

“conversation” – albeit an acrimonious one – as Martin Stokes has recently argued in *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago, 2010). Lastly, although the book is well presented, the editing process has not prevented a number of mistakes (e.g. the second Tanzimat reform was enacted in 1856, not 1876; *kürdili* is spelt *kürdili* throughout) from entering the published version. Nonetheless, these do not affect O’Connell’s main argument, and *Alaturka* remains an impressive work of scholarship which deals with important issues both in modern Turkish history and musicology in a convincing way. It will appeal to specialists in ethnomusicology or Turkish studies, and to readers seeking a serious introduction to the topics of music and nationhood in the Middle East.

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HELEN LACKNER (ed.):

Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition.

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For those who are not aware of how much Yemen matters in the current maelstrom of Middle East politics, this book makes a convincing case. As the subtitle notes, Yemen is a society in transition following the forced resignation in 2011 of strong man ‘Ali Abdullah Salih after 33 years in power. The chief value of the volume is that it highlights the context in which Yemen entered the recent turmoil within and without the country; the main drawback is that the current process of rebuilding the state is ongoing and unpredictable. Yemen matters for a variety of reasons, including its strategic location in the volatile Horn of Africa, its recent history following unification of a socialist south and a republican north in 1990, the continuing relevance of tribalism as the main civil society in much of the country, the perceived role of terrorism, the relative ineffectiveness of four decades of development aid, the poverty and dismal health indicators, and the mere fact that Yemen is seldom mentioned in the media except in relation to terrorism.

As is common with most collected papers from a conference, the volume lacks consistency in the sixteen separate articles, at times citing different statistics and at others reading more like a development report than a readable book chapter. Yet the sheer variety of information on Yemen’s political, economic and development context make it well worthwhile reading as a whole. Considering that the conference was held in 2013, this is a timely turn around and much of the information is up-to-date. The best part of the volume is Helen Lackner’s succinct and informative introduction (pp. 1–26). Here she addresses the relation of Yemen to the outside world, a brief overview of history and politics of the former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), as well as the post-unification Republic of Yemen (ROY), the socio-economics of poverty, the declining natural resource base of water and oil, the economy of a state formerly heavily dependent on remittance income, a social structure which combines traditional group allegiances with the impact of nationalism, and major differences in wealth accumulation.

The volume begins with three articles on politics and security. Sheila Carapico explains the revolutionary fervour which swept through Yemen during the Arab Spring by juxtaposing two major issues: “one about Yemeni aspirations for social justice and better governance and the other about American and Saudi operations undertaken in the name of combating terrorism” (p. 29), the main contenders for power as the Salih regime started to collapse, the “haphazard” use of drones in counter-terrorism by the United States (p. 43), and the long-term meddling of Saudi Arabia in Yemen’s politics. Adam Seitz focuses on the “praetorianism” in which Yemen’s military has evolved in relation to tribal militias since unification, including the role of the USA in supplying Salih with weaponry to fight terrorism. He also addresses the split in the military between Salih’s kin-based Republic Guard and the major army general Ali Mohsen during the Arab Spring. The article by Katherine Hennessey on Yemeni theatrical and film production in relation to the Arab Spring is a bit out of place in this section, since it is primarily descriptive. She notes the role played by street theatre among the protesters, especially in Sanaa and Taizz.

The internal strife in Yemen has several fronts. Laurent Bonnefoy argues that the ongoing Yemeni revolutionary process is not simply about the youth (*shabab*) protesting on the streets, nor was the revolution hijacked by the religious conservatives. He provides a review of the influx of Salafis and resilience of the pre-existing political parties and religious groups, noting the often under-appreciated diversity of Yemeni society. Marieke Brandt’s ethnographic account of the Huthi rebellion in Yemen’s north is one of the strongest parts of the volume. She argues quite forcefully that “it was not tribal involvement per se, but rather an erosion of tribal norms that contributed to the brutalization of the conflict” (p. 107). Her account of Sa’da’s “Colonial Sheikhs”, a major ally of Salih and big loser in the Huthi conflict, is the best analysis of this issue to date. Noah Brehony and Susanne Dahlgren focus on Yemen’s disgruntled south; Behoney revisits the political development of the PDRY and the aftermath of unification leading to a new shape of South Yemeni identity and Dahlgren focuses on the lack of employment for southern youth.

Water and land are two issues that link environmental concerns with economic development. Lackner reviews the issue of Yemen’s declining water resources since 1990 with a focus on government initiatives and laws. It would have been useful to discuss how the same issue was addressed in the 1980s, when water was a critical issue in both Yemens. Gerhard Lichtenthäler analyses a water dispute case from the Amran basin, providing the Arabic but no English translation of the resolution document. Jens Kambeck’s discussion of land disputes is based entirely on legal issues and would have been aided by examining the ethnographic literature for on-the-ground examples.

The development context is explored in Kais Aliriani’s economic portrayal of small and medium enterprises in Yemen, Adel Aulahi’s discussion of the healthcare system and Christina Hellmich’s account of women’s reproductive health. The all-important issue of Yemen’s migration history, including the many displaced persons in the last few years, is addressed by Hélène Thiollet and Marina de Regt, followed by Ho Wai-Yip’s brief discussion of the Yemeni community in China. The “Select bibliography” is too brief. Overall, however, there is much to be gained by reading the volume for anyone interested in the recent political and economic development (or lack thereof) in Yemen.

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