



FACULTY  
OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES

Graduate School  
At the Faculty of Social Sciences

# **I Don't Know Who Was the Reason for This War, But I Know Who Paid the Price: Unpacking Marginalized Positionalities in the Contemporary Yemeni Civil War**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in Middle Eastern Studies

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Date: August/2022

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the lived experiences of Yemeni individuals with marginalization in context of the contemporary civil war. Experiences on the margin are approached from a multifaceted framework which allows for a contextual understanding of how Yemeni bodies face social, political and economic exclusion. In-depth semi-structured interviews with seven Yemeni individuals provide this study with empirical data to inquire what it means to be on the margin and how hegemonic power structures embedded in the Yemeni regime perpetuate such marginal positions. This research sheds light on the complex negotiation tactics employed by marginal Yemeni bodies to interact with current regimes of oppression. The participants' individual acts of resistance vis-à-vis the status quo demonstrate how power structures are constantly contested rather than passively experienced. This study employs a three-dimensional theoretical framework focusing on regimes of disorder, peripheralization and everyday resistance to challenge essentialist depictions of the current conflict. Thereby, this study offers an alternative space for marginal Yemeni bodies to make sense and to ultimately reconceptualize the current conflict through the lens of bodily regulation, socio-spatial differentiation and elite politics.

*Keywords:* Yemen, Bodies, Conflict, Experiences, Marginalization, Power, Resistance

## **Acknowledgements**

To all the brave individuals who so willingly shared their life stories. May this thesis illuminate your lived struggles and resistance which are so often forgotten.

To Torsten who encouraged me throughout this process. Your support shall never be forgotten.

To my friends and family who continue to guide me through life, no matter where I may be.

To all those silenced on the margin. May your voices be heard and shatter the walls of subjugation. Your endurance and strength continue to inspire me.

## List of acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
BY	Believing Youth
CT	Critical Theory
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GoY	Government of Yemen
GPC	General People's Congress
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NDC	National Dialogue Conference
PDRY	People's Democratic Republic of Yemen
PRE	Politically Relevant Elite
STC	Southern Transitional Council
UN	United Nations
YAR	Yemen Arab Republic
YSP	Yemeni Socialist Party

## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	7
1.1 Purpose .....	10
1.2 Context .....	12
<b>2 Literature review</b> .....	14
2.1 The Yemeni conflict through the sectarian lens: contextual limits.....	14
2.2 Politics of patronage: dynamics of rewarding and punishing .....	16
2.3 Southern grievances: systematic exclusion, struggling livelihood .....	19
2.4 Tribal power channels: forging elite coalitions.....	21
2.5 The GCC initiative: maintaining of the status quo?.....	23
2.6 Summary .....	25
<b>3 Theory: towards a critical framework of conflict and marginalization</b> .....	27
3.1 Wedeen: Disorder as Control .....	28
3.2 Peripheralization: socio-spatial considerations within marginality .....	30
3.3 Resistance on the margin: prospects for social change .....	33
<b>4 Methodological approaches guiding the research</b> .....	37
4.1 Research design.....	37
4.2 Data collection: semi-structured interviews.....	38
4.3 Tackling access into Yemeni experiences: gatekeepers as entry point...39	
4.4 Sampling and selection of participants .....	40
4.5 Ethical considerations .....	41
4.6 Positionality of the researcher: avoiding the unequal power impasse ....	42
4.7 Limitations: capturing the “marginal Yemeni experience” .....	43
<b>5 Findings</b> .....	44
5.1 Centralization of power in the Yemeni conflict.....	45
5.2 Political representation: a playground for the few .....	47
5.3 Access and opportunities: deprivation as reality for the many .....	49
5.4 Yemeni identity: diverging modes of identification .....	51
5.5 Societal divisions: a regulatory governance tool .....	54
5.6 Better governance as framework for radical change.....	57

<b>6</b>	<b>Analysis: underpinning meanings of Yemeni marginal positions</b> .....	60
6.1	Power structures sustaining marginal positions of Yemeni bodies.....	60
6.2	Spatial vulnerabilities as marker of marginal positions .....	64
6.3	Resistance on the margin: interactions with power structures and manipulation of alternative space.....	67
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	74
<b>8</b>	<b>References</b> .....	77
<b>9</b>	<b>Appendix</b> .....	85
9.1	Interview guide.....	85

## 1. Introduction

The civil war in Yemen has been described as major contemporary humanitarian crisis by the international community (EC 2022, HRW 2020, ICG 2022, OCHA 2022, Sida 2021, UN 2022, UNICEF 2022, WFP 2022). Yemen has furthermore been posited as a “failed”, “weak” and “fragmented” state, providing a haven for terrorist activity (Clausen 2015, p. 24). Narratives of Yemeni otherness, coupled with portrayals of the Yemeni state as epitome of overarching instability, circulate among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), creating images of a collapsed Yemen (Hoetjes 2021, p. 156).

Overall, these depictions of the conflict unilaterally ascribe the state an intrinsically “helpless” outline, emphasizing omnipresent Yemeni “fragility”. Such discourses feed into essentialist understandings of the current conflict, thereby furthering distorted visions of social realities as experienced by Yemeni individuals. The unitary, passive Yemeni body is artificially constructed, detached from individual experiences.

Before I started the interviews with the participants, I was concerned about my role as a researcher and how this position may unintendedly result in me exploiting or abusing the power distance between the “researcher” and the “researched”. I designed the interviews in a way that was likely to circumvent such power chasms. However, once the interviews start, I suddenly find myself in a situation where the participants turned the tables on me. Our positions are now seemingly reversed. Samir, Amal, Mahdi, Hamza, Karim, Amira and Leila let their life stories inform the interview; it appears that it is indeed them who are “in charge”. Some interviews extend over two hours and I realize how their lively interactions with current events in Yemen and their contesting voices vis-à-vis the regime manifestly contradict the imagery of “vulnerable”, “passive” Yemeni bodies deprived of agency.

Samir, Amal and Mahdi tell me in grand detail about the history of Yemen. Throughout their stories, it becomes clear that they make sense of the contemporary war by drawing parallels between past events and current

conditions. They underline the implications of the 1990 Yemeni unification and recall how the lives of Yemen residents forever changed with the 1994 civil war. As the participants meticulously describe the historical context of Yemen, I come to understand that the contemporary circumstances cannot be treated as isolated incidents but instead reflect and intertwine with previous socio-political processes. Amal and Samir's narratives make me question what it means for them to be "Yemeni" as they navigate complex local identities such as the "Southern cause" and confront informal political power channels.

As I listen to the experiences and life stories of the participants, a clear picture emerges. Contrary to the oversimplified portrayals of the contemporary civil war as furthered by the media or the international community, the current circumstances cannot be reduced to categories such as "instability", "sectarian tensions" or "haven for terrorists". Instead, a multitude of exclusionary dynamics operating along societal, institutional, political and economic lines shape the experiences as well as the relationships of Yemeni individuals with the status quo. These multifaceted experiences with exclusion are situated in a complex web of systemic marginalization processes which create disparate social realities for Yemeni residents. When I asked Samir about the role of marginality in the civil war, he freely recites a poem (Chaudhuri, 2021) by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish titled *The War Will End*:

*The war will end. The old lady will be waiting for her Martyr son and that wife will be waiting for her dear husband to come home and those children will be waiting for their beloved father to show up. I don't know who was the reason for this war, but I know who paid the price.<sup>1</sup>*

Samir directly correlates Darwish's poem with the socio-political dynamics at play throughout the contemporary war. He tells me that those forced on the margin are the ones who pay the price by facing the dire situation. His narrative suggests that outside the boundaries of essentialized depictions of the current war,

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<sup>1</sup> This is an adapted version of Darwish's poem as recited by Samir. Two of Darwish's poems in their original form, including *The War Will End* and *The ID Card*, can be found at: <http://santanusc.blogspot.com/2021/01/two-poems-by-mahamoud-darwish.html>.



complex practices of marginalization prevail. The following research questions wish to emphasize and capture in a contextual manner the lived experiences of Yemeni individuals with marginalization:

- 1. In which ways do Yemeni individuals experience and resist structures of power and control which frame their marginal positions?*
- 2. How does lived marginalization as a phenomenon resurface in the discourses and perceptions of the contemporary civil war in Yemen?*

## 1.1 Purpose

Since the Arab uprisings, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with particular emphasis on prospects for democratization. While democratic transitions have been, to a certain degree, successfully implemented in Tunisia, other countries have witnessed autocratic resilience and enhanced repression (Josua & Edel 2021, Makdisi 2017). In the post-2011 scenario, Yemen is not immune to repressive tendencies. Persistent, often violent exclusionary mechanisms dominate state-citizen interactions and encourage deep cleavages within the Yemeni society (Alley 2010, Durac 2011, Jones 2011, Lackner 2016). Such cleavages stimulate an environment which systematically disadvantages, stigmatizes and discriminates across multiple axes. By applying the concept, but also the process, of marginalization, this study seeks to frame and to conceptualize these multidimensional exclusions as well as the dynamics of repressive governance as embedded in the socio-political landscape of the Yemeni civil war.

This thesis relies on the voices and experiences of the marginalized to demystify the contemporary war, but also to emphasize the distinct ways through which Yemeni individuals make sense of the current circumstances. Lived experiences on the margin are approached as a primary resource to identify and analyze regimes of power, oppression and exclusion which envelop marginal Yemeni bodies. At the same time, this study is interested in exploring acts of resistance through which marginal Yemeni bodies contest entrenched oppressive mechanisms and engage with contemporary modes of governance. In doing so, this study aims to dispute portrayals of “passive” Yemeni bodies on the margin by underlining in which ways agency is represented within their individual acts and strategies. Imageries of unilateral victimhood and helplessness will as such be challenged while exploring the emancipatory potential of individual acts of resistance in the context of marginality.

This thesis seeks to draw upon individual lived experiences to investigate, in the Yemeni context, what it means to be marginalized. In terms of “defining” marginality, this study opted for a dynamic understanding which is actively informed by the participants. Therefore, this thesis decided against utilizing predefined categories or criteria to delineate marginal positions. Instead, by listening to the stories of those on the margin, their lived experiences constitute the groundwork for explicating marginalization. In line with the counternarrative mission of this thesis, the emphasis on lived experiences intends to create a space for marginal Yemeni bodies to articulate their perceptions and opinions while offering alternative knowledge production vis-à-vis the contemporary war.

## 1.2 Context

Following the 2011 protests, the GCC attempted to usher Yemen into a transitional phase aiming at restoring political stability, forwarding reforms and incorporating political leaders into a negotiation process. Saudi-backed transitional president Abdo Rabbu Mansour Hadi oversaw the transitional phase, which ultimately culminated in the failure of the GCC Initiative and exacerbated internal socio-political tensions towards the materialization of the civil war (Day & Brehony 2020, pp. 214-215).

The civil war officially began in 2014 when Houthi forces took control of Sana'a.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, the Houthi<sup>3</sup> movement deposed President Hadi, followed by Saudi Arabia launching Operation Decisive Storm. Since then, Saudi Arabia has, especially on the military level, been heavily involved in the contemporary war in Yemen. Saudi Arabia has positioned itself as defender of the legitimate Yemeni government and has disseminated narratives regarding the necessity to undercut Iranian influence (Clausen 2018, p. 572).

Oppositional bodies such as the secessionist movement in the south of Yemen and the Houthi phenomenon are heavily discussed in context of the contemporary conflict. However, such movements should be understood against their respective historical backdrop. Prior to 1990, the Yemeni state was divided into two distinct states, each with their own respective mode of governance. In the north, the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) primarily relied on skillful manipulation of tribal elites and political co-optation. Meanwhile, in the south, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) formally emerged in 1970, following the departure of the British three years prior. A Marxist regime ensued, characterized by fundamental economic, agricultural and political restructuring programs

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<sup>2</sup> Sana'a is, under the Yemeni constitution, the capital of the country, although its status as capital is ambiguous since Hadi declared Aden "temporary capital" in 2015.

<sup>3</sup> The Houthi movement, also known as "Believing Youth" (BY) has been in conflict with the GoY (Government of Yemen) since 2004. These conflicts can be ascribed to a series of factors. Among them, the socio-physical dimension of the conflict, regime-local discrepancies and the post-September 11, 2001 scenario are of particular importance when analyzing GoY-Houthi interactions. In the contemporary Yemeni Civil War, the Houthi movement has consolidated their presence and control in various key cities such as Aden and Sana'a. The Houthi movement has been described by the GoY as "terrorist" or "rebel" organization which challenges Yemeni unity and undermines the regime (Salmoni et al. 2010, pp. 1 -8).

(Salmoni et al., 2010, pp. 19-20).

The 1990 Yemeni unification failed to achieve comprehensive integration of the Yemeni population into the new mode of governance. Instead, the post-1990 setting was marked by dynamics of political domination over disenfranchised regional entities, as well as the appropriation of southern lands (Perkins 2017, p. 308). Eventually culminating in the 1994 civil war, imageries of northern occupation continue to inform southern perceptions in the contemporary climate (Salmoni et al. 2010, p. 20). Oppositional bodies stem from a distinct environment where tactics of divide and rule exclude specific segments of the Yemeni society. The contemporary war as such continues to reflect a series of multifaceted divides.

## **2 Literature review**

This literature review employs a multidimensional approach towards violence and instability, underlining the political, economic and societal realms of marginalization as a process. The following chapters outline scholarly analyses of a variety of contextual key elements relevant to the conflict, namely sectarian narratives, patronage politics, southern Yemeni grievances, politicized tribal networks and the GCC initiative. Simultaneously, by discussing the academic input regarding the above-mentioned factors, the underpinning meanings, expressions, practices and interpretations of marginalization in the Yemeni context will be explored.

### **2.1 The Yemeni conflict through the sectarian lens: contextual limits**

Scholarly emphasis has been successively put on “irreconcilable” sectarian divisions within the MENA region since the 2011 uprisings. The sectarian lens has been employed to explicate the resilience of violence and “fragmentation” of regional societies. Overarching sectarian explanations rely on a stark Orientalist explanatory framework to conceive “struggle” in the Middle East (Hashemi & Postel 2017, p.1-2). The stagnant, primordial notion of “sectarianism” is arguably of limited value in the process of understanding contextual realities such as conflict, cross-border alliances and subjectivities.

Instead, Hashemi and Poster refer to an alternative interpretation of conflict. They designate sectarianization, as opposed to sectarianism, as state-sponsored strategy of politicizing religious identities. Ethno-religious identity formation is thus part of a broader political process in which state actors play a crucial role in mobilizing in-group and out-group aspects (idem, pp. 4-10). Al-Rasheed feeds on Hashemi and Postel’s alternative sectarianization framework, focusing on specific counter-revolutionary measures adopted by the Saudi Arabian political elite. More precisely, religious differences are exaggerated by authoritarian regimes to further cleavages among groups and subsequently regulate their mobilization (Al-Rasheed 2011).

Hashemi & Postel and Al-Rasheed provide a more than useful analytical foundation for examining the role of sectarian narratives in Yemen. In particular, the Houthi phenomenon is construed as key sectarian feature guiding the ongoing conflict. However, while comprising religious components, the Houthi conflict did not emerge out of sectarian roots (Clausen 2018, p. 564). Less attention has been paid to the historic anti-Zaydi sentiment circulating across the Yemeni society after the end of the imamate, resulting in their widespread defamation and politico-economic marginalization. Such perceptions of Zaydi identity as a threat to Yemeni unity have been both sponsored by the Yemeni government and regional actors, namely Saudi Arabia (Granzow 2015, p. 163).

Increased marginalization after the 1990 unification activated resentment and highly politicized interpretations of Zaydi identity (Salmoni et al. 2010, p. 23). The Saleh regime<sup>4</sup> continuously posited the Houthis as restorationist movement aspiring to institute former Zaydi glory. In favor of upholding the sectarian theme of the conflict with the Houthis, the regime has instrumentalized, but also internationalized the sectarian narrative to discredit anti-regime movements (idem, pp. 169-171). Clausen provides a useful analytical framework for the proliferation of sectarian narratives enveloping the Houthi phenomenon. While sectarian affiliations have limited political importance in Yemen, its discursive resurgence can be attributed with the regionalization of the conflict. The Sunni vs. Shia dichotomy has been heavily reiterated by Saudi Arabia and arguably presents a powerful tool to delegitimize the Houthi movement (Clausen 2015, pp. 19-22). Yadav correctly distinguishes between the externally ascribed sectarian nature of the Houthi conflict and the existing governing practices forwarded by the transitional post-2011 government in Yemen. Yadav assesses that the sectarian framework does not provide a useful lens to scrutinize the

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<sup>4</sup> The “Saleh regime” refers to the 33 year-rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh as president of Yemen. The Saleh regime is known for its intricate co-optation dynamics and divide-and-rule tactics. In late 2011, Saleh agreed, as part of the GCC initiative, to step down and was later on replaced with Hadi (former vice president under Saleh) who then served as president until April 2022 when he transferred executive power to the Presidential Leadership Council consisting of eight members.

movement. Rather, met with exclusion from the transitional government, the Houthi phenomenon aims to renegotiate the transitional framework (Yadav 2014).

Certainly, sectarian portrayals of the Houthi movement carry limited reliability and fail to account for the distinct socio-political and economic conditions determining the radicalization of the movement. Moreover, the sectarian narrative fails to explicate the diverse alliances beyond sectarian affiliations the movement has crafted (Clausen 2015, pp. 22-23). Sectarian disregard the complexity of the ongoing conflict while exaggerating and distorting socio-religious realities.

## **2.2 Politics of patronage: dynamics of rewarding and punishing**

The deterioration of the political climate in Yemen is often associated with former president Ali Abdullah Saleh's semi-autocratic ruling style. The post-unification period marked the intensification of patronage politics, facilitated by their entrenchment in formal political bodies. Durac argues that the General People's Congress (GPC) was founded as an instrument to further Saleh's grip on power, which enabled both the survival of the regime and its respective patronage network (2011, p. 351). Similarly, Perkins understands the post-1994 war setting as a milestone in the expansion of authoritarian rule. Perkins correlates this development with complex patron-client relationships which engendered personalist modes of ruling (2017, pp. 303-304).

The patronage system can be understood as powerful means to include elites which endorse regime rule and as a result strengthen regime legitimacy as a whole. At the same time, patronage politics ensure the effective regulation of politically relevant elites (PRE). Importantly, the patronage system also institutionalizes political marginalization. Elites failing or refusing to reproduce established forms of governance are promptly excluded from the political system (Brehony 2017, p. 437). This is exemplified by the sudden shift in alliances between the GPC and Islah. The latter was founded in 1990 by former GPC members as a counterweight to the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP). Between 1990-1997 Islah maintained close ties with the ruling party and the regime, however, as



the GPC enhanced its position and perceived the growing influence of Islah as a threat to the status quo, Islah was subsequently marginalized, leading to the dissolution of their strategic partnership (Durac 2011, pp. 352-356).

On a different note, the post-unification period initiated a new phase of economic order. By manipulating the oil sector, Saleh's patronage system enlarged their individual wealth and undermined political opposition via influencing local power brokers (Perkins 2017, pp. 304-305). The energy sector thus serves as the foundation for state revenue and creates patronage resources for the PRE (Alley 2010, p. 389). Northern dominance over oil resources in itself presents a disproportionate distribution of power in the sense that Southern citizens are denied participation in the respective economic sector.

The construction of patronage networks can be understood as a set of calculated decisions which aim at co-opting and compromising prominent actors via divide-and-rule tactics. Durac and Alley provide an insightful account of diverse processes guiding the maintenance, multiplication and strengthening of patronage ties. Saleh produced personalist networks by gradually inserting his direct or close family into key positions, especially within the military/security sector (Durac 2011, pp. 361-362). Hence, acquiescence is cultivated via the dual manipulation of family ties and incorporation of prominent elites into the ruling body. Alley emphasizes the unwritten rules/guiding principles embedded in a flexible and uncertain system. Because patronage networks are inherently fluid and change overtime, they adjust their exclusionary and inclusionary tactics accordingly, which renders oppositional coalitions difficult to sustain (Alley 2010, pp. 391-392).

As Perkins correctly assesses, understanding the exclusionary nature of the patronage system is pivotal in explaining the proliferation of widespread disillusionment and resentment towards the regime. More precisely, the 2011 protests saw a multiplicity of societal segments calling for substantial political change in the face of widespread marginalization which exposed the Yemeni Youth with scarce opportunities for education, employment and political participation (Perkins 2017, pp. 308-310). Certainly, the patronage system is only

truly beneficial for the established political elite, omitting lower and middle social classes. Access is granted to those affiliated with channels of power and/or prestige and as such are not accessible to the majority of society. As such, Saleh's patronage politics fail to respond to popular grievances and further immobilize actors beyond formally instituted bodies of power. The reliance on patronage networks in the process of allocating prominent political, military and economic positions exemplifies the high degree of exclusionist rule that has been reproduced, reinforced and formalized since the unification period.

Marginalization plays a central role in the discourses forwarded by oppositional movements due to the prevalence of tangible discrepancies between the ruler and the ruled. According to Jones, the overrepresentation of Saleh's inner circle within the political apparatus induces high and systematic levels of discrimination, exclusion and regulation, ultimately exacerbating public discontent (2011, pp. 907-908). Arguably, the exclusivist patronage system nourishes cleavages across society to better manage its subjects and to ensure the longevity of established elitist networks. In doing so, competing voices are, to a certain degree, incorporated into patronage networks with the objective of furthering fragmentation across anti-regime movements.

The available literature suggests that the pervasiveness of patronage networks serves as a platform for undercutting participation outside the system. Indisputably, cherry-picking "suitable" clients for regime survival enhances the marginal position inhabited by non-elite social actors and ignores their claims. Saleh's elitist patronage system denies the average Yemeni benefits and inclusion, which steadily generates feelings of disconnection with the regime. As a result, experiences of relative deprivation become more expansive, transforming into popular dissent (Alley 2010, pp. 392-393). In context of the contemporary Yemeni war, these experiences on the margin shape the perceptions of political and non-political bodies vis-à-vis the regime and in return define state-citizen interactions accordingly.

### **2.3 Southern grievances: systematic exclusion, struggling livelihood**

The “Southern issue” in Yemen has been extensively debated by the international media. However, the complex socio-political and economic factors feeding into contemporary claims of secession and independence are often omitted from the discussion. According to Day, oppositional forces in southern Yemen have long called for an end of corruption and regional discrimination. Such voices have been labelled by the Saleh regime as foreign-inspired national threats. In doing so, political discourse of securitization is forwarded vis-à-vis the perceived “deconstruction” of Yemeni unity (Day 2008, pp. 417-419).

The formation of southern secessionist movements can be understood as a product of long-term economic, demographic, political and socio-cultural norms and values marginalizing the South, manifested in spatial injustice (Augustin 2015, p. 47). Augustin moreover outlines the impact of the post-unification period as a marker of embedded large-scale institutionalized discrimination of Southerners (idem, p. 50). In line with Augustin, Brehony (2017) and Granzow (2015) describe the post-unification period as visualization of northern dominance over southern territories, during which parallels between colonial occupation and the northern mode of governance crystallized. Lackner argues that Hirak<sup>5</sup> emerged out of large-scale perceptions of deprived livelihoods and mechanisms of oppression furthered by the Saleh regime. Southern frustration was gradually met with violent, repressive regime reactions, bringing about insurgency movements (Lackner 2016, p. 26).

Hirak provides oppositional narratives which act as groundwork for various protest movements. Southern opposition stems from a series of persistent divisions and grievances (Salmoni et al. 2010, p. 20). The high levels of poverty and decline of infrastructural networks, coupled with the continuous marginalization and stigmatization of the South, point to the ongoing inequities in Yemen (Augustin 2015, pp. 52-53). As a result, popular discontent towards the PRE dominate Southern discourses (Hill 2017, p. 157). These systematically nourished divergences have been publicly expressed since 2007 and reinforced via

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<sup>5</sup> Umbrella term enveloping various elements of Southern Yemeni separatist movements.

the usage of the Southern flag during the 2011 protests. Initially appearing as peaceful protests movement in 2007 led by former military officers coerced into retirement after the 1994 war, the 2015 events instituted a radical change in the organizational outline of the movement. Founded in 2017, the Southern Transitional Council (STC) arguably represents the sharpest divide within Yemen's political structures (Day & Brehony 2020, pp. 253-254).

While Southern anger and bitterness has featured as a central theme since 1994, this tendency was only exacerbated by the regime's appropriation of southern lands, assets (namely oil reserves) and the unilateral appointment of predominantly northern political elites to key military/security positions. Within the 2011 uprisings in Yemen, the gradual deterioration of living standards, political resentment towards the regime and disintegrating economy were repeatedly criticized (Lackner 2016, pp. 16-20). A significant lack of resolutions addressing wide-spread socio-economic grievances experienced by Yemeni marginal populations can be observed (idem, p. 51). The southern governorates in particular are exposed to multifaceted predicaments resulting from prolonged marginalization processes (Dahlgren 2014, chapter seven). Therefore, the role of marginalization in the Southern context is of critical importance when analyzing the contemporary Yemeni conflict. As Brehony assesses, the post-unification institutionalized marginalization and as such only strengthened southern identities as they actively experienced their subordination vis-à-vis the regime. In the process, the symbolic value of the former PDRY may have been reinvigorated, culminating in a contemporary reformulation of southern Yemeni identity. (Brehony 2014, chapter six).

Undoubtedly, the Yemeni Civil War has produced various opinions on an international scale, which seek to explain the "sudden" escalation of violence. The Houthi movement predominantly features as main perpetrator in the perpetuation of instability. However, the seizure of Sana'a was enabled due to the presence of extensive frustrations within the Yemeni population (Clausen 2015, p. 16). Grievances induced by marginalization processes resulted in clear shifts of practices, perceptions and positionings towards the regime. Oppositional

movements, namely in the Yemeni South (but not exclusively limited to the respective governorates), were framed by multifaceted inequities which permeated the Yemeni socio-political life and determined access to economic prosperity. As such, when analyzing the contemporary Yemeni conflict, further attention must be paid to the highly systematic nature of regional discrepancies and how such disparities intersect with popular mobilization tendencies.

#### **2.4 Tribal power channels: forging elite coalitions**

Tribal allegiances heavily feature in academic inquiries regarding the Yemeni socio-political context. While the relationships between tribes and power structures are highly relevant for such studies, overemphasis on the tribal nature of such interactions may lead to essentialist depictions of tribal networks. Rather than falling into the primordialism trap which conceives identities as stagnant, innate entities, tribal channels within the Yemeni society have been scrutinized by various scholars from a contextualized stance which illustrates their malleable, complex characteristics.

First and foremost, the meaning of “tribalism” and “tribe” must be clarified. Salmoni et al. describe tribalism as “enduring way of organizing society in northern Yemen (...) which is engrained in social structure and functions as a complex of values informing the way people evaluate their actions and those of others” (2010, p. 45). “Tribe” designates a “collection of extended family kin networks claiming descent from shared ancestors (...) cultivating notions of reciprocal social, economic and political commitment (...) the sociopolitical unity of tribes is not a constant (...) tribes become explicitly relevant when (...) individual or group protection require collective identities” (idem, pp. 52-53).

Durac’s study of oppositional political parties in Yemen acknowledges tribal networks as a platform for informal political action. However, while Durac views tribal loyalties as important factor in guiding informal politics, the oversimplification of tribalism is problematized. Durac argues that understanding the strategic manipulation of tribalism as a means to secure and expand patronage networks and to simultaneously enlarge popular acquiescence via powerful tribal

elites is of central importance when studying tribal affiliations. Tribal networks thus play an instrumental role in defining GPC operations and upholding the status quo (Durac 2011, p. 360-361). Furthermore, Perkins characterizes tribes as the most potent social forces in Yemen. Due to the restricted influence of the central government, which is most pronounced in urban centers but fails to reach rural and peripheral areas, tribal elites are recognized as important resource in maintaining control and order. As a result, the Saleh regime crafted alliances between prestigious tribal leaders (Perkins 2017, p. 304).

Likewise, Knights (2013) and Salmoni et al. (2010) correlate the persistence of tribalism with the continuity of patronage opportunities. Both tribal leaders and the regime benefit from the inclusion of tribal channels into the central government. Alley (2010) provides a more detailed look into the non-random composition of tribal leaders within Saleh's patronage network. The balancing of tribal, technocratic, religious and economic factors can be understood as key determinant of how inclusion into patronage networks is distributed among various actors. Moreover, social influence and popularity of respective elites, namely within tribal channels, are driving forces behind inclusion mechanisms. Tribal networks are thus enveloped by divide-and-rule tactics, which is further exemplified by the high visibility of the Sahan clan<sup>6</sup> within important military and security positions (Alley 2010, pp. 395-399).

Tribal channels mark an opportunity for the regime to further centralize its mode of governance and consequently impose marginalization on the excluded parties. In return, grievances emerge as a response to unequal political representation. Anti-government sentiment crystallized due to continued neglect towards economic and political claims of the non-elite Yemeni population. In context of the contemporary war, notably the Houthi movement and their supporters capitalized on the multiplying experiences of marginalization in Sa'ada, which fueled Houthi influence (Brandt 2014, chapter five). Tribalism in Yemen is thus situated in a web of complex, shifting and exclusive-inclusive

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<sup>6</sup> The Sahan clan is part of the wider Hashid confederation into which former president Ali Abdullah Saleh was born.

relationships with the status quo. Moreover, the regime allies with specific tribal elites at different times to combat oppositional forces, disenfranchise the latter and extend containment and regulation over the Yemeni population (Salmoni et al. 2010, p. 75).

## **2.5 The GCC initiative: maintaining of the status quo?**

As a reaction to the 2011 events, the GCC agreement aspired to usher the Yemeni socio-political landscape into a transitional period to respond to the growing political, social and economic claims voiced by the Yemeni population. The GCC initiative entailed Saleh's removal from his presidential status in return for his and his family's immunity from political persecution (Durac 2011, Clausen 2015, Hoetjes 2021). Local interpretations and receptions of the initiative revealed the shortcomings of the agreement, notably in terms of cleavages between included and excluded parties in the transitional process.

While the transitional phase was originally launched by young protest movements, the agreement concluded in a mere reshuffling of the PRE rather than instituting fundamental change. The UN and GCC thus favored strategies ensuring short-term stability via cooperation with the status quo (Clausen 2015, p. 19). According to Karim, Saudi Arabian foreign policy interests are reflected in the GCC initiative. More precisely, endeavors to utilize tactics of omnibalancing provided the groundwork for Saudi Arabian involvement in the Yemeni conflict. The GCC thus represents an institutionalized body to further respective security interests on a regional level. In doing so, the GCC is used as a platform to enhance Saudi political weight and legitimacy in Yemen (Karim 2017, p. 72-73).

Durac ascribes to Karim's assertion, pointing out that the predominantly negative reception of the GCC initiative stemmed from its inability to generate change; instead contributing to the continuation of pre-2011 politics in Yemen. Consequently, the GCC initiative marginalized those who demanded Saleh's resignation: neither the Yemeni Youth, nor the multitude of disenfranchised groups such as Hirak and the Houthi movement were involved in designing the transitional program (Durac 2012, p. 173). Alwazir points out that despite the

tremendous role the Yemeni Youth movement has played since the 2011 events, they remain continuously excluded from negotiations to resolve the conflict. This alludes to the failure of the GCC initiative to integrate specific groups among the Yemeni society and their accountability in reinforcing the marginal positions of those excluded. The GCC agreement hence signifies a program of counter-revolutionary nature (Alwazir 2016, p. 173-174).

This counter-revolutionary outline of the GCC initiative is explicitly reflected in the preservation of Saleh's patronage systems after his removal from power, compounded by Saleh's continued grip on the GPC (Hoetjes 2021, p. 159). Lackner argues that the GCC initiative safeguarded the political predominance of the GPC and its ability to determine the post-2011 political trajectory in Yemen (2016, pp. 12-13). Transfeld confirms Lackner's analysis regarding tactics employed by the GPC, stating that the GCC initiative enabled established political and economic alliances between the PRE, simultaneously undercutting substantial structural reforms (2016, p. 164-165).

Visibly, the GCC initiative relied on profound interactions with the status quo and failed to respond accordingly to distinct demands voiced by the opposition and to calls for politico-economic reforms which defined the protest movements. The major shortcoming of the GCC can be associated with the maintenance of the status quo, thereby intensifying and perpetuating marginalization for those excluded from the negotiation process. The endurance of established patronage channels and their semi-permeable network can moreover be understood as detrimental to participatory opportunities for Yemeni oppositional and/or marginalized groups. As Lackner correctly assesses, the GCC initiative facilitated the continued concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the PRE at the expense of public demands for greater inclusion (2016, p. 33).

The National Dialogue Conference (NDC) served as primary transitional tool following the 2011 events. Scholarly attention has been paid to the outcomes of the dialogue and the distinct actors partaking in its formulation, including the implications for the future of Yemen (Day & Brehony 2020, Lackner 2014 & 2016, Elayah et al. 2020). The objective of the NDC was to address the



accumulating grievances within the Yemeni society by involving various segments of the Yemeni society in the process of creating a new constitution (Clausen 2015). Hirak played a central role in the NDC, documenting key aspects of the Southern issue with particular emphasis on protracted discrimination (Day & Brehony 2020, p. 262). Nevertheless, the internal composition of the NDC heavily relied on political actors and elites within Hadi's inner circle, while failing to adequately include southern separatists. Marked by evident favoritism towards supporters of the established elite instead of incorporating different social groups to attain more substantial demographic representation, the level of inclusion within the NDC was remarkably low. In addition, socio-economic grievances experienced by the Yemeni Youth and rural societal segments were neglected (Lackner 2016, p. 42-51). Due to the inability of the NDC to represent the Yemeni society, agreements on the eventual governance of Yemen within a federal framework were inconclusive (Hoetjes 2021).

When assessing the outcomes of the GCC initiative and the NDC, protracted marginalization provides a useful framework for analyzing the outbreak of the contemporary Yemeni civil war. Despite calls for fundamental political and economic restructuring, regime survival was clearly prioritized in the post-2011 scenario. Oppositional bodies faced further systemic oppression and failed to be meaningfully included in the decision-making process. Existing literature on the GCC initiative and the NDC confirms such shortcomings within the transitional government and allude to the exacerbation of tensions resulting in the current conflict. Such analyses also call for a more thorough inquiry into the means, actors or processes which sustain marginal positions within the context of the contemporary war.

## **2.6 Summary**

This literature review attempted to provide an inclusive, contextual overview of scholarly analyses of the Yemeni socio-political environment through space and time. At the same time, literature with explicit focus on embedded articulations of marginalization and their role in the contemporary conflict has been discussed. Throughout this review, political strategies adopted by the Saleh regime, local

grievances and international involvement in the Yemeni war has scrutinized through available critical academic contributions in the field. On a general note, the role of unaddressed grievances as such constitutes an important aspect of the war, providing insightful information regarding the escalation of tensions. In doing so, exploring marginalized Yemeni positionalities constitutes a more than useful resource.

### **3 Theory: towards a critical framework of conflict and marginalization**

Critical theory (CT) functions as the theoretical groundwork for this research. This research seeks to reveal oppressive and hegemonic dynamics which construct marginal social realities in the Yemeni context. This study adopts an emancipatory objective by investigating how Yemeni social actors utilize their marginal position to resist and potentially overcome entrenched structures of oppression and inequality. Critical theory is thus instrumental for this study as it “invokes its emancipatory system of meaning (...) providing postmodern modes of analysis with a normative grounding” (Steinberg & Kincheloe 2010, p. 140). CT outlines social actors as active participants in the construction of social realities (Smart 1976).

Importantly, the meaning as well as the implications of emancipatory aspirations embedded in this study must be clarified. Undoubtedly, emancipatory struggle and reasoning stems from multifaceted disadvantaged positionalities. Notwithstanding, emancipatory knowledge production does not argue for a categorically “better” mode of existence, but instead “(...) proposes, in all earnest, to take an ironic attitude toward experience itself, complete with the allegedly unshakable “facts it furnishes” (Bauman 2010, chapter three, section one). In other words, rather than advocating for a “utopian” articulation of social, economic or political conditions, this research considers the voiced marginal lived experiences of Yemeni individuals to represent a counter-narrative to taken-for-granted knowledge while problematizing the punitive characteristics entrenched in the state apparatus.

### 3.1 Wedeen: Disorder as Control

This study decidedly relies primarily on Lisa Wedeen's conception of disorder as a mode of reproducing control and rule when approaching power structures in the Yemeni context. Wedeen suggests that spaces of disorder in the Yemeni context are instrumentalized for purposes of regime survival. Based on divide-and-rule modes of governance, categories delineating boundaries between societal groups are created. Subsequently, the regime exploits the process of group-making to accentuate, but also perpetuate, disorder as a form of rule (Wedeen 2008 p. 151). The process imposes identification modes via obscure and artificially produced groups (idem, p. 157).

Wedeen advocates for a constructivist conception of identification in which knowledge is shaped by historical, political and discursive elements. She asserts that in times of (imminent) conflict, identifications adopt a more active role in the lives and experiences of individuals. Political identifications in return are guided by political organizations or networks which generate more urgent, potentially hostile expressions self-differentiation. Ultimately, this culminates in prescribing societal groups with distinct categorical space used in everyday practices and interactions (idem, pp.161-162). Group belonging plays a crucial role in times of conflict and instability and can in this context be further mobilized or stimulated (Brubaker 2004).

Wedeen furthermore notes the centrality of spaces of ungovernability within conflict. Regions subjected to chaotic and unpredictable modes of governance may serve as a space in which the political vacuum is exploited by the PRE to enforce disciplinary and regulatory control (Wedeen 2008, p.166). Control is achieved by navigating phenomena of conflict to posit group identifications in an antagonistic network of relations (idem, pp. 167-169). Wedeen underscores the regime's role in governing how categorical schemes are played out on an everyday basis. Categories can be ordered and regulated through powerful actors accordingly to reproduce specific social conditions which in return facilitate the maintenance, power and legitimacy of the regime (idem. p. 176). Modes of identification are hence situated in a system of "formalized, codified and

objectified categorization developed by powerful, authoritative institutions” (Brubaker 2004, p. 42). The state assumes the role of the “identifier” and imposes distinct categorizations through its material and symbolic power (idem, p. 43).

According to Wedeen, “A politics of disorder yields a measure of order, while helping to structure the imaginative and organizational possibilities available to citizens” (2008, p. 178). The encouragement of disorder in specific places at specific times represents a distinct regime-sponsored strategy to overcome power limitations associated with the weak grasp on certain segments of the Yemeni society, such as the northern periphery. Disseminating disorder allows to reassert the predominance of the regime (idem, pp. 179-181).

Wedeen’s theoretical postulations point to the spatial vulnerabilities conceived as a result of insecurity, deprivation and chaotic livelihoods. Stark disparities can be detected between the concentration of regulatory power in the hands of the Yemeni PRE as opposed to the everyday struggle with disorder which marks the experiences of non-elite populations. Disorder as mode of governance culminates in the reproduction of multifaceted inequalities which construct marginal positionalities within the Yemeni society. Analyzing marginalization in Yemen through the looking glass of Wedeen’s conflict theory enables this research to radically reconceptualize knowledge production about the phenomenon at hand.

However, when theorizing disorder as mechanism for regime survival, emphasis on bodies as a platform for exercising control and discipline arguably adds another theoretically valuable layer to Wedeen’s approach. Examining the body as medium for subjectification is useful for exploring through which means the power apparatus transforms the body into “manageable” entities. Through specific applications of power, control over the population and thereby the regulation of their bodies is enabled (Ryan, 2015, chapter three). In Ryan’s study on the subjugation of Palestinian women and their bodies, control is exercised on the body via a multitude of practices which aim to punish the Palestinian population. Security discourses frame Palestinian women as de facto subjects by designating them as the violent, terrorist “Other”. Palestinian bodies are

subjugated through the act of incarceration and subsequently exposed to deeper levels subjugation by systematically targeting and exploiting gendered dimensions of the body. Subjugation moreover occurs via exercising control over housing in the form of demolitions, leading to forced displacement and increased bodily and psychological vulnerability (idem, chapter six).

Ryan's inquiry into the bodily control of Palestinian women vis-à-vis the Israeli state reflects the conduct of the Yemeni state in various ways. More precisely, state-sponsored disorder impedes on Yemeni bodies and enforces chaotic modes of governance which severely restrict the available options, access and political representation of Yemeni bodies. Moreover, the socio-spatial control applied via the regime over specific areas explicitly subjugates, but also disenfranchises regionally based Yemeni bodies, such as southern residents and citizens of specific cities, such as Ta'izz, Al-Hudaydah and Ibb. By incorporating Ryan's bodily subjectification into Wedeen's theory of disorder, the regulation of Yemeni individuals through the power apparatus and their marginal position can be analyzed in a meaningful and contextual way.

This reconceptualization of marginalization processes in Yemen provides a platform for envisioning change and potential emancipatory opportunities. In this research, lived experiences with marginalization, coupled with the selected theoretical framework, demonstrate how disorder informs and is simultaneously informed by marginality. More precisely, this research highlights the complex ways in which repressive, disorderly governance, aiming at (re)constructing marginal bodies, is met with claims for alternative modes of governance, favoring stabilization, broader inclusion and fundamental changes within the composition of the Yemeni PRE.

### **3.2 Peripheralization: socio-spatial considerations within marginality**

Peripheralization entails the process of "becoming disconnected from and dependent on the center (...) a "periphery" is neither a given nor a static entity (...) as the outcome of complex processes of change in the economy, demography, political decision-making and socio-cultural norms and values"

(Fischer-Tahir & Naumann 2013, p. 9). Fischer-Tahir and Naumann argue that peripheralization emerges out of uneven development within the capitalist dogma. However, peripheral realities cannot be reduced to a mere outcome of capitalist programs, but on a more important note represent a socially shaped space in which inequalities are spatially bound. Peripheral space entails practices of exclusion and inclusion and are conceived according to social norms, values and rules (idem, pp. 18-19).

The “peripheral” as such exists within a web of broader power dynamics which construct space as a means of disciplinary control. As Lefebvre states “The concentration of ‘everything’ that exists in space subordinates all spatial elements and moments to the power that controls the centre” (1992, p. 356). The “center” constrains relations, access, distribution and generates norms that enhance its durability, engendering continuous inequality and discrepancies which differentiate space and lived experiences from each other. In other words, social spaces, in this context intitled the “periphery”, beyond the center are continuously marginalized through the maintenance of the center.

On a theoretical basis, peripheralization can be used as an analytical tool to investigate spatial differentiation processes (Fischer-Tahir & Naumann 2013, p. 21). Socially trained and habitualized discursive practices heavily feature within such analyses (Bürk 2013, p. 171). Von Braun and Gatzweiler describe marginality as a multidimensional concept which “refers to where people are and to what they have (...) integrating poverty, discrimination and social exclusion (...)” (2014, pp. 3-4). Similarly, Bhalla and Lapeyre point out that social exclusion as a process encompasses multiple dimensions, namely of socio-political and economic nature (1997, pp. 418-420). This theoretical framework is particularly useful in the Yemeni context as it visualizes how lived peripheral space and marginal positionality interconnect and are reproduced by specific actors, processes and norms.

Thus, analyzing peripheral realities is likely to provide insight into how marginalization as a phenomenon is articulated in practice and may demonstrate which factors significantly contribute to its perpetuation. Investigating spatial

differentiation illuminates how lived space is systematically categorized, regulated and disciplined. In critically examining the entrenched multifaceted inequalities operating within the center-periphery dichotomy, the regulatory power of space is illustrated. Therefore, the role of space in regulating social realities adds to the conceptualization of what constitutes marginal positionalities. Studying marginalization through the looking glass of peripheralization posits the unequal distribution of power and resources as a central feature of lived space, underlining the restrictions and constraints associated with broader practices of domination in the Yemeni context. Via highlighting complex socio-spatial processes, peripheralization as theoretical framework may illuminate the roots of social inequalities (Meyer & Miggelbrink 2013, p. 220).

This study first and foremost understands marginality as active, malleable and complex lived experience. It advocates for contextual and highly individualized knowledge production regarding marginalization and rejects mystified, essentialist representations of an imagined “unitary Yemeni experience” with regimes of oppression. This theoretical conception of space arguably allows this research to pursue the transformative aspirations of CT. Namely, marginal experiences based on socio-spatial discrepancies provide the groundwork for emancipatory action. Alternative governance modes mark prospects for the emancipation of the constructed “marginal” from the centralized, hegemonic regime which circulates disorder (Wedeen 2008). Moreover, this theoretical approach carries transformative potential by reconceptualizing spatial relations between the delineated “center” and the “periphery”.

Applying peripheralization as a theoretical angle helps to underline the salience of disciplinary violence exercised within disconnected, subjugated Yemeni space. Moreover, construing peripheralization as crucial process within the broader phenomenon of marginalization underscores what Lefebvre calls “lived space”. Everyday space is shaped according to subjective experiences and interpretations, which “has an origin (...) with its hardships, its achievements, and its lacks” (1992, p. 362). Lefebvre understands everyday lived space as representational rather than abstract or quantifiable (idem). Lefebvre’s emphasis



on the “lived” component of space intersects with the methodological approach selected for this research.

### **3.3 Resistance on the margin: prospects for social change**

Within studies centering around resistance, multiple forms or expressions of resistance have been identified, such as everyday resistance (Scott 1985). Scott classifies characterizes resistance as dependent on the level of institutional repression. Expressions of resistance vary and may translate into formal-informal, individual-collective and public-anonymous modes of resistance. Changes in repression levels are likely to induce a shift in modes of resistance from organized, political organization/activity to silent and anonymous forms of resistance to openly violent acts (Scott 1985, p. 299). Everyday resistance, as characterized by Scott, exhibits predominantly hidden, disguised and informal properties (Scott 1985, 1990).

Scott’s conceptualization of everyday resistance presumes the existence of a purposive/explicit intent as central part of acts of resistance. Baaz et al. (2018) rightfully problematize Scott’s postulations as they omit unintended and other-intended resistance from the debate. Baaz et al. claim that acts of resistance, even when encompassing ambiguous intent or when articulated in a non-political format, should be understood as such. By imposing certain criteria, such as Scott’s prerequisite of political consciousness, on resistance movements to “legitimize” themselves, the plurality of everyday modes of resistance is overlooked (Baaz et al. 2018, chapter two).

In line with Baaz et al., Vinthagen and Johansson critique Scott’s presupposition of political intention/ consciousness within everyday forms of resistance. Vinthagen and Johansson assert that resistance as a means of interacting with hegemonic structures carries the potential of undermining power. They underline the transformative, emancipatory premise of resistance and agency while recognizing the centrality of context and discourse. More precisely, Vinthagen and Johansson understand resistance as heterogenous act, not as

consciousness or intent, which is articulated in accordance with the respective contextual environment (2013, p. 18).

Likewise, Baaz et al. emphasize that resistance should be understood as a subaltern practice that has the potential to negotiate, undermine or reformulate power structures (2018, chapter two). Its internal constitution is complex and varies from environment to environment, as does its intent, which constantly evolves and adapts to dynamics of politico-institutional repression. Therefore, resistance should be conceived as plural and as available in hybrid formats, which continue to be contextually reshaped. There is a need for studying specific acts of resistance based on particular circumstances such as economic conditions, state-citizen interactions, institutional opportunities and access into the political realm (idem).

Such context-driven modes of resistance are explored by Bayat (2013) who points to the increasing prominence of “urban marginals” as broadly excluded groups within a globalized world. Bayat introduces an alternative framework for examining acts of resistance and political activism expressed by marginalized bodies. He applies the theoretical concept of “quiet encroachment” to designate “noncollective but prolonged direct actions of dispersed individuals and families to acquire basic necessities (...) in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion” (Bayat 2013, chapter 2 section one).

Bayat draws clear distinctions between quiet encroachment and resistance. According to Bayat, the former does not rely on an explicitly defensive or political premise, but rather constitutes a necessary action to improve conditions and life in general, while it is cumulative in nature. Differently put, through continuous, quiet and individual struggle of the marginalized, gains and improvements are achieved which then challenge prevailing norms of exclusion (idem, section three).

However, Bayat also acknowledges that such silent, everyday acts of quiet encroachment may transform into political struggle/activism once their advances are undermined or jeopardized. Consequently, acts of everyday quiet encroachment attain a certain “political consciousness” and are reformulated

accordingly (idem, section four). Certainly, Bayat's quiet encroachment demonstrates the fluidity of modes of resistance as exemplified by their ability to adjust to specific social, economic or political settings. Furthermore, Bayat's theoretical input alludes to complex intersections between individual and collective and silent and audible resistance acts of resistance.

Baaz et al. further expand on such intersections, emphasizing the entanglement of everyday acts of resistance and more organized activities of resistance in the process of furthering social change. To understand social change, acts of resistance should be not approached as isolated entities. Instead, it is crucial to underline the dynamic interplay between various resistance modes. For example, organized resistance may contribute to the formation of new, innovative and alternative activities of resistance. Baaz et al. state that resistance continuously evolves and adapts. Forms of resistance build on other existing expressions of resistance, while they may simultaneously discourage, encourage or transform each other. One mode of resistance may potentially provide a platform of contestation which inspires the creation of emerging forms of resistance (Baaz et al. 2018, chapter 4).

Furthermore, Baaz et al. highlight the centrality of self-reflexivity in crafting the particular mode of resistance employed by the subordinated. This self-reflexivity is informed by regimes of power and domination imposed upon the subaltern body (idem, Chapter 5). Self-reflection as platform for meaning-making guides the ways in which the produced subordinate bodies conceive their relationship with the power apparatus and in return employ acts of resistance to interact with oppressive structures (idem, chapter 6).

When examining lived experiences on the margin in the contemporary conflict, it is crucial to consider the emancipatory potential of Yemeni bodies who actively engage with power structures embedded in the status quo. Resistance as such is one example of how marginal bodies negotiate their position in society or politics and how they confront the current circumstances of war, disorder and exclusion. Therefore, integrating resistance into the theoretical framework sheds light on an often overlooked aspect of the conflict while underscoring, in line with

the premise of CT, the role of individual agency. To theorize the Yemeni resistance in a meaningful way, resistance should be approached as a process rather than a stagnant act exercised by the Yemeni subaltern. This requires strong emphasis on historical, political and socio-cultural contexts. The variety of resistance articulations and their continuously shifting content, application and intention merit further attention and inquiry.

## **4 Methodological approaches guiding the research**

This chapter outlines the different segments of the adopted research methodology, namely the basic research design, data collection, access, sampling, ethical considerations, reflections on positionality of the researcher, challenges and limitations. The chosen theoretical framework intersects with the methodological approach insofar that social actors interpret the world, as well as the underpinning meanings of the latter, according to their subjective positioning (Comstock 1982, p. 149). Yemeni lived experiences with marginalization thus provide the basis for contextual meaning-making. Arguably, in this context theory and methodology within this research synthesize to render visible the role of subjective experiences in paving way for emancipatory change.

### **4.1 Research design**

This study aims to investigate social injustices as maintained through the status quo. Therefore, a profoundly qualitative research design was selected for this project. The qualitative nature of this research intends to reveal how Yemeni individuals experience disenfranchisement, marginal positionality and omnipresent power structures. In order to accentuate, in a Yemeni context, lived experiences on the margin, this study relies on phenomenology as describing the “meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell 2007, p. 57).

Phenomenology is considered to facilitate the attempt to “unfold meanings as they are lived in everyday existence” (Lavery 2003, p. 22). As such, the social world from a phenomenological perspective is conceived as “product of human activity, interpretation and intentions, as a subject world” (Smart 1976, p. 75). Lived experiences constitute the core of phenomenological research, acting as both source and object (Van Manen 2016, chapter three, section one).

Notwithstanding, it is important to underline that there is no scholarly consensus on what constitutes the phenomenological method as such. Moran describes phenomenology as “anti-traditional” philosophy which is particularly

interested in studying the way distinct phenomena appear to the consciousness rather than relying on notions of common sense (Moran 2000, pp. 4-6). Within phenomenological approaches, the relationship between external stimuli and the subjective interpretation of the respective phenomena is underpinned, suggesting that experience is not an isolated process and that perception and experience intertwine in complex ways (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, Moustakas 2011). Reflexivity is of particular importance when relying on phenomenology as a methodological approach to explore the “meanings human being attribute to their behaviour and the external world” (Della Porta, Keating 2008, p. 26). Marginalization as phenomenon will thus be treated as an embodied, individual experience through which Yemeni social actors make sense of their environment.

#### **4.2 Data collection: semi-structured interviews**

For the purpose of exploring the central theme of marginalization, semi-structured interviews as data collection method are considered most valuable. In line with phenomenology, the advantage of interviews for qualitative research can be found in its ability to make sense and understand lived experiences and the meanings that accompany them (Seidman 2006, Van Manen 2016). Due to the geographical dispersal of the participants, the interviews were conducted via digital platforms, namely Zoom and Google Meet. The length of each interview was mainly determined by the individuals, depending on their engagement with the central concepts and themes underlined during the conversations. The interviews ranged from 60 to 150 minutes.

English was used as principal language for conveying narratives of marginalization to avoid translation and to establish a common linguistic groundwork for all participants, as well as the researcher, which ultimately ensured a comfortable space for all involved parties to express themselves. All participants stated their consent in partaking in the research and were informed that each interview was recorded. Voluntary participation within the study was underlined, as was the option to withdraw from the process at any moment. Any personal or sensitive information which may enable their identification was

anonymized.

While interviews can be conceived in different forms, this research is devoted to in-depth interviewing. For this approach, open-ended questions are well suited, as they allow for the participants to “reconstruct their experience within the topic under study” (Seidman 2006, p. 15). As such, lived experiences “become meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (idem, p. 17). Central themes and concepts create a de-facto “weak structuring” guiding the conversations. These themes are as follows: political representation, the Southern secessionist movement, socio-economic disparities, the NDC, the political elite within the Yemeni regime, personal experiences with marginalization, the post-unification period.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4.3 Tackling access into Yemeni experiences: gatekeepers as entry point**

Access is crucial for data collection and arguably affects the research outcomes on a fundamental level. Access is moreover constituted of a complex web of negotiation processes with people. How the initial stage of access is handled by the researcher may hold long-lasting and highly consequential effects (O’Reilly 2012, p. 6). Therefore, it is imperative for the researcher to carefully consider how to access the setting and to reflect upon the role of access for the project as a whole.

When embarking on the recruitment process, social networks within Lund University proved to be highly valuable. For this research, the recruiting process was initialized via contacting a Yemeni individual, followed by a short description of the study and its purpose. Subsequently, the Yemeni individual declared her commitment towards the study, thus transforming into the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper shall from this point on be known as Amal. The presence of Amal as a gatekeeper significantly facilitated access, as Amal voluntarily took charge of large parts of the recruiting process. Eventually, Amal’s efforts culminated in the recruitment of key informants, who were later on interviewed.

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<sup>7</sup> The interview questions can be found in the appendix under “interview guide”.

Gatekeepers have the ability “indirectly decide what data are collected and where and when” (Eklund 2010, p. 130). Thus, interacting with a gatekeeper entails a separate negotiation process on its own. Gatekeepers may understand their knowledge and role in pinpointing local problems and solutions as “absolute” (idem, p. 140). As such, I continuously assessed to which extent Amal actively engaged with the generated data. Nevertheless, Amal’s contributions to this research must be underlined as her involvement enabled access, established connections with the informants and acted as a constant support in the researching process.

#### **4.4 Sampling and selection of participants**

Depending on the anticipated research outcomes, various sampling tactics can prove useful. The selection of participants is often guided by the research design, as well as the formulated research puzzle (O’Reilly 2012, p. 195). This research tailors the sampling and selection process in a way that is likely to induce in-depth, meaningful data. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was employed.

Purposive sampling refers to the systematic selection of a given sample based on its ability to represent a population guided by specific criteria. Purposive sampling selects participants who “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell 2007, p. 125). Participants were recruited from a variety of socio-economic, educational, philosophical and residential backgrounds to fulfill the diversity principle and provide rich insight into various lived experiences, their commonalities and differences and their positionality vis-à-vis marginalization in Yemen. Moreover, the selection of the participants required for the latter to have lived through, have been exposed to or have formulated an explicit opinion on marginalization processes.

Additionally, this research utilized snowball sampling to further enrich data pertaining to the phenomenon of marginalization. The recruiting process started with a small sample of initial contacts, who then referred to other potential



participants (O'Reilly 2012, p. 198; Bryman 2012, p. 202). While this sampling method did not exclusively rely on predefined criteria, it facilitated the identification of participants reflecting attributes which may enrich the research. Namely, the recruiting of female Yemeni participants was achieved via snowball sampling. This enabled the incorporation of a valuable gender perspective into the accumulated data.

In total, seven individuals were interviewed, including: two female Yemeni students/activists, one female Yemeni activist, one male Yemeni student/activist and three male Yemeni professionals. Although the small sample size raises questions regarding adequate representation, a small sample size may provide in-depth data and /or observations which follow the purpose of phenomenological methodology. Qualitative samples are as a result often small in size as they produce rich and detailed data (Bryman 2012, Ritchie & Lewis 2003).

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

According to Lune and Berg, disadvantaged groups are more accessible to researchers than powerful groups. We must therefore ask ourselves whether the research may entail ramifications of political or other nature (2017, p. 58). Due to the significant role interviews play in this research, it is necessary to consider numerous ethical questions when conducting them.

First and foremost, questions raised during the interviews may intersect with trauma, distress or simply overstep personal boundaries of the participants. Particular interview questions or the interviewing style can create an uncomfortable environment for the interviewees and as such requires careful consideration. Certainly, the researcher must engage with these dynamics and reflect about methods to decrease potentially negative effects.

Researching the marginalized inevitably implies investigating their multifaceted vulnerabilities. Exploring marginal positionalities within this research necessitates critical reflection about the impact of certain conditions or events as experienced by the participants. The selected Yemeni individuals may have been/are subjected to sources of precarity, which in return must be

acknowledged by the researcher and must not be overlooked in the data analysis. On a different note, their participation in this study may enlarge their visibility in the public sphere and provide a platform for silenced voices to be expressed (Fisher 2012, p. 13).

However, researching the marginalized also carries the danger of producing essentialist and taxonomic knowledge (Spivak 1988, p. 27). While different forms of vulnerability identified by the participants must be discussed, it is imperative to overcome the double-edged sword of studying vulnerable positionalities. Differently put, investigating how vulnerabilities are constructed may have the unintended effect of reinforcing such vulnerabilities through reductive, mystified or orientalist discourse. As a result, this research may risk portraying the participants as victimized, agency-deprived, othered subjects. Thus, when exploring marginal Yemeni subjectivities, the researcher must carefully contemplate the potentially harmful byproducts of creating and utilizing the category “vulnerable”.

#### **4.6 Positionality of the researcher: avoiding the unequal power impasse**

Throughout this research, different axes enveloping me such as class, educational background, socio-economic status, race and gender may intersect with the research output and the research process in general. Certainly, my educational background (created via pursuing University studies in multiple countries) and my socio-economic status (living in Sweden and comfortable livelihood) put me in a certain position which has the potential to become reflected in the study as a whole. Constant engagement my own potential bias was practiced to both increase self-awareness and to guarantee a high degree of transparency.

Furthermore, insider and outsider positions can materialize at different times and on different levels depending on where the researcher stands in relation to the “researched” (Merriam et al. 2001, p. 411). The extent to which researchers adopt the insider or outsider role is hence questionable (Narayan 1993, p. 671). Throughout this research, this assessment proved more than relevant. Depending on the different interactions with the research participants, communalities between

different axes such as philosophical assumptions, social class and education rendered my outsider position less apparent and stagnant. At other times, socio-cultural and historical divergencies between both parties were highlighted, thus reinforcing my outsider position. As a general note, my positionality shifted in complex ways and led to flexible identifications and interactions with the informants.

#### **4.7 Limitations: capturing the “marginal Yemeni experience”**

Undoubtedly, the time restrictions imposed on this research project interfered with the research process. Furthermore, my outsider position limited access. According to Bryman (2012, p. 200) and Singleton and Straits (2005, p. 134), if a study aspires to analyze a heterogenous population, as exemplified in the Yemeni case where different regions exhibit highly individualistic properties, the sample size must be larger to reflect these heterogenous attributes. Evidently, for the above-stated reasons, this research relies on a small sample size. However, the purpose of this study is not to represent all existing segments of Yemen in a quantitatively substantial manner, but rather to inquire, understand and shed meaning on the narratives of Yemeni individuals. In a way, it is highly unlikely that “the Yemeni experience” can be quantified or captured. Instead, this research focuses on portraying multiple, personal lived experiences with marginal realities rather than constructing a mystified, artificial and “unified” account of marginalization in Yemen. Therefore, giving a detailed, inclusive picture of marginalization in Yemen “allows for a detailed investigation of social processes in a specified context” (Ritchie & Levis 2003, p. 79). Positioning the in-depth personal accounts, not their number, into the center of the methodological approach enables this research to explore how people experience a given setting/condition. Decidedly, understanding the meaning of their lived experiences is the prime concern of this research. In-depth qualitative exploration of individual lived experiences is considered to be more fruitful for this research than imposing sample boundaries.

## 5 Findings

This chapter outlines the study findings which were extrapolated from the accumulated data. To facilitate the coding process, the posited findings were thematized. Findings pertaining to a specific theme will as such be discussed in distinct paragraphs. The diverse profiles represented within the interviews each conceived “marginalization” in different ways. Nevertheless, commonalities between prominent themes and concepts emerged. These recurring themes and concepts were linked to subjective understandings of marginalization as a process.

Firstly, centralized modes of governance in Yemen, including their informal elite-based power channels will be discussed. Following individual experiences with centralization, the implications of such modes of governance are further examined through themes such as unequal political representation and scarce access and opportunities. Importantly, the theme of post-unification politics intersects with political representation and access and opportunities in a way that it enabled to institutionalization of systemic inequalities and furthered marginal positions. These systemic inequalities are explicated through themes of regional modes of identification and societal divisions, in which individual experiences with the power apparatus are rendered visible. Following the experiences with regimes of oppression, the various interactions with the status quo are explored. Under the theme of better governance, individual acts of resistance which contest exclusionary elite politics and envision radical change in various ways are highlighted.

## 5.1 Centralization of power in the Yemeni conflict

The respondents consider centralization to be a driving factor regarding the prevalence of marginalization in Yemen. Due to the prominence of centralization within the respondents' narratives, centralization is within the findings scrutinized as a contextually overarching theme which guides the experiences of Yemeni individuals on the margin. As such, this theme constitutes a roadmap to understanding various articulations and specific practices pertaining to marginalization processes.

Samir elaborates on the specific political mechanisms utilized to maintain the status quo.

*(...) power was (...) locked into these five, six families, that's it (...) They owned it. (...) An entire nation was built or raised under this notion (...) of, oh, after Ali Abdullah Saleh dies (...) Ahmed would take over or would the Ahmar kids or whatever. (...) I think that was one of the reasons that made me believe that there is no hope for change because it seemed very corrupted from the entirety of the system. (Interviewee E: Samir)*

In this interview section, Samir emphasizes the role of powerful families and their influence in the political field. Samir outlines the role of centralized political power in generating "hopelessness" among the Yemeni population. Samir argues that due to the prevalence of elite networks and their grasp on power, he has a rather pessimistic outlook regarding access to the political sphere and prospects for inclusionary decision-making. As a result, the political field appears as "locked", predetermined by interpersonal relationships nourished between the few select elite families.

Hamza's narrative overlaps with Samir's reflections on the centralization of power. However, Hamza approaches centralization from a broader geographical perspective.

*The system of the north talks over the whole country. The tribal system in the north generalized the whole system inside the entire country. (...) That's why there is war as a result of that. But in the general, the system did not change (...) because the north tries to take over, to prevail.*  
(Interviewee B: Hamza)

According to Hamza, the geographical North of Yemen has historically claimed power by imposing their mode of governance on other regions within the country, namely the South. The contemporary conflict constitutes as extension of such inequalities, as exemplified in his claim that the “system did not change”. Hamza associates power centralization in the North with a process of “homogenizing” the whole of Yemen. Centralization in Hamza’s mind is reflective of hegemonic governance practices which aim at silencing contesting voices. In a similar fashion, Mahdi criticizes tribal governance in Yemen.

*(...) tribal leaders are very affluent, they are very rich, they have many connections (...) it's hard to question tribal leader. You cannot question tribal leader. (...) In democracy, the people are equal. But in tribal governance, you cannot question or hold tribal leader accountable. Someone from a (...) marginalized area, from Tihamah or from Hadhramaut, will come and question someone who is from Amran, that's impossible. He says who are you to ask me, there is a power distance (...) there is a power distance between those people.* (Interviewee C: Mahdi)

Mahdi refers to tribal networks as embedded within the central government. For Mahdi, the regime is a reflection of tribal networks which command the socio-political landscape within Yemen. Mahdi considers the repercussions of this tribal mode of governance to be epitomized in the “power distance” between tribal elites and “regular” citizens.

## 5.2 Political representation: a playground for the few

Direct consequences of political inequality in the lives of the participants are pointed out, exposing the multiple ways in which the political domain intersects with deprivation, frustration and cleavages across the Yemeni society. Amal is a human rights activist from South Yemen and has devoted her work, free time and personal resources towards advocating for more equitable, more representative and more autonomous socio-political realities.

Amal moved to Sweden in 2013 and has since then witnessed the multilayered tensions in Yemen from abroad. Amal recalls numerous experiences in Yemen when her Southern status/identity was received negatively. She distinctly remembers two experiences during which her political rights were contested.

*(...) And then I asked them, why you didn't talk or have a vision, a new vision, for the outcomes for the National Dialogue to have two countries, or two federal states and then to give rights for the Southerners, after ten years, for the right to self-determination if they want to keep this unity or not. (...) I didn't even finish the question, (...) people they want to attack me physically. (...)*

*(...) I took a taxi and then the taxi driver noticed that I'm not from Sana'a and then he said, oh, you're from Aden and I told yeah, I'm from south. And he said don't say south (...) and he said, you know, you are ONLY 2 million in the South and we are 25 million. We are gonna go, kill you all and then take all the country because for us, you are only the minority and we are one Yemen (...). (Interviewee A: Amal)*

The first experience shows how Amal was met with explicitly violent reactions as a result of her representing the Southern cause. Amal's experience demonstrates the stark marginalization of the Southern issue within the political sphere and furthermore underlines the ways in which southern voices are forced to remain

invisible. Amal's second experience more directly refers to othering processes which are imposed upon southern residents of Yemen. Throughout the interaction between Amal and the Northern taxi driver, her identity and positionality are associated with minority status. Furthermore, the South is construed as region to be subjugated and eclipsed by the status quo. Amal's description of her home as "South" is promptly met with utter dismissal, as the mere existence of the "South" is negated. Consequently, the political representation of the Southern issue is undercut due to its perceived non-existence.

Like Amal, Hamza identifies omnipresent disparities between political representation for specific segments of the Yemeni society.

*(...) I will say 98, or 99 % of the people (...) have nothing to say about the crisis. And there is one person who play the games, there is one monkey who runs the show. That monkey is (...) the political parties (...) and the countries (...) surrounding Yemen (...). And they see our money and they negotiate between themselves and we get killed, we get nothing, that means we are marginalized. We have nothing to say. (Interviewee B: Hamza)*

Hamza conceives the Yemeni population as completely deprived of political say. Hamza claims that relevant decisions are solely made within elite networks, enabling "one monkey" to rule over the whole country without facing political contestation. Samir subscribes to Hamza's claim that the political elite grasps power and influence. According to Samir, this power is then transformed into a disciplinary apparatus to regulate Yemeni citizen's representation.

*(...) they would use the few people that did not represent, that is one of the greatest tactics of marginalization. So, you would use two people from Ibb, two people from Ta'izz, two people from Dahle, two people from Aden. However, most of the people are not there to reflect the Adeni experience, the Ta'izzi experience, the whatnot. (...) So, marginalization is using your name to disadvantage you. (Interviewee E: Samir)*



Samir sheds light on the exploitative dynamics within the political field which aim to instrumentalize political participation as a means to sustain the status quo. The selected political actors from such areas are in Samir's mind systematically selected to falsely depict or represent the experiences of the respective residents. Hence, marginalized voices are deliberately "included" in the political realm to better regulate them within the confines of the political system.

### **5.3 Access and opportunities: deprivation as reality for the many**

The respondents characterize declining living standards and low access into the job market as particularly prevalent phenomena, both in contemporary and historical contexts. The theme of access/opportunities is directly connected with the livelihoods of Yemenis and therefore features heavily in the experiences with marginalization shared by the respondents. Amal recalls the systematic marginalization of southern military officers, accompanied by low job opportunities due to closure of major factories and institutional disintegration.

*After the war in 1994, (...) they replaced all the people with their positions from people from the North, even teachers. (...) I mean, we have the sea (...), we can't even afford to buy fish, because it's so expensive, while in the capital it's cheaper than the places in front of the sea, this is so crazy. Why they face us in this way, why they do all this to us.*

(Interviewee A: Amal)

Amal pinpoints the visible discrepancies between access, opportunities and economic conditions in Yemen. Amal considers conditions in the South to be below average, as epitomized in the lack of basic services, such as electricity, water and food. According to Amal, the South has been historically deprived, while the areas surrounding the capital face more advantageous economic realities. The absence of such services has transformed the South into a

dispossessed, impoverished and empty space where Yemenis struggle to make a living.

Amira's and Amal's narrative intersect regarding the concentration of poor living standards in the South.

*Marginalization is more prevalent in the South as a whole. (...) this resulted in a low standard of living, poverty, and shameful need due to the direct marginalization (...) The reduction in income and rise in inflation, the nonpayment of veterans' wages, widespread poverty, and the increased use of violence as a result of marginalization are key issues dominating state-citizen interactions. (Interviewee F: Amira)*

Amira understands marginalization in context of the Yemeni South as inducer of multilayered inequality. Moreover, Amira believes that marginalization in economic terms constructs a state of deprivation through which southern populations interact with the regime. In other words, Southerners are created, viewed and reproduced by the status quo. In line with Amal and Amira, Karim correlates low access and minimal opportunities with local socio-spatial entities.

*(...) the same thing with the other parts of Yemen, like Hudaydah. This area been tortured for the last 100 years (...) The same thing to Ta'izz. (...) So, that's the situation, (...) Sana'a, or the ruling gang, I usually call them the ruling gang, they try to make the things according to their wishes, I mean not what the people need. (Interviewee D: Karim)*

Rather than denominating the whole South as deprived, Karim pinpoints specific cities such as Ta'izz and Al-Hudaydah as markers of multifaceted inequities.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Both Ta'izz and Al-Hudaydah as socio-spatial bodies have experienced protracted vulnerability throughout the course of the war. Ta'izz has witnessed a series of armed confrontations between pro-government and Houthi forces and as a result seen its infrastructural system gradually destroyed, accompanied by heavy civilian casualties. Al-Hudaydah, a key port city which delivers food and basic aid to the Yemeni population, was heavily hit in 2018 when the Saudi-led coalition

Describing these cities as “tortured”, Karim alludes to the prevalence of low living standards for local populations. He detects a lack of initiative in the political sphere to tackle these issues, which subsequently deteriorate the situation for Yemeni residents.

Mahdi’s experiences with access and opportunities diverge from those of other respondents. He is from a middle-class family and encountered deprivation on a different level. Mahdi is from the Yemeni North and is currently living in Germany. His academic training is rather extensive, he was awarded a PhD in Germany and had the opportunity to pursue a short-term postdoctoral position. However, while still residing in Yemen, he directly experienced exclusion from the job market.

*I graduate from Yemen and then I was one of the top students. And then when I applied for a job with government, there is a law that says if you are from this district (...) you will be given the priority. And, so, for me I was not from this district, but I am from the same region (...) They say no, you cannot get this job because we are not from there. (Interviewee C: Mahdi)*

Mahdi describes how socio-spatial affiliations can both enable the individual to gain access and at the same time deny entry to those unaffiliated with local networks. Mahdi saw his access into the job market suppressed as a result of these networks. Privileges are thus accorded to specific segments of the Yemeni society, while the remaining populations confront bureaucratic violence and blockages within the system.

#### **5.4 Yemeni identity: diverging modes of identification**

Among the participants, emphasis was repeatedly put on regional identities within Yemen which generate distinct perceptions and outlooks towards the

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aimed to recapture the city and block Houthi resources. Consequently, the humanitarian situation in Al-Hudaydah worsened considerably.

contemporary conflict, while shaping different interactions vis-à-vis marginalization practices. Meaning-making thus heavily relies on contextual circumstances which construct particular socio-spatial entities and consequentially contribute to the emergence of unique positionalities through which Yemeni individuals negotiate their rights, self-determination and participation.

Mahdi underlines the ways in which regional Southern Yemeni identities overlap with expressions of resentment as a result of their systematic marginalization by the regime.

*(...) when those secessionists were defeated, they were marginalized and military leaders were forced to, you know, retire. (...) a driver of a helicopter, a driver of an aircraft will become the driver of a taxi. (...) this person will, of course, will have some kind of resentment feelings. And (...) they might organize themselves in general and they have the Southern movement, the Hiraq in 2007. (Interviewee C: Mahdi)*

Mahdi claims that the concentration of deprived and excluded livelihoods in the South eventually “normalized” their marginal position in society. Eventually, their everyday interactions with multifaceted injustices reinforced the mobilization of the Southern movement. According to Mahdi, the “Southern identity” properly materialized in form of a political movement as a result of their relative disenfranchisement.

Karim agrees with Mahdi’s assertion regarding the crystallization of discontent regional voices when subjected to long-term marginalization.

*So that’s what’s happening with the South Yemen. Because the people from the North Yemen, they exclude more than 50 000 from the government offices and military and security. And they send them to the roads and to the fields. (...) This kind of behavior create this kind of hate and trouble between the South and the North. (Interviewee D: Karim)*

Karim's comment visualizes the imaginary boundaries between Yemeni regional entities and how such boundaries are politicized and weaponized by various actors. He demonstrates the tangible consequences arising from top-down marginalization practices and how they alter dynamics among societal groups. Karim's comment shows how group polarization in Yemen occurs as a byproduct of regionally disadvantaged identities and experiences and persists in contemporary settings.

Amal's story converges with Karim and Mahdi's accounts, specifically on the matter of regional othering within the Yemeni society.

*When I went to Sana'a to issue my visa to Sweden, I faced so many things. They know (...) you are from Aden, and they look at me in a very bad way. Because they have this perception (...) that Adeni women or Southern women, they are more open and they are easy to get because they been living under the socialism. (...) I would say they look at us as if we are whores. (Interviewee A: Amal)*

In Amal's narrative, the degradation of Southern Yemeni women as second-class citizens constitutes a well-established phenomenon which permeates public opinions and perceptions. Here, the conflict between "moral" and "religious" norms and the distinct Southern lifestyle plays a pivotal role in the dissemination of derogative discourse on regional Yemeni identities. This classification of "lesser" Southern women subjugates Southern bodies by chaining them to an othered, marginal social category. In the eyes of certain segments of the public, Amal represents nothing more than a Southern "whore", whose right to self-determination is denied. A distinctly marginal positionality is thus imposed on her.

The centrality of struggle within the South Yemeni context is discussed in detail by Samir.

*So, for me, (...) the idea that you belong to people that are struggling, it made me realize and glorify and respect struggle anywhere, you know? So, because I'm a Southerner, because of my Southern identity, I am able to really claim that today I have a cosmopolitan identity (...) because once you see the struggle somewhere, you could also relate to it, anywhere. (Interviewee E: Samir)*

Samir has internalized a cosmopolitan outlook due to the prominence of struggle he experienced on an everyday basis while he was still living in Yemen. He deeply sympathizes and relates to other accounts of oppression around the world which push disadvantaged population segments to the margin. Samir points out that confronting the Southern Yemeni struggle has heavily contributed to his personal development and shaped him into the person that he identifies as today. He views the contemporary Yemeni war as a constant reproduction of systemic Southern marginalization instituted by the regime and the exclusive dynamics within the political system in general. He directly correlates Southern identity with marginalization and claims that Southern identities in Yemen crystallized as a direct consequence of marginal experiences.

### **5.5 Societal divisions: a regulatory governance tool**

The participants attribute the exacerbation of tensions and perpetuation of violence and instability in Yemen in context of the contemporary civil war to lingering internal divisions within the Yemeni society. Many of the respondents underscore the systematic exploitation, but also encouragement of such divisions by the Yemeni regime. When Mahdi describes his position vis-à-vis the contemporary civil war in Yemen, he insists on the dilemma of internal divisions within the Yemeni socio-political landscape and how they further aggravate ongoing tensions while undercutting prospects for crafting effective solutions.

*(...) we are now witnessing a very deep division between local actors. (...) those who are against the Houthis are also having some conflicts amongst themselves (...) we have also Islah Party, they are (...) against the Southerners (...) the people in the South, also they have divisions.*  
(Interviewee C: Mahdi)

Mahdi interprets these underlying divisions as blockages within the system which prevent peacebuilding. He has since the outbreak of the war observed the successive multiplication of internal divisions, which moreover complicate the process of mobilizing, but also organizing movements within civil society. He perceives the political apparatus to employ a mode of governance which only fosters divisions instead of implementing fundamental changes in the system which would allow for broader inclusion of different social segments into the political realm.

While Mahdi underlines the socio-political dimensions of internal divisions within Yemen, Hamza concentrates on the profound polarization which dominates interactions between Yemeni citizens in context of the current conflict.

*People inside (...) because the problems start getting worse, they start to hate each other. They accuse each other, because there is explosions, there is killing. (...) even sometimes they make borderline between the South and North (...). The people on the top make them like that.*  
(Interviewee B: Hamza)

According to Hamza, these deep divisions result in the politicization of claims and opinions voiced by social actors. Experiences with violence and insecurity on an everyday basis visibly aggravate the process of politicization. As demonstrated in his comment, in the aftermath of societal divisions, Yemeni citizens confront each other, “accuse each other” and establish regionally based borders which in return provide the groundwork for further

separations to be created. Divisions are thus continuously reproduced, reshaped and rearticulated.

Samir is especially vocal about impending shifts within marginalization processes.

*(...) we have people who stayed, who suffered during that time (...) there is another side who paid the price by running away from Yemen (...) what's Yemen, what does it mean to be Yemeni, how do you identify as a Yemen, who has the power to rule Yemen? (...) it's gonna take us into a deeper situation of marginalization. (Interviewee E: Samir)*

He is concerned about eventual confrontations occurring between primarily younger generations of Yemenis who left before or during the contemporary civil war and those generations who remained in the country. He believes that such divisions may induce further societal segmentation and as such hinder comprehensive peace building in the post-war area. On the one hand, he views the existing competing visions of what it means to be Yemeni and how to rule Yemen as highly divisive topics which further prolong the conflict. On the other hand, Samir emphasizes the outcomes of such discrepancies regarding marginalization.

Leila talks about societal divisions from a gender perspective which are proliferated in context of the ongoing conflict.

*(...) there is a gap between women working on the community level and elite women (...) the women on community level feel that there aren't represented, their demands are not viewed as important (...). And those same women who are ignored and neglected are working very hard in communities to keep, you know, life going. (Interviewee G: Leila)*

Leila takes the term “inclusion” with a grain of salt. She detects stark disparities between elite and non-elite Yemeni women and their affiliated degree of political inclusion, but also socio-economic prestige. Leila argues that non-elite Yemeni women continue to be excluded from political



dialogues revolving around participation of women in the Yemeni public sphere. Non-elite Yemeni women perceive clear divisions between “empowered” women and those left on the margins which scarce opportunities to enlarge their political role.

### **5.6 Better governance as framework for radical change**

The participants conceive better governance as main tool for undercutting the reproduction of marginalization practices and for securing long-term stability in Yemen. Mahdi and Leila are particularly invested in this matter and refer to poor governance as main driver of multifaceted inequalities and as political tool securing the marginal positions of specific social actors/groups in Yemen.

Mahdi is determined to one day return to Yemen and to utilize his human capital which he acquired abroad to benefit the country. He perceives an utter lack of governance in Yemen and points out that the absence of such produces systemic marginalization within the Yemeni population.

*We lack governance. And because we lack governance in Yemen, people feel disadvantaged (...). And only small groups of people took advantage of the wealth and they steal the wealth of Yemen. Those political leaders. (...) people were marginalized. Because of corruption, political institutions took advantage of economic institutions. So, I think the leadership that can provide stability, security, public services, in terms of water, electricity, salary, that is what people need either in the South or in the North. (...)* (Interviewee C: Mahdi)

Mahdi strongly advocates for an unraveling of these elite channels and outlines the prioritization of basic needs/services as necessary means for achieving a less corrupt, more equitable mode of governance in Yemen. Marginalization as such may only be undercut by forming a leadership which implements institutional changes which guarantee basic needs/services and as a result pursues long-term stability in Yemen.

Furthermore, Mahdi notes a lack of transparent, accountable, modern and inclusive attributes within the current mode of governance in Yemen.

*(...) there should be a presidential council that will involve all parties, even those marginalized groups. And they will select a technogovernment to normalize the situation in Yemen. (...) we need emerging leaders (...) born out of, let's say, intellectual movements (...) that believes in modern values, in transparency, accountability (...) building Yemen on the economy.* (Interviewee C: Mahdi)

Mahdi stresses the importance of new, emerging leaders, especially among the Yemeni Youth movement, to be integrated into the political sphere. A continuation of the old system would, based on Mahdi's viewpoint, only result in short-term solutions and disregard those segments of the Yemeni population which find themselves in marginal positions. Nevertheless, Mahdi also considers the selection of new leaders and decision-makers based on their aptitudes, or specialized knowledge, rather than on their political affiliation, to be pivotal in the creation of better governance in Yemen. Furthermore, Mahdi a new economic agenda pivotal in the process of creating better governance in Yemen.

Leila's imagination of more equitable governance in Yemen overlaps with Mahdi's description on multiple occasions.

*Only if we had a technocrat government, where people are represented equally, where women and youth are included. (...) then they form one government and then marginalization issues could really come into focus, as a nation we could work step by step.* (Interviewee G: Leila)

She imagines a technocrat government, combined with high political representation across the Yemeni society to be of utter importance to achieving more equitable conditions for the Yemeni population. When

conceiving better governance, she emphasizes enhanced political representation of Yemeni women, as well as the Youth movement. Leila believes that by bringing the above-mentioned parties to the table, the dilemma of widespread marginalization in Yemen could be properly addressed and solutions could be crafted. Leila argues that gradually overcoming marginalization in economic, social and political terms as such is imperative in the contemporary Yemeni scenario, as its prominence hinders the formation of long-term solutions.

## **6 Analysis: underpinning meanings of Yemeni marginal positions**

This section discusses how the gathered findings can be understood and interpreted through the selected theoretical frameworks and the available literature. This analysis seeks to decipher the underpinning meanings of marginalization processes in Yemen in context of the contemporary conflict. Wedeen's theoretical postulations will firstly be posited against the findings on centralized governance and its embedded tribal power channels as well as systemic discrepancies within political representation. Disorder as imagined by Wedeen is then extended to regional socio-spatial bodies. Wedeen's disorder as mode of governance interconnects with peripheral spaces insofar as the implications of strategic encouragement of disorder are further illustrated on a regional, spatial level. The third and last section of the analysis seeks to underline the ways in which Yemeni bodies navigate entrenched oppressive structures through acts of resistance.

### **6.1 Power structures sustaining marginal positions of Yemeni bodies**

Based on the participants' lived experiences and narratives, it can be assessed that the Yemeni regime and its affiliated PRE network function as main perpetrator in upholding hierarchical relations. Vertical power relations between the established PRE and the non-elite Yemeni population dominate citizen-state interactions. These power structures are exercised primarily along socio-political lines. The centralized mode of governance actively restricts membership into the political sphere. In practice, these restrictions can be understood as socio-political boundaries through which Yemeni citizens are excluded from the decision-making process. The participants experience their marginal positions as symptom of such exclusion.

The patterns of informal politics within the government constantly reproduce the prestige and influence of established actors, thereby locking centralized rule into specific tribal and family elite networks. Here, Day's (2008)

study on mechanisms behind the concentration of power and key positions in the hands of Saleh's inner entourage and direct family is especially pertinent. The overlap of centralization and tribal networks exhibits a regime behavior reflective of political favoritism which resist the integration of out-group actors. In this context, Alley's (2010) detailed investigation of politics of patronage furthermore outlines how the strategy of divide-and-rule aims at regulating, but also balancing competing (political) bodies to guarantee regime survival. Perkins (2017) stresses the importance of building and maintaining alliances with tribal elites in the process of upholding relative control over the Yemeni population. Imageries of prestige and legitimacy are created through co-optation of local tribal elites into the central power body.

Moreover, the participants associate spaces of disorder with the regime's failure and lack of initiative to pursue sustainable solutions regarding the Houthi movement and other sources of instability. Hill (2017) rightfully asserts that these individual perceptions are shared by oppositional bodies such as the Hirak movement. Frustration and discontent vis-à-vis the Yemeni elite due to the absence political restructuring programs heavily feature within their discourses. Likewise, Clausen (2015) highlights the gradual transformation of peaceful protest movements calling for structural changes into escalating tensions following the protracting of regional marginalization in context of the contemporary war. Political ignorance towards escalating tensions within the Yemeni society as discussed by Hill and Clausen suggest the instrumentalization of disorder to enhance both bodily regulation and to enforce punishment upon contesting social actors.

On a different note, bodily divisions which differentiate between elites and non-elites are enforced by the power apparatus through non-transparent mechanisms, which intensify the degree of disorder within the socio-political landscape of Yemen. As discussed by Salmoni et al. (2010), the selective integration of elite bodies into the political field further intensifies the marginal position of non-elite Yemenis. Non-elite bodies are seemingly disconnected from the political apparatus as entry points into the decision-making process rely on

informal mechanisms. Lackner's (2016) study on transitional post-2011 governance in Yemen highlights these intersections between elite families and ruling bodies within the political sphere which facilitate the mobilization of support vis-à-vis the regime. Due to the locked political mechanisms, inclusion and exclusion of Yemeni bodies is meticulously controlled. Bodies favorably affiliated with the status quo are equipped with an in-group classification which grants various privileges. Conversely, bodies detached from elite networks experience protracted marginalization processes and are vulnerable to centralized, authoritative modes of governance. Alley (2010) points out that this informal, disorderly political organization grounded in the manipulation of (tribal) elites generates distrust within the Yemeni population.

In line with Alley, the respondents characterize the Yemeni regime as ignorant towards the claims and needs of the non-elite population. Within the narratives of Karim, Hamza, Mahdi and Samir, the contemporary civil war represents an exacerbation of political disorder due to the survival of informal power channels. Sustained informal politics prevent comprehensive restructuring programs which are necessary for the alleviation of widespread instability. Therefore, disorder as regime-sponsored phenomenon amplifies marginal bodies, while the outbreak of the contemporary civil war exacerbates their vulnerability due to increasing insecurity and instability. Their perceptions and discourses vis-à-vis the contemporary war focus on the durability of disorder as mode of governance which allows for distinctions between elite and non-elite bodies to persevere. Mahdi and Samir speak of a tangible "power distance", which prevents interactions with the elite. The bodies of non-elite social actors are turned into non-represented, marginalized entities who are identified through the lens of socio-political subjugation.

Ryan's perspectives on bodily subjugation overlap with Wedeen's reflections on systematically employed disorderly conduct. By reinforcing disorder in Yemen, the regime enhances the internal divisions and as an extension the salience of categorization on socio-cultural, political and religious levels. Hierarchical classifications between elite and non-elite bodies are imposed

through the regime, thereby constructing “lesser”, marginal and othered non-elite Yemeni bodies. The power apparatus hence appropriates the Yemeni body in an attempt to assign it a subjugated status. Categories thus transform into more immediate, more decisive modes of identification in the course of the contemporary civil war.

Additionally, Yemeni bodies are appropriated for the purpose of reproducing the status quo. More precisely, as discussed by Samir, within the centralized mode of governance, power is represented within select elite families. In line with Samir, Jones (2011) notes how elite bodies within patronage networks contribute to the longevity of the regime. Their presence in the power apparatus is thus crucial in the process of maintaining the status quo. Notably, elite bodies serve as a platform for constructing socio-political prestige which is ingrained in the public conceptions of governance. Subsequently, the status quo is constantly reproduced by relying on the symbolic power of elite families as cornerstone for centralized mode of rule.

The 2011 events in Yemen reflect an additional regime tactic of utilizing bodies to maintain the status quo. In the midst of the protest movements, the emerging disorder, accompanied by often disorganized oppositional bodies, presented an opportunity to exploit the fragile socio-political landscape to reshuffle elite bodies within the political apparatus. In this context, Wedeen’s assertion that disorder is at specific times encouraged by the power holders is especially relevant. Under the 2011 disorganized phase, the established elite bodies and the centralized system prevailed despite numerous contesting voices. Via promoting disorder and further prolonging the respective chaotic circumstances, elite bodies successfully outmaneuvered dissidents, prioritizing regime survival rather than instigating structural changes. Consequently, elite bodies grasped prominent positions in the political realm in a slightly differently organized format. Samir describes this process as “stealing the revolution from the people”.

As Yemeni bodies openly interact with these oppressive regimes, their lived experiences with marginal conditions reveal the complex ways in which

elite bodies subjugate “lesser”, non-elite Yemeni individuals. Common stories of disenfranchisement and omission from the decision-making process dominate state-citizen interactions. Marginal livelihoods are expressed against systemic mechanisms which aim to restrict the participatory opportunities of Yemeni bodies. Bodily regulation as sponsored by the regime preserve power distances between the elite and non-elite population, engendering multifaceted vulnerabilities which are actively and routinely experienced by those on the margin.

## **6.2 Spatial vulnerabilities as marker of marginal positions**

Themes such as the 1990 unity, political representation, access and opportunities are frequently intertwined in the experiences and stories of the participants. Based on their descriptions of socio-spatial entities in Yemen, systemic inequalities can be analyzed with the help of the selected theoretical postulations. Here, peripheralization and Wedeen’s disorder as mode of governance allow for a critical investigation regarding regionally based concentrations of deprivation, poor political representation and multifaceted exclusion.

In the formation of socio-spatial marginal positions in Yemen, conceptions of spatial dependencies and social injustice as explored in Fischer-Tahir & Naumann’s edited work are crucial. Amal and Samir speak of the 1990 unity as a turning point for the livelihoods of Southern Yemenis. Following the unification, state-sponsored practices promoting regional disadvantages and discrimination penetrated the Yemeni population. Augustin’s (2015) study of peripheral space in South Yemen intersects with Amal and Samir’s stories of life on the margin. Like Amal and Samir, Augustin identifies the post-unification mode of governance as regime of institutionalized discrimination which created disparate socio-spatial bodies. Augustin’s contributions are particularly valuable when scrutinizing the lack of economic and political opportunities or access in the South Yemeni context. Socio-spatial entities detached from the power center of Sana’a saw the solidification of regional inequalities. Regional identities were furthermore transformed into markers of low prestige, typifying the Yemeni lower class.



Based on Amal and Samir's narratives, the 1990 unification acted as a catalyst for the manifestation of corporeal boundaries across socio-cultural, political and economic lines.

Peripheralization as a theoretical tool helps in tracing the processes involved in the creation of marginal spatial entities. As suggested by Fischer-Tahir & Naumann, embedded norms and values are essential in the process of peripheralization. In the Yemeni case, the continuity of regional disenfranchisement in institutional-economic terms gradually shapes distinct perceptions of bodies residing in peripheral areas. Consequently, Yemeni socio-spatial bodies witness their broad subjugation. Their marginal position is thus nourished by elite bodies which differentiate socio-spatial entities from each other and, more importantly, ascribe them with "lesser" value.

Yemeni bodies are as such viewed through the lens of regional inferiority. As noted by Hamza, Samir, Amira and Amal, this development normalizes practices, discourses and social relations which degrade specific groups based on conceived socio-spatial differences. These differences render marginal positions more immediate and decisive in the Yemeni society. Lived experiences heavily differ from each other, as exemplified by Samir and Amal's livelihoods in which entrenched norms of socio-spatial differentiation directly affected the ways through which they were identified as second-class citizens. In the same way, they associate their identity with omnipresent deprivation. Augustin's (2015) study on spatial injustice Southern Yemeni speaks to the prevalence of narratives revolving around the theme of marginalization and deprivation.

Amal and Samir both registered a shift in the production of regional marginal positions following the outbreak of the current war. Marginal realities are further reinforced throughout the course of the contemporary conflict as the provision of basic services and resources declines and culminates in the intensification of socio-spatial differences/divisions. Day and Brehony (2020) shed light on the differentiation of Southern Yemeni bodies in context of the contemporary Hirak movement. Their assessment of bodily divisions constituting a major challenge for Southern oppositional organizations to integrate into the

political apparatus intersects with Amal and Samir's narratives of systemic exclusion based on socio-spatial categories. The salience of socio-spatial categories such as "North" and "South" in the contemporary war arguably reflects dynamics of bodily control which seek to categorize, subjugate and then rule over divided subjects.

Furthermore, Mahdi insists on the predominance of corruption in context of the contemporary war and its role in furthering deprived regional bodies, isolated from the economy and the job market. Likewise, in context of the contemporary war, Hoetjes (2021) underlines the role of sustained corruption in engendering widespread grievances, while serving as a means to maintain the "old" political system. Yemeni bodies experience multifaceted suppression and exclusion through their assigned socio-spatial characteristics.

Leila refers to the current conflict as promotor of economic disorder and instability which reinforces the socio-economic discrepancies between societal segments within the Yemeni population. Following the increasing marginal positions of deprived socio-spatial bodies, economic disintegration features heavily in the perceptions and lived experience vis-à-vis the war. Clausen (2015) argues that the economic aspect of the contemporary conflict is often overlooked, while it constitutes a pivotal factor in the social realities of Yemeni residents.

In line with Wedeen, the respondents emphasize the role of categories in creating out-group and in-group dynamics which conserve marginal positions based on regional affiliations. Hamza, Karim and Mahdi note how the contemporary civil war along with its sustained regime of disorder compounds categorical collisions within the Yemeni society. Said differently, the contemporary war is approached by the respondents through the lens of magnified categorical divisions which result in clear antagonisms between societal groups. Disorder as mode of governance in the current war thus exploits previously created categories to stimulate societal discord in an attempt to both uphold regime rule and to regulate its subjects.

Moreover, as suggested by the participants, in context of the civil war, socio-spatial bodies face more urgent hardships, exemplified by the deprived

livelihoods and widespread conditions of insecurity in Ta'izz, Al-Hudaydah and many regions within the Yemeni South. Augustin's (2015) study confirms the prevalence of Southern deprivation in the current climate as suggested by the participants. More precisely, Augustin refers to exploding levels of poverty and increasing insecurity as indicative of spatial injustice, which is furthered by contemporary disorder. In a way, marginality is fostered by the perpetuation of violence and conflict. The "making" of marginality as an identity, but also as an experience, in the current war relies on the preservation of marginal positions through time and space, while marginality is reproduced in more acute forms in contemporary settings.

However, while peripheralization results in deprived regional bodies, the body can also be utilized as a means to resist hegemonic power structures by mobilizing regional socio-spatial entities to contest the status quo. Karim, Hamza and Mahdi underscore the public backlash against regime-sponsored socio-economic deprivation both during the 2011 events and throughout the course of the contemporary conflict. In this context, Durac (2011) emphasizes the gradual transformation of regional discontent into, due to the absence of reforms and ignorance towards the claims of the Yemeni population, organized movements. Such forms of collective bodily mobilization call for further investigation of techniques of resistance which challenge suppressive modes of regime governance in Yemen.

### **6.3 Resistance on the margin: interactions with power structures and manipulation of alternative space**

Emancipation from disorder as mode of ruling divided Yemeni bodies is heavily featured within the narratives of the respondents. By advocating for systemic changes, Yemeni individuals undoubtedly aim to achieve more equitable, but also more autonomous conditions/realities and reject normalized disorder. The participants' narratives vis-à-vis the power apparatus suggest bodily, intellectual and socio-political modes of resistance which are employed to contest regimes of subjugation rather than passive reception of their marginal positions.

Scott's theoretical postulations do not allow for an inclusive and meaningful discussion of everyday modes of resistance. According to Scott's definition of resistance, prerequisites regarding the political consciousness or class-motive of the subaltern must be fulfilled if the act is to be designated as "resistance". This stagnant definition fails to account for the flexibility and interactive nature of acts of resistance with power structures or systemic practices of subordination.

Instead, Baaz et al.'s conception of resistance as a resistance as subaltern practice with the potential to challenge, negotiate and undermine power structures is more relevant to the respondents' interactions with entrenched hierarchical norms, suppressive modes of governance and exclusive paradigms. Baaz et al.'s dynamic understanding of imagine resistance leaves room for emphasizing the contextual articulation of power structures in the Yemeni case. In return, the highly individual perceptions and respective interactions of the participants with suppressive modes of governance can be explored in a meaningful way based on their lived experiences.

In line with Baaz et al.'s reflections, Mahdi's experience of being denied access into the job market illustrates the ways in which he uses his imposed marginal position to his advantage. Mahdi decided to leave Yemen to enhance his human capital and to, ultimately, return and utilize his acquired personal qualities for the purpose of contributing to better governance. This decision can be interpreted as act of resistance through which Mahdi aspires to challenge mechanisms of economic and socio-spatial exclusion. Mahdi skillfully navigates marginalization processes he is confronted with by creating an alternative space abroad for him to formulate, develop and then at a later stage perform his resistance. The restrictions Mahdi faced when attempting to enter the job market and gain access into the economic sector resulted in his determination to surmount systemic boundaries. Lackner's (2016) study speaks to Mahdi's experiences with economic exclusion. Lackner notes that socio-economic grievances were largely ignored by the transitional government in the post-2011 scenario and as such reinforced the marginal position of the Yemeni Youth and rural poor. While this

lack of access forced Mahdi into a marginal position, it simultaneously pushed him to locate alternative pathways to resist modes of suppression and exclusion. Mahdi's experience demonstrates his tactical interactions with the power apparatus and highlights the fluid, constantly evolving relationships between agency, suppression and resistance.

While Mahdi's acts of resistance undoubtedly exhibit political intent as he envisions specific fundamental changes in the Yemeni mode of governance, he does not exclusively limit his resistance to political consciousness. Rather, he underlines the failure of the Yemeni regime to prioritize survival, stability and equal socio-economic status of the population in context of the contemporary war. In reference to the 2011 scenario, Perkins (2017) addresses widespread disillusionment with the Yemeni regime grounded in marginalization and scarce opportunities for the Yemeni Youth. As suggested by Mahdi, Perkins underscores claims within the Yemeni population for fundamental changes vis-à-vis the contemporary mode of governance. Better governance thus prominently features in public protests and resistance towards the regime. These key factors guide Mahdi's openly critical discourse towards the power apparatus and continue to feed into his individual forms of resistance.

Furthermore, Mahdi mode of resistance relies on imageries of better governance in Yemen is inspired by modernist values and intellectual movements in Europe which he believes to be a prerequisite in the Yemeni context to resist marginalization and to bring about "modern" governance. When conceptualizing inclusive, modern governance in contemporary Yemen, Alwazir (2016) stresses the importance of integrating the Yemeni Youth into the decision-making process. Mahdi's conception of better governance reflects Alwazir's assertions.

Leila shares Mahdi's critical outlook on governance in Yemen and advocates for changes within the political system. However, she decidedly approaches political inclusion from a gender perspective. Direct parallels between Granzow's (2015) study and Leila's conception of more inclusive modes of governance emerge. Granzow notes that the gradual removal of Yemeni women from the political sphere is heavily contested by Southern oppositional groups and

as such constitutes an act of resistance. Leila speaks of fundamental shifts regarding political representation, inclusion and participation for women which need to occur to create a better mode of governance.

In context of the contemporary war, she financially supports families in regionally marginalized positions to alleviate their socio-spatial vulnerabilities. Growing up as a designated non-elite body, Leila faced severe difficulties when attempting to claim educational and professional opportunities for herself. Nevertheless, she challenged her imposed marginal position by continuously improving her human capital. Her persistence to work on herself to eventually gain access despite the systemic disadvantages and exclusion she experienced due to her non-elite body represents her individual mode of resistance. While she simultaneously defends a political cause, her resistance cannot be reduced to political consciousness but instead relies on a combination of personal interests and ambitions which contest protracted gender discrimination, collective impoverishment and widespread instability.

On a different note, the participants interact with power structures in the Yemeni context by mobilizing their distinct regional socio-spatial identities and bodies. Brehony (2014) asserts that regional identities are mobilized in the Yemeni context based on collective experiences of oppression, deprivation and exclusion. These regional identifications then serve as a platform to express resistance towards the status quo. In line with Brehony, both Samir and Amal claim their Southern identity as a bodily mode of resistance when interacting with power structures. As a response to their long-term marginal positions, Samir and Amal elevated their bodily struggle and suppression to a socio-political level. By publicly affirming their Southern identity, they contest regime-sponsored discourses or practices which seek to render their bodies invisible. Their bodies thus transform into a means to negotiate their ascribed marginal identities.

Nevertheless, modes of identification among the participants occur within varying contexts. Samir decidedly adopts a more cosmopolitan outlook which posits his identity in a network of global belonging. At the same time, Samir feels strongly affiliated with the Yemeni Southern identity. Contrary to Samir, Amal

associates the Southern identity she has claimed for herself with regional socio-spatial entities in Yemen instead of positing this mode of identification in a global context.

In Amal's narrative, Southern grievances as discussed by Lackner (2016) are clearly reflected. Lackner underlines the continuity of Southern disenfranchisement through time and space and correlates it with the deteriorating living standards and widespread impoverishment in context of the current climate. Amal's acts of resistance feed on Lackner's conception of Southern deprivation, which she uses as a lens to make sense of the contemporary war. Hence, "Southern identity" as a concept takes on different forms according to the individual experiences of the participants. Samir and Amal's conceptions of Southern Yemeni identity demonstrate the fluid nature of identification techniques and how they, on an individual basis, construct varying self-understandings which constantly evolve.

Bodily resistance as performed by Samir and Amal is tactically deployed at specific times when confronted with systemic inequality. In doing so, Samir and Amal claim their marginal space as a platform for bodily contestation towards the status quo. Their acts of resistance are not chained to a single mode of resistance, but are actively shaped, reformulated and transformed. The participants' acts of resistance indicate, in correspondence with Baaz et al.'s assertions, that there is no unitary form of resistance, but that every Yemeni body resists in individual ways depending on the degree of systemic suppression, but also on the availability of resources and opportunities.

In context of the contemporary war, Samir, Amal, Leila and Mahdi argue that modes of resistance may transform into more urgent and open acts. In context of the current war, Day and Brehony's (2020) study explicates this important transformation of resistance in reference to the radical remodeling of Southern resistance into an organized, political body which openly contests the status quo. Visibly, in context of the civil war, the participants' resistance initially stems from a certain sense of necessity. In other words, due to their lived marginal positions, they perform specific acts to counteract prolonged deprivation. Clear parallels can

be detected between Mahdi's mode of resistance and Bayat's (2013) theoretical concept of quiet encroachment.

More precisely, As Bayat proposes, quiet encroachment may be firstly described as individual movements from within the "ordinary" which gradually take on a more politically conscious, but also collective outlook. Mahdi first and foremost employs resistance in a way that is likely to ameliorate his living conditions for his current life abroad but is also determined to raise awareness regarding emancipatory, political change necessary for stabilizing socio-economic dimensions of a post-war Yemen. He relies on seemingly "ordinary", everyday actions to formulate his quiet encroachment. Moreover, Mahdi's everyday resistance reflects the cumulative nature of Bayat's quiet encroachment in a way that his continuous, "ordinary" acts have the potential to achieve effective, long-lasting advances, both on an individual and collective basis.

The civil war constitutes what Bayat describes as undermining force vis-à-vis individual quiet encroachment. Mahdi recognizes the detrimental effect of the civil war on his position, which is further pushed on the margin, and the local Yemeni multifaceted precarities, but also vulnerabilities, which are encouraged in the process. The predominance of collective hardships experienced throughout the war engenders the metamorphosis of Mahdi's continuous and quiet struggle into political activism. Arguably, in understanding this development, Bayat's quiet encroachment is particularly useful as it emphasizes the transformative, fluid nature of resistance as an individual act. Mahdi's changing mode of resistance demonstrates the importance of contextual settings in the process of performing resistance in a distinct way at specific times.

As proposed by Baaz et al., the dynamic intersections between different forms of resistance are crucial in the process of shaping specific articulations of resistance of the respondents. To a certain degree, the participants' individual conceptions of what better governance in Yemen would entail is derived from local Yemeni activism. For example, Amal's resistance is visibly influenced by collective bodies which contest, within the context of the contemporary civil war, the protracted socio-spatial discrimination/disenfranchisement of Southern



Yemen. Transfeld (2016) highlights the regime's neglect towards structural reforms following the GCC initiative and states that protracted exclusion of broad parts of the Yemeni society are explicitly contested in the contemporary context. While Amal is informed by such claims, she does not fully ascribe to the internal composition or political agenda of formally organized bodies such as the STC.

Stories of individual resistance from the margin indicate the various avenues through which marginal Yemeni bodies interact with the status quo rather than passively receiving dynamics of oppression and exclusion. Such interactions demonstrate how unilaterally sustained vulnerabilities of marginal Yemeni positions are interrupted through agency. By exploring their individual acts of resistance, the respondents provide insight into how they understand themselves and their positionalities in a web of restrictive modes of governance. When attempting to understand Yemeni experiences on the margin, we must distance ourselves from portrayals of everlasting vulnerable identities and instead recognize individual agency and its potential to undermine hegemonic power structures in the Yemeni context.

## 7 Conclusion

Marginality as a lived experience encompasses intersecting exclusions ranging from disenfranchisement, deprivation, political expulsion, economic disparities and other omissions in between. It is impossible to capture the totality of marginal positions which Yemeni individuals are subjected to, neither can marginalization as a process be “characterized”. Instead, this study attempted to listen to the voices of the marginalized to paint a picture of their respective lives of on the margin, both in context of the contemporary war and beyond.

What has been clearly demonstrated throughout the individual stories is that marginality is, first and foremost, a contextual phenomenon available in varying, multifaceted forms. As such, marginalization should be posited against distinct social realities and their underlying conditions to better comprehend how different vulnerabilities are both imposed upon Yemeni bodies, but also how they are negotiated and resisted. Marginality and power are interrelated and continue to inform each other. Focusing on the Yemeni state, this study explored in which ways regimes of oppression induce the marginal positions of non-elite bodies.

The participants understand marginality as a well-established phenomenon which has persisted through time and space. Their narratives suggests that socio-political and economic power distances emerge as a complex oppressive regime which frames their marginal positions. In context of the contemporary war, informal power channels and exclusionary governance feature as main factor in perpetuating the marginal position of non-elite Yemeni bodies. Throughout the course of the current conflict, marginal positions have acquired a more urgent, immediate format, resulting in deprived livelihoods, scarce opportunities and low levels of security. Furthermore, the participants note that societal divisions as articulated in the contemporary war have been exploited by the regime to increase the marginal position of oppositional bodies. The current conflict is primarily interpreted as enabling the protraction of marginality. Additionally, the absence of structural changes compounds the marginal position of non-elite Yemeni bodies.

Moreover, marginality as experienced by the participants is associated with disadvantaged socio-spatial bodies. Marginal positions appear more prevalent in specific regional entities such as the South, but also define social realities in cities such as Ta'izz and Al-Hudaydah. In context of the civil war, the participants assert that such regional experiences with marginalization are transforming into more pronounced socio-economic disparities. Through the course of the war, dynamics of systemic exclusion become more acute, thus binding marginal bodies to low living standards, regional discrimination and low prospects for integration into the job market. Similarly, regime tactics of “making” categories for the purpose of enhancing bodily regulation across socio-spatial lines are especially visible in context of the war.

Importantly, the margin is not passively received by subjugated Yemeni bodies. Instead, marginal subjectivities are actively contested and resisted. As this study showed, social agents adapt their acts of resistance strategically, skillfully manipulating their marginal space to enhance their visibility, representation and access. The participants rely on existing political bodies which formed throughout the contemporary war to shape their individual modes of resistance and continuously adapt the latter according to current developments or happenings. Hence, their resistance is both informed by collective, organized resistance as well as their individual contestation vis-à-vis regime-sponsored practices of exclusion and marginalization.

The modes of resistance adopted by the participants transcend the frontiers between the local and the international while their contesting voices envelop multiple, at times overlapping objectives. These objectives range from structural changes in the political sphere, to broader inclusion based on distinct socio-spatial or gender perspectives, to economic restructuring and personal interests. Resistance is therefore not homogenous and cannot be meaningfully scrutinized by relying on taken-for-granted concepts or preconceived categories. Albeit expressed in various shapes, the participants' individual resistance functions as a means to interact with the power apparatus and aims at social change. Their resistance is thus built upon emancipatory endeavors.

In line with Samir's contention that the marginalized are those who pay the price in the current conflict, this study attempted to employ marginalization as an alternative framework for understanding the contemporary civil war in Yemen. Positing lived experiences with marginalization in Yemen in the center of this study has allowed for a contextualized analysis of political mechanisms and socio-economic conditions of Yemeni bodies on the margin while underscoring their dynamic interactions and active resistance vis-à-vis regimes of oppression.

This study has challenged essentialized discourses treating the Yemeni civil war as mere sectarian playground. Instead, the participants' experiences with marginalization have revealed how current circumstances are historically grounded and cannot be viewed as isolated phenomena. In the same way, overarching imageries of Yemeni victimhood have been challenged by the participants' alternative modes of (bodily) resistance. Their voices from the margin provide avenues for reconceptualizing the current conflict and as such need to be acknowledged and further explored in future studies.

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## 9 Appendix

### 9.1 Interview guide

#### Background information

- Could you tell me about yourself? Please feel free to share anything you consider relevant about yourself and your personal experience.
- Are you currently residing in Yemen?

→ If yes, would you mind describing the environment you are exposed to? Are there any experiences that marked you as an individual/had a major impact on you in Yemen?

→ If no, how would you describe your experience while still residing in Yemen/what is your relationship with Yemen as an individual? How long did you remain in Yemen before relocating to your current country of residence? Which factors contributed to your decision to leave Yemen? Do you maintain ties with your social network in Yemen? If yes, via which means and do you consider it important to maintain these ties?

#### The contemporary conflict in Yemen

- Could you describe your positioning vis-à-vis the civil war in Yemen? Did, if available, any specific developments throughout the course of the war have/continue to have an impact on your personal experiences or opinions? If yes, would you mind telling me how they affected you personally and why?
- Do you keep informed about new events and if yes, through which means?
- How would you describe local, regional or international reactions towards the conflict?

- How do you interpret portrayals of the civil war in the media? Do you think the conflict is generally discussed in a meaningful and contextual manner?
- Do you think people (this does not exclusively refer to residents of Yemen) are in general informed about the conflict?

→ If yes, which aspect of the war do you think is most known and why?

→ If no, where/regarding which issues would you say knowledge is limited and why is there a lack of awareness? Why do you personally think that these issues merit more attention/reflection?

Individual experiences with marginalization and the role of marginalization in the Yemeni war

- How do you personally understand “marginalization”?
- Historically speaking, would you consider marginalization in Yemen to be a well-established phenomenon or rather a product of relatively recent events/factors? Do you see any fluctuations regarding the level of marginalization in Yemen at specific times?
- Which factors, structures, practices or actors do you consider to be especially relevant in the process of dispersing marginalization in Yemen?
- If available, would you mind sharing your personal experiences with marginalization in Yemen? In which context did this occur? Through which means/actors was marginalization produced? How did this experience impact your life, did it alter your perceptions and opinions towards the status quo? Have you since then heard of similar experiences by other people in Yemen?
- In general, in which practices or conditions do you recognize symptoms of marginalization?
- Would you consider exposure to marginalization to have played a role in the mobilization of protest and oppositional movements? If yes, in which

ways does marginalization feature in the claims and practices of the respective movements?

- If available, could you describe your experiences with post-unification modes of government? How and in which ways did post-unification politics impact your life? Do you consider marginalization to have played a role in these experiences?
- Could you describe your personal take on the Southern issue in Yemen? For example, have you been directly or indirectly exposed to the various claims voiced by southern residents of Yemen and how do you interpret them? How would you describe the relationship between the southern regions and the regime? According to your own experience or those of individuals you have interacted with, how would you describe the livelihoods and conditions of southern residents of Yemen since unification?

→ if participant is from southern Yemen: How have your lived experiences in the south shaped or impacted you? For example, do you consider equal access, opportunities and inclusion to be represented within the realities of southern Yemeni residents and, more importantly, your life?

- Could you share your experiences or thoughts on political representation within Yemen?
- Based on your own experiences with marginalization, do you consider marginalization processes to play a role in generating popular frustrations, dissent or grievances within Yemeni population, particularly in the context of the civil war?
- What are your personal reflections on the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference which ended in 2014? What are your experiences with popular opinions and perceptions regarding the level of inclusiveness within the NDC? Would you consider the NDC to have pursued greater

political representation for all segments of the Yemeni society? In which ways do you think have the outcomes of the NDC impacted the participation of various actors in the political realm and their inclusion or exclusion?

- After discussing your lived experiences with marginalization in Yemen, do you have any additional reflections on its role and connection with the civil war? Do you think examining marginalization processes provides a useful contextual framework for understanding the war?