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Book Review

Yemen: Poverty and Conflict

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Yemen is a country in the Middle East where conflict and poverty have existed for a long time. Despite experiencing more tragic humanitarian crises than many other countries in the Middle East, it has received less attention and intervention from the international community compared to others. The limited and unsuccessful interventions in humanitarian crises can be attributed to the need for significant interests of major powers in Yemen.

The book "Yemen: Poverty and Conflict," written by Helen Lackner in 2022, has been published by Routledge. The book focuses on the last century of Yemen. It assesses the state-building process, political institutions, actors, and the economic and political reasons behind poverty and conflict in Yemen over the past century, aiming to share insights into the future. The book is divided into four chapters.

The first chapter explains the history of Yemen, the state formation process, and the key characteristics of the two main political groups that united in 1990 to form the Republic of Yemen (RoY). During the Cold War, Yemen Arab Republic (RoY) was aligned with the Western bloc, while the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) was close to the Soviet Union. The first chapter succinctly outlines the institutions established by the Republic of Yemen since its formation and the reasons leading to the war in 2015.

Second chapter discusses the various factions and political parties that have served as the primary political institutions since the establishment of the RoY. It scrutinises their importance in relation to the origins of the war and investigates

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the role of Ali Abdullah Saleh as a pivotal figure shaping Yemen's contemporary history and politics (Phillips 2008, pp. 50-52). Additionally, the chapter explores the emergence of the Huthis and southern separatism in the decade leading up to the war outbreak. The conclusion of the chapter involves an analysis of the primary internal forces active in the war, an examination of the significance of key international coalition members (Saudi Arabia and the UAE), and an exploration of the factors contributing to the lack of success in UN mediation (Schwedler 2006, p.72)

Chapter 3, addresses the inherent constraints on economic development, focusing on climate change's present and future impacts, emphasising the issue of water scarcity—a long-term concern for Yemenis extending beyond the current politico-military context. The analysis of economic development policies underscores the alignment of the globally supported neo-liberal agenda with the political priorities of the Saleh regime, providing insight into why poverty is a fundamental aspect of Yemen's development. The chapter also explains changes in international migration patterns and possibilities as contributing factors to the widespread poverty among the population. The portrayal of the war economy depicts it as a continuation of previous neo-liberal policies with new participants, fundamentally exacerbating social differentiation between a minority of Yemenis and the majority.

In Chapter 4, focuses is on Yemen's relations with its primary neighbours, acknowledging their enduring role in Yemeni politics and society. It then extends its scope outward to encompass Yemen's relationships with the world's most powerful states. The book concludes by evaluating the main economic, political, and social factors that will shape the future of the country, both domestically and internationally, providing insights into post-war Yemen.

The author covers the states and formations that have ruled throughout Yemen's history in the first part of the book. The arrival of Islam, Yemen under Ottoman rule, the British presence in Yemen, and the subsequent struggle for independence against the British, along with the emergence of two political formations, are discussed. The author chronologically narrates Yemen's history, emphasising the tribal structure of Yemeni society. The book divides Yemen's history into sections, such as the arrival of Islam, the Ottoman period, and the British occupation, clearly stating the purposes of each state's arrival in Yemen. Each section of the book maintains a straightforward narrative. The author avoids theoretical discussions and complex explanations. At the end of the first chapter, the author briefly addresses the theoretical debate about whether Yemen is a state, providing examples from the literature to clarify the topic. However, these explanations are also brief and do not allow the reader to experience confusion.

In the first part, after narrating the historical development of the state in Yemen over time, the second part covers the period starting from 1982 with the General

People's Congress, followed by the unification of the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen into the new Yemen Republic, which allowed for a transition from single-party rule to a multi-party system. The book discusses reform movements from the 1990s to the mid-2000s, including Ali Abdullah Saleh's Islah Party reform initiatives that initially created hope among the people but eventually led to disillusionment. Over time, the people came to believe that reforms were made for the benefit of the elites rather than addressing their needs. In the early 2000s, public hope shifted towards the opposition. The second part of the book also addresses the emergence of the Houthis and the southern separatist movement in Yemen. It describes how the process that began with the unification of the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1990 evolved into a dictatorship until the internal conflict in 2015. The narrative explores how leaders shifted their focus from policies benefiting the people to serving elite interests. Helen Lackner emphasizes in this part that, despite changing actors, the fundamental motivations remained unchanged. It discusses the increasing influence of the Houthis, the southern separatist movement, and the collaboration among various actors leading to the internal conflict. The two external states intervening in the conflict are Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. At the end of the chapter, Lackner highlights that the merger of these two states did not eliminate their differences, and the impact of these differences persists. Throughout this conflict, people's daily needs were disregarded by political elites.

In the third part, Lackner focuses on the Yemeni economy. At the beginning of the chapter, Lackner, state that the poor state of the Yemeni economy contributes to instability and the continuation of conflict, summarises topics such as Yemen's natural resources, economic policies, and workforce potential, frequently utilizing statistical information. Subsequently, Lackner examines the reasons behind the poor state of the Yemeni economy, listing the climate crisis and the war-induced war economy as the causes of poverty. The use of statistical information in the chapter facilitates the reader in forming opinions about the Yemeni economy and its potential. In the conclusion section, Lackner shares recommendations on how the Yemeni economy can recover from the crisis and offers suggestions regarding utilising Yemen's human and natural resources.

In the last section, Lackner evaluates Yemen's international relations by addressing its relationships with regional and non-regional actors in separate sections. In each section, she narrates the history and current status of the relationships with the respective states, explaining the fundamental reasons behind these countries' Yemen policies. Lackner emphasises the vital importance of Yemen's external relations for its economic and social assistance and development. In the conclusion, she highlights her foresight that despite Yemen experiencing one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, it will not receive sufficient attention.

In conclusion, the book "Yemen: Poverty and Conflict" examines the transformations Yemen has undergone throughout its history, the countries that have influenced it, and the reasons for the ongoing conflict and poverty after becoming an independent state. The discussed topics are explained in a simple and clear manner. The absence of lengthy and complex theoretical discussions on the reasons for conflict and poverty, and the clear expression of these reasons, makes the book an important work that readers at all levels, curious about Yemen and its current situation, can easily read.

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