

Yemeni Women and Civil Society in Light of Political Transformations and War

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IN TODAY'S WORLD, THE PARTICIPATION of women and civil society in public life is of great interest, but its nature and scope differ from one place to another. Repressive regimes view political or human rights activities as threats to order, and they inflict severe punishment on those who engage in such activity. Democratic governments place few restrictions on activities in the public sphere. Another type of regime, meanwhile, tends to impose some restrictions on freedoms but leaves a small margin for women and civil society to express themselves, with the possibility of resorting to violent intervention if required.

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Most governments in developing countries tend to adopt a policy of evasion on women's issues and civil society. On the one hand, they call for promoting the role of women and strengthening civil society. On the other hand, they enact laws and regulations that obstruct the performance of civil society organizations. Government councils and bodies on women's issues often exist, but they are generally ineffective.

In this essay, I will discuss the experience of civil society in Yemen, the gains achieved through women's political and civil participation, and the ways in which transformations resulting from political mobility, revolution, and war have contributed both to women's presence and absence in the public sphere. I find it appropriate to shed light on the experience of Women Journalists Without Chains (WJWC) as a model for engaging women with civil society, and for showing how women are often left alone in the face of the exclusion deliberately

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practiced by the regimes of the Arab world.

SUFFERING CREATES OPENNESS

Yemen is one of a few Arab countries that has been open to women's participation in the public sphere and to the establishment of unions focused on issues

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related to women, human rights, students, and labor since the early twentieth century. In the 1940s, the Adeni Women's Association, which included local and foreign women, was

founded; women from Aden founded the Arab Women's Association in 1956. The Yemen Women's Union, meanwhile, was established several decades later.¹

Both regions in pre-unification Yemen lacked a democratic system and political pluralism. Party work in the north was criminalized, and political pluralism in the south was hindered by Marxist socialism. Yemen's reunification on 22 May 1990 was accompanied by the adoption of the principle of political pluralism and the emergence of public freedoms. Accordingly, media outlets and political parties flourished. Helen Lackner has noted that the 1990s (the period immediately following the establishment of the Republic of Yemen) witnessed a boom in freedom of expression through a variety of media.

In 1994, there were approximately 50 political parties in Yemen. This new climate facilitated the rise of hundreds of associations, organizations, and unions, which contributed to the enrichment of community-based action. In 1992, there were 223 NGOs, a number that reached roughly 9,707 by 2015.

Women were heavily involved in political and civil work after reunification. Yemeni political and civic life witnessed an increasing presence of women, who joined existing political parties and participated in mass rallies and various elections. Yet the millions of votes cast by women in favor of various parties did not result in an increase in their representation among elected politicians.

Political parties did not nominate sufficient women in parliamentary elections under different pretexts, such as women's lack of political experience and societal disapproval of women's candidacies.² Women's participation in the parliamentary elections of 1993, 1997, and 2003 shows a steady increase in the number of women registered in the voters' lists, despite a decrease in the number of female candidates.

A combination of factors contributed to this imbalance, such as the inclination of the majority of Yemenis to prefer males to females as parliamentary candidates and the reluctance of many people to allow women in their families to engage in political activity. However, the selfishness of political parties and their lack of faith in women's ability to engage in political action is also a fundamental contributing factor.³

The aforementioned governmental openness started to narrow after the 1994 Yemeni Civil War, and political and media freedoms generally lessened as a result of exclusionary policies pursued by the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who wanted to monopolize power. This decline had a profound impact on the nation's political situation. The political opposition began to form alliances, especially after parliamentary elections in 1997. A political bloc called the Supreme Coordination Council of Opposition was formed in 1999.⁴ It included the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserist Unionist People's Organization, Arab National Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Al Haq Party, and the Union of Popular Forces.⁵

The major political shift in the course of political opposition took place in February 2003 when prominent opposition parties, consisting of Islamists, Socialists, and Nationalists, developed an opposition alliance known as the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP), with the aim of coordinating their positions in the April 2003 parliamentary elections. The continuation of this alliance in the post-election period helped maintain an active political scene. Despite its shortcomings, the JMP became the primary opposition party in Yemen. This political dynamism was reflected in other civic activities, such as a newfound focus by NGOs and research centers on human rights, democracy, and election observation.⁶

The political rivalry in the country contributed greatly to the expansion of different types of freedoms, and it motivated young people to engage in more political and civic work. This was evident in the transparent, credible, and competitive elections among university student unions, which were often won by students belonging to the political opposition. Amid these circumstances, Women Journalists Without Chains was founded. The organization's early days were not easy, especially given the many obstacles placed in the way of new projects and ideas. The official authority responsible for granting work permits to NGOs and associations tended to deal passively with any serious project.⁷

WJWC'S STRUGGLE FOR RIGHTS

Women Journalists Without Chains stands out as an example of solidarity among civil society and women's organizations. From the outset, I bore in mind that women should have a more active role in the public sphere, and that civil society organizations ought to pressure authorities for more freedoms and respect for human rights. Within a short period of time, WJWC became one of the most effective NGOs in Yemen and the greater region due to its interest in key issues related to public freedoms, the right to expression, and the corruption of Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime.

WJWC helped to develop Yemeni civil society and cofounded many civil coalitions to raise awareness about the serious consequences of policies adopted by the government, such as press restrictions, the arbitrary imprisonment of journalists, the total monopoly of television and radio stations, and the banning of private televisions and radios.⁸ Our organization succeeded in employing media, including social media, to promote comprehensive community development efforts and to disseminate principles and values reinforcing integrity and tolerance.⁹

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Additionally, the organization has made significant progress in capacity building and in providing journalists with necessary skills and human rights knowledge. Many individuals who have now gained prominence in the fields of human rights and journalism in Yemen were trained by WJWC.¹⁰

WJWC raised political awareness of the need for change via conferences, seminars, workshops, and quarterly and annual reports. These platforms addressed human rights, freedom of opinion and expression, women's rights, elections, anti-corruption efforts, and good governance. The organization supported people's right to express their opinions, ideas, and convictions while opposing any laws or policies that presented a threat to this right.¹¹ In this context, the organization qualified and trained journalists, opinion leaders, and civil society activists, promoted their professional performance, and worked to provide means of protection for them.

These efforts helped expand the popular rejection of poor government policies. The remarkable achievements of our organization include its defense of those who were persecuted by the regime—regardless of political position—its organization of sit-ins and peaceful protests to support human rights and public freedoms, and its rejection of unfair government policies. These contributions helped to develop the culture of popular and peaceful protest that eventually led to the overthrow of the corrupt dictatorial regime in a popular uprising that

erupted on 11 February 2011.

The expansion of the circle of protests and the growing culture of peaceful change drew women and broader society to the importance of change, especially as the dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh sought to break the constitution by transferring power to his son Ahmed Ali, who was in charge of the Republican Guards.¹²

This transfer of power was not the only issue that led to the 11 February revolution. During the reign of the dictator Saleh, the prestige of the law declined, the government failed to provide services and security, and corruption permeated the entire security and state apparatus. According to the 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), Yemen ranked 146 out of 178 countries.¹³ This was accompanied by political impasse arising from Saleh's attempt to monopolize power, break the political opposition, silence opposing voices, and impose harsh restrictions on public freedoms, especially freedom of expression.

ROLE OF WOMEN AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE 11 FEBRUARY REVOLUTION

It could be said that civil society organizations in Yemen helped create the conditions for the outbreak of the revolution of February 2011.¹⁴ They succeeded in encouraging political parties to counter unilateral governmental measures aimed at reducing the democratic margin and deepening social injustice.¹⁵

In the beginning, the opposition political parties were not enthusiastic about a revolution, and their maximal demands were confined to guarantees regarding the integrity of parliamentary and presidential elections. But after young people took to the streets in large numbers, escalating their demands by calling for the overthrow of the regime, the position of these parties changed. They began to speak of the need for the then president's departure. The political parties, especially those representing the opposition, such as the Islamic Islah Party, the Socialist Party, and the nationalist Nasserite Party, realized that the regime was not as strong as they had imagined. Therefore, they decided to fully join the revolution, especially after peaceful protesters were targeted by the security forces in what became known as *Juma't Al-Karama* (Friday of Dignity) on 18 March 2011.¹⁶

Previously, women, many civil society organizations, and anti-government activists created a public climate hostile to political exclusion and marginalization. The formation of the Military and Security Retirees Association and the growth of voices calling for secession in southern Yemen constituted important turning points in the delegitimation of Saleh's regime.

In 2007, Yemen's southern provinces witnessed the emergence of what

became known as the Southern Movement, which began defending the rights of civil and military personnel who had been forcibly dismissed after the Yemeni Civil War of 1994. It also called for correcting the course of Yemen's unification. Then, the movement went further by calling for the return of Yemen to the pre-1990 two state arrangement, one in the north, and the other in the south. The Southern Movement posed a political challenge to the government, helped expand the political and social resistance to Saleh's regime, and encouraged citizens and vulnerable social groups to protest against the government in different parts of the country.

In this context, it may be appropriate to draw attention to the issue of al-Ja'ashin's displaced people, which revealed the regime's political impotence and demonstrated the strength of civil society. A pro-regime figure with political and social influence, Sheikh Mohammed Ahmed Mansour displaced 1,200 people, including children, women, and the elderly, and has taken over their houses and farms gradually since 2007.

Mansour was a member in the ruling party's Shura Council. He displaced these families after they refused to pay illegal taxes imposed on the area. The families were forced out of properties where they and their fathers and grandfathers lived, so they came to Sana'a to search for justice. When the displaced families first sought justice, no one listened to their complaints. Only WJWC responded to their problems, providing them with tents, food, clothing, medicine, and adequate housing in the capital Sana'a and, more importantly, organizing more than 30 sit-ins to enable them to return to their villages.¹⁷ Among many other similar examples, this action helped demonstrate that civil society organizations, despite critical observations regarding their performance, held advantages over a political power structure that was biased against and failed to protect its citizens.¹⁸

The 11 February revolution began due to a number of factors, including the regime's failure to meet the basic needs of its citizens through its repeated failures in the areas of development, economic management, and the fight against poverty. The 2011 uprising could also be attributed to a heightened level of national awareness of governmental corruption and authoritarian regime policies. This was manifested, for example, in opposition parties' rejection of proposed constitutional amendments intended to restrict freedoms and enable the dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh to stay in power forever. The success of civil society organizations in promoting a culture of human rights and peaceful struggle among many younger Yemenis should also be noted as a precursor to the uprising.

Millions of Yemenis took to the streets in mass demonstrations, and sit-ins

were staged in public squares for more than a year to force Saleh and his regime to leave. This peaceful societal movement contributed to the strengthening of civil society and the increasing presence of active NGOs in Yemen. In 2014, there were about 8,300 registered organizations in the country, a quarter of which arose after the transitional period in Yemen in 2011, not to mention a large number of informal organizations and networks.¹⁹

Many young men and women found themselves motivated to engage in politics and public activism, leading to the formation of a number of organizations and associations. Indeed, women maintained a large presence in demonstrations and mass rallies in most Yemeni cities. Women's mass participation in the youth-driven popular revolution was seen as a surprise in Yemen. However, it was not surprising for those attentive to the situation of women in the country. Yemeni women were well-qualified to work in the public sphere.

Women in different political, partisan, unionist, civil, and legal positions took part in various revolutionary activities, and they should be credited for their courage in leading peaceful demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins—overcoming many social obstacles in the process. Once Saleh realized the seriousness of women's involvement in demonstrations that demanded his removal from power, he resorted—in what would become one of his well-known speeches—to portraying this presence of women in the streets as a violation of customs, traditions, and religion. Saleh's statements were rejected and denounced by political parties and women, who continued their sit-ins and protest marches.²⁰

These developments had a profound impact on the thought processes of civil society organizations, which thereafter seemed to more closely follow the ongoing discussions about the future of Yemen, its democracy, and the need for a greater presence of women in state institutions.²¹

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL TRANSITION

After 11 February 2011, Yemen witnessed political and social openness and an unprecedented growth in media freedoms. These developments augmented the civic vibrancy of Yemeni society, proving particularly beneficial for women, who increased their participation in the public sphere. The pivotal role of women in the political transition was clearly demonstrated in the popular referendum in which President Hadi was elected to lead Yemen through this transitional period. Women participated actively and intensively in the referendum.

The participation of women and civil society organizations in the nine-month comprehensive National Dialogue Conference remains a prominent

landmark, recognized as such by most local and international parties, including the United Nations, that were monitoring the progress of the conference.

Set by a quota, women had to make up at least 30 percent of the total lists submitted by political parties and groups, and 40 seats were each allocated to women, youth, and civil society.²² Women, through their various positions in the main and subsidiary committees and through their constructive proposals and projects, helped make the conference's final document among the best political documents Yemen has ever known.²³

The document provided radical solutions to many critical issues, including the basis for the constitution and the structure of the state and the government. It was agreed that Yemen would be transformed into a federation of six regions and that a committee to draft a new constitution would be formed. The drafting of the constitution was completed only a month before the 21 September 2014 coup by the Houthi militia and forces loyal to the ousted president Saleh.²⁴

The draft constitution had explicit provisions that obliged the state to allocate at least 30 percent of seats for women in such a way as to enable them to participate actively in its bodies and application of state authority, as well as in its elected and appointed councils. It also stipulated that the political parties should commit to this percentage, and that the lists of candidates should include one woman for every three candidates. All lists that did not comply with this procedure would be rejected.²⁵

Undoubtedly, the undeclared alliance between women, younger generations, and civil society activists within the National Dialogue Conference contributed to a number of important determinations in the NDC document to be laid down in the draft constitution. This constitution stipulates, among other things, that citizens are equal before the law and that any discrimination based on sex, race, language, color, origin, occupation, social or economic status, doctrine, thought, opinion, or disability must be criminalized.

The constitution also calls for the equality of men and women in blood money, as in some prevailing Yemeni and regional jurisprudential opinions the blood money for a murdered woman is only half of the blood money for a murdered man. Moreover, the document criminalizes all forms of violence against women, sets the minimum age for marriage to 18, and calls for criminal sanctions against anyone who forces a child to marry.²⁶

The draft federal constitution, which is expected to be approved after the end of the war, contains explicit articles empowering women to participate in state institutions. For example, Article 76 states: "To give effect to the principle of equal citizenship, the State shall enact legislation and take measures to achieve

effective political participation for women to ensure access to at least 30% in various authorities and bodies.”

Article 314 of the draft constitution states its intention to “empower and expand employment opportunities for women in the Armed Forces, Police and General Intelligence,” and that this expansion shall be regulated by law. Similarly, Article 329

states that the “Con-
stitutional Court shall be composed of fourteen members, consisting of senior judges, lawyers and

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law professors in universities, who are highly qualified and persons with integrity and experience representing the various regions and taking into account the representation of women.”

Article 151, which refers to the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies and the Federation, consisting of a president and two deputies, requires that at least one of them be a woman.²⁷

THE DISASTER OF WAR

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The great gains in human rights and public freedoms have suffered severe setbacks following the coup led by the Houthi militia and the deposed dictator Saleh’s forces against President Hadi. As in any coup, the Houthi-Saleh alliance initiated a series of repressive measures against public freedoms and civil society activists, closing down and looting the media, deploying its militants on university campuses, placing politicians who opposed their decisions under house arrest or in jails, and using excessive violence against demonstrations and sit-ins.²⁸

The coup and the ensuing three-year war have led to a neglect of women’s issues. Civil society has become less engaged, and only organizations that have decided to turn a blind eye to the ongoing crimes of the Houthi coup, such as planting landmines, child recruitment, arbitrary arrests of activists and journalists, and restrictions on freedoms, are still operating in Yemen.

In these harsh circumstances, in which the putschists consider any peaceful demonstration as treason and an expression of support for “the Saudi aggression on Yemen,” women and a limited number of NGOs resist these bad conditions without hesitation. The Sana’a-based Association of Abductees’ Mothers, which exemplifies this kind of entity, has staged several protests and has been harassed

and assaulted by members of the ruling militia in Sana'a.²⁹

Mothers, sisters, and wives of the detainees, who are mostly journalists and civil society activists, have shown rare courage and the ability to withstand violations and tirelessly call for the release of their relatives. A similar association based in southern Yemen was founded by a group of mothers to demand the release of their relatives kept in the prisons of a United Arab Emirates-backed militia known as Aden's Security Belt. The association has organized several peaceful protests, which have been suppressed.³⁰

The ongoing war in Yemen has produced many challenges, perhaps the most severe one being the expansion of the militia presence across the country; meanwhile, political and civil presences in the public sphere have decreased, resulting in more suffering.

LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

To talk about the future of Yemeni women, we need to recall two moments: the pre- and post-coup periods. During the pre-coup period, women and civil society organizations actively participated in political entitlements such as the UN-brokered National Dialogue Conference and elections, referendums, demonstrations, peaceful marches, and political action.

As for the post-coup period, armed sectarian women appeared to suppress other peacefully-demonstrating women. The Houthi militia has been able to turn these women into a hideous repression machine, which foreshadows a dark future if the war and the coup continue and state institutions are not restored. It is true that the Houthis pretend not to be sectarian, but many incidents have confirmed that they are pursuing a sectarian policy. For example, the group leaders openly believe that the descendants of Ali Ibn Abi Talib (the cousin of the Prophet Mohammed and the husband of the Prophet's daughter Fatima) are racially superior.

They label their political opponents as enemies of the Prophet of Allah and Islam. Hence, the security approach and the resulting violence do not deviate from this racist vision. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also interfered in Yemeni affairs through their more than three-year military campaign in Yemen, the establishment of armed militias belonging to them in many regions of the country, and the use of Salafi groups as a tool to get rid of potential archrivals—namely the Muslim Brotherhood. Consequently, it could be said that not only the future of political and civil life, but also the ability to return to conditions of normalcy, are today largely dependent on the ability to limit

such Saudi-UAE policies in Yemen.³¹

Ultimately, the three-year-old war in Yemen has brought women back into isolation and closed the door to civil activity, which had witnessed a remarkable development in recent years. However, if there is a peaceful and fair resolution to the war, life will go back to normal for both women and civil society, and it is expected that civil activities will be resumed for many reasons, including:

1. Yemen is among the most dynamic Arab societies.
2. There are no laws that constrain work in the public sphere.
3. Yemen enjoys a fairly good political experience.
4. There is an acceptance of party competition and cultural and media diversity.

This optimistic outlook is reinforced by the nature of Yemeni society, characterized by tolerance, endurance, and non-despair. 

NOTES

1. Rémy Leveau, Franck Mermier, and Udo Steinbach, eds., *Le Yémen contemporain* (Paris: Karthala, 1999).

2. Based on the records of the Supreme Committee for Elections and Referendums, there is an indirectly proportional relationship between the number of female candidates and the number of female voters. In the parliamentary elections held in 1993, there were 42 female candidates, including 18 party candidates, out of the total 3,166 candidates. Then in the 1997 elections, the number dropped to 19 female candidates, although the number of female voters jumped from 378,379 out of 2,668,323 voters in 1993 to 1,304,550 female voters out of 4,669,273 voters in 1997. The number of women candidates reached the lowest level in the 2003 elections, when only 11 women were nominated as candidates despite women representing 3,414,640 out of 8,097,433 voters.

3. Relevant statistics are available on the website of the Supreme Committee for Elections and Referendums. The Yemeni researcher Abdel Nasser Al-Mowade' also has a study on "Political Participation of Women in the 2003 Parliamentary Elections in Yemen," *Journal of Contemporary Affairs* 12 (2003), Yemen Center for Studies and Research. The reports of the Yemen Parliament Observatory are available through the following link: <http://www.yppwatch.org/category.php?id=60>.

4. Studies and reports have pointed to the decline of the indicators of democracy and human rights after the 1994 war. See: Abdul-Bari Taher, "Winter of Press Freedoms in Yemen," *Al Masdar*, November 8, 2016, <http://almasdaronline.com/article/56384>.

5. See: Muhammad al-Sharafi, "Political Opposition in Yemen," *Journal of Contemporary Affairs* 35 (2009). It should be noted that the Supreme Coordination Council of the Opposition did not form a government or participate in ruling under this name, unlike the the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) bloc, which could be described as an upgraded version of it, and formed a governing coalition with the General People's Congress after the revolution of February 11, 2011.

6. JMP is the largest gathering of opposition parties and was established on February 6, 2003, with 85 members in the Yemeni parliament out of 301 parliament deputies. The JMP ran against Ali Abdullah Saleh and failed to win in elections that lacked integrity and transparency. This bloc consists of six opposition parties.

7. At that time, the authorities did not welcome any NGO that wished to work seriously in the public

sphere. Therefore, I applied to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor for a legal license for founding Women Journalists Without Borders. As is clear from the title, I was looking forward to establishing a transnational organization. My request, however, was rejected, and I was surprised that the authorities gave this name to another organization. The regime was known for its “cloning policy,” which is based on spawning projects parallel to the existing ones for the purpose of interference. To resist this, I held several sit-ins and protests inside the ministry, receiving solidarity from many international institutions, which forced the regime to submit to our demand in the end. It is true that the name was changed to “Women Journalists Without Chains,” but my team and I decided to provide a good model for the work of civil society organizations, breaking the monopoly of information by the regime. Therefore, we launched an SMS news service, which was a major step forward as the only existing similar service was run by *26 September News*, the mouthpiece of the Yemeni army. Another step was taken to end the monopoly over the mobile news service when WJWC organized dozens of events and sit-ins for this purpose. Our organization, along with other journalists and activists, was able to overcome the challenge. The third issue faced by the organization’s majority-female staff was how to transfer indoor activities and events of the organization to the streets in a conservative and armed society. We again succeeded in overcoming that challenge. This was an important indicator of Yemeni citizens’ acceptance and respect for what we were doing.

8. To learn about the environment in which Yemeni journalists were working, please read WJWC’s fourth report of 2008 on journalists’ freedoms in Yemen: *Annual Spring Report on Press Freedoms in Yemen, 2008* (Women Journalists Without Chains, 2009), <http://www.womenpress.net/reports/المرقبتل/ريقرقتل-2008.html>. Also see: “Yemen: The Need to Stop the Campaign on Newspapers,” Human Rights Watch, May 15, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2009/05/15/236537>; Abdul Karim Salam, “Intimidation of Journalists in Yemen takes a new turn,” Swiss Info, August 29, 2005, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/ara/يحيحمذختي-نميلي-يحيححص-عويورت/اديدج/4693868>.

9. WJWC depends on Facebook and YouTube to publish stories related to human rights and development issues. See: “March for the Fourth Anniversary of the February 11 Revolution,” Women Journalists Without Chains, Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1vOSOH-ypEG4fxI6jf5QCA>.

10. It is worth mentioning here that workshops targeting local administrators, parties, and local actors were held by the organization in about ten governorates over a period of six months to identify specific development needs. For more details, see: “Women Journalists Without Chains’ concludes the conference with the needs of Yemeni governorates and the priorities for the next phase,” Women Journalists Without Chains, February 13, 2015, <http://www.womenpress.net/conferences/المرقبتل/ريقرقتل-2015.html>.

11. WJWC has taken a stand against laws imposing restrictions on freedoms since its establishment in 2005. For example, the organization addressed the Yemeni parliament to compel the government to implement its decisions and recommendations related to the release of mobile news services and put an end to the government’s misdeeds. For further information, see: “After final remarks in front of the House of Representatives on the stop of a mobile service without restrictions,” *Mareb Press*, July 19, 2008, http://marebpress.net/news_details.php?lng=arabic&sid=12290.

12. A day after the Tunisian revolution succeeded in bringing down the regime and President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled on January 14, 2011, a group of young political activists went to the Tunisian Embassy in Yemen’s capital Sana’a to congratulate the Tunisian people. Meanwhile, the security forces pursued them. Thereafter, demonstrations and marches demanding the departure of Saleh took place at Sana’a University.

13. Abdo Ayes, “Yemen between the options of inheritance and extension,” *Al Jazeera*, July 31, 2010, <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2010/7/31/يديدمتل-او-ثيروتل-اراي-خني-نميلي/الجزيرة>.

14. “Yemen ranks 146th in the Transparency International Index for most corrupt countries,” *Al Masdar*, October 27, 2010, <http://almasdaronline.com/article/12617>. Many NGOs have contributed to enriching civil society and supporting political and legal reform policies in Yemen, including Women Journalists Without Chains, the National Organization for the Defense of Rights and Freedoms “HOOD,” Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights, Information and Training Center for Human Rights, Social Democratic Forum, Yemeni Network for Human Rights, Coalition of Civil Society Organizations “Umam,” and Transparency International Coalition–Yemen Branch.

15. One form of social injustice in Yemen involves extrajudicial actions by tribal leaders and influential people, such as building special prisons to imprison the opponents. The Minister of Human Rights in the post-revolution 2011 government, Houria Mashhour, said in an interview with the army's *26 September News* that her ministry will seek to close down private prisons controlled by influential sheikhs and officials, as they contravene national laws and international standards.

16. For more details on the massacre of Friday of Dignity, see: "Yemen: Massacre without Punishment," Human Rights Watch, February 12, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/video-photos/video/2013/02/12/278189>; <https://www.hrw.org/ar/video-photos/video/2013/02/12/278189>.

17. Ja'ashin is an area in the province of Ibb, about 240 kilometers south of the capital Sana'a. In general, most of the Ja'ashin's Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have returned to their villages, but some are still in Sana'a waiting for their full rights and adequate compensation. For more details on the case and the role of Women Journalists Without Chains in defense of the displaced of Ja'ashin, see: "Flash on the suffering of the children of Ja'ashin," Youtube, April 10, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XFCsRUKZjI>; "Ja'ashin sit-in before the Shura Council," Youtube, September 27, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrTExV_LzHo; "Sit-in of Ja'ashin," Youtube, October 12, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e93A68bm5g.

18. Not all criticisms leveled at the work of civil society organizations are accurate, as some consider dealing with international organizations to be unpatriotic, but some criticisms are fair. For example, the work of civil society organizations lacks institutionalization. Some strongly criticize Women Journalists Without Chains on the grounds that it receives external funding. WJWC and other NGOs are often treated as companies and banks that should not get funding for their programs from any donor organizations and parties. Such propaganda is usually spread by authoritarian regimes.

19. "A new role for civil society in Yemen," World Bank, March 4, 2014, <http://www.albankaldawli.org/ar/news/feature/2014/03/04/a-new-role-for-civil-society-in-yemen>.

20. "Yemeni women's response to President Saleh concerning mixing," Youtube, April 15, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CI4coF816hU>.

21. After 2011, civil society organizations were more concerned with issues related to human rights and the political empowerment of young people and women.

22. Thania Paffenholz and Nick Ross, "Inclusive Political Settlements: New Insights from Yemen's National Dialogue," Inclusive Security, March 2016, <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/inclusive-political-settlements-new-insights-from-yemens-national-dialogue/>.

23. As a member of the Conciliation Commission of the National Dialogue Conference, which consisted of the conference chairmanship, the chairmen of working groups, and a number of members appointed by the president, I could emphasize that women and civil society organizations actively participated in the comprehensive national dialogue conference. To read the NDC document, see: *Comprehensive National Dialogue Document* (Sana'a, Yemen: National Dialogue Conference, 2013–2014), http://www.ndc.ye/ndc_document.pdf.

24. The coupists broadcasted what they called "a constitutional declaration." By doing so they actually ended the political process and contributed greatly to national chaos. See: "Yemen: A chronological sequence of events escalating into a 'gale storm,'" *BBC*, March 27, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2015/03/150327_timeline_yemen_crisis_recent_development; "Armed Houthis movement kidnapped Ahmed bin Mubarak, Chief of Staff of the President of Yemen, to 'prevent the coup against the partnership agreement,'" *BBC*, January 17, 2015, http://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2015/01/150117_yemen_president_chiefstaff_kidnap.

25. Other recommendations were that a national high authority for maternal and child welfare would be established, and that women would be given at least 30 percent of seats in the constitution-drafting committee. The NDC members also came to agree that at least 30 percent of elected legislative councils should consist of women. See: *Outcomes of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference: A Step toward Conflict Resolution and State Building* (Sana'a, Yemen: Doha Institute, January 26, 2014).

26. See: "Yemeni women...difficult political empowerment," *Middle East Online*, February 24, 2015, <http://www.middle-east-online.com/?id=194718>.

27. *Draft: New Yemeni Constitution* (Sana'a, Yemen: National Dialogue Conference, 2015), <http://www>.

29. Ghaida Sabri, “‘The Mothers of the Kidnapped’: The last civil struggle front in Sana’a faces the failure of society and the suppression of militias,” *Al Masdar*, November 8, 2016, <http://almasdaronline.com/article/86157>.

31. For example, Doug Bandow, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute who previously served as a special assistant to President Ronald Reagan, thinks the information in the report of the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen is not shocking to Americans. He affirmed that there is ample evidence of Saudi and UAE support for Salafist militant groups in Yemen. See: “Why are the UAE and Saudi Arabia funding militias in Yemen?,” *Al Jazeera*, August 20, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/behindthenews/2017/8/20/نمى-ل-ابتدائى-شى-ى-لى-ة-ى-و-ع-س-ل-ا-و-ت-ار-ال-ا-ل-ل-و-ت-ا-ذ-ا-م-ل>.