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Laurent Bonnefoy et Marine Poirier

1   The Yemeni Congregation for Reform (*al-Tajammu' al-yamanî lil-islâh*), commonly known as *al-Islâh*, was established on September 13, 1990, a few months after the unification of North and South Yemen and the legalization of a multi-party system. It was created at a time of profound changes in the Yemeni political system, which went from a single-party system in each of the two Yemens (the General People's Congress in North Yemen and the Yemeni Socialist Party in South Yemen) to a political project in a unified Yemen who regarded itself as openly democratic. Opposition parties were then allowed (except based on regionalist or sectarian grounds) and within a year, 20 political parties were accounted for. Partisan and independent press also emerged, elections were organized, and a new constitution was drafted. Though sudden, the transition was initially rather painless and free of major violence or protest, even within the two former single parties.

2   *Al-Islâh* is often described as the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. It does, however encompass diverse religious, ideological and sociopolitical tendencies[1]. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood are largely associated with a traditionalist and "tribal" wing (less directly ideological (al-Abdali*, 2007)) as well as with business elites who do not fit in either category, some of whom with close ties with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies[2].

3   When it comes to relations between political rulers and Islamists the Yemeni case study Yemen is quite enlightening. It gives us the opportunity to understand the development and patterns of mobilization of various movements or parties in an environment that appears to be only slightly repressive when compared to other countries in the region. Here, the various Islamist tendencies have been allowed to develop, debate, structure and position themselves (on democracy, multiparty systems, foreign policy, etc.) without being directly exposed to state repression. In order to introduce and facilitate an in-depth

study of *al-Islâh* party, the subject of this chapter, we shall begin with some facts on the original "Yemeni political formula".

4   Historically, the "republican revolution" of September 26, 1962, which overthrew the Zaydi Imamate in North Yemen, only managed to establish itself after eight years of civil war, following a peace agreement between republicans and royalists. The compromise led to a peculiar balance of power, whose basic mechanism has endured even after the unification of North and South Yemen, even if subjected to various pressures and becoming the reason for contentions. The balance was based primarily on the rejection, albeit incomplete, of the denominational cleavage between the Zaydis (a Shiite minority predominantly found in the northern highlands and clearly distinct from the Twelver Shiites found in Iran) and the Sunni *Shafeis*. Hence, even within the republican framework built in opposition to the Zaydi Imamate, all presidents of North Yemen and later of unified Yemen were of Zaydi origin. Yet none of them laid direct claims to their identity; instead they encouraged to look beyond inherited religious identities (Bonnefoy, 2008).

5   Led by military inspired by Nasserist ideology, the revolutionaries of September 26, 1962 engaged in a long civil war against a royalist stronghold, made up mainly of Zaydis from the high plateaus of the northwestern region of North Yemen and supported by Saudi Arabia. Progressively, the violence and determination of the Egyptian-backed military failed, and the revolutionary group began to fall apart. In December 1994, historical figures of the Yemeni Free Movement – including Muhammad al-Zubayrî and Ahmad Nu'mân, mayor leaders of the revolution (Douglas, 1987) – denounced the corruption of the ruling power controlled by Colonel 'Abd Allâh Sallâl. At the end of 1967, the Royalists surrounded Sanaa for 70 days and appeared to be in a position to reinstate the Imamate. At that time, the Republicans had lost the support of the Egyptian army, busy elsewhere and defeated on the Israeli front. In order to end the North Yemen deadlock, a compromise was drafted that aimed at reintegrating tribes (not just Zaydi tribes) and the pro-royalist Zaydi religious establishment more systematically into state structures. Beyond bringing peace to the country and stabilizing the republican regime, the compromise led to a purge of some "left-leaning" servicemen and the co-optation of some royalist political leaders.

6   For more than 40 years, the foundational compromise of contemporary Yemen's political formula (in which former South Yemen has been engaged since 1990) has enabled participation to power of different political forces with various ideological tendencies (leftwing, republicans, Arab nationalists, traditionalists, the Muslim Brotherhood, *Salafis*) or multiple identity referents (Zaydism, Sunnism, tribalism). Therefore, regime leaders have gained recognition by drawing, whether simultaneously or alternately, on various registers.

7   As early as November 1967, 'Abd al-Malik al-Tayyib, a Muslim Brotherhood leader (a largely informal and illegal structure at the time), was appointed Minister of Education and Information of the Yemen Arab Republic. During the 1970s, 'Abd al-Majîd al-Zindânî, a former companion of al-Zubayrî and a member of the conservative branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. was entrusted with religious education in North Yemen through the Bureau of Orientation and Guidance (*Maktab al-tawjîh wa al-irshâd*). In dire need of educated personnel, the education sector recruited many Egyptian and Sudanese teachers who were reportedly close to the Brotherhood. Some ended up teaching in the Scientific Institutes (*al-Ma'âhid al-'ilmiyya*), a parallel education system financed through a substantial Saudi donation. Though clearly controversial, this system contributed to

moving beyond Zaydi and Chafei religious identities during the second half of the 20th century and creating a more global identity. Such movement shielded the Yemeni society from sectarian stigmatization, even if it re-emerges every now and then, as with the Saada War which began in 2004 between the Yemeni army and the Believing Youth (*al-Shabab al-Mu'min*), a group professing Zaydi revival led by the al-Hûthî family (Dorlian, 2008). The Yemeni national army also reorganized partially around individuals who were close to Islamists of various tendencies. In 1982, the General People's Congress (GPC, *al-Mu'tamar al-sha'bî al-'âmm*), a partisan structure aiming at uniting all political movements, was established in North Yemen. At the time, in addition to President 'Alî 'Abd Allâh Sâlih's autocratic inclination, the GPC also expressed the President's wish to postpone the legalization of the multi-party system.

8   The participation of various political movements exemplifies the capacity of integration characterizing the regime of the Yemen Arab Republic and explains why the North Yemeni society, which constitutes about 80% of the overall population of unified Yemen, had not experienced any violent and profound cleavage between state power and traditional tribal and religious members on the one hand, and Islamist movements on the other hand, until well into the 2000s. Although real, dissidences such as the guerilla movement of the National Democratic Front, financed by South Yemen in the 1970s, have remained essentially peripheral, and, in any case, have not led to any massive state repression.

9   In his analysis of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, Renaud Detalle declared in 1997 that one of the major stakes in Yemen's political future was "the Islamists' emancipation from state tutorship." Over ten years later, have Islamists in general and *al-Islâh* in particular managed to free themselves from the power in place? Does the party still represent a "restrained" (Burgat, 1999, p. 241), "discreet, peaceful and intellectual" (al-Yamani, 2003, p. 55) opposition, or has it evolved into a real political opposition force with a plausible project for change?

10   Our study of *al-Islâh* deals primarily with the evolution of the party in its Yemeni context. How are *al-Islâh*'s strategies, resources and mobilization affected by the context's changes due to internal and external factors (increasing monopoly of President Sâlih and the General People's Congress, and "Global War on Terror")? How can *al-Islâh*'s destiny, forever oscillating between pro-power and opposition strategies, symbolize the paradoxes of a political landscape that is both "gaining" pluralism (through the institutionalization of the opposition) and "losing" pluralism (through the ruling power's hegemony over resources)?

11   We shall first examine the impact of political and social structures on *al-Islâh*. How does the party fit into a landscape shaped by institutions, political, social and religious identities, other parties, and ideological debates? How does the cause defended by *al-Islâh* interact with other agendas and identity referents? Subsequently, we shall look into *al-Islâh*'s resources and repertoires in an effort to understand, in our final segment, the strategies aimed at achieving emancipation and building a project for political change.

Al-Islâh: A Party Embedded within the Yemeni Context

Gathering and institutionalization of preexisting movements

12 Ever since it emerged in 1990, *al-Islâh* party has had little difficulty in representing a credible political power within the particular framework of the "Yemeni formula" and the political system in post-unification Yemen. It has been regarded as an alternative power despite the close relationship between some of its founders and the ruling regime. For almost two decades, the party has played on this ambiguity, both inside and outside of the political regime. When they established their party, the leaders were no beginners in politics; they had long been active in the field: 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar, sheikh of the *Hâshid* tribal confederation, who chaired *al-Islâh* until his death in December 2007 had been, since the 1960s, a key figure in the interaction between the republican power, the tribal system and Islamism. Al-Ahmar was considered as instrumental in rallying leading Zaydi tribes from the northern highlands to the republic during the 1960s. When the General People's Congress was established in 1982, he was appointed as a permanent council member[3]. Consequently, *al-Islâh*'s emergence on the political scene in 1990 made possible the institutionalization of various pre-existing political forces such as, among others, the Muslim Brotherhood branch, which operated at the time either within the framework of the ruling General People's Congress, or in a non-institutional even semi-clandestine fashion through militias fighting against the socialists in the 1970s and 1980s[4]. The various tribal, Islamist and commercial components of *al-Islâh* seem to have rallied around symbolic figures such as 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar, Muhammad al-Yadûmî and 'Abd al-Majîd al-Zindânî, as well as around more political slogans, such as the preservation of traditional tribal and religious values, the refusal to share power with socialists as imposed by the unity agreement, or the fight against corruption. The three wings that make up the party do not systematically compete with one another; they coexist generally and agree on these issues. Each wing, however, uses different repertoires and mobilization methods, which may reflect a potential division of political tasks. Hence, the tribal component is made up of a pool of men and voters who seem to influence the relation between the ruling power and *al-Islâh* more often than not. The Islamist component contributes their ideology and acitivists, whereas the commercial component contributes their networks and respectability. Less than three years after it was created, *al-Islâh* results during the 1993 legislative elections, ranked ehaed of the Yemeni Socialist Party and second to the General People's Congress of President 'Alî 'Abd Allâh Sâlih[5].

13 Early on, *al-Islâh* derived much of its legitimacy in North Yemen from the tribal system prevailing in the highlands (the role of sheikhs, the legal system, the code of honor (Dresh, 1993)) and from the historical contribution of Islamist movements throughout the numerous founding stages of contemporary Yemen, especially during the 1962 revolution. Therefore, ever since it was established, *al-Islâh* was able to represent a significant political force capable of challenging the ruling party directly. Even though the republican regime had also based much of its legitimacy on the mobilization of traditional groups and symbols, *al-Islâh* had done it even more systematically and more ostentatiously. In the former South Yemen areas, the pressure put by state institutions on traditional (tribal and religious) elites during the socialist period led to a conservative reaction, after the 1990s unification, reminiscent of the reaction that occurred in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia (Petric, 2002) at that time. This reaction, in turn,

encouraged the development of Islamist movements (the Muslim Brotherhood, Sufis in the province of Hadramout, for instance, or *Salafis*) on which the party could capitalize (Mermier, 1997).

14 Moreover, the party's official denomination, the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, directly reflected the integration of the party structure into the debates and references that characterized the post-unification political system in Yemen. In fact, the word "party" implies a negative connotation specific to Yemeni history and associated with division, corruption, and exclusive allegiances. During the 1980s, the political scene in contemporary Yemen was largely influenced and dominated by the General People's Congress, who broke away – at least formally – from the party structure and their call for a *hizb* (party) for the sake of a solidarity that transcends and stigmatizes party divides. Since the 1980s, the Yemeni *Salafi* movement led by Muqbil al-Wâdi'î has brandished a founding principle based on rejecting *hizbiyya* (partisanship), i-e partisan structure and electoral participation (Bonnefoy, 2008). In spite of their relatively marginalized position, they managed to initiate a debate and stigmatize the very concept of parties. Mistrust of partisan politics was reinforced by the fact that the socialist period in the South between 1970 and 1990 is frequently referred to as "*ayyâm al-hizb*" (i.e. the days of the party). In collective imagination, the word "party" thus refers primarily to the Yemeni Socialist Party, and the term "*tajammu*" (congregation) adopted by *al-Islâh* seems, in effect, much more positive[6].

15 *Al-Islâh* also managed to play a significant part in the Yemeni political landscape by capitalizing on the historical role of the Muslim Brotherhood or other reformist groups close to them (including some of the Free Yemenis led by Muhammad al-Zubayrî) in the process of building the republican compromise, achieving the goal of bringing together religious identities and moving beyond primary Zaydi and Chafei identities by recruiting, ever since the party was created, members of both groups without discrimination. The Muslim Brotherhood participated directly in the early phase of the process of political and social modernization; indeed, as mentioned earlier, the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen did not begin with the establishment of *al-Islâh*. They were involved in the first revolution attempt in 1948 when they delegated Algerian revolutionary Fudhayl al-Wartilâni. In an attempt to lay the foundations of the republican project, Muhammad al-Zubayrî, described by his companions as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood[7] and later assassinated in 1965, created in 1964 a "Party of God" (*Hizb Allâh*) (Burgat, Camberlin, 2002), thus asserting his conviction that religion was the only referential authority capable of reconciling the republic with a highly conservative rural society where royalists were recruiting. The "tribal-Islamist" alliance later played a part in the republican movement and in defending the regime against protest. For example, many of today's *al-Islâh* leaders, including Muslim Brotherhood member Muhammad Qahtân, were active during the 1970s in the armed struggle (then financed by the government of North Yemen[8]) against left-wing movements and Arab nationalists, who were supported by the socialist regime in the South.

An Islamist party?

16 The diversity in the backgrounds of *al-Islâh*'s leaders, elected representatives, voters and activists, revealed in the many studies published on the party over the past 15 years, raises the issue of its ideological structure and its designation as an Islamist party as well.

Al-Islâh cannot be reduced to the sole offspring of the Muslim Brotherhood. Both rural and urban, the party is not quite elitist yet not a true mass party; therefore identifying one typical sociological party member profile seems doomed to failure. Although activists and leaders have Zaydi and Chafei backgrounds, they are clearly different, on the one hand, from movements inspired by the Zaydi revival, which began in the 1980s under the leadership of clerics, such as Majd al-Dîn *al-Muayyadî* and Badr *al-Dîn al-Huthî*, and parties, such as *al-Haqq* Party, and on the other hand, from *Salafi* movements who reject political involvement and systematically stigmatize the Zaydis' Shiism. Under the dual supervision of its tribal and Islamist components (a phenomenon described by P. Dresch and B. Haykel (1995, p. 410) as "patronage" relations), *al-Islâh* placed the party directly at the heart of Yemeni political culture yet made it harder to identify and explain a cause for the party to defend. As a result, the first electoral victories of *al-Islâh* candidates in some districts were due as much to the strength of tribal allegiances and support of local notables as to the recruiting ability of Islamist ideology. The flexibility of *al-Islâh*'s doctrine and program and its mixed leadership have thus promoted clientelist relations and partisan "nomadism".

17 The case of 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar's sons is a good example of this trend: over the years, four of his sons were elected to the Parliament, two of them (Hamîd and Madhhaj) on *al-Islâh* lists, and the other two (Husayn and Himyar) on the General People's Congress' lists; meanwhile, Sadiq, his oldest son, was appointed to the *Majlis al-shûrâ* (the Consultative Council) as a member of *al-Islâh.* Likewise, several intellectuals, including Nâsir Taha Mustafâ and Fâris al-Saqqâf, moved from *al-Islâh* party to the General People's Congress in the late 1990s. Indeed, relations between individuals, tribes or regions frequently took precedence over party loyalties, which were no longer an issue when it came to being appointed as civil servants, being elected or serving in a commission. While this state of affairs may have encouraged pluralism, it is challenged today by the obvious monopoly of the General People's Congress over resources and its increasing control over institutions and positions, including low-ranking civil servants and teachers. Accordingly, *al-Islâh*'s attempt to gain more autonomy – as we shall see below – may be the result of a decreasing pluralism. Indeed, such attempt exemplifies the limits of a patronage-based system which tries to contain the opposition but is no longer able to satisfy all its potential followers.

18 While *al-Islâh* may be labeled as an Islamist party, it does not have a monopoly on the denomination. On the contrary, it is part of a varied landscape where multiple references compete, condemn and sometimes overlap and complement one another. These groups include the Muslim Brotherhood (who represent the ideology-oriented branch of *al-Islâh*), "jihadist" fringes, Salafis, Sufis, and Zaydi revival groups. Each group has their own opinion on four key issues, namely participation in partisan politics, loyalty to the regime, violent confrontation with the rulers, and stigmatization of other religious and political identities (Bonnefoy, 2009).

Table 1. Summary of the strategies adopted by the various typical Islamist ideals in contemporary Yemen

Typical Islamist ideals	Key figures and organizations	Direct participation in party politics and democratization process	Automatic loyalty to the republican ruler	Significant episodes of violent confrontation with the State	Significant episodes of violent confrontation and stigmatization of other religious and political identities
The Muslim Brotherhood	*al-Islâh*	Yes	No	No	Yes
"Jihâdist" fringes	Groups affiliated with *al-Qaeda*	No	No	Yes	Yes
*Salafi*s	Muqbil al-Wâdi'î (died in 2001)	No	Yes	No	Yes
Sufis	*Dar al-Mustafa*	No	Yes	No	No
Zaydi revival	*Al-Haqq* Party; Husayn al-Hûthî (died in 2004)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

19   The strictly "Islamist" field is not *al-Islâh*'s only competitor; the religious repertoire is predominantly based on consensus and regularly exploited by partisan groups on the Yemeni political scene.

20   The designation of *al-Islâh* as an Islamist party (in the broad sense of the word, i.e. as a party whose aim is to "speak the Muslim language" and, as François Burgat says, "resort in a privileged and sometimes ostentatious manner to a rhetoric borrowed from the Muslim culture." (Burgat, 2005, p. 15)) may also be challenged based on the rather heterogeneous nature of its leaders and members, on the diversity of positions they hold (Bonnefoy, Ibn Sheikh, 2002) and on the regime's ability to use the same rhetoric in addition to religious symbols. Nevertheless, the party's platform, positions, practices and repertoires are largely consistent with Muslim culture and are clearly part of a conservative framework (defense of traditions and tribal values, distrust of modernization often perceived as synonymous with westernization, support for Islamic

causes); as a result, *al-Islâh* shares common characteristics with other Islamist parties in the Middle East and yet, at the same time, it deviates from the dominant rhetoric of the regime based on the democratization process, economic development and security. For example, in 1991, *al-Islâh* activists drew general attention when they criticized Article 3 of the new constitution which stipulated that the Sharia was the primary source of legislation rather than the only one, as the Islamists wished. In 1994, following the war between the ruling regime in the North and the southern secessionists, a constitutional amendment was adopted and *al-Islâh* won its case on this controversial issue.

21   At the same time, it seems that at least some of *al-Islâh*'s founders refuse to use their religious identity as a factor of distinction, division or opposition to other political formations. In 1993, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Anisî, then-secretary general of *al-Islâh*, declared: "We chose to be called the Yemeni Congregation for Reform rather than the Islamic Congregation, because we do not want to be identified on the basis of Islam. We believe that the Islamic project in Yemen is not that of a particular group or party, but rather the project and choice of all constituent groups of the Yemeni people. Yemen is very different from other Arab and Muslim countries, because Islam here is not a contentious issue: No political force or party – not even the Yemeni Socialist Party – can claim that they steered away from Islam[9]." Through a fairly consensus-oriented position, *al-Islâh* has, to a certain extent, based its political platform on a principle of integration into decision-making circles and loyalty to the power in place rather than rupture from them. Therefore, its position as an opposition member, rekindled during electoral campaigns, and their wish to project itself as a political alternative, are very ambivalent.

22   Such refusal to stigmatize the regime based on religion is definitely characteristic of *al-Islâh*'s ambiguous position and places the party at the heart of the implicit framework of the republican compromise. Consequently, since its creation *al-Islâh* has emerged as both a full-fledged component of the political system and an objective ally of President 'Alî 'Abd Allâh Sâlih's power. As a result, the image of opposition party fostered by the party leaders as well as observers may be awkward, and, as we shall see further, the choice of breaking away and building an alternative option (a position underscored when the party was created in 1990 and concretely embraced as of 1997), is not very convincing and not well accepted by everyone in the party.

23   In this context, the partisan cause endorsed by *al-Islâh* seems unpredictable or hard to define. From a limited point of view, it may be perceived as a means to defend the interests of some party leaders, including 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar until 2007, who have close relationships with the president and are even sometimes patronizing. Under the circumstances, criticism of the regime (largely theoretical through the denunciation of corruption or the inefficiency of leaders in general) is tolerated only when the access to that same power by key party figures is not fundamentally challenged. Therefore, we could say that the development of *al-Islâh* which was extensive during the 1990s and rather limited in the past few years, has actually made it possible for the regime to dominate a large part of the opposition and prevent them from playing their role to the fullest. The illusion of true pluralism was kept up and rulers were spared the full-blown consequences of an open political game.

24   A more comprehensive approach reveals that the party has several programs and strategies based on the ideological, social or generational diversity of *al-Islâh* members, especially with reference to the role of 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar's sons. Those programs include a compromise with power for the sake of preserving interests and positions[10],

militant social action and virulent criticism against the very foundations of the regime or against its alleged corruption in the name of the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine[11], as well as the (often depoliticized) attempts to produce local notabilities as alternatives to the General People's Congress' candidates[12]. Consequently, the idea whereby *al-Islâh* is merely a bogus, fake opposition party is not relevant. Given the inclusive formula of the Yemeni political system and the characteristics of the republican compromise, *al-Islâh*'s emancipation from its various legacies or sponsorships (whether ideological through the socialists' stigmatization or social through tribal and political allegiances based on their alliance with power) can only be understood as a long process. *Al-Islâh* definitely has multiple resources and can achieve self-sufficiency and autonomy from the ruling party and smooth the way for an openly admitted opposition.

Resources and Mobilization

25   An analysis of *al-Islâh*'s resources and mobilization patterns is interesting for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it sheds light on the particular position of the structure within the Yemeni political system; that is to say it shows the mobilization of varied resources within the framework of limited pluralism[13]. On the other hand, it reveals the relation between directly politicized mobilization patterns (via Islamist ideology or adaptable protest) and other less explicitly political resources (sometimes even described as apolitical) associated for instance, with tribal, economic or patronage allegiances. Obviously, the two types of resources are inextricably linked. However, it seems relevant to differentiate between the "rental" resources linked to the party's regional or tribal allegiances representing a support base that can be mobilized beyond the realms of ideology or programs, and mobilizations related with the party's active participation in the community charities, education and religion, which are more obviously part of other Islamist parties' activities elsewhere in the Middle East.

A tribal and economic "rent" based on identities

26   Since the early 1990s, *al-Islâh*'s double Islamist and tribal affiliation has been used to consolidate the party's presence on the political and electoral landscape. The "rental" resources described further, may seem, a priori, depoliticized and non-ideological. However, they are ambivalent because, by nature, they limit the party's autonomy. In fact, they give the party a seemingly efficient mobilization capacity with a quasi-automatic base of voters, elected representatives and activists and they make possible the creation of strongholds. However, at the same time, the party's independence as a whole becomes contingent on the strategy – sometimes even on the interests – of the figures who symbolize these resources primarily based on tribal or regional allegiance networks and on charismas that can be described as traditional and that some *al-Islâh* leaders rely on for mobilization purposes in certain areas. These "rental" resources are not necessarily based on political projects or programs designed to convince voters and activists; rather, they are linked to the special positions held by some leaders (local or tribal notability, historical role, wealth from trade, etc.).

27   In addition to the al-Ahmar clan led at first by 'Abd Allâh, and since late 2007 by Sâdiq, the Abû Luhûm family led by Sheikh Sinân from the region of Nihm (one of the main figures of the Bakîl tribal confederation) plays an important role in this particular

mobilization process. For instance, Târiq Sinân Abû Luhûm is one of the founders of the Charitable Society for Social Welfare (CSSW, *Jam'iyya lil-islâh al-ijtima'î al-khayriyya*), that is officially independent from the party but contributes nonetheless to spreading the party' guiding principles and ensuring part of its popularity.

28   Such resources have inevitably led to regional disparities, and, since the early 1990s, to the creation of electoral strongholds, especially in some tribal zones to the north of Sanaa where the local sheikh is affiliated with *al-Islâh* (in the governorates of 'Amrân and Hajjah for instance). Nevertheless, this mobilization system proved fragile, and the party lost many "tribal" districts during elections (in 1997, then in 2003), which led it to promote a more autonomous strategy. *Al-Islâh* then created other electoral strongholds, which now seem more enduring. Increased reliance on the party's ideological message brought in additional votes in Lower Yemen (*al-Yaman al-Sufla*), in the governorates of Ibb and Taiz, as well as in major cities where tribal allegiances play only secondary roles and where international observers help make elections more transparent than elsewhere. In 2003, *al-Islâh* won 10 out of 19 MP seats in the capital Sanaa.

29   The Yemeni Congregation for Reform has been successful in rallying support beyond tribal allegiances and expanding to commercial ventures and networks. In the southern regions where tribal organization is less influential, emigration and economic success – particularly in Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries – have produced family notabilities that are all potential voters for *al-Islâh*'s. In the 2003 elections, 'Abd al-Khâliq bin Shayhûn, born into an important family of tradesmen settled in Saudi Arabia, was elected on *al-Islâh*'s ballot in a district of the Yâfi' region (northeast of Aden).

30   Indeed, businessmen are often described as *al-Islâh*'s third component. They provide means and financing and grant the party privileged access to conservative elites. One obvious example is the commercial empire of the al-Ahmar family, which includes printing presses, travel agencies, restaurants, transportation, etc. Hamîd al-Ahmar's is the owner of the Sabafon mobile telephone company which makes it possible to broadcast different slogans (*via* SMSs sent to all users), especially in support of Palestine, or to call for boycotts of certain items (of Danish products for instance, following the 2006 controversy over the caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad[14]) or non-Muslim holidays (e.g. Valentine's Day). During the 2006 presidential election, the mobile telephone operator stopped short of calling directly for voting in favor of Faysal bin Shamlân, the candidate sponsored by *al-Islâh*, but did convey information via SMS on meeting locations and dates of the opposition's campaign[15]. Likewise, Sabafon relayed in July 2008 the news of the establishment of the Virtue Authority (*Hayat al-fadhila*), an individual initiative led by religious scholars with close ties to the party, including 'Abd al-Majîd al-Zindânî[16]. Moreover, the conference establishing it was held at the Apollo Center, a complex owned by the al-Ahmar family.

31   This privileged access to means of mobilization (through allegedly non-political commercial companies) has made it possible for *al-Islâh*'s members or sympathizers to network and create common references. Accordingly, even if non exclusive or systematic, a contract signed with Sabafon rather than its competitors may sometimes be perceived as a political act and a sign of allegiance to *al-Islâh* in particular, and also to the opposition in general. While other companies, especially those established by Hâ'il Sa'îd (*al-Tadhâmun* International Islamic Bank, Abû Walad Biscuit Factory) apparently do not supply direct financing to the party, they remain close to it and support its social base by building mosques (especially in Aden in the mid-1990s) and buying advertising spots in

various publications close to *al-Islâh* (*al-Asima* or *al-Sahwa*) or to Islamists in general (*al-Muntadâ*).

Community action

32   These "rental" resources are completed and most probably reinvested in community action through more direct mobilizations. From charities to mosques to schools, *al-Islâh*'s wide range of resources and repertoires, resulting from its members fervor, helps strengthen the party's influence and ensures its popularity and visibility on the Yemeni political landscape. The party is actually surrounded by a cluster of actors performing in various fields, including charity, education, mass media, religion and human rights. In order to understand the scope of *al-Islâh*'s diverse, numerous mobilizing resources one cannot ignore this large collection of social networks; they are not always coordinated or even institutionalized, yet they create a team spirit and share a number of references and objectives that define the political and ideological principles of the party.

33   The Charitable Society for Social Welfare (*Jam'iyya lil-islâh al-ijtima'î al-khayriyya*) also known as *al-Islâh* charity, established in 1990, represents a major resource for the party (Alviso-Marino, research to be published). Financed by traders, probably subsidized by Gulf countries and funded by substantial individual donations[17], the society is active in charity works for the benefit of the underprivileged (poor neighborhoods, orphans, handicapped people, areas hit by natural disasters, Somali refugee camp in Aden, etc.) and is one of the best developed and most efficient in the country. Members of the society and members of the political party all consistently deny any relation between the two organizations. However, their affiliations are inextricably linked, and the activities sponsored by the charity are undeniably beneficial to the party (Clark, 2004; Phillips, 2008, p. 144)[18]. *Al-Islâh*'s members, frequently involved in charity works (Grabundzija, 2003, p. 129), use the organization network as a reservoir of sympathizers easily mobilized at election time[19]. What's more, charity activities are performed in areas conducive to protest because they lack state aid. Yet, the CSSW also has followers outside the sphere of underprivileged people.

34   By soliciting donations and organizing protests in support of Palestine, particularly those coordinated with the al-Quds International Institution (*mu'assasa al-quds al-dawliyya*), whose vice-chairman was 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar and whose actions and solicitations were relayed by SMSs to Sabafon customers, the Charitable Society for Social Welfare has gained support from the masses who associate such mobilizations with the party's dynamism. For instance, during the protests in support of Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009, *al-Islâh* emerged – even in the opinion of a member of the Socialist Party – as a "clearly active force" and a major mobilizing party whose activities were far more significant than those organized by the General People's Congress[20].

35   Education is another field of local action favored by *al-Islâh*, who – throughout history – has infiltrated the social fabric by way of the Scientific Institutes (*ma'ahid 'ilmiyya*). Established in the mid-1970s to counter the ideological offensive of the Socialist Party in South Yemen border areas and initially financed by Saudi Arabia, the parapublic teaching network offered religion-based education. The network was independently managed by the Direction of Scientific Institutes and led by individuals close to the Muslim Brotherhood - such as Yahyâ al-Fusayyil, who later became *al-Islâh*'s secretary general - which helped spread the party's ideals throughout the country and made the recruitment

of new members easier (al-Saqqâf*, 2004). Placed under the government's authority in 2002, the Institutes merged with the public education sector and were administratively and financially integrated into the Ministry of Education, which caused an important wave of protest among party members[21].

36   The al-Imân University is another branch of the education network where *al-Islâh* is involved. Established in Sanaa in 1993 by *al-Islâh* Consultative Council member 'Abd al-Majîd al-Zindânî, the university, which hosted over 4,000 students in 2006, specializes in a religious curriculum (Johnsen, 2006). Although it is officially independent and free from government control, it is widely associated with the party and constitutes a reservoir for rallying young people and religious elites in Yemen and abroad.

37   The same holds true for the University of Science and Technology (*Jâma'at al-'ulûm wa al-tiknûlûjiyâ*) in Sanaa and its various branches in all major cities. Established in 1994, it was built on land donated by 'Alî Muhsin, a public figure close to President Sâlih and the military commander of the northern region, a land it shares with an important mosque built by Sheikh Sinân Abû Luhûm. Although the university curriculum, generally regarded as first-rate, is not religion-based and although the structure as a whole is not affected by charges of support to terrorism formulated by the US government against al-Imân and its president, al-Zindânî, the university is fully integrated into *al-Islâh*'s vast network. *Al-Islâh*'s connections with major tradesmen and figures close to the party contribute indirectly to the university's good reputation and profile. Indeed, the University of Science and Technology Hospital, whose board of directors is chaired by Târiq Sinân Abû Luhûm, is regarded as one of the best in the capital city, which helps cement the university's local roots and image of modernity and efficiency, in opposition to the underdeveloped and difficulty-ridden public universities and hospitals[22].

38   *Al-Islâh* also relies on a large media network as another mobilization tool. A wide-ranging press helps the party spread their views and take part in processing information. The network includes *al-Sahwa* and *al-Asima*, two weekly newspapers affiliated with the party, *al-Masdar* and *al-Nâs*, two independent weekly publications with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, and *al-Nûr*, a monthly magazine previously named *Nawâfidh*. These publications expand the party's presence within the social fabric by speaking on behalf of the "*Islâhî*" cause and its variations. The politically-oriented press is supplemented by a publishing network with partisan political and religious markers: printing presses (such as *al-Afâq*, owned by the al-Ahmar family), and specialized bookshops and shops selling religious DVDs and tapes (such as *tasjîlât al-Imân*) are all indirect mobilization tools used by *al-Islâh*.

39   Moreover, *al-Islâh* benefits from religious, institutional and informal structures that help develop its local presence and influence. Friday sermons are perhaps the most obvious mobilization tool, and their openly political orientation is a great asset for the party, all the more so as the domination – even the control – of mosques and training institutes by religious scholars close to the Muslim Brotherhood has been increasing in the South (notably in Aden) since 1994 and in traditionally Zaydi areas since 2004[23]. Under the supervision of *al-Islâh* members, Koran courses for children taught in the afternoon or during the summer and literacy courses for women in rural regions, in addition to regular participation in prayers at the mosque all help create social networks that are beneficial to the party. This is particularly true in predominantly feminine circles. Indeed, political socialization seems less easy for women (men are invited to take part in political debates at a young age during qat sessions[24]) and is mainly done through social structures linked

to charity action, as mentioned earlier, or to religious teaching. As is the case for charitable activities, Koranic societies create mobilization networks. For instance, women's religious meetings including comments on the Holy Koran and debate on religious issues are not just a tool for the militant "re-Islamization" of society. According to Janine Clark (2004), these *nadwât* (forums) are a way to bring together women more or less in favor of the "Islâhî" cause, and introduce them to political ideas and encourage partisan commitment. These meetings are actually an efficient mobilization tool to infiltrate the social fabric as well as a recruitment channel.

40 Finally, the field of Human Rights provides high visibility to the party, even if only recently developed. Indeed, the activities of the non-governmental organization HOOD (The National Organization for Defending Rights and Freedoms - *al-Haya al-wataniyya lil-difa' 'an al-huqûq wa al-huriyyât*), are consistent with *al-Islâh*'s principles. Mobilization slogans focus primarily on Guantanamo Bay and the defense of Yemeni prisoners. Such activities unite a large portion of the population around problems and issues that do not affect the regime directly and are unanimously agreed upon. Yet the issue of arbitrary arrests or disappearances, particularly those linked to the Saada War, is also discussed. Although there is no direct link, public opinion generally associates these activities with the party, and is familiar with HOOD activists' political leanings, especially with the positions of the organization's founder, Muhammad Nâjî 'Allâw, or attorney Khâlid al-Anisî (who left the organization in 2009) or party members Ahmad 'Amrân and 'Abd al-Rahmân Barmân. The same is true of Women Journalists without Chains (*Munazama sahafiyât bilâ quyûd*), an association whose president, Tawakkul Karmân, is a member of *al-Islâh*'s Consultative Council. The affiliation undeniably brings the party many political benefits.

41 Taiz humorist Fahd al-Qarni uses another inventive mobilization method. His satire of the ruling power spread by audio tapes was immensely successful during the 2006 presidential campaign. Since then, he has frequently participated in events organized by *al-Islâh* and opposition parties. His caricatures of the president, of the General People's Congress and of Prime Minister Bâ Jammal led to his arrest in July 2006, and to his imprisonment for a few months. The incident helped the Islamist party boost their image as defenders of freedom of expression and take control of the large solidarity network formed around the artist, especially through the action of the HOOD organization[25].

42 *al-Islâh* obviously has no qualms about using all available means and tools to publicize its doctrine and recruit sympathizers and activists[26]. In terms of mobilization, the party clearly benefits from varied resources that make up its solid local base and important followers' networks.

43 As a result, members of *al-Islâh* are just as likely to participate in strictly political activities as they are to be involved in socioeconomic or religious activities that are more or less connected to the party. The reasons for loyalty between the various leanings and the political parties are not always easy to identify; however, they do exist and provide an explanation for "*Islâhî*" activism. The relationship between these "targeted" segments of population (sympathizers, charity beneficiaries, readers, voters, etc.) and the party varies according to circumstances that depend on their expectations as well as on the types of capital and arguments used to mobilize them.

44 In this respect, *al-Islâh*'s membership is complex, because it is based on diverse forms of relationships with the party and commitment towards different objects and fields. Nevertheless, these networks are inextricably linked because they represent solidarity

and community networks with common religious beliefs. Therefore, social fabrics are not unified, but rather bridged together by these common values that ease mobility and transfer from one field of action to another. If, as sources close to *al-Islâh* believe, the party constitutes the largest partisan structure in Yemen, it may realistically be considered as a popular party, if not as a mass party. Beyond political divisions, recruitment is based on religious references largely shared among the population. In addition to patronage and solidarity networks, the party's support is founded on a social and religious conservative position, which may be regarded by some as the "interpreter of the Yemeni society's culture[27]."

45   Besides a substantial base of activists, *al-Islâh* is privileged to have a national and local organizational structure far more developed than its competitors (al-Yamani, 2003, p. 52). Local branches add dynamism to a partisan life often portrayed as elitist. Strong management provides coherence to these heterogeneous networks. Indeed, while *al-Islâh* is made up of different groups who sometimes hold opposing opinions, its internal "pluralism" is offset by the influence of the party leaders, who seem to exert rigorous control over party members. That's why *al-Islâh* followers often boast about the richness of their party, anchored in the variety of positions expressed within the party, and reject the fact that such richness may be a source of internal divisions, since the decisions taken by the General Secretariat or the Consultative Council are respected and supported by the masses[28]. In fact, despite the internal diversity of the party, positions are generally endorsed by all members, who are less inclined to publicly display their disagreements than Socialist Party members for exemple. The authority emanating from the relatively closed circle of the party's political elite may be explained by "the charisma of the leadership[29]" or by the existence of an allegiance mechanism, whose functionality is strengthened by the fact that many members view their commitment to the party through a religious prism.

The Difficult Process of Emancipation: Building an Alternative Force

46   Since the late 1990s, *al-Islâh*'s leadership has endorsed a strategy of alliance and cooperation with other opposition movements, and particularly with their historic enemy, the Yemeni Socialist Party (Browers, 2007). How do Islamists negotiate their merger with the opposition? What are the consequences of relinquishing a system based on loyalty? The final part of our study will focus on the realization of *al-Islâh*'s emancipation potential, mentioned earlier. How are resources converted and mobilized to re-create a concrete opposition project?

The party from 1990 to 1997: between alliance and opposition

47   Following the Yemeni unification in 1990, President Ali 'Abd Allâh Sâlih was confronted with socialist elites from the former South Yemen, who – even if destabilized – were to rule the country with him in accordance with the unity agreement. In an effort to change the balance of forces, Sâlih turned more overtly to *al-Islâh* and other Islamist groups, including *Salafi*s and other groups linked to the movement of Zaydi revival. By co-opting them in place and stead of his socialist "partners", he altered the boundaries and territories of the opposition.

48   Between 1993 and 1997, the Yemeni government was composed of *al-Islâh* ministers representing the various leanings of the party. They held relatively important positions, such as Education, Religious Affairs, Justice and one deputy prime minister. In October 1993, President Sâlih appointed 'Abd al-Majîd al-Zindânî, who had been living in Saudi Arabia for several years and was entrusted with Islamist mobilization in Afghanistan in the 1980s, to the five-member Presidential Council. *Al-Islâh* was thus introduced in the institution, whose task was to provide the president with assistance and which had been, until then, composed of three members of the General People's Congress and two socialists. Moreover, the 1993 election of *al-Islâh* chairman 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar to the office of Parliament Speaker was carried by the votes of the ruling party. The cooperation between the ruling power and *al-Islâh* reached a climax in 1994 during the brief war between the armies and political elites of the two former Yemeni entities. Paradoxically, the war was also to help speed up its decline.

49   *Al-Islâh* Islamists provided theological legitimization for the war and took part in combat operations with armed militias trained for this purpose by tribal factions and other militants recently returned from Afghanistan. During the fighting, *al-Islâh* member 'Abd al-Wahhâb al-Daylamî, who was later appointed minister of Justice immediately after the war, issued a fatwa equating secessionists with impious individuals (Schwedler, 2004, p. 217). The president benefited from his partnership with *al-Islâh* during the struggle between northern and southern elites for political hegemony in unified Yemen. However the partnership was no longer of use when the North achieved military supremacy over the South and the Yemeni Socialist Party, brought down to its knees, was compelled to rebuild itself around individuals who had rejected secession. The alliance game of the General People's Congress changed with the quasi-total disappearance of its socialist rival. Although *al-Islâh* was granted nine ministerial portfolios in October 1994, the Islamists' influence was progressively limited, while the authority of the General People's Congress increased. *Al-Islâh* was gradually excluded from decision-making circles, even though the elites of both parties maintained a close relationship.

50   The first visible, albeit incomplete, split occurred in 1997. In keeping with their ambiguous position vis-à-vis the ruling power, the party leadership signed a declaration of cooperation with the Higher Coordination Council for the Opposition[30] in August 1996, and a vast majority of its MPs boycotted the 1997 budget vote. However, they were not quite ready to relinquish their alliance with the General People's Congress. They published a statement in October of the same year, to emphasize their wish to maintain a strong relationship with the ruling party (Schwedler, 2004, p. 221). On April 27, 1997 however, the parties were unable to reach an electoral agreement, which resulted in GPC candidates running against *al-Islâh*'s, in addition to several candidates from minor parties. *al-Islâh* emerged as the new – and almost unique – opposition party, in the absence of socialists who boycotted the elections; they won 22% of the votes, but lost 10 seats compared to 1993, while the General People's Congress gained 60 extra seats, dominating parliament by a wide margin[31]. Following the relative defeat in the elections, probably aggravated by various voting irregularities, *al-Islâh* was also excluded from the government, as no portfolio was granted to the party members in the new cabinet. The role of political backup, once held by *al-Islâh*, was then briefly played by the small Zaydi *al-Haqq* Party, whose Secretary General Ahmad al-Shâmî was appointed Minister of Endowments. The co-optation of a firm opponent to the Muslim Brotherhood was

implicitly aimed at undermining the party's position among religious or educational institutions, particularly the famous Scientific Institutes (*ma'ahid 'ilmiyya*).

51   Yet, the break between *al-Islâh* and the ruling power in 1997 was not quite clear: The threats of boycotting the legislative elections, waged by some *al-Islâh* figures in the partisan press, were never carried out. The party never used the name of the president in their statements and criticism, however virulent. Furthermore, 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar was reelected as parliament speaker with the support of General People's Congress MPs. It seems that a head-on confrontation with the ruling power of Ali 'Abd Allâh Sâlih was the red line that *al-Islâh* was ultimately unable – or simply unwilling – to cross during the 1990s. Therefore, the party did not enter any candidate for the 1999 presidential elections. Najîb Qahtân al-Sha'bî, a member of the GPC, ran against President Sâlih in an attempt to give a touch of credibility to an election where the incumbent president won with more than 96% of the vote (Wedeen, 2008).

Progressive rallying to the opposition platform

52   As the party leaders began to explore the possibility of cooperation with opposition parties, particularly with socialists, *al-Islâh*'s change in strategy occurred progressively when their political situation evolved: agreements were found when *al-Islâh* was excluded from political decision-making circles. The party's survival and credibility were at stake when they joined the opposition platform. Yet, the shift in allegiance and the internal reform made it possible for the party to remain "in the game." Does this reveal a surge in pragmatism among Islamists? The answer is yes, insofar as efforts are made to forego historical ideological rivalries between Islamists and socialists to the benefit of these new forms of cooperation. We cannot ignore, however, that while a partnership with the General People's Congress seemed rather "natural", it was also primarily tactical and dependent on the leaders' personal interrelations.

53   *Al-Islâh*'s opposition strategy emerged at the same time as the process of cooperation among opposition parties led by the Yemeni Socialist Party. The latter, in an effort to restructure itself around reformist figures such as Jâr Allâh 'Umar [32], chose to renew a dialogue with the ruling elites and return to the political arena after the 1997 boycott. The socialists, who had worked since 1995 at bringing together opposition parties into a Higher Coordination Council for the Opposition, reached out to *al-Islâh*'s. Numerous contacts were made and forums were organized, such as the Political Development Forum (*muntadâ al-tanmiya al-siyâsiyya*) led by 'Alî Sayf Hasan, with the participation of reformist elites from both parties; as a result a common platform was institutionalized. These bridge-building efforts revealed the increasingly pressing need for opposition parties to develop long-lasting mechanisms of cooperation against the backdrop of a shrinking political stage (Burgat, 2000).

54   During the 2001 local elections and referendum, *al-Islâh* was all the more committed to the opposition's campaign as the General People's Congress criticized and publicly accused the party of "electoral terrorism." (Browers, 2007, p. 570). Opposition parties reached agreements among themselves in an attempt to secure a maximum number of seats in local councils and fight against a number of constitutional amendments. The campaign failed, amendments were ratified by referendum with close to 75% of the votes, and the General People's Congress prevailed in local councils. The defeat was as much the result of a lack of transparency in the elections and probable ballot-rigging as it was the

result of a poorly coordinated ineffective opposition campaign. Nevertheless, the episode was an important step in the bridge building process between *al-Islâh* and the leftwing and the validation of the party's new role amid the opposition. *al-Islâh* denounced the fraud and insecurity - violent clashes marred the campaign and the voting process - and for some time refused to acknowledge the results published by the government[33].

55   The post-9/11 era gave *al-Islâh* members the opportunity to consolidate their opposition strategy. While Yemen was heavily criticized by the international community and accused of providing a safe haven for groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, President Sâlih took a stand in the war against terrorism, and confronted *al-Islâh* with a security-oriented position. A victim of this criminalization process, *al-Islâh* leadership, particularly the more Islamist oriented wing, intensified their efforts to build up the opposition platform and took part in the establishment of the Joint Meeting Parties (*Ahzab al-liqâ' al-mushtarak*). The Meeting, whose successful breakthrough on the political stage only materialized in 2005, took part for the first time in the 2003 legislative elections. Agreements were then reached between *al-Islâh* and the Yemeni Socialist Party in more than half of all electoral districts in an effort to avoid fragmenting anti-government votes (Schwedler and Clark, 2006; Carapico, 2003).

56   In November 2005, the opposition was further unified by the publication of the "Unified project plan for a comprehensive national and political reform" by the Joint Meeting. The program, which set the political agenda of the unified opposition, was cosigned by *al-Islâh*, the Yemeni Socialist Party, the Nasserite Popular Unionist Organization, the National Arab Socialist *Baath* Party, *al-Haqq* Party and the Union of Popular Forces (two small parties with Zaydi referents). Parties of the Joint Meeting agreed on supporting a single presidential candidate for the 2006 election and organized the opposition's first ever presidential campaign. The joint platform was then created, in spite of the reluctance of some members (some even regarded an alliance with "atheist" socialists as treason and opposed the platform). The unified opposition supported the candidacy of Faysal bin Shamlân, a former Oil Minister and an independent public figure, despite his southern roots indirectly associated with socialists. *Al-Islâh* Islamists saw in Shamlân the opportunity to end the conflict that riddled the Joint Meeting leadership at the time. While his integrity and honesty most likely appealed to the opposition regardless of individual party political principles, the candidate's position was identified by *al-Islâh* as close to the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, Shamlân had participated in 1990 in the establishment of the Yemeni Free Platform (al-Minbar al-yamanî al-hurr), considered as the counterpart of the Muslim Brotherhood in the South, before returning to the political stage as an independent figure. Regardless of the lock that guaranteed reelection of Sâlih, Shamlân's relative success (22% of votes) gave the opposition new prospects. *Al-Islâh* had invested a great deal in the campaign (more than any other party of the Joint Meeting), and made their political resources available to the coalition (mobilization networks, press, experience, etc.) (Poirier, 2008). *Al-Islâh* publications [34] were now primarily dedicated to the program of the Joint Meeting, a complete change in the party's political identity. The party was frequently criticized by reluctant members, who considered that *al-Islâh* no longer supported their own political program, but rather the general program of the Joint Meeting[35].

Al-Islâh's identity repositioning

57　*Al-Islâh*'s commitment to the Joint Meeting made it necessary to put aside some forms of embedded sectarianism, and give up stereotyped visions of socialists and, to a lesser extent, of Zaydis as well. As we mentioned earlier, *al-Islâh*'s political program had long been fueled by the split between Islamists and socialists. This stigmatization, demonstrated by discriminatory positions, was for some time less symbolic and became very direct in the early 1990s. The Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights, whose close ties with the leftwing were no secret, reported no less than 155 assassinations of socialist figures by religious and paramilitary organizations, mostly between 1990 and 1994 (Rougier, 1999). A large majority among Islamists condemned these acts of violence, but they continued to be perpetrated as evidenced by the December 2002 assassination of Jâr Allâh 'Umar, then deputy secretary general of the Yemeni Socialist Party, during *al-Islâh* General Congress he was attending as a guest[36]. The Islamist party was therefore compelled to give up their allegation that socialists, because of their secular political leanings, were "unbelievers" working for the West and importing western "impious" practices[37]. It became necessary to put an end to religious discrimination against socialists and call attention to the piousness of some, such as Jâr Allâh 'Umar, and – more generally – to give up a strictly "Islamic" position and focus on socioeconomic criticism. Along these lines, Yemeni Socialist Party leader 'Alî al-Sararî emphasized "*al-Islâh*'s important role in putting an end to propaganda against socialists[38]." Vis-à-vis the Zaydi partisans of *al-Haqq* Party or the Union of Popular Forces, *al-Islâh* gave up their claim that the latter were regarded as enemies of the Republic seeking to re-establish the Imamate overthrown by the 1962 revolution.

58　The change in *al-Islâh*'s strategy following their involvement in the opposition platform clearly included a trend reversal from techniques of stigmatization to the promotion of common references. It hasn't been easy, however, to give up sectarian reflexes, especially in the context of social unrest in the South since 2007 and the Saada War since 2004. Indeed, stigmatizing attitudes, encouraged and fueled by the ruling power, may actually be relevant again. In the South, the Retired Military Movement, which expanded beyond the boundaries of the socio-professional group led to a resurgence of regionalism and even to secessionist positions among a more radical faction (Mermier, 2008). Since 2007, southern identity, in general, and the concept of national unity have been the subject of many debates actively attended by *al-Islâh*. Muhsin Bâ Sura, *al-Islâh*'s leader in the former South Yemen province of Hadramout, expressed the population's mounting antagonism towards unity and threatened to support secession if necessary reforms were not put in place[39]. In 2004, the army launched the Saada War against al-Hûthî members of the Believing Youth (accused of paving the way for the reinstatement of the Imamate with the support of the Shiite regime in Iran), which led to renewed attacks against Zaydis, especially Hashemites; such attacks have expanded to a large portion of the political landscape, including some intellectuals close to *al-Islâh* (Dorlian, 2008).

59　Moreover, *al-Islâh* profoundly reshaped their political image nationally and internationally by promoting a moderate, reformist elite. The movement, led by political intellectuals close to the Muslim Brotherhood, distanced itself from ideology in favor of pragmatism or, at least, from a direction based on ideological differences in favor of practical interests. Muhammad al-Yadûmî, 'Abd al-Wahhâb al-Anisî and Muhammad Qahtân were the outstanding "*asâtidh*" (teachers) of this movement (Browers, 2007, p.

575). Muhammad al-Yadûmî, a former member of the security services and a former *al-Islâh* secretary general, has been the chairman of the party since the death of Sheikh ‘Abd Allâh al-Ahmar in December 2007. Former Deputy Prime Minister ‘Abd al-Wahhâb al-Anisî was the party’s secretary general, while Muhammad Qahtân was one of the ten members of *al-Islâh*’s Higher Committee (*al-Hay’at al-‘uliyya*). The three public figures, who united their efforts in the dialogue with the Yemeni Socialist Party and acted in favor of a joint action by opposition parties, played a major role in the establishment and consolidation of the Joint Meeting. While maintaining a conservative branch, *al-Islâh* has used the press, among other tools, to launch onto the political scene young actors such as Sa’îd Shamsân, Ibrahîm al-Ha’ir, Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salâm or Sa‘îd Thâbit, with liberal ambitions, modernist policies and a commitment to the “democratic” partisan system. These young men have joined the ranks of *al-Islâh*’s reformist wing[40].

60   While they may not represent the opinion of the majority, these individuals have become the party’s spokespersons during gatherings and protests of opposition parties or international conferences. Furthermore, they have managed to soften some of the party’s positions, especially with regard to women’s participation in political life. Although *al-Islâh* refused to nominate female candidates for the elections, the debate on the role of women in politics upset the status quo among party members and leaders, even if no clear position was taken on the issue. The debate led to a slow promotion of women: indeed 13 of them, approximately 10% of elected representatives, joined the Consultative Council following the 2007 Congress. During the opening session held in the presence of many independent journalists and observers, Tawakkul Karmân, a young female activist, delivered a speech directly supporting the Joint Meeting process.

61   With the emergence of new elites, the party opened up to the international scene particularly through ties maintained with the National Democratic Institute and the National Endowment for Democracy which provide respectability and new sources of political support to the party. In an effort to strengthen their position amid their international networks, *al-Islâh* has been forced to redefine their ideas and projects in order to comply with the agendas imposed by some organizations. Consequently, in addition to promoting the development of reformist elites, *al-Islâh* has launched a full-fledged communication campaign in an attempt to emerge as a centrist party committed to democracy and to a moderate Islamic project. This position, associated with the new constraints of the international arena, has also led the party to take a more active part in the opposition.

Should the active participation in the opposition lead to alternation?

62   In this context of reshaping their political allegiances and partisan identity, what role can *al-Islâh* play as an opposition party within the Joint Meeting? We shall now examine the evolution of the tactics adopted by the opposition coalition, which seem to have switched from dialogue to boycott, as well as the ambivalent positions taken by the party.

63   So far, the Joint Meeting’s strategy has been based on their participation in the instituted political game. During the 2006 presidential elections, the coalition thus rose to prominence as the legitimate opposition. The new configuration directly affected the customary lack of electoral transparency and forced the General People’s Congress to review their electoral practices and political platform[41]. It is worth noting that the president was forced to make many concessions to his rival by using the same campaign

themes as the opposition, such as fight against poverty, unemployment and corruption, education reforms and improvement of public services.

64 The Joint Meeting's credibility as an opposition force to the ruling power was confirmed when they were included as a GPC's "partner" in the reform of the electoral law and the Supreme Commission for Elections and Referendum (*al-Lajna al-ʿuliyya lil-intikhâbât wa al-istiftâʾ*), an institution created in 2001 to organize and monitor the elections. While GPC and Joint Meeting representatives agreed on the need for these reforms, the stormy debates and incompatible positions defended by the parties led to intense battles of wills during the autumn of 2008[42]; the Joint Meeting refused to attend a number of parliamentary sessions and threatened to boycott the parliamentary elections scheduled to take place on 27 April 2009. The Joint Meeting gambled on the support (and pressure) of foreign institutions and defended the transition from a First Past The Post voting system in single electoral districts to a party-list proportional voting system in multiple districts[43]. An agreement was finally reached in February 2009 following major negotiations between the General People's Congress and the Joint Meeting Parties: The elections were postponed until 2011 and extensive reforms were promised in order to introduce the party-list proportional system[44].

65 Although *al-Islâh* was officially involved in the process of establishing the opposition, they seemed willing to let their partners appear in the spotlight, notably Yassîn Saʿîd Nuʿmân, secretary general of the Yemeni Socialist Party, featured many times in the partisan and independent press. *Al-Islâh* members took a rather reserved stance on events that were wreaking havoc in the country (terrorism, economic crisis, challenges to the North's hegemony over the South, the Saada War). The contrast was striking between their discreet mobilization on the Southern issue on the one hand – especially in light of the repressive steps taken by the government, the release of political prisoners -, or the Saada War and its consequences, and, on the other hand, the efforts they made to boost the boycott campaign of Danish products or the support for Gaza[45]. This attitude of taking a back seat to their partners, no matter how little representative they may be, is undoubtedly a legacy of the 1990s and shows how difficult it is for *al-Islâh* to achieve emancipation[46]. The talks about amendments to the constitution and the electoral law, and the forthcoming parliamentary elections are expected to be an interesting challenge to the strategy of head-on opposition and alliance, officially embraced by the party.

66 In addition to their cautious behavior, *al-Islâh* is divided by contrasting ambitions. A significant number of party members are not really willing to get involved in electoral battles and undermine their alliance with the ruling power. Refusal to break away from allegiance to the president also has affected and weakened the unitary movement begun by the party in 2006. For example, on the eve of the presidential elections, *al-Islâh*'s chairman ʿAbd Allâh al-Ahmar declared his personal allegiance to President Sâlih which delegitimized Faysal bin Shamlan the party's candidate (al-Shuja'*, 2007). Many sheikhs of the Hâshid tribal confederation then followed suit and supported the incumbent president. On the whole, traditional affiliations and personal allegiances have endured and to some extent undermined the party's efforts to establish its autonomy. A branch of *al-Islâh* still rejects political games for the sake of preserving consensus and protecting themselves from government repression at the same time. For example, ʿAbd al-Majîd al-Zindânî has not overtly supported his party's shift to the opposition. He refrained from making any public declaration of allegiance in 2006 and remained silent about the opposition-backed candidate; as the chairman, he hosted the president's visits to al-Imân

university at the beginning and near the end of his electoral campaign. Competition has also come from groups that favor an apolitical approach, particularly the *Salafi* movement (*al-Hikma* in particular).

67 Despite profound changes, *al-Islâh* leadership does not seem willing to break free from their former loyalty to the power in place and do without their "rental" resources. Therefore, the reformist wing could just be a showcase of their commitment amid the Joint Meeting and coexist with more conservative movements. When the party chairman, Sheikh 'Abd Allâh al-Ahmar, who symbolized the historic alliance with President Sâlih, died in December 2007, the party had a major opportunity for emancipation. However, al-Ahmar's death did not lead to any significant break. *Al-Islâh* MP Hamîd al-Ahmar, in spite of his strong anti-establishment position and support of Faysal bin Shamlân during the 2006 electoral campaign, later seemed to hesitate between recanting his position by adopting a more conciliatory attitude, and calling for new presidential elections and advising president Sâlih to step down, as he did during an interview on al-Jazeera in August 2009. His brothers, Sâdiq and Husayn, himself a member of the General People's Congress, stood by 'Abd al-Majîd al-Zindânî when he created the Vice and Virtue Committee (*hayat al-fadhila*), a sort of religious vice squad, in July 2008. Such positioning was considered by some analysts as part of a renewed alliance between the ruling power and al-Ahmar's sons[47].

68 Indeed, ideological concessions and outward pragmatism do not have unanimous support among party leaders or members (al-Daghshî*, to be published)[48]. Changing affiliations and rhetoric and partnership with the Yemeni Socialist Party have led to various clashes about the way many partisans view the "Islâhî cause" even if the party's predominant public position is openly in favor of the Joint Meeting. The rhetoric of stigmatization of socialists or Zaydis and the opposition to *al-Islâh*'s new trend remain a reality and continues to reflect the party's internal diversity.

Conclusion

69 The issue of *al-Islâh*'s moderation and its relation to the party's participation in government were the subject of an important research by Jillian Schwedler (2007). Based on a comparative study with the Jordanian Islamic Action Front, Schwedler's work focuses on the complicated process of opening up and breaking away from radicalism. The author concludes that *al-Islâh*'s participation in the government between 1993 and 1997 and their close ties with the country's ruling elites have had little effect in terms of moderation, defined as the capacity to accept multiple perspectives. Yet *al-Islâh*'s commitment to the Joint Meeting, largely described throughout our study, seems to challenge Schwedler's theory. Indeed, the quest for autonomy, though difficult, is now generally accepted by the party leadership. It involves more radical criticism of the ruling power on themes of corruption or authoritarianism, and a capacity to cooperate with various political groups, primarily with socialists.

70 Since its creation in 1990, *al-Islâh* has shown a remarkable capacity to adapt, by striking alliances with the ruling power in some cases while successfully preserving its position as an opposition party. This ambivalent strategy made it possible for the party to be spared both by repression and marginalization. The party's numerous resources, whether "rental" or the result of efficient local action, are a real asset for mobilization. Taking advantage of these resources to create an alternation project remains a hypothetical and

fragile process still far from completion. Changes in alliances, constant transitions from co-optation to emancipation, from consensus to criticism, all *al-Islâh*'s trademarks, make the study of this highly rich and complex party both interesting and inspiring to study this highly rich and complex party.

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NOTES

1. In addition to the works referenced further in this chapter, several monographs of *al-Islâh* were published. For instance, see al-Tawîl*, 2009; Al-Hakîmî*, 2003; Grosgurin, 1994; Jillian Schwedler, 1998; Stiftl, 1999; Sa'id*, 1998; Al-Saqqâf*, 1997; Proceedings of the seminar "Al-islâmiyûn fî al-sulta wa al-mu'ârada" [Islamists in Power and within the Opposition] (in Arabic), *Shu'ûn al-'asr*, n°4, 1999, p. 35-186 and Proceedings of the seminar "*Al-usûliyyât al-dîniyya wa hiwâr al-hadhârât"*[Religious Fundamentalists and the Dialogue of Civilizations], Tome 2: *Al-islâmiyûn fî al-Yaman*[*The Islamists in Yemen*] (in Arabic), Sanaa, al-Markaz al-'âm lî al-dirâsât wa al-buhûth wa al-isdâr, 2002, 384 p.

2. Such close ties are not without consequence. The mobility of major Islamist figures and their presence in Saudi Arabia, where they studied, worked or found refuge, resulted, according to some of their opponents, in a form of "Wahhabization of the Muslim Brotherhood". 'Abd Allâh Hâshim al-Sayânî, a Yemeni *Zaydi* intellectual, observed that adaptation to the specific Saudi

context had an influence, for example, on the positions of the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (some of their leaders, such as ʿAbd al-Majîd al-Zindânî and Muhammad al-Yadûmî, had lived in Saudi Arabia for long periods of time) on women's rights and political participation. According to al-Sayânî* (2002), the close ties with Saudi Arabia explain why Yemeni positions on these issues are more conservative than those professed, for example, in Egypt or Lebanon.

3. For further information on this key figure of contemporary Yemen, refer to his biography: Al-Hadramî*, 1998; as well as his autobiography, published a few weeks before his death: Al-Ahmar*, 2007.

4. Interview with an *al-Islâh* intellectual, Sanaa, February 25, 2008.

5. Even though *al-Islâh* won more seats than the Yemeni Socialist Party (63 seats to 56), it still had fewer votes in its favor than its competitor (17% compared to 18.5%).

6. In spite of this strong aversion for the concept of party, various formations that were established in the early 1990s used the name "party", particularly the *al-Haqq* Party, which was established by the partisans of the *Zaydi* revival.

7. ʿAbd al-Majîd al-Zindânî, *Al-Hizbiyya [Partisanship]* (in Arabic), recorded conference, undated.

8. Interview with a member of *al-Islâh*'s Consultative Council, January 10, 2009.

9. Quoted by Lefresne, 1993.

10. Even though he is a member of the so-called radical branch of the Muslim Brotherhood as well as a prominent figure of *al-Islâh*, ʿAbd al-Majîd al-Zindânî, who was accused by the United States of having close relations with Usâma bin Laden, seems to have escaped repression by edging closer to President Sâlih. On ʿAbd al-Majîd al-Zindânî's position vis-a-vis these accusations, see: *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, n°10069, June 23, 2006.

11. As an example, refer to the recorded sermon of Muhammad al-Anisî, titled *al-Wahda*[*Unity*] (in Arabic), in the early 1990s, in which this member of *al-Islâh*(and secretary-general of al-Imân University) challenged directly the terms of unity with the socialists. In another tape made public a few years later under the title *Tâmur ilâ al-taʿlîm fî al-Yaman* [*Plot against Teaching in Yemen*] (in Arabic), al-Anisî launched a particularly virulent attack on the government's educational policy for neglecting Islamic teaching.

12. In early 2008, the inhabitants of a town in the region of al-ʿAnsiyyin, near the city of Ibb, were evicted from their village by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mansûr, a local sheikh who was a member of the Consultative Council (*majlis al-shûrâ*) known to be close to the president. The inhabitants received active support from *al-Islâh,* especially through the human rights organization HOOD. *Al-Shârʿa*, n°39, March 15, 2008 or electronic version of the *al-Islâh*-affiliated *Sahwa net*, March 26, 2008: http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/view_news.asp?sub_no=1_2008_03_26_62340 (retrieved on February 5, 2009). See also HOOD's website: http://www.hoodonline.org/det.php?sid=2005 (retrieved on February 5, 2009).

13. Or "pluralized authoritarianism"; refer to Phillips, 2008.

14. SMS received by Sabafon customers on February 20, 2008: "Yemeni religious scholars call for boycotting Danish products due to the drawings insulting the Prophet."

15. Interview of the person in charge of the media campaign for the Joint Meeting during the 2006 elections on February 19, 2009: "We did not take advantage of it. We paid for sending the SMSs about the opposition gatherings. Sabafon was the only company who accepted to send them, all others refused."

16. On the Virtue Authority, see Anahi Alviso-Marino, research to be published.

17. *Charitable Society for Social Welfare, Orientation Profile* (list of donors), leaflet of the Charitable Society for Social Welfare, Sanaa, undated. See also the society's website: http://www.csswyemen.org/.

18. Interview with a university professor close to *al-Islâh*, February 19, 2009.

19. « The role of charities in Yemen's development », *Yemen Times*, September 27 – 30, 2007: http://www.yementimes.com/article.shtml?i=1089&p=business&a=1 (retrieved on February 19, 2009).

20. Interview with a Yemeni Socialist Party leader, February 19, 2009.

21. "*Al-Islâh*yudîn al-ijrâ'ât al-hukûmiyya dhid al-Ma'âhid" [*Al-Islâh*denounces the government's measures against the Institutes] (in Arabic), *Al-Sahwa*, May 17, 2001.

22. See the hospital's website (http://usthyemen.com/) and the university website (www.ust.edu.ye).

23. On this issue, refer to "Al-shatât al-Ta'lîmî" (The Educational Confusion) [in Arabic], *Al-Thawra*, April 7, 2005.

24. Qat is a light narcotic chewed daily and in groups by a large proportion of the Yemeni population during the *maqyal*. Qat is chewed fresh; its use has spread across the country thanks to the development of road infrastructure, and has become an important element of the Yemeni national identity.

25. *Sahwa net*, April 13, 2008: http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/view_news.asp?sub_no=1_2008_04_13_62735 (retrieved on February 5, 2009).

26. Interview with a university professor close to *al-Islâh*, *op. cit.*

27. *Idem.*

28. Interview with an *al-Islâh*member, February 11, 2009.

29. Interview with a university professor close to *al-Islâh, op. cit.*

30. The Higher Coordination Council for the Opposition *(al-Majlis al-a'lâ li-l-tansîq)* encompasses the Yemeni Socialist Party, the National Arab Socialist Baath Party (*Hizb al-Ba'th al-'arabî al-ishtiâakî al-qawmî*), the League of the Sons of Yemen (leftist liberals,*Hizb Râbita Ibnâ' al-Yaman*), the Nasserite Popular Unionist Organization (*Tanzîm al-wahdawî al-sha'âbî al-nâsirî*), the Yemeni Unionist Congregation (lay leftist movement, *Tajammu' al-wahdawi al-yamanî*), the Union of Popular Forces (liberal *Zaydi* party, *Itihad al-Quwa al-Sha'abiyya*), the *al-Haqq*Party (conservative *Zaydi* party) and the Constitutional Liberals' Party (liberals close to the Yemeni Socialist Party, *Hizb al-Ahrâr al-Dusturî*).

31. *Al-Islâh*retained 53 parliamentary seats (more than 17% of MPs), while the GPC dominated the Lower Chamber with 189 seats out of 301 (more than 60%) compared to 54 seats for independent candidates.

32. On the role played by this individual, see: Carapico, Wedeen, Wuerth, 2002.

33. "Al-Islâh yudîn muhâwalât al-iltifâf 'alâ al-natâ'ij" [Al-Islah denounces the attempts to rig the results] (in Arabic), *al-Sahwa*, February 22, 2001. Interview of Abdullah al-Ahmar, *al-Sahwa*, May 24, 2001: "Mâ hadatha fî al-intikhâbât al-mahaliyya yusî' lîal-dîmuqrâtiyya" (What Happened in the Local Elections is Harmful to Democracy) [in Arabic]. Report of the French Senate, « Yémen: l'Arabie heureuse en mouvement », 2002: http://www.senat.fr/ga/ga35/ga35.html (retrieved on February 5, 2009).

34. For instance, Mansûr, 2007.

35. Interview with a university professor close to *al-Islâh, op. cit.*

36. This political assassination, perpetrated by an Islamist activist, led to many rumors and controversies and was perceived by some members of *al-Islâh*as an attempt sponsored by the security services at undermining the rapprochement between the Islamists and the leftwing see Yahyâ, 2003.

37. On the stigmatization of socialism by the Islamist, and more particularly the Salafist, movement, see: al-Wâdi'î*, no date.*

38. Interview with Ali al-Sarari, February 19, 2009.

39. *Al-Masdar,* n°4, December 4, 2007.

40. On the new generation of party members, see also: « Al-Islâhiyyûn al-judud » (The new reformists) [in Arabic], *Abwâb*, August 2008, p. 32-35.

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41. M. Poirier, "Score one for the opposition?", *Arab Reform Bulletin*, March 2009. www.carnegieendowment.org/arb/ (retrieved on March 20, 2009).

42. *Al-Sahwa*, n°1103, November 22, 2007: http://www.alsahwa-yemen.net/view_nnews.asp?sub_no=408_2007_01_27_54232 (retrieved on February 5, 2009).

43. The members of the Joint Meeting rallied around the project of reviewing electoral districting and the methods of electoral registration and agreed to the proportional voting system, but the coalition was divided over promoting women's participation in political life. While the socialists heralded the idea of a quota for women (whether directly in parliament or on electoral ballots), *al-Islâh*partisans proved reluctant on the issue.

44. M. Poirier, 2009. *Newsyemen*, February 25, 2009: http://www.newsyemen.net/view_news.asp?sub_no=2_2009_02_25_25944 (retrieved on February 25, 2009).

45. Interview with an official representative of the Sisters Arab Forum for Human Rights (*Muntadâ al-shaqâ'iq al-'arabî*), Sanaa, January 20, 2009.

46. Sarah Phillips (2008, p. 163-166) described this attitude as "standing under the tree and waiting for the fruit to fall."

47. *Yemen Times*, n°1144, April 5, 2008.

48. "Shaykh salafî yukaffir al-Sahwa wa al-Nâss" [A Salafist Sheikh accuses *Al-Sahwa'* and *Al-Nâss '* of Infidelity] (in Arabic), *al-Tajammu'*, March 26, 2007.

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