

Text for YEMEN TIMES

FELIX ARABIA at the cross roads?

Born in Austria into a western family of old style my curiosity to see beyond the wrought iron fences of an overprotected childhood made me learn other languages as quickly as possible so as to be in a position to travel abroad on my own and get to know other civilizations. 30 years ago I arrived in Sana'a, spent four weeks with a traditional family just outside the old city, attended classes in Arabic, set out to explore all other corners of the country and thoroughly fell in love with the land and its inhabitants ...

I have been going to Yemen once a year ever since, it became my second home country. I could share the excitement when the unification materialized, I could participate in discussions during the Gulf war, gradually feeling convinced that nothing would make a Yemeni despair or lose confidence or not find a solution to whatever problem. I was given a "proper" name in Arabic by the women considering me as a genuine sister. At the university and in discussions with academics and journalists I was thrilled to be referred to and consulted as a "Yemenologist". I became accustomed to a life in two worlds, moving to and fro and always feeling at home ...

Alas, since the summer of 2011 I no longer get a visa since it is considered too dangerous for me to go there. Thanks to my multiple contacts and so many wonderful friends I have made over the years I keep being fully informed of events and developments.

When the Arab spring started I had (while still in Yemen) joined the protest marches in Sana'a, proud to see the impressive discipline of the crowds marching unarmed but with electrifying enthusiasm, telling their little ones that all will be well soon and promising each other that poverty will be alleviated, corruption defied, the economy revived. When the political dialogue started I once more admired the ingenuity of the Yemeni organizers, eagerly followed reports and waited for the outcome. When I received the news that Yemen has become a Federal Republic consisting of provinces with partly independent discretionary powers I rejoiced, thinking that the dialogue had successfully united political parties and tribal representatives. For two years Yemenis of all different social classes had shown admirable patience, good will and trust in a favourable development, had shared what little food they had with the many neighbours no longer with a job. In the many years of partly living in the country I have been ever and again fascinated by a Yemeni's ability to adept, to grasp essential facts of a situation ad hoc. This is obvious with the very young already when one observes children playing in the street, cute and inventive, making a toy of waste thrown away by passers-by and sharing the smallest gift they are given. Nowhere else have I met with love and care for children the Yemeni fathers devote to their offspring. And the allegedly helpless, ill treated and exploited women? I could submit a long list of women running a household entirely as they see fit, in addition to having a job chosen by them and coming to terms with problems no western woman could solve in a better way.

With months gone by, filled with alarming news of kidnapping, killing of foreigners, assassination of compatriots, public and private, I start wondering: could it be I am mistaken, could it be I had misjudged the unique characteristics of Yemeni people? Have so many ill spirits invaded the country

and arranged for Yemen to join the deplorable victims of the Arab spring not having come true in other countries, and have paved the way to an endless bloody conflict?

I refuse to believe that Yemen should not have a better, a brighter future. I cannot be true that ill-intended activities gain momentum, that misguided terrorists feel welcome on Yemeni soil to commit crimes in the name of Allah. For hundreds of years Yemen managed to keep out or make leave invaders ... Rome had to withdraw their mighty armies, the elsewhere impressively victorious Ottoman sultans lost hope twice to conquer indefatigable Yemen. The British, fabulously experienced in establishing colonies, failed to prolong a protectorate already initiated on wrong assumptions.

May I send a special address to all of you, dear friends in Yemen, to get together on Unity day, to combine your bright ideas and undertake practical steps to come to terms with the deplorable status quo, for FELIX ARABIA to take the right turn at the cross roads and secure peace and the best possible future!

Anisa