

Seeing like a Citizen, Acting like a State: Exemplary Events in Unified Yemen

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INTRODUCTION

This essay uses a discussion of three recent events in Yemen to dramatize the relationship between state power and the experience of citizenship in the aftermath of national unification in 1990.¹ The first event is a “direct,” purportedly competitive presidential election on 23 September 1999, the first since unification and unprecedented in the histories of the former countries of North and South Yemen. The second is the celebration of the tenth anniversary of national unification on 22 May 2000, including the extraordinary preparations leading up to the event. The third is the public sensation following the arrest and prosecution of a man touted as Yemen’s first bona fide “serial killer,” which occurred during the lead-up to the decennial celebration.

As a period in the short history of unified Yemen, these years can be charac-

This essay is based on open-ended interviews and ethnographic research conducted during fourteen months of fieldwork (summer 1998; summer and fall 1999; spring 2000; Sept. 2000; fall 2001; winter 2002; fall 2003). The title is, of course, beholden to James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*. An early version of this paper was presented at the Second Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence, 21–25 March 2001, hosted by the Mediterranean Programme, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute. Subsequent drafts were presented to audiences at The University of Pennsylvania (2002), The University of Chicago (2002 and 2003), and The University of Wisconsin, Madison (2003). In particular, I would like to thank Nadia Abu El-Haj, Madawi Al-Rasheed, Isa Blumi, H. Zeynep Bulutgil, Craig Calhoun, Sheila Carapico, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Jim Chandler, Michael Dawson, Dilip Gaonkar, Ellis Goldberg, Debbie Gould, Yusuf Has, Eng seng Ho, Leigh Jenco, Matthew Kocher, Ben Lee, Zachary Lockman, Claudio Lomnitz, Patchen Markell, W. Flagg Miller, Harris Mylonas, Anne Norton, Stacey Sheridan Philbrick, Hanna Pitkin, Don Reneau, Jillian Schwedler, William H. Sewell, Jr., Susan Stokes, Ronald Suny, Charles Taylor, Ed Webb, John Willis, Anna Wuerth, and Iris Marion Young. I dedicate this article to the memory of Jar Allah ‘Umar.

¹ My analysis depends on readers understanding the differences I am registering among the terms “state,” “nation,” and “regime.” By “state” I mean a common set of institutions capable of distributing goods and services and controlling violence within a demarcated, internationally recognized territory. By “nation” I refer to a shared sense of belonging simultaneously with anonymous others to an imagined community. By “regime” I mean the political order of a particular leader or administration. For example, we tend to say “the regime of ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah Salih,” but not “the state of ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah Salih.”

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terized as ones of renewed political jockeying between a durable regime with meager institutional capacities, on the one hand, and a mobilized citizenry, on the other. These events are exemplary in the sense that each exposes aspects of lived political experience in Yemen—a country where lively, critical public discussion, a weak but multi-party system, a free press relative to other parts of the Arab world, and active civic associations indicate vibrant, participatory political practices in the absence of fair and free elections (Carapico 1998; see also Habermas [1962] 1996). Viewing these episodes together makes it possible to draw more general comparative lessons about the anatomy of citizen contestation and regime control in newly forming nation-states.

Each of the events betrays a note of irony. The election was widely heralded as “the first free direct presidential election” ever held in Yemen, and there was never any doubt about the ability of the incumbent to capture a majority of the vote. Yet the ruling party, on dubious legal grounds, barred the opposition’s jointly chosen challenger from the race and then appointed its own opponent. President ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah Salih had a chance to win what the world would have regarded as a fair and free election, but chose instead to undermine the process, using the apparently democratic form to foreclose democratic possibilities. In the case of the unification anniversary, both the preparations and the event itself required the regime to introduce state-like interventions in domains where they had never been seen before. In areas of everyday practice, such as garbage collection and street cleaning, the state made itself apparent to citizens in ways that could only serve to remind them of how absent it usually was. Finally, the revelation that a shocking series of murders had taken place inside the state-run university produced communities of criticism in which people found themselves sharing a sense of belonging to a nation the existence of which was merely imputed by the failure of the state to exercise its expected role of protecting its citizens.

The first two events pose a puzzle. In the case of the presidential election, why would a regime that was guaranteed to win a real election undermine its credibility unnecessarily? The case of the unification ceremonies repeats the puzzle in a different form (one common to many poor dictatorships). Why spend a reported \$180 million on a celebration in a country with a per capita annual income of less than \$300, when state coffers are drained and the IMF is pressing for austerity? The third event differs from the first two in that it occurred independently of state officials’ intentions, if not, as critics were quick to point out, of state practices. Like the other two, however, the publicity surrounding the arrest and the discussion that animated public life in the aftermath of the grisly revelations exemplified the ways in which a political community is formed by the shared experience of events. In this case, unlike the other two, the publicity attending the arrest, rather than exaggerating the presence of state institutions, advertised their absence. Registered in reactions to this event is the “moral panic” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999:5) of citizens longing for a state

capable of protecting them. By being aware of the simultaneous and common character of their anxieties, moral entitlements, and desires, even in the absence of state institutions, inhabitants of a common territory were able to experience a shared sense of connection to it.

This paper explores three counter-intuitive understandings of the relationships among state sovereignty, democracy, and nation-formation. First, whereas contested elections may require “strong” states and national coherence (see, for example, Rustow 1970; 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996), other forms of democratic activity, such as widespread political activism and lively public debates, may exist *because* state institutions are fragile and affective connection to nationness only mildly constraining. As we shall see, the fragility of the state and the vibrancy of civic life mean that the regime’s exercise of power is both blatant and intermittent. Second, common experiences of moral panic may be just as effective as, or even more capable than, state spectacles in generating a sense of passionate belonging to the imagined community of the nation. Third and relatedly, experiences of national belonging may actually be shared in the breach of state authority—in the moments when large numbers of people, unknown to each other, long for its protection. Or put differently, Yemen demonstrates how events of collective vulnerability can bring about *episodic* expressions of national identification. This essay is devoted to elaborating these arguments while narrating the events that bring them to the fore.

THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: ACTING LIKE A STATE, PART ONE

President ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah Salih has been in power for twenty-five years, as the leader of North Yemen since 1978, and of unified Yemen since its inception in 1990. Yet in spite of the regime’s durability, the Weberian fantasy of a state that enjoys a monopoly on violence—legitimate or otherwise—is not remotely evident. In a country of 18.5 million people, there are an estimated 61 million weapons in private hands.² The state is incapable, moreover, of providing welfare, protection, or education to the population. Complaints are heard with incantation-like regularity all over Yemen about the absence of “security” (*aman*) and “stability” (*istiqrar*), the inability of the state to guarantee safe passage from one region to another, to put a stop to practices of local justice, and to disarm the citizenry. There is also little evidence to suggest that the incumbent regime has succeeded in constructing a sense of membership that is coherent and powerful enough to tie people’s political allegiances to the nation-state. Yet

² The population figure is from the World Bank’s “Memorandum of the President of the International Development Association and the International Finance Corporation to the Executive Directors on a Country Assistance Strategy for the Republic of Yemen, 6 August 2002.” The oft-cited figure on arms is close to the Ministry of Interior’s estimate of 60 million weapons in the country (*Yemen Times*, 28 Jan. 2002). In the period of 1999–2000, the population was estimated at sixteen million people with fifty-one million arms.

Yemen cannot be placed in the category of countries like Yugoslavia or Rwanda, where violence has destroyed communities and shattered the fragile political arrangements previously in existence. In an era when some nation-states are being challenged by ethnic conflict and the fragmentation of previously unified multinational political communities, while others are undermined by transnational patterns of migration and of capital accumulation, a never-before-united Yemen has managed to survive despite markedly weak institutional capacities and a peripheral location in the global economy.³

Unified Yemen came into being at the end of the cold war when a non-democratic state dependent on labor remittances and donor aid combined with an unsuccessful, authoritarian socialist one. The idea of Yemen as a single political entity preceded actual unification, as evidenced by constitutionally mandated goals in the two separate states calling for unity, by failed unity agreements, and by stories, songs, and poetry dating back to the early 1920s. Moreover, key figures in the socialist People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in the South were from the North, and politicians in the North's Yemen Arab Republic hailed from the South. Yet, importantly, unlike other recent examples of unification such as Vietnam and Germany, North and South Yemen had never united into a single nation-state before 1990.⁴ In this sense, the Republic of Yemen is not an instance of "re-unification," but a new experiment in nation-state formation. Or put differently, although nationalist identification with the state requires on-going work in any country, there were no prior political arrangements that regulated membership in a territorially determinate association of Yemeni citizens, who, as "a people," could identify themselves with an existing common political authority.

Unification between North and South occurred under the condition that a transition to democracy would take place. And in the early 1990s, openly contested elections for Parliament, a wide array of critical newspapers, and a plethora of political parties made Yemen one of the only Middle Eastern countries to tolerate peaceful, adversarial politics. Then the brief, two-month civil

³ This characterization of the contemporary world is taken from Ronald Beiner's introductory essay, "Why Citizenship Constitutes a Theoretical Problem in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century" (1995).

⁴ The term Yemen is considerably older than are aspirations for a modern nation-state, however. Important historical antecedents for Yemen's twentieth-century "imagined unities" include repeated invocations of the term "Yemen" in the Traditions of the Prophet to indicate the territory south of Mecca, and the centuries-old identification of various local literatures and practices as explicitly "Yemeni" (Dresch 2000:1, 6, 11, 49–50, 184, 209–10). The border between North and South was drawn in 1905, but there is no evidence to suggest that "Yemen" referred to a coherent political entity or enjoyed the imaginative status of nationhood before the inter-war period. Even in this latter period, such imaginings overlapped with, and were often less important than, appeals to local, regional attachments. For a discussion of the varying ways in which Yemen was understood, see, in addition to Dresch, Mermier (1999; also 1997a; 1997b) and my *Peripheral Visions: Political Identifications in Unified Yemen* (in preparation). For a discussion of aspirations towards unity prior to unification, see also Gause (1987); Halliday (1997).

war of 1994 altered the conditions of democratic possibility, producing an annexationist politics that continues to reinforce Northern dominance.⁵ The parliamentary elections of April 1997, which the Yemeni Socialist Party and two other small, southern-based opposition parties boycotted, were widely understood to be less democratic than the ones in 1993 (Glosemeyer 1993). Voter turnout in the South was low, the ruling party won a clear majority of seats (187 out of 301), and the seats of the main Islamicist party, *al-Tajammu' al-Yamani lil-Islah*, decreased from 62 to 53 (Detalle 1993a; 1993b; Baaklini, Denooux, and Springborg 1999:213; Schwedler 2002:51). Indeed, although the ruling General People's Congress party and the main Islamicist party had forged an informal coalition for the 1997 elections, thereby agreeing not to oppose each other in specific districts, many "independents" in those districts turned out to be identified with the ruling GPC party. As a consequence, the ruling party's control of Parliament was overwhelming in 1997: close to 266 seats, or 75 percent of the assembly (Schwedler 2002:51; Dresch 2000:209). In some districts outcomes were decided in advance, failing to fulfill even a "minimalist's" view of a democracy in which electoral outcomes are uncertain (Przeworski 1991). The 1999 presidential "election" both demonstrated and contributed to the assertion of Northern control and the corresponding constriction of permitted, institutionalized political contestation.

Although the regime represented itself to foreign donors and citizens alike as an "emerging democracy,"⁶ the staged elections could not possibly have been intended to reassure Yemeni democrats or foreign observers of the regime's commitment to institutionalizing competitive, free elections. Opposition leaders wondered aloud when an "ornamental democracy" (*dimuqratiyya shakliyya*) might become a genuine one. In newspaper articles and other public venues, people identified with the opposition denounced the elections as mere "trappings" (*libas*), another example of a "theatrical comedy" on the part of the regime, which was gradually narrowing the prospects for democratic politics in Yemen (al-Mutawakkil 1999; al-Saqqaf 1999; Muthana 1999). The political scientist Muhammad 'Abd al-Malik al-Mutawakkil even likened the event to "a Hindi film, long, boring, and exorbitantly expensive" (al-Mutawakkil 1999).

Two months before the election a unified opposition had chosen its candidate for President, 'Ali Salih 'Ubbad, or "Muqbil," the Secretary General of the Yemeni Socialist Party, a Southerner who, everyone acknowledged (even Muqbil), had no chance of winning, but who could put forth an alternative agenda, increase people's awareness of democratic practices by competing, and open

⁵ Abu Bakr al-Saqqaf terms this annexationist politics "internal colonialism" in his pamphlet *Al-wahda al-yamaniyya: min al-indimaj al-fawri ila isti'mar al-dakhili* (1996); see also Al-Saqqaf (1999). For a brief but helpful discussion of the war, see Sheila Carapico, *Middle East Report* (1994).

⁶ The National Democratic Institute, an organization associated with the United States' Democratic Party, helped the regime to host the "Emerging Democracies" conference, in which fifteen countries participated in June 1999.

up possibilities for future electoral successes. In order to begin his campaign, however, Muqbil had to be approved by 10 percent of Parliament's members. This system, borrowed from Tunisian judicial codes, enabled the regime to weed out undesirable nominees, and Muqbil's candidacy was thereby rejected. Thus the regime, rather than sailing to victory in an openly contested election, chose to disqualify the opposition candidate, turning the event into the phony referendum familiar to many post-revolutionary and post-colonial polities. Nor did the ruling party stop there. To replace the opposition's candidate, the regime nominated one of its own Southern members, Nagib Qahtan al-Sha'bi. The son of its first President, who was deposed and imprisoned in 1969 during a coup d'état carried out by socialists, Nagib and his family had fled to Cairo where they had received support and protection for years from the anti-socialist North. Election day, then, offered people the choice between two candidates from the same party, the ruling President from the North, and the puppet-like contender whose origins were identifiably Southern. One published cartoon depicted Nagib as a wind-up toy. A joke echoed this sentiment: "Nagib is elected and is then asked, 'What is the first thing you are going to do?'" He replies: "Make 'Ali 'Abd Allah Salih President."

Yet even by producing a bogus alternative candidate, the regime enabled some form of limited choice. A few people voted for Nagib Qahtan despite his compromised candidacy. As a taxi driver from Ta'izz argued: "even though I don't know Nagib, he's got to be better than 'Ali 'Abd Allah. The President steals and he allows others to steal. And when a good prime minister like Faraj Bin Ghanim tries to intervene, he is sacked."⁷ People were broadly aware that they could register their protest in at least four ways: they could boycott the election; they could vote for Nagib; they could cross out both candidates' pictures; or they could write in a candidate, as some people claim to have done. For instance, several state employees and opposition politicians reported people writing in the name of Sa'd Zaghlul, a famous Egyptian nationalist who died in 1927. Rumors circulated that another voter wrote "stupid" (*ahbal*) below Nagib's picture and "robber" (*sariq*) under the President's.

According to official reports, more than 66 percent of the electorate took part in the presidential election, with President 'Ali 'Abd Allah Salih garnering 96.3 percent of the vote. Independent observers and opposition party members alike, however, estimated that only 30 percent of registered voters bothered to go to the polls. In the aftermath of the election, stories abounded about poor voter turnout, 3000 stuffed ballot boxes hidden in reserve, army personnel dressed in civilian clothing casting additional ballots, and minors voting, some more than once.⁸ The act of voting required people to put their thumbprint on the com-

⁷ Faraj Bin Ghanim served as prime minister of Yemen from 17 May 1997 until his resignation on 29 April 1998.

⁸ According to one source, there were 20,100 ballot boxes made, but only 17,148 distributed.

puter-generated list of registered voters, and afterward regime supporters and fearful citizens were eager to signal loyalty by displaying their inked thumbs in public. Stories were told of people who had failed to vote purchasing inkpads from local stores in order to dissemble having participated. People reported being visited by friends checking to see whether they had voted. The inked thumb became a particularly fraught signifier registering either participation in the elections or the fear of having not done so. Or to put it differently, an inked thumb could mean that a person had participated out of duty, love, or fear, or that a person had not participated but could act “as if” he had (Wedeen 1999). The following joke speaks to the latter condition: “A guy goes to a *qat* chew and shakes hands with his thumb up to prove that he has voted [a practice many adopted the day after the elections].⁹ His friend says, ‘Why is your thumb red?’ He replies, ‘They ran out of blue inkpads at the store.’”

The ballot sheets themselves, however, signaled the solemnity of official state practice. Colored photographs and the names of the two candidates appeared on each ballot. ʿAlī ʿAbd Allah Salih was pictured in suit and tie. Below him were the hallmarks of his campaign, three encircled images, the logos of the three main groups that had ostensibly supported the President: The *al-majlis al-watani* (a loosely knit group of parties, including Baʿthists and some Nasirists) depicts three hands clasping a torch to symbolize unity; the main Islamicist party, *al-Tajammuʿ al-Yamani lil-Islah*, portrays the sun shining brilliantly on the horizon to connote a “bright future”; and the ruling General People’s Congress party’s insignia is the horse—symbol of power and bravery (*shumukh*) or of a shared Arabian genealogy (depending on whom one asks). Nagib Qahtan’s portrait was set against the backdrop of a sky, the scales of justice to the right, a rather innocuous reference to (both candidates’) declared commitments to procedural justice and judicial reform.

Political posters of the President also covered the walls of buildings and the windows of shops.¹⁰ The Delacroix-like portrait of ʿAlī ʿAbd Allah Salih astride a stallion and draped in a billowing Yemeni flag conjured up for some Yemenis

The source took this to mean that the undistributed ones were to be used in an “emergency situation” so that the regime could show that it had not only amassed the required majority, but also generated enthusiasm for the elections.

⁹ *Qat* is a leafy stimulant that many Yemenis chew in the afternoons, frequently at public gatherings. Marriages are often arranged, commercial transactions accomplished, and political deals solidified over *qat*. *Qat* chews are also occasions to discuss with friends, familiars, and some strangers political topics of general concern. Conversations range from the abstract to the concrete, from the meanings of Yemeni-ness to date palm cultivation problems in the Hadramawt. Chapter Four of my forthcoming *Peripheral Visions: Political Identifications in Unified Yemen* deals with the political significance of *qat* chews in detail. See also Shelagh Weir’s informative *Qat in Yemen: Consumption and Social Change* (1985) and the eloquent descriptions in Messick’s *The Calligraphic State* (1996).

¹⁰ There were relatively few political posters of Nagib Qahtan, and those that did exist were hand-placed by party members on public walls. No such posters were available for purchase, nor could they be found in shop windows.

images of ʿAli ibn Abi Talib, the son-in-law of the prophet and a symbol for Zaydi (Shiʿi) Islam of legitimate rule. The original poster, which towers over a main commercial thoroughfare, allegedly cost the regime 13,000 dollars, an exorbitant sum for ordinary citizens.¹¹ Other posters combined ʿAli ʿAbd Allah Salih’s portrait with advertisements for companies such as Canada Dry and Daewoo, thereby blending domestic kitsch with global capitalism in ways that probably saved the regime some money. Corporate endorsements signified that the President enjoyed the backing of capital, and that investor confidence was indifferent to, if not supportive of, phony electoral processes.

No one disputed that the Yemeni President would have won an openly contested election against Muqbil, if not by the margin by which he allegedly actually won. As the political scientist François Burgat points out, had leaders of the Islamicist party, *al-Islah*, decided to put forward their own nominee, there might have been some cause for concern among regime officials, but the party’s decision to support the President eliminated any prospects for competition, even before the regime’s denial of Muqbil’s candidacy (Burgat 2000:70). Salih’s assured victory raises the question of why the regime would bar the opposition’s candidate, guaranteed to lose a fair and free election, from running. Members of the opposition and the ruling party speculated that Muqbil’s personality was to blame; he was difficult and refused to ingratiate himself with members of Parliament who might have voted to allow his candidacy. In the words of one opposition politician, “Muqbil doesn’t hold his tongue—he’ll say anything, and the impact on public opinion of criticizing the President’s personality directly inclined the President to make that decision.” Politicians close to the President and in the opposition argued that ʿAli ʿAbd Allah Salih had personally ordered Parliament’s members to deny Muqbil’s nomination. The President was worried, in this view, that a Yemeni Socialist Party candidate would polarize North and South, thereby solidifying deep, regional divisions that had emerged after union and had worsened in the aftermath of the civil war. “Victory” required more than winning the elections; it demanded a vision of unity in which ʿAli ʿAbd Allah Salih could represent both regions. Being a “tactician” rather than a “strategist” or statesman, argued one presidential advisor, meant that the President missed a historical opportunity, thereby revealing himself to be like other dictators who prefer garnering a literally unbelievable number of votes, rather than risk the political uncertainty that a less decisive but more credible victory would have entailed. One key opposition figure likened the President to “a guy who sells groceries at a road stand” (*sahib al-sandaqa*): “He’s busy with the little things and can profit from the details, but he loses sight of the big picture. He has small ideas.” Slogans congratulating the “father of Ah-

¹¹ Estimates of the average per capita income vary from approximately \$270–\$347, depending on the source and year. See, for example, the *World Bank Report* (1999), and the *Yemen Times*, 13–19 Nov. 2000.

mad” (*Abu Ahmad*) also suggested the regime’s dynastic ambitions, thereby implying that although the President knew that he would win, he did not want to set precedents that might endanger his son’s succession. In contrast, some educated professionals who defended the regime justified ʿAli ʿAbd Allah’s move by arguing that democracy must proceed gradually. This referendum was a first step in getting people used to the process, and future presidential elections would be more democratic than this one. Within a roughly familiar “civilizing process” narrative, arguments about ill-prepared citizens suggested that some elites in Yemen viewed citizens as not yet ready to engage in the mature electoral processes of the developed world. No one, however, could answer why the regime would put forth another candidate from his own party in Muqbil’s stead—a variation on the sham election that, to my knowledge, has no historical precedent.

I want to argue that the orchestrated event not only ensured an electoral outcome that was already obvious, but also provided an occasion for the regime to announce and enact its political power. This political power, in turn, resides and was made manifest in the regime’s use of democratic procedures in order to empty democracy of what liberals take to be its content: fair, competitive elections. The elections signaled that “support” for the President, by those who admire, fear, and loathe him, was becoming tied to public performances of democratic openness *and* to the sense of lost opportunities such public performances reiterated. For example: in response to a questionnaire asking whether she “supported the government’s policies,” a housekeeper from the distant, northern mountainous region of Haraz said that she did. When I asked her later how she could give this response when she complained constantly about government actions, she explained, “I’m with them because what’s the point of being against them . . . right? They’re the ones in power.” The elections communicated this absence of actual alternatives by presenting a bogus one.

This excessive bogusness operated as both a signaling device and a mechanism for constituting the political power it signaled. The “elections” conveyed to politicians in the opposition and to disaffected ordinary citizens that the regime would actively intervene to foreclose democratic possibilities. The elections were constitutive because they provided the occasions through which the regime could impose this authoritarian impulse onto citizens, at least temporarily. Even when such disciplinary strategies are contested, they are still partially effective—organizing men and women to participate and consume the regime’s idealized version of the real. Men and women worked to register voters and to ensure that polls functioned in an orderly fashion. Soldiers were bussed in to vote and ensure stability. Official institutions, including foreign donor organizations (Burgat 2000:72), devoted time and money to organizing and orchestrating an event everyone knew to be fraudulent. People gathered together in crowds to hear both candidates avow their commitments to institutional reform, stability, security, the material well-being of ordinary citizens,

and to democracy itself. The event had the effect of exercising power by announcing it publicly, thereby forefending against the deleterious effects of weak state institutions and IMF pressures by reminding citizens that even regimes without a monopoly over violence have some measure of control.

Some part of the control a regime exercises derives from its efforts to act like a state. Such enactments always rely on pre-existing mechanisms of coercive, utilitarian, and normative compliance. As this paper shows, in the case of Yemen, where the pre-existing forms are especially meager, the way the regime of ʿAli ʿAbd Allah Salih attempts to bring itself into being as a state can be seen especially clearly. No regime actually enjoys an undisputed monopoly over force, if crime statistics are any indication, but the Yemeni regime's coercive control is exceptionally limited, especially outside of the capital. Nevertheless, Yemen does have an army, many of whose key officers derive from the President's region and family grouping of Sanhan in the Northern Highlands. The army has been used to quell resistance in the northeastern areas of Ma'rib and al-Jawf, as well as in the southern areas, such as Kud Qarw village (near Aden) and in al-Dalī. Human Rights Watch reports the detention of political prisoners, torture, and death sentences (Human Rights Watch 2000:420). In the past, the regime has also threatened to dissolve a main opposition party, the Yemeni Socialist Party, and has harassed the independent press on a number of occasions. Security officials infiltrate opposition organizations in order to intimidate and divide would-be dissidents while also providing information about subversive activity to the President.

Even so, a key aspect of the Yemeni example is that such forms of social control do not generate the sorts of fear characteristic of many dictatorships. The government's deployment of military and paramilitary units has usually been a *response* to an overt challenge to the regime's authority rather than a prophylactic, protective form of preempting dissent. Yemen, moreover, possesses a dense network of associations and a degree of local civic participation unparalleled in other parts of the Arab world (Carapico 1998; 1996). In the (qualified) public spheres of opposition-oriented conferences, political party rallies and meetings, Friday sermons, newspaper debates, and *qat*-chew conversations, even in the daily television broadcasts of parliamentary sessions, Yemenis from a variety of regional and class backgrounds routinely criticize the regime without the fear of repercussions found in regimes classified as "authoritarian."

The regime also exploits its utilitarian mechanisms of social control by purchasing the loyalty of would-be subversives. Automobiles, homes, vacations, and foreign bank accounts are perquisites of allegiance. Politicians who do not support the regime may also periodically benefit from its largesse. Influential opposition figures sometimes have to make difficult choices about whether to accept such amenities as a bodyguard or a car for the family or money for medical treatment abroad—decisions that may ease life's burdens but may require

compromises or generate unsettling questions about political commitments. In the absence of a state capable of delivering public goods and services through common administrative institutions, political figures who have no sources of independent wealth may have to rely on the personal largesse of regime members.

Finally, the Northern, Sanhan-dominated regime seems genuinely popular in key areas of the North and in isolated parts of the South. The North is not a unified region, but many inhabitants—especially in the capital and the Northern Highlands—actively support the President even when they do not have to. The working-class area of Hudayda in the Tihama, the city of Ta'izz and much of *al-mintaqa al-wusta*, as well as parts of the northeastern desert regions of al-Jawf and Ma'rib, do not overwhelmingly support the regime—if riots and organized, armed resistance are any indication. Even in these areas, however, some would have voted for the President. Although the minority of Yemenis living in the South would probably have voted for a Southern candidate, had a genuine representative of the region run for the presidency, the South's small population (of anywhere from 2.5–4.5 million inhabitants) would not have significantly affected the President's electoral majority.¹² Moreover, dissatisfaction with the former rule of the socialist party among groups who self-identify as “tribal” in the interior or *wadi* region of Hadramawt would have given the President some support there. The ruling GPC party has enjoyed backing among Southern groups whose organizations were prohibited during the socialists' rule there. Despite electoral infractions during the Parliamentary elections of 2003, the Yemeni Socialist Party's poor performance—the Party won 7 seats out of 301—further supports the claim that the President would have won a fair and free election. The common assumption that non-democratic regimes have no popular support is belied by the President's observable popularity in many areas. Even ambivalent voters argued on more than one occasion that “the devil you know is better than the devil you don't.”¹³ Given the President's ability to win a credible election (or, for that matter, to rig one covertly), the regime's decision to produce an overtly phony one implies that the event did more than exemplify political power; it was also doing the work of creating it by demonstrating to officials and citizens alike that the regime could get away with the charade.

Arguably, post-election politics have continued to narrow possibilities for institutionalizing liberal democracy. In an August 2000 letter to the speaker and members of Parliament, President 'Ali 'Abd Allah Salih and 144 members of

¹² It is difficult to obtain population breakdowns by region in Yemen. *The World Gazetteer's* estimates of approximately 4.5 million inhabitants of the South in 1994, and 4.2 million in 2003 strike me as inflated; the overall population figures cited are high by any other source's standards (close to 16 million in 1994; close to 23 million in 2003). The suggestion of migration away from the South is intriguing in its own right, however. Officials in the ruling GPC and members of the opposition quoted me the figure of 2.5 million inhabitants of the South in 1999.

¹³ I have chosen to render this expression idiomatic in English. In Arabic, the literal translation would be, “the devil you know is better than the human you don't.”

Parliament recommended constitutional amendments that would lengthen Parliamentary members' tenure in office from four to six years, thereby postponing elections scheduled for April 2001. A nationwide referendum in February 2001 approved this extension and also lengthened the presidential term from five to seven years, thereby enabling Salih to remain in office until 2013, when opposition leaders anticipate that Salih's son, Ahmad, will make a bid to take over. The referendum also authorized the President to appoint a 111-member "Consultative Council," which activists charge will allow the President to offset the role of the elected Parliament and promote indirect executive control over legislation. Moreover, elections for local councils, held at the same time as the referendum, were marred by opposition charges that voter registration lists had been rigged. Violence also undermined free elections. Forty persons reportedly died and more than a hundred were injured in clashes between supporters of different parties and security forces; official sources claimed that eleven died and twenty-three were injured. Disputes over irregularities in at least 20 percent of the poll centers meant that final results in those areas were never announced. The ruling General People's Congress celebrated a comfortable majority in the councils, but opposition leaders charged that results were fraudulent. Even were outcomes to be fair, the local councils' resources and decision-making powers remain circumscribed by the fact that the President appoints the heads of the councils (*al-Ayyam*, 21 Aug. 2000; Human Rights Watch 2000:420–24). Preparations for the Parliamentary elections of 27 April were similarly tainted with charges of irregularities in registration, and post-election conflicts also raised doubts about the process.¹⁴ The unresolved assassination on 28 December 2002 of a key spokesman for liberal democracy, Jar Allah ʿUmar, moreover, threatened to undermine a united opposition and may have additional chilling effects on future institutionalized electoral contestation.¹⁵

The ability to foreclose alternative possibilities to the regime's dominance is, in part, a result of "theatrical" occasions, such as the presidential election, that the regime invents to reproduce its political power.¹⁶ It is also the product of a balancing act, which entails meting out punishments and distributing payoffs, as well as cultivating some belief in the regime's appropriateness. But the elec-

¹⁴ For a discussion of how Yemen's ruling party managed to enjoy an electoral landslide in the April Parliamentary elections, see Carapico, 2003. Even were such elections to be fairly contested, Parliament's actual political powers remain extraordinarily limited.

¹⁵ Some Yemenis believe that the President, the ruling party, and/or the security forces encouraged the assassination of Jar Allah ʿUmar in order to prevent an effective opposition coalition from forming. Others argue that "jihadist" or "salafi" extremists outside the political mainstream, with possible links to al-Qaʿida, may have begun targeting secular and liberal intellectuals, along with foreign interests and security forces. It may never be clear whether the assassin ʿAli Ahmad Muhammad Jar Allah acted alone, or if he acted in cooperation with co-conspirators who they were. The regime has rounded up suspects in association with ʿUmar's murder, but many details of the interrogations have not been made public (see Carapico, Wedeen, and Wuerth 2002).

¹⁶ For a discussion of the ways in which rhetoric and symbols not only exemplify but also produce power for a regime, see my *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (1999).

tions also suggest a “muddling through” approach to anxieties about citizen disorder and regional polarization in a world where civil society and the agonistic public conversations it generates are backed by the violent potentialities that an armed population makes apparent.

THE DECENNIAL CELEBRATION: ACTING LIKE A STATE, PART TWO

The decennial celebration, like the presidential election, exemplifies the ways in which the regime attempts to redefine the terms of electoral politics and national unity, producing performances in which an identifiably Northern regime specified its dominance (and Southern subordination) simply because it could. The regime harnessed national spectacles to the task of constraining democratic practices by staging scenes of consensual unity and popular sovereignty. The posters of the President hoisting up the Yemeni flag, which were distributed in the weeks prior to the actual spectacle celebrating the tenth anniversary of unification, summarized the regime’s approach to the founding of the nation-state. The same picture had originally depicted the Presidents of North and South together in 1990; the Northern President raised the flag while his Southern counterpart stood behind him. In an effort to obscure the history of partnership that had initially animated union, the Southern President’s image had been deleted from the photograph of 2000.¹⁷

The festivities around the tenth anniversary of unification, culminating in celebrations on 22 May 2000, illustrated the regime’s idealized representation of national belonging. They also registered a paradox at the heart of the regime’s state- and nation-building projects. On the one hand, unified Yemen was founded on what anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have termed “the modernist ideal of the nation-state,” a “polity held together by the rule of law, by the claim of government to exercise a monopoly over legitimate force, by a sense of horizontal connection, and by universal citizenship which transcends difference” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1998:iii; see also forthcoming 2004). The celebrations around unification, orchestrated for both foreign and domestic consumption, were an attempt to project this image of the nation-state. On the other hand, the production of this ideal required the violation of some of its principles and the concealment of counter-tendencies, which include appeals to local justice or other assertions by regional communities—often termed “tribal”—against the jurisdiction of the state.¹⁸

¹⁷ Such an act was not without precedent, of course. Stalin deleted Trotsky from the historical record, for example. The fictional account from Milan Kundera’s *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* is also noteworthy. Importantly, several Yemeni Socialist Party members recall that the two Presidents jointly raised the flag, but I could find no picture to substantiate that memory. Instead, in the capital’s Military Museum a photograph taken in 1990 does depict al-Bid, the former President of the South, gazing up from behind as ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah Salih raises the flag. Museum curators argued that although political posters had excised al-Bid’s image, they displayed the photo of the “traitors” because they were “protecting the historical record” (author’s interview, fall 2002).

¹⁸ The words “tribe” and “tribal” are deeply problematic, fraught terms in the Middle East studies literature. My use of them here is not meant to disregard debates about usage, or to ride

In other words, in order to generate an image of a modernist nation-state, the regime had to do *whatever* was necessary to make the projection happen, or seem to happen, in actuality. For example, the unification festivities burdened the regime with a host of security concerns that, in turn, generated new forms of intervention and new efforts to monopolize force. The regime set up road-blocks, multiplied checkpoints, and ordered all mobile phones and pagers shut off at midnight on 16 May. The regime also barred tourists from entering the country until 1 June to prevent the public relations fiasco that a kidnapping might cause. Unification celebrations made travel from one region to another particularly difficult. Rumors of curfews and of not being allowed to leave Sa^ha^h kept many people off the roads and in their homes.

The regime also made an extraordinary effort to be an effective state by delivering public services. The main streets sparkled with lights and were unusually clean. Garbage was collected more regularly than usual. Rumors suggested that workers actually moved refuse from areas of the city where the foreign delegations were visiting to areas of the city off the beaten path. Blue paint was distributed so that shop doors could be freshly coated. And residents of spacious homes in the posh area of Hadda were given money to vacate them so that visiting dignitaries could be comfortably housed in places outfitted with imported furniture. One educated woman in Sa^ha^h noted that the occasion demonstrated the regime's ability to provide state services, at least temporarily. In this light, her sisters raised questions about the regime's seeming lack of "political will" (*irada siyasiyya*) to build durable state institutions capable of ensuring citizens' protection and stability, and of providing the services for everyday life on a more regular basis than an official occasion demands.

Preparations also generated considerable ire among ordinary citizens. The celebrations cost anywhere from 20 to 50 billion riyals. In fact, teachers did not receive their paltry salaries and civil servants had their salaries halved in the month of April so that the regime could pay for the festivities. Regime officials were so concerned that the 1600 youths mobilized to participate in the festival would fail to show up that they postponed the announcement of examination results to induce participation.¹⁹ Those students who did not attend would automatically receive a failing grade. Air force planes had been flying in formation above the capital every morning for weeks, the deafening sounds from low flying aircraft a consistent reminder and, indeed, an instance of the excess associated with the ceremonies. Rumors that prices would rise once the celebra-

roughshod over the complex issues invocations of the concept bring to the fore. Yemenis use the terms often and in varying ways, sometimes referring to the organization of real and fictive kin, and sometimes as a pejorative term to mean "country bumpkin" (Carapico), or uncivilized. As Paul Dresch points out, Yemen's "tribes" do not fit anthropological characterizations of "corporate" groups: "Tribes do not cohere as wholes around people at odds, and a tribesman who feels himself wronged but does not receive support from his tribe may leave and take refuge with another tribe. He may even become permanently part of the group he joins" (1990:225). My current book project addresses the term's scholarly and local connotations in depth.

¹⁹ Author's interview with Minister of Education, May 2000.

tions were over also made people nervous and angry. In the working-class neighborhood of Hasaba, people hoarded food in preparation for imagined disasters. Even families identified with the ruling GPC party were anxious. One woman whose husband worked as a policeman asked why the regime would put on such a spectacle at a time when people have no money and the government is giving civil servants less of their salaries, or withholding salaries altogether in order to pay for the event. Another lower middle-class woman said, “many of my friends are stocking up on food because they are worried about a coup or something” during the ceremony. Another woman giggled, “we were afraid of the solar eclipse, and now we are afraid of the holiday.” Another worried that the ceremony might result in an assassination, “like Sadat’s.” Apprehension around the event spoke to the regime’s inability to ensure order routinely. As the above statements indicated, that the regime could perform like a state raised questions about why it failed to do so regularly. People also reminded each other of the state’s fragilities, so that activities in which the regime was required to be a state were fraught with anxiety.

The actual event began with ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah Salih’s arrival in a motorcade to the official parade grounds where foreign dignitaries and Yemeni politicians were already seated. Only invited guests were permitted to view the festivities from the parade grounds, and invitations specified that would-be spectators had to gather at six in the morning at the Police College in order to be bussed to the stands where they would watch the festivities. For those viewing the event on television, the beginning of the broadcast showed an edited sequence of clips of the President in a variety of official contexts: crowds cheer him, he responds to questions at a press conference, and planes fly overhead in a display of Yemen’s military might.

The President took his seat next to Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince ‘Abd Allah, perhaps the most important official to attend the ceremony. A panegyric to ‘Ali ‘Abd Allah Salih and the union could be heard over the loud speaker extolling the leader as the “symbol of the nation” (*ramz al-watan*) and the “creator of the glorious union” (*sani‘ al-wahda al-majida*). Like the posters that omitted the co-founder of the union, ‘Ali Salim al-Bid, the speeches, poems, and visual displays of the unification’s anniversary attributed the union to a single founder. The former ruling party of the South proved a specter that haunted the proceedings for those whose memories of history or whose political commitments made them want some acknowledgment of the original founding. When the camera mistakenly aimed its lens at rows of empty seats, knowing viewers could see the visible absence of socialist members who had decided not to attend.²⁰

The Yemeni Socialist Party members were divided as to whether to accept invitations to the gala event. Some members argued that the holiday commem-

²⁰ In the video version of the festival, the scene of empty seats is edited out.

orated unification and therefore was every citizen's holiday. The victory of the North in the war was a separate event and should be treated as such. Other members argued that although they were for the union, the 1994 war was a big loss. Attending the celebrations would endorse the regime's version of unity and lend unwitting support to Northern dominance. In one *qat*-chew conversation held at this time, Jar Allah ʿUmar, the late Assistant Secretary General of the party, argued that "the absence of equality between North and South made the initial hopes of unification seem hollow, and its democratic possibilities elusive." For him, even the word *infisal* (secession) had lost its dangerously titillating charge. "People are likely to use the word or to threaten its invocation as a way of policing public space, but it has lost some of its meaning. Words like 'revolution' have also been emptied of their political significance, subject to the banalities of repetition." Some members favored a separate YSP celebration in Aden; while others maintained that the capital of Yemen was Sanʿa and any national event should be held there. After multiple discussions, leaders decided to let individual party members decide for themselves whether to accept the regime's invitation. Some went to the event and others did not.

In terms of the modernist ideal of the nation-state, the celebration represented the image of universal citizenship that is part of that ideal, but in the Yemeni context the image required a hybrid of particular regional practices subsumed under an assertion of Northern dominance that was intended to unify but proved divisive. This hybridity was most evident during the folklore sequences, when a clunky float of terraced mountains and the façade of Bab al-Yaman (the main entrance to the capital's traditional market) with ten candles on top and a big number 22 (for the original founding, 22 May) on the front appeared on the grounds like a gigantic, mobile birthday cake. As the float moved to the center of the parade grounds, the names of the different regions of Yemen were recited over a loudspeaker system. Men on horseback and others with rifles dressed in Northern Highlands tribal dress and brandishing the conventional daggers filled the parade grounds. At times, the television zeroed-in on participants who looked confused or whose horses were misbehaving, but as the spectacle progressed, television cameramen filmed an impressive array of men who combined dance steps from the Northern Highlands with those from the northeastern desert.²¹ As the dancers moved in unison, the event began to take on the regimented character of a Busby Berkley extravaganza, with the synchronized moves and geometric shapes common to most mass spectacles. The choreographed folk dance part of the spectacle was the regime's effort to make Yemeni "culture" into an explicitly national object—one that hybridized North and

²¹ Najwa Adra's work on "tribal dancing" links the *baraʿ* (a Yemeni group dance performed by men outdoors in the Northern Highlands) to the growth of Yemeni nationalism in the essay, "Tribal Dancing and Yemeni Nationalism: Steps to Unity" (1993). In "Dance and Glance: Visualizing Tribal Identity in Highland Yemen" (1998) she connects dancing to conceptions of tribal affiliation or groupness.

South, coastal and interior regions of the country (see Handler 1988:14). In one recognizably coastal dance, for example, a Northern Highlands dagger was used rather than the typical stick. In another dance, men performed stunning Southern sword work while dressed in identifiably Northern Highlands clothing.

These spectacles undoubtedly put forth *images* of unity (Adra 1993:166; Anderson 1991:22, 145), but there is little evidence to suggest that they either signaled existing unity or actually worked to *create* it. Thus the significance of these public exhibitions was not their ability to weld an inchoate national community together, although the festival may have generated feelings of communal pride for some. Rather, the festival defined national community in ways that required and advertised a substantial array of regulatory and intrusive capabilities associated with a state.

On the level of visual representation, such displays were open to multiple interpretations and invited re-signification. For some self-identified Northern and Southern spectators, despite the projection of an explicitly unified national culture, each region's practices were both referenced and relativized in relation to Northern, and more particularly Highlands, visual dominance. Others, particularly Southerners, interpreted the spectacle neither as expressive of unity nor as instance of Northern dominance, but rather as the failure of an explicitly Northern imagination to produce dances that did not borrow from the creative movements of the South.²²

Although the spectacle's preparations required the careful consideration of the foreign delegates' comforts and distractions, the spectacle's images seemed primarily intended for domestic consumption. Few foreign spectators would be able to distinguish among various regional practices, but most Yemenis could. Similarly, the regimented military parade that followed the folkloric sequences implied the importance of the spectacle's domestic messages: ordered lines of soldiers in a modified goosestep and varying colors of camouflage fatigues represented troops' respective institutional affiliations. The occasion also entailed displaying the latest addition to the Yemeni army's military technology with an air-show and presentation of an "all-terrain armoured vehicle built exclusively in Yemen" (*Yemen Observer*, 31 May 2000:1). Although such displays of military power are typical of most national spectacles, it is inconceivable that Yemen's military hardware would frighten spectators from countries such as Saudi Arabia or the United States. Indeed as two first-hand Yemeni observers with experience in military affairs told me after the spectacle, the display of weapons was unlikely to impress foreign viewers, but was rather intended for domestic consumption (22 May 2000). The description of the tank manufactured in Yemen suggests that Yemen's defense forces might have domestic uses for the

²² I watched this spectacle with Northern and Southern Yemenis on 22 May 2000. I thank W. Flagg Miller for bringing my attention to additional alternative readings.

tank: “the vehicle has bullet-proof armour plating and a high-velocity machine gun with the ability to turn 360 degrees mounted on top. With Yemen’s varied landscape a key factor in its design, the vehicle has been adapted to perform in all conditions, particularly in mountain regions. Its flexibility and ability to operate at high speeds have impressed military observers, who expect it to be a vital part of Yemen’s defence forces” (*Yemen Observer*, 31 May 2000).

The ordered, mass-mobilization event was the largest and most regimented of its kind in Yemen’s history of spectacular displays. Yet the representations of consensual unity could not mask the underlying tensions that preparations for the event had made public. Even members of the ruling party disagreed on how the nation should be represented. Not unusually for any polity, gender was one site of contestation. Among the 100,000 participants, about 1600 were ten-year-old boys and girls who represented the generation born after unification. Several Yemeni scholars, headed by Shaykh ‘Umar Muhammad Sayf, member of the GPC, issued a religious opinion (*fatwa*) prohibiting the participation of females in the parades, but their efforts came to naught. Why would the regime spend scarce resources and risk alienating important allies and ordinary citizens by producing such an event?

In part, the answer rests on insights drawn from the first event discussed in this essay. The example of the presidential “election,” in which the regime put forth an opposing candidate from its own party and converted what had promised to be the first free, competitive race into a phony semblance of democratic politics, is an example of a regime acting to express political power for its own sake—to demonstrate its ability to induce modest participation in, and contain the disappointment of, bogus elections. Similarly, the unification ceremonies offered not only something of a preview image of a modernist nation-state, they also enacted the conditions of its possible emergence by giving the regime an opportunity to act like a state. State intervention entailed putting into practice mechanisms of enforcement that helped ensure the regime’s temporary monopoly over violence, as well as producing public services to which most citizens remain unaccustomed.

In both events we see the regime attempting to reproduce power by developing competencies that allow the regime to monitor and control citizens. These attempts are all the more remarkable in the context of the regime’s fragile institutional capacities. The regime’s efforts to reproduce its power have therefore tended to rely not on generating durable institutions (although there are some), but rather on the sporadic, intermittent assertions of power that strategies like spectacular displays allow. These spectacles may also be attempts to construct a national community in the absence of adequate state institutions, such as schools, generally entrusted with that role. It remains unclear, however, how successful such festivities are at actually generating, as opposed to projecting abstractly, national belonging.

Images of national unity do not paper over the divisions that generate lively

worlds of debate in Yemen. Both the elections and the unity celebrations provided discursive contexts within which alternative forms of “groupness” and politics could take place. Indeed, in the absence of a repressive apparatus capable of controlling (let alone monopolizing) force, spectacles inspire public communities of political argument that are often at odds with the regime’s vision of political dominance. The disclosure of serial killings on state property during preparations for the nation’s anniversary celebration reinforced this disarticulation of state and nation, in which citizens could experience themselves as part of the nation without a state capable of ensuring communal safety.

MURDERS IN THE MORGUE: SEEING LIKE A CITIZEN, PART THREE

The “murders in the morgue” case became public knowledge on 10 May 2000, when two mutilated female bodies were discovered at San‘a’ University. Two days later, police arrested a Sudanese mortuary technician at the medical school, claiming that he had confessed to raping and killing five women. Muhammad Adam ‘Umar Ishaq (whose full name was rarely reported) was a forty-five-year-old Sudanese citizen who allegedly admitted to an increasing number of murders—sixteen in Yemen and at least twenty-four in Sudan, Kuwait, Chad, and the Central African Republic (*The Observer*, 11 June 2000). The Nasirist newspaper reported stories that he had killed up to fifty women (*al-Wahdawi*, 16 May 2000). It was said that Adam also implicated members of the university’s teaching staff who, he said, were involved in the sale of body parts. According to Brian Whitaker’s account in *The Observer* one month later, Adam “had enticed women students to the mortuary with promises of help in their studies, then raped and killed them, videotaping all of his actions. He kept bones as mementos, disposed of some body parts in sewers and on the university grounds, and sold others together with his victims’ belongings” (11 June 2000).

A purported and obviously contrived interview with Adam published in the Yemeni armed forces newspaper, *26 September*, provided supposed details of the grisly killings, which registered the interviewer’s fascination with the particulars and a desire for precision worthy of a detective, as in the following example:

Interviewer: How did you kill and dispose of the corpse of your victim?

Adam: I strangled her or I banged her head on the ground of the tiled floor.

Interviewer: Immediately when she entered the morgue?

Adam: As soon as the victim entered the morgue I hit her head on the wall or on the ground.

Interviewer: And why did you cut up or slice your victim after that?

Adam: In order to obscure her features. I’d already started to cut up the victim and this cutting wasn’t a process of slicing . . . I would cut her in half and I cut her body in parts and then I would hide it for two days or three days, and then I’d skin it and chop the rest

into small pieces, and I'd clean the bones and put them in the sink after dissolving the flesh in acid (26 September, 18 May 2000, p. 4).

When asked why he had "chosen" these specific women to kill, he answered: "The impulse (*al-dafi*) is for some unknown reason (*huwa hajjatan fi nafs ya'qub*). When I see girls, specifically beautiful ones, 'in my mind something happens.' I can never resist it" (ibid.). Adam claims to have begun killing early, before he married, when he was twenty-two or twenty-three years old. He was supposedly influenced by Satanic books, especially those written by foreigners and translated into Arabic, such as an alleged book with the title *The Killer of Women (Qatil al-Nisa')*. He also acknowledged that he was pained by his actions, but could not explain what came over him. When pressed to clarify what his motivation or impulse for killing was, he replied, "I kill her in order to let her enter heaven without her realizing, and I go to hell." When asked why he had spared his wife, he replied laughingly, "Is she a woman?" (ibid.) He flatly denied marketing the organs, and refused to say how many women he had killed in Yemen and abroad.

In a broad spectrum of Yemeni newspapers, one or two pictures of the accused appeared. They showed either a wild-eyed man of color behind the bars of his cell, or an impish man in Sudanese dress, handcuffed. All newspapers uncovered the unfolding drama by reporting rumors, speculations, and questions that both reflected and generated anew a community of argument about the nature, causes, and disputed facts of the case. The progressive independent (then) tri-weekly *al-Ayyam* reported that the Council of the University of Sa^{ʿa} had fired Adam from his job in December 1999 after he was found guilty of bribery. The paper asked, "How was the killer reinstated in his job after being expelled for bribery?" (20 May 2000). The independent weekly *al-Haqq* said in a front-page story that the Sudanese serial killer had begun his life in Yemen as a gardener at the residence of the Sa^{ʿa} Bank director, but was dismissed because he made the director feel "uneasy." The director's son was surprised to learn later that Adam had become an anatomy technician at the Faculty of Medicine, because he knew that Adam had no qualifications for the job (*al-Haqq*, 21 May 2000). The English language newspaper, *Yemen Times*, wondered whether the "mystery of the serial killer's accomplices" would be "revealed" (*Yemen Times*, 29 May 2000). The independent weekly *al-Shumuʿ* asked: "who is responsible for these crimes of the murderer (*saffah*) of the College of Medicine? The College of Medicine is lax (*sa'iba*) and its security administration doesn't fulfill its duties" (*al-Shumuʿ*, 20 May 2000, 2). The newspaper of the Sons of Yemen League, *Ra'y*, devoted its headlines to the "faculty butcher" who "kills 16 and sells their organs" (16 May 2000). *Al-Umma*, the weekly paper of *al-Haqq* (the Zaydi Islamicist party) reported that "the luggage of the accused Sudanese was brought back from Khartoum Airport. Only the identity cards of the Iraqi student Zaynab and the Yemeni, Husn, were found. No other documents were discov-

ered except a videocassette that is said to contain recordings of two or three of the victims. A common feature among the corpses recovered is that they did not contain livers, hearts, or kidneys, which confirms suspicion that it involves a trade of human organs" (18 May 2000). The Yemeni Socialist Party's *al-Thawri* (18 May 2000) cited police sources claiming that "several security men have been detained" in connection with the crimes at the Faculty of Medicine. *Al-Sahwa*, the major Islamicist party's paper, covered the "demonstrations of anger," when over 5,000 students took to the streets demanding broad investigations of the "butchery" (*majzara*) at the Faculty of Medicine (1 June 2000, headlines). Literate people read newspaper reports aloud to others who could not read. Television and radio reports also informed illiterate Yemenis, and well-known mosque leaders such as 'Abd al-Majid 'Aziz al-Zindani recorded scathing condemnations of state impropriety and moral laxity that were then distributed on cassette tapes. Children made extra money by selling additional photocopies of newspaper pages reporting details of the horror. Unprecedented stories of regime complicity and citizen vulnerability animated public discussions.

Debates in newspapers, in the streets, during Friday mosque sermons and *qat* chews, and in government offices laid bare how easily civic terror can be generated by perceptions of ineffective state institutions, and how public appeals can be made on the basis of the moral and material entitlements that citizens of even the most nominal of nation-states felt were due them (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). People were outraged that the university had not done more to protect its students or to investigate the disappearances. Criticisms focused on the incapacities of the state, the corruption and potential complicity of the regime, and the need for the seeming elusive but desirable "*mu'assasat al-dawla*" (state institutions). In one *qat* chew I attended someone went so far as to claim that serial killings could never happen in the developed United States (a point I hastened to correct).

Students of nationalism might be tempted to interpret the narratives about the Sudanese serial killer as an instance of "othering," in which understandings of the nation are brought into being by contrasting Yemenis with Sudanese. In a country with high unemployment, Adam's status as a Sudanese immigrant with a job did bring to the fore prejudices rarely expressed in public (*The Observer*, 11 June 2000, p. 3). A union leader, for example, charged that "the employment of a foreigner as a university technician contravened a presidential decree" (*ibid.*). The Sudanese community, which is several thousand strong, immediately condemned Adam's crime and many said they feared a backlash. Yet, interestingly, although there were some expressions of anti-Sudanese sentiment, especially among the working-class poor, many Yemenis went to great lengths to disavow the chauvinist statements of others. Indeed, if homogeneity is a typical "national fantasy" (see Berlant 1991), Adam's imprisonment and the subsequent talk about it suggested that not all national citizens shared this desire for homogeneity or thought that it required demonizing Sudanese others. In this

vein, one Yemeni intellectual argued that within a broadly Arab nationalist framework, Sudanese were not considered others at all, but were rather seen as a sub-group of Arabs whose “habits and ways of thinking were especially similar” to Yemeni ones.²³ What made a Yemeni a Yemeni *in this instance* was therefore the common moral panic that gripped citizens and enabled them to experience themselves as a community—as a group of people who shared a sense of belonging with anonymous others in what Benedict Anderson has called, borrowing from Walter Benjamin, “homogeneous, empty time” (Anderson 1991:24; Benjamin 1973:265). In this view, what gave these citizens a sense of their shared experience was not only the common practice of conversing about the crimes, but the recognition that all over Yemen strangers were conducting similar conversations about this unparalleled event. Etienne Balibar argues that “a social formation only reproduces itself as a nation to the extent that through a network of apparatuses and daily practices, the individual is instituted as *homo nationalis* from cradle to grave, at the same time that he or she is instituted as *homo oeconomicus, politicus, religious*” (Balibar 1991:93). In other words, people are not born with feelings of national attachment; national citizens have to be made and remade. In the absence of state institutions capable of generating *homo nationalis*, the shared fascination with Yemen’s purportedly first serial killings could nevertheless produce conditions in which a putative “nation” of Yemenis longed for a state capable of protecting them.

Admittedly, the existence of shared arguments and the knowledge that anonymous others are similarly engaged in conversation may be a necessary condition for national connectedness, but it is certainly not a sufficient one. For one, the debates were not confined to Yemenis. Non-Yemenis living in Yemen were also engaged in similar discussions. And the tabloid presses throughout the Arab world covered the event in all of its ghastly detail. Nevertheless, claims of moral and material entitlement, the outrage that attended the event, and the stated hopes that a representative state could be made accountable and ensure safety—these were conversations in which Yemenis often appealed *as a people* (Berlant 2000:45), wondering aloud too how such a crime could happen *in Yemen*.²⁴ In other words, people often framed their complaints in terms of a territorially determinate group of Yemeni citizens, who, as “a people,” could criticize the regime for failing to act as an effective political authority.

One might also argue that the murders in the morgue simply prompted people to gossip or to discuss a new topic, mostly with their familiar interlocutors and sometimes with strangers they were unlikely to see again. But technologies of communication, such as print media and tape recordings of Friday mosque

²³ Author’s interview, May 2000.

²⁴ There is a growing literature on the sale of body parts that interprets actual marketing practices and the stories circulating about purported trafficking as products of “globalization” or neo-liberal capitalist policies. See, for example, the provocative account by Comaroff and Comaroff (1999).

sermons, worked in tandem with social practices, such as *qat*-chew conversations, to generate public knowledge both of the event itself and of anonymous others simultaneously engaged in discussions of it: people talked about the event *and* its circulation (about the boys selling photocopies on the streets; about relatives who telephoned to express concern for the well-being and safety of their kin; about the distribution of Friday mosque sermon cassettes; and about previous *qat*-chew conversations in which aspects of the event were probed with painstaking detail). To be sure, other events have generated lively discussion in public places, but the scope of debate about the murders in the morgue was by all accounts unprecedented. For example, one of the editors of *al-Ayyam* claimed that newspaper issues featuring stories about the murders in the morgue sold 75,000 copies, more than double the number of copies usually circulated. The murders-in-the-morgue conversations constituted a self-organized “public sphere” (Habermas 1996) in which citizens, many of whom were strangers to one another, deliberated on the radio, in newspapers, and in *qat*-chew conversations.²⁵ These debates represented the practice of “nationness” (Brubaker 1996)—not evidence of a real or enduring collectivity, but of a contingent event whose significance lies in its ability to reproduce the vocabularies of imagined community and popular sovereignty, occasioning the temporary manifestation of community in the warp and weft of everyday political experience.

In contrast to much of the mainstream literature on nationalism, the murders in the morgue case suggests that experiences of national belonging can be generated by transient events of collective vulnerability rather than by state institutions (Hobsbawm 1990; Tilly 1975; 1990; Mann 1993; 1995; E. Weber 1976), industrialization (Gellner 1983), or even the on-going effects of print capitalism (Anderson 1991).²⁶ In this view, nation-ness need not develop; it can also happen, “suddenly crystallizing as a basis for individual and collective action” within a “political field” conducive to such consolidations (Brubaker 1996:19–20; see also Sewell 1997; Calhoun 1991). In the broader political context in which nation-state-ness is the privileged form of political organization, the “nation” then becomes the intelligible category through which people imagine political community. In Wittgensteinian terms, what makes this community “national” has to do with the ways in which, in the age of nation-states, imagining a nation is simply what it means to imagine an abstract sovereign “people” (*sh‘ab*) whose political community is comprised of anonymous others. Doing so effectively may require a plausible rhetorical appeal to language, culture, and/or history, but it does not imply that those characteristics be historically correct and universally shared in the way imaginations represent them.²⁷

²⁵ The theme of public sphere practices is discussed in detail in Chapter Four of my *Peripheral Visions: Political Identifications in Unified Yemen*, in preparation. See also my “Concepts and Commitments in the Study of Democracy,” forthcoming 2004.

²⁶ The example of September 11 provides a case in point.

²⁷ I am indebted to Patchen Markell and Craig Calhoun for this formulation.

Rather, “protean” communities of argument, prompted by identifiable events, help generate conditions of possibility, idioms of affective connection, and practices of reproduction through which experiences of common belonging to a territory might be institutionalized or just made available as an organizing principle for making some demands and registering grievances (Brubaker 1996:10).²⁸ Nation-ness can wax and wane because the nation is not a “thing,” but a set of dispositions inscribed in material practices. National solidarities (and other forms of local or regional attachment) exist through the on-going work of political entrepreneurs, but also, as in this case, through the acephalous transmission of identifications in ordinary activities of communication.

In the context of heightened and sustained public debate, the gender politics of the crime elicited multiple interpretations, which tended to coincide with the variety of prevailing attitudes about women’s place in the putative nation. Yemen’s medical school, established nearly twenty years earlier with 35 million dollars in donations from the Emir of Kuwait, produced the first female doctors in the 1990s. Nearly half of the 3,500 students enrolled in the college are women, and many women from other countries without medical schools, or without medical schools that admit women, traveled to study at the \$3,000-a-year institution (*New York Times*, 3 Dec. 2000). When the killings were first disclosed, parents talked of pulling their daughters from the university. Some local bus (*dabbab*) drivers and their money collectors teased women who rode the bus to the university about their destination, often calling out ominously “the Sudanese, the Sudanese.” Some members of the Islamicist *al-Islah* Party used the case to justify their position that educating women leads to trouble. Others within *al-Islah* suggested that appropriate safeguards had to be established so that women could be educated safely, and perhaps separately. Among socialists and their allies, discussions ensued about the normative attitudes that underpinned security police responses to reports of women missing. The mother of the twenty-four-year-old Iraqi woman, Zaynab Sa’ud ‘Aziz, whose remains were positively identified, was purportedly told to “search the dance floors” when she reported her daughter’s disappearance (*The Observer*, 11 June 2000). Other families did not report their daughters missing, supposedly because they worried that their daughters had engaged in illicit sex or run off with a lover. In Arabic language tabloids circulating in Yemen and elsewhere, Adam was even referred to as “the Saṅa’ Ripper.”

The tabloids’ analogy of Sana’a’s serial killer to the legendary Jack the Ripper of late Victorian London may be, in some respects, apt: both were what his-

²⁸ My debt to Rogers Brubaker’s excellent work is obvious. Yet even scholars whose constructivist commitments allow them to posit concepts such as “nationness” and to caution against the reification of groups are slow to apply such theoretical lessons empirically. For Brubaker, “nationness” might imply practices of provisional, contingent collectivity-making, but ethnicities tend to be treated as naturalized or given categories—as always already there.

torian Judith Walkowitz calls “catalyzing” events in which the felt absence of law and order combined with fears of sexual danger to galvanize “a range of constituencies to take sides and to assert their presence in a heterogeneous public sphere” (Walkowitz 1992:5). The narrative’s potency—its ability to stimulate conversation outside the capital where the events took place—may also have to do with the ways in which the capital city is presumed to be the place where state power and services, including security, reside. The point to be made here is not that bad things happen in all countries, but rather that Yemenis from a variety of class and regional backgrounds, through divergent media, tended to coalesce as a community through the circulation of explanations that privileged state incompetence and linked it to both moral and political corruption. Citizens located their sense of entitlement as a people in a fantasy of impersonal, effective state institutions and the consequent protection they might offer.

The regime’s responses to the “murders in the morgue” were paradoxical. On the one hand, officials put forward the images of Adam for public consumption. In the official view, Adam was a depraved man who drank alcohol. In the unfolding of the official account, Adam confessed to sixteen murders and provided explicit details of his crimes. In the first killing of 1995, according to his alleged statement to the police, he met Fatima, a Somali woman, in downtown Sa‘ā. He convinced her that he was a well-known professor at the medical school and he enticed her with money to visit him repeatedly at the morgue. There they would have sex; Adam claimed to have had sex with her more than twelve times before killing her. Another woman came to the morgue to collect body parts for a medical experiment. As she entered, he sprayed a chemical on her face, thereby rendering her unconscious. It was at this point that he remembered that her friend was outside. He invited her in, sprayed her in the face as well, and disposed of both bodies in acid (*The Observer*, 11 June 2000). The confessions continued, and the state, if slow to react at first, seemed to present an air-tight case in which prosecution would be swift, justice enacted, and the rule of law upheld. True, some regime officials seemed incompetent or corrupt, but the state could operate to protect and unite its citizens in the aftermath of the tragedy. The Prime Minister suspended the dean of the medical school and his deputy, and he fired the university’s head of security in attempts to respond to citizen unrest. The judge, Yahya al-Islami, ruled that Adam be taken to the “forecourt of the morgue” in plain view of students and faculty, where he would be “tied to a wooden board, lashed 80 times for his admitted use of alcohol, then executed, either by beheading with a sword or by lying face down and being shot three times through the heart” (*New York Times*, 3 Dec. 2000).

On the other hand, the regime’s attempts to manage the Adam affair seemed partial and ambivalent. Both police officers’ slow response to initial inquiries by Zaynab’s mother and the suspicion that regime officials were implicated in the killings were also part of the public discourses circulating vigorously in the

aftermath of 10 May, and the regime could do nothing to prevent criticisms from occupying much of public discussion. Moreover, when newspapers published the names of the victims in the beginning of June, several of the women Adam had confessed to killing turned up alive and in court for the trial of 3 June. A woman claiming to be Nada Yasin, a twenty-one-year-old whose rape and mutilation Adam had described in detail, apparently appeared in court with her sister who verified her identity, although there was some disagreement about whether she was, in fact, Nada. Indeed, as Adam's confessions became obviously less reliable, stories began to disseminate about high-ranking government officials' complicity in an alleged prostitution ring. According to these accounts, Adam was the "fall guy" for a great government conspiracy. None of the evidence at the trial supported these claims, but the fact that such rumors circulated revealed worries about a regime that not only failed to provide proper state institutions but also contributed to the nation's moral deterioration. As the school's founding dean said, "We have had to ask ourselves some hard questions, such as 'Is there a moral decay?' and 'What happened to our standards?'" (*New York Times*, 3 Dec. 2000). The regime's decision to bring in a team of German forensic experts also proved embarrassing. They found pieces of more than 100 bodies in the morgue, mostly men's that had never been entered in the morgue records. Professors claimed, according to the *New York Times*, that "deliberately loose controls were adopted in the medical school's early years, when illicit importation of bodies and body parts was necessary to circumvent Islamic injunctions in Yemen against dissection." Certainly loose controls at the university were not merely the product of injunctions—Islamic or otherwise. Indeed the criticisms that circulated in public were simultaneously about the unusual horror of the event and the all-too-familiar experience of loose controls. The regime's attempts to manage moral panic, then, also registered its incompetence and laid bare the limits of state power. Legal scholars and ordinary citizens appealed to the constitution and bemoaned the absence of institutions that could make officials accountable and people safe. Even the harsh sentence made evident some of the inadequacies of a regime and the vulnerabilities of supposed commitments to the rule of law. Adam was eventually convicted of only two murders—Zaynab's, and that of Husn Ahmad ʿAttiya, a twenty-three-year-old woman from Hamdan whose remains were found in the morgue's drains—and sentenced to death. The judge's insistence that the execution be carried out on university property drew criticism from students and faculty at the college, as well as from local human rights lawyers. Adam's defense lawyer also complained that he had been permitted only one five-minute meeting with his client in the entire six months between arrest and conviction.

The sentence, too, exemplified the tensions between various aspects of a distinctly modernist ideal of the nation-state. Muhammad Adam ʿUmar Ishaq was finally executed, near but not on university grounds, in a public square in the neighborhood of al-Madhbah, on 20 June 2001. With security forces cordoning

off the square, in front of the victims' families and a crowd estimated to be in the thousands, a single policeman fired five bullets into Adam's back. The regime could mobilize its security apparatus and enforcement capabilities in retrospect. It could even exercise its "legitimate" or moral right to dispense violence. But faith in constitutionality and desire for the rule of law, which were expressed in newspaper accounts, in ordinary conversations, and in the fact of the trial, were at odds with the prosecution's story and the judge's initial rush to judgment. The nation as a group of anonymous citizens who occupy a shared sense of attachment by virtue of undergoing common experiences was being formed in the breach of state authority. The publicity around the serial killings, however, demonstrated the fragility of state power at the same time that it made manifest a process of nation-ness predicated on moral panic and the desire for protection.

Protection, as Charles Tilly points out, has two contrasting connotations. The comforting sense of the term "calls up images of the shelter against danger provided by a powerful friend, a large insurance policy, or a sturdy roof" (1985:170). The other sense of the term connotes "the racket in which a local strong man forces merchants to pay tribute in order to avoid damage—damage the strong man himself threatens to deliver. The difference [between the two senses], to be sure, is a matter of degree" (ibid.). Tilly likens state-making to organized crime in the sense that states tend to stimulate the very dangers against which protection is then required. Of course the analogy between a state and the mafia has limits, as Diego Gambetta has pointed out (Gambetta 1993:7). Plausible arguments can be advanced, moreover, that Yemen's regime does operate more like a mafia than like a state. The points to be made in the context of the three events analyzed above are simply that: (1) Regimes that do not fulfill the conditions of a "minimal state" (Nozick 1974) by enjoying sufficient control over violence to be perceived by citizens as protecting them "whether they like it or not" (Gambetta 1993:7) may end up being more "democratic"—more encouraging of civic associations, vibrant political debate, and substantive thinking about politics—than regimes with efficacious state institutions and/or passionate attachments to a nation. The fictitious elections dramatized the regime's power to foreclose democratic possibilities, but official power remains limited by the vigorous, qualified public sphere activities that co-exist with, and offer public criticisms of, these phony rituals. (2) Public spectacles generate the sorts of security dangers that then prompt, and sometimes justify, state protection. The Yemeni regime can at times act like an effective state, and public spectacles such as the presidential election or the unification ceremonies place these acts on display for citizens' consumption. (3) Public criticisms of regime practices, however, reveal that many citizens want protection in Tilly's first, optimistic sense of that term. Incidents such as the serial killing drama suggest that "nationness" might nevertheless be constituted in the absence of a sovereign

state, through the shared experiences of belonging to a community imagined in the breach of institutional authority.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By way of a conclusion, further reflections on three points: First, many scholars of political transitions have taken national unity and the existence of a sovereign state as prerequisites for the development of democracy. Dankwart Rustow, for example, views national unity as a necessary condition for a transition to democracy: “the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to” (Rustow 1970:352). Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan argue that a transition to democracy is exceedingly difficult in a country that has a “stateness problem.” According to these authors, “modern democratic governance is inevitably linked to stateness. Without a state, there can be no citizenship, without citizenship, there can be no democracy” (1996:27).

The Yemeni example, by contrast, suggests that lively political activity and experiences of citizenship may actually thrive because the state is fragile and national identification tenuous. Admittedly, my account has not produced adequate evidence to establish a strong causal claim, but it does support hypotheses to be tested. State formation seems to entail modes of regimentation and pacification that are antithetical to democratic activities, if by “democratic activities” we include the presence of civic associations and also the informal political practices of vigorously debating with others in public questions about action—about what should be done. In Western Europe, the birth of electoral forms of government occurred after “absolutizing” monarchies created unified institutions of power, controlled directly by the ruler, who gradually came to preside over the decentralized, feudal aristocracy (Anderson 1991:55). According to Norbert Elias’ account, state-formation also entailed the pacification of restive populations through the introduction of codes of conduct, manners, norms, prohibitions, and constraints that worked to co-opt elites and “civilize” the population—a pacification that conditioned the form that liberal democratic institutions assumed historically, and that may have helped to ensure their durability (Elias 1982). Similarly, in *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault suggests that Western European states became increasingly capable of regulating their subjects, devising a “specific technology of power . . . called ‘discipline,’” which replaced the external sovereign authority (Foucault 1979:194). The disciplinary power of modern liberal states works by virtue of the internalization of patterns of authority previously experienced as external constraints. It operates by producing persons whose “subjectivity” or “individuality” is formed by a multitude of specialized institutions and disciplines (Mitchell on Foucault 1991:93; see also Althusser 1971). Disciplinary power produces “docile bodies,” according to Foucault, which both participate in and are the results of

these new mechanisms of social control (135–69). The argument is by now familiar, and the coherence of these “technologies” may be exaggerated. The point to be registered here is that the institutions through which states generate power, such as armies, schools, and factories, may help to ensure the durability of electoral institutions while also destroying vigorous forms of public life that are participatory and discursively vibrant, but also inherently less stable and institutionalized than liberal democracy has come to be. Citizens in fragile states may thus enjoy lived experiences of participation and contestation that are eliminated when states regularize their monopoly over force and their control over populations. The Yemeni case suggests not only that civic participation can exist under conditions of tenuous state control, but also that it may be an effect of such conditions.²⁹ Similarly, the contested character of national unity may encourage civic participation rather than undermine it. A national politics that puts too much emphasis on unity and consensus often comes at the expense of not tolerating difference. When late centralizing regimes make efforts to be state-like or define the terms of national unity, they often narrow democratic possibilities rather than broaden them. The Yemeni case also invites scholars to think of civic engagement, not as an instrumental good leading to formal democratic institutions (Putnam 1993), but as the very activity of energetic political participation in its own right.

Second, if spectacles operate to teach or signal the reality of the regime’s domination, they are also strikingly visible instances of that domination and of its precariousness. Spectacles provide the occasions for regimes to mobilize citizens to enact the conditions of their membership and to exaggerate the existence of their state-like qualities. In Yemen, as opposed to an authoritarian context such as Syria, these spectacles can be occasions for temporarily dominating without saturating social, or even political, life. The regime has a monopoly over official pageantry; and it has some control over its self-representation as

²⁹ The history of the early United States suggests the same phenomenon, as do many pre-revolutionary situations. Sheila Carapico makes a compatible but not identical argument; her emphasis is on the ways in which “Yemeni states, lacking major outside benefactors or domestic wealth, may be unique in the region in their need for civil society” (Carapico 1998:17; see also ch. 5 of that work; and 1996). Her aim is to challenge prevailing stereotypes of conservatism and passivity often attributed to tribalism and to Islam by charting the history of activism within the context of local civic associations and self-help projects. My point here might also be likened to Joel Migdal’s insights from *Strong Societies and Weak States*, but it differs in two ways. First, I am not claiming that there is a zero-sum relationship between weak states and strong societies, or that we can even measure weakness and strength in ways that make consistent sense. I am suggesting that the Yemeni example—in which the state is “weak” by *anyone’s definition* and political participation is vibrant and backed by significant coercive power—provides a corrective to some of the prevailing assumptions in the literature on democracy or “democratization.” Some of these assumptions are dealt with at greater length in Chapter Four of my *Peripheral Visions*, in preparation. Second, my argument is concerned with the phenomenology of citizenship, the ways in which people talk about and practice their experiences of, and desires for, state authority and political community.

a nation-state. But the images a fragile state is able to convey are intermittent and transient—hints of political possibility rather than established facts. Some citizens were aware of the ways in which the elections and subsequent spectacles were simultaneously announcements, generators, and barometers of the regime's power. The regime had to mobilize people, channel goods and services, and produce the messages that would become the subject of newspaper reports, street and *qat*-chew conversations, and intellectuals' conferences. The regime could navigate various contestations in political life by ignoring most, co-opting some, punishing others—and doing it all publicly. By acting like a state, the regime was not dissimulating state-ness; it was being one.

Third and relatedly, cases of early state-formation in Western Europe suggest that the state evolved into a powerful set of institutions before nationalism developed as the articulated, ideological expression of common political identification (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1987 and 1990; Mann 1993; 1995; E. Weber 1976; for a contrary account of nationalism in England see Pincus 1999). National identity emerged from the state in the form of a legal framework for citizens as rights-bearing individuals (Shafir 1998). Scholarly accounts of a number of post-colonial states, as well as of Central Europe, suggest a second, different relationship between state- and nation-building. In these cases, regimes have had to construct an effective institutional apparatus while concomitantly cultivating national consciousness. The need to consolidate state power while generating national identification affects the kinds of institutions, practices, and loyalties these regimes can produce. In the examples of many post-colonial states, such exigencies have produced authoritarian regimes that deliver goods and services in return for a modicum of national allegiance and a lot of obedience.

The case of Yemen suggests a third model of political development involving the emergence of vague, mildly constraining forms of national identification in the absence of an effective sovereign state. The state is generally incapable of playing a compelling educative or formative role in fashioning national persons. The serial killing incident points to a possible grassroots source of nation-building in the absence of a strong or effective state. It suggests that discursive practices, such as newspaper and television reports, mosque sermons, street and *qat*-chew conversations help to construct national persons by producing the shared conditions under which a community of anonymous fellow citizens can be imagined into existence. In Anderson's terms, a nation entails citizens becoming aware that their concerns are "being replicated by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence [they are] confident, yet of whose identity [they have] not the slightest notion" (Anderson 1991:35). Yemen shows how shared entitlements to state protection can bring into being *episodic* instances of a national life.

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