

# FROM BORDERING TO ORDERING: THE TRIBAL FACTOR IN MANAGING THE YEMENI-SAUDI BORDER

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## Introduction

This chapter aims at a closer consideration of the different border management practices at the Yemeni-Saudi border and its transformation throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and until today. Particular attention will be paid to the shifting importance of the local tribes in managing the border. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has marked the beginning of major changes in the tasks of the border shaykhs (tribal leaders) and their tribes, who have been responsible for the guarding and administering of the border from its initial establishment in 1934. Increasing Saudi security concerns, as well as the conflicts raging in northern Yemen, have contributed to the successive formalization, institutionalization and militarization of the Yemeni-Saudi border management at the expense of the long-standing role of the local tribes. Today, with the conflict-induced eviction of many shaykhs from their territories, the traditional system of tribal border protection has collapsed.

By understanding the essence of border making as power strategy (Popescu 2012, 8), the chapter illustrates drastic power transformations in the securing of the Yemeni-Saudi border, shifting from relative tribal autonomy and responsibility, and close cooperation between tribe and state, towards the increasing exclusion of the border tribes from active bordering processes and practices. The theory of border studies has extensively addressed this phenomenon. In the 1990s, border studies faced a major paradigm shift that has led to the understanding of borders as processes or practices that can be produced by different actors on multiple levels. Newman and Paasi (1998) suggest that borders and their meanings are historically determined and thus, a focus should be put on how boundaries and their narratives of inclusion and exclusion are produced. Following this perspective, a debate on “bordering” (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002) which takes account of the socially constructed character of borders as vantage points would be fruitful for further reflection. Borders are continually enacted, created and maintained by local “borderwork,” the informal and formal labor of borderland residents. In this view, it becomes clear that local actors are not always passively subjected to borders and bordering processes from above; rather, they are enrolled and engaged in the active remaking of political and social borders (Rumford 2008; Lamb 2014). Border communities are often perceived as isolated, sometimes autonomous groups far away from the power center of a state. However, it will be shown that in specific regional and historical contexts, these communities can fulfill the function of an important cooperation partner for the central government and gain certain benefits from this collaboration. Especially when the influence and control of central authorities was considerably marginal at the margins of a territory and political power was rather concentrated on local or regional levels, central state powers considered the establishment of dependable and cooperative local networks an effective strategy to extend their state authority (Hignett 2008, 35). Strategic communities for the explicit purpose of defending the

border either had to be created in the first place, or the central power had to co-opt already existing communities. This could not have been done without offering these communities a series of enticements or providing them with certain privileges in return for their cooperation<sup>1</sup> (Hignett 2008, 50–51). The following case studies elucidate different forms of border management that reflect the three phases in the transformation of the Yemeni-Saudi border management.

In the first case study, Gavrilis (2008) explores the Greek-Ottoman border throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The successful management of this border originated from the fact that both state authorities had more or less completely delegated the border administration to local authorities. In particular, these local authorities, who were instructed to administer and secure the border, consisted of a group of former bandits, mercenaries and domestic police units. For the first decade after the demarcation of the Greek-Ottoman border, the border administration of the two states depended to a considerable extent on a local level and was outsourced from the central governments' agendas and responsibilities. The border guard institutions on both sides collaboratively developed innovative policing tactics such as the coordination of border patrols or regular meetings in order to effectively guard the common border.

In the second ethnographic sample, Reeves (2014) focuses on the recent "borderwork" that takes place in the borderlands between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The majority of the border guard members are single men who were raised up in a social system strongly based on age hierarchy. Economic contexts given, border guards establish manifold social relationships with the inhabitants of the border region in which they are deployed. Encounters among the border villagers and the border guards include receiving gifts such as tobacco or gasoline, transportation services between the village and the border post and the exchange of news and gossip. Reeves highlights the uncertain and negotiable functions and associations with the act of border guarding. Apparently, border guards are often suspected of and associated with corruption. Similarly, the border guard's authority is perceived as frangible and often becomes the target of subversive attempts (Reeves 2014, 175). Border guards are bearers of the variable permeability of the borders they are monitoring. They are expected to know who and what can transcend the border without further examination. Social customs, rather than border authorities, often determine who is able to cross through unchecked. In practice, this requires the ability to memorize a high number of names, persons, vehicles and their connected social status (*ibid*, 176).

The third case study by Maurer and Sälter (2011) exemplifies a central state-controlled border management that totally excludes local border communities. From the 1950s, the East German Border Guard was not only responsible for preventing citizens from fleeing to West Germany but was also expected to serve as an initial front-line defense in case of war. The Ministry for State Security (the "Stasi") surveilled and controlled the distribution of conscripts. Family links to West Germany usually caused the deployment of the conscript far from the actual border (Maurer and Sälter 2011, 26).

What these border case studies show is an essential differentiation between three distinct stages of border management. The first phase embraces managing a border relatively autonomously on a local level. This form includes close cooperation between local border communities and the central government as well as the provision of incentives such as certain privileges to the border residents in return for their

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. economic privileges such as land, hunting and fishing rights that were granted to ethnic or social groups in the borderlands, but also important financial subsidies in money or grain as well as the yielding of considerable degrees of domestic autonomy and self-government.

services at the borders. In a second stage, professional border guards supplied by the state successively replace local border guards and centralize certain border practices such as the administration or cross-border movements. The third level comprises the efforts by the state to fully control its national borders through centrally regulated border practices such as the deployment of trained soldiers without any social relationships to the border area. These three different stages roughly correspond to the development of Yemeni-Saudi border management, which will be examined in more detail below.

### The Yemeni-Saudi Border Region

The Yemeni-Saudi border region surrounds a border spanning more than 1,800 kilometers from the Red Sea to the border triangle with Oman encompassing strategically and economically significant land and maritime territories between Northern Yemen and Southern Saudi Arabia. For an extended period of time, large stretches of the international border remained undefined and unfixed due to the active involvement of the borderland tribes within both countries in establishing and securing the border. Only in 2000, did the Treaty of Jeddah permanently define the exact location of the common borderline. On the Yemeni side, the governorates of Ḥajjah, Ṣa‘dah, al-Jawf and Ḥaḍramawt directly adjoin the international border, neighboring the Saudi provinces of ‘Asīr, Jīzān, Najrān and al-Sharqiyah. The present study focuses on the western part of the disputed boundary mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the northernmost Yemeni border province of Ṣa‘dah is far more populated than the eastern border regions, and secondly, the tribal societies of the western border region (i.e. mainly the eight tribes of the Khawlān bin ‘Āmir confederation as well as the Bakīlī tribes Wā‘ilah and Dahm) have been studied extensively in recent decades (see, for example, Gingrich 1993; Lichtenthäler 2003; Weir 2007; Brandt 2017). This provides access to a research area that has to be studied at a distance due to the insecure and unstable political situation on the ground<sup>2</sup>.

The majority of Ṣa‘dah’s population is tribal and associated with the confederations of Khawlān bin ‘Āmir and Bakīl. The confederation of Khawlān bin ‘Āmir subdivides into eight main tribes (five of them located in Yemen), which further subdivide into moieties and subtribes or segments. Given the historically weak influence of the Yemeni state in its northern peripheries, the members of the tribal borderland communities have, for long periods of history, lived and acted with a relatively high status of autonomy. This was partly based on their economic independence due to farming and livestock supplemented by extensive regional trading. Historically, the region of Ṣa‘dah was closely linked by official and unofficial commercial activities along ancient trade routes with the areas that are today the Saudi provinces of ‘Asīr, Jīzān and Najrān. These trading activities were dominated by tribal groups and families who established extensive trade networks across the border. Socially, *qabyalah* provided a traditional and yet locally diverse system of tribal leadership and customary law as well as social structure, norms and rules (Adra 1982). The tribal societies along the common border with Saudi Arabia have historically entered into very different relationships with overlords and states – be it their relationships with the former religious elite<sup>3</sup> in imamic Yemen or the Republic after 1962 (Gingrich

<sup>2</sup> The present study is based on literature research supplemented by numerous written online interviews with local informants, namely influential shaykhs from the border region, via *WhatsApp*.

<sup>3</sup> For over a millennium, parts of Northern Yemen were ruled by an imamate established by Zaydī imams in the 9<sup>th</sup> century in Yemen. The *sādah* (sg. *sayyid*) claimed legitimate rule by their descent from the Prophet Muḥammad through the line of the Prophet’s daughter Fāṭimah and his son-in-law ‘Alī Ibn Abū Ṭālib (see Dresch 2000, 15).

1993). Before the September Revolution of 1962, which led to the overthrow of the last imam and the establishment of the Yemeni Republic, the imams depended on the loyalty of the tribal elites to provide military strength for their governments. They therefore pursued a precarious policy of cooperation and coercion vis-à-vis the tribes, which optionally consisted of patronage, military subjugation, and/or hostage taking (Dresch 1991, 257; Weir 2007, 287ff).

The initial establishment of the Yemeni-Saudi border in 1934 bisected the Khawlān bin ‘Āmir and parts of the Bakīl confederation. The territories of three tribes of the Khawlān bin ‘Āmir confederation, Fayfā’, Banī Mālik and Balghāzī, are located in Saudi Arabia due to Yemen’s cession of land to the Saudi kingdom in 1934. The territories of the tribes of Munabbih, Rāziḥ, Khawlān, Jumā‘ah and Saḥār are located on Yemeni land (Gingrich 1993, 258). In addition to the division on the confederation level, the tribal territories of the Jumā‘ah and the Bakīlī Wā’ilah tribe have been bisected by the border on a subtribal level (Brandt 2017, 27). However, strong tribal links, facilitated through descent, kinship and marriage relations, remained vital across the international border (ibid, 77).

### The Introduction of the Border

The initial establishment of the international border between Yemen and Saudi Arabia after the Saudi-Yemeni War of 1934 was part of the peace negotiations between the two countries competing over the provinces of Najrān, ‘Asīr, and Jīzān. The post-war Treaty of Ṭā’if first officially defined the boundary between the Yemeni imamate and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the map along the so-called “Ṭā’if Line” between the Red Sea coast to the west and Jabal al-Tha’r near Najrān city to the east. The division was implemented by an international border demarcation committee headed by Harry St. John Philby in which some shaykhs of the border tribes were actively involved. However, parts of the central mountainous section of the borderline remained undefined because the committee could not access them due to tribal conflicts (Philby 1952; al-Enazy 2005). The exact course of the Ṭā’if Line, therefore, was of vital importance for the central governments of both Yemen and Saudi Arabia and the local tribes. In practice, however, after its initial establishment in 1934, the border remained invisible for the local border population since moving across the border for visiting relatives, herding cattle and engaging in cross-border trade were everyday practices and were legally guaranteed in the stipulations of the border treaty.

The period after the Saudi-Yemeni War marked the beginning of a close relationship between the Saudi government and the Yemeni borderland tribes. From 1934 onwards, the Saudi kingdom pursued a policy of alliance and patronage in the common borderlands aiming at ensuring the loyalty of the Yemeni border tribes. Through the integration of Yemeni borderland shaykhs into Saudi patronage networks, the Saudi kingdom aimed at securing the stability of the new controversial border with the support of its local tribal aides (Brandt 2017, 78). As a legal basis for Saudi Arabia’s political strategy, special and unusual provisions regarding the rights of the borderland tribes were included in the Treaty of Ṭā’if and its appendices. Appendix 3, Article 1 (1936) granted borderland residents the right to cross the border through certain checkpoints without restrictions, whereas other Yemeni citizens were obliged to enter Saudi Arabia with regular passports and visas. From the tribal perspective, the Saudi cooperation strategy and the establishment of the international border was highly beneficial as long as their legal rights to cross the border were guaranteed (Brandt 2017, 79).

### Competing over Tribal Support

The Ṭā'if Treaty of 1934 was concluded as a temporary settlement that had to be renewed every 20 lunar years. These renewals took place in 1953 and 1973 after periods of severe tensions and deep political disagreement between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the Saudi kingdom's vulnerability towards violence and instability in Yemen became evident during the 1962 Yemeni revolution and the ensuing civil war that led to the abolition of the imamate and the establishment of the Yemeni republic. Saudi Arabia's initial considerations of the Yemeni war as a domestic matter changed when Egyptian troops targeted Saudi border towns in air raids in November 1962. During the civil war, the established patronage networks with the borderland tribes proved highly beneficial for the Saudi government because loyal border tribes functioned as buffer zones between Saudi Arabia on the one side, and Yemen's republicans and its Egyptian allies on the other (Badeeb 1986, 51). After the civil war, Ṣa'dah's tribal leaders continued to benefit from Saudi subsidies that contributed to the image of the Saudi kingdom as supporting and protecting the interests of Yemeni borderland tribes. Its major financial concessions to the borderland shaykhs granted Saudi Arabia an influential stake in Yemen's north and solidified a secure boundary. From a tribal perspective, Saudi subsidies enabled border shaykhs to extend their local power and to acquire additional sources of income and influence (Brandt 2017, 83).

The 1960's civil war marked the beginning of a new political era in Yemen that had repercussions on Yemeni and Saudi border politics concerning their common, still unsettled boundary. The development that set in after the fall of the Yemeni imamate resembled the situation in many other regions of the world. With the consolidation of the Yemeni nation state and the rise of a national awareness, the Saudi government reinforced its central objective of securing the loyalty and cooperation of the Yemeni borderland shaykhs and their tribal allies for the sake of securing and stabilizing the Yemeni-Saudi border. The fledgling and vulnerable Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), on the other hand, also attempted to patronize the northern tribes for its own interests. For some of the border shaykhs, the newly established government of the YAR offered the opportunity for extending their power and influence on the national level. In the YAR, for the first time ever, tribal leaders were incorporated in the government. The resulting relationship of mutual loyalty between the state and some of the border shaykhs and their tribes enabled the government to gain influence in the tribal peripheries of the country (Brandt 2017, 57). Against this background, local tribal leaders of the border regions such as the senior shaykh of the Munabbih tribe during the 1970s, were assigned to act on behalf of the republican state. The northern and western borders of Munabbih's tribal territory were congruent with the – in parts still undefined – international border with Saudi Arabia, and the republican government authorized the Munabbih to monitor and secure these parts of the international border as an “auxiliary police force” (Gingrich 2011, 43). Competition over tribal support and loyalty by the Yemeni and the Saudi governments has led to the engagement of some shaykhs in double-dealings, receiving lucrative subsidies from both sides of the border (Brandt 2017, 83).

### Determining the Boundary

The Treaty of Jeddah in 2000 marked the next step in the development that led from a Yemeni-Saudi border policy focusing on tribal cooperation and patronage networks towards a border management strategy aiming at more strictly guarding and monitoring the national borders with Yemen. Under the

government of ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ,<sup>4</sup> the Treaty of Jeddah was signed in 2000. The Jeddah Treaty integrated the regulations and all appendices of the Ṭā’if Treaty altering the terms as final, permanent and non-renewable. In addition, despite the resistance of the opposition parties, the Ṣāliḥ government abandoned Yemen’s former territorial claims to the regions of ‘Asīr, Jīzān, and Najrān. The three contested regions permanently belong to the Saudi kingdom and formerly undefined segments of the land and the sea border are now defined by their exact location in geographical coordinates rather than by ambiguous tribal affiliations. Still, the provisions of the Treaty of Jeddah, like the Treaty of Ṭā’if, grant the borderland residents the right to cross the border without restrictions through designated border checkpoints (al-Enazy 2002, 70). Nevertheless, the final demarcation of the boundary obliterated the former active involvement and participation of the border tribes in the political debates and negotiations on the border. The Saudi argument for justifying this step was the need to improve the security and stability situation (Brandt 2017, 86–87). After the signing of the Treaty of Jeddah, which permanently demarcated and fixed the previously largely undefined border, the prior informal cooperation between the Saudi and the Yemeni government and some of the borderland tribes became formally institutionalized.

### The Institution of the Yemeni-Saudi Border Guard

In 2003 the joint Yemeni-Saudi Border Guard (*ḥaras al-ḥudūd*) was established, a regular army unit consisting of soldiers with a local background positioned along the international boundary, particularly in the mountainous regions of the Ṭā’if Line border segment. The main driver for the establishment of the joint Border Guard institution and the fostering of mutual cooperation between Yemen and Saudi Arabia was the high increase of illicit cross-border movements such as the smuggling of weapons, explosives, and drugs as well as the illegal immigration to the Saudi kingdom. According to the website of the Saudi Ministry of Interior, King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz laid the cornerstone for the present Border Guard already in 1913 by establishing patrols and centers for guarding the eastern coast. Concentrating predominantly on watching and controlling the maritime coasts of the Saudi state, the former “Directorate of Coast Guard” was transformed into the armed “General Directorate of border armed-force, and coasts and seaports guard” in the early 1960s, which in the early 90s became the “General Directorate of Border Guard”. The Border Guard is supposed to maintain the security of the kingdom’s sea and land borders. It is subdivided into nine different key departments, among them the separated subsidiaries of ‘Asīr, Jīzān and Najrān. All of them consist of different sectors guarding a stipulated length of kilometers of the border demarcation. These sectors also include several centers. According to the website, the Sharūrah sector is the biggest sector guarding the border with Yemen, which is responsible for guarding about 1013 km on land, and it includes 17 centers (MOI 2018). Whereas the Saudi Ministry of Interior provides an elaborate website for the Saudi Border Guard,<sup>5</sup> there is no equivalent for the Yemeni Border Guard. According to one of my informants, who was an officer in the Yemeni Border Guard for five years, the main tasks of the Yemeni Border Guard encompass securing the boundary, monitoring transgressors and the controlling of smugglers. He states that the Yemeni Border Guard consists of 30,000 members deployed among numerous units along the Yemeni-Saudi and the Yemeni-Omani borders.

<sup>4</sup> From 1978 ‘Alī ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ was president of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen). He became Yemen’s first president after unification in 1990. In February 2012 he was succeeded by ‘Abd Rabbuh Maṣṣūr Hādī.

<sup>5</sup> The official website of the Saudi Border Guard publishes current reports of people and goods that have been prevented from entering the Saudi kingdom. They also stated there that 52 women joined a security inspection training course in 2017.

### The Fortification of the Border

Despite the overall progress of the joint Yemeni-Saudi Border Guard institution in curtailing illegal border-crossings, it was difficult for both countries to fully control their joint borders due to the rough terrain (Brandt 2017, 84). More importantly, the weakness of the Yemeni state meant that the chances of success for a joint border management were minimal (Rossiter 2017, 32). In order to control the threats deriving from the permeable border, the two national governments took certain joint and individual steps in the years after the signing of the Jeddah Treaty such as constructing watchtowers along the border, establishing joint patrols, increasing security coordination and exchanging information on contraband and border-crossers (al-Rammah and Awass 2009, 6). Thereby, the two governments successively withdrew the task of border control from the borderland shaykhs and put the more centralized institution of the Yemeni-Saudi Border Guard in charge of controlling the border. Meetings between the Yemeni and Saudi authorities were held regularly, such as the periodical meetings of the Yemeni-Saudi Coordination Council or those of the border officials. The border authorities consisted of three different social levels, comprising the Yemeni-Saudi joint committee (whose meetings are presided over by the Yemeni and Saudi interior ministers), and the second and third-rank joint committee. The latter is made up of representatives of the border guard bodies of the two countries. Saudi Arabia, for its part, installed permanent watchtowers, built up its border guard units and intensified the patrols, and laid barbed wire along some parts of the border. At a cost of \$8 billion, electronic equipment has been installed, such as thermal cameras which detect living or moving objects at a distance of 5 kilometers (al-Rammah and Awass 2009, 6). These joint and individual measures curbed – according to the Saudi government – all kinds of smuggling operations and the movements of illegal border-crossers on both sides (al-Rammah and Awass 2009, 8). The increasing regulation and securing of the border negatively affected the constant trade relationships that had historically kept the Ṣa‘dah region flourishing, thereby imposing major challenges for the local population in pursuing their commercial activities and interests (Blumi 2011, 111).

As a result of Saudi Arabia’s increased perception of the cross-border movements as a threat to Saudi internal affairs and security, the kingdom started to complete the demarcation of the border as concluded in the Treaty of Jeddah with the support of international companies. As a further step, the kingdom also launched the construction of a border fortification which further induced the physical implementation of the boundary. This endeavor aimed at preventing alleged threats identified by the Saudi government such as a flow of economic refugees, al-Qaeda fighters, smuggled weapons and drugs as well as the potential spillover of political events inside Yemen from entering the Saudi kingdom. The physical implementation of border fortifications starting in 2003 marked another turning point in Saudi border policy. The Saudi intention was to fix the long undefined and unimplemented border, which had been open for borderland residents’ crossings and partly depended on tribal territorial negotiations. With this controversial measure, Saudi Arabia provoked some of the borderland tribes such as the Wā’ilah, who reacted with fierce resistance and sabotage of the border fortification works. In the Treaty of Ṭā’if and its border regulations, parts of traditional Wā’ilah territory were assigned to the Yām tribe. Consequently, members of the Wā’ilah tribe are still fighting against the demarcation of the border right up until today. The Wā’ilah consider the provisions of the Treaty of Jeddah, including the Saudi border fortification project, a violation of the tribes’ legal rights to cross the border in exchange for their loyalty to the Saudi kingdom (al-Enazy 2005, 14; Brandt 2017, 77–80).

Since the eruption of armed conflict in the border region in 2004, the Yemeni regime has increasingly lost control of its northwestern periphery. The emerging power vacuum led to the expansion of the

Ḥūthī movement in Yemen's north. Many of the important tribal leaders in Ṣa'dah, and especially from the border region, were displaced and fled to Saudi Arabia. The former powerful positions of Ṣa'dah's tribal leaders generated through close cooperation with the Yemeni and the Saudi states were weakened in the wake of the Ḥūthī movement's growth. Its attraction to those who felt economically, politically and religiously marginalized has led to internal tribal conflicts and the dissociation of many formerly influential shaykhs from their tribes (Brandt 2017, 37). The Saudi kingdom, having invested in the establishment of cooperation with these shaykhs since the initial introduction of the border, welcomed them with open arms in Saudi Arabia, formally continuing their policy of co-option. Nevertheless, the expulsion of Riyadh's tribal cooperation partners from the border areas had a major impact on Saudi Arabia's border policy, as it led to the weakening, if not elimination, of those cooperation and securing practices with the borderland tribes which had been established and maintained by Saudi Arabia for decades (Brandt 2017, 96).

### Recent Developments at the Yemeni-Saudi Border

Since the seizing of power by the Anṣār Allāh or Ḥūthī movement, the Yemeni Border Guard has split up into several political fractions. The pro-Hādī Border Guard unit to whom my informant belonged was established in 2014 and is made up of 1500 men. The unit's 15 checkpoints are located on the Saudi side of the international border since the Yemeni territories of the border area have been occupied by the Ḥūthī forces. These Border Guard units, loyal to Hādī, were therefore dislocated from Yemeni territory. Hence, the fracturing of Yemen's political landscape is mirrored in the current re-organization of the Border Guard.

Two newspaper articles from the *Middle East Eye* highlight the current precarious situation and transnational transformation of the Yemeni-Saudi border conflict in the present time. The first one from August 2017 points to the fact that thousands of poorly trained Yemenis were recruited by the Saudi government to fight against the Ḥūthī rebels instead of their own soldiers. Trained within only a few weeks, the Yemeni mercenaries, who were predominantly recruited from Yemeni provinces in the south that are controlled by pro-Hādī forces and the Saudi-led coalition, are deployed into Saudi-funded border defense regiments that are staffed almost exclusively by Yemenis. Their average wage is up to \$800 per month, a significantly higher amount of money than can be earned from fighting in local battles. The wages for fighters in Yemen, at \$130 per month, are less than a quarter of those fighting on the Saudi side (MEE 2017a). Apart from Yemenis, most other troops fighting with the Saudi-led coalition against the Ḥūthīs are foreigners, among them many fighters from Egypt and Pakistan, but also from Latin American countries such as Columbia, Panama, El Salvador and Chile. Here, it becomes evident that not only in the past but also in the current Yemeni-Saudi border dispute, the motivations for guarding and administering the border from a tribal as well as from a state point of view depended greatly on, amongst others, economic reasons. In December 2017, the second newspaper article reported that hundreds of Yemeni mercenaries fighting for Saudi Arabia had protested peacefully in reaction to the non-disbursement of their salaries. According to sources, the soldiers were then paid \$400, they were told that they were no longer needed and were sent back to Ma'rib in Yemen where they had received their training months earlier (MEE 2017b). Inconsistent with these articles, sources from among the Yemeni Border Guard indicate that Yemeni citizens neither fight for the Saudi *ḥaras al-ḥudūd* nor for the general Saudi army. The Yemeni and the Saudi Border Guard cooperate and work closely together as one joint institution but each national Border Guard subordinates to its national government.



As has been shown, shifts in Saudi Arabia's border policy resulted in the successive marginalization of Yemeni border tribes in managing and guarding the border. Responsibilities and well-established cooperation between the Saudi kingdom and the Yemeni border tribes have gradually been weakened and taken over by a state-led institution that hired mercenaries from different countries as border guards. It is worth noting that the online application form for a position in the Saudi Border Guard requires – among other information – detailed indications on the tribal background, including confederation, tribe, tribal section, and representative persons of the applicant (MOI 2018), which shows that the Saudi government is well aware of the importance of tribal identity and belonging within the border management. Historically the kingdom has always recognized the tribal background of its border guards and their relationship to the borderland residents as an important factor in the general border management. In recent years, however, Saudi Arabia seems to steer away from local tribal border management because it perceives permeable borders, regularly crossed by people, goods and contraband as threats. To prevent these threats, local border management has been replaced by a professional, highly hierarchized border guard consisting of soldiers and officers without links to the local tribal population.

## Conclusion

Managing and securing the Yemeni-Saudi border has undergone profound transformations since the first establishment of the border in the Treaty of Ṭā'if in 1934. During the decades after the initial border demarcation, many Yemeni shaykhs and their affiliated tribes from the northern provinces of Ṣa'dah and al-Jawf were responsible for the security and administration of the Yemeni-Saudi border. In return, they received substantial financial support and rights from Saudi Arabia in order to carry out their tasks. Other examples highlight the widespread practice and use of border communities as border guards e.g. at the Greek-Ottoman border (Gavrilis 2008). The rough physical conditions in the Yemeni-Saudi border region, especially in the mountainous border segments were another reason to rely on border guards who are familiar with the local terrain and its people. Moreover, the Yemeni border shaykhs had a vital interest in monitoring and administering the international border since segments were identical with tribal territorial margins that had yet to be renegotiated. In the course of the permanent and definite determination of the border in the Treaty of Jeddah in 2000, the duty of securing the border was successively transferred from the tribes to a central state institution, consisting of a joint Yemeni-Saudi Border Guard. The formalization of border management practices tends to follow with strong militarization of border guards in case of danger and perceived threats. Like the East German Border Guards in the 1950s as well as the Chods in the Kingdom of Bohemia (Hignett 2008, 47), the joint Yemeni-Saudi Border Guard, too, with the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has performed a double task. Their primary function of preventing fugitives and illicit trade from crossing the border has been reshaped into serving as an initial front-line defense. The traditional practice of local border management in Yemen has not continued further due to the splitting up and re-formation of several Yemeni border guard units which recruited soldiers from all over the country. Thereby, and through Saudi Arabia's announcement of the construction of a border fence, the special rights and privileges of the Yemeni border tribes that were stipulated in the official border agreements between the two states have been curtailed. For them, the possibility of actively negotiating and adapting the Yemeni-Saudi border according to tribal resolutions and local agreements was gradually diminished and impeded. With the coming into power of the so-called Ḥūthī rebels in Yemen, the pro-Saudi border shaykhs were expelled from their territories in the North of the country and many of them have taken refuge in Saudi

Arabia. In the course of the internal political conflicts, the official institution of the Yemeni Border Guard has split up and reformed into several different factions. Hence, not only the traditional locally administered but also the centrally organized system of securing the border in Yemen has collapsed, leaving the border region more contested than ever.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Yemen's tribal border communities successively lost their central and active role in guarding the Yemeni-Saudi border. With a series of measures, and in order to implement and protect its porous border, Saudi Arabia has deprived its former tribal cooperation partners of their traditional task as loyal but semi-independent local border guards. As a result, the active "borderwork" of the border shaykhs and their tribes has been curtailed. The former bordering processes of Yemen's tribal border communities that implied their active participation in the act of controlling, negotiating, managing and securing the international border, have been transformed into practices determined, limited and strictly regulated by the states.

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