to the fact that Nabil speaks with a good Egyptian accent, however it was different enough to be noticeable to the officer. Furthermore, his expired residency and lack of a work permit meant that he was always at risk of the state intervening in his case.

It may appear as though Nabil was reckless in not seeking out a work permit and failing to renew his residency visa. However, we must read these decisions in the context of the indifferent and, at times, ambiguous practices of the state and the broader governing of refugees and asylum seekers. As I mentioned in Chapter One, the probability of resettlement for refugees is highly unlikely, owing to the fact that states in the Global North are reluctant to increase their quotas, and yet local integration is a solution which the Egyptian state refuses to fully embrace. In Egypt, these responses create a jarring temporal experience in which the asylum seeker is "endlessly waiting" and yet fearful of the imminent intervention of the state at any moment to detain (Griffiths 2014, 1992).

A further layer of the temporality of migration in Egypt may be added by Nabil's observation of racial discrimination while being detained.

> There were Syrians and Sudanese in the prison. The Sudanese . . . they were in such a poor state. They were dealing with them in the most horrible way. Punching and beating them for the smallest reason. There was one Sudanese guy with me who was a pharmacist, working in a pharmacy. They took him from the pharmacy. "Your residency permit!" They saw he was Sudanese and asked for his permit. It was expired. "Come with us." I asked him, did you go to the passport office? He said to me, "I went three times. Now I am stuck here for a month." . . . There was also one guy in there, a Palestinian, who was there for three months because of an expired residency permit.

Kelsey P. Norman's (2021) discussion of whether differential state treatment occurs on the basis of cultural affinity between asylum seekers and Egyptians, reveals that discrimination is a complex and contentious issue. At times, culturally closer groups, like

Syrians have experienced generous and favourable conditions of welcome, as they did from the Egyptian government led by Mohamed Morsi in 2012. However, their treatment drastically changed following the fall of Morsi's government, with the new regime launching a defamation campaign against Syrians which led to a change in their *de facto* treatment by the state (Norman 2021, 130). The favourable treatment received by Syrians from the Morsi government, Norman argues, was most likely down to political expedience rather than cultural affinity. However, the perception that African migrants receive worse treatment than Arabs from the Egyptian state remains strong amongst asylum seekers themselves (Norman 2021, 122).

Nabil was more fortunate than these other migrants. As he explained to me, his ordeal in the prison was ended after a few days.

> When I got out, I didn't get let out. I got out through *wisāṭa* (mediation). My wife's sister lives in Turkey and is married to a rich Yemeni businessman. He invests here in Egypt. So he knows a lot of important Egyptians. As soon as he heard about my situation he made some calls. The next day, my brother and wife came to the prison to find me. The prisoners were all amazed, "How did these people get let inside?" It is not allowed for anyone to enter the prison in Egypt. Of course, people are allowed to the visitors section, but into the prison itself, no. They came and got me and I left with them.

Nabil's case aptly exemplifies the transnational solidarity described by Pascucci (2016) in response to the 'everyday emergencies' of Cairo life. Nabil's family were able to mobilise their connections in Turkey and Egypt to secure his release and overcome this disruption to his daily life. As a father, such an emergency has implications for those who are dependent on him, meaning that the disruption is experienced among a wider group of people. However, through their use of transnational solidarity, Nabil's family were able to accrue the requisite level of power to leverage and expedite his release. Once again, this highlights the power of connections amongst Yemenis to reconstruct their lives in Egypt. This reinforces the idea that a person's status within Yemeni society continues to determine

their level of access to services. Without personal connections to important people, Yemenis, and more generally asylum seekers, who are detained for having expired residency visas have little agency in relation to the law.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed the experiences of Yemenis moving to Cairo in terms of their temporal experience, arguing that certain 'times' materialise to impact its character. In the first section, I looked at the case of Yemeni men and women dealing with marriage and the temporal expectations that wedlock is part of the fulfilment of stability. Although marriage continues to be highly valued amongst Yemenis, the expectation that it is a means of obtaining stability is troubled by the inherent instability of Cairo life. Marriage and the production of offspring carry with it added burdens and for some it is better to postpone the time of marriage and negotiate with their families to continue their education. In Zeina's case this was also an opportunity to plan further ahead, for a possible onward journey to Europe or America.

In Cairo, stories about women being killed for the sake of "honour" revealed the persistence of Yemen's social temporality in the lives of Yemeni men and women in Cairo. The struggles of Yemeni women against harassment or sexual violence were set against the backdrop of notions of honour, which were often associated with the continued backwardness of rural and tribal people. My participants used the act of storytelling to distance themselves from the perpetrators of these killings by positioning themselves as educated or urban. But they also became a mechanism through which to view the challenges facing women experiencing unwanted male attention on their journeys to Cairo, or those women who must

face the physical advances of men whose place in society is less vulnerable to harm in cases of sexual indiscretion.

Transnational solidarity materialised at important times for some of my Yemeni participants. In Nabil's case, he was able to extract himself from a difficult situation through the connections provided by his family. However, as his story revealed, there are many others who are not so fortunate. The intervention of the state to detain and the racialised nature of such detention settings, means that many migrants and asylum seekers are rendered highly vulnerable to exploitation. Although, there are systems in place for the maintenance of residency visas and the obtaining of work permits, the prohibitive costs of these processes and the ambiguity surrounding their imposition, means that Yemeni asylum seekers are left to take risks regarding their legal statuses. For some, this no doubt contributes to the fragmented nature of life in Cairo and the onward journey that some of Nabil's friends eventually decided to make in the story recounted in Chapter 1.

What is the Yemeni?

What does hayati mean if my world is a desert, desolate, nothing but an empty blazing? If life is a rose-hued phantom circling in the sand, what is the Yemeni?

The country snicked my father's heart. The hole gushes, *Because there are no more green fields and citrus trees. Now it's nothing and I'm from nowhere.*

—Threa Almontaser, *Guide to Gardening Your Roots*

The symbolic act of exchanging prisoners, performed by Saudi Arabia and the ruling regime of north Yemen, Ansar Allah, has ignited fresh hope that a resolution to the bitter conflict which has embroiled the country may soon be found. However, news of the exchange was met with little joy by my participants in Cairo. Despite the promise of an end to hostilities, the political act merely reminded them that their lives and the lives of their loved ones were tied to the political manoeuvrings of influential families who seem callous to the suffering of Yemen's people.

As Kamilia Al-Eriani (2020, 228) reminds us, the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) initiative to solve the 'crisis' provoked by Yemen's democratic 2011 protests, widely backed by the United States, United Kingdom, and European Union states, was a means of recycling the old regime and ensuring that Yemenis could not determine their own fates. As I have argued in this thesis, the recycling of the old regime, although on the surface altered by the events of the last decade, continues today in Cairo. Not only are the symbols and imagery of the nationalist imaginary reproduced in the Yemeni school and the art exhibition, but the anachronistic narrative of unity is perpetuated by those keen to maintain the status quo. The

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desire to maintain the semblance of unity while in 'exile' is respectable, however one has the sense that the grievances many Yemenis carry with the former regime and its manner of conducting domestic affairs remain unaddressed. For example, the economic power obtained by elites and ruling families during the decades before the current conflict persists in the lives of Yemenis in Cairo today. Yemeni businesses and projects require investments and only those with the right connections are able to find the opportunities to improve their standards of living in Egypt. The disparity of wealth created in the years of the unified Yemen endures and is just one aspect of a legacy which is bound to the narratives of Yemeni unity, whose repetition in Cairo does little more than paper over cracks.

Yet the desire for a unified Yemen goes beyond Yemeni political elites in Cairo. As Al-Eriani (2020, 227) writes, according to many "observers and international and regional actors . . . it is only through saving the waning power of this political entity that hope of retaining a united Yemeni nation can be restored." Just as the 2011 Yemeni protests became a problem that had to be solved, so the current crisis—prolonged by the interventionist 'solution' of the GCC's initiative—requires a solution that must result in a united Yemeni nation. However, for Yemeni people in Cairo this limits the adoption of alternative forms of rebuilding social realities, or for imagining new ones. Instead, Al-Eriani (2020, 240) argues that "the difference between worrying about, and mourning the death of, the Yemeni state becomes equivalent to the difference between the state's betrayal of political unifying possibilities and its fidelity to a political community." What does it mean to call Yemenis to become a community of grieving and lament? Can vulnerability and loss be the basis of a new community or political life?

Radfan Al-Mohammadi's painting, *Edge of Place*, which was perhaps the most accomplished work of art in the "Light of Art" exhibition, captures the liminality of Yemeni life in the contemporary moment and the sense of grieving and lament suggested by Al-Eriani

(see, Fig. 10). The painting is dominated by the image of a young girl in a bright blue dress. Her puffy red eyes glisten with the remnants of tears recently shed. Once again we see the image of the Yemeni girl used as the representative of the nation, in this case as a symbol of the (innocent?) suffering which many in Yemen have experienced. Of course, as I have alluded to in this thesis, the representation of women in Cairo's spaces, whether the art exhibition or more generally in work and in life, is not a static issue and women are afforded various opportunities to determine the ways in which they prefer to be represented. Sometimes these choices align with the symbolism and narratives closely tied to the former regime and at others they contest the status quo which continues to focus power in the hands of male political elites.

Behind the girl lies a non-descript city which represents the Yemen of the past. From the city of the past, there leads a long and winding highway raised above the clouds, to the hoped-for future which is depicted in the details of the girl's eyes. Radfan described to me how the girl's eyes reflect the imagined future of those Yemenis who believed that the protest movement of 2011 held the promise of a better future. Instead of receiving this promised land, they are now faced with the realisation that they have given up a past, which held many great things, for an unobtainable future. For Al-Eriani (2020, 237), this capacity to grieve and lament is an opportunity for new ways of imaging Yemeni life: ". . . loss [becomes] a reason for abandoning differences and embracing a collective sense of belonging to (the lost) Yemen." However, giving up on the past, accepting loss and entering into a state of mourning is not a journey that all are willing to embark on.

Figure 10. Radfan Al-Mohammadi, *Edge of Place*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 90.0 × 102.0 cm. Reproduced with permission of the artist.

In many of my interactions with participants and during the times I spent as part of their lives, I sensed a tension between the new and the old, the desire for a new way of thinking and conducting social relations, and the influence and persistence of the established order of things. This was seen particularly in the ways my participants thought about love and marriage. They exposed generational differences and highlighted new ideas about finding partners with which to share their lives. However, these new aspirations for marriage must be negotiated alongside family expectations and obligations. The strong transnational character of Yemeni life in Cairo, whereby the temporality of Yemeni social life and customs continue to force itself into the lives of my participants here in Cairo, dictates the nature these marriage aspirations adopt.

In Radfan's painting, the way to an imagined future falls away but the path back to the past is long and winding and return is no longer possible. In fact, the non-descript nature of the city's visage, it's generality or vagueness, also seems to suggest that nostalgia is the hope of a return to a past that never existed in the first place. For some of my Yemeni participants, the hope of return to Yemen, let alone a 'past' Yemen, is a dream that they have long left behind. Their lives in Cairo are thus stuck between not going back, however with little chance of moving forward. The ambiguous and liminal nature of this experience is dealt with by participants in different ways. For some, the onward risky journey to Europe is the only way to move toward some sense of stability. For others, those who have the opportunity to work or start a business, Cairo becomes a temporary home, albeit a home whose temporariness continues to be extended.

As the girl looks past the viewer to the future, her gaze invites us into the image and presents an interesting temporal dynamic, transfixing the viewer in the unobtainable future. Do we stand in the chasm into which the girl is falling? Or have we made it to the future she hopes for? Are we helpless to help her? The girl cannot return to the city of the past, in fact

she stands on the precipice of the road which crumbles away beneath her feet. Her forlorn expression suggests that there is no hope. This creates the sense that we are glimpsing a fleeting moment in a time before the road gives way or the girl disappears altogether. Is the girl herself crumbling into the abyss?

I began this thesis by asking, what is Yemen? Through the course of my research I interacted with many Yemeni people who made use of national identifications and symbols to make sense of their lives in Cairo. But as Threa Almontaser's verse asks: If your country is reduced to nothing what becomes of your own life? For Yemeni people living in Cairo, not only may they be dealing with the ambiguity of Egyptian bureaucracy and the sudden materialisation of the state, as Rashad and Nabil experienced in various ways, but they may also be trying to make sense of the violent conflict that has rendered their country "a desert, desolate, nothing but a blazing."

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