Hadiboh: From Peripheral Village to Emerging City

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Hadiboh is the main town of Soqotra Island, which is the largest of the four islands that make up the Soqotra Archipelago. It is undergoing an accelerated process of change driven by the Yemeni government's modernization of its infrastructure, and the consolidation of its political incorporation into the national community as well as the gradual internationalization of its economy. This is being done by turning the island into a showcase on the international stage as an environmentally and culturally unique sub-national entity. Hadiboh is a growing town with a population of 5 000 inhabitants, about ten percent of Soqotra's population. Today, Hadiboh is the main gateway for external influences, and constitutes a post-traditional social context, which straddles the gap between the no longer traditional and the not-yet-modern. Thus, it represents an emergent socio-cultural mosaic of residual ethnic loyalties and regional parochialisms, due in part to an emergent version of provincial cosmopolitanism. The latter is being generated by, among others, the emulative effects of satellite television, and a developing taste for modern consumer goods available from a honeycomb of little shops around the unpaved, garbage strewn main alley of the town. This suq alley is a retailers' emporium and the main market place for the entire island; it acts as a broker of the gradual transition from a subsistence to an exchange economy, as it gradually weaves an island-wide web of monetized economic transactions. This emerging space has a haphazard layout organized around the disintegrating old city dead sea coral buildings, which in the days of the Sultanate used to stand imposingly: the mosque, the residences of members of its administration, and of other notables. This space is the center of gravity located near the coast, and expands southward toward the base of the *fedenhen Ḥajhir* [Fedehon ḥajher] (Ḥajhir Mountains), the

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icons of Soqotra's landscape. Hadiboh is still under construction and thus rather untidy. It exemplifies a hybrid between the remains of a village entwined with the debris of a ramshackle town, in the midst of which a modern city seems to be emerging. Construction activities show how the Hadiboh agglomeration is pursuing an evolutionary course. It reveals an unmistakable transition in architectural style and aesthetic orien-tation: the old manifesting a lack of aesthetic considerations as is evident in the riotous asymmetry of the Soqotri flat rectangular houses with their constantly leaking roofs, built with reddish rocks of all sizes and shapes, held together by an uneven mixture of mostly mud and cement. The new is represented by the aesthetic minimalism displayed in the ordered monotony of the north Yemeni multilevel cube-like structures made of cement blocks with the sculptured white rock finish. This new architectural style seems to underpin the emergence of a corporatist political culture and to signify the mainland's architectural proprietorship of the Soqotra landscape.

The itinerary of Hadiboh's ongoing metamorphosis traced in this paper is perhaps a prelude to the fate of the island as a whole. The discussion of the following aspects of Hadiboh's transformation since the 19th century is based on the author's interviews with elders and other residents of the island, in addition to consultation of the available and relevant documentary sources. The paper is organized as follows: a brief genealogy of the rise of Hadiboh as capital is provided; I then provide an analysis of the development of the town through different phases of internal migration and external immigration, including a discussion of their cultural impacts; its spatial organization as well as social structure, and the subsequent changes are described; the evolution of the economy from food bartering to planned ecotourism is explained. Finally, the paper briefly notes the central and consistent role of Hadiboh in the different stages of the island's transformation as a political entity, and ponders on the likely scenario for the future both of Hadiboh and the island.

Genealogy of Hadiboh

Diodorus of Sicily, in the 1st century BC, praised the island of Panchia, widely believed to be Soqotra, for supplying the entire world with all sorts of aromatic and medicinal plants. He also described the Greek temple of Jupiter built, from the wealth accumulated from the aromatics trade, in its main settlement Panara Tamara, which turns out to be the old name of Hadiboh (Naumkin 1993:27; Doe 1992: 60)[2]. Hadiboh, it seems, was perhaps one of the early settlements on the island, if not the main one, before it was designated the capital of the island in the 16th century. The delay in achieving this official status was perhaps related to its lack of a natural bay that could serve as a port. Nevertheless, Hadiboh seemed to have been a haven for migrants from elsewhere, including Europe, India, Africa and the ancient civilizations of mainland Yemen. It would seem reasonable to assume that Hadiboh was among the settler communities that the *Periplus*, written in the first century AD, referred to in its description of the inhabitants of the northern part of the island: "The inhabitants, few in numbers, live on one side of the

[2] Brian Doe conducted archeological research in Jabal Ḥuṣn where this temple was supposed to have been built.

island, that to the north, the part facing the mainland; they are settlers, a mixture of Arabs and Indians and even some Greeks, who sailed out there to trade" (Casson 1989: 69)[3]. Indeed, throughout at least two millennia, Tamara or Tamarida (today's Hadiboh) along with a few northern coastal settlements, namely Fatk (today's Qalansiyah), Qâḍib [Qadhub], Mûrî, and Sûq, seem to have been the preferred destinations of migrants from across the seas. As they seem to have been used as a temporary refuge for pirates, missionaries, colonizers, as well as a medley of seasonal economic vagrants, who sought to intermediate in the trade of the island's varying commodities that were exported to East Africa, the Gulf, India, mainland Yemen, and elsewhere.

Yet the village of Sûq (*Shiq* in Soqotri) seems to have earned the distinction of capital, it is not clear when, and maintained it apparently until the 16th century. This was undoubtedly due to the advantage of having an inlet in which ships could be anchored. This offered some protection both from the easterly and westerly winds as well as being located in a central position that facilitated internal communication; and therefore it was the obligatory stop for all trading ships. This facilitated the regulation of maritime commerce with the island and the imposition of taxes. Indeed, it was at Suq that the tribes from Mahra disembarked, when they arrived in a flotilla of ten ships to take over, or more accurately to formalize their heretofore informal presence on, the island in 1480 in their attempt to forestall the colonial ambition of their perennial rival the Qu'ayṭî Sultanate in Hadramawt. The Portuguese reported that, "to keep control the Arabs had built a fort at '*Soco*' (al-Sûq), which was where trading ships called. A garrison of a hundred men was usually stationed there and tribute was imposed" (Beckingham quoted in Serjeant 1992:161). According to Doe, Hadiboh's rise from the shadow of Sûq, seems to have occurred soon after the departure of the Portuguese in 1511 when they terminated their brief colonial experiment on the island, which had started in 1507. Hadiboh's status as capital, under its old name, was confirmed both by the first Englishman to have visited it in 1607, William Finch of the East India Company, who mentioned having met the son of the Sultan of Qishn, and later in 1615 by Sir Thomas Roe who described the town as follows: "The King's town of Tamara is built of lime and stone white over, the houses being flat at the top shows fair in the road but when one is there is but poor" (Doe 1992:59). However, the new Mahri political overlord of the island with its new capital seemed to have been present only intermittently, and used it for two purposes: as a temporary refuge from their political enemies, as Ibn Mâjid, writing in the 15th century, explained, "to rally in it when they are weak and in danger from the Sultans of Hadramawt and others [e.g., the Omanis]" (quoted in Serjeant op. cit: 144), and as a tax farm, which was the island's principal purpose. This set a pattern in which Hadiboh and the other coastal settlements were merely used as tax collection nodes, and that was to last until the end of the Sultanate under the Bin 'Afrîr dynasty. This is captured in Ibn Mâjid' statement: "In our time 'Amr bin 'Afrîr and the Banû 'Abd al Nabiyyi al-Sulaymânî al-Ḥimyarî, both of the *mashâyekh* of the Mahra built a fort there, and governed over some of its inhabitants, imposing unpaid labour on them, taking from each man a mound of ghee, and from each woman a rug" (quoted in Serjeant ibid: 144).

[3] See Elie (forthcoming) for a comprehensive historical overview of the Soqotra Archipelago.

In the 19th century, the chain of events that led to the final confirmation of Hadiboh as capital of Soqotra could be said to have been a by-product of the British geo-political concerns fomented by its imperial ambitions in the Gulf of Aden specifically and in Southern Arabia generally. This culminated in the occupation of Aden in 1839, and the subsequent application of its policy of indirect rule, first through a series of protection treaties, and later through the creation of a Protectorate system both in the eastern and western parts of South Yemen. The latter incorporated over twenty political entities representing an incongruous mixture of statelets composed of Sultanates, Sheikhdoms, Emirates, and a colony. Significantly, Soqotra was the first to have attracted British colonial interest, when in 1835 an offer to purchase the island was made to the Sultan ʻAmr bin Tawârî bin ʻAfrîr of Mahra, who had jurisdiction over the island, but was rejected. As one British observer put it, "Socotra was the bell-wether of British intentions in the Gulf of Aden area" (Gavin 1975:198). The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 generated an increase in maritime traffic among powers potentially hostile to British interests in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean (see Dostal 1998). This traffic occasioned British imperial anxieties that led them to conclude a protection treaty in 1876 specifically for Soqotra and its sister islands, given their strategic location, which was signed by Sultan ʻAli bin ʻAbdallah bin Sâlem bin Saʻd bin Tawârî bin ʻAfrîr al-Mahrî. For the privilege of receiving, according to the treaty, "the gracious favor and protection of Her Majesty the Queen-Empress," the Sultan was entitled to a personal salute of nine guns, and was paid 3 000 dollars and was to receive an annual subsidy of 360 dollars, which was increased later on. Finally, the signing of a protectorate treaty with the Mahri Sultanate in 1886, initiated what was to become the Eastern Protectorate, which would include the Kathîrî, and Quʻaytî Sultanates of the Hadramawt. In effect, the treaty "was to set the pattern for those to be negotiated later with the potentates on the South Arabian coast" (Gavin op. cit: 198).

The treaty seemed to have brought peace between these perennially feuding Sultanates, by restricting them to their territorial boundaries. Once the cessation of the customary hostilities was achieved and the security of each of these political entities guaranteed, the decision seemed to have been taken soon after to move the administrative seat of the Mahra Sultanate from the village of Qishn to Hadiboh – or more precisely, Tamarida, as the British called it until the early 20th century. Prior to the treaty of 1876, the island was barely administered, and was used merely as a tax farm, as noted above. The "Governor" of Soqotra, a relative of the Sultan, did not reside permanently on the island, but made annual visits to collect taxes in the form of ghee (*ḥami*) mainly from three villages: Hadiboh, Qâḍib, and Qalansiyah. During Wellsted's visit in 1835, he remarked, "that they do not possess throughout the island a constituted authority either civil or military, or of any description whatsoever" (1835 : 205). There was, however, a qâḍî and one or more imam on the island. The treaty seemed to have provided an incentive to assert the Sultan's authority over the island through a more sustained presence of the resident Governor, and in order to maximize tax revenues. By 1877, the British Assistant Political Resident in Aden, while on a visit to the island, "found that the execution of the treaty had strengthened the Governor's hand, and that the revenue had doubled" (Hunter and Sealy 1886: 113). The second Sultan Sâlem bin Ḥâmed, who was the Governor of Soqotra since 1877, and still under the Protectorate Treaty of 1886, seemed to have replaced Sultan ʻAli bin ʻAbdallah upon his death probably in the late 1890s, as the latter was around seventy-five years old when the treaty was

signed[4]. It was he who probably became the first permanent resident Sultan of Soqotra, but he resided in Ḥawlaf (a coastal hamlet in the east of Hadiboh where a jetty, in guise of a seaport, is presently located), at least for a while. The peripatetic change of residence seemed to have been a tradition among the Sultans, as they took up temporary residence where a new bride was offered, which was a rather frequent occurrence[5].

Socotra Ecotourism Society

Overview of Hadiboh (2003)

An interesting question is raised by the changes in location as main anchorage point and capital for the island between Sûq, Ḥawlaf and Hadiboh. Unaware of the previous history summarized above, Soqotrans, at least some of them, have a particular oral recollection of the chain of events that led to the designation of Hadiboh as capital. This version, which is briefly related below, may not be as mythical as it might at first appear. The abandonment of Sûq as capital may have been necessitated by environmental changes. As Serjeant (op. cit: 134) notes from his conversation with the locals: "I was told that at al-Sûq, ships once anchored where now there are palms growing and that there used to be a lagoon there. This local tradition is not at all impossible as the beaches shift during heavy storms in the summer. It might also explain why there was a movement of population from al-Sûq to Hadiboh." Moreover, Ḥawlaf being a promontory, and thus more accessible to ships than was Hadiboh, might explain its possible selection, even if for a short while.

4 It is worth noting that Sultan Sâlem accompanied the British from Qishn to Soqotra when they came to raise the British flag in Hadiboh (still Tamarida) in 1886 (Hunter & Sealy 1886: 115).

5 The latter was the optimal strategy used by ambitious individuals or clan leaders to achieve the status of a local notable, and thus be conferred upon positions of authority among other favors (e.g., land proprietorship) from the Sultan. The last Sultan 'Issâ bin 'Ali is reported to have married more than fifteen women. These marriages were brief liaisons that lasted a few months at the most and followed by divorce, perhaps out of concern for Islamic strictures on the number of wives allowed.

According to this oral version, the shift of location seemed to have happened as a result of luck and partly because of to the reclusive character of the reigning Sultan. Before Hadiboh could become, or be reinstated as, the seat of administration, it was the village of Joho which played that role. According to local elders, Ḥawlaf was abandoned as official residence, and perhaps as the seat of the island's tax collecting administration when the Sultan heard that people in a ship from Oman were asking for him. Upon hearing the news he departed for Joho, which is located inland in the eastern part of the island, a choice that might have been related to some conjugal alliance. However, its natural assets made it an idyllic agropastoralist village, perched next to a wadi in which water flows throughout the year, and is bordered on both sides by date palms from which a plentiful date harvest could be gathered each season. The Sultan seemed to have been quite averse to meeting with foreign visitors, and moreover he was perhaps constrained by the treaty's instruction "to refrain from entering into any correspondence with any foreign nation." According to this mythical story, the Sultan's departure from Ḥawlaf is linked to the exploit of a brave woman of African descent from Hadiboh. According to this account, Ashara bint Muya who worked for the Sultan happened to be on the beach when the captain of an approaching boat inquired about the Sultan. She was wearing a headscarf tied in a masculine fashion, which gave her the appearance of a male. She told the captain and the assumed foes in the boat in a threatening voice that the Sultan was not around and that if they were to come on shore they would be killed. Her performance was sufficiently convincing to dissuade the visitors' desire for a *tête-à-tête* with the Sultan. This encounter prematurely ended the ship's visit, but it ultimately led to Hadiboh's becoming the island's hub for the outside world. Whatever was the exact date, or the basis, of the Soqotrans' choice of Hadiboh as capital village, the British officialized it in on the 30th of October 1886 subsequent to the signing of the protectorate treaty in April of that year. On that day, "the Union Jack was formally hoisted, saluted on shore [in Tamarida] by a guard of Marines and from H.M.S. Penguin by a Royal Salute of 21 guns" (Hunter and Sealy 1886:115).

This ceremony not only officialized, but also made permanent, the shift from Mahra to Soqotra, after nearly four hundred years of official – albeit intermittent – Mahrî representation on the island since the 15th century. The move effectively made Mahra a dependency of Soqotra. In addition to increased tax revenues, which were not available in Mahra, not insignificant perhaps in the decision was that Soqotra offered a more attractive landscape than Mahra in which the Sultans' attachment to a bedouin lifestyle could be pursued in unadulterated authenticity. Indeed, the Sultans who succeeded each other on the island were to show an aversion to any kind of urban existence as they all dwelt in the hinterland (*al-bâdiya*). All of them were illiterate or semi-literate (only one could read the Qur'ân) bedouins whose occupational priority was supervising the care of their herds and date plantations, hence their attachment to the *bâdiya*. Contrary to Ibn Khaldun's prediction (Rosenthal 1967: 93), the Soqotran bedouin, in the image of his Sultans, maintained his allegiance to the *badawa* (desert dwelling) and never succumbed to the temptation of *ḥaḍâra* (urban life). And the British seemed rather to have encouraged this attitude by their policy of benign neglect of the Soqotrans' living standards, otherwise known as indirect rule. One old bedouin aptly captures the essence of British policy by referring to it in the metaphor of a renegade pastoralist: "It was like the owner of a sheep who ties the animal under the sun, not in the shade, and without water or food."

Constitution of a Mosaic Township

Leaving aside the cultural traces in the form of a mixed population left by previous migratory movements dating from antiquity, the genesis of Hadiboh as a mosaic town began with the period when the Sultanate of Mahra shifted its administrative center to Soqotra in the late 19th century. This move led to a corresponding relocation of members of the Sultan's "court," and of its ascriptive social hierarchy, which included members of the Sultan's family, families of notables and a retinue of service providers who, among others, were affected by the "caravan effect" of the decision. It could not have been an impressive relocation exercise, since the cultural attainment as well as economic capacity of the Mahra (pl. of Mahrî) at the time was the least developed of all the Sultanates; thus the number of people involved and the paraphernalia of the court were kept to a functional minimum. From that time onwards four migratory waves can be identified that have contributed to the gradual socio-cultural metamorphosis of Hadiboh as the island's gateway.

The First Wave

The first influx of migrants could be described as a trickle, and came from mainland Yemen along with the Sultan. Another group came from the Arab Gulf (today's Oman and United Arab Emirates), and partly preceded as well as followed the formal transfer of the Sultanate's administrative center. These immigrants were attracted by the island's potential for pearl diving and opportunities to broker the trade in ghee, then a major export commodity to the Gulf and East Africa. It is said that a great many of the Gulf immigrants came from the Emirate of 'Ajmân. The people of 'Ajmân were known as sea traders who traveled along the Indian Ocean coast and exchanged goods between South Arabia, including Soqotra, and East Africa. These sailors established themselves in Soqotra and married Soqotrî women, as the island was in a better economic situation than the Emirates at the time, namely before to the start of oil production in the early 1960s, and before their unification in 1971. These settlers, according to Western visitors unaware of Diodorus' designation, called their new abode Tamarida. It was hypothesized that the term was the latinized version of the Arabic word for date, *tamr*. Regardless of its origin, the term aptly reflected the fact that the place resembled an enormous date plantation at that time, which have now mostly disappeared to make way for residential, commercial and administrative buildings. The palm groves may have inspired these new settlers to use such a term, as it was in sharp contrast to the desert ecology they previously inhabited. As the Bents (1900: 391) observed during their visit in 1899, "the present capital is called Tamarida by the Arabs and foreigners, and Hadiboh by the natives." This form of ethnic appropriation of the town through the use of different names seems to have persisted until the late 1960s, as Boxhall (1966), a British surveyor who visited the island in 1965, observed, "The capital is called Hadibu by the African element of the island population. The Arab community, however, called the capital Tamarida."

It seems that the simultaneous use of the two names for the capital was finally discontinued only when the island was taken over by the South Yemen government. The choice of Hadiboh must have been associated with the fact that it was the appellation used by the majority population, as well as to its mystique, since it refers

to a protective spirit who dwelled in all of the houses of the village. It is the name of a *jinniya*'[6] a protective female spirit, not an evil one. It reminded the inhabitants of the appropriate steps to take to protect their houses. She was the guardian angel of the village. In the past, a libation was offered in her memory before people ate or drank something that came from outside the island. Even today, some people are said to still perform the libation.

The discovery of oil in the Gulf countries led to a reverse migration, as Gulf residents in Soqotra returned to their native land to partake in the new wealth. However, Hadiboh's hospitality to the migrants from the Gulf was to pay off in the form of a return favor by the Emir of 'Ajmân, as a show of gratitude for the refuge offered his subjects when they were escaping from what was then the arid and impoverished land of the Emirates. The father of the current Sheikh in 'Ajmân (Râshid al Nahîmî) visited and knew personally the last Sultan 'Isâ bin 'Ali and his mother. This special relationship was to lead to a kind of "most favored immigrant" status accorded to Soqotrans who migrated there in search of economic opportunities. Today, the majority of Soqotran emigrants to the Gulf is to be found in 'Ajmân, and as such constitutes the most important Soqotran diaspora.

The Second Wave

The next major period in migratory movement was the end of British colonization of South Yemen in 1967, which led to the demise of the Sultanate of Soqotra and the incorporation of Soqotra into the state of South Yemen as well as the imposition of a Socialist administration. This period inaugurated the island's entry into modernity, which Soqotrans describe in Arabic as the coming of *haḍhara* and that began a process, which is still ongoing, of opening the island up to the outside world. This process has breached their communal insularity as well as challenged them ever since to adapt their cultural repertoire honed in the *badâwa* to the construction of a modern society. Hadiboh was at the center of this change process, as it was the locus for the embryonic modern administrative machinery for the whole island. The creation of jobs, the promises of public services, and the building of a road network linking the major parts of the island, gradually began the metamorphosis of Hadiboh from an agropastoralist abode into an urban magnet for people from different parts of the island as well as outside it. The Socialist administration not only started a population transfer from the mainland to the island in the form of soldiers and civil servants (e.g., teachers, police, and administrators), but also led to an internal population redistribution from the hinterland to the coast. It adopted in 1980 a land redistribution policy, where the lands that belonged to the Sultan were confiscated, and the relatively wealthy families were arbitrarily dispossessed of their land. Beside the

6 Soqotrans point out that there are two meanings for the word Hadiboh [Ḥadîboh], and which are not phonetically different, one for the *jinniya* and one for the village. There is also an etymological explanation of Hadiboh, according to which the root of the word is *Ḥidib*, which refers to a familiar place that one is comfortable with after many visits. Also, it is pointed out that the name Hadiboh, at least from the perspective of those from the hinterland, was used only after the start of the Socialist period. Prior to that, according to one Soqotran informant, two appellations were used by the bedouins to convey the gradual expansion of Hadiboh as a settlement: *shirḥa*, which means few and was used to designate the place as being sparsely populated; subsequently it was referred to as *bilad* (Arabic for country) toward the end of the Sultanate, as it began to expand in terms of population and to differentiate itself from the rest of the villages on the island.

fulfillment of an ideological imperative (equality of access to the means of production), the purpose was to allow people to supplement their precarious pastoralist livelihood with fishing and other activities. The availability of land at nominal prices from the government provided an incentive for people, especially from the east and south, to move to Hadiboh. In cultural terms the Socialist period had the following impacts: First, it initiated the Arabization of the culture partly as a by-product of an administrative imperative: People had to be registered for school, birth certificates and identity cards had to be issued, among other administrative functions that had to be carried out. Soqotri names, therefore, for *raison d'Etat* had to be dispensed with since they could not be transcribed into the Arabic script. The assumption of Arabic names took on a cultural significance of its own, as an emblem of modernity, as children, especially from the hinterland, carrying Soqotri names were the butt of jokes at school, and their mainland teachers unable to pronounce their names arbitrarily assigned them Arabic ones. Second, Hadiboh's internal cultural configuration was reconstituted through an intensive internal migration process, which overran the old city's original borders, and expanded into date plantations and incorporated adjoining villages. This set the pattern of what was to become greater Hadiboh, a microcosm of the island, as every region of the island was to be represented.

The Third Wave

The unification of north and south Yemen in 1990 brought a new dimension to the migratory process to the island. But its impact was to await the resolution of the internal political tension of the reunification process, which came to a head in the civil war of 1994 in which the north defeated the remnants of the Socialist government in the south. This led to a northern cultural appropriation of the south, symbolized in the *daḥbashî* syndrome: named after a character in a Yemeni television series shown in the early 1990s, whose demeanor symbolized all that was perceived as obnoxious in the northern Yemeni culture. At least, that was the interpretation given to it by people in southern Yemen[7]. In Soqotra, the new migrants came from the north as well, and were known in Arabic as *shimâliyyên* (northerners), in contrast to the southern origin of the migrants during the Socialist period. This term has assumed the same connotation for Soqotrans, as did *daḥbashî* for southerners. Hadiboh became an economic haven for the people marginalized by the mainland economy. At first however, northern soldiers came as part of the conquering army, and some chose to settle upon completion of their tour of duty. They opened grocery shops as part time supplementary income activity, and were the pioneers of the qat trade in Soqotra. Their brothers or male relatives, who manned the stores when on military duty, soon joined them. Through word of mouth, Hadiboh began to attract a wider circle of migrants from: the surplus labor from agricultural zones (e.g., Ibb, Lahej); the semi-skilled laborers (e.g., masons, electricians, plumbers, etc.,) made prematurely redundant by the depressed economies of the major cities of the mainland (e.g., Sana'a) and brought along by the building contractors; those with a traditional propensity for trade

[7] The term took on potent political symbolism and Southern Yemenis transformed the roots of the word into a short poem meant to disparage the political leadership: D for *Dawla* (the State), H for *Ḥâkimha* (its ruler), B for *Baltagî* (unscrupulous individual), A for *Aṣluhu* (his origin), SH for *Shâwish* (lowest ranking officer in the military). Currently, the use of this term is devoid of any political connotation, and is employed as an epithet *vis-à-vis* anyone, from any part of Yemen, with an uncivil comportment.

(e.g., Taizz); and elementary school graduates and high school drop-outs whose skill deficiency seemed to have induced a propensity toward vagrancy especially to places in which rumors of high wages were circulating, and who became shopkeeper's assistants and itinerant odd-jobbers. The end result of their influx was the plethora of micro-capitalist ventures symbolized in the ubiquitous presence of the grocery or variety shop in almost every built (even half-built) structure in Hadiboh. This influx of migrants and their gravitation to retail trade and service sectors has led to a division of labor: mainlanders have monopolized the private trade and service sectors, while locals have a monopoly on governmental jobs. However, these government employees, who are the most sensitive to imitative tendencies, have also opened shops, a decision that seems to be driven more by status seeking or as an alternative use of leisure time than by economic considerations. Nonetheless, some have attracted Soqotran patrons partly out of communal solidarity and the ease of purchasing on credit regardless of repayment capacity or punctuality. Inter-group relations seem to be characterized by a superficial cordiality and the sublimation of socio-economic antagonisms. For instance, Soqotrans do not work in northerners' shops or restaurants, and vice versa. This is partly due to kinship considerations, but also due to mutually shared misanthropic perceptions.

The northern migratory influx has brought about a qualitative shift in Soqotran culture: first, it is from this beehive of micro-economic activities established by northerners that a Yemenized version of modernity and a region-wide, or Arab, model of cosmopolitanism are being purveyed. Among these shops are the TV cafés, which are the Trojan horses of modernity in Soqotra, as they are assuming the burden of expanding the scope of Soqotrans' imagination by mediating their familiarization with the outside world. There are six TV cafés in Hadiboh's sûq alley, and they are mediating the spread of Arab cosmopolitanism to a Soqotran audience avid for images that would distract them from their surroundings, which are deprived of entertainment, and information scarce, while linking them with the wider world. This is a mostly urban phenomenon, with Hadiboh as the center of cultural influence radiating to the rest of the island. Interestingly, the dominant cultural reference are not Western programmes (shown with Arabic sub-titles, which cannot always be read by the audience), but the Arabic ones. In their public viewing context, Arabic programmes fulfill a number of functions. One of the most significant is political education through ideological confirmation of an Arabo-Islamic identity brought by news broadcasts especially. These have symbolically induced people to leapfrog out of their insularity into a kind of virtual translocal politico-religious polity. Watching television is a reality test that has made semi-urbanized Soqotrans aware of the breadth of the cultural gap to be bridged between them and their Arab counterparts. The effect is similar to forcing them to become aware of the incompatibility between the socio-economic expectations created by the visual discourses of the television programmes and the reality of their daily lives; thereby inducing feelings of cultural inadequacy especially in terms of a sense of linguistic deficiency and relative economic deprivation.

The second cultural change is the introduction and adoption of the consumption of qat, which represents an interesting case of cultural diffusionism, as it entailed the transfer of an external cultural habit to a significant and still increasing number of Hadiboh residents. This might be the only successful aspect, thus far, of cultural integration (*indimâj thaqâfî*) or mere mimetism, but it is mostly confined to Hadiboh. The qat bazaar that takes place twice a week in Hadiboh symbolizes a second-hand modernity

mediated by a Yemeni tradition, namely the social ritual of qat chewing; which is the national pastime during which Yemenis spend half their waking hours nearly everyday on an ostensibly aimless collective conviviality, chewing the mildly narcotic leaves of the plant *catha edulis*. Soqotrans have taken up this leisure activity in ever increasing numbers. It is an activity that has become a cultural habit, though it started as an act of pure mimetism on the part of members of the host culture predisposed by a curiosity rendered obsessive by the absence of internal outlets for its satisfaction. However, its success has induced the ire of some Soqotrans who see the qat chewers as cultural renegades. Indeed, the poet ʻAlî ʻAbdallah Saʻîd al-Rijdihî, one of the better-known Soqotrans poets, has written a poem –or more aptly, has recorded one– in the Soqotri language on that very subject that blames qat consumption for local forms of socio-cultural dereliction. On the mainland, qat chewing has attracted a lot of Occidentalist interpretations, which elevated the ritual of chewing into both a harbinger and barometer of Yemeni society's change process, in which the qat chewing session was seen as the very medium through which the politics of the change process were playing themselves out (see Weir 1985). If qat consumption symbolizes anything in the Soqotran context, it is an emerging individualization of lifestyles in a benign disregard of communal sanction, as the latter is no longer essential to find one's place in a social order that is being integrated in a national acculturation process. Qat consumption seems to provide an opportunity for the assertion of an individual identity and the construction of a self-image as a provincial cosmopolitan, thus conferring a distinctive marker of social elitism, at least among a segment of the urban population.

The third cultural characteristic of this migratory influx is the intensification of the Islamization of Soqotran culture, as a means of undoing the impact of the secularization of the culture by the Socialist administration. This has led to religious discourse becoming the mainstay of intellectual life on the island, which is influencing the educational choices of high school graduates; and is having a crippling effect on certain defining cultural activities of Soqotrans (wedding ceremonies, poetry readings, etc), the performance of which usually involved the participation of both men and women, and is now being discouraged. Soqotra is now a regular destination for mainland Islamic missionary groups, and different tendencies have their individual advocates in Hadiboh (e.g., *da'wa, islâh, salafi*). This phenomenon seems to be a reaction to a complex dialectic of externally and internally generated anxieties: on the one hand it is being deployed as a semiotic of resistance against assimilationist external political and cultural influences, since it provides a cover against the charge of political secessionism based on Soqotrans' cultural particularism; and on the other it is being used as a source of spiritual security against the generalized feeling of being economically *laissé pour compte* by fomenting a hegemonic Islamic sensibility that could be redeployed as the means for the reproduction of a traditional society. That is, a society disciplined by exclusively otherworldly expectations and dominated by religious authority figures. Moreover, the use of religious discourse seeks to appease the older generation's anxieties induced by a shared sense of inadequacy *vis-à-vis* the challenges of an impinging modernity; hence religion becomes a form of ascetic negation of the cultural present. These anxieties are perhaps related to the fact that the majority of Soqotran adults are illiterate or semi-literate.

The Fourth Wave

The fourth migratory wave was the result of the Yemeni government's policy of designating Soqotra as a biodiversity preserve, and the subsequent approval and implementation of a biodiversity conservation project funded by the Global Environment Fund (GEF), beginning in 1998. This was to initiate what is expected to be a continuous and perhaps long-term engagement with foreign experts, researchers, and tourists, as Hadiboh is expected to be the gateway to eco-touristic activities around the island. This has generated a lot of infrastructure development. Hadiboh boasts a new airport that much bigger towns on the mainland would envy, and four two star hotels, from a one star hotel prior to 1998, and an asphalted road network is under construction. These activities herald the increasing monetization of social relations among the island's residents and with foreigners, and as such constitute vectors of a rise in social expectation as well as competition that could destabilize the current social configuration, if improperly managed. They could generate the perception among Soqotrans that Yemeni mainlanders are unfair competitors for limited economic opportunities. Foreigners may come to be seen as cultural brokers of the hybridization of the local cultural vernacular that could have a corrosive effect on cultural identity. Indeed, English has made its entry as the language of development and ecotourism, and an Australian-run school is teaching it. Its mastery by the locals could lead to jobs, thus further relinquishing Soqotri to economic irrelevance. This is a conjuncture that is conducive to the emergence of a culturally alienated new generation of Hadiboh residents, if not of islanders as a whole.

One indication of this cultural alienation is the dilemma of ethno-linguistic loyalty being experienced by Soqotrans, and especially Hadiboh residents, who are unwittingly becoming cross-cultural brokers and change agents, given their continuous exposure to external cultural stimuli. This is evident in a set of views toward the Soqotri language that are becoming emblematic of differentiating cultural allegiances and generating problems of integration both within the changing communal context and national society. These views betray attitudes toward the language that are indicative of a complex adaptative attitude toward the change process. Soqotrans' views about their mother tongue can be categorized into four perceptions: The first is as an "impediment to progress" in which the language is seen as being of little help to the new generation's attempt to improve its socio-economic status. And its intrinsic limitations as an exclusively oral vernacular are seen as obstacles to learning other languages. The second is as an "obstacle to national unity" in which the preservation of Soqotri is seen as an impediment to full cultural assimilation into the national society. The argument is that since the national language is Arabic there is no reason for maintaining Soqotri; this implies the denial of any identitarian particularity or intrinsic association to their language. The third is as a "relic of *jâhiliya*" in which Soqotrans prioritize their Muslim identity and thus extend Islamic monotheism into its linguistic counterpart, in that the exclusive use of Arabic suggests itself as the ideal form of mono-lingualism wherever Muslims predominate. Accordingly, the argument is that Soqotrans are Muslims and the language of the Muslims is Arabic, the authentic badge of one's membership in the Islamic Community, therefore Arabic should be the sole language of Soqotrans. To defend the continued existence of Soqotri would be seen as betraying an attachment to the *jâhiliya* period. The fourth is as a "communal heritage" worthy of preservation, as it constitutes a cultural asset in the national cultural patrimony. This is based on the widespread recognition of the importance of the language as a repository of a rich taxo-

nomic imaginaire in which are stored the knowledge of the faunal, floral, aquatic and terrestrial resources of the island, as well as the ethno-geographical vernacular in which are recorded every aspect of the Soqotra landscape (Cf. Simeone-Senelle 2001).

What seems certain is that Hadiboh residents very rapidly, and other Soqotrans more gradually, are replacing their native language for a variety of reasons, such as economic exigencies, and religious proprieties, among others, which are becoming more significant determinants of their perception of themselves and their sense of place in the world[8]. In effect, what is becoming obvious, based on the influence of television, Islam, and foreign languages, is that the process of Soqotran self-identification, at least in its urban context, is gradually emerging from a localized identity confined by the boundaries of clan, to one that currently straddles not only communal but also national and international dimensions.

Internal Socio-Spatial Configuration

Two wadis (in Soqotri *jahy* [jehi] for a small wadi and *sha'ab* [tla'ab] for a larger one) framed Hadiboh's original location, *jahy* Hadiboh in the east, and *sha'ab* Al-Raḥaba in the west. However, the area occupied by the kernel of Hadiboh, which now constitutes the old city, did not extend over the entire area but was confined to a circumference of about half a square mile, surrounded by palm trees. Until the late 1960s there were, at most, a hundred buildings with a population of under five hundred people. Indeed, one visitor noted in 1966 that the total population of the five largest agglomerations in Soqotra was 1 880 people (Brown 1966)[9]. During the Sultanate, the internal logic of Hadiboh's spatial organization could be described as a mosaic, in which a traditional society was composed of closed corporate groups organized around, if not segregated into, an ethnically-based division of labor, which was characterized by an ascriptive relationship between ethnicity and occupation. Social relations between the groups were specific in nature and bound by well-defined rules of conduct (Turner 1978). The social composition of Hadiboh was a hierarchical social pyramid based on ascriptive status, with a social stratification not based on material criteria. It was based on a descending scale of social status related to the following criteria: Kinship based on an exclusive tribal pedigree (Sultan's family), religious piety (*Ashrâf*), ethnicity (*'Arab*), labor conscription (*Muwalladîn*/Africans), and occupa-

[8] The evolving linguistic situation on the island undermines the view of language, in traditional linguistics, as "a necessary condition of ethnocultural identity... or essential quality of community membership." According to Silverstein (1998), the emergent linguistic anthropology conceptualizes language as the outcome of a valorizing process by the members of a local language community, which is influenced by local politics of culture as well as by the political order of the nation-state, and the local influence of international institutions (pp. 402, 415). It is worth noting that in spite of the recent commendable and highly technical work done by the few Soqotri linguists, the language still awaits its grammarian as well as its 21st century sociolinguist.

[9] The other four were: Qalansiyah, Qâḍîb, Sûq, and Qeysô. All of which are considered minor villages today with the exception of Qalansiya, which is the main settlement of the Western District (*mudîriyya gharbiyya*), but a long way behind Hadiboh. The latter is, in fact, formerly the capital of Soqotra, but currently that of the Eastern District (*mudîriyya sharqiyya*). The new territorial division was introduced in 1999.

tional specialization based on socio-ecological particularities (bedouins)[10]. The components of this social hierarchy were as follows:

At the top were the Sultan and his kin, who lived partly off the taxes and labor of others. The second rung were the Ashraf, from Tarim in Hadramawt, who constituted the religious class, and provided spiritual protection and religious legitimacy to the Sultan's rule, but traditionally resided outside Hadiboh. In the middle, were the Arabs who originated from different parts of the mainland (e.g., prominent Mahrî tribes[11], and individuals from Hadramawt, and Aden) as well as immigrants from the Arabian Gulf. The Mahrî tribes controlled land and many date plantations as well as slaves, and had tax farming privileges and positions of authority in some regions. The other Arabs constituted the class of traders who mediated the barter system, which was the basis of the economy at the time. This group was allowed by the Sultan to trade in some commodities (e.g., pearls) for a concession fee, and to live off the profits from the traded goods produced by the Bedouins and coastal residents. Included as well in the category of Arabs, based on achieved social status, were a handful of nûbân who supposedly originated from Nubia, a region located between southern Egypt and northern Sudan[12]. Interestingly, they were of African origin and of slave descent, but had emancipated themselves by becoming literate through Quranic education, which distinguished them from the other Africans, and thus they occupied functions of a higher social status than their social background would have normally allowed. They provided secretarial and administrative services among other functions.

Last, were the *Muwalladin*, (*muwallad* sing.)[13] who came as involuntary migrants from East Africa, and who, in exchange for food rations, provided free labor to all the above-mentioned social categories. According to elderly residents, the Africans constituted, at least in the 19th century, the majority of the population of Hadiboh; their descendents

[10] The social structure of Hadiboh differs from that of the hinterland, for some of the groups were found exclusively in the coastal areas, especially Hadiboh (e.g., Muwalladin), or others (e.g., Ashraf) who resided in specific villages in the vicinity of Hadiboh.

[11] It is important to note that while the Mahrî are from mainland Yemen, they were not always regarded as Arabs. As Harold Ingrams (1966: 207) observed: "the Mahras seemed a foreign people by their language, clothes, and customs. Their neighbours in the West scarcely regarded them as Arabs, though they themselves consider they are of the pure stock of Himyar." Similarly, the Mahra at one time did not consider themselves Soqotrans. According to the Arab geographer Al Hamdani, writing in the 10th century, as quoted by Serjeant (1992: 137-38): "If a Mahri is addressed as 'Ya Suqutri' he gets angry." And responds, "Socotra is of the Greeks (al-Rum) only who were there...[until] they entered into the lineage of al-Qamar tribe of Mahrah."

[12] This description of the Nûbân and their origin is the "official" Soqotran account. However, there is an alternative explanation to the official version. That is, the use of this term in Soqotra during the Sultanate was perhaps unrelated to the actual origin of the individuals concerned, but a convenient appellation that served to differentiate them from the rest of the slave population. A brief portrait by BOTTING (1958: 64-5) of the most famous Soqotran Nûbân, Wazîr Ibrâhîm, suggests that this might be the case.

[13] On the mainland this term refers to people who are the progeny of a Yemeni father and an African mother, or more generally of a non-Arab mother. In Soqotra, the term came into use only after the end of the Sultanate, as a substitute for the Soqotri term *mabḥil* [mebeḥil] (pl. *ambuḥileh*), which was the term used to designate the slave population. Also, the Arabic term *akhdâm*, which designates a class of servants on mainland Yemen, was used interchangeably with *mabḥil*. Today both of these terms are no longer used on the island, as they are considered socially denigrating.

represent today a sizable community in the island's two major urban settlements, Hadiboh and Qalansiyah. The Africans, local elders say, were brought from the port town of Sohar by Omani sailors who transported the goods traded between East Africa and the Gulf, by way of Soqotra. The captains of these ships lured destitute young boys in the coastal cities of East Africa, Zanzibar in particular, to come on board, with promises of being well fed and well kept, and kidnapped them. These young boys were later sold into slavery in Soqotra. They were bought by the well-to-do (e.g., Arab merchants, and the Sultan) on the island, who had date palm plantations and herds of livestock, and needed labor. They were kept as domestic labor and were looked after as members of the extended families who bought them[14]. Everyone who worked on the island was paid in kind and not in cash except when the sale of pearls was involved.

C John Farrar

Wazir Ibrahim escorting visiting delegation (1964)

Missing from the above urban social hierarchy were the bedouins, especially from the central and western regions, who constituted a social category entirely outside the pale of urban life. Their contact with Hadiboh was the most furtive, occasioned only by the need to procure basic necessities, as they found its smell, among other things, repugnant[15]. Seasonally, however, compelled by hunger, they used to offer their services to the Sultan

[14] The practice of slavery in Soqotra seemed to have been brought to a formal end only when the island was taken over by the South Yemen government after independence from the British in 1967. In a "Report on Slavery in the Persian Gulf" in 1842, the British Assistant Resident in the Gulf, A. B. KEMBALL, confirms the view the Soqotran elders' version, and explains that since 1820 the British had signed treaties with sheikhs prohibiting the traffic in slaves in the entire Gulf region, in which Soqotra was specifically included. However, he confessed, "not a single seizure [of ships carrying slaves] has been made." See LEWIS 1990.

[15] The latter was due to the drying of fish in large quantities on the beach, and was associated, according to the bedouins, with the production of a feared fly (*Di Asru*) [di'âsar] that dropped larvae in people's mouths and which caused a throat infection which could last for forty days of hell.

and his kin as well as the Arabs in exchange for food. In effect, the bedouins had a similar role to that of the *akhdâm*, by volunteering their services to urban groups, as herders for urban absentee owners and as surrogate mothers (*ridâ'a* in Arabic, *qanḥy* [qanḥiyye] in Soqotri) to the children of the Sultan and Arab families. In this situation, the distinction between slaves and bedouins was rather slight, as it seemed to have been based on a combination of epidermic criteria, social stigma attached to having been purchased into service, and the absence of clan origin on the island.

Hadiboh's oldest mosque, Al Jama'a (1964) John Farrar

The neighborhoods of Hadiboh, called *ḥâra* in Arabic or *ḥafa* [ḥafeh] in Soqotri, were organized around the residences of the prominent Arab personalities, who were either relatives of the Sultan, or represented the economic and administrative cadres, and the Sultan's representatives (*muqaddam*)[16] for the two major ethnic groups Arabs and the *muwalladin*: *Firqat al Bîḍ* (the White group) and *Firqat al-Sûd* (the Black group) (Serjeant 1992: 166). Hadiboh was divided into a number of *ḥafa* of which the main ones were: *ḥafa* bin Hamoudish, a businessman from Shabwa; *ḥafa* Nuban, where resided the Sultan's wazir who was said to be of slave descent and was nick named Al-Nûbî; *ḥafa* bin Silman, one of the Sultans's Qadhi and originally from wadi Ma'auli in Oman; *ḥafa* bin Ghanem, a trader from Aden; *ḥafa* bin Subayt, the *muqaddam* for the Africans, part chief, part corvée organizer; and *ḥafa* Nujed, the residence of Africans, and a labor reservoir for the Sultan and his kin. Each *ḥafa* was nearly exclusively a kin-based compound, and attached

[16] The *Muqaddam* constituted the lowest level of political representation, namely the clan leader. He had responsibility for his own individual village or set of villages that the clan inhabited, and performed the following functions: political representative, enforcer of tax obligations, police officer, and executioner of judicial sentences.

to each was a retinue of African servants. The *muqaddam* for the Arabs was a merchant from the village of Ghurfah in Hadramawt, whose daughter was given to the last Sultan as bride.

While political history markers were to become components of Hadiboh's identity under State incorporation, in its pre-State phase religious markers provided the distinguishing features. Hadiboh boasted four mosques within the small area it originally occupied. Their main purpose was as symbolic reminders to the majority of its residents of an alternative conception of God. Since for most people access to proper religious instructions was not available, they were left to find their own syncretic practice. A form of saint worship originating from the Hadramawt, seems to have been practiced in Hadiboh[17]. However, it was leavened with African expressiveness through the use of music, singing and dancing. This found expression at one sacralized site in Hadiboh named "*medawwar al-nakhala*" (the palm tree circle). The place is the location of a dry well in which a palm tree grew "miraculously" in spite of the lack of water. Rejuvenating powers were associated with the well and it became the locus of a major ritual, linked to the name of Sheikh Ibn Ali, and took place every year at the end of the monsoon season in October. It lasted for a few days, during which there was no work, as the Sultan decreed them as holidays. Food offerings were made and incense burned. People rubbed their bodies with the soil from the well and took some home as blessing. It was essentially a celebratory-prayer ritual practiced by agropastoralist and fishing communities on the northern coast of Soqotra asking for God's blessing so that the new season would bring good rains for their date groves, and that the sea would abound with fish[18].

It was this context characterized by the search for ecstatic spiritual release from hunger, an ethnically based occupational and residential divide within an ascriptive social hierarchy, and their corollary socio-economic inequities that the Socialist administration sought to unravel. It proceeded in a manner similar to that of the 1962 Republican Revolution in North Yemen *vis-à-vis* the Imamate's traditional stratification system. The Socialist imposed a nominal grid on this embryonic urban agglomeration, partly as a means of reorganizing this medieval village into an emerging town, and partly to erase its ethnic structuring, if not the memory of its legacy. This symbolized Hadiboh's – indeed, the island's – incorporation into the political history of both Yemeni states at the time, and the major markers of their nation-building itinerary. Simultaneously, it heralded the inclusion of Soqotra in the national history that served as the myth of origin of the newly incorporated community, as part of a common culture and shared history. The demarcation of Hadiboh

[17] This is the customary manner of symbolizing the intermediary status of sainthood achieved by a religious personality, who is called *walî* in Yemen but *sheikh* in Soqotra. There is a mausoleum (*ḍḥari* or *qabar* in Arabic) behind the oldest mosque in Hadiboh, Al Jama'a, which is dedicated to Sheikh Al Hashimi. There are two more of these mausoleums, but are abandoned, as they no longer serve their former purposes.

[18] Elders do not remember the name of this ritual, perhaps due to self-imposed amnesia, since this custom is now cast away into the dustbin of the period of ignorance (*Jâhiliya*). However, it is similar to the ritual called *fiyus li masa*. This is a prayer ritual, which involves some kind of sacrifice, a goat usually, or other offerings to God in order to bring about rain or some other livelihood enhancing blessings. It is still performed whenever there is a need for it, but is now referred to by its Arabic appellation *ṣalat al istisqâ* and is done without any sacrificial offering. The *medawwar al nakhala* ritual was discontinued during the Socialist period.

in the early 1980s into distinct neighborhoods was linked to political administration functions aimed at consolidating the sense of shared destiny, such as local council elections. The first census took place in 1973 as part of the preparation for the political management of the population. Hadiboh was, and still is, divided into neighborhoods identified by the dates of major historical events in both North and South Yemen (see Map). The market alley constituted the center of Hadiboh, and was used as the demarcating line that divided the town into the three government designated neighborhoods or *wahda sikeniya* which doubled as electoral wards. From that dividing line toward the sea to the north, and to the west of this line toward *sha'ab* Al Raḥaba is *ḥâra* 14 October, the anniversary of the revolution in the South in 1963. To the east, *ḥâra* 14 October ends at *jahy* Hadiboh where ḥâra 30 November starts, named after the date of departure of the last British soldiers from Yemeni soil in 1967. To the south of the market alley and all the way to the ring road, which constitutes the limit of the city, and bordered on the east by Jahy Hadiboh and on the west by the street next to the main hospital built in 1976, is *ḥâra* 26 September, named after the revolution in the North against the Imamate in 1962. Each *ḥâra* is represented by a Sheikh, as there are no longer any *muqaddam* in Hadiboh, although the position is still in use in most villages.

Most people, although aware of these official designations, do not always use them in referring to their areas of residence, except for official purposes, such as getting an identity card. With the passing of the present generation the official names will prevail. Instead, a local grid was used, which conveyed a different sense of belonging still rooted in local history. This local grid was constituted through a naming pattern used initially during the Sultanate that was maintained and extended to the new neighborhoods, however without the connotations of an ascriptive stratification system. Accordingly, in the old city as well as in its new satellite areas, either new *ḥafa* were created or old ones acquired new names. For example, *ḥafa* Shatifa to the west, which was unhabitated, became *ḥafa* Qadmu, as migrants from the village of Qadama in the west moved in. And *ḥafa* Nujed, became known as *ḥafa* Nasib. This naming process reflected the gradual accretion of Hadiboh according to the regional provenance of its new residents. As a result, the town was divided into a multiplicity of zones, organized around, and identified with, the regions or villages from which the residents originated. Roughly, the town could be divided into the four cardinal points of north, south, east and west, because the population in each of these parts reflects the geographical locations of the island from which they come. Moreover, within each of these sections of the town there seems to be a further sub-division into micro zones reflecting clan affiliation. This would seem to indicate the transformation of Hadiboh in its expanded version into a microcosm of the "atomization syndrome" that prevails throughout the island, as most villages tend to average a handful of houses of related families. However, this was merely the way the new internal migrants, who were attracted by the activities of the new government, sought to adapt through recreating a web of familiarity in the new environment. They brought along cultural habits specific to the milieu they left behind. Many of the residents of Hadiboh have maintained their links with their places of origin, and thus tend to consider it as a seasonal abode. During the monsoon season, which coincides with the summer as well as marks the end of the school year and the beginning of a four-month vacation period, parts of Hadiboh, especially its eastern part, are emptied of their residents. This seasonal desertion of Hadiboh is a variant of the transhumant movement of herds and people that is practiced in Soqotra. As everything else in Soqotra, this move has a name, *Haruf*, which refers to a

movement that entails going away and staying for a period of three or more months[19].

The fastest growing area during the Socialist period in the 1980s was Musaqibhen, to the east of wadi Hadiboh, which is the residence of internal migrants from the eastern region. It is a sprawling neighborhood, which is part of *ḥâra* 30 November, but not usually referred to as such by the residents. This neighborhood, or at least part of it, is regarded as the "red district" of Hadiboh. So called, it seems, merely because of some of its inhabitants' excessive display of *joie de vivre* through frequent "disco" nights animated with local drum music. In fact, they are merely continuing a tradition institutionalized under the Socialist administration, which established an alcoholic beverage store in the neighborhood to animate the celebration of the New Year (*Ras As Sana*), which lasted three days and was livened up by Western music. Today, the *Ras As Sana* is still celebrated, for one day only, by some people in Hadiboh but out of public view, as it is accompanied by drinking a locally brewed alcoholic beverage (*dibish*) that is the equivalent of beer. Musaqibhen is divided into two sections: Musaqibhen di Ala [ʻale] (upper) and Musaqibhen di Laha [leḥe] (lower). The lower section is also known as *ḥafa* Shuqhu, because many of its residents are from the village of Shiq (Sûq), the former capital of the island. Some of the residents are people of African descent, the rest of the residents are from the eastern region, in particular from Momi. It was from this group of migrants that the first batch of government employees was recruited thanks to their relatively higher literacy level, acquired through an early acquaintance with learning how to read the Qur'ân, than those from other regions of the island. People from other villages or areas of the east occupied the upper part of Musaqibhen. Further up from Musaqibhen di Ala, is an area surrounded by palm trees and called Basra, perhaps because its dates evoked the name of the city of Basra in Iraq, which was the source of the dates imported to Soqotra during the Sultanate. It is known as *ḥafa* Daʻarho, since its residents are from the central mountains region of the same name.

By the time the post-unification period dawned in the 1990s, the transformation of Hadiboh, initiated by the previous administration, had led to the sprouting of an embryonic infrastructure for a mid-size provincial town, and the establishment of the basic institutions (e.g., education, health, water, electricity) for the preparation of a national citizenry and, ultimately, of an administrative cadre able to manage the public services provided by a modern state. However, the emergent contours of a city, marked by a higher density of built structures and a bustle of people, did not take place until the mid-1990s with the launching of major infrastructural works, (e.g., airport, seaport, asphalted road network, expansion of electricity grid, etc.), and a construction boom of public buildings (especially of schools and clinics), and of privately funded mosques. This flurry of construction activities has reconfigured the geography of Hadiboh. There is a gradual displacement of the center of the town from the north east of *ḥâra* 14 October to the south toward the base of the Hajhir Mountains in *ḥâra* 26 September and toward the west at the entrance

[19] *Ḥaruf* is the verb form, and *ḥorf* is the noun and it refers to the transitionnal period between end of summer and begining of fall. The move for a shorter period is related to going to the date garden during the harvesting period, which is also during the month of July, is called *yaharuf*. These terms, however, seem to be corrupted borrowings from Arabic: In North Yemen, the term *kharîf* is used to refer to the temporary relocation of well to do families, say, from Sana'a to Wadi Dhahar where a house with a grape garden is rented for the summer. These movement patterns are offshoots of the practice of the seasonal transhumant movement of the Soqotri bedouin: from lower to higher grazing grounds (*merqiyoh*), and the reverse (*mezhyroh*).

of Hadiboh. This is due to the presence of an asphalted ring road around Hadiboh, which bypasses the town's interior and parallels an area called Sakasak that is sparsely inhabited. But the land is already demarcated, purchased by better off Soqotrans and mainlanders, who intend to build homes that will be showcases of a modern architecture as well as provide ideal sites for future business ventures. In addition, many government offices are moving into new buildings located at the entrance of the town, as if to part company with a rustic past and to symbolize the new façade of an emergent city.

From Autarkic Subsistence to International Ecotourism

Throughout the entire period of the Sultanate until its demise in the late 1960s, and under the vigilant gaze of British indirect rule, life for all islanders seems to have been, with few exceptions, agony in the face of the permanent threat of hunger. Food deficit was the defining feature of life on Soqotra. Indeed, hunger was the perennial companion of the islanders and its alleviation the all-consuming preoccupation of the population. Barter (*ish'irimun* in Soqotri, in Leslau 1938: 329, the term is *'aremoh*) was the predominant mode of exchange, and food was the currency of choice. The economy was a kind of semi-autarky imposed by nature, châracterized by limited internal as well as external trade of a small number of locally produced, or naturally available, goods. To this situation of intrinsic scarcity was added the seasonal trade embargo of the monsoon season, when maritime contact with the island was brought to a halt. It was during these austere times that Soqotrans developed a set of informal institutions, which constituted a web of domestic security for their mutual survival; they also honed their nature-using skills with unintended environmental conservation effects. Soqotrans, in effect, have constituted – and still do, although less intensely – a community of necessity, linked through a network of cooperative exchange, based on a system of coordinated reciprocity, in which Hadiboh residents played a pivotal role. It was a subsistence economy based on some form of reciprocal obligation, whether the transactions involved internal exchange or external trade, and in which Hadiboh served as an exchange platform between the hinterland and the coast, and a relay station between Soqotra and the outside world.

Internal exchange was based on the institution of *ma'ârif* (acquaintance), which entailed reciprocal exchange of necessities based on relations of mutual assistance and dependency that were set up between bedouins from the hinterland and residents from coastal villages. Any family in Hadiboh that had a meager surplus to exchange had a *ma'ârif* somewhere in the hinterland. However, depending on the social categories involved it became a patron-client relationship or was simply a twinning of livelihood resources for domestic security between the participants. It involved the sharing of a basket of goods that was more accessible to each one of the participants and that would complement their mutual needs. This could include any item that was edible or had some use in improving the daily existence of the parties. The main items shared by the bedouins were ghee (*ḥami*), milk (*shaf*) [tlof], occasionally a malr goat (*mi'shir)* or sheep, and honey. And coastal villagers would share dried fish (*maqdad*), dates (*timhir*), maize (*maqdereh*) – this last item was imported from East Africa, and was the prize for which all work activities, voluntary or forced, were undertaken – and sweet potatoes (*zifat*), among other vegetables, grown in home gardens (*maq'ah*). The latter were the women's contribution to the perennial struggle against hunger.

It was during the monsoon season, when fishing was not possible, and there were no ships coming to deliver food, that dates assumed a near providential status in the Soqotrans' fight against hunger. Indeed, in the local scale of value, dates had a symbolic value equal to oil, as a source of economic wealth and social status for those who own the trees, but for the rest they were an effective hunger suppressor. Harvest time (*qaṣi timhir*), which occurred during the monsoon season in July, usually a time of near starvation, was a major ritual – a festival of sharing – which involved the participation of hundreds of people who migrated from all over the island to Hadiboh, as the main date plantations were in its vicinity: Ma'anefo, Irhino, Shiq, Sirihin, and Hadiboh itself. The beginning of the harvest was formally announced in the mosques at Friday prayers. This harvesting ritual fulfilled a number of purposes, but the most important was as a regulated food distribution system as well as symbolic wealth redistribution strategy, the Sultanate and its entourage were fulfilling their alms-giving obligation (*zakat*) *vis-à-vis* the destitute majority. The harvesting process was constrained by a set of rules that ensured that dates were available to as many people as possible, and which included a form of reciprocal exchange: labor for part of the harvest.

External trade was also a barter system, but was referred to in Arabic as *tijara al muqâidha* (commerce of swapping), as it entailed contractual relations and was not based on the affective relations of the *ma'ârif* system. It used a system of value equivalence between the different kinds of goods. The main standard bearer of value was *maqdereh*, exchanged in units of measurement (e.g., *raṭal*). There were just a few individuals, who operated from stores within their residence in Hadiboh, and were from the following places: Hadramawt, Aden, Oman, Emirates, and three Soqotrans from Qâḍîb and Di Hamḍ. Together they made up the business community in Hadiboh, as they constituted the main, if not sole, middlemen between Soqotran goods and external markets. They collected the local goods from the bedouins and coastal residents and sold them abroad and purchased in return the goods they requested. Money was not used in these transactions, except for pearls. The main destinations for Soqotra's exports and imports were the following: Muscat (Oman), which received pearls, oysters, Dragon Blood tree resin, firewood, ghee, and aloes, and sent back dates and rice. Zanzibar (Africa), received salted fish, and ghee, and sent maqdere, kerosene and coconut oil. Aden (Yemen), received Soqotri rugs (*ḥaḍhil*), and oysters, and returned rice, sugar, flour, and clothes. Finally, Bombay (India), received Soqotri rugs, ghee, and Dragon Blood tree resin, and sent back rice, sugar, and cloth. During the 1950s, dhows owned locally by the Sultan and private individuals, began to collect local products for sale directly to Mombassa, East Africa mostly, and to the Gulf. A customs house was opened at Port Da'an in *ḥafa* Nujed to generate whatever revenue the Sultanate could.

This barter economy, especially in its external trade dimension, was partly disrupted by the Socialist administration. The latter's economic policy was based on the provision of the population's basic needs through subsidized consumption using different types of goods from different commercial partners. This led unwittingly to an economic destructuration, in that there was an internal disarticulation of the local economy, and its re-articulation with new State-led economy. Consequently, an almost complete reorientation of local production and imports took place, which led to the gradual abandonment of ghee production for export and the discontinuation of economic transactions with the former trading partners of the Sultanate, especially East Africa. One of the changes, which

had the most widespread impact, was the introduction of new consumer goods at subsidized prices[20]. In the past, the most basic food items (e.g., sugar, rice, flour, tea etc) and consumer goods (e.g., tea cup, water jug, plates etc) were only available, if at all, to the few, and unknown to the vast majority of the islanders. People's diet, which previously consisted of natural milk and ghee, maqdere, meat (occasionally), and dates, changed almost overnight to canned milk, rice, flour, synthetic oil, and tea. The introduction of these goods led to a relative neglect of the animals, as the bedouin's dependence on the animals' product for their sustenance lessened. This resulted in enhanced dependency on the State. The subsistence economy was a belly-driven one, as there was a symbiotic linkage between production and consumption. Once consumption habits changed the production process changed as well. While this economic policy was perhaps necessary in the short term given the extreme state of deprivation that was experienced throughout the period of the Sultanate, the long-term impact has been the weaning of Soqotrans away from primary dependency on their herds and the subsequent abandonment of their rigorous animal husbandry system (e.g., regulated breeding system, consistent use of animal pens, more strategic use of grazing areas etc,) as well as the interruption of the social reproduction of dedicated pastoralists. The transformation of fishing from subsistence to an economic exchange activity, led to the abandonment of the cultural disdain for, and social taboo on, fishing by pastoralists. Socialist-induced *ḥaḍâra* had breached the dike of *badâwa*; although it has not led to a deluge out of it, the genie was out of the bottle.

Further cracks were to be opened up in this dike during the 1990s with the economic strategy of government sponsored growth through the creation of official posts, especially in the expansion of the police force, which attracted primary school leavers in the hinterland escaping the arduous life of a bedouin, and the muwalladin in the coastal areas seeking an additional, if not a more regular, source of income to seasonal fishing; and the expanded recruitment of office clerks from secondary school graduates. The government posts created a class of salaried clerks with enhanced capacity as well as desire to consume. Also, the lifting of economic restrictions imposed by the previous administration enabled the starting up of private sector activities. The latter were to be intensified when the major infrastructure development activities were launched in the mid-1990s. Moreover, the Socialist administration's tight regulation, if not monopoly, over economic activity was brought to an end by the liberal tendencies of the post-unity government. The direct and indirect pull-effects of all aspects of Hadiboh's economy on the rest of the island, were significant and included the following: (a) The creation of a permanent class of civil servants (e.g., teachers, health assistants, police, administrators, office clerks, etc) with the bedouins as an occasional proletariat, if not potentially a permanent one, on the prowl. (b) The generation of new opportunities for locals to acquire new skills or modernized old ones (e.g., electrician, masonry, car mechanics, etc). (c) The establishment of new opportunities for Soqotran businessmen as contractors or sub-contractors in construction works, and the spawning of new service providers: water sellers, general transport, taxi service (between Hadiboh and airport as well as to the villages bordering the asphalted road

[20] Since then, dates have gradually lost their providential value, and became a mere accompaniment to the religious rituals of Ramadan. Also, the *ma'ârif* system gradually declined in importance as a means of exchange of essential food items, and is now merely an exchange of hospitality and the occasional animal gift when the bedouin visits the town.

toward the west), restaurants, hotels, ecotourism association (with website), women NGO-run souvenirs shop. (d) The generalized increase in consumption from he basic food items to non-essential ones (e.g., qat), but mostly among the urban salaried class thus far.

Participation in the cash economy is gradually becoming a necessity, and heralds the generalized substitution of affective communal relations by contractual individualized ones. This is demonstrated by the gradual shift from communal self-help symbolized in the gyrif [jîrif] to familial entre-aide enshrined in the *nutum*[21]. This imperative has set inmotion the rise of a peculiar cultural-economic category namely the "transitional bedouin": He is drawn by the pull of the town into becoming an itinerant odd-jobber, and driven by the push of an increasingly uneconomic pastoralist livelihood due to the vagaries of the environment. Yet the bedouin is unable to abandon one for the other, as both occupations are subject to seasonal variability or economic contingencies. The resolution of this straddling exercise with its disabling sense of economic insecurity is a challenge for the evolving economy of Soqotra. Finally, the preparation of the island as an ecotouristic destination was launched, partly as a means of spreading economic benefits beyond Hadiboh. In this context, bedouins are being trained as ecotourist guides and are being induced to develop a self-conscious conservationist ethos in order to play a more effective role as custodians of the island's biodiversity on behalf of the international community. Moreover, this has led to the reconfiguration of the island's landscape into delimited natural biotic zones as protected areas, and their integration within an environmental regulatory regime. However, Hadiboh has been largely exempted from this regime so that it can develop into a modern gateway while the rest of the island is maintained as a bucolic abode.

[21]The *gyrif* is a village-wide form of self-help. In practice it refers to a form of mutual aid undertaken by communities to assist one member when a task necessitates the collective input of all members. This form of activity approximates the practice of *ta'âwun* (Arabic for cooperation) on mainland Yemen. The *gyrif* displays as well as reinforces the Soqotran communal ethos. Its practice, which used to be widespread on the island, is now being gradually restricted to close-knit communities or among members of extended families, as people now prefer to be paid in cash given the increasing monetization of the economy. The *nutum* is a Soqotri term that refers to any act of sharing, whether it is food, animals or land between people withinspatial proximity to each other. In practice, it seems to be mostly an inter-household form of sharing in which primary kinship plays a determining role.

Prospects

Hadiboh has been the theater for a variety of political experiments, which constituted the cardinal markers in Soqotra's historical evolution. Indeed, it was an evolution that seems to have followed the circuitous path of a polity à la dérive: first, as a dependent pre-state formation annexed to a mainland Sultanate in the 15th century. This was followed by a brief encounter with a brutal Portuguese attempt at colonization and religious conversion in the 16th century (Birch 1875: 53-54; see Elie forthcoming for details). It became a Sultanate with an annexed territory of its own in the 19th century; while it was simultaneously a neglected protectorate of British imperial power until the 1960s. Subsequently, it was emancipated into a provincial ward of a new state engaged in a Socialist political experiment for two decades from 1967. And finally, as an integrating community within a recently constituted unitary state since 1990, which entails the search for an appropriate mode of political incorporation.

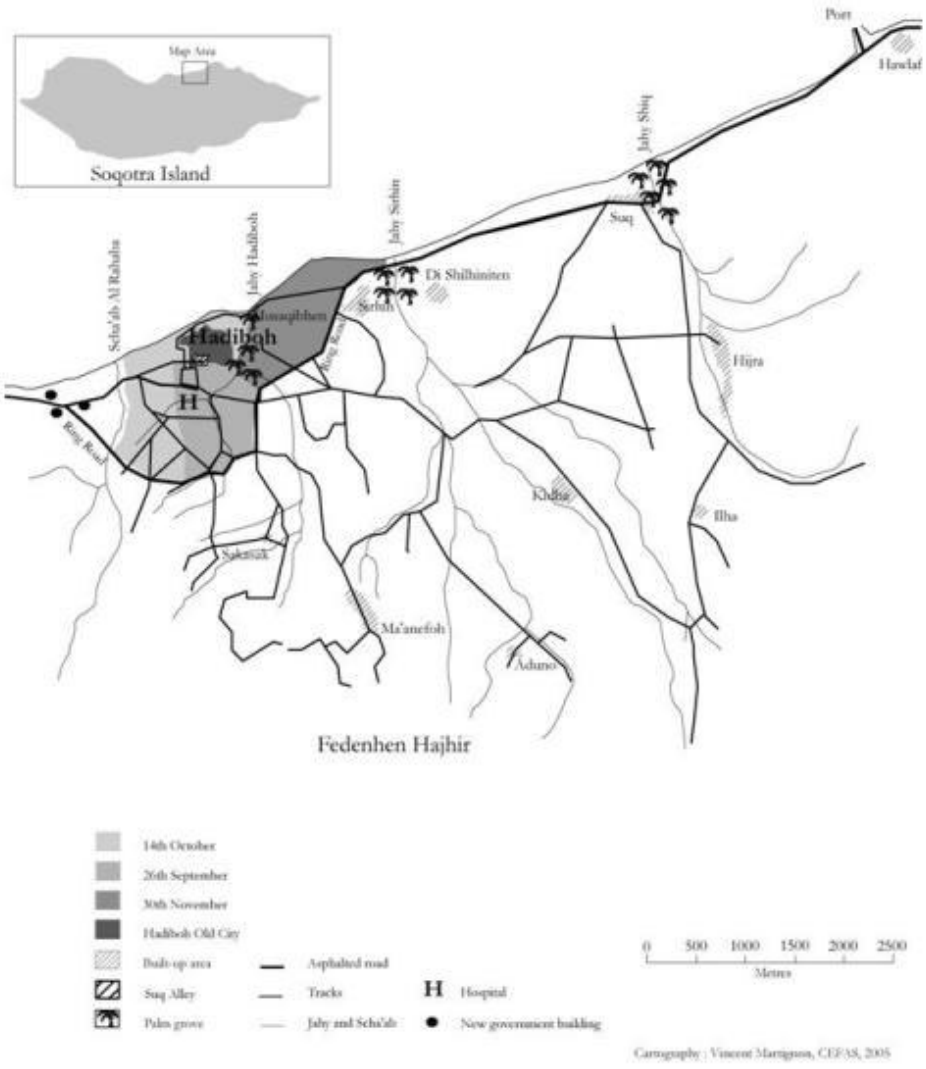
Throughout this historical trajectory, Hadiboh had maintained a complementary relationship with the rest of the island. Under the Sultanate, it was a medieval village with a few built structures inhabited by a privileged few, surrounded by hovels. Since then, a social engineering ethos, introduced by the Socialist administration in the 1970s and followed by succeeding regimes, has informed the relationship between Hadiboh and the rest of the island, and sought to regulate, and slightly differentiate the pace of their political and economic development. This was partly as a corrective measure to the relative neglect of the island and its people by local and foreign rulers prior to independence. The dilemma throughout Soqotra's recent history was, and remains, how to enable Soqotrans to achieve some degree of economic self-reliance, so that the island does not remain a dependent ward with its economy perennially in need of financial infusion from State coffers or in expectation of the episodic generosity of international donors.

The most recent brainchild of that social engineering ethos is the proposed transformation of the island into an international biodiversity reserve, a scientific research station, an ecotouristic destination, and a model of sustainable development that straddles tradition and modernity in a symbiotic embrace. The challenge that will have to be answered in the affirmative, is captured in the following question: Can Soqotra be feasibly incorporated into the modern world through an environmental management regime driven by an ecological conservationist ethos inspired primarily by existing indigenous practices, and that is articulated within a sustainable development programme, which seeks only to stabilize and marginally improve local "good practices" without changes in the prevailing life ways of Soqotrans? The fundamental gamble of this proposed vision of Soqotra's future seems to be based on the assumption that Hadiboh's modernization, while the rest of the island is maintained in its current state with marginal improvements, will not induce the bedouins to expect and demand the same kind of transformation of their territorial domain. The ultimate viability of the above vision seems predicated on the hope that the phenomenon of rising expectations among Soqotrans induced by intro- duction of external stimuli will not have a destabilizing influence. In effect, the sensibility that seems to underpin this vision is captured in the observation made by two intrepid antiquarians, during their 19th Century trek around the island, regarding the potential threat of

modernity to Soqotrans: "Money is scarce on the island, and so are jealousies, and probably the bedouin of Sokotra will remain in their bucolic innocence to the end of time, if no root of bitterness in the shape of modern civilisation is planted amongst them" (Bent 1900: 393). What is perhaps insufficiently appreciated, is that Soqotrans in their overwhelming majority have already made the virtual exit, if not yet crossed the actual threshold, out of the 19th century. As Marshall Sahlins (1999: viii) has observed, "cultural change is externally induced but internally orchestrated," thus a certain adjustment to this internationally sponsored and government approved vision should be expected. The future of Hadiboh and of Soqotra as a whole will necessarily be an encounter with the unexpected, if not the unintended.

Note on transliteration:

The Soqotri terms used in the article are based on the actual language used by Hadiboh residents today. Therefore, the transliteration tends to reflect Arabic phonetics. In some instances the International Phonetic Alphabet is used in brackets to attempt to approximate Soqotri phonetics. This remains unsatisfactory due to the absence of a formal, coordinated transliteration convention among the community of linguists of the Soqotri language. Moreover, the informal, almost idiosyncratic, systems used do not seem to take into account the dialectal variants in the different regions of the island. Leslau's **Lexique** (1938) remains the standard reference, and occasional references are made to it in the text. However, it is not of much help as a guide to the current use of Soqotri by Soqotrans. In that regard it is in dire need of revision and expansion. There are projects underway to prepare Soqotri lexicons, but they seem uncoordinated, and might perpetuate the current cacophony. This already confounding state of affairs is being exacerbated by the current linguistic situation in Soqotra, which is characterized by an asymmetric trilangualism (English, Arabic, and Soqotri) that is generating a process of uneven linguistic acculturation.


Hadiboh and Satellite Villages
Map Area
Soqotra Island
Port
Hawlaf
Suq
Di Shilhinitem
Hadiboh
H
Hijra
Khdisr
Ilha
Ma'anefoh
Aduno
Fedenhen Hajhir
14th October
26th September
30th November
Hadiboh Old City
Built-up area
Suq Alley
Palm grove
Asphalted road
Tracks
Jahy and Scha'ib
Hospital
New government building
0 500 1000 1500 2000 2500
Metres
Cartography : Vincent Martignoni, CEFAS, 2005

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