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Smuggled fireworks turn Eid festivities into tragedies

Story and photos by
Ali Ibrahim Al-Moshki

As with any holiday, there are certain rituals for Eid—and if you are a child—toy guns and fireworks are almost a guarantee.

Fireworks are illegal in Yemen, but that hasn't stopped their popularity.

While these pastimes can seem innocent enough, fireworks have proved to be a double-edged sword, resulting in childish smiles and happiness, but also tragedies when things go wrong.

Abdulsalam Abu Talib, 15 years old, is one such victim of the often innocent pastime. Fireworks that were set off in his home last year left him badly injured and disfigured. He even refuses to now pose for photos.

Talib's face looks pale and wrinkled. He says he is often mistaken for someone much older—as old as 50 years old.

"Fireworks have become a tradition, especially the ones that make loud sounds," he said.

Despite the trauma, he remembers vividly what happened.

"My brother and I bought fireworks valued at YR30,000 (about \$150). My brother set off one of the fireworks and went to throw it from the window. But, he dropped it and before he could throw it outside it exploded," Talib said.

"Out of fear, my brother threw the matches down and they landed in the fireworks box. The box exploded, resulting in a huge fire. My injury was the worst," he added, with tears in his eyes.

Talib and his family partially blame the unregulated flourishing of fireworks markets, which is largely due to smuggling.

He says he bears part of the blame, but, "I hold the owners of fireworks

shops [largely] accountable for what happened to me. Smugglers smuggle dangerous fireworks at a time when government monitoring is inadequate. Children are [often] the victims of this trade."

Dozens of fireworks shops are spread out throughout the streets of the capital. Though some sell illegal fireworks, they say they are only able to do so because of the state's lack of monitoring and regulation.

"The Interior Ministry knows we sell these kinds of fireworks. But the security situation in the entire country has made the government busy with more serious issues," said an owner of a fireworks shop in the capital city who declined to be named.

He told the Yemen Times that some of the fireworks are legal, particularly those that do not make loud sounds and those that are not dangerous for the environment and humans.

"We buy the illegal fireworks from smugglers who bring their goods in through the sea," said the source.

In early July, the coast guards captured 2500 cartons of illegal fireworks near the Mocha port, according to the state-run Saba News Agency.

In order to facilitate smuggling, smugglers often pay a large sum.

"The security personnel at seaports are bribed so that smugglers can bring the more dangerous fireworks to Yemen," said the shop owner.

"Individuals who have strong links to the government help smuggle these fireworks. They are shipped as if though they were food commodities," he added.

Shop owners are reluctant to speak to the press on the record, afraid that it will affect their business. Another fireworks shop owner who declined to be named said he had an agreement with the Interior Ministry.

"We agreed with the Interior Ministry that we could sell the fireworks, but we would not allow them to be photographed while they were in our possession."

Colonel Mohammed Hizam, deputy head of public relations at the Interior Ministry, said all fireworks shops are unlicensed by the ministry, and that the ministry does not grant such licenses.

Because the goods are smuggled, the ministry launches random campaigns to arrest shop owners, he said. They serve anywhere from a number of days to months in prison, he told the Yemen Times.

"Six containers full of fireworks have been detained since the beginning of this year. A truck full of fireworks was also confiscated in Marib."

He said the Interior Ministry has no specific statistics about the number of fireworks-related casualties.

Hizam said the Interior Ministry shut down a building manufacturing fireworks in the Old City of Sana'a, but its owner reopened. The ministry came in and shut it down again, he said.

Smuggling has been on the rise since the breakout of the 2011 uprising, as security forces have been distracted with a number of issues, including a Houthi rebel movement in the North, a secessionist movement in the South, and an offensive against Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula.

According to the Interior Ministry, the majority of smuggling happens through the Bab Al-Mandeb port of Taiz governorate.

The port connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and is near the international waterway. The ministry says smugglers use the poor economy to recruit locals—bribing them to carry out the smuggling or bribing security forces to turn a blind eye.

Abdulkareem Naji is a former



The business of smuggling fireworks is flourishing in Yemen's post-2011 environment of insecurity.

security officer at Bab Al-Mandeb port.

"Security personnel were bribed. One reason is that our salaries are not adequate and also, some smugglers threaten to kill us if we oppose them. Some smugglers have strong connections to the government," said Naji.

While another Eid brings a new season for smuggled fireworks, Talib—like so many other children—continues to deal with the lifelong scarring injuries he received on that

fateful Eid last year.

"I wish I never played with fireworks," Talib said. "If I knew I would end up disfigured, I never

would have touched one. I wish smugglers would stop, otherwise, there will only be more victims like me."

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Eid Mubark

Eid and labor: Worker entitlements and their exceptions

■ Madiha Al-Junaid

The celebration of Eid Al-Fitr that marks the end of Ramadan is a festive ritual, concluding over four weeks of fasting.

In an Islamic country like Yemen, the days of Eid are a public holiday, starting on the 29th of Ramadan and ending on the 3rd of Shawwal, the month which follows Ramadan.

These dates apply to both the private and the public sector.

"Three to four years ago, Ramadan the 29th was approved as the beginning of the work holiday," said Abdullah Al-Haidari, a high-ranking director at the Ministry of Oil. Before then, Eid holidays began on the 28th of Ramadan.

During official Eid holidays, working employees in the private as well as the public sector must either be paid double their normal wage or receive another form of compensation, according to Abdo Al-Hakimi, first undersecretary in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

However, Yemen's labor market witnesses several exceptions to that rule.

According to Nasher, private sector institutions can amend existing labor laws regarding holiday entitlements. In fact, employers can

have people work during public holidays, as long as compensation can be agreed upon, he explained.

The Yemen Times was told by an anonymous source who holds a high-ranking position at one of Yemen's large oil companies that the company's employees no longer receive higher wages when working during holidays.

"The company arranged a settlement with its employees, who agreed to accept a permanent rise in their salaries in return for remaining uncompensated for any overtime, even when working on holidays like Eid," the source said.

A different agreement had been arranged for Hussien Al-Maqrami, a security guard working for Stalion security company in Sana'a. He explains that he and his colleagues are obliged to work every second Eid. Given that he gets double his usual \$10 per day payment, Al-Maqrami likes to work during Eid.

"Sometimes I cover for my colleagues during Eid to get more money and be able to visit my family in Taiz after Eid vacation," he says.

Ammar Al-Sharabi, an employee in one of Sana'a's numerous corner shops, describes a similar situation, saying that he is obliged to work every second Eid.

Al-Sharabi specifies that he works over 12 hours during Eid but does

not receive double payment. When asked, he admitted not to know about any labor laws in Yemen. The holiday regulations he describes seem arbitrary and completely dependent on his employer's decisions.

"When I wanted to attend the wedding of my brother in Taiz, my boss refused to give me a day off," he complains.

According to Nasher, exceptions to existing regulations also occur within the public sector, with some institutions having their own compensation policies. He mentioned the state-run media as an example.

"I have been working for more than five years on holidays, including Fridays and Saturdays, but received normal wages for my work," says Al-Humaidi, who works for the state-run Al-Yemen channel.

Young doctor Basma al-Nuzaili, who just finished her medical education in pregnancy and delivery, works at Sana'a's public Shabaeen Hospital. As a young entrant she does not have a contract yet and therefore does not count as a public employee. This means she does not get any extra money when working during Eid. However, she says that "others, who have a contract do get extra money."

In addition to compensations, holiday entitlements before and during Eid have traditionally in-

cluded the pay out of special bonuses.

However, "the bonuses are not legally enforceable," says Al-Hakimi. Depending on the employer, people may receive anywhere from a 100 percent salary bonus to nothing at all.

While many private sector institutions pay bonuses to their employees before Eid, others do not.

Al-Humaidi, who works in the government sector, said that he and his colleagues used to receive small bonuses for Eid, ranging from a small amount of money to sweets. "For approximately three years, no more bonuses have been given to us," Al-Humaidi says regretfully, blaming the tight state budget.

According to Al-Hakimi, "if we [the ministry] receive complaints regarding Eid bonuses, we only send friendly messages to the employer, kindly asking him to consider handing out bonuses."

Ali Dahaq, the International Labor Organization coordinator in Yemen, said that the organization does not intervene in disputes about Eid compensations.

"Such conflicts occur in all countries around the world. In Yemen, the Ministry of Labor resolves these conflicts," said Dahaq. He claims to not have observed any gross violations with regards to Eid entitlements in Yemen.

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The diverse Eid traditions of Yemen's governorates



SANA'A: Traditional dancing

The people in Sana'a governorate gather in various open areas to perform the Eid prayer and wish each other "Eid Mubarak," meaning "happy Eid." Consequently, tribesmen gather in public spaces, usually squares, to perform traditional dances, involving Jambyas and drums. Each dancer does his best to perform well, hoping to be praised by the audience.

HADRAMOUT: Holy Quran

Hadramout is distinguished for its emphasis on religious practices during Eid. Worshipers spend the night of Eid in the mosque, reading the Quran into the early morning. They read loudly until they finish the entire book. While they break their fast on the first day of Eid, they follow the example of Prophet Mohammed in that they resume fasting for another six days, starting from the second day of Eid.



SOCOTRA: Where noses meet

Shaking hands and giving nose kisses when greeting others is a Socotran tradition during Eid.

MAHWEET: Painted Houses

The traditions and customs during Eid in Mahweet are much the same as in Sana'a, with one notable exception: In Mahweet, people paint the outside walls of their houses with gypsum in order to make them look shiny and new.



LAHJ: Henna

On the eve of Eid, families prepare henna to paint intricate designs on the hands and feet of both girls and boys. Early the next morning, children wash the henna off, enjoying artistic patterns and shapes on their skin for at least another week.

The month of Ramadan is over, and the days of eagerly waiting for delicious "iftars" has come to an end. As bellies fill up, so do the streets; congested with people who are heading home to celebrate Eid Al-Fitr with their families and friends. While all of Yemen is united in celebration, welcoming the tenth month of Shawwal with a lively feast, differences in customs and traditions in different governorates shine through.

ADEN: Tourism

Several people spend their Eid vacation in Aden because of its tourist landmarks and nice beaches. There are no special rituals practiced by people in the governorate during Eid as more modern practices have replaced its unique traditions.

AL-BEIDHA: Fireballs of ash

As Ramadan approaches its end, children begin to knead ash with burning oil, forming balls. They place them on their roofs and then set them on fire, creating small balls of fire that illuminate their villages during the night on Eid.

DHAMAR: Singing

On the eve of Eid, people in Dhamar sing traditional songs, known as "Zamel", on the roofs of their houses and the sheikh's house. On the morning of Eid, all around the governorate, clusters of about five close-by villages gather together and perform the Eid prayer, after which they start singing again.

RAIMA: Dancing in a shady field

After performing the Eid prayer in an open area known as Al-Jabana, people of different ages in Raima gather fields shaded by trees and start singing traditional songs, known as "Zamel." After that, they dance and fire bullets into the air to express their happiness.

MARIB: Celebrating with the ill and disabled

Following the morning Eid prayer, people go to have breakfast with a sick or disabled person. They hope to thereby increase the joyful experience of Eid for those whose lives are hardened by disadvantages.

AL-DHALE: Prince of Eid and Eid Court

A comedian, who is called "Prince of Eid," is brought to an open public area to tell jokes and funny stories, thereby continuing a century-old tradition in Al-Dhale. Eid Court is a tradition specific to the Damt area in Al-Dhale. People gather to chew qat and watch a play taking place between some men acting as a judges and others acting as their guards. The judge listens to various cases put forth by people and issues theatrical punishments.

IBB: The Prince and the Maiden

The Prince and the Maiden is a game, traditionally taking place at night in public squares during Eid. One man, the prince, covers his face with a mask. Another man, the maiden, wears a woman's wedding dress, sitting on an elevated platform. While the prince dances around the maiden, others play the drums. When anyone gets too close to the maiden, the prince "hits" him out of jealousy, and the audience bursts out laughing. People continue this carnivalesque tradition until late into the night.



JAWF: Showing off their weapons

In the morning of Eid, men go outside sporting their best weapons, showing them off to the world. They wear their weapons when going for Eid prayer, be it out in the open or at the mosque. After the prayer they go in groups to visit friends and celebrate the occasion.

ABYAN: Declaration of intention to perform pilgrimage

Though the security situation is deteriorating in Abyan, rituals are still performed during Eid celebrations. Following the morning Eid prayer, people gather in circles and repeat popular songs. A particularly common theme underlying songs and poetry is the clearly expressed desire to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca.

SHABWA: Poetic competition

One thing that Shabwa is known for during Eid is its poetry competitions. Groups of men gather in circles outdoors, rather than inside their houses, and start improvising poems. Each group attempts to outperform the other.

HAJJA: Gathering in the eldest family member's house

On the eve of Eid, the members of families in Hajja gather at the house of the eldest family member to spend the night there. They have breakfast together in the early morning and then go out together in large numbers—each showing off the size of their family. They have lunch, chew qat, and stay the following night at the same house.

TAIZ: Shooting

Shooting is the most prominent Eid tradition in Taiz. The youth go to an open area joined by some elderly men who have experience shooting, and set a target. A competition follows, with each one trying to hit the target. The winner receives money, which is collected from all shooters participating in the competition. This tradition takes place during the first three days of Eid.

AMRAN: Roofs on fire

One or two days before Eid, people begin to prepare fireplaces on their roofs. Once the end of Ramadan is announced, residents set them ablaze. Similar to fireworks but more traditional, this acts as a means to express happiness and celebratory joy. Fireworks are also set off during the festive event, accompanied by the singing of popular songs.

AL-MAHRA: Cooking in rainwater canals

After performing the Eid prayer, people in Mahra go back home, choosing a different route, however, than the one they took on the way to the mosque. They chant traditional "Zamel" songs on their way home. Once arrived, they pick up raw meat and go with their families to the canals, where they cook and eat together. In the afternoon, people meet with their sheikh or community leader and start visiting houses to eat nuts and cookies prepared for the occasion.



HODEIDA: Camel jumping

Jumping over camels is a popular activity in Hodeida that dates back to Yemen's distant past. The competition starts with a man jumping over one camel, with the number of camels increasing all the way up to five. The youth compete to show their skill and the winner is treated like a hero—Al-Zaraniq tribe is renowned for its particularly skillful competitors. Camel jumping acts as entertainment during joyful and festive events like weddings and Eid.



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Prof. Abdulaziz Al-Saqqaf, (1951 - 1999) Founder of Yemen Times



OUR OPINION

Bidding a sad Ramadan farewell

This year's Ramadan was one of the worst in Yemen's recent history. The difficulties Yemenis encountered were mostly unrelated to hunger and thirst, despite this being the warmest Ramadan in 40 years.

The overall atmosphere during this year's holy month was quite tense and did not encourage the spiritual environment or even the social friendliness that we have become accustomed to over the years. The conflict in Amran claimed the lives of hundreds and displaced thousands. The scarcity of fuel, coupled with frequent power cuts and long queues of cars lined up for a chance to fill their tanks did not help either. In addition, continuous price hikes in basic commodities made the celebration of Eid quite difficult for those with limited income.

This gloomy environment was reflected in the general mood of the people, especially in terms of productivity. Yemenis during Ramadan are already much less productive and tend to spend more time sleeping during the day than working, but this year those trends got even worse. Many government officials took leave during the first week of the month instead of the last week, as was done in the past. Diplomats, expats, and everyone else who could afford to do so left the country for the summer break—some for security concerns and others for fun. The country feels deserted.

At night the streets show signs of life, but Yemenis are taking many more security precautions than we used to in the past.

This Ramadan was a test of our patience, endurance, and faith. Those who did go to work every day for regular hours stood distinguished from the crowd, who accused them of being crazy. Those who continued to feel cheerful and friendly were told to check into a mad house. And those who were excited about the holy month and considered it a spiritual opportunity to strengthen their fate were told that their spot in heaven was already guaranteed by simply surviving Ramadan.

Now, as we try to celebrate Eid and bid Ramadan farewell until next year, I am filled with much regret. It should have been a happy occasion, not one that causes an entire nation to resent its fate. We will need some time to recover and hopefully get back on our feet without sinking any further into national depression.

Nadia Al-Sakkaf

The NGO-ization of Yemen

Rooj Alwazir
middleeasteye.net
First published July 23

A portrait of toppled President Ali Abdullah Saleh hangs crooked from a burned building. Down the street lays another portrait across the entry of Bab Al-Yemen, which literally means “The Gate of Yemen,” announcing the celebration of a new Yemen. A poster of President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi is pinned on top of the entrance. Inside Bab Al-Yemen is an old marketplace where hundreds of small shops sell many different items and people from all over Sana'a come to do their shopping.

On the drive to Rada'a city, a 176km drive from Yemen's capital, Sana'a, there is little to no infrastructure besides the checkpoints where young children and their parents gather, targeting cars as they stop to sell water, fruits and oat. Faded UN signs decorate the impoverished town, advertising their development projects that have long been abandoned or never followed through.

Despite \$6.2 billion dollars pledged in aid since 2011, the lives of Yemenis remain troublingly frail. After the ousting of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in March 2012, Yemen became a hot pocket for international aid and a testing ground for counter-terrorism strategy. Yemen became known as “the model” to much of the West.

But the Yemenis tell a different story.

In short, aid and the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector in Yemen have been counter-productive, allowing for corruption to continue and undermining local movements for social change, often in support with the Yemeni state and elite.

Three years have passed since Yemenis stood together, waving their banners and chanting messages of change and justice. Together they brought down three decades of institutionalized violence and oppression.

Since the uprising, many well-qualified young people began to look for work in the fastest rising field in Yemen, the NGO sector. This particular sector of work was viewed as a vehicle for development, democratization, and social change. For many, it was a close representation of civil society. With an \$8 million approved grant by the World Bank specific to NGOs, grassroots civic initiatives formed during and prior to the revolution and turned into top-down structures encouraged from abroad. The offer of financial support, in addition to a well-paying job, seduced many Yemenis into diverting their energy from organizing on the ground independently and voluntarily to “program development” work. The funding given was meant to help local NGOs promote national dialogue, democratization, gender equality, good governance, and respect for human rights.

Despite NGOs scaling up their presence across the country, they are nothing new to Yemen. NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) rose in the 20th century. They particularly flourished during the 1962 revolution in the north, to compensate for the breakdown of the state, and after the North and South unity in 1994. Funds from international donors started pouring in to address the political repercussions of structural changes that occurred in Yemen. To date, the number of organizations registered, according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, exceeds 13,000, a 24 percent increase from after the 2011 uprising.

So understandably, because of all the aid pouring into NGOs, the young and eager took jobs in this sector in hopes of building toward a new Yemen. But what happens when projects implemented are taken by NGOs? And decisions are made solely by international aid from people far removed from the struggle? Well, while many organizations have good intentions, a majority of the time, harm is done. With no financially sustainable framework and without support from communities impacted by the issues NGOs are working on, a significant accountability deficit transpires and the process of helping Yemen turns into a business—a business which employs “cheap” locals, “Western experts,” and where NGOs are predominately accountable to their donors, not to the people they are entrusted to support.

In this process, the NGO-model contributes to its share of abuse and co-optation of the Yemeni struggle for social, economic and political justice. The youth movement's demands have yet to be systemically addressed as initiatives have become increasingly institutionalized and disconnected from the ground, prioritizing funders over people and normalizing an exploitative culture for the way their work is ultimately carried out. Their loyalty to the Yemeni youth revolution is long gone.

Western-Savior Complex

Despite the human rights approach and rhetoric adopted by NGOs in Yemen, numerous Yemeni workers have complained of discriminatory practices between employees, whether in the hiring process or employment conditions.

Rabie Khaled Shaiban, 24, graduated with a marketing degree from City College, San Francisco. Shaiban returned to Yemen in 2011 and according to him, his Yemeni passport is hindering him from finding employment. “I can't find a job. All the jobs are prioritized for foreigners, even though we have the same qualifications,” he explains. “Sometimes, they don't even speak Arabic. How are they going to do some of the required work if they don't even speak the language of the people?”

Nina Aqlan works for a foreign-funded Yemeni NGO and has felt the barriers between her and her employees: “Yemeni's and foreigners will have the same job description, responsibilities and qualifications, however, when it comes to work and pay, there is a significant difference between a foreigner and a Yemeni.”

If we look at the dynamics of some of these NGOs and the work they produce and the relationships between people inside these organizations, it becomes clear that the power of NGOs, particularly internationally backed NGOs in Yemen, is complex and heavily interconnected with the myth of the “Western expert.”

“For a foreigner doing my job their net salary is \$1,500 per month, not including their risk security payment which is an additional \$3,000 per month and an ‘R&R’ which gives foreigners a leave every six weeks and cash of \$1,200. My salary is \$900 and my risk security is \$400,” Ahlam Al-Sagheer, 27, working for a UN agency told me. “And what about us? We do most of the work. They can't even go out in the field. We do. We are in riskier situations than they are; yet they get paid more. We have the same stress, if not more. Why do they get double or triple our salary? What's the difference between me and my colleague other than our passport?”

Al-Aagheer went on to say that 60 percent of the donor money that comes in is for foreigners. For her, that money should be going towards community projects and hiring locals. And with the increase of bombings in Sana'a, Al-Sagheer is almost certain that the risk security allowance for foreigners will jump even more, while hers will stay the same.

The “Western expert” problem is a deeply embedded concept that any problem in any part of the world can,

or even must be solved by Westerners. Many Yemenis are concerned on this dependency of “aid” and “Western help.” Internationally backed NGOs hire foreigners and although usually with very good intentions, these internationals, many times, come and carry with them a mentality that view themselves and their activities as the only solution to the Yemenis' “complicated” problems.

This mentality, whether obvious or subtle, is the long-term product of an ideological phenomenon that has a history of colonization and imperialism. “You can't buy us, and you can't buy democracy either,” says Hossam, who is among the millions of unemployed youth facing a shaky labor market. An inferior mentality and an “unequal” relationship has allowed international funders to influence the work, priorities, and direction of local NGOs, pushing them to adopt issues, language, and structures they want, rather than those preferred by the Yemeni people. The aid community has consequently turned NGOs and CSOs into a dependent and vulnerable community.

“International and local NGOs face significant difficulties tailoring programmes to the needs and realities of the Yemeni people, especially in a competitive and donor-driven funding environment. We are instead forced to formulate our strategies and goals in line with donor priorities and interests,” said a program officer at UNICEF-Yemen who wishes to

remain anonymous.

Without support led by communities impacted by the struggle, NGO “solutions” will only end up reinforcing the same dynamics between the “West” and the “East” that created the global economic and political inequities that facilitate classism, racism, sexism, and all other oppressions in the first place.

The “building democracy” effort in Yemen has revealed that development has become a commodity. Whose perspectives do NGOs represent? The Yemeni people deserve better, yet their oppression has historically generated profits for the elite, through labor, and now as a laboratory for NGO-led neoliberal development. Within this context, how long could the proliferation of NGOs in Yemen last? And if NGOs were put under the radar, would they change?

In order to work toward democratization, a different approach is needed with a different vision and a more sustainable power base. Yemen's demands for social, political and economic justice will be addressed only when donors and NGOs do less, stepping back and allowing communities impacted by their struggles to dictate the agenda, priorities, and concerns.

Rooj Alwazir is a Yemeni-American documentary photographer and co-founder of Support Yemen, a media collective based in Sana'a.

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Interpreter	Interprets spoken statements into/from English into Arabic. Translates documents, correspondence, forms, and other written material from one language into another. Rewrites material from English into Arabic vice versa. Maintains records of materials translated and interpreting contacts. At least 3 years' experience in interpreting and translation or Project Administration. Computer skills with working knowledge of MS Office applications, such as Word, Excel and Power Point required. All other duties as assigned by a manager or supervisor.	\$1,000 US Dollar (Gross)
Hospitality Support Specialist (Waitress)	Presents menu, answers questions and makes suggestions regarding food and service. Writes order on check or memorizes it. Relays and/or enters order into POS system for the kitchen and serves courses from kitchen and service bars. Observes guest to fulfill any additional request and to perceive when meal has been completed. Totals bill and accepts payment or refers patron to cashier. May ladle soup, toss salads, portion pies, and desserts, brew coffee, and perform other services as determined by establishment size and practice. May clear and reset counters or table at conclusion of each course. All other duties as assigned by a manager or supervisor.	\$410 US Dollar (Gross)
Time keeper	The Timekeeper is responsible for recording staff, vendor and visitors in and out timesheets and ensure the accurate attendance. Maintain and record manually and daily basis in and out time list for the staff, vendors and visitors. Make sure the staff submit Pass gate ID and receive Work ID when he/she shows up to work, and do the opposite in the exit time. Report immediately any suspected identity or behavior during the time of entrance or exit. Make sure of the staff shift work time and maintain note in case of change in the shift work. Monitor staff use of the biometric (Finger Print) system for Staff during the in and out time. Monitor and control bring in or taking out of the facility unpermitted stuff. All other duties as assigned by a manager or supervisor.	\$385 US Dollar (Gross)
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Politics of Qat: The Role of a Drug in Ruling Yemen

By Peer Gatter

Book review and extracts
Nadia Al-Sakkaf

The cover page shows an old man with an apprehensive look in his eyes, half-smiling as he hands you a bunch of qat leaves. In the background there is a wild-eyed teenage boy, cheeks swollen from the qat that fills them, peering into the camera.

This 862 page hard-cover book published by Reichert Publications is a weap-

on in all senses of the word. Besides documenting the ever growing role qat plays in Yemen and in the life of Yemenis, the book also analyses Yemen's qat policy, the tribal qat economy, and the qat connections of our decision makers.

I had this huge publication lying by my bedside for months before I summoned the courage to pick it up and start reading. This was not only due to its intimidating size, but probably even more so due to its

topic. Qat, and the political and economic schemes around it, were to me as a Yemeni always a well-known problem. I just was too afraid to read for myself and acknowledge how I as a citizen am part of a society that enables this culture of qat.

I don't chew Qat and personally I am ardently opposed to it. But I live in a society where Qat prevails. After years of research, Peer Gatter, the author of this book, published it in 2012, offering to the

world an insight into this drug and what it has done to my country. Gatter was working for many years for the World Bank and UNDP in Yemen and is now heading the Integrated Expert Program for Afghanistan of the German Development Cooperation (GIZ-CIM).

To read more about the book go to www.qat-yemen.com



PART 8

Yemen's Unification and Qat

When the two Yemens unified in 1990, many progressive Yemenis hoped the Popular Democratic Republic of Yemen could impose on the united state its strict and quite efficient regime restricting chewing to weekends only. They were bitterly disappointed when the southern legislation was repealed and qat cultivation and consumption was liberalized throughout the former south.

Qat cultivation was now also permitted on the vast government-owned southern estates and expanded rapidly in the mountain areas of Al-Dhale, Lahj, and Shabwa.

The liberalization of qat chewing in the south did not only strengthen the north economically vis-à-vis the south, but also led to a further gain in power of the highland tribes.

The chewing habit quickly spread south and eastwards after unification and by 1992, when Yemen conducted a household budget survey, the inhabitants of Lahj, Aden, Abyan, and Shabwa would spend more on qat than on health and education combined. Only in Hadramout and Al-Mahra had qat not yet started its triumph.

After unification a general law on taxation raised the tax due on qat sales from 10 to 20 percent. It was issued in response to recommendations from a 1986 IMF mission that had reviewed the Yemeni system of taxation, particularly focusing on problems associated with the taxation of qat.

To facilitate the implementation of this 1991 law, the minister of finance issued in the following year an executive bylaw on estimation and collection of qat consumption tax. It was complemented by Order

No. 614 of 1992 that was issued by the Chairman of the Tax Authority and provided directives for tax collection. An IMF mission revisiting the reformed tax system in 1995 concluded that despite the adoption of all recommendations of the 1986 mission by the government, "rather than improving the situation, the volume of daily sales has steadily risen with no proportional increase in revenue... [and] despite the penalties being severe, [tax] evasion runs rampant."

The mission also found that the increased tax rate of 20 percent existed only on paper. It was only applied and enforced after the country drifted into a severe revenue crisis in the late 1990s.

Besides the 1991 tax law and its bylaws, few official documents published during the early years of unity touched upon the topic of qat. Its absence in political planning was flagrant.

With the loss of remittances after the expulsion of migrant laborers from the Gulf in 1990/91, the qat sector and the profits it produced became ever more important in Yemen's economy and a ban of qat consequently even harder. Many of the returnees were absorbed by the agricultural sector and in many mountain areas eroded terrace fields were rehabilitated or rangelands turned into fields to grow qat. The qat sector saw enormous growth and much investment was directed towards it in the years 1991-1996. In the official figures and projections published on qat after the crop was included again in national statistics in 1997, this development is not reflected.



Buying votes with subsidies, money and qat: Prime Minister Abd Al-Qadir Ba Jamal in the run-up to the 2003 parliamentary elections. He is labelled as "government of the Yemeni people" and holds a sack of incentives: "money of the Yemeni people." More sacks of "subsidies for the Yemeni people" lead to a ballot box that is decorated with the horse of the GPC and inscribed "candidate of the Yemeni people." A ladder of qat branches ("qat of the Yemeni people") is leading up to where the vote is to be dropped (Al-Thawri, Aug. 11, 2002).

the pressing economic, social, environmental, and health problems associated with qat. Instead, for long a blanket of silence has been laid over the issue—a blanket of idleness and hopelessness that has laid itself over the entire country. Yemenis generally referred to it as nitham al-qat, the "regime of qat."

For many this term is tantamount to the "Saleh regime"—to a polity whose actions were solely geared towards power retention; a system finding nothing but short-term solutions to long-term problems, generating a society wholly absorbed in the daily struggle for qat; a country where after the noon prayer more civil servants can be found in the qat markets than at their workplace; where policemen regulate traffic phlegmatically with a twig of qat instead of the truncheon, where during Ramadan a whole country sleeps for most of the day because it chews qat the whole night; and where revolutions were believed to loom only if the flow of fresh qat comes to an abrupt halt.

Yemeni physicians have compared Saleh's Yemen to Odysseus'

"island of the lotus eaters"—a strange land whose people, the "lotophagi," feed on the fruits of the narcotic lotus flower and doze most of their life in peaceful apathy. President Saleh has deliberately postponed and avoided decisions on qat, as these would have compromised his rule. To appease the tribes in a difficult period of state building and power consolidation he has awarded them countless direct and indirect subsidies—many relating to qat—that have helped them to tremendously increase the area under qat cultivation and to maximize their profits from growing qat.

He has thereby fostered the emergence of a powerful qat lobby, an oligarchy comprising tribal leaders, politicians, army officers, wealthy businessmen, and administrators—all deriving handsome profits from the growing, retail, and taxation of qat.

Conflicts over water

Part of the nitham al-qat is the increasing number of disputes over land and water resources and the impotence of government authori-

ties in settling these. Besides rapid population growth and the effects of climate change, the expansion of qat farming and water exploration play a central role in these conflicts. Profits from qat farming are often invested in a further expansion of the area cultivated with qat or in the drilling of new and deeper wells.

After the turn of the millennium, qat accounted for 39.9 percent of the value of agricultural crops in Yemen and its cultivation was practiced by 33.2 percent of Yemeni farmers. Qat farming had thus become the main driver of the overexploitation of Yemen's rapidly diminishing water resources.

The increasing appropriation of rangelands by powerful tribal families, businessmen, politicians, and military leaders has created new forms of inequality that has caused conflicts in many areas of Yemen. Many of these lands used to be communal property and were vital for the grazing of the village livestock and for the collection of runoff water used for irrigation purposes. Conflicts arising from this are only rarely settled by government organs such as the courts or the relevant ministries. As court cases may last for years and verdicts are often influenced by bribes or threats, many farmers take the law into their own hands. True tribal wars over water resources leaving many dead or disabled are not rare.

In 2004 and 2005 the Sana'a-Hodeida road was cut frequently due to hostilities over water in the Al-Hayma Al-Dakhiliyya area. The long-standing instability of the area could only be overcome by setting up a number of military outposts along the highway with dug-in tanks on several hilltops overlooking the road. It is estimated that at

least 4,000 people are killed each year as a result of land and water conflicts, which is four times the number of people falling victim to criminal homicides. As the state has little leverage in rural areas many disputes go unrecorded and it is believed that the estimated figure represents only the tip of the iceberg. The International Crisis Group documented numerous cases of inter-tribal conflicts and found that nearly half of these "are, or were initially, related to land or water." According to figures of the Ministry of Water and Environment for 2004, some 80 percent of revenge crimes in Yemen were caused by conflicts over water.

In the qat-growing highlands, falling groundwater levels have led to a new phenomenon—the "water marriage." Especially in the western escarpment and in the highland's basin zone, sons or daughters of farmers are increasingly wed off in return for access to water. A family owning a well or holding the water rights to a seasonal stream has become an attractive marriage match in times of diminishing resources. At the same time falling ground water levels have led to increasing conflicts between the farming population and water authorities in areas where farmers and city dwellers share the same aquifers, notably in the catchment areas of large cities such as Taiz or Sana'a. In the Taiz area there have been repeated incidents of farmers bombing wells that supply the city with water.

Also in the capital Sana'a, which hydrologists believe will run out of water within the next decade, conflicts between the rural and urban population are on the rise. As tubewell-irrigated qat is intensively cultivated in many areas of the Sana'a basin and is said to account for up to 60 percent of the extracted water, it is clear that the profitable crop will be at the root of the looming distribution battles.

Since the 1980s, groundwater levels fall each year up to seven meters in the Sana'a basin and it is estimated that up to five times more water is abstracted than can be replenished by rainfall. The concrete interests of the qat oligarchy have so far thwarted any plans to enforce Yemen's 2002 water law that is to regulate water abstraction and put an end to random drilling of wells.

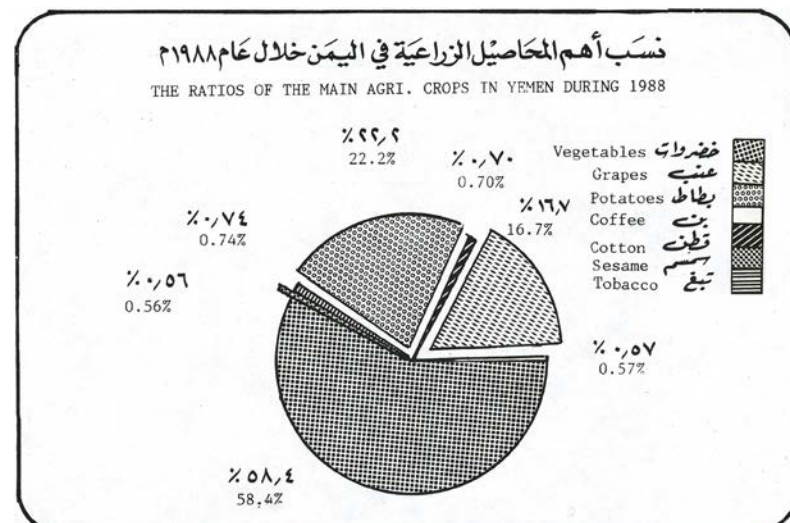


Ladies of Jabl Sabr selling qat in the old city market of Taiz. It is quite unique in Yemen for women to work in this trade. Folk legend has it that Jabl Sabr farmers of earlier days (before a road navigable by car was built to the top of the mountain) were too lazy to descend each day from their steep mountain to sell qat and have to climb all the way up again in the evening with heavy pockets full of money. So they decided that it was better to send their wives and remain on Jabl Sabr to oversee the fields and chew some qat.

The Blanket of Silence

The exclusion of qat from Yemen's development and research agenda has lost the country decades of precious time. Until today little is known about the true effect of Yemen's most important crop on the country's economy; on long-term health hazards; of its effects on food security, poverty, and nutrition; on soil and water requirements of the plant; on the pests and diseases affecting it; and last but not least, on ways of making its cultivation less harmful to the consumer and the environment. How fatal this policy was came to the attention of the government and donors only in the late 1990s, when qat was finally included in official statistics.

But until today Yemen has not developed any adequate strategy to address



During the 1980s and most of the 1990s, Yemen's agricultural statistics and national accounts made no mention of qat, as this illustration shows (from the CSO's Statistical Yearbook for 1988, p. 71).



Bakr Ali Bakr, responsible for water and environmental affairs in Amran (right), negotiates with tribal representatives and farmers to resolve a water conflict (Gerhard Lichtenthaeler, March 2007).

Austerity, subsidies and Yemen's economic woes

■ Ali Saeed

President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi ordered the Cabinet on July 9 to start an austerity package to control the growing cash shortage Yemen has been experiencing since late last year.

The Defense Ministry's website says the package is part of broader financial and administrative reforms.

Hiring will be frozen for all state institutions; procurement of cars for government officials will be halted; and international travel by government officials will be restricted.

Government officials, including ministers, are to be limited to a maximum of four overseas trips per year, each trip lasting a maximum of five days. According to the statement, during international trips "the minister can be accompanied by only two persons. State officials are no longer permitted to travel first or business class."

The statement also says that there will be no renting of offices for government departments, with the exception of urgent cases subject to approval by the finance minister. Other state and endowment buildings are to be used instead of renting.

The austerity package proposes improving tax collection methods and solving accumulated unpaid tax duties.

Every year Yemen loses about \$4.7 billion in unpaid taxes, according to Mohamed Jubran, a professor of accounting at Sana'a university who specializes in state budget strategies.

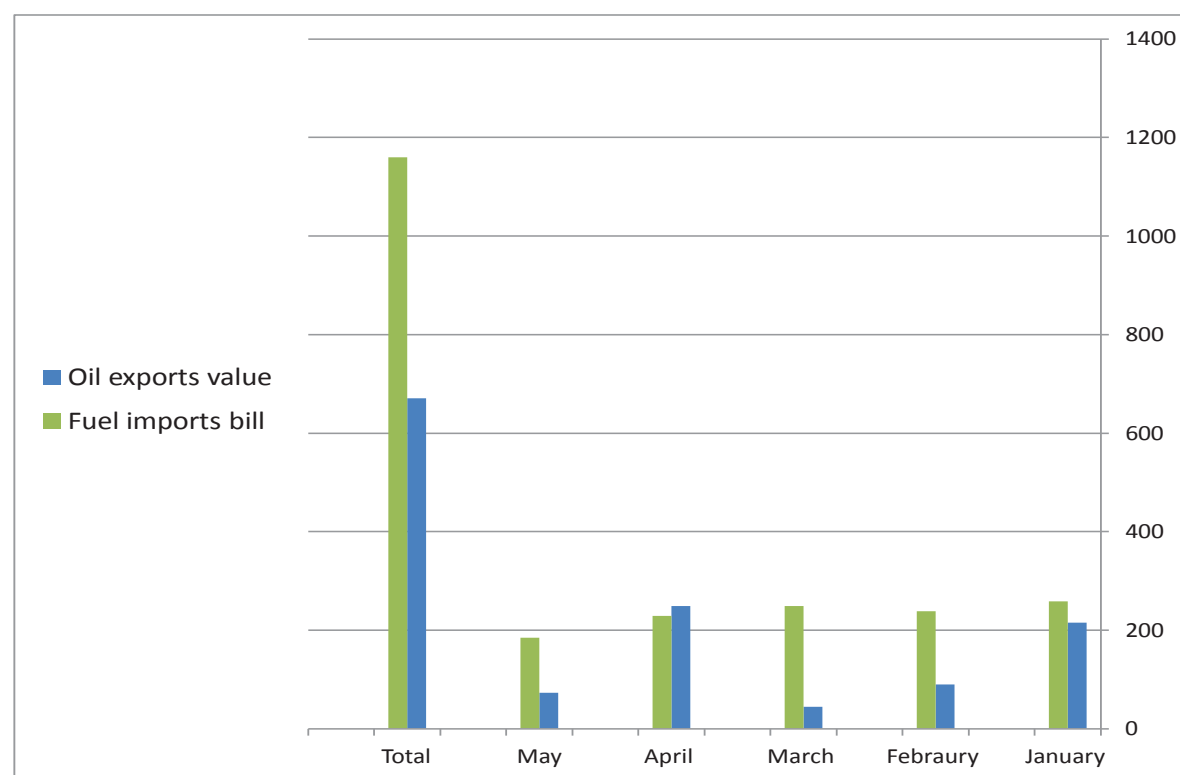
According to the proposal, the finance minister will be authorized to decrease or cancel fees to get individuals to pay their tax debts.

Many businessmen, who are often tribal leaders or military commanders, simply refuse to pay taxes and use their armed guards to avoid doing so.

The government will form a specialized military unit made up of members from the Special Forces to control tax and customs evasion. This unit will be supervised by the defense and finance ministers and the chief of the National Security Bureau.

The government has several state-owned companies in telecommunications, commodity supply, and transportation. According to a study Jubran conducted on these firms, if run efficiently these state-owned firms should be making \$2.32 billion yearly.

A feasibility review of all state-



owned companies to control corruption and calculate their economic efficiency is part of the announced austerity plan.

Jubran said that an annual cost of about \$1 billion goes toward drilling and extracting crude oil. This cost includes security, food, hous-

ing, and other expenses for workers in the oil sector. Reviewing the cost of drilling and extracting crude oil and bringing it down to global averages is a major part of the austerity plan.

In the past the government used to provide these services for oil companies directly. While it still provides the same services, it does so indirectly by paying private companies owned by Yemeni tribal leaders and military commanders.

The cost of drilling and extracting crude oil went from \$3 per barrel when the government was providing the services directly, to about \$20 with the current indirect service.

Energy reform

The Public Electricity Corporation is banned from creating any new diesel power plants, renting them, or expanding existing diesel power stations, the austerity plan reads.

Diesel power plants cost \$60 million annually, according to Heba Al-Tairy, Director of the Commercial Affairs Unit of the Yemen Petroleum Company (YPC), a state-run company that supplies the country with fuel.

According to the plan, the YPC has to terminate its contracts with private electricity suppliers by 2015.

"The Ministry of Electricity cooperates with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Finance to work on expanding gas and coal power stations to replace diesel power stations," the plan reads.

In his order on July 9 to the Cabinet, Hadi also said that all renewable energy systems are to be exempted from customs fees as part of an effort to create cheaper and cleaner power alternatives.

Fuel Subsidies

However, many observers view the action as an attempt to persuade the public to accept the removal of fuel subsidies—a move anticipated to occur very soon.

The government promised the International Monetary Fund (IMF) last May it would remove the fuel subsidy in order to get an IMF loan of over \$500 million. The loan would be disbursed in the three coming years.

The removal of the fuel subsidy could spark violence, as was the case when former President Ali Ab-

dullah Saleh partially removed the fuel subsidy in 2005 and violent demonstrations broke out.

In 2013 the fuel subsidy cost \$3.07 billion, which is about 30 percent of the government's revenues and 21 percent of spending, according to a statement made by the former minister of finance, Sakhr Al-Wajeeh, to Reuters.

"The government will proceed with the removal of the fuel subsidy during the Eid vacation to prevent any popular protests against the action," he said.

Residents in the capital Sana'a blocked major streets and set tires on fire in June to protest the acute fuel shortage and rampant power outages ongoing since April. Hadi said early this month that the riot in Sana'a against the fuel shortage was "a coup attempt" against the interim government, accusing the former regime of planning the protest.

The government is unable to meet the local demand because oil exports, which form around 70 percent of government revenue, have been in sharp decline due to repeated acts of sabotage on oil pipelines by disgruntled tribesmen. Forced to rely on fuel imports, the government find itself in an unsustainable financial situation, having been unable to pay for its fuel imports bill since April.

The latest attack on the major oil export pipeline in Marib governorate took place on July 12. The damage was not repaired until July 23 because armed tribesmen prevented the technicians from accessing the pipeline.

The fuel imports bill reached \$1.2 billion between January and May of this year, while oil exports generated only \$670 million for the same period.

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