

The War in Yemen: Media Narratives and Perspectives

1 Introduction

“World’s worst humanitarian crisis” (United Nations), yet a “forgotten war” (*Amnesty International*)—these are the two most dominant labels international media outlets repeatedly use when framing the current war in Yemen. Together they form a worrisome paradox: Despite suffering from year-long chain of violence, famine, scarcing resources and spreading diseases, and a merciless Saudi Arabian bombing campaign, Yemen has not found its way into global consciousness.

The label “forgotten war”, as used by the *BBC*, *CNN*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *Slate* and even *Vice* magazine among others, suggests a severe deficit in the coverage of the Yemen war, namely a lack of media attention. The label can be traced back to a 2015 *Amnesty International* report, which condemns the numerous war crimes conducted by “all sides” of the conflict: “On the one side,” according to Amnesty, are the Houthi rebels, allied with supporters of Yemen’s former President Ali Abdullah Saleh. “On the other side”, *Amnesty* states, are “anti-Huthi forces”, cooperating with the current President Abd Rabbu Mansour Hadi and an international military coalition led by Saudi Arabia. The civilians, *Amnesty* concludes, are trapped in the middle.¹ When regarded in the context of the wider region, news outlets often phrase the conflict in an equally binary manner, namely as a ‘Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia versus the Shia Iran proxy war.’²

But the war in Yemen is much more than that. International perspectives do not “recognize the complexity of factors driving and sustaining hostilities, or the multiplicity of combatants and interests involved,” Peter Salisbury, senior research fellow with the UK-based Chatham House’s Middle East and North Africa Programme, states in his December 2017 report on Yemen. In addition, Salisbury argues, Yemen might have rightfully been declared a ‘chaos state’, however the country inherits an ‘internal logic’, that policy-makers, so far, have failed to take into account.³ The unsuccessful UN-brokered peace talks for instance did not include

¹ Amnesty International 2015.

² Sharma 2017.

³ Salisbury 2017: 2-3.

several important tribal and military allies, that govern or control different parts of the country. This suggests a second deficit in the international perspective on Yemen: a lack of understanding the intricacies that constitute the current-day crisis.

Indeed, the conflict is rather a series of ‘small wars’ as much as Yemen itself today rather resembles a region of mini states. The radical Islamic Houthi movement together with Saleh loyalists has succeeded to seize crucial territory in the west, but they face different military or civilian opponents in each region of the country. After their 2014 *coup d'état* in the capital of Sana'a and Saudi Arabia's decision to move in, a complex network of local and international, state and non-state actors has emerged: The Saudi-led bombing campaign against all Houthi-aligned forces that began on 26th March 2015 is supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, Egypt and Pakistan, while the U.S. participates with intelligence, targeting and logistics. Some of these states, for example the UAE, have precise strategies of which groups and areas to support on the ground, while some local militias have also formed impromptu alliances.⁴ More than 10,000 people have been killed since the war began. But the violence has also intensified Yemen's structural resources problem: Eight million people (a third of the population) are currently facing famine, and roughly a million suffers under the largest cholera outbreak ever recorded.⁵

This paper aims to examine the two suggested media deficits in the coverage of the Yemen crisis: the West's lack of attention to the conflict and the lack of understanding the war's complexities. In doing so, I will first discuss the war and its fragmented yet historically conditioned character before gathering possible reasons that could have led to scarce media coverage. Eventually, I will highlight specific misunderstandings of the conflict and how these could be countered by a Peace Journalism oriented approach.

⁴ Salisbury 2017: 10.

⁵ Fahim 2018.

2 New Wars, Chaos State: The Yemen War in Context

2.1 Pre-War developments and the roots of the South/North divide

Yemen is the second largest country in the Arabian Peninsula but also the poorest of the Middle East. The country's 28 million inhabitants are split into 56 per cent Sunni Muslims (mainly in the South) and 44 per cent Shia/Zaidi Muslims (mainly in the North). According to estimations, around two third's of the country's population is under 24 years old. Yemen is mainly a tribal country, with 400 Zaidi tribes living in the northern mountains. Additionally, Yemen has always been a crucial destination for refugees from Somalia, Iran, Ethiopia and Syria.

Multiple wars and regional tensions have led up to Yemen's current situation. Since British colonialists (who had a strategic interest in the port of Aden) and Ottoman rulers both claimed territory in the 18th century, a division between North and South has persisted: A 1905 border agreement between the two foreign nations—negotiated without the Yemeni population—is largely reflected by today's frontlines.⁶ In 1962, The North was shaken by a civil war between royalists (backed by Saudi Arabia) and eventually victorious revolutionary republicans (backed by Egypt), which led to the formation of the Yemen Arab Republic. Saudi Arabia did not recognize the Republic until 1970 and hereafter opposed any form of political or social reform through financing tribal elites.

Meanwhile, South Yemen remained a British protectorate until the 1967 formation of an independent socialist state. In 1978, Ali Abdallah Saleh became president of the northern Republic. Eight years later, an deadly civil war raged the South, in which the Socialist Party dispersed. That paved the way for the unification in 1990, after which Saleh remained president. Yemen supported Iraq in the 1990 Kuwait invasion, which outraged Saudi Arabia and lead to the expulsion of 800,000 Yemenis living in the Kingdom. Tensions between South and North remained, ultimately leading to another civil war in 1994.

⁶ Watson 2017.

2000 marks the beginning of an awareness of Sunni Islamist Al-Qaeda movements, after they had attacked a U.S. naval vessel near Aden. In the aftermath of the 11th September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington, Saleh officially assured US president George W. Bush to support his ‘War on Terror’, although he is said to have pocketed 60 billion US Dollar of the funding he received.⁷ In 2009, the radical Islamists officially formed Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), including Saudi Arabian nationals who had returned from the US Guantanamo Bay prison. Ever since, the group is a target of the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) drone program.

In 2012, an uprising often referred to as the ‘Yemeni Arab Spring’ forced Saleh to resign, lifting vice president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi into office. By that time, the Zaidi Shia sect Houthis (who’s leader Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi had called for a rebellion already in 2004) had taken control over much of the northern highlands supported by Saleh loyalists. This enabled a relatively smooth takeover of Sana’a by the Houthis in 2014, as Saleh’s loyalists were still occupying much of the previously weakened governmental institutions.⁸ Hadi first fled to Aden and eventually to Saudi Arabia, when the Houthis stormed Aden and seized the airport. December 2017 marks a peak of the violence, including the Houthi’s killing of Saleh after he had made diplomatic promises to end the conflict.

2.1 Dissolved State and Fractured Leadership Structures

The complexity of the war in Yemen might be best understood through the lens of Mary Kaldor’s crucial analysis of ‘new wars.’ According to Kaldor, today’s war’s aren’t fought by unilateral, interstate aggression, neither are they fuelled by territorial interests only. Rather, they assemble asymmetric and hybrid forms of transnational warfare, where state and non-state, internal and external, aggression and repression, or even local and global has become difficult to distinguish. This type of conflict arises when the traditional autonomy of the state has been ‘eroded’, both from above by the transnationalization of military forces (that is, cross-border cooperation of armies and militias); and from below, by the privatization of relevant war components (that is, criminal networks, illegal arms trade). Once the state economy is weakened by, for instance, corruption or inefficiency, and cannot uphold a traditional and loyal army,

⁷ Watson 2017.

⁸ Watson 2017.

other violent and 'private' actors such as paramilitary groups can spread further. This, in turn, severely damages the state's legitimacy.⁹

Yemen is a classic example for this. There is currently no central governmental structure and rather autonomous regions. President Hadi might be recognized by the international community (after a UN Security Council Resolution in 2015), but has no 'earned' legitimacy on the ground, nor is he in control of the country's administrative center.¹⁰ Instead, the 2000s enabled "the rise to national prominence (...) of formerly peripheral and marginalized identity and territorial groups, including the Houthis, southern secessionists and tribal groups."¹¹ Due to a flourishing smuggling industry these groups can maintain large and sophisticated weapon arsenals.¹² In fact, war goods are traded so widely that prices have sunken.¹³ Additionally, the Houthis are believed to have their hands on 'leftover' Russian ballistic missiles North and South were firing at each other during the 1990's civil war.¹⁴ Therefore the war was not eventually 'internationalized' with the beginning of the Saudi-led offensive, but external military powers, proxy conflicts, trade deals as well as migration movements have long before set the ground for the cross-border fragmentation of today's war.

Most importantly: Due to the lack of a unified legal system, local leaders, tribes and military groups have taken over the responsibility of state-like services. Many Yemenis flee to any part of the country where they expect stability and safety. This also entails people moving to al-Qaeda-controlled territory, because it might be more stable at times.¹⁵ Not rarely, some of these civilians join forces with whoever is fighting their enemy. But while this makes the war look rather 'chaotic', these various regions contain their very own "*internal logic, economies and political ecosystems.*"¹⁶

⁹ Kaldor 2012: 2-6.

¹⁰ Salisbury 2017: 2.

¹¹ Salisbury 2017: 8.

¹² Watson 2017.

¹³ Salisbury 2017: 2.

¹⁴ Watson 2017.

¹⁵ Watson 2017.

¹⁶ Salisbury 2017: 2.

3 Yemen and the Media: Why was the war “forgotten”?

There is very little empirical or academic research to date that investigates to what extent the Yemen crisis has received less media or political attention compared to other conflicts. But a few fragmented tendencies can be traced: The media watch group Fair has analyzed the coverage of US channel *MSNBC* and found that the cable network “did not run a single segment devoted specifically to Yemen in the second half of 2017.”¹⁷ In contrast, *MSNBC* ran nearly 5,000 per cent more segments that mentioned Russia throughout this time. Over the span of the whole year, the network aired one report on a deadly Saudi-led airstrike which killed thousands of civilians. Meanwhile, the outbreak of the cholera epidemic had not been mentioned once. What they did include was a statement of a former US diplomat claiming “Iran is a violent troublemaker in the Middle East.”¹⁸ As a comparison, a look into the online archives of the *New York Times* reveals that between February and December 2017 the *Times* published around 50 articles (around five a month) that focus either on the US drone program and associated killings, arms deals between the Trump administration and Saudi Arabia, or on the health crisis.¹⁹ Outside of the realm of international English-language broadcasters Russia’s *RT*, Iran’s *Press TV* and Qatar’s *Al-Jazeera* have reported on the crisis, which, considering their geopolitical involvement, seems reasonable. It should be noted here that *Al-Jazeera* has reported extensively and on a daily basis even though Qatar has participated in the Saudi-coalition with 1,000 troops and Yemeni military allies have forced *AJ*’s bureau in Taiz to close.²⁰

In the following, I want to gather factors that have, or might have, contributed to the “western media’s cold shoulder”²¹ towards the Yemen crisis and therefore the continuous reference of a ‘forgotten war.’

3.1 Lack of Western involvement?

Indian journalist and scholar Prasun Sonwalkar suggests that “news superpowers based in the West” have a “distinct sense” for some “wars being ‘our’ wars, because ‘we’ are interested or involved, while ‘their’ wars—the numerous wars and conflicts

¹⁷ Norton 2018.

¹⁸ Norton 2018.

¹⁹ New York Times online archives.

²⁰ Rivera 2015.

²¹ Rivera 2015.

that are taking place right at this moment (...) do not really matter much.”²² What follows is that “the power geometry of international relations ensures that conflict involving major actors such as the United States, western Europe states, or NATO are extensively covered” in the West. The case of Yemen shows that this equation cannot be fully applied, yet offers some ground for reflection. The ‘superpower’ USA is certainly involved in the conflict, both by supplying arms to Saudi Arabia and assisting the coalition with intelligence while simultaneously piloting their very own CIA drone program. However, this type of involvement follows rather the strategies of ‘new wars’, and does not entail the risk of U.S. casualties, which would change the sense of involvement instantly. In a way, the U.S. involvement in the war is invisible for the wider public—for instance, a journalist cannot be embedded into a covert, remotely-controlled drone strike mission in Yemen. From a national focus, the U.S. press can focus on the deals with Saudi Arabia, which for instance the *New York Times* has done.

However, “conflicts gain sustained American attention only when they provide a compelling story line that appeals to both the public and political actors”, *Times* journalist Amanda Taub has analyzed regarding the minimal Yemen coverage. “That often requires some combination of immediate relevance to American interests, resonance with American political debates or cultural issues, and perhaps most of all, an emotionally engaging frame of clearly identifiable good guys and bad guys.”²³ The Yemen war in that sense does not provide a ‘good-versus-evil story’, nor is there a ‘camera-ready’ enemy the American public can rage against. And with Saudi Arabia as their closest partner, the U.S. has little interest to have their war crimes spread.

A possibly even more drastic case to be studied is the UK. A March 2017 poll by *The Independent* has found that more than half of the British public are unaware of the ongoing war at a time where already 10,000 people had been killed.²⁴ Meanwhile, the government in London had approved a 3,7 billion Euro arms deal with Saudi

²² Sonwalker 2004: 206.

²³ Taub 2016.

²⁴ Dearden 2017.

Arabia.²⁵ Considering Britain's colonial impact on the initial division of Yemen, the country has been accused of having "the most gross double-standard."²⁶

3.2 Lack of geopolitical relevance?

Yemen's geographical position and natural resources are not without relevance. A central point is the port of Aden, the reason why the Britain empire initially occupied Yemen. Since the opening of the Suez canal, Aden has been a gateway to the Red and Arabian Sea, which made it the second-busiest port after New York during the World War II. But now that the country's resources are fading, it's relevance could shrink in the eyes of Western partners. While Javier Delgado Rivera has argued that Yemen might play a potential role as a supplier of oil to the West,²⁷ an earlier NATO-report states that though oil still represents 75 per cent of Yemen's income, their resources are expected to run out in the next five to ten years.²⁸ Additionally, the country is the most water-scarce country in the Arab world—due to uncontrolled extractions and weak legal regulations the groundwater table dropped from 30 meters to 1,200 meters in roughly the last 40 years. Rather than a relevant business partner to the West, these conditions make Yemen first and foremost a problematic case for its immediate neighbors. The diminishing water resources could force half of the population to seek asylum in Saudi Arabia.²⁹ Yet, that only adds up to the amount of people already displaced through war and hunger into neighboring nations such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia, Oman and especially volatile Somalia (Yemen had traditionally been a country of refuge for many Somalis, but according to UNHRC, some 30,600 Somali refugees in Yemen have already returned home due to the equally hopeless situation)³⁰.

The dynamics of previous, current and future displacement shows one of the geopolitical characteristics potentially influencing the alleged lack of attention in the West: "There are no 'waves' of Yemeni refugees crossing the Mediterranean because it's too far," Barah Shiban, a UK-based Yemeni human rights activist has told

²⁵ Sharma 2017.

²⁶ Sharma 2017.

²⁷ Rivera 2015.

²⁸ Hughes 2010.

²⁹ Hughes 2010.

³⁰ UNHCR 2017.

Deutsche Welle.³¹ When compared to the war in Syria—which has received massive media attention—more of these analogies surface. The discourses emerged in connection to the Syrian war were heavily influenced by the ‘wave’ of refugees, but also their key reason to leave the country: the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). ISIL did not only proactively prosecute Syrian civilians and successfully propagated their bloody methods of doing so, but the Islamists addressed the West openly with the intention to launch as many terrorist attacks as possible. The spreading of ISIL therefore forms a much more direct threat in the Western perspective than AQAP in Yemen does. The group is ‘busy’ with attacking government institutions inside the country.³² Additionally, they intend to recruit Yemeni citizen rather than executing them.³³

3.3 Lack of journalistic resources?

Reporting on Yemen is considerably difficult both for local and international journalists. Yemen ranks 166th in the *Reporters Without Borders* (RWB) Press Freedom Index, entitled as a “disastrous situation for journalists.”³⁴ Numbers vary, but according to *RWB* 15 journalists and media workers are currently kept in hostage by the Houthis. The *Committee to Protect Journalists* (CPJ) states 18 have been killed in the conflict, two of those were targeted for murder.³⁵ The Yemeni Journalist Syndicate lists more than 100 press violations during the first six months of 2016, including 24 abductions and disappearances.³⁶ Many local journalists are said to have fled the country, while some continue to report from their new homes.³⁷ International journalists face equal challenges.

On the one hand, land routes are either nonexistent or severely destroyed. This to a large extent is a result of the Saudi-bombing, whose strikes have hit water distribution centers and critical infrastructure more than 100 times—a third of their bombing ends on non-military targets. Other roads are often too dangerous due to armed groups on the ground. To access the country, journalists would need permission from the Saudis

³¹ Sharma 2017.

³² Sharma 2017.

³³ Al-Dawsari 2018.

³⁴ Reporters Without Borders 2018.

³⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists 2018.

³⁶ Sharma 2017.

³⁷ See for instance the work of Iona Craig, Afrah Nasser, Nadwa Al-Dwasari and others.

or the Houthis, which, according a report by crisis reporting group *IRIN* has gotten more difficult: the nominal government of Yemen and its Saudi-led backers have “moved to prevent journalists and human rights workers from travelling on UN chartered flights to the capital”, they have stated.³⁸ Since most of commercial airlines were suspended (only a Saudi Arabian company operates two flights a week), the UN had become journalists and investigators “only path” into the rather populated parts of Yemen.³⁹ The only option left, in that case, would be crossing the border over Oman with the help of a fixer—a rather dangerous venture. But it should also be noted, that Iraq and Syria still rank above Yemen as the world’s most dangerous places for journalists, and both conflict situations there have been extensively covered.⁴⁰

Following the Houthi-takeover of Sana’a in February 2015 many nations have suspended the services of their embassies, among them France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Japan and Egypt.⁴¹ This also means that the only official voices currently reporting from the critical spots are humanitarian aid groups in emergency facilities, such as improvised cholera treatment stations. “We absolutely need more press coverage,” Oxfam’s humanitarian coordinator in Yemen, Arvind Kumar, told *IRIN*. “I’m not sure if any Western journalists have visited the hardest hit areas.”

4 A new approach is needed: policy recommendations through the lens of Peace Journalism

Both chapter 2 and 3 have assembled various reasons for why the conflict in Yemen is difficult to approach as a journalist. These obstacles must be acknowledged and can to some extent not be overcome by even the most ambitious reporter. However, the crisis in Yemen has also produced a set of very grounded, in-depth expert analysis, like, for example, the recent publications by Peter Salisbury or Yemeni researcher Nadwa Al-Dawsari. When studied through the lens of a theoretical concept such as Peace Journalism, their conclusions and recommendations to policy-makers could function as a valuable tool for journalists as well—and *vice-versa*, an innovative

³⁸ IRIN 2017.

³⁹ IRIN 2017.

⁴⁰ Sharma 2017.

⁴¹ See individual statements of the embassies.

reporting could contribute to a more grounded understanding among the western public.

Repeatedly labeling a country's situation as "forgotten" is by no means a productive approach. There are options on the table for how to change that, and these align with the Peace Journalism thinking model: Explore the conflict formation and make less obvious or historically rooted sub currents transparent, give voice to all parties *and* the people, and highlight structures that are or could be contributing to peaceful solutions and long-term stability.⁴²

4.1 Reporting beyond the chaos state: Yemen's internal logic and international accountability

Peter Salisbury argues that, "even in the midst of the messiest conflict, places such as Yemen contain improvised or partially informal systems of government, trade and politics." As shown before, Yemen's functional central government has long been replaced by multilayered networks of armed groups and local leaders. While some of these not necessarily reflect a democratic and trustworthy system of governance Western policy-makers might wish for, they must recognize that a chaos state like Yemen is by no means a "vacuum of structure waiting for the right leader to restore order."⁴³ This is why traditional peace building concepts that aim for a "Westphalian model of 'statehood'"⁴⁴ have proven inadequate and unsuccessful, not only in the case of Yemen. These concepts were developed around binary models of state-building, which due to the vast set of on-the-ground-actors proofs insufficient. The example of the failed UN-negotiations illustrate this: The UN envoy Ould Cheikh Ahmed was internally criticized for having spent only two weeks in Sana'a since the war broke out, instead spend a considerable time in Riyadh negotiating with the Gulf states and the Hadi government.⁴⁵ Hence he was incapable to develop a concept that is based on a more grounded, flexible or local understanding. Salisbury recommends paying particular attention to these subnational and local conflict dynamic, "by engaging with key military and political leaders from each governorate", which

⁴² Galtung 2006: 1.

⁴³ Salisbury 2017: 44.

⁴⁴ Salisbury 2017: 46.

⁴⁵ Note: It must be admitted that Saudi Arabia is a key actor and it is unclear whether crown prince Salman bin Abdulaziz will accept a deal that removes president Hadi and gives political power to the Houthis, as his goal is to push back the Houthis entirely.

includes for instance the separatist tribal south or the Hadi-independently functioning regions of Hadramawt and Al Mahra, because it is those leaders which have earned legitimacy on the ground.

Peace journalists, in that sense, should shed light on these particular, improvised microcosms: Who is regulating life during the conflict? How are these local systems structured so that citizens can purchase basic goods? Who has earned credibility among the Yemeni public and for which reasons? In what way do local leaders qualify as important actors for a peaceful future? This also calls for alternative ways of journalistic formats, for example interactive maps, that visualize the network of various actors and third-party interests. Not only local structures could be explored through this approach, but also the decentralized, transnationalized and interconnected warfare system that enables this conflict. This must include countries beyond the ‘usual suspects’ Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, the US or the UK and France, for instance countries where arms are smuggled through. As *Times*-journalist Amanda Taub has rightfully pointed out, there needs to be a common feeling of being involved or responsible for a conflict, in order to grasp attention. Arms deals that “directly or indirectly prolong the war by sponsoring military actors,”⁴⁶ belong to these areas, where shared responsibility could be highlighted. While an autocratic regime like Saudi Arabia is hard to influence through public pressure, citizens of Western democracies can still vote for politicians who oppose these cooperation’s. It is the media’s responsibility to educate and promote their legal maturity to do so.

4.2 Spotting chance for peace: Yemen’s tribes and resolution perspectives

In regards of the role of AQAP and the spread of radical Islamist ideologies in Yemen, Javier Delgado Rivera has speculated that “the bloody chaos engulfing the country and the increasing grievances unleashed by the Arab invasion guarantee sectarian and jihadist volatility for years to come.” For him, the media’s lack of attention means a dangerous indifference in the face of a future threat to the West. For this reason, the media “should play a proactive part in warning our leaders that another Syria and another Iraq are in the making.”⁴⁷ An extensive study published by Nadwa Al-Dawsari this month counters this approach with a different reality. She has

⁴⁶ Salisbury 2017: 46.

⁴⁷ Rivera 2017.

studied the spread of Al-Qaeda and its pre-conditions on the ground. According to Al-Dawsari, a common perception among Western analysts (and even Yemeni government officials) is “that a key reason for AQAP’s staying-power”, despite countless drone strikes, “is that some tribes are aligned with the terrorist group and provide it with safe havens, fighters and other support.”⁴⁸ However, she has found, this is entirely not the case. While it is true that in some areas, tribal members have joined AQAP, these have acted rather independently, out of hopelessness, and against the will of the tribe. Yemeni tribes as ‘collected entities’ have *not* cooperated with AQAP, because they reject their violent ideology.

Most significantly here is: In contrast to common perceptions, the tribes in Yemen “operate according to a well-developed system of rules, rights, and obligations, including *peaceful conflict resolution methods* that have been effective against Al-Qaeda,”⁴⁹ Al-Dawsari writes. Although they oppose Al-Qaeda, the tribal leaders “seek to avoid unleashing violence that could destroy whatever fragile security exists in their regions.”⁵⁰ The peaceful and effective approach these tribes leaders and members are putting forward shows that they could function as a key actors in countering extremism and violence. Al-Dasani’s conclusions are therefore not only of particular relevance to the U.S. counterterrorism strategy, but also showcase one extremely important process peace journalists could work with in order to establish a grounded understanding of how a stable Yemen could look like in the future. Rather than imposing detached peace building initiatives onto the population, both Western journalists and policy-makers alike should study these locally productive dynamics carefully and shed light on them.

5 Conclusion

The war in Yemen could be regarded as a hopeless case, where very little can be done due to the circumstances. But the war in Yemen could also be regarded as a pressing example of a new reality of conflict, which policy-makers and journalists both have to face eventually. Mary Kaldor’s depictions are not a merely theoretical framework, but indicate that there are more ‘Yemens’ out there. The structure of war today has

⁴⁸ Al-Dawsari 2018: 2.

⁴⁹ Al-Dawsari 2018: 3. Parenthesis by author.

⁵⁰ Al-Dwasari 2018: 2.

fundamentally changed, and so should peace building initiatives and journalistic approaches. This essay has aimed to highlight this, by putting forward the structures that might have led to a persistent image of Yemen as the “forgotten war”, but also by trying to counter these narratives with proposals for change. In doing so, I have excluded the more general debate on academic beliefs of whether the media is even capable of triggering any sort of political change to a conflict like Yemen (as in: the ‘CNN-effect’). On the one hand, Piers Robinson’s assessment of media influence as unlikely to occur in environments where policy is certain could be of use here, since actors like the U.S. or Saudi Arabia both have very clear and manifested enemy images and battle strategies.⁵¹ On the other hand, Eytan Gilboa has suggested, that messy conflicts have produced ‘irregular leaders’ and therefore a sort of ‘media-broker diplomacy’ could be possible, where journalists act effectively as ‘third parties’ at the negotiation table.⁵² But both of these models might need to find new ways of understanding and application in the ‘new war’s era’. The conflict in Yemen redefines the boundaries of war and its actors, and to adequately mediate it, journalism must re-examine the traditional structures of war to include local actors and the civilian sphere that, in the case of Yemen, eclipse the internationally recognized powers of the government itself.

⁵¹ Robinson 2000.

⁵² Gilboa 2004.

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